

Maryland Historical Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form

1. Name (indicate preferred name)

historic Bonfield's Service Garage

and/or common Bonfield's Service Garage

2. Location

street & number 6124 MacArthur Blvd. not for publication

city, town Bethesda vicinity of congressional district 7

state Maryland county Montgomery

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> not applicable	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property (give names and mailing addresses of all owners)

name Walter J. & A. Bonfield

street & number 6124 MacArthur Blvd. telephone no.: 301-229-2082

city, town Bethesda state and zip code MD 20816

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Montgomery County Courthouse liber 775

street & number folio 235

city, town Rockville state Maryland

6. Representation in Existing Historical Surveys

title

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Survey No.M: 35-59

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date of move _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Prepare both a summary paragraph and a general description of the resource and its various elements as it exists today.

Bonfield's Service Garage occupies a two-story frame structure built into the hillside which drops away from the southwest side of MacArthur Boulevard. The building, constructed originally as a garage, contains the shop on the first floor, an apartment on the second floor, and an attic beneath its gable roof. Except for the lower half of the front (northeast) elevation, which is covered with asbestos shingles, the building is sheathed in German siding. The foundation is of concrete block. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles and has a small brick chimney projecting from the center of its ridge.

In the center of the front elevation a pair of sliding doors gives entrance to the shop on the first floor. A four-light window to the left of these doors lights the shop. At the right a doorway opens onto the stairway which leads to the apartment above. The second floor has two eight-over-one, double-hung wood sash windows; a small four-light window lights the attic. A large Art Moderne metal sign, announcing "Bonfield's, Road Service, Auto Repairs" in white letters on a black background trimmed in red and accented with horizontal strips of silver, spans the width of the building between the first and second floors. In the center of the sign's crest is a round clock which has a neon ring surrounding its face, inside the glass. This clock still runs. Beneath the sign, in letters cut from sheet metal, are the words "Our 61st Year."

The southeast elevation contains a door on the first floor and two windows on the second floor (except for two windows on the southwest elevation, these and the remaining windows are all six-over-six, double-hung wood sash).

The remaining two elevations have an exposed basement wall. The northwest elevation has a pair of garage doors in this basement wall, one window on the first floor, and three windows on the second floor. The southwest elevation has two windows in the basement and first floor walls. The second floor has one typical window and one newer window. The attic has a small, single-light window.

Between the building and the road is a paved area which contains a single gas pump, a Coke machine, and a round Texaco sign suspended from a metal pipe supported by a slender pole. At each side of the building are open pits for working on automobiles. This area also contains various signs advertising kerosene, gasoline, and oil, as well as numerous tires, containers, tools and miscellaneous parts for automobiles.

8. Significance

Survey No. M: 35-59

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates c. 1921 Builder/Architect

check: Applicable Criteria: A B C D and/or

Applicable Exception: A B C D E F G

Level of Significance: national state local

Prepare both a summary paragraph of significance and a general statement of history and support.

According to the Tax Assessment Records, the building currently housing Bonfield's Service Garage was originally built as a garage about 1921. The owners of Lot 2 where the garage was built, were Charles and Bertha Posey who platted the subdivision "Bon Air Heights" in 1920 (Plat Book 3, Plat No. 206). The Posey's willed this lot and several others to their daughter Grace Gordon in 1939, and she sold Lot 2 to Walter and Althea Bonfield in 1940 (Deed 775/235).

The Bonfield family, however, has been associated with the garage since 1927, when Walter Bonfield's father, a former Rolls Royce mechanic from England, sold his other gas stations in Washington and moved to the building on MacArthur Boulevard. The business was strictly a repair shop at first; the gas pump, located next door, was purchased later. In 1934 the elder Bonfield died, leaving the business to his son. Walter Bonfield has operated the gas station and repair service by himself since that time.¹

Bonfield's Service Garage is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, automobile service stations in Montgomery County still operating as it did originally in its original building. There are a few other family-run stations in the County, such as Eastham's in Bethesda, opened in 1929, but their original buildings have been replaced over the years. The next oldest remaining building housing a service station of which this researcher is aware, is the Kensington Service Station built in 1926. Thus, the Bonfield building, dating from approximately 1921, predates them all.

