

Late in the summer of 1905, 45-year-old G. B. Hippee and his 15-year-old son, Herndon, headed north on an automobile trip. Their destination was Spirit Lake, where G. B. and his wife, Minnie, owned a cottage on the west side of the lake, and his parents owned a cottage at Orleans, the beach and town at the south end of Big Spirit Lake. There was just enough time for a trip to the lake before Herndon returned to school at the Shadduck Military Academy in Minnesota.

The Hippees were driving a 1905 Franklin automobile. The Franklin was air cooled. It had neither a water jacket around the engine nor a radiator, so with less weight, the car had more power. The car had been shipped to Des Moines in pieces and assembled in the yard of the Des Moines Street Railway Company. Hippee was the company's general manager.

Given the condition of Iowa roads in 1905, the trip from Des Moines to Spirit Lake proved to be quite an adventure, as you'll see in the following account written after the trip by G. B. Hippee. Hippee's grandson, Luther L. Hill, Jr., brought it to our attention, and it is with his permission that we reprint it below, edited slightly for publication.

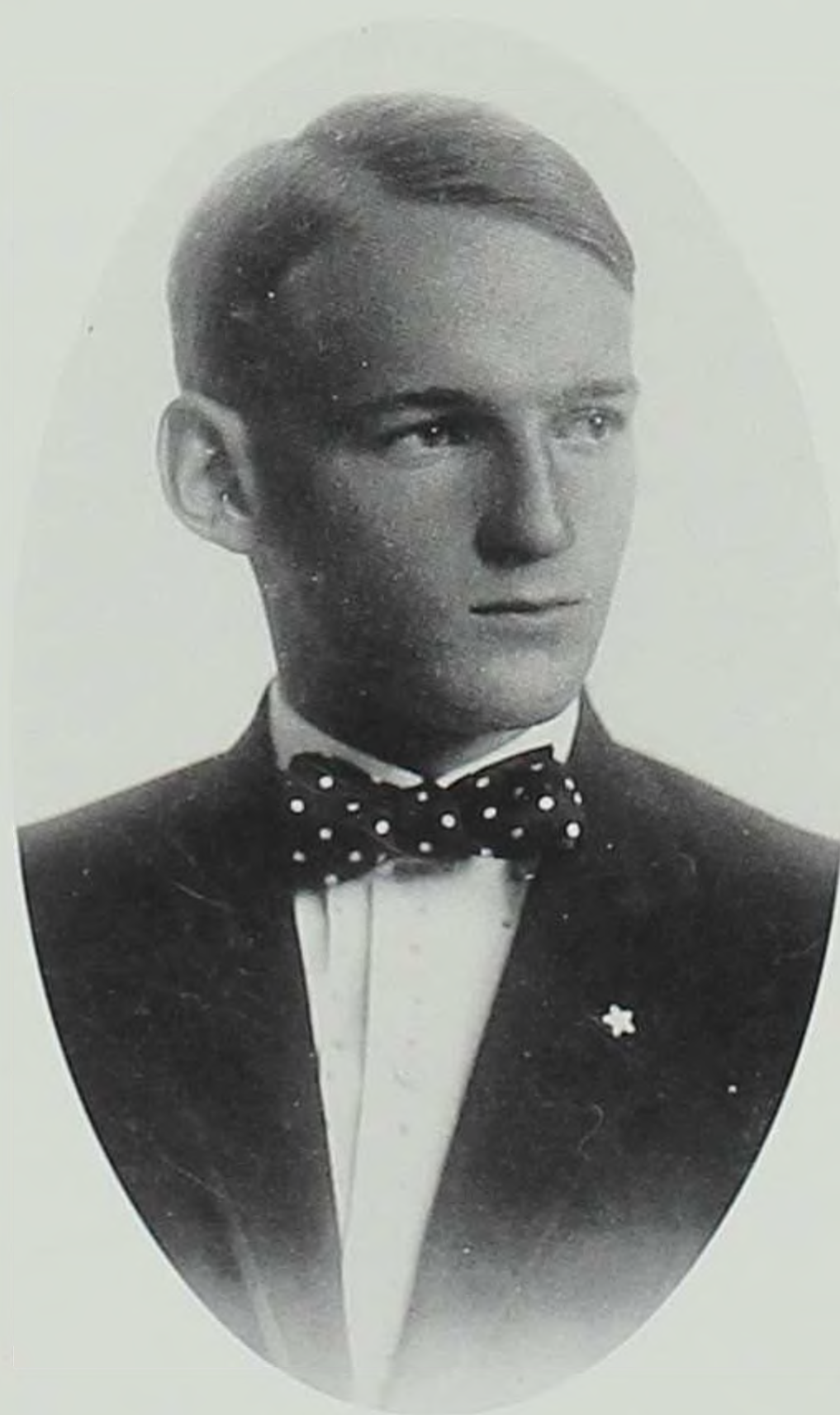
—The Editor



G. B. Hippee

A 1905 Auto Trip to Spirit Lake

by G. B. Hippee



Herndon Hippee

Wednesday

Herndon and I left Des Moines at 6:40 o'clock, August 31, 1905. Everything worked all right until we got about two or three miles east of Waukee, when we struck the worst piece of road I ever had to drive a machine over. It seems that the graders were working on this road the Saturday previous and had run their road scrapers and plows over it, and it was nothing but a mixture of soft earth and big clods and everything of that kind that had been thrown up in the center, and the heavy rains on Saturday night came on top of this and they had not touched it since; it was practically a road with no bottom. We had to put chains on our wheels to get traction to pull through. It took us almost three hours to make the

three miles into Waukee. Before we got through we were both in good swearing mood, and I did not blame Herndon for swearing some, because I did it myself, and felt like doing a good deal more. After we got to Waukee we took our chains off, and from there to Ortonville the road was in splendid shape. At Ortonville we turned north and the road to Dallas Center was good, and from Dallas Center to Woodward the roads were poor, and we had considerable trouble before we got into Woodward. We reached Woodward about 1:30 and left there about 2:30. From Woodward to Ogden, thence north to Pilot Mound, thence to Dayton, the road was simply elegant. No asphalt pavement could have been better. The machine could run at

