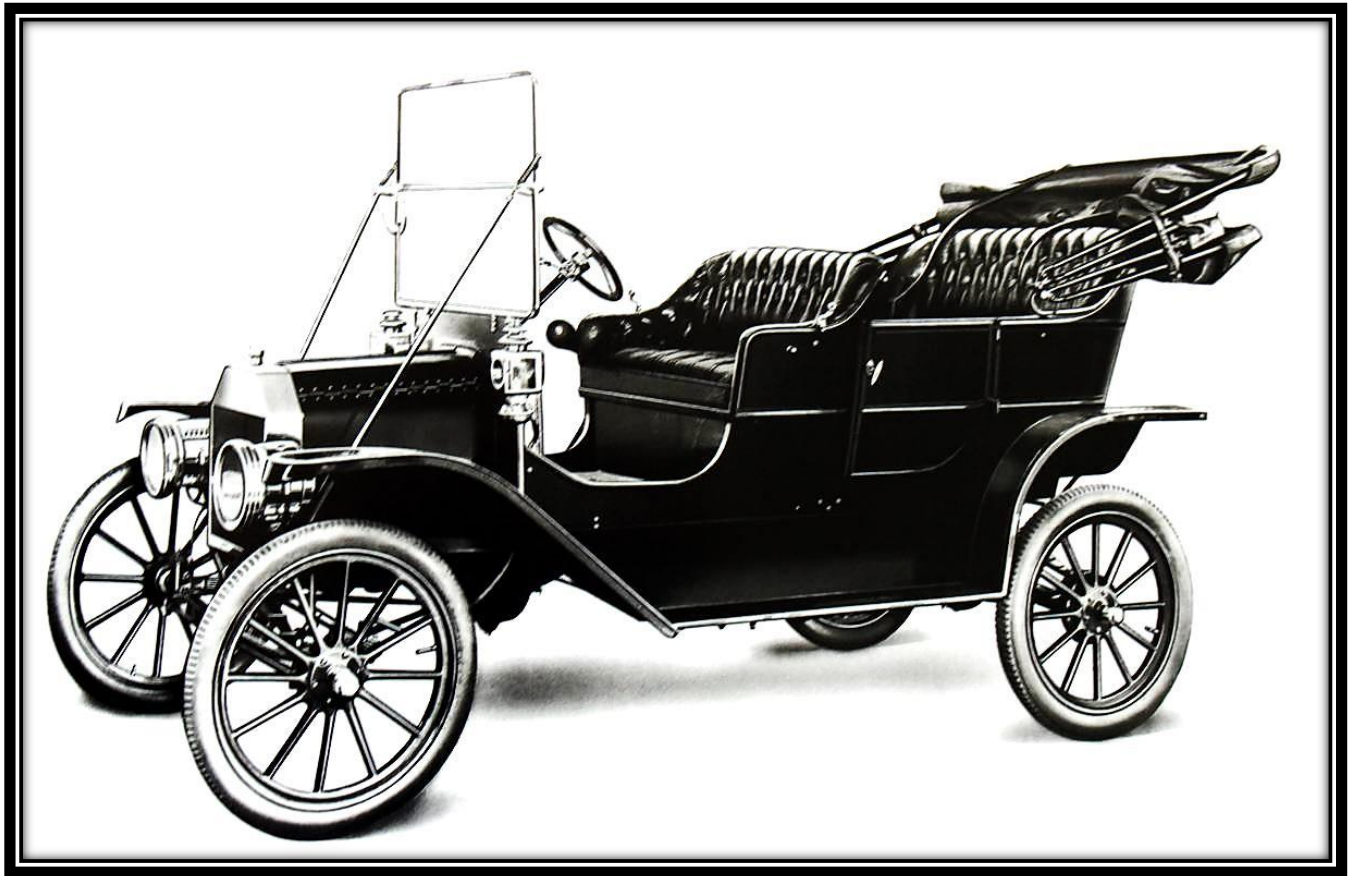


FORD'S FABULOUS FLIVVER, THE KINGSFORD HIGH SCHOOL MASCOT

Compiled by William J. Cummings



Kingsford High School's mascot, the Flivver, began serving as a mascot for athletic teams in the Iron Mountain-Kingsford area shortly after Henry Ford established a plant south of Iron Mountain's city limits in 1920.

Sports writers of the era frequently referred to Iron Mountain city baseball, football and basketball teams as the Fords or the Flivvers, even though it is doubtful that the name was worn on a jersey. Apparently any reference to a name connected with the Ford Motor Company was a badge of pride and honor for all citizens of the community.

Soon even the Iron Mountain High School teams were labeled as Fords or

Flivvers on occasion. Apparently the Mountaineer mascot had not been selected by this time, as the team is not referred to by that name.

When Kingsford High School opened its doors in the fall of 1925, athletic teams were also identified by the word Flivver in the headlines, but, again, there is no indication that this was the official mascot at the time.

