

# History of Ava's Auto Dealerships — Part 1

By Paul Barker  
and Kenneth Brown

**Preface:** Before conducting our study, if we were asked which type of transportation vehicle arrived in Ava first – the train or an automobile – we would have most certainly answered the train. The first train arrived at the Ava Depot on the current school grounds on February 10, 1910. But, our study revealed that a “horseless carriage” was on the Ava square three months earlier, in October 1909. In fact, the October 21, 1909, issue of the Douglas County Herald printed a picture of an automobile on the Ava square, and its September 30, 1909, issue carried a large half-page ad purchased by the Studebaker Automobile Co., of South Bend, Ind.

While a car arrived on the Ava streets with some fanfare, few people probably alive at the time could envision the impact that the automotive industry would have on the area. Now, almost one hundred years later, the effect of the automobile is known fully, and many people still living from the 1930s and 1940s have fond memories of their family's first automobile and its purchase. The early automakers were soon to adopt the agency approach to auto sales. And most of us remember going to the agency showrooms to see the shiny new yearly model.

Memories of the auto agencies (from the 1940s for Paul and the 1950s for Kenneth), caused us to want to research the history of the auto agencies – who operated them, what models were offered, and where their showrooms were located in Ava. Most of the information in this article came from Paul's

extensive reading of Douglas County Herald microfilm from around 1909 through 1942. Kenneth's role was to try to summarize the massive amount of information into one or two articles for the Douglas County Historical Journal. This article (Part 1) is the product of this process. A second article is planned that will focus on auto agencies from 1940 to the present.

## Introduction

Initially, Moses Calvin “M.C.” Reynolds was just plain lucky. In 1871, Moses and his father, James Austin Green “J.A.G.” Reynolds, had a small store/post office close to what is now the Ava square, when Henry Miller, Lock Alsup, and Judge Martin chose that very site for the location of the new town platted in 1872. Had the county seat been placed somewhere other than close to the Reynolds store,

M.C. may not have become the famous city father that he now is. Admittedly, Henry Miller was M.C.'s uncle, and the Reynolds family could easily have had input as to the location.

Seeing an opportunity, 28-year old M.C. (a Civil War veteran) and his father didn't waste any time getting a post office set up in a log structure on the new town square's east side. It was a meager start; as M.C. went out to sweep the steps of his humble little store/post office, he could pan the square with his eyes and see but few clues as to what the city would eventually become. Most certainly there were more of the citizens' hogs on the square than structures at that time; the idea of brick structures, hard-surfaced streets, and “horseless” carriages would have seemed folly to him in this period just a few years after the Civil War.



**H.E. Bash and Rev. George R. Curry in one of the first automobiles on the streets of Ava. The Ozark Real Estate & Abstract office behind was located at the rear of the Citizens Bank when it was located on the northwest corner of the Ava square.**

(Reprinted from the Oct. 21, 1909 Herald)

History shows that M.C. was an astute business man and one who perhaps saw opportunities before others. He built up a tremendous retailing establishment on the Ava square's east side and also maintained the post office. The Herald archives are filled with his ads and those of his competitors who attempted to get some of the market away from him. But as is often the case in business, the earliest entrant to the race is very difficult to overcome.

In 1890, J.M. Adams arrived from Kansas with his banking fixtures and set up the Bank of Ava, a new and untested type of business in the county. M.C. Reynolds almost immediately saw the need and potential for this new business, cast his lot with the new bank and became its President.

**Automobiles Introduced to Ava—**

Before 1909, a now elderly M.C. Reynolds would have been hearing all about the new "horseless carriages." No doubt he had already seen and even ridden in one in Springfield. With the county's roads being in such terrible shape, old M.C. would have had difficulty judging the practicality of these new contraptions for Ava. But in 1909, at least one of the new vehicles appeared on the now bustling Ava square upsetting the horses tied to the rail outside his now large brick store on the northeast corner of the square.

However, a move was already afoot to sell automobiles in Ava. In September 1909, the Studebaker Automobile Co., of South Bend, Ind. took out a half-page advertisement for their new Studebaker-

Flanders "20" at a price of \$750. The Herald actually printed a photo of a "horseless carriage" that was on the square in October 1909.

**Reynolds' Ford Agency – the County's First**

How quickly Douglas Countians took to automobiles is unclear. The Herald for the years 1910-1914 mention little about automobiles, and who sells them or who buys them. But on August 12, 1915, a major announcement was made in the Herald:

*REYNOLDS GETS AGENCY – We have been reliably informed that M.C. Reynolds has secured the agency for the "Ford" car for Douglas and Ozark counties, and has a car load of them on the road to Ava. Mr. Reynolds, as everyone who is acquainted with him knows, has been a successful business man, and a man who is*

**Would You Buy a Car from This Man?**

Yes, you would if you knew M.C. Reynolds like the citizens of

Douglas County in 1915. He was held in high esteem; his business, church, and civic dealings spoke for themselves.

During the Civil War, he was reputed to be with the Union forces at Fort Lawrence (present-day Rome, MO). When the Confederates attacked the Fort, his Uncle Henry Miller told him to run for his life, and years later he recalled that he ran across Beaver Creek "...so fast that my feet never got wet!"

When the town of Ava was established in 1871, he was the town's first postmaster and an early merchant. In the 1890s, M.C. spearheaded the fund-raising drive and contributed greatly to build the first church building in Ava. The building still stands today as the Ava General Baptist Church.

In 1890, when J.M. Adams

brought in the first bank (the Bank of Ava), M.C. quickly put his financial might behind the bank and became its president.

So, by 1915 when M.C. became the county's first auto dealer, the community would have had no trouble walking up to his store and placing an order for a car to be delivered once he sent a driver to St. Louis to bring it back for the buyer.



