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# H O D E I S L A N D Y E A R B O O K



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# Here Comes The Horseless Carriage

BY JAY RICE MOODY, D.M.D.

**F**EW people realize that in the beginning New England was the center of automobile production in the United States — long before Detroit was even a gleam in the eye of the future.

Our State of Rhode Island has many early accomplishments to its credit in the motoring world, a fact of which we can all indeed be proud. This priceless heritage stems not only from the pioneering Rhode Island automobile inventors but also from the staunch and hardy citizens who owned and drove their cars in Providence, Pawtucket, Lincoln, Bristol, Newport, South County, Westerly, in fact, in all sections of the state.

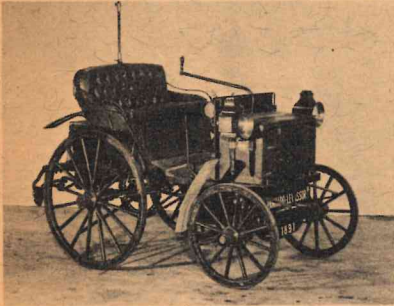
The first automobile built in Rhode Island was by Mr. Alonzo T. Cross, the founder of the Cross Writing Instrument Company, now the A. T. Cross Company of Lincoln, Rhode Island.

In the winter of 1896-97, shortly after the building of the first United States auto race track at Narragansett Park in Cranston, Mr. Cross completed his automobile.

The chassis was built at the Cross pencil factory on Warren Street, Providence. The buggy-styled body was built by the H. M. Howe Company of Bucklin Street, a carriage maker specializing in pony carts. The engine was built by L.F.N. Baldwin of the Cruickshank Engine Works on Dyer Street. Two engines were built, a first a 4-horse power and later a 6-horsepower which propelled the car at ten miles per hour. Mention of a boiler in the Registry of Motor Vehicles indicates that this was a steam car.

Providence was the home of the American Locomotive Company builder of the Alco automobile, a 6-cylinder 60-horsepower high performance high quality vehicle that was the winner of the 1909 and 1910 Vanderbilt Cup Races for 278.08 miles at an average speed of 65.18 miles per hour! Small wonder that their slogan called it — “the car of amazing longevity — a little better than any other in the world.” These fine cars were used in Providence for taxi service which in no small way attests to their rugged construction and dependability.

The late Webster Knight II of Providence and West Warwick owned one of these prized cars among his collection of antique automobiles. Other Providence automobile companies that were well known were Maxwell-Briscoe Motor Com-

