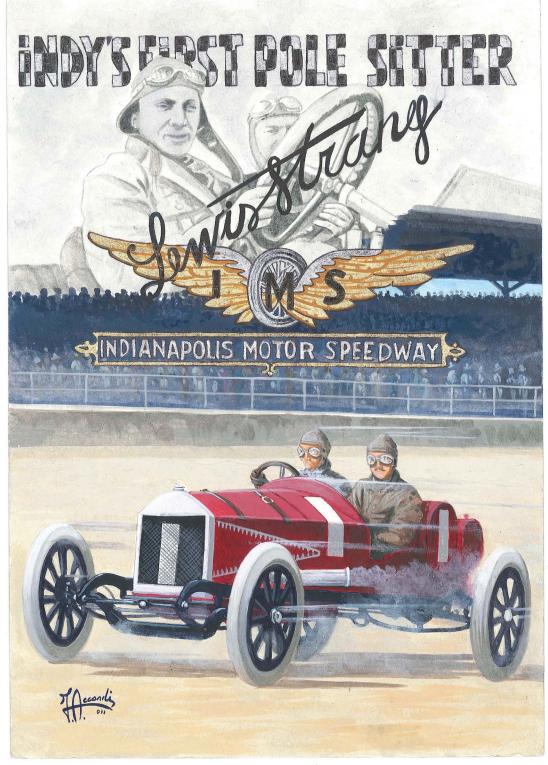
# Lewis Strang Memorial Ride® La Crosse to Blue River Wisconsin

## Saturday, July 23rd, 2011

Starting at 9:00 am in front of the La Crosse Club 250 Harborview Plaza, La Crosse, Wisconsin



Lewis Strang in his Case racecar at the first Indy 500

Watercolor by Franco Accardi



Strang in Case, 1911

Lewis Strang was a great American champion who won memorable races, established famous records and became the first Indianapolis 500 pole sitter less than two months before his death. He died in a freak accident during the stage of the Milwaukee Sentinel Trophy that started from La Crosse in the morning of July 20, 1911.

This 100th anniversary of his death coincides with the century mark for the Indianapolis 500 and this year Indianapolis Motor Speedway official guide celebrated his memory with a major article by Mark Dill profiling his life and achievements. Lewis Strang is also the man portrayed in the oldest known picture about the speedway, "The Vision", with him in front of a cement model of what would later become the most famous track in the world. Special thanks for their help and support to Mark Dill and T.A. Adolphus of Hemmings Motors News.

### **Ride Itinerary**

Directions to Blue River, WI Starting from West Ave S			
1	1 Head north on West Ave S toward Jackson St		
2	Take the 1st right onto Jackson St		
3	Turn right onto State Rd		
4	Turn right onto Losey Blvd S		
5	Turn left onto US-14 E / US-61 S / WI-35 S / Mormon Coulee Rd		
6	Turn left onto US-14 E/US-61 S		
7	Turn right onto US-61 S/Soldiers Grove Rd / Continue to follow US-61 S		
8	Turn left onto WI-60 Trunk E		
9	Turn right onto Co Hwy T		
	Arriving at N East St	Total: 74.4 mi - about 1 hour 42 mins	
Directions to Prairie du Chien, WI Starting from N East St			
1	Head south on N East St toward North St		
2	Turn right onto WI-133 S/WI-133 Trunk S/W Exchange St / Continue to follow WI-133	S/WI-133 Trunk S	
3	Turn right onto US-61 N/Elm St		
4	Turn left onto WI-60 Trunk W		
5	Turn left onto S Business St		
6	Turn right onto WI-60 Trunk W/Guard St / Continue to follow WI-60 Trunk W		
7	Turn right onto US-18 W/WI-35 N/Great River Rd / Continue to follow US-18 W/WI-35	Ν	
8	Turn right onto E Iowa St		
9	Turn left onto S Ohio St		
10	Take the 1st left onto E Wisconsin St		
11	Turn right onto S Marquette Rd		
	Arriving at S Marquette Rd	Total: 36.4 mi - about 48 mins	
Directions to La Crosse, WI Starting from S Marquette Rd			
1	Head north on S Marguette Rd toward E Blackhawk Ave		

- 2 Continue onto WI-35 N/Great River Rd / Continue to follow WI-35 N
- 3 Slight right onto West Ave S
- Arriving at West Ave S

#### How Strang met his death



Lewis Strang in a Thomas at the French Grand Prix, 1908

Many men participated in the dawn of organized motor racing in the US, and many lived hard and died young. Lewis P. Strang stands shoulder to shoulder with Louis Disbrow, Barney Oldham, Ralph De Palma, David Bruce-Brown, Louis Chevrolet and other titans of the era, but his early death, after only four years of competition, has left him largely unmemorialized.

