

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name Memphis Overland Company  
Other names/site number Hemphill Diesel School; Memphis Cycle & Supply Company  
Name of related multiple property listing N/A  
(Remove "N/A" if property is part of a multiple property listing and add name)

## 2. Location

Street & Number: 421 Monroe Avenue  
City or town: Memphis State: TN County: Shelby  
Not For Publication: ☐ N/A Vicinity: ☐ N/A Zip: 38117

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting Official:

Date

Title:

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

#### 5. Classification

##### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private ☒  
Public – Local ☐  
Public – State ☐  
Public – Federal ☐

##### Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s) ☒  
District ☐  
Site ☐  
Structure ☐  
Object ☐

##### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	1	structures
0	0	objects
1	1	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/specialty store

### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/Not in use

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Other: Two-part commercial block

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: BRICK. TERRA COTTA, CONCRETE, GLASS

### Narrative Description

The Memphis Overland Company is located at the southwest corner of the intersection of Monroe Avenue and S. Lauderdale Street in Memphis, Tennessee. The c. 1916 two-story brick building features a prominent terra cotta cornice above its storefront façade, which is framed by prominent pilasters. The building occupies about half of its lot with a non-contributing parking lot on the western half. The building has an urban setting, which historically featured commercial buildings of similar heights and massing, but is now characterized by mixed-use development, including new multi-family buildings directly to the north and southeast.

The c. 1916 two-story, brick building located at Monroe and Lauderdale is embellished with terra cotta that is especially notable at the cornice and heavy corner pilasters. The storefront façade has two bays of storefront display windows, currently boarded up, and topped with five sets of three-light transom windows on the ground floor. They are separated by a two-leaf, single light entry with rectangular transom and sidelights topped by a canopy supported by metal rods. A 1962 brick window box sits at the foot of the storefront along the sidewalk. Brick pilasters and smaller fixed windows delineate the elevations of the Memphis Overland Automobile Building. The interior is primarily open space with concrete support

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columns, decorative tile on the main floor, and metal balustrades. The building retains its architectural integrity.

According the June 10, 1916 *American Engineering Record, Building Record and Sanitary Engineering, Vol. 73, No.24, p. 29*, the 75' by 364' building contract was let June 10, 1916. There is no architect of record, but the building resembles other Overland company showrooms. The core structural elements of the building are made of reinforced concrete. The strength and versatility of steel reinforced poured concrete construction allowed the owners to create a building with capacity for automobile storage on three floors, from the basement to the second floor. Automobiles were placed on an elevator located in the basement, then lifted to the first floor for display and service or to the second floor for additional display, and storage.

When completed in 1917, both the first and second stories of the north facade and two bays of the east elevation had large plate glass windows. This fenestration provided an abundance of natural light to the interior of the building. The floor to ceiling plate glass windows are hallmarks of early 20th century automobile dealerships. A denticulated terra cotta and brick belt course separate the first and second stories, with ghost signage for Hemphill Diesel Motor School (c. 1935) remaining on the brick between the terra cotta ornament. The original second story display windows on the facade and east elevation are infilled with concrete blocks painted a brick-color and topped by five sets of rectangular, single-light metal frame replacement windows c. 1962. Signage from the same era for Memphis Cycle & Supply Co. is affixed below the second-floor windows on top of the concrete block.

Above the windows on the facade is a heavy terra cotta cornice and parapet wall that is ornamented with rectangular inlaid brickwork with tapered terra cotta dentils topped by lion heads. Terra cotta bricks are inlaid on the top of the parapet wall. Brick pilasters ornamented with inlaid terra cotta squares and edged with terra cotta bricks decorate the corners of the north facade. The parapet ornamentation is missing on the north east corner of this elevation, as well as across the first two bays of the east elevation.

The east elevation along Lauderdale Street has seven bays `delineated by either ornamented engaged pilasters or by unornamented brick pilasters. The east elevation bends at a slight angle about half-way. Glass display windows matching those on both stories of the north facade were originally found in the first two bays, with multi-light steel casement windows filling the window openings down the length of the elevation. All the original window openings on this elevation are now infilled with painted concrete block or brick laid in a stack bond and topped by banks of single-light, metal frame replacement windows c. 1962. Across the first two bays from the facade, a denticulated terra cotta and brick belt course separate the first and second stories, with ghost signage for Hemphill Diesel Motor School (c. 1935) also visible on the brick between the terra cotta ornaments. There is a below-grade vehicle entrance with ghost signage for Automobile Sales Co. (c. 1950s) above in the last bay from the front facade.

The west elevation appears to have been the east side of a party wall and is plain brick with plain red terra cotta topping the parapet. A large elevator bulkhead wall rises above the parapet toward the rear of the building. A non-historic vehicle opening is located towards the rear, as well. The south, rear elevation has three bays with bricked-in window openings topped with banks of single-light, metal frame replacement windows c. 1962. A historic vehicle entrance is located on the southeast corner.

The 29,112 sq. foot commercial building is located on the southwest corner of Monroe Avenue and Lauderdale Street on a 139.9' X 169' irregularly shaped lot. A concrete city sidewalk runs the length of the

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north facade and turns south to continue along the length of the east elevation. The rear of the property has an asphalt parking area. The west elevation sits next to a concrete paved parking lot. The site slopes sharply from north to south and has no landscaping.

### Interior

The most imposing space in the interior is the former first floor showroom with its reinforced cast concrete support columns and mosaic tile floors. The ceiling height accommodates a mezzanine above the former sales offices located at the rear of the main room. The business offices and bathrooms on the mezzanine level are reached by concrete and metal stairs with simple, square metal balusters. A metal balustrade in a diagonal cross pattern extends between the offices along the mezzanine look out.

The rear of the first floor is reached through a corridor which allows access to a parts storage room and opens into a large open former automobile service and storage area. On the west side, there is an enclosed rectangular area that was used for painting, with an exterior garage door used for vehicular access in and out of the first floor. A substantial freight elevator remains toward the southwest corner of the room. This is a feature that is no longer used but is of historical significance, and a character defining feature, for the building

The former repair shop on the second floor is accessed by the stairwell on the east or by the freight elevator. The second floor also has tall ceilings with poured concrete floors. A wall separates the room above what was the end of the showroom area on the first floor.

There is a partial length basement in the southern two-thirds of the building which is at-grade at the southern end of the property as Lauderdale Ave slopes downhill from Monroe Ave heading south. This open area has an elevator shaft, restrooms, a boiler room, and a janitor's closet. An overhead door in the southeast corner allows vehicular access.

The original design of the building remains intact and conveys the feel of an automobile dealership in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century including the showrooms on first and second floors, the sales offices, and the mezzanine for the business offices.

Most of the original materials and their pattern and configuration have been preserved. The side and rear elevation windows have been replaced but their outlines remain.

