



YPSILANTI AUTOMOTIVE HERITAGE MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 1, NUMBER 3

SUMMER/FALL EDITION 2014

President's Report

BY RON BLUHM

One of the car club partnerships suggested in my last report is official! On April 30th, the YAHM board approved an agreement with the Hudson, Essex, Terraplane Historical Society (HETHS) converting our Miller Motors Hudson dealership into the "National Hudson Motor Car Company Museum." HETHS representative Ed Souers said "The Hudson and Nash merger took place in May of 1954. It is only fitting that we commemorate the 60th anniversary by establishing the National Hudson Motor Car Company Museum in Ypsilanti, near Hudson's Detroit birthplace." Excited about the partnership, I was quoted saying "Our partnership provides us an opportunity to enhance our Hudson collection and place our museum on the national stage with other major auto museums."

The partnership is leading display changes in our museum. What was the Miller Motors showroom will annually represent one of the decades between 1909 and 1957 when Hudsons were manufactured. A car from a decade with sales literature, posters, and memorabilia from that decade will fill the showroom. The front garage will take visitors on a circle tour of Hudson automobiles representing Hudson's history. Companion display boards will outline and parallel Hudson history with American history. The rear garage will feature Hudson engineering, racing history, and Hudson's role in the Arsenal of Democracy. The Hudson Hornet #92 once owned by race car driver Herb Thomas will be displayed there.

With the support of HETHS, we have been able to complete major maintenance projects in the Miller Motors building which is well over a hundred years old. Foundation bricks had crumbled and physically threatened the structure. They have all been carefully removed and replaced. A new display case was built, folding showroom doors were replaced, and the rear garage is being converted into a display area. There is still much to do before the September 21st grand opening.



Don Calvert repairs the crumbling brick.



Leo Hepner builds a display case.

With all of the above going on, we are continuing talks with a second national car club which we expect will lead to a second partnership that will help us enhance our local automotive history story. Like I wrote in my previous report, stay tuned!

We are one of a handful of nonprofit auto museums that have assumed the responsibility of keeping the automotive history of Southeastern Michigan alive. We continue to be grateful to the financial support we receive from our Friends that helps us do this.

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1953 Mercury

Our 1953 Mercury

BY JOYCE NOVAK

It was a beautiful spring morning in 1959 and I was feeling both incredibly excited and sad as I anticipated where this day was taking me. As a senior, I would soon be graduating from Roosevelt High School, a K-12 prep-school that hasn't existed for many years but was on the campus of Eastern Michigan University.

On this day, I was preparing to meet my classmates at the train station in Depot Town. The class, with only 52 students, was set to graduate in June and we were gathering to leave for our Senior Trip, a 5 day adventure that would take us to Washington, DC and New York City. My bags were packed and I was waiting at the door for the young man I had been dating for the past year to pick me up and see me off at the station.

Young love being what it is, I simply couldn't imagine spending nearly a week separated from Dave and tears came to my eyes as I saw the 1953 Mercury he had purchased several years before, while still in the Navy, pulling up to the curb. Dave told me as I boarded the train that he was planning a special surprise for my return and I felt the surprise had something to do with that Mercury but had no idea what it might be.

This story is about that car, but I will report here that I made it onto the train, survived the separation anxiety – forgotten about 15 minutes into the trip actually - and experienced the wonderful adventure as advertised. As another aside, Dave and I ended up married, having four wonderful sons

and are working on celebrating 55 years of marriage in the fall.

I quite honestly can't remember now what that car looked like as it drove up that day except for thinking of it as a big two-toned blob. I should explain that I, like many young people of that time, was a "car person" and still am. I loved cars, waited all day for my Dad to get home from work to take me to get my license on my birthday, and hung out with others, especially guys, who felt the same.



Dave & Joyce

Anyone who had a car, particularly an older one, immediately modified it. Chopped it, channeled it, rolled and pleated the interior, added glass-packs and did anything the owner had the money, time, and/or talent to do to hype up the car's engine and decibel level. A new paint job was also a requisite with flames and pin striping taking top honors in design. But think Earl Scheib, if the best you could do was a shiny coat of paint - and had the \$29.95 to pay for it: primer and sanding cost extra.

Dave was no different and had great plans for, someday, getting a real hot rod to modify. In the meantime, he wanted to do something to put his mark on that '53 Mercury. Unfortunately, he had neither time, money, nor a lot of talent but decided that a new paint job for the Merc' was doable. He and his buddies would do the priming and sanding themselves. This would be the great surprise waiting for me when my train pulled back into the station.

