

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, July 17, 2006

Alex Joyce's Grandmother's Account of a Train Trip to Estes Park: From Alex Joyce of Nashville, Tennessee, a longtime antique car collector and former president of the Horseless Carriage Club of America, comes the story for this week. Alex relayed this in a letter to me written nearly 20 years ago. As background to its content, some of you know that F. O. Stanley opened his New England style resort hotel at Estes Park, Colorado, in 1909, and the first Mountain Wagons were built to transport his guests from two railheads nearly 30 miles away.

I spent some time yesterday with my grandmother, who was quite perky and talked for an hour about her travels to Estes Park with her father in the period 1914–1918. She had learned to drive in 1914, first on a Franklin, then a Dorris, and then a Rauch & Lang electric. She also had a Model T roadster that she kept in Loveland, Colorado. She was caught drag racing with her brother on the streets of Nashville in 1914, and their father had to take the trolley to the city jail to bail them out. He bought them the Rauch & Lang, and told them to race with that! Grandmother definitely remembered a rear-entrance White steamer in Estes Park which had been there for several years (the last “rear-entrance” Model Es were built in 1905, I think).

On Day One, they would take the night train from Nashville to St. Louis. Day Two would always be spent at the St. Louis Zoo, followed by an evening outdoor symphony at the riverside park before boarding the night train for Kansas City. On Day Three, they would change to the Denver train in Kansas City. The trip across the Great Plains could take up to two days if the winds came up, and with no irrigation the dust restricted visibility. The porters would open the vestibules for air, and then hang sheets on every part of the compartment walls and floor to keep down the dust and soot, changing these sheets often during the day. Fresh lemonade and iced tea were in pitchers in each compartment. Nonetheless, by the time they reached Denver, they were exhausted and checked into a hotel (sometimes the Brown Palace) and slept for 24 hours. Finally, they made the 50-mile train trip to Loveland on the Sixth Day.

With no through train service from the East, she remembered those unrested, cranky souls fighting to endure the Mountain Wagon trip for the last 30 miles up the Big Thompson Canyon to Estes Park. Being young and rested herself, she rather enjoyed the ride. In her last years at Estes Park, she became acquainted with a Mr. Papa, an Indian Chief who scared the “eastern dudes” to death. One of the hotels had a movie projector in its billiard room, and young ladies were allowed to attend in this hallowed men’s domain. Since the films were silent, the projectionist and those in the audience would often mimic the actors on the screen.

Thank you, Alex, for sharing this with us, telling of transcontinental train travel in this country 90 years ago, and for your grandmother’s remembrances of Estes Park.