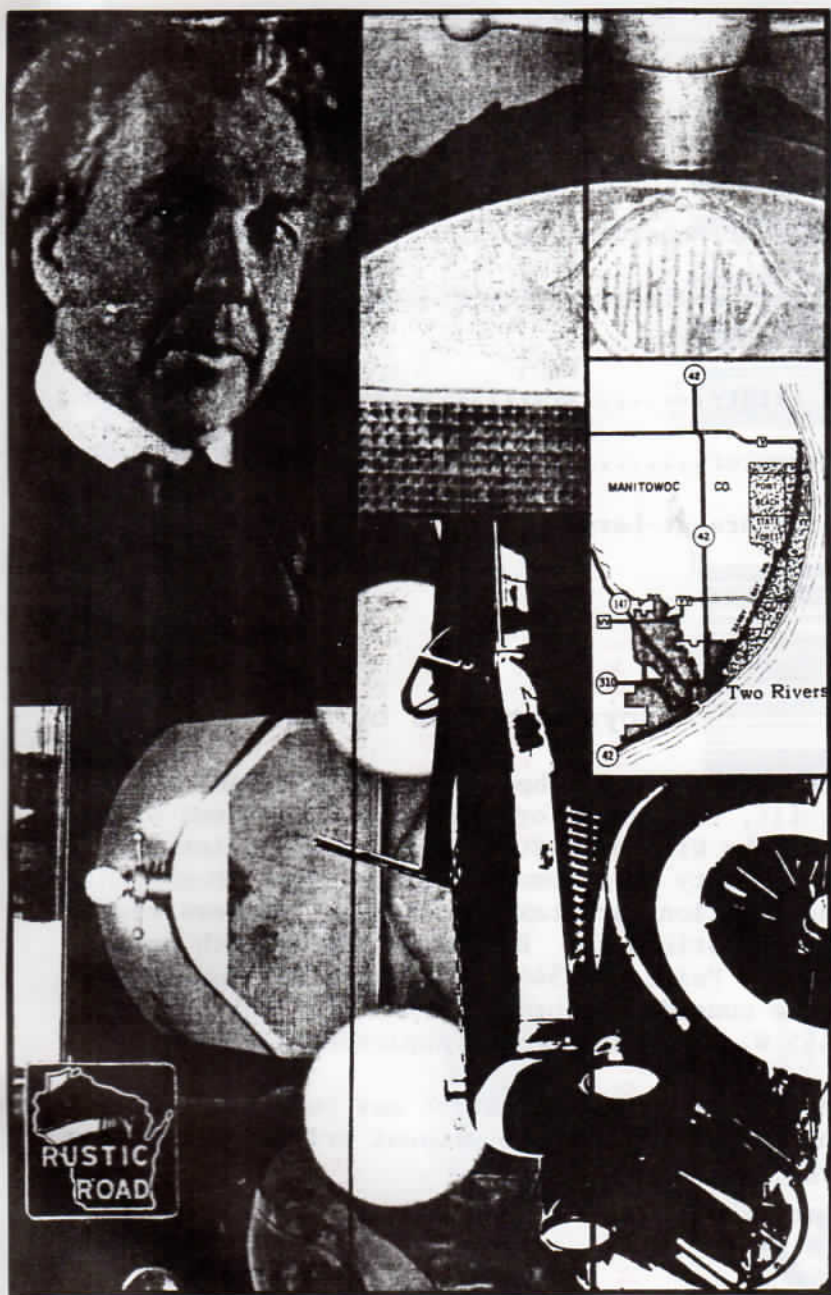


SPARK



special interest car either being restored or already in show condition. Here we have several subdivisions. On one side the do-it-yourselfer who has a fairly well equipped workshop and a variety of skills, only farming out things like upholstery or the final coat of paint. In the opposite corner is the owner who patronizes a professional restoration shop and is glad to pay for and take the advice of experts who make this branch of the hobby a business.

