

Atterbury Motor Car Company

By Brian Szafranski, Elma, NY

Part 1: George Washington Atterbury – Pioneering Truck Builder – Co-Founder of Auto-Car Equipment Company and Atterbury Motor Car Co. of Buffalo NY

George W. Atterbury was born in Litchfield Illinois in 1854. He received engineering degrees from McKendres College in Lebanon, IL. After college he initially worked non-technical jobs, including stints as a school teacher & principal, and as a salesman. In the 1890's he found engineering positions in Chicago with General Electric, American Electric Vehicle Co. and Westinghouse. While at Westinghouse he engineered electric rail mass-transit systems and electric powerhouses.

In 1902 George Atterbury moved to Buffalo NY to work with Brunn Carriage Manufacturing Co. (initially as a Westinghouse consultant, and then directly). He developed large electric vehicles, putting his experience with electric railways to good use. Electric vehicles were popular in the early days of the car as buyers thought that gasoline engines were unreliable.

In 1903 George Atterbury joined the Conrad Motor Carriage Company as General Manager to develop steam and gasoline powered vehicles. Like so many companies in the early days of the car, Conrad had financial difficulties and closed in 1904.

In 1903 George Atterbury co-founded his own company, Auto-Car Equipment Company, after receiving an order for 50 electric-powered buses to carry the crowds visiting the St. Louis World's Fair. The publicity garnered from these high-visibility vehicles led to more fleet orders for other large expositions, as well as orders from large luxury hotels all over the U.S. and Canada. Many of the early vehicles were built by Brunn for Auto-Car, but were designed by G. W. Atterbury and his team. In 1904 the company was officially incorporated, with offices on Niagara St. near Main. In 1905 Auto-Car moved to Edward St.



An early electric vehicle built by Auto-Car.

Auto-Car focused on trucks, buses, delivery vans, trolleys, and sightseeing vehicles. Auto-Car electric vehicles featured Westinghouse electric motors & controllers, powered by on-board Exide batteries, or electrified by overhead wires (such vehicles were known as "trackless trolleys"). In the advertisements of the day, Auto-Car claimed that they were the "oldest manufacturer of commercial cars in America." They were also one of the first firms in the U.S. to build specialized commercial vehicles, such as ambulances, fire trucks, and others.

Once gasoline engines started gaining popularity, Auto-Car developed vehicles featuring 2, 4 or 6 cylinder gasoline engines of large displacement (earlier engines had fewer cylinders). Twice the firm tried entering the car market: first in 1907 with a huge 60 H.P. limousine and again in 1910 with a 10-passenger touring car. Both cars were short-lived ventures as Auto-Car knew that it should do what it did best: *building quality trucks!*

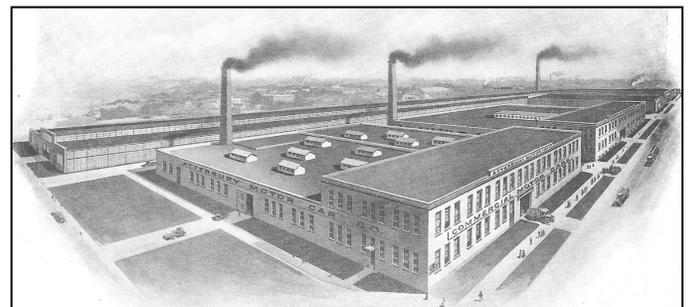
Just when the name Auto-Car became synonymous with quality commercial vehicles, the name had to be changed. The Autocar Company of Ardmore Pennsylvania claimed rights to the name with or without a hyphen. For a short while the firm tried calling its vehicles "Buffalo." Finally, in 1909, Auto-Car changed its name to Atterbury Motor Car Company without any change to capital stock, management, staff, facilities and so forth.



An early logo from Atterbury Motor Car Company.

By then the company was working out of a large plant on Elmwood and Hertel Avenues. In 1919 plant size was doubled. In 1924 land was bought for expansion, extending the facility to the Erie R.R. tracks. While celebrating its 25th Anniversary in 1928, Atterbury mourned the loss of its namesake founder in Nov.

Next issue: **Part 2 - Specifications and... "whatnot."**



The newly-expanded plant at Elmwood & Hertel in 1919.

CORRECTION: In the last issue of Flywheel News I indicated that Wiard was pronounced "WY-ard." It should have read: "WHY-ard" – similar to the way you say "wired." I apologize for this confusion. –Brian S.