

# Continental Memories Come to Life

The story behind  
the restoration of  
Continental Trailways  
#13542

by Larry Yohe

Larry Yohe was photographed in the driver's seat of his Eagle at the recent Scenicruise 2010 event in Amarillo, Texas. His interest in Eagles dates back to an early unforgettable trip from Pittsburgh to Baltimore. Years Later, Yohe decided to buy and restore an Eagle of his own.  
NBT.



*From time to time we like to print the stories of individuals to whom buses are more than a business and have invested the time and effort to restore and preserve one or more buses. Known by many in the industry, this is the story of Larry Yohe and his Silver Eagle.*

— Larry Plachno, Editor

On a summer evening I was walking along Grant Street in downtown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. As I continued to walk on the west side of the street, I heard the sounds of a muffler resonating, sounding a bit like a group of tubas playing band music. As I looked across the street, there was a cream-colored bus with whitewall tires and a raised eagle insignia on the side, which was the source of the music. I never saw one quite like it and the lettering on it spelled "Continental Trailways." I knew I would have to make my next trip to Baltimore on that bus, or on one like it.

The following week I went to the Continental Trailways Bus Station on 10th Street, between Penn and Liberty avenues, and bought a ticket to Baltimore. In a short time,

I would again hear that muffler, which I would learn years later was a Donaldson, playing its song through the Ray's and Sideling Hill Tunnels on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Seated on the right side window, about the second row back, I could see the clock up front below the vista windows. The seats, equipped with adjustable headrests, seem to fit like a tailor made suit.

We were well on our way to Baltimore, traveling eastbound on the Pennsylvania Turnpike. It was nearly three hours into the trip when we exited the turnpike at Ft. Littleton and then went south on U.S. 522 for a couple of miles before making a dinner stop at Baker's Diner. We then continued southeast across the mountains of Pennsylvania and made stops at quaint little towns like McConnellsburg, Mercersburg and Waynesboro. As the sun set and darkness fell, a soft lime glow colored the front interior of the bus and a light bluish cast was over the luggage racks, serving as the night lights. We continued into Maryland on State Route 140 where we made stops at Emmitsburg, Taney-

town and Westminster, towns that I had never heard of until that night. Shortly after nightfall, we finally arrived at the Continental Trailways station in downtown Baltimore. There was something special about that bus. There was something special about that trip.

That was the summer of 1967. I was in the Army then and training at Fort Holibird, located in the Dundalk section of Baltimore. On weekends, or if I lucked a three-day pass, I would take the bus from Baltimore to Pittsburgh, as my family resided in Ginger Hill, a rural village about 20 miles south of Pittsburgh. Within a few months I would be bound for a faraway land in Southeast Asia, a land where restaurants like Baker's Diner, and places like Taneytown, and buses like the Continental Trailways Silver Eagle with the Donaldson muffler, eagle insignias, white wall tires and soft lime-colored lights seemed, if anything at all, like a blurred dream from a distant past.

More than three decades had passed and it was the fall of 2001 when business took me

to a bus company in Houston where I saw an old Silver Eagle parked in the lot. It still had the raised Silver Eagle insignias on the side, was painted red and white like the Trailways buses of a later era, and was lettered East Macedonia Baptist Church. The bus company owner told me it was in for some A/C work and I talked him into letting me drive it.

As early as my late teens, I had a knack for talking drivers into letting me drive buses that I had no right to drive, and they often let me do it at great peril to their own livelihood. Some of these ventures included driving an 88 Transit Lines "fishbowl" on Smallman Street in downtown Pittsburgh, a Suburban Lines Flexible from the old Greyhound terminal in Washington, Pennsylvania, to their bus garage on U.S. 40 west of town, a Pioneer Bus Lines GM 4106 on Union St. in downtown Nashville and a Flexible Clipper from a company, whose name I cannot recall, after the soldiers had disembarked from it at Fort Holibird. I know those drivers could tell from the illumination in my face and the passionate tone of my voice that they simply could not say no. I am sure that they must have known, and of course a good bus driver has exceptional intuition, that to deny me that privilege would cause them, in a way they did not quite understand, to interfere with destiny, despite breaking major traffic laws, as well as company regulations.

