

April 24, 2006

Hello, Steam Team:

The story this week is of no importance, but Bill Schwoebel thought it humorous, so here goes. I guess it comes under "Auto trips of the past".

In March, 1948, driving my 1940 Packard 110 4-door sedan, I went to Vandalia, OH, to attend the first-ever Central Handicap Committee meeting of the Amateur Trapshooting Association of America. I was a charter member of this original 3-member committee which attempted for the first time to assign official yardages to registered trapshooters from all parts of the country. The other two were S. W. McKibben of Rushville, IN, (chairman), and Parr Rhines of Marseilles, IL. We were appointed by President Merle Henkel of Portland, OR, on the recommendation of Ray E. Loring, Manager of the A.T.A.

Following the 2-day meeting and not having a regular job at the time, I made a circuitous return trip, visiting the Lincoln sites around Springfield, IL, and then headed east through southern Indiana, Kentucky, and West Virginia, new territory for me at the time. In the days before credit cards, the cost of the trip was estimated in advance and I thought I had sufficient cash to complete my itinerary, and in addition I had a check for \$91 in my pocket as reimbursement for expenses in connection with the Vandalia meeting.

Passing westward through Indianapolis, it started to snow as I crossed the Illinois line and was quite slippery for the last 30 miles from Decatur to Springfield. Being unable to secure lodging in the city as the legislature was in session, I had a nice dinner and walked the several blocks in the snow after dark to look at Lincoln's home at 8th & Jackson Streets. He must have done the same thing many times about 90 years earlier. The house was dark except for a dim light in one of the rear first-floor rooms. Perhaps a caretaker was there, but I don't know as I lost my nerve when about to knock on the front door. How different it is today! I got a room in a tourist cabin on the south side of town, and that night the temperature went into the single digits.

The next morning was bright and clear, but the Packard wouldn't start- I had to be towed to get it started and that cost \$15 I hadn't planned to spend. Heading south toward Edwardsville where I wanted to visit a trapshooting friend, the motor began running rough, and after my brief visit when I turned eastward toward Vandalia, IL, and Effingham on U.S. 40, it got much worse. Afraid to go farther I stopped at an old hotel in Vandalia for the night, and learned that there was a Packard dealer in Effingham, about 40 miles farther. The next morning I limped into the Packard place, and the mechanic there established that it was a blown head gasket, which he replaced. I paid him in cash something like \$60 or \$70, as he had never heard of the Amateur Trapshooting Asso. and didn't want a check from them. After the transaction, my available cash was under \$20, and I was 3 days from home via my anticipated route. I ate very little, probably spending \$1 to \$1.50 per day, and had to buy gas once in a while at about \$3 each time. I visited Lincoln's boyhood home in southern Indiana and his birthplace at Hodgenville, KY, and stayed in a tourist cabin at Elizabethtown, KY, at about \$1.50 for the night. The weather was improving but my available cash was something in the range of \$4, so I decided not to eat that day. Early that evening as I arrived in the outskirts of Charleston, WV, I had 47 cents in my pocket (plus the A.T.A. check for \$91) and the fuel tank was almost empty. I knew of a prominent trapshooter by the name of LaFollette from Charleston, so I spent 10 cents to call him. We had a pleasant conversation but I lost my nerve and didn't ask him for a loan (he probably would have cashed the check). I drove to the center of town and parked near the Daniel Boone Hotel, where there was an AAA office. It cost 35 cents in advance to park, reducing my available assets to .02. I found the AAA office but it was closed. I went to the hotel's front desk and pled my case. Soon the assistant manager, a kindly older man, appeared and listened to my story. He didn't want the A.T.A. check, either, but said he would cash a personal check for \$20. I was back in business! I had a nice dinner at the hotel for about \$2, and a room overnight for \$5 or \$6. Even after filling with gasoline the next morning, I had about \$8 for the 480-mile trip home, enough to buy more gas on the way, and that night I ate my mother's cooking at Auburn Heights. I enjoyed some of the trip.

Small as they were, our events began this past weekend. On a rainy Saturday, we took the '22 Model 740 Stanley to Winterthur for the first of several "Famous Cars on an American Country Estate" days there. We were treated royally by Greg Landrey, Bob Brown, and other Winterthur personnel. Thanks to Rob Robison, Jerry Lucas, and Bob Reilly for making this possible for me. On Sunday we had a visit from the Chester Springs Old Car Club with three cars and five people- a tiny group that Bob Reilly and I entertained and tried to show them a good time. Since our railroad crew was testing out Locomotive 401 with its train before they left, we gave them a train ride as an added bonus.

This week will be a busy one leading up to the Friends School Day on Sunday, the 30th. Tomorrow a few of us will meet with the Lions Eye Bank people to talk about a cooperative event in 2007, and Anne Cleary is chairing an Events Committee meeting at her home in the evening at 7:30. Emil has called a Finance Committee meeting for Thursday evening here at 7:30. Work is continuing to get the 735 completed, and we hope to get the boiler installed this week. Our hydraulic brakes are finished for this car and for the Model EX, and as soon as we can coordinate picking them up from Bob Barrett, we will have them in Yorklyn. Butch is going to fire up the Mountain Wagon tomorrow afternoon (4/25) and prepare it for service next Sunday. Our new safety valves were tested on both locomotives by Bill Schwoebel and his crew, and they need adjustment. I will follow up on this immediately. Rob Robison is in the final stages of editing the spring edition of the "Herald", to be out within two weeks. Some track work is still needed for the April 30 running of the train, and the museum will have to be rearranged.

In early May, Bob and I meet with Chazz Salkin and Matt Chesser of the Division of Parks on the 2nd, and we have two steamers going to "Old Dover Days" on Saturday, the 6th. On this same Saturday, the two Packards will be going to Winterthur for the third of their special days mentioned above. Jim Personti is giving the '32 a needed tune-up. And it is ESSENTIAL that we get the Promotion Team in place to assist the Simpkins' and Chuck Erikson with our June 3-4 steamin' weekend. Since no one has signed on, we will be asking some of you to join in this effort. Tom