



Dr. George Arthur Neal in his Model T Ford automobile, ca. 1915. Photographer unknown.
Courtesy of The Southwest Harbor Public Library Collection of Photographs (number 9955)

From Horses to Horsepower: Mount Desert Island's Ten-Year War for the Automobile

Bill Horner, M.D.

This year's *Chebacco* marks the centennial of one of Mount Desert Island's most famous controversies: the admission of the automobile to the island's picturesque roads. As background, it should be remembered that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, an American urban elite created an extensive "pleasure periphery," with seasonal resorts that dramatically reshaped local economies and landscapes. Mount Desert Island and, in particular, Bar Harbor, exemplified this type of resort with the arrival of such familiar American surnames as Vanderbilt, Kennedy, Dorrance, Stotesbury, Ford, Kent, Rockefeller, and Eliot. Affluent summer cottagers developed an exclusive, picturesque retreat, with a local service economy almost completely dependent on tourism. The resulting civic discourse gave rise to many instances of differing opinions as local residents confronted an unprecedented wave of change brought about by a class of people who were often paternalistic and expected deference in return. Most of the townspeople were used to a fairly independent life. Deference did not come naturally, and tension was never far from the surface.¹

The years 1903 to 1913 constituted a decade of disobedience, division, and debate on Mount Desert Island. The local and national press of that time vividly displays the divergent thinking and attitudes that informed the emerging relationship between these very different societal sets as they engaged in the so-called Automobile War.

On April 27, 1909 the *Bangor Daily Commercial* published an editorial entitled "Motor Mania," which commented on the first Eastern Maine Automobile and Motor Show held one week earlier at the Bangor Auditorium: "The gasoline motor car is no longer an experiment. It has demonstrated its usefulness not only as a racing machine for millionaires and cranks to play with, but as a useful vehicle of travel, or for the delivery of packages and mail, for the carrying of passengers for pay, for the transportation of physicians and for so many purposes that in a very wide sense it is now indispensable to civilization."

The Mt. Desert Livery,

Stafford Bros., Proprietors.



*The best equipped livery in the State. Vehicles of all descriptions.
Four-horse Buckboards.*

MAIN STREET, BAR HARBOR, MAINE.

TELEPHONE CONNECTION.

W.H. Davis advertisement. *From the Bar Harbor Record, November 14, 1900*

Automobiles arrived in Bangor in 1900. In 1905, the State of Maine required registration of all motor vehicles and by 1909 there were 4,495 on record.² Not so on Mount Desert Island. Here, the use of automobiles was strictly prohibited. Long embraced by the influential and conservative summer colony, traditional horse-drawn conveyance ruled the day and the island roads.

Indeed, the livery trade on Mount Desert Island was no small economic matter; it was an important income source for the native population. Quite aside from the locals' need for ordinary transportation, the arrival of the summer colony brought with it massive amounts of horse flesh and related appurtenances, as related in this account by authors Lydia Bodman Vandenberg and Earle G. Shettleworth Jr.: "In 1893, Bar Harbor could boast 600 livery horses in town, not including privately owned horses, of which there were many. When the rusticators' privately owned horses arrived on the ferry, it created quite a spectacle, especially by 1899 when more than 1,000 horses clopped down the gangplanks, escorted by their grooms."³ Inventive locals responded to the demand for livery-related equipment such as larger and more comfortable carriages. For example, W.H. Davis, a successful Bar Harbor buckboard builder, is credited with its original design in the 1870s. "The entry was low to the ground, and the carriage offered a pleasant, swaying ride through the scenery. . . . Enterprising buckboard drivers charged passengers \$1.50 for round-trip rides to Schooner Head, Otter Cliffs and Eagle Lake."⁴ Horse racing at the Kebo Valley Club and formal horse shows at Robin Hood Park provided additional entertainment for the summer equine set. As one maven described her day at the 1901 show: "A gay crowd of people on coaches, carriages and afoot, a band playing and the beautiful horses prancing up and down the track made a scene of color, life and gayety."⁵ The Bar Harbor horse show ended for good in 1912.

Specific measures to prohibit automobile use date to 1903, when a law was passed that proscribed their presence on "the Ocean Drive, Bay View Drive from Duck Brook Bridge to Hulls Cove Bridge, the Eagle Lake Road as far as Eagle Lake and the Green Mountain Drive."⁶ Despite this, there is evidence of continuing summer community concern. In its minutes of the August 8, 1905 meeting, the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association, an amalgam of local businessmen and summer cottagers, "instructed its officers to ascertain what public sentiment on this subject now is, and we



Buckboard in front of summer cottage. *Courtesy of the Bar Harbor Historical Society*

accordingly venture to ask the addressee of this communication, as well as any other adults residing in the same house, to sign the accompanying postal card and post it as soon as convenient.” The result of this survey was the so-called Manifesto of 1905, which stated the following:

