

THE JOURNAL

OF THE SOCIETY OF AUTOMOTIVE HISTORIANS, INC.

May - June 1984

Issue Number 90

Editorial Comment

This issue of the *Journal* contains an article reprinted from *The Spark*, the quarterly publication of the Wisconsin Chapter of the Society of Automotive Historians. I'm sure that many of our members will find it interesting and, perhaps, even controversial. Letters of comment are welcomed, and will be published in the next issue of the *Journal*, assuming that sufficient space will be available—which brings us to the next point:

This is a very full issue, and a few items will have to be carried over for publication in the next one. By that time, however, the situation may have become even more acute. The time is not many months away until a decision will need to be made as to whether the number of pages per issue or the number of issues per year must be increased. And because either choice will increase publishing and mailing costs, neither can be put into effect until our membership and income are greater.

It is probable that almost every one of our members knows someone who would be a good prospect for membership. If you have a friend who might be interested, send his or her name and address to me and I will mail each prospect a sample copy of the *Journal*, a form letter outlining the purpose and objectives of the SAH, and a membership application form.

Additionally, any and all suggestions and ideas for building greater membership will be most welcome.

*Richard B. Brigham, Editor
1616 Park Lane, N.E.
Marietta, Georgia 30066*

MINUTES OF SAH BOARD MEETING FEBRUARY 10, 1984

The winter meeting of the Board of Directors was held on Friday, February 10, 1984, in the Board Room of the Library of the American Philosophical Society, 105 South 5th Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Those present were: President John A. Conde, Vice President Walter E. Gosden, Secretary Charles L. Betts, Jr., and Directors Beverly Rae Kimes, David L. Lewis, Thomas E. Warth, and R. Perry Zavitz.

President Conde called the meeting to order at 10 a.m. and welcomed the new vice president and directors. The report of the 1983 fall board meeting was approved as published in Issue No. 87 of the *Journal*.

Vice President Gosden reported on his plans to visit England this summer, and his desire to bring the United Kingdom Chapter, as well as other chapters, into closer focus. During discussion, President Conde appointed Gosden to serve as Chapter Liaison Chairman.

President Conde introduced Director Jeffrey I. Godshall's resolution with regard to the wanton destruction of certain automobiles during the filming of the movie, "Christine." The board decided to take no official position on this matter, but at the same time concurred such destruction of older cars was to be deplored, and suggested that Director Godshall detail the events in an article for publication in the *Journal*. The board also voiced the opinion that other members of the Society with strong feelings on the matter might want to communicate same to their congressman.

President Conde announced that Gerald Perschbacher had been appointed to fill the vacancy on the board resulting from the resignation of the directorship (not the membership) of Douglas A. Bakken. Mr. Perschbacher has also been named chairman of the Society's Publicity Committee.

Director Perry Zavitz brought up the question of annual dues payments by out-of-country (foreign) members. In view of charges imposed for International Money Orders and the like, the board decided, beginning in 1985, to discount annual dues payable by all foreign members of the Society by a flat 20 percent.

There was considerable discussion about the Society's publications, with regard particularly to new stories and features which would be of interest and benefit to members. It was decided to ask Richard Brigham to serve as editor of *Automotive History Review*, with one issue of the magazine to be published by October 1, 1984. The *Journal* will continue on its bi-monthly schedule.

With regard to our membership status, Charles Betts reported that approximately 100 1983 members (including 20 British members) had not renewed for 1984. President Conde volunteered to contact the non-renewers (excluding the British non-renewers), while Charles Betts promised to contact Letters Unlimited regarding their arrangements for sending the Society's publications to foreign members.

Finances permitting, it was agreed to compile (with a March 15, 1984 deadline) and issue a 1984 Membership Directory to include phone numbers wherever possible. Future membership applications and renewal notices will carry a request for both business and home phone numbers.

President Conde announced the sad news of the passing of Hoosier Heritage Chapter member William G. Neptune.

President Conde revealed that *Cars & Parts* magazine had generously donated the sum of \$100.00 to the Society to be used for the James J. Bradley award.

In the absence of Treasurer George Ward, Secretary Charles Betts was authorized to make a contribution of \$50.00, on behalf of the Society, to Friends of the Library of the American Philosophical Society for the use of their Board Room.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Charles L. Betts, Secretary



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SOCIETY OF AUTOMOTIVE HISTORIANS' OFFICERS, 1984

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Persons interested in joining the Society of Automotive Historians, write to Charles L. Betts, Jr., Secretary, 2105 Stackhouse Drive, Yardley, PA 19067.

If you have moved, forward your new address to Charles L. Betts, Jr., 2105 Stackhouse Drive, Yardley, PA 19067.

Material for publication in the Journal or Automotive History Review should be sent to Richard B. Brigham, Editor, 1616 Park Lane, N.E., Marietta, GA 30066.

BACK ISSUES OF SAH PUBLICATIONS FOR YOUR FILES

AUTOMOTIVE HISTORY REVIEW

With the exception of number two, all issues are available from one to fifteen. Price is \$3.00 per copy, plus \$1.00 postage per order in the USA.

NEWSLETTER AND JOURNAL

Out of print: 3, 4, 6, 7, 23, 26, 43.

