

BILL BURCHETT

By Bob Burchett: *Cousin to the owner of the Phamous Phrendly 1928 Phaeton*

Bill Burchett's passing is truly the end of an era, and while I am Bill's next of kin, it is You, the proud owners of the Classic cars, who are his true family. Bill was better known to you than to me since we "discovered" each other at (what else?) a car event relatively recently in 2002. Some of you know the story where we got our credentials late and the lady guarding the gate said we weren't on the guest list to enter, but when she saw my name, blushed and stammered out "You must be with Bill so please go right in!"



An avid CARavanner, a Master CCA Judge, the recipient of the Classic Spirit Award in 1998 and judge of American Classics at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance from 1973 to 2013.



I then recovered faster than she did, asking "So do you see Bill?" She pointed him out and I slapped on a "Hello my name is" sticker to my lapel and parked in front of Bill gnawing the ear off of some unsuspecting stranger. I will bet the title to your Classic that 99% of you readers already know just how prolific a writer and talker Bill was. After we met I embarked on a quest to discover the lineage that didn't line up. I previously wrote the story of how it seems he was descended from one line and I from another, so it took five years and three genealogists to establish the fact we were related to one single Revolutionary War Patriot Ancestor in Burwell Burchett some 245 years ago who served with General George Washington at Valley Forge.

DNA tests independently confirmed that we were a 100% match in all 37 DNA markers. Bill's passing is truly the 'end of the line' in more ways than one, and while that phrase is generally reserved for the trolley and coal cars, Bill's perseverance gave the Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) as well as the Daughters (DAR) a brand new Patriot Ancestor and that feat hasn't happened in half a century, so I am told. With the loss

of Bill, the line of genealogy ends since his "children," the Classic cars that don't bear his name. As the guy entrusted with the Burchett family archives I can speak with miniscule authority here.

In his mail I found that he gave money to practically every known charity which belies the reputation of "cheapskate" image from his great-great-grandfather Burwell I. We finally discovered that he broke the chain of inheritance of the family land grant to his son Burwell II in an odd sequence of events. It seems Burwell the first was awarded a land grant from the Loyal Company that was dividing up Colonial Virginia property under charter from King George III where he had 122 acres that all he needed to do was survey and build on it. So dad had the work done and built the house but decided to not pay the \$3.33 for the survey to be recorded. Therefore son Burwell II didn't inherit the land; he had to pay the county fees for it making it a "purchase" rather than inheritance. That stymied genealogists for years since they were unable to prove the father-to-son link. Fortunately Bill didn't inherit that trait.

Bill was the son of Eugene Burchett who

served as captain aboard two naval ships and the Navy conferred the title of Commander aboard the USS Constitution (yes, that ship!) for a ceremonial term of two years and was later presented a sea chest made from the prized wood gleaned from repairs of that famous ship. Bill's mother's maiden name was Paris and so that became his middle name and many of you will recall there is a Paris Island that bears their family name and that is the background on this little known fact. My lineage comes from a different son of Burwell's dating from about 1784 that split us apart for so long and made tracing difficult but fun and challenging and I now have in my possession the Constitution memorabilia that is worth it all.

I found the only photo of his grandfather, George Gerome, in an obscure leather bound book of Baptist ministers as he wandered from East to West establishing churches and Masonic Lodges. George went from Ohio to Washington and then southward apparently landing in Glendale, California where there is an old church on Burchett Street but since the historical records of that era are pretty sketchy Bill never ceased working to prove the >

connection. An interesting note is that both Bill and I are also Masons and he donated a lot to the Shriners Hospital fund so old George Jerome did seem to have that positive effect on Bill as well.

Bill started at age 5 visiting a neighborhood garage and, per his biography in the recent manuscript, was wedded his entire life to the Classic car world and it is certainly better off for it as he leaves behind memories that many of you will recall.

Residing in Fullerton most of his life he had a condominium there that his long-time friend Chris Bock described as the proverbial 100 pounds of memorabilia in the 10 pound bag. When he sold it, Chris said it took them quite some time to help Bill "scale down" a bit to move a few miles away only to restart the process anew.

Bill's retirement apartment was jammed with trophies, badges, photos, memorabilia and many awards. I am sharing with



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you a copy of a photo taken during one of his proudest moments when he and Phrendly carried Bob and Dolores Hope in the Hollywood Christmas Parade. He also transported Magic Johnson and others. What great treasures!