As to utilization of an antique vehicle, we can have some sharp divisions. Some owners go to extraordinary means to win trophies, awards, badges and dash plaques, even to the point of trailering their pride and joy in order to avoid even the remotest possibility of a mud splash or a stone bruise. Opposed to this group are the hardy souls who believe antique cars should be driven and put their heart and soul into touring, parades and car related outings.

One of the most recent, and discouraging, areas of participation, is peopled by those who buy and sell cars purely for speculation, content to bid the price of a car to phenomenal heights, and buy it to sell at a profit at some future auction. A distant relative of this group is the individual who buys exotic cars at fabulous prices, partially if not wholly for the publicity such dealings bring to an otherwise unrelated enterprise.

Of course there is the business of the hobby: Those individuals and firms who provide equipment, machinery, supplies to keep other hobbyists going. A subdivision is made up of the proprietors of salvage yards who only recently have come to realize that what they have considered worthless junk is now in great demand.

Somewhere along the line we have another group of dedicated individuals who are researching and writing about the history of the automobile. These dedicated souls spend money and long hours visiting libraries, museums, historical societies (mostly without any thought of remuneration) and write about their findings. These historians run the gamut from publishing elaborate, profusely illustrated coffee table books to those who simply write an article for a club newsletter, bulletin or some of the fancier club magazines.

Perhaps on the highest level of participating in the hobby are those who organize, support and run our not-for-profit antique car museums. It takes a great deal of time, money and perseverance to assemble and run these fabulous collections.

From a selfish standpoint it is gratifying to know that we have a small group of historians, collectors, operators of restoration shops here in Wisconsin who have banded together to research and publicize Wisconsin's contribution to overall automotive history. We can be proud of our Wisconsin Chapter.

William T. Cameron

A LETTER

Having noticed the listings of various automobiles credited to the state of Wisconsin in SPARK I wonder if I might pick the brains of those members with a knowledge of the Kissel? Recently, I completed a manuscript for Bev Kimes at The Classic Car on the subject of the classic Kissel automobile. During my research, I discovered a little known tidbit of information concerning a proposed venture involving Reo and Kissel. Then, while visiting the Kissel Heritage Museum in Hartford last February, much to my amazement, I was confronted with a scale model of just such a car.

According to what I've been able to come up with, this car was to be powered by an Auburn (Lycoming) straight eight and to combine components furnished by Reo with a body which was not unlike a cross between a 1934 Hupp Aerodynamic and a Chrysler Air-flow. Presumably, the car would be assembled by Kissel and marketed through existing Reo dealers.

In some correspondence with Ralph Dunwoodie, I mentioned this curiosity. Ralph had never heard of such a proposal or of the model at the museum. I also drew a blank from Jeff Godshall and Austie Clark whom I talked with on this matter at Hershey.

If additional facts can be unearthed, it seems they might make for an interesting story for SPARK, SAH Journal or a similar publication. Lacking any additional facts, however, would make the effort unworthy.

Your assistance in directing me to such individuals

who may have information in this matter, would be appreciated.

Karl S. Zahm
4520 Edgewood Hills Drive
Rockford, IL 61108

A PLAINTIVE CRY IN THE WILDERNESS: GM'S 1919 "WHOLE FAMILY CAR"

By Keith Marvin

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is reprinted here with the author's permission. CH.)

When an easterner thinks of Janesville, Wisconsin, he is apt to think of the Parker Pen Company and leave it at that. And, alas, Janesville has been noted for many other things of which, one of the most forgotten is the former Samson Tractor Company which flourished--sort of--for six or seven years.

Now a tractor company isn't generally ever going to become much more than that, but Samson was an exception to the rule, having been spotted by the eagle eye of the late William C. Durant who, at the time, was President of the General Motors Corporation, and who, in addition, was buying just about anything he could lay his hands on to add to GM's holdings. This was at the period of what has come to be known as "Durant's Second Empire" as he had previously headed the prestigious GM conglomerate and been fired from same, only to re-establish himself in control all over again by a brilliant stock maneuver.

Durant's empire was vast, his sales excellent and

the profits therefrom just out of this world. Durant and GM were riding high but ignoring the fingers on the wall which were not writing "Mene mene tekkel uparson," but, rather, "Pride goeth before a fall." Durant was a spendthrift and his non-working crystal ball did not clue him in on the upcoming 1921 recession.

