

Biography of Ray Toler

Ray Toler was born in 1922 to Dr. R. W. and Mary Lyde Toler in Searcy, Arkansas. In recent years, he has shown his devotion to his hometown by contributing his memories of his youth in numerous articles in the White County Historical Society Quarterly. Anyone fortunate enough to read these articles will learn of a young, 1930s era boy as he occupied his time making and flying kite and model gliders, making and using tin can telephones, and experimenting with dry cell batteries, vacuum tubes, and Hot Shot six-volt ignition batteries. Ray's first bicycle gave him economic opportunity in the Great Depression years. He soon used it to earn money delivering groceries, messages for Western Union, and newspapers.

His stories of the places and people of that time afford the reader the opportunity to step back into an earlier era. The Sterling Store, Smith-Vaughan Mercantile, and Robins-Sanford Mercantile were establishments full of the items we like to collect today. He observed first-hand the wood-fired, steam engine at a dimension mill in a nearby town; his school's coal-fired boilers for steam heat; and the Carter flooring mill's huge Corliss steam engine. Most of us have seen such engines in operation, but he saw them being used for their intended purposes.

Besides the bicycle other vehicles he owned were a Harley Davidson motorcycle he bought in pieces and, in 1941, a 1932 Chevrolet Victoria Coupe. The Harley was complete with a sidecar, but the engine was in pieces in four boxes. After he assembled it, he made several eventful trips on the bike. The automobile also required attention. He apparently learned lots about mechanics from these two possessions.

Ray graduated from Searcy High School in 1940 and entered the University of Arkansas that fall. After completing his junior year in 1943, he was inducted into the U. S. Army during World War II. He received indoctrination at Camp Joseph T. Robinson at North Little Rock, Arkansas, and was then sent to Camp Crowder, Missouri, for Signal Corps training. After assignment in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, he was sent back to Fayetteville, Arkansas. There he married Juanita Edwards. He received an appointment to the Signal Corps Officer Candidate School at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. After his training, he was sent to Manila in the Philippines. Ray spent 20 months in the Philippines until the conclusion of the war. He was awarded the Bronze Star for his service.

Upon returning home, he attended one semester at the University of Arkansas and completed his degree in electrical engineering. He then began a forty-year career with Arkansas Power and Light. Upon his retirement, he and Juanita moved to Springdale, Arkansas, where they currently reside.

Ray began collecting antique engines when he was given a 3 HP Fairbanks/Morris farm engine in 1984. It had lain in a cotton field for 20 years. He restored it to running condition. He joined Tired Iron of the Ozarks in 1992, the inaugural year for the club.

After years of collecting antique items, Ray showed his generosity by three major donations to Tired Iron. He donated five hit & miss engines to be auctioned or sold, a fine collection of antique tools for auction, and blacksmith shop items for inclusion in our future blacksmith shop. Ray continues to attend all our meetings along with Juanita if her health permits. NOTE: Juanita is now deceased.

