

# **ABOUT MIDWEST COACHMEN (MWC)**

## The History of MWC, Inc.

By Kenneth Kerik, President MWC, April 10, 2015

The history of the Family Motor Coach Association, Midwest Coachmen, Michigan Knights of the Highway and the Northeastern chapters is inextricably intertwined. Organizational activities were paralleled during the early years, when meetings of “house car” owners were being called together to discuss forming an organization of fellow coach owners in Michigan, Maine and Indiana.

These “bus nuts” consisted of families who wanted to join together in some sort of club that centered on travel in those “house cars”.

In the meantime, activities were occurring in Michigan that saw a meeting of fellow coach owners holding a meeting at Corunna, Michigan on June 2, 1963. This is believed to be the first meeting of any coach owners in the U.S. It was held at McCurdy Park on a Sunday at 2:00PM. An Open House was held for members’ comparisons of cruisers. That was followed by a short business meeting and discussion. The purpose of the meeting was to explore an organization with the mission of exhibiting acts of courtesy on the highway and in camp and to establish a reputation of “Welcome Traveler” and to disseminate helpful information among fellow members. The next meeting was planned for July 28, 1963 at McCurdy Park.

The new organization was called the Courtesy Coach Club for licensed house car owners. A decal sticker for the lower right hand corner of the windshield was proposed. Dues were set at a donation of \$1.00 and would be sufficient to cover the expenses of a mailing list and initial expenses.

The Charter officers of the Courtesy Coach Club included:

Charles Benore, President; Lee Matthews, Vice-President; Dennis McGuire, Secretary-Treasurer; Ted Austin, Host and Membership; Genny Jennings, Sociability

Later, the Michigan Knights of the Highway was formed as a Chapter of the FMCA on April, 10, 1965.

The name was changed to the Michigan House Car Club and then to the Michigan Knights of the Highway, as it remains today.

During that same early time period, on July 20, 1963 a group of coach-owning families gathered on the grounds of Hinckley School in Hinckley, Maine.

They also discussed the need for an organization centered on travel by "House cars". Bob Richter was chosen to explore the feasibility of forming such an organization and on July 21, 1963, FMCA was chosen as the official name of the group. A committee was formed to draft a constitution and by December 15, 1963 the constitution had been written, circulated among the members and ratified. FMCA was born. Bob Richter became the first National President of this yearling organization. Charles Owens, from Ohio, was elected as a National Director along with Dennis McGuire from Michigan.

At about the same time, a group of fellow house car owners under the guidance of Charles Owens, was also meeting and considering forming an organization. That group represented owners from Indiana, Ohio, and Kentucky.

An organizational meeting was held on October, 19 and 20, 1963 at Whitewater State Park, near Liberty Indiana. Charles Owens F44 presided at that meeting. Twenty-three families in coaches and five other families attended. Charles Owens was selected to head the incorporation effort.

It was decided to form an organization and the Ohio-Indiana-Kentucky chapter of FMCA was born. The name "Midwest Coachmen" was selected later to represent the three-state membership. "Coachmen" was the reference to the majority of buses that were being used and the states represented, were located geographically in the Midwest.

At this meeting, the following temporary officers were elected: Charles Owens, President; Virgil Lovett, Vice-President; Don Marsh, Secretary-Treasurer. A regional constitution committee composed of Ken Scott, chair, Bolton Drackett and Stuart Jacobs was formed. Their job was to prepare a regional constitution for submittal to the membership for approval. It was determined that the group would become a chapter of FMCA and it would be expected that members of the chapter would also maintain membership in the national organization.

A study on insurance rates was also initiated, since it was discovered that insurance rates were variable. A \$2.00 donation was determined to cover the expenses of organization.

A constitution was prepared and circulated to the membership on January 23, 1964 to all members for a ballot approval. Chapter membership, at this time, was fifty-five. Plans for the next rally were made to be held on May 23 at a site to be selected.

On May 23 and 24, 1964, at the Logan County fairgrounds in Bellefontaine, Ohio, the second meeting of the group took place and the Midwest Coachmen constitution was ratified. A \$2.00 annual dues was established and the hat was passed to pay for organizational expenses. This was referred to as "Charlie's Fund". Forty-three coaches from Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan were in attendance.

Charles Owens was elected to be the first President of MWC; Bolton Drackett, Vice-President; and Jean Owens, Secretary-Treasurer. Bob Richter, FMCA's first President, attended the rally representing FMCA, as well as several coaches attending from the Michigan Knights of the Highway.

At this meeting, the necessary changes to the constitution were made, in order for the affiliation with FMCA to take place. At this time, membership had grown to seventy (70) members.

MWC hosted the second annual, national, FMCA rally which was held in June, 1965 in Greenville, Ohio at the Darke County fairgrounds. This was after the first Ft. Ticonderoga FMCA national rally in Ticonderoga, NY.

