

# *Motoring to Conneaut Lake:*

*A Memoir by  
Bronson B. Luty*

Edited, with an introduction, by Jonathan E. Helmreich







**The Luty family regularly drove to the town of Conneaut Lake in northwestern Pennsylvania. Here, their car rests upon arrival in 1914.**

**B**RONSON LUTY, born in 1905, grew up in Pittsburgh, where he graduated from Carnegie Tech (predecessor to Carnegie Mellon University) and enjoyed a distinguished career as a construction estimator for the Dravo Corporation. His family brought him early in his life to Conneaut Lake, in Crawford County 90 miles north of Pittsburgh, and the magic of those summer vacations stayed with him. As an adult, he, too, vacationed there. Upon retirement in 1972, Luty moved to the lake community, where he died in 1993.

As early as 1930, Luty had begun a lengthy and meticulously researched history of the lake which also served as a memoir of his lake-related experiences. In 1993, portions of that account were published by the Crawford County Historical Society: *The Lake as it Was: An Informal History and Memoir of Conneaut Lake*. One chapter that did not become part of that publication recalls the early journeys by automobile north from Pittsburgh. It is presented here for the interest of both those readers who remember such trips themselves and for those unacquainted with auto-touring in the years before World War I. I deeply appreciate the Luty family making his manuscript available for publication.

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**Bronson Luty's first house  
was in Ben Avon, a  
Pittsburgh suburb which  
overlooks the Ohio River  
and Neville Island.**



Our first car was a 1913 Studebaker. My father probably had decided that was a good year to join the small but rapidly growing clan of motorists, because by that time all sorts of new things were being installed on cars. For example, our car had doors to the front seat, electric lights, and a self-starter. A storage battery which was encased in a metal box on one of the running boards activated the starter (you hoped) and this in turn started the engine. There was a switch on the dashboard which you turned to "battery" for starting. As soon as the engine was running you flicked the switch to "magneto." The magneto produced enough electricity to keep the engine running but there was no generator, so the battery had to be recharged periodically, for starting.

Now a new era dawned for us — the era of the "motor car," or "automobile," or just "machine." We made many journeys to and from the lake in those early years, but there was never such running back and forth as became common among cottagers when there was a paved road all the way. A weekend at the lake wasn't much fun if it took you at least six hours to make the trip up and another six hours to return to the city. So, we, like many other cottagers, drove our car up in June, kept it there for the summer, and drove it home on Labor Day, when the whole family moved back to the city. And during the summer months my father came up, on the train, for weekends.

Here is a scene from that period, with my family as the "dramatis personae." It is a June morning, but not any June morning. This is the morning that we had been dreaming about for weeks and days, the morning when we would be going to the lake for the summer. We had gone to the lake many times before, but this year our trip would be a new experience, an adventure, because we were going in our new car.

In spite of all the plans and preparations that had gone on before, there still seemed to be a hundred things to do. The trunks and large wooden boxes were packed, but there were some finishing touches to be put to them before they would be ready. Then, sometime before lunch, they would start their own journey, in a truck which would haul them to the railroad station.

Then came lunch, a hurried, almost frantic meal. Next, the car would be brought around to the front of the house and we would enter the final stage of getting underway. There were suitcases, boxes, and bundles to be carried out and somehow fitted into the car. And while this was being done, space had to be reserved on the floor of the car for at least two dogs. They liked the lake, too, but I fear that they did not enjoy the journey necessary to get there. For the first several hours in the car they stood, sat down, or tried to walk back and forth until, from sheer exhaustion, they gave up and went to sleep.

So, in our getting ready, for another hour or two there would be organized confusion: my mother and father attempting to organize, we kids contributing mightily to the confusion. Then would come a time when Mother or Father would say, with a sigh, and an attempt at calmness, "Well, are we ready?"

We would climb into the car, and in those days you really did climb into a car. It was one step to the running board, another up to the floor. And when we were all settled, more or less comfort-

ably, our journey would begin. "Farewell you asphalt streets and brick sidewalks. We're off to another world, a world of sunshine and sparkling waves, of shady paths and yellow dirt roads; Conneaut Lake, here we come. Rowboats, canoes, steamboats; we have dreamed about you; today those dreams will come true."

By present-day standards we probably presented a comic picture. Our car was a "touring car," which suggested front and rear seats, four doors, and a cloth top which could be put up or folded down so that it stuck out in the back. According to the catalogue, that top could be raised or lowered with ridiculous ease. But if you happened to be caught in the rain on a country road with your top down, you might wish fervently that the writer of that glowing description were there to help you jockey your top into the "up" position.

The top, however, had another function beside providing shelter from rain or sun; on a trip to the lake things could be hung from it. The underside of that canopy on a journey like ours sometimes resembled the upper shelves of a clothing store. There might be hats and caps, small bundles, sweaters, even shoes; as long as these were lightweight articles it didn't matter; if something came untied and fell on someone's head there was no harm done, it just had to be tied up again. If something fell out on the road, it was a simple matter to stop the car and wait while someone went back and retrieved it. That was one advantage of the speed, or lack of it, which was common in those days. At 20 miles an hour, such an emergency stop added only a slight delay to the trip as a whole.

Some of the odds and ends tied to the top showed below its lower edge. Things hung all over the car: packages, bundles, spare tires, pennants; and as we rolled along, they bounced with the bumps or waved in the breeze. Frequently one running board was so cluttered with suitcases and boxes lashed against the side of the car that the doors on that side could not be opened.

A picture of our family under a full head of steam would no doubt have accentuated the stiff, upright position of the passengers. That position was partly due to the cruelly straight backs of the seats and partly because, with miscellaneous baggage and two restless dogs all around one's feet, relaxing was a bit difficult.

