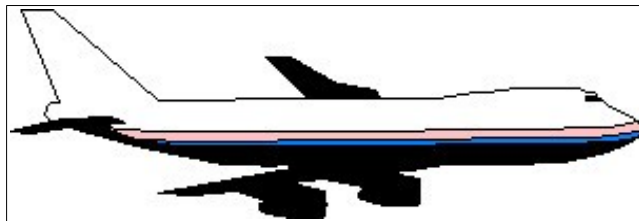
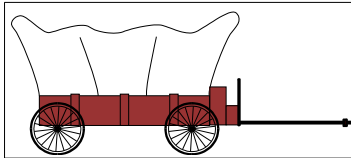


Moving Through Time:

One Man's View of Transportation



Moving Through Time:

One Man's

View of

Transportation

by

Vernon Delmar South

as told to

Fred S. South
January 1996

Introduction

Beginning in September, 1995, in Miles City, Montana, when we were home for the Great American Cattle Drive, and continuing by telephone over the course of the next four months, a number of interviews were conducted with my dad, Vernon Delmar South. They dealt with his view of what had happened in the last 85 years relative to transportation. What you have here, is the result of those interviews.

It was just a short time ago that Vern wrote his memoirs in which he had some to say about the various ways in which he had traveled throughout his life. It occurred to me that he knew a lot more than was included, for his transportation was incidental to the primary thrust of his original narrative. With that in mind, I determined to have him set down in print what he recalled about this aspect of his life.

The younger the reader, the more novel will be much of what is herein contained. It is hoped that the reading will be both enjoyable and educational.

F.S.S.

To see how complicated it was to drive a Ford Model T view the Jay Leno video of him teaching a fellow how to drive one.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7mPbBxNBEo>

The Interview

Q: Did you ever ride in a covered wagon?

A: One time. I was about 3 years old and we moved from Odel, to Brownville [Nebraska], a distance of about 80 miles.

Q: What about a stagecoach. Did you ever ride in one of them?

A: No. But Leo [his brother] was in western Kansas in 1924 and said that a stage ran from St. Francis, the county seat [Cheyenne County], carrying mail to the inland towns.

Q: Do you remember the first car you saw?

A: I think it was when I was 6 years old in Auburn, Nebraska. No, I would have been 5 years old. How I saw it was that we lived in a place where there was a building on the alley and two fellows had an outfit there where they recapped tires, but not like we do today. They would take a tire that had blown out, with pretty good tread on it, take that tread off and place it on a bald tire. They fastened it on with copper harness rivets. The business lasted, I think Dad said, a couple of years. The rivets would come loose and puncture the tubes and so forth. All I can remember is that they would bring cars there, take the tires off and fix them. That was the first time I remember seeing a car.

Q: What was the first car you drove?

A: It was a four-cylinder Dort, a 1919 touring car.

Q: How old were you then?

A: At that time I was not quite 14.

Q: Did you have a driver's license?

A: They were not required in Nebraska, until 1928.

Q: How much did the licenses cost?

A: Seventy-five cents for a supposedly lifetime license.

Q: Was there a test required?

A: No test. You just drove your car away. If you couldn't, they'd take back your license.

Q: What was the first car you owned?

A: It was a 1931 Pontiac.

Q: Your next car?

A: A 1931 Durant. Both had 6 cylinder engines.

Q: Do you remember how much they cost?

A: The Pontiac was about \$740 and I think the Durant was close to \$800 when new.

Q: So these were 3 years old when you got them?

A: Yes. Actually, I got each for \$80. The other car [the one trade in] wasn't worth anything.

Q: Isn't that a lot of depreciation in 3 years?

A: It is, but they depreciated that fast.

Q: So these were both 6-cylinder engines?

A: Both were 6-cylinder.

Q: What kind of gas mileage did you get?

A: With the Pontiac I think I got about 20 mpg. The Durant got about 22-23 mpg.

Q: Did they burn a lot of oil?

A: Neither one of these used any oil other than the normal amount and that was kind of uncommon.

Q: What were the early gas stations like?

A: There were none. They sold gas at the grocery stores; the same place they sold the kerosene. They kept both in a barrel in a back room. That wouldn't be allowed today at all. The barrel had a pump on it and you took your own container to get either gas or kerosene. You then took the gas out and poured it into your tank with a funnel. Most people got their kerosene in a gallon container with a pour spout. The guy at the store would stick a small potato on the end of the spout to keep the contents from spilling out.

Q: How large were the gas tanks back then?

A: The largest were 10 gallon and they were in the Buick and Dodge. Most of the others had 8-gallon tanks. The Model T Ford had the gas tank under the front seat. So when you came to a steep hill, you had to back up it to keep the gas flowing. They didn't have a fuel pump.