Very limited supplies: 1, 2, 5, 8, 9, 12, 33, 34, 39.

These are priced at \$1.00 each, while they last, not to be included in quantity prices quoted below.

All other issues: The following price schedule applies;

Single copies, each. \$1.00
Any ten. \$8.00
Any twenty-five \$17.00
All available from #10 thru #75 \$33.00

Please add \$1.00 per order for postage in USA

For shipment outside the USA please make payment in US funds and add ten percent of the amount of your order for shipping.

Make checks payable to The Society of Automotive Historians, Inc., and mail to Fred Roe, 837 Winter Street, Holliston, MA 01746 USA.

FORMER NEVADA GOVERNOR WILL HEAD FUNDRAISING DRIVE FOR HARRAH CARS

RENO, Nevada—Former Nevada Governor Robert List has agreed to serve as chairman of the \$10 million fundraising drive for the William F. Harrah Automobile Foundation.

List, as governor, was active in the formation of the non-profit Foundation, which was established to build a permanent home for the best cars from Harrah's Automobile Collection in Reno.

The announcement that List will be fundraising chairman of the Foundation was made by Foundation Chairman Benedict J. Dasher.

"This is more than an honorary position," Dasher stressed. "Governor List has agreed to devote as much time as possible to helping the Foundation realize its goals.

"We look upon this as a continuation of the work he started as governor. Bob List has a strong commitment to the goals of the Foundation—goals which can be realized only through a successful funds drive."

In accepting the chairmanship, List, now in private legal practice in Reno, said he was anxious to get started.

"This is a challenging assignment, but the essence of the car collection compiled by Bill Harrah should always have a home in Reno," List said, "I will do everything I can do to help.

"The Collection is more than the greatest aggregation of motor vehicles in the world, more even than a tribute and legacy to the man who compiled it.

"Above all, these cars are an important asset to Nevada's tourism economy," List said. "We need to keep them here for our visitors to enjoy.

"My wife, Kathy, and I are full-time residents of Reno. This is a great opportunity for us to serve our new hometown," List added.

Dasher said List would be working closely with the Foundation's fundraising firm of Brakeley, John Price Jones, Inc. in the identification of major funding sources. List will be helping personally to solicit funds, as well as supervising a broadly based fundraising committee charged with spearheading the effort.

The fundraising drive thus far has been marked by two major events, a \$1 million gift from Verna Harrah Levin, widow of Bill Harrah, and the *Superstars and Classic Cars* nationally syndicated television special, Dasher noted.

"Mrs. Levin's gift was a pivotal moment in our effort," said Dasher, "because it gets us ten percent of the way to our goal before we even start. And it was truly a gift from the heart.

"*Superstars and Classic Cars*, with its national telecast, helped us tell our story to an audience we think can appreciate the importance of the Foundation's effort.

"Now we have a third major event. The decision by Governor List to continue his involvement in our work gives us new momentum and starts us well on the way to success."

The City of Reno has agreed to build a museum for cars being donated from the collection by Holiday Inns, Inc., parent company of Harrah's, on land the city has started to acquire in downtown Reno.

About 300 cars, valued at some \$30 million, will be located in the museum, which is expected to attract eight million visitors a year.

— News release from *The Harrah Automobile Foundation*
Post Office Box 21477
Reno, Nevada 89515

NINE SAH MEMBERS HELP DETROIT LIBRARY EARN \$80,000

by Gerald Perschbacher

DETROIT, Michigan—Nine members of the Society of Automotive Historians were instrumental in helping the Detroit Public Library earn nearly \$80,000 to use toward improving the National Automotive History Collection (NAHC). Funds were collected through a special sale of duplicate or unneeded automotive literature housed in the collection. The sale was from March 4th through 6th, with a half-day auction at the end of the week to dispose of the remaining material.

John A. Conde, president of the SAH and chairman of the sale, mentioned that \$57,000 was collected on the first day of the event. "We opened the doors at 9:30 a.m. on Sunday, and there must have been about 400 people already waiting," said Conde. "We estimated that about 1200 people had come to the sale by noon of that first day."

Lee R. Kollins, chairman of the NAHC Board of Trustees, and Paul T. Scupholm, director of the Friends of the Detroit Public Library, were two members of the SAH who were deeply involved in this sale from the very beginning. John McAlpine, a former advertising executive and member of the SAH, added to the proceeds through the sale of six rare, gold-printed ad proofs of the Packard Darrin Speedster at \$100 each.

Other SAH members involved in the sale were David L. Lewis, SAH board member; Joseph H. Karshner, retired General Motors public relations executive; Michael J. Kollins, former Packard and Chrysler engineer; and Melvin McCabe; and Gerald Perschbacher, SAH publicity director.

Sales literature, bound volumes of antique and vintage automobiles dating back to the turn of the century, owners' manuals, photographs, and technical books filled much of the sale space on the upper floor of the Detroit Library. Most prices were at or below those listed in most hobby publications. "There were tons of automobile literature in the sale," says Conde, a former American Motors executive. "It took about three years to get the material together like this, but it certainly was worth all the volunteer help. I know the library echoes my words when I say that the sale would not have been such a big success without the help and dedication of these SAH members."

