



Finally our tent served as a meeting place for members and guests, a reference facility for visitors researching a particular marque or period of automotive history, an oasis for an occasional snack or soft drink and a quick king-size umbrella for friends, visitors and casual passers-by when it rained (which was quite often).

Bill Cameron

TREASURER'S REPORT

Iola went well; \$160 in sales, good meeting, great car display. Rain both days cut into sales. Also, we're running short of books and other automobilia to sell. We have too many low buck items and too little quality. We need good contributions.

Tony Hossain came by on Saturday. Said he could no longer participate. Too many miles between here and Detroit. Wished us well.

Four new members and one old comeback signed up at Iola. Deposit tonight (7/18/86): \$296.78 to WSAH.

For those members who haven't paid their dues as yet: The WSAH 1986-87 fiscal year began on July 1. It is time to renew. Regular dues are \$5.00. Senior dues are \$3.00. Please pay as soon as possible.

Bob Gary

A LETTER OF IMPORTANCE

Dear SAH Member:

Something wonderful is happening in Osceola, Wisconsin on September 6, 1986 and I am writing because I am certain that you will want to know about it. Perhaps you will be able to participate.

What is happening is the first SAH sponsored, Wisconsin SAH hosted, Literature Swap Event. This is a swap meet for automotive and aviation literature only. Until now, for the most part, literature collectors and sellers have had to pursue their interest in places where commerce in automotive parts was the main activity, or by mail. I need not elaborate on the disadvantages of both of these contexts for buying and selling literature.

In order that serious literature collectors and vendors could have a centrally located place to buy, trade, sell and examine out-of-print automotive artifacts, we have created a "literature only" swap meet in conjunction with the annual Wheels & Wings event that is sponsored by Classic Motorbooks in Osceola, Wisconsin in September. We hope that the literature swap meet will become an annual event and that it will draw serious literature collectors and sellers from all parts of the country, and other countries. We know that the time of year and the location will make attendance at Osceola very attractive for people with an interest in automotive literature.

If you want to reserve a literature vendor space (10' x 15') under our "huge" tent, the charge will be \$15.00. Outside spaces, the same size, cost \$10.00, and reservations for either can be made by

sending me a check made out to the Wisconsin SAH. Vendor space will also be sold on the day of the event on a space-available basis. I strongly recommend making an advance reservation.

If you are not familiar with the Wheels & Wings event in Osceola, you have missed a treasure. Each year, for nearly a decade, this meet has attracted some of the most interesting automobiles and aircraft in the central part of the United States. Osceola, Wisconsin is about 60 miles northeast of Minneapolis in the lovely St. Croix Valley. Some of the most interesting and important writers, journalists and publishers in the field of automotive history make a habit of attending Wheels & Wings. Classic Motorbooks' warehouse is open to the public for the entire day of the meet for browsing, and all titles in stock are offered at a 15% discount. Other damaged, overstocked and discontinued books are offered at prices slashed to as little as \$1.00.

I know that if you have read this far, and are able, you are already considering attending the Literature Swap Event at Wheels & Wings in Osceola on September 6. Let me add one more inducement. Classic Motorbooks is sponsoring a riverboat party on the evening of September 6, after the meet. Participants will be bussed from Osceola to Stillwater, Minnesota, where they will board the Andiamo for a three hour cruise on the St. Croix river. Music will be provided by a three piece, New Orleans Jazz Band, the Mouldy Fig. A cash bar and snacks will be available. After the cruise, participants who are in any kind of condition at all, will be returned by bus to Osceola.

Of course, this party is the place to "see and be seen" by members of the automotive writing fraternity, by serious automotive impressarios, by people looking for a good party, and by those wondering what a jazz band called the Mouldy Fig will sound like.

Reservations for the riverboat cruise--space is limited--can be made by sending a check for \$10.00 (per person) to me or to Classic Motorbooks in Osceola. Checks should be made out to Classic Motorbooks.

If I can provide you with any further information regarding the exciting Literature Swap Event on September 6, please do not hesitate to write to me. I would also be happy to answer your questions by phone at (608) 798-4317. I hope to see you at the meet this year, or in the future.

Sincerely,

Matt L. Joseph
SAH Board/Wisconsin SAH Board
Literature Swap Event Coordinator
7728 Martinsville Road
Cross Plains, WI 53528

WSAH PUBLISHES OLD MAPS

As many members already know, WSAH has undertaken the publication of a brand new 1925 Wisconsin road map. In more precise terms a replica of the official original. The original was acquired by Matt Joseph, the replication handled by Bill Cameron.