It is also a rare survivor of a once-common building type, and as such has considerable architectural significance. Throughout Montgomery County and the rest of the country in the early days of the automobile, the repair garage and filling station were housed in buildings resembling most other shops and general stores: frame structures which differed little from residential structures in their overall form. As in so many 19th and early 20th century commercial structures, the business was located on the main floor and the second floor contained an apartment for the owner or shopkeeper. Such buildings are rapidly disappearing in Montgomery County, and only Bonfield's remains as an example of such a type occupied by an automobile service station.

REFERENCES

1. *Washington Post*, July 10, 1975 and July 27, 1983, and confirmed in an interview with Walter Bonfield, December, 1987.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Survey No. M: 35-59

Montgomery County Land Records and Tax Assessment Records.
Washington Post, July 10, 1975 and July 27, 1983.
C & P Telephone Directory, 1939-40.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 5,318 Sq. Ft.

Quadrangle name _____

Quadrangle scale _____

UTM References do NOT complete UTM references

A	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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D	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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E	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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F	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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G	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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H	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>
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Verbal boundary description and justification

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Andrea Rebeck

organization Mont. Co. Hist. Pres. Comm. date 11/87

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town Rockville state Maryland

The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 supplement.

The survey and inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

return to: Maryland Historical Trust
Shaw House
21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 269-2438

JULY 10, 1975

Business & Statistics
Bonfield's Garage
McArthur Blvd

Bonfield's Garage Noted for the Signs It Keeps

By Denis Collins

Special to The Washington Post

For hundreds of motorists who pass it each day, Bonfield's Garage is a one-pump gas station on McArthur Boulevard that looks as though it belongs in some small New England town. But more importantly, it's the place with the peculiar signs.

Some are funny, like SLIPPERY OIL and RUNNY HOSE. Others, such as MUSHROOM PLUGS and MOOG BALLS, are more mysterious. And then there are the seasonal signs, the ones people wait for every year.

"I didn't put up AH SPRING till May," said 62-year-old Walter Bonfield, who lives with his wife, Althea, in the two floors above the garage.

"People were asking for it, but I don't like to announce spring 'til I'm sure it's really here."

Bonfield has been announcing one thing or another on his sign board for the past 20 years. Initially, it was a standard means of advertising. Then he misspelled one. "I only had one 'P,'" he explained, "so I spelled it COLD PEBSI." He got so much reaction from people who wondered if he was being comical or just couldn't spell that he started creating a different sign each week. "It makes

the traffic past here a little more personal," he said.

"I still get letters," said Bonfield, holding up a postcard from a Glenmont car-pool asking the meaning of the current sign, MOOG BALLS. "It's a brand of ball joint," explained Bonfield with a laugh. "I've had five people ask about that sign today."

"One fella last year came in to buy some 'mushroom plugs' for his spaghetti. When I showed him they were rubber plugs used to patch tires, he bought one anyway. Said he wanted to give it to his girlfriend for Christmas."

His favorite story is about a doctor's car he towed into the garage. "I called his wife to tell her about the damage, but she wasn't a bit interested. She just wanted to know what sign was up, to settle a bet with some friends."

Despite the latest thing in Exxon stations just 100 yards down the road, Bonfield's signs remain a hobby and are not meant to attract more customers. His appointment calendar is filled for the next five months, and Bonfield estimates that his time is promised to steady customers for at least a year.

"Getting Wally to work on your car can take a spell," said 92-year-old Fred Popp, doing a slow jog in the



Walter Bonfield

warm weather. "But folks around here know it's worth the wait. When Wally fixes your car, it's fixed."

The wooden building is more than 65 years old, and even without the sign above the doorway celebrating "Our 49th Year," Bonfield's has obviously been servicing cars a very long time.

Next to the new Coke machine are advertisements for auto parts that would only fit in antique cars. And there are so many tools hanging by hooks from the ceiling and piled around the 1936 Chevrolet tow truck that a journey of more than a few feet into the garage requires a certain determination.