While many modifications of the day were Do It Yourself and learn-as-you-go propositions, there were procedures to follow for most alterations, especially for something like painting a car. You were encouraged to find a well-ventilated, extremely clean place and buy/rent/borrow a power paint sprayer to get an even coat. According to instructions, you should also wear protective clothing and cover one's head/face to avoid breathing any toxic fumes. Unfortunately, Dave and his buddies didn't get the memo.

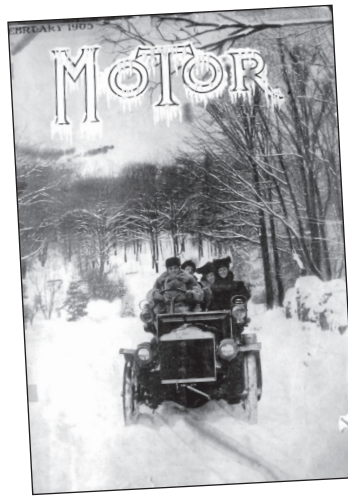
They found an old shed, put on their oldest clothes, bought some primer, and, from Dave's Dad's garage, "borrowed" one of those bug spray contraptions with the container at one end below the sprayer and a long plunger-type handle that the operator pumped to get the contents to "spray" out. They closed the shed up tight to keep the dust out and started spraying.

It didn't take too long before they were having trouble breathing and bailed out of the shed just before they passed out. Somehow, they got a coat of primer on the whole car without killing themselves, spent a day sanding it smooth and, despite the unorthodox methods, the finish was ready for the \$29.95 special. For some reason that even he doesn't remember – or admit to – Dave chose a color called "Sea Green", a bright mint green that I spotted in the depot parking lot long before the train stopped moving. When I saw the pride on Dave's face as he showed it to me, I played along and tried to match his excitement, enjoying his pleasure while kind of dreading actually being seen driving around in that car. I got used to it, no wonder our marriage has lasted!

He wasn't done, however. Wanting to follow the trend of channeling (lowering) the car, he came up with a creative way to do that without the usual costs or expertise required to do it correctly. He heated the springs which automatically lowered the car. It also caused the car to bounce uncontrollably when you put on the brakes or went over bumps. Again, I went along and kind of got used to it at least until, married by then, I became pregnant with our first child. Needing to be near a bathroom during the first few months is normal for any pregnant woman; riding in that car, I was an accident waiting to happen every time I set foot in it!

Not a great family car and with several more children added to the family, we eventually traded the Mercury in for a 1961 jet black Ford - with a 390 cubic inch police interceptor engine. Now that's more like it!

Joyce is a YAHM volunteer, husband Dave is a YAHM board member.



American Cars vs Foreign Cars

Reprinted from the above February 1905 issue of Motor magazine.

BUY AMERICAN – ALBERT A. POPE

There are a good many valid reasons why Americans should purchase motor cars manufactured in this country. A great many are influenced by the patriotic sentiment that one should patronize home industries and thus foster the interest of our own people. This is a rational line of thought, and one to be thoroughly commended, especially in cases where the products are of as good a quality as those of other countries.

The past history of the wonderful achievements of American inventive genius and manufacturing skill can lead our minds to but on conclusion, namely, that the next few years will find foreign cars a drug in the American market.

Buy Foreign – E. R. HOLLANDER

While it very properly may be a source of regret to Americans that the best motor cars of the world still hail from Europe, the fact is simply a natural consequence of the European manufacturers. The American manufacturer has shown and still shows an unaccountable tendency to devise freak constructions, rather than accept standardized European practice. Flagrant instances of American inexperience in motor-car construction are numerous. For this reason, American cars are improving only as they become slavish copies of foreign designs.

The desire to make an immediate profit, while natural enough, is not the least of the American manufacturer's handicaps. It takes several years of costly experimenting to learn how to build a good car, and the established European builders passed through this period long before the commenced to make money.

Thanks to Scott Virgo for bringing this magazine to our attention.

Ypsilanti Gas Stations 1948 to 1951

BY JACK MILLER



Thorne Tire

According to the 1948 and 1951 Ypsilanti City Directories, there were 36 stations all within the city limits selling gas, lubricating cars and trucks, and doing light mechanical jobs. At that time, cars required an oil change and grease job every 1000 miles. Now, with cars requiring much less maintenance, there are only 7 gas stations within the city limits. Today, most Ypsilanti gas stations are gas/convenience stores, a couple on Washtenaw Avenue are true service stations.

