

The Preservationist

The Member Newsletter of the Elkhart Lake Historic Race Circuits Preservation Society
Volume 38

Fall 2017

ROBERT SIDNEY “SID” DICKENS

1911 -1997

“A Genius with a Sense of Humor” - A profile by Fred Egloff

“Sid” Dickens was an Indiana farm boy, a descendent of circuit riding Baptist preachers, Native American Indians, and President James K. Polk. He started his career painting barns in rural communities. After high school, he left home and set out on his own supporting himself by trimming store windows and making stage curtains for burlesque houses. Along the way he met a lovely girl from Wisconsin named Ruth who became his wife. In 1930 Ruth gave birth to a son they named Robert Lee Dickens always called “Bob”.

The Dickens family settled in the Chicago area where Sid began designing packaging for consumer products. He had a kind of genius for package design that seemed to make product fly off store shelves. He could solve almost any problem and his ability to do so on a purposeful level would take him to the top levels of his profession. In 1931 he founded a packaging design



Sid Dickens appears in an early trade ad for cellophane see-through packaging.

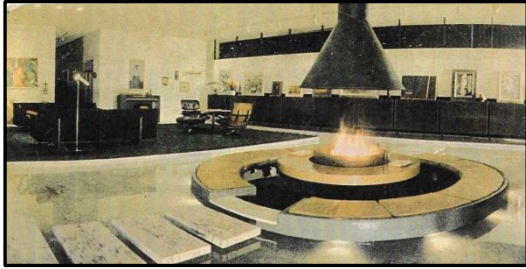
firm that became the Dickens Design Group, one of the best known and prestigious in the country. Some of his recognizable designs include the Dial soap wrapper, Kimberly-Clark and General Mills products, Oscar Meyer meats, Jones Sausage, Morton Salt, emblems for Schlitz, Blatz and Hamms beer, as well as Coca Cola cartons and Tab bottles.

Bob Dickens attended Niles Twp. High School, the University of Colorado, and the Chicago Academy of Art. He was an artist in his own right and joined the now rapidly growing design group after completion of his studies. Bob and his wife Lou settled in Oak Park, IL.

Sid's creativeness didn't stop with his package designs. He designed his own home, studio and clothing for himself that he called “Fat Boy” Edwardian.

Dickens first studio in Chicago was on Ernst Court (1 block long) half a block west of Michigan Ave. and

between Walton and Delaware. Sid designed and built his ultimate studio on Grand Ave. a block west of Michigan. Around 1970 it was the only industrial design firm with all



The Dickens' third floor residence.

of its facilities under one roof. The Dickens residence and garden were on the top floor and the full studio occupied the entire middle floor. The first floor contained a 3,000 sq. ft. "superstore" to test product shelf appearance and design. The Chicago Tribune featured it in the Sunday color magazine with a color photo on the cover entitled "A designer and his urban fortress".

Sid wasn't at Wacker's gathering that founded Chicago Region of SCCA, but was among the earliest members. His first sports car was a light green MG-TC he bought as a gift for Ruth. None of the three Dickens' could be described as tall or even medium height but Ruth was the smallest at 4" 8". They had to put nine inch blocks on the pedals so she could reach them. The terra-cotta brown that Sid eventually colored the car he called "Dickens Racing Red".

Sid and Ruth both raced in the 1950 races in Elkhart Lake. Sid ran in

both the under 1500 cc novice event finishing 6th and the main event for experienced drivers although the result is not known. Ruth, with pedal blocks in place, ran in the Ladies Race finishing 5th overall and 3rd in class.

At Elkhart Lake in 1951 Bob Dickens ran in the Novice Race finishing 15th overall and 6th in class. Sid ran in the Main Event for Experienced Drivers but completed only thirteen laps. As luck would have it, Sid overcooked the bend at the location named in his honor and ended up back end first in "Dickens Ditch" the site of today's Historical Marker.