Q: Did these have electric starters, or did you have to crank them?

A: Both of these had electric starters, but they had cranks too. They put out cranks on cars up until about 1945-46.

Q: Was the starter in the ignition key like ours is?

A: No, there was a foot stomper on the floor, right over the battery.

Q: So the key was on the dash, with the starter on the floor?

A: Yes. You hit the starter with your heel to start the engine.

Q: I imagine that you have cranked a few cars in your day.

A: Yep, but I didn't break an arm. Many did, however. Leo [his brother] broke his on a Ford tractor. Actually, the Model T was the worst of the bunch. The arms were broken when the engine would "kick back," while being cranked. Some fellows would jack up the rear wheel of a Model T, put the transmission in high gear and start it that way. This was a dangerous act, as some were badly hurt when the jack slipped, allowing the cranker to be either pinned against the barn or garage wall or run over. One, I recall, was killed. And I suppose others were hurt, too.

Q: What did people use in their radiators for coolant in the early days?

A: Water. You had to drain it out when the weather got cold. Then, in the morning you would heat the water, pour it in the radiator, put a blanket over the engine and start it. When you parked the car [on a cold day], you had to drain the water out. Eventually, they came out with a denatured wood alcohol that you mixed with the water. Lute [Luther Howell, his brother-in-law] was one of the first to try this mixture.

Q: How well did it work?

A: It was difficult to get just the right mixture and if it wasn't just right, it would boil over, or freeze.

Q: Were there thermostats in the early engines to control the engine temperature, like we have today?

A: No. There weren't even temperature gauges. In about 1924-25 they came out with a "moto-meter." That was a radiator cap that replaced the original one. You could see the engine temperature by looking at the radiator cap.

Q: Where was the cap located?

A: It was on top of the hood, at the front of the car.

Q: Many times in those days one would see a car traveling down the highway with a canvas bag hanging on the grill. What was that all about?

A: It was a bag of water. You carried it just in case your radiator needed some. There were no water pumps on the engines. The water circulated by using gravity. In our trip to Nebraska [September, 1939] the radiator boiled over many times.

Q: Today, we seldom need to work on our engines. And, if we do, it is usually something quite minor. Now, it is common to run our engines for 100,000-200,000 miles. What about those early engines?

A: There were no air cleaners, so a lot of dust was sucked into the engines. Also, there were no oil filters. I tightened up the rods before we left Montana

[September, 1939] and had to tighten them again when we got to Howe [Nebraska]. It was common to get 2,500 miles out of a set of rings. Today you can go 100-200,000 miles on a set.

Q: I recall one time when you and Uncle Harry were discussing a fellow whose engine had thrown a rod. What were you referring to?

A: A wrist pin [a round cylinder of metal, about the size of a large thumb, that ran through the piston, to which the connecting rod fastened] or the bottom half of the connecting rod would break [the piece of metal that connected the piston to the crankshaft], throwing the piston out the top of the engine, or the rod through the side.

Q: Describe the windshield wipers.

A: There weren't any on the early cars. The first ones were vacuum operated. These cars had a vacuum tank on them that built up vacuum off the manifold.

Q: Probably when the vacuum changed, that affected the working of the wipers.

A: Yea, they slowed down.

Q: What about the ignition systems?

A: The early cars had no battery ignition, just a magneto. Grandpa Ducello [Vern's wife's dad] used a "hotshot" to start his Model T. It was a 6 volt battery that he would hook up to start the thing, then unhook it, and the magneto then provided the necessary spark, when the engine was running.

Q: What were the headlights like on the early cars? Did you have bright and dim?

A: Not when they first came out. On the Model T and some of the other cars with a magneto ignition you had low-tension magneto lights. The problem with them was that if you sped up your motor you had pretty good lights. But when you slowed down and needed the light you didn't have much. It was more like candlepower. I think it was in the middle 1930s before they had high and low beam.

Q: Didn't people often run their cars with the lights on, especially on the highway?

A: Yes.

Q: What was that all about?

A: The cars had generators, not alternators like cars today have. What would happen is that the battery would get overcharged. By leaving the lights on, that took care of it. The Buick had a Delco-Remy electrical system. The electric starter was also the generator. It became a starter to start the engine, then switched, and became a generator to charge the battery.

Q: *What did they use before they developed electric lights?*

A: Our 1913 Maxwell had presto lights in front and a kerosene tail light. The presto light used carbide gas, which was in a tank on the right running board. At first, you had to light them with a match. Then they came out with a lighter that used flint.

Q: *While we are on the topic, what was a running board?*

A: It was what you stepped on to get into the car. Most all of them had running boards.

