

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, December 5, 2011

The Packards I Remember at Auburn Heights, 1927–37: During the time when I grew up, mostly during the Depression, there were always three Packards at Auburn Heights and sometimes four, as my father was in business with Frank W. Diver in the Packard Motor Company of Wilmington. We always had a “big car” with Delaware license #76, driven only by my father and used mostly for trips. His everyday car was usually a Standard Eight, often with a club sedan body that carried license #8. For my mother’s use and usually driven by her or by Clifford Murray, who worked for us for 50 years, was often a smaller Standard Eight or, after 1935, one of the “Junior” Packards, with license #155. The fourth Packard, and there usually was one, was an older car with license #154, “the school car,” as it was used some of the time by Clifford to take or pick up my cousin Eleanor Marshall (Reynolds) and me on our daily trips to Friends School in Wilmington.

My very first remembrances were in 1927 or 1928. My father had a 1924 First Series Straight Eight seven-passenger touring car, and this car was used frequently for trips to my parents’ new beach-front cottage in Rehoboth, Delaware. A noreaster came up, and we were advised to evacuate the beach-front house on a very wet and windy night. Along with my grandmother Shallcross, we piled into the big Packard touring with side curtains in place, drove a long block back from the beach and spent the night waiting for the storm to subside. I’m sure I was the only one in the car who slept that night. I remember the car at Auburn Heights when my father had it for sale in 1929. The year before, he had bought a 1928 Model 443 seven-passenger sedan with a trunk rack, and along with my Aunt Helen Shallcross, the Auburn Heights Marshalls took a motor trip to Florida in the new car that year. For my mother, my father bought a 1929 Standard Eight five-passenger sedan, the first year Packard’s small car of that period had an eight—instead of a six-cylinder engine. That car was short-lived in our family, as Clifford upset it on New Year’s Day 1930, on Miller’s Hill in Kennett Square. The “#155,” as we called it, then became a 1930 Standard Eight five-passenger sedan (Model 726) with rear-mounted spare and no fender parking lights. In the meantime, my father had for his “#8” first a 1929 Model 640 rumble-seat coupe with the “big eight” engine and then a 1930 Standard Eight Club Sedan. When my grandmother Marshall died in 1930, a pristine and little-used 1928 Model 526 that had been kept for her use at the Packard agency came to Auburn Heights as “#154, the school car.”

The 1932 models were introduced in June 1931, and they were slightly more streamlined and lower, with “V” radiator grilles and exposed chrome-plated horns below the head lights. In August, my father bought a Standard Eight Club Sedan, Model 902, with 137-inch wheelbase. He loved that car and drove it nearly five years. The following January, when we were living at Southern Pines, North Carolina, for three months, a new “big car” was delivered by Joe Stoeckle of the Wilmington dealership, who returned home in the 1928 Model 443. The new “76” was a 1932 Model 904 Super Eight seven-passenger sedan. I loved this massive car and urged my father to use it more, but he was never particularly enamored by it. Returning in the “big car” from the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in September 1934, we stopped at the Packard factory in Detroit, and my father picked out a leftover Packard Twelve seven-passenger limousine with leather in front and a divider window. Both the ‘32 and the ‘34 “big cars” had wheelbases of 147 inches.

With the introduction of the Packard One-Twenty in 1935, which sold for less than half that of the “senior” Packards, my mother got one that replaced the 1930 car as #155, and the former car with this registration became the “school car, #154.” Both my parents liked the ease of driving this smaller 120 and used it a lot for the year they owned it. They liked the 1936 models better, however, as the “suicide doors” in front were turned around to open more safely, so the 1935 was replaced with a similar 1936 One-Twenty for my mother’s use. My father exchanged his faithful 1932 Club Sedan for a 1936 One-Twenty Club Sedan, but he soon realized he liked a larger car. Frank Diver had taken in trade a 1935 Standard Eight Club Sedan (the smallest of the “senior” Packards), also with suicide front doors, but with only 20,000 miles, my dad bought it, and it became the new #8. It was mostly on this Packard that he experimented with his patented fuel-saving device and improved the gas mileage from about 12 M.P.G. to 14 or 15. In 1937, Mary Chalfant and her daughter Sara Bowers decided to update their “wheels” and traded a 1931 Model 826 sedan with very low mileage for a new 1937 One-Twenty five-passenger touring sedan. The 1931 Packard came to us and became #154, the school car,

and the 1930 Model 726 previously used for that purpose was sold to a man named Smith who ran a general store in the Odd Fellows building in Centreville, Delaware.