the limit of its speed, and we let it run. This is a beautiful country; well settled, and the farmers are all rich and well-to-do. They all have good houses and barns and their places are well fenced and kept up. It is the garden spot of the State of Iowa. Going into Dayton we got our first view of the beauties of a rough, rolling country. We went down a long hill, crossed a small river or creek, to Dayton, and this was a very pretty, scenic effect. One that pleased Herndon very much. From Dayton the road angles from the east over to Lehigh, which is a coal mining town on the Upper Des Moines River. It is about eighteen miles south of Fort Dodge. The banks at this point are very high, and very beautiful. It resembles a great deal the banks of the Hudson. They are abrupt and steep and covered with heavy foliage, and it is one of the most beautiful sights I have ever seen; in fact I do not believe there is anything handsomer on the Hudson than the bluffs on the Des Moines River going into and coming out of Lehigh. The road winds and twists down these bluffs to get into the town and to the valley. It reminds one very much of one of the mountain roads in Colorado, as it twists and winds around to climb the mountain. At Lehigh we crossed to the east bank of the Des Moines River and climbed a very steep hill. While the hill was steep the machine had no trouble whatever in ascending the grade. As the sun was shining almost directly up the river, the view from this hill was simply magnificent. Herndon wanted to stop and camp out at this place, he was so taken with the country. From Lehigh our road wound round in a northwest direction to Fort Dodge. Just east of Fort Dodge we passed through what is called Gypsum City, where there are several of the

largest gypsum mills in the United States. These mills are all white. They are white from the gypsum dust that covers them, as gypsum is a rock that is ground and used as plaster for the walls of our houses. From Gypsum City we ran into Fort Dodge in a very few minutes, and got there about 7 p.m., put our machine in the stable at the Duncombe House, and got our supper and room. Fort Dodge is a very pretty place, with several

ful, but it was anything but beautiful this morning. We had to run on our slow speed all the time. Along about 1 o'clock we stopped at a farm house and got a lady, after talking to her awhile, to get us something to eat. She got us each a cup of tea, fried eggs and apple sauce. Herndon was very enthusiastic. He said it was the best meal he ever had eaten. Of course it was because he was exceedingly hungry. After our dinner was over

The road was simply elegant. No asphalt pavement could have been better.

well paved brick and asphalt streets. While we had a little hard luck when starting out of Des Moines by striking bad roads, yet we made very good time this day, making one hundred and two miles, as shown by the register on our machine. The weather on this day was delightful; not a cloud in the sky and was nice and warm. This was Wednesday night.

