



CITY OF  
ST. CATHARINES

## Corporate Report

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**Report from** Recreation and Community Services, Programs and Cultural Services

**Date of Report:** August 21, 2013

**Date of Meeting:** September 9, 2013

**Report Number:** RCS-261-2013

**File:** 68.32.151

**Subject:** St. Catharines Museum Artifact Acquisition – 1905 Oldsmobile Touring Runabout

### Recommendation

That Council support the purchase of the 1905 Oldsmobile Touring Runabout at the purchase price of \$45,000 to add to the City's museum collection; and

That this purchase be funded from the St. Catharines Museum's Development Fund.  
FORTHWITH

### Summary

The St. Catharines Museum has been offered the opportunity to acquire a 1905 Oldsmobile Touring Runabout with a "French Front" made by Packard Electric Company Ltd. The engine and chassis of the vehicle were manufactured in St. Catharines at the Packard Electric factory which was located at the corner of Race and Geneva Streets in the former Neelon Mills building. This report will provide the details of the potential acquisition of this vehicle as an addition to the Museum's collection.

### Background

#### **There is a manufacturing connection to the City of St. Catharines**

The 1905 Oldsmobile Touring Runabout is representative of the automotive industry in St. Catharines. It is the first style of car built in the City and it was manufactured in the first plant in Canada designed and built specifically for automobile manufacturing. Packard Electric built this car on license from Oldsmobile for the distribution in Canada and the British Empire. Around the turn of the 20th Century, Oldsmobile was the first to establish the idea of a supplier and distribution network across the U.S and in foreign countries, to stem the illegal copying of patents and designs and to take advantage of the open commonwealth market.

The Packard Electric Co. re-located to St. Catharines in order to take advantage of the close proximity to water power, which was acquired from a mill wheel powered by water diverted from the Welland Canals; and inexpensive water transportation offered by that waterway. The company was also manufacturing and distributing motors for operating lock gate mechanisms on the Canal as well as incandescent bulbs and watt hour

meters for the general consumer. The Canadian branch of the electric company expanded rapidly to become the second largest firm of its type in the Dominion.

The Packard cars that were built in St. Catharines were not actually built by the Packard family. By 1900, the Packard brothers who had started the Packard company were no longer shareholders in Packard Electric and the speculation is that they sold their shares to finance their automobile interests. In 1904, the Olds Motor Works of Lansing, Michigan started on a program to build bigger, more modern cars for the 1905 season. As part of their expansion plans, they got together with Packard Electric of St. Catharines and made a deal for the Canadian firm to build Oldsmobiles under license. The St. Catharines-built cars that appeared in 1905 were mostly lightweight, one- and two- cylinder runabouts with a hood in front and optional removable rear tonneau. Prices began around \$800 and production was in the hundreds. Production began in 1905 and was discontinued before the end of 1907. At the same time, the American company continued to make larger and fancier cars. By 1907 it was decided it was no longer practical to build cars in St. Catharines. These cars were seen as too large and expensive and Canadian production was discontinued to adapt to the changing market. Oldsmobile's Canadian operation became solely a selling and servicing agency for imported vehicles, and headquarters were moved to Toronto.

In 1909, Packard Electric sold a part of its real estate to the REO Motor Car Company of Canada Ltd., and REO automobiles were manufactured in this plant until 1913. In 1912, REO expanded its production from 600 to 1200 units per annum. The St. Catharines Museum has a REO in its collection dating from 1912.

Oldsmobiles were not made again in Canada until 1920 when the newly founded General Motors of Canada began building them in Oshawa.

### **Provenance: the history of the artifact from time of manufacture to present**

There are limited details of the early history of this vehicle before 1970. The engine was found on a boat in Vancouver by Fred Bell who also gathered the chassis around the same time. The body and linkage parts were recreated. During the 1970's it was driven in several classic car tours. During the 1980's it was owned by Murray Gammon who operated a private classic car museum in Victoria, B.C. When he closed his private museum in 1989, it was sold to two more owners before coming to Ontario in the early 2000's. It was owned by one other person before coming into the possession by the current owner in 2007.

### **Significance**

This vehicle is extremely rare, the PECO Oldsmobile was produced for less than 2 years. Today only four are known to exist in the world (1 in New Zealand, 1 in the UK, and 1 in Pennsylvania, in addition to this vehicle). If American produced Oldsmobiles are included, this vehicle is one of two still in Canada – the other is in the collection of the Museum of Vancouver.

