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The Pioneer Phase of Automobiles in London and Area

Dan Brock

Two articles, appearing in *The London Free Press* on March 8, 1911 and June 21, 1939 respectively, give differing accounts of who owned the first automobile in London.¹ A third article, Ed Bernard's "Reminiscences of a Motorist – Vintage of 1903" appeared about 1932 in an issue of *The Canadian Motorist*, published by the Toronto Ontario Motor League. While Bernard's original article has not been located, much of its contents can be found in two of Charles S. Buck's articles which appeared in July 1972.²

None of these accounts help to pin down the year that the first car was purchased by a Londoner. There is no agreement as to who owned London's first car. Nor do these articles mention when an automobile was first seen on its streets. The purpose of this article is to attempt to answer these questions.

Somewhat further afield from London, it is believed that the first automobile in Elgin County was the Stanley Steamer, purchased in 1899 by Harry Sheldon and Edwin Jenkins, proprietors of the Aylmer Iron Works. It cost \$600 (about \$16,452 today), weighed 350 lbs. and had a 15" x 15" boiler. Gasoline, at a cost of half a cent per mile, was used to produce the steam that powered it. This vehicle also became "The first automobile to travel the streets of St. Thomas" on the afternoon of Tuesday, November 7, 1899.³

The first mention of "horseless carriages" relating to London was on the evening of June 12, 1899, when members of the local Trades and Labor Council formed "a co-operative company to operate automobiles" in the city. Known as the London Automobile Company (Limited), it elected a board of directors and placed its capital stock at \$50,000, to be divided into 10,000 shares at \$5 per share.⁴ The Trades and Labor Council was motivated by the then vicious London Street Railway Co. strike and wanted to provide Londoners with an alternate means of transportation. This meant it would not be covered by the city by-laws governing the rights of the LSR Co. Ultimately, however, the Council was permitted to operate horse-drawn buses during the strike.

Meanwhile, at a labour-related mass-meeting in Victoria Park on July 31st of the same year, Thomas Bengough, president of the Still Motor Company (Limited), Toronto, proposed to the Council to supply the newly-formed London Automobile Company with automobile cars resembling what we know as buses. One such "car" was already built and could be delivered in four weeks or before the opening of the Western Fair in September. It would take four to six months to build another. Each would cost \$3,500 to \$5,000 and would carry 25 persons, "or 40 at a pinch." This vehicle "could be fitted up for 17-horse power" and "would run 24 hours, and would cost five or six cents a mile for power." Unlike the

illustration in the below image provided by Bengough, who is believed to have been a younger brother of the famous Canadian cartoonist John Wilson Bengough, the vehicles Thomas was suggesting for London's streets "could be fitted with rubber tires."⁵



Illustration of the Still Motor Company "Automobile Car" Used elsewhere and proposed for London. The carriage wheels appear to be entirely of metal.

As it turned out, Bengough's offer was not accepted even though he "had found that many leading citizens would have financially assisted the project."⁶

Bengough, however, had not given up on Londoners and at the Western Fair that September unveiled one of the Still Motor Company's "horseless carriages." This was not a steamer, as one might have suspected for this era, but an electric "autocar." Its selling price was \$750.

The Still Motor Company had just begun producing automobiles in 1899. William J. Still had invented the electrical equipment necessary to "be attached to ordinary carriage bodies, the storage battery being only about one-third the weight of any other." That same year, Robert Gray of the newly-incorporated William Gray & Sons Company Ltd. of Chatham began building the carriages for The Still Motor Company.

These carriages, "an ordinary 'Ivanhoe'— a handsome two-seated carriage of fine proportions," were married to Still Motor's 5 hp, 300 lb., air cool engine. The one shown at the Western Fair is believed to have been the first automobile seen in London.⁷



W. J. Still at the tiller of an Ivanhoe Electric

It's believed that Still's Ivanhoe Electric was shipped to and from London by rail for the Western Fair of 1899. The first automobile, there were in fact three, appeared on London's streets on the evening of Sunday, June 24, 1900.

Three couples from Cleveland, Ohio—Edward T. and Mary Strong, Walter S. and Suzanne Root and Albert S. and Jane Ingells—had travelled to Buffalo by boat. They arrived in London, in three automobiles via Buffalo, Niagara Falls, St. Catharines, Hamilton and Woodstock. The next morning, June 25th, they left London, en route to Cleveland, via Delaware, Warwick, Sarnia, Courtright, St. Clair, Detroit and Toledo.⁸

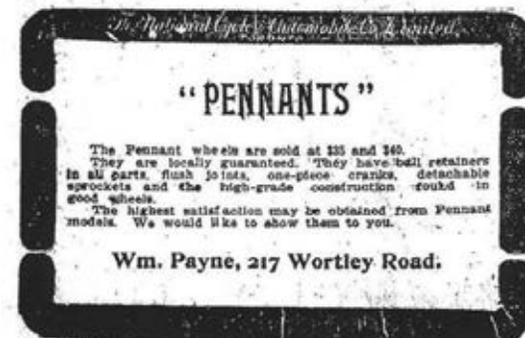
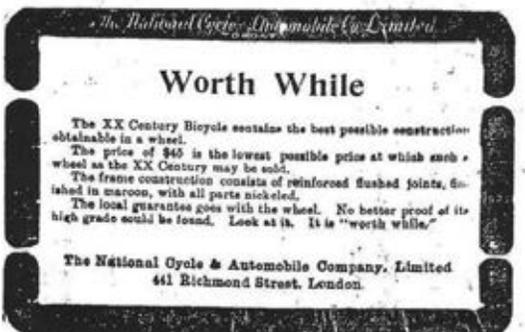
The first advertisement, using an automobile, in a London newspaper appeared in *The London Advertiser* on December 7, 1899, for Johnston Bros. who had a bakery on the northwest corner of South and Wellington streets. Heretofore, the advertisement for XXX Jersey Cream Bread was illustrated with a horse and buggy.



