

SOUTHERN UTAH MEMORIES: Parke and Emily Cox were the driving force behind Parke Cox Trucking Company

by Loren Webb, August 2, 2013

(ST. GEORGE, Utah) - For 66 years, Parke and Emily Cox have been associated with Parke Cox Trucking of St. George, and at 92 and 90 years old respectively, they still come to work every day.

And even though they sold the trucking business to their sons Dave and Don Cox in 2004, Emily still does all the licensing and all of the fuel reports for all of their 70 trucks which operate in 48 states.

Until two years ago, Parke drove trucks to Cedar City and back and he still has his Commercial Drivers License. Today, he helps with office tasks and runs errands.

“They have been an incredible team from day one,” says their daughter, Karen Reber, “They have worked side by side. She (Emily) has been an incredible partner to my father.”

It all started when Emily Cox, born and raised in Scipio, Utah, signed up with the National Youth Administration, a New Deal Program started by President Franklin Roosevelt. The NYA program allowed Emily, who had graduated from Millard High School in Fillmore, Utah in 1939, to attend Dixie College in St. George.

It was at a Senior Prom Dance at the Old Recreation Hall, east of the existing Woodward School building, where Parke and Emily met.

Neither person had come to the dance together. But as Emily was getting ready to leave, Parke offered to take her home. She declined, saying “You didn’t bring me (here) so you aren’t going to take me home.”

Instead, she went home with a friend of hers, Helen Pectol. The next thing Emily knew, “He (Parke) came trudging down to my house and knocked on my door.”

When she opened the door, “he kissed me right there,” Emily said.

The couple started dating, and were married Sept. 12, 1942 in St. George. A few months later, the marriage was solemnized in the St. George LDS Temple.

At the time of their marriage, Parke was working for McCord's service station on North Bluff Street, driving truck for owner Lorraine Cox. Parke would drive to Los Angeles and then haul gasoline back to McCord's. He was also flying part-time in the Civil Pilot Training Program at the St. George Airport (then located on the Black Hill), training Army cadets how to fly.

Their first residence was an apartment in the Wadsworth Building, above the Dixie Theater on South Main Street. They then moved to Oxnard, Calif., where Parke continued to teach Army cadets at a military base.

One day, a cadet asked Parke to do a slow roll with an airplane at the air base. When he landed and came into the office, he was fired for doing the aerial stunt.

Emily was pregnant with their oldest daughter, Tina, at the time, so as they left California in a Studebaker, Emily was experiencing labor pains. Tina was born the next day, Nov. 19, 1943.

Shortly afterwards, a buddy of Parke's asked him to apply to work at another Civil Pilot Training Program in Ventura, Calif. So Parke, Emily and their daughter, Tina, moved to Santa Maria, Calif., and worked with the CPT Program until it closed down.

He was then transferred to Douglas, Ariz., where he completed an advanced airplane instrument training course. From there, the government sent him to Dallas, Texas, to a P-51 Mustang factory. From the factory, 86 pilots (including Parke) flew the planes to Newark, N.J., after which the planes would be moved overseas for use during World War II.

While in Newark, Parke decided he wanted to see the Statue of Liberty so he flew his P-51 Mustang around the historic structure. When he returned to his base in New Jersey he found his name had been posted on the bulletin board, a measure designed to let everyone on base know that no one was supposed to fly military planes around the Statue of Liberty during the war.

Parke and the other pilots were then flown to Niagara Falls, N.Y., to the P-63 airplane factory. The pilots then flew the P-63 airplanes to Great Falls, Mont., and from there, to Anchorage, Alaska where Russians were scheduled to pick up the planes through a government lend lease program.

Parke continued to fly the planes between these locations for one year, returning to Great Falls, Mont., by Army transport. They were then scheduled to fly the “Hump” through the Himalaya Mountains from India to China, but instead were assigned to Sparks, Nev., to take another advanced aircraft instrument training course.

