The E-M-F Company

The Story of Automotive Pioneers
Barney Everitt, William Metzger, and Walter Flanders

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I became fascinated with the accomplishments of Messrs. Everitt, Metzger, and Flanders several years ago while researching the early days of the auto industry in Detroit. What intrigued me was the frequency with which their names kept recurring in the automotive press between 1900 and World War I, if not beyond. It soon became obvious that Barney Everitt, Bill Metzger, and Walter Flanders were as highly regarded by their peers as Henry Ford, Will Durant, Henry Leland, or R.E. Olds. However, today Everitt, Metzger, and Flanders are virtually unknown. For reasons that escape me, contemporary historians more often than not simply ignore them.

However, in 1908, when they founded the E-M-F Company (EMF), Everitt, Metzger, and Flanders were known on the streets of Detroit as the "Big Three" of the auto industry. Within three years, EMF was the largest employer in Detroit and was producing more cars than any other company in the United States other than Ford. Were it not for the fact that the Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Company purchased the entire E-M-F Company for an outrageous price in 1910, EMF might still be an auto giant today. On the shoulders of EMF, Studebaker (until then, the largest wagon builder in the country) built its strong automotive base. Before the purchase of EMF, Studebaker had been only a bit player within that industry.

Barney Everitt, Bill Metzger, and Walter Flanders were automotive pioneers in many other ways outside of EMF. Everitt was instrumental in forming the extensive body building industry that characterized Detroit prior to World War II. Metzger in turn established the first automobile dealership in Detroit, if not the country. As head of sales for Cadillac, he virtually guaranteed the
success of that company in its formative years. Flanders, a genius with machines, masterminded the tools of production for the first Model T.

By documenting the careers of Everitt, Metzger, and Flanders, I have provided some insight into the typical wheeling and dealing that went into the formation of automobile companies in Detroit prior to World War I. It truly was a freewheeling era during which men of great skill, courage, drive, and fortitude overcame a lack of formal education to create wealth for themselves and for those willing to back their efforts.

For easier reading, I have taken the liberty of substituting the terms EMF or the EMF Company for the more correct E-M-F Company or the Everitt-Metzger-Flanders Company. I also generally refer to their automobiles, advertised as the E.M.F. “30” and the Flanders “20,” as the EMF 30 and the Flanders 20. The fact that both the company and the car used E-M-F in their logo lent itself to much friendly satire. One of the most popular of these was “Every Mechanical Fault.”

For the information that went into the writing of this history, I owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Robert Denham of the Studebaker National Museum, who allowed me to prowl through the EMF board minutes and provided me with copies of pages without which this account would have been impossible to write. My thanks also are extended to Mark Patrick, curator of the National Automotive History Collection (NAHC) of the Detroit Public Library, who provided the photographs that appear in this book and made available to me the NAHC collection of early auto periodicals, as did the late Richard Scharchburg and Bill Holloran of the Collection of Industrial History at Kettering University. In addition, I am grateful to Barbara Fronczak and the Chrysler Archives, where the board minutes of the Metzger, the Everitt, and the Flanders Motor Car Companies reside, and to the State Archives of Michigan, the source of annual reports of old auto companies.
Introduction
Setting the Scene

The year is 1908.

Before 12 months have passed, 1908 will have become a momentous year of change for the auto industry.

This change first is signaled in February when a Thomas Flyer wins the grueling New York to Paris race, thus putting to rest the vaunted superiority claimed by European automakers over U.S.-built cars.

A few weeks later, officials of the Royal Automobile Club disassemble three Cadillac cars, mix their parts together, and then rebuild the cars. The three vehicles are taken to a track and, to everyone's amazement, are driven for 500 miles without a hitch—proving that automobile manufacturing techniques within the United States have reached a stage of standardization unequalled by any other industrial nation.

In September, the automotive world is startled by the creation of the first successful conglomerate in the auto industry: General Motors Corporation, a product of the visionary outlook of Will Durant and Ben Briscoe.

At the beginning of the next month, October 1, a homely and unpretentious new Ford model emerges from the factory on the corner of Piquette Avenue and Beaubien Street in Detroit. It is called the Model T, the ninth in the series of cars built thus far by Ford. Demand for the Model T will become so great that production soon will cease for nine weeks to enable orders to be filled. More than 15 million Model T's will be built during the next 19 years.
Several months before the first Model T is produced, the factory manager responsible for setting up its initial production—a man of genius with machines—leaves Ford to join with two others to form their own company. His name is Walter Flanders.

Mark it well.

Joining Flanders are Byron F. "Barney" Everitt, pioneer body builder and trimmer, and William E. "Bill" Metzger, the first auto dealer in Detroit and perhaps the nation. Each of the three men is well known within the auto industry of this time—as well known as Henry Ford, Ransom Olds, Henry Leland, Will Durant, Ben Briscoe, and the Dodge brothers. They are movers and shakers. When they speak, the automotive world listens and gives them deference, so strong have their reputations become within the industry.

