

AUTOMOTIVE MILESTONES

This chapter of the Brookside Timeline acknowledges the importance of the automobile in the development of St. Louis Park.

Park's first residents were served well by T.B. Walker's streetcar, which ran from Park's "Industrial Circle" to downtown Minneapolis. Brookside residents came to the area as a result of the 44th St. streetcar, and could also get downtown via bus down Excelsior Blvd. Before the War it was only dad who worked, and mom could get her groceries delivered, so a family car was not necessary (and often not affordable). During the War, cars weren't available anyway. But during the postwar boom, the growth of the city went beyond the reach of public transportation, and newfound prosperity enabled Park residents to finally buy the automobiles that had eluded them for decades.

As a result of this postwar love affair with the automobile, Park's boosters promoted its highways as a tremendous advantage, touting the town as "out where the highways meet." One of those highways was the state-of-the-art Highway 100, described in another chapter of the Brookside Timeline. Another was Excelsior Blvd., a very old road that ran directly into Minneapolis. The intersection of these two highways, located at the northeast corner of the Brookside neighborhood, formed the hub of commercial life in the southernmost part of the Park.

One of the most striking examples of the importance of the automobile to the local economy was all the gas stations that lined Excelsior Blvd. The list of these gas stations is so extensive that this phenomenon is addressed in a separate chapter of the Brookside Timeline.

There are many great sources of information about cars and highways. One extremely detailed website is www.autoshop-online.com/auto101/histtext.html. Automobile factoids in this section also came from *Divided Highways* by Tom Lewis. Although this book is mostly about the Interstate Highway System (394 is the only Interstate relevant to Park), it is full of great information about American highways in general. AAA's website is also interesting: www.aaaminneapolis.com/aboutaaa/tpl_history.asp. Also see the Mn/DOT website at www.dot.state.mn.us/information/history.html.

Although it does not pretend to be comprehensive, the following timeline includes some pivotal national, state, and local events that provide evidence of the automobile's importance in the economic and social growth of St. Louis Park.

- 1850: Congress passed the Minnesota road act on July 8, authorizing five "government roads" (intended for ox-cart traffic), most of which are now abandoned.
- 1858: Shortly after Statehood, the Minnesota legislature began regulating road and bridge buildings, but didn't actually build anything itself.
- 1886: The first successful gasoline-driven automobile was patented by Carl Freidrich Benz, who competed against fellow German Gottlich Wilhelm Daimler. When Daimler died in 1900, the company was renamed after Mercedes Jellinck, the daughter of an influential French distributor. The two companies merged in 1926.
- 1892: The first successful internal-combustion car was built by the Charles E. and J. Frank Duryea.
- early 90's: The Stanley Brothers put a steam-driven car on the market. These proved to be hazardous, especially when one was hit and hot water scalded the driver. The Stanley Brothers also produced the Locomobile, a cheaper car made under the same patent.
- 1893: America experienced a bicycle craze, which started when Albert Augustus Pope invented his "safety bicycle" in 1878. By 1900 there were over a million bicycles on the road, made by over 300 manufacturers. The demand for good roads resulted in the creation of the U.S. Office of Road Inquiry under the Department of Agriculture. This office later became the Bureau of Public Roads. Local bicyclists petitioned the village to build bicycle paths, but traditionally conservative Village fathers were hesitant to spend the money.
- 1894: The first auto show was held in Chicago. A Minneapolis newspaper reporter brought a car to the 1895 bicycle show, and that was considered to be the first automobile in Minnesota. Shortly afterwards, the A.E. Chase Company of Minneapolis became the sales agent for the Oldsmobile, which was known as the "rolling peanut."
- 1897: After much debate, the term "automobile" became the name of choice for the increasingly popular machines, according to the New York Times. It had already entered the French language in 1895.
- 1898: An amendment to the Minnesota Constitution allowed the State to build roadways, although that did not happen until 1905.
- Genevra Delphine Mudge became the nation's first known female driver, navigating her Waverly Electric automobile in New York.
- 1899: The Automobile Club of America, predecessor to the American Automobile Association, met for the first time in New York on October

16.