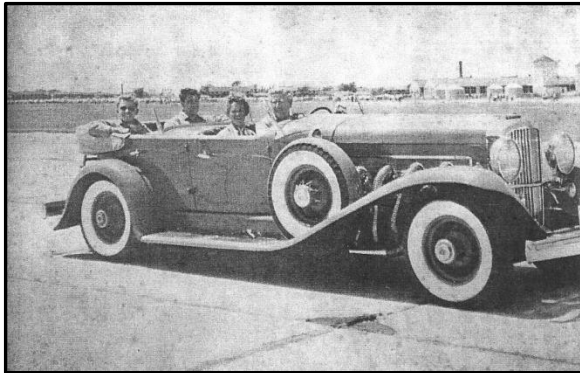


Sid in his MG-TC slides into Dickens Ditch resulting in a loss of oil pressure and an early retirement in 1951.

Following the Elkhart Lake races Sid raced off and on until 1956 running in MGs, a Jaguar XK120 and a Siata Spyder. His last race was in a Nardi at the Road America National Championship Endurance race with Bob Schroeder as co-

driver. Unfortunately they did not finish.

Sid eventually owned a number of other sports cars including an E Type Jaguar and a Lamborghini Miura. He later purchased a Duesenberg which was frequently seen touring along State Street.



Sid's 1934 Duesenberg phaeton at Chanute Air Base.

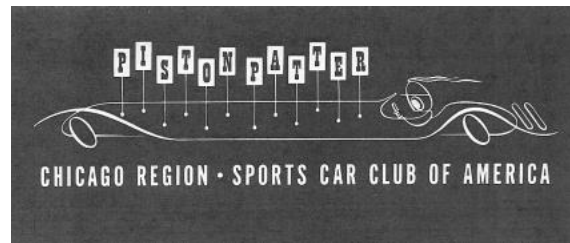
Bob Dickens raced a modified Victoress (renamed a "Mooselette") at Wilmot in 1958 and raced Mini Coopers for many years.



Sid (center) and Bob (left) at a Chicago Region meeting

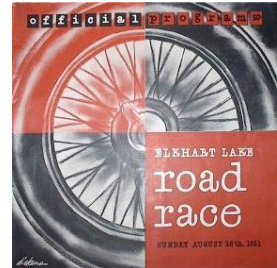
Sid and Bob both made significant contributions to the early development of the Chicago Region and the Region benefitted greatly from Dickens' design skills. As soon as Dave Garroway came up with the name for the regional publication, Sid designed a logo with an elongated twelve cylinder sports car with its pistons labeled PISTON

PATTER that was used for many years thereafter.



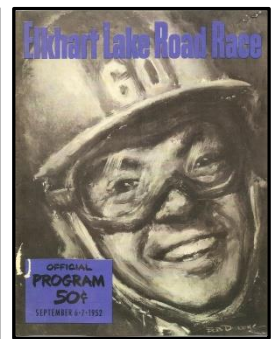
The Sid Dickens designed Piston Patter logo.

The orange wire wheel program cover for the 1951 Elkhart Lake Road Races was also designed by Sid.



The Sid Dickens designed 1951 program cover.

Bob Dickens designed the 1952 blue driver program cover that featured a self-portrait.

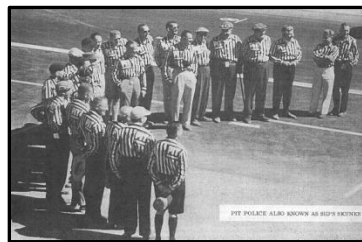


Bob Dickens and the 1952 program cover self-portrait.

Bob Dickens also drew the now familiar picture map circling the lake used in the 1951 reservation form. Although the course was later revised, the map showed the shorter course using CTY X and the start finish line on Lake Street near the intersection with East Street. The

[illegible]

The Sid and Ruth were also excellent Ralliers winning the 1952 Cook County 120 and custody if the coveted Borg Warner Trophy (the same as given to the 500 winner). Sid also designed some very successful rally brochures for the likes of the Rally Elkhart Lake, The Lake Michigan Miglia and the Old Fashioned Fun Rally.