In the pre-historic years, due to financial constraints, MWC used fairgrounds primarily to hold rallies. There was little or no entertainment and members shared stories on bus conversions and actually installed such things as gas refrigerators, holding tanks and engine swapping, with the help of members. Coaches were primarily converted buses, although several custom coaches and manufactured motorhomes were being used.

Charles Owens, the first President of MWC, served for one year and also served on the first board of directors of FMCA as a National Director. Charles was elected President of FMCA in 1967. He was the third President of FMCA following Bob Richter and J. Howard Fritz, from Rhode, Island.

He was followed as President of MWC by Howard DuBois from Oxford, Ohio. Howard owned the Dubois Bookstore on the Miami University Campus in Oxford and also owned one bookstore in Cincinnati, Ohio. He served a two year term from 1965 to 1967.

William "Bill" Powell from Millersburg, Ohio followed Howard Dubois and served from 1967 to 1969. C.J. Goyert from Cincinnati served from 1969 to 1971 as MWC's fourth President. Phil Wood, from Toledo, served from 1971 to 1973.

There were four years from 1973 to 1976, when single year term Presidents served.

E.D. Kimball, Columbia, Ohio in 1973; Robert Myers, Dayton, Ohio in 1974; Bob Dolson, South Euclid, Ohio in 1975; and Archie Eckardt, from Sylvania, Ohio in 1976.

MWC got back to two year terms in 1977-1978 when Gerald Jeffers from Granville, Ohio served. He was followed by James Shanley, 1979-80 from Pittsburgh, PA and Terry Seese, from Steubenville, Ohio, and a current member, served from 1980 to 1983; Bob Beutler, from Ashtabula was President in 1983-1984; Ray Beech from Akron, Ohio, served from 1983-1984; Herb Kleve, Burton, Ohio, was President from 1984-1987; Ted Ungerman, Seven Hills, Ohio, 1987-1989; Carl Moss, Austintown, Ohio from 1989-1991; Carl Moss was followed by Jay P. Lucas, Ashtabula, Ohio 1991-1992; Don McGrath, from Mansfield, Ohio, served a three year term from 1992-1995; Don Tracy, Livingston, TX served from 1995-1997; Roy Steibeling, Maple Hghts., Ohio served from 1997- 2000.

The next decade saw Wanda Trash, Crestline, Ohio, as the first women's President of MWC. Wanda served from 2000-2003; She was followed by Bob Sherwood, from Centerburg, Ohio, 2003-2005; John Bisson, Stow, Ohio, was MWC's first two term President, serving from 2005-2009; following John was Tim Fowler, Magnolia, Ohio, who served from 2010 to 2012; Elected in 2012 was Kenneth Kerik, Fremont, Ohio, who is currently in his second term as President of MWC. There have been a total of twenty-six Presidents elected in the fifty year history of MWC.

The "Modern" period of MWC actually saw a change from converted coaches to the manufactured equipment that we see at chapter, area, and national rallies today. The need to install household equipment has all but disappeared and the RV industry has given us many choices of "house cars" today from the smaller Class C's, B's and A's, gas or diesel powered units. We also have various commercial industries that support our style of living.

What remains, is the same zest for the outdoors, the need to make new friends, and socialize, as well as the caring people who are members of our chapters and FMCA.

Kenneth Scott, who was an active member of MWC, became the first executive director of FMCA in 1965.

On September 18, 19, 20, 1964, the Northeastern chapter was also formed at Elli Haven Campground in Carver, Massachusetts. Shortly after the first FMCA convention at Ft. Ticonderoga, a group gathered and the name Northeastern was chosen in order to include members attending from NY, Quebec and New Jersey. Frank Shaw was elected President, Secretary and Treasurer. Annual dues was set at \$2.00. Affiliation with FMCA was sought and on April 10, 1965, Northeastern was officially chartered. On that same day, 20 coaches gathered at the Grange hall in Rockland, Mass. For its very first rally.

The Northeastern Chapter is still active and is affiliated with its sister clubs, the Yankee Travelers, and Cape Codders that meet for one tri-meet a year.

With the formation of three “house car” owner groups at about the same time, FMCA was also discussing the feasibility of forming regional groups to allow members to hold meetings in close proximity to their hometowns. That occurred in September, 1964 at a meeting held near Plymouth, Massachusetts.

Midwest Coachmen, Michigan Knights of the Highway and the Northeastern groups were the first chapters formed within the FMCA on April 10, 1965. Other groups to join as chapters included the Pioneers, Twentieth Century Wagontrainers, and the Badger Chapter.

FMCA’s first national gathering took place on July, 17, 18, 19, 1964 at Ft. Ticonderoga in Ticonderoga, NY. One hundred and six member coaches attended that event from twenty states and the Canadian Province of Quebec. Representatives from all three groups, at that time, attended.

*My thanks to Charles and Jean Owens, FMCA and many “old timers” for providing me with information to recollect the past fifty years of history of the Midwest Coachmen Chapter. Without their help, I couldn’t have put this together. This effort will establish an archives for the chapter, so that the next fifty years will be easier to recollect. Additionally, this history will be established on the MWC website.*