

The Jackson Automobile, Part I

A history by Ronald G. Bean,

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This story begins in Jackson, Michigan long before the turn of the last Century. Jackson is located in the heart of southern Michigan, with Detroit 76 miles to the east, Chicago 208 miles to the west, Cincinnati, Ohio 244 miles to the south and Lansing, Michigan's capital just 35 miles to the north. The city covers an area of nine square miles.

In 1954 the Republican party was formed "Under the Oaks of Jackson" and a bronze tablet commemorating this event stands at the corner of Second and Franklin Streets. Jackson, Michigan was blessed with many diversified industries which was largely responsible for the financial stability not found in many other Michigan cities at the turn of the nineteenth century. One of the first automobile companies to be formed in Jackson, Michigan was the "Jackson Automobile Company" at Park Place and Park Avenue in 1902 by three farsighted business men, namely:

Byron J. Carter, George A. Matthews and Charles Lewis. As of this writing (1970) no automobiles are manufactured or assembled in Jackson, but many of the suppliers to the great auto industry of Michigan and the United States are situated in Jackson County, supplying everything from tires, crankshafts, gears and the many tools and dies required to produce today's fancy cars. One of the silent industries of Jackson, which still serves Michigan residents "only" is the stamping and enameling plant where all Michigan auto license plates are manufactured within the walls of the Michigan State prison which is also located within Jackson County. It is hoped by the author that you enjoy this three part story.



This "woodcut" furnished by the Michigan Historical Commission dates back to the year 1874 clearly depicting an early Carriage Factory of J. W. Hewitt and Son. Note the wide boardwalk and ramp leading into the "paint shop". The men's suits look much the same as they do today, but compare the long draping dress of the lady on the boardwalk



A typical "Village Smithy" prior to the Automobile age. Many of these men and shops were to become auto agencies, auto repair garages, gasoline filling stations and many just disappeared with the disappearance of the horse from the American roads and streets. This was one of the better equipped blacksmith shops! Note the overhead line shaft and both gas and electric motors on the right wall.



This is the main street of Jackson, Michigan. It looks as if a contingent of soldiers are leaving for the Spanish American war. From 1865 until 1898 the United States lived through its greatest length of peacetime in history and it

was also this period in history when great men and inventors such as B. J. Carter, G. A. Matthews, C. Lewis and Henry Ford were getting a foothold to make this country great.

Introduction to one of the three founding fathers of the “Jackson Automobile Company” and later founder of the “Cartercar” of General Motors fame: BYRON J. CARTER



Young B. J. Carter was born to Martha (Crum) and Squire B. Carter in Jackson County, Michigan on August 17, 1863. This was just 18 days after the birth of Henry Ford over in Wayne County, Michigan on July 30, 1863. Much of B. J. Carter's years before he was 21 were spent on his father's farm on West Avenue in Jackson and also out on his Uncle Anthony Carter's farm in Spring Arbor Township. This farming and mechanical experience, much like Henry Ford's early years, was the training ground for B. J. Carter. Early in 1885 when he was 21 years old he moved into the city of Jackson and established himself in the Steam Job Printing and Rubber Stamp Manufacturing business at 167 Main Street. This printing business lasted until 1901, but during this period of 16 years he and his father established two other going businesses within Jackson. In 1894 Byron J. and Squire B. Carter started a bicycle and sundries store on the corner of Courtland and Jackson Streets. In 1896 B. J., along with his father, started the “United States Tag Co.,” again going back into the printing business.

It was during his years of “Steam Job Printing” that he gained valuable experience with steam engines which accounted for the granting of U.S. Patent No. 722,206 to B. J. Carter for the three cylinder steam engine which was the first engine used in the 1902 “Jaxon” steam car. B. J. Carter also applied for and was granted U.S. Patent No. 761,146 on a Friction Transmission which Was the feature of the “Cartercar” of later years.

