## ATHENAEUM SOCIETY

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## NAMES

Mack, Diesel, Dodge, Lincoln, Olds, Chevrolet, Chrysler, Packard, Mercedes, Benz, Datsun.

Automobile, roundabouts, traffic light, chauffeur, limousine, Jeep, Greasy Spoon, speeding ticket and Redneck.

Interesting names and words and all with an interesting story, but then I heard a stand-up comedian talking about the idiosyncrasies of our language. English we call it, but more on that later.

This comedian found it unusual that we drive our automobiles on parkways and park those same automobiles on driveways. And I have always wondered why we drive on the right side of the road when our linguistic cousins drive on the left? But the names of things - where do they come from? Who chose to call the place we drive parkways?

When asked what language we speak, we all say English -the English people, however, would most certainly not agree, but I
never hear any of us say we speak American. Maybe we should.

On September 5, 1977, the American space craft, Voyager I, blasted off on its historic mission to Jupiter and beyond. The scientists who sent Voyager knew that one day it would spin through different star systems, had installed a recorded greeting from the people of the planet Earth. Preceding a brief message in fifty-five different languages for the people of outer space, the gold plated disc played a statement from the Secretary General of the

United Nations, an Austrian named Kurt Waldheim, speaking on behalf of the 147 member states of the United Nations, in English.

The rise of English is a remarkable success story. As chronicled by the Public Broadcasting System in a show entitled <u>The Story of English</u>, it was related that when Julius Caesar landed in Britain nearly 2,000 years ago, English did not exist. Five hundred years later, <u>Englisc</u>, incomprehensible to modern ears was probably spoken by about as few people as currently speak Cherokee today.

Nearly a thousand years later at the end of the 16th century, English was the native speech of between five and seven million Englishmen and it was in the words of a writer of that time "of small reach, it stretches no further than this island of ours, naie not there overall."

Four hundred years later, the contrast is extraordinary. Between 1600 and the present in armies, navies, companies and expeditions, the speakers of English including Scots, Irish, Welsh, and Americans traveled into every corner of the globe, carrying their language and culture with them. Today, English is used by at least 750 million people and barely half of those speak it as a mother tongue. Some estimates have put that figure closer to one billion. Whatever the total, English at the end of the 20th century is more widely scattered, more widely spoken and written than any other language has ever been. It has become the language of the planet, the first truly global language.

Robert McCrum, author of <u>The Story of English</u>, states that the statistics of English are astonishing. Of all the world's languages, which now number some 2,700, it is arguably the richest in vocabulary. The Oxford English Dictionary lists about 500,000 words and a further half million technical and scientific terms remain uncataloged. According to traditional estimates, German has a vocabulary of about 185,000 words and French, fewer than 100,000.

Three quarters of the world's mail, and its telexes and cables are in English. So are more than half the world's technical and scientific periodicals: it is the language of technology from Silicon Valley to Shanghai. English is the medium for eighty percent of the information stored in the world's computers. Nearly half of all business deals in Europe are conducted in English. It is the language of sports and glamour; the official language of the Olympics and the Miss Universe competition. English is the official voice of the air, of the sea, and of Christianity. Five of the largest broadcasting companies in the world, CBS, NBC, ABC, BBC, and CBC, transmit in English to audiences that regularly exceed one hundred million. But what is this international common language and how did it get to be that? This is a digression, but only a short one, and then back to the more important question of why we drive on parkways, etc.

