

## A “SECRET” FIRST

by Fred Hobbs

Everyone enjoys being first. A popular Denver restaurant boasts that it holds the first liquor license issued to a dining establishment in the city. Kids line up to be first to enter the theater or arena to hear their favorite rock or rap group. Normally polite shoppers gather at the crack of dawn at the entrances of stores offering bargain prices during holiday sales or grand openings. They jostle and shove and sometimes actually fight to be first in line lest they miss the limited offers of 50 percent off on the latest model TV set, computer or apparel.

Memorable firsts in a person’s life usually are noted with pride and/or nostalgia. Baby’s first spoken word, first day in school, first kiss, first legal drink of alcohol (or more often, *illegal* under-age consumption of same) to name just a few.

Some firsts are not discussed, at least not in mixed company.

Many firsts are silly and trivial. Consider the following:

To call this incident a secret as noted in the story’s title, is not quite accurate. To be truthful, it was kept secret from a *select* group of people for good reason and later told by the perpetrators to numerous associates, family and friends because all miscreants just have to confess at some point.

The date was January 17, 1952. In two days, a new era was scheduled to dawn in transportation for travelers between Denver and Boulder. The Denver-Boulder Turnpike, a toll road was set to open.

For 25 cents, motorists could make the trip in roughly half the time it had taken in the many decades previously when the route ran down Denver’s Federal Boulevard and through both Broomfield and Lafayette before ending on Arapahoe Avenue in downtown Boulder.

The advent of the new highway was widely anticipated. Students at the University of Colorado, many of whom traveled from the college town to the “Big City” frequently, were especially eager to make the trip in less time, spending less gas money and most of the time able to pony up a quarter for the privilege.

Two of the most eager of that number were having a beer or two at the famed Tulagi student hangout about a week before the scheduled opening, when an idea hit them. All the concrete for the highway had been poured, dried and cured. The appropriate signage had been erected, so why wait? Let’s go down in history, they agreed. Let’s be first!

So two nights before the ribbon cutting by then Governor Dan Thornton, Denver Mayor Quigg Newton and Boulder Mayor John Gillespie, the two intrepid collegians rode in an old 1929 DeSoto coupe to the entrance to the highway to-be. In the dark of night, they carefully moved

to the side of the road the barriers with the “Do Not Enter” message emblazoned. The DeSoto chugged down the darkened highway. The “boys” at first flirted with the idea of driving all the way to Denver. They then decided it was best to turn around after about a mile to avoid conflict with the constabulary. In any case, the mission had been successfully completed.

This tale is true. I know. 'Twas I who owned and drove the first ordinary passenger vehicle making this brief, but historical journey!