

Fortnum Motor Company
Route 130 and South Bridgeboro Street,
northwest corner
Bridgeboro
Burlington County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-937

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

STATE New Jersey	COUNTY Burlington	TOWN OR VICINITY Bridgeboro
HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME) Fortnum Motor Company		HABS NO. NJ-937
SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE		
COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES) Route 130 and South Bridgeboro Street, northwest corner		
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE) 1914 (Elwood Fortnum)	ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE) Unknown	
SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE) The Fortnum Motor Company is significant as an early (c. 1913) automobile dealership maintained by the same family for over 66 years. The Fortnum buildings are representative structures of the early automobile age, particularly in their use of artificial stone (concrete block).		
STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE)		
MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS) Main showroom - wood frame roof and artificial stone wall and pier buttresses Service garage - timber truss roof and artificial stone wall and pier buttress		
SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE) See attached plan		
EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE Artificial stone facades of main showroom.		
INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED) Decorative tin ceiling, walls, and columns in showroom.		
MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES 1916 addition to rear of showroom; various additions up to 1928.		
PRESENT CONDITION AND USE Fair condition, vacant since 10/1/81.		
OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE Structure is to be demolished as part of expansion of Route 130.		
SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDING LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.) Cultural Resource Survey for Rt. 130, 9F, 2/80, by Historic Sites Research. Interviews with owner, Elwood Fortnum, 1982.		
COMPILER, AFFILIATION Dennis DeGregory, N.J. Department of Transportation	DATE 9/30/82	

THE FORTNUM MOTOR COMPANY

Lester F. Fortnum, Sr. founded the Fortnum Motor Company in 1913 in Bridgeboro, New Jersey. Until 1911 Mr. Fortnum worked as a shipper in the Henry Taubels Hoisery Mills in Riverside. Beginning his sales career in 1912 at the age of 22, Fortnum sold his first bicycle in a building adjacent to the current firehouse on South Bridgeboro Street in Bridgeboro. As business progressed and technology changed, Lester Fortnum shifted from bicycles to motorcycles, and finally in 1913 he sold his first automobile.

On May 26, 1914, Lester Fortnum purchased the 2.33 acre parcel of land where the company's building is now located. Fortnum had the showroom and office section of the structure built on the site that year. In the same year Fortnum received his first licensed automobile franchise from the Ford Company.

Conversations with owners and mechanics of early auto agencies indicate the irony of the term "showroom." Most dealers sold cars out of a catalog and purchased autos from various manufacturers, unlike the current practice where dealers represent one car manufacturer exclusively and have numerous demonstrator models in the lot. Selling automobiles in the dawn of car manufacturing was difficult because few people had driver's licenses or could operate autos. Most salesmen would drive out to the client's house and take the potential buyer for a free demonstration drive and then provide driving lessons.

The new Model T cars that were sold to Fortnum Motors were shipped by rail to Riverside, New Jersey. These automobiles arrived in pieces and were assembled near the rail line. Each car was given three gallons of gas to make the trip from Riverside to Bridgeboro. The Ford Motor Company began production of the Model T in 1908 and ceased production in 1927. On October 3, 1908, a full-page advertisement in the Saturday Evening Post stated that for \$850 a Model T Ford, 4-cylinder, 20-horsepower, 5-passenger Touring car could be purchased from the Ford Motor Company of Detroit, Michigan. The weight of this car was 1,200 pounds, and four body styles were offered in 1909. The Touring car, Runabout, Towncar, and Delivery car were manufactured in black, green, red, blue, and also two different shades of gray. By 1913, the Ford Motor Company had dropped all optional colors and offered only black. Head lamps and radiators were made of brass. Just over 10 feet in length, the car measured 7 feet tall with the top up. The cherry wood dash had no fuel, oil, or temperature gauges. In addition, there were no speedometers or windshield wipers. In the 1913 touring car the driver's door did not open and one entered the car from the passenger side. The top speed of the 1909 Model T was estimated at 45 mph.

Most of these vehicles came completely stripped and the mechanics spent the slower winter months adding such popular luxuries as electric lights on the fender and tilt fox steering wheels. In 1915, an electric horn replaced the bulb-type horn. Electric lighting eventually replaced kerosene side and tail lights and carbide gas headlights.

