

Garage Marks Anniversary

By MEL MOST
Business Writer

ALLENDALE — The business of auto service may look a bit young for golden anniversaries, and so do the robust inventive Megnin brothers—George, 74, Gene, 72, and kid brother Barney, 68.

Yet here are proprietor George W. Megnin and his Central Garage, both joined early in the game by his brothers, celebrating a half-century at the same stand on the same corner.

For 50 years he has been selling the same kind of gas, starting before there were gas pumps, and repairing cars in the same building, much modernized and expanded.

• It had been a livery stable when George rented it for \$15 a month in 1919 to get his start. He had a 50-gallon Standard Oil barrel, from which gas had to be pumped and then poured into cars by funnel.

With customers from Waldwick and the Saddle Rivers to Mahwah and Ramsey, he soon needed the help of his younger brother, whose real name is Frank.

Taxi Too

They also had the village's only taxi, and one day Frank fetched a tardy woman to the railroad station so fast that he was nicknamed Barney after racer Oldfield.

Eugene E. Megnin, back from the Army, came aboard within the first few years.

They had all moved to Allendale in 1915 from the Bronx after their father, a French-born carpet and wallpaper designer, had found it was getting too citified for his taste.

The elder Megnins, their seven children and a brother and sister occupied what is now The Carriage House restaurant. One day George fixed a neighbor's Graham-Paige, and his fame spread so quickly that he found himself in business almost without knowing it.

He had been a tool and dye-making apprentice in the New York printing press factory of Hoe and Company. To this day, he has never lost his fascination for machining, and Central has one of the most complete machine shops of any garage of any size.

Cars and motorists were fewer, and the Megnins still remember who had what, by name.

Plumber Louis Rossner next door, now retired, had a 1908 two-cylinder Reo, and so

did the late Mayor Gustave Nadler. There was the late A. B. Sullivan with a Marmon, a Mercer and a Chandler.

"They were mighty good cars," George recalls. "I remember tuning up an eight-cylinder Hupmobile. I tested it at 120 m.p.h. on Hillsdale Avenue."

Nearby was the Franklin Turnpike, main route from western New York State to New York City, and Central Garage got a lot of its business from vehicles coming through.

One was a Stanley Steamer bus from Kingston. "Beautiful," George remembers, "It worked like a dream."

Central Garage had a tow car, much in demand. In 1921 there was a lumberyard fire in Waldwick, which at that time had no water system, while Allendale's Reo fire truck had no engine.

The Megnins towed the fire

truck and laid a mile-long hose line from Allendale to the fire. Later, George was to be fire chief of Allendale for 28 years.

To keep things going during the frequent breakdowns of electric current in those days, the brothers acquired a steamboat generator from an old Hudson River Dayliner and ran it, of course, with an auto engine.

Carrying on the family torch is Gene's son George W. Megnin II, now shop foreman. But there's not the slightest hint of retirement by any of his seniors.

"Only the other day," said George the First, "my wife was saying I ought to relax. I said to my wife, 'Not the way I feel about it. This has been my life, I like it here, I like this business, I like all the associations I've had.'"

He added, "What else would I do? I'd just be lost. I guess I'll stick it out."



Staff Photos by Edward Hill

3 STURDY VETS — George Megnin, left, who started the Allendale Central Garage in 1919, talks to his brother Gene from his 75-year-old rolltop desk which their father used before them in his New York business.