Q: *Today we call the compartment in the rear of the car a trunk. In the early days, was there a real trunk back there?*

A: Yes, there was. They were separate from the car and sat on a platform, which was made of perforated metal so it wouldn't collect water or dirt. The items in them were protected by a lock and key.

Q: *What was the "rumble seat"?*

A: On coupes and roadster there was a lid back where the trunk was in other cars. The lid pulled open from the top, rather than the bottom, and in it was an upholstered seat. And they did "rumble." Your mom and I rode in one a number of times.

Q: *Did you get dirty?*

A: Yes, but not much dirtier than in the front.

Q: *Were there heaters for the passengers in the early cars?*

A: No.

Q: *How did you keep warm in the winter?*

A: You didn't. It was like in a wagon; you piled on a lot of blankets. Lap robes were used. These were of different types. Some were horse blankets made of wool or mohair. Some were horsehide or cowhide with felt lining. Others were comforters made of wool or heavy cotton and lined with cotton or wool bats and were real warm. In real cold weather, some would heat flat irons or rocks to use as foot warmers.

The early cars were either open or had folding tops. Side curtains were available for some. These were made of the same material as the tops and had isinglass windows [thin, transparent sheets of mica]. They fastened with snaps and were by no means wind proof. They were better than the open air.

Q: *What was the very earliest heater like?*

A: It was a manifold type. A tube came from the engine manifold into the dashboard of the car.

Q: *Wasn't that dangerous?*

A: Very dangerous. Any leaking exhaust would end up in the passenger compartment. The best of the early heaters was the April-Air, which burned gasoline, just like the engine. It had to be purchased separately and sat under the dash.

Q: *How did you start your car in the winter?*

A: In the days when the radiator was filled with water, you drained it at night, then heated water the next morning and filled the radiator with it. Then you would take hot water and pour over the intake manifold. Some people also took hot coals from the stove and placed them under the engine oil pan.

Q: *Wasn't the latter dangerous?*

A: Yes, it was. If there was any oil on the engine, it could catch on fire, and I knew of some that did. Don [a brother] was called to be a pallbearer one-day when it was 40° below zero. He placed coals under his car to warm the engine, while he changed clothes. The oil on the engine caught fire and the car was totaled; it was a 1941 Dodge worth \$800 or more.

Q: *Now, the tires on these cars were probably not as good as our tires are today.*

A: Oh no, no comparison! Dad bought two new tires for \$18.75 a piece. That would be like \$185 or more per tire today. It was 6 miles from Auburn to Howe [Nebraska] on a dirt road and on this road he blew one of them all to pieces. There was no guarantee. They didn't guarantee that you could drive it a block. The other tire, as I recall, was still on the car when we sold it. I never did buy new tires. I got used tires.

Q: *Were these ones with some of the tread worn off?*

A: Yea.

Q: *Today we seldom have blowouts. Did you have a lot of them in the early days?*

A: Oh yea. If you went anywhere without a blowout, you did real good.

Q: *Were the blowouts from hitting rocks or what?*

A: Probably from the weakness of the tires. They weren't cord tires; they were fabric tires. It was like laminated canvas. And some of it wasn't laminated too well. Those laminates would get air between them and pretty soon "bang" and you had a whole side out of the tire.

Q: *How much air did you put in the tires?*

A: The high-pressure tires held from 40 to 60 pounds of air. That was probably another reason so many of them blew out. With that much pressure in them, if you hit anything, it would puncture the tire.

Q: How did you take care of your flats?

A: Everybody carried a patch kit and a tire pump. The kit was a can with patches, glue, and a scraper to rough up your tube with. You roughed up the tube, put your glue on, then pulled the backing off the patch and put it on.

Q: Were there tubeless tires?

A: Oh no! They had tubes in them. I think it was around 1945 before we could get tubeless tires. But most cars didn't have them.

Q: Where were the spare tires kept in the early days?

A: On the fancy cars the spares were often kept in chrome containers located in front fenders wells. In others, they were on the back.

Q: Didn't you work at recapping tires, during World War II?

A: Yes, from October 1942, to December 31, 1945, I worked at the Beacon in Miles City, recapping and vulcanizing tires.

Q: What was vulcanizing?

A: It was repairing holes, where tires had blown out. We had to cut out the loose stuff and fill it with latex, a layer at a time. Then a tube was put in the tire and the tire placed in a metal form and cooked for 45 minutes at 360° with steam pressure. The recapping was done by buffing off the old tread, putting on the latex glue, then the "camel back," which is what they called the new tread. It was then cooked with steam pressure at 360° for 1½ hours, while in the form.

