Mississippi Valley Region Past Activities

Celebrate Good Times

This song title certainly reflected the mood of the people living in Davenport, Iowa and Rock Island, Illinois — April 22, 1856 marked the opening of the first railroad bridge to cross the Mississippi River. Three steam locomotives pulled eight passenger cars across the bridge, allowing people to reach the great opportunities of the western expansion and to travel from eastern Iowa to New York City in 42 hours. Regrettably, the adulation and celebration lasted for only two weeks.

FIRST BRIDGE ACROSS THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

On May 6, 1856 the steamboat "Effie Afton" lost power after passing through the swing span of the new bridge. The steamboat hit the Iowa-bound section with great impact, toppling a wood stove in one of the cabins, and causing a fire that completely incinerated the boat and the span itself.

With growing animosity between the railroad and the steamboat operators during the three-year construction, this was heralded as a victory for the boat operators. A lengthy court battle brought an Illinois attorney to the forefront; his name was Abraham Lincoln. The battle between *Hurd v. Rock Island Railroad* was billed as the battle of the century. Lawyers for the steamboat operators claimed the Effie Afton was "forcibly driven by the currents and eddies" caused by the bridge piers, resulting in the destruction of the boat and bridge by fire. Known for basing his defense on fundamental facts, Lincoln found a young boy sitting by the river. Together they configured the speed of the river current under the bridge and insinuated the destruction was deliberate. Although this case ended with a hung jury and the case ultimately dismissed, it opened more U.S. Supreme Court litigation and the railroad ultimately winning.

The bridge was replaced immediately during the litigation, and has been modified to the present bridge opened in December 1, 1896. The current bridge has served largely unchanged for 100+ years.

The Quad Cities and the Car

A legacy from the wonder years of carmaking: the spirit of invention and the will to try

More than 20 automobile companies formed to fail or flourish, even if only fleetingly, in what is now known as the Quad Cities of Illinois and Iowa, between 1897 and the mid-1920s. The stories that follow are brief glimpses of those times of bravery and bravado, when a buggy company could transform itself into a manufacturer of motor vehicles, or when a clever man with a mechanical bent might take it into his mind to turn his stable into a factory, and make automobiles.

Some of these stories speak of far more elaborate operations, and far more lavish rewards. But the more typical story is one of short-lived hope: a company forms, lasts a year or two, and disappears – but not without a trace.

Those companies did leave their traces here. The Quad City area, with a population today of more than 300,000 people, has remained a hub of engineering savvy and manufacturing strength; it has long been the farm implement capital of the world, home to present and past farm and industrial equipment manufacturers including John Deere, Moline Plow Company, Rock Island Plow Company, International Harvester, J.I. Case, Caterpillar, Minneapolis-Moline, and many others that have passed from the scene.

But over the course of a century, these communities have been the beneficiaries of an inventive spirit and a determination to try, and those values call out to us over the years from the brief annals that follow.

Blackhawk Moline, Illinois (1903)

In 1897 W.E. Clark of Moline, a former Deere & Company employee, built his first automobile – a single-cylinder, air-cooled car with a fan mounted on the flywheel.

In 1901 the Clark Manufacturing Co., announced completion of a single-cylinder 4 h.p. air-cooled runabout, but the car was not marketed at that time. In 1902, the decision was made to call it Blackhawk, and in 1903 it was finally ready for market.

By this time Clark had come up with a two-cylinder model as well. Both were placed on the same chassis, the engine mounted in the rear above the frame; its flywheel fit underneath, positioned horizontally; the transmission was planetary. Steering was by tiler. Prices: $750 for single-cylinder runabout; $850 for double-cylinder phaeton.

The company survived less than a year. W.E. Clark was back in 1906 with Deere.

Deere-Clark
Moline, Illinois
(1906)

Type "B"

DEERE

MADE AT THE
FACTORY OF

DEERE-CLARK MOTOR CAR CO.
MOLINE, ILLINOIS
U. S. A.

