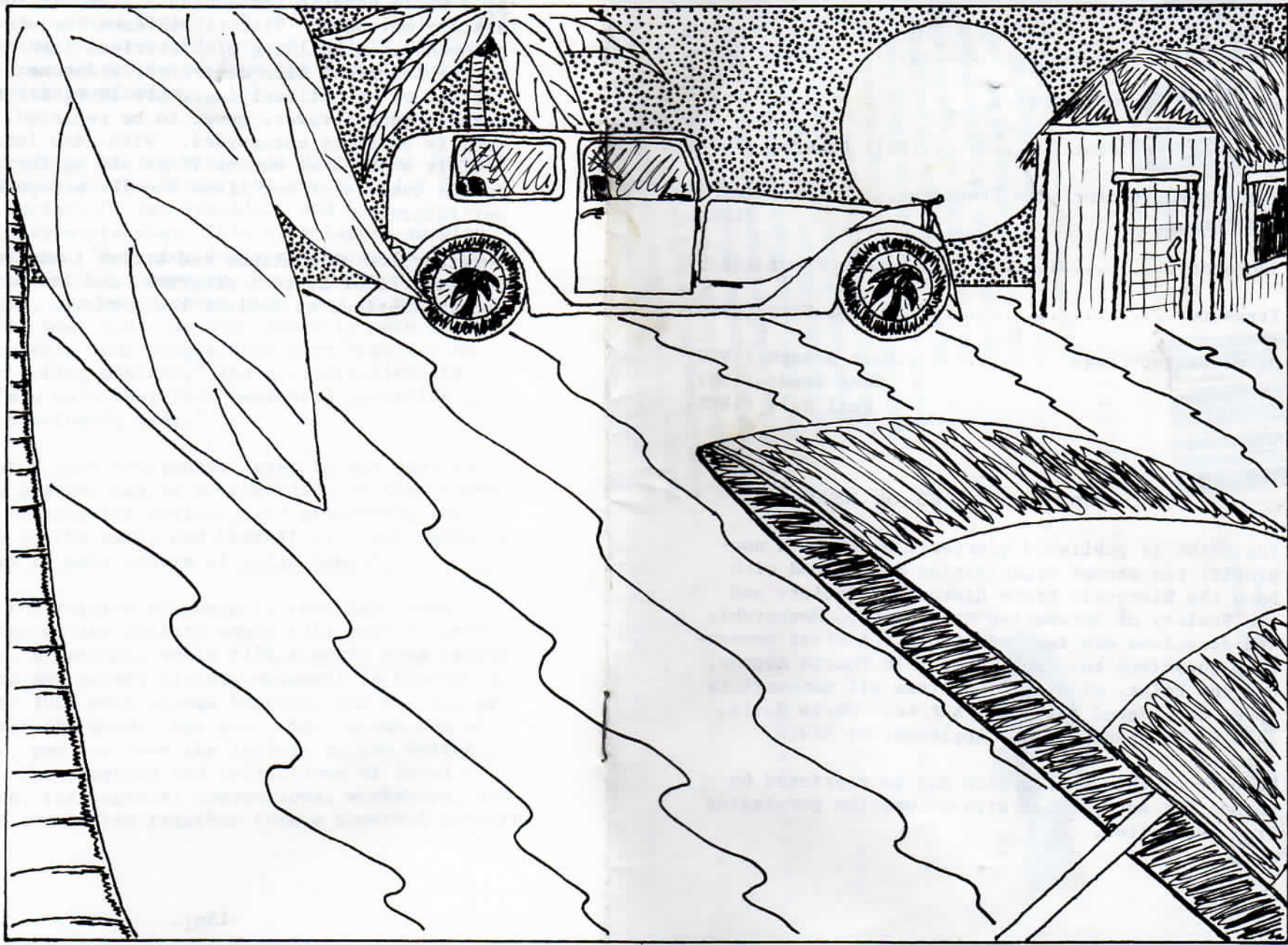


# SPARK



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 (1989)  
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 Treasurer.....Bob Gary (1989)  
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### EDITORIAL NOTES

Write to these people:

BILL CAMERON, 7495 Clearwater Road, Minocqua  
   54548;  
 KEN NIMOCKS, 2982 Sunshine Place, Green Bay  
   54313;  
 KEN KNAUF, 802 South Spruce Street, P.O. Box 1,  
   Marshfield, 54449;  
 BOB GARY, 1316 Fourth Avenue, Stevens Point  
   54481;  
 MATT JOSEPH, 7728 Martinsville Road, Cross  
   Plains 53528;  
 GENE WENDT, 4817 Apple Drive, Rhinelander  
   54501;  
 PHIL HALL, 754 North 113th Street, Milwaukee  
   53226;

These are our WSAH officers. Write to any of them or all of them and tell them how you think WSAH should celebrate its 10th birthday (February 3, 1979-February 3, 1989). And tell them what you think about WSAH in general. What do you like? What don't you like? What would you like to see changed?