"There are more in the basement," said Bonfield,

pointing out some of the more timeworn instruments. "And a good many of them are handmade."

His father, a former mechanic for Rolls Royce in England, was sent to the United States by the British government during World War I to buy shell casing lathes.

After the war, his father bought and sold two gas stations ("one was in the city and the other was too close") before moving into the McArthur Boulevard location in 1927.

"It was called Conduit Road back then, and it was right busy," said Bonfield after giving one of his regular customers a dollar's worth of gas and the kind of maintenance advice that television commercials would have you expect from all Texaco attendants.

"Massachusetts Avenue didn't go into Maryland in those days, so this was the only way to Glen Echo and Great Falls except for a Virginia toll road. It would get so crowded on weekends that people would park here and walk the last four miles to Glen Echo."

For the thirsty, there were three or four notorious taverns along the way. "They were real bucket-of-blood places," said Bonfield raising an eyebrow, "with cheap beer and wild brawls."

"We'd know there'd been a bad accident when the traffic was stopped for more than half an hour." With the road blocked, the tow truck would hop the B&O Railroad tracks just below the station and bounce up the wooden cross beams until parallel with the accident scene. "No, we never did run into a train. Sheriff Ferguson was always up there to make sure of that."

Bonfield and his wife have managed the garage without hired help since his father died in 1934. They have a 31-year-old son, who has a job in Washington as a commercial artist, and no desire to continue the family garage.

"I can't say that I'm sorry," said Bonfield. "He can do better than this. I've got no complaints. I love my work and I'm a right fair boss. But a man needs more security in a job today. If I get sick or injured, there's no money coming in and nobody to pay the bills but me."

But Walter Bonfield isn't planning his retirement. "I'll give it up when I can't do the job the way it should be done." Fred Popp, for one, hopes that isn't soon. He's got an appointment in November to have his brakes relined and he won't trust his car to anybody else.

(over) - only photos on reverse
Post
July 10, 1975

M:35-59

JULY 27, 1983

BUSINESS ESTABLISHMENT
BONFIELD'S GARAGE

50 Years Behind the Pump

Made for Memories: Wally Bonfield & His Gas Station

By Paul Hendrickson

In the perfect American filling station, in a town named Sylacauga or Bogalusa, there will be a red Coca-Cola machine with "5 cents" artfully scrolled on it, an overstuffed rack of road maps yours for the taking, a wizard of a mechanic who will limp out of a back room in a pair of striped greasy coveralls, wiping his hands on a dirty rag. "Does this road go to Texarkana?" you'll ask.

"Nah," he'll answer, a Gomer Pyle grin on, "this road don't go anywhere, mister. Stays right here all afternoon."

It is not gas stations themselves we love so much, it is their myth: fueling up and getting away, life on the road, the great flat rush of the country right there at your elbows. This myth is rooted deep in the American psyche, and artists from Steinbeck to Kerouac to Woody Guthrie have all tried to get it down, define its shimmering texture. It is a legend that grew up with the country, that seemed ever bound for glory . . .

The place hangs there in the roadside dust and late afternoon sun of upper MacArthur Boulevard like a Walker Evans photograph come lovingly to life. Maybe it's a mirage. Maybe it's a Smithsonian "living canvas." Is someone making a movie hereabouts?

"Fill 'er up," says the mother in the blue sedan.

"Righto," says the man in the ice cream-white coveralls with "Wally" stitched in black over the pocket, haunching himself out of the shade and through the heat over to her gas tank.

"Hey, Mom, can I get an inner tube?"

"Pipe down, Buster Brown."

He is leaning on the rear door, forehead trickling sweat, one finger on the pump's trigger. He lifts his arm and wipes grime from his forehead. The hair on his wrists glistens. It is 92 in the shade, but this man seems oddly content.

"Hope you're surviving this heat," she says.

"Oh, yeah."

"Would you check my oil, Walter?"

"You betcha."

She is hardly gone, a glint of metal down the tar-soaked road, when another car slides onto the premises. This time it's two ladies in sun hats, and one of them is already out on the pavement. She has a map and a woeful look.

