



History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

November 2016

Upcoming Events

ROCK, REBELLION AND BROWNIES

Thursday, November 17 – 6:30 p.m.

East Lansing Public Library – 950 Abbot Rd.

To be sung to the tune

“We Didn’t Start the Fire” by Billy Joel:

Sigma Chi, SDS, segregation, what a mess!
John Hannah, Madam Nhu, Mary Poppins, She Loves You
Stevie Wonder, Grace Slick, McNamara, Tricky Dick
Roger Daltrey and The Who, Lennon and McCartney too

Draft dodgers, “RotCee,” Vietnam, and LSD
Goldfinger, James Bond, Bob Dylan, Blonde on Blonde
Gary Powers, U-2, Sergeant Pepper, Kind Of Blue
Kent State, Green Berets, Ole Miss, and JFK

Rowan, Martin, Smothers Brothers, Frank Zappa and
The Mothers
Malcolm X, Cassius Clay, The Graduate, homecoming day
Woodstock, Vonnegut, downtown Lansing, “cruise the gut”
Draft status 1-A, ATL, no PDA

Bubba Smith, Notre Dame, Tiger’s pennant,
Rose Bowl game
Smoking weed, women’s rights, everything will be all right
Coral Gables, Union grill, also Frandor open still
Walter Adams, Mr. Kite, Beaumont Tower, Green & White!

(With apologies to Billy Joel and thanks to Bob Mainfort, Mary Kwes and Bill Castanier.)

Join the Historical Society of Greater Lansing for a look back at the tumultuous Sixties through the eyes and ears of two MSU graduates: Bob Pearson and Bill Castanier. There’s the old saw: “If you remember the ‘60s, you really weren’t there.” This presentation, taken from the pages of the *State News* and the airwaves of WILS Radio, will help you fill in the blanks. Castanier was a *State News* staffer in the 1960s and Pearson worked as a DJ at Lansing’s leading rock station WILS.

A TOUR THROUGH MID-MICHIGAN MODERN

Sunday, December 4, 2016 – 1:30 p.m.

Michigan Historical Museum, 702 W. Kalamazoo

Learn first-hand about modernist architecture from Susan Bandes, author of *Mid-Michigan Modern: From Frank Lloyd Wright to Googie*, as she leads a tour of the new exhibit *Minds of Modernism* which is on display at the Michigan Historical Museum. Bandes, who teaches art history and is director of museum studies at MSU, acted as advisor/curator for the exhibit and will conduct the free curated tour. Parking is free and Bandes’s book will be available for purchase.

In her new book, Bandes has collected photographs, art, and oral histories featuring more than 130 modernist structures that were built in East Lansing and Lansing between 1940 and 1970. Included are homes, offices, and sacred places you drive by every day, but really don’t know the story behind the building. For example, the Michigan Medical Society building on Saginaw in East Lansing is a classic example of modernism and was designed by the architect of the Twin Towers, Minoru Yamasaki. She also delves into the architects who designed the modernist buildings and looks at what might be considered mundane structures like East Lansing’s Dawn Donuts. One classic example of a home designed in the modernist vein is the soaring “airplane house” on Moores River Dr., which was designed for the aviator-entrepreneur Talbert Abrams and built to look like the shadow a plane casts while in the air.

The *Minds of Modernism* exhibit includes architectural drawings, building models, and representative commercial products from noted designers, such as Eero Saarinen, that reflect the Modernist era. The exhibit was curated by the Archives of Michigan, the Michigan Historical Museum, and Susan Bandes.

Continued on page 3

TRANSPORTATION FOR “YOUNG TOURISTS”: REO MOTORS’ PAL PEDAL VEHICLES

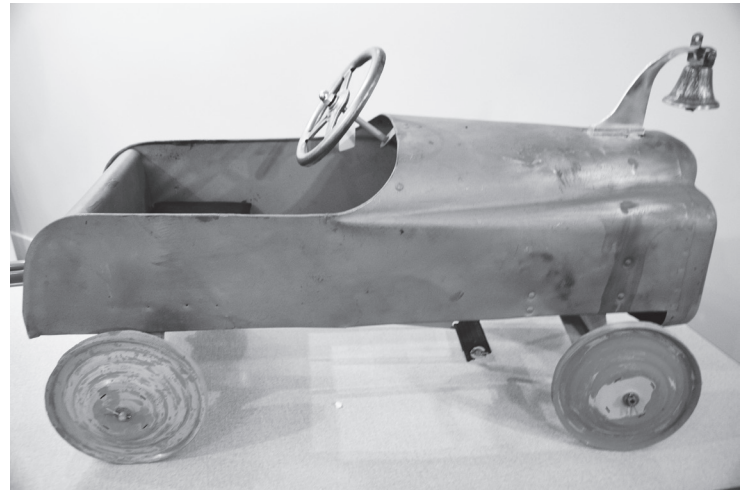
By
Mia Tioli

REO Motors Inc. was a large supplier of trucks and equipment to the military during World War II, but with the end of the war, company president Joseph S. Sherer Jr. began a diversification program to compensate for lost business. REO took over the lawnmower production of Ideal Mower, producing products under the Royale, Flying Cloud, and Michigan Noiseless names. Another product was an inboard/outboard boat engine called the Trollabout.

In January 1953 REO bought Pal Wheel Goods from the Northern Indiana Steel Supply Co. and established the Pal Wheel Goods Division, REO Motors, Inc. The Division made bicycles, tricycles, baby strollers, swing sets, and pedal cars, which they advertised “For Young Tourists.” The bikes and trikes were named “Superbikes.”

