The *Official Automobile Blue Book*, 1901–1929: Precursor to the American Road Map

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Navigating by automobile at the dawn of the twentieth century was difficult because maps appropriate for this new mode of transportation were scarce. An early solution to this problem was the route guide. Listing turn-by-turn directions between various cities, route guides helped early motorists navigate a network of unmarked, local roads. This paper focuses exclusively on the Official Automobile Blue Book, the earliest and most popular of the route guides. It contends that the Blue Book series was a precursor to the American road map because the volumes served two important functions of road maps and did so before road mapping matured into a full-fledged cartographic business. The Blue Book commercialized automobile touring and provided directional information, helping motorists navigate. Twelve Blue Book volumes, covering 1901 to 1929, form the primary sources for this research. After examining the series' use, content, and history, the paper places the Official Automobile Blue Book within the larger context of the history of road mapping. A short review with directions for further research follows as a conclusion.

Keywords: *Official Automobile Blue Book*; Route Guide; Road Map, Automobile Navigation

When Dr. Horatio Nelson Jackson completed the first transcontinental crossing in 1903 by automobile from San Francisco to New York, the United States was still in the golden age of railroads. Automobile travel was in its infancy, and most Americans had never personally seen, let alone driven, one of these new "horseless carriages." Dr. Jackson and his mechanic, Sewall K. Crocker, spent sixty-three days on their historic trip, traveling nearly 6,000 miles (9,656 km). Mostly because of mechanical breakdown, only forty-six days were spent driving. The journey took more than two months because roads at the time were in poor condition at best in some locations and nonexistent in others. In addition, Jackson and Crocker had difficulty navigating because road maps and signs were virtually nonexistent. The doctor and the mechanic found their way by pointing their compass east, following railroad tracks, and asking local people for directions (Duncan and Burns 2003; McConnell 2000).

"The success of Dr. Jackson's transcontinental journey and the publicity that followed thrust the automobile and auto travel into the national public consciousness."

The success of Dr. Jackson's transcontinental journey and the publicity that followed thrust the automobile and auto travel into the national public consciousness. Soon, other adventurous drivers set out on their own journeys across the country, testing their mechanical and survival skills (McConnell 2002, 2000). Many more preferred to visit places in their own state or local region, and thus a new vacation pastime, called automobile touring, was born. After Henry Ford introduced the Model T in 1908,

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which effectively democratized this new form of transportation, automobile ownership and automobile touring soared (Flink 1970; Rae 1971).

With the increasing popularity of automobile touring came a pressing need for navigational aids, because during the early 1900s, geographic route-finding knowledge was primarily local. People knew how to navigate on foot or by horse and buggy within their local town or county using the mental map that they had acquired through experience. Because people relied on mental maps, road signs were not needed; thus signage was rarely a feature in the landscape. If someone wanted to travel farther than a day's carriage ride, he or she usually did so by railroad. There was no need, for instance, to know how to navigate from Chicago to St. Louis because the train did all the navigating and "driving." However, a locally based mental map was insufficient for navigating by automobile. There were no road maps and few road signs, so how would someone know which roads to take? In which direction would one travel? Where would one turn?

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This problem of navigation, or finding one's way, by automobile during the early years of the last century prompted entrepreneurial automobilists to create route guides. These guides helped early automobile tourists navigate through unfamiliar territory by collecting localized directional information and presenting it in a form usable to outsiders. Automobile clubs, highway associations, and other related organizations published or sponsored route guides during these years, which competed with one another in the marketplace. The *Automobile Green Book*, official guide book of the Automobile Legal Association of Massachusetts, *King's Official Route Guide*, published by Sidney J. King of Chicago, Illinois, the *Interstate Automobile Tourists' Guide*, published by F. S. Blanchard and Company of Worchester, Massachusetts, and the *Official Automobile Blue Book*, published by the Automobile Blue Book Publishing Company (ABBPC) of New York, are just four examples of guides that were commonly available between 1900 and 1930.

This paper focuses exclusively on the *Official Automobile Blue Book*, the earliest and most popular of the route guides. It contends that the *Blue Book* series, and in general all route guides, were a precursor to the American road map for two reasons. First, the *Blue Book* series was a commercially oriented travel guide created to foster an increase in automobile touring and tourist-related businesses. Second, the *Blue Book* was a navigational aid and provided directional information. Although the *Blue Book* methods of recording and transmitting this information were different than road maps that came later, they were uniquely suited for navigating the primitive network of local roads that existed prior to the 1920s.

"These guides helped early automobile tourists navigate through unfamiliar territory by collecting localized directional information and presenting it in a form usable to outsiders."

Twelve *Blue Book* volumes covering 1901 to 1929, from both the author's personal collection and the Google Books digitization project, form the primary sources for this research. (See the appendix for a detailed listing of these twelve volumes.) The paper begins by examining the series' use and content. A 1914 volume covering the Middle West illustrates how directional information was recorded and transmitted in the *Blue Book* series. The next section briefly reviews the history of the series, beginning with its origin as a guide to service stations and then tracing its expansion and eventual demise in the late 1920s.

Little has been written about how the routes in the series were first traced. A third section fills this void by examining the role of amateur and professional "pathfinders" who were hired to assemble new automobile routes. Finally, the article places the *Official Automobile Blue Book* series within the larger context of the history of road mapping. A short review with directions for further research follows as a conclusion.

Much has been written about the history and use of road maps, including

the origins and popularization of sheet maps like Rand McNally & Company's "Blazed Trails" series, official state highway maps, and the seemingly innumerable "oil company" maps of the post-WWII era (Akerman 1993; Akerman and Block 2005; Bay 1952; Schmiedeler and Perucca 1996). Few works, though, examine route guides, including the *Official Automobile Blue Book* series. The author is unaware of any study devoted entirely to the *Blue Book*. Discussions of this early navigational aid are found in Akerman (2006, 2002), Ristow (1964, 1946), and Schlereth (1990), but their treatments are often brief. The most comprehensive study of road guides in general is an unpublished Master's thesis by McKenzie (1963). This article contributes to our knowledge of the history of road maps by examining *Blue Book* volumes at a detailed level.

"Automobile Blue Book *volumes were intended to be a single source of information for automobile tourists, an authoritative guide on which travelers could reliably depend throughout their entire journey."*

Using the *Official Automobile Blue Book*

Automobile Blue Book volumes were intended to be a single source of information for automobile tourists, an authoritative guide on which travelers could reliably depend throughout their entire journey. The title page of a 1918 volume explains that *Blue Books*

> tell you where to go and how to get there, giving complete maps of every motor road, running directions at every fork and turn, with mileages. All points of local or historical interest, state motor laws, hotel and garage accommodations, ferry and steamship schedules and rates. A veritable motorist's encyclopedia. (ABBPC 1917, 9)

Even the look and feel of the *Blue Book* spoke of authority (Figure 1). Bound with black leather and embossed with gilt lettering, it was meant to be regarded and used as the automobile tourist "Bible." Measuring approximately 14 x 23 x 4 cm, it consisted of nearly 1,000 pages of thin, onion skin paper.

Contrary to the publisher's statement on their title pages, *Blue Book* volumes did not include "complete maps of every motor road." Highly generalized maps were included in *Blue Books* as indexes to the routes and supplements in urban areas. Figure 2 shows a portion of the index, or "skeleton," map for Illinois from 1914. Each route segment is labeled with an identification number that refers the user to the associated text about that segment. The influence of railroad cartography on these maps is clearly evident (Akerman 2002). Similar to railroad maps from earlier decades, major centers in the network are shown as large circles with minor towns, or "stops," along the way indicated by smaller circles. With only minor exceptions, the individual route segments connecting the towns are depicted as straight lines, giving the impression that the route follows the shortest distance, when in reality it rarely did.

