

## Lifetime of Keeping Busy:

### When Cars and Radios Were Coming Out, Glenn Sabin Sr. Was There to Fix Them

by Bill Babel, Republican Correspondent, July 5, 1981

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Northampton- Glenn Sabin Sr. is 93 years old and you usually can find him sitting in a chair at the back of Sabin's store at 16 Crafts Ave. in Northampton. It's a pretty rare day that you don't find him at the store. "Gotta keep active," he says, flashing a smile. "Gotta keep going."

Sabin's has been a family business for about 80 years, providing support for three generations of Sabins. Glenn Sr. and his son, Glenn Jr., are both retired and the business is now operated by three grandsons, Dale, Robert and Gary Sabin.

Glenn Sr. was born on March 26, 1888 on a farm in Amherst, MA. A little after the turn of the century, when he was in his early teens, automobiles were starting to make their appearance. But there were no auto repair shops. So young Sabin went into the automobile repair business. Where did he get his know-how? "I was raised on a farm, and you fix everything yourself on the farm. That's how I learned to fix cars... just worked at it." He left Amherst about 1911 and moved to Northampton where he operated Sabin's car repair shop on Maple St. "I worked on cars almost from the time they first appeared in the community," said Sabin.

"Over in Amherst, Martin Gould had the first steam-powered Grout car that was made in Orange. It took about 15 minutes to get the steam up. There was no quick get-away with those early steamers. Kerosene was used to heat the water to produce steam. Every 100 miles you had to get more water. I never heard of a steamer that blew up. They withstood the steam pressure.

Dick Holland who ran a hardware store in Amherst had a Thomas Flyer. That had a gasoline motor. I took care of that car for him. Steamers could go where gas-driven cars couldn't go. The power in a steamer was absolutely steady. It didn't fluctuate at all. I worked on cars and on radio at the same time. Radio was just coming out too. And I did lock and key work. It wasn't called radio in those early days. It was called wireless. That was a little after the turn of the century. I learned to operate the wireless and send messages by Morse code. For a while before WWI, I worked for Western Union in Northampton."

Sabin set up a radio station on Williams Street in Northampton in 1914 and he ran it until this country got into the war in 1917. "We sent messages and received them by Morse code just as a hobby. We provided a message service for people free of charge. People used to wonder why we fussed with early radio like we did. But if it wasn't for early radio, you wouldn't have what you have today. Those early radio men were experimenters. Ninty percent of the inventions used today can be traced back to amateur radio."

When WWI came along, Sabin entered the Navy as a radio officer. He was already knowledgeable in the radio field. He helped set up the Harvard Radio School in Boston for the Navy, and later helped set up WBF, a commercial radio station in Boston.

He said the Navy later shipped him to South Carolina to a radio laboratory and put him in charge of all radio activities in the Sixth Naval District. After the war, he resumed his car repair business. He specialized in electrical circuits of cars. But the Connecticut River overflowed its banks and flooded Northampton in 1936, and Sabin's Garage was under 12 to 13 feet of water.

Sabin's moved to 26 Crafts Avenue after the flood and got out of the car repair business. A few years ago, Sabin's moved again this time to 16 Crafts Avenue, to be nearer the downtown. Today Sabin's does lock and key work, repairs safes, repairs and sells lamps of all types, sells and leases sound systems. The nature of business has changed somewhat since those early years. "You just have to adjust to the times," said Sabin.

Sabin's does all the sound system work for the Northampton fairgrounds. "We probably have \$50,000 invested in sound equipment," Sabin volunteered. "We have 45 loudspeakers and 15 or 18 amplifiers. We got into this business because of the needs at the fairgrounds and it just grew." Sabin's also specializes in safes. "We sell them, open them and repair them," he said. "We get problem safes open by one method or another. We never know how we will do it until we try, but we always get them open. Sometimes you can hear the tumblers fall into place and open them by sound. Other times you have to drill them. We open them on the spot. It may take five minutes or three or four hours. We charge \$25 to \$200 to open a safe, depending on what's involved."

Sabin's is the only safe specialist in the area outside of Springfield. Most locksmiths refer safe problems to Sabin's. At 93, Sabin still has a hobby, a hobby of more than 70 years. He's a Ham Radio operator. He has his own set at home which he built himself. He got his first radio license in 1913. "I can talk to anyone anywhere in the world. I have talked to Ham operators in Russia, in England and in Germany. I have never talked to anyone in China. I go on the air three or four times a week on three or four networks. I chew the fat back and forth with other Ham radio operators from all over. I use it as a public service too. I will transmit emergency messages and receive messages for people. I do it as a courtesy."

At 93, Glenn Sabin Sr. is keen-minded and interested in everything that goes on. Does he feel essential at Sabin's store since he is there almost every day? "Sometimes I can save the boys time on a problem because I have handled it before. But the boys are experts in their own right in what they do." Glenn Sabin Sr. has been officially retired for 18 years, but the man will never retire for his mind is actively engaged in all that goes on about him.

(Glenn died at 95 on April 17, 1983.)