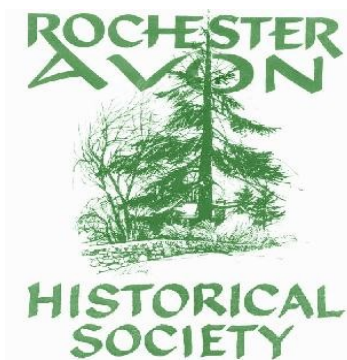


Rochester Avon Historical Society Research Reports

Research Report #13
History of the Butts Surrey
December 2013



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History of the Butts Surrey
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Table of Contents

- I. Introduction
- II. Brief History of the Butts Family
- III. History of the Dunlap Vehicle Company
- IV. Summary
 - Bibliography
 - Appendix
 - Endnotes

Introduction

The Butts Surrey was donated to the Rochester Avon Historical Society by Roger Knapp in 2009. Originally owned by the David Wagner Butts family and used by his daughter, Elizabeth “Lizzie” Butts Casey Case, the surrey was purchased by the Knapp family during an estate auction held at the Butts farm prior to the sale of the property in the late 1960s or early 1970s.

The surrey is a four-seat, light-duty carriage manufactured by the Dunlap Vehicle Company of Pontiac, Michigan. It was built in the decade between 1898 and 1908. Rochester Avon Historical Society is the third owner of the surrey in the vehicle’s more than one hundred year history.

Brief History of the Butts Family

Elias Butts (1806-1879; also sometimes spelled Butz) was an early emigrant to Avon Township, settling on the southwest quarter of section 14 of the township in 1855. His farm lay on South Hill, between the southern limits of the village of Rochester and what is known today as Avon Road. Butts came, as a good number of Avon Township settlers did, from Oxford Township, Warren County, New Jersey, where he had also been engaged in farming. He was one of fifteen children of J. Henry and Anna Eva Huffschtmidt Butz. J. Henry Butz (1753-1843) was an American patriot who served as a private in the Pennsylvania militia during the American Revolution.¹

In 1827, Elias Butts married Catherine Emery (1806-1894), the daughter of Revolutionary War patriot John Emery, who had served as a drummer boy and was wounded in the Battle of Brandywine in 1777.² Among their children was David Wagner Butts (1844-1924), who took over the farm that his father established on South Hill.

David Wagner Butts married Juliet E. Bromley (1858-1955) in 1881. They were the parents of two daughters, Elizabeth "Lizzie," born in 1888, and Laura, born in 1891. Butts was a respected farmer and served three terms as treasurer of Avon Township.³

Elizabeth "Lizzie" Butts (1881-1973) was married twice. She married George Edward Casey (1884-1944) in 1909 and subsequently married Rochester hardware dealer Charles Wallace Case (1870-1944) in 1939. Although she worked for Charles W. Case as a bookkeeper in his hardware store, she was also a well-known local business woman in her own right. She purchased a number of properties in Rochester and managed them as apartment houses.

The only known early photograph of the Butts surrey shows Lizzie Case and another woman, possibly her mother, Juliet, with the carriage; the barn on the David W. Butts farm is visible in the background of the shot (see Illustration 1, Appendix).

History of the Dunlap Vehicle Company

The Dunlap Vehicle Company was organized in 1898 as an offshoot of the Pontiac Buggy Company. At the time, Pontiac Buggy wanted to concentrate on production of carriages for heavier duty, while allowing Dunlap Vehicle Company to handle the market for lighter vehicles. Newspapers announced the formation of the new company in July 1898. The *Saginaw News* reported:

It has been definitely decided that Pontiac will have a new carriage factory and it will be in operation in time to supply the fall trade. It will be known as the Dunlop Vehicle Works [*sic*] and will employ one hundred workmen.⁴

A week later, the *Grand Rapids Herald* informed its readers that articles of association for Dunlap Vehicle Company had been filed in Lansing, and the firm had been capitalized at \$25,000.⁵ According to Arthur Pound's 1934 history of General Motors, the carriage companies in Pontiac at the time were all inter-related:

The largest of the Pontiac carriage factories was the Pontiac Buggy Company, which Edward M. Murphy, S. E. Beach, and Francis Emmendorf had incorporated in November, 1893. Although incorporated for only \$25,000 paid in, it built a factory then reckoned large on Oakland Avenue, where the Pontiac, Oxford & Northern tracks crossed that thoroughfare, on land now occupied by the Pontiac Motor division.

