

*Wisconsin Society of
Automotive Historians*



Carhart Chronicle

WINTER 2020

DUES DUE, PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE, MINUTES, AND RACING HISTORY AT THE MILWAUKEE MILE

HILL & VALLEY HIGHLIGHTS

The September meeting was held on the grounds of the Hill and Valley Car Show and Tour in Cross Plains, an annual show that closes out the show season in Wisconsin.



Fords were well represented – the show is co-sponsored by the Wisconsin Capital Model T Club - including this dressed-up maroon 1926 Model. Bright red had been a factory Model T color through 1913, but only black was available from 1914 through 1925. Colors, including maroon, were again offered for 1926 and 1927. This T also sports wire wheels, first offered by the factory in 1926, and a nickel-plated radiator – something of a “day two” look for the Model T of that era.

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WORDS FROM THE PRESIDENT

With annual dues due or overdue (say that fast 90 times) it's a good time to emphasize the importance of keeping dues current for any organization. Our Treasurer, Gary Koehnke, has developed an excellent system for keeping track of income and expenses as well as current membership and dues. However, as a volunteer in a typically thankless job, I hate to see him have to send out dues reminders to individual members. Our treasury is in good shape, but without income from dues and the Lola Car Show we would quickly find the WSAH without a publication or donations to worthy causes. Also, when someone pays their dues, it is an easy way to know if they wish to remain a member. A few

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE CONTINUED

decades ago we had a plump treasury (before we depleted it on publishing our Wisconsin Cars and Trucks book) and I had the brilliant idea that we could get by for a while without having members pay dues...uh, how do you then know who is a member? Hey, brilliant people do stupid things, you know, "stupid is as stupid does," right?

When it comes to recruiting new members, keep in mind that potential members might only need to be asked. We are not some sort of *EX*clusive wine and brie group, but we are an *IN*clusive group that does not care if someone is an expert on Wisconsin automotive history or just likes old Chevrolets and Case tractors. Some members are truly experts on certain marques and models or such diverse areas as carbide lamps and 1930s dealership service operations. Others may have a general interest in anything with wheels. If you know of anyone who might be interested - especially younger people - invite them to one of our meetings or direct them to the WSAH and SAH websites so they can decide if they want to join.

A reminder that members can borrow issues from our Automobile Quarterly collection by simply letting me know their wishes and I can bring them to our next scheduled meeting (to be returned to me at the following meeting). And regarding AQ, our collection is now complete thanks to the effort and generosity of our member, and SAH Vice-President, Bob Barr. Bob was able to find a "new, in the box" edition of Volume 48, Number 2 and has donated it to WSAH. It now occupies the space reserved for it in the AQ bookcase.

I encourage you to occasionally look at the SAH website as well as our own WSAH website. Recently, Jessica Z added a page on Wisconsin license plates in the "Projects" section of our website, with a link to photos and trivia courtesy of the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. For more plate history, continue with the link to the LaCrosse

County Historical Society site.

George Tesar is working with the Wisconsin Historical Society to set up a WSAH meeting at their facility in Madison in April. This has become a more involved process than setting up our meeting at the ever-popular Wisconsin Automotive Museum in Hartford, which simply meant a call to Dawn Mueller and deciding which Saturday was best for us. Thank you George for your effort on this.

As always, if you have ideas for the Carhart Chronicle, let Ralph or me know your thoughts. It might be something you have heard or read about that could be of interest, maybe an unusual antique tool or obscure vehicle, or a regular column or section you would like to see. As I have said before, why don't you try writing about something that interests you? It doesn't have to be polished (after all, that's what editors are for). Some people can weld, or split atoms, or throw a 100 mph fastball - and some can write...but I doubt anyone can do it all.

Ken Nimocks

WHERE TO SEND YOUR DUES

WSAH dues are \$15.00 annually.

