

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, September 18, 2006

Weldin V. Stumpf (1922–1990): Weldin was born on a farm on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the youngest of six children. About 1935 his family moved to Kennett Township, Pennsylvania, and lived along Marshall's Bridge Road just 2 miles from Auburn Heights. From here he attended Kennett High School and was graduated in the Class of 1940. His future wife, Dorothy Fogg Stumpf (1924-2004), was in the Class of '42.

Out of high school, Weldin went to work for the Pennsylvania Railroad in the Wilmington shops. Since steam locomotives were king, he soon became a boiler maker. Serving in a military railroad battalion in the European theater during World War II, he returned to the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1945 and worked in the shops at Wilmington for the next 25 years. In the years before and after 1960, he moonlighted by working for his brother-in-law, Eugene Reese, a pharmacist in Kennett Square. My father bought his cigars from Reese's Drug Store, and Weldin soon learned that he and I had bought a steam locomotive and were moving it from Canada to Yorklyn with the hope of starting the Wilmington & Western Railroad (W&W). He offered his services to get the old "steamer" running again. Through his direction and hard work, a few volunteers operated the engine on the Snuff Mill siding in the summer of 1960, but a lot more work was needed, including the retubing of the boiler before it began tourist service on the W&W in 1966. During the first four years of the tourist operation, Weldin kept the equipment running—while some give me credit for starting the W&W, it would not have been possible without the knowledge, interest, and hard work of Weldin Stumpf.

Being knowledgeable on heavy steam equipment, it was natural that Weldin wanted to know more about steam automobiles. I invited him to go with me on the 1961 Glidden Tour in eastern Pennsylvania, and within two years my father agreed to sell him a Stanley that was considered surplus to us at that time—a 1913 20-horsepower Model 77. With help from my father, Stumpf soon had his car running and drove it on two Glidden Tours in the mid-1960s. He also helped my father work on his quite complicated Doble steam cars, a real challenge. Less than two weeks after my father died in 1969, Weldin approached me for a job, saying he had worked long enough for the railroad and that if I wanted to open Auburn Heights and its steam attractions to the public (which I had hinted I wanted to do), he would like to work for me to make that happen.

Weldin started work here in February 1970, built the railroad trestle across the old vegetable garden, built the tunnel out of railroad tank car bodies, supervised the building of the pond and the driveway around the house (for a Mountain Wagon route), built a model Delaware River ferry boat that we named the "Jersey Shore," and a real steam-powered paddle-wheel steamboat that could carry about eight passengers. A lot of steam-powered exhibits operated in the museum as well, being powered by steam from a large central steam boiler. This effort opened to the public in September 1971 as the Magic Age of Steam. In the summer of 1972, he and his wife, Dorothy, and 13-year-old daughter, Joan, participated with me in our Model 87 for about three weeks of the eight-week, 8,328-mile Transcontinental Reliability Tour for cars 1914 and older (we had the only "steamer"). After the Magic Age closed at the end of 1977, he and I took in Stanley mechanical work and worked on probably 25 cars owned by others in the next several years. He also upgraded several of my cars. Retiring at the end of 1986, Weldin lived just four years, the last two in very poor health. His presence at Auburn Heights will never be forgotten. Like my father a generation earlier, he could build or fix anything.