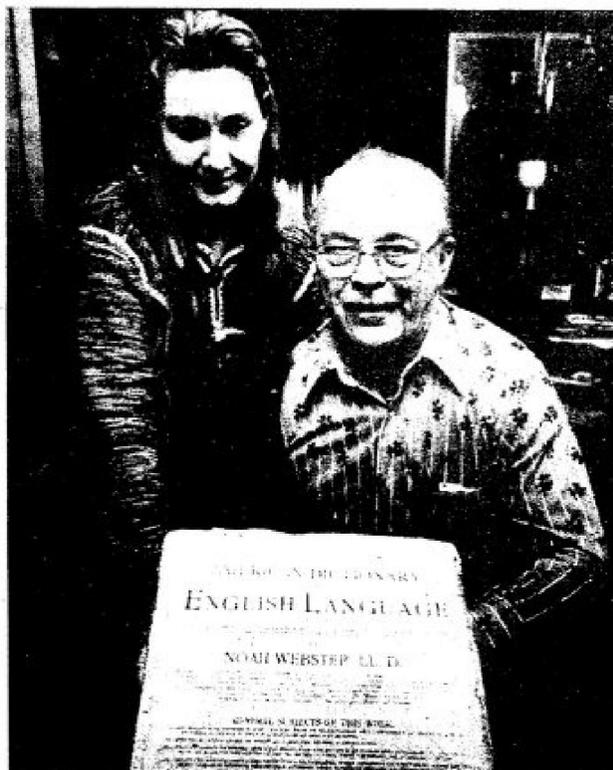


George Lafayette Heaton Jr. 1926-2006

<https://aircaraccess.com/achf-heaton.htm>

My co-worker at the library, a well-read lady named Maria, was the wife of George Heaton, a genteel and well-spoken taxi driver in Portland, Oregon who was on the Library Board and had the longest Cadillac taxi in the world. He used to be called upon by the mayor and governor, who liked both him and his limo taxi.

B2 THE OREGONIAN, THURSDAY, JANUARY 27, 1983



Staff photo by DAVID WEINTRAUB

WORN WORDS — Taxi driver George Heaton and his wife, Maria, a book-binder, own 1860 edition of Noah Webster's dictionary that cannot be restored or rebound because of a long-ago run-in with a garden hose.

Old dictionary rich in meaning

By DIANE LUND

Correspondent, The Oregonian

George Heaton's antique dictionary is kept inside a plastic bag. Its frayed cover of brown leather fell off long ago. Its pages, dry and brittle, crack when they're turned, and the book reeks of mildew. Yet, this rare volume has value.

"The book is good for its content, not for its context," said Heaton's wife, Maria, who binds books for the Multnomah County Library and has pronounced the dictionary beyond repair.

"Too much mildew has set in," she said. "The book's too brittle to be rebuilt. It can live fine in its plastic bag. But, it could be destroyed by admiration."

Heaton's dictionary is among the world's oldest and was either the first or second revision published by Noah Webster in 1860, he said. Its printers, Donohue and Henneberry of Chicago, went out of business 75 years ago.

The dictionary was bequeathed to Heaton by his mother, Alice. She received it as a gift while working as a cook in Buffalo, New York.

"I come from a family of words," said Heaton, 56, who lives in Northeast Portland and has been driving a cab since 1968. "My grandmother used to rap me on the head with her thimble if I misused a word and told me either to use the King's English properly or not use it at all."

Heaton kept the dictionary stored in his root cellar, along with 2,000 other rare volumes, while living in Sacramento, Calif.

He had accumulated 30 antique dictionaries, occasionally comparing word meanings between the 1860 and 1894 editions.

One weekend his neighbor accidentally left his garden hose running and

water seeped into the cellar. Heaton said, destroying the books. Two boxes surfaced, floating to the top, and the 1860 dictionary was among those rescued, he said.

"We tried drying out the books as best we could, but moisture had ruined them," Heaton said.

"Now, this dictionary's become more of a history book than anything else," he said. "If I had the resources, I'd like to see the whole thing duplicated on nice new paper and have my wife bind it in good buckram."

Gently leafing through the 1,250-page book, Heaton loves reading old definitions of words such as "predecease," "psychomancy," "slattern" and "tachygraphic." However, his favorite is "transpire."