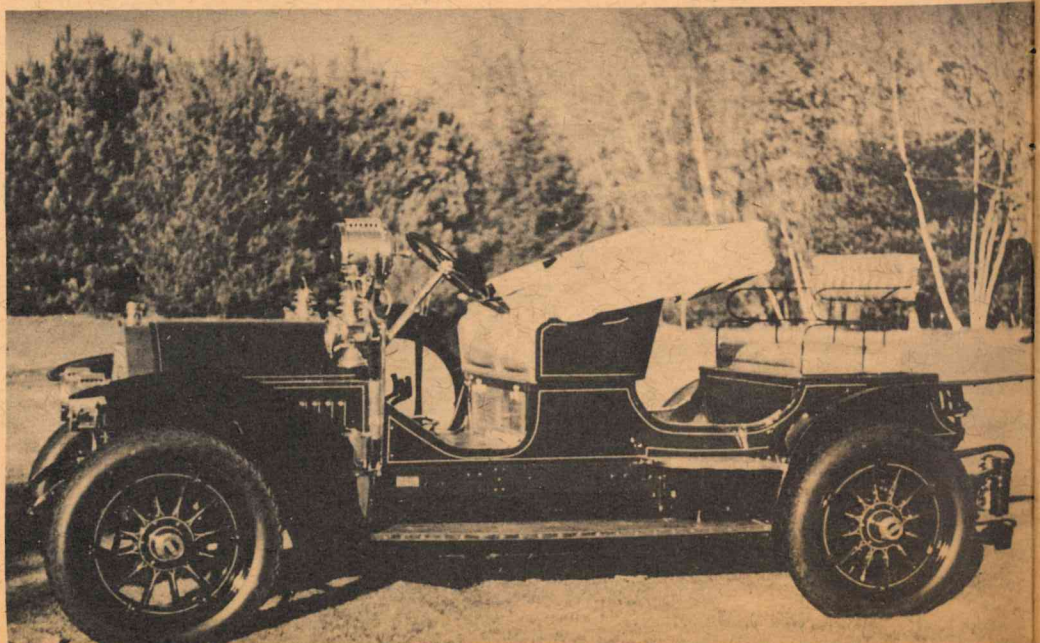


1892 Panhard.



1899 Benz.

1909 Alco Roadster formerly owned by Webster Knight II.



pany, Page Gas Engine Company, Baldwin Automobile Company, and the Rhode Island Auto Transit Company.

Pawtucket, Rhode Island, made history in 1901 when the Brown Textile Machinery Company, 481 Main Street, formed a corporation called United Motors and produced the Cameron Automobile in 1902. In 1904 the Cameron won many contests, the most important being the Mount Washington Hill Climb. By 1906 the company had manufactured 1,800 automobiles at a purchase price of \$750 each, fully equipped "guaranteed absolutely for one year."

Bristol can lay claim to a fine motor car called the Novara, designed by Mr. A. Sidney Herreshoff and built by the Herreshoff Manufacturing Company in 1916. The body was unusual in that it was framed and built like a boat of double planked mahogany and varnished. Unfortunately the 1938 hurricane destroyed all drawings of the car, as well as plans, pictures, literature and history.

The Herreshoff family owned several well-known cars, among them two Stanley Steamers, famous for their silent operation and extraordinary hill climbing ability and acceleration. The memory of these fine automobiles lingers with those who owned and drove them. Of all the steam cars originally built in the United States only the White and the Stanley survived. The White passenger car was discontinued in 1912 while the White truck was continued for a few more years. The last Stanley Steamer was built in Newton, Mass. in 1922.

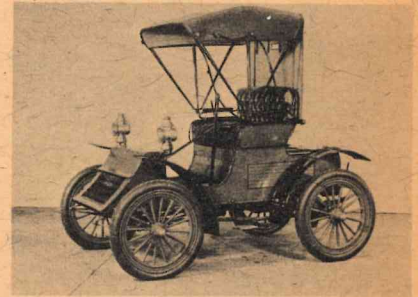
Bristol had its share of early automotive history because of the wealthy families in the county. Foremost among these was Col. Samuel Pomeroy Colt who resided on Hope Street and garaged his stable of cars at Linden Place. The man in charge of these early vehicles, Mr. J. Floyd Huestis, lives in Bristol; healthy, vigorous, blessed with a remarkable memory, and he still supervises his machine business with thirty employees. J. Floyd's father owned the first "automobile station" in Bristol at the turn of the century (1900).

In 1904 Colonel Colt possessed an optimistic attitude toward all things new and challenging. He was the founder of Rhode Island's Industrial Trust Company (now the Industrial National Bank) also the National India Rubber Company (now Uniroyal, Inc.). Mr. Colt fell in love with the automobile and wanted a good mechanic to supervise his growing stable of cars. He offered Floyd Huestis the unheard of sum of \$40 per week to take charge of his automobiles which included a 1907 Leon Bollee, 1912 Mercedes, 1905 Clement-Bayard, 1910 Knox, 1921 Fiat, 1917 Cadillac, 1910 Locomobile, Reo Speed Wagon, Stutz Roadster, Model "T" Ford, lastly a buckboard with a Smith motor wheel attached. In all, a dozen or more cars with a staff of seven to keep them in prime operating condition even to making any needed parts in the machine shop at one end of the garage.

