

POSTAL A'S

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 1984

EDITOR'S COMMENT

I suppose some of you have been following the letters in THE RESTORER in recent issues relative to whether members of old car clubs are friends or gougers. Well, this past winter I had another experience with what I believe this old car hobby should be all about--people helping others toward mutual enjoyment of antique vehicles.

One cold and snowy Saturday last January, Mike Bentinck-Smith volunteered to come up and see what could be done about the prodigious oil leak from the rear main on my truck. Although we were able to get the air in the garage reasonably warm, the concrete floor never did warm up any and Mike spent a couple of cold hours under the truck pulling the pan, diagnosing and working on the problem. As it turned out, everything appeared to be fine except that when I had had the engine overhauled, whoever had reassembled the pan had added an extra piece of sealing on the lower half of the rear bearing cover on the pan. This, in turn, instead of sealing any rear main oil leakage from getting out of the pan, had instead folded inward and plugged the oil return tube, thus forcing the oil coming through the rear main to run back into the clutch housing and drip, drip, drip away. For that kind of help, and the miserable working conditions, a can of beer and a warm supper hardly seems (to me) to be anywhere near adequate compensation. To me, Mike exemplifies (like so many others that have helped me on my first restoration) what old car clubs are, or should be--helpful friends. In this connection, I would certainly be remiss if I didn't mention (among the Postal A's) Gordon Reed, Dennis Sanborn and Vern Boyd who supplied certain hardware items that were missing on my truck in exchange for what help they felt they were getting from me in the way of "soft" information on construction, drawings, etc. from my earlier research and collection of information from others.

MAFCA News--

The new National Officers and Directors held their Board of Directors meeting last January and a few of the highlights include: Steve Hamilton, who had been the Technical Director that I had corresponded with about Mail Truck Standards, is now the Vice President; Ann Canziani has returned as Chapter Coordinator and is our contact at Headquarters again; the newly revised Articles of Incorporation are in the process of being "legalized"; announcement on the 1986 joint MAFCA/MARC National Meeting will be made in the July/August issue of THE RESTORER (but the last issue of the MARC Model A News has already announced it as being in Milwaukee!); car judging will emphasize Canadian standards, testing and certification, and then get in to the body style standards; Membership Rosters are available for \$2--a handy item to carry in your tour and travel kit.

FROM THE MAILBAG--

Mel Pruitt wrote early this year to give me some information on windshields. Included in Mel's letter were some sketches of the various hardware pieces which are needed on the glass frame for the lighter pivot (Configuration 2) frames (the bow handles and the retainer clips for the upper glass which incorporates a finger pull). He also notes that the screws which hold the clips in place are the same as used on the passenger car garnish molding. Those screws are the oval head (both ends) that thread into each other similar to stationery binder post screws. One last piece of information is that Mel's windshield had evidence of two wiper motors mounted on the glass frame. If anyone needs copies of Mel's sketches, let me know and we'll include them in a Newsletter.

Hugh Pearson reports that the country is not overrun with people wanting to buy a nicely restored AA Mail Truck. Maybe when the New England weather turns better--. I am sure that having a garage tall enough to admit a AA Mail Truck is somewhat of a limiter--it's hard enough to find one for the A-sized trucks.

Charles Tomlinson has written several letters recently. He's seriously into his restoration on a full-time basis, so he comes up with lots of interesting information. I had raised the question of the possibility of the Post Office giving the same number to two different vehicles in different parts of the country. Charles spent his working life with fleet maintenance for the City of Philadelphia, and he says it would be virtually impossible. However, he goes on to say that it is rather common practice in fleets of similar vehicles to replace a good body from a bad chassis/engine/frame on to a good chassis with a damaged body. This also applies to parts, so things like the sliding side doors, or rear doors or tail gates could very likely have been swapped from one vehicle to another by the Post Office. The vehicle number would be maintained basically as the number assigned to the chassis as far as cost sheets and records go. Charles lives in Lancaster County (PA) which is the heart of Amish country, and one of the few areas left in the country where the people have not converted to the more modern-day conveniences of electricity, automobiles and engines (other than wind-powered). The result is that there are still buggy makers (and repairers) in the area, and Charles has been fortunate in finding sources for good blacksmithing for handles, etc., for the steam bending of the wheel wells, and also for the rear door curtains (including straps and fasteners) and upholstery. One other interesting sidelight is that most of the older (horse-drawn) buggies in the area have the old round mirrors, although the newer ones are being made with the larger rectangular mirrors. By buying a pair of the larger mirrors and stopping the first buggy he saw that had the round mirrors, he was able to swap--the farmer got a better mirror, and he got the ones he needed for his truck.

