



WEBFOOTER EXTRA

AUGUST 2017

TRANSPORTATION PIONEERS: BALLOU & WRIGHT



Ballou & Wright drove their truck to a park or public place to sell tires, etc. circa 1908.

- ◆ NW Transportation Pioneers: Ballou & Wright – see page 3.
- ◆ Solar Eclipse of the Century – see page 8.

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NORTHWEST TRANSPORTATION PIONEERS: BALLOU & WRIGHT



Ballou & Wright's new headquarters building which opened in 1921.

The Ballou & Wright Company contributed significantly to the regional economy as the leading wholesaler of bicycles, motorcycles and automobile parts and accessories, between the World Wars. In large part, they created and developed the market for recreational wheeled-vehicles locally.

Founded in 1901, the company early developed a sales area which was regional in scope. A branch office was opened in Seattle, Washington in 1913. Plans for construction of a new headquarters building in Portland were announced in 1917 as the company expanded its market to Alaska, Idaho and southern Oregon. The headquarters building and warehouse, completed and opened for use in 1921, represents the company's period of most dramatic growth.



By 1928 the company maintained 12 branch offices, including two in Seattle, as well as Spokane and Tacoma, Washington, and Salem, Eugene and Klamath Falls, Oregon. The building was occupied by Ballou & Wright until 1960, when the company disbanded following

the death of company founder Charles F. Wright.

The history of the bicycle can be traced back to the hobby horse of the 1650s. It was not until the 1860s that the development of the modern bicycle began in earnest. Improvements in the bicycle continued until the development of the safety bicycle in the 1880s. The safety bicycle is the design of the bicycle as we know it today. Man's fascination with the bicycle started in France and England. However, by the late 1890s, America, too, had been gripped with a passion for pedaling.

Charles F. Wright started out to make a career for himself as a buckaroo in Montana where he saw his first bicycle in the Yellowstone country. Wright's life was immediately changed. Upon seeing a bicycle Wright was determined to exchange the hurricane deck of a bronco for the springy seat of a two-seated "bike." Wright made contact with D.P. Warner, president of the factory making the "Warner Special," at Madison Wisconsin. Wright was just 17 when he headed to Great Falls, Montana to meet Warner. In his first few months as a traveling salesman, he pedaled 3,600 miles covering Montana, Idaho and Washington.

While in Great Falls, he was introduced to D.P. Dorrance, a bicycle man. Dorrance suggested the partnership to Ballou and Wright and he became a silent partner in the bicycle shop during the first year. The new company was established in Great Falls, Montana in 1896. Ballou and Wright signed the partnership papers before they had even met in person. Wright is quoted in the Oregonian, June 21, 1921, describing their first meeting: "Ballou came to the hotel at Great Falls and I went in to meet him. As I stepped up and introduced myself, he looked me critically up and down then suddenly held out his hand and smiled." Right there a friendship was formed which lasted the length of their partnership.

Within a year Ballou and Wright had purchased Dorrance's interest in the business and they became sole proprietors of the little bicycle shop which measured 20 feet on the front of a side street in Great Falls. Bicycles then sold for \$100.00 for the cheapest makes. Ballou and Wright remained in the bicycle business in Great Falls for five years selling most of the town's bicycles. But Ballou still had wandering in his heart and he sold out to Wright and left the shop in Great Falls, returning to the traveling life of a bicycle salesman.

Ballou took charge of the Pacific Coast Agency for Ames and Frost of Chicago, makers of Imperial Bicycles and began the life of a traveling salesman. Three months later Wright sold the bicycle shop in Great Falls. The partnership of Ballou and Wright was not destined to end here.

In 1901, Wright, who was then operating a hardware store in Great Falls, Montana, received a telegram from Ballou saying Portland, Oregon was a great place for a bicycle shop, asking Wright to rejoin him in partnership. Wright sold out his interest in the hardware store and came to Portland to open a small bicycle shop at 147 First Street with Ballou. The shop measured 25 feet wide and 100 feet deep.

Ballou continued to travel and Wright took charge of the store. In 1902, they went into the wholesale bicycle business in addition to the retail shop. The heyday of bicycling occurred between 1895 and 1905. Thus it is no surprise that between 1901 and 1904 Ballou and Wright's business grew so quickly they were compelled to move uptown to larger headquarters located at 86 Sixth Street. It was here they added a motorcycle department.

