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Steam Car Meet at Kent, Ohio, 1957: There had been at least five Steam Car Tours before: Charlemont, Massachusetts in 1948; Yorklyn, Delaware in 1949; Wellesley, Massachusetts in 1951; Lakeville, Connecticut in 1955; and Schwenksville, Pennsylvania in 1956. These were two-day weekend events with short runs but really no "touring." Nevertheless, almost all cars in attendance were driven over the road to get there. The trip to and from "made" the tour for those who took a steam car. By 1957, Robert L. Lyon of Chicago thought it was time to start a Steam Automobile Club of America, and many of us agreed.

Bob Lyon invited the informal group to convene on the campus of Kent State University (northeastern Ohio) in mid-August 1957. It was the first time a steam car gathering had been held outside the eastern states. We were accommodated in the dormitories and took most of our meals in the college cafeteria (there was also a good restaurant across the street). I will try to recall the cars and their owners who attended:

Gardner King (Stamford, Connecticut), 1909 Stanley Model E-2; Abner Devilbiss (Union Bridge, MD), 1917 Stanley Model 730; Clyde S. Walton (Lansdale, Pennsylvania), 1922 Stanley Model 740; Calvin and Charles Williams (Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania), 1954 Williams steamer with '49 Ford body; Forrest Dietrich (Ohio), 1956 Dietrich steamer; Robert L. Lyon (Chicago), 1922 Stanley Model 740; Robert Stenholm (Rockford, Illinois), 1913 Stanley Model 77; Earle S. Eckel (Washington, New Jersey), 1914 Stanley Model 712 roadster; Harry Peterson (newly from Mississippi), 1955 Peterson steamer; and Richard Penny and myself in our 1918 Stanley Model 735 with its engine recently equipped with Gibson piston valves. I think all cars above were driven over the road except for King's E-2. In addition, my father and J. Donald Gibson drove "modern," and Stanley Ellis and Henry Shepard flew in from Massachusetts to attend. Earle Eckel even made a second trip and brought another car on his trailer, his 1903 Stanley Model C. I know there were others there, but my memory fails me.

There was a lot of interest in experimentation, and many had high hopes that a modern steam car could be developed and successfully marketed. The Williams twins seemed to offer the best prospect. They told us how they drove across the Pennsylvania Turnpike at high speed and got excellent fuel and water mileage. The Dietrich steamer was a fiasco. It ran but steam flew everywhere, and the heavy car was completely impractical. Harry Peterson gave my father and me a ride in his car and could maintain 55 M.P.H. with his special boiler and atomizing burner and a body that was basically a wood crate. Donald Gibson, in very poor health (he died two weeks later), had had 10 piston-valve cylinder blocks cast, which would fit on 20-horsepower Stanley engines. My father had machined the first one (still in use in our Model 735), and Richard Penny, my passenger on the trip who owned a machine shop near West Chester, was planning to machine the rest of them.

Attendees had a chance to ride a mile or so in the cars of their choice. I don't recall any "official" tours or steam car games offered, as had been the case at some of the early meets. Accompanied by Penny and Mr. Gibson, I drove the 735 to Hudson, Ohio, and return, about 60 miles round-trip, to visit Richard E. Estabrook, an old army friend. The Stenholm Model 77 impressed us as being a very nice car. About 20 years later, it was purchased by Ole Vikre, who sold it to Garrett Shanklin in the mid-1990s. Bob Lyon arrived from Chicago with the vaporizer completely choked in his 740, so the car was not fired up during the two days. Clyde Walton and Abner Devilbiss, both "old-timers," drove the Pennsylvania Turnpike both ways, no doubt completing the longest steam car trips of their lifetimes, with no apparent trouble.

The following year, in June 1958, the Steam Automobile Club of America officially came into being at Lake Forest, Illinois. For the rest of his life, nearly 20 years, Bob Lyon financed the club and remained as its president. He and his wife owned the Drexel Savings and Loan Bank in Chicago. In recent years, Tom Kimmel of Berrien Springs, Michigan, is almost solely responsible for bringing the club back to prominence in the steam car community, largely through its excellent technical and historical magazine published quarterly.

In 1971, Kent State made world news when several students were shot on campus protesting the Vietnam War and society in general.