

## History of Das Awkscht Fescht

### I. Introduction.

Das Awkscht Fescht, known to English speakers as “The August Festival,” (the “Fescht”) is a three-day show of antique cars, trucks, motorcycles and tractors, with sales of antique toys, cars and automobilia. It is also a cultural event in Macungie Memorial Park (the “Park”) whose family-friendly aspects include a swimming pool, live music, food, beverages and crafts. The principal show day is the first Saturday in August, with the start day being the prior Friday and concluding on the following Sunday. The Fescht is influenced in name and flavor by the Pennsylvania German culture found in Macungie. It remains one of the largest antique and classic motor vehicle shows east of the Mississippi River.

The Fescht began in 1964 and ran continuously through 2019 until the COVID-19 pandemic caused organizers to hold over until 2021. Then it resumed with shouts of gratitude. The Fescht has been conducted in five phases through 2021. It had roots in prior agricultural and car shows for the benefit of the Park. Its history reflects the passion of the Macungie Memorial Park Association (the “Association”), the Ontelaunee Region (“Ontelaunee”) of the Antique Automobile Club of America (“AACA”), and thousands of volunteers. They all enjoy antique motor vehicles while raising money to maintain and operate the Park. This article is based on presentations given by Bob Hobaugh beginning in 2013. Bob gratefully acknowledges the historical information provided by Hon. Robert Young, David Bausch and others, and the records of the Macungie Historical Society.

### II. Early Activities.

The Association is a non-profit Pennsylvania corporation formed in 1944 to acquire and operate the Park. The Association purchased 22 acres in Macungie, Pennsylvania, in 1946 to establish the Park. Because the Association receives no tax dollars, it must fund the Park privately. That private activity began with Macungie’s roots in the agricultural and family-based life styles. Because the Park had been land used as a potato farm, the Board and other community members initiated activities to make the land useful as a recreational area. Families gathered to remove rocks from the 22 acres. By 1955, Macungie Memorial Hall was erected, first as a single-story stone building and then a second story was added. Look closely at the stone work to see the addition.

The costs of Park improvements were addressed in four named activities: Agricultural Field Days, Saturday Night Family Fun, Antique Automobile Derby and Macungie Field Days. Agricultural Field Days consisted of tractor pulls, plowing contests and picnics. It lasted from 1947 to 1963. Saturday Night Family Fun grew out of those picnics and the relocation of a bandshell from Fogelsville to the Park in 1949. Families listened to “country-western” style music while eating hamburgers, french fries and ice cream, and playing field games such as baseball. That fun lasted until 1963.

The Antique Automobile Derby was an antique car show with food, games and music which ran from 1956 to 1963. Agricultural Field Days and the Antique Automobile Derby merged into “Macungie Field Days.” Last held on August 11, 1963, it was a joint effort of the Association and the Macungie Grange. A little-known fundraiser was the Iron Horse Rambles held in 1963 and 1964. The Reading Railroad brought visitors from northern New Jersey to Macungie where a band played at the train station and visitors attended a car show in the Park.

But the Association truly enhanced the Park and took on new debt with the “Greater Macungie Area Singmaster Swimming Pool,” dedicated July 1-4, 1960. The Pool Committee of the Board consisted of town leaders, Woody Schantzenbach, Attorney Bob Young, Rep. Bill Shoemaker, John Franks, Margaret Singmaster, Ann Long and Olive Williams. Initially, the Association issued bonds to pay for the pool but soon realized that a good fundraiser was needed to pay off the bonds.

### III. Das Awkscht Fescht – Phases I and II

Rep. Bill Shoemaker asked George L. Wendling, an automobile restorer, and LeRoy C. Schaeffer, a manufacturer of aluminum shades, to create and operate an antique car show to pay off the swimming pool bonds. They became the Automobile Co-Chairs with Atty. Bob Young as the General Chair of the first Fescht held August 8, 1964. 500 antique and sports cars assembled in the Park and were judged following rules of the AACA. Nearly 10,000 people attended that Fescht and enjoyed a hood ornament display in Memorial Hall. George Wendling held a class in car restoration on Friday. Allen Organ provided a wooden bowl as the first prize that was awarded to David Bausch for his 1926 Franklin. The Fescht turned a profit in 1964 and every year since then.

