



CITY OF ROCKVILLE AUTO SHOW,
Rockville, Md., October 1975

Potomac Region celebrates its 35-year anniversary

BY RICHARD SILLS, STEVEN SISSON AND VINCE TALIANO



POTOMAC REGION FALL CAR SHOW, Capitol Cadillac, Greenbelt, Md.,
November 2003

As the name suggests, the Potomac Region is based in the Washington, D.C., area, also serving the state of Maryland and northern Virginia. Tracing its origins to 1969, the Potomac Region was one of the earlier active Regions in the East.

In the summer of 1969, Richard and Steven Sisson answered a *Washington Post* classified ad for Cadillac parts being disposed of by the widow of a Mr. Lineback in Silver Spring, Md. He had owned several 1938-'40-era senior Cadillacs and had left this Earth prematurely.

Getting near the parts stash in the basement proved a little bit difficult due to a certain Ron VanGelderren rummaging through them. Actually, he was going back and forth, loading the trunk of his car with the best goodies. After quick introductions, the search was on for anything that might be useful for the 1946 Cadillac

PHOTOS COURTESY VINCE TALIANO

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Convertible that Steven was then fixing up. Ron asked Richard and Steven about any cars that they might own, and, in turn, they learned that Ron owned a small fleet of some four or five collector Cadillacs and that he had recently moved to McLean, Va., from Chicago.

They invited Ron to their Dad's nearby home, where the '46 Convertible was resting. They were amazed to learn that Ron had come from a very active CLC Region in Chicago and had already become distressed to learn that there was no active local Region in the Washington, D.C., area.

About a month later, Ron called Steven and asked if he could come up with a mailing list of interested Cadillac fanciers in the area. Steven said yes, because he was a member of the local AACA Region and CHVA Region and knew a lot of people. He did come up with some 20 to 25 names and forwarded them on to Ron. Ron, in turn, came up with the idea of having a CLC meet at Turkey Run Park in McLean in October 1969. Ron did the inviting and the people came. It was fun and some 12 cars were shown.

THE REGION'S FIRST MEETING

All of this must have gotten to Ron because a month or so later, he was on the phone planning a social get-together at his home in McLean. Ron mentioned that he wanted to explore the idea of having a local Region. He and his then wife, Sherry, hosted the function and did all the mailings. The first meeting took place in November 1969 with some 15 to 20 potential members in attendance, including Juan Aranda, Glen Cole, Bryce Frey, Glen Murphy, Bill Thomas, Joe Schutz, Richard Sisson and Steven Sisson.

Ron led the meeting and announced that he wanted to get a local Region started. After some discussion, it was decided that the Region would be called Potomac and Steven Sisson would be its first director. The first order of business was to apply to the National Club for provisional status and to get a good mailing list organized.

These things were done, and the Potomac Region was off. After helping to form the Potomac Region, Ron VanGelderren later served as president of the CLC (1972–1978 and again from 1984–1986).



FIRST POTOMAC REGION MEET, Turkey Run Park, McLean, Va., October 1969

The infant organization was very loose in a number of ways, including not even requiring dues for the first couple of years. The hat was passed around at the various get-togethers and this brought in enough money to buy paper supplies and pay for postage. Steven more or less ran the club from his office across the street from the *Washington Post* on 15th Street. Bryce Frey was the keeper of monies, while Steven served as newsletter writer/editor. Different people came up with ideas for gatherings, meetings and so forth. Actual dues were put in effect when it became necessary to buy trophies to give out at the national sanctioned shows.

The Potomac Region kept growing. Its members in the early years of the '70s include a number of members who remain active today such as Juan Aranda, Bryce Frey, Richard Sisson, Steven Sisson and Bill Thomas, who were present at the first meeting at Ron VanGelderren's house in 1969, as well as Charlie Lightbown, Henry Ruby and others.

To show how a car club can be run on a low budget, the June 1971 *Potomac Region News* reports that, at an upcoming concours, it "...is currently planned that a CLC car emblem will be given as a first-place prize and one of the new patches will be awarded for second-place winners in the three classes."

MOMENTUM BREEDS MORE REGIONS

Besides the D.C.-area enthusiasts, Cadillac and LaSalle owners from Pennsylvania and New Jersey made the journey south to attend Potomac Region events during the '70s. These included Gary Anderson, Lew Howells, Bill Lanning and the late Gus Drake. Steven Sisson, who by then was the CLC's Eastern vice president of Regions, felt that there was a need for a CLC Region in Pennsylvania, because, "we have a large number of members residing there, but no Region for them to be involved with." Steve published an open letter to CLC members residing in Pennsylvania in the February 1975 *THE SELF-STARTER*, promising that if a CLC Region could get started in Pennsylvania, "The New York, Potomac and New England Region people will assist you in getting started and I assure you I will give you all of the guidelines necessary." From this appeal came the Valley Forge Region, which has not only flourished but has become one of the most active Regions in the CLC.

