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"Reckless Walking Must Be Discouraged"

The Automobile Revolution and the Shaping of Modern Urban Canada to 1930

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L'apparition de l'automobile au Canada à l'aube du vingtième siècle a révolutionné l'existence dans tous ses aspects, de la qualité de l'air à l'environnement sonore en passant par les grilles de rues, les types d'habitat et... la congestion. Au delà des transformations du cadre physique, l'automobile a bouleversé les relations entre le rural et l'urbain, et la généralisation de son usage a resserré le quadrillage réglementaire imposé à la société dans son ensemble. L'éventail des changements est tel que rares sont les Canadiens qui sont restés à l'abri de leurs effets.

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"Reckless Walking Must Be Discouraged":

The Automobile Revolution and the Shaping of Modern Urban Canada to 1930

Stephen Davies

Abstract

The introduction of the automobile at the turn of the century revolutionized all aspects of Canadian life from sound and smell, to housing design, to street patterns and congestion. In addition to the physical changes brought about by its presence, the automobile radically altered established rural-urban relationships, and its proliferation also necessitated an increasing regulation of society as a whole. Thus, given the wide range of changes created by the automobile, few Canadians remained unaffected by its introduction in the first decades of the 20th century.

Résumé

L'apparition de l'automobile au Canada à l'aube du vingtième siècle a révolutionné l'existence dans tous ses aspects, de la qualité de l'air à l'environnement sonore en passant par les grilles de rues, les types d'habitat et... la congestion. Au delà des transformations du cadre physique, l'automobile a bouleversé les relations entre le rural et l'urbain, et la généralisation de son usage a resserré le quadrillage réglementaire imposé à la société dans son ensemble. L'éventail des changements est tel que rares sont les Canadiens qui sont restés à l'abri de leurs effets. "Civilization," wrote Dr Frank Crane in 1918, "is a matter of transportation. The true symbol of the twentieth century, the sign of its soul, the indicator of its spirit, is the wheel." And, as Crane went on to argue, the greatest adaptation of the wheel was the automobile.1

In the three decades that followed its introduction into Canada at the turn of the century, the automobile revolutionized all aspects of Canadian life. However, in a society in which the presence of the automobile has become an inseparable part of daily life, the nature and magnitude of change created by its rapid proliferation is readily overlooked. The following is an exploration of the automobile's impact on Canadian society during the first three decades of the 20th century.² One can easily comprehend the physical alterations: roadbuilding, traffic signs, and the ever-growing problem of congestion. But there is another aspect to be considered, one which must be balanced against the unbridled enthusiasm

and optimism of individuals such as Crane. Change cannot always be directed or controlled, and the automobile, like other major innovations, also brought unanticipated and, in many instances, undesired consequences.

Not all change was as physically apparent as, for example, the automatic traffic signals that began to appear in Canadian cities during the 1920s. There was also a crucial, though less obvious, cultural and social reorientation. What must not be overlooked is an element of irony connected with the automobile's proliferation, in that many of the changes were the opposite of what the auto's introduction had promised. One of the unforeseen by-products of the automobile's appeal was the increasing number of restrictions and regulations imposed upon the Canadian public. The growing array of regulatory detail created one of the great paradoxes of the automobile: a vehicle ostensibly designed to increase freedom and personal mobility could become a means for



The automobile's mobility meant an escape from the city to recreation areas removed from the urban environment. However, as this riverside outside Toronto indicates, escape did not necessarily mean solitude. CTA, James 1237.

the increased restriction of society. Rather than creating freedom, the automobile created the myth of carefree motoring. Mobility must not be confused with, nor mistaken for, freedom. As Edward Sapir noted in 1924, although man may have harnessed machines to his use, more important was that he had also harnessed himself to the machine.³

The diffusion of the automobile in Canada prior to 1930 was phenomenal. Ontario enjoyed the distinction of having the highest number of passenger vehicles of any province. Thus it was often in Ontario that changes, generally on a scale greater than in the other provinces, were first observable. The 535 automobiles registered in Ontario in 1904 increased to 31,724 by 1914, 155,861 by 1920, 303,736 by 1925,and 490,906 by 1930.⁴ The number of autos remained considerably lower in the other provinces, but at the outbreak of World War I Ontario ranked only fifth in automobiles per capita, with Saskatchewan a surprising first.⁵ However, Ontario's rank altered rapidly, and by 1928 it ranked first (one motor vehicle per 7.3 individuals), while Saskatchewan had dropped to third (one motor vehicle per 7.8 persons).6 The degree to which Canada readily embraced the automobile is apparent if one considers that in 1929 Canada ranked third behind the United States and the Hawaiian Islands in the world in per capita automobile registrations.7

The last years of World War I and the several years immediately following it represented the crucial period of expansion for automobile ownership in Canada. That growth can be attributed to a combination of both intellectual and economic factors. At one level the automobile's rapid spread reflected an alteration of perceptions regarding its role in Canadian society. By the 1920s it was no longer simply a rich man's toy and had been transformed, as the *Canadian Motorist* argued in 1915, into a necessity rather than a luxury.⁸

From an economic point of view, an important consideration was the effect the war had on the automobile's rise in numbers. Wartime inflation and demand had increased automobile prices in Canada, but that rise was more than offset by higher wages. By 1920 automobile prices had begun to drop. This decline, and the introduction of new financing plans, such as that extended by GMAC beginning in 1919, stimulated automobile purchases. In the four years following 1920, the selling price of the average automobile dropped by approximately 38 per cent.9 In fact automobile prices dropped continuously throughout the 1920s. The average selling price for an automobile in 1921 was \$906, a figure which declined to \$695 by 1926.10

The attendant expansion in ownership meant a physical alteration of the urban landscape in one manner or another. The most obvious change was the increased number of vehicles visible on the streets of Canada's cities. As registrations rose, so too did traffic congestion. While the growth of the former was generally lauded as concrete proof of the country's progress, the latter was accepted as an unfortunate by-product of that progress. A comparison of traffic on Dundas Street ten miles west of Toronto in 1908 and 1912 graphically illustrates the changes in traffic patterns wrought by the automobile. In a ten-hour period in mid August 1908, one site on Dundas witnessed the passing of six automobiles. By 1912, 382 automobiles passed that same spot within the ten-hour period, leading the president of the Ontario Good Roads Association to remark how the automobile had "revolutionized traffic conditions everywhere."11 Yet the true revolution was yet to come, as comprehensive traffic surveys conducted in 1914 and 1922 demonstrate. In these studies more than 200 stations were monitored on various roads throughout southern Ontario during the summer months. Two examples suffice to convey a sense of how dramatically traffic had increased in only eight years. On the Toronto-Hamilton