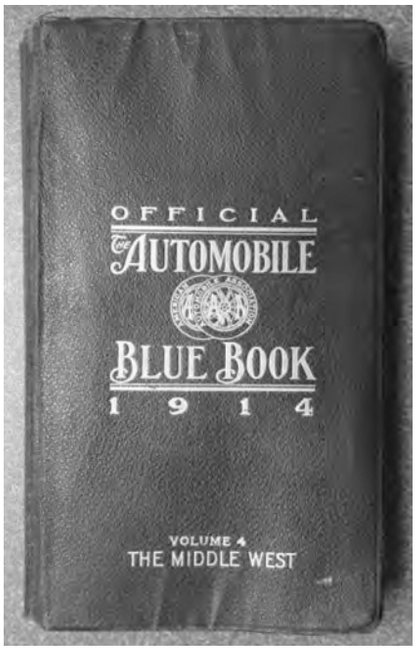

Figure 1. Cover of the 1914 Middle West volume of the Official Automobile Blue Book.

Supplemental maps of major urban areas helped travelers follow routes through cities and showed connecting routes to other destinations (Figure 3). Routes began (and ended) at a major intersection in the central business district, typically adjacent to the courthouse, depot, post office, bank, monument, public square, or other prominent landmark. Like the skeleton index maps, city maps were highly generalized, depicting all streets as straight lines and often omitting smaller side streets. Cartographers labeled only those streets that were called out in the route directions. Like the skeleton index maps, city maps were not intended to be the primary means of navigation.

In *Official Automobile Blue Books*, geographical information was recorded and transmitted in a textual format, written as turn-by-turn directions.

Figure 2. A portion of the skeleton index map for the 1914 Middle West volume.

Single volumes in the series often contained over five hundred routes, requiring eight hundred pages or more to describe. For example, the 1914 volume for the Middle West contains eight hundred routes spread across 932 pages. Because of the guide's format of textual turn-by-turn directions, though, each physical route had to be described twice, once in each direction, so the Middle West volume only contains four hundred origin and destination pairs. The forward and reverse versions of each route consisted of the same landmarks and turns; only the directions were reversed. This obligation increased the bulk of each volume and was cited by Ristow (1964) as a reason for their very thin pages. Reverse routes were indicated on the skeleton index maps (Figure 2) and in the route text.

Figure 4 shows Route 127 from the 1914 Middle West volume, connecting Bloomington and Springfield, Illinois. The entire route comprises thirty-eight individual segments and requires one and a half pages of text to describe. In a fashion that would later be expanded in the *American Guide* series from the Works Progress Administration, a short description of the road conditions and potential points of interest along the way is provided at the beginning.

"Because of the guide's format of textual turn-by-turn directions, though, each physical route had to be described twice, once in each direction . . ."

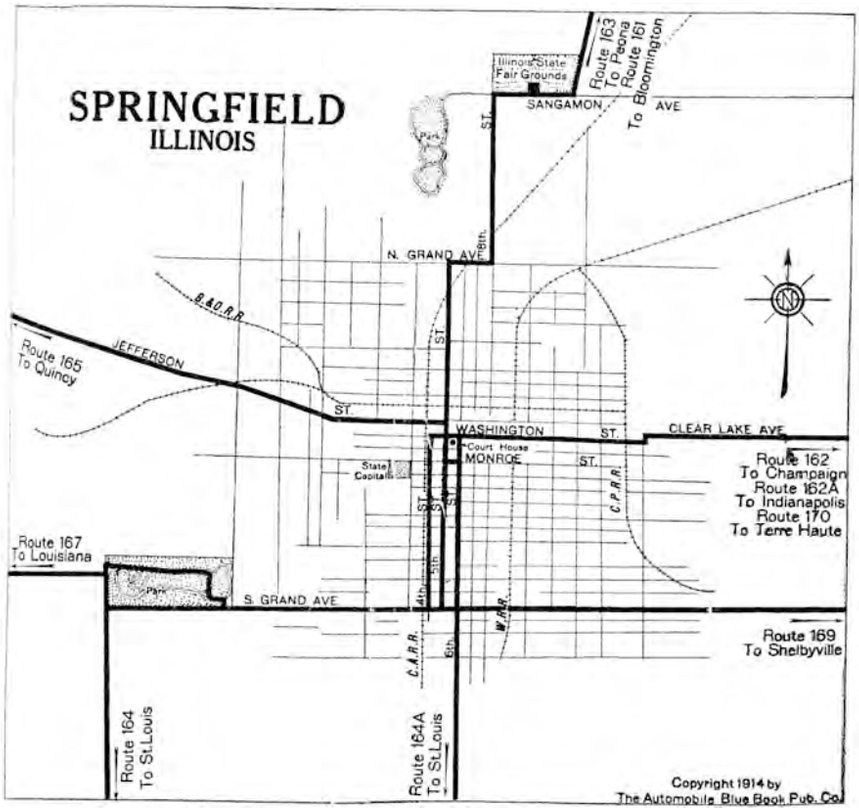

Figure 3. Map of Springfield, Illinois, from the 1914 Middle West volume.

"Central to the guide's wayfinding narrative is the use of mileages, both total and intermediate."

Central to the guide's wayfinding narrative is the use of mileages, both total and intermediate. The distance, in miles, of each turn in the directions from the beginning of the route, plus the distance from the previous turn or directive, is listed along the left-hand side of the route log. Occasionally, additional distances from the route's beginning are indicated within the route's directions. For example, the fifth directive in Route 127 indicates that the route passes Shirley Station at 6.9 miles (11.1 km) and then turns away from the railroad tracks at 9.6 (15.4 km) miles (Figure 4). Users reset their odometers to zero or kept a pencil and paper handy so they could keep track of distances and intermediate mileages. Early automobiles were not equipped with odometers (or speedometers), so automobiles owners had to purchase and install the devices before they could use the *Blue Books*. For this reason, odometers (and speedometers) were prominently advertised throughout each volume.

"In addition to distances, landmarks are also at the heart of the route guide's narrative."

In addition to distances, landmarks are also at the heart of the route guide's narrative. Not only did prominent landmarks identify the beginning and ending of routes, they identified individual turns or segments along the route. Most commonly, these intermediate landmarks were railroad tracks and power/telephone poles. For example, Route 127 references railroad tracks twenty times and poles eighteen times within its thirty-eight segments (Figure 4). Other popular landmarks were buildings (courthouse, church, school, post office, library, railroad station), bridges (covered bridge, iron bridge, small wooden bridge), businesses (drug store, blacksmith shop, grocery store), trolleys, and parks, including fairgrounds and cemeteries.

All of these landmarks were easy to identify from the road. In the case of bridges and railroad crossings, they were unavoidable features in the

Bloomington Section — Route 127

Route 127—Bloomington, Ill., to Springfield, Ill.—76.5 m.

Route map, page 145 — Reverse route, No. 161

Road Conditions—Via Lincoln and Williamsville. Good natural dirt roads in dry weather.

Descriptive Outline—Leaving the city, we pass by Miller Park, with its lake, pavilion and other facilities for amusement. Continuing, follow closely the line of the Chicago & Alton through a very rich farming district. **Lincoln**, laid out as a town in 1853, is the only town in the United States named for Abraham Lincoln during his lifetime with his full consent and acquiescence before he had acquired fame in either the state or nation. In those years Lincoln was a lawyer at Springfield, "riding the circuit," and as such drafted and secured the charter for the town. Lincoln opened his first office for the practice of law in the old Court House, which is still standing. Lincoln College, a Presbyterian institution, founded in 1855, is located here, also the Lincoln State School and Colony for Feeble-minded Children. Three large coal mines are situated near the city. South of Lincoln, at **Elkhart**, is the site of the first settlement in Logan County. Gov. Richard J. Oglesby, three times governor of Illinois and former United States senator, formerly lived here. The old homestead is still standing on the hill.