In 1948, gas stations displayed quarts of oil that were always placed by the gas pumps as vehicles used or leaked oil (automotive technology was not as advanced as today) and fan belt assortments and wiper blade displays were always part of every station. Some of the larger volume stations stocked new tires, tubes, and batteries for customer convenience. Lounsberry's Standard, located at the corner of East Michigan and Lincoln, stocked a large inventory of new tires with other Standard Oil dealers buying the Atlas brand whole sale from them. Schill Tire Company at 317 West Michigan was a full line Goodyear dealer. Thorne Tire Company at 309 E. Michigan Ave. was the B.F. Goodrich Tire Distributor. Thorne also operated a small John Deere tractor dealership in the Millworks Building at 300 North River Street. In addition to selling truck and tractor tires, both Thorne and Schill were household appliance dealers.

Most of the service stations had a cigarette machine or candy and cigarettes displayed in a glass counter and also had a Coca Cola machine vending cold Cokes for usually fifteen cents. The Coke driver/salesman complained to Bill Newhouse owner of Bill & Jim's Sinclair at 301 East Michigan that the number of empty bottles returned were always less than the number of bottles sold. Bill took him to a house he owned directly behind the gas station on Babbitt Street where his mechanic Gordon Sparks lived. Gordon's family drank Coke all the time and at every meal but failed to return the empties to the station. Several large boxes of empties were stored on the back porch.



McClure's Mobil Gas, West Michigan & Ballard, Harol Harrington, c 1945

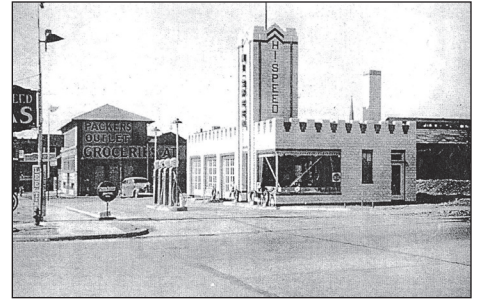
The larger volume stations usually had a pickup truck or Jeep with a wooden push board on the front which was used for picking up parts or aiding a customer who had run out of gas, suffered a flat tire, or had a dead battery. Bill & Jim's Sinclair was open 24 hours and provided AAA Towing



Charlie Niles Station, chicken restaurant



Allison's Shell, pizza shop



Hi Speed Station, East Michigan & River Street, c 1936

and Road Service. A large lot behind Bill & Jim's held wrecked vehicles on a short term basis and was often visited by spectators when word spread about a bad wreck in the area.

Most Ypsilanti Service Stations were the two-bay design like Bill & Jim's. Schill Tire Company had two large bays connected to the east side of the store which held four vehicles. A fifth bay housed a front end alignment machine. Riverside Gulf at the corner of East Michigan and Water Street was two bays wide with a third bay at the rear. The High-Speed Station at W. Michigan Ave. and Hamilton Street was three bays wide with a Willard Battery store attached and behind it on Hamilton Street. Both Stout's Hi-Speed at the corner of East Michigan and River and McClure's Mobil Gas at the northeast corner of Ballard and West Michigan were three bay stations. Only one station, Charles Niles at the point of West Michigan and Congress Street, did not have a hoist or a pit for servicing underneath cars.

Before detailing a car became a service, both Stout's Hi-Speed and McClure's Mobil Gas specialized in washing and polishing cars. A third total car care service station was Bill Wales Gulf on North Washington behind the Huron Hotel.

Fast-Friendly-Full Service was the way most of the stations operated. All had a cable that extended in front of the station that rang a bell when a car ran over it and entered the station. When the

bell rang, attendants moved into action. Self service was not known or available at the time. Along with washing the windshield and checking wiper blades, attendant service included checking the oil, looking for coolant leaks, and checking the condition of the fan belt. These were very important items in the operation of a vehicle at that time.

Several of the Ypsilanti Gas Stations always sold Christmas Trees. Pete Brooks Sinclair on South Huron Street, Mac Hayes Pure Oil at Michigan and River Street, Lounsbury's Standard at East Michigan and Lincoln Street, and Virgil & Leonard's Cities Service at 508 East Michigan next door to the Buick dealership always had a very large selection.

