

By Guy Forstrom, Quinnesec, Michigan

The Kingsford Motor Car Company as it appeared in 1911, believed to be in Marquette, Michigan. E.G. Kingsford on extreme left.
Courtesy of Viewsofthepast.com.

Greetings from Iron Mountain – Kingsford. I live a couple of miles down the road from the cities of Iron Mountain and Kingsford, Michigan. My Grandfather worked at the Ford Plant here during its entire operation. He owned nothing but Ford cars and trucks. I've been an old car guy all my life. In 1969 I bought my first car, a 1930 Model A Tudor, from a farmer friend of my grandfathers. Negotiated a \$275 deal and drove it off the farm. I've always been interested in Henry Ford and the Ford Motor Company. Especially the effect it had on this community and the Northern Michigan Operations. I would venture to say, that if Ford Motor Company had not built its wood processing facility here in the 1920's, there may not be a City of Kingsford or Kingsford Charcoal brand, or worse yet, the Kingsford High School Football team wouldn't be called the "Flivvers." Of course Henry Ford would have the final say as to the direction of the Ford Motor Company, but Mr. Kingsford would have a profound effect on helping that be directed to this community, intentionally, and unintentionally.



Portrait of E.G. Kingsford
Courtesy of Margaret Kingsford

Edward George Kingsford was born March 1st 1862 in Woodstock, Ontario, Canada. His family moved to a farm in Fremont, Michigan, when he was a young boy. At age 18, he left the farm to become a timber cruiser for a land agent in Marquette, the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. As a young man, E.G. Kingsford also dealt in logging, timber sales and real estate. In 1890, he married Mary Frances (Minnie) Flaherty.

Ms. Flaherty was a first cousin to Henry Ford and had a close relationship with him. This relationship would set in motion, events that would set the rest of E.G. Kingsford's life. In 1908, E.G. Kingsford signed a contract with the Ford Motor Company, to become its sales agent in Marquette, Michigan. The new Model T's were then shipped by boat to Marquette. Several years later, the Kingsford's moved to Iron Mountain Michigan along with the Ford dealership. The Kingsford Motor Car Company occupied several buildings around Iron Mountain for several years, including an old livery. The dealership grew. In 1913, Mr. Kingsford started construction on a new, brick, two story building at 125 S Stephenson Ave., in downtown Iron Mountain. In 1914 the new Kingsford Motor Car Company building was occupied. This building had an elevator in it that would take the cars upstairs for service and repair. This must have been a novel thing for that time period. The elevator still exists today in the building, although non operational.

In 1919, Mr. Kingsford was contacted by Henry Ford. Henry asked E.G. to come along on a camping trip out east to discuss land and timber in the Upper Peninsula. Henry Ford had been eyeing resources in the U.P. since about 1912. Mr. Kingsford was still dealing in real estate and timber. These "camping" trips consisted of such notables as Thomas Edison, Harvey Firestone, John Burroughs and their wives. They liked to call themselves the "Vagabonds." Many pictures have been published of these hearty people on those camping trips. Upon Mr. Kingsford's return to Iron Mountain, he proceeded to take options on approximately 400,000 acres of land and timber in the U.P, which included several iron mines. The bulk of this was purchased from the Michigan Iron and Lumber Company. At that time, it was



The Kingsford Motor Car Company as it appeared in 1927 in Iron Mountain. There appears to be a salesman and his product in front of the building. The device is a farm implement used for the spreading of excess farm animal by products. On the side it says "The Original Tractor Spreader"
From The Collections of The Henry Ford.



The Kingsford Motor Car Company building as it appears today. It is divided into small business spaces. Photo by Guy Forstrom.

estimated that Ford Motor Company needed 1 million board feet of lumber a day for its operations. No, that is not a typo, 1,000,000 board feet a day. You have to remember, the Highland Park Plant was cranking out 6,000 Model T's a day in the 1920,s. That's a lot of wood product. E.G. also persuaded Henry to consider buying about 1,000 acres of land just south of the Iron Mountain city limits in Breitung Township. This property was flat farm land and was on the Menominee River. This would be the site of a new sawmill, dry kilns, body plant and wood distillation facility, and would be the largest of its kind in the world. One of the by products of wood distillation is rough charcoal. Let's see, what are we to do with all that darn charcoal. We all know how Henry Ford hated waste. A hydro electric dam was also built on the river to supply power for the operations. With acquisitions proceeding, a holding company was formed to bring all of the Northern Michigan Operations (NMO) under one control. The Michigan Iron, Land and Lumber Company, (MILLCO) would be the name of the new holding company. Henry Ford President, E.G. Kingsford, Vice President and Secretary. Mr. Kingsford would oversee operations of MILLCO and the NMO until about 1933. Facilities included the Iron Mountain Plant, Sawmills and shipping docks at L'Anse and Pequaming, Logging camps at Sidnaw and Watton, the Imperial Mine at Michigamme and the Blueberry Mine near Ishpeming.