Earliest newspaper ad in London illustrating an automobile. (*London Advertiser*, Dec. 7, 1899, 8:2)

The Johnstons were ahead of the times, as bicycles were still the fashionable mode of transportation and it was the cycling clubs which were then the advocates of better streets and roads.⁹ For some years hereafter, bicycles would be mentioned at least once in virtually every issue of the local daily newspapers.

Interestingly, by the latter part of May 1900, the bicycle store of the Canadian Typograph Co. Ltd. On the west side of Richmond Street, south of Queen's Avenue, was renamed The National Cycle & Automobile Company, Limited. John C. Drake remained its manager.



First appearance of bicycle advertisement for The National Cycle & Automobile Company, Limited (*London Advertiser*, May 21, 1900, 3:1)

It's believed Wm. Gurd & Co. of Dundas Street and Wm. Payne of Wortley Road, both of whom sold bicycles in their respective establishments, were partners in this new venture. It would also appear that these forward-thinking men were preparing to open an automobile dealership if this new fad, still on the horizon, should catch on.¹⁰

One year later, the *London Advertiser*, with amazing prescience, declared that the automobile, "still in its initiatory stage,...is destined to be to the coming years even more than the bicycle has been to the past decade....Men who are constantly watching the trend of public affairs have written that the automobile will rise similarity [as has the bicycle] in the public estimation, and indeed it does not need a minute study of the situation as it is today to appreciate the truth of their statements."¹¹

Not everyone, however was so insightful. In 1903, after Henry Ford had incorporated the Ford Motor Co., the president of the Michigan Savings Bank advised one of Ford's lawyers, Horace H. Rackham, not to invest in the Company as: "The horse is here to stay but the automobile is only a novelty—a fad."¹²

According to the 1911 article, the first automobile purchased by a Londoner was that of Frederick G. Mitchell. Mitchell stated that he paid \$800 plus 25% duty for his steam-powered vehicle. The automobile was picked up in Buffalo and along with it came a chauffeur to bring it to London. Being "a nine days' wonder," it took three days to travel to the Forest City as "The farmers used to rush from their plows as we came in sight, and always they wanted us to stop while the new machine was explained to them."¹³

While Fred Mitchell was quoted as saying that his steamer was "made in Geneva, N.Y.," there is no evidence that steamers were ever produced in that city. It seems more probable that Mitchell's steamer was manufactured by the Geneva Automobile and Manufacturing Company of Geneva, Ohio. This company was formed in late 1900 by J.A. Carter, former owner of the Geneva Cycle Works. His first automobile, The Geneva Steamer, was rolled out on May 8, 1901. No more than 30 Geneva steamers are believed to have been manufactured before the company folded in 1904.

The 1911 article also indicated that Mitchell had "opened a salesroom and garage on Carling Street," eight years earlier. "soon after bringing the old steam Geneva car to this city." Having brought his Geneva to London, Mitchell was later to state that this steamer "passed out of my hands in about six months, but was around the city for quite a while afterwards." But, as he still had his "Geneva Steam machine" in October 1903, as will be described later in this article, it would not have been until sometime in 1903 that Mitchell purchased his first automobile. Several other Londoners would have owned a "horseless carriage" by this time. So much for Mitchell's claim to have owned the first car in London!

As for his Geneva Steamer, "It had a shiny black wood body with a red line trim, red wire wheels and red gears trimmed in black. The brown leather seat had 27 spindles painted red. Brass lights on the sides added elegance." It had a two-cylinder engine and could achieve six horsepower. The throttle and reverse levers were combined in one and worked

from the centre of the seat. The steering post was in the centre but could be shifted to either side of the seat.



A 1901 Geneva Steamer

Mitchell further stated that the first automobile owned in the London area belonged to Richard Shaw-Wood who lived at “Woodholme”¹⁴ in what was still London Township at the time and that Shaw-Wood had purchased his steamer shortly before Mitchell.

