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THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF RVING AS A LIFESTYLE

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ABSTRACT

This essay is a discussion of the evolution of RVing. This development is one of lifestyle in regard to population needs. The growth was one of methods for the caring of necessities to that of travel for exploration and adventure. The technology increase has significantly provided ways and methods to fulfill the desires of the traveling population.

Key Words: Recreational Vehicles, Lifestyle, Travel, History of Transportation Needs

BEGINNING

What is now recognized as RVing and its related lifestyle has its roots in times long before the invention of the automobile and related small trucks. As early as the 1800s and even before, nomadic peoples around the world developed ways to carry their home or shelter with them as they traveled. Asians used the Yurt and ways to transport it on their horses or camels in their travels. Gypsies and Tinkers in Europe developed horse or ox drawn caravans as places to live. The plains native Americans created the travois to carry their shelters (tipi's) with them as they traveled. Early American woodsmen, explorers and hunters like Davy Crockett and Lewis and Clark developed ways to carry their shelters with them as they traveled throughout our land. A few people want to include the covered wagons of our westward expansion as campers but they carried all household effects and were, in reality, an early form of moving vans in which part of the family sometimes slept.

As soon as the automobile was created in the earliest days of the 20th century, plenty of American vagabonds and hunters began to figure out how to take living necessities with them as they traveled. At first, supplies were piled in and on the cars and rather quickly cars became strong enough to pull rudimentary trailers. The first campers were generally just a canvas tent erected on a light platform as the earliest autos were unable to pull anything more. Then, as trucks and stronger cars were developed, the trailers became identified as "house trailers" if they had a bed and a kitchen on board. When early trucks became strong enough, full cabins were built on truck chassis and were identified as "house cars" as different from house trailers. This

evolution all began in the years before World War I. Actually, every style of RV popular today was invented before the War. We already had tent campers, very rudimentary travel trailers, 5th wheel trailers, and both large and small motorized campers when WWI began.

The origination of camping vehicles and the related lifestyle has not been limited to the United States. The first clubs of early RVers were formed in Europe not in America but with the American propensity for travel and a vagabond lifestyle, and the huge growth in the development of automobiles and related vehicles, camping and RVing has grown much more rapidly in this country

Through the 1920s, as both cars and trucks rapidly grew larger and stronger, so did the vehicles that today we call RVs. As both house trailers and house cars became larger, so did their livability and creature comforts. By the time of the “Great Depression” a few Americans were using RVs for more than camping and recreation but, were beginning to use them as temporary housing for extended stays. The depression, which created a “homeless” condition in many families, forced many people including some families to live, at least temporarily, in the more affordable “house trailers”.

MODERN ERA

As the depression ended, shortly the US got heavily involved in World War II. Enormous war production airplane and military equipment plants exploded in communities throughout the

country that did not have housing for the thousands of families that were brought in to staff airplane plants, tank plants and ship yards among many others. The answer to this housing shortage was solved in most areas with the creation of huge “trailer parks” where hundreds of barely livable camper trailers could be quickly pulled in on wheels to house the families of workers to build the equipment that our full involvement with the war required. These trailer camps with hundreds of trailers quickly grew up on the outskirts of any town with a war production facility. One of the largest of these camps was in the wilds of Minnesota where over 1000 trailers were gathered to create a community to house miners to work the huge Mesabi Range iron ore mines to supply ore to the steel mills that were making steel to become tanks or ships and other needed materials.

Through WWII and into the 1950s came the separation of the mobile home industry from the RV industry. From the 1920s and 1930s and into the war years, the only difference between a recreational vehicle and a residential trailer was who owned it and for what purpose it was intended. During the war came the creation of trailers that were too large to be moved and located by personal cars and the manufactured home industry began to separate from the RV industry.

Today we have some 40 and 45 foot RVs that are larger than the late 1940s and early 1950s mobile homes. After the economic turmoil of the 1970s, great comforts quickly found their way into the RV world. Until the 1980s, RV owners were primarily campers and used their RVs for camping experiences. Until this time most RVs as well as their owners were identified as

“campers”. They used their campers as a way to get away from such life “clutter” as radios, televisions, and even clocks and schedules. These “campers” used their vehicles primarily for weekend get-a-ways and a week or two of vacation each year. With the 80s and 90s came the introduction of comforts such as air conditioners, living rooms with couches and recliner chairs, stereos and televisions and even computers, fully equipped kitchens and a whole new lifestyle called RVing attracted a whole new clientele that would never be attracted to rugged camping experiences. Today we still have a group of campers who enjoy taking their “campers” into the wilderness and communing with nature in housing much more comfortable than old style canvas tents. We also have RVers who would not ever think of camping in the woods but are very happy staying on a paved parking lot with hundreds of their friends with full hook up utilities and their activities fully scheduled for them. Many of these are simply driving or pulling a huge, fully equipped, luxury hotel suite so they can park it exactly where they want it and then take it home with them when the event is over. Some, perhaps most, of today’s RVers are somewhere between the two extremes.

