

Tuesday, January 1, 2008

Hello, Steam Team: My parents and I always had Christmas dinner with my mother's family, either at Auburn Heights, at my grandmother's home in Middletown, DE, or at Aunt Mary Ferguson's home in Ridley Park. On New Year's, however, it was with the "Marshall side", either at Auburn Heights, at Uncle Warren's home in Yorklyn, or at Aunt Anna Mancill's home, first at Mendenhall, then on Locust Lane near the Kennett Country Club, and finally in Kennett Square. My mother liked to entertain during the holidays and one year when I was 12 or 13, I can recall her having 4 dinner parties in 10 days. With Christmas and New Year's Day coming in mid-week, she first had Christmas dinner, then Sunday dinner between Christmas and New Year's, then New Year's dinner, and finally dinner on the Sunday following New Year's. The Sunday guests were "other than family". As was typical of families living in large homes before World War II, there was always some domestic help to assist the lady of the house with her parties, and this was the case at Auburn Heights.

On the last day of 2007, however, Ruth entertained 18 for dinner at Auburn Heights, having very minimal assistance from "domestic help", but great help from several of her close friends, whether or not they were among those invited. It was the traditional New Year's Eve party and get-together for members of our "Game Group", this time celebrating its 50th anniversary. We had 100% attendance, even though some of us are quite decrepit. The very first meeting of these young married couples (I was the odd man out until Ruth joined the group in 1985) took place at Auburn Heights on either December 28 or 29, 1957, so it was fitting that our golden anniversary party should be here on our last New Year's Eve while living here. A table was set for 10 in the front hall, and for 8 in the dining room. All the rooms featured Ruth's large collection of Byers Carolers. Although one guest came in a wheel chair, two with walkers, and several with canes or hearing aids, they all made it, and had a good time. It's impossible to explain the "Game Group", so I won't try, but the ages of its members now range from 70 to 88.

The coming of 2008 will bring many changes for Ruth and me, and for *The Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve*. We will begin sorting, captioning, cataloguing, discarding, and preserving 3 generations of collecting on this property. Unfortunately, I will spend less time on FAHP's mechanical projects in order to proceed with the necessary. If all goes according to plan, we expect to move to our new home at Cokesbury Village, a fine Methodist community just over 3 miles from here, before year-end.

Our new full-time Executive Director, Catherine Coin, plans to begin work with us the week of January 7, and this, too, will be a new opportunity for FAHP. We have high hopes that she is the right person for an unusual and difficult job. She will need the help and cooperation from all of us and I know she can count on it. We are grateful that Bob Reilly, our retiring Executive Director, has agreed to spend two or three weeks with Catherine before he departs for Colorado. It is expected that the apartment-over-garage, used by Bob for the FAHP office and for the Reillys' living quarters when they were in Delaware, will be converted completely to office and meeting space for the *Friends*.

This will be the last “Weekly News” in this format. Originating in February, 2005, I have written homely historical anecdotes almost every week, and there have been 150 of them. Attached is a list of topics covered. If any of you have an interest in any particular “issue”, let me know, and I’ll E-mail it to you. From now on, the Weekly News will not start with “Hello, Steam Team”, but will have a more appropriate beginning, and will be limited to a story or biography, and reports on a few important happenings affecting FAHP. Work projects and activities involving active volunteers who participate regularly will be covered in an “Internal Memo”, which may be weekly, bi-weekly, or however often seems necessary, and will not be sent to all members. It is hoped that someone from the Management Group can write these periodic memos.

Our mechanical work sessions will begin again on Thursday, January 3. It will take a few more sessions to finish the burner for the 735, and the Model CX is almost ready to return to its spot in the Museum. I hope we can move ahead rapidly on the Stanley Museum’s car, and address the loose wheels, the perch poles, the oil pump, the seat cushions, and the throttle linkage. Jim Personti has the engine repair in his capable hands. We can also “drop” the flue on the Model 78 roadster, thoroughly clean it, and repair the feed water heater. Other small groups can concentrate on rebuilding the tracks in the shop’s basement, and modify the turntable to make it user-friendly. We need to approve a plan, even though somewhat temporary (temporary because a Master Plan for the Museum’s future will require more time and study, and will need to be coordinated with the State Division of Parks and FAHP’s Strategic Plan), for Rose Ann and her committee to follow in upgrading the Museum for the coming season.

On either January 30 or the 31st, our Model 71 is due to go to the Philadelphia Auto Show, and we must review our strategy for transporting it safely. At least a week prior to its move, it should be checked over in the shop, and prepped for the winter trip in our trailer. We are in touch with the shop in Florida (indirectly) that has our diesel locomotive partly finished, and our Florida member, Walter O’Rourke, has offered to go and inspect the progress, and recommend to us how we should proceed. We hope this inspection can take place within the next two weeks. Bill Schwoebel is planning to have some training sessions and/or lectures this winter for active volunteers wanting to learn or review the systems used in steam transportation.

This is how I see the beginning of 2008. Your continued interest and enthusiasm is essential to FAHP’s success. May we count on you as we have in the past? You have always come through, and I know you will continue to do so. Many thanks, and HAPPY NEW YEAR! Tom