



YPSILANTI AUTOMOTIVE

HERITAGE MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER

Volume 1, Number 2

Spring 2014

President's Report

By: Ron Bluhm

THANKS to everybody who joined our "Circle of Friends" with the mailing of our first newsletter. Your contributions are a major revenue source that keeps YAHM as one of a handful of auto museums telling the automotive story of Southeastern Michigan. Some readers are receiving our newsletter for the first time. We invite you to also join us and help keep the automotive heritage of our region alive. In addition, "Friends" have free admission to the museum and 10% off for gift shop purchases!

The year 2013 brought much publicity to the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum. We had local, national, and international (Australia & Brazil) media coverage. A local recorded program from Grosse Pointe was placed on YouTube and can be accessed by googling "Ypsilanti Automotive Museum John Clor." A C-Span program broadcast nationally also can be accessed by googling "Ypsilanti Automotive Museum C-Span." While you are watching videos, YouTube has a nice one from our 2013 Orphan Car Show honoring museum and show co-founder Jack Miller. Get on the YouTube website and search "Orphan Car Show Jack Miller."

Do notice our new logo that is used above as a header on our newsletter. The logo is used on our new line of shirts and caps for sale on our website and in our gift shop. We all can use a new shirt or cap for summer cruising and car shows.

The new 2014 year brought some sad news. Bob Stevens, long time editor of Cars & Parts, died on January 1st. Bob attended many of our Orphan Car Shows and always wrote flattering articles about his visit. A few days later on January 3rd, Blanche Mericle died. Blanche was the source of much of the Kaiser-Frazer information in the museum. Both will be missed. Tributes to both are posted on our website.

Our mission is to tell the automotive history of our area. As mentioned elsewhere, we do invite you to write and send us your memories working at Willow Run, Ypsi Ford, local gas stations, local dealers, and interesting car stories. Help us record and tell our local history.

In 2002, we enhanced our Chevrolet Corvair display by partnering with the Corvair Preservation Foundation. That partnership continues today. We are currently discussing partnerships with a couple of car clubs that could lead to the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum hosting national museums! Stay tuned.

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Ypsilanti Hay Press Company
1907



Central Specialty circa 1925



Corner Brewery, former Motor
Wheel Office Building



Abandoned Motor Wheel
Buildings, 1999

Forest Ave – Century of Industry

By Nick Williams

Along East Forest bordered by the Huron River and Norris Street, an old abandoned factory complex sits empty. Like old houses and old people, the complex has a story.

Before the automotive revolution of the Twentieth Century, hay was a major farm product. Factories all over the United States manufactured hay presses. It was on this corner of the Huron River and East Forest that the Ypsilanti Hay Press Company was established in 1907. As their business grew, they expanded into the manufacturing of farm tractors.

Central Specialty was founded in Detroit in 1911. They started as a gray cast iron foundry, pouring castings for the auto and plumbing industry. In 1917, they pioneered individual piston ring castings. A rapid molding machine was developed by one of the owners that was very successful.

The growing business soon outgrew their Detroit facility. Expansion occurred by buying the Ypsilanti Hay Press facility at the corner of East Forest Avenue Norris Street. The Ypsilanti site was particularly attractive because it included an existing foundry. The expansion in Ypsilanti became a subsidiary of Central Specialty and was named the Ypsilanti Foundry Company. Ypsilanti made piston rings which had the distinction of being used in Charles Lindbergh's solo Atlantic flight!

In 1928, Detroit based Central Specialty sold out to its subsidiary. With the purchase, the Ypsilanti Foundry Company assumed the Central Specialty name. Shortly after, the main office moved to Ypsilanti and manufacturing discontinued in Detroit.

With the decline of the auto industry during the depression, 1930 to 1935 were difficult years for Central

Specialty. Over time, manufacturers supplied their own piston rings which led to Central Specialty discontinuing production in 1940.

Fortunately, in 1933, they established a "Craftsman" line of power tools sold exclusively by Sears, Roebuck, and Company. October 1944 saw the company sold to King-Seeley and the plant experienced a major expansion. As a division of King-Seeley, Central Specialty diversified manufacturing included instrument panels, gauges, speedometers, governors, Army and Navy defense products, along with their Craftsman line of power tools.

