

The Preservationist

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D. CAMERON PECK

1912 – 1990

“Heaven is thirty minutes from Chicago”

By Fred Egloff

Peck's Alley located on CTY JP just beyond the turn off CTY J with its long gentle uphill run under a leafy green bower, is easily the most beautiful and peaceful location on the Historic Race Circuits. It was named for D. Cameron Peck who was arguable one of the most influential pioneers of the vintage car collectors that emerged after World War II.



D. Cameron Peck

wreck.” He purchased the truck for \$35 and spent months restoring it. It was the beginning of a passion for collecting and restoring vintage automobiles that spanned more than twenty years. His collection would eventually be among the largest in the country.

As his collection grew, he became acquainted with Major Lenox Lohr the head of the Chicago's Museum of

Peck resided in Evanston, IL and was a Vice President of the Bowman Dairy Company. Bowman Dairy, established in the 1870s, had become the largest home delivery provider of



The Bowman Dairyman, a familiar sight on the streets of the Chicagoland area.

dairy products in the world by 1940. At its peak the Company employed over 4,000 Chicago area residents. Peck's grandfather, Dr. Comfort Edison Peck, had married into the Bowman family in the late 1800s and his father,

Dr. David Bowman Peck was elected president of the Company in 1935.

D. Cameron Peck, (the D. was for David to avoid confusion with his father) was called Cameron or “Cam” by his friends.. Cameron Peck was infatuated with automobiles as far back as he could remember. Recalling how his collection began he said, “I first decided to collect cars in 1930 when I discovered a 1908 two cylinder International truck in back of a gas station in Niles Center (now Skokie) Illinois. It was a

Science and Industry. Over time Peck loaned the Museum more than thirty cars for public display and he was named the Museum's Associate Curator of Transportation. In 1946 Peck and Lohr joined with Auto Scrapbook publisher Floyd Clymer to stage a reenactment of America's first auto race (originally held in 1895). It was a fifty-four mile race that ran from the Museum in Chicago to Evanston and back on the original course. It was the first auto event other than auto shows the author remembers attending.

The gradual transition from horse drawn wagons to motorized trucks opened up a lot of space in various Bowman Dairy “Barns” for car storage in which Peck regularly stored his collection. In 1947 he moved his main collection into a private auto museum located in a former auto dealership at 2520 Green Bay Road in Evanston. The facility housed more than a 135 cars the oldest dating back to the first automobile offered for resale, an 1892 Benz. Inside the entrance was a drawing room like salon with oriental carpets where four cars could be displayed alongside of the 5 foot tall

Elgin Road Race trophy. Behind the room was a large display area with space for three rows of cars. A service garage was attached on the right where restoration work was done. The year it opened the museum was featured in the Chicago Tribune's Sunday Magazine.

There were five full time staffers manning the museum; Chester "Jeff" Shelton, 1st mechanic; Hal Ullrich, 2nd mechanic; Ed Inman, upholsterer and painter; George "Riz" Risley; Librarian and Henry Thomas, Peck's man Friday. Riz said that 650 cars passed thru the collection in the years of its existence from 1936 to 1952. The collection at its height contained 175 restored vehicles.



The Museum staff (left to right) Chester "Jeff" Shelton, Henry Thomas, Ed Inman, Hal Ullrich and George "Riz" Risley with a 1909 American Underslung Traveler.

Peck's collection was one of the three largest collections in the world being matched only by the Ford exhibit and the Barney Pollard collection in Detroit. The July-Aug 1948 issue of SPORTS CAR published by the SCCA contained an article by Bob Gegen (Florida Regional Executive) about his visit to the Museum entitled "Heaven is thirty minutes from Chicago".

Peck had excellent taste and made impeccable choices in his collection that included the oldest operating vehicle in the United States, a 1884 DeDion steamer, the only known example of an Adams Farwell 6 with its rear mounted rotary engine, the 1913 Peugeot that won the Indy 500 with a four cylinder dual overhead cam engine fore-runner of the famed Offenhauser and the famous Bugatti Royale built by Ettore Bugatti for himself. Hal Ullrich drove the Bugatti from the east coast to Evanston and was often asked what it was like driving the "Big Bug". Hal said, "It was late November and it had no heater so I

damn near froze my butt off". The car required some extremely large tires (700x24) that were only available to the US Army. Peck phoned Harvey Firestone telling him that he would take all the Firestones off Bowman Dairy's hundreds of trucks unless he got the big tires he needed. He got the tires!

Peck maintained memberships in car clubs throughout the world. In the early 1950s he was simultaneously president of The Antique Automobile Club of America (AACA) and the Veteran Motor Car Club of America (VMCCA). He served as National Secretary of the SCCA in 1949 and received the Woolf Barnato Award as member of the year for his outstanding contributions. He urged and advised Fred Wacker to organize the Chicago Region and attended the Regions early meetings and events. Peck served as SCCA National President for two years (1950 and 1951) sanctioning and overseeing national events including the first Elkhart Lake national events in 1951. He organized and judged the Concours d' Elegance events in all three years.



