

## Anna Marcellus Conner and her 'Miss Nancy Belle'

Written by Jes-c Brandt

---



Perhaps the most well-known feature of the Phillips County Museum is the 'car room.' Few can forget the assortment of Fords or the honk of the Hupmobile.

While it is exciting to just look at the antiques from the early 1900s, even more intriguing are some of the stories behind them. One car in particular has an especially interesting background.

In March of 1932 Leo and Anna Marcellus bought a car they held very dear to their hearts. It was a 1931 Ford Model A, and it was a beauty. They named her Miss Nancy Belle.

Their car was not their only possession with a name. In fact, the Marcellus couple made a habit of naming their belongings. Keeping Nancy Belle company were their roadster Jip Coon and their cook stove Lorain.

Nancy Belle was bought in Holyoke at the Holmes Motor Company. The couple worked very hard so they could one day buy the car. Both were employed at the Burge Hotel, where Leo did laundry and yard work, and Anna made beds.

Anna and Leo had celebrated 11 years together and Anna was 31 years old when they finally earned enough to buy their car.

Although Ford had stopped making the Model A the year before due to a tremendous drop in sales during the Great Depression, Anna and Leo were eager to make one theirs.

Ford created the second Model A to be faster and more powerful, stylish and comfortable than previous cars. They must have done something right, because the Marcellus couple loved that car. One resident of Holyoke, Bette Linnenbrink, noted while she never met Anna, she remembers how much she loved her car.

The couple enjoyed their car until Leo died in 1935. Even after his death, however, Anna still had her Nancy Belle.

On Oct. 29, 1963, Anna married her neighbor Clarence Conner. Together they drove the car until sadly, one day that came to an end. Clarence's great niece was involved in a car accident that frightened Anna so she could never drive her Nancy Belle again.

Despite the tragedy, Anna could not stop loving her car, and wanted others to have the chance to enjoy it as well. After Clarence died in 1974, Anna began looking for a new home for her Nancy Belle. In 1976 she made the decision to donate her car to the Phillips County Museum, where the car still lives today.

Nancy Belle is completely original, down to the tires, except for a replacement battery. Visiting her in the back room of the museum is almost like looking into a window of history.

The display created by the Phillips County Museum truly is a testament to the time and to Anna's character. Inside the windshield is posted a prayer that reads:

"My prayer, Lord Jesus grant us protection, and keep me mindful of my responsibilities as I drive this car. In Jesus name I pray. Thank you"

It is easy to imagine Anna reciting that prayer by memory as she drove Nancy Belle. She was always proud of her ability to recite poetry from as far back as her childhood. For several years, Anna contributed poetry to the Enterprise Christmas edition.

Those who had the chance to meet Anna remember her as a God-fearing woman who loved poetry. Rita House of Sterling told about her time with Anna.

## Anna Marcellus Conner and her 'Miss Nancy Belle'

Written by Jes-c Brandt

---

When Anna was in her 80s, she was staying at Rose Arbor Manor in Sterling. Her roommate was House's mother. House recalled Anna was always very excited for her to visit and eagerly shared her poetry with her, reciting pieces she had memorized even then.

Anna sometimes wrote poetry for House and her family. House shared it was often beautiful and sometimes humorous, and it is something her family still appreciates today.

House also remembers Anna talking about her church and the joy she found in reading her Bible. While she lived in Holyoke, Anna regularly attended United Methodist Church.

While Anna has long since passed, her legacy continues to live on in the Phillips County Museum, and will continue to be a key part of any visit to the car room.

Countless individuals have visited the museum and seen the nifty little car Anna and Leo worked so hard to purchase and cared for so much. It was Anna's wish that people would continue to have a peek at their joy when they visited Nancy Belle for as long as possible.

Before she donated the car, Anna wrote, "I have prayed for several years to get my little Nancy Belle in a show-room where she will stay permanently and will be well cared for as long as time remains on this earth."

Upon donating the car, Anna stipulated that it never be disposed of and if the museum ever closed that the car be moved to another so even more people would have a chance to visit.

Incorporated into the exhibit at the museum is the contract between Anna and the museum, reminding visitors just how much Nancy Belle meant to her.

After coming off the assembly line 78 years ago, Anna's Model A is a fascinating antique. The plan, however, is that the Nancy Belle will remain in its pristine condition for many years to come, enduring as a small piece of automobile history.

To see Nancy Belle and the other antique cars, visit the Phillips County Museum at 109 S. Campbell, Sundays from 2-4:30 p.m.