The 1912 Mercedes had a romantic history. In the summer of 1914, while the Colonel was touring France with Floyd at the wheel, and always with a footman who spoke the language, World War I began. The Colonel and Floyd were lucky to get out of the country by way of Italy but the Mercedes had to stay behind. In 1919, after high-ranking French Army officers had enjoyed the use of the car for the duration of the war, the Mercedes was returned to Bristol, and it remained the Colonel's favorite until his death in 1921. The car was later sold to Ralph Kinder then to Ralph Pewsey and finally found a permanent home with Webster Knight II in West Warwick.

Colonel Colt's brother-in-law, Francisco E. DeWolf, a titled, Austria-Hungarian, made history in the area by sitting on the front seat beside the chauffeur carrying a three-tubed horn and at about 100 feet before reaching every corner he'd raise the horn to his lips and clear the way with a melodious blast. This horn still works beautifully and is owned by Mr. Carlton Pinheiro of Bristol.

Mr. Ralph Kinder of Bristol at the age of 12 years was "given permission to



1902 Haynes-Apperson.



1905 Columbia Electric.

drive" by the town council and police chief John Morrissey, "so long as he did not cross the town line into Warren!"

The first car owned and registered in Bristol belonged to Mr. Daniel Case of Poppasquash Point.

Newport, Rhode Island, in 1910 claimed to be the city with the greatest number of motor vehicles, with the exception of New York City. The reason for this is easily understood when one recalls the fact that Newport was the home of the wealthy and most fashionable families of the continent from the late 1800's to the present day. The admonition was made many times that "the automobile was not practical, it wouldn't last - rather it was a toy of the rich!" (Sic).

Newport has the distinction of having presented the first automobile parade in 1899. This program climaxed the gay summer season for that year and overwhelmingly eclipsed all other social events.

The *Mercury* account of September 9, 1899 titled "Unique Parade" quoted "The first parade of automobiles ever seen in this city was held Tuesday afternoon and was a grand success from a social and spectacular point of view. The line was formed at Belcourt where the competition in obstacle driving was encountered. Bellevue Avenue was lined with people to see the vehicles. Mrs. Herman Oelrichs met with an accident and was unable to continue." (The rear axle broke and her auto served as an additional obstacle to the others who followed.)

"The competition was held in the park at Belcourt with prizes as follows :

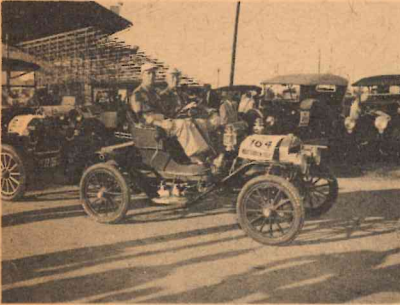
- I Mrs. Herman Oelrichs - Best decorated auto.
- II Mr. H. M. Shoemaker - Best decorated auto.
- III Mr. Stuyvesant LeRoy - Best competition driving.

"Parade to Gray Craig followed by a large drag to be used in case of a breakdown. Dinner was held in the barn at Gray Craig and dancing was in order later." (Today the Viking Chapter commemorates this event of 1899 with a "Newport Motor Car Festival" on the original site at Belcourt.)

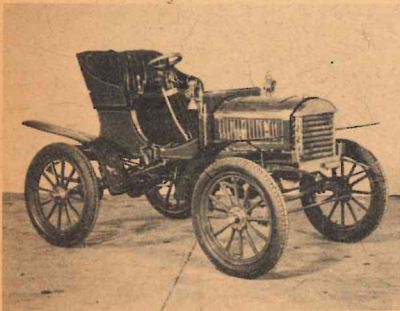
This event brought others in quick succession. There were races at Portsmouth Aquidneck Park in August and September 1900 won by William K. Vanderbilt, Jr. and attended by 8,000 people. Other races were held at Second Beach, Middletown Fair Grounds and private races on the roads of the island, much to the consternation of the constabulary.

