

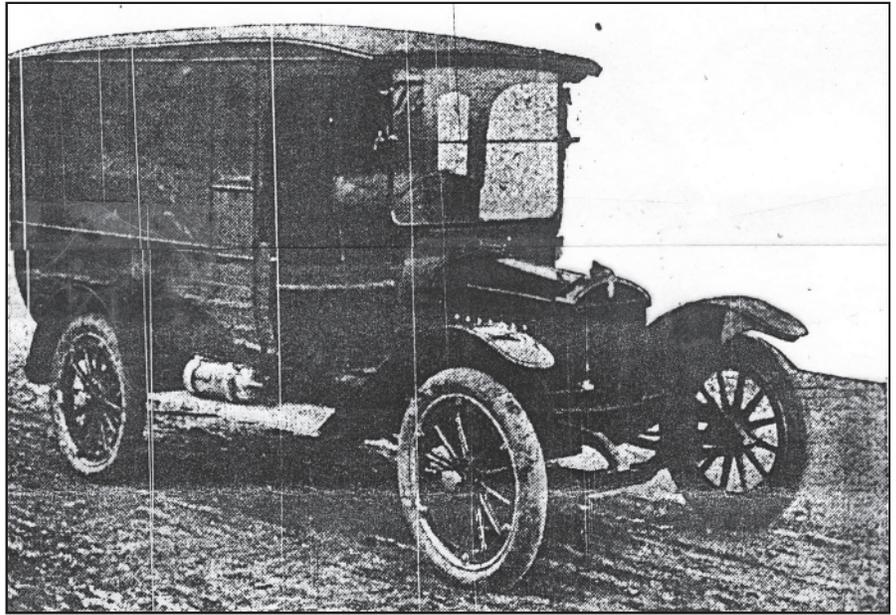
FULTON SECURES HUGE MOTOR CAR PLANT

By Barbara Mask

Headlining the Fulton Journal on November 24, 1916 was this promising announcement. The front page article detailed the Champion Motor Car Company plans to 'roll out' ten models of the new autos on the next day. The great hopes and expectations of the community must have been quickly dashed as there is scant information about the success of the vehicle or the company following the grand announcement.

The investors represented both outside and local involvement in the capital stock company valued at \$5,000,000. The formal announcement raved about the site for the new manufacturer as they had purchased the Mississippi Stove Company (later owned by J. T. Cullen Company). The site, which included five buildings, was immense in size and was strategically located near the Milwaukee and Chicago & Northwestern Railroad Junction.

A Mr. N.R. Wildman of Cleveland, Ohio was first vice president of the Champion Motor Car Company and was widely known in financial circles for his immense commercial successes. The design to be manufactured in Fulton was a 'light delivery truck.' The owners believed that every mercantile establishment with a delivery problem has need of their product and can afford to own and operate one or more of these trucks. Mr. Don Dickinson was the director of sales and came to the newly-formed company with impressive credentials. He had operated the first jitney line in the United States in the state of Rhode Island and worked for several truck manufacturers prior to his employment with the Champion Motor Car Company in Fulton.



Champion Motor Car Company's Paneled Bopsy Car - 1916

THE CHAMPION LIGHT DELIVERY CAR

The design was labeled the 'De Luxe' delivery car. It combined exceptional class in its design with distinctive features that adequately meet the delivery requirements of a light commercial car. It was built the strongest and most durable wagon that money and human ingenuity could produce, according to the Fulton Journal article. The selling price was just under \$1,000. The space behind the driver's seat was 72 inches wide by 58 inches high in the closed body. There were four body styles available and the company was prepared to offer any special body that might be desired.

THE CHAMPION MOTOR CAR COMPANY PLANT

In addition to locating near three major railroads running into Fulton, the location of the plant was on Lincoln Highway and 137 miles west of Chicago. The plant, according to the report in the Fulton Journal, covered nine acres, with 64,000 square feet under roof, including one of the largest, lightest and best equipped assembly floors in the country, covering 15,00 feet on the ground floor. "The nucleus of the plant was originally the Fulton Foundry of Fulton, Ill., but it has since been enlarged and rebuilt to meet motor car manufacturing requirements. Alongside of the main building is a double track adding to the main line 150 feet away." Those of us who grew up in the neighborhood when it was the J. T. Cullen Company plant, can recall the rail tracks still being there. Fronting on Lincoln Highway to the north, the building was three stories with a second story wing on the northwest for the engineering and drafting departments.

COMING OUT PARTY

On the 24th, we learned that, "The Cleveland Motors, Inc. in the factory of what was formerly known as the Mississippi Valley Stove Works completed ten, one thousand-pound trucks." They were on display at the factory and also at the Lafayette Inn in Clinton, Iowa from 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

The plant opening was hailed as a great benefit to the community as it projected at full capacity, would employ 1500 to 2000 people. In the next issue of the Fulton Journal, an article covered the history of the automotive industry up to that time and Henry Ford's contribution of making autos affordable for the general public. That article heralded the Champion Company and its splendid location for shipping over the three railroad trunk lines. The local commentary stated, "The fine display of the ten beautiful trucks just finished at the Fulton factory as shown in the coming out party in this city and Clinton Saturday was convincing to the most skeptical that the Champion motor truck is far superior to the other light trucks so far manufactured."

On December 5, 1915, the Consumers' Service Tire & Equipment Company was featured on the front page. It was later named the Lincoln Highway Tire Company. Mr. Toole, a representative of the Champion Motors company, spoke at the banquet announcing the new tire factory which was located in the former Dement House/Northern Illinois College building. No further mention of the Champion Company has been revealed. How long did it survive in Fulton? Did the company relocate? These and other questions remain unanswered at this point in time.