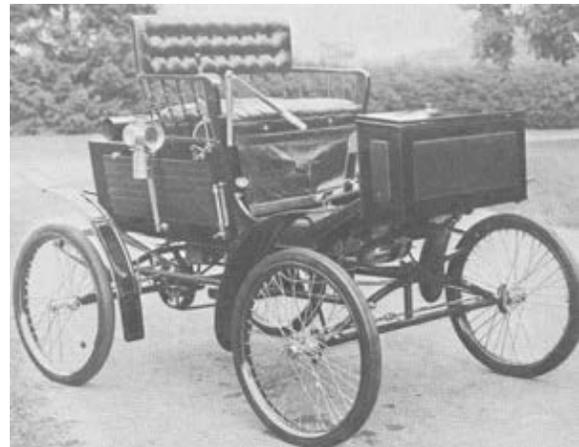
Contrary to these details, the 1939 article claimed that Shaw-Wood didn’t purchase his Locomobile steamer until 1903. In any case, it was purchased from the Dominion Motor Company, an agent for the Locomobile Company of America, then of Bridgeport, Connecticut. It was in 1903 that the company ceased the manufacture of small, affordable steam cars and switched production entirely to internal combustion-powered luxury automobiles.

While the Locomobile was equipped to seat two passengers, Shaw-Wood “had a rear seat accommodation built,” so that it would allow four persons. He paid \$1,250 for the vehicle and it was driven from

Toronto to London by none other than a young employee of London’s Canada Cycle & Motor Co. and the Forest City’s future eight-time mayor, George Wenige. Wenige and Shaw-Wood “made the record run from Toronto to London in 10 hours....”

Wenige stated that the Locomobile “was equipped with a water boiler tested for 1,200 pounds water pressure, and had been built to operate on gasoline. However, Mr. Shaw-Wood, sensing some danger attached to the use of this inflammable fuel, had it changed so that coal oil, vaporized, could be used. Vaporization was achieved by heating a plate with burning alcohol, and was one of the many gadgets that needed constant attention.”

Also, according to Wenige, the vehicle was equipped with pneumatic tires and “rode easily and smoothly.” Its 300 copper flues, however, took a good deal of time and care and often burned out. The “innumerable shut-off, stopcocks, and water and steam gauges” also consumed much time and care.¹⁵



A 1900 Locomobile 5½ hp steam buggy

One of the interesting features of this steamer was “the fitting of ”knuckles” to the front axle; on these knuckles were attached a pair of shafts so that in the event of a breakdown, all that was necessary was to get a team of horses and harness and lead them to the steamer, which was all ready to be pulled away to the nearest repair shop.”

Shaw-Wood kept this car for many years and one of the drivers was his only surviving daughter Anna. Eventually, the Locomobile was sold to the London gunsmith, William A. “Billy” Brock. By 1939, however, Shaw-Wood’s steamer was “no more than a memory in the automotive history of London and Western Ontario.”¹⁶

This 1939 article also credits Verschoyle Cronyn, not Fred Mitchell, with having the first automobile in London. Cronyn’s car was said to have been purchased in 1902 and to have been an Oldsmobile. But the Oldsmobile was gasoline-driven and, as will be seen below, Cronyn’s first automobile was a steamer! Fred Mitchell had made no mention of the eldest son of the late Bishop Benjamin Cronyn and claimed James C. Duffield as the owner of “the first gasoline-driven auto” in London. Mitchell also stated he “had the second. This was known as the Cameron car.”



A 1903 Cameron Runabout

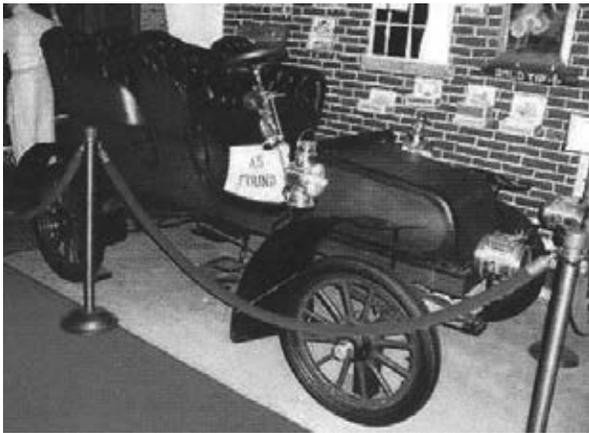
Between 1902 and 1903, Everitt Cameron built the Taunton Steam Runabout in Taunton, Massachusetts. He grew tired of the steam cars in 1903, and started working with gasoline, thus developing the Cameron Automobile. He had Brown Machinery Company in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, build his automobile until 1905 when this company decided to stop making cars. The Cameron “was a very good car, but it had the same fault as the others. It was weak-lunged,”¹⁷ i.e. it was operated by a single-cylinder engine.

The 1911 article makes no mention of Dr. Edwin Seaborn’s 1902 curved-dash Oldsmobile, which the 1939 piece stated was purchased a month after Cronyn’s for \$850. Seaborn “had to go down to Detroit to view it and arrange for purchase,” as the nearest outlets were in Detroit, Toronto and presumably Buffalo at the time. According to the 1939 article, J. C. Duffield purchased his car *after* Seaborn.¹⁸



Sketch by Stanley Dale of Drs. Benjamin Bayly & Edwin Seaborn in Seaborn’s 1902 Oldsmobile. Note Leather Permit No. 138, issued to Seaborn by the Provincial Government in the latter part of 1903. A photograph of this automobile with Dr. Seaborn from another angle appears in *Fragments from the Forks*, page 388. (London Room, London Public Library)

