

HISTORICALLY SPEAKING

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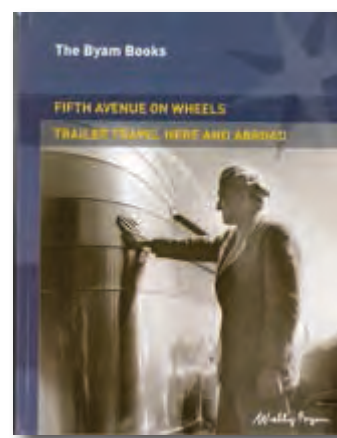
Historical Books by WBCCI Members

Some WBCCI members are prolific writers that put their thoughts to paper and have them published for others to read. Many members submit stories for the Blue Beret and other club publications. In the early years, several WBCCI members had Airstream and Caravan related stories published in newspapers and magazines. For this article, though, we are focusing on those WBCCI members that went further and authored entire books about Caravans and other Airstream related topics, many of which were written in the historic early days of Airstreams and WBCCI.

This review is limited to books written by WBCCI members (with one exception) and published before the year 2000. It will not discuss the variety of Airstream related “coffee table” books and travelogues that have proliferated greatly since 2000. Perhaps that could be a topic for a future article.

We must start the discussion with the two books written by WBCCI’s most famous member, Wally Byam, WBCCI #1:

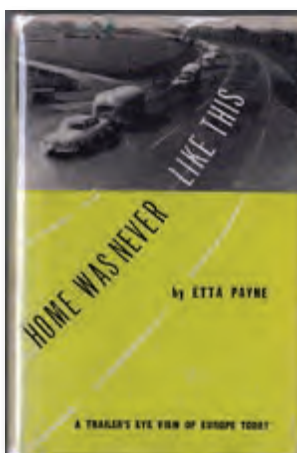
- **Fifth Avenue on Wheels** – Wally’s first book was not his first foray into promoting the trailering lifestyle in print, but it was a substantial piece of work when initially published in 1949 and then reissued in 1953 with additional content. The title imparted a classy image of trailer travel at a time when most trailers were stationary and most “trailerites” were still looked down upon as second class citizens. This book was Wally’s exposé on how to travel comfortably, economically and luxuriously by trailer. Original copies of both editions are rare and expensive.
- **Trailer Travel Here and Abroad – The New Way to Adventurous Living** – Wally’s second book was first published in 1960 with several additional printings into the early 1970s. It is a real “how to” primer on trailer travel and combines a little Wally Byam philosophy, with some trailering know how, and quite a bit of caravan adventure. Chapters alternate between these topics, with the caravan reviews ranging from the 1951 Central American Caravan to the 1959-60 African Caravan, with Mexican, Canadian, European, and U.S.A. caravans in between. The book begins with a discussion of the benefits of and history of trailer travel. In between reviews of various caravans, it also discusses trailer selection, tow car considerations, preparing for a trailer trip, hitching, towing and backing up. The reading is enjoyable and the trials and tribulations of the early caravans are laid out for all to see. Original copies are easier and less expensive to obtain than Wally’s first book.



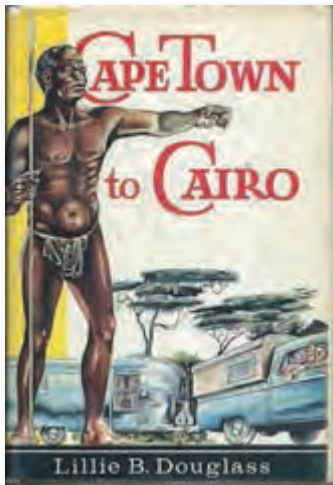
If you want to read these books without breaking the bank, you can obtain a 2010 reprint of both books in a single paperback volume that was published under the title *The Byam Books*. New copies are still available at the Airstream Company Store in Jackson Center, OH and in the Airstream Life Magazine online store.

The next category of books written by WBCCI members are each accounts of a significant Airstream caravan. All are scarce and fairly expensive when you do find a copy:

- **Home Was Never Like This – A Trailer’s Eye View of Europe** – This first book by Etta Payne, WBCCI #165, was published in 1957 and is her account of the 1956 European Caravan. It was the first “travelogue style” book ever published that focused on an exotic international Airstream caravan and must have been exciting reading in its day, just as it is to this day.



