

# THE SPARK PLUG

News to spark your interest

July/August 2020

Spirit of St. Louis Region Classic Car Club of America



Lincoln Theodore Monroe Andrew Perry AKA “StepinFetchit” with his 1928 Cadillac 341A Sport Phaeton.

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## SPARK PLUG NEWSLETTER

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# Director's Message

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I trust this message continues to find you well and staying safe from the coronavirus. As you are well aware, this pandemic has resulted in the postponement, even cancellation, of events not only in our region, but nationally as well. Even the AACA made the difficult decision recently to cancel the venerable Hershey Swap Meet, one that many in our Region attend each year. Regrettably, this is the first time in 65 years that this iconic event will not take place.

But the days ahead can only get brighter, right? In fact, a few SSR members recently drove their cars out to join some other old car aficionados in parading through the grounds of Friendship Village in Sunset Hills for the benefit of the residents there, among them Bill Albertin of our Region. I've heard it was a huge success!

Soon, this whole thing, this pandemic, will be in the rear-view mirror, and we'll be talking about getting back together socially, and on the road again with the Classics we love. I'd like to propose that we get back on track with Spirit Nights in August, how about it? I know we can find a suitable place to enjoy a nice dinner where we can be an "old car length apart."

Here's some good news to share, and perhaps you've already heard, but SSR member Larry Hassel is now a member of the National CCCA Board of Directors. It seems another Board member unexpectedly resigned leaving a position open, so as a runner-up in the national election earlier this year, new CCCA President Steve Babinsky contacted Larry to consider the position, and he accepted. Larry's multiple talents will be put to good use by the CCCA Board, and his presence will keep the SSR in the forefront on the National level. Congratulations Larry!

Oh, one last item, and that is we're always looking for interesting articles, or tidbits of information related to our hobby, or perhaps your own restoration, so please feel free to share it with us, and we'll include it in an upcoming *Spark Plug* newsletter, or perhaps *The Spirit Magazine*.

Most importantly, stay well, stay safe, and keep smilin'!

John



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# Across the Editor's Desk

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The unusual cover image on this Spirit of St. Louis Spark Plug is interesting and appropriate as it represents something about Wendell Smith's great article in this issue. Many of you may not be old enough to know who StepinFetchit was but if you have ever watched a lot of movies from the 1930s and 1940s you may have seen him and his character. His real name was Lincoln Theodore Monroe Andrew Perry but his screen name represented the slow moving, but cool and positive character that today would be considered offensive to many black Americans. At that time, he was merely accepted as humorous and never meant to be taken seriously in the story. It is obvious by his Classic transportation in this picture that he must have done well for himself in this career as he could afford a beautiful 1928 Cadillac Fisher Sport Phaeton and a well-dressed chauffeur to drive it for him. This was a \$3,950 car in 1928 and the accessory running board mounted spotlight added a bit more to that cost.

The point here is that researching the history of your Classic may turn up famous or important owners from when it was new or sometime later in its life. It is possible that Mr. Perry's Cadillac may still exist and someone's diligent research may dig up that fact and add interest and value to your car.

We are disappointed that we have not been able to identify the original owner of our 1929 Cadillac Fleetwood 3512 Transformable Town Cabriolet, although we know his initials were M.M.S, which were on the rear door moldings when we found the car. We do know it was delivered at the distributor in Jersey City, New Jersey on 28 October, 1928, but that is as much as we have been able to find out.

It was in the Boyertown, Pennsylvania Museum of Historic Vehicles from 1963 to 1983 and had been driven by the Paul Hafer, owner of the museum, from New Hampshire to Pennsylvania when he acquired it. Although not the complete story we would like, it still adds interest and personality to our Cadillac. Those of our members who know the history of their Classic Car are invited to put together a story about its history for our publication. They are all interesting.

