

A photograph of an automotive assembly line. A silver car body is positioned on a red conveyor belt. A yellow robotic arm is welding the car's body, creating a bright orange and yellow spark trail. The background shows other parts of the factory, including more car bodies and machinery.

MICHIGAN *History* **FOR** *kids*

SPRING 2002

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE

Automobile

INDUSTRY

What's

INSIDE...

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Why is this horse so bored?
To find out, turn to page 4.

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THE EDITOR SAYS...



This issue covers the beginnings of the automobile industry in Michigan. In 1896 several Michiganians drove horseless carriages. In a few years, factories in Lansing, Detroit and Flint were producing so many cars that Michigan became the world's automobile capital. The photo on the cover—taken at a General Motors plant in Detroit—shows how computer-controlled robots are used to make cars today. Photo: American Iron and Steel Industry

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Ask the Professor



WHY is Michigan the world's automobile CAPITAL?

—PAT from DEARBORN

men to the state. As one historian explains, the men who made the automobile industry a reality—Ransom Olds, Henry Ford, William Durant and many others—were “in the right place, at the right time and with the right talents.”

During the 1890s, many talented and determined individuals who were interested in automobiles lived in Michigan. These men set off a chain of events that caused the automobile industry to prosper in Michigan. Their efforts drew more inventors and business-

Henry Ford Museum/Greenfield Village



Henry Ford with
his Model T

In The NEWS



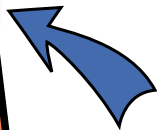
AP

New Cadillac CTS models roll off Lansing's new assembly line on January 9, 2002.

ON JANUARY 9, 2002, the General Motors Corporation (GM) opened its first new car assembly plant in twelve years. The plant, which makes the new Cadillac CTS, is located in Lansing. The plant's 800 workers make 90 cars each day, but the workers say by April they can make 160 cars each day. GM has great plans for the plant. Using hundreds of robots and more than 1,600 people, the plant will eventually make at least three different Cadillac models at the same time. The Cadillac plant is not the only new plant coming to Lansing. GM is also building a new \$1 billion plant near Lansing that will make SUVs.

In the last issue
we asked you...

What would the
camera see if your
picture were taken in
the 1860s?



“I think all the
pictures were
black and white.
I also think that
all women had to
wear dresses.”

—MICHELLE from MIDLAND



—ALLISON from OKEMOS

WHAT DO YOU THINK?



—BRANDT from OKEMOS

**TELL
US!**

Show or tell us what your
first car will look like.

Send your response
and pictures to:

Michigan History for Kids
Attn: What Do You Think?
Michigan Historical Center
P.O. Box 30741

717 W. Allegan Street
Lansing, MI 48909-8241

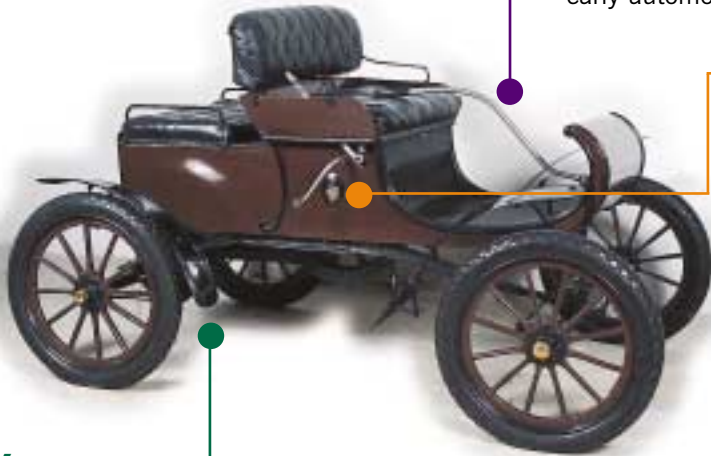
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CAR TALK

Many new words were added to the English language because of the invention of the automobile. How many of these auto-related words do you already know?



Tiller

A long handle, like a boat tiller, used to steer early automobiles.

Crank

A metal handle attached to the engine was turned, or cranked, to start early automobile engines.

Horseless carriages

The first automobiles were called horseless carriages because they were carriages with engines attached.

Chassis

The rectangular steel frame that supports the car body.

Dashboard

The front panel of a car where driving instruments are located. Horse-drawn carriages had dashboards first. Dashboards saved the driver from being “dashed” by flying stones thrown up by horse hoofs.

Horsepower

A measure of how much power an engine has compared to the power of a horse.

