

Pop's Car Stories -- by Lewis Miller Smithson -- written after 1942

In the autumn of 1911 I went to work for J. K. Ward at that time he owned a men's furnishing store, hardware store, printing office and saddle horse (king). He soon purchased three young horses named Lord Olga, Lady Olga and maid. During the winter 1911/12 J. K. went to Clarksburg for a few days. On returning he told me that he had bought a Maxwell car. He had learned to drive it and it would be shipped here within a few days. He said "it is up to you to take care of it along with the horses" since it was to be kept in the barn with the horses, the first thing was to fix the streets so we could get it to the barn.

The Gents Furnishings store was located near where the Wiles Barber Shop is now and the Hardware two doors down the street. The Hardware was sold to Sagraves and Richardson who moved across the street and I believe they sold to W.L. Thomas. The Yew Pine Independent Publishing Co. Was located in the rear en of the Wolverton law office bldg on Oakford Ave and I believe the presses were sold to the Nicholas Republican.

The barn was the basement under the Umbarger bowling ally on one of the lots where the Post Office now stands. The curb stones at street crossing, while OK for wagons, were to high for auto wheels. So I hauled dirt in a wheelbarrow to fill the ruts high enough so a car axle would pass over the stones across Edgewood Ave. And Oakford at Edgewood.

The only car to visit Richwood prior to that time was a Model T Ford from White Sulphur Springs, and it could not pass the Barrier on Oakford at Edgewood Alley. That was the only auto I had seen until the Maxwell arrived. We got it out of the car and J. K. drove it to the barn.

J. K. Ward, HG Carskadden, WA Hamilton and other had organized a racing association (Richwood Fair Association) and started to build a race track, but winter stopped them before the grading was near done. When spring came, since there was no street and no track, we had to find a place for me to learn to drive, so I filled the crossing so we could use the Hinkle Mountain road, and I learned to drive between the Cranbury Road forks at Hinkle Church.

The car was a 1911 model Maxwell with R H Drive and progressive transmission, acetylene head lights, oil parking and tail lights, generator, horn, lights and other metal parts all brass and must be polished every week.

The race track was finished early in the summer of 1912 and then we used the car to keep it dragged smooth and had a place to drive the car at night and on Sunday. Many nights I drove around the track till 1:00 am while J. K. visited with friends in the back seat. Since we had no public roads that we could use in 1912, I had no drivers license that year, but I did get chauffeurs license for 1913 since they were starting to pave main street from the square to the McClung hospital (now the Virginia Hotel)

In the late Summer of 1912 J. K. decided Pneumatic tired were going to be expensive and he made an offer to try a set of semi-solid tires on approval. I think of stretching a solid tire over a clincher rim but he said put them on, and at the end of the trial period he said take them off,

which was even harder than putting them on.

Early in 1913 some Ford cars were bought by John Landacre, LM Richards, JH Kincaid, Harry Dilley, TL Falar. Leroy Crapp and others, also a few used cars by Dr. LM Kahle, John Carter and others.

Only the Landacre car had been over the Cold Knob road before a caravan of five cars started to White Sulphur Springs as a Sunday excursion of 1 JH Landacre, 2 J. K. Ward, 3 TM Richards, 4 JH Kincaid, 5 Harry Dilley, only the first and second cars made the entire trip. All of the cars were kept close together till we reached the top of the mountain, as all hands were needed at times to push them through the mud holes, but at that point we presumed the worst was past and went on to Lewisburg. While waiting in the drug store for the others to catch up, we heard a crash and went out to find the Richards car with a [spring and frame end of the Maxwell frame & spring] sticking through the radiator. Russell said he wore the service brake out going down the mountain and had been using the hand brake until he had not brake at all when he wanted to stop near our car. He had a new Radiator put on while we took all of his passengers we could on to the Springs.