At the time of our independence, many argued and, in fact, clamored for an American language. Noah Webster of dictionary fame stated that our honor requires us to have a system

of our own in language as well as government. Thomas Jefferson stated that the new circumstances under which we are placed called for new words, new phrases and for the transfer of old words to new objects. However, the first recorded attack on American usage came in 1735 when an English visitor named Francis Moore, referred to the young city of Savannah, as standing upon a hill overlooking a river "which they in barbarous English call a bluff." According to H. L. Menchen, author of The American Language, this set the tone that British criticism has maintained ever since. Samuel Johnson who seldom passed up a chance to insult us, his colonial cousins, (we were in his much quoted phrase "a race of convicts, and ought to be grateful for anything we allow them short of hanging), vilified an American book on geography for having the misguided audacity to use such terms as creek, gap, branch and spur when they had not been given a British benediction. Another critic attacked Noah Webster for including the Americanism "lengthy" in his dictionary. "What are we coming to" he despaired. "If the word is permitted to stand, the next edition will authorize the word 'strenghty'."

The 19th century was in literary ways our Elizabethan age and the British apparently hated us for it. Among the many neologisms that stirred their bile were backwoodsmen, balance for remainder, spell in the context of time or weather, round up, once in a while, no great shakes, to make one's mind up, there's no two ways about it, influential, census, presidential, standpoint,

outhouse, cross purposes, rambunctious, scrumptious, loan for lend, immigration, fork as in a road, mileage, gubernatorial, reliable, and almost any new verb.

Even at a time when the British ridiculed us concerning our language, there was a great debate going on even in England. The debate between the forces of standardization and the forces of localization came to a head with the first substantial English dictionaries which, in fact, was a move toward written standardization. It was in England at the time of Queen Victoria when the idea was realized that there needed to be standardization of speech. It was decided that the "Queen's" English should be spoken and that it was to be a spoken standard to which the lesser breeds could aspire.

In 1870, England passed the Education Act which established the English public school which became the melting pot of upper and middle class speech and society and also started a boom in English preparatory schools. The Queen's English was now taught in English preparatory schools. It is said that the contrast in English speech of the educated elite before and after the education act is startling.

The biggest changes were still yet to come. In 1922, the BBC, the first radio broadcasting service, was established and from the first, the BBC had a global and in those days imperial attitude towards the English language. It's motto ran "Nation shall speak

peace unto nation" and no one doubted what the tongue should be.

The only question was: what kind of English?

The debate now raged on what was acceptable vocabulary and new inventions or new words did provoke furious public debate. Should airmen be recognized in favor of aviator and what about americanisms? What attitude should the new BBC take towards such words as cocktail, joyride, pussyfoot, roadhog and sneakthief. To the English and consequently to us, the most sensitive issue of all: what English accent should the BBC adopt?

The decision was made by committee. The committee was called the Advisory Committee on Spoken English. It was a high powered group of experts including poets, writers, George Bernard Shaw for one, art historian Kenneth Clark, and Alister Cooke and even an American, Logan Pearsall Smith. The committee's declared task was to arbitrate on the usage and pronunciation of words, English and foreign. Decisions were reached by a simple vote, an arbitrary procedure that, in 1936, for example sensibly favored roundabouts against gyratory circuses, but, less sensibly, proposed stop and goes instead of traffic lights.

But all this started with the simple question of why we drive on parkways and park on driveways. When trying to see if there was an answer to that, I came across some very interesting information about the names and the stories behind those names that deal with the automobile. Bill Bryson, author of <u>The Mother Tongue</u> and <u>Made In America</u>, states that only by the merest chance do we

call this central component of our lives an automobile. Scores of other names were tried and discarded before automobile hauled itself to the top of the linguistic heap. Among the other names for the early car were self motor, locomotive car, autobat, autopher, diamote, autovic, self propelled carriage, locomotor, horseless carriage, motor buggy, stink chariot and machine. Automobile, a french word concocted from Greek and Latin elements was at first used only as an adjective. By 1899 the word had grown into a noun and was quickly becoming the established general term for cars, though not without opposition. The New York Times sniffed that automobile being half Greek and half Latin is so near indecent that we print it with hesitation. Before the year was out, the word was being shortened to auto. Although the early technological developments were almost exclusively German, it was the French who became the first big manufacturers of cars and thus gave us many of the words associated with motoring; chassis, garage, chauffeur, carburetor, coupe, limousine and, of course, automobile itself.

