

Through Harry's Lens

A Photographic Essay of Burlingame's
Formulative Years 1910s – 1920s



Burlingame pioneer Harry Dessin (1877-1955) had a keen interest in photography, acquiring an Eastman Kodak glass plate view camera in the early 1900s with which he photographed family and friends, and scenes of the developing city a century ago.



Henry "Harry" W. Dessin



ca. 1916

1200 block of Donnelly Avenue facing northeast

These images focus primarily around the area of “Main Street” (Lorton Avenue) and Donnelly Avenue-- the center of Dessin’s work-and family life.



"Big Six" Locomobile pictured in 1913 on Main Street (Lorton)

It was on Main Street in 1910 where the new town's first *City Hall* and volunteer fire department were located, in a leased space in Weinberg Hall, for \$45 per month.

By 1911, Burlingame's commercial activity had expanded beyond *Burlingame Square* (the immediate area around the railroad station).

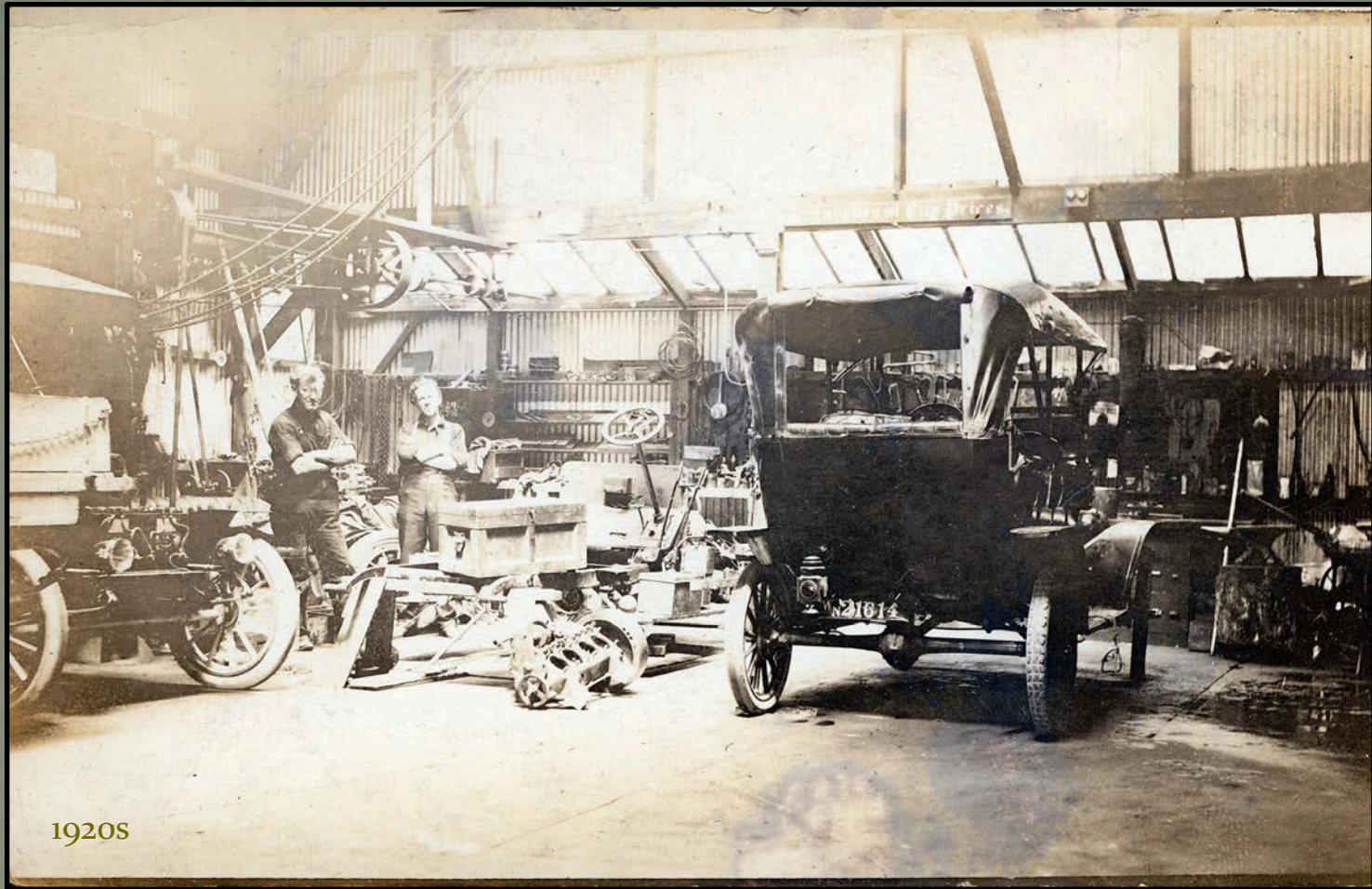
Businesses were developing into the residential areas beyond the first block of Burlingame Avenue, and to the north, along *Main Street*.

