

# SIMSBURY

## Genealogical and Historical Research Library

Volume 12 Issue 1

Spring 2005

### Robert Pringle of Edinburgh and Simsbury Pioneer in the Automobile Business in the Farmington Valley

*Mary Pringle Mitchell has written this account of her father's arrival in this country almost a century ago and the life he made for himself and his family.*

My father, Robert Pringle, was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1890, the son of Mark and Mary Oliver Pringle. He was the first in his family to immigrate to the United States. To come to another country with no contacts took a lot of courage and faith in yourself and the future. He came to this country on the *S.S. Sicilian* in 1914 and eventually settled in Simsbury in 1916.<sup>1</sup> He arrived with a lot of hope, some clothes in a trunk and very little money in his pocket. He operated a little auto repair shop for Joe Kane while he was away during World War I. The 1920 census shows that Dad had become a United States citizen by then.

His father died in Scotland in 1919 and his mother, Mary Oliver Pringle, and her three other sons came to the United States in 1920 to join my father in the Weatogue section of Simsbury. Their first house in the States still stands at 51 Canal Street. My father's brother George had just served four years in the Cameron Highlanders in World War I and his brother Bennett had just finished four years in the Royal Flying Corps. His brother Alexander was only sixteen years old when he came over with his mother.

In 1922 Dad rented a cow barn on Canal Street from Henry Genlot and went into business for himself. He called his shop the Pringle Garage. He repaired cars and shared the barn with Bessie the cow.

My mother, Irene Katherine Piccini Wotley, emigrated from Bournemouth, Eng-



Robert Pringle, 1890-1956

land, to Canada and eventually to New York, where she worked for Mrs. Josephine Dodge, widow of Arthur Murray Dodge. In the summer the Dodges always came to their summer home on Sand Hill Road in Weatogue. Mother walked by Dad's business on the way to Weatogue Post Office every day and that is how they met. They were married in 1922 and I was born in 1924, the first of my family to be born in the United States.

On December 31, 1923, my Dad and Leon D. Genlot signed a business agreement that established The Weatogue Garage. According to the record filed in Simsbury Town Hall, the business would engage in "the sale and distribution of Oakland automobiles and Federal trucks." My father was to provide service and equipment and Leon Genlot was to conduct the rest of the business.<sup>2</sup>

A series of fifteen advertisements for Oakland cars began appearing in the weekly *Farmington Valley Herald* in March 1924. Supplied by General Motors, they proclaimed the merits of the Oaklands sold by The Weatogue Garage and Salings Garage in Unionville. The Oakland, which had come on the market in 1908, now offered seven models: the touring car and roadster for \$995, the sport touring car and sport roadster for \$1025, the business coupe for \$1195, the coupe for four for \$1395 and the sedan for \$1445.<sup>3</sup> The Oaklands had six-cylinder engines, four-wheel brakes, automatic spark control and bodies by Fisher. Potential customers were invited to come in for demonstrations of how the durable blue Duco finish could stand up to sulfuric acid, fire, fire extinguishers, ammonia, lime cement, hot tar, boiling water, mud and dust.

On December 31, 1926, The Weatogue Garage filed with Connecticut's Secretary of the State for a Certificate of Incorporation. The document stated that the business would "conduct a first-class garage for repair, maintenance and service of automobiles of all kinds...buy, sell and deal in motor vehicles...[and] conduct...an automobile livery service." The Certificate of Organization, filed three days later, lists the officers of the corporation as Robert Pringle, President and Treasurer, and Herman Case, Secretary. The other directors were Adolph Engleke and Walter Rogers. All the men were from Weatogue, except Mr. Engleke, who lived in Avon.<sup>4</sup> The business was now at 384 Hopmeadow Street. Annual reports in subsequent years show that Dad's brother Alexander became Vice President and Leon Genlot served as Secretary.

During World War II, Dad was an air raid warden and he taught a course to train women to take care of their cars while their husbands were at war. There were no cars to sell during the war, so the challenge was to keep the old ones on the road. With no new auto parts available, he had to repair the old ones, which put him to the test many times. He used to joke and say that sometimes you had to repair the parts with bailing wire and glue.

Dad truly loved the town of Simsbury. He served on the town's Board of Finance and was involved in many town affairs. He was a director of the Simsbury Bank and Trust and was one of the founders of the Simsbury Development Company. He was a charter member of the Simsbury Coon Club and member of the Newgate Coon Club, Simsbury's St. Mark's Masonic Lodge #36 and of the Sphinx Shriners.

He was president of the Connecticut Auto Trades Association and he was always active in



Robert Pringle's youngest brother, Alexander, is pictured in front of the Pringle Garage on Canal Street. To his left is Andy Forbes. Alexander remained involved in the family automobile business. He eventually married Alice Rust of Simsbury and they had one daughter, Joan. He died in 1995, but his widow, Alice Rust Pringle, 95, still lives in Simsbury.

George Pringle, the former Cameron Highlander, settled in Weatogue and married Laura Cross of Woodstock, Connecticut. They had two sons, Robert and Ronald. George Pringle worked for Mrs. Lettie Dodge Montgomery in Weatogue and he eventually operated our Mobil Gas Station. He died in 1982.