Deere
Moline, Illinois
(1907)

For two years following the demise of the Blackhawk (see Blackhawk), W.E. Clark of Moline sought financing to try again. Late in 1905, he persuaded Charles Deere to help. Deere bought the defunct Clarkmobile Company of Lansing (no relation to W.E. Clark), moved the tools to Moline, and established the Deere-Clark Motor Company in January 1906.

This car was watercooled. The Deere cars that followed in 1907 were offered as tourers, limousines and runabouts. "A Car Designed to Satisfy" the brochure said.

But the Deere people weren't satisfied enough to back the project for long. Also, Charles Deere, the prime sponsor, died. By the end of 1907, it was decided that Deere should stick to agriculture and the company name was taken off the car. Deere also took its money out of the company, but the firm recognized and produced another car, the Midland, which survived a little longer.*

Moline Daily Dispatch - June 22, 1907

Honors for Deere Auto In Big Race
Perfect Record Secured In 700-Mile "Sealed Bonnet" Contest
In New York - Silver Cup Is The Prize

The Deere-Clark Motor Company this afternoon received a wire from New York City saying that its car entered in the four-day "Sealed-Bonnet" Race came through with a perfect score and was awarded a silver cup. For the car to secure a perfect record, it must have been run 700 miles in four days without the slightest attention to the motor. Deere participated in the Glidden Tour with a Deere 30.

Davenport
Davenport, Iowa
(1902)

Although the Davenport Cycle Works of Davenport, Iowa, reported itself in the automobile manufacturing business in 1902, if any cars were produced at all, they were few. The factory was closed that October when the landlord complained that the rent was overdue.*

Hathorn
Davenport, Iowa
(1914)

C.E. Hathorn's cyclecar had a Spacke engine, a 100-inch wheelbase, a 36-inch tread, and a long belt drive. It was a tandem two seater with a metal body and leather seats. Although not an underslung, it appeared low to the ground due to the fitting of quarter-elliptic springs.

The American Cyclecar reported in early 1914: "Recently the car was taken out in a severe snowstorm and negotiated a notoriously steep hill near Davenport on high gear, overtaking a roadster which had considerable difficulty in making the grade."

Quantity production was promised soon – but it never happened.*

Huber
Davenport, Iowa
(1909)

In 1909, just before the Meteor Car Company of Bettendorf folded, Emil Huber left the company intent on building a car of his own. He built a prototype – a four-cylinder runabout, 100-inch wheelbase, underslung frame – which he drove that summer in the Glidden Tour, probably hoping to find potential investors enroute. He did not.*

Illinois
Moline, Illinois
(1907)

In January 1907 the Moline Pump Company exhibited its new line of gasoline engines at the Chicago Automobile Show. In February the firm announced plans for a 12-horsepower runabout ($650) and a 20-horsepower runabout ($850) using the new engines. The cars would carry the trade name "Illinois."

"Production would begin," Moline Pump said, "as soon as a number of old sheds were razed and an addition made to the present factory."

The records indicate the company made and sold engines several years, but the cars only in 1907.*

Little Mac
Moline, IL (1909)
and
Muscatine, IA
(1930 - 32)

On June 13, 1929, Little Mac, an experimental model of the Moline Motor Car Company, appeared on the streets of Moline. Its inventor was Clayton R. Frederickson. It had a wheelbase of 81 inches, it was powered by a Continental engine capable of 80 mph, and it could go 40 miles on a gallon of gasoline.

The company was using the old Moline Elevator Company at the foot of 17th Street to make these experimental models.

Herb and Ralph Thompson, two attorneys from Muscatine, Iowa, refinanced and reorganized the company as the Thompson Motor Corporation and relocated the plant on East Fourth Street, at a site now owned by Hon Industries. The company headquarters was at 210 Walnut Street in Muscatine.

Two models were produced, two-passenger coupes at $350 and truckettes at $500.

