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A Letter from the Editor

A FEW WORDS about history, auto history and our history --or-- ON THE ROAD AGAIN yet,so long.

In October of 1978, a number of us who were at the time in the employ of Chester Krause attended the dinner meeting of the Society of Automotive Historians at Hershey, Pa. We were, of course, dues-paying members of that organization. (Before I go any further, allow me to say that as things stand right now, it looks good for the SAH and the Wisconsin Chapter, and the relationship between the two. I'll let Matt say more about this very positive subject in his column.)

At that meeting we talked a great deal about the pluses and minuses of the organization. By the end of evening we had made a decision to do what we could to overcome the negative items. After the meeting, John Gunnell and I managed to get Frank Robinson -- then the new SAH president -- aside to check on his feelings about a Wisconsin Chapter. He felt good about it. As soon as we returned to Iola from Hershey, we went to work.

Old Cars Newspaper was employed to contact other Wisconsinites who might be interested in coming together as an SAH region. We also did a lot of letter writing and phone calling. On Saturday, Feb. 3, 1979, nine members of the SAH, residing in Wisconsin, met to take some preliminary steps in forming a Wisconsin Chapter. Those nine members were: Terry Boyce, Ken Buttolph, John Gunnell, Tony Hossain, John Kress, Chet Krause, Bob Lemke, Bob Lichty and myself. Several others who couldn't attend had written or phoned to express their interest. Especially enthusiastic among the latter group were three men who have had a great deal of influence on what the WSAH has become during its first (just less than) three years of existence. These men were: Wally Wray, George Tesar and Matt Joseph.

During that first informal meeting, we discussed dues (they haven't changed), an annual summer meeting

(it hasn't changed), a newsletter (it's changed a lot), a complete list of Wisconsin-built automotive vehicles (done and done), awards (still under discussion), a winter dinner meeting (we've had two with the third coming up), an archives (it's taken a long time and a lot of work to get nowhere), museum and club memberships (an issue forgotten), and a Wisconsin Automotive History book (it's in the works). We also elected our first (pro-tem) Board of Directors which consisted of Director, myself, Assistant/Associate Director, George Tesar, Secretary, Tony Hossain and Treasurer, Bob Lichty. Tony Hossain was also drafted to edit the newsletter.

Tony had the first newsletter out within a week after the meeting. The entire editorial content was a brief piece from Tony and a brief piece from me. The second newsletter came out around May. The entire editorial content was a "Director's Message."

On Saturday, July 8, 1979, the WSAH held its first official meeting. We already had 24 dues-paying members. Fourteen of them and one guest attended the meeting.

The first order of business was an election. The results were: Director: Matt Joseph; Associate Director: George Tesar; Secretary: Chris Halla; and Treasurer: Bob Lichty. That was also the meeting at which, to some of your dismay, I became the editor of the newsletter (named the SPARK at the suggestion of Wally Wray -- after Dr. Carhart's early experiments with the automobile).

The keynote of the meeting was one of comradery and the uniting of unique attitudes and directions. There was no question that we were rolling, rolling in a big way.

Well, to make a long story short, we've come a long way. We've had two more summer meetings (one successful and one a little less so) as well as two excellent winter meetings (one each in Madison and Milwaukee). We've worked hard at making WSAH a good and strong organization, and, for the most part, we've succeeded. We've made a lot of positive contributions to our parent organization, and we've spent a lot of time debating (perhaps too vigorously) with

the directors of our parent organization. (That last situation has hopefully and finally been laid to rest). We've changed Associate Directors once (Wally Wray elected 1980) and Treasurer twice (Bob Lichty was succeeded by Vince Ruffolo and Vince by Phil Hall). We've lost a couple of members but gained a bunch of new ones. The WSAH has passed from childhood into adolescence. The next step, in process now, is the passage into adulthood.

In July 1982, WSAH will have its first major change in leadership. WSAH and SAH seem to have overcome their differences, or are at least on the way to doing that. Unfortunately, in the process of all that has happened, membership enthusiasm has dwindled. That brings us 'round to all of you. Everyone has to get involved to make this thing work. Consider running for a director position yourself; contribute to the SPARK and use it; write to your directors and tell them what can be done to make WSAH effective in a maximum way. Speak up; make yourself heard; be active. End of sermon.