In fact, the following two headlines appeared on the sports page of the December 17, 1925 edition of The Iron Mountain News: Kingsford Five Wins Its Battle From Quinnesec – Raikko Is Star for Flivver Crew In Second Contest (column 2); and “Eck’s” Flivvers Meet

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Florence Squad Tomorrow – Crew Rounding Out In Shape With Week of Practice (column 8). Eck was Iron Mountain High School's coach at the time.

As of this writing, there is no clear-cut indication as to exactly when Kingsford High School officially adopted the Flivver as its mascot.

The “flivver” was one of many names affectionately applied to Henry Ford's Model T, the first mass produced automobile built so the common man could put the horse out to pasture and ride in style in a horseless carriage.

When the average car was priced at over \$2,000, you could drive a Model T home for \$850, and the price kept on dropping, to a low of \$260. Early Model T's came in red, grey, or Brewster Green. Then Ford said, “Any customer can have a car painted any color he wants so long as it is black,” and the flivver remained black forevermore.

As Henry saw it, automobiles were too blamed expensive because of the ornate hardware, so he eliminated the doodads, cut out the frills and built the Model T. It had no bumpers, windshield wipers, water pump, speedometer, gas gauge, or battery, and merely the stamped outline of a left front door. The fuel tank was under the front seat, feeding the engine by gravity. To find out how much gas you had, you removed

the seat and everything on it, unscrewed the cap, and stuck in a sounding stick. Oil was checked by crawling underneath and fiddling with two petcocks on the rear of the crankcase.

Parts were available almost everywhere: the dime store, the blacksmith shop, the corner grocery; and they were cheap, too. A peck of potatoes and a muffler cost less than \$2.

The flivver stood seven feet high with its top up, and was high enough off the ground to clear all bumps and most tree stumps. The four-cylinder engine banged out 20 horsepower and would do 45 miles an hour, assisted by a tail wind. Most engine troubles could be fixed with a paper clip, a safety pin, or a piece of wire; a monkey wrench and a jackknife were usually the only tools required. Radiator leaks were easily stopped by throwing in a handful of oatmeal. If the Model T completely conked out, a short rest was often enough to get it going again.

Getting the flivver started was a test of strength, endurance, and will power. First, the driver had to set the spark and throttle levers on the steering column at quarter to four. Then, going around in front of the car, the driver pulled out the choke wire emerging from the radiator, took a firm grip on the crank and gave it a spin. If the crank didn't snap back and

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break his arm, he grumbled a bit and spun it a second time.

Once the engine caught, he leaped back to the throttle and eased off of the gas; otherwise the car was liable to shake itself into its component parts. The rest was simple. Three pedals were at the driver's feet; clutch on the left, reverse in the middle, brake on the right. Depressing the clutch pedal engaged the planetary transmission, starting the car in low. When the flivver reached what the driver judged to be twenty miles an hour, he lifted his foot and catapulted into high. In an emergency, stepping on any of the pedals would at least slow the car down.

The Model T was as ugly as sin to begin with, and throughout its long life, Ford never got around to improving its looks. But it sold like hotcakes, and for years Ford's biggest headache was trying to keep up with the demand. In less than ten years, half the cars on the road were Model T's in one form or another. They were converted into trucks, tractors, fire engines, ambulances, buses, taxicabs, and paddy wagons. Railroads added flanged wheels and used them as inspection cars.

The flivver was used to plow fields in the spring, pull a harvester in the fall, and churn butter in between. By jacking up the rear and attaching a drive belt, it could be used to pump water, grind feed,

press cider, generate electricity, or run a buzz saw.

The Model T wasn't without its faults. Because of the way the gears were set up, hills were usually attacked backwards, a maneuver which also helped preserve the front bearing. No two sounded alike, and no two ran alike. A new flivver began rattling immediately. For 98 cents you could buy a set of antirattlers for the engine, but all they did was give the rattle sort of a muffled sound. Antirattlers were also available for the doors and fenders.

Nearly everybody took to calling his Model T "Lizzie," after the Queen of Spades in the game of Hearts. With the Model T came Model T jokes, like these often heard at vaudeville shows:

Salesman: Can I sell you a speedometer?

Customer: I don't need one. At ten miles an hour my teeth rattle, at fifteen my fenders rattle, and when I'm going twenty the transmission falls out.

Then there was the farmer who stripped the tin roof off his barn and sent it to the Ford factory. A few days later he received a letter saying, "While your car was one of the worst wrecks we've ever seen, we will be able to make repairs and return it to you by the end of the week."

Ford didn't mind the jokes at all, even the bad ones, for every wisecrack was

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free publicity and kept him laughing all the way to the bank.

Through nearly two decades the Model T remained unchanged, except for minor improvements. But as the years passed, the flivver began to show her age more and more. By the middle 1920's other makes of cars in bright colors with smoothly function gearshifts and annual beauty treatments were catching on. For little more than a Model T, you could get a flashier, more comfortable Chevrolet. Ford saw the handwriting on the wall, and on May 26, 1927, after nineteen unrivaled years, the last Model T, number 15,007,033, rolled off the assembly line. Ford closed the plant, went into the designing room, and six months later came out with a new design, the Model A.

