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Automobiles becoming more popular in Arkadelphia by 1910

By Wendy Richter
For the Siftingsh

One hundred years ago, the automobile was becoming increasingly popular. As of 1903, some 50 Arkansans owned vehicles. In fact, a Hot Springs man drove to Arkadelphia that year "on his automobile," creating quite a stir here. It was the first car that most Arkadelphians had ever seen. C.C. Henderson of the city purchased an automobile in 1908, and the local paper remarked that "now our horses will have to take lessons in acrobatic performance." But, a revolution in transportation had begun. By 1910, about 25 Arkadelphians owned automobiles.

As more and more autos began to appear, the state began to improve roads to handle the increased traffic, and actually started assigning official highway numbers in 1917. The Ozark Trails Association even produced a map that included distances measured between white rings that had been painted on posts and trees. Of local interest, signs were put up in 1916, when R.W. Huie Jr., Chick McDaniel and Sam O'Baugh installed some on the Hot Springs Road, "by way of the mountain route through Bismarck." The men "measured off the distances and put up signs along the entire way." The signs indicated the number of miles to the Caddo Hotel, and were "put especially at the road crossings where



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Downtown Arkadelphia began to transition from horse and buggy to automobile in the early 1900s.

a traveler is more liable to lose the way." And, adding authenticity to this work, the paper proclaimed that "the accuracy as to the distances was measured by a speedometer."

While commonplace today, automobile matters were quite newsworthy in Clark County a century ago. For example, the front page of the Jan. 14, 1915, edition of the *Southern Standard* newspaper reported the purchase of a car by a local resident: "B. R. Oastler has bought another Hupmobile, this time a five passenger car. It is a new car of the 1915 model, and Bert got it at a bargain from a fellow who was trying to drive it to Texas, but found the roads too bad to attempt to go further."

About a month later, Arkadelphia's mayor, J.J. Kress, warned residents of the dangers of speeding in a notice to "Automobile

bilists": "You certainly read in the Little Rock papers recently the account of two persons being sent to the penitentiary for killing two people by fast auto driving and the owners of the autos being sued for several thousand dollars by the families of the deceased. The above should be sufficient warning, but seems not, and if 'speeding' in Arkadelphia is not stopped, those doing it may expect to pay the maximum penalty."

In July of 1915, the paper reported yet another new vehicle on local streets: "Dona Huie has the latest thing in an automobile. It is one of the late models, six cylinder Overlands with all the frills, and shows up fine on our streets. More cars, better roads."

Progress with regard to roads was evident across the county, as the newspaper continued to

publish items proclaiming various improvements. One mentioned a road that was "the pride of Clark County," and "pointed to as an example of road building by everybody who has traveled it. It is the road which branches off from the Amity and Arkadelphia road and goes to Graysonia." It was described as "equal to any of the turnpikes leading out of our large cities." The paper concluded that "Clark County needs more such roads as this."

For additional information about the history of Clark County, visit or contact the Clark County Historical Museum at the train depot (www.clark-countyhistory.org or 230-1360) or the Clark County Historical Association's Archives at the Ouachita Baptist University Library (www.obu.edu/archives or 245-5332).