It seems to me that there was about twelve in the two cars but I do not remember all of them. Mr. & Mrs. SM Whitmore, Mr. & Mrs. LM Richards, Mr. & Mrs. J. K. Ward, I do not remember who Landacre had with him. We arrived at 1:00 pm and went to the Hotels. They were constructing an addition at that time and informed us that dinner was over and we would have to wait till supper time if we got anything to eat there. They told us there were some boarding houses, but no restaurants in town. We finally found a boarding house where the lady said she had some fried chicken left from dinner and if the ladies of our party would stay, she would fix them a cold lunches but she did not have enough for all of us. We had eaten some ice cream in Lewisburg and now started looking for anything to eat or drink. We never found anything to eat and the only drink was Welshes Grape Juice. We returned to Lewisburg as soon as the ladies were ready, and the men got a sandwich while we were waiting for Richards car to be finished. We learned then that the other two cars did not make it that far, and we did not see them again as they had taken a different route.

We left Lewisburg between 4 & 5 o'clock and had country ham for supper at Trout Valley arriving back in Richwood about 11:00 pm.

I have receipt from State Auditor for payment for chauffeurs license for 1913, and have had drivers license ever since.

In the summer of 1913, J. K. traded D. Kahle a new car for a used Maxwell Run-about he had just purchased and brought to Richwood. On Sunday morning Aug 31, 1913, there was a funeral or something special at the Hinkle Church, and J. K. told me to drive the Run-about and he the Touring Car. So we could take more people to the service.

I had a lot of trouble getting up the hill and decided I would try to find the trouble when I got my passengers back to town. In the afternoon, I started up the Greenbrier road to do some adjusting on the hill. I had not gone far when some boys sitting by the road asked for a ride. I

shook my head, but they started for the rear of the car, which looked like the rear end of the old horse buggy. Since the car was moving slightly faster than one could walk, it was no trouble for them to get on, and I was sure the motor could not pull that extra weight. The road at that time was only wide enough for a car or wagon and while I was trying to explain my trouble to them behind me, I evidently took my eyes from the road long enough to run off the road and cause the first auto wreck in Richwood. The car stopped leaning against a chestnut tree, and the boys were thrown against a poultry netting fence which prevented them from serious injury.

WV Jarrett, who had purchased a car from JD a short time before came down the road at this time and I learned later that I stood on the running board of his car and rode to the square at Main St. However, I was in my room on Walnut St washing my face when I became conscious and was told what had happened.

Dr. LD McCutcheon then patched my cuts and told J. K. to keep me out in the air so I rode with him till time for supper.

The next day, we got a heavy rope block from JA Tincher, hung it in the tree and with a tram of mules lifted the car high enough to swing it on to the road. I made and put a new running board on one side and a new windshield and after getting the motor to do its duty was ready for the next trouble, which turned out to be the tires and rear axle. This happened some weeks later when John Arnett, who was chief clerk in J. K.'s's Clothing store asked me to take him after the store closed at 8:30 to the JC Baber farm, where a party was in progress that evening. The other members had gone earlier on a wagon (hay ride). After the evening train came in about 6 o'clock, John brought Ernie Cutlip in to see if he and a girl friend could go along, and since J. K.'S was out of town, I said we'll try it. The only place for the boys to sit was on the ear end with their feet hanging down. We had not gone a mile till we had a flat tire and we kept having them. It was patch and pump at least every mile, so the boys decided to walk on while I patched a tube and thus reduce the load. But before we caught up with them, there was some noise in the rear axle and the car stopped. I advised Miss Perkins there was only one thing to do, walk. The oil head lights just slipped on to a bracket, so I took one off, put it under my arm and we walked till we met the boys coming back to see what the trouble was. We had plenty of help to get the car out of the as we came back on the hay wagon. We learned the next day that the planetary differential case had lost some bolts so the gears would not mesh. We put it back together and got it back to town that evening.

