

This article was originally published in Legend #38, Spring 2008. [Link](#)

Dating Clason Touring Atlases, 1923-31

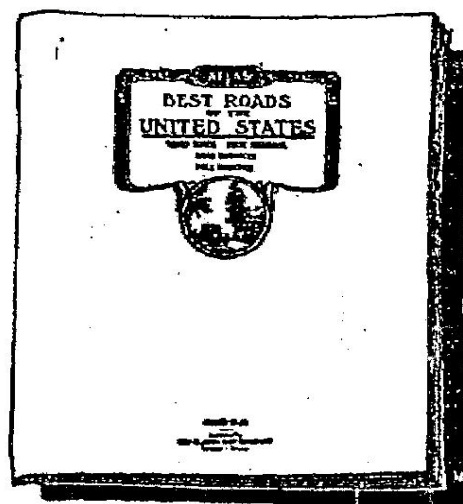
by **Carl Liedholm** (RMCA #836) and **Mark Greaves** (#39)

BACKGROUND

In 1923, the Clason Map Company produced its first road atlas of the United States. An advertisement appearing in the August 4, 1923 issue of the Chicago Daily Tribune (shown at right) shows a picture of Clason's "Best Roads of the United States" atlas and proclaims that it is "just off the press; nothing like it has ever been published before."

There is some validity to this claim. Although the Cram Co. had produced a "Good Roads Atlas of the United States" and an "Auto Trails and Commercial Survey of the United States" a few years earlier, the road component of these atlases was rudimentary at best, consisting of nothing more than a few "main roads" that had been crudely overprinted in red on some already existing state railroad maps. By contrast, Clason's road atlas contained fresh state maps that focused just on the road networks and that provided such details as the mileage between towns as well as the quality of the roads. Rand McNally followed this approach as well when it launched its first U.S. road atlas one year later.

Clason continued to issue updated versions of their road atlases each year until 1931. Like their competitor Rand McNally, Clason produced two versions of these atlases beginning in 1924. One version, the "Motor Atlases," were specifically produced for an array of different clients, such as the Detroit News, the San Francisco Examiner, the Milwaukee Journal Tour Club and many others. The covers and titles of these "client" atlases changed over the years. Initially, the covers featured a single car driving under a large tree with "Best Roads of All States Across the Continent Motor Atlas" featured in the title. In later years, different cars and settings were portrayed on the cover and "Motor Atlas" became the central focus of the title.



**Atlas of
Road Maps** **\$1** Post Paid

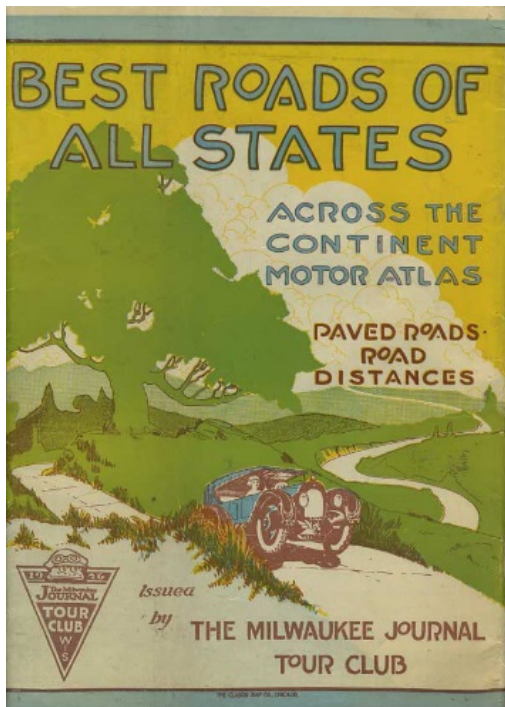
48 Pages in Colors.

Contains a separate and complete Road Map of every State in the Union and a U. S. Trail Map with index, bound in one book 9x12 inches.

