A Tendency Toward Wordiness

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There are no laws, natural or manmade, to prevent humans from devising new words or adding to the accumulated meanings of previously established words. Consider the monosyllabic English word, tend. It is derived from the Latin, *tendere*, meaning to stretch (and earlier from the Greek, *tenien*, also meaning to stretch or extend).

Currently, the word, tend, (as an aphetic for the word, attend) is interpreted variously as meaning to supervise (to tend a fire), to watch over (she tends her patients), to define a biological purpose (the wound healed by primary intention), to be inclined toward (the children tend to watch TV), to favor something selectively (he tends to believe in polytheism), or to participate (he tended a convention). And so the burgeoning English vocabulary is extended still further by closely related terms such as: attendant, contend, distend, attenuate, portent, tenuous, monotonous, pretense, and tensile.

Three somewhat divergent families of meanings have emerged: firstly, things that are stretched as in the word, tendentious (stretched beyond credibility) or the word, tendency (to stretch extensively in one direction); secondly, words that stress the vulnerability of things that are excessively stretched as in words such as tender, (meaning soft, delicate, malleable) or young and not yet inflexible (as in a tender steak or tender years). And thirdly, to extend or stretch one's self (I tender an offer) or as an extension of a corporate entity (a legal tender).

Medicine has also made claims upon the word, tend, particularly to convey the meaning of looking after (the shepherd tends his flock). Tender, in a medical context, takes on the shaded meaning delicate or fragile or susceptible to pain. And then there is the anatomic word, tendon, meaning a sinew. The Dutch anatomist, Philip Verheyen, in 1693, remembering the mythological tales of the invulnerability of Achilles – except for the dorsal aspect of his ankle – named the tendon attaching the gastrocnemius (literally, the belly of the leg) and soleus (from the Latin meaning sandal) muscles. Achilles' mother, Thetis, had dipped the infant Achilles in the waters of the River Styx to provide him with a shield of invulnerability; but she held him by his ankle thus making the tendon *(chorda Achilles)* a locus of vulnerability – and Achilles' undoing in the Trojan War.

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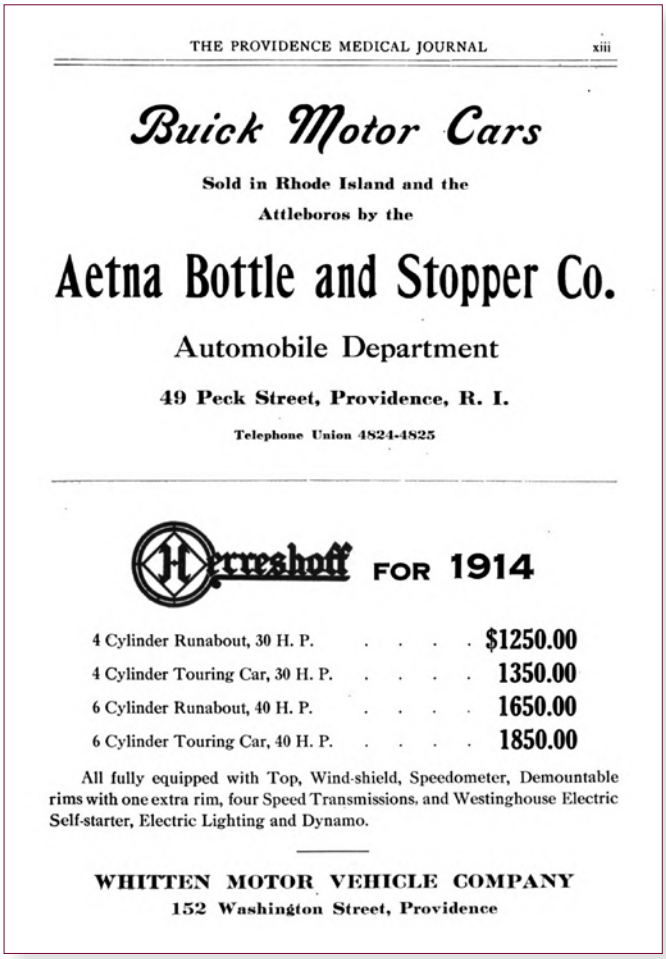

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This advertisement for the upcoming car models appeared in a 1913 issue of the *Providence Medical Journal*. Charles Frederick Herreshoff of the famed Bristol yachting family designed the Herreshoff Model 30.

100 Years Ago: The Automobiles Doctors Drove

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Dr. Samuel Starr of Providence is shown at the wheel of his Morris touring car, circa 1912, perhaps on his way to a house call.

50 Years Ago: Dr. Hamolsky of Boston Joins Brown Faculty

To work in six-year medical program

The June 1963 issue of the *Rhode Island Medical Journal* announced in its "Through the Microscope" section that **DR. MILTON W. HAMOLSKY**, who had recently been named chief of medicine at Rhode Island Hospital, would join the Brown faculty and hold the title Professor of Medicine at Rhode Island Hospital.

The report stated: "He will share responsibility for clinical research and teaching at the hospital in connection with the university's new medical program. The six-year medical course, leading to a degree of Master of Science, will begin in the fall. Graduates of the program will be able to enroll elsewhere for the last two years of medical education leading to the Doctor of Medicine degree or pursue further graduate study for the PhD. degree."

The account stated that Dr. Hamolsky is "now an assistant professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School and a member of the full-time staff at Beth Israel Hospital in Boston. He will begin his duties at the university and at Rhode Island Hospital on July 1.

Dr. Hamolsky has made a specialty of thyroid disease."

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