Fender

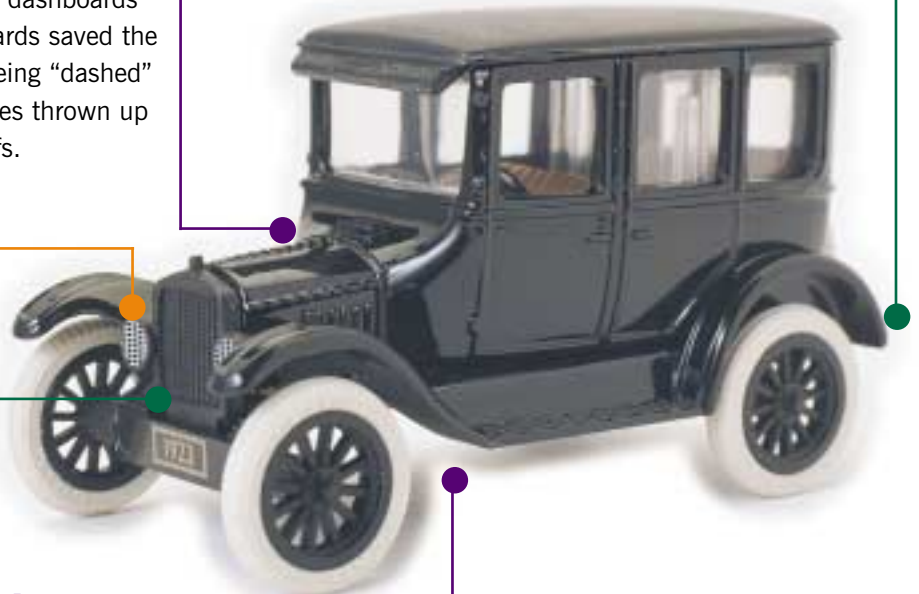
A long piece of metal over the wheel that keeps mud and rocks from flying upward.

Headlights

Lights on the front of the car.

Radiator

A device on the front of a car with hollow tubes through which water flows to cool the engine by radiating heat.



Running board

Many early cars had a ledge to step up on to get into the car. Today, some SUVs and trucks have running boards.

GENTLEMEN,

Start Your

Engines!

At 11:00 P.M. on March 6, 1896, Charles B. King, a 28-year-old Detroit engineer, seated himself in an open carriage. The carriage looked like most other vehicles on the Detroit streets, except there were no horses pulling it.

King's "horseless carriage" moved down Woodward Avenue to the surprise of pedestrians. The next day, a Detroit newspaper noted that King's contraption was powered by a gasoline engine and could run up to eight miles an hour. The paper called it "a most unique machine."

After seeing the many new inventions at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, King, who had studied engineering for years, began experimenting with a gasoline-powered engine. He then attached the engine to a carriage.

Charles King was the first Detroiter—and possibly the first Michiganiaan—to drive a gasoline-powered horseless carriage in public. But vehicles like King's were being driven in Europe and elsewhere in America in the mid-1890s. After he drove down Woodward Avenue, King predicted that horseless carriages "will in time **supersede** the horse." Amazingly, it only took a few years. The automobile caused great changes in America and at the center of these changes was Michigan.

supersede
to replace
something

Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library





On March 6, 1896, Charles King (right) and his assistant, Oliver Barthel, drove King's horseless carriage in Detroit.

Three other Michigianians who helped Michigan become the automobile state were Ransom Olds, Henry Ford and William Durant.

On the morning of June 4, 1896, 33-year-old Henry Ford drove his “quadri-cycle” out of a shed behind his house in Detroit. Five weeks later, Ford went to hear a speech by Thomas Edison, the

great inventor. He asked Edison if there was a future for the gasoline-powered combustion engine. Edison pounded his fist on the table and said, “Young man, that’s the thing; you have it. Keep at it.” Ford did keep at it.

Another Michigianian who was working hard at the same time was Ransom E. Olds, who

On August 11, 1896, Olds drove his horseless carriage in Lansing.

In 1901, Olds set up a factory in Lansing to make cars. Olds’s earliest cars were too expensive for most people to buy. He then decided to make a small horseless carriage called a “Runabout.”

It sold for \$600. The Runabout was a simple vehicle with a curved dash. It looked like a carriage. The Runabout was steered by a tiller, or handle, that curved up from the floor. By 1903, Olds was selling 4,000 cars a year.

Olds was the first Michigianian to manufacture cars in large numbers. He also was one of the first

businessmen to prove **profits** could be made by producing small, low-priced cars.

