

NOVEMBER 30, 2009 F.A.H.P. NEWS

C. E. Simmons and the Washington (DC) Steam Car Group: C(lyde) E. Simmons (1880-1979) was the self-appointed leader of a group of about 6 steam car advocates in the Washington area from the late 1940's until the mid '60's. He was also the least knowledgeable, but self-esteem was not his problem. In 1947 he learned of my father after he had purchased a Model 740 Stanley in nice original condition. The Marshalls, father and son, were planning to go on our first of many Glidden Tours that fall with the newly-restored Models 71 and 735, and my father invited Mr. Simmons to accompany us, along with his old trapshooting friend, Ralph Willis. Mr. Simmons was my passenger in the 71 for most of the tour, and the car won second prize for a car of that age driven the longest distance to the tour that began in Hartford, CT.

C. E. Simmons was a native of North Dakota, but was able to attend college in Chicago and claimed to have degrees in medicine as well as the law. He never practiced as a doctor or as an attorney. Eventually settling in Washington, DC, he owned two large apartment houses on Massachusetts Avenue in a nice section of the city. Around the corner in an alley was his garage which eventually housed two Model 740 Stanleys and a partially-restored Doble steamer. He had acquired what he thought was a one-half interest in the Doble with TWA pilot Dick Hempel. Simmons spent a lot of money on this car (I don't think much was accomplished), and then one day Hempel arrived, claimed it was his, and removed it to his home in Idaho. Simmons' garage was an interesting place, however. Men with little to do would congregate there to exchange stories and theories. There was always someone there who would hand you a business card with his name and occupation as "consultant". It was never known on which subjects he could consult.

Simmons was such a "wise guy" that he was very gullible. Bill Allaband of Kennett Square had painted a few cars, including the 735, for my father for a cost of anywhere from \$100 to \$200, which gave the owner a very satisfactory cosmetic restoration for those days. Simmons arranged for Allaband to paint his 740 (completely black), and the job turned out well. The owner asked Bill what he owed him. The answer: "Bein's it's you, Mr. Symons (Allaband called him "Symons"), it will be \$650". Simmons thought he got a bargain.

Norbert Behrendt (1917-1980), written up in the "News" of 11/10/08, first appeared at Auburn Heights about 1949, and possibly through Mr. Simmons, had also acquired a sincere interest in steam cars. Eventually purchasing a Model 740 himself, Norbert lived with his parents on South Dakota Avenue in Washington. William Dennis Zerega (c. 1915- c. 1995), a certified plumber, also became a proponent of steam cars and bought a 1920 Model 735. Very influential in the group was L. Edward Pamphilon (1910-1964), who was rising in the ranks of AACA and had bought his first Stanley, a 1919 Model 735, from Hyde Ballard in 1946. "Pam" installed and owned small radio stations around the east and lived in the areas of Philadelphia, Washington, and Boston in connection with his work. Most of this time he lived in the suburbs of Washington. There was also Jim Palmer who owned a stylish '30 Lincoln touring car with wire wheels and sidemounts that had been converted to steam and ran reasonably well for a heavy car. Finally, Eugene W. Goodwin had on semi-permanent loan from Bill Besler of Emeryville, CA, an E-series Doble steamer of about 1925. All these cars were used locally.

One evening I called at the Behrendt home and Norbert's father, a German-American of small stature but wide smile, came to the door and asked for my password. It was "steam" and that permitted me to go to the basement where I found most of the group working on Stanley parts.

Together with Bill Cook, Tom Ladson, and a few others, this group formed the National Capital Region of AACA, with Simmons as its Regional Director. Although the region grew and its members were happy, Simmons soon had "bones to pick" with the national AACA leadership. At the Annual Meeting of the parent club held at the Franklin Institute in Philadelphia, Simmons rose and gave his infamous "Banks of the Potomac" speech, in which he claimed those living in the Washington area were being ignored by AACA. It was embarrassing to all, including those members of the National Capital Region in attendance.

With a lay-over at National Airport in 1979, I spoke by phone to Mr. Simmons, who was then living in a nursing home at the age of 99. He was as sharp as ever and enjoyed my call. He died a few months later. Ed Pamphilon, longtime secretary and treasurer of AACA, had died in 1964 at the age of 54. Eugene Goodwin, after Besler had reclaimed his Doble, died in 1965. Norbert Behrendt, who substituted Shire horses for Stanleys during the last ten years of his life, died in 1980 at the age of 62. Bill Zerega maintained his interest in steamers until his death in the mid 1990's. I'm not sure what happened to Jim Palmer. Jim Keith became the prime collector of Stanleys in the Washington area when he retired from the Navy in the early 1970's.

The weather at Yorklyn on Friday and Saturday past was cold and windy, but the bright sunshine Saturday made for a very successful day. 380 visitors came that day and 237 on Friday. Richard and Carol Bernard and Anne Cleary chaired an excellent two-day event and Jonathan Rickerman is to be commended for his efforts in successfully promoting our "Steamin' Days". Dan Citron reported that a total of about 145 toured the house. In all, \$6,215 was collected, including \$81 for hot chocolate which was supposed to be free (grateful visitors insisted that they pay). We are indebted to our volunteers, to the Division of Parks staff, and to the wonderful young Americorps members who make these events possible.

The usual clean-up and ongoing work projects will continue for three more weeks before the annual holiday break. Bill Schwoebel has called a railroad meeting for Tuesday, December 1, at 7:00 P.M. in the F.A.H.P. office. Last night I talked with Joyce Sybell, who said Art is recuperating with a lot of pain from his knee replacement on November 9. We miss you, Art!

The Search Committee is developing some good prospects for our Executive Director position. Hopefully more interviews will take place this week. A total of 14 people have applied.

Our major members' benefit of the year, namely the Robisons' Holiday Party, is to be held at their beautiful home on Yorklyn Road this Saturday, December 5, starting at 5 P.M. It is a superb annual party, most generous of the Robisons to entertain us, and all members of F.A.H.P. are invited to attend. If you have not accepted yet, there is still time. Please get in touch with Rob or Chevonne Robison, 1091 Yorklyn Road, Yorklyn, phone (302) 239-4096, if you can be with them next Saturday. Happy December to all!

Tom