Chauffeur was a term for a ship's stoker and as such was applied to drivers of cars in at least a mildly sarcastic sense. Limousine meant originally a heavy shepherd's cloak worn in the "Limousin" region of France. The first chauffeur's who were forced to sit in the open air adopted this coat and gradually the word transferred itself from the driver to the vehicle and by 1902 it was part of the English language.

The first car most Americans saw was one designed by Karl Benz which was put on display at the 1893 Chicago Worlds Fair. Before the year was out, two brothers in Springfield, Massachusetts, Charles and Frank Duryea, had built America's first gasoline powered car and the country never looked back.

No big technology in history has taken off more swiftly, more breathtakingly than the car and nowhere did it take off faster than in America. In 1898, there were not thirty working cars in the whole United States. Within a little over a decade, there were not just 700 cars in America, but 700 car factories.

They came from every walk of life to found car companies. John F. and Horace E. Dodge had run a Detroit machine shop. David Buick made plumbing supplies. Studebaker was the world's largest producer of horse drawn carriages. Pope, Winton and Rambler all started out as makers of bicycles. A striking number the first manufacturers were from mid-west and particularly from Michigan. Ransom Olds, creator of Oldsmobile, from Lansing. David Buick and Henry Ford from Detroit. William Durrant, founder of General Motors, from Flint -- all of which helps to explain why Detroit became the motor city. There also were others in Detroit. Packer, Duesenberg, Cord, and scores of companies now almost entirely forgotten. Among them, Pathfinder, Marmon, Haynes, Premier, McFarland, Maxwell, Briscoe, Lexington and Ricker (which held the world's speed record of 26 m.p.h. in the late 1890's.)

Many of the early cars were named for explorers reflecting the sense of adventure they imparted. DeSoto, Hudson, LaSalle', Cadillac, (named for a French nobleman Antoine da le Mothe Cadillac, who would almost certainly have been long forgotten except that he had the good fortune to found Detroit.) Buyers could choose among a positive galaxy of names now sadly forgotten. the Black Crow, the Bugmobile, the Average Man's Car, the Dan Patch, the Royale Male, the Lonestar, the Premier, the Babygrand, the Hupmobile and the Locomobile.

The most amazing thing is that all the infrastructure necessary to support an automobile society; highways, gas stations, traffic signals, road maps, insurance policies, drivers licenses, parking lots, was entirely lacking in the first years of this century. Cars were not just unnecessary, but since there was almost no place to go in them, effectively pointless. As late as 1905, America possessed not a single mile of paved rural highway. Such roads as existed were unmarked and unnamed dirt tracks which became swamps in the wet months and were hopelessly rutted for much of the rest. Those who made long journeys were deemed heroic or insane and often both. In 1903, the year that the Ford Motor Company was incorporated, Dr. Horatio Nelson Jackson of Vermont, accompanied by a mechanic named Crocker and a dog named Bud, made the first transcontinental crossing by car in a two cylinder open topped Winton. The trip took 65 days, but made heros of them. For the most part, cars of the period simply were not up to this type of challenge. Those who tried to drive through the Rockies generally discovered that the only way to get over was to go backwards, otherwise, the fuel flowed away from the engine. Not only were there almost no decent roads, but no prospect of them. The federal government refused to provide highway funds arguing that it was a matter for the states and the states, likewise, showed the deepest reluctance to subsidize what might be a passing fad. In 1912, twenty of the states spent not one penny on highway construction.

But the absence of highways did not stop anybody. America's 8,000 motor vehicles of 1900 had jumped to almost half a million by 1910 and to two million by 1915.