MILEAGE Total / Intermed. (For this and other exits, see city map, page 144.)

Total	Intermed.	
0.0	0.0	**BLOOMINGTON**, Main & Washington Sts. From Court House on right go west with trolley on Washington St.
0.7	0.7	Morris Ave.; turn left around drug store, leaving trolley. Cross RR., going upgrade just beyond.
2.1	1.4	6-corners; bear right with poles.
4.5	2.4	4-corners; turn right with poles and travel.
4.9	0.4	Immediately before RR. turn left along tracks past **Shirley Sta.** 6.9, turning left with road away from tracks 9.6.
14.1	9.2	End of road; turn right past McLean over to right 18.1, crossing RR. 18.2.
20.5	6.4	Turn left with poles across RRs. 22.9 & 24.5.
24.9	4.4	End of road; turn right with poles.
26.4	1.5	Turn left with poles around school.
26.9	0.5	Turn right with poles.
28.0	1.1	End of road; turn left away from RR. and follow poles.
29.5	1.5	End of road; turn right with poles.
30.0	0.5	Turn left with poles, keeping straight ahead where poles divide 31.1.
32.5	2.5	4-corners; turn right, leaving poles.
34.5	2.0	4-corners; turn left with travel.
35.5	1.0	4-corners; bear right with travel, coming along RR. for short distance 37.2.
37.8	2.3	Just beyond coal mine turn left, curving right 37.9; cross RR. 38.2 to Court House,
38.9	1.1	**Lincoln**, Broadway & McLean St. Turn right on Broadway.
39.0	0.1	Cross RR. and immediately turn left around station.
39.2	0.2	Curve right away from tracks; cross trolley 39.8.
40.1	0.9	End of street; turn left across RR. 40.2 and trolley 40.7, winding downgrade through covered bridge 41.0.
41.4	1.3	Curve right with poles and left 41.7.
42.2	0.8	Turn right with poles.
43.2	1.0	Turn left with 4-arm poles, turning right 44.1 to
46.3	3.1	4-corners; turn left with poles to
47.3	1.0	End of road; turn right, curving left with poles 48.5; keep straight ahead where poles leave to right 51.5, curving left with travel 53.2. Cross RR. and trolley at **Elkhart.**
53.5	6.2	End of street; turn right, curving left 53.9.
58.0	4.5	Right-hand road; turn right.
61.4	3.4	**Williamsville**, park on right. Turn left.

Figure 4. Text for Route 127 from the 1914 Middle West volume.

61.6 0.2 End of street; jog right and take first left to
63.9 2.3 End of road; turn right away from poles, curving left with road 64.7.
66.2 2.3 4-corners; turn right around school; cross trolley 67.8 and RRs. 68.0 & 68.1.
69.0 2.8 Turn left around school, picking up heavy telephone line. **Caution** for sharp downgrade across Sangamon River bottoms 70.5, over 3 bridges running upgrade.
71.4 2.4 Curve right and left just beyond, under RR. 72.9.
73.9 2.5 At far side of state fair grounds turn right across tracks on brick pavement.
74.3 0.4 At western edge of fair grounds turn left on 8th St.; cross RR. 75.1 to
75.3 1.0 Grand Ave.; turn right on pavement 3 blocks, recrossing RR.
75.6 0.3 5th St., small church on right; turn left across RRs. 75.7 & 76.3 to Court House,
76.5 0.9 **SPRINGFIELD**, Washington & 5th Sts.
New Leland Hotel, Sixth & Capital Sts.
Auto Inn, 513 So. Fourth St.
For city map, see page 201. For diverging routes, see index map, page 200.

Figure 4 (continued). Text for Route 127 from the 1914 Middle West volume.

road. Route compilers chose landmarks that were easy to identify but not so abundant that they would cause confusion. Therefore, landmarks such as "house," "farm," "barn," or "silo" almost never appear in route directions.

Compass directions were rarely used in any of the route segments. If they do appear, they often are at the route's beginning. For example, the first segment of Route 127 says "go west with the trolley on Washington St" (ABBPC 1914,153) (Figure 4). After that initial compass direction, users were expected to travel the next 76.5 miles (123.1 km) by simply watching their odometer and following the text. Directional terms in the route narrative, such as "turn right" and "curve right," had specific meanings. A "How to Use the Blue Book" section at the beginning of each volume explains that "keep right" means "avoid fork or branch road to left," "bear right" means "turn slightly to right, as at a fork," "turn square right" means "to turn at a right angle (90 degrees) to right," and "turn sharp right" means "to turn more than a right angle to right" (ABBPC 1914, iii).

"Without detailed maps keyed to markings on the ground, routes needed to be flawless and tourists had to follow them precisely."

This reliance on written directions with mileages, landmarks, and turns made navigation with the *Blue Books* difficult and was cited by Akerman as the route guide's chief flaw (1993). Without detailed maps keyed to markings on the ground, routes needed to be flawless and tourists had to follow them precisely. For instance, what if the user lost track of his or her mileage, missed a turn, or turned in the wrong direction? Or worse yet, what if a landmark burned down or was destroyed, a road or bridge closed, or the route directions were wrong? It is easy to envision any number of scenarios where tourists find themselves off the route. In these situations they would have to retrace their path until they encountered a familiar place earlier on the route or search out an alternative route.

It was also difficult for travelers to navigate with a *Blue Book* while driving their automobile. Both tasks required concentration and skill, so most often drivers were accompanied by a navigating passenger, or co-pilot, who kept an eye on the odometer, read and followed the written directions, and looked ahead for the next stop or turn. Because speeds faster than thirty miles per hour (48 kilometers per hour) were uncommon due to poor road conditions, legal restrictions, and the limited power of early

automobiles, navigators had sufficient time to perform these duties. Even so, driving and navigating demanded constant attention. Because many automobiles at the time were sold without roofs, and some without windshields, users risked damaging their *Blue Books* in the elements while en route. *Blue Book* publishers sold leather holders with clear celluloid faces to aid navigators by keeping the book open, clean, and dry.

When first introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century, the *Official Automobile Blue Book* was marketed toward wealthy automobile owners seeking a leisurely touring trip filled with scenery and adventure. Only wealthy Americans at that time, after all, could afford the high expenses of purchasing and operating an automobile. However, after Ford Motor Company introduced the Model T in 1908, the cost of purchasing and operating an auto declined dramatically, thus bringing this new form of transportation, and its associated pastime of touring, to the middle class.

"When first introduced at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Official Automobile Blue Book *was marketed toward wealthy automobile owners seeking a leisurely touring trip filled with scenery and adventure."*

This shift in appeal from the upper class to the middle class can be seen in the advertisements included in the *Blue Books*. For example, Figure 5 is a full-page advertisement for *Motor Print* magazine from the 1914 Middle West volume. Notice the appearance of leisure, wealth, and sophistication in the artwork. All six travelers are well dressed, and none appears dirty or disheveled from the journey (even though the car is open to the elements and has a short windshield). The advertisement text claims that *Motor Print* "smacks of high character and cleverness from cover to cover" and seeks subscriptions from "every well-to-do motorist" (ABBPC 1914, 969). *Motor Print* was founded in 1906 at a time when automobile ownership was dominated by the wealthy upper class. As automobiles became affordable by the middle class, *Motors Print's* advertising retained its symbolic reference to wealth in an appeal to the aspirations of the less well off. By subscribing to *Motor Print*, middle class motorists that owned and used a *Blue Book* could feel as if they were equal to their wealthier counterparts.

Origins and history of the *Official Automobile Blue Book*

The *Official Automobile Blue Book* was founded by Charles Howard Gillette, a prominent businessman from Hartford, Connecticut. Gillette was involved with automobiles his entire adult life, both professionally and recreationally, until his untimely death in 1914 at age thirty-nine. Before starting the *Blue Book* in 1901, he founded Columbia Lubricants Company, suppliers of oil and grease for automobiles. He was also a cofounder of the Automobile Club of Hartford, Secretary of the American Automobile Association (AAA), and an occasional official starter for the Vanderbilt Cup automobile races (Hart 1919).

