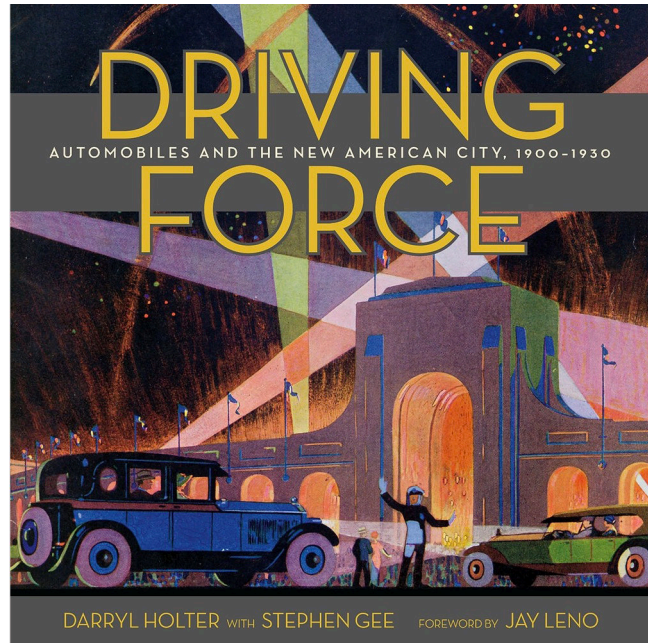


A BOOK TO CHECK OUT



Available at <https://www.chevaliersbooks.com>

“Ralph Cunningham Hamlin personified the glamor and excitement of early Los Angeles motoring. Not only was he the top Franklin dealer in the nation, whose clients included luminaries such as Harry Chandler and William Mulholland, he was also a successful car racer himself.

Born on October 17, 1880 in San Francisco, Hamlin arrived in Los Angeles when he was six years-old. He was suspended from school when he was fifteen after refusing to identify a classmate who placed matches on stairs as a prank. He ignored his parents pleas to return and instead took a job as a bicycle messenger before being hired by Pacific Cycle Company.”



Reproduced in *Driving Force*. credit: Kerry Galton

Thanks to Roger Moffat, the ACN has been introduced to a newly published book that has some distinct Franklin connections: specifically Ralph Hamlin. Following is a synopsis of the book and a few photos and quotes from the book.

As written in *Driving Force: Automobiles and the New American City, 1900-1930*:

Have you ever wondered how and why Los Angeles became so obsessed with cars? While historians and sociologists have provided numerous explanations, little or no credit has been given to the dealers, who ventured into unknown territory to sell a product regarded by nearly all banks and most businesses as a fad at best.

Released on May 9, 2023, *Driving Force: Automobiles and the New American City, 1900-1930* (Angel City Press) reveals how the city’s passion for automobiles was ignited by an unlikely mix of entrepreneurs and risk-takers. The early days of the city’s auto business owed its inception to the bicycle shop owners who began repairing and selling cars, carriage retailers, and automobile aficionados who learned how to broaden the market for automobiles and convince the public that the car was no longer a luxury, but a necessity.

In this first major history of dealers at work—and one of the first books to chronicle the early history of cars in Los Angeles —authors Darryl Holter and Stephen Gee share the untold story of pioneering auto dealers who seized the chance to join a start-up industry that reinvented an American city. Some became wealthy and powerful, others failed. But the lure of the automobile never wavered. At the dawn of the twentieth century, as Los Angeles transformed from a rugged outpost to a booming metropolis, so too did the fledgling automobile simultaneously come of age.

Los Angeles dealers helped change the way cars were sold. They championed selling cars on credit while accepting “used cars” that buyers “traded in” so they could buy a new one. They introduced the West Coast to the concept of dealerships with service bays for on-site car repairs; persuaded manufacturers to design cars to their specifications and created custom vehicles and innovations that were copied around the country.

With more than 150 spectacular vintage images—many never before published—*Driving Force* brings to life the people who made the automobile an icon of the modern American city. In its pages, readers will discover how the story of the automobile is interwoven with Southern California’s unique topography and sun-drenched climate; a new era of women’s rights and a growing female influence on automobile design; the creation of the Los Angeles Auto Show and the remarkable 1929 fire that threatened to destroy it; and how car dealers launched beloved L.A. radio and television stations, including KNX, KFI, and KCBS-KCAL.

As car collector extraordinaire Jay Leno explains in the book’s foreword, “In *Driving Force*, Darryl Holter shows that auto retailers connected manufacturers to buyers, changing America and shaping the history, economy, and culture of Los Angeles.”



Reproduced in *Driving Force* with permission from the Ralph Hamlin Collection, Seaver Center

From *Driving Force*: [Hamlin] “was fascinated with the Franklin... applied to become a dealer and traveled to the Franklin factory in Syracuse, New York. With the financial backing of his friend Maines, Hamlin received a franchise agreement to sell Franklin automobiles in 1905. He later became a distributor for the automaker and hired managers to run dealerships in Hollywood, Glendale, and San Diego.

“It was not easy to sell air cooling,” he wrote. “My competitors, all of whom sold water-cooled cars, would tell my prospects that if air cooling was so good, the rest of the cars would be using it.”

“At Franklin Automobile Company meetings in New York, founder Herbert H. Franklin made sure Hamlin was placed at his table. Hamlin had made several recommendations on improvements to vehicles that were, in fact, implemented. However, in 1923, he threatened to switch to another franchise if the company refused to make styling changes to the front end of the vehicles, and shocked by his protest, Franklin agreed.”



Reproduced in *Driving Force* with permission from the Ralph Hamlin Collection, Seaver Center

For more info on Ralph Hamlin, be sure to check out the Members Section of the Franklin Club website. Fascinating character.

Franklincar.org.



Ralph Hamlin's Dealership, located at 1040 South Ferry, 1914. From ACN #162, page 26



The Franklin Collection at Hickory Corners



Ralph Hamlin in 1929. Photo from ACN # 162, page 28.