

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, September 10, 2012

Carl S. Amsley (1921–1998): Carl was a master carpenter and mechanic who lived in Franklin County, Pennsylvania, all his life. In the 1950s, he was a building contractor and developer who built a small motel called the Carlton across from his home just east of St. Thomas. Before the decade was over, he built a much larger motel at Fort Littleton on the Pennsylvania Turnpike about 20 miles away, and he owned and operated both of them. He was also buying a lot of properties with old homes at depressed prices in the Chambersburg area. He had a keen eye for business and seldom made a bad deal.

In the mid-1950s, he became interested in antique cars and bought and restored some very early ones. On the 1957 Glidden Tour through Virginia, he and his first wife, Audrey, made the trip in a 1906 Jennis, a spectacular looking car with a lot of brass that didn't run very well. At Williamsburg, my room at the Motor Lodge was next to the Amsleys, and I invited them to ride to an outdoor barbecue in our Stanley Model 76. Carl was converted to steam cars almost immediately. Within a few months, he had acquired a few and was making regular trips to Yorklyn to visit my father, buy an occasional Stanley part, and learn all he could, and he was a fast learner. The 1907 Model H-5, recently owned by the late Gene Matlusky of Greenville, during which time FAHP volunteers got it running for the owner, was an early "Amsley" restoration. By the spring of 1959, Carl's older son, Larry, restored a condensing car and entered it at the AACA Spring Meet at the Valley Forge Military Academy.

It is estimated that in the 40 years Carl worked on Stanley cars, well over 200 passed through his shop! Some were unrestored original cars to which he would usually do very little before selling them at a modest profit. Many, however, were "Amsley" cars, put together from the huge supply of parts he accumulated, with new bodies, wheels, and lamps. They were beautiful to behold, and Carl won many National First prizes at AACA Meets. He knew all the tricks of the trade and made a lot of money doing what he loved. However, I always found him to be honest and above board in all my dealings with him, which were numerous. As a lasting tribute, there are probably as many "Amsley" Stanleys running today as there are originals.

Carl loved to make trips in his cars. He and Bob Garlock made the first transcontinental trip in a Stanley in 1966, starting from Atlantic City and ending in southern California in his 1907 Model F. He also participated in several of the "Great Races" but realized that there was no way a Stanley could go coast-to-coast in something under 10 days trying to compete with souped-up 12-cylinder Packards and the like. He seldom missed a steam car tour and had a major presence at Hershey with many Stanley items and complete cars for sale.

Carl and his family hosted steam car tours at St. Thomas and Chambersburg in 1975, 1978, 1984, and 1995. His second wife, Elisa, and his five children and their families were a major asset to these tours. I attended the first one and the last and drove to Gettysburg and back to join for one day in 1978. Ruth joined me in 1995 when we visited Mercersburg Academy, Allenberry Playhouse, and the East Broad Top Railroad. In 1998, Carl, accompanied by Alan Kelso, attended his last Steam Car Tour at Waterloo, Ontario. About the same time, we needed a new boiler for our Mountain Wagon, Don Bourdon was back-ordered for six months or more, and I called Carl to see if he could furnish one. He said he was making a 30-horsepower boiler at that time, and he would make two instead of one. He delivered the boiler to Yorklyn in early August, and he died about two weeks later—it was the last of many Amsley boilers. The boiler has served us well. It is still in the Mountain Wagon after many years of frequent use. Terry Amsley, Carl's younger son, is a member of FAHP.