"*The* Official Automobile Blue Book *was founded by Charles Howard Gillette, a prominent businessman from Hartford, Connecticut."*

Gillette's 1901 *Automobile Blue Book* covered the Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Washington, and Baltimore metropolitan areas. Its stated purpose was to promote touring by establishing routes that connected automobile "supply stations." The introduction to the guide explained that

> The Official Automobile Blue Book Company has for the past year been devoting its energies to a plan for increasing touring facilities by means of a system of supply stations, and a book listing these stations and giving information regarding routes, etc. A chain of stations only a few miles apart along every popular touring route, each one offering supplies and facilities for repairs, cannot help but appeal to every automobilist, but also those who contemplate becoming such. (OABBC 1901, 5)

The *Blue Book* placed stations into four categories according to the

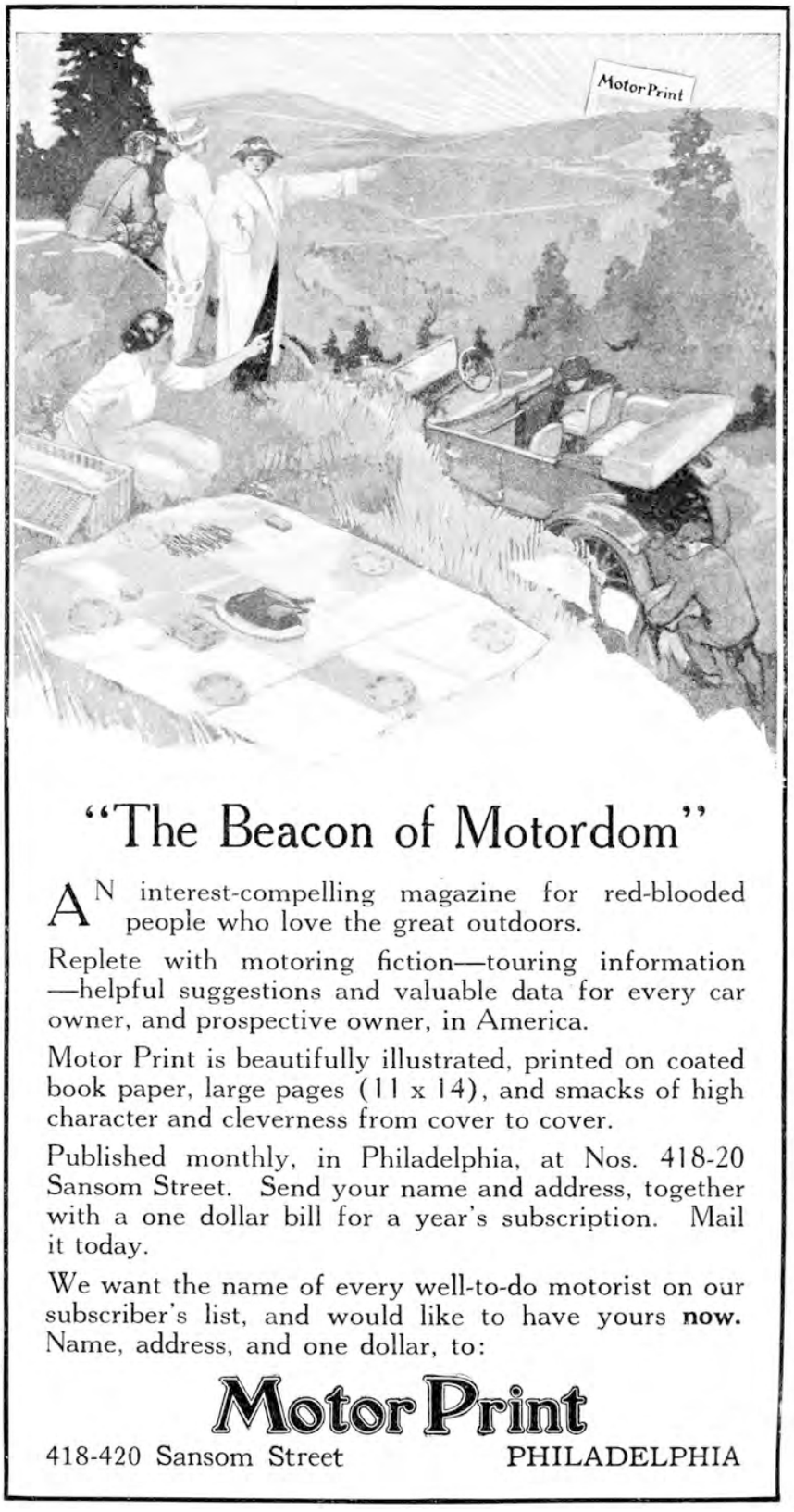

Figure 5. Magazine advertisement from the 1914 Middle West volume.

services provided. Number 1 supply stations provided comprehensive services and could charge electric vehicles, sold gasoline and lubricants, offered complete machine shop and repair shop services, and stored automobiles. Number 4 stations only sold gasoline and lubricants. Number 2 and 3 stations provided intermediate-level services.

Sixty-two routes were included in the 1901 edition. All of them are one-way; no reverse directions were given. Each route consisted of a short descriptive paragraph along with a table showing information about supply stations. Towns were linked together in such a way as to ensure that supply stations would be found every ten to fifteen miles (sixteen to twenty-four kilometers). For example, Boston Route 7, between Boston and Springfield, Massachusetts, connected ten supply stations, most offering category 2 or 4 services. The distance between each station, along with the construction material and condition of the roads, was also indicated in the guide. Motorists were supposed to navigate using the following detailed description:

> Leaving Capitol, follow Beacon Street through Back Bay, Longwood, Allston, Brighton to Newton. 6.75 miles, to Newtonville, 1 mile. Through West Newton, Auburndale, Newton Lower Falls, Wellesley Hills to Wellesley, 6.25 miles. Taking road to right between the two lakes to Natick, 3 miles, the road here follows Railroad tracks to So. Framingham, 3.5 miles . . . . The road here follows railroad through Butlerville, North Wilbraham, skirting three lakes to Springfield, 15 miles. Total 88 miles. (OABBC 1901, 166)

The guide's emphasis on automobile operations and maintenance is also indicated by an extensive reference section. Data tables on resistance, horsepower, energy, friction, traction, and other automotive engineering topics were included to help owners repair or refashion many of the unique, handmade parts of early autos.

New editions of the *Blue Book* were issued annually after 1901, but the series consisted of only one volume until 1907, when coverage expanded enough to require three (Class Journal Co. 1907). For $2.50, motorists could purchase a volume for New York and Canada, New England, or New Jersey and Pennsylvania (Table 1). Volume 1, covering New York and Canada, contained over two hundred routes (including reverse routes). Routes consisted of highly detailed verbal directions arranged in paragraphs. Total mileages between towns were included, but not intermediate mileages between turns.

The 1907 volumes placed more emphasis on touring and less on operations and maintenance, reflecting the increase in automobile ownership and touring. Gone were the engineering tables and detailed information about supply stations. In their place were full-page picture advertisements for service stations, hotels, automobile manufacturers, and other related businesses. Route index maps, included for the first time in 1907, along with strip maps and large-scale maps of cities and towns, were also added to aid tourists.

