

## TRIP TO VIRGINIA JULY 16-22, 2016

By Jon Miller

The story begins a few days before departure when most of the intrepid travelers were making final preparations for the trip and ensuring their Model A's were ready for the first overnight Club road trip of the year. Our group, consisting of Steve Meyer (Tour Leader), John Leydon, Bud Carroll, Don Keller, Ken and Nancy Godfrey, Laura and Harvey Hack, Milt Hartig, Sally and Bill Lermond, and your truly Jon Miller, had been eagerly anticipating this trip for many months. You just know that the nine cars participating on this road trip were being serviced, tuned-up, and cleaned-up to provide their passengers with the best possible ride for this seven-day excursion.

On my 1931 Town Sedan, I knew the headlights needed alignment so I went over to Steve Meyer's house one evening to use his long driveway to do a "seat-of-the-pants" alignment of the headlights. I discovered a problem with the passenger side headlight socket which would not focus properly. With no time to replace it before departure, and since the headlight worked and could be generally aligned, I left it alone to replace another day. Not so Steve who discovered, the day before departure, that his battery would no longer hold a charge. With a frantic search of several car parts vendors, given the late hour on a Friday afternoon, Steve found a battery at the NAPA store in Laurel and got it installed in his car in time for departure the next morning.

### DAY ONE

On Saturday, July 16, Don, Laura, Harvey, and I met at Steve's house to begin our journey with the first stop at White's Ferry to cross the Potomac River. Bud, Milt, Sally, Bill, Nancy and Ken were driving directly to White's Ferry where we would all link up and proceed to John Leydon's house for a refreshment stop on our way to Charlottesville.

Then Steve received the call. Milt had experienced a breakdown somewhere west of Mt. Airy. After much discussion on the telephone, Steve decided to proceed to White's Ferry and then reassess our trip plan at that time to see if Milt would be back on the road. Steve, Don, Laura and Harvey, and I departed Steve's house with everything going to plan. Until we came upon the "Road Closed Ahead" sign near Germantown. Using a miracle of modern technology, the GPS, Steve was able to re-route us over a very picturesque series of Montgomery County back roads until we magically arrived at White's Ferry.

Bill had graciously obtained ferry tickets for all the cars and was busy handing them out as Steve was obtaining an update on Milt's roadside repair. With the expectation that Milt would soon have his car running, Steve decided that the group would depart and head to John Leydon's house and wait for Milt there, rather than in the parking lot for White's Ferry. So, this is what we did.



John lives on the estate once owned by President James Monroe, called Oak Hill. John lives in the former Superintendent's 100-year old house which is steeped in history. John had a very nice table of refreshments laid out for the group, assisted by his neighbor Meagan. While the group was enjoying the refreshments, Steve received a call from Milt that his car was running and that he was on the way. Since we were then a bit behind schedule, the group decided to forego a lunch stop in order to save some time so we revisited John's refreshment table and consumed just about everything he had laid out. Thank you, John!



Once Milt arrived, we drove through the Oak Hill estate for John to give us a quick preview of where the Model A club October event will take place. Since Oak Hill is not open for public tours, the current owners have invited the George Washington Model A Club and our club to attend an open house on October 23, 2016 which will be an event not to be missed.



After a quick stop for fuel, Steve led our group to Charlottesville where our sightseeing destination was Ash Lawn-Highland, another home of President James Monroe. The drive took several hours and it was hot, very hot. Our cars were all running ok and we all made it to Ash Lawn without difficulty. Taking a guided tour of the remaining house, we learned that the original house built by James Monroe had been destroyed by fire sometime around 1850. A subsequent house had been built on the site and recent excavation discovered the foundation of the original Monroe house. One of the incredible sights to see was a 400-year old oak tree that was already 100-years old when President Monroe built his house on the property next to the tree. If only that tree could talk!!



