History of R.S. McLaughlin
Grandfather John McLaughlin came to Canada from County Tyrone on a sailing ship in 1832. He and the 140 other Irish men, women and children on the ship were not “potato famine” immigrants but had been persuaded to come to Canada by an agent for a scheme to populate the Peterborough area.

When a man looks back on his life from his eighty-fourth year, those who will listen to his memories expect him to become nostalgic about the good old days. But I happen to take more interest in the present and future than in the past, so to me everything that happened before yesterday belongs in the old days...

Should I remember particularly that day in 1907 when the first automobile bearing the name McLaughlin rolled out from among the doomed graceful carriages in our Oshawa shop?

Or that spring afternoon in 1934 when my graceful Horometer won me my first King's Plate in record time?

Or the latest report of General Motors of Canada, which shows that the company that grew from an axe handle my father fashioned on a backwoods farm a hundred years ago is, more than ever, the largest single producer of consumer goods in Canada?

All those things, and a thousand more memories, are part of my old days: and all of them were good.

My father’s days were good too - all his long life - although he never reconciled himself to the supplanting of his beloved carriages by the automobiles he could never learn to love, even though they bore our name.

So were the days of my grandfather John, who first stepped on the soil of Ontario with no other possessions than the clothes he wore. And very wet clothes they were, too.

Grandfather John McLaughlin came to Canada from County Tyrone on a sailing ship in 1832. He and the 140 other Irish men, women and children on the ship were not “potato famine” immigrants but had been persuaded to come to Canada by an agent for a scheme to populate the Peterborough area. I don't think Grandfather...
McLaughlin required much persuasion; he was eager for the opportunities offered to an energetic young man by the big new country across the Atlantic.

From Montreal, John McLaughlin and his companions transferred to riverboats for the hazardous trip up to Lake Ontario. It proved so hazardous that Grandfather nearly did not survive it. His boat was swamped in rough water and all his possessions were lost. When he landed at Cobourg for the overland journey to Peterborough he had only the contents of a thin wallet between himself and destitution.

Grandfather stayed in Peterborough only a short time and then took up a 160-acre grant of crown land in the virgin forest six miles north of Bowmanville. Some of the other Irish settlers took land nearby, and, nostalgically, they called the place Tyrone.

Granddad cut enough trees to build a log cabin and make a clearing to sow his first crop. In that log cabin was born his eldest child, my father Robert McLaughlin. It was a thrifty life the McLaughlins and the other settlers led. They could grow much of their own vegetables, catch fish in the creeks, and occasionally butcher and share a pig. But there was mighty little cash for the tea, salt, sugar and flour they had to buy in the bustling town of Bowmanville, half a day’s journey away. In fact, my father remembered that about the only cash crop on the farm was the potash they made by burning the hardwood they cut as they cleared the land, slowly and laboriously, acre by acre.

As soon as my father was big enough to swing an axe, he was enlisted in that work that never finished for the Tyrone settlers - felling trees to make land for the plough. They say that if a person gets a surfeit of anything when he is young he will grow up hating that thing; well, that certainly wasn’t the case with my father. From the time he was a boy until he was a grown man and married, my father felled and logged and stacked hundreds and thousands of cords of hardwood. And when he married, what do you think Granddad gave him for a wedding present? Why, fifty acres of virgin forest to be cleared into a farm of his own! And so he sharpened his axe again and fell on those endless trees to build a house and clear a field for his wife and the family they were soon to start.
Yes, next to God and his family, wood was the great love of my father’s life. He loved the smell of it and the feel of it and the way it worked under axe and saw, adze and chisel and plane. There was to come a time when I would have to stand before him, more than a little nervous and prepared to be ordered indignantly from his office, and tell him that the McLaughlin Carriage Company should start making automobiles as well as carriages in order to keep abreast of the times. Yet he took my brash suggestion surprisingly quietly and calmly, and I know he agreed - albeit sadly and reluctantly - only because cars in those days had bodies made of wood which required quite as much skill to fashion as his carriages. This was something he could understand and approve of, even though he disapproved of the noisy smoke-belching iron machine, which took the place of the stately horse. It wasn’t until metal bodies replaced wood that he finally lost interest. “That’s the end,” he told me quietly.

While he was still a boy my father had taken up a hobby. In those days, on a backwoods farm, you pretty well made your own entertainment; there were no movies to go to, of course, and no radio or television to keep a boy entranced. Even such entertainments as “the city” might offer - in this case the village of Bowmanville - were out of the question; the trip over the narrow rutted muddy road from Tyrone to Bowmanville was a major undertaking.

So, in the few hours between the end of a day of hard labour with his axe, and his early bedtime, my father occupied himself with what was to become his life’s work: shaping wood. At first it was axe handles, fashioned with such skill that when Granddad took them into Bowmanville on market day the merchants declared they were the best they had ever seen, and even paid a penny or two above the going price for them. In addition to being my father’s hobby, those axe handles were an important supplement to the family’s other source of cash income, potash. The axe handles also were in a very real sense the first production units of the enterprise that is now General Motors of Canada.

Granddad was a devout man, and the only activity permitted on Sundays was churchgoing. But that in itself was an adventure, a complete change of scene, a transition from the “Little Ireland” atmosphere of Tyrone to
the mixed Irish and Scottish settlement of Enniskillen, four miles away. For there was no Presbyterian church at Tyrone, and the good Ulstermen journeyed to the kirk at Enniskillen.

It was in the kirk that my father met Mary Smith, the daughter of Scottish settlers who had come to Enniskillen from Perthshire two or three years after the McLaughlins reached Tyrone. She was a bonny lass, this Enniskillen girl who was to become my mother; I can remember her to this day, nearly eighty years later, even though I was only five years old when we had the great misfortune to lose her in 1878, the same year my father moved his little carriage shop to Oshawa. I know just how my mother looked then, in the days not many years after my father courted her after church on Sundays and then married her; I know not only from my memory, but because she had once had her photograph taken, and many years later Sir Wyly Grier painted her portrait from it for me to hang in a place of honour in my home.

In due time after his Sunday visits to Enniskillen, my father could informed Granddad that he was going to marry Mary Smith. On the acreage Granddad deeded to him on hearing this news, my father set to work to build a home for his bride. It was to be a better house than the one the McLaughlins had started in - of boards, not logs. Nowadays when a young man says he is going to “build a house”, it usually means calling in a contractor to do the work. In my father’s case it meant building a house with his own hands, of his own materials.
Cutters in a Catalogue

It meant felling the trees, cutting the logs to length, hauling them to the sawmill, hauling the lumber back to the site he had chosen for the house and then building it. Nearby he put up a driving shed. There wasn’t much to be stored in that shed, just a few tools and odds and ends. But there were compensations for the emptiness of the shed - it meant that my father could build a fine big workbench. At that workbench, in the evenings, he made dozens of axe handles, using the finest straight-grained bits of hardwood that he had selected from the lumber milled for the house. With his little farm still being cleared of virgin forest, those axe handles were an important source of revenue.

But the Governor - I might as well start using now the name we called him, in affection and respect, for all his life - the Governor wasn’t satisfied. He was eager to make more ambitious use of his self-taught skill in working wood. One of his treasured possessions was an old catalogue illustrated with wondrous pictures of carriages, wagons and cutters. The Governor pored over these pictures with endless interest, tracing with his finger the elaborate curves and carvings of the bodies; he studied the methods of fastening the body frame to the springs and the springs to the wheels or runners. Then one day he reached a decision:

“I’m going to build one of those.”

His first project was comparatively modest - a sleigh. While he was working on it, a neighbour passed by, stopped to see what Bob McLaughlin was up to in his shed, and watched the quality of wood and workmanship he was putting into his first sleigh, and said:

“Will you sell me that cutter when it’s finished?”

“I’ll make you another one like it,” said the Governor, “and you can specify the time you want it.”

Thus his first “production line” was two cutters at the same time. He couldn’t do all the work himself, of course. In those days small carriage and wagon shops were dependent on journeyman artisans - and “journeymen” they really were - blacksmiths and upholsterers who traveled about the countryside, stopping to perform their special work on as many vehicles as the shop had ready, then
Schedules Were Uncertain

It was a very casual schedule these journeymen kept. The state of the roads, the amount of work to be done at any one place, the artisan’s own habits of temperance or intemperance - all these determined how punctually a journeyman would arrive for his assignment. In that leisurely age the uncertainty of the journeyman’s coming was of no great consequence as a rule, but it so happened that the Governor’s first production schedule was geared to a very tight deadline.

He was fortunate with his upholsterer, J. B. Keddie of Oshawa, who arrived in good time. In his wagon were two apprentices and his supply of horsehair, canvas, leather and other upholstery materials. My mother had to provide room and board for the journeyman and his apprentices - that was part of the unwritten contract.

The promised date of delivery of the neighbour’s cutter was drawing near and still the blacksmith who was to do the essential ironwork on both cutters had not arrived. Meanwhile the man who had ordered the cutter came around to see how it was progressing. He said to the Governor:

“Bob, I forgot to tell you - I want a picture painted on the back of that cutter: King Billy crossing the Boyne on his white horse.”

My father, unlike many of his North of Ireland Protestant neighbors, was not an Orangeman. Moreover, he had never seriously tried his hand at picture painting. But he set to and produced a creditable - and vivid - picture of the event that made July 12 famous. Three quarters of a century later that cutter came back into the possession of the McLaughlins, and the picture the Governor painter on the back of his first vehicle was still recognizable - especially the white horse. Thereafter no customer had to use any great persuasion to get my father to paint pictures on their vehicles.

When the blacksmith finally arrived, quite unabashed at his tardiness, there was so little time left that he and my father had to work day and night to finish the cutters. But finished they were, and one was delivered to the staunch Orangeman.

But, strangely enough, it was the Governor’s near-failure rather than his success that probably led to the growth of the Tyrone shed into General Motors of Canada. It is not difficult to imagine what might have
happened if that blacksmith had arrived on time and given my father no cause for worry: the Governor might well have been content to continue the production system then in vogue with dozens of small carriage shops in Ontario, which used visiting journeyman artisans for important roles in carriage building, with resulting limited production and dependence on the whims of a very independent bunch of men.