* * * * *

As WSAH enters a new era, I've decided to do what I can to help the SPARK do the same. This is the last issue of which I'll be at the helm. With the next issue, Tim Tilton will become editor. To those of you who encouraged and contributed, Thanks -- you were a small but greatly appreciated minority. To those of you who criticized, I hope you one day have the opportunity to do something like this yourselves. To those of you (most of you) who never said anything, thanks for not criticizing. The chore has often been fun: always challenging and always hard work. I've tried to make each of these 12 issues as good as I possibly could. Only you know if I've succeeded or not. There's probably a lot more that could be said, but not much reason to say it. Good luck, Tim.

So long.

(Address all future correspondence to: Tim Tilton, SPARK editor, c/o Krause Publications, 700 E. State St., Iola, WI 54990).

Director's Message

It's almost all good news, for a change. Our once persistent problems with SAH seem to be rapidly coming to an end. At Hershey I had the opportunity to speak to the new SAH President, David Lewis, at some length about many of the problems we have had in the past. Every indication that I got was good. This is not to say that David agreed with all of the positions that our Chapter has taken, but it was clear that many of the issues that we have raised are being confronted by SAH and there is a realization that there are problems that must be solved. I am absolutely sure that David and the SAH Treasurer, George Ward, and several other members of the Board are going to do everything possible to create a more positive atmosphere in the area of policy development and regional relations than has existed in the past. I want them to know that the Wisconsin Chapter is going to play a very constructive role in helping to bring about some needed changes.

I might add a personal observation. I think that the nominations that Bill Cannon and his committee made were excellent and that the electorate in the SAH should be credited with making excellent decisions. I am particularly impressed with the new president. I have admired his work for years and considered him perhaps the most talented and versatile practitioner of the art of automotive history in the world. After meeting with him at considerable length about SAH policy, it was clear to me that he is equally impressive as an administrator and as a person. We can expect great things from SAH in the future.

There have been some well-grounded criticisms of our release of the SPARK, and particularly the schedule of our release. I want to assure everyone that we are aware of the problems and do not intend to let the SPARK become the "latest thing in periodicals" (i.e., the Christmas issue arrives for Easter). We will be making some changes in our "production schedule" early next year and this should result in greater regularity and better quality. A persistent problem that we have is the acquisition of material to put in the SPARK. Some of our members like Bill

Cameron, Dan Hampton and Wally Wray have been very good about this, but there are others who could make meaningful contributions and have elected not to. We have made this plea before, but it is worth making again. The SPARK is your publication and it needs your efforts to be successful. Some of you may not think that your research and knowledge is all that earth-shattering, but I urge you to submit articles, comments, or whatever and let the rest of us judge their utility. We have a lot of individual knowledge and talent in our membership. Let's have some of it show in print.

Our Treasurer, Vince Ruffolo, has resigned for personal reasons. He will continue to be a supportive Chapter member and we hope an active one. I have asked Phil Hall to assume the position of Treasurer for the remainder of Vince's term and he has graciously agreed. Ray Scroggins, the first runner-up in our July election, has accepted the Director-at-large position that Phil is vacating. Both of these fellows have been active and constructive in our affairs and are the best possible people for the jobs involved. They were jointly responsible for our superb mid-winter meeting in Milwaukee last year. Phil has been on the Board since the beginning and knows its ways. Ray, on the other hand, has yet to experience the Gyros-pig-outs that inevitably occur after Board meetings when they are held in Madison. He can now learn first hand why it is amazing that members of the Board have survived this long.

My son recently recounted a story to me which he had heard at Hershey for the first time and thought might interest me. The problem is that I have heard the story in varying versions about almost every expansive car and placed in contexts spread across forty years of automotive history. He told it about Packard in the 1920's, but I still like the first version that I ever heard -- that one involved a Locomobile in the 'teens. Here goes.

A gentleman took delivery of a Locomobile Town Car shortly before the outbreak of hostilities in Europe known as World War I. The car performed perfectly in every way, but exhibited a persistent and annoying "clunk" on acceleration and cornering and at some other times. The clunk seemed to emanate from

the rear of the car, but beyond that if proved impossible to isolate and locate it despite considerable effort to do so. The dealer who sold the car attempted every known diagnosis of the clunk, but to no avail. Extraordinary theories were developed and tested, but without success. In the process, the car was almost totally disassembled and reassembled, but the clunk aggressively persisted. Finally the hapless owner was given the mythical, ultimate option -- a new car.

By the way, for those of you contemplating telling this story, it is at this point that you can show off your knowledge of obscure clunk-producing maladies and claim that all of these were considered by the dealer.