The Samson Company had been around since 1916 producing a creditable line of trucks and tractors, but it was the tractor aspect which caught Durant's eye because, the way he saw it, it was an upcoming product and the world of the smaller farm tractor was just coming in with names like Fordson, Uncle Sam and John Deere to do the work formerly the responsibility of such enormous steam juggernauts as the Case of Racine.

So Durant bought Samson and whereas truck and tractor production continued in their easygoing manner, he (or someone who got his ear) decided that in addition a special sort of automobile could be added to the production line in Janesville. This idea, as it turned out, would be a large passenger car which could accommodate nine persons and be used as a pleasure car on Sunday to take the family to church and such (there were large families on Wisconsin farms in those days), whereas for day-to-day work, a farmer could remove the rear upholstery and convert it into a truck, and fill it with grain or take hogs to the marketplace. Simple.

The Samson Whole Family Car was thus introduced in 1919 at Janesville and put on display there where, Durant probably felt, it would revolutionize the entire farm industry. And an attractive piece of machinery it was, too, with a 118-inch wheelbase and a Northway four-cylinder engine identical to that which was being used as the power plant for

GM's Chevrolet Model FB. I have always felt that Mr. Durant's successes in the automotive field which, God knows, were frequent and many, were bound to produce a second generation of successes or even surpass the existing records.

The Samson was an attractive novelty of a car with room for three in both front and rear seats and three jump seats as well. At the time, GM was in its zenith with Chevrolet. Scripps-Booth, Oakland, Oldsmobile, Buick and Chevrolet Truck and with more than a single model available on most of those chassis. In that year of 1919 when Samson made its debut to the good folk of the Badger State, Chevrolet alone would produce 149,904 cars in its Detroit plant plus another 17,431 north of the border. Impressive? You'd better believe it.

But life is full of strange, wondrous and sometimes downright unpleasant things, and the Samson Family turned out to be one of the latter. Exactly why, I'm not entirely certain. This was 1919, remember, and, only a year from the lean days of WW I, cars were in great demand. The Samson was attractive, it certainly was a utilitarian vehicle for large families, and it was dual purpose. Seemingly, everything was going for it. And yet, production was concluded with the completion of Car Number 1, which was subsequently sold to a farmer in Green County, and despite years of checking its ultimate fate, I've come up tilt. It seems to have disappeared into thin air. Perhaps it did.

I think it would have been killed off in the 1921 recession in any event--the odds point to that. But by that time, Durant had been fired by General Motors for the second and final time. In 1922, the corporation would discontinue the Scripps-Booth from its line of offerings. It also divested

itself of the Samson Tractor Company at Janesville which subsequently became just another Chevrolet assembly plant.

We know the rest of the story. Durant built his own empire and through the Twenties and even into the Thirties produced a line of cars including Durant, Star, Flint and Locomobile--several models of each, plus the Mason truck. Two other attempts, the Eagle and the Princeton, died a-borning.

Durant, himself, would leave this world in 1948.

General Motors went on with new and more successful management. It tried some other cars in its line, the Marquette and the Viking, for example, both of which laid an egg due to economic vicissitudes. It also introduced the Pontiac as a companion car to Oakland which became so successful that, in true praying mantis fashion, it devoured its parent in 1932 when the Oakland became the Pontiac Eight.

It is sad, in a way, to research automotive history, and there are the peaks and the nadirs as one finds in any similar aspect of big business. But I wish the Samson might have survived, despite Durant's possibly misguided enthusiasm and the car's apparent lack of appeal. Yet, it was a viable part of the Wisconsin automobile history, small as it may have been. We should never forget it for that reason alone.

UPDATE ON THE HARDING AUTOMOBILE

By William T. Cameron

This is the second of a three-part history of a mysterious automobile named the Harding Steer-Safe thought to have been built in Oshkosh, Wisconsin somewhere around 1915, by a nephew of President Warren G. Harding.