- ~ Roads are unsuited for automobiles.
- ~ Autos seriously endanger life and property.
- ~ Autos do not contribute to comfort and welfare.
- ~ Autos cause loss to commercial interests.
- ~ Attractions of the place would be spoiled for that element in the community which pays more than half the taxes and “whose sojourn here mainly supports the commerce of the village.”
- ~ Remoteness of place promotes a prolonged stay; autos bring in a “class of people who do not tarry.”⁷

A “class of people who do not tarry” is an interesting, possibly revealing, turn of phrase worthy of further examination. By way of context, it is worth recalling two events of 1903: Henry Ford’s creation of the Ford Motor Company and the granting of a charter to the Hancock County Trustees for

Public Reservations by the Maine Legislature for the purpose of “acquiring, owning and holding lands and other property in said Hancock County for free public use, and improving the same by laying out and building roads and paths and making other improvements thereon.”⁸ By 1916 there would be a mass-produced Model T and a Lafayette National Monument on Mount Desert Island for transient tourists to visit in ever-increasing numbers. Perhaps it is here—in 1905—that one begins to see ambivalence in the cottager ranks. The more progressive Eliots and Dorrs would have seen the benefit to the commons, whereas the more conservative of the wealthy might have framed the conflict in terms of class. We shall see how this plays out as we move through the decade.

During the following summer of 1906, the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association again distributed ballots to members of the summer community. Of the 242 ballots returned, all were predictably negative, some with florid embellishments: “After a while there will be little automobiles—capacity one fool—and I am pained to say the privilege will be demanded of running them into churches during services, or into opera houses, just to annoy the devout and to worry lovers of music. Automobiles on Mount Desert Island? Perish the thought!”⁹

Summer Visitor's Automobile Ballot

It is deemed advisable to obtain the opinions of visitors at Bar Harbor regarding the advisability of allowing automobiles on the roads entering the Village. Every visitor is therefore requested to answer the following questions, to add such remarks as knowledge of the subject may suggest, to date and sign the ballot, and to return it to P. O. Box 376, Bar Harbor. Additional copies of the ballot may be obtained at the offices of the various hotels.

1. Do you favor the admission of automobiles to the Village of Bar Harbor? No

2. Do you favor the admission of automobiles to this neighborhood? No

3. In your opinion would the admission of automobiles tend to increase the prosperity of the place? No

4. Do you own any automobiles? No

5. (to be answered only by heads of families) Of how many persons, including children and servants, does your family here consist? _____

6. Remarks: Every year when I come here, I hire a team from a livery stable for the season. But should automobiles be allowed on this island, I would not dare to drive, and would have to give up coming to Bar Harbor.

Dated, August 27th 1906.

Signature: M. E. Bagley

Bar Harbor Address: The Louisburg

This Summer Visitor's Automobile Ballot was one of 242 contained in the Minutes of the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association of 1906.

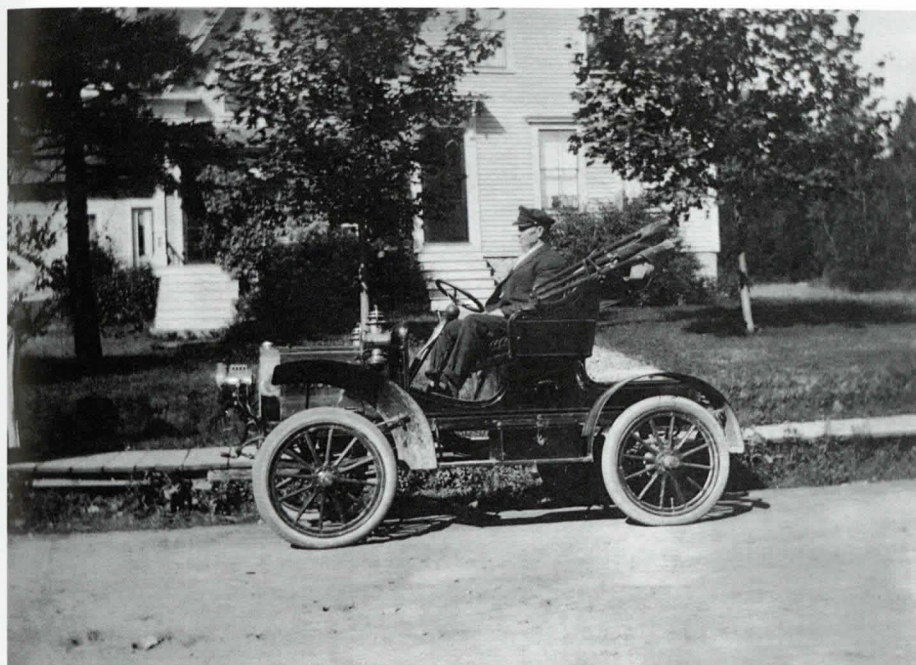
Courtesy of the Jesup Memorial Library

In 1909, a more aggressive stance was taken when the State Legislature passed a new law prohibiting autos from all Mount Desert Island roads, save a special section connecting Tremont to Trenton via Pretty Marsh, Indian Point and Town Hill.¹⁰ This did not sit well with many local residents. As George B. Dorr recalled, “in January, 1909, an attempt was made by a number of the permanent residents of Bar Harbor to obtain repeal of a law passed some years before (1903), when motor cars were still but crude affairs, prohibiting all use of them upon the Island. Duly warned in advance, a committee of summer residents, anxious to maintain the prohibition, was formed which defeated it, but not without criticism afterward of the methods used, a liberal fund being raised and placed where—as was stated later in a famous New York railroad case—‘it would do most good’.”¹¹

