

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 3, 2011

M. J. "Jerry" Duryea (ca. 1895–1956): In the early years of the Antique Automobile Club of America (AACA), there was not a more public and flamboyant member than Jerry Duryea of Longmeadow, Massachusetts, near Springfield. He was the son of Charles E. Duryea, credited with inventing the first successful American automobile in 1892. Actually, J. Frank Duryea, Charles's younger brother, was the mechanical genius in the family, but Jerry spent the last 20 years of his life promoting his father's accomplishment to the detriment of his Uncle Frank.

Jerry Duryea was greatly liked by many, criticized by a few, and disliked by some who had to acknowledge his abilities and accomplishments. He did a lot for the two fledgling national clubs, AACA and the Veteran Motor Car Club of America, and served as president of both. He was also editor of the *Antique Automobile*, when it was a volunteer job no one really wanted. He was one of a small group of leaders that included Sam Baily, George Hughes Sr., Hyde Ballard, James Melton, and D. Cameron Peck, who collectively ran AACA in the 1940s. All except Baily served as AACA's president (Hughes and Ballard served twice each).

Upon first contact, my father did not like Jerry Duryea. Serving as chairman of the 1947 Glidden Tour Revival through New England, he would get the procession of cars moving along slowly in formation, then come alongside in a big 1918 Pierce Arrow 48 and, with an old-fashioned megaphone, direct the procession to do this or that (it turned out, he had borrowed the Pierce; he owned a less-valuable 1924 Cadillac). At the New England Inn at Intervale, New Hampshire, our two- or three-night headquarters in the White Mountains, my father thought Duryea took our reservations for the use of his small party, downgrading us to a guest house with inadequate heat about a mile away. Within a year, however, they were good friends, and my father spoke highly of Duryea until the latter's untimely death in 1956.

In late June 1949, a mammoth antique automobile show was planned in Philadelphia, and Jerry Duryea was its logical chairman. Convention Hall in center city was reserved for a week, and, based on the interest and success of meets and tours, a huge crowd was expected. Duryea, a natural public relations man, worked tirelessly for weeks to achieve a large attendance. Something like 30,000 color booklets were prepared, describing and illustrating most of the 100 or more cars and other artifacts to be displayed. I don't remember many of the cars on display, but a few gems from James Melton, Cameron Peck, and greater Philadelphia collectors headed the list. E. Paul du Pont had a DuPont phaeton there, and his son, Lex, had his 1901 Mobile steamer. Ted Brooks showed his big six-cylinder 1912 White, and Earle Eckel drove his 1914 Stanley roadster from his home in Washington, New Jersey. Les Henry showed a two-cylinder Maxwell, and Ralph Weeks displayed an early Rambler. Sam Baily had a 1928 Bentley there and probably his T-head Mercer Raceabout, and Joe Van Sciver (father of "our Joe") showed his 1909 Winton and possibly his Mercedes and his Locomobile steamer. I'm sure George Hughes displayed several cars. Naturally, Model T Fords were included, and Bob Laurens's 1911 touring was one of the nicest ones around. We took four cars, driving the 1908 Stanley Model EX and the Mountain Wagon over the road, while Lex du Pont trailered our 1901 (or 1902) Toledo Jr. steamer. The fourth car was probably a Packard, but I am vague on which one.

The Philadelphia Antique Automobile Show of 1949 was a colossal failure, with attendance about 20 percent of that expected. It seemed like half of the printed but unused booklets were stored upstairs in our museum for many years until I threw most of them away 20 years ago.

Jerry Duryea and his attractive wife, Marian, lived well, and they maintained a summer home at Stonington, Connecticut, on Long Island Sound. Norbert Behrendt and I shared a late evening coffee with him at a hotel in Ithaca, New York, in June 1956, immediately following the AACA's National Spring Meet at Cornell University. A few months later, he was dead.