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New Mexico's First State Automobile

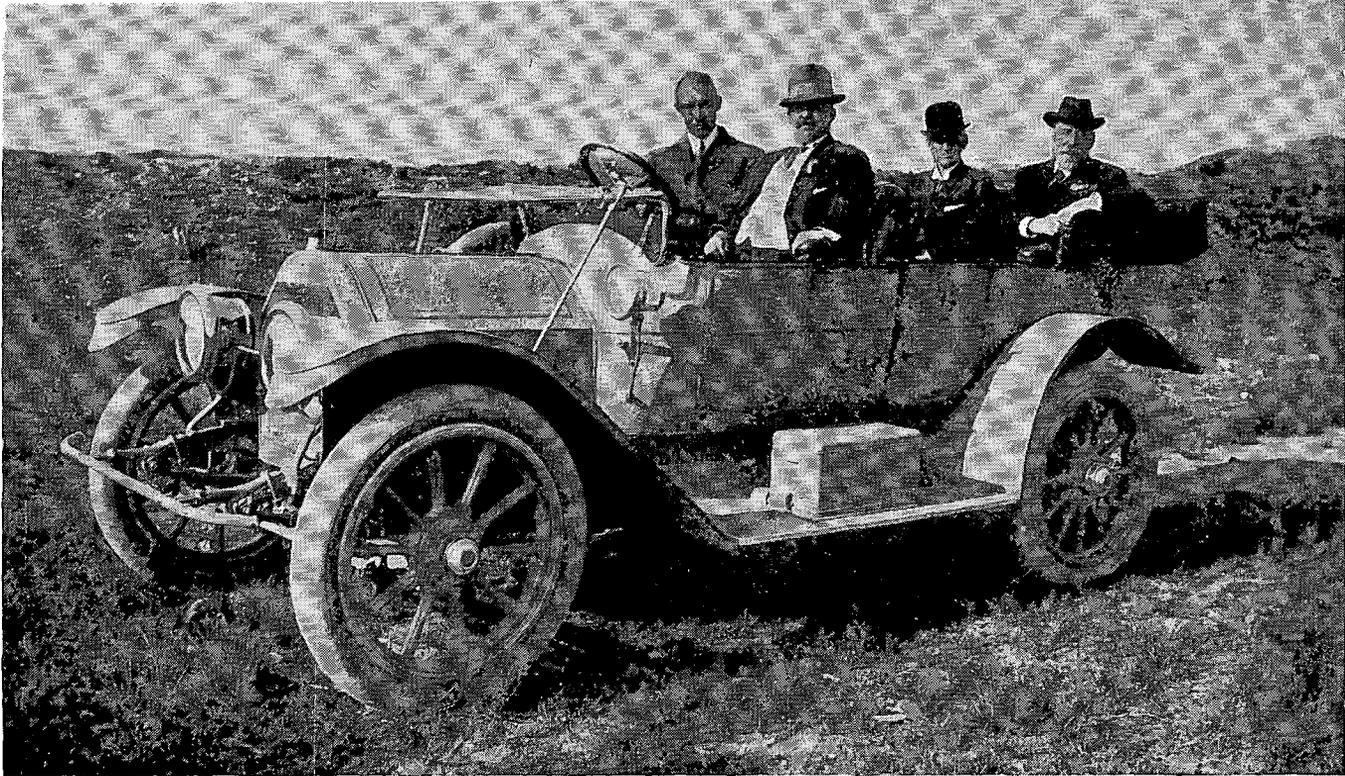
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AN EARLY EXECUTIVE AUTOMOBILE

The late ex-Governor Herbert J. Hagerman at the wheel of his right-hand drive automobile, with ex-Governor Otero at his left; at the left in the rear seat the late ex-Governor LeBaron Bradford Prince; at the right ex-Governor William T. Thornton. This picture was taken on Fort Marcy about 1912. Experts pronounce the car a Cadillac model.

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NEW MEXICO'S FIRST STATE AUTOMOBILE

By E. DANA JOHNSON

THE FIRST official gasoline vehicle of state in New Mexico was an imposing Ford automobile of the vintage of the early 1900's, owned, driven and frequently execrated by Territorial Governor Miguel A. Otero at the turn of the century.