**M. C. Reynolds**  
(b. 1844—d. 1921)



**Reynolds Store on the East side of the Ava Square**

careful and considerate in financial dealings. Uncle Moses foresees good roads throughout this county, and consequently, an opening for successful business in dealing with automobiles. This is the first business enterprise our good roads movement has brought to Ava. We congratulate Mr. Reynolds on his keen foresight, and wish him success in the new business.

In the first few months, very likely, Moses Reynolds (with the help of his son-in-law, Henry S. Wilson), ran the Ford agency out of either the Reynolds store, or the Wilson Hardware next door. Within a few months, however, Reynolds had constructed a new building across the street west of his home (see map on page 34).

From that August 1915 announcement until the end of the decade, the Herald was filled with advertisements and news of the budding auto industry.

**Automobiles Quickly All the Rage**

All evidence suggests that 1916 marked the beginning in which automobiles became all the rage in Ava. In May 1916, the Seymour Citizen newspaper reported that "Uncle" Moses Reynolds had sold 15 Fords, and had given one to his daughter, Belle Wilson, and his two daughters-in-law: Mrs. J.A.G. "Jez" Reynolds (Leota Curnutt) and Mrs. W.F. "Bid" Reynolds (Vivian Sellers).

Then the following Memorial Day weekend, Ava citizens who owned cars provided transportation to the old soldiers and their wives to and from the G.A.R. Hall (on the east side of the square) and the cemetery. These early owners (listed in the Herald) were:

Models Advertised or Noted in the Herald Before 1920		
Date	Model	Distributor
2/10/1916	<b>METZ</b>	Deluxe Auto Company, St. Louis
3/30/1916	<b>REGAL</b>	Paul H. McMahan, Seymour, MO
12/7/1916	<b>MAXWELL</b>	Ava Motor Car Co., Ava, MO
<i>(Note: The Ava Motor Car Co. above was owned by Lester H. Pettit and Verne R. Wilson – M.C. Reynolds, grandson)</i>		
4/26/1917	<b>GRANT</b>	John W. Byng, Ava, MO
<i>(Note: John W. Byng, at this time, was also the general manager of the Ozark Southern Railway between Mansfield and Ava).</i>		
5/17/1917	<b>CHEVROLET</b>	Jones and Martin, Ava, MO
<i>(Note: The word – Chevrolet – was new to Douglas Countians. The ad prompted them to say "Shev-ro-lay!")</i>		
5/17/1917	<b>DORT</b>	Hatfield and Bralley, Ava, MO
5/24/1917	<b>SAXON</b>	Bond Motor Co., Kansas City
7/26/1917	<b>OVERLAND</b>	-- Dr. J.H. Coffman and J. Herbert Sell are each driving Overland cars (agent unknown)
8/9/1917	<b>BRISCOE</b>	-- C.E. Norman of the Norman-Gentry Drug Company left for Kansas City after a Briscoe car.
5/23/1918	<b>DORT</b>	R.V. Hatfield, Ava, MO
6/21/1918	<b>PAIGE</b>	Paige Automobile Dealership (dealer sought)
12/26/1918	<b>DODGE BROTHERS</b>	Ava Motor Car Co., Ava, MO
1/2/1919	<b>BUICK</b>	(Manufacturer's advertisement)
1/19/1919	<b>WILLYS-OVERLAND</b>	Overland-Springfield Motor Co. (dealer sought)
1/23/1919	<b>MAXWELL</b>	Martin Motor Co. – Springfield (dealer sought)

- L.H. Pettit
- H.S. Wilson
- E.E. Lawson
- Wm. Miller
- Oden Reynolds
- M.C. Reynolds
- Mrs. J.M. (Sallie Jo) Adams
- J.F. Holestine
- J.L.B. Harnden

**Auto Ownership Not Just Restricted to Ava**

Despite still deplorable roads in the county, automobile ownership didn't seem to be restricted to Ava – the county's only populous village. For example, a June 8, 1916 item indicated "Hurrah for Denlow, it now has three autos within the

city limits." A year later, on June 14, 1917, another news item stated that "M.C. Reynolds distributed a carload of Ford cars last week to the following persons: A.B. James, Bakersfield; Lou Cochrum and Alta Boone of Gainesville; Landon Gaulding of Nottingham; Dr. G.W. Taylor, Almartha; and W.M. Lethco, Goodhope."

Based on the above citation, a "carload" must have consisted of six automobiles. However, in this early period, automobiles weren't hauled to Ava – they were driven. For example, in April 1917, five individuals (H.M. Curnutt, H.S. Wilson, Cole Coffeen, Dewey Mankin and Willie Dickinson) car-

pooled to St. Louis to drive back new Fords for M.C. Reynolds).

**Competing Models and Agencies**

Caught up in a competitive storm to sell their cars, auto manufacturers dotted the Douglas County Herald with their advertisements during 1916-1919 seeking buyers (and distributors). As shown by the table on the prior page, over a dozen different models were advertised. Noticeably absent from the list is M.C. Reynolds and his Ford Agency. Apparently Ford had such a competitive price edge that advertisements were not necessary.

**Auto Sales in the 1920s**

Dealerships started to solidify. Models being sold in Ava settled down to be mostly Fords and Dodge Brothers vehicles. Once the World War was over, Ford continued to lower its prices and put a squeeze on its competitors. It's not clear from our research whether Ava even had a Chevrolet dealership during the 1920s until late in the decade when Burdett Chevrolet came into being. Ford dealers were Reynolds & Wilson early in the decade and Martin Motor Co. starting in 1924. Ava Motor Car Co. sold Dodge Brothers cars at least until 1922.

