

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 27, 2018

South of Pittsburgh, 1930s: Seven times between 1934 and 1942, I was privileged to attend the Grand American Trapshooting tournament at Vandalia, Ohio, with my father, although in 1934 it was for only one day. We would always drive from home, and except for the last two years of this time period, there was no Pennsylvania Turnpike. Each way the trip took two days, and my dad's favorite stopping places were the George Washington Hotel in Washington, Pennsylvania, or the famous old spa at Bedford Springs, about 180 miles from Yorklyn. Bedford Springs was a sprawling frame resort from the early 19th century (President Buchanan called it the "summer White House"), and even though it was on its "last legs" in the 1930s, it was an experience to stay there. The dining room was formal with full-course dinners complemented by a small musical group, including a violinist. Our bedrooms, complete with small porches and makeshift private baths, were in one of the wings, 500 feet or so from the lobby. (After World War II, the Bedford Springs property was leased to G. Bland Hoke, former manager of the Mayflower Hotel in Washington, D.C., and upgraded to a first-class resort. The Glidden Tours of 1948 and 1951 stayed two nights each at Bedford Springs, and the participants were treated royally. Falling again into disrepair, Bedford Springs was closed and its buildings shuttered in the late 1980s, only to be bought by Washington (DC) interests and reopened as a deluxe Marriott Resort.)

In 1934, my father engaged Joe Stoeckle of the Wilmington Packard agency to accompany him, and they left in time for the big "shoot" in our 1932 Packard Model 904 straight eight, seven passenger sedan. It was arranged that Uncle Bassett and Aunt Mary Ferguson would leave Auburn Heights several days later in my dad's '32 Model 902 club sedan, his "everyday" car. My mother and I would be passengers, along with the Fergusons' son Gene who was starting his sophomore year at Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh. The first day, we drove the Lincoln Highway to Pittsburgh, over several Allegheny Mountain ridges, going up in high gear and down in second gear to cool the engine and protect the brakes. Uncle Bassett handled this very well. Staying one night at the Schenley Hotel and dropping off Gene at Carnegie, the four of us proceeded to Dayton, Ohio (ten miles from the shooting grounds) via Washington (PA) and the old National Road (U.S. Route 40) through Wheeling, Zanesville, Columbus, and Springfield. I remember crossing the Ohio River at Wheeling, with all the signs facing us on the other side reading "Sohio." This confused me as I knew we were going to Ohio, but I had never heard of Sohio. Soon, I learned that this stood for Standard Oil of Ohio, and filling stations of this brand were everywhere. We stopped for lunch at a small restaurant on the main street in Cambridge, Ohio, and they had two prices for full-course lunches: 25 cents and 35 cents. Probably chicken croquets or a stuffed pepper would have been at the lower rate, more expensive meats were the higher. The next day, my dad showed the Fergusons the shooting grounds, and then they headed east toward home in his club sedan. One day later, my parents, Joe Stoeckle, and I headed for the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in the "big car."

Except for 1937 when we didn't go, and 1941 when we stopped at the end of our long western trip, Clarence Walker (1875-1964), a longtime Wilmington trapshooting friend of my father, accompanied us. We kidded him mercilessly, and he thrived on it. Ralph Willis, a well-known shooter from Penns Grove, also accompanied us in 1940 and 1942. Except for 1936, all these trips were made in our '37 Packard Twelve, still in our collection.

My dad avoided going through cities at all cost, and Pittsburgh was no exception. We would get on the Lincoln Highway east of Lancaster (PA) and follow it at least to Bedford and sometimes beyond. Several ridges of the Alleghenies had to be crossed. Sometimes we got off Route 30 just west of Bedford onto Route 31, which was a slow but hard-surfaced road that ran west through Somerset, Donegal, Mount Pleasant, West Newton, Monongahela, and joined U.S. 40 at Washington. I remember stopping for ice cream at Somerset on a very hot day in 1936. Other times, we continued from Bedford west on U.S. 30 to Ligonier, before heading south to pick up 31 at Donegal. West Newton was in a deep valley with high ridges to cross on both sides. Harry Doernte, a trapshooter who attended the shoot at Yorklyn annually, lived there. A lot of trapshooters lived in the area south of Pittsburgh, and they formed a Western Pennsylvania Trapshooters' League, with several gun clubs like Uniontown and Washington participating. As a side note, baseball great Stan Musial came from this area, as did

Hollywood actress Shirley Jones. Where we crossed the Monongahela River at the town by the same name, heavy steam tug boats were pushing their barges loaded with West Virginia soft coal toward Pittsburgh's steel mills. West of Washington (often the next day), we would be stopped at the West Virginia State Line, and a polite man would ask whether we were carrying any fresh vegetables, flowers, or produce. Sometimes he looked inside the car or opened the trunk. This was the "Japanese Beetle" man, who was trying to prevent beetles from crossing the state line. After 5 minutes or so, we were on our way again. This practice lasted for several years before World War II.

Before the Interstate connection was built between the Pennsylvania Turnpike at New Stanton and Washington (PA), the 120 miles from Bedford to Washington (PA) was slow going, but it was certainly not monotonous. As we returned from the Grand American in 1939 and 1940, we could see evidence of the building of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, especially on the mountainsides between Bedford and Breezewood. The original section of this road, 168 miles from Middlesex (Carlisle) to Irwin, 20 miles southeast of Pittsburgh, opened on Labor Day, 1940, so in 1941 and 1942, we used it from its eastern terminus at Middlesex to Donegal, where we got off on the familiar Route 31 to proceed through the region south of Pittsburgh.

In 2005, Ruth and I spent the better part of three days south of Pittsburgh, but we included the Horseshoe Curve, the Allegheny Portage Railroad, and Fort Necessity where a young George Washington surrendered the fort to the French in 1754.