In 1903, with three automobiles in use in Oregon, Ballou and Wright, in what appears to be their usual visionary manner, were the first to open an automobile accessories and supply department in Oregon. (Evening Telegram, Jan. 12, 1926 pg.6). The business continued to grow rapidly, forcing a move in 1911 to 80-82 Broadway, where the company was overcrowded despite the fact they occupied two stores measuring 50 x 100 feet each with a mezzanine, basement and an outside warehouse. Not including the warehouse, the business occupied 20,000 square feet. The company had 50 employees by 1914. A branch store was opened in Seattle on East Pike Street near Broadway with 13,000 square feet in February 1913.

In the early days, automobiles were delivered to the customer with few of the basic necessities or luxuries of today's cars. One of the first things a motorist did was to go to an auto parts store and buy all the necessary gadgets. Accessory manufacturers and dealers were becoming very wealthy. By 1906 over 90 different American manufacturers offered products to the public. Automobiles were available for as little as \$250. Steam, gas and electricity were used to power the automobile. Early automobile travelers were faced with the hazards of rough dirt roads deeply rutted by earlier conveyances of transportation and open spaces.

The automobile owners of early days were an adventuresome group, not satisfied with in-town driving alone but traveling cross-country as well. They were interested in gadgets which would help in their battle against bad roads and the discomforts of travel in early automobiles. Accessories included odometers, oil cans, waterproof auto shirts, rubber cape caps, horns, goggles, hats, storm aprons, amp meters to test voltage of the dry battery, tools, tire pumps and lanterns.

The automobile as a new means of transportation had to prove itself to the general public. Speed records were one means of proving of autos. Transcontinental road races were another serious test. The first continental automobile race started in New York and ended in Portland, Oregon in time for the June 20, 1905 opening of the National Good Roads Association convention at Lewis and Clark Exposition.

Two curved dashed Oldsmobiles named Old Scout and Old Steady made the trip. They dealt with uncertain spring weather and heavy rains. The winner after 44 days and 4,000 miles was Old Scout driven by Dwight B. Hess and his mechanic Milford Wigle. Portland was excited about the automobile and with the conclusion of this test of the automobile, ready to buy all the accessories Ballou & Wright had to offer.

With the steady increase in business Ballou & Wright announced plans in 1917 for a new large building of their own to house their company. These plans were delayed two years before construction was started. The delay was presumably due to what Ballou and Wright felt were uncertain economic conditions, most likely due to World War I. By May 22, 1921 Ballou and Wright were predicting that there would be a healthy return of business. The building of the new headquarters was to proceed with only slight alterations to the original plans, the most noticeable change being the placement of the tower.

The new building was considered one of the finest, if not the finest wholesale automobile equipment building on the Pacific coast at the time of its construction. Located on the Southwest corner of Tenth and Flanders, on a 100 x 100 foot lot, the building was built with five stories, basement and square footage totaling 60,000 feet. Materials used in construction included concrete faced with white brick and slow burning mill construction for the interior. In 1987, the building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The building features several escutcheons displaying a winged wheel.

The building was completely equipped with a modern sprinkling system. Featured were large windows on each floor which made it light in every section of each floor. Spiral chutes, fast elevators and other labor saving devices were used in construction of the building. With the new building, Ballou & Wright shifted from the downtown area to the northwest warehouse area. The building was built with railroad tracks along Flanders and excellent trucking facilities on 10th Street for local business. The company changed its focus with its move to new quarters, eliminating its retail business and maintaining the wholesale business only.

Ballou & Wright, during their years in business, carried three principal lines of automobile equipment and accessories as well as bicycles and motorcycles. They also provided service for Indian motorcycles for which they were the northwest distributors and Bosch Magnet Service. Ballou & Wright also manufactured many automobile and bicycle accessories and novelties. For the motorcycle, they manufactured motorcycle tandems, luggage carriers, handle cross bars, clutch adjusters and auto truck racks as well as bicycle tandems. By 1928 the company operated up to twelve branch shops employing some 100 employees. Over the years the company's territory grew to include Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

Oscar B. Ballou, President and co-founder of Ballou and Wright, lived an adventurous life during an incredible period of technological change. During his lifetime, bicycles, motorcycles, automobiles and airplanes were all invented and introduced to the public on a wide scale. Ballou always kept at the forefront of modern technology both in his business and leisure. He traveled extensively around the United States and the world during his long life.

During his youth he roamed over the western states on horseback. But as soon as the bicycle first came to Montana, where Ballou was living, he climbed off his horse and onto a bicycle. His interest in modern inventions influenced his choice of business enterprise so that by 1896 he was a traveling bicycle salesman throughout the western states. Ballou was born in Oxbridge, Massachusetts, in 1853.