Spend a quarter on a stamp, and speak up.

And while you're at it, is there anything you haven't seen in SPARK that you would like to? Anything you would like to see reprinted/repeated? Anything that left a particularly bad taste in your mouth? Write me:

CHRIS HALLA, 1455 W. Prospect Avenue, Appleton 54914. I'll look forward to your letters. In the meantime, enjoy this modest issue and stay cool.

Chris Halla

## DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

WSAH is about to celebrate its 10th anniversary; which in the history of SAH chapter continuity and growth is quite a spectacular achievement. We have more than tripled our membership, made substantial contributions to the national organization and are well on our way to compiling the history of Wisconsin's contribution to the development of the automobile. In addition to researching and recording the history of some 175 cars built in Wisconsin, we hope to include information on Wisconsin's important function of component and accessory supplier to the automotive industry in general. We believe that over the years this contribution has equaled or exceeded that of Ohio, Indiana and possibly even Michigan.

Of the eight founding members, one, John W. Kress, Jr., has recently gone to his reward. Two others have left the state. Another two have dropped their affiliation, leaving Chet Krause, John Gunnell and Chris Halla still actively lending their good will and expertise to the continued success of the chapter. Except for a brief period, Chris Halla has served as editor of SPARK, our chapter publication. This has been a momentous task, handsomely accomplished. His devotion to the cause got me to thinking about motivation; why Chris, Matt, Bob, Ken, Wally and others of us continue year after year to contribute time, energy and whatever skill we possess to keeping the organization viable and productive.

The bruised-finger-dirty-fingernail folks tend to sometimes look upon we desk-bound-inky-finger types as somewhat high brow, elitist individuals. In

their view we miss the real down-to-earth aspect of automotive history--the rescue and restoration of actual tangible concrete (if you'll pardon the term) examples of automotive history--the vehicle itself.

Of the thousands of people who attend car shows and swap meets, Hershey and Iola for instance, only a small handful appear to be interested in books, publications and related printed materials for historical purposes. Aside from the occasional purchase of a shop manual or parts book (or a current magazine that contains an article about their particular make of car) only a very small portion of the millions of dollars spent on the hobby goes for the things offered by SAH chapters.

While these hobbyists are out touring or just statically displaying their beautiful restorations in the hope of winning a fancy trophy, or whatever, we are seriously working, recording automotive history, establishing libraries, archives and oral histories, all designed to preserve and protect and make available to others this important aspect of overall national history.

As WSAH launches into the next decade, we are determined to carry on in the pursuit of our established goals.

William T. Cameron

## IOLA REPORT

The summer meeting of the Wisconsin Society of Automotive Historians (Wisconsin Chapter of the Society of Automotive Historians) was called to order by Director/President William T. Cameron at 2:05 p.m. on July 9, 1988, at the WSAH tent at the annual Iola Car Show. In attendance were Bill Cameron, Bob Gary, Bob Hall, Matt Joseph, Duane Kasten, Michael and Betty Keller, Ken and Dolly Knauf, David Lanning, Don Luebke, Dan Manola, Ken Nimocks, Florian Stucinski, Wally Wray. A moment of silence was observed for John Kress, a founding member of the organization. Tim Kress, son of John Kress, then described the contents of the John Kress estate, which is to be auctioned off on July 11-12. The minutes of the last meeting were read, corrected and approved. Treasurer's report by Bob Gary showed a current balance of \$735.42. Report approved. Our chapter currently has 42 members. Chris Halla sent a letter to our Director/President, which was summarized for those in attendance. Contributions for Spark are needed, and a special 10th anniversary publication is anticipated.

Wally Wray presented an award to his fellow three-wheeler driver, Duane Kasten--a Kasten for Senate sign--and Duane made a few comments.

On the national level, the SAH Hospitality Tent will be in a new location at Hershey, and the banquet will feature a silent auction. The Society president, Beverley Rae Kimes, will handle seminars on automotive history.

Our Wisconsin chapter fall meeting will be held after Hershey in late October.

Amid wind, rain, and general confusion, the meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

Ken Knauf

## THE OGREN

By Keith Marvin

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is reprinted from The Crank Journal with the author's permission. CH.)