All WSAH members are being sent a single copy, folded road map style, with this issue of the SPARK. Additional copies may be obtained by members and others at the giveaway price of \$1.00 each for one through nine copies or 75¢ each for 10 or more. Order from Bill Cameron, 7495 Clearwater Road, Minocqua, WI 54548.

In addition to being great curiosities for the automobilest at home, these maps are also excellent for presentation at local historical society meetings, to be used as sale items at fund raisers and for display at establishments of the public sort. Order now and avoid the rush; the maps will also make nice, cheap Christmas gifts.

FULL CIRCLE

By Wally Wray

There is a radio talk show host who often concludes his program by asking his guests, "what have you learned about life?" The question is asked in jest, of course, but frequently brings surprisingly revealing and provocative replies. Similar questions are asked of car hobbyists and historians, but usually without the humorous intent. People genuinely want to know how and why cars were invented in the first place, why a particular car was designed and built the way it was, and a really tough one, "what have you learned about automotive history that tells us about the car of the future?" There is never enough time and knowledge to give complete answers, assuming there are complete answers.

At the grass roots of automobile history, there was a perceived transportation need. The bicycle had given freedom of movement at will upon the roads, but it was hard work and far too slow. Steam, electricity and the "explosion engine" seemed to offer an answer to the question that had been perplexing dissatisfied horsemen for who knows how long. Along came an amazing variety of engineers and tinkers and blacksmiths who enjoyed locking horns with an unsolvable problem. Sure enough, they solved the riddle of how to build enough power into a small enough package to move a vehicle loaded with human and other cargo.

Progress came quickly, and by the turn of the century it was no longer a game of seeing if you

could make something from bits and pieces, and make the darned thing run. Many a motor vehicle was built in woodshed and stable, but the automobile had already passed the doubtful stage and become big business. Far too many people without the time or skill to build their own also wanted to ride. The makings of a large industry was off and running to the consternation of the experts who claimed it was just an expensive fad.

Just how big that business was to become was far from the imaginings of even the most hopeful optimist. The challenge of building a workable machine had already been replaced by the profit motive. Until the end of the first decade, it was still a relatively cheap and easy business to get into, and many took the plunge. All that was needed was to talk the city fathers and local citizenry into putting up some cash, equip a small shop with a lathe and drill press, tap local resources of buggy builders, purchase what you couldn't or didn't want to make, and you were ready to enter the growth industry of the day. This scenario is admittedly simplified, but a quick look at any list of the estimated 5000-plus makes once built in this country alone indicates that it happened exactly that way often enough.

By the beginning of the second decade, however, both the vehicles and industry had grown up. It was now a much larger and more complex business. To stand a chance of succeeding it was now necessary to have specialists in engineering, design, production and marketing within the organization. Requirements for facilities and financing had also increased several times the minimums of a scant few years before. Inept and unscrupulous predecessors had caused tales of woe to circulate among

prospective backers, and it was no longer an easy job to convince the town council that an automobile factory was the golden goose to put their town on the map and easy street, nor to loosen the strings of potential investors.

Competition was also a predominant problem. Small town firms that in any other business would not have had to compete beyond a few miles radius were suddenly thrust into a nationwide marketplace. Buyers were no longer willing to accept an unreliable or antiquated machine and some degree of luxury was also being demanded. Newcomers unable to offer several low priced, mass produced models (low volume meant high individual unit cost) were at an immediate disadvantage, if not totally out of the running. All of this required sound management, expensive facilities, tooling and constant advancement of engineering. Even with these obstacles, hundreds of individuals thought themselves capable of tackling the job. Historians and collectors of today are delighted that they did, but a place in history is a poor excuse for risking cold hard cash.

So successful was the growing industry in setting standards and creating and filling demand, that the privately owned automobile became a necessity rather than a plaything of the rich. Competition within the industry had seen extremely rapid advancements in design and technology. It can be argued that the time was at hand for a weeding out process now that raw invention had begun to be supplanted by refinement. Whether that time was really needed or not, it came with the Great Depression. With few exceptions, less stable producers fell by the wayside in record numbers.

Those few that managed to survive, some just barely, were soon to be rewarded tangibly. World War II broke upon a financially troubled world, and wartime contracts saved the life of not a few of America's automakers. Of those who reached the mid-Forties several saw the handwriting on the wall, either going on to other things and abandoning car manufacture forever, or cashing out at a profit. In 1945, then, America faced peace more or less on the wheels of what was soon to become the "Big Three."