"Whirlwind" Strang is best known for taking the pole at the inaugural Indy 500 in 1911, but that was actually at the very end of his racing career. While he was racing, his name was in the papers, but we know almost nothing about his life before that. He was born in August of 1884, and while he always said he was from Amsterdam, New York, family members said he was in fact from the Atlanta, Georgia, area. He was always known as a New Yorker, though, and some of the confusion may stem from the fact he essentially changed his name after 1907.

I suppose there's no reason he'd have made the news in his first 23 years of life, but he got a jump into the world of motor racing thanks to his uncle, Walter Christie. He must have been a dab hand with engines, because in July of 1907, he was on Majestic with Uncle Walter, bound for France and the Grand Prix as the Christie mechanician. He almost certainly did some driving, as well.

When he returned, he controversially ended up driving the front-wheel-drive Christie machine in the south, racing variously as Lewis Christie and Christie Strang. Managed by the infamous William Pickens (who also managed Christie and Barney Oldfield), Strang was at first using the car with Christie's permission, but later on, absconded with it. The odds are that Pickens (who today we'd call a promoter) had made commitments to appear and was the force behind the car's disappearance, but it was Strang with his name in the headlines. In fact, they were using the Christie car on track at the same time that Walter Christie was selling it to W. Gould Brokaw: "I have been taught a lesson in allowing a man of whom I know little to manage me for a racing circuit," Christie told the New York Times in November of '07.

Mr. Pickens made the proposition to me at the Brighton Beach meet [where he was later sanctioned for certain "irregularities"--ed.]. It was a good offer, and I accepted. In the two track events in which I drove before my Pittsburg accident I made a little money, but at the present time I am very much out. After I had nearly recovered from my accident, Pickens proposed that I go South, driving if I could, and if not, allowing Strang to take the wheel. I did drive in one meet at Birmingham. I then went to New Orleans to arrange a meet there, but found it could not be secured for five weeks, and, therefore, decided to bring my car with me. It was sent to New Orleans, and I left sufficient money to pay for its shipment to New York, and I came on ahead. For a week I learned nothing. Then I learned form a friend there was no record of the shipment of the car, and it could not be found in any garage.

That was because Strang was racing, and ultimately, wrecking it. Walter Christie put the Pinkertons on the case.

Meanwhile I had heard nothing from either Strang or Pickens. My car is too valuable to lose, and, besides, it not mine now, as it was purchased several weeks ago by W. Gould Brokaw, who allowed me to use it on condition that I keep it in repair. I put the matter at once in the hands of the Pinkerton Detective Agency, and they discovered on the very day of the second Birmingham meet that the car had been shipped right back from New Orleans after I left. This, therefore, explains the second Birmingham meet. When the affair was over, Pickens and Strang evidently heard that detectives were hunting for the car, for they abandoned it, and I don't know where they are. I did get one telegram from Strang, asking what steps I was going to take.

When he finally recovered the car, it had suffered an undetermined degree of engine damage including a cracked cylinder, although a photo showing Brokaw in the car in 1908 indicates it was salvageable. Before that, Strang claimed a mile record with it, posting a :51:60 at St. Paul on October 16, 1907, coincidentally beating Walter's own mile record. But grave disagreement about the actual time later emerged, with Walter now among his foremost critics. It scarcely mattered, since he'd soon be vastly faster.

Now apparently thoroughly estranged from his uncle and coming into his own, he dropped the "Christie," and started going by Lewis Putnam Strang (it's unclear what his name really was), which probably helped spectators, as he was soon in head-to-head competition with Walter. For 1908, he went back to France, as driver of the #15 Thomas in the XI Grand Prix. He didn't finish the GP, but won the Great Race that year in an Isotta, at 4:40:47 for 254.4 miles over 24 laps.



