

# Kings County Museum

## Kings County Vignettes

### The Nova Scotia Carriage Co. - The McKay Car

By Elizabeth Rand

There are some very famous names in the automobile manufacturing industry from Mercedes-Benz to Honda and Ford. If a Kentville, Nova Scotia company had been successful, we might have all been riding around in a McKay car.

In 1868, a group of Kentville business men formed the Nova Scotia Carriage Company which was incorporated in 1889. This business was located on Cornwallis Street near the bridge where the Library and Police Station are now located. Its purpose was to manufacture horse drawn carriages, sleighs and slovens of all sizes and varieties.

In 1908 Jack and Dan McKay from Prince Edward Island were living in Kentville. They rented the facilities of the Nova Scotia Carriage Company to carry on the carriage trade but they were also interested in the possibilities of the automobile trade which was beginning in the United States. They were able to get financial backing for the project but needed a man with some knowledge of the automobile. They found such a man in Archie Pelton.

Mr. Pelton was a Berwick man who had gone to the New England States to work for a company which manufactured machinery for the weaving trade. New England was the centre of the textile industry and Pelton's job was to install the machinery for the companies. Before the turn of the century he had joined the International Harvester Company and returned to Nova Scotia as their service manager for some of their farm machinery. These machines were equipped with one cylinder gasoline engines and Pelton learned the principle of the internal combustion engine.

In 1904, Mr. Pelton and a Mr. Porter of Kentville went to New York to attend the first automobile show. While in New York they purchased two Curved Dash Oldsmobiles and had them shipped to Kentville. These were the first cars in the province for resale. Pelton had never driven a car but when they arrived in Kentville he drove one into a barn and completely dismantled it. As he put it back together he learned what made it go. Both these cars were later sold in Halifax. This marked the first car dealership in the province.

It was not until 1910 that the McKay brothers seriously began to consider manufacturing automobiles. Pelton, having no engineering background, went to Detroit and contacted E. T. Birdsall, President of the American Association of Automobile Engineers. On his advice Pelton bought engines, rear ends and other parts to make up the chassis of a car. He bought enough for 25 cars. Pelton's brother Roy, and a man named Young, both cabinet makers, were in charge of building the wooden bodies for the cars. Another McKay brother who was a blacksmith, also joined the staff.

In the first four years more horse drawn vehicles were made than cars but progress was being made. However, in 1912 a group of business men from Amherst interested the McKay brothers in relocating to Amherst. A new company was formed, the Nova Scotia Carriage and Motor Car Co. Ltd., and construction of a large building was begun. At first there were problems with the building but by 1913 all the equipment had been moved from Kentville. They planned to produce 1000 cars a year at the Amherst plant. The car was successful but the company had financial problems and the company only lasted two years, closing in 1914.

Before the company left Kentville, Dan McKay and Archie Pelton drove one of their 1911 production cars to Regina, a distance of 2600 miles. Dealerships were planned along the way, from Port Elgin, N.B. to Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Pelton recalled years later that they arrived in Regina with Kentville air still in the tires.

The McKay was obviously a complete success. The Halifax Herald sponsored a race from Halifax to Yarmouth via the Annapolis Valley and then back by way of the South Shore. The race, open to all cars, was won by a McKay car.

Unfortunately there does not seem to be a complete McKay car left today. In 1968, W. H. McCurdy of Halifax found a disassembled McKay car in Gaspereau. It belonged to a Mr. Coldwell who had used the motor in a tractor. The chassis was stored in boxes which Mr. McCurdy acquired and donated to the Nova Scotia Museum. The Museum also has a unique picture of Mr. Coldwell and his car. He had taken it to the river for a wash and became stuck. The picture shows a team of oxen hauling the car out of the river.

Material taken from The McKay Car by Wm. McCurdy & Chocolates, Tattoos & Mayflowers by Clary Croft