At any rate, I started up the old Eagle and could hear that the engine was definitely a Detroit, all the way. The bi-fold door would barely shut due to an oil-saturated air valve and there was a bit of rust, to be expected of an Eagle of that vintage. It did not quite measure up to the Continental Trailways Silver Eagle that I rode on that summer evening from Pittsburgh to Baltimore. However, it was still a Silver Eagle, it still had the eagle insignias on the side, it still had the clock below the vista windows, it still sounded like an Eagle. Most of all, it stirred memories of a ride in a Silver Eagle with mufflers resonating through the Pennsylvania Turnpike tunnels while en route to Baltimore on the Washington Express.

Thanks to all those drivers who put their jobs at risk, along with the Greyhound and Trailways drivers I rode with when in the Army, it made it easier to adapt when I later drove for Lincoln Coach Lines near Pittsburgh. On those army-time trips I watched and listened attentively, especially when the driver matched the four-speed Spicer to the Detroit engine. While driving for Lincoln, I was returning from a trip to Baltimore when I was struck with the urge to take a trip down memory lane. I departed from my assigned routing, wandered a little north, and came back on the route of the former Continental Trailways Washington Express. Missing was the tuba like sound that resonated from the Donaldson mufflers and the bluish cast over the luggage racks that a driver could see



The fully-restored Eagle creates an impression wherever it goes. In this case, the Eagle was photographed adjacent to the Union Pacific depot in Cheyenne, Wyoming. Although the date was October of 2009, it would be easy to believe that the photo dated from many years earlier. LARRY YOHE.

through the rearview mirror when darkness fell. In short, it lacked the ambiance created by a Continental Trailways Silver Eagle.

Perhaps company officials wondered why that Baltimore day trip took so long, why the trip mileage was excessive or why so much fuel was used. However, if they noticed, nothing was ever said to me. Besides, had I been queried, they would never have believed why I did it, and would be more likely to understand had I told them

I got lost coming out of Baltimore due to a road construction.

Further, they would not understand that my passengers should also be able to ride through the scenic Maryland and Pennsylvania mountains, and though Continental Trailways had already disappeared from that route, the folks sitting on their porches in quaint places like Taneytown and McConnellsburg, should still be allowed the view of an occasional motorcoach, even

This recent photo of the Eagle shows that the driver's cockpit area has been substantially restored including the dash and the Eagle insignia in the middle of the steering wheel. The coach retains its manual transmission and clutch. However, the original engine was replaced by one found in NATIONAL BUS TRADER. NBT.



though it was chartered and they could not flag it (well, at least not normally flag it). Yet, those people sitting on their porches at sunset could reminisce about the days when they could ride the Washington Express to Baltimore or Pittsburgh.

Back in Houston, after I took the old Eagle for a spin, I told the garage foreman that if the church ever wanted to sell it to please give me a call. Within a few months the call came. A couple of months later I was

in Houston helping the mechanic prepare the Eagle for a trip to Denver. On the return trip, near Las Vegas, New Mexico, I picked up a straggler, en route to Billings, Montana, and took him to all the way to the Greyhound terminal in Denver. When approaching the terminal, I eyed the stalls where the Greyhounds were parked, loading and unloading passengers. Admittedly, I was overwhelmed with a sense of temptation. Then I wondered what type of commotion might occur among the drivers and Grey-

hound management when this old tattered Silver Eagle drove into the terminal and parked in a stall beside a newer MCI DL3.

In retrospect, I probably made the wiser choice when I dropped the passenger off on Arapahoe Street across from the terminal. Besides, both the front and side destination signs on the weathered Eagle had been removed and covered over and I rationalized that you could not possibly have a bus in Greyhound station without a destination sign to inform the passengers that they were on the right bus. Hence, I drove home to Arvada, a few miles from downtown and parked the bus along the street near my residence.

On the front of the bus was an aluminum panel, with the name "Rev. Frank Celestine" riveted to it. No offense to the pastor, but it had to be come off. When the panel was removed more of the dream came true, as I could see the light shadows from previous lettering that at one time said "CONTINENTAL" across the front. Now, I knew I had the real thing. At some point, I called Norris, a former Continental Trailways employee who worked at Jefferson Truck and Bus in Oklahoma City. I gave him the VIN plate information; Bus and Car Company, Model 05, VIN 8473. Another hit; it was Continental Central Lines #13542, domiciled out of Wichita, Kansas. I knew that some day in the future, it would again bear Continental Trailways #13542.