Thursday

Along about 4 o'clock Thursday morning, it did not rain at Fort Dodge, it simply poured, and kept it up until 10:00 o'clock in the morning, but after looking the ground over, Herndon and I concluded we would tackle it, so we chained our wheels again and started out. We left Fort Dodge, crossing the river, going to the west bank and climbing another very steep hill to get out of the city, and then took what is known as the Old Humboldt Stage Road, along the west bank of the Des Moines River. This road in nice weather would have been beauti-

we worked on our machine a little while, adjusting it and getting it in shape, [and] succeeded in breaking one of the walking beams on one of the exhaust valves, but we had an extra one so it did not delay us. We then left the farm house and went about two miles north and turned east. We were about nine miles from Pioneer. It took us all afternoon to make nine miles through the mud. We got to Pioneer about 7:00 o'clock in the evening. This is a little station on the Des Moines and Fort Dodge road. We stayed all night in Pioneer, and I think there was another rain that night. I slept pretty well and did not hear it, but the roads looked like there had been more rain.

Friday

We wanted to go from Pioneer to Gilmore City, as Gilmore City is only nine miles from Pioneer, and the railroad track was perfectly straight so we thought it a good idea to get on the railway right-of-way, this we did, and started

down the track. The muddy roads were bad, but this piece of track of the Rock Island was worse. They have not ballasted their road there in the last twenty years from the looks of it. From the ends of the ties the bank dropped off in some places two or three feet. We would go a little ways and then stick, and the differential gear would catch on the ends of the ties and stick, and we would have to pry or jack it off the ties. We soon saw we could not make this. We came near a crossroad, headed the machine down an embankment, and ran a short distance until a fence stopped us. The railroad fence; but we had hammers and axes and simply knocked a board off and took the wire cutters and cut off the wires and went through. We put the board back and left the wires go. From this point we went by mud road to Gilmore City. We got there about 11:30. We stopped in front of a pretty good looking blacksmith shop. I wanted to get the walking beam I broke at the farm house fixed and the blacksmith did a very good job, and made a new one for me. Previous to this time, I had had considerable trouble with No. 4 cylinder, and after talking with them in the blacksmith shop, I found there was quite a gas engine expert, named Heath, as you find in all these smaller towns. They are