All his old associates ascribe to "Ed" Murphy extraordinary powers of organization and business drive. Born in Wayne, Michigan, he climbed the ladders of success largely by his own efforts and came early into business authority. In 1898, after the Pontiac Buggy Company had enjoyed its share of the boom, he brought Lee Dunlap into his orbit by establishing the Dunlap Vehicle Company, to manufacture a somewhat lighter grade of buggies than Pontiac had built. Mr. Dunlap came over from the C. V. Taylor organization. Pontiac Buggy also formed the Crescent Carriage Company in 1903. In 1904 Mr. Beach sold his interest to Mr. Murphy and bought the latter's interest in the Crescent and Dunlap plants, but later went back into the Pontiac organization, remaining until the change from carriage to automobile production. When this change came Mr. Murphy was sole owner of Pontiac Buggy Company, but his associates had interests in the allied carriage plants.⁶

Dunlap was headed by Louis Lee Dunlap (1870-1954), who learned the carriage trade in the Charles Vliet Taylor factory in Pontiac. (Taylor, the first to establish a carriage factory in Pontiac in 1886⁷, was the brother of Harvey J. Taylor, a hardware merchant in Rochester, and Charlotte Taylor, later the wife of Joseph Case. Charlotte and Joseph's son, Charles Wallace Case, took a job with his Uncle Harvey in Rochester to learn the hardware business and eventually bought him out, forming Case's Hardware.)

The Dunlap Company formed a distribution agreement with John G. Wilkinson of Newburgh, New York as the sole eastern agent for its products, and announced the partnership in the *Automotive Manufacturer* issue of August 1899⁸ (see Illustration 4, Appendix). By 1901, business was going well enough to prompt the company to expand. The *Flint Journal* reported on July 22 of that year:

A Pontiac dispatch says the Pontiac Buggy Co. and the Dunlap Vehicle Co. announced Saturday that they will build additions to their factories so as to enable them to nearly double their output. Plans are prepared for the erection for the new buildings for the Pontiac Buggy Co. The plans and locations for the Dunlap company's buildings are not yet decided upon. Double the number of men will be employed in both factories. The buildings will be erected before the close of this year.⁹

Dunlap's 1902 product catalog contained illustrations of 37 different vehicles available for order from the company (see Illustrations 5&6, Appendix). It boasted the quality of the woodwork and components thus:

All our wood work – including bodies, seats and gear parts – also all wheels, axles and springs are made in Pontiac under our immediate supervision, thereby placing us in a very favorable position, owing to the fact that we get at all times the best of material and workmanship in all of the above parts, and at the very lowest possible cost.

Bodies and seat have white wood panels and ash sills and frames, securely put together with glue and screws. Gear parts are all made from selected Ohio hickory.¹⁰

The following year, the trade publication *Carriage Monthly* described the newly-expanded facility and its relationship to the other Pontiac carriage factories:

The Dunlap Vehicle Co., Pontiac, Mich., now have a new factory, 92 x 116 feet in size, and containing three stories and a basement. This doubles the capacity

of the company, and already the surplus from the old factory is being moved into the new one. The two factories are connected by a covered bridge. S. E. Beach, formerly secretary of the Pontiac Buggy Co., and J. S. Stockwell, formerly secretary of the Crescent Carriage Co., have associated themselves with L. L. Dunlap in the Dunlap company and have now taken hold. The company have in sight a big increase of business this year.¹¹

With automobiles quickly overtaking horses, Pontiac's carriage business was in a transformative state by the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century. The carriage manufacturers adapted to the new landscape and moved on. Dunlap Vehicle was merged with Pontiac Buggy in August 1908, and Pontiac Buggy along with the C. V. Taylor and Crescent concerns were folded into a new company called Oakland Motor Car Company. The 1912 *History of Oakland County* explains how Oakland Motor Car developed from its carriage roots:

As stated, the Oakland Motor Car Company is an absorption of the old Pontiac Buggy Company, the Dunlap Vehicle Company and the C. V. Taylor Carriage Company, and existing plants were utilized by the new organization. The first cars, numbering five hundred, were built in the season of 1908, by two hundred employees, and were sold through the Centaur Motor Company of Detroit. For the year ending July 31, 1912, the company placed six thousand cars on the market, or an average of about twenty per day, excluding Sundays. One thousand one hundred men were employed.¹²

One year after its formation, in 1909, Oakland Motor Car became part of General Motors, and was the ancestor of the Pontiac brand.

Summary

As a Dunlap vehicle, the Butts Surrey represents an important part of Pontiac's history and has ties to a company that played an important role in the formation of General Motors. Because the Butts Surrey's manufacturer's plate identifies both Dunlap and its early distributor, John G. Wilkinson, it is likely one of the earlier examples of a Dunlap surrey, most likely built between 1898 and 1901, since an exact match to this surrey does not appear in the 1902 Dunlap product catalog.

