

# SAH Journal

The Society of Automotive Historians, Inc.  
Issue 196  
January–February 2002



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## When R.E. Olds "Chased After Strange Electric Gods"

by Donald and Kenneth McDowell

The Olds Motor Vehicle Company was founded August 21, 1897. Nearly two years later the company was renamed in Detroit as the Olds Motor Works. Chief executives were Samuel L. Smith, his two sons, Fred L. and Angus, and Ransom E. Olds.

While the new factory was being built, R.E. plunged into the development of a line of gasoline-powered vehicles. After spending considerable money and over a year of time, he was forced to re-think his entire vehicle program. His initial vehicles were found to be too mechanically complicated, not particularly dependable, and so expensive that few, if any, were sold. Unproven vehicles selling at the high end of the price range obviously didn't have wide appeal for the general buying public in 1898/99.

The company's re-evaluated plans called in part for developing a one-cylinder gasoline-powered "runabout" that was to sell in the \$1,000 price range. This proved to be a slow and difficult task. Even at the \$1,000 price, sales were few and far between.

In time, however, this concept developed into the world-famous Curved-Dash Oldsmobile. By eventually achieving a \$650 selling price, this model soared to unprecedented sales success in the months following the March 9, 1901 factory fire.

*continued on page 7*



An Olds "Stanhope" electric is driven by test driver Mrs. M.F. Loomis with her friend Elsie Ruggles. (photo courtesy Gary Hoonsbeen)



**Thomas S. Jakups, Editor**

# A New Year, a New Look, and a Heartfelt Appreciation

layout that had served the membership well but had remained essentially unchanged for quite a few years. People are comfortable with things that are familiar, even take them for granted, but they don't get excited about them. I wanted members to get excited about the *Journal*, to feel a renewed sense of pride in membership in SAH.

This new layout provides more flexibility, white space and contrast, and I hope that you will find it visually appealing. It also puts a face on the office of President, who sets the agenda for the Society, and the position of Editor, who is your repository for articles, opinions, news, reviews and requests for information. I hope this makes us more approachable and encourages you to contact Dale about any Society concerns you may have and to consider contributing to the *Journal*.

Speaking of contributing, I would like to thank *Beverly Rae Kimes, Dennis David, Sinclair Powell, Joe Freeman, Fred Roe, Jeff Godshall and Mike Berger*. When I put out the call last issue for the presentations that were made at the Awards Banquet at the Annual Meeting in Hershey, these wonderful people did not hesitate to send along copies of their speeches, in some cases dredging up from their memory banks comments they had made off the cuff. Because of their contributions every member could read about the award winners and their accomplishments. And thank you *Bobbie'dine Rodda* for all those fine photos of the banquet and the hospitality tent that you sent me. Per your suggestion I sent them to *Leroy Cole* for inclusion in the Society archives.

—Tom Jakups

**H**appy New Year 2002, the first year since 1998 which isn't the official or unofficial beginning or end to a millennium. I hope that the new year will treat you and your family well and that it will be kinder to this nation than the past two were.

As you are reading this you no doubt realize that there is something different about the look of the *Journal*. Yes, with the new year comes a new layout for the newsletter. When I assumed the editorship of the *Journal* with Issue 195 I inherited a newsletter

## SAH Journal

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118-157 Jan./Feb. 1989-July/Aug. 1995

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158-194 Sept./Oct. 1995-Sept./Oct. 2001

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Dale K. Wells, President

**H**aving introduced myself in the last issue, I want to begin this new year by thanking once again our past officers for all their work and dedication last year. I especially want to thank Past President *Leroy Cole* for his conscientious preparation of a detailed notebook which might properly be titled "Presidential Job Description for Dummies," because all the duties and responsibilities are so well outlined, anyone could jump in and do the job.

Leroy and his lovely wife, *Cora*, have shown their love and dedication to SAH in giving me all their help. To all you other SAH members, let's hear from you with suggestions and ideas to keep improving SAH as we go into the new year and face the inevitable changes we will encounter.

When thinking about "changes" I am reminded of the story about a newspaper reporter assigned to write a human interest article about small town life in New England, and how local townspeople deal with the changes brought on by encroaching suburbia and interstate highways. While visiting one small town, the reporter met a local oldtimer lounging on a park bench near the old courthouse. The reporter asked, "Have you lived around here all of your life?" to which the oldtimer replied, "Yep." The reporter then said, "I'll bet you've seen lots of changes here in your lifetime haven't you," to which the oldtimer replied, "Yep." The reporter then asked the oldtimer what he thought about all those changes, to which he replied, "I've been agin every one of them."

## Out with the Old; On with the New

We are now witnessing frequent changes of industry leaders and CEO's and also the dropping of familiar old products such as the Oldsmobile. There has always been a lot of hype in the selling of automobiles, often promising more than what is being delivered, and also downright misrepresentation of what is "ALL NEW!" We have sort of come to expect that, and mostly ignore it as the fluff surrounding the advertising and marketing of any new product. In just a few generations we have witnessed the death of many automobiles for various reasons. Of course, the death of Studebaker, Packard, Hudson, and Nash have been variously dissected and explained. But what of such well accepted family cars as Oldsmobile, DeSoto, and Plymouth—cars that had strong, loyal followings, were part of larger corporate structures and generally delivered exactly that which was promised.

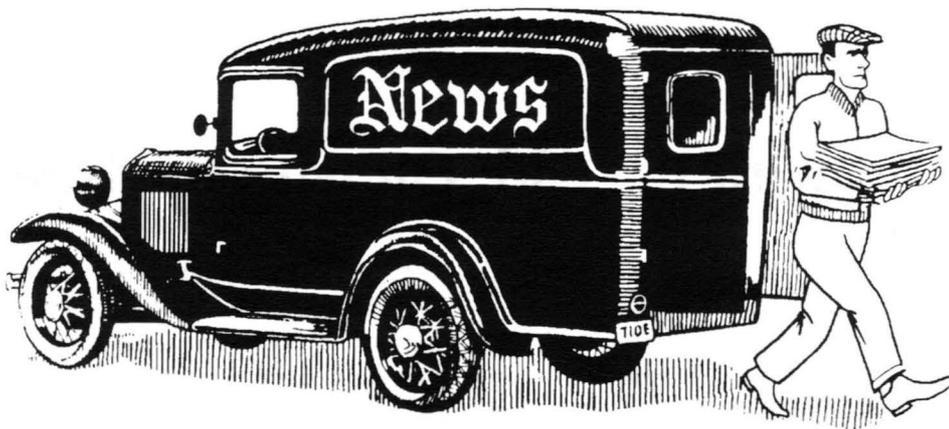
It seems that there are simply too many brands to survive in the face of the competition of this new world market. Although the total market is growing along with the world population and rising third-world economies, the perpetuation of individual brand names is indeed an expensive and repetitive process. In the case of Oldsmobile, one might think that some "thirty something" sales executives simply decided that in our youth oriented society, it would be too difficult to market anything that contained the word OLDS. However, in spite of all the marketing hype we've become familiar with, most typical family cars today will equally do the job for which they were intended, and there is usually no significant advantage of one over the other.