As reported in SPARK 16 I volunteered to research the history of Wisconsin built cars in and around Neenah, Menasha and Oshkosh. One of the cars on a list compiled by the WSAH, the Harding, was said to have been built in Oshkosh, but my research at the Oshkosh Library revealed no trace of such an automobile. There was a Samuel B. Harding, but we don't find him in a City Directory until 1919 and then only as a proprietor of a foundry producing boilers and steam engine equipment.

My report in SPARK 16 told of my visit to the Stanley G. Reynolds collection of mostly unrestored automobiles in Wetaskiwin, Alberta, Canada and finding a Harding automobile jammed in between two other antique vehicles in the loft of an old barn where I could photograph only the front end of the car. Two of these pictures were reproduced in SPARK 16. Attempts to secure more information from Mr. Reynolds about the car, both in person and by subsequent letters, proved fruitless and it wasn't until some time later that I was able to obtain some meager information about his purchase.

Over four years have elapsed. Spasmodic research has continued and we now have more of the story. But much more still remains a mystery.

Additional research began when Chet Krause sent me a page from Harrah's September 1981 auction brochure picturing and describing a 1915 Harding roadster, designated as Lot No. 73.

Chet's note reads: "Built by Harding Machine Company, Oshkosh--may be only one built (the roadster) but have a report that a coupe was also made."

A letter to Harrah's brought an 8x10 glossy of the 1915 Harding roadster showing a boxy rumble seat protected by a separate windshield. The oversize front wheel hubs apparently contained the "Steer-Safe" unit. The caption repeated the same misinformation about the Harding Machine Company of Oshkosh, Wisconsin and the fact that the car was built by a nephew of President Warren B. Harding. A letter accompanying the picture stated that the car was sold at the September 1981 auction for \$7,500 "present owner unknown."

Keith Marvin, who loves to solve car mysteries, agreed to secure some kind of a response from Stanley G. Reynolds and after several months delay received what appears to be a work sheet or set of instructions to an employee on what to look for when picking up the car at Harrahs--as it was now clear that he was the successful bidder. This apparently solves one mystery: There was not both a Roadster and a Coupe still in existence, only the former.

The next information to surface on the Harding was Beverly Rae Kimes' write-up in the Standard Catalogue of American Cars 1805-1942. In addition to what now seems to be an unlikely claim that "two of these cars are known to exist" we find this sentence, "A reference from 1950 reported the discovery in Green Bay during that year of a Harding roadster

bearing 1924 license plates; another Green Bay old timer remembers seeing a Harding coupe."

Acting upon this Green Bay reference I wrote to Jeff Gillis, an automotive historian in northern Wisconsin, asking if he would help run down this particular reference; could it be that Hardings were built in Green Bay, not Oshkosh?

Jeff writes to Bev asking her to see what additional information might appear in her files, which of course I should have done in the first place.

Beverly came up with two interesting items. The first a very faint copy of a letter written by a Mr. Ted Pamperin on June 27, 1960 offering to sell to Harrahs--what do you suppose?--a 1915 Harding roadster. The letter, postmarked Green Bay, Wisconsin June 27, 1960, mentions the fact that "the car was designed by Samuel B. Harding, a cousin of President Warren G. Harding and also a personal friend of my Grandfather." Mr. Pamperin goes on to say "the car has been partially restored by me but because I am attending the University of Wisconsin and have practically no time to devote to it, I am interested in selling. The car is a one-of-a-kind automobile--we have the original plans and know that no more than 73 were built. Mine was Mr. Harding's personal car."

In Beverly's report to Jeff she says that that "reference" about a Harding having been seen in 1950 in and around Green Bay appeared as an article in the Green Bay Gazette early in July 1950. Through the Inter-Library Loan program I obtained a microfilm tape of the newspaper of that date, but could not find the article in question.