- **Land Yachting to Central America** – A Trailer’s Eye View of our Nearest Latin Neighbors – This second book by Etta Payne, WBCCI #165, was published in 1960 and is her account of the 1958 Central American Caravan that went all the way to Costa Rica by road and then to Panama by air. It is interesting reading with many caravanners mentioned by name.
- **Cape Town to Cairo** – This book by Lillie B. Douglass, WBCCI #342, was published in 1964 and is her account of the 1959-60 African caravan. It is probably because of this book that we now often refer to the African Caravan as the “Cape Town to Cairo Caravan”. It is a good account of the wonders seen, the mechanics of caravan life and the hardships experienced during that long and rugged journey.
- **Thank You, Marco Polo** – The Story of the First Around-the-World Trailer Caravan – This book by McGregor Smith Jr., WBCCI #8511, was published in 1966 and is his account of the 1963-64 Around the World Caravan. It documents the highs and lows of the longest caravan ever undertaken by a group of Airstream owners. Considered by some to be the best Airstream caravan book ever written, it mentions almost all the caravanners by name at least once. Typical copies have a green cover and a paper dust jacket, but much scarcer copies exist that are “hand bound in a variety of dynamic fabrics.”



- **Mexican Caravan** – A Journey South with Airstream Trailers – This “late to the game” caravan book by John A. MacDonald, WBCCI #25753, is his account of Airstream Company Caravan #89 Mexico Fall 1972, but was not published until 1999, 27 years after the caravan ended. While the subject caravan was not as exotic as those of the earlier caravan books, this book is a more detailed look into the workings of an Airstream caravan during the heyday of Airstream Company Caravans in the 1970s than you will find anywhere else.

Other WBCCI members authored Airstream-related books that had a focus other than that of a single Airstream caravan. These too are scarce and fairly expensive:

- **Miles of Smiles** – This tiny 40-page paperback by Charles Kiefer, WBCCI #1104, was published in late 1958 or early

1959. It is a collection of over three dozen anecdotes and short stories, some just one paragraph long, about experiences that occurred on 1950s Airstream caravans to Canada, Mexico, and Central America. Charlie went on to become the WBCCI International President in 1959 and was a frequent caravan leader in the 1960s.

- **Retire to Adventure** – This book by Harrison Karr, WBCCI #58, was published in 1962 and is his account of eight years of solo and caravan travel with an Airstream trailer after retirement and after meeting “Mr. Ulysses” (his pet name for Wally Byam) at a trailer rally in Palm Springs, CA in 1954.
- **Tow Each His Own** – This second book by Charles Kiefer, WBCCI #1104, was published in 1968. It is Charlie’s personal story of trailering before Airstream and how it evolved into Airstream ownership, caravan participation, and eventually leading Airstream Company Caravans after Wally Byam’s death. Interestingly, Charlie never mentions Wally Byam or Airstream by name, but we know who he is talking about.



- **Rainbow Road** – This paperback by George and Jean Lokie was published in 1976 and details a year long, 27,000-mile “full timing” trip they took around the continental U.S.A. in 1972, with their two sons, in a 1963 24’ Tradewind Airstream. As far as I can tell, the Lokies were never WBCCI members, but I am including this book in the list because they were at the cutting edge of the “full timing” trend of quitting your stationary job and working from the road. The title stems from the concept of “chasing your rainbow” in the pursuit of happiness.
- **Camping Memories** – This very rare, self-published paperback by Elvera (Vera) and Rupert (Bert) Leuch, WBCCI #496, was copyrighted in 1994 when the authors were both in their 80s and is dedicated to Wally Byam. It is a collection of notes, memories, observations, and short stories gathered during 46 years of camping, travel, rallies and caravans, much of it in the many Airstreams they owned since 1953. Hand drawn images accompany many of the stories.

That’s it for now. I hope you enjoyed this brief introduction to historical Airstream books written by WBCCI members.