

## HISTORY OF THE GAS STATION

*By Brian Rohrback*

Now that we have extended the range of the Classic Era back to 1915, we can reflect on how the distribution of motor fuels has changed from this onset of casual driving. In the earliest times, the demand for gasoline was only a microscopic fraction of the current demand and there was a need to use an existing channel of distribution.

It has been a long time since we bottled up gasoline and sent it to local drugstores for sale to the auto-enthusiast. At that time, there would be absolutely nothing to gain from economic fraud. In the times immediately prior to the Classic times, gasoline was considered a waste product of the refining process (which focused on the production of kerosene for lighting plus heavier oils for heating and running machinery). This waste product was often poured onto the ground just to get rid of it; insert a collective shudder here.

As automobiles came into their own as part of society's fabric, the means to dispense gasoline, diesel, and natural gas went through a series of evolutionary steps. The first place to dispense fuel for a road trip is reputed to be a pharmacy, the Stadt Apotheke, in Wiesloch, Germany. The year was 1888 and the purchaser was Bertha Benz (I have heard that name somewhere) en route from Mannheim to Pforzheim, a route that zips past Heidelberg and is revisited as a commemorative drive each year. We bumped around with an inadequate distribution system until Henry Ford launched his latest car company spurring demand.



*First Drive-up Gas Station  
Pittsburg, PA (1913)*

Although the first for-purpose station was built in St. Louis in 1905, it should be proudly noted that the population of gas stations doubled over the next two years when the second station was opened in our very own Seattle (chants of "we're number two" ring out). The first drive-up pump did not make an appearance until 1913. Clearly, most of the fuel as the "New" Classic Era emerged was supplied as a side business by other stores.

From this modest start, the number of fueling stations ballooned to somewhere around 180,000 spanning the US and Canada, probably peaking in the 1980s. Since that time, a decline in the personal service component, more fuel-efficient cars, and the advent of warehouse fueling locations has dropped the number of gas stations north of our border with Mexico.



**Remembering Shirley LeCoque:** Long time CCCA Associate Member Shirley LeCoque passed away on Oct. 29th from complications of Multiple Myeloma that she had fought for eight years. She was 88. Shirley participated in the CCCA and Cadillac & LaSalle Club events for five decades. She also had numerous hobbies of her own. Working in resin, Shirley developed reproduction Tail Light Jewels for 1941 Cadillacs. Bob and Shirley produced over 2500 sets of Jewels that were sent all over the world. She also sewed, knitted, painted and, worked in stained glass. Bob and Shirley also had a love for the road and traveled extensively in their RV. Shirley is survived by husband of 60 years Robert E. (Bob), sons Robert A. (Bobby) (wife Devree) and Thomas (wife Jodie), along with three grandchildren, Linnane, Robert, and Dallas.



**Remembering Evelyn Freedman:** Val Dickison informs us that Howard Freedman's wife, Evelyn, has passed on. For the last year or so, Evelyn was in a health care facility, but in past years she was very active in the CCCA. Howard serves on the CCCA Museum board and the two of them often traveled in their motorhome back to Hickory Corners, Michigan for CCCA Museum events. Together, they were active in their home region (Oregon) and also belonged to the PNR. Evelyn was also deeply involved in her Jewish faith and recognized by her Jewish peers for her service. Val recalls that Evelyn loved to read and that she could often be found in the lobby of a hotel at a CCCA event with a smile on her face and a book in her lap. Evelyn will be missed by many.