The dress of our family on one of those trips was distinctive. For example, in the early days of automobiling, fashion decreed that the well-dressed motorist should wear a duster. This garment looked like an oversized raincoat and was worn over the normal suit or dress. It was made of light-colored linen and when the wearer stood up it reached to within 6 inches of the ground. It was usually accompanied by a voluminous cap with a visor. The visor

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## Pittsburgh Section

## Route 541

### Route 541—Pittsburgh to Erie, Pa.—142.9 m.

Reverse Route, No. 585.

Route Map, page 515.

Via Mercer, Meadville and Cambridge Springs. Fair-to-good dirt roads with considerable clay and stretches of macadam. Numerous hills and sharp turns. Good, average trip for dry weather. Variant is given E. Liberty to Mercer where connection is made with this route; see Route 541R. Another option to this route and used in dry weather is by way of Route 558 via Butler.

**Descriptive Outline**—Leaving Pittsburgh we cross the Allegheny River and proceed north thru Harmony and Mercer into Meadville. Owing to road conditions a detour is made at Mercer via Conneaut Lake. Meadville Theological School, founded 1834 by E. J. Huidekoper, and Allegheny College, founded 1815, are located at Meadville. Saegertown, on French's Creek, has numerous mineral springs, while Cambridge Springs attracts numerous visitors with its chalybeate springs. Waterford is the connecting link to Erie.

**Mileages**  
Total Intermediate (For this and other exits see City Map, pages 517-518.)  
0.0 0.0 Pittsburgh, 5th Ave. & Smithfield St. Northwest on 5th Ave.

- 0.2 0.2 Turn right on Market St.
- 0.3 0.1 Jog left on Liberty St. and immediately right into 6th Ave. Go under RR. 0.6 and cross long iron bridge (Allegheny River—toll 5c). Go under RR. 0.8 and follow trolley up-grade into Federal St. Keep left with trolley to Perrysville Ave.—numerous curves; trolley leaves (to left—4.9).
- 5.7 5.4 Irregular 4-corners; curve left, leaving trolley, to Plank Road 6.8.
- 6.9 1.2 Fork; bear left down winding grade. Caution for sharp left curve 7.2. Cross trolley at West View 7.6 and straight thru Perrysville 9.1.
- 9.4 2.5 3-corners at hotel; turn left, avoiding left fork 10.9. Caution for numerous sharp left and right curves next 20 miles. Go thru Wexford 15.9.
- 16.6 7.2 3-corners; curve left with poles.
- 18.7 2.1 Fork just beyond stone bridge; bear left past Thorn Hill P. O. (on right—19.5), thru Ogle 22.5. Caution—left curves 24.9—27.0; descend thru Zelienople 29.1.
- 29.3 10.6 4-corners at brick school. Cross trolley under RR. 30.1.
- 30.2 1.9 Harmony, Club Sign at 4-corners. Turn right across iron bridge 30.4.
- 30.6 0.4 Fork; bear left with poles thru Middle Lancaster 33.7 and Portersville 39.4.
- 40.1 9.5 Fork; bear left, crossing RR. at foot of steep grade 43.6. Cross iron bridge 43.8 on poor road thru Harlansburg 47.0, avoiding left and right forks, crossing RR. twice into
- 61.4 21.3 Mercer, Park on right. Straight thru.  
There are two ways to Meadville, one given in the route being longer but better; for shorter but poorer road see Note (a).
- 61.6 0.2 Fork, bear left across iron bridge on direct road, avoiding all left and right-hand roads. Cross RR. Cross corner bridge 75.2 and RR. 75.7; go under RR. 76.1 into
- 76.5 14.9 Greenville; Bank on right at 4-corners, turn right. Cross RR. 76.7.

Before road maps were widely distributed, motorists used road books. Navigating could be tricky — success depended on an accurate odometer, an absence of detours, unchanged landmarks, and an attentive navigator (preferably not the driver). The 1914 Automobile Blue Book (this volume only covering New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the South East) has more than 1,000 pages and is one-and-one-half inches thick.



might have a sort of isinglass window attached to it which could be flipped down in front of the wearer's eyes. Sometimes goggles were worn as a separate item. Gloves with gauntlets added a sporting touch, besides giving additional protection against dust and wind, of which there was plenty in an open car on roads which were, for the most part, just plain dirt. It was even possible to purchase shoes or boots, which were especially recommended for the rigors of driving and riding.

In one way the duster and cap were very practical because they certainly kept out a lot of dust. I can remember my mother and sister wearing them, but I believe they gave up the duster idea after a few years. They probably decided that the protection which they afforded wasn't worth all the putting on and taking off and besides, in warm weather, the duster could be just something else to add to the heat of the day.

The cap might have been modified into something more resembling a hat. This hat was probably held on by a hat pin, a very necessary implement when motoring in an open car for affixing the hat to the head or, more explicitly, to the hair, of which women, in those days, wore large quantities.

From the time my father had first acquired our car, he had tried to learn all he could about the gears, shafts, tubes, wires, rods, and miscellaneous gadgets that made it go. When he thought he had a general working knowledge of the machine he turned his attention to that intriguing question, "What is the best road to the lake?" So he armed himself with a road book. When you were on a trip and weren't sure of your route, this was a handy thing to have with you. It gave detailed directions, with mileages in tenths down the left side of each page, of how to get from a lot of places to a lot of other places.

It was possible, with the help of the road book, to figure out how to go from Pittsburgh to Conneaut Lake, but to my father that was just the first step. He assembled a set of topographical survey maps showing all the country between the city and the lake. Having marked in red what would be our route on these maps, he pasted them together in a long strip. He then pasted one end of this strip to one mailing tube, the other end to another mailing tube, then rolled the strip on the two tubes. Rubber bands were placed over the ends of the tubes to hold them together, so that the strip, or map, could be rolled forward or backward like an ancient Roman scroll.

