

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 21, 2011

Thanksgiving Weekend, 1940: There was no school the Friday after Thanksgiving, so the Marshall and Mancill families decided to make a three-day trip to Williamsburg, Virginia. My mother, especially, had been following the Williamsburg restorations and was enamored by Colonial gardens and interior furnishings and colors. The year 1940 was the first Thanksgiving that I had a driver's license; the Mancill twins had turned 16 but were not yet driving. I was allowed to drive "my" 1940 Packard 110 touring sedan, and my father drove his favorite car, the 1937 Packard Twelve still in our collection. In addition to the twins and their mother (my father's sister), Sara Bowers, a close friend of both families, and Mary B. Passmore (1890–1980), my father's cousin who taught fourth grade at Wilmington Friends School for 35 years, were in the party. I can't remember whether Sara's mother, Mary Chalfant, was along, as 1940 was about at the end of her traveling. Mary Passmore and the twins were in the small car with me as driver; everyone else was in the "big car" driven by my father.

We left home Friday morning and followed U.S. Route 1 across Conowingo Dam and through Bel Air and downtown Baltimore. Route 1 then went into Baltimore's North Avenue and turned south on the west side of town, coming out next to Montgomery Ward's big mail-order warehouse before heading toward Washington through Elk Ridge, Laurel, and College Park. The District of Columbia was always a beautiful place through which to drive in those days, and Route 1 down Rhode Island Avenue, then 16th Street toward the White House, and around the tidal basin to 14th Street Bridge was a delight. Being cocky, I missed a turn and followed New Hampshire Avenue until it reached the Potomac and then turned downstream to the Route 1 bridge to Virginia. I thought I had discovered a better route, but, alas, my father, who had followed the correct route, was at least 10 minutes ahead. As was usual in those days, occupants of neither car could know where the other was.

The road to Fredericksburg was fast, and I hit 60 m.p.h., not knowing whether I was ahead or behind. In front of the Princess Anne Hotel on Fredericksburg's main street, the big 1937 Packard was parked. We found its occupants eating lunch, seemingly unconcerned about our whereabouts. After lunch, however, we stayed together and followed the Rappahannock downstream to Wakefield, where George Washington was born. Then we headed for Williamsburg, passing through Tappahannock and West Point. We stayed two nights in a very nice guest house operated by Colonial Williamsburg and had dinner at the new Williamsburg Lodge, very good and reasonably priced.

Saturday, we had a very good day and toured the places then open: the Capitol, Raleigh Tavern, the Stocks, the Governor's Palace, the George Wythe House, and Bruton Parish Church. We probably had a carriage ride, and we boys especially enjoyed the maze behind the Governor's Palace. Just behind the maze, a C & O passenger train with a large main-line steam locomotive drifted by—the best of the 18th century next to the early 20th! Automobiles were allowed on Duke of Gloucester Street in 1940 (and for many years thereafter).

On Sunday, we came home. My father liked to seek out and eat at good places, and in his estimation, these were usually in the large hotels. However, we had heard of the Olney Inn in the Maryland town of the same name about 20 miles north of Washington. After an excellent Sunday dinner there, we made our way through Baltimore again and came home with no trouble. My dad let me take Mary Passmore home (she lived on Concord Pike where Concord Mall is now located) in the Packard Twelve, the first time I had driven it without him at my side. I drove too fast over the back roads, but all was well and I, too, regarded this as my favorite car for many years.

The next time I visited Williamsburg was on December 7, 1941, "a day that will live in infamy," with history classes from Mercersburg Academy.