

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, September 21, 2009

The Cars Anna Drove: My father's only sister, Anna Marshall Mancill (1883-1986), was a good driver for her time. She lived at Auburn Heights from 1897 until her marriage to Norman B. Mancill in 1912, then again with her husband for four or five years, 1913–18. As has been written, Norman Clarence Mancill was born in the big house on November 28, 1914, the only birth ever to take place there.

Anna's first car was a 1913 Stanley Model 65, four-passenger touring. When it arrived by train from the factory, her brother Clarence conducted the first driving lesson. It was in the afternoon and he said, "We'll pick up Bertha and the baby, and go for a little ride." The baby was Lorraine, one-year-old daughter of Warren and Bertha Marshall. They proceeded as planned, and the four of them went to Hockessin. Clarence proposed that Anna should drive home, which she prepared to do. About that time he saw a trolley coming along, bound for Yorklyn, so as he ran to catch the trolley, he shouted to his sister: "I have to get back to work, thee can drive home." She had to know something about the three-tube indicator, what to do if the pilot went out, how to keep enough water in the boiler (and not too much), and several other things. The car would have had a gasoline burner 18-inch in diameter, like our Model EX. She was terrified, but she made it and drove the little Stanley successfully for two years or more, including a trip to Gettysburg and back with her husband and her cousins Joseph and Emilie Mitchell. It didn't hurt that the Stanley dealership was at Auburn Heights. (Aunt Anna told me this story many years later.)

Aunt Anna later learned to shift gears much better than my mother did. The first car I remember as "her car" was a 1930 Packard Model 726, five-passenger sedan with the deluxe package of dual side mounts, parking lights on the front fenders, and a trunk rack. Uncle Norman had a 726 rumble-seat coupe, also with the deluxe package. The Mancills drove these cars on a daily basis until 1937, and I had many rides in both of them. Their son Norman had a 1934 Lafayette, an economy car built by Nash Motors.

Widowed in 1937, Anna bought a Packard One-Twenty four-door sedan of the same year. Much lighter and easier to drive than her obsolete 1930 car, it was a favorite until the more stylish and longer 120 of 1940 (Model 1801) came along. I really liked the '40, and drove it at least once. However, she traded it in late in 1941 for one of the very first Packard Clippers (these '41 Clippers had a wheelbase of 127 inches, vs. 120 inches for the '42s and most of the Clippers that followed after the war before the styling was changed in 1948).

In 1949 Anna bought a new Pontiac, and together with her son Bob, Sara Bowers, and Joe Jackson, drove this car on a circuit tour of the west. Bob and his friend Joe probably did most of the driving. Anna didn't drive much after her 80th birthday, but she lived to be 103. Most early women drivers enjoyed long lives.