On July 19, 1902 when Byron J. Carter was 38 years old, he, along with Mr. George A. Matthews and Mr. Charles Lewis, all of Jackson, Michigan signed “Michigan Articles of Association” under Act No. 232 of the Michigan Public Acts of 1885, forming the Jackson Automobile Company. B. J. Carter was its first Vice President, claiming 800 shares of stock. Mr. Carter was associated with the Jackson Auto Co. until the spring of 1905 when he then formed the Motorcar Company in Jackson, featuring a friction drive car of his patent and naming it “Cartercar”. The Motorcar Co. operation was soon moved to Detroit and his untimely death as a young man of 44 years of age came on April 6, 1908 when he passed on from pneumonia, leaving behind his widow and two small children.

CHARLES LEWIS



Charles Lewis was born on April 10, 1853 in Winscombe, a town in the steel manufacturing district of England near Leeds. Mr. Lewis came to America as a boy of fourteen years. For some years he lived in Auburn, New York and later he went to Amsterdam, New York where he became the superintendent of a spring manufacturing plant. Mr. Lewis came to settle in Jackson, Michigan through the meeting of Samuel B. Collins of Jackson who was in the manufacturing business under the name of Collins Mfg. Co. Mr. Collins was at that time associated with certain other progressive Jackson men in the promotion of the Jackson Land and Improvement Co. Mr. Collins entered into an arrangement with Mr. Lewis whereby he and a Mr. Allen would come to Jackson to begin the manufacture of carriage springs under the firm name Lewis & Allen, Mr. Allen being an accountant who came from the eastern plant. It would be a failure in veracity to say that the firm was prosperous from the start. It had its full measure of lean years, for the cash capital which the partners brought into the newly organized business did not exceed \$3,000. That fact spelled hard sledding for the business. After three years, Mr. Lewis purchased his partners' interest. He was a farsighted business man and he knew how to make a good steel spring. In 1897 he added an axle department, thus forming "The Lewis Spring and Axle Company" of Jackson, Michigan. After the year 1900 Mr. Lewis could see the coming of the "Motor Car" and now being a Director of "The Union Bank of Jackson" he, along with Mr. Byron J. Carter and Mr. George A. Matthews, signed the original "Articles of Association" bringing into being the Jackson Automobile Company. Mr. Lewis became the first president of the Jackson Auto Co., holding 800 shares of stock which had a par value of \$10.00 a share. The Jackson Auto Co. was formed on a total of twenty-four thousand dollars of capital stock between the three founders. After a few years with the Jackson Auto Co., Mr. Lewis decided to withdraw from the auto business and devote all his time to the Lewis Spring and Axle Co., an enterprise which by now was Jackson's largest single industry, employing seven hundred men. Later along with the manufacture of springs and axles, he also entered into the manufacture of brake lever assemblies, transmissions and forgings. Its factory occupied a floor space of 320,000 square feet.

Mr. Charles Lewis passed on February 24, 1912.

GEORGE A. MATTHEWS



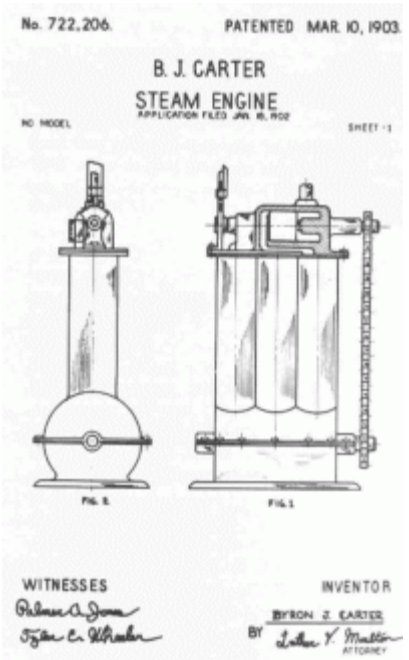
George Adelman Matthews was born in Thompson, a small village in Geauga County, Ohio, November 23, 1852. His