Between 1938 and 1963, led by Walter Gaskell, Central Specialty filed over twenty power tool patents with the United States Patent Office. They were drill press, jointer, planer, radial arm saw, and power tool part patents. In 1964, Central Specialty lost their contract with Sears which, by then, made up nearly 70% of the production at the plant. At that time, with the loss of Sear's business, Central Specialty sold out to Motor Wheel Corporation in June. Like other buyers before them, Motor Wheel found the foundry portion of the business attractive.

With 450 employees, Central Specialty was the third largest employer in Ypsilanti. When Motor Wheel took over, they had 100 employees. Motor Wheel used the foundry to produce automobile brake drums and disk brake rotors. Employment grew to 800 in the 1970s.

In 1996, company executives attempted to reduce costs by asking the union to reduce wages and benefits by about 65%. When the proposal was rejected by the workers, the company announced it would close. When the doors closed in 1997, the City of Ypsilanti was left with one major manufacturer – Ford Motor Company.

The property between the Huron River and Norris Street north of East Forest was developed for manufacturing a few years after the dawn of the Twentieth Century and lost manufacturing a few years before the close of the Twentieth Century. It is an example of what happened to much of industrial America before survivors were able to transition into the new industrial economy of the Twenty First Century.

The old factory is owned and operated by Bay Logistics now. They do warehousing, storage, and distribution for the auto industry.

Thanks to the Ypsilanti Historical Museum's Archives for keeping historical records of Ypsilanti.



Preston Tucker's Armored Car



Preston Tucker's Grandson John Tucker holding wood turret pattern.



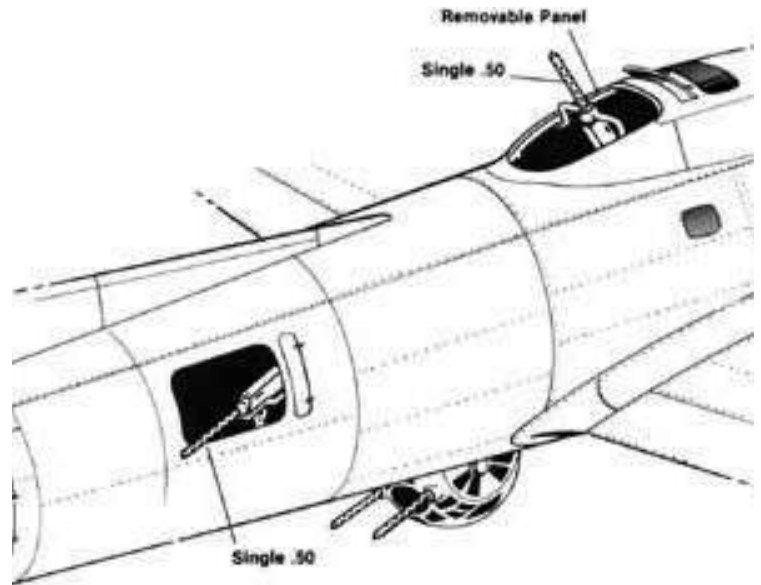
B-17 With Gun Turret

Preston Tucker's Contribution To Our WWII Victory

By John Tucker

During the 1930s, Preston Tucker lived at 110 Park Street and operated the Ypsilanti Machine Tool Company in a metal building adjacent to the barn behind the house. It was here that he designed an armored car for the Netherlands. Before a deal was achieved, Hitler overran Western Europe.