There was little doubt now that the bus had to be restored to look like it was while it was still working hard on the local trip traveling Route 36 between Kansas City and Denver, or perhaps on the LAX-NYC express when she was new. Maybe, just maybe, it was running a double into Pittsburgh and had to be serviced. And maybe, just maybe, on a day short of cars, it was needed on the Washington Express. Though the Ray's and Sideling Hill Tunnels are now but storage bins in the mountains and Baker's Diner is no more, I imagined that one day again it would be traveling east on the Turnpike to Ft. Littleton, then through McConnellsborg, Waynesboro, Taneytown and Westminster on its way to Baltimore. I believed that some day it would again see these towns.

The front and rear caps were well-weathered and needed to be replaced. With Norris's help, I located Carl Higginbotham, the owner of Cape Carlyn Coach near Roanoke. It was in late November of 2001 when I drove from Denver to the rural bus conversion facility overlooking a lake near the small town of Goodview, Virginia. When I arrived at Carl's lakeside shop, I noticed seven or eight old Eagles strewn about midst the trees and grass, and I knew that I had come to the right place. I told Carl I wanted to restore it as a Continental Trailways bus. I wanted new front and rear caps and wanted it painted in the original cream color. I gave him the paint

This Eagle was originally discovered at a bus company in Houston. Several months later, Larry Yohe returned to purchase the bus when it was put up for sale. This photo was taken in July of 2001 shortly after Yohe left Houston with the bus. LARRY YOHE.



When purchased, the lettering on the side of the bus indicated that the previous owner was a church. However, after starting work on the bus, it became obvious that the original owner was Continental Trailways. It was then restored and repainted in the Continental Trailways paint scheme. LARRY YOHE.



codes that I had obtained from Norris, and Carl had his work cut out for him.

Having provided fiberglass caps for Trailways in earlier times, Carl still had the molds, although he had to do some rummaging to find the mold for the rear cap. Carl assured me these would not leak because the fiberglass was one solid piece and it was painted black where the windows should be. When I told Carl I wanted real glass put in the vista and rear windows, he balked and reiterated the advantages of the solid piece cap. When I looked him in the eyes and told him it had to be like Continental, he realized the situation was hopeless and that it had to be just like Continental. Carl, any more questions? Oh yes, Continental Eagles of that era had a side destination sign and I knew somewhere among those old Eagles strewn about the grass and trees, there must be one.

Several months later I returned to Cape Carolyn and there it was, with the real vista windows, real rear windows, new matting for the steps, cream colored and yes, a front and side destination sign. Now I was feeling it was more like Continental, but not yet. I drove to Richmond where I spent the night and then the next day I met my friend Bruce Korusek, a bus lover and manager at a local bus company. He let me use the shop vacuum to make the inside a little more presentable before we went to lunch in the newly painted Eagle. It was then on to Washington, D.C. where I stopped by my office to proudly show my shiny and newly painted Silver Eagle. After a group photo with the NTSB employees, it was on to Pittsburgh where I met my family and took all my relatives on an afternoon trip to Sarris, a candy



Larry Yohe took great pains to restore the coach to its original appearance. The illuminated sign box on the rear, below the rear windows and above the engine compartment doors, came from another Eagle. The actual sign itself had to be painted and recreated from scratch. LARRY YOHE.

and ice cream shop in Canonsburg. The following day I began my trip back to Denver.

In my mind it was a Continental Trailways bus, but how would the onlooker know? So now the front had to be lettered "CONTINENTAL." After all, a real bus person would know what CONTINENTAL meant, and for now, that was all that mattered. I had a sign shop make up the red reflective letters for the front. Shortly after

getting back to Denver, I asked Norris if he knew of any Eagle mechanics around Denver. Norris said "Well, there's a guy by the name of Pete Zanetti who buys parts from me, so I guess he must know Eagles." As fate would have it, Pete came from a bus family, Zanetti Bus Line in Wyoming, and yes, he knew Eagles and he knew them well. (OK, so even an Eagle needs occasional maintenance, and thanks to NATIONAL BUS TRADER, I was even able to acquire a low mileage 8V-71 that Pete installed.)