Concours cars parked along Lake Street in 1952.

In 1949 and finally in 1952, Peck auctioned off his entire collection. It's not clear why he did so but rumor had it that he was fighting skin cancer brought on by exposure to UV light when he was young. Problems with the IRS may have also been a contributing factor.

3,500 requests were received for the 67 car list for the final auction in 1952. On the day of the sale Peck acted as auctioneer himself because these cars were his "children". Those unable to attend the large gathering could mail in bids. Many of the cars went for more than the minimum required and today are selling for millions. Purchasers included well known collectors like opera star James Melton, Henry

Lloyd Weindt a noted historian reported that

Austin Clark, J.B. Neathercutt and Briggs Cunningham. Many of the cars eventually ended up in Bill Harrah's famous National Automobile Collection in Nevada.

Following World War II, as home delivery of milk products slowly declined in favor of supermarket distribution, Bowman Dairy Co. began to experience losses in its home delivery

sector that would eventually forcing the Company out of the dairy business completely. The business was later purchased by local rival, Dean Foods.

After selling his collection, Cameron Peck was no longer active in motorsports. He retired to Tucson, Arizona in 1953 where, overcoming his health problems, he lived to the age of 77 passing away in 1990. He was survived by his wife Margaret and his brother Edison.

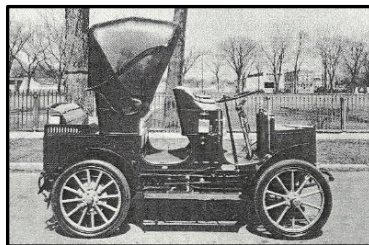
Epilog: After Peck's Collection was liquidated, the Ullrich brothers Hal and Bill rented the Museum's restoration shop and opened Ullrich Engineering, a shop that worked on exotic cars while maintaining and racing Brooks Stevens' Excalibur race cars.

It would be inappropriate to conclude an article based on the life of D. Cameron Peck without including photos of some of the vintage cars in his collection, but how does one choose? Given that over 650 cars passed thru Peck's collection this is a daunting task to say the least. The following are a few photos ranked by era.

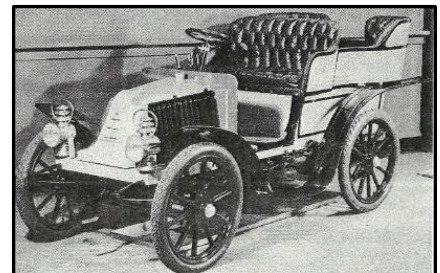
PRE WORLD WAR I ERA



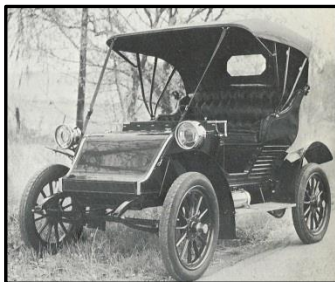
Peck fires up his 1884 De Dion steamer with wife Margaret as passenger. It brought 4.6 million at action in 2011



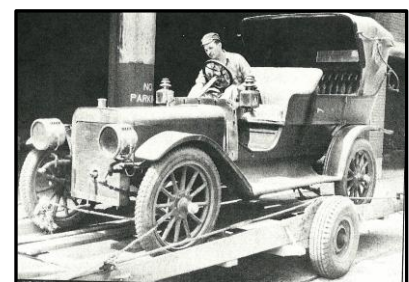
1902 Gardner Serpollet Model F with Victoria body by Kellner. Note the inadequate brake shoe on the rear tire.



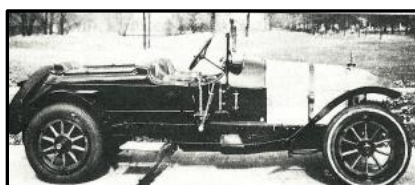
1903 rear entrance Renault powered by a one-cylinder 8 hp engine.



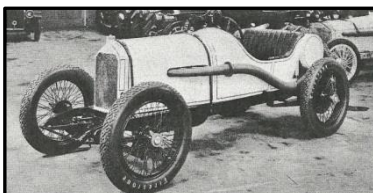
The 1906 Adams Farwell 6 (left) and the unique rotary engine that was rear mounted horizontally to power the car (center).



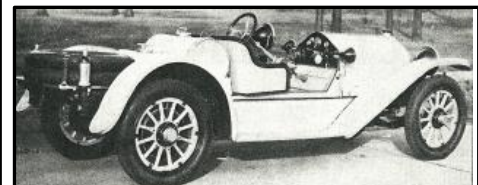
1907 Model K Ford Victoria the largest car ever to bear the Ford name with Bill Ullrich at the wheel.



1913 Austro Daimler "Prince Henry" four-cylinder three passenger roadster.



The 1913 three liter Peugeot that won the Indianapolis 500 of that year.

