

An 'unloved' Studebaker part finds its way to former Osmond car

(By Darrell Kahler)

Last Saturday, Sept. 22, I was looking at what was left behind in my dad's shop after the auction a week prior. I wanted to take another walk through the now empty space, to see what was left and to reflect on what once filled the rooms. Now that the clutter is gone, the space left behind speaks of the history and activity that once filled the air.

While wandering around in what was the parts room, I saw a tag sticking upon the top of an empty shelf. I reached up and grabbed the tag to see what was on the other end. The tag was connected to a new old stock (NOS to car buffs), a door latch. It was covered in dirt, like it hadn't been touched for at least 50 years.

I decided to take it home, along with a couple of other mementos that I had decided to keep from the sale. Upon arriving home, I looked up the part number on the tag to find it fits the left rear door of a 1951

Studebaker Commander.

This is one of the famous "bullet nose" sedans that old-timers can recognize a mile away. There was only one '51 Commander in Osmond that I could recall. It belonged to my Grandpa Wally's older sister, Clara, and her husband, Johnny Bahr.

Surprisingly, the car is still on the road. I know the car because I have

hands with several people with family and Osmond ties. It is part of a very loved collection that sees the road occasionally and shows up in car shows on the East Coast. Bob has made numerous repairs to the car; it's in great condition.

I speculate that my grandpa, Wally Kahler, temporarily fixed a broken latch on the car door and

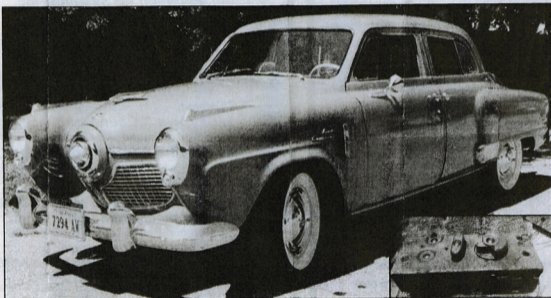
Days, weeks, months passed. The repaired latch was still performing and thus no sense of urgency was made. Ultimately, the car was retired to the barn and the new latch was never installed.

Playing on this hunch, I reached out to Bob, the keeper of the Commander, via e-mail. I had his e-mail address in my contacts from previous exchanges regarding the family history of the car. Sure enough, the left rear door latch had broken a few years ago and doing what car guys do, he went to work and found a used latch from a donor car and installed it.

I asked him if he was interested in having the "right" part for the car. Enthusiastically, Bob replied within an hour of me sending the e-mail. I sent him a photo of the latch to insure it was a match, I had little doubt. I will mail the part to Bob on Monday, no charge. The latch may finally get to work after 50-

odd years of patiently waiting on the shelf. I trust Bob will not hesitate in getting it installed.

Final note: according to Bob, the car took a first-place trophy at his local car show on Sunday.



This 1951 Studebaker Commander, now owned by a car collector in Norfolk, Virginia, was once owned by John Bahr of Osmond; inset: part found on shelf in Wally's Shop

followed its history and have written about it several times during the past few years. Today, the Studebaker is at home in Norfolk. Not Norfolk, Nebraska, but Norfolk, Virginia. A collector named Bob owns the car; he acquired it after it exchanged

ordered a replacement to be installed when the next opportunity came up. I can imagine a phone call or two he made to Johnny and then Clara, letting them know that the new latch was in and he would install it if they brought the car in.