**Automobiles and Highways in Kentucky Resource Guide**

**Table of Contents:**

Introduction…………………………………………………………….1

Images……………………………………………………………….3-4

Keywords, events, phrases…………………………………………..3

Vehicle makes and models………………………………………..4-5

Price of a car and automobile innovations……………………….6-7

Books, highway maps, oral history interview……………………7-9

Automobile manufacturers……………………………………….9-14

Articles……………………………………………………………14-56

**Introduction:** This resource guide is designed to provide you with tools to help people engage with the past and connect with others. There are images to share with your clients, clip art that can be copied and colored or used for another purpose, manipulatives that can be handled, information about interstates and highways in Kentucky, information about vehicle manufacturers in Kentucky, and articles about automobiles and automobile culture in Kentucky.

**Images:**

-Encourage your audience members to look through the images included in the kit and to share any memories they have about cars, either riding in them, purchasing them, or working on them.

Some conversation prompts can include:

* What do you want to say about what is going in this picture?
* What do you think is happening in this picture?
* What was your first car?
* What did you like or dislike about it?
* Did your first car have any of the features listed in automobile innovations? (See pages 6-7 of this guide for a list of innovations) When did you get a car with some of these innovations?
* What was it like to drive a vehicle before seat belts, air conditioning, power steering, and automatic brakes?
* Did you or someone you know work in an automobile plant or a facility that provided parts for the automobile plants in Kentucky? If so, what was your experience like?
* Where did you or your family go when you traveled by car?
* Did your family ever take road trips or vacations? Where did you go?
* What was it like to drive on the old highways before the interstates were built?
* When did you first drive on the interstate?
* Did you ever go to a drive-in movie? What did you see? What kinds of snacks did you usually get at the drive-in theater?
* Did you or your family go to drive-in restaurants? What was your favorite meal to get at the drive-in?
* Did you know anyone who worked as a carhop? What was his or her experience like?

-Use the clip art image to talk with the group about the parts or sections of a car, or photocopy it and allow people to color the sheet. Talk with them about the car they are coloring or one of the cars they had as they color.

-Share the included CD as folks work on the clip art images.

Automobile clip art retrieved from:

PublicDomainPictures.net. Artwork done by Karen Arnold. Retrieved on July 28, 2021. https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/pictures/60000/velka/vintage-car-clipart.jpg

**Keywords, events, phrases:**

-Construction of the interstates in Kentucky: I-24, I-64, I-65, I-69, I-71, I-75

-Vehicle manufacturing plants: Corvette/GM, Ford, Toyota

-Highways and parkways: Audubon Parkway, Bert Combs Mountain Parkway, Louie Nunn Cumberland Expressway Martha Layne Collins Bluegrass Parkway, Pennyrile Parkway, Purchase Parkway, Wendell Ford Western Parkway, 23, 25, 68, 27, 127, 421, 431, 460

-Drive-ins (either the theaters or the restaurants)

-New Circle Road and/or Watterson Expressway construction or bypasses in other cities

-Car, pickup truck, sedan, station wagon

**Vehicle makes/models:**

There is a word search included with this guide. The word search contains a few of the vehicle names listed here. If you have a board or large piece of paper to write on, you may want to list a few of these vehicle names and ask your audience which brands they owned.

-Airstream

-Bel Air

-Biscayne

-BMW

-Buick

-Buick Roadmaster

-Cadillac

-Camaro

-Century

-Chevelle

-Chevette

-Chevrolet

-Chrysler

-Chrysler Town and Country

-Corvette

-Corvair

-De Soto

-Dodge

-Edsel

-El Camino

-Fairlane

-Falcon

-Ford

-General Motors

-GMC

-Imperial

-Jeep

-Mercedes

-Mercury

-Monte Carlo

-Mustang

-Nash

-Newport

-New Yorker

-Nova

-Oldsmobile

-Packard

-Royal

-Saratoga

-Townsman

-Toyota

\*For more information visit the following sites:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Buick\_vehicles

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:General\_Motors\_vehicles

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\_of\_Ford\_vehicles

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\_of\_Chevrolet\_vehicles

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\_of\_Chrysler\_vehicles

**Cost of a Ford**

Share the prices for a new Ford for the years listed. Ask your group members what they paid for their first vehicle.

Ford car prices (Information taken from the BiFolkAl programming guide:

Erickson, Lynne Martin and Kathryn Leide. (1983). “Remembering 1924: A Program Manual.” Madison: Bi-Folkal Productions, Inc. p. 28.)

-1905, cost $1200.00.

 -1924, cost $490.00

 -1977, cost $7000.00 (with options)

**Automobile innovations**\***:**

Ask you group members about these innovations. What was it like to drive a vehicle before seat belts, air conditioning, power steering, and automatic brakes?

Shatter-proof windshields

Gas gauge

Automatic radios

Automatic windshield wipers

Adjustable front seats

All-steel turret top

Sealed beam headlights

Shock absorbers

Hot water heaters

Bumpers as standard equipment

Gearshift on wheel

Power steering

Balloon tires

4-wheel hydraulic brakes

Electric starter

Automatic transmission

Air conditioning

\*This list came from the BiFolkal Production’s Remembering Automobiles Kit guide, “Spare Parts.” This guide was published in 1981.

**Book to share:**

*Northern Kentucky’s Dixie Highway* by Deborah Kremer (2009)

Northern Kentucky's Dixie Highway is a slice of Americana pie. Known also as U.S. 25 and the Lexington-Covington Turnpike, the once-rural route connects the urban cores of Cincinnati, Covington, and Newport to Central Kentucky. (Summary provided by Amazon.)

*Slow Travels Kentucky: A Historic Driving Guide* by Lyn Wilkerson (2009);

Explores four highway routes through the Bluegrass State. U.S. Highway 25 travels from Covington to the Cumberland Gap, retracing parts of the Wilderness Road and Daniel Boone's Trace. U.S. Highway 31W travels the important Louisville-Nashville Road from Louisville through Bowling Green. U.S. Highway 41 explores the Pennyrile section of the state, from Henderson and Owensboro to the Tennessee Line. Finally, U.S. Highway 68 travels the width of the state, from the Ohio River opposite the state of Ohio, to Paducah. (Summary provided by OCLC.)

**Kentucky maps:**

https://transportation.ky.gov/Planning/Pages/Official-Highway-Map.aspx https://maps.kytc.ky.gov/officialkentuckystatehighwaymap/

Have maps available for your group members to see where the different highways and interstates are. Encourage and assist them in finding different places on the map to where they’ve traveled.

**Oral history interview:**

Interview with Sallie Morton, January 29, 1992

Ms. Morton discusses the first vehicle she and her husband got, and she also talks about her father’s vehicle. If you click on the tab to, “Play Interview,” you will get a listing of subjects discussed during the interview. You can go directly to the portion of the interview where Ms. Morton talks about automobiles. This is at the 34 minute 42 second mark.

https://kentuckyoralhistory.org/ark:/16417/xt7vhh6c5g7f

Shared with permission from the Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, University of Kentucky Libraries

*All rights to the interviews, including but not restricted to legal title, copyrights and literary property rights, have been transferred to the University of Kentucky Libraries.  Interviews may only be reproduced with permission from Louie B. Nunn Center for Oral History, Special Collections and Digital Programs, University of Kentucky Libraries.*

**General Motors Bowling Green facility**

Share facts about the Bowling Green facility where Corvettes are made.