One day I opened the tailgate and saw a metal pan located between the top of the tailgate and bottom of the rear windows. After seeing wires coming out of the right side of the pan, I learned that this one had the illuminated CONTINENTAL TRAILWAYS target sign on the rear. I contacted my friend Jon Hobijn, former owner of Blue Ridge Trailways and a real bus historian. The next day Jon sent me a picture of the target sign on the back of a Continental Trailways bus. As fate would have it, there was an old converted Eagle that had the rear target sign, parked in the lot at Grace Coach Lines in Denver, where my bus was being stored. Pete and I made a deal with the guy; I would pay him for the frame and Pete would cover the rear of his motor home conversion with new aluminum. After locating a graphic artist to scale the letters, within a couple of months the rear of the bus was illuminated with the words CONTINENTAL TRAILWAYS.

The next thing was the side lettering and numbers. I could have had decals put on or even plastic letters, but the real thing is the real thing and nothing less would do. I did a little more research and learned from a Bus

The restoration and repainting was essentially complete when Dave Sucha from Michigan DOT took this photo of the coach in the Spring of 2006. Louis Hotard is in the driver's seat impressing everyone with his driving skills. The location is near Albuquerque with Sandia Peak visible through the trees. DAVID SUCHA.





Instead of converting the bus into a motor home, Yohe decided to restore the traditional Continental Trailways interior. Here is what the interior looks like today. NBT.



The interior of the bus is restored to an authentic Continental Trailways interior including the seat covers and the silver Eagle insignia on the forward side of the restroom. NBT.

& Car Company brochure that quarter-inch raised aluminum letters were used. A few months later, after having the red aluminum letters affixed to the sides, the Eagle became truly CONTINENTAL TRAILWAYS #13542. I thought it was now the real thing and could not be mistaken for a fraud. Well, that was until a former Continental Trailways driver, Jim Powell, came along. He noted that my wheels and hubs were a dull white and worse, the hubs were painted white. So it was late one night, after coming home from an out of town trip, I pulled up my driveway and saw the Eagle setting there just the way I left it, or so I thought. The next morning I went outside and there she was, with freshly painted white rims and red hubs. I knew that Jim, a real bus man, decided to play Santa. Now it was truly Continental Trailways #13542, all the way.

Often times someone will say to me, "a bus, aren't you going to convert it to a motor home?" After gently pointing out the error of their way, I always forgave them because I knew their comments were out of pure ignorance and not meant to be offensive. It is like speaking Chinese to an Englishman, as it would be the rare one who understands. I doubt those who made such comments had ever heard the Donaldson muffler resonating when riding through the Ray's or Sideling Hill tunnel on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, or saw the soft glow of the lime-colored lights or the bluish cast from the lights above the luggage racks. It is highly unlikely they ever rode the Continental Trailways bus from Pittsburgh to Baltimore. Further, it is even doubtful that they were ever a patron at Baker's Diner when the Continental Trailways Silver Eagle pulled in on the evening Express run to Baltimore and Washington.

In short, those who made such remarks were not necessarily bad people, but they simply were not "bus people" and could not reasonably be expected to understand "bus matters." Guys like Pete, Bruce, Jim, Norris, Jon, or any of the attendees at a recent Greyhound Scenicruiser event in Adrian, Texas never made such remarks. Again, it was not that they considered themselves superior to the ones who did, but they were simply "bus people," understanding of "bus matters," and no such thought would be even remotely entertained when viewing Continental Trailways #13542.

During the past few years I have had people stop by my house and want to see the bus, because they used to drive for Continental. When making a fuel stop at a small town in eastern Iowa, a man and his wife asked if I would wait a few minutes for them to go home for their camcorder, as they recalled pleasant memories of a bygone era when they rode Continental Trailways. In sub-zero temperatures with the bus parked at a motel near Iowa City, a man was taking photos of the bus and when I approached him, I learned that he was a former Continental driver and had fond memories of Eagles. Another man left a note on my bus and wanted to meet because he remembered riding with his father, who drove for Continental.