3/

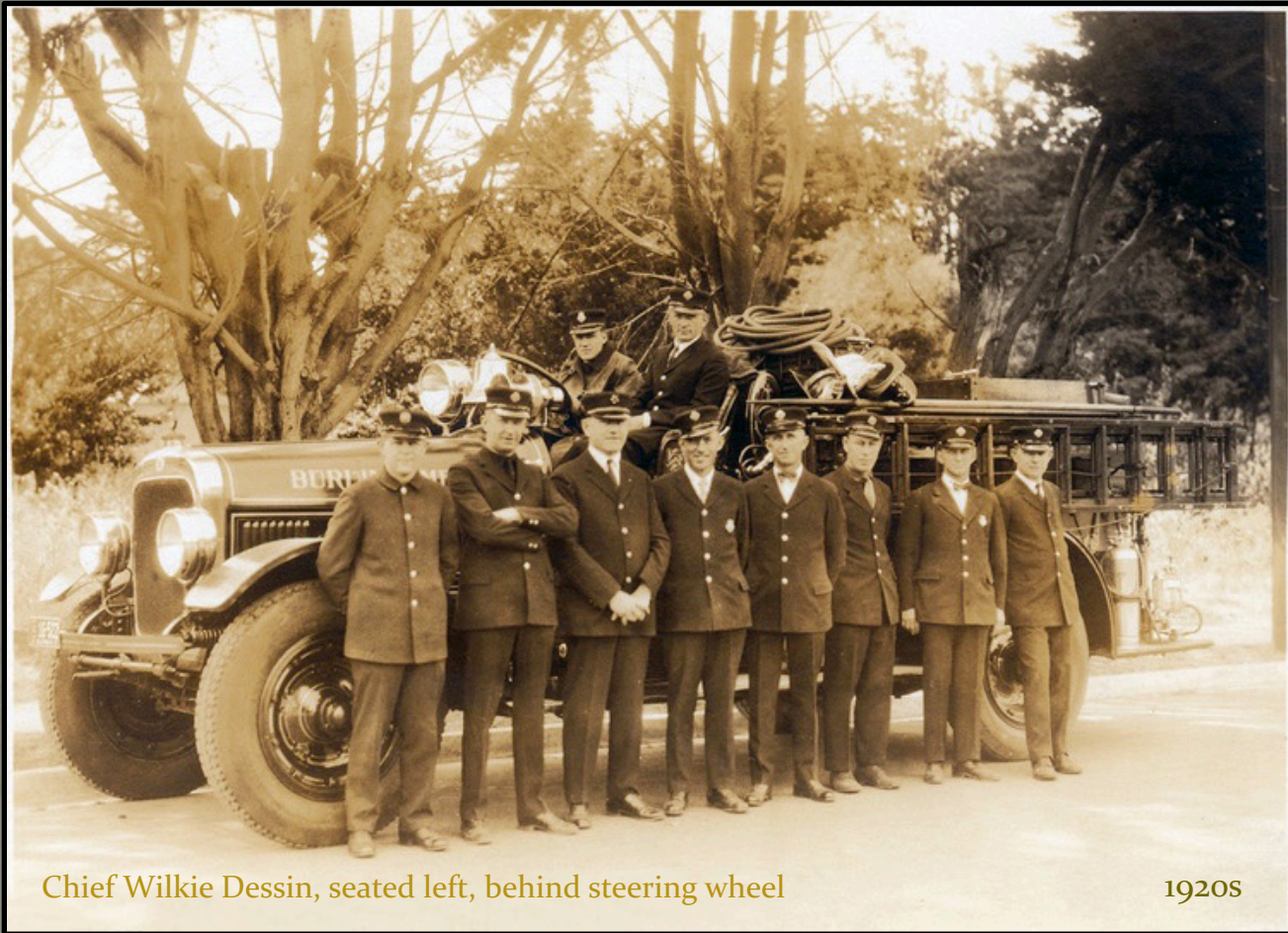


ca. 1915

Burlingame Avenue at Main Street (Lorton Avenue)



Harry and Wilkie (at left) were pioneers in a number of early auto-related businesses in the area --precursors of Burlingame's successful *Auto Row*.



Chief Wilkie Dessin, seated left, behind steering wheel

1920S

The Dessin brothers also played a significant role in the foundation of Burlingame's Fire Department. Wilkie Dessin served the city for three decades.



Early on, fire equipment was centrally housed inside the Dessin garages. Note the *Locomobile*, at left.



Dessin Brother businesses included the *Burlingame Garage* in 1912, located on *Main Street* (renamed *Lorton Avenue* in the mid-1920s) and its *California Drive* expansion, in 1913...



*...the Burlingame Garage Machine Shop in 1915
on Lorton Avenue (westside), near Donnelly Avenue.*

