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In Cleveland County's Early Days

By MAMIE JONES

Nearly 3,000 years ago Nahum, the Blkoshite, had a vision. He prophesied: "The chariots shall rage in the streets . . . they shall seem like torches, they shall run like lightnings; they shall jostle one against another in the broad-ways." Whether or not he was talking about the present day automobile, the description fits perfectly.

The first automobile race in the USA was held on Thanksgiving day, 1895, and was won by the driver of the Duryea gas-buggy, which averaged a racing speed of ten miles an hour. The driver had to stop several times for repairs, and also to procure large blocks of ice with which to cool his over-heated engine.

The road of achievement from automobiles averaging a racing speed of ten miles an hour to our present-day motor cars which average a racing speed of more than two miles a minute, is strewn with broken hearts and shattered fortunes of disappointed individuals and corporations who spent all they had in a vain effort to attain the perfection of today's motor cars.

Of the 1800 different makes of automobiles manufactured in the USA since about 1886, when automobile manufacturing was first attempted here, only twenty different makes of cars are now on the market.



SHELBY'S FIRST AUTOMOBILE—Charles L. Eskridge and Miss Mable Joseph, in the former's wonderful horseless carriage, pose for the photographer one summer's day in 1904. The background is the south side of the Court House Square.

LIFE

(From Page 1, Second Section)

In the year 1900, there were 8,000 automobiles in the United States, nearly everyone of which was powered by either steam or electricity. Today, in Cleveland county, there are more than 15,000 automotive vehicles, powered by gasoline and electricity. There are enough motor cars in the county for every inhabitant to ride at the same time, if such a thing were practicable.

AUTOMOBILES IN 1866.

From time immemorial men have dreamed of and have tried to create a self moving vehicle. The earliest record I found relating to this effort was in 1796 when an application for a patent for a land carriage operated by steam was rejected by London authorities as being utterly and completely absurd. This was a number of years before Robert Fulton and his steam boat. But Fulton's boat also had paddle wheels.

England and France manufactured automobiles long before the USA did. By automobile, I mean any vehicle that moves along the ground under its own power. The word auto means self, and the word mobile means moving. Hence, an automobile is a self moving vehicle. In England, in 1829, steam driven stage coaches plied between London and Bath.

In the 1890's Duryea Bros., Olds, Henry Ford, Winton, and several others were making some form of horseless carriage. Duryea Bros. were first to make the gas-buggy. Fifty years ago the Oldsmobile and the Buick were placed on the market. After 1892, some of the automobile manufacturers began using storage batteries. As I said, above, nearly all the early motor cars were operated by steam or electricity. Gas and electricity were first used together about 1910. In 1912, Charles F. Kettering sold to Cadillac his electric self-starter. Soon thereafter all motor cars had self starters.

The early cars had to be started with a crank or lever placed on the outside. As the lever was moved around by hand it looked like the vehicle was being wound up, and these early cars were jokingly referred to as "side-winders."

SHELBY'S FIRST HORSELESS CARRIAGE

Pictured above is Shelby's very first automobile, which belonged

to Charles L. Eskridge, the gentleman holding the "L" shaped steering apparatus. The lady beside him with the big hat, the pompadour, and the very full long skirt is Miss Mabel Joseph, who later married Tom Lattimore. She tells me this picture was made in 1904. The background is the southside of the Court Square.

Mrs. Eskridge, widow of Charles L. Eskridge, who very graciously lent me this picture, thinks the car is a White Steamer. J. Fell Babington says the car is a Locomobile Steamer. Fell says Eskridge received the car by freight over the Southern Railway, probably the latter part of 1903. That when it arrived it was not completely assembled, and that he helped Charles get it together and set it up for use.

The early motor cars — which were referred to as gas-buggies and horseless-carriages — were designed to look like buggies. You will notice that the vehicle pictured above resembles an over-size buggy body; that the tiller, or steering rudder, is "L" shaped and is on what we Americans call the wrong side; the driver's seat is on the right. The early cars were modeled after the English style car, and the English place the driver's seat on the right.

Mr. Babington says the engine and boiler were under the back of the car. Steam to operate the two-cylinder engine was produced by heat from a small gasoline burner. The over-sized wire wheels resembled those of a motor cycle. There was no windshield and no top. But the acetylene lamps that had to be lighted each time, shone brightly at night along the dark, dusty roads.

RANDALL'S OLDSMOBILE

Very soon after this picture was made Lucius Randall, of the Earl community, drove into town with his new Oldsmobile. That same year, 1904, Joe Smith moved here from Newton, and brought with him a big Cadillac which had a back entrance.

There were no paved roads in the county then, and the dust was sometimes almost stifling. As protection against this dust both men and women motorists wore linen dusters and goggles. Women tied heavy long veils over their hats.