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Appendix



Illustration 1: Butts surrey on the David W. Butts farm, ca. 1930



Illustration 2: Butts Surrey manufacturer plate



Illustration 3: Butts Surrey in 2013, before restoration

Michigan.



A SAFE COMBINATION

HOW IT WORKS.

The Dealer turns to WILKINSON,
Wilkinson turns to DUNLAP,
That opens the Sale.

WHAT IS INSIDE?

Two compartments—WAGONS AND WEALTH.
The Dealer handles the WAGONS, the WEALTH follows.

HOW?

Write to WILKINSON for Catalogue and Price List of
DUNLAP WAGONS. It is self explanatory.

IN BRIEF,

JNO. G. WILKINSON, NEWBURGH, N. Y.

is sole eastern agent for the

DUNLAP VEHICLE COMPANY, PONTIAC, MICH.,

who build the only WESTERN WAGONS that give satisfaction
to the EASTERN DEALERS.

Please mention "The Mail" when you write

Illustration 4: Dunlap Vehicle advertisement from Automotive Manufacturer, (Aug-Nov 1899)

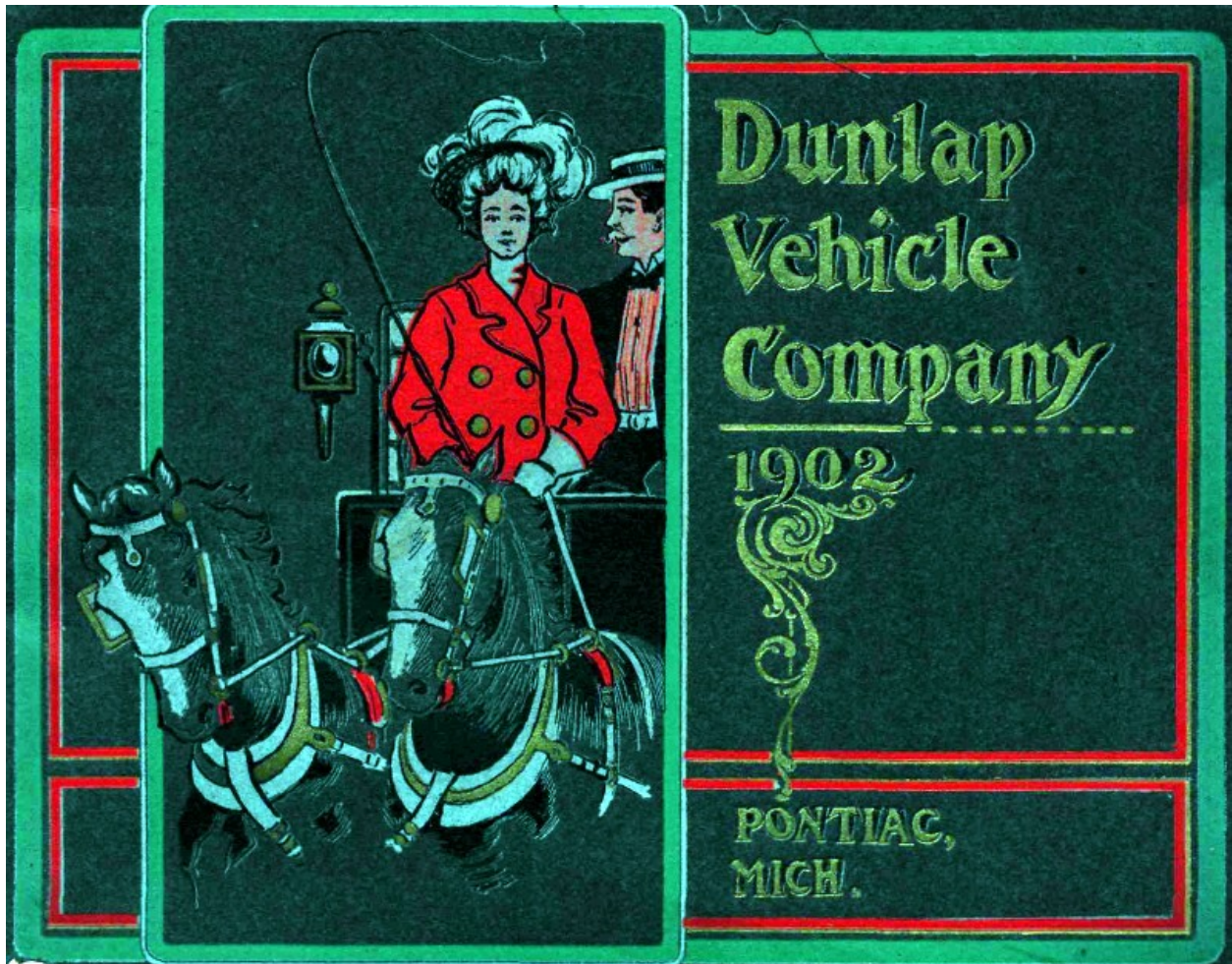
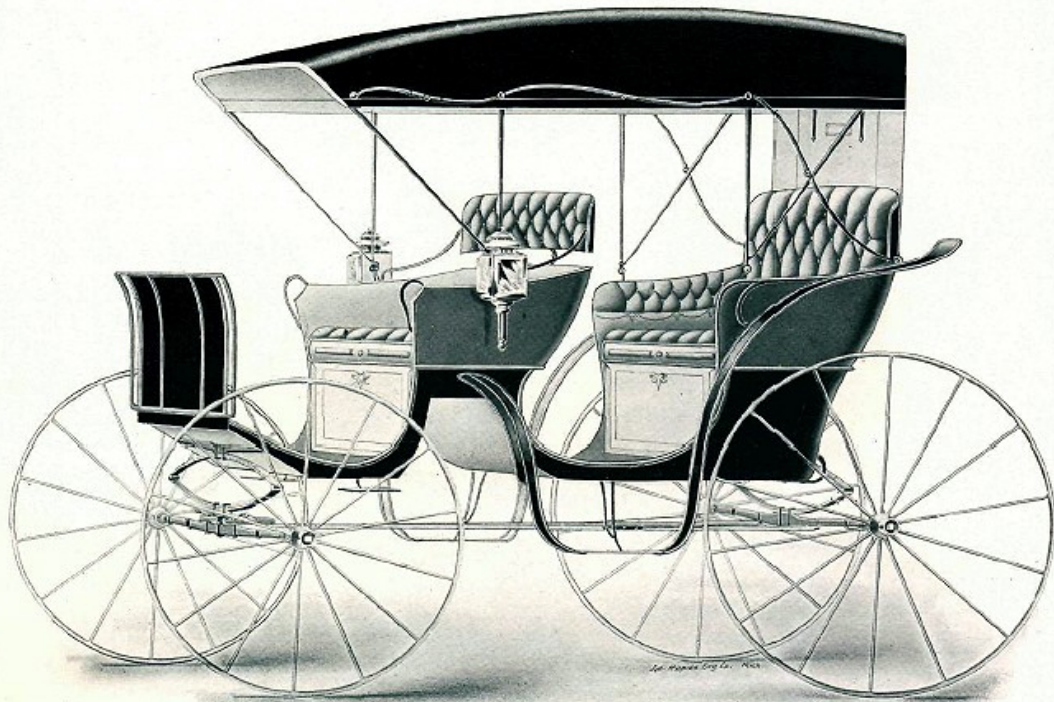


