

THE MARSHALL COLLECTION

Group seeks to preserve steam-powered autos

By Andrea Miller
Staff Reporter

Those who love steam cars would be interested to know that a non-profit organization is being formed to preserve a rare collection of steam powered automobiles.

The collection of 17 automobiles and a scale model of a steam locomotive belongs to Yorklyn resident Tom Marshall, but he will eventually give them to the "Steam Team," a non profit group that is being organized.

In April, Marshall donated Auburn Heights, his 3.8 acre estate valued at \$3 million, to Delaware's Division of Parks and Recreation for preservation. Parks and Recreation will take over the property in five years.

The Victorian mansion, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, was built by Marshall's grandparents, Israel and Elizabeth Marshall, in 1897 for \$11,500. The donation included the house, land and historic furnishings, but the automotive collection, which includes 14 Stanley steam cars, two Packards, and an electric car, will be cared for by the "Steam Team."

Marshall began an informal group of 30 to 35 enthusiasts about five years ago, teaching them how to operate and maintain the collection.

"We're all there because we love old cars," says Anne Cleary, one of two women who joined the group two years ago, because she loved steam locomotive engines.

Hockessin, the Steam Team's secretary, is the creativity and craftsmanship that went into designing these automobiles. "It was a unique venture into transportation, one that wound up not working so well in comparison to internal combustion, but the Stanley brothers—like the Wright brothers— were perfect examples of late 19th century ingenuity and American know-how," he said.

The oldest steam car in Marshall's collection dates from 1902.

"Personally I think they didn't catch on because they are so mechanical, you have to understand machines to use them," says Cleary.

"It is a very interesting no longer used technology, external combustion, as source of power," says Bernard. There is no explosion inside the engine, its more like a fire on a gas stove that makes steam, with a pipe that sends the steam back to the pistons, like a locomotive. The engine requires kerosene to keep the burner going, pilot fuel to keep the pilot lit, and water to produce the steam.

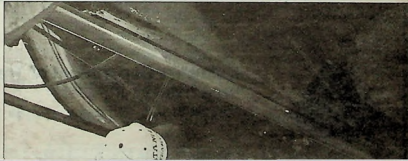
Aside from the mechanical know-how, the steam powered automobile may have died out because it took so long to get them ready, according to Cleary. Before using one, the boiler must heat for up to an hour.

Marshall's collection is special because most of them are original



Photo by Ruxana Bhatti

Bob Wilhelm lights the pilot light on a Stanley Steam car.



The group meets every Thursday night to work on the cars, and drive them to Mitchell's Ice Cream on North Star Road, weather permitting.

Cleary says she has a special affinity for the cars. "I can't explain it. You can't understand until you've experienced it, it's like flying."

The engine on a steam car is very quiet. "You don't hear a sound, just a faint puff puff, sometimes howls when burner turns on," says Cleary.

The Stanley brothers started producing the steam powered automobiles around 1900, and stopped making them in 1928. They were never mass-produced, and are very rare today.

What is unique and charming about them, according to Richard Bernard of

rather than refurbished, according to Bernard. Only one has been restored in some kind of concourse condition. Though Marshall does regularly tour them, they are not strictly show cars, they have always been very much working cars, says Bernard.

"The reason they've lasted 100 years is because we use them regularly and don't take top speed," says Cleary. They are driven about 35 to 40 mph.

Five to seven of Marshall's steam car collection will be in Hockessin's 4th of July Parade, on Old Lancaster Pike, beginning at 3 p.m.

The collection is on display several times throughout the year, including Hagley Museum and Kennett Square's Mushroom Festival in the Fall, and in



Tom Marshall examines the undercarriage of a Stanley Steamer.

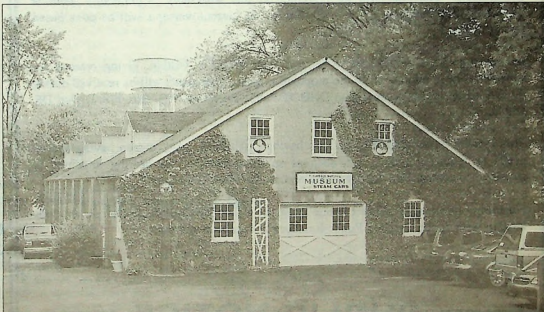
the Spring at Linville Orchards car show.

The non-profit group that is forming is looking to expand. "We will need a good group of volunteers to help with special events on the property and all phases of the

operation, including operating and maintaining the cars, as well as interpreting the museum to public, and maintaining the exhibits of life in 1910, life at Auburn Heights, and steam related exhibits," says Bernard.



Yorklyn resident Tom Marshall, who owns a collection of steam cars, talks with Joe Mitchell, owner of Woodside Creamery.



The collection of steam cars is stored in a museum on the grounds of Marshall's estate, Auburn Heights, in Yorklyn.