CHAPTER DOINGS

The Wisconsin Chapter

Bill Cameron, editor of the Wisconsin Chapter's quarterly publication, *The Spark*, has sent us a copy of the Spring 1984 issue. This is a booklet of 28 pages (including covers) filled with a variety of items of particular interest to members of the chapter plus articles of general interest which would appeal to just about all SAH members.

Among the goodies included in this current issue is an article by Karl S. Zahm concerning the study of automotive history (Karl is a long-time SAH member) and an installment of a continuing series about Wisconsin-built cars, written by Walter E. Wray. Another of Wray's articles, this one about the Ruxton car, is reprinted in this issue of the *Journal*, on pages 6 and 7.

We'd like to report the activities of other SAH chapters around the country and around the world. Send information, and, if possible, copies of your newsletters or other publications to: R. B. Brigham, Editor, 1616 Park Lane, Marietta, Georgia 30066, U.S.A.

WERE ANY SAGINAW SPEEDSTERS EVER BUILT?

This provocative question calls for a search into the old trade journals of circa 1914. Therein perhaps remains the possible answer to this mystery.

From *The Horseless Age* (May 13, 1914, page 741) we read of the formation of the Saginaw Motor Car Company, of Saginaw, Michigan. (We must be careful not to confuse this firm with a later company of the same name which in the years 1916-1918 built the Yale 8; likewise concern must be exercised not to mingle this firm with the Saginaw cyclecar manufactured by the Valley Boat and Engine Company in 1914 and 1915.) From this one-paragraph article we learn that this firm's capital stock was to be \$150,000, that the principal men involved were A. R. Thomas, of Detroit, and W. L. Walls, of Chicago, that the firm was to take over the property of the defunct Brooks Motor Wagon Company, and that this proposed cyclecar was to sell for \$395.

Beverly Rae Kimes, noted authority on the subject of early American automotive history, has pointed out that the two men mentioned above were connected in 1913 with the Little Detroit Speedster. That four-cylinder water-cooled car had a 12-hp engine, 28 x 3 inch tires, a 44 inch tread and a wheelbase of 92 inches. Its selling price was \$375, and it was a product of the Detroit Cyclecar Company, 504-8 Elk's Temple Building, Detroit.

Automobile Topics (May 16, 1914) states that negotiations between Brooks and the Saginaw Motor Car Company had been completed. This article further reports that Thomas and Walls had formerly been associated with Buick and Studebaker. Also it is mentioned that "manufacturing of the 'Speedster' is to be commenced at once."

By June 4, 1914 (*The Automobile*, page 1196) the company supposedly had been incorporated, has "acquired the site," and expected "shortly to commence the manufacture of automobiles." By that time, James P. Bowen had also become associated with the firm.

The old Brooks plant, according to *Automobile Topics*, (May 16, 1914, page 23), was "large and well equipped, the building being 200 by 400 feet, while the property itself covers five and a half acres." The site was located at the corner of Rust and Jefferson avenues in Saginaw.

A press release dated June 26 (1914) appeared in *The Automobile* (July 2, 1914, page 21). Mention was made of the hoped-for initial output of ten cars. Further on we read, "if the company's plans mature, it will build 2,000 cars in 1915 and employ 300 men." By then David Cuthbertson had joined the firm; apparently Bowen and Walls had left. This same article stated that the firm had definitely acquired the Brooks Motor Wagon plant.

The Horseless Age (July 1, 1914, page 8) announced that directors for the firm had been chosen and that the company "hoped to begin active operation about July 1," that "considerable stock [had] been subscribed," and that "cars would be sent to selected points to agencies already chosen."

Nothing further concerning this *marque* is known to this writer. Thus the question remains: "Were any cars with the name Saginaw Speedster ever built?" As far as this writer is concerned, no cars or pictures, folders, catalogues, stock certificates, stationery, et cetera of this firm are believed extant.

Anyone having further information regarding this elusive and mysterious company is invited to communicate with this compiler at: 201 Salzburg Avenue, Bay City, Michigan, 48706-5317.

Ronald John Putz

NEW CARS FOR OLD

Visit any large antique car show or meet, and sooner or later another spectator—usually a complete stranger—will tell you about someone who was offered a brand new automobile in exchange for his old one. The teller of such a tale never seems to know for sure who actually owned the old car, or when or where the supposed exchange took place. Most of us have heard these accounts more than once, but few, if any are backed by any solid evidence.

Probably one of the most often repeated stories goes something like this: "My grandfather knew a man who had a 1916 Ford, and Henry Ford heard about it and gave him a brand new car for it." Or perhaps: "Heard about a fellow over in Indiana or Illinois, I think it was, who had a 1919 Chevy. General Motors offered him \$50,000 for it but he wouldn't sell it."

There is, however, at least one well documented case on record. The following item, in small print, appeared on a back page of the June 1, 1916, issue of *Motor Age*:

"Offers New Haynes for Old. The Haynes Automobile Co., of Kokomo, Ind., will give a new Haynes twelve in even exchange for the oldest Haynes car that can be found."