Ordinances were passed in Newport and Portsmouth in June 1900 against speeding "to exceed 10 miles per hour" with a \$20 fine or 20 days imprisonment or both for "The reckless and rapid driving of these vehicles by certain noted individuals since the first of May."

The Bliss Steam Automobile made by the Bliss Chain Company, Attleboro, Massachusetts, was probably the first chainless steam car in Rhode Island and was owned in 1901 by John F. Allen father of Dr. J. Stafford Allen, 25 Rhode Island Avenue, Providence. A picture was taken on September 23, 1901 at 40 Oriole Avenue and shows Dr. Allen as a boy on the front drop seat and his father back of him at the tiller which was used to steer the car. Of interest is the garage in the background which was the first garage in Rhode Island. This was built especially to house the Bliss Steamer and was called the "automobile house." On the floor there was a trap door with a ring in it for lifting and this opened into a pit that permitted work on the car from below. The magazines for some time advertised patented automobile houses. The *Providence Journal* of September 23, 1901 mentioned "This tiny affair is one of a kind and to some people in the vicinity its purpose never has been explained. The boys in the neighborhood named it, 'the house of too much trouble,' because of the fact that there is somebody in there most of the time working on the machine." The Bliss steam car finally burned up during a repair session in a commercial garage.



1908 Maxwell.



1904 Mitchell.

Dr. Allen remembers riding about Providence in this car and recalls that his father "had to attack College Hill" in order to make it to the top. On Blackstone Boulevard one day they came upon another car with a breakdown. His father's comment was, "That's one of those gasoline cars — they'll never be successful."

The supreme tests for all automobiles were the steep grades of Jenckes Street hill, College Hill and Waterman Street hill. A favorite pastime was to watch the cars try to make the grade or in some instances "not make it." Some had to resort to turning the car around and backing up. The model "T" Ford could make Waterman Street in high provided the tank was three-quarters full of gasoline. Gravity feed failed if there were less than three gallons in the tank. College hill was steeper than Waterman hill and required a real running start to make it in high.

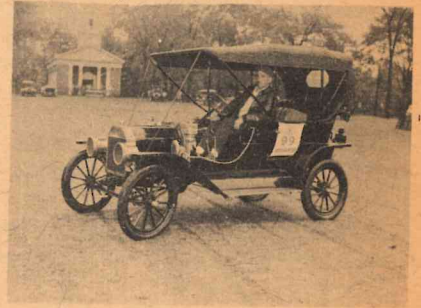
Sales and maintenance requirements of automobiles brought garages to the city with well-trained mechanics. Pugh Brothers on Matthewson Street sold Overland, National, American, Star and Durant. Foss-Hughes Company on Elmwood Avenue sold the Reo motor car and trucks. Maxwell-Briscoe car was made at the old Universal Winding Company plant on upper Elmwood Avenue in Cranston. The company is now the Leeson Corporation in Warwick, makers of textile machinery. The cars were test run back and forth on Elmwood Avenue with a box seat on the chassis, and the test drivers were paid \$10 a week which was considered good pay at that time. The Davis Auto Company had a show room where the Sheraton Biltmore Hotel stands today. They sold Cadillacs and Wintons.

Dutee Wilcox Flint was the New England distributor and dealer for the Ford Motor Company. The beautiful Flint home on Narragansett Boulevard in Cranston is now owned by Harmony Lodge A.F.A.M.

Roger Williams Park was a famous place to learn to drive the early autos, and a wonderful place also to picnic and enjoy a Sunday afternoon.

