

FAHP News, August 31, 2015

Eastern Steam Car Tour at St. Thomas, 1975: Carl S. Amsley (1921-1998) hosted four steam car tours at or near his home on the Lincoln Highway just east of St. Thomas, Pennsylvania, and about 5 miles west of Chambersburg; 1975 was the first one, and Johnny Springer and I drove out in our 1913 Model 76. Before Amsley got into steam car restorations in the late 1950s, he had been a building contractor and also owned two motels, one of which was called the Carlton across the highway from his home. Springer and I stayed at the Carlton.

Like most similar tours before and since, touring consisted of day trips, Monday through Friday, from a central point or “hub” that served as headquarters for the tour. These trips usually ran between 50 and 100 miles per day. I picked up Springer at his home on Route 41 between Hockessin and Avondale at 7 A.M. Monday, and with the competent Model 76 performing well, we had an early lunch in Chambersburg after a 120-mile run. Joining the group in the afternoon, we enjoyed the week immensely, laughing our way through much of it.

In retrospect, although I had attended previous steam car tours for nearly 30 years, this tour marked the first for several things. It was the first time I had seen Bob Mead’s 1912 Model 73 in operation (this car and its owner seldom missed a tour for the next 35 years). Although I had first met my longtime friend Mike May in 1973 at the New Garden Airfield Steam Car Tour and had met Kathryn at Williamstown in 1974, Carl Amsley’s 1975 tour provided the first time I really got to know them. They were camping for the week in Carl’s yard with their three-year-old daughter Heather. It was also the first time I got to know the Hancocks: Jim, Judy, and their children Anne and Jimmy, who attended with Jim’s 1914 Model 607.

The day tours were interesting. One day we went to Harpers Ferry and had lunch at the old frame hotel on a hill in town with a view of Civil War history unfolding below. Carl Amsley’s good friend, Bob Garlock of McConnellsburg, provided a trouble truck which was a big White of about 1914 (not steam-powered). When queried by an onlooker at Harpers Ferry as to whether it cost a lot to own and operate steam cars, Bob replied “I guess so, if they can afford to hire an antique trouble truck.”

The last day was “Game Day,” and Kathryn May planned an extensive treasure hunt for the steam cars, with clues planted around the countryside within 10 miles of Amsley’s home. If I ever had a carload of “characters” in a Stanley, this day was it. Bill Zerega, Abner Devilbiss, and Johnny Springer, all very comical men in their own right, occupied the passenger seats in the Model 76. Despite our talents, we did not score high. One place, we were supposed to find minnows in a stream under a bridge and preserve them for inspection in a glass jar. Being unsuccessful, I suggested passing off a slug of Abner’s well-used chewing tobacco in place of minnows, which I thought would work. Kathryn May, also the judge, rejected this entry, and even took off points for our devious attempt. The Hancock kids easily won the treasure hunt.

The pilot was very weak and used very little fuel but remained blue throughout the week. For some reason the burner continued to work well and never backfired or failed to light. On the way home just west of York on Route 30, I showed Johnny Springer 60 m.p.h. in the Model 76, one of my favorite cars and the first in the FAHP collection. It was purchased by my father in 1940 from Springer’s grandfather, John Becker. Johnny Springer thought he remembered riding in the car when his grandfather owned it, but he was born in 1916, and old John stopped using his steamer in 1919, so he was no more than three years old!

Carl Amsley and his family hosted subsequent steam car tours in 1978, 1984, and 1995. Since these tours had grown in size from the first one in 1975, the Holiday Inn in Chambersburg served as headquarters.

Work Report: On Monday, August 24, Jim Personti, with “Bucky’s” help, spliced and laid a new phone line from the carriage house to the ticket booth, and properly buried it below the sod.

On Tuesday, August 25, the following 11 volunteers were on hand: Paul Kratunis, Dave Leon, Bob Stransky, Ted Kamen, Bill Schwoebel, Mark Bodenshtab, Steve Bryce, Jerry Lucas, Jerry Novak, Dennis Dragon, and Tom Marshall (in charge).

Many tables, chairs, and picnic tables were moved into place for the upcoming Invitational event on 8/30. The signs for our visiting cars were brought from the attic and made ready for placement around the grounds. Many other directional signs were prepared and made ready (mostly by our staff). Steve Bryce and Jerry Novak determined the exact location for all the cars entered in the show and marked the spaces accordingly. The carpet in the reception room of the museum was shampooed on Sunday, 8/23.

Several of our cars in the museum were polished and cleaned, and the museum itself was made ready for our visitors at the Invitational. The Rauch & Lang electric was moved from the museum to the upper garage to make room for the 1918 Stanley Model 735 to go in its proper space in the museum. The '32 Packard was temporarily placed near the back door, as it will be moved out for photo opportunities during the August 30 event, and the '37 Packard was moved to the upper garage to make room for special programs in the museum.

A small crew cleaned up an unsightly area alongside the track between the new wall and the back curve of the A.V.R.R. and sifted some dirt from the crushed stone to retrieve some good ballast. Most of this was spread along the secondary track near the turntable. On the Model 71, a fitting was tightened going to the steam gauge, and the valve stem of the syphon valve, now used for a stack blower, was refaced. The spring clip for the hood rod was re-fastened to the inside of the hood.

On Thursday, August 27, 13 volunteers answered the call, as follows: Mark Russell (in charge), Jim Personti, Devon Hall, Rose Ann Hoover, Bill Schwoebel, Anne Cleary, Richard Bernard, Tom Marshall, Lou Mandich, Ed Paschall, Tim Ward, Jerry Novak, and Steve Bryce.

More pieces were properly fit into place on the Cretors popper, as this project moves ahead slowly but surely. More last-minute placement of special items for the Invitational was accomplished. The multitude of items for the Invitational’s Gift Shop, Silent Auction, and Raffle were assembled. Most of the special signs were put in place. A final “going over” in the museum was conducted and the cars wiped off one more time.

The four wooden railroad cars, to be used behind steam locomotive 401 on Sunday 8/30, were brought around to the trestle for examination of trucks, couplers, and side-bearing clearance. Two of the cars were checked underneath before darkness prevented further work. A bearing block that had fallen off one of the cars was replaced, one of the bolster pivot pins was straightened, and a new coupler pin was made to replace a temporary 3/8” stove bolt in one of the couplers. Washers were added or removed from the bolsters to allow for proper side-bearing clearances. It is planned to do the same maintenance to the other two wooden cars before the September 6 “Steamin’ Sunday.”

Arrangements are complete for the parking of trailers on 8/30, thanks to Steve Bryce, Jerry Novak, Dan and Missy Lickle, and Charlie Webb. On Friday, the museum floor was mopped, and the windows were washed on the outside. Attempts were made to clean up the shop and the carriage house, although they will not be open to the public on 8/30. Also, Bill Rule cleaned up around the tunnel area, and we are grateful to State Parks for mowing the bank and trimming the hedge at the front of the property.