In 1907, he'd ridden along with Walter at the Vanderbilt and in 1908 entered a Renault on his own, but dropped out early with mechanical problems.



Strang in the Thomas at Dieppe, July 7 1908



At the start of the 1908 Vanderbilt





Strang at the wheel, 1908, probably at the Vanderbilt

Strang was friendly with Louis Chevrolet, who had famously helped him pour a bearing mid-race in 1907, and Buick soon picked him up as a factory driver by (where he kept company with the Chevrolet brothers and Bob Burman), but in 1909, Strang left for Isotta, having won in one at Savannah, Briarcliff and elsewhere in 1908. Worldwide fame came shortly thereafter, when in the fall he broke numerous American and world speed records in a 175hp Fiat called "Earthquake." According to The Horseless Age, it started at the Atlanta Speedway in November:

The most spectacular and brilliant individual performance was that of Lewis Strang, in the 175 horse power Brooklands Fiat, formerly driven by Nazzaro, and holder of the world's record average speed. Strang covered a mile in 37.7 seconds, outstripping Oldfield, Christie and others by a big margin. In fact Oldfield was so chagrined and disappointed at being beaten a couple of times by Strang, that he and Manager Bill Pickens packed up and departed for the cattle country of Texas.

Strang won five events with the big car at Atlanta, sweeping the boards clean for everything from one to ten mile distances.



Strang at wheel of 175hp Fiat Earthquake



Strang breaking the record at Atlanta in 1909

He followed that up in December, when he broke the Oldfield record for the Indianapolis Speedway mile at :40.61, in what appears to be a new 200hp Fiat, the same one later known as the "Cyclone," when owned by Ralph De Palma, and others.

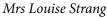
For all his early shenanigans, Strang was known as one of the smarter guys in the business, with a sense of his own mortality that eluded many of his compatriots. "On the track he was a spectacular but careful driver," Barney Oldfield wrote in Popular Mechanics in 1911. " He was one of the few who mixed brains with gasoline…"

Strang was a fatalist. One day I heard him tell "Bill" Pickens...that he was a big league fellow. He did not want to meet his gate while driving a touring car or in a stock chassis race. When it came his turn to bow to the scythe-swinger, Strang wanted to be gripping the wheel of the fastest racing car in the world, with his foot shoving the throttle wide open. He wanted the band to be playing the latest rag, and when the ambulance hauled him to the morgue he wanted the crowd to say as they filed out, "Well, he certainly was going some."



The Strang hoodoo legend started in 1908, with a string of mechanical failures in major races, including one which knocked him out of an unassailable lead in a Renault, in the 24 hour Brighton Beach races, during hour 18. The Renault failed him again a week later at the 234-mile Motor Parkway race, then he was hoodooed out of the lead at the 1908 Vanderbilt Cup, the first lap of the 1909 Vanderbilt Cup, the Savannah Grand Prix, the 1909 Cobe Cup in a Chevrolet (although he got to share the \$10,000 purse that team-mate Louis Chevrolet won), and Brighton Beach again in a Marion. Actually, his very first crash was in 1904, when he hit an elevated road pillar on Third Avenue in New York, wrecking the car (also the pillar).

Some of the hoodoo, at least, has to have been attributable to Strang driving at all times to the limit of his machine's capacity. He might not have finished often, but he was always a threat to win if he did. At Decatur in June 1908, driving for Buick, he won the fifty-mile Decatur Derby, five mile Free for All and five mile Handicap. In August 1909, he was at Indianapolis Motor Speedway again, where he brought Buick the Prest-O-Lite Trophy and claimed a \$10,000 purse for the team. The hoodoo, however, wasn't confined to the track.







Strang in Isotta, waving to his sister while negotiating a bad turn at Briarcliff



Strang's Renault being pushed at the start of the 1908 Vanderbilt Cup

In 1908, Strang had married Jennie L. Spalding, who performed as an actress under the name Louise Alexander. They made a high-profile society couple – among other things, the nascent aviator named a hot-air balloon Queen Louise in her honor – but the union was tempestuous from the start. If he should fail to finish first in a race, the beautiful Spalding would reportedly demand to know why Strang didn't win. She had also promised to give up the stage, this not being an era of two-career couples. But she didn't, and in '09 left him to return to acting, soon appearing in Florenz Ziegfeld's Follies of 1910.