The information below was gathered from Company page on General Motors’ website on July 16, 2021. Retrieved from:

https://media.gm.com/media/us/en/gm/company\_info/facilities/assembly/bowlinggreen.html

Bowling Green

Revised:2021-05-03

Facility: 1.7 million square feet on 212 acres

Employee Information

Hourly Approx.: 1187

Salaried Approx.:186

Total Approx.: 1373

\*Population is based on employee count by location and not by full-time equivalent. Data as of March 31, 2021.

PRODUCTS

2019 Chevrolet Corvette Stingray/Z06/Grand Sport/ZR1

LT1, LT4 and LT5 6.2L V-8 engines for Corvette

2020 Corvette Stingray

FACILITY DETAILS

Bowling Green Assembly is the only plant in the world to build Corvettes.

This manufacturing facility has produced over 1 million Corvettes since its startup in 1981.

The plant has the largest solar array of any automaker in the state of Kentucky.

The Corvette team attends various customer events throughout the year to gain valuable insight and feedback on the product.

Bowling Green Assembly has been the exclusive home of Corvette for over 30 years. Previously a Chrysler air-conditioning unit factory, the building was renovated to become a modern automotive factory befitting of America’s sports car in 1981. Today, Bowling Green features a new paint shop that uses dry scrubber technology, LED lighting and a limestone system to create a world-class paint job while minimizing our ecological footprint.

BGA Mission Statement: To Build the Thoroughbred of Sportscars

**Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Kentucky, Inc.**

Share facts about the Georgetown facility where Camrys are made.

The information below was gathered from the About TMMK page on Toyota’s website on July 26, 2021. Retrieved from:

http://toyotaky.com/boutdex.asp

Toyota Motor Manufacturing, Kentucky, Inc. (TMMK) is Toyota’s largest vehicle manufacturing plant in the world, annually capable of producing 550,000 vehicles and more than 600,000 engines.

Since 1988, over 11 million vehicles have rolled off Toyota’s assembly lines in Georgetown, where full-time employment is more than 8,000. In addition to the Camry, America’s best-selling car, TMMK manufactures the Camry Hybrid, Avalon, Avalon Hybrid and Lexus ES 350, as well as four-cylinder and V-6 engines.

In 2017, Toyota invested $1.33 billion in TMMK to introduce Toyota New Global Architecture and $120 million to expand 2.5- liter engine production. Today, TMMK represents a $7 billion investment.

Plant President: Susan Elkington

Plant Site: 1,300+ acres

Total facility size: 8.1 million sq. ft. (Equal to 169 football fields under roof)

Current Employment: 8,000+

Products: Lexus ES 350 / Camry sedan / Camry Hybrid sedan/ Avalon sedan / Avalon Hybrid sedan / 4-cylinder & V6 engines / axles / steering components / machined blocks / cylinder heads / crankshafts / camshafts / rods & axle assemblies / dies

Supplier Information: 350+ parts and commodities supplier locations in the U.S.; 100+ located in Kentucky

Operations: Stamping, die manufacturing, body weld, paint, plastics, vehicle assembly, engine/axle machining and assembly

**Lexington Motor Car Company**

Share facts about the Lexington Motor Car Company. Ask if anyone in the group owned one. Share Article 1 the group. The article is about someone who did own a Lexington.

http://lexhistory.org/wikilex/lexington-motor-car-company

The fledgling automotive industry by 1908 consisted of a number of firms manufacturing steam, electric and gasoline powered vehicles.  The motor car was slowly emerging from a status symbol of the wealthy to a vehicle for the masses.  The average automobile at this time cost $1,300 or equivalent to the price of a high-end car today.



Entering this market in 1908, the Lexington Motor Car Company of Lexington, Kentucky, began producing the **“**Lexington Motor Car” – a low, sleek design, with a powerful four-cylinder engine.  Compared to contemporary makes, the Lexington’s innovative design received favorable publicity – especially after a strong showing in the 1909 Glidden Reliability Tour – and the company was soon faced with a large backlog of orders.  However, production of the Lexington was limited by the availability of components from suppliers and by financial constraints caused by the low capitalization of the company.  These limitations eventually led to the company’s relocation in the summer of 1910 to Indiana.

The motor car in 1910 was a rare sight in Lexington, but by 1920, the horse had become the rare sight.

The information above was taken directly from the Lexington History Museum’s Lexington Motor Car Company page on July 28, 2021. http://lexhistory.org/wikilex/lexington-motor-car-company

For more information about the Lexington Motor Company or the Lexington vehicle, there is a book. The book is *Lexington Motor Car.* By William M. Ambrose. Limestone Press, Lexington. (2007).

**Articles to share/read with your group:**

Share one or more of the articles below, and ask your group questions about them. You can read the articles to your audience members or have them take turns reading the articles you select.

Questions:

* What do you find interesting about what the article discusses?
* What memories do you have about the events discussed in the articles? Would you like to share your memories with the group?

**Article 1:**

OLD LEXINGTON LIVES, THANKS TO MOUNT STERLING CAR BUFF

March 30, 1986 | Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)

Author/Byline: Don Edwards Herald-Leader columnist | Page: A1 | Section: MAIN NEWS

The difference between you and Bob Thomason is that you can drive in Lexington, but Thomason can drive in Lexington in a Lexington.

That's a Lexington automobile, an old make of car so rare that there may be only half a dozen left in the world. Thomason has one, a 1921 Lexington Minute Man Six, that he values at between $50,000 and $60,000.

"It wasn't really a luxury car, like a Stutz or a Marmon," he said, "but it was a better-than-average car, very well designed and very well made. It was priced at about $3,000 the year it was made."

Thomason, a retired used-car dealer, grew up in this Montgomery County town of 5,800 and has had a long love affair with automobiles. "I began hanging around garages when I was 7," he said. "I remember the Essex, the Willys-Knight, the Overland - all of them. I had my eye on that Lexington for years. I finally got the chance to buy it in an estate sale in 1969."

The car has only 28,923 miles on the odometer and all its original equipment, except for the canvas top, tires and battery, which have been replaced. Thomason still drives it every year when the weather gets pretty.

"It can be a monster to handle," he said. "It's like driving a big Mack truck with no power steering. And the brakes - well, it depends on how strong your right leg is. On a wet day, you might not stop at all."

The Lexington also has no radio, no heater, no shock absorbers and no side windows. The windshield wiper is strictly manual - you work it with your hand while you drive.

But the 65-year-old auto has some conveniences that modern cars don't have, such as its own air compressor and hose in case you have a flat tire. "Back in those days, you might have two or three flats on a 70-mile trip," Thomason said. "If you drove to Lexington and back - 'motored' to Lexington, they called it then - without having a flat, it was so unusual that the Mount Sterling newspaper would publish a story about it."

Most people in Lexington have never seen a Lexington car, but they'll have a chance next month. Thomason plans to drive the car to Lexington on April 10 and display it in front of the University of Kentucky Art Museum that afternoon as part of UK's "Celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the Automobile."