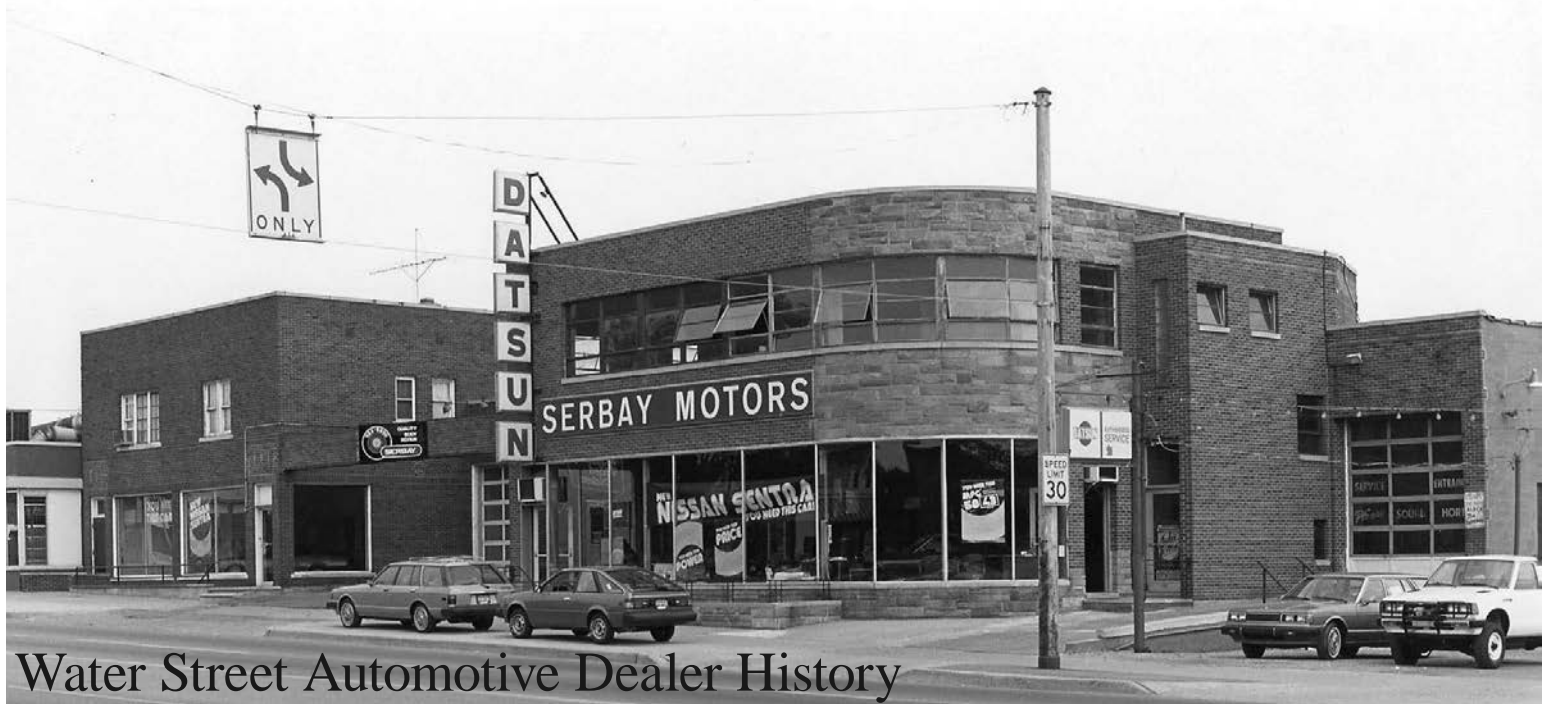
The US Government looked at the armored car and expressed interest in the gun turret and bought the patent rights. The gun turret updated our B-17 heavy bomber with gun turrets which were also installed in the rest of our bomber fleet and PT boats. Prior to the gun turret, our 1935 designed B-17 had an opening in the roof of the plane with one machine gun that pointed up and to the rear. With a gun turret, the B-17 was armed with twin machine guns that rotated 360 degrees in all directions.



B-17 Without Gun Turret

In 2001, the barn behind 110 Park Street burned. While inspecting the site after the fire, Ypsilanti Fire Marshall John Ichesco found what is believed to be Preston Tucker's patterns for his patented gun turret. The wood patterns are on display in the museum. We can only speculate how his gun turret improved the armament of our heavy bombers and improved the effectiveness of our raids on Germany which eventually led to victory.

John Tucker is Preston Tucker's grandson and an Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum board member.



Water Street Automotive Dealer History

34-38 East Michigan, Serbay Motors, circa 1985

By Bill Nickels

In 1999, the City of Ypsilanti decided to redevelop thirty-four acres bounded by Michigan Avenue, Park Street, and the Huron River. The redevelopment became known as the Water Street Project. Since the area had a rich automotive history, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) required that the history be recorded. This article tells the history of auto dealerships along the south side of Michigan Avenue between the Huron River Bridge and Park Street, a distance of only a quarter mile.

Before The Automobile

The vacant land we now see on Michigan Avenue in downtown Ypsilanti was an avenue for the wealthy during the last half of the Nineteenth Century. Alva Worden invented a new and improved whip socket. As the name implies, a whip socket is a holder on a carriage that secures a whip that is used to encourage horses. With brothers John and Chancey, they manufactured their whip sockets in a building on South River Street in the present day Water Street area. Using their new found wealth, each of the brothers built their own French Second Empire mansion on Michigan Avenue between the Huron River and River Street. Before being torn down late in the Twentieth Century, the last of the mansions watched the transition of Michigan Avenue from an elegant residential avenue to an avenue for the sale of not yet invented automobiles during the Twentieth Century.

6 East Michigan Avenue

Close to the Huron River and on the southeast corner of Water Street and Michigan Avenue, 6 East Michigan Avenue was a car dealership twice. In 1927, Alex Longnecker rented the newly built building at 2 East Michigan (now 6 East Michigan) and opened a Hudson and Essex dealership. Carl Miller bought into the business late in 1932. They stayed until 1933 when the depression encouraged them to move their dealership to the southeast corner of East Cross and North River in Depot Town for cheaper rent. Their Depot Town dealership is now the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum which Carl's son Jack helped found.

Silkworth Oil Company used 6 East Michigan after Longnecker and Miller moved. From about 1948 to the mid 1950s, Schaffer Motor Sales occupied 6 East Michigan selling Chrysler, Plymouth, and GMC trucks. It is unusual that Lawrence Schaffer sold GMC trucks in a Chrysler dealership. It is explained knowing that Joseph Thompson sold Dodge trucks in his Dodge and Plymouth dealership across Michigan Avenue.

In 1957, Ralph Gorlick came to Ypsilanti from a Packard dealership in Wayne to partner with Eric Lidell. The formed Gor-Dell Incorporated, a DeSoto Plymouth franchise at 6 East Michigan.

In 1960, Myron and Ray Serbay bought Gor-Dell Incorporated. When Chrysler Corporation dropped the DeSoto

line in 1961, Serbay became an Imperial, Chrysler, Plymouth, and Valiant dealer. When Vincent Chevrolet moved from 34 East Michigan in 1962, the Serbay brothers took the opportunity to move to their modern building. After 1962, 6 East Michigan was occupied by auto related businesses, but never found use as a new car dealership again.

20 East Michigan

Starting in 1828, the Thompson family made significant contributions to the Ypsilanti scene. Benjamin first used his millwright skills to help build the many mills that flourished along the Huron River. He also built and used Depot Town's Thompson Building for manufacturing. His son Oliver was once mayor, his grandson was a member of the school board for three years.

It was Benjamin's great grandson Joseph who moved his Dodge dealership in Depot Town's Thompson Building to 20 East Michigan in 1927. Spencer Davis came with him from Depot Town as Vice President. By 1934, the dealership offerings expanded to include Plymouth and Dodge trucks. When Detroit's auto plants switched to the production of military vehicles during World War II, Thompson moved his dealership across the street to 21 East Michigan. He resumed the sale of Dodges, Plymouth's, and Dodge trucks after the war until 1956. Thompson was a charter member and once president of the Ypsilanti Board of Commerce, Ypsilanti Kiwanis Club member, and Mackinaw Island State Park Commission member.

Joseph Sesi left his home in Mesopotamia and arrived in America in 1923. He came to Detroit where a handful of fellow countrymen had settled and began working as a grocery store delivery boy. In the early 1930s, he opened a grocery store in Detroit's Boston Edison Neighborhood named "The Olde Shop" which later became "The New Center Market." Featuring one of the nation's first frozen food sections selling Birdseye products, Joe met Henry Ford I, the Fisher Brothers, and other prominent Boston Edison Neighborhood residents.

At the conclusion of World War II, Henry Ford I and Ford family members were so impressed with Sesi's work ethic and dedication that they offered him an opportunity to manufacture auto parts. Alan Chapel, husband of Mrs. Ford's niece, partnered with Joe and founded Ypsilanti Industries in 1946. Alan was president and Joe was vice president. They decided to use the building vacated by Joseph Thompson at 20 East Michigan. He and Alan had a contract from Henry Ford to manufacture 50% of the roller bearings and synchronizer rings for manual

transmissions Ford needed to start post war auto manufacturing. Borg Warner had a contract for the other 50% of the roller bearings. When the Borg Warner workers went on strike, Joe and Alan worked twenty-four hours a day to keep production going for Henry Ford.

As the demand for cars increased after the war, Ford Motor Company decided to separate the sale of Lincolns and Mercury's from Ford dealerships. On March 14, 1947, the two entrepreneurs opened one of the original twenty-seven Lincoln-Mercury dealerships in the United States in the front of 20 East Michigan Avenue. In 1948, they also sold Ford tractors and farm implements at 20 East Michigan under the name of Ypsilanti Tractor Sales Inc. By 1957, the Chapel/Sesi partnership was consolidated under Joe, his wife Catherine, and nephew Joe Sesi Junior. In 1965, Sesi Lincoln Mercury moved from 20 East Michigan farther east on Michigan Avenue in Ypsilanti Township. The Ypsilanti Press newspaper then took over the building ending the sale of new cars at 20 East Michigan.

40 - 42 East Michigan

After graduating from Cleary Business College, Theodore Schaible was hired by Ford Motor Company as a Washtenaw County representative. In 1910, Theodore Schaible partnered with E. G. Wiedman and opened the first Ford agency for Washtenaw County. Starting in Saline, they moved to 27 North Washington in Ypsilanti. In the spring of 1912, fire destroyed their building. The partnership dissolved with Wiedman retaining the Ford dealership and moving to 212 Pearl Street. Schaible tore down the wood frame Thorton General Store at the southwest corner of River Street and Michigan Avenue and built a salesroom and garage for the sale of new Buick's. Schaible was active in civic affairs and was Ypsilanti mayor from 1920 to 1922. The Buick dealership continued with a name change to Hall Motor Sales, WJ Pink President, in 1928. Theodore Schaible again became President until 1933 when he last sold Buick's at the corner of River Street and Michigan Avenue. In 1935 he moved his residence to Ann Arbor.

With the Depression still lingering in 1934, 40-42 West Michigan no longer sold new cars and provided automotive service under the name of Dudley Motor Service. In 1937, Harold Dietrich Auto Service serviced cars and occupied the building.

Edwin Doran grew up in Detroit, attended Massachusetts Institute of Technology and, in the early 1920s, became personal service representative for William S. Knudsen who was vice president of General Motors and general



20 East Michigan, Thompson Dodge Plymouth, 1938, Worden Mansion in the background.

manager of the Chevrolet Division. In 1938, Schaible's building became Doran Chevrolet Company and Ypsilanti Motor Sales Incorporated, Roy Wise President and Manager. Doran sold Chevrolet's and Wise sold Oldsmobile's. The original show room burned down leading to the construction of a new show room during World War II. At the conclusion of the war in 1945, the corner was entirely Doran Chevrolet Company and, in addition to Chevrolet's, sold Oldsmobile's, Buick's, and Cadillacs. Doran was a member of the Michigan and National Automobile Dealers Associations and director of the National Bank of Ypsilanti. He was a member of the American Legion, Ypsilanti Kiwanis Club, Camp Newton Club, and a charter member of the Automobile Old-timers. Doran Chevrolet closed in 1951 when George Vincent left Shalla Chevrolet in Detroit and bought the Doran franchise. Vincent Chevrolet continued at 40 East Michigan until 1953 when they moved to the newer more modern building at 34-38 East Michigan.

Owning Airport Cab Company, an ambulance service, and the car wash next to the Masonic Temple; Ray Milligan was an entrepreneur of sorts around Ypsilanti. He briefly opened a DeSoto Plymouth dealership at 40 East Michigan in 1954. The dealership closed in 1956. Ray operated the last new car dealership at this corner. The building was later occupied by a fish market.

34 – 38 East Michigan

With a pent up demand for new cars after World War II, Ralph Gerganoff designed an ultra modern dealership at 34 East Michigan for James Davis, son of Spencer Davis, long time Vice President and salesman for Joseph Thompson Dodge at 20 East Michigan. They first sold for DeSoto and Plymouth. Davis also sold foreign cars in the basement of 34 East Michigan. Next door, at 38 East Michigan, dad Spencer Davis and Herbert Teachout sold for Packard, Crosley, and International Trucks. The

DeSoto Plymouth dealership was last known as Richards DeSoto Plymouth and closed in 1953.

Leaving the corner of South River and East Michigan, Vincent Chevrolet moved into 34 East Michigan in 1953 and stayed until 1962 when they moved farther east on Michigan Avenue outside the city limits.

