

BIRMINGHAM HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Newsletter

February 2002

Motor on Over to the Motorsports Museum

Join us for the Annual Meeting of the Society to enjoy one another and George Barber's fabulous collection of vintage motorcycles, cars, and trucks. The Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum on Birmingham's Southside

displays more than 400 pieces and houses a library and a hands-on restoration studio.

The Barber collection is the largest motorcycle collection in the United States (more than 700 pieces). The collection includes American, European and Asian models dating from 1904 to the present. Begun in the 1980s, it continues to grow through the acquisition of exceptional machines and entire collections. Almost every machine on display in the 35,000 sq. foot facility can be ready to run in an hour.

In 1998, *The Art of the Motorcycle* exhibition exploring the culture, design, and technology of motorcycles featured Barber machines and drew the largest audience ever to New

York's Guggenheim Museum. Barber motorcycles also traveled to Spain for a showing at the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao.

The 2003 completion of the Barber Motorsports Park, just off I-20 between Birmingham and Talledega, will host a variety of events including vintage, motorcycle, and Sports Car of Club of America (SCCA) races in addition to the museum program. Operations will occupy 140,000 sq. feet of exhibit space. To be run by a private foundation, the facility is planned to be self-supporting.

The Society expresses gratitude to George Barber for his passion to collect, conserve, race, and share his growing collection with Birmingham residents and visitors from across the world.



A l l J a z z e d U p

The Birmingham Heritage Band, organized in 1976 to celebrate Birmingham's music heritage, brings together a changing group of local band directors and music teachers. The current combo will play at the Annual Meeting. The combo features music legends: saxophonist, Dr. Frank Adams and pianist William Johnson, III. Pastor Jim Lowe serves as business manager.

In the 1980s, musician and educator J. L. Lowe and others organized the Jazz Hall of Fame to bring back and recognize those musicians who had trained under Professor ("Fess") Whtley, band instructor at Parker High School, and then left the city to make a living playing with major American bands. The Hall of Fame also developed as an institution to collect, preserve, and present our city's musicians and musical heritage.

Music and promoting and writing about it come naturally to Dr. Bolivar who came from a musical family and married into another. Her professional career in California and this city also includes counseling and teaching.

To order a postpaid copy of *SWING LOWE*, send a check for \$ to Marzette Media Promotions, 1533 Second Avenue West, Birmingham, 35208, t. 786-1724.

SOCIETY NEWS

New Trustees to be Elected

The Nominating Committee recommends Anne Morrow Connors, Harold H. Goings, Clarke H. Gillespy, Frederick L. Smith, Jr., and Joe W. Strickland to the Members for consideration as Trustees of the Society for three-year terms. The election of Trustees takes place at the Annual Meeting.

Heritage Society Heads to the Heights

Milner Heights, that is and to the houses along Crest Road built in the early 20th century.

This year's Party Committee includes Pat Camp, Patricia Driscoll, Melissa Slaughter, and Marjorie Lee White.

• • SWING LOW • •

Dr. C. Marzette-Bolivar will autograph copies of her new book *Swing Lowe: A Family's Dedication to Preserving Music in the Magic City*. Based on Sammy Lowe's *Memoirs* as a trumpeter and arranger and correspondence and interviews with his brother J. L. and his sister Leatha and other musicians, the volume traces the ups and downs of jazz musicians' lives here and in the major music centers of the Big Band, bebop, jazz, swing, blues and hip hop eras. As an arranger for big bands, Sammy Lowe became world-renowned. He is credited with giving the Erskine Hawkins band its bluesy, rocking beat that audiences, especially dancers, craved.

Society Calendar

Annual Meeting

Barber Vintage Motorsports Museum
Fifth Avenue South
Monday, February 18, 7:00 p.m.
Dr. Bolivar autographs *SWING LOWE*.
The Heritage Band plays.

Heritage Society Party

The Milner Mansions, Crest Road
April 21, 2002, Noon

Preservation Awards

May 16, 5:00 p.m.
Jefferson County Courthouse

60th Anniversary Celebration

November TBA

Motorcycle Mania

A French man invented the motorcycle, but it was the English in the late 1860s whose engineers skilled in watch-making, weaving and cycle building began making motorcycles, and later cars.

The leading American firms of the early 20th century included Harley-Davidson and Indian. In 1901, two bike racers and inventors in Springfield, Massachusetts started Indian, the first commercially marketed gasoline

powered motorcycle manufacturing company in the United States. Two years later in Milwaukee, William Harley and Arthur Davidson founded Harley-Davidson. By 1920, the firm became the largest motorcycle manufacturer in the world with dealers in 67 countries. While Indian closed in 1950, Harley-Davidson continues production for an international market.

These American manufactures targeted local cycle shops to sell and

service the new machines that "took the work out of bicycling." Robert Stubbs' cycle shop began selling Indian cycles in 1914. In 1915, William Specht, Jr.'s firms on Birmingham's Northside began selling the rival Harley-Davidson cycles.

American motorcycles and automobiles made their debut at the same time. Cycles were often a hard sell. They transported two persons for almost the same price of a Model T that transported four.