People brought us tires out of barns and chicken houses; some had been used as swings and were egg shaped. We vulcanized them, if necessary, then recapped them.

Q: How long would one of your recapped tires last?

A: At first we used reprocessed rubber, so the tread lasted only 2-3,000 miles. Later, they came up with synthetic rubber made from coal, like the Germans were using. Those recaps lasted much longer. In the time I was at the Beacon, we recapped 45,000 tires.

Q: How much were batteries?

A: A battery at that time [1930s] was \$45. When you are working for \$2 a day, that's quite a lot of money. Imagine what it would cost today at that rate!

Q: How long would your batteries last?

A: Well, a Willard or an Excide would perhaps last 4-5 years, if you kept a check on them--checked the water in them. I don't think any of them would last more than that and a lot of them lasted a lot less.

Q: *These were all manual shift cars?*

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: *When did you get your first automatic transmission?*

A: It was in the Nash Ambassador. It was a 1952 and we bought it in 1955. Our 1940 Dodge had the gear shift on the steering column. All of the others, before the Dodge, were on the floor.

Q: *So the early cars had a stick shift on the floor?*

A: Oh yes. And they had different positions for different gears. On the Dodge the left side and ahead was reverse. Back on that side was low, over on the other side and ahead was intermediate, while back to the right and rear was high. The Buick had reverse to the upper left and low was to the lower right. Intermediate was to the upper right and high was to the lower left.

The Model T had the most difficult set up of all. If you could learn to drive that thing, you could fly a plane. And that's what your mom learned to drive on. It had three foot pedals. The one on the left was low, the middle one was reverse, while on the right was the brake. Plus, it had a lever on the left that worked like this: All the way back was the emergency brake, halfway was neutral, and full forward was high.

Q: *Almost exactly the reverse?*

A: Almost exactly the reverse. There were 3 different shifts, until they finally got standardized. So you had to watch how you shifted when you got into the different cars.

Q: *Did you have any transmission problems in those early cars?*

A: Not in my cars. In the Dort there was no transmission problem, but the ring gear played out, stripped, or something. Tom at that time had a 4 cylinder Buick on which the engine had quit, so he said: "Take the back-end out of the Buick and use it." I tried, but it didn't work and I wasn't enough of a welder to make it work. So we junked them both. Now the Model T had a different set up. It had 3 bands--one for low, one for reverse, and one for brake. I was hauling coal there in Howe [Nebraska] in an old one-ton Model T truck and got out south and east of Howe with a load. Where I had to dump it or scoop it off there was a snowdrift and I got stuck. I wore out both the low and the reverse bands. It was 10° below zero and I had to put in new bands, before I could get back to town. Fortunately, the transmission and its oil were warm, so I kept dipping my hands in the oil. Then I put my mittens on to put the screws back on the cap. The cap was about 7 inches long and 4 inches wide.

Q: *What about the brakes in the early cars? Were they like our brakes today?*

A: Oh no! They were outside grab brakes on rear wheels.

Q: None on the front?

A: No. The first front wheel brakes came out on the 1928 Buick. In 1925, Chrysler bought out the Maxwell Company and their first cars had hydraulic brakes, on the rear wheels, of course.

Q: You have driven cars with mechanical and hydraulic breaks, so what was the difference between them?

A: There was a vast difference, like the difference between driving a Model T and a Cadillac.

Q: Did you have to push harder with the mechanical type?

A: Oh yes. The mechanical brakes wouldn't stop like a hydraulic brake. When you touch a hydraulic brake you compound the pressure a great deal. Of course, now you have expansion brakes, which are much more successful. The old brakes were on the outside of the drum. They would get mudded up or wet and would not stop at all.

Q: So these early mechanical brakes squeezed the drum from the outside?

A: Yes. And they had a coil spring arranged so that when you let off the brake the shoes would spread apart.

Q: How often did you have to change those brake shoes?

A: I never changed any of them, because I didn't have a car that long.

Q: What was the suspension like in the early cars?

A: The Maxwell had a spring like a baby buggy spring in the rear, allowing the car to rise enough to let the drive shaft slip out of the splines of the shaft and drop to the ground. It usually happened on a railroad crossing or any sharp rise like that. You can imagine the inconvenience of such a thing, as well as the danger. The 1932 Plymouth had a "floating power," "knee action" front end, using coil springs.

Q: Were these cars of yours four door or two door?

A: My first two were both four door.

Q: Did the doors open in the same way as ours today?

A: The front doors did, but not the back. They opened in reverse.

Q: They opened from the front?

A: Yes, and they had so many doors torn off [from opening while on the move] that they stopped making them that way.

Q: What was the inside of the car like? We use vinyl today on our seats. What were the early ones covered with?