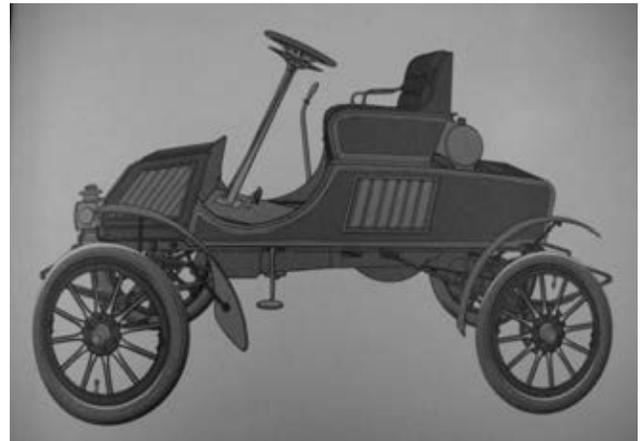
In any case, Duffield's car was a Thomas, built by the E.R. Thomas Motor Co. of Buffalo. This company manufactured motorized bicycles and tricycles, motorcycles and, beginning in 1902, automobiles. Duffield's chauffeur "was J. C. Beemer, one of London's first car repair experts and mechanics."¹⁹



A 1902 Thomas Touring Car

William Payne, who had a bicycle business on Wortley Road, is said to have purchased his Rambler about the same time as Duffield had purchased his automobile. Payne and his wife took a motor trip to Detroit, in September 1903, and found that the "roads via Leamington and Kingsville are very good."²⁰

While the 1939 article states that the Rambler was manufactured in Racine, Wisconsin, in fact the former Chicago bicycle manufacturer, Thomas B. Jeffery, produced his automobiles in Kenosha. In 1902, apparently the year before Payne purchased his car, 1,500 Ramblers sold for \$750 apiece. This light "runabout" had "a single horizontal cylinder, chain drive, cycle-type wire wheels and tiller steering...."



A 1902 Rambler Runabout

It's possible that Verschoyle Cronyn did in fact purchase a "gasoline-driven Oldsmobile" in 1902, but his first automobile was a steamer, as noted by his grandson Verschoyle Phillip Cronyn. Young Cronyn described the car as "one of, if not the first cars in London." The car was very open without any protection on the top or sides. It had a buggy dashboard, but no windshield or instruments. Its headlights were oil-lighted. Steering was by a tiller. The passengers sat on seats facing each other, with an entrance though a gate opening at the rear of the car through which steps were lowered outwards. The wheels were of solid rubber.

Young Cronyn described part of a trip taken in the car from London to Port Dover by his father, mother and a maternal aunt in the summer of 1903. The group started off at 8:30 a.m. with women wearing veils, goggles, long heavy gloves and dust coats. The father had insured that "A good supply of fuel oil was on hand with water available to replenish the steam boiler." The trip was called off, however, after starting out. Two days later, they tried again. This trip, one way, took more than a day.

A few weeks after this, Verse's father drove the car to the grandfather's farm, some four miles east of London, "garaged it in the drive shed, but forgot to extinguish the burners, with the result that car and drive shed were consumed by flames."²¹

If Verschoyle Cronyn didn't have a gasoline powered Oldsmobile by the summer of 1903, the destruction of his steamer then could have prompted him to purchase one!

Verse Cronyn said that he doubted whether his grandfather's steamer had a name at all and that it "was built prior to the White Steamer...."²² The White Sewing Machine Co. was incorporated, in 1876 in Cleveland, Ohio, by Thomas H. White. It was in 1900 that it got into the production of "trucks and the White Steamer automobile...."



A 1901 White 2-Cylinder Steam Surrey

Could it be then that Verschoyle Cronyn's steamer was of 1900 or earlier vintage? Since there is not even a hint of a "horseless carriage" being owned by a

London resident in the local newspapers during 1899 and 1900, it would appear that the steamer in question was of 1901 vintage. This then would place Richard Shaw-Wood's vehicle, described by Fred Mitchell as "the first steam automobile" owned in the immediate London area, as also of 1901 vintage, since no mention of such a vehicle has yet to be found in a London newspaper prior to October 1901. It was certainly not purchased in 1903 as claimed in the 1939 article.²³

The 1939 article also claimed that Shaw-Wood's Locomobile originated in Connecticut. The Locomobile Company of America was founded in Watertown, Massachusetts, in 1899 and was transferred to Bridgeport, Connecticut the following year.

Further proof according to the article, that Shaw-Wood's steam car would have had to have been purchased before 1903, and in fact, before 1902, is that his daughter Anna, who was known to have driven her father's Locomobile, purchased her own automobile in July 1902. This vehicle was said to have been "of the most improved type" and to have cost "over \$1,000."²⁴ The *London Free Press*, however, makes no mention of its make. It's quite possible that Anna Shaw-Wood was the first woman in the London area to both drive and own an automobile.

