



Buick Heritage Alliance

If you're aspiring to restore your favorite Buick to its original splendor, the BHA can help you create a textbook restoration. We invite you to browse the BHA's electronic online archive, where you will find the research materials needed to authentically restore your Buick down to the last nut and bolt, just as it was done on the assembly line.

Matinee Idol Burt Lytell Takes the Wheel

From 1915 to 1935, Christopher J. Helin (1887-1964) served as a renowned automotive writer, travel editor, and photographer for the *San Francisco Examiner*. Originally from Minnesota, Helin was working for the *Minneapolis Tribune* when William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951) personally recruited him as editor of the *Examiner's* Automotive Section. With the city of San Francisco being well-served by its expansive cable car system, to help sell more cars — and more advertising for the newspaper — Helin's *California Motorlogues* featured brief automobile trips to areas of scenic beauty, prominent points of historical interest, and other landmark locations in and about San Francisco and Northern California. Helin's test-drive reports of new cars — always prominently featuring his iconic photography — further promoted travel by automobile.

While working for the *Examiner*, Helin also composed photography for Charles S. Howard's (1877-1950) Howard Automobile Co., at the time San Francisco's largest Buick dealer and the world's largest

automobile distributor. In his impressive photographs for Howard, Helin often utilized San Francisco landmarks. The iconic photograph below depicts dashing silent film and theater star Burt Lytell (1885-1954) in a 1931 Buick Model 8-64 sport roadster situated in front of San Francisco City Hall. Buick's change in 1931 from six-cylinder engines to three all-new ohv straight-eights was momentous ... so much so that Buick added the prefix "8" to every model number. For Howard, nothing epitomized "The 8 As Buick Builds It" better than a high-spirited sport roadster driven by Lytell.

As with many silent screen stars, Burt Lytell's acting career collapsed with the advent of talking pictures. Roadsters, too, were on their way out. Buick, like most car companies, dropped the body style after the 1931 models. After sales of automobiles went into significant decline during the Great Depression, Christopher Helin left the *Examiner*. Today, his photography is highly regarded and is some of the most historically significant automotive photography of its time. — David M. Ladow