Over the years, Potomac Region members too numerous to mention kept the momentum going. Steven Sisson served as director of the Region from 1969 until 1976. The

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**POTOMAC REGION
ANNUAL PICNIC, Nick Wilson's
home, Brookeville, Md., August 1994**

those of Mike Barruzza, Fred Palmieri, Paul Perreca, Rob Robison, David Rothman, and Andrew and Karen Toton. Also seen at the 2003 Fall Show were Scott Bard, Ron Threadgill and Steven Tuck from the Central Virginia Capital Area Region and Art Matthews from the Hampton Roads Region. The annual shows at Capitol Cadillac are definitely Mid-Atlantic meets.

DINNER CRUISE COMMEMORATES 35TH

In addition to the shows, the Region holds monthly business meetings, as well as other get-togethers at which its members can socialize and talk about Cadillacs and LaSalles. This year, to commemorate its 35-year anniversary, the Potomac Region is hosting a dinner cruise on the Potomac River on Aug. 28. All CLC members and their guests are welcome to join the Potomac Region in this celebration; for further information, contact Bill Sessler at (703) 368-2367 or williamf.seessler1@verizon.net.

Just as the Potomac Region inspired its visitors from up north to start the Valley Forge Region, it assisted with the formation of the Hampton Roads Region in the Tidewater area of Virginia and more recently, has assisted the Central Virginia Capital Area Region in Richmond with the development of their Regional boundaries.

Thanks to the Potomac Region, and all of the support it receives from its members and from the CLC, the Cadillac-LaSalle hobby remains alive and well in our nation's capital! ■

Richard Sills is the immediate past president of the CLC, Steven Sisson is a co-founder of the Potomac Region and Vince Taliano is the activities director and newsletter editor of the Potomac Region.

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successive directors have been Charlie Lightbown (1977–1982), Ralph Bennett (1983–1984), Bill Thomas (1985–1992), Keith Pierce (1992–1996), Nick Wilson (1997–2000) and Bill Sessler (2001–present).

For a time during the '80s, the Potomac Region became less active and questions were raised about its continued viability. In an interesting irony, the Valley Forge Region—which had begun with an enthusiasm sparked by the Potomac Region—provided welcome support to its neighbor to the south. Several Valley Forge Region members joined the Potomac Region when it was trying to build its membership back up, and a considerable number of cars with Pennsylvania and New Jersey license plates regularly attend the Potomac Region's meets and shows.

Under the leadership of Bill Sessler, the Potomac Region is again thriving, with approximately 130 members. As with any successful Region, the workload is shared by an enthusiastic nucleus of officers and members. Those who do the work for the Region and contribute to its success include Randy Denchfield, National director; Paul Estaver, secretary; Harry Scott, treasurer; Steven Sisson, Web site manager; and Vince Taliano, activities director and editor of the *Caddie Chronicle*. Also not to be missed are George Boxley, Gary Elder, Mike Fahey, Alex Figueroa, Derrick Fisher, Jim George, Jim Govoni, Jeff Gurski, Sandy Kemper, Charlie Lightbown, Americo Oliveira, Henry Ruby, Richard Sills, Richard Sisson, and a

multitude of others who attend monthly meetings and events on a regular basis.

The Potomac Region is also fortunate to have the support of CLC member Daniel Jobe, the owner of Capitol Cadillac in Greenbelt, Md. Capitol Cadillac is an historic dealership, which was established in Washington, D.C., in 1934 by Daniel's grandfather, Floyd Akers, and is celebrating its 70-year anniversary in 2004. For many years, the dealership was located at 22nd and M streets, in what is now a busy commercial area midway between the central business district and the exclusive restaurants and shops of Georgetown. About 1979, the dealership moved to its present, much-larger facility in Greenbelt, near the intersection of the Washington Beltway and the Baltimore-Washington Parkway.

The Potomac Region holds two major annual shows at Capitol Cadillac: one in the spring and one in the fall. As was the case in the '80s, many Delaware, New Jersey and Pennsylvania license plates were seen at the 2003 Fall Show, including



SPRING RUN, White's Ferry, Md., April 1971