

TOO LITTLE - TOO EARLY? THAT'S THE LITTLEMAC

The cyclecar craze hit hard in 1914 but by the following year, there were few left to remind one that they ever existed. The memory did linger on, however, in the minds of the men that built the little cars. One of these men was Clayton E. Frederickson. He had been deeply involved in the little machine that carried his name. It was developed through 1913 and 1914 but few were built and sold to the public. It takes a while to go from drawing to finished product and by the time the little car was really ready, the public had tired of the whole concept. Frederickson did not tire that easily and for the next 14 years, he worked and perfected a design for a solid small car. The main ingredient, money, was the one outstanding problem. He didn't have any and there wasn't anyone really looking around for a good small car. It seems as though Henry Ford had taken care of that category quite well.

Finally, in the summer of 1929, he received an inquiry and was told to come out to Muscatine, Iowa for an interview. He packed up his papers, plans, designs, and dreams and headed for tall corn country. There he met the Thompson brothers, Herbert and Ralph. They were very interested in his little machine and were thinking about building a factory in Muscatine to put it on the market. Frederickson was given enough money to build a pilot model and he hurried over to Moline, Illinois, where the first car was built. Moline was filled to overflowing with manufacturing plants, at this time, and it didn't take long to get the job done. He was back in Muscatine in late August of 1929 and plans were made to get things started. The little coupe was shown around the farming communities and created a lot of interest. By October of that year all papers had been drawn up and a million dollar concern was incorporated as the Thompson Motor Corporation of Muscatine. Herbert and Ralph were president and secretary-treasurer, respectively. Other local men were picked for the board of directors. The car was to be called the Littlemac and it was to sell for around \$350. The car was to weigh around 1200 pounds and would be built on an 80" wb. It was to be powered by a Continental 18hp. engine and would have a top speed of 75mph. The predictions were easy because they had the car in hand and it did all of these things, and it was all of these things. They couldn't miss!

There were a few announcements to the trade but the whole affair was kept pretty much on the local level. The Thompsons were quite sure the market would be so good in the midwestern area, there was no need for excessive advertising. They really needed all the funds they could get to get the factory running. They were planning on full production, of 30,000 units per year, to start on April 1, 1930. Colorful brochures were printed showing the neat little coupe by all of the important buildings of Muscatine. There was no landslide of orders, but there was enough interest and voice orders to encourage them. They had decided to eliminate some of the middle money by selling the cars out of the plant. Purchase

contracts and order forms were sent out with each descripttive folder

The planned factory buildings were not started as yet and temporary quarters were used to build the first production car. It was also a coupe. At this time they decided that there would also be a small delivery van and this would be called the "Truckette" to sell for \$500. A couple of dozen men were hired to work in this temporary building and with this setup, the company could build around five cars a day. In April of 1930, the new corporation bought a 30 acre plot of land on Stewart Road in Muscatine and construction was to begin in 60 days. The old money problem again reared it's ugly head and in spite of the \$1,000,000 capitalization, the stock wasn't being sold, so the funds were not available. There were around twelve cars built in the cramped quarters during 1930 and the process of revamping, correcting, and beefing up in this period, did much to give them a better product to show to a larger public. By the end of 1930 a decision was made to go national and a space was applied for at the huge show in Chicago. They needed more exposure and this could be the answer. Through the fall and winter the car had grown a bit. The lines were a bit more curved and a little lower. The engine horsepower was increased to 30 and it was now in a unit with the transmission. Shock absorbers were added to both models and the coupe design was turned into a coach. The interior upholstry and hardware were refined to a great degree. The price was now raised to \$428, still a good bargain. Most of the drive components were purchased from Durant and were the same as those used in the last Star and Durant 4 models. They had to be cut down some but it gave the company something to work with, without putting out a lot of capital.