Meteor
Bettendorf, Iowa
(1906-1909)

Arno Peterson, son of the owner of the area's largest department store, and his friend, Bodo Liebert, both enthusiasts, established the Meteor Auto Works in 1906.

They announced three models to the press in 1907, but the cars didn't arrive. Then, with family backing, the Meteor Motor Car Company was formally established in March 1908 and the first car was completed in May. Total production is not known; factory photos indicate it was a going concern.

But a fire in the summer of 1909 put an end to the company. Although the drawings, jigs and patterns were saved, the loss was too heavy for the company to continue, and in January 1910 the Bettendorf Axle Company acquired its assets. Today the Twin Bridges Motel sits on the site of the Meteor factory.

Midland
Moline, Illinois
(1908-1913)

Early in 1908, with $100,000 of capital stock, the Midland Motor Car Company succeeded the Deere-Clark Motor Car Company. The man behind it all was Charles H. Pope.

The first 30/35-horsepower four was introduced the same year, and a companion 25/30-horsepower was planned for 1909. Deere participated in the 1909 Glidden Tour with a Midland 35. In 1910, horsepower was up to 40 and 50, although prices remained in the $2,000 range. Pope retired as president in 1911, and the Deere estate took over control. Production in 1912 was 200 cars

In 1913, Midland became the largest bankruptcy case ever handled in central Illinois district court up till that time. Company liabilities totaled $450,000. In March 1914, it was disclosed that Midland had been solvent at the time of receivership, but gross irregularities in the firm's operations were everywhere.

Company books and papers disappeared, as did 40 or 50 cars – mysteriously, without serial numbers. Much of the blame for the shenanigans was placed on C.H. Pope, who had died in the meantime.

The Midland was dead. A proposed merger with the Colby in Mason City, Iowa, fell through and the factory equipment was purchased by John McLaughlin for $22,000 in January 1914. The real estate was purchased – also for $22,000 – in March, by Harry Schriver, mayor of Rock Island.

Midland

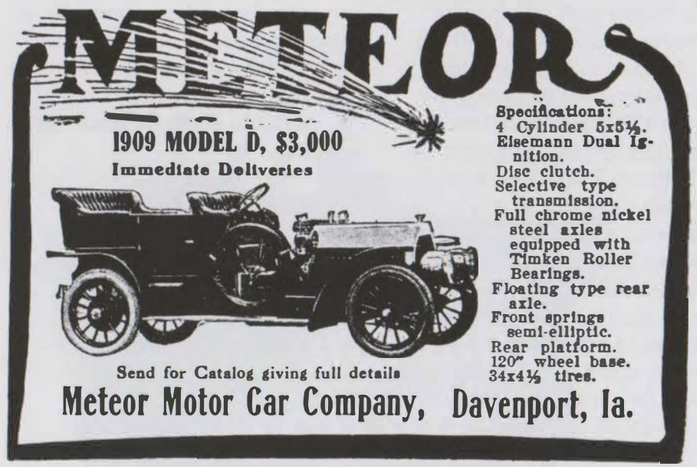
Regester
Rock Island, Illinois
(1900)

T.L. Regester built an automobile in 1900 powered by a horizontal 2-cylinder, 4-stroke engine fitted under the forward seat of a two-seater carriage. The engine weighed 205 pounds; the complete vehicle, 850 pounds. The final drive was a single chain. It was claimed the car could go as fast as 20 mph.

Regester, who had been factory foreman for the Rock Island Plow Co. before this venture, is not known to have built another car.

Mierley
Davenport, Iowa
(1902)

Dr. A.W. Mierley, Davenport, was among many American physicians who built an automobile for his own use at the turn of the century. But unlike most, he attempted to organize a company to manufacture it: He did not succeed.*



Moline
East Moline, Illinois
(1904-1913)

Moline Knight
East Moline, IL
(1914-1919)

W.H. Vandervoort, assistant professor of mechanical engineering at the University of Illinois and a former classmate, Orlando T. Root, organized the Root & Vandervoort Engineering Co. in 1899, to manufacture stationary and portable gasoline engines. They incorporated the Moline Automobile Company four years later, to manufacture medium-sized 2- and 4-cylinder cars.

