

AUTOMOTIVE HOMECOMING

William L. McLaren's 1910 Russell-Knight Model-22

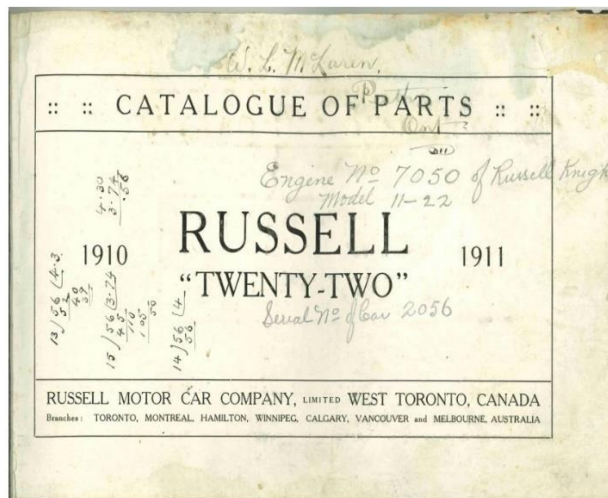


Peter Findlay and his 1910 Russell-Knight Model-22
(Courtesy of Alyn Edwards, driving.ca)

In July 2023, the only surviving example of a 1910 Russell-Knight Model-22 automobile made a return visit to its hometown of Perth. The vehicle had first rolled along Gore Street 113 years earlier as it completed the trip from the Ketchum & Company Ltd.¹ auto dealership in Ottawa to Nevis Cottage on Drummond Street. In 2023 that journey, via Richmond, was re-created by the car's most recent owner, Peter Findlay² of Burnaby, BC, President of the Antique Chapter of the Vintage Car Club of Canada.

¹ 309-311 Sparks Street, Ottawa, (Corner of Bank and Sparks Street).

² A former music and computer teacher at General Wolfe and Sir Alexander Mackenzie Elementary Schools, Vancouver, and educational software developer, Findlay pursues a family passion. In 1997 his 70-year-old father, Lorne Findlay, and he drove a 1912 Reo from Halifax to Vancouver, recreating the accomplishment of the first car ever driven across Canada, an identical 1912 Reo (driven by Thomas Wilby and Jack Haney).



When purchased, the Russell-Knight was first registered³ to Sophia Elizabeth Lees-McLaren (1845-1923), wife of Senator Peter McLaren (1831-1919), but appears to have been presented as a wedding gift to her son William Lees McLaren (1880-1932), on the occasion of his October 8, 1910, marriage to Anna Lees Gemmell (1884-1975). Today the signature 'W. L. McLaren', written in William's hand⁴, is still clear on the 1910 parts catalogue that has remained with the car for over a century. For his part, Senator McLaren's wedding gift to his son was a graphite and mica mining property⁵ in North Burgess (Tay Valley) Township, (now BurgessWood residential development) where William and Anna made their home.⁶



Nevis Cottage, Drummond Street, Perth

William, commonly known as 'Willie', was the youngest of five children⁷ born to Peter and Sophia McLaren⁸. He grew up at Nevis Cottage and was educated at Perth Collegiate Institute, Trinity College, Port Hope, Upper Canada College, Toronto, and took courses from the International Correspondence School of Mining and Engineering, at Scranton, Pennsylvania. The wedding gifts chosen by his parents were expensive, even extravagant.⁹ The Russell-Knight automobile cost \$3,500 fob Toronto (about \$120,000 today), but the McLarens were, by

³ In the late 1960s a 1911 automobile license plate, #1857, believed to be the Russell-Knight's original plate, was found in a shed on William and Anna McLaren's property in Burgess Township. Ontario motor vehicle registration records show that plate was registered to Mrs. Peter (Sophia) McLaren.

⁴ As matched to his signature on land transfer documents in the Archives Lanark collection.

⁵ Known as 'McLaren's Mines', at the peak of operations it employed 50 men, but operations ceased in 1923.

⁶ William and Anna built 'Forest Lodge' on the Burgess Township property where they lived for over 20 years until William died in 1932 in a Montreal Hospital at age 52. Anna continued to live at Forest Lodge until 1969. She died in 1975, age 91, at Wiseman's Private Hospital, Perth. William and Anna were childless. They are buried in Elmwood Cemetery, Perth.

⁷ Margaret Elsie (1869-1954), Mary Isobel (1874-1927), Annie Kathleen (1875-1954), James Lyon Playfair (1878-1934), William Lees (1880-1932).