As I recall the Chicago show of 1931, the car I saw as the Littlemac was not impressive to look at. I'm sure it was a coupe and not the newer styled coach. With the American Austin and the American Mathis in the same building, the Littlemac looked very high and boxy. This, of course, was a little boy's opinion. According to the Thompson people, they got 60,000 orders out of the Chicago showing. More than 200 people came to go through the plant, the week after the show closed. National money did not put in an appearance, however, and finally a mass local campaign was started to try to get this effort off dead center. The local Chamber of Commerce investigated the entire project from start to finish and pronounced it clean and promising. All it needed was a good financial push, and it would be on the way. The Studebaker Corporation was very interested in the concept and asked the Thompsons to bring a car down to South Bend, so they could have a good inspection and trial run. This they did, and the Studebaker people were quite impressed. They were impressed enough to make a good offer to either take the car over completely, or to finance the effort, with them being the boss and big gainer. The Thompsons didn't think the offer was adequate and went back to Muscatine to await further developments. Production continued at around five for each working day. They didn't work every day. It was figured that if they could put out ten a day, they would be on the black side of the ledger. The small plant was still being used. The bodies were built on the second floor and the chassis was constructed on the first. The units were pushed along on dollies with components attached at each station. At the end of the chassis line, the wheels were added and the

chassis was then run up a ramp, under its own power, to the second floor. Once up there, the bodies were attached and the exterior lighting was put in. They started building the Truckette, finally in August of 1931. There were fifty men on the payroll by this time but all the funds that came in just kept the place running as it was. There was still no capital buildup and no outside financing came to light.

The struggle continued into 1932 and in June the sales manager, Reuben Rasmussen, resigned. With the depression at it's peak, the situation did not look good. There never was any money forthcoming from the incorporation and little stock was actually sold. The local records indicate that the company existed into 1935. There was a new Truckette sold in February of 1934. That vehicle carried the serial number of 29N6-242. The last Littlemac to be sold, was done so in 1935, and was built of leftover parts. No one really knows how many were built. If the 242 number is an indication, and it could be, there may have been around 250 units built. This is not hard to believe for they did dribble out to the tune of about five a day for a year and a half, at least. If the company started numbering from 101, then that cuts it down a bit. There is no one left that can tell. It ends up just another modern mystery and the only way to solve it may be to get into the Continental Engine files. Eventually, this may be done, if the right person can see the right person at just the right time. The Littlemac was an honest car and the Thompson Corporation was an honest company. The people that worked for them was good people and they did their work well. The cars that were sold locally, ran for a long time, with a minimum of trouble. There was too little to go on and the end product was probably just about 45 years too early.

The above was put together by Don Paul, SAH member from Muscatine and Stan Yost. The pity of something like this little car, is that there is so little available information on it. For automotive history, this is quite recent and evidently the scope of the effort kept it on a local level enough so there is little evidence that it even existed on a more national level. Member Paul did some great digging to get what he did.

Sorry For The Omission

Unfortunately the name of Vernon Vogel was left off the list of those attending the Detroit meeting that appeared in issue #42. The Secretary of the Society should not have been slighted. Sorry!



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SOCIETY OF AUTOMOTIVE HISTORIANS' OFFICERS - 1975

PRESIDENT Michael Lamm P. O. Box 7607

Stockton, California 95207

SECRETARY Vernon Vogel Box 24

VICE PRESIDENT

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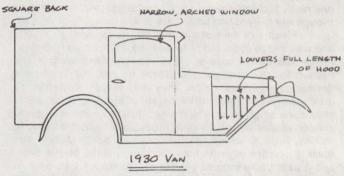
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VAN WAS-MODEL C-E

CAR WAS-MODEL C-F

No. 1, 2, & 3 are of the 1931 delivery "Truckette." No. 4 is the outline of the 1930 model, giving the model designations. There are no available coupe or coach pictures at this time.

Miscellany ERRATA, KAISER FRAZER BOOK

"If possible, history would be served by its publication in SAH Newsletter for the benefit of anyone who bought the book before the errata sheet was slipped in." Dick Langworth

Page 12: car is a 1941 Willys. Page 14: Graham Crusader is correctly a 1936-37 model and the designer of the sharknose Graham was Amos Northrup, not Raymond Loewy. Page 47: Studebaker shown is a 1950, though body was not greatly altered from 1947. Page 169: Pontiac shown is a four-door. Page 234: both Brooks Stevens and Howard Darrin claim the clay model of the Jeep Wagoneer at lower left in the lefthand column. Page 268: Kaiser convertible estimate is not 22, but 42, and the Kaiser Manhattan models 51367 and 51467 (1955) were converted '54's, not converted '53's. Page 271: an additional paint code has been discovered: #239, Raven Black.