Today, with paved roads, route numbers, and maps at most service stations, it is hard to picture conditions as they were when we first ventured forth to the lake in our car. The road, for the most part, was dirt, but there were other problems. It was not only dirt, but it looked very much like all the other dirt roads which branched from it, ran into it, or crossed it. Also roads twisted and turned more than do our modern roads, so that a good sense of direction was not always sufficient to keep you on your course. So it was that frequently you would come to a fork in the road and ask yourself "Which road do I take?" The more-traveled road might offer a clue, but this could be a snare, too. The road to Shady Falls or Mitchell's Corners might take more traffic than the one to Harlansburg and Mercer, which was where you

wanted to go. Sometimes there were signs, but they were often so weather-beaten as to be illegible. Perhaps you would ask someone; ah yes, but who? There weren't so many people to ask in those days, especially in the country between the towns along the way. The country, beautiful as it was, could be a lonely, deserted place when you were wondering which road you should follow. Then, if you did find someone who was willing to help you, you had to beware of the man who directed you to "go as far as Bill Brown's house and then...." These men were dangerous. In a town it was usually a little easier; if there was no sign, you could usually find someone who could point out the way for you. But a road book answered all these questions, and my father's map was even better.

Our route would first lead us up onto Observatory Hill, by way of twisting, turning Perrysville Avenue. You don't hear much about Observatory Hill anymore — it is still there, of course — but there was a time when many residents of "Old Allegheny" knew it with such warm affection that they spoke of it as just "the hill." Out Perrysville Avenue we went, to where it became Perrysville Road. On our left, we would pass the Five Mile House; the building, since remodeled, and more recently seriously damaged by fire, has disappeared. The old home touches a thread of history, since it was just five miles from the center of downtown Allegheny, where stood the mayor's office and market house when Pittsburgh and Allegheny were separate cities. Just beyond the Five Mile House, we would pass, on our left, the road to Bellevue, and from there the road would follow the tortuous course around the "horseshoe curve" and on through the borough of West View. The pavement was then brick, 16 feet wide. Today such a width would be hardly more than adequate for one lane of a modern expressway. But in those early days of motoring, cars weren't as wide, they didn't go so fast, and most importantly, there weren't nearly so many of them as there are today. A 16-foot pavement was ample, too, when most of the traffic you met in your auto was of the horse-drawn variety.

A mile or so beyond West View we would clatter through the village of Perrysville, whence came the name of the road and avenue. The name of the town came from the hero of the battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812, Oliver Hazard Perry. We had been on our way for close to an hour, but our speedometer would tell us that we had covered only about nine miles. And the brick pavement, uneven as it was, with a definite hole here and there, was now something to be appreciated, because it would end about a mile further on.

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**Above:** Luty recalled their guidebook's direction to turn at the Hotel Beam in Harmony. **Right:** The Eagle Hotel, Zelienople.





from Perrysville to Wexford], that moment we had longed for but also dreaded — that moment when we would first embark on the dirt road. Here would be the answer to the question — “How is the road?” — that we had been asking for weeks. When you planned a trip such as this, even though it was for a distance of less than 100 miles, you called up the auto club or some of your friends who possibly had been brave enough to have already driven to the lake or who might know someone who had. Cottagers who had cars were a small group, and word traveled quickly around this little clan as to whether the road was dry, wet, or rough. If the weather was bad or the roads muddy, you just didn’t go until you got better reports. There might still be some doubt, however. Maybe Bill Jones, who had driven down from the lake last week, said the road was “in good shape,” but his idea of good shape could be quite different from yours. So you still weren’t sure.

Sometimes the transition from brick to earth was not such a shock as we expected. The dirt could be soft and yielding, and so make for smoother riding than the brick. This effect could be even more noticeable if the paving became rougher as one approached its edge. Then there were times when the earth was hard and rutted, having just dried out from a heavy rain.

We were in dirt road country now, and who could tell what was to come? Here was another touch of spice in our trip: we still had more than 80 miles to cover before we would roll into Conneaut Lake town, [and] of that, all but a six-mile stretch of macadam between Wexford and the Butler County line would be clay, sand, dust, or even mud. [Editor’s note: Luty’s definition of “macadam” is unclear; such roads require, technically, some sort of petroleum or cement to bind small stones into a hard surface, but many times in early automobiling literature “macadam” meant a packed surface of gravel.] The so-called “open road” was before us, but it might be open only in that there was very little traffic on it. We probably had a “clear track,” too, but in our car this track was only good for speeds up to 30 miles an hour. Over that speed we would be risking life and limb, as well as springs, axles, tires and what have you.

There were probably enough adventures and obstacles ahead of us if we proceeded at a conservative speed, without tempting fate by “letting it out.” It was a long trip, fraught with uncertainties. What lay ahead: a sudden storm, an overheated radiator, a flat tire? But just being on the road made us feel strong and brave.

Speaking of tires, this was one of the big weaknesses of a car of that period. Our first car came with tires which were guaranteed for 1,500 miles; the next set promised 3,500. What chance had a poor motorist with such fragile material between himself and the road! So he carried with him at least two spare tires and a kit for repairing “punctures” on the road. In fact, a car with three or four extra tires tied on the back was not an unusual sight in the country.

A dirt road was different from a paved road, and not only because it usually resulted in a rougher ride. There could be the added discomforts of dust and mud. In fact, mud could be considerably more than a discomfort — at times it could be a hazard. It would be sticky, or soft, or slippery, or all three at once. It could

hold you in its grip; it could form what seemed a bottomless swamp; it could become a slimy coating over the road surface which might slide you and your car unceremoniously into the ditch.