A: Both of my early ones had cloth, a kind of fuzzy broadcloth. I don't know what it

was. It wasn't wool and it wasn't cotton. It was more like a man-made material. The old Studebaker had genuine mohair.

Q: You said something about the starters being over the batteries. Where were the batteries in these early cars?

A: Some of them were under the back floorboard, but most were under the front floorboard. They were right down where they got all of the mud, water, and everything.

Q: How did you get to the battery?

A: Over the battery the floorboard lifted up. There were thumbscrews that had to be removed.

Q: Today we dim our lights usually up on the steering column. Where were the dimmers in the early days?

A: The dimmer was on the floor. You had a little button that you pushed with your foot.

Q: Were there parking brakes?

A: They had an emergency brake activated with a hand lever.

Q: When you parked, did you put the transmission in gear?

A: Yea, you just put it in gear and pulled the emergency brake. The Model T had a unique setup. The emergency brake was a lever to the left of the driver. All the way back was the emergency brake, half way was neutral and all the way down was high.

Q: Were all of the early transmissions the same?

A: No. The transmission on the Model T was controlled by three foot pedals arranged as follows: The lower pedal top left, reverse, middle and the right was the foot brake. The older Overland cars had the transmission next to the differential [rear-end] with a linkage rod up to the shifting lever. The 1919 model had an electric gearshift on the dash, with four buttons. It was about 30 years ahead of the times. The 1913 Maxwell, our first car, was a right hand drive with the gearshift and hand brake on the outside.

Q: When did seat belts become available?

A: The first ones I saw were about 1960 and they had to be special ordered and didn't work too well. Seems like they had a problem with the clasp.

Q: Of what were these early cars made?

A: Some of the older ones had aluminum oil pans and brass was used extensively. The bodies were heavy steel. The older Dodges had a baked on enamel finish. To demonstrate the durability of the paint, the salesmen would hit the body with an

axe. Some of the older ones had plywood dashboards.

Q: Did they all use a steering wheel?

A: The earliest ones steered with a lever, rather than a wheel. Those affluent enough to own one would dress in riding clothes, with a cap and goggles, to go "autoing," as it was called.

Q: Did you ride motorcycles before you got a car?

A: Oh yea.

Q: What kind of motorcycles did you ride?

A: Well, I rode a Harley-Davidson and an Excelsior, a twin cylinder, and I had an opposed twin Harley-Davidson, but could never get it to run. It lacked a part we never could find anywhere. I don't remember what I did with it. The guys who ran them said they were great, but Floyd [his brother] said there was no way we could get that part without sending to the factory and I didn't have enough money to send for the part. I traded Ervin a sheepskin coat for the Excelsior. He got it from somebody he was working for and he had no luck starting it. He would go somewhere and he'd come pushing it home. He said: "It's nothing but a push cycle; that's all it is." I asked: "What will you take for it?" He said: "I donno." I said: "I'll give you my sheepskin coat." "You got a deal," he said. I set the carburetor where it was supposed to be, kicked it, and away I went. We had an open shed where the old buckboard and stuff was. It had been raining and I rode into the shed, turned, and slid right under the buckboard.

Q: What kind of gas mileage did you get on motorcycles?

A: I don't remember on the Excelsior, but on the Harley, which belonged to Floyd and Leo, we got, with the sidecar attached, about 40-mpg. Without the sidecar it was about 50 mpg.

Q: How much did gas cost back then?

A: Well, if there was not a gas war, it was around 18 cents up to 20 cents a gallon. Then they would have a gas war, where companies would lower prices to get customers and I could buy it for 13 cents a gallon. Of course, there was no tax on it then either. When you paid for the gas, that's all you paid for.

Q: How much were you making a day when you paid 20 cents a gallon for gas?

A: Usually \$2 to \$3 a day, but sometimes less. At \$2 per day, I was paying 1/10 of that day's salary for a gallon of gas. That would mean that if a person earned \$80 a day, in today's world, they would be paying \$8 for a gallon of gas. And they call those the "good old days."

Q: How much was a quart of oil back then?

A: I think it was around 35 cents for quite a while. When I came out here [to

Montana] in the old Hupmobile, which is another car I had, I used 50 gallons of gas and 8 gallons of oil. It was reprocessed oil I bought at a Gambles store for 75 cents a gallon.

Q: *By reprocessed you mean used oil that had been cleaned up?*

A: Yea. It had been used, then cleaned up and they put green dye in it to make it look pretty healthy. When you use that much oil it don't make much difference what you use.

