

John H. Waudby

Tired Iron of the Ozarks charter member John Henry Waudby began life on September 26, 1946, in Nebraska at the town of Superior. His parents, Henry Waudby and Opal Ball Waudby, actually lived on a farm across the state line in Weber, Kansas, but the closest medical care was in Superior and thus John was very briefly a Cornhusker. Both of John's parents came from large Kansas farm families. John was the youngest of three children, one boy and two girls, both girls a good bit older than John. Joann, the oldest of the three, is now deceased. His other sister Jean currently lives in Grand Saline, Texas.

John's identity as a Kansas Jayhawker was also brief. In 1948, when he was two years old, the family moved to Colorado Springs, Colorado. His dad was born into a farm family and had maintained his own farm and hired out to help neighbor farmers. However, in Colorado he would work for a number of years in custodial capacities at area schools, but mainly in the Colorado Springs school system proper. Mr. Waudby never gave up his love for farming. He had relatives in Northwest Arkansas and, while visiting them, began looking for farm property in the area. In the fall of 1957, Mr. Waudby purchased a sixty acre farm near Hiwasse, Arkansas, and at the age of eleven, John would begin learning what farming was all about and would eventually come to know that he did not want to spend his life as a farmer.

In Arkansas, John's dad not only pursued general farming with row-crops but soon branched out into dairy farming. To his dad's credit he soon had a first-class dairy with the biggest herd of Guernsey cows in Benton County. Another direction for the farm came when chicken production began. The Waudbys had four houses of their own and also managed three houses belonging to neighbors. A "crop" included as many as 160,000 chickens at a time. As a dutiful son, John was immersed in all the farming activities. By the early 1960s John's dad suffered from ill health and, during John's junior and senior years of high school he essentially took over full management of the farm...a heavy load for a youth interested in almost everything but farming. He said his high school years were just a blur. John had attended elementary school in Hiwasse, but with no high school available, he attended Gravette High School and graduated in 1964.

John's parents hoped that he would take over the farm as his own, but his interest did not lie in such an occupation. His first outside job was in Rogers, Arkansas, at Wendt-Sonis, a leading company manufacturing carbide tip cutting tools for industry. The tools were cut from carbide, heated, and machined in the factory. He liked the work but did not like the night shift he was assigned, and after being passed over for a shift change, he left for other opportunities. In the meantime, when his parents realized he truly did not want to pursue a farming career, they sold the farm and moved to Bentonville.

In 1966, John's next work was as an apprentice electrician with Williams Electric, a local company helping develop the Bella Vista community just north of Bentonville. Now a fully developed community with thousands of homes, at the time the main area of the town contained only nine houses. By 1967, John began work with Cooper Communities, the main developer of Bella Vista, but this would last only until October 1968 for reasons we will address below.

More importantly than the work history of the 60s is the fact that on September 30, 1966, John married Rogers native Jo Easley. The newly weds will celebrate their forty-eighth anniversary this year. A present sad circumstance of their lives is that Jennifer, their only child, is in advanced stages of Multiple Sclerosis. She has fought the illness for years but is now in a care facility in Bentonville. A happier part of this is that her three sons are supportive of her, as are John and Jo. These grandsons of John and Jo are Duncan age nine, Connor age 13, and Austin age 18. They visit at least every other

weekend.

The reason John cut short his employment at Cooper Communities in 1968 was that Uncle Sam called. He entered the U. S. army that year and went directly into basic training for six weeks. He went back into training in AIT (Advanced Infantry Training) with the Green Berets for nine weeks. After completing training, he came home on leave. He expected to be sent to Vietnam but was surprised when he was sent to Germany where he was assigned to the 709th Military Police Battalion. He was in the 709th for only two weeks before being assigned to the 510th MP/CID (Criminal Intelligence Division) where he would stay for the duration of his tour. The positive side of being assigned to Germany was that his wife was able to join him there for a year and a half. Not much else about his deployment as a criminal investigator could be considered good.

In his work he dealt with all levels of criminal activity all over Europe, but strangely enough, as a Vietnam War era veteran, he never set foot in that country. He did fly over on many occasions. His usual cases involved AWOL soldiers, drug enforcement, theft investigations of military property, etc. His work was often undercover, which necessitated disguises. With top secret security clearance he had unlimited authority for any possibility, including that he could arrest officers. Some officers insisted he did not have the power to do so, but he could and did arrest anyone in violation. John did not like this type work, and he actively sought to be reassigned to an engineer group, but his requests were repeatedly denied. His work was highly respected as can be recognized because of his certificates of appreciation from his battalion commanding officers and from none other than General William Westmoreland, the commander of the Vietnam War. John's tour in the military ended when he was honorably discharged in 1971.

The army attempted to help returning service men during this period by providing deprogramming at Fort Dix, New Jersey. John went through these sessions. He said they worked for about thirty minutes and then the negative thoughts of all he had seen and done would return. For some time after his service, he was reminded again and again of his experiences when he would be approached by city, county, state, and federal (FBI) authorities attempting to persuade him to return to police work. He refused, sometimes in no uncertain terms. Only in recent years has he become reasonably comfortable with his experiences in the military.

