

YPSILANTI GLEANINGS

PAST SCENES and OLD TIMES

YPSILANTI HISTORICAL SOCIETY ~ PUBLICATION ~



Ypsilanti Historical Museum
~ 220 N. Huron Street ~

YPSILANTI AND THE AUTOMOBILE

In the year 1890, the year Joseph H. Thompson was born, and many others of course, there were four recognized automobiles in the United States. At that time, it seemed as though every bicycle shop was trying to hitch some other power to the buggy and cart and get rid of the horse. The vehicles were made by the carriage makers, but the power by small machine shops. In 1885, a three-wheeled light weight vehicle with a single cylinder engine was developed in Germany. Staebler & Son in Ann Arbor and O.E. Thompson and Son were the largest bicycle dealers in Washtenaw County. Both companies were approached about 1900 by a Chicago company, the makers of a three-wheeler called the Trimoto. In 1901, this three-wheeler was demonstrated in the O.E. Thompson building--NE corner East Cross and River Street. The single cylinder internal combustion engine was mounted on the front wheel. The Thompsons did not think the few people who came to the demonstration were very much impressed and they did not take on the dealership for the Trimoto. The Staeblers in Ann Arbor did, and became the first automobile dealership in Washtenaw County. The Trimoto weighed 500 pounds, had a 2 plus horse power engine and listed at \$425. The first Trimoto received for sale was unsatisfactory and the dealership changed to the Toledo Steam car. The Thompsons continued to sell bicycles, sell coal and make hand seeders and cultivators.

Some of the early owners of automobiles in Ypsilanti were: Dr. P.W. Cornue had a two cylinder, single seater, with rudder stick for steering and it was a Steamer. He was a Homeopathic Physician and Surgeon. In 1901, he was probably the first owner of an automobile that had not been assembled in his own shop. In 1903, he sold his home and practice at 119 North Washington, to Floyd E. Westfall a newly graduated Physician. Cornue moved to the state of Washington and became wealthy from apple orchards. In 1902, C.E. Woodard, Civil Engineer who came with the railroad in 1838, bought a Covert for his daughter, Gertrude Woodard.

Early Ypsilanti experimenters who built their own automobile, were the Crist twins. George W. Crist and his twin brother Joseph, came to Ypsilanti with their parents in 1887 from New York state. Their father, Solomon Crist, had a machine shop on River Street and later worked for the Ferrier Foundry and Machine Shop. The twins graduated from Ypsilanti High School. George W.

Crist married Evelyn Frances Sinkule. George and Joseph had natural mechanical minds and had a lot of fun with their own power propelled vehicle which Harris Fletcher says: "I saw the remains of it lying in the ditch at the old Lake Shore railroad crossing west of the old Country Club. That was before 1905"

Howard Curts, 459 N. Hewitt, an early auto mechanic reports: "A Ford car--either 1902-03, driven by Henry Ford at the NW corner of old Congress (Michigan Avenue) and Washington, had high buggy type wheels and a hinged steering arm, not a wheel. The engine was under the seat and cranked from the side. Had a low dashboard and I believe it was leather. The engine was internal combustion and from the pop-pop of the exhaust, I think it was twin cylinder."

After 1905, George Geer had a red Model N Ford runabout with toolbox for a rumble seat. Melvin Lewis owned a car which could have been a Kissel. John P. Kirk owned a 4 cylinder Cadillac Touring car. Each cylinder was cast separately and copper jacketed for water cooling.

W.H. Sweet was the agent for the 2 cycle Elmore, a large two seater and sold a few. In those days you bought an automobile from the maker, given the wholesale price, and agreed to try to sell a car or two. There is evidence in the 1905 City Directory that Ed. Dolson, the owner of the bicycle shop at 24 N. Washington offered automobiles for sale and one of the makes was the Ford.

Johnny Wortley had a Chalmers 30 Touring Car and Alex Wanless on South Huron had a Touring car, the exact make unknown. (Memories of Harris Fletcher). John Riggs may have owned a Stanley Steamer according to Howard Curts. Later John was agent for the Carter Car and sold several to his friends. Harris Fletcher recalls that about 1905 when he was a clerk in the King Grocery, a Stanley Steamer arrived at the grocery from Detroit and bought all the kerosene the store had, 20 gallons. Grocery stores and hardware stores sold whatever gasoline and kerosene was sold in those early days, with kerosene sales the largest. Frank T. Newton was Sales Manager for the Jaxon when it was first made in Chelsea and later moved to Jackson, Michigan. "No hill too steep, no sand too deep".