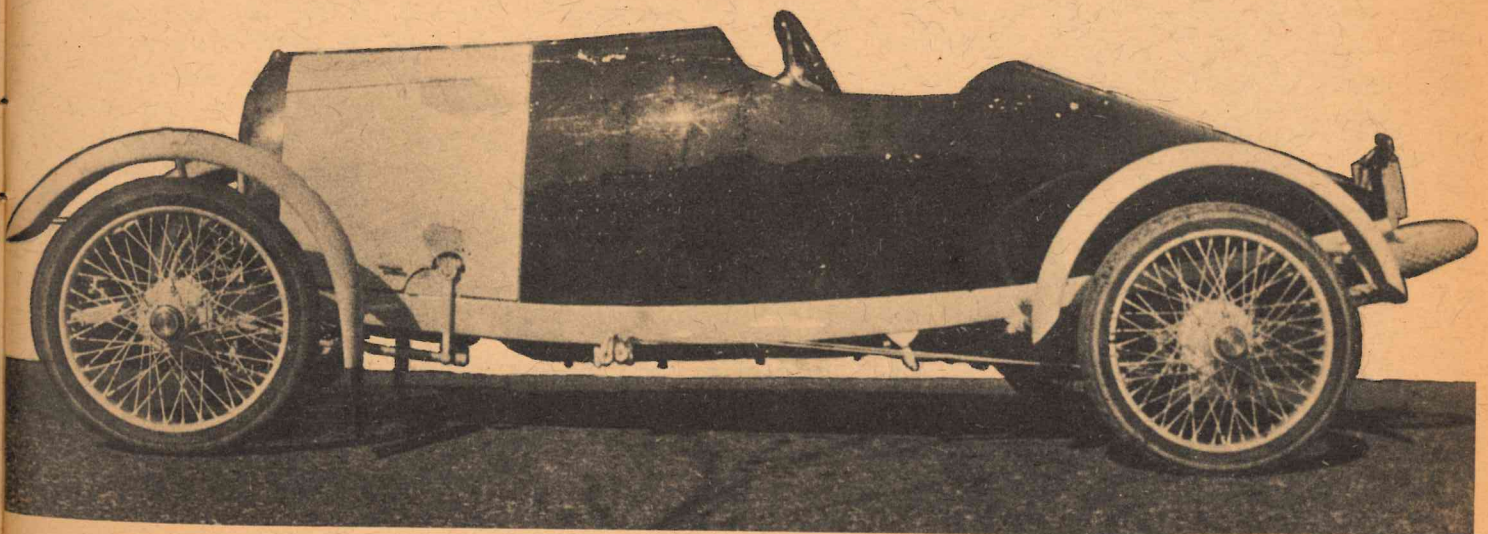
During World War I the gasless Sundays of 1917-1918 curtailed pleasure driving. The children loved this because they could roller skate on the streets to their hearts content. During World War II gasoline was rationed based on need — the privilege to drive a car rested on your sticker "A," "B" or "C."

Joseph and Leon Samuels, who founded the Outlet Company, drove Rolls Royces from Providence to their summer home at Narragansett Pier. The beautiful silver blue roadster was a familiar sight in Providence and South County.



1909 Ford.

Novarra built in Bristol by Sydney Herreshoff in 1916.



1909

The Two-Time Winner of the Vanderbilt Cup

1910

"It Stays New"

6 CYLINDER, 60 H.P. TOURING CAR.

**ALCO**

Magazine advertisement  
for the famous Alco,  
Vanderbilt Cup winner.

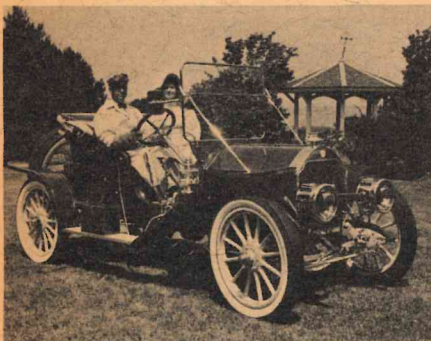
The first automobiles in South County were electric runabouts delivered in the summer of 1896 to Mr. Francis Kinney, a member of the summer colony. A short time after this Dr. Burt Burns took the agency for the Locomobile Steamers and in the summer of 1899 opened an auto show room in the basement of the Rockingham Hotel. On September 12, 1900 the hotel burned and four of these cars were saved. This was perhaps one of the first automobile sales rooms in the state.