⁸ Peter McLaren married Sophia Lees in 1867 and purchased and expanded Nevis Cottage in 1870.

⁹ When they married, William and his brother James were offered, in turn, the property known as Victoria Hall on Drummond Street as a wedding gift. The former residence of Judge John Glass Malloch had been purchased by Sophia McLaren in 1898. Both young

far, the richest family in Perth and among the wealthiest in Canada. In the days when lumber was king, William's father had gone to work in the Mississippi River timber shanties of the Gillies Lumber Company at age 14. He became a partner in the enterprise in 1853, purchased the company in 1873 and in 1887, at age 56, sold his Ontario timber and mill holdings for \$900,000 (\$23,400,000 today). In semi-retirement¹⁰, he was appointed to the red chamber by Prime Minister John A. Macdonald (1815-1891) in 1890.¹¹

Expensive and rare as automobiles were in the first decade of the 20th century, the Russell-Knight was not the first motor vehicle in the McLaren household. Two years earlier, in July 1908, the *Perth Courier* reported,

Perth's First Auto – Senator McLaren has purchased a Maxwell touring car¹², and same will be here this week. The senator will have the distinction of being the first Perth resident to own an auto.¹³



LtoR - James, Peter & William McLaren
(Courtesy of BurgessWood, Evolution of a Community (2011),
photographer unknown.)

Nor would Willie McLaren's wedding gift of 1910 be the last. The following year Sophia McLaren purchased yet another car, this one as a gift for his elder brother James Lyon Playfair McLaren (1878-1934).¹⁴

Another Automobile – Mrs. (Senator) McLaren has purchased (a gift to her son Mr. James L. P.) a McLaughlin-Buick¹⁵ automobile from Dittrick Bros¹⁶. It will be down in a few days.¹⁷

men declined the gift, however, allegedly because the property was believed to be haunted. Victoria Hall became the Great War Memorial Hospital in 1922.

¹⁰ After he sold his lumber interests, Peter McLaren still owned several resource based businesses in Alberta and Virginia.

¹¹ See *Mississippi Lumber Baron* elsewhere on this website <https://www.perthhs.org/documents/peter-mclaren-shaw.pdf>

¹² Maxwell was an American manufacturer that operated from 1904 until 1925 when it was acquired by Chrysler (later owned by Stellantis North America).

¹³ *Perth Courier* July 3, 1908.

¹⁴ Ontario vehicle registration records for 1911 show two vehicles registered to 'Mrs. Peter McLaren', No. 1857, probably William's and No. 1858, probably James'. By 1912 the Russell-Knight carried a registration plate numbered 12463.

¹⁵ McLaughlin Motor Car Company Ltd. began as a carriage manufacturer at Oshawa, Ontario. From 1907 into the 1930s it built McLaughlin automobiles with Buick engines and from 1915 also manufactured Chevrolet vehicles for the U.S. and Canadian market. The company was taken over by General Motors in 1918.

¹⁶ See *Mechanical Genius* elsewhere on this website <https://www.perthhs.org/documents/mechanical-genius-john-dittrick.pdf>

¹⁷ *Perth Courier* May 26, 1911.



1908 Maxwell Touring, \$1,750



**1911 McLaughlin-Buick \$1,300-\$1,875
depending upon options.**

Willie McLaren's 1910 Russell-Knight was among those built in Toronto by the Canada Cycle and Motor Company (CCM), between 1905 and 1916, taking their name from General Manager Tommy A. Russell (1877-1940).

The vehicle was powered by a four-cylinder 230 cubic inch, water cooled, Knight sleeve-valve engine, generating 40 horsepower, twice the power of a Ford Model T, and equipped with a three-speed sliding gear transmission. Its cutting-edge Knight engine was first used by Daimler in England and was dubbed 'The Silent Knight' for its unusually quiet and smooth-running design. It quickly became the choice of royalty throughout Europe as other European manufacturers began using the Knight engine. In 1911, when the Duke¹⁸ and Duchess¹⁹ of Connaught toured Canada at the commencement of the Duke's term as Governor General²⁰, Russell cars were provided for the entire Royal party. In return, Russell received a Royal Warrant authorizing the publication of promotional material topped with the singular phrase 'By Royal Appointment'.

Built on a wheelbase of 120 inches the frame was of pressed steel with a semi-elliptic front suspension and a three-quarter elliptic rear suspension. The steering wheel was on the right.²¹ Upholstery was available in royal blue/black, or red. Willie McLaren's car was a five passenger touring model, but the vehicle was also available as a two-passenger runabout (\$3,500), a five-passenger torpedo (\$3,500), or open touring limousine (\$4,500).