The original workmanship of the building with its modest plain finish remains intact. Some exterior ornamentation has been lost due to age and weather. The feeling of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century "automobile row" is evident from the exterior's physical features and conveys the property's historic character.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

N/A

- ☐ A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE

### Period of Significance

1917-1935

### Significant Dates

1917, 1935

### Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

NA

### Cultural Affiliation

NA

### Architect/Builder

Unknown

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### **Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph**

The Memphis Overland Company is nominated under criterion A in the area of commerce. From its opening in 1917 until it closed in 1935, the building was associated with the growth of automobile-related businesses in an area of Memphis known as Automobile Row. It is an example of automobile manufacturing companies constructing showrooms in prominent locations near downtowns in order to promote the rapidly growing automobile industry so they could sell more cars. The Memphis Overland Company shows this trend in its location just outside the central business district. The imposing two story brick building sits close to the road and has prominent show windows and minimal classical detailing on the façade, while the back portion of the building is less detailed. The Memphis Overland Company retains its integrity.

### **Narrative Statement of Significance**

#### **Early American Automotive Industry**

While the automobile was invented in Europe in the late 1800s, Americans quickly came to dominate the industry. The first successful American gasoline automobile was designed by J. Frank and Charles Duryea in 1893. Based in Springfield, Massachusetts, the bicycle mechanics won the first American car race in 1895 and sold the first American-made gasoline car in 1896. By 1899, thirty American manufacturers produced over 2,500 motor vehicles, with nearly 485 companies entering the business over the next decade.<sup>1</sup>

Despite its allure, the early automotive industry was a volatile one. “Between 1900 and 1920, there were 600 manufacturers building cars, with most not surviving after one or two cars. Because of the transitory state of the auto business, banks were not inclined to loan money to a new automobile venture.”<sup>2</sup> Additionally, the earliest automobiles were sold directly to the consumer from the factory, with automakers often resorting to mail order catalogs or traveling salesman to better market them to the public. Early automakers were largely better mechanics than businessmen, and the answers to both issues of continued financing and fruitful marketing were found in the independent auto dealer.<sup>3</sup>

In these early days, supply could not keep up with demand, and large bank deposits were easily secured by dealers to continually finance the manufacturing of the next models. Sales territories were franchised to independent dealers with minimal stipulations. Many contracts simply required proper signage to identify brick-and-mortar operations as authorized dealers and that the franchisee would stock “an adequate supply of parts on hand for any repairs needed.”<sup>4</sup>

The successful relationship between manufacturers and dealers led to authorized dealerships popping up all over the country, often clustering to form new commercial districts. Such automobile rows, as they came to be known, represented a major shift in the urban streetscape, often “lined by walls of buildings whose shop windows, instead of being crammed full of jewelry, clothing, hardware, or groceries, showcased a single product— automobiles. By walking, driving, or riding a trolley down the street, shoppers could survey the

<sup>1</sup> History, “Automobile History,” <https://www.history.com/topics/inventions/automobiles> (accessed April 23, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Genat, *The American Car Dealership*, (Osceola: MBI Publishing Company, 1999), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



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latest cars available, while gaining an impression of dealers and the companies they represented from the appearance of their buildings.”<sup>5</sup>

Chicago’s Motor Row (NR 11/18/2002) is considered the largest, intact early “automobile row” in the United States, reflecting the design evolution of automobile showroom buildings from 1905-1936. The earliest dealerships on Motor Row were one to three-story, storefront-cornice style commercial buildings with large, plate glass showroom windows on the first floor. Generally constructed of glazed brick or enameled terra cotta, “these materials enabled the use of minimal ornament, classical-style details, or—most often—an inscription of the name of the car company.”<sup>6</sup> Such dealerships commonly displayed the automobiles in the front of the first floor, while “the rear was devoted to service and storage.”<sup>7</sup> With its construction started in 1916, the Memphis Overland Company followed this pattern.

### Automobile Industry in Memphis

Memphis’ first automobile dealer was Jerome P. Parker. A former real estate dealer, Parker opened a bicycle shop at 296 Second Street in 1895 where he sold Union and Royal bicycles and published a mail-order catalog of bicycle parts and accessories. It was not until 1901 that the last page of his catalog announced that the “Automobile age had arrived,” and advertised a “self-propelling... ‘Mobile’” for sale for \$750.<sup>8</sup>

Parker remained Memphis’ sole automobile dealer until 1903 when fellow downtown bicycle shop owner Harry A. White added automobiles to his own mail-order catalog. In 1904, Tri-State Automobile and Supply Company offered cars for sale with the additional service of providing “competent and careful operators, ensuring safety to accompany parties.”<sup>9</sup> By 1910 there were more than 24 dealers operating in Memphis with a handful of accompanying garages and repair shops listed in the City Directories.

By 1920, the Memphis City Directory included more than 20 pages of automobile related listings, showing most dealerships located along Madison and Monroe Avenues. Monroe’s strong east-west line had long made it a street for transportation purposes, with many mule barns and stables already located along it. It became a natural spot for the burgeoning new automotive industry, with various dealerships, garages, and repair shops beginning to cluster as early as 1909. Other dealerships located on Memphis’ early Automobile Row included the city’s first Ford Motor Company dealership and the Overland Automobile Company.<sup>10</sup>

### Overland Automobile Company

The Overland Automobile was created in 1903 by Claude Cox, a brilliant, young engineer who had previously built a three-wheeled vehicle for his senior thesis at Rose Polytechnic Institute. While employed at the Standard Wheel Company in Terre Haute, Indiana, Cox designed the advanced “runabout” style car, a

<sup>5</sup> *Landmark Designation Report: Motor Row District* (Chicago: Commission on Chicago Landmarks, 2000), 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Michael Finger, “Memphis in Motion: How the automobile changed our city,” *Memphis Magazine*, September 12, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Vance Lauderdale, “Lost Memphis: The Ford Motor Company Dealership and ‘Automobile Row’ in 1911,” *Memphis Magazine*, March 20, 2012.



