

HELEN WEBSTER FEELEY

a pleasure to

re-read. Those

were the days! * * * (C)

#1 - April 2 on Saturday during
Buckhardt's adm (1947-1957)

Spring 1955

in 1949+1955
#2 Morris Olson did not come to Bts
until 1950. This was spring 1955

College Gets New Fire Truck, or Many Truths Are Stranger Than Fiction

Selection of a title for an article or story usually commits the writer to bring into the piece at some time or another, and usually toward the end, a witty quotation or statement that quotes the title verbatim. This is a rather sneaky way to do things but articles must have titles and titles must be justified so the never ending circle is completed. This title tells the whole story and if that is all you are interested in don't read more. On the other hand if you have a few minutes you may be interested in a rather fantastic series of ~~events~~ events which took place during March and early April on the campus. But in so far as the title goes, the College does have a "new" fire truck and if you read farther you will find that "Many Truths Are Stranger Than Fiction."

This all started early in March, the exact date is immaterial, but I do remember having as a dinner guest a Mr. Joe Joseph. Some of you may know Joe. He is one of the local business men who regularly commutes to New York and in recent years has practically established a transportation system for the College students who long for rides and usually find them obtainable. Joe can invariably count on one or two calls a week along about Thursday or Friday and eventually ends up with a car full of students. His problems of collecting and distributing the students, though not the current subject could be developed into an equally interesting article.

Among Joe's interests is a passion for automobiles, especially old ones. This is almost a devotion with him, so much so, that his recent model Chrysler and Cadillac must bear the rigors of a Vermont winter, while his 1932 Lincoln is serenely settled in the garage at his home which is just off campus.

Now to get on with the story. We had just finished dinner and were having coffee and small talk in which Joe was relating some of the difficulties of obtaining a new transmission for Phoebe (his Lincoln) when a gleam came to his eyes and he asked, "Do you want a fire engine?" I allowed as how a fire engine could be a rather bulky thing to store and really did not have much use for one when I had, what I thought, was a good idea. The College needed a replacement truck and if this were

half as good as Joe described it possibly there could be some interest in the deal. It was dirt cheap and available.

Joe had found the truck at Sam Addleman's in Mt. Vernon. Sam has a similar fabulous interest in antique autos. Only he is one of those who can supply the parts for all the Phobes that are being reconditioned. He had bought the fire engine from the Town of Larchmont for -- well what does one buy an old fire engine for? But he had it and had offered it to ^{Joe} for for \$75.00. And as Joe insisted the tires alone were worth that. Furthermore it had an excellent paint job and was really a steal at that price.

We immediately called Mr. Pike, the College Comptroller, who does not share Joe's enthusiasm for Phobes, but agreed that this might solve a college replacement problem. Joe immediately called Sam to find out if the fire truck was available. It was but in the three day interval between Joe's conversation and our dinner party the price of used fire engines had fluctuated somewhat along the lines of the stock market and apparently things looked much brighter in fire engine futures at least the price was now \$300.

Another call to Mr. Pike -- who flatly refused to consider the inflated nature of the market. Then Joe made a tempting offer. If he could raise the difference by a fund raising procedure would the college be interested. Again Mr. Pike was skeptical and could not see the economy of the situation, but did consent to consider it with Mr. Burkhardt and Miss Bowman at an early date. The preliminary planning stages of Operation Fire Engine were under way. Joe left for the city with his usual complement of passengers and the College returned to its normal routine.

This was not to last forever because Joe was due to return the following week. ~~The~~ He did, and the real planning got under way. The consultation of the higher echelons resulted in acceptance of the second plan and Joe went off on his fund raising campaign. He returned within forty-eight hours successful, and plans for the purchase of the engine were completed.