Lexington automobiles began in Lexington in 1909 at a factory on the site of the present Savage Lumber Co. on West Main Street. The factory moved to Connersville, Ind., in 1911 and in 1926 was absorbed by another automobile manufacturer, E.L. Cord.

Thomason doubts that any of the Lexingtons actually made in Lexington still survive. The car's emblem was a rifle-holding frontiersman resembling Daniel Boone, and the "Six" in Minute Man Six referred to the number of cylinders in its big Ansted engine. The Lexington had a bit of national fame in the early 1920s when it won a race up Pikes Peak, Colo., three years in a row.

Thomason's Lexington is no speed wagon, but it will "get along," as Thomason puts it, at 50 mph with no trouble. The speedometer will register to 80; Thomason has never driven the car faster than 60. He estimates that his Lexington gets about 18 miles a gallon on unleaded gasoline.

One sunny day last week, Thomason took the car out for a spin around Mount Sterling. Elderly people waved nostalgically. School kids yelled with glee and pointed. Thomason blew the oo-gah horn and waved back.

Everybody who saw the 1921 Lexington looked happy about it.

Bob Thomason has a theory about why seeing an old car causes people to smile. Call it longevity defying obsolescence.

"They enjoy it," he said, "because it's a survivor, you see. It escaped the scrap heap."

**Article 2:**

NEW CONRAD OWNER A MINORITY SUCCESS

June 16, 1996 | Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)

Author: Ameet Sachdev, Herald-Leader Business Writer | Page: 3 | Section: Business

For Cornelius A. Martin, the Lexington automobile market was too lucrative to turn down the second time.

The Bowling Green auto dealer recently bought Conrad Chevrolet Geo on Richmond Road, renaming it Thoroughbred Chevrolet Geo. With the purchase he became the only - and maybe the first - black businessman to own a dealership in Fayette County.

In the late 1980s, Martin owned the rights to Lexington's first Saturn dealership but traded them for what he thought was a better deal: the Saturn franchise in Dayton, Ohio, which has twice the population of Lexington.

The move propelled his upstart auto-retailing business, which began in 1985 with a Oldsmobile-Cadillac dealership in Bowling Green, and has made Martin a wealthy man. With the Conrad purchase, his company, Martin Automotive Group, now owns seven dealerships in four states, including four Saturn franchises.

"I was one of the first wave of dealers interested in Saturn," said Martin, 47. "I knew it would be great, but I didn't think it would be as popular as it is today."

Martin Automotive Group is one of the nation's largest black-owned dealership groups. Black Enterprise magazine ranked the company, with more than $100 million in sales, 12th among dealerships.

As Martin's company grew, he kept his eyes on Lexington. Martin prefers smaller metropolitan areas because the markets are not saturated with dealers. (His other dealerships are in Charleston, W.Va., and Des Moines, Iowa.) Lexington also offered other attractions: one of the highest average household incomes in the state, low unemployment and a low crime rate.

But like most successful business people, he waited for the right opportunity.

"Lexington was a targeted market, but I wouldn't come here to buy just any store," he said. "We feel this was better than any store."

Conrad has been among the leading Chevy dealerships in sales in the state, said Martin, citing industry reports. When a friend at General Motors Corp. told him the dealership might be for sale, he didn't think twice.

Although a keen observer of the Lexington market, Martin is still an outsider. So one of the first things he did after buying Conrad two weeks ago was hire John Tewell, a veteran of the local car business, to be his operations manager.

Martin's next priority is to spruce up the dealership by adding a facade to the building and changing the color scheme. "I want to give the building more of a '90s look, rather than the '50s or '60s look it has now," he said.

The burly, well-dressed Martin believes in presenting a modern image. He travels in style in his company jet when he visits each of his dealerships. He makes it a point to drop in at least once a week.

He moved to Bowling Green from Dayton in 1985 to open his first dealership. For Martin, it was a homecoming.

He was born in Greenville in Muhlenberg County and spent his childhood on his parents' 900-acre farm. They grew tobacco and soybeans and raised cattle.

But farming wasn't in Martin's future. He moved to Dayton to live with his sister after graduating from high school in 1967.

He got his first job as a mechanic at a dealership. He hasn't worked outside a dealership since.

"I was born and raised on a farm, but I always liked cars," he said. "People said I had gas in my blood."

While working at the dealership, he attended Wright State University in Dayton. After two years he dropped out. But that wasn't the end of his education.

The Buick dealer he was working for sponsored him for a dealer-training program run by GM. It was targeted at up-and-comers, primarily minorities, who the automaker thought had a future owning dealerships.

"It was a very selective program," said GM spokesman Jack Hartzell.

The two-year program was based at General Motors Institute in Flint, Mich., a college the automaker owned and used to train dealers, engineers and technicians. The college, no longer owned by GM, is now called GMI Engineering and Management Institute.

Martin learned the administrative and financial side of operating a dealership. At the time, domestic automakers had virtually no black auto dealers, but the program was a beginning.

"If the manufacturer didn't take a lead role, minorities would have never gotten those franchises," Martin said.

But even today the number of minority dealers is small. Of the 400 new-car dealerships in Kentucky, fewer than a dozen are owned by minorities.

The domestic automakers have been more active than import automakers in recruiting minorities. The National Association of Minority Automobile Dealers reports that only 11 of the 27 import makes have any minority franchises.

Martin owned Subaru and Isuzu franchises in Bowling Green but sold them to concentrate on his domestic dealerships.

"In the future, imports will have a tougher time," he said. "Domestics have found out they can compete with imports by improving quality, dealer networks and customer service."

Martin didn't buy Conrad's Subaru franchise but agreed to continue operating it for two months while the automaker finds a buyer.

A Subaru spokesman said last week that the automaker will keep a franchise in Lexington. The company plans to announce a new location within weeks.

**Article 3:**

Gov. Louie B. Nunn's speech drew a horse laugh as parkway opened

By Frank Boyett | December 16, 2020 | Gleaner, The (Henderson, KY)

Page: B8 | Section: News

The Audubon Parkway toll booth at Hebbardsville rolled from the horse-powered age to the computer age this week in 1970.

About 400 people attended the dedication ceremony at 2 p.m. Dec. 18, 1970, and they laughed heartily when Bomberry, a 10-year-old trotter from Audubon Raceway, "emitted a loud horse laugh in the midst of Gov. Louis B. Nunn's address," according to The Gleaner of Dec. 19. "Bomberry interrupted the governor's remarks on two other occasions but the governor managed to outtalk the horse and won on points."

"I wasn't aware when I came here I'd get a horse laugh," Nunn joked, laughing along with the crowd. "But I've grown accustomed to it."

There were no hard feelings. After his speech Nunn got into a racing sulky, pitched his fare into the grate, and Bomberry pulled him through toll booth.

The opening of the parkway between Henderson and Owensboro is worthy of note, in and of itself of course, but there was an additional factor that is often overlooked and led the way for the entire commonwealth. The Gleaner of Dec. 18 describes it:

"It's dedication also heralds the debut of a new computer communications system on the state toll road network.

"The computer terminal at Hebbardsville will store daily information on receipts which will be fed into Frankfort via (paper) tape. The Audubon project is being used as a prototype in the state. After it is perfected it will be installed on all the state's toll roads."