The past few decades have witnessed what may be called the blurring of the brands as every manufacturer

tried to offer everything to everybody. The old niche marketing theory of giving customers the next higher product to move into was thrown out the window during the 1960s as each product line was expanded to include compact, intermediate and fullsize products. Each of those in turn then began to offer every conceivable luxury and option available in the market. So now Oldsmobile has been deemed redundant to the bottom line, and its fans will have to look elsewhere, as will its dealers. Will they stay in the GM family or will they be persuaded to look at some new, exciting brand with a more relevant, descriptive name such as Catera, Elantra, Fuego, Nubira, Sephia, Solara, or Vitara? Are those names more exciting and appealing than Oldsmobile, DeSoto or Plymouth? They definitely seem to be proof that TRADITION IS DEAD in the automobile industry, and new products must be offered having new names.

Within GM this could be carried to the ultimate end by abandoning such timeworn names as Chevrolet, Pontiac and Buick, and offering a Cadillac Impala, a Cadillac Bonneville and a Cadillac LeSabre. Already, we see Cadillac Suburban and Pickup models appearing (although with some other strange sounding nameplate), so why not use that most prestigious label to compete in the new world markets and get rid of all those old traditional nameplates? Sometimes changes are hard to accept, and there is often a strong sense of security in sticking with that which is tried and proven. But we can be certain the new year and new century will bring major, significant changes in the industry, its products, and the way we utilize them. Our job will be to analyze and record them for posterity.

—Dale Wells



## Cadillac Museum Hosts Leland Chapter Fall Meeting

The Leland Chapter of the SAH met at the Cadillac Museum in Warren, Michigan, for its fall business meeting. Director *Don Hoeft* had all things prepared and by 10:30 AM our meeting convened.

Nominating Chair *Leroy Cole* announced the results of the election: *Robert Elton*, Director; *James C. Peterson*, Assistant Director and *Victoria Mobley*, Secretary/Treasurer. Victoria has held that position for over ten years and has greatly served the Chapter. Director Don Hoeft was thanked for his leadership.

Some book announcements were made and *Tony Yanik* gave out order slips for his new book *EMF*, published by S.A.E. Press. *Mike Kollins*, our speaker, announced that his four-volume set on the lives of the Automobile Founders would be published in March by S.A.E. Press.

Some Canadian historians were present, which added to the interest. We

enjoyed a very relaxed and refreshing day, of the type we enjoy in the Hershey Tent, only surrounded by Cadillacs.

—*Leroy Cole*

## Birthday Bash a Big Success

Close to 200 hobbyists helped *Bobbie'dine Rodda* celebrate her 80th birthday one day early last December. Many more sent gifts in the form of donations toward a proposed Petersen Automobile Research Library in Los Angeles.

The final tally is not in (checks are still arriving) but it should be safe to say that the December 10th party will net more than \$12,000 for the library.

*Bobbie'dine* was downright delighted to visit with so many of her friends. These were from shows and concours *Bobbie'dine* has organized or attended, from her involvement with the Southern California Chapter of SAH and from her years of work with the Classic Car Club of America. There were so many people there from differ-

ent aspects of the hobby that it might not be fair to pigeonhole any of them except to say that they are her friends.

Early in the evening four special presentations were made before the birthday cake was cut. The Petersen's Richard Messer outlined a worthy vision for the proposed library and then *Bobbie'dine* was presented with an elaborate proclamation from the Classic Car Club of Southern California thanking her for all she has done to make that organization outstanding.

Two substantial donations toward the library were also announced. One was a \$2,000 check from Irwindale Speedway and the SAH Literature Faire presented by *Harold Osmer*, director of the SAH's SoCal Chapter. The other was a \$2,500 check delivered personally by *Sandra Kasky* and *Glenn Mounger* from the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance.

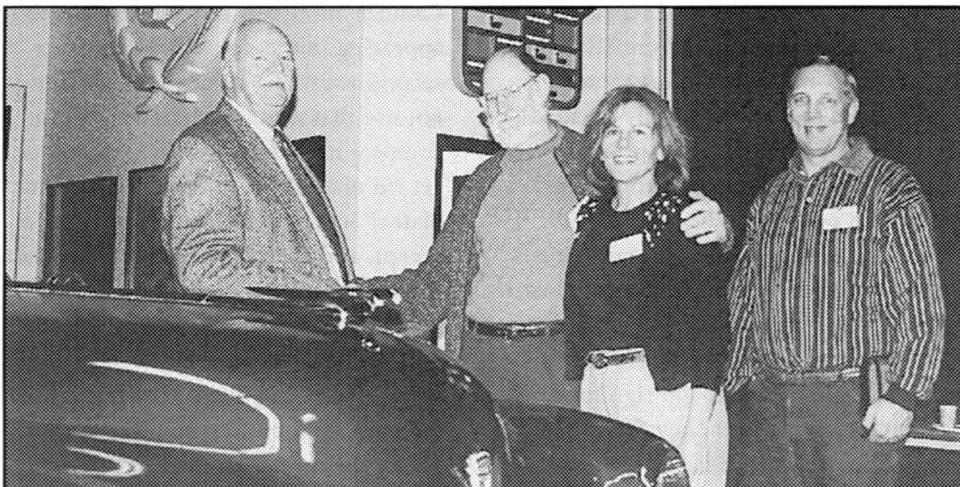
Since the occasion was one to celebrate *Bobbie'dine's* birthday as well as draw some attention to the Petersen Automotive Museum's lack of a world-class library, it was only natural that a dozen popular automotive authors would be asked to autograph their works. All in all, it was a very special Monday afternoon at the Petersen Automotive Library.