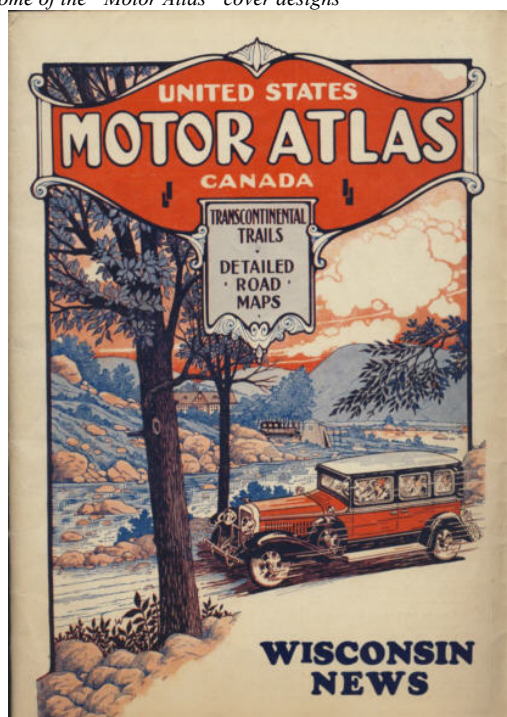
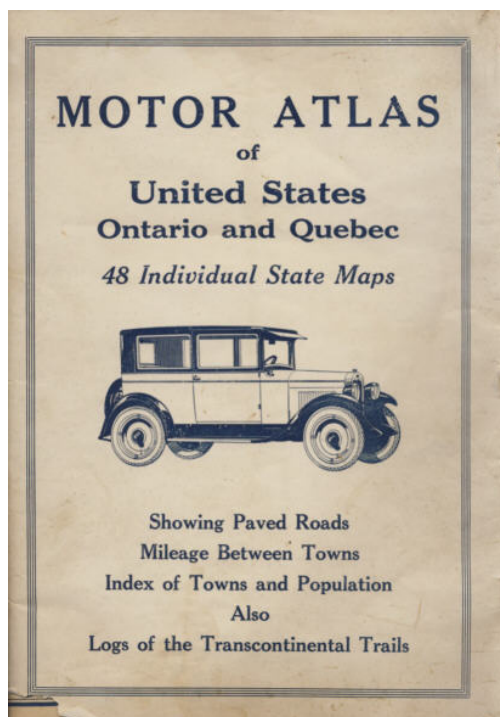
It shows Paved Roads and other highways.
Mileage between towns.
Road names — Numbers, Pole Markings.
Cities and Towns.
National and State Parks, Mountains, Rivers and Lakes.

Up-to-date, Just off the press. Nothing like it has ever been published before. Every car owner should carry one in his car. Enclose one dollar bill in an envelope and this wonderful Road Atlas will be mailed you at once.

THE CLASON MAP CO.,
431 S. Dearborn St.,
Chicago, Illinois.



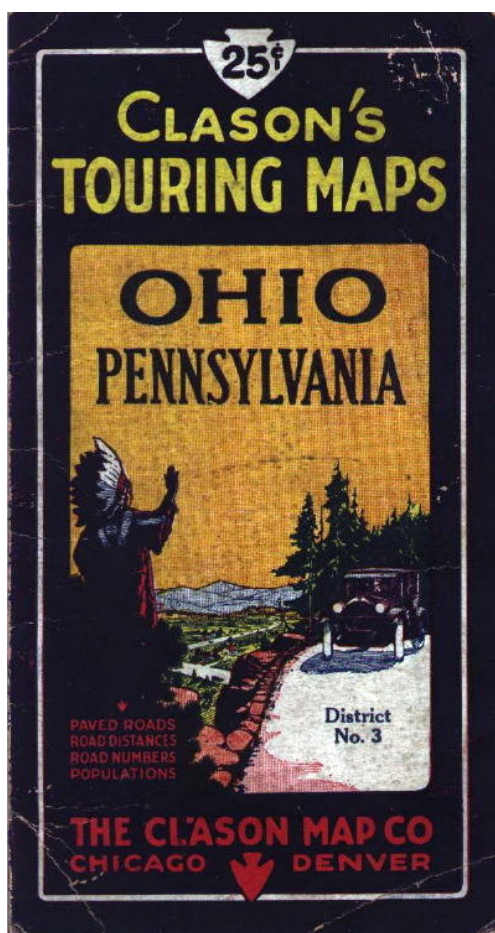
Some of the "Motor Atlas" cover designs



The other version, the one that Clason produced directly for sale, was called the "Touring Atlas of the United States." With a distinctive image of a Native American on the left of each cover, a new Touring Atlas was produced each year until 1931. From year to year, there were variations in images to the right of the Native American, in the border colors, and in the wording on these covers.

Dating these "Touring Atlases," however, presents unusual challenges. Unlike Rand McNally and Gousha, Clason typically did not place dates or even codes on their products during this period. Thus, until now it has only been possible to approximate their dates. This article is designed to provide a more precise dating scheme for Clason's "Touring Atlases." It is still to some degree a work in progress and subject to revision as additional examples are uncovered.

