

Charlie Fulton Opened First Local Automobile Dealership



An early photographer snapped this picture of Charlie Fulton as he strolled in front of his place of business on Dixie Street.



Fulton's building on Dixie Street housed Brown's Garage, owned and operated by Jack Brown, for many years.

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Charlie Fulton had an uncanny skill for multiplying his assets and a unique art for selling his Ford automobiles



Fulton

back in the early "Model-T" days of 1916.

Fulton would select a potential customer, drive a car to his home and leave it "on trial." By the time the customer had driven it for a few days he was "hooked" on the newfangled motor buggy and bought the machine.

Fulton opened the first auto dealership in Mount Airy in 1916, selling Ford cars. According to a newspaper report in 1918, he traveled to Cincinnati, accompanied by his machinist and a party of drivers, to bring a number of cars through the country. The railroad, under government control, was not taking shipments then, hence the necessity of running the cars through the country.

John Redmond of Pilot Mountain joined Fulton in the operation and the two were business partners from 1930 until 1933. The next year, three new partners, Arthur Jones, Lewis Talbert and George Wright, formed a partnership with Fulton at Granite City Motor Co.

The business first was located on Main Street and later on Dixie Street. Fulton also had dealerships in Pilot Mountain and Lexington.

Not only did it offer cars, but Granite City Motor Co.

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sold the "Fordson." A newspaper ad from 1920 read, "The Fordson will do these jobs for you — plowing, harrowing, drilling, cultivating, pulling your binder, operating your grain separator.

"There are hundreds of other jobs that it is capable of handling and that will keep it busy throughout every season, continually increasing its profit to you. It will haul your manure spreader, take produce to market, operate your ensilage cutter, your hay baler, your silo filler, your pump, your saw — help build roads — in fact, supply draw-bar or belt power for every job you and your neighbors have to do. It's doing it right now for more than 75,000 Fordson owners. Small cost, ample power, economical operation and long life are the big essentials of a successful tractor that Mr. Ford built into the Fordson."

In 1941, Jones, Talbert and Wright dissolved their partnership with Fulton and moved the business to the old Burke building, which is now the home of Robby's Sales. The three liquidated the business in 1960.

Fulton continued his operation on Dixie Street until around 1948, when Jack Brown moved his garage to that location. Brown's Garage was in operation there for about 30 years, and later the building was demolished for the municipal parking lot that borders Dixie and Franklin streets.

Through his investments, Fulton amassed considerable wealth. He owned various business properties, farms and rental homes throughout the area.

Born on Hamburg Street on Dec. 12, 1881, he never wandered far from his native community. His parents, James and Sally Fulton, owned a tobacco business near town and had a summer home on Riverside Drive, a white two-story frame structure that stands today.

Fulton owned property across the road that became known as Sulphur Springs Farms Inc. in 1941. During that era, folks from the area escaped the city life and headed in that direction for a return to nature and to the days when horses were the mode of transportation.

Sprawling out over the rolling country estate, the farm housed show horses owned by individuals, barns, rings, stalls, lockers and grazing land. All in all, 23 horses were quartered at the farm. The first annual Junior Chamber of Commerce horse show was held there in August 1941.

The home and barns are long gone, but Fulton chose a hill site on that property for his residence. He died at the age of 99, just five months short of being 100.

In later years, failing hearing and cataracts on his eyes left Fulton to turn his thoughts inward on his memories. Still driving a car at age 90, he used his latter years to support the cause of better conditions for aged persons everywhere. He carried in his pocket clippings and poems promoting their cause.

At his death, a newspaper article stated, "One of the pioneers of the emerging Mount Airy community at the turn of the century, Fulton's business activities helped develop the community toward its present shape. The legend surrounding him will survive for many years."