

Reminiscence

# On the Road in 1949

*This is the 13th and last installment of Walter Walker's reminiscence of his trip through the US in the summer of 1949. His companions were Skip Powers and Harold Crane. All three had just graduated from Andover High School.*

By Walter Walker

Thursday, September 15, found us up at 6:15 AM helping get breakfast and doing the dishes before we put the Kansas number plate back on the Olds and also the "Harold Club" shield. We gave the car a good cleaning and then cut some more bushes before going swimming. Later we helped get supper, did the dishes, and listened to the radio before bed at 10:30 PM.

September 16 found us doing some laundry after breakfast, and after lunch I read some folders Mrs. Conant had, and then we went swimming until supper time, after which we went to a high school football game. We got in as students and sat in the cheering section among a bunch of "junior high brats, which didn't help any." Back at the Conants we did the dishes and went to bed around 11:30 PM.

Saturday, September 17, found us staying in bed until about 8 AM. After getting cleaned up, we had breakfast and did the dishes. We got our things packed and left the Conants around 10:30 AM.

We had gone only about a hundred miles when the back wheel just about came off. We hitchhiked back to Centerville to get the bearing put back on and caught a ride back to the car, where we put things back together. We took off again and stopped for some oil and had a heck of a time getting the Olds started. We finally got it going and headed for Jacksonville, Florida. We entered Georgia at 6:05 PM and drove until about 40 miles from Jacksonville and hit the sack around 11:30 PM.

On Sunday, September 18, I "fought my way out of the mosquitoes at 7:30 AM, packed up, and took off. Entered Florida at 8:16 AM."

I am sad to say that is the last entry in my diary. I remember we briefly visited an elderly lady, Mrs. Lenard, whom Harold had lived with for several years near the Andover/Wilmot town line. We then headed north. On a back page of my diary I show the following mileages and times: Tennessee: 76,614 at 10:40 PM; Virginia: 76,675 at 8 AM; West Virginia: 76,824 at 1:35 PM; Virginia: 77,005 at 7:40 PM; Massachusetts: 77,795 at 9; New Hampshire: 77,852 at 10:40.

Photos in my album show we went over Virginia's famous Skyline Drive before we visited Washington, DC. I remember we tried to run up and down the Washington Monument and visited a few important buildings there. The truth is, I think all three of us were homesick!

Also, we were running out of time, as Harold had learned Anna Roberts had registered him to attend the University of New Hampshire, so one of the last trips for the faithful old Oldsmobile was to ferry Harold to the university.

But before that trip, that great lady Anna threw a welcome home party for we three and the girls we were going with at that time: Jane and Caroline Thompson and Josie Lorden. It was a wonderful and fitting end.

Sadly, the famous '36 Olds ended up in Anna Robert's barn and forgotten as the Korean War came along. We three ended up enlisting and serving in the United States Air Force until being honorably discharged.

I hope *Beacon* readers have enjoyed this series half as much as I have, as I went through my diary and relived those days. Also, I tip my hat to editor Charlie Darling for finding room for my scribbles and photos.

The End



*Shortly after the trip was over, Walter's parents received this letter from Louis Conant, whose family the boys had stayed with.*

Tuscaloosa, Alabama, September 21, 1949

Dear Frank and Annie,

Two weeks ago three husky and healthy looking youngsters reached our place in their Oldsmobile after a fairly steady trip from California. We were glad to see them, and I guess they were kind of glad to settle down for a few days. We made them at home as well as we could, and tried to help them find jobs, with only fair success.

Tuscaloosa unfortunately has a lot of surplus labor at present, thanks to a strike at a big tire factory, and partial shutdowns in their plants, so jobs are not plentiful. Thanks to a good neighbor, however, who took an interest in the boys, they did get a profitable job unloading a carload of lumber and got some pleasant (?) work clearing a building lot close to a private swimming pool where they were welcome to go in. That job didn't pay very much, but did afford some money and a few good times.

They also tried picking cotton one day, but quit at noontime after a morning's hard work had netted less than 75¢ apiece.

The boys made a fine impression on the people they worked for, who were pleased with the way they buckled down to work and got a lot done. Such manner of work is uncommon in these parts...

We enjoyed the boys a lot, they are all so nice, and such a clean-cut bunch of fellows. Having boys in the family for several days was an especial treat to our girls, who have remarked wistfully "we wish there were some boys like that in Tuscaloosa."

For a change, our girls enjoyed helping with the dishes. With the three boys all pitching in on the dishes, our little kitchen was a busy place after each meal. It was also an interesting experience for G. to cook for boys with real appetites, in contrast to the appetites of her two daughters and a middle-aged husband who works in an office. She enjoyed it.

The boys really seemed to be in good condition. At first they appeared to have had enough wandering for a while, but I think that after the opportunity of settling down for a few days they felt rested and showed a renewed spirit.

You folks are to be congratulated on having such a fine son. We surely hope that Walter will be able to find something for work after his trip in which he will be interested. Whatever he does, however, we'll bet that he tackles it with a will and makes good. You may also tell the other parents, if you see fit, that we think Harold and Skip are fine fellows. Such a trio from one small high school class is impressive...

Sincerely,

Louis

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