

HSGL Newsletter

Official Publication of the
Historical Society of Greater Lansing

January 1997

THE OLDS FAMILY and 100 YEARS of OLDSMOBILE

Program, January 15
7:00 p.m., Library

"It's that crazy Olds kid," neighbors muttered, as Ransom E. Olds rolled his first horseless carriage onto River Street in Downtown Lansing at 3:00 a.m. in 1886.

Olds began his experiments after his father, Pliny Olds, had taught his sons his trade at P.F. Olds & Son, manufacturers of stationary steam engines. Determination, optimism and brilliant mechanical ability led Olds beyond the early ridicule that accompanied his horseless carriages. R.E. Olds later earned the title of "Great Teacher" from other carmakers, such as Ford and the Dodge brothers.

In 1889, in a financial agreement with Samuel Smith of Detroit, Olds merged the Olds Gasoline Engine Company and the Olds Motor Vehicle Company to start a new company in Detroit called Olds Motor Works. After this plant suffered a disastrous fire in 1901, Olds came back to Lansing. In 1908, through a consolidation brought about by William C. Durant, Olds Motor Works and Buick of Flint became General Motors.

But, by 1904, R.E. Olds had disassociated himself from Olds Motor Works. With backing from prominent Lansing businessmen, Olds organized the Reo Motor Car Company, located on South Washington.

From an early age, Olds worked 16-18 hours a day. But once a business became productive he never liked being involved in its day-to-day operations. He would hire qualified men who shared his beliefs to take over the management tasks. Olds increased his fortune by investing in real estate, bonds, and other businesses; he never wanted to be poor again, and had a reputation of being a tightwad.

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The *HSGL Newsletter* is published bimonthly from September through May.
Articles and news of historical interest may be sent to the
Historical Society of Greater Lansing, P.O. Box 12095, Lansing, MI 48901.
Linda Peckham, President. Tel: 517/372-3385.

Olds, continued.

Significant to his achievements was the support of his wife, Metta Ursula Woodward Olds. Metta, a reserved person, was dedicated to her husband, children and strong Baptist beliefs. Ransom and Metta were born three days apart in June of 1864. They were married in June of 1889 and, after 60 years of marriage, died one week apart in 1950.

Both valued serving the needs of others. They actively supported their church, the Lansing Children's Home, the "Y's," and other charitable organizations. In 1942, they remodeled a Daytona Beach hotel into an inter-denominational home for retired religious persons and their spouses. Olds also invested heavily in Lansing to strengthen the city's development. Their years were filled with sacrifice, trauma during the deaths of two of their children, and excitement in achieving their goals.

The horseless carriage revolutionized the American way of life. Through the efforts of such prominent automotive pioneers as the Duryeas, Winton, Haynes, Ford, and Olds, an industry developed that promoted the establishment of other businesses, provided employment to millions, and changed travel in the United States.

— Pat Heyden

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Updates:

• Sesquicentennial Family History Project – Deadline Extended to March 1, 1997.

We continue to seek information on families who have lived in Lansing or the surrounding area for many years. Recognition will be given at the Annual Dinner in May to families who have lived here for 100 years, and special recognition will go to families who have lived here since 1847. If your family has lived in the Lansing area for at least 100 years, please pick up a form at the Library or call 372-3385.

• **The Preservation Directory**, listing organizations and companies with information and preservation skills, will be published soon.

• **Lansing Public Library**. No news. In December 1997, the Library will be separated from its funding source, the Lansing Public Schools; proposals for a new district library are incomplete. We have many concerns about the Local History Collections housed at the Library.

HSGL Bookshelf Suggestions

Books will be available for purchase at meetings of the Society.

1878 Lansing City Directory

★ Under the auspices of the Historical Society of Greater Lansing, board member Dave Caterino has reprinted and cross referenced Mudge's 1878 Lansing City Directory. The directory is indexed alphabetically by business and street. The reprint with index is 200+ pages. Available at \$15.00 (Add \$2.00 postage if ordered by mail).

Behind the Badge: The History of the Lansing Police Department

By Pat Heyden

★ This 256 page book features 85 photographs and illustrations, bibliography, glossary, index and a library binding. "Takes us on a historical walk through a century of police organization and development from its primitive beginnings to its current professional and technical excellence" – Noel Bufe, Director of the Northwestern University Traffic Institute. Available at \$22.98 (Add \$2.50 if ordered by mail).

Announcements:

Notecards of Lansing, made from drawings done by Charles H. Mead in the 1870s, are available at The Mole Hole in Downtown Lansing, Curious Books in East Lansing, and the Local History Room of the Lansing Public Library. Price: \$6.00 for eight cards and envelopes. Special prices to members of the Historical Society at the Local History Room. Proceeds will be used to restore the drawings.

Volunteers Needed. This year, Lansing is celebrating 150 years as the Capital City of Michigan. We especially need volunteers to help with the following:

- The Mead Cards
- Family History Project
- Reproduction of Historic Maps
- Annual Dinner
- New Brochures: write, layout
- Distribution of material

Board Members. Due to resignations, we have two seats open on the Board. If you can help promote Lansing's history, especially during this Sesquicentennial year, we want to hear from you. Interested?

The Historical Society seeks donations of local historical materials, such as papers or photos, especially of those related to our programs. All donations are made available to the public through the Local History Room at the Lansing Public Library. Please contact the Historical Society at 372-3385.

Board Meetings are held on the third Wednesdays of October, February, and April. Any business may be addressed to the Board before or at the meetings. All are invited.

Who do you know who should belong to the Historical Society? Send in your membership, and recruit a member.

Lansing Public Library Local History Room Hours

Wednesdays

12-3 p.m.

**Second Saturday
of each month**

9:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Give a Gift that Gives All Year . . .

Membership in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

Membership Application

*Historical Society
of Greater Lansing*

P.O. Box 12095
Lansing, MI 48901

Annual Membership in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing is due for the 1995-1996 program year. Please clip and return this coupon with payment.

New **Renewal**

Enclosed: \$10 Individual \$15 Family \$150 Life Gift

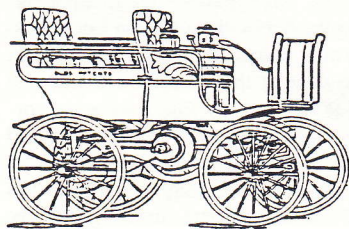
Name _____

Address _____

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The *Historical Society of Greater Lansing* is a non-profit corporation, and we appreciate your support.

The Historical Society of Greater Lansing
proudly presents



The Olds Family & 100 Years of Oldsmobile

By Pat Heyden & Helen Early

In 1897, R.E. Olds started the Olds Motor Vehicle Co. Designer of the curved-dash Olds, he was a principal founder of the automotive industry. R.E. and Metta Olds, philanthropists who supported their town and their employees worldwide, lived in Lansing for 70 years. Program by Pat Heyden, author of *Metta and R.E. Olds*, and Helen Early of the Oldsmobile History Center, co-author with Jim Walkinshaw of *Setting the Pace*.

7:00 P.M.

Wednesday, January 15, 1997

Lansing Public Library

Friends Auditorium

The Public Is Invited

*Historical Society
of Greater Lansing*

P.O. Box 12095
Lansing, MI 48901

Lansing Public Library
401 S Capitol Ave
Lansing, MI 48933

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