Jeff checked the address on that 1960 letter and

found that Pamperins were listed and upon phoning found that they were Ted Pamperins' mother and father. Upon receiving this information I wrote to Mr. and Mrs. Pamperin. Several days later I received a letter from Ted's mother stating among other things: "We did know Mr. Harding as an older man. He came from Chicago to Green Bay. In Chicago he had been an architect and inventor. He was hired by the WPA to supervise construction of a shelter and a bandshell on some property donated by the Pamperin family for a Brown County public park. It was he who told us of the presidential connection. We never heard that the car was built in Oshkosh. Mr. Harding borrowed some money from our family and gave the car as security. It was abandoned by him later and given to our son and friends to restore." Signed, Doris Pamperin."

Mrs. Pamperin supplied son Ted's address, but a letter to him has not yet elicited a reply. Similarly a letter to the Brown County Historical Society has not been replied to. However, Jeff Gillis is in touch with the research librarian at Society headquarters who promises a reply shortly.

I have also written to President Harding's Home, a Division of the Ohio Historical Society, asking if President Harding had a cousin rather than a nephew Samuel B. Harding. No reply to date.

This concludes Part II of the Harding Story. Hopefully the next and final chapter will answer such questions as: If the car was not built in Oshkosh, where? Ted Pamperin says his car was the "first of 73" -- what became of them? "We have the original plans" -- does he still have them? Was the "Steer-Safe" front end unit patented? Just who was this Mr. Samuel B. Harding, when and where did he live,

what did he do besides designing and building the Harding automobile?

THE WRIGHT LEGEND: AN EXHIBIT

(NOTE: The December, 1987 issue of On Wisconsin contained the following article on a planned Frank Lloyd Wright exhibit in Madison at the Elvehjem Museum of Art this fall. At the end of the article mention is made of a car show on Labor Day Weekend that is to include cars owned by Wright.

One of the coordinators of this event, Mary Jane Hamilton, asked if I would help to locate Wright cars and arrange for their attendance. I agreed and suggested that the WSAH might be able to play a role in this event. The Elvehjem event was described to the WSAH officers during the WSAH Hartford meeting. The officers unanimously accepted the idea of helping with the arrangements for it, providing that WSAH would not have to assume any financial responsibility for the event.

The Elvehjem plans some very limited advertising in the events sections of the major old car hobby press and will also attempt to place some press releases in these publications. Beyond that, they are open to suggestions. The two areas where help is most urgently needed are in locating Frank Lloyd Wright cars and in convincing their owners to bring them to Madison for the show. If you have any ideas, contact Matt Joseph, 7728 Martinsville Road, Route 1, Cross Plains, WI 53528; (608) 798-4317. MATT JOSEPH.)

A major exhibition about Frank Lloyd Wright, opening in September at the Elvehjem Museum of Art, is shedding new light on the famous architect's work in Madison, where he lived as a child and University student.

Wright's 32 Madison designs, many of which are virtually unknown, have been the focus of a scholarly research project. Several designs have been re-dated, and one heretofore unknown Wright building has been discovered.

The Elvehjem project brings together many University resources and includes a wide range of activities about Wright, his family, and his architecture, explained Mary Jane Hamilton, guest curator. Hamilton, with others, are bringing Wright's Madison designs into sharper focus and finishing the research that provides a context for the exhibition and essays for the catalog.

Members of the multidisciplinary team (architectural, social, and cultural historians) bring to the project a familiarity with Madison's people, institutions, and history. They are aware of the networks and family ties that connected Wright's Madison clients and they have checked property deeds, tax records, and public and private collections to document accurately the Wright designs. In their research, they have tracked down and interviewed original Madison clients or their descendants and also several former Taliesin apprentices associated with local buildings or projects.

Hamilton, who has been searching for many years for details about Wright's Madison work, said it has never before been presented in such a complete and systematic manner. "If people in other towns with Frank Lloyd Wright buildings or designs would ap-

proach them with the same thoroughness, we'd have a much more accurate and complete picture of Wright's architectural work," Hamilton said.

She still would appreciate hearing from people with private collections or drawings, photos, or other material about Wright's Madison designs.

Wright (1867-1959) attended the University for two semesters in 1886. As a student of Allan D. Conover, an engineering professor who supervised Science Hall construction, Wright assisted in building the roof. He "was entrusted with the working out of some steel clips to join the apex of the trusses of the main roof," according to Wright's autobiography. Wright visited landscape architecture classes in the 1930s. Much later, in 1955, he was awarded an honorary degree.