Evidently many subscribers read the small items on the back pages, for just one week later, in the issue of June 8, *Motor Age* printed this second small report on this subject: **"Many Old Haynes Cars Found.** One hundred and twenty-one old car owners have replied to the inquiry of the Haynes Automobile Co., of Kokomo, Ind., for the oldest Haynes car in service. New York leads the states with twenty-three cars that were built before 1907."

Several weeks later, in the issue of July 13, 1916, *Motor Age* printed the following story—this time right up in the news section of the magazine:

"1897 HAYNES WINS CONTEST

"Kokomo, Ind., July 10—In all probability the Haynes "Light Twelve" car, offered for the oldest Haynes car that is still running in America at the present time, will be awarded to Walter E. Smith, Bound Brook, New Jersey, who has an old two-cylinder car that was built in 1897. The car is in operation today, and this spring won a prize as the oldest car in a county contest. Its nearest competitor was a 1902 two-cylinder car.

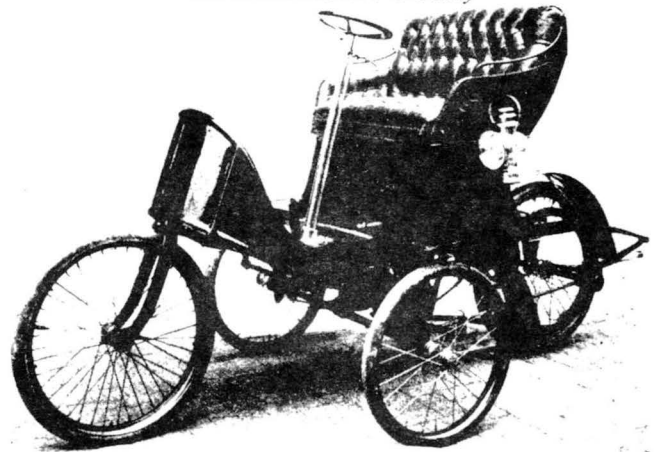
"The machine retains its original appearance almost in entirety. Even the rubber matting which was furnished with the car is still intact, and the original warning system, a bell operated by a foot lever, is used by Mr. Smith today. Throughout its tenure, the old car has received the best attention, and has never been in any sort of accident. It weighs 1,950 pounds and originally cost \$1,900. It is a surrey that provides ample room for four passengers and is steered by a lever. The car today makes from 15 to 20 miles an hour over good roads.

"Compared to the high-speed, multiple cylinder motors of the present day the old two-cylinder engine presents a vivid contrast. Each cylinder has a carburetor and dry battery of its own. The engine has a 5-inch bore and a 6½-inch stroke, and is rated at 15 horsepower.

"The Bound Brook car was built shortly after the Haynes company began building two-cylinder models in 1897. With the exception of three one-cylinder cars that Elwood Haynes built himself and have since been lost trace of, this car stands, according to present records, as the patriarch of the old Haynes cars in America."

Do any of our members know the present whereabouts of the 1897 car, if it still exists?

THE AUTOCYCLE *An Automotive Oddity*



This odd-looking vehicle was made back in 1907 by the Vandergrift Automobile Company, 13th and Cumberland Streets, Philadelphia. It was originally known as the Vandergrift, but the name was soon changed to "Autocycle."

The reason for the unusual configuration of the wheels is not clear, but the general design of the machine was plainly influenced by contemporary bicycle construction. Without the side wheels the car would resemble a bicycle carrying a chair.

Power was supplied to the single rear wheel, suggesting motorcycle design practice. The side wheels were needed, of course, to keep the vehicle upright. Perhaps the Autocycle was intended to be a two-passenger motorcycle.

The engine which drove the rear wheel was a one-cylinder air-cooled affair, similar to a motorcycle engine. It produced six horsepower, which provided the Autocycle with a top speed of 40 miles per hour.

The single front wheel and the two side wheels were all connected to the steering mechanism. The car could turn in a 30-foot circle, and could be driven head first into (and out of) an ordinary parking space.

It is not known how many of these unorthodox cars were produced, but the Vandergrift Automobile Company lasted less than a year.

THE 1984 MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY

As this paragraph is written, the long-awaited 1984 SAH *Membership Directory* is being printed, and by the time this paragraph is being read, your copy of the directory should already be in your hands. Every effort has been put forth to insure accuracy, but errors can occur. Check your own listing, and if correction is required please notify Secretary Charles Betts, Jr., 2105 Stackhouse Drive, Yardley, PA 19067. Corrections, additions and changes will be included as required in all future issues of the *Journal*.

Letters

From Charles L. Betts, Jr., 2105 Stackhouse Drive, Yardley, Pennsylvania (dated March 26, 1984). Last week I happened to be in Princeton, New Jersey, and, just on the spur of the moment, I dropped in at the editorial office of *Automobile Quarterly*. I was anxious to learn the status of Griffith Borge-son's forthcoming book, *Errett Lobban Cord*. As I stepped off the elevator, I was greeted by a huge banner — WELCOME GRIFFITH BORGESON. Was Griff actually here, or what?

Yes, he was here (in this country) all right, but not actu-

ally in the A-Q office at the moment. He and editor/publisher L. Scott Bailey, were in northern New Jersey where the Cord book was being bound. Griff was there (he resides in southern France), I learned, to autograph copies prior to their distribution to subscribers.