Highway at Long Branch Park, an average of 268.8 automobiles a day passed in 1914. with the maximum for one day reaching 382. That same spot in 1922 witnessed an average of 8,236.4 automobiles a day, with a maximum of 12,296 on Labour Day, A survey conducted at Fruitland, on the Hamilton-Niagara Road, arrived at similar figures. In 1914 that road bore an average of 189 vehicles a day, with a one-day high of 253. By 1922 the traffic passing the same spot had risen to a daily average of 2,849.8 with a one-day maximum of 5.030.12 Taken together, traffic surveys and registration figures create some understanding of the physical implications of the automobile. Undoubtedly it heralded an age of personal mobility, but it also introduced a new range of problems, of which increased traffic flow and the resultant congestion were only a part.

One overlooked alteration to the urban environment, and indeed to the country as a whole, was the decline of the automobile's nearest competitor, the horse. The traffic censuses of Ontario conducted in 1914, 1922, and 1925 give some notion of the shift underway. At Port Credit on the Toronto-Hamilton Highway, the daily average of horse-drawn vehicles in 1914 was 158.7, which by 1922 had declined to 25.3.13 In Toronto the change was even more startling. A survey of traffic on Dundas Street at Bloor in 1914 showed 349 automobiles and 248 horse-drawn vehicles passing in a day. By 1925 the daily total of automobiles had risen to 7,943, while horse-drawn vehicles had declined to a mere 15. "One noticeable feature of this tabulation," noted the Toronto and York Road Commission, which had undertaken the Dundas and Bloor survey, "is the constant dwindling, almost to the vanishing point, of horse-drawn traffic on the main roads, pointing to the conclusion that the main roads of the future must be designed primarily for motor traffic."14

Even roads removed from the larger urban centres witnessed a decline of horse-drawn vehicles. For instance, a survey on the



As automobile registrations increased, so too did urban traffic congestion. But as this street scene from Toronto points out, the automobile did not immediately replace its nearest competitor, the horse. CTA, James 1116.



The automobile's presence created an unprecedented need for the regulation of city streets by the time of the First World War. Significantly though, as this scene from Toronto indicates, it meant the regulation of pedestrian traffic as much as vehicular traffic. CTA, James 1008

Guelph-Owen Sound Road saw the number of horse-drawn vehicles decline to 30.2 per day in 1922 from a level of 39.0 in 1914.¹⁵ The declines varied from area to area and were sometimes only slight, particularly in predominantly agricultural areas. At best the number of horse-drawn vehicles in use remained static in the face of a rising population.¹⁶

The decline of horse-drawn vehicles was indicative of fundamental changes taking place in cities, towns, and villages. The movement from horse to horseless carriage meant that urban life acquired a quicker pace in the first decades of the 20th century. Along with this faster pace of life, the dominance of the automobile meant a distinct change in urban sights, sounds, and smell. Taken together, such changes had created by 1930 a greatly altered urban environment.

Traffic congestion by the automobile was not a significant problem in Canada prior to 1910. The chief constable of Toronto reported in 1907 no problems with congestion, though he was perturbed about automobile speeding. A 1910 report on transit in Toronto could still conclude that, as for ordinary vehicular traffic, there existed no "extraordinary congestion."¹⁷

By the end of the first decade of the century, however, indications were already present that increasing automobile traffic was to have a serious impact on Canadian cities. As the Civic Improvement Committee for Toronto reported in 1911, problems engendered by the automobile's proliferation were becoming increasingly clear. The report noted that a "courageous endeavor" was required if the transportation problem was not to prove detrimental to the interests of the city.18 Apparently this growing apprehension had some effect, for in 1913 members of the Toronto police force were sent to New York City and London, England, to learn how to handle traffic more effectively.19 Though concern was not limited to Toronto, it had the

greatest concentration of automobiles in Canada and generally experienced problems of congestion first and to a greater degree. Even Ottawa, which had less than 1,900 automobiles at the end of World War I, was reporting serious traffic problems by 1923.²⁰

Growing automobile congestion meant that two new topics had come to the fore in urban planning. One was where to park vehicles and the other was how to keep them moving quickly and efficiently. By 1916 the Canadian Motorist, a publication representing motorists across Canada, was noting how parking was a problem for all urban centres. "The automobile." the Canadian Motorist editorial pointed out, "is a latecomer in the general scheme of things and the best must be made of inadequate parking facilities. Cities of the future no doubt will be planned in such a way as to provide for the parking of cars in convenient and accessible parts of the business district."21

Yet even as the Canadian Motorist was putting forward its case, the Toronto City Council, equally aware of the problem, had already designated streets where parking was permissible. On all other streets, in an effort to reduce traffic slowdown, drivers could be given a summons by the police for leaving their automobiles unattended for more than a few minutes.²² This approach, however, offered little more than a temporary solution. Toronto's chief constable lamented in 1926 that the city's streets were "just an open air garage."23 By the following year the problem had intensified, prompting the chief constable to call for a strict enforcement of parking bylaws:

Vehicles should be prohibited from standing unattended in that district [downtown] or for a period longer than necessary to take on or discharge passengers, or load or unload merchandise.²⁴

Automobile parking was only part of the larger crisis imposed on urban planning by

the automobile's presence. Civic bureaucracies became increasingly preoccupied, from World War I onwards, with the problems created by automobile traffic.25 As Blaine Brownell has argued in the case of the United States, and it is a point equally applicable to the Canadian situation, one byproduct of the automobile's rapid spread was a significant evolution in urban planning.26 Planning for the automobile was, according to Brownell, an evolutionary process. whereby "most planners perceived at least the broad outlines of the motor vehicle's impact, and even the necessity of redesigning the city to accommodate the innovation."27 In that context the automobile held yet another unexpected influence, since the growing necessity for traffic planning helped advance the status - not to mention the business - of urban planning and consulting.28