1921 – Henry Ford applied existing technology to convert wood waste from sawmills (used in production of Model T's) into charcoal briquettes; wood production, charcoal processing plant in Iron Mountain area of Michigan's Upper Peninsula; 1924 – chemical plant produced 55 tons of briquettes each day, sold as Ford Charcoal Briquets for \$.25 per bag (above at 1930's trade show) to industry, to car customers through Ford dealerships; 1951 – acquired by local investment group, renamed Kingsford charcoal; September 22, 1953 – registered trademark; 1973 – acquired by Clorox.

Mr. Kingsford continued to operate his own businesses while supervising Ford Operations. At its peak in the 1920's, there would be about 7,000 employed at Iron Mountain. With the sudden growth of the local population, property around the Ford Plant suddenly increased in value and was in high demand. Soon, city-size building lots were being planned with homes being built. Paved streets, sewers and water lines followed. Ford Motor Company itself built about 160 homes next to the plant, in what is known as the Ford Addition. In 1923, about the same time Ford operations were in full swing, the Village of Kingsford was offi-

cially organized. Of course, the village was named after Mr. E.G. Kingsford, who helped make it all possible.

Along with the growth of the Village of Kingsford, so went the growth of the Kingsford Motor Car Company. I would think 7,000 Ford workers must have made for good sales. In 1922, Mr. Kingsford built another building on S. Carpenter Avenue, in the Village of Kingsford. Although the main show room stayed in Iron Mountain, the parts and service department moved to S. Carpenter Avenue location in 1934. Kingsford Motors also operated a branch dealership in Crystal Falls, Michigan, 30 miles west of Iron Mountain, up into the early 1940,s. The Crystal Falls dealership remained a Ford dealer up until about 10 years ago. E.G. Kingsford and his wife Minnie both passed away in 1943, several months apart. Their son, E. S.

"Ted" Kingsford had taken over the Ford Dealerships several years before his parents passing. The Iron Mountain dealership was operated until the early 1960's, when it was closed. The Kingsford Motor Car Company had been the oldest Ford dealership in Michigan. A new Ford dealership, Town and Country Sales, was started. The new owner built a facility in the City of Kingsford, within viewing distance of the old Ford Plant. This dealership still operates today on Hwy US 2 in Quinnesec, Michigan.

In 1947, the Village of Kingsford voted for and was granted a City Charter. Even though Kingsford had become a City of its own, Ford Motor Company plant continued to be referred to as the Iron Mountain Plant. This hasn't always sat well with some of Kingsford's City Fathers. But redemption was at hand, because E.G. Kingsford's name would go on, not only as city, but also the name of a product that we are all familiar with. Shortly after WWII, Fords demand for wood had decreased. Henry Ford had passed away, and his beloved Northern Michigan Operations were on the decline. By 1951 most Ford operations in the U.P.




E. G. Kingsford while on one of the famous Vagabond camping trips. As Henry Ford hated smoking, our guess is that the un-lit cigarette was only a cowboy prop. Photo courtesy of Ford Motor Company – History Department.

STATEMENT

PHONE 157

KINGSFORD MOTOR CAR CO.



IRON MOUNTAIN AND CRYSTAL FALLS, MICH.

ALL ACCOUNTS ARE DUE AND PAYABLE THE TENTH OF MONTH FOLLOWING PURCHASE

DATED May 15, 1936.