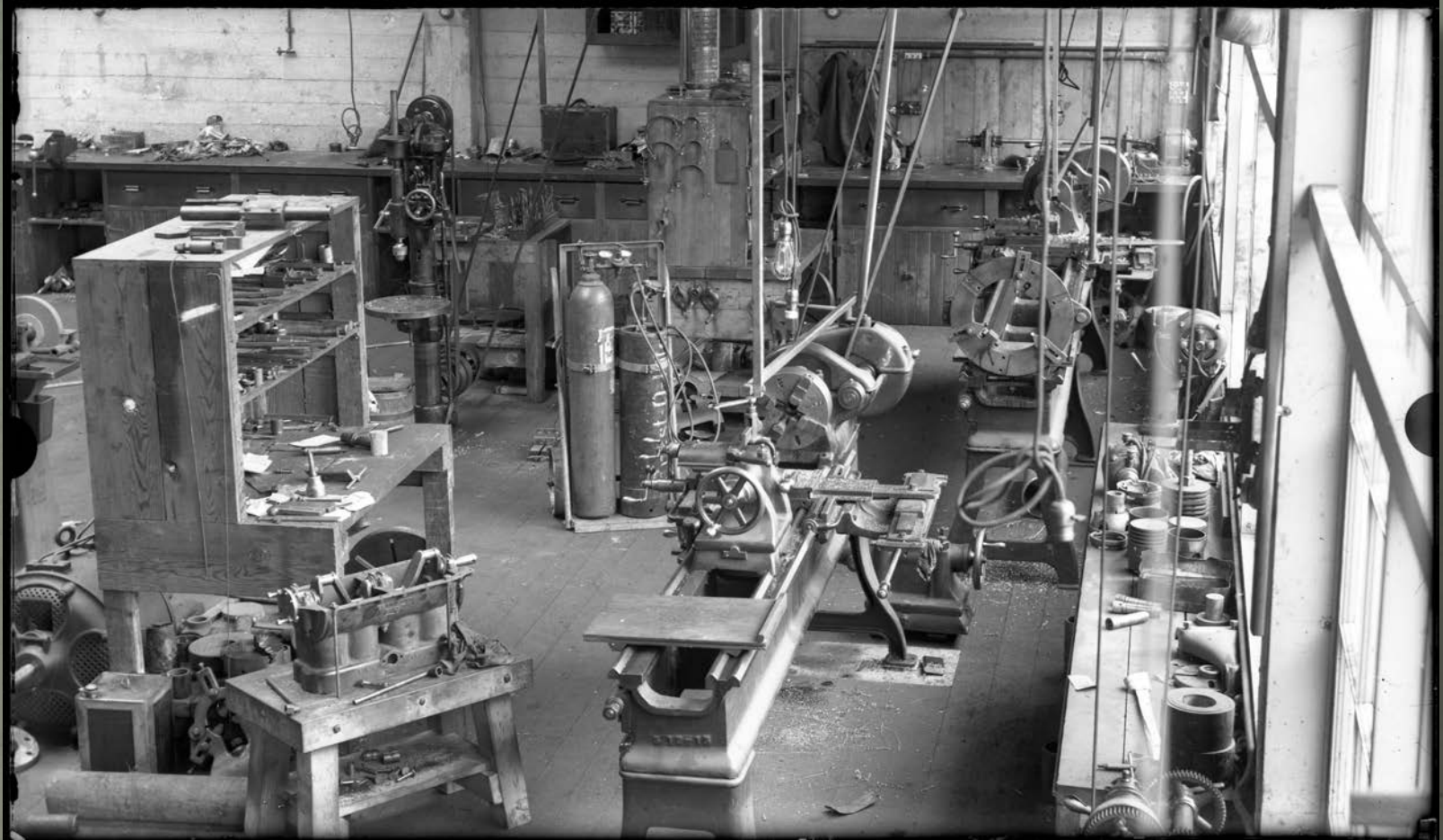


...and the *Dodge Brothers Showroom*
constructed in 1920.



