



Sargeant's Chronicles



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Norfolk Public Library

Frederick Alexander Roethke {1891-1957} was one of Norfolk's pioneer automobile dealers. The Saginaw, Michigan native arrived in Norfolk about 1907. In 1911, he and his brother, J. Albert Roethke, {1876-1952} established Roethke Bros., a Hupmobile dealership. The Hupmobile, built in Detroit from 1908 to 1941, was once a highly regarded manufacturer of quality automobiles. The firm operated out of a small building at 127-129 W. City Hall Avenue across from the Hotel Fairfax. By 1915, they had outgrown this location and in October of that year, construction began on their new 10,000 sq. ft. dealership and garage building. Built on a triangular shaped lot on Monticello Avenue between 10th & 11th Streets, the two-story brick structure cost \$12,500 to erect and was completed in March, 1916. The building was triangular in shape as well and featured an automobile elevator to transport vehicles between floors. The architect for the building was Herbert W. Simpson {1870-1945}. Formerly a New

Bern, North Carolina architect, Simpson moved his practice to Norfolk in 1912 and enjoyed a moderately successful career for a number of years. Jesse Johnson, another prominent Norfolk builder, was the contractor.

FROM HUPMOBILES
TO DESOTOS:

THE F. A.
ROETHKE, INC

Dealership

~ BY WILLIAM B. INGE ~



Used Car Lot at new location, 1000 Granby Street, circa 1952.

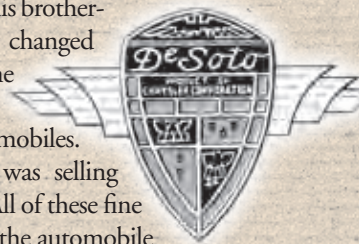


The F. A. Roethke dealership from 1950, by Charles Borjes.



Lubrication Department from the late 1940's showing two DeSotos.

In their new facility, the dealership sold both Hupmobile cars and for several years, Federal trucks. Roethke Bros. was incorporated in 1916 with Frederick as President and C. R. Carver, his brother-in-law, as Secretary. The name was officially changed to F. E. Roethke, Inc. in 1919. In that same year, the Hupmobile franchise was dropped and the firm sold Peerless and Liberty automobiles. With Liberty in financial straits, Roethke was selling Peerless, Haynes, and Gardner cars by 1922. All of these fine manufacturers have long since vanished from the automobile



CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Research the History
of Your Norfolk Property

Motoring
Memories

On-going SMR
Genealogy Workshops



Sargeant's Chronicles

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Purpose:

To promote the collection of the Sargeant Memorial Room and Norfolk Public Library.

To educate readers about the rich history of Norfolk and Virginia based on research and materials within the Sargeant Memorial Room's holdings.

To educate readers about current research, resources, and trends within genealogy and other historical research fields.

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Employees of F. A. Roethke, Inc. from the late 1940's. The gentleman in the center on the back row is Frederick A. Roethke.

scene. By 1925, Roethke ceased selling these cars and the dealership renewed its Hupmobile franchise. In 1930, they picked up the DeSoto distributorship as well.

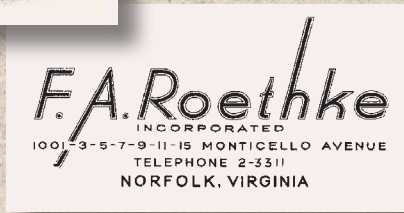
Two years later, they dropped Hupmobile and added Plymouth to their sales line up. Both DeSoto and Plymouth had been introduced by Chrysler in 1928. The

DeSoto bridged the gap between Chrysler and Dodge and competed against Pontiac and Nash while Plymouth was the third best selling car in America for nearly 25 years in a row. Selling these two extremely popular makes during those bleak Depression years was a very wise move for Roethke.

By 1938, the dealership had outgrown their now dated and obsolete building. An extensive modernization program commenced that February with the erection of a two story, 125 foot addition. Designed by Philip B. Moser [1886-1940], it was one of the last commissions by an important Norfolk architect best known for his



Letterhead from 1941. A special thanks to Madeline Roethke Sawyer for permission to use these photographs.



apartment houses and residences. E. E. Weddle of Norfolk was the contractor and the \$30,000 figure was more than double the original building cost. The addition allowed for increased sales space on the first floor and more room for service and repair work on the second floor. The used car department was also on the second floor and offices were located on the mezzanine. The entire exterior was given a smooth stucco finish, transforming it into a sleek modern structure which bore a strong resemblance to Neff & Thompson's Flatiron Building on Granby Street. The used car department moved to a new location at 1000 Granby Street directly behind the main building in 1952. Frederick Roethke died in March, 1957 and in November, 1960, Chrysler Corporation ceased production of the DeSoto; a sad end to a once fine automobile. By the end of the year, the dealership had closed as well. A new Plymouth and Valiant dealership, Mid-Town Motors, opened there in 1961. Later known as Mid-Town Dodge, it too closed in 1967. Shortly thereafter, the property was purchased by Kline Chevrolet and used as their body shop for a few years. Afterwards, various non automotive businesses occupied it. While Hupmobiles and DeSotos are long gone, the F. A. Roethke building survives

today as one of the oldest automobile dealership buildings left in Norfolk's former "auto row."