Although no official dates appear on these atlases until 1930, it was possible, using an array of approaches, to assign dates to each of them. Some of the individual atlas descriptions or maps, for example, had dates. This was true of the 1925 atlas, in which the Colorado map was dated 1925, and of the 1927 atlas, which mentions that "the final routing of the U.S. Highways was not settled until January 2, 1927." For other years, it was possible to date the atlas by examining the road network or the road legend descriptions in the individual state maps. Moreover, during this period, Clason often produced individual state maps in folders that would typically include a calendar, and cross checks with these maps provided additional validation of our atlas dates. It also became apparent in this exercise that some of the individual state maps included in an atlas were not always updated, and in this case, Clason would include the previous year's state map instead.



Clason folded road map

THE CLASON TOURING ATLASES

The 1923 Clason road atlas was titled, "Atlas: Best Roads of the United States" and sold for one dollar. There were 44 midget maps of the states printed in black on a yellow background; the size of the atlas was 9" x 12". "Highly improved roads" was a distinctive road legend that could be found on virtually all the individual state maps of that year.

The 1924 Touring Atlas, the first with the distinctive Native American on the cover, was, in many respects, similar to the 1923 atlas. The size of the atlas as well as the number, color, and order of individual state maps, for example, remained the same. Several of the individual state maps, however, were revised, along with their road legends and logos. The price of the atlas was also lowered to 50 cents. Although "Touring Atlas" appeared on the top of the cover, "Paved Roads of the Nation" dominated the title.

A similar version of the 1924 atlas was also produced somewhat later, perhaps towards the end of 1924 or early in 1925. The cover title was changed to "Touring Atlas: Paved Roads of the Nation," the number of cars on the road was increased from 3 to 6, and the price of the atlas was placed in an arrowhead. Most of the individual maps, however, were exactly the same as in the previous atlas. Only those of Pennsylvania, Kentucky, Iowa, Utah, and New Mexico were changed.

A major change in the format of the Touring Atlas occurred in 1925. The page size of the atlas was increased from 9" x 11.5" to 16.5" x 12", with the individual maps now folding out from the atlas. The midget maps were no longer used. Most of the individual maps were just titled "Mileage Maps," and they were now printed in blue on a white background. Many of the maps used in this atlas were simply larger, but unchanged versions of the midget maps used in the 1924 atlas. There were also new individual states maps produced in 1925 that were included in this atlas; many of these used "through routes" or "best roads" in their road legends. The picture on the cover of this atlas was similar to that on the late 1924/early 1925 atlas, but the main title now read "Clason's Touring Atlas of the United States," and "Logs of National Trails" replaces "Pole Markings." A two page pictorial featuring the "Wonders of America" was added to the inside cover in 1925, which continued (with some variation in the pictures shown) through 1929. Also for the first time, there is an advertisement on the back cover: it is for the Nutshell Publishing Co., another part of the Clason empire.

In 1926, the Native American was reduced in size and one car facing the reader on a mountain ledge now dominated the right side of the cover design. This year a map of "Ontario and Quebec Canada" was added to the atlas, a fact mentioned on the cover. Many of the individual state maps were revised and many now included some mention of "gravel" in their road legends. Clason, however, did not attempt to include U.S. Highways in their 1926 atlas. It thus avoided the mislabeling problems that beset the Rand McNally Co., which, in their infamous 1926 atlas, included U.S. Highway Route numbers (U.S. 60 for U.S. 66 being the most famous instance) from a listing that had not yet been formally approved and that was subsequently changed. The back cover now includes license and motor laws along with the Nutshell Publishing Co. advertisement.

The advent of the U.S. Highway system was reflected in the 1927 Touring Atlas. The border color of the cover was changed from blue to red and a U.S. 40 highway logo was placed in front of the car on the mountain ledge. U.S. Highways now appeared on all the individual maps, and these were marked in red. In addition, the price of the atlas was increased from 50 to 75 cents. At least two versions of the back cover

exist. One featured an advertisement for the Powerine Co., with Bearcat motor fuel highlighted, while the other advertised both the Atlantic Pacific Highway and Denver Tourist Bureau.

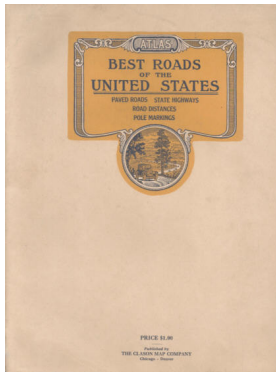
The image on the cover of the 1928 atlas was changed once again and now depicted a convertible heading towards a blue mountain. A map of Canada was now included, a fact mentioned on the atlas cover. The maps of West Virginia and Virginia were combined, however, so the number of maps remains the same. Most of the road legends now included an "all-weather-road" designation and, for the first time, map codes (e.g. R -300A) appeared at the bottom of individual maps. These codes, however, don't offer much help in dating the maps, and except for a few updates in 1929, remain unchanged through the 1931 edition. A Powerine Co. advertisement appeared on the back cover, this time with a tiger dominating the page.