Finally, the car was returned to the factory in Bridgeport, Connecticut and totally disassembled for inspection. The engine and chassis were found to be without fault and the body was then disassembled. Here it was found that in the right rear door a disgruntled workman had installed a large hex nut suspended on several inches of string -- the cause of the noise. Attached to the device was a terse note: "Now you found it, you rich bastard!"

Now, I wonder about that persistent squeak in my new Honda wagon

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SOUND SUGGESTIONS: A COLUMN ON ORAL HISTORY METHODS

By Dale Treleven

Conducting an Oral History Interview

By the day of an actual interview careful research, planning and preparation will have reduced much interviewer anxiety. Not only will the interviewer have written or telephoned the interviewee several days in advance to confirm the date and time for the taping session, but he/she will have practiced setting up and operating the tape recorder to reduce the likelihood of problems later. Besides

the tape recorder itself, such items as tapes, extension cord, note pad, legal agreement forms, and question lists should be gathered together for the inevitable last-minute rush before heading for the interviewee's home. An earlier-prepared and duplicated check-list of all items needed is a simple yet helpful memory aid to refer to before departure.

On the average, a single taping session will last for a maximum of two hours because of possible interviewee and probable interviewer fatigue. Interviewing is a demanding task. Simultaneously the interviewer must make sure the recorder is working properly, keep an eye on the tape, listen attentively as the interviewee responds to a question, formulate the next question or line of interrogation, and jot down reminders of additional probes or areas of questioning to return to later.

Nevertheless, take along an extra hour's worth of tape in the event you and the interviewee agree to extend the discussion a bit longer than two hours. If at the end of several hours of taping a substantial number of subjects remain to be discussed, it is probably best to schedule a second session in the near future instead of attempting to cram everything into one long sitting.

An interviewer may assume that a two-hour taping session actually will consume a half-day at the respondent's home. In addition to initial greetings and early chatter, more time than expected will usually pass while setting up the recorder, pausing to change the tape every half hour (often a time for coffee and cookies!), halting for telephone calls or other unanticipated but unavoidable interruptions, packing up after taping, and departing with good wishes.

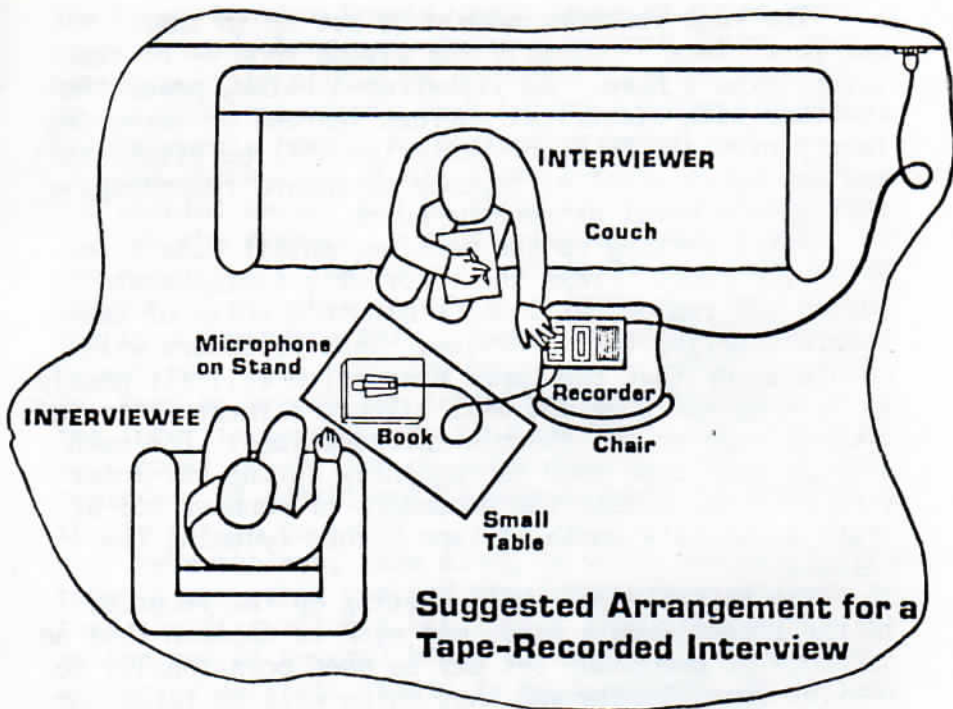
Morning, when minds are often fresher as contrasted with early-afternoon, post-lunch sluggishness, is usually the best time to conduct the interview. Scheduling a taping session for early afternoon also may interfere with an interviewee's regular nap. All in all, of course, interviewee preference should be the deciding factor in setting the best time of day for the interview.

