

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, November 27, 2006

1972: An Outstanding Year: In the Weekly News of October 23, 2006, I mentioned that 1941 and 1972 were two of the most enjoyable years of my life, and I told of our trip in 1941 that made one of them memorable. I have already written a lot about the 8,300-mile trip in the '12 Stanley in 1972, how we prepared for the trip (10/3/05), and three installments of the trip itself (1/2/06, 3/20/06, and 5/8/06). So here is another and perhaps the final reason why 1972 was so special.

Modest inflation with increasing incomes since World War II had resulted in a steady rise in the standard of living during the 25 years prior to 1972. Gasoline averaged 35 cents per gallon and was usually less in the Delaware Valley because of the numerous refineries. Lodging rates in good hotels and modern motels averaged about \$16 double per night. Kerosene to fuel the steamers was about 25 cents per gallon in this area (one station north of Harrisburg sold it for 14 cents), but it was slightly higher in Canada and in the West. A good meal at a family restaurant was around \$3. It was a good time to make a long trip. The year 1973 brought the first gasoline lines, our president became a national disgrace (Nixon resigned in '74), and integrity was fast becoming an unknown attribute, or so it seemed to this ancient writer, who was about 50 years old at the time.

Back to 1972, Millard Newman, who ran the Trans-Continental Reliability Tours for cars 1914 and older, liked to stay at the finest hotels. In Montreal, we stayed at the new Chateau Champlain and paid \$36 per night, the highest of anywhere on the tour, which included the Sheraton Ritz in Minneapolis, the Sun Valley Lodge in Idaho, and the Century Plaza in Los Angeles. To ship 40 gallons of Arco Solvent 36 for the steamer's pilot fuel, I bought new five-gallon metal cans for \$2.50 each and shipped them via Yellow Freight to eight places along the route, going and returning. I also sent 15 or 20 gallons of cylinder oil the same way. Never were we disappointed—the supplies were always waiting for us to be retrieved. I did have to buy kerosene from a hardware store in Montreal in gallon cans and paid \$1.10 per Imperial gallon, but in Ottawa the next day I bought “stove oil” for 31 cents per Imperial gallon that worked just as well.

Credit cards had not yet come into common use, and many places would not accept them. I didn't have a credit card until much later. I bought a lot of travelers' checks, but I ran out in Idaho, and my cash was getting low. Dick Worrall, president of the National Bank & Trust Company of Kennett Square, had given me a letter of credit to use in case I needed cash. At Sun Valley, they told me I would have to find a regular bank, so the next morning I went into a bank at Shoshone, Idaho, but the manager was not impressed with my credit letter. I suggested he call Mr. Worrall, but he said that would not mean anything to him. I came out empty, and we headed into Nevada. When we finally reached Reno, I was almost penniless, as I had tried a couple more banks with the same negative result. There was a casino just off the lobby of the hotel where we were staying, so I made a stab at it. The cashier said, “How much do you need?” and when I said I'd like to get a check cashed for \$300, I think he was surprised it was for such a modest amount, and no more questions were asked. I was back in business, but I know the casino expected more benefit from the transaction. Later that night, I gambled \$1 at Harold's Club and lost it all, but it was still a very good year.