By 1919, electric starting, lighting, a six-volt battery, and generator were optional equipment. The 1916 Sears and Roebuck automobile catalog offered a standard speedometer for \$7.25, a windshield for Fords prior to 1915 for \$8.25, a shock absorber for \$4.45, and a cast brass radiator cap with projecting arms permitting easy removal when the radiator was hot for 27¢. The early Model T had hard tires, and it was not until 1923 that Firestone began marketing the balloon design tire. By 1927 more than half the tires manufactured in the United States were balloon-type tires. The Model T initially sold for \$850 in 1909, but due to Ford's success, it was possible to sell Model Ts for \$600 in 1912, \$440 in 1915, and \$335 in 1921. By 1924, the selling price had been reduced to \$290. The final 1926 model included electric starting and lighting, plus detachable wheels with balloon tires, and sold for \$380. By the time the last Model T was built and sold on May 31, 1927, a total, of 15,456,868 "Tin Lizzies" had rolled off the assembly line.

The first Model A came off the assembly line on November 1, 1927 and in the next four years, 4 1/2 million cars were manufactured. Unlike the Model T, the Model A had a shatter-proof windshield, shock absorbers, and four-wheel brakes. The Model T had a 20-horsepower engine compared to the Model A's 40-horsepower, 4-cylinder engine that was 53 pounds heavier. Approximately 20 inches longer than its predecessor, it was also 10 inches lower. When first introduced, the Model A cost \$385, and by the time it was discontinued in 1932, the standard Roadster had risen to \$430.

The Ford 65-horsepower V-8 engine, the first low-priced 8-cylinder car manufactured, was introduced on March 31, 1932. Ford offered fourteen body styles with the lowest price of \$460 for the Roadster, and the Convertible Sedan topping the price list at \$650. The new V-8's had a 106-inch wheelbase with an overall length of 165 1/2 inches. In 1934 the horsepower was boosted to 85, the wheelbase was increased 6 inches, and the length increased to 175.9 inches to create the new version of the Ford V-8.

Initially the 4-cylinder, 40-horsepower Model A was a success in the automotive industry. Ford's chief competitor, Chevrolet, outsold Ford in 1927 and 1928. In the years 1929 and 1930, the Ford Motor Company regained its lead over Chevrolet. But neither the Model A nor the V-8 could carry Ford after 1930. Chevrolet outsold Ford between 1931 and 1970 in every year except 1935 and 1945.

The Fortnum Motor Company lost its Ford franchise during World War II and began selling Studebaker cars. Studebaker went out of the automotive business in 1966, and after that Fortnum sold American Motors cars.

Over the years, the Fortnum Motor Company sold other products in addition to automobiles. From 1917 to 1963 the company sold farm equipment and tractors. It also sold appliances, radios, and a machine known as the Bean Fruit Washing Equipment. During the early automotive days, Fortnum sold the Pierce Arrow, Rowe Trucks, Mercer's, and also the Gibson Tractor which had no steering wheel.

Bibliography

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1977 The American Heritage History of the Automobile in America
American Heritage Publishing Company, Inc., New York, New
York.
- Wilkie, David J.
1945 Esquire's American Auto's and their Makers
Esquire, Inc., New York, New York.
- Dominguez, Henry L.
1982 The Ford Agency A Pictorial History
Motor Books International, Wisconsin

Interviews

Elwood Fortnum - Owner of Fortnum Motors, Delran Township, N. J.

Edward C. Krieger - Early mechanic of Fortnum Motors, Beach Haven, N. J.

FORTNUM MOTORS
BRIDGEBORO, N.J.
SITE & FLOOR PLAN
SCALE: 1" = 30'

FORTNUM MOTOR COMPANY
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SOUTH BRIDGEBORO STREET

BLOCK 82 LOT 13

SERVICE AREA

STOCK ROOM
CAR PREP

PARTS

BOILER

MEN
WOMEN

OFFICE

GARAGE

SHOWROOM

FORTNUM
HOUSE

BLOCK 82 LOT 14



← US 130 (SB)

US 130 (NB) →