

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, September 26, 2005

**J. Homer Kratz and the Beginning of National Fibre & Insulation Co., 1904:** In thinking of steam car trips of the past, I want you to know J. Homer Kratz (1881–1956), who is pictured at Bedford Springs with my father, Earle Eckel, and Augustus Post in a large photo panel that hangs in our museum. Homer's expression was dead-pan; I never saw him laugh, but he enjoyed his bachelor life, and during the last 10 years of it, he made many Stanley trips with my father, often in the Mountain Wagon or in the Model 87.

About 1904, Homer was hired by the new National Fibre and Insulation Co. as accountant and bookkeeper. His office was in the No. 1 Fibre Mill, just across from the railroad station in Yorklyn. He rented a room from the Walter sisters in Kennett Square and usually boarded with them as well. He commuted daily to Yorklyn by trolley. When my father, then a bachelor also, became a Stanley dealer in 1910, Homer made a few trips with him and thought he wanted a Stanley. Another bachelor and fibre mill manager, Samuel E. Cooper, had the same thing in mind, so he and Homer bought a slightly used Model 72 together (1911–12 roadster, 20-horsepower). Forty years later, Homer was telling us about his experiences with this car, which he called the "hair-pin raiser." Curious as to what he meant, he elaborated to us that he had a girlfriend who had a head full of hair-pins. One day he took her for a fast spin, and the hair-pins started to fly out and were lost behind. Unfortunately, the partnership of Homer Kratz and Sam Cooper lasted only about a year, and I think Cooper bought out Homer's interest. Neither one was mechanically inclined, and the car was here frequently for repairs, as evidenced by my father's book of accounts.

When Homer retired from National Vulcanized Fibre at the end of 1947 (it was not called NVF until 1965), he was ready to travel. My mother never enjoyed long trips in the open cars, so my father was glad to have a companion, and he usually invited Homer. He went to steam car tours in 1948, 1949, 1955 and 1956 and on the Glidden Tour every year from 1948 through 1953. He also attended many of the spring and fall meets of the Antique Automobile Club of America. He looked slightly like my father, and many thought they were brothers. They got along well. When the Stanley would stop for water, my father would attend to mechanical things, and Homer would entertain the crowd. About 75% of what he said was correct. When the watering up was completed, Homer would still be engaged in conversation, and my father would pull away, as if he were leaving Homer behind. He would pull around the corner and stop, and Homer would come puffing and climb aboard. Then they would travel for miles without a word being said.

They shared a room at overnight stops, and Homer snored. My father would grab spare pillows and start throwing them at Homer until he awoke, and they'd have another "go" at a night's sleep. In his retirement, Homer also enjoyed golf. He played one afternoon in early December 1956, suffered a heart attack, and died two hours later in his landlady's home in Kennett Square.