In the Ypsilanti Historical Archives, there is a snapshot dated 1908 taken at Cavanaugh Lake with two lovely ladies standing beside a Jackson Touring Car. These ladies were Mrs. H. B. Lewis and Mrs. Frank T. Newton. The picture is through the courtesy of Evangeline Lewis.

Chelsea can easily claim that two of the old automobiles were born there. The Jackson, as mentioned, and then the Welch. Eugene Congdon has a color picture of the Welch auto, and its history. Welch was the uncle of Mary Shaw formerly of 106 N. Adams. Mary was a bookkeeper for her uncle while he was developing the Welch automobile but she did not follow the company when it moved to Pontiac and then became part of the General Motors Corp. The Welch was the last of the non-standardized automobiles.

Ypsilanti is sort of Chelsea in reverse. No automobile had its beginnings in Ypsilanti in very early days but later, the Saxon and the Commerce Truck and also Ace Motors died in Ypsilanti.

William B. Hatch owned a Northern before 1910 and Ed Dolson spent a lot of time every morning to get the machine in running order. It was a two seater, two cylinder pancake type engine and the patent for it was later bought by the Packard Motor Car Company.

Henry Samsons owned a "Sears Motor Buggy" in 1909. The Samsons owned property, NW corner Cross and Adams, and had a bicycle shop. Sears Roebuck sold this light weight, high-wheeled buggy type auto for nearly three years. The man who made these Motor Buggies was Alvarado S. Krotz. You won't find this buggy in the regular Sears 1909 catalog but it was in a special catalog. The buggy had a 72 inch wheelbase, a 14 horse twin opposed engine aircooled and sold for \$325. The Scotney Brothers, Will and Charlie, retail milk dealers, were owners of a Beyster-Detroit delivery truck, about 1909-10. Henry Bennett, who lived on Watling Street, was the owner of an Orient Buckboard, a buggy-type light weight machine and kept it in running order from 1910 to 1915.

In November 1909, The Ypsilanti Press carried an advertisement.

The Cornwell 24 North Washington Street, Office
The New 1910 Model Studebaker E M F 30, \$750

This advertisement appeared each week with the E M F dropped from the name of the automobile and by March 1st, 1910, the advertisement was changed. E.C. Cornwell offered office space for rent and the Studebaker was not mentioned again.

Nineteen hundred and nine was the year the Michigan State Normal College was "the largest institution devoted to the training of teachers, west of the Alleghany Mountains.....six buildings with well equipped laboratories and gymnasium....70 members of the faculty..." April 14-15 of that year, Excelsior Chapter No. 25 Royal Arch Masons, put on the "Doctor of Alcantara" in the Ypsilanti Opera House. The cast of characters and the sponsors range from Hon. E.P. Allen to Leo and Tony Witmire (sic). In the advertising pages for the Souvenir Program, there is just one for automobiles, the

Coombs-Gilmour Co., Detroit, advertised the Mitchell-Model 20--\$1000--
Model Forty 7 passenger--\$2000.

The automobile drew national attention when newspapers carried the story of the Everett-Metzger Flanders Co. (EMF) was bought by J. P. Morgan for \$5,000,000 and it was all cash with two Pinkerton Guards or Brink Trucks mentioned.

The 1912 Ypsilanti City Directory, lists an advertisement for
The Hawkins Garage

Auto Storing, Repairing, and Machine Shop: The
Schaible-Wiedman Auto Co.

The Schaible-Wiedman Auto Co. is listed in the same publication as Agents for Ford Cars. These young men, Theodore R. Schaible and Emanuel G. Wiedman, having entered the world of business after graduating from Cleary Business College, began their illustrious careers as agent for Ford Cars in Saline, Michigan, in the days before there were paved roads and to get a car from Detroit to Saline took all day. The paved road from Detroit to the east edge of Washtenaw County was not completed until 1911, and only eleven feet wide.