The lesson the Governor learned from the belated blacksmith led to an important decision: to build his own tiny blacksmith shop in front of the shed at Tyrone. The upholstery end was never a problem; J. B. Keddie was a reliable man and a fine workman. He was to stay with my father as journeyman upholsterer until the business moved to Oshawa, when he became foreman of the McLaughlin Carriage Company, a position he held for the rest of his life.

Soon the demand for the cutters and wagons outgrew the Tyrone shop, and in 1869, two years after he made his first pair of cutters, the Governor decided to move to a larger community - Enniskillen. In that year my brother George was born. My eldest brother Jack (J. J. McLaughlin) was three years old; I was to be born two years later.

In Enniskillen the Governor built a somewhat larger shop with a separate blacksmith shop; on the second floor was a room where wheels hung from the ceiling to dry and, surmounting everything, a small tower where the town bell was installed. The Governor was still building only cutters and wagons, but in his fine new shop he decided to try his hand at a carriage - the McLaughlin representative at the coming county fair at Bowmanville. He and Mr. Keddie gave it their best and produced a beautiful phaeton. Among entries, which included the products of two of eastern Ontario’s largest carriage makers, the McLaughlin phaeton won first prize. Immediately the McLaughlin carriage shop stopped making wagons and went in for carriages.
Wheel Fell on Head

My own first recollection of the carriage business was a painful one. One day when I was five, I wandered into the room where the wheels were hung from the ceiling to dry. A wheel fell on me, knocking me out and opening a deep gash in my head. I was carried to my father’s office - howling lustily as soon as I recovered my breath, I have no doubt - and while everyone else fussed around wondering what should be done next, the governor solved the problem simply; he produced one of those brown-striped humbugs and gave it to me. The pain and the tears stopped miraculously. After that, the family always said I had “wheels in the head.” And I suppose they were right.

The McLaughlin carriage shop outgrew Enniskillen within half a dozen years of moving there. It now employed as many as eight men at busy seasons, but it operated under conditions that would cause a businessman today to pull out his hair in handfuls. There was, for example, no bank; Enniskillen was a long way from the nearest railway, and all supplies had to be carted in. In 1876 the Governor decided to make the big and daring move - to Oshawa.

It might be wondered how any business could expand, or operate at all, without banking facilities. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that a village carriage maker seventy-five years ago didn’t do business the way it is done today. I have before me a faded and torn journal in the Governor’s hand writing, in which a typical entry is that of Feb. 10, 1875: “H. Taylor - one cutter, $30 in cash next fall and seven cords of good dry hardwood, maypole or beech.”

When I say the move to Oshawa was daring, I am not reflecting my father’s attitude, but that of our competitors. There were at that time two established carriage makers in Oshawa, and they let it be known that in their opinion “McLaughlin will last six months.” It took a little longer than that for further changes to occur in the Oshawa carriage industry -- and when they did, it was the competitors who disappeared.

It is true that the Governor brought no great ambition for expansion to Oshawa. After he had bought a lot and...
erected a smallish three-story building on it, with a separate brick blacksmith shop, he sold the balance of the lot to the town, which built a jail on it and later the city hall.

And indeed my father’s methods did not permit mushroom growth. People called him “a crank for quality,” and he took it as a compliment. No workman would dare skimp a job, or rush it through, because my father inspected everything and poor workmanship was the one sure way of calling down his wrath; he was disdainful of the quality of the carriage-hardware traveling salesmen tried to get him to buy, and insisted on using nothing but Norway iron, a tough and durable metal which cost five to ten times as much as ordinary iron. But, early in the eighties, the Governor produced an invention that was to revolutionize the carriage industry and expand the little McLaughlin shop into a million-dollar-a-year enterprise. It was, strangely for my father whose great concern had been with the woodwork and who had hired others for the metal parts, an invention made of metal. It was a new “gear” for buggies and carriages. The “gear” is all that part of a carriage between the body and the wheels - the springs, couplings, chassis and the mechanism that permits the front axle to turn and thus steer the vehicle.

The McLaughlin gear had long flexible springs, couplings of Norway iron, of course, brass and rubber washers. But the most important part was the turning mechanism. There’s an old saying, “as useless as a new-type fifth wheel,” but the Governor belied that saying by incorporating a fifth wheel into the turning mechanism of his gear, and he patented it. The McLaughlin gear is, I suppose, part of the vanished history of a vanished type of vehicle. But in those days it was big news. It made carriages safer and smoother-riding.

From my father’s point of view, his new gear was just another improvement in the design of his carriages, and he made them only with the intention of using them in his own products - until Tony Foster saw the gear.

Tony Foster was the most popular of the many traveling salesmen who called on my father. He was a memorable and colourful figure, and we were always glad to see him come to the shop, dressed in a soft tweed hat, braided velvet coat, horse-blanket vest, yellow gloves, and carrying a cane. Tony sold upholstering material and hardware items, and he was always sure of an order from the Governor, even when we weren’t really low on inventory of the goods he sold. But this day Tony didn’t have time for a sales talk. He took a look at a McLaughlin gear that had been set up, leaned his ample weight on the springs, tested the fifth wheel steering mechanism and said: “By Jove, Mr. McLaughlin, that’s a fine-looking gear ... I could sell some of those
to my customers, now."

The Governor thought of this idea for a moment, then said: “All right, Tony, if you can sell them, we’ll sell them to you.”

Tony waited to hear no more. He hurried back to Guelph and described the gear to his boss, Chris Kloepfer. A couple of days later both Tony Foster and Mr. Kloepfer arrived early in the morning. They looked the gear over again, then spent the rest of the morning in the Governor’s office.
Offered to Buy Gear

When my father came home at noon he held a solemn conference with his sons, two teen-agers and me not yet in my teens. “Boys,” he said, “I have had an offer to sell the gear patent.” He paused. “Ten thousand dollars.” Pause. “That’s a lot of money.” Pause. “Will I take it?”

I suppose that, since he had done us the honor of consulting us on this very important matter, we should have thought over the question for a minute or two. But we didn’t. In one voice we chorused: “No, don’t sell it.”

The Governor returned to Foster and Kloepfer and announced his decision not to sell the gear patent. But he offered them exclusive rights to sell the gear itself across Canada, provided they placed a minimum order for 1,000, to be taken over a period of two years. As it turned out, that was a conservative contract that underestimated Tony’s salesmanship and the appeal of the gear to other carriage makers; in the years that remained of the heyday of the carriage, Foster was to send in orders for nearly 20,000 gears.

To manufacture this sideline we had to expand both the carriage factory and the blacksmith shop; and then we had to enlarge again to meet the increased demand for the carriages with the new gear, which we built ourselves. It might be thought that by selling other carriage makers this important part we were competing with ourselves. But it didn’t work out that way. Carriage factories all over the country advertised their products as “equipped with the wonderful new McLaughlin gear” and that meant they were advertising us. People figured, “If we’re buying a carriage with a McLaughlin gear, why not buy the whole McLaughlin carriage?” Even some carriage makers came around to that point of view. After fitting McLaughlin gears to their own vehicles for a time they started ordering completed carriages and thus became our agents.

Until then our sales had been almost entirely local. Often a buyer would come to our shop with a horse and drive away in a new carriage. Now orders for gears and for carriages started to come in from places that our shipper had never heard of, places far beyond Ontario in eastern and western Canada. Walking through the crowded busy shops the Governor regretted that he had sold that “surplus” half of his lot.

To take advantage of this gratifying new demand for the carriages he had been building for nearly twenty years, my father hired his first traveling salesman,
John Henry. Others were put on the road in quick succession: William Stevenson, Manley Rose, T.A. Chadburn. They sold McLaughlin carriages literally from coast to coast.

In the early days of this expansion, while the carriage shop was still small, I graduated from high school. I was only sixteen, so I suppose I should confess modestly that I was a fairly bright scholar. But I think one reason was that I found the world such an exciting place that I wanted to get out into it as soon as I could.

I had no great urge to go into the carriage business. My brother Jack had graduated as a chemist from the University of Toronto and was in New York doing what he called “looking things over.” Actually, he was even then planning his own great enterprise - the founding of the Canada Dry beverage company. My brother George, a couple of years older than I, was already apprenticed to the carriage shop, and I thought that one second-generation carriage maker in the family was enough.

Besides, there were other things I wanted to try. I thought I might like to become a hardware merchant, and worked in Dan Cinnamon’s store for five months. I thought of becoming a lawyer - I fancied I looked a little like one. I knew from George that apprenticeship with the Governor was no rest cure. It meant working practically from dawn to after dusk, six days a week, and that would interfere with the bicycling I was so keen on.

Not, mind you, that the Governor let any of his family suffer from idle hands. We were not allowed to run the streets at night; there was cordwood to be sawed, the horses to be looked after, any number of chores around the house. We didn’t have a hired man until much later. But I still managed to find time for some furious cycling. The Governor must have been concerned about this, although he never reprimanded me. But he mentioned my over-enthusiastic cycling in a letter to Jack. My brother replied:

“Regarding Sam’s bicycling propensities, it seems to be a kind of fascination that gets hold of a boy but it usually wears off in a year or two. It seems to stick to Sam longer but it’s a mistake for him to travel such long distances.”

Long distances? Once for a holiday I rode from Oshawa to Brockville and back over dirt roads, a distance of more than 300 miles. Often I rode the thirty miles to Toronto and back in one day. That was a toll road, but being on a bicycle I didn’t have to pay.
Almost every day of the week I took a sixteen to eighteen-mile swing around the Oshawa-to-Whitby-to-Colombus circuit. And this was not on a modern cycle, but on an old-time solid high-wheeler with a little bit of a pilot wheel. I entered races at all the fairs and meets I could get to, with pretty fair success. In facts, George said jokingly that I brought home so many cups and cruets and pickle dishes that I would be able to furnish a house when I got married.

I knew the answer to that one. I wasn’t ever going to marry. I was going to be too busy to be anything else but a bachelor. What finally decided me to go in with the Governor was a very pleasant but firm letter from Jack, in which he persuaded me that it was my duty to enter the family business. So in 1887 I became an apprentice in the upholstery shop. I soon found that George had not been exaggerating when he said it was no advantage to be the boss’ son. I swept the floors and did all the other menial work that apprentices have hated from time immemorial. Everybody in those days worked a fifty-nine-hour week except the bosses (and, I soon discovered, the boss’ son). They sometimes worked seventy or eighty hours, without overtime either.