OPINION ON PASSENGER TRUCKS

Arising out of the June, 1975, newsletter

Fargo Passenger Cars. Where does one draw the line? Officially the 'Bedford' name is assigned to commercial vehicles made by General Motors in Britian, and Bedfords are by definition 'commercial.' Yet until three months ago we were running a Bedford passenger car in the shape of an 'estate' conversion of the HA-series (Vauxhall Viva) panel van, and such machinery has been catalogued by Vauxhall Motors since mid '38. In spite of this, most works of reference cite the Bedford solely as a UK-assembled Buick of the 1911-16 period with English bodywork. Fargo passenger cars did, however, exist, though the sole customers were apparently the US Army, whose pre-War Plymouth staff cars wore 'Fargo' badges. They seem, however, to have abandoned this practice before Pearl Harbor, as I don't recall seeing Fargo badges on the '41 Plymouths used by the US Forces in Europe in the latter part of World War II. Michael Sedgwick

MORE OPINION ON PASSENGER TRUCKS

Here is my opinion concerning the controversy over whether vehicles such as the Fargo stationwagon should be considered "passenger cars," and whether El Caminos should be considered trucks.

You should check the back issues of the SAH newsletter, and you will see that the writer asked if the GMC Sprint was to be considered a GMC "car" when the vehicle first appeared. My letter was answered by another member who stated that the Sprint should be considered a truck, as the state of New York registered them as trucks for license plate purposes. This does not really prove anything, as the writer owns a 1962 Chevrolet 3/4 ton pickup truck with four wheel drive that is registered as a "passenger car" in Oregon, because the vehicle does not weigh over 6,000 lbs. (5,280 lbs.) The writer also owns a much lighter 1975 El Camino, also registered as a "passenger car." On the other hand, New York registers ordinary stationwagons as "trucks," and presumably a Crosley stationwagon would be considered a "truck" in New York state. Therefore, citing the registration rules of one of the 50 states is not sufficient to establish whether or not a vehicle is a truck.

In Oregon, Cadillac hearses are registered as "trucks" because they weigh over 6,000 lbs.

Obviously, the confusion arises because the vehicles in question share the chassis with either a well known truck, as in the case of the Fargo, or else a well known passenger car, as in the case of the Chevelle based El Camino and GMC Sprint.

The writer has over five years experience as a truck fleet mechanic. In my biased opinion, if the vehicle is sold as a truck, carried in the truck sales records, and parts sold out of the truck parts catalog, then the vehicle is a truck. This would mean that the El Camino, the GMC Sprint, the Ford Ranchero and the Holden Ute are all trucks. The Hudson pickup was always considered a truck, even though it shared passenger car front and sheet metal. Sedan deliveries and coupe pickups (Rancheros, Utes, El Caminos, Studebakers, Willys, etc.) were sold as trucks, intended to carry freight, considered by the manufacturers to be trucks, and referred to by most of the general public as "trucks." Because of the similarity, Cadillac and Packard flower cars should also be considered to be trucks. When somebody modifies an old sedan by cutting off the back of the body and installing a truck bed, what does everybody call the vehicle? A home made pickup truck, of course. When the manufacturer builds a similar vehicle new, it is only fair to consider that they intend it to be a truck.

I am sure there would be no controversy such as this in Australia, where Ford and Chevrolet passenger car chassis based "Utes," or utility vehicles (pickup trucks) have sold

since the early thirties. The regular ½ ton American style pickup is very rare in Australia. Most vehicles of this type resemble the El Camino.

The size of the vehicle means nothing. The late, unlamented, Westcoaster van with three wheel suspension and a two cylinder air cooled engine probably weighed no more than 800 lbs., yet it is considered a truck. It was made to carry freight, in this case the U.S. Mail, therefore it is just as much a truck as a tandem axle Mack. Maybe that last sentence should be re-phrased, but the Westcoaster is still a truck.

The other part may be harder. In my opinion, Chevrolet Surburbans, International Travelalls, and the new Plymouth vans should all be considered as passenger cars because they are intended to carry passengers rather than freight, have nice seats and upholstery, air conditioning, and all other features found in regular automobiles. This despite the fact that they use the truck chassis. I close my argument with a reference to the Mohs Safari Car. This odd vehicle used an International truck chassis, yet it had an unusual sedan body and no cargo carrying capacity. Can you call it a truck?

