

December 11, 2006

Hello, Steam Team:

"Let's go to the Movies": For twenty years starting in the mid 1930's, I loved to go to the movies. "My time" did not go back to silent films (thank goodness) but many were in black and white. The first movie I really remember was a 1929 release of Mark Twain's "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" starring Will Rogers and Myrna Loy (a later musical version in Technicolor starred Bing Crosby and Rhonda Fleming). Through the latter years of the 1930's came the Fred Astaire-Ginger Rogers musicals and the like featuring the musical talents of Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Jerome Kern, and Richard Rodgers. Historical films, some of them not very accurate, were popular, among which were biographies of Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas A. Edison, Stephen Foster and Abraham Lincoln. I loved all of them, and saw "Abe Lincoln in Illinois" many times.

Movie theatres were considered "First Run", "Second Run", etc., which did not apply to the quality of the films but rather the order in which these theatres showed the top releases. The large theatres in downtown Philadelphia such as the Boyd, the Mastbaum, and the Fox were "First Run", and the best Wilmington theatres were "Second Run". They showed the same films one week later. Theatres in smaller places like Kennett Square were "Third Run" (a week later still), and in West Grove, Middletown, and towns with populations just over 1,000, the films were 3 full weeks behind Philadelphia. Some of these smaller theatres never did qualify for the top films, and had to be happy to show "B pictures". The Grand in Wilmington (now the Grand Opera House) was in this "B" category.

I remember first going to the Auditorium Theatre in Kennett Square for the Saturday matinee. At these events, the theatre often featured children's films and cartoons. Once they gave us paper goggles with one eye looking through a red lens and one through a green. This was supposed to make the image on the screen turn from black & white to color. My recollection is that it didn't work very well, but I think tickets were only 15 cents.

The best theatres were always in the cities, as suburban theatres and open-air drive-ins did not arrive to any extent until after World War II. These top theatres were usually associated with one of the major Hollywood studios. In Wilmington, Loew's, first located on Delaware Avenue at Adams Street, showed MGM films. "Gone with the Wind" showed here in 1939. The Rialto, between 2nd and 3rd on Market, had the latest 20th Century-Fox offerings. In February, 1939, Warner Brothers' new Warner Theatre opened on 10th Street between Tatnall and Orange and featured its first film "Wings of the Navy" with

a color short called "Lincoln in the White House". The first New Year's Eve after I had my driver's license (1940), I prevailed upon my parents to let me pick up my twin cousins, Alan and Bob Mancill, and go to the midnight show at the Warner. Loew's later moved to Market Street between 8th and 9th to become Loew's Aldine (now the "Baby Grand"), and the old Loew's was downgraded to the Ritz. At 5th and Market was the Queen, housed in what had been Wilmington's best 19th-century hotel, the Clayton House, and in the same block the Arcadia. On the other side of Market between 5th and 6th was the Savoy, later called the Towne. At 24th and Market was the Strand, on Union Street near 4th was the Park, and on Maryland Avenue the Ace. A segregated theatre on Walnut Street was called the National. While some of these theatres were not in the best neighborhoods, the streets were safe and none showed racy films, as this was not allowed by Hollywood's Hayes office of censorship.

Small towns had their local theatres which often served as social centers for the community. New Castle had the Earle, Newark the State, Middletown the Everett, Woodcrest (near Newport) the Crest, West Grove the Roselyn, and there were several others. Suburban places got into the act just before and after World War II with the Edgemoor, the Manor (in Wilmington Manor), and several popular Drive-Ins. In the late 1940's, having run the open-air theatre for our 55th Weather Reconnaissance Squadron on Guam in 1945, I established the Club House Theater in Yorklyn's former community clubhouse, which showed old 16 mm. films for two winter seasons before giving way to television, then spreading to everyone's home.

The members of the Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve were treated to a wonderful holiday party at Rob and Chevonne Robison's home in Yorklyn this past Saturday night. Over 60 guests enjoyed an elaborate feast prepared almost entirely by Chevonne, and great comradery prevailed in their beautifully decorated home. This festive event was a highlight of our active and successful year. THANK YOU, ROB & CHEVONNE!

This past Thursday, 30 volunteers attended our informative meeting in the museum, at which time our newly-adopted Collections Policy was explained and the plan for small working groups at our bi-weekly work sessions was outlined and discussed. Our new treasurer, Bill Enslin, was introduced to the group. I named the 4 cars I intended to transfer to FAHP by the end of 2006: the 1905 Model CX Stanley, the 1914 Model 607 Stanley, the 1918 Model 735 Stanley, and the 1916 Rauch & Lang electric, but stated that title changes, possible transfer taxes, and insurance may delay this transfer of ownership for a few weeks. Last Tuesday, the 735 was fired up and run on the jack,

but a serious leak in the steam pipe going from the superheater to the engine prevented a few things from being thoroughly tested. We'll repair this leak and try again. New volunteers Art Wallace, Steve Bryce and Pat Little witnessed a Stanley being fired up for the first time.

Our work sessions will continue on Tuesday (12/12) and Thursday (12/14) and there is also a Nominating Committee meeting on Dec. 12 and an Events Committee meeting on Dec. 14, both in the FAHP office here. On Tuesday, Dec. 19, Bill Schwoebel and I hope to meet with the group leaders on our new Working Groups Chart, to further discuss how we can get this program off the ground. Stay tuned as to whether there will be a work session on Dec. 21, before we adjourn for the Christmas holidays. In addition to getting the 735 finished and ready for the road, the boiler must be lifted out of the '13 Model 76, to be replaced with a newly-retubed boiler on hand. Also, we need to address the water tanks on the Models 71 and CX. One of the wooden railroad cars is in the garage for seat repair and possible painting. We need to zero in on needed work projects for the rest of the winter. Charlie Johnson, one of our Advisors, has given us a list of spare parts he thinks essential for preserving and operating the Stanleys in our collection, which will be of great help in our budgeting and planning.

Bob and Barb Reilly leave for their Colorado home tomorrow. Bob will not return to Delaware until February 3, but he will be doing F.A.H.P. work electronically from home except for two weeks in January when they will be on a trip. Best wishes to all. Tom