In these last 6+ years he was unable to drive his treasured Phrendly so early on I picked it up from storage and kept it in my garage where I routinely practiced driving it. Finally when I was able to qualify him into the SAR I said he should show up there in style and I should drive him. Bad choice on my part; that was the first day he got to complain about my lousy double-clutching and occasional missed-shifts. I had been working on the special technique for some time but without him beside me pointing out the fact that I was annoying the car.

Being his de-facto chauffeur it was always my pleasure to pick him up and take him to the HCCA Holiday Motor Excursion (HME) as well as CCCA and Packard International events. I personally enjoyed wearing my chauffeur's

hat with my 1928 badge on it showing I was legally entitled to haul him from place to place sporting a grin nearly reaching door-to-door. After lunch with the crowd following the HME a few years back I was told by his friends that everyone got the same miserable treatment regarding shifting the car so I don't feel picked on quite so much now.

One of the trips to the Packard International event I got to push him around in a wheelchair judging as he went from car to car inspecting in painstaking detail each fleck of dust that defiled the perfection he was demanding. Using my cell phone camera and a towel I was required to stand on those pristine running boards and snap pictures for him to see the faults and help him grade them accordingly.

Never without a characteristic bottle of trademark Scotch, I found two bottles of Johnnie Walker Red in the trunk of Phrendly one day when cleaning it out and there they remain waiting for Bill to show up for a snort. The day I brought him to our house in Rancho Palos Verdes to spend the night before the

big car rally he drove the Shirley Temple 1940 custom Buick into my garage and we sat at the dinner table while I watched him polish off a fifth of my best White Horse Scotch and never miss a syllable. Both he and Phrendly were close to bulletproof it seems.

(By the way, it wasn't the Scotch that finally got him; it was COPD if you want to know. Confidentially, I think it was the Scotch keeping it in check for many years and when he had to give it up that began his downhill slide.)

To wax political for a moment, kindly indulge me as I recap my return from the Trump Inauguration in 2017 proudly presenting him with a MAGA hat from the event. He promptly put it on his head and may not have taken it off even to shower. A few weeks later we are out together in Phrendly and stopped at some event where a local decided that the hat just had to go. Well Bill is probably not the right guy to pick for a verbal confrontation and I kept my mouth shut while Bill spoke for the half-dozen onlookers and me as the crowd improved and he had

an audience to play to. Bill was enjoying the process of gently informing the assailant that the hat was remaining and if he wanted it off, to take it off himself. With Bill, the filters were turned OFF.

For those 10,000 of us in his "inner circle" of close friends Bill sent the annual Christmas Card Novel resembling "War and Peace" recalling the trips of the past year for us to ponder and marvel at. Nothing could make you more envious than pages penned by someone blessed with zero worries, no pets, no yard to keep up, no house to paint, no roof to patch and no family to worry over at the holiday events. His life was just cars, cars and more cars. No wonder he went to 110% of the various club events where he is far better known than any of us reading this episode and the trophies and awards he had on the floor-to-ceiling shelves were incredible to see.

As a lifelong stutterer (which never flustered Bill; just those of us listening)

his brain was truly ahead of his speech capability as evidenced by his amazing recall right up to the time of his passing. I found that I could set his gears in motion rather easily by simply asking a question about a car-related subject and off he would go for what seemed like hours.

The Phrendly Phaeton appears to have entered his life in the early 1980s (from what I can tell; subject to input from readers) and he wrote an article about the "C to C-Era" trip in 1988, after naming the car and told the story from the viewpoint of Phrendly so a star was born some 32+ years ago. ("C to C" referred to the "Sea to Sierra CARavan, not the 1995 Coast-to-Coast CARavan which he also completed.) I discovered the original article in his vast stack of memorabilia when rummaging through the long-forgotten storage area along with all of his judging credentials and posters from each event.

Badges? He had plenty of stinkin' badges!

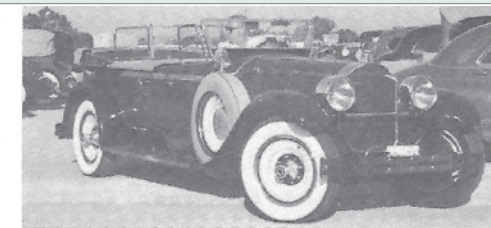
I found 57 of his prized event and judging badges in a box and took a photo for you all to see he really did revere the association he had with all of you including the red one in the middle where they misspelled the family name.