Dick Larrowe, SAH #84 RT. 1, Box 900 Corbett, Oregon 97019

Editor, Chevrolet Illustrated

Ed Note; Here are a couple of opinions for the rest of you to chew on. Mike, from the land of "shooting brakes" and Estate wagons has thrown a little more wood on the fire with the Bedford and Dick has a good analization of the whole problem. I can also add to the confusion. I own a 1972 International Scout II. I use it for a service and trouble truck in my business. It is licensed and titled as a stationwagon, even though there are no rear seats in the vehicle. Personally, I say that if the vehicle is a passenger carrying one, in the confines of the normal passenger carrying vehicle, private type, it is a passenger car. I do include the Fargo, International, and any others of the "stationwagon, Suburban, Travelall" lines. I don't include vehicles such as the glorified pick-ups, because to me, they are still trucks. I think I would have a rough time going along with the designation of truck for the funeral and professional cars. I like to think they are in a class by themselves, or with the taxi.

MORE ON THE AMERICAN NAPIER-

Ed Note; Mike Sedgwick item on C.A. Glentworth is relating back to the Clentworth mentioned in issue #42 in relation to the American Napier.

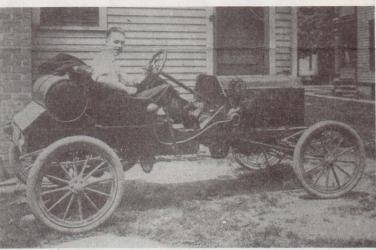
C.A. Glentworth was, I think, concerned with Napier's export division, as earlier he had been concerned with licence production of Napier automobiles by San Giorgio in Italy. He drove a San Giorgio-Napier into seventh place in the 1906 Coppa d'Oro, a 2, 485 mile reliability trial organised by the newspaper Corriere della Sera. (It is a matter of opinion whether this actual car was made in Genoa - it was probably London-built - but some Napiers were almost certainly built in Italy, and an Italian Napier engine is on show in the Turin Automobile Museum). After World War I Glenworth was with Hudson-Essex Motors Ltd. in London, and drove a special sprint Essex (the F-head four, not the later flathead six) in British hillclimbs. I have an idea that Glenworth may have been a US citizen, but have so far been unable to verify this point. Michael Sedgwick

The two accompanying photos are of the Michigan built Thomas. Neither car achieved production status but they were built with something in mind. The builder was Charles C. Thomas and with minor exceptions, all mechanical components were built by him. The first was the 1904 model with the wooden curved dash. Mr. Thomas made all of the patterns and castings from his own drawings and then did all of the machining himself. The engine was a one cylinder horizontal with a copper water jacket. The trans was also homemade with a single spur gear train. He turned this into a v-belt drive the following year. The belt drove to a jack shaft which then carried the chain drive to the rear wheels. The clutch was a cone type, leather faced, operated by a hand lever. The rear axle did not have a differential. He cut some buggy wheels down so they would take bicycle rims and tires. With the exception of the chain drive, the springs, and steering wheel, all else was made by young Thomas. The body and frame were made of wood and the top speed of this machine was 15mph.

The second model was built at the University of Michigan, while Thomas was a student. It was a two cylinder, 4x5 four cycle job. Again, all of the engine parts were built by Thomas, from scratch. The axles, springs, and wheels came from an old electric car. The trans on this one was of the friction type. The friction disc was copper faced cast iron. The frame of the car was of built up angle iron, the body and hood being made by Thomas. This car had a good cruising speed of 40mph.

There were high hopes of doing something commercial with these cars but the financing and production details were far beyond the grasp of this young man. He did go on into the automotive field but had to be satisfied working for someone else. It would be interesting to see how many of these ground up machines were built in the pre-1910 era. Some of them were quite sophisticated and deserve more than just passing notice.





Some notes on the Kitto; In an earlier issue of the Newsletter, Fred Roe tossed out the name, "Kitto," as a possible automobile make. We have a couple of nibbles on that bait. George Risley, at the Detroit Public Library, sent copy from the Jan. 11, 1906 issue of Motor World. It gives a little rundown on the shady operations of the day, including Pennington, Wm Carter of the American Mfg. Co. and our own Mr. Kitto. Wm. H. Kitto was an employee of the Eisenhuth Horseless Vehicle Co. Upon leaving said company, he formed the Simplicities Auto Co. of Middletown, Conn. The article stated that in the one year of the company existance, they did build one car and then went broke. Kitto then took off for the Western states, finally settling in Desmoines, lowa. His purpose is to "promote a factory to manufacture artic radiators, Supremus carburetters, and eventually gasolene motors." Mr. Kitto, who is "an Englishman, formerly having lived in London, where he has had a wide experience in the manufacture of automobiles."