—*John C. Meyer III*

## Fourth History Conference April 10-13, 2002

SAH and the National Association of Automobile Museums will jointly sponsor their fourth automotive history conference from April 10-13, 2002 at the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum in Auburn, Indiana. Entitled "Knowledge of the Automobile," the conference will feature two days of presentations on auto history topics and workshops directed toward museum professionals and one day of tours. The theme for NAAM sessions will be Education.

The conference will open Wednesday evening, April 10th, with a reception at the museum. A full day of conference sessions is planned for Thursday, with topics including manufacturing and marketing, media and international affairs. Friday will be



Outgoing Director, *Don Hoeft*, greets the new officers, *Bob Elton*, *Victoria Mobley* and *James Peterson*. (photo courtesy *Leroy Cole*)

devoted to tours in the northern Indiana area. Saturday's historic sessions will include motorsports and cars and culture. Concluding the conference will be a social hour and keynote dinner on Saturday evening, featuring the presentation of NAAM's annual NAMMY awards.

Cost of the conference, which includes registration, refreshments and seven meals, will be \$180.00; a one-day rate of \$90.00 will be available to those who cannot attend the entire conference. Accommodations are the responsibility of attendees and should be arranged directly with the hotels Auburn Inn (219) 925-6363 or Super 8 (219) 927-8800. The nearest airport is Fort Wayne, Indiana; there is no public transportation from Fort Wayne to Auburn (30 miles) so car pooling, personal or rental, is advised.

Bob Sbarge, ACD Museum director, is general chair of the conference. Program chair for NAAM is Jim Johnson of the Alfred P. Sloan Museum in Michigan, (810) 237-3450, email [jjohnson@flintcultural.org](mailto:jjohnson@flintcultural.org). Kit Foster serves as program chair for SAH; he may be reached at (860) 464-6466 or email [foster@net-box.com](mailto:foster@net-box.com). Registration should be made with the Auburn Cord Duesenberg Museum, P.O. Box 271, Auburn, IN 46706 USA (219) 925-1444. Make checks payable to NAAM or pay with your VISA or MasterCard.

—Kit Foster

## 2002 SAH Award Nominations

Yes, that's right, last issue we reviewed the 2001 award winners and it's already time to start thinking about books, magazines, articles, organizations and people worthy of being honored in 2002.

The **Nicholas-Joseph Cugnot Award** recognizes the best book in the field of automotive history published in the prior year. Nominations can be made to **Darwyn Lumley, 1911 Goodwin Drive, Vista, CA 92084-2590.**

The **Carl Benz Award** recognizes the best article in the field of automotive history published in the prior year. Nominations can be made to **Don**

**Keefe, 6173 Doe Haven Drive, Farmington, NY 14425.**

The **Richard and Grace Brigham Award** recognizes the best overall treatment of automotive history for a magazine as a whole. Nominations can be made to **Jack Juratovic, 819 Absecon Trail, Lake Orion, MI 48362.**

The **James J. Bradley Award** recognizes outstanding contributions to automotive history by an organization. Nominations can be made to **James Wren, 5930 Glen Eagles Drive, West Bloomfield, MI 48323.**

The **E.P. Ingersoll Award** recognizes the best treatment of automotive history in media other than print. Nominations can be made to **James Wren.**

The **Friend of Automotive History Award** recognizes exceptional contributions to the cause of automotive history by an individual. Nominations can be made to **David L. Lewis, 2588 Hawthorn Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48104.**

The **Student Writing Award** recognizes the best treatment of automotive history by a student. Nominations can be made to **Sinclair Powell, 8 Ruthven Place, Ann Arbor, MI 48104-2612.**

## Time to Renew

Renewal notices for the 2002 membership year were mailed to all members the middle of December. To renew, return the notice with your check or credit card information. Be sure to check the membership information printed on your form and make any desired corrections. This information will be used in the preparation of the 2002 Membership Directory, due out in late summer.

Form gone astray in the mail or misplaced in your office? Not to worry! Just write your name and address on a piece of paper and mail with your check for \$40 (U.S. funds drawn on a U.S. bank, or use your Visa, MasterCard or American Express) to

**SAH Membership Renewal  
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Renew before March 1st so you don't miss any history-packed issues of our publications. Renewals for mem-

bers in the UK will be sent separately by our chapter, the Society of Automotive Historians in Britain.

## Reminder

The deadlines for European reservations are January 25th for February 11th London lunch and January 31st for February 7th Paris dinner. See *Journal* 195 for details.

—Taylor Vinson

## 2002 Amelia Island Concours

The seventh annual Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance, March 8-10, will honor Dan Gurney and the 35th Anniversary of his wins at LeMans (with A. J. Foyt) and Spa in the Eagle. It will also celebrate 100 years of Cadillac.

Over 230 antique, classic, special-interest and race cars will be on display on March 10 on the fairways of the Summer Beach Golf Course at The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island, Florida.

Further information can be found on the web site [www.ameliakoncours.org](http://www.ameliakoncours.org).

—Bill Warner

## New Book on Norwegian Coachbuilders

Late in 2001, *Rolling Coachwork—The Story of Norwegian Bodymakers*, to give it its English title, was published in Norway (ISBN 82-995890-0-2).

Written by *Asbjorn Rolseth* of Oslo, the book covers 256 different companies from all over the country which have been active in the body building business. Lacking a domestic car and truck industry (except for a few unsuccessful projects), Norway has always imported vehicles and chassis from other countries. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Norwegian market was dominated by American makes, with Ford and Chevrolet as the best selling cars and trucks. In the 1930s, Reo moved up to the number three spot in truck registrations and in 1938 became the leading supplier of bus and coach chassis to Norwegian bodybuilders. After World War II Swedish, British and German makes dominated the scene.

*continued on page 8*

# A Bold Yet Practical Vision

by Albert Mroz

**M**any small so-called mom-and-pop companies have built motor vehicles in America, and at one time there were hundreds of them. Nearly all of them failed to survive into the second half of the 20th Century. Enter brothers Hayward and Channing Powell of Compton, California. They had their own idea.

The brothers started out building motor scooters and motor homes after World War II. They decided to build pickup trucks and station wagons which handled like passenger cars. The inspiration incorporated the use of existing chassis and running gear with bodies built in their own shop. In effect the Powell Brothers were recycling old cars.

