

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, January 30, 2017

Renovations of Our 1937 Shop: Since we are presently in the early stages of renovating our primary shop next to the original carriage house at Auburn Heights, it seems appropriate to tell of the beginnings of this 1937 addition. Stories of 10/7/06 and 12/30/06 told of its building. This is partially repetitive.

As a 13-year-old on summer vacation, I watched the daily progress of its construction by Kennett Square building contractor Paul Hannum, a second cousin of my father. Very little grading was required, as a basement was planned where the ground fell off sharply toward the mill race below. The old Marshall stone quarry, just off Route 82 barely in Pennsylvania, was opened again and enough granite blasted therefrom for the walls that matched the mansion, carriage house, and pump house at Auburn Heights. Wood scaffolding was erected so the stone masons could get the stone and mortar to the height needed to complete the vertical walls. Wheelbarrows pushed up temporary ramps by hand were still used on jobs this size in 1937. With the window and door frames set in place as the walls went up, next would be the roof and the interior furnishings.

Almost no power tools were used in the construction. The slightly-sloping roof had a center section cut away to form an open deck, accessible from the apartment above the carriage house. A one-piece overhead door, wide enough for an automobile, and seven windows allowed outside light to enter the main shop, with an additional four windows and a walk-in door in the basement. Another 32-inch door was cut through the old stone wall (where a tiny window had been), connecting the carriage house with the new shop on the same level. By July, it was time for interior finishing.

My father wanted a wood floor, easier to stand on for extended periods, an opening in the middle of the floor to serve as a pit for servicing the underside of automobiles, and enclosed wooden steps to the basement. Drawers, open bins, and cupboards were everywhere around the shop's perimeter. Numerous electrical receptacles complied with 1937 standards. There was a neat (cool) cupboard, above the basement steps and about 4 feet off the floor, just the right size for a 13-year-old to locate and observe as work progressed (we use this now for storage of paper supplies).

Sam Massey of West Grove was Hannum's chief carpenter, and he was good. Joe Stabler of Kennett got the electrical contract. The new wiring was not in conduit but rather encased in a heavily wrapped flexible cloth material, state-of-the-art for the late 1930s. I can still see Stabler boring holes through the floor joists with a brace and bit for running wires under the floor to various locations. Sharp Thompson of Kennett was the plasterer. In a single day, he plastered all the interior walls on both floors with rough-coat plaster. In the basement, the joists were exposed; in the main shop the ceiling consisted of ½" plywood nailed to the joists above. The building of the main work bench, its drawers and cabinets below, floor-to-ceiling cabinets, and numerous smaller drawers and open "cubbies," completed the carpenter work. By summer's end, the 16" South Bend lathe was moved from the carriage house to its present location, and new tools soon occupied the main work bench. The interior of the shop was never painted until 40 years later. My father installed the plumbing and the steam heat (that was second nature to him).

For the first 10 years, cars were worked on and serviced in the shop, and the movable planks below allowed for an open pit for oil changes, etc. The 1940 Packard 180 was converted to steam in the shop in 1941-42 (Bill Rule now owns this car). In those years, it was necessary to cross a short section of lawn to reach the shop door, as the parking lot in front of the museum was not graded and paved until 1947. With the building of Locomotive 401 and the finishing of 402 in 1960-61, one of the basement windows was cut down and tracks entered the building from a turntable constructed immediately outside. The "pit" was permanently closed. Soon thereafter, my father bought a new Rockwell Milling Machine, which he located in the middle of the floor, with a 230-volt line to power it. In the late 1970s, most woodwork in the shop was painted grey, and the floor was painted dark green.

In 1981, a stairway hugging the outside wall toward the museum was added to access the enlarged and improved apartment. A few years later, a roof covered the former open deck, and the porch was screened in. A significant change came in 1993, when a new elevator was installed to service the apartment on the second floor of the carriage house. One corner of the shop was partitioned off for the elevator, requiring the loss of one window and the repositioning of floor-to-ceiling cabinets. Some space for the mechanism was also lost in the basement.

Late in 2016, work was undertaken by FAHP volunteers led by Mark Bodenstab to revamp and revitalize the heavily used shop. In some cases, heavily used supplies and tools will be relocated, the water-damaged ceiling will be replaced, ceiling insulation will be added, and the whole place will be repainted. New railings have been installed on the basement steps. The “Engine House” in the basement is being improved. The milling machine will be removed to another location, and a second work bench will occupy the center of the shop. We hope many FAHP volunteers will help Mark as this project moves along in the coming weeks.