All this required about two or three weeks. Then during one of the social gatherings following the College Panel discussions of The Yalta Papers, a passing mention was made of Operation Fire Engine. The group had assembled at the Feeley's

and with mention of O.F.E. the hosts eyes lit up and his first question was who is going to drive it from Mt. Vernon to Bennington. Mr. Burkhardt's reply was "Harry of course!" Harry, being the College chauffer and Transportation Chief, naturally was the one for it. Paul Feeley did not agree. It would be a weekend deal and naturally Harry was possessive of his "free time." He, Paul, would drive it up and Fred would go with him. When I heard my name mentioned I was most curious and it turned out that I had volunteered. I did have minor objections plus the fact I very definitely would prefer to spend that particular Saturday (April 2nd) in North Bennington. Hence my enthusiasm was not too great. However, Mr. Burkhardt insisted that Harry should go and that was it, especially as far as I was concerned. It remained that way until 12:15 on Friday, April 1st. Even the date should have been a tip off for me.

At that time I was on my way to lunch when Mr. Pike called me to his office and asked if I wanted to be a party to the second phase of Operation Fire Engine. Apparently there had been a reversal and in addition Harry was catching a cold and so on. In a weak moment I agreed and we called Paul -- "was he still interested?" "Definitely!" I had to be off campus that afternoon so it was left that if Paul could get in touch with Joe and arrange for a set of plates and for us to drive one of Joe's more reliable cars to the city we would leave at 5:15 A.M. Saturday, April 2nd for New York. It was done and when I returned home that evening Paul called that everything was o.k. and we'd take off as scheduled. A minor problem had presented itself, however, Morris Oliver had somehow found out about the trip and would like to go too. Well -- that type fire engine is equipped with two bucket seats and a lot of standing room and it was left to Morris to make up his mind. At 5:15 I stopped for Paul and Morris had made up his mind he was there and ready to go. The trip to New York was uneventful and we arrived at Joe's apartment at nine.

After a Brief visit we left for Sam Addleman's in Mount Vernon. What an antique car fancier's paradise . All types of vintage cars are there, intact

or in pieces and nestling in the rear of the shed was our beauty, Larchmont #1. It looked pretty much as Joe had described it with minor variations which may have crept into the description as it was passed around the campus. It looked road-worthy and ran with the roar characteristic of a fire engine of its vintage. We left Sam and Joe deep in a discussion of some of Phoebe's needs and pointed ourselves north on Route 22. It was then 10:15. We first had to stop at the gas station to check oil, water, gas, etc and were somewhat surprised to find the gas tank held 20 gallons. That with the oil bill started our expense account.

The "lower part" of route 22 as viewed by residents of Bennington is a constant stream of village, city, town, etc all with Route 22 as the main street. Not being familiar with side roads, short cuts and by passes, and knowing full well we'd be thrown off the parkways if we ventured on them, we stuck to the Route 22 signs. We were most welcome everywhere and everyone watched our approach, passing, and departure. There were a great variety of expressions on the faces of people as we passed and I remember vividly passing the White Plains Fire Dept with their fancy Aerial Ladder and pumpers parked in front. The engineers of the company must have heard us coming because they were standing at the curb and admired us as we went by. By that time #1 had been well tested. Her brakes were excellent with a tendency to leave amounts of tire on the streets if applied too fast and it was not until much later that we found a switch which indicated brake tension and naturally it was set for "maximum."

It was in the vicinity of White Plains that one of the natives showed a more than passing interest in our operation. We were stopped for a traffic light and this character, noting our Vermont plates, informed us we were going in the wrong direction. He insisted we should be on the Boston Post Road! I have frequently questioned the educational system but not being a geographer could not follow the man's reasoning. The Boston Post Road may be a better road but we were committed to Route 22. So as the light changed we thanked the man for his concern and continued on our way.

By this time we were entering into the spirit of the occasion. Paul

would acknowledge the smiles and waves of the people we passed with a blast from a most rancous horn that Sam had installed. Morris perched on the back deck would smile and wave back and I held grimly to the wheel as we progressed thru the maze of towns. Soon we were in Brewster. By soon I mean it was 12:30 and time to eat. We had been on the road a little over two hours, had covered about forty-five miles and it seemed as if we should be home in good time. From Brewster north the towns are spaced farther apart and naturally that makes for faster travel.