In 1908 a 1200 mile endurance run was established by Colonel Charles J. Gilden. One of the famous Gilden Tours came from Detroit thru Ypsilanti on old Congress Street, then on Ballard to Cross Street and on up Cross. The lead car called the Pathfinder had a man on the back who tossed out confetti to mark the roads for the tour. Captain Galbreth and Eddie Edenburn helped promote the tours and also often drove one of the cars.

In March 1910 Edward Cornwell was advertising the Flanders 20 for \$750 and the E M F \$1250 and the want ads of the Ypsilanti Daily Press contained the following:

WANTED - Young men to learn the automobile
business by mail and prepare to become
mechanics and chauffers. A 10 week course
will assure you an excellent livelihood...

The year 1910 seems to be the beginning of the end for the horse and carriage, even though in April of that year there appeared an advertisement picturing a handsome buggy with the headline beneath: "DON'T BELIEVE IT! WHEN PEOPLE TELL YOU THE AUTOMOBILE IS GOING TO DO AWAY WITH THE FINE HORSES AND FINE CARRIAGES. DON'T BELIEVE IT! ...CARRYING A SPLENDID LINE OF VEHICLES." This vigorous advertisement is over the name Martin Dawson, a very successful

grain and fuel and implement man and also Mayor of Ypsilanti 1902-03.

In 1910, there were 1500 licensed automobiles in the State of Michigan, 160 of those were in Washtenaw County. We list the various makes and the owners in Ypsilanti.

AUBURN - A. G. Griswold
 BUICK - F. J. Vorce
 CARTER CAR - John Riggs, Henry Gilmore, Allie Lewis
 DeTAMBLE - J. A. Root
 ELMORE - D.F. Ross, M.M. Reed, W.H. Sweet
 E M F - Edward Cornwell, John Haviland
 FORD - George Geer
 GRAND LOGAN - Frank Stowell
 JACKSON - Frank Newton, Henry Dietrich
 MAXWELL BRISCOE - L.H. Jones, Fred Gallup, D.H. Roberts, Maude Burt
 LAMBERT - Elmer Lyman, F.L. Schaefer, Wm. Waidner, F.N. Nissly
 NORTON - William B. Hatch
 OLDS - C. P. Ferrier
 REO - Charles Diest
 REGAL - William Lister
 SEARS - Henry W. Samson, H.H. Chapman, Jr.

A State Convention, meeting in Grand Rapids, to promote good roads, was poorly attended and little interest. It was in the summer of 1910 that an advertisement appeared in THE YPSILANTI DAILY PRESS for the Herreshoft car, "Built on Honor".

On June 22, 1910, an interesting editorial appears in the same paper:

...Superintendent of Instruction, James Elton Clarke, Class of 1904 and here for the Alumni meeting, and now at Sante Fe, New Mexico, must have taken the automobile ride which citizens were glad to give the alumni yesterday afternoon. Later in speaking of the Territory of New Mexico, now about to pass into Statehood, Mr. Clarke spoke of the fine highways they have out there, of being made largely by convict labor and the automobiles running 50 miles an hour over those fine roads.

He said he noticed there was a Speed Limit in Ypsilanti, but thought it impossible for anybody to exceed the speed limit without risking his life over the streets of Ypsilanti! ... The streets of Ypsilanti are the roughest of any we find anywhere, and we travel quite a bit, and the crosswalks the worse seen anywhere!

On July 3, 1910, an article appeared in the PRESS stating that the Hines car was to be demonstrated here on July 5, by an O. Alexander who was trying to locate here. However, on July 11 another article in the same paper stated that Mr. Alexander had not come as he had found another city for his location.

D.L. Quirk owned a 1911 Packard Touring car and Howard Hand was the chauffeur. Howard, (Biscuit to some of us), went on to become truck sales manager for General Motors.

A man born in Ypsilanti whose name is known by but two or three, was Alexander Brownwell Cullen Hardy, better known perhaps, as A.B.C. Hardy. Hardy was Manager of the Wolverine Road Cart, Davison, Michigan and in 1896 became Manager for Durant in the Diamond Buggy Company, Flint. In 1901 he went to Europe for a vacation and observed the advance in automobiles being made in Europe--he could see the end of the carriage-cart business. When he returned to Michigan, he warned the Durant-Dort Carriage Company Board of Directors to get out of the carriage business but no one listened.

