



# YPSILANTI AUTOMOTIVE HERITAGE MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

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## President's Report

BY RON BLUHM

**T**wo Thousand Fifteen was another interesting year at YAHM. During May, Estabrook School brought four groups of 3<sup>rd</sup> Graders through the museum. The kids have a great time trying to find the location of museum display items. After the annual Color Run held in Ypsilanti, Bob Elton, Jim Curran, Mickey Ichesco, and Bill Nickels taxied the staff to dinner and back to their hotel. The Color Run staff texted pictures of their rides all over the world. In July, TV 2 visited Ypsilanti for a Friday morning ZIP Tour. They set up in Riverside Park for their two hour live broadcast that featured our cars as a back drop and a live museum interview. ZIP Code 48197 sure looked good!

In August, the newly organized Ypsilanti Heritage Festival asked if the museum would be able to host their Kick Off Party. With some rearranging, we were able to accommodate their party of close to a hundred guests. Heritage Festival leaders said it was the most enjoyed event in years! We continue to host corporate parties when companies are interested in having a unique venue. In September, Tel Systems from Ann Arbor chose us to have their 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary party. Hosting parties is generating valuable income for the museum.

YAHM retired curator Jack Miller received the 2015 "Friend of Automotive History" award at the Society of Automotive Historians banquet held at the Hershey Country Club, Hershey, Pennsylvania on October 9, 2015. The award is presented annually in recognition of outstanding contributions to automotive history. YAHM was founded by Skip Ungrodt, Peter Fletcher, and Jack in 1995. YAHM member Bob Elton accepted the award for Jack.

Having completed extensive restoration of Hudson Sales & Service dealership which became our National Hudson Essex Terraplane Museum, we applied for the 2015 MotorCities National Heritage Award of Excellence in the category of Automotive Heritage Preservation. We learned in October that we were selected from a group of seven applications to be one of three finalists for the award. We travelled to Lansing, MI for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Michigan Auto Heritage Day on November 10<sup>th</sup> where we accepted our finalist award. The awards were presented under the dome of the State Capital. Thanks to Carl and Jack Miller for maintaining the



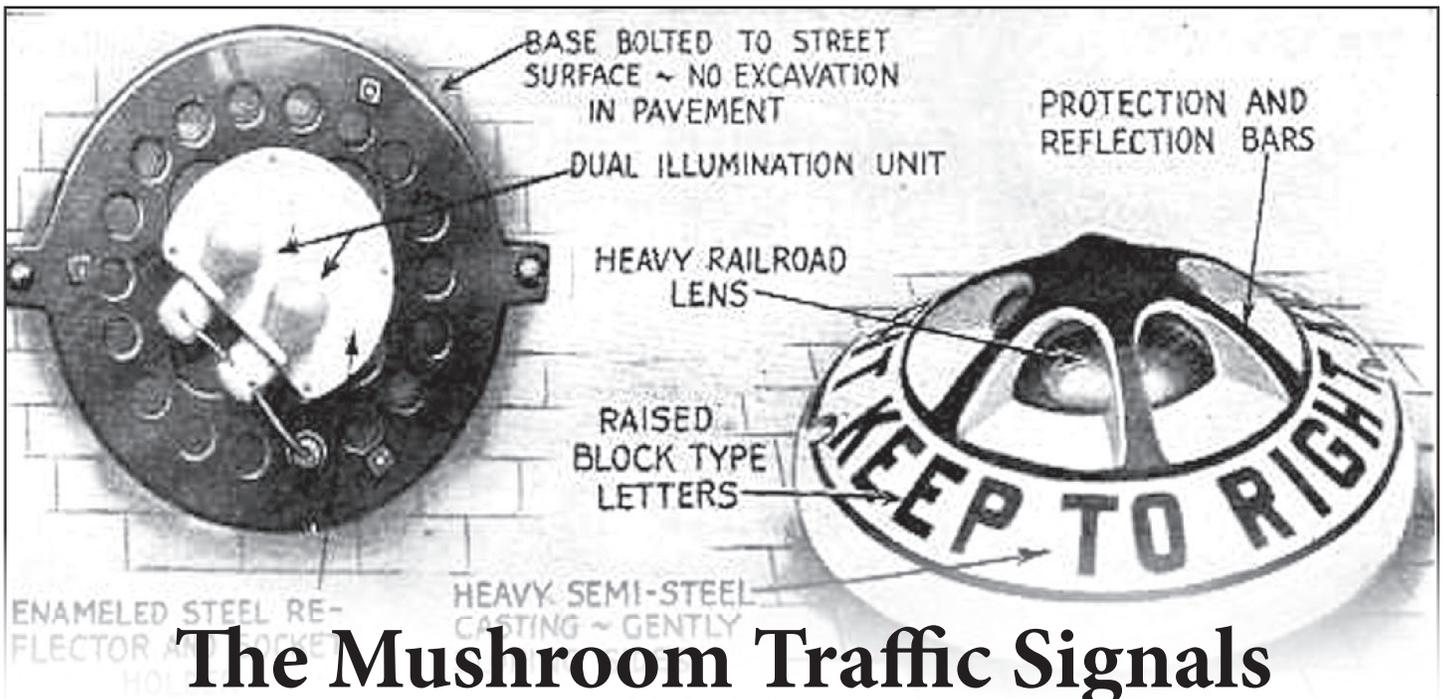
MotorCities' Brian Yopp congratulates Ron Bluhm.

