

June 27, 2005

Hello, Steam Team:

The Adventures of John Benge (continued from last week): One summer Saturday morning about 1915, John and his daughter Mabel left Yorklyn in John's 1910 or '11 20-H.P. Stanley for a weekend outing at Tolchester Beach on Maryland's Eastern Shore, about 60 miles away. It's not clear whether they planned to return that night or not until Sunday. Late Sunday afternoon, John and Mabel returned home on the trolley. Neither ever breathed a word about what happened to the Stanley. (Within a year, John bought another one from my father, a 1915 Model 720, very similar to our 725).

40 years later, my father went to Tolchester to look at a Cagney park locomotive and some tiny cars that had not been used since the closing of the amusement park a few years before. He was able to buy them (in rather poor condition) but in discussing the purchase he happened to mention to the seller that he had a collection of Stanley steamers. The man said, "I remember when a Stanley came to Tolchester. You see that pier there? The fellow was getting ready to go home, the car caught on fire, he headed it straight toward the end of the pier, jumped off, and let 'er go! She ran off the end of the pier and sank in the bay." Draw your own conclusion. We did.

Another "Steamin' Sunday" is behind us, and thanks to all who helped, we had a very successful day. 34 volunteers led by Chuck Erikson, chairman for the day, took part. As was the case in May, our visitors seemed highly pleased with our product. Jerry Novak questioned all when they arrived how they knew about our June 26 opening. By far the largest number said from the May 30 News-Journal article. The next most important source was our Website. Unfortunately, the attendance figures, while slightly better than in May, were below our goals, 187 adults and 86 children for a total of 273 (plus about 12 complimentaries). I hope we can boost this to at least 400 next month. Thanks to ALL who helped yesterday and to the many who distributed promotional material and prepared for the event.

On Tuesday, John McNamara did yeoman's work when he talked about the history of steam locomotives to 135 Cub Scouts assembled at Banning Park. Starting his first lecture at 8:55, he went non-stop until 3:45.

Mostly, the talk and demonstration was to groups of about seven 10-year-olds and their leaders, with each group spending 40 minutes on the subject. He ran the 3/4"-scale locomotive from the museum in place and on compressed air as the climax to their 40 minutes. It was very well-received by the Scout Leaders, and John presented each Cub Scout with a complimentary ticket stapled to one of our flyers. At least three were used Sunday. Thursday night was an Ice Cream Run to Mitchells', and 4 Stanleys plus Rose Ann in her '40 Packard made the trip. Friday evening, the two Packards again went to Hagley to be on display near the Fireworks, as they had done the week before. This time, Rose Ann also took her Packard. On Saturday from 5:00 until 8:00, we hosted the annual president's picnic for the Wilmington Rotary Club through the auspices of Cam Yorkston. A caterer served about 60 guests a rather fancy picnic supper on the front porch and the lawn, and 8 or 10 FAHP volunteers operated one train, the electric car, the Mountain Wagon, and had the Museum open. Again, our visitors seemed highly pleased and complimentary. Many thanks to all who helped and to those who participated in the week's events.

Our newest member is Gisela Vazquez, a very active shop volunteer at the Wilmington & Western. We hope she will find time to spend some of her volunteer time with us! Our next event is off-site on July 4th, and you have received an E-mail from Anne Cleary about participation in the Hockessin Parade at 3 P.M. that day. It looks like we'll have 7 or 8 cars participating, and there will be seats for all who may wish to ride to, in, and from the parade. On the return trip, most will go to Mitchells' for ice cream before coming back to Auburn Heights. Cars need checking and preparation, so some time should be spent this week on this, as well as cleaning up (mostly the locomotives) from our June 26 operation. We also want to move ahead with our signal installation on the Auburn Valley, and Bob Wilhelm is helping with the circuitry needed. The Rockwood Museum's parade and Ice Cream Festival is on Saturday, July 9, and while we have not been specifically asked to participate this year, any of our cars will be welcome if there is interest in going. It's shaping up that 3 Stanleys and 9 or 10 people plan to attend the annual Eastern Steam Car Tour at Lakeville, CT, July 17-22. We wish more of you could go, as this annual event is the best way to gain experience in operating steamers over the road. I am the only living member of a committee of 6 that ran the 1955 tour there, and

they want us to give a presentation on its 50th anniversary. And before we know it, July 31 will come along and we'll present our next "Steamin' Sunday". Have a good summer! Tom