



WBCCI HISTORY

John Irwin
9632

Wally's Early Caravans

Much of what we recognize as WBCCI today came from the experiences on Wally Byam's early caravans.

These caravans were a learning experience for Wally as well as the caravanners.

The caravans were advertised and any make of trailer was welcome.

Wally produced decals and metal plaques to be attached to identify the trailers.



Central America, 1950-1951

Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua

It was a total disaster!

Wally expected 50 trailers to show up, but they kept coming. 63 showed up.

Every make of trailer, even including a short Spartan.

Every caravanner was given a blue beret by Wally.

Trailers were numbered and owner's name on outside.

The roads were poor to nonexistent.

One third of the caravanners "bailed out" at Mexico City and returned north.

Only 14 of the 63 trailers finished. Many trailers ended up as homes for the natives.

There were flat tires, broken springs, broken frames, failed and overheated tow vehicles.

Two generators for lights. This required a lot of running wires. Many rigs insisted on running electric refrigerators in violation of Wally's rules. This burned out wires and both generators failed early in the trip.

The Blue Beret

The blue beret predates WBCCI.

It is warm

It protects the head from bumps on low trailer doors

It can be rolled up and put in a pocket

It is easy to spot caravan members in a crowd

Wally bought them by the dozen and gave one to each early caravanner.



Life Magazine covered the caravan



Second Mexico Caravan

November 1952

32 Trailers

The Bull horn appears

- **The bullhorn improved communication at driver's meetings, but Wally was sometimes too blunt and often ruffled feelings.**

The "kitty fund" appears

- **Expenditures such as wood for the campfire were difficult to share evenly. Wally began collecting a "kitty fund" prior to departure to cover such costs.**

The "caboose" appears

- **A specific rig would depart last, follow the caravan, stop and remain with any breakdowns.**

The Jackrabbits

A loose-knit group of friends who had been on one or more of Wally's early caravans.

Reading between the lines ... this appears to have been the "in group" with Wally.

Jackrabbit was a slang term for anyone who passed the leader of the caravan, either intentionally or accidentally.

Wally had a metal plaque made up with the image of a jackrabbit which they proudly displayed on their trailers.



They asked Wally permission to form an Airstream club. He gave his blessing.

The Jackrabbits were the nucleus of WBCC. Notice that the "I" was added at a later time.

Western Canada Caravan

Summer, 1954

First issue of "The Caravanner", May, 1954

100 rigs

The "Gopher Hole" is invented by a caravanner who parked over an actual animal burrow.

from Wally's book "Trailer Travel Here and Abroad ...

The toilet situation was another sixty-four dollar problem. We had planned to set up army-type latrines, but when we tried them at Chihuahua it was obvious that they wouldn't do — the ladies, especially, objected. So we dug a garbage pit at the end of each campsite and relied on old-fashioned chamber pots or chemical toilets, which could be emptied into the pit. We hired local labor to dig the pit and to fill it in when we left. This was hardly an ideal arrangement, but it was the only solution we could think of. This, too, was distasteful to some sensitive souls.

The advantage of having individual pits for each trailer was obvious. Soon, caravanners were carrying a spade to dig their own gopher hole.

The image below is the directions for digging gopher holes that WBCCI provided.

AIRSTREAM WALLY BYAM CARAVANS
INSTRUCTIONS & DIAGRAM FOR GOPHER HOLE

The gopher hole should be dug as close to the trailer and holding tank outlet as possible. You should always carry a good sturdy shovel and a metal cover, such as a garbage can cover or a sheet of either heavy aluminum or steel, about 24" square. The following procedure is recommended:

FIGURE 1: Use shovel to cut a plug of turf about 14" in diameter. Lift the plug out in one piece. Place on newspaper under trailer where it will not be exposed to sunlight.



FIGURE 2: Dig hole 12" to 14" in diameter and 30" deep. Cut away at one edge a small trench -- 3" deep and 12" long. This permits sewer hose to enter at ground level under gopher hole cover.