The Governor was impatient at the paper work involved in business. The working day of a carriage maker, he felt, should be dedicated to making carriages. He never started the office routine - making our purchasing orders, writing letters and such things - until after six. I was expected to stay and help with such chores as copying letters on the big old-fashioned screw-press. We seldom got home until after seven at night - and work started sharp at seven in the morning.
Sneaked in Back Door

I was thirty years old, a partner in the business and a family man, before I decided I had come up in the world enough to start going to the office at the luxuriously late hour of eight o’clock. The first morning I did so my conscience grew more and more bothered the nearer I got to the plant - and finally I sneaked in the back door, thoroughly ashamed of myself. It took a long time for me to become accustomed to keeping “executive’s hours.”

As an apprentice I was paid three dollars a week; and every payday the Governor solemnly deducted two-fifty for room and board. I had fifty cents a week to spend as foolishly as I wished. In later years when I related this to the younger generations of my family, they looked at me with incredulous eyes and exclaimed: “But what could anyone do with fifty cents a week?”

Well, let me tell you that in Oshawa in those days there was a lot a boy could do with fifty cents a week; perhaps I should say there were a lot fewer ways of getting rid of the change in your pocket; there were no movies, no twenty-five cent sodas and sundaes, no fifty-cent ball games in enclosed grandstands, no bus or streetcar fares to pay if you wanted to go somewhere a couple of miles away. We made our own games, we could hunt and fish and hike. And when it came to spending money you’d be surprised how many wintergreen candies you could get for a cent; or, better still, there was the old lady who made taffy in her little shop, and for one cent she would hand over a lump that could pull all the fillings out of your teeth, if you had any.

Certainly I didn’t suffer any hardship during my three years of apprenticeship. I learned to stitch and sew, to make wax ends, to lay out jobs, to make cushions - everything an upholsterer must know from the ground up. It was so thoroughly worked into me that I am still a journeyman upholsterer, and I think I could make a living at it even today.

But I wasn’t so confident back then in 1890, when I was still in my teens and the upholstery foreman told me I had become a full-fledged journeyman. Oh, I was cocky enough, but I just wanted to make sure that I was good enough to make a journeyman’s full pay - $1.75 a day - in carriage shops other than McLaughlin’s. In other words, I wanted to find out that I wouldn’t be paid all that money just because I was the Governor’s spoiled brat.

So I put twenty dollars in my wallet, took the train to Gananoque, crossed the St. Lawrence in a ferry and
went on to Watertown, N. Y., where the H. H. Babcock Co. was located. The company was noted for making magnificent carriages and having a very high standard of workmanship. If I could get a job there - and keep it - it would be a good test of my ability. I got a job right away and to my surprise, top wages of $1.75 a day.

After I had been there two weeks I heard a couple of men working near me whisper, “Here comes the big boss, Mr. Rich himself.” Mr. Rich was superintendent of the plant. He came up to me and said: “Are you a McLaughlin from Oshawa?” I suppose he had seen my name and address on the plant records. I told him I was.

“What are you doing here?”

“I’m just testing my apprenticeship, sir,” I answered. “I am out to learn a little more and look around.”

Mr. Rich smiled and said: “I was born in Brooklin.” Brooklin is a village a few miles north of Oshawa, in those days about the same size as Enniskillen. The superintendent was kind. He gave me the run of the plant and helped me in every way. So in Watertown I not only learned that I was worth $1.75 a day, but I absorbed a lot of ideas about plant management, design and quality control. I stayed with the Babcock Company for two months, and was sorry to leave. But I wanted to see more of other carriage factories. I got a job with Sturtevant and Larabee, carriage and sleigh makers in Syracuse, N. Y., and later moved on to a similar job in Binghampton. Then I took my savings, went to New York City, and “did the town.”

After all those years, the details of that first visit to the big city are somewhat hazy - but still pleasant. I arrived back in Oshawa with fifteen cents in my pocket. Now I was ready to settle down and make carriages ... for a while, anyway.
Part Two • How The Auto Beat The Horse

When fire razed their factory, the confident McLaughlins built it again and their horse carriages went full tilt with a gross of a million dollars a year. Then over the horizon in a cloud of dust came a strange new contraption called the automobile.

In 1892, when I turned twenty-one, my father repaid me the $2.50 a week he had taken from my $3 salary for room and board during my three-year apprenticeship with the McLaughlin Carriage Company. He repaid me with generous interest, I should say, since he made me a partner, along with my older brother George.

The business was still growing slowly. Our capital was quite small. I am sure the Governor would have had no difficulty in finding a silent partner who would have brought considerable capital into the business, but he was more interested in work than in money. He had started with nothing but his hands in a little shop in a forest clearing at Tyrone, in Durham County of Ontario, and built the first McLaughlin vehicle, a cutter, in 1867 - which makes us exactly the same age as Canada. The Governor wanted working partners - certainly George and I brought nothing into the business but willingness to work and such skills as we had acquired in the carriage shop. In the same year he also took in William Parks, who became foreman of the blacksmith shop. He remained in that position until his death, when his estate was wound up and paid off by the partnership.

Bank credit, essential for operating an expanding business like ours, was very difficult to secure in those days. It was fortunate that my father’s reputation as a reliable and devout man, an elder of the church, made it possible for us to get a reasonable line of credit from Dominion Bank, then the town’s leading bank.

Then some local men in Oshawa formed the Western Bank and offered the Governor expanded credit if he would change his account to the new bank. It was a tempting offer, and my father accepted it. Later, when the Standard Bank bought out the Western, we resumed our former contacts and divided our business between the Dominion and Standard banks.

Now that our working capital problem was eased we were ready for the expansion necessary to meet increasing orders for McLaughlin carriages. But there remained a major bottleneck: our plant was a considerable distance from the Oshawa railway freight yards. We had to load all carriages at the factory on flat wagons, with bodies on gears and wheels and shafts neatly stowed away, then team them down to the railway,
unload them, and reload them on the railway cars. The streets were unpaved, deep in mud in wet weather, heavy with dust in dry weather.

The boxcars used by the railways in those days were dinky things, too small for the economical shipment of carriages. So we loaded our carriages twenty-five at a time on flat cars, which were much longer than boxcars, and we kept a crew of men building `houses’ right over the carriages, closing them in solidly. It was a costly, time-wasting way of getting our products from factory to purchaser.

Then came Oshawa’s great street-railroad issue. The Rathburn Company of Deseronto wanted to build a railway through Oshawa for the benefit of the town’s industries. There was strong opposition, speeches for and against, friends quarrelling with lifelong friends over the issue. Finally it was put to a vote - and the railway won. I was all in favour of the railway, of course, but I feel that the town was pretty generous in allowing the railway to use so many streets. It was being done in many other towns, however, as the only answer to the transport problem when a town grew up around an industry or group of industries, as so often happened. I don’t suppose the problem will ever arise again, with industries becoming more and more decentralized and truck transport supplementing railways to a large extent.

The breaking of this shipping bottleneck soon led to one even more serious. The McLaughlin Carriage Company finally reached the point where it could not add another foot of badly needed work space to the crowded buildings on the half-lot my father had bought twenty years before. We either had to move or hold down production.

Looking for new quarters, we considered a much bigger factory, which had been built by the Hon. T.N. Gibbs to manufacture furniture. That business failed and the building had been taken over by the Heaps Manufacturing Company, another furniture concern, which also failed, leaving the building empty. We made an unusual deal for that building, trading in our old plant on it. We were warned by some people that the building was “jinxed,” and by others that we were biting off more than we could chew.

“You will be lost in that big building,” people told us. “You’ll have to rent out some of it.” But in two years we were up to our usual tricks: we were busy building extensions.

In 1896 we spread further by opening our first branch office in Saint John, N.B., where our carriages had
become popular. My brother George went down there for several months to open this, our first branch away from home, and he did a splendid job of organizing our business in the lower provinces. Later we established similar branches in Montreal, London, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary and other cities.

As I look back on those last years of the 19th century I think I can honestly say that I was the busiest young man in North America. After I returned from “testing my apprenticeship” in the U.S., I became foreman of the upholstery shop for a year or two. Then I went into the office and, in addition to handling my share of the business end, I became the designer for all McLaughlin carriages. It was to be one of my jobs - and my real labour of love - for the next twenty-five years, on all our early automobiles as well as the carriages.

Years before, I had wanted, among other things, to become a draftsman and had taken a correspondence course in it. But when I wanted to go off and learn the profession seriously, the Governor put his foot down. “If I want a draftsman,” he said, “I can get a draftsman. I want you to stay here and learn the business.”

Now I think he was glad that he had someone with some training in design in the family, the way the carriage business was developing. Today a motor manufacturer who puts out half a dozen different basic body designs feels he is offering a full line, and he is. But at the turn of the century, to keep abreast and ahead of the stiff competition, McLaughlin’s was offering no fewer than 143 separate body designs of carriages and sleighs, with new models in many types every year.

Every part of the country had its own ideas about the carriages it wanted. Quebec wanted Concord bodies, for example, but Ontario preferred square boxlike bodies. The Northwest and other frontier areas must have their buckboards and democrats. Then there was the city stuff, phaetons, stanhopees and fringe-top surreys. The Maritimes insisted on the fanciest designs of all. We were developing an export business too; Australia was buying our carriages. Road carts, the simplest type of conveyance then in existence, two-wheeled and low in price, were in great demand not only locally but in South America as well. Once we shipped five hundred road carts on one vessel bound for South America, then received a message from the buyer: “Ship lost with all carts; please repeat the order immediately.”

It was quite a job to keep up with the plant’s demand for all those different designs. Often I would work until well after midnight, trying out new ideas in design and throwing a dozen or more into the wastebasket until I got just the lines that suited me. Then next day at the plant I would draw the new designs and all the components of the carriage on a big blackboard. The foremen of the various departments would work from those blackboard drawings to make prototypes of the new models and then the whole plant would be geared
to put them into production.