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small, inexpensive car body type, featuring a two-cylinder water-cooled engine mounted under the hood. The car was also fitted with a removable two-way switch plug and could not be driven without it.<sup>11</sup>

Cox built twelve Overland automobiles in 1903, with sales doubling the following year. By 1905, the enterprise moved to a vacant Standard Wheel plant in Indianapolis to accommodate increased production. Despite early success, Charles Minshall, the owner of the Standard Wheel Company, soon withdrew his financial backing of the project, allowing carriage manufacturer David Parry to become a partner in the Overland Automobile Company with Cox in 1906. Parry and Cox expanded the Indianapolis factory and began production just as the Bank Panic of 1907 struck, leaving the new company bankrupt.<sup>12</sup>

Receiving no communication from the now defunct company and wondering why his advance order of cars had not yet shipped, John North Willys, owner of an Overland Automobile dealership in Elmira, NY, travelled to Indianapolis to find no cars made, but enough inventory to build three cars from parts. He immediately took over the company and restarted production under a large tent, building 465 new cars in 1908. The bizarre yet successful operation was captured in a 1908 *Motor Magazine* article: "They are literally building machines in large tents grouped about the factory precincts and every available inch of ground space is crammed with men who are being persuaded to do their utmost to bear their part in the production of the Overland success—for it has been a success, this little machine."<sup>13</sup>

Despite the turnaround, Claude Cox quit the company in 1909. Willys continued to ramp up production, soon buying the Pope Toledo Factory and moving the operation to Toledo, Ohio where it continued to expand over the next decade. The company was renamed Willys-Overland in 1912 and at that time was second only to the Ford Motor Company in sales.<sup>14</sup>

### **Memphis Overland Company**

In 1916, the booming Willys-Overland Motor Company established the Memphis Overland Company dealership along Memphis' Automobile Row (see Image 1). Memphis Overland's franchise president was Thomas Henry Smart, a twenty-nine-year-old entrepreneur who had worked his way up through the ranks of the automobile industry after starting as a mechanic at 16. *The Horseless Age: The Automobile Trade Magazine* mentioned Overland would be moving to Memphis and stated "The showroom, as usual, is in front of the building, while ample stock room is provided in the rear for a full line of Overland parts, etc. In the extreme rear is the service department."<sup>15</sup>

Smart came to Memphis in 1913 after buying the franchise for Overland cars for West Tennessee, North Mississippi and Eastern Arkansas. The Overland buildings he built included local dealerships in Mississippi and Arkansas, as well as a grand new Memphis showroom at 421 Monroe. According to a 1920 publication by the Mid-South Biographic and Historical Association about Smart, "It took him three weeks to sell his

<sup>11</sup> Early American Automobiles, "History of Early American Automobile Industry 1891-1929," <https://www.earlyamericanautomobiles.com/americanautomobiles12.htm> (accessed April 23, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> "Overland Cars Being Made in Tents," *The Automobile*, July 16, 1908.

<sup>14</sup> Early American Automobiles, "History of Early American Automobile Industry 1891-1929," <https://www.earlyamericanautomobiles.com/americanautomobiles12.htm> (accessed April 23, 2020).

<sup>15</sup> "New Quarters for Overland in Memphis," *The Horseless Age: The Automobile Trade Magazine*, January 7, 1914.

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first Overland car here. Since then he has sold approximately nine thousand, being second only to the Fords, and built many buildings for Overland agencies in this territory.”<sup>16</sup>

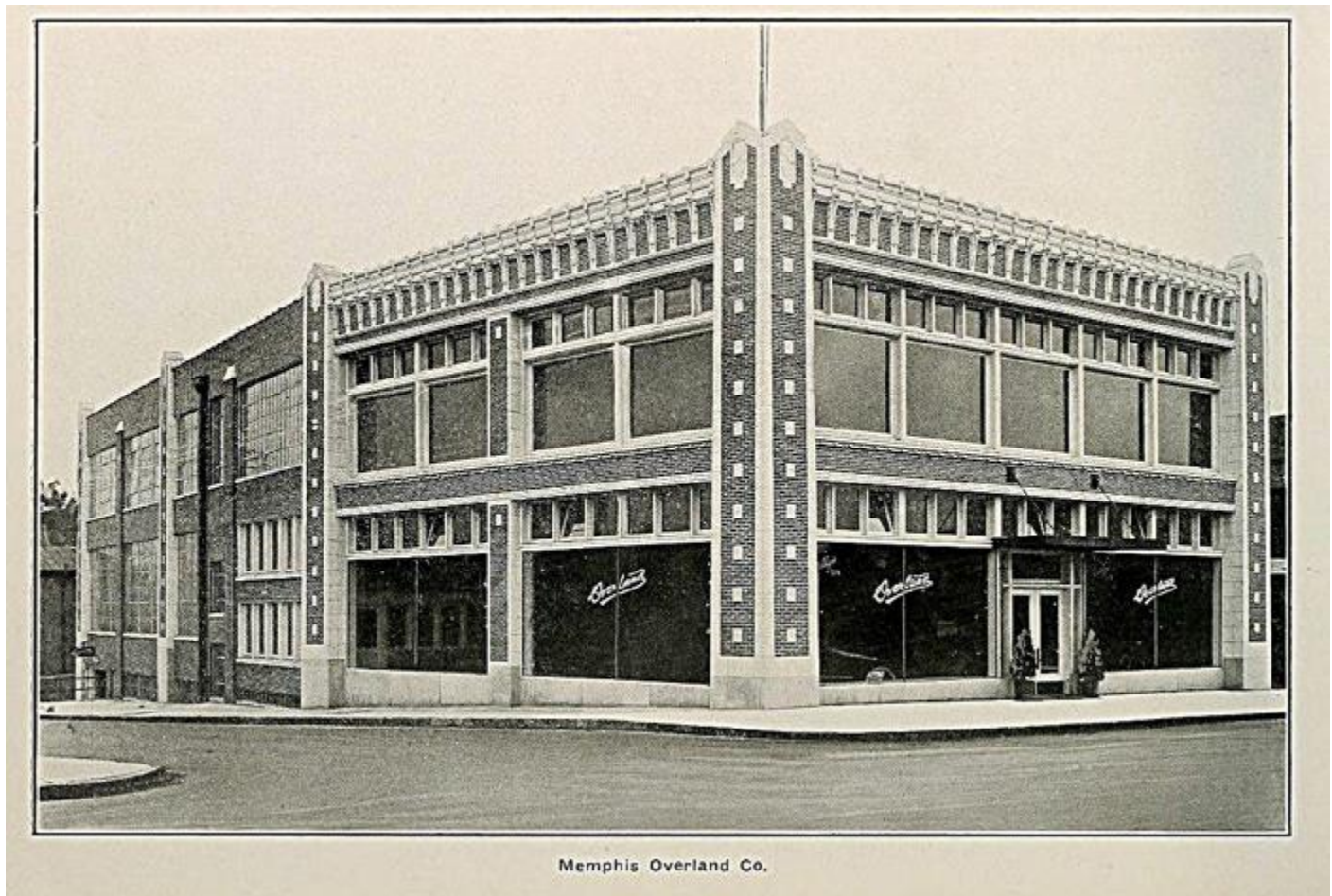


Image 1. Memphis Overland Motor Company c. 1916

On October 11, 1916, as Smart’s business continued to boom all over the Mid-South, Greenwood, Mississippi’s *Daily Commonwealth* reported that Smart was “exceedingly optimistic over the outlook for fall business” as he travelled to the Willys-Overland factory in Toledo to increase his fall shipments for the Memphis territory. ““Overlands are moving as fast as we can get them,” said Mr. Smart. ‘When I made my contract for this year I thought I had anticipated the full volume of business which would come, but the popularity of the new Overland models is such that business has come rolling in far in excess of my allotment, hence this trip to the factory in an effort to increase deliveries. The new home of the Memphis Overland Company at the corner of Monroe avenue and Lauderdale street is nearing completion and we hope

<sup>16</sup> C. P. J. Mooney, *The Mid-South And Its Builders*, “T.H. Smart,” (Memphis: Mid-South Biographic and Historical Association, 1920), 379.

