

— Up front —

DUSTING OFF A TREASURED COLLECTION OF VINTAGE WHEELS

By FRANCINE ALLEN
Staff Writer

HILLSBOROUGH — A movie star from the film "The Color Purple" is alive and well — alive and running well, that is. Remember that scene in the movie when Whoopie Goldberg fainted as Shug Avery drove away? Well, forget Whoopie. The real star of that scene was a 1923 white touring bus that stood ever-so-faithful as Whoopie fainted. That touring bus along with a 1936 Chevrolet pick-up truck, a 1923 Franklin automobile and several other antique cars achieved stardom with the movie "The Color Purple." But you'd never know it. As priceless gems of an antique car and truck collection, they sit humbly in the small historic town of Hillsborough, without a word to say about their stint under the bright lights. They let their owner, Hillsborough native James Freeland, do the talking.

Not that he talks much — perhaps association does bring on assimilation. He isn't quite as silent as his cars, but he is humble and forever occupied with business.

Freeland will exclaim the virtues of his 40-year-old collection of over 20 antique cars and trucks, but he is

reluctant to do the same for himself. However, according to his wife, Maxine Freeland, he is a "pretty good fellow who likes odd things." His friend, Betty Ibrahim, called him an entrepreneurial genius who is imaginative, innovative, full of dreams and equipped with the guts to follow those dreams. "He's an original," Ibrahim said.

Freeland's taste for the oddities of life and his originality may be one reason his antique car collection includes a white, black-topped 1918 French taxicab.

But as a businessman who owns a conglomeration of stores and businesses in Hillsborough known as Daniel Boone Village, why would he collect antique cars? He says his motivation is simple: "I get satisfaction seeing something 80 years old run."

One summer he and a few of his grandchildren raced a 1935 Ford in an antique car race from Disneyland in California to Florida's Walt Disney World. They came in 74th out of 100 cars.

However, California's Disneyland and the Hollywood studio of "The Color Purple" have not been the only experiences with stardom for Free-

land's cars. A 1924 Buick hearse was cast in the Steve Martin movie "Roxanne," which was produced in Tarboro, N.C.

His streetcar starred in "Meet Me in St. Louis" as Judy Garland clung onto it singing "clang, clang went the trolley horse."

Recently, a 1929 Whippitt school bus, a 1932 Ford dump truck and a 1935 Chevrolet pick-up truck returned from Mount Elk, N.C., where the movie "Winter People," starring Lloyd Bridges and Kurt Russell, was produced.

When movie producers rent his cars, Freeland said he receives approximately \$250 to \$500 monthly.

The producers discovered Freeland's cars through his membership with the North Carolina Horseless Carriage Club, one of three local antique car clubs, Freeland said.

The other two, the Vintage Car Club and the Antique Automobile Club, have large memberships in Orange County and Roxboro respectively, he said.

These three clubs, along with a magazine for antique car buffs called the "Heming Motor News," inform Freeland of available antique cars and are in fact how he discovered most

of the stars in his collection, he said. His collection began with a Model T purchased at \$125, a car chosen as a result of his growing up in the Model T days, he said.

His oldest car which "runs every now and then" is a 1902 Cadillac, the 10th Cadillac built in the United States.

Comparing modern and older cars, Freeland pointed out some major differences.

"It was bad in early days. They'd make open cars for the safety because they thought they (cars) would turn over," he said.

Open cars were those without doors because closed-door cars were usually high-topped and therefore