**Don't forget the Spark Plug Submission deadline of 20 August, 2020**

**Jim Schild**



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## Membership Musings



I am restless. I suspect I'm not alone. I have been looking for ways to get in my car and get out – trying to be in appropriately small or socially distant groups, of course. Events and interactions with people are taking on a different look. A Fathers' Day car show at Friendship Village, instigated by member Bill Albertin, attracted around 40 cars. But rather than a static display, we were led through the complex by a golf cart, like a giant snake, sometimes circling back on ourselves as we made our way around cul-de-sacs. Definitely a different twist on the traditional car show. This kind of show requires cars to look good at 5 to 10 mph. Hot weather may make a long, slow drive a huge hurdle. Show visitors sit or stand near the curb and shout their compliments or questions as you approach. It's a different kind of show. I'm not sure it will catch on or last for long. But it was different. Something new to try. An adventure. May not be ideal, but it's an alternative to sitting around, waiting for normalcy

to return.

Or you can engage in a bit of fantasy. Another one of our members has written a book about a slightly different adventure. *Journey to the West*, by member and Spark Plug editor Jim Schild, tells the story of brothers Jim and Jack Thompson as they make a 1915 trip from New York to San Diego in a 1913 Peerless touring car. There is a lot going on in this story. Part of the appeal for me is the idea of a long drive through the country. I've always been a fan of driving. I enjoy the experience of seeing sights framed by a car's windshield. The story is keeping alive my hope of taking exciting trips in a Classic. Now I can also look forward to the time when I'll be able to stop and talk to people along the way.

Todd



# Researching Your Cars History

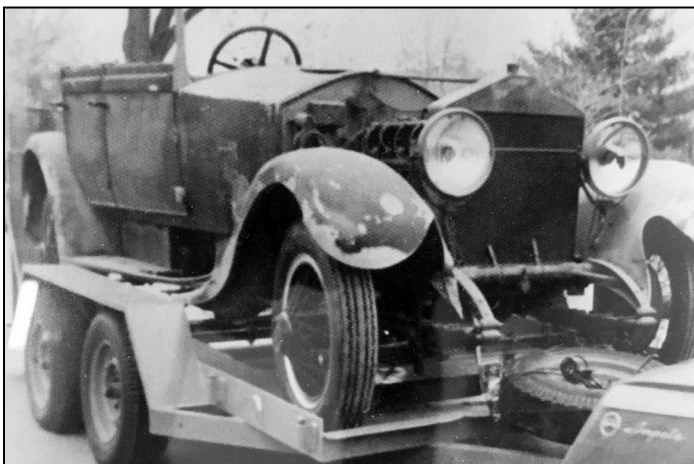
By Wendell Smith

I believe anyone that owns or has interest in classic cars is a history buff at heart. Some of us have an innate desire to delve into the history of our cars beyond cursory knowledge to the point of tracing a car's history all the way back to the original owner. I have found knowing, who the original owner was, where the owner lived, his /her profession, where the car was purchased, where the owner kept the car etc. to be extremely fascinating.

I bought my first classic, my 1927 Phantom I Rolls Royce (83EF), in the mid 1970's. I acquired the car from the estate of Carroll Vail. Vail had been active in the St Louis car collector community and in 1953 was president of the national Rolls Royce Owners' Club. His widow told me he had found the car in a corn field near Chamois, Missouri, approximately three years before his death. Carroll had planned to restore the car; however, he died before he had an opportunity to undertake what proved to be a very extensive project. The car, a convertible, had sat in the corn field for approximately twenty years without a hood or a top as we call it in the U.S. The engine was seized, all of the wood in the coach framing was rotten, the top irons and several parts including instruments and wing lamps were missing. I was extremely curious to learn why such a very expensive car had been neglected and had fallen into such disrepair.



*Carroll Vail and Norris Allen retrieving the PI in 1971. Below: The PI when I pulled it home from the Vail estate. All that Vail had done was to install used tires to roll it around.*