The Automobile generation, which recognizes the buggy in sweet old-fashioned songs, may think of it as the simplest form of machinery, but to us and to our customers it was a complex mechanism requiring considerable maintenance. Here, for example, are the first two of a dozen “Rules for the care and preservation of wagons and carriages” we issued in 1896:

“Carriages should be kept in an airy, dry coach house. There should be a moderate amount of light, otherwise the colors will be affected. The windows should be curtained to avoid having direct sunlight strike upon the carriage.

“There should be no communication between the stable and the coach house. The manure pit should be located as far away from the coach house as possible. Ammonia fumes crack and destroy varnish, and fade the colors of both painting and lining.
“Also avoid having a carriage stand near a brick wall, as the dampness from the wall will fade the colors and destroy the varnish.”

Owners of new carriages were advised that “it is better for it to stand for a few days, and to be frequently washed and dried off before being used. Frequent washings with cold water and exposure to fresh air will help to harden and brighten the finish.”
Tires Needed Care

Mechanical maintenance of a carriage was not, of course, anything like that of cars. But the carriage owner had problems the motorist never heard of: moths in the upholstery, for example. We recommended turpentine and camphor if the woollen linings became infested.

Carriage drivers never had to worry about punctures, but tire troubles were possible, and our instructions said: “Should the tires of the wheels get at all slack, so that the joints of the fellows become visible, have them immediately contracted or the wheels may be permanently injured. `A stitch in time saves nine!’”

The instructions we gave carriage buyers about lubrication shows how comparatively recent is the world which runs on petroleum. In 1896 we instructed: “Keep the axles well oiled ... pure sperm oil is considered best for lubricating purposes. Castor oil will answer, but never use sweet oil, as it will gum up.”

We promised carriage buyers that the care we outlined would result in long life. How long, we did not know at the time. One of the rewards of long life has been for me to see for myself how well our promise has been kept, for many of those stoutly built McLaughlin vehicles survive to this day and give good service forty and fifty years after they were made.

In 1897, when I was twenty-six, I got the idea I would like to try politics. The Governor had been mayor of Oshawa and I suppose I wanted to try my hand at civic affairs too. In that year I campaigned for a seat on the council and was fortunate enough to be elected at the head of the poll.

That was the beginning and end of my political career. I was, as I have said, working extremely long hours; I really wasn’t interested in politics, municipal or any other kind, and I was never much of a speaker. To those of my friends who will raise an eyebrow at this last statement, I will point out that I said speaker - not talker. But the chief reason I abandoned politics so quickly was a young lady named Miss Adelaide Louise Mowbray. In 1898, twenty-seven years old and a confirmed bachelor, I bicycled out to Tyrone one Sunday to visit my uncle on the old homestead. I should have remembered that Tyrone was a dangerous place for my family - my brother George had married a Tyrone girl. But I had no inkling of my fate when my uncle asked me to go to church with his family.
The only person I really saw in the church that day was a vision of beauty in the choir, but the strange part of it was that I had known her previously. She had visited in our home - she and my younger sister had gone to model school together - but I had never paid any attention to her. Somehow that morning, as my uncle’s pew was well forward in the church, I could get a ringside view of her. So absorbed was I that my uncle had to nudge my elbow when they passed the collection plate.

After the service I was waiting at the side door through which the choir entered. I wanted her to come out for a walk that afternoon but she had to teach the Bible class. I made a date out with my horse and buggy.

I believe I made some progress, for I asked for another date the next Sunday and on that day I proposed to her. In those days I sported a big sandy-colored mustache and a Vandyke beard. Although Miss Adelaide had not said anything against them I reluctantly decided they must go, for I had made up my mind that my bachelor days, with such a beautiful girl available, should come to an end and nothing interfere with my chances.

I was accepted in October and we were married the next February. I made a happy choice that day as my wife and I have enjoyed more than fifty-six years of married life. She has been a wonderful helpmate always and possesses great charm, not only for me but for all who know her.

A little less than a year after my marriage the biggest disaster in our history struck. On Dec. 7, 1899, the McLaughlin Carriage Company buildings burned to the ground. We were helpless; we could only stand and watch our life’s work go up in flames, not only we McLaughlins, but the six hundred men who depended for a living on the carriage works.

The only water we ever saw at that fire wouldn’t even reach the first floor, because it had to be pumped all the way from the city hall by a dinky little fire engine. The building was cram full with raw material, carriages in all stages of completion, and a large number of carriages ready to ship. All our tools and equipment, including the special gauges and jigs we had designed to make our products just a little better than others. All our designs - my designs - went up in the flames. Insurance covered part of the loss, but couldn’t begin to meet the disaster of a going concern employing hundreds of men suddenly becoming a heap of blackened wreckage.

If we were dismayed, the Governor, George and I, we didn’t stay that way long. For the ruins of the McLaughlin
Carriage Company were still smoldering when a telephone call came through from Belleville. The city was ready to float a bond issue, we were told, to provide us with a big cash bonus if we would rebuild our factory in Belleville. In quick succession, by telegram, telephone and letter, similar offers came from fifteen other Ontario cities and towns. How could we remain discouraged in the face of that kind of confidence in our ability to re-establish our business?

But we wanted to stay in Oshawa. We felt a loyalty to the town in which we had now been established for nearly a quarter of a century, a loyalty that amounted to the feeling that Oshawa owned the business as much as the McLaughlins did. And we soon had heartening evidence that Oshawa reciprocated that feeling. The town offered us a loan of $50,000, to be repaid “as convenient.”

We appreciated that and accepted. But what were we and our workers to do while the plant was being rebuilt? And what about our markets? Would buyers who needed a new carriage wait six months or a year until we got into production? Somehow we had to start making carriages - immediately and in quantity.

I started scouting around for temporary quarters. At Gananoque, one hundred and fifty miles east of Oshawa, I came across an empty two-storey factory that we could rent, and grabbed it. I suppose the next six months were the most hectic of my life. Remember, we were going back into the carriage business with nothing except what we had in our heads. While machinery was being hastily installed in the Gananoque factory - anything we could lay hands on that would make carriage parts - I set about re-creating the designs we needed to make the prototype models.

By the time the new century had dawned, we were ready to get into production again. Of course, we couldn’t hope to produce, in that makeshift factory, all the scores of models we had been making. But we could produce enough to keep the McLaughlin Carriage Company a going concern. I took as many of our Oshawa workmen as I could use along at Gananoque, and we found billets in boarding houses and private homes. The town took quite an interest in our “invasion” - old timers of Gananoque still tell me they remember vividly “the time McLaughlins moved in.”

By keeping that double-decked plant running two shifts every 24 hours we really rolled those carriages out, and they were every bit as good as the ones we had been making at a more leisurely pace in Oshawa; the Governor wouldn’t have permitted anything else.
By the middle of July 1900 - starting from scratch without a design or a pattern or a tool - we turned out 3,000 carriages. That was enough to supply our most urgent orders, and more important, to establish beyond any doubt that the McLaughlins were still in business. The Gananoque operation confirmed my belief that the willing conscientious worker is the backbone of any business.

We all returned to Oshawa in mid-summer after winding up the Gananoque business, and pitched in to help finish the new plant... and we were making carriages in Oshawa again before the roof was on.
Old Plant Still Stands

The new plant was on such an ambitious scale that it was not until 1911, when we were deep in automobile production in addition to carriages, that we needed to acquire our “No. 2 site” of forty acres on what was then the outskirts of Oshawa. So well built was that 1900 plant that it is still part of General Motors.

The new plant, designed by M.J. Butler, of the Rathburn Company, and built by that company - using many of the McLaughlin employees thrown out of work by the fire - consisted of two large main buildings. One was 395 feet by 61 feet, the other 274 feet by 60. Our recollection of the fire - of how the flames had ripped through the thin floors as though they were not there, of how the walls had collapsed - influenced the specifications of the new buildings. They had five-inch-thick floors with castings on the main posts so that the walls would remain upright in the event of fire. We put in a big underground water tank with a powerful pump and six-inch pipe outlet - it was not until 1905 that Oshawa installed a waterworks. We put in a generator to make our own electric light.

All in all, the new plant was the last word in modernity. There was even an office section designed as part of the plant, instead of a corner grudgingly lopped from space devoted to the all-important business of making carriages. And there were telephones. Oh, there had been an intercommunication system in the old plant, but it was not one that Alexander Graham Bell had made or invented. It consisted of a metal pipe running up through the three floors. Anyone on any floor could call anyone on any other floor by opening a flap and whistling through the tube, then asking for the person wanted. It was our own idea and we were very proud of it. It was supposed to be a great timesaver, and I suppose it was - for others. But almost always the message which reached me through the tubular telephone was, “Sam, you’re wanted in the office!”

We created a small sensation in Oshawa by hiring a stenographer, probably the first in the town, certainly the first in the McLaughlin Carriage Company. We took on a few more appurtenances of big business, notably when I hired an assistant, William Coad, who came to me from high school. George couldn’t stand that very long, so he took on Jack Beaton as his assistant. That was the office staff, except for the man who was the real tower of strength to the Governor and ourselves - Oliver Hezzlewood. Mr. Hezzlewood was an Oshawa schoolteacher and kept the books straight for the McLaughlins, who were more interested in designing and building carriages. For four or five years he dropped in after school to do his work, until the Governor decided we needed him full time.
In 1901, as we were getting into stride after the fire, we changed the setup of the company; the partners became shareholders and the company became the McLaughlin Carriage Company, Ltd.

Those were wonderful years for the carriage business. Everybody in Canada seemed to want a McLaughlin carriage or cutter. Our volume rocketed to the 25,000-a-year mark, and our sales passed the million-dollar volume.

There was only one small cloud on the horizon, a cloud caused by the appearance on Ontario’s dusty roads of a strange contraption called the automobile.

I don’t remember the first time I saw an automobile. It might have been the one that was the pride and joy of Oliver Hezzlewood. Certainly Hezzlewood’s was the first car I had any personal contact with, the first I ever worked on. I don’t even remember its make. I think it ran on one cylinder and was chain-driven. I know it had no doors, top or windshield. I know for this reason: one day Hezzlewood complained to me that his car, in spite of its many virtues, was a little inconvenient in inclement weather. What he meant was that when it rained he and his passenger got soaked to the skin.