Even with this large number of automobiles, there were still very few roads. Two things were clear. American desperately needed better roads and government was not going to pay for it. It was at this juncture that Carl Graham Fisher stepped onto the stage of American life. Fisher was a former bicycle and car racer who founded the Indianapolis 500 Speedway and was a hugely successful businessman as well as a daredevil. His fortune came from the Presto Light Car Headlight Company, but his enduring fame came from creating America's first coast to coast highway. In 1912, he proposed raising \$10,000,000.00 for a gravel, two lane road from New York to San Francisco. Thousands of people sent money in. President Woodrow Wilson, patriotically gave \$5.00, though Henry Ford refused to cough up a penney. By 1915, the pot was

sufficiently full to make a start, but there were two problems. The first was what to call the highway. A good name was important to galvanize support. Fisher's proposed name, The Coast to Coast Rock Highway was apt but rather short on zip. Fisher toyed with the Jefferson Highway, the Ocean to Ocean Highway, the American Road, before finally settling on the Lincoln Highway. We named our roads then, and for some reason only known to some obscure bureaucrat or perhaps a mapmaker, we changed and rather than give a new road a name, we give it a number. The Lincoln Highway, when completed, became U. S. Route 30. The Great Dixie Highway was renamed Route 25; William Penn became Route 22 and probably the most famous highway which Mark Lovely has already told us, Route 66 never suffered the indignity of being stripped of its name for the simple reason it never had one. Also with highways came eating places, some referred to them as greasy spoons, first recorded in 1925.

Infrastructure also began to appear. License plates made their first appearance in 1901. Four years later, Sylvanis F. Bouser invented a workable gas pump calling it a "filling station" though the term would not become common for gas stations until the 1920's. In 1920, the Automobile Gasoline Company of St. Louis started the first chain of gas stations and everywhere they were singing Gus Edwards' In My Merry Oldsmobile.

"Come away with me, Lucille In my merry Oldsmobile, Over the road of life we'll fly Autobubbling, you and I." With all of these automobiles, a new vocabulary also emerged. Road Hog, in 1893; self starter in 1894; station wagon in 1904; spark plugs in 1908; step on the gas in 1916; jalopy in 1924; to hitchhike in 1925. Speeding ticket entered the language in 1930; double parking in 1931 and parking meters in 1935.

The two million cars of 1915 rose to ten million by 1920, more than in all the rest of the world combined. Before the decade was over, America would be producing eighty-five percent of all the world's cars and the automobile industry which had not even existed a quarter of a century earlier would be the country's biggest Some of the names that we now use when talking about business. cars or their parts, were in fact real people. All of us know about Henry Ford and most of us know the history of the Model T and the Model A, but what has gone unrecorded and something that no one can explain now is the manner in which he choice his letters. His first eight models were the A, B, C, F, K, N, R and S before he finally produced the Model T, but when production of that ceased nineteen years later, he did not succeed it with the model U, but with another - Model A. By 1916, a new Model T cost as little as \$345.00, even so, that was far more money than people could get their hands on. A new system of financing arouse and with it came a raft of new expressions: installment plan, time payment, onethird down, down payment and that perennial invitation to ruin buy now, pay later.

A month before the first Model T was produced, another great name in the industry was born - General Motors. The company began life as the Flint Road Cart Company founded by William Billy Durrant apparently knew nothing of engineering and was not a gifted innovator and many say he was not even a particularly astute businessman. He was simply a great accumulator. He bought companies indiscriminately, not just car makers but enterprises that were involved in the automobile businesses only marginally. Companies like Samson Sieve-Grip Tractor Company which built tractors steered by reins on the dubious grounds that farmers would find them more horselike. He also bought a one man refrigerator company that would eventually become Frigidaire. Many of his automotive acquisitions became great names: Buick, Oldsmobile, Cadillac, Chevrolet, but many others like, Carter Car, Sheridan, Scripts-Booth and Oakland, did not. His strategy as he put it was to get every kind of car in sight in the hope that the successes would outweigh the failures. He lost control of General Motors in 1910, got it back in 1916, lost it again in 1920 and in 1936 he was bankrupt.