dealership while it was active and to the Hudson Essex Terraplane Historical Society for their restoration assistance.

The Holiday Season is financially very important for YAHM. Renewed Friends memberships and donations make up an important part of our annual budget. Thanks in advance for helping us keep the rich automotive history of the Ypsilanti and Washtenaw County alive. Remember that our museum gift shop contains a variety of items that can make nice gifts for the auto enthusiast in your family. For that really difficult person to buy for, honor them with a personalized brick. A form for purchasing a brick is included in this newsletter.

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# The Mushroom Traffic Signals

BY AL RUDISILL

*The earliest mushroom lighted traffic signals were placed in the middle of an intersection to show drivers where the edge of their lane ended.*

According to the “History of Ypsilanti” on the city’s web site: “By the 1920s, officers had begun to patrol the streets in a Model A Ford wielding two submachine guns. The first man to actually be called Police Chief was John F. Connors, who managed the department from 1922 to 1929” An article in The Ypsilanti Press of February 28, 1924 was titled “Traffic Orders Must Be Obeyed – Police Make First Arrest for Disregarding Signals and Regulations.”

The article goes on to describe the arrest of Frank Scott for disregarding the “Mushroom Light” traffic signal. The article describes Scott’s offense as follows: “Scott didn’t have time to wait for the D.U.R. (Detroit United Railway) car to take on passengers and leave the waiting room; he accordingly drove around on the left hand side and went on. The chief wasn’t in his car so he didn’t see Scott that time. It wasn’t more than a few minutes later that he came driving back on Michigan Avenue and this time he decided the mushroom light wasn’t put there for any specific purpose and he cut on the wrong side of that too. This time the Chief stopped him. This afternoon he is to appear in municipal court and will doubtless be instructed as to what the city traffic regulations are. It is altogether likely he will find out what the penalty for violating them is also.”

In the article Chief Connors was also quoted as saying, “Autoists will have to learn the traffic signals are to be obeyed. The police department has been lenient during the winter when the streets were slippery but the thing has gone

too far, now. All autoists seen disregarding the mushroom lights will be brought into court from now on.”

According to court records in 1924 there were 54 Washtenaw County Traffic Court cases from the City of Ypsilanti involving the mushroom signals. Fines in these cases ranged from \$4.25 to \$10.00 and jail time ranged from 0 to 40 days. Three of the 54 cases resulted in 40 days jail time, 10 of the 54 cases resulted in 20 days jail time, 21 of the 54 cases resulted in 10 days jail time, and in 10 of the cases no jail time was assigned.

At the time there was a great deal of debate regarding traffic signals. The issue related to keeping traffic to the right of center at each intersection. One side argued that mushroom type signal lamps created less of a hazard to errant drivers of motorcars and horse drawn vehicles who miscalculated a turn. The other side argued that pedestal mounted lights were easier to see from a distance and it would cause less damage to run into a pedestal signal than to disregard a mushroom signal and run into oncoming traffic. As time passed the argument became moot as automatically timed traffic signals were suspended over intersections rather than placed in the center of intersections.

Note: This article was inspired by the research being done in our Archives by Marcia McCrary. She is indexing early Ypsilanti court documents and has run across several cases of fines and jail sentences imposed on individuals for violation of mushroom traffic signals.

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*Al Rudisill is president of the Ypsilanti Historical Society*

# Kaiser Cottage “Home for a Day” at Willow Run

BY JACK MILLER

Located directly west of the Willow Run Plant Administration building overlooking Willow Creek, the Kaiser Cottage originally served as a mess hall for troops and workers during bomber production at Willow Run. Kaiser changed the appearance of the building by adding bay windows and portions of brick/stone paneling to give it a very lavish home-like atmosphere.



