

JUNE 8, 2009 F.A.H.P. NEWS

Katherine Harper Hastings Wright (1909-1999): In 1942, Kitty Hastings and her husband Calvin built a small but comfortable home on Benge Road, next to the present home of Anne and Steve Cleary. When completed, they moved in, with their daughter Gail who was 2 years old. With World War II under way, Kitty joined my mother's sewing group, where the women of Yorklyn made surgical dressings for the Red Cross in the sun parlor of Auburn Heights. When I was away, my father was very good about writing to me at least twice a week. Subsequently, one of his letters told me that they had met this nice young couple, Calvin and Katherine Hastings, and that he was 39 and she was 33 (my father always had to establish people's ages before he could talk about them). The Marshalls successfully interested the Hastings' in attending Hockessin Friends Meeting. In turn, the Hastings' convinced several other young couples who had recently settled along Benge and Meetinghouse Roads that they, too, might enjoy coming to Meeting, or at least to Sunday School, which Quakers call "First-Day School".

I got to know the Hastings' when I returned home in 1946, and Calvin and I worked on several projects together, including the establishment of a Boys' Club in Yorklyn, with permission to use as a club house the former community building owned by the George W. Helme Snuff Company. The Club might have been a great success, except that mill families were fast moving away from company houses in Yorklyn to seek better living quarters. The Hastings' also got me to be in a community play, which was not my thing, but I have a photograph to prove I performed. In 1953, Calvin Hastings died suddenly of a heart attack at the age of 50.

George S. Wright, a life-long friend of Kitty's (they had lived in the same household in Dover when they were 'teen-agers), became a widower about the same time Calvin Hastings died, and in less than a year, he and Kitty were married. It was a wonderful thing for them both. George sold his home in Brandywine Hundred, and moved to Benge Road. Being very handy with tools and wood-working, he enlarged and improved the Hastings home, and did excellent carpentry for neighbors, charging very little for his work, if anything at all. After he retired from a top job with Acme Markets, he built tall clock cases, and before he stopped, he had built 100 of them. All the oak, poplar, cherry, and maple would come from fallen trees he would observe, cut up, and take to Kennedy Crossan's saw mill near Landenberg for having it sawn into usable lumber. Then it would be stored above his garage/shop to dry before he would begin the building of a fine clock. Kitty would help him sand and finish, then sand some more, to attain the wood finish that distinguished his clocks. My mother, in her last years, admired an unfinished cherry clock in George's shop, I asked him if he could finish it by Christmas, and I bought it for her Christmas present in 1974. The clock moved with us from Auburn Heights to Cokesbury last fall.

Gail Hastings, having developed into a beautiful young lady, died from hepatitis early in 1960 at the age of 19. When my mother became housebound in the early 1970's, seldom a day went by when Kitty Wright did not stop to see her. When Ruth and I were married, the Wrights' wedding gift to us was dinner at their home 4 times, one for each season. Kitty was an excellent cook, and George always had a new game to teach us.

Ruth and I took George and Kitty to the Chautauqua Institute for a 3-day stay in the summer of 1986, which both seemed to enjoy very much. George died less than a month later. Kitty, who had long been interested in the Hockessin Interfaith Association, continued to host a picnic for that group in June each year and Ruth was her assistant. The last of these picnics were held at Auburn Heights instead of the Wright home. About 1990, she knew she should sell her home, and in the midst of moving out, she fell and broke her leg. She had been accepted at the retirement community of Kendal-at-Longwood, however, where she lived out her life, passing away shortly after her 90th birthday in 1999.

Good weather prevailed at our public opening of Auburn Heights yesterday. A lot of work went into preparing for this event. The volunteers of FAHP, with exemplary help from John McCoy of Hagley, completed the turntable rebuilding, and it worked well for the first Auburn Valley R.R. operation of 2009, successfully carried out by our excellent group of engineers, conductors, and mechanics. Jim Sank completed the lettering of passenger car #204 and it was put back in service on one of the trains. Improvements to the Museum, headed by Steve Bryce and Catherine Coin, demanded a lot of volunteer time, and many pitched in to complete this effort. Our new “hands on” Stanley engine and rear-end display, built by Walter Higgins, Steve Bryce, and myself, was well received, as well as the boiler/burner configuration next to it. Art Sybell, with help from Jonathan Rickerman, completely repainted “Little Toot”, a great attraction for our visitors under the age of 6. Thanks to Jim Personti and the Hopkins family, the electric trains worked well. Jim had completely rebuilt the Cretors steam engine on our popcorn machine, and it performed flawlessly as Ed and Betty Hoffmeister and Emil Christofano made popcorn all afternoon. Bill Rule conducted a Stanley “firing-up” demonstration with our Model 78. Our gift shop, operated by Jane Cannard, Rose Ann Hoover, and Catherine Coin, operated successfully. Ed Lee was here riding his high-wheeled bicycle, and Paul and Joyce Harris operated their hurdy-gurdy for the enjoyment of our guests. New at this event were rides in an early Autocar bus, owned and lent to us by Ross Myers and operated by Terry Bookheimer, which proved to be a great supplement to our Stanley Mountain Wagon ride. A cameraman from WHYY Channel 12, along with a public TV reporter, filmed the event most of the afternoon, so we hope the publicity from this will be beneficial. Dan Citron and his several part-time staff people had the “mansion” and the grounds looking very nice, and an efficient crew of docents escorted about 110 visitors through 2 floors of the big house. In all, 325 tickets to the event were sold. Our next “Steamin’ Sunday” is July 5.

This week, work sessions will be devoted to cleaning up from our public event, and further captioning the new pictures and displays in the Museum. Nine of us leave Thursday morning, with the Mountain Wagon and the ’13 Model 76 in two trailers, for a 5-day tour around Estes Park, CO, where we will help celebrate the 100th birthday of the Stanley Hotel, and of the very first Mountain Wagons that served it. We are told there will be in excess of 20 steamers there, including three Mountain Wagons. Our group expects to return home late on June 23.

On Saturday, June 13, our yellow ’32 Packard, piloted by Rose Ann Hoover, is scheduled to go to New Castle to participate in the Separation Day parade. THE “WEEKLY NEWS” WILL BE ON VACATION FOR TWO WEEKS, as its editor will be away. Expect the next edition on June 29. Happy Summer Solstice!

Tom