On February 5, 1965, the AACA chartered the Ontelaunee Region. Its first members included those “car people” who judged at the first Fescht. For the second Fescht, the first-year winner, David Bausch, became the Car Chair and Atty. Bob Young continued as the General Chair. Their vision for the second year became the model for the future: a square dance was held on Friday, August 6, 1965; quarter horses, car judging and a fashion show were held on Saturday August 7, 1965; and there was a road tour to the Trexler Game Preserve and western horse shows were held on Sunday, August 8, 1965. Each day people enjoyed music, crafts, the swimming pool and children’s rides. Ontelaunee organized the antique car show and the Association organized the other activities. Volunteers helped both organizations.

I consider Phase I of the Fescht to have been held from 1964 to 1972. Phase I followed the structure of 1964 and 1965, but grew with new features. Parachutist Robert Trauger dropped from a hot air balloon operated by Sherwood Cole to open the Fescht beginning in 1965. In 1966, David Bausch organized an antique toy show in Memorial Hall and motorcycles were first displayed. Sundays were the province of car clubs. In 1966, the Classic Car Club of America organized a display and conducted a road tour to the Rose Gardens in Allentown. Each year the program cover art was based on German fraktur and the dash plaque issued to each owner presented a Pennsylvania Dutch image such as distelfinks (stylized yellow finches). In 1971, the Macungie Fire Company conducted beer sales in a “biergarten.” Ontelaunee continued to judge the cars, the number of which grew to 750 in 1971. By 1972, nearly 40,000 people attended the Fescht. Classes ran from A-EE, not following the AACA classifications.

Phase II of the Fescht ran from 1973 to 1980. During this period, the Fescht followed the Phase I format but nearly outgrew the Park. Awards transitioned from wood to pewter. A “Queen” was named each year, reflecting the wholesome and attractive nature of local teens. Fireworks continued each Saturday night after the live music. But by 1979, about 45,000 people attended the Fescht and the antique toy show moved off-site to Eyer Middle school. Vendors at “Toy Town” continued to sell at the Park. In 1980, Ontelaunee judged 1,000 antique motor vehicles; 600 flea market vendors occupied paved and grass areas; and Kinderfest (children’s festival) replaced the horse shows because the area that held the oval track had to be used to display motor vehicles. The Kinderfest expanded youth crafts and activities

with a petting zoo and pony rides. On Sunday, August 3, 1980, we displayed 800 special interest and 200 sports cars.

#### IV. Das Awkscht Fescht – Phase III

Phase III of the Fescht occurred between 1981 and 1990. During this period, the Park grew from 22 to 42 acres through acquisitions of adjoining parcels by the Association. The car corral moved to a remote location. Ontelaunee caused cars to be displayed all three days of the Fescht. Daily music, crafts and food continued, but Ontelaunee stopped judging cars. Frankly, Ontelaunee could not supply enough judges, even with AACA members outside the Region, to adequately point judge the cars displayed. Thus the Fescht became more casual for owners of motor vehicles.

Phase III is also remarkable for two principal changes, not just internal growth in cars, flea market vendors and food concessions. On Main Street, the Mack Truck Museum opened in a former municipal garage and provided alternate entertainment. Mack Trucks was headquartered in the Lehigh Valley from 1905 to 2009. The Museum opened in 1982 and stayed on Main Street until 1995. Second, sales of beer were discontinued in 1986 following a dram shop lawsuit against the Macungie Volunteer Fire Company. Since then, beer sales have returned to the Fescht.

#### V. Das Awkscht Fescht – Phases IV and V

A “featured marque” characterizes Phase IV of the Fescht. Ontelaunee works with Car Clubs and other entities to rent, erect and staff a large white tent and to locate owners who display a representative of that single brand of automobile. Featured cars are located under and adjacent to the tent. We began in 1991 with “Fifty Years of Jeep” and ended the period in 2013 with Buick. Each year featured an American-made automobile. Some years we displayed cars from independent manufacturers, such as Hudson in 2005 and Crosley in 2012. Other years we featured cars from the “Big Three” which are no longer produced, such as DeSoto in 2008 and Oakland in 2009. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fescht occurred in 2013 when we displayed 50 cars manufactured from 1939 to 1988 together with a special circle of vehicles that appeared at the first Fescht in 1964. Phase IV also included “postcards from Macungie.” Each year we produced a postcard with a different marque that could be mailed from a temporary post office located next to the show field.