As we were departing, a thunderstorm crossed the mountains and it began to rain. We helped John install the side curtains on his station wagon and then we were heading for our hotel. The rain stopped during our group's check-in at the hotel and the sky cleared. We went to the Tip-Top Diner for dinner and came back to the hotel for a good night's sleep. Don mentioned at dinner that his water pump was making a strange noise which warrants further inspection before the next leg of our journey. With night upon us, Don decided to wait until morning to assess what to do but would likely replace the water pump with a spare he is carrying.

## DAY TWO

The second day of our trip began with some discoveries. I discovered that Milt and Bud had taken apart Milt's distributor overnight, creating a work bench in their hotel room, and they had discovered a loose piece of metal inside the distributor. Milt speculated that this may have been a piece of metal from an old fake condensor that had been cut in half and installed about five years ago. Milt must have hit just the right bump to jar that piece of metal loose and then it shorted out the bottom plate. After cleaning the inside of the distributor, Milt subsequently reinstalled it and it worked fine. Problem solved!

Don also made a discovery about his water pump noise. After a fitful night's sleep thinking about the noise in his water pump, Don had a "eureka!" moment. He removed the water pump from his car, and found that the front bushing had become partially unseated which allowed the shaft to move a bit forward and backward. After moving the bushing back into position, Don reinstalled the water pump and was wrapping it up just as the bulk of our group was coming down to breakfast. Don's car was ready for the day which was forecast to be another hot one with temperatures hitting the mid-90's

We then departed Charlottesville for Lynchburg heading for our destination of Appomattox Court House before checking into our hotel. After a beautiful drive through the woods and along a ridge line, we stopped in the little town of Scottsville for a rest stop. As we began starting our cars to form up our departure line, Ken starts waving out of his window. His starter seems to be just spinning and not starting the engine. All of the many mechanics on the trip gathered around Ken's car, opened the hood, and had Ken hit the starter. Sure enough, it made the sound of a spinning fan, but no engagement with the flywheel. Conclusion was that the Bendix had failed so several strong backs pushed Ken's car backwards a few yards to allow for a push start. This method worked just fine and Ken's car was running, albeit without a functional starter. We all knew that when we next stopped, Ken needed to park his car on a hill before turning off the engine so we could push start him again until the Bendix could be replaced.

Steve did a fantastic job of navigating the group to Appomattox Court House, now a National Park, where Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant in the parlor of the McLean House thus ending the Civil War. We spent the entire afternoon there, watching a short film depicting the surrender, and listening to a re-enactor from the surrender time period as well as a Park Ranger who enthralled us all with the history of the location. A fascinating day well worth the investment of our time.





Then, on to our hotel. After checking in, we decided to go into Lynchburg for dinner at The Depot Grille, a restaurant on the James River. Since the parking situation was unknown, we consolidated the group into four cars and headed into Lynchburg. The restaurant was great but even there we had a bit of adventure when a drink glass was spilled on the table. Who knew that Harvey holds the world record for quickly jumping out of his chair lightning-fast to avoid an onslaught of spilled Coke? A skill that came in very handy it would seem!

After returning to the hotel after dinner, the car repairs began. John and Bud set to adjust John's brakes on his station wagon since we would be facing some increased mountain driving over the next few days. Don's water pump was making a noise again so he decided to swap it out with another pump. Milt took on the task of removing Ken's starter to fix the Bendix, with Harvey, Steve, Ken, and myself assisting. I had an original Bendix as a spare with my car so Milt used the bolts on the "good" Bendix to replace the bolts on Ken's Bendix, one of which had fallen out which caused the Bendix to not function. After the starter was reinstalled, Ken's car started just fine. All the cars were then ready for the next day's drive to Lexington and, since it was now dark, everyone retired for the evening.



### DAY THREE

The forecast was for another hot day with a high in the mid-90's. Steve gathered the group at 8:30 am for a pre-departure briefing about the day's intended destinations, first the Virginia Natural Bridge then

on to Lexington to visit General “Stonewall” Jackson’s home, Washington and Lee University, and the Virginia Military Institute. After a quick stop to refuel the cars, off we went!

