



SPARK

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CELEBRATING OUR 10th YEAR

WSAH Mid-Winter Meeting
Saturday, March 4, 1989
Pierce Manufacturing Co.
Appleton, Wisconsin

Spouses and Friends Invited

The Annual Mid-Winter meeting of the Wisconsin Society of Automotive Historians will take place Saturday, March 4th, in Appleton, Wisconsin as follows:

Host: Douglas A. Ogilvie, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer Pierce Manufacturing Company, Appleton, Wisconsin.

Noon: The conference will begin, just off highway 41, with a luncheon in a private dining room at the Captains Restaurant, 30 West College Avenue (a few blocks from the Pierce Manufacturing Company plant). There will be a Board of Directors meeting to which the entire membership is invited.

1:30: Assemble in conference room of the Pierce plant, 2600 American Drive, for a presentation of Pierce Company history (1913 to date) by Mr. Ogilvie and staff.

2:00: A conducted tour of the Pierce plant. Appleton has a number of attractions for spouses or friends not wishing to attend the tour.

4:30: Chapter business meeting. Election of officers for the coming year. PLANS FOR WSAH TENTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION: TIME, PLACE, PROGRAM. Treasurer's report and 1989 money raising activities. Secretary's report.

5:30: Adjourn to hospitality room. Super 8 Motel, 3624 W. College Avenue. Beverages and snacks provided.

6:30: Dinner, private dining room, Captains Restaurant (locally known as the Captain's Steak Joint). Speaker to be announced.

Headquarters motel: Super 8, 3624 West College Avenue. Ph: (800)-843-1991 (AARP discount available).

EDITORIAL NOTES

WSAH is now officially 10 years old. And SPARK as well. Is this the big 10th Anniversary issue I hoped for? Well, no. But I've tried to make it at least a little special. Hope it meets with your approval.

We're still going to have a truly special issue, it'll just take a little longer and a little extra work. Rest assured that issue is in process.

A couple items in passing: First, take note that this year all of our WSAH offices (except for one Director-at-Large position) are up for election. How about taking this opportunity to get really active and "toss the bums out." Seriously, your WSAH Officers have always been hard working, caring individuals who have done their best for the organization. (And I'd like to personally thank all of them past and present for their part in growing the organization.) On the other hand, what better way to get involved than to run for office and serve a term yourself as it were?

Second, allow me to remind everyone that articles

aren't all you might contribute to SPARK. Your letters on stories that have run or other WSAH/SPARK related topics are welcome as are requests for assistance on your own pet projects. Remember, we're a non-profit organization beholdng to no one, so the profit motive won't keep you out of print here. Hell, your language doesn't even have to be pretty.

As a final note, please allow me to repeat from our last issue. "As an individual, take whatever you can out of WSAH, and if you feel like it, put something back in. As a society, let's look at what our capabilities are and do our best with a small, simple set of achievable goals. Let's fix anything that isn't working quite right, let's appreciate what we have and do that does work. We have an excellent organization." Let's spend the coming years making it even better.

Chris Halla

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Among the many drawbacks of old age is the curse of reminiscing--the act of casting ones mind back over past events whether silently to one's self or verbally to others--devoting ones time to recalling the activities, successes and accomplishments of vanished yesterdays. Living in the past, one tends to neglect the present and give no thought whatsoever to the future. The Wisconsin Chapter of the Society of Automotive Historians is 10 years old and I am 10 years into what might be called another lifetime; a decade so far removed from previous existence that I am hard pressed to even recognize that former individual that used to be me.

Ten years ago I moved from the life of an optical engineer in the state of Virginia to my present home in Minocqua. I left behind a successful business career, formal attire, a cruising sailboat, a mini-motorhome and a life of physical activity.

Ten years ago my wife of 52 years died and I learned to live the life of a bachelor, to cook, to wash dishes, to mend my own clothes, to use a vacuum cleaner and in general, how to to "keep house."