- 1900: The first automobile showroom opened in New York City.
- 1901: States began to require automobiles to be registered, although plates were sometimes do-it-yourself affairs.
- 1902: The Park Village Council passed a 10 mile speed limit. Dr. John Watson was said to have the first car in the village, a one-cylinder side crank Oldsmobile trimmed with brass that the locals called a gasoline buggy.

There were thought to be about 125 automobiles in Minneapolis.

The American Automobile Association was formed in Chicago. The Automobile Club of Minneapolis was formed in the fall, its stated objectives being "the instruction and mutual improvement in the art of automobilism and the literary and social culture of its members." One of the reasons that Automobile Associations were being formed around the country was harassment from farmers and city officials, some of whom passed speed limits as low as... 10 miles per hour... Opposition came from farmers whose horses were spooked by the "devil wagons," buggy and wagon makers, and blacksmiths, although the latter transitioned into automobile mechanics

- 1903: Minnesota began requiring the licensing of automobiles, except where municipalities had already begun to do so. 920 vehicles were registered that year.

Henry Ford, the chief engineer of the Edison Electric Plant in Detroit, started the Ford Motor Company in a converted wagon factory. The new company produced the first version of the Model A.

Dr. Horatio Nelson Jackson and his personal mechanic/chauffeur made the first cross-country trip from San Francisco to New York. They drove a Winton, and it took 63 days.

Cars were first enclosed and given glass windshields.

- 1904: Ford came out with the Model B. Steering wheels replaced tillers.
- 1905: The State legislature created a three-member highway commission to distribute state road building funds to hard-pressed counties for the first time.

- 1906: Although Hit Parade featured the song "In My Merry Oldsmobile," not everyone was enamored of the automobile. Woodrow Wilson, still the President of Princeton University, was quoted as saying "Automobilists are a picture of arrogance and wealth, with all its independence and carelessness... Nothing has spread socialist feeling in this country more than the automobile."
Ford developed the Model K, which was just as much of a disaster as the "K Car" of the 1980's.
- 1907: Minnesota's first state automobile license laws were enacted. Before that, cities individually licensed their drivers. [from another source: Rhode Island passed the first driver's license laws in 1908, followed by New Hampshire in 1909.]

Local Automobile Associations combined to form the Minnesota State Automobile Association, its purpose to procure "fair and equitable automobile legislation and Good Roads for Minnesota."
- 1908: William Crapo Durant, a buggy maker from Flint, incorporated General Motors by buying several fledgling automobile companies such as the Rapid Motor Vehicle Company. He later lost control of the company and went on to found the Chevrolet.

Ford came out with the Model T, which was adapted from the Model N Runabout of 1906. With an average cost of just \$400, the Model T created the first mass market for automobiles. By 1924, a Tin Lizzie could be had for as little as \$290.
- 1909: Monitor owner SE Davis had a Lozier; previously he had a White Steamer.

GM purchased the Cadillac Automobile Co., which was derived from the Detroit Automobile Company in 1902. Cadillac is named after the founder of Detroit: Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac.
- 1910: In Minnesota, 15,150 cars were registered.
- 1911: GM purchased the Chevrolet Motor Car Company, named after race car driver and designer Louis Chevrolet.

Members of the Automobile Club of Minneapolis built the AAA Auto Club Country Club at Bloomington-on-the-Minnesota, which became a dinner and dancing spot for Club members. Members built a road to the location from Minneapolis. It was rebuilt in 1919 after a fire.

Studebaker first offered cars on the installment plan, starting a slippery slope of American consumer debt.

1912: The Dunn amendment revised the State constitution again, allowing a tax for roads. Roads were classified as either State, county, or township roads.

AAA copyrighted its first map. Rand McNally, a Chicago cartographer, issued his first national road atlas in 1924.

