Edith Wakeman-Hughes, *Motoring in White, From Dakota to Cape Cod*

By Frank Vyzralek

The difficulties faced by a North Dakota motorist traveling long distances just short of a century ago are recalled in a small book entitled *Motoring in White, From Dakota to Cape Cod*, written by Edith Wakeman-Hughes (Mrs. Edmond A. Hughes) of Bismarck and published by the Knickerbocker Press of New York City in 1917.

Born in Rochester, New York, about 1876, she came west with her mother to join her father, James D. Wakeman, at the pioneer community of Bismarck. James had first reached the Dakota prairies on May 20, 1873, but did not actually settle here until 1878. Edith grew up in Bismarck and eventually became the first wife of Edmond A. Hughes, who was owner of the Hughes Electric Co. and erected a considerable number of commercial buildings here.

Her narrative began with a description of Ed Hughes’ first automobile:

*Have you heard of men, who, if they hope to view heaven at all, wish to do so from their automobiles? Well, Husband is one of these!*

*He acquired, some years ago, the first automobile in North Dakota, one of those comical effects that had the steering wheel in the back seat. This obliged women, proud as Puck, with their large hats, in the front seat, to lean out to right or left, at times, to give the driver a clear view of the road. It was a steamer, and very often on the main thoroughfares we would have to stop and pump air, while the gaping crowds gathered to jeer us, for the automobile of that time was a greater novelty than the flying machine is today.*
President’s Message:

Greetings. This year is shaping up to be a busy year for the Bismarck Historical Society. Although our city was not named Bismarck until 1873, it was 1872 when the first permanent settlers arrived and the first buildings were constructed here.

Historians date the beginning of Bismarck from 1872, which makes 2012 the 140th anniversary of the city. The Bismarck Historical Society will celebrate that anniversary with a cake and ice cream social at Camp Hancock on May 15. It is our intention to celebrate each anniversary for the next 10 years in a buildup to the 150th anniversary in 2022. Mark the date on your calendars and watch for additional information.

The Bismarck Historical Society has asked the Bismarck Park Board to name our municipal baseball park after Satchel Paige. Few Bismarck residents know the story of Paige's summer here in 1935 and the semi-professional baseball team he led to an historic national championship. It is a compelling story which has been the subject of articles in previous newsletters, and it has led me to the speaker's circuit at several service clubs over the last several months. As a result of those speaking engagements, several people have come forward to offer pictures, baseballs, souvenir coins, bats, gloves, jackets, and partial uniforms. from Bismarck's rich baseball history, which we hope to eventually have on display. The Park Board has hired an architect to develop a masterplan for the baseball park, and by the time you read this column, I expect the preliminary plan to be revealed. We hope naming the park after Paige will be part of the strategic plan, as well as establishing a baseball museum.

This leads me to ask our readers to search their family records and files for pictures, documents and memorabilia, which might be of significance or of interest in the run up to Bismarck's 150th anniversary. I suspect there are great treasures out there just waiting to be re-discovered, and for heaven's sake, don't throw anything out.

Like all fledgling organizations, we are heavily dependent on a membership base to support our activities. If you haven't renewed your membership recently, please do so. A membership form for your use is included. And finally, we have an ambitious schedule of public programs through the upcoming year. A listing of those programs is included in this newsletter. Look it over and see if there is something of interest to you.