“Can’t you do anything about that?” he asked me. I talked with one of the foremen and we delivered a top. It wasn’t really a top, but a rubberized sheet that fitted over the body, with four holes cut in it for the heads of the driver and his three passengers. It was the darnedest-looking contraption you ever saw, but used in conjunction with sou’wester hats worn by the occupants, it did keep them dry. And Hezzlewood was immensely pleased with it. He had me drive his car - and from then on I had a new kind of wheels in my head: motor-driven wheels.

By 1905 there were a couple of dozen cars in Toronto. The nearest one to us was in Whitby. They were still much of a curiosity, a sporting proposition for adventurous people.
A Merry Time for Autos

In the U.S., 1905 was the year in which the automobile could claim to have emerged from the “horseless carriage” stage and become an industry. The Ford Motor Company was two years old. The Buick Motor Company, also two years old, had just been taken over by a carriage builder named William C. Durant and in this year would produce 750 cars. Cadillac, three years old, was offering a one-cylinder car with the motor under the front seat. Among other cars for sale were the Locomobile, Mobile, Winton, deDion, Columbia and Gasmobile. But the real titan was R.E. Olds, whose curved-dash one-cylinder Oldsmobile outnumbered all other cars on America’s dirt roads and rutted gravel highways. Up to 1905, Olds - who was later to give his name to another car, the Reo - had produced nearly 12,000 cars. In that year he was to make a record 6,500 runabouts, and Gus Edwards was to write that priceless piece of publicity - the song, “In My Merry Oldsmobile”.

Yes, 1905 was a good year for a Canadian carriage maker to start taking an interest in automobiles. And I was interested in them, both for their own sake and as potential competition.

I started a campaign to persuade my brother George that automobiles had a place in the world, and pretty well convinced him. We never did convince the Governor, though. He honestly believed that the automobile would never replace the horse-drawn carriage; certainly not for many years; certainly not in his time.

In keeping an eye on this intriguing new idea in transportation I had to move warily. I had to wait until my holidays before I could visit the U.S. and learn more about what was being done in the automobile field. I can imagine what the Governor’s reaction would have been if I had said, “I want to take time off to learn how to go about replacing carriages with automobiles in the McLaughlin plant.”

So when my vacation came I went to Buffalo, where Richard Pierce was making a car that was beginning to be heard about. Mr. Pierce took me to lunch at his club and afterward showed me around his plant, where the Pierce-Arrow was being manufactured, painstakingly by hand operation, piece by piece, part by part. This stately courteous gentleman of the old school then made a startling statement in a quiet matter-of-fact voice: “Cars like this have no future, Mr. McLaughlin. I would advise you against trying to make them.”
He explained that it was his belief that large cars would never find a considerable market; that McLaughlin should use its experience in mass production of carriages to enter the low-priced car field. And, when I considered the $2,000 to $3,000 price of the Pierce-Arrow in comparison with our own price range for carriages - from $50 for our low-priced models to $165 wholesale for the largest and most elaborate carriages - I was inclined to agree with him.

In a sense, Mr. Pierce was forecasting the fate of his own products. He continued to make his fine cars for many years, and they acquired great prestige. But they never sold in sufficient quantities to enable the company to survive adversity, and in the thirties Pierce-Arrow went out of business.

I thanked Mr. Pierce for his kindness and went over to the E.R. Thomas Company, also in Buffalo, for a look at the Thomas Flyer. Mr. Thomas couldn't talk business with me, he said, because he already had commitments with the Canada Cycle and Motor Company in Toronto. This fact made me all the more interested in getting a line on some arrangement to make cars in Canada, before competitors got the jump on us in our own country.

I also visited the Peerless Company in Cleveland, the Reo works and the Thomas Detroit factory, without coming to any conclusion about making cars in Canada. Back in Oshawa, I told my father what I had seen on my trip. He did not approve of my interest in cars, but he did not forbid it either. I think he considered it a youthful enthusiasm, which I would outgrow much as I had outgrown bicycle racing.

Not long afterward, we had a visit from a great friend of my father's, a Mr. Matthews, of Gananoque. He told us that a man he knew, Charles Lewis, of Jackson, Mich., had been in the spring and axle business and was now making automobiles. He suggested that we talk to him.

So I took the train to Jackson with Oliver Hezzlewood, who was now an executive of the company. We called on Mr. Lewis. He was a fine old gentleman, genial and courteous, and ready to do anything in the world for us. He was enthusiastic over the possibilities of our manufacturing cars in Oshawa and outlined how it could be done. We could manufacture the engines and many of the parts, and he would supply us with an engineer and certain parts. He proposed an arrangement whereby we would pay him a certain amount in cash for the benefits we would derive from our connection with him. He was confident that the Jackson car was for us, and pointed out that one of his cars, driven by the great Bob Burman, had recently won the hundred-mile Vanderbilt Cup race on Long Island.
All in all, the proposition sounded good. I went home feeling that we were probably in the automobile manufacturing business at last - provided, of course, we could persuade the Governor to let us try it. Fortunately, I made one reservation before committing ourselves: I ordered two cars from Mr. Lewis for testing, one a chain drive, the other shaft driven. As soon as they arrived, Mr. Hezzlewood took the wheel of the former and I climbed into the latter. Off we went down the macadam highway...
Converted to Automobiles

I will draw a curtain over the events of the next hour. Suffice to say that as automobiles they were a poor job of plumbing. We broke down several times. If we had not been optimists we would have gone contentedly back to carriage making. Certainly if the Governor had been along on either of those rides we would have been out of the automobile business before we entered it.

But there was still one bright spot. While we had been eating breakfast in Jackson before going to the Lewis works, William Durant and his factory manager had walked into the dining room.

“Sam, what on earth are you doing here?” Durant asked. I told him. He thought for a moment, then said: “Charlie Lewis is a dear friend of mine. You get his story, then if you’re not satisfied, come and see me.”

I had known Durant for ten years, having met him at conventions of carriage manufacturers. He and his partner, Dallas Dort, had built a fifty-dollar stake into Durant-Dort, then one of the biggest carriage and wagon companies in the U. S., with a production of up to 150,000 units a year. Like my father, Durant wanted no part of the automobile business, which was then blossoming in his hometown of Flint and nearby Michigan cities. Yet just about the time I started to get interested - and concerned - about cars, Durant had been persuaded to buy the Buick Company.

This is how it came about: David Buick, Walter Marr, who made the first Buick two-cylinder engine, William Patterson, a Canadian-born carriage manufacturer who had invested in Buick, and other backers were anxious to get their money out of a venture which seemed to have little hope of success. They decided that Durant would be a good prospect. At any rate, he had the money to buy Buick if he could be talked into it.

Marr drove a Buick to the Durant carriage factory in Flint and invited Durant to go for a ride. Durant wouldn’t even come out to look at the car. But Dallas Dort, more impressionable, climbed in. During the ride, Marr stopped the car and invited Dort to drive. With a few instructions, Dort found he could operate the car. He returned to the factory, rushed into Durant’s office and said excitedly: “Come on out - it’s great! They taught me to drive; I’ve been driving a car!”

Durant wasn’t impressed. “I want nothing to do with it,” he said.
Marr didn’t give up. That evening he drove the Buick back and forth in front of Durant’s home. Next morning he was back again. Durant was impressed, not so much by the car as by Marr’s persistence. He agreed to go for a ride. It was then that he learned that Marr was not trying to sell him a Buick car - but the Buick Company.

Characteristically, having put one foot into something, Durant plunged all the way in. What happened next is related in The Turning Wheel, the official history of General Motors:

“With no technical experience of his own to guide him, Mr. Durant applied the only test he could make... He drove that two-cylinder Buick back and forth over a wide range of territory devoid of good roads save for a few gravel turnpikes built by toll companies. He put it through swamps, mud and sand and pitch-holes for almost two months, bringing it in for repairs and consultations and then taking it our for another strenuous cross-country run.”

Before accepting Durant’s invitation to “come and see me,” and without knowing at that time the story of how he had come to buy Buick, I did very much what he had done. I went to Toronto and bought a Model F two-cylinder Buick for $1,650 from the Buick agents, Dominion Automobile and Supply Company. But I didn’t have to put it through Durant’s stiff tests. Before I was halfway to Oshawa I knew it was the car we wanted to make in Canada. I wired Durant and went to see him.

Durant greeted me with: “Well, there’s no doubt this is the car for you.” I agreed with him. He turned me loose with his factory manager and accountants, and for two and a half days we went over every detail of the Buick operation. We worked out a tentative plan we thought would be fair to both sides. Then Durant and I got together, sharpened our pencils, agreed on most points - and then reached an impasse. We just couldn’t agree on final details of the financial arrangement. We weren’t far apart, but we just couldn’t get together. I guess we were both stubborn.

We parted the best of friends. “I’m sorry we couldn’t work it out,” I said. He answered: “So am I, Sam; this is the car for you.”

I went home to Oshawa and told the Governor and George about my failure. I half-expected my father to say, “all right, that’s over; now let’s get busy making carriages.” But he didn’t. He listened while George and I worked out our alternative plan - to make our own car. All the Governor said was, “If you think you can make a go of it, go ahead.”
We needed a first-class engineer to supervise the manufacturing and assembly processes, and of the many I interviewed my choice was Arthur Milbrath, who was with the A.O. Smith Company, of Milwaukee, makers of auto and engine parts. We brought him to Oshawa and installed him in one of our buildings, on the west side of Mary Street, which had been set aside as the automobile shop. We equipped it with automatic lathes and other machine tools, planers and shapers - dozens of machines. From a Cleveland firm we ordered cylinders, pistons and crankshafts to our own specifications, and engine castings to be worked in our own shop. I put all I had into designing the most beautiful car I could dream of - the bodies, of course, would be made by the same artisans who had been making our carriages for years. The car was to be more powerful than the Buick.