From the wording, I don't think Motor World had too high of an opinion of Mr. Kitto. I had another listing on the man, which George also had. It appears in the Horseless Age for Feb. 18, 1903. At this point he is showing a new light car at the Crystal Palace Show in London. It was called the Kitto and the one model was built by a local manufacturer but the design and plans were brought by Kitto from the United States.

He had the car especially designed for the English market, it was said, but it didn't say what nationality the man was. It could have been that the English thought he was an American and the Americans thought he was English. At any rate, Fred was right, there was a Kitto automobile. It was of American-English origin, or English-American origin, depending on how you look at it. The car that he was attached to here was the Simplicities, out of Conn. Prior to this, according to George, he was on the English bicycle scene in the 1901-02 period. Just for the record, the Simplicities got a lot of favorable writeups in the 1904-05 periodicals. Old William maybe wasn't all bad.

Harry pulfer sends this little item of interest. In the Autocar for August, 1898 an article states that "In the Netherlands an autocar will in the future be known as a SNELPAARDELOOS" ZONDERSPOORWEGPETTOOLTIJTEIG" - and how do you like that?? That must have held the Dutch auto industry up for a number of years.

Harry is also looking for any information on the Chipman Limited company that may have built some kind of vehicles from 1912 and 1913. It was a New York City concern.

Another little item sent by Harry is a copy of a letter-head from the Peterson-Culp Gearless Steam Automobile Co. of Denver, Colo. It is dated May 30, 1919. They claimed to be manufacturers of steam automobiles, trucks, and tractors. Original address was 1637 Court Place but that had been crossed out and marked 727 Symes Bldg. Someone out that way take a look into this. A Mr. J.P. Adams was president. SKY

The Mail Bag

I was very much interested in Rick Lenz' listing of automobiles and decided to write on his entry on the "Rugby" which states - "(listed as unsubstantiated) is true, was a Durant derivation built in Canada in 1929 & 30, I've a reproduction of a folder (somewhere.)

I'd like to take it from there if I may. There may have been a Rugby built in Canada, but if there was, it doesn't appear in Durnford & Baechler's CARS OF CANADA (McClelland & Stewart Ltd., Toronto, 1973.) For the matter, the only Durant data I can find surrounding Canada was the Model "A-22" Durant, built or assembled at Toronto in 1922 and 1923 and the Frontenac which was the Canadian version of the Durant and which was succeeded by the DeVaux for 1933, after production of the DeVaux had ceased in the United States. (See AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRIES, October 8th 1932.) It is my recollection that this car actually was marketed well into 1933 as the Frontenac. There was so much confusion both here and north of the border as to the ancestry and parentage of the Durant, DeVaux and Continental that it takes a veritable Rosetta Stone to unwrangle the mess!

But back to Rugby! The name Rugby, as manufactured by Durant in the United States, applied to three basic and different motor vehicles, e.g.:

1. A truck, manufactured 1927 through 1931.

The name given to Star automobiles which were built for export, and...

3. An export model of Durant, built in 1927 and of which I enclose a photograph.

In the latter catagory, it will be of little surprise to most SAH members to know that technically, Durant closed down the manufacture of Durant automobiles for the 1927 calender year and production was concentrated instead on the Rugby for export. This had nothing to do with the production of Stars, Flints or Locomobiles. The export Durant (i.e. the Rugby), was built along basically similar lines and size of the Durant, but carried a Star-type radiator with the Rugby emblem.

This enclosed photo was taken in the 1950s in Montevideo, Uruguay, where it was serving as a taxi. It is my understanding that in a few remote corners of the earth, Uruguay, the Canary Islands, etc., there are still some Rugbys rolling, mute evidence of 1927, Durant's "year that wasn't!"

Keith Marvin Route 1, Box 24 Pomfret Center, Cn. 06259

Book Reviews

Dalton [Lawrence] COACHWORK ON ROLLS-ROYCE 1906-1939. London. Dalton Watson Ltd. 1975. 448p. Illustrations. plates with four coloured frontispieces. Index. 7½" x 9¾". Black cloth boards. [Sole distributors for U.S.A. Motorbooks International. 3501 Hennepin Avenue, South Minneapolis, Minnesota 55408. \$36.95

A sequel to the same author's "Those Elegant Rolls-

A sequel to the same author's "Those Elegant Rolls-Royce" which has now become a standard reference work, this new publication illustrates some 700 motor cars from 80 coachbuilders.

