

THE SPIRIT

Spring 2020

NEWSLETTER OF THE
R.E. OLDS TRANSPORTATION MUSEUM



R.E. OLDS AND THE BLACK HAND EXTORTION ATTEMPT

Prominent people have been targets for kidnapping and extortion for eons. R.E. Olds was unfortunately of one those targeted in 1911.

One of the “more popular” methods of extortion in 1911 was called the Black Hand, or Mano Nera in Italian. Developed in Italy and brought to the USA in the 1880’s, it was soon established in certain, but not all, Italian communities throughout the US, including Detroit and Chicago. Some Italian communities even taught students in the techniques of the Black Hand and the use of a stiletto knife.

The typical Black Hand technique was to send a letter to a targeted victim wherein they would be threatened with bodily harm, extortion, kidnapping or disappearance and murder. A certain amount of money was demanded in the letter with instructions to have it delivered to a specified drop place.

To ensure the message and its intent was understood, the letter typically included drawings in thick black ink of a noose or smoking gun or a knife with blood dripping as examples. The “signature” was a black hand, also drawn in thick black ink, which was intended to be viewed as a warning. A journalist at the time called them Black Hand letters which soon stuck as a generic term for this type of organized crime.

On September 29, 1911, a letter was delivered by the US Post Office to R.E. Olds at his home at 720 So. Washington St. in Lansing. The letter contained the following demand: \$2,000 (\$54,000 in 2020 dollars) or Mr. Olds and/or his property would be harmed. Olds was to drop the money at a certain spot on a vacant lot near W. St Joseph St. and Middle St. The currency was to be placed there before the next afternoon at 4:30pm. The letters were quite clear about killing Olds if the money was not paid. The letters were also clear that the letter writer intended on destroying Olds personal home after Olds’ death if the payment wasn’t made.

Olds was quite anxious, as the local paper reported. His initial inclination was to pay the amount so his wife and children wouldn’t be frightened. However, R.H. Scott, President and General Manager of REO Motor Car Company convinced R.E. to turn the matter over to the Lansing Chief of Police for their handling. The police arranged a stakeout around the drop-off spot for the designated time and date.

R.E. was instructed to take a “dummy” package of blank paper and drive to the appointed spot. He was told to get out of his car and walk to the billboard, with the package under his coat. However, rather than throwing the package as instructed by the Black Hand individual, Olds dropped the package from under his coat. This proved to be a problem as the package dropped down a hole and could not be seen by the extortionist!

The package being in a hole rather than plain sight meant no contact from the extortionist and no arrest. The police decided to see if the extortionist would contact Mr. Olds again.

On Friday, October 13th, the extortionist sent his second letter to Olds. The second letter was even more adamant and sinister in its tone. Olds was traveling to the East on business and left instructions for his brother Emory to open all his mail, both business and personal. The second letter was signed with the Black Hand and a skull and cross bones.

The extortionist, clearly not a deep thinker, picked the same lot but said he would put a stake with a flag tied around it so there wouldn’t be any confusion and the package of money couldn’t fall down a hole. The drop was to occur on Saturday, October 14th. Several police officials

Continued on page 3

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: 12 noon — 5 p.m. (April — Oct.)
Closed major Holidays & Mondays

Admission

Adults: \$7, Seniors & Students: \$5
Families: \$15
Members: Free

Special group rates and tours available

The R.E. Olds Transportation Museum is a 501(c)(3), non profit organization

Email:

autos@reoldsmuseum.org

Website:

www.reoldsmuseum.org

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Director's Corner

Greetings.

We'll, that's not how we thought 2020 would begin. First of all I hope everyone is safe and taking all the precautions that your state and our government are prescribing. This shut down has caused many car shows and events to cancel including the R E Olds Chapter canceling the 2020 Homecoming. Our own Car Capital Auto Show scheduled for July 18, 2020 may be canceled. Time will tell and it may be the City of Lansing making the call.

This puts two big fundraisers in jeopardy. We count on the Oldsmobile Homecoming and the Car Capital Auto Show to sell tickets on our raffle car. This year's car is a 1965 Oldsmobile Cutlass Convertible with only 46,000 actual miles. It is absolutely beautiful and is one of the nicest cars we have ever raffled. We sell about 1/3 of all the tickets at these two shows.