While Governor Otero is under the impression that he bought the car in 1900, various testimony indicates that the year was about 1904, in which twelvemonth the first four automobiles to break the motorless silence of the Ancient City of the Holy Faith made their appearance after the lapse of some three hundred years of history. Local wiseacres claim that the first car to arrive in Santa Fé was that of Dr. J. M. Díaz, a Stevens-Duryea; the second, a Winton, was introduced to the startled population by Colonel Edmund C. Abbott; and numbers three and four, which were simultaneous, were the twin Fords purchased by Gov. Otero and J. Wallace Reynolds, known to fame through his tenure of office as Secretary of the Territory and Acting Governor.

Paul A. F. Walter deposes and says that it was in 1904 that he was building a "jig-saw" fence in front of his Palace avenue property; and that Mrs. Miguel A. Otero stopped the gubernatorial gas-chariot there and told Mrs. Walter that "your fence makes my automobile wobble every time I ride by."

It appears from all authorities that this brass-bound, high-seated, narrow-tread, lofty-clearance triumph of mechanical genius in the realm of transportation partook of the Gayety of the Gay Nineties and to that leisurely phase

added a hint of the genius of the speed-age of the Twentieth Century.

Governor Otero's Ford was the predecessor of fleets of official New Mexico cars; of an investment of \$100,000,000 in 100,000 automobiles and motor trucks and an annual expenditure, it is said, of some \$12,000,000 for gasoline in New Mexico, something at that time inconceivable in the wildest flights of imagination. The executive would undoubtedly have been skeptical of the sanity of any one who told him in 1904 that the people of this commonwealth would in thirty years be spending more to get from place to place than on all their public schools and state institutions.

It was just three years later that the Pope-Toledo automobile electrified the world with a record of fifty miles an hour. In 1904 a Durango dare-devil won a bet that his auto could cover 200 miles in a day. It took him fourteen hours. Meanwhile folks got a terrific thrill out of the sensational speed of thirty miles per. The drunken driver and the daily highway massacre were utterly unknown in those primitive times when there were hardly a dozen gas-propelled vehicles in the territory. These included the massive red Thomas Flyer owned by Banker M. W. Flournoy, in Albuquerque; the jaunty two-lunger Maxwell driven by Dr. John W. Elder there and the automobile which I. Singer guided with a handle like that of a feather-duster.

In 1904 the motor vehicle makers were just beginning to get away from the persistent idea of an automobile which had to look like a buggy, with bicycle wheels, and three years later almost all makes uniformly had high, heavily upholstered seats, no doors, rickety surrey-canopies anchored in front with long leather straps, a maze of levers at the side of the front seat, low hoods, heavy, shiny brass headlights and parking lamps still of the buggy pattern, a horn operated by a fat rubber bulb, large wooden-spoked wheels and small-caliber pneumatic tires.

The first automobiles in Santa Fé as elsewhere were the advance guard of the greatest era of road building in his-

tory. At that time no one yet knew certainly whether or not the automobile was a passing fad, like the bicycle. In 1900 a handful of factories produced only about 4,000 autos, and crowds still followed them on the streets. But six years later ninety firms placed 18,000 motor vehicles on the market, and it first began to dawn on the public that they must have something better to run on. The new rubber tires pulled to pieces the old fashioned macadam roads, made for buggies and wagons. Experiments began with bituminous binders, oil and tar. Even with heavy veils the motoring ladies choked on the dust, and off the beaten path miry, ratty wagon-roads were impassable for the new vehicle.

Thus the "good-roads" movement was born. In 1913 it had brought such organizations as the National Old Trails Association. The idea dawned of a "coast to coast highway." In the early 1900's a pioneer named Westguard got nation-wide publicity for the adventurous trip of a Reo through the Southwest, Santa Fé and Albuquerque, to the Pacific—as hazardous an enterprise as a trip down the west coast of Mexico today. New Mexico was early in the procession and joined with Missouri, Kansas, and Colorado for an improved Santa Fé Trail before there was a national organization. Crossing the western prairies and mountains by auto became the most alluring of adventures. From then on the development of gasoline passenger and freight traffic became the most revolutionary social and economic phenomenon of American annals. The automobile industry steadily grew gigantic, and millions of Americans, thrilled with new sight-seeing possibilities, started out on the Road to Elsewhere.

In 1906, leaders were the Pierce Great Arrow at \$4,000 to \$4,200, Maxwell at \$1,450, Sterns, the \$2,500 Rambler, the \$3,500 Northern with real airbrakes, the Columbia, "smartest car ever put on the market," Pope-Toledo, Baker Electric, Cadillac, Stoddard-Dayton, Peerless, Winton, Locomobile, Haynes-Apperson, the White and Toledo steam carriages. The cars were invariably four-cylinder, forty

horsepower machines. The Ford was still somewhat in the background, little heard of in the advertising, the world-shaking Model T yet to burst upon the pedestrian public. Ford was busy experimenting. He got out a six-cylinder car with a hood nearly six feet long.