The book comprises 22 Chapters, the first twenty of which are devoted to the most important English coachbuilders. Each Chapter has a brief history of the firm concerned and in a number of instances the author has had access to the firm's record books and from these he quotes extensively.

The last two Chapters deal with the smaller English firms and with American & European coachbuilders respectively. Here it is worth noting that the American Rolls-Royce coachbuilders will be described in detail when Dalton Watson publish "The American Rolls-Royce" by John W. de Campi early this winter.

All of the illustrations are captioned and while the purist may complain that some of the cars do not appear in strict order of chassis numbers, nobody can complain at the extensive index and above all at the high quality of the illustrations which are of the usual high standard that we have come to expect from Dalton Watson publications. Here is a book which can confidently be recommended. John Schroder [Historian, Rolls-Royce Enthusiasts' Club]

ADDITIONAL REVIEW COMMENTS BY KEITH MARVIN

"With the exception of one Barker body incorrectly positioned in the Hooper chapter in the early editions of THOSE ELEGANT ROLLS-ROYCE, no photograph has been printed in this book that was published in the first book. Between the two books there are now almost 1400 different bodies on prewar Rolls-Royce chassis illustrated."

And there you have it - more or less. What this is really all about is to explain to the reader that the material at hand is new and hasn't been seen before, at least in this series. The book is chock full of fine photographs of the make which will titilate and delight any Rolls-Royce afficianado. And



those extracts put the stamp of authenticity on the coachwork builders surrounding production by them as applied.

The price, I feel, is exhorbitant and although I recommend the book without reservation, I think its most satisfied market will be those already bitten with the Rolls-Royce bug or the happy collectors who buy the books for pleasure and indulge them accordingly.

The volume is a luxury and should be regarded as one of the nicer things to have on your shelves. Keith Marvin

New Members & New Addresses

Anthony J. Yanik 1292 Beaupre Madison Heights, Mi. 48071

Robert Ackerson 8 East St. Schenevus, N.Y. 12155

Harold M. Loutzenheiser 8 Wellsford St. Pittsburgh, Pa. 15213

Herbert H. Zieman, Jr. 906 Eton Rd. Toledo, Ohio 43615

Ted Weems, Jr. P.O. Box 34665 Dallas, Texas 75234

Robert L. Merrill P.O. Box 165 Budd Lake, N.J. 07828 C.M. Cawley Md. Natl. Band 225 N. Calvert St. Baltimore, Md. 21203

William S. Locke AMI Lane Lexington, Ky. 40505

Michael L. Schauer 17 Standish Ave. Plymouth, Mass. 02360

Griffith Borgeson Campagne Mirail, La Motte d'Aigues 84240 La Tour D'Aigues, France

> John A. Gunnell 27 Franklin Ave. Staten Island, N.Y. 10301

Honorary Members:

Owen Bombard PR Dir., Lincoln-Mercury Div. 3000 Schaefer Rd. Dearborn, Mi. 48121

John R. Bond 28 Harbor Island Newport Beach, Calif. 92660

Roy D. Chapin American Motors Corp. 14250 Plymouth Rd. Detroit, Mi. 48232 William Harrah Box 10 Reno Nv. 89504

Strother MacMinn 255 S. Bonnie Ave. Pasadena, Ca. 91106

Address Changes and Corrections:

R.C. Lenz 22033 Newport Colton, Ca. 92324

R.P. Bellman P.O. Box 517 Needham, Mass. 02192

Keith Marvin Route 1, Box 24 Pomfret Center, Conn. 06259

Previous member returning:

Richard M. Langworth Dragonwyck Hopewell, N.J. 08525



June SAH meeting at Detroit Public Library. Clockwise from Mike Lamm, seated center; Bruce Cox, Jeff Godshall, George Tesar, Charles Bishop, Don Butler, ? guest, Bill Locke, Dick Brigham, Grace Brigham, Hugo Pfau, Harlan Applequist, Stan Yost and Fred Roe.



June meeting SAH, Detroit Public Library. Left to right; Harlan Applequist, Stan Yost, Vern Voegel, Grace Brigham, Mike Lamm and Jeff Godshall.