The Strangs at Brighton, 1909: "The Maid and the Man."

Heartbroken, Strang held hope she would return to him, but those dreams came crashing down around him. "Then Mr. Strang's hoodoo got to work," reported The Washington Post. "Miss Alexander was suddenly named by Bessie Clayton, herself a well-known dancer, as correspondent in the suit of divorce begun against her husband, Julian Mitchell, who is Miss Alexander's partner in a "Vampire" dance." Strang, two weeks earlier having been ejected from an airplane in an accident while taxiing, said, "Two knockouts together. This is the limit," and promised to give up marriage, if not racing.

After that, he just wasn't the same racer for the next 18 months or so. In part, some of his energy must have been going to Case, which in 1910 made him manager of their new racing department, and aeroplane division, as well – in addition to putting together cars for the Case race team, he was also building "Miss Case," the first of three to support the race team. People did note that in 1910, he was missing from many of the major events he'd dominated in years past.



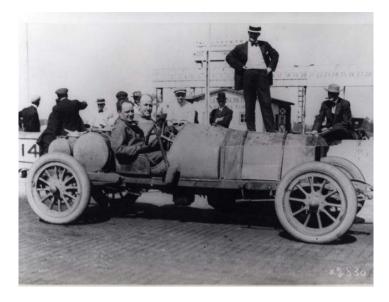
Strang in Case, 1911

The Case team planned to debut at New Orleans in February of 1911, but never showed and narrowly avoided a one-year suspension. By June, however, they were in winning form and when the new Indy 500 came around, his team was in world-class shape. He put his car on the pole, with teammates "Dutch" Joe Jagersberger and Will Jones in 8th and 9th. He lasted 109 laps, before retiring with a steering problem (only 12 out of 40 entries finished at all).

His fire had returned. Not only was he now a serious threat and in control of his own race team, but he was in negotiations to buy an astonishing 300hp Fiat, presumably thinking he would be able to reclaim some of his world speed records. Despite his acknowledgment of mortality, Strang also said a race car would never get him, and amazingly, he was right.

Since his divorce and the temporary decline of his racing career, rumors had swirled he was out of control. In August of 1911, word came out of Wisconsin he had been killed on a tour, and the press went wild with stories of drinking and suicide. The truth, however, was much less exciting.

Scouting a tour route in Blue River, Wisconsin, in a Case touring car, he passed a farm wagon while going up a hill. In first gear, at a speed somewhere between four and 10 miles an hour, the wheels of the Case dug into soft ground on the far side of the road, and the car slowly tumbled down a ten foot bank. Three other occupants jumped clear without harm, but Strang was pinned underneath, and crushed.



Lewis Strang at the Brickyard in Case, 1911

"Gambling is the greatest sport in the world," he told The Horseless Age in the winter of 1911.

The sensation of winning and losing and of taking a chance with something is probably the greatest in the world. It is natural to gamble with what you value. Some men obtain sport through gambling with money. I wouldn't take a minute's interest in a money stake. It doesn't appeal to me. I like to gamble for something else, though. The sensation when you come close to a bad accident and yet don't 'get it' can never be described.



Strang Case Teammate





HR 56.

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LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN, THURSDAY, JULY 20, 1911.

#### STRANG KILLED **AT BLUE RIVERS** R Famous Auto Driver Meets

Death in Auto Accident During the Tour

WAS IN LA CROSSE TODAY 18 Turns Out for Wagon and

Goes Over Embankto ment; Killed In-

stantly

BLUE RIVERS, Wis., July 20.-Louis Strang, the noted automobile driver, was instantly killed near here this atternoon when, in an endeav-or to avoid a wagon, his automobile careened, and went crashing over a high embankment. 28

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Strang was driver of a Gase car carrying the technical committee of the annual endurance tour of the Wisconsin Automobile association.