For a while I thought this would be an issue without a new member to report. However, Keith King (Clay, NY, north of Syracuse) wrote me after contacting Rick Black through the listing in THE RESTORER. I answered and he very shortly came back all signed up, registered and specificationed. Not sure I have the story completely straight, but believe the following is essentially correct. Keith has a 1931 A (#11328, which he found painted more-or-less over the cowl). He bought it pretty much as a basket case trade as a second best to an original, complete and unrestored Mail Truck which the present owner had promised to sell someone else. Keith has inventoried the odds and ends of what he has, and at the moment thinks he has most of the metal parts--in fact, he probably has some extras. A better list later as he gets a better parts list to work with. However, for now he knows he is missing some parts, so see his Want Ad elsewhere in the Newsletter. He plans to start restoration of the chassis this summer, then begin the body next winter and have it finished by the time he retires (from teaching) in 1986. Sounds like a possible schedule.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

A few events for 1984 that may be of interest are:

1. The National Woodies Club Grand National, celebrating the tenth anniversary of their club will be held in Stowe, VT, August 10-12, 1984, culminating in National Woodie Day on Sunday, August 12, 1984. The following reprint from the Woodie Times gives some specifics about details:

"The Town and Country Motor Lodge, Mountain Road, Stowe, Vt, has been selected as the official headquarters for the Woodies Grand National the weekend of August 10th thru the 12th, 1984, Bill Dexter, event director, announced early this month. The Town & Country's name is appropriate enough for this prestigious event, but this lodge has much more going for it than the name. It has just about everything you'd ever need or want for a weekend or a week long stay, including a restaurant, fireplace cocktail lounge, tennis on all-weather courts, golf at the nearby Stowe Country Club, a big outdoor pool, a heated indoor pool and sauna, game room, and of course several banquet rooms. Dick and Millie Marron are the owners and managers, and they're looking forward to hosting our 10th Anniversary Meet some seven months from now. If you want to register early (and we urge that you do so) you can write Town & Country Motor Lodge, Mountain Road, Stowe, VT 05672 or call 802/253-7595."

Bill Dexter, West Hill, Wolcott, VT 05680 (802/888-2820) can be contacted for more information.

2. National Woodie Day on Sunday, August 12, 1984, will be celebrated across the country for those unable to be at Stowe, VT. Anyone interested in participating in any local events can contact the National Woodies Club, 5522 W. 140th St., Hawthorne, CA 90250 to find out what is going on in your area, or drop me a line and I can give you the name of your State Representative for NWC whom you can contact directly.

3. The Branford Electric Railway Association is holding their annual Trolley Festival on July 14-15, 1984 in East Haven, CT. Since they have an unrestored U.S. Mail Trolley in their collection, they would be interested in having other mail vehicles participate (see article elsewhere in this Newsletter).

BRANDED TIRE UPDATE--

In an earlier issue of the Newsletter (Fall 1983) was a compilation of the then-known "U.S. MAIL" tires. Since then, two more owners have reported having some. They are:

Walter Sapp has two 21-inch tires from The MANSFIELD Tire Co., with no serial numbers evident, and

Mel Pruitt also has one tire with U.S. MAIL embossed, but no serial number (and he didn't tell me whose tire it was).