Driving through the hills departing Lynchburg, it soon became apparent due to his increasingly slow speed that John’s station wagon had an issue. Finding a relatively flat area where all nine cars could pull off the road, we ended up stopping near a cluster of houses and a former business location to inspect John’s car to figure out the problem. We generated some curiosity in some of the folks who lived in the houses and they came out to talk to us and see what was going on. As Milt, Bud, John, Steve, and Ken assessed the issue with John’s car, the rest of us were engaged in talking to the folks who wanted to see our cars. Very friendly folks who offered use of any tools they had if needed to fix John’s car. It turned out that the clutch actuating arm on John’s car was cracked and was not fully disengaging the clutch when John was trying to shift. After adjusting the clutch free play, the panel of road-side repair engineers decided that the car would function and we should go ahead and continue our journey to Lexington. After bidding the friendly folks a fond farewell, we departed and, sure enough, John’s car performed just fine for the rest of the day.

It was a beautiful drive to the Virginia Natural Bridge. The mountain road was replete with curves and switchbacks that made the drive so much fun! It was also very shady so the air was relatively cool and the cars were in no danger of overheating as we climbed the mountains. Upon arriving at the Virginia Natural Bridge, we found it closed due to a power outage. No entry for sightseeing, use of bathrooms, or having lunch. So, we decided to continue driving to Lexington but stop for lunch in a couple of miles at the Pink Cadillac Diner. Arriving at the diner, we found we were not the only travelers to have this same idea. The diner was packed! Consequently, it took us a while to complete our lunch. Our collection of cars in the parking lot was also drawing some attention so it took a few minutes to depart since, of course, we engaged those folks looking at our cars and talked with them for quite a few minutes. Then, off to Lexington.





After arriving in Lexington in the early afternoon, somehow seven cars became separated from the other two. Since our tour leader Steve was in one of the two cars that we were now missing, the larger group's task was to find Steve! Through the miracle of modern radio technology, walkie-talkies, Harvey managed to communicate with Steve and find out where he was. The group of seven cars then made a collective U-turn at the Virginia Military Institute stadium and then reunited with Steve and Ken. Steve then led us to the Stonewall Jackson visitor center where we parked our very hot cars and scrambled into the air conditioned Visitor Center. We then proceeded to tour the Jackson house and then take a walking tour of the area, stopping first in the R. E. Lee Episcopal Church, then through the campus of Washington and Lee University, and finally onto the grounds of the Virginia Military Institute where we saw the crypt of Confederate General Robert E. Lee and walked through the museum. By this time it was almost 5 pm and we had at least a 90 minute drive back to Lynchburg so we headed up and moved out!



Returning to Lynchburg on a somewhat different route than our arrival, Steve led us to the Blue Ridge Parkway, a beautiful drive along a section of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Getting there, however, required driving up a long, steep grade for 3.6 miles. With the air temperature about 95F, the engines of many of the cars got a bit hot but all kept running. Personally, my temperature gauge was indicating over 190 degrees but my engine seemed to be purring right along. Several other cars were experiencing the same thing. Once we reached the top of the ridge, however, the road was mostly shady and the engines soon cooled down into a more normal operating temperature. It really was a beautiful drive and our cars seemed to be in their element. Then, of course, descending the mountain, engines cooled down even further until we arrived in Lynchburg and faced additional hills. There are many steep hills in Lynchburg and it seemed like every hill had a traffic light which, naturally, turned red every time we approached. The skill of every driver was tested getting our cars rolling up these steep hills once the traffic lights turned green but we all survived this challenge and made it back to our hotel with cars and

drivers unscathed by the experience! It had been a long but thoroughly enjoyable day. Time for a bite to eat, then relax, then check the car, then contemplate the next day's adventure.

