Hartford, CT (May 2013) – Summer is the season for driving with the windows down across Connecticut. Behind the Wheel, a new exhibit at the Connecticut Historical Society (CHS) will take you on a ride through time to when cars were fairly new and America’s love for automobile traveling emerged. Along with this new passion for cars was the responsibility of learning safety for both drivers and pedestrians. The American Automobile Association was, and still is, a hub for education and enjoyment of car travel.

Behind the Wheel features vintage automobile safety posters, Connecticut road maps from the 1920s-1970s, and other items from the CHS collection that highlight both the joys of driving and the responsibility of sitting behind the wheel. The highlight of the exhibit is a newly-acquired collection of colorful automobile safety posters printed in the 1930s-1950s by the American Automobile Association for the Automobile Club of Hartford. Behind the Wheel is on view from May 23 to September 28, 2013 at the Connecticut Historical Society (CHS).

On display are 23 posters about automobile safety, printed by the American Automobile Association for the Automobile Club of Hartford. The American Automobile Association (AAA) was founded in 1902 when nine motor clubs joined to advocate for better roads. At that time, only 23,000 cars were being used in the United States compared to 17 million horses for transportation. Soon the club initiated a safety program to educate motorists and pedestrians on the rules of the road for the newly paved streets.

As the car population increased in the early 20th century, so did the need for automobile insurance, new and improved roads, traffic laws, and public service programs (like AAA’s posters) to instruct and protect drivers and pedestrians. Items in the exhibit include early accident insurance advertisements (supporting Hartford’s status as the “insurance capital of the world”), driver’s licenses and motor vehicle documents, and three editions (spanning from 1922-1953) of the “Automobilier,” the magazine of the Automobile Club of Hartford.

In addition, Connecticut road maps from the 1920s-1970s illustrate the evolution of the “scenic drive” by highlighting new road systems (like the Merritt Parkway, which opened in 1938), rest stops, picnic areas, and driving destinations, as well as information on driving distances and how to pass another vehicle.

On Saturday, June 1, 2013, a special family day devoted to cars will be held on the grounds of the CHS from 10:00 am until 2:00 pm. A car club display of vintage cars will be held on the CHS grounds by the Valley Collector Car Club, a nonprofit group dedicated to the appreciation and preservation of classic automobiles. Automobile historian Robert Staneslow will speak at 11:00 am about automobile manufacturing in Connecticut and New England. Rounding out a perfect day for families, kids can make their own bumper stickers and take them home. Admission is free for these events.

Behind the Wheel is sponsored by the American Automobile Association (AAA). CHS is located at 1 Elizabeth Street in Hartford. For more, visit www.chs.org.
About the Connecticut Historical Society (@ConnHistSoc):

Founded in 1825, the Connecticut Historical Society is a non-profit museum, library, research and education center. CHS strives to inspire and foster a life-long interest in history and ignite a passion for learning about history through research assistance, exhibitions, tours and programs for all ages. Visit www.chs.org or call 860-236-5621.

About the American Automobile Association (AAA):

AAA provides travel, insurance, financial and automotive-related services to 53 million members nationwide. AAA is committed to keeping its members on-the-go by providing outstanding roadside assistance, valuable online resources on buying and maintaining vehicles and through the Approved Auto Repair program, which has inspected and approved over 7,500 auto repair facilities in North America. For more information about AAA, members and non-members can visit one of eight offices in eastern Connecticut, go online to AAA.com or call 860-236-3261.