It was about Easter in 1901 that Mayor Frederick G Rumball of London got wind that The Canadian Steam Carriage Company of Toronto intended to establish a new factory. London Alderman Edward Parnell, Jr. was already in Toronto and Rumball directed him "to do the best he could to bring it" to London. On Easter

Monday, April 8th, Parnell was able to convince the Company's representative, the Toronto financier and promoter John H. Jewell, to visit London to see what the city at the forks of the Thames River had to offer. Tax and water rate breaks convinced the company to set up a factory in the Forest City. By May 2nd a showroom had been opened on the east side of Richmond Street, south of King Street.²⁵ Two days later, large advertisements appeared in both the *London Advertiser* and the *London Free Press*. Mayor Rumball had been selected as treasurer of The Canadian Steam Carriage Co. and both he and Col. Francis B. Lees, MPP for London, were among the members of the board of directors.²⁶

A “demonstrating carriage” was put on display in the showroom on Monday, May 6th and “All day long visitors in a continual stream went in to examine the automobile that the company has here.” The automobile in question, a steamer, had “already run over 3,000 miles.” It was claimed that, “On a trip, it can carry enough water for 40 miles and enough gasoline for 80 miles. The carriage is suitable for either city or country use and when the water in the boiler is perfectly cold steam can be raised and the carriage in motion in six minutes.”²⁷

While the *Advertiser* was waxing eloquently about the proposed factory and what it could mean for London, the *Free Press* maintained a sphinx-like silence. It did, however, as with the *Advertiser*, carry the company's advertisements over the next several days.

The factory was to be built and completed by July 1st. Fifty workers were expected “to turn out seven one-seated or single carriages per week.” The Company felt confident that, within eight months, twice or three times the number of workers would be employed. Automobiles in various styles were to be produced, “including Pleasure Carriages, Single and Double Road Wagons, Gladstones, Stanhopes, Victorias, Bus, Delivery, Wagons, Business Wagons of kinds, Drays and Coal Trucks” and all were “to be self-propelled.”

If all this sounds too good to be true, it apparently was! While money had been collected in London and elsewhere, no steamers were ever produced in the Forest City and, that November, Jewell was charged, in Hamilton, with fraud.

—THE—
Canadian Steam Carriage Co
 LIMITED
 Incorporated under the Ontario Companies' Act.

Authorized Capital, - - - \$250,000.00

5,000 Shares of \$50 Each.

3,500 Shares of Common Stock,	\$175,000
1,500 Shares of 10 Per Cent. Preferred Stock,	75,000

Solicitors:
 Lockyer, Kippen & Hildall, Toronto.

Bankers:
 The Ontario Bank (Young Street Branch), Toronto.
 The Trust & Savings Co., Toronto.

Register of Stock and Transfer Agents:
 The Dominion Savings & Investment Society, London.

President,	JAMES CURRY, Esq., Toronto.	
Vice President,	L. M. STABLEY, Esq., Berlin.	
Secretary,	E. H. HILBORN, Esq., Toronto.	
Treasurer,	F. G. RUMBALL, Esq., London.	

Board of Directors:
 J. V. Toward, ex-Mayor, Director Trade & Guarantee Co., Hamilton.
 James Curry, Banker and Broker, Toronto.
 Chas. F. E. Lyle, M. P. F., London.
 F. G. Rumball, Mayor, London.
 E. H. Hilborn, Ex-Off. People's Sav. Co., Toronto.
 G. I. Hildall, Inspector Life Ins. Co., Toronto.
 Thomas H. Langlois, Foreman, Toronto.
 Andrew Brown, of Brown & Booth, Toronto.
 J. M. Stabler, Ex-Mayor, Uxbridge, Berlin.

TORONTO OFFICES: 24 Manning Arcade, 1
 LONDON OFFICES: 354 Richmond Street.

Factory and Works to be Established at London, Ont.

The Memorandum will be offered on the first day of May, 1901, at an Office of Dominion Savings & Investment Society, 354 Richmond Street at 1-2 p. m. Applications will be received from that date until the 30th of May.

London Capital.
 As the amount of several London applications the Company has consented to offer the only \$100,000 of the 10 per cent. preferred stock to be sold through the Dominion Savings & Investment Society, London. The Dominion Savings & Investment Society will issue the shares of common stock as a matter will be given. The shares of common stock will be sold to the Dominion Savings & Investment Society and will come into circulation for the use of the shares of common stock. The shares of common stock will be sold for the purpose of raising the capital of the company, and will be sold at 10 per cent. discount.

Board of Directors.
 F. G. Rumball, Esq., Mayor of London, and Chas. F. E. Lyle, M. P. F., have been elected members of the Board of Directors with the approval of the Dominion Savings and Investment Society, London.

Subscription for Shares.
 Applications for shares may be obtained from the Dominion Savings and Investment Society, London.

A portion of The Canadian Steam Carriage Co. Limited advertisement (*London Free Press*, May 4, 1901, 13:4)

What happened to the steamer on display in London in early May 1901? I'd like to think that this was the one purchased by Verschoyle Cronyn. The description given by his grandson seems to conform, in general, with an obviously different model illustrated by the Company in May 1901. A further examination of the 1901 London newspapers may, hopefully, shed light on this.