Disobedience

The above-referenced attempt by many of the permanent residents incorporated conventional legal and legislative channels, but also included three memorable acts of civil disobedience. The first, in fact, had occurred two years earlier. On August 4, 1907 a Mr. Fordham Mahoney drove his automobile over the then Corniche Drive (now the Paradise Hill extension of Witch Hole carriage trail loop), one of the closed roads. He was arrested, found guilty and fined \$1 plus \$16.69 in costs.¹² Then, on April 5, 1909, as a test of the new law’s blanket prohibition, S.H. Mayo of Southwest Harbor ran his vehicle over the Eagle Lake Road. He, too, was arrested and found guilty in the Bar Harbor Municipal Court. On this occasion, the verdict was appealed to the Maine Supreme Judicial Court, challenging the 1909 law “as unreasonable and arbitrary, contrary to the Constitution of Maine, and of the Fourteenth Amendment of the US Constitution.”¹³ The court took the summer to consider the appeal and by October 1 it was rumored that a decision was imminent. Another Southwest Harbor resident, Dr. J.D. Phillips, in what was likely a planned act of defiance, drove his car up through Somesville to Town Hill, where he “disturbed the early morning quiet of the village with his motor vehicle.” He proceeded on to Hancock, left his car, and returned to Bar Harbor by boat, where he was arrested, quickly tried in a crowded court room, found guilty, and fined \$20 plus costs. The good doctor was then jailed briefly and released when his \$100 bond was posted by W. H. Sherman of Bar Harbor and Herman L. Savage of Mount Desert, both fierce proponents of the law’s repeal.¹⁴

Despite these efforts by local residents and their supporters, the Law Court unanimously upheld the 1909 ordinance of automobile exclusion, noting that “In certain sections of our state, such for example as Mount Desert Island and the vicinity of Bar Harbor, public highways have been constructed along precipitous mountain sides, ravines, and on the very edge of ocean cliffs. The use on such ways of the powerful, swiftly moving and dangerous automobiles must necessarily endanger all who travel thereon and especially those who ride in carriages drawn by horses.”¹⁵



Simeon “Sim” Holden Mayo at the wheel of his 1907 Maxwell automobile, ca. 1910.
Photographer unknown. *Courtesy of Charles Conover Morehouse; number 7487, The Southwest Harbor Public Library Digital Reference Archive*

Division

With this background as context, it is easy to understand that with the opening of the 75th Maine Legislature in January of 1911, the stirring drumbeat of local discontent would crescendo to an outright fusillade of legal argument and confrontation. The evidence suggests that the discourse was divided into three camps: local control, persistent status quo, and compromise, with private funding. Thus began one of the most interesting and colorful chapters in Mount Desert Island’s history.

The *Bar Harbor Record* of February 8, 1911 reflected the prevailing mood with the opening of its front page story: "The fight to open the narrow tortuous roads of Mount Desert Island to automobiles began in Augusta last Wednesday. . . ." The opening salvo was fired by Bar Harbor Representative Shea's introduction of a bill to amend the *Private and Special Laws* of 1903 and 1909. He proposed that automobiles be prohibited "from all roads excepting one continuous highway leading from the town line between Trenton and Eden to a point not more than one-half mile distant from the post office in Bar Harbor."¹⁶ This highway would be designated by the selectmen and the two road commissioners of the town of Eden. Also noteworthy was that W.H. Sherman of Bar Harbor, who will figure prominently in this account, was active in promoting the measure, saying that it would include the old Eagle Lake Road to the Cromwell Harbor Road and down to the Athletic Field on Main Street. This bill was accompanied by petitions signed by 529 of the approximately 1100 voters in the town of Eden, indicating significant local support. The *Bangor Daily Commercial* of one week earlier had defined well the sides of the question:

