

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, December 17, 2012

**Newtown, Connecticut:** Since I know Newtown so well, the tragedy that occurred there on Friday lingers in my thoughts. Both Newtown and Sandy Hook, about 1½ miles north and 200 feet lower in elevation, were both on the old U.S. Routes 6 and 202, our favorite way to and from destinations in New England. Sandy Hook was on the level of the Housatonic River, most scenic in this area. Newtown had a tiny square in the center of town with a monument in the middle where our favorite route made a right-angle turn. Along the main tree-shaded street were a number of large mansions built shortly after the Civil War. As I drove the Mountain Wagon home from the Boston area in 1946, the steep upgrades from Sandy Hook through Newtown and beyond toward Danbury, just after dark, caused an undue amount of vapor behind that blinded other drivers in the cool fall air.

John P. Miller was a dentist in Stratford, Connecticut, who loved White steamers. We first met John, his wife, Shirley, and his brother Bob either on the Glidden Tour in 1947 or at the first Steam Car Tour at Charlemont, Massachusetts, in 1948. Immediately after that, my father traded a lot with John Miller, as he did with James Melton. Miller was operating a 1910 Model OO White, which he had restored. My dad sold him a big 1907 Model G White that had come from the roof of the Franklin Institute through Frank V. du Pont, and a 1905 Model E that had come from Wherry Long, a mail carrier in Selbyville, Delaware, along with a 1910 Model OO parts car. In return, we got a 1907 Stanley Model F that Miller had bought from Donald Randall. All cars in these transfers were unrestored. Miller set his sights on restoring the big Model G, and he appeared in this car on the Glidden Tour in 1950, with his brother Bob in the passenger front seat and Colonel Augustus Post in the rear. The car was driven successfully from Connecticut to the tour's start at Lake Placid, New York, then to Montreal; the Thousand Islands; Rochester, New York; and back to Connecticut. For the next 12 years, Miller and his wife enjoyed this outstanding car, and wherever it went, it was the hit of the tour.

About 1952, John and Shirley bought one of the large Victorian homes on Newtown's main street that was built in 1865; they restored it and moved from Stratford, less than 25 miles away. He restored the gas generating plant in the basement and activated the gas chandeliers and lamps all over the house. About this time, the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga Springs was scheduled for demolition, and its furnishings were being auctioned off. Miller bought a huge chandelier and installed it in the largest room of his new Newtown home. He also had music machines therein, including an enormous Wurlitzer Band Organ.

At the conclusion of the 1954 Glidden Tour, Norbert Behrendt and I, who had completed the tour in our Stanley Model 76, were invited to stop for the night at the Millers' on our way home from Boston. As we planned the 1955 Lakeville Steam Car Tour the following winter, Norbert and I again took advantage of the Millers' hospitality, as did Frank and Weezie Gardner, when all of us worked over details of the upcoming tour. My father and I spent a night at a motel in Newtown as we visited the Millers in 1959.

Although they had not been active with their White steamers for some time, John and Shirley Miller visited me at Auburn Heights in 1980. I suggested he might like to go with me on the New England Glidden Tour that fall in our Model 87, and he accepted. I drove alone from home to Salisbury, Connecticut, where Miller joined, and we traveled together from there to the start of the tour at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire. After the tour ended near Portsmouth, New Hampshire, we made our way back to Newtown. As I dropped John Miller off, Shirley wanted a ride in the Model 87, so she rode about 25 miles down Interstate 84, after which she departed and John picked her up for their return to Newtown. John Miller is not living, and I don't know about Shirley, who would be in her 90s if still alive.

It took a terrible tragedy for me to remember this quiet, attractive community.