"It means to emit through excretions of the skin. That's what 'perspiration' means today," Heaton said. "And a 'car,' why that was a small vehicle driven by one horse. Get this one: An 'in-mate' was one who lodged or dwelled in the same house but had a separate room."

Words such as "radio" and "airplane" have no place in this volume, Heaton said.

"This book goes back to more simplistic lifestyles," Heaton said. "Most of the definitions here have no place in today's society. That saddens me."

Heaton said he has checked with the state libraries in California and Oregon and can't find any dictionaries as old as his.

"I'd like to see a publishing company take an interest in this volume," his wife added. "A company which cares enough to have the pages reproduced. Otherwise the book's going to gradually rot away. The acid from the paper is eating at it."

I recall George saw me walking once and gave me a ride to the bus stop. He was one of those people who made you feel like something great when in his presence. He did this by oozing natural self-confidence coupled with a genuine curiosity about other people, and he came across as sincerely interested in you. He was afraid of nobody; he was a participator, a player, and a ladies' man. He spoke to every child he met and they instantly liked him. I've tried many times to describe his amazing persona. He was a taxi driver who worked the rough end of town, but he was also friends with the governor. What can I say? I only met him three or four times, but I worked with his wife 40 hours a week for four months, and he was a people person, so he probably knew me better than I knew him. As for me, well, the short version is that at that time in my life, four months at the same job was like, forever, dude.

At work, Maria would long-sufferingly listen to me go on about the suction-powered air car I planned to build, based on my fascination with player pianos. After several of my single-topic barrages of long-

winded obsessiveness, she'd eventually had her fill. She invited me to her annual Halloween spaghetti dinner so I could speak with her husband George. She informed me that George would like to tell me about his real-life invention, a real air car that he had built long ago.

So on Halloween of 1980, air car research history was made: I showed up in my "Average Boy" costume and after a spaghetti dinner that couldn't be beat, when he was good and ready, George took me into a little book-lined room in his humble wooden home and proceeded to fill my mind with ideas which became a blueprint for the next four+ decades of my research.

Halloween 1980 at George Heaton's house.



Sacramento Bee, California
May 2, 1964 page B5

Gasoline Dealers Laud Ending Stamps

Dan Herd, acting president of the Retailers Gasoline Association of California, said today the association's move to eliminate trading stamps from its members' operations appears to be meeting success.

"I don't have any way of knowing right now how the move is going in Sacramento proper," Herd said, "but I estimate that in the north area about 85 to 90 per cent of the stations have stopped giving out the trading stamps.

"Of course, there are a few competitive situations where one dealer cannot afford to stop, but generally the move has been successful."

Herd said the retail gasoline dealers stopped giving trading stamps yesterday in an attempt to cut their overhead.

George Heaton, Jr., executive director of the association said the average dealer pays about \$240 a month for stamps and cannot pass this cost on to the public because of price regulations by the oil companies. Independent dealers, he said, cannot afford to give the stamps and still employ the help required for top service.

First things first: he told me to watch out for dirty air; explaining that one drop of oil in the wrong place could diesel and blow up a compressor. He must have wanted me to take his warning seriously, because he was trying to get me off suction and onto a scarier energy medium, compressed air. In this regard he mentioned that he had once been the vice-president of the California Fuel Dealers Association, even being called to testify before a congressional committee about the dangers of catalytic converters.

Now that he'd blown my wooden suction motor off the map, George proceeded in his quietly confident way to blow my mind. He said that as a young man in 1949 he and a friend had started out converting their motorcycles to run on compressed air, which they would refuel by driving them from gas station to gas station where they'd use the tire-filling hose to get to the next gas station. From there they graduated to converting auto engines to run on air by blocking the carburetor hole with a brass plate and putting compressed air into the engine through the spark plug holes. He told me that "a good cam man" could change the cam to run the motor as a two-cycle engine instead of the four-part combustion engine cycle.

I was already hooked, but then George dropped a big one: "Our air cars acted like a perpetual motion machine. I'm not saying they never ran out of air, but we drove them back and forth from coast to coast." I didn't even know what "perpetual motion" meant, but I noticed that just hearing the mysterious term made me feel skeptical.