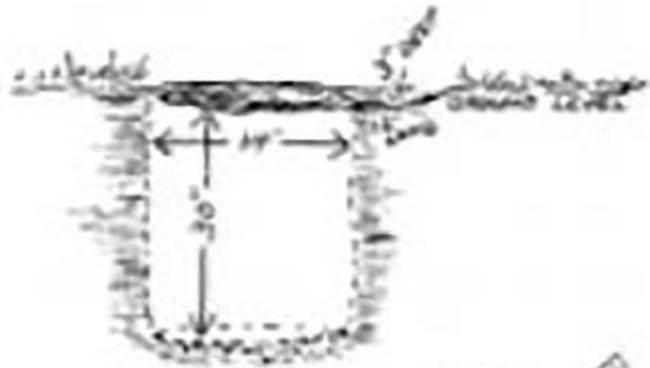


FIGURE 3: Sewer hose should fall to a depth of about 8" in the hole. Place metal cover over hole and shovel dirt over entire installation until no part of the metal cover is exposed.



Eastern Canada

Summer, 1955

100 trailers

Wally and Stella left the caravan in Montreal. Helen Byam Schwamborn, (Wally's cousin), led the remainder

The birth of Wally Byam Caravan Club (WBCC), 39 families

Advisory board - Hamp Millender, Oscar Selent, Fred Beltner, Mark Smith, Pop Riley, John McNamara

Of the above, Pop Riley was chosen as the first President of WBCC. Pop Riley was a retired railroad engineer from Arizona.

In Wally's book "Trailer Travel Here and Abroad", the caravan is discussed at length, but the formation of the club was not mentioned.

Pop Riley



Wally, Stella, and Helen



JULY 4TH 1955 EASTERN CANADA

Marker at Birthplace of WBCC



The first meeting of the Wally Byam Caravan Club was held on this estate in the summer of 1955.

Members of the Airstream Company's 1955 "Eastern Canada Caravan" decided they would form a recreational vehicle club to continue the caravanning they so much enjoyed. During their trip they formed a committee and by the time they reached Halifax had a new constitution and bylaws drafted. It was during their visit to Kentville that the new club held its first official meeting. They elected officers and adopted the new constitution and by laws on August 3, 1955. Dues were established at \$1.00 per year. The Wally Byam Caravan Club's first President was F.E. (Pop) Riley.

A description of the camp ground where the first meeting was held is described in the book "Trailer Travel Here and Abroad" (1960) written by Wally Byam, the founder of the Airstream Company and designer of the Airstream trailer. "The three days at Kentville were spent on the estate of Mr. Robert Palmetier. 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."

The Eastern Canada Caravan with 100 trailers began at Sault Saint Marie, Michigan and visited many Canadian cities and towns, including the major cities of Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec City, Halifax, Charlottetown and Saint John. The caravan ended in Bangor, Maine. Wally Byam had to leave the caravan at Montreal and his cousin, Helen Byam Schwamborn, completed the caravan as its leader.



This historic marker dedicated on August 17, 2005
Wally Byam Caravan Club International, Inc.
Airstream, Inc.
Jackson Center, Ohio USA

Text of the marker

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Wally Byam Caravan Club International, Inc.

Airstream, Inc. Jackson, Center, Ohio USA



Caravans of Note

Caravan #8 toured Europe in 1956; featured in the June, 1957 National Geographic magazine.

Caravan #20 made history when the fleet of Airstreams traveled 9,000 miles in 1959 to traverse the length of Africa from Capetown to Cairo.

Caravan #35 took a full year to go around the world in 1963.

First International Rally

July 4, 1958

Wally Byam's 62nd birthday.

Bull Shoals, Alabama

Newspapers called it "Byamville"

Wally's Death

Wally Byam died on July 22, 1962 at the age of 66.

Cause of death was a brain tumor.

Interred at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, CA in the Garden of Honor, Columbarium of Honor.

The Early Club

Wally chose the location for the Club and Caravan Headquarters. Helen's home was in Bakersfield; there was no reason to have the office at either of the factory locations.

Helen started the office with a typewriter, a notebook, and a 3 x5 file box with lined cards.