Olds’s success led others to make cars.

profits
money taken in beyond expenses



This advertisement for an Oldsmobile Runabout shows how horseless carriages were becoming more popular than horses.

lived in Lansing and built steam engines. After visiting the Columbian Exposition in 1893, he started tinkering with gasoline-powered engines.

Ransom E. Olds

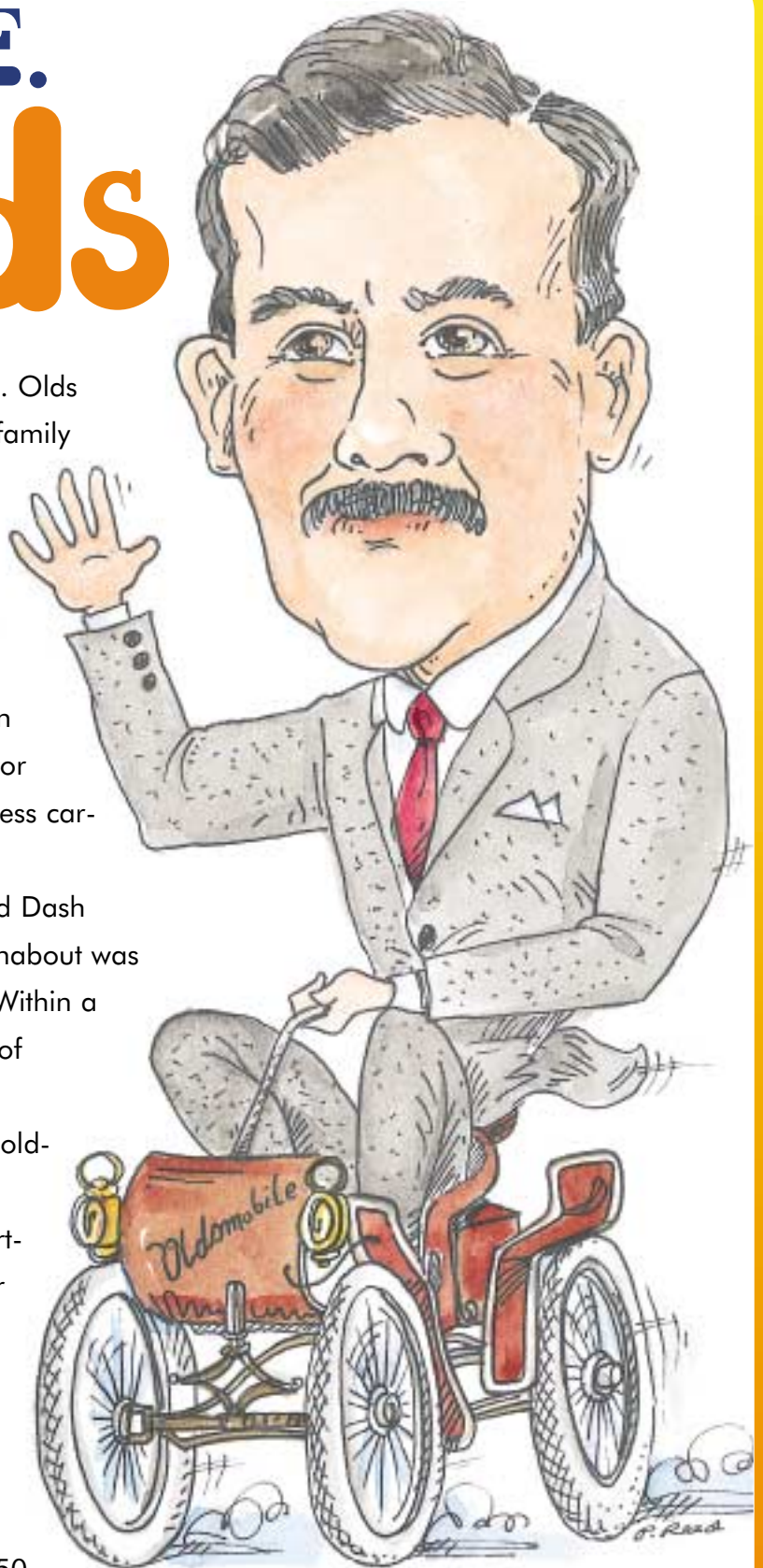
BORN IN OHIO in 1864, Ransom E. Olds moved to Lansing, Michigan, with his family around 1880. There, he worked with his father making steam engines. In 1887, Olds built a three-wheeled, steam-powered horseless carriage.

