

The Automobile Arrives in Washburn

During the first decade of the Twentieth Century, a quite different vehicle arrived to share the roads with the horse-drawn wagons and carriages—the automobile. The gasoline powered automobile quickly displaced the earlier steam and electric powered vehicles, and soon appeared on the streets of the major cities. High volume production of cheap automobiles, which the Ford Motor Company began in 1910 with the Model T, made the automobile affordable to rich and poor alike. "Automobility," as it was then known, was soon viewed as a necessity, not just a convenience.

The first automobile in Bayfield County was purchased by a Bayfield resident in March 1907. George Glazier, Washburn's all-around daredevil, brought the first automobile to the city in October 1903.

The Times noted that "it is a large tourist car and George is using it for hauling passengers about the city." The second automobile was purchased in September 1911 by the lumber man, Monroe Sprague, the News reporting that it was "a two passenger Brush roadster and a very neat and thoroughly durable machine" In May 1912 O.A. Lamoreaux and E.E. Kenfield, owners of the box factory,

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each purchased a Cadillac, bringing the total of cars in Washburn to five. These cars were equipped with all the latest improvements, including the self-starting device. By the summer of 1914 there were 25 automobiles in Washburn, the Times noting that this was quite a few more than a year ago. The first dealership and garage in Washburn, selling Ford and Studebakers and doing repairing, washing, and "oiling," was apparently the Washburn Garage, opened in 1914. It occupied an old livery stable, an apt symbol of the inevitable replacement of the horse by this new mechanical steed, located on the north side of Bayfield Street, between Central Avenue and First Avenue West, about where the Olson Lumber Company is located. By 1915 the Washburn Garage, now selling Overland and Ford automobiles, was joined by the Service Garage, located on the north side of Bayfield

Street, between First and Second Avenues West, which sold Studebaker cars, as well as providing repairs and other services. While three makes of automobiles, Ford, Studebaker, and Overland, were sold by the two dealers in Washburn, other makes, such as Dodge and Willys-Knight could be ordered from out of town. The Overland was particularly popular, with 17 models from \$635 to \$2,000. There were so many automobiles (along with motorcycles) that the city council was compelled to pass an ordinance setting a speed limit of 12 miles an hour, while the chief of police warned parents not to allow their children to play in the streets, where they might impede the automobiles or be injured by them. The change from the old horse culture to the new automobile culture was symbolized by the purchase of an automobile by the local blacksmith and wagon maker.

Automobiles in those days were rather primitive machines. They were either open or covered by a fabric roof with side curtains for protection against rain; there was no anti-freeze for the cooling systems and the tires were extremely fragile and had to be frequently dismounted and repaired. Except for a few expensive

models with self-starters, the engines had to be hand cranked to start them, resulting in numerous broken arms. In addition to knowing how to drive the car, an owner also had to be able to service and repair it since garages were few and far between. And with no anti-freeze, oil that congealed in the cold, inadequate winter tires, no protection from the weather, and abysmal roads, autos had to be "laid up" for the winter. No wonder the farmers, with their faithful teams of horses, laughed at the city slickers who spent their money on such useless contraptions.

Trips by car that today would not be given a second thought were big news then. For example, in June 1910 the News ran a two-part article describing a long trip overland by a party from Bird Island, Minnesota to Ashland, a distance of about 400 miles. The News reported that "they found the roads excellent, for the most part, and made good time, except in the cities, where they lost considerable time in keeping within the speed limit, as the habit of hitting a pace of from 20 to 40 miles an hour, according to the roads, was becoming too strong to resist. Hills posed a problem, however, requiring chains and pushing."