

## **Dobbin Makes a Comeback**

By Chris Sanders

What would you do if suddenly the government issued a “request” forbidding joy riding on Sunday—a request not heeded that would quickly become an order? I think you would be a little taken aback, but not be totally surprised, because the United States had entered WWI April of 1917. By fall of 1918 more than 2,000,000 Doughboys had landed in France. The purpose of this no-car-riding Sunday sacrifice, of course, was to save gasoline so it could be utilized at the front.

This “request” is exactly what happened per a Morning Press article dated Saturday, August 21, 1918, headlined, “Dobbin’s Day is Coming Back.” This intriguing article caught my eye while browsing through some old newspaper microfilm at Bloomsburg University, and it didn’t take me long to brush aside the project I was working on and quickly get sidetracked (so what’s new)!

I envisioned my grandmother who would have been 18 at the time and soon to be married, giving up her Sunday joy ride with her beau (my grandfather to be)!

The article goes on to say, “liverymen report an unprecedented demand for horses since the “request” was issued. Instead of stepping into the machine tomorrow to take a jaunt, Mr. Patriotic American will sit idly by on this front porch and watch the procession of horses and carriages and the pleasure seekers who are not so patriotic. There promises to be an unusual number of cars remaining in the garages tomorrow and an exceptionally large number of horses on the road.”

The county fuel administration then arranged to have men stationed along the roads in various parts of the country to catch the number of pleasure seekers who under the government’s request should stay home, but did not, these people being tagged “slackers”!

The next day, Sunday, September 3, 1918, the following article entitled “Gasless Sunday Like Olden Days—Dobbin Replaced Auto and Few Who Were Out Came in for Free Criticism.” It stated that “remarkable was the response Sunday to the appeal of the patriotism of the true American to refrain from using their automobile as pleasure vehicles.” Nine-tenths of Sunday driving was eliminated, added evidence of the determination of the people to back the soldiers in the trenches.”

“As proof from a count made at Lime Ridge of the number of cars on the road on Saturday between two and four o’clock in the afternoon, there were 116 pleasure cars, 22 trucks and 7 motorcycles (wow, I didn’t know motorcycles were that prevalent back then!). Between the same hours Sunday afternoon there were 21 pleasure cars and two trucks. Usually traffic is twice as heavy on Sunday as on other days.”

The article predicted that “the next Sunday coming up would have even LESS pleasure seekers on the road, stating that their ears should be burning from the remarks made about them from the ones that kept their cars in the garage.”

It was noted that the Sunday ban affected church goers, especially farmers who could not walk to church, with the result that many ministers preached to empty pews.

The next article in the Morning Press regarding the ban was on Saturday, September 14, 1918, giving an, “Explanation of Gasless Sunday,” from the Federal Fuel Administration. It stated that “it has been suggested a better method of conserving gas should be a system for rationing. The answer was that the time this would take to administer such a system to three or four million automobile users was so large and expensive that it should be not undertaken until the need is extremely great.”

A note of interest was that the request for no Sunday driving was “limited to east of the Mississippi because most of the country’s gasoline is obtained in the mid-continent fields while all oil and gasoline sent to the war zone is shipped from our Atlantic seaboard, and transportation is saved by conservation in the east.”

“People have asked whether they should use their cars for church going. The answer is, “where church can be reasonably reached in any other way, the automobile should not be used and that, after all, the conscience of each citizen will be the best guide.”

“It has been reported that many proprietors of hotels and restaurants and operators of soda fountains refused to serve pleasure-seeking customers who drove out in automobiles last Sunday. Taxi operators refused to take passengers and declined all hourly and pleasure trips.”

A sobering fact, I noticed just left of the article was a big headline stating, “Casualty List of Yesterday. Many Pennsylvania Boys and Columbia Countians included in the List of Casualties.” It went on to report, per the Commanding General of The American Expeditionary Forces the names, rank and homes of the individual soldiers. Killed in Action; Missing in Action; Wounded Severely; Died of Wounds; Died from Accident and Other Causes; Died of Diseases; Wounded Degree Undetermined. Oh my goodness, wouldn't this jog the consciences of someone who was bold enough to flagrantly disregard the request to omit their Sunday gallivanting?!

Well, it sounds as if patriotic Americans WERE sticking together to heed the “request” to give up their pleasure-seeking ways on Sunday—or was it more the wrath of their neighbors' scathing remarks if they DID NOT give it up?! This sacrifice worked however and added to the war effort because about two months later on November 11, 1918, the Germans signed an Armistice with the Allies ending WWI.

For me, giving up my Sunday “pleasure-seeking” would not be a problem. Even today I long for a slower pace of life and envy the Amish as their horse-and-buggies trot down the road. I roll my window down and follow leisurely behind so I can hear the clip-clop of the horses' hoofs! Gee, what's WRONG with me?!



Elijah Crossley Sr. and horse, early 1900s