



My First National (well, just one day)

by Michael W. Conner



According to the 2011 *Membership Directory and Handbook*, annual National Meets were inaugurated in 1966. Wichita was an early host in 1972. I joined the GPP in 1973. I had missed the Wichita National, so attending a National, even for a day, was something I had wanted to do for a very long time.

Bill Friedrich, Chaired this year's National committee. In 1977, Bill had hosted the only other Illinois meet in Chicago. I think that his experience attending Packard events in intervening years must have culminated in the wise selection of historic Galena for the state's third National. Here, the brick buildings that lined Main Street provided a picture perfect backdrop for a grand reunion of distinguished automobiles.

Wednesday, July 13

Wanting to get an early start on Thursday's events, I stayed overnight at an inexpensive Super 8 motel (smile) just across the border in Dubuque, Iowa. When I checked in, I spotted two Packards already in the hotel parking lot—a harbinger of what was to come.



Thursday, July 14

We awoke to a cool, clear morning. The kind of day car show enthusiasts always pray for but seldom get. I arrived downtown in time to document the Packard's entrance. One by one, they were being directed to their designated parking spots. The street ran east and west at the base of a steep hill, running along what was once the banks of a large river. Cars were parked (according to year) along both sides of the street. Those to be judged were parked parallel to the curb on the south, and those being shown parked opposite. Un-registered Packards took spaces along the side streets. Although most looked as huge as a truck they all idled so quietly that my wife asked why they had parked in the middle of the street?

Very soon, the town came alive. Main Street bustled with people of all ages and nationalities. Foreign languages intermingled with accents from



across the country. Elders reminisced, the young ogled, and the children ran about. A surprising number were dressed in period clothing. It appeared almost as if time itself had been rewound.

I found the car owners to be tolerant of questions, and generally welcoming to everyone in the crowd. I met Ark-La-Tex Packard members David & Peggy Stewart. They had driven from Longview, Texas in their 1925. Naturally, they were on a mission to encourage ALL Packard owners to eschew the trailer and actually drive their Packards to these events. You can read David's trip blog at:

http://arklatexpackards.blogspot.com/2011/07/2011-packard-national-meet-in-galena_ii.html?showComment=1310509294558#c3123439795855721922



Another owner (Swiss) told me that he had planned to buy a Model T but that his daughter sternly informed him that if he was going to buy an old car then he should buy an interesting one! They pooled their funds and bought a Packard. They have driven this car to shows for over a decade.



If and when you wanted a break from “talking Packard”, then reasonably priced boutiques, antique shops and eateries were ready at hand offering refuge from the sun and heat under canvas awnings and in air conditioned show rooms.

You could also venture up the slope from Main Street, where you would be greeted with block after block of picturesque, historic mansions surrounded by lush gardens, ornamented with bunting and flower boxes.

All Things Must Pass

At 4:30, the Packard's started up their motors and one-by-one, they drove out of town, heading to the official hotel for the final awards banquet and fashion show. I stayed behind to watch the last Packard pull away. Then, drove back to Champaign in my VW Passat, surprised to spot an occasional Packard cruising along, too!