In 1906, the *Blue Book* series received official sponsorship by the American Automobile Association (AAA), immediately boosting its popularity (Ristow 1964; Class Journal Co. 1907). The AAA placed its logo on the front cover of each *Blue Book* and advertised itself prominently throughout the volumes' pages. *Blue Books* were offered to association members at a reduced rate. The author is unable to confirm whether or not this endorsement was related to Charles Gillette's role as Association Secretary. However, it is easy to see how these two facts could be related. The size

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1901	1 volume – The Northeast	unknown
1906	1 volume	unknown
1907	3 volumes	$2.50 ea
	Volume 1 – New York & Canada	
	Volume 2 – New England	
	Volume 3 – N.J., Pa., & The South	
1908	3 volumes	unknown
1909	4 volumes	unknown
	Volume 1 – New England	
	Volume 2 – New York	
	Volume 3 – N.J., Pa., & The South	
	Volume 4 – Middle West & Chicago	
1912	5 volumes	unknown
	Volume 1 – New York & Canada	
	Volume 2 – New England & Eastern Canada	
	Volume 3 – N.J., Pa., & South Atlantic States	
	Volume 4 – Middle West	
	Volume 5 – Mississippi River to Pacific Coast	
1914	5 volumes	$2.50 ea
	Volume 1 – New York & Canada	
	Volume 2 – New England & Eastern Canada	
	Volume 3 – N.J., Pa., & The South	
	Volume 4 – Middle West	
	Volume 5 – Mississippi River to Pacific Coast	
1915	6 volumes	$2.50 ea
	Volume 1 – New York & Canada	
	Volume 2 – New England & Eastern Canada	
	Volume 3 – N.J., Pa., & The Southeast	
	Volume 4 – Middle West	
	Volume 5 – Mississippi River to Pacific Coast	
	Volume 6 – Calif., Ore., Wash.	
1916	6 volumes	$2.50 ea
	Volume 1 – New York & Canada	
	Volume 2 – New England & Eastern Canada	
	Volume 3 – Del., Md., N.J., Pa., Va., W. Va.	
	Volume 4 – Middle West	
	Volume 5 – Mississippi River to Pacific Coast	
	Volume 6 – Southeastern States	
1917	10 volumes	$3.00 ea
	Volume 1 – New York & Canada	
	Volume 2 – New England & Eastern Canada	
	Volume 3 – Pa., W. Va., & Mid Atlantic States	
	Volume 4 – Ohio, Ky., Mich., Ind.	
	Volume 5 – Ill., Mo., Iowa, Wis., Minn.	
	Volume 6 – Southeastern States	
	Volume 7 – Great Plains & Eastern Rockies	
	Volume 8 – Pacific & Western Rockies	
	Volume A – New York City & 100 mile radius	
	Volume C – Chicago & 100 mile radius	

Table 1. Territorial coverage and price of the Blue Book *for selected years.*

1918	11 volumes	$3.00 ea
	Volume 1 – New York & Canada	
	Volume 2 – New England & Eastern Canada	
	Volume 3 – Pa., W. Va., & Mid-Atlantic States	
	Volume 4 – Ohio, Ky., Mich., Ind.	
	Volume 5 – Ill., Mo., Iowa, Wis., Minn.	
	Volume 6 – Southeastern States	
	Volume 7 – Great Plains & Eastern Rockies	
	Volume 8 – Calif., Nev., Ariz., Utah	
	Volume 9 – Pacific Northwest	
	Volume A – New York City & 100 mile radius	
	Volume C – Chicago & 100 mile radius	
1919	11 volumes	$3.00 ea
	Volume 1 – New York & Canada	
	Volume 2 – New England & Eastern Canada	
	Volume 3 – Pa., W. Va. & Mid-Atlantic States	
	Volume 4 – Ohio, Ky., Mich., Ind	
	Volume 5 – Ill., Mo., Iowa, Wis., Minn.	
	Volume 6 – Southeastern States	
	Volume 7 – Great Plains & Eastern Rockies	
	Volume 8 – Calif., Nev., Ariz., Utah	
	Volume 9 – Pacific Northwest	
	Volume A – New York City & 100 mile radius	
	Volume C – Chicago & 100 mile radius	
1921	12 volumes	$4.00 ea
	Volume 1 – New York & Canada	
	Volume 2 – New England & Eastern Canada	
	Volume 3 – Pa., W. Va. & Mid-Atlantic States	
	Volume 4 – Ohio, Ky., Mich., Ind.	
	Volume 5 – Ill., Mo., parts of Iowa	
	Volume 6 – Southeast	
	Volume 7 – Southern Plains & Rockies	
	Volume 8 – Calif., Nev., Ariz., Utah	
	Volume 9 – Northern Plains & Pacific Northwest	
	Volume 10 – Wis., Minn., parts of Iowa	
	Volume T – Transcontinental Routes	
	Volume A – New York Metropolitan Routes	
1922	4 volumes	$4.00 ea
	Volume 1 – New York & New England	
	Volume 2 – Middle Atlantic & Southeastern	
	Volume 3 – Middle West	
	Volume 4 – Western & Transcontinental	
1924	4 volumes	$3.00 ea
	Volume 1 – New York & New England	
	Volume 2 – Middle Atlantic & Southeastern	
	Volume 3 – Middle West	
	Volume 4 – Western & Transcontinental	

Table 1 (continued). Territorial coverage and price of the Blue Book *for selected years.*

1929	9 volumes	$1.00 ea
	Volume 1 – New England & Eastern Canada	
	Volume 2 – New York & Canada	
	Volume 3 – Mid Atlantic States and Ohio	
	Volume 4 – Southeastern States	
	Volume 5 – Florida	
	Volume 6 – Southern Plains and Southwest	
	Volume 7 – Midwest	
	Volume 8 – Northern Plains and Eastern Rockies	
	Volume 9 – Pacific and Western Rockies	

Sources:

1901 – McKenzie 1963; Ristow 1946; and 1901 volume.

1906 and 1907 – Series coverage index on page 532 of the 1907 Volume 1.

1908 – McKenzie 1963.

1909 – Automobile Blue Book Out, *New York Times*, April 25, 1909, part 4, Sporting News Section.

1912 – Series coverage index and map on pages 1 and 24 of the 1912 Volume 2.

1914 – Series coverage index and map on pages 968 and 970 of the 1914 Volume 4.

1915 – Miscellaneous news item in the *The New England Medical Gazette*, 1915, Volume 50: 331.

1916 – Copyright entries in *Catalog of Copyright Entries, Part 1 Group 2*, 1916 New Series, Volume 1, Issue 3: 193, and Volume 1, Issue 5: 465.

1917 – Series coverage index and map on page 756 of the 1917 Volume 2.

1918 – Series coverage index and map on page 376 of the 1918 Volume 6.

1919 – Series coverage index and map on page 416 of the 1919 Volume 6.

1921 – Series coverage index and map inside back cover of the 1921 Volume 7.

1922 – Series coverage index and map inside back cover of the 1922 Volume 3.

1924 – Series coverage index and map inside back cover of the 1924 Volume 4.

1929 – Series coverage index and map inside back cover of the 1929 Volume 3.

Table 1 (continued). Territorial coverage and price of the Blue Book *for selected years.*

"Year after year, the size and coverage of the series grew until it reached its peak in 1921 with twelve volumes."

and coverage of the series steadily grew as more routes and territory were added, expanding to four volumes in 1909 and to five volumes sometime between then and 1912. In 1915, a sixth volume was added, completing coverage for the entire United States. Year after year, the size and coverage of the series grew until it reached its peak in 1921 with twelve volumes (Table 1).

Apparently, a twelve-volume set must have grown unpopular or unwieldy, and probably too expensive, because a year later, in 1922, the entire country was condensed into four volumes. The publishers achieved

this by consolidating volumes, cutting routes, and abbreviating the route directions. For example, Volumes 7, 8, and 9 from 1921 were combined to create Volume 4 for 1922. The Midwest volume (Volume 3) of 1922 contained routes from 1921 Volumes 4, 5, and 10 (Table 1). Routes were also removed from the guides. The 1921 Volume 7 lists forty-eight routes (including reverse routes) in Nebraska. In the 1924 Volume 4, only twenty of them remain. More routes were printed in a smaller amount of space. The 1924 Volume 4 used a smaller font, two-column pages, abbreviations, omitted common words such as "turn" and "corner," and omitted intermediate mileages so it could squeeze over 1,500 routes into 793 pages.