All of this time no gasoline was allowed within the corporation except what was in the tank of a machine plus one gallon. The gasoline house was on the cemetery road just below where the radio station now stands. The barrels were delivered there by wagon and all gas used for printing, riding or anything else was siphoned out with a hose and carried back to town. But with the paving of Main St. An ordinance was passed allowing gasoline within the corporation if the tank was at least 2 feet under ground and J. K.'S started building the first public garage where the Mansfield Garage now stands. He built several additions to it before he sold it to the Motor Sales Car about 1924.

I was summoned for jury duty at the 1914 summer term of Circuit Court. J. K.'S tried to keep me from going, but I told him I did not have \$333 1/8 dollars to spare. So he said he would take

me there. Since several cars were going from Richwood it was decided to go as a caravan. Either 7 or 9 cars started the only route at that time over Hinkle mountain, Woodbine ferry & Craigsville and all went well till we were at the Dave McQueen farm on McMillions creek. Some of the cars had passed the bridge when we looked back and saw the other had stopped. Going back to see what the trouble was we found E.D. Darseys car down in the creek bu the bridge. Sam and Slader Hinkle had been riding with him. Sam told us what had happened and no one was hurt, there was no railings on the bridge and the floor was not nailed. Some one went to the house and found he had a set of rope blocks. We took the floor off the stringers, put one end of the stringers down in the creek and then put the floor back. We fastened the tackle to a tree in the field, pulled the car up onto the road and then put the bridge back so the other card could follow. When that was done we were almost as black as miners, but we got dinner in Summersville about 2 pm.

I had worked in the printing office with Mel Brack who had told me about the Brock House, so I went there to board, but I only had one night there as I was called on the first case to come before the court.

Judge Fisher was ill so Judge Dice of Lewisburg would preside during the McClung trial and hope Fisher would be able to take his place when this case was finished. Dice thought it a very important jury and assigned two deutes to guard us. All 14 men must sleep in one room, and always be together. This caused complications when it was decided the jury should go and view the scene of the crime.

When a jury was finally empaneled, we were taken directly from the court house to the Alderson Hotel where they had a room large enough for the beds, but very little room to pass between them. There was no inside plumbing and when one decided to cross the lot to the alley, 13 went to keep him company and sometimes this happened several times in one night. We were not allowed to go to the barber shop nor to have a barber come to our room.

I like many others could not go back to where I had left my clothes and when we needed a clean shirt or other clothing we gave one of our guards the money and he bought new ones for us. At the end of nine days you can imagine what we looked like. Our ages were from 24 to 65.

The barber shop was the first stop when we were released from futher duty at that term and told that we could go home. Judge Fisher occupied the bench and would not hold us for futher duty.

The question was how to put that many men in three cars. I think one of the officers has a Ford and if I would drive only one driver would be needed, thus making a total of 15. I had never driven a Ford and would not attempt to drive on where we were ordered to stay so close together. J. K.'S had sold Dr. CS Covie a Maxwell some time before and I had taught his son to drive it. The boy was in Summersville and offered to let them use the car if I would drive it.

We left early with the Maxwell in the middle, a deputy in each Ford and Jake Dorsey driving the third car, all went OK until we crossed Hughes bridge and started up the Hill, then most of the trouble was with the Judge and lawyers cars who were leading the caravan. We

arrived at Hominey Falls soon after 12 noon, and had dinner before going on to Levasy. It was near 4 pm when we were told to start back and it was decided to go back by way of Nettie. Jake had one or two flat tires before we reached Nettie and another not far from the store. We were not allowed to go to the store, but one of the officers offered to get us some cheese and crackers while Jake patched & pumped the tire. That was all we had to eat that day as it was after midnight when we got back to the hotel. It was not easy driving a three speed car between two speed Fords and keeping the cars within a few feet of each other at all times because at that time the roads were only build for the use of wagons.