The CCM company had been created in 1899 by the amalgamation of four major Canadian bicycle manufacturers. When the bicycle market shrunk in 1903, CCM acquired Canadian Motors Ltd. (CML), a failed automobile producer, and in 1911 established the Russell Motor Car Company (RMCC). Over its first three years the company produced an electric automobile branded the 'Ivanhoe'. In 1905 it built its first two-cylinder gasoline engine powered

¹⁸ Prince Arthur William Patrick Albert (1859-1942), Duke of Connaught and Strathearn & Earl of Sussex, seventh child and third son of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert.

¹⁹ Princess Louise Margaret Alexandra Victoria Agnes (1860-1917) of Prussia.

²⁰ Canada's 10th Governor General, October 1911 - November 1916.

²¹ Most parts of Canada and the USA have always driven on the right side of the road and the steering wheel for early automobiles was generally on the right. In 1908, however, the Ford Motor Company moved steering wheels to the left to provide a better sightline to oncoming traffic. It took nearly a decade, however, before left-hand-drive became standard across the North American automotive industry.

car, followed by a four-cylinder model in 1906, a 40 horsepower touring car in 1907 and a 50 horsepower model in 1908. The RMCC was incorporated separately from CCM in 1911.

CCM and the RMCC produced the most successful all-Canadian automobiles ever built, known for their high quality and luxurious style. The price tag for a Russell-Knight was twice that of a Cadillac and five times the price of a Ford. Sales offices were opened in England, Australia, and New Zealand. However, a downturn in the luxury car market, combined with the outbreak of World War One, led to the sale of the RMCC to the American company Willys-Overland Motors in 1916.²² CCM continued to produce bicycles until 1980 but went bankrupt in 1983.²³

In 1910 Willie McLaren's Russell-Knight was among just 4,230 cars registered in Ontario and 9,158 in all of Canada.²⁴

The vehicles purchased by the McLarens in 1908, 1910 and 1911 were not, of course, the first ever seen in Perth. One of the earliest local sightings of a motor car dates to the spring of 1903 when the *Perth Courier* reported,

Automobile In Town – It is not often that we citizens of the town hear the explosion puffing of the automobile in our own municipal borders and the vehicle that was with us over Sunday formed a topic of conversation – somewhat after the weather subject – for a good many people. The automobile was in charge of Mr. Le Sueur²⁵ and Norman Drummond²⁶, of Ottawa, who came up in three hours. The party returned on Monday to the Capital, including Miss Meighen, of town. The auto proved a stranger to the horses of the town and district ...²⁷

A year later the newspaper's social notes column from the village of Balderson commented that "An automobile passed through our town the other day and we hope to see them become numerous by and bye".²⁸

Senator McLaren's 1908 Maxwell had been in operation for only a few months when, while driving near Lombardy, it panicked the horse team of Fred A. Crate of Smiths Falls, causing a runaway and accident in which one of the horses was so badly injured it had to be destroyed. Crate sued McLaren for \$200 in damages and a Brockville judge awarded him \$150. Unsatisfied, Crate appealed the ruling but the higher court in Toronto upheld the original award.²⁹

²² For more about CCM and the Russell Motor Company see *Canada Cycle & Motor: The CCM Story*, by John A. McKenty (2011)

²³ The CCM brand (hockey equipment) is now owned by the Canadian Tire Corporation.

²⁴ Registration statistics may include trucks and motorcycles.

²⁵ Ernest Arthur LaSueur (1869-1953), a chemical engineer, son of William Dawson LaSueur (1840-1917) Superintendent of the Canada Post Office Money Order Branch and Secretary of the Civil Service Board of Examiners.

²⁶ Norman Wildred Drummond (1874-1957), an engineer, son of Robert J. Drummond (1841-1926), manager of Perth branch of Bank of Montreal c1881-c1913. Ernest LeSueur was married to Maude Sinclair Drummond (1870-1953), Norman Drummond's first cousin.

²⁷ *Perth Courier* May 1, 1903.

²⁸ *Perth Courier* August 26, 1904.

²⁹ The *Perth Courier* of June 11, 1909, named the defendant as "Hon. Peter McLaren" while the *Smiths Falls Record News* of October 14, 1909, said the defendant was "Mrs. McLaren of Perth". It is probably a safe to assume that, at the time of the incident, Senator McLaren (although owner of the vehicle) was not present and his wife, Sophia Lees-McLaren, was either driving or, more likely, a passenger in the car driven by a chauffeur.