In my hunt for artifacts for the Pal Products Display at the R.E. Olds Transportation Museum, I came across vintage advertising, photographs of little boys with their Pal pedal cars, and a boy on his Pal tricycle. Another find was a membership card and lapel pin for the “Real Pals Association,” a club for children. Among the rules: Wash your face and hands, brush your teeth, and drink your milk!

Searching on EBay, I soon found a Pal pedal car that I quickly purchased from a seller in Pueblo, Colorado. Upon opening the box, I was able to determine that the car never had a windshield. The only Pal car I have seen without a windshield was the Fire Chief car. The steering wheel that came with the car was totally trashed, but it just so happened that a seller in St. Louis had a “new old stock” Pal steering wheel for sale, which I bought. I also had to find “correct style” tires, pedals, bell and stanchion. I was able to buy tires and pedals, and bought a suitable similar



bell, and Dan Shafarman created a facsimile stanchion. New paint, body work, and reproduction graphics made this early 1950s REO ready to display.

The story, however, has even more to it. Ken McDowell, who used to work at REO Motors, brought six original designs for REO-branded pedal cars to donate to the R.E. Olds Transportation Museum. The designs were done by the Sundberg-Ferar firm, dated October 1952, and included two trucks, a trailer, a fire truck, and two wreckers. One of the designs was initialed “JBF.”

Sundberg-Ferar (S-F) was founded in 1934 by Carl Sundberg and Montgomery Ferar. It is still in business today, the longest-operating industrial design firm in the world. They are located in Commerce Township, Michigan, and in 1952 their studios could be found on Woodward Avenue in Detroit. I called S-F to see if they could give me any info about JBF and the drawings. Jeevak Badve, VP of Strategic Growth, invited me for a visit.

At S-F I met with Jeevak and S-F President Curtis Bailey. They were quite interested and informed me that in the early 1950s REO was a big client of S-F. Curtis grabbed his laptop and started looking up old photos that he had scanned, including ones of REO truck cab models of various types and a red-and-white prototype REO-branded pedal car! He had five different photos of Carl Sundberg’s daughter Wendy with the car. Mr. Bailey also had an email in his laptop from Mary Ellen Dohrs, a former employee

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of S-F. She remembered working on the pedal car design with Johnny Foster—JBF! I was graciously provided with contact info for Mary Ellen and soon had a meeting set up with her. Although she was living in Florida, she was coming back to Royal Oak for Christmas.

In 1952 she was still Mary Ellen Green, a petite redhead with a head for design. She had attended Pratt Institute in New York and went from there to become the first woman in design at General Motors. While at GM she designed the cowhide interior of William “Hopalong Cassidy” Boyd’s 1950 Cadillac. She was also called upon as a model, posing in the wood, metal, and clay “buck” of GM designer Harley Earl’s 1951 Buick Electra. One of Mary Ellen’s clients at S-F was Packard. She designed the “Posture Perfect” seat of the 1955 Caribbean.

One of Mary Ellen’s first clients at S-F was REO Motors Inc. She told me that she did a quick sketch of the REO pedal car, and “Monty” immediately gave her a pay raise! It is too bad that REO never proceeded with these cars, but there were two designs by Mary Ellen that REO did produce. Mary Ellen showed me photographs that she took of two other prototypes of designs for REO. She had several photos of a REO-branded tricycle. She told me that as REO was a truck builder, she designed the tricycle with “dual exhausts.” She also showed me a child’s coaster wagon she designed. It said “REO” on the hubcaps, and on the foot rest in front was “REO Speedwagon”! Of course, I am on the hunt for one of those coaster Speedwagons.

As things happen, after this meeting a box of old photographs was donated to the REO Museum. Some of these photos were of a 1953 trade show at the REO Clubhouse. There is a photo of REO experimental engines, such as one for a V-2 lawn mower. There is also a photo display of Pal wheel goods and gym sets, and a photo showing REO Wheel Goods. The photo shows three tricycles and a coaster Speedwagon. There is another photo showing a second wagon up on a shelf. The wagons and tricycles in the trade show do not match exactly the prototypes made by Mary Ellen at S-F. So that means there was a prototype pedal car, wagon and tricycle, and that at least two wagons and three tricycles were made.

REO Motors’ experiment with the production of children’s vehicles was short-lived. In December 1954, just two years after the purchase, REO Motors sold Pal

Wheel Goods to a new company. Unfortunately, the new Pal Products was out of business by March 1956. But for a short time, “Young Tourists” drove very snazzy vehicles.

This article is a compilation of three articles, first published in REO Echo, the newsletter of the REO Club of America, January to June 2016. Used with permission of the author.



Upcoming Events *Continued next page 1*

Lansing Has Fun! Closes

HSGL would like to thank everyone who loaned objects for, visited, and helped organize the *Lansing Has Fun!* exhibit. The exhibit closed due to a scheduling issue with City Hall. Look for news of our next exhibit in early 2017!

Turner Dodge House Festival of Trees

HSGL will be partnering with Wonder Women Estate Sales to create a tree for the 2016 Festival of Trees at the Turner Dodge House. Stop by the Turner Dodge House in December to check it out! Admission \$5 per person.



Historical Society of Greater Lansing
P.O. Box 12095
Lansing, MI 48901

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Historical Society of Greater Lansing - Membership Application

Please accept my application for:

- New Membership
- Renewal Membership
- Gift Membership

in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

I have enclosed:

- \$25 Individual Membership
- \$35 Family Membership
- \$100 Business Membership
- \$_____ Additional Gift to HSGL

Member Name _____

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City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone _____ Email Address _____

Please Send The Newsletter Via Email

Make Checks Payable to
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