I was over some of the same roads again that year when a Mail Pouch tobacco advertising man wanted to cover his territory with a car instead of the mule drawn wagon he had been using. When he and J. K.'S reached an agreement, I was informed that we has two days in which to visit every store in Nicholas county. We started early in the morning with the rear end of the car full of samples and advertising and decided to ford the river at Fenwick and try to go by Nettie thus saving a lot of miles for one mile then was equal to at least 25 now. He had to have a few words with and give samples to every one we saw along the road and spend some time at every place where tobacco was sold. At one place he asked me to stop by a rail fence and said we would have to walk through the fields to reach the house where one room was used for a store, also not to be shocked is we found the old couple who owned the place barefooted and we must take time for them to come out and see their first automobile. We did.

His plan was to spend the night at Summersville but he finished there so early in the afternoon we decided to move on and finally stopped with J. K.'S Baber at Calvin. Since he had so little work left for the second day, he took in a part of Webster County. We worked Craigsville, Camden on Gauley and Cowen, and back by way of Tioga and then ferry at Woodbine to Richwood early in the afternoon.

J. K.'S had a Mr. Fullen selling cars for him at Roncevert and any time he had any trouble, I had to go over Cold Knob and find the trouble for him, and as it took 4 to 6 hours to get there I nearly always had to spend one night there and remember you must have a strong back for they all started only with a crank

Early in 1915, J. K.'S received the car that cause me to change jobs. You could not see anything wring with the pulleys but a fan belt would only last a few minutes. We ordered belts and has some made at the harness shop. I finally had one made that was holding and I was not watching it closely while I took two ladies for a few laps around the track. I had promised them earlier that I would take them for a first auto ride at the first opportunity. We had only gone a few laps when I saw the steam and had to stop. The belt was torn to shreds as usual, and as they left J. K.'S came on the scene, his face red as a beet, which was natural when he was mad. He got all over me for letting anyone ride without asking his permission and that I should have noticed before the motor got so hot. I simply handed him his keys and told him I had finished.

A few days later, Dr. L.N. McCutcheon asked me to drive his car to Huntington and near by points. He wanted to take his family for a vacation but was unable to drive because of an injury to his leg.

The car was a Partin-Palmer with a long very narrow body with two fixed seats and individual disappearing seats.

We were in Summersville the first night to hear Hon. Stewart F. Reed speak at a public meeting at the Court House. The party who brought him to town did not wish to take him back and asked Mr. [mucat] if he could squeeze him in. It was a squeeze because the family planned to be gone 3 weeks and Reed had a large bag with him. Please remember there were no car trunks in those days. It was raining but we had to put some of the baggage on the running boards, as there just was not room for all of it and 6 people inside. However, we left about 9 am and had only gone a short distance when one cylinder stopped firing. We had no extra spark plugs and it was different from any used here at that time. I drove it in that condition till we found some plugs in Gallipolis Ohio.

We let Mr. Reed off at Gauley Bridge, Swiss or some where near at about 1 pm. As he said he could bet home faster by rail.

We had forded Bill creek about seven times, it had rained all of the time, and with a crippled motor, I was getting tired. The sun began to shine just before we reached Charleston at about 5 pm.

We had supper and I went to my room. I was sleeping by 7 o'clock and [Newt] did not awaken me next morning till they had breakfast and were ready to start on to Huntington. I have always said that was the hardest days work I have ever done. 75 miles in 8 hours.

We went to Mr. Mc's uncle Bill Brown's farm which was about three miles from the river but uncle Bill was a fisherman and took us with a camping outfit to his brother's farm on the river bank. We camped in his watermelon field and fished with a trotline for a week or more. We were at Uncle Bill's when they decided to start home but there was a difference of opinion as to the day. Mrs. Mc did not want to start on Sunday but Mr. Mc said we would, so when all was loaded and the farewells said, I started up a steep hill to miss the sand along the river road. We were nearly to the top of the hill when there was a snap in the rear axle and the car started to roll backward. I found the key sheared off in a rear wheel, so we drifted backward to the house, and unloaded everything but the watermelons.

