

## A Car Capital

**Note to teachers:** This supplement includes a discussion guide, lessons and Michigan Content Standards to use with the Michigan Time Traveler page published in the Lansing State Journal on January 8, 2003. You may reproduce the pages in this supplement to use with students.

### DISCUSSION GUIDE

*(SOC.1.1. Time and Chronology; SOC.1.2. Understanding the Past; SOC 1.3. Analyze and Interpret the Past; ELA.1. Meaning and Communication in Context)*

**R. E. Olds and His Cars.** How did R. E. Olds second car get national attention? Why would that be important to an inventor? What two automobile companies did Ransom Eli Olds start? What happened to the factory he built in Detroit? For how many years was the REO company in business?

**Billy Durant.** W. C. Durant pulled together the first companies that made up General Motors. What is he called because of that achievement? What two brands of autos did he manufacture at his Lansing factory? Why do you think that that factory is often called the "Verlinden Plant" today?

**Signs of Lansing's Early Auto Industry.** Name at least two streets and two schools in Lansing named for the city's early automobile industry. If you were going to name a new street for a Lansing industry, what would you call it? Why? What two buildings in Lansing used to be named for R. E. Olds? What name would you give to Lansing's tallest building? Why?

**Carriage Houses to Garages.** What did many people have before garages? Why? What was unique about the garage that R. E. Olds built? What happened when two boys played with the turntable in the garage? What is a Pierce-Arrow? What happened to the Olds' house? How do you feel about that? If it could have been moved somewhere else, how would you like to have seen this historic building used?

**Olds and His Community.** How did Mr. Olds help the Lansing Women's Clubs? Michigan State College? the YMCA? If you become a successful business person like Mr. Olds, would you want to use some of your money to help your community? What groups would you want to help? Why?

### ACTIVITY ONE: Build a Car Capital Time Line

*(SOC.1.1. Time and Chronology; SOC.1.2. Understanding the Past)*

Put each event on the Michigan Time Traveler page time line on a poster or card and hang the posters/cards around the classroom. Extend the time line by making a poster or card for each item below. Divide students into groups of 2-3. Assign one event from the newspaper time line or list below to each group to research using an encyclopedia, library books, the Web and other resources. Tell the story of R. E. Olds and his cars by having each group describe their event, with groups reporting in chronological order.

- 1883 R. E. Olds begins working full-time for his father.
- 1885 R.E. Olds buys out his brother's share of the business and becomes the "Son" in P. F. Olds and Son.
- 1899 The Olds Gasoline Engine Company and the Olds Motor Vehicle Company merge as the Olds Motor Works.
- 1902 First cars are shipped from the Lansing factory.
- 1911 The REO Truck Company begins producing the REO Speedwagon truck.
- 1936 REO stops producing cars. REO Motors produces commercial and military vehicles.
- 1957 REO becomes a division of the White Motor Company.
- 1967 Diamond T Trucks and REO merge and produce Diamond REO trucks.
- 1979 Although a National Historic Landmark, the REO plant falls into disrepair. The plant is demolished.

## **ACTIVITY TWO: Getting to Work on Time**

*(SOC.1.1. Time and Chronology; SOC.1.2. Understanding the Past)*

Page 3 presents an article from the December 16, 1901, *Lansing Republican* newspaper. Remind students that Olds' new factory in Detroit had burned down in March 1901, and that he decided to rebuild it in Lansing. He still had his small factory on River Street in Lansing, which did not have the space or technology to produce cars in the numbers he needed. This news article announces the opening of the new Lansing factory.

Give each student a copy and, after discussing the vocabulary words, have them read the article.

- Discuss the importance of the factory whistle. (Some workers might not have a pocket watch or a clock in their homes. If they owned a timepiece, they would need to set and wind it daily. They set their clocks by the railroad, jeweler's clock, church bells or factory whistle.)
- Learn more about Standard Time Zones. Although railroads in the U. S. had used standard time since 1883, most communities in Michigan still used local—or sun—time in 1900. Thus clocks could be set to a slightly different time in Detroit, Lansing and Muskegon. The U. S. adopted standard time in 1918 (moving Michigan from the Central to the Eastern Time Zone at that time). Find the nation's six time zones on a map. Discuss: Why did Mr. Olds want everyone to know his factory would run on standard time? How would it affect us today if we did not have standard time?

### **Further Resources**

- Did Anybody Really Know What Time It Was? by Lawrence W. Reed: <http://www.mackinac.org/article.asp?ID=4128#>
- A Walk Through Time, NIST Physics Laboratory: <http://physics.nist.gov/GenInt/Time/time.html>
- O'Malley, Michael. *Keeping Watch: A History of American Time*. NY: Viking, 1990. (Library of Michigan: QB223 .O43 1990)

## **ACTIVITY THREE: Plan a Tour of Lansing Auto History Sites**

*(SOC.1.1. Time and Chronology; SOC.1.2. Understanding the Past; ELA.11. Inquiry and Research)*

Learn about the places in Lansing that are connected to the city's early automotive history. Have students discover facts and background about each of the "Tour Stops" listed on page 4 by doing research in the school and public libraries, interviewing parents and grandparents and listening to invited speakers in your classroom. (Add other locations, including places from the "Time Traveler" page articles to the list on the handout.) Use a local map to organize a tour of these sites, assigning individuals or groups of students as "tour guides" for each stop. Or, conduct a walking or bus tour of as many places as possible for other students or parents. If not possible, have students prepare a tour using posters or pages in a PowerPoint presentation or Web site for each location.