Please make your check payable to the WSAH and mail it to:

Gary Koehnke
WSAH Treasurer
931 Beta Street
Neenah, WI 54956-1357

MINUTES OF SEPT. 21, 2019 MEETING

After some members enjoyed a tour of the area around Hill & Valley in the old vehicles and others took in the sights of antique cars, we settled into our seats for our annual Fall meeting. The Hill & Valley show is held at Baer Park in Cross Plains, Wisconsin. This has been our location for several years in the past for the Fall meeting. The meeting was called to order at 1:30 p.m. by President Ken Nimocks. Members in attendance were the following: President Ken E. Nimocks, Vice President Don Gullikson, Treasurer Gary Koehnke, Secretary Dan Manola, Directors Jim Morris and Don Chandler, Newsletter Editor Ralph Kalal, Liaison to the Wisconsin Historical Society George Tesar, and members Greg Vanark, Reuben Johnson, and Gene Steinfeldt.

Order of business included the acceptance of the minutes from the Summer meeting at Iola with a motion made by Ralph Kalal and seconded by Don Gullikson. Gary Koehnke read the Treasurer's report and a motion to accept was made by Dan Manola and seconded by Gene Steinfeldt.

George Tesar and Ken Nimocks met in Green Bay to discuss what could be our involvement with the Wisconsin Historical Society. The Wisconsin Historical Society wishes to have 3D displays of automotive artifacts and hopes we may contribute to these goals. We discussed having a future meeting at a warehouse in Madison at the Wisconsin Historical Society's campus. Member Don Chandler introduced a historian who gave us a brief history on the Badger Army Ammunition plant in Wisconsin which we all found interesting. Our group is interested in pursuing some fund-raising activities to add to our dollar amount to our treasury. Ideas included food stands, working at Packer games, soliciting donations by people who would give to the WSAH and selling advertising on the Carhart Chronicle. All these avenues will be discussed further as to their feasibilities

Iola Car Show - The Iola Car Show staff has asked

that our group have a larger participation in the show. They have asked that we also control the Blue Ribbon area. This would include selection of vehicles and managing the layout. Ken Buttolph had done this in the past. We would have *carte blanche* on the vehicles chosen. We would rotate displays and also set display hour times. We would require better security times and policies. As of this writing no particular 2020 theme has been decided. If we are to pledge ourselves to the task they are asking we would require more set down freedoms and responsibilities which we can navigate from. We would decide to still have table sales duties and we would possibly need more volunteer help from other Iola Car Show groups. We want them to be specific on what their needs are. A motion was made by Gary Koehnke to adjourn the meeting and it was seconded by Jim Morris. Meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m.

**Respectfully submitted,
Dan Manola, Secretary**

OPT-OUT FROM MEMBERS DIRECTORY

Many organizations and clubs share a membership list with their members. The list usually contains contact information and sometimes more, such as interests. Treasurer Gary Koehnke keeps the member list current, so it would be rather easy to mail a copy to each member, either along with the Carhart Chronicle or separately. What we need from anyone who might have reservations about disclosing their contact information is to let Gary know if there is anything you don't want to share. Along with your name, the list includes your address, phone number(s), and email address(es). If you're okay with sharing your listed information with other members, you need not do anything. If you want any information withheld, please let Gary know. His phone is (920) 558-3090, email is gary7140@att.net and mailing address is 931 Beta Drive, Neenah, WI 54956-1357. The WSAH list is not shared with non-members.

HILL AND VALLEY CONTINUED

The abundance of Model T's also provided the opportunity to see the evolutionary changes in its design. Pictured below is a 1917 Model T. 1917 was the year the T abandoned the five-sided hood used since its introduction in 1908 and adopted a curved design that met a cowl panel that covered the previous flat cowl. By 1926, that design had



evolved into the "high hood" design seen on the maroon 1926 model, where the hood and cowl are at the same level.



The Dahl Auto Museum, located in LaCrosse, brought the flashy 1932 Chrysler CP8 sedan, pictured above, featuring automatic clutch, silent

gear selector, free-wheeling, hydraulic brakes, and all-steel body. The 1932 Chrysler CP8 was also the first to use universal joints with needle bearings. (Dahl has been a Ford dealer since 1911.)