Anyway, I couldn't help blurting out, "I sure would like to meet him!" And those good people at A-Q don't miss a trick! By the end of the week Griff and I met for the first time and became better acquainted over a leisurely luncheon. The more we talked, the more I discovered our interests were mutual. Griff has a very warm personality and an honest dedication to learn the whole truth about the subject at hand. He reminds me so much of Peter Helck in his graciousness and his inner feelings.

Before we parted, Griff asked me to convey his sincere greetings and best wishes to his many SAH friends. All in all, it was a truly remarkable day.

Editor's Note: The picture postcard referred to in the letter below appears in enlarged form on the back page of this newsletter.

From William T. Cameron, 7495 Clearwater Road, Minocqua, Wisconsin 54548: I thought you might be interested in this picture postcard printed in Savannah, Georgia, circa 1908. It shows Forrest F. Cameron driving a 1908 six-cylinder, air-cooled Cameron Racer, presumably a "first-prize winner" in the much publicized Savannah races sponsored by the Automobile Club of America. The Cameron was entered in the International Light Car Race of 196 miles, scheduled for the second day of the race. According to Dr. Julian Quattlebaum's *The Great Savannah Races*, the Cameron car was forced to drop out on the sixth lap where it was running fourth because of a burned-out clutch and a bent crankshaft. If it is true that the Cameron "won first prize," as indicated on the postcard, it was at a consolation race held next day.

Incidentally, the mechanic in the picture is, J. J. (Dog-Face) White, who was an expert at adjusting the oil flow, pressurizing the gas tank, shifting his weight on turns, keeping track of what was going on behind (as this was a day before rear-view mirrors). "Joe-Joe" also did the cranking and, on occasions when the car stalled at the starting line, got out and pushed from behind and then made a flying leap into his cramped bucket seat. But above all, his greatest asset was his ability to scowl at the competition, the public, and the judges.

Research and Classifieds

Information wanted: I need to know what happened to Albert C. Barley; when and where he died and what he did after the demise of the Roamer. Also similar information on Cloyd C. Kenworthy after the Kenworthy car operation ceased.

Fred Roe, 837 Winter St., Holliston, MA 01746.

Information requested on any and all automobiles manufactured in New Jersey. I'm collaborating with two other gentlemen in gathering information on such vehicles in preparation for a book we are planning to have published.

This is strictly a labor of love as all of our time is being donated and any proceeds will go to the New Jersey Historical Society.

We are looking for information on the very early cars and trucks in particular, but do need information through the 1920's. Corporate names, names of individuals involved, exact locations, reasons for giving up the business, original photographs, sales literature, etc.

Franklin B. Tucker, 216 Central Ave., West Caldwell, NJ 07006.

Information wanted: INGRAM car, circa 1917. Have catalog, seek further information on the car and on Ingram-Hatch Motor Corporation.

PENNINGTON. Seek technical and, above all, operational information on Pennington/Kane-Pennington engines.

Griffith Borgeson, Mirail/La Motte, 84240 La Tour d'Aigues, France.

Wanted: *Motor Vehicle Yearbook*, published by Ware Bros. Company, who published *Motor Vehicle Monthly*; yellow hardcover book, 3/4 inch thick, 9 3/4 x 12 3/4. Want any issues, any condition. Also want pre-1942 books and magazines whose subject is on coachbuilding or coachbuilders. Will purchase outright or I have material for trade.

Walt Gosden, 197 Mayfair Avenue, Floral Park, NY 11001.

Book Review

THE CONSTANT SEARCH: COLLECTING MOTORING AND MOTORCYCLING BOOKS, by Charles Mortimer. 303 pages. 166 B&W illust., 8 color plates. 8-1/2" x 10-7/8". Hardbound. ISBN 0 85429 260 8. Haynes Publications, Inc., 861 Lawrence Dr., Newbury Park, CA 91320. \$42.95.

This is a mixed bag valuewise but it is something which should be brought to the attention of anyone seriously collecting automotive literature in any form.

Charles Mortimer was for many years both a literature dealer and collector and, as far as it goes, his book is most interesting and a potential guide for anyone interested in the chase. This, of course, applies to both automobiles and motorcycles and, as much has been written on both, there is much to be found here. The format is broken into various categories. *The Constant Search* was published in 1982 and it carries a good deal of the material Mortimer found and annotated dating back to the turn of the century.

I found the travel book section of especial interest, those wonderful volumes which were printed privately by those who had traveled here or there and, because of limited publication, have become rare and, frequently, desirable.

The only real drawbacks I find in *The Constant Search* are that (1), it is UK-oriented, which is fine as far as it goes but it doesn't go far enough, and (2), some obvious titles are missing—titles which should normally have been included in the various categories but somehow didn't make the lists.

Nevertheless, it is replete with valuable and informative information and, for the serious flea marketer, I think it should be examined because there are things listed here I have never seen before and maybe you haven't, either.