Kaiser created a program with its dealers to sell new Kaiser and Frazer cars and encourage the buyer to travel to Willow

Run for a vacation and pick up their new car. Travel costs to Ypsilanti using plane, bus, or train were less than the freight costs of shipping the new car to the buyer's home town. Savings examples given were New York City freight \$63, plane \$31, train \$34, bus \$12; Memphis freight \$77, plane \$43, train \$34, bus \$12; Jacksonville freight \$103, plane \$59, train \$55, bus \$17; Los Angeles freight \$232, plane \$135, train \$122, bus \$45; Boston freight \$66, plane \$40, train \$36, bus \$13. The Kaiser Cottage featured a private lounge with a shower, maid service, and a porter to take care of visitor's luggage. The large lounge featured beautiful appointments

of furniture, lamps, drapes with a fireplace, and a snack area. After freshening up and having a snack, visitors could take the electric “Buffalo Train” trip through the giant Willow Run Assembly Plant to view car production and have lunch in one of the executive dining rooms. For the return trip home, the buyer was given clearly marked maps with suggested sight-seeing stops and hotel reservations for the nights ahead. At the door of the Kaiser Cottage was the new Kaiser or Frazer with luggage loaded waiting for the purchaser's departure.



General Motors sold the cottage before 1960 to Carroll Petty of Ypsilanti for one dollar. He moved it three miles west to 116 South Harris Road in Ypsilanti Township placing

it sideways on a narrow lot. Over the years, it has been severely neglected. A church called the Martha Mary Chapel built by Henry Ford stood near the Kaiser Cottage. At about the same time, it was sold and moved to Belleville Road south of Ecorse Rd where it still serves as a place of worship.

*Jack is YAHM's retired curator.*

## NEW WAYSIDE SIGNS

BY BILL NICKELS

The Huron River Watershed Council is highlighting the Huron River as an auto heritage trail using Wayside Signs available from the MotorCities National Heritage Area. Three new auto history signs will be added to our existing nine signs. One of the signs tells the history of the Central Specialty/Motor Wheel complex on East Forest that now partly is occupied by the Arbor Brewing Company Microbrewery. The second sign tells the Ford Motor Company history at the Ford Rawsonville Plant. Ford Lake and the Ford Dam are featured on the third sign. All twelve signs are a short walk from the Huron River and can be viewed during a Huron River canoe trip or during a short car/bicycle drive. Stop by the museum for a map that locates them.

*Bill Nickels is YAHM Secretary.*

# Driving Around the World at 77!

BY BILL NICKELS



Ron Bluhm gives Heidi a replacement hub cap.



In July of 2014, 77 year old Heidi Hetzer left Berlin, Germany driving her 1930 Hudson straight eight on a two year trip around the world. She drove through China, Laos, Viet Nam, Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia. By boat, she and her car travelled to Perth, Australia where she started her trip across Australia to Melbourne. By boat again, she travelled to New Zealand. After touring, New Zealand, a boat brought her to Long Beach, California earlier this summer. Her North America travelling took her to San Francisco, Seattle, Vancouver, Calgary, and Regina.

Somewhere along the way, she lost a hub cap from her Hudson. She pressed an aluminum beverage can into service as a replacement. A member of a Hudson club learned of the loss and happened to have an extra 1930 Hudson hub cap. He sent the hub cap to YAHM and made arrangements to have her stop with us to have it installed.

Greeted by Christian Overland from The Henry Ford, Automotive Hall of Fame Executive Director Bill Chapin, and YAHM members; Heidi arrived on Sunday September 6th. We learned she was a child in Berlin during the bombing of Berlin during World War II and remembers her home taking a direct hit while

she and her family hid in the basement. She mused about a talk she had with an American who said how bad it was in the United States because of sugar rationing. We asked her why she is doing the trip. “Now I have good health, I am retired, my children are raised and on their own, and I have an ex-husband. I am free to do whatever I want!”

She mentioned having trouble with her Hudson’s cork clutch in Ubitzikan. After having it repaired in an automotive shop, she started her Hudson expecting to leave and found the clutch inoperable, the shop used cork slices too thick making the clutch inoperable. Frustrated, she went to bed not knowing what to do. In the morning, she was surprised to find that two locals with mechanical skills took the clutch apart and used cork slices from wine bottles cut to the proper thickness. Her car was ready to go!