THE MILWAUKEE MILE

No topic of Wisconsin automotive history is more exciting than its racing heritage. No Wisconsin racetrack offers more history on display than the Milwaukee Mile. You can read about the early days of road racing in Elkhart Lake – but the historic street circuit is now just that: streets. In Milwaukee, you can experience racing today at a track that remains much as it was in the past.



1972 Rex Mays Classic at Milwaukee Mile.

For many years, the Milwaukee Mile was the race following the Indianapolis 500. That tradition began in 1949. The Rex Mays Classic basked in the worldwide attention created by the 500 - as fans watched to see whether the Indianapolis winner could win back-to-back races. Ten did, including A. J. Foyt, Al Unser, Sr., Johnny Rutherford, Gordon Johncock, Tom Sneva, Rick Mears, and Al Unser, Jr. When Jim Clark stunned the world by driving a rear-engine Lotus to second place Indianapolis, he followed up by winning the Rex Mays at Milwaukee, setting a record lap time of 109.303 mph. Two-time Indianapolis 500 winner Roger Ward won seven times at Milwaukee, in the Rex Mays race and in the August race, the Tony

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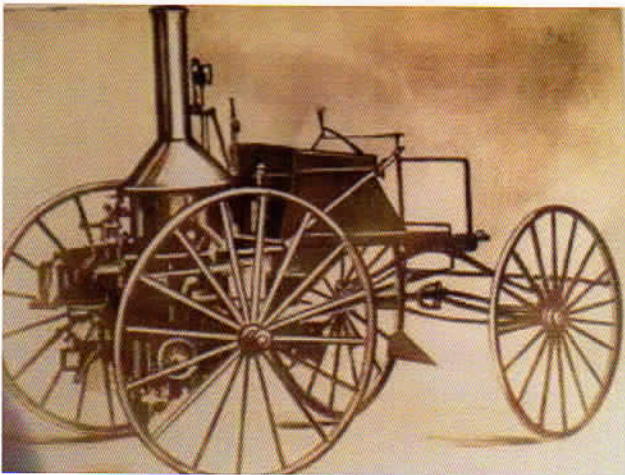
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THE CARHART CHRONICLE IS NAMED IN HONOR OF THE REV. DR. JOHN WESLEY CARHART, CREATOR OF THE SPARK STEAM CARRIAGE, SEEN BELOW, AT RACINE, WISCONSIN, IN SEPTEMBER OF 1873.



Dr. Carhart was named the "Father of the Automobile" by Horseless Age magazine in 1903. He was honored by the French government at the International Automobile Exposition in Paris in 1905 as creator of the first automobile. The French awarded Dr. Carhart a cash prize for his achievement. History does not record the amount.

MILWAUKEE MILE CONTINUED

Bettenhausen 200, held at the track from 1947 to 1982.

It was at Milwaukee that the front-engine Indy roadster, now rendered obsolete by the rear-engine Lotus and similar cars, won its last race.



Foyt on pole at Milwaukee in 1965.

It happened in 1965. A. J. Foyt's team and his rear-engine race car were delayed, unable to arrive at the track in time to qualify. Foyt towed his old Offenhauser-powered roadster to the Milwaukee Mile, where he personally prepared the car. He won the pole at 107.881 mph. For the perfect storybook ending, he'd have won the race – but, as it was, Foyt finished second to Gordon Johncock. (Foyt was back in his rear-engine car for the remainder of the season.)

What makes the Milwaukee Mile so special for spectators and competitors alike is its configuration. The track is basically flat. The maximum banking in corners is 6 degrees. The track is also very, very wide. That makes passing possible anywhere on the track. Passing on the outside of the corners is an art form at Milwaukee, with cars lapping side-by-side until one gains the advantage. The best feature, though, is visibility from the stands. There isn't a bad seat at the Milwaukee Mile. You can easily see the entire track from any seat. You can do that at other tracks, of course – but at Milwaukee, you sit close to the track, not elevated hundreds of feet up and away in acres of stands.

