

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, January 14, 2013

Local Connections with Automotive Pioneers: Soon after the Brandywine Region of Delaware (BRAACA), a regional group of the Antique Automobile Club of America, was founded in 1956, G. Leslie Shafer, BRAACA's first president (then called Regional Director), learned of an interesting contact. An elderly Mrs. Pierce, widow of Percy P. Pierce, who died in 1940, was living with a married daughter in Brandywine Hundred, north of Wilmington. Percy Pierce was a son of George N. Pierce of Buffalo, who invented and manufactured the high-quality Pierce-Arrows (the Pierce Motorette was introduced in 1901). Percy drove a Pierce-Arrow on the original Glidden Tours and won many awards. Shafer made contact and invited Mrs. Pierce to attend a BRAACA meeting, which she said she'd like to do. Unfortunately, she became too ill to do so and passed away not long thereafter.

It was always rumored that F. O. Stanley, driving a steamer in the Boston suburbs near Newton, Massachusetts, ran over and killed a man who stepped off the curb in front of his car. Investigation indicated that the deceased was a widower with a 12-year-old daughter. F. O. and Flora, his wife, who were childless, took her into their home and raised her as a daughter. About 1955, Gilbert Talbot of West Chester, Pennsylvania, knowing my father had Stanley steamers, learned of an older woman, like Mrs. Pierce living with her daughter, who had been raised in one of the Stanleys' homes. Gilbert thought she would be interested in seeing my father's collection of Stanley cars. He tried to make the connection so he could bring her to Auburn Heights. It never happened, so this story cannot be confirmed.

In May 1910, my father, about to become a Stanley dealer, sold a 10-horsepower Model 61 to his second cousin, Paul H. Way, a rose grower in Kennett Square. They took the train to New York and the Fall River Line (overnight coastal steamer) to Providence with a connecting boat train to Boston, intending to take delivery of the car at the Stanley factory. Arriving on Sunday morning, they checked out the factory's location by taking a trolley to Newton Corner, and they soon found where the Stanleys were made. The place was locked up as was expected on a Sunday. However, within a few minutes a bearded gentleman appeared in a little red Stanley and asked what he could do for them. They explained their mission and said they hoped to pick up the car the next morning and start their trip home. The bearded one replied, "Unfortunately, boys, tomorrow is a holiday (Memorial Day) and the factory is closed. However, if you will tell me what accessories you want on the car (lamps, speedometer, windshield, etc.), I will have someone here, and it will be ready for you at 7:00 tomorrow morning." Knowing the direction they were headed, the older gentleman added "New York is 242 miles, and I drive it in 6-1/2 hours." My father was never sure to which Stanley twin he was speaking, but it must have been F.E., as F.O. would have been in Colorado at that time, and it's unlikely the latter would have bragged about his fast time to New York.

Early in 1915, my father attended the Philadelphia Auto Show, at which the Stanleys were displaying their new condensing car (Model 720). One of the Stanley twins was near the car. My father asked him: "Mr. Stanley, why didn't you put the 30-horsepower power plant in this much heavier car?" Stanley's reply: "We don't need it, it will run 55 m.p.h., and no one should drive faster." This time it may have been F.O., as he spent his winters in the East.

Abner Doble, an inventive genius not long out of M.I.T., had developed a steamer that he touted as being far superior to a Stanley. In 1913, he had a prototype in Wilmington, Delaware, hoping to get financing from DuPont-connected people. In particular, he tried to persuade William Winder Laird, founder of the brokerage house of Laird, Bissell, and Meads and a brother-in-law of Pierre, Irene, and Lammot du Pont, but without success. More than 10 years later, Abner built the famous "California Doble," the finest steamers ever, but he was never properly financed, and only 40 cars were built.

Finally, Eugene Delling of suburban Camden, New Jersey, had built a few Delling steam cars about 1925-26; then as World War II approached, he had Nazi connections, or so he was accused. Whether he actually built anything for Hitler's Germany is unknown, and by the late 1940s, he was back in New Jersey. In 1949, Delling

attended a small steam car meet at Auburn Heights. He was a quiet man, but since anti-Nazi feeling was still prevalent, he was not well received by some attenders, especially Ralph VanDine, who had worked at the Stanley factory when it closed in 1924 or 1925.