His family moved to Minnesota in 1862 and by 1874 he was working in Nevada mining camps as a contractor building homes. Not surprisingly, gold fever struck Ballou while he was working in the mining camps. He opened a number of mining prospects in the west but never struck it big. The need to make a more secure living brought him to Helena, Montana where he opened a small confectioners shop, selling candy, tobacco and cigars.

It wasn't long until the confection business proved too staid an occupation for Ballou. It was at this time that the newly introduced bicycle caught his attention and imagination. Ballou learned to ride a bicycle during a half-hour lesson. He realized that the bicycle business was due for a great expansion and was eager to get involved. Soon after his lesson, Ballou was representing several bicycle agencies in the west.

In his first few months as a traveling salesman, he pedaled 3,600 miles covering Montana, Idaho and Washington. Ballou ended up back in Montana after this adventure and it was here that he met his partner C.F. Wright. Ballou and Wright opened their first bicycle shop in 1896 in Great Falls, Montana. Ballou & Wright grew to be a million dollar enterprise over the next several years, being the first to introduce motorcycle and automobile accessories to Portland when only four cars traveled the streets.

With the business going well, Ballou was able to further indulge his wanderlust and in 1922 took the first of five trips around the world. Traveling by the steamship Laconia, the Ballous visited the Hawaiian Islands, China, Japan, Formosa, Manchuria, India, Manila, Java, the Middle East and Europe. The trip took four months and six days.

Ballou's second trip in 1925 took him to the Fiji Islands, New Zealand, Australia, Africa and Europe in five months, also by steamship. Ballou also traveled to all 48 states during his lifetime. In 1913, at age 60, Ballou joined the Mazamas of which he became a life member and subsequently climbed several of the Northwest's mountain peaks. During his world travels he climbed peaks in the Himalayas and Mt. Vesuvius in Italy.

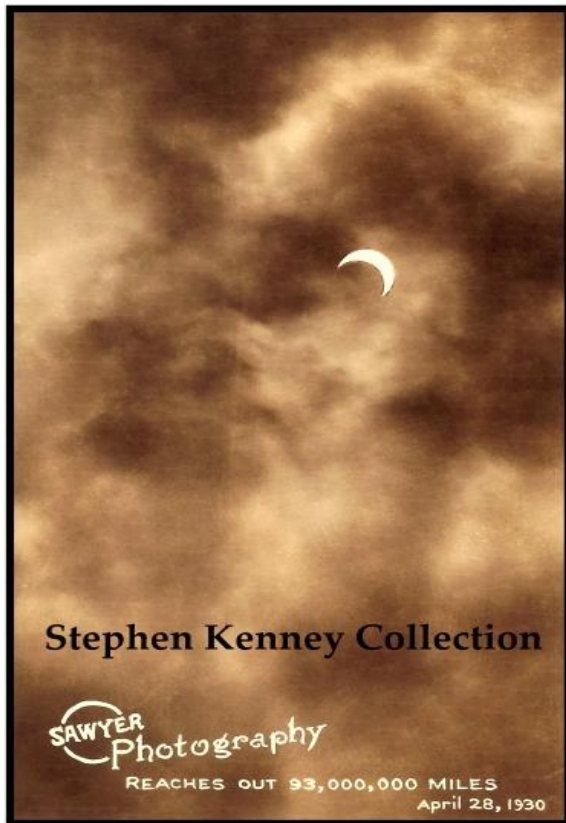
At age 90 Ballou was still running the company from his office in the Ballou and Wright building. Three years later, after a life of travel, adventure and successful business enterprises, Ballou died at his home in Portland. The company remained in business in their headquarters on 10th and Flanders until 1960 following the death of Wright. He left an estate worth over one million dollars. Ballou was a man of his times, welcoming modern technology with open arms but still preferring the wilds and the mountains. "I always feel better in the high altitudes," he said, "and besides, where nature is big, awesome and regal with man small and insignificant in comparison — there is life in its fullest."

Charles F. Wright, secretary of the Ballou & Wright Company was the antithesis of his partner Oscar B. Ballou. While Ballou was the adventurer and traveler, Wright was more staid, involving himself more in the business and social life of Portland. The two men's interests and personalities obviously complimented each other, enabling them to establish and develop the very successful business concern of the Ballou and Wright Company.