**Auto Sales in the 1930s**

The early 1930s saw the construction of Highways 5 and 14 through the county. This was a big boost for auto and truck sales. Additionally, it would be the start of a period whereby people drove their cars to Ava for shopping instead of relying totally on the local country store. By the late 1950s, many of the country stores and post offices had closed across the country.

Like the 1920s, the 1930s was a

decade when one could go to Ava to either buy a Ford, Chevrolet or a Dodge car or truck. The Ford dealers at different points in the decade were Martin Motor Co., Shipman Motor Co., or Sallee Motor Co. The primary Chevrolet dealer during the decade was Burdett-Chevrolet Company.

Dodge-Plymouth-Chrysler dealers were W. & H. Motor Co. and Shipman Motor Co.

**Conclusion**

The authors are seeking more information and photos about the auto dealers who operated after 1940. Here is an listing of dealers we believe have operated for a period since that time.

- Adams Motor & Supply (Nash) A.A. Adams
- Campbell & Pender (Nash) Andy Campbell
- Davis Motor Co. (Dodge-Jeep) Dale Davis (Still operating)
- Davis Sales Co. (Kaiser-Fraser & Buick) Cecil Davis

- Givans Motor Co. (Dodge) Eldon Givans
- Hodges Motor Co. (Studebaker) Arthur Hodges
- Hunt Sales Co. (Studebaker & Hudson) Roy Hunt
- Kellogg Motor Co. (Oldsmobile) Charlie Kellogg
- Kerr Chevrolet Co. Ralph Kerr
- Kester Sales Co. (Dodge) Rudy & Virgil Kester
- Lethco Sales Co. (Pontiac & International Trucks) Fred Lethco
- Sallee Motor Co. (Ford) Joe and Don Sallee
- Thompson Sales Co. (Packard) Tommy Thompson
- Viles Motor Co. (Oldsmobile) Floyd Viles
- Zane Gray Chevrolet Co.

If you have any information or memories you wish to share about one or more of these dealerships (or others that may have been left off), please contact one of the authors: Paul Barker at (417)832-0049 or Kenneth Brown at (417)882-4547.



February 1919 Car Repair Advertisement in the Douglas County Herald

**History of Each Auto Agency from 1915 through 1940  
(Listed in the order they were established)**

**1915—Reynolds & Wilson (later Wilson Motor Co.)**

The first known auto agency in Ava, Reynolds and Wilson, was opened in August 1915 by M. C. Reynolds. The firm sold Ford cars. Reynolds was joined by his brother-in-law, Henry Wilson, in the business either at the beginning or soon after its opening. Within a year of the business being formed, Mr. Reynolds built a new building northeast of the square that was called the “Reynolds Garage” (see Map Location 3 on page 34).”

While the dealership sold many cars, in part because of the Ford’s price advantage, the financial success of the firm is unclear. In 1919, the Ford dealership was apparently lucrative enough to cause Henry Wilson to sell his Wilson Hardware business to E.C. Yeoman so that he could focus on the car business. At the same time, Wilson had the Reynolds building remodeled with the upstairs being a “showroom” and the basement housing the garage business. He bought the O.H.D. Garage and the Crumley Garage and consolidated them into one unit.

Also in 1919, the Ford Motor Company instructed its dealers to sell “genuine Ford Parts to any and every reliable Garage who will pledge their use in the repair of Ford cars.”

M.C. Reynolds died in 1921, and the Ford agency was renamed the Wilson Motor Co. The firm continued to operate for three more years (until September 1, 1924) as the Wilson Motor Co., when it was sold to Harry Martin, owner of the Martin Livery Stable, east

of the square.

The announcement of the sale in the August 28, 1924, Herald, included the following historical recount of the firm:

*“The Wilson Motor Company was established here in 1915, and is the only Ford agency ever operated in this county. At the time the firm was known as the Reynolds & Wilson Motor Company with the late M.C. Reynolds as a business partner with H.S. Wilson. Following the death of Mr. Reynolds in 1921 the name was changed to Wilson Motor Company.*

*The business is well located and is one of the largest and best equipped Ford agencies in this section of the state, having a floor space of approximately 12,000 square feet. For the present year the business is being operated under a contract with the Ford Motor Company calling for a total of 108 cars, trucks and tractors. This is one of the biggest contracts held by any Ford agency in this part of the state outside of Springfield.”*

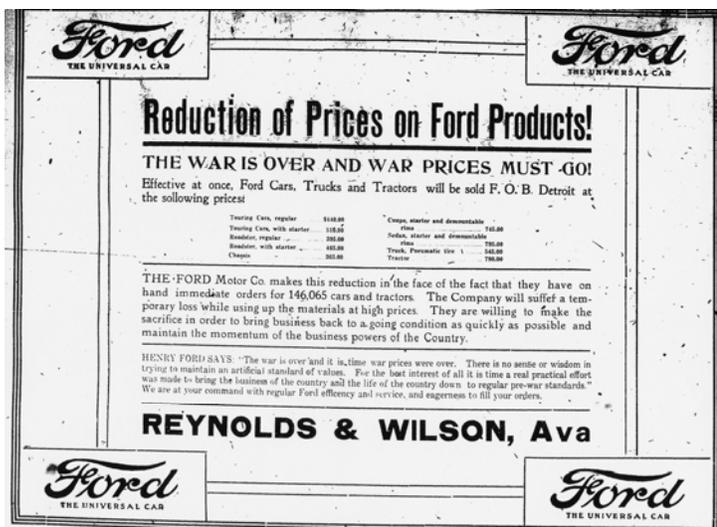
**1916—Ava Motor Car Co. (or Ava Motor Co.)**

The second known auto agency in Ava was started in December 1916 by Lester H. Pettit and Verne R. Wilson. The agency was called the Ava Motor Car Co. and sold Maxwell automobiles initially. Temporarily, the firm was operated out of Wilson Hardware on the east side of the square before being moved to a new structure called the “Post Office Building” just south of the Reynolds Garage (see Map Location 4 on page 34).