Similar computerized programs were already in use in Connecticut and Illinois, as well as in Spain.

The Audubon Parkway is significant is another way, also. It is the only one of Kentucky's nine parkways that was not later renamed for a Kentucky politician. The original proposed name for it was the Green River Parkway as of 1966, however.

That name, of course, was later adopted by the parkway that runs between Owensboro and Bowling Green, which was later renamed in honor of U.S. Rep. William H. Natcher.

An Aug. 13, 1966, Gleaner article contained a map that depicts a very different proposed route for the Audubon Parkway. The parkway would have intersected the U.S. 41 Bypass near its junction with U.S. 60, and run north of Kentucky 351 the entire length of its portion in Henderson County.

The Gleaner of July 16, 1968, reported the Kentucky Turnpike Authority had OK'd construction of the Audubon Parkway and at the end of that year took bids totaling $19.4 million. The ultimate price tag totaled $23.5 million.

Construction was supposed to begin in March of 1969 but wet weather turned the ground to mud, so clearing of the right of way didn't really begin in earnest until the beginning of May, according to the caption of a photo in The Gleaner of May 2. Little more than three months later the highway was far enough along that Nunn authorized placement of signs, according to The Gleaner of Aug. 10.

Which brings us back to the dedication of the toll road. In his remarks Nunn said the 24-mile toll road "is more than a pavement of concrete. It is a pavement of the future for a long-neglected area of our state, particularly from a standpoint of highway construction and governmental concern."

In a more poetic vein, he noted John James Audubon would find the area "far different than when he roamed the bottoms. But his artist eye would not find this road offensive in its symmetry of line and landscaping."

When the remainder of Kentucky's nine toll roads were completed it gave Kentucky the nation's second-largest system of toll roads, surpassed only by New York.

But the Audubon Parkway was one the safest of them, according to a March 9, 1980, Gleaner article. The next year, however, the parkway began experiencing cave-ins just east of the Hebbardsville toll booth, according to The Gleaner of June 11, 1981. The bank slippage continued until mid-1987, when work to repair the problem caused the parkway to convert to two-lane traffic in that sector.

Exit ramps for Zion and Sorgho were added in 1986. Tolls were lifted Nov. 21, 2006, on both the Audubon and the Natcher parkways, which were the last of Kentucky's toll roads to require tolls.

Gov. Ernie Fletcher razed the toll booth at Hebbardsville on that date by means of an excavator.

In the spring of 2014 another mysterious dip materialized in the parkway east of Hebbardsville, which highway engineers were at a loss to explain. The Gleaner of Nov. 8 that year reported a $12.3 million contract had been awarded to a Louisville firm to repair nearly 12 miles of the parkway, including the area with the dip.

Kentucky's toll roads got a lot of criticism at the time they were built from folks who felt they favored those better able to pay the tolls. In retrospect, though, I doubt we'd have Interstate 69 and other Kentucky interstates if toll roads had not paved the way for those federal highways.

**Article 4:**

TOYOTA PLANT CEREMONY TODAY IN SCOTT OFFICIALS INVITED TO GROUND-BREAKING FOR $800 MILLION AUTO-ASSEMBLY SITE

May 5, 1986 | Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)

Author: Andy Mead Herald-Leader staff writer | Page: C1 | Section: CITY/STATE

The population of Scott County will swell by several hundred for a while this morning when a crowd gathers for a ground-breaking ceremony for Toyota Motor Corp.'s $800 million automobile-assembly plant.

The ceremony at the plant site north of Georgetown is expected to draw about 450 people, said Janie Lewis of MER & Associates, a public relations firm that is handling publicity for the event.

Not just anyone can attend. Mrs. Lewis said attendance is restricted to members of the news media and those who have received invitations.

Those on the invitation list include Gov. Martha Layne Collins, numerous state and local officials and Scott County residents who owned the land where the plant will be built, Mrs. Lewis said. Among the national news media expected at the ground-breaking for the largest single Japanese investment in the United States are The Wall Street Journal and Cable News Network, she said.

The event will begin at 9:15 a.m. with a news conference at the Marriott Resort at Griffin Gate in Lexington. Those expected to speak at the news conference are Toyota President Shoichiro Toyoda, chairman of the board Eiji Toyoda and Kaneyoshi Kusunoki, the president of Toyota Motor Manufacturing U.S.A., a Toyota Corp. subsidiary set up to run the plant.

Then everyone will board a fleet of buses for the ride to the plant site, where at 10:30 a.m. the Toyodas, the governor and others will speak before the actual ground-breaking. Seventeen people are expected to line up with shovels to ceremoniously turn the "first" chunks of earth. Heavy equipment has been moving large chunks at state expense for several weeks.

The Toyota plant will be a group of buildings with more than 3.3 million square feet, according to a site plan approved by the Scott County Joint Planning Commission. The largest structure will be the main assembly building, which will be 2.6 million square feet.

The plant is expected to employ about 3,000 people in the assembly of a Camry-like vehicle. More jobs are possible at supplier plants that might build in the region.

Production is expected to begin late in 1988. When the plant reaches full production in 1989, it is expected to turn out 200,000 vehicles a year.

The plant will have an annual payroll of more than $86 million, and it has been hailed as an economic boost for the state.

**Article 5:**

50 Years Ago for May 8

May 7, 2010 | Winchester Sun, The (KY)

Section: Community news

May 8, 1960

Frankfort (AP) - Interstate highway construction totaling $216,974,000 has been scheduled by the state Highway Department over the next five years. The project envisions the starting or completion of the final phase or construction - paving - on approximately 224 miles of Interstate Routes 64, 65, 71, 75 and 264.

The Phillips 66 Oil Company has purchased from G.B. Toler's building site for a service station on Route 15 of the intersection of the Ecton Road.

Washington (AP) - Sen. John Sherman Cooper, (R-Ky.) has proposed Congress put up $175,000 to survey a proposed parkway connecting national parks in three states. His bill calls for a survey of a parkway from Great Smoky Mountains National Park in North Carolina and Tennessee to Mammoth Cave National Park in Kentucky and Natchez Trace Park in Tennessee.

**Article 6:**

TRAFFIC LIGHT BRINGS FLASH OF PROGRESS TO COUNTY

August 27, 1987 | Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)

Author: Lee Mueller Eastern Kentucky bureau | Page: A18 | Section: MAIN NEWS

INEZ -- Seventy-seven years after the first automobile appeared in Martin County, another beacon of progress is about to shine on this Eastern Kentucky county:

The traffic light.

A state highway crew yesterday began to install the light one mile from Inez at Ky. 645, a new four-lane road, and old Ky. 40. When the job is finished later this week, it will leave only two other counties in the state without traffic lights: Elliott County in Eastern Kentucky and Edmonson County in the west.

Although it meant the end of an era in Martin County (population 14,400), few residents appeared to mourn the passing.

"I'm certainly for a red light," said Sheriff Ray Fields, who estimated that a dozen or more accidents had occurred at the intersection since the four-lane road opened to through traffic this year.

Highway officials term the light a "flashing beacon" because of its blinking red and yellow lights, but that technicality did little to dim the news elsewhere.

