

**N**ow nearing its 65th anniversary, Anderson Coach and Tour in Greenville, Pennsylvania, has become one of the oldest and most respected coach operators in the United States. Like many bus companies, it has a long and fascinating history which begins with a young man interested in providing transportation and continues to the modern and successful company that Anderson Coach & Tour has grown to today.

Orville DeWayne (O.D.) Anderson, the company founder of Anderson Coach & Tour, was born on a farm in southern Mercer County, Pennsylvania. He attended a rural, one-room school for the first eight grades, then attended three years of high school in New Wilmington, and Volant, Pennsylvania.

O.D. Anderson first got into the transportation business in 1937 at the age of 21. His local township asked for bids to provide transportation for school children to a one-room school house near Mercer, Pennsylvania. O.D. may have had more of an interest than other bidders because his younger brother, Sam, was one of the students involved. Being the successful bidder, O.D. began operating a converted panel truck to transport the students with the start of the new school year in the fall of 1937.

On the first day of school, O.D. successfully picked up and delivered his students and then went into the school to check with the teacher on details regarding when classes would end and when he should be there to pick up the students. He found a brand new teacher by the name of Dorotha Elder. She was born and raised north of Mercer, Pennsylvania, and graduated from Mercer High School in 1933. Dorotha had just graduated from Slippery Rock University in 1937 and had just been hired to teach in the one-room schoolhouse.

That one-room schoolhouse was closed the following year and the children were sent to a Mercer public school. O.D. continued to hold the school transportation contract and purchased a new Studebaker four-door automobile to transport the school children during the 1938-39 school year.

It was in 1939 that O.D. purchased his first school bus. He soon began using that school bus for tours. He worked with local schools and offered one-day field trips to Pittsburgh on Saturdays. The students could visit the Carnegie Museum, H.J. Heinz Company and the Buhl Planetarium. Lunch at the former McCann's Cafeteria could be included in the cost.

Now a small but reasonably successful school bus operator, O.D. asked Dorotha Elder to become his wife in 1940. She agreed and soon became both a wife as well as an

# Anderson Coach & Tour



*by Carlotta Raymond Sheets and Larry Plachno*

Photos courtesy of Anderson Coach & Tour unless otherwise indicated

**Like most bus companies, Anderson started out small and grew through the years by providing good service and keeping their customers satisfied. This 1942 photo shows Dot Anderson on the hood and a friend on the roof cleaning the company bus. Dot married O.D. Anderson in 1940 and has been active with the company for 60 years.**

important part of the bus operation. Dorotha Anderson, Dot to those who know her, worked hand in hand with O.D. to develop the business. While O.D. drove, she was responsible for all of the office duties including planning trips and dispatching. Dot still works in the office each day providing the coach operators and tour operators with their dispatch money. Her children often

joke that Dot is Anderson's own Department of Transportation (DOT).

Through the following years, Dot and O.D. would not only expand the bus business but, at least initially, would also venture into other enterprises. These included trucking, farm machinery, steel buildings and car sales. The tour and charter end of the business began to expand at this time.



This GM PD2903 appears to have been the first over-the-road coach in the Anderson fleet. The contented passengers probably had no idea that this was the beginning of major growth for the little company.



Records indicate that O.D. occasionally purchased a coach from Beck which was based in nearby Sidney, Ohio. This Beck was photographed in January of 1953 while on a charter to the Farm Show.

In 1940, friend and fellow bus operator, Allen Watson, furnished the second bus for a two-bus movement to D.C. with O.D. Anderson. In 1941, O.D. took the senior class of Cochran High School to Washington, D.C., in his bus.

The company expanded over the following years and made two important decisions in 1948. The first was to add over-the-road coaches to their existing fleet of school buses. As a result, a brand new 1948 GMC coach with 33 seats and a six-cylinder gas engine was purchased that year and become the company's first over-the-road coach. This also established a habit of buying GMC coaches which would continue until GMC no longer built intercity coaches.

The second decision of 1948 was to move operations to Greenville, Pennsylvania. This move resulted from Anderson's operation of school buses in that area. The company has continually operated school buses in what is now known as the Reynolds School

District. Anderson Coach & Tour is still at this same location on Conneaut Lake Road in Greenville.

O.D. and Dot Anderson were so successful in the bus business that they decided, in 1957, to sell their other businesses and operations. These even included the sale of Packard cars. After 1957, O.D. and Dot put all their efforts into the bus business.

Company records, unfortunately, do not identify the model number of that first coach purchased in 1948. However, records do show that the company remained with GMC coaches and purchased models 3701, 3702, 3703 and 3704. Anderson was one of many companies making the switch to the GM "41" series coaches and subsequently operated 4101, 4102, 4103, 4104 and 4106 models.

