

AUTOMOBILES GIVE IMPETUS TO ROAD BUILDING

In May 1904, two Rock Hill brothers of prominence, W. Joseph and John T. Roddey, motored from Rock Hill to the county seat of Yorkville, each in his own automobile. The same day, another car bearing a "Gaffney City" couple stopped in Yorkville on its way to Charlotte.

The Yorkville Enquirer reported, "There were three automobiles in Yorkville yesterday, a circumstance involving considerable novelty to many of the citizens, as up to this time the visit of a single machine of this kind has been rare." (Apparently no one in Yorkville yet owned a car.)

The paper continued, "The owner of each of the automobiles treated quite a number of Yorkville people to short trips over town, and the unusual sight attracted lots of interest."

To get to Yorkville one had to travel on rough dirt roads. Worse, there was not a single bridge; every creek and branch had to be forded. The time it took the Roddey automobiles to travel the 15 miles between Rock Hill and Yorkville was not recorded but we know that a horse and carriage generally took about two and one half hours.

A year earlier, in May 1903, the Roddey brothers' father, Capt. W. Lyle Roddey, had led a "Good Roads" campaign in Rock Hill. Captain Roddey using the slogan, "Summer dust makes Winter Mud," persuaded Gov. D. C. Heyward and the senior U. S. senator, Benjamin R. Tillman, to come to Rock Hill for a large picnic and Good Roads rally in June.

Captain Roddey believed that if Rock Hill would see to it that all the major roads leading into Rock Hill within a 10-15 mile radius were "macadamized" (paved with crushed stone), then Rock Hill would monopolize the farm trade. West Main Street had been macadamized in 1891 but no outlying roads were paved.

The acquisition of stone for street paving was made possible when the town council voted to pay for stone as well as purchasing a mechanical stone crusher. The offer was attractive enough to cause farmers and contractors to dig up sufficient rock and bring it into town. Wagon scales showed that some wagons brought in as much 5,500 pounds at a load.

Fort Mill citizens not as concerned about street paving as they were about getting across the Catawba river in order to do business in the courthouse town of Yorkville. On March 11, 1897, J. W. Ardrey of Fort Mill, who was a member of the county bridge committee, voiced his frustration in a letter to the editor of The Yorkville Enquirer:

"The committee [Fort Mill members] left Yorkville Tuesday evening and lodged with a friend—a former Fort Millian—Tuesday night. They resumed their journey next morning, and when near the river—at Dinkins' ferry—met a gentleman who informed them that they could not cross the river, and while

debating their new dilemma, a wild mule belonging to the gentleman whom they had met, collided with their surrey, and demolished one of their wheels.

“ A part of the committee returned on foot to the ‘Magic City’ of Rock Hill, while the rest, thoroughly disgusted with their experience, walked to the river, crossed the railroad bridge, and then walked home. Those who returned to Rock Hill, deposited their horses in the livery stable, the surrey in the shop, and boarded the first train home, more satisfied than ever of the necessity of a bridge.”

Another impetus for road paving was the arrival of rural free delivery of U. S. mail. The U. S. government had some strict rules about the delivery of mail, including the requirement that all traffic give the mail carrier right of way at all times. The postal carriers were not required to ford streams. Their refusal to do so caused local farmers to get together and donate lumber and pay for the sawing of planks and bridge supports. The county agreed to furnish chain gang labor to construct bridges.