### **Further Resources**

- L is for Lansing Tour: <http://www.msu.edu/~lansing/tour/a.htm>
- Great Driving Tours, Travel Michigan: <http://travel.michigan.org/drivingtours/?m=9&city=>

## **ACTIVITY FOUR: Philanthropy Helps the City**

*(SOC.VII.1.Responsible Personal Conduct; see also the Learning to Give Curriculum Standards)*

The "Learning to Give" curriculum defines philanthropy as "the giving and sharing of time, talent, or treasure intended for the common good." Some philanthropists help others through generous donations of money to organizations that serve the public. Among his philanthropic deeds, R. E. Olds provided money to build the Women's Clubs' building and to purchase land for the YMCA camp. Teach one of the lessons from Learning to Give. You can adapt the unit, "Great Philanthropists in History - Charles Hackley," to look at the work of R. E. Olds in Lansing or other auto barons such as Henry Ford and W. C. Durant.

### **Further Resources**

- Learning to Give, Council of Michigan Foundations (Go to Teaching Materials, Grades 3-5: "Great Philanthropists in History - Charles Hackley" Unit"): [www.learningtogive.org/](http://www.learningtogive.org/)
- Teaching with Historic Places: Philanthropy in America: [www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/philanthropy.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/nr/twhp/philanthropy.htm)

# The State Republican

## Monday, December 16, 1901

### Words to Know before you read:

**Asbestos:** a fireproof mineral now known to cause a fatal type of lung cancer

**Carriages:** motor cars or automobiles (the Curved Dash Olds)

**Chime:** a device used to call or bring people to the ship or announce its arrival or departure

**Mammoth:** a huge or very large item of its kind

**Whistle:** This is a steam whistle in which the sound is produced by the action of steam; often placed on top of a factory building to announce the starting and ending times of work.

### WHEELS WILL TURN AT OLD'S WEDNESDAY

The wheels in the new Olds Mobile shop will start Wednesday to do the first work in turning out carriages for the market. About 100 men are expected to answer the mammoth whistle to work on the some hundred machines which have already been placed. The whistle is one that was made for the chime on the steamer Northland, but as it did not chime as well as was expected it was not used. The entire works are lined with asbestos paper for retaining heat and preventing fire.

As all the machinery has not yet arrived, the number of men that will be needed cannot go to work now. The arrival of the machines will set more men to work.

Mr. Olds, when seen today, wished it to be thoroughly understood that the factory will work on standard time and that the River st factory will also use standard.

**Tour Stops**  
Lansing's Early Automobile History Sites

<b>Auto Production or Person Related Sites (built during early years):</b>	<b>Sites With Information or a Modern Connection to Auto History</b>
Atlas Drop Forge site 209 W. Mt. Hope Road	McDonald's Restaurant 3220 E. Saginaw Street
Durant Park Saginaw Street, between Washington Avenue and Capitol Avenue	Michigan Historical Museum and State Archives of Michigan 702 W. Kalamazoo Street
General Motors Lansing Car Assembly Plant 920 Townsend Street	Michigan State University Archives and Historical Collection (Olds' personal papers) Conrad Hall, MSU
General Motors Verlinden Plant (originally William C. Durant's factory) 401 Verlinden Avenue	Oldsmobile Park (home of Lugnuts baseball team) 505 E. Michigan Avenue
Grand River Plant 920 Townsend Street	REO Motor Car Company/REO Clubhouse Michigan Historical Marker 1445 South Washington Street
Hotel Olds (now the George Romney Office Building) 111 S. Capitol Avenue	R. E. Olds/Curved Dash Olds Michigan Historical Marker 920 Townsend Street, corner of William Street
Lansing Forge (demolished) 2907 S. Logan Street	R. E. Olds Transportation Museum 240 Museum Drive
Michigan Screw Company 502/506 S. Homer St.	
Olds Hall of Engineering, Michigan State University West Circle Drive, East Lansing	
Oldsmobile Headquarters (former) 920 Townsend Street	
Oldsmobile Plant #2, Genasys Assembly Plant (formerly Ryan-Bohn Foundry) 2901 W. Saginaw Street	
Olds Mansion (demolished for construction of I-496) Corner of S. Washington Avenue and Main Street	
Olds Tower (now the Capital National Bank Tower) 130 W. Allegan Street	
W. K. Prudden Company (formerly Lansing Wheel Co., 1885; Motor Wheel, 1920) 701 May Street and 701 E. Saginaw Street	
Ransom E. Olds Monument 221 River Street	
R. E. Olds burial site, Mount Hope Cemetery Aurelius and Mt. Hope Roads	