Ten years ago I acquired the sad remains of a Cameron automobile and began its restoration. This in turn led me into a research project culminating in the writing of a book covering the history of the Cameron car, what might be called an auto-biography, the story of two automotive pioneers ghost written by yours truly.

Ten years ago this diversion sent me to Hershey in search of parts and historical information and is where I met the late Jim Bradley who was instrumental in my joining the Society of Automotive Historians. A few months later, while engaged in similar pursuits, I went to Iola where an announcement over the public address system brought me to a meeting of the newly formed Wisconsin Chapter of the Society of Automotive Historians. And look what's happened since then!

All of this makes me wonder if perhaps this interest which we all share in automotive history isn't just some dynamic form of reminiscence. Researching the lives of early pioneers, dealing with activities which took place in the dim, distant past, some of us working with the acquisition and restoration of antique motor vehicles, avoiding the present and ignoring the future as much as possible. No matter what, there are lots of us doing it and obtaining a lot of satisfaction in the doing.

So as the WSAH celebrates its 10th Anniversary in 1989 let's engage in some healthy reminiscing, review our accomplishments, renew old friendships, while at the same time charting a productive course for the next 10 years.

Bill Cameron

WISCONSIN CARS IN THE TWENTIES

By Keith Marvin

Unlike Michigan, Wisconsin has never been thought of especially as a center of motor vehicle manufacturing, although it had its day in times long past. And, indeed, to a degree, right up to the recent moment when the Chrysler Corporation took over American Motors and shut down operations in Kenosha. Like its border states of Illinois, Iowa, Michigan and Minnesota, the Badger State was destined to hold a prominent place in the field in its day, until it and just about everywhere else in the land would be edged out by Michigan. In the recent Second Edition of the Catalog of American Cars by Beverley Rae Kimes and Henry Austin Clark Jr. (Krause Publications, 1988), it appears that no less than 171 different makes of passenger cars were produced in at least 42 different Wisconsin communities at one time or another. This doesn't include trucks, of which there were many, including the FWD, Kissel, Nash, Oneida, Oshkosh, Parker, Reliance, Sterling, Stoughton and Winther, plus others.

Chris Halla has asked me to write something on Wisconsin cars and I thought that perhaps a brief run-down of the Wisconsin automotive picture in the Twenties might be an apt subject, as the decade was

pretty much the twilight of the state's automotive industry with the lone exception of Nash-cum-Rambler-cum-American Motors-cum-oblivion.

Thus, I should like to examine the 13 cars which were manufactured in Wisconsin between January 1st, 1920 and December 31st, 1929 and comment briefly on them. Alphabetically, they follow.

AJAX: Built by the Ajax Motors Company of Kenosha, but in truth a subsidiary of Nash and, except for its radiator badge and hubcaps, little more than a small Nash. Introduced May 27th, 1925, some 10,693 cars had been built by the end of the calendar year. Exactly one year from its introduction, the car became the Nash Light Six with an approximate overall production of 15,000 to 20,000 units completed. Dealers with Ajax cars still remaining in showrooms were able to obtain a kit and thus update their cars by changing the Ajax logo (RADIATOR BADGE AND HUB-CAPS) to that of Nash.

CASE: This was a veteran concern centered in Racine, which had built traction engines as early as 1880 and both steam and gasoline agricultural tractors from 1892 to the present, being taken over by Massey-Harris in 1928. Between 1910 and 1927, Case also produced a line of passenger vehicles in several models and sizes. In the 1920s, Case peaked in automobile production with 1,600 units in 1923 but in all probability, perhaps as many as 15,000 cars or more were completed during eight years in the decade of the Twenties.

CLASSIC: This was one of Wisconsin's lesser known automotive offerings which had been built in limited numbers in 1916 and 1917 before WWI pressured it out of business. Its second coming in late 1920 was short lived, and whether anything more than proto-

types were made is doubtful. At best, the car was rather nondescript in its first time around.