"The Car of Unfailing Service," the slogan claimed; indeed, Moline automobiles participated in several endurance contests including the 1910 Glidden Tour, with three vehicles, and again in 1910, and won the Chicago Trophy. The cars were proudly referred to as Dreadnaught Moline.

In 1914 the battleship emblem was replaced by Sir Galahad, "the most perfect of King Arthur's Knights." The Moline version, the only sleeve-valve version with cylinders cast en block and the only one featuring thermo-syphon cooling, cost $2,400.

In 1920, the name was changed to R & V Knight.

Pugh
Davenport, Iowa
(1901)

Speaking of the gasoline auto he had just built, William J. Pugh said: "I have been offered $500,000 for the invention, but I do not think that I will sell it. My plan is to have the invention patented in all the countries of the Old World, and these patents I will sell. But the United States I will keep under my control. I don't have to sell the thing anyway."

Later in 1901, Pugh showed up in Chicago to buy machinery to take back to the Pugh & Bofinger machine shop, and expressed hopes of getting enough capital to establish a large factory, but that did not happen.

R & V Knight
East Moline, IL
(1920-1924)

The initials "R & V" referred to Orlando T. Root and W.H. Vandervoort, who were in partnership back as far as 1899. In 1904 the partners organized the Moline Automobile Company. Through 1919, they manufactured the Moline, then the Moline Knight.

The new R & V Knight, a sleeve-valve engined car, was a continuation of the Moline Knight. Production for 1920 totaled 767 cars; 450 were built the first half of 1921.

But the success of the firm was undermined by the death of W.H. Vandervoort and by the fact that debts incurred for a major expansion to handle wartime government contracts had not been repaid when the postwar depression set in. The economic downturn forced the company out of business. Its assets, except for the rights to the 4-cylinder R & V engine, were sold to Moline Body Corp.

Orlando Root committed suicide in 1928.

J.C. Reuter built and patented a steam automobile in 1900 and spent nearly two years trying to drum up interest in getting it manufactured. There is no evidence that he succeeded.

Reuter Steam
Davenport, Iowa
(1900 - 1901)

The Stoltenburg & Reimers Company was organized during the fall of 1903 with capital stock of $5,000 to manufacture, repair and sell automobiles. Partners involved were Henry Stoltenburg and John Reimers. Whether any cars were ever actually manufactured is doubtful.*

Stoltenburg & Reimers
Davenport, Iowa
(1903)

Arnold A. Samuels, who lived at 1120-11th Street, Moline, in 1899 built a 670-pound electric runabout with a 2-1/2-horsepower motor and a dry cell battery weighing 184 pounds. In late fall, he notified the automotive press of his achievement, but there's no record that he proceeded to manufacture any cars.*

Samuels Electric
Moline, IL
(1899)

During the fall of 1913, F.W. Skinner reported his plans to manufacture a cycle car. When the car arrived on the market, its trademark was Zip.*

Skinner
Davenport, IA
(1913)

Stephens-Moline Freeport, IL (1916 - 1924)

The Stephens Company was organized in 1870 in Moline and was a thriving business up until World War I. The company entered the automotive field, noting it had been "forced to embark in this line due to the decline in the demand for farm vehicles and buggies."

The car that resulted from this decision was named after G.A. Stephens, whose father had founded the company he now headed. The prototype was designed by E.T. Birdsall (former designer of the Selden, among others).

The Stephens Salient Six was on the road in the spring of 1916. Continental engines were used at first; in 1918 overhead valve units from Root & Vandervoort Engineering Company of East Moline were substituted.

In 1919 John North Willys acquired controlling interest of the company, though it remained a separate entity from the Willys-Overland empire. Many of the same directors stayed on board.

In 1920 the Moline company bought out Roor & Vandervoort; they had previously purchased about 80 percent of R & V output.

