

# THE SPIRIT

NEWSLETTER OF THE  
R.E. OLDS TRANSPORTATION MUSEUM

Nov Dec  
2021

# REO ITEMS

VOL. I NO. 5

*December  
1952*



240 Museum Drive  
Lansing, MI 48933  
(517)372-0529

**Mission Statement**

The purpose of the R.E. Olds Transportation Museum is to collect, preserve, study, and exhibit those objects that will serve to illustrate the part Lansing played in the development of transportation with emphasis on the automobile and its effect on this community and its people.

**Museum Hours of Operation**

Tuesday through Saturday: 10 a.m. — 5 p.m.  
Sundays: (call for hours)  
Closed major Holidays & Mondays

**Admission**

Adults: \$10, Seniors & Students: \$7  
Members: Free  
Special group rates and tours available

The R.E. Olds Transportation Museum is a 501(c)(3), non profit organization and all donations may be tax deductible.

**Email:**

[autos@reoldsmuseum.org](mailto:autos@reoldsmuseum.org)

**Website:**

[www.reoldsmuseum.org](http://www.reoldsmuseum.org)

**Executive Director**

Scott Mrdeza

**Operations Manager**

Rick Kaiser

**Board of Trustees**

Donald Baron, Gary Doty, Ron Horowitz,  
Dick Roth, Justin King, Henry Green,  
Lori Lanspeary, Peirre Medawar  
Debbie Stephens, Peter Stephens,

## Director's Corner

I can tell when fall officially arrives as the driveway in my heavily wooded lot disappears under a mass of colorful leaves. I can tell you for sure that fall is here!

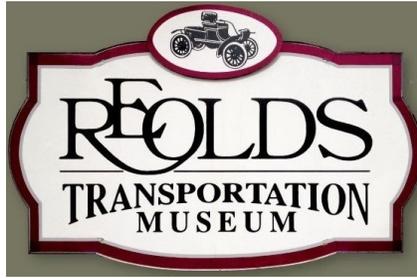
During the months of September and October we had a significant increase in our museum, conference room and vehicle rentals which are all great sources of additional income. The new portable flatscreen TV has come in handy for several of the rentals. Our visitor count continues to pick up as well.

We participated at the Old Car Festival at Greenfield Village in September with the 1929 Oldsmobile 4 Door Landau Motorola car, which drew quite a bit of interest during that two-day event. The 1930 Viking and 1959 Oldsmobile Super 88 Convertible both participated at the prestigious Eyes on Design Show at the Edsel and Eleanor Ford House in Grosse Pointe Shores. That was a very nice show and I want to thank Rick Kaiser and Rusty Berg for helping to host those cars. The Viking garnered quite a bit of attention due to its relative rarity. Speaking of the Viking, the Museum staff and volunteers got that vehicle running and driving after at least 24 years of dormancy. It was donated by Dick and Sue Neller back in 1997. It has a great sounding V8 engine and was the first monobloc V8 to be mass produced, predating Ford's venerable flathead by three years. I think it was the first time that car saw sunlight since coming to the Museum.

Most recently, Dick Roth (one of our board members), Rick Kaiser and I participated in the Congress of Motorcars, which is a pre-war tour and show at the Gilmore Car Museum. Our 1937 Oldsmobile 4 Door Sedan "Mz Lucy" attended that event which helped to promote the RE Olds Transportation Museum in other circles.

We changed out our display at the Capital Region International Airport to a 1906 REO Model B and we will be loaning the 1904 Curved dash, that was previously on display at the airport, to the Automotive Hall of Fame in Dearborn.

Cont. on page 3



Since August, we have received four more vehicle donations which includes a 1940 Oldsmobile 4 Door Phaeton (from Mike Fusick), 1948 Oldsmobile Series 78 4 Door Sedan (from Mike Wilhoyte), a 1951 Oldsmobile Super 88 2 Door (from Tony and Betty Fabiano) and a 1963 Oldsmobile 98 Convertible (from Larry Weyand). Please come out to the Museum and check out the new vehicles (the Phaeton has not yet arrived yet but will be on display very soon). The vehicle and other donations continue to keep our archives staff quite busy.