We had everything we needed for our first hundred cars, and had the first car all laid out and practically ready for assembly, down to the beautiful brass McLaughlin radiator on which I had spent many hours, when disaster struck. Arthur Milbrath became severely ill with pleurisy. Without an engineer we were helpless. The automobile shop, so nearly ready to produce its harvest, lay idle... dead. In this plight I thought of William Durant and his goodwill toward the McLaughlins. I wired him, explaining what had happened and asking him if he could lend us an engineer. His answer came back promptly: “Will you be home tomorrow? I’m coming over.”
“Sold,” said GM’s top men, and McLaughlins of Oshawa became part of a great growing industrial group. They almost bought Ford too and they produced the paint Sam McLaughlin calls the biggest thing that happened to the automobile.

Anyone who attended the Oshawa town fair in the year 1907 might possibly have caught a glimpse of three dignified men in a carriage driving from the railway station toward the McLaughlin Carriage Company’s office and looking a little bewildered at the large crowds abroad so early in the streets of the little city.

The onlooker could not know that the pleasant-faced man with the dark brown penetrating eyes, sitting in the middle, was carrying Oshawa’s destiny in the portfolio he balanced on his knee. The man himself, William C. Durant, did not know it. And certainly the McLaughlin partners with him did not know it.

The day before, I had wired Durant, head of the young Buick company in Flint, Mich., to ask for help. The McLaughlin automobile, which we had started to make ourselves after I failed to arrive at a co-operative manufacturing arrangement with Durant and other U. S. carmakers, had run into trouble. Two days before, with the parts on our first car laid out ready for assembly - and the components of one hundred more in various stages of completion - our engineer had suffered a severe attack of pleurisy. In my wire I asked Durant to lend us an engineer until our own man recovered.

Durant arrived, not with an engineer but with two of his top executives. He took up the discussion of our last meeting - when we had failed to get together on a manufacturing arrangement - just as if we had merely paused for breath. “I’ve been thinking it over,” he said, “and I have the solution to the problem we couldn’t overcome in our figuring.” The deal he suggested was pretty close to what I had had in mind in the first place, and I said: “That will work.” Durant nodded. “I thought it would,” he said in that voice of his that was always so gentle - and always so much to the point.

We went into my father’s office with my brother George and Oliver Hezzlewood, who looked after our books, and in five minutes we had the contract settled. It ran just a page and a half and was a model agreement for lawyers to study. Chiefly it covered the terms under which we had 15-year rights to buy the Buick engine and
Nothing was said about the McLaughlin car, the hundred cars lying stillborn in the Mary Street building. Our contract with Buick meant, of course, that we would have to abandon those plans - and the partly built cars. We sold off the lathes and some other equipment, but much of the material and parts we had invested in had to be scrapped.

I have heard people regret that the coincidence of an engineer falling ill should have put an end to the project to produce an all-Canadian car. I may say that any regret on my part is tempered by the hard facts of the automobile industry, by the very great probability that if our engineer Arthur Milbrath had not become ill and we had proceeded with our plan to make our own cars, we almost certainly would have taken a header; and once having failed in our first effort we might never have got back into the automobile business.

No, the coming of Durant to Oshawa, not with an engineer to lend us but with a plan for co-operating with us in building cars, was a blessing. Even with the Buick connection we had to be lucky to succeed. We just happened to pick a car that was destined to make good. I have often wondered why some cars succeeded and some failed. One of the strangest facts about the automobile business in North America is that in its fifty-odd years no fewer than 2,400 different makers have manufactured and offered cars for sale; in each case the designers and engineers put the best they knew into the car; each was launched with high hopes - and today you can count on the fingers of two hands the car manufacturers who have survived.

A contract with an American manufacturer was no guarantee of success in Canada, either - a few names that no longer exist are the Briscoe, made by Canada Carriage; the Everett, made by our good friends and competitors the Tudhopes of Orillia, and the Gray-Dort, made by the Gray Carriage Company of Chatham. In the carriage business Gray was actually bigger that we were at first, but we soon passed it.

The motor business is a volume business. If you don’t have volume you’re sunk. And that’s as true today as it ever was. It is unfortunate for the smaller automakers, but it is a hard fact that can’t be overcome. In that first year that we made McLaughlin cars with Buick engines - it was only part of a year really - we turned out 193. That’s not a high figure in terms of 1954 production, but it was quite a feat for a bunch of carriage makers who
were just cutting their teeth on automobiles.

Not long after he made his agreement with us, Durant started to parlay Buick into General Motors by taking over or buying control of Oakland, Oldsmobile, Cadillac and other companies making cars or car parts. Incidentally, in answer to people who sometimes wonder nostalgically, “Whatever happened to the good old Oakland?”, I would like to mention that nothing happened to it - except that a particularly popular model of the Oakland, produced in 1926, happened to be named the Pontiac and the company started concentrating on that model.

To me personally, the arrangement with Durant meant much more than making cars in Oshawa. I was made a director of General Motors Corporation, and took part in the adventurous events of the early years of the industry - events largely sparked by the energy and enterprise of William Durant.

Durant was a daring, farseeing man, in my opinion the greatest in the auto industry of that time. Perhaps he was too advanced for his day, for his great plans and even greater forecasts of things to come often scared the bankers. “The day is not far off when the United States will be producing 300,000 cars a year!” Such a “fantastic exaggeration” convinced the bankers that the man was irrational, and the loan was refused.

I suppose it is not generally remembered that Durant came within an ace of adding the Ford Motor Company to the General Motors family.

On October 26, 1909, Durant called a meeting of the General Motors directors. He told us that he had called on Henry Ford and James Couzens, the Canadian who has been called the organizational brain behind Ford, at the Belmont Hotel in New York. Ford was ill with lumbago, so Durant talked business with Couzens. After the latter discussed the proposition with Ford, Durant came away with a 48-hour option to buy the entire Ford business for about $9,500,000.

In advance, Durant had lined up a group of bankers who had tentatively agreed to back him with a big loan, not only to finance the purchase of Ford but also to put the expanding General Motors empire on a stable financial footing. In the two or three years since he had taken over Buick, Durant had added not only Oldsmobile, Oakland and Cadillac to his new General Motors Corporation but a number of other businesses in the automobile and allied fields: Champion Ignition Co. of Flint, organized by the pioneer French spark-
plug designer, Albert Champion; Weston-Mott Co. of Flint, maker of auto axles; Reliance Motor Truck Co. of Owosso; Ranier Motor Co., of Saginaw; Michigan motor Castings Co. of Flint; Welch Motor Car Co., of Pontiac, maker of large powerful luxury cars; Welch-Detroit Co.; Rapid Motor Vehicle Co., of Pontiac; Cartercar Co., of Pontiac, makers of a patented friction-drive car, and several other companies.
When the Thomas Flyer was bigger than the Ford

We voted approval of the Ford deal and Durant went back to the bankers, only to be informed: “We have changed our minds. The Ford business isn’t worth that much.”

Actually the statement “General Motors nearly bought Ford for $9,500,000” sounds far more spectacular in 1954 that it did in 1909. At the time Ford was just another motor maker trying to establish a foothold in an industry filled with expendables. It is putting it mildly to say that in 1909 the auto industry was in a state of flux, that today’s sensation might become tomorrow’s bankrupt. At the time of the Ford negotiations, for example, General Motors was also considering the purchase of the E.R. Thomas Co., makers of the then-famous Thomas Flyer, and in automobile circles this deal was considered a much more important and promising one than the Ford negotiations.

In the early days of General Motors - I am speaking of the U.S. company of which I was a director before there was any General Motors of Canada - Durant was frequently in search of bank backing. Alexander Hardy, a General Motors director, used to tell of a meeting he had on a train with Durant and A.H. Goss, a large shareholder in the company. The latter two had visited bankers in the east, and then in the west, with little success.

“The train,” Hardy related, “stopped in Elkhart, Indiana, in a pouring rainstorm.” Far down the dark and dismal street shone one electric sign: A BANK. Durant shook Goss, who was dozing dejectedly in a corner. “Wake up, Goss,” he said. “There’s one we missed.” Mr. Hardy liked to cite that incident as an example of Durant’s sense of humor and resiliency of spirit under pressure.

In the end a group of New York bankers agreed to lend us $15 million, enough to straighten out the affairs of General Motors. But they did it on condition that they be permitted to name the chairman of the board and appoint the directors, which let the venturesome Mr. Durant out. He had to agree that he would not concern himself with the affairs of the company for five years.

But the bankers could not keep him out of the automobile business. He had Louis Chevrolet, an expert mechanic and daring racing driver, design a new car for him. Durant then formed the Chevrolet motor Company, bought a plant on Grand Boulevard in Detroit - and started to make automobile history afresh.
One day I was in Durant’s office with Dr. Edwin Campbell, a lifelong friend of mine who was born in Port Perry. Edwin had graduated in medicine in Canada while still too young to practice, so he went to Michigan and got a job doctoring the men in a lumber camp. While vacationing at Mackinaw Island he met, and later married, William Durant’s daughter. So it was that we both were interested when Durant raised the question of a new general manager for Buick to replace William Little, Buick’s original chief who had been forced to resign because of ill health.

I suggested that Charlie Nash, who was then general manager for Durant-Dort Carriage Company, would be good for the position. Dr. Campbell interviewed him and eventually an agreement was made for Nash to become general manager of Buick, and after a holiday in Europe he started his work. But, as events turned out, because of the new financial arrangements and Durant’s temporary departure from General Motors, Charlie Nash was to operate under a new financial committee headed by the late James J. Storrow, head of Lee, Higginson and Company. A year or two after taking over the Buick works, Nash became president of General Motors Corporation.

Almost immediately he engaged Walter P. Chrysler as factory manager of Buick. On Durant’s resumption of control, Chrysler was taken to Detroit as chief operating vice-president of General Motors. Then, owing to a misunderstanding with Durant, he left General Motors and took on the job of rehabilitating Willys-Overland Company, receiving a stupendous salary, one unheard of before in the motor industry.

Later Walter Chrysler designed his own car and launched the Chrysler Motor Car Company. Charlie Nash left General Motors when Durant again resumed control and, with the aid of some prominent bankers, formed the Nash Motor Car Company.