Dennis Boyd
President
Bismarck

City Administration

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, on May 14, 1872, the first identifiable settlers having the specific intent of establishing a permanent community arrived at this location; and,

WHEREAS, this community, originally named Edwinton, later Bismarck, survived numerous hardships and uncertainties but slowly began to grow and prosper; and,

WHEREAS, many towns and cities claim origins as "railroad" towns, or "army" towns, or "riverboat" towns, or "cattle" towns, Bismarck claims the heritage of all these beginnings and has become the economic, financial, medical, legal, political, educational, cultural and social center of a vast geographical region; and,

WHEREAS, this community has accomplished this growth by welcoming a broad array of skilled, talented, hardworking people of varied racial, ethnic, religious, economic and education backgrounds; and,

WHEREAS, this community has raised and educated its young and sent them off to every part of the world to teach, to heal, to inspire, to entertain, to rescue, to protect and sometimes to die for the beliefs and ideals they learned here; and,

WHEREAS, the stories of this town and these people comprise the remarkable history of this community, a history which begs to be told, and once told, helps define us as a people;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that I, John Warford, Mayor of the City of Bismarck, North Dakota, have the honor and pleasure of PROCLAMING May 14, 2012 do hereby proclaim May 14, 2012 as the

FIRST ANNUAL "FOUNDERS DAY"

and encourage all citizens and visitors to celebrate this 140th anniversary by remembering those who have preceded us by reflecting on the courage, foresight, determination, ingenuity and effort of all who have worked to establish, nurture, build and protect this city.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and seal of this City of Bismarck this 1st day of May, 2012.

JOHN WARFORD, MAYOR

JOHN WARFORD, MAYOR
Bismarck Historical Society

Calendar of Events 2012:

May:
Wednesday May 9, 7:00 p.m., Bismarck Public Library
Bismarck’s Historic Street Names – Ann Vadnie with Frank Vyzralek

Tuesday May 15, 6:30 - 8:00 p.m., Camp Hancock State Historic Site
Founders Day, Bismarck’s 140th Anniversary

September:
Wednesday September 12, 7:00 p.m., Bismarck Public Library
The Beginnings of the Bismarck Tribune - Ken Rogers

October:
Wednesday October 10, 7:00 p.m., Bismarck Public Library
Bismarck Trivia and Tidbits - Ann Vadnie

November:
Tuesday November 20, 7:00 p.m., Bismarck Public Library
The Benedictine Sisters Contributions to Bismarck - Sr. Thomas Welder

Watch for us at Urban Harvest this summer.

The Board of Directors of the Bismarck Historical Society holds its regular meeting the second Tuesday of each month starting at 7:00 p.m. at the Bismarck Public Library (Missouri River Room). Society members and interested parties are welcome to attend.
The first few days on the road carried them to the Twin Cities.

Starting early in the dewy freshness of the morning, we left Bismarck. . . . over the Red Trail, August 3d, on good dirt roads, making Jamestown, a hundred miles to the east, in time for lunch. The glorious day, and our exuberance, kept us there only a little over an hour, when we were on the way for Valley City, on the Cheyenne, forty more miles distant. Here we thought it well to stretch, while having a glass of soda-water.

After feeling refreshed, we found in front of the drug-store, a crowd around our car, which reminded us of the old days and our old steamer. But this time there was profound respect, for the years have brought a motor education and an appreciation of the high-powered roadster, in communities where “Tin Lizzies” abound. What have seemed long barren stretches, in the past, now are infested by the farmer motorist, who finds his circle has widened with the age of the horseless carriage, and calls his friend, who is fully fifty miles distant, his neighbor.

The first night was spent in Fargo, two hundred and two miles to the east, and we both admitted fatigue from the first day’s trial. At nine o’clock the following forenoon we crossed the Red River into Minnesota, and from Fergus Falls, southeast, one finds very pretty lake country through wooded hills. Minnesota counts her lakes in the thousands, and it is not difficult to find many summer resorts on bodies of water. We were bound for Alexandria, to Blake’s Hotel, which is about four miles from the town, over a wide and well built road. This is attractively located between two beautiful lakes, Lake Carlos and Lake Le Homme Dieu, and is a popular place, where one is, in season, often turned away. Our second day registered a hundred and twenty-five miles.

We turned one hundred and forty miles on the third day, passing through St. Cloud, Elk River and Anoka, into Minneapolis.