Unlike wartorn Europe and Japan, there was no rebuilding of the homeland for Americans to do. A scarcity of jobs existed to be sure, but for the most part folks were ready to get on with the job of living. Spending for a stylish new car to replace the worn out family chariot was uppermost on many family agendas. In many ways it was the beginning of a new world, but the best Detroit had to offer when cars finally started rolling off the assembly lines again were slightly facelifted versions of the weary old dog in the garage. It was a seller's market, and for awhile it seemed as if anything with wheels and an engine would sell.

Detroit had foreseen America's eager postwar automotive appetite and was anxious to fill demand in all price levels. They perceived a small but very real niche for small, inexpensive, economical cars as well as traditional large family types. While that segment of the market did indeed exist, corporate thinkers soon reasoned that filling it would be difficult if not impossible for them to do at a profit. There are basic costs in producing cars, no matter what size. Paring a few inches, pounds and dollars off a standard sized

unit cost them too much money, they felt, to justify production in a land where big had become synonymous with beautiful. That they were wrong to some degree is evident in the industry wide rejection of offers to take over Volkswagon for next to nothing.

This lack of foresight was not entirely their fault, however, as the decisions were based on prewar buying trends. But things had happened within the public's mind that were not easy to measure. For one thing, returning servicemen had had an opportunity to drive small European cars and found them sporty and fun. A rekindled love affair with the automobile and driving in general, the allure of the open road, economics of new car purchase within the average family budget, new materials and technologies, and a host of other considerations were all factors that should have entered into decision making. Even if Detroit had been able to feel this new pulse of the American car buyer, it would not have been able to answer it immediately. Besides, they reasoned, they had been able to mold public taste before and would do it again.

Minor makers had repeatedly tried and failed to market small alternatives since the automobile had first grown up c1910. First among them were the cyclecars of the early teens; small machines owing much of their concept and mechanical components to the motorcycle. Solid reasons, primarily tax laws and fuel costs, gave the type a degree of legitimacy in the overseas lands of their birth, but they did not fit in with the American scheme of things and soon died out. A valiant few struggled for acceptability in the next three decades, but it wasn't until after WWII that the promise of a

small car returned in earnest to the market place. With the exception of Tucker and Kaiser-Fraser, who bucked established markets with full-sized family cars, all the promising hopefuls were small cars.

What Detroit could or would not do, it seemed to many individuals and small shop owners they could. Most of them had a point; they were unhampered by traditions and existing tooling. For the most part they were also unhampered by any concept of what it takes to mass produce automobiles: suitable facilities and adequate funding. In blithe innocence an unbelievable number jumped feet first into the fray. Depending on which list and years one wants to use as a yardstick, some 300-plus new makes appeared; at least in press releases. Auto news was hot news, so it shouldn't come as a surprise that every Joe Wrench who ever conjured up a mental image of his dream car got into the act with a level of enthusiasm not seen since the pioneering days of the industry.

Most of these ventures promised to be in production inside a year with highly advanced products. Most were out of business in a few months, having produced at most one or two handmade prototypes. Why? For one thing, they saturated a limited market for available investment capital. There was also insufficient quantities of capable engineers and designers, plus serious material shortages. And anyone who studies photos and claims of many of these dream cars will note another reason, many were nightmares with features only their creators could love. There were flying cars, folding cars, one that was parked by tipping it up onto its flat rear panel, a bulbously ugly safety car and an articulated safety car. Today's collector

would love to have them, but it's a safe bet that had the majority gone into real production, they would have fallen flat in a burst of derisive laughter.

Others, the ones we remember with varying degrees of clarity, built a handful of semi-successful pilot models in quantities ranging up to a hundred or so. Keller, Davis, Tucker and Playboy all showed real promise, yet succumbed to the realities of inadequate financing, corporate mismanagement, internal strife or legal troubles. More successful were Kuntz, Crosley, Kaiser-Fraser. Their dealers actually sold cars in numbers from a few hundred to well into the thousands. Almost unbelievably, the tiny automotive misfit known as King Midget outlasted them all. In the long run they shared one thing in common; they all failed.

In addition to those bent on bucking the system with an entirely new car were the entrepreneurs who revived another ancient concept of automotive marketing, the kit car. This time around, however, few marketed complete cars in knocked down form. Their offerings were usually in the form of custom bodies to dress up old chassis, thereby offering stylish motoring with little if any thought for lower cost or increased performance. Performance and whole car kits were also made available, of course, with Frank Kurtis' roadsters perhaps leading the list in terms of quality and performance.

Though experimented with in the Thirties by Henry Ford, fiberglass soon came into its own as a body material. Not terribly well suited at that early date to mass production methods, it was the ideal material for the producer of low volume custom bodies. Those early postwar pioneers didn't know

what they were starting. The movement toward personalizing the motor car that they spear-headed is reminiscent of those days after the turn of the century when anyone with an idea, some tools, a little talent, and a burning desire to express himself by dabbling in the art of auto building could put together one or a dozen or more of his idea of what a car should look like.