Henry Leland invented a self-starter after a friend of his died of injuries received from the kickback of a hand crank. [perfected by Samuel Kettering]

1913: Automobiles were becoming affordable to working folks. An ad from the Minneapolis Journal dated 11/2/1913 listed Dealers in Automobiles and Accessories, featuring these makes:

N.W. Cole	Oldsmobile
Detroit Electric	Pathfinder
Dreadnaught Moline	Pierce Arrow
FIAT	Rambler
Hupmobile	Stanley Steamer
K-R-I-T	Stevens-Duryea
Locomobile	Winton
Marathon	Velie

Harley Davidson and Indian motorcycles were also for sale downtown as well.

Minnesota had about 45,000 automobiles.

1914: Hungry for good roads, automobile associations were shelling out their own money to build them. The Minneapolis Automobile Club spent several thousand dollars to grade, oil, and improve roads in Hennepin County.

The first manual traffic signal was installed in Detroit, and the first electric one in Cleveland.

Henry Ford began to mass-produce the Model T in "any color so long as it is black." These sturdy, reliable cars were manufactured until 1927. Ford paid his workers \$5 per day, so that they could afford to buy the products they made (and to create a market for the products they bought).

1915: AAA's first emergency road service was started by the Automobile Club of Missouri, and spread across the country by the late 20's.

- 1916: The Federal Aid Road Act was the first Federal law providing funds to the States for rural post roads. In the first year, \$5 million was provided to states - \$75 million over five years.
- The Minnesota Scenic Highway Association was founded to promote to promote auto travel. It encouraged commercial development along roads by naming and marking highways before such identifications were standardized. The Minnesota Scenic Highway was marked with blue signs with a white star. The Yellowstone Trail (Highway 212; at one time part of Excelsior Blvd.) was marked with large rocks painted yellow. Other highways were marked by color-coded poles instead of route numbers.
- 1917: The Minnesota Highway Commission was abolished, and the Minnesota State Department of Highways was authorized. The first Commissioner was Charles M. Babcock of Elk River.
- At the end of WWI, the debate between the horse and the auto was decided in favor of the machine. One reason was that it required five acres of land and 20 man-days of work per year to keep a horse.
- Cars began to come with heaters.
- 1918: The Ten Thousand Lakes of Minnesota Automobile Association was founded.
- 1919: Thomas Harris McDonald became Chief of the Federal Bureau of Public Roads, then under the Department of Agriculture. He would keep his position until the Eisenhower Administration.
- On February 28, the Secretary of War was authorized to distribute excess war material to the Department of Agriculture to distribute to the states for use in constructing highways. The excess material included trucks tractors, and other heavy equipment. By the end of 1920, Minnesota had received 632 trucks.
- 1920: With the help from a campaign waged by the Minnesota Highway Improvement Association, the Minnesota legislature approved the "Babcock Amendment" to the state constitution, which initiated the state's system of 70 trunk highways. The amendment required a vote of the populace, and the day before the election, a parade was staged in Minneapolis, complete with slogans such as "Pull Minnesota Out of the Mud!" and "Good Roads for All Loads." The 7,000 miles of highway were intended to connect all county seats and cities in the state. Under this plan, many state and federal highways were moved to new locations. By now there were 324,166 motor vehicles registered in the state. Automobiles were here to stay.

- 1920: Pneumatic tires made for a gentler ride, but made one vulnerable to flat tires.
- Minnesotans owned approximately 300,000 automobiles.
- 1921: Park had no car dealers so many residents bought their cars from Dahlberg Brothers Ford at 1028 Excelsior Blvd., Hopkins. In 1953, Ward F. Dahlberg was the Business Manager, and Earl A. Dahlberg was the General Manager.
- The first drive-in restaurant, the Pig Stand, opened in Dallas.
- The 1921 Federal-Aid Highway Act first created the notion of a national highway system.
- 1922: Minnesota's 150 tourist campgrounds served 500,000 tourists that summer. There was concern about the safety of the drinking water and cleanliness of the camps.
- An early police car, dubbed the "Bandit Chaser," was put into action in Denver. It featured a Cadillac engine and a machine gun on the hood.
- Ford bought the Lincoln Motor Company. Half the cars on the road, in America and Europe, were Model T's.
- The first back-up lights were introduced, on the Wills-St. Clair.
- 1923: Minnesota banned billboards and advertising along its trunk highways.
- 1924: Radios first appeared in cars.
- John and Horace Dodge assembled 1,000 per day until they were bought out by Walter P. Chrysler in 1928.
- 1925: The Minnesota Department of Highways was formed.
- James Vail opened the first "motel" in San Luis Obsispo, California.
- Hertz offered the first rental car, called the "Drivurself."
- Walter P. Chrysler established the Chrysler Corporation.
- 1926: The Oakland Automobile Co. introduced the first Pontiac.
- 1927: Ford replaced the "tin lizzie" with the bigger and more comfortable Model A, but Chevy outsold Ford for the first time.