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to move in early in November and have everything running smoothly in time for a formal opening early in December.”<sup>17</sup>

Before Smart’s new showroom at the prime corner of Monroe and Lauderdale opened to great fanfare in early 1917, his membership in the Memphis Business Men’s Club allowed his new building to be featured in their 1916 “Memphis Greets You” publication showcasing Memphis businesses. In his building description entitled “Approximating the Ideal,” Smart explained how “each detail of its construction is the result of months of painstaking thought and attention. The president of the company visited every large city in the country seeking new ideas of design and equipment to utilize the plans for this building.”<sup>18</sup> The “spacious grand foyer” would display the most popular automobiles available, the rear parts and service department would “supply instantly parts for any model,” and restrooms were even provided for customers, with “Overland tourists... especially invited to avail themselves of [the] facilities.” Smart concluded by stating: “Our ideal of an automobile sales and display station is revealed in the perfection of our new building. Our ideal of real service to automobile owners can only be appreciated by those who need and utilize the facilities of this modern plant and courteous organization.”<sup>19</sup>

The modern, two-story Memphis Overland dealership was built to the highest standards of the day but was not unique for a luxury auto dealership of the era. A full-page announcement in Detroit’s *Hudson Triangle* for a new Chicago dealership opened by the Louis Geyler Company in 1917 describes every detail of the building, with most specifics matching the new Memphis dealership, even down to the mosaic tile floor. Both featured wide-open showrooms with tall ceilings on the first floor surrounded by sales offices in the rear and on a viewing mezzanine above. They also boasted on-site parts and service areas located in the rear and on the second floor, as well as washrooms for the mechanics provided on the basement level. Even a less grand, single-story version of this common floor plan published in the February 1918 issue of *American Garage & Auto Dealer* included large front windows for best viewing and light, a rear supply room as not to distract potential new customers, and of course, the ubiquitous white mosaic tile floors.

Unfortunately, despite Smart’s rapid success and the realization of his ideals through Memphis Overland’s new building, the timing was bad for Willys-Overland. A major strike at the Toledo plant in 1917 halted production of the 1917 models. Unable to put them into production until 1919, the Overland had lost its appeal. Additionally, the post-WWI recession hit Willys-Overland hard, forcing Willys to hire former General Motors VP Walter Chrysler at the bank’s request. After two years of extreme cost cutting and a steep \$1 million salary, Chrysler was unable to wrestle the company from Willys, and left in 1921.<sup>20</sup>

By the end of 1921, Thomas Smart had also left tumultuous Overland to start his own company. The grand showroom at Monroe and Lauderdale now functioned as Willys-Overland, Inc., and the Thomas H. Smart Motor Company opened on 962 Union Avenue, where a new Automobile Row was taking shape.

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<sup>17</sup> *The Daily Commonwealth*, Greenwood, October 11, 1916.

<sup>18</sup> C. P. J. Mooney, *Memphis Greets You* (Business Men’s Club—Chamber of Commerce, 1916), 85.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Early American Automobiles, “History of Early American Automobile Industry 1891-1929,” <https://www.earlyamericanautomobiles.com/americanautomobiles12.htm> (accessed April 23, 2020).



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### Changes on Memphis' Automobile Row

The early automotive industry was not just volatile for manufacturers and dealers but for the American cities that now teemed with automobile traffic. Streets built for people, horses, and the occasional streetcar now had to accommodate fast-paced individual modes of transportation, drastically altering the way residents both moved through and interacted with the streetscape around them.

In 1919, recognizing the need to plan for a comprehensive plan for the city, including a future centered on automobiles, Memphis became the first city in Tennessee and one of the first in the South to engage in comprehensive planning and zoning.<sup>21</sup> Memphis Mayor Rowlett Paine and City Attorney Russell Randolph implemented a seven-member City Planning Commission (CPC), and tasked the commission with hiring a qualified city planner. By 1920, Harland Bartholomew & Associates out of St. Louis was contracted by the CPC to create a plan for the growth and development of the expanding city.

Bartholomew, a civil engineer by training, ran one of the most prominent planning firms in the country and created comprehensive plans for dozens of American cities. His fascination with the burgeoning auto industry's influence on every aspect of urban life lead him to the field of planning, and he always considered the street system the paramount issue to be addressed in a city plan. His "Comprehensive City Plan" for Memphis was presented to the CPC in 1924. Among many other recommendations, Bartholomew's plan called for the reduction of cross streets in urban neighborhoods, the standardization of street widths and traffic flows, and imposed new residential, commercial, and industrial zoning districts throughout the city.<sup>22</sup>

One such zoning change would forever change the high-end residential character of Union Avenue. Since the 1870s, the mansions on Union Avenue had been the demarcation line for the "silk-stocking district" for Memphis' founding families and most successful entrepreneurs and the area from which the aristocratic or wealthy class was politically influential or active. The new zoning plan changed the broad, gracious Union Avenue from large residential lots to automobile dealerships. Just one block south of Monroe, a few dealerships had already encroached on Union, but the zoning change encouraged countless automobile companies to make the leap, cementing the shift of Memphis' Automobile Row to the newly available territory. An auto row is a business cluster with multiple car dealerships in a single neighborhood or road.

One of those companies was the Southern Motor Car Company, which had opened in 1909 and soon set up shop at 627-631 Monroe. As the sole Cadillac dealer in town, the firm prospered and quickly outgrew its Monroe location. While constructing a state-of-the-art showroom at 1107 Union, the company leased the former Overland dealership at 421 Monroe from 1923 to 1927. The Southern Motor Car Company only remained at their location on Union's Automobile Row until 1937 before moving even closer to downtown at 341 Union where it remained for decades.<sup>23</sup>

As the Cadillac peddling Southern Motor Car Company flourished, Overland-Willys floundered, as did many other automakers and models during the late 1920s. The Overland Automobile was discontinued in 1926,

<sup>21</sup> Steve Barlow, Tommy Pacello, and Josh Whitehead, "Regulatory Created Blight in a Legacy City: What is it and What can we do About it?" University of Memphis Law Review 2016, Vol. 46, 873.