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MILWAUKEE MILE CONTINUED

The configuration of the track results from its original design in 1876 as a horse racing facility. The first automobile race at the Milwaukee Mile was held in 1903 - a five lap contest won by William Jones of Chicago with a lap speed of 50 miles per hour.

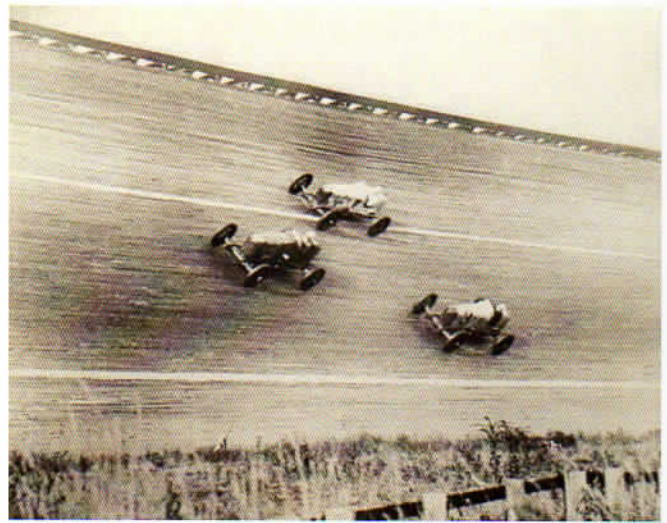


Barney Oldfield and the Miller "Golden Submarine."

In 1910, Barney Oldfield set a new Milwaukee lap record at 70.159 mph in the "Blitzen Benz" – at the time probably the fastest automobile in the world. (Oldfield drove the same car, officially the model 200 PS Benz, to a one-way speed of 131.724 mph in March of 1910 at Ormand Beach, Florida.) Seven years later, Oldfield would duel with another racing legend of the early years, Ralph dePalma, at the Milwaukee Mile. Driving the Miller "Golden Submarine," Oldfield won a series of match races between the two.

The Milwaukee Mile was not paved until 1950, so these early races were dirt races. That led to the first challenge to the track's survival. In the 1920's, board track racing became popular. Top drivers migrated to board tracks races, where speeds were higher. The Milwaukee Mile faded from its early prominence in national racing.

Modeled on velodromes popular for bicycle racing in Europe, board tracks were steeply banked – corners banked at 45 and 50 degrees were common. The board track in St. Louis had corners banked at 62 degrees.



Race at Salem, N.H. board track. Six drivers were injured and one died in the race in an accident occurring on the next lap.

Board tracks were killers. A loose board could create a major wreck when hit by a tire at speeds that could reach 120 mph. Driver fatalities were common. Gaston Chevrolet was one of four Indianapolis 500 winners killed racing on board tracks.

Though cheap to build, board tracks were not durable. In 1929, there were twenty-four board tracks in the United States. By 1931, there were four. Rebuilding them in the depression cost too much.

The Milwaukee Mile outlasted board tracks to return to national prominence.

The Milwaukee Mile's comeback began with its first "Champ Car" race, in 1933.

That race also invented the "rain date."

The July 17th race date in 1933 was rained out. The drivers banded together to convince the promoter to run the race the next day – and the "rain date" became a racing convention.

The halcyon days for the Milwaukee Mile were from 1947 through the 1990's. In most of those years, racing at Milwaukee was sanctioned by the United States Auto Club (USAC). The track hosted every form of racing popular America except sports cars: Indianapolis-style Champ Cars, stock cars,

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MILWAUKEE MILE CONTINUED

and national championship midgets. Al Unser, Sr., dominated in the Championship cars, winning four times.

In 1970, Unser started the Tony Bettenhausen 200 from the pole, led all 200 laps, and finished four laps ahead of the second-place car. In 1985,



Rick Mears and A. J. Foyt at the Milwaukee Mile, 1978. Mears won.

Miller Brewing became the sponsor of the June race. Mario Andretti won both the pole and the race. His son, Michael, would win in 1986 and 1987. In 1983, NASCAR had briefly come to Milwaukee, setting an attendance record of 34,260 for the first Busch Late Model Sportsman Series race held there. Future NASCAR Winston Cup champions Bobby Allison, Alan Kulwicki, and Dale Jarrett appeared at Milwaukee.