Meanwhile, in Oshawa, production and sales of the McLaughlin models were rising steadily. There is some interesting history connected with the naming of our car, which I don’t think has ever been told publicly. When we started making cars in 1907, the name on the radiator was, simply and justly, McLaughlin. There was more McLaughlin in the car than anything else. But in three or four years the Buick started to take a big place in the U.S. public eye.
How Durant Won Control

In 1909, Bob Burman, the famous driver, at the wheel of a Buick, won the first Indianapolis speedway race. An elaborate advertising campaign followed. Our own advertising men in Oshawa decided that it would be smart business to cash in on the fame of Buick, so they asked that the name of our cars be changed from McLaughlin to Buick. Not wanting to stand in the way of sales, I agreed.

To the great chagrin of our “idea men”, sales declined considerably. It was therefore, some small recompense for the lost business for me - and particularly the Governor - to be reminded that the name he had built on quality vehicles meant more to Canadians than the name of an American car. Thereafter we compromised on the respective advantages of both named, and our cars became McLaughlin-Buicks. They remained that until General Motors of Canada came into being and the McLaughlin Motor Car Company ceased to operate.

A big event in the lives of the McLaughlins occurred in 1915. I went to the auto races at Sheepshead Bay, N.Y. But it rained so hard that the races were called off, so I went on to New York City. It was my custom whenever I was there to have lunch with Edwin Campbell. On this day in 1915 I found myself lunching not only with Dr. Campbell, but with Mr. Durant and another Chevrolet stockholder, Nathan Hofheimer. Durant owned the Dominion Carriage plant in West Toronto and right then it was in the process of being converted into a plant to make Chevrolet cars. I had been interested - perhaps concerned is a better word - in that project since I heard it was under way. It sounded like strong competition, for Chevrolet had gone over big from the start. In fact, a few months later when Durant’s five-year banishment was up, he was back in control of General Motors. The newcomer Chevrolet Company actually controlled General Motors, through the holdings of Durant and his friends. So this day at lunch I asked Durant casually how the Chevrolet project was coming in Canada. Before he could answer, Hofheimer shot at him: “Why don’t you give that to the McLaughlin boys, Billy?”

Durant and I looked at each other and we both laughed. “Well, Sam, do you want it?” He asked.

I certainly wanted it. But there were two obstacles that had to be overcome. First, how did we stand with our Buick contract if we took on another line of cars? More important, could we persuade the Governor to sell the
carriage business? Certainly, if we undertook to make a car with the volume Chevrolet promised in Canada, we couldn’t go on making carriages. And if the Governor decided against abandoning the business that was his life we couldn’t take on Chevrolet.

George and I would abide by the Governor’s decision. Apart from any considerations of filial loyalty, Robert McLaughlin was still the boss. Sam might be the president of the McLaughlin Motor Car Company, but Robert McLaughlin headed the McLaughlin Carriage Company - and the carriage company owned the motorcar company. As a matter of fact, by buying up the stock of our outside shareholders I actually owned control of the McLaughlin Carriage Company but that fact was not considered for a moment as my father, George and I always worked as a team. There was no doubt that, from a business viewpoint, it would be a smart move to drop carriages and take on Chevrolet. By 1915 carriage sales were declining steadily, and automobile sales were rocketing. I calculated that there would be only three or four more years in which carriage production would show a profit.

 Durant asked me: “How long will it take to make up your mind?” I asked him for two days. I telephoned George in Oshawa and asked him to come down immediately to New York. Durant and I went to his office and talked to John Thomas Smith, later to become vice-president of General Motors in charge of the vast legal office. Smith gave us his opinion that the Buick contract would not be affected by an arrangement to make Chevrolet.

 Boldly, on the chance that the other obstacle - the Governor’s attitude toward selling the carriage business - could be overcome, we went ahead and drew up a tentative contract. Our experience in arriving at the Buick contract eight years before made it not too difficult to reach terms. The Chevrolet contract wasn’t quite as favorable as the Buick deal - but then both Durant and Smith thought the McLaughlins had got much the best of that Buick deal.

 My brother George traveled all day by train and got to the Vanderbilt Hotel on Sunday evening. Tired as he was, we talked into the early hours of Monday, mulling over the agreement with Durant. In the morning, we went to see Durant again, talked over the contract again, suggested a couple of changes, and then we agreed to it all around. We got on the train that night and came home.

 George said to me on the way to the office in Oshawa: “You will have to talk to the Governor.” I knew how he was feeling - I was feeling that way myself.
I said: “We’ll both talk to him.” George looked unhappy at that. “I know what a shock this will be to him,” he said, “and I can’t face him.” So I was elected.

I walked into the Governor’s office and told him all about my trip and what was in the wind. I said we couldn’t run three businesses, and that the carriage business was dying. I quoted him our own figures to prove it. It hurt to have to do that. But to my surprise he took it calmly. “Sam,” he said, “I’m about through. George is thoroughly in accord with this?” “Absolutely,” I assured him. We called George in and reviewed the whole matter briefly. We assured the Governor that if he said the word we would abandon the Chevrolet project; after all, he had started the business and felt a deep sentiment for it. We shared that sentiment too. The Governor shook his head.

“Do what you think best,” he said.

As soon as I left his office I put in a telephone call to Jim Tudhope, president of Carriage Factories Ltd., in Orillia. That company, an amalgamation of five or six carriage companies, had tried to buy McLaughlin’s many times. It had never been for sale.

I said to Jim Tudhope right off: “Do you want to get rid of your largest competition?”

“Do you want to sell the business now?” he asked in reply.

I said, “Yes, she is for sale if we can get quick action.” He asked what had happened and I told him. We agreed to meet next morning at the Queen’s Hotel in Toronto, as soon as he could get his directors together.

We met and arrived at a tentative agreement, which was signed two days later in Oshawa. The terms included the right to use the McLaughlin label on the carriages for one year. We started shipping stuff out within twenty-four hours. We had to finish three thousand sleighs, which were under construction, but all the carriage material and equipment were out within three or four weeks.

The McLaughlin Chevrolet operation was as successful on its own scale as Mr. Durant’s enterprise was in the U.S. As with Buick, we made our own bodies to my designs - and we always tried to design and finish them just a little better than those across the line. I remember once a General Motors executive visiting in Oshawa was particularly impressed by one model of Buick. He asked us to send one to the New York office to let the boys there see what we were doing in Canada. We sent it and before long it came back. Presently we
learned why. Alfred Sloan had seen it parked in front of the New York showroom and ordered: “Get that thing out of here, and quick. It’s gathering crowds - and it’s no more like one of our Buicks than St. Bernard is like a dachshund!”

The year 1918 saw our final big decision - to sell the McLaughlin business to General Motors. There were a lot of factors involved: my wife and I had been blessed with five daughters, but we had no son to carry on. George was anxious to retire; he had never been strong and he had worked hard all his life. His sons had tried the business but had not taken to it. Those were the personal reasons. On the business side, there was the fact that if we decided to stay in the automobile business, we should almost certainly have to make our own cars from the ground up. As I have said, I had managed to make an agreement with Buick that was too favorable to us for them to renew on the same terms - when the 15-year agreement was up in three or four years. Chevrolet was now part of General Motors - their best seller - and we could scarcely expect GM to allow us to continue making just one of their models.
The McLaughlins Had to Stay

Those were our business reasons. Equally important was the fact that McLaughlin had become by far the largest employers in Oshawa. My father had always felt, and George and I had come to feel, that the business was as much Oshawa’s as it was ours. If Oshawa’s motor industry became a General Motors operation, expansion and employment opportunities were assured. If we had to venture into making a car of our own in Canada, failure and unemployment might well result.

Years before I had had to sell George on the idea of going into the automobile business. Now I had to sell him on the idea of going out of it by selling to General Motors. My argument took this form: “We are through when the Buick contract expires. We could go on until then, but I wouldn’t have anything to do with attempting to make a new car when that time came.”

I didn’t have to argue much with George before he agreed. So I went down to New York and saw the top men of General Motors: Mr. Durant, Pierre DuPont, of the great American industrial family, and John J. Raskob, the noted financier. I told them the basis on which we would sell. As had happened so often before in our major deals, this one was closed very quickly. It was no more than five minutes before Durant, DuPont and Raskob said, “Sold.”

But the three men added: “We will buy on one condition, and one condition only - that you and George will run the business.” I cannot deny that it was wonderful to hear those words of confidence from those great figures of the automobile world. Their proposition suited me; I was young and vigorous and full of energy, and certainly, at forty-seven, had no inclination to retire. I told them how I felt, but added that I could not speak for George, who I believed did not want to carry on much longer. I became president, and as a result of the condition of sale George accepted the position of vice-president of the new General Motors of Canada and remained in that capacity until his retirement in 1924.

When that happened I felt a sense of shock. We had worked and fought together for so many years. His going left me lonesome for someone to scrap with. But by scrap I do not mean quarrel. Long ago we had made an agreement never to quarrel with each other, no matter how great the An ardent fisherman, he has 3 private pools stocked with trout near Oshawa
pressure under which we worked - and we never did.

In 1924 I became the last McLaughlin active in the business my father had founded in his driving shed at Tyrone fifty-seven years before. For in 1921 we had suffered a grievous loss in the passing of the dear Governor. He had been active in an advisory capacity until the end. When he knew at last that he had only three or four days to live, he did something which was characteristic of him: he sent for fifteen of our oldest employees, men who had worked for him and with him for the greater part of their lifetimes, to bid them farewell.

My father Robert McLaughlin was a remarkable man. I refer not only to his achievements but to his character. He was one of those rare men who could be called, in the truest sense of the word, a good man. And he was incapable of doing anything into which he did not put his honest best.

Not long after George retired I reached a decision. I had worked hard for many years; the growing business with its ramifications was becoming a great load. I wanted to ease off a little. I told Alfred Sloan, president of the parent company, that I wanted a general manager - and selected my own choice for the position, K.T. Keller, who later went from Oshawa to become president of the Chrysler Corporation.