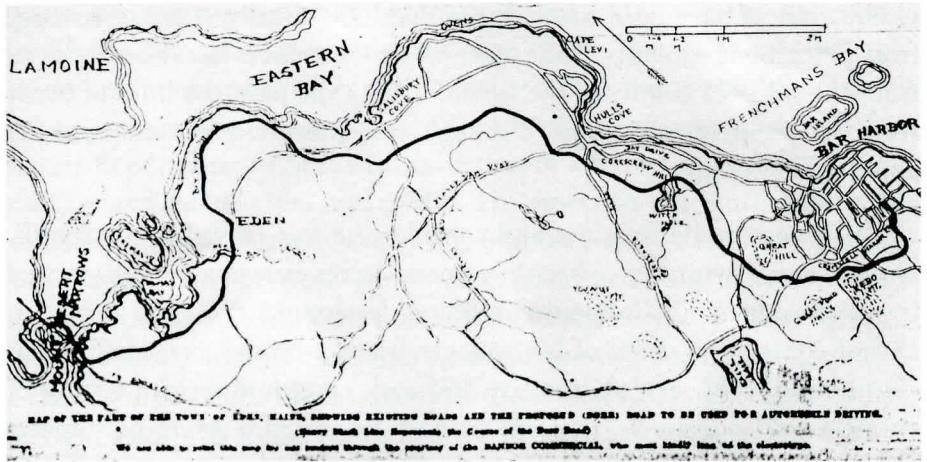
There seems to be a good deal of difference of opinion as to the solution of the matter. A number favor the proposition advanced by George B. Dorr and others to build a private automobile road through as far as possible portions of the town that are not now opened up by roads. Still others feel that if the town should be called into this matter, it is too expensive and uncertain a problem, and favor the taking of some of the least used roads, such as the old Town Hill road and the Eagle Lake road, and opening them up for automobiles to reach town. Still another party are [sic] satisfied with the present prohibition, and a crusade in its favor is already being led by Hon. J.P. Bass of Bangor, who has been all along an ardent advocate of auto exclusion. The matter seems to be a vital one, as far as the town is concerned, and is one of the hardest problems it has been called upon to face.

The first hearing of the Shea bill took place on February 21, 1911 and, as reported by the *Record*, the atmosphere was hot: "A large number of

remonstrances have been made, more than 600 already, it is understood, from permanent residents, while scores of remonstrances have been received from the summer colony of the island." As in the past, the lines of battle were drawn in certain terms, although this year the expected outcome appeared less clear.

It is worthwhile to pause and consider the role played by George B. Dorr. He appears to have been pragmatic in his assessment of motorized transportation and its influence on Island development. At the very least, and in contrast to many of his cottager friends, he saw that change was coming, and was able to conceive and seek compromise in a setting of strongly held positions. In 1906 he had convinced a group of summer residents to obtain a charter from the Maine Legislature for an electric railroad line survey. This line would convey passengers between Bar Harbor and Ellsworth, connecting with the established Maine Central Railroad. The financial commitment was considerable, with the \$40,000 purchase of 12 acres of land from John S. Kennedy of New York for a terminal station. The headline in the July 13, 1907 *Bangor Daily Commercial* read, "Bar Harbor to Have a New Electric Railway." Although the railway never came to pass, the survey remained. Now, five years later, with the focus on the automobile, Dorr said, "Could the change, which I already then foresaw would be in the end inevitable, be brought about gradually, it would be far better; and a thought of how this might possibly be done came to me, which went back for its inspiration to the electric railroad we had made such a thorough survey for."¹⁷ It was at this juncture that he turned to his trusted legal counsel, Luere Babson Deasy, Esq. of the Bar Harbor law firm Deasy & Lynam.

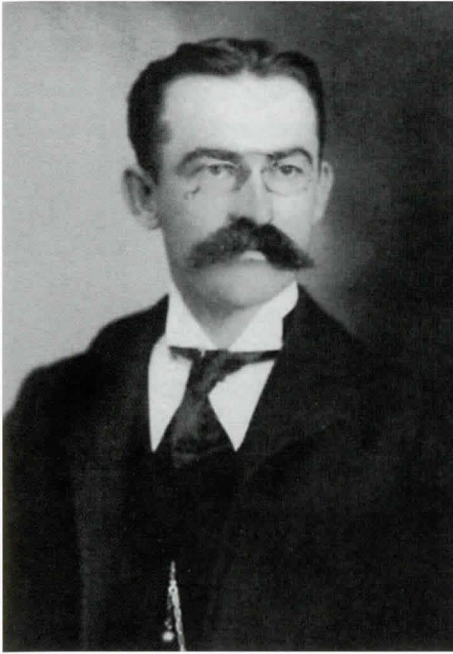
Deasy drafted "An Act relating to the use of Automobiles in the Town of Eden," which was published in full in the *Bar Harbor Record* of March 8, 1911. In seven sections, it precisely laid out a new road extending from the Trenton town line to Ledgelawn Avenue in Bar Harbor. The route followed Dorr's earlier electric railroad survey and was known as "The Dorr One Road." This would be the only road upon which automobiles could be operated. Construction details were specified and it was clearly stated that with but one short exception, the road "shall not follow any now existing road," thus avoiding a conflicting use with horse and carriage. The construction cost would be partially borne by the town's obtaining a loan of up to \$20,000.