There was the Greyhound driver who asked me if he could sit in the driver's seat because he formerly drove Eagles for Continental. (Of course there was no need for him to ask.) A man pulled up along side of me at a traffic light near Pittsburgh with the smile of a kid on Christmas morning. I pulled over and met Gil Cowan, a former Continental driver from Pittsburgh, and we took photos with him in the driver's seat as he shared with me the good times he had when driving Eagles. Then there was George Jameson, a legendary Continental driver who I had heard of for over 25 years, but had never met. When I visited him in Christmas

Although not a Scenicruiser, Yohe decided to bring his Eagle to the Scenicruise 2010 event in Adrian and Armarillo, Texas. This photo was taken during that gathering in Adrian, Texas. The bus is parked next to the sign indicating the mid-point on US 66 between Chicago and Los Angeles. NBT.





Larry Yohe and his niece Rachel pose in front of the Eagle in December of 2005. Several of Yohe's relatives and friends have ridden on the Eagle over the years. LARRY YOHE.



Graham Dunnage, then on the staff of Adirondack Trailways, was photographed with the Eagle while at the Adirondack Trailways garage in Kingston, New York. LARRY YOHE.

of 2004 and took him and his late wife out for an evening supper trip, he said later that evening "This is the best day I've had since my retirement (more than 20 years earlier)." There are some experiences in life that you just can not put a price tag on.

Continental # 13542 has taken my comrades at the Veterans of Foreign Wars to several Rockies baseball games where the VFW Color Guard carried our national flag. It has taken several church groups on missions to El Paso en route to Mexico and taken the youth of my own church to Los Angeles, en route to a Mexican mission. It has rescued a church choir on a broken down bus and taken them home to Denver. It has been to New York City where I took my nieces and nephews to see the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center and it has taken my family in Pennsylvania on several Christmas season day or evening trips.

At times I wonder if one of those young people on a church trip will someday be reminiscing and recall the sound of that Donaldson muffler, the illuminated clock in the front below the vista windows, the soft glow from the lime-colored lights in the front of the coach, or the friends they made on the mission trip. Maybe some of my comrades at the VFW will remember the bus trip to the Rockies games and the good times we had together. Perhaps one of those youths on the mission trip to Los Angeles will remember riding through the western Rockies past the midnight hour and recall the sound of the Detroit engine or the soft lime-colored glow in the front of the bus as they viewed the stars of the western sky through the vista windows.

My friends' children may recall the trip to the ice cream shop in Poolside, Maryland, knowing that the bus trip was made just for them. Maybe one of my nieces or nephews

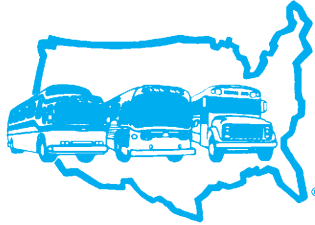
will remember going through the Queens Mid-Town Tunnel on their way to see the Christmas tree lights at Rockefeller Center. Perhaps some in my family will remember driving through the light display at Ogleby Park at Christmas time or my nephews will remember going to see the train display at the Science Center in Pittsburgh. The Continental Trailways Silver Eagle made a trip filled with special memories for me nearly 40 years ago.

Long distance buses are not just for hauling people from one town to another. Hauling is for trucks, but buses are for carrying people on a journey en route to a destination; and real "bus people" want you to have good experiences on that journey. You see, I do not really own Continental Central Lines #13542, but am the temporary custodian, as all things belong to the Lord. As long as I am the custodian, it is my job to see that this Eagle and its passengers, whoever they may be, are properly cared for, as a bus driver is always responsible for the safety and welfare of the passengers.

Still, it is my hope that Continental Central Lines #13542 will be around for a few more years helping to create special memories for those on a journey. Whether it be for a VFW comrade, members of a church choir stranded along the road, for family, friends or a former Continental Trailways driver. The special memory may be for the youths on a mission trip to help those in need, or perhaps for a straggler on his way to Billings or some other distant town. Perhaps someday again special memories will be created for those folks walking the sidewalk or sitting on their porches at sunset in McConnellsburg and Taneytown when they see CONTINENTAL across the front of the bus and hear the mufflers resonating, then wondering if they will ever again be able to flag the Washington Express, or even some other bus of a later vintage, to Baltimore, Washington, Pittsburgh or some other distant town. □

Larry Yohe has had his coach out in all kinds of weather. This particular photo was taken along U.S. 6 in Nebraska during a snow storm. LARRY YOHE.





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9698 W. Judson Road  
Polo, Illinois 61064

Phone: (815) 946-2341

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