

July 16, 2007

Hello, Steam Team: **Weldin V. Stumpf (1922-1990)**. Weldin “Bill” Stumpf could build anything. Born on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the youngest in a family of four boys and two girls, he moved with his family to a small farm on Marshall’s Bridge Road near Becker’s Bridge, from which he attended Kennett High School. Before graduating in the Class of 1940, he met his future wife, Dorothy Fogg, who was in the Class of ’42. They were married in 1946 at the end of World War II.

Right out of High School, Weldin went to work for the Pennsylvania Railroad in the Wilmington shops. He soon had the title of boiler maker, even though the shops were servicing the railroad’s fleet of GG-1 electric locomotives in addition to the diminishing number of steam locomotives. The famous “G’s” used in passenger service still carried steam boilers to heat the cars in their trains. The first of these were fire-tube boilers almost of the Stanley design, only larger and carrying much lower pressures. Working on steam locomotive boilers was HARD WORK, but Stumpf thrived on it.

In 1942, he joined a railroad battalion of the U.S. Army, and was sent to England to build freight cars and locomotives for the invasion of France. He crossed to the Continent following the successful D-Day invasions, and worked on military railroads there until the war in Europe ended in May, 1945. Sailing from the port of Marseilles, he arrived home in the summer of ’45 and returned to the PRR, keeping his seniority from the date of first employment.

My father bought his Webster cigars from Reese’s Drug Store in Kennett Square, and Weldin “moonlighted” in the store owned by his brother-in-law, pharmacist Eugene Reese. In 1959 he had heard of our acquisition of a steam locomotive from Canadian National Railways (#92) with the hope of starting a tourist railroad, and wanted to know how he could help. My father and I assured him his help would be most welcome. Through his knowledge and hard work, #92 was made operable again and along with many dedicated volunteers the foundation was laid for the beginning of the Wilmington & Western R.R. operation in 1966. Weldin wanted to know more about Stanley cars, and I invited him to be my passenger on the 1961 Pennsylvania Glidden Tour in my father’s Model 76. The tour started at Hershey and ended at Harrisburg with overnight stops at Reading, Scranton, Allentown/Bethlehem, and Wilmington, DE. In a short time, he wanted to own a Stanley. My father sold him a 1913 Model 77 in 1963.

After my father died in 1969, Weldin approached me and said “You are going to need help if you want to keep the collection together and open the facility (now Auburn Heights) to the public”. We made a deal, he retired from the railroad with 29 years of service, and the idea of the *Magic Age of Steam* was born in February, 1970. In the 18 months from then until our opening, Stumpf built the pond, the tunnel, the driveway around the house, the double-tracked trestle across the vegetable garden, and did the grading for our new right-of-way. He built operating exhibits in the Museum including rebuilding the old “O”-gauge circular railway, a long steam table for operating model stationary engines, a stand for operating a Stanley car on steam, and provision for running our ¾”-scale 4-8-4 locomotive in place, also on steam. Soon he completed our river boat with its paddle-wheel steam engine that was used for rides around the pond. In addition to helping me run the “Magic Age”, he, his wife Dorothy, and their daughter Joan made about half of the 8,328-mile trip in our 1912 Stanley in the summer of 1972. After the “Magic Age” closed in 1977, he and I took in Stanley work and while we never did cosmetic restorations, we did mechanical work on about 30 cars owned by others.

Weldin Stumpf retired at the end of 1986. Acquiring a motor home, he and Dorothy enjoyed a trip to California and one or two to Florida before he became ill. Developing a brain tumor in the summer of 1989, he died on December 16, 1990 at the age of 68.

Last Wednesday between 6:00 and 7:30, a group of couples from the New Jersey side of the Delaware River south of Camden visited Auburn Heights for one of their occasional outings. Arriving in 2 small buses, the group numbered about 50 people, and we treated them to the Museum, a Mountain Wagon ride, and an electric car ride, plus the “video”. Following their visit, they had dinner at Hartefeld Country Club before returning home. About 7 volunteers showed them a good time and they presented us with a check for \$500. Thanks to all who helped! On Saturday, four of our cars were driven to the Ronald McDonald House for an event sponsored by the Corvette Club. There was great interest in the steamers and the Rauch & Lang, and patients from the Alfred I duPont Hospital were treated to the show. Again, thanks to those FAHP volunteers who made this possible.

On Thursday evening, Bill Schwoebel held a meeting of all volunteers who were here that night (20 attended) to discuss our Working Groups and how they can be improved. From this, a new chart is being prepared, along with projects coming along in the next few months. A listing of these will be E-mailed to all active volunteers in a few days.

Work sessions are planned for Tuesday and Thursday this week, but next week Tuesday, July 24, will be an Ice Cream Run and Thursday, July 26, is an Events Committee meeting. Bob Reilly plans to return to the office about July 23. Bucky is starting to prepare the Museum floor toward the back wall for repainting, so the Museum will not be presentable for two weeks or more.

Stay tuned for any special events that may develop, and thanks to all. Tom