The tape recorder should be set up in the quietest place -- usually the living room -- of the interviewee's home. As illustrated below, power the recorder with electrical current instead of batteries (worry over nearly-spent batteries will be eliminated) and use an external microphone to ensure recordings that have minimal extraneous noise.

After setting up the machine, insert Side 1 (or A) of the tape. Press the recorder's fast-forward button and run off at least a minute's worth of tape before starting the interview. That procedure will ensure later that the taped discussion will fit neatly on to a master tape and will allow the interviewer sufficient room to add audible introductions. For each side of each tape used subsequently during the interview session, repeat the procedure of running off at least a minute's worth of tape before resuming the discussion.

The interviewer, while setting up the recorder in the interviewee's home, may wish to explain that an earphone or headphone set may be used occasionally to monitor sound levels and that notes will be taken during the discussion. Once the tape recorder is ready and after both interviewer and interviewee are seated comfortably, the interviewer may suggest that the interview will begin with some general questions about background, education and so on.

If the interviewee has no further questions or comments, the interviewer may begin the discussion. No grand introduction is needed; in fact, such an introduction may do little more than "freeze up" the interviewee. Instead, start in a low-key manner, such as, "Well, Mrs. Doe, here we are in your living room on this beautiful autumn morning. To begin with why don't you tell me where and when you were born?" Proceed for at least five or ten minutes with easy questions about personal or family background, questions that are non-controversial and that will usually elicit expansive answers. Save controversial questions for later on, by which time rapport will have been established and recorder shyness will have eased.



Most of the "how-to-do-oral history" publications include many "dos" and "don'ts" for holding an oral history interview. Among the more common hints are:

- (1) Do ask short questions; ask just one at a time;
- (2) Don't, as a rule, ask questions that elicit simply yes or no responses;
- (3) Do phrase questions so they begin with such words as Who, Why, How, When or What;
- (4) Don't lead the interviewee; keep yourself and your opinions out of the interview;
- (5) Do encourage the interviewee with continual and constant attentiveness; employ facial expressions and occasional short verbal responses;
- (6) Don't turn off the recorder except for such necessities as changing tape, telephone calls, or calls of nature; don't stop the machine in order to go "off the record";
- (7) Do give the interviewee time to think; avoid prematurely interrupting an interviewee response;
- (8) Don't fret over seemingly endless pauses during a response for such "long" pauses usually last no more than a few seconds;
- (9) Do probe constantly: always ask why and how and ask for opinions and feelings;
- (10) Do, in concluding the

interview, ask an obvious wrap-up question to allow the interviewee an opportunity to reveal anything questioning may have missed and/or to add whatever he/she thinks is important.

It is sometimes difficult to keep an interviewee "on the track." If a respondent begins to wander in an undesirable or irrelevant direction, the interviewer has little choice except to listen interestedly until the end of the story. As soon as possible, however, the interviewer should tactfully but firmly return the respondent to the desired line of questioning. That may be accomplished by such a rejoinder as, "Well, that is a very interesting story and I'd like to hear more later, but right now could you tell me more about?"

If an interviewee's recollection of events seems to disagree with the facts as you understand them, rephrase and repeat the question later on. Do not challenge the interviewee's remembrance; if he/she persists with a questionable response, refer to an anonymous source that disagrees with the remembrance and ask for an opinion.

As tapes are used make sure all of them are marked to indicate the number of the tape (tape one, tape two, and so on), name of the interviewee, and date of the interview. Finally, at the end of each interview session, have the interviewee sign a legal agreement form.

These suggestions only begin to steer towards conducting a successful interview. The results of a first interview session are often disappointing. Employ healthy self-criticism in reviewing your early tapes. Find out what you've done well and what you've done poorly; determine how successful you were in obtaining the information you desired to acquire in the first place. Typically, the next interview session will be a vast improvement, the next one even more so, and so on. It won't be long before you'll be proud -- and justifiably so -- that you're consistently making clear recordings which contain a fascinating and valuable array of remembrances about life in your community since the turn of the century.

Post-Interview Work

Since oral history interviews are conducted to collect and preserve permanently unique and valuable remembrances, it follows that such information must be processed fully to ensure a research use for many decades. Field tapes must be identified completely, a preservation master tape of each original recording should be made, and typewritten finding aids must be prepared. The conclusion of an interview, therefore, signals the commencement of tedious but essential work. A project or program coordinator can assume that well over half the work involved in an interview will take place after the taping session.