Learning that rain had turned the dirt roads of Wisconsin into quagmires, the Hughes’ loaded their auto on a Mississippi River steamboat and spent two nights and a lazy Sunday floating down the river. Landing at Clinton, Iowa, they continued on to Chicago, arriving at the incomparable Blackstone [Hotel] in Chicago overlooking Lake Michigan, at five o’clock. After we were unpacked, bathed, clothes pressed, laundry dispatched, and mail read, we were ready to meet friends for dinner and the theater that night. The rains continued and they rode the little Lake Michigan steamer The City of St. Joseph, from Chicago to Holland, Michigan, thus avoiding two days of mud.

At Lansing it was in the program to visit the State Capitol. Just as I made this announcement the driver said we were a little late on schedule, and then an old yarn occurred to me about two of our countrymen who were doing England. Upon their arrival at Westminster Abbey, one of them said: “John, we have only ten minutes left for this place,” to which his companion replied: “That’s alright—you go through the inside, and I’ll go around the outside and we will meet in ten minutes and compare notes.

Arriving in Detroit, they drove the car to the factory where it was made.

It was our good luck to find the mechanic they had sent out west to us, a year or two before, to repair one of the same make, this new one being our third blossom from that plant. This all added zest to the service we had, and after a thorough inspection, we decided, while we were in the city, to visit the Peace Factory, and see them pull machines, like doughnuts out of hot lard, in twenty-seven seconds!

The trip continued across New York State and on to Cape Cod. Returning, they found another lake boat, the Octorara, at a dock in Detroit, bound for Duluth, Minnesota, and thus were able to avoid more muddy roads. Forty miles from St. Paul, a tire blew out, the first of the trip, after 3446 miles on the road.
They left Minneapolis,

at nine o ‘clock, and followed the same Red Trail, and with two short stops, we arrived in Fargo that night at ten forty-five, making our record run of two hundred and sixty-five miles, and had much to recount to the friends we stopped with.

The day following we left early, ..... and when we pulled into Dawson we saw so many private [railroad] cars on the spurs of the railroad tracks, we suddenly realized that our hunting season was on and we would stop over and get some prairie chickens.

And after an early morning bag, we were pulling into Bismarck, through immense grain fields, rivaling in golden color the maples of the Berkshires, on one of the prettiest autumn days I have ever seen.

I had made my obeisance to so many statutes in the East, commemorating historical characters and events, that it seemed a fitting climax to make our apologies to SAKAKAWEA, the bronze statue in our capitol grounds, for she was the Indian maiden, the BIRD WOMAN, who piloted the Lewis and Clark Expedition, from this spot in 1804, through perilous days to the PACIFIC!

I hated so to stop motoring that we went from there to the hills of our Country Club, overlooking the Missouri, and looked across the river to the old Fort Lincoln, and related the story of Custer and the frightful massacre, and then concluded we had our BLUE-BIRD OF HISTORY right here at home, after a 4052-mile hunt for it.

The Hughes eventually divorced and Ed re-married. Edith took her elderly parents west to California, where they spent the rest of their days—James dying in March, 1944, at the age of 93. Stricken by blindness in 1934, Edith devoted much of the rest of her life to aid for the blind and work for the Braille Institute. She originated some novel fund-raising techniques. In 1944 she installed an enormous porcelain piggy bank, named Aurora for the Goddess of Light, and through it raised more than $90,000. Smaller piggy banks, made inexpensively in Mexico, were sent out to friends and were returned to the Braille Institute, stuffed with ten or twenty dollar bills.

Until 1941 she returned to Bismarck annually. In Los Angeles she developed a reputation as one of the most notable party hostesses on the West Coast. She also made a good living selling “cells” from the popular Walt Disney motion pictures as objects d’art. In 1949 new surgical techniques were able to restore her sight. She died in Los Angeles on June 23, 1957. Her personal papers can be found in the archives of the State Historical Society of North Dakota in Bismarck.