Keith Marvin

SAH QUIZ NO. 2

QUIZ NO. 2—The plant of an Indianapolis auto maker, well known in the teen years, became a shoe-polish factory when the automobile company was dissolved. Can you name the maker of the car? Send your answer to: SAH, 1616 Park Lane, Marietta, Georgia 30066, and receive a photographic copy of a full page ad for this make.

QUIZ NO. 1—Member Walter O. MacIlvain, Manchester, Connecticut, correctly named the Smith Automobile Company, Topeka, Kansas. The founders of this company, Dr. Anton Smith and his brother, Clement Smith, were makers of artificial limbs until they switched to automobile building in 1904.

RUXTON - The Kissel Connection

by Walter E. Wray

This article appeared in the Spring 1984 issue of *The Spark*, a quarterly publication of the Wisconsin Chapter of the Society of Automotive Historians, and is reprinted here by permission.

Over the years, Wisconsin has played host to makers of several of this country's quality vehicles in all price ranges. It has also seen production of some of the most unusual and innovative makes. One that has often been overlooked as a Wisconsin product, in part, is well known in collector circles. The front-drive Ruxton certainly qualifies in all categories.

Born in the experimental shop of Philadelphia's Edward G. Budd Company in 1926-28, it was the outgrowth of brainstorming by William J. Muller, gifted experimental engineer, and later fed the ambitions of wheeler-dealer financier, Archie M. Andrews. The Budd prototype was built by Muller, Joseph Ledwinka, and a Col. Ragsdale, in the hope of obtaining for Budd a contract for all-steel bodies from any potential manufacturer that could be attracted to the front-drive concept. Such speculative ventures were common practice at Budd at the time. Andrews, holder of seats on both Budd and Hupp boards of directors, saw the car, loved it, and purchased exclusive rights to its manufacture and marketing. Naturally enough, he planned that Hupp would produce the new car, but didn't count on resistance from Hupp's management which had plans of its own.

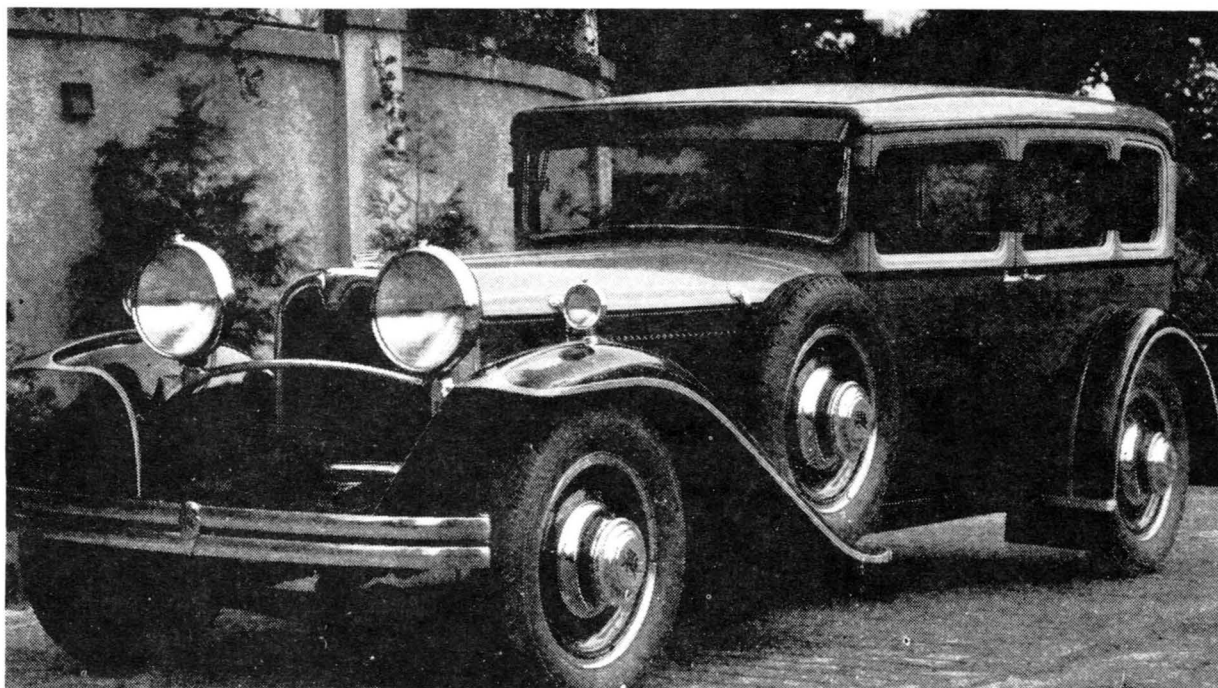
Undaunted, he formed New Era Motors, Inc., a Delaware corporation with offices in New York City, to build it. Board members included an impressive list of names, including Fred Gardner of Gardner Motor Car Company, metallurgist C. Harold Wills, formerly of Wills Ste. Clair, and stockbroker William V. C. Ruxton. During this period, the prototype sedan was being exhibited for promotional purposes without a name, just a "?" on the radiator emblem, and was referred to as the "Question Mark." At first, "Dolphin" was the name being considered for the line, but it can be assumed that the new car

was named for Ruxton in the hope that he and others would invest in the company. It did not come to pass, and Ruxton soon disassociated himself from any connection.

