

FAHP News, September 19, 2016

The Rivalry: For 80 plus performances on Broadway in 1959, a play featuring the events surrounding the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 was not exactly a resounding success. Richard Boone portrayed Abraham Lincoln.

Always an admirer of Lincoln, I was delighted when the Breck's Mill Players of Wilmington staged this two-act play about 10 years later in their small theatre on the third floor of Breck's Mill along the Brandywine, just downstream from the Hagley Museum. I encouraged members of our "Game Group" to go, and we thoroughly enjoyed it. Like the Wilmington Drama League and the Lyceum Players, the Breck's Mill Players were excellent amateur performers, many of them very prominent people in the community. When they staged "The Rivalry," this was indeed apparent.

The famous sculptor Charles Cropper Parks played Lincoln, and Louise Prickett, the wife of prominent Wilmington attorney William Prickett Jr., played Adele Douglas, the wife of Senator Stephen A. Douglas. Jim Beaver, a teacher in one of the Pennsylvania school districts touching Delaware, was Senator Douglas, and C. Douglass Buck Jr., president of the New Castle County Council, was a drunken Republican politician. There were only about two others in the cast.

The actual details of the debates are well known. Between August and October 1858, seven planned debates took place across Illinois, the first being at Ottawa and the last being at Alton. Douglas was one of the most prominent politicians in Washington, running for his third Senate term and definitely having his eye on the presidency. A northern Democrat, he found himself caught up in the slavery issue and the extension of slavery into the new western states fast joining the Union. He had nowhere to go but to straddle the issue, arguing that to do nothing was less likely to cause bloodshed and was therefore the practical solution. Lincoln was nominated by the brand-new Republican Party to oppose him, and he saw an opportunity to gain recognition by challenging Douglas to the series of debates. Both men had known each other since the 1830s, when they had served together in the Illinois legislature at Vandalia, before the state capital was moved to Springfield. In the November election that followed the debates, Lincoln received more popular votes, but U.S. Senators were then elected by their State Legislatures, and Douglas was re-elected. When asked how he felt, Lincoln replied: "I feel like the small boy who stubbed his toe. He was too big to cry, but it hurt too much to laugh" (fellow-Illini Adlai Stevenson repeated Lincoln's statement when he was defeated by General Eisenhower in 1952, giving credit to its originator). Nonetheless, the famous debates received national attention and helped both men receive their parties' nominations for president in 1860.

"The Rivalry" was based on the interaction of the candidates during the debates, some of it fiction. Mary Lincoln did not accompany her husband around the state, but Adele Douglas was with her senator. Often Lincoln and Mrs. Douglas would meet in a hotel lobby, and she grew very fond of him, especially enjoying his humor. These encounters and others like them, plus the political capers of those who followed the senatorial campaign, made this an interesting and humorous play.

Unfortunately, the State Fire Marshal determined that Breck's Mill was a firetrap, and the Breck's Mill Players went out of business. The mill building still stands and the Montchanin Post Office is on the first floor (it's about two miles from Montchanin).

Work Report: On Tuesday, September 13, 19 volunteers turned out, including those who attended the Events Committee meeting: Dennis Tiley, Mike Ciosek, Brent McDougall, Dave Leon, Anne K. H. Cleary, Ryan Cleary, Rose Ann Hoover, Jerry Novak, Steve Bryce, Jerry Lucas, Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Matt Richard, Paul Blau, Nate Blau, Bob Stransky, Tom Marshall, Art Sybell, and a new prospective volunteer Matt Appleby. Susan also attended the Events Committee meeting.

Work continued on the complicated wiring on the '37 Packard. A few more tubes were drilled out on the old boiler from the Model 87. The Model EX fuel system was cleaned and the pressure tanks blown out in an attempt to prep the car for its run to the Hagley Show on 9/18. It was then fired up and returned to its position in the museum. The steering wheel from the EX was sanded thoroughly following the removal of old paint, in preparation for repainting.

Installation of the steam pipe on the Model H-5 was attempted, but the flexible packed joint was not finished, so hook-up was delayed until the next time. On the A.V.R.R., the last of the trucks on the wooden cars were inspected and cleaned.

On Wednesday afternoon, September 14, the following six volunteers were on hand: Richard Bernard (in charge), Jeff Kennard, Dave Leon, Jerry Novak, Bill Schwoebel, and Tom Marshall.

The '32 Packard Phaeton was prepped for its run to the Hagley Car Show on 9/18. Rubber hold-down bumpers for the hood of the Model 740 were made and installed. The superheater on the Model 78 developed a leak when the car was fired up earlier in the day, and a puddle of water under the car was mopped up. It was determined that closing the throttle stopped the water from syphoning out of the boiler and through the leak (and the burner) onto the floor.

Planning for the making of two or more new pilots, parts and tools were assembled for this project. Jeff Kennard took some of this home with him for getting started in his shop. The packing joint on the steam pipe for the Model H-5 was completed and the pipe installed and hooked up. The exhaust hose was also connected, so the car should be ready for testing under steam. The wooden steering wheel from the Model EX was primed. The broken speedometer cable on the Mountain Wagon was examined again, and it was determined that the problem is in the bevel gears on the drive near the wheel. It appears one of these gears is badly worn.

On Thursday, September 15, 10 volunteers attended, viz: Ted Kamen (in charge), Tom Marshall, Steve Bryce, Bob Jordan, Neal Sobocinski, Kelly Williams, Mark Russell, Jared Schoenly, Bob Koury (in the afternoon), and Mike Pecora (a prospective volunteer).

Bob Koury installed more new ties on the Auburn Valley Railroad. New prospect Mike Pecora was given a complete "run-by" of our museum and working facilities. He came as a result of witnessing Kelly Williams's firing-up demonstration at the Kennett Mushroom Festival on 9/11. The new boiler was installed in the Model 87, and final drilling and tapping of the fitting holes in the top head was continued. The battery was charged on the Model 740.

The steering wheel on the Model H-5 was removed for refinishing. The Model EX was thoroughly oiled and prepped for its trip to Hagley, and its steering wheel received a final coat of gloss black. The tail light wiring on the '37 Packard was nearly completed, but two new sockets are required for additional direction signal installation (not standard, or even thought of, in 1937).

Of our three cars planned for the Hagley Show, none actually got there. Rich Gregg was not available to drive the '32 Packard, and Kelly Williams (in the EX) and Steve Bryce (in the Model 71) turned around just over one mile from Auburn Heights. The problem was lingering foreign material in the fuel system of the EX so that the pilot went out frequently. Being delayed with this problem, time ran out to get to Hagley by the entering deadline, so Steve, in the 71, and Kelly returned both cars to the museum. Tom thought he had the EX fixed, but obviously his work was not complete.