Uncle Bill had a forge, anvil and vises but I am not sure if I was allowed to use it on Sunday or had to wait till Monday. However, I found some metal and forged and filed a key, so we could start back to Richwood. On arrival here I put the car in the Ward Garage. De. [Meuit] told me when he went to use it again, the keys sheared off before he got it out of the garage.

This was in July 1915 and I had never driven a Ford car but Mrs. M.E. Snyder asked me if I would drive this ford some evening after they closed the store, as they had lost their man to J. K.'S when I quit him.

While taking them for one of these short joy rides, Mrs. Snyder was instrumental in securing a job for me with the [WmF Massss Ceen] where I worked until April 1918 with only one outing with a car worth recording.

A few weeks after I started to work at the tannery, the Snyders asked me to drive them to the top of Cold Knob for a Sunday picnic. I went to the store early to check the car but when I started through to the garage, Mr. Snyder informed me that he had done so and there was no need for me to go till they were ready to start, I was very sorry later that I had not gone on as planned.

It was a nice day, and we had a very pleasant outing thus far, but when the lunch was finished, Mr. Snyder suggested that we drive out where we could see the valley below. When I pointed out Williamsburg, he said let's go there. Since it was early I did not object, but when he wanted to go on to Lewisburg I remembered my date and finally made him understand that we could be in the night getting home. We turned back at Cornstalk, and were just starting back up the Mountain when a connecting rod bearing burned out and I learned that Mr. S had only checked the lower oil gauge [cack] and we had started with out enough oil.

Mr. Snyder was trying to get a call through from Trout Valley to Richwood when some one, I believe it was LL Falar, came by going to Richwood. He took the family with him leaving me to wait for help. Fisher came but could not find a rod and wanted me to take the plug out of that cylinder and drive it in as some of the Ford owners had done that. I refused and left it there so he brought me into town after 11:00 pm.

Some of the Ford owners offered to bring it in a few days later, and broke the side of the crank case out so when they finally hauled it in it was necessary to buy a new motor block.

I then went to the Tioga Coal Co. And while there found some friends who wanted to buy cars if I would teach them how to drive. I also had to do some car repairing while I was in the [Mech] Shop at Tioga. Came back to Richwood in Nov 1920, bought the HC Comstock rep shop and started a car repair and vulcanizing shop in Jan 1921.

Started to work for Yew Pine Garage in July 1923 and remained in shop when it was sold to Motor Sales Co. Continued with them till Nov 1927 when I went with MD Morton, where I remained until Oct 1942.

Since there was no wrecker service for many of those first years, if a disabled car still had four wheels that would roll you could sometimes get a truck to tow it in but if a spindle or a knuckle bolt broke it had to be replaced at the scene of the accident and believe me there were plenty of them, especially in extremely cold weather.

I went to the top of Cold Knob on the 10th day of May back in the 20's to put a soft plug in a motor block of a truck left there the night before when the driver found he had no lights. It was raining and as there was no top on the truck and the driver was soaking wet and cold. He opened the cooling system drain cocks and walked back [jaion] to the nearest farm house to spend the night, returning in the morning he found the motor block had not drained and it became cold enough to freeze the soft plug out of the block. We had to walk some distance because the snow was drifted on top of the mountain so deep the Model t taxi would not pull through it.

At that time all gasoline tanks were place under the front seat, and if you did not let it get to near empty you were OK but a nearly empty tank could make you go up a steep hill backwards in order to make the gas flow to the carburetor. But when they first put the tank at the rear of the car, you were never sure how far you would go on the Greenbrier road until you caller for help. I have plugged the hole with cloth and wood and borrowed gas to get home. And I have taken a can of gas, blow torch and soldering iron, lie down in the snow to take the tank off, solder the hole. And put it back , pour in the gas and hope he would not hit the drain plug on another rock before he got over the Cold Knob. There was also a rock out there that took the oil plug and bottom out of the Studebaker Aluminum transmission case which cause me a lot of welding.

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