The Senator's acquisition of his Maxwell, the first car owned by a Perthite, was followed less than a year later by Dr. Andrew W. P. Dwyre's (1860-1939) purchase of a McLaughlin-Buick in January 1909.³⁰

*The motor car Dr. Dwyre purchased in Oshawa from the McLaughlin Company arrived the latter part of last week and is now quite at home in town. The doctor was not long in mastering the running details and incidentally found out that his friends are legion. He has been very generous and has given all those who desired it of their own volition or on his invitation a jaunt through the ozone. The motor-car looks to be a serviceable one and is decidedly attractive in appearance. It should prove a handy vehicle to the doctor in his practice.*³¹



Perhaps taking a lesson from the incident at Lombardy involving the McLaren car, Dr. Dwyre seems to have been sensitive to the dangers created when horses and automobiles came in close contact.

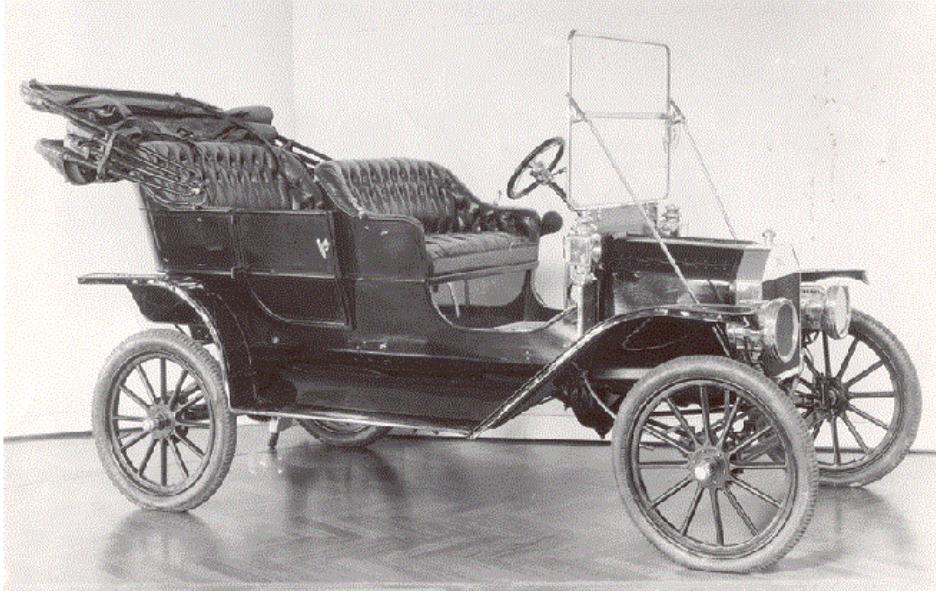
*Autos and Horses – Those who have seen Dr. Dwyre's new auto-car running about town are pleased to note the good judgement used with passing horses. It is expected that some horses might be frightened at first, but if the auto is sent by them slowly a few times they soon learn that it is harmless so far as they are concerned. In a good many cases, the most frightened one is the horse's driver, and one farmer goes on record as saying he is glad the auto has at last made its abiding appearance here, for the sooner it came, the sooner would the country horses become accustomed to it, and the sooner would the farmer's wives and daughters go out driving again. As it was, some were nervous to drive to town alone, for they did not know what minute any car from Carleton or Smiths Falls would honk along.*³²

³⁰ Dwyre served as a local doctor and Lanark County Coroner from 1896 through 1939. He was also active in politics, serving on both the County and Eastern Ontario Liberal Party Federation, and ran unsuccessfully as a Lanark South candidate in the 1904 Federal election. Locally, he sat on the Perth Board of Education 1901-1935 and served as its chairman 1915-1928. He was also a member of the Perth Board of Trade. A man of considerable energy, for many years in the early 1900s he coached both the Perth lacrosse and hockey teams.

³¹ *Perth Courier*, January 14, 1909.

³² *Perth Courier* September 14, 1909.

The care taken to ensure Perth's horses were gently trained to accept the doctor's car might be put down to the fact that the vehicle was more often driven by Dwyre's niece than by the doctor himself. When she graduated from Montreal's Royal Victoria Hospital School of Nursing in 1908, Ursula Murphy came to work for Dwyre as his nurse-receptionist and, when he acquired his car in 1910, he added the job of chauffeur to her duties.