Dust, naturally, was something else. A period of hot, dry weather combined with heavy traffic over a stretch of road might grind the exposed portion of the road into a layer of yellow powder. This dust was often of such depth that it became a pronounced drag on the wheels of the car. And then, if there was any wind at all, the dust blew everywhere. After a few hours’ exposure to millions of tiny granules, you could actually taste it. A banner attached to the back of a car reading “Excuse my dust” was a fairly common sight. We even sported one in those early days.

There were pleasures in dirt road riding, however, if you could put up with the swaying and bouncing through the countryside at 15 miles an hour, with occasional bursts up to 25. We might have a feeling, for example, when our wheels first rolled onto the dirt surface, on our way to the lake, that we were meeting an old friend, one we hadn’t seen since the preceding summer. Except for a few brief Sunday afternoon rides, we had been confined to the city all through the autumn, winter, and spring. We had become accustomed to breathing all manner of noxious gases, including just plain coal smoke, of which, in those days, there was plenty. And there had been smells which seemed magnified by the stagnant air and intensified by the burning sun. After being exposed to this stench for nine months, it came almost as a shock to rediscover fresh air.

Our road would bring us more pleasures as it led us past well-kept farms, through shaded woodlands, across lazy, rock-floored streams. We would find the air not only clean, but laden with new delights from fields of wheat, clover, and buckwheat. There was, too, the perfume of wayside flowers, as well as the distinct aroma from the mosses of a wooded glen. Even the overturned earth of a newly plowed field had a pleasing smell. And here and there along our way would be a farmhouse whose barnyard carried to our nostrils its own familiar smells — some pleasant, some not so pleasant, but all so intimately part of life in the country.

The landscape around a farmhouse usually included some chickens — anywhere from five to 50 of them. These poor, dumb creatures wandered aimlessly about the yard of the house, or the barnyard, or along the side of the road. And of course it was an even bet that any chicken on one side of the road, at the approach of a car, would suddenly decide (if a chicken was capable of deciding) that she simply must be on the other side of the road. Motorists usually tried to avoid running over them; perhaps the driver did have some responsibility in that respect. But any law

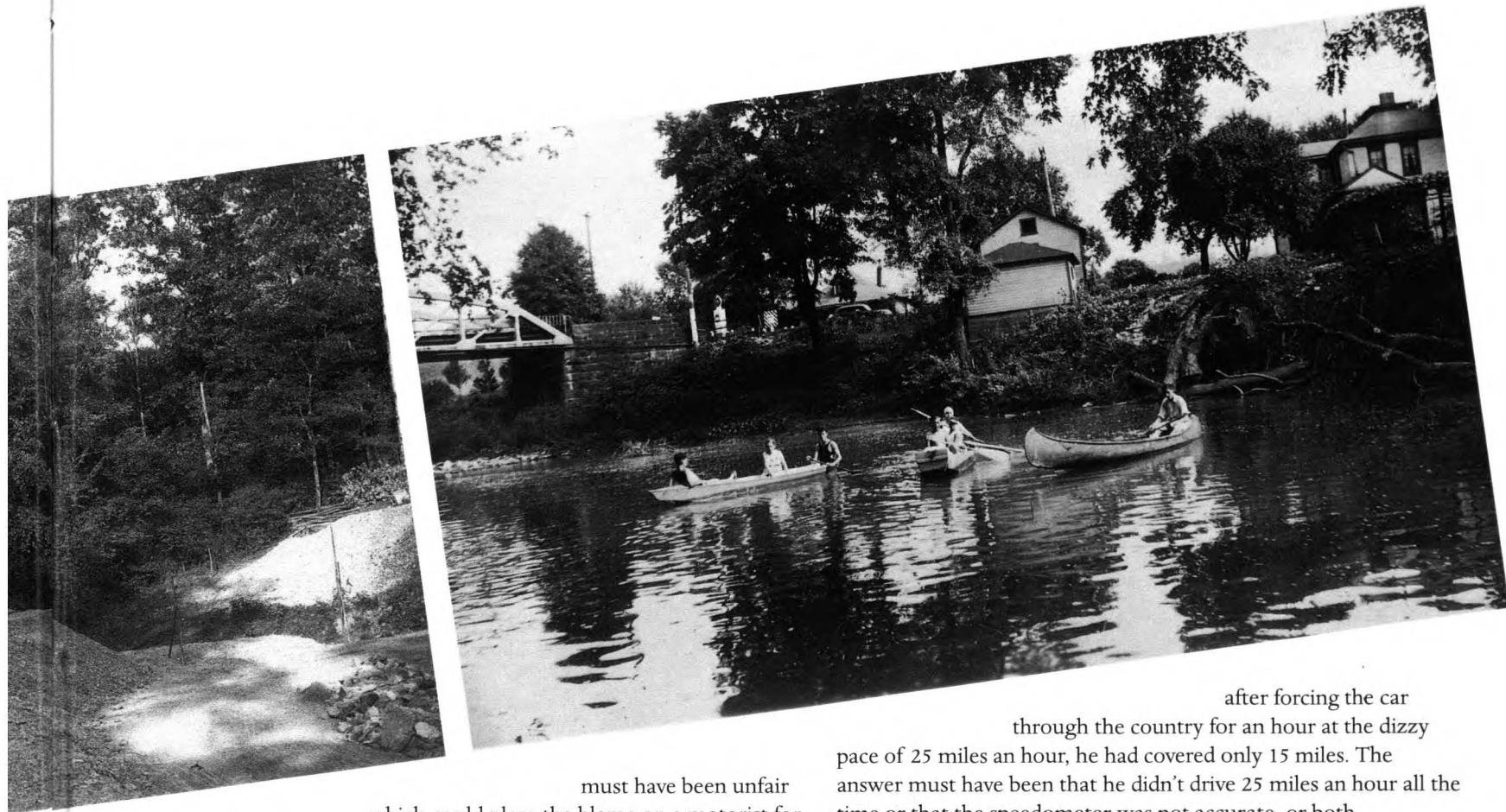
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**Above:** Bronson Luty's father Bert posed with the family car about 1914. **Middle:** Bronson Luty's daughter believes this is Perry Highway near Ingomar Road. It appears improvements are underway, possibly a fill or culvert. **Right:** The Luty car passed over Connoquenessing Creek when leaving Harmony.





must have been unfair which could place the blame on a motorist for hitting one of these wildly running fowl. Anyway, it was not unusual to see a farmer running from his house or barn, protesting loudly at what he thought was some passing driver's disregard for his chickens' safety.