SOURCES:

"Many Buildings Being Erected." *The Virginian-Pilot* and *The Norfolk Landmark*. December 26, 1915.

"Automobile Section." *The Virginian-Pilot* and *The Norfolk Landmark*. March 26, 1916.

"Building Permit for Roethke Addition Puts Week's Construction at \$48,635." *The Virginian-Pilot*. February 6, 1938.

"F. A. Roethke, Auto Dealer, Dies, Age 65." *The Virginian-Pilot*. March 28, 1957.

Recent Acquisitions:

- Six Scrapbooks of Ms Alleene Jones (1877-1979) of Norfolk, VA. From John Parker.
- Map Book, These United States (Readers Digest), Civil War Centennial Handbook; pictures of boats; Boy Scout Diary, 1925. From Gerald Beasley, Norfolk, VA.
- One black & white photograph of the Confederate Veterans Reunion at the Jamestown Exposition, 1907. From Caroline Doonan & Stuart B. Smith.

- One 19th Century Vendors Book, rescued from City Hall. From Mrs. Joan McCrory, Norfolk, VA.
- Four 19th century Norfolk/Portsmouth city directories 1866, 1877-1878, 1882-1883 and 1888. From Louise Loughran Peele, Norfolk, VA.
- Scrapbooks, photographs, WWII letters, family letters, family trees, from the estate of Mr. & Mrs. James H. Parker, Norfolk, VA. From Grace Parker Tazewell.
- Framed map: Preliminary Chart of Hampton Roads and Elizabeth River Virginia, 1857. From the collection of Wm. B. Inge.

Great Resource for Researching the History of Your Norfolk Property!

<http://gis.norfolk.gov/norfolkair/>

Norfolk AIR (Address Information Resource), accessible from your home computer, is another useful tool for your research concerning information regarding Norfolk properties. This database was created by Norfolk's Geographic Information System G.I.S. team to provide current information about properties within the city limits. You will need to know the street address of the property to start the search. The database will typically list the last three owners of the property, dimensions of the structure, assessment/sale history, photographs of the front exterior and aerial photographs along with other technical information relating to the property. Norfolk AIR allows you to download the information in Adobe Acrobat PDF file format and Microsoft Office Word file. Using the information from Norfolk AIR and resources from the Sargeant Memorial Collection, such as city directories and the Guaranty Title Company records, you can build an impressive history on your property –in some instances dating back to the 1600s!



A New Chapter FOR THE SARGEANT MEMORIAL COLLECTION'S HISTORY

We are very excited to announce that the Norfolk Public Library, in order to more clearly describe all that our local history and genealogy collection has grown to be, is changing the name of our collection to the

Sargeant Memorial Local History and Genealogy Collection.

Our resources and materials have come a long way from the humble beginnings as the “Americana Collection” in the old Freemason Street Library. William Sargeant, the first Norfolk Public Library Librarian, believed strongly that every community needed a collection devoted to local history and people. Our collection has grown to contain over 17000 books and materials which include papers from many local citizens, businesses, and organizations. In addition, we have been given the invaluable photographic heritage of The Virginian-Pilot and Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch, which contains images from the 1920s to 1950s. We also have the photographic collections of Carroll Walker, John Emmerson, and Harden David Vollmer.

We feel our new designation is appropriate given our ever

expanding role as the region's leading historical and genealogical collection. We are currently planning for our space within the new Slover Memorial Library complex; SMC will occupy the two upper floors in a renovated Seaboard building. We will have more space for our collection and a closed storage area, environmentally controlled and organized, to meet national archival standards for our rare and valuable books and materials. We will also finally have space for a large digitization lab, processing space for our collections, and expanded staff workspaces. We have truly grown beyond our “room” due in large part to the unwavering support from our community. This renaming of the collection is just the next step in the evolution of this wonderful treasure.

Motoring Memories: Two Early Automobile Dealerships on “Auto Row”

BY WILLIAM B. INGE

The modern automobile dealership of 1920 was a far cry from the mammoth hi-tech facilities of today. These early dealerships, often located near the heart of the city on a busy urban street with little space to display vehicles, have given way to those located on large commercial thoroughfares with plenty of land for display, parking and service. Two examples that clearly illustrate that point are the former H. H. Johnson and Wilcox Motor Corporation buildings. Both

2300 block of Colonial Avenue & the 1000–1500 block of Monticello Avenue. While today there are no automobile dealerships left in downtown Norfolk, many of these original structures have survived.