Q: *Why did it use so much oil? Were the rings bad?*

A: No, I had Donny [his brother] work on it before I left. I had traded a Model T for it, while there in Nebraska. It [the Model T] was the one we took you [Fred] to Nebraska in [September 1939]. It [the Hupmobile] had one loose rod and Donny fixed the connecting rod for me. He ground the valves and found it didn't need rings. But the problem was--it was a Lycoming motor--all Hupmobiles had them. It was an L-head engine and the sleeves for the valve push rods were too soft. When they wore, it would pump the oil out. It really didn't use that much oil. In that 800-900 mile trip it probably would have used a couple quarts, if it hadn't been pushing the oil out the valve sleeves.

Q: *On what kind of roads was most of your traveling done?*

A: They were gravel and we traveled anywhere from 25-35 miles per hour. If it was 35 mph it had to be a good road.

Q: *What about on the paved highways?*

A: It was usually between 40 and 45 mph on a good road. That was what you had better drive if you wanted to keep the car a while.

Q: *You got your first car in 1934. As you look back on those cars you had in the 1930s and 1940s, which one was the best all around?*

A: Probably the Dodge and Buick, between 1920 and 1930, and I'd add the Studebaker to that, too.

Q: *Were they just better made cars, or did you happen to get a hold of cars in better shape?*

A: They were better made, better engineered, heavier built, with better material--like upholstering.

Q: *What was the worst car you ever owned?*

A: The Hupmobile. Not the body part of it, but the engine, on account of its oil use. Then, the front end was loose on it and you had trouble keeping it between the fences.

Q: *Were there stop signs in the early years?*

A: No, with horses you didn't need them. The first ones I saw were in the late 1920s.

Q: *What about traffic lights?*

A: The first ones I saw were in Lincoln and Omaha, when I was driving truck. That would have been about 1928 or 1929.

Q: *When you traveled in those early days were there any motels to stop at for the night?*

A: There were some. They called them tourist cabins and they were few and far between. They had a bed with no covers or anything on it. Most of them had the toilet outside. You even had to go outside to get your water. Some of them had a kerosene stove to heat with in the winter. Of course, nobody traveled in the winter so they didn't get used much.

Q: *What would one of these cost for a night?*

A: We got two motels on our way to Nebraska when you [Fred] were a baby [September 1939]. The first was at Kadoka, South Dakota, and it cost \$2. It did have a mattress, pillows, and one blanket on the bed, besides the sheet. It was 100° above, so we didn't need any of the covers. The next one was at Bridgeport, South Dakota, down by Yankton. It was a brand new outfit, built by a retired farmer, I guess. He built, I think, eight of them in a row. When we stayed there our unit was a new one in which no one had stayed before and that was also \$2. The next night we were down home at Brock [Nebraska].

Q: *What are a couple of major differences between those early cars and the cars we have today?*

A: I don't think there is any comparison at all. The car today is a very dependable piece of machinery and in those days they were not. The least little thing could go wrong. The distributor was one thing you had trouble with. The carburetor was another. Their rod bearings were Babbitt; they didn't have inserts. They didn't have oil pressure; instead, it was a dip system that slopped the oil up into the engine, so the wear and tear on the engine was terrible. In the Saxxon, that Lute [his brother-in-law] had, the oil system fed to each cylinder through four glass vials on the dash, so you could see the lubrication system in operation.

Q: *In those days I assume that the cars had speedometers on the dash. What other gauges did they have?*

A: The Model T didn't. Most cars from 1920 on up, and some before that, had speedometers. Some ran off the front wheel and some ran off the transmission. Ford came out with the speedometer with the Model A. Then they had a regular speedometer. Before that you could buy one and place the gear on the inside of a front wheel.

Q: *Were the speedometers very accurate?*

A: Fairly so. The older speedometers didn't have a hand, the speedometer digits turned on a little spool thing.

Q: *What about odometers that recorded the miles traveled?*

A: The early cars didn't have them at all. The first one I remember was on my 1931 Durant.

Q: *What was the fastest you ever went in one of those old cars?*

A: I got the Studebaker up to 60 once with a lot of coaxing.

Q: *Was it smooth or did it vibrate a lot?*

A: It vibrated quite a bit.

Q: *Did you have to balance your tires back then?*

A: We had never heard of it. If you had a tire that held air, it was pretty good. We didn't worry about balancing.

Q: *Did you have to align the front wheels on the early cars?*

A: Not until the cars with "knee-action" [coil spring] front ends came out. The early ones had flat springs in the front and those didn't have to be aligned.

Q: *Were the paved roads concrete or blacktop?*

A: Where they had a lot of oil--Oklahoma, etc.--they were blacktop and were called McAdan, after the guy that invented them. In our area of Nebraska, they were concrete.

