



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

# 'Clara's Car'

BY C.W. LATTIN

Back around 1913 George B. Clack, who lived in Kent, talked Henry Smith into buying an auto. Mr. Clack was the first in that area to have a car, which was a 1910 Ford, and he thought his friend Henry Smith should definitely have an auto, too.

Mr. Smith finally agreed and purchased the Overland shown here, which was the second car in that vicinity.

It seems that Henry and Matilda Smith, who lived on what is now Roosevelt Highway near the Transit Road, had three daughters who were Josephine, Helen and Clara. The girls at the time were attending Albion High School.

Mr. Smith actually bought the car for his daughters so that they could drive to school. They were the very first Albion High School students to drive a car on a daily basis to school. In fact, the three Smith girls were the only ones in the family who knew how to drive the car.

When the car was delivered to their farm, the man who brought it was told to park in a scale house on the property. He

wasn't able to control it, however, and bashed out the doors on the other end of the scale house before the car halted.

Mrs. Clara Smith Cliff, who graduated in 1916, remembered that her first year of high school she and her sister drove a buggy which they kept in a drive barn on the west side of North Main Street near the canal. From there they walked to school.

During the winter months they did not drive the car daily, but basket boarded. This meant they had to take their own food, enough for five days, while living with someone in Albion.

Because they lived out of the Albion District, they also had to pay tuition.

Driving the car was easier and faster than the buggy. And the only reason they got the car in the first place is that their father told them they had to learn how to take care of it. That meant changing oil, greasing and changing tires in a day and age when there were frequent blowouts.

Mrs. Cliff stated, "I even put in spark plugs as there were no service garages."

The photo shows Clara (note overalls), circa 1915, starting the car with a crank. There was a small tank on the running board filled with gas for the lights which you had to stop for when you wanted them turned on because this system needed to be pumped up and the lamps lighted by hand.