The automotive sector has been an important part of the image of St. Catharines that starts with this vehicle and carries on with REO and then McKinnon Industries Limited and eventually General Motors of Canada. Since 1940, General Motors has been one of the major employers in the community.

In addition to this, Packard Electric, which eventually became known as Ferranti-Packard, has been a major employer in the community and continues to operate as VA Tech Ferranti-Packard Transformers Ltd.

From a technological standpoint, this vehicle is a bridge between the oldest vehicles which were “horseless carriages” and the modern vehicle with the engine in front. The engine in the 1905 Oldsmobile is still under the front seat but the radiator and fuel tanks have been moved to the front of the vehicle to make it appear more modern and to compete with European styles at the time.



## **Report**

The acquisition of the 1905 Oldsmobile Touring Runabout vehicle would be a significant addition to the City's artifact collection. It is rare for the Museum to purchase artifacts for its collection, usually relying on donations of artifacts to fill in the historical record. In this case, the significance and rarity of this object make it unlikely that the Museum will ever find this same artifact through donation. For this reason, this report is recommending the purchase of this vehicle.

## **Funding available to purchase acquisition**

The St. Catharines Museum has a number of reserve funds which have accumulated through various fundraising initiatives prior to the Museum becoming a direct department of the City. Some of these funds have restrictions which preclude them from being used for general usage while others are available for any usage. The Museum has over \$57,000 in its Development Fund which is unrestricted and could be used to finance this acquisition.

The Museum has adequate funds in its Development Fund reserve account to fund this purchase. These funds have been specially set up and designated for special projects. Monies in these accounts come from various fundraising initiatives and donations.

These funds were within the previous Museum Board of Management's jurisdiction. The Museum Board designated these funds by motion, the motions were ratified by the Board, and were then approved by the City of St. Catharines prior to the project accounts being established. At this time as there is no longer a Museum Board of management, funds in these accounts are expended as projects are approved through the regular City approval process with the endorsement of the Museum Advisory Committee.

While some of this fund has been designated for specific projects, including artifact acquisition, a large portion of the fund is undesignated and could be used to fund the purchase of the vehicle, with the intention of renewing this fund as additional monies are raised.

In support of this purchase, the Museum Advisory Committee passed the following motion at its meeting of March 26, 2013: "That the funds for purchase of the 1905 Oldsmobile Touring Runabout be allocated from the Museum's Special Funds at the discretion of staff, in combination with fundraising and sponsorship efforts."

### **Proposed fundraising and sponsorship options to replenish reserve fund**

**Sponsorship:** Because of the unique nature of this acquisition, it is possible that a sponsor could be found to partially or fully offset the purchase of this vehicle. Should a corporate sponsor be secured, a sponsorship package should be developed to outline potential benefits, including public acknowledgement of the donation, photo shoot with the vehicle, opportunity to host the vehicle at their place of business as appropriate, invitation to special activities at the Museum and depending on the level of sponsorship, and membership advantages at the Museum.

**Donations:** There are three ways the Museum can gather donations to fund this acquisition - a donation box in-situ; a targeted solicitation of the Museum's membership; and fundraising events and activities targeted for this purchase. Should the purchase of the vehicle be approved, donations will be solicited in all these ways in order to recover the purchase price and replenish the Museum's Development Fund.

### **Financial Implications**

The vehicle is being offered to the St. Catharines Museum for the acquisition price of \$45,000. The Museum's Development fund currently has \$61,319.

The Museum has had the vehicle appraised by two independent appraisers to confirm the vehicle's value:

Autohelm/Mainway and Associates – appraised value of \$32,000-\$32,800  
Niagara Appraisal Services – appraised value of \$40,000-\$45,000

Additional Costs to acquire this artifact:

Exhibition Costs	\$5,000
Research Fees	\$500

Notwithstanding the above appraised values, the owner of the vehicle has indicated that his price is fixed and not negotiable.

### **Conclusion**

This vehicle is a very significant artifact in the history of the community. While it is not 100% authentic, in all aspects, it is representative of a major manufacturing sector in St. Catharines which has come to define the City. It is recommended that the Museum acquire this object for its collection at the asking price of \$45,000 using funds in the Museum's Development Reserve Fund.

### **Submitted by:**

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### **Prepared by:**

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### **Approved by:**

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