The project began in 1954 when a prototype was built on a 1952 Chevrolet chassis. The slab-side design was based on non-compound curve sheet metal that could be produced with inexpensive dies. The only pieces with compound curves were the front grille, which was fiberglass, and the roof and end caps of the bed.

The Powells decided to buy old Plymouth automobiles from junkyards, remove the bolt-on bodies and use the chassis, engines, transmissions and suspensions. Technically, they were not “truck manufacturers” because they did not build their own chassis. But their production numbers and unique business profile make them worthy of mention as builders.

Because of the Plymouth's frame construction it was fairly simple to remove the body, leaving the entire vehicle ready for a metamorphosis. The Plymouth six-cylinder side-valve engine was rebuilt as was the transmission. The 117-inch wheelbase Plymouth chassis were mostly pre-war vintage of 1940–1942. Powell trucks that survive today have owner's certificates (i.e. pink slips) dating from that period, but they were all built in 1955 and 1956, with some leftovers for 1957.

The Powell Brothers probably chose Plymouths due to the ready availability of fairly rust-free, whole vehicles at local wreckers. Plymouths were relatively light and inexpensive but known to be quite reliable. Apparently, the Powells avoided Chryslers and Dodges due to the fact that their vacuum-actuated Fluid-Drive transmissions sacrificed performance and reliability for convenience. Plymouths did not use Fluid-Drive.

Powell prices started at \$988.97 for the Sport Pickup in 1955. The price went up to \$1,095 the following year. The deluxe version, with turn signals, two-tone upholstery and chrome hub-caps was \$1,195, still \$250 less than any other comparable offering at the time. That \$250 could pay for a clever pop-up camper option the Powells offered.

A two-door station wagon was added for 1956. According to some

records, total production was approximately 1,000 pickups and 300 station wagons. That would mean over a two-year period the Powells assembled about two vehicles per day. That is within the realm of possibility in the context of their small factory.

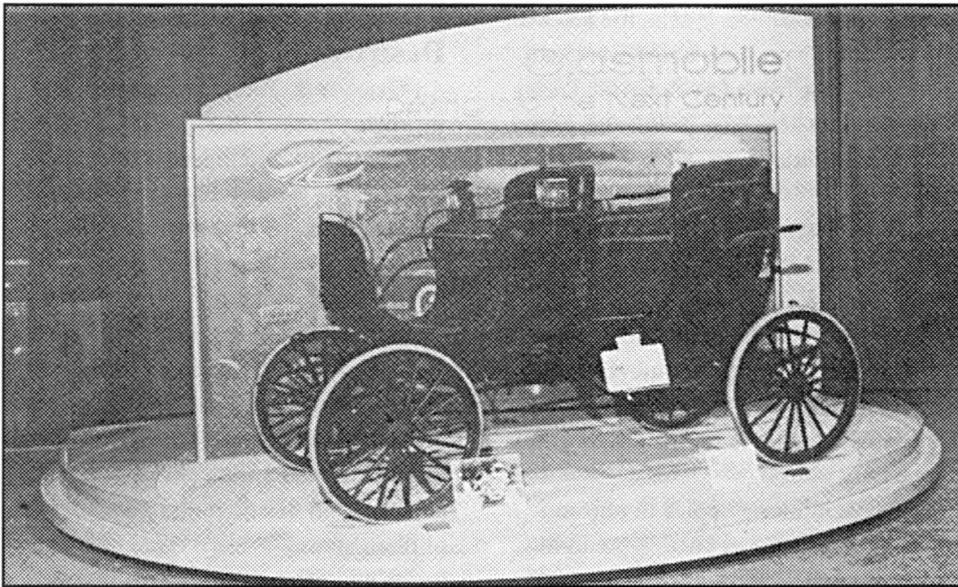
Some of the components used were innovations for pickups of the era, such as front coil springs, which was an idea derived from the Chevrolet prototype. Steering was Gemmer worm and roller. Rear suspension was standard with longitudinal left springs. The Powell sheet metal was lighter than the original Plymouth body, enhancing performance. The goal was to have a well handling vehicle with one-quarter-ton capacity. Those who bought a Powell knew they were buying something unique, so a number of them have survived.

The Powell slab-side styling has been likened to the Chevrolet Cameo, but Chevy's restyling did not appear until mid-year in 1955. The simplicity of the design and overall concept gave the Powell a contemporary look, yet there is a timelessness about it. The one example extant at the Hays Antique Truck Museum in Woodland, California, receives uncomplimentary remarks, probably due to its plainness and lack of chrome and other stylistic features. It's easily mistakable for a Willys design. Willys also intentionally avoided compound curves and limited sheet metal die draw to less than six inches, thereby saving cost and remaining independent of the suppliers that were too busy working for the mass producers anyway.

The Powell's wooden tailgate was not very durable, but it was inexpensive to make and replace. It resembled a transom on a boat and lifted straight up. Electrical and mechanical replacement parts were off-the-shelf. However, the tail lights were extremely small, resembling those of a VW microbus. Whether the Powells made any money building the pickups and station wagons is doubtful as production ceased after 1956. But they had a bold yet practical vision as independent craftsmen. ■



1955 Powell pickup (photo courtesy Hays Antique Truck Museum, Woodland, California A. Mroz)



The sole surviving four-passenger phaeton (photo courtesy Oldsmobile History Center)

### **Electric Olds continued from page 1**

A second, much less-known undertaking by R.E. at this same time was his decision to make what he called “city” vehicles powered by electricity. Though previously rejected by R.E., he now reasoned that a line of electrics could be put on the market quickly, as they were to be primarily assembled from proven components that Olds planned to purchase from outside manufacturers.

The electrics would hopefully reach a segment of the buying public not at all interested in owning a gasoline-powered vehicle. Well over half of the 8000-plus vehicles registered in America in 1900 were electric. Consequently, the market for the sales of electric vehicles envisioned by Olds appears to be reasonable in hindsight. Further, any revenues generated from their sales would do much to soothe the cash-flow worries of his backers, and hopefully would provide the needed time for him to bring to market his “second generation” of less expensive and simpler to operate gasoline vehicles.

The new electric project was quickly put into operation, and in a short time, several electrics were assembled, tested, and offered for sale. Although found to be very dependable, easy to operate and of high quality construction, the necessarily high selling price drastically limited their sales

appeal. With a price of over \$1,600 for the least costly model, the Olds electrics were not “cheap” by any standards of the day.

