



Finding Aid for

**COLLECTION ON BARNEY OLDFIELD, 1895-1949**

**Accession 2005.108**

Finding Aid Republished: September 2013



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## OVERVIEW

REPOSITORY: Benson Ford Research Center  
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ACCESSION NUMBER: 2005.108

CREATOR: Benson Ford Research Center

TITLE: Collection on Barney Oldfield

INCLUSIVE DATES: 1895-1949

QUANTITY: 1 oversize box

LANGUAGE: The materials are in English

ABSTRACT: Barney Oldfield was American racing's first "superstar" documented in this collection through photographs, tickets, and advertisements.

## ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

- ACCESS RESTRICTIONS:** The collection is open for research.
- COPYRIGHT:** Copyright has been transferred to The Henry Ford by the donor. Copyright for some items in the collection may still be held by their respective creator(s).
- ACQUISITION:** Acquired, 2005.
- PREFERRED CITATION:** Item, folder, box, accession 2005.108, Collection on Barney Oldfield, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford
- PROCESSING INFORMATION:** Collection processed by Benson Ford Research Center staff, February 2006.
- DESCRIPTION INFORMATION:** Original collection inventory list prepared by Benson Ford Research Center staff, April 2011, and published in September 2013.
- Finding aid written by Pete Kalinski, May, 2013, and initially published in September 2013.
- Revised to correct date range in Scope Note and formatting of Arrangement note. Republished September 2013.
- Finding aid prepared using Describing Archives: A Content Standard (DACS) and local guidelines.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

"You know me, Barney Oldfield," was the classic catch phrase of one of America's earliest celebrity sports figures and during the nascent period of the automobile most every American knew Barney Oldfield. As a teenager, Oldfield worked odd jobs in Toledo earning money to buy his own bicycle to ride in local and regional road and endurance races barnstorming with bicycle racing teams throughout the Midwest.

During the winter of 1899, Oldfield reconnected with an old racing companion, Tom Cooper, who had just returned from England with a motorized two-wheeler (an early motorcycle). Cooper was going to demonstrate the vehicle at a race in Grosse Point, Michigan in October 1901 and asked Oldfield to come along. Cooper and Oldfield were a preliminary exhibition before the main event: a race between local "chauffeur," Henry Ford, and the most well-known automobile manufacturer of the day, Alexander Winton. After touring western states with the motorized bicycle, Oldfield returned to Detroit in the fall of 1902 at the request of Tom Cooper to drive a racecar. "The Race" between Cooper's 999, recently purchased from Henry Ford and driven by Oldfield, and Alexander Winton's "Bullet" captured the imaginations of not only Detroit's automotive elite, but the mass of people as well. When Oldfield piloted the 999 to victory over Winton's sputtering Bullet, the news spread like wildfire across Detroit, the Midwest, and eventually the nation.

Over the next 15 years, Barney Oldfield set multiple world speed records and gained notoriety wherever he went. After a brief stint driving for Winton, Oldfield took the wheel of the Peerless "Green Dragon" and established himself as America's premier driver claiming world records in the 1, 9, 10, 25, and 50-mile speed categories. In addition to entering 20 to 30 races and exhibitions a year, Oldfield also found time to appear on Broadway and in silent movies. Oldfield flaunted the conventions of his time both on and off the track and was sanctioned by the American Automobile Association for several years. In order to keep racing, Oldfield and his manager set up exhibitions at county and state fairs across the country holding, 3-heat matches against a traveling stable of paid drivers. Oldfield padded his reputation by adding an element of drama to these events by losing the first match, barely winning the second, and after theatrical tweaking and cajoling of his engine, winning the third match.

Barney Oldfield retired from competitive racing in 1918 although in typical Oldfield fashion, his final race was under suspension by the AAA. Oldfield continued to keep himself at the fore of America's sports entertainment culture with ceremonial "referee" jobs at various races and rubbing elbows with American movie, stage and music stars. Barney Oldfield's last public appearance was at the May 1946 Golden Jubilee of the Automobile Industry held in Detroit. Oldfield shared the main speaker's table with automotive icons including Henry Ford, Ransom Olds, and Frank Duryea and accepted a "trophy of progress" for his role in automotive history. Barney Oldfield passed away in October, 1946.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The Collection on Barney Oldfield consists of photographic prints, advertisements, postcards, promotional brochures, and event tickets highlighting various races and exhibitions in which Barney Oldfield participated. **The Photographic Prints series, circa 1902-1936**, contains photographic prints of Barney posing in various race cars or with other drivers. **The Printed Material series, circa 1895-1949**, consists of printed matter related to races and exhibitions. The series includes advertisements, clippings, correspondence and event tickets. Researchers should note that individual object identification numbers are included in the inventory below. These items are available for viewing at <http://collections.thehenryford.org/index.aspx>.