On June 2, 1908, the three men call a press conference in New York City to announce that they have formed the Everitt-Metzger-Flanders Company (EMF) and will begin production of a medium-priced car in Detroit in September. Oddly enough, the EMF factory will be located on the next block west of the Ford plant.

That three such powerful automotive names have come together to build a new automobile is sensational news. Proof of the magic of their names will come from sales figures as the months unfold. By the close of 1909, EMF will vault into the Number Two slot in automotive production—truly a remarkable achievement in such a short period of time. Part of the success of the new company will be due to its alliance with the Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Company, then the largest wagon producer in the nation. The Studebaker sales outlets will be used to market EMF automobiles, but the association is acrimonious. Eventually, Studebaker will buy out EMF and use it as the foundation for a reorganized Studebaker Corporation that will become a leader among second-tier auto producers (behind Chrysler, General Motors, and Ford) for almost half a century.

This is the story of Barney Everitt, Bill Metzger, Walter Flanders, and the EMF Company, which augured so much success during the first decade of the twentieth century. Had the three men not sold out to Studebaker, it is conceivable that their names would be familiar to us as founders of a large automobile company that continues to exist to this day.
Timeline

1908

- June 2  
  Formation of Everitt-Metzger-Flanders (EMF) Company announced.

- August 4  
  EMF incorporated in Michigan. 
  Everitt voted president, Metzger secretary, and Flanders general manager.

- August 5  
  EMF signs sales agreement with Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Company.

- September 15  
  EMF purchases Wayne Automobile Company.

- October 5  
  EMF purchases Northern Motor Car Company.

1909

- March 4  
  Everitt’s letter to EMF board condemns Studebaker sales agreement.

- April 12  
  Flanders’ letter to EMF board cites need for Studebaker.

- April 21  
  EMF board proposes new sales agreement to Studebaker.

- April 29  
  Everitt and Metzger resign after Studebaker buys their EMF stock. 
  William Kelly resigns. 
  Flanders appointed president. 
  EMF signs new sales contract with Studebaker per latter’s terms.
EMF buys De Luxe Motor Car Company.

EMF announces purchase of Western Malleable Steel & Forge Co. and Monroe Body Company.

Flanders’ letter to Studebaker terminates EMF/Studebaker sales agreement.

EMF advertises for sales agents to replace Studebaker.

Studebaker files bill of complaint against EMF in Detroit (Judge Swan).

Detroit court (Judge Swan) refuses to grant injunction preventing EMF from selling its own cars.

Studebaker files second bill of complaint against EMF in Cincinnati (Judge Severens) and requests injunction to prevent EMF sales.

Cincinnati court (Judge Severens) informs EMF of injunction halting EMF car sales.

Cincinnati court (Judge Severens) lifts injunction against EMF and drops Studebaker suit.

Studebaker asks Detroit court (Judge Swan) to withdraw its original suit.

Detroit court (Judge Swan) agrees to drop Studebaker suit.

Studebaker files new bill of complaint in Kalamazoo (Judge Severens) asking for injunction to stop EMF car sales.

Studebaker also files another suit in Cincinnati (Judge Warrington) asking for similar injunction.

At special EMF board meeting, majority of directors vote support of Flanders’ letter rescinding Studebaker sales contract.

Same day, EMF asks Wayne County court to remove Studebaker members from EMF board.
Timeline

1910

- **January 3**  
  Studebaker files new suit (Judge Swan) against EMF in Detroit asking for damages and injunction to prevent further sales by EMF of its cars.

- **January 10**  
  Cincinnati court (Judge Warrington) refuses Studebaker complaint filed on December 31 and apologizes for wasting court’s time.

- **February 10**  
  Detroit court (Judge Swan) dismisses Studebaker suit filed on January 3.

- **March 5**  
  Studebaker drops any suits still pending against EMF.

- **March 8**  
  
  New officers are elected, with Flanders appointed president and general manager.

1911

- **February 14**  
  Studebaker Brothers Manufacturing Company reorganizes as Studebaker Corporation as a result of Fish being forced to borrow new money to pay the notes due for purchasing EMF.
  
  EMF now becomes “auto division” of Studebaker Corporation.

- **April 24**  
  Flanders agrees to new contract as general manager of automotive operations, on condition that Studebaker purchases his stock in the Flanders Manufacturing Company.
1912

August 7

Flanders resigns from Studebaker and rejoins Everitt and Metzger as general manager of Everitt Motor Car Company (originally named Metzger Motor Car Company) which Everitt and Metzger had formed after leaving EMF. Subsequently, Everitt Motor Car Company is renamed Flanders Motor Car Company in August 1912 and eventually is purchased by Maxwell Motor Company in April 1913.