

STATUES



In 2012, Back to the Bricks unveiled the first of several commemorative statues of important automotive pioneers. Life-size bronze replicas of David Buick, William C. (Billy) Durant, Louis Chevrolet, and Albert Champion stand proudly in Pioneer Plaza in downtown Flint. Statues of Walter P. Chrysler and Charles W. Nash welcome visitors in the baggage claim area at Bishop Airport. A statue of Otto P. Graff stands at the corner of Court and Saginaw Street near the site of his early dealership. A bronze replica of Charles Stewart Mott, local philanthropist, will soon grace the campus of the college that bears his name. These statues, created by local artist Joe Rundell, celebrate key leaders in business, industry, and labor whose vision, ingenuity, and determination became an integral part of the heritage and culture of the "Vehicle City." The Statue Project plans to honor other historic figures from the automotive industry in the future.



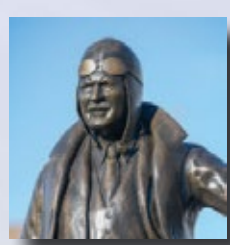
David Buick
September 17, 1854 – March 5, 1929

In 1903, Flint Wagon Works purchased Buick Motor Co. and moved it to Flint, where David Buick managed the new factory. By 1904, the first 37 production Buicks were built in Flint. Buick brought in Billy Durant in 1904, and car sales immediately took off. Over the next four years, Durant helped Buick become the nation's greatest producer of automobiles, which led to the founding of General Motors in 1908.



Durant William C. Durant (Billy)
December 8, 1861 – March 18, 1947

Under Durant and his successors, Flint became one of the world's leading centers of automobile manufacturing. Durant built the giant Flint Buick complex, which over decades, produced millions of Buicks and GM cars, as well as World War I aircraft engines and huge amounts of World War II military hardware. By the 1980's, GM employment in the Flint area totaled 80,000 and the local GM payroll topped \$2 billion in part to Durant's automotive innovations.



Louis Chevrolet
December 25, 1878 – June 6, 1941

Louis Chevrolet was enlisted in 1911 by Billy Durant to help create the Chevrolet Motor Company. While Louis wanted larger, more luxurious cars, Durant was more interested in a smaller vehicle to compete with Ford's Model T. Chevrolet ultimately sold his shares of the company to Durant and pursued other automotive interests, including racing circuits. Chevrolet was inducted into the Automotive Hall of Fame in 1968, the International Motorsports Hall of Fame in 1992, National Sprint Car Hall of Fame in 1990 and the Motorsports Hall of Fame of America in 1995.



Albert Champion
April 4, 1878 – October 26, 1927

Albert Champion, whose initials form the "AC" in the AC Spark Plug and AC Delco brands and who earlier gave his name to rival Champion spark plugs, was a flamboyant figure in the early automotive industry. Champion became known for winning major bicycle races in his Paris, France, his home city in the 1890s. In the early 1900s, he earned fame in Europe and the United States by setting records in international bicycle and motorcycle races and then turning to automobile racing. After almost losing a leg in a car racing accident, Champion began making spark plugs and other auto equipment.

In 1905, he was in Boston making Champion brand spark plugs. During a dispute with his backers, he met William "Billy" Durant, then in charge of Buick Motor Company in Flint. Durant, setting up a Buick showroom in Boston, told Champion he would finance a new company if Champion could make high quality but lower-priced spark plugs for Buick. Champion went to Flint where Durant, who had just created General Motors, organized Champion Ignition Company Oct. 26, 1908, awarding Albert a quarter interest and providing space at Buick for its operations. Champion Ignition was soon renamed AC Spark Plug Company to avoid a legal issue with Albert's first company, Champion Spark Plug. After Charles Lindbergh landed in Paris to complete his historic solo transatlantic flight May 21, 1927, he gave AC this endorsement: "AC plugs functioned perfectly during entire flight."

During a visit to Paris months later, Champion died at age 49, allegedly the result of an assault. Back to the Bricks is pleased to give the community these gifts to recognize these Auto Pioneers and provide the opportunity to share their entrepreneurial spirit. We look forward to dedicating other statues of other auto pioneers in the future.



Charles W. Nash
January 28, 1864 – June 6, 1948

Nash rose from child laborer to general manager of Flint's booming Durant-Dort Carriage Company. Born in DeKalb County, Illinois, when Nash was six his parents separated and he was sent to work on a farm, near Flint. After six years of farm labor, he found other work.

Durant noticed Nash, working in a grocery store, and started him as an upholstery stuffer. Impressed with Nash's work, Dallas Dort, Durant's partner, promoted Nash a number of times. Under Nash's leadership, including to the position of plant superintendent and vice president and general manager of the carriage company, Durant-Dort Carriage Company became worlds, largest producer of Road Carts and Carriages.

Meanwhile, Durant lost control of General Motors. Although no longer in control but still on the GM board – Durant urged the bankers to put Nash in charge of Buick. The bankers then elected Nash president of General Motors in 1912.



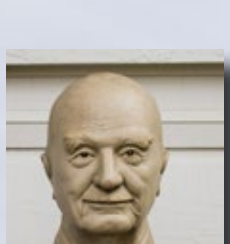
Walter P. Chrysler
April 2, 1875 – August 18, 1940

Long before he founded Chrysler, Walter P. Chrysler was a leader in Flint's burgeoning auto industry. In 1925, Chrysler formed Chrysler Corporation and was named "Man of the Year" by Time Magazine. He also personally financed the spectacular, and then world's tallest building, 77-story Chrysler Building in New York in 1931.



Otto P. Graff
March 11, 1880 - January 26, 1967

Otto P. Graff was the Genesee County Treasurer when he received a loan from Citizens Bank and opened a Ford dealership in Flint in 1914. He sold over 150 cars that first year and the business grew to selling more than 2,000 cars a year. By 1927, Otto P. Graff, Inc. was selling Lincoln-Mercury vehicles and Fordson tractors in addition to Ford automobiles. By 1950, the dealership and service facilities occupied most of the Block across Saginaw Street from the Genesee County Courthouse.



Charles Stewart Mott
June 2, 1875 - February 18, 1973

After earning a degree in engineering, C.S. Mott ran the family business, the Weston-Mott Co., making wheels, hubs, and axles for bicycles and carriages. In 1907, C.S. Mott moved his family and his company from New York to Flint at the urging of Billy Durant. Weston-Mott later merged with the Buick Motor Company, making Mott the original U.S. partner in the creation of the General Motors Corporation. He served on the GM Board of Directors for 60 years from 1913 until his death in 1973. He also served two terms as Mayor of the City of Flint. Charles Stewart Mott, automotive pioneer, well-known philanthropist and Flint's most generous benefactor, established the Mott Foundation in 1926 which has been instrumental in funding a host of medical, educational, and charitable causes through the years.