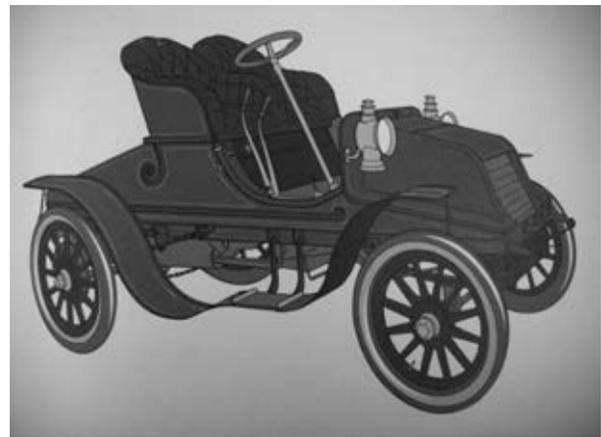
One of the models of steamers proposed by The Canadian Steam Carriage Co. (*The London Free Press*, May 6, 1901, 6:7)

According to an undated clipping, probably from a St. Thomas newspaper, the first owner of an automobile in St. Thomas was Calvin "Cal" Ellis who, in late March 1902 "sold his fine tandem of roadsters to Pfee & Son and purchased what was described as "a one-lunger Winton." This gasoline automobile had "a one-cylinder

motor that fired once every two revolutions of the crank-shaft." As sold, it had a top speed of 30 miles per hour and travelled 20 miles on a gallon. It was said to have "required skill and agility in its operation and defied any man of average strength to crank it without releasing the compression on the cylinder first. Originally a one-seater runabout, its engine was under the seat. The vehicle was chain driven and "steered with a wheel, hand brakes, foot brake, clutch, shift and all..."²⁸

The popular Winton was produced in Cleveland, Ohio, by Scottish immigrant Alexander Winton, former owner of the Winton Bicycle Company. The first Winton Motor Carriage Company automobiles were built by hand in 1897.

The Winton, purchased by Ellis for \$1,050, appeared in St. Thomas, on Tuesday, March 25, 1902. It arrived by railway, on a freight car from Toronto. Ellis then "cranked her up, and took her on her initial spin" to Aylmer and back.²⁹



A 1903 Winton Touring Car

Cal Ellis disposed of his Winton the following year and is said to have purchased "a four-cylinder Ford in Toronto for

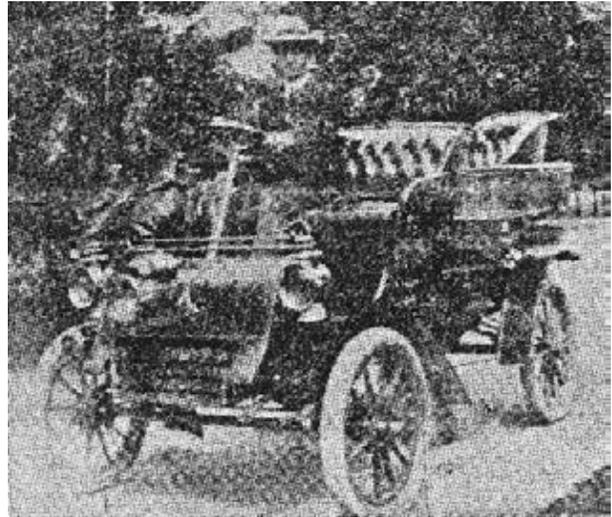
\$1,200.” If Ellis indeed purchased his Ford in 1903, it would have been a 2-cylinder, 8 hp Model A. While “A beautiful little machine,” it “wouldn’t stand up under the steady grind Cal demanded from her, and in four months she went back to the factory for overhauling.” The St. Thomas article says it was then “sold to Eddie Bennett, of London, as London’s first automobile.”



A 1903 Model A Ford Rear-Entrance Tonneau

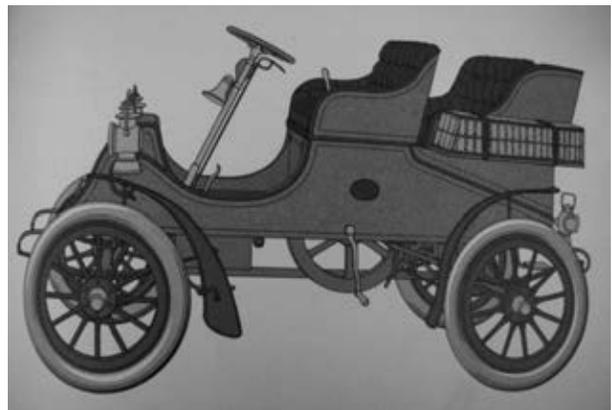
It’s believed that the person in question was actually Eddie Bernard. This was certainly *not* “London’s first automobile!” Nor, as will be seen, was it Bernard’s first!³⁰

In any case, it appears that Bernard had the Model A but a few months and, in the spring of 1904, purchased a “two-cylinder,” chain-driven, Model C Ford “from an agent in St. Thomas.”³¹ Bernard’s 1904 Ford was described in the 1939 article as “a right-hand drive car and the crank shaft was situated at the side of the car behind the driver’s seat.”³²



Eddie Bernard and his Model C Ford in Victoria Park, in the summer of 1904.

Now, back in the early summer of 1903, Bernard, along with Clarence Reid, Fred Darch and Darch’s wife, had gone on a weekend trip to Detroit. On Sunday afternoon, the party visited Belle Isle and was quite taken up with the automobiles “scooting along the driveways of the park.” Most of vehicles were one-cylinder curved-dash Oldsmobiles and Cadillacs. Mrs. Darch joking suggested, “Why don’t you boys buy one of those things”?