ca. 1916

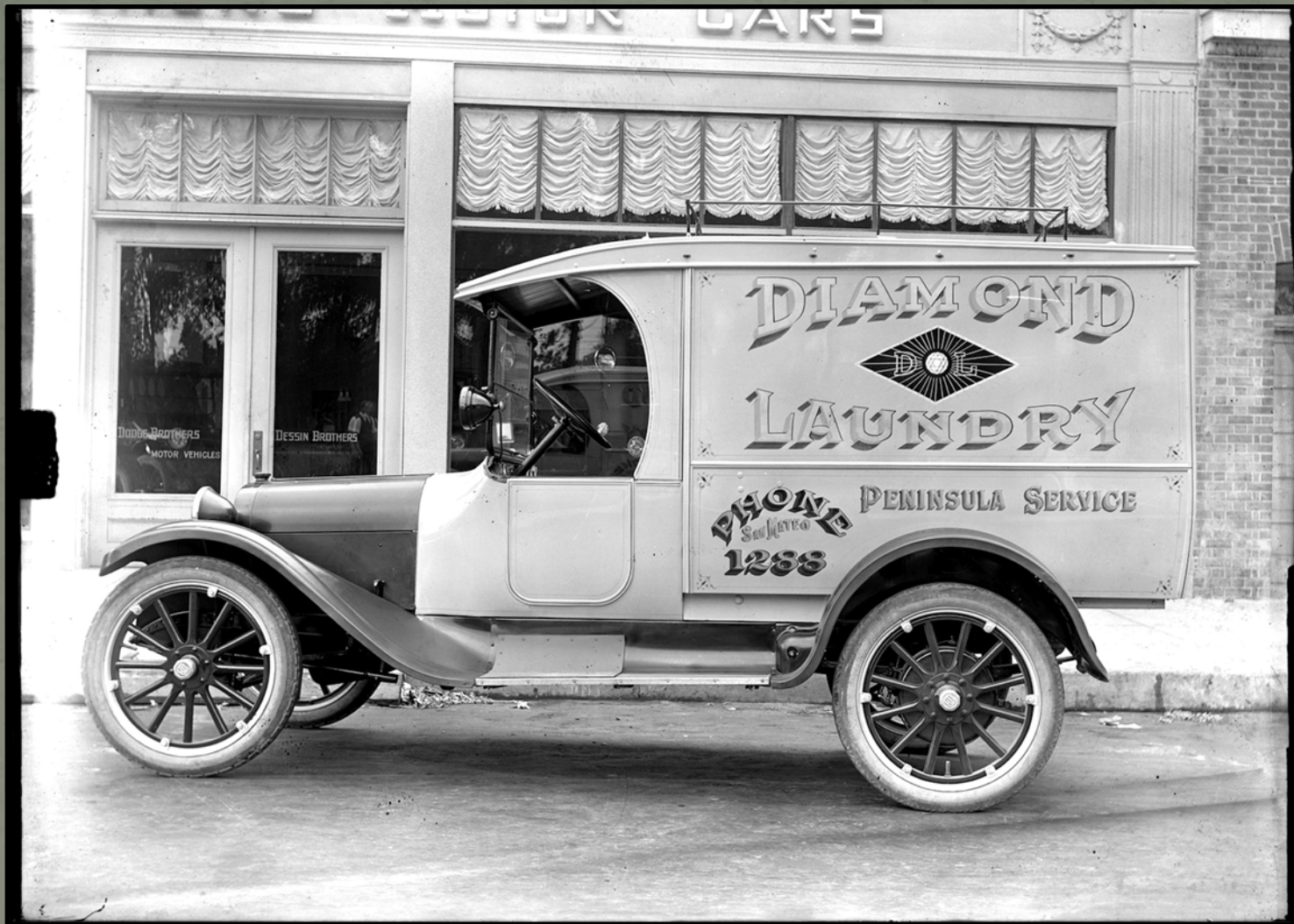
The Dodge Showroom replaced L. Picasso Co. market,
on the corner of Donnelly and Lorton Avenues.



The Dessins also operated machine shops on the north side of Donnelly Avenue.



Ornate Dodge delivery trucks were captured by Harry's camera, including milk trucks...



...laundry delivery trucks,



...bakery trucks,



...and even a hearse.



In 1925, Harry photographed the aftermath of a fire at the southwest corner of Lorton and Donnelly Avenues. It consumed a garage, a plumbing shop, and damaged the city's first hotel, the *Portola Hotel*, built in 1910.



*Wilkie Dessin
feeding toddler*

Harry's images of family and friends reflected
Burlingame's still bucolic life .



Dessin family members gather at 1423 Floribunda home



Child at piano



1920S

Children pose with cannon, at *Cannon Park*
(in 2019, a new Roundabout)



Matriarch Augusta Dessin working at home



Daughter Edith Dessin poses at window

By 1918, a handful of Burlingame Avenue homes had been carted off to other locations to make room for more businesses expanding up the street.

By 1930, car dealerships and repair shops could be found throughout downtown, and Burlingame's first Fire Station was constructed on California Drive.



*Harry's wife,
Adele Dessin,
poses at home,
with children*

Adele and Harry Dessin's home
at 1212 Donnelly Avenue was eventually moved across
the street to 1221 where it has been a longtime hair salon.

The Dessin structures at Lorton and Donnelly Avenues have been lovingly repurposed for retail and restaurant uses.

•

They continue to contribute to the beauty and vitality of Burlingame's downtown district a century after they were built.

We are grateful to the Dessin and Day families for the donation of these splendid images, and of Harry's original glass plate view camera with which they were taken.

© 2019 *Burlingame Historical Society*