How far we have progressed in the era of uncountable garages, service stations, filling stations, is indicated by a glance at *Country Life in America* in 1907, which carried a long illustrated article on "How to Overhaul an Automobile," with explicit directions to the car-owner how to dissect it into all its component parts and re-assemble them with none left over. Today if the carbureter develops a slight hoarseness or there is a grease-spot on the upholstery the owner immediately telephones to the garage, and the majority of motorists have only a nebulous idea of what is under the hood, if anything.

During his nine years as territorial executive Governor Otero was always a stickler for due and fitting official pomp and state ceremony. The brilliantly uniformed Otero Guards paraded at his frequent inaugurations and his omnipresent official staff was heavily loaded with gold braid and epaulettes.

It was with characteristic enterprise that he decided to keep abreast of the times and substitute the gas-wagon for the victoria-and-four as the equipage of state.

The capital awaited the arrival of the Otero and Raynolds automobiles with considerable excitement and from all accounts their subsequent careers were of recurring stimulus to the popular entertainment.

"The two Fords," said Governor Otero, with a reminiscent grin, "each painted yellow, each a four-seater touring car, occupied a whole freight car on the Santa Fé railroad and Mr. Raynolds and myself were at the station to supervise the delicate job of unloading them when they arrived. We had quite a crowd of spectators and a good many remarks from the bystanders."

The Fords were filled with gas and with unexampled moral courage and hardihood the two newly fledged motorists put on their heavy black leather gauntlets, donned their heavy leather motoring caps, adjusted their motoring coats, took their places at the wheel, manipulated the levers at the side, stepped on the gas and went up town. It is of interest in this connection that so far as known neither had ever previously touched the wheel of an automobile or taken a single lesson in its operation. "I didn't know a thing about running a car, but we got away with it," said the governor. It is reported there were scattered cheers as the vehicles clattered and banged up Montezuma avenue, past the capitol, and reached the owners' respective homes.

"That, however, was only the beginning," said Governor Otero in an ominous tone. At this point we may pass on for a moment to see the end.

"Four months later a man came up from Albuquerque, called on me and asked me if it were true I had an automobile for sale," said the author of *My Life on the Frontier*. I clutched him tightly and hurriedly piloted him to my new garage, probably at that time the best of the few in the territory.

"I showed him the Ford and after he had looked it over he offered me \$400 for it. It had cost me \$2,400 in the first instance and about \$275 a month to operate.

"'You can have it on one condition,' I told him. 'That is, that you promise also to take every single thing in the garage connected with it, tools, parts, gadgets, appurtenances, accessories, supplies, and everything which could possibly remind me of it.' I told him moreover that if he refused I would get in the auto and chase him all the way to Albuquerque if necessary, run him down and take the check from him by force. But he made out the check and signed it and I stuck it in my pocket, helping him to load up all the dinguses in the car, and experiencing a feeling of great relief when he finally drove it out of the yard. He ran it in Albuquerque for many years; in fact may be running it

yet, as it was indestructible. Thereafter I made a solemn vow that I would never own another automobile until I was able to hire a chauffeur to run and take care of it, which resolution I have kept scrupulously to this day.

"You must remember that in those days there were no public garages or filling stations where there are now thousands, and very few repair shops equipped to do automobile work. There were no paved or graveled roads to speak of, the highways were not made for cars, and if it rained and got muddy you simply stayed wherever you happened to be.

"If anything went wrong with the car, if you had a flat, or carbon in the cylinders, or broken steering gear you either fixed it yourself or sent a telegram to R. L. Dodson in Albuquerque, and he came up to fix the car at a cost of \$15 a day and expenses. Apparently Dodson was the only man in New Mexico who knew much about the insides of a car. And when you bought an automobile you had to purchase a whole automobile supply stock. When I got the Ford I bought a drum of gasoline, several dozen gallons of oil, numerous boxes of inner tubes, extra casings, chains, jacks, tire tools, wrenches, vulcanizing outfits, pumps, oilcans and other paraphernalia too numerous to mention."

Governor Otero estimates that during his four months as a motor-car owner he probably did more walking than during any other similar period in his life. His recollection is that it was the Raynolds auto which took its owner, the governor and a party of friends down to Bonanza, some ten miles out of Santa Fé, near the turquoise mines. Everybody wore motoring clothes, the women having voluminous veils tied over their hats and large goggles were considered indispensable. "The automobile broke down," said Otero. "I was elected to walk in to the penitentiary to send a team of horses out and haul the thing in."