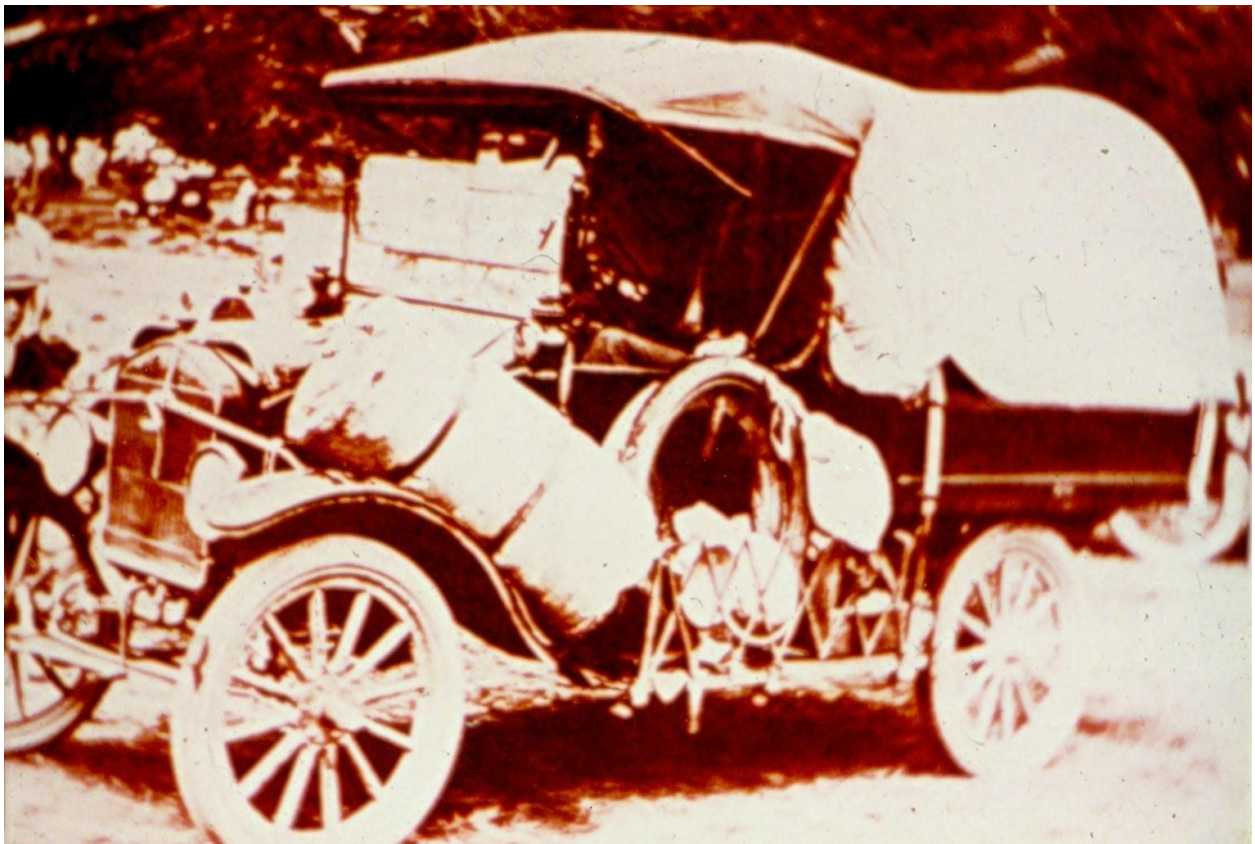
FUTURE

Today both the campers and the “mobile suite” RVers are supported by both local and huge national organizations that provide literature, support materials and organized events for their chosen lifestyle and its escape from the routine of the business world to the extent that many members of the modern RV lifestyle have chosen to escape the confines of brick and mortar housing and reside full time on the wheels of today’s modern RVs, some more or less on the

road but many at least mostly parked in a location of their choosing. These folks seem to have a personal motto that “Home is Where You Park It”. Today’s recreational vehicles vary in size from tiny 6 and 8 foot long campers so light that they can easily be pulled by modern motorcycles to giant motor homes based on semi-truck chassis that are over 50 feet long and cannot fit in campsites available in many RV parks.

Some modern RVers have chosen to purchase an attractive site in a modern RV park where they can live permanently in their chosen RV or move back and forth seasonally between a permanently parked unit and a brick and mortar home in some other part of the country. A few RV facilities are restricted to only the very large, motorized rigs and exclude any trailers of any size. Thus there is surely a modern RV for every lifestyle.

PHOTOGRAPIC ESSAY



Early Camper 1920s



Homemade Camper 1920s



Camper 1930s and 1940s



Late 40s to Early 50s



Mid 70s Style RV



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