One of our most recent and important additions though is Danielle Schneider. Danielle is our new cashier and will be given additional responsibilities as she gains experience in our operations. Please give her a kind hello on your next visit.

The Museum will be installing a new CCTV surveillance system which will provide high-resolution video coverage throughout the facility and high-resolution night vision coverage for the exterior of the Museum. This important security improvement was made possible by a \$25,000 grant from the RE Olds Foundation.

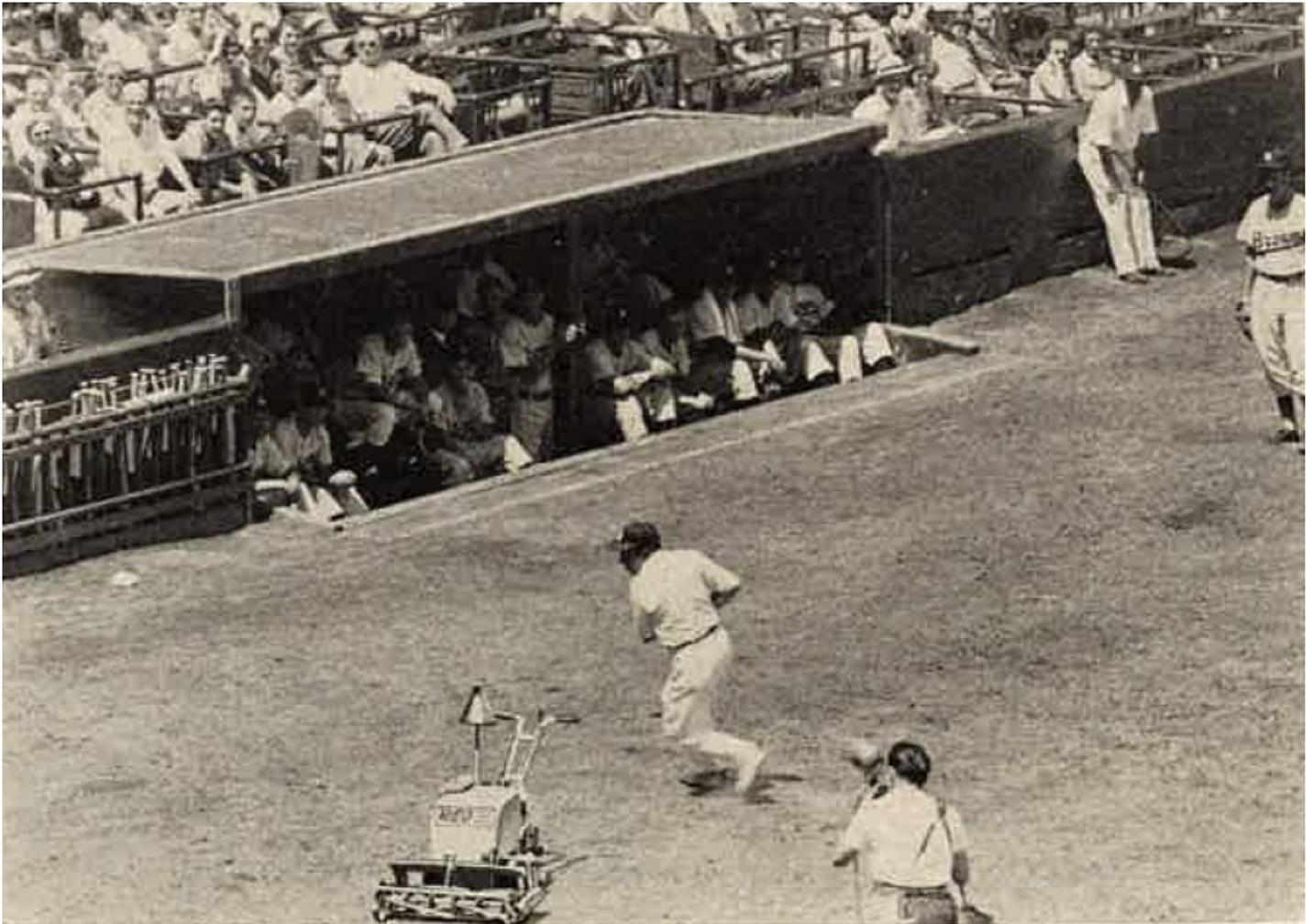
Adding to the previous approved grants from the Community Foundation of Lansing, the RE Olds Foundation and our own fundraising, we were approved for a \$13,000 grant from the MotorCities National Heritage Area, which will allow us to proceed with a fully funded ADA compliant restroom project. I have begun the process to start clearing out the area as we will be saw cutting out the concrete slab and installing the underground plumbing in November. The Museum will stay open throughout the construction except for days of intense construction.