Still, R.E. saw enough selling potential for them that the Olds Company placed several large orders for electric parts and materials. Also, a large area on the second floor of the factory was outfitted with the equipment needed to assemble a substantial number of electric vehicles.

Just as significant production of electric vehicles was getting underway, disaster befell the entire automobile operation of the Olds Motor Works. On March 9, 1901, the factory was almost destroyed by fire. Reportedly, all but one of the existing Olds vehicles, both gasoline and electric, were destroyed in the fire. This catastrophe brought an immediate and total end to R.E.’s hopes for marketing a successful line of electric vehicles.

Some post-fire historians have stated that there is no “hard” evidence that any Olds electrics were ever sold. They also point out that several “knowledgeable, first hand” sources have stated that only a handful of electrics at best were ever produced. Thus, they make the case that the electric project was not, and never had been, (even in R.E.’s mind) a sincere and all-out attempt to produce and sell an ongoing and significant number of electric vehicles. They

quote the fact that (in 1954) Theo Barthel, Oldsmobile’s official bookkeeper in 1901, stated that he recorded a total of only five electrics on the company inventory report for 1900.

Also often quoted is Fred Smith’s 1928 published account that proclaimed that R.E. did actually “chase after strange electric gods” for a short while, and may have even sold “one or two” of what Smith obviously, and in hindsight, perceived to be a worthless and ill-conceived undertaking.

These historians draw the conclusion that the entire electric project was at best only a minor footnote in Oldsmobile’s long and storied history, not important enough to warrant more than a brief mention in passing.

Other equally compelling evidence, more recently uncovered or rediscovered, calls for a somewhat different and possibly more accurate conclusion.

The following account of events in the Olds electric vehicle story are presented in as accurate a chronological order as can be determined, and will shed new light on the Olds electric vehicles themselves. It will also expand their significance in the overall history of Oldsmobile vehicle production.

A pre-1901 Olds sales catalog shows many fanciful artist-drawn renditions of never-existing and obviously never-built vehicles. Of the many fanciful sketches in this catalog, only two closely resemble actual vehicles under development by R.E. They are a four-passenger electric “Cabriolet” and a small gasoline-powered “Runabout” shown with a straight dash front-end configuration. There are no prices or descriptive texts covering either of these vehicles. If the Olds Motor Works had any other gasoline-powered vehicles ready to market, wouldn’t they logically have been pictured in this catalog?

A second pre-1901 catalog published a short time later features R.E. Olds on the cover, at the tiller of an electric “Stanhope.” Also included are pictures and text covering two electric vehicles. Further, possibly for the first

*continued on page 10*

## SAH News continued from page 5

The book with nearly 800 illustrations on 616 pages shows combinations not normally seen in countries with a domestic car and truck industry. With the captions of all illustrations in English and German, the book displays American, Belgian, British, Czech, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Italian and Swedish cars and commercial vehicles bodied in Norway.

The book is the result of 15 years of interviews and research on the topic. Asbjorn Rolseth has been a member of SAH since 1987. Members resident in the United States can order the book directly from him for \$55 which includes postage. His address is Transportreportasje, Postboks 222 Okern, N-0510 Oslo, Norway. While he would be willing to sell directly to members resident in Europe for the same price but including postage of \$16, he advises that a British wholesaler, Meneshire, has bought a quantity to sell through European automobile book dealers, and that it might be cheaper (and more convenient) for them to order the book from these sources. The postage is \$25 for orders shipped to South America and Asia.

—Taylor Vinson

## New Book on Frank Kurtis

Gordon White's book, *Kurtis-Kraft, Masterworks of Speed & Style*, is now available from Classic Motorbooks. The hard-cover book is 216 pages and contains more than 280 photographs, 41 of them in color. Included is a 40-page appendix listing every champ car appearance of a Kurtis racing car from 1941 through 1970.

The book covers Frank Kurtis' career from his childhood in the coal towns of Utah and Colorado, through his pre WWII work building custom cars, his apprenticeship under Harley Earl and Clyde Adams, his earliest race cars, the midgets, champ cars, the few sprint cars, the TQs and quarter midgets, the sports cars of various sorts, the Mille Miglia and Mexican road race cars, sports and slingshot dragsters and the Bonneville cars he

did late in his career. It sells for \$39.95.

Gordon's previous books were *Offenhauser, the Legendary American Racing Engine and the Men Who Built It* and *The Indianapolis Racing Cars of Frank Kurtis*.

## Hayes-Hunt Update

*Journal* 195 included a *Saturday Evening Post* ad for Hayes-Hunt Bodies of Elizabeth, New Jersey, that *George Hanley* submitted. George had never heard of the company and asked for help from other members. *Ralph Dunwoodie* was happy to oblige.

He sent along copies of automotive publications that shed some light on the company. Here are his findings:

- H. Jay Hayes designed the first all-steel body in the United States in 1897; it was built by the Wilson Hayes Manufacturing Company of Cleveland, Ohio, for Eastman Electric Automobile. (*Antique Automobile*, September 1961)
- After moving to Detroit in 1903 the company was renamed the Hayes Manufacturing Company with H. Jay Hayes as president. (*Cycle & Automobile Trade Journal*, December 1909)
- A special offering of shares in the Hayes-Hunt Corp, the unit that manufactured closed bodies for Star and Durant cars, was made by the Durant Corp. The company, which now operated in Elizabeth, New Jersey, elected H. Jay Hayes president and J. S. Hunt vice president. It planned to establish plants in Lansing and Flint, Michigan, and Oakland, California. (*Automobile Topics*, March 24, 1923)
- The Hayes-Hunt Body Corp. operations were discontinued and the making of bodies for Durant cars was taken over by Durant Motors, Inc. (*Automobile Trade Journal*, August 1, 1928)
- John S. Hunt was now general manager of the Durant Motor Co. of New Jersey. (*Automotive Industries*, October 27, 1928)

SAH member *Nelson Bolan* confirmed this Hayes-Hunt/Durant connection by submitting an ad for a 1926 or 1927 Star. The ad notes that the Durant car had a body by Hayes-Hunt.

## Limousine Body Plant Destroyed

An October 3, 2001 fire swept swiftly through the old Limousine Body plant in Kalamazoo, Michigan. By October 4th nothing but bricks and rubble covered the area.