[Information adapted from *Ford's Fabulous Flivver* by Lyman M. Nash.]

Junk Man, Spare That Ford

By Ellen Andrus

Junk man, junk man, spare that
Ford,
Touch not its coat of tin...
For that's the same old flivver
That I sparked my Missus in.

My 13 children cut their teeth
Upon that steering wheel,

And so far that old heap of junk
A tenderness I feel.

My sons all took their honeymoons
In that old rusty car,
And so for over nineteen years
It's traveled near and far.

Its brass work was all polished up
When new in 1907;
It only took one tank of gas
'Till late in 1911.

It's been a good, dear friend of mine
Stood by thru thick and thin,
It's never failed to do its work
Tho' mostly made of tin.

The engine walls are all worn
through
But still 'twill never stop;
The radiator's full of holes
But never leaks a drop.

And when this dreary life is o'er,
The thought fair makes me dizzy;
How I will drive through heaven's
gate
With my family in that Lizzy.

Then I will take my harp of gold,

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Sit by that shining river;
Or take some Flapper angel out
Joy-riding in that flivver.

Now junk man, you have got it
straight,
You can have my farm or home;
But now vamoose right through that
gate

And leave that Ford alone!

[This original poem, written by Ellen Andrus, a Kingsford High School student from the Class of 1927, appeared in the 1927 *Kingsfordian*.]

COBB-SHINN COMIC FORD MODEL T POSTCARDS – Circa 1915-1920

Conrad “Cobb” X. Shinn (1887-1951) was born September 4, 1887, in Fillmore, Indiana, to Roscoe and Emma Pierce Shinn. He moved with his family to Indianapolis where he took art classes at the YMCA. In 1907 he enrolled in the John Heron School of Art and studied under William J. Forsyth and William Merle Allison between 1907 and 1909.

Shinn is primarily known as a postcard artist. He began producing cards as early as 1907. His most popular images included novelty cards, featuring Ford cars printed by the Commercial Colortype Company.

Shinn served in France during World War I, returning to Indianapolis in 1919. The retail demand for postcards was waning, partly due to a glut on the market, so he turned to other forms of commercial art. Shinn produced a comic strip for the World Colortype Company of St. Louis, Missouri, and illustrated children’s books for the Chicago publisher Albert Whitman. He also created books of clip art. These small drawings were used as fillers in newspapers and other publications.

Some of his postcards mimic a German accent or some refer to it as a Dutch accent.

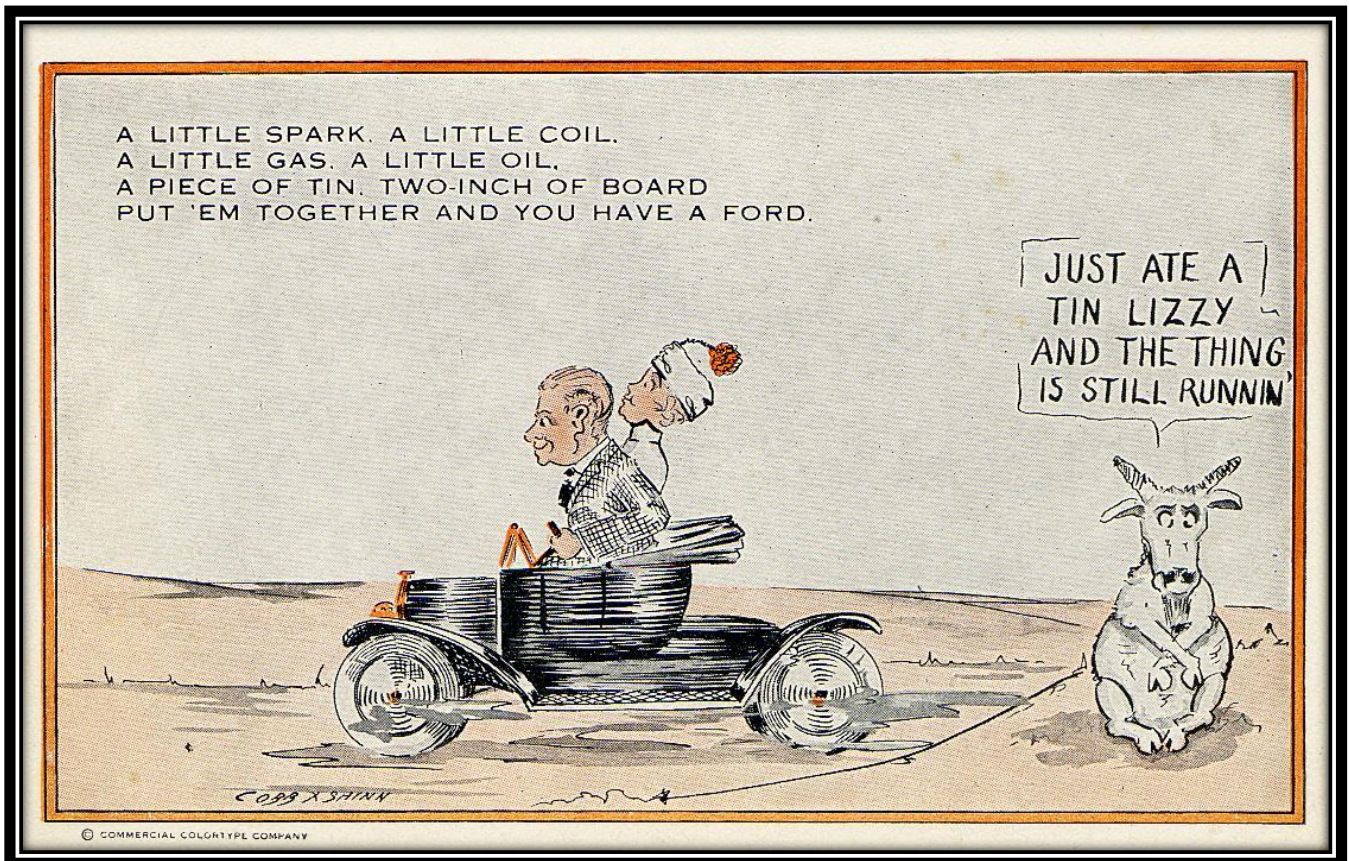
Shinn was the illustrator for Helen Bannerman’s famous book *The Story of Little Black Sambo*, published in 1945.