The Washtenaw Farmers Oil Company was associated with the Ypsilanti Farm Bureau on West Forest Ave. Ypsilanti native Frances DuBois gave the following accounting of the Washtenaw Farmers Oil Company. "There were five driver salesmen who owned their own gasoline/ fuel oil delivery trucks. My father Lee DuBois, Carl Schanz, Hollis Carr, Bill Sparrow, and Don Rickard filled their trucks at a bulk plant near Chelsea which was owned by the Michigan Farm Bureau Association. Each driver was independent and owned their respective routes. My brother Ed and cousin Gerald Byrnes also drove truck for my dad for short periods of time. In addition to keeping the Co-Op gas station (located on West Cross Street at Washington Street) tanks full, the drivers delivered gas, oil, and kerosene to area farmers as well as

residences for their heating and farming needs throughout Washtenaw County."

Some stations depended on neighborhood business or friendships and those stations in the downtown area relied on the downtown merchants as customers for gas and automotive service. At closing time, most stations performed the ritual of washing down the service bay floors which were always covered with oil and grease from the work day.

Six additional stations were built after 1960 – Bob & Otto's Standard on the southwest corner of Washtenaw Avenue at Mansfield, Lorne Kemp's Gulf on the southeast corner of Washtenaw at Mansfield, Clark Gas at South Grove and Prospect, and Hickory Hill Gulf at South Grove Street and I-94, Bob Boss's Marathon on the west side of Ecorse Rd. at Emerick Street, and a Standard Oil station on the east side at the point of Ecorse Road and Emerick Street.

The amazing fact is all of the Ypsilanti gas stations were providing a living for the owner and employees. Today, only two Ypsilanti gas stations provide mechanical service. Most of the post World War II Ypsilanti gas stations have been demolished. Charlie Niles' station at the West Michigan and West Congress point is now a chicken restaurant. Allison's Shell station at the Washtenaw and West Cross point is a Domino's Pizza shop.

Jack Miller is a co-founder of YAHM and retired curator

Motor State Products – An Ypsilanti Industry

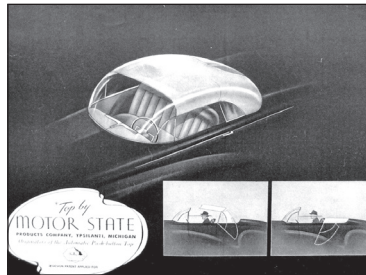
BY BILL NICKELS

On September 2, 1910, Alfred Langer arrived in New York City. On May 2, 1911, he opened a factory on West 56th Street near the Hudson River for the manufacture of convertible top frames. These early frames were built using handmade wooden bows. During the spring of 1912, Mr. Langer visited with Mr. Golde in Germany, owner of the Golde Patent for convertible tops. He successfully obtained the patent rights and moved his factory to Long Island.



Alfred Langer

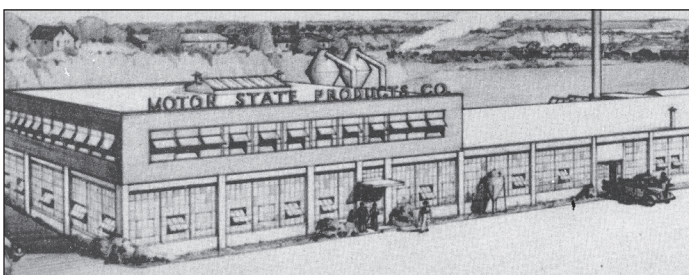
Cliff Dickey, retired Gene Butman sales manager, remembers conversations with Langer family members. They said “Alfred went to Dearborn to visit Henry Ford. He saw Henry in the parking lot and told him about his convertible top frame. Henry invited him back to office where the frame was discussed. Henry was intrigued enough to ask for 12 frames. After testing the frames, Mr. Ford agreed to purchase Langer’s frames for Ford roadsters which were the convertibles of the time.”



Convertible ad

Golde Patent Manufacturing Company moved to Ypsilanti to be closer to the automobile industry. The first listing in Ypsilanti Street Directories is in 1930 on South River Street at the corner of Parsons where a larger manufacturing facility was constructed. This property is now part of the Water Street Development Project. Alfred Langer was listed as President. August “Gus” Keller was invited from Germany to be Vice-President of Engineering and Design. The management team continued in 1938, but the name was changed to Motor State Products Company.

“Motor State built tops for the largest percentage of the car industry,” retired curator Jack Miller once said. “Other companies built tops and paid a \$5 patent fee per top to Motor State. The Motor State convertible top became the standard for the industry.”



Factory picture

Motor State employees went on to invent the hydraulic cylinder that made convertibles automatic. They also designed and manufactured power window and power seat mechanisms. The hydraulic powered tops were introduced in 1941, the window and seat systems were introduced in 1946. Our museum has a display that includes a Motor State manufactured power window switch and a hydraulic top motor. Vice President Gus Keller designed the Syncro Seat that had no sag springs and gave truck drivers back support. The seat also was manufactured in Ypsilanti.