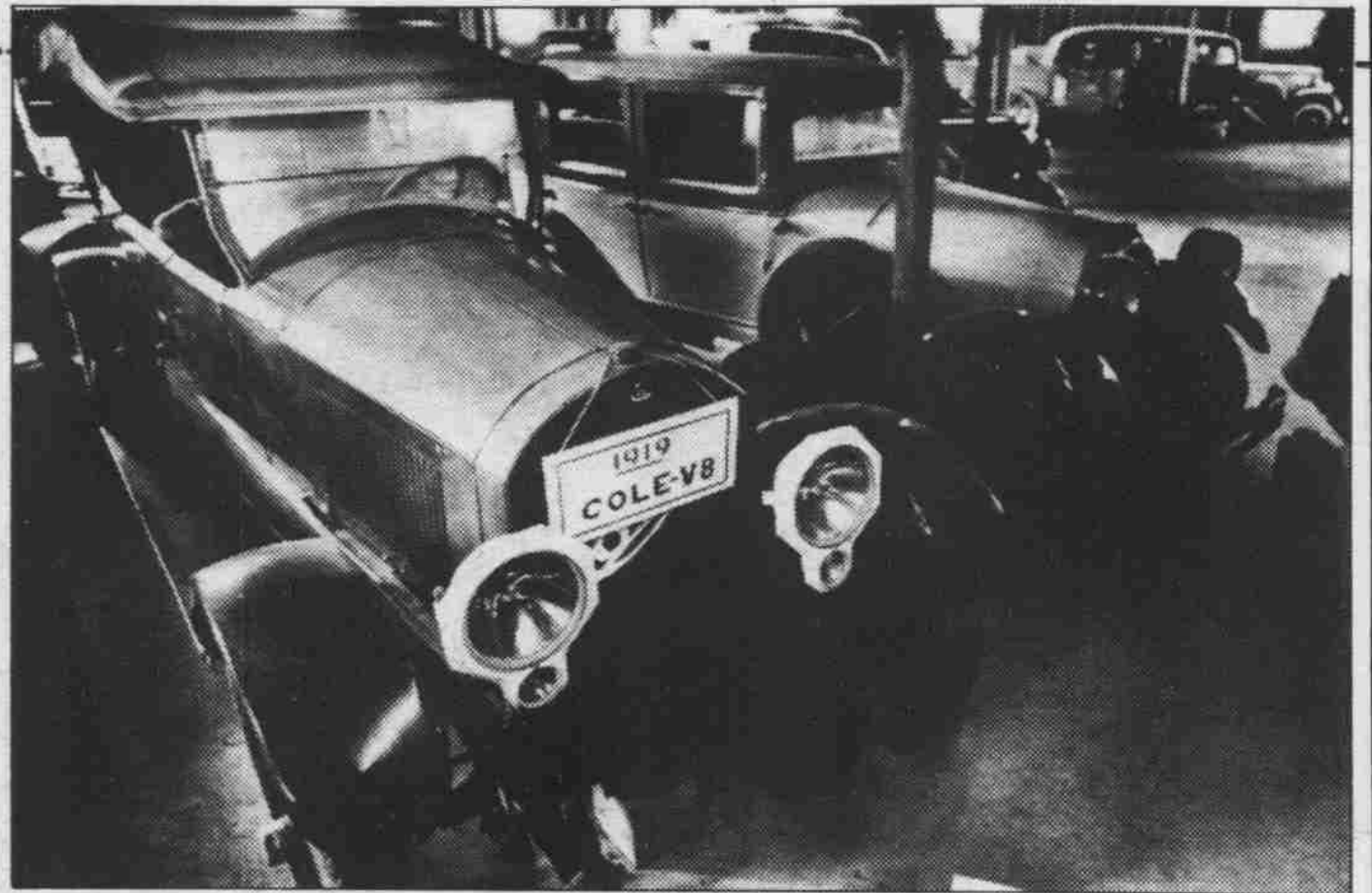
prone to flip sideways, he said.

In older cars, "You could get as hot as the dickens in them, and you could get as cold as the dickens in them," he said. The luxuries of heat and air conditioning were non-existent.

An older car traveling to Durham had to be equipped with a patching outfit, a jack and a hand pump because tires weren't durable and unexpected rocks were always emerging from the sand-clay roads to deflate tires, he said.

However, when concrete roads were developed in 1925, drivers had less trouble with flat tires.