"Lights mean you got progress," said Clete Ferguson, a Sandy Hook businessman who heads Elliott County's industrial development committee. He has been trying to have a traffic light installed at a bridge where Ky. 7 and Ky. 32 intersect in Sandy Hook.

In Edmonson County, people "take pride in the fact they're the last of a vanishing breed," said Lance Meredith, an Edmonson County native who is now a state highway department official in Bowling Green.

Highway officials decided to erect the flashing light near Inez after other measures -- including speed bumps -- failed to slow motorists.

**Article 7:**

HOUSE LIGHTS ARE DIMMING ON FADING DRIVE-IN SCENE

July 31, 1986 | Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)

Author/Byline: Jim Warren Herald-Leader staff writer | Page: D7 | Section: LIFESTYLE

The drive-in theater may be about to go the way of the corner blacksmith's shop.

Across the country, drive-ins are rapidly disappearing, replaced by shopping centers, fast-food restaurants, high-rise office buildings and other 1980s-vintage developments.

America's first drive-in opened in Pennsylvania in 1933. Some religious leaders blasted the new theaters as "dens of sin," but young Americans loved them. By 1973, the country had 12,000 drive-in theater screens. The industry, however, has been on a downhill skid ever since.

As of last summer, only 2,179 screens were still showing pictures, according to the National Association of Theater Owners.

The main problem, industry officials say, is that land in urban areas simply has become too valuable to use for drive-ins. Faced with the lure of big bucks, theater owners convert their property to more profitable uses, a shopping center, say, or a subdivision.

'When property like this gets too valuable, these theaters are going to go out," said J.M. Johnson, who opened the Lexington Drive-In in 1949 and now operates it in partnership with his son, Breck. "The land just gets too valuable to leave undeveloped."

Glenn Peters, who operates the Richmond Drive-In Theater in Madison County, agreed.

"The price of the land just gets too high," he said. "It's especially true in these big towns, where the town just grows up around the theater."

According to Peters, one of Louisville's largest drive-ins was forced to close a few years ago because of skyrocketing land costs. The owner no longer could afford to lease the site, he said.

In 1954, J. Waller Rodes Jr. opened Fayette County's first drive-in, the Family, on the "beltline," as Lexingtonians called New Circle Road back then. Later, he also owned the nearby Circle 25 Drive-In. Today, a McDonald's and some shops stand where the Family used to be, and Brock-McVey occupies the site of the old Circle 25.

"The price of the land got so high that we sold it to some people to continue to operate the theaters," Rodes said recently. "But they didn't operate them very well, so we took the theaters back, and then subdivided them for business purposes.

"Drive-ins really were a very good business when we were in it. But I feel like we got out at the right time."The Johnson family, however, intends to buck the trend.

"We're not going out," Breck Johnson said. "My father started the business. I started working here when I was 16, taking tickets. Now, I've got an 11- year-old boy who's just like me. He wants to run it when he's older."

**Article 8:**

Area drive-ins fight twilight of trend

October 17, 1988 | Owensboro Messenger-Inquirer (KY)

Author/Byline: STEVE HUNT; Messenger-Inquirer | Page: 1C

About one-fourth of drive-in theaters nationwide closed in 1986 and 1987, but the ones remaining in 1988, including ones in this area, seem to be holding their own.

From a peak of 4,063 in 1958, the number of drive-ins dropped to 2,084 as of August 1987, according to figures from the National Association of Theatre Owners.

Fifty of those are in Kentucky, including the Starlight Drive-In on Parrish Avenue. The future of it is unclear now, according to Jimmy Tashie, vice president of operations for Malco in Memphis, which operates the Starlight.

Tashie said insurance adjusters soon would have an estimate of the damage done by a fire there Oct. 3. Malco will make a decision about what to do with the theater based on that estimate, he said.

Tashie noted that since the theater was already closed for the season, Malco does not have to make that decision immediately.

The Starlight did a marginal business over the past few years, according to Tashie.

The lease for the theater property is another factor affecting the decision. Mrs. Andy Anderson of Hartford owns the property, and the lease expires in 1989, according to Tashie.

Mrs. Anderson has been unavailable for comment.

The number of drive-ins has declined, in part, because the real estate became more valuable than the operation itself, according to Alan Denton, who manages the Starlight.

Most of the drive-ins were built in the country, but as suburbs developed around them the value of the property greatly increased, he said.

Denton also attributes the growth of videocassettes and cable TV to the decline of drive-ins. ''There are a lot more entertainment options that weren't available 10 or 20 years ago,'' he said.

The Starlight, built in 1948, is Owensboro's only drive-in. At one time in the 1950s, five drive-ins operated in town.

Four drive-ins within a reasonable drive from Owensboro are operating.

Only one is still showing films this late in the year; the Irvington Drive-In at Irvington will be open until cold weather forces it to close, according to owner Don Ford.

''We're still going, but we're on the verge of shutting down for the winter any day now,'' Ford said. In the drive-in business the season generally runs from Memorial Day to Labor Day, ''and anything after Labor Day is a gift,'' he said.

Business has been good for Ford this year, mainly because of the blockbuster movies that were released this summer, according to Ford.

''It all hinges on Hollywood,'' he said. ''When they give us 'Rambo III' and ' ''Crocodile'' Dundee II' it's fantastic. All we have to do is lay back and play it.'' The others, the Holiday Drive-In at Reo, Ind.; the Starlite Drive- In at Henderson, and the Tri-City Drive-In at Beaver Dam, are closed for the season.

Drive-ins in general will survive as long as they show first-run movies and aren't forced out by the lure of high real-estate prices, Ford said.

But once they close, they'll be gone for good, according to Ford.

''Drive-ins will just disappear, and they won't come back.'' The start- up cost for a drive-in has become so high that it just isn't worth the effort, he said.

Business has also been up from last year at the Henderson Starlite twin-screen drive-in, according to owner Gene Miller. He also attributes that to better movies this year.

Miller tries to get the biggest first-run films he can get while trying to avoid the ''cheapies'' that feature monsters or sex.

This year's most successful films at the Starlite were '' 'Crocodile' Dundee II,'' ''Fatal Attraction'' and ''Big,'' according to Miller.

Miller, who built the drive-in with his father in 1953, said that it used to be that any John Wayne or Randolph Scott film would pack the theater, but now there aren't any big-name stars that can guarantee a big crowd.

Now that the Starlite is the only drive-in left in the Henderson- Evansville area, Miller thinks it will survive.

''I plan to stay with it,'' Miller said. ''It's all I've ever done.'' Tony Frizzel, owner of the Tri-City Drive-In Theater at Beaver Dam, had to close prematurely this season because of a fire in the concession stand during a movie.

''Business had been off since 1984, but it was coming back a little bit,'' said Frizzel, who also owns the Mall Cinema at Hartford and switches films back and forth between the drive-in and indoor theaters.

''The drive-in business has changed. It used to be that you could put on just about anything and draw a good crowd. Now it has to be a good movie,'' he said.

Like Miller and Ford, Frizzel plans to keep the business going as long as he can.

**Article 9:**

PARKETTE DRIVE-IN OWNER RETIRES, BUT HIS LEGACY CRUISES ON

June 28, 1984 | Lexington Herald-Leader (KY)

Author/Byline: Don Edwards Herald-Leader columnist | Page: B1 |

From the Department of Rock around The Clock, Pegged Pants, Ponytails And Hamburger History:

Joe Smiley retiring? We couldn't believe it.