Illustration 5: Dunlap Vehicle Company product catalog cover, 1902



<p>No. 29. <u>Extension Top Cut-Under Surrey.</u></p> <p>No. 29½ Same, only Canopy Top.</p>		<p>Self-oiling dust-proof axles. Serenwood rim wheels. Faultless spring cushions. Higgin quick shifters. Oil burning lamps. Double fenders. Large roomy seats with comfortable spring backs. Neat design. Carefully finished body. Painted with small amount of ornamentation. Wheels 2 inch, either Surven or L. & J. band hub. Cozes Brewster green, neatly striped. Trimmings, Slater's green or blue carriage cloth, whipcord or leather (see price list). Track 4 ft. 8 in. or 5 ft. 2 in.</p>
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Illustration 6: Example page from 1902 Dunlap Vehicle product catalog

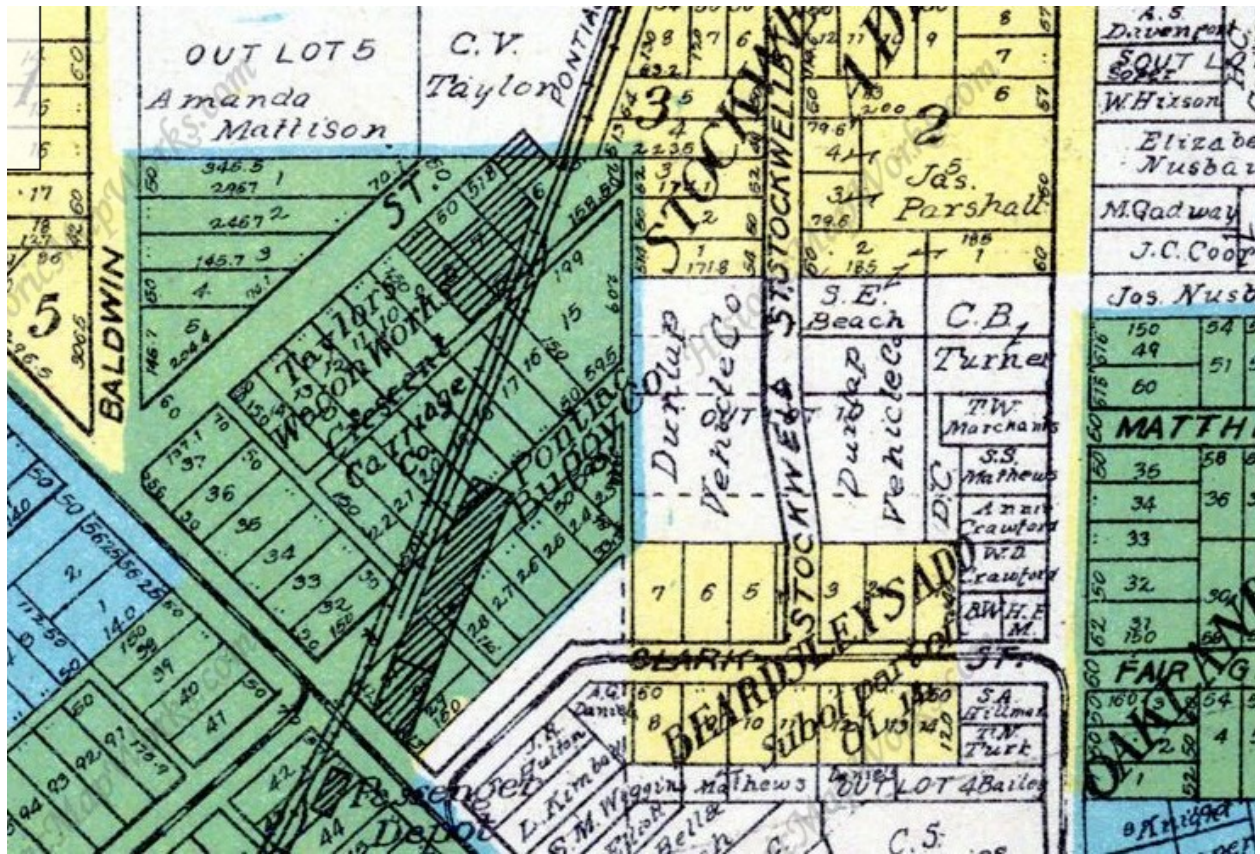


Illustration 7: 1908 plat of Pontiac, Michigan, showing location of Dunlap Vehicle Co. and other associated carriage factories

- 1 John Eyerman, *Genealogical Studies: the Ancestry of Marguerite And John Eyerman* (Easton, Pa.: Eschenbach print. co., 1902), 83.
- 2 *Daughters of the American Revolution, Lineage Book*, (Washington, D.C.: The Society, 1895-1921), 143: 250.
- 3 *Portrait And Biographical Album of Oakland County, Michigan*. (Chicago: Chapman Bros., 1891), 951.
- 4 "Pontiac's Luck," *Saginaw News*, July 22, 1898, p.2.
- 5 "Michigan Corporations," *Grand Rapids Herald*, July 27, 1898, p.2.
- 6 Arthur Pound, *The Turning Wheel: the Story of General Motors Through Twenty-five Years, 1908-1933* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Duran & Co., 1934), 92-93.
- 7 "C. V. Taylor," in Biographical Publishing Company, *Biographical Record: This Volume Contains Biographical Sketches of Leading Citizens of Oakland County, Michigan ...* (Chicago: Biographical Publishing Company, 1903), 394-395.
- 8 *The Automotive manufacturer*, (New York: Trade News Publishing Co.) 41 (Aug-Nov 1899):242.
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- 10 *Dunlap Vehicle Company, Pontiac, Mich., U.S.A. 1902* [product catalog] (Pontiac, Mich.: The Company, 1902).
- 11 *Carriage monthly* (Philadelphia: Ware Brothers) September 1904: 357.
- 12 Thaddeus D. Seeley, *History of Oakland County, Michigan: a Narrative Account of Its Historical Progress, Its People, And Its Principal Interests* (Chicago: Lewis Pub. Co., 1912) 328.