

HISTORY CORNER

By

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In 1878, Thomas Buckland Jeffery and R. Philip Gormully started their bicycle manufacturing business in Chicago. It was called Gormully and Jeffery. The bicycle they built was called the Rambler. They advertised the bike as the American Rambler. In the late 1890's, Thomas Jeffery began to notice a contraption on the streets of Chicago which many people referred to as a "horseless carriage". Thomas was fascinated by this new development, especially since some of these horseless carriages were using what seemed to be bicycle tires.

So new were these vehicles that people were unsure what to call them. The French were using the half Greek half Latin word "automobile", but it wasn't until January 3, 1899, that a New York Times article used the word automobile for the first time in print. Thomas decided to get into the automobile business. Enlisting the aid of his son, Charles, Thomas Jeffery built his first car in 1897. It was rudimentary at best, and it is not known if Thomas built a second car, or if he even sold that first one.

Thomas sold his share of the bicycle business to the National Bicycle Company in 1900. In 1901 he moved his family to Kenosha, Wisconsin to begin building cars in earnest. Charles Jeffery designed and built a car with the engine mounted up front and used a steering wheel mounted on the left side of the car. Thomas did not like this design. In 1902, Thomas and Charles sold their first car at the Chicago Auto Show. Thomas had changed the design, placing the one-cylinder engine under the seat, and getting rid of the steering wheel in favor of a tiller. The Jeffery's built 1500 cars that first year, coming in second place for American sales behind Oldsmobile.

Jeffery's new car was called the Rambler. When Thomas Jeffery sold his bike company, he did not sell the Rambler name, so he was allowed to use it in naming his car. Remember what happened to Ransom Olds when he quit the company he started? He could no longer use the Olds name in any future venture. He used his initials, REO, from Ransom Eli Olds, to build his next car.

In 1910, Thomas took a trip to Italy, where he died of a stroke. He was 65. Charles took over the company, and in 1914, he changed the name of the car from Rambler to the Jeffery, in honor of his father.

In 1915, Charles took an ocean liner to England. But the ship never made it to England. The ocean liner was the Lusitania and was sunk off the coast of Ireland by a German U-Boat. Charles survived the sinking and decided life was too short to be worrying about making cars. He sold the company to Charles Nash in 1916. Charles Nash at once changed the name of the car to Nash. Charles Nash never built a car called the Rambler. After his death in 1948, George Mason took full control of the Nash Motor Division of Kelvinator, and in 1950 he introduced a car called the Rambler American. Did Mason dig into Nash's past? Maybe.