Because a crisis in its farm equipment business brought devastating losses to the firm in the early 1920s, the Stephens motor car department was taken out of the parent company in mid-1922 and reorganized as the Stephens Motor Car Company.

In 1923, for the first time, two models on two separate chassis were offered. The cars were extensively restyled. Disc or wire wheels were provided on the Sport, the most rakish Stephens ever built. Production ended the summer of 1924 when the parent company announced that it would concentrate on farm implements, even though the previous year had been Stephens' second best ever – 4,400 cars were sold. Total production for seven years was about 25,000 cars.

Velie Moline, Illinois (1909-1929)

When Velie started building cars in 1908, 270 other companies across the country were doing the same thing. By 1928 only two men owned and managed the motor vehicle business they had founded – Henry Ford and Willard L. Velie.

The Velie Carriage Company was a late entry into the buggy-building field. It was incorporated in 1902, when many companies were switching over to horseless. Willard Lamb Velie wanted to do the same but decided to start with what was traditionally needed in rural Illinois until the area became more accustomed to the automotive idea.

The Velie Motor Vehicle Company was incorporated July 2, 1908. The Velie 30 appeared at auto shows by year end.

The first engine was a 4-cylinder made by American & British Manufacturing; 1000 were sold the first year. Velie used a Lycoming for the Model 40 in 1910, but made its own four-cylinder engine in 1911.

A Velie was in the 1911 Indianapolis 500 race and finished 17th in a field of 46.

Velie participated in the final Glidden Tour in 1913 with two vehicles. The AACA and VMCCA revived the Glidden Tours.

Central Fall Meet

August 23-25, 2007 · Moline, IL

Vehicles by Class

Class # / Award Sought	Vehicle #	Name	Make	Model	BodyStyle
01C					
1st Jr	5000004	Kolzow Sr, David A	Auto Red Bug	1930	Buckboard
05C					
1st Jr	1024662	Hoffman, Jack	Mustang	1948	motorcycle
1st Jr	1025015	Appleton, Deborah	Harley-Davidson	1952	Motorcycle
Repeat Pres.	18947	Appleton, Deborah	Harley-Davidson	1953	Motorcycle
05D					
1st Jr	5000025	Mohr, Paul J	Gadabout	1978	Moped Bicycle
Sr	19722	Chandler, David	Pryer	1979	3 Wheel
05E					
1st Jr	5000039	Harville Jr, Jack	Cushman	1959	Eagle Scooter
Repeat Pres.	16929	Mitchell, Don	Cushman	1961	Super Eagle
05F					
1st Jr	5000008	Chandler, David	Cushman	1956	Step-Thru
1st Jr	5000009	Chandler, David	Cushman	1945	Step-Thru
1st Jr	5000010	Chandler, David	Cushman	1951	Military Package
Sr	19723	Chandler, David	Cushman	1949	Step Thru
Repeat Pres.	17196	Shore, John L	Cushman	1946	Step-Thru
Repeat Pres.	18116	Mathiowetz, Charles	Comet	1947	Scooter/Pickup
05G					
1st Jr	5000022	Whitmire, Art	Vespa	1981	Scooter
05H					
Repeat Pres.	18181	Worthington Jr, William	Yamaha	1977	Motorcycle
09A					
DNJ	5000034	Rhoads, Chuck	St. Louis	1903	Runabout
Repeat Pres.	9999	Anderson, Vicky J	Sandusky Courier	1904	Roadster
09B					
1st Jr	1024927	Quirin, Daphne M	Maxwell	1910	Runabout
10A					
1st Jr	5000040	Beek, Craig M	Ford	1910	Coupe
1st Jr	5000041	Beek, Craig M	Ford	1912	Roadster
1st Jr	5000047	Husted, Lester M	Ford	1912	Touring
Sr	18982	Beek, Craig M	Ford	1910	Town Car
Sr	18983	Beek, Craig M	Ford	1910	Touring