father, Charles Matthews, was a farmer. His mother's maiden name was Ellen Daniels. The early years of Mr. Matthews' life were spent in the village school and in helping with the farm work at home. In his boyhood he developed the ambition and tireless energy which was a potent factor in his successful business career. By continuous application he was able to put aside enough money to take a course in a commercial college in Cleveland, where he laid the foundation of his business knowledge. At the completion of his commercial course, he entered the employ of a large coal company in Cleveland, where he had valuable experience in the details of business and was able to learn the principals of successful management. Seeking a larger field for his activities, he entered the employ of a carriage wheel manufacturing plant at Madison, Ohio. His employers soon recognized his ability and integrity and in a short time he was sent out to buy the materials for their plant. At this stage of his career, Mr. Matthews, having proven his ability as a successful director of manufacturing enterprises, was determined to strike out for himself. He borrowed money and added to it what he had been able to save from his salary. With this capital in 1891, he bought stock in the Fuller Buggy Company of Jackson, Michigan. A year later, at the death of Mr. Fuller, who had been the chief stockholder, Mr. Matthews took over the entire business. About nine years after he was in full ownership of the Fuller Buggy Co., Mr. Matthews, foreseeing the change which was destined to come into the field of transportation, began to direct his attention toward motor cars. It was a natural step from the production of horsedrawn vehicles to the development of the automobile. At this time of his life, Mr. Matthews was a director of the Jackson City Bank, so on July 9, 1902 when the "Articles of Association" were signed, forming the Jackson Automobile Company it was natural for Mr. Matthews to become its first Treasurer. He owned 800 shares of stock in the Auto Company along with the other two founders, Mr. Byron J. Carter and Mr. Charles Lewis.

Mr. George A. Matthews, after a few years with the Jackson Auto Company, gained full ownership and the Jackson Auto Company remained in the Matthews family until it folded in 1923.

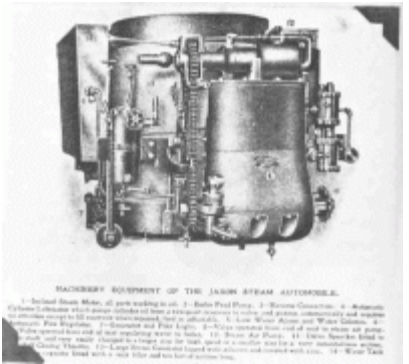


This is what B. J. Carter's share of the company looked like on paper.

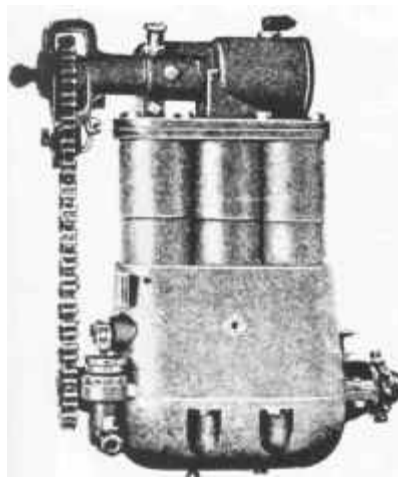


This is one of the drawings which were included in B J. Carter’s patent papers for his three cylinder steam engine. It is interesting to note that the patent application date is “January 18, 1902”. The Jackson Auto Co. was not formed until July 19, 1902. Carter not only being a good mechanic must have been a good salesman and promoter to encourage Matthews and Lewis to form the Jackson Auto Co.

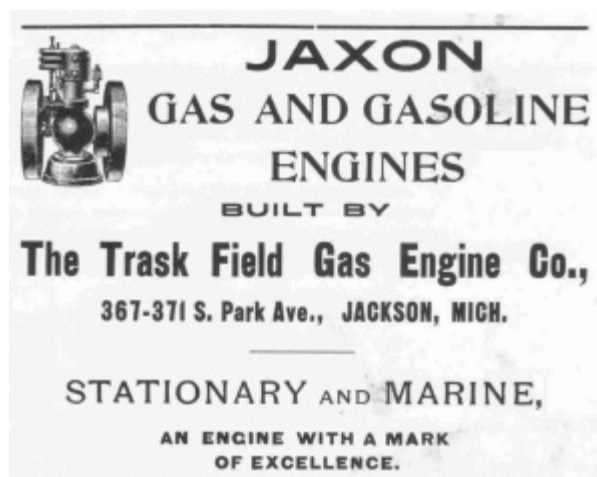
The following is a quotation from the opening specifications of the patent TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: “My invention relates to improvements in steam-engines and more particularly to the valve mechanism of the same: and its object is to provide the same with improved reversing mechanism, to provide a simple, cheap and durable valve mechanism for engines especially adapted for propelling automobiles and analogous uses”. It is interesting to note that Carter was basing his claims on the reversing mechanism, and valve mechanism, more so than the three cylinder steam engine itself.