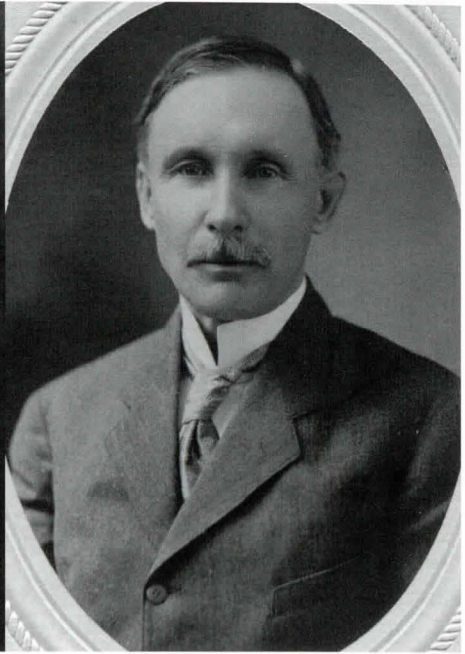
Map of the proposed Dorr One Road.
 From the Bar Harbor Record, March 15, 1911

Here we see an example of Deasy's skill in bridging a gulf in opposing interests and attitudes. Drafting the act must have not been easy for him, given his long association with the Hancock Trustees for Public Reservations and the cottagers. Through an organization known as the Bar Harbor Property Owners' Association, the cottagers had effectively blocked previous efforts to introduce the automobile, as we have seen. Now, and with George B. Dorr's urging, Deasy had changed tactics: rather than persist with obstructionism, he had strategically worked out a compelling solution, an alternative to the locals' bill.

William H. Sherman, a Bar Harbor stationer and member of the Maine legislature, was the chief advocate of the locals' position. Seeing weakness in the Shea proposal, he and E.N. Benson, Esq. presented a new draft in which, as Mr. Dorr emphasized, "it was pointedly brought out at the hearing on the bill that this road, would affect 12 of the drives on the island, which were advertised and the rates of fare for which were published in the souvenir and guide book printed by Mr. Sherman." This guidebook would become a valuable tactical asset for Mr. Deasy in the ensuing debate, for it described some of the drives in promotional and lavish terms: "In some places the road runs down close to the water's edge; in others it winds along the edge of a precipice, at the base of which, hundreds of feet below, the ocean is beating and throbbing continually."¹⁸



Representative W. H. Sherman.
*From Vandenberg and Shettleworth,
Bar Harbor's Gilded Century, 1850-1950.*
Source: Bar Harbor Masonic Lodge



Luere B. Deasy, Esq., ca. 1915.
Courtesy of Bill Horner, M.D.

Debate

The showdown, if it can be called that, took place before the Judiciary Committee of the Maine Legislature on March 10, 1911. An official record of the proceedings does not appear to exist, but fortunately Mr. Dorr was present and provides this colorful reminiscence:

The Legislative Hearing on the question of opening the Town of Bar Harbor to motor cars, which extended to include the entrance from the bridge, was held before the Judiciary Committee in its large auditorium, with seats sloping down toward the front and a dais on which sat the committee—one of the largest and most important in the Legislature. The room was crowded, every seat taken, with others standing at the back, for the question had aroused great interest.

The Bar Harbor summer-resident committee, a number of whose members had come up for the hearing, was

represented legally by Mr. Deasy; William Sherman, Town Clerk and stationer at Bar Harbor, and Representative to the Legislature, led the townsfolk seeking repeal. He and Mr. Deasy, as representing their respective cohorts, both sat centrally opposite the Committee, which was seated in a row with their chairman in the middle. Altogether, it was a notable gathering and impressive scene, showing forth alike the importance of the occasion and the dignity of the law.

Mr. Deasy, who had secured an initial advantage by using my survey to offer a constructive solution of the problem instead of waiting on the introduction of the townsfolk's bill and then opposing it, opened the hearing, presenting the case for his committee with telling force. He had got hold of a publication sold by Mr. Sherman at his stationery shop, which, published as a guide to Bar Harbor, bore his name. In it was stated that one of the chief assets of the town as a resort was its picturesque, exciting drives "skirting the edge of precipitous cliffs, descending into deep ravines, rising up to commanding heights with glorious views. . . ." From this Mr. Deasy read such portions as were suited to his purpose, and ended by asking:

"Now, Gentlemen, do you consider this a suitable place to open to these dangerous new contraptions?"

Mr. Sherman, a most excellent man and valuable citizen but of a naturally nervous and excitable temperament, was unable at this point to control his feelings and sprang to his feet, exclaiming to the Committee:

"Gentlemen, I protest."

Mr. Deasy, breaking off from his reading and looking down over his spectacles at Mr. Sherman, asked, with the book he had been reading from in hand:

"Mr. Sherman, is this not your writing?"

"No!" shouted Mr. Sherman.

“Why,” continued Mr. Deasy, “it bears your name. Do you mean to say that you put your name to what you do not write?”

Here the chairman of the Committee interrupted to say, “Mr. Sherman, you are out of order; you will please resume your seat.”