<sup>22</sup> Charlie Lambert, "A Little Late, But Vital," *StoryBoard Memphis*, February 5, 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Michael Finger, "Memphis In Motion: How the automobile changed our city," *Memphis Magazine*, September 12, 2016.

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and even Ford's ubiquitous Model T was withdrawn from production in 1927. Between 1908 and 1929, the number of American automobile manufacturers dropped from 253 to only 44, with 80% of the industry now held by Ford, General Motors, and Chrysler. The Great Depression would soon wipe out many of the remaining independent makers.<sup>24</sup>

After the Southern Motor Car Company vacated 421 Monroe at the end of 1927, the building stood vacant on the eve of the Great Depression. It was finally sold in 1930 to auto dealer Iver Schmidt, who sporadically operated two used car dealerships on the site from 1930 to 1935. This ended the building's use as an automobile showroom.

### **Hemphill Diesel School**

In 1935, Schmidt leased the former Overland showroom to the Hemphill Diesel School. Founded in Vancouver, Canada in 1920, Ralph Hemphill brought his diesel mechanics school to Los Angeles in 1930, before expanding to Detroit, Chicago, Seattle, and 421 Monroe in Memphis by 1935.

With a focus on training diesel engineers through both traditional classroom learning and distance education with custom textbooks, Hemphill Diesel Schools offered training through day, night, and combination home study courses. Ads for the school published in *Popular Mechanics* throughout the 1930s promised an increasing demand for trained diesel engineers with "unprecedented growth in the new high-speed aviation, automotive and truck diesels." Students were trained on Hemphill's "large assemblage of diesel engines" from highly qualified theory and shop instructors, and only exemplary students would be recommended for "responsible positions in Diesel Installation, Operation, Maintenance and Sales Work".<sup>25</sup>

The Hemphill Diesel School thrived in the former automobile dealership which offered plenty of workspace for students in the former showroom on the first floor, and an entire service department on the second. The Hemphill Diesel School moved downtown to 311 South Main Street in the mid-1950s, but a large ghost sign remains below the belt course on the front façade of 421 Monroe.

### **Memphis Cycle & Supply Co.**

After the departure of the Hemphill Diesel School, Iver Schmidt transferred the property to his company, Automobile Sales Co., in 1958 before selling it to Guerrino Amagliani in 1962. Amagliani had immigrated to the United States from Italy in 1904 and opened the Memphis Motorcycle Co. in 1917. The company was one of the first Schwinn dealerships, selling Schwinn bicycles, Whizzer motorbikes, and Henderson and Indian brand motorcycles, and distributed motorcycle and bicycle parts throughout the Southeast.<sup>26</sup>

Beginning in the 1970s, business declined with the rest of downtown Memphis. While the operation was owned by the entire family, Frank Amagliani was the brother who continued to run the Monroe location, which had evolved into a wholesale lawnmower parts distributor. In 1992, just before the Schwinn Bicycle Company declared bankruptcy, the Amagliani family was inducted into the Schwinn Hall of Fame in

<sup>24</sup> History, "Automobile History," <https://www.history.com/topics/inventions/automobiles> (accessed April 23, 2020).

<sup>25</sup> "Hemphill Diesel Schools," *Popular Mechanics*, August, 1935.

<sup>26</sup> Memphis Type History, "History on Wheels: Memphis Bicycle Co.," <https://www.memphistypehistory.com/history-wheels-memphis-bicycle-co/> (accessed April 23, 2020).

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recognition of their many years of accomplishment, dedication, and service to Schwinn.<sup>27</sup> In 2015, Frank, the last surviving Amagliani brother, and the rest of the heirs to the building, sold 421 Monroe to PGK Properties, LLC. They in turn sold it to the Chestnut Cycle Shop QOZB, LLC. The new owner's received tax incentives from the Memphis Center City Revenue Finance Corp which requires that they be listed as the owners until the incentives expire.

### **The Edge District**

Despite the general decline faced by much of downtown Memphis at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the area is currently experiencing major reinvestment. According to the Downtown Memphis Commission, more than "\$13 billion in revitalization projects [have] reshaped Memphis' downtown" in recent years, and more is coming.<sup>28</sup>

Memphis' early Automobile Row is found in what is now called the Edge District. Located at the eastern "edge" of downtown, the handful of long-vacant but remaining former auto dealerships, garages, and service stations along Monroe are being transformed back into viable businesses. Among these is the former Cherokee Motors building, now home to the Edge Motor Museum. Located around the block at 645 Marshall Ave, the Edge Motor Museum celebrates the cultural, economic, political, and technological importance of the American car, as well as the Edge District's rich automotive history. As one of the last remaining witnesses to that early automotive history, the former Memphis Overland Company building at Monroe and Lauderdale stands ready for rehabilitation and continued contribution to Memphis history.

<sup>27</sup> Memphis Type History, "History on Wheels: Memphis Bicycle Co.," <https://www.memphistypehistory.com/history-wheels-memphis-bicycle-co/> (accessed April 23, 2020).

<sup>28</sup> Patrick Sisson, "Memphis downtown boom fueled by riverfront city's rich history," *Curbed*, September 25, 2018.

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## 9. Major Bibliographic References

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<https://www.memphistypehistory.com/history-wheels-memphis-bicycle-co/> (accessed April 23, 2020).

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"New Quarters for Overland in Memphis," *The Horseless Age: The Automobile Trade Magazine*, January 7, 1914.

"Overland Cars Being Made in Tents," *The Automobile*, July 16, 1908.

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*The Daily Commonwealth*, Greenwood, MS, October 11, 1916.



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Previous documentation on file (NPS):		Primary location of additional data:	
X	preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)	X	State Historic Preservation Office
	previously listed in the National Register		Other State agency
	previously determined eligible by the National Register		Federal agency
	designated a National Historic Landmark		Local government
	recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #		University
	recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #		Other
	recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #	Name of repository:	
Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): SY-35400			

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## 10. Geographical Data

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<b>Acreage of Property</b>	Less than 1 acre	<b>USGS Quadrangle</b>	Northwest Memphis TN-AR 404-NE
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### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

Latitude: 35.141213

Longitude: -90.042907

### Verbal Boundary Description

The National Register Boundaries correspond to the Legal Parcel Boundaries of Shelby County Tax Parcel Number 007004 00010C. In general, this parcel is bounded by Lauderdale Street on the east, Monroe Avenue on the North, and private property lines on the west and south. These boundaries are depicted on the enclosed boundary/tax map.