In 1897, the year after he drove his gasoline-powered horseless carriage in Lansing, Olds organized the Olds Motor Vehicle Company. Soon, Olds's horseless carriages were called Oldsmobiles.

His most famous car was the Curved Dash Runabout. Introduced in 1900, the Runabout was lightweight, reliable and inexpensive. Within a few years Olds was selling thousands of Runabouts.

In 1904 a disagreement with stockholders forced Ransom E. Olds to leave Oldsmobile. That same year, Olds started a new Lansing firm—the Reo Motor Car Company. Olds said that since his name had been used with the first company only his initials were needed for this new company. Reo remained in business until the early 1970s.

Ransom Olds died in Lansing in 1950.





The “Tin Lizzie” was rugged and dependable.

In 1903, Henry Ford founded the Ford Motor Company. Five years later, he introduced the car that made him famous—the Model T. According to Ford, the car was to be “constructed of the best materials [and] after the simplest designs that modern engineering can devise.” It would be, Ford said, “so low in price that no man making a good salary will be unable to buy one.”

For nineteen years, the Ford Motor Company made only one car—the Model T. When production ended in 1927, more than 15 million Model Ts had been built. The Model T came in one color—black—because that was the paint color that dried the quickest. Americans nicknamed it the “Tin Lizzie” because it rattled so much they said it was made of tin. The Model T was cheap and dependable. Almost

anyone with a pliers or a screwdriver could keep it running.

Eventually, the Model T cost less than \$300. As Ford had hoped, his Tin Lizzie “put America on wheels.” The Model T also made the Ford

Motor Company the world’s largest automaker.

One man who challenged Ford’s number one position was William Durant. In 1904, Durant, a millionaire who lived in Flint, was introduced to a car that David Buick, a Scottish immigrant, had created. Although Durant disliked horseless carriages, he changed his mind and purchased Buick’s company. Four years later, the Buick was the most popular car in America.

Henry Ford

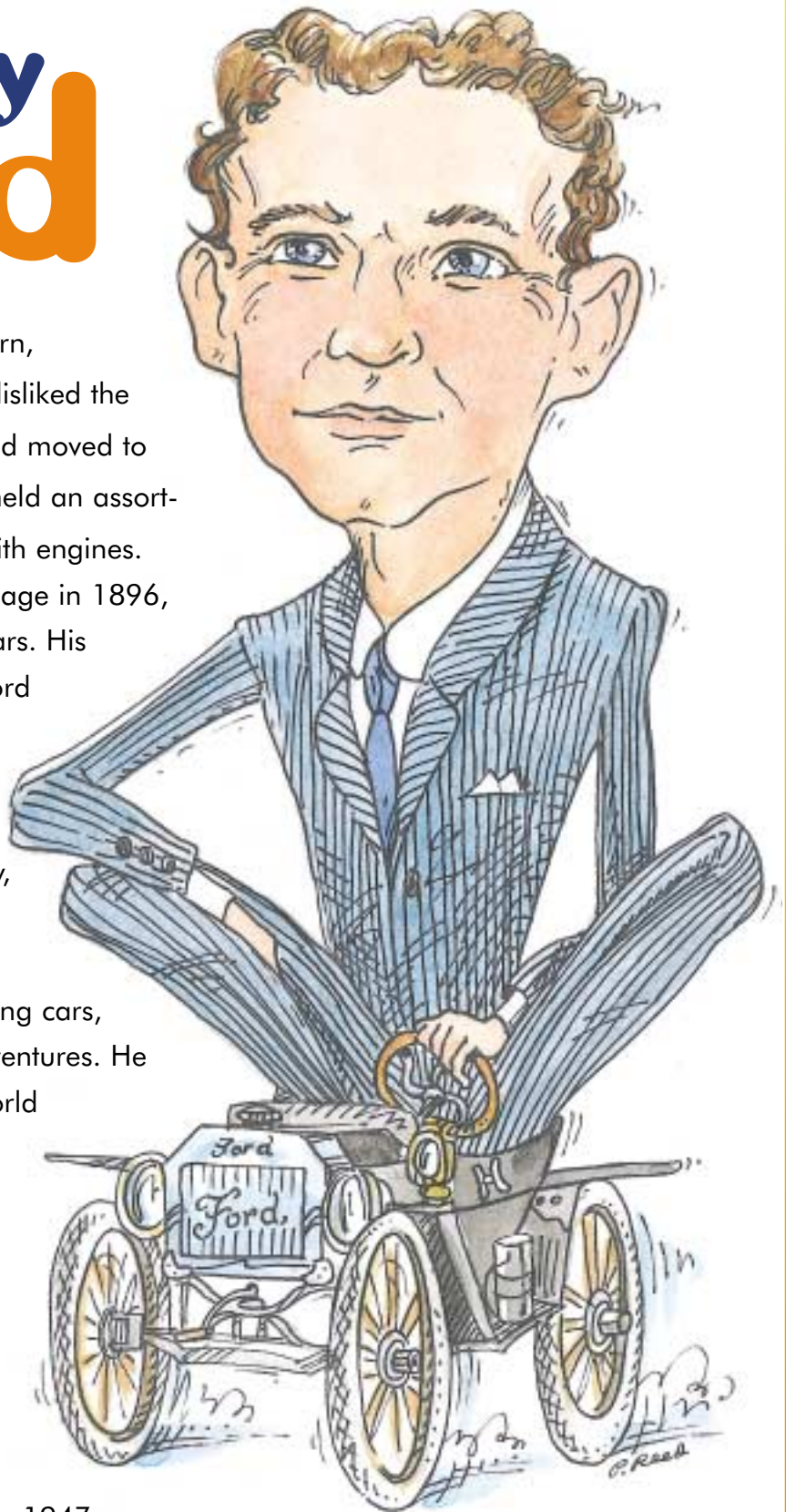
BORN ON A FARM in Dearborn, Michigan, in 1863, Henry Ford disliked the hard work of living on a farm and moved to Detroit as a teenager where he held an assortment of jobs. He also tinkered with engines.