Mr. Sherman reluctantly sat down, while Mr. Deasy continued with his reading from the pamphlet, commenting on it to the Committee as he read. But this soon proved more than Mr. Sherman could endure and he rose again to speak in further protest, when the Chairman peremptorily ordered him to resume his seat—he would be given his opportunity later, he said, to present his side of the case.¹⁹

The Judiciary Committee voted unanimously to return a favorable report on the bill presented by Mr. Deasy, and the legislature went on to pass it, again confounding the locals’ efforts to bring motorcars to the Island. The victory, however satisfying as a demonstration of Deasy’s rhetorical skills, was rather more Pyrrhic than definitive, for within its provisions lay the seeds of eventual defeat. The \$20,000 amount to be raised by the town was woefully short of the estimated \$60,000 needed to complete the construction of the Dorr One Road and it never came to pass. One can hardly blame the cottagers for their lack of financial support, although evidence indicates that many of them were acquiring a more progressive and, therefore, sympathetic mindset. Eventually, of course, automobiles would come to Mount Desert Island and the Great Debate of 1911 would have caused no more than a two-year delay.

Interregnum

Over the subsequent two years, the issue of the automobile persisted in the local press—and evidenced the opposing attitudes and controversial issues that continued to characterize the relationship between cottager and native resident. Despite the successful passage of the 1911 Deasy-Dorr bill, the summer community feared that misinformation might “become a serious detriment to those who have intended renting cottages or going to hotels.” In the May 3, 1911 issue of the *Bar Harbor Record*, the author, Mr. Fremont-Smith of Washington, D.C., went on to say,

“Leaving out entirely the merits of the automobile question, I speak only of the present summer and the importance of having it widely known that there is no possibility of the entrance of machines this summer or until the new road is built. . . . Unless something is done soon, I foresee for the first time in all the years of acquaintance with Bar Harbor an extremely poor season.” He strongly recommended that a clear public statement be made by responsible local businessmen, through the Bar Harbor Board of Trade.

Not all summer residents shared the majority cottager point of view, however. The June 26, 1911 *Record* ran a front-page article titled “Mr. D. H. Morris Replaces Burned Stables with Modern Garage.” In a published letter to a local building contractor, Dave H. Morris stated, “I note that you say that the law excluding automobiles from Bar Harbor is still in force; but I cannot believe it will remain so long enough to warrant my rebuilding horse-stables.” Reflecting a refreshingly progressive inclination, he goes on to say,

Conditions change rapidly in this country; where I was myself an advocate of the local exclusion policy when automobiles were new and crudely made, and your roads too narrow and winding, I am now of a different opinion, for I must admit that most of those objections no longer hold true, and that it may be unreasonable and selfish of us longer to keep out a vehicle that has revolutionized the modern world. It does not seem just right for those of us who spend only the summer months here, to use our influence to handicap the growth and development of Bar Harbor for what is a debatable personal pleasure. And now that all my carriages, harnesses and stables are burned, I am brought face to face with the problem I have been heretofore instrumental in making others solve. I don't enjoy the other side of the question. Most people solve the problem by staying away. Perhaps the loss of my stables, a heavy financial one though it is, has been a good thing, as it has vividly made me aware of the meaning to others of my former attitude.

Others' attitudes changed more slowly or not at all. Although the summer of 1911 passed uneventfully, the Bar Harbor natives' restlessness showed itself at the Town Meeting of the following spring with another vote in favor of repeal. An article in the March 13, 1912 *Record* indicates that vocal cottagers had again dug in their collective heels. This quote from the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* is telling: "Native residents of Bar Harbor, the fashionable resort on Mt. Desert Island patronized by hundreds of wealthy Philadelphians and New Yorkers, have voted to repeal the law barring automobiles from the island. This law has been upheld by most of the summer residents, who, it is said, pay more than four fifths of the taxes on the island." Also quoted is Mr. E. B. Mears, a Philadelphia attorney and realtor with summer offices in Bar Harbor, who said, "The idea of the summer residents, who pay practically all the taxes, is that motor cars are not needed. . . . All of them have cars; they use them in the autumn, winter and spring. They feel they don't need them in Bar Harbor." Regarding the repeal effort, he went on to say, revealingly, "As the Legislature . . . will be serving without pay, and so naturally will be in a hurry to get through and get home, they will hardly be inclined to take the time necessary to consider a purely local, not to say private, matter like the repeal of this law. So the chances are the matter will not actually come before the Legislature until the spring of 1913. Then we will fight it for all we are worth."

The Final Battle

The year 1913 opened with an odd combination of the sociologically bizarre and the legally prosaic. As expected, the Maine Legislature was presented with two bills providing for admission of automobiles to Mount Desert Island. Again, Representative William Sherman was the main protagonist. Local spirits were high, reflecting general optimism. Native support was nearly universal and the word was that the cottager opposition would spend very little money this time around. The *Record* of January 1, 1913, under a "Town Automobile Gossip" headline, reported that several upbeat local entrepreneurs were, in fact, building automobile garages. Legislative victory appeared to be a very likely outcome.