Conrad “Cobb” X. Shinn died in Greenwood, Indiana, in 1951.

The following postcards were mailed between 1915 and 1918, using a 1 cent postage stamp. Most of the postcards were mailed from the New England states: Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut. They are a part of the collection of William John Cummings.

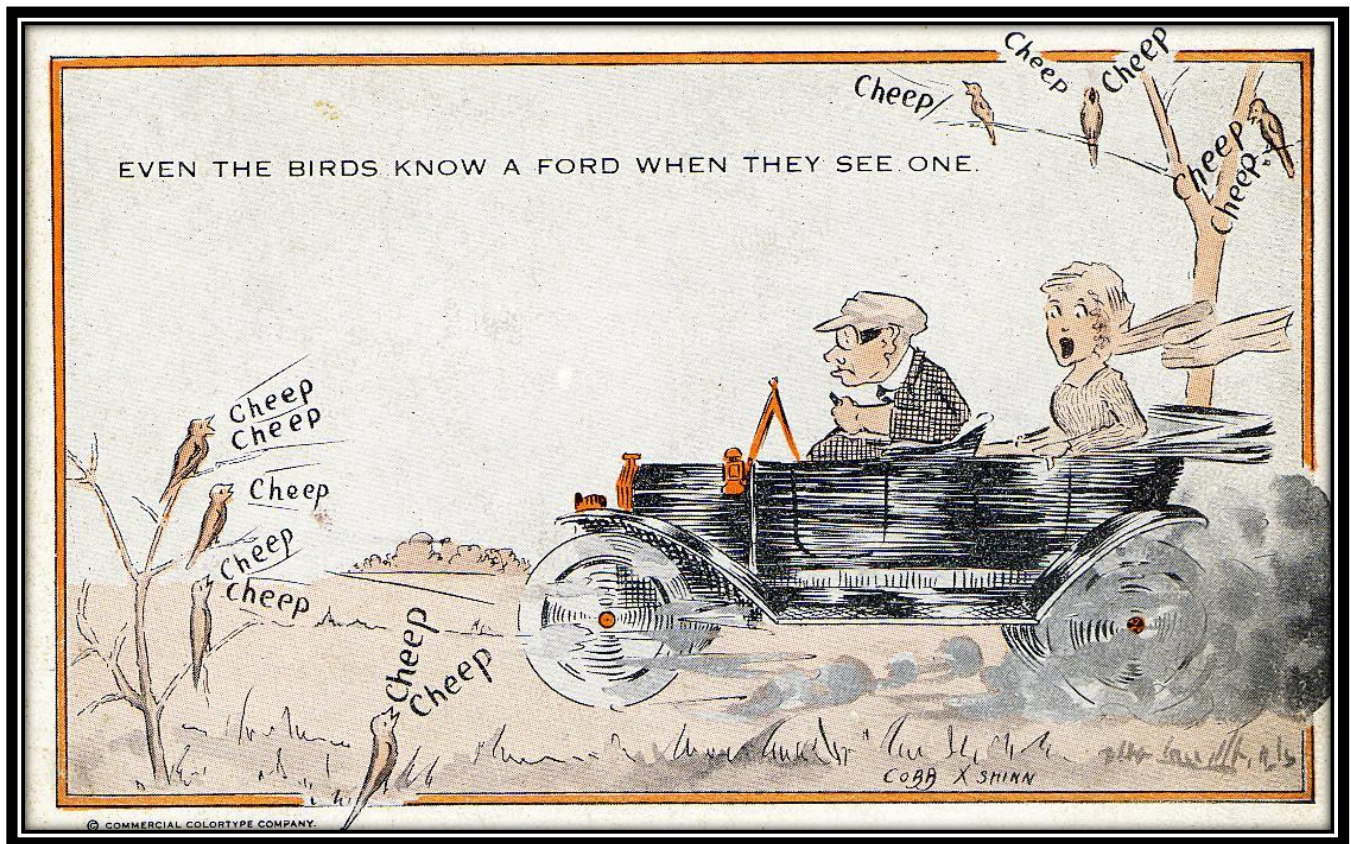
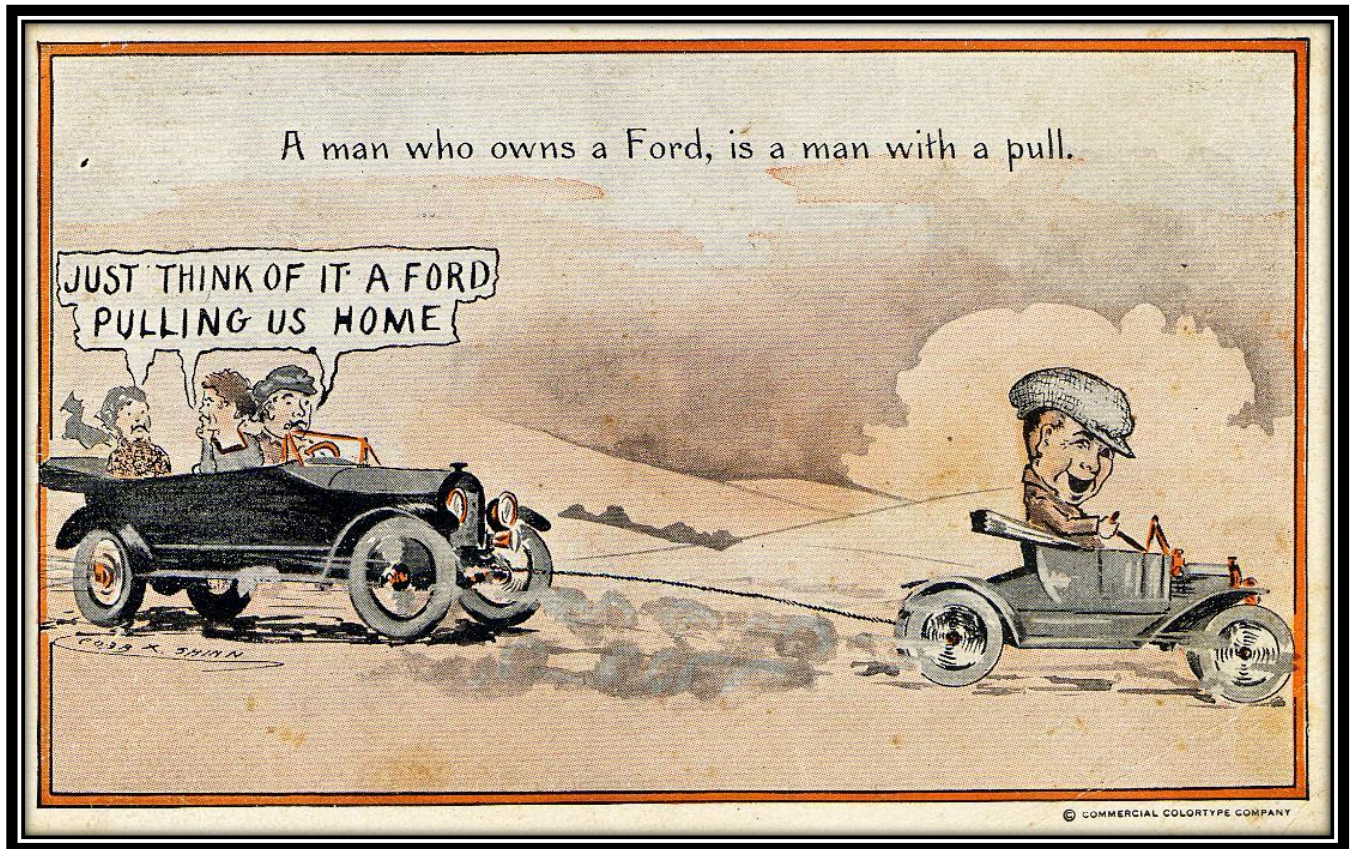
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