

# Runaway cars, horses usher era of the family automobile

By June W. Kennedy

**A** good many things have changed in this town over the past 100 years, but surely one of the most amazing happenings, at least from the point of view of oldtimers, is the coming of the automobile. In this first of a two-part series on the advent of the horseless carriage, diaries and recollections of those who were on hand to experience this phenomenon are offered up.

From the diary of Emma M. Day, June 1869: "Over to Mrs. Cummings yesterday to see how they did, for their horse threw them out of the wagon over to Graniteville. He got frightened [by] a dog. He ran home very fast. A young man tried to stop him and got a good deal, but they did not get any bones broke. S. & Ada could not go to Lowell for W. wanted the horse."

Allister MacDougall: "About two or three times a year, we took a trip to Lowell in the carriage. We'd put the 'hoss' in a stable on Church Street. For children it was quite a treat, especially during the Christmas season with the windows decorated with all the toys.

"We'd return nine, ten or eleven o'clock over the road to Westford. I always remember it was when we hit Princeton Boulevard that we'd hear the first clank of hoof of our trotting horse. Till we reached that point in our journey, all the roads were dirt."

Otis Day: "First car I saw came up Boston Road, went around the Common and down Hildreth Street. I was at Sunday School [Congregational Church] settin' out on the doorstep. There were two men in an open car — no roof — a stubby little thing, darndest lookin' contraption.

"In 1920, Dad got a Model T Ford. All you had to do was drive 25 miles, send in something to tell 'em, and they'd send you a license. That's all there was to it."

Diary of May Day (sister of Otis Day), July 1905: "Uncle Arthur carried Alice Etta down here on his wheel. Uncle Arthur went to Lowell in the afternoon on his automobile.

"While I was at Aunt Margaret's they nearly had an accident. Uncle Arthur came up to get his camera and Edith Northington was with him. While he was in the house she happened to hit the thing that started it. Aunt Margaret had been talking with her. She had hold of the automobile and run along beside it. It struck the apple tree side of the house. She jumped as it struck. It bent the dashboard and broke some of the front but he could use it.

"I walked up [town] because the hind tire wouldn't pump up good."

January 1906: "Addie and Grandma went to Graniteville [church] because the horse

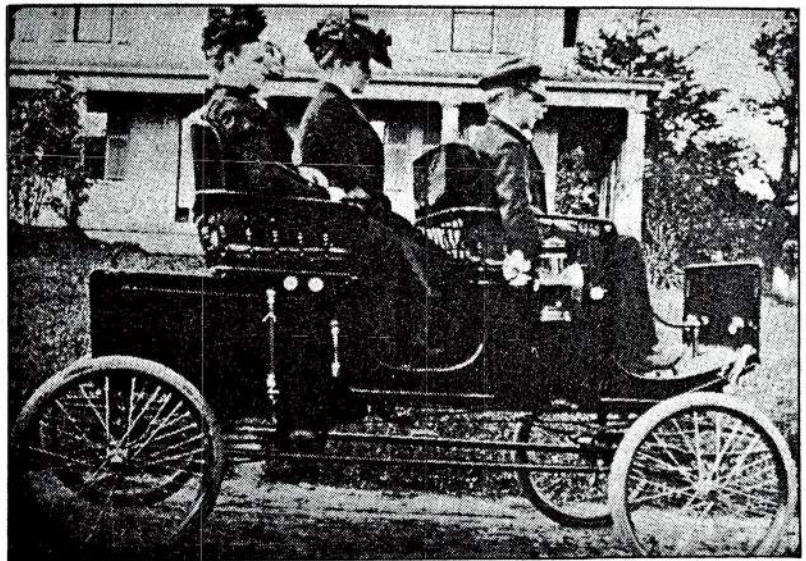


Photo courtesy of June Kennedy

A turn-of-the century photo from the album of the F.G. Sargent family (co-founder of C.G. Sargent Sons Corp.) shows the 1902 Stanley that featured seating more appropriate for a parlor than a traveling machine.

**"Although I do not remember it, my first automobile ride was the year of my birth, 1906. I rode from the hospital in my grandparents' new car and came to live in Graniteville across from the Mill Pond. It was a slow ride, for Grandmother was terrified of speed, speedprobably being about 15 miles an hour."**

Vivian Sargent Smith

couldn't go up the hill.

"The wagon wheel run over Uncle Arthur's foot going up the hill and hurt it quite badly."

August 1906: "Pleasant. Otis and I went to Concord Reformatory with Uncle A. and Cora in the auto. Started 9:10. Got there 5 minutes of 10. Ten miles. I wore Aunt M. auto glasses. It commenced 10:30; 823 prisoners. The guardroom was all ironed. We passed by the cells on a walkway above the floor. The men were reading. The rooms weren't any bigger than our sink room — a bed, chair, wash stand.

"Gave us slips with the hymns on. Went up in the gallery front seat. The prisoners marched in lockstep — 16 in a seat. The choir was made up of prisoners. The officers had seats along the

side. Some of the prisoners had stripes on their arms for good behavior; 31 in red. They were the worst ones.

"After service, people went out before prisoners. Some hadn't been to church. Saw them marching in their cells and heard the noise locking them. Saw some of their work in the guardroom. Uncle A. watered his auto. Went back same way we came."

September 1906: "The horse acted out. Tore my drawers on wagon shaft.

"Studied till Meeting time. Horse sick so walked."

Vivian Sargent Smith: "Although I do not remember it, my first automobile ride was the year of my birth, 1906. I rode from the hospital in my grandparents' new car and came to live in Graniteville across from the Mill Pond. It was a slow ride, for Grandmother was terrified of speed, speedprobably being about 15 miles an hour.

"The auto had side baskets; the door opened in the back. As I grew older and wanted to sit in back, there was a rope to prevent me from falling out. I remember the cars had side curtains of some kind of isinglass that you'd put on when it rained.

"I think people wore dusters in those days because I have found a few in the attic. Dusters were long linen coats that even the men wore to protect their clothing before the day of paved roads. I've seen pictures of my mother with a large hat and veil worn for protection against the wind and that great speed, I suppose.

"It was a great feat and an event to ride up Westford Hill."

June W. Kennedy is a Westford resident and author of "Westford Recollections", a series of historical vignettes and photos.