A year or so ago, I had a branding iron made up (see repro below). It is similar to those used for branding names, logos, etc. in wood, is heated by a propane torch and reproduces well in the tire rubber sidewall (if you heat it too hot, or hold it on too long it could burn through the cord like happened on a couple of my original P.O. tires). For a modest fee to cover shipping, etc., I'd be glad to loan it out to anyone who wants to add a finishing touch to their truck.

US MAIL

A MAIL TROLLEY

Last year, Bill Shefts sent me a copy of an article which had appeared in TRUE magazine back in 1956. The article was about a group of vehicle restorers who were electric street railway and trolley car buffs, called the Branford Electric Railway Assn. (located in East Haven, CT). What had caught Bill's eye was a trolley mail car that had been used in New Bedford, MA.

Before going any further, perhaps it is appropriate to inject a little geography lesson to avoid confusion about Bedford (where I live) and New Bedford (which is about 80 miles away). Bedford, along with Concord and Lexington are a triangle of towns about 20 miles west of Boston and which achieved some notariety on or about April 19, 1775. As a matter of fact, for those of you familiar with Longfellow's version of a night rider from Charlestown by the name of P. Revere, the "flag to April's breeze unfurl'd" refers to the flag carried by the Bedford Minutemen. New Bedford, on the other hand, is a city known for the whaling ships which sailed from its harbor a century or so ago. It is on the south coast of Massachusetts between Rhode Island and Cape Cod, and has a considerably larger population (100,000) than Bedford (13,500), hence, at one time, had an operating trolley system.

Getting back to Branford Electric Railway and their Trolley Museum, since the TRUE article was so old, I wasn't sure whether they were still in business, so I wrote them to find out. Not only are they still in business, but are still very active. At this point, the restoration of their #302 Mail Trolley has been diverted in favor of passenger-carrying trolleys (which they use for passenger sightseeing). However, they have given me a standing invitation to "exchange mail" any time--just let them know so they can bring #302 out of the car barn and clean it up a little. I am sure the offer would be open to anyone else wanting to get (and give) a little free publicity. Maybe this can serve as an incentive for another year to have a "Postal A's East" with the completion of the three Long Island Mail Truck restorations, and those from up the coast (ME, NH, MA). Keep it in mind and if you'd like further information, get in touch with me or Howard G. Williams, Branford Electric Railway Assn., 17 River St., East Haven, CT 06512.

WANTED

Now that he has inventoried some of the metal parts of his '31 basket case trade of several years ago,

315 698-3034

Keith King 5681 Williamson Pkwy. (Clay) NY 13041

at the moment knows he needs both side sliding door latches, some roof bow brackets, some front quarter panel braces (30" on one end, 60" on the other), partition latch and possibly roller brackets and window frame for the partition. (6)

Aldie Johnson needs the stationary part of the rear door latch. He has the moveable arm piece, but the "keeper" tab on the stationary part is broken off.

IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER--

I hope no one is keeping a tally on the accuracy of what has been projected IN THE NEXT NEWSLETTER. For a variety of reasons, not all expectations are realized. As stated in the last issue, I had contemplated including a more comprehensive write-up on Padlocks in this issue. Time for the necessary research has not materialized, but one day I expect to get this underway. In the meantime, the Newsletter seems to get filled up, hopefully with as useful information. So, for what it is worth at this time, here is a guess as to what will be in the next Newsletter--a feature on Moving The Mail, more late-breaking news from members, more new member news, and maybe even the padlock update.