Peace Hazard had a 1904 Orient Buckboard that had to be pushed to be started and then one had to run and jump in. This operation was quite a spectacular thing in the eyes of the boys in the neighborhood.

Dr. Rowland R. Robinson, who carries #1 Rhode Island plate, purchased a 1904 Cadillac. Mr. Charles M. Hansen, a master mechanic at the Peacedale Manufacturing Company, bought a 1904 Stanley Steamer with a seat that let down in the front. This car could climb Kingston Hill with such ease that it gave the sensation of riding on a ferris wheel. Mrs. William D. Stedman, mother of Oliver Stedman, was asked to take a ride in the Stanley, so she looked the thing over carefully, but before getting in asked, "How much pressure do you have to carry in the boiler?" "Five hundred and fifty pounds," came the reply. "Do you think I'm going to be blown to glory sitting over 550 pounds?" That ended the ride in a Stanley Steamer for Mrs. Stedman.

In 1896 the state fair was held at Narragansett Park and auto races were the big events of the time. The first race was won by a Riker Electric. The last big race at the park was held September 10, 1915. Two pioneer racing drivers contested the lead for 50 miles, Ralph DePalma and Eddie Rickenbacker, with the former barely edging the victory.

No story about early motoring would be complete without mention of the *Automobile Blue Book*. This volume gave detailed direction for the route to be followed from one town or city to the next. For example, "Route 222 - Newport to Providence, R. I. - 38.8 m. The long route, via Fall River; mostly macadam; one poor stretch entering Warren."



1910 Stoddard-Dayton.

Descriptive outline in Routes 225 and 215.

**MILEAGES**

<i>Total</i>	<i>Intermediate</i>	
0.0	0.0	<i>NEWPORT, Washington Square and Perry Monument. Northeast with trolley on Broadway, past City Hall (on right – 0.2 m.)</i>
1.4	1.4	<i>3-corners; bear left with trolley.</i>
2.1	0.7	<i>“2-Mile Corner,” bear right with branch of trolley on East Road – macadam.</i>
9.1	7.0	<i>Fork at poultry farm (on right); keep right with trolley. (Left is Route 221 to Providence.) Caution for square right turn with trolley (10.5 m.); cross new iron bridge (12.2 m.) to Stone Bridge Hotel.</i>
12.3	3.2	<i>TIVERTON. Turn left with trolley, keeping right with tracks at fork (12.8 m.) upgrade. Where trolley leaves to right, run straight ahead, joining tracks again (from right – 16.4 m.) into South Main Street, past South Park (on left). You are now in Fall River.</i>



1898 Autocar.

To preserve the history and encourage the restoration of the early automobile three national clubs have evolved: The Antique Automobile Club of America, The Horseless Carriage Club and the Veteran Motor Club of America. These organizations have memberships in the thousands with regional and chapter affiliations throughout the United States. Rhode Island clubs are the Rolling Rhodies Antique Automobile Club, Viking Chapter of the Veteran Motor Car Club of America, Model “T” Owners Club, and Model “A” Restorers Club.

Mr. George Waterman, Jr. and Mr. Kirkland Gibson of Providence are two Rhode Island authorities on antique vehicles who have had a wide influence throughout the United States because of their vast knowledge of American and European automobiles and their unsurpassed collection of vehicles.

Memories become more precious with the passing of time. Transition from the horse and carriage to the horseless carriage can best be conveyed by the story of the dignified businessman who bought his new 1904 Cadillac in Providence at the Davis Auto Company and drove it thirty miles home. He entered his driveway with all of the confidence that pride and ownership bestows upon mere man – then drove into the garage and went right through the back wall and emerged covered with storm windows and screens that were stored against that wall. The memory of old dobbin was still pretty strong and our dignified driver had forgotten for only a moment. He failed to push the lever for neutral and the pedal for brake, rather he held the steering wheel and yelled – “WHOA!”

*The Rhode Island home of the original Maxwell.*

