

The Story of "The Hub"

Taken largely from "The Hub" October 1908

This trade journal report on the news of the carriage industry every month with the latest information about different factories from all over the world, feature articles were included each month on the latest design for vehicles, black smithing, wood working, drafting, trimming and painting.

"The Hub" trade journal was the earliest and longest running monthly trade publication for carriage builders from 1858 to 1919 when it changed its name to the "Automotive Manufacturer." The publication was totally destroyed by fire once on April 28, 1874 and again on July 22, 1883. In order to tell the whole story of this publication we will start at the very beginning with the annual publication of Cyrus W. Saladee of Columbus, Ohio in 1853. It was in book form, containing about 150 pages of technical matter, with a supplemental chart containing the fashion plates. Only two numbers were issued. After discontinuing his annual, C. W. Saladee began the publication of the "Coach Makers' Illustrated Magazine," in 1855 published at Columbus, Ohio. However, Ezra M. Stratton became the agent in New York City, which added somewhat to its reputation.

During the period of the late 1850's the majority of the carriage factories were in New Haven, Connecticut - Bridgeport, Connecticut - Newark, New Jersey - Rahway, New Jersey - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania - Wilmington, Delaware, making the majority of heavy coaches then in use. At the same time, nearly every town of a thousand inhabitants north of the Potomac and Ohio Rivers had one or more prosperous "coach factories." They were considered coach factories even though the heaviest job they produced was a Rockaway or a Germantown.

Saladee's magazine lasted scarcely three years when it was discontinued, chiefly from lack of support as well as a bitter quarrel between C. W. Saladee and Ezra M. Stratton. One of the chief difficulties that Mr. Saladee had to overcome was the difficulty of obtaining the names of vehicle makers, as there were no mercantile reports, no carriage directories, nor any lists from which to mail sample copies. The names were obtained one by one, in various ways, and the list carefully guarded as it was an important item in the stock of accounts.

Mr. Saladee while away on a business trip in Europe left Ezra Stratton in charge. Mr. Saladee claimed that Ezra Stratton immediately began preparations to launch a paper of his own. Mr. Stratton denied these claims, however, Saladee's paper died and Stratton's paper was born.

In June, 1858, the first number of the "New York Coach Makers' Magazine" made its appearance, the "New York" in the title serving to give the paper metropolitan prestige, which was essential in those days. It was "Devoted to the Literary, Social and Mechanical interests of the Craft," the literary coming first, it is to be observed.

This magazine being ultimately merged with The Hub, it might be well to state that the "literary" feature was faithfully adhered to, not only by Mr. Stratton, but by Geo. W. W. Houghton, both of

whom were scholars and did much to elevate the carriage industry, striving to make it a profession rather than a trade.

The first number of the "New York Carriage Makers' Magazine," opened with a two-page biography of James Brewster, together with a full-page portrait. Then follows three columns of "Coach Making with the Poets"; three columns on "The Centralization and Manufacture of Carriages"; another three columns on "The Threefold Nature of Man," after which we read the opening chapter of "Coach Making Historically Considered and Incidentally Illustrated." There were four fashion plates, per issue, showing only the side view and not in perspective, as in later issues.

In subsequent volumes of the magazine, Mr. Stratton wrote the most complete history of early vehicles which has ever been published. Because the articles on ancient vehicles seemed to be out of touch with the times, there was a lot of ridicule at the time. They later became a valuable addition to carriage literature. The history was republished in a single volume, the title of which is "The World on Wheels."

The "New York Coach Makers' Magazine" catered almost exclusively to the proprietors of the shops, rather ignoring the workmen. While this attitude was not conducive to big clubs in the shops, and could not swell his subscription list, those names which he did have represented the purchasing power, so advertisers benefited.

First Advertisers

Apropos of his advertisers, a few of the material men who supported those early issues of the New York Coach Makers' Magazine were David Dalzell, of Dalzell Axle, South Egremont, Massachusetts - Tomlinson Spring and Axle Company, Bridgeport, Connecticut - Spring Perch Company, Bridgeport, Connecticut - Ives and Pardee Company, Mount Carmel, Connecticut mountings - Carey & Young and C. N. Lockwood, both of Newark, New Jersey, carriage lamps - Dann Bros., New Haven, Connecticut, woodwork - C. Cowles & Company, New Haven, Connecticut, carriage trimmings - H. D. Smith & Co., Plantsville, Connecticut, shaft couplings - and nine different varnish firms. One of the varnish firms Stinson, Valentine & Company of Boston was later to become the owners of the magazine.

These advertisements help give historians a picture of what the carriage industry was like in the late 1850's. There were no advertisers west of Philadelphia. There were few articles sold through jobbing houses. There were no body factories in those days; every carriage builder made his own bodies and gears, and in many cases he also made his own wheels, though his hubs, spokes and felloes were purchased. Such a thing as a top factory was unheard of, each shop employing its own trimmer either all or a portion of the time.

The Hub's Early History

Early in 1869, George F. Swain, an employ of Valentine & Company, 32 Kilby Street, Boston, issued a most remarkable sheet entitled Valentine's Advertiser. It was issued during the absence of Lawson Valentine and immediately on his return he ordered every copy burned.