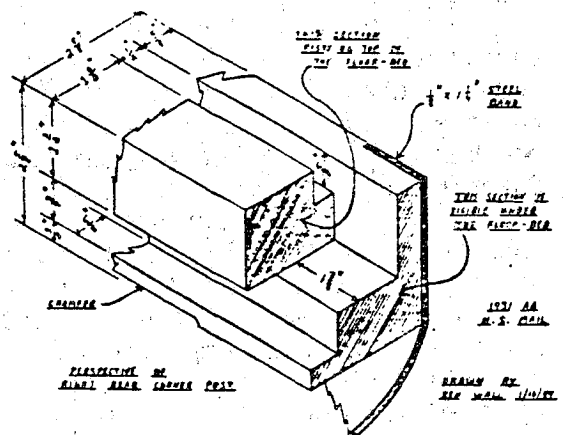
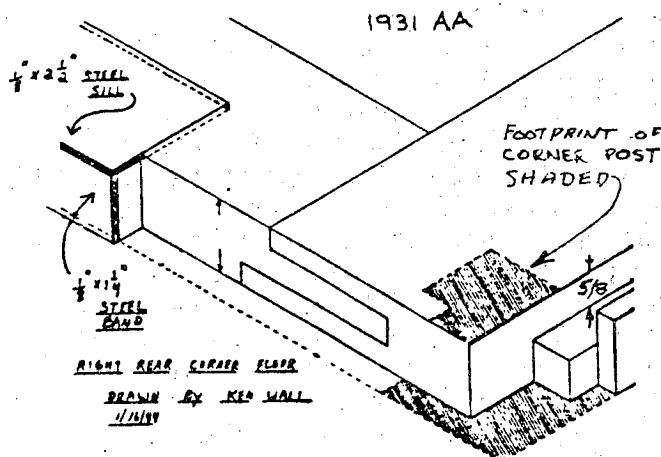
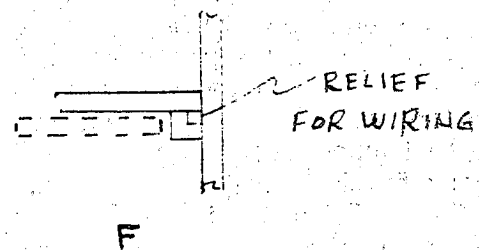
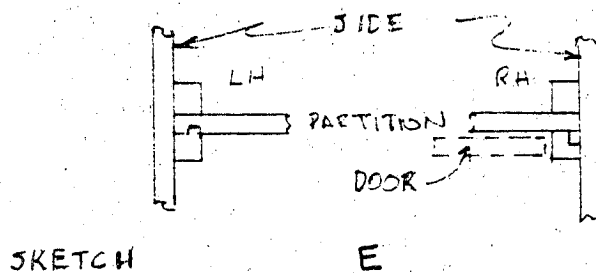
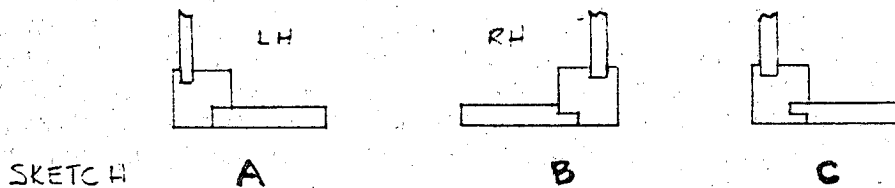
TRIVIAL DIFFERENCES--CONTINUED--

Dan Kasten reports that the construction of the rear corner posts on his truck (a low-numbered '29 A) were not the same L and R (see sketches A & B). There are at least two other versions of the corner post known to exist. Sketch C was the configuration found on my ('31 A) truck, and someone (I believe it was Mike Bentinck-Smith) said one of his corner posts was milled from a solid piece.

Ken Wall sent me some very detailed drawings of the rear corner configuration on his (AA) truck. No good reason to believe that the A and AA truck construction should be different. One of Ken's drawings is included as sketch D below.

Dan Kasten also reports that the partition which separates the compartments had posts fore and aft of the partition itself (both L and R sides)--rabbetted on LH and butt-jointed on RH (with rabbetted relief for baggage compartment dome light wiring)--see Sketch E. On the '31 A's, there is only one additional post (only on the RH side) which serves as the door stop and contains the dome light wiring relief--see Sketch F.

