

American Tire Manufacturers: Pneumatic tires and their desirability for early automobiles were described last week. Dozens of companies in America got into the business of tire manufacture. A few of these early companies, notably Firestone and Goodyear, are making tires used on modern cars today.

Charles Goodyear (1800-1860) was a 19th-century man who had nothing to do with tires, but he invented the process for vulcanizing rubber. The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company was named for him upon its founding in 1898. Harvey S. Firestone (1868-1938) was a close friend of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford and certainly had the “inside track” when he started the tire company bearing his name. At least two of his sons, Harvey Jr. and Roger, were involved in the operation of the company after their father’s death. Roger Firestone was superintendent of the Pottstown (PA) plant in the mid-20th century and was very supportive of the antique car hobby when the AACA Spring Meet was hosted by the new Pottstown Region in 1952. In fact, in the late 1940s, Firestone kept antique cars on the road when it started making new “Non-Skid” tires in about six of the sizes required for early cars. A Firestone truck would accompany the early Glidden Tour revivals, and its perennial operator named “George” was extremely helpful to those who had tire trouble on these tours. In 1950, we bought two new tires from George for our Model 78 at Lake Placid, New York. Firestone was bought out in 1988 by a Japanese company named Bridgestone.

There were many other “heavy hitters” in the tire business. Many of the companies were located in or near Akron, Ohio, but others were widely scattered. For many years, the United States Rubber Company had a major share of the market. Tires with the name “U.S.Royal” and “Royal Master” appeared on many new cars, including Packards. About 1940, this company came out with a puncture-proof “Lifeguard” inner tube, or so it was advertised. It was actually two compartments in one tube, so if something ruptured the outer one nearest the road surface, the other would hold air for a while and go down slowly. These tubes were heavy and were badly out of balance.

General Tires were more expensive and were considered very good, but they were sold in more limited numbers. Clarence Hazel was the General Tire dealer in Wilmington with his shop on West 11th Street across from the Nemours Building. Here are some of the other makes that come to mind: Goodrich Silvertown, Lee of Conshohocken, Kelly-Springfield, Fisk, Pennsylvania, Gates, Seiberling, Carlisle, and Cooper. Johnny Rigg, an expert trapshooter who worked for the Lee Tire Company in Conshohocken, got his company to make some antique-size inner tubes and flaps for my father about 1950. In its advertising, Fisk featured a yawning toddler with the words “Time to Retire, Get a Fisk.” When I needed to buy a spare for my ’40 Packard in New Mexico early in 1945, the Albuquerque ration board gave me a coupon that was exchanged for a Pennsylvania tire made in Jeannette (PA), just east of Pittsburgh. I bought several Gates tires for my ’55 Chrysler from George Kane, who had a Texaco station at Price’s Corner. This Denver company, better known for its fan belts, made very good tires. The Carlisle Tire and Rubber Company made excellent inner tubes for antique cars.

Big-name mail houses, such as Sears Roebuck and Montgomery Ward, sold tires through their catalogs and also their retail stores. It was not generally known who made Sears Allstates or Ward’s Riversides, but they were highly competitive in cost and quality. The first new tires on our Stanley Model 76 after its 1940-41 restoration were 32 x 4-1/2 Allstates, and a Model T Ford owner could buy 30 x 3½ Riversides well into the 1960s. In Wilmington, the Sears tire shop was at 10th and French Streets in the old Packard dealership building. I bought two Allstates there for my ’40 Packard 110, and it was obvious from the tread that they had been made by Goodyear. Cornell Tires were sold by Pep Boys. They may have been made by a tire company of that name, or they may have been bought from someone else like was the case with Allstates and Riversides.

Filling stations owned by the large oil companies also sold tires, usually made by others. Atlas Tires were sold widely in the east by Esso (Eastern States Standard Oil) and other Standard Oil affiliates. On a trip to Ohio in my Packard 110 in 1947, I bought two Atlas 6.50 x 16 tires from a Sohio station. There were some Dunlop tires imported from England during the first half of the 20th century; in fact, Dunlop may have had a factory in this

country. However, excellent tires made by the French company, Michelin, very popular today, were almost unknown in the U.S. before 1970.