About two months after returning home, he began working as an electrical contractor and would continue this for about two years. He next took the Civil Service test and became a letter carrier in Bentonville for nine years. In the late 1970s, he earned his Arkansas Master Electrician license and went back to electrical contracting, this time as the self-employed owner of John's Electric. He did extensive electrical work all over the region with his company, but even this soon changed when he, while on a service call to the Rogers United Methodist Church, saw the need to repair a misaligned entrance door that slammed shut each time it was used. An official of the church was impressed with what he had done and soon he was offered a part-time job in maintaining the huge church. The job soon became full time. After he worked about twelve years at the church, a new pastor led in the building of a new church out of downtown Rogers. Some members stayed at the old church, but John in this changed work environment soon left this employment. He went back into electrical contracting in the 2000s. He was soon employed in maintenance and supply at the Bentonville ARVEST Bank.

In April 2012 he retired. At the same time, his wife Jo retired. She had an extensive work career with employment at Emerson's Electric, Roy's Office Supply, and ARVEST Bank. They are greatly enjoying their well-earned retirement.

John's journey to become a serious collector and restorer of antique engines began with one running, but rusty engine. In 1972, he started building a home on Bright Road west of Bentonville. The assisting builder was Gaylen Smith, who incidentally was at one time a member of Tired Iron and

a collector of many rare antique tractors. Gaylen persuaded John to attend a tractor and engine show at Republic, Missouri. For \$75 he bought that engine and began more than two decades of intense buying, selling, restoring, and collecting antique engines. He had about twenty of his own engines, but he meticulously restored for other people. From the early 70s until the mid-90s he restored over 300 Maytags and over 200 other types of engines, mainly hit and miss varieties. He restored a late 1890s or early 1900s Otto engine with about an eight-foot flywheel for a gentleman who soon sold the engine. The new owner placed in his will that the engine should be donated to the prestigious Owls Head Museum in Owls Head, Maine. Others of John's restored engines are the jewels in the collections of engine aficionados all over the country.

The other great interest for John is his Cushman collection. This interest began in 1958 when his sister received an accordion as a gift and when he was asked what he wanted, he asked for a motorcycle. Their preacher's son owned a Cushman three-wheel package car with stake sides on a carrier in the front of the cycle, and this became his first Cushman. Unfortunately, in the early 70s, he sold it, but this would not bury his interest in the precision machines. Today, John owns six Cushmans of various types. They include a 1957 Eagle with an upgraded engine, a 1946 Cokester advertising Coca Cola, a 1973 Cushman Truckster with beautiful wooden sideboards, a Tryke completely built by John from the frame up, a 1957 Conoco Truckster, and a recently purchased former Dallas police 1995 three-wheel unit with an automatic transmission. John belongs to and is active in the national Cushman Club of America and the regional Arkansas Vintage Scooter Club. The Scooter Club makes yearly rides on back roads in NW Arkansas.

By about 1997, John was more or less burned out on engine collecting and restoration. By 1998 he had sold his entire collection, mainly to get more involved in Cushmans as noted above. Fortunately, for all of us in the Tired Iron club and our visitors who admire these old engines, John, in the last year or so, has returned to his love for them.

Club member Charles Rakes encouraged John to get involved again with Tired Iron by inviting him to club member Ike Lockridge's shop. They later also visited the shops of club members Al Walkenbach, Dale Crawford, and Rodney Friend. In recent months, several Tired Iron members and friends have gathered at John's shop to work on engines and to enjoy the museum-like exhibits displayed throughout. Along with the Cushman units mentioned above, John has eight full-sized engines, six Maytag engines, two models of hit and miss engines, and thirty-two old steam engine models. The displays also include almost every type collectable imaginable. It is truly a pleasure to meet with John and enjoy his shop.

Of the engines mentioned, several of them are ones he previously owned with others added, including some from our club members such as Rick and Ike Lockridge, and from his friend Gene Addington, who is a regular at the Tuesday/Thursday work sessions at various shops. The repurchased engines include two engines he had sold to Don Etris, a notable Tired Iron member who tragically passed away while very young. Tim, Don's son, called John and told him his mother was attempting to contact those who had sold Don his engines to see if they wanted to repurchase them. He did. In the negotiations for the two engines, Mrs. Etris said she would accept what Don had paid for them, but John insisted that they were much more valuable after all the work that had been put into them by Don. They negotiated a compromise and both parties were pleased.

Over the years, John has given back to the antique clubs. For years he has given support to clubs as far away as Pittsburg and Fort Scott, Kansas, and has even served on the board of EDGE&TA Branch 16 in Republic, Missouri. Along with these clubs in Missouri and Kansas, he has visited and/or participated at shows and clubs in Pennsylvania, Maine, Connecticut, Illinois, Ohio, and Washington. In respect to his zeal for all things collectable and for his skills with restoration he shares with all, and

for his friendship, we are looking forward to many more years of association with John Waudby in Tired Iron of the Ozarks.



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Maytag Engines, Steam Engine Models (in case to right side), and examples of the many items. Other engines in the collection can be viewed in "Featured Engines" at www.tiredironoftheozarks.org.