Dave Zimmerli's truck (high numbered '29 A) had solid poplar wood panels in the angled front corner posts, whereas on Dan's (earlier '29 A) truck the panels were plywood.



SKETCH D

FEATURE

A FORD/ESSEX MAIL TRUCK

by

Charles A. Tomlinson Jr.

I first got started in my hobby of restoring vehicles with a '65 Ford hard top, then a '67 MGB, followed by a '29 Model A tudor sedan, and a '28 "A" closed cab pickup that had been in a barn fire that burned to the ground (that was a real challenge!!)--everything burned that could burn. Then came a '30 "A" standard coupe that was converted over from a rumble seat job into a plumber's truck, which I converted back into the rumble seat again. These were all ground up restorations with everything being authentic.

I have always wanted a Postal truck, because I like to be different and not look like everyone else at a car show. I read and read all kinds of auto antique ads for a "mail truck" and spent a lot of money on phone calls. I decided to reverse my tactics and advertise in THE RESTORER magazine that I wanted a Postal A. After waiting over three months for my ad to appear (I had just missed the printer's deadline), I finally received a call from a man in Oakland, CA who had a basket case '29 that he had been planning to restore for over the last four years, but was going to sell now due to health problems. From the way he described it over the phone, I just fell in love with it. My next problem was how I was going to get it home from California to Lititz, PA.

There are a lot of outfits that will haul your antique, but not from the West to the East Coast. I finally located a man who was delivering two vehicles to California and could bring back two to the east coast, and if I acted right away, I could save \$600. So, I called the man back in California and told him to take some pictures and send them off to me right away, and the outfit in New Jersey to stand by till I got those pictures as I was really buying a "cat in a bag". I didn't have time to make arrangements for my wife and me to fly out and look it over. Plus, the airplane fares had just gone up again and the plane fare would pay for my vehicle being shipped East. So, I bought my Postal A sight unseen. Boy, Oh, Boy, is that having faith!! Well, when it arrived, I wasn't too disappointed. By the pictures in THE RESTORER articles, my Postal A wasn't that bad and here again was this big challenge facing me, which I enjoy more than anything else. To buy a vehicle that was completely restored and all I had to do was polish and drive it, wouldn't be any challenge to me and I wouldn't have much interest in it.

But, back to the basket case. I believe now that the man in California purchased just the postal box and then went to many swap meets to put together a Model A chassis (of which many parts are still missing, but can be obtained or replaced). When I set the postal body on the "A" chassis, nothing lined up. Then I checked underneath the body and I began to believe this body must have been on a '29 Dover/Essex chassis. Here are a few reasons: The inside measurements are 52 inches; The compartment doorway is straight and not notched out like others for the lock and hasp; the floor in front of the driver's seat is notched out to remove the battery (on a Ford chassis, that opening would be right over the emergency brake cross-shaft assembly); the door cut-out portion is not as big as for the '31 Fords; under the driver's compartment flooring is grooved out to fit some other frame; the rear wheel wells will fit over the '30/'31 Ford coupe fenders, but they were bolted on down through the top rather than through the side fender flange; the front driver's flooring all the way forward under the gas tank and cowl panels is made with a mortise and tenon cutout which would fall right in line with the gear shift tower on the Ford transmission (to be used on a Ford, this cross member would have to be removed and left out); the rear sub-rails were straight from front to rear

(these were 1 7/8" x 5 1/2" and narrowed down toward the rear starting about half way back. I must admit that I have never seen a body from an Essex chassis, other than a front view picture. I wrote to the man who sold me this vehicle in California and asked him to check it out against the one out at Harrahs in Reno, NV, which is only about 80 miles from where he lives. As of the moment, I have not heard anything back from him, and probably won't.