Firestone made its “Non-Skid” tires in antique sizes, along with excellent tubes, through the 1950s, but when others got into the manufacture of these obsolete sizes, it quietly bowed out. The Gehrig Tire Company of Fort Wayne, Indiana, began making excellent rib-tread tires in many sizes not previously available. Many of these tires were six-ply, and you couldn’t wear them out! When Gehrig fell on financial hard times in the late 1960s, his company was bought by Winthrop Rockefeller, Governor of Arkansas, who continued to make and expand the sizes available under the name “PJA Pneumatic.” Bill and Ann Klein of Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania, bought PJA and changed the name to Universal Tire Company. At the same time, Tom Lester, a wealthy car collector from Cleveland, began the manufacture of Lester Tires in most of the same sizes offered by Universal. Eventually, Ann Klein bought Lester and the competition between the two for a very similar product was ended.

Harold and Corky Coker of Chattanooga developed a full line of classic car tire sizes, as did Stan Lucas of Long Beach, California. The Cokers started building antique car rims developed by Bruce Green, and sometime after 2000, the Coker Tire Company bought Universal, which is now operated from a separate location near Hershey.

Work Report: On Tuesday, June 30, the following 14 volunteers were in attendance: Dave Leon (in charge), Brent McDougall, Anne Cleary, Jerry Lucas, Ted Kamen, Tim Ward, Steve Bryce, Jerry Novak, Jay Williams, Mac Taylor, Tom Marshall, Paul Kratunis, John Bacino, and John Schubel.

The Mountain Wagon’s speedometer, which had failed again on the trip to Rockwood, was repaired, and the car was prepped for the July 4 parade and the Steamin’ Day on July 5. On Locomotive 401, braces were installed in the cab to support the rear near the top, the hand brake was removed and bent so it will catch the notches when applied, and the rear coupler on the tender was adjusted and vertically supported. The right foot support was straightened and fastened in place.

The red panels of the Cretors popcorn machine were sanded again, as the first attempt at painting resulted in a rough finish. The A.V.R.R. track was checked over and cleaned off, especially near the switches. The electric train crew made further improvements and reported that they have another standard-gauge locomotive running. The trailers from the Eastern Steam Car Tour were unloaded, and the Stanley cars and parts were put back in their proper places.

On Thursday, July 2, 10 volunteers were on hand, viz: Steve Bryce (in charge), Emil Christofano, Tim Ward, Jim Personti, Bill Schwoebel, Lou Mandich, Edwin Paschall, Kelly Williams, Tom Marshall, and Ted Kamen (in the afternoon).

The rebuilt track near the back building was re-checked for gauge and elevation, and some slight modifications were made. The spill-containment modules were moved onto one of the concrete pads. Both trailers were parked in their permanent storage locations. Locomotive 401 was checked over again, and one car was hooked to it to make sure the rear coupler on the tender is properly aligned and adjusted. The Model T Ford was fueled up for its planned use on Steamin’ Sunday.

The Model 725 was thoroughly cleaned from its trip to the Steam Car Tour, and the steam automatic is off for checking and rebuilding. The “Cretors red” was sprayed again on the popcorn machine parts. The Cretors engine with its newly-nickeled parts is completely re-assembled and has been tested on air. Unfortunately, the complete unit will not be ready for display and operation on our “Tuesday night at the Museum” on July 7. The wheel hubs and one damaged rim from the Model 607 were further checked to determine the right course of action before they will be ready for new wood wheels.

We are sorry to report the passing of Arland Lane Sr. on June 30. “Arlie” was a woodcarver, and his operating model carousel was on display in our museum for several months in 2012. Earlier, a life-size wooden horse,

built for and painted by Mary Lou Lawlor, was on display at several of our Steamin' Days. Arlie was 77, and he will be missed.