There are two good things that have come out of the shutdown. First, we are a 501 (c) 3 non-profit, therefore, we qualify for the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). Based on last year's W3 form we qualify for over \$21,000 to pay for payroll and utility bills. The loan is forgiven when we show proof of payroll and utility payments. This will cover a period of 8 weeks. There is a possible extension of the program. The second is a program that is part of the CARES Act. This is a one-time tax deduction of \$300 to any 501 (c) 3 no matter what your income or deductible expenses are.

The museum is doing fine and although we can't have our volunteers come in, everything looks good and is proper working order. We will follow any and all protocols set forth by the State and City when we re-open. Let's hope we can open in May.

We are going to sell many items that we have multiple copies of and non-museum items this summer. These items will include signage, photos, memorabilia etc. We will also be selling a few vehicles that are not relevant or not museum quality. A list is being compiled and will be available sometime in the next two months.

Our ADA bathrooms have also been put on hold because of the grant process. Our main grant source has elected to postpone this grant cycle. The cycle hasn't been cancelled, just postponed. Let's hope it comes back on line this year.

The museum is in the process of possibly acquiring an Oldsmobile Aerotech. This is a long shot but we have put a timeline together and partnership papers in hopes that everyone can agree on the terms and conditions. We will know more by the next issue of this newsletter.

I can't thank everyone enough for their support, please consider purchasing raffle tickets and take advantage of the C. A. R. E. donation program this year.

All the best and be safe, Bill

REOLDS TRANSPORTATION MUSEUM

again argued against paying the \$2,000 because they feared the Black Hand individual would come back for another round of extortion soon after. So the police devised a new plan to capture the man.

This time, with Olds traveling in the East, R.H. Scott was to impersonate Olds and make the delivery drop. According to the Lansing State Journal, the impersonation was so good that friends couldn't tell whether it was Olds or Scott. Scott drove Olds' personal car and was given a regulation police revolver for protection. Scott drove to the empty lot, got out of his car and deposited the package of worthless paper by the stake as instructed. Scott returned to his car and drove to a spot where he got into his own car, picked up the Chief of Police and returned to watch and see if anything would happen.

Continuing the series of mishaps and humorous missteps, as the police were awaiting the arrival of the extortionist, a newspaper boy for the Lansing State Journal was taking a shortcut across that exact empty lot. The young boy saw the package, picked it up and proceeded to carry on with his newspaper deliveries. The police tried valiantly to get the boy to drop the package which didn't work. However, a man from across the street told the boy to drop the package which he did. A short time later, the same man emerged from the house and retrieved the package but got safely into the house before the police officers could arrive. The house, on 1329 W. St. Joseph St., was secured by the police to make sure no one had left the premises.

The police entered the home and found a man, Emory E. Knox, in a room on one of the upper floors. He was comfortably resting and smoking his pipe. The man vehemently denied picking up the package or having any knowledge of it. One of the officers searched a back storage room and found the opened package had been stuffed into a chimney stovepipe. When confronted, Knox confessed to the extortion but claimed his wife, who was then in the room knew nothing of the plot.

The first public mention of the incident was in the October 16, 1911 edition of the Lansing State Journal. Thereafter daily updates on the incident appeared in the local paper with sensational headlines: "*Knox makes confession to Police Chief*" and "*Strange letters written by Knox*".

While Knox claimed he did not expect to collect the money and certainly had no intention of harming Mr. Olds, he did confess to the crime and the letter writing. Justice moved much faster in 1911. By October 24th, 1911, Knox was sentenced to 2 years in a state prison. The judge regretted that the law prohibited him from giving a larger more severe sentence.

The story does not end here. By November 6, 1911, the police stated in the Lansing State Journal that they had determined Knox was living a double life! Knox had another wife with three children in Bloomfield, Indiana. Trying to support two families as a traveling salesman wasn't working. So he quit his job and moved with wife #2 to Lansing to seek a higher paying job. When he couldn't readily find work, he resorted to the Black Hand extortion.

