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## **Beverly Rae Kimes, Automotive Journalist and Historian, Is Dead at 68**

By [DOUGLAS MARTIN](#)

Beverly Rae Kimes, who, after failing to find work as a theater writer, parlayed a job as a secretary at a fledgling car magazine into a career as one of the nation's pre-eminent historians of automobiles, died on May 12 at Lenox Hill Hospital in Manhattan. She was 68.

Her husband, James H. Cox, announced the death but did not give a cause.

When Ms. Kimes became the first employee hired at *Automobile Quarterly* — which aimed to define elegance in cars, mainly antique ones — she said her main qualification was a driver's license. But she quickly advanced from typing and stenography to writing or editing more than 20 books and hundreds of articles; winning almost every award in automotive journalism; and becoming a judge and announcer at classic car meets.

In announcing her death, the Antique Automobile Club of America called her “one of the greatest automotive writers of our time.”

As an editor, she amplified her influence. She rose to be top editor of *Automobile Quarterly*, then edited publications for the Classic Car Club of America.

She strove to bring larger social context to the journey from handcrafting the horseless carriage one at a time to building one of the world's largest industries, even as she painstakingly sketched the personalities in the car world, from brilliant engineers to grandiose tycoons to con men. Her expertise began with early steam-powered vehicles and included Europe as well as the United States.

She did not oversimplify.

“The history of the American automobile is a can of worms that would make any self-respecting bilateral invertebrate blanch,” Ms. Kimes wrote in “Standard Catalog of American Cars, 1805-1942” (1985). “In fact, it is the sublime disorderliness of the saga of the American car that is among its chief charms.”

Ms. Kimes's search for large thoughts was reflected in a 1996 interview with *The Morning Call* of Allentown, Pa. She said that the automobile “remade America in its image and gave a kind of freedom which the railroad never could.”

Her playfulness in choosing quotations drew notice, as when she recorded [Henry Ford](#)'s response to his partner's proposal to build a bigger car, with six cylinders instead of four. Ford said, "A car should not have any more cylinders than a cow has teats."

Beverly Rae Kimes was born in West Chicago, Ill., on Aug. 17, 1939, and grew up in Wheaton, Ill. She earned two journalism degrees, a bachelor's from the [University of Illinois](#) at Urbana-Champaign, and a master's from [Penn State](#).

Soon after starting at Automobile Quarterly, she took her first ride in a classic car, a 1903 Curved Dash Oldsmobile, considered the first car to be mass produced in high volume. She later owned distinguished old cars, including one made by Sears, Roebuck and Company and sold by catalog as mail-order item 21R333, The Chicago Tribune reported in 1997.

In an interview with Contemporary Authors in 2002, Ms. Kimes said her success in "a field dominated by men might have been difficult save for a decision of my parents." That was naming her Beverly, which can be construed as a man's name.

"By the time word was generally out that I was not a man, I had published more than one hundred articles on automotive history and my reputation could easily survive the fact that I was writing about something women are not supposed to write about," she said.

For 17 years, Ms. Kimes provided commentary at the Concours d'Elegance of the Eastern United States, a conclave of vintage cars in Bethlehem, Pa. "You can never have too many Bugattis," she once said, referring to cars renowned for luxury and speed.

When a 1929 Stutz paused in front of the stand, she reminded the audience that the car was made in the year "Ain't Misbehavin' " was recorded. She said, "This is a roomy car in which you could misbehave."

In addition to her husband, Ms. Kimes's survivors include her sister, Sharon, of Star Lake, Wis.; her stepson, James Jr., of Bushkill, Pa.; and her stepdaughters Lori Ann Cox Reeve, of Hampton, N.J., and Cheryl Lynn Cox Redding, of Baltimore.

Ms. Kimes wrote minute, much-admired necrologies of car makes and brands that now exist only in the garages of a few collectors. But in the interview with Contemporary Authors, she was optimistic about the outlook for cars.

"I daresay the automobile will be with us until that distant day when we are molecularly beamed from place to place 'Star Trek' style," she said.