

Transcription of *Gresham Outlook* article from 1/15/1970:

EDITOR'S NOTE: The author of this article is a member of the Antique Automobile Club of America. He would like to hear from anyone in Gresham who remembers the Beaver auto or has pictures of it.

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There was once an automobile factory in Gresham. The building now has been added on to and is occupied by the Olympic Manufacturing Co., 519 NW 10th Drive.

This building was completed in March, 1914, as the home of the Beaver State Motor Company.

Beaver believed that Oregonians would purchase a local product instead of one shipped from Detroit if the car was of equal quality. The first Beaver car was made in Portland in 1912 and is pictured in the Beaver brochure sent to prospective stock-holders.

This brochure compares Beaver with the Ford Motor Company car, saying Beaver in 1914 was the same size as the Ford was in 1904 and that Beaver has every expectation of growing and prospering the way Ford did. It also listed the profits made by several other auto companies, including General Motors and Packard.

Glowing testimonials as to the sterling character of the officers of the Beaver State Motor company are also included in the brochure. These testimonials came from officers of The First National Bank, Willamette Iron and Steel Works, and the Portland Chamber of Commerce.

Beaver State Motor Company believed it was in an ideal location for exporting cars to other countries. The Panama Canal would make it possible for Beavers to be sold on the East Coast. The brochure compares the future of auto building in Oregon with the California gold

rush, but states that while the riches obtained in the gold rush were the result of luck, the riches obtained with the Beaver car will be the result of careful planning and hard work. Beaver held the patent on the single plate dry clutch. This type of clutch is still used on manual transmission cars.

P.A. Combs was president and general manager. He invented the clutch and at one time worked for one of the predecessors of American Motors. The factory superintendent was Tom Fetch. He worked for Packard for 12 years before coming to Beaver. They planned to build 200 cars and light trucks a year.

The Beaver Six weighed 3050 pounds, had a 45 HP six cylinder engine, electric lights, and a self starter. It also had a worm drive rear end imported from Coventry, England. It was made by Daimler-Lanchester, the same company that still makes cars for the Queen of England.

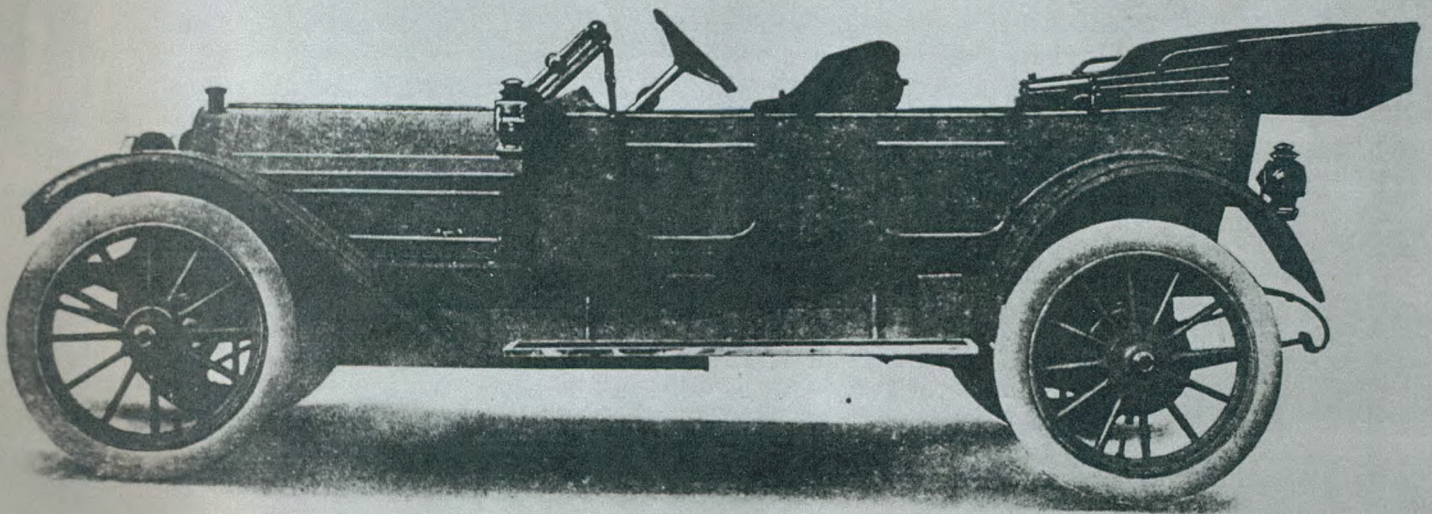
The car was comparable with the Chevrolet Classic Six, the Studebaker Six, or the 1912 Oldsmobile, none of which were cheap cars. They planned at a later date to build a smaller four cylinder car that would compete with the Model T Ford and sell for \$650. Freight on a car from Detroit to Portland was \$100 in 1914. Purchase of a Beaver would save this \$100 for the customer.

