

1911 Overland Poem
an Oral History

Ruth Kellier, Interviewee
Of Walnut, Illinois

Interview Date:

Oral History Tape Number:
Tape Number: 109
Number of Transcribed Pages: 6

Subject(s) Covered:

Starved Rock Library System History Collection

Digitized under an Illinois Historical Records Preservation Grant
Awarded in 2013 to the Peru Public Library
1409 11th Street, Peru, Illinois 61354

Narrator's Name: RUTH KELLIER
Tape Number: 1
Date of Interview:
Place of Interview: WALNUT, ILLINOIS
Interviewer's Name:
For: STARVED ROCK LIBRARY SYSTEM ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Q: This is a poem written by Mrs. George Dahl about the first car purchased by her family. The car was a 1911 Overland. The family consists of George the husband, Edith the wife, and their two sons Merle and Kenny.

George was worrying more every day
Because his brother just over the way
Was buying a car
So he would not be driving his own axle far.
Now we had as good a driving horse
As any there were around here of course,
And a team of broncos that were just as gay
As any old automobile made in that day.
We had a harness trimmed in buckles and reins
A lap rope, a whip, and all of those things,
But our buggy was old and it wouldn't last long
And that was what made George's argument strong.
He said the money we had laid away
To be used by and by for a rainy day
We would spend for a car and travel some.
There'd be plenty more where that came from.
I thought we were too poor by far
To ever be thinking of buying a car
And that we'd better wait a while and see

How wise or foolish that buy might be.
We had auto for breakfast, dinner, and tea
And lunch in between times, the boys and me,
Until late in the fall when a young man so swell
Came out from town with a car to sell.
The body was black, the wheels were red;
It was all trimmed in brass, was gray overhead.
On one side a brass can set real tight
Filled full of carbide for a bright, crystal light.
A tool chest was built on the other side
And you used every tool when you went for a ride.
It had curtains, too, they were laid away
Under the back seat for a rainy day,
A coat hanger too and a real leather seat,
A rail and a beautiful mat for your feet.
There were doors in the back and the fronts were cut low
Like they made the sleigh cutter in the long, long ago.
The top folded down with a hood over it;
It was better that way if the weather was fit
For it had more power if the top was down,
Made it better equipped for the hill in the town.
The horn was a large rubber ball
On the end of a bright, shiny rod so tall.
It was built from the running board up to the seat
And that made the trimming of brass so complete.
When you wanted to start you just raised the hood

Primed the pet cocks with gas and cranked all you could.

If it started with all of that roaring power

You soon would be going some twelve miles an hour.

Well, the gent stayed over night to see

If he could convince us how wise it would be

To own a car with such style and class;

He said all it would need was a little gas.

He surely did the job up fine and slick

For he soon had our \$900 check.

George drove him back to town that day

And came home all alone in that stylish way.

I got in the back with the lad on his side,

George sat in front trying to guide.

And on we rode with our mouths closed tight

Hoping and praying we'd make it all right.

All fall from then on while husking corn

We'd plan where we'd go on that next Sunday morn.

If the roads were dry and the weather fine,

We'd be up bright and early to make the brass shine.

For at that time the cars were all in the sheds

Before winter snow flakes flew over our heads,

And that old horse again had a part to play

In all three months preceding April and May.

Say, it took nerve and skill in those early days

To drive a car on the rough highways!

Cement was not thought of for thoroughfares,

And a good gravel road was thing quite scarce.
There weren't any signposts along the way
Nor maps or traffic rules to obey.
You just stopped and asked someone by the road
If you didn't know how to reach your abode.
A car on a country road of that day
Was as welcome as tax on a paved highway.
But we vowed we'd be one of the few
Who would dare buy a car and drive it, too.
And almost every time we drove the darn thing
A tire blew out or we broke a spring.
But gas was only eight cents in that day
And the old _____ we saved money that way.
To change a tire meant a delay of two hours,
A dirty job of hammering back tires
For the rubber had to come right off the rim
There were no burrs or bolts to fit in.
But you were not alone with car trouble those days
As you travel along on the rough highways.
For the next car that came along always stopped to see
If they could find out what the trouble might be.
But now if you stop they think you are tough,
A holdup or some other thing that is rough.
For motoring greed has increased with the speed
Until now we all just race for the lead.
Of all the trips that we took, I'll not try to tell

Although I remember them all very well.
One trip I'm sure was four hundred miles strong
And we made it all in three days that were long.
In a year or so if the roads were fit
Merle got to drive the car a wee bit,
Just down the road a ways, oh boy,
Twas a wonderful treat for a twelve year old boy.
And Kenny sure loved that automobile,
He was only seven when he took the wheel,
Released the brake and travelled a pace
That took the old red shed right off its base.
Now we've driven a car from east to west
Through Death Valley, over mountain crest,
From Columbian drive to the beautiful caves,
To Yellowstone Park and the ocean's ways.
But it's failed to give us the thrills and joys
That we had in those days with our two young boys,
When the work was done and we'd a moment to spare,
We'd all get in the Overland and go 'round the square.
Or in to town for an ice cream cone
Or a big lollipop and then back home
To rest and dream of another glad day
With heart full of joy both for work and play.
Yes, we think the old Overland brought more joys
To George and me and our two boys

Than the very best car we could drive today
With the best gasoline on the best highway.

Reader, Ruth Kellier.

Janet Kankaala
Transcriptionist