

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 5, 2006

1936 Nova Scotia Trip in '34 Packard Twelve: In the Marshall household, June was the time many great trips took place or began. On June 20, 1936, four of us left Auburn Heights in my father's 1934 Packard Twelve seven-passenger limousine for a six-week motor trip to the Northeast. My parents and I were joined by my father's cousin, Mary Passmore, who taught fourth grade at Wilmington Friends School for more than 30 years. We stopped at Lake Mohonk and Lake Placid, New York, at Whitefield, New Hampshire, and at Bangor, Maine, before crossing into the Maritime Provinces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Quebec. Some memorable moments were the breaking of tie rods between the firewall and the radiator on the washboard roads of Nova Scotia, the trip around Cape Breton Island on the dusty unpaved road called the Cabot Trail, lodgings without electricity on the Gaspe Peninsula, and a blow-out 200 miles east of Quebec, where goats and cattle roaming wild watched my father change the tire with great curiosity.

Before we left Nova Scotia, we crossed the Minas Basin (at the head of the Bay of Fundy) from Wolfville to Parrsboro, where they had 50-foot tides. The steam ferry trip took two hours, and the little boat carried five automobiles and up to 50 passengers. Ferry slips or ramps as we knew them were impossible with this variation in water level, so the cars were lifted on and off with a boom and cables that swung them over the boat rail and onto the open deck. The other four cars were loaded first and then came the big Packard. The loading rig was not designed for 6,000 pounds, and as the car was being lowered onto the deck, the boom broke and the car bounced on the deck a few times, barely missing the other cars and the boat's attendants. The old captain had no choice but to pull away from the dock immediately, as the tide was going out, and 15 minutes later there would be nothing but mud flats. Feverishly he and his crew worked to repair the boom as we sped across the Minas Basin. Halfway across, we were supposed to stop to pick up passengers at a pier at the end of a small peninsula, but the captain had no thought of stopping and steamed on by, with the stranded ferry prospects waving feverishly from the dock.

When we arrived at Parrsboro in early evening, the dock was high above the boat's deck, and as the captain tied up, the hull began to settle on the mud bottom. The passengers were unloaded first, and all held their breaths to see if the repaired boom would hold as the cars were raised about 20 feet to the dock. Again, the lighter cars came off first, and all went well. Finally came the Packard, and everything held together as it was lifted high in the air and safely lowered to the dock to be driven away. My father crawled under the car to inspect the axles, as he feared they might be bent. Finding everything in apparent good shape, we drove away toward Monkton and the rest of our trip, with no stories to tell from the six-week adventure to equal that one.

I loved that Packard and was saddened when my father sold it in the fall of 1937 to buy the Packard Twelve still in our collection. He and I must have liked the '37 quite well, also.