Incredibly, this wasn't the end of Black Hand extortion for the Olds family. In 1916, according to the Nov. 21, 1916 issue of the Lansing State Journal, a man driving a Ford drove to the residence of Gladys and Bruce Anderson (Gladys was the oldest daughter of the Olds') and walked up to the porch to started looking at their baby boy, R.E. Olds Anderson. Screams by the maid caused him to run to his car and drive away. While never released, the family had received a Black Hand letter about the child. The family chose to keep the letter secret but did say to the Lansing State Journal in November that they thought the whole episode with their son was "a joke" to defuse the matter. No other incidents ever occurred with the family.

Written by Peter J. Stephens



Strike at Lansing.

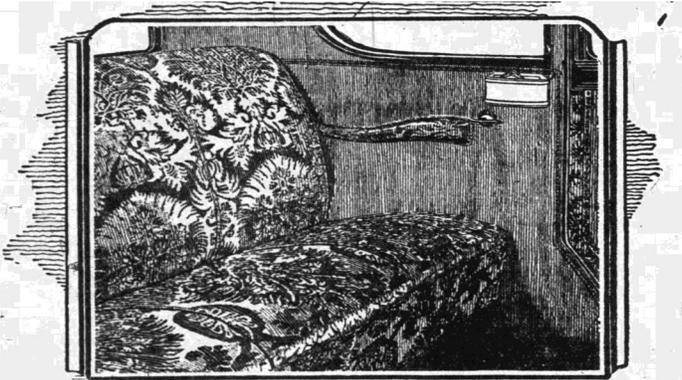
Lansing, Mich., March 31.—(Special.)—About fifty men employed by P. F. Olds & Son, manufacturers of engines and horseless carriages, quit work this afternoon because of the action of the company in requiring one of the men to operate two machines.

In the News = 1908

DUE TO LOW WATER.
**TWO PERSONS SERIOUSLY INJURED
IN BOILER EXPLOSION.**
Lansing, Mich., June 4.—By the explosion of a small gasoline boiler in the factory of Olds & Son this morning, M. F. Bates was dangerously injured and Edward Brown seriously hurt. The explosion was caused by low water in the boiler. The machinery in the shop was injured, the walls cracked and the windows broken. Bates had several bones broken and was badly burned. Brown was also badly cut and burned.

REOLDS TRANSPORTATION MUSEUM

When marketing to the female buyer, REO knew that **“Fashion Sells!”**



NEW REO HUES LURE FAIR SEX

First it was “Mellow Cream”; Now it’s
“French Magenta”

Getting “Mother” and “Gladys” past the Reo Sales corporation’s sales rooms on North Grand Avenue, is as much of a problem to “father” as when he takes the females of his family to the downtown shopping district while a real sale in women’s wear is going on.

Laying aside all appeal of the design of the new Reo Flying Cloud and its many mechanical developments, the female of the species is attracted to the new Reo color schemes like a moth to a flame. The Reo Motor Car Company startled the conservative eye with its new ‘Mellow Cream’ job. This color scheme still stands out in the automotive world. The “gargoyle gray” and the “tokay maroon” color schemes appealed to the public until the company flashed its “mellow cream” innovation. But now comes the “French magenta,” a new color scheme which is chasing the mellow cream job right out of the spotlight. So far as is known here, such a color has never appeared on any automobile before.

“The ultra-conservative folks may sarcastically remark that the new French magenta blend looks somewhat like a cross between Hollywood socks and a kindergarten Easter egg. One may have that opinion at first glance. But the more one “glances” the more one softens such harsh judgement.

Anyway the ladies like it and it is the ladies who count, as Frank J. VanDervoort, manager of the Reo Sales Corporation, observes. “Man may have opinions.” He says, “very decided ones – but the madam soon adjusts them to her own, given a little time and inclination.”

Lansing State Journal March 13, 1936

Car of the Month

REO FLYING CLOUD

SPRING → an awakening,
a resurrection from the drab scenes and thoughts of late winter.
Crocus, daffodil, jonquil and hyacinth soon will add their note
of color joy to the waiting world.