The anticipated cottager rebuttal took on an interesting, if not eccentric, character. In a letter to the editor of the *Record* dated January 15, a writer calling himself "Rusticator" had this to say, in part: "Will you

permit a 'rusticator' who has spent 29 summers on this beautiful island in the various roles of boarder, mealer, haul-mealer and cottager, to mix up in the agitation now going on about the admission of the automobile to the highways of the island? Representing more or less all those social castes, his opinion may be of some value in determining the controversy." He goes on to say,

Your apologetic rusticator reiterates the statement that the REASONABLE WISH OF THE SUMMER PEOPLE SHOULD BE CONTROLLING in the matter. For to whom are the permanent residents indebted for the prosperity they now enjoy? Fifty years ago Bar Harbor was an insignificant hamlet unknown outside of Hancock County; today its fame reaches all over the civilized world. Then, the natives earned a scanty and precarious living from fishing and logging; now, they fish no more . . . they log no more. . . . Now the natives live in comfortable ease and some in genuine luxury from the profits of the summer . . . and hie away to the cities of Florida and California for the vacation which the profits of the summer enables them to enjoy.

As if the point were not clearly made, he then says, "The sole business of the native is housing, feeding and making pleasurable the life of the rusticator. Therefore, what the rusticator wants and what he does not want ought in all fairness and in common business shrewdness to be controlling."

"Rusticator" returned to the *Record* one week later with this candid polemic. Coming to the automobile issue and the issue of permanent resident sentiment, he writes, "The real demand when sifted down comes from the small number who hope to make money out of it. . . . They are relentless in their endeavors to make the people believe that the automobile will bring a return to prosperity. . . . The promise of increased prosperity is an illusion. There is no substance in it. . . . It WILL bring heavier taxation, for the country roads will have to be macadamized and asphalted at enormous cost."

And if these relatively objective arguments aren't sufficiently persuasive, perhaps hyperbole will make the case. He continues, "It will tear the

roads to pieces; it will bring terror to horses and peril to pedestrians and bicyclers; the horse will be no more; speed will be substituted for leisure; and excitement for rest; one of the great charms of Mount Desert will be gone."

Not to be outdone, the locals responded in the *Record* of February 12, 1913. An individual calling himself "Ross T. Cator" submitted this doggerel:

*To auto or not is a question
That's raising the deuce with some minds,
For there's some of us feels if we get 'em
It's good-bye to peaceful old times.*

*The stables will change to garages,
And chauffeurs in goggles and dust-clad
Will tear down our streets blowing honk! honk!
Making those that oppose 'em darn mad.*

*Some say they'll just swarm on the Island
Cross Trenton bridge, a thousand a day;
Buzz around and partake of our scenery
Spend thousands before going away.*

*O it sounds like a beautiful dream,
And Bar Harbor has had 'em before
And they proved delightful big bubbles
That float for a time—then no more.*

In the same issue, another correspondent, claiming to be fifty-eight years old and "an old native of Bar Harbor or 'East Eden', as it was once called, even Bar Island, when I was a boy," signed his letter as "Anemone." Responding to "Rusticator" by distinguishing between the so-called old natives and their more modern business-oriented counterparts, he began: "I fully believe it is time for the summer visitor or 'rusticator,' instead of fighting the town's people so long on this automobile question, should look well at what he may have to contend with in the town, in years to come. . . . We see the old natives' places being taken by new, and perhaps

more up-to-date business men, and these new business men will remember nothing about how the rusticator made the 'poor old native prosperous' and built up the town from a quiet, peaceful settlement, to the fashionable watering place it is today."

He reminds "Rusticator" that there are two sides to the issue: "In all my 58 years of life, I cannot remember of a single instance where the summer visitor, if he sold out at all, did not ask for his property, many times what he at first had to pay the native for it. Isn't this, in a measure, a speculative proposition on their part?" Touché, Anemone!

On the 1913 legislative front, an "Act Permitting the Use of Automobiles in the Town of Eden" was passed by the 76th Legislature on March 18th.²⁰ At last, the onerous chapters 420 of 1903 and 242 of 1911 were repealed. With the exception of the Norway Drive, the Breakneck Drive, and the Ocean Drive, all of Eden's roads were now open to the automobile.

The town of Bar Harbor rejoiced; the conflict was over at last. The *Bar Harbor Record* of March 19, 1913 reported the jubilation: "A demonstration which caused the town to sit up and take notice was accorded to Representative Sherman Friday evening, when he returned from Augusta, after securing the successful passage of the act repealing the obnoxious legislation against automobiles. The autoists and younger element were out in force, and he was escorted from the wharf up the street by a noisy crowd with horns and bells, with several auto horns adding volume to the noise."