In 1926 Toronto's chief constable, still concerned with regulating traffic in the city, introduced recommendations that would guickly and permanently alter the urban form. Noting that traffic problems were common in most cities, he suggested "Mechanical Automatic Controls" for all street intersections in the downtown Toronto area.29 Acting on that recommendation, in 1928 Toronto installed automatic traffic signals at 71 intersections.³⁰ In addition, given the realization that, as the chief constable expressed it. "our present streets were not laid out with any idea of the amount of traffic they would be called upon to carry," recommendations were put forward to improve traffic flow by revising existing street patterns. That trend had been underway in many cities since the early 1920s. Ottawa's planning commission, for example, had been busy throughout the decade "rounding corners" to facilitate a faster movement of traffic.31 Toronto's planning commission responded in a similar fashion to the new problems of the automobile, noting that the primary need of the city was the development of a series of through and paved streets for modern vehicular traffic.32

Such alterations provided the city of 1930 with a look that unmistakably distinguished it in appearance from the city that had existed only two decades previously.

One of the rarely considered legacies of the automobile has been its impact on the form of urban residential structures. "As an architectural unit," the *Canadian Motorist* argued in 1915, " the garage is rapidly coming into its own."³³ The automobile garage was not merely a useful accessory but by 1915 was touted as an essential component of housing design. Garages were no longer an afterthought but were being integrated into new housing structures whenever possible. This integration had, according to the *Canadian Motorist*, gained favourable acceptance. As the journal noted:

The merits of such an arrangement has gained wide popularity for this style of a garage. In the new residential districts of our Canadian cities thousands of such are to be seen. Sometimes they are located under verandas and porches, frequently under conservatories, sun rooms, dens, breakfast rooms, etc. When so located they are, of course, part of the architectural scheme of the house indeed part of the house itself.³⁴

Thus along with the more obvious changes in street appearance and structure, the automobile ushered in a new era of housing design whereby residential structures were altered or entirely redesigned to accommodate the new technology.

The automobile's introduction had, however, far more serious implications than the transformation of housing styles. Its presence introduced a new element of risk and destruction to Canadian streets, for as the number of automobiles grew, so too did the number of related deaths and injuries. By the late 1920s Ontario, with the largest automobile population in the country, was experiencing the highest number of such fatalities. In 1927 for example Ontario had 387 motor fatalities, a figure that represented more than 40 per cent of Canada's automobile-related deaths. In terms of fatal motor accidents per 100,000 persons, Ontario with 12.1 ranked second behind British Columbia (with 13.4). With a significantly smaller population than Ontario, however, British Columbia had only 77 such fatalities.³⁵

The cities had the most lethal concentration of motor vehicles. Although Toronto experienced only one motor fatality in 1907, the number had reached 17 by 1912, 48 by 1922, and 87 by 1927.36 Thus, in 1927 Toronto accounted for more than 10 per cent of the country's total number of deaths related to motor vehicles. And yet Toronto did not have the highest number of urban automobile fatalities. Montreal held that dubious distinction with 126 deaths. Nearly one-quarter of all Canadian automobile fatalities occurred in the two cities.³⁷ Such was the paradoxical nature of the automobile that a vehicle which promised increased freedom and mobility also meant death and injury for thousands.

The new element of danger did not pass unnoticed. When, in 1913, advertisements for the Hupmobile pointed out that the countryside was "better, cleaner and safer than city streets," it was not merely advertising rhetoric.38 City streets had become dangerous, particularly for children. Inspired by the presence of the automobile, and partly as an attempt to instill a degree of moral and social guidance in the young, local playground movements developed in the early 20th century. In an editorial commenting on the opening of a new playground in 1918, a Hamilton newspaper underscored the role which the automobile had played:

Playgrounds are becoming more a necessity than ever. The automobile and the motor truck have driven the children off the streets.³⁹

Hamilton had established its first playaround in 1909, but the streets, as advertisers pointed out, nevertheless remained a dangerous place for children. Even with the establishment of subsequent playgrounds throughout the city, Hamilton children, as did the children of all urban centres, continued to fall victim to the automobile. From January to September 1922, 789 street accidents occurred in that city. Of those, 162 involved children under the age of 14, of whom 41 were injured while playing on the streets. From June to August that year, automobile accidents claimed the lives of six Hamilton children.⁴⁰ Influenced by the growing number of fatalities an editorial gueried:

Should we encourage properly supervised playgrounds, or, by neglect, make of the streets unhealthy "plague" grounds, a menace to the safety and sanity of child life?⁴¹

Playgrounds, like the addition of automatic traffic signals or the newly designated traffic routes, contributed to a new look for the urban environment of the post-1920 period. Many of the physical changes caused by the automobile were minor or of a subtle nature, but their cumulative effect was to alter the Canadian city by 1930.

The overt physical alteration of the urban environment was only part of a much wider societal transformation created by the automobile's presence. The automobile, or more specifically the new mobility provided by the automobile, caused a reassessment and reorientation of established spatial norms. Of all the changes brought about by the automobile, the alteration of established spatial relationships, particularly the relationship between rural and urban society, perhaps held the greatest consequences. Within a relatively short period of time the automobile became synonymous with a new freedom of space, distance, and speed.

However, because of the inherently restrictive nature of the urban environment,

the countryside became the logical location to experience the new boundaries of mobility as defined by the automobile. The rural environment's suitability as an outlet for automobile mobility was often augmented by urban planning which, as Blaine Brownell has pointed out, de-emphasized the truly revolutionary nature of that mobility. Urban arteries were often designed on the inflexible models of rail transit systems which failed to exploit the range of the automobile's mobility to the degree possible in a rural environment. Major street and highway plans emerged from the urban core in a line arrangement which, as Brownell noted, stifled the automobile's capacity for lateral mobility.42 Such designs, coupled with speed restrictions obligatory in an urban environment, meant that it became virtually impossible to experience, legally, the sensations of rapidly diminishing space or to feel the exhilarating freedom of speed in the city; the rural environment with its open spaces and unchecked speeds became the ideal location to experience the full potential of the automobile's ability for spatial reorientation.