## ARRANGEMENT

The Collection on Barney Oldfield consists of two series:

- Photographic Prints series, circa 1902-1936
- Printed Material series, circa 1895-1949

## SUBJECT TERMS

### Names, Personal and Corporate

Oldfield, Barney (Berna Eli), 1878-1946

King, Anita

### Subjects

Automobile racing

Automobiles, Racing--Speed records

Bicycle racing

Endorsements in advertising

Land speed record car

### Genre and Form

Photographs

Advertisements

Postcards

## CONTAINER LIST

**Box no.**                      **Description**

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### Box 1

#### PHOTOGRAPHIC PRINTS

- Barney Oldfield and Lincoln Beachy Racing, Columbus, Ohio, 1914 (Object ID 2005.108.1)
- Anita King with Barney Oldfield, Receiving Trophy at Ascot Speedway, Los Angeles, California, 1917 (Object ID 2005.108.2)
- Anita King with Barney Oldfield at Ascot Speedway, Los Angeles, California, 1917 (Object ID 2005.108.3)
- Anita King Introducing Barney Oldfield at Ascot Speedway, Los Angeles, California, 1917 (Object ID 2005.108.4)
- Barney Oldfield and Douglas Fairbanks at Ascot Speedway, Los Angeles, California, 1917 (Object ID 2005.108.5)
- Lincoln Beachy Lighting Barney Oldfield's Cigar, 1914 (Object ID 2005.108.7)
- Barney Oldfield and Cyclist on a Motorized Tandem Orient Bicycle, circa 1902 (Object ID 2005.108.10)
- Barney Oldfield and the Peerless "Green Dragon" Racecar, circa 1905 (Object ID 2005.108.14)
- Barney Oldfield Behind the Wheel of the Peerless "Green Dragon" Racecar, circa 1905 (Object ID 2005.108.15)
- Barney Oldfield On the Track, Driving the Peerless "Green Dragon" Racecar, circa 1905 (Object ID 2005.108.16)
- Barney Oldfield in "Lightning Benz" next to Ralph DePalma in a Fiat, Daytona Beach, Florida, March 16, 1910 (Object ID 2005.108.18)
- Barney Oldfield Driving the "Blitzen Benz" Car on a Racetrack, 1910 (Object ID 2005.108.21)
- Barney Oldfield Greeting a "Safety First" Dog, New Jersey, 1936 (Object ID 2005.108.22)
- Barney Oldfield and Advertisement Outside a Chrysler Dealership, circa 1936 (Object ID 2005.108.23)

#### PRINTED MATERIAL

- Barney Oldfield Advertisement for Plymouth Olite Springs, circa 1935 (Object ID 2005.108.24)
- Life Membership Certificate for Barney Oldfield from the Berkeley Traffic Safety Commission, Ltd., California, April 1937 (Object ID 2005.108.26)
- Advertisement of Barney Oldfield Riding a Bicycle, 1896 (Object ID 2005.108.11)
- Letter to Barney Oldfield Requesting Biographical Information, 1943 (Object ID 2005.108.12)
- Letter from Barney Oldfield with Biographical Information, 1943 (Object ID 2005.108.13)
- Letter to Barney Oldfield from R. D. Merrill, January 18, 1934 (Object ID 2005.108.17)

**Box 1 continued:**

- Periodical, 'Speed Age The Motor Racing Magazine', March, 1949 (Object ID 2005.108.8)
- Barney Oldfield in "Lightning Benz", Daytona Beach, Florida, March 16, 1910 (Object ID 2005.108.19)
- Barney Oldfield and Former Boxing Champion Jim Jeffries in "Blitzen Benz", 1910 (Object ID 2005.108.20)
- Barney Oldfield, My Prayer, a Poem by E. B. Carson circa 1935 (Object ID 2005.108.27)
- Barney Oldfield Advertising Postcard for Plymouth Automobiles, circa 1935 (Object ID 2005.108.25)
- Radio Scripts Featuring Barney Oldfield, circa 1935 (Object ID 2005.108.28)
- Ticket for the Beachey vs. Oldfield Racing Competition, "Championship of the Universe," Oakland, California, 1914 (Object ID 2005.108.6)
- Barney Oldfield Ticket to Ride on Bicycle Track, Toledo Exposition Grounds, Toledo, Ohio, 1895 (Object ID 2005.108.9)