Bennett Pringle, formerly of the Royal Flying Corps, married Alice Twiggs of Simsbury and they had one son, Bennett Pringle Jr. Bennett Sr. was employed by Westinghouse and the family lived in Springfield, Massachusetts, and Elizabeth, New Jersey. He died in 1987.

Mary Oliver Pringle, Robert's mother, lived until 1953, preceding him in death by just three years. All these Pringles are buried in Simsbury Cemetery.

the progress of the automobile business in Connecticut. He was a true pioneer in the auto business in Connecticut and highly respected.

Dad ran the business until he died in 1956, then my husband, Walter Mitchell, and I stepped in. We eventually changed the name from The Weatogue Garage to Mitchell Pontiac. Now the business is managed by the third generation, our sons Mark, Steven and Robert. Many new

franchises have been added, so we are known as the Mitchell Auto Group. We also have dealerships in Canton, Torrington and Southington. A business that had such a humble beginning in a cow barn now employs more than 200 people and we are well known throughout the area. My Dad would be very pleased to see how the business that he started has grown over the last eighty years.

My Dad was truly a self made man and he did so much to help the town of Simsbury become the great town that it is today. I am very proud of my Scottish and English heritage and my father Robert Pringle.

by Mary Pringle Mitchell

### Notes

1. *S.S. Sicilian* passenger list on Ancestry.com.
2. Simsbury Town Records, Personal Property 1:255. *Geer's Hartford Directory* for 1922-23 lists Leon D. Genlot of Simsbury as U.S. Federal Prohibition Agent 983.
3. John Gunnell, *75 Years of Pontiac-Oakland* (Sarasota, Florida: Crestline Publishing Co., Inc., 1982), 10. *Farmington Valley Herald*, April 17, 1924, 8.
4. Connecticut State Library, History and Genealogy Unit, RG6, Secretary of the State Articles of Incorporation, 1835-1945, Joint Stock Co., 1926-27; 409-10, 472-73.
5. Simsbury Town Records, 2:79, 109, 155, 193, 260, 300; 3:79, 195, 265; 4:17, 70.

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### *Worthy of Note:*

- When the Weatogue Garage began selling Oakland cars in 1924, there were three other car dealerships in Simsbury. The Simsbury Garage sold Ford cars, trucks and tractors. Kane's Garage sold Maxwell and Chrysler cars. Harry N. Curtiss sold the Overland, Whippet and Wyllys-Knight. Other makes sold in nearby towns included the Hudson, Essex, Hupmobile, Dodge, Oldsmobile, Buick and Chevrolet. The Welden store in Simsbury sold bicycles and there was the Western Horse Market in Torrington.
  - Josephine M. Jewell Dodge (1855-1928), who is mentioned on page two, was the daughter of Marshall Jewell, governor of Connecticut from 1871 to 1873. Her late husband, Arthur Murray Dodge (1852-1896), was an heir to the Phelps-Dodge Company fortune and he had pursued a business career with that company. The Dodges maintained a residence in New York City and kept a summer estate in Simsbury. They are buried in Simsbury Cemetery.
  - A native of Council Bluffs, Iowa, Letitia (Lettie) Dodge Montgomery (1855-1935), mentioned on page three, was the daughter of Ann Brown and Major General Grenville Mellen Dodge. An engineer by training, he fought in the Civil War and was a key figure in the building of the Union Pacific Railroad, which met the Central Pacific to form the transcontinental railway. Robert E. Montgomery, her late husband from whom she was divorced, had worked for her father. During the latter part of her life, she kept a residence in New York City, but lived most of the year at her country house in Weatogue. She and two of her three children are buried in Simsbury Cemetery.
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### *In Memory of Robert H. Lindauer Sr., 1921-2005*

The Board of Trustees and all of his friends at the Simsbury Free Library mourn the passing of Robert Lindauer, Trustee Emeritus. His contributions to his country and his community are legion and we are proud to have had him with us. Bob was a mainstay on the library board from 1990 until his retirement last year. We wish to extend our deepest sympathy to his widow, Margaret, and to all his family and we hope to greet Margaret in her accustomed place in the library soon again.

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#### *Volunteer Luncheon Postponed*

Out of respect for our Champion Volunteer, Bob Lindauer, the Trustees are postponing the Annual Volunteer Luncheon, usually held in June. We appreciate the dedication of all our volunteers and look forward to seeing them at the luncheon when it is rescheduled.

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#### *Plantings and Spring Flowers*

The foundation plantings that our House Committee's Rick Schoenhardt had planted have survived the winter and are a treat to behold. The dogwoods and other flowering trees are glorious, soon to be followed by the colorful annuals that the town's garden clubs plant and tend. We are ready to greet our out-of-town members on their warm weather family history treks.