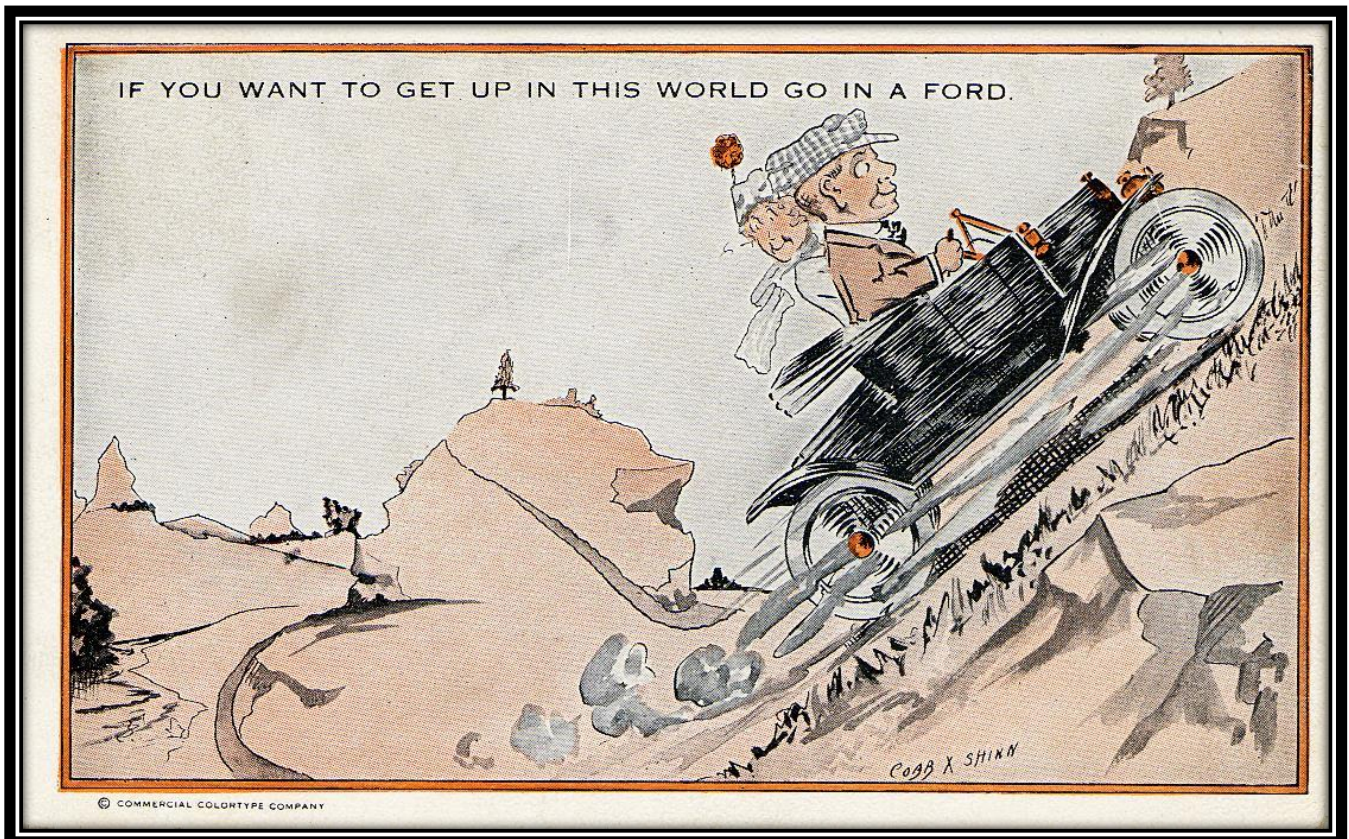
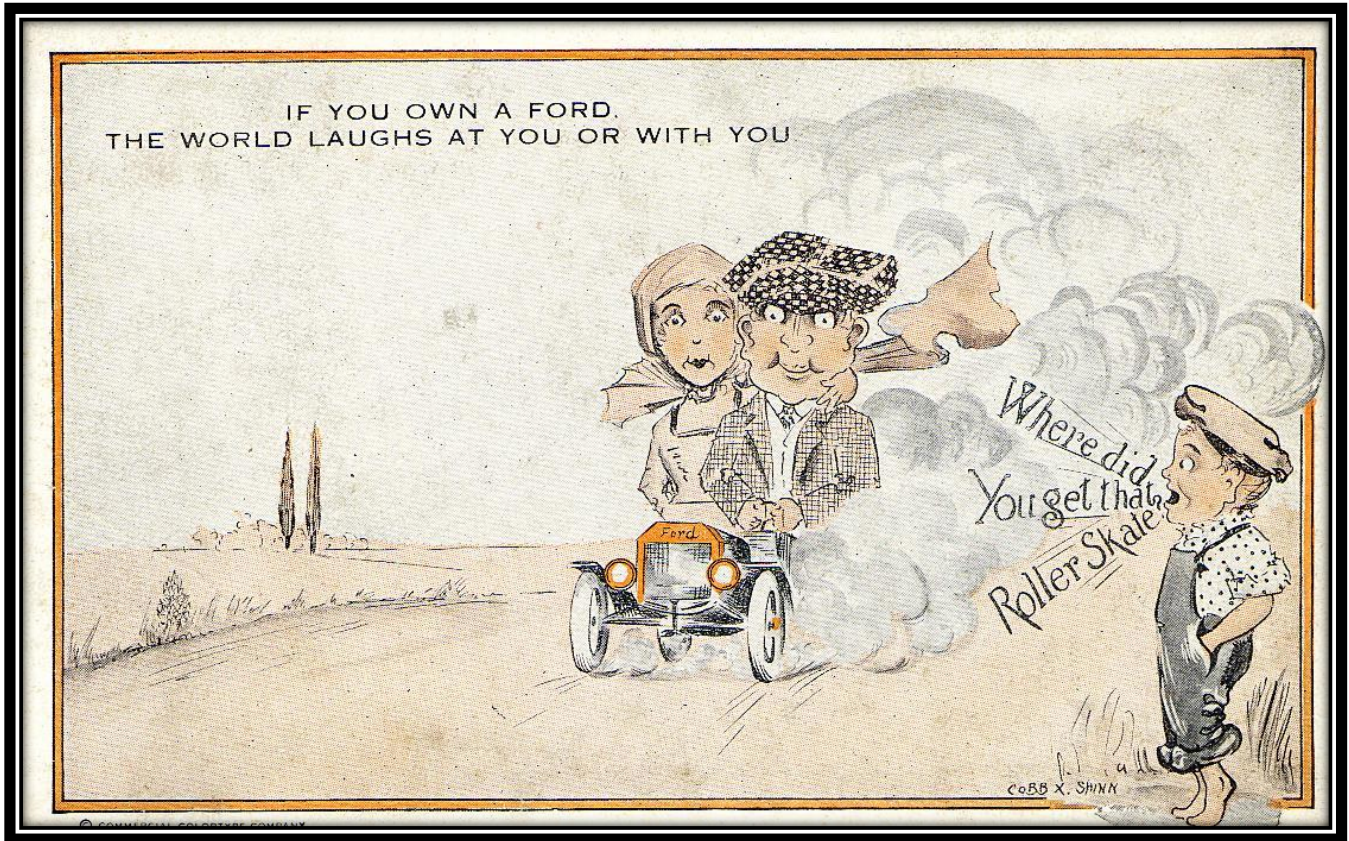
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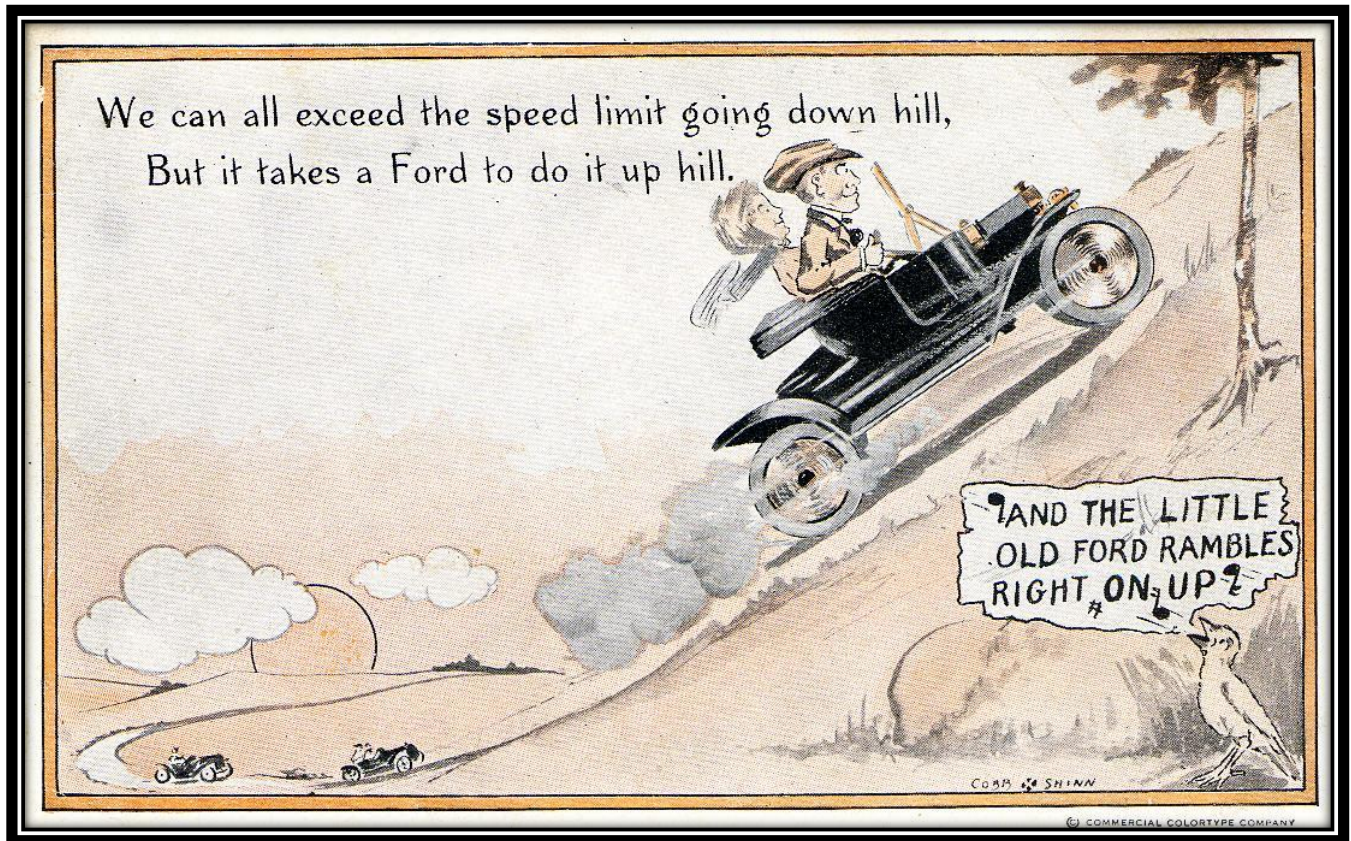
