

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 24, 2015

What We Do to Keep Running (continued from August 17): Tom Ackerman and I planned to make the 400-mile trip to Woodstock in two days, stopping at Kingston, New York, after the first day. In 1970, my favored steam car route was via Pottstown, Bethlehem, Wind Gap, and Stroudsburg in Pennsylvania, Port Jervis, Kingston, and Chatham in New York, and Bennington, Manchester, and Chester in Vermont, before arriving at Woodstock.

On a pleasant Saturday morning in late June, we left in high spirits, making the usual water stops about 40 miles apart. We had a late lunch at Milford, Pennsylvania, and were right on schedule to make Kingston in good time. As we left Milford, however, a distinct knock developed in the engine, and we crept into the next town, Matamoras, about seven miles ahead, and found a garage where we could work on the car. Removal of the engine cover revealed that one or more of the crosshead balls had escaped their slides and had vanished. To find balls the right size on a Saturday night (I think they were 5/8" diameter), the garage man suggested we should call Jerry Wade, president of the local bank and a prominent citizen of Matamoras, who owned and drove a Model T Ford. Wade went to work with his many connections, and some time that night he assured us we would have the needed balls the next morning. We stayed at a tiny "mom and pop" motel nearby that night.

With the balls in hand the next morning, we re-assembled the engine and were ready to go by early afternoon, but only after Jerry Wade and other locals had a ride. This was the afternoon we were supposed to arrive at Woodstock, and we were still about 250 miles away. We moved up Route 209 and crossed the Hudson at the Rip Van Winkle Bridge, then traveled eastward toward the Berkshires in western Massachusetts. As we reached Pittsfield about 9 p.m., darkness was falling, and we "put up" at a tourist cabin just north of the city. There was no place to eat nearby, so we didn't eat. In early afternoon on Monday, about 35 miles short of Woodstock, I didn't hear a knock this time, but we lost all the packing from a gland on one of the piston rods. With this gland leaking badly, we made it to the parking lot at the Woodstock Inn, where most of the cars on the tour were returning from their first day's itinerary. Again, where could we work on the Mountain Wagon?

At a filling station and garage at the east end of Woodstock, nearly a mile from the Inn, the proprietor told us we could use his grease rack and could work on our engine there. We found that crosshead balls had escaped again and decided that the only fix would be to make bronze slides to replace the original Stanley balls (Stanley owners have been doing this ever since, as the Stanleys themselves made this improvement on their condensing cars). Harland Whitcomb of North Springfield, Vermont, about 30 miles away, was the owner of a Stanley Model 70, but it was not yet in running condition. He came to our aid and said he thought he had some bronze bar stock suitable for fabricating the needed slides. Harland tried to turn these to size on the small lathe in his basement but said he could not do it accurate enough, so we were recommended to a man in Woodstock who built ski lifts and who had a machine shop to carry on his trade. All this took time, and we missed Tuesday's and Wednesday's tours. We would return to our deluxe lodgings at the Woodstock Inn each night usually covered with cylinder oil, not exactly what they had in mind for their guests.

By Wednesday afternoon, we were back together and under steam and were testing the new slides and their adjustment. I thought they were good, but there was a steam expert, Calvin Holmes, staying in his house trailer in Paul Bourdon's yard west of Woodstock. With a borrowed car, I sought out Calvin and asked if he would check the slides before I put on the engine cover. This he did and advised me that all looked good but that I should remove a thin shim on one end of one slide, as he detected just a little heat being generated. I followed his advice, and the engine gave no more trouble for as long as I owned the car.

We enjoyed the last two days of touring with the Brass and Gas group. The first day, we went south to Weston and the Vermont Country Store and on down to Grafton, returning over gravel roads for a portion of the trip. The last day we went north with quite a climb to Pomfret and then descended into the Connecticut Valley to enjoy a catered lunch on the lawn of a tour member at Orford, New Hampshire. I had about eight passengers on

the “Wagon” for this trip, and as one of them remarked how well the car was steaming when climbing the long hill, Harland Whitcomb, riding on the front seat, turned and replied, “It has something to do with the management.” That was the nicest compliment I could have received.

It was raining hard on Saturday morning as we prepared for our return to Delaware. The top was up, but there were no side curtains. Wrapping up as best we could, Tom Ackerman and I drove through rain for the first 90 miles to Bennington. As we stopped for water there, the rain stopped, the wind picked up, and it was windy the rest of the afternoon. A real gale hit the Mountain Wagon as we crossed the high bridge over the Hudson River at Kingston. Fearing we would lose the top, as I had on the ‘15 Mountain Wagon on a January day in 1956, I shouted to Tom to climb over the seats and unhook the back curtain. He completed his assignment successfully, and the top was not damaged.

Traffic was heavy on Sunday, the last day of our trip. About 30 miles out of Kingston (where we had spent Saturday night), we stopped at the Resnick Antique Auto Museum at Ellenville, then proceeded toward home. The car was running well, but top speed was between 30 and 35 m.p.h. At our last water stop at Pottstown, a woman came up and said she had an old duster at home and would I like to have it? I assured her I would, and she ran home to get it, returning a few minutes later. It was definitely an original linen duster in heavily-used condition. I thanked her, and we completed our trip. As I examined the duster later, I discovered, sewed in the neck, a name tag: “B. Oldfield.” All the holes in the duster’s front may have been from ashes from Barney’s cigar.