

# Fertilizer Man Retires After Nearly 50 Years



**PAGE OUT OF THE PAST—**  
Here is Virginia street, in Mount Airy, as it looked shortly after the turn of the century. The covered wagon at the left is taking on a load of fertilizer from

**P. D. Webster's place of business**—a business which went out of active operation last Wednesday after 42½ years in one spot. The blacksmith shop on the right also was a familiar landmark for

many years. So was the mud! So was the general lack of paint that can be seen on all the buildings in the distance. Truly, times have changed, and so has the appearance of the Granite City.

(Special to The Journal and Sentinel)  
Mount Airy.—In striking distance of the half-century mark of service, P. D. Webster Sr., last Wednesday, July 1, retired from active business in which he had served literally thousands of farmers in the sale of fertilizer that went to farms over all Surry and many adjacent North Carolina and Virginia counties.

He was in business 46½ years. Not only was the veteran businessman's period of service remarkable. He maintained his business at the same location throughout all this period except for the first four years. The removal of the business, therefore, is the removal of a widely-known landmark.

Webster was born in the Granton section of Stokes county, March 25, 1868. He moved to Mount Airy at the age of 21 years and has watched and helped the Granite City grow from a straggling little mountain village to a bustling business center. The railroad had just been extended to Mount Airy the year before Webster came here to make his home, and rail travel and transportation were still a novelty to the people when he accepted position with the G. O. Welch store in the lower end of Mount Airy, a portion of town that was

one of the business centers of the community 50 years ago.

**New Block Built**  
After sometime with the Welch concern, Webster worked with Martin and Gwynn, a firm operated by the late John A. Martin and R. L. Gwynn, returning later to a post with Welch and Worth. By that time G. C. Welch had formed a partnership with the late John L. Worth and built an entire business block in Southern Mount Airy.

Those early years in Mount Airy are still fresh in the mind of Webster, and he recalls vividly the first street lamps, crude oil-burners that were installed about the turn of the century. He tells of seeing the late Caleb Barker driving along with a one-mule wagon, filling the oil street lamps from a small tank, making them ready for the lamp-lighter who lighted them at twilight from a perch on a short ladder.

He says that some of the events standing out most vividly in his memory are some of the big fires that have struck at Mount Airy with disastrous effect. One blaze destroyed the old Blue Ridge Inn block about 1891. One destroyed the old Graves Warehouse, the post office and a cafe on December 13, 1898. The most recent of big fire burned the Planters Warehouse early in 1941. Each of these

fires struck close to the spot where Webster was working or in business.

**Goes in Business**  
Webster first began selling fertilizer for the late J. O. Hollingsworth in 1896, managing a business in the old Graves Warehouse, which stood opposite the present Mount Airy post office. That warehouse, operated by E. L. Brown, W. T. Haynes and Dock Brown, was burned two years later, and he moved his fertilizer business to the old dance pavilion of the historic Renfro Hotel which stood on the site of the present post office.

The veteran fertilizer man made his last business move January 1, 1900, when he became manager and bookkeeper of the old Mount Airy Guano Company on Virginia (sometimes called Needmore) street. That company was formed by J. B. Sparger and the late J. D. McCollum and J. D. Smith, but Smith later bought out Sparger and McCollum.

Webster survived all changes and eventually bought the company himself upon the death of Smith, in 1936. He found rationing and transportation shortages making much inroads on his business this year that he elected to retire. He plans to wind up his open accounts this fall, but his active business ceased when his

old license expired on July 1st.  
**Going to Loaf**

Webster, who was married in 1887 to Miss Frances Webster, also of Stokes county, plans to divide his time between his beautiful old home in Southern Mount Airy and his various real estate interests. He owns some business property and a good farm near Mount Airy, but he declares he will have to spend part of his time "just loafing up and down street," keeping in touch with friends of his more-than-two-score-years in business.

Not the least interesting part of Webster's story is his home itself, for he and his wife own and occupy the oldest residence standing today in Mount Airy. The building, which is the old Elisha Banner home and inn, they purchased about 38 years ago. They have resided there ever since.

**QUALITY-**