The attraction of the rural environment for the urban dweller was not based solely on the possibilities of speed. While the countryside represented the appeal of the outdoors with all the associated virtues (independence, open space, and a slower pace of life), the automobile remained the key to enjoying those virtues. A 1908 article in the Toronto *Globe* rhetorically asked its readers,

Who is the owner of an automobile who has not many a time used it to hurry far away from the madding crowd to the quiet spots of nature, where he can breathe freely and receive the endless inspirations of fine scenery?⁴³

Moreover, the opportunities opened by the automobile were themes reinforced by the advertising process. Automobile advertising placed an emphasis on the virtues of rural space, forming a crucial element in the renegotiation of the rural-urban relationship. Automobiles were portrayed as the means of escape from the urban maelstrom - they held out the hope of tranquility in a hurried world. In an increasingly urbanized and industrialized era, automobiles provided a tenuous reaffirmation of urban society's pastoral links. The emphasis on the automobile as a source of mobility, particularly as a mechanism of escape from the city, blossomed into a fascination for the countryside. This feature is particularly apparent in automobile advertisement after 1920.44 Advertisements prior to 1910 were generally based on objective information concerning the product, which emphasized features, price, and performance. By 1914 advertisers had begun, as Roland Marchand points out, "to appreciate the advantage of selling the benefit instead of the product."45 The new direction was an attempt by manufacturers and advertisers alike not only to sell a product but also to shape consumer's desires, so much so that by 1920 it had become common for advertising firms to hire psychological consultants.46 Mobility was promoted as a familial necessity, for without an automobile, according to Chevrolet, a family became "prisoners on a limited range - like hobbled horses in a pasture."47 Given that philosophy as their guide, manufacturers also fused rural



The automobile had become a presence on Canadian streets by 1910, though often the streets themselves left much to be desired. CTA, James 41.

and urban interests to create the "middle landscape," which was increasingly apparent in automobile advertising illustrations.⁴⁸

Copywriters often waxed eloquent about the joys to be found in the non-urban environment. Some appeals were straightforward. One Chevrolet advertisement in 1929 reminded the reader:

There's a shady woodland nook awaiting you. Beside the blue waters of a placid lake are rest and relaxation. A laughing, leaping brook is calling you to come! Break down the barriers of everyday. There's happiness ahead.⁴⁹

A Ford advertisement nine years earlier had enticed the reader "out beyond the pavement" to "the unexplored woodlands and remote farmlands." The automobile became a necessity to explore such areas, for as Ford pointed out:

Nature's loveliest beauty spots, her choicest hunting grounds are far removed from the railroads, away from the much travelled highways.⁵⁰

Such advertisements, while seemingly more contrived than effective, were nevertheless based on a belief that the automobile and the countryside were intimately linked, and that the countryside was the suitable outlet for the automobile's potential. Thus a slogan such as Overland's "the owner of an Overland owns all out of doors" was not entirely advertising hype — it expressed concisely and clearly the notion of freedom of mobility believed to be intrinsic to automobile ownership.⁵¹

Advertisements with an outdoor theme did more than comment on the superiority of the outdoors: by implication, if the rural environment was healthy, the urban environment must be unhealthy. A Chevrolet advertisement in 1924 urged readers to escape "from the dust of the city" to where one could "drive through the fresh air to some inviting spot amid the beauties of nature."⁵² Some advertisements were more forceful in denouncing the city, juxtaposing the benefits of the country with the liabilities of the city, and making the choice between the two appear obvious. That year Ford asked potential consumers, "which shall it be this summer?" and then went on to lay out two choices:

City streets for a playground, or the open country where the air is perfumed with the scent of growing things and the butterflies dance in the sunshine? The Ford car is the friend of childhood — the modern Magic Carpet that will transport them and you from the baking asphalt to the shady country lanes whenever you wish to go.⁵³

Thus the assessment that the countryside represented an environment that was, according to Hupmobile, "better, cleaner and safer than city streets" was not simple advertising rhetoric, particularly in light of the death toll previously discussed.⁵⁴

Advertisers did not so much create the contrast between urban and rural environments as they exploited themes already prevalent in society and adopted them as marketing techniques. And, as the ease of travel from one locale to another by the automobile created a greater interaction between the two environments, comparisons were made increasingly easy. By contrasting the two environments, advertisers reinforced the differences, real and imagined, between the two.

With the new relationship fostered by the automobile came a growing interchange between urban and rural areas, characterized by an increased enthusiasm for the rural environment by the urban population. That new relationship manifested itself in many ways throughout Canadian society, particularly through advertising. However, the advertisements presented a naive interpretation of rural space, one seen almost exclusively from an urban point of view. Certainly one would never surmise from the advertisements that there was a conflict over the use of rural space, the controversy of workplace versus playground. Yet for the rural population, the intrusion of motorists was a concern. According to Joseph Interrante, motor touring was seen by farmers as an invasion by upper-class urbanites, and the resulting conflicts were struggles over the definition and use of rural space.⁵⁵

The fascination with space, particularly with the ability to traverse increasingly larger distances, made the country appear, in relative terms, smaller. The redefinition of spatial boundaries had many unforeseen, but not necessarily unwelcome, implications. Limited mobility had meant limited accessibility to non-urban environments for a significant proportion of the population, which in turn created a perception of the countryside as a homogeneous, but little understood, environment. For city dwellers before the automobile age, the countryside could seem a jumble of farms, forests, and open spaces, images often culled secondhand from a variety of sources. For many the sense of the countryside was the product of glimpses obtained on a railway journey, but the sharp linearity of the railway removed the individual from the true irregularity of the rural environment, alienating the individual from the landscape through which he or she passed.56 The automobile, by contrast, made the rural landscape generally accessible and removed the barriers between the traveller and the landscape. A realization that the countryside could no longer be considered a homogeneous entity came with the increased contact made possible by the automobile. The automobile replaced impressions with new specifics of spatial awareness. A more profound contact was essential for a proper appreciation of the nature of the rural environment, for, as Siegfried Gideon has pointed out, "In order to grasp the true nature of space the observer must project himself through it."57 The automobile meant an enhanced appreciation

of space and spatial diversity, as well as an expansion of traditional boundaries which, when considered collectively, redefined the idea of the "countryside" in the early 1920s. The irony was that just as urban families came to experience the countryside, they changed it.