The H. H. Johnson dealership was located at 1410–1414 Granby Street, an area interspersed with nearby homes and

apartments in East Ghent. It was built in 1919 by Thomas S. Southgate, President of Southgate Terminals. The building cost nearly \$50,000 to construct and was designed by Wickham C. Taylor {1883-1963}. S. B. Williams, a well established Norfolk builder, was the contractor. Taylor, a Norfolk native, was a draughtsman for Neff & Thompson and Benjamin

Mitchell before starting his own firm. A true Classicist at heart, his major works include Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church and the original Park Place United Methodist



Harry C. Mann picture of the Wilcox Motor Corp. dealership {1920}.

Church. Wickham Taylor was also the architect for three dealership buildings on 21st St: Arthur W. Depue, an Overland & Willys-Knight dealer, Motor Sales & Service Co., a Buick dealership, and the Dixie Motor Car Co., a Dodge distributor. All were designed in 1919, the same year as the Johnson building, and all are still standing. These handsome structures have since been rehabilitated for other commercial uses.



Picture of the H. H. Johnson dealership from the *Southern Motorist* {1921}.

dealerships were located at the corner of Granby & Fifteenth Street in a section known as Norfolk’s “auto row.” This area encompassed the 700-1000, the 1400, the 2400 and the 2600 blocks of Granby Street, the intersection of West 21st & Manteo Streets, the 2100-



The staff from H. H. Johnson dealership



An array of new Whippets in the elegant showroom of the Arthur W. Depue, Inc. dealership from 1928. The Whippet was manufactured from 1927 to 1931 by the Willys-Overland Company of Toledo. The Depue dealership, located at 700-702 W. 21st Street, later housed Bruce-Flournoy Ford. Photograph by Tidewater Photo Service.

Henry H. Johnson was a dealer for Chandler {1913-1929} and Cleveland {1919-1926} automobiles. The Chandler, built in Cleveland, Ohio, was once a very highly esteemed medium priced car. The Cleveland was in actuality a smaller Chandler with its own name and factory. The Johnson dealership only lasted a few years. In 1923, the Wrenn Motor Car Co., a Cadillac dealer, moved into what the Ledger-Dispatch called "one of auto row's most attractive motor car houses." Cadillac occupied the building until 1928 when V. H. Miller, a Graham-Paige dealer, moved in. In 1936, Perry Buick took possession of the building and occupied it until July, 1973 when they moved to their present location on Virginia Beach Boulevard. The building was demolished for a parking lot circa 1975 and today, The Row At Ghent Condominiums occupy the entire block.

The Wilcox Motor Corporation was located at 1500-1502 Granby Street. It was built by David H. Goodman, Vice-President of the Lowenberg-Goodman Corporation. Later, he established his own real estate firm, D. H. Goodman & Co., which eventually became Goodman-Segar-Hogan Inc. Wilcox was the dealer for

Nash and the famous Apperson Jack Rabbit {1902-1926}. Construction of the \$30,000 facility began in January, 1920 and was completed by the middle of June. Peebles & Ferguson

were the architects and the Johnson Construction Co. of Norfolk were the builders. A small one story masonry structure measuring 47 1/2 feet x 100 feet, the Wilcox building featured a striking façade and noteworthy for its use of glass panels. Peebles & Ferguson were generally not associated with the design of early automobile dealerships as Neff & Thompson or Wickham Taylor were. However, the firm also designed the imposing J. Gilbert Grubb Motor Co. building at 744-746 Granby Street in 1923. This early Chevrolet dealership was later Cavalier Ford and is now Bob's Gun Shop. In 1924, Wilcox severed its ties with Nash and Apperson and became the distributor for Packard, then the leading luxury car manufacturer for many years. By 1930, it had become Mooers Motor Car Co. of Norfolk, also a Packard dealer. In 1938, it became Packard Norfolk, Inc. and ceased operations four years later at the start of World War II. The building



Two new Hudson touring cars in front of the C. E. Wright & Co., Inc. building. The long time Hudson dealer occupied this building at 426-430 Monticello Avenue from 1912 until 1939. This Harry C. Mann photograph dates from circa 1913-14.

housed a furniture company for a number of years and was demolished circa 1968 for a parking lot. The Alexander At Ghent Apartment Homes is now on the former Wilcox site.

SOURCES:

Manufacturers Record. June 26, 1919.

Manufacturers Record. September 18, 1919.

Manufacturers Record. February 5, 1920.

“Cadillac Home Now On Granby Street.”
Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch. March 31, 1923.

Southern Motorist: The Official Publication of the Tidewater Automobile Association of VA. Marine and Industrial Issue. 1921.



