

A 1930 Packard that Came Home to Manchester

by Marshall Lamenzo, edited by Susan Barlow, Manchester Historical Society

Very early in my life, I found that I had a great curiosity and interest in automobiles, especially Packards. I remember at about age three seeing a big maroon sedan in traffic. It had huge disc wheels and a jewel-like tail lamp. Taking off from a stop, it exhibited a beautiful sound of gears. I think, with what I now know, this first noteworthy Packard of my memory was probably a 1929 Model 626.

Many years later, in the 1940s, while still on a bicycle, I recall frequently seeing a black, five-passenger Packard coupe, driven by a petite woman, coming out of Westminster Road in Manchester, Connecticut, not far from where we lived. I also saw it parked on Main Street by Center Park on Sundays, when I went to my church, St. James, a few blocks further down Main. Later, I discovered that this same petite woman attended my same church. Apparently she didn't want to cause a stir in the church parking lot with her impressive Packard car, so she parked some distance away.

In the early 1970s, I found that this special car – a 1930 Packard sometimes referred to as a Victoria coupe – was garaged at 50 Scarborough Road, just off Westminster Road in Manchester. I then decided to pursue this car.



Calling on the Owner of the Car

The owner, that woman I had seen driving the car decades earlier, would not answer her doorbell and had an unlisted phone number. So, periodically I'd drive by the house. And then it happened – one late spring afternoon, I found the owner, Mary O'Leary, raking the grass in the backyard of her house. Both bays were open in the two-car detached garage, made of brick as was the house.

Even as a youngster, Marshall liked cars. Below: bookshelf in Marshall's study, with a childhood portrait and a model of a Packard car.



2009 photo by Susan Barlow

The 1930 Packard was up on blocks, and the other Packard, the one she was then driving, was in the next stall. It was a 1938 Packard Six four-door sedan with double whitewall tires. I pulled into the driveway, got out of my car, and introduced myself to the woman. I then asked her if I could “check out the wiring” in her older Packard, the one up on blocks.

She said in a delightful Irish accent, “Yes, Mr. Lamenzo, you may.”

I went to the car and opened the passenger door and found a near perfect, original Packard wool interior with 39,000+ miles on the odometer. I was most thrilled.

Returning to the yard, I asked Ms. O'Leary if she would consider selling me the 1930 Packard, offering her a brand new Ford automobile for it if she wished. She stated that the car was not for sale, nor was she interested in any new Ford. “Thank you, Mr. Lamenzo,” she said “and good day!” I was summarily dismissed.

Auction of House and Car

In the spring of 1984, I was told of a legal notice in *The Hartford Courant*, seeking bids for a house at 50 Scarborough Road, its contents and two Packard automobiles – Mary O’Leary had died. I responded immediately and called for an inspection appointment. A few days later, I was met by a young attorney from Hartford and toured the house and garage, with the 1930 Packard, just as I had viewed it ten or so years before.

Upon raising the right hood, I found the reason it wasn’t being driven. The Detroit Lubricator carburetor had a large crack in the float-chamber area, and thus would not hold fuel. The registration tag on the rear was dated 1956 and the plate carried the owner’s initials, MOL – Mary O’Leary. This dear woman took special care of this car when motoring in it. The original wool velour upholstery is near perfect for wear and no moth damage! Even the windlace fabric seal (see photo below) of the “A” pillar on the driver’s door escaped the damage usually found in these cars – frequently chewed to a mass of thread and rubber. On her car, it is perfect.

The vehicle next to the 1930 was the 1938 Packard Six four-door sedan, again, a near mint original interior, original black paint and four flat double whitewall tires. The registration on this car was ML-11 (my initials!) and had recently expired. This car couldn’t be driven either, as at some time in the not-too-distant past, Ms. O’Leary had dented the driver’s door, causing it not to close properly unless slammed. Repeated slamming had cracked the “B” post completely, thus making it impossible to keep either of the driver-side doors closed. Hence, this car sat for some time, too, but not on blocks. Its indicated mileage was 28,000+ miles.

I compiled what I believed was a fair offer of around \$14,000 for the two Packard cars. After a two-week lapse, I called the attorney only to be informed that the Packard cars were awarded to another party, whose name and winning bid could not be divulged. To say the least, I was most disappointed – again.

