

Charlton Historical Society Newsletter

Fall 2008

News for Charlton Historical Society Members

Volume 33, Number 2

Automobile Racer, Richard Edwin Saunders

By Peter D. Tacy, Jr.

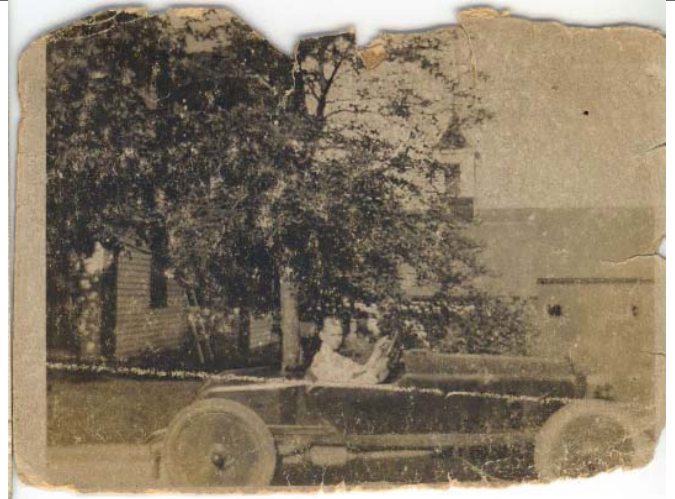
This narrative would never have been created without the chance sighting on August 31, 2007 of one of Mr. Saunders' cars in Ferndale, Michigan, just a little more than mile from where I live. I am quite sure I am the only one in Michigan who would recognize the car. I lived in Castleton, New York in the 1960s through the early 1980s. The 1936 Packard Twelve Boat Tail Speedster was a familiar sight to just about any person involved with classic cars in the Hudson Valley, Vermont, or the Berkshires of Massachusetts. This car was one of many Saunders built custom speedsters and convertibles. My research began in Charlton, Massachusetts where Mr. Saunders grew up and lived until 1927 or 1928¹. The earliest speedster Mr. Saunders spoke of was his 1915 Maxwell.

Richard E. Saunders was born on January 16, 1899. He graduated from Charlton High School on June 23, 1916, where he presented an essay on "Electricity, Water Power, and the Public Interest"¹. Mr. Saunders was always focused on technology and was a fan of anything to do with railroads and automobiles. He even had an engineer's license to drive steam powered automobiles. Accordingly his creations were always innovative and bold. All of them were made with little more than hand tools.

Mr. Saunders started work at Alvin T. Fuller^{2,3}, a Packard Dealer in Massachusetts, on June 21, 1917 as a "Parts Clerk." Mr. Decker mentioned that Mr. Saunders recalled that the springs were stiff when each "Twin Six" Packard would arrive from Detroit. Several salesmen would pile into the cars at lunchtime to loosen the springs up on the nearby bumpy roads before the new owners were allowed to take delivery. Mr. Saunders eventually graduated to the "Service Sales" position until he moved to New York State in the late 1920s.

According to a flyer Mr. Saunders had printed in the 1970s, he raced a 1915 Maxwell. The flyer states that in that car, he won five main events out of eight races over the course of two seasons (see Photo). This is no doubt the start of Mr. Saunders' love affair with powerful speedsters.

The Charlton Historical Society was able to find some reference to the racing of that era. The races were held at the site that is now occupied by the Host Hotel¹ in Sturbridge.



Undated Photo – Mr. Saunders and the 1915 Maxwell parked on the east side of Main Street in front of the garage and barn formerly located at 19 Main Street in Charlton, Massachusetts. The barn is no longer present, but the house is still standing¹. Original photo courtesy of the Russell Decker Collection.

One race was recorded in the Hamilton Woolen Mill's Newsletter (Vol 111 No. 8, August 1922). Each automobile was named as any entrant would be for any race at the fairgrounds racetrack (i.e. horse or automobile). Mr. Saunders competed in the 1915 Maxwell (aka "Jigglesquak") against the following cars: Harvey Marcy in Calamity Jane, Paleface Chamberlain in the Greyhound, and Ben Tully in Rickety Ann. The five mile race was won on the course at Sturbridge Fairgrounds in 7 minutes, 13 seconds over 5 miles on the ½ mile dirt course. W. R. Edson was listed as the race starter and W. F. Hefner as the race timer. (Information from the Hamilton Woolen Mill Newsletter was gathered by the Southbridge Library in cooperation with the Charlton Historical Society¹ and the Sturbridge Historical Society confirmed details about the Sturbridge Fairgrounds races⁴).