If a dirt road was properly cared for, it was scraped periodically, especially in the spring. Through the summer, fall, and winter, the dirt in the center portion was pushed by the traffic to the sides and into the ditches in the form of dust and mud. Holes and ruts developed at the same time. In order to fill in these holes and ruts, and at the same time to remove some of the high places, the road was scraped. And while the ditches were cleaned out and reshaped, the excess dirt was thrown onto the center portion, where it became part of the scraping operation.

Having covered the [dirt road area between Perrysville and Wexford, and the] six-mile stretch of macadam paving from Wexford to the Butler County line, we reached the last "jumping off place." Allegheny County and all paved roads would soon be only memories behind us.

It was about two hours from the time that we pulled away from our house in Pittsburgh's North Side until we were descending the gentle grade into Zelienople. "What took you so long?" you might well ask. (We had covered less than a third of our journey.) My father, too, used to wonder why it took so long. He carried a small notebook with him on these trips and at the end of each hour, deducting stops, he would write down the mileage we had covered in the last hour. But he could never understand why,

after forcing the car through the country for an hour at the dizzy pace of 25 miles an hour, he had covered only 15 miles. The answer must have been that he didn't drive 25 miles an hour all the time or that the speedometer was not accurate, or both.

In those days, even the main street of Zelienople was not paved. There were some stretches of sidewalks of stone or brick. The hotel was at the main corner, and the school house at the next corner on the other side of the street. As we drove through the town on that June day, we had to turn right just beyond the "business section," because the road straight ahead past the stone church, and over the bridge spanning Connoquenessing Creek, was still years in the future.

We would hardly leave Zelienople before we would be in Harmony. This town still breathed of the simple charm built into its beginnings by the Harmony Society 100 years before. There was a touch of more modern construction in the wooden bridge over the B & O Railroad in the middle of the village, but even its rough timbers, darkened by age and soot, were taking on an ancient appearance. The roadbook told us to turn right at the Hotel Beam, and a short distance beyond we would swing suddenly up to the left and over the creek on an iron bridge.

Beyond Harmony, and all the way to Mercer, seemed to be a lonely stretch of road, a ribbon of dirt and dust that threaded its way through a thinly settled region. There were hills and valleys that cut across its path; there were forests that crowded up to its very edge. What farms there were appeared to be only partly used or cultivated, giving the whole area a desolate, neglected aspect.

The hills which we encountered were enough to keep this part of the journey from being monotonous. In the primitive cars of those days, one was very conscious of hills. Our car had three





With almost no traffic, the Luty car found it easy to pull off to the left. Even on dry days, cars kept to the single pair of ruts in the middle. Culverts like the one mid-picture could trap cars in any kind of weather.



speeds forward, generally known as "low," "second," and "high." (Some catalogues and instruction books referred to second as "intermediate" but, understandably, the term never caught on). It was common practice, and frequently necessary, when approaching a hill of any magnitude, to "make a run for it," or "rush it." This meant that the driver gripped the steering wheel a little more tightly and pushed the accelerator (also known as the "gas pedal") to the floor as he approached the bottom of the hill. He hoped in this way to attain such a speed that the momentum of the car, plus the engine's feeble contribution, would carry the machine and its occupants over the brow of the hill "in high" without shifting into second gear.

Rushing a hill added a bit of excitement to what sometimes became a tiresome experience. I suspect, too, that the driver often started his rush a little sooner than necessary and pushed a little harder with his foot for that very reason: to relieve the monotony. There was exhilaration for the passengers, too, in those bursts of speed, although I would judge from my mother's occasional protests that she did not always share in the general enthusiasm.

Then, after that mad dash at the bottom of the hill, would come that disheartening period, when the car could be felt to slacken its speed as it ascended the grade. Now a tenseness might develop among all of us; I can remember pressing my feet against the floor as though there was an accelerator under each of them, [hoping] that my efforts might add to the car's velocity. But there would be hills which would defy all our efforts, and on which we would have to drop into second gear. It was always a slow, noisy, degrading ordeal.

In between the hills, on the other hand, were often reasonably level stretches where driving and riding were much easier. Here we could sit back, at least partially, and relax in whatever pleasures there were in dirt road driving.

Accustomed as we are now to "parades" on our highways, moving as though on gigantic concrete belts, it is difficult to picture a dirt road on a summer afternoon of 1914 or 1915. In that time, one might drive for miles without seeing a single car, so that meeting another car became somewhat of an event. If the other machine was coming in the opposite direction, the incident was over rather quickly. Each driver, presumably, steered his car as far to his right as possible and, assuming that the road was wide enough, the danger of a sideswiping or a head-on collision was soon past.

One car overtaking another car going in the same direction could lead to a more drawn out, sometimes exciting, incident. To begin with, the encounter might be friendly, impersonal, or even competitive. For example, there was among these dirt road travelers a sort of unorganized brethren who seemingly had a warm feeling for everybody. Among these kindly people, it was not unusual for a driver or occupant of one car to wave a friendly greeting to a driver or passenger of another car.