After the bonfire, Lawson Valentine told George Houghton to try his hand at editing a paper in the interest of Valentine's varnishes and particularly of permanent wood filling, which was just being placed on the market. Perhaps no one was more capable of accomplishing this task than was George W. W. Houghton, recently graduated from the Cambridge High School and with natural literary talent.

"The Hub" was the title of the paper which George Houghton issued in April, 1869, it being published at the Riverside Press in Cambridge. It was in newspaper form, clean, bright and readable. The title was borrowed from Oliver Wendell Holmes' allusion to the State House in Boston being the "hub of the universe." This and the fact that the hub is a very important part of the vehicle decided the name.

Moved to New York

In 1870 Valentine and Company moved to New York and "The Hub" came along. Its form was changed to that of the "Aldine," a literary magazine which had just been started; even the style of type used for the title was copied. The "New York Coach Makers's Magazine" was purchased and merged with "The Hub," which maintained both titles for a year or two, and then dropped the magazine part.

After disposing of his publication Ezra N. Stratton resided on Lexington avenue in New York, and conducted a coal business, which he had previously maintained in conjunction with the magazine. He died in November, 1883. Cyrus W. Saladee died on Sept. 5, 1894, the later part of his life being spent in improving other men's patents and selling his patents on royalty.

The first New York office of the Hub was at 88 Chambers street and it branched out as a full fledged trade journal. Clemens Peterson, who had recently come to this country from Denmark, was made assistant editor, George Meyer was advertising solicitor. He was soon succeeded by H. E. W. Campbell, who became manager. He was succeeded by a man named Dalzell, who continued only for a short time.

About that time the Hub moved to 323 Pearl street, and Hadwin Houghton, a brother of George, purchased Lawson Valentine's stock and became treasurer and manager. In 1879 Hadwin Houghton went to Paris to open a branch house for Valentine and Company, and as he was to be absent a number of years, he sold his stock back to Mr. Valentine.

William R. Beckwith, a young man in Valentine's office, was then placed in charge as manager, and filled the position for several years, finally resigning to enter other business.

Charles B. Sherron who had represented the "Carriage Monthly" for many years, having started as office boy and become traveler, entered the employ of "The Hub" in September, 1876. He succeeded a Mr. Van Siclen as traveling representative and on Mr. Beckwith's retirement was made manager. But the love of the road was too strong and in a short time he resumed his former position and was succeeded by Maximilian Yaegerhuber. Then J. Howard Barnard became manager. He quit and was succeeded for a short time only by a Mr. Wells.

After Wells came J. H. Eggers, who had grown up in the business, having come to "The Hub" office when a lad, and later became book-keeper. Mr. Eggers was manager for a number of years, finally leaving to enter another publishing business in New York.

C. B. Sherron, in the meantime, had left "The Hub," but after six years of absence returned for three or four years, while Eggers was manager and George Houghton still editing the publication. The territory was then divided, C. B. Sherron taking Pennsylvania and all west of and south of the State, while Alfred E. Chirm had New York State and New England. Chirm was an Englishman, a Birmingham boy, and as noble, honest and conscientious a man as was every in the employ of "The Hub." After leaving "The Hub" he entered the employ of a big English varnish house, representing them in the United States and Canada and also visiting South Africa in their interest.

But we must go back a few years to 1880, introducing Charles H. E. Redding, who succeeded Sherron when he left the first time. Redding served "The Hub" faithfully and well for a period of four or five years, resigning to start a paper of his own, which was devoted to the harness industry. This paper ultimately became known as "Harness" and became owned by the publishers of "The Hub." While not actively interested in the carriage trade, Redding attended all the C. B. N. A. conventions, having charge of the annual exhibit.

While "The Hub" had quite a number of managers and traveling representatives during its existence, it had few owners, editors and draftsmen. As previously stated, George W. W. Houghton was its first editor after the amalgamation of the two papers and Adolphus Muller was its draftsman. Adolphus Muller was a highly respected draftsman with his own publication "The Lithographic Carriage Fashion Book," this was purchased and merged with "The Hub" in 1879.

They had the assistance of such men as John D. Gribbon, foreman of Brewster's body room and Henry F. Porter, who had been a Philadelphian, but had gone to South Bend to take charge of Studebaker's carriage department.

When the Carriage Builders' Technical School was started, John D. Gribbon was selected as instructor, a position which he filled acceptably to everybody until his death. Everybody who knew John D. Gribbon knew an honest, faithful unassuming and lovable man.

J. L. H. Mosier was another man who helped build up "The Hub" with his pencil. Mosier was foreman smith at the Brewster factory and not only an excellent workman, but knew how to teach others. The smith department of "The Hub" was not excelled by any department.