After she left us, she spent the evening in a Saline private home. The next day, Christian Overland made arrangements to have her park her car in front of the main entrance of the Henry Ford in Dearborn. From there, she was off to Niagara Falls, Toronto, and Ottawa where she met with the German embassy. This portion of her travels was interrupted by an oil leak. With her car on a lift and the engine running, Heidi was underneath wiping off excess oil with a rag. The rag and her right hand were pulled into the engine by the distributor shaft. She lost two fingers and broke a third. Due to her injury, her son Dylan flew in from Berlin to join her for her North American journey which included Hemming's headquarters in Vermont and Hershey, PA's October car show.

She has a GPS in her trunk which enables family and everybody in the world to follow her trip. One night, her family called and asked what happened and why is she in a hospital. She explained she was fine and was staying in a hotel across the street from a hospital!

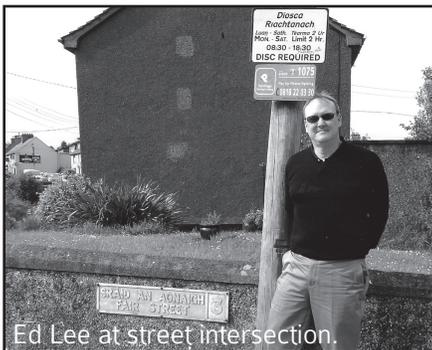
Her trip will end in 2016 after going from Florida to Latin America to Africa to Portugal and finally home in Germany. We asked her if she would write a book about her adventure. She responded, "No, I have too much to do, maybe after my hundredth birthday." To view additional Ypsilanti pictures and learn more about Heidi's trip in her beloved 1930 Hudson she affectionately calls "Hudo," visit her website at [Heidi-Around-the-world.com](http://Heidi-Around-the-world.com). Her website also tells where she is at the moment you connect.



## Ford in Ireland & Ypsilanti

BY MATT LEE

We all know Henry Ford's family came from Ireland. While travelling in Ireland, former Ford employee Ed Lee visited the intersection of Fair Street and Fairlane Road in Cork County. The Ford family farm fronted on Fairlane Road. Fair Street bordered the local fairground. The flat area now filled with houses to the left in the picture below was the fairground that was the reason for the names of the street and road. It extended to the hill in the background of the picture.



Ed Lee at street intersection.

Ed served his co-op time between our local Rawsonville Ford Plant and the Ypsilanti Ford Plant. Both plants manufactured automotive electrical components. Ford Motor Company

sold the Ypsilanti plant in 2009, Rawsonville Ford continues to operate. YAHM has the Ford script sign from the Ypsilanti Ford Plant and a display of electrical components produced at the two plants.

*Matt is a board member of both YAHM and the National Automotive History Collection at the Detroit Public Library.*

## Kaiser-Frazer Used Ypsilanti for Sales Promotions

BY JACK MILLER

During 1950, the Kaiser-Frazer Corporation chose several Ypsilanti locations along with Ypsilanti Fire and Police officers to create an Emergency Response brochure for the 1950 Kaiser "Traveler" and Frazer "Vagabond" utility vehicles. Pictured in the brochure was an auto-accident scene at the northeast corner of South Hamilton and Ferris streets with a Kaiser-Frazer emergency vehicle. Also pictured were Ypsilanti fire fighters Chief James Dignan and Captain Russell Forsyth working with portable oxygen equipment inside the Kaiser Traveler. Beyer Hospital's emergency entrance was used for a picture of Ypsilanti police officers Chief Emil Susterka and B. C. Maxwell unloading a patient into a Kaiser-Frazer police vehicle. The final picture was under the canopy at Geer Funeral Home with a Kaiser-Frazer hearse. The city of Wayne, Michigan purchased one of the emergency vehicles and used it for many years.



*Jack is retired YAHM curator.*

# Orphan Car Show Judge's Favorites

BY KEVIN WILSON



Kevin Wilson, 2nd from left, and Orphan Car Show judges.

**A**wards at the Ypsilanti Orphan Car Show are called the “judges’ favorite” car for each category. The reasons for choosing a “favorite” are different from calling a car “best.” Judges may choose a car because it is rare or because it represents a particularly popular model, because it perfectly restored or because it is well-maintained in its original state, or because the owner has a great story about how they got the car, or because the design stands out as a historic landmark (for good or ill) or for any other reasons. There are two or three judges per class, and they have to agree on one car in each category. They are informed and enthusiastic “car people” but not necessarily “experts” in the category to which they’re assigned.