I wonder how many people realize that early in this century, Milwaukee was a center for automobile manufacturing. Almost 50 different makes of cars were produced here at one time or another, ranging from bare prototypes to those that sold in the thousands.

This wasn't unusual: Car building proliferated throughout the Midwest, and while Milwaukee didn't compare with such manufacturing centers as Indianapolis, St. Louis, Cleveland or the greater Chicago area, it certainly tried. In those days, many communities were giving Detroit a run for its money as the car capital of the nation.

The cars produced in Milwaukee ranged from experimental models to cars that would make a national name for themselves. One, a luxury car called the LaFayette rivaled such aristocratic makes as Lincoln and Cadillac.

Then there was the Ogren, which got the drop on the

LaFayette by two years and which made its mark as another automobile of high quality, esthetically pleasing design and with a price tag to match. Like the LaFayette, the Ogren was not targeted to the pocketbooks of the peasantry. These cars were just about the finest for their price.

The LaFayette was in reality a luxury holding of Nash, but its market just wasn't enough to keep it afloat, and in 1924 the LaFayette joined the rising ranks of cars that tried and failed, although several thousand had been sold. A later auto by the same name did a little better.

In those days, the larger automobile companies built their cars almost from the ground up. Most of the lesser makes were assembled cars which used components--engines, frames, radiators, bodies--manufactured by specialists.

The Ogren was an assembled car, and it was assembled with great care. Its designer and builder, Hugo W. Ogren, had had considerable experience with the car when he first set foot in Wisconsin in 1919. He was well-known as the designer of several racing cars (all known as "H.W.O." cars after his own initials), and also had been employed by the Colby automobile company in Mason City, Iowa, where he had been the designer. He left Colby to form his own enterprise, the Ogren Motor Car Company, in Chicago, in 1914.

He advertised a touring car for 1915, but it is not known whether this ever materialized. In 1916 he moved his operations to Waukegan, Illinois where the very first Ogren cars apparently were produced and where the operation continued sometime into the

next year. How many cars were built we don't know, but the venture failed.

Undaunted, Ogren reorganized the operation and moved it to Milwaukee, where operations were set up in the former Elite skating rink. The first Ogren car rolled out the door in July 1920.

The car was handsome and built with considerable care. Although probably no more than 20 or 25 cars a month were produced--150 to 200 altogether--the Ogren name spread quickly.

There were other cars being made in Wisconsin at the time, notably Nash in Kenosha, Case and Mitchell in Racine and Kissel in Hartford. But somehow, by its appearance and obvious quality construction, Ogren had its exclusive place.

The open touring car listed at a high \$3,750 and some of the closed models at more than \$5,000. It was pretty, prestigious and powerful.

Meanwhile, the automotive press announced that the company was about to be reorganized and would be headed by Fred G. Smith, president and general manager and one of the original stockholders of the Ogren Milwaukee operation.

So Ogren left his company and joined another group that wanted to produce a luxury automobile. Thus the Commander Motors Corp. was formed with headquarters in New York City. An elaborate brochure was prepared for prospective investors.

Ogren provided an Ogren touring car that might have been his personal car. To this was attached

"Commander" hubcaps and a new radiator badge. Many saw the car for what it was, a reconstituted Ogren. The Ogren and its illegitimate scion, the Commander, soon faded.

When the word got out that the Ogren was through, the remaining cars were sold and the Ogren plant went into receivership.

I've often wondered what became of the lone rebadged Ogren that became the Commander. Some say the Commander name eventually was removed and it was sold as a "1923" Ogren, a car that didn't exist. And Hugo W. Ogren himself? He seems to have vanished into the mists of history.

#### A WRITTEN COLLECTING POLICY

By Tom McKay

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This article is reprinted from the State Historical Society of Wisconsin's Exchange with permission. CH.)

Of all the services that local historical societies perform, none is more important than that of saving from destruction historical artifacts, documents, and photographs that form a record of the past. In innumerable cases, only the presence of a local historical society has prevented locally significant historical materials from being carted off to the landfill or scattered in all directions by the auctioneer's gavel. The way in which historical

societies collect and the manner in which they administer those collections also have an impact on the care that historical materials will receive.

Each historical item that becomes part of a local society's collection deserves proper care and places demands upon the resources available for collection care. As a result, how and what a local historical society collects partially determines how much and what kind of care collection items will have. Each new acquisition, whether a single molding plane, a complete carpenter's chest, or the entire contents of a carpenter's shop, will make claims on storage and/or exhibit space. As infestation of silverfish found in a newly acquired box of business records will require emergency treatment and may delay needed conservation treatment for another item already in the historical society's collection. Reconciling the benefits of building a broad-based collection that documents the many sides of local history with the potential resources available to exhibit, store, and care for collections can present a historical society with difficult collecting decisions. A written collecting policy offers a tool to help guide those decisions.