To a generation of Central Kentucky kids who came of age in the 1950s, Smiley is the man who invented the drive-in restaurant.

His Parkette Drive-In on the southwest corner of New Circle and Liberty roads - with the huge neon carhop sign and the religious message on the marquee - was the place to go cruisin' in your '56 Chevy with the fuzzy dice, the graduation tassel and the fake shrunken head all hanging from the rear- view mirror.

When Parkette opened Nov. 11, 1952, the location was considered "out in the country" (New Circle hadn't been paved then) and Smiley's double-decker hamburger - called a "Poor Boy" - cost 45 cents (it costs $2.10 now).

Well, Joe Smiley, 65, retired this month. But the Parkette has not hung up its rock 'n' roll shoes.

''We may spruce up the building a little," said new owner Richard Wilkins, ''but that's all we'll change. Joe's tradition will stay the same."

Meantime, Smiley, relaxing at home with such trophies as a 16-pound black bass mounted on the wall, put it this way: "I feel beautiful - I'll have more time to do the Lord's work and more time to go fishing."

And if you thought the '50s were dead, consider this one:

Each Friday night, members of the Ancient Age Lexington Street Rod Club, who own modernized, 1948-or-earlier-model cars, hop in their custom jalopies . . . and just like in the old days . . . go cruise Parkette.

**Article 10:**

A Look At The Three Corvette Assembly Plants: Building America’s Sports Car

Jim Smart, Editor. July 29, 2019

Retrieved from: https://www.motortrend.com/features/1907-look-three-corvette-assembly-plants/

In 1953, who would have believed that an American automaker—known more for great styling rather than road-going, canyon-cutting performance—would give the world an exciting two-seat sports car. American automakers in the post war period introduced fresh and exciting models erected on new underpinnings with updated sheetmetal and creature comforts. In the early 1950s, Chevrolet had its eye on building a fierce competitor to European sports cars. European sports cars were enjoying a healthy market share in the United States and GM wanted a piece of the action.

The Corvette was named for those small, fast-moving naval vessels employed by the British Navy more than a century ago. It seemed a suitable name for Chevrolet's flagship sports car when it was debuted early in January 1953 at the Motorama shows in New York City and Detroit. The Corvette was an exciting and welcome concept car that excited a lot of potential buyers who wanted to know how to get one. GM's marketing and product planning people went back to their jobs conceiving America's sports car.

Corvette production began at Flint on June 30, 1953, under intense pressure to produce the first 300 units as efficiently as possible. The Corvette production line at Flint was a modest, temporary affair erected in an existing GM plant before production began at St. Louis on December 28, 1953.

When the first mass production Corvette was bucked and assembled at GM's Flint, Michigan, assembly plant on June 30, 1953, it launched not only a legendary flagship product line for GM, but also a passionate movement that has lasted nearly seven decades. (The first two production Corvettes were assembled in a temporary facility in the customer delivery garage; reported to be an old building on Van Slyke Ave. The '54 and later cars were assembled in the renovated St. Louis facility.) The Corvette was born as a fiberglass body on a steel frame sports car designed by legendary stylist Harley J. Earl, who birthed the hot-selling Buick LaSalle in the late 1920s. The LaSalle tanked badly during the Great Depression. However, that didn't deter GM. Earl penciled out the 1950 Buick LeSabre, which performed very well in the marketplace. Chevrolet then looked to Earl to come up with a sporty two-seat design for its Motorama display. Although it has been widely written Zora Arkus-Duntov designed the Corvette, it really was Earl who birthed America's sports car in the first place. Duntov would become very influential in its continuing development a short time later.

Chevrolet's first attempt at what would become Corvette was code named EX-122. Mass production began in earnest with 300 Polo White Corvette roadsters with red interiors, which were produced during the summer and fall of 1953, making these coveted rides the only Corvettes the Flint assembly plant would ever produce. Beneath its fiberglass epidermis, the Corvette wasn't much to write home about. It was built on the same basic chassis as other Chevrolet sedans of the era, which didn't make it competitive with its European counterparts. The Corvette was powered by the 235ci "Blue Flame" six, which certainly wasn't wowing anyone despite its side-draft induction system. However, it was all Chevrolet had in 1953. The 265ci small-block V-8 wouldn't be available for two more years.

Crafting the Corvette was just that, hand-crafting, because each and every fiberglass body was different in its own way. Building these bodies took undying patience and tenacity to get it right. Building a fiberglass-bodied car was uncharted waters because it had never really been done before on a mass scale. Steel would have been easier, but not high-tech. Steel would have also produced a heavier Corvette.

Planned production at Flint was 50 units a day, which called for a handful of assembly skids and workers to meet the demand. Because so few Corvettes were produced in 1953, only a select few—celebrities, politicians and GM executives—were able to get their hands on one. This was an intentional strategy staged by GM management to spur demand. That plan backfired. Demand didn't meet expectations because Corvette had a long way to go in terms of refinement and buyers quickly grew tired of waiting.

Although St. Louis was always the planned assembly plant for the Corvette, St. Louis was never going to be ready in time to build the Corvette on a mass scale with the few short months of advanced notice it had been given by GM management. It was going to take months to tool up for the Corvette. GM had to come up with a short-term solution on how to build 300 Corvettes before the end of the 1953 model year.

The Corvette consisted of 62 separate fiberglass body panels that had to be dovetailed together to complete the body. These were labor-intensive cars to build. This is one of 300 Corvettes built in the summer and fall of 1953 at Flint, with production wrapping up on Christmas Eve.

There were two assembly lines at Flint for the Corvette: body and chassis. Capacity was a modest six units at a time. The bodies were built and assembled on one line while painted frames were assembled on the other. Once Flint had rolling chassis ready for completion, fiberglass bodies were lowered onto them. Tony Kleiber, a Flint plant worker, drove the first Corvette, E53F001001, off the line on June 30, 1953, while Plant Manager F.J. Fessenden and General Manager R.G. Ford looked on and posed for the ceremonial drive-off. This was one of those rare moments where the symbolic Job 1 was actually serial number 001.

Because Corvettes were of fiberglass construction, this made them more time consuming to produce. When the fiberglass bodies came out of the molds the real work was only beginning. The seams and joints had to be filled and sanded. The environment was crude with resin and fiber dust in the air and virtually no lung protection for plant workers. Corvette body parts were produced both in-house and by outside suppliers like the Molded Fiber Glass Company. GM used the "bag" fiberglass process for Corvette bodies where a plastic vinyl sheet was applied over the fiberglass to reduce work time and to provide a more user-friendly surface with less prep time.

Corvette assembly really was more of a custom car building operation in the beginning with a handful of assembly workers on a small makeshift line at Flint. It was a small enough line where everyone knew each other, working very hard together at problem solving.

Corvette builds began with the fiberglass platform fitted with reinforcements designed to make it stiffer and to safely support occupants. Before the platform could be mated to the body shell, some 200 mounting holes had to be drilled into the platform. To ensure accuracy, a special drilling fixture had to be mated to the fiberglass platform. Once the platform was ready for body join, it was mounted on a rolling assembly skid that followed tracks down the line.

