

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, July 16, 2007

**Weldin V. Stumpf (1922–1990).** Weldin “Bill” Stumpf could build anything. Born on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the youngest in a family of four boys and two girls, he moved with his family to a small farm on Marshall’s Bridge Road near Becker’s Bridge, from which he attended Kennett High School. Before graduating in the Class of 1940, he met his future wife, Dorothy Fogg, who was in the Class of ‘42. They were married in 1946 at the end of World War II.

Right out of High School, Weldin went to work for the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR) in the Wilmington shops. He soon had the title of boiler maker, even though the shops were servicing the railroad’s fleet of GG-1 electric locomotives in addition to the diminishing number of steam locomotives. The famous “G’s” used in passenger service still carried steam boilers to heat the cars in their trains. The first of these were fire-tube boilers almost of the Stanley design, only larger and carrying much lower pressures. Working on steam locomotive boilers was *hard work*, but Stumpf thrived on it.

In 1942 he joined a railroad battalion of the U.S. Army and was sent to England to build freight cars and locomotives for the invasion of France. He crossed to the Continent following the successful D-Day invasions and worked on military railroads there until the war in Europe ended in May 1945. Sailing from the port of Marseilles, he arrived home in the summer of ‘45 and returned to the PRR, keeping his seniority from the date of first employment.

My father bought his Webster cigars from Reese’s Drug Store in Kennett Square, and Weldin “moonlighted” in the store owned by his brother-in-law, pharmacist Eugene Reese. In 1959 he had heard of our acquisition of a steam locomotive from Canadian National Railways (#92) with the hope of starting a tourist railroad and wanted to know how he could help. My father and I assured him his help would be most welcome. Through his knowledge and hard work, #92 was made operable again and along with many dedicated volunteers the foundation was laid for the beginning of the Wilmington & Western Railroad operation in 1966. Weldin wanted to know more about Stanley cars, and I invited him to be my passenger on the 1961 Pennsylvania Glidden Tour in my father’s Model 76. The tour started at Hershey and ended at Harrisburg with overnight stops at Reading, Scranton, Allentown/Bethlehem, and Wilmington, Delaware. In a short time, he wanted to own a Stanley. My father sold him a 1913 Model 77 in 1963.

After my father died in 1969, Weldin approached me and said, “You are going to need help if you want to keep the collection together and open the facility (now Auburn Heights) to the public.” We made a deal; he retired from the railroad with 29 years of service, and the idea of the Magic Age of Steam was born in February 1970. In the 18 months from then until our opening, Stumpf built the pond, the tunnel, the driveway around the house, the double-tracked trestle across the vegetable garden, and did the grading for our new right-of-way. He built operating exhibits in the museum, including rebuilding the old “O”-gauge circular railway, a long steam table for operating model stationary engines, a stand for operating a Stanley car on steam, and provision for running our ¾-inch-scale 4-8-4 locomotive in place, also on steam. Soon he completed our riverboat with its paddle-wheel steam engine that was used for rides around the pond. In addition to helping me run the Magic Age, he, his wife, Dorothy, and their daughter Joan made about half of the 8,328-mile trip in our 1912 Stanley in the summer of 1972. After the Magic Age closed in 1977, he and I took in Stanley work, and while we never did cosmetic restorations, we did mechanical work on about 30 cars owned by others.

Weldin Stumpf retired at the end of 1986. Acquiring a motor home, he and Dorothy enjoyed a trip to California and one or two to Florida before he became ill. Developing a brain tumor in the summer of 1989, he died on December 16, 1990, at the age of 68.