COMMANDER: Technically, this wouldn't fall into the Wisconsin orbit as its headquarters were supposedly located in Chicago, but in truth it was no more than a rebadged Ogren and (the one car known to be so rebadged) the flagship of a new venture anticipated by Hugo Ogren car in Milwaukee. The Commander laid an egg, and it is doubtful that more than one rebadged touring car sported that badge. The car was presumably sold off as an Ogren when that company failed.

HARRIS SIX: This was an assembled car built by the Wisconsin Automotive Corporation of Menasha, which had picked up bits and pieces as well as the design of the recently defunct Winther automobile in 1923. Only a touring car was planned and before assembly could be started, the company ran out of funds. The court took over and ordered assembly to cut down on bankruptcy costs. At least nine and perhaps 10 of the cars were thus completed and sold before the end of the 1923 calendar year.

KISSEL: A revered name among the smaller independent makes, the Kissel was the product of the Kissel Motor Company of Hartford, its first car being completed in 1906. Kissels were extremely well designed and carefully built, with their rakish Gold Bug models among the most popular of American sporting automobiles. Production ranged as high as 2,500 to 3,000 units per year during their best days in the Twenties. In 1930, the company would assemble a few of the front-wheel-drive Ruxton automobiles. Kissel ended its passenger car production in 1931. It also produced the National-Kissel funeral cars from 1927 to 1930 as well as a line of commercial vehicles and, in Chicago, the Bradfield Cab from 1929 through 1931.

LaFAYETTE: To all intents and purposes, this was Nash's luxury line, although technically it was an independent make, and the Nash connection was played down throughout its five-year existence. Surfacing in 1920, the cars were first built in Mars Hill; then in Indianapolis in 1921 and 1922, operations moving to Milwaukee in 1923. The car was one of the finest luxury cars in the country at the time, its quality equal to that of Cadillac, Lincoln and Packard and with prices to match. LaFayettes were built into 1924 although the badge and name were again used on a Nash model in the mid and late Thirties.

MAIBOHM: If any Maibohms were built at the plant in Racine in 1920, they were few and far between. Produced there since 1918, production had been piecemeal following a devastating fire at the plant in 1918, and in 1920, operations were transferred to Sandusky, OH, where they continued until mid-1922, briefly resurfacing in 1923 as the Courier which marketed perhaps as many as 500 cars before failing in 1924.

MITCHELL: The Mitchell was first produced in 1903 and survived into 1923 when the Mitchell Motors Company of Racine failed. It was both well-known and well regarded among the smaller independents of its time, selling as many as 10,000 units in 1919, after which production spiraled downward. In its final year, approximately 100 cars were marketed. The factory was then purchased by Nash which used it for production of its Ajax Six a year later.

NASH: One of the major independents, Nash began life as the Rambler in 1903, produced by the Thomas B. Jeffery Company of Kenosha, its name being changed to Jeffery for the 1914 model year and, ultimately, Nash starting in 1917. During the Twenties Nash produced more than 800,000 cars and

for four years--1921, 1926, 1928 and 1929 occupied eighth place in American automobile corporation output. In 1958, the Nash name was relegated back in time once again when the Rambler name was revived to replace it, and in 1966, Rambler was dropped in favor of AMC (American Motors Corporation). In 1987 The American Motors Corporation was absorbed by Chrysler thus ending what remained of Wisconsin's automobile industry.

OGREN: A limited-production, high quality assembled car, the Ogren was built off and on in Milwaukee from 1914 to 1922. (Many sources list 1923 as the final year of activity, but it is almost certain that such cars sold that year had been built in 1922.) Although plans in 1920 called for a 25 car per month production, probably no more than 250 cars at the most were built in the company's entire history.

SCHULER: The Schuler was a tiny car with a two-cylinder engine, 78-inch wheelbase and which tipped the scales at 800 pounds. Introduced in January, 1924, at the Wisconsin State Automobile Show in Milwaukee, where (there is some doubt) it was purportedly built. No production figures survive but few were completed and the Schuler was out of the picture in a matter of months.