1910 Ford Model-T \$950

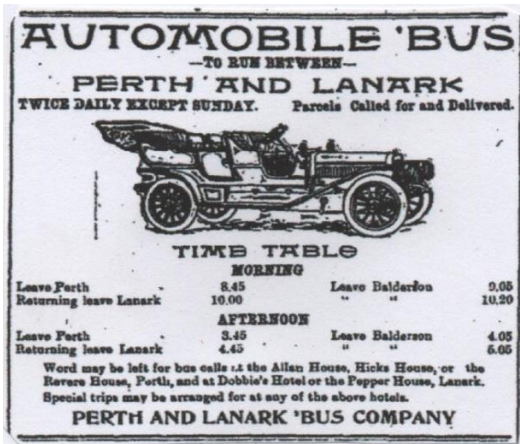
In 1910 the cars of senator McLaren and Dr. Dwyre were joined on the streets of Perth by William McLaren's Russell-Knight, and by a Ford Model-T purchased by lawyer John A. Stewart (1867-1922)³³, "... two seated, to hold five persons. The machine is ... a very fine one ... procured through Messrs. Rogers & Nicoll".³⁴

In April 1910, the 'Perth & Lanark 'Bus Company', organized by "a number of Perthites and two or three Ottawa gentlemen", announced a twice daily, Monday to Saturday, "automobile bus" service between Perth and Lanark, with future plans for service to Christie Lake and Rideau Ferry on Sundays. The company advertised "a six passenger car" and proposed, in due course, to add a "large passenger car, which will carry 12 passengers [and] a truck capable of hauling three tons".³⁵ Advertisements were placed in the *Perth Expositor*, *Perth Courier* and *Lanark Era*, offering pick-up of passengers and packages at the Allan House, Hick's House and Revere House in Perth, and at Dobbie's Hotel and at the Pepper House in Lanark. After only two weeks, however, the advertisements disappeared and apparently so did the 'automobile bus' (if it had ever actually taken to the road).

³³ Mayor 1900-1902 & 1903-1904, MP 1918-1922, Minister for Railways & Canals 1921-1922.

³⁴ *Perth Courier* April 29, 1910. Rogers & Nicoll Hardware, 12 Gore Street East, proprietors George Richard, William Rogers (1862-1943) & Neil B. Nicoll (1881-1943).

³⁵ *Perth Expositor*, *Perth Courier* and *Lanark Era*, 04 May 1910.



1910 E-M-F \$1,250

The following year brought a rush of new automobiles to the streets of Perth. James McLaren received his gift of a McLaughlin-Buick from his mother. Lawyer Alexander Campbell Shaw (1857-1918)³⁶ bought an E-M-F³⁷ through the local firm of James & Reid³⁸ "... sole agents for the E-M-F."³⁹ James & Reid also furnished an E-M-F to John A. Stewart who had sold his slightly used 1910 Ford to a buyer in Newboro. Autos of unknown brand were also purchased in 1911 by Lieutenant Colonel James Morris Balderson (1862-1943)⁴⁰, John E. Maloney (1868-1931)⁴¹, Dittrick Brothers⁴² and J. A. Craig. Unhappily, 1911 also marked Perth's first motorcar related casualty.

Dog Run Over – Mr. W. G. Butler's⁴³ dog was run over by an automobile on Wednesday evening and badly injured. The Chief⁴⁴ later shot it.⁴⁵

In September 1912 William McLaren's Russell-Knight participated in a "floral parade" that marked the move of the Perth Fair from its former location at Wilson and Leslie Streets to the site it now occupies between Arthur Street and Rogers Road. A photograph of the car "... driven by W. L. McLaren [decorated in] *heliotrope and perennial phlox*"⁴⁶, captures the moment it passed in front of the 'Palm Gardens Ice Cream Parlor' at #73 Foster Street. That photo appeared on a 1984

³⁶ Town Councillor 1893-1898, Mayor 1899.

³⁷ An early American automobile manufacturer, E-M-F produced cars 1909-1912. The name E-M-F was gleaned from the initials of the three company founders: Barney Everitt (1877-1940), a custom auto-body builder from Detroit, William Metzger (1868-1933), formerly of Cadillac, and Walter Flanders (1871-1923), who had served as Henry Ford's production manager.

³⁸ James & Reid Hardware, #2 Gore Street West, proprietors George James (1843-1911), Lawrence H. James (1877-1958) and David William Reid (1866-1943).

³⁹ *Perth Courier* February 17, 1911.

