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Dodge Brothers exhibit on display at MBH

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

A **Meadow Brook Hall** exhibit highlighting auto industry pioneers John and Horace Dodge and the company they built, Dodge Brothers Motor Cars, is open to the public through September 30.

The exhibit, on display in the hall's Fountain Room, features historically significant photos, films, advertisements and documents dating back to the 1880's said Maura Overland, Meadow Brook Hall curator of collections.

"Some items went to Matilda Dodge Wilson after the death of John Dodge in 1920, and others were donated," Overland said. "Many items have never been viewed by the public. The silent film footage from 1915 is very special. One was filmed on Belle Isle and shows a simulation of Dodge vehicle performance in poor weather conditions. This footage contains what may be the first recorded crash test. The other film shows automobile production at the Hamtramck Assembly Plant."

John Dodge was born in Niles, Michigan, in 1864 and his younger brother, Horace, in 1868. They learned their mechanical skills from their father, Daniel R. Dodge, who operated a machine shop and foundry.

The brothers settled in Detroit in the late 1880's and in 1901 established Dodge Brothers, Inc., a bicycle manufacturing facility on Beaubien Street. Their first major involvement with the burgeoning automotive industry came in 1902 when Ransom E. Olds commissioned them to manufacture 3,000 transmissions for the Olds Motor Works. With their profits, John and Horace constructed a machine shop on Monroe Avenue and Hastings Street.

Soon afterwards, John and Horace completely converted their shop to manufacture automobile parts for Olds and the newly founded Ford Motor Company. In 1914, the brothers broke away from Olds and Ford and began production of the Dodge automobile. By 1917, the company had become the fourth-largest automobile manufacturer in the country.

The brothers were enjoying great success when they each contracted influenza in 1920. John died of pneumonia in January of that year, while Horace, who never fully regained his health, died that December.

The widows, Matilda Rausch Dodge and Anna Thompson Dodge, sold the company to a group of investors in 1925 for \$146 million. Matilda and her second husband, Alfred G. Wilson, established what would become Oakland University with their gifts of the 1,500-acre Meadow Brook estate and \$2 million in 1957.

Admission for the exhibit only is \$3 per person or \$4 on August 5 during the **Meadow Brook Hall Concours d'Elegance**. For more information on the exhibit or Meadow Brook Hall, call (248) 370-3140.

SUMMARY

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