

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 22, 2007

Leroy Benge Sr. (1903–1982): “Roy” was the youngest child of John and Fannie Benge of Yorklyn. John had joined the Marshall brothers as a millwright at the old Homestead Mill (Marshall’s Bridge) in 1888, and moved with his family to Yorklyn when Israel and Elwood Marshall bought the old Clark woolen mill in 1890 on what is now Benge Road. Probably about the time the first fibre mills were built near Yorklyn’s railroad station in the first decade of the 20th century, John became superintendent of the Marshall Brothers paper mill at the older location and held this position until his retirement in the early 1930s. John had owned three used Stanleys, believed to be a Model EX (1907), a Model 71 (1911), and a Model 720 (1915), purchased from the young T. Clarence Marshall, agent for Stanley steam cars.

Having great mechanical aptitude, young Roy was enamored with his father’s Stanleys. He once told me that while riding with his father down the dirt road from Kennett Square in the EX, they lost some balls out of the engine—possibly from the crossheads or the crank bearings. John sent Roy behind to try to find them in the dirt of the road’s surface. Roy could not have been more than 7 or 8 years old at the time, but he understood the workings of that early Stanley. When he was old enough, he, too, went to work for the Marshall Brothers paper mill, and upon his father’s retirement, he became superintendent when about 30 years of age. Although only 21 when the last Stanleys were made, Roy had a fond spot in his heart for the steamers his father had owned when he was growing up.

About 1940, having lived in Kennett Square for many years, Roy, his wife Emma, and their children moved into the large house owned by the mill and occupied from about 1900 until 1936 by his parents. That was the year my father bought the first Stanley that was to become his collection, our 1913 Model 76. The office of Marshall Brothers was less than 100 yards from where the excitement of mechanically restoring a Stanley was going on in the old carriage house at Auburn Heights. It wasn’t long before Roy managed a short visit nearly every day to inspect the progress and offer help. When I returned home from the service in 1946, I witnessed these daily visits. By that time, Roy had decided that he wanted a Stanley, and it had to be just like the last one his father had owned, a 1915 Model 720.

Mervin Allatt of Three Bridges, New Jersey, was one of the “agents” for Stanleys in the early collecting years. My father had acquired several cars through Merv Allatt, and he asked him if he could find a 720 for Roy. It wasn’t long before he turned one up, and Roy purchased it late in 1947 or early 1948. In the tiny garage across Benge Road from the big house where he lived, he mechanically restored his Model 720. It was painted in a local shop, the original leather was preserved, and Roy did the rest, including the re-tubing and welding of his steel-tube boiler. Starting to use the car in the 1949 season, he and Emma were charter members of the Historical Car Club of Pennsylvania and participated in the Glidden Tour that year. The tour started in Gettysburg, proceeded to Luray, Virginia, Richmond, Williamsburg, Annapolis, and Wilmington, Delaware, terminating the night before the annual Fall Meet of AACA at the Devon Horse Show grounds. Like my father, Roy never seemed to have any trouble, and many happy trips and tours were enjoyed during the next several years. He drove his Model 720 on the Glidden Tour to Montreal in 1950 (Lake Placid to Rochester, New York) and covered 293 miles the last day and on the Philadelphia to Washington, D.C., tour via a route through the Poconos and Harrisburg in 1952. In 1965, he sold his Stanley to Walt Gray of Kansas City. It is now in the Allen Blazick collection, possibly the only 720 in existence.