⁴⁰ Lawyer, mayor 1902, commanding officer of the 42nd Lanark & Renfrew Regiment of Militia 1908-1920, built Balderson Theatre in 1914.

⁴¹ Ferguson's Falls farmer.

⁴² Dittrick Brothers Machine Shop & Foundry. The business was established by brothers John (1847-1925), Alvah (1851-1880), and Alonzo (1854-1890) but by 1912 was operated exclusively by John Dittrick. In 1916 Dittrick Brothers secured the dealership for Overland Automobiles and then a Studebaker dealership in 1919.

⁴³ William George Butler (1865-1926) owned a tinsmith, plumbing and hardware business located at 73 Gore Street East where he installed gasoline pumps in 1913.

⁴⁴ Police Chief John Russell Griffith (1872-1928).

⁴⁵ *Perth Courier* June 11, 1911.

⁴⁶ *Perth Courier*, September 6, 1912.

Town of Perth calendar published by the Heritage Canada's Foundation Main Street Programme, and in the 1998 book *The Merchants, Professionals & Tradespeople of Perth*, by Gus Quattrocchi, but its origins and the photographer are unknown.



1912 Perth Fall Fair 'Floral' Parade
(Original source unknown)



Perth Fair 1948, Kenneth Darou at the wheel
(Photo by Cecil L. Newman, Perth, courtesy of Jim Darou)

Following its appearance in the 1912 parade, a gap of more than three decades opens in the life-story of William McLaren's Russell-Knight. Presumably it remained in the possession of William and Anna for much of that time, but its whereabouts and ownership are uncertain until 1948 when Kenneth Norman Darou (1923-2003) and his cousins Bob and Len Anderson of Perth purchased it for \$100 and pulled it from storage in the barn of John Douglas McLaren (1899-1962) on the Scotch Line in North Elmsley Township⁴⁷. Despite the common surname, John Douglas McLaren of North Elmsley was not related in any way to the family of Senator Peter McLaren⁴⁸ and how the car came to be stored in his barn is unknown. In 1948 the car may have been owned by John Douglas McLaren, but it is equally possible the vehicle had been stored in his barn by some other owner. When it resurfaced in 1948 the car carried a 1922 Ontario licence plate (#13740), suggesting it could have served Willie and Anna McLaren for at least 10 years and then perhaps spent the next two decades in storage. Exactly to whom Darou and his cousins paid the \$100 purchase price is unclear, but they put the car back on the road and, later that year, the Russell-Knight appears in a photograph taken at the Perth Fair.

⁴⁷ North Elmsley Township C-10/L-28(E).

⁴⁸ John Douglas McLaren was the son of William McLaren (1847-1929) & Caroline Matilda Poole (1866-1958). The North Elmsley C-10/L-28(E) property had been granted by the crown in 1824 to his immigrant great-grandparents James McLaren Jr. (1776-1849) & Euphemia Jamieson (1782-1862), passed to his grandparents William Alexander McLaren (1806-1894) & Frances Thornton-McLaren (1894), to his parents and then to John. On his death the land was inherited by his sister, Hilda Alice Frances McLaren (1898-1976), wife of Robert Gordon Armour (1908-1981), and she sold it to the Town of Perth for use as an industrial park. John Douglas McLaren never married and neither he nor his sister Hilda had children.



Visiting Perth Matheson House Museum, July 2023

In the early 1950s Darou sold the vehicle to a collector in La Jolla, California. After a sojourn of a half-century in the United States, in 2002 the Russell-Knight found its way to a buyer in Calgary, Alberta, and then to Burnaby, British Columbia, in 2018.

In the summer of 2023, the 113-year-old Russell-Knight made its return visit to Perth when latest owner Peter Findlay brought it east to attend the Horseless Carriage Club of America (HCCA) tour at St. Jean Sur Richelieu, Quebec. En route, Findlay and his car spent a night at Nevis Estate Bed & Breakfast, formerly the McLaren family's Nevis Cottage residence, after re-enacting the vehicle's maiden voyage of 1910 from Ottawa, via Franktown, to Perth. During its visit the antique car also recreated its 1912 drive down Foster Street, toured the North Burgess (Tay Valley) Township property once owned by William and Anna McLaren and was exhibited for an afternoon at the Perth Matheson House Museum.

- Ron W. Shaw (2023)

With appreciation for assistance from Peter Findlay, Brent McLaren, David Taylor, Donald Beattie, Roy MacSkimming, Karen Prytula, Kendra Swallow, David Bromley, Glen Darou.