Other drivers and passengers followed a code which has survived until today: ignore all people in other cars; stare straight ahead when passing them; pretend that you don't see them. Then there was that deadly group of drivers who, when one overtook

another, immediately became antagonists, neither one being willing to concede that the other could drive faster or had a better car. So would result a race, spontaneous and without rules except, perhaps, those of survival.

Imagine a road of uncertain surface, filled with bumps, ruts and ridges of dust, with barely space for the two cars to race neck-and-neck through the aisle formed by the shrubbery that lines its ditches. So close is that shrubbery that a bush or tree branch sometimes scrapes the side of one of the onrushing cars. Or picture a stretch where the main feature of the road is a high crown, which forces each driver to continually pull his car toward the center as far as possible without actually hitting the other car or forcing it into the ditch on his side. All this takes place at 25 or 30 miles an hour which, under those conditions and in cars of that day, was a breakneck speed. One circumstance, however, favors the racers: in that sparsely settled country, the probability of a car coming in the opposite direction is close to zero.

There were times, too, when one car overtook another and the competitive spirit between the drivers was missing. Then the following driver had a decision to make: to pass or not to pass. If the road was dry loose dirt, following closely was out of the question because of the choking yellow cloud of dust being thrown out by the car ahead. So the driver either stepped on it or dropped back.

Incidentally, when a motorist intended to pass a car going in the same direction, he usually blew his horn. Sending out this signal might serve various purposes: it could be a friendly greeting, a warning, or even a challenge for a race. And in the early cars, horns were actually "blown" by squeezing a rubber bulb mounted beside the driver's seat. Then there was introduced a horn which was activated by electricity. Our first car came equipped with one of those electric "horns," but it wasn't much more than a buzzer, which could not be heard at a distance of more than 20 feet on a still night, even with the engine not running. My father soon replaced that original horn with a much noisier model, similar to a "Klaxon," which had the ability to scare everybody, including the occupants of the car on which it was mounted.

Some 15 miles north of Harmony, at the turn in the road just before it crossed Slippery Rock Creek, was a shady spot which we called "Table Rock." This was our regular stop for lunch, which somehow had been packed in the car, with everything else. We

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or 1915.*



were always well aware of approaching this stopping place, because for a distance of probably a half a mile the loose dirt had been washed away from the road to such an extent that the wheels of our car as we descended the grade would drop from ledge to ledge of exposed rock as we descended, with screeching two-wheel brakes, into the valley of the stream.

Table Rock derived its name from a flat slab of rock probably 8-feet-square and 2 to 3 feet thick, its top some 3 feet above the road. Along the side toward the road ran a wooden watering trough, fed by a nearby spring. To travelers on a hot dusty road in summertime, the watering trough was like an oasis in the desert, a refreshing pause for man and beast. To those two categories, which would naturally include our dogs, we could add a third — the machine. It usually had to have a drink, too, and this from a folding canvas bucket which was standard equipment on a journey to the lake. Everybody was hungry and everything tasted good; seldom was there much left. We were refreshed and ready for the three hours or more which we would require to complete our journey. The road still crosses the stream at that same location, but the iron bridge was replaced years ago. The rock from which we ate so many enjoyable picnic lunches has been broken up piece by piece. The watering trough is just a memory.

Perhaps, while we were pausing to eat, father would take the opportunity to check the gasoline supply. The gasoline tank was under the front seat, so he removed the seat, unscrewed the cap from the tank, and lowered a graduated stick into the hole. It was an accurate measurement as long as the car was level. So, as we crossed the rattling boards of the bridge spanning the creek, father might have said, "We had better stop in Harlansburg for gasoline." That town did not boast of anything as up to date as a garage. So if

we paused there for gasoline, it would have been at the General Store. The storekeeper probably brought it out in a 5-gallon can and inserted a large funnel into the opening in the tank — this of course after the occupants of the front seat had stepped down to the road and someone had lifted out the seat. Sometimes the funnel had a piece of chamois skin placed over its top, to filter out the dirt from the gasoline; otherwise we would hope that when we were on our way the dirt would pass through our fuel line and carburetor without causing the

engine to cough and sputter, and perhaps die altogether on some lonely section of road.

There were times that we rocked and rattled over this part of the journey between Harmony and Mercer in the dark of night, and that was a weird, even frightening experience. The twin yellow beams sent out by our headlights seemed like brilliant shafts, in contrast to the inky blackness which they pierced. Sometimes these quivering lights picked out trees along the side of

the road which sent ever-shifting shadows to play strange tricks on other shrubbery beyond them. And beyond that, and all around us, was darkness, complete and absolute. Surrounding us, it caused us to feel very much alone.

Occasionally, with night seeming to shut us in on both sides, we might pass a farmhouse, but here was little to dispel our feeling of loneliness. Not a light could be seen; if there were people inside, all had retired for the night. This was years before the days of radio and television; few farm people even enjoyed the convenience of electric light. And as we clattered by, a dog might bark at our intrusion into the pervading stillness. Other than that, there might be no sign of habitation from the house or barnyard as we plunged on into the blackness.

Whether by night or by day, there was the ever-present fear that something would happen to the car. If something did, you hoped that you could fix it. Roadside tire repairs were commonplace; in the dark they just took a little longer. If the car developed some mechanical ailment which you couldn't repair, you tried to limp to the next village for help. If your car wouldn't go at all, you walked or thumbed your way to the village. There you hoped to find some resourceful garage-keeper or blacksmith who could stop a leaking radiator, or wire something together, or tighten something so that you could at least complete your journey the same day under your own power.

