

# DEADWOOD WALL OF FAME

2005

## Ahmed Etem

Born: 1884

Died: May, 1966

It may have seemed to Ahmed Etem like a string of rotten luck, but a series of bad trips put the Turkish man on course to meet a president and become one of the most successful businessmen in Deadwood.

Born to Turkish parents in Bulgaria, Ahmed Etem set out for the United States at the age of 23. After passing through Ellis Island, Ahmed moved on to Chicago, where he spent the winter of 1907 clearing snow from railroad tracks. One day he mistakenly boarded the wrong train to go to work. Because he spoke no English, it wasn't until the next day that he discovered he was bound for South Dakota. He soon arrived in Belle Fourche, where he fell in with a group of Greek and Turkish immigrants brought there to build Orman Dam.

When the dam was completed two years later, Ahmed obtained a job with Homestake building a tunnel for the mine's hydroelectric plant in Spearfish Canyon. Over the course of his work on the tunnel, Ahmed made several trips between Spearfish and Deadwood on the old Spearfish Stagecoach. The incredibly bumpy ride in the rickety carriage inspired Ahmed to save his money and buy a car in 1916. As the region's first taxi driver, Ahmed began regular trips for hire between Lead, Deadwood, Spearfish and Beulah, Wyoming.

During the 1920s, Ahmed's most frequent customers were Black Hills real estate professionals, although he chauffeured a more well-known passenger in 1927. That August, Ahmed was asked to drive U.S. President Calvin Coolidge from his vacation headquarters at the State Game Lodge in Custer State Park to the Days of '76 Parade in Deadwood. In 1929 Ahmed decided to take the next step by opening his own car dealership. From his store on Mill Street in Lead, Ahmed sold Hudson-Terraplanes to residents throughout the region. His business prospered until the Homestake Mine condemned his property in 1935 because underground mining was causing sinkholes. Although Ahmed wasn't compensated for the loss of his building, the automobile pioneer was undeterred. He immediately drew up plans for a new dealership in Deadwood.

Completed in 1936, Ahmed's new Hudson-Terraplane dealership on Pine Street soon became a community fixture. Ahmed, his wife Rosalyn and son Maurice continued to operate the business until the end of World War II. In 1946 Ahmed sold the building to the Safeway chain of grocery stores. It was later purchased and restored by the Deadwood VFW chapter, which continues to use the building.

The Etems moved to California in 1950, where Ahmed died sixteen years later. His son Maurice has since moved back to the Black Hills and resides in nearby Spearfish.



DEADWOOD  
SOUTH  
DAKOTA

A National Historic  
Landmark