

SAVING HISTORIC LANSDALE-2

NOT YOUR AVERAGE AUTO AGENCY

(Second in a series featuring historically significant buildings in Lansdale.)

By **DICK SHEARER**

Not all the buildings on our list of historically-significant structures that must be preserved have served their original purpose for more than a few years.

A case in point is the Butler Buick Building in the 800 block of West Main Street. Mention that name

porary quarters in the just-built Lansdale Theatre Block, an unlikely place for an auto agency if ever there was one.

Perhaps it was more than coincidence that when Butler decided to erect his own agency, it would mimic the Spanish theme employed in the theater's design.

Construction began in February, 1928, with contractor W.D. Lukens of North Wales in charge. He is also credited as the architect. That should be mentioned because this was a car sales shop like none



to even long-time Lansdale residents and you're likely to draw blank stares. Show them a photo and they immediately recognize its façade.

Lansdale's first prominent Buick dealer was Dresher's Garage downtown in the 300 block of West Main. But Dresher saw greater possibilities for this central site if it was converted to retail shops and apartments, hence its transformation into the Dresher Arcade.

This opened the door for Charles S. Butler of Jenkintown to take over the franchise with a group of officers/investors from eastern Montgomery County in 1927. Initially, Butler Buick operated out of tem-

porary quarters in the region if the story in the Nov. 10, 1928 *North Penn Reporter* is to be believed:

"The building is unique among the business structures in Lansdale; the lot has been intelligently landscaped giving the building a setting that makes it perhaps the most elegant business place in the North Penn area."

This wasn't much of an exaggeration:

"The total floor area exceeds 16,000 square feet, 5,000 of that for the auto showroom across the front of the building. The room is approximately 100 feet wide by 50 feet deep and is finished in buff rough

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plaster. The floor is of great flagstone carefully selected for color and size.

"A balcony at the back breaks the broad wall space and is quite in keeping with the design of the building. Massive doors in the center are flanked by four great show windows plus two on the sides of each end.

"Between the west windows, a fountain bubbles from the wall and the water falls into a tiled fishpond just above floor level. Tile from the Franklin Pottery is freely used throughout.

"A large rug occupies the center of the room opposite the main entrance and on this rests a massive walnut table with great chairs all of period design. The room is designed to display effectively no less than 11 motor cars at one time."

With all these amenities, buying a Buick from Butler must have been more of an experience than an expense.

For whatever reason, Butler Buick never achieved

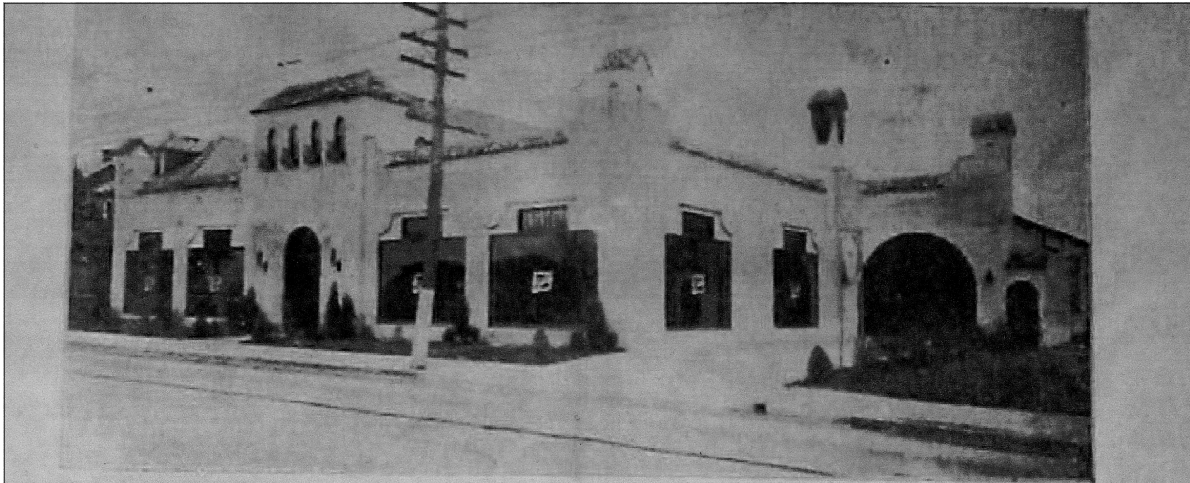
the longevity of J.L. Freed & Sons or Yocum Ford. By the middle of the 1930s, Butler closed, likely a victim of the Depression.

In later years, folks remember it as the headquarters of Hajoca Corp. and later Hammer's Moving and Storage. Recently, it housed a furniture store but now the storefront sits vacant.

What makes it historically significant to Lansdale? That question shouldn't require an answer. Take a glance at the photo that ran with the Nov. 10, 1928 advertisement in *The Reporter*. Although much of the grand interior is long gone, the façade today looks much like it did 85 years ago.

With the Lansdale Theatre gone, it is the only survivor from Lansdale's brief flirtation with Spanish architecture in the 1920s.

Wouldn't that 100-by-50 showroom make a great restaurant, dinner theater or some other 21st century use that will preserve it for future generations to enjoy?



The Butler-Buick Company Announces

The Formal Opening

Of the New Lansdale Plant

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10