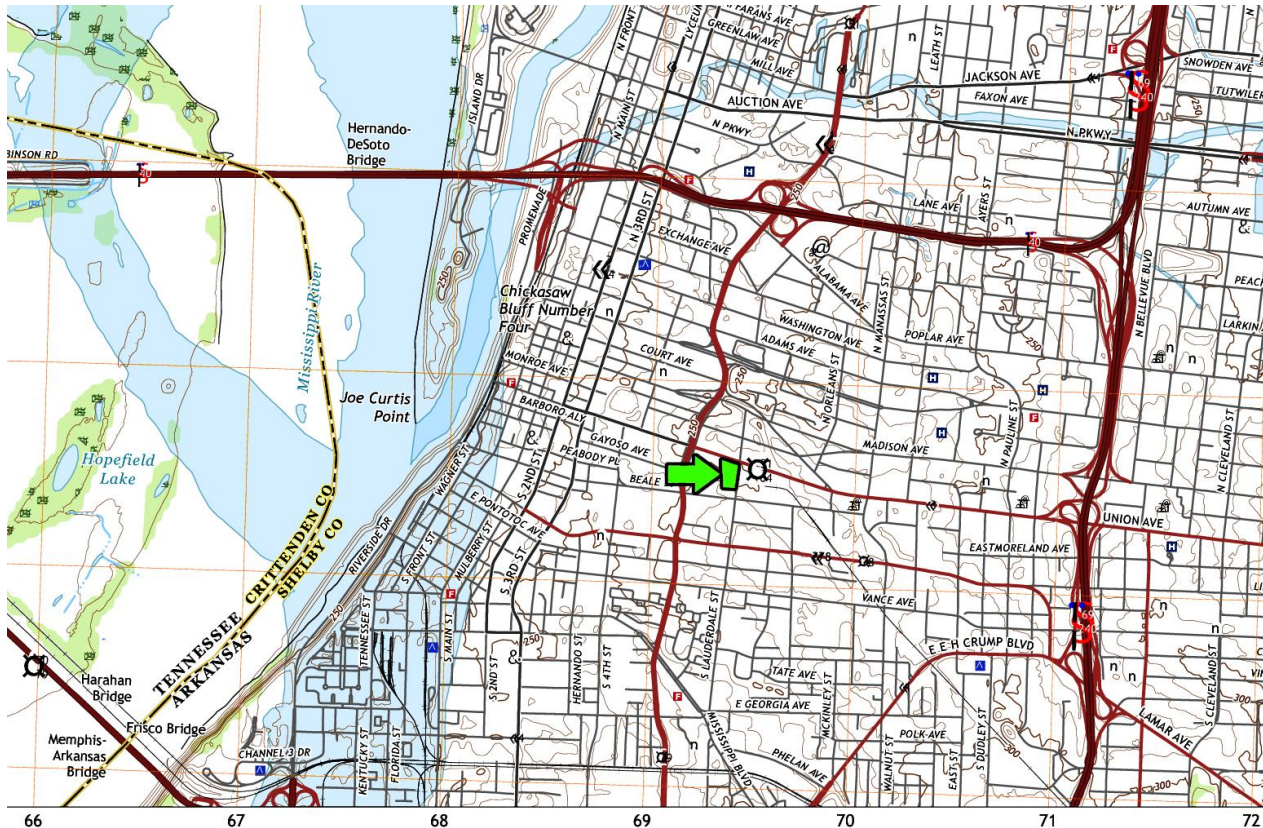
### Boundary Justification

These are the historical boundaries associated with the Memphis Overland Company.

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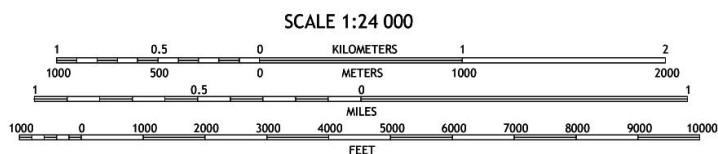
## USGS Map



421 Monroe Ave.

Memphis, Shelby Co., Tennessee

Northwest Memphis Quadrangle  
Tennessee-Arkansas  
USGS Topographic Map



CONTOUR INTERVAL 10 FEET  
NORTH AMERICAN VERTICAL DATUM OF 1988

This map was produced to conform with the  
National Geospatial Program US Topo Product Standard, 2011.  
A metadata file associated with this product is draft version 0.6.18