Breitung Township,

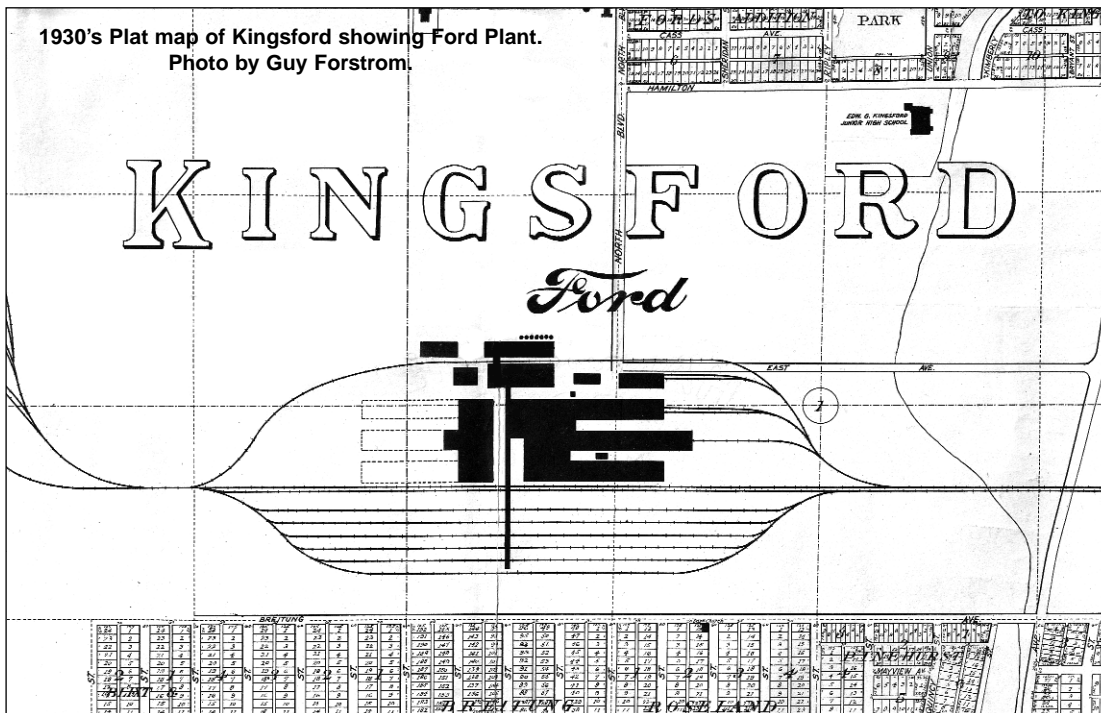
Iron Mountain, Mich.

Note..... \$718.45

Interest to May 15th... 8.55 727.10

*Received Payment
Kingsford B.M.
5/26/36*

1936 Kingsford Motor Car Company Statement. Photo by Guy Forstrom.



End This With a
Guaranteed USED CAR.

THE SMART CAR-OWNER KNOWS WHEN TO TRADE-IN HIS CAR!

- 1929 CHEVROLET COACH
- 1932 CHEVROLET SEDAN
- 1935 CHEVROLET FOUR-DOOR
- 1937 CHEVROLET FOUR-DOOR
- 1939 CHEVROLET TOWN SEDAN
- 1936 CHEVROLET PICKUP
- 1936 CHEVROLET COUPE-PICKUP
- 1937 CHEVROLET PICKUP
- 1937 CHEVROLET DUMP TRUCK
- 1935 DODGE COUPE
- 1934 BUICK SEDAN
- 1937 BUICK FOUR-DOOR
- 1936 PONTIAC COACH
- 1938 OLDSMOBILE COACH
- 1937 PLYMOUTH TWO-DOOR
- 1936 GMC PICKUP
- 1938 GMC PANEL
- 1939 GMC STAKE TRUCK