Left La Crosse Today

Left La Crosse Today Strang was not a contestant in the race. So retkless was he that those accompanying the tour declined to ride in his car and from Wausau to La Crosse other drivers were inti-midated by the daredevil driving of the Speedway King. Strang was in La Crosse last ev-wing and left with the tour this morning boasting that he "would show them all the way into Mil-waukee." 0 ty d-

ir. waukee.'

Strang also accompanied the 1910 our of the Wisconsin. Automobile ssociation's reliability run and was he first to land in the Cream City. tour ed ir. the In the car with Strang were three other passengers including Joe Jag-ersberger, also a driver of Câme cars, and Lester Clark of Richland Center, Wis, The name of the other passen-ger could not be learned. All mana-



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et C-

Famous Auto Driver, Who Lost his Life Shortly After Leaving La Crosse This Morning.

id to id ill et aged to jump from the car in time to escape; Strang, however, remain-ed with the wheel and was crushed to death in the fall of thirty feet.

Strain was well known as an au-tomobile "racer, having been enter-ed in most every race meeting of importance in the country since 1907. He was manager of the Case team of the J. I. Case company of Racine, Wis. e-J Strang was 26 years of age and married. He leaves a family at Ra-





This was in substance the an-nouncement of John H. Roemer of the Wisconsin rate commission over long distance telephone today.

The decision of the committee followed the exhibition of a piece of pipe, alleged to have been cut from the heater and boiler in the plant of the La Crosse Ruber Mills com-pany on Indian Hill.

pany on Indian Hill. The pipe was given to Alderman Burt Smith by A. P. Funk of the Rubber Mills company, and is al-leged ti have been heavily corroded on the inside. The water, which is said to be the cause, is claimed to have come from a well, sunk at a depth recommended by the commis-sion for the wells to be used in La Crosse's new system. It is also maintained that the water comes from the same water shed from which it is intended to take La Crosse's supply.

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OWNER OF GUN IS Sought as slayer	
Virginia Banker Says a	SYLVIA PRICE
Stranger Shot Wife	Fourteen Year Old Girl
while Autoing in	Shot by Infuriated
the Country	Farm Hand Last
BLOODHOUNDS LOSE TRAIL	Night
Leaps from Car and Grap-	FIEND ATTEMPTS SUICIDE
ples with Unknown As-	Gun Fails and He Runs for
sailant; Captures	Woods After Snatching
Shotgun	Bottle of Carbolic
RICHMOND, Va., July 20-On	Acid
the ownership of a shotgun of an of- dinary type hinges today the solu- tion of the mysterious slaying of Mrs. Louise Owen Beattle, Jr., wife of the Manchester banker who, ac- cording to the story told by her bus- band, was shot down while seated behind him in their automobile. De- spite the efforts of more than a thou- sand searthers no one has seen a trace of the man who, according to Beattle, blocked the Midlothian pike Tuesday night and, when asked to give up half of the road, raised his shotgun and fired directly into the Beattle automobile, instantly killing Mrs. Beattle.	AWFUL DEED PREMEDITATED

"Dear Aunt: "I drop you these few lines to let you know I will be dead next time you hear from me, I am heartbroken and can't get over it. I am going to kill the girl that has betrayed me. I am bet-ter off dead I know. (Signed) "EDGAR." "Good-bye. Don't mourn for me—I don't deserve it. Good-bye, good-bye." \*

bre, good-byc." \*\* The county is being scoured today by posses of farmers and sheriff's deputies in an effort to locate Ed-gar Robinette, 21, haif negro and haif Indian, who at 7:30 o'clock fast-night attempted to murder Sylvia Price, 14, following her refusal to make an appointment with him. Miss Price, who is the daughter of James Price, who is the daughter of James Price, who is the daughter of James Price, who is the daughter of La Croisse on the North Salem road, is suffering today from two bullet wounds in the left arm and while Dr. F. C. Suiter says she will recover, her extremely nervous condition has ne-cessitated her removal to a La Crosse hospital.

Following the shooting of the Following the shooting of the Price girl, Robinette, who was em-ployed as a farm hand, returned to dis own rooms, fired three bullets into his own body and escaped.

into his own body and escaped. On the way out of the house he grabbed a pint botile of carbolic acid and on the table in his room was found the letter printed above ad-dressed to his aunt in Kansas City, telling her that he intended to mur-der Miss. Price and kill himself. Insanity following a sick spell is the only cause assigned for the shoot-ine

ing.

Wanted to See Her

At 7:30 last night Miss Price and a girl friend, Miss Bernice Skogen, On-alaska, Wis., were preparing for a





) FOR ROBBERS STRANG'S BODY TO BRYAN HITS I BE SENT TO EAST STARTS

PACIFIC ROAD OF-500 FOR CAPTURE iN WHO HELD P LIMITED

)LIS, Minn., July 21 .-1 of \$7,500 was hung the Northern Pacific ard for the capture and three men who boardi Coast Limited, eastin Valley City and Bufakota, at midnight on hot Engineer Olson and assengers of watches, noney. For the capture n of any one of the the road will pay \$2,-

were arrested at Casght. They are being ose, Minn., three men ested. They arrived in the Great Northern on ind are said to answer a of the robbers. s from Tolna, N. D. en, who say the are being held there, havthat city in an autogave their names as vill be held until their ablished.



COMBINES SAYS JUFFERS WHEN CIANS MEDDLE H BUSINESS

. July 21-"The sooney are increasing the pace. commodities and that ic alone must be the sted John E. Parsons, counsel for the Sugar Hardwick congressiontoday. ion of the actual phy-

of properties is a 1

Famous Speed King Killed while Car Was Going at a Snail's

#### Pace

BLUE RIVER, Wis., July 21 .--The body of Louis Strang, the daredevil driver of Case cars whom fate decreed should be killed near here yesterday while his car crawled at a snail's pace, will today be sent to Ohio, from securing the Chicago thence to Amsterdam, N. Y. where the dead speed man is survived by three sisters at his former | home.

The wreck of the Case car at the bottom of a five foot embankment on the pike road north of here, was today brought here for shipment to the factory of the Case company at Racine, Wis. Examination of the car shows a broken wheel and steering gear. The body of the man who had gained fame nation-wide for his speed exhibitions was even more battered than his car. Strang was thrown under the machine, his head pinned under the running aboard, with a crushed skull. The driver's left ankle was broken and innumerable gashes were sustained on the upper portion of the body.

Preston Burbanks, the farmer who in a wagon Strang attempted to pass when his car gave way on the soft earth beneath it, today attributed the tragedy to faulty road building and corroborated the statement of members of the technical committee of the Wisconsin Annual Reliabilrealize that in their ity tour whom Strang was carrying went the combination that Strang was driving at a slow

With Strang in the ill-fated car was also Joe Jaggersberger, his etter it will be for the team mate in a hundred flirtations with death in the speed game.

Jaggersberger remained at his place and will have charge of the shipment of Strang's body to Chicago today.

FIGHT TO OHIO GOVERNOR 1 DEMOCRATIC NC TION FOR PRES

LINCOLN, Neb., July fending himself from a Douglas county democr. sailed him for bolting ! torial candidacy of man last November, W nings Bryan, in the curi The Commoner, fired wh ed as his opening gun it prevent Governor Judson nomination for the Ð 1912.

Bryan declares the him is made by Oma through the Douglas co cracy, which, at the sar dorsed Harmon. "who democratic national ticl and used his influence t Mr. McKinley, the repul date.

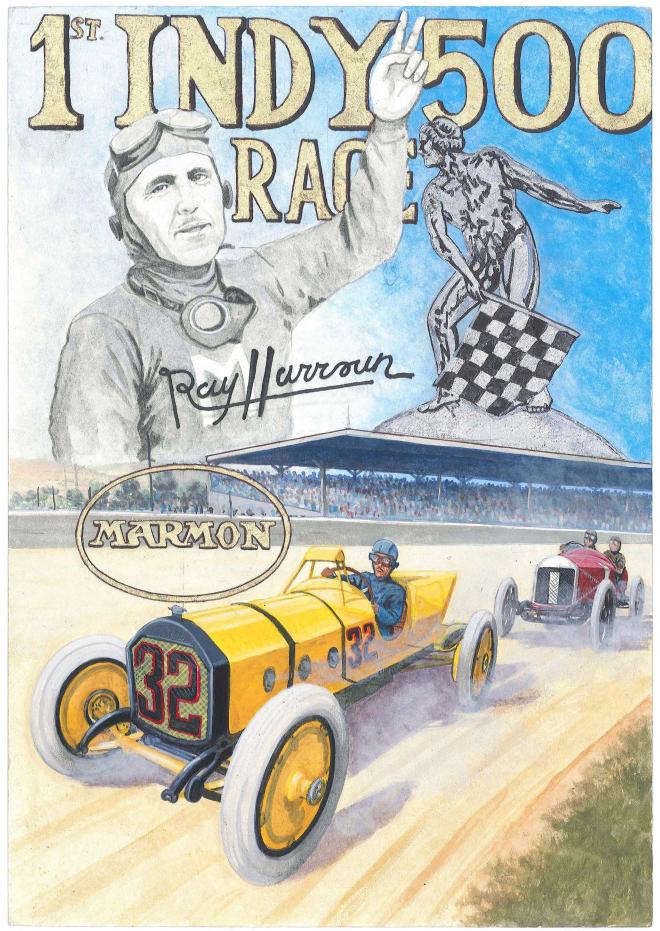
"Bolting," continues I not seem to be so bad politics-it is only in a paign that it is an unpar

'It is a small matter. a cabinet officer to go enemy when the common engaged in a life and de with Wall street, but if democrat protests again bauching of his party partisan group of brewet nounced as a traitor."



HARTZEL INDICTED GLARY CHARGE 6 OUT OF SLUGG CASE

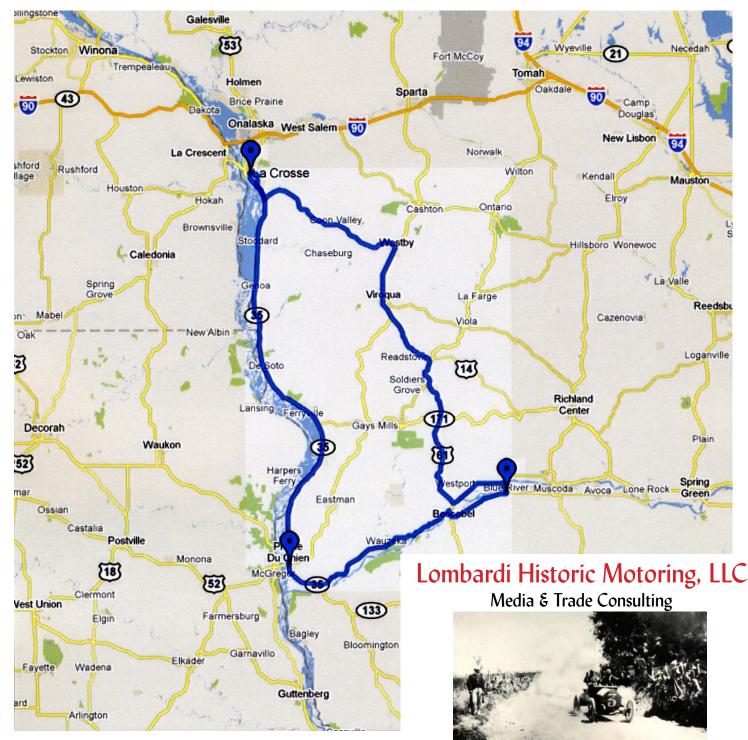
CHICAGO, July 21 .--- V nouncement today that indictment has been vo "Johnny" Hartzel, who have delivered to State



The winners of the inaugural Indy 500 in 1911, Ray Harroun and the Marmon Wasp.

On Saturday July 23rd, I hope you will join us on a ride, from La Crosse to Blue River, Wisconsin in honor of the memory of Lewis Strang, one of the earliest, great auto racers, who died there on July 20, 1911. Departure is at 9:00 am in front of the historic La Crosse Club, 250 Harborview Plaza in Riverside Park. For more information, please contact Antonio Lombardi, Lombardi Historic Motoring, 608-738-4478 or lhm0673@gmail.com.

Directions to La Crosse Club from I-90: Take Exit 3 to merge onto US-53 S / WI-35 S toward La Crosse. Continue to follow US-53 S. Turn right at State Street. Turn left at Front Street.



Antonio Lombardi

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