A reporter from the *Gresham Outlook* visited the Beaver factory in early 1914 and found a two passenger run-about that the reporter said looked modern enough to be a 1915 model. There was also a bright red water tower of 600 gallon capacity. It was one hundred feet high and the sign "Beaver State Motor Company" was painted on it.

The Beaver factory was the first automobile factory in Oregon. The others were Ford, Portland, Pacific, Kaiser, Frazer, and Henry J. It is believed that Oregon's first smog control laws were passed because of the Beaver factory.

Not too many cars were sold by the Beaver Company and headlines in the *Gresham Outlook* reflect the grow-

ORIGINAL BEAVER SIX CAR



THIS CAR HAS BEEN ON THE STREETS OF PORTLAND SINCE OCTOBER, 1912

ing concern on the part of the stockholders. Headlines such as "Numerous Unforeseen Delays Delay Production at Beaver" were common in the Outlook.

Few 1914 Models were built, it is possible the above mentioned runabout was the only one. The factory had 25 men employed and expected to hire 500 more. The 25 men were preparing to build 1915 models.

In September 1914 they were building six cylinder engines that "require neither battery nor magneto." The Outlook did not explain how the engines ran. It is doubtful they would revert to the obsolete hot tube ignitions system. The 1915 Beaver was advertised as "The smallest six cylinder car in existence."

The First World War interfered with the plans of Beaver by cutting off the supply of rear ends from England. This forced Beaver to change its plans and may have lowered the quality of the car. Beaver still had its own foundry and was making other things such as railroad car wheels and sewer pipe in an effort to stay in business. By Christmas of 1914, a milling and a forging machine were installed at the factory. The company could now make brass and aluminum castings along with cast iron. At the end of 1914, it was revealed that the officers of the Beaver Co. had worked all of 1914 without drawing any salary. The factory workers were paid.

On Jan. 15, 1915, the company said it was optimistic about its future as it owned all machinery and property it occupied and owed no money to anybody. In February of 1915, Beaver resumed work, making castings.

On March 30, 1915, the offices were moved to Gresham from the Lumbermans Building in Portland. Only 5 men were employed in April of 1915 when Beaver resumed automobile production. Worry on the part of the stock holders again was responsible for a visit from the Outlook on April 27, 1915. The reporter found Tom Fetch in his work clothes with the five employees busily working casting four cylinder engine blocks. The work was being done in a shed dating from 1865 that was built by a member of the Powell family that Powell Blvd, a main street in both Portland and Gresham, is after. The men

were working long, hard hours in an effort to keep the Beaver State Motor Company alive.

On Dec. 17, 1915, a new foundry was completed and Beaver began manufacture of drag saws and cement mixers. The next news of the Beaver State Motor Company was in May 16, 1916. A photograph of the Beaver factory was on the front page of the Outlook. The story said that the 1917 Beaver was to be an 8 cylinder. There was a depression in 1916. This, together with war shortages, accounted for the lack of production in 1916.

On Dec. 14, 1917, the Outlook said Beaver is busy, "Live and snap pervade the place". All the machines were now run entirely by electric power.

