

# One Hundred Years Ago...

A mysterious fireball exploded over Tunguska in Siberia on June 10, 1908. Seismic shocks were recorded as far away as Washington, D. C. The heat set woodlands on fire and the black rain that followed caused a scabby disease on reindeer herds. Russian scientists did not enter the remote area until 1927 and found no meteorite fragments or other explanation for the phenomenon. It was later speculated by some people that the event was an explosion of a nuclear-powered alien spacecraft.

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Tea bags, small hand-sewn muslin envelopes, were introduced by Thomas Sullivan, a New York tea and coffee wholesaler. The convenience of pouring hot water over the bag to make the beverage caught on and a machine was soon invented to satisfy the demand.

The Boy Scouts of Britain was founded by Robert Smyth Baden-Powell. Following the international scouting movement, the Boy Scouts of America was formed two years later.

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The Seventeenth Amendment

to the U. S. Constitution was ratified. It provided for the direct election of Senators.

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America was still a rural society. Half of all Americans lived on farms or in towns with less than 2500 residents. There were 6 million farms in the country.

By 1908, there were 200,000 cars on the road from a mere 8,000 in 1900. There were at least 24 companies producing motorcars and production reaches 63,500 in 1908. Less than two percent of farm families owned an auto.

Henry Ford introduced his Model T on August 12. The \$850 "flivver" outsold all other automobiles, although it took the average American more than 4600 hours to earn the sticker price. It had a wooden body on a steel frame powered by a four cylinder, 20 horsepower gasoline engine. A pickup truck model for farmers was soon on the way. By the end of the Ts production in 1927 (followed by the Model A), almost 17 million were sold internationally. Harvey Firestone sold Ford tires for the Model T and his company rode the wave, too.

W. C. Durant, who owned Buick Motor Co., bought Olds Motor Vehicle Co. and created the General Motors Corporation.



1908 Ford dealership. Courtesy of Jan and Terry Primas.

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Max Kiss, who came to this country from Hungary at the age of 15 and penniless, became a pharmacist. Using Bayer Co.'s new laxative phenolphthalein, Kiss, at the age of 25, founded the Ex-Lax Company.

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Orville Wright made the first one hour airplane flight. It was also the first flight with a passenger. The flight ended in a crash, killing the passenger, who also became the first airplane crash victim.

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Philadelphia observed the first Mother's Day.

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General Electric introduced the first successful electric toaster. With a porcelain base, wire retainers held the bread slice near bare electric coils. It sold for \$1.45 but only 10 percent of American homes had electricity.

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President Theodore Roosevelt created Grand Canyon National Monument under the 1906 Antiquities Act to protect the

canyon from land speculators.

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Richard Sears retired as president of Sears-Roebuck Co. in 1908. Sears started his company in 1886, originally selling watches to supplement his small income as a railway station agent. In 1896, Sears published its first large general catalog and tapped into a huge, primarily rural, market. Goods at the general store were relatively expensive, going through several hands before they reached the customer, resulting sometimes in a 100 percent markup from wholesale. Sears not only cut out the middlemen but began manufactur-

ing many of its products, including buggies, and sold them "factory direct." The catalog items were well described and became known as quality merchandise. This gave customers confidence to buy from a book.

By 1908, the 1300 page catalog offered everything

from cradles to marble tombstones. It was also the year that the company began selling Sears Modern Homes-mail order houses. The Post Office Department's

innovations of Rural Free Delivery and Parcel

Post aided the mail order business and likewise added pressure for more RFD routes. Sears' new mail order plant

(1906) in Chicago, with 3 million square feet of floor space, was the largest business building in the world.

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The Chicago Cubs won the World Series - for the last time.

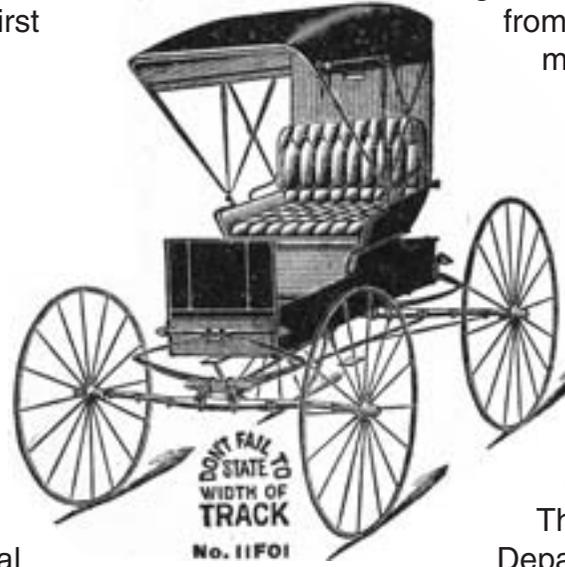
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Statistics

The average life expectancy: 47  
 Homes with bathtubs: 14%  
 Homes with a telephone: 8%  
 Tallest structure: Eiffel Tower  
 Average wage in U.S.: 22 cents per hour, \$200-\$400 per year  
 More than 95 percent of all births took place at home  
 Price of sugar: four cents/lb  
 Eggs: 14 cents a dozen  
 Coffee: 15 cents a pound  
 Population of Las Vegas: 30  
 Number of states: 45  
 High school graduates: 6 %

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In addition to the ratification of the Seventeenth Amendment mentioned earlier, this year also saw the ratification of the Sixteenth Amendment, which authorized the Federal government to collect an income tax.



Sears-Roebuck \$29.95 buggy

Bowles Aquarium

King Auto Glass