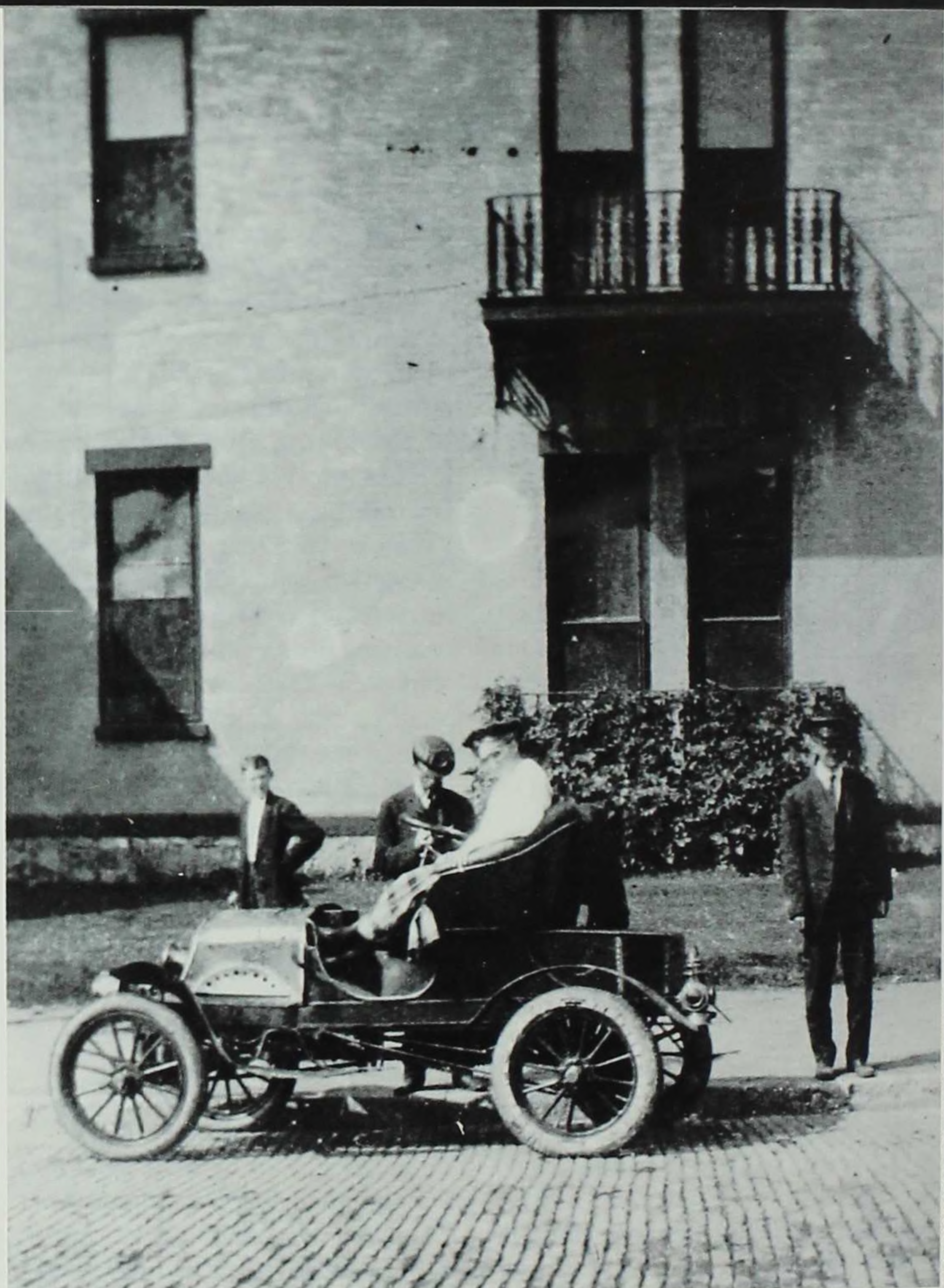
If we had ever gotten into one of them, we could not have gotten out for a week. We simply had to run slow and dodge the mud holes.

more familiar with the gas engine than the people in the city, for the reason that they use more of these small engines for the purpose of pumping water, grinding feed,

told him that was easily fixed, we could take it off. We took it off and it worked fine. We thought we would then put it back, so back we put it and it would not work.

etc. I found the man and he looked over my machine, and finally decided the exhaust pipe was stopped up in the No. 4 cylinder. I

This stumped him. He did not know what to make of it. Finally he suggested that if it will work without a pipe, why don't you cut it out and leave an open air exhaust. I thought this a very sensible piece of advice so I took off the pipe and simply let the cylinders all exhaust in the open air. This makes a noise like a battery of light artillery coming up. You can hear it for two miles. It is a quick, sharp report, almost exactly like a rapid firing gun; but just the same the machine ran and ran fast. We left Gilmore City about 3:15, got to Mallard, Iowa, a small



Herndon Hippee sits at the wheel of the Franklin, parked in Fort Dodge.

ALL PHOTOS PAGES 22-27 COURTESY OF LUTHER L. HILL, JR.

station on the Des Moines and Fort Dodge, at 7 p.m., and stayed all night there.