Wright's work evoked strong emotions in Madison as well as across the world. The exhibition will convey the cultural context in which Wright's designs were produced as well as the reaction they generated from clients and the public.

Few American cities have as many realized Wright buildings or proposed designs as Madison. Oak Park, Ill., for example, has a majority of Wright's early Prairie examples, and California the bulk of the 1920s concrete block buildings.

Only Madison was the intended site of designs from the architect's first year of independent practice in 1893 and from every decade until his death in 1959. The stylistic changes and variety of designs during those 66 years represent Wright's career in microcosm. His local work encompasses a lake cottage, dance academy, factories, hotel, motel, hospital, church, boathouses, and many homes. Probably the

least known was a small fish factory, now demolished; the best known, the unrealized Monona Terrace project.

A civic center and auditorium had been a political issue in Madison since the turn of the century when Wright proposed in 1938 what later was known as Monona Terrace. It combined a theater, restaurant, train station, art gallery, boat dock, roof-garden-extension of an existing street, plus county courts, jail, and administrative space for both the county and city.

A revised plan for a multi-use lakefront proposal was approved by voters in a 1954 referendum, but old political wounds reopened along with delaying tactics, high bids, and attacks on the architect's patriotism. Several hundred supporters honored him with a banquet at the Memorial Union and generous gift in 1955, but never did get the lakefront project underway.

Madison, thus, offers the rare opportunity to study the development of an outstanding international artist in relation to a specific community and a group of discerning clients. He settled permanently in Wisconsin in 1911, and started construction of his country home, Taliesin, near Spring Green, where until his death he spent most of his time.

Through the years, Wright's relationship with Madison extended beyond individual clients and friends. He often came to Madison to shop, attend concerts, secure medical assistance, and give lectures.

The exhibition, lent from public and private collections including the Taliesin Archives, will include about 200 objects consisting of more than 30 original drawings, furniture, scale models, blueprints, photographs, and related artifacts.

An illustrated catalog will have essays by Hamilton; Paul Sprague, UW-Milwaukee, architectural historian and Wright scholar; Donald Kalec, Oak Park, director of research and restoration at the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio; Diane Filipowcz, Raleigh, N.C., formerly of Madison, architectural historian; John Holzhueter, Madison, social historian; Timothy Heggland, Madison; architectural researcher; and Kathryn Smith, Los Angeles, Wright scholar.

Support has come from two federal grants. The National Endowment for the Humanities awarded the Elvehjem \$205,580, and the National Endowment for the Arts awarded \$20,000. "It is very exciting that both the endowments have acknowledged the importance of the Elvehjem's exhibition which focuses on Wright's work in Madison," said Russell Panczenko, Elvehjem director. "The awards will enable the Elvehjem to present the exhibition in a way that its content merits and to publish new research that has surfaced in the course of this project."

During the exhibition, September 2 through November 6, there will be a performance of vocal and instrumental compositions of William C. Wright, the architect's father, and a display of original sheet music by William Wright; a public television program; a film series and display of architecture books; and other related activities, tours, and lectures. Cars owned by Wright will be on display on the University Ave. side of the museum for a weekend.

Other exhibits at the Elvehjem will include The House Beautiful: Frank Lloyd Wright for Everyone and Wright books and printed materials in the Kohler Art Library. The Memorial Union and State Historical Society also will have exhibits.

RUSTIC ROADS OF WISCONSIN:
TWO-LANES THROUGH THE PAST

The Wisconsin Department of Transportation has available a new brochure that contains small maps of 46 routes throughout the state officially designated as "rustic roads," where traffic volume is low, but historical, cultural and visual benefits are high.

Wisconsin's Rustic Roads System was created by the state Legislature to preserve some of the state's scenic, lightly traveled country roads for the leisurely enjoyment of bikers, hikers and motorists.

Currently there are 48 Rustic Roads located in 28 counties, ranging from 1½ to 26 miles long. Many roads pass through thickly wooded areas where waterfowl and wildlife abound. Others go through open farming areas offering pleasant agricultural vistas. Some of the roads are gravel, most are paved; some are curved, others hilly; but all of them offer enjoyable sights for the leisurely traveler.

