The spark of auto innovation ignited here in the 1890s. P. F. Olds founded a prosperous machine shop here on River Street, repairing and building steam and gasoline engines. His was one of many Lansing manufacturing plants that produced small engines, carriages, windmills and other equipment used by farmers and businesses. His son, Ransom, had bigger ideas. He put engines in carriages, creating his first successful “horseless carriage” in 1896. A year later, the Olds Motor Vehicle Company became Michigan’s first operating automobile company.

Ranse thinks he can put an engine in a buggy and make the contraption carry him over the roads. If he doesn’t get killed at his fool undertaking, I will be satisfied!”

Pliny Olds, father of Ransom E. Olds

Ransom Olds’ first car could “run at any speed from four to fifteen miles per hour, with perfect safety.”