Competition from emerging sheet maps and other guidebook publishers accelerated these changes. By 1926, Rand McNally, H.M. Gousha, and General Drafting were producing thousands of sheet maps each year (Ristow 1946). Motorists could obtain many of these maps for little or no cost, so it became increasingly difficult for them to justify the high cost of a *Blue Book* set. The AAA stopped distributing the *Blue Book* in 1926 and launched its own series of guidebooks to replace it. Without its privileged relationship with the AAA, sales of the *Blue Book* series plummeted (McKenzie 1963). *Blue Book* publishers attempted the following year to make the series more competitive by switching to an atlas format. All turn-by-turn directions were removed and replaced with large-scale highway maps, greatly reducing the number of pages in each volume. The advertisements, city maps and descriptions, and touring information remained. For example, the 1929 Volume 3 contains only 162 pages and twenty-nine large-scale maps of its territory. This radical format change, however, came too late, and the series ultimately ceased publication after the 1929 edition.

"The AAA stopped distributing the Blue Book *in 1926 and launched its own series of guidebooks to replace it. Without its privileged relationship with the AAA, sales of the* Blue Book *series plummeted."*

Pathfinders

Little has been written about how the routes in the *Blue Books* were first traced. Evidence indicates, however, that both professional and amateur "pathfinders" did this work. These early automobilists took upon themselves the task of field-compiling routes while traveling local, unmarked roads. The first pathfinders were actually bicyclists with the League of American Wheelmen (Mason 1957). After growing enthusiasm for the automobile replaced the bicycle craze of the 1880s and 1890s, the task of pathfinding fell to members of local automobile clubs and highway associations. The compiler's forward to a 1907 *Blue Book* acknowledges "the friendly cooperation received from the American Automobile Association, its affiliated and other clubs, and from tourists who have placed notes of their own trips" (Class Journal Co. 1907, xxxv). Even the Rand McNally Company used information from its own pathfinders to support its "Blazed Trails" mapping program (Akerman 1993). Unfortunately, little research has been published detailing the crucial, behind-the-scenes role that pathfinders had in road mapping and the creation of a national highway system.

"The most famous and successful pathfinder was Anthon L. Westgard, who was employed as Field Representative and official pathfinder for the AAA."

The most famous and successful pathfinder was Anthon L. Westgard, who was employed as Field Representative and official pathfinder for the AAA. Westgard began his pathfinding career in 1903 and in just a few years earned the reputation as a foremost authority on automobile routes and touring. According to Westgard's memoirs, *Tales of a Pathfinder*, he was instrumental in the establishment of nearly forty transcontinental routes (1920). The *Blue Book* publishers must have taken advantage of the common association between themselves and Westgard, through the AAA, because the publisher's forward to the 1907 Volume 1 credits him for the volume's maps (Class Journal Co. 1907). Some even contain Westgard's

initials (ALW) in their lower or upper corner. No *Blue Book* that the author has seen, however, credits any of the actual routes to Westgard.

The contributions of automobile club members and amateur pathfinders are revealed in a couple of routes in the 1907 Volume 1. The first route, from New York City to the Berkshire Hills, was contributed by Cortlandt F. Bishop of the Automobile Club of America (ACA). Apparently, the ACA gave the *Blue Book* publishers permission to include its own copyrighted routes. The other route, from New York City to Mineola, Long Island, was contributed by R. H. Johnston. Mineola was the site of the 1906 Vanderbilt Cup race, and Johnston documented this route for its official program (Class Journal Co. 1907). One could reasonably expect that there was a considerable amount of borrowing and copying of routes, both legally and illegally, among automobile clubs, pathfinders, and route guide publishers.

"In addition to relying on amateur pathfinders from automobile clubs, by 1907 the Blue Book publishers were employing their own professional pathfinders and outfitting them with official Blue Book cars."

In addition to relying on amateur pathfinders from automobile clubs, by 1907 the *Blue Book* publishers were employing their own professional pathfinders and outfitting them with official *Blue Book* cars. The 1907 guide states that "between eight and nine thousand miles of the routes described anew for 1907 have been covered personally, either by the Blue Book car, or by our staff in cooperation with local autoists" (Class Journal Co. 1907, xxxiii). Figure 6 shows an official *Blue Book* pathfinding car from 1912. The entire fleet consisted of three cars that year but expanded as the series grew to include the entire country. In 1924, the western United States required a fleet of five pathfinding cars.

Each car was operated by a team, consisting of a driver and "route compiler," whose job was to mark mileages, turns, and landmarks. A 1910 *Chicago Daily Tribune* article described these workers as "geography makers [or] professional route finders, who scour the country in their machines mapping out fresh trails for automobile tourists who wish to take long runs through sections of the country unfamiliar to them." Working from spring to late fall, each team spent the entire driving season covering thousands of miles as they created new routes and updated others in their assigned region of the United States. One team, for instance, assigned to New York State, drove over 10,000 miles (16,093 km) in 1909. Another team, responsible for all New England, covered 11,000 miles (17,703 km) that season. The cost of this route-finding work was high. Publishers spent almost $1,000 per month on each team, including $600 for the salaries of the driver and "route compiler" (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1910).

"Early pathfinding excursions, such as those by Westgard, Bishop, and Johnston, were loosely planned and haphazard affairs."

Early pathfinding excursions, such as those by Westgard, Bishop, and Johnston, were loosely planned and haphazard affairs. A 1907 trip by Johnston between New York City and Savannah, Georgia, illustrates this well. Although he chose the overall route that "promised the most interesting sights and scenes," not the route of shortest distance, details of the journey, such as mileages, roads, and turns, were determined en route. For instance, Johnston claimed to have asked nearly two hundred people (quite possibly an exaggeration) for directions to Chattanooga, Tennessee, before finally getting correct directions from another motorist (Johnston 1908, 368). Professional pathfinding teams from the Automobile Blue Book Publishing Company were better organized, although they, too, often relied on directional advice. Before leaving for the field, teams met with company officials to map out potential trunk lines between major cities. Once in the field, the teams searched out the shortest distances and best roads, connecting them to create new routes (*Chicago Daily Tribune* 1910).

