

## Arkadelphia's New Ford Dealership, 1917



During the early years of the twentieth century, the automobile became increasingly popular. At the time, Arkansas's transportation pathways were not only rough and filled with curves, but also dusty in dry weather, and muddy on rainy days. Traveling was difficult, and many lamented the condition of the trails and roads of the day. But, poor road conditions did not deter those who wanted to be a part of the automobile revolution.

As of 1903, some fifty Arkansans owned vehicles. In fact, a Hot Springs man drove to Arkadelphia that year "on his automobile." It was the first car that most Arkadelphians had ever seen. Then, C.C. Henderson of the city purchased an automobile in 1908. A transformation in transportation had begun. By 1910, about twenty-five Arkadelphians owned automobiles. Horses, wagons, pedestrians, and cars all competed for space on the streets as use of the new means of travel spread quickly. As more and more autos appeared, businesses began to change as well.

Indicative of such developments, in the early part of 1917 the Wilson livery stable located at Fifth and Main was being demolished, to soon be replaced by an automobile dealership. The *Southern Standard* newspaper of February 22, 1917, reported the changeover this way: "The old livery stable at the corner of 5<sup>th</sup> and Main streets is being torn down, in accordance with an order made by the city council several months ago. While this is not one of the old landmarks of the town, the building has been there since the earliest recollection of the younger generation, and has always been used as a livery stable. It was built nearly thirty years ago by Joe Wilson, who for a number of years had his livery stable there. Later it was the Sloan livery stable for several years, and since then has passed to several different owners. The property was recently bought by John W. Allen, who will erect a fine brick building as a home for the Ford automobile. The building will be 50 x 136 feet, and will have a plate glass front and a tiled floor in the front part for the Ford showrooms, and in the rear will be a ladies' restroom and a garage for tourists. The building now occupied by Allen & Allen will be used as an automobile repair shop only. The new building will cost about \$7,000."

And, Allen completed the construction project a few months later. Allen's new Ford dealership building opened in July of 1917 as a visible reminder of modernization and the transportation revolution. The structure stood until destroyed by the 1997 tornado.