

## Parkwood National Historic Site The McLaughlin Family

Robert Samuel McLaughlin was born in Enniskillen, Ontario Sept. 8, 1871. His father, Robert McLaughlin Sr., was a pioneer in the manufacture of vehicles in Canada. From a modest enterprise of carving ax handles, the senior McLaughlin began to build cutters and wagons in 1867, first in Tyrone, Ontario and later in the larger community of Enniskillen located a few miles further east. Demand quickly increased, and in 1876 the enterprise was moved to the expanding community of Oshawa, Ontario.



Initially, Sam McLaughlin was reluctant to enter the family business, and considered mercantile or legal careers. After completing high school at age sixteen, Sam apprenticed in his father's carriage works and became a journeyman three years later. At that time he left Oshawa to gain broader experience in the manufacture of vehicles, working in Watertown, Syracuse and Binghamton, New York.

Following his return home – and to mark his 21st birthday – Sam and older brother George were made partners in McLaughlin Carriage Works, which grew to become the largest carriage company in the British Empire. Sam was named the chief designer for all McLaughlin carriages and sleighs. By

this time, the family firm had achieved sales of over one million dollars per year, and had developed and patented the “fifth wheel” – a revolutionary turning mechanism which allowed the front wheels to turn independently from the chassis.

With the advent of the motorcar, Sam turned his interest to developing a McLaughlin line and began to tour U.S. production facilities. He and his brother George persuaded their father that the future of the firm lay in motorcar production. Robert Sr. was reluctant but finally agreed to proceed with development. In 1908, the McLaughlin Motor Car Company was established, with Sam as President.

The company failed in its attempt to produce a completely original motorcar, due to the illness of the chief engineer. The next production attempt was a winner: the McLaughlin-Buick began production in 1908. It was designed and built in Canada using an engine supplied by the American firm of Buick. The arrangement was brokered through an agreement with Sam’s friend William Durant, one of the original “architects” of General Motors. In 1915, production of Chevrolets began through a similar arrangement. The promise of a thriving “horseless” industry overtook the fading carriage works and the McLaughlin Carriage Company was sold that year.



With intense competition from many newcomers, it was “survival of the fittest” within the new auto industry. Even the legendary McLaughlin quality was not enough to guarantee long-term success. With the lucrative agreement with Buick drawing to a close, and with no immediate third generation to carry on the family firm, the McLaughlin’s decided to join forces with the new General Motors Corporation. This move would ensure the long-term success of the company and would increase chances that production would remain in Oshawa.

The McLaughlin Motor Car Company was sold in 1918 to facilitate the formation of the Canadian operation of General Motors of Canada. Sam was named President of the Canadian operation and Vice President of the parent corporation and his brother George was named Canadian Vice President. Sam remained President until 1945 when he stepped down and was named Chairman of the Board, a position that he held until his death in 1972. GM Canada is headquartered in Oshawa at 1908 Colonel Sam Drive.