A 1903 Cadillac Tonneau

That did it, and early Monday morning the three young men set out on a tour of car agencies on Detroit's Jefferson Avenue. Their first stop was in the Cadillac showroom but their inquiries, according to Bernard, were treated "with contempt." Further along the street they came to the Detroit sales office and in the window "saw a gaudy car model, fire-engine red, furnished with a host of gleaming brass fittings." Inside the building, they were "welcomed with handshakes, courtesy and attention."

Interestingly, there is no record of a Detroit (Briggs-Detroit) or a Detroit, being built in 1903! It's therefore my opinion that the car in question was actually manufactured by the Marr Auto-Car Co. of Detroit. Walter Marr had been chief engineer, between 1899 and 1901, for David Buick of Detroit. During this period, Marr had built a motorized wagon in a barn behind Buick's motor shop. After a disagreement between the two men, Marr purchased the car from Buick and used it as the prototype for his Marr Auto Car. It was a one-cylinder six hp runabout on a 66-inch wheel base. Marr had the Fauber Manufacturing Company of Elgin, Illinois, build the cars for his Marr Auto-Car Company of Detroit. When the Fauber Manufacturing Company, with 14 of his autos, was destroyed by fire in August 1904, Marr returned to work for Buick.

In any case, Bernard, Darch and Reid offered \$1,200 in cash for the automobile they wished to purchase. They also stipulated that the car was to be ferried over to Windsor and the customs duty paid by the vendors. After "long negotiations and a few days of deliberations," the Detroit agency agreed.



A 1903 Marr Runabout

The following Saturday morning, the men were down at the ferry-dock in Windsor at sunrise watching for the car to be ferried across the Detroit River. With the car came a driver and instructor. Both were to accompany the owners and acquaint them "with the intricacies of the machine and to iron out any bugs" en route to London.³³

As J.C. Duffield is also said to have purchased a car at this time, presumably the aforementioned 1903 Cameron Runabout, one can only conclude his was certainly not the "first gasoline-driven auto" in London as claimed by Mitchell.³⁴

Meanwhile, Bernard, Darch and Reid shared the cost of the car equally and worked out a schedule for its use. Bernard said that, after six months, he decided to become the sole owner of a new car and one of a different make. This is when it is believed that he purchased Cal Ellis' Winton. Reid may have sold his share in the "Detroit" as well by this time as, in mid-October 1903, Fred Darch and William F. Horton are said to have been the owners of what had become known to the locals as "The Red Devil." Darch and Horton were on their way to Detroit to have some gear changes made.³⁵

By this time, the “pioneer” phase of the automobile in London and elsewhere had ended. Steam automobiles were being replaced by gasoline-powered cars. Autos were no longer quite the novelty on London’s streets and stricter regulations had been implemented in Ontario and elsewhere.

In July 1903, the province of Ontario had enacted its first motor vehicle legislation. As of September 1st, the speed limit in urban centres was 10 mph and on public highways 15 mph.³⁶ Ironically, while Fred Mitchell appears to have incorrectly claimed to have been the first person in London to own an automobile, on October 6, 1903 he did become the first person in the Forest City to be brought before a magistrate “on a charge of immoderate going,” i.e. driving beyond the speed limit, in his “Geneva steam machine” and was fined \$5. Mitchell had been “scorching,” i.e. racing, on Richmond Street, proceeding south between Dundas and York against another “Geneva steam machine.” The latter was driven by a “Mr. Keller, an expert chauffeur, and possibly owned by William Hyman, one of three passengers therein.”³⁷

The 1903 statute also enacted that motor vehicles were to be registered and each owner was to “have attached to or expose upon the back of every such motor vehicle, in a conspicuous place, the number of said permit, so as to be plainly visible at all times during daylight, such number to be in plain figures not less than three inches in height.” The cost of these permits was to be \$2.

A member of the Hamilton Auto Club (a forerunner of the Ontario Motor League), had been instructed to design these shield-shaped markers. A harness maker in

Toronto was then commissioned to produce 1,000 of the leather markers with the metal registration numbers and insignia, attached. These markers were then fastened to the vehicles by leather straps which went through two loops at the top.³⁸

While London’s Dr. Edwin Seaborn appears to have been issued permit # 138, Richard Whittaker of Sarnia, formerly of Oil Springs, “registered his car with the Ontario government on Sept. 3, 1903 and was assigned a license [actually marker] number of 126.”



The leather marker issued to Richard Whittaker



Metal insignia on the above leather marker

Whittaker's auto was a 1901 curved-dash Oldsmobile, apparently purchased on July 1st of that year and delivered to him directly, two days later, at the Oil Springs railway station. The vehicle, "one of just 425 built in 1901 by the Old Motor Works" in Detroit, cost Whittaker \$750 and was the first automobile in Lambton County. After Whittaker's death in January 1904, his Oldsmobile passed into the hands of his daughter Isabella and her husband the Reverend Villers M. Durnford. Isabella, died in 1931, but Durnford, as rector of the Anglican Church of the Hosannas in Hyde Park, still had the car until 1943 when he sold it to George Gunn, an antique collector in nearby London. M.J. Cole of Gregory, Michigan, purchased the 1901 Oldsmobile in 1952. It was subsequently sold to C.E. Hulse of Flint, Michigan in 1963. After this, the providence of Lambton County's first automobile goes cold.³⁹



Aylmer Quinney, a Hyde Park mechanic in Rev. V.M. Durnford's 1901 Oldsmobile in the late 1940s

In summary, the first automobile was seen in London on or before September 10, 1899, the opening day of the Western Fair. The first city newspaper advertisement, depicting a "horseless carriage," appeared in

the *London Advertiser* on December 7, 1899. The first automobiles were seen on the streets of London on June 24, 1900. It was probably after September in 1901 that the first Londoner purchased an automobile and that person would appear to have been the elder Verschoyle Cronyn.