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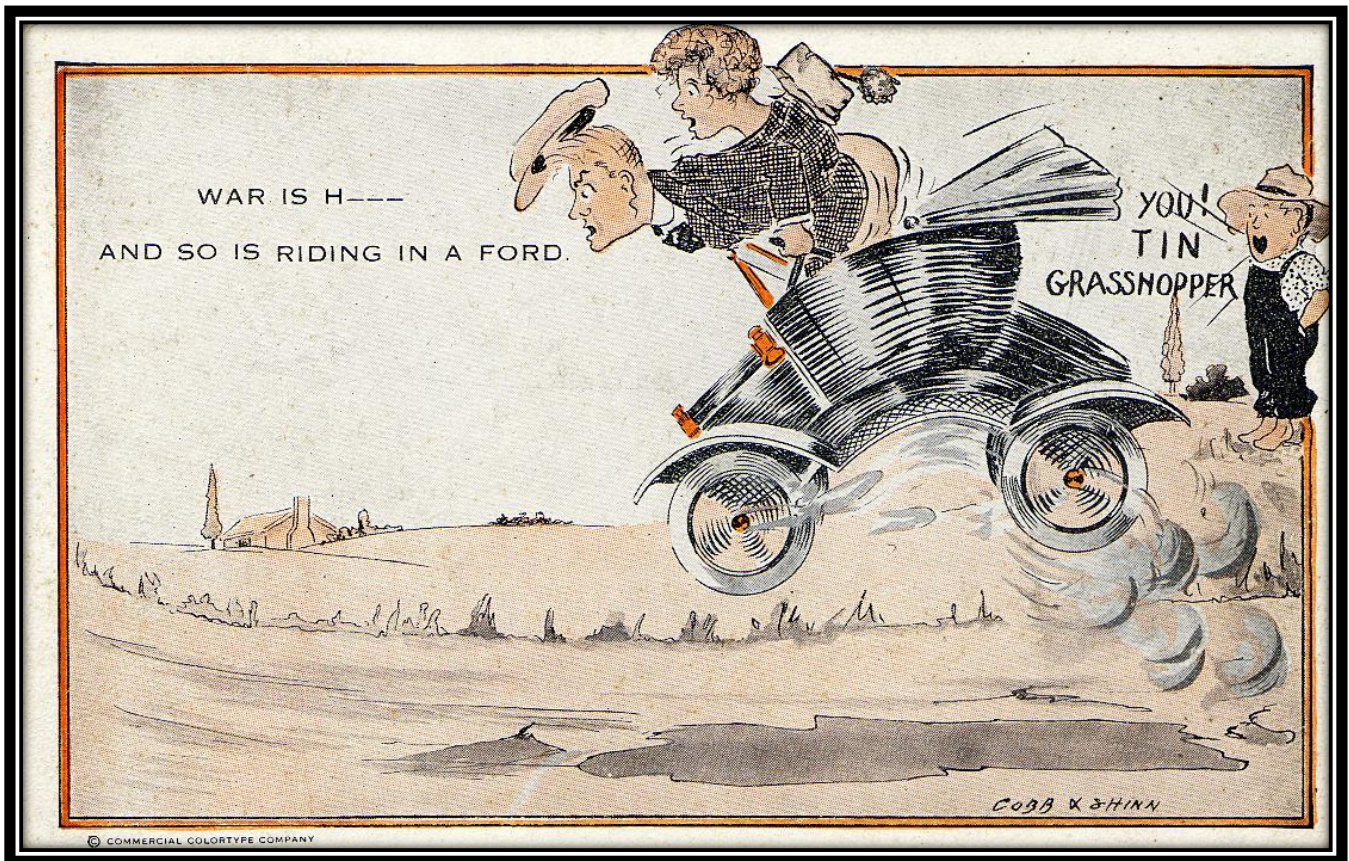
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