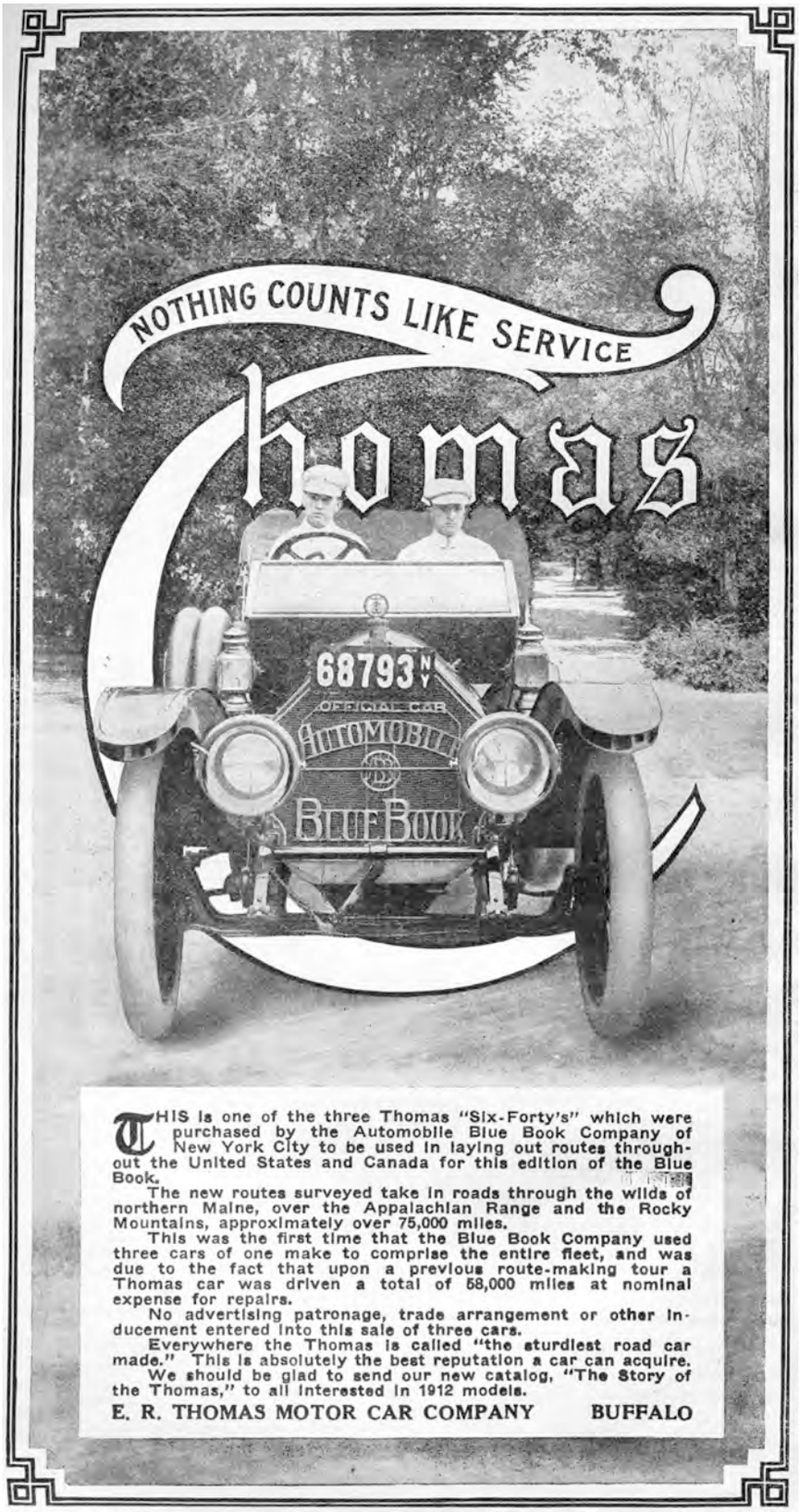

Figure 6. Official Automobile Blue Book *pathfinding car from the 1912 New England volume.*

Official Automobile Blue Books and Early Highways

The efforts of pathfinders such as Westgard, Bishop, and Johnston were made more difficult because of the very poor condition of roads during the early 1900s. In 1912, only 220,000 of the 2.2 million miles of public roads in the country were improved (Department of Commerce 1914, 260). The technological advances of automobiles, along with the public's adoption of the machines, quickly outpaced any improvements to the nation's road network. Driven by grassroots organizations such as the American Automobile Association, the American Highway Association, and the National Good Roads Association, public outcry for road improvements grew loud enough to spur Congress to pass the first federal highway act, the Federal-aid Road Act of 1916 (Hugill 1982; Jakle and Sculle 2008).

"The technological advances of automobiles, along with the public's adoption of the machines, quickly outpaced any improvements to the nation's road network."

Although the Act brought federal money to the aid of the nation's motorists, it did not create an integrated highway network or a standardized system of highway identification. These tasks were undertaken instead by various highway associations, which introduced named "booster" highways to the country. These highways were intended to promote road improvements and construction and encourage more people to travel by automobile (Jakle and Sculle 2008; Paxson 1946). Organizers marked the routes of these highways with color-coded blazes on signs or posts so drivers could be confident they were following the correct roads. Some early road maps, such as those of Rand McNally's "Blazed Trail" program, even contained indexes to dozens of different "booster" highway markings (Akerman 1993).

The first "booster" highway to capture the public's imagination was the Lincoln Highway, created in 1913 (Hokanson 1988). Hundreds more were established over the next few years, although many existed only on paper and were never adequately marked in the field. Others, such as the Yellowstone Trail, Pike's Peak Ocean-to-Ocean Highway, National Old Trails Road, Dixie Highway, and Meridian Highway became popular and well traveled (Jakle 2000). Many of the routes in the *Blue Book* were associated with these booster projects, often indicating the name of the highway a Blue Book route followed. For example, Route 27 in the 1914 Middle West volume, connecting Chicago, Illinois, to Clinton, Iowa, indicates that it was a section of the Lincoln Highway (ABBPC 1914). Route 625 in the 1924 Volume 4, connecting Belleville to Norton, Kansas, was a section of the Pike's Peak Ocean-to-Ocean Highway (ABBPC 1924).

"Many of the routes in the Blue Book *were associated with these booster projects, often indicating the name of the highway a* Blue Book *route followed."*

The increasing numbers of "booster" highways bred confusion within the motoring public. Many highways had similar names and blazes and connected the same towns. It was common for multiple highways to overlap and follow the exact same roads, where posts and poles became a complex jumble of painted blazes. In an effort to alleviate these problems, the American Association of State Highway Officials (AASHO[1]) in 1926 devised a unified highway identification plan based on one- and two-digit numbers. Every state quickly adopted this plan, which ensured that all interstate routes would maintain the same numeric designations from start to finish. States were allowed to mark their intrastate routes (those that did not cross state borders) in any fashion they wished (Weingroff 1997). The *Automobile Blue Book* incorporated these new highway numbers when it drastically altered its format in 1927 but did not remove the old booster names. Each large-scale section map indicated the numerical designations, while the introductory text for each section described the named highways of the area.

A Precursor to the American Road Map

The *Official Automobile Blue Book* was an important precursor to the American road map because it, like road maps decades later, was promoted to encourage automobile touring and automobile tourist-related businesses. Indeed, the entire series was created to benefit automobile tourists, for the inaugural edition explicitly stated "increasing touring facilities" as its main objective (OABBC 1901, 5). This emphasis on touring grew as the series matured.

The *Blue Book* was just as commercially oriented as the ubiquitous "oil company" road maps that appeared thirty years later (Akerman 2006, 2002, 1993; Ristow 1964, 1946; Schmiedeler and Perucca 1996) and the official state highway maps that became commonplace after them (Akerman and Block 2005). "Oil company" maps were intended to foster brand loyalty to the issuing oil company, thus selling more petroleum products. Companies hoped that by giving away free maps, tourists would return again and again to their branded service stations. Official state highway maps were also intended to be tools of economic development. They advertised touring destinations, thus encouraging tourists to spend their time—and money—within the issuing state. Similarly, the *Automobile Blue Book* was intended to encourage and promote automobile touring, and users were expected to patronize the businesses that advertised in the series.

"*The* Official Automobile Blue Book *was an important precursor to the American road map because it, like road maps decades later, was promoted to encourage automobile touring and automobile tourist-related businesses.*"

Each *Blue Book* volume contained hundreds of advertisements for automobile-related literature, hotels, resorts, garages, auto dealers, and other related businesses. For example, the 1914 Middle West volume contains 190 advertisements for hotels and restaurants and 146 advertisements for garages and auto dealers (Figure 7). Its index to hotel and garage advertisements states, "[H]otel and garage accommodations are recommended and endorsed by the Publishers. Each has been carefully investigated and found to be thoroughly desirable as first-class accommodations in their respective sections" (ABBPC 1914, 936). Some garages and hotels even displayed signs advertising themselves as "Official Automobile Blue Book Garage" or "Official Automobile Blue Book Hotel" (Figure 8). It is unclear whether these businesses paid a premium advertising fee for the endorsement, or if the distinction was granted on their own merit. Apparently, only hotels and garages were endorsed because the index to general advertisers (literature, resorts, auto dealers, and other related businesses) lacks any official recommendation or endorsement note. Regardless of whether endorsements existed and how they were granted, though, it is clear that tourists were expected to patronize the businesses that advertised in the guides.