### Speaker on Genealogy Brought Back for a Second Popular Subject

Jean Nudd, Archivist at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Northeast Region, Pittsfield, Ma, will speak on

#### **Starting Your Search at NARA**

Saturday, June 11  
11:00 A.M.  
At the Library

Free and Open to All  
Refreshments Will be Served

## Some Recent Acquisitions

*Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society: The Wolcott Papers, 1750-1754; The Wyllys Papers, 1590-1796; Records of the Particular Court of Connecticut, 1639-1663*; vols. 16, 21, 22 (donated by Shirley Damato)

*Early American Inns and Taverns* by Elise Lathrop (donated by Clavin Fisher)

*A Guide to Dating Old Family Photographs* by Judith Allison Walters (donated by Stephen E. Simon)

*History of the Abigail Phelps Chapter, National Daughters of the American Revolution, Simsbury, Connecticut* by Ruth Stafford Clark (donated by Priscilla G. Bergethon)

*More Lasting Than Brass: A Thread of Family from Revolutionary New York to Industrial Connecticut, Members of the Haring, Herring, Clark, Denton, Phelps, White, Griggs, Judd and Related Families* by Peter Haring Judd (donated by Stephen E. Simon in memory of Robert H. Lindauer)

*Marriage Returns of Penobscot County, Maine, Prior to 1892*, 2 vols., edited by Ruth Gray (donated by Bruce Hale in memory of his wife, Amelia Riley Hale)

*The Scotch-Irish: Or the Scot In North Britain, North Ireland, and North America*, 2 vols., by Charles A. Hanna

*Stage-Coach & Tavern Days* by Alice Morse Earle (donated by Clavin Fisher)

*Stranger Stop and Cast an Eye: A guide to Gravestones & Gravestone Rubbing* by G. Walker Jacobs (donated by Stephen E. Simon)

*Taverns and Stagecoaches of New England*, vol. 2, by Allan Forbes and Ralph M. Eastman (donated by Clavin Fisher)

*University of Chicago Graduate School of Business 2002 Alumni Directory* (anonymous donation)

*The Valley of Opportunity: A Pictorial History of the Greater Binghamton Area* by Gerald R. Smith (donated by Stephen E. Simon)

*Vital Records of Bangor, Maine: Birth Records, Death Records*, 2 vols., compiled by Michelle E. Thomas (donated by Bruce Hale in memory of his wife, Amelia Riley Hale)



### Books Published by SGHRL for Sale in the Library

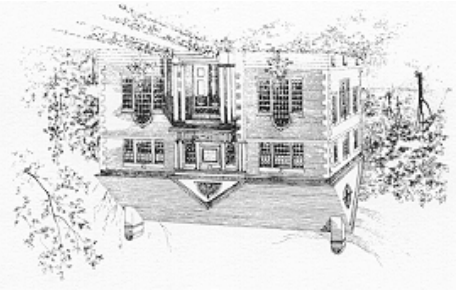
*Simsbury Cemetery Gravestone Inscriptions, Simsbury, Connecticut 1688-2000: The Old Section* compiled by Joyce A. Cahill. This award winning text gives a brief history of the cemetery with maps and illustrations. It lists the gravestones by row and by alphabetical order. The spiral bound paperback costs \$25:00, plus tax.

*John Case and His Descendants* compiled by Ruth Cost Duncan. This is the 2000 revised edition of the 290-page genealogy. The spiral bound paperback costs \$32.00.

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**SIMSBURY MARRIAGES**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Birthplace</b>
Nov. 3, 1878	John Hill	50		Ireland
	Julia Murphy Roydon	37		Ireland
Nov. 7, 1878	Geo. C. Eno	24		Simsbury
	Nellie S. Goodrich	23		Simsbury
Nov. 14, 1878	William E. Griffen	26		Granby
	Emma P. Dale	22		Simsbury
Dec. 24, 1878	Charles H. Walker	26		South Scituate, R.I.
	Martha J. Kitchen	24		Simsbury
Dec. 24, 1878	Henry C. Long	27		Suffield, Ct.
	Laura J. Rayneferd	24		New Marlborough
Feb. 13, 1879	George Turnbull	24		Simsbury
	Carrie E. White	24		New York City
Feb. 23, 1879	James M. Convey	29		Thompsonville, Ct.
	Sarah A. Starr	24		Chatham, N. Y.
Mar. 26, 1879	Henry C. Tuttle	35		Tyringham, Mass.
	Anna M. Rogers	21		Simsbury, Ct.
June 4, 1879	Louis G. Eno	28		Simsbury
	Annie E. Bradley	23		Simsbury, Ct.
June 11, 1879	Howell C. Hough	29		Canton, Ct.
	Jesie C. Case	25		Simsbury, Ct.
June 17, 1879	William G. Curtis	21		Waterbury, Ct.
	Delice E. Downes	19		Norfolk, Ct.
June 3, 1879	Wilber S. Holcomb	31		Granby
	Adella S. Welton	25		Simsbury
July 8, 1879	Miles Latimer	30		Canton
	Laura E. Gates	19		Simsbury
July 10, 1879	De Gray F. Crozier	23		Newerk, N.J.
	Carabell Brooks	18		East Haddam
Oct. 28, 1879	Augustus E. Pettibone	40		Elba, N. Y.
	Jennie Lines Root	30		New York City
Apr. 13, 1879	Benjamin H. Selby	22		Hartland, Ct.
	Lillia I. Case	19		Simsbury, Ct.



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