

1908-1958

GM

**FIFTIETH
ANNIVERSARY**

50 YEARS AGO

50 years ago . . . life was much simpler than it is today.

There were no cold wars or intercontinental missiles . . . no rush-hour jams . . . no tranquilizers. People lived at a slower pace.

There were many pleasant aspects to life in 1908, but on the whole working and living were harder. Most people had few conveniences and no luxuries. This booklet shows both sides of life at that time.

In most homes a winter day began with the rumbling sounds made as Father shook the grates of a big potbellied stove. Meanwhile, Mother was busy preparing breakfast in her relatively primitive kitchen.



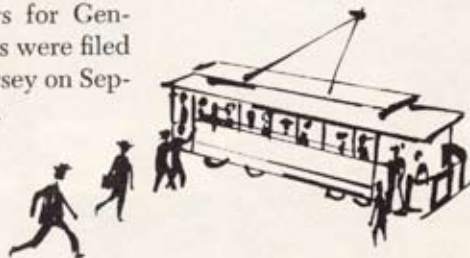
Breakfast over, Father hurried off to work—on foot, on a bicycle, or on a trolley car. Except for top executives, the men who made automobiles could not afford

to own one—not even a secondhand one. There had been a financial panic in 1907, and wages were down.

Yet in 1908 J. Pierpont Morgan made the famous statement: “There may be times when tidings are dark and cloudy in America. . . In such times . . . remember that the growth of this vast country will take care of all.”



And it was in 1908—that dark-seeming but hopeful year—that incorporation papers for General Motors were filed in New Jersey on September 16.





When Father got to the factory in 1908 he entered a bare, warehouse-type building that had been planned to house machinery and materials rather than people. Except in the forging or casting departments it was very cold, so men worked in heavy clothing. The hours were

long—in most cases, a 10-hour day. And Saturdays were full days, too.

The washrooms were primitive. Many of them had no hot water and no towels. And since cafeterias were practically unknown, you brought lunch and ate where you worked.

and the long day began



Handmade automobiles

1908 style

These photographs show how automobiles were built 50 years ago. They were literally made by hand; the car was assembled on the spot from parts brought from various storerooms and warehouses. If a part didn't fit, it had to be refitted by hand.

Automobile bodies were made of wood, or shaped over a complicated wooden frame; floors, dashboards, seats, roof bows, and wheels were all made of wood. Skilled carpenters, cabinetmakers, wheelwrights, and wood finishers were needed to make a car in 1908.

Today no wood is used in modern American cars. And the picturesque but often dangerous handicraft trades have been replaced by other trades as a result of skillful advance planning and modern engineering.



◀ THE LEATHER JUNGLE

Metalworking machinery in a 1908 auto plant was driven by a tangle of unprotected belts. Today driving mechanisms are covered and automatic safety devices protect the worker.



WAGON WHEELS FOR CARS ▶

Carriage-making techniques still lingered on, and wooden wheels with spokes were made by hand. Today wheelwrighting is a lost art.

◀ FURNITURE FOR THE ROAD

In 1908 it took longer to build one of these wooden seats than it now takes to make an entire automobile body.



MEN OF ALL SORTS ▶

counting out parts. The men aren't wearing derbies to be stylish; that's what men wore then, and it was cold in the unheated sorting room.

PAY DAY—

In 1908: \$9.84 a week (\$31.36 in today's buying power)
+ few, if any, employe benefits—

In 1958: the week's wages + many extra benefits—



“But things were cheaper then”

... or that's how it seems. But they weren't really, for what matters is not what things cost but how long you have to work to buy them. In 1958 a GM employe works far fewer hours to buy lots more things than his father or grandfather did in 1908. Then, for example, it took a factory worker approximately 4,400 hours to earn enough to buy a low-priced Buick. Today's automobile worker puts in fewer than 1,250 hours to buy Buick's latest popular-priced car. And, in addition to his pay, he gets many extra benefits that were unheard of 50 years ago. Besides those indicated here are: more time for sports and leisure activities, better working conditions, and a real chance to get ahead.



In 1908 this Sears, Roebuck mail-order suit cost only \$14.39. Sounds cheap, doesn't it? But if you do some figuring, you'll see that a production worker had to work about 75 hours to make that much money. Today's medium-priced Sears, Roebuck suit costs \$39.95 — only 16 to 18 hours of working time at today's wages.





