

**A Chapter from the book
"Trailer Travel Here and Abroad The New Way to Adventurous Living"
By Wally Byam**

Eastern Canada

The Western Canadian Caravan was such a success that it called for a sequel -- a tour through Eastern Canada in the summer of 1955. Since this area is much more heavily populated than any place we had yet taken a Caravan, the route was planned very carefully and again limited to 100 trailers.

I had a fresh problem this time: I had been invited to the International Trailer Rally in the Saar Valley, to be held in midsummer, and wanted particularly to scout routes for a possible European Caravan in 1956. Stella and I would have to leave the group in Montreal and get someone to take over the Caravan. I asked my cousin, Helen Byam Schwamborn of Bakersfield, California, whether she would like the job. Helen was new to trailering, but had energy, tact and imagination, was well liked by the Caravanners, and a natural choice.

Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan, was our bivouac point, and we were surprised upon arriving to find almost the whole Caravan neatly parked in straight rows. Helen told me that this had been accomplished by Edward Jost, a ferryboat captain from Miami, Florida, who had been the first arrival two weeks before. When the second trailer arrived he was well-established, so he parked it; and after that, everybody thought Ed was in charge and went to his trailer for instructions. For someone who had never been on a Caravan before, he did a remarkable job and was promptly voted parking chairman for the trip.

We got organized in the midst of the centennial celebration of the opening of the Soo Canal. Everyone in the small Michigan town was garbed in a costume of the 1850's and wildly celebrating the anniversary of the opening of the locks that joined the Eastern Great Lakes with Lake Superior. Canadian officials had come to our camp earlier to put all our papers in order, so we crossed on the ferry, passed quickly through Customs, and hightailed it to Blind River and a visit to Canada's largest sawmill. That evening we camped at the first of a wonderful series of campsites -- Algonquin Park among the pines on the Lake of Two Rivers. Virtually before the wheels had stopped, the entire younger contingent was in the clear cool water.

In this lovely spot a new Caravan institution was born. Caravanners love to sit around camp and talk. As might be expected, the talk frequently centers around trailers and new gadgets people have found to make trailering easier and more comfortable. Someone suggested that all those interested get together to discuss these ideas and share them. This lively bull session produced many good ideas for improving trailers which have since been incorporated into Airstreams. Because the men dominated this meeting, the women got together for a "cow session" to discuss their own problems, and both types of meeting have been repeated on every Caravan and at every rally since with very useful results.

The technological improvements made in travel trailers as a result of our Caravan experiences are almost too numerous to mention. These trips were better than any laboratory for torture-testing equipment, and mechanical weaknesses quickly became apparent. Springs, shock absorbers and hitches that were perfectly adequate on a well-graded California freeway wouldn't hold up on a rutted, rocky Central American "Byam Boulevard." Hinges, door fasteners and locks that were secure on Route 66 flew open on the Pan American Highway. The necessity for really dust-tight windows was painfully evident to every woman who had to do a thorough housecleaning at the end of every day. We needed bigger tires to carry heavier loads under these conditions.

In the early days we used a combination aluminum and steel tubing for our frames in an effort to make the trailer lighter. These were not sturdy enough for rough roads, so we replaced them with all-steel electrically-welded frames. Running gear hangers were lengthened to prevent their breaking off in large chuckholes. Floors installed with screws loosened under vibration, so now only car bolts are used. The soft aluminum of the early days had to be replaced with extremely hard aircraft alloys and screws with rivets. The heat in some parts of Mexico made us appreciate the necessity of better insulation. After years of prodding suppliers, our refrigeration problems were finally solved by a foolproof gas refrigerator built especially for trailers. Butane lights proved impractical -- the mantles broke constantly -- and they were replaced by a 12-volt lighting system. These are only a few of the improvements that resulted directly from Caravans, and others are continually being made.