After driving his horseless carriage in 1896, Ford struggled to manufacture cars. His first two companies failed, but Ford found success on his third try. In 1903, the Ford Motor Company was organized. Five years later, he introduced the Model T. Today, the Model T remains one of the most popular cars ever sold.

Because of his success at making cars, Henry Ford tried other business ventures. He even made airplanes. During World War II his company made B-24 bombers at a factory at Willow Run, which is near Ypsilanti.

One of Ford's most lasting achievements is the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in Dearborn. Today, it is one of the nation's largest museums.

Henry Ford died in Dearborn in 1947.



Durant saw great things for the automobile industry. In September 1908, he formed the General Motors Company (GM). Durant was not an inventor like Olds or Ford. He was good at advertising and selling cars. Durant believed that GM should offer customers a range of different cars. Within a few years, GM sold Buicks, Oldsmobiles, Cadillacs,

The last member of the Big Three was the Chrysler Corporation. It was founded by Walter Chrysler (below).

Chevrolets and Pontiacs.

Other men besides Olds, Ford and Durant helped Michigan become the auto state. In 1911, Charles Kettering invented the electric ignition. It was first used in 1912 Cadillacs. Before Kettering's invention, a car was started by using a heavy hand crank. This could be dangerous. The electric ignition made it easier to start a car, allowing more women to drive.

As World War I started in 1914, Michigan was the automobile capital of the nation. During this time, half of all cars built in America were Fords. Following the war, General Motors became the nation's largest car manufacturer. During the 1920s, the Chrysler Corporation was formed. Although there were other car companies, Ford, General Motors and Chrysler became known as the "Big Three." By the late 1920s, 8 of every 10 cars in the United States were made by the Big Three.

The Big Three opened factories across the nation, but their headquarters remained in the Detroit area. Even today, over a century after Charles King drove his horseless carriage down Woodward Avenue, Michigan remains home to America's automobile industry. ■



William C. Durant

BORN IN MASSACHUSETTS in 1861, William C. Durant and his mother moved to Flint, Michigan, in 1872. His grandfather, William C. Crapo, served as Michigan's governor from 1865 to 1869.

Durant became a millionaire making horse-drawn carts and wagons. In 1904, he bought the Buick Motor Car Company. Four years later, Durant organized the General Motors Company (GM). He became president of GM, but after the company had financial problems Durant was fired.

Durant then organized a new company around a low-priced car designed by Louis Chevrolet, a French engineer and race car driver. The popularity of the Chevrolet allowed Durant to become president of GM again.

Durant was a great salesman, but he spent money recklessly. By 1920, GM was once again in financial trouble and Durant was forced to give up the presidency.

Durant organized another car company, but it failed after a few years. In 1946, the founder of GM—what later became the world's largest automobile manufacturer—died penniless in New York City.