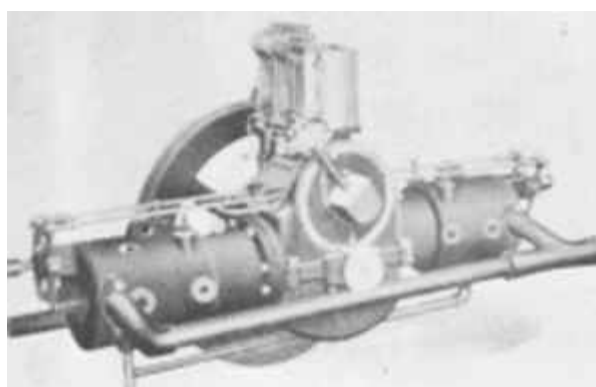
This picture is from page 160 of the January 31, 1903 issue of “The Automobile.” It clearly describes all the workings of the “Jaxon” steam engine used in its first steam automobile. It was rated at 6 h. p.



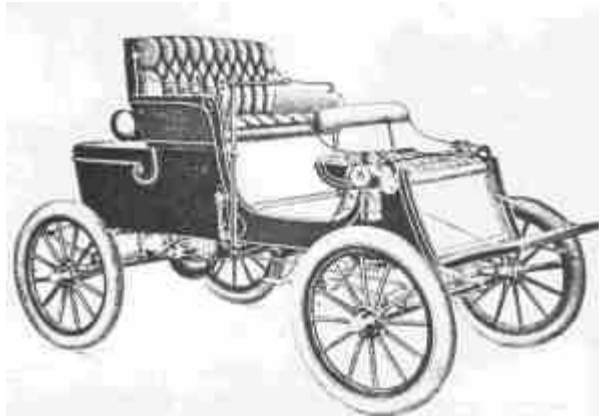
This picture is from page 301 of “The Horseless Age”, February 25, 1903: The picture certainly resembles the patent drawing showing the three cylinders, chain drive to the overhead valving and main drive sprocket on the right hand side.



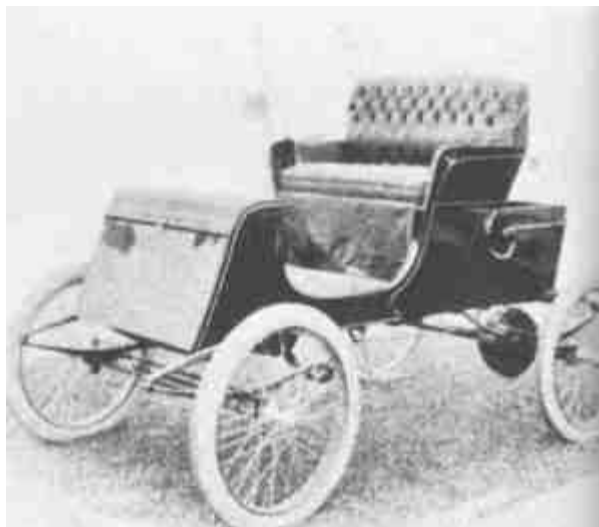
This is an early ad from “The Trask Field Gas Engine Co.” which was located on Park Ave. and due to its close proximity to the Jackson Auto Co. which was located on the corner of Park Ave. and Park Place, it is quite evident that they could have done quite a great deal of the “casting and machine work” on the first Jackson Auto Co. engines, both the steam and gasoline type. Also at one time David D. Buick built engines in Jackson, Michigan before moving all the Buick operations to Flint, Michigan.