The "Headquarters," was first at 2204 Lindora, then 822 Niles, Helen's homes. HQ then moved to the Airstream plant in Cerritos, and finally Jackson Center.



First Office



Second Office

Helen's contributions to WBCCI

Organized all of the early Caravans, including those to Mexico, Central America, the 1956 European Caravan, the 1959 African Caravan and the 1963 Around the World Caravan.

A founding member of the WBCC.

Led caravans, was the first editor of the Blue Beret, created the first club directory, the first club history, first song book.

Wrote and edited "The Caravanner" newsletter

Sat on the Airstream board of directors.

Led the Wally Byam Foundation.

Helen Byam Schwamborn in her Airstream



Images of Helen Byam Schwamborn



Helen Byam Schwamborn

Helen speaking to Airstream dealers



WBCCI was a sales tool for the Airstream Company and Helen was the ambassador.

The Club Inside Airstream

The Club was incorporated in the late 50's or early 60's. Wally wanted the two entities separate, yet linked...Airstream and the Club. The seal is shown below.

Helen Byam Schwamborn managed the club until her retirement

Airstream bought by Beatrice Foods in July, 1967

Financial disaster came in 1977 - 1978



The WBCCI “Divorce”

1977

Airstream very near “belly up!”

Bad economy and poor product. Tail droop caused by addition of gray water tank without beefing up frame.

Closed Cerritos plant

Ended annual “Homecoming” rally

Split off WBCCI. Sold the club to the club for \$1.

1979

Discontinued Argosy

Closed Sidney office and Versailles plant

Beatrice wanted out of the Airstream business, pronto!

Airstream “Given” to Thor

- **1980**
 - Thor acquired Airstream
 - No money down, Beatrice loaned Thor the money
 - Thor Reinstated the Homecoming Rally
 - The club became self-supporting. Salaries and offsite offices were required and dues increased correspondingly.

Membership

- Peaked at about 24,000 in 1974
- Dues increased and a large number of members dropped out
- Membership dropped to 16,000 by 1979
- Membership is currently about 6,250
- International rally attendance listed on the following pages shows that most active members were retained.

WBCCI International Rallies

- **1958 1. Bull Shoals, AR (300)**
- **1959 2. Wisconsin Dells, WI (515)**
- **1960 3. Colorado Springs, CO (868)**
- **1961 4. Hershey, PA (960)**
- **1962 5. Auburn, WA (1717) – the first 1000 rig International rally**
- **1963 6. Bemidji, MN (1882)**
- **1964 7. Princeton, NJ (1969)**
- **1965 8. Laramie, WY (2592)**
- **1966 9. Cadillac, MI (2828)**
- **1967 10. Santa Rosa, CA (2156)**
- **1968 11. Grand Island, NE (2211)**
- **1969 12. Laramie, WY (2175)**
- **1970 13. Hershey, PA (3402)**
- **1971 14. Salem, OR (2869)**
- **1972 15. Louisville, KY (3652)**
- **1973 16. Bozeman, MT (3909)**
- **1974 17. Notre Dame, IN (3943)**
- **1975 18. Brandon, Man., CAN (4209)**
- **1976 19. Louisville, KY (4493) - the largest international rally**

Auburn, Washington, 1962

1717 rigs



- 1977 20. Bozeman, MT (3949)
- 1978 21. Ames, IA (3993)
- 1979 22. Las Cruces, NM (2138)
- 1980 23. Notre Dame, IN (3346)
- 1981 24. Ames, IA (2020)