- 1927: Curbside mail boxes were first installed in Houston.
- 1928: The Chrysler Corporation sold Dodges, DeSotos, Plymouths, and Chryslers.
- 1930: The State began to require tourist camps to provide clean facilities and drinking water, and to reduce fire hazards.
- Howard Buster Johnson opened a restaurant outside of Boston, the first of hundreds of Howard Johnsons nationwide.
- L.V. Dowling protested against the proposed erection and operation of a Tourist Camp on Excelsior and Highland [36th] and Fern [Lynn]. Somehow that doesn't add up.
- 1931: The Minnesota Bureau of Tourism was formed as a division of the Department of Conservation.
- The "School Police" was established in St. Louis Park. The Automobile Club of Minneapolis began providing belts and badges to schools in Hennepin County in 1928.
- 1932: The Roadside Development Division was formed as a division of the Minnesota Department of Highways. See the chapter on Highway 100's Roadside Parks.
- Ford replaced the Model A with the first V-8.
- 1933: The first drive-in theater opened in Camden, New Jersey on June 6. The field was large enough to hold 500 cars, and the screen measured 40 x 50 ft. At their peak, there were over 4,000 drive-ins across the country.
- During the Depression, the Federal government funded road construction to the tune of over \$1.8 billion, putting millions of unemployed men to work.
- 1934: With the opening of Highway 7, George Seirup (brother of J.K.; see below) established Park's first automobile dealership, a sub-dealer for Dahlberg Ford - on Wooddale Avenue. George constructed a showroom and garage and received \$25 from Dahlberg for each car sold. This was the only automobile dealership in the Park until after WWII. In the 30's, Fords were available for \$25 down and \$25 a month.

- 1934: The Volkswagen Beetle was begun when Adolph Hitler ordered Dr. Ferdinand Porsche to develop a small car "for the folks." Porsche had been trying to find interest in his small car, and although he was not a Nazi, he took up the challenge.
- 1935: Cities discovered the money that could be made from parking meters.
- 1936: Highway Chief McDonald toured Germany and admired the Reich Autobahn, built by Dr. Fritz Todt. During the war, General Eisenhower would observe that it was easier to disrupt train traffic than road traffic, making the interstate highway system a national security concern.
- 1938: Buick introduced turn signals.
- The Volkswagen Beetle (so-named by an American reporter) was put into production at a factory in Wolfsburg - a town created for the workers at the factory. Production soon turned to military vehicles, including the German version of the jeep.
- 1942: Production of all domestic vehicles was suspended on January 30 for the duration of the war, as car companies retooled to produce planes, tanks, etc.
- 1944: The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1944 provided states with funding to improve secondary rural and urban roads. Minnesota's State Aid Division was created in 1945 to carry out this activity.
- 1945: After the war, the British command restarted production of the VW Beetle, and it became popular in Europe.
- 1947: Radar, developed by Hamline graduate Dr. Robert M. Page, was first used to catch speeders. It was still new in 1955, as evidenced by song of the same name by Mr. Bear and His Bearcats.
- 1948: Inspired by the P-38 "lightning" fighter plane, Harley Earl at GM placed the prototype of what became gigantic tailfins on the 1948 Cadillac. Tailfins reached their peak around 1959-60, "the year when the Cadillac Eldorado convertible took on the appearance of the Batmobile."
- 1950: VW started production of the VW Bus, officially called the Transporter.
- 1952: Charles Kemmons Wilson opened his first Holiday Inn, named after the movie, on a road leading into (or out of) Memphis.

