

Story of the Week

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The Early Days of Cadillac Manufacturing

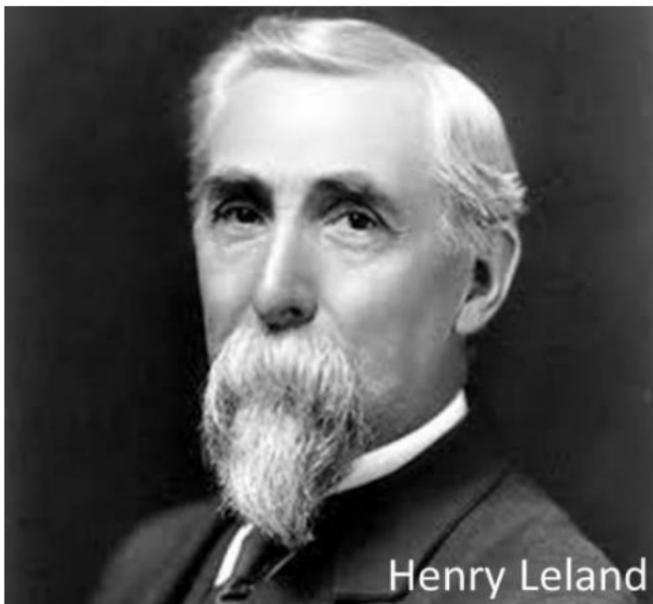
By: Robert Tate

When the name Cadillac is mentioned, the first thing that comes to most minds is great craftsmanship, pioneering, and leadership in the automotive world. The name Cadillac was selected in honor of Le Sieur Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, a French explorer who founded the city of Detroit on July 24, 1701. The Cadillac Motor Car Company is one of the oldest automobile companies in Detroit, Michigan. Back in 1895, Leland & Faulcomer Manufacturing Company was organized to build such high grade machinery.



During September 1902, production began on the first Cadillac automobile, the Model A one cylinder. Back then, only one vehicle at a time was produced. On October 17, 1902, the Model A one cylinder, along with a second and third model, was completed. In contract to production plans, this prototype was built at the L & F Factory, as were the two others that were finished that year. The vehicles were turned over to Mr. William Metzger for display at the New York Automotive Show that would be held on January 1903.

During the first year of production of 1903-1904, the Cadillac Automobile Company built and shipped 1,895 finished vehicles to the American consumers. By 1904, all Cadillac vehicle power plant mechanisms were manufactured by Leland & Faulcomer and just prior to 1905, consolidation with the Cadillac Automobile Company occurred and the firm's name was changed to Cadillac Motor Car Company. The first general manager of the new Cadillac Motor Car Company was Mr. Henry Leland. At the time of the position, he was sixty years old and would receive approximately \$750 dollars per month for his work.



The general production started with the work of a thousand men, six hundred employed at Cadillac and four hundred at the former Leland & Faulconer Plant. The combined floor space of the two plants totaled 500,000 square feet. The plant located at Cass and Amsterdan in Detroit, Michigan included its general offices along with production of the Cadillac engine and automobile assembly.

In 1910, Cadillac became a division of General Motors, and during that year, the closed body was introduced as standard equipment. As Cadillac began to have increasing sales volume within the automotive market, a new manufacturing building was becoming a new chapter in Cadillac's history.



On August 6, 1919, the Clark Avenue Plant located in Detroit, Michigan began its ground breaking work. The silver shovel was called upon for this momentous task was a historical celebration for Cadillac. When the ground was broken, the plans at the time were available for building a 2,100,000 square feet or 48 acres of floor space. Starting with the assembly area, this was the second largest building in the plant with a total floor area of 20,000 square feet. A considerable portion of the assembly building was devoted to painting operations on the chassis, wheels, bodies, and metal parts.

The rough bodies started from the Cadillac body factory with sand blasting which created a smooth, clean surface for the vehicles during assembly. Afterwards, the models were painted and varnished for the next operation. The bodies were also upholstered and trimmed within this building as well. One of the most interesting operations in the manufacturing plant was the engine test. Each finished Cadillac engine would run for hours to ensure its perfect operation for the buying consumer.



The storage building that adjoined the assembly building was 480 ft long and 140ft wide. This building, along with the fourth floor, gave storage for its 1000 finished automobiles which was great assistance to the factory in making prompt deliveries to customers. Within the design and construction of this factory was also a number of interesting features that were worked out by the DuPont Engineering Company. Being in charge of the construction work, they offered a new ventilating system that provided workers with pure and wholesome air.

The new Cadillac Factory produced many years of steady growth and progress. On February 7, 1958 Cadillac celebrated the achievement of a significant milestone, the production of the 2,000,000th Cadillac. During the celebration, many historic events were present such as Mr. Joe Malachinski, one of Cadillac's first employee's and the first Cadillac model produced was showcased. At the time, Cadillac's general manager, Mr. James M. Roche, is shown placing a special plate on the milestone Cadillac as Mr. Malachinski waves for approval from the driver's seat of the 1902 model.



On December 23, 1987 the Cadillac plant closed its doors. The site of the plant was redeveloped into a Clark Street Technology Park. In conclusion, the Cadillac automobile has helped shaped American automobile culture from yesterday and today, and will always be a great part of automotive history.

A special thanks to Robert Tate, Automotive Historian and Researcher, for donating the story to the MotorCities Story of the Week program. Photographs are courtesy of the National Automotive History Collection (NAHC) of the Detroit Public Library. (Bibliography: Hendry D. Maurice . Cadillac Standard Of The World The complete History/Automobile Quarterly Publications . Bonanza Books New York 1979.)

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