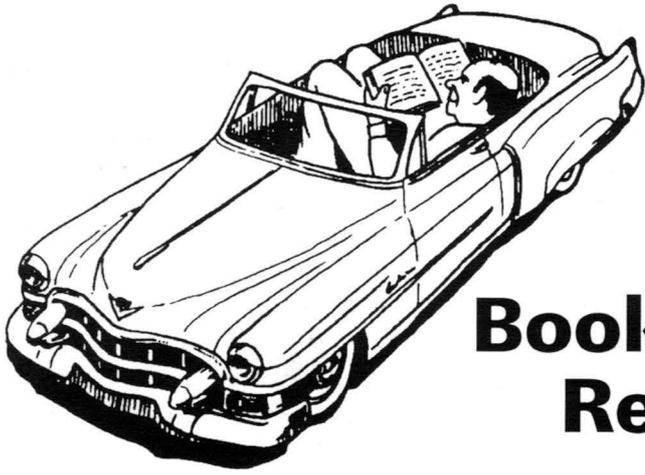
Lane Boulevard, the location of the plant, is named for M. Henry Lane, founder and former president of Michigan Buggy, a company that sold horse-drawn vehicles and sleighs and began manufacture of the Mighty Michigan car in 1909. In 1912 the company finished construction of one million square feet of plant space for blanket manufacture. Included in this construction was the plant at 2002 Lane Boulevard that eventually became Limousine Body.

The decision to build an automobile and the founding of the Michigan Automobile Co. in 1912 proved fatal, as the firm was not equipped to manage the complexity of such a venture. Michigan Buggy went bankrupt and closed in 1913. The buildings, including the blanket factory, were purchased by Charles Hays, a local real estate developer, and he in turn sold the blanket factory to James Bobb, a former salesman for Michigan Buggy and founder of the Limousine Body Company.

Bobb founded the Limousine Top Co. in 1914 and began manufacturing demountable weather-tight tops with Edwardian-style windows for open cars. Many of these tops graced the bodies of the Kalamazoo-built Roamer. The company name was changed to Limousine Body Co. in 1920 and production was expanded to include automobile bodies. Construction was said to be free of squeaks, rattles and "canary chirps," and the high quality of manufacture soon drew the attention of E. L. Cord in Auburn, Indiana. Cord contracted with Limousine Body to build the cabriolet and convertible sedan bodies for the Cord and Auburn automobiles. Limousine Body became a part of the E. L. Cord conglomerate.

After the Wall Street crash in 1929 and the ensuing depression, E. L. Cord

*Continued on page 10*



## Book Reviews

**The Drive to Design** by Rolf J.F. Kieselbach, 1998 ISBN 3-929638-17-7. Hardcover, 8 x 11 inches, 211 pages, 240 illustrations, photographs, renderings, sketches and drawings in black and white and color, text in German. Published by Avedition GmbH, Königsallee 57, D-71638 Ludwigsburg, Germany. DM98 (approx. \$50)

Rolf J.F. Kieselbach is a university lecturer on design who wrote *Technik der Eleganz* as well as books on the streamlined cars of Germany and abroad.

The first chapter of *The Drive to Design* is devoted to the history of automotive design and also contains short biographies of four famous chief-designers of Germany.

This history, from the early motorcars still very much resembling horse-drawn vehicles to the automobiles of the 1970s, is a long and fascinating story. The author explains how French fashion and influence were predominant in the early years. Later coachbuilders and designers developed more and more individual bodies and shapes typical for their countries or even certain marques.

The advent of mass production steel bodies, the experiments with aerodynamic cars of Jaray and others, the increasing speed on the road, requirements of comfort and baggage space, all these and many other aspects triggered the creation of new shapes, forms and bodies. The special coach-built bodies, mainly on expensive chassis of fast tourers, sports and town cars

also often influenced the design of less exclusive models.

Some of the most remarkable developments and cars are pictured. The four-side drawing of an early boat-tail sports phaeton on an Austro-Daimler, a beautiful Reuters color advertisement for the Lincoln and 15 renderings published in the French *L'Auto Carrosserie* as well as several special bodies by Chapron and Sodomka are especially pleasing.

Then the postwar designs influenced by the American and Italian styling are explained. A 16-page section lists the most important coachbuilders of Europe and the USA and their specialties. A portrait of the Karmann Design Studio is followed by biographies of Luthe, Rennen, Kapitza and Dienst.

The next chapter gives an insight into the professional education of automotive designers with an interview with James Kelly, who provides details on modeling with clay, along with addresses of design schools in Germany, UK, Italy and the USA.

In depth reports on the design departments of Volkswagen, Daimler-Benz, Audi, Opel, BMW and Porsche are most interesting and well illustrated.

The last chapter deals with the question of aerodynamics, a balance between art and physics.

The book will appeal to any enthusiast of automotive history, especially those interested in the design of motorcars over the years, and it is also a preview of future ideas.

—Ferdinand Hediger

**Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper**, by Nicholson Baker. ISBN 0-375-50444-3. Hardbound, 6 x 8½ inches, 372 pages, seven color illustrations. Random House, \$25.95

This isn't a car book, so what's its review doing in *SAH Journal*? Well, as *Leroy Cole's* presidential perspectives have noted over the past two years, we historians tend to operate on an unending stream of paper. The knowledge we all seek, whether printed or written down, invariably ends up on a sheet of paper—many sheets of paper, usually bound together. And according to Nicholson Baker, the librarians of the world, the people whose job it is to protect and disseminate that paper-bound knowledge, are going to great lengths to throw it away.

Like so many things, this debate involves a multi-faceted tradeoff: the fragility of paper vs. the space needed to store it vs. the compactness of microfilm and digital media vs. the difficulty in converting between media vs. the stability of the new media vs.—well we don't even know all the parameters of the "information age" yet. Baker, who admits to substantial bias—he *likes* paper—makes a swaying argument that in the rush to embrace new technologies our librarians have exaggerated the self-destructing properties of paper, oversold the new media, favored destructive techniques for the conversion processes and failed to monitor the quality of the facsimile copies before tossing the originals. In the United States, most prominent in the scan-and-burn brigade has been the Library of Congress.

This is not the place to play out the whole argument. Read the book and draw your own conclusions, but you won't go wrong keeping your paper books and literature on your shelving. They'll outlast you anyway. And we won't even mention the new digital literature that wings its way around cyberspace for a few months and then is gone forever. Could the assault on paper spell the end of automotive history as we know it?