Don't forget our Annual meeting on Monday, November 8<sup>th</sup> where will provide a State of the Museum presentation, Board elections, an interesting speaker, heavy hors d'oeuvres and beverages, including wine and beer. There is still time to get your raffle tickets for the 1967 Cutlass!

On Wednesday, November 17th, the Museum will be hosting the MotorCities National Heritage Area Annual Awards of Excellence. This will be a video live streamed event and another good "plug" for the Museum.

All the work described is made possible through our wonderful staff of volunteers and we are always looking for additional help so, if you know any enthusiasts or recent retirees that may have an interest, please send them our way. It's our volunteers and supporters that keep this Museum open, along with all your generous donations. As always, thank you for your continued support.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Scott A. Mulgrew', is located in the bottom right corner of the page.



## Magic Mower—Take Me Out To The Ball Game

Spectators, players, and umpires were fascinated when REO Motors' "magic" remote control power mower cavorted at Sportsmans' Park prior to a game between the St Louis Browns and the Cleveland Indians. Here a groundskeeper is trying to catch up with the runaway mower. The machine is radio-controlled over a radar frequency. During the St. Louis demonstration the operator was seated in the upper deck of the stadium.

(Dateline 1952. The St Louis Browns were a Major League team from 1901 to 1952. After the 1952 season they moved to Maryland and became the Baltimore Orioles.)



**Passing Cars  
When You Can't See  
May Get You  
A Glimpse  
Of Eternity**



This picture is clearly “PhotoShopped” - but why? It is a photo of James Oliver Curwood, a well-known and very successful author of Action-Adventure novels. Born in Owosso, Michigan on June 12, 1878, he died on August 13, 1927.

The photograph shows Curwood, on the left, pushing(?) a Curved Dash Oldsmobile. It was taken sometime during his employment at the Detroit News-Tribune where he worked from 1900 to 1907. This photo, along with many others, is on display at the Curwood Castle.

Photo used with permission of the Owosso Historical Commission.

Recon was introduced at the 1999 North American Auto Show in Detroit. It was designed completely with computers. It had a two panel opening roof, and an instrument panel that could be reconfigured to the driver's preferences using display windows. Recon was all-wheel-drive and featured a 3.0 V6. Lear seats were made of foam and had no covering or padding. Their slim profile added to interior space.

## **If They Had Built It—Would You Have Bought It?**

1999  
OLDSMOBILE  
RECON





## John Palmberger

March 22, 1932- July 13, 2021

John Palmberger was surrounded by his loving family when he passed away on Tuesday July 13, 2021 at the age of 89. Loving son of the late John and Clare Plamberger; beloved husband of the late Thelma Plamberger which he spent 64 years of love and friendship beside; cherished father of Darren Palmberger (Christa) and the late Linda Palmberger, Steven Palmberger and John Palmberger; dear grandfather of Amanda Palmberger: uncle, cousin and friend to many.