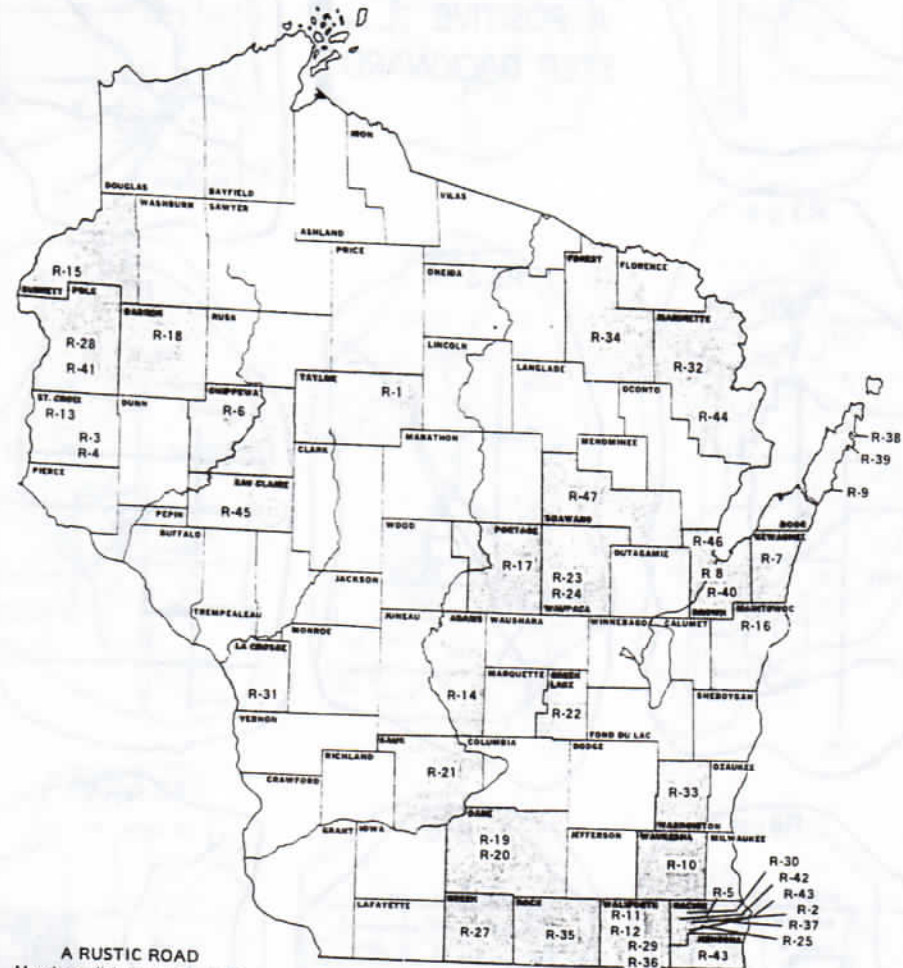
Rustic roads are marked by brown and yellow signs with a one-to-three digit identification number prefixed by the letter "R," assigned by the state Rustic Roads Board. The maximum speed on any rustic road is 45 mph.

A program brochure is available for town or county boards or any resident who is interested in having a favorite road approved as a Rustic Road. Inclusion in the statewide system does not change a road's jurisdiction.

For a copy of the map brochure, entitled "Wisconsin's Rustic Roads, a Positive Step Backward," or the program brochure containing rules and regulations for

getting a road approved, persons should write to the state Rustic Roads Board, Department of Transportation, P.O. Box 7913, Madison, WI 53707-7913.

The Rustic Roads System in Wisconsin was created by the 1973 State Legislature in an effort to help citizens and local units of government preserve what remains of Wisconsin's scenic, lightly travelled country roads for the leisurely enjoyment of bikers, hikers and motorists.



JANUARY 1987

WISCONSIN'S
**RUSTIC
 ROADS**

A POSITIVE
 STEP BACKWARD

