



In the foreground is author Stephen Gee, and seated next to him is author Darryl Holter.

Photo courtesy of Gary Leonard

Notes From the Archive

HISTORY BOOK LAUNCH SPECIAL ISSUE, MAY 2023

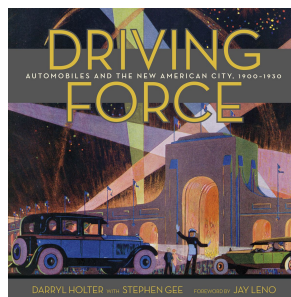
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Driving Force: Automobiles and the New American City, 1900-1930

by Darryl Holter with Stephen Gee

As the month of December in 2017 was winding down, Darryl Holter, historian and auto dealership owner, visited the Seaver Center to gauge an understanding of the primary sources available to support his research project exploring how the retail car industry grew and thrived in Los Angeles.

From the fourth day of the new year Darryl began pouring through the [Ralph Hamlin](#) manuscript collection. Other significant collections relied upon in the ensuing years include the [Stutz Automobile Scrapbook](#), the [Automotive Literature Collection](#), the [General Photo File Collection](#), the [Ralph Hamlin Photograph Collection](#), the [Greater Los Angeles New Car Dealers Association Historical Records](#), scrapbooks of Cadillac dealer Don Lee, numerous reference books and extensive print runs of the automobile periodicals *Motor West* and *Touring Topics*.



The Book Launches at the Vernon Collection Center

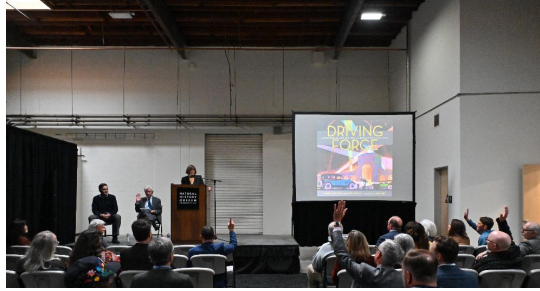
Angel City Press set the book for publication on May 9th, and NHMLAC's new Vernon Collection Center became the fitting venue for the book launch celebration. Guests enjoyed a cocktail reception amid an industrial landscape where lively conversations were briefly interrupted by the occasional whiz across the street by a Metrolink commuter rail line or a freight train.

Soon everyone found seats in the presentation space, and NHMLAC President and Director Lori Bettison-Varga provided opening remarks. Authors Darryl Holter and Stephen Gee each took their turn to engage the audience with serious, curious and entertaining facts alongside historic imagery.

Darryl Holter has written on Woody Guthrie in Los Angeles, 1937-1941, as well as several works on labor history. Stephen Gee's work includes the seminal 2013 *Iconic Vision: John Parkinson, Architect of Los Angeles*, followed

by several other books relating to architecture and the 2018 documentary film on Parkinson.

Guests in attendance included professionals in the field of History: Angel City Press publishers Paddy Calistro and Scott McAuley, Victoria Bernal, Harry Chandler, Kim Cooper, William Estrada, Francis French, Paul Greenstein, Leslie Mark Kendall, Gary Leonard, Merry Ovnick, Christina Rice, Richard Schave, Carole Shammass, and Morgan Yates.



Lori Bettison-Varga at the podium queries the audience about their last visit to the museum. Photo courtesy of Gary Leonard

Much emphasis during the talk was placed on Ralph Hamlin, an important figure in the growth of automobiles in the city. Hamlin's association with the museum stems back to 1930. When the Hall of Transportation opened in 1944, his 1908 Franklin car was among those on display.

The audience viewed an 11-minute television segment from 1967 of KNXT's *Ralph Story's Los Angeles* featuring an octogenarian Hamlin at home proudly showing off his car collection and taking a rear-view mirror look at his long and successful career.



Hamlin pictured in 1907 behind the wheel.

GPF.5944 General Photo File



Author Stephen Gee humorously describes Hamlin's trip to Egypt during the King Tut mania. Photo courtesy of Gary Leonard

Cars on Display

A key attraction of the event was a display of ten cars from the History Department's automobile collection. Collections Manager for Material Culture, Beth Werling, expertly imparted her knowledge of each vehicle's historical significance as she conducted group tours.



On view is the Raymond Loewy BMW 507 built in 1957.
Photo courtesy of John Cahoon



Shown is the 1904 Franklin Roadster, donated in 1975 by the estate of dealer Ralph Hamlin. Photo courtesy of Gary Leonard



The three vehicles pictured are the 1902 Oldsmobile Runabout with a Curved Dash, the 1912 Franklin Model D Roadster, and the 1897 Anthony Electric Runabout (a replica built by Earle C. Anthony around 1920).
Photo courtesy of Brent Riggs



Dr. William Estrada, Curator and Chair, History Department, with author Darryl Holter. Photo courtesy of Betty Uyeda



John Cahoon of the Seaver Center, with Angel City Press publishers Scott McAuley and Paddy Calistro. Paddy and Scott continually cook up new publishing projects with at least three on the front burners and a fourth on simmer. Photo courtesy of Betty Uyeda

Acknowledgements

Collections Manager Beth Werling is the pillar and backbone of the History Department's three-dimensional collections of which most reside at Vernon. Beth had the gargantuan task of preparing the center for the special evening -- from moving artifacts and cars around the storage space - - to transforming a work office into the focal point of the book signing.

Thank you to Paul Bessire, Chief Advancement Officer, for arranging the festive event. The 100 plus guests enjoyed the night's activities seamlessly because of the work of our Major Gifts colleagues, Edward Lin, Director; Alyssa Arredondo and Bridget Altman. JaLynne Farrar from our Special Events team handled the event logistics.

Much appreciation goes out to guest and photojournalist, Gary Leonard, for documenting the event. Photographs in this newsletter issue are courtesy of Gary except as noted.



Alyssa Arredondo, Major Gifts Coordinator, and Bridget Altman, Major Gifts Officer. Photo courtesy of Gary Leonard



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The collections are a part of the History Department of the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. The Seaver Center opened in 1986 through a generous grant from the Seaver Institute.

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