John above all cherished his family. He was happiest when everyone was together. John was a proud father, but he cherished his title of Grandpa deeply. John grew up in the city of St. Louis, where his parents owned a bakery and grocery store. His father was an immigrant from Germany and taught John the value of a dollar and the importance of a strong work ethic. John was a longtime member of the Archway Oldsmobile Club, where he also served as the president for over 20 years; he also was a longtime member of the Oldsmobile Club of America (OCA) for over 50 years. John was an Oldsmobile fanatic: he had a plethora of knowledge on these cars; if you had a question on an Oldsmobile, he had an answer. He wrenched for Larry Hamilton's amateur race team (Tinker Toy). To say that John was a car enthusiast would be an understatement. He loved the mechanics of cars and enjoyed racing. He has a 1957 Oldsmobile, which he has owned since 1960; this is the car that John's wife failed her driving test in. Needless to say, it has been in the garage since Darren was born until now, so you can do the math. John would tinker with the car in his spare time but was often busy in the garage of friends and family helping with their projects. That's the kind of man that John was he had a loving, giving, and charitable heart. He was the kind of friend that anyone would be lucky to have. John was a part of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers of Local 949. John retired from TWA as a lead mechanic; he was employed by TWA for over 30 years. He had a wonderful sense of humor and was great for cracking a joke. John will be deeply missed by all who knew and loved him.



## How Reo Almost Became An Aeroplane Factory.

### The Story of a Born Inventor

Francis Korff.

It was a hot, muggy, August Saturday. On the porches along the quiet street, women sat idly fanning themselves, thankful for escape from their stifling kitchens. Listless children played half-heartedly, too weary from the heat for their usual rush of games. The few neighborhood dogs drooped.

Only the young man working so intently in a silent backyard ignored the overpowering heat. Unconscious of everything except the odd-shaped toy before him, he did not even hear the little girl calling. She ran across and tapped him on the shoulder, whispering importantly in his ear. He started. "Visitors! Now! We-e-e-I-I-I-I, I don't know. (Dubiously.) I suppose you'd better bring them around". And he turned back, absorbed in what he was doing.

Two men came through the gate beside the house and made their way across the grass. Businessmen apparently. Executives. The usual civilities were exchanged and the three of them fell into conversation. Lively technical conversation. Centered obviously on the contraption of sticks and strings and metal and bits of cloth before them.

Isn't it strange that a few words can sometimes revolutionize many lives? This talk almost altered the whole future of the REO Motor Car Company.

The year was 1911 and all the western world was agog over the miracle of flight. After 50 centuries of animal transportation, a new American industry had just given gasoline power to an enlarging world of wheels. Venturesome spirits, having conquered space on the ground, were attempting the infinitely more difficult feat of putting a harness on wings.

With Kitty Hawk barely three years in history, air fever was sweeping the country. "Josephine and Her Flying Machine" had already become the theme song of the new era. And the handful of manufacturers who could produce the wobbly aircraft with their low-powered little motors were swamped with orders.

Truly a new age had begun. But it was off to its brave start on uncertain wings. A better plane was needed and confidently expected. A craft with two or more engines whose performance could be synchronized for faster, smoother, safer flying. "It can't be done" wailed the leading engineers. "With our present knowledge, there's no way of synchronizing several motors for sustained flight."

Right here in Lansing, though a quiet young railway man, a member of the Aeronautics Society of the USA, built the first flying machine that could. The two important men who examined his aircraft model that sultry afternoon were R.E. Olds, the founder of REO and H.C. Thomas, his brilliant chief engineer. They recognized the value of such an invention, knew its tremendous potential of sales. And tests satisfied them that here was the machine the aviation industry was waiting for. So, they made a tremendous decision. REO would embark on large scale production of the revolutionary plane.

Plans were laid for the new venture. Manufacturing space would be required; a new type of tooling would be necessary; and a whole series of engineering experiments would have to be initiated.