Even now, in this same way, Reo Car of the Month is contributing to someone's happiness. Its distinctive color treatment, inside and out; its specially designed upholstery material by Cheney Bros.; its gold plated interior hardware—these unusual custom features, combined with Reo Flying Cloud's accepted mechanical excellence—here is the answer to every discerning woman's motor car dreams. A fulfillment all the more cherished, knowing that Reo Car of the Month costs but slightly more than the regular models.

Only (and here we urge you) you should see Reo Flying Cloud Car of the Month at the earliest possible moment. The allotment of these exclusive car creations is being closely limited in each city.

*Reo Flying Cloud Car of the Month
is now on display at Reo Showrooms*

REO MOTOR CAR COMPANY LANSING MICHIGAN

FAUST MOTOR CO.
Cor. Cumberland & Lee Streets

Reo Cadillac Co.
Market Street
Johnson City, Tenn.

Phone 1718

Sales REO Service

Kingsport Reo Co.
Sullivan Street
Kingsport, Tenn.



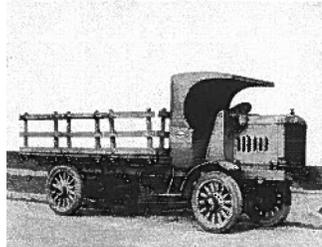
THE CAR INTERIOR A PART OF THE DRESS PICTURE
Sheer fabrics, delicate colors, are the present mode in women's dress, with which thought the elite style, clinging car materials, with their more somber shades, do not compare. Cheney Bros. have aided Reo to solve this problem. A new material, free from heavy nap, artistic in pattern and color, yet with durable fibers woven into its densely constructed fabric, has been produced exclusively for Reo's Car of the Month.



REOLDS TRANSPORTATION MUSEUM

Red Arrow Trucks

By C L Meil



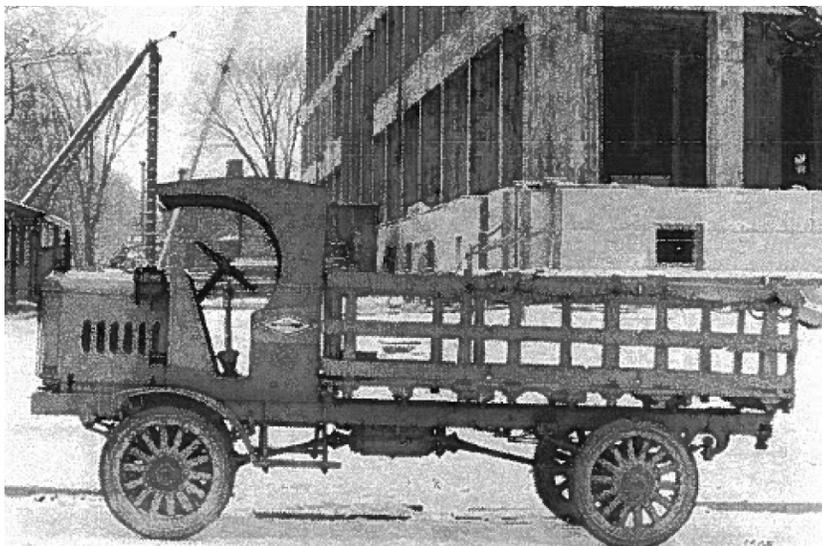
(from the Jan 2017 issue of West Michigan Chapter of the ATHS "Loading Dock Legends" newsletter)

Very few people have ever heard of the Red Arrow Four Wheel Drive Truck. This truck proves that just because you have a quality product doesn't mean you can get it into production. The Red Arrow Truck Company in Lansing MI built a truck that got great reviews but for reasons lost in history the company could not find investors nor could its founders locate a building site for the factory.

