

Seen and Heard in **Our Neighborhood**

IT'S TIME for an update on the Senator, the automobile that was manufactured in Ridgeville some 80 years ago.

Only a few of these machines were built, over a four-year period beginning in 1907. And Robert M. Taylor of Indianapolis, director of the Indiana Historical Society's research projects and grants division, has written a history of the enterprise.

He asked me some weeks ago if I could help him obtain photographs of the early gasoline-propelled car. They are hard to come by, he said, and I mentioned this in *Our Neighborhood*.

Well, there were two responses. One was from Robert Garrett of Muncie; he telephoned when I happened to be visiting in the newsroom of *The Muncie Star*.

And he said he had a picture of the Senators and that he would drop by with it so it could be copied and perhaps used in *The Star's* Sunday features Album of Yesteryear.

He and I missed connections, so I've yet to see the photograph. *Star* editor Larry L. Shores has promised to pursue the matter, however, so perhaps all is not lost.

The other communication was a brief letter from Gerald E. Godwin of Albany.

He reminded me that the Ridgeville history book prepared a few years ago by Wayne L. Norton of the Randolph County town told about two cars made there, the Senator and the Victor. I had browsed through the Norton book when it was published, and I believe Ruth Hillman may have written about it in *Our Neighborhood*.

I had already given Wayne Norton's name to Bob Taylor as a possible resource person with regard to the Senator, and perhaps they have talked by now.

But the Victor! That came as a surprise. I'll have to do some research on it, and I shall report at some future date.

Most Indiana towns and cities had, in the early years of the 20th century, one or more firms that built motor vehicles. There were several in Muncie, and at least one was located in Albany.

I've mentioned before that there



Bill Spurgeon

11/2/92

is an Albany car on display in Auburn's Auburn-Cord-Duesenburg Museum, and this machine was loaned to the Minnetrista Cultural Center in Muncie some months ago for an automotive history exhibit.

Ned Griner, professor of art at Ball State University, has Albany roots, and in addition to two delightful books that he has written about Muncie and Delaware County (*Side by Side With Coarser Plants* and *The Gas Boom Society*), he also has done an extensive genealogical/historical study of that town's McCormick family.

Family members were prominent and active in Albany's bank-

ing, retail and commercial circles for perhaps three quarters of a century, into the 1970s.

In *The McCormicks of Albany*, Ned Griner mentions John L. Tulley, who acquired the building of the bankrupt Grand Hotel on Albany's East State Street and started to build cars there in 1904.

By 1907 some 250 vehicles had been built. The machine was considered a luxury item, historian Griner notes, the Surrey model selling at \$700 and the Runabout for \$100 less.

Cars were shipped all over the U.S. But competition among early automakers was fierce, and two years later the firm closed, having built more than a thousand cars. The one on display at Auburn may be the only surviving Albany car.

Ned Griner's grandfather was Ora McCormick; he and his brother Frank were partners with a third man, named Ash, in a Farmland hardware store.

The Albany McCormicks were engaged in retailing, banking and manufacturing. In the latter their products included washboards (made in Eaton) and various metal products produced in their Albany plant, McCormick Brothers Co., until it closed in the 1970s.

Brother Walter McCormick was also a licensed embalmer, so their Albany hardware store became an undertaking establishment as well.

Many funeral directors — even well into recent years — were also furniture retailers, the connection dating back to the days when furniture, cabinets and caskets were all built in the same shop.

Writes Ned Griner, "The McCormicks would undertake almost anything, and they cut a doorway on the west wall of their hardware store to join with the adjacent building, where they sold furniture and conducted the undertaking aspect of the business." Obviously they were aggressive entrepreneurs.

A final footnote on John L. Tulley, also from the McCormick book: He and several other early-1900s Albany citizens went to the Ridgeville area, where they dug 400 maple trees. They took them by wagon to Albany and replanted them along the town's streets. Most are still there.

Wiley W. (Bill) Spurgeon, former executive editor of *The Muncie Star*, resides in northeastern Kosciusko County.