Because fiberglass was leading-edge technology in 1953, Flint assembly had more than its share of growing pains. Air bubbles in the fiberglass surfaced during the paint drying process in hot 300-degree ovens. That meant repair and repaint time plant management didn't plan for. Especially remarkable was how light these Corvette bodies were compared to steel; just 411 pounds, about two-thirds what a steel body would have weighed. However, it would have been easier to produce the Corvette as a steel body. GM wanted leading-edge technology, hence the Corvette's fiberglass construction.

Assembly of 300 freshly painted Polo White Corvette bodies began at Flint in June 1953. Assembly was a methodical step-by-step process handled by craftsmen who understood the importance of close attention to detail with GM's new-found challenge.

Painted frames were assembled on a separate line where chassis components such as control arms, springs, rear axle, brakes, fuel and brake lines, exhaust and the like were installed with the frames inverted. Once the frames were fully dressed they were flipped over and readied to be lowered onto the assembly line where they would get engines and transmissions and be mated to the body. GM wanted all 300 Corvettes assembled and ready for delivery by Christmas 1953. The last Flint-assembled Corvette unit rolled off the line December 24, Christmas Eve.

What hurt Corvette sales initially was limited availability of those first 300 units produced at Flint. Because availability was intentionally limited by GM management, buyers yawned and ultimately turned their attentions elsewhere. By the time GM made the Corvette available to the masses in 1954 no one cared, which made it challenging to sell GM's two-seater.

Job 1 body drop at Flint was a team effort where the body and frame met for the final journey to completion. Body drop in itself was challenging due to the intricate nature of fiberglass body structure. For these Flint assembly workers, it was just another day at the office.

St. Louis — Corvette's Spiritual Home

GM's St. Louis assembly plant dated back to the origins of General Motors early in the 20th century. The St. Louis assembly plant on the north side of the city was one of GM's oldest plants in 1954.There were actually two plants at St. Louis; Fisher Body and Chevrolet. Ultimately, the two plants merged into one large operation consisting of a car line and a truck line. The addition of the Corvette would make three assembly lines in 1954.

Once Chevrolet wrapped up 1953 Corvette production at Flint, production was moved to St. Louis where the goal was again 50 units a day. Key St. Louis plant workers and supervisors had to travel to Flint during the summer of 1953 to see what they would be facing back home when it was time to build Corvettes. Job 1 would be right after Christmas at St. Louis.

The first of 300 Polo White '53 Corvettes makes its way down the Flint line. Drive-off was just minutes away when this picture was taken.

The production launch at St. Louis was not an easy one. Aside from the usual production start-up issues automakers face; there was the issue of a backlog of unsold Corvettes. Chevrolet had an unrealistic goal of 50 units a day and 10,000 Corvettes annually. However, only 3,640 units were completed in 1954, with many left unsold from coast to coast. It was dreamy-eyed window shoppers at the Motorama shows that inspired GM to produce the Corvette to begin with. When it came time to plunk down the cash, buyers were nowhere to be found. Production was cut by two-thirds until Chevrolet management could figure out how to market and sell the Corvette.

Chevrolet considered dropping the Corvette altogether. However, when word hit the streets Ford had a two-seater of its own planned for 1955, the Thunderbird, GM continued its marketing plan for the Corvette. It is important to understand that the Corvette and the Thunderbird were never in the same two-seat class, which means they were never direct competitors. The Corvette was a true two-seat canyon-cutting sports car. The Thunderbird was a two-seat personal luxury car that sold in greater numbers because it appealed to a larger audience who wanted luxury. With this in mind, Chevrolet continued to focus on Corvette's demeanor as a true American sports car.

Tony Kleiber, who was a Flint assembly worker, drove Job 1 off the line June 30, 1953. This is the original Team Corvette lined up for the picture led by Plant Manager F.J. Fessenden and Chevrolet Assembly Plants General Manager R.G. Ford.

The road to success for the Corvette would be a long one. In 1955, Chevrolet would sell just 700 units, a huge disappointment for GM management and Chevrolet dealers who expected better numbers, especially in light of the new V-8 available in 1955. This wasn't great news for William Mosher, Plant Manager at St. Louis at the time.

Accommodations at St. Louis for Corvette assembly were modest and on a par with Flint. Because production quotas for the Corvette were small compared with the more mainstream passenger cars and trucks being produced on two other GM lines there, Corvette production would be at the old Fisher Body mill building on Natural Bridge Road in the St. Louis Union Avenue complex. Production at the plant made GM accountants weep at just 300 units a month at St. Louis. The Corvette just wasn't selling. Economic conditions at the time weren't robust, which surely contributed to weak sales. The Corvette's inadequacies at the time didn't help either. St. Louis, a big union town, had its share of labor issues and strikes during the three decades Corvette was produced there.

Several hundred miles away in St. Louis, assembly of '54 Corvettes began shortly after Christmas 1953. St. Louis was better equipped to build Corvettes at a rate of 50 units a day. Unfortunately, Chevrolet dealer lots from coast-to-coast were full of unsold Corvettes, creating a manufacturing bottleneck at St. Louis.

Although it has been widely reported St. Louis produced nine Corvette units an hour in those days, former plant worker Mike Dixon wrote in his Corvette book The Factory of Dreams there were just seven units produced an hour. "The line moved so slow that you had to look close as you would think it was sitting still," Dixon said in his book. He spoke of deplorable conditions in the St. Louis plant, "I remember wearing company supplied sweat bands and taking many salt tablets that were available at all drinking fountains," he reflects, "The summer heat was terrible, and water fights inside the plant were plentiful, as there was no A/C, but we couldn't miss what we never had."

Dixon went on to say, "The body drop area where I worked had a nice big glass top over it to keep us warm from the solar rays in summer. To add to the misery, we had a big slick shiny floor where the body drop men a rolled around on little stools tightening up the eight body bolts and installing the back bumpers." Dixon went to work for GM at the St. Louis plant in 1969 and was involved in production until Corvette manufacturing ended there in July 1981. He moved on to GM's Wentzville, Missouri plant after that.

Near completed Corvette bodies get convertible tops and side curtains at St. Louis prior to body drop.

Two companies were enlisted to produce Corvette fiberglass body parts: Molded Fiber Glass Parts Company and Goodyear, both two states away. The A.O. Smith Company began producing Corvette fiberglass in 1954 to make up for the Goodyear shortfall. Collectively, these suppliers produced the 62 pieces necessary to build a Corvette body. They had a difficult time keeping up with demand and the quality was disappointing. Body parts had to be hand sanded and filled, which consumed excessive amounts of time. GM's in-house shop known as the Parts Fabrication Group in Warren, Michigan, filled in as necessary with fiberglass components.

General Tire would ultimately produce Corvette fiberglass employing a process known as Shrink Molded Compound (SMC), which produced super smooth fiberglass and meant less labor time for St. Louis assembly workers. Mike Dixon commented in his book on how miserable the body line was to work on because fiberglass causes horrible itching. "If you were unlucky to have been placed in the body shop, you were almost always itching, scratching and miserable," Dixon states in his book. "The body shop was covered with dust and of course some asbestos I'm sure." He adds many people came great distances to work there because it was considered a great job. However, working conditions were grueling.