Then, as suddenly as it had arisen, the spate of public air fever abated. Dare Devil flyers, stunting with their limited craft, met with ghastly accidents. Dozens of amateurs lost their lives, and hundreds were maimed. A horrible crash on the west coast shocked the public. Almost overnight, the zest for flying died away. REO, preparing to launch into large-scale production, was forced to drop its plans. What point was there in making a production that wouldn't sell? Not until the outbreak of the first World War several years later did interest in aviation flicker up again.

Except for those, untimely crashes, Francis Korff of Experimental Engineering might have become one of America's great aeronautical inventors. REO might well have become one of the country's pioneer producers of fine aircraft. Lansing might have grown into one of the aircraft capitals of the world. And REO might have forgotten her trucks as she had her cars.

Continued on next page.

However, the inventive mind that could design an important aero plane was too fertile to be seriously disturbed by such setbacks. Francis' prime interest was in inventing and wherever he turned he found something to be improved or invented so many items that the family long ago lost count of them.

Take, for instance, the cold January afternoon when he pushed the family baby carriage through the snow to the grocery store. The going was tough. It occurred to Francis that a set of metal runners attached to the carriage and controlled by a lever to drop down and convert in into a sleigh in snowy weather would make pushing easier for his wife. He made a set and Mrs. Korff liked it. Other people liked the idea too, amongst them was REO's young Glenn Fitzgerald who ordered one for their buggy. A local furniture dealer saw it as a boon for weary mothers and persuaded Francis into business. So, the Korff Manufacturing Company came into being.

But winter had given place to spring by the time the new firm was ready to go into production. And the season for sleigh runners was months away. Francis needed a second product to fill the companies off weeks. He looked around and found it.

His furniture dealing friend, who also had an undertaking establishment, noted that a collapsible metal carriage to hold coffins would be handy in the burial business. (The wooden horses then in use were ugly, cumbersome affairs.) Sixteen hours later, Francis completed a beauty. This was immediately spotted by a furniture supply salesman who ordered two dozen as samples. Within two weeks, orders began pouring in from all over the country. Related items were speedily added to the line and the business snowballed. The cost of success, however, was heavy and within a few years the prodigious work undermined the inventor's health. He suffered a lengthy breakdown and was forced to sell out.

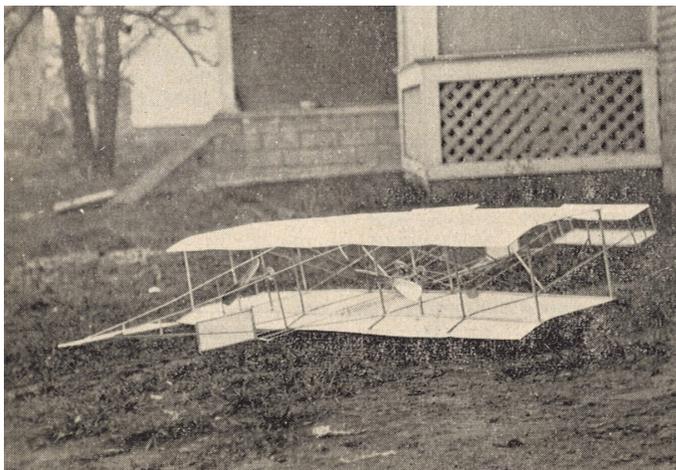
When he was able to work again, H.C. Thomas invited Francis to join REO's experimental engineering staff. He promised to try it out- for a week. This December, after 36 years, Francis Korff is due to retire.

In half a lifetime at REO, Francis' mechanical wizardry has made rich contributions to the progress of the company. The list of his technical ideas and improvements is long and varied. And astonishing.

In the development of REO's first power lawn mowers for example, Francis worked with J.S. Sherer designing and building the original models (all made by hand) . The chain drive wheel was his idea. And he devised the intricate reel bending machine,

Last August, while working on another complex project, Francis fell ill and has been confined to his home ever since.

No company can ever be better than the individuals who form its working parts. In Francis Korff, with his inexhaustible genius, REO has been proud of one its finest components.