In common with most established coach operators, Anderson ventured into scheduled service in a small way. In 1965, he

established regular route service from their home town of Greenville, Pennsylvania, to Cleveland, Ohio. The service was more a convenience for local residents and shoppers than anything else. Patronage was so light that the route became little more than an interstate franchise run in the late 1970s and was discontinued entirely in 1985 after deregulation.

O.D.'s brother, Sam, was also briefly in the bus business. Sterling Stages, which was originally founded in 1923, became an Ohio corporation. It operated both charters and scheduled service. Sam Anderson purchased the company in the late 1950s and ran it for several years. O.D. purchased Sterling Stages in 1965, and it became a subsidiary of O.D. Anderson, Inc. Sterling operated a route from Ashtabula, Ohio, to Sharon, Pennsylvania, from 1970 to 1980 while under Anderson ownership.

Continued expansion in long distance tours at this time made the Anderson Com-

No, this is not a GM Scenicruiser but a Beck coach built to look like a Scenicruiser. The Anderson staff called it "Big Bertha" because it was one of the first 40-foot coaches to operate in the area. The photograph was taken in June of 1958.



Sterling Stages was originally founded in 1923 and was later purchased by Sam Anderson. O.D. purchased the company in 1965. What looks like a GM PD4103 was photographed in February of 1967 while in the Sterling Stages fleet.



pany somewhat of a pioneer in some areas. Among the most noteworthy was a 1966 motorcoach tour to Alaska. Anderson ran a PD4106 all the way from Pennsylvania up the Alaska Highway through Canada to Alaska. The 35-day tour allowed time to visit several locations. This was one of the first commercial motorcoach tours going to Alaska from the continental United States.

Since it was America's 200th birthday, the nation's bicentennial in 1976, Anderson named a new GMC P8M4905A coach, with a price tag of \$81,850, the *Spirit of '76*. It toured the original 13 colonies to celebrate America's bicentennial. Anderson's allegiance to GMC coaches continued until GMC quit building intercity coaches in 1980. In that final year, Anderson purchased three coaches at a cost of \$99,778 each. Like many other coach operators, Anderson then turned to MCI for new coaches.

By 1987, the Anderson intercity fleet was almost exclusively made up of new MCI coaches. Company records show that one 1980 GMC coach remained in the fleet while the rest were MCI or TMC coaches built from 1981 to 1986. Most were model MC-9 although the newer ones were models 96A3 and 102A3. There were also five coaches in the Sterling Stages fleet at this time. The oldest was a 1980 GMC with four newer MCI coaches ranging from 1983 to 1986.

Celebrating the 50th anniversary of the company, O.D. and Dot purchased four new MCI coaches. These new 102C3 coaches cost \$185,000 each and were painted with a striking black and gold color scheme. The



This line of coaches in front of the garage serves to illustrate the GM years at Anderson. Both PD4106 and PD4107 coaches are obvious in this photo. Anderson continued to purchase GM coaches until 1980 and then switched to MCI.

last of the older GMC coaches was also sold at this time, leaving the 32-coach fleet entirely MCI with the oldest coach built in 1981. This anniversary year also saw the company computerize its tour department while the number of full-time employees increased to 75.

The following year, 1988, saw more expansion in both the fleet and tours. Four more new MCI coaches were added while only three were sold, bringing the size of the coach fleet up to 33. This was also the year

that Anderson started their popular Polar Bear Watch tour to Churchill, Manitoba. Since Churchill is inaccessible by road, the tour initially used the railroad into Manitoba. In more recent times, Anderson's tour to Churchill uses an airplane.

Over the years, the company's operations and business expanded faster than office facilities could keep pace. In the early days, the home of O.D. and Dot also served as the company office. A garage was added to the house to maintain and service the buses. Later, a portion of the garage was converted into office space. In 1990, the company undertook an ambitious endeavor to build an office complex which would meet its needs.

It was on April 20, 1990, that the company broke ground for its new office complex. Opened in 1991, this two-story structure featured separate work areas for charters, dispatch and tours. Support services such as accounting, marketing, sales and technology management are now located on the second floor of the building. A training room and board room are also located on the second floor. Other features of the building included an extended portico for loading and unloading as well as a large waiting area for passengers.

The new office complex was designed to be customer friendly. A large waiting area is located in the front of the building. This room allows customers to relax in comfortable surroundings as they await the departure of a tour. It also offers them shelter while waiting to be picked up after returning from a trip. The waiting room features restrooms, a telephone for local calls, a television/VCR

Several vehicles in the Anderson fleet are lined up in front of the new office complex. Opened in 1991, the two-story building provides space for various Anderson office functions from charter sales to accounting and dispatch. The portico behind the buses provides protection for passengers while loading and unloading, and the building has a large waiting area.



as well as coffee, hot chocolate and cookies. On the south side of the complex, the portico shelters customers from inclement weather as they board the coach or visit the office. There is also a large, lighted parking lot where tour customers can leave their cars for an extended period of time.

