

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, October 16, 2017

The Early Years of the Antique Automobile Club of America: AACA was the first of the national antique automobile clubs, founded in 1935. It did not start out as a national club, however. Founded in Philadelphia, it was intended to invite those who liked old cars to meet once in a while to show off what they may have found somewhere in a barn or simply have fun discussing motoring memories. In the late 1930s, there were probably about two dozen members; by the time my father joined in 1941, there were 75. The "News" of 3/28/05, 4/11/05, 9/24/07, and 9/6/10 describe early annual meetings, early regions of the club, and the Devon Meet of 1946, all after my father's involvement.

I can't name them all, but some of the pioneers of the club in the 1930s were Sam Baily, George Hughes (Sr.), Hyde Ballard, Ralph Weeks, Ted Brooks, Tom McKean, Earle Eckel, Paul Marvel, Walter Matter, Ray Levis, George Green, Joe Van Sciver Jr., and Paul Cadwell who had just transferred from Boston when he married a Philadelphia girl. Eckel was from Washington (NJ), Marvel was from Lancaster, Matter was from Hawley (PA), Levis was from Annapolis, and Green was from Lambertville (NJ). All the others were from Philadelphia and environs.

Small meets where three or four cars would show up were held at members' homes if they had the room. Several were held at the Folwell estate in Merion, as Hyde Ballard had married Mary Folwell, and they lived with her parents. Dinners and the annual meeting were held at local restaurants -- the Lamb Tavern near Media was a favorite place. I think my father attended his first "meet" at Folwells' or at Lamb Tavern, and he went in his 1922 Stanley Model 740 (about 1942). He wrote me that he had a good time but that his car was not old enough; next time he would take the 1913 Model 76.

Despite World War II and the traveling restrictions it imposed, AACA had a slow but steady growth. Larger "meets" were sponsored, usually one in the spring and one in the fall. My parents went to one in the Model 76, probably in the spring of 1945, accompanied by Bill and Peggy Carr, who lived on the 3rd floor of Auburn Heights while he flew C-54s for the Air Transport Command out of New Castle Army Air Base. About this time, the Fall Meet settled on the Devon Horse Show grounds, and it was held there through 1953. The year 1954 was the first at Hershey, the day after Hurricane Hazel passed through our area.

When gasoline rationing was lifted at the end of 1945, there was pressure for AACA to sponsor tours, where the cars of old could prove their worth on the road. The first Glidden Tour revival, co-sponsored by the Veteran Motor Car Club of Boston, was held in August 1946 and went from East Coast cities to Detroit and return. AACA began an annual weekend run from Philadelphia to Atlantic City, which increased each year in popularity. The destination was changed to Cape May in 1951.

Sam Baily and others could not see why regions of the club were needed, especially in areas surrounding the club headquarters. By 1950 AACA did have an Ohio Region and a Connecticut Valley Region, the latter in cooperation with VMCCA. Many Philadelphia members, desiring local meets and tours, founded the Historical Car Club of Pennsylvania in 1949, with its first Saturday event being held at Valley Forge Park. With many of the officers and active members of AACA on board, HCCP's success was assured. It still exists today as a large independent club, sponsoring its annual spring meet at Linvilla Orchards and its fall meet at the Delaware County Community College. When AACA's Spring Meet was awarded to Pottstown in 1952, Bill Pollock and Ernie Hunter petitioned the club for a Pottstown Region, the first regional AACA group approved for the Philadelphia area.