As we were finishing lunch Paul had a brilliant idea. Let's set up a pool and see who could come closest to our arrival time. I had been considering the problem myself and without thinking blurted out 5:30. Morris apparently was ready because he immediately selected 5:45 and I realized then I had been taken because Paul, after an attempt at mental calculations, gave it up, took the easy way out and bracketed me by claiming 5:29. We got ready to go and before shoving off tried to locate a piece of paper for our expense record but could not, so settled for recording it on the side panel of the truck by writing on the dust film. Paul was driving and took off with a valiant attempt in mind to collect on the pool.

By now we were in open country and there were long stretches of good concrete roads. Somewhere between ~~Wingdeale~~ ^{Wingdeale} and Wassic the temperature of the radiator ~~could~~ suddenly started to climb. The only thing I thought of was -- fan belt. So we stopped and sure enough it had slipped out of the pulley. Fortunately there was a gas station visible about a mile ahead, so we headed for it. Fan belts come in sizes and as luck would have it, our size was not available, so we tried the nearest size in stock but it refused to stay in the pulley and our old one was worse. So we decided to try for the next service station. First though we should fill the radiator with water. So I asked the attendant where the faucet was located and was informed that there was a "hand faucet" alongside the station. I went searching for it and after a feeble attempt was directed to a pump which after careful priming and coaxing, gave up about a cup of water with each stroke of the pump handle. We finally got about a bucket of water, filled the radiator and took off for the next station. No V-31 belt in stock there either, but possibly we

we could get one in Amania which was only about ten or twelve miles further on. Finally after a couple more cooling stops we arrived in Amania. We headed for the first sizable station and presented the problem. No V-31 belt, but with adjustment we might be able to put on one of the sizes in stock. So it was done. In the process I noticed the water pump was leaking and possibly accounting for some of our loss of water, so it was tightened and in the I fished out a queer looking gimmick, which had obviously fitted on a wire from the distributor to the coil. I had never seen the like of it before, so deduced it was some sort of exciter lamp to show if the magneto was functioning. Its falling off had not seemed to impair the running of #1, so I put it in my pocket to turn over to Harry later. Again we started on our way. It was then about 3:30 and pretty obvious that Morris would collect on the pool. Just south of Hillsdale on the flat level road, the temperature started to climb again -- presumably the fan belt again. Again the assumption was correct. We stopped at the service station by the stop light and were told that we were a little late because they had had a fire a couple miles down the road, but it had been taken care of by the local company.

The attendant there diagnosed our trouble as too much end play on the fan shaft. Tighten it up and our trouble were over. So it was done -- the fan belt replaced and adjusted and we started off again. North of Hillsdale there is a very long hill -- Green River Hill. We started up it and it was nip and tuck as to whether or not we would make it. However #1 came through and we headed for Austerlitz. Soon there was a thump, and the temperature shot up again. Fan belt, we thought, so got out to replace it. This time we were wrong. The fan shaft had snapped and the fan had gouged a chunk out of the radiator, and there we were miles from anywhere. Fortunately we were on a down grade. We had to do everything possible to keep the motor cool, so we took off the hood cover and coasted down the hill. This cooled the motor down and after several more "cooling" stops limped into a service station where we at least could refill the radiator. This man understood our plight and when Paul asked if he had an old gallon jug we could have to carry a supply of water, he gave us a five gallon can. We filled

it and figured we'd run for awhile, stop replace the water that had leaked out and repeat the process. At this rate we got about a mile or two to a gallon of water and had to stop to replace the water at that interval. We stopped at the next service station and asked for advice. Was there anything available that we could use to plug the gauge in the radiator long enough to get us to an operating garage? By then it was getting dark (6:00). Morris had long since won the pool but was gentleman enough not to press collecting under the circumstances. The attendant thought for awhile and said no there was nothing unless we wanted to try, of all things, bubble gum! Everyone immediately reacted, Paul in particular, with no! But we were getting more and more desperate, and finally agreed to give it a try. Our reasoning was that if it stuck half as well there as it does in other places, it just might work, and besides we might even write a new type of testimonial for an otherwise useless product. So we purchased a nickel's worth and went to work. You can judge the size of the gash in the radiator when the first purchase was practically lost in the hole. Our die was cast, so we went to work in earnest. Each bought a nickel's worth and finally we had the hole plugged. We filled the radiator with water and it held -- at least until we started the motor. Then a year's supply of bubble gum suddenly plopped out onto the drive, and we were right back where we started, the grand experiment had failed! We limped on to New Lebanon, twelve miles in about one and a half hours, arriving there about 7:30 p.m.