Unfortunately, O.D. Anderson passed away on October 28, 1990, at the age of 74, while the new building was being constructed. He was greatly admired by friends, employees and residents of Mercer County. It is noteworthy that four years after his passing, the state of Pennsylvania dedicated the O.D. Anderson interchange at the junction of interstates 79 and 80 in Mercer County.

O.D. and Dot had four children. Doug Anderson, the youngest of the Anderson children, became the president of Anderson Bus & Tour in 1991. A daughter, Sue Ann Nicklin, oversees many facets of the present business and her husband, Darrel Nicklin, is the head of maintenance. After teaching school, Lyle Anderson worked in the company for several years as a coach operator and vice president. The oldest child, Karen Lee Jones, lives in Connecticut with her family.

In 1993, Anderson Bus & Tour made a major step forward by adding 45-foot coaches to its fleet. Six new MCI 102DL3 coaches with a length of 45 feet and a seating capacity of 55 passengers were purchased. Older coaches in the fleet were 40 feet long and seated 47 passengers. This same year the company received the highest possible safety rating from the U.S. Department of Transportation.



Even after 65 years of successful operation, Anderson Coach & Tour continues to be a family operation. From left to right: Doug Anderson, the youngest son of O.D. and Dot, took over as company president in 1991. Sue Ann Nicklin, a daughter, oversees many facets of the business. Dot Anderson has been active with the company for more than 60 years.

The following years witnessed a continuation of the fleet expansion as well as an identity change. More 45-foot MCI 102DL3 coaches were added to the fleet. In 1995, the company changed its name from Anderson Bus & Tour to Anderson Coach & Tour to reflect its increasing commitment to inter-

city coach operations. Following the name change, a new logo was developed for the company in 1996, which incorporates the letter "A" in the Old English style type into a graphic similar to a compass rose. The "A" in the traditional type face indicates the Anderson name and the family's long history in providing transportation while the compass design bespeaks of Anderson's far flung operations to all points of the compass. At this same time new tour departure points were added in Austinburg and Conneaut, Ohio.

It was in 1997 that Anderson Coach & Tour celebrated six decades in transportation by launching its first Internet Web site. The following year, 1998, saw Anderson make a break with tradition by adding different makes of vehicles to its fleet. The Prevost name made its first appearance on Anderson property when 10 Prevost H3-45 coaches were added to the fleet. These coaches were delivered with a new paint scheme which included the new Anderson logo stylized in red, orange and yellow on a metallic black background. The company also purchased two minibuses, a 28-passenger Goshen and a 34-passenger Thomas. A new tour departure location in Boardman, Ohio, was added in 1997.

On June 24, 2000, Anderson Coach & Tour celebrated the grand opening of its new, state-of-the-art maintenance facility. This new 16,600-square-foot facility fea-

Anderson's fleet took on a new appearance in 1998. With the delivery of the new Prevost H3-45 coaches, Anderson went with a new graphic paint scheme with a stylized compass rose and the traditional Anderson "A" on a black background.



tures a lighted pit for working under the coaches, a work area that holds four coaches, parts and tool rooms, offices and storage rooms. In the upper level of the building is a bunk room and locker room for the coach operators. The facility houses a wash area with a state-of-the-art automatic wash unit that will clean more than 7,500 vehicles a year.

More recent additions to the fleet were three 45-foot Van Hool T2145 coaches, which brings the total to 53 units including 20 MCI 102C3 buses, 15 45-foot MCI 102DL3s, and 15 Prevost H3-45 coaches. Thirty of them have wall to wall carpeting and one is a lounge coach. In addition, the company now operates three minibuses with a 24-passenger Krystal joining the Goshen and Thomas, four vans and 30 school buses.

The company has 130 full-time and 73 part-time employees. Dorotha Anderson is still active with the company. Doug Anderson, the son of O.D. and Dorotha, continues as president with Sue Anderson Nicklin serving as vice president. Anderson Coach & Tour continues to provide school bus service in the Reynolds School District which serves Greenville, and Transfer, Pennsylvania area students. The company also operates approximately 150 tours each year to numerous destinations nationwide including Alaska and Hawaii. A regularly



The newest additions to the Anderson fleet are three Van Hool T2145 coaches which bring the total fleet up to 53 units. This photo of one of the Van Hool coaches was taken at ABC Bus prior to delivery. Note that the Van Hool coaches were also delivered with the new Anderson graphic paint scheme. ABC BUS.

scheduled service is operated to Niagara Casino in Niagara Falls, Ontario, on Friday, Sunday and Monday. The company also operates approximately 7,500 charters annually.

Anderson Coach & Tour will celebrate its 65th anniversary in 2002 when the new

school year starts. To help celebrate this event, Anderson Coach & Tour will be the host company for the Bus Bash over the Labor Day weekend of 2002. Bus people and buses from all over will converge on Greenville, Pennsylvania, to visit the Anderson staff and facilities and to participate in this event. □

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