

## THE GRAND RIVER TRAIL (Cont.)

In the early days the farmer had given of his property in order to provide land for roads. He still, legally, owned the land and paid taxes on the original description on the tax rolls. This meant the only right the traveler had was to journey on the roadway. Occasionally travelers in later years were puzzled by the farmer's objection to their picking fruit and nuts from the trees (planted by the farmer) growing along the roadsides or digging bushes and trees to take with them.

The new century was also the advent of a new mode of transportation, the automobile. By 1903 an occasional car was seen chugging its way over the farmer-built roads in the area. Still maintained locally, the roads were sufficient for the farmers' wagons but autos of that era had little power. It was difficult enough for them to traverse relatively hard, smooth roads. The hills, sand, slippery clay, mud, holes and ruts made a trip between towns a real adventure.

About 1906 some of the buisness people in Howell and Brighton were among the first to buy cars. Around that time, also, a Glidden Tour fleet of about fifty cars left Detroit and following the Grand River Road passed through Brighton. It is assumed their route was to take them to Grand Haven, then south along Lake Michigan to return to Detroit via the Detroit to Chicago Road which is now US 12. The tour took several days and only about half made it without breaking down. Many had so little hill climbing ability that the local boys often ran behind and pushed them up the hill west of the Ratz School. (Corner Kellog and Grand River.)

By 1909, one farmer after another got the car buying fever. George Ratz was a clerk in his father's hardware store in Brighton (S.E. corner Main & Hyne), when he took the agency for the Model T Ford. Salesmanship was not necessary to sell the vehicles (not too much choice anyway) - the telephone was employed to place an order.

After learning to driver the Overland bought by his father early in 1913, Bill Pless and other young men were taken on the train to Detroit and the dealer would have each of them drive a new car back to Brighton. The adventure of the trip was their only recompense, and it seemed sufficient.

As vehicle development improved it seemed the roads deteriorated. As more and more farmers bought cars they suddenly were in favor of better roads on which to drive these new vehicles. With no gasoline tax money and license plates costing only three dollars, the cost of the new roads had to come out of the realestate taxes. Farmers voted at town meetings to issue bonds to build sturdy gravel roads all through the township. (Registration of cars began in 1903. Two dollars bought the registration disk which was placed on the dashboard. In 1909 the Secretary of State directed the County Clerk to give out plates made of leather for the three dollar fee.) (To be continued. Condensed and edited from "A Scrapbook of Michigan Memorabilia" by Wm. A. Pless and "Yesteryears of Green Oak 1830-1930")

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