The 1932 Automobile Show at the Selden Arcade. In the foreground is a new Chevrolet Deluxe cabriolet, which retailed for \$610. Photograph taken by Charles Borjes.



Ford officials stand beside the first 1934 model to come off the Norfolk plant assembly line, a V-8 Tudor sedan. Photograph was taken by Charles Borjes on February, 9, 1934.



The above photograph was taken in September, 1948 at the intersection of W. 21st Street & Manteo Street. Ford dealer Bruce-Fournoy Motor Co. is shown on the left while Lühring Motor Co., a Dodge and Plymouth dealer, is on the right. Both of these buildings were built in 1919-20 and designed by Norfolk architect Wickham C. Taylor. Photograph taken by Charles Borjes.



A wide variety of body styles greeted the perspective truck buyer at Colonial Chevrolet in 1950. Located at the intersection of W. Olney Road & Boush Street, this Carroll Walker photograph was taken from Olney Road looking towards the Body & Paint Works buildings on W. High Street, now Virginia Beach Boulevard.

ON-GOING SMR GENEALOGY WORKSHOPS

SMR staff offers the following workshops, free to the public, at Norfolk Main Library.

Beginning Genealogy is offered the first Saturday of every month to help new genealogists begin their search. Searching wills, deeds, marriage and other court records will be covered as well as other basic information resources. The program will conclude with a tour of the Sargeant Memorial Room and time for questions and answers.

Saturday, October 2 @ 2:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 6 @ 2:00 p.m.

Saturday, December 4 @ 2:00 p.m.

How to Use On-line Genealogy Databases is offered once every quarter (typically the third Saturday of the month) and teaches researchers how to use Ancestry.com genealogy database. Space is limited to 10 people per class. Please register in advance by calling (757) 664 – 7485.

Saturday, November 20 @ 2:00 p.m.

Researching Your Norfolk Property is offered once every quarter (typically the third Saturday of the month). Come learn step by step how to research the history of your Norfolk residential or commercial property. Examples from maps, plats, photographs, title abstracts, books on architecture and house plans, city directories and land books will be used to assist the property owner.

Saturday, December 18 @ 2:00 p.m.

Be sure to see our flyer describing the Genealogy Workshops or call us at (757) 664-7485 to find out the next available classes.

Our Gratitude to... We would like to thank the following people for their generosity in donating to the Sargeant Memorial Room, and/or the Norfolk Public Library Foundation.

Robert C. Nusbaum of Norfolk, Virginia
Dr. Robert Wojtowicz of Norfolk, Virginia
Dr. Peter Stewart of Norfolk, Virginia
Robert F Baldwin, Jr. of Alexandria, Virginia

Nancy Kight of Moyock, North Carolina
Phyllis Risner of Germantown, Ohio
Jane Gardner of Norfolk, Virginia
Carolina Doonan of Norfolk, Virginia

Stuart B. Smith of Chesapeake, Virginia
Grace Parker Tazewell of Norfolk, Virginia
Gerald Beasley of Norfolk, Virginia
John Parker of Norfolk, Virginia

About the Sargeant Memorial Room Endowment

The Norfolk Public Library Foundation has set up seven different endowments to enhance and improve the collections, technology, programming and buildings of the Norfolk Public Library system. In particular, the Sargeant Memorial Room Endowment, known as the local history and genealogy endowment, was established to preserve and protect fragile and often one-of-a-kind items in the library's local history collection. In conjunction with the 80th birthday of the Sargeant Memorial Room in 2007, the NPL Foundation announced its campaign to raise over \$1.5 million dollars during the next ten years for the Sargeant Memorial Room endowment. A current donation or inclusion in your estate planning will be greatly appreciated. If you have questions, please contact Robert Hitchings at (757) 664 – 7485.

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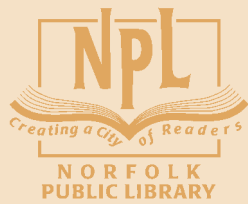
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Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday:
10:00am – 9:00pm

Friday & Saturday:
10:00am – 5:30pm

Sunday:
1:00pm – 5:00pm

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Images From Norfolk's Past: Green-Gifford Motor Corporation



These two postcards from 1963 show the Green-Gifford Motor Corporation dealership at Wards Corner on 238 E. Little Creek Road. The Chrysler, Plymouth, and Valiant dealership was established on April 11, 1939 by William T. “Bill” Green and Chester B. “Buddy” Gifford. Formerly located on E. Liberty Street in Berkley, the dealership moved to this new \$125,000 facility on October 1, 1951. In July 1966, they moved to larger quarters on N. Military Highway across from the airport. The buildings at the Wards Corner location were razed shortly afterwards when Interstate 64 was constructed. It was Bill Green who reputedly coined the phrase for Wards Corner as being the “Times Square of the South.”