In a conversation with my father, Mr. Saunders mentioned that a rear axle replacement made the Maxwell more competitive. So much so that Mr. Saunders was required to start races on a delay to allow the competitors an edge.

Miraculously the silver trophy from the race survives. The trophy reads "Hamilton Woolen Co. Fifth Annual Field Day, August 5, 1922, Automobile Race, Richard Saunders." This trophy showed up at a Rensselaer County, New York convenience store a few years ago. Apparently it was fished out of the trash just before curbside pickup. It was brought to Mr. Russell

“Hoppy” Decker, one of the few people that would recognize the trophy.

Mr. Saunders created a one page flyer describing his various racecars and custom makeovers, and handed the flyers out to family and friends. It reads in part, “...the years have not dimmed our love for the Maxwell, and we bet she is up there waiting for us on the ‘Golden Speedway.’”

The only known surviving Saunders customs are the 1936 Packard Twelve Boat Tail Speedster and a 1938 Packard Eight Coupe that Mr. Saunders converted to a Twelve cylinder.

General Footnotes and Acknowledgements

¹Charlton Historical Society, personal communication, June and July 2008.

²According to Wikipedia, Alvin T. Fuller was founder and owner of the Packard Motor Car Co. of Boston. Mr. Fuller served as Representative and went on to be Governor. As Governor he was accused of wrongdoing because he did not cash his paycheck from the Packard Motor Car Co. of Boston according to the Monday, January 28, 1929 edition of Time magazine.

³“The Classic Car”, Classic Car Club of America, March 1975, letter to the editor.

⁴Sturbridge Historical Society, personal communication, June 23, 2008.

I have relied on, photographs, a trophy, and documents from Mr. Saunders. In a few instances, I contacted museums (Old Sturbridge Village) and historical societies (Charlton Historical Society, and the Sturbridge Historical Society). The Southbridge Library was contacted by the Charlton Historical Society¹. Wherever possible I have added recollections of conversations with Mr. Saunders from friends including my father (Mr. Peter D. Tacy, Sr.), Mr. Russell “Hoppy” Decker. **For more information or comment contact Peter D. Tacy at vintageride@gmail.com**

History Day

Free horse-drawn carriage rides, entertainment by the Heritage String Band, and militia re-enactors are only part of what you can experience from noon until 4 p.m. on Oct. 5, 2008. This special event at the Rider Tavern at 255 Stafford St., Charlton also features rug-hooking and spinning demonstrations, and the opportunity to participate in games like those children played in the 1800s. Guides positioned throughout the tavern will share stories about local residents and events from the time period when stagecoaches stopped at the inn owned by brothers William and Isaiah Rider. Hand-screened reproduction wallpaper on the landing and grain-painted walls in the taproom are just the two most recently completed decorative features to enjoy inside before you check out the restoration work on the shed in the back of the building. Displays include a rare hand-tinted print of the building signed by artist Wallace Nutting on loan just for the day, photos showing the effect of the hurricane of 1938, and articles telling about the creation of Buffumville dam from 50 years ago.

From 1 to 1:30 author William O. Hultgren will be available to autograph copies of his Charlton history books you can purchase on site. Gingerbread and Rider Tavern tea are available for \$5.00 in the ballroom. Then head a few hundred feet away along Northside Road to visit the Number 2 schoolhouse, to continue your step back in time.

Thank You

The financial support of members is outstanding! The following kindly provided donations to assist with CHS programs and restoration projects:

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Property Committee Report

By Don Weinhardt

This is a summary of just some of the artifact and archival items donated to CHS since last reported in our Fall 2007 newsletter: **William Fitts**, Utica NY-Book, hardcover "Fitts Families (Fitts-Fitz-Fittz) A Genealogy by Sylvia Fitts Getchell, copyright 1989. **Edd And Karen Oberg**, Ashford, CT-Seat and desk for two pupils, early 19th century school; provenance is one of Charlton's early school houses. It is made of chestnut wood with hand wrought iron nails. **Lois Fay**, Charlton-Book, hard cover, "The Elegant Royalls of Colonial New England" by Gladys N. Hoover, published by Vantage Press, New York 1974. **Martin Sleeper**, Wayland, MA-Surveys, the Thames River Flood Control, Buffumville Dam, Record Area "A", Corps of Engineers, not dated, and the Land of Samuel Streeter, Buffumville Dam, not dated. **Paul Whipple**, Lexington, MA-File, newspaper articles and clippings covering the area of Worcester and Shrewsbury, MA in June 1953. These all dealt with the tornado and resulting consequences.