A routine but important post-interview task is to make sure that each side of each tape is labeled with complete identification information, i.e., the name of the interviewee, date of the interview, and tape and side number. It works well to have a standardized numbering plan for the tapes: Tape 1, Side 1, Tape 1, Side 2, Tape 2, Side 1, etc. If you reserved enough space to do so at the time of the interview, at the beginning of each side of each tape you may add audible introductory and identification information: "This is an interview with John H. Doe for the Rivertown Historical Society. The interview was conducted by John M. Smith on October 10, 1981, was done for the Rivertown Bicentennial Oral History Project. Tape 1, Side 1."

If the interview was recorded on cassette tape, as a security measure you will want to punch out the two small tabs located at the back of the plastic tape housing. This simple procedure makes it impossible for a tape already holding interview material to be inadvertently re-used, as the "Record" mode on a cassette machine cannot be engaged once the tabs are removed. At the same time, a piece of common plastic tape placed over each of the tab housings will restore the recording capability, if desired.

A preservation master tape, reproduced on 1/2 mil., one-quarter inch open-reel tape, should be made of each field interview before further processing tasks are begun. Once created, the preservation master tape

will serve just one function -- to generate additional copies of the interview when needed. The master tape is stored in a location where the temperature is relatively constant between sixty and seventy degrees F. and where the humidity levels range from forty to sixty percent. Master tapes should be re-wound periodically, about every two or three years, on an open-reel machine operating at one of the "Play" mode speeds.

While preparing a standard 3 X 5 library catalog card for each interview and filing it for public reference is adequate for providing basic information, in and of itself the card is too general to be anything but a minimum and inadequate finding aid. Additional materials should be prepared to describe the subjects discussed on each side of each tape. The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, for example, developed a standardized format and procedures which include the times that interview segments begin, short major headings and, usually, follow up sentences which elaborate upon the major headings. For instance:

Example of Index Format

Tape 1, Side 1	John H. Doe Abstract
00:30	Background of John H. Doe. Born on September 1, 1901, on farm in town of Boone (West County), Wisconsin. Youngest of five children; oldest sister died at age three.
02:15	Education. Attended eight grades in one-room school in Boone Township; at age twenty attended Rivertown Business College.

An indexer may refer to the numbers on a recorder's digital counter as a basis for determining where a segment of discussion starts, although such counters are usually crude measures with little uniformity from machine to machine. An alternative, one that

results in greater uniformity, is to employ a stopwatch to measure discussion segments. Another alternative, the most precise indexing methodology for sound recordings used anywhere in the United States, was developed as part of the TAPE System by the author and several colleagues at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

A complete transcription constitutes the most extensive and complete typewritten finding aid to the oral history interview. While many researchers prefer to "listen" to a typescript instead of interview tapes, few local historical agencies can afford either the time or funds required to transcribe. Even with volunteer help the task is formidable since it takes about eight hours to transcribe each hour of tape-recorded interview. Moreover, after the first draft is completed, many additional hours are required to audit, edit, and re-type the thirty to forty double-spaced pages of transcript generated from each hour of interview tape.

Such heavy time and cost constraints notwithstanding, some directors of community oral history projects and programs still may elect to prepare typewritten transcriptions. Such individuals will find either of two books very helpful:

Willa K. Baum, Transcribing and Editing Oral History (Nashville: American Assoc. for State and Local History, 1977).

Cullom Davis et. al., From Tape to Type: An Oral History Manual and Workbook (Chicago: American Library Assoc., 1977).

Two more comments about post-interview work are in order. First, a transcribing machine, complete with a foot-pedal, is extremely desirable for indexing or transcribing. Secondly, there is a great danger that interview tapes will be created far in excess of finding aid preparation. After all, the job of preparing finding aids and carrying out other post-interview chores is dull compared to the interesting and exciting tasks of doing pre-interview research and conducting

actual face-to-face interviews. But a balance must be maintained. One method to keep processing and interviewing balanced is to set a policy that whoever conducts the interview is responsible also for processing the interview tapes. Such a policy also tends to be a strong inducement for interviewers to keep extraneous discussion during the interview to an absolute minimum.