EARLY AUTOMOBILES

Probably the oldest car in use locally is a Metz, which looks like a small buggy with a steering wheel. It was built between 1904 and 1909 and has wooden spokes, as did nearly all the cars built

before World War I. J. B. Howell and Newman McIntyre own this antique.

By 1907, local people had begun to buy automobiles. The most popular were Maxwells, Jewels, Reos, Locomobile steamers, and Oldsmobiles. Stough Wray bought a Maxwell; W. T. Calton had a Jewel; W. J. Arey came here from Virginia in 1908 with a Knox; later Mr. Arey had a Ford agency; Dr. Gibbs had a Locomobile; George Hoyle and Joe Smith and Carl Webb bought Hupps from J. D. Lineberger who had an agency; George says he bought gas at twenty cents a gallon from the drugstore for his Hupp; ex-sheriff D. D. Wilkins had a Maxwell; Charlie Eskridge bought from S. B. Tanner an International; Dr. Iv. McBrayer and Rush Thompson nearly got killed by an frate pedestrian in 1909, because he resented their having a car; Hone Washburn and Dr. Palmer and others had a Reo for hire. I am unable to get names of other early car owners. Fords came just a little later.

Approximately 100 years ago Goodyear discovered a process for hardening rubber. Rubber tires have been in use since 1870, and twenty years later pneumatic tires were being used. However, the rubber tires of the early days of automobiling were not very hard and were easily punctured.

George Hoyle recalls that one day in 1907 a party rented the Reo above referred to and set out for Charlotte to see a circus. They left Charlotte at about 6:00 that evening. On the way home they had so many punctures — more than 20 in all — that their patching material gave out. The last puncture was at four o'clock next morning, when they were near El Bethel church, about two miles west of Kings Mountain. Thoroughly disgusted, they rolled the car off the road, walked back to the hotel at Kings Mountain, got a room and went to bed.

Automobile travelling was very uncertain forty years ago. There is a story that Charles L. Eskridge set out one morning to drive Mr. and Mrs. J. T. Bowman to Marion, N. C., to visit the A. Blantons. The roads were rutty and muddy. The car stalled. The party reached Marion the next afternoon in a horse-drawn vehicle.

Drivers of early motor cars usually stopped in the road when they saw a horse or mule team approaching. These beasts were pathetically afraid of horseless carriages.

According to W. A. Pendleton, the state of North Carolina first began to register cars in the name of the owner in 1909. He tells me that he and two other Shelby men had very early registration numbers. According to his recollection, Chas. L. Eskridge had Number 2; Joe C. Smith had Number 3; and he, W. A. Pendleton, had Number 4; The registration tag was a small piece of metal about two inches wide and four inches long, and was fastened to the wooden dash board of the automobile with small screws.

A SUCCESS STORY

W. Arthur Pendleton says that at one time he owned a Jewel, a Knox and an International automobile. But about 1910 ill health overtook him, and he did not own anything except an aching, crippled body, a wife and three small children, and debts, debts, debts. Because I think there is inspiration in his story, I am telling part of it.

W. Arthur Pendleton came to Shelby in 1902, and established a small music store, selling pianos and other musical instruments, and prospered moderately. Then, about 1910, he became ill. And continued ill for more than two years. His savings were wiped out. His partner, Will Magness, moved to Tennessee, leaving him (Pendleton) with a firm indebtedness of \$9,780.

Mr. Pendleton says: "I was so busted I couldn't buy a penny postcard. Oscar Palmer, the grocer, was continuing to let me have food for myself and family. Oscar's associates told him he was foolish to continue letting Pendleton have groceries. That it was just like throwing away money. That Pendleton could never pay him. Oscar replied that Pendleton always had paid him."

After two years he began to get a little better. One day while rummaging through an old trunk he came upon a bonanza. What do you think it was? Three stamped envelopes!! Now, to you or to me three stamped envelopes may not represent much. But to poverty-stricken Arthur Pendleton they gave new hope.

With those stamped envelopes he wrote letters to three piano companies with whom he had formerly done business asking that they ship him pianos on consignment. One firm wrote they were shipping a piano When it came Pendleton told L E. Ligon, agent at the Southern Railway, that he had no money to pay the freight, but that there was a prospect to whom he believed he could sell a piano; and that he would pay the freight when he could collect for the sale. Cline Eaker agreed to haul him and the piano to call on the prospect. Continuing, Mr. Pendleton says:

"I couldn't walk, but I pulled myself up into the wagon. We went to see the prospect and sold him. I paid Eaker \$15.00 for hauling the piano. That left me a \$15 profit. I ordered other pianos on consignment and sold them. That Fall I went into business again.

"In due time I paid my debts and paid all that \$9,780. It was the best money I ever spent. Since then I have always been able to get credit.

Although W. Arthur Pendleton is not now a wealthy man, he does have a profitable business in Pendleton's Music and Furniture Store on North LaFayette Street. He also has other interests and sources from which he receives an adequate income.