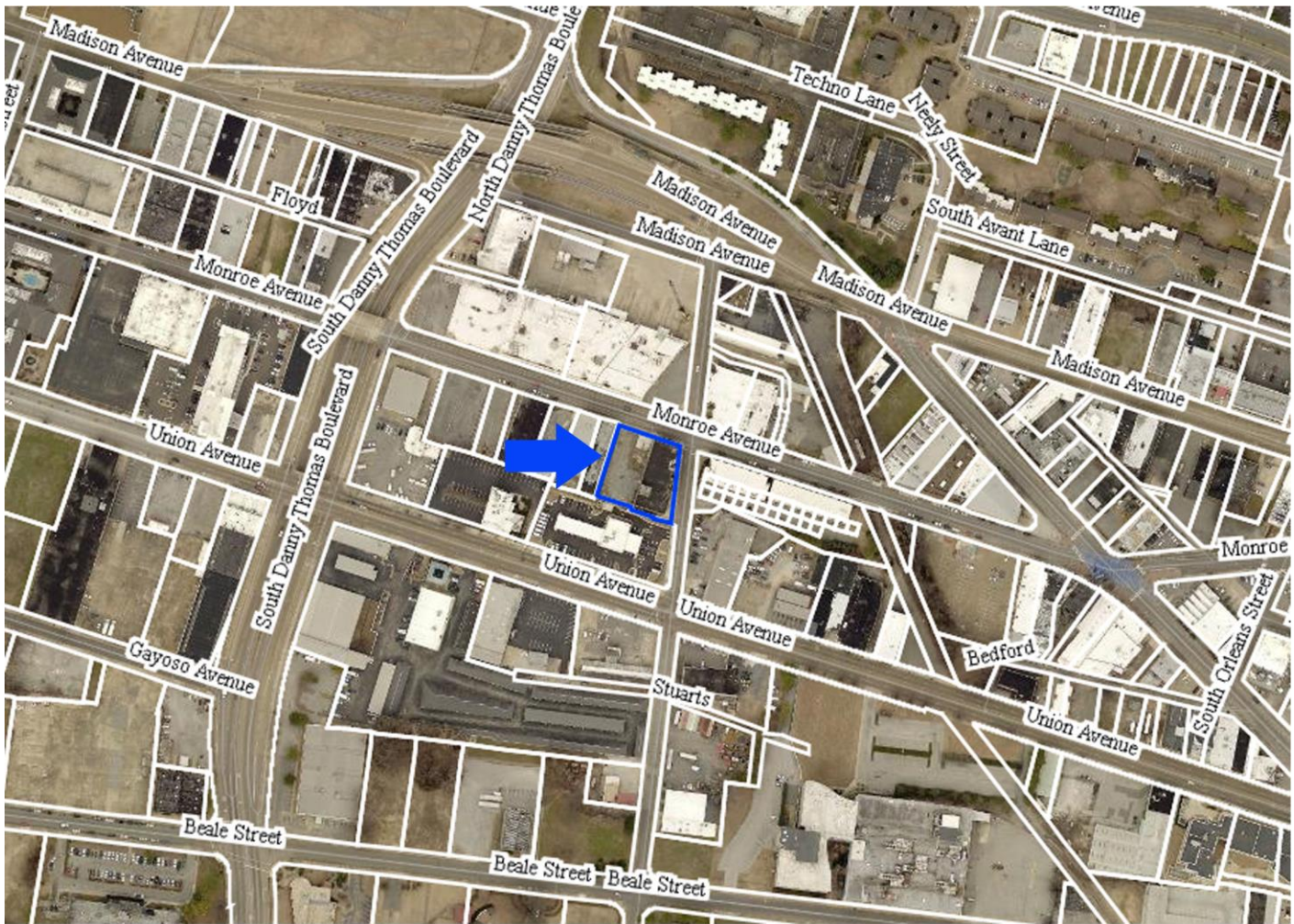




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**Shelby County Tax Map for Parcel 007004 00010C/National Register Boundary Map**



**421 Monroe Ave.  
Memphis, Shelby Co., Tennessee  
Shelby County Tax Assessor's Map**



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### 11. Form Prepared By

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Name	Judith Johnson & Margot Payne		
Organization	J. Johnson & Associates		
Street & Number	475 S. Perkins Road, #612	Date	August 2, 2020
City or Town	Memphis, TN 38117	Telephone	901-603-0054
E-mail	judithjohnson73@gmail.com	State	TN Zip Code 38117

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to map.
- **Photographs** (refer to Tennessee Historical Commission National Register *Photo Policy* for submittal of digital images and prints)
- **Additional items:** (additional supporting documentation including historic photographs, historic maps, etc. should be included on a Continuation Sheet following the photographic log and sketch maps)

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**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Overland Motor Company  
City or Vicinity: Memphis, TN  
County: Shelby State: TN  
Photographer: J. Johnson  
Date Photographed: October 7, 2020

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

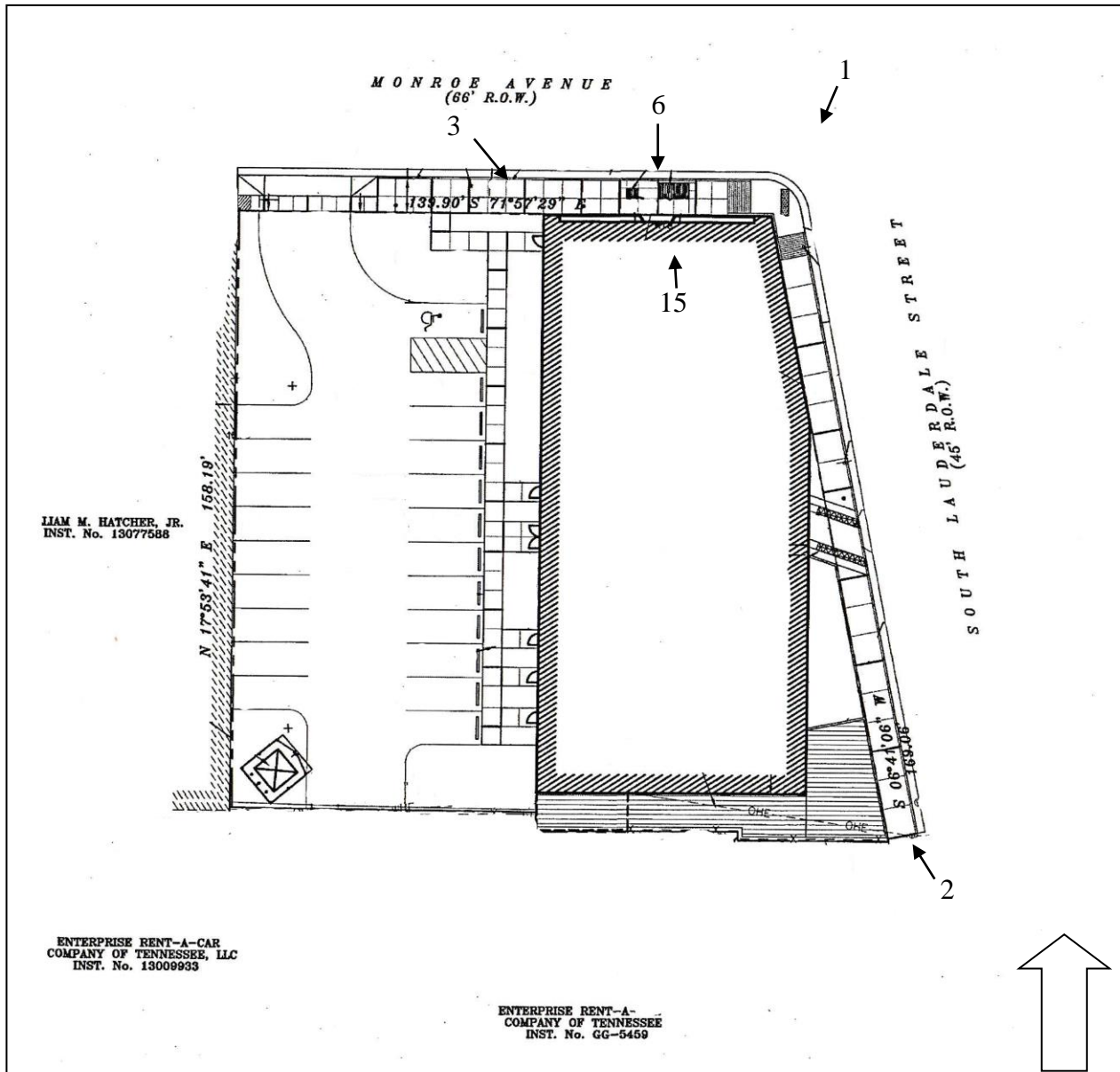
- 1 of 15. North façade and east elevation. Photographer facing southwest.
- 2 of 15. Rear South and East elevations. Photographer facing northwest.
- 3 of 15. West Elevation and North Façade. Photographer facing southeast.
- 4 of 15. Interior. First Floor showroom. Photographer facing northeast.
- 5 of 15. Interior. First floor showroom. Photographer facing southeast.
- 6 of 15. Interior. Floor Detail at Main Entrance. Photographer facing south. .
- 7 of 15. Interior. Mezzanine. Photographer facing southwest.
- 8 of 15. Interior. First Floor Showroom. Photographer facing south.
- 9 of 15. Interior. Rear service area. Photographer facing northwest.
- 10 of 15. Interior. Basement. Photographer facing northwest.
- 11 of 15. Interior. Stairwell. Photographer facing southwest.
- 12 of 15. Interior. 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. Photographer facing north.
- 13 of 15. Interior. 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. Photographer facing south.
- 14 of 15. Interior. 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Elevator Shaft. Photographer facing east.
- 15 of 15. Rooftop Cornice Detail. Photographer facing north.