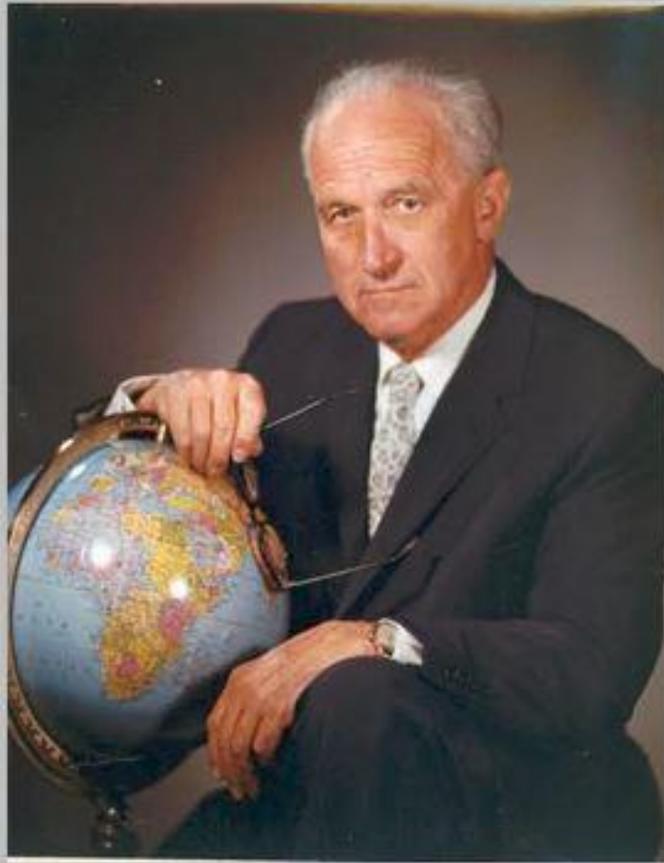
- 1982 25. Bozeman, MT (3423)
 - 1983 26. Duluth, MN (3753) *
 - 1984 27. Notre Dame, IN (3396)
 - 1985 28. Lake Placid, NY (3965)
 - 1986 29. Boise, ID (3644) *
 - 1987 30. Rapid City, SD (2813)
 - 1988 31. Huntsville, AL (2741)
 - 1989 32. Bozeman, MT (3461)
 - 1990 33. Notre Dame, IN (3350)
 - 1991 34. Duluth, MN (2481)
 - 1992 35. Dayton, OH (2721)
 - 1993 36. Bismarck, ND (2531)
 - 1994 37. Brandon, Manitoba, Canada (2263)
 - 1995 38. Amherst, MA (2594)
 - 1996 39. Rapid City, SD (2150)
 - 1997 40. Huntsville, AL (1509)
 - 1998 41. Boise, ID (1902)
 - 1999 42. Dayton, OH (1989)
 - 2000 43. Bismarck, ND (1310)
 - 2001 44. Sioux Falls, SD (1143)
 - 2002 45. Rapid City, SD (936) - first modern rally under 1000
 - 2003 46. Burlington, VT (1669)
 - 2004 47. Lansing, MI (1197)
 - 2005 48. Springfield, MO (1154)
 - 2006 49. Salem, OR (1049)
 - 2007 50. Perry, GA (1017) - Last rally over 1000
 - 2008 51. Bozeman, MT (871)
 - 2009 52. Madison, WI (903)
 - 2010 53. Gillette, WY (709)
 - 2011 54. Du Quoin, IL (539)
 - 2012 55. Sedalia, MO (459)
 - 2013 56. Huron, SD (386)
 - 2014 57. Gillette, WY (346)
 - 2015 58. Farmington, NM (427)
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Region 9 History

- **June 27, 1966; one of 12 regions**
- **Oklahoma, Texas**
- **W. O. Wylie, first President, served 1 year**
- **February, 1975, first Region 9 Rally in San Benito/Harlingen.**
- **Peaked at 17 units in 1975 (THLU)**
- **1981, Mountain time area of Texas moved to Region 11**
- **Currently 10 units.**
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Credits

- **Dale “Peewee” Schwamborn and the Estate of Helen Byam Schwamborn, who was in charge of Airstream Caravans, and Manager for the WBCCI**
- **SierraNevadaAirstreams.org website**
- **Book- “Wanderlust”**
- **Book- “Airstream”**
- **Book- “Trailer Travel Here and Abroad” (Wally Byam)**



"I am a man of extremes -- either I will be a big boss, a rousing success, or a blank failure. In my heart I know I'll be a great big glorious success, and that my name will go down in history.

Wally Byam 1916