A written collecting policy contains a set of criteria that must be satisfied when historical materials are added to a society's collection. The policy also delineates authority for acquiring and disposing of items in the collection. Written collecting policies vary in their details according to the needs of different local historical societies. However, basic provisions which every collecting policy should have include a definition of the geographical area that the collection repre-

sents, a statement that only unrestricted gifts and purchases may be acquired for the permanent collection, a clause on the tax deductibility of gifts to the historical society, and a designation of the responsible officials to approve acquisitions and disposals. Virtually all collecting policies state that items in poor condition or that unnecessarily duplicate materials already in the collection should not be accepted into the collection.

Local historical societies may wish to further focus their collections with other reasonable limitations stated in their collecting policies. Many historical events or activities have been depicted in modern dioramas, paintings, models, and artifact reproductions. While these items are usually labors of love, some may be poorly executed and others may provide misleading images with which to interpret the past to visitors. In such cases, a society may, as stated in a collecting policy, choose not to accept items which are not contemporary with the time period they represent. Memorabilia pose problems in collecting. A scrapbook of newsclippings and souvenirs from a local resident's trips to major cities around the United States may be of no use to a local historical society. If the same resident kept a scrapbook of newsclippings and souvenirs documenting the visits of well-known people to the community, it might represent important themes or events in the community's history and serve a valuable purpose in the local historical society's collection. A clause on memorabilia can spell out the test of relevance to important themes or events in the community's history.

The question of authority to acquire and dispose of

collection items merits careful thought. A local historical society's collection is most often its largest tangible asset as well as its central resource for fulfilling its mission. From those perspectives, final authority to add items to the collection or dispose of items in the collection should rest with the Board of Directors. However, the Board cannot and should not be present on a daily basis to respond to donors who call, write or visit to offer items for the collection. In a large organization, the director may delegate part of this responsibility to one or more staff members. In a volunteer operated historical society, the collection committee would assume responsibility for temporary approval of donations offered to the society. In either case, the staff or the collection committee should report its recommendations for acquisition or disposal of collection items to the Board of Directors for its final approval. In most cases, approval of the report and its recommendations will be routine business similar to the approval of the treasurer's report at a Board meeting. Nonetheless, Board approval of collection acquisitions and disposals demonstrates responsible oversight of the society's tangible assets just as action on a treasurer's report signifies oversight of financial assets. Historical societies should be aware that disposal of collection items represents the reversal of previous decisions made on behalf of the society. In an analogy to the amendment of bylaws or other actions that reverse previous decisions, the society may wish to require more than a simple majority vote to dispose of items from the collection.

## SUPERIOR LOCAL HISTORY PROGRAMS

(This is a message from Dr. H. Nicholas Muller, III, Director of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. It is reprinted from the Society's Exchange with permission. CH.)

The Proceedings of the Wisconsin Historical Society for 1909 carried the "Report of the Superior Historical Society." The President and Secretary of that society wrote that "This city lately adopted as its slogan, 'Superior delivers the goods.' Our Historical Society, however, has not lived up to this motto, for since there have been no meetings during the past year, we are unable to make any annual report. Our people have been busy during the year making history," the officers cleverly noted, "and have therefore neglected recording history previously made."

"We trust," they continued, "that in the year to come the present may be so subordinated that there will be leisure for reviving and preserving the memories of the past, and that it will not again be necessary to make return of nulla bona."

In 1988 the reports of the more than 225 local affiliates of the Society would fill many volumes, and none, I warrant, would file a nulla bona return. The local and county history movement in Wisconsin, strong in 1909 even though Superior did not manage to deliver the goods that year, has become one of the best, perhaps even the leader, in the United States. The programs and collections of local societies, the regional conventions, workshops, and the WCLH convention together form a powerful network.

Individual communities, our counties, and Wisconsin as a whole benefit immeasurably from the local history movement. Historical resources are non-renewable. A building of historical importance or an archeological site destroyed, a document discarded, or an artifact lost, are important resources gone -- gone forever, never to be replaced. So, too, is a memory unrecorded. With each loss, we forfeit a piece of our heritage and suffer a decline in the quality of our lives and the prospect for our future.

Together let us continue and strive to improve our Superior local history programs, and let us in Wisconsin continue to deliver the goods.