

# Ford's Folly

by Lynne Belluscio

If you haven't heard, Henry Ford will be arrested - - again - - in Le Roy on Friday, August 1, in front of LeRoy House a little after 4 in the afternoon. You may ask why we're reenacting this unusual event again. My response? "What else is there to do in Le Roy on August 1!"

In case you're not acquainted with this little known event, Henry Ford had been on vacation with Thomas Edison and Harvey Firestone and was in a hurry to make a boat from Buffalo late on August 1, 1922. His chauffeur, George Burns was at the wheel and riding in the back seat with Ford was Dr. R.D. McClure, chief surgeon at the Henry Ford Hospital.

It was a little after 3 p.m. when the car approached the East side of Le Roy and slowed down to the posted 15 mph speed limit. When they reached the Western edge of the village, they crossed the railroad tracks (where the railroad underpass is located now). Thinking that the tracks marked the edge of the village, George Burns began to accelerate - like the other vehicles in front of them. Then they discovered the sign that marked the edge of the village. This was to be their undoing.

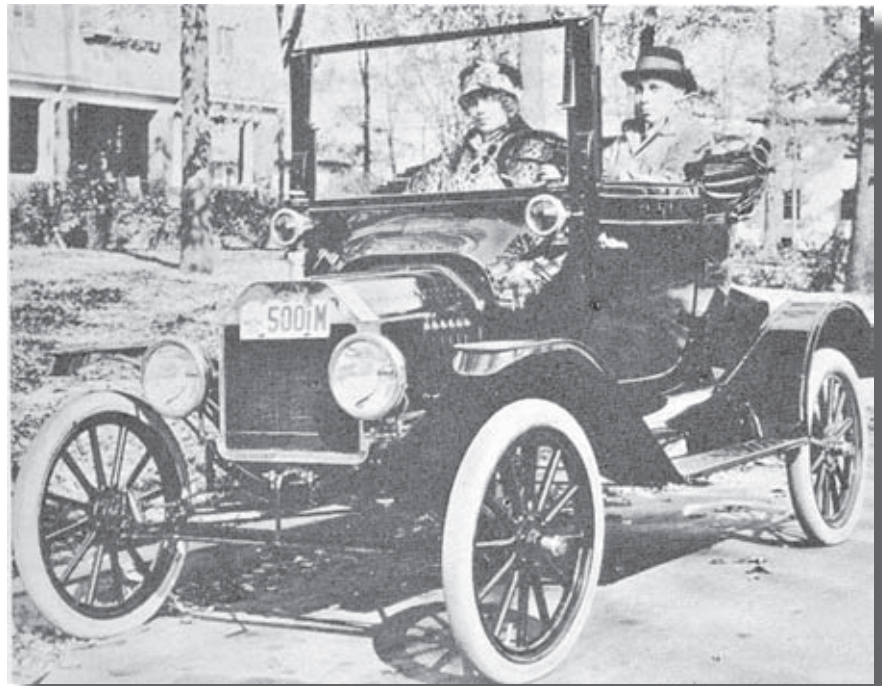
Police Officer Raymond W. Dampier on his motorcycle, caught up with the speeding Ford car and accused them of speeding 43 miles per hour. Officer Dampier insisted that Ford return to the village and appear before local Justice of the Peace, N.A. MacPherson. He set a hearing for August 5 and to make

sure that George Burns would return, he set bail at \$30. Ford paid the \$30.

What ensued after is recorded in the files at the Henry Ford Museum. Ford was furious. He wanted to fight the ticket. He posted signs at the entrance to Le Roy warning travelers that Le Roy was a speed trap. The people in Le Roy took the signs down and Ford had them put back

up. Ford's private secretary wrote letters to the Buffalo Automobile Club asking them to apply pressure on the folks in Le Roy. They even threatened to discourage commercial traffic through Le Roy and told the businessmen that the impact of the bad publicity would hurt business in Le Roy.

Ford, it was said, didn't get mad, but he did get even. Actually Ford had a fair complaint. Many out of town travelers were getting speeding tickets in Le Roy. Their names were posted in the newspaper each week. This was money in the pocket of the local government. For quite a while, the state collected the local speeding tickets, but that policy changed and small towns discovered a new source of income to



the displeasure of the motorists. Ford claimed that the speed limit signs were printed with numbers that were too small. That tactic didn't work. He claimed that the arresting officer was out of his jurisdiction. That didn't work.

Ford's persistence continued through June 1923. Then he was advised that things in Le Roy had gotten better. There were fewer arrests. The police weren't hiding behind fences and bushes waiting for speeding cars. The last report to Ford read: "I would say under the circumstances that Le Roy is acting very reasonable in this matter and needs no further attention at this time." And so the Henry Ford arrest in Le Roy became history - - that is until 2006 when Dr. Bruce Baker agreed to be Henry Ford and to be arrested in front of LeRoy House.

Last year, Genesee County Legislator, Jay Grasso took Henry's

part - (he still had to pay the fine). This year, it's still up in the air who will play Henry Ford, but Lt. Eugene Jankowski will ride into town on his vintage motorcycle, portraying Office Dampier. Justice Chuck Dusen will hear the case in Town Court, portraying Justice MacPherson. I hope Tom Stewart will be able to drive his Model T again this year.

So if you're not doing anything on Friday, August 1, stop by and bring your camera. You'll have a chance to photograph the arrest of Henry Ford. The descendents of arresting officer Dampier will be coming to Le Roy - some as far away as Florida. They now have a family reunion each year on August 1. I've made contact with some relatives of Justice of the Peace MacPherson and I think they might show up. Now all I have to do is find descendents of Henry Ford and George Burns.

**SHOW OFF**  
your corporate, club, or organization logo with any of these **COOL** promotional products...  
*with many more to choose from!*

**LP GRAPHICS**  
1 Church Street, Le Roy NY  
585-768-2201  
lpgraphics.net

**Main Street FITNESS**  
66 Main St., Le Roy  
Call (585) 414-3181

**SPECIAL: 3 Mo. Membership for \$69.99 - 78¢/day!**  
Website: [www.fitness-karate.com](http://www.fitness-karate.com)

**ALL MEMBERSHIPS INCLUDE ...**  
Pilates Class (3 X Week)  
Cardio Equipment • Free Weights • Circuit Training

**Credit Cards Accepted** *With Your Health Care Company, They May Reimburse You For The Cost!*

**KEY PAD ENTRY SYSTEM!**  
Allowing Access Between 5:00 am-11:00 pm