Those early postwar producers are no longer actively in the market place, but very much remain within the related auto hobbies in spirit. Not since the Twenties and Thirties have there been so many options available to consumers, and the end is not in sight. Their influence has also been felt in the larger scope of the auto industry. Once the early frail and unreliable machines had been left behind for good, improvement of the breed became the course followed by industry. Engineers and stylists are individuals interested in cars, and their creations reflect this interest.

To some degree, large makers can dictate taste to the consumer, but it's a two-way street. With few exceptions, those responsible for what we drive were car enthusiasts long before they joined the industry and carried their ideals and dreams into their jobs. They have applied their talents and modern advancements in technology to many of the problems facing the industry safety and economy to mention only two of many -- and are now turning their attention to the stuff dreams, and sales, are made of; performance and luxury.

Without the unavailable crystal ball, we can't make accurate predictions for the future, but we

can draw on the lessons of history to make a few assumptions. It is highly unlikely that the future citizen will be persuaded to turn over his car keys in favor of mass transportation, so the personal car will persevere. That vehicle will continue to offer increasing levels of performance and handling, greater safety and luxury and will embody the latest in material, electronics, mechanical design and aerodynamics. Quantum leaps in technology, which we have had regularly and are today experiencing again, are reflected in auto design, followed by periods of perfecting the details. This century-old trend can be expected to continue.

If we were able to transport ourselves a century into the future, we would doubtless be able to recognize the generic entity called "automobile," though its systems and functioning parts would likely seem very strange and marvelous indeed. And it's likely also that the personal touch via after market suppliers and individual creativity will be part of the scene. Mankind may occasionally ignore what he has learned from the past, but that goodness, he is never satisfied with what he already has. He wants to do something better. And the automobile, one of his most loved creations, will continue to receive better than its fair share of his creative spirit.

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This seems a most appropriate time to remind all WSAH members and other readers that they are encouraged to respond to what they read in the SPARK and, for that matter, elsewhere. Agreement, disagreement and general commentary are all welcome. CH.)

FARM EXHIBIT AT RIVER FALLS

"Culture and Agriculture," a major interpretive exhibit prepared by the State Historical Society of Wisconsin and thirteen local historical societies will appear during September and October at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls. The 4,000 square foot exhibit illustrates the diversity of agricultural history in Wisconsin. From dairying to cranberry growing, the exhibit documents a fascinating variety of agricultural pursuits in Wisconsin's history. The exhibit will be open each weekend in September and October. "Culture and Agriculture" was funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The catalog for the "Culture and Agriculture" exhibition regularly sells for \$4.00. Members of SHSW affiliated societies, however, are entitled to a \$1.00 discount. To order the 88 page catalog containing over 40 historical photographs send \$3.00 to: Publications, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 816 State Street, Madison, WI 53706. Make your check payable to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin.

25th ANNIVERSARY WCLH CONVENTION

The 1986 Annual Convention of the Wisconsin Council for Local History celebrates the Council's 25th anniversary. The convention takes place at the State Historical Society headquarters in Madison on October 17 and 18. The program includes a tour of the new State Historical Museum, a retrospective look at the local history movement in Wisconsin, a resource center of successful projects and ideas of local historical societies from around the state, and the local history awards luncheon.

As a special highlight, the Wisconsin Council for Local History will be honored with a reception at the Governor's Mansion. For registration information contact: Connie Meier, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 816 State Street, Madison, WI 53706. (608) 262-9613.

SHSW EVENTS CALENDAR

September 13-14:

Sixth Annual Villa Louis Carriage Show, Villa Louis, Prairie du Chien. Carriage display and horse-drawn carriage rides.

Annual Art Fair, Pendarvis, Mineral Point. Fine arts and crafts show and sale.

Threshere, Old World Wisconsin, Eagle.

September 21:

Dane County Ramblers, State Historical Museum,
Madison. A performance of Dane County folk
songs.

October 11-12:

Art of the Blacksmith, Pendarvis, Mineral Point.
Craftsmen demonstrate their skills.

Greenbush Harvest, Old Wade House, Greenbush.
Corn husking, cider making and other autumn
chores.

October 12:

A Day with the Morgans, Old World Wisconsin,
Eagle. High stepping Morgan horses and antique
carriages.

October 25-26:

Autumn on the Farm, Old World Wisconsin, Eagle.
Quilting bee, soap making and storing produce
for the winter.