As a footnote, it may be said that, "After the gas buggies had become well known in the city, there came a demand for an easily driven car for town service, and the electric car" fit that niche. It may have been as late as 1912, however, before they were purchased by Londoners as the 1939 article said that the first electric cars in London were manufactured in Walkerville, Ontario. But the Tate Electric Ltd. only started up there in 1912 and ceased production in late 1914 or early 1915, a victim of the electric starter for the gasoline-operated autos. Col. William Gartshore is believed to have been the first Londoner to purchase such an automobile. Other early owners of electric cars in London were Caroline (Mrs. John L.A.) Hunt, May (Mrs. Charles B.) Hunt, John M. Gunn, Albert O. Jeffery and Thomas G. Meredith. These vehicles were said to have gotten about 40 miles before needing to be recharged.⁴⁰

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Endnotes

¹ “Daddy of the Auto in London,” *The London Evening Free Press*, March 8, 1911, 3:3-4; “London Banker First Who Had An Automobile,” *The London Daily Free Press*, June 21, 1939, 4th Section, 2:7-8

² Charles S. Buck, “Three partners in 1903 car,” *The London Free Press*, July 22, 1972, 48:1-3; Charles S. Buck, “Lion rode in back seat of Bernard’s 1904 Ford,” *The London Free Press*, July 29, 1972, 48:19

³ “Horseless Carriage,” *St. Thomas Daily Times*, November 8, 1899, 1:3; *Aylmer Express*, November 9 1889, 1:6

⁴ *The London Free Press*, 1899: June 12, 5:2; July 23, 5:3; *London Advertiser*, June 13, 1899, 8:2

⁵ *London Free Press*, 1899: July 31, 1:5; Aug. 1, 8:5

⁶ “Pointed Resolutions,” *London Advertiser*, Aug. 1, 1899, 8:3-6

⁷ “An Electric Carriage,” *London Advertiser*, Sept. 4, 1899, 8:3

⁸ *London Free Press*, June 26, 1900, 8:3; *Sarnia Observer* (weekly edition), June 28, 1900, 5:2-3

⁹ Albert S. Ingells, one of the party of six American automobilists of June 1900, observed that “they never rode over such good roads as they had experienced” between Niagara Falls and Sarnia. *Sarnia Observer*, June 28, 1900, 5:2-3

¹⁰ *London Advertiser*, May 21, 1900, 3:1. The National Cycle and Automobile Co. was still advertising in the *Advertiser* one year later. *London Advertiser*, May 6, 1901, 4:5-6

¹¹ “Automobiles Growth in Popularity,” *London Advertiser*, May 3, 1901, 2:3

¹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horace_Rackham

¹³ “Daddy of the Auto in London”

¹⁴ This later became the Lawson estate.

¹⁵ “London Banker First Who Had An Automobile”

¹⁶ “London Banker First Who Had An Automobile”

¹⁷ “Daddy of the Auto in London”

¹⁸ “London Banker First Who Had An Automobile”

¹⁹ Beemer, “worked in the early days of the automobile production era in Detroit and Lansing, Mich., with R. E. Olds, manufacturer of the Oldsmobile....” “London Banker First Who Had An Automobile.”

²⁰ *London Advertiser*, September 15, 1903, 8:2-3

²¹ Verschoyle Phillip Cronyn, *Other Days* (1976), 4-5

²² *Other Days*, 4

²³ “Daddy of the Auto in London”; “London Banker First Who Had An Automobile”

²⁴ “City News.,” *The London Free Press*, July 23, 1902, 3:3

²⁵ “Automobile Factory,” *London Advertiser*, April 20, 1901, 5:2; “Around the City,” *London Advertiser*, April 24, 1901, 5:1; *The London Free Press*, April 25, 1901, 3:4; “Automobile Factory for London,” *London Advertiser*, May 2, 1901, 3:3; *The Toronto City Directory 1901*, 553

²⁶ *London Advertiser*, May 4, 1901, 15:4; *The London Free Press*, May 4, 1901, 13:5

²⁷ “Interested in Automobiles,” *London Advertiser*, May 6, 1901, 5:4

²⁸ “Cal Ellis Owned First St. Thomas Motor Car,” undated newspaper clipping, St. Thomas? See also *The Aylmer Sun*, March 27, 1902, 1:6 and *Aylmer Express*, March 27, 1902, 1:5

²⁹ See above citations.

³⁰ “Cal Ellis Owned First St. Thomas Motor Car,” undated clipping; Buck, “Three Partners in 1903 car”