#### DAY FOUR

The plan for the day was a visit to the Virginia Transportation Museum in Roanoke. The drive south was uneventful (always nice, those non-events!) and we made it in under two hours. We arrived at just about 11 am and found enough free parking for all of our cars right in front of the museum. After paying our entry fee, we joined a walking tour of the outdoor railroad display led by Mr. Charles Hardy, a very energetic tour guide who regaled us with many stories of life on the rails and the history of many of the locomotives and railcars at the museum. For example, the traditional caboose on trains originally did not have an onboard restroom since all the rail workers were men (use your imagination here). Once women began taking railway jobs, the "luxury" of a restroom became a necessity and all railway workers, men and women, experienced the benefit of having cabooses retrofitted with restrooms. As time and technology moved on, the caboose became extinct and is no longer used on modern trains. The caboose was originally intended to be a safety device to ensure that the integrity of the train was maintained by people physically watching the train from the very last car. Now, electronic sensors do this job and are monitored by the train engineer from the locomotive, thus eliminating the need for a caboose and the workers staffing the caboose.

Since the tour of the outdoor railway displays took all of our time before lunch, we temporarily left the museum to have lunch. We then returned to the museum to finish looking at the displays of classic cars, model trains, history of the Greyhound Bus system, model aircraft, and to peruse the gift shop. Prior to our departure, the marketing director for the museum asked if we could line up our cars in front of the main entrance so he could take a couple of photographs. We of course obliged!





Some of the group decided to head back to the hotel in Lynchburg by the fastest route (Don, Milt, Sally, and Bill) while the remainder of our group (Steve, Jon, John, Laura, Harvey, Bud, Nancy and Ken) decided to take a more circuitous route via the Blue Ridge Parkway. The air was significantly cooler in the mountains and the scenery was spectacular. We stopped at several scenic overlooks and actually walked on a segment of the Appellation Trail.



Going up the mountain to drive on the ridgeline was not as tough, it turned out, as coming down about a four-mile steep downhill stretch of the road a bit later in our drive. The road was pretty steep and, with almost no guardrails and no lines on the road (it had been freshly repaved), all of our cars (especially the brakes!) and driving skills were put to the test in descending the mountain. It definitely was an adventure trying to keep the cars from accelerating beyond a safe speed and to take each of the many, many curves under full control but at the same time, it was indeed lots of fun! Once we reached the valley, we were able to calmly continue motoring back to the hotel where we quickly freshened up and headed out to dinner.

After dinner, we came back to the hotel and saw two fire trucks with emergency lights flashing at the main entrance. Wondering what was going on, we learned that the ongoing hotel renovations on the second floor had set off the fire alarms. Thankfully, there was no real emergency. Most of the alarms were silenced and our group could retire to their individual rooms—except for me and Don. Through the luck of the draw when we first checked in, Don received a room for the hearing impaired and I received an ADA-compliant room. The fire alarms for these two rooms could not be silenced! The hotel staff and their contractors worked frantically over the next hour or so to figure out how to silence the alarms in these rooms and finally achieved success. The night manager of the hotel was so apologetic about this inconvenience to our group and the other hotel guests that she offered everyone a free breakfast for the next morning. Great customer service! Thus ended another interesting day of driving our Model A's!

## DAY FIVE

The weather forecast was predicting another hot day as we departed our hotel for Bedford, VA to see the National D-Day Memorial. The weather forecast was correct with temperatures hitting the mid-90's but all of the cars were running just fine. Upon arrival at the Memorial, I was struck with how large the memorial park seemed to be. We later learned that it is 88 acres in size with only a portion currently containing memorial artifacts. One of the reasons the National D-Day Memorial is located in Bedford is because, on that fateful day, the town of Bedford had about 3,700 residents. Of those residents, 34 were soldiers participating in the D-Day invasion. Regrettably, 19 of those 34 were killed on the first day of the invasion thus making Bedford the American town with the highest per-capita loss rate of any other town in the United States. The most notable, and moving, display for me was the long row of plaques listing the name of every American and Allied soldier whose life was sacrificed that day. I had not heard about the National D-Day Memorial prior to preparing for this road trip but am very glad we visited it. The park is a wonderful commemoration of the sacrifice many nations made to win back the freedom we so frequently take for granted.



