

August 20, 2007

Hello, Steam Team: **BIG CARS OF THE 1930's:** I always liked big cars. Of my family's Packards when I was growing up, our "big car", the one in which we took trips, was a 7-passenger sedan with the largest motor and the longest hood. This car, changing from a 1928 Model 543, to a 1932 Model 904, to a 1934 Model 1108, to a 1937 Model 1508 (still in the collection) always carried license number 76. So I would coax my dad to take "the 76" when we were going anywhere, but he seldom used it for everyday travel, and it was considered too heavy and cumbersome for my mother to drive. When we took the '37 to California in 1941, my cousin Meta Shallcross dubbed it the "Spirit of '76", and said "the Spirit moves us!" I have written about our big cars in previous editions (10/16/06, and 2/26/07).

A few times each year my mother shopped in Philadelphia. Sometimes she would go on the train from Wilmington, but sometimes she would be driven by my father or by Clifford Murray, who performed many tasks around Auburn Heights (see "News" of 7/4/05). Saturday mornings would have been the only times I could have been there during the school year. When we would stop on Chestnut Street near 15<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup> chauffeur-driven Packards and Cadillacs, presumably from the Main Line and other affluent suburbs, would pull up to the curb, their drivers would walk around and open the back door, and a society matron with a fur around her neck would disembark for her shopping engagement. In the Cadillac line, most of the cars would be V-8's, but occasionally a V-12 or V-16 would be seen. Packards were almost entirely Super Eights or Twelves. Very seldom did I see a Lincoln, a Chrysler Imperial, or a Pierce Arrow, and foreign cars were almost non-existent in America. These cars would usually be black, often had the divider glass between front and back seats, and would be clean and polished regardless of the weather. The chauffeur would take the car around the block or into a parking lot until his important passenger was ready to go home or somewhere else in the city. Members of the city police were on horseback, and would make their rounds, politely reminding people of the no-parking zones and sending them around the block. Most of these fine cars were melted up in the scrap drives during World War II, and their owners could not maintain this life style after the war. A relatively small number of people seemed to have it all during the 1930's.

Occasionally we would stop at a fine resort hotel, and there a wonderful array of big cars seemed to be everywhere. I can recall such scenes in 1936 at the Lake Placid Club and at the Glen Springs Hotel at Watkins Glen, NY, overlooking Seneca Lake (on our Nova Scotia trip). Not only were there big sedans and limousines, but many convertibles as well: rumble seat roadsters and convertible coupes, seven-passenger tourings with rear windshields, and sporty short-coupled phaetons. Cadillacs and Packards again outnumbered all others.

A man named MacKenzie operated a bus line between Boston and Sydney, Nova Scotia, in the 1930's, an over-the-road distance of about 800 miles. He could not use large buses as the ferries on Cape Breton Island were so small they could carry only cars. The Nova Scotia roads were terrible in the summer of '36. Rebuilding was taking place but was not very far along, and there was almost no paving, only dust. So, MacKenzie had two or three 1935 Pierce-Arrow V-8 12-passenger sedans with four doors down each side. A few years later, vehicles of this type would be known as "airport limousines". I believe the one-way trip took 2-1/2 days, as he did not travel at night. With 3 similar vehicles, I'm not sure how frequent his schedule was, but I would think there was a departure twice a week from each end. After crossing onto Cape Breton Island on the Gut-of-Canso ferry (a larger boat), the best route to Sydney was via the Ross Ferry that crossed an inlet from the Atlantic. This little boat could carry five small cars or four large ones, and with MacKenzie's Pierce-Arrow at a 45-degree angle across the stern, our big Packard and one or two small cars was the limit. The owner himself was one of the drivers and my father had several conversations with him. We saw him again in Sydney washing up and servicing for the return trip to Boston. This 12-year-old dreamed of running a bus line like this one! Such an endeavor would allow me to drive a BIG CAR.

The past week has been another busy one. Art Wallace put the final touches on the engine to go back in the H-5 Stanley, Bill Rule ran the engine quite successfully on Norman Schaut's Model 61, and Jim Personti started slotting the 16" burner casting for the Model CX. Rose Ann Hoover, Dale Simpkins, Lou Mandich, and Brent McDougall stacked the shingles brought to us by Lou for future use as locomotive firewood. Clean-ups and final mechanical touches were applied to 4 cars that went to two events Friday and Saturday. Butch Cannard, Steve Bryce, Kelly Williams, Walter Higgins, and Bob Hargraves took the Models 740, 76, and 78 to the Threshermen's Reunion at Kinzers on Friday; and Butch, Steve and Ann Bryce, Steve Jensen, Bill Schwoebel, Anne Cleary, Art Wallace and Art Sybell took the Models 71, 76, and 78 to the Peach Festival at Middletown (DE) on Saturday. All made out well with minor problems. Two of our couples, the Mays and the Reillys, successfully completed a progressive tour of about 700 miles in Vermont with our Model 87.

This week, the first meeting of the Search Committee to find a successor to Bob Reilly as Executive Director will be held today while Mike May is in Delaware. The Events Committee will meet on Thursday, August 23, at 7:30 P.M. in the Museum Reception Room to further refine the 2008 Schedule of Events at Auburn Heights. Next Sunday, August 26, is the "Day on the Farm" event at Worcester, PA. Bill Schwoebel has reserved space for those who think they can go, but if you still have an interest, ask Bill if he can get you in, even with the deadline past. I think at least 3 Stanleys are going. It's a wonderful event with a driving trip of 85 miles round-trip. Steve and Ann Bryce have agreed to co-chair the September 2 Open House event at Auburn Heights, and while many of the volunteer positions have been filled, they can still use your help. Please call (302) 234-0789, or E-mail at [stevebryce@verizon.net](mailto:stevebryce@verizon.net) if you can work that day. Many thanks! Tom