

Wilmington Auto Dealers in the 1930s as I Remember Them: I do not remember all the dealers, but here are some of them:

Delaware Motor Sales, with financial backing from the du Ponts, was located on the northeast corner of 11th and King Streets, across 11th Street from the Courthouse. The showroom faced the corner and a large neon sign on top of the building advertised Cadillac V-12's and V-16's. LaSalles were sold as well, and of course a lot of Cadillac V-8's. Roy Freck, formerly of West Chester, was the general manager. Somewhere between 1937 and 1939 they moved to a new facility on Pennsylvania Avenue between Clayton and Du Pont Streets. After nearly 70 years, Delaware Motor Sales is still at this location, and still selling Cadillacs. The building at 11th and King was torn down to make way for the Continental Life Insurance office building. After 30 years or so, this building was also demolished and an open parking lot occupied the site before MBNA built one of its downtown office buildings here in the 1990s.

The Wilmington Automobile Company had a showroom on the north side of West 10th Street just before it angled into Delaware Avenue. This was the Buick dealer, and they must have sold another G.M. car, possibly Pontiac. I don't know when Anthony Ursomarso started Union Park Pontiac, but I think somewhere along the line he took on Buick as well and Wilmington Auto went out of business. The building on West 10th Street was torn down to build the DuPont Company's Nemours Building in 1935. William D. Luke, Sr., had the Oldsmobile agency on the west side of North Market Street near 14th Street. In the early 1950s Luke moved his Delaware Olds agency to a new facility on Governor Printz Boulevard. I can't recall who had the Chevrolet agency in the 1930s, but Fred Schermerhorn was going strong with Colonial Chevrolet by the late 1940s, with his agency on North Market Street near 35th.

Frank W. Diver and my father started the Packard Motor Company of Wilmington in rather cramped quarters at 10th and French Streets. This was a three- or four-story building with an old-fashioned elevator and limited frontage on the street. The showroom would not hold more than two Packards, and there was a very narrow passageway alongside for cars to enter the shop, storage area, or the elevator. Needing to take on a more reasonably priced line of cars in the mid-1930s, Diver moved to a larger single-floor building on Pennsylvania Avenue between Union Street and Grant Avenue, which building later housed the Food Fair, one of Wilmington's first self-service food stores. Sears later used the old Packard building on French Street to sell and install Allstate Tires. In the new location, Diver took on Nash cars, and White and Indiana trucks, in addition to the Packard line. In 1936, Albert Haddock built for Diver and my father a large new facility one block up the street, where they sold Packards, Studebakers, and a very few White trucks. My father retired from the company in 1940, but he was never active there on a daily basis. In this 1936 building, greatly expanded and modernized, Diver Chevrolet is still going strong, now managed by a grandson of Frank Diver. The latter had given up Packard in 1947 and Studebaker shortly thereafter, to obtain the Chevrolet franchise. An out-of-town company called Packard-Goldner sold Packards from a facility on Lancaster Avenue east of Union Street from 1947 until Packard's demise in 1956-58.

I think there were two Ford dealerships, Buckley and Porter. Mr. Buckley was an older man who went out of business prior to World War II, and Austin Porter (to my knowledge, no relation of William H. Porter who sold General Motors cars in Newark) inherited his father's "Porter Ford." The younger Porter, although not more than 40 years of age, had health problems and Clarence Cannon seemed to run the company and take care of Austin before the business was closed out in the early 1950s.