I started by disassembling all the body parts to replace some of the dry-rotted pieces, but when I got down to the sub-rails and crossmembers, I found them to have had termites in them at some time or other. So now I have replaced all of that with new oak wood. It now looked like the picture of Aldie Johnson's truck with only the body and rails and cab flooring that was in the article in THE RESTORER

Also, I am still searching for any numbers that I might find. I'm using paint remover to remove all the old junky household paint that some one painted on several times. I have the rear compartment partition scraped down to the bare wood. It was good to see the olive green showing right before I got to the wood. I looked on the front cowl section, which I think had been replaced, also on the rear body header over the door, but still no number (I didn't get the side doors with the vehicle). But, I still had hopes of finding a number and I have since scratched down the front seat box assembly and a lot of other places with tons of thick paint still covering them.

From the pictures and floor plan from David Frint, it looked like my Postal body was definitely an "Essex" body. While removing the old layers of paint, I came across a P.O. vehicle number stamped on the top of the compartment door stile. There it was, "515" stamped deep into the wood. I even took a couple of pictures of it to have proof of my findings. After I had tried to remove the paint off the front cowl to uncover a vehicle number, I was able to see in the stained wood what appeared to be the number 11---something or other. It was later that I found the number on top of the door. Now, that created a problem. If my number was 11515, then it was the same number as Dave Verna's '31 A. Lacking any information on the Essex numbering system, or even knowing for sure what years they might have been, I was confused. I subsequently found another number (#494) stamped in the top of the compartment door retainer housing. I believe the door is original but the metal housing had been replaced.

The body style is more of the 1929 "A" with the center post in the body being in the top center position of the wheel well and not to the rear as the '31 "A's" are located. The floor plan matched the Essex floor plan exactly. Inside, mounted on the left forward section of the wheel well is a small bracket to support the spare tire, and "rub marks" to show that one had been stored there. I believe this was original equipment and not an "add on", as I don't think Essex ever had a tire well in their right front fender. The door notch on this Essex is much smaller than the '31 "A" and smaller than the '29 "A". There is only one set of windshield wiper motor holes over the driver's side of the windshield (the opening being 43 1/2" x 19 3/4").

Unlike David Frint's, my vehicle has the same small square seat that the Ford bodies have. This could have been changed over by the P.O. garage, but I couldn't find any holes in the flooring. Also, I tried to fit the rear fenders off my '30 coupe and '28 pickup (Model A's) in the rear fender wells and they were much too small. Essex used a 5 x 30 wheel on its vehicles, but I found that a '32 Ford panel truck fender will fit--but it is hard to find them and the price they are asking matches my share of the national debt..

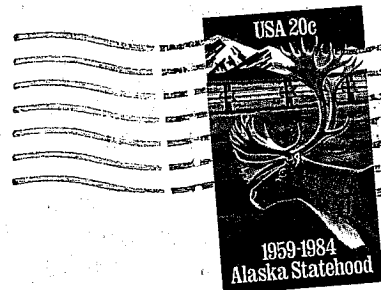
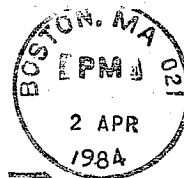
So, as of now, I am planning on mounting my rebuilt Essex body on a 1929 Model A frame and use all the "mix-and-match" parts the last owner sent me in my "basket case".

I have replaced the missing (or "never was") sheetmetal covering the rear panels on both sides with #22 ga. steel. I made up two metal poster holders and ordered two "I Want You" posters from the local recruiting station, which they said will take 60 days (bureaucratic red tape!--sound familiar?--but when it is free, we must be humble and patient). The lower curved cowl panels that I received were replacements and made of fiberglass, which are a NO! NO! on any authentic restoration, so I manufactured a like set in #20 ga. steel. I have my black upholstering material, but must pick up new seat springs to replace the big block of foam rubber that had replaced the old springs somewhere along the line.

All my woodwork is completed and I am waiting for the weather to break so that I can start painting. I have purchased all new glass and picked up new 5 inch round side view mirrors, new curtain straps and fittings from a local Amish carriage builder. I am now starting on the "A" iron and have hopes of completing this restoration for the Fall Hershey Meet in October '84. More continued up-date on this restoration will be forthcoming.



POSTAL A's NEWSLETTER
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