There were villages, of course, such as Middle Lancaster, Portersville, Harlansburg, and Leesburg. However, finding help in one of them after dark in those times would have been a rare feat. If they had had sidewalks, they would have taken them in at night. Instead, they just closed everything up tight, usually leaving only a few lights burning which, if you happened to be traveling through, gave the buildings along the highway a ghostly appearance; they seemed to march past in solemn procession in the opposite direction.

An hour's driving from Harlansburg would take us to Mercer. As we rounded a bend about a mile south of the town, assuming it was still daylight, we saw the county courthouse standing proudly on the hill on which the town is centered. When we first drove to the lake, it was less than 10 years old and its fresh red brick and gleaming cut stone trim stood out cleanly against the bright blue sky.

Mercer was to us a giant milestone on our journey. The worst was over now; from here on the country would suddenly appear to level off. Then, too, the soil in this region was of such a nature that proper road care always produced an excellent driving surface. So, not only were we on the last lap of our trip, but the road would become noticeably straighter and smoother.

Greenville would be next — a busy, well kept town, and home of important shops and offices of the Bessemer Railroad. It was a relief to ride evenly over its neat, brick-paved streets, after bouncing over 60 miles of dirt and stones. The road book, if we consulted it, would tell us to turn right at the National Hotel, at what appeared to be the center of town. Out that street and around a turn to the left, for possibly a mile, would bring us to the end of pavement and we would hit the dirt again.

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Heading north, the road became dirt and rolled with the land. The towns it passed through were still rural outposts.





Bronson  
Luty's  
mother,  
Jessie, and  
his sister,  
Eugenie,  
upon arriving  
at the lake,  
1915.





A few miles more, and we would pass through Osgood, an experience which would test the nerves of even the most stout-hearted traveler. Heading north, toward the lake, this adventure would begin by crossing the main line of the Erie Railroad at grade as our road began its descent into the valley of Crooked Creek. This was one of those sections of road on which shifting into second gear was strongly advised, if not absolutely necessary. After crossing the tracks, the road curved sharply to the left and dropped more steeply until it took us onto the rattling iron bridge over the creek. At this moment if we looked up, and it were daylight, we would see the massive steel bridge which carried the Bessemer "cut-off" freight line, probably 50 feet over our heads. Just after leaving the bridge over the creek, we would cross the original Bessemer track, still used then by passenger trains. A steep, winding climb would take us to one more grade crossing, this time over the New York Central branch to Franklin and Oil City. And all this took place within a distance of no more than a half-mile. At night, with the half-hearted headlights common to cars of that period, it could be a particularly scary place. Then, as a welcome relief from that valley of horrors, we would pass through the peaceful village of Osgood, a cluster of a dozen houses and possibly one store.

We were paralleling the Bessemer tracks now, passing through Adamsville. A right turn in Hartstown, across the railroad at grade, close by the typical Bessemer grey and black station, and then a jog to the left would take us past Crystal Lake. Finally, somewhere between six and eight hours after leaving our house in Pittsburgh, we rolled into Conneaut Lake town.

The entrance to the town was the same route now followed by the highway, but whether road or "street," it was still just plain dirt. The "burg," as we affectionately called it (and still do) was like most other villages of the day. The dirt roads ran right through the towns, even though they might be dignified by names such as "Water Street" or "Main Street."

If we drove through the town in daylight, there was that breathtaking moment when we crossed the railroad track and had our first glimpse of the lake. In that quick look, we might also catch the steamboats, tied to the dock in the foreground. If our arrival was after dark, we might see only a blackness where we knew the lake should be, with a few lights along the shore.

The "main road" (today Route 18) was so-called because it was an important thoroughfare, leading north past the lake, on through Harmonsburg, Conneautville, Springboro, and Albion. However, important as it was, its surface was dirt like all the other roads around the lake. We would drive a mile more and then pass the Quigley farmhouse on our left, where the Midway road led down to the lake. That road was not for us, however. We probably would have been able to navigate it as far as the Midway Hotel, on the lake, but the road from there behind the cottages to our place was little more than a lane, and for automobiles was all but impassable.

So our route took us along the main road past the farm of James Foust on our right, then left down the Oakland Road. We would follow that road down to the lake, past the Oakland Hotel

on our right, then turn left at the steamboat landing. It might seem improbable today, as you walk down the path along the shore south of the Oakland Road, that there was once a road in the space between the bank and the beach and the hill sloping up into the pine trees. But there was; for one thing, traffic wasn't as heavy in those days, and if you were driving along that road and met someone coming in the opposite direction, it might be embarrassing, but nothing more.

And so, at the garage behind our cottage would come an end to the motor trip from our home in the city to the lake. That building had its beginning in the spring of 1913, shortly after our first car joined the family. Along with learning how to handle and care for this new machine, and mapping out a route to Conneaut Lake, my father felt that another matter required his attention: if he got the car from the city all the way to the cottage, there should be a proper shelter for it.

When completed, the structure was one story, 16 by 24 feet, with one end partitioned off for the car. The remainder of the building was finished as a bedroom. My father planned this for his and my mother's exclusive use during his weekends at the lake. There they could enjoy quiet restful nights away from all the talking, singing, and phonograph-playing which was usually being generated by the rest of us, "the younger set" down at the cottage. My father called his new creation "the *boudoir*," a romantic term certainly, but somehow the name never did catch on with the rest of the family.

There were many trips to the lake by car while that journey was still a joyous, dusty, punishing adventure. During those early years, there would be incidents and mishaps which stand out in my memory even now, many years later.