Ottawa, Canada's beautiful capital, was our next stop, and we were escorted to our campsite at Lansdowne Park on the landscaped banks of the Rideau Canal. Arrangements had been made with the

Ottawa Electric Company to install a transformer, and with the aid of the cable Louis Beatty had obligingly lugged all the way from Los Angeles, we had electric lights, refrigeration and working gadgets in every trailer. American Embassy representatives came to call, a Member of Parliament, many city officials and numbers of curious Canadians, who were especially baffled by the sign on Fred Doane's trailer reading "Los Angeles City Limits." A boat trip down the canal, tours of the city and a visit to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Training School, where the neophyte Mounties gave us a special gymnastic show and drill, were highlights of our stay. Later we visited the Royal Canadian Mint, a paper mill, and the Peace Tower which commemorates the 66,650 Canadians who gave their lives in the first World War. When we attended a session of Parliament, Conservative Leader Drew was engaged in a ten-day filibuster with Prime Minister St. Laurent and Trade Minister Howe over a \$19,000,000 wheat deal with Poland, but we didn't feel we could stay to the end.

It was a short drive to Montreal, where our campsite was another ideal spot -- the Isle de Ste. Helene in the St. Lawrence River, where we had a swimming pool and picnic grounds and the evenings offered a wonderful panorama: great deep-sea vessels departing against the vivid orange, red and yellow sky.

It was there that Stella and I had to leave the Caravan. This was the first time we had not gone all the way and we felt alternately like little cubs leaving the mother bear, and mothers leaving the cubs. The Caravanners gave us a farewell party, the most touching feature of which was a program put on entirely by the children and concluding with a song entitled, "Good-bye, Wally Byam." We hated to leave, even though we realized that the Caravans were growing to the point where they would soon be running simultaneously to all parts of the continent and even to Europe, and we couldn't travel with every one. Besides, Helen had already proved capable of doing a remarkable job, and we appointed a committee of veteran Caravanners to advise her on any unfamiliar problems that might arise.

Montreal was another round of avid sightseeing, Helen reported. They toured the city in a charming open-topped trolley with wrought-iron railings and lighted hoops on top, and climbed steep Mount Royal in a horse-drawn tally-ho for a breathtaking view of the seaport.

Another grand entrance was made into Quebec. Shrieking sirens accompanied them to the campsite on the Exposition grounds, and Mayor Hamel and his staff came to extend their official welcome. The Quebec papers carried many stories about the Caravan expressing amazement at the spirit of the travelers who seemed to be so miraculously immune to the problems of old age. "Some of these oldsters," wrote one reporter, "seem younger and more sprightly than I." The townspeople were extremely cordial. One store manager asked suddenly, as Helen was completing a purchase, whether "Madame enjoyed the Mayor." He had read the Mayor's published greeting and recognized Helen from her picture and telltale blue beret. City officials showed the group everything in their lovely old fortress city, the cradle of French culture on this continent. They visited the Plains of Abraham where Wolfe defeated Montcalm, were honored at a special changing of the guard at the Citadel, the scene of Churchill's meeting with Roosevelt to plan the invasion of Europe, and became thoroughly familiar with Quebec's quaint streets and French charm.

One evening the Huron Indians visited camp and presented a program of singing and dancing, then ceremoniously traded their feather headdresses for the blue Caravan berets. After the party, everyone traded back -- though some mothers had trouble persuading their "little Indians" that this was the only fair thing to do.

Further north they headed along the St. Lawrence to Ste. Anne de la Pocatiere and Riviere-du-Loup, where opinion was divided on whether to proceed around the Gaspé Peninsula or cut across' to Campbellton. Helen called a meeting and the issue was resolved in typical Caravan fashion: those who wished to proceed would, while the rest would cut over to Campbellton for a four-day rest. Thus, the more adventurous members toured the ruggedly beautiful peninsula on an excursion into ancient French traditions and folklore, along a road that dipped and soared and skirted the surf. Except for a dusty forty-one-mile stretch the road was excellent and the opportunity to buy fresh filet of cod for fifteen cents a pound more than compensated for a few steep climbs.

Meanwhile the other half "settled down" at Campbellton. Canadian Air Force officers issued guest cards admitting Caravanners to all the privileges of their fine club, and the solicitous Mayor and his wife visited the campsite almost daily to make sure their guests had no unsatisfied wants. Helen reported an amusing incident: shortly after they arrived, accompanied by the usual flock of waving children, a woman came to the camp to "buy tickets." "Tickets for what?" Helen asked. "Why, for your circus, of course," came the reply. Her little boys had come running home to report that the circus had come to town.

