

Sensebach Heritage

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A family history newsletter for:

Sinsabaugh Sensibaugh Sensenbaugh Sinsebox
Sinsapaugh Sencabaugh Sencenbaugh Sencerbox
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Sensaugh Sencibaugh Cincebeaux Sensaboy
Sensebaugh Cencebaugh Cincebox Senciboy
and other variations of the name

Chris Sinsabaugh, Newspaper Man

by Steven L. Sinsabaugh

When we write stories about notable Sensebachs, the writing is often preceded by extensive research to pull together the details of the person's life. In the case of Chris Sinsabaugh of Pennsylvania/Illinois/New York/Michigan, the subject himself tells us of his life. In Chris's case, however, half the fun is in how he tells the story.

Chris wrote the autobiographical "Who Me? Forty Years of Automobile History" published in 1940, about 3 years before his death. In the foreword his editor, George Slocum, calls the book an "AUTO biography", for it is both the history of the first forty years of the automobile industry, as well as an autobiography of the author. For Chris Sinsabaugh was a renowned "newspaper man" who specialized in covering the automobile industry. As Slocum wrote in the foreword, "Chris Sinsabaugh is the only man living who can pick up a telephone and get a 'What do you want, Chris' from the brass-hat in the corner office of any automobile company in America."

Chris was not only a prominent person in the early auto industry, but a rather colorful character. Continuing with Slocum's foreword:

"Now although Chris is old enough to know better, he is proud of having broken every law of man and nature that most mere mortals, like you and me, swear by. To wit: vegetarians tell us to refrain from meat, eat plenty of fruits, salads and vegetables, and avoid the starches. Chris eats meat two or three times a day, pushes the salads and spinach aside, fills up with potatoes or beans and top it all off with a heavy dessert and probably two cups of coffee! Any prominent bartender in Detroit can give you a 'Chris Sinsabaugh Martini,' which is made exactly as every other good Martini in the world is made, excepting that it calls for a glass suit-



able for holding three times the ordinary quantity and avoids the olive because that, according to Chris, is space wasted which might otherwise be more profitably used. However, if you don't care for Martinis you might try his Old Fashioned recipe which is exactly like everyone else's, except that he leaves out the sugar, bitters, orange slice, pineapple and cherry, and avoids, of course, any dilution with water.... You begin to catch the idea of why I say Chris is the exception who proves the rules by which most other humans are guided."

Chris deliberately combined the automobile history and autobiographical elements of his book. "I'm aiming to tell you about [early automobile builders] and what they achieved, and to milestone the growth of the industry under their leadership. And I'm using as a background an autobiography of one [i.e. Chris] who for half a century has watched and shared in the work of putting a nation on wheels, from the days of the bicycle to the coming of the 1941 motor cars. 'Who, Me?' is that autobiography, and the saga of the firsts 100 years on rubber."

Who, Me? includes an insider's look at the early decades of the auto industry. But the balance of this article will focus on the more autobiographical parts of Chris's book, with occasional explanatory segues (*in italics*).

The Saga Begins

Chris begins the books with a little history of himself from his birth until he first became a reporter.

If you must know, I first saw the light of day at Athens, Pa., January 5, 1872. And Athens at that time was just a wide spot on the road. It is situated at the confluence of the Susquehanna and Tioga (or Chemung) rivers, 20 miles south of Elmira, N. Y. It is said it was there that the first white man to step on the soil of Pennsylvania – a Frenchman – hopped out of his canoe after floating down the Susquehanna...

Athens came into more prominence in 1872, when David and Harriet Sinsabaugh gave birth to the bottle baby whom they tagged Christopher George Sinsabaugh. His Christian name came from his mother's English father, Christopher Tallaramshaw Slater, Grandfather Slater's middle name being the names of his two godfathers, Talla and Ramshaw. The baby's "George" came from an English grand uncle. Grandfather Slater, by the way, owned and operated the Rathbun House, which is still in business, in Elmira, N. Y., during the Civil War.

Sinsabaugh is a German name, but I doubt whether there is much Teutonic blood coursing through my veins, for the original Sinsabaughs came from Germany in 1735, when they settled in Orange County, News York. I have Sinsabaugh ancestors who fought in the Revolutionary War and in the War of 1812. My branch of the family, however, migrated to Bradford County, Pa., more specifically to Athens. Grandfather Richard

continued on page 5