Once Corvette assembly got underway at St. Louis, the fiberglass body panels were produced via an improved process known as the Superior Matched Metal Die process, which reduced assembly time. Despite these refinements the Corvette still suffered from disappointing fiberglass quality.

The Corvette's frame line began on the lower level of the old Fisher plant. Frames were unloaded off rail cars and scheduled into production there. Like the Flint plant in 1953, frames were assembled in modest quantities. Engines arrived from the Tonawanda, New York, engine plant bare and ready to be dressed with generators (later alternators) along with power steering pump (where applicable), engine mounts, transmission and starter. Dressed engines and transmissions were routed from the dress-up line via an overhead conveyor to the frame line where they were secured to the chassis.

Chevrolet introduced its all-new 265ci OHV V-8 in 1955, making it an exciting Corvette option that year. The Blue Flame six remained standard. The new revolutionary small-block V-8 produced 195 horsepower, with an increase to 210 horsepower for 1956. Chevy's venerable small-block V-8 only got better with time.

Corvette product planners wanted what they could not have in 1953-'54: a V-8. This left them with Chevrolet's venerable in-line six. Displacing 235 ci, Chevrolet engineers took this beasty inline and gave it power-adders. The Chevrolet "Powerglide" six had been around since 1929 in all its forms and it hadn't changed much. It made 115 horsepower with wedge combustion chambers, hydraulic lifters, low 7.5:1 compression and a one-barrel downdraft Carter carb. For 1953, it received aluminum pistons, full-pressure lubrication and press-in rod bearings.

The Corvette's "Blue Flame" six made 150 horsepower. Compression was raised from 7.5:1 to 8.0:1 to improve power, which called for premium fuel. The solid lifters from the 261ci Chevy truck engine were lined up with a more aggressive camshaft with 0.405-inch lift intake and 0.414-inch lift exhaust. Dual valvesprings were employed to prevent valve float at high rpm. Three side-draft Carter carburetors were bolted to a cast-aluminum intake manifold. Each Carter atomizer addressed siamesed intake ports, with all three carburetors connected by a surge pipe that synched air/fuel flow.

St. Louis witnessed the assembly of thousands of Corvettes in its time. The paint booth was crude by today's standards, with '58 Corvettes lined up here for several coats of lacquer. This picture was taken July 11, 1958. One can only imagine how hot it was in the plant that day.

In 1955, the Corvette got a new optional 195-horsepower 265ci V-8 with a lightweight skirtless block, state-of-the-art heads, dual-plane manifold and a revolutionary demeanor that would last for generations. Horsepower went to 210 horsepower for 1956. Through it all Corvette was fitted with the two-speed Powerglide automatic. You might be tempted to ask why Corvette didn't get a manual transmission. Manual transmissions were considered old-hat in the mid-1950s. Automatic transmissions were viewed as high-tech. A three-speed manual transmission became available in 1956, while the four-speed came about in 1957.

The Corvette's evolution has always been about improvement. Despite marketing struggles, GM continued to forge ahead with a better Corvette each year until sales gradually began to improve. Engine displacement grew to 283 ci in 1957 along with optional Rochester Ram Jet mechanical fuel injection to sweeten the package.

St. Louis continued to produce Corvettes even in the toughest of times when the economy and sales were weak in the 1950s. In the years to follow, Corvette production and sales would gradually ramp up, but was never robust. Production numbers surpassed 30,000 units for the first time in 1969. By 1979, numbers were in excess of 53,000 units, which is a record that has never been surpassed.

This is the final line at St. Louis, July 11, 1958, with new Corvettes ready for drive-off. The '58 Corvette's faux hood louvers would go away in 1959.

In the early 1960s, GM began asking itself how to improve on the winner it had in the C2 1963-'67 Corvette, which was a quantum leap technologically from C1. Costs for developing the C2 had been astronomical because it was so radically different. It wasn't long into C2 production when GM began to look at the Corvette's long-term future. C3 1968-'82 styling began with stylist Larry Shinoda's Mako Shark II show car, which debuted in 1965 on the show circuit. Scheduled model year debut was 1968. However, plagued with lengthy development issues, the Corvette entered production with its share of problems. In due course, GM ironed out these issues and the C3 Corvette enjoyed a steady production life at St. Louis through 1981.

It was a hot, sticky summer day on July 31, 1981, when Alphonse Juergensmeyer drove the last Corvette off the St. Louis line signaling the end of an era for the riverfront community. Some 695,214 Corvettes had been produced there in 27 years. Alphonse, like so many others, was devastated by the end of Corvette production. Some transferred to other GM plants while others lost their jobs. Roughly 1,000 St. Louis workers made the tough decision to abandon their St. Louis roots and move to the new Corvette plant in Bowling Green, Kentucky.

This was body drop at St. Louis in 1961—with the first redesign of the Corvette's posterior and a fresh taillight treatment. The Corvette's chassis was changed very little from what it was at Flint nearly a decade earlier.

A floorpan is readied for mating with the body. The Corvette was easily the most labor-intensive automobile ever produced by Detroit at the time due to its fiberglass construction. GM teaches us all about the value of tenacity with the challenges it faced with the Corvette in the beginning. It stayed with the Corvette even in the toughest of times when other automakers might have given up.

In 1961, a Corvette platform was set up in a jig for the drilling a couple of hundred holes that enabled the platform and body to be joined.

Assembly workers at St. Louis put the finishing touches on a '61 Corvette body prior to body drop. Note, the body was still mounted on an assembly skid where all components were installed. C1 Corvette production ended in 1962, signaling a new generation of more advanced Corvettes for 1963.

A '63 split-window coupe goes together on the St. Louis line where the steel frame "bird cage" becomes wrapped in fiberglass on October 1, 1962. The C2 Corvette's beginnings date back to 1957 when GM envisioned a more advanced Corvette to get sales up. Zora Arkus-Duntov developed the chassis while stylists molded and shaped the slippery fastback body with a split rear window, which lasted one model year.

The Corvette's chassis for 1963 was an all-new frame with fully-independent underpinnings. It was clearly the most advanced American automobile ever produced. Here, an assembled C2 chassis gets its 327 engine and Powerglide transmission right before body drop. This image was taken on October 1, 1962.

This was that religious moment where body and chassis met for the first time at St. Louis on September 28, 1965. This is a '66 coupe becoming a completed Corvette. By 1966, the Corvette had four-wheel disc brakes. It can be endlessly debated which Corvette generation excites the senses most. The C2 in our opinion ranks among the best.

A '69 Stingray gets one last look before leaving the final trim line and readied for shipment.

Fast-forward to 1977 at St. Louis and body drop on the trim line. By 1977, Corvette quality had vastly improved with better fiberglass manufacturing technique. Sales numbers were up as a result, topping out in 1979 at more than 50,000 units.

St. Louis would build its last Corvette on July 31, 1981. Production of the 1982 Corvette began on June 1, 1981 at the new Bowling Green, Kentucky, assembly plant, which was a rare two-month period when Corvette production overlapped at both St. Louis and Bowling Green. Building the last St. Louis Corvette was an emotional experience for St. Louis workers and management. For a lot of GM associates, it would mean relocating to Bowling Green, Kentucky. For others, it meant unemployment.