After Victory in Japan Day occurred on Aug. 14, 1945, Parke and Emily Cox returned to St. George. Parke was discharged from the Army Air Force in 1946. When Parke couldn't find a job flying in the St. George area, he started hauling copper ore for his cousin, Emerald Cox, from Apex Mine on Utah Hill, to Cedar City, where it was shipped by train.

He then worked for Premium Oil hauling gasoline from El Segundo, Calif., to St. George, Ut., between 1946-47.

In 1947, he heard the U.S. government was selling an Army surplus of trucks at a very low cost. “Parke and his wife Emily took advantage of this and drove cross country to Warren, Ohio to pick up their new truck,” according to the company's website. “Upon arriving in Ohio, to their surprise they found their truck was still in crates, and unassembled. Having no other choice, they hired to have the truck assembled and Parke and Emily assembled the trailer together.”

“We drove it back to St. George at the top speed of 42 mph,” Parke said.

And because there were no diesel stations available at that time, the couple had to stop at state road sheds to get diesel. In addition, because the truck had black lights, the truck could not be driven at night, so it took four to five days to get home.

With their new “White” diesel truck, Emily and Parke Cox started “Parke Cox,” a trucking company based out of their home at 109 South 200 West in St. George where the couple still live today.

Emily kept the accounting books in the kitchen. She also helped changed the truck's oil, washed the truck, and bought truck parts, while also helping to raise the couple's five children. Parke also shared those duties along with driving the truck.

The truck was parked in front of the house with the refrigerator units running all night long. As the trucking company grew, two other trucks were parked near a football field across the street from the Dixie Market.

One of Parke's first trucking jobs was going into partnership with Harry Lundin of St. George, and hauling meat out of Dubuque, Iowa.

After Parke and Harry Lundin split six months later, Parke hauled meat from Armour Pack in Omaha, Neb., to Allen Wholesale in Los Angeles, Calif., for 25 years. Parke then leased two to three trucks and hauled for Wenzel Tent and Duck Company in the St. George Industrial Park.

In those early days, Karen Reber said the truck drivers working for their company became like family. Emily Cox washed the bed sheets in the trucks and fixed meals for the drivers to help them on their way.

As the Parke Cox trucking business grew, it picked up Genpak in Cedar City and Porteous Fasteners in Los Angeles. They hauled supplies in 48 states for the latter client.

In 1969, the family-owned Parke Cox business moved to the St. George Industrial Park at 396 North Industrial Road, and remained at that location until October 2011 when they moved to their current location at 4250 South River Road in the Fort Pearce Industrial Park.

In 1974, they changed the name from Parke Cox to Parke Cox Trucking Company, Inc.

In 1985, their son, Don, who had graduated from the University of Utah with a degree in business, joined the company. At that time, the company owned 8 trucks. Shortly afterwards, it doubled to 16. In 1987, Parke Cox applied for and received the Interstate Commerce Commission operating authority and became a fully independent trucking company.

In 1990, their son Dave Cox joined the company full time after having served 15 years at Moore Business Forms.

When Don and Dave joined the business, they enlarged the company to its present number of 70 trucks.

“Both Don and Dave, being “raised in the business,” are thoroughly familiar with every aspect of trucking and felt confident enough to purchase the company from Parke and Emily in 2004, the company website states.

Meanwhile, Parke and Emily’s daughter, Karen Reber came to Parke Cox Trucking Company in 2011, after retiring from the federal government with 34 years of service in the Department of Agriculture. She is a receptionist and office manager with the trucking company.

In October 2011, the company moved onto a 10-acre site in the Ft. Pearce Industrial Park. Karen said her sister, Tina, helped design the interior of the company’s main building and helped with the exterior building’s architectural design.

Looking back on the success of the family-owned business, Parke and Emily said they learned to depend on each other and made their business decisions together.

“And I think that really saved our marriage,” Parke said. “We get along good.”

Adds Karen, “They have a deep love for each other.” And she says, “They have worked hard for everything they have achieved.”