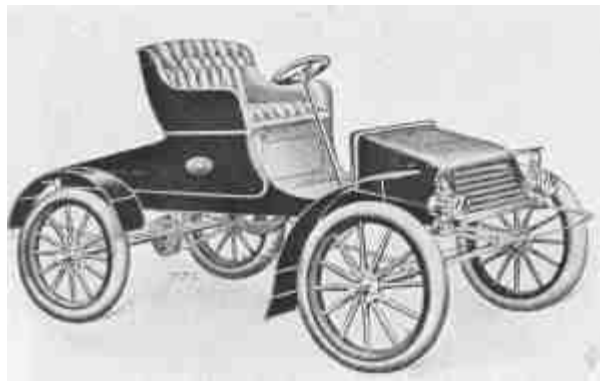
An early Jackson two cylinder engine of the opposed type.



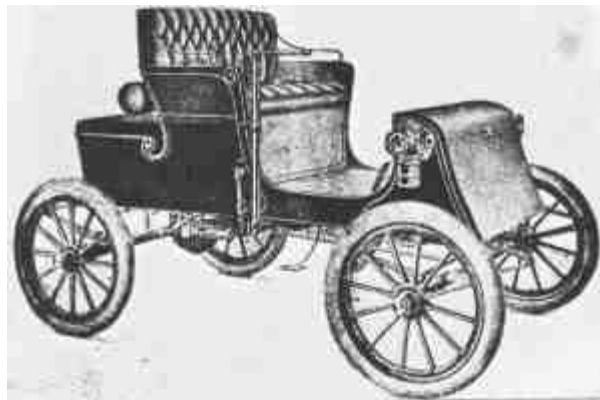
This is an artist's rendition of the 1903 Jaxon steam runabout from page 160 of "The Automobile" for 12-31-1903. One of the interesting highlights of the description in The Automobile is that it came with or without a folding front seat and the seat was "placed so low as to avoid interfering with the view of the driver." How would you have liked to get caught in a rain storm with this open job?



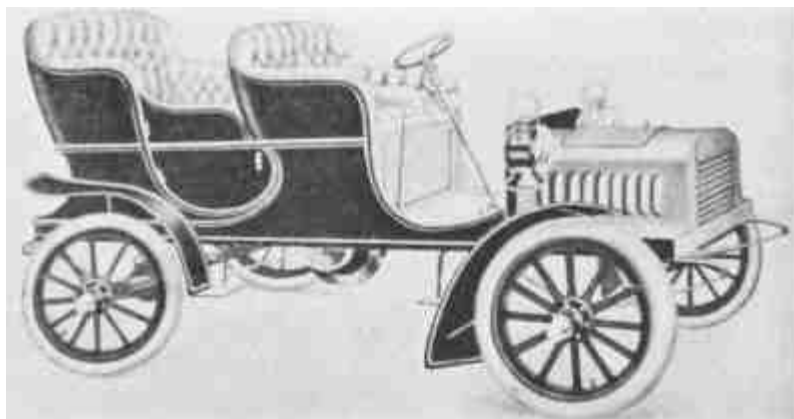
This is an actual photo of the 1903 "Jaxon" steam surrey. Note this picture shows the front seat folded in. Unlike the 'artist's drawings', this surrey features "wire spoke wheels", quite common on many of the early lightweight runabouts. Its features were as follows: a 72 inch wheelbase, double acting brakes, carried 35 gallons of water, 10 gallons fuel, three feed pumps, a crosshead pump, a hand pump and an emergency steam pump. A low water alarm was standard equipment 1903 prices were: The Model A, \$975 and the Model B sold for \$800 less the folding front seat.



