

The First Automobile Was Seen in Monroe on July 2, 1901

Have you ever wondered when the first automobile was driven to Monroe or who was the first Monroite to own an automobile? Both of these questions will be answered in the column today. We can only imagine what it was like for the people who were “driving horses” the first time they encountered a horseless carriage. For many years the Times reported the comings and goings of people in their automobiles.

The Monroe Evening Times reported on July 2, 1901 that, “Geo. H. Clarke and F. D. Clarke, of Evansville, were in the city today. The trip was made with an automobile, the first one that has been seen in this city. It proved to be a great attraction.”

Fred J. Karlen received his automobile on the morning of July 23. In giving it the first trial run he was somewhat unfortunate in encountering horses that did not take kindly to the horseless vehicle. He was able to master the auto and although he was cautious, the nags about town were as hostile as could be. His greatest difficulty seemed to be in getting the good will of timid horses. The automobile was propelled by a small steam engine and ran quietly. It weighed 900 pounds and he paid \$900 for it. At that time it was the only automobile owned here and proved to be the only attraction of the street.

It was reported the same day that a team of horses owned by S. R. Titus and hitched to the covered wagon of Ward Remedy company made a sharp turn at the corner of West Merchants and Emerson [14th Street and 14th Avenue, respectively] streets shortly before noon was frightened by the sight of the automobile. The wagon was overturned and its occupants, Mr. Titus, his 10-year-old daughter, Olive, and Peter Chase were thrown out. Chase struck the left side of his face on the road, receiving a cut under his eye. Mr. Titus had a gash in the top of his head from coming in contact with the top of the wagon. The girl was not hurt. “The horses reeled around while Mr. Titus and his daughter were still in the overturned wagon and Mr. Chase and B. G. Treat were soon at the head of the horses and brought them to a standstill.”

Mr. Titus wore a white shirt, the front of which was covered with blood from his wound, and Mr. Chase’s eye was red and bleeding, so Dr. Loofbourow was called by telephone to attend to the injured on the lawn of L. H. Gapen. The doctor sewed up the gash on top of Mr. Titus’ head. The top of the wagon, which was almost new, was badly demolished, and the wagon itself was otherwise damaged.

Mr. Titus was heading west on Merchants street when he met Fred Karlen in his automobile at the alley between West avenue [15th Avenue] and Emerson street. Mr. Karlen sounded his gong and noticed that the horses on the medicine wagon were frightened, so he stopped his machine. Titus had control of the horses until they reached the corner and made a turn so short that the wagon tipped over. Chase felt it going and leaned over to keep it balanced, but his weight was not sufficient and he was thrown out as the wagon went over. The horses whirled in a circle before they could be stopped. Titus was stunned by the blow to the top of his head. The girl was too excited to know how she got out of the accident and was very fortunate in not receiving a scratch.

Fred Karlen made a trip to Oakley on the afternoon of the 24th with his automobile. He made the return trip in an hour. Karlen and his automobile got caught a mile and one-half from town in the storm on the night of the 24th without gasoline. He telephoned to town for five gallons and some rope to wind around the tires to prevent them from slipping. They got to town but without the automobile. He went out after it the following morning.



This 1901 Baker Electric Stanhope automobile may have been similar to those automobiles seen in Monroe that year.

It seems that Karlen was getting his use of his new vehicle as he was at Darlington with his automobile on August 7 and he was at Freeport with it today the following day.

It was reported on August 8 that Mr. Titus, who had been injured and had his medicine wagon damaged in a runaway, was again attending to business after having his wagon repaired and brightened up with a little paint and a coat of varnish. Fred Karlen, whose automobile probably caused the runaway, paid the doctor's bill and the expense of repairing the wagon. Mr. Titus did not expect him to make payment for the damage, which made Mr. Karlen all the more willing to do that much for him.

The August 24 paper reported that, "Fred J. Karlen and E. L. Adelman [sic] will go to Buffalo, making the trip to Toledo with the automobile. The auto will be run into the factory there and it will be equipped with late improvements."

A future column will take over where this one left off to find out whether Mr. Karlen and Mr. Edelman made it to Toledo or not and let you know whether other Monroeites started to invest in automobiles or not.