

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, February 10, 2014

Howard G. Henry (1916–1997): Howard Henry was a Packard collector and a close friend for many years. Unlike many collectors, however, he and his wife, Judy, were “goers, not show-ers (rhymes with goers),” as she told me on one occasion. They loved to drive their early Packards on tours, the longer the better.

Howard's father was a prominent Philadelphia physician, and Howard was raised on that city's Main Line. About 1930, Dr. Henry purchased over 500 acres on the west side of the Elk River south of North East, Maryland, and called it Piney Creek Farm. In addition to the farm buildings on the property, he built a summer retreat, a sprawling two-story home facing the river where he and his family could relax from the rigors of fast-paced city life. Shortly after World War II, Howard inherited the property and soon made it his year-round home. He, his first wife, and their four children moved in.

During World War II, Judy Osborn, a native of Utica, New York, married an Air Force flyer who was killed in action before their son was born. Howard Henry's wife had serious mental problems that forced her in and out of institutions, and her condition made it unsafe for her children. She and Howard were divorced, and about 1950 he married Judy at Skaneateles, New York, a favorite weekend retreat for Syracuse people. She and her young son became part of the Henry family, and she soon loved Maryland and Howard's Packard cars as much as he did.

Howard and a partner owned and operated a farm machinery and general hardware store in North East, and when he was home, Howard “tended store” every day. The oldest of his eight Packards (more or less) was a 1910 four-cylinder Packard 30 roadster with a “mother-in-law” seat, which he really bought for Judy. They signed up and started on the very first Trans-Continental Reliability Tour from New York to San Francisco in 1968 with this car. A few days into the tour, Howard's partner in the hardware business died suddenly, and he was forced to return home. Judy, never one to give up, continued alone with the Packard all the way to San Francisco. I think Howard flew to the City by the Bay to attend the final banquet. Here they visited with Alice Ramsey, the first woman to cross the U.S. in an automobile in 1909.

The second “Trans-Con” was planned for 1972, this time from Montreal to Tijuana, Mexico. I entered our 1912 Model 87, and the Henrys had a newly restored 1913 Packard six-cylinder touring car. In fact, it was so newly restored that they missed the opening banquet in Montreal, joining at Ottawa one day into the tour. I learned later that the Stanley would have been disbarred from participating had it not been for my friend Howard Henry, who interceded for me. After a futile attempt by a novice Stanley operator in 1968, the committee did not consider steam cars reliable for such a long trip.

While my participation in “Trans-Cons” was limited to four such tours, all with the Model 87, the Henrys made about 10 in their 1913 Packard until Howard was in declining health in the 1990s. Although they were not expert mechanics, they made up for it in other ways, with their good friends and tour members Ernie Gill and Whitney Snyder keeping the Packard running in top shape. Judy published a newsletter on the tour called the “Tattler” with about six editions in the four-week period. After Howard died, Judy started on two more “Trans-Cons” with her Packard, but when she had mechanical trouble, she felt she was a burden on others to keep going, and she did not complete either of them. She died about 10 years ago. I think Piney Creek Farm and the Packard collection are still intact, with the main house being occupied by Howard's younger daughter and her husband, a Japanese-American originally from Seattle, who loves old cars, trains, and all the right things.