

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, December 7, 2009

**The Lukes of Delaware and Piedmont, West Virginia:** Since later generations of the Luke family are still living in Delaware, I apologize if my information is not 100% correct; some of it is. The patriarch of the family, James L. Luke, of the same generation as my grandfather, Israel Marshall, owned a large and very prosperous paper mill at Piedmont, West Virginia, along the upper reaches of the Potomac River (the town of Luke, MD, right across the river, was named for the family). The Lukes may have lived there before settling in Delaware, but, in any event, they were in the Wilmington area before World War I. The papermaking Marshalls wanted to see the Luke operation at Piedmont, so in the summer of 1910, shortly after purchasing his Model K Stanley, Clarence Marshall, then 25, decided to drive to Piedmont and back over a three-day weekend. He asked the Delaware Motor Club (later AAA affiliated) for the best route where the roads were acceptable for the 450-mile round-trip journey.

With two passengers in addition to himself in the Model K, the trio headed southwest. I'm not sure of the recommended route, but it was probably through Baltimore and Hagerstown, Maryland. My father's passengers were most likely Homer Kratz and Earl Barnard. The K has only two bucket seats in front and a single abbreviated bucket in the back, usually referred to as a "mother-in-law" seat. Where they could have carried luggage and tools is a mystery, but adventurous youths could travel light in those days. The K was fast, but the roads would not allow it. Deep ruts and mud slowed down the young voyagers, and it took nearly a day and a half to reach Piedmont. As they got ready to leave on Sunday for the return home, something let loose in the engine. It turned out to be a broken wrist pin, but fortunately no other damage occurred. How many 25-year-olds would know what to do in order to drive the car home?

My father understood steam engines. In some way, he blocked the slide valve on center on the broken side, preventing steam from entering that cylinder. They came home, about 225 miles, on one side, or with half the engine working! Geared extremely high (66 to 54) anyway, it may have been somewhat hard to start, but my father said the "bark" of the exhaust was almost deafening with one cylinder doing all the work. All got home on time and went back to work.

Mr. Luke had three sons, Joe, Jim (Jr.), and Bill. Jim (1902–1964) became an expert trapshooter and for many years operated a gun club that he called "Lukehurst" on the east side of Concord Pike just north of Talleyville. He and his family lived in the big house on the property. The Delaware State Shoot was held there in 1932 and 1933. The gun club closed after the 1939 season. In the 1960s, the Brandywine Country Club used the home for a clubhouse, and there was a nine-hole (possibly 18-hole) golf course adjoining, which included the old shooting grounds. Most of this property is now a part of the Widener University campus.

Bill Luke, the youngest of the three brothers, established Delaware Olds, Inc., with showroom and shop on Market Street above 13<sup>th</sup> in Wilmington. In the 1950s, the operation moved to Governor Printz Boulevard, and much later the dealership sold Hondas as well as Oldsmobiles. Bill Luke had two low license numbers: Delaware #50 and #100. His brother Jim had #41. Bill's son, Bill Jr., expanded the business and bought the Mason Chevrolet Company of Kennett Square, selling Chevys and Oldsmobiles at that location on West State Street.