WINTHER: The Winther was an example of that curious anomaly, a pleasure car produced by a truck concern, the Winther Motor Truck Company, of Kenosha, the car surfacing in 1921 and surviving into 1923 with probably 400 to 500 units completed, all five-passenger touring cars. Upon its demise, patterns and existing parts were obtained by G.D. Harris of Menasha who resurrected it--little changed--into the Harris Six. The Winther truck, which had been built since 1917, survived until 1927.

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WHERE THE STORYTELLERS STARTED: Comments on Oral History

By Chris Halla and Gary Busha

The roots of oral history are the roots of storytelling. The two--although for most of history

they were one--go back to the very beginning of human communication. Perhaps even before spoken language. Since the dissemination of gossip is a built in need of our species, it's logical to suspect that if prostitution is the oldest profession, oral historian is the second oldest. After all, someone had to spread the news about who was doing what to whom; and for how much.

In ancient times--no tv, no radio, no print--hunters, gatherers, folks sat around their campfires in the evening and related events of the day. Surely, talk was of the hunt, of dangers encountered, of the depth of rivers and the height of mountains. But just as surely, the happenings of the past, tribal histories, were also related so that future generations might recall. Accounts, passed on from father to son, from teller to tribe, were heard and remembered by the listeners.

Cave drawings preceded spoken language as the vehicle of history. Spoken language was in large part replaced by written language as a way to record for posterity that which the ever changing, ever growing tribe chose to pass on. In time people largely forgot the value of oral history. The storytelling tradition survived for many only as entertainment. History came to be accepted as written, distilled and rewritten; sometimes even redistilled and yet again rewritten.

Some historians in a quest for depth and the complete picture have gone to the source, as it were. These are the founders of oral history as we know it now. History remembered and told by those who experienced it and recorded word for word in writing, on audio tape and now on video as well. History recorded with warts, inaccuracies and personal views intact.

At its best, oral history adds insights that traditional written history alone would remove. The most adept recorders of oral history are sometimes even able to raise it to the level of art. (The work of Studs Terkel is hereby highly recommended as example. His books include Hard Times, Working and The Good War among others.)

Where do we in Wisconsin begin? Who do we talk to? In spite of a little automobile manufacturing over the years there isn't all that much to talk about. Right? Wrong. Wisconsin is rich in automotive history, and it's not by any means all limited to manufacturing.

Don't think just of automobile manufacturers. Think as well about Wisconsin's many auto related industries. Think of parts manufacturers, auto dealers, and gas and service station operators.

Company founders and their families are always excellent sources of information. So are long term employees. Secretaries often see everything that goes on. Everything! Designers, of course, are able to shed light on otherwise forgotten aspects of development. Advertising professionals and journalists also have a unique point of view. For good, solid second-hand information, museum curators and local historians can't be beat.

If you still don't know where to start, start hanging around in taverns, cafes, diners and barber shops. Always pick the establishment by the number of senior citizens you see coming and going. Then just mention your interest in the automobile. Almost everyone is willing to "talk cars." It comes with being human.

Like auto racing? Consider the numbers of former race car drivers who campaigned and still live in Wisconsin. You might be surprised just at what you can turn up in our membership if you look hard enough.

Do names like Stevens, Mohs, Davidson and Mosling ring any bells? Think about it. Wisconsin is still a very active auto and auto related manufacturing state, especially if your definition stretches beyond automobiles alone.

Consider oral history as it pertains to automotive history to touch upon all aspects of life. Consider the automobile apart from society and you are left only a machine, nothing more. And the machine alone is without soul. Then consider oral history. Pursued and shared it can help us to more clearly understand the development of the automobile and its impact on society.

THIS ISSUE'S COVER

Art shows #36 Stephenson (1910-19, Stephenson Motor Truck Company, Milwaukee) in fuel line for the Chicago Evening American Commercial Vehicle Reliability Run. The run started and ended in Chicago with turnaround on Court Street in Fort Wayne, IN. (art and information supplied by John A. Davidson, Bristol, WI.)