John Henry Bogie and John D. Peters, Worcester, MA-Oil painted portrait on canvas, the subject is Lord Hyde, framed. The painting is signed Pinx/ B. Killingbeck/1793. Lord Hyde is most probably Thomas Villiers, First Earl of Clarendon (1708-1786). Benjamin Killingbeck was a painter, printer, print maker and a publisher in London, England active c. 1769 and 1789. This painting is most likely a 19th century copy of an earlier work. **Frank Racette**, Putnam, CT-Portrait of Lafayette, steel engraving in an Empire style frame; four newspapers all dated 1824, covering Lafayette's visit to the US; four flint glass, pressed panel style tumblers, mid 19th century for the Lafayette dining room; book, hardcover, "The Return of Lafayette 1824-1825" by Marion Klamkin, pub. by Charles Scribner's Sons, NY 1975; window rosettes. **Jerry Hartwell**, Charlton-Two matted and framed watercolor paintings: "Winter-Charlton High School" dated 1988, and "Summer-Rider Tavern" dated 1989. Both are signed by the artist S. A. Anderson. **Ruth Schwendeman**, Charlton-Booklet, "Having Fun with Theorems" by Dawn B. Kenahan.

Robertine Fountain estate, through **Robyn and Tom Burns**, Wilbraham, MA-This is large and significant gift to our archives, over 100 items have been cataloged so far. This is a summary of the material received. Local history, books and manuscripts-8; a scrapbook of Worcester and Charlton 1910-1927; photo, an aerial view of Northside Village taken in 1950; Charlton school booklets, documents, and programs, etc.-25; school and class photos-26; local postcards-4; family photos, mostly studio portraits, for the following families: Tucker, Waldron, Hammond, Baker, Smith,

Carpenter, Bond, Putnam, Cudworth, Miller, Culver, and Whitehead; miscellaneous photos showing local scenes, buildings, trolleys, Old Home Day, newspaper articles, and clippings.

Alvin S. Lotti, Charlton-Hand held brass bell with wood handle used in Charlton's #10 Schoolhouse.

William O. Hultgren, Charlton-Atlas, hard cover, "Cornell's Intermediate Geography..." by S. S. Cornell, published by D. Appleton and Co. This book is inscribed Henry D. Dresser, Southbridge, Mass. 1868; photo, black and white, subject is an unidentified trolley conductor in uniform (photo is from Jesse Hall Westlund estate 2002 courtesy of Helga Nordstrom); photo, tintype, hand painted, subject is an unidentified female child seated in a fancy chair. The photo is said to have an association with Charlton's Brackett family.

Thank you all for helping to preserve Charlton's past. If you have, or know someone who has, any locally significant material, and is looking for a good permanent home for it, please contact Don at 248-3202.

Also note that the archive and library reorganization is almost complete.

Remembering

Robertine (Tucker) Fountain, a long-time supporter of the Charlton Historical Society, passed away last year. She and members of her extended family had been instrumental in helping to preserve the Rider Tavern as a site to remember Charlton's past, by contributing the "widow's third" of the building to Charlton Historical Society in 1976. Her mother, Henrietta (Waldron) Tucker had been born at the tavern. The Waldron family owned that portion of the building for many years. Over the years, even after she moved away, Robertine frequently asked how the society was progressing with the restoration of tavern, and showed an interest in continuing the process. Keeping the building as a museum tribute to the history of Charlton was a high priority for her. Her interest in preserving the tavern never failed.

Recently, Robertine's daughter started looking through the items her mother had saved. She knows her mother was proud of her Charlton heritage, since so many pictures, journals, and newspaper clippings tell a story of the community. Many of those items have been donated to CHS. The items embody the many generations that have been positively influenced by the feeling of connection to the community we have in Charlton.

Robertine's lasting legacy includes a generous bequest to Charlton Historical Society. Known as the Tucker Fund, the donation is to be used for the preservation of the Rider Tavern. Her remembrance of CHS in her will is humbling, and greatly appreciated.

Charlton Historical Society
P. O. Box 252
Charlton, MA 01507

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P. O. Box 252
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Coming Events:

October 5 History Day