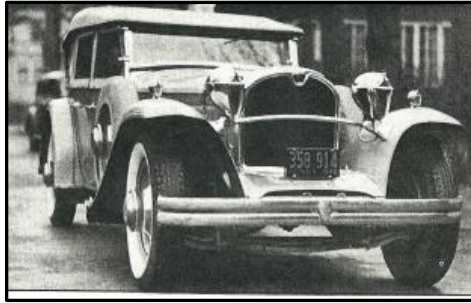


1913 National semi-racing roadster powered by a 4-cylinder T-head Wisconsin engine.

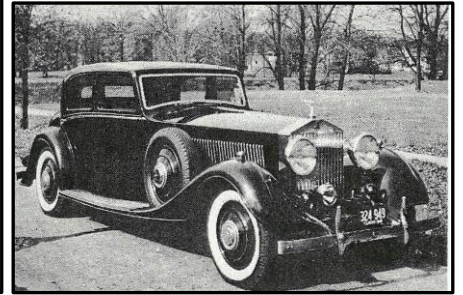
POST WORLD WAR I ERA



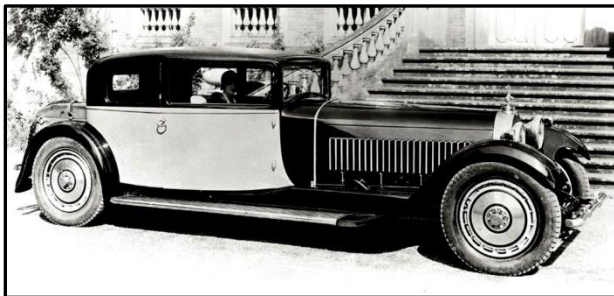
1925 Vauxhall 4-cylinder boat tail roadster Model OE. England's fastest stock car of the twenties (100 mph.) and Bentley's great rival.



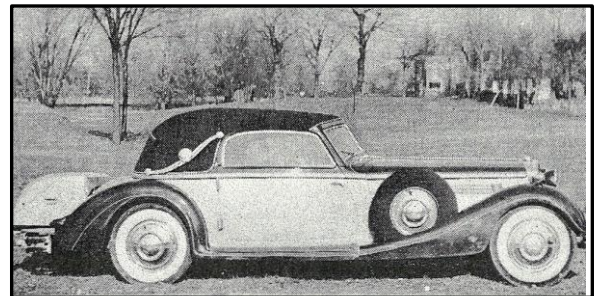
Rare 1931 Ruxton phaeton front wheel drive built by Moon Motors and powered by a Continental engine. Only two phaetons were built.



1934 Rolls-Royce Phantom II capable of a speed of 98 mph making it the fastest Rolls-Royce of the time.



1930 Bugatti Type 41 Royale with its massive 12.7 liter engine. Built for Ettore Bugatti as his personal car, it was the largest production car ever built.



1937 Auto-Union Type 853, 8-cylinder Horch Cabriolet, Auto-Union's most prestigious car.



Peck, who could have driven any car of his liking, preferred the 1932-33 Franklin air cooled V12 sedan manufactured by the short lived Franklin Automobile Co. in Syracuse NY as his personal car saying it was more cooperative and fun than its rivals.

Spring Dinner Report

Over 90 HRC members and friends gathered on Thursday, May 17, at historic Siebkens resort in Elkhart Lake for the spring dinner event. After a



(L to R) Members Jim Anderson, Bob Romeo and Larry Palmerson at the cocktail reception.

Photo by Ron Nelson

long winter friendships were renewed and new ones formed during a reception in Siebkens' tavern. The group then moved to Siebkens' main dining room and enjoyed a dinner of roast pork tenderloin with Marsala sauce.

Motorsport historian, Jacques Dresang, presented a program that focused on legendary American driver, constructor and innovator Dan

Gurney. Jacques and his family own and operate Kettle Moraine Preservation and



(L to R) Rick Dresang, Allison Dresang, Jacques Dresang (speaker) and HRC Chairman John Calhoun.

Photo by Ron Nelson

Restoration where they have restored race cars produced by Gurney's All American Racers. Jacques, recounted Dan Gurney's career and illustrated it with well-known and lesser-known information gathered from personally knowing the Gurney family. Jacques had his own AAR Eagle Formula Ford at Road America for the SVRA Spring Vintage Festival race weekend.

July Dinner Program Announced

Mark your calendars for next HRC Dinner Event scheduled for Thursday, July 19th preceding the WeatherTech International Challenge vintage race weekend at Road America. The program will feature Ernie Nagamatsu of Los Angeles, CA who will tell the fascinating story of the Old Yeller



Old Yeller II, the original junk yard dog.

race cars, the so-called junkyard dogs that were giant killers "back in the day". Ernie is the owner of Old Yeller II which he has taken to venues around the world. Invitations, location details and reservation forms will be in the mail later this month.