Reappearance of the Packard

Just before Christmas 2006, again in *The Hartford Courant*, under Antique Automobiles, appeared an ad for a 1930 Packard coupe. Upon phoning the number advertised, I asked if the Packard had a rumble seat? “No, it is a five-passenger coupe.”

I pressed on and asked, “What color?” “Black.” WOW!

“Could this car possibly have been from a Manchester estate by the name of O’Leary?” “Yes, ‘O’ something or other,” was the answer.

Immediately I went to Farmington, visited the advertised Packard and determined it was truly the same Packard that I have been after for 30+ years. A hasty, but expensive, deal was made and the Mary O’Leary Packard was in my garage, and again back home in Manchester.

Since my purchase, I returned many of the “changed altered” items (generally minor) on the car to “original Packard.” Lastly, the fuel tank was removed and cleaned and the vacuum tank put back in order, providing a smooth, nice-shifting, reliable-driving Packard car.

The Story of Miss Benton, Miss O’Leary and the Car

Mary O’Leary and her sister, Rita, arrived in Manchester circa 1927 from Ireland probably as a result of a Cheney mills recruitment ad. Mary ended up working as a domestic for Mary Louise Benton, a single woman, who lived in a home owned by Cheney Brothers at 36 Elm Street, located behind Cheney Hall.

Miss Benton, also known as Molly, lived in that house with her parents, continuing so after their deaths. Miss Benton’s father was Paymaster for Cheney Brothers. A former neighbor recalls quite vividly her visit to tea at Miss Benton’s house when she was a young girl. “It was very proper and nicely furnished.” She mentioned that Miss Benton drove a very large and expensive car, the very car which is the subject of this story.

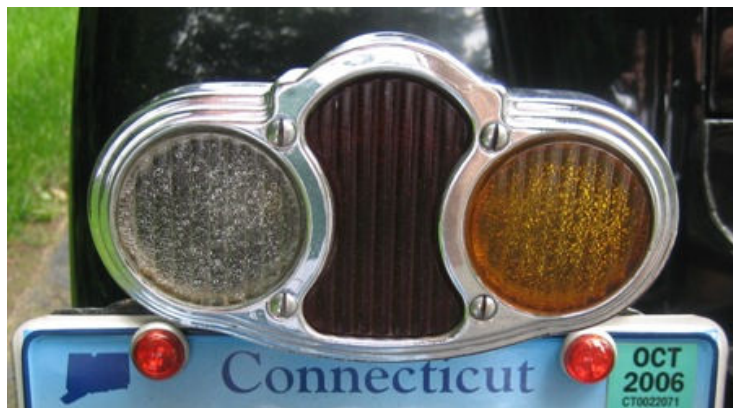
Having been left very well off, Miss Benton was able to purchase a brand new Packard car, a 1930, five-passenger coupe, from the Packard Motor Car Co., Hartford branch on Washington Street in Hartford, on June 16, 1930.

In 1938, she purchased another new Packard – the black four-door sedan. Miss Benton either gave or sold to Mary O’Leary, still in her employ, the older 1930 Packard car, which I saw her driving in the late 1940s. At about this same time, Miss Benton moved to a newer house at 50 Scarborough Road.

For many years Mary O’Leary was kept in the employ of Miss Benton, as a domestic, companion, nurse, college student – our town directory showed all of these descriptions at different times. Finally, on March 30, 1950, at age 85, Miss Benton died. Most of the estate, including the newer Packard car went to Mary O’Leary.

Miss O’Leary died in April 1984. The gentleman who acquired the two Packards from her estate was P. Rodney Fazzone, of Southington, CT. Upon his moving to California in 2000, he sold the 1930 Packard to Jack Matava, his mechanic, and owner of Edward Motors Garage in Unionville, from whom I purchased the subject car.

I am a happy owner, after all these years.



The rear light of Marshall’s Packard has, left to right, the backing-up light (clear), the running light (red), and the stop light (amber).

Photos by Susan Barlow



Marshall shows the “windlace” inside the Packard’s door. Due to its location, this long upholstered piece would ordinarily get a lot of wear and tear, but it’s in original condition thanks to Mary O’Leary’s care.