—Kit Foster

**Electric Olds continued from page 7**  
time, several pictures of prototype "Curved Dash" gasoline vehicles are shown.

A pre-1901 one-page Olds price sheet lists the two-passenger "Stanhope" at \$1,650 and the five-passenger "Phaeton" electric at \$1,750. A number of gasoline-powered Olds vehicles are also listed at prices ranging from a low of \$1,000 for a one-cylinder "runabout" to \$2,750 for a four-passenger "Brougham." Obviously the new lower-priced gasoline powered vehicles envisioned by R.E. weren't "up and running" or being offered to the public as of yet.

A 1900 trade journal article states that Olds Motor Works had placed a "large" order for batteries with the Sipe and Sigler firm of Cleveland, Ohio.

In 1900 the company displayed a "Stanhope" electric at both the Chicago and Cleveland Auto Shows. R.E. himself took the vehicle to Chicago. It was given very good reviews by automotive reporters covering the shows. Doesn't it stand to reason that Olds would have shown the proposed new gasoline vehicles at these shows as well, if they were ready for production?

The fairly recent discovery and identification of a number of actual pre-1901 Olds factory photographs show a number of electric vehicles being tested and driven on Belle Isle. A close study of these photographs identifies at least seven, and perhaps more, electric vehicles existing in 1900.

A newspaper account appearing one day after the factory fire quotes Olds automobile department superintendent Willis Grant Murray as saying that more than 20 electrics, either completed or in varying stages of assembly, were destroyed in the fire. He further stated that a large amount of electric parts and materials was also destroyed. One other interesting statement by Murray is that one electric vehicle survived the fire because it was being used by an Olds official and therefore was not at the factory.

A photograph of a four-passenger Olds electric "Phaeton" in a Detroit parade in July of 1901 shows R.E. Olds at

the tiller and Fred Smith as his passenger. This is four months after the fire.

In the 1960s an electric vehicle was recovered from a barn in Lansing. It is subsequently identified as an Olds electric "Phaeton." (It is owned by Donald and Kenneth McDowell.) A study of this newly found and apparently sole-surviving Olds electric reveals much about the fine engineering and high quality workmanship that R.E. lavished on his line of electric vehicles. To begin with, R.E. bought the high styled and beautifully executed bodies for his electrics from one of the leading body firms in Detroit, the Sievers and Erdman Coach Builders Company. The bodies were appointed with patent leather mudguards and dashboards, nickel trim on all exposed hardware and top-quality goatskin leather upholstery. The highly lacquered black wooden bodies featured both gold hand striping and beautifully contrasting purple cloth trim bands along all exposed seat edging.

Mechanical features included instruments by Weston, motor by the Eddy Company of Windsor, Connecticut, hard-rubber tires by Goodyear, top-grade Sarvin wheels and hubs and an Olds-designed and built controller unit for changing speeds. Showing nice attention to small details, the control arm and tiller were furnished with sterling silver-accented ebony handles. This was a high-quality, beautifully made vehicle that puts to rest the contention that the line of Olds electrics was developed only as a stopgap and cut-rate proposition. That it did not survive and succeed sales-wise was a shame.

It died principally because of the fire, not because of any inherent design weakness in its make-up. But for the fire, it seems likely that it could have successfully found its own segment of the market and thus co-existed with Olds curved-dash gasoline vehicles.

While the demise of practically all electric vehicle companies was only a few years down the road, the Olds electric could almost certainly have had more than a couple of years of success at the turn of the century.

The sudden and almost overwhelming success of the Curved-Dash Oldsmobile immediately after the fire left Olds with no room to even consider re-introducing the electric or any other model. Thus, this fine car, like thousands of other American vehicles, disappeared into almost total obscurity. It is gone but should not be forgotten.

Obviously, the entire history of the Olds electric vehicle project is far from complete at this time. Readers are invited to offer feedback covering new or corrected information concerning the Olds electric history presented in this article. ■

*This article was first published in the R.E. Olds Transportation Museum Quarterly Review, Winter 2000/2001*

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### **SAH News continued from page 8**

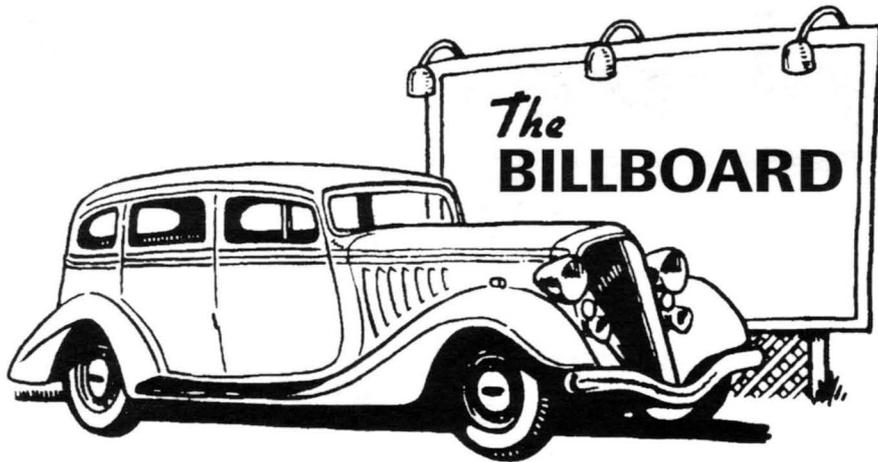
reportedly pressured Bobb to move his plant to Auburn at a time when approximately 27 percent of the Auburn cars were ordered with cabriolet or convertible bodies. When Bobb refused Cord reassigned the manufacture of the Cord and Auburn bodies to a firm in Indiana. After the loss of the Cord contracts Bobb could not find sufficient work to maintain Limousine Body. Undaunted, he sold the automobile related manufacturing equipment in 1933 and a year later opened a furniture manufacturing plant. The Limousine Body building, while not identified formally as an historic site, is a tragic loss to the automotive heritage of the city.

*Editor's note: this news item was submitted by Dales Wells with the permission of the Kalamazoo Antique Auto Restorers Club. The article first appeared in the club's newsletter, Arc & Spark.*

### **Member News**

Past SAH President *Sinclair Powell* was elected to the Board of Directors of the R.E. Olds Transportation Museum, Inc. at the museum's Annual Membership Meeting on December 10th.

In its monthly publication *Supercharger* the Detroit Section of the Society of Automotive Engineers named *George Hanley* as one its 100 most notable members of the past century.