Until the 1920s in Ontario, when the provincial government assumed responsibility for highway traffic and locational signs, private organizations such as the Ontario Motor League undertook the task of erecting signs throughout the province. Road signing to aid touring motorists often unintentionally altered the character of rural society. Sign campaigns threatened a sense of identity which for many small rural communities had remained unchanged for years before the coming of the automobile. Illustrative of this possible consequence of the motor league's sign efforts was the case of Green River, Ont.:

The unwary traveller might pass through and go for miles beyond still looking for it, did he not know that the church set among the trees on one side of the stream and the small general store on the opposite side of the stream, each hidden from the other, were two positive evidences that it was a village.⁵⁸

Since the post office at Green River displayed no sign, the members of the motor league arbitrarily decided where to place a name sign announcing the village, a necessary step "so that the travelling tourist might know when he came to certain villages."⁵⁹

The indigenous population, however, displayed little enthusiasm for the process. When a nearby farmer was asked whether it was an appropriate place for a Green River sign, he replied, "Well, boys, I guess it is as good as any, as the store and post office are across the crick."⁶⁰ The apparent indifference of local inhabitants was understandable, given that in their minds

there already existed a clearly defined local identity of place and circumstance, even if it went unsigned. Although identity had been local and unofficial, it none the less had been sufficient for those who lived and worked in the immediate environment. If signs did not create an identity for such communities, they did so for outside interests such as touring motorists. Signs, and the motorists they served, meant that communities such as Green River were slowly integrated into the wider fabric of provincial life with their "new" identity. But in turn such communities were forced to sacrifice some of the local identity that relative isolation and anonymity had provided.

One further paradox of the automobile was that while it expanded spatial accessibility it simultaneously debased space. A desire to be outdoors and away from the city meant that the intervening space (the transitional space between rural and urban environments) became important only so far as it represented a zone to be traversed to reach one's ultimate goal. Intervening transitional space was devalued as an increased range of mobility extended accessible locations further from the urban environment. Whereas the transitional zone had once been important for leisure activity, being the area comfortably reached by personal non-mechanized transportation, the increased mobility provided by the automobile, as well as the expansion of the city, removed the aesthetically desirable leisure areas further from the city. What had once been a destination became simply a transitional zone for motorists eager to escape towns and cities for a day or a holiday. Transitional zones had not yet assumed the identity of "the strip," characteristic of the urban fringe in the second half of the 20th-century, but boundaries became progressively blurred as they exhibited characteristics of both urban and rural environments but belonged to neither.61

In any consideration of the mobility and freedom provided by the automobile, the question of speed is crucial. Speed, and the fascination with it, were integral parts of the early 20th-century consciousness. And the automobile was, as Macleans noted in 1914, "the sign of a quicker-moving age."62 Speed naturally became an important selling feature (for some manufacturers the prime selling point) in automobile advertising. The Auburn billed itself as "America's Fastest Stock Car," while the Willys-Knight pointed out that its six-cylinder model "Accelerates like a Flash - 5 to 40 miles in 14¹/₂ seconds."⁶³ Under the headline "One Hundred Horsepower is Waiting Your Command," the manufacturers of the Lafavette traded on the lure of speed. boldly guaranteeing drivers that "No one can keep ahead of you if you only choose to go around. No one can pass you."64 Likewise the Stephens cited its easy leap to 60 miles per hour "when you need acceleration - or want exhilaration."65

Judging from police reports and newspaper accounts, owners certainly were partaking of the sensations a speeding auto provided. It soon became apparent that regulation was necessary to check the appetite for speed. By 1911 Hamilton employed plain clothes policemen on the city's thoroughfares to time the speed of, and to apprehend, offending "buzz wagons." Shortly thereafter the Hamilton police resorted to using officers disguised as tramps in order to time suspected speeders, an early instance of unmarked speed traps.⁶⁶ Despite official checks and traps, the public's thirst for speed appeared unquenched. The difficulty lay in controlling the belief that, as it was expressed in Macleans, "the automobile has been invented in vain if it is to be forbidden to travel guickly."67

Ontario's actions to deal with motorists in general, and not just speeding drivers, were typical of the regulatory revolution that the country as a whole underwent. In 1903 the province introduced its first motor vehicles act (3 Edw. VII c.27) which formed the



As these service stations from the 1920s indicate, the automobile introduced new physical forms which became a common part of the post-World War One cityscape. CTA, SC 488-3653.

nucleus of all subsequent motor vehicle legislation. The 1903 act consisted of 12 sections: 7 were concerned with administrative details and the remaining 5 dealt with items such as speed limits. By 1912 the Motor Vehicles Act of Ontario had expanded to 55 sections, and by 1923 to 227 sections, subsections, and clauses; this expansion highlighted the province's growing concern for all aspects of automobile use. Motor vehicle acts as inclusive as the one in 1912, and particularly that of 1923, ensured that motoring relinquished much of the simplicity that had characterized its introduction. Driving was no longer a matter of paying a registration fee and taking the vehicle directly onto the road. Despite a lack of testing or licensing requirements for the general public, driving was gradually transformed into an involved affair; it became difficult to have more than a rudimentary understanding of all the legislation bearing on the operation of a motor vehicle.68

In Ontario the Motor Vehicles Act of 1912 represented a turning point in the relationship between the motorist and the province, or, more appropriately, between the public and private spheres. Through various aspects of the act, government intruded into private life. According to the act, for example, notice of any conviction was to be filed with the Provincial Secretary's Office (in the case of a chauffeur, including the name, address, and description of employer).69 That particular provision may not appear so startling in itself, but it was important for what it represented. Along with the collection of reports on births, deaths, and marriages, registration of drivers helped to establish the wider role of government in society by its collecting a variety of records for a growing portion of the population. This process marked the separation of 19th-century government practices from those of the 20th century; it exemplified a progressively bureaucratic state within which segments of the public were on file in a growing range of records.70

Legislation such as the 1912 act rejected the casual ad hoc approach to automobile legislation of the early years of the automobile. The 1912 act was the first to legislate to the needs of this remarkably dynamic situation. Merely undertaking to register all drivers, and then to record their changing status following convictions, entailed a tremendous amount of paperwork. From a government perspective, the detail involved a significantly expanded bureaucratic structure. By 1916 in Ontario the enormity of the task had outgrown the Provincial Secretary's Office, under whose jurisdiction the act initially fell, thereafter control of the act fell to an expanded Department of Public Highways.71 Such a pattern was repeated across the country, although the timing of bureaucratic growth varied. The automobile's proliferation placed novel demands on government services at all levels, and this situation in turn necessitated government expansion and the consolidation of control to cope adequately with a myriad of new problems.