By May, 1918, the Ava Motor Car Co. was also selling “Dodge Brothers” and Buick cars. In January 1919, the company moved to a “new garage building” on “main street” but ceased to sell Maxwell cars.

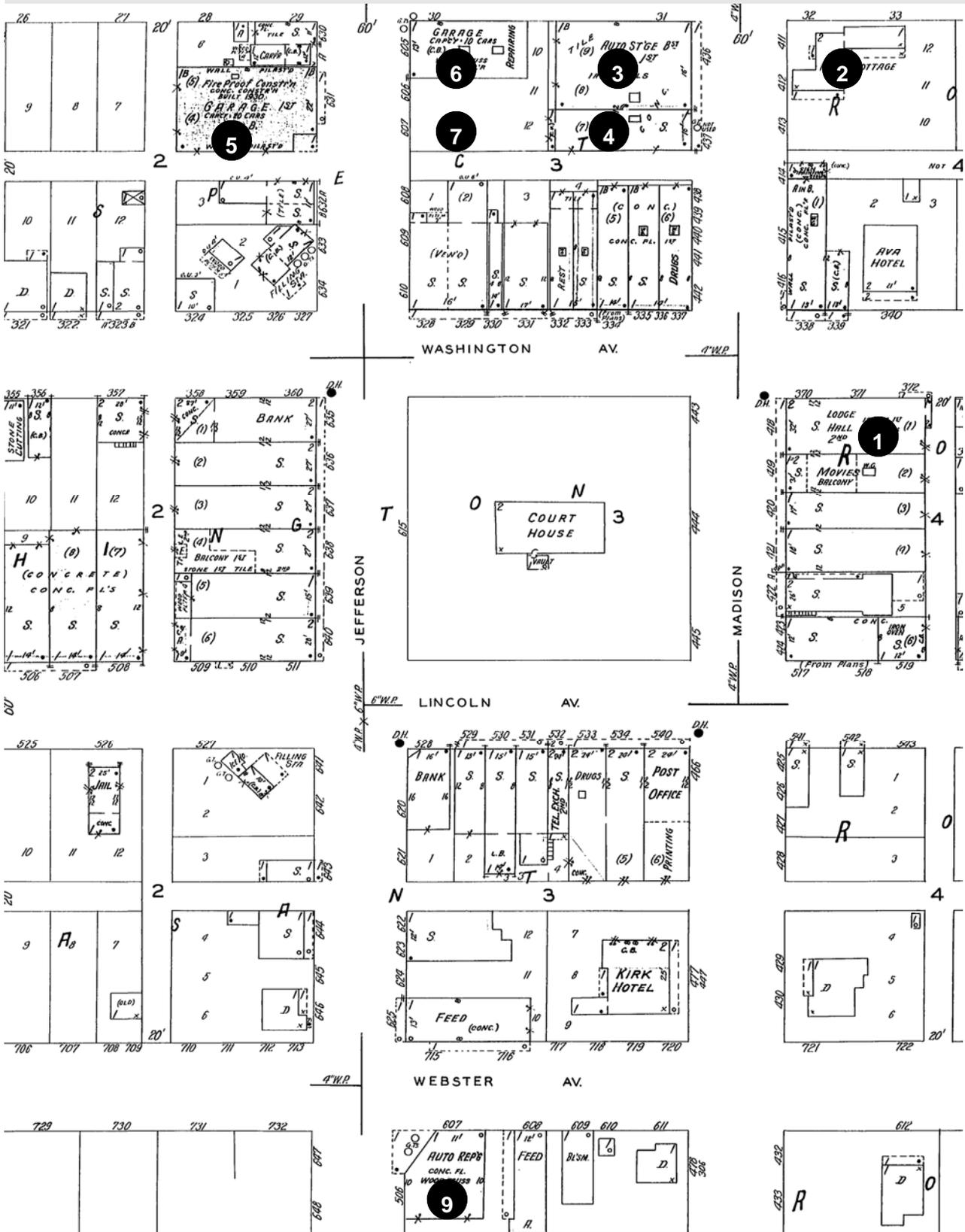
At some unknown date, Verne R. Wilson ceased to be a partner in the firm. It could have been in 1919 when his father began to rebuild and expand his Ford agency. By 1919, Cole Coffeen was a partner with Pettit and then bought out Lester H. Pettit in June 1919. He had owned the dealership for only two months when he sold it to E.Q. Johnson in August 1919. Coffeen stayed on as a mechanic, however, with his former garage partner, Dewey J. Mankin, and with Wardie Williamson.

This organization was short lived as E.Q. Johnson



Herald Advertisement — September 20, 1920

# Map of Downtown Ava Showing Locations of Dealers Before 1940



### LEGEND

- |                                |                          |                  |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|------------------|
| 1. Reynolds Store              | 4. Post Office Building  | 8. Martin Garage |
| 2. Reynolds Home               | 5. Pettit Lot & Building | 9. Sallee Garage |
| 3. Reynolds & Wilson Motor Co. | 6. Burdett-Chevrolet—A   |                  |
|                                | 7. Burdett-Chevrolet—B   |                  |



In 1916, the Post Office was on the left side of the building and Ava Motor Car Co. Garage on the right. Many remember this building in the 1940s and 1950s as the Star Theatre

**DODGE BROTHERS**  
**4 DOOR SEDAN**

The four doors have more than ever endeared the Sedan to those feminine members of the family to whom convenience means so much.

They also appreciate the high quality of the genuine mohair velvet used in the upholstery.

The gasoline consumption is unusually low.  
The tire mileage is unusually high.

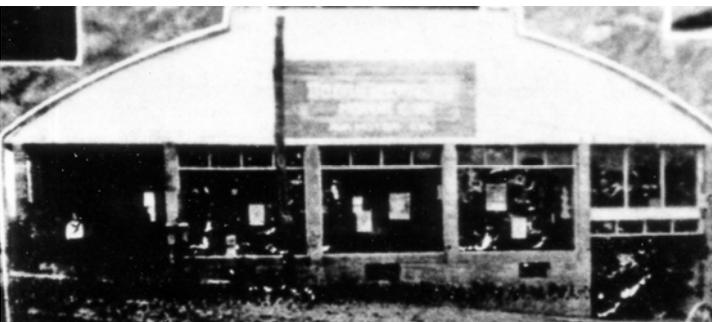
**AVA MOTOR COMPANY**  
AVA, MISSOURI

Herald Advertisement — November 18, 1920

sold the dealership back to C.C. Coffeen in November of 1919. Coffeen’s partners were T.H.E. Mathis (a former Ava post master), and T. J. Moorhouse (the former Normal School educator). They were selling Overland cars from the same Jefferson Street building. This organization lasted three months before Mathis and Moorhouse bought out C.C. Coffeen. Their staff consisted of J.E. Williams as manager, and Claud Crumley and Ray Dilsaver as mechanics.

By late 1920, Ava Motor Company was ceasing to advertise Overland cars and was describing itself as a “new” dealer for the Dodge Brothers Motor Car (apparently having lost or dropped the Overland line at some earlier time). A November 18, 1920, notice in the Herald stated that Dodge Brothers (a forerunner to present-day Chrysler), had appointed Ava Motor Company for Douglas and Ozark counties.

A photo of the company appeared in the 1922 “Docomo,” Ava High School’s yearbook. It may



Ava Motor Co. in 1922 at the Jefferson Street Location (see Map Location 5 on page 34) (Photo from the Ava High School’s yearbook for 1922)

have been renamed by T.H.E. Mathis as Ava Tire Company around that time. Advertisements surfaced in 1928 for Chevrolet cars being sold by the Ava Motor Co., with S.D. Roberts and his son, Clarence, as the owners. That dealership was sold to Rondo Burdett in December 1928.

**1917—Jones & Martin (Chevrolet)**

In April 1917, the firm of Jones & Martin (or Martin & Jones) acquired the Chevrolet agency for Ava. At this early pre-radio time, people hadn’t heard the name “Chevrolet” pronounced; so one of the firm’s ads coached the public to say “Shev-ro-lay.”

The dealership apparently operated out of the Reynolds Garage (see Map Location 3 on page 34), and to date, we don’t know the full names of the owners. It was sold in May 1918 to Alex Crumley and his son,

(At right, Herald Advertisement on January 5, 1928)

Claude. The name was changed to Douglas County Garage.

**1924—Martin Motor Co.**

In September 1924, Harry Martin purchased the Wilson Motor Co. (formerly Reynolds & Wilson) from Henry Wilson. Initially, Mr. Martin kept the business in the same location (see Map Location 3 on page 34), having leased the Reynolds building north of the Ava square from Henry Wilson. The business was operated from this location until 1932 when Mr. Martin built a new structure east of the Ava square for the agency (see Map Location 8 on page 34) and the advertisement below. That building now houses the Douglas County Herald.

The new building was constructed at the start of the Great Depression, and Mr. Martin operated the Ford agency from the new building only until April 1933 when he sold the agency and leased the building to H.T. Shipman. Shipman had been the local game warden prior to buying the Ford dealership.

**1928—Burdett-Chevrolet Co.**

In December, 1928, Rondo Burdett purchased the Ava Motor Co., and its Chevrolet franchise from S.D. Roberts and his son, Clarence. He renamed the business the Burdett-Chevrolet Co. The December 13, 1928, Herald announced that Burdett's "...contract with the Chevrolet Company calls for delivery of 145 cars and trucks during the upcoming year."

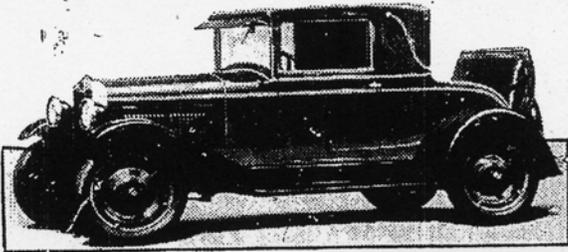
Initially, Burdett operated the dealership in the same building that once housed the Ava Motor Car Company on the west side of Jefferson Street (see Map Location 5 on page 34). But, in 1932, the business was destroyed by fire, and Burdett moved the business directly across the

**THE NEW CHEVROLET**  
 Another Chevrolet Offering



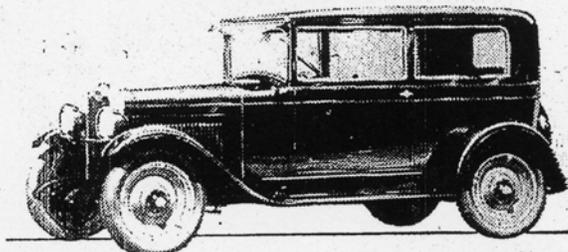
Here is one of the models General Motors designed for 1928 competition with Henry Ford's new car. It is the Chevrolet touring car.  
 Price \$495 f. o. b. Flint, Michigan

**The New Chevrolet Coupe**



How does this compare with the new Ford with which it is meant to compete? It is the 1928 edition of the Chevrolet sports coupe.  
 Price \$595 f. o. b. Flint, Michigan

**The 1928 Chevrolet Coach**

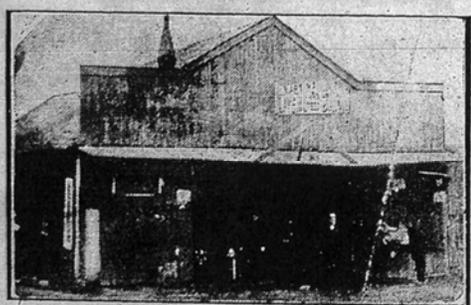


Among the new models announced by General Motors is the 1928 Chevrolet two-door coach, which will compete with the new Ford Tudor sedan.  
 Price \$585 f. o. b. Flint, Michigan

**AVA MOTOR COMPANY**  
 Roberts & Son

(Below: Advertisement from the August 18, 1932, Herald Issue)

**Keeping Step With the Progress of Time**



Site of Martin Auto Co. as it Looked a Few Years Ago.

The two illustrations show effectively the steps of progress made by the Martin Auto Co. The old stable, up-to-date a few years ago, has given away to the progress of time, and has been replaced by the beautiful structure pictured at the right. The Martin Auto Co. has contributed to the progress of the town and community.



New Home of the Martin Auto Company.

**MARTIN AUTO COMPANY, Ava, Missouri.**

**Presenting the**  
**NEW CHEVROLET SIX**  
*in twelve attractive models*

**CONVERTIBLE CABRIOLET**—A comfortable coupe or a roadster. Wide rumble seat. Price..... \$615

**STANDARD COUPE**—An excellent personal car for business or professional use. Large rear deck. Price.... \$535

**PHASTON**—Distinctive in style. Top fabric harmonious with body color. Top best standard. Price \$510

**THE COACH**—An ideal car for the family. Roomy seats. Smart Fisher body. Driver's seat adjustable. Price \$545

**STANDARD SEDAN**—A car for general family use, smartly styled, very comfortable. Wide seats. Price \$635

**SPECIAL SEDAN**—Exceptional beauty. Six de luxe wire wheels. Special fenderwall. Radiator grille. Price \$650

**STANDARD FIVE-WINDOW COUPE**—An exceptional value. Spacious rear deck for goods. Price..... \$545

**CONVERTIBLE LANDAU PHASTON**—A new convertible touring car. Top and windows can be lowered. Price \$650

**SPORT COUPE**—Every inch a smart automobile. Roomy rumble seat. Adjustable rear window. Price \$575

**FIVE-PASSENGER COUPE**—A new and distinctive de luxe model. Chrome-plated radiator grille. Price.... \$595

**SPORT ROADSTER**—A fast, smart, youthful open car. Wide rumble seat. Special upholstery. Price.... \$495

**STANDARD ROADSTER**—A quality car at a very low price. Spacious rear deck. Top best standard. Price \$475

All prices f. o. b. Flint, Michigan. Special equipment extra.

Family cars, personal cars, cars for business, cars for sport—Chevrolet offers them all in a variety of body types, colors, equipment and upholstery meeting practically every personal preference.

Nowhere else in the low-price field can you find such a wide selection of fine coachcraft—for Chevrolet alone in its class provides the many recognized advantages of Body by Fisher. This means not only attractive styling in lines and appointments—but also the safest, most durable body construction known—wood-and-steel scientifically combined.

And as for performance—Chevrolet gives you the smooth, quiet, flexible power of an easy-running six—a six that develops fifty horsepower, yet operates with less expense for gas, oil and tires than any other car you can buy! Furthermore, the Chevrolet Six will serve you faithfully for tens of thousands of miles with a minimum of repairs—due to its thoroughly modern design, the high quality of materials used and the extreme care with which even the smallest Chevrolet part is built.

When you get ready to buy a low-priced car, you will find it to your advantage to inspect the line of new Chevrolet Sixes now on display. Among the twelve attractive models, you are certain to find a car that will not only meet your specific requirements—but will also be a source of pride as long as you continue to drive it. Any Chevrolet Six can be bought with a small down payment and easy terms on the liberal G. M. A. C. credit plan. *And remember that Chevrolet's delivered prices include only reasonable charges for delivery and financing.*

See your dealer below

**Burdett-Chevrolet Company**  
AVA, MISSOURI

shed on the south side has been removed to make way for a drive-in service station and parking space.”

The dealership expanded again in 1936, and this item appeared in the Herald: “A new addition to the Burdett Chevrolet company garage got under construction this week which will double the amount of the present floor space. Rondo Burdett, manager of the motor company said the new structure will be fifty-two by ninety feet, adjoining the present garage building on the south. The location has been used by the garage as a used car lot.”

All during the growth period starting in 1933, Burdett employed the region’s number one Chevrolet salesman, Ralph Kerr. In January 1937, a representative of the Chevrolet Motor Co. announced that... “there are 240 salesmen in division four which consists of 23 counties in southern Missouri and Mr. Kerr leads in total sales of new and used cars by a wide margin. His total sales were 349 new and used cars for the year of 1936.”

In 1939, Burdett’s star salesman, Ralph Kerr, however, left the firm, and became the Dodge-Plymouth dealer in the Martin building vacated by Shipman Motor Co. earlier that year. Although Burdett brought in salesmen, Kerr’s absence no doubt affected the firm.

The fate of Burdett-Chevrolet Co. was sealed in July 1940, when Rondo Burdett was implicated in an insurance fraud in Springfield. Although he was ultimately cleared, Rondo lost his Chevrolet franchise. By September of 1940, Ralph Kerr was the new Chevrolet dealer in his Martin building east of the Ava square.

Rondo Burdett remained in automotive services, and in 1941, he advertised “genuine Chevrolet parts” to sell at his Ava Salvage Co. on north Jefferson in Ava.

**Herald Advertisement — April 16, 1931**  
street to the east (Location 6).

Although the plan was to immediately take the business back to the west side structure once it was repaired, that apparently didn’t happen. The original building was not repaired until a year later (1933), and it became the home of W. & H. Motor Co.

Burdett proceeded with improvements to Burdett-Chevrolet Co. on the east side. This notice appeared in the May 18, 1933 Herald: “*Extensive improvements are being made at the Chevrolet agency here on Jefferson Street. The building is being remodeled with a new roof, and a new drive-in entrance, and the old*

**1928—W. & H. Motor Company (Later Hodges Motor Company)**

The old building of the Ava Motor Co. on the west side of north Jefferson (see Map Location 5 on page 34) which burned in 1932 was rebuilt in May 1933 by L.H. Pettit. The building’s first tenant was W. & H. Motor Company owned by Wardie Williamson and W. A. “Arthur” Hodges. Then in June 1935, the firm announced that it was the new Dodge-Plymouth dealer. The Herald announced that “the new organization is composed of W.A. Hodges, Wardie Williamson, Ray Dilsaver, and Rudy Kester, and will handle Dodge and Plymouth cars and Dodge trucks.” (Note:

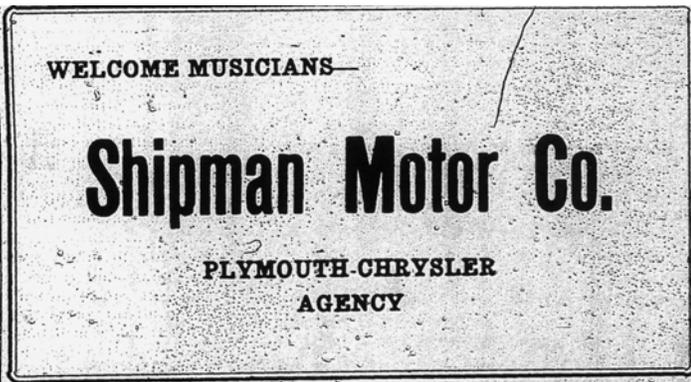
during the same time, Shipman Motor Co. continued to handle Plymouth and Chrysler cars).

In January 1939, this announcement appeared in the Herald – “W.A. Hodges Buys Partner’s Interest in W. & H. Garage. J.E. Williamson last week sold his interest in the W. & H. Sales Company to his partner, W. A. Hodges. Mr. Hodges plans to continue under the same company name. The firm has Dodge and Plymouth agency and automobile repair shop. Mr. Williamson has announced no immediate plans. The sale of Mr. Williamson’s interest in the firm ends an 11-year partnership. Mr. Williamson has been in the automobile business in Ava since 1918, being one of Ava’s earliest automobile mechanics.” In the new firm, Rudy Kester was in charge of sales, and Floyd Hensley and Arlo Thompson were mechanics.

By July 1939, the firm had been renamed Hodges Motor Co., and the company was advertising as “Your Friendly Studebaker Dealer.” (More about this company can be found on page 251 in the book, *Douglas County Missouri—History and Families, 1857-1995*.)

### 1933—Shipman Motor Co.

In April, 1933, H.T. Shipman purchased the Ford dealership of Martin Auto Co. and renamed the firm Shipman Motor Co. The Herald announced that “... Henry T. Shipman, former game warden for this terri-



Herald Advertisement — April 2, 1936

tory, has taken over the Martin Auto Company of this city, under a five-year lease executed late last week. The deal carries with it the local Ford Agency. Mr. Martin who retires from the business, has no definite plans for the immediate future, other than a rest as a means of recuperating his health. Mr. Martin has been in bad health for some time, and stated yesterday that he would probably enter a hospital in the near future for an operation.”

For unknown reasons, however, Shipman was not

able to retain the Ford franchise. Within one year, Shipman was advertising as a Plymouth dealer. He continued to operate a Plymouth-Chrysler dealership until January 1939, when his garage was destroyed by fire. The firm never reopened, although Harry Martin, still owning the building, repaired it; and Ralph Kerr opened his new Kerr Motor Co. there in April 1939.

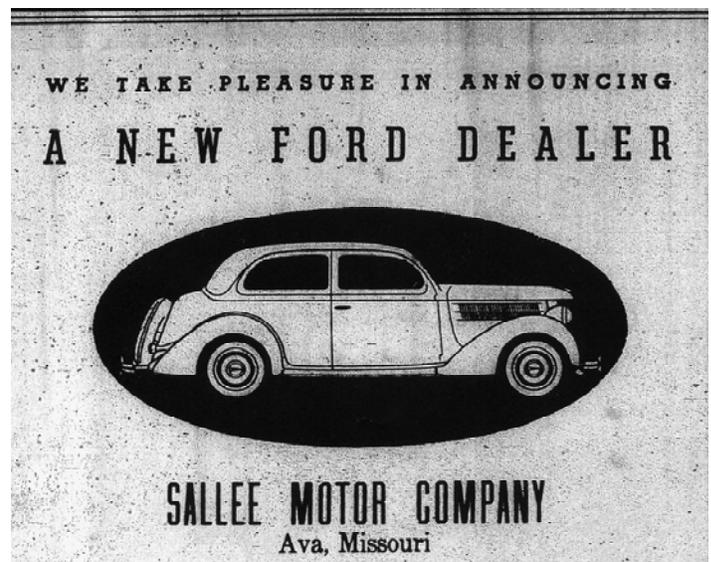
### 1936—Sallee Motor Company

In September, 1936, Joe Sallee was awarded a dealership by the Ford Motor Company. As far as can be determined, the area did not have a Ford agency from 1933 or 1934 when H.J. Shipman did not retain the agency he purchased from Harry Martin in 1933. Sallee had purchased his father’s business, Sallee and Robirds Garage, just a few months earlier. The June 11, 1936 Herald told the history of the Garage with this announcement:

*“Joe Sallee Purchases Garage, Filling Station. Buys Out His Father, R.L. Sallee, and his Brother-in-law, C.W. Robirds. Joe Sallee, who sold his interests in the Ava Produce Co. two months ago, has purchased the Sallee and Robirds garage and filling station from his father, R.L. Sallee, and his brother-in-law, C.W. Robirds. The garage and service station is located on Jefferson street just south of the Farmers Exchange.*

*Joe Sallee was one of the organizers of this business several years ago when the business was established under the firm name of R.L. Sallee & Son. About eighteen months ago Joe Sallee sold his interests to his brother-in-law, C.W. Robirds and the firm name was changed to Sallee & Robirds.*

*The business will continue to handle Shell gaso-*



Herald Advertisement — April 2, 1936

line, Pennsylvania tires and Willard batteries, Mr. Sallee announced this week. R.L. Sallee who retires from the business has no definite plans for the immediate future, while Mr. Robirds plans on moving to Springfield, it is understood.”

**1939—Kerr Motor Co. (Later Kerr Chevrolet Company)**

Ralph Kerr surfaced in the 1930s as a super-salesman at Burdett-Chevrolet Co. But, he left the company in 1939 and was, for a short time, the dealer for Dodge-Plymouth in the old Martin Motor Co. building east of the Ava square. Here’s the announcement that appeared in the April 27, 1939, Herald:

“Kerr Motor Co. to Open Here Saturday. Will Be Located in Harry Martin Building with One-Stop Service Station. The formal announcement of the opening of the Kerr Motor Company and the Williamson-Duff One-Stop Service Station will be found on page four of this issue of the Herald.

These new Ava business enterprises, which are to occupy the recently rebuilt Harry Martin building, are to open for business Saturday, April 29, according to the announcement. The building, until destroyed by fire last January, was occupied by the Shipman Motor Company.

Ralph Kerr, for many years a salesman for the Burdett Chevrolet Company, was this week named distributor for the Dodge-Plymouth cars in this district, and will operate his agency in the new building. New Dodge and Plymouth cars will be on display Saturday, Mr. Kerr stated.

Wardie Williamson and Marion Duff have leased the Standard Oil Station from the Standard Oil Company, and will operate the station in connection with a service department in the same building. Lowell Hartley will be employed in the service department, Mr. Williamson stated.

Mr. Williamson and Mr. Duff have been installing new equipment this week, along with an Electrolux cleaning outfit, and a Lincoln pressure lubrication service. The lubrication service, Mr. Duff said, is one of the latest of modern construction, and carries enough pressure to take care of the most stubborn job.”

Within one year (1940), Chevrolet Motor Co. apparently rushed to star-salesman, Ralph Kerr, with the Chevrolet dealership after their previous dealer, Rondo Burdett, was involved with an insurance scandal.

Ralph went on operate a highly successful Chevrolet agency for at least two decades. More about this dealership will be included in the next article in this series.

**1940—Kester Sales Co.**

Like Kerr Chevrolet Co, another long-time dealership was started, Kester Sales Company. On November 21, 1940, the Herald provided this announcement: “Kester Sales Co. Named Dodge Distributor Here. The Kester Sales Company has been named as distributor for Dodge and Plymouth cars in this district according to an announcement made this week by Rudy Kester, manager of the company.

Mr. Kester is well acquainted with Dodge and Plymouth cars having been a salesman for the Ava agencies since 1935. The Kester Sales company is located two blocks south of the square on highways 5 and 76. Mr. Kester stated that he will move soon to a new building just across the street from the present location. Ray Dilsaver, who operates Ray’s Auto Shop, is erecting a new garage which he will share with the Kester Sales Company.”

More will be contained about the Kester Sales Co, and other agencies of the 1940-1960 era in the next installment in this multi-part series.

**KERR MOTOR CO.**  
 Located Block East of Square, on Highway 14

**Dodge-Plymouth Agency**

Ralph Kerr, Sales Manager    Wardie Williamson - Marion Duff, in Charge of Service

**Open Saturday April 29**  
**One-Stop Service Station**  
**Standard Oil Products**

**Free!**  
 OPENING DAY ONLY  
**Quart Polarine**  
 With Each  
**5 gal. gas**



4 FINE MOTOR OILS  
 100-WTS. . . . . 16 qt. 2 1/2 qt. quart  
 150-WTS. . . . . 16 qt. 2 1/2 qt. quart  
 POLARINE . . . . . 16 qt. 2 1/2 qt. quart  
 STANDARD . . . . . 16 qt. 2 1/2 qt. quart  
 (Prevaling dealer prices) \*Plus Tax

We are equipped to give you a complete check-up and servicing at the ten important points indicated: namely 1. Radiator 2. Spark plugs 3. Crankcase 4. Transmission 5. Differential 6. Gasoline 7. Battery 8. Chassis Lubrication 9. Tires 10. Lights

**Free**  
 OPENING DAY ONLY  
 Coupon Good For  
**75c grease job**  
 With Each  
**Oil Change**  
 Coupon Good 30 days

**Repair Service**  
 We are equipped to handle any kind of repair service . . . including body and fender work. Marion Duff and Wardie Williamson will be in charge of the mechanical department, and they need no introduction to the motoring public of Ava and Douglas county.

**One-Stop Service**  
 We offer a complete one-stop service . . . with everything from air to the most complicated service. We specialize in greasing and feature the famous Lincoln Pressure Service. We also have Electrolux cleaning equipment. You'll like to stop here.

**Atlas Tires**  
 We shall handle the well-known and popular Atlas brand of tires . . . as well as all other Atlas products . . . backed by the reputation of the Standard Oil Company. They are priced in the popular class and will give miles of satisfactory service. Try them.

Herald Advertisement — April 27, 1939