

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, April 27, 2015

The Last Week of April: Many years ago, with spring in the air, things were settling down in our country after many days of great trauma in our history. In April, three presidents died in office: William Henry Harrison on April 4 (1841), Franklin Roosevelt on April 12 (1945), and Abraham Lincoln on April 15 (1865). The skirmishes at Lexington and Concord that started the American Revolution were on April 18–19 (1775), and Fort Sumter was fired upon to start the Civil War on April 12 (1861). The great San Francisco Earthquake and the devastating fires that soon swept the city occurred on April 18 (1906), and the Titanic sank in the north Atlantic on April 15 (1912).

The last week in the month was less traumatic; in fact, it is a beautiful time when nature comes alive. When I was trapshooting with my father, we would be warming up for the season, probably attending our first registered shoot of the year and welcoming the start of the Penn-Del Twilight Trapshooters' League, which opened on Tuesdays with the advent of Daylight Savings Time (in those days, that was always the last Sunday in April). On April 30, 1949, the Yorklyn Gun Club hosted the New Castle County Championship (won by Carl McCallister of Newport).

Near the end of April was also the beginning of the touring season for antique cars. In 1949, the first Saturday Run of the new Historical Car Club of Pennsylvania was to Valley Forge Park, which my father and Homer Kratz completed in our Model 725. With Charles Bernard (Richard's grandfather) as my passenger, I made it in my newly restored Model 607, arriving at the destination just as the others were leaving. A required repair of one of the small fuel pressure tanks made us late.

Regions of the Antique Automobile Club of America were being established in many parts of the country but were slow to include the Philadelphia area, as this was the headquarters of the national club, and some felt local regions were not necessary. One such new region was in Virginia, which at first covered much of the state. In 1951, its season opened with a meet in the Waynesboro-Staunton area, and my father and I decided to go with two steamers. He drove his Model 87 with Homer Kratz on the front seat, and I drove my 607 (if I had a passenger it was probably Elwood Wilkins III of Strickersville). Our route was via Gettysburg and Hagerstown and down the Shenandoah Valley, a beautiful ride in late April, staying away from Baltimore and Washington.

I think we left home Friday morning, probably stayed at Luray, Virginia, overnight, and arrived at Waynesboro about noon on Saturday. There was a show in the afternoon with probably between 20 and 30 old cars and a dinner Saturday night. We had the only steamers there. On Sunday the cars traveled in a procession to Staunton, where we had a concluding dinner at a country restaurant outside town. From there, we began the trip home, arriving late Monday after a very enjoyable four days. On the last stretch over the newly rebuilt Route 41 from Gap, my father was rolling along at a good clip in the Model 87 and was well out of sight ahead of me. Before we reached Avondale, however, he was stopped alongside the road and had the front floorboard out. One of the packing nuts on a water pump had come off, giving him and Homer a bath. This was soon fixed and was the only problem of either car on the 600-mile round-trip.

By 1954, there had been established a Waynesboro-Staunton Region, and they hosted the Old Dominion Meet at Waynesboro as the kick-off for the season. We decided to go again, this time planning to take my father's Doble #E-11 and his Model 87, which he was letting me drive on a trip for the first time. Homer Kratz was with my father again, and my passengers were my cousin Bob Mancill and a recent college friend of his. The 87 had been laid up after the 1952 Glidden Tour, and the boiler had been left empty. I thought I was preparing the car well for the trip, but I also thought that car never gave my father any trouble, so it would not give me any, either. That was not the case.

The morning we were to leave was cold and rainy. My dad decided he and Homer would go in his '40 Packard, which was still his everyday car at that time. I was not about to give up on the 87, so we started off. For some

reason, we planned to use Route 82 to Coatesville, then west and south. It is uphill from Auburn Heights to Kennett Square and on toward Unionville. The water stayed down in the glass, as it does with a three-tube indicator, indicating high water level in the boiler, so I kept the pumps off. Six miles out, the boiler was dry, and I scorched it. The fitting in the bottom of the boiler, to which the water column and the indicator are attached, was completely choked, and the restriction caused a false reading. This was a very stupid and costly error on the operator's part.

With a rope, we towed the Model 87 back to Yorklyn, and my father suggested I take his 1916 First Series Packard Twin Six, which he said "needed some running." As I prepared this car and transferred luggage, my dad and Homer went on ahead, as they didn't want to be late at the first night's destination, the Mimslyn Hotel in Luray, Virginia. Even though it was not a steamer, I enjoyed driving the Twin Six, which served us well, and we pulled in at Luray just before dinner time. On the whole trip (about 600 miles) we used 8 gallons of motor oil (not 8 quarts, but 8 gallons!), yet the spark plugs never fouled or required cleaning. I'm sure the next owner rebuilt the engine.

The month of May gets even better!