

The **PROFESSIONAL** *CAR*



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COVER PHOTOS – The principal feature in this issue of *The Professional Car* is a photo essay on one of the most significant "milestone" funeral coaches ever built in America – Sayers & Scovill's exclusive and hyper-expensive (for the time) 1929 Signed Sculpture hearse. All accompanying art, including the front and back covers, are from the collection of Thomas A. McPherson. This is the third in a series of landmark historical articles written especially for TPC by noted funeral car historian and author Thomas A. McPherson. We are indeed privileged to be able to publish Tom's thoroughly researched, richly illustrated histories. We're even more pleased to have a seemingly endless supply of similar superb historical articles for future issues.

Announced with great fanfare 80 years ago, the Signed Sculpture hearse was of the classic open-front town car style, built on Sayers & Scovill's own assembled chassis. The car's most distinctive styling feature were large cast-bronze Angel of Memory panels mounted on the sides of this regal hearse. These classical sculptures were created exclusively for S&S by famed U.S. sculptor Clement Barnhorn, who personally signed each – hence the car's name. At a time when a funeral director could buy a fine hearse for less than \$3,000 the S&S Signed Sculpture bore a truly staggering price tag of \$8,500! Sales were strictly limited to just one in each sales region.

Alas, however, the aristocratic Signed Sculpture was launched just weeks before the 1929 stock market crash and the beginning of the Great Depression. Talk about bad timing! Ostentation was out, sales of luxury cars plummeted and the custom-body business all but disappeared. It is not known how many Signed Sculpture hearses were sold, but it was probably no more than a few. For 1930, the car's name was changed to the S&S Masterpiece. By 1931, the Signed Sculpture was gone, replaced by a conventional limousine style hearse called the Majestic with downsized replicas of Barnhorn's sculpture in the rear side windows. For 1934, S&S introduced an eight-column, carved-drape hearse called the Olympian. While anything but a sales success, the Signed Sculpture hearse nonetheless set the stage for the return of the ornate carved-panel hearse – considered by many as the Golden Age of funeral coach design in the 20th century.