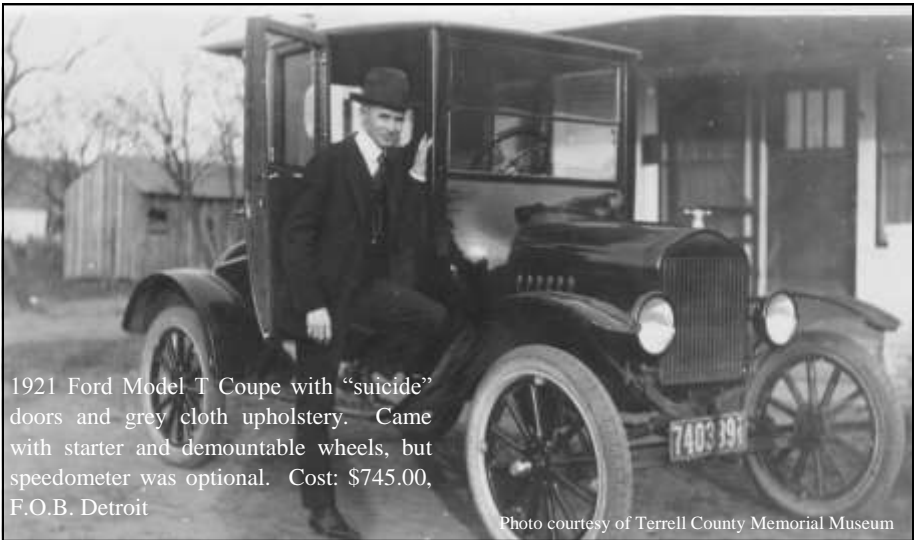




# Museum News

## "Come away with me, Lucille, In my merry Oldsmobile"



1921 Ford Model T Coupe with "suicide" doors and grey cloth upholstery. Came with starter and demountable wheels, but speedometer was optional. Cost: \$745.00, F.O.B. Detroit

Photo courtesy of Terrell County Memorial Museum

Since Terrell is such a young county, it was a part of Pecos County when automobiles as we know them were invented.

[inventor.about.com](http://inventor.about.com) says the first self-propelled vehicle was a steam-driven military tractor invented in France in 1769. Most developments in automobile technology up to the turn of the 20th century were made on experimental vehicles, and there were few commercial autos available.

*Panhard and Lavosser, Peugeot, Daim-*

*ler and Benz* produced the first commercial autos in Europe, but the *Duryea Brothers* built the first gasoline-powered commercial vehicles in the US in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1893.

Contrary to popular belief, Henry Ford did not invent the automobile assembly line (that was Ransome Eli Olds) but he took it to new heights, and through clever marketing made automobiles successful and popular. He built his first vehicle, the "quadricycle," in 1896, but his most successful auto was



Railroader Howard Flagg's '33 Austin averaged 39 miles per gallon.  
Courtesy Terrell County Memorial Museum

the *Model T*, introduced in 1908.

Terrell County was born into a modern world in 1905. Wright Flyers soared through the skies, cities were lighting up with electric bulbs, gigantic oil-fired steam locomotives plied the rails, making the older models look like clanking tea kettles, and the roads and trails began to see horseless carriages flitting to and fro. And, of course, affluent Sanderson citizens just had to have the new marvels.

Just who owned the first car in Terrell County is a matter of some controversy in the pages of the Terrell County history book. Since the articles were written and submitted by the families themselves, each one thought they had the first car.

High schooler Anna Lee Allen, who won an award in 1936 for her history of Terrell County, says the first auto in Sanderson was owned by rancher N. H. Corder. He brought it in from San Antonio, along with a man to teach Mr. Corder how to drive it and make repairs when it broke down.

Early resident Isabel C. Hunter remembered that the first automobiles were owned by Sheriff Doc Anderson and rancher Henry Mansfield. She remembered that Anderson owned a *Model T Ford* and the Mansfields owned a larger, heavier *Buick*. Not to be outdone, her father bought a *Saxon*.

Mrs. Jim Kerr remembered that when she and Mr. Kerr first came to Sander-

son, Mr. J. W. Happle met their train. She remembered that he and Mr. Ed McGinley had the only automobiles in Sanderson.

Charlena Vargas-Prada, in her history of the Chandler family, recalled that Charley Chandler bought a *Model-T Ford*, one of the first autos in the county. When he bragged to a

friend that he had zoomed from his ranch to Sanderson at a dizzying twenty-five miles per hour, his friend lectured him, saying, "You're going to kill yourself, Charley. God didn't intend man to travel that fast."

Sanderson old-timer Arthur W. Murray also remembered that automobiles were scarce in the early days. He thought that C.A. Downie owned one of the first autos in the county, driving in from the ranch every Saturday to attend church on Sunday. Charles Downie II owned the first motorcycle, a bright red *Indian*. A.D. Brown owned another. Murray also believed that J.W. Happle was an early day car-owner. He remembered them having a *Dodge* touring car, but Mary Alice Happle Townsend insisted their first car was a *Jackson*.