Hardy set up the Flint Automobile Company and by 1902 his roadsters were selling for \$750 - one cylinder, 8 1/2 horse and produced 53 cars in 1903. That was the year Ford manufactured 1708 cars and Cadillac 1895 and there were at least a dozen makers of automobiles in Detroit by that time. In 1912, Hardy was General Manager and Vice-President of Chevrolet. Durant said of him; "Hardy was a student, a good judge and director of men....and he was largely responsible for laying the foundation for what later became one of America's institutions, General Motors..."

During the winter of 1911-12, the Schaible-Wiedman Co. had at least two of the Model-T Fords which were larger cars than the later standard Model-T. They also had the Model-N and their garage was in that large wooden frame building in the rear of the Quirk block on North Washington Street. This frame structure dated back to the old Hawkins House Hotel before 1879 when that hotel was a wood structure on the NW corner of old Congress and Washington Street. Travelers' horse drawn rig and, of course, the horses were housed. At 4 A.M. on February 4, 1912, the Ypsilanti Fire Department responded to a call for a fire in the Hawkins House Hotel Garage, the location of the Schaible-Wiedman Auto Co. After the fire in that wooden structure and locating the business in the old brick building at the NW corner of Huron and Pearl Streets, a new modern brick building was built at 212 Pearl Street for the automobile company.

In 1912, there were only two garages in Ypsilanti, the same ones listed in 1911: Ed Dolson and Schaible-Wiedman. In 1914, a third garage was added, Joseph E. Barnes, 103 North Huron Street. The name of T.E. Schaible has disappeared from the agency at 212 Pearl and it is E.G. Wiedman alone as owner.

Nineteen fourteen was the year of the great change for the automobile in Ypsilanti and also in the entire country. The Dodge Brothers began production of their own automobile and the local newspaper carried advertisements for the Chalmers new "Six" and the Paige-Detroit in Ann Arbor. The Overland was advertised at \$950, with a dealer in Ann Arbor and the dealer in Ypsilanti was

M. G. Day with his address given as 212 Pearl Street. Morris Day was a very successful salesman for the Wiedman Auto Co. for many years.

Joseph DeMosh and Son operated an auto livery at 1-3 Congress Street.

Cleary Business College has had several graduates who distinguished themselves in the automobile world. Two young men who did very well in the selling of automobiles were T.E. Schaible and E.G. Wiedman. Theodore E. Schaible was born March 6, 1888, on a farm in Freedom Township. After graduating from Cleary Business College, Ted, as he was known for many years in Ypsilanti, went to work for the old Michigan Central Railroad, then on to Ford Motor Company, later as distributor of Ford Cars for Washtenaw.

After leaving the partnership with E. G. Wiedman, Ted established the Buick Agency on East Michigan at River Street where he built a modern garage and salesroom after tearing down the old frame structure that housed the Thornton General Store. The Buick Agency was a great success, civic affairs received his attention and he served as Mayor of Ypsilanti 1921-22. A truly distinguished graduate of Cleary Business College, a Civic leader and successful business man. (Just recently moving into the Infirmary at the Lutheran Retirement Home, Ann Arbor, with a serious heart condition).

Emmanuel G. Wiedman was born October 1, 1886 on a farm two miles south of Manchester. An intriguing story in the old days, was that "E.G." as a young man, was to go to a Theological Seminary in Ohio, but a fall from a farm horse broke his hip and caused a change in plans. The young man enrolled in Cleary Business College, worked a few months in a bank for \$35 a month, and then was an office worker in Detroit for the Buhl Company before joining Ted in Saline where they became agents for the Ford Automobiles. Both young men, with tremendous, dynamic personalities. Ira Uphaus was the mechanic for the Schaible-Wiedman Co. having been hired by T. E. Schaible, and this was before the standard Model-T Ford was in production. The first Model-T Ford was shown in Detroit in October 1903, the same year in which William Crapo Durant incorporated General Motors.

Irs Uphaus was head mechanic for the Wiedman Auto Co. through the forty year life of that company & even now 1974, puts in several hours every day at the Butman Ford Sales.

It was in the year 1914 that World War One began and an auto agency opened in Ypsilanti that would have a tremendous impact, on not Ypsilanti but also on the entire State of Michigan. Joseph H. Thompson took the agency for the new Dodge automobile through Thomas J. Doyle, in August 1914 with auto #1144 from

the factory. Joe bought three cars, sold them quickly and bought three more. Early car buyers were: M. M. Reed, Wm. Connors, F. M. Beal and E. R. Beal. The location of the first sales room and garage was in the north end of the Thompson Building on River Street. Business expanded and in 1916 a move was made to the building on East Cross just east of the railroad tracks and then to the Michigan Avenue location in a newly constructed brick building at 20 East Michigan.

Several were associated with Joe through the years: Spencer Davis, Alex Longnecker, Holmes Manchester, Lloyd Lyke, Herman Smith and Ben C. Thompson, Joe's brother who managed the shop. Mrs. Edith Whiting was the bookkeeper through 35 years of growth for this outstanding agency which at its peak, sold 825 units.

Joe H. Thompson established "Associate Dealers" in Saline, Milan, Belleville, Wayne, Plymouth and Northville. Joe was President and founding member of the Michigan Automobile Dealers Association and President of the Chamber of Commerce. He is a Charter Member of the Ypsilanti Kiwanis Club and Ypsilanti has been fortunate in having Joseph H. Thompson as a civic minded leader as well as surrounding himself with young men endowed with talent and civic pride. Joseph H. Thompson was born January 29, 1890 in the house at 108 Maple Street. The backyard of that home touches at right angles the location on River Street where in 1877, Walter O. Briggs was born. Briggs became an important man in the manufacturing world in Detroit. Not far away, William Ryan was born in the house at 213 East Cross Street. After graduating from Cleary Business College he was with the Ford Motor Company where he became a manager and salesmanager in later years.

Glenn Groosbeck relates that Grace Mansfield bought a Detroit, an electric automobile in 1915, paying \$3500 for it. Miss Mansfield was crippled, having no use of her legs, but could drive the Electric which had a hand tiller-bar for steering and the brakes were applied by a hand lever. The car required no servicing except for the tires and battery charging. She had her own battery charging equipment and charging was done every other week. Glenn states he had driven the car forty or fifty miles over the rough country roads and were possible reached a speed of thirty miles per hour. Miss Mansfield was a piano teacher and owned this Electric automobile as long as she lived, having died in 1938.

Arthur Howard recalled a second Electric in Ypsilanti and this was verified through Eugene Congdon. Anna Congdon Sears of Chelsea and a sister of A.R. Congdon,

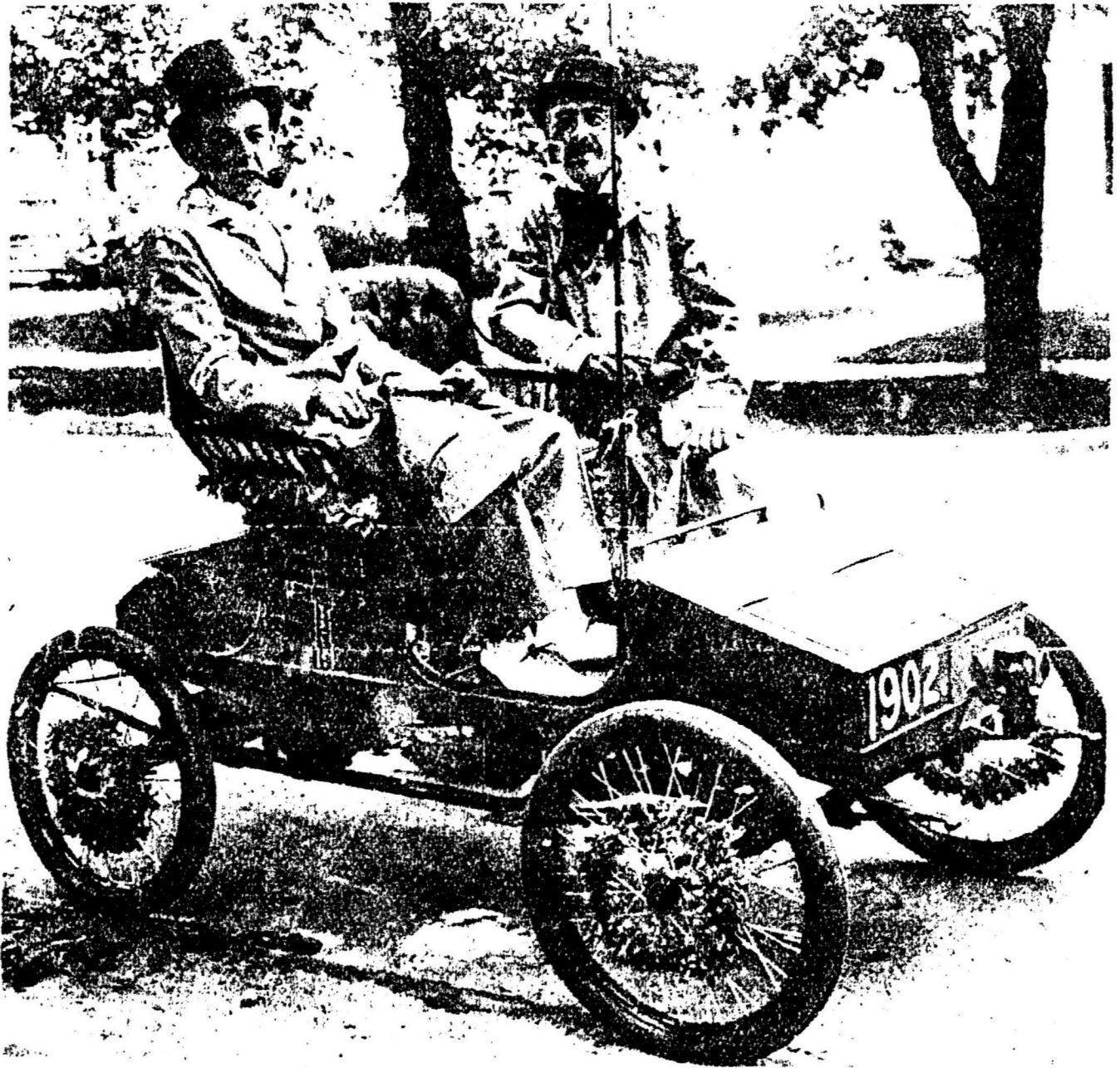
owned a Baker Electric which in 1915 came into the possession of Howard Congdon, 420 South Huron. Howard had the Baker for a few years until it was wrecked when he was giving a driving lesson to A. R. Congdon. In 1915, Buggies, Surries, and Spring Wagons were being manufactured in Ann Arbor and auto dealers numbered less than 15 for the entire county. In spite of the war, automobile dealerships increased rapidly during the next three years. By 1918 Ypsilanti had two blacksmith shops, twelve physicians, nine saloons and six automobile dealers as follows:

Glen Dusbiber -- 303 E. Michigan (Saxon-Overland)
Hall & McWhirter - 103 N. Huron
T.E. Schaible - 40-42 E. Michigan (Buick)
Schrader Motor Sales - 3-11 E. Michigan (Studebaker)
Joseph H. Thompson - 100 E. Cross (Dodge)
Wiedman Auto - 212 Pearl Street (Ford)

With the close of the war, this is a place to close our short article, hoping some of our readers will be able to supply many names and fill the gaps in our article about the days of the automobile in Ypsilanti.

We will mention a name but leave his history and accomplishments until another time. It is Norval A. Hawkins, born in Ypsilanti in 1867, the son of Walter H. Hawkins. Norval is possibly the most distinguished alumnus of old Cleary Business College of all time. A superb bookkeeper and after graduating from Cleary, he worked for Standard Oil and then....in 1896, after serving one "term", he graduated from Jackson Prison, later after the turn of the century, he became Sales Manager for Ford Motor Co., placing that company at the top of production and sales in the country for many years.

Another prominent Ypsilanti name in the early days, was Arthur Holmes, a young engineer who helped develop the air-cooled Franklin.



EVERYTHING IS JUST DANDY when Joseph H. Thompson dons his motoring togs and dashes through the streets of Ypsilanti in this 1902 model called the Motorette. Years ago this little car made a trip from Lockport, N. Y., to Michigan under its own power, and it still chugs along the highways when the occasion demands. Spencer Davis is the assistant engineer, standing at right.

PICTURE TAKEN AT 1932 FOURTH OF JULY PARADE.
In 1902 C.E. Woodard, Civil Engineer, gave this car to his daughter Gertrude.