Thus, a well-organized and efficiently run oral history project or program will not only collect valuable remembrances on tape but process fully and professionally all of the tapes so that many generations of researchers both within and outside the community will have an opportunity to listen and learn from the oral record. The more complete the finding aids, the easier the later task of finding and extracting excerpts for various types of public history programming in the community.

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What's Happened

The Wisconsin Chapter of the Society of Automotive Historians held its most recent Directors' Meeting on Nov. 21, 1981, at the Wisconsin Center in Madison. Seven directors attended. (Editor's note: Board Meetings are open to all members and those members who are able to attend are encouraged to attend).

Minutes (always carried in this column in the SPARK) of our last meeting were adopted. The first order of business was a discussion of membership policy and philosophy directed by Phil Hall. The major concern is that only the directors reap the full benefits of WSAH membership. Everyone wants that to change. This should be and can be an organization capable of serving all levels of curiosity in the area of automotive history. With the help of the board, the membership must become involved. A personal profile questionnaire is a good start. Developing new and different levels of relationship among members and increased communications are of prime concern. All you

have to have to belong to this organization is a demonstrated interest of some sort in automotive history. That means that anyone already involved in the automotive hobby or industry, as well as academic historians, are potential members. A number of things are in the works to make this a more effective organization. While those things are being implemented, you can help by getting in touch with each other and your directors by running a free classified ad or research help wanted ad in the SPARK; by writing a story of letter; by attending every meeting you can and by taking an active part in whatever you can in your Chapter. The WSAH can be as good and effective as its members want it to be.

Next subject up at the November meeting was the SPARK. I've taken the newsletter as far as I can and have reached the point where it's time to pass on the torch. The board accepted my resignation as SPARK editor and appointed Tim Tilton erase my footprints. Give Tim all the help you can. This is not the easiest job in the world. It might help if you keep in mind that while Wisconsin automotive history is the base from which we operate, all automotive history is our concern.

Society historian Wally Wray will, from this winter on, provide an oral report at mid-winter meetings on all July SPARKS. Hereto it might help if you communicated your thoughts on how things have gone with WSAH so far. The Archives Committee has been reactivated. Contact Matt Joseph if you would like to contribute. A discount book project is still under consideration by Wally Wray. Any ideas? The Education Committee is discussing a publication project and other educational possibilities. The Wisconsin Automotive History Project continues to make slow but steady progress. Relations with SAH have improved and look to get even better. Our mid-winter meeting will take place in Madison, Feb. 26-27, 1982. Details coming soon. Our July meeting and election signals a new age for WSAH. Now is the time for everyone to consider running for board positions. There will be a new Director, Associate Director, Secretary, Treasurer and

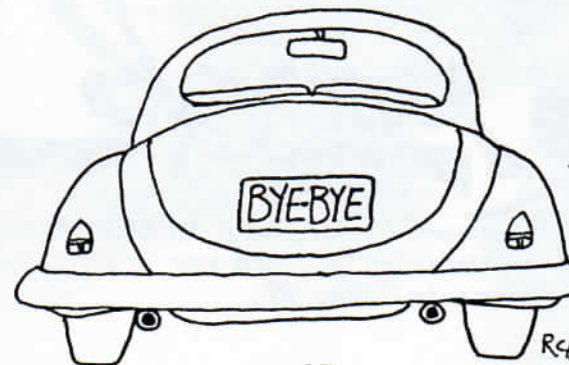
one new Director-at-large. It would be great to see everyone running for something. Meeting dates for 1982-83 are as follows:

Madison -- Feb. 26-27, 1982
Milwaukee May 8 or 9, 1982
Iola -- July 10-11, 1982
Iola -- Oct. 30, 1982
Kenosha -- Feb. 25-26, 1983

A new public relations program will begin with our mid-winter meeting.

In addition to all of the above, a number of criticisms of the SPARK were discussed. While I'm confident in saying I think it's been a damn good newsletter, others don't feel exactly the same. The SPARK and its editors have been criticized for running fiction (no one complained when we ran a series of letters on IRS and the car hobby, which have even less to do with auto history), covers (only two members have stepped forward to help), editing (this is no ivory tower. We call them as we see them and occasionally make mistakes. We never intended to emasculate anyone), artwork (I still don't understand what the criticism is here), and one member even criticized the SPARK for not having justified columns (you have to be kidding!). Well, hold your criticism for a while. Editorship is changing and we're all confident that things will get better. Hell, the thing may even come out on schedule from now on

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Associate Director: Wally Wray
Secretary: Chris Halla
Acting Treasurer: Phil Hall
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Bill Cameron
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