With Ruxton out of the picture and Hupp not interested, Andrews set out in best pre-depression style to attract investors and to find facilities. A number of firms showed interest; some agreed but later changed their corporate minds. While the "Question Mark" was being shown around the country, work was being completed on a handful of pre-production show cars at the Edward Board Machine Company, also in Philadelphia. Black Friday's arrival served only to complicate matters, but Andrews wasn't about to give up. He finally worked out a deal with the Moon Motor Car Company, of St. Louis, and the Ruxton at last had a home, inadequate for production though it was. He then acquired control of Moon by purchasing more stock on the open market, and installed Muller as president.

Realizing the inadequate facilities of Moon, Andrews drew another firm into the net. The Kissel Motor Car Company, of Hartford, Wisconsin, had been building good cars since 1906. Its plant was large and modern, but its quality car was finding sales more and more difficult to achieve in the prevailing economic climate. In short, Kissel shared the money woes of so many small auto makers of the period. Andrews' resources seemed to promise new life, and George Kissel therefore agreed, individually and in writing, to have the company build transmissions and related parts, plus assemble up to 1500 Ruxton cars annually in addition to stated numbers of Kissel vehicles in what has been termed a "suicide contract."

June of 1930 saw Ruxton cars starting to roll off the Moon assembly line, while a trickle also came out of the Hartford plant. Just when things started to look promising, the writing on the wall became all too apparent to George Kissel, president of the firm. According to the terms of the agreement,



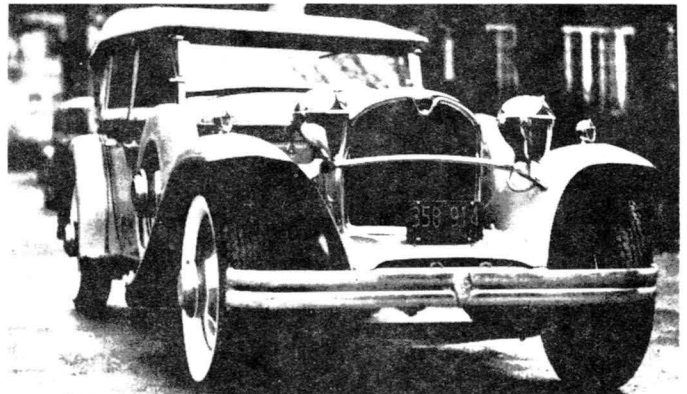
The large-diameter Indiana headlights and matching fender lights mark this Budd-bodied Ruxton sedan as among the first cars built at the Moon Motor Car Company's plant in St. Louis.

failure to live up to its provisions was grounds for Andrews to take over. The influx of money had not been enough; Kissel couldn't meet its obligations, eliminating any possibility of George Kissel fulfilling his agreement. Most of the Kissel stock was turned over to Andrews, but it was a gesture without effect in view of the immediate application for a receiver in September.

Attempts to continue production of Ruxton transmissions at Moon took time, although some were built there when tooling tied up in the Kissel plant was freed by the court. Moon sustained losses, closed its doors on November 10th, and then followed Kissel into receivership on the 15th. With heavy liabilities and no product, New Era filed for bankruptcy in early December. Andrews would remain active in the automotive field at Hupp for several years, but it was all over for Ruxton, his best shot at production.

In retrospect, the Ruxton car seemed to have what it took to succeed—except adequate facilities and financing. A heavy frame mounted the big straight-eight Continental 18S of 100 horsepower in “backward” fashion. The genius-inspired Muller transmission, split across the center to shorten the driveline and bring the engine weight forward, provided plenty of traction to the front wheels, and there was no steering-wheel fight. Budd provided stylish (though of rather ordinary construction) sedan bodies, based on altered Budd-built dies from the British Wolseley, while Cleveland's Baker-Raulang supplied stunning roadster bodies. Low profile and graceful, nearly hood-high fenders enhanced the car's appearance. Holbrook, Locke, and Baker-Raulang also built a handful of long wheel-base customs, and Kissel produced two beautiful phaetons based on altered Baker-Raulang roadster panels. Large diameter Indiana headlamps were first used, but the majority utilized the highly stylish but controversial “cats-eye” Woodlites then in vogue as an accessory after-market item. Rumor has it, by the way, that Andrews specified them after it was demonstrated that a cigarette could be lit from the triangular lens.

Just how many Ruxtons were definitely built remains an unanswered question. Estimates have ranged from 62 to 500. Muller, who was in position to know, placed the number at



This Ruxton phaeton—one of only two produced at the Kissel plant—was probably the one built for William Kissel. At the time this photo was made in 1942, the car was a part of the D. Cameron Peck collection in Chicago.

325 or so out of New Era's total production of 500 cars at Moon. Of these, he said 200 were ex-Moon “Windsors,” some of which were exported under the Moon name. Roughly half of production was sedans, with roadsters and the customs accounting for the remainder. Total Kissel-built Ruxton production didn't exceed 26 units, and 14 more were assembled by the receiver after the failure, and sold for as little as \$350 each, which did not cover the receiver's costs.