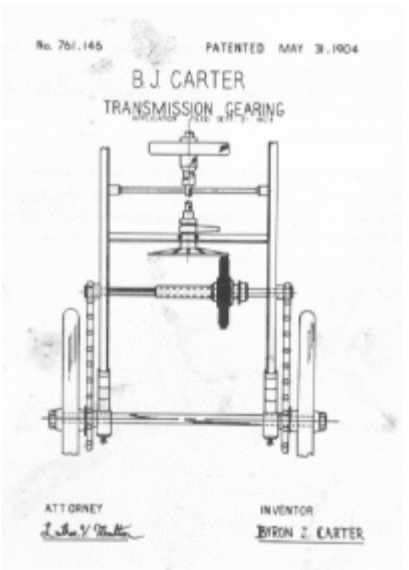
This again is an artist's rendition of the 1903 Jaxon gasoline car. It was a very good design and had the following features: a single cylinder engine which developed 6 h.p. at 700 r.p.m., splash lubrication, water cooled, rotary water pump, 28 x 2Y2 pneumatic tires, a sun and planet transmission, two forward speeds and a reverse, the carburetor was controlled by a foot pedal. The body was designed so that a "tonneau" could be added. Selling price with lamps, tools and extra spark plug was \$750.00. From the Auto History Collection, Detroit Public Library



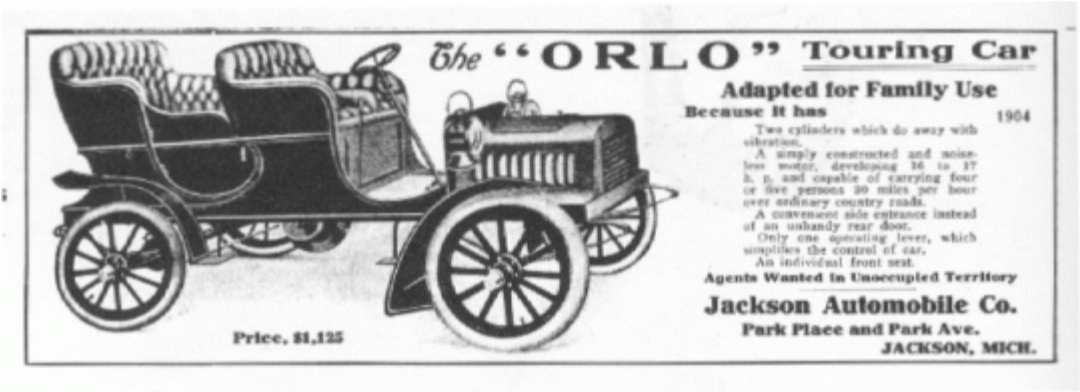
Artist's rendition of the 1903 "Jaxon" steam runabout from page 301 of "The Horseless Age" for February 25, 1903. The caption under the picture referred to this as "Jaxon Model A Surrey". This was a "tiller" steering arrangement from the right hand side. Note the "water level" sight glass and buggy type step and also the artist dolled this up with wood spoke wheels. Quite unlike the actual wire spoke wheels of the next picture.



How many of the "Orlo" models were ever made if any, no one seems to know.. Many of the old timers with whom I talked had never heard of the Orlo name. I've tried very hard to figure Out what it could have been tied into and I couldn't come up with a thing. Any readers have an idea?



It is interesting to note that while B. J. Carter was one of the founders of the Jackson Auto Co. of 1902 that in Sept. of 1903 he filed for a patent on a “Friction transmission and received No. 761,146 under his name in May of 1904. The Jackson line of autos never featured this type of transmission, but B .J. Carter was driving the streets of Jackson with a car having the “Friction Transmission” and I will go into more detail in part three of this series on B. J. Carter.



An ad describing the “Orlo” touring car for 1904. Also note the address of Park Place and Park Avenue. This is before their move to a larger factory which will be featured in series two. Park Avenue is now named “Hupp” St. in Jackson.



This picture is on the streets of Jackson and as far as I can figure it out, it is a 1904 model “Orlo”, judging from the straight radiator position and front springs and upper spring hangers as shown on the preceding “Orlo” ad. The driver

could more than likely be B. J. Carter himself. Anyone reading this story and is not familiar with Michigan, this picture is typical of Michigan roads and streets in mid-winter with a good old snow fall and cold weather thrown in to boot. The early auto industry didn't have the MODERN test tracks as they do today. So testing was conducted on many of the streets and roads as shown above, summer or winter. The Jackson Auto Co. had a quarter mile test track as you will see in Series Two.



