

# Automobile made presence known in dramatic ways

"A large white touring car was totally wrecked and two men injured, one seriously, on a steep hill about two miles east of Harrodsburg at three o'clock yesterday afternoon."

— *Bloomington Evening World*, July 18, 1906.

There was a time when some people in Monroe County would have said that the new invention, the automobile, was a mixed blessing. That view was confirmed by stories in the newspaper in the summer and fall of 1906.

\* Two out-of-town men arrived in Bloomington on July 17 and stopped at the Hotel Bowles for a meal. They identified themselves as R.S. Overman of Pennsylvania and H.E. Speer of Evansville.

Shortly after dinner, the two men headed south. The newspaper related that "The hill (east of Harrodsburg) is very steep, and is known by automobile enthusiasts all over this part of the state as being very dangerous. At the bottom is a sharp turn, and the road runs over Salt Creek."

As the car gained momentum going down the hill, it became "uncontrollable." When the driver attempted to negotiate the sharp turn,



## LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

one of the wheels broke. Understandably, the car went off the road, where it plunged down a 30-foot embankment, went over a stone wall and rammed into a tree.

Help was not far away. Both men survived the accident, but Overman, who turned out to be the owner of the car, was also unconscious.

The *Evening World* described what happened next. "He (Overman) was taken to the Harrodsburg Hotel, and Dr. Campbell rendered medical aid. Mr. Overman recovered sufficiently to be able to go to Greencastle on this morning's accommodation (train)."

After than the article gives some conflicting information. "His companion (Speer) who was painfully bruised on his neck and head, remained at Harrodsburg and will arrange to ship the wrecked automobile to a garage for repairs ... The young men left here shortly

before one o'clock yesterday, one riding in the front seat and the other in the rear seat."

According to the newspaper, a Dr. Evans of Greencastle responded to a telegram and went to Harrodsburg to accompany Overman to Greencastle. Incidentally, their original destination was French Lick, and the "40-horse power automobile was valued at \$3,000."

Horses weren't philosophical about the new invention. In August of 1906, the Misses Eva Dodds and Lola Dillman had been riding in a buggy "west of the city on the Randall hill, when the Henry Henley automobile suddenly appeared."

The horse took exception and bolted, racing down the hill. The girls were pitched from the buggy, one landing in a field and the other against a barbed wire fence.

Henley "got out of his machine" and stopped the horse. The injuries were a sprained thumb and badly lacerated hands.

The *Evening World* had a lot of fun on Oct. 31, 1906, with another story involving an automobile belonging to another member of the Henley family. It began, "Bewildered and lost in Brown County was the plight of Editor Bradfute, State Treasurer Nat Hill and Atty.

J.E. Henley who left Bloomington last night bound for Needmore, Brown County, to hold a meeting."

It was just after supper when they left town. The trouble began when they came to Wolf Creek "on the edge of Brown County." The narrative continued. "Here they could not get their bearings, and after wandering around for a long time, they finally secured a native Brown County man to pilot them to the Needmore road."

That was not the end of their troubles. Automobiles do break down, and theirs certainly did under trying circumstances: "... the only thing about the machine that was in working order was the horn."

Having found someone to fix the problem, the men proceeded to Needmore, arriving after midnight. Concluded the *Evening World*, whose editorial leaning were Democratic, "... lights were all out, all good Brown County people who are going to vote the Democratic ticket anyhow, were in bed asleep so no meeting was held, and the politicians arrived home just as the Democratic roosters of Monroe County were crowing for the break of day."

H-T 9/11/95