"On another occasion I drove out over the winding wagon-road to Tesuque, six miles distant. The machine gurgled, choked and died and would not resume. After I had walked as far toward Santa Fé as the top of the Tesuque

Hill I met a man whom Raynolds had sent to my rescue. I instructed him to go on out and burn the car up, and I walked home."

The governor was unable to recall all the misadventures connected with the gubernatorial Ford. He did mention a trip to Lamy Junction with the late Levi A. Hughes and several other friends who were having a jovial evening in the open air; the vehicle thundered into a deep sandy arroyo and stood on its front end, being righted with considerable toil and labor but with no serious injury to the occupants.

Mrs. Otero, according to the governor, drove the car a great deal. In case of a flat tire, she would just tie a rope around the tube, casing and rim and thump along. She was having trouble with the machine one day in front of the Palace of the Governors. A truck driver for Charley Dudrow politely tied his horses and jumped down to assist her in turning the automobile around. It backed suddenly and violently and broke his nose.

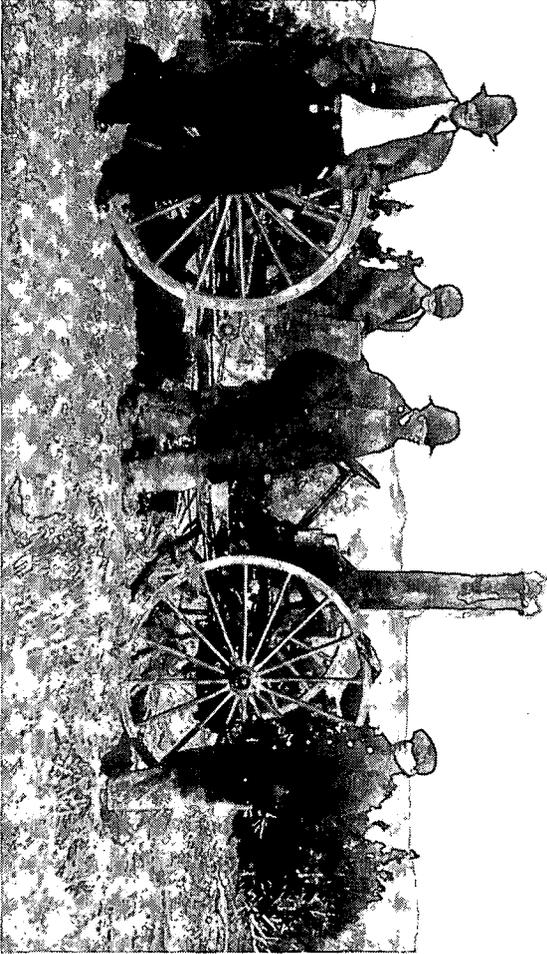
"I remember," said the governor, "what was probably the most agile movement ever made by the late Levi Hughes. I was driving up Palace avenue with Mr. Hughes, the late Charles A. Spiess of Las Vegas and my young son Miguel on board. I attempted to turn in high gear without stopping and start back down town. Something went wrong with the mechanism. To avoid crashing into a telegraph pole I had to drive over a high bank into the Arroyo Sais. As we started over Mr. Hughes and Mr. Spiess soared out of the car. Miguel stuck with me and we landed in the bottom of the arroyo right side up with no bloodshed. Citizens came running to the rescue and with their assistance we managed to extricate the car."

To avoid frightening horses and thus causing disastrous runaways seems to have been one of the prime responsibilities of a motorist in 1904.

It is to be regretted that the Historical Society of New Mexico is unable to add to its carretas and stagecoaches this first official state automobile in New Mexico. It deserves a

place in the State Museum. A place in the transportation collection should also be awarded to the first home-made coal-burning steam automobile fabricated by Walter Miller of Santa Fé, which, when short of fuel in the country, subsisted on fence posts and piñon fagots and inhaled water through a hose from convenient streams.

This machine, it is said, caused such widespread public panic that the common council eventually barred it from operating inside the city limits. Another vanished but historic vehicle of later date was the pioneer motorcycle of Jesse L. Nusbaum, whose deafening siren so afflicted public nerves that the motorcycle was also made subject to municipal regulation.



A HOME-MADE AUTOMOBILE

Courtesy of Walter Miller