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Site Plan (Not to Scale)

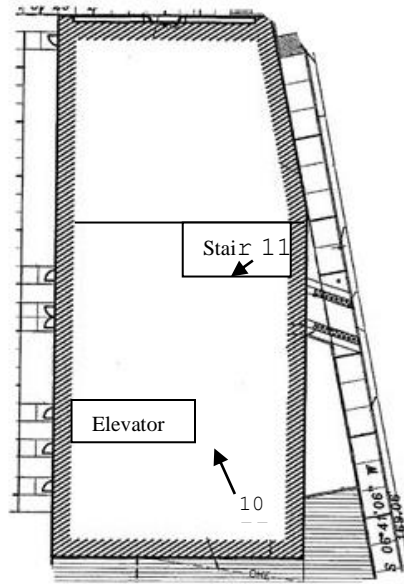


Floor Plans

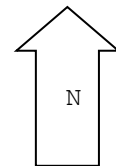


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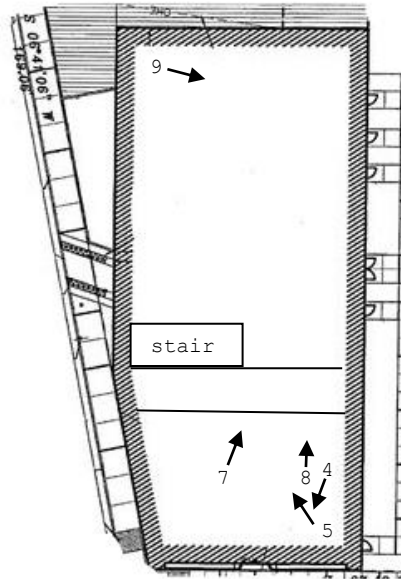


Basement (only south part)  
Not to Scale

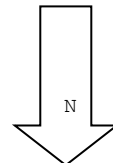


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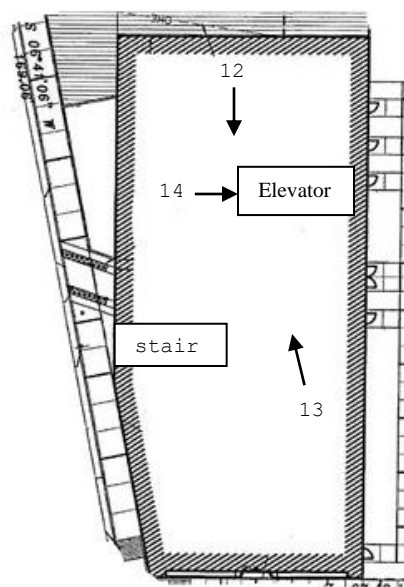


Ground floor  
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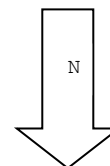


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Second floor  
Not to Scale



**Property Owner:**

4/9/2021

(This information will not be submitted to the National Park Service, but will remain on file at the Tennessee Historical Commission)

Name Chestnut Cycle Shop QOZB, LLC & Memphis Center City Revenue Finance Corp

Street &

Number 1605 Carroll Lane

Telephone 703-508-8262

City or Town Chattanooga

State/Zip TN 37405



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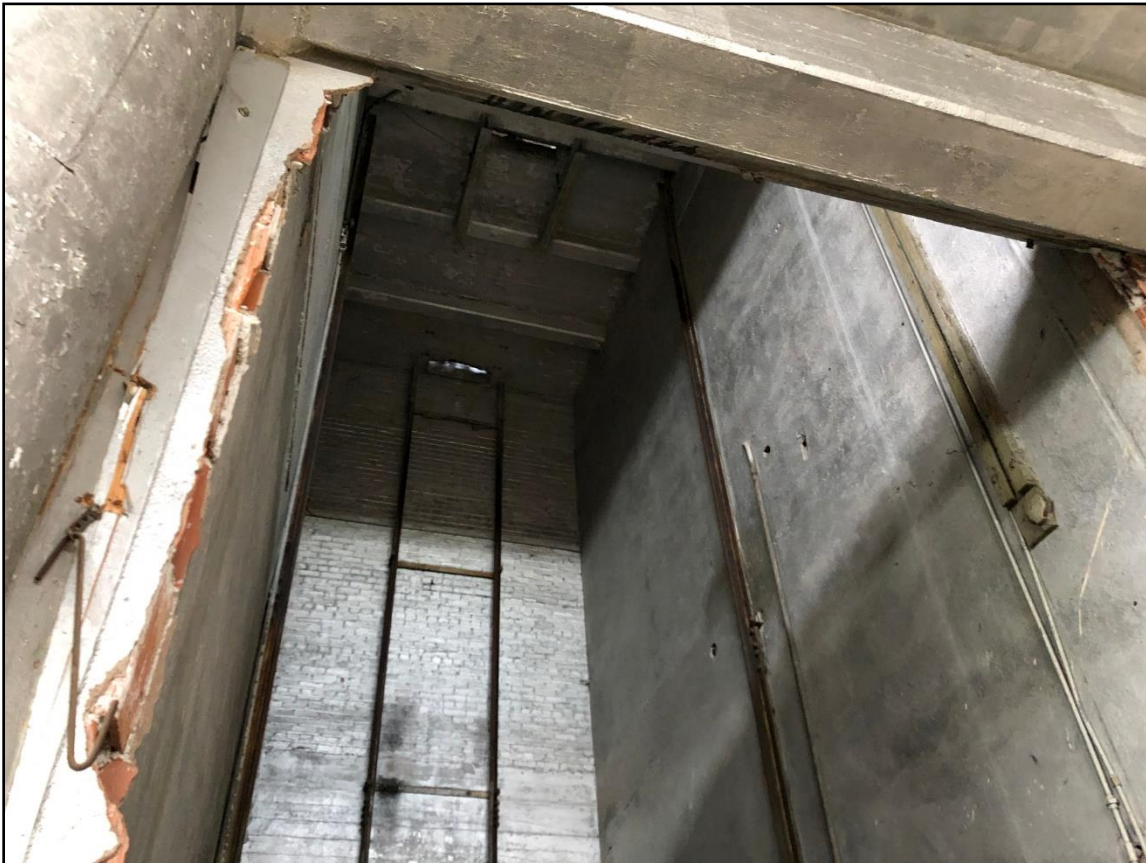


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