Phase V ran from 2014 to 2019 and in 2021. Phase V is known by the new classifications of vehicles displayed in different areas in the Park. Six classes included: (1) Pre-War: 1900 -1945, (2) Post-War: 1946-1960, (3) 1961-1975, (4) 1976 to at least 25 years old, (5) Commercial vehicles, and (6) motorcycles. We also displayed non-classified tractors, reminiscent of Agricultural Field Days. In 2017, we added a seventh class, Sports Cars, and 2019, an eighth class called “Future Classics.” The Association added a barbeque competition called “Pit in the Park,” in 2017 and 2018, following a national program recognized by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. In 2019, the Association acquired an additional 1.5 acres. “Toy Town” relocated to this land in 2019. Antique “stock cars” from the Dorney Park racetrack were shown on Sunday in 2019 and 2021. My favorite featured marques in Phase V were the Chrysler Letter Series in 2015, Packard in 2018 and Cadillac/LaSalle in 2021.

## VI. Das Awkscht Fescht – Phase VI

In 2022 we ran a new Fescht in which the featured car was not a single marque. Instead, we showed foreign cars, particularly sports cars, manufactured in England. This was a return to the glorious past. Ontelaunee member, Atty. Arnold Rapoport, assembled sports cars for the Feschts in Phase I. His son, Jed Rapoport, worked with Ontelaunee in 2022 to assemble British sports cars. Jed asked that we include electronic registration. The Fescht frequently includes sports cars on Sundays represented by Clubs. We made a new class for sports cars in 2017. By increasing our ability to adapt, we displayed interesting motor vehicles.

In 2023, we plan to feature the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chevrolet Corvette. Ontelaunee began this 60<sup>th</sup> year of the Fescht with online and mail-in registration for motor vehicles to address the preferences of different generations of owners. In addition, we plan to include in the theme car display automobiles younger than the 25-year cut-off for antiques. That we allow us display all 8 generations of the Corvette, not just those manufactured up to 1998, including the 8<sup>th</sup> generation mid-engine model manufactured beginning 2020, including the 2023 Corvette Z06 model. The Corvette is named for the small, light and fast escort ships in the French Navy that appeared in the 1670s. We believe you will enjoy our new approach to the theme car this year.

## VII. The Big Picture

The Fescht always represented family fun and antique motor vehicles but it also has evolved. What is an antique? According to The Official Judging Guidelines, AACA (Revised 2021), at page 1-1, “AACA accepts motorized vehicles 25 years or older, which were built in factories and specifically designed and manufactured for transportation use on public roadways and highways.” “25 years or older” means something different each year. Reviewing pictures from the Antique Automobile Derby is instructive. The predominant car displayed was the Ford Model T. Today, we rarely see a Model T at the Fescht. This evolution reflects the aging demographics of car collectors who display their vehicles. We are more likely to see Ford Model As and further, demographics tell us that owners now favor Muscle Cars from the 1960s and 1970s. I will never forget first seeing an antique Chrysler product known as the “K Car” drive onto the show field. They represent over 2 million K-Platform cars produced by the Chrysler Corporation from 1981 to 1988. But they are modern production cars, not vintage classics.

The Classic Car Club of America (“CCCA”) defines a “vintage classic” as designated cars manufactured from 1915 to 1948, including most made by Packard, Cadillac, Lincoln, Peerless and Rolls-Royce. Those cars always show at the Fescht but they are outnumbered by production cars. I routinely judge classic cars so designated by the CCCA at AACA events under Class 19. The Fescht does not try to emulate a CCCA event and its show field is much broader than AACA class 19. Why? Because the Fescht is a “collectible” motor vehicle show for a broader age demographic than those attracted only to vintage classics. The success of future antique car shows depends on attracting younger people. We remain flexible by displaying motor vehicles in which younger people have interest and that they can afford. We call these vehicles “collectible.”

The other part of the “big picture” is the effect of the Internet on sales of automobilia. Parts vendors formerly attended the Fescht for fellowship and because there existed no online sales. It has never been convenient to load, unload and reload trucks with auto parts and related goods. Current vendors use the Internet. The Fescht cannot expect the same number of vendors now as we had during Phases II, III and IV. The world is changing and the Fescht reflects those changes. Ultimately, the Fescht reflects family fun. The Fescht’s vibrancy comes from generous volunteers, our love of collectible motor vehicles, and the 42-acre field where we can have fun for people of all ages.

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