With very few leads to work from in a pre-internet era I set about my research. I contacted the chamber of commerce in Chamois and ask if they could help me make contact with the family in their community that had once had a vintage Rolls Royce that had been parked in a corn field for a number of years. The community historian got back to me providing the name of a lady that had previously owned the farm where the car had been parked. She was living in a retirement center. I contacted her and made arrangements to go out for a visit. She told me the story about her former husband who had gone to Chicago in the 1940s to find work in support of World War II. He had found the Rolls in a scrap yard where it was destined for demolition. The car was road worthy. He drove the car to Missouri and put it in her parent's barn. She said they drove the car very little and when she and her husband divorced, her parents pulled the car out of the barn to the side of a corn field where it sat for approximately twenty years before being recovered by Vail and fellow club member, the late Norris Allen. I am not sure how much she was paid for the car. She asked me what I had paid for it and I told her I got it from Vail's estate through a sealed bid I had made of \$2,500. I got the impression I paid considerably more than she had received for the car. I asked if there were any parts such as the top irons that remained in the barn. She said no. The loose parts were either thrown in a ditch and would be destroyed by rust or were stolen. Apparently the clock, small wing lamps, tools and other items were stolen off the car when it was sitting in the field behind the barn which was not far from a country road. The top irons, which were difficult for me to reproduce, must have ended up in a ditch on the farm.

The next phase of my research was to contact Rolls Royce in England to try to find out who had bought the car new. I found out who had ordered the car, the address to which the car was to be delivered, and I was provided with the Rolls Royce factory build sheet of the chassis. Additionally, I was provided the coach details of the custom coach builder Windover's. In this era Rolls Royce didn't make their own bodies. The chassis was delivered to six or so approved high end custom coach builders who worked with the owners in providing exactly what they wanted.

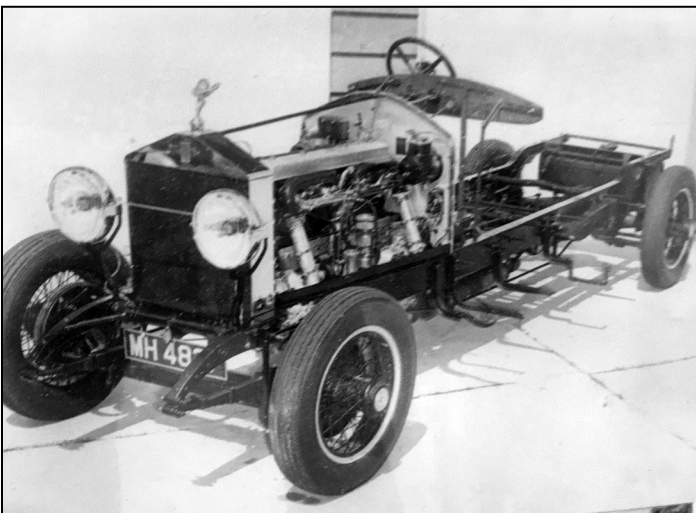
Having been provided with the name and address of the gentleman who purchased the car new, I set about my next phase of research; learning what I could about J. P. Rend. The address on the order was an office in the McCormick building on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. I found Rend's name in the 1927 Who's Who publication. Rend owned coal mines in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. I learned he had a wife, son and two daughters. The family lived in the Water Tower District of North Chicago. Their home was a large unit in the first condominium that was built in the United States. The building is now on the national register. I was unable to find the name of Rend's wife or children in Chicago directories. My next step was to check obituaries and probate records which are public documents. I learned that Rend and his wife had both died by the time I was conducting my research in the mid 70's. Usually a will lists the names of all members of the immediate family. Rend only gave his wife's name. I would have liked to have contacted his children to inquire if they had any family photos of the car when it was new. The car was so badly deteriorated when I got it I didn't even know the color it had been painted.

The research was fun. I even made a couple of trips to Chicago. I visited the McCormick building where Rend had his office. I found the family's condominium and saw the garages behind

the building where my car had been kept. I even visited the cemetery where Mr. and Mrs. Rend were buried. By the time I completed my research I almost felt like I was part of the Rend family and that I had lived in the era when the Phantom I was delivered to the Rends.



