

Gaston Auto Livery Garage 1920

James E. Gaston Sr. started Gaston Auto Livery in 1914 by building a 40 foot street frontage garage next to the Vanderslice Blacksmith Shop. Initially the business was an automobile transport and day trip service and by 1933, they were the only legally licensed taxi service in Fairhope. However, the garage services rapidly expanded. A new concrete floor was installed in 1916 and welding; inner tube repair; auto repair and parts; paint kits; a battery filling station and sale of gasoline were added to the business. By December 1916, Gaston was selling Fords at the location.

Even though the Garage sold gas for cash only, The "Home of Cheerful Service", became one of the largest retailers of gasoline in the county and a new tank with three times the capacity of the old one was installed in September 1917. In November of 1917 a big illuminated "Garage" sign lit up downtown Fairhope.

In 1923 Gaston Garage became an authorized Ford dealer selling both new and used vehicles.

James E. Gaston Sr.

James E. Gaston Sr. (1890-1966) was the son of Fairhope founder E.B. Gaston. In addition to being President of Gaston Motors for decades, he was very active in community organizations and government where he was well known for his opinion that utilities should be owned by the public.

James E. Gaston Sr. was a long time Fairhope City Councilman who served on the Finance and Street Committee. He was also a member of the county commission for 16 years, elected to several terms as Vice

President of the Chamber of Commerce, and held a seat on the Board of Directors of the Rotary Club.

Structural Description

Gaston Auto Livery Garage (Comer Market), 401 Fairhope Avenue, c. 1920, altered. Two-story retail commercial building with flat parapet, now refaced in ELFS (or new stucco?), its side along the Comer Court serving as the primary facade and entry; recessed double-door entry on Fairhope Avenue, not presently in use; plate windows in wooden frames; double doors above entry bay upstairs, not original. The side along the Comer Courtyard, originally a row of open service bays, now contains double wood and glass doors. Balcony similar to one on Fairhope face fronts this whole side wall with exterior stairs to upper-level; windows along here look like old fanlights. This was the service wing for the Gaston Automobile dealership; because of its historic association and relatively intact service bay openings, it has been kept in the historic district even though NC.