Q: *What percent of the early roads would have been paved?*

A: Well, the main road from Omaha [Nebraska] to Kansas City [Missouri], which was number 75, wasn't paved, except right around the cities, until 1930. I worked on it in 1930, after I had come back from Montana. Worked on it in 1931, too.

Q: *The rest of the roads were graveled?*

A: Most of them were dirt. But before that one [75] was paved, it was graveled. They had a bus system then, which I guess was national--Yellowway Bus. They weren't as big as a Greyhound today, but they were huge for those days. They had a hood out front, like some busses today. I remember the tires. They didn't have duals; they had huge tires 42" x 10" in the rear. I think the front tires were 42" x 8 1/4". Of course, they were 20" wheels.

Q: *When you had a problem out on the road in those days, could you call for a wrecker?*

A: Not unless you were around a big city. They didn't have many anywhere else.

Q: *How did you deal with your problem, if your car broke down?*

A: Well, if you couldn't fix it you caught a ride back to town and got a mechanic or

you had a farmer pull it into his lot and get Floyd [his brother] to come fix it.

Q: *What was the fastest you ever went on one of your early motorcycles?*

A: One hundred miles an hour and that's too fast!

Q: *Did it run smooth at that speed?*

A: Oh yea! You kind of hydroplaned a little bit, on account of your air pressure pushing on the front of the motorcycle. We didn't have a windshield in those days, so the air pressure on you and the cycle took some of the weight off the front of the cycle. It made you feel not too secure at that speed. Seventy miles an hour was fine, but not 100.

Q: *Did you wear any kind of special clothes when you rode a motorcycle?*

A: Just goggles.

Q: *Did everybody wear goggles?*

A: Yea. You had to on account of flies, mosquitoes, bugs, and stuff. If you got one of them in your eye going down the road on a motorcycle, you had a problem.

Q: *So you didn't have windshields on those early motorcycles?*

A: No, no. Not in those days.

Q: *Besides riding on motorcycles or in cars in those early days, did you use trains at all?*

A: Yea, I rode, as a kid, from Auburn to Howe on what they called the Plug, the Missouri-Pacific passenger train that went from Falls City to Omaha [Nebraska] and back on the same day. Its nickname was the Plug. It had three coaches. One was for baggage and mail, while the other two were for passengers. It didn't go up through Julian, instead it went up along what was called the low line, through Brock, Talmage, Dunbar, and back into Omaha.

Q: *Was this a steam train?*

A: Oh yea.

Q: *Did you have any electric trains around?*

A: No.

Q: *Did you have any electric street cars in those days?*

A: In Omaha and Lincoln. I guess Grand Island had them too, but when I got there they had a bus.

Q: *Was it cheaper to go by train or by car from Howe to Auburn?*

A: Well, if you don't count any wear and tear on the car it was cheaper by car. But you could go from Auburn to Howe for 25 cents train fare.

Q: How many miles was that?

A: Six miles. For the 25 cents you could buy about a gallon and a half of gas, which would take you 30 miles or so.

Q: What was the worst gas mileage you ever heard of in a car back then?

A: The Studebaker!

Q: What did it get?

A: It took 3 gallons of gas to go 6 miles. That's the day we trade it off.

Q: What about car wrecks in those days? Did you see many?

A: Quite a few. Mainly because of the instability of the car itself, because of the steering systems they had and because of road conditions. Roads back there [in eastern Nebraska] were all section line roads with square corners. Somebody would be going too fast and roll over. Sometimes they would miss a bridge and go down into a creek or river. I remember one time when people coming home from a dance south of Brock missed the bridge and went down into the Nemaha River. One of the girls drowned. One of the guys could have gotten her out, but he had a new suit on and didn't want to get his suit wet. I remember that very distinctly. Can you imagine that? A new suit against the life of a girl!

Q: Were most of the accidents single car accidents.

A: Yes, because there wasn't a great deal of traffic.

Q: In those early days did cars often hit animals on the road--deer or cattle?

A: Well, in our part of the country [Nebraska] everything was fenced. And there was no wild game there at that time, like there is now. The thing that might have happened was someone hitting a cow that had gotten out at night, but I can't recall any, though I know that happened.

Q: When you were traveling in those days and there was no motel around could you stop and stay with local farmers?

A: Well, I suppose you could have, but we never did. We always slept in the car. If we had a blanket along, we'd roll out on the ground. When Leo, Ervin, and I went to Julesburg [Colorado], we stayed in the city park at Kearney [Nebraska]; we slept out on the grass.

Q: How many names of cars can you remember?

A: At one time I had compiled a list of over 300 cars I could recall seeing, all made in the U.S. Floyd [his brother] at one time had an auto magazine that listed over 1,500 different brands of cars that had been built in America.