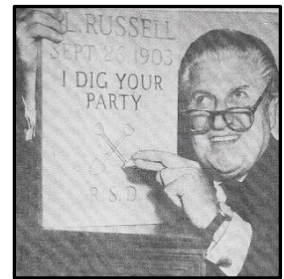
Sid was responsible for the pit stewards at the 1955 RA

Sid's stripped skunks but the shirt motif was expanded and employed many of the following years.

In 1954 Sid was elected the clubs fifth Regional Executive and he became the editor for PISTON PATTERN in 1956 and 1957 developing it into a work of art with a longitudinal format and featuring superb graphic design.

Sid displayed his unfailing sense of humor when SCCA member Al Russell threw a party for the men he would most like to serve as pallbearers at his funeral. He was dead serious. Sid who was a

Sid with Al Russell's 50 lb tombstone.



Sid with Al Russell's 50 lb tombstone.

potential pallbearer, dropped by Al's office to deliver his RSVP to the party lugging a 50 pound tombstone with Russell's name lettered gravely thereon.

Sid was a popular speaker to classes of budding designers in his later years. He retired to Manasoto Key, Florida in the late 1970s.

On Sid's retirement, Bob took over the Dickens Design Group but closed it down in 1989 moving to a ranch in Livingston, Montana to pursue a career in western art under the name "Little Blue Hand".



Sid and Ruth at a Chicago Region event.

Sid passed away in 1997 and Ruth in 2001.
They will long be remembered.

Fall Dinner Event Report

On September 14, 2017 eighty-nine HRC members and guests gathered at Siebkens Resort in Elkhart Lake for the last HRC dinner event of 2017. This included 9 new members who, at the dinner, took advantage of the September early 2018 membership special thus receiving remaining 2017 membership benefits including:

1. 2017 membership pin.
2. Member pricing for the evenings dinner.
3. Direct email receipt of this as well as 2018 issues of the Preservationist.

HRC memberships, except for Life Membership, are on an annual basis January thru December.

Acquaintances were renewed and new friendships begun at the reception in the Stop-Inn Tavern. Dinner was served in the Main Dining Room highlighted by the

main course, a delicious Beef Wellington. Guest speaker for the evening was Richard "Nick" Candee, an internationally recognized authority on Aston Martin and the co-author of The Aston Martin DB4GT⁽¹⁾.

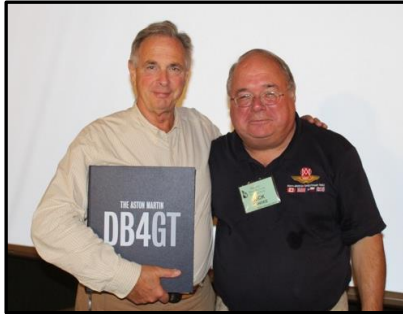


"Nick" Candee with HRC member Kaye Kovacs (right) and "Nick's" longtime friend and new HRC member Diane Markham Lane (left) who in the 1960's survived transport to a winter formal in Nick's red Triumph TR3, in a blizzard no less, elegant in a floor-length gown.

Photo by Ron Nelson

John Calhoun opened the program by welcoming new Lifetime Members John and Sonia Breslow and Najeeb and Nancy Khan.

Reporting on the recent resurfacing of County Highways P and JP, John told the group that HRC was glad to see that the resurfacing was performed in compliance with the Resource Management agreement between the Wisconsin State Historical Society and the Sheboygan County Transportation Department.



*HRC Director Clyde Morter introduces Nick and the main program.
Photo by Ron Nelson*

HRC
Director
Clyde
Morter,
who has
been
friends
with Nick
since
boyhood

when they were in the same Cub Scout pack, introduced Nick for presentation of the evening's main program.

Nick augmented his presentation with a variety of photos and illustrations as

he explained the origins of the fabled Aston Martin DB4GT series and its eventual evolution into later DB models including the DB5 made famous as James Bond's car in the film "Goldfinger". HRC thanks Nick for his lively and stimulating presentation.



Nick backs his presentation with photos and illustrations.

All in all, the evening was a fine kickoff to the Elkhart Lake Vintage Festival weekend and a great wrap-up for another enjoyable and informative HRC season.

1. The 544 page book is available from Palawan Press, London, www.palawan.co.uk