

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, March 24, 2008

G. Whitney Snyder (1921–1998): About 1912, a young woman named Whitney who was a direct descendant of Eli Whitney, inventor of the cotton gin in 1793, drove onto a ferry boat to cross a southern river in her massive Mercedes touring car. Before the ferry had finished loading, a young man named William Penn Snyder II drove onto the deck with his Mercedes, almost the identical model as that of Miss Whitney. He was the son of William Penn Snyder, who had founded the Shenango Steel Company in Pittsburgh. The river crossing was successful, and a friendship that began on that occasion blossomed into a romance that soon developed into marriage. The Snyder estate was on a bluff above the Ohio River in Sewickley, about 10 miles west of the Golden Triangle in Pittsburgh. On this property in the late 19th century had been built a massive stone house, somewhat similar to Auburn Heights but half again as large, along with a fancy carriage house and other outbuildings.

Upon the death of his parents, W. P. II, and his wife occupied this spacious home, and their two sons, William P. Snyder III and G. Whitney Snyder, grew up there. Both had toys galore and a dog named Mooney. They grew to be tall, Bill about 6'6," and Whitney about 6'4." Both liked cars, especially fine old cars, and were early members of the Antique Automobile Club of America. Bill was on the Board of AACA in the late 1950s, but Whitney was the mechanical one, and when they would go on early Glidden Tour revivals with two of their cars, Whitney was needed to keep both cars running well. Bill represented Shenango Steel Company on bank boards and belonged to the fancy clubs around Pittsburgh. Whitney was the down-to-earth plant manager type who always had his employees' interests foremost in the conduct of their company. Bill moved into the old family mansion on the property; Whitney built a very nice but more modest home on the grounds. Deciding carriage collecting was more his "cup of tea," Bill assembled a nice array of coaches and housed them in the old carriage house; Whitney built up his collection of fine antique automobiles, he understood well the mechanics that made them operate correctly, and had a split level garage-shop near his home. Among his collection was the Mercedes his father had driven onto the ferry boat about 1912, and he drove it on at least two of the "Trans-Con" tours for cars 1914 and earlier.

I had not seen the Snyders since the early 1960s, but when Weldin Stumpf, Jules Reiver, and I arrived in Montreal to start the 1972 "Trans-Con" tour to Tijuana, we backed the Stanley Model 87 into our slot in the Chateau Champlain garage next to Whitney's Mercedes! What fun it was to have him and members of his family (who came and went) on the tour. His one passenger who went all the way was a young man named John Benz, who was dating Whitney's daughter, Nina. Whitney introduced John as his "factory representative." He had a minimum of trouble with the massive Mercedes and was always helping others with his mechanical expertise, but he did have to experiment with various lubricants to keep the clutch from grabbing and chattering badly. Finally, he settled on Jergens Lotion as the perfect product. All on the tour celebrated Whitney's 51st birthday at a western barbecue outside Miles City, Montana, attended by his wife, Jean, and their daughter Nina.

Whitney owned a 1911 Stanley Model 62, which was a nice original car. In 1980, he brought it here for Weldin Stumpf and me to work on. We soon got it running well, but he never spent much time with it and ran it very little, although he would have been an excellent operator. He was instrumental in starting a transportation museum in Pittsburgh; first it was located at Station Square, then there was a chance to be next to the Carnegie Science Museum. When that fell through, the Henry Clay Frick estate was being developed as a tourist attraction, and a permanent auto collection was assembled to occupy the carriage house on the estate. Whitney gave most of his cars to the Frick, and its policy is that the cars in the collection will never be operated again. Unfortunately, Jean and Whitney had passed away before details had been worked out. It's my opinion that he would have wanted it to be an operating collection. A very fine 1909 Model R Stanley that had been restored by Charlie Johnson was donated to the Frick Museum as well. A steam tow boat named the *W. P. Snyder, II* is one of the attractions at the Ohio River tourist town of Marietta, Ohio. Apparently it was donated by Shenango Steel and named in memory of Whitney's father.