This methodology means every car stands a chance of being chosen in any given year. The award does not always go to the most expensive, the most exacting restoration, or even the rarest car in its class. We don’t judge as “competition” so much as a way of saying “thank you” to the owners for participating and bringing us an interesting car. The favorites for 2015 are:

- Class A Nash, Clarence and Nancy Becker’s 1950 Nash Ambassador.
- Class B Packard, Ben and Jean Harwood’s 1946 Packard Clipper Deluxe.
- Class C Studebaker, Dennis Berry’s 1956 Studebaker Skyhawk.
- Class D Pre-WWII Independents, Debbie Gagnon’s 1923 Star C.
- Class E Kaiser-Frazer, Terry Trassati’s 1954 Kaiser Darrin.
- Class F1 Big Three Orphans (Ford), Jim Goerke’s and Phyllis Swonk’s 1956 Continental Mark II.
- Class F2 Big Three Orphans (Chrysler), Edwin and Dorothy Holter’s 1953 DeSoto Firedome.
- Class F3 Big Three Orphans (GM), Claude and Marie Boisvert’s 1962 Pontiac Grand Prix.
- Class G Brass Era, Eugene LaChapelle’s with 1910 Hupmobile.
- Class H Willy Overland, Ed Hanish’s 1931 Willys 6 Model 97.
- Class J Convertibles (featured), Gerald Szostak’s 1926 Willys Knight 66.
- Class K1 Foreign (British), Rusty Blackwell’s 1979 Triumph Dolomite Sprint.
- Class K2 Foreign (Non-British), Ken Nelson’s 1966 Panhard 24 BT.
- Class L Post-WWII Independents, James Kaczmar’s 1948 Crosley Liberty (station wagon).
- Class M AMC, Jay Nagel’s 1975 AMC Gremlin.

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*Kevin has been Chief Judge and handled publicity for our Orphan Car Show since the founding of the show. He is a writer for car-and-driver.com.*

# Alan Chapel & Joe Sesi

BY BILL NICKELS



**Y**psilanti memorabilia collector Ernie Griffin recently brought us a license plate frame that simply said “Alan Chapel Ypsilanti.” Everything, including license plate frames, has a story.

Joe Sesi Sr. operated the New Center Market seven blocks north of the General Motors Building in Detroit. Joe met both Henry Ford and Alan Chapel doing business at his grocery store. Alan was married to Henry Ford’s niece. At the end of World War II, Henry Ford invited Chapel to work for the Ford Motor Company. Chapel asked to bring along his

friend Joe Sesi. The two of them partnered and founded Ypsilanti Industries in a vacant building at 20 East Michigan. They manufactured parts for Ford’s manual transmissions.

The front of Ypsilanti Industries became Ypsilanti Tractor Sales Inc. and sold Ford tractors and farm implements. In 1947, when Lincoln Mercury became a division of Ford Motor Company, Chapel and Sesi were awarded one of the first dealerships. It was called Alan Chapel Inc. with Alan as president and Joe as vice-president.

Alan died at the young age of 52 in 1956. The dealership then became Sesi Lincoln Mercury, the same Lincoln dealership that is now in Ann Arbor and is owned by Joe Sesi Junior.

*Ernie is the premier Ypsilanti memorabilia collector in town. Ernie, thanks for sharing this piece of auto history with us!*

## 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

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

### Payment Type

Check

Credit Card:  Visa  MasterCard

Card # \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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Funds will go to enhancing the Ypsilanti Automotive Heritage Museum



**YPSILANTI AUTOMOTIVE  
HERITAGE MUSEUM**

100 E. Cross Street  
Ypsilanti, MI 48198  
734.482.5200

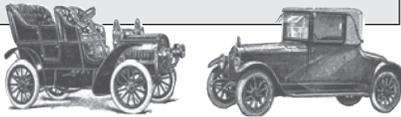
**MUSEUM HOURS**

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

**CONTACT US**

info@ypsiautoheritage.org  
www.ypsiautoheritage.org



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*Join YAHM's Circle of Friends Enjoy the following benefits*

- Free museum admission • Quarterly newsletters • 10% Gift Shop Discount •

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City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

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Do you own a historical automobile?  yes  no

Make \_\_\_\_\_ Model \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_

Are you interested in becoming a museum volunteer?  yes  no

Areas in which you have interest:

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

Contribution for upgrading and developing new exhibits \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_  check  MasterCard  VISA

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_

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