From the two largest car companies in America came many of the famous names in the history of automobiles. The Dodge brothers were originally with Ford and left Ford over philosophical differences to found their own car company. Walter Chrysler left General Motors to form Chrysler Corporation; Henry and Wilford Leland also left and created Lincoln; Charles Nash left and went to

built Nash-Rambler. One name that is very familiar to all of us, came to us in a very unusual way. Durrant, while still in the early years at General Motors, hired a Swiss mechanic and driver named Louis Chevrolet. Unfortunately for both of them, Durrant could not abide smoking and when shortly after joining the company Chevrolet wandered into Durrant's office with a cigarette dangling from his lips. Durrant took the instant decision that the only thing he liked about the Swiss mechanic was his name. He fired Chevrolet who dropped from sight, but not his name. Durrant was also responsible for the Chevrolet symbol which he found as a pattern in wallpaper in a hotel room in Paris. He carefully removed a strip of that wallpaper, took it home with him and had his art department work it up into a logo.

As I have mentioned, so many of the automobiles were named for their manufacturer. Some were not.

The name Jeep has always been to me self-defining. As usual, the assumption was wrong. I thought that a jeep type vehicle has always been a utility vehicle and associated with Willis-Overland Car Company, now merged with Chrysler. But no one knows where the name came from. Certainly it is American.

The army may have invented or caused the jeep to be invented. Somewhere around 1937 the first army utility vehicle was assembled and tested successfully. Three companies made the early vehicle and the first delivery to the army of this new vehicle was by the Bantam Car Company in 1940. Knowing that war was coming and

wanting to insure production, the army let contracts to other companies for this vehicle. The fact that the code symbol of Ford on army cars was the letters "GP", has led to the surmise that the word jeep was born then and there, but Menken says there is no hard evidence to support this.

Others say it was called jeep because of the use of the acronym for general purpose or GP. However, the early versions were called not "general purpose vehicles", but "half ton 4X4 Command Reconnaissance cars."

Still others claim the name came from the comic strip "Popeye the Sailor" by E. C. Segan who developed the character, Eugene the Jeep. He also gave us the word "goon."

The word jeep had other meanings, too, but after World War II, the word had come to mean utility vehicle and passed into our language and most of the European languages, along with G.I. and O.K.

Diesel engines were named after their inventor, the German engineer, Rudolf Diesel. Mack trucks were named after the brothers, Mack. They came to own a wagon company which later came to make large vehicles. Moving from Brooklyn to Allentown, Pennsylvania, they incorporated themselves to manufacture motors, cars, vehicles, boats, locomotives, automobiles.

Paul Harris told a nation on his radio show that the Mercedes-Benz was named for Mr. Benz's daughter, when in fact the

Daimler-Benz Company named their car after one of their friends, Emil Jellinels, whose daughter, Mercedes, had just been killed.

Japan, not America, gave us the Datsun, now Nissan. At the cost of 70 million dollars, Nissan consolidated its world wide marketing under a single name and the Datsun became history. Originally it was named the DAT from the initials of the company's three founders and in 1931 a small DAT was dubbed "son of Dat" which later evolved into Datsun.

I can find no answer to the original question of who named the places we drive and park. We, however, drive on the right because the earliest heavy wagons - the Contestogas put their brake on the left so the driver needed to sit there to use the brake, and thus, because he sat on the left he could see the road better when driving on the right. Well then, where were the brakes on British wagons?

I did run into many interesting origins of words and will share only one more with you. We all think we know what a redneck is and Jeff Foxworthy has made a fortune defining the term as a benign blend of populism - hard work, mostly rural, good old boy patriotism, and a whiff of nostalgia for the old South.

Originally it was a racist term. Rednecks were a splinter group of the Ku Klux Klan, distinguished by their public defiance of reconstruction laws (they went unmasked) and by the wearing of the confederate flag as a neckerchief, thus the red of the flag giving them their popular name.