**Man worked
from sun to sun,
but woman's work
was never done**

Men worked hard in 1908, but perhaps women worked even harder. Many homes were without gas, electricity, or even running water, and hot water often had to be prepared on a coal or kerosene stove. Monday—wash day—was the low point of the week. Then came patching-and-mending day, ironing day, housecleaning day, preserving day, cooking-for-the-week-end day, and so on, week after week. The only labor-saving devices were carpet sweepers, foot-driven sewing machines, and primitive water-powered washing machines. Of course, women did have pleasures, too, but because their work was so much harder, they aged early, and their hands usually had a perpetual dishpan look.



**And how
did the children do?**

In 1908, as today, most kids had fun. But except in large communities, it was the day of the one-room schoolhouse, where an overworked teacher taught all grades by having one grade recite at a time while all the others supposedly were busy studying. It sounds very chummy, but it was really noisy and distracting for everyone.

Few children got through high school; still fewer went to college. In fact, a college education was then considered a luxury for the children of the rich.



This early GM sight-seeing bus could carry a really big load. Since this was in sunny California, it could be open on all sides.



Louis Chevrolet, the famous racing driver, at the wheel of a Buick, several years before the first Chevrolet was built.



Here is a big Oldsmobile being driven out of the factory late in 1908 — the first of next year's models to take to the road.

Around the country

GM

wheels were turning



The sign on the front of this Rapid Truck (later GMC) announces that it made the long, hard climb to the top of Pikes Peak.



Autos needed roads, and this early GMC self-powered dump truck helped to build them. Note the air horn at the driver's right.



Three 1908 Cadillacs made history when they were rapidly assembled in London from interchangeable parts to win the Dewar trophy.

Here's what they did for fun



A ride in an open-air trolley to a baseball game was a thrilling experience in those days.

Pleasures then were fairly simple according to our modern standards, but people enjoyed them to the full. Then, as now, there were beaches to go to, and there was more country nearer at hand for picnics and outings. Since there were few cars, long trolley rides were big events in the summer. And in winter there were such activities as skating, sledding, fishing through the ice, and all kinds of indoor parties. Small communities, especially, tended to become closely knit during the cold weather.

The big parade was sometimes a pretty small one, but marchers and spectators both enjoyed it.

During the nickelodeon age silent movies were projected on the screen with superimposed titles and much overacting.



The family picnic was the high point of the summer. Everybody dressed up in his best clothing for this gala occasion.

A sunny spring day, a bicycle built for two, and off you could go on a trip for several miles near town.



Outdoor skating on a pond or river brought whole crowds of young folks together for this pleasant winter sport.



People dressed up to go swimming. In fact, they wore more clothes in the water than they do now when they go skating on it.



They had a good time, but . . . remember

there were



no sound movies



no radio



no television



no hi-fi



no air travel



no outboard motors

also, no auto for the average family

EVERYDAY LIFE IN AMERICA 50 YEARS AGO



Sears, Roebuck offered this high-style, sturdy shoe for sale for only \$2.50 a pair. They were real sharp, too.



When a woman wore an apron in 1908 she wanted it to cover her all over. Meanwhile, her skirts were dusting the floor.

Here are some of the things that were common household objects in 1908.

Now most of them have vanished utterly or can be found only in little-visited attics, museums, or antique shops. Youngsters will stare at them with questioning eyes, while old-timers will remember them fondly.



A Hammock That's Right

The only hammock made that combines Quality, Durability and Beauty with comfort. Can be used indoors or out. For further particulars write

QUEEN HAMMOCK CO.
173 Lake St., MUSKEGON, MICH.
Formerly Kalamazoo, Mich.

Nothing about the 1908 era seems as nostalgic as this two-place hammock. And there are porches where they can still be seen today.

Kerosene stoves like this are still used in summer camps and bungalows. In 1908 they were often a family's only means of cooking.





A Winter Idyl

When the biting winds do blow,
And the water will not flow,
When the pipes to frozen tight,
And you're seated, at the night
Of your work and in the room,
Then, oh then, you wonder why
That Hot-Air Pump you did not buy
Now is the time, in early fall,
To have your handiwork in brass,
Don't let your work go dry.

The Hot-Air Pump

gives an abundant and permanent supply,
always fresh and in a temperature which
keeps the animals in health. No
water, it does away entirely with the slow
and expensive process of warming the
stock with a coal and by hand.

It is the only pump that will operate in
any weather, and is the only one that
will not freeze.

Ryder-Ericsson
Engine Co.



Home improvements were
just getting started, but
they were on their way.



The horn on this hand-wound
phonograph was painted to
look like a morning glory. From it
poured the hit songs of 1908.