What to do? Abandon the project -- limp on -- go home and return on Sunday, or what? So far we had been blessed with ideal weather, but the forecast was for rain on Sunday, and none of us was interested in driving an open cab fire engine in the rain. So we cornered a garage man. He agreed to solder the radiator if we would remove it. Again the decision was obvious. With its pronouncement Paul's chin practically hit the floor. As it turned out we took off the necessary nuts and bolts, pried off the hose connections and, even allowing for certain wasted motions on the part of all of us, had the radiator off in about a half hour. We turned it over to the attendant who started soldering the

gap and we gracefully retired to get some food.

One can seldom go wrong with a hamburger in a joint the likes of which we entered. Paul with his usual voracious appetite ordered two and Morris and I settled for one. The singles were served first and, as Morris and I lifted the buns and took our exploratory bites, Paul commented he was hungry enough to eat a horse. We immediately agreed that was just about what he was doing.

In a surprisingly short time the attendant came to tell us the job was finished. We went to the garage and were impressed with the amount, if nothing else, of solder he had melted into the hole. He would not guarantee the job to be one hundred percent, but made a sly reference to the fact that at least it would not drop out like bubble gum. I then produced the gimmick that fit on the condenser-distributor line. He was amazed that we had gone that far until it was pointed out we did operate with both magneto and battery and apparently we had been operating exclusively on magneto for a long time. He soldered the necessary wire in place and the gimmick was returned to its rightful location. After some straining and forcing, the radiator was finally restored to its rightful location and we were ready for the final test. Would it hold water? A hose was held over the inlet of the radiator and all eyes focused on the wad of solder. Each was aware immediately of a trickle of water on the floor, but it turned out that the hose was being held directly over the overflow and our hearts went back to their normal location as soon as this was remedied. They did not stay in their correct position, however, because as the level in the radiator rose we were aware of a slight trickle around the solder. That, we were assured, would be remedied by a DuPont radiator fixer -- so this was added with some ceremony, and again our eyes focused on the various leaks. The crack in the head ceased flowing immediately, the radiator slowed but was content to just dribble, so we gassed up and pointed north once more. It was then about 9:15 and we still had forty-five miles to go. To be on the safe side we carried our five gallon can and of water and set off!

The blasted thing ran like a charm -- apparently the gimmick was necessary

and we breezed along in fine style. We even started to pass cars on the highway. Morris had acquired a flashlight at the Bubble Gum Station and kept it focused on the motor meter to check for any rise in temperature, I clung to the wheel and Paul hung on to both of us. By this time the air temperature was riding about forty, and riding in as well a ventilated place as we were, made us well aware that it was cool to say the least. In fact all of us had at one time or another poured considerable water over our feet in the many attempts to fill the radiator, and by now this was nearing the freezing point. But we were on our way!

We took the short cut from Stephentown to Williamstown and arrived there about 10:25. All this time we were conscious of the dribble splashing on the windshield, but the temperature was holding fine. We stopped to check in Williamstown and surprisingly enough had to add only a couple quarts of water, so it did look like we'd make it. We climbed aboard, fitted the three of us into the two bucket seats and started the last lap. We passed the clock in Bennington Square twenty minutes later and were back on campus at 10:55.

Our arrival at the Durand's in the orchard was something of a Mr. Livingstone, I presume, act. I will say that scrambled eggs and bacon never tasted finer and three more weary faculty members would have been difficult to find.

Joe in the meantime had been frantically calling every hour on the hour to find out if we had arrived. We decided to let him sweat it out for a couple more hours, so he did not learn that old #1 had arrived until his midnight call came through.

Incidentally we did get eight inches of snow on Sunday so perhaps we were not so stupid after all. There are sequels already for this tory, and sometime in the future someone may write Chapter II of Operation Fire Engine.