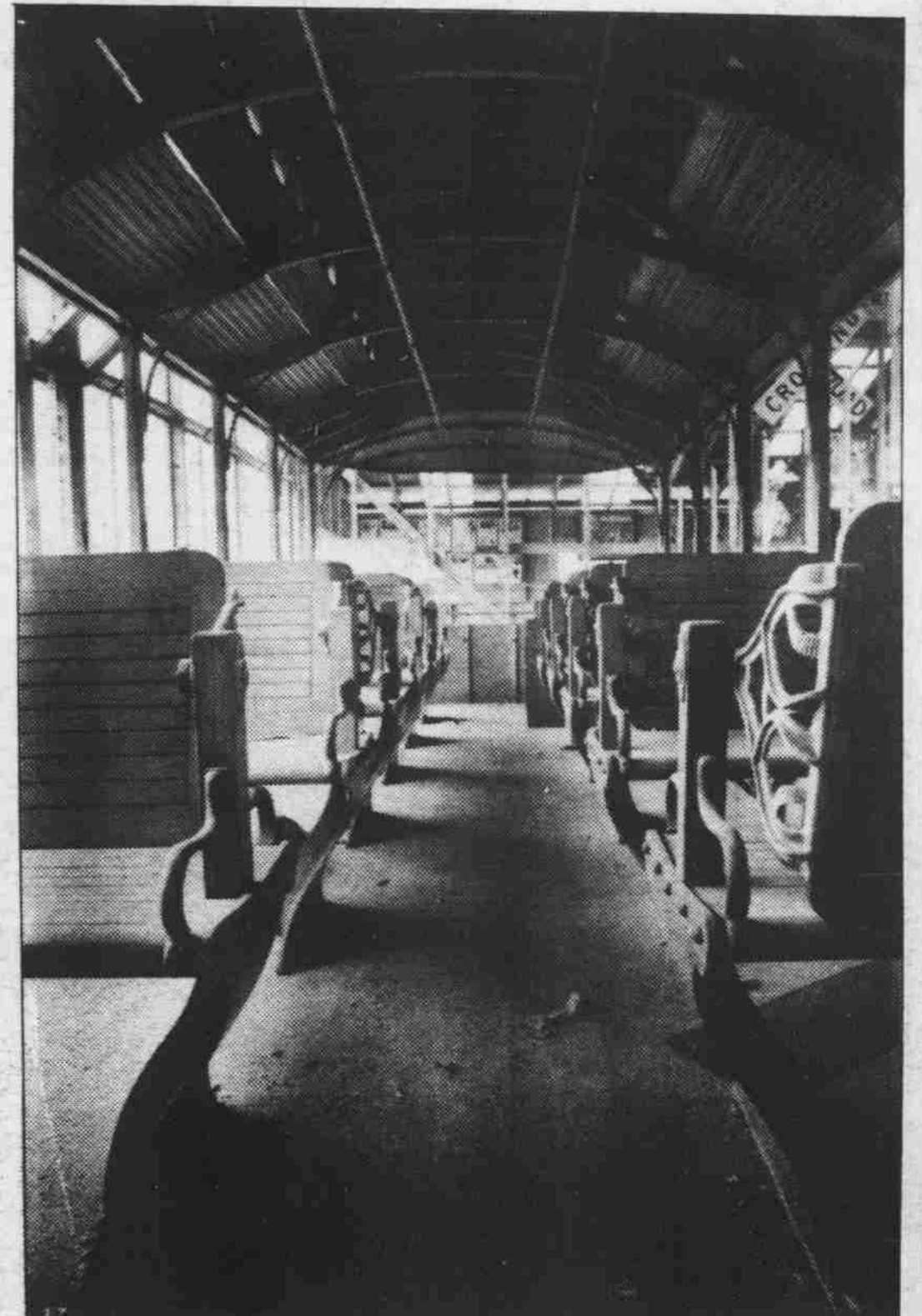
The tire has been one of the best improvements in cars, but "the modern car has gotten so sophisti-



Cars from the Roaring Twenties era



Antique car collector James Freeland



Trolley used in "A Streetcar Named Desire" and "Meet Me in St. Louis"