A poor lamp with a good chimney will give
more satisfaction than a good lamp with a
poor chimney. A chimney that doesn't fit,
causes smoke, smell, and cuts down the light.

I make a chimney to fit each differ-
ent style and size of burner ever
made. MACBETH chimneys never
break from heat, and my name is on
every one.

My Lamp-Chimney Book teaches getting the
right chimney for any burner, and gives sug-
gestions about lamps, chimneys, wicks, etc.,
and tells how to keep lamps in order. I gladly
mail it, free, to anyone who writes for it.

MACBETH, Pittsburgh.

Fancy oil lamps like this
one now bring fancy prices
in antique stores. Then they
get wired for electricity to
cast new light on a new
generation.

The Murray Vehicles

22
YEARS
AT IT

Not too costly—not too cheap. A combina-
tion of style, strength, durability—produced
from best grade of raw materials by craft-
smen of highest order—under direction of
the Murray regime —and sold at prices that sell them.



A Murray Creation
Price \$63.00

Any reasonable per-
son can order and test
Murray Vehicles thor-
oughly before paying
one penny, or oblige
himself in any
way—the only fair way.
Our Illustrated Catalogue
No. 11, free for the asking, shows our complete line of
Buggies, Road Wagons, Stanhopes, Concord, Phaetons,
Traps, Suggies, Carriages, Pony Vehicles, Grocery Wagons,
Laundry Wagons, Passenger and Farm Wagons, Busses,
Harness and Saddles.

WILBER H. MURRAY MFG. CO., Cincinnati, Ohio.

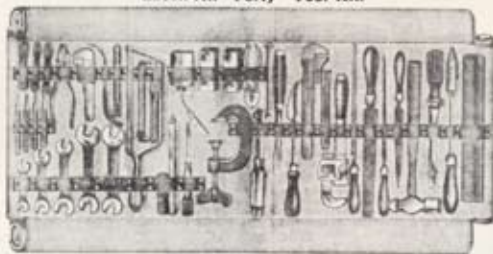
Buggies and carriages
sold for low prices in 1908,
while cars were expensive.
But cars won out eventually
because they were faster
and didn't have to be fed —
like a horse — when not used.

THEN			NOW
91,972,266 1910		Population	172,790,000 1957
51.1 years 1908		Life expectancy	69.5 years 1955
156,429 1910		Number of students graduated from high school	1,358,600 (est.) 1957
37,199 1910		Number of students graduated from college	347,000 (est.) 1957
6,483,629 1908		Number of telephones	63,620,863 1957
6,363,502 farms 878,798,000 acres 1910		Number of farms and farm acreage	4,782,416 farms 1,158,191,511 acres 1954

When a pair of mules was a car's best friend!



Excell-All "Forty" Tool Kit.



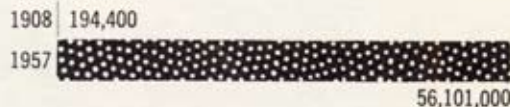
It is practically impossible for a young person today to realize just how bad roads were in 1908. No one would dare to take a modern car over such roads; it hasn't enough clearance for them. Most main roads were unpaved then, so they were deep with dust in dry weather and bottomless morasses of mud when it rained. Cars really did get stuck like this and had to be hauled out by a good strong team of horses or mules.

And the cars themselves were far from being perfected; they often broke down and had to be repaired on the road. A tool kit like the one shown above got plenty of use. On a long trip — of 200 or 300 miles or so — it would almost surely have to be used. Tires lasted only about 5,000 miles. There were no demountable wheels or rims, so a tire had to be changed on the wheel. And that was really hard work!

Roadside restaurants and motels did not exist in 1908. You had to drive into a town or city to eat or sleep. There were no lights to control traffic at intersections, and international rules for road signs were not adopted until December of that year. Twenty-nine states did not require any drivers' licenses at all; seven states required only professional chauffeurs to have a license. Driving was free and easy then, but cars were slower and there weren't many of them—yet.



Number of registered passenger cars



Number of miles of public roads



Number of miles of surfaced public roads



Number of service stations



Number of horses and mules





As we look back to 1908, we tend to think that life in America was harder then than it is now and that even the apparent simplicity of that era had about it a certain quaint absurdity. But people who will be living fifty years from now are likely to think the same about us. And they will be right, for progress means that we must always outgrow our yesterdays. From laboratories and experimental shops like those in the great GM Technical Center near Detroit will come the thinking, the planning, and the concrete results that will make the better living of tomorrow come true.

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