And then he tried to tell me how to do it, but he claimed he didn't remember all the details. I have come to suspect that he actually didn't want to give too much information all at once to a hippie in an Average Boy costume, in the first conversation. George told me, "There's a way to put low pressure air into a high pressure tank." These words changed my life forever. He said he couldn't remember the details, but they used to put air into the tank in little spurts instead of a steady flow, and he said the air had entered the tank "at an angle or something". I was taking notes as fast as I could, but my notes disappeared long ago. George and his friend gave up on their project because they "weren't engineers enough" to properly control the pressure going to their engines, which kept blowing up. The last time George was driving an air car, it was across the Nevada desert when "a piston blew out the top of the engine, through the hood, and up into the sky," never to be seen again.

My relationship with George's family didn't improve when I quit my job at the library in a childish way; Maria would no longer speak to me and George made an excuse to get off the phone when I called him once to ask more questions, but I'd met two of George's children that Halloween night in 1980.

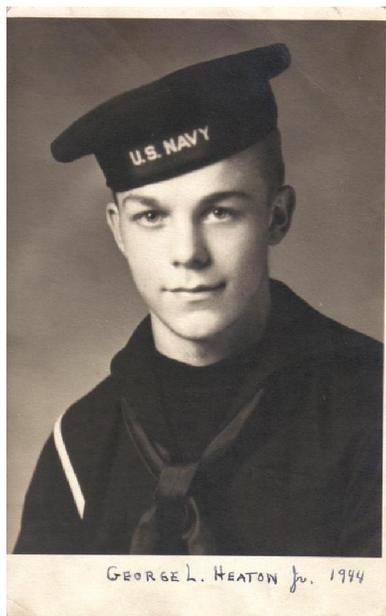
One of these girls, Anna, who was about ten years old in 1980, had inherited George's outgoing personality. When I tracked her down online over 30 years later, she went out of her way to help me to try and get a better grip on what kind of person he'd been. Since I was guilty of hero worship, I've tried to rely on Anna's version when describing him, but to be perfectly honest, Anna might be guilty of hero worship too. In spite of his human shortcomings, such as paying too much attention to her little sister, Anna and George were close and grew closer with time. When George's lifetime driving career was ended by his being run over by a truck, it was Anna who cared for him the last 20 years of his life. He died on January 21, 2006. Most of the photos on these pages were provided courtesy of Anna Heaton.

photos: (L) George on another Halloween. (R) 2014 Anna Heaton, me, Cynthia Heaton



George Lafayette Heaton Jr. was born December 21, 1926 in Madison, Ohio. The family also lived in Buffalo, New York and Mexico, and ended up in Sacramento, California by about 1966, where they stayed. Before that, George served in the Navy for a while, but when he tried to defend the honor of a

lady by getting into a fistfight with another sailor, he was booted out of the Navy since the other sailor happened to be his superior officer.



It would be around this time that the air cars were built. I believe George was driving trucks for a living around this time also.

While he was in the Navy, George had taken the time to marry a fellow soldier, Lois Castle, and get her pregnant, not necessarily in that order. Their son was born in Sacramento. In the course of my research, I was able to find this son, George's oldest child, and reconnect him with Anna, his younger half-sister, who'd known nothing about him except his name. I don't know how their reunion went and I guess it's none of my business. George also had a set of twin boys with a Cuban woman, and he raised a daughter Cynthia who had earlier been fostered at his request by one of his older sisters. One day George showed up at his sister's house and took Cynthia home with him. The family disagrees as to whether Cynthia is his daughter, and I guess it's none of my business. George was the youngest of six children, and had no brothers. This might explain how he learned the art of diplomacy. (In my case, having two older sisters worked the opposite for me, so I guess what I probably needed was four more older sisters, and then I would've been just like George.)

In all honesty, I cannot fail to mention that George was something of a swinger. No one has catalogued how many families he actually started over the years. He was a relatively sedate family man in his 50s when I knew him, but his marriage to Maria eventually ended in divorce.

That's about all I know about George, within reason, so here's a little background on his unique and interesting ancestors.

George's father, George Lafayette Heaton, had been abandoned by his father Samuel Jacob Heaton when George Sr.'s mother died young. George Sr. and his siblings were split up among

St. Joseph News-Press
St. Joseph, Missouri
September 28, 1947, page 22

Lois Castle and Navy Man Are Wed

Mrs. Lella M. Castle, 312 West Rosine street, announces the marriage of her daughter, Miss Lois J. Castle, radioman third class of the WAVES of San Diego, to George L. Heaton Jr.,



MRS. HEATON JR.

seaman first class, son of Mr. and Mrs. Heaton Sr. of Sacramento. The ceremony was performed Sept. 12 in the Wedding Bell Chapel at San Diego with Seaman First Class Donald R. Heaton, brother of the bridegroom, and Miss Jean F. Henthorne, seaman first class of the WAVES, in attendance.

The bride, who is a graduate of Lafayette High School, has served as a member of the WAVES for the past three years. She and her husband are both stationed at the San Diego Naval Air Station.

various foster homes and Samuel, who was the oldest son of Joseph Heaton and Sarah Rebecca Runyan, moved to Arkansas where he started another family.

George Sr. was adopted by a single lady when he was three or four years old, and renamed Harry C. Wetzig, but one of his sisters eventually found him and told him who he was, so he had his name legally changed back to George Lafayette Heaton and eventually gave his son the same name. George Sr. was a railway conductor in Cleveland, Ohio, amongst other things. One day, the trolley he was working on stopped so he and the other employees of the trolley car along with a police officer could run over to a residence that was on fire. George Sr. (H. C. Wetzig) climbed to the top of a human ladder and rescued the family trapped on the second floor, then the trolley crew rescued the other two families from the ground floor.

THE CLEVELAND LEADER

MARCH 29, 1912

3

**3 MEN IN HUMAN CHAIN
SAVE FAMILY IN FIRE**

**Street Car Crew and Patrolman
Mount Each Others' Shoulders
and Rescue Children.**

Mrs. Sarah Bonovitz and four small children were rescued from their burning home, 3829 Scovill avenue, yesterday by Patrolman Koemit and a street car crew, who formed a human ladder. Motorman Arthur Taylor, 2348 E. 86th street, heard Mrs. Bonovitz scream. With Conductor H. C. Wetzig, 8014 Amos court, and Patrolman Koemit he left the car.

The conductor climbed upon the shoulders of the other two men to reach the second story window, where Mrs. Bonovitz had marshaled her family. The children were quickly lowered to the ground.

Mrs. Bonovitz was rescued by means of a ladder which her husband, Frank Bonovitz, brought to the window after the children had been rescued.

Wetzig's hands and face were slightly burned. All the children were overcome by smoke, but recovered quickly.

T. G. Tin, a Chinaman, in whose laundry the fire started, was dragged from his bed by the rescuers, and the family of Sam Friedman, consisting of his wife and six children, occupying rooms in the rear of the building, were also aroused.

SACRAMENTO BEE, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 25, 1958

Page A-2



REPEAT VOWS—Mr. and Mrs. George L. Heaton of 4700 65th Street walk down the aisle to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary by repeating their marriage vows. They first were married in Cleveland, Ohio, June 10, 1908. They repeated the ceremony in Sacramento's St. Matthews Episcopal Church. The Heaton, residents of Sacramento 11 years, are the parents of Mrs. Virginia McGuire of Sacramento; Mrs. Roger Heatherly of Placerville, El Dorado County; Mrs. Carl Krueger of Detroit, Mich; Mrs. William Bukky of Madison, Ohio; Heaton, Jr., of Boise, Idaho; Donald Heaton of Buchle, NY, and Raymond Heaton of San Diego. They have 25 grandchildren and eight great grandchildren.

George Sr.'s grandfather Joseph Heaton was born in 1820 in Richland County, Ohio. He served in the Civil War and was wounded by having one of his testicles pinched in the saddle when jumping a fence on his horse, and later he was shot in the leg below the knee. He and Sarah were married in Kalamazoo, Michigan in 1852 and had six children. They settled in Putnam County, Ohio where Sarah's ancestors might have been among the first settlers, and one of Joseph's ancestors might have been the first to survey the area. By the time Joseph died in 1916, the area was still so rugged that there was no hospital there. He died a few years later than Sarah, both expiring in nursing homes for the indigent and buried in paupers' graves.

But before that, when Joseph was 90 years old and could still split a cord of wood in a day, he and his wife of 50 years set out on a journey worthy of a Hollywood movie.

It seems that, as a young woman before marrying Joseph, Sarah had given birth to a child she couldn't care for, but of course she cared for him anyway. Until someone named Enos Bradbury came along saying he'd help her out by taking the boy off her hands for a period of time till she could get back on her feet. He apparently lied about where he lived and took the child far away to New Hampshire. Sarah couldn't find him to get the child back when she married Joseph Heaton a few months later, and spent her life wondering what happened to her son.

Enos Bradbury and his older wife had no children, and they raised the boy as "Charles H. Greenough". When the boy died at the age of 90, we learn from his death certificate that Enos was his uncle. Charles worked as a carpenter, never married, and is buried with the couple who took him from Sarah Rebecca Runyan. Obviously there are a lot of things I don't know about this whole theory, including whether or not it is true. But since Enos Bradbury is an uncommon name and the one qualifying individual I could find by that name did in fact foster a child exactly the age of Sarah Rebecca Runyan's son, it's likely that I'm telling the truth and it was Sarah who was lied to.

Until you got a chance to read this, I was the only person on earth who knew what happened to Sarah Rebecca Runyan's lost child. And now you know too. Aren't you glad you asked? My next plan is to get in my time machine and go back and administer lie detector tests to everyone involved. Now that would be some real accurate storytelling.

Which leads me to say that, because of my compulsion to study the backgrounds of these air exotica inventors, I ended up becoming a genealogist. And after that, I spent the last four+ years working full-time to create a genealogy software project called Trebard GPS.

Well, you can't study air cars forever. Since no air car inventor will ever tell you the whole story, you either figure it out for yourself, or you find a new hobby. One thing I'm sure of: if you don't build it, it won't work. And I couldn't afford to build it.

THE KALAMAZOO GAZETTE,
SUNDAY, MARCH 6, 1910. 11

AGED OHIO COUPLE HUNT FOR SON HERE

MOTHER BEGINS SEARCH FOR
BOY SHE HAS NOT SEEN FOR
FIFTY YEARS.

With the picture of a chubby little boy of four years old in her mind, Mrs. Joseph Heaton of Putnam county, Ohio, is in Kalamazoo looking for a son whom she has not seen for 58 years.

In spite of the fact that many years have passed since she gave him to the care of another, she is confident of securing some trace of him and has been searching the city diligently. She is 78 years old.

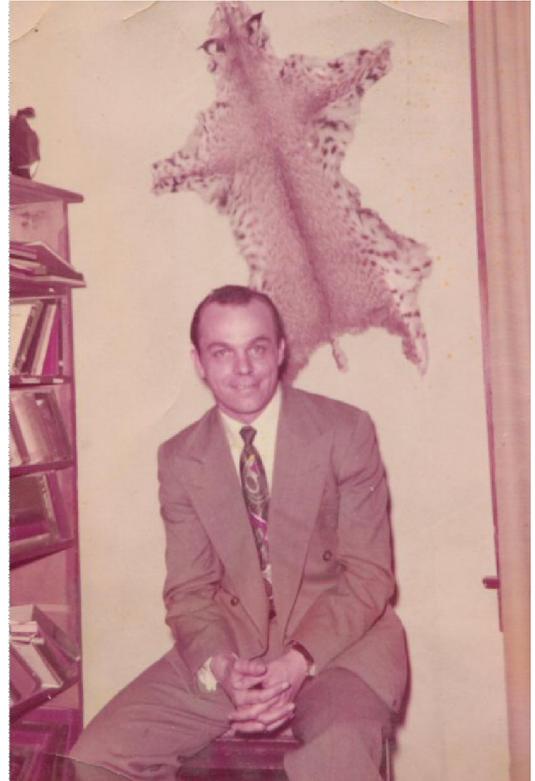
With her is her husband, who is 90 years old, and who says that he can still split a cord of wood a day. He brought his ax with him in the hope that he might find some work to do while his wife was searching for his step-son.

Fifty-eight years ago, shortly after the death of the boy's father, who was a veteran of the Mexican war, and while the mother was working as a domestic at Grand Rapids, she gave the child to Enos Bradberry of this city. Although she later wrote several letters, she could get no reply and later she heard of Bradberry's death. She lost all track of her child, but finally started with her aged husband to Kalamazoo to find her son.

"I think I will be able to find him," said the mother wistfully last night. "I heard of a man who answers his description out at Richland and think that he may be my boy."

The aged couple are at the Portage hotel and last night they sat alone in their room laying plans for the search for the boy and for their trip back home as cheerfully as any young couple just starting out in life.

Mr. Heaton, in spite of his age, is active and strong.



This chapter of *Air Car Hall of Fame* is dedicated to the Heaton women who helped me with this research:

Anna Heaton
Cynthia Heaton
Shanda Lomax
and especially to Maria for putting up with me... sorta.