1905 Jackson Touring Car. This picture was featured on page 196 of "The Horseless Age" on August 9, 1905. It was a five passenger model with side entrance tonneau body. The motor was a two cylinder opposed job, rated at 18 h.p. It had a Kingston carburetor, a 12 gallon gas tank, jump spark ignition, dry batteries, Splitdorf coils. The engine was water cooled and equipped with a "water" gear pump. The water capacity was 8 gallons. It had a planetary transmission with two forward speeds and one in reverse. It was "chain" driven. It had a wheelbase of 90 inches, 30 x 31A tires, a Brown-Lipe Steering Gear, its weight was 1600 lbs. and had a top speed of approximately 35 m.p.h.



This is a 1905 Jackson Touring car all trimmed out for what might have been an up and coming auto show. My grandfather, Samuel J. Bean, who is 94 and still living in Jackson, Michigan did this type of "Top and Trim" work quite a few years for the Jackson Auto Co. until they went out of business.



Here's a young man out for a test drive in a 1905 Touring. Note that the car has only one upper side lamp. Most all the early cars came without a windshield. A canvas and "Izon" glass windbreaker as shown in the preceding picture was furnished at a moderate extra cost

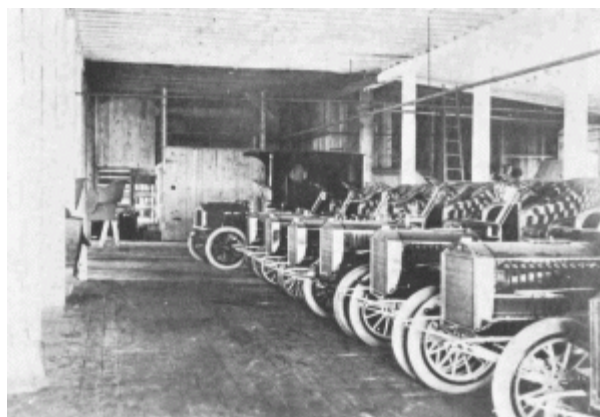


The above is an ad for the 1906 Model-D Jackson which was the two cylinder opposed model.



I conclude “Series One” with this picture of the first Jackson 4 cylinder test car which was destined to become the Model-G for 1906. Prior to this car, most of the Jacksons were 2 cylinder opposed models.

The building in the background was the office portion of the Park Ave. and Park Place factory, quite typical of many of the beginnings of auto companies in the early days. Jackson Auto Co. soon outgrew this factory and moved to a larger and more modern plant. The driver of the above car is Harry E. Matthews who was the son of Mr. George Matthews, founder of the Jackson Auto Co. It is Dr. Harry Matthews of Saginaw, grandson of the above H. E. Matthews and grandson of George Matthews of whom I am greatly indebted to for much of the data in this article. Also the rider on the test car is Mr. Ernest Schiffler of Jackson, Michigan who was a test driver and mechanic for the Jackson Auto Co. who furnished me many of the early photos in this article.



This picture is inside the Jackson plant on Park Avenue and Park Place. Pictured are seven touring cars and one delivery wagon. Note that the cars do not yet have their headlamps installed, but one of the cars has its upper side lamps in place.

About the Author:

Ronald G. Bean was born and raised in Saginaw, Michigan. He is an old car fan, owning two Model “T” Fords: His father, George R. Bean was born and raised in Jackson, Michigan. His grandfather, Samuel J. Bean, who is 94, is a resident of Jackson, Michigan and was born in Marshall, Michigan. His great grandfather, John L. Bean, was born and raised in Marshall, Michigan and his great-great grandfather, John G. Bean, who came from England, settled in what was then the Northwest Territory, shortly after the war of 1812. So here we have an “Auto Story” from a long time “Wolverine State” family.



Mr. Bean has no parts or manuals for the Jackson line of cars: His interest for this article came from his curiosity of Byron J. Carter and the friction drive Cartercar, which will be featured as part three of this series: