

36-1163-1

Twenty-fifth Anniversary

A Handmade Steam Car

Made by

Howard E. Coffin, Past President of the Society,  
While a Student at University of Michigan

Made in 1899



OFFICE OF  
THE PRESIDENT

# SEA ISLAND COMPANY

SEA ISLAND, GEORGIA

36-113-1

January 10, 1936

13

Mr. Carl B. Fritsche,  
16826 St. Paul,  
Grosse Pointe, Mich.

Dear Mr. Fritsche:

Away back in 1898 and 1899, while Mr. Coffin was attending the University of Michigan, he made a steam car. The body for the car was built by some carriage maker whose name I do not know, but who put a tag on it. The car was sold in 1902, then it was bought back later as a curiosity. For the past several years Mr. Coffin has had it in storage in the Riverside Storage Company there in Detroit. It, of course, is doing no one any good sitting in the warehouse, and when Mr. Coffin was down here a week or so ago he wondered if perhaps this old car would fit into Mr. Ford's collection of antiques, and if it would that he would be very glad to give it to the museum or lend it, or most any other way that might be suggested.

Would you be good enough to determine whether the museum there at Dearborn would be interested in having it.

Kindest regards and best wishes.

Sincerely,

*Alfred W. Jones,*

February  
3  
1936

Mr Alfred W Jones  
Sea Island Company  
Sea Island Georgia

Dear Mr Jones:

Mr Carl B Fritsche has referred your letter of January 10 about Mr Howard Coffin's steam car to this office. Mr Henry Ford will be delighted to have the car for The Edison Institute Museum.

If you will write the Riverside Storage Company asking them to release it, we will send a truck down for it.

It is kind of Mr Coffin to make this offer and we assure you that we appreciate it.

Very truly yours

FLB:EB

*h* 1 BLACK

- \* Howard Coffin
- x Carl B. Fritsche
- x Thomas Chamberg's Council - Shu
- x Riverside Storage Co.
- x Sea Island Co.

HOWARD E. COFFIN  
SEA ISLAND BEACH  
GEORGIA

CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD  
SEA ISLAND COMPANY

April 15, 1936

Riverside Storage & Cartage Co.  
Cass & Congress Streets,  
Detroit, Mich.

Gentlemen:

Please use this as your authority to release the carted old automobile, that you have in storage there for Mr. Coffin, to the Edison Institute of Dearborn, Michigan. Mr. F. L. Black of the Ford Motor Company will arrange to have the Institute pick up this car.

Please send a bill for storage to date to Mr. Coffin at Sea Island, Georgia.

Very sincerely yours,

*Aefed W. Jones,*  
For Mr. Coffin.

Alfred W Jones Transp. Co. U. S. Steam Car 36-163

66/13

May 11 1936

1936

Howard Coffin, President  
Sea Island Company  
Sea Island Georgia

Dear Mr Coffin:

Mr. F. L. B. It was indeed kind of you to present to me the steam car you made while a student at the University of Michigan.

Dear Mr. B. I am pleased to include in our museum this interesting example of your early efforts in automotive transportation. I am also grateful to you for the opportunity you have given me to preserve it. Your welcome contribution will greatly increase the educational value of the Edison Institute. We have to-day ask to have to- Edison automobile in the Edison Institute is very happy to turn this car over to you.

With renewed thanks and the best of wishes,

Sincerely yours,  
Very truly yours  
Alfred W. Jones.  
For Mr. Coffin.

- X Howard Coffin
- X Carl B Fritzsche
- X Farm Chemurgic Council - Dbn
- X Riverside Storage Co.
- X Sea Island Co

ANTIQUES  
CARD INDEXED. H.H.  
DATE 5-13-36

✓

### Howard Coffin's Steam Carriage

Howard E. Coffin was a resident of Ann Arbor. While he was a student in the Engineering College of the University of Michigan, he built a steam carriage.

At the time, 1900-01, Staebler and Sons were the only automobile dealer in Ann Arbor. Their demonstrator was a Toledo Steam Carriage. Coffin ordered parts through Staebler. The boiler was purchased from Frank Milne, Everett, Massachusetts; the engine and other materials from E. J. Carter, Jackson, Michigan.

