

## Tom Marshall's Weekly News, May 31, 2010

**Marvin W. Klair (1913–2007):** The word unique is over-used, but Marvin fit the definition perfectly: “one of a kind.” There will never be another like him. I first knew Marvin and his late wife, Olive, about the time the Brandywine Region of the AACA (BRAACA) was founded in the late 1950s. They had just lost their old home and part of their farm to the new Milltown Road, and Marvin had given up his dairy operation. They built two ranch-type homes next to the old barn, and they fell in love with old cars and those who owned them.

Marvin and Olive participated in BRAACA activities from the beginning, and about 1964 he bought a 1918 Stanley steamer from my father (now owned by Bob Wilhelm) to add to his growing antique car collection. Marvin's approach to the Stanley was unorthodox, as it was to most things. He devised a method of securing the burner to the boiler with the liberal use of chicken wire, a procedure that required about four days to attach the burner, as opposed to the usual two hours. He found or fabricated a bull's head to screw on the condenser's filler cap (a radiator cap on a conventional car), so that when the car moved, the chuffs from the exhaust caused the bull to snort steam from its nostrils. Once on a tour in Canada with his steamer, he bought fuel from an Indian, only to find it was bunker “C” instead of kerosene. Another time he siphoned stagnant water from Lake Como in Smyrna, sucking scum, not water, into the water tank. Marvin enjoyed things like this much more than having his car run well.

When Marvin was president of BRAACA (1964–66), to many members he was the Brandywine Region. He reached out to eastern Pennsylvania, to south Jersey, and to neighboring Maryland for new members and built up BRAACA's membership to nearly 300. Through his friendly and amusing personality, and through Squeaks from the First State Region, which he edited and published, this flood of new members loved BRAACA because it was Marvin's region. The humorous editor became “Squeaky Witherspoon,” and he established regular columns written by Kitty Highwheeler and the Farmer's Daughter. Marvin's cartoons were also unique: they usually featured two farmers exchanging yarns in peculiar situations, one of whom was cross-eyed with dark-rim glasses and a pipe in his mouth. Marvin liked to run old car tours, but he insisted that no tour was worth an entry fee of more than \$1.

Marvin was a kind and generous man. If he became interested in an organization, whether it was a 4-H group, his church, or something of historic significance, he would volunteer long hours and hard work. When the Wilmington & Western Railroad was in its infancy, he came every day for weeks with his gasoline-powered tractor to lift the timbers for its pole barn engine house and car shed. When the historic Yorklyn Station was re-erected at Greenbank, he dug the trenches and helped me pour the footers at its new location. When we were preparing to open the Magic Age of Steam in Yorklyn (the present Auburn Heights property), he and his tractor moved all the dirt to build the pond and the railroad tunnel and to build additional paved driveways. Despite the magnitude of this work, every day he was at Auburn Heights he was interested in a dove's nest nearby and was fearful of disturbing its occupant sitting on her eggs. When my father died in 1969, Marvin wrote a beautiful obituary for the Squeaks. I wrote this one for the Squeaks after Marvin's death in 2007.