*PI Coachwork before restoration.*



*Restored PI chassis*

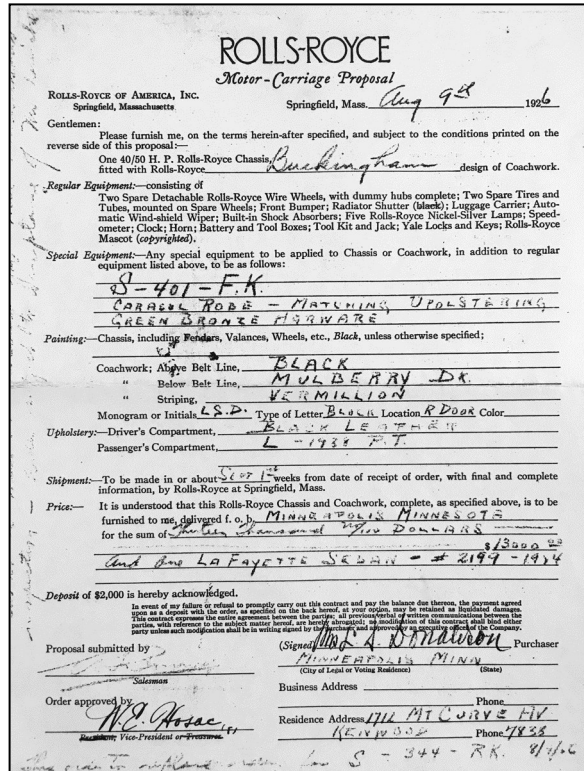
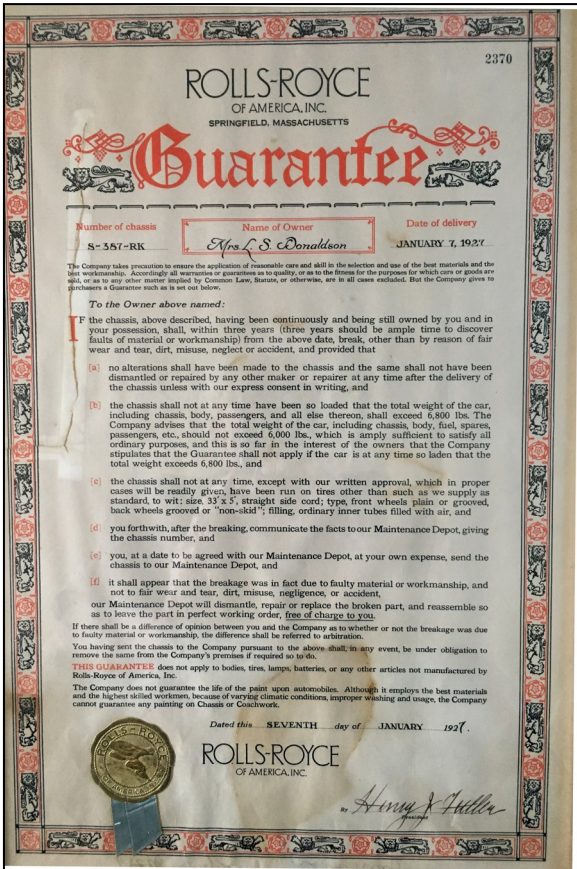
The research on my 1925 Silver Ghost (S387RK) proved to be much simpler. The car is original and had spent its first fifty years with the same family. Randall Andrae, from whom I acquired the car, had gone about researching the car when he bought it in the 1970s. I did, however, spend a brief amount of time on the internet to build on the research Randall had provided. The Rolls Royce Foundation now has ownership and factory records that are readily available to foundation members. I verified that the original owners of the Ghost had been the Lawrence S Donaldson family in Minneapolis. I also learned the mansion where the original family lived is still in existence and had been recently restored. The Mansion was recently featured in a tabletop book on the twenty best mansions in Minnesota. The book even includes photos and descriptions of how the carriage house where the chauffeur lived is connected via tunnel to the basement of the mansion.

Even though I now have considerable information on the history of the Phantom I and the Ghost my research hasn't ended. Now I want to determine if both cars were ordered through the

same Rolls Royce dealership in Chicago. It is quite likely they were, and it is also very likely Rend and Donaldson knew one another. Donaldson owned the largest department store in Minnesota. He was well connected throughout the Midwest and even had a membership in the Chicago Country Club. I do not believe Minneapolis had a Rolls Royce dealership. The original order form/invoice on the Ghost indicates it was ordered in 1925, however, it was not delivered until January of 1927. My Phantom I was delivered in March of 1927 to the Rolls Royce dealer in Chicago. The Ghost was made in the Springfield, Massachusetts factory and the Phantom I was made in England. The Springfield factory was a couple of years behind the factory in England in converting production to the new model. Many people became upset with the two-year production delays at the U.S. factory and ordered the new model from the Derby factory in England. There were actually 120 Phantom I's shipped to the U.S. during this period.