Saturday

We left Mallard the next morning at 9 o'clock a.m., through Spencer and when about three miles north of Spencer to make the thing complete for us, and be sure we had not missed any trouble, a tire bursted. This meant another delay, getting down, taking off the tire, patching the inner tube and then put it back again. While this is not necessarily a hard job, it is a slow one, and it was the delay we

were just sitting down to supper, but they heard us a long ways off and were out to meet us as we came down the hill, and we came down the hill, flying, too. This was 7 p.m., Saturday, September 3d. Our total mileage on this trip from Des Moines to Spirit Lake was two hundred and twenty-six miles. The first day we made one hundred and two miles, the second day thirty-six miles in the mud, and the last day we made sixty-six miles; but the machine was none the worse for it, and was in perfect running shape when we got to Spirit Lake.

I spent most of my time at

As we left Ruthven the infernal reverse gear got balky and this time locked the machine, so I just disconnected the gear entirely and did not have any reverse to my machine.

swore about more than the puncture. From Fostoria to Milford we struck a rotten road, and it certainly was a bad piece of road, muddy and full of ruts. If we had ever gotten into one of them, we could not have gotten out for a week. We simply had to run slow and dodge the mud holes. But after we left Milford the roads were good and we sailed into Okoboji and thence into Spirit Lake. After we pulled up the long hill north of Milford at the top, we got our first view of Okoboji Lake. It is a beautiful sight. We did not stop at Spirit Lake village except to send a telegram to Des Moines and stop for a few minutes at Father's and Mother's cottage to speak to them, but went right straight to our own cottage. Harry [Harry Polk, Minnie's younger brother] and George [George Polk Hippee, G. B. and Minnie's oldest son]

Spirit Lake getting the cottage in shape, the wood blinds fixed on better, so that thieves and fishermen could not break in so easily next winter.

Sunday

We left Spirit Lake on our return trip Sunday, September 11th, at 12:40. It took about seven minutes to run over to Father's and Mother's cottage and say good-bye to them, and then sail out for Spirit Lake. When just south of Spirit Lake something began to go wrong with our reverse gears. I did not like the sound of them. I got out, tightened that up, and everything went all right. We went through Okoboji, down through Spencer, through Ruthven, and were making good time, but just as we left Ruthven the infernal reverse gear got balky and this time locked the

machine, so I just disconnected the gear entirely and did not have any reverse to my machine. We got off the road in leaving Ruthven a couple of miles, but we got back on the main road to Emmetsburg. We went right through Emmetsburg and took the road direct south to Mallard.

Monday

We left Mallard the next morning, ran to Rolfe, thence to Plover, thence to Gilmore City, thence direct east from Gilmore City to the Humboldt road. This is a splendid road from Gilmore City east, well graded and the greater portion of the way has been graveled. We made lively time on this. The Humboldt road was not so good. It is rough and I found that the night before they had quite a rain there, but it did not give us much trouble. When we struck the Humboldt road we turned south and rode directly into Fort Dodge. We got there at 1:15, went to the Duncombe House and got dinner. At 2:15 we left Fort Dodge and started for Lehigh. We found some bad roads between there and Lehigh. We had to go over a portion of the road they were working on with road scrapers, but got through without any accidents. As we got to the long, steep hill going into Lehigh, we had the reverse disconnected on our gear and could not use that as an emergency brake. I said to Herndon, as we were going down this grade, "What would become of us if this foot brake would go back on us?" He said, "You would use your slow speed clutch." I said, "Would that hold us?" He said, "It would stop us going so fast." I said, "Let's try it," and with that put my hand on the lever and threw her into slow motion. Herndon



As children watch from behind, G. B. Hippee and his wife, Mildred ("Minnie"), pose in their Franklin auto at Spirit Lake.

yelled at me not to do it, that we were going too fast, but it was all done so quickly that I had the machine thrown into a slow speed before I heard him. He said, "You

a blacksmith shop owned by a man named Jack Stewart. He was one of the most accommodating and obliging men that I have ever met, for a stranger. This was 3:30

We were close to a blacksmith shop owned by a man named Jack Stewart. He was one of the most accommodating and obliging men that I have ever met, for a stranger.

will strip your gears," and that is what I did. When we got to the foot of the hill, we could not start the machine. Something was broken in the gears. We were close to

o'clock. The only thing to do was to take off the front of the machine and examine the gears and see what the trouble was, so we went to work on it. He was helping us

in the meantime, giving us the use of his tools, and, in fact, doing part of the work. We got off the gear shield and found we had broken a tooth out of one of the gears, filed it off nice and clean, took out the broken pieces and supposed it would run after we had put it together again. We got it together and it was then just about eight o'clock. I tried the machine, but found still a grating noise in it. We pushed the machine in the blacksmith shop for all night and went to the hotel.