"We seem to be lost."

"I could tell that when I saw you."

"Now it says here . . ."

"Don't tell me where you've been, lady. Tell me where you want to be." He sort of snaps it—with benevolent gruffness.

"Mount Vernon College," she says with the air of a person putting herself in the hands of a respected surgeon.

"First traffic light, turn left, head due east," he says, adding two or three more turns and arm waves so fast you can't get them down. She gets back into the car. Gravel flies. The station man heads for the water spigot. The spigot sits below a single bulb rigged on a pole. There's also a hose and a bucket there, the latter deftly painted with the name of the station. He splashes water on his hands, wipes his mouth, spits expertly into a yellow can by his shoe tops.

"Two problems with directions. One is that people giving them always give too many. Other is people who are lost won't listen to you."

The name of this one-pump, white-frame lubritorium is Bonfield's Garage, and Wally Bonfield himself is talking. To just come on it, to see it after you've topped the hill by the Defense Mapping Agency, is to wonder for a moment if you're suffering heat fatigue.

The place wasn't an antique when it started, half a century ago, but time rolled on under the night, and not the least of the evidence is the glass-and-steel Exxon station that sits 150 yards down the road. In a U-Pump-It world, Bonfield's Road Service is kicking against goads.

The premises are blistered with old wood and creaky, whimsical signs: KER-O-SENE and GUM-OUT and SWIM TUBES. Everything seems a symphony of the eccentric. In a tree are some homemade bird cages with goofy slogans under them: "Will Rent For a Song." What kind of birds nest here?

"Sparrows, we got sparrows here," Bonfield says, coming over. "Used to have bluebirds but haven't seen one in 10 years now. Don't know why, exactly. They say the poisons and all, around a sta-

tion, maybe. ^{ars} had several families of sparrows raised in those houses. They grow up, raise their own young ones." He says this gently, almost nostalgically.

Over to the right is an open-air grease pit, and in its leaf-strewn bottom are a decaying icebox and a red lamp on a long iron stem. Beside the pit is a section of picket fence that probably hasn't had a coat of paint since Truman left office.

Lubed a lot of cars in that pit, a visitor ventures. Thousands, probably.

"Thousands wouldn't touch it." He sneezes and adds:

"This pit's been here since at least '36. Let's see: '36, '46, '56, '66, '76, that's almost 50 years, isn't it? Dug the hole myself. I think Amoco or somebody said if I'd buy some oil products they'd put in some wooden pilings for me. Well, we had them for about 10 years but then they started to rot so we tore them out and put in these cement pilings and the racks went over top. I can move them closer together for Volkswagens."

In his garage, which is cool and dark and lit with lone bulbs of low wattage, there is a 1½-ton wrecking truck, vintage 1941, with a chain crank that doesn't go anymore. The truck doesn't go anymore, either, and one reason is that it is buried under layers of all kinds of junk. You'd have to do a three-day excavation. "Yeah, lotta people would like to have this wreck wagon," Wally Bonfield says. "It isn't budging, though."

There is a smell in here, an aroma, almost. Something wet, or at least liquid. Something cool and oddly pleasing and vaguely familiar. What it is is old motor oil on an asphalt floor, layers of it, decades worth.

(CONT. OVER)

M. 35-59

And everywhere you look the junk, the clutter, or maybe it's art: gas tanks, oil cans, old fan belts dangling from the ceiling, spent plugs, new points, gaskets, saws, boxes of washers, cans of wheel bearing grease, cans of Golden Chassis Grease, Hi Performance Gear Oil, transmission sealer. This enterprise has been a family business since 1927 and you get the feeling nothing has ever been thrown away. Can't tell when a fellow will need some stove bolts.

Truth be told, the gas station man wasn't sure he needed to be in a newspaper article. He's gotten along just fine all this time and, besides, too many people from the city nowadays think they can come out on Sundays to take pictures of him, as if he and his station were some kind of freak show. This is his living, and his home, too, because he's always lived upstairs in the three little rooms with the doilies on the sofa and the organ over in the corner. Raised his son there. Grieved his wife's death there. Never wanted to be anywhere else.