- 1953: The Government lifted production restrictions required for the Korean War, and car culture went into overdrive.
- Cadillac introduced air conditioning.
- Anderson Cadillac** opened, located at 5100 Excelsior Blvd., across from Miracle Mile. This was the site of the Waddel farm, owned in the 1920's by C.B. Waddel, a Hennepin County Commissioner and likely descendant of Sarah E. Waddel, who owned a strip of land along Excelsior Blvd. that ran all the way to 36th Street according to an 1889 map. The firm paid \$14,000 for the house. The dealership, headed by Victor E. Anderson of St. Paul, was apparently a spinoff of Warren Cadillac. The building was designed by architects Lang & Raugland. Its 16,000 square feet occupied four acres, and featured a glass enclosed showroom. Victor Anderson was a former director of the Minnesota Automobile Dealers Association. Reuben L. Anderson, Vice President of the new Dealership, was a plumbing and heating contractor, and was said to have held the contract for remodeling the White House in Washington. At the time, Anderson Cadillac was only the second Cadillac dealer in Hennepin County. In 1965, Anderson Cadillac moved to 7400 Wayzata Blvd.; in 1966 the site was briefly the home of Riviera Imports.
- 1954: At his confirmation hearing to be appointed Secretary Defense, Charles "Engine Charlie" Wilson, the President of GM, was (mis)quoted as saying "What's good for General Motors is good for the nation." He actually said it the other way around, "and vice versa." The press had a field day.
- The Nash Kelvinator Corp. merged with the Hudson Motor Car Co. to become the American Motors Corporation.
- 1956: The Interstate Highway System was officially created with President Eisenhower's signing of the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956. The law provided \$25 billion over 12 years, created the Highway Trust Fund, and required that the highways accommodate projected traffic levels of 1972, which is the year the system was to be completed. The first 8 miles were opened outside of Topeka, Kansas on November 14. In 1991, Congress officially dubbed the system the Dwight D. Eisenhower System of Interstate and Defense Highways.
- 1958: Congress passed a bill creating a "National System of Interstate and Defense Highways." The law included provisions for the taking of private property, required public hearings, and called for consultation with the Federal Civil Defense Administrator and the branches of the Military. Emphasis was placed on the civil defense angle: "the 'Interstate System' is essential to the national interest and is one of the most important objectives of this Act."

Roads leading out of cities would facilitate evacuation in the case of nuclear attack. Also, the road had to be wide enough to handle tanks being hauled on the back of flatbed trucks; unfortunately, many bridges cleared only 14 feet, where 17 feet were required. The Interstate System was restricted to 41,000 miles, and was required to be "adequate to accommodate the types and volumes of traffic forecast for the year 1975." The Bureau of Public Roads was designated under the Commerce Department, headed by the Federal Highway Administrator.

- 1962: I-35 was dedicated near Hinckley in the fall.
- 1964: I-94 opened between Minneapolis and St. Paul. Coincidentally, the first Skyway opened in downtown Minneapolis.
- 1965: At the behest of his wife, President Lyndon Johnson signed the Federal Highway Beautification Act, which required billboards to be at least 600 feet from the highway and junkyards to be camouflaged.
- 1965: Ralph Nader wrote Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-in Dangers of the American Automobile.
- 1969: Minnesota created the Department of Public Safety, which took over the Highway Patrol and Drivers License Bureau from the Highway Department.
- 1971: VW Beetles reached their peak production, with 1.2 million.
- 1976: AAA Minneapolis moved to its current location in St. Louis Park, on top of the former garbage dump. Its original headquarters was in the Radisson Hotel and later the Plaza Hotel in downtown Minneapolis. In 1922 it was moved to a townhouse at 13th and LaSalle. In the 50's, the townhouse was demolished and the operation moved to a remodeled auto agency next door. That, in turn, was overtaken by the Loring-Nicollet redevelopment, which resulted in the move to Auto Club Way in the Park.
- Mn/DOT was created to "develop, implement, administer, consolidate, and coordinate state transportation policies, plans, and programs."
- 1978: The last VW Beetle was produced in Emden, Germany. It continued to be produced in South America until the late 1990's.