Using the opportunity to move to a newer more modern building, Myron and Ray Serbay moved their Imperial, Chrysler, Plymouth, and Valiant dealership from 6 East Michigan into 34 East Michigan. In 1980, brother Myron got out of the business and Ray dropped the Chrysler franchise and picked up Buick, Datsun (which became Nissan), and GMC trucks. By 1989, the franchise was named Davis Buick, GMC, and Nissan. Not staying the same very long, in 1991 34 East Michigan became Campus Buick, Honda, and GMC trucks with George Davidson as president. With the close of this dealership sometime in the 1990s, the sale of new cars during most of the twentieth Century along this short stretch of the south side of Michigan Avenue ended.

Summary

In all, 31 name plates were sold on the south side of Michigan Avenue during the Twentieth Century. The following list summarizes the dealers:

Buick, Theo Schaible Garage,
40 – 42 E. Michigan

Dodge, Graham Brothers Trucks,
Joseph Thompson Incorporated,
20 E. Michigan

Buick, Hall Motor Sales,
40 – 42 E. Michigan

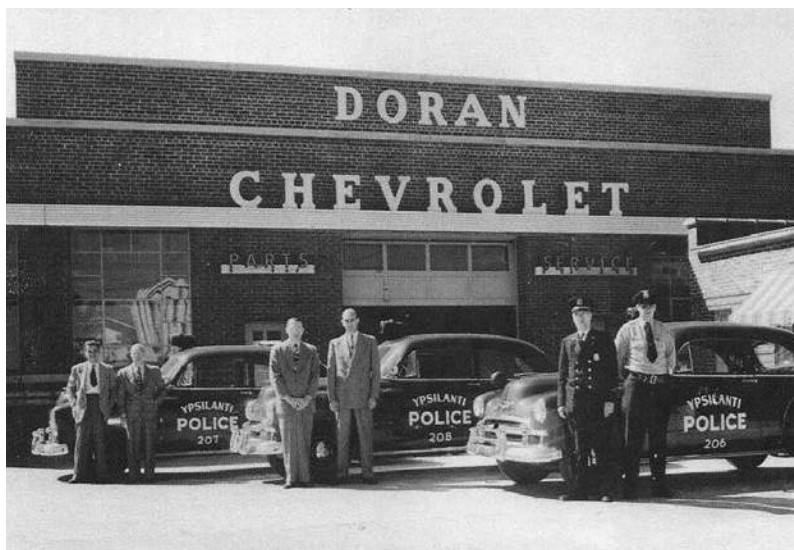
Hudson, Hudson (& Essex) Sales and Service,
Alex Longnecker,
2 E. Michigan

Dodge, Plymouth, Dodge Trucks, Joseph Thompson,
20 E. Michigan

Packard, Packard Motor Sales and Service, Spencer Davis,
22 E. Michigan

Chevrolet, Cadillac, Oldsmobile, Doran Chevrolet,
Edwin Doran,
40 - 42 E. Michigan

Oldsmobile, Ypsilanti Motor Sales Incorporated, Roy Wise,



40-42 East Michigan, Ed Doran Chevrolet, circa 1950

40 – 42 E. Michigan

Packard, Crosley, Ypsilanti Body Shop, Harold Teachout,
38 E. Michigan

Desoto, Plymouth, Richard's Desoto Plymouth,
34 E. Michigan

Ray Milligan Desoto Plymouth,
40-42 E. Michigan

MG, Jaguar, Morgan, Singer, Volkswagen, Renault,
Porsche, Davis Motor Sales,
38 E.

Packard, Crosley, International Truck, Ypsilanti Body Shop,
Teachout & Spencer,
38 E.

Ford Tractor, Ypsilanti Tractor Sales, Incorporated,
Chapel and Sesi,
20 E. Michigan

Lincoln, Mercury, Sesi Lincoln Mercury,
20 – 22 E. Michigan

Imperial, Chrysler, Plymouth, Valiant, Serbay Motor Sales,
2 – 4 E. Michigan

Buick, GMC, Datsun, Campus,
34 E. Michigan

It is doubtful if any similar quarter mile in any city could
match this retail automotive history.

*Information sources include Ypsilanti Street Directories
from the Archives of the Ypsilanti Historical Museum and
interviews with Mickey Ichesco, Jack Miller, and Joe Sesi
Junior.*

Announcements:

Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum's Orphan Car Show

Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum's 18th
Annual Orphan Car Show.