She also remembered vividly that you had to make special preparations to go "joyriding." The open cars of the day provided minimal protection from the elements. All automobilists were required to wear dusters...long white or beige jackets akin to lab coats...to protect clothing from dust and dirt. Goggles were also required, since some autos had no windshield. And, hats also were a necessity, but, then, everyone wore hats in those days. Ladies used long scarves to tie down their flamboyant hats to prevent them from sailing out into the pasture. Some early photos show passengers looking like mummies, swathed in their scarves, mufflers,

dusters and protective gear.

Now that automobiles were common on the dusty trails and cow paths around Sanderson, the need for repairmen immediately became evident.

Almost from the beginning, the local blacksmith shop received business from those wanting car repairs. Mr. Tom Mayes was a skilled blacksmith and an inveterate tinkerer. Very soon he came up to speed on the early, simple engines, and body repairs were similar to the wagons he had been repairing for years. His shop was located across from Javelina Hill, at Wilson and Oak.



Photo courtesy of Terrell County Memorial Museum

### **Reuben Mussey's Garage and Ford Dealership, ca 1920**

According to Reuben Mussey's daughter-in-law, he and his brother, Cap, moved to Sanderson and opened a blacksmith shop that specialized in



Courtesy of Donna Smith Collection, Terrell County Memorial Museum

automobile mechanics. They also opened the first *Ford* dealership in Terrell County. But in those days you couldn't buy a model from the showroom floor...in fact, there was no showroom. The first *Model Ts* were selected from a catalog and had to be shipped by rail in sub-assemblies. The Mussey brothers built them up from a pile of parts, piece by piece, nut by bolt.

Later they went into partnership with Bill Ferguson, until their shop was demolished and the new Princess Theatre was put up in its place in 1929. The Musseys moved on, but Ferguson had already built a new *Ford* dealership just west of Kerr Mercantile.

Soon, service stations were built and many talented mechanics called Sanderson home through the years. Some of those early mechanics were Tom Mayes, Reuben and Cap Mussey, the Farley brothers, Dan, Van, Ray and Ernest and bro-in-law Harry Nutter, John Montgomery, Jim Nance, Montie Wallace and Dalton Hogg, to name a few, but there were many more. ~

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#### **References**

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*Terrell County, Its Past, Its People*, Alice Evans Downie. Sanderson, Texas: Terrell County Heritage Commission, 1978.

*Model T Ford Club of America* <http://www.mtfc.com/>

<http://modeltford.com>

[www.terrellmuseum.info/newsletters/](http://www.terrellmuseum.info/newsletters/)

## *A lamp unto my feet, a (carbide) light unto my path*

Buying a car in Sanderson in the "Teens and Twenties was pretty simple. For instance, Mussey's Garage, which sold Fords, would receive the vehicle in subassemblies, shipped by railroad flatcar, and Mussey's mechanics would finish building your car on the spot. The basic car was pretty plain, but you could accessorize with the many after-market options available

Something we take for granted now but which was an accessory in those days was headlights. Cars did not come with headlights unless you requested them. Most folks didn't motor at night so headlights really weren't necessary. And, the early headlights were so dim that it was little better than candlelight.

The first headlights available were kerosene carriage lamps in fancy brass cases, a holdover from horse-and-buggy days. You filled the reservoir, lit the wick, adjusted the flame and off you went.

Another type of headlight producing a brighter light used the same acetylene gas welders use today. A sealed reservoir containing calcium carbide crystals in a little basket was mounted on the running board. Above it was a water container with an adjustable valve which allowed the water to drip on the crystals, causing a reaction that produced the acetylene gas.

A bright red rubber tube allowed the gas to rise from the reservoir to feed the brass and ceramic lamp burner, and lenses on the lamp focused the light on the road. The lamps had the same appearance as kerosene lamps. The reservoirs were fancy and were covered with



Carbide Burner

Courtesy [modeltford.com](http://modeltford.com)



Photo courtesy of Robert Allen



Photo courtesy of Fred J. Durant

### **1911 Ford carbide headlight and sidelight**

either polished, lacquered brass or with a black enamel, edged in brass and with brass fittings.

Some enterprising inventor did away with the carbide gas generator and constructed a gas tank which was filled with acetylene gas from the supplier when empty. One charge could last up to 100 hours. The interior of the bottle was filled with a porous fabric material, usually asbestos, and the fabric was saturated with a liquid called acetone. When the bottle was filled with acetylene gas it reacted with the acetone to make a liquid. Acetylene gas can only be compressed safely to about 15 pounds, but liquid acetylene can be compressed up to 200-250 pounds, meaning more would fit in the tank. When adjusted properly the special valve released the right amount of pressure and the liquid turned back to gas, traveling up the red rubber tube to the standard gas lamp burners. Very ingenious!

In the photo (r) a Presto Lite-brand tank is mounted to the running board of a car on the Bob Allen Ranch. Mr. Allen found the old, rusting tank and brought it to the Terrell County Memorial Museum in 1990. He also provided the photo, presumably taken on his ranch.

An interesting side note: bottles filled with acetylene can still be purchased at welding supply stores, and they are almost identical to our original at the museum.

We've come a long way, baby!