Coffin assembled the carriage in Staebler's garage with the assistance of Herman Staebler. It was driven about the streets for the first time on July 5, 1901. Coffin said that it cost him \$400. According to Edward Staebler it was "quite a creditable carriage."

Herman Staebler sold the carriage for Coffin to Edward Waples, an Ann Arbor real estate dealer, in 1903.

The facts on which this account is based were found in the business records of Staebler and Sons which are in the Michigan Historical Collections of the University of Michigan.

F. Clever Bald  
Assistant Director  
Michigan Historical Collections

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
MICHIGAN HISTORICAL COLLECTIONS

*Ann Arbor*

LEWIS G. VANDER VELDE, *Director*  
F. CLEVER BALD, *Assistant Director*

RACKHAM BUILDING  
ROOMS 156-168

July 17, 1953

Mr. Martin D. Lewis  
The Henry Ford Museum  
Dearborn, Michigan

Dear Mr. Lewis:

Thanks for arranging to have photographs of the Howard E. Coffin car made for the Collections. We shall send a requisition to our business office after we receive them and the bill.

I read with interest the copy of the letter from Alfred W. Jones. The information in it is obviously based largely on hearsay.

I am enclosing some facts on a separate sheet which you may give to whoever is responsible for the descriptions of the exhibits (if you want to stick your neck out). Do what you please with them.

Sincerely yours,

*F. Clever Bald*

F. Clever Bald

FCB:VR

enc.

36,163.1

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
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Ann Arbor

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Information about Howard E. Coffin's steam car now in the Henry Ford Museum.

According to Edward W. Staebler, Howard E. Coffin first drove his car in Ann Arbor on July 5, 1901. It was built "mostly of parts purchased of B. J. Carter, Jackson, Mich., and is quite a creditable carriage. . . ." Coffin stated that the car cost only \$400. Edward W. Staebler to American Bicycle Company, Ann Arbor, October 28, 1901. Staebler and Son Letterpress Book, Michigan Historical Collections.

The boiler was bought from Frank Milne, Everett, Massachusetts. Staebler to Milne, February 10, 1902. Ibid.

Coffin's car was the only automobile in the Ann Arbor Labor Day parade on September 2, 1901. Ann Arbor Daily Argus, September 3, 1901.

Coffin sold the car to Edward Waples, an Ann Arbor real estate dealer, in 1902 or 1903. (References to the sale in the letterpress book are not clear as to the date.)

Coffin, who was a resident of Ann Arbor, was paying his way through the University of Michigan by carrying mail. He used the car during the Christmas season when there were many packages to deliver.

Coffin was graduated from the University in 1903 with the degree of Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering. He went to work for R. E. Olds in Detroit.

F. Clever Bald



## DEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATION

To Mr. Frank Davis Dept. \_\_\_\_\_ Date Aug. 24 1953

Dr. F. Clever Bald of the Michigan Historical Collections, University of Michigan, has just sent me some facts taken from original records in their collections on the Steam Carriage built by Howard Coffin when he was a student at the University. According to these records the date of the first run of the carriage on the streets of Ann Arbor was July 5, 1901. I am changing the date of the carriage from 1899 to 1901. Will you please change the card which I sent you so that the date reads 1901 rather than the one on it now.

J.I.S.

J. I. Smith

Registrar

SAFETY IS EVERYBODY'S BUSINESS.

"Late in 1898 or early in 1899 Mr. Coffin built a steam automobile which performed according to reports better than any machine of a similar type then known. . . . He drove this car himself for about three years. After drifting around the country in various hands, it finally came into the possession of the Hudson Motor Car Company and is now in Mr. Coffin's garage in Detroit."

--The Hudson Triangle, Vol. V, No. 12,  
September 18, 1915, page 1.

NOTE: Photos in this folder were made from originals borrowed in 1977 by D. J. Kava from relatives of Howard Coffin. If used, they should be credited to D. J. Kava. Both pictures are of the same steam car built by Coffin.

COFFIN  
STEAM CAR

HOWARD E. COFFIN, ANN ARBOR, MICH.

1901  
~~1899~~