*From the November 1952 issue of the REOITEMS*

A scale model of the world's first two-engine areophane. Designed by Francis Kroff about 1911, it (the model) had a wingspread of 48" and a 52" overall length.



0023-3

# AUTO ADOPTION PROGRAM

We have several vintage automobiles that need help with providing for their care. You can help by taking part in our **Auto Adoption Program**. Your tax-deductible support will aid the Museum in its mission to preserve examples of automotive history for future generations.

The Program offer three levels of support, each with its own set of rewards.

## Become a Foster Parent –

For a \$60 gift you can meet the needs of an automobile of your choice for six months. In return a small sign will be placed in the window of the car announcing your “Foster Parent” status. You will also receive one FREE and one BOGO pass that will allow you and a friend to visit your fostered vehicle. Foster care is renewable at a rate of \$50 for a six-month period.

## Adopt a Car of Your Own –

For a one-time \$100 donation you can select a car to become part of you extended family for a period of one year. A sign will be placed near the car that will explain how you have taken it in and are providing for its care. Your chosen vehicle and its adoption will get special coverage in the Museum newsletter as well as on our website. You will receive 2 FREE and 2 BOGO passes so you can spend time together. A 10% off coupon will allow you to pick up a memento of your visit from our gift shop. Yearly extensions are only \$90.

## Be a Long Term Benefactor –

\$300 will allow you to provide for a favorite automobile for 4 years. When you become a Benefactor your gift will be commemorated with a plaque. Additionally, 4 FREE and 4 BOGO passes will be issued to you. A list of all Benefactors will be published in every newsletter and on the website. Your long term generosity will also be recognized at the Annual Membership meeting. You can use your 10% gift shop discount whenever you visit. Renewals and longer term support options can be arranged.

For more information or to sign up to be part of our **Auto Adoption Program** contact the Museum office at 517-372-0529 or email [autos@reoldsmuseum.org](mailto:autos@reoldsmuseum.org)

# Current Auto Adoption Benefactors

Don Barron—1950 Oldsmobile Coupe

Olds Club of Florida— 1906 “Baby” REO

Chuck and Judy Wooderson—1938 Firetruck

1950 Woody Wagon



# *Annual Membership Meeting*

**NOVEMBER 8, 2021**

**5:30 P.M.**

240 Museum Dr

Lansing MI 48933

Drinks and Light Food

Special Program and Raffle Car Drawing



Did you know that you can also help support the Museum when you make purchases on Amazon? Go to [Smile.Amazon.com](https://www.smile.amazon.com) and select **Re Olds Museum Assoc Inc** as your charity of choice; .5% of every purchase you make on [Smile.Amazon.com](https://www.smile.amazon.com) will be donated back to the Museum! Don't worry! Item prices are exactly the same in [Smile.Amazon.com](https://www.smile.amazon.com) as on normal Amazon (but make sure to sign in through Amazon Smile)!



# Spyder Wheel Is Introduced



A new styled wheel, geared to "follow the action," has been introduced to the replacement market by Motor Wheel. Called the Spyder, the mod sports wheel features a bold, wide-open design highlighted by a die-cast aluminum disc and a steel rim. The Spyder joins Motor Wheel's Magnum 500 all-steel custom model in the aftermarket. In addition to these two wheels, the company offers custom wheels as original equipment, and has eight basic designs for 15 new-car models. Motor Wheel is the world's largest manufacturer of styled wheels. There has been a sharp increase in the popularity of styled wheels in the replacement market, according to company officials. Motor Wheel has introduced the Spyder wheel to capitalize on this popularity. The wheels are being manufactured in Lansing. Alcoa is providing the aluminum discs.

April 1969 Motor Wheel Spokesman



## 3rd Qtr. Donors

Olds Club of America Members

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Diane Fitzgerald and Deborah Haris

Cherie & Wayne Mitchell

Connie Deehan

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REO Olds Chapter

Phil Lange

Larry & Susan Doyle

Susan Davis

Penny & Erik Sathers

**Thank you for your support!**