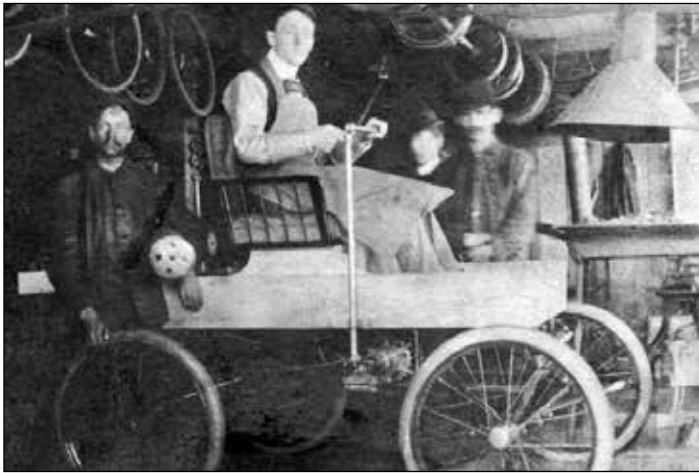


A “Tribute” to the Fossmobile (1897)

by Ronald M. Foss

As a young boy growing up in Fort Chambly, Quebec, from time to time I would hear stories of my grandfather George Foote Foss’ invention. At times, I would overhear these stories as my father shared the details with friends and neighbours who were visiting our home. However, the stories that I most often heard came directly from my grandfather, as we visited him frequently. Fondly, I recall sitting on a footstool near his feet as he sat in his large, comfortable chair, recounting the steps he took in tinkering, planning and ultimately building a gasoline engine automobile, which was to be the first in Canada – later dubbed “The Fossmobile.”



George Foote Foss sitting in his yet-to-be-completed Fossmobile

In the early 1960s (I was only about age 7), I recall that everyone around me was talking about a flurry of renewed interest in his accomplishment. It was then that he was presented with two honorary memberships: one from the Vintage Automobile Club of Montreal (VACM) and the other from the prestigious Antique Automobile Club of America (AACA). Only two Canadians have ever received this latter honour. The other Canadian to receive this was Colonel Robert Samuel McLaughlin, who started the McLaughlin Motor Car Company in 1907, which was one of the first major automobile manufacturers in Canada.

With these two initiatives, there came a swarm of media attention, and I can recall being shown newspaper clippings, many of which I still have in my possession today. Not only were there photographs and articles written about his honorary memberships, but many of the local papers also reprinted his earlier writing, “The True Story of a Small Town Boy,” originally published in 1954 by *The Sherbrooke Daily Record*.

Having a relative with historical significance meant that most of his descendants have ended up using his invention story and the various publications about it, as a topic for school projects. I remember using his story as a topic for one of my school projects, both of my two children did, and just a year ago my 6-year-old granddaughter did a “show and tell” at her school about her great-great grandfather’s invention.

George Foote Foss

(September 30, 1876–November 23, 1968) was a mechanic, blacksmith, bicycle repairman and inventor from Sherbrooke, Quebec. During the winter of 1896, he developed a four-horsepower single-cylinder gasoline powered automobile. In the spring of 1897, he completed his invention: the first gasoline-powered automobile to be built in Canada, which was, later referred to as the “Fossmobile”.



George Foote Foss – Circa 1897

It was in early 1896, during a trip to Boston, Massachusetts to buy a turret lathe for his expanding machine shop, that my grandfather saw his first automobiles. These cars, electrically driven broughams, were rented out for \$4.00 an hour. He paid the fee to have a ride, but unfortunately, after a ride of only half an hour, the batteries died. Returning to Sherbrooke, he decided to build an automobile that would address this problem.

My grandfather drove his car in and around Sherbrooke, Quebec for four years. He later moved to Montreal, Quebec, where the car sat idle for a year before he sold it for \$75 in 1902. He had previously turned down an offer to partner with Henry Ford who went on to form the Ford Motor Company. He turned down the offer, as he believed Ford’s Quadricycle vehicle to be inferior to the Fossmobile. He also turned down financial backing to mass-produce the Fossmobile, citing his inexperience to do so, as he was only 21 years old at the time.

I am often asked if I know if my grandfather had any regrets about not partnering with Ford or not mass-producing his invention. From everything I recall hearing him say, he had no regrets. He enjoyed a

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simple life and I heard him say on more than one occasion, that “you don’t live a long life with the stresses of running a big business.” He passed away at age 92, so perhaps his theory was right, at least for him.



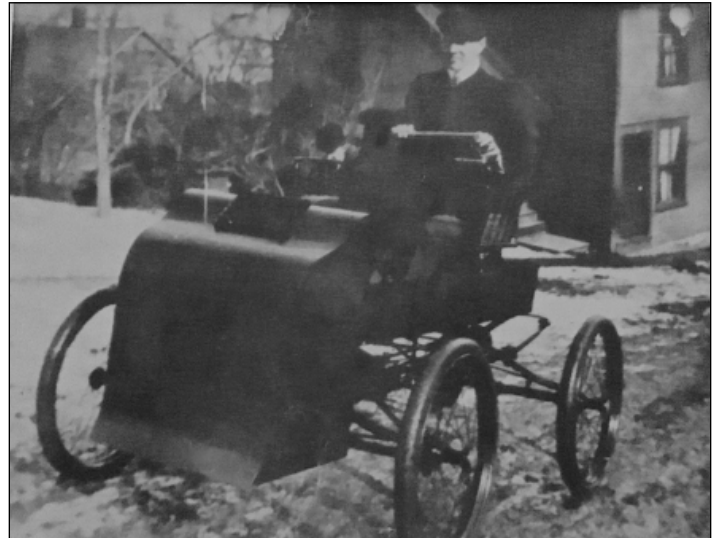
The workshop in Sherbrooke, Quebec

Recently, I re-opened the Foss family archives, to better understand and accurately document my grandfather’s remarkable accomplishment. My objective has been to find ways to share this historic Canadian event with automotive enthusiasts, historians and future generations of Canadians. To this end, I have established “Fossmobile Enterprises,” as a means to build networks, foster collaboration and share important historical memorabilia.

As George Foss’ grandson, I have talked with some visionaries, and I am seeking the help of other potential experts in vintage automobile restoration for a very special project. The goal is to use reverse engineering (the reproduction of an inventor or manufacturer’s product), to create a “Tribute Automobile,” emulating as closely as possible the specifications of George Foss’ invention of the first gasoline powered automobile built in Canada: the Fossmobile. There are no original drawings, so the Tribute Automobile will have to be based solely on detailed scrutiny of original Fossmobile photos.

I have begun the process of acquiring vintage parts from the era, with the hope of building this automobile, replicating parts only when it is absolutely necessary. I will provide oversight for this process and collaborate with automobile historians and experts. Along the way, the journey will be documented, while ensuring attention to detail.

The hope is to honour my grandfather’s legacy and bring to greater light this significant chapter of Canadian history. With its completion, this Tribute Automobile will be a tangible embodiment of the first gasoline car built in Canada. There is a growing interest in showcasing the completed Tribute Fossmobile in classic automobile shows. However, it will eventually be donated to a Canadian museum to enhance historic



Driving the hilly streets of Sherbrooke – 1897

education for current and future generations.

Further information can be found on the website: www.fossmobile.ca. Fundraising has been initiated, hoping to attract personal donations and corporate sponsorships to help with the cost of building the Tribute Fossmobile. Anyone wishing to participate can access a “Go Fund Me” link from the Fossmobile website or use the search word “Fossmobile” on the www.gofundme.com website. Alternatively, a cheque can be sent to Fossmobile Enterprises.

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