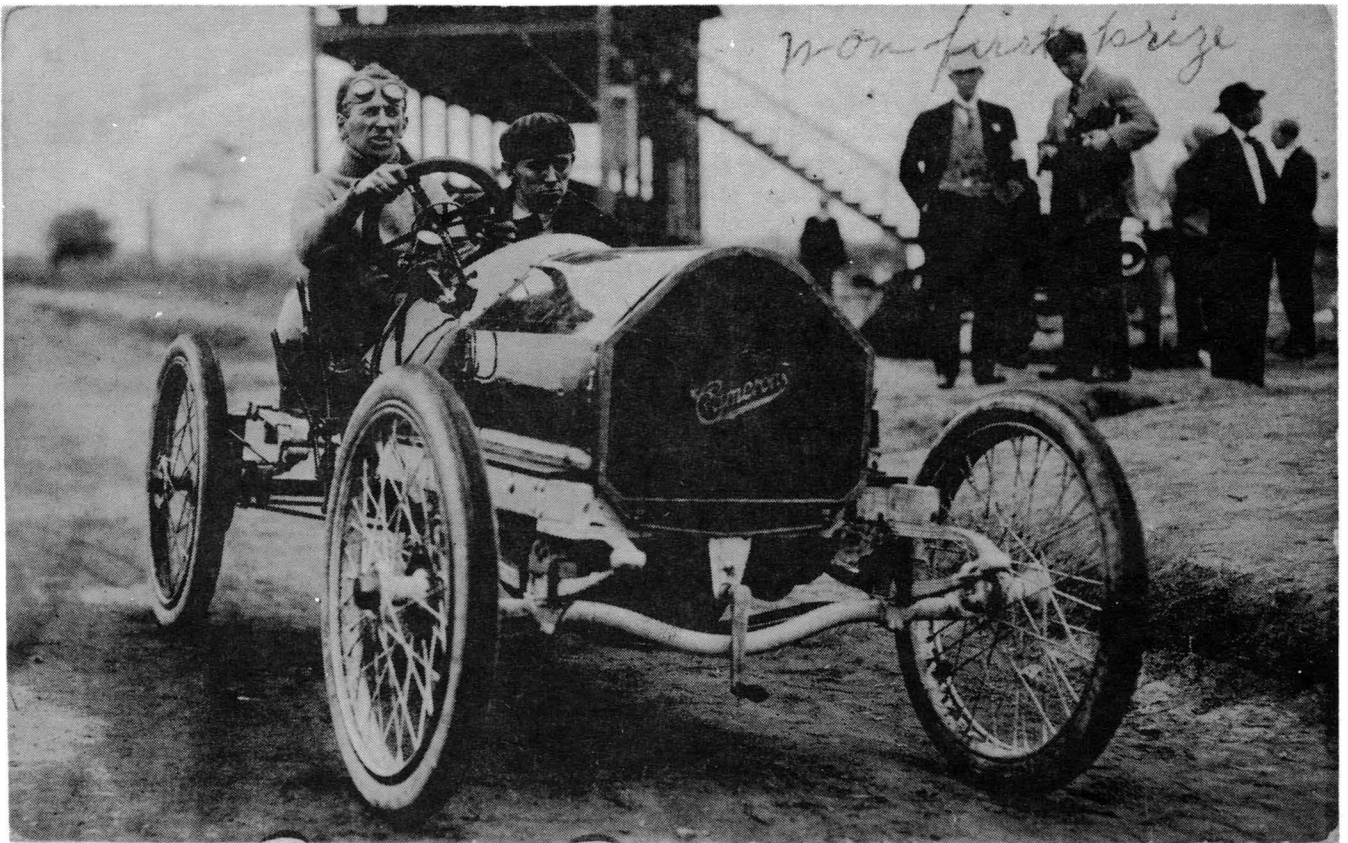
While there is no hard evidence to indicate it is so, Kissel's contribution seems to have been limited to the transmissions, and to assembling cars from panels and other components shipped from Moon and Baker-Raulang. How many survive is better understood—to date 19 Ruxtons have been located. Ten of these are sedans, none of which were Hartford products, eight are roadsters, two of them built by Kissel—one of them was George Kissel's personal car—and the custom phaeton built for his brother, William. Also surviving is a supercharged Muller-built custom with an altered Brigg-built Dodge roadster body on a shortened Ruxton chassis, which bears “Muller Front Drive” on the radiator badge, that was nicknamed the “Alligator.” The “Question Mark” is long gone, having ended her days in an Illinois junkyard.

NOTE: The author would like to extend a special thanks to Gene Husting, noted Kissel historian, for his additions and corrections to this history.

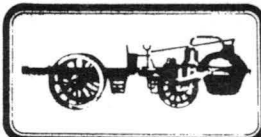
The photos used in this reprinted article are from the collection of Brigham Books, Marietta, Georgia.



Ruxton roadster, with body by Baker-Raulang, of Cleveland, Ohio. Note the Woodlite “Cat's-Eye” headlights, which were standard equipment on all Ruxton cars except the earliest models.



Postcard picture of Forrest F. Cameron at the wheel of his Cameron Racer, Savannah, Georgia, November 25, 1908.
(See letter on page 5)



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