Elsewhere, the Town of Mount Desert and its proportionately higher population of cottagers continued the resistance. Indeed, Charles W. Eliot, of Asticou and Harvard University and a cottager since 1881, had even received a supportive note from President-elect Woodrow Wilson stating, "I wish you all success in keeping automobiles from Mount Desert Island."²¹ The 1913 "Act Relating to the Use of Automobiles in the Town of Mount Desert in Hancock County," which was also passed on March 18, provided that "The town . . . at any legal meeting of the voters thereof, may adopt by-laws prohibiting the use of automobiles on any or all of the highways or townways in said town which said by-law may declare to be for any reason dangerous or unsuitable for their use."²² Such bylaws appear to have been

adopted, since automobiles did not appear in the Town of Mount Desert until 1915, after enactment of the following terse law provision: "All acts and parts thereof, prohibiting or restricting the use of automobiles or motor vehicles in the town of Mount Desert, on the island of Mount Desert, in the county of Hancock, are hereby repealed."²³ So now Dr. Phillips of Southwest Harbor could drive his car through Somesville to Town Hill with impunity, although one suspects that he still may have disturbed the early morning quiet.

And so the war was over, the last battle won. The ensuing decades would see the transition from Lafayette National Monument to Acadia National Park, which today sparkles as a gem of the northeastern coast of North America, drawing millions of motorized vehicles annually. Horses and their carriages now travel off the beaten path, traversing the beautiful carriage roads given to the public by a caring and perspicacious summer cottager—John D. Rockefeller, Jr. We so-called locals are different now, too, our ranks having filled out with an assortment of vital retirees and engaged "people from away." (Old Anemone of 1913 might have been pleased at the affirmation of his "old natives' places being taken by new.") Still, the discordant dialogue between local resident and the increasingly heterogeneous mix of summer visitor continues, not infrequently punctuated by themes reminiscent of old.

George B. Dorr's vision of inevitability proved to be correct, and one cannot help but wonder how he would react to a typical August day among the crowds atop Cadillac Mountain. But much of what he saw when he looked seaward from the summits, hiked over the mountain trails, and strode through wooded glades remains. He breathed the essence of this place, as we can, too—native and visitor alike—if we but climb high enough or penetrate more deeply into the forest, away from the sound of the engine. The controversy over the automobile was a flash point for opposing attitudes towards progress and development—perhaps even Mount Desert Island's very place in the world—that were deeply embedded in very different socioeconomic factions. A century later, as places such as this have become increasingly rare and endangered, one hopes those forceful, divisive voices will engage in a new and more harmonious discourse to find viable ways to maintain our livelihoods while sustaining the unique beauty and tranquility of this island we call home.

Notes

- ¹ Stephen J. Hornsby, "The Gilded Age and the Making of Bar Harbor," in *Geographical Review* 83, no. 4 (October, 1993): 455-68.
- ² Wayne E. Reilly, "New garages in Bangor fueled motor mania," *Bangor Daily News*, January 17, 2010.
- ³ Lydia Bodman Vandenberg and Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., *Opulence to Ashes: Bar Harbor's Gilded Century, 1850-1950* (Rockland: Down East Books, 2009), 131.
- ⁴ Vandenberg and Shettleworth, *Opulence to Ashes*, 96.
- ⁵ Vandenberg and Shettleworth, *Opulence to Ashes*, 97.
- ⁶ Maine *Private and Special Laws*, Chapter 420, 1903.
- ⁷ Minutes of the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association, August 8, 1905.
- ⁸ An Act to create the Hancock County Trustees for Public Reservations, Maine *Private and Special Laws*, Chapter 369, 1903, 556.
- ⁹ A quote from one of 242 ballot responses to a Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association survey, 1906. Minute Book of the Bar Harbor Village Improvement Association.
- ¹⁰ Maine *Private and Special Laws*, Chapter 133, 1909.
- ¹¹ George B. Dorr, *The Story of Acadia National Park: The Complete Memoir of the Man who Made it all Possible, George B. Dorr, the "Father of Acadia"* (Bar Harbor: Acadia Publishing Company, 1997), 2: 8.
- ¹² *Bar Harbor Record*, September 28, 1910.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Larue Spiker, "The Great Automobile War: Part II," *Bar Harbor Times*, June 20, 1968.
- ¹⁶ *Bar Harbor Record*, February 22, 1911.
- ¹⁷ Dorr, *The Story of Acadia National Park*, 2: 9.
- ¹⁸ W.H. Sherman, *Bar Harbor Guide, Business Directory, and Reference Book*, 1890, 41. <http://archive.org/details/shermansbarharbo00barh>.
- ¹⁹ Dorr, *The Story of Acadia National Park*, 2: 12-13. The author is grateful to Acadia Publishing Company for permission to use this extended passage.
- ²⁰ Maine *Private and Special Laws*, Chapter 134, 1913, 491.
- ²¹ *Bar Harbor Record*, February 26, 1913.
- ²² Maine *Private and Special Laws*, Chapter 124, 1913, 481.
- ²³ Maine *Special and Private Laws*, Chapter 152, 1915, 497.