



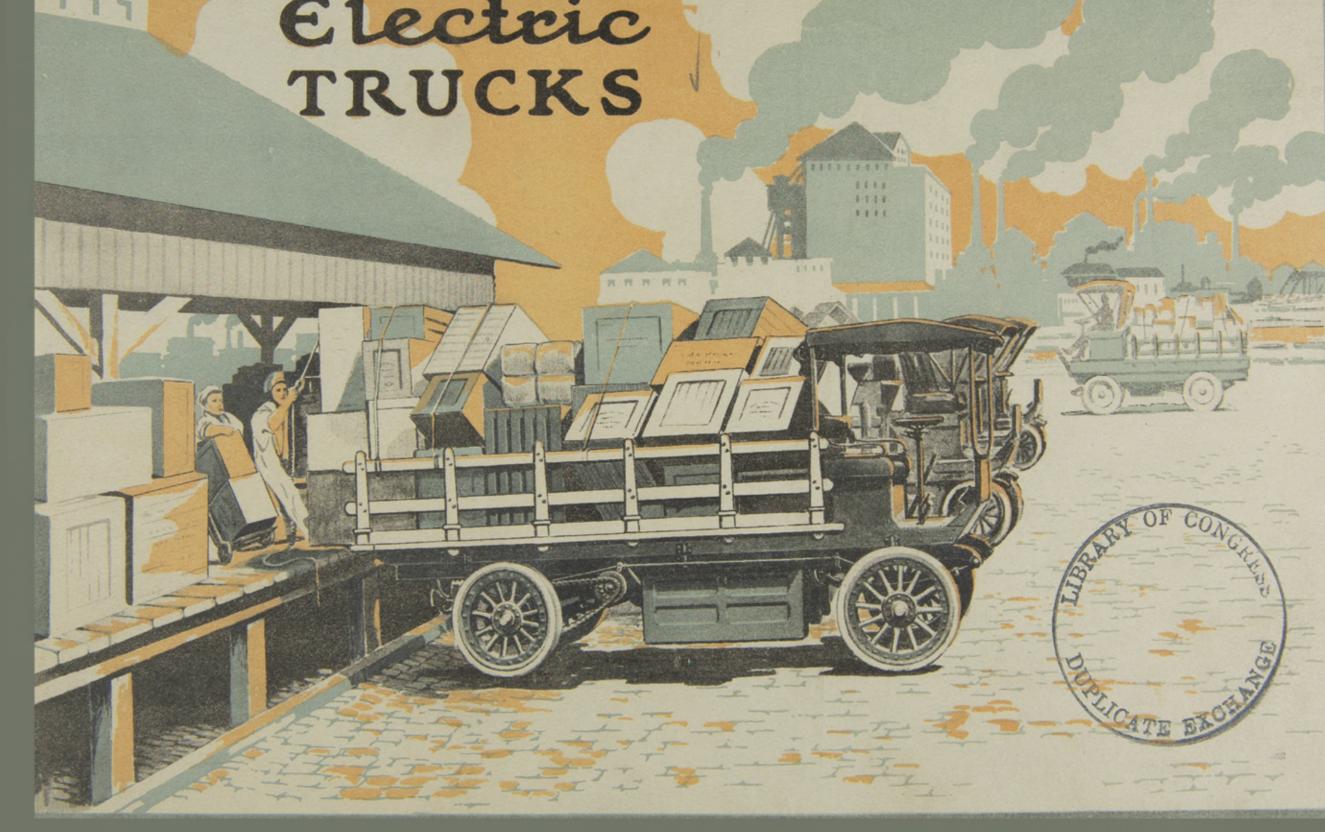
THE RISE AND FALL of Early Electric Cars

Around 1900, the emerging automotive industry expected steam, electric, and gas-powered vehicles to all play a role in transportation.





Thomas Edison and wife Mina in one of Walter Baker's earliest electric cars, 1902. Established in 1899, the Baker Motor Vehicle Company specialized in electric vehicles. Edison, who promoted his patented nickel-iron batteries as an alternative to lead-acid, helped Baker develop them. William B. Northrup, *IEEE History Center*



Baker Electric sales catalogue, 1912. Electric power suited the stop-start habits of urban commercial and service vehicles, which sold well before WWI. Delivery trucks' regular schedules facilitated charging and planned routes minimized the chance of batteries dying on the road. *The Henry Ford*

Early automobiles were a luxury. Wealthy motorists typically owned several different types to suit their driving patterns. Despite limited range, electric vehicles featured several advantages over their competitors. Gasoline cars were noisy, smelly, and required manual cranking to start. Steam-powered cars took time to warm up. Both were less reliable.

The allure of touring, design improvements in gasoline vehicles—especially the self-starter—and their cheap mass production by Ford contributed to the "electrified gasoline" car's dominance from the 1910s. The periodical Electric Vehicles observed wryly in 1913 that they contained *"more distinctly electrical contrivances than any genuine electric vehicle ever designed."*

Baker Electric advertisement, 1916.

Women preferred the cleanliness, reliability, ease of operation, and safety of electric cars. This Baker Electric ad featured an imaginative appeal to freedom and luxury within an idyllic family life. *The Henry Ford*



Commercial charging station, New York City, 1910. EV Charging infrastructure developed according to distinct visions of touring and urban commuting. These competing priorities hampered the early electric car's progress. *Museum of Innovation and Science*



THE BAKER R & L COMPANY Cleveland, Ohio Detroit Electric sales catalogue, 1928. Detroit Electric was the most well-known, pro

Detroit Electric sales catalogue, 1928. Detroit Electric was the most well-known, prolific, and longest-lived American electric car manufacturer. Between 1907 and 1939 the company built 13,000 electric cars, most before the stock market crash of 1929. Thomas Edison, Charles Steinmetz, John D. Rockefeller Jr., and Henry Ford's wife Clara all drove Detroit Electrics. *The Henry Ford*



STANDARD WARRANTY APPROVED BY National Automobile Chamber of Commerce

Detroit Electric Car Company DETROIT, MICH. U. S. A.

540 - 580 Piquette Avenue Established 1906 41.368,-