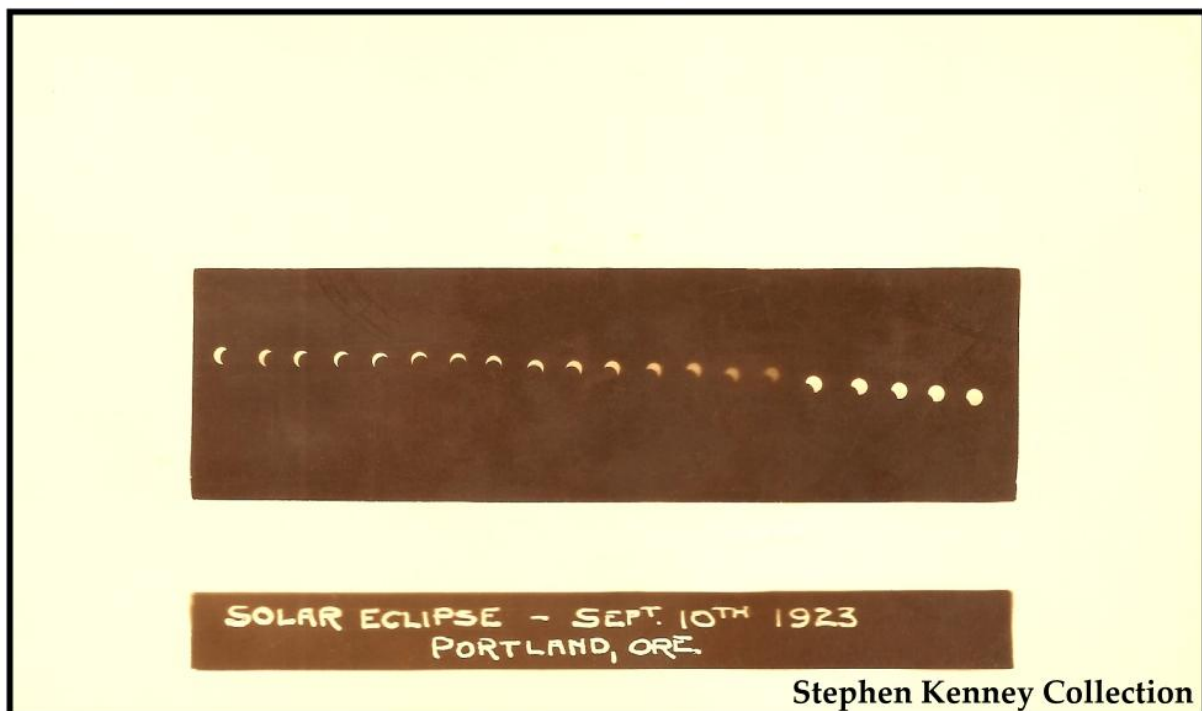
Wright was born in 1877 in Kansas. His family soon moved to the Gallatin Valley of Montana where Wright's father engaged in cattle ranching. Wright was educated in Montana, attending the State Agricultural College at Bozeman. Wright struggled in the real estate business for a time and then turned to cow punching. About this time Wright happened to see a bicycle in the Yellowstone country and as they say "the rest is history."

Wright became president of the company in 1938 when Ballou went into semi-retirement. Wright was involved in several organizations in Portland during his career. He was a charter member of the State Automobile Association of Oregon of which he was president in 1919 and was also on the board of directors for ten years. He was a member of the Portland Chamber of Commerce and was a prominent Mason. In 1958, at age 81, Wright collapsed and died in front of the Ballou & Wright building. He had been a partner in the company for 62 years and had amassed an estate worth well over a million dollars. He left \$17,000 to institutions and \$23,000 worth of Ballou & Wright stock to be distributed among 27 employees.

THE SOLAR ECLIPSE OF THE CENTURY



On Monday, August 21, 2017, the Moon will pass in front of the Sun, casting its shadow across all of North America. This will be the first total solar eclipse visible in the contiguous United States in 38 years. The last one occurred February 26, 1979. A solar eclipse is a lineup of the Sun, the Moon and the Earth. Totality crosses only through the United States, no other country and it has been called the "Great American Eclipse." Everyone in the U.S. will see at least a partial eclipse. The first contact in the U.S. with the total eclipse will be on the waterfront at Government Point, Oregon at 10:15:56 am and it will last 1 minute, 58.5 seconds. From there, it will progressively cover 12 states and will end at the Atlantic Ocean's edge, just south of Key Bay, South Carolina. In Portland, 99% of the Sun's surface will be covered by the Moon, making it the largest city with the most partial eclipse coverage. It is never safe to look directly at the Sun.



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