While the provincial legislatures gradually realized the importance of retaining regulatory control of major concerns regarding the automobile, they were willing to leave some minor areas to local option and enforcement. Indeed almost as soon as the automobile became prominent, attempts were made by municipalities to assert their primacy in the matter of the automobile. Local option was acceptable under certain circumstances, as provincial governments realized that local conditions at times required allowing municipal or county councils to regulate within their respective jurisdictions.

What emerged from this delegation of authority was an increasingly regulated urban environment. The substance of the regulations, and, as importantly, their form, would alter early 20th-century Canadian society. The Canadian Motorist pointed out in 1914:

Regulations governing the use of motor vehicles in Canada at the present time vary in each Province of the Dominion, and motorists who have occasion to drive from one province to another are frequently perplexed and sometimes greatly inconvenienced by the divergent laws as to speed, display of numbers and lights, and other less important features of motoring.⁷²

In February 1915 the same journal noted with approval the plan undertaken by the Association of Police Chiefs of America to develop a standard set of rules and regulations with respect to the automobile.73 The following year it endorsed the compilation of a standard code of traffic regulations by the street traffic committee of the Safety First Federation of America, which would "be welcomed by everyone conversant with the present chaotic conditions caused primarily by the varying traffic ordinances in force in our municipalities."74 The committee was hopeful that such regulation would be enforced in every city in North America with 5.000 or more residents.75 Thus the automobile had. by the time of the World War I, set in motion a process that would revolutionize the character of the urban environment. Local characteristics would never be entirely eliminated, but more and more cities came to resemble one another under the influence of a commonly shared technology. Ironically, it was the very technology which purported to be an expression of individualism that contributed significantly towards a homogeneity of environment.

Automobile legislation was unique in an important respect, in that it often meant the regulation of Canadian society as a whole, non-motorists as well as motorists. A case in point was the reduced status of the urban pedestrian. Animosity quickly developed between the motorist and the pedestrian after the turn of the century, each claiming priority over the other. In the struggle to assert their claims, pedestrians gained an early sympathy in some quarters. The pedestrian, as the Premier of Ontario made clear in 1910,

has the first right of the road. The chauffeur who thinks that, because he gives warning of his approach, he is entitled to the road, is utterly and entirely wrong. He comes after the pedestrian and even after the man on the bicycle. It is not the pedestrian who must get out of the way of the automobile, but the automobile that must get out of the road of the pedestrian, even if he is standing still.⁷⁶

Yet within a decade, as the number of motor vehicles grew at an unprecedented rate, a reversal of positions was underway. Initially calls were made for the "re-education" of the pedestrian. One contributor to the *Canadian Motorist* in 1916 argued that the automobile's presence required a change of attitude amongst pedestrians, but unfortunately a large number of pedestrians had

not yet graduated from the parochial, or colonial, or wayback attitude, whatever one may call it, in spite of the enormous increase in all kinds of vehicular traffic.⁷⁷

Education alone did not appear to have a significant effect on reducing the conflict between the two, particularly in light of the rising number of pedestrian-related automobile accidents. Many arguments in support of automobiles were built upon accident statistics to demonstrate that, if automobiles were indeed dangerous. pedestrians brought that danger upon themselves. Thus, motorists argued, the problem rested not with the automobile but with the person on the street. Early in 1923 the Ontario Motor League alleged that 70 to 90 per cent of "so-called" automobile accidents in which pedestrians were injured were the fault of the victims; a year later the

Toronto police pointed out that 75 per cent of accidents in which pedestrians were injured were the fault of the pedestrians.⁷⁸ By 1925 the *Canadian Motorist* argued that "reckless walking" must be discouraged and "pedestrian traffic, like all other traffic, regulated."⁷⁹ It was not surprising, therefore, that the journal should smile upon legislation passed in Connecticut that made "reckless walking" an indictable offence.⁸⁰ The logical extension of this attitude regarding pedestrian education, and one increasingly favoured by many, was the regulation of the pedestrian.

By 1920 changes were underway to redefine the relationship between pedestrian and motor vehicle in Canada's cities. F.C. Biggs, the Minister of Public Works for Ontario, stated in 1921:

The sooner this House or the cities wake up and ask pedestrians to cross the street at street intersections and not anywhere they have a mind to hop off the sidewalk, the sooner we are going to get away from 90 per cent of the accidents in the Province.⁸¹

Biggs, a boisterous good-roads advocate and auto enthusiast, was a biased witness to events. Nevertheless, his statement signalled an official recognition of a change of attitude due to the automobile. Moreover, Biggs was not alone in demanding the regulation of the non-motorist. What provided freedom and mobility for one segment of the urban population brought regulation and loss of freedom for another. Claims of prior rights by pedestrians were dismissed by an editorial in the Canadian Motorist in 1923 as "so much idle prattle."82 By that time it had become evident that pedestrians had lost the primacy of consideration to motorists on the nation's streets.

By the onset of the Great Depression, Canada had experienced major alterations brought about by the automobile's presence. It was a transition filled with conflicts and

decisions, the long-term consequences of which had been unforeseen. Given the pattern of concentration, it was to be expected that the urban environment would exhibit striking examples of that change. In everything from sound and smell, to housing design, to street patterns and congestion, the automobile profoundly affected urban life. Although the potential for increased mobility was immediately recognized, the degree to which it ultimately would alter established patterns of temporal and spatial reality (patterns based on 19th-century transportation technology) went unappreciated. The automobile irreversibly altered stable established forms of interaction between the rural and urban environments. Similarly the presence of the automobile required a greater level of societal control than had previously existed, in turn bringing about far-reaching developments. The effects of regulation spread beyond the motoring public, and all city dwellers were subject to restriction forced by the automobile. The automobile was fraught with irony, particularly evident in the paradox of freedom versus regulation — a technology that traded heavily on the possibilities of personal liberation, simultaneously introduced an escalating level of restriction on personal conduct. The introduction of the automobile into Canadian society not only demonstrated how unpredictable a technology's ultimate effects might be but also underscored how technological innovations affect the public in ever-widening and increasingly complex circles.