These are the ones I remember:

Allen	Dodge	Jordan	Pontiac
Ajax	Duesenberg	Kaiser	Pullman
Auburn	Durant	Kissel Car	Rambler

Apperson	Elgin	La Salle	REO
Brisco	EMNF	Lafayette	Rickenbacker
Buick	Erskine	Lexington	Rockne
Cadillac	Essex	Locomobile	Saxxon
Case	Felix	Marman	Scripsbooth
Cevauz	Ford	Marquette	Sears Car
Chalmers	Franklin	Maxwell	Stanley Steamer
Cherd	Fraiser	Mercury	Star
Chevy	Gardner	Mitchell	Sterns-Knight
Chord	Graham	Moon	Stutz Bearcat
Chrysler	Graham-Paige	Nash	Terra-Plane
Cleveland	Grant	Oakland	Toledo
Cole	Gray	Oldsmobile	Tucker
Columbia	Hollywood-Graham	Overland	Veilia
Crossley	Hudson	Packard	Whippit
Culver Car	Hupmobile	Paige	White Steamer
Damier	International	Pilot Car	Willes-Knight
Dearborn	Jewett		
DeSoto			

Q: Do you remember the first airplane you saw?

A: Yes, I do. I was 7 years old and we lived west of Brock, about 2 miles, and this was during the First World War. We heard this awful noise and no one could figure out what it was; it didn't sound like thunder. We ran outside to see and saw 17 or 18 planes going over from Omaha, going south. Those were the first planes I had seen. I saw a lot of them after that. They used to take those old planes to picnics and fairs and take people for rides for a couple of dollars. They were old World War I planes.

Q: Did you ever go up in one back then?

A: No.

Q: When was the first time you rode in a plane?

A: When we went to Coleman's wedding [in southern California] in 1969. I think it was 1928 and we had the merry-go-round at Talmage [Nebraska], the next town north of Brock. All of those towns had 2-day picnics and that's why we had the merry-go-round there. A girl that I was interested in said: "You watch me tomorrow." "Why, what are you going to do?" I asked. She said: "When that plane comes over here, you are gonna see me out on the wing." And the little brat did it! How they allowed it I don't know. She was sitting out there on that wing holding on to one of the struts just as big as you please. I didn't have guts enough to go up in one. I got razzed a little.

Q: How old was she?

A: I was 18, so she was probably 16. She had more nerve than I had.

Q: Did any of your family members go up in one?

A: Leo did. As far as I know, he is the only one who ever rode in a plane, unless Tom [his brother] flew to Phoenix or California. Floyd said: "You're never going to get me up there in one of those things."

Q: How did Leo come to ride in one?

A: It was in Talmage, when he, Floyd, and I were there with the merry-go-round. Somebody, I think it was Ada Darling, daughter of the guy who owned the outfit [merry-go-round], dared Leo to go up with her and he did. I chickened out. I went over and looked it over, but it didn't look very stout.

Q: Was it a biplane?

A: Oh yea. The planes were covered with canvas then coated with shellac or paint.

Q: What did Leo think of the ride?

A: He thought it was pretty nice. Said he got up there, looked down "and seen lot's of stuff".

Q: There is no doubt that we travel faster and farther today than you folks did in the early years. It should give us more time to do other things. Does it?

A: Not necessarily, mainly because there are many more things that require our attention. Today some drive 20-80 miles to and from work, etc., etc.

Q: Has our modern transportation system led to more or less stress?

A: We had neighbors in Auburn, Nebraska, who had traveled from Pennsylvania to California in a covered wagon, taking one year. The same trip today would consume all of 3-3½ hours, in comparative comfort, while the wagon trip lacked anything that could be considered comfortable today.

Q: I think it was Will Rogers who said something like: "Thank you Mr. Ford [for the auto], but it will take us a hundred years to figure out whether you have helped us or hurt us." What would you say about that? Has the auto helped us or hurt us?

A: Compare the automatic washer to the washboard, the rubber tire tractor to the mule team and the walking plow (I have used both), the snow shovel to the snow blower and on and on. I lived in the "good old days" and I would not trade back.

Q: Let's finish up here by having you list, in order, all of the cars you have owned.

A: Okay, I can do that:

1931 Pontiac

1931 Durant

1926 Ford (Model T)

1928 Hupmobile

1934 Plymouth

1934 Plymouth

1940 Dodge

1934 Plymouth

1948 Nash

1952 Nash Ambassador

1960 Dodge Dart

1968 Chrysler Newport

1991 Plymouth Acclaim

1936 Oldsmobile
1934 Plymouth

1979 Plymouth Horizon
1985 Chrysler LeBaron