

April 16, 2007

Hello, Steam Team:

Augustus Post (1879-1952): In the early years of the antique car hobby, “Colonel” Post was an important player, just as he was an automotive pioneer in the early years of the 20th century. To say the very least, he was a flamboyant theatrical character, yet a joy to be around. The early Glidden Tour revivals after World War II would not have been the same without Colonel Post; he brought SPIRIT to the occasions.

He was a member of the “Early Birds”, a group whose membership consisted only of those who flew airplanes before World War I. He loved to impersonate Daniel Boone in historical productions. Giving speeches on the Fourth of July were his delight. And in the very early years of the 20th century, he established a record (and held it for a long time) for the longest flight in an unguided balloon. He and his competitors took off from St. Louis to see how far they could go and how long they could hold out, allowing the wind currents to carry them northeastward. Within a few days, all landed and were accounted for except Post. He had vanished, literally into thin air. From his point-of-view, however, he realized he was approaching the Atlantic Ocean and he’d better come down. This he did, in the swampy bogs of Labrador, 50 miles or so from the coast. From this landing site, he walked two or three days until he reached a native village. From there, he soon got back to civilization, and his record was properly acclaimed in the world’s newspapers.

As a young adventurer, it was natural that he should become enthused by the automobile. White Steam Cars were his favorites. After the first “Climb to the Clouds” and while still on the summit of Mount Washington in 1904, he convinced Charles J. Glidden that the latter should sponsor long-distance tours to prove the reliability of the automobile. A recent photo in one of the antique car magazines shows a row of cars lined up in front of the Plaza Hotel in New York to kick off the very first Glidden Tour in 1905. Colonel Post is behind the wheel of the first car, a White steamer. That tour made its way through New England to the Mount Washington Hotel at Bretton Woods, NH, and return. White steamers and Pierce Arrows won most of the awards on the early Glidden Tours, which were held annually until 1914. Post drove a White steamer each year as long as they were made (the last were built in 1910).

Although he never owned an antique car in the early years of the hobby, the first Glidden Tour Revival in 1946 from New York and Boston to Detroit and return brought him to the attention of all who liked to tour in old cars. He was THE featured historian, who was asked to speak at banquets along the route. No matter what he said, his booming voice kept his audience on the edge of their chairs- he had no use for, nor did he need, a microphone. His presence and his orations became a fixture on all the early Glidden Tour revivals. There were not a lot of steamers participating on these tours, and especially scarce were White steamers. On the first Glidden Tour that my father and I enjoyed in 1947, however, we met Colonel Post for the first time, riding in the back seat of Murray Brown’s 1909 Model O White, originally owned by the famed Charles Steinmetz of General Electric. By 1950, he had “graduated” to John P. Miller’s big 1907 Model G White, where both this outstanding car and its famous back-seat passenger, complete with goatee and proper touring attire, were a knock-out as we passed through Lake Placid, Montreal, the Thousand Islands, and Rochester, NY. Post is one of the four “Steam Car Men on the Glidden Tour (1951)” in the mural on our Museum wall. Asked to speak at one of the banquets each year, his message was always the same and most knew what he was going to say, but he was still enjoyed by all. His booming voice and his message, always heavy on patriotism and the SPIRIT of the Glidden Tours, became legend.

In 1952, I was scheduled to go on the Glidden in my father's 1910 Stanley Model 71, but I needed a passenger. Since there were no Whites signed up to go, I invited Colonel Post, and somewhat to my surprise, he accepted. The tour that year began in Philadelphia, and after a circuitous route through Eastern Pennsylvania, terminated in Washington, DC, to help the AAA celebrate its 50th anniversary. As we rode along, my distinguished passenger talked about his early flying, his balloon trip, the early Glidden Tours, and speculated as to the future of automobiles and the roads they would run on. As I recall, he thought Mamie Eisenhower, as First Lady, should be in charge of woman-drivers. When we got to Washington, the AAA officials took the famous Colonel under their wing, he appeared on radio and TV, spoke at banquets, and in all ways was a VIP. We saw little of him until it was time to leave, and he rode back to Yorklyn with me in the Stanley. After spending the night at Auburn Heights, I put him on the train for New York, where he lived in an apartment. Nine days later, we read in the paper that Augustus Post was dead.

Last Monday, the Steam Car Tour Committee met for the third time, and details are getting worked out for our upcoming big event in June. On Tuesday the Ad Hoc Committee to help us get started on Strategic Planning met in the FAHP office. Mike Riska, Director of the Delaware Nature Society for the past 22 years, was very helpful and enlightening. From this meeting, it is recommended that the Board of Directors should be the committee to develop our long range Strategic Plan. Steve Bryce hooked up a new 3-tube indicator on the Model 76 Stanley, and on Thursday he and Kelly Williams had driving lessons on the road with Bill Schwoebel and me as back-seat instructors. Also on Tuesday, Rose Ann Hoover and Dale and Ted Simpkins painted the center section of the museum floor with a second coat, which looks very nice. Art Sybell completed the painting of the wooden railroad cars, and a painting crew accented them with yellow. Art and Ron Turochy are now building the gift shop closet in the museum. Art Wallace filled the engine case with oil on the Model 78 roadster, and this car is ready to come off the grease rack when the museum floor is dry enough to run cars over it. Jim Personti and Jeff Fallows had both lathes going Thursday night, manufacturing "prickers" for our Steam Car Tour in June. Emil and I visited Irene duPont at his Granogue home and planned early details of the Steam Car Tour's visit there on June 20. On Saturday, Bill Schwoebel, Steve Jensen, and several others ran the #401 around the *Auburn Valley* to test the track and the cars for each train. A few adjustments will be made before the Wilmington Friends School day on April 29.

By Thursday this week, we will be able to move cars on the "new floor" in the museum, so we can get them back in order for our first event here on April 29. The day before that the '37 Packard is due to go to Winterthur for one of their spring old-car days. On Saturday, May 5, two Stanleys, probably the Models 87 and 76, are promised to be in Dover for one of the annual Dover Days, for which the Division of Parks makes a nice contribution to FAHP for our participation. Joyce Sybell has agreed to be chairperson of our May 6 public opening, and she still needs volunteers for several of the jobs to be filled. If you have not signed up, please do so on the sheet located in the garage. And, PLEASE REMEMBER, WE NEED TO PROMOTE THIS EVENT. Ask for flyers and posters that you can distribute for us. We always need to "prime the pump" for the first public event of the season. This is the key to good attendance. We may need a few more volunteers for the Friends School day on April 29 as well. If and when the weather improves, we'll all be ready to go! Tom