After departing the National D-Day Memorial and having lunch, we travelled to Poplar Forest, the “second home” of Thomas Jefferson (the first, of course, being Monticello). Poplar Forest was intended to be Jefferson’s “private retreat” from all the people who came to Monticello to visit him and provide him with the quiet solitude to enjoy his passions of reading, writing, and thinking. After Jefferson died, the house changed hands several times with each successive owner making changes to Jefferson’s original design. The house now is undergoing renovation to bring it back to the original Jefferson design using materials and building techniques, as much as possible, that would have been used in Jefferson’s time. An impressive sight is a stand of five tulip poplar trees planted by Jefferson that are still living and



magnificent to see along the front approach to the house, as you might have seen from your carriage as you approached the house to pay a call on Mr. Jefferson.



After departing Poplar Forest, we headed back to the hotel and then to dinner. The big question regarding dinner was whether to try a Mexican restaurant in Lynchburg as recommended by the hotel staff or to return to the Depot Grill, also in downtown Lynchburg, where we had eaten a few nights earlier. Our group's thinking bounced back and forth with the final decision to go to the Depot Grill, primarily because we knew they had a big table where we could all sit together for our final dinner in Lynchburg plus we already knew the food was great! After a fine dinner, we returned to the hotel where Steve reminded everyone of our earlier-than-normal departure so everyone needed to refuel their cars beforehand and be ready to go by 8 am the next morning. And so we did!

#### DAY SIX

We departed our Lynchburg hotel for the last time as close to 8 am as a group of 12 people can possibly manage, heading for the Blue Ridge Parkway. Steve expertly navigated us through morning traffic and got us onto a very scenic backroad on our way to the Blue Ridge Parkway. The air was amazingly cool and fresh, much unlike our previous mornings, so cars and passengers were feeling just fine! Seeing the beautiful Virginia countryside pass by at 40 mph was simply wonderful. With windows open to take full advantage of the cool morning air, I could hear (yes, even above the noises of my car) birds, cows, and other outdoor sounds as we merrily motored along. Turning onto the Blue Ridge Parkway, and then climbing to almost 3,000 feet, the air became noticeably cooler. I kept one eye glued to my temperature gauge since the uphill climbs were pretty steep, but with the cool outside air (and the fact that I had already topped off my radiator) my car ran cool and performed flawlessly, as did everyone else's car, too. We took advantage of driving along the ridgeline of the Blue Ridge Mountains and stopped as a couple of vantage points to observe the beautiful vista of the vista below us. What wonderful views we experienced!



This morning's journey had us heading back to Charlottesville for lunch at a deli that Steve and his wife Susan frequent when they travel to Charlotte, NC to visit their grandson. Before we reached Charlottesville, Bill and Sally broke off from our group to head home. Before departing, Bill graciously provided Steve with ferry tickets for our cars. We then were down to eight cars and 10 people. After arriving at the deli, we found that the parking lot was a bit tricky to enter and exit, especially at lunch time, but we managed to accomplish this without any incident. Since we were actually ahead of schedule on our way to Orange, VA, after lunch we decided to visit Monticello, home of the third President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, only a 15-minute drive away.

We found Monticello (along with quite a few other people who were already there!) and thus had to weave through the parking lot to find some available spots. The process of "moving people" to the tour location was easy enough to figure out and we soon had tickets and, after a very short bus ride, we were in line (in the shade!) to begin our tour. We learned that Monticello was in reality a plantation just like other plantations in the South at the time and that Jefferson had 136 slaves when he lived there. We also learned that Jefferson had some serious debts after he left the office of President of the United States and this was the main reason that Monticello and his second home, Poplar Forest, along with all the furnishings, had to be sold after his death. Monticello currently does contain many of the items Jefferson owned and used at Monticello during his lifetime, having been purchased back by the foundation that currently owns Monticello. The house, grounds, and outbuildings are all experiencing renovation to be returned to the same state, as much as possible, as when Jefferson lived there.





