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Keith's Corner/McGill News

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What Happened to Cars?

It was a welcome sight last week to see those beautiful old Chevys parked on main street here in McGill. It reminded me of the old days when cars had a distinct look and personality. It was easy to identify what car company built them. Today, most of the cars look alike.

During my lifetime I have seen many changes in looks and functions.

My memory is getting somewhat fuzzy, so correct me if I get something wrong. I will start with seating. I remember many cars had only one front seat and others had two front (bucket) seats. Now most vehicles have two seats. In my early days as a McGill heathen, I and my brother Paul rode in a rumble seat in the back of our parent's coupe. 1929 Ford soft top



That is the old KCC assay office and lab.

My 1941 Chevy club coupe had a solid front and back seat. The back of the front seat would tip forward to allow access to the back seat. This was the case in Paul's 1948 Chevy club coupe. My great-grandfather, Bill Hayes, had a 1926 Star 2 door sedan that had bucket front seats. The back of the seat would fold down and then the whole seat would tip forward. In some other cars, the whole seat would slide forward. There were many combinations.

Another change was in the doors. Some of the old cars had the doors swing out from a hinge on the back of the door. It was easy to open the door and step out. Other doors had the hinge on the front like most vehicles today. My cousin's family, the Dentons had a 1941 Plymouth that had the back doors with the hinges on the back. One time when my Aunt Norma was driving up K Ave in McGill,

my cousin Richard opened the back door and went out with the door.

Luckily the car was moving slow and he escaped with a few minor road burns. His dad, Lewis bought and installed a special latch that prevented the back doors from opening until the front door was opened first.

The weirdest doors were the gullwing ones. The first one I can remember that was in production was the Mercedes-Benz 300SL that came out in 1954. There are 13 different cars with the se doors this year.

The van type vehicles have sliding doors.

Another big change was in the hood. And the front fenders. In the early cars like the 1926 Star, the fenders were fairly flat across as they curved up and over the tire. Later the fenders were curved and rounded like a lot of the 1938 cars. The next step was when the fender melded with the engine compartment like my 1941 Chevy. The hood in the beginning was split into two sides of the engine compartment like in an old Model A Ford. To get to the engine you reached over a fender and twisted a handle and lifted the hood up and laid it over the small hood. Once the fenders melded with the engine compartment the hood was one large piece that lifted up from the front of the car.

Here are some examples of hood and fender.



Now here is an old DeSoto Airflow from around the late 1930s. It has the hood and fender almost merged totally.