Somewhere in the vicinity of Mercer there may still be a farmhouse which once played a part in our family's history. On one of our pioneering trips, some doubts began to assail us when the blackness of night finally enclosed us. Our situation seemed to become more hopeless by the minute, our future more precarious as we pushed on, knowing that there still remained ahead for us at least 30 miles of dusty, rutted road, stretching out into the pitch black night. So it was that my mother and father decided that driving farther that night was unwise, although they knew that finding lodging for all of us in that lonely country might be a difficult matter.

We were heartened, therefore, a few miles further on, by the appearance of a lone light, stabbing out from the darkness to our right. We located a road which took us to that light and we were

*The entrance to the town was the same route now followed by the highway, but whether road or "street," it was still just plain dirt.*



greatly relieved to find there a farmhouse and a kindly farmer who, with his wife, said they would be pleased to “put us up” for the night. That, to the best of my knowledge, was the only time I ever slept on, or rather in, a feather bed, and what a delightful experience it was.

A new world greeted us the next morning. A sound night’s sleep, a hearty farmer’s breakfast, and a bright June sun flooding the landscape sent us on our way with our hearts singing. We arrived at our cottage for lunch with a memory which we would cherish for years to come.

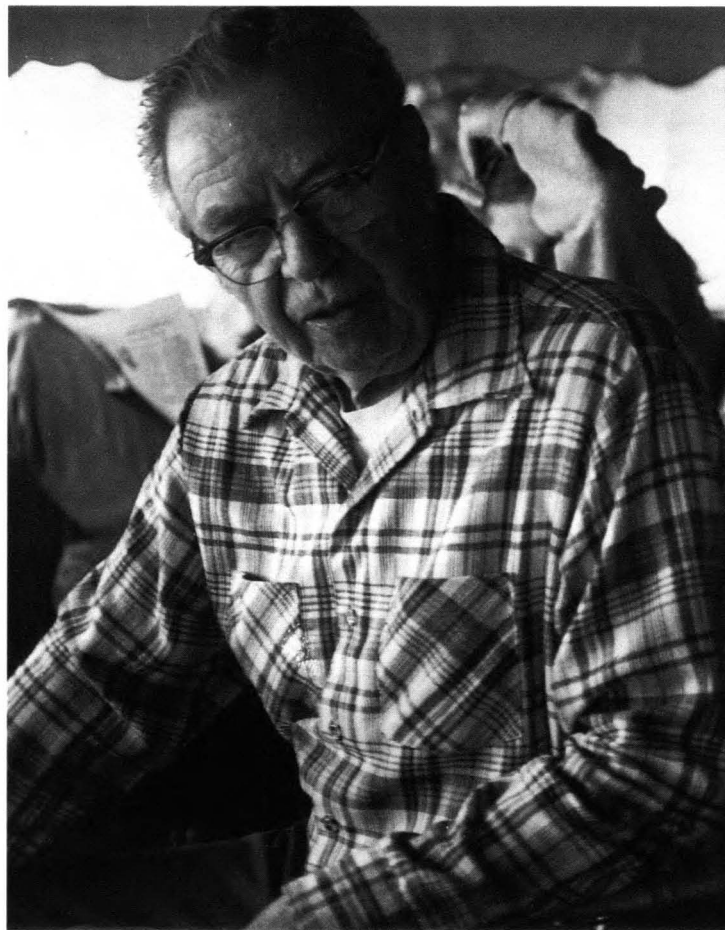
On the other hand, those motor trips could have unpleasant features, too. It could rain, for example. Most of our trips were made with the top up, so we were spared the ordeal of putting it up. But if it rained very hard, and especially if wind accompanied the rain, the driver stopped the car and everybody pitched in to put the “jiffy curtains” in place. These were rectangular sections of black canvas which slid on wires strung along the inside edge of the top, and hung down as far as the tops of the doors. Spaced along their length were vertical pieces of “isinglass,” presumably to see through, but which, after a while, became so scratched and discolored that their only function was to admit a small amount of light into the darkened interior of the car. When not in use, these curtains were folded up, accordion style, and fitted along the inside of the top.

Sometimes, when a sudden rain caught us unawares, it was not uncommon to stop and wait for it to end. Some livery stables and stores had roofs extending out over a portion of the road. If you were so fortunate as to find one of these during a storm, you pulled under it. This, too, might eliminate the annoying task of trying to pull down the jiffy curtains and snap them into place before the rain soaked everybody and everything inside the car.

A summer shower might last less than an hour, but it could leave the dirt road ahead laced with rivulets of freshly running water. Only the foolhardy would venture out onto that stretch of soft, yellow uncertainty, especially with a load of family humanity in the car. So, people often just sat and waited for the road to “dry up.” Today such a suggestion might smack of comedy; but actually between Pittsburgh and the lake, there were stretches of road where the soil was such that the water from a sudden rain could be soaked up in a surprisingly short time.

There are, too, touches of humor in some of my memories of motor travel to and from our cottage. I remember a dark night when we had paused to repair a punctured tire along the road where it parallels the Bessemer tracks north of Osgood. Our solitude was suddenly broken by the figure of a man emerging from the darkness. Probably an employee of the railroad, he was, obviously, under the influence of too many drams from the bottle.

**Bronson B. Luty  
vacationed at  
Conneaut Lake all  
his life, retiring  
there in 1972.**



So, in a manner combining the rule book and an overdose of alcohol, he berated my father for not displaying the proper lights “on his train.” In this case, he had engaged the wrong antagonist. My father, consulting his watch by the yellow glow of our headlights, replied evenly yet emphatically: “I have been here for exactly 17 minutes, and if I want to I will stay here for 17 years.” So ended the discussion, and our railroad friend wavered into the blackness.

So this was motoring, as I remember it, between Pittsburgh and Conneaut Lake, when automobiles were young. Those days of joy, excitement, and suspense are still vivid in my memory, and if I have been able to bring them to you, I am well repaid for my efforts. ☼