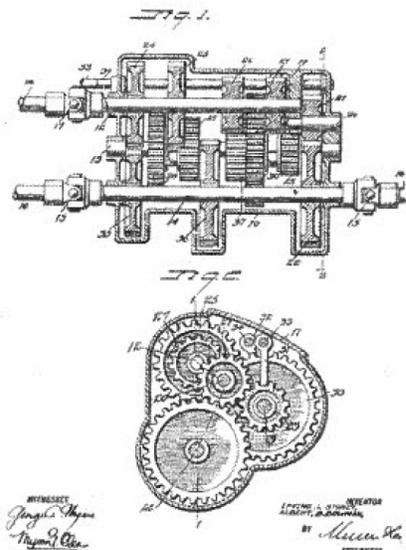
In 1918 Irving Stoney and Albert Bowman patented a Double Drive Gear Set that drove all four wheels. With this patent in hand the two men designed a transmission and drive train using the Double Drive Gear Set and in July of 1919 they hired machinists to build a truck using their design. The prototype was finished in October. Stoney and Bowman tested the truck in the gravel pits outside of Lansing.

Stoney, who had worked for both the Duplex Truck Co. and the Republic Motor Truck Co., and Bowman, who had worked for Buick, put their extensive experience together to make a truck with the driver in mind. The brake levers were within easy reach and the Steering wheel was tilted to make steering easier. The truck's front driving knuckles coupled with the Double Drive Gear Set made the big truck easier to handle. The trucks weighed three tons and was capable of hauling loads up to four tons. It is speculated that a total of three Red Arrow Trucks were actually built.

The Red Arrow Motors Company, or as it was latter known, the Red Arrow Truck Company, was supposedly incorporated in Indiana with \$100,000. However, no record of the incorporation can be found and although the company explored building sites in and around Lansing Michigan no factory was ever built. Everyone involved with the company went on to other jobs and all that remains of the Red Arrow Trucks are a few photos and a patent.



L. STONEY & A. S. BOWMAN.
DOUBLE DRIVE GEAR SET,
APPLICATION FILED 10/16/1918.
1,285,456. Patented Nov. 19, 1919.





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

1957 F88 Mark II



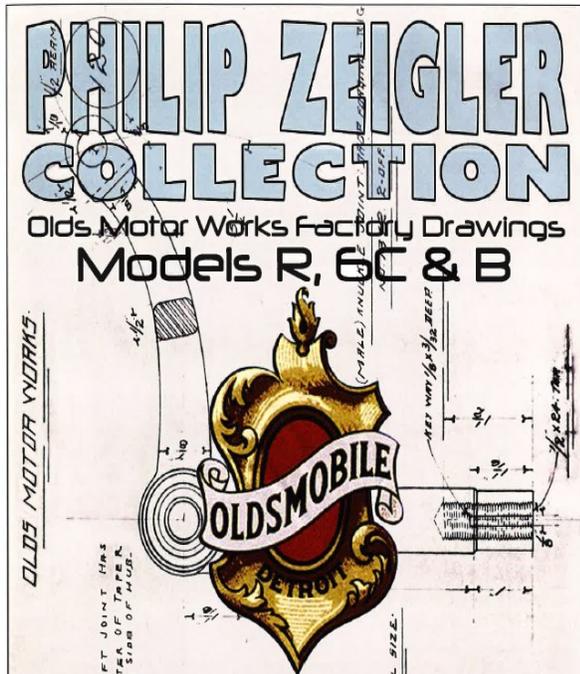
This Moto Rama show car was reported to be a rebody of Henry Earls F-88 #2. It was one of several design ideas for an Oldsmobile answer to Chevy's Corvette. It was powered by a 250 horse power 324 Rocket engine.



Adjust your calendars !!!

This years show is on the 18th of July.

REOLDS TRANSPORTATION MUSEUM



The Museum has recently acquired the Hoonsbeen collection. We are currently sorting and cataloging the items. Among them is the Philip Zeigler Collection of Olds Motor Works Factory Drawings. This is a group of over 250 drawings ranging in size from 8X11 to 2X3 feet. The earliest is dated April 10, 1901 and the latest is May 23, 1905. There are about 125 drawings dealing with Curved Dash models. The bulk are for the 1901 to 05 Model R but also included are the 6C and B models. Drawing for models D,G, K, N, T, S and I are also included. The drawings cover miscellaneous parts—some marked obsolete and others are not completed. A few are, as of yet, unidentified.

We have them inventoried and scanned so that they are available to researchers.

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! While we try to support buying locally, there are times when Amazon is the only place you can find what you are looking for. AND.... 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)!



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Donation: [Click here to donate online](#)

___ In memory of: _____
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