"I've been to Minnesota a couple times. Never been to California."

Althea was from Minnesota. Duluth. Best wife any man could ever have, he says. She used to do his coveralls in the heavy-duty washer, cook two and three suppers while she waited for him to finish work and come upstairs for the night. She never complained much. The work was good, and they did it, they didn't shirk it. A place like this would give you a living but you had to give it one back. Walter made the living; Althea made the living worthwhile.

In the old days, when Glen Echo was alive, back when MacArthur Boulevard was called the Conduit Road and patrolled by federal marshals, he'd keep the station open till midnight. Winter and summer, he was down there with the customers, wiping the windows and pumping the gas and checking the oil in all those flivvers and Essex Ter-

raplanes. "On a summer night in '28 or '29, I'd lay you wages you couldn't get across without half an hour wait."

"I don't know which was worse, to tell the truth, summer or winter, maybe winter, come to think about it. It's such a chore to make yourself keep going. You got 20 cars waiting to get the skid chains on, and you can't feel the end fasteners, and all these people are waiting. That's why I'm cutting back. I've cut way back the past couple years. I just don't want it anymore. We're closed Sundays and Mondays now. I won't do an internal engine job anymore. I still got all I need, you understand."

He's had some blows, but the work was sweet. Mainly. "See, I was with Exxon 30-some years, 36, I guess. For years we were the only station for miles around. Then that new Exxon went in just a block away. Exxon said, 'We want you to stay right with us.' I said, 'You have really got to be kidding.' So I went with Texaco. That was '70, I guess."

He's rebuilt uncounted engines, from the first gasket upward. Never worked on one indoors. He'll take the open-air pit any day, even in the bowels of winter. "Working in the daylight, you've got the whole engine before you. You take a hose that's chafing on something: If a droplight is up here, and you've got your head down there, why, you can figure you're gonna miss something. In some ways I've got some sympathies for all these fellows who work indoors at big garages. But when you got daylight all around you . . ." He doesn't finish, nor need to.

Althea died seven years ago—in his arms one morning at 5. Cancer. He thought he was dying himself that day. She had such a radiance in death, the sun was coming in. He could almost hear music . . . But that's enough of that. He moves the talk away.

He's got a girlfriend now, Millie Rhinehart. She works in an office next door and comes by after work. They sit and talk. "We get along."

He is 70, with huge forearms and shivers of white hair sweeping straight back. His mustache has gone stone-white, but don't make a mistake: He can still throw people off the property, kit and caboodle, head first, if he has to. He's had some fist fights in his time. You wouldn't want to make lengthy speeches when Wally Bonfield is riled. "I got the bad of it once or twice."

He is sitting in the shade in a plastic-webbed folding chair. A UPS truck has just come by with a package. He has just filled a big Merc station wagon driven by a priest, then did his windshield. A few minutes earlier, he had surveyed the artful chaos of his property, did a sort of mental ah-ha, then pulled the plastic-webbed chair out from behind an Eco Tireflator stenciled with the word AIR. The stencil hasn't been colored in yet; it's only been a half century, he'll get to it.

His legs are crossed, pants pulled up on a bone-white shin, the zipper of his jumpsuit open halfway down his stomach. Rude traffic blows by almost nonstop. Over on the other side the sparrows are flitting in and out.

He is talking of his dad, an Englishman who worked on Rolls-Royces at the shank of the century before he came over to America and found a living at a little wooden garage out in Bon Air Heights, Md. When they first got the station, they didn't even have gas, just the repair shop. The gas pumps were next door, at a beer tavern. Eventually, they bought the pumps.

"He taught me so many things, not just how to file a piece of metal. He had apprenticed out to his father, and I apprenticed out to him when it was my turn. He died in '34, and then the place was mine. He used to say, 'It's much easier to do things right than wrong, son.' You see, the true mechanic is going by the board. I'm talking about the man whose ears could tell him so much.

