

May 21, 2007

Hello, Steam Team:

If some of you have been having trouble receiving the “Weekly News” in a pleasant format, I hope this change may make it read better.

A MINERVA automobile and the Wrights of Newark: At Winterthur on May 12, I was treated to observe an outstanding Belgian MINERVA of about 1932, which brought to mind another Minerva story. A few of these huge and expensive cars made in Antwerp were imported to the U.S. in the period between the two World Wars. Also, I think the Queen of Belgium was killed in one about 1935 when King Leopold ran off a Swiss highway and upset.

Pilling and Ernest Wright ran the Continental Diamond Fiber Company of Newark, which had been started by their grandfather and greatly expanded by their father, Samuel. Samuel Wright and Israel Marshall were keen competitors, but the best of friends. They often bailed each other out when mechanical breakdowns at their respective mills might threaten their manufacturing operations. Probably in the early 1920's, Pilling and Ernest built elaborate homes on the east side of Orchard Road in Newark, across a side street from one another. Pilling's former home is now the Blue and Gold Club; Ernest's is the President's House for the University of Delaware.

About 1930, Pilling bought a Minerva 7-passenger sedan or limousine, always driven by a chauffeur. Tiring of this 150-inch wheelbase giant that had cost about \$16,000, he traded it in to Frank Diver in 1934 for a new Packard Twelve 7-passenger limousine (my father bought a similar car a few months later). The new Packard cost Pilling Wright about \$4,500, and I doubt that Mr. Diver allowed him more than \$500 on the Minerva. Thinking that my father might have an interest, it was arranged for him to go to Wright's home in Newark to see the Belgian car, just before he turned it in. I accompanied my dad. I was impressed by the size, but it's boxy appearance seemed outdated and unattractive. My father did not want to take it on, either. Eventually, Frank Diver sold the car to a captain from Fort duPont at Delaware City, who paid \$75. I have visited the Blue and Gold several times in recent years, but there has not been a Minerva or a Packard in the driveway.

Last Saturday, May 19, about 15 volunteers entertained the Ameriprise charter group of 75 people, arranged by Tom Fairchild. It was an outstanding day, and all went well. Ameriprise had arranged for a food and beverage tent which was pitched on the parking lot between the carriage house and the museum, and we did our standard things: the steam train ride, the Stanley Mountain Wagon and the Rauch & Lang electric car rides, steam-made popcorn, and of course the Museum. The comments were very positive, and the volunteers enjoyed the delicious food. Tom Fairchild gave FAHP a nice contribution over and above the contract price. Since he does something special for his clients each year, he said he made one mistake: he could not top this event in the future. On Sunday 3 cars and 7 FAHP members went to the HCCP Spring Meet at Linvilla Orchards, near Media, PA., a 35-mile round-trip. The Models 71, 607, and 87 ran flawlessly but one operator, yours truly, has a lot to learn about Stanley burners. You can't light a pilot without some sort of torch, and I left mine home. Three new operators did very well: Steve Bryce, Kelly Williams, and Art Wallace. Butch Cannard and his mother Jane instructed Art Sybell in the operation of the Model 87. We enjoyed a visit with Herb Kephart, where we stopped for water on our way back from Linvilla.

Art Sybell was busy today painting on "Little Toot", and Emil and Jerry Novak installed new batteries in FAHP's Rauch & Lang electric. Steve Bryce and Art Wallace pressure-washed the pond bridge and island platform before Saturday's event. A small area of the museum floor is being prepared for painting, and all furniture and the '37 Packard have been removed so this can take place this week. Walter Higgins' team is continuing work on the hydraulic brakes on our cars equipped with same, and the Models 71, 76, and Mountain Wagon require minor repairs.

Last week was also "Board Meeting Week", with the same taking place on Thursday evening, May 17. Preceding the main meeting was a meeting of the Collections Committee on Wednesday and of the Development and Finance Committees on Thursday afternoon. Only three of our 18 directors were absent from the main meeting. At the conclusion, it was announced that Cam Yorkston, a member of the Board for nearly 3 years and chairman of the Development Committee for that time, is resigning from the Board effective June 30. Cam will be continuing with us as an Advisor and member of the Development Committee, as well as an important liaison with the Division of Parks & Recreation. His resignation is being accepted with regret but with deep appreciation for his invaluable counsel during our first years. An opening exists to fill Cam's unexpired term, which expires in February, 2008. Ruth and I exercised our option to appoint our second representative to the Board (Bill Enslen was our first last winter), and our appointment of Jerry Novak to this position was most favorably accepted by the directors present.

Bob Wilhelm has agreed to conduct a seminar for interested Museum docents on Wednesday, May 23, in the Museum at 7:30 P.M. I spent some time in the Museum on Saturday, and Chuck Erikson and Butch Cannard were doing a fine job in talking to people and explaining the exhibits and the operating car collection. It was an easy group for us to handle, as we had mostly older people with a lot of interest. I hope all who can help in the Museum from time to time will be able to attend this Wednesday.

Anne Cleary has reminded me of the upcoming Memorial Day parade in Kennett Square on Monday, May 28. It is hoped that several of our cars can go, to be driven by qualified operators, recent and "old". There should also be seats for any who would like to ride along. I think the parade starts at 10:00, and line-up on the west side of Kennett is from 9:00 to 9:30. Without mishap, it takes about 15 minutes from Auburn Heights to the starting point. The parade concludes near Union Hill Cemetery on the north side of town, and you should be back at Auburn Heights by noon. Please let Anne or Bob Reilly know if you can go and want to take or ride in a car.

Rob Robison had the spring issue of the "Herald" off the press and available for the Board meeting last week, and all of you should have received your copy in the mail by now. Thanks, Rob, for another job well done! Enjoy Memorial Day weekend and the beginning of summer! Tom