About his prolific writing skills regarding the CARavan events and much more; recently, those of you lucky enough to receive a copy of his last writing; the "Economic conditions that led to changes in automobiles between the great Depression and the post World War II Boom" are being treated to an incredibly accurate historical recap of everything Classic car related during those times that was literally written by Bill from memory with few notes. In retrospect I believe that he used his last ounce of stamina to create this "life's work" he had labored for well over a year on this amazing article. Over time it grew to 14 pages being so long that Bill had printed up and self-published since it wouldn't fit in the magazines and my understanding is he was one of just three people who paid for 50 copies each so if anyone would like one of them it won't be hard to find the sources; Chris has some of them left in the stock found in Bill's home which I gave to him to insure that CCCA would have some access to them.

As I recall the words of the immortal Frank Sinatra "...and now, the end is near, I traveled each and every highway; but more, much more than this, I did it my way" come to mind through my misty view as I round out this short recap of a long life of Bill traveling the world including Havana, Cuba during the Castro era, driving the Alcan Highway (top down all the way for 1,600 miles) and more; much more than this. He did it HIS way. •

> Comments and anecdotes cheerfully accepted at the special email address I had built on my web server just for him that is directed to me at: William.Paris@Burchett.org

> The digital photo frame I bought for Bill is still active for the time being and you can email photos to it from your cellphone to Bill.Burchett@MyPixstar.com. THANKS to all of you for your memories sent to him there over the years. You can also call me at: 310-686-9973.



#28 Bill Burchett's 1928 Packard 443 The Phrendly Phaeton

C to C-era

Phrum the eyes and ears ov the Phrendly Phaeton

Hi Phokes,

The 1988 C to C-era CARavan was grate, and ov course us kars were the stars ov the sho.

Bill phound me in Monterey egerly awaiting the start ov the CARavan. The phirst side trip was thru Monterey, Karmel and the phamus 17-mile drive witch was spektakular under blu ski and sunshine with mi top down. Ov course no sta in Monterey is kumplet without a trip 2 the Passeys in Watsonville, and then later Jack and Mobare kame down to Monterey and saw me agen (tha mes mee!).

Mi only overheating was going 2 Yosemite Valley wher it was almost 100 degress out and on a long grade. The kooling sistem repairs at Kustom Auto (Santa Ana) fiksed mee! Yosemite Valley was spektakular and the only time mi top was up was 4 a wile wen it rained.

Phrum Yosemite we krused down the mouneten stoping 4 lunch in Columbia, a kute restored town. Then on 2 Sacramento and Old Town. Craig Watrous, an old-time CCCA member and phrend of Bill's joyned us as mi passenger. Sacramento also saw Bill and Marvin Zukor krusing Mane Strete with mi nasty oogah horn going off sumtimes.

Driving over the C-eras and into Reno on bak rodes shoed brethtaking cenery and also included a gold mine toor and lunch stop in Grass Valley. (These people ete 2 much al the time and ther xtra wate is hard on our springs.)

Leaving Reno with a nu passenger, Ken Minier (Craig rode with Jim Weston), we had lunch (mor phood) in Carson City, Nevada wher Bill had gon 2 hi skul. Bill saw the 2 houses wher he had lived and the then hi skul is now a gramer skul and named apher the English teacher who tryed to teech Bill (she must have been gud, but I ges Bill jest never lerned anything).

Later, in Minden, Nevada, we toored the xtensiv kolekshun of Ted Bacon. Ted has a 1928 Packard 443 rodster witch was restored at Kustom Auto 22 years ago, but sum lephed-over parts at Kustom Auto phrum then are now helping me sta on the rode.

Going up Kingsbury Grade 2ward Tahoe Valley was phun—wi I was mostly in hi gere at 35 mph xcept 4 the last 1/4 mile—but going down into the valley we neded second gere a lot.

At Tahoe Bill saw the phamly home still there and also did sum joy riding in mee with Connie and George Newhall of San Francisco.

Alas—at Tahoe (boo-hoo)—the saddest time ov al: Wen a CARavan is over C U nxt toor. (smm)

Pea Ess: 1 ov the CARavaners thot enuph ov mee 2 have Jack Passey phind him a 1928 Packard 443 phaeton. Jack phound 1 in Pencilvania, and J.W. Silviera phrum Oaklund is now its proud oner.