

F.A.H.P. News, May 14, 2012

American History in Perspective: It can be argued that no other democratic government in the world has lasted as long as our country's, now 225 years old since the Constitution was adopted. In that sense, we are an old country, but in contrast to many in the Eastern Hemisphere, it is easy to prove how young we are.

Sometimes it is proved like this: When the aged John Quincy Adams was serving in Congress following his single term as president, a discussion ensued on the House floor in which members claimed to know something about the founding of the country. Adams told them they knew nothing about it, that he observed the smoke from the Battle of Bunker Hill, along with his mother, Abigail, from a hilltop on their farm at Quincy, Massachusetts, probably 10 miles away. That was in 1775, when John Quincy was eight years old. When Adams chided his younger House members about 1847, the beloved Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. (son of the poet Oliver Wendell Holmes who penned "Old Ironsides" and "The Wonderful One-Hoss Shay") was six years of age. When Holmes died in 1935, I was 11. When I pass on, it is entirely likely that the 55th president of the United States may have been born (Obama is #44). So, indeed, ours is a young country.

Not trying to prove anything, here are some more interesting facts. Our first 9 presidents had been born before the Constitution became the law of the land in 1787, and 14 of the first 15 were born in the 18th century. Presidential births in the 19th century numbered 20, starting with Franklin Pierce in 1804 and ending with Dwight Eisenhower in 1890. To date, 10 have been born in the 20th century.

Of more interest, perhaps, is something not recorded in the history books. It is almost certain that the first 34 presidents could ride horseback, not for enjoyment but of necessity. Most of them could certainly handle a horse-pulled buggy or a small carriage as well. William McKinley is recorded as the first president to ride in an automobile, when F. O. Stanley visited the White House with his tiny steam buggy in 1899 (or 1900). There are mixed reports on the success of this ride. Some said the president was uncomfortable and did not like his experience. Others indicated that McKinley was impressed and felt the self-propelled road vehicle would soon take over in America. We do know that McKinley's successor, Teddy Roosevelt, did not want the government to own automobiles and apparently did not enjoy riding in them, although he was photographed during his presidency near his home in Oyster Bay, New York, in the back seat of a big Model G 1907 White steamer.

It is not known how many (if any) presidents before our 32nd, Franklin D. Roosevelt, knew how to drive a car. In the 1930s, Roosevelt kept a Model A Ford touring car at Hyde Park equipped with hand controls, so he could enjoy driving despite his paralysis. It is likely that all our presidents since have had a driver's license, but most have not driven many miles. Ronald Reagan and at least two of our three Texas presidents could certainly ride horseback but not out of necessity.

Work Report: On Tuesday, 15 volunteers were on hand, and on Thursday the number was 8, with 12 more attending the quarterly Board of Directors meeting. Good work continued on the Model 607, with the new master cylinder being permanently mounted, its inlet reconfigured, the perch poles temporarily attached, and the fire valve and by-pass rods parallel to the steering column, along with their brackets, being aligned and fastened. Further refinement to the painting of unseen portions of the body's underside was continued. The relaying of "O"-gauge track on the circular electric railway progressed at a good rate, and the new look of the electric trains is evident to all who observe. The three cars that were used for Dover Days and Winterthur were cleaned and placed in their permanent locations in the museum. A new vaporizer cable was made for the Model 87. The water tank was installed and hooked up in the Model 725, and except for the "sock-in-the-tank," this car should be ready to go with its new copper-tube boiler. The tower for the water tank on the Auburn Valley Railroad was more thoroughly sanded and primed and is now ready for its final coat of green. Last Tuesday, the museum hosted the meeting of Ann Bryce's Spade & Trowel Club of Kennett Square, Steve fired up the Model 76 to show the men how it's done, and Dan Citron presented a slide show for all.

On Tuesday night, the following volunteers were at the work session: Jerry Lucas (in charge), Bob Jordan (in charge of 607 project), Ted Kamen, Dave Leon, Emil Christofano, Mark Hopkins, Alan Deike, Tim Ward, Mac Taylor, Tim Nolan, and Tom Marshall, with Anne Cleary, Rose Ann Hoover, Jerry Novak, and Susan Randolph attending the Events Committee meeting. On Thursday, it was Dave Leon (in charge), Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Chuck Erikson, Jim Personti, Butch Cannard, Tim Nolan, and Mark Russell, with Steve Bryce, Greg Landrey, Anne Cleary, Susan Randolph, Dan Citron, Bob Reilly (by phone), Pete Parlett, Mike Scott, Jerry Novak, Bill Schwoebel, Kevin Worsh, and Tom Marshall attending the Board meeting.