Detroit Harvester took over Motor State in 1947. As a corporate division, the Motor State Products name continued.

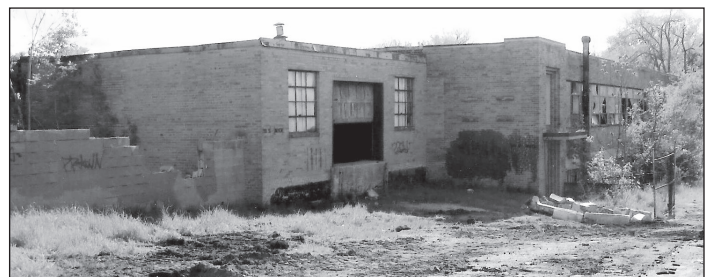
Alfred Langer’s son John was interviewed for a 1996 newspaper article. In the article, John said “Motor State assembled tops for all of the major automotive concerns. They eventually didn’t have the finances to meet union demands for more money for the people working. Detroit Harvester took over and they brought in new people. When the Golde Patent ran out, all the companies made their

own tops.”

By 1971, the Motor State Products plant at 103 South River Street was listed as “vacant” in the Ypsilanti Street Directory. This loss began the loss of automotive industries in the Ypsilanti area.

Detroit Harvester purchased The Dura Company of Toledo, Ohio in 1936. Detroit Harvester grew and adopted the Dura Corporation name in 1958. On October 30, 2006, Dura filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection. In December of 2009, Dura Automotive Systems was acquired by the New York private equity firm Patriarch Partners. They continue to use the Dura name.

Thanks to Cliff Dickey, Jack Miller, and the Ypsilanti Historical Museum Archives for background information.



Factory picture 2010

Ypsilanti Ford Plant Sign

BY NICK WILLIAMS

One of the largest items displayed in the museum is a neon Ford script sign from the Ypsilanti Ford Plant. Hanging from the ceiling by the front door, it measures 8' high and 13.5' wide.



Ypsilanti Ford Plant

The Ford script logo was registered as a Ford Motor Company trademark with the United States patent office on July 20th, 1909. According to Ford Motor Company Archives, Henry Ford picked this as the Ford logo from a collection prepared by C.H. Wills. The first use of the logo enclosed in the now famous Blue Oval occurred on a 1928 Model A.

In 1932, Ford Motor Company bought the Ypsilanti Water Works & Electric Light Plant which was built in 1886. Ford started the plant as a Village Industry. Over time, it grew into a major Ford factory. The neon Ford script sign was installed on the north front of Building

#1 sometime before the use of the logo was discontinued in 1938. Corporate revival of the logo started in 1982.



Manufacturing ended at the Ypsilanti Ford plant in 2008 and the plant was sold in 2009 by Automotive Components Holdings (ACH), a Ford controlled company. After asking Ford Motor Company, the sign was given to the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum as a display item. Joe Sesi Jr. graciously paid for the restoration and installation of the sign. Several years earlier, Joe also donated a mint condition 1953 Lincoln to the museum.



Sign Lighting Ceremony, Peter Fletcher (r), Joe & Yvonne Sesi (l).

This Ford logo was written in Spencerian Script which was the American standard writing style for business correspondence before the wide spread adoption of the typewriter. Spencerian Script is also used by Coca-Cola for their corporate logo.

Nick is a frequent contributor to the YAHM newsletter.

Etch Your Name In Ypsilanti Automotive History

Preserve your memory or honor someone today with a personalized brick at the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum!

Please check one: 4" x 8" brick \$100 each 3 lines of text 8" x 8" brick \$200 each 6 lines of text

Payment Type

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Credit Card: Visa MasterCard

Card # _____

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One Order Form Per Brick Please

Please PRINT what you want your brick to say. One letter or space per box. Punctuation marks and space take up one box. 4x8 bricks can have 3 lines 8x8 bricks can have 6 lines

Funds will go to enhancing the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum



**YPSILANTI AUTOMOTIVE
HERITAGE MUSEUM**

100 E. Cross Street
Ypsilanti, MI 48198
734.482.5200

MUSEUM HOURS

Tuesday-Sunday
1:00 to 4:00 P.M.

Monday
Closed

Admission \$5.00 adults
Children 12 and under are free
when accompanied by an adult

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Single \$25 Family \$35 annual (2 adults) Supporter \$100 annual (4 adults)

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Donations made to The Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum are tax deductible to the extent of the law.