Hudson is the 2014 featured marque!
Riverside Park | Ypsilanti | Michigan
Sunday September 21st, 2014

9 AM to 4 PM

Contact info@ypsiautoheritage.org
or call 734-482-5200 for
registration information.

2014 Car Shows

May 4, Show and Shine Car Show,
Riverside Park

May 17, Bulletproof Hot Rod Show,
Milan Dragway

May 18, Vintage VW Show,
Riverside Park

June 5 to Sept 12, Depot Town
Cruise Nights, *Every Thursday*

July 4-6, Michigan Camero Superfest,
Riverside Park

Aug. 27, Annual Firetruck Muster,
Riverside Park

Sept. 21, Orphan Car Show,
Riverside Park

Wanted

Your car/local automotive stories! We all have
our favorite car or a car we were in love with.
Maybe we had a job at Motor State, Butman Ford,
GMAD, or another local auto business. Help us
keep our history alive, write about it and send to
info@ypsiautoheritage.org or Ypsilanti Automotive
Heritage Museum, 100 East Cross, Ypsilanti, MI
48197 for a future issue of our newsletter.



Hudson Assembly circa 1949

Hudson Motor Car Company

by Robert Tate

In 1909, The Hudson Motor Car Company evolved by eight talented individuals sharing the same vision of building an automobile for less than \$1,000. The team consisted of Mr. Joseph L. Hudson, Mr. Roscoe. B. Jackson, Mr. Hugh Chalmers, Mr. Howard. E. Coffin, Mr. Frederick. O. Benzer, Mr. Roy D. Chapin, Mr. James J. Brady, and Mr. Lee Counselma.

On February 24, 1909, they decided to incorporate the firm under the Michigan State Laws, and shortly thereafter, the Hudson Motor Car Company emerged. The team created the revolutionary Hudson “Twenty” on the drawing boards and soon secured a small two-story plant with 80,000 square feet of floor space on the corner of Mack and Beaufait Avenue located in Detroit, Michigan. From the drawing board to reality, the work of five hundred men and a total capital of \$20,000, the first Hudson Motor Car rolled out of the factory on July 3, 1909.

During 1909, over 4,000 Hudson models were sold to the buying public. Within the first six months, Hudson had net sales that amounted to \$3,980,999. Due to the great success, the company decided to invest in a new location available at Jefferson and Conner Avenue in Detroit, Michigan. The building was designed by Mr. Albert Kahn, a well-known talented architect of commercial buildings in Detroit, Michigan. His reinforced concrete design allowed for additional buildings to be built outward and upward as necessary. The total floor space offered was 172,000 square feet at an estimated cost of \$500,000. After the purchase of the location, the sales of the new Hudson models increased progressively and the company was soon recognized as the third largest manufacture in America.

During the later years, Hudson introduced the first coach models to the buying public. The closed model had such a great selling price that it became an overnight success. The positive responses were so great, that the Hudson manufacture location at Conner and Jefferson Avenue had to double the floor space and triple its production.

On February 5th, 1942, the last Hudson automobile rolled off the assembly line and cleared way for war production materials. Women became highly involved with the war time efforts and the Hudson manufacturing of the Martin B-26 Marauder Bombers. By 1944, the Hudson Plant was also producing cabins for the deadly Bell Airacobra fighter planes and assembly other Aviation parts as well. After the war, Hudson manufacturing regenerated production on its first post-war automobile which rolled off the assembly line on August 30, 1946. In 1948, Hudson started producing the new Step Down models, which were the most radical styling cars built to date. Mr. Don Butler, former Hudson designer, once said that it was the most rewarding project that he ever contributed towards.

Although the Hudson manufacturing buildings are no longer with us today, they will always continue to be a great part of the American Automotive history.

Thanks to Robert Tate for researching and writing this article, the Detroit Public Library for references, and MotorCities National Heritage Area for supporting this article. Hudson is one of the four featured stories at the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum.





YPSILANTI AUTOMOTIVE
HERITAGE MUSEUM

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 10
48185

100 East Cross Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48198
734.482.5200

Museum Hours

Tuesday — Sunday *1 to 4 PM* Monday *Closed*

Admission: \$5 for adults

Children 12 and under are free when accompanied by an adult.

Contact us at: info@ypsiautoheritage.org
www.ypsiautoheritage.org



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HERITAGE MUSEUM

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