Consumers were males who could ride to work during the week and enjoy themselves on weekends, as well as specialized commercial users.

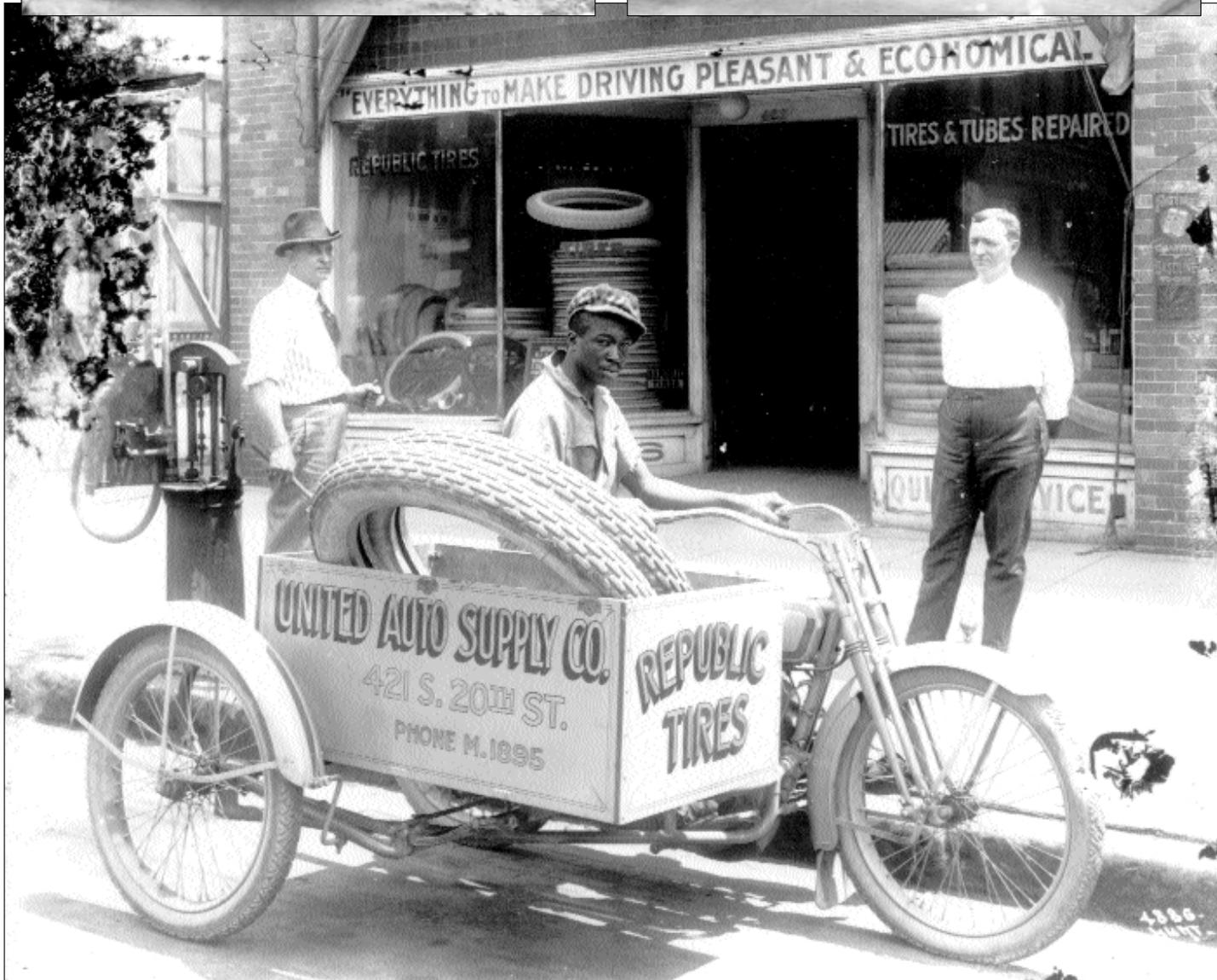
These photographs from the collection of the Birmingham Public Library Archives showcase the competition as well as successful sales to retailers large and small, the police and pleasure riders and racers. Birmingham commercial photographer, Oscar V. Hunt, made the photographs from 1914 to 1916.

Left: This photograph shows an Indian motorcycle pulling a wagon load across 20th Street. North Alabama Indian dealer and repairer, Robert Stubbs staged the promotion. *Below:* His competitor William F. Specht, Jr. announced the arrival of his first shipment of Harley-Davidsons in 1914.



Sources: BHS researcher Peggy Balch, Barber Motorsports Museum Director Jeff Ray, the Harley-Davidson firm, the Indian Museum in

Springfield, MA and the Museum of British Road Transport in Coventry, England.



Early users of specialty motor cycles included the police, downtown retailers such as Parisian and Blachs and family firms such as Robert and Grace Puckett's cleaning firm in the fashionable downtown

residential district. United Auto Supply provided services to the new forms of transportation: motorcycles and autos which provided growth opportunities for new businesses.