

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 6, 2018

The Earliest New Cars I Remember, 1920s: Old photos, of which there are many in the Marshall family, make us think we remember an event when we really do not. This is the case with a picture of me behind the wheel of my father's 1924 First Series Straight Eight, taken on Maryland Avenue in Rehoboth in 1925. In a 16 mm. movie taken at the same time, my mother and grandmother Shallcross can be seen arranging me behind the wheel, although both of them made sure their appearances were very brief. Two years later, in that same car, I do remember sitting tightly on the front seat between my parents as I was rushed to Beebe Hospital in Lewes having just knocked out six lower baby teeth. About a year after that (1928), I remember spending the night in that same car, along with my parents and my grandmother, as we escaped the fury of a Nor'easter that threatened the new cottage on Queen Street. Although my dad had bought a new 1928 Model 443 Packard sedan, he kept the '24 touring car until 1929, although it must have been in dead storage away from Auburn Heights.

Soon after the 443 took its place in the garage at Auburn Heights, six cars were lined up side-by-side, with three using each of the two barn doors, just as they are today. Starting from the north side was a 1926 Graham Brothers truck with a 4-cylinder Dodge heavy-duty power plant, a starter-generator, and a 12-volt electrical system. On the side of this partially enclosed truck were brass numbers on each side reading "3750, 2250, 6000." This meant "light weight, tare weight (the supposed capacity) and total weight" when loaded. This truck was used very little, mainly for moving us to and from Rehoboth once a year. It never gave trouble, but I never attempted to drive another car that steered so hard. In the late 1930s, it was sold to Dorsey Peterson Jr. of Hockessin, who used it for his many enterprises.

Next in the line was a 1929 Model A Ford Station Wagon with side curtains but without the rear seats, which we used as a pick-up truck. Twice a day Clifford Murray would exchange mail at the Yorklyn Post Office and exchange our milk pale once a day at Cousin Albert Marshall's guernsey dairy at Marshall's Bridge. It was used heavily by the Yorklyn Gun Club and for leaf gathering around the lawn in the fall. I really learned to drive on this car, and, at age eight, I would come home from school, get in the Model A, and run all over the driveway, venturing under the rose arbor to the lawn beyond (the "loop" around the east side of the house was not built until 1971). Replaced by a new '36 Chevy station wagon that cost \$640 without seats, the Model A was sold to Russell Draper of Middletown, Delaware.

Next came the big Packard 443 sedan, which was used only for trips. Since it was usually stationary in the garage, it was great fun to sit behind the wheel and pretend I was driving, including the shifting of gears with the Packard "hum." A certain amount of "slobber" was deposited on the steering wheel and the dash beyond, which had to be cleaned off. So long as this was done, my father never complained, but I was warned never to blow the horn unless I was hurt. A lot of long trips were made in this car for over four years, before it was replaced by a '32 Model 904 seven-passenger sedan. Costing nearly \$4,000 new, Frank Diver was able to get only about \$400 for this 1928 car in 1932. The "big car" always had license #76 (still in the FAHP collection and assigned to our Stanley Model 76 of 1913).

When my grandmother Marshall died in 1930, her car (she never drove herself), which my father probably owned anyway, came to Auburn Heights. It was a pristine 1928 Model 526, heavy six-cylinder five-passenger sedan. This made a fine "school car," one that Clifford Murray used to take my cousin and me to Friends School in Wilmington daily. It was usually parked next to the "big" car and was used four or five days per week. Once it failed near Lower Brandywine Cemetery on Old Kennett Road, and we had to call for help, but it was a very nice car. It was used this way until about 1937. It was sold to Arthur A. Armstrong, a bookkeeper at National Fibre in Yorklyn who lived in and commuted from Wilmington. "Army" liked good used cars and had owned Franklins before the '28 Packard. The "school car" carried license #154.

Next in line came my mother's car, which always had license #155. My very first recollection of "her car" was a Packard Six of about 1925, followed by a somewhat stylish but hard luck 1929 straight eight Model 626. With this car, two minor accidents occurred near the former lake now under the Hoopes Reservoir, both when the car was nearly new. The first was when my mother spun completely around on the ice that had formed where the spillway from the lake crossed the road en route to a water wheel alongside Coleman du Pont's Hillside Mill. Route 82 traffic normally drove through this minimal amount of water, but when it froze, more care had to be taken. My mother spun around 360 degrees and was thoroughly shaken, but she drove on home. There was no damage to the car, but a few months later, in heavy fog, my father was run into by a car coming the opposite direction where this same road skirted the lake. It bent the front bumper and fender, and I recall my dad throwing the hub cap into the lake. The car was repaired, but on the following New Year's Day, "Cliffey" turned over on the ice in Miller's Hill near Kennett Square, after taking Gertrude Whittock ("Cousin Gertie") home from her holiday with us to her apartment in Media. Cliffey had only worked for my parents about four months, and he thought he would be fired. Fortunately, the car was scrapped, but Cliffey stayed for 50 years. My mother then got a new 1930 Model 726 sedan, which she drove for five years, after which it became the "school car."

Finally, car #6 parked in line was my dad's "everyday" car that was pulled in next to his workbench and closets. Since the shop was not built on to this end of the building until 1937, he had cramped quarters for his many work projects, so he often backed his car out under the shed during the day. For his everyday cars, I recall the following: a 1929 Model 640 rumble-seat coupe with a golf compartment door in the side of the body. What fun it was to climb in the rumble seat and out through this small door. Then he had a 1930 Model 733 Club Sedan, painted maroon. In August 1931, he bought a '32 Model 902 Club Sedan, which he kept for over four years and gave it up with 38,000 miles in favor of a new '36 One-Twenty Club Sedan. My dad's everyday car always carried license #8.