



*Left: Briscoe at Manitoba Car Show Note: Centered single headlight was distinctive to early models;  
Below: 1912 Brockville Atlas*



# BROCKVILLE'S AUTOMOBILE HEYDAY

By Russ Disotell

**B**rockville as Ontario's answer to Motor City, U.S.A.? Not quite, but at the beginning of the twentieth century Brockville was one of the communities trying

turning out the Brockville 30 using parts supplied by the Orillia factory, turning out 80 automobiles in 1911. The model had 30 horsepower and sold for approximately \$1,500.

By the end of 1915, T.J. Storey and Canada Factories were producing a new automobile for the Canadian market, the Briscoe, in an arrangement with Briscoe Motor Corporation of Jackson, Michigan. One selling point was that it was more moderately priced than the Atlas. Benjamin Briscoe had begun working in the auto business as a partner of Jonathan Maxwell. Their company Maxwell-Briscoe, producing the Maxwell, which proved to be the beginnings of the Chrysler Corporation. Briscoe left to head up the new United States Motor Company in 1910. After two years, the company failed and Briscoe was off to France, specifically Billancourt, home of the already renowned Renault. Here he developed the innovative Briscoe engine,

to cash in on the start of North America's love affair with the automobile. It all started with a "buggy" company in Gananoque.

Between 1886 and 1892, the Gananoque Carriage Company had doubled production and were in need of an expanded factory to improve shipping facilities. At that time cities were allowed to provide financial incentives to attract businesses (this is no longer allowed) and Brockville City Council wasted little time in reaching out to the carriage company. A cash bonus of \$50,000 and property tax of \$500 was enough to facilitate the relocation. The new plant was built at a junction of the CPR and Grand Trunk rail lines near where the present day Legion Ball Park is.

The investment proved lucrative as the company flourished. In 1909 Canada Carriage Company was part of an amalgamation, led by J.B. Tudhope of Orillia. The new company was known as Canadian Factories Ltd. Following the acquisition, Brockville became a distribution point, leaving the factory facilities largely idle. However, the company's general manager T.J. Storey, soon rectified this.

In 1910, Tudhope reached an agreement with American auto manufacturer Everitt to build their "30" model in Orillia for the Canadian market. Soon Storey's Brockville plant was

Based on this success, Storey decided to produce his own automobile. In mid 1911 the Brockville Atlas Auto Company was formed. The name Atlas was derived for the Atlas engines, sourced from Indianapolis, that were used in the car. Three different styles, touring, roadster and landaulet were produced. They ranged in price from \$1500 to \$2250. Initially the bodies were supplied by Canada Factories. One innovation the Atlas featured was an internal brake system, lined for protection from mud and water, which wouldn't appear consistently in other automobiles until the late 1920's. It also sported features such as electric start and electric lights, which believe it or not, weren't available on all autos of the time.

The Brockville Atlas enjoyed a modicum of popularity in what was becoming a crowded auto market. An advertisement in the February 27, 1914 edition of the Recorder & Times, proudly pointed out that Toronto's largest taxi fleet boasted ten Atlas autos. Indeed, two of three Brockville taxis were also Atlas. However, the relative high cost of the Atlas, combined with supply and labour problems from the outbreak of WW1, soon ended the Atlas. In total, a respectable 300 cars had been produced.

known as the "Half Million Dollar Engine".

Working in partnership with the Michigan headquarters, the Briscoe was more successful than the Atlas. In 1916 it sold for \$825. This made it much more affordable than the Atlas. It also enjoyed a reputation for fuel economy and power, although it should be noted production of a V8 model was discontinued because it was too powerful. Over the lifetime of the Briscoe Corporation approximately 53,000 cars were manufactured in the U.S. and 5,000 in Canada.

The various subsidiaries of Canada Factories Ltd. enjoyed an upsurge in business during WW1, despite the attendant difficulties. However, on October 27, 1918 the Brockville plant was destroyed by fire, with only four of the company's buildings surviving. Shortly thereafter the U.S. parent company went bankrupt. A newly minted enterprise emerged from the bankruptcy, renamed the car the Earl and continued production for two years. The surviving Brockville operation continued to manufacture parts for the Earl, before closing shop for good in 1921, ending Brockville's brief foray into the nascent world of auto manufacturing. [LH](#)