For many years now I have been chairman of the board of General Motors of Canada, in addition to being vice-president and director of the parent company. For many years I have been telling my associates that I would stay at my desk only as long as I could be of some value to the company - only as long as I did not get in the way. I would not be human if I did not appreciate the fact that in my 84th year they will seem to think that I have a contribution to make.
A World Record

It is almost half a century since I first put my hand to an automobile, so I suppose that gives me the longest experience of any living man with all phases of the motor age - from designing cars to forming a company to make them. I have been intimately concerned with their growth from converted carriages in which a single cylinder delivered uncertain power to an exposed chain which in turn drove carriage-type wheels with solid rubber tires, up to the present magnificence of the all-automatic car which practically drives, stops and steers itself.

But if I were asked to name the one development that more than any other contributed to the incredible growth of the industry, my answer might surprise most people, for it has nothing to do with the advance in engines or the design and structure of the car, great as the developments have been in those fields. My answer is - the development of Duco finish by Charles F. Kettering, general Motors’ great research chief, who also, of course, invented the self-starter, ethyl anti-knock fluid, and designed the first V-8 engine in America as used in Cadillacs as well as diesel locomotives.

Up to 1914 automobiles were finished with the same paints and varnishes used on carriages, which required up to fifteen coats of paint. That finish took up to three weeks to dry in fine weather, as much as a month when the climate was humid. The magnitude of that paint-job bottleneck can well be imagined and the present huge production would have been an utter impossibility, because there would not have been space enough to store the bodies during the drying process. Undoubtedly Kettering’s development of a finish that could keep pace with production lines was, more than anything else, what made possible the motor industry as we know it today.

When in 1924 I decided to “ease off”, I found there were many avenues of new interest. From my bicycling days I had loved speed - competitive speed. When I grew up I became the proud possessor of a fast motorboat - fast for those days, because it would speed from the Oshawa waterfront to the Royal Canadian Yacht Club in Toronto in an hour and a half. Late in 1925 I commissioned an R-class yacht to be built in an attempt to bring the international Richardson Cup, emblematic of the championship of the Great Lakes in that class, to the Royal Canadian Yacht Club of which I was a member. She was designed by Bingley Benson, built
at Oakville, and named after my youngest daughter, Eleanor. Norman Gooderham skippered Eleanor in the 1926 races against yachts from Chicago and Cleveland, and won handily.

Later that year I bought a big beautiful three-masted schooner, the Azura, which led to a strange incident. Azura was registered in the U.S., and since that country was in the throes of prohibition, we were liable to seizure if we sailed into any American port with liquor aboard. This put a crimp in entertaining on cruises so my lawyer, Strachan Johnson, tried to have Azura’s registration changed to British, but failed. Finally we learned that the only way to get the registration changed was to have the ship “libeled” for non-payment of a liability, put up for sale, and sold to a British subject. By coincidence the captain of Azura decided about that time that I owed him $140 for some reason I cannot remember. I refused to pay; Azura was “libeled” and put up for auction. A British subject by the name of Sam McLaughlin was the successful bidder - at $140. Then I could fly the blue ensign and carry supplies for the sick and ailing into any port I chose.

The man from whom I had bought Azura, Jesse Metcalf, head of a large American industry, was away when all this happened. When he returned and heard part of the story, he was deeply concerned that the McLaughlin fortunes had fallen so low that I had lost the schooner for a $140 debt.

For many years, up to 1950, the name McLaughlin was probably known to as many people interested in horses as in automobiles. The family had always owned horses; I had spent thousands of boy-hours feeding and grooming our horses in the days before we got a hired man. During World War II, when most executives were fretting over the difficulty of driving even to their offices with a small gasoline ration allowed, I solved that problem by putting up my car and driving to the plant in a carriage.
Horses Are Main Hobby

It was logical, therefore, that when I decided to “ease up”, one of my hobbies should be horses. At first they were show horses - hunters, jumpers, saddle horses. I had the advantage of a fine team of riders that I had raised in my own home - my daughters Eileen, Mildred, Isabel, Hilda and Eleanor.

We first entered the Cobourg Horse Show in 1926, and thereafter for more than ten years, my horses - and daughters - competed at shows and fairs throughout Ontario and Quebec, as well as in the U.S. The names of some of my best horses revive memories for me, and perhaps for others - My Delight, Sharavogue, Sligo, Michael, Punch, Rathmore, and El Tigre.

The racing stable came later. It wasn't a case of dropping show horses in favor of racers at once, but in the thirties the change gradually took place. For one thing, my daughters were getting married and I felt it wasn't fair to take them away from their families to ride; for another, I had a neighbor, Charles Robson, who was a persuasive advocate of horse racing.

Success in the show ring, Robson maintained, depended too much on the judge's personal opinion about conformation and performance; judges were only human, and humans were fallible. Now horse racing, he insisted, was the real sport - “when a horse gets his nose under the wire first - he's won!”

We could scarcely complain that we had suffered at the hands of the judges, considering that our horses had won a total of 1,500 ribbons and more than 400 pieces of plate. But there was much good sense in what Robson said, and I proceeded to build up the breeding and racing stable known as Parkwood.

I am not going to go into any great detail concerning my racing career, which is such recent history. There were thrills and highlights galore, including the winning of three King’s Plates by Horometer, Kingarvie and Moldy.
I own a gold teacup, but I don’t drink out of it.

I love horses and racing, but in 1950 I sold my farm, racing horses and all equipment with the understanding that the beautiful farm that had given me so much pleasure would continue as a stud farm for the promotion and improvement of the thoroughbred. My horses, of course, had not always won, but I believe the public knew they were trying all the time.

One of the Parkwood Stable’s feats in racing was winning the Golden Cup and Saucer stake three times. The prize for this race is a solid-gold cup and saucer. After I had collected three, Fred Orpen, owner of Dufferin and Long Branch tracks in Toronto, rounded out the set with a gold teapot and cream and sugar pieces. Now who can own a gold tea set and resist having a tea party? So we held one.

For the benefit of anyone who would like to know what it’s like to drink tea out of a gold cup, I know the answer. It’s terrible. The precious metal conducts the heat and burns your mouth painfully. Tea drinking is pleasanter out of a ten-cent china cup.

And so it is, I’ve found through the years I’ve just told you about, with all the rest of the business of living. The things I cherish are harder-wearing than gold: the solid worth of lifelong friendships with men of good faith; the men whose names have cropped up in this story and the others whose names would be here if the story were as long as my memory; the worth of a lifetime spent working at a job that drew the best from me and the men I worked beside - an association with a great industry and a great enterprise; a long life of good health, and sport in the outdoors. Above all these, I treasure the love of my wife and the affection of my family. Those are the things of real worth in my life.
PARKWOOD - an important place in Canadian history

Sam McLaughlin’s home, Parkwood, is now a popular heritage attraction and National Historic Site, comprising a stately fifty-five-room mansion and gardens of outstanding design. It was a labour of love for Sam and his wife Adelaide, who collaborated with some of the most important artists, architects and landscape designers of their day to create the grand estate we enjoy now.

Parkwood is praised by Canada’s Historic Site and Monuments Board “as a rare surviving example of the type of estate developed in Canada during the inter-war years, and is rarer still by its essentially intact condition, furnished and run to illustrate life as it was lived within.”

Parkwood was built for Sam McLaughlin between 1915 and 1917, shortly before he became the founding President of General Motors of Canada. By 1915, the McLaughlin Motor Car Company was quickly surpassing the success of the earlier McLaughlin Carriage Company (already named the largest producer of vehicles in the British Empire).

The McLaughlins had achieved “First Family” status in Oshawa, and they purchased the former “Prospect Park” as the site for a grand new estate. Prospect Park was a large single property with many beautiful trees, and it had been used for many years as a public amusement park. It provided the perfect starting point.

Architects Darling & Pearson were commissioned to design the magnificent house, many of the outbuildings and many of the alterations that followed in the 1920s and ’30s. No strangers to success themselves, Darling & Pearson designed the Centre Block of the Houses of Parliament, the Royal Ontario Museum and University of Toronto’s Convocation Hall, among others. At a mere forty rooms initially, the house designs included many modern conveniences rare in the period, such as sophisticated water and heating systems, private ensuite baths, an electric elevator, a built-in vacuum cleaner system, and an inter-room telephone system. The house also contained a bowling alley with an early automatic pin-setter, a squash court, an indoor pool and a large greenhouse complex. Nearly all these features survive today. Significant murals adorn the interior, including works by Frederick Challener and Frederick Haines, along with
many other artworks, which remain today. The interiors are so complete, down to the family mementos and monogrammed linens, that visitors experience Parkwood almost as guests of the McLaughlins.

Shortly after the family took residence in 1917, landscape designers Harries & Hall were engaged to design a fitting setting for the mansion. Drawing on English garden traditions, they incorporated many of the existing trees and shrubs from Prospect Park into their work. The landscape was designed to beckon from every principal room of the house, to a terrace or garden area just outside, and finally out into the beautiful wooded park. Beyond - and screened by groves of trees and rows of cedars - were areas for recreation, farming and the production of fruit and cut flowers.

The grounds and gardens were further refined during the 1920s by the husband and wife team of H.B. and L.A. Dunington-Grubb, who added the Italian Garden, the Sundial Garden and Summer House, and the Sunken Garden. They also refined the South Terrace and designed intricate lattice fencing for the Tennis Court and the Italian Garden.

The Formal or “New Garden” was added in 1935-36 and was immediately hailed as an achievement of significance in Canada. Architect John Lyle was awarded the Bronze Medal from the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada for its design. Lyle is also responsible for Parkwood’s most modern interiors, the Art Gallery, and Col. McLaughlin’s bedroom suite, which were completed in 1941.

Parkwood remained the principal residence of the McLaughlins throughout their lives. Adelaide passed away in 1958, and “Colonel Sam” in 1972 - just four months after his 100th birthday. Their appreciation of design and horticulture, and their love of beauty continue to be reflected in every room and garden space at Parkwood.

R.S. McLaughlin remains in our memory as a great Canadian industrialist and philanthropist. Among his many gifts to Oshawa, Ontario and Canada was the bequest to the Oshawa General Hospital of his beloved Parkwood. The Parkwood Foundation was established to operate and care for the property, and it has been enjoyed as a heritage site for nearly twenty-five years.

Guided tours of the mansion are available year-round, with grounds tours available through the summer. Many special events are offered at various times of the year. Parkwood continues to gain in fame and popularity and has made numerous appearances in feature films, television movies and commercials.