Popular touring destinations also advertised in the guides, often purchasing large, multiple-page, color ads that were intended to increase touring interest. Figure 9 shows one such advertisement for Colorado attractions, sponsored by the Denver Tourist Bureau. This spread is part of a twenty-four page "National Touring Objectives" insert in the middle of the 1921 Volume 7, which covers the southern Plains and Rocky Mountains. This special section contains destinations throughout the United States, including New England, New York, North Carolina, Michigan, Colorado, Montana, and Oregon. Since route directions to some of these destinations are covered in other *Blue Book* volumes, these advertisements also prompted users to invest in additional volumes in the series.

"*Another reason the* Official Automobile Blue Book *was an important precursor to the American road map was that the volumes provided directional information, helping motorists navigate.*"

Another reason the *Official Automobile Blue Book* was an important precursor to the American road map was that the volumes provided directional information, helping motorists navigate. Today, the method of navigating by detailed mileages and turn-by-turn directions may appear

Figure 7. Hotel and garage advertisements from the 1914 Middle West volume.

Figure 8. Signs advertising Official Automobile Blue Book hotels and garages from the 1914 Middle West volume.

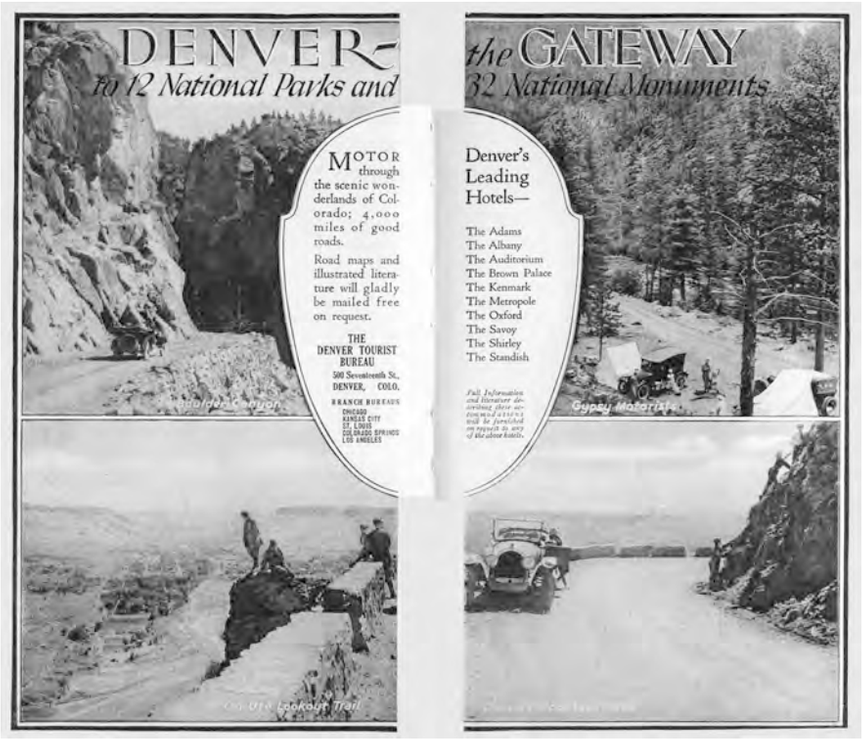

Figure 9. Denver Tourist Bureau advertisement from the 1921 Volume 7. (see page 58 for color version.

cumbersome and unnecessary to some drivers, especially those who excel at map reading, but those techniques were ideally suited for the conditions of automobile travel during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Roads at the time were constructed with only local uses in mind and often lacked descriptive signage. Prior to the automobile, roads that stretched across the country, or even a state, in an unbroken fashion were unnecessary. Traveling that far was reserved for railroads. Therefore, anyone wishing to travel cross-country by automobile was forced to make hundreds of turns onto hundreds of different roads. Such detail could not have been depicted at an appropriate scale on a sheet map because of the generalization that would have been required. Publishers and automobile enthusiasts turned to route guides such as the *Official Automobile Blue Book* and their turn-by-turn directions as a more effective solution.

Contemporary road maps work today because highways are built as continuous, unbroken networks and are adequately signed using a modern version of the AASHO numeric designation system. The highway numbers on the road signs match the designations on the map, so drivers at all times should know which highway they are on and the general direction in which they are traveling. Since these two features eliminate the need to show, in detail, every individual turn, sheet maps can effectively depict a generalized route at an appropriate scale. The *Official Automobile Blue Book* series, along with other directional route guides, fell out of favor during the late 1920s because improvements to the road network and a uniform highway identification system made their solution to the navigational problem obsolete.

"The Official Automobile Blue Book *series, along with other directional route guides, fell out of favor during the late 1920s because improvements to the road network and a uniform highway identification system made their solution to the navigational problem obsolete."*

Conclusion and Further Research

The *Official Automobile Blue Book* series of route guides was an important precursor to the road map because it commercialized automobile touring and provided directional information, two important functions of modern road maps, and did so before road mapping matured into a full-fledged cartographic business. Beginning as a single volume that connected service stations around the cities of the Northeast, the series grew into a massive enterprise filling a dozen volumes with thousands of touring routes, covering tens of thousands of miles. Its rise to prominence was only exceeded by the swiftness of its collapse. Eight years after its peak, the series and its publishing company were out of business, unable to compete in an era of uniform highway numbering and an ever-improving highway network.

Three avenues for further research can be pursued with what is currently known about the *Blue Book* series. It is clear that the guides were precursors to modern road maps, but did they also influence the emerging highway network? More specifically, do state and federal highways today consist of old *Automobile Blue Book* routes? Also, what was the relationship between the *Blue Book* routes and the hundreds of named "booster" highways? Did "booster" highways and the *Blue Book* borrow each other's routes? Research that compares the actual paths of *Blue Book* routes with the paths of "booster" highways and modern highways is necessary to answer these questions.

A related research avenue concerns the origins of the routes themselves. Thousands of routes were painstakingly assembled in the field by amateur and professional pathfinders, some of whom were employed by the book's publishing company. Little research has been conducted on pathfinders. Who were the *Blue Book* pathfinders, how did they assemble routes, and what were their objectives when blazing a new route? To what extent did

they borrow each other's directions? Do *Blue Book* routes match those of competitors' route guides? The Automobile Blue Book Publishing Company's papers could potentially hold answers to these questions, but it is unknown which archive owns them, provided they even exist. Research that compares the paths of *Blue Book* routes with the paths of similar routes in other guides could possibly also yield answers.

Additional theoretical research is needed to investigate how *Blue Books*, and their directions, are related to emerging navigation technologies. One cannot thumb through an *Automobile Blue Book* today without noticing that the digital age is returning the turn-by-turn method of navigation to the mainstream. Internet-mapping Web sites such as Google Maps and MapQuest, as well as in-car Global Positioning System navigation units, provide maps and turn-by-turn directions with the click of a mouse or push of a button. It is a bit ironic that turn-by-turn directions, the navigation method abandoned by the *Automobile Blue Book* in 1927, are widely available today and seem to be gaining in popularity. Is this the reemergence of an old, time-tested navigation system or the appearance of a new paradigm in automobile navigation?

"One cannot thumb through an Automobile Blue Book *today without noticing that the digital age is returning the turn-by-turn method of navigation to the mainstream."*

NOTES

1. Currently the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

APPENDIX

Official Automobile Blue Book volumes used in this research:

From author's collection:

1912 Volume 2
1914 Volume 1
1914 Volume 4
1918 Volume 6
1921 Volume 7
1922 Volume 3
1924 Volume 4
1929 Volume 3

From Google Books:

1901
1907 Volume 1
1917 Volume 2
1919 Volume 1

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