Moncton offered press and radio interviews and impressed the group with two natural wonders -- the Magnetic Hill and the Tidal Bore. Flowing into Shepody Bay is the Peticodiac River, a broad mud flat for half of every day. Then suddenly it is converted into a navigable river by the arrival of the Tidal Bore, a great wall of water which, compressed by the narrowing shores, moves in from the Bay of Fundy and increases the depth by thirty feet in a few minutes. The Magnetic Hill is another wonder -- cars appear to coast uphill, an especially interesting experience when you're towing a trailer. It doesn't really save any gas, though -- it's an optical illusion.

Nova Scotia impressed the whole group as the Number One beauty spot of Eastern Canada. At Halifax they shared honors with the visiting United States Navy and were taken on a tour of the harbor aboard the *Gansby*, a Canadian minesweeper. Peggy's Cove was another popular place, with a rocky coastline and somnolent countryside especially beguiling to painters. A trip was made to a fish plant at Lunenburg where fish sticks were prepared, cooked and frozen for sale; free samples were enjoyed, right out of the fryer.

At Yarmouth, Caravanners were guests of the Kenney estate. with access to all of its wonderful facilities -- boats, private beach, a recreation room and acres of lovely lawn. The town held a clambake in their honor, and several motion pictures were shown of the earlier Caravans to Mexico and Western Canada. Fishermen had a field day, reeling in whoppers the instant their lures hit the water. In appreciation of Mr. Kenney's hospitality, a donation was voted to a boy's camp he sponsored, a Caravan custom when no charge is made for parking.

Annapolis Royal made each Caravanner a member of "The Order of the Good Time," the oldest social club in North America. The Order was founded by Champlain in 1606 to revive the flagging spirits of the early troops and pioneers, and has dedicated itself exclusively to having a good time ever since. Membership is limited to those who spend at least seven days in Nova Scotia, which is presumed to make the tourist an expert.

The three days at Kentville were spent on another estate, this one owned by Mr. Robert Palmeter, president of the largest bone china establishment in Canada. Parked on a hilltop overlooking a beautiful golf course, croquet and lawn bowling greens, and lovely flower gardens, the Caravanners were served tea and cookies every afternoon at four. Kentville is situated in Annapolis Valley, made famous by Longfellow's poem, *Evangeline*, and the group visited Evangeline Chapel at Grand Pré, now a museum. The last night of their stay Mr. Palmeter was host at a farewell party and presented each Caravan lady with an exquisite bone china butter plate in the Evangeline pattern which he had designed.

Three more days were spent in Bonnie Scotland -- or so it seemed, for the annual "Gaelic *Mod*" was in progress at Sainte Ann's, Cape Breton. The *Mod* is the provincial Celtic culture festival and gathering of the clans, whose members contend for such honors as best-dressed highlander, best piper, best dancer. The town greeting during this engaging celebration is "*Ciad Mile Faile*" -- a hundred thousand welcomes to you. Kilted and brogued townspeople were as captivated by the trailers as the Caravanners were with them. Chet Coffey, a retired photographer from Oregon, discovered that he was a member of the McCorkle clan and donned the appropriate attire. He was promptly rechristened "MacCoffey" by his colleagues.

More Scottish activities were in progress at New Glasgow and Prince Edward Island. Hurricane Connie cut short the Prince Edward stay, driving the group to Shediac and a day with the lobster fishermen which was topped off with a magnificent lobster feast.

Saint John, last stop in Canada before the Caravan was to cross the border back to the United States, had to be celebrated in some way, so it was decided to hold a pre-farewell party. The occasion was the celebration of Mom and Pop Riley's golden wedding anniversary. The Mayor of Saint John, who had hung great "Welcome Wally Byam Caravan" signs over the streets for our arrival, spoke a few words, and everyone sang Irish songs in honor of the popular couple.

The Caravanners crossed the border the following day and, loath to part, they combined their final farewell fling with an observance of Hamp and Mae Millender's thirty-second anniversary in Bangor, Maine. Hamp and Mae, who now have seven Caravans listed on the front of their Airstream, had served unselfishly in a wide variety of committee assignments, winning everyone's respect and admiration. This wonderful party brought the Caravan to a bang-up close.