Randall had the original order for the Ghost. This makes one's research easy to do.

It makes one's research much easier if your car comes with the original guarantee

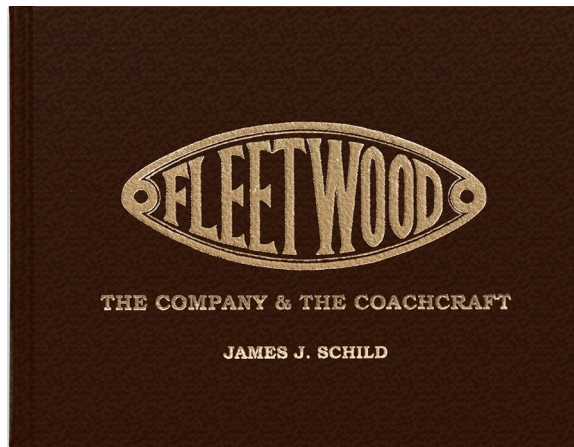


1927 Rolls-Royce Phantom I Windover's All Weather. Photo by Larry Hassel

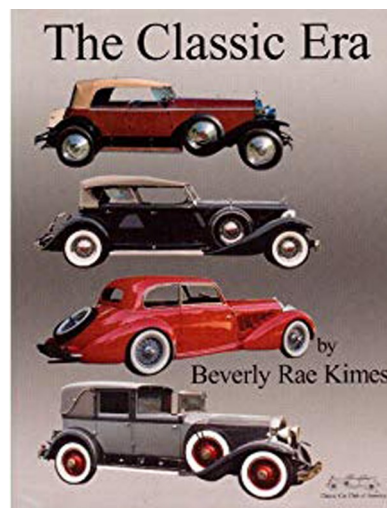


1925 Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost Limousine, Brewster.

## THE CLASSIC BOOKSHELF



The SSR Region proudly announces a re-issue of the book *Fleetwood, The Company and The Coachcraft*, by Region member James J. Schild. Long out of print, and a must for all Classic Car enthusiasts, the book is printed on high quality paper, and is the authoritative work on Fleetwood coachwork supplied to the finest American and European car manufacturers. Awarded the prestigious **Maurice Hendry Award** for excellence in journalistic contributions by the Cadillac & La Salle Club in 2012, and the **Thomas McKean Memorial Cup** by the Antique Automobile Club of America in 2013. Brown leatherette cover with gold foil stamping, 464 pages, 1100 b/w illustrations. \$99.50 postpaid. International buyers, please contact us for a shipping quote. Order your copy today from the SSR Region via email at [ssr.ccca@yahoo.com](mailto:ssr.ccca@yahoo.com), or via our webstore at [www.spiritccca.com](http://www.spiritccca.com).



The SSR has a limited supply of the award winning book, *The Classic Era*, by the late Beverly Rae Kimes, available for sale. Hardcover, 8-1/2 x 11, 720 Pages. The top and bottom cover Classics are owned by SSR members. These books are brand new and a must for the Classic Car enthusiast. \$50.00. To reserve a copy, contact Bob Radel at 314-991-3590.

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website: [Robertpass.com](http://Robertpass.com)

email: [Robert@robertpass.com](mailto:Robert@robertpass.com)

# CALENDAR OF EVENTS

## July 2020

St. Louis Car Museum Show, 1575 Woodson Road, St. Louis County 25 July, 2020

Veteran's Home Show, 10600 Lewis & Clark Blvd., Bill Albertin 26 July, 2020

## August 2020

>>SSR Spirit Night. Location and host to be announced 4 August, 2020

SSR Spark Plug Submission Deadline 20 August, 2020

## September 2020

>>SSR Spirit Night. Location and host to be announced 1 September, 2020

HCCM Brass & Nickel Show, Museum of Transportation 12 September, 2020

Wheels in Motion Charity Show, Westport Plaza 13 September, 2020

British Car Show, Creve Coeur Park 19 September, 2020

HCCM Show and Swap Meet 20 September, 2020