

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, March 9, 2009

Robert Shackne and Our Model H-5: Shackne was a reporter for CBS News in the days when Walter Cronkite held forth in grand style. The former had a good voice but was not pleasant to look at. Nevertheless, Cronkite's team gave him assignments from time to time, and he would report on them during the news hour about once a week. Seldom did the viewers look at him; they only heard his voice. In 1968, he did a piece on the future of steam cars, and this time he was on camera for at least a part of his segment.

The twin brothers Calvin and Charles Williams of Huntingdon Valley near Philadelphia had developed a very good modern steam car. Shackne wanted to compare it with a Stanley, a name many people could relate to and certainly the most famous steam car made in the distant past. He heard of the Williams brothers and of my father who had a collection of Stanleys. He visited the Williams' first and filmed a demonstration of their modern steamer. Snappy-looking it was, a two-passenger small sport car with fiberglass body painted red. A few years before, I had ridden in it with Calvin Williams from Auburn Heights to Clifton Mills and back.

In 1968, we were not open to the public at Auburn Heights, and my father was not well, but he rather liked publicity for his collection, and it was arranged for Shackne and his crew to come. They arrived on time and selected our 1908 Model H-5, the Gentleman's Speedy Roadster, as the car they wanted to use for comparison with the Williams steamer. I fired it up, and they spent some time deciding where they wanted to photograph it in action. Shackne was not nice to my father, which I did not like. He was quite ill at the time, but it *was* his collection.

It was decided to film on Old Public Road near Anne Cleary's parents' home. I drove the H-5 to that location, and Shackne and his crew followed. As they got set up to film, Shackne told me that he was going to drive. That did not set well with me; I thought, "no way!" He insisted and said he had driven the Williams steamer in the segment filmed there. I relented, shut the fire valve and told him not to touch any of the valves. He took off with steam flying and cameras rolling while trying to describe the Stanley to his future audience, turned around (somehow), and returned with about 250# of steam. He and the crew said goodbye, and I never saw them again.

When the segment appeared on the CBS Evening News a few days later, the Williams brothers were shown driving their car; Shackne was not driving it. They knew better, but I didn't.