My father's ears could tell him so much. He could lean into the hood and tell you curious things just from listening. Anymore, we're a little bit like the doctor. Mechanics are all specialists now. I think the public has brought some of this about.

"I don't look at a clock when I'm on the job. I don't think of time. You take greasing a car, simple job, really. Well, my price is so damn high, but if I can do it on your car just once, you'll be back. Because you'll visibly feel what I do. I do the door hinges. I do the door catches. I do the emergency brake. That's the way I want to do it and you'll love it, too. There are too many people now who can't associate price with quality. It's all just price, and when a job is based on that, you got slipshod starting to creep in. All the tools in the world aren't going to give you quality.

"Everything's gotten too hard. There isn't time to be decent to people anymore."

He works himself out of the chair. Getting up he seems a tired old man. He goes over to a car he has been working on today on and off, a late-model sedan that belongs to a retired editor from U.S. News & World Report. "I got two, three, four, five, yeah, about five customers who go back at least 40 years with me. One of my customers used to come by every year to get kerosene. Used to soak his garden seeds to keep the boll weevils off. Now the man who owns this car is one of my oldest customers. I know his car, I know it damn well."

He opens the hood. "See that writing in there? That's my writing. I label with a yellow pencil all the work I've done. I write it right on the cooling system when the last service was. I write right on the battery when I put it in. That way my customers can go anywhere in the country and they can tell somebody something if they have to.

"And by the way, when I say 'road

test I'm talking road test. I might get in one of my "owners' cars and drive it all the way to Bethesda on a personal errand. I tell them, too. I'm not talking about a drive around the block."

A lady walks up. She is carrying a briefcase and a styrofoam cup with something cold in it. "Hi, Jacka," Wally Bonfield says. "You're all ready to go."

Her car is on the other side of the property, and after she has driven off, he says: "I haven't done a lot of work for her. Millie knows her. She tooted when she went by the other day and I noticed she had only one taillight. Now she's got two."

Fifteen minutes pass. Millie Rhinehart approaches. She sorts of sidles up with her purse, peers demurely into the hood of the car he is just finishing up. "How was it today?" she asks.

"Bout like always."

She takes up a seat behind him on some nearby cinderblock, putting newspaper down, folding her arms. This could be an Edward Hopper painting. A minute later he goes off to fuel another car and she says:

"He needs this contact with people. He loves it. It's his life. Sometimes it's hard on him, when it gets bitter cold or hot like today. I think doing heavy work, the kind of work he does, made him strong. I wouldn't want him to hit me. And yet he's a real gentle person with animals and all. I never will forget one day we were out driving, down by a marina, and suddenly he put the car in reverse and backed up 100 yards. He'd seen a little turtle by the side of the road. He lifted him into the weeds."

"What was that?" Bonfield says, coming back. Is she giving secrets away?

"I was telling him about how you use birds and other creatures."

"Oh. Remember that little peach-faced parakeet I had? I stayed up half the night grinding the bill down with a drill so he could eat. He died. Old age, I guess." He studies Millie. "I touched like a baby, didn't I?"

"You sure did. And then you took it out to your wife's grave and buried it next to her."

He mops his brow. Another 45 minutes, he'll close up. "It's all dollars and cents. You just try to keep on and do an honest job and charge the guy \$2. But my expenses are the same as anybody else's."

"See this?" Walter Bonfield says. "It's a swivel-T wrench. It was my dad's and now it's mine. I guess it's pretty near 60 years old. I don't need a new one."

PHOTO BY GERALD MARTINEAU



Bonfield's Garage, where you can buy old-fashioned swimming tubes; by Gerald Martineau--The Washington Post

M35-59

WASHINGTON
WEST



57°30"

414

GLEN ECHO 0.9 MI.
GLEN ECHO 1.5 MI.

513

5561 NW
(FALLS CHURCH)

FAIRFAX 14 MI.
6 MI. TO INTERSTATE 495

10

55'

09

WM-3



M: 35-59

Bonfield's Service Garage

6124 MacArthur Boulevard

Bon Air Heights, MD

Andrea Rebeck 1987

Looking West