After departing Monticello, we headed toward our hotel in Orange, stopping for dinner along the way. Several folks gathered to see our cars in the parking lot so we chatted with them a while before leaving for the hotel, arriving just before dark. Another long but very fun and enjoyable day had come to a close.

#### DAY SEVEN

Our final day of this magnificent road trip began with a great breakfast at our hotel. The last sightseeing objective was to visit Montpelier, the home of President James Madison and his wife Dolley. It was already very hot and humid when we departed the hotel but once underway, the air moving through our cars was comfortable. It only took about 15 minutes to drive to Montpelier and we watched an introductory video and then took a tour of the house. Montpelier was Madison's lifelong home having been originally built by his father and then expanded when Madison himself began a family. We learned how the architecture had changed to accommodate a separate living area for Madison's elderly mother as well as a properly ornate parlour for entertaining official guests both during his term as President and afterwards as well. A bit of trivia is that Presidents of that era, including Madison, had to pay to entertain official guests out of their own salary, not receiving any extra stipend for this responsibility. Since the number of official guests of the United States was not trivial, this "duty" did have an impact on the personal finances of the sitting President (a recurring theme is that they all died in debt).



We then departed Montpelier for the drive to Haymarket, VA for our final fuel stop before the group split up to head home. The temperature had risen to the mid-90's by this time but all the cars seemed to be running just fine, if a bit on the warm side. Half of the group, Ken and Nancy, Milt, Bud, and John decided to accept John's offer to visit his garage where he stores the station wagon he was driving on the trip. We bid them a fond adieu and the rest of us, Steve, Harvey and Laura, Don, and myself went to lunch to fortify us for the long remaining ride home.

It seems like no location within 50 miles of Washington, DC, is free from heavy traffic especially on a hot summer weekend. The traffic was intense as we drove towards White's Ferry to cross the Potomac. My temperature gauge was flirting with 190 a couple of times as we sat totally stopped in several construction zones and during the last half mile of travel on the Leesburg Bypass. We made it to the ferry just as it was preparing to cross and, lo and behold, we found that Milt, Bud, and Ken and Nancy were at the front of the ferry! The bulk of our group was reunited one more time to take a quick break together at White's Ferry before we once again went our separate ways home. Our reuniting was fortuitous since Ken's starter Bendix broke another bolt (we think—TBD as of this writing) as he was starting the car to exit the ferry. So, when he shut down the engine in the parking lot at White's Ferry, we needed to push the car in order for him to jump start it, which it did without a problem. Once Ken and Nancy's car was running, they departed for home followed by Milt and Bud. Steve, Don, Harvey and Laura and I then did the same but via a totally different route. Once last little road side repair was needed when, somewhere in Montgomery County, Harvey's car suddenly stopped running and he had to pull off the road into the grass. It turns out that his coil wire had come out of the distributor cap and, once reinstalled, the car immediately started and we were on our way again. Everyone then had an uneventful return home.

This was another wonderful trip, even in the heat. We were travelling as did drivers of our cars when they were new. The ventilation inside the Model A is just fine when the car is moving but, admittedly, the interior quickly heats up when the car is stationary. We were able to make the necessary repairs



and adjustments either on the road or once we returned to our hotel for the night since we had appropriate and different parts being carried by each member of the group. The best part of the trip was seeing a lot of different American history while driving historic American vehicles!

Finally, special thanks to Steve Meyer for organizing this trip. A seven-day trip covering 880 miles and travelling to different locations every day while keeping an eclectic group of 12 people together is no small feat and took lots of time to organize, beginning many months ago. All of the accommodations that Steve had coordinated, along with the restaurants and historic places we visited, were outstanding. Steve did the work so all the rest of us had to do was show up and join in. Thanks, Steve, for an outstanding trip! Now, where are we going next??!!