Twin City Motor Company Building

Local Historic Landmark #142
633 North Liberty Street, Winston-Salem
Landmark Designation Date: June 7, 2021

The Twin City Motor Company Building at 633 North Liberty Street in Winston-Salem was designed by Northup and O’Brien and built in 1925-26 as a joint project of the Twin City Motor Company and land owner Henry R. Starbuck. Frederick DeTamble, the founder of Twin City Motor Company, and Starbuck both attended Home Moravian Church; they worked together to design and build a second large automotive building in 1927.

Frederick DeTamble acquired the Ford franchise for Forsyth County and some surrounding areas in 1917 and formed the Twin City Motor Company. DeTamble had been in North Carolina since 1914, when he moved to Charlotte to work as assistant manager of the Ford assembly plant there. He became manager of the Charlotte plant in 1916. DeTamble opened his first Ford dealership at 610-612 North Liberty Street on February 6, 1918. Twin City Motor Company sold Ford passenger cars and Fordson tractors. He needed more space within a year, moving to 211-233 South Liberty Street in 1920. The business added Lincoln to its offerings after Ford purchased the company in 1922. The second location on Liberty Street was severely damaged by fire in 1925, and DeTamble began to look for a new home.

Construction of the building at 633 North Liberty Street cost $90,000 and was finished in May 1926. The 44,000 square foot building extends east-west across the entire block between Main and Liberty Streets, on the south side of Seventh Street. The three-level reinforced-concrete building is particularly notable due to its white-glazed-terra-cotta-tile-sheathed Liberty Street façade, which is embellished with slightly projecting pilasters, a molded cornice above the second-story windows, and paneled crenellated parapets atop the corner and north central bays. Original storefront elements on Liberty Street include copper-framed plate-glass windows above low, black-marble kneewalls. The Main Street façade is stuccoed and...
ornamented with a crenellated parapet atop the central bay. Large multipane steel sash windows light the service sections of the building. The southern façade showcases the concrete frame, which can be seen transecting the brick walls.

Twin City Motor Co. moved into the new building on September 2, 1926. The grand opening coincided with the Lincoln Salon, which was held from October 27 to November 6. The Salon showcased “Masterpieces of Coachwork” by numerous automotive designers, including Brunn, Dietrich, Judkins, Le Baron, Willoughby, and Holbrook. This traveling Salon was designed to highlight Lincoln’s innovative designs.

A newspaper ad for Lincoln Salon courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library NC Collection

Hull-Dobbs Company bought Twin City Motor Company’s Ford franchise in 1953 and remained downtown until moving to a new showroom on Miller Street in 1966. Several other dealers operated out of the building through 1972. That year, Automotive Associates – an independent repair and body shop – moved in, remaining until April 2018. Automotive Associates was the longest running tenant of the building, operating there for 46 years. In 2018, Twin-City Motor Company Building LLC purchased the building with plans to rehabilitate it into an entertainment venue.

Car elevator courtesy of Heather Fearnbach

The sales showroom and offices were accessed from Liberty Street, the most highly decorated façade. Ford’s repair department was located east of the showroom, and Lincoln’s service area was below Ford’s in the basement. A car elevator near the center of the building moved cars between floors. The building also housed a parts department and a used car sales room. The service functions were accessed from the comparatively spartan Main Street side of the building.

Newspaper ad for Twin City Motor Company Building courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library NC Collection

This information is also available at the Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission’s website: http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org