**Wanted** I am looking for any information about the Luverne Automobile Company—location of surviving automobiles, parts, literature, magazine articles and/or advertisements that have any reference to this car company. Information on this company is very difficult to find so any help would be very much appreciated.

**Richard Herman** 1303 Northview Dr., Luverne, MN 56156 (507) 283-2412 email [dick@hermanmotor.com](mailto:dick@hermanmotor.com)

**Wanted** Complete set of RROC "The Flying Lady" magazine; license plate attachments/frames from the 1930s Hollywood/Beverly Hills/Los Angeles (original only); programs from Beverly Hills board track, particularly February 25, 1923, race won by Jimmy Murphy. **Bob Joynt**, 1 So. 808 Deerpath Road, Batavia, IL 60510 (630) 879-8884

**Wanted** Info needed on the IKA Torino of Argentina. This was based on an Italian-modified Rambler. **Diego Rosenberg**, [rosenb37@msu.edu](mailto:rosenb37@msu.edu), (786) 276-3113.

**Wanted** I am currently writing a book on French streamline designs of the 1930s, featuring the work of Figoni et Falaschi and Pourtout. Two of the stylists who worked on these designs were Georges Paulin and Marcel Andreau. I am looking for any information available on Paulin and Andreau, such as photos and biographical information.

I am documenting the history of every Tear Drop Talbot-Lago chassis. Any information on early Talbot-Lago Tear Drop owners would be extremely helpful.

In Volume XX No. 1 of *Automobile*

Quarterly there is a 1939 Talbot-Lago Darracq owned by a Gladys Gehrt Milnes. Does anyone know anything about this person or the car?

The other early owner on whom I am trying to find information is a Robert B. Gegen, regional executive of the SCCA in Miami, Florida. Mr. Gegen owned a Talbot-Lago Tear Drop built on a T23 chassis. It is a lovely two-toned car with exposed headlights. Mr. Gegen more than likely owned the car in the late '40s to early '50s. I believe this same car was shown at the Museum of Modern Art exhibition concerned with the esthetics of motor car design in New York in 1951. Per the exhibition catalog, it was on loan from a Carroll Bagley. Any info on Carroll Bagley would be appreciated.

I would like to confirm from whom Brooks Stevens purchased his two T150C SS Figoni Talbot-Lago Tear Drops. The first car he purchased was from the St. Paul area, and was wrecked and never restored. This car has since been stolen from the Wisconsin area. The car in Stevens' museum for many years is now in Great Britain. Any information on either of these cars would be appreciated. **Richard Adatto**, 1314 Denny Way—Suite 103, Seattle, WA 98109, phone (206) 652-5300, fax (206) 652-5255, email [richard@adattoconstruction.com](mailto:richard@adattoconstruction.com)



## Dale LaFollette's Vintage Motorphoto

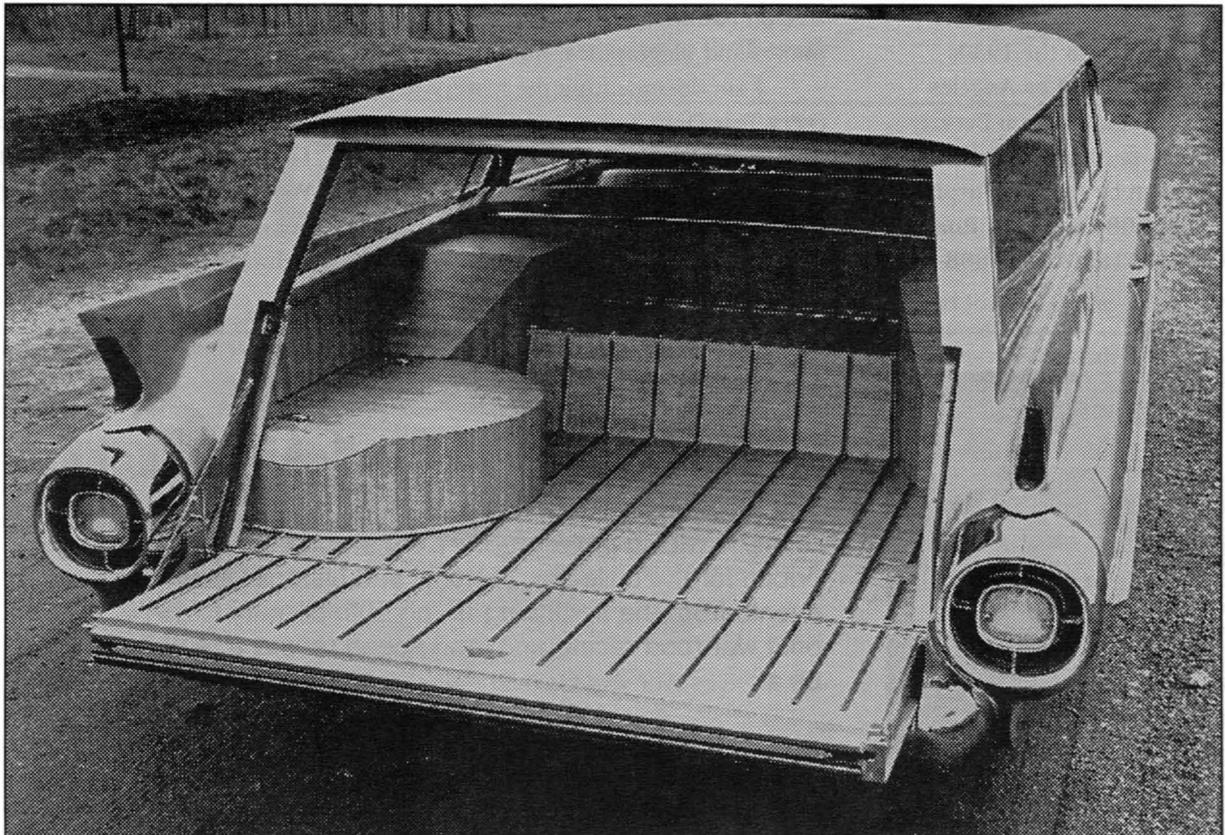
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**ESCALADE'S ELDER?** Cadillac wagons are nothing new. Various coachbuilders and conversion houses have been turning them out for years. This is an odd duck, with what appears to be 1960 fins on '59 light pods. What may have passed for a luxury interior back then would be called motorhome kitsch today. Anyone know who built it?  
*Kit Foster collection*