The final image change on the cover occurred in 1929, when a man was now portrayed waving to the Native American from the rumble seat of a car with a white mountain in the background. The number of individual maps declined to 40 as the maps of several states were combined. Also, the maps were now printed in black rather than blue. The back cover has an advertisement for the Clason Green Guides, rather than one for the Powerine Co.

The cover of the 1930 atlas was similar to that of the previous year. A star in the price arrowhead and an underlined "Road Maps of Every State", however, now appeared on many, but not all, of the 1930 and 1931 covers. A star could be found on some of the 1926 and 1928 covers as well, but the role of such stars is unclear. The "Wonders of America" pictorial spread is now replaced with a yellow outline map of the United States on the inside cover for the edition, and for the first time, a copyright date, 1930, appeared. The individual state maps were revised as the road network changed, but the road legends and other map features remained unaltered. The Powerine Co., with a tiger portrayed, returns as the back cover advertisement.

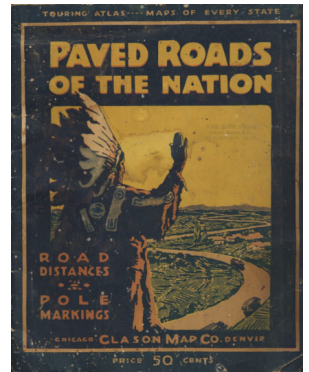
The last Clason Touring Atlas appeared in 1931. The phrase "new census edition" appears on the cover and a copyright date reaffirmed the year. For the first time, some city maps were portrayed inside the front and back covers. Once again, the Powerine Co. tiger graced the back cover. With this issue, the Clason Co. brought its nine year run of Touring Atlases to a close.

1923

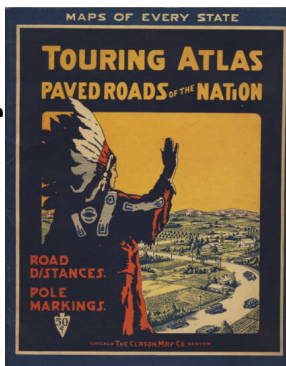


Clason Touring Atlas 1923 - 1931

1924



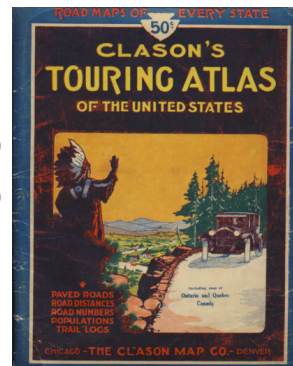
Late 1924 / Early 1925



1925



1926



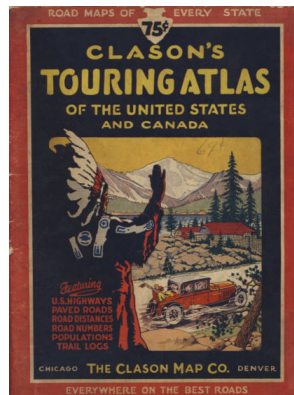
1927



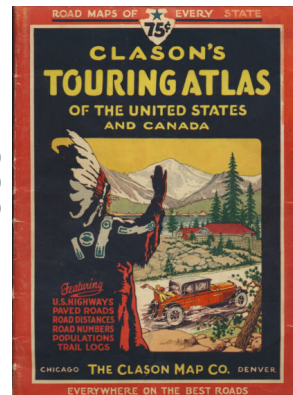
1928



1929



1930



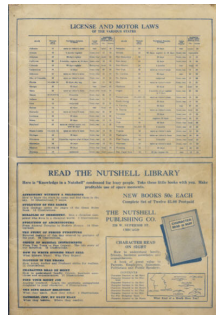
1931



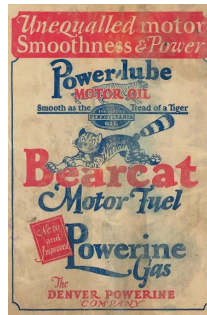
Back Covers (1923-24 back covers are blank)



1925



1926



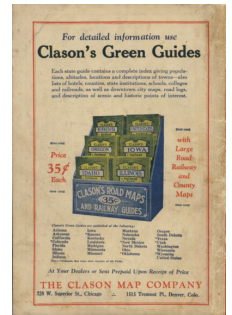
1927 Var. 1



1927 Var. 2



1928,30,31



1929