

Then & Now – Auto Museum 200 Worcester Road



In the late 1910's, Albert B. Garganigo ran the Turnpike Garage and Auto Wrecking Company at the corner of South Quinsigamond Ave and Route 9 in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts that was located near White City and the former Spags. He noticed car styles changing so rapidly that he decided to collect older models as a hobby, which were becoming scarce. Unfortunately, his garage was too small to store a collection so he purchased the Red Fox Farm at 232 Worcester Road in the early 1920's. The big barn and several outbuildings served as a perfect location for him to store and refurbish his growing collection. He built a ramp and installed a hand winch in his barn, which allowed him to store more vehicles in the barn loft. A full

length shed was attached to the east side of the barn, and a second shed building was a small apartment where his brother Salvatore lived for a while.

On weekends, when the weather was good, he displayed his collection on his front lawn behind a stonewall for those traveling from Holden to Princeton along Route 31 to see and admire. To his surprise, people stopped to get a closer look at his memorabilia. People, out of curiosity, would ask to see what he had accumulated in his barns and what items he was currently restoring.



About this time, Raymond Bassett, a teenage boy from Holden, began to show up every weekend and during the summer. He became Al's apprentice and eventually became chief mechanic and restorer.

In 1935, Al opened a small two-pump gasoline station on Worcester Road, (near Jillian Drive where it meets Worcester Road). He then built a small shed type building called the "*Horseless Carriage Exhibit*" to provide a safe place for people to view his restored treasures and provide for the needed additional parking. Over a very short period of

time, his small museum grew in popularity, and soon the gas station was expanded to handle his increased display and restoration needs. The building had an overhead



garage door in front, and an added ell on the north side, which eventually featured a small restaurant called the "Pine Grove Grill", run by the Dole's. The building changed over the years to *Mom & Pop Russell's*, and to *Monty's*, run by Mrs. Montgomery; and then to a pizza joint known as *The Stove* (that succumbed to fire and was torn down).

In 1936, Al realized he needed more exhibit and restoration space. It was about this time, the Rutland World War I Prison Camps were being torn down, and Al contracted to purchase the used bricks. He built a 30' x 200' building, which became known as the *Museum of Antique Autos*. It officially opened in late 1937 containing 75 horseless carriages all in running condition. In 1940 another building was added to house 25 more cars. It was open every day, including Sunday, and the public was cordially invited to visit the Museum. Admission was 10 cents.

Over the next eighteen years, Al and Ray built 6 additional buildings, which increased his display space to 28,000 sq. ft. On the inside, he had:

- 198 antique autos, horseless carriages and various antique bicycles
- An old steam Fire Engine
- Numerous player-pianos and nickelodeons
- Old mechanical toys
- A mechanical fortune teller that dealt you a card with your fortune if you deposited a coin in the slot
- Pinball machines
- A calliope and a merry-go-round which never ran because the crank would hit the roof which was built too low
- And various interesting contraption



On the outside they displayed several items:

- Steam tractor
- Steam narrow gauge railroad engine
- Steel wheeled farm tractor
- High 4-wheeled lumber yard lifter/mover
- World War II Italian Fighter Airplane
- Small working railroad on which to give rides
- Snack bar and area for family picnics



Besides displaying restored working antiques, Al and Ray were adventurers. They took their cars all over the United States and displayed them, as well as, raced them at regional fairgrounds. Probably the race that raised the most local interest, in the central Massachusetts area, was the

annual 4th of July antique auto race from the Museum on Worcester Road to the top of Mt. Wachusett. One of their adventures as described by his grandnephew, George Sampson, went as follows:

Through the years to attract attention from passer-byers:

- Ray would often dress up like a Keystone Cop and sell helium balloons,
- George would ride a High Wheeler bike around the parking lot &
- Pat, the daughter of the neighbor from across the street, would give customers rides in an electric car.

“The picture below shows: Al Garganigo, George Sampson, and Ray Bassett with their 1906 one Cylinder Cadillac that they used to climb Mt. Washington in 1946. “Al said there wasn’t a record established anywhere of an one-cylinder car being driven up Mt. Washington to reach the top. He wanted to attempt the challenge. He said the summer was not a good time to attempt it because the car would overheat. Ray suggested we make a couple dry runs up Mt Wachusett, and our two tries made it, but not with easy success. Al said the car needed some modifications, so he replaced a cast iron piston

with aluminum one. The car was chain driven, so by fusing a rear end sprocket with a different number of teeth, we changed the gear ratio giving the car more power. We loaded the car on to a 1926 Dodge truck, and off we went on a pleasant fall day in Massachusetts heading to New Hampshire, where we discovered the temperature was considerably lower. We unloaded the car only to find



out that it had a frozen radiator and one small radiator crack that was leaking water. However, we got in the car and started our journey upward on a dirt road. We continued to climb until we reached 600 feet; then the Cadillac decided to quit. Al suggested that Ray and I get out and walk because the car couldn't tolerate so much weight. We abided by his decision, and hoped we might be able to hitch a ride with someone else. Al continued on; after walking for a while, we saw a car approaching, and he stopped and offered us a ride to the top. Al had already made it to the top, and was waiting for us, where the temperature was then below 20 degrees. Coming down the mountain, pumping the two-wheel brakes and driving in the lowest gear, everything burned out before we reached the bottom. How I wished I had thought to take a camera along with a bag of cookies and some water! A stranger had, however, taken a picture and mailed it to Al, which was much appreciated."

Ray and his family left Al and the Antique Auto Museum in 1952 for a better offer at the Old Village Farm Museum and Campground owned Ralph Cox, which closed in 1964-65, then they moved on to Uncle Dick's Museum. Eventually, they retired from Frank Wheaton Village in New Jersey.

Al's other helpers were: Al's brother Salvatore, his grandnephew George & Nancy Sampson in 1946, and Burt Jacobson in 1960.

Al often would take rides around Princeton in his Baker Electric sedan that was similar to the one pictured above. He passed away at the age of 70 after a brief illness at Holden Hospital. Unfortunately, he died with no will, and his estate was subject to a prolonged litigation in probate court.

In 1963, after 25 years of operation, the museum closed and the majority of the contents were sold to Zimmerman's Automobilorama "*History on Wheels*" in Pennsylvania. A gala auction with consignment autos was held on this property in July 1973. The main attraction item was the original 1934 Deluxe Ford in which Bonnie Parker & Clyde Barrow were captured and killed on May 23, 1934.

Since then, this museum property has housed various businesses including Photo Panels, Buffton Post & Beam, Princeton Tool, Sigler Machine Shop, Hubbard's Lumber, and today Hunt & Gather Vintage Consignment Market, as well as Monti Farms & Deli and recently Henry Schwab Company has purchased the old Bufton buildings.

Please visit www.princetonmahistory.org to learn more about Princeton's rich history.

We would love to hear from you, if you have any questions or information to share at princetonmahistory@gmail.com