Howard M. DuBois, was in charge of the wheel department of "The Hub. Outside of the Forestry Service at Washington, there was not a man that ever studied timber as Howard Du Bois did. He had specimens which grew on high ground and low ground; specimens which were cut at different seasons of the year; air dried and kiln dried. He tested these woods in every way and examined them all under the microscope. Then he wrote about them for "The Hub" in a way that was far from tedious reading. He became known as the authority on wheel timber. Mr. DuBois articles on wheel making have been reprinted in the 1996 Carriage Museum of America's book "Wheelmaking" edited by Don Peloubet.

Mr. Houghton had the valuable assistance of Capt. O'Donnell, foreman painter with R. M. Stivers, and F. B. Gardner, who had been a painter at Brewster's. Mr. Gardner had issued his own periodical the "Painters' Portfolio" in August 1877. It was published and edited by him, and for several months he did the entire work of writing the articles, putting them in type, drawing and engraving the cuts, printing, mailing, and all. The subscription price was only fifty cents a year. This publication was consolidated with the Hub in May 1878.² These were the most prominent of the regular staff of the Hub, though there were scores of occasional contributors.

In 1873, and for a number of years before and after that period, the subscription price of "The Hub" was \$5.00 a year and it was cheerfully paid, too. In 1873, George Houghton went to Europe, accompanied by Adolphus Muller. They visited the London and Vienna Expositions, making drawings of all the best vehicles and gleaning much valuable information for their readers on this side of the water.

Then George went to Paris and enrolled himself as a pupil in Albert Dupont's School for carriage drafting. He mastered the French Rule and was able, on his return, to write many valuable articles on carriage drafting. Then, too, because of this attendance at Dupont's School, he was instrumental in having the Carriage Builders' Technical School founded in New York, a school started by the Carriage Builders' National Association and continued under their auspices.

Houghton remained with "The Hub" until 1889, when he left to become editor of "Varnish," later "American Vehicle," but after fifteen months returned to the editorial chair of "The Hub." During his absence, Fred Kinsman, later editor of the "Carriage Dealers' Journal," assumed editorial charge. A few months after his return he was stricken with disease and on April 1, 1891, in his forty-first year, he passed away, mourned by all who had known him. His cordial greetings, his winning smile and his charming personality made many friends for the paper with which he was so long connected. For twenty-two years he had been a potent force in the carriage trade of America.

A month later, on May 5th, Lawson Valentine, the first owner of "The Hub," and brother-in-law of Mr. Houghton, passed away at his beautiful country seat, Houghton Farm, in Orange County, New York.

It was at this period that William N. FitzGerald was called upon to take editorial charge of "The Hub," which he held until June 1904, when he died. Mr. FitzGerald was peculiarly fitted to fill the position of editor for a carriage trade journal, being a practical body-maker and having formerly edited a vehicle publication of his own. He was also author of several books of practical value to mechanics of the carriage and harness trades.

Adolphus Muller died in 1882 and soon thereafter was succeeded by Albert Kehrl, as draftsman. Kehrl had been foreman body-maker with Henry O'Connell, Baltimore, and had won the gold medal offered by the C. B. N. A. for the best carriage draft. This brought him to the attention of New York parties and he was offered inducements to enter the employ of the H. H. Babcock Buggy Company. From there he went to "The Hub," where he remained until carried off by consumption in 1887.

During the last year or two of his service he had an assistant, Gustave Welsch, who succeeded to the position of draftsman on the death of Mr. Kehrl. Welsch died in 1893 and was succeeded by Jacob H. Klein. "The Hub" had four draftsmen between 1870 and 1908.

Later History

In the matter of managers, after John H. Eggers, W. B. Templeton became manager, who soon after engaged Vernon Comstock, as traveling representatives. Templeton had years of experience in the varnish business, having been identified with several varnish concerns and one of the founders of the present Hildreth Varnish Company, and also secretary and general manager of the "Oil, Paint and Drug Reporter."

During his administration, he established the "Hub News," weekly, which was a small periodical about the size of "Printers' Ink." "The Hub News" later was incorporated with "The Hub." Mr. Templeton was secretary of the Paint, Oil and Varnish Club, of New York, a position which he occupied for over twenty-one years.

Herbert Comstock went on to sell automobile specialities and is prosper. Vernon Comstock died several years ago while in the service of Palm Bros., manufacturers of transfer ornaments.

"The Hub" then became the property of Taylor & Gregory, who were very successful with it in a financial way. After some years they sold it to the present owners. Taylor subsequently purchased "The Engineer" a western publication, which he afterwards sold to the Hill Publishing Company, and was later identified with the latter organization as general manager. Walter Gregory purchased the "Four Track News" and converted it into "Travel Magazine," a most entertaining publication.

The history of "The Hub" is the history of carriage building in the United States. It has chronicled the deaths of those who have passed away; it has mentioned the new concerns which started as well as those which fell by the wayside. It has not only been instrumental in doing good but has pointed out and helped to abolish many trade abuses.

It was on the call of "The Hub" that the first small contingent of carriage builders assembled in the St. Nicholas Hotel in 1872 to form the Carriage Builders National Association, one of the largest trade organizations in the world.

It was through the efforts of "The Hub" and its popular editor that the Carriage Builders' Technical School was started. It has numbered among its contributors the brightest men in the trade, both in America and Europe.