Tuesday

Next morning we went to the machine and looked it over. As

Herndon had to start back for school Wednesday night, and this was Tuesday morning, I was afraid to take the machine apart again, as it might bring him into Des Moines too late. I concluded the best thing to do was to load the machine on a [railroad] car and ship it to Des Moines and take the train and come home. So we loaded the machine on a Chicago, Great Western car and had it shipped. The man Stewart got two other men and a team, got planks and cribbing, loaded the machine into a box car and handled it as though he had had experience before, which he said he had in handling traction engines, and he certainly has, as he was an artist in twisting and turning and knowing how [to] get things through small places. He was just twenty-five minutes in putting the machine into a car, blocking wheels and getting the car closed. This is re-

out of the gears on my machine. They both invited me to be sure and come back and arrange my trip to stay over night with them. In fact nobody could have been nicer to me and tried to do more than these two men did, and as soon as I get my machine back and get it fixed up, I am going to Fort Dodge one day and back the next.

With all the hard luck and breaking of the machine the last day, I would not have missed taking this trip for anything. I felt better for being out in the air. It was more recreation than any vacation I have ever taken. I never was tired a moment in handling the machine over the roads. The only thing that made me tired was the mud. Probably if I had not sworn so much, I would not have been so tired. I would swear awhile and then Herndon would swear awhile, but we were both

was not capable of standing, but this machine stood it and never stuck once. We never had a particle of trouble from overheating.

Herndon is one of the best mechanics for a boy I ever saw. He knows how to fix things, and knows just how to get at it. What he and I don't know about the inside of a Franklin machine, I don't believe is worth knowing. Herndon enjoys every minute of his time he is driving over the road. He ran the car quite a good deal himself, but when he is not driving the machine, he is looking around over the country, and is perfectly happy, just so the wheels are moving under him. The last day just before we got into Fort Dodge, he said, "I would rather ride than do anything else. I would just like to ride over the country and look at it."

The northern Iowa country is the greatest place for women to drive I ever saw. The men must be all at work and the women and children driving. We were very careful of every team we met, stopping the auto still on the side of the road, and Herndon going ahead and leading the horses, if necessary, past the auto. In the entire trip we never had an unpleasant or uncivil word from anyone. We tried to respect their rights and not scare their horses and they showed they appreciated it. ♦

Probably if I had not sworn so much, I would not have been so tired. I would swear awhile and then Herndon would swear awhile, but we were both justified in it.

markably fast time and what is better, for all this work done, with what he helped us the night before, the expense of himself and the two men he employed in handling planks and blocking, he only charged me \$5.25. After loading the machine he took me around and introduced me to the banker, the man who runs a little bank at this town, and several other people there, and I made some very nice acquaintances. I told him I was going to get my machine fixed, was coming back, and was going down that long hill into Lehigh if it took every cog

justified in it, as we both said after we got home, we had all the hard luck that was possible to store up in one trip, but what we don't know about running automobiles through mud, and about the capabilities of the Franklin car, is not worth knowing. We gave it a better test and a more severe test I believe on low speed than the car has ever had, because we ran it almost two days on the slow speed, which is very severe on engines and heats them up to a very intense heat, and it is a test that owners of water-cooled machines all claimed an air-cooled machine

The author of this travel account, George Benton ("G.B.") Hippee was a Des Moines business leader, involved in the Des Moines Bank, the Des Moines Street Railway Company, and the Iowa Loan & Trust Company. He died in 1930. His son Herndon Hippee, who accompanied him on the auto trip to Spirit Lake, became a lawyer and practiced in Des Moines.