—ALSO—

- 1939 MERCURY SEDAN
- 1940 MERCURY SEDAN COUPE
- 1937 ZEPHYR SEDAN

—AND—

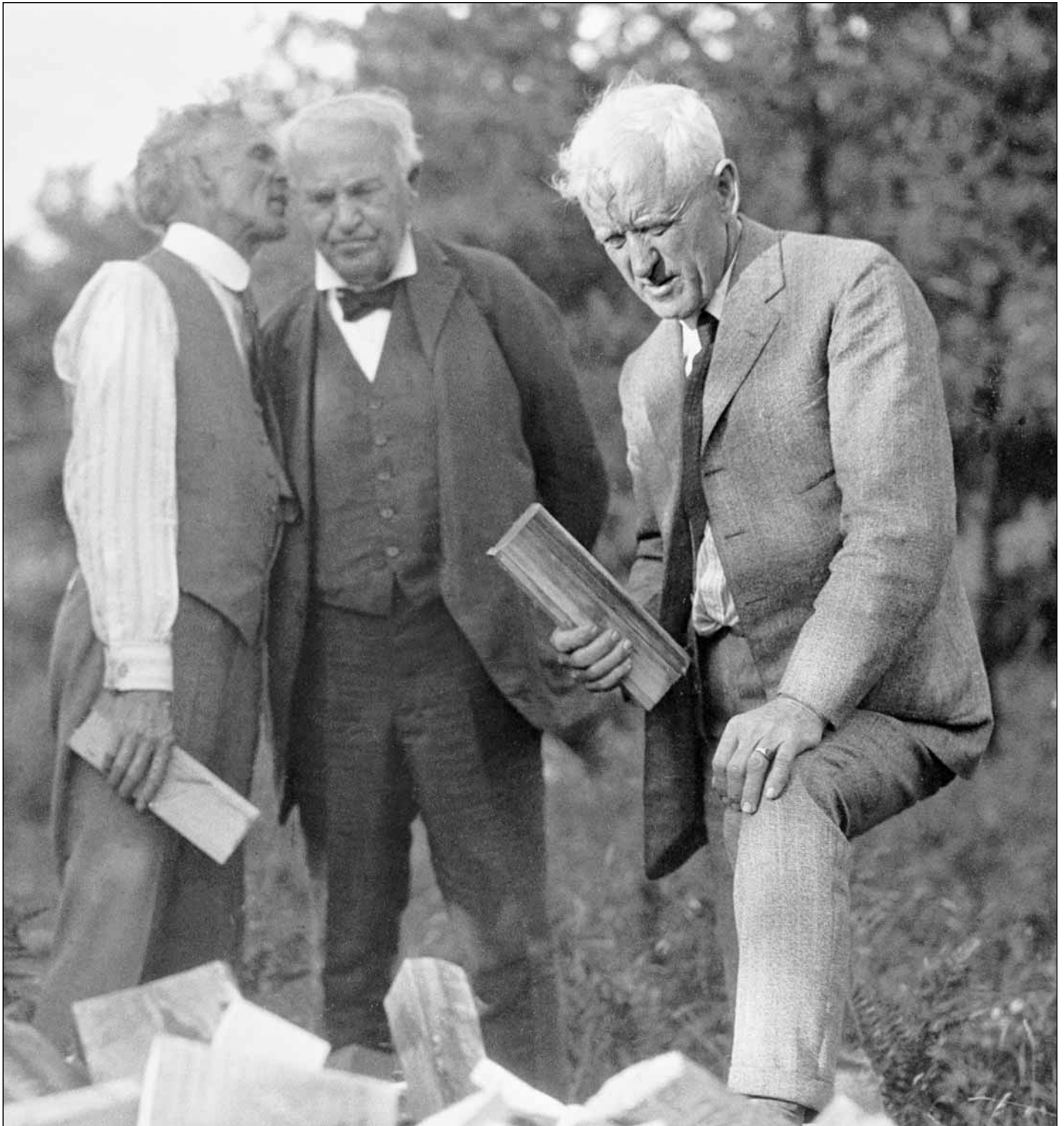
The finest line of Used Ford V8's in Upper Michigan

Kingsford Motor Car Co.

Kingsford Motor Car Company Used Car Ad – 1940.

were near their end. This included the Iron Mountain- Kingsford Plant. With the last of the Woody bodies at hand, the local community scrambled to find a use for the Ford facilities in Kingsford. A handful of business men, local and outside the area, joined together to form the Kingsford Chemical Company in 1951. One of the products of this new company, and the most famous, was Kingsford Charcoal Briquettes. This was a continuation of the Ford briquetting operations. Guess they found a use

for all that darned old by product. Kingsford Chemical operated here until 1961. Briquette making was then moved to other parts of the country. The sawmill, powerhouse and distillation building were torn down after Kingsford Chemical pulled out. The three body buildings, maintenance building and kilns are occupied today by other businesses. A good book on this subject is the City of Kingsford's 75th Jubilee book, "Kingsford, The Town That Ford Built."



L-R: Henry Ford, Thomas Edison and E. G. Kingsford. Photo courtesy of Ford Motor Company - History Department.

Editor's Note: The 2012 MAFCA National Convention will be held in Upper Michigan. The convention is being hosted by the Superior A's of Ishpeming, Michigan and the convention will be headquartered in Marquette, Michigan. Many of the towns and sites described in this article will be among the interesting and historical places being scheduled for our visit. Watch for further details about this exciting Model A Ford gathering!



E.G. Kingsford home as it appears today on West Brown St., Iron Mountain, Michigan. Current owners are restoring it back to its 1940's condition. Photo by Guy Forstrom.