

JANUARY 12, 2009 F.A.H.P. NEWS

Frank H. Gardner (1920-2004): I first met Frank and his wife Eloise (Weezie) in October, 1946, when my father took delivery of our 1915 Mountain Wagon from George Monreau, grandfather of Brent Campbell. From that time until his death, I considered him one of my very best friends. Frank and Weezie drove from their home in West Newton to Cochrasset, MA, residence of George Monreau, in Frank's 1918 Franklin touring car to give us a good send off for the 400-mile trip back to Yorklyn.

As a teen-ager, Frank had developed an interest in antique cars, his favorites being Stanleys, Franklins, and Packards, of which he eventually owned several. His first Stanley was a 1913 Model 65, 10-H.P. touring car, bought before World War II. He served in the Pacific theatre during the war, and upon his return in 1945, he married Eloise Woodward. They had met during summer vacations on Cape Cod. They raised four daughters and one son, but sadness struck about 1974 when their youngest daughter, Barbara, was killed watching a parade in Mexico where she was attending college.

Having found an exceptionally nice Stanley 20-H.P. touring car of 1912, Frank sold his first Stanley to Jim Keith in 1947 (this car is presently owned by the Swigart Museum), and proceeded with the complete restoration of his new find. When he and two others (Stanley Ellis and Ed Pamphilon) hosted a Steam Car Tour in the suburbs of Boston in 1951, Frank had his 20-H.P. Stanley chassis running, minus the four-passenger body, and run it did! He could not resist leaving the rest of us behind in his steam.

A few months later and before the restoration was complete, however, tragedy struck the Gardner family. In early summer, 1952, on Cape Cod, the whole family came down with polio (this was about 3 years before discovery of the miraculous Salk vaccine). Frank's brother died within 48 hours. Weezie was not paralyzed but has had to favor a weak back from that time on. The three girls (two of their children had not yet been born) had light cases with no long-term effects. Frank was completely paralyzed from the waist down. He could have thrown in the towel, but instead led an exemplary life, giving in to nothing as he pursued his church activities, his non-profit interests, and his antique cars. He loved to drive, and drive them he did, with hand controls making possible the elimination of foot pedals. Weezie was always supportive and at his side.

On his 1912 Model 74 Stanley, his good friend Calvin Holmes, who had worked at the Stanley factory, did a beautiful job in finishing the restoration and working out the driving system for Frank. Unlike most of us, Frank could not jump out to re-light the pilot when it went out. Cal Holmes developed a very satisfactory propane pilot with an electric igniter, and a later improvement by another friend, the talented Ole Vikre, had a dash gauge that told when the

pilot was out. Frank drove his Stanley for 40 years with great enjoyment and satisfaction, keeping it in pristine condition. Many times he took part in steam car tours in our part of the country as well as in New England. In 1994, realizing his strength was waning, he sold the Stanley to Brent Campbell, who still treasures it as one of his nicest cars. In the 1970's Frank also owned a Stanley Model F touring of 1906 that had been restored by Roland Dunkelberger, but after a few years, he sold it to Jim Hancock. It was like the new Model F Frank's grandfather had owned 70 years before.

Frank also treasured his Packards, most notable of which were a huge 1915 straight Six, 7-passenger touring, and a 1929 Model 633 7-passenger touring, in which he and Weezie enjoyed many miles of touring. In his later years, he treasured his collection of Franklins, all of which were equipped with hand controls, and most with overdrive transmissions or rear ends. Annually he attended the Franklin Trek at Cazenovia, NY. Frank was president of Boston's Museum of Transportation for 10 years, and oversaw its expansion into a downtown facility next to the Children's Museum. He and Weezie attended Trinity Church on Copley Square in Boston, possibly the oldest and largest Episcopal church in New England, where he held several positions of responsibility.

I was privileged to visit many times at the Gardner home on Prince Street in West Newton, and Ruth was with me on several of these visits. They also stayed at Auburn Heights on many occasions. Once at their home the lights went out during the great New England black-out in 1965; once in 1980 I drove our '37 Packard there for a short visit; and once the rear axle of our Mountain Wagon broke near there in 1997. We last saw Frank at their summer home near Woodstock, VT, in September, 2003, where he insisted on cooking dinner before we stayed with them overnight. Weezie is now living in a retirement facility at Lexington, MA.

Our work sessions got off to good starts last week, and several automobile projects moved forward. The Executive Committee met for 3 hours Thursday to further develop the most pressing action steps resulting from our Strategic Plan. The next meeting is scheduled for January 22. We are developing a questionnaire for new working volunteers, hopefully to get them into the projects they will like the most, and make our work sessions more efficient. The Events and Scheduling Committee plans to meet on Tuesday, January 27, at 7 P.M. The Annual Meeting of FAHP is scheduled for Tuesday, February 17, and our quarterly Board of Directors meeting on Thursday, the 19th. It's a busy time ahead! Tom