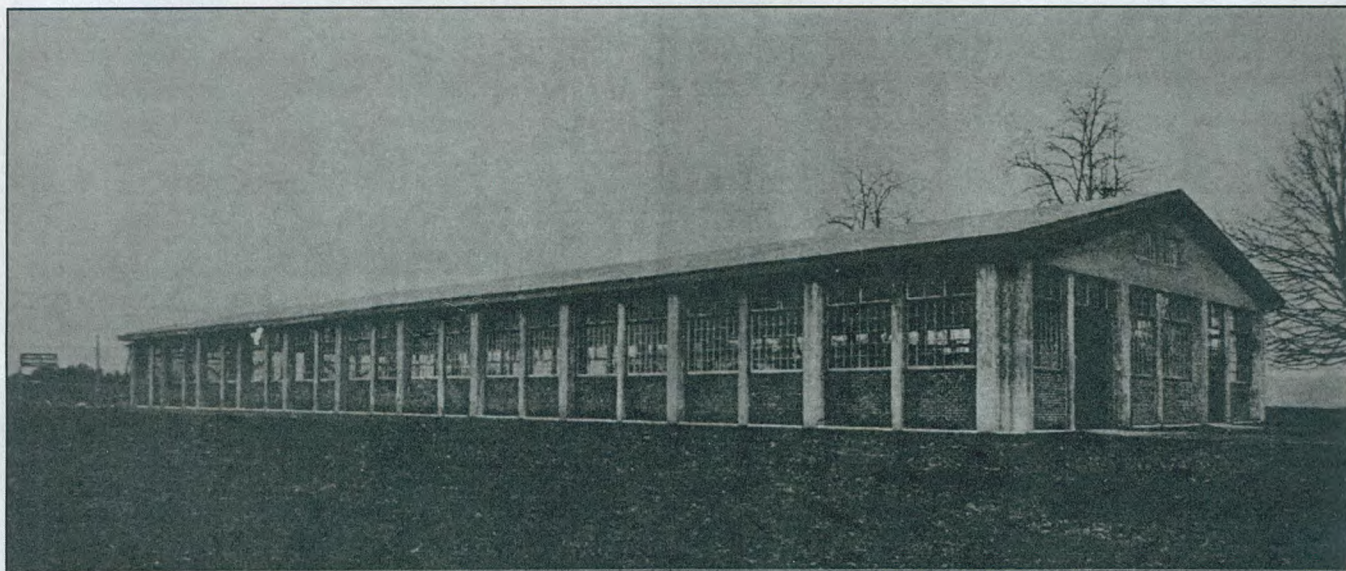
The company had several demonstrator automobiles in various stages of construction. They were making four kinds of gasoline engines and a one cylinder, 5 HP drag saw. They had 125 drag saws on the line and completed 5 saw rigs a day. Again, they couldn't finish the cars because of shortages.

In April 1918 Beaver had 40 men on the payroll, the size of the plant was doubled, and it was running at full capacity making drag saws. The drag saws sold for about \$200 each. There is no further mention of Beaver cars.

In about 1915, the Outlook printed a list of cars by make owned by Gresham residents. There is not one Beaver on the list, in fact, there are no other orphans on the list. Only makes that are still in existence today are listed. How could they have known which ones would survive?

There was far more interest in the Detroit cars by the local residents. There is far more information about the Willys-Overland factory in the old newspapers than there is about the Beaver.

At the time the Beaver State Motor company was comparing itself with the Ford Motor Company of 10 years before, it was the same size and had a comparable car as Chevrolet, which started the same year Beaver did. Ford and Chevrolet are now known all over the world, while most residents of Gresham are doubtful if the Beaver ever existed.



BUILDING No. 1—BEAVER STATE MOTOR COMPANY'S PLANT, GRESHAM, OREGON.

(From Photograph Taken March 7, 1914)

Date: July 22, 1913

Location: Oregon

Paper: Oregonian

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GRESHAM MAY GET MOTOR PLANT.—
The location of the Beaver State Motor Company appears to have centered at Gresham, the other places having withdrawn from the contest for the plant, which gives Gresham a clear field if it can comply with the conditions. The Gresham Commercial Club made investigation of the standing of the company and at the meeting last week adopted resolutions urging citizens to assist in getting the plant. It was then reported that \$13,000 of the \$25,000 stock of the concern had been subscribed for in sums ranging down from \$2000. If Gresham gets the factory \$75,000 of the stock will be held in escrow until the factory is in operation. The site of the factory is the main point at issue, and if that can be settled satisfactorily it is considered almost sure that Gresham will secure the factory.