But the politics of racing had been nibbling at the racing foundations of the Milwaukee Mile during the 1980's. The tension that had been building for decades between the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and the owners of the teams that raced there had led the owners to form their own sanctioning body, Championship Auto Racing Teams (CART), in 1979. Though the teams were not strong enough, given the national prominence of the 500, to muscle the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, other tracks were forced to accept CART as the sanctioning body.

In 1980, CART became the sanctioning body for Championship Car races in Milwaukee. This shift away from USAC sanctioning represented a significant loss of power by tracks over racing at their facilities. It also was a major wound to USAC, the sanctioning body for the other forms of national racing held at the Milwaukee Mile.

CART envisioned itself as a domestic version of Formula One, emphasizing street races and road courses, rather than the traditional Champ Car oval tracks. This not only had an impact on the type of racing, but also on those who were driving. The drivers who had become household names faded, replaced by drivers from Europe and South America with backgrounds in road racing that increasingly dominated the Championship Car calendar.

None of this was good for the Milwaukee Mile.

By 1992, the Milwaukee Mile faced loss of its remaining Championship Car race. The State Fair Board, owners of the track, contracted with Carl Hass, co-owner with Paul Newman of a major CART team, to promote the race. Hass succeeded. Meantime, NASCAR racing returned to Milwaukee, with the Busch Series stock cars in 1993 and the Craftsman Truck series in 1995.

It seemed the Milwaukee Mile had survived the revolution in racing created by the internal politics of Championship Car racing and the contemporaneous rise to dominance of NASCAR. The State Fair Board embarked on an expensive improvement project in 2002, replacing the grandstands, increasing seating capacity, adding amenities, and renewing an infield road course.

At first, all was well.

The track was now hosting an IndyCar race, as Champ cars were now called, NASCAR Busch and Craftsman Truck races, plus USAC Silver Crown and National Midget races. The Automobile Racing Club of America (ARCA) was also racing at Milwaukee with the RE/MAX series. In 2009, the

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MILWAUKEE MILE CONTINUED

NASCAR races sold out, with 45,000 fans in attendance at each race.

The racing in at the Milwaukee Mile had never been better.



The last NASCAR race at the Milwaukee Mile.

Then it fell apart.

The State Fair Board had borrowed \$19.1 million to finance the 2002 improvements. It expected to repay that debt by selling the naming rights to the track, by holding six major races per year, and by having sales of \$25.00 per person per race in concessions (two to three times the industry average at the time).

None of that happened. To try to cover the debt payments, the State Fair Board increased the price for holding a race at the Milwaukee Mile. With that increase, even sold out events could not cover the costs of promotion and the Board's fees.

NASCAR did not come back after 2009. The last IndyCar race was held in 2015. No major races - of any series - was held after that until 2019, when ARCA raced at the Milwaukee Mile on Father's Day.

Oddly, it is the same debt that almost killed racing at the Milwaukee Mile that has - so far - saved it from destruction. The State Fair Board has resisted those who would tear down the track and redevelop the land - largely because it would require paying the remaining debt, which is not

scheduled to be fully retired until 2030. But the annual payments of \$1.5 million per year decrease beginning in 2023. That means the future of the Milwaukee Mile remains in doubt.



ARCA at the Milwaukee Mile - Father's Day, 2019.

You can partake in the history of the Milwaukee Mile on Father's Day, Sunday, June 14th, starting at 1 p.m. The feature 100 lap race is the ARCA Midwest Tour Super Late Models, but the day includes races in the Midwest Trucks, Mid-American Stock Cars, and Upper Midwest Vintage series.



Miller's at Milwaukee, 2019.

To truly experience Milwaukee Mile's history in all its glory, you can also attend the Miller's at Milwaukee Vintage Indy Car Event held at the Milwaukee Mile on June 26-27: Miller-powered Indianapolis race cars and Offenhauser-powered roadsters from the 1950's - at home, at speed, at the venue they once ruled.