CTA, SC 488-1519

Appendix 1

Appendix 2

Passenger vehicle registrations in Ontario, 1903-30.*

Year	Registrations
1903 1904 1905 1906 1907 1908 1909 1910 1911 1912 1913 1914 1915 1916 1917 1918 1919 1920 1921 1922 1923 1924 1925 1926 1927 1928 1929 1930	$\begin{array}{c} 178\\ 535\\ 553\\ 1176\\ 1530\\ 1754\\ 2452\\ 4230\\ 11339\\ 16268\\ 23700\\ 31724\\ 42346\\ 51589\\ 78861\\ 101845\\ 127860\\ 155861\\ 101845\\ 127860\\ 155861\\ 181978\\ 210333\\ 245815\\ 271341\\ 303736\\ 343992\\ 386903\\ 429426\\ 473222\\ 490906\\ \end{array}$
 These figures include the number of foreign automobiles registered in Ontario, which presents a truer indication of the number of vehicles on Ontario's roads. 	

Source: Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1942, Annual Report of the Department of Highways, Report of Motor Vehicle Registrations, 1941.

Province	Number	Motor Vehicles Per Population
Saskatchewan	5 773	1:94
Manitoba	5 010	1:100
Alberta	3 600	1:114
British Columbia	3 081	1:140
Ontario	17 750	1:156
Quebec	8 652	1:254
New Brunswick	1 268	1:305
Nova Scotia	1 435	1:343
Prince Edward Island	35	

Source: Canadian Motorist (April 1914): 168.

Appendix 3

Passenger vehicle registrations in Canada 1903-30*

Registrations
178
535
553
1 176
1 530
2 172
3 160
5 890 13 775
20 367
29 295
45 716
60 688
77 963
115 596
157 079
196 367
251 945
333 621
368 510
513 075 573 204
573 204 641 186
736 729
830 001
930 619
1 030 880
1 061 500

* Passenger automobiles also include taxi cabs.

Source: Historical Statistics of Canada, 2nd ed., Series T 148.

Notes

1 Canadian Motorist (hereafter CM) (June 1918): 387.

² The termination date of 1930 has been chosen because most of the changes precipitated by the automobile were either already in place or at least underway by that date. As well, the exceptional social and economic conditions of the Great Depression and their impact on the spread of the automobile in Canada would in themselves require a separate study.

- ³ Edward Sapir, "Culture, Genuine and Spurious," American Journal of Sociology, 29 (Jan. 1924): 408.
- ⁴ Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1942, Annual Report of the Department of Highways, Report of Motor Vehicle Registrations, 1941.
- 5 CM (April 1914): 168.
- ⁶ Preliminary Report: Registration of Motor Vehicles, 1922-24, 1926-56 (Ottawa, 1956).
- 7 Ibid.
- ⁸ Don Kerr and Stan Hanson, Saskatoon: The First Half-Century (Edmonton, 1982): 258; CM (Feb. 1915): 35.
- ⁹ The Automobile Industry in Canada 1924 (Ottawa, 1925).
- ¹⁰ The Automobile Industry in Canada 1921 (Ottawa, 1922); Automobile Statistics for Canada 1926 (Ottawa, 1927).

- ¹¹ Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1923, President's Address, Eleventh Annual Convention, Ontario Good Roads Association.
- ¹² Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1915, Annual Report on Highway Improvement, 1915, appendix D; 1923, Annual Report on Highway Improvement, 1922, appendix G. The 1914 census was conducted for a 12-hour period, from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. However, because of the prevalence of night traffic, the 1922 census was conducted from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m.
- ¹³ Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1915, Annnual Report on Highway Improvement, 1915, appendix D; 1923, Annual Report on Highway Improvement, 1922, appendix G. In this comparison I have considered only one-horse carriages, which most closely correspond to the passenger automobile. However even two-horse vehicles, which would be used in hauling or for light industry, also declined at approximately the same rate according to census figures.
- 14 Report of the Toronto and York Roads Commission (Toronto, 1926): 33.
- ¹⁵ Ontario, Sessional Papers, 1915, Annual Report on Highway Improvement, 1915, appendix D; 1923, Annual report on Highway Improvement, 1922, appendix G.
- 16 The rise of the automobile at the expense of the horse is readily apparent in the decline of the carriage and wagon industry. In Ontario in 1920 there were 217 manufacturers of carriages and wagons, which by 1930 had declined to only 80 such producers. Other forms of transportation also experienced a decline with the growing popularity of the automobile. The automobile meant the eventual decline of the steamboats that served the resort areas of Lake Simcoe and Georgian Bay. Even Ontario's inter-urban railways, built expressly for the efficient movement of passengers, suffered a decline in passenger levels during the 1920s because of the automobile. Preliminary Report of the Carriage and Wagon Industry in Canada 1920 (Ottawa, 1922); Preliminary Report on the Carriage and Wagon Industry in Canada 1929 and 1930 (Ottawa, 1932); John Craig, Simcoe County: The Recent Past (The Corporation of the County of Simcoe, 1977); Report of the Commission Appointed to Inquire Into Hydro-Electric Railways (Ontario Sessional Papers, 1922): 53; John F. Due, The Intercity Electric Railway Industry in Canada (Toronto, 1966): 25, 33-36, 53, 61-95.
- ¹⁷ Annual Report of the Chief Constable of the City of Toronto, 1907, 1910.

- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1913.
- ²⁰ CM (Feb. 1918): 71; J.H. Taylor, Ottawa: An Illustrated History (Toronto, 1986): 146.
- ²¹ CM (July 1918): 445.
- 22 CM (Dec. 1916): 496.
- ²³ Annual Report of the Chief Constable of the City of Toronto, 1926.
- 24 Ibid., 1927.
- ²⁵ James Lemon, "Tracey Deavin Lemay: Toronto's First Planning Commissioner 1930-1954," *City Planning* (Winter 1984): 4-5.
- ²⁶ Blaine Brownell, "Urban Planning, the Planning Profession, and the Motor Vehicle in Early Twentieth Century America," in *Shaping an Urban World*, ed. G. E. Cherry (London, 1980): 60.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 69
- 28 Ibid., 67.
- ²⁹ Annual Report of the Chief Constable of the City of Toronto, 1924.
- 30 Ibid., 1928.
- ³¹ Taylor, Ottawa: 48.
- ³² Report of the Advisory City Planning Commission (Toronto, 1929): 11.
- 33 CM (Oct. 1915): 345.
- ³⁴ CM (Sept. 1915): 306. The Canadian Motorist also added a note of warning to owners of houses with garages joined by conservatories. Noting the danger to plants when the doors are thrown open in winter, the journal advised that there would be no problem "so long as the chauffeur sees to it that the communicating door between the conservatory and the garage is kept shut."
- ³⁵ Deaths Due to Motor Vehicle Accidents (Ottawa, 1934).
- ³⁶ Ibid.; Annual Report of the Chief Constable of the City of Toronto, 1907; CM (Feb. 1923): 76.
- ³⁷ Deaths Due to Motor Vehicle Accidents (Ottawa, 1934).
- 38 Macleans (July 1913).

- 39 Hamilton Times, 6 July 1918.
- 40 Hamilton Spectator, 27 Feb. 1923.
- ⁴¹ Hamilton Spectator, 6 May 1924.
- 42 Brownell: 72.
- 43 Globe, 21 March 1908.
- ⁴⁴ An analysis of *Macleans* advertising shows that rural settings were favoured in the majority of automobile advertisements in which a setting was discernible: 1920-21 67%; 1922 60%; 1923 38%; 1924 63%; 1925 88%; 1926 68%; 1927 59%; 1928 67%; 1929 68%; 1930 69%. The lure of the countryside is well documented by Warren Belasco, who examines the rise of autocamping in the United States and the organizational changes necessitated by its phenomenal popularity, in *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979).
- ⁴⁵ Roland Marchand, Advertising the American Dream (Berkeley. 1985): 10.
- ⁴⁶ A.T. Poffenberger, *Psychology in Advertising* (Chicago, 1925); T.J.J. Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of Consumer Culture, 1880-1930," in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History*, 1880-1980 (New York, 1983): 18-19.
- ⁴⁷ Saturday Evening Post (hereafter SEP) (15 March 1924).
- ⁴⁸ The term "middle landscape" is from P.D. Goist, From Main Street to State Street: Town, City and Community in America (Port Washington, 1977): 40.
- 49 Macleans (1 May 1929).
- 50 Macleans (15 Oct. 1920).
- 51 Macleans (June 1924).
- 52 Canadian Magazine (May 1924).
- 53 Macleans (July 1924).
- Macleans (July 1913).
- ⁵⁵ Joseph Interrante, "You Can't Go To Town in a Bathtub: Automobile Movement and the Reorganization of Rural American Space, 1900-1930," *Radical History Review*, 21 (1980): 153-54.

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- ⁵⁶ Wolfgang Shivelbusch, The Railway Journey: Trains and Travel in the 19th Century (New York, 1979): 25-27.
- ⁵⁷ Siegfried Gideon, "The New Space Conception: Space-Time," in *Aspects of Time*, ed. C. A. Patrides (Manchester, 1976): 85.
- ⁵⁸ P.E. Doolittle, "The Pleasure of Erecting Road Signs," CM (April 1914): 146-47.
- 59 Ibid., 182.
- 60 Ibid.
- ⁶¹ For an examination of the urban "strip" in light of the physical, architectural, and economic characteristics peculiar to it, see R.P. Horowitz, *The Strip* (Lincoln, Neb., 1985).
- ⁶² James Grantham, "The Law and the Motor," *Macleans* (May 1914): 29.
- ⁶³ Macleans (1 May 1927); Canadian Magazine (April 1927).
- 64 SEP (24 Sept. 1921).
- 65 SEP (26 May 1923).
- Hamilton Herald, 14 June 1911; Hamilton Herald, 19 Aug. 1912.
- 67 Grantham: 30.
- 68 The 1923 act consolidated the various disparate streams of automobile legislation into a single cohesive unit. Under the one act were combined the Motor Vehicles Act and its amended acts, the Loan of Vehicles Act and its amended acts, the Traction Engines Act, and the Highway Travel Act. In doing so, the one act incorporated virtually every conceivable nuance of motorized vehicle legislation. The act itself was divided into ten sections: two of the largest were concerned with vehicles - the first was broken down into 26 separate sections and subsections, outlining items from registration procedures to details of proper licence plate display, and the second, the equipment section, with 32 sections and subsections, defined the physical necessities of the automobile including brakes, mirrors, tires, and mufflers. 13-14 Geo. V, c. 48, S. 67.; 13-14 Geo. V, c. 48, S. 3-16.
- 69 2 Geo. V, c. 48, S. 26.

- ⁷⁰ The information required for a chauffeur's licence, for example, included the now standard personal questions such as age, weight, height, and eye and hair colour. It also included, however, questions concerning a criminal record, the use of alcohol, and whether or not the individual was addicted to the use of morphine or other drugs. *CM* (January 1914): 9.
- 71 Geo. VII, c. 47, S. 2.
- 72 CM (Aug. 1914): 319.
- 73 CM (Feb. 1915): 40.
- 74 CM (Feb. 1916): 38.
- 75 CM (May 1916): 163.
- ⁷⁶ Toronto Daily Star, 10 March 1910.
- 77 CM (Aug. 1916): 292.
- ⁷⁸ CM (Jan. 1923): 31, CM (March 1924): 119.
- 79 CM (Jan. 1925): 19.
- ⁸⁰ CM (Jan. 1923): 31.
- ⁸¹ Ontario, Legislative Assembly, *Debates*, 8 March 1921.
- 82 CM (Feb. 1923): 89.

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