

Survey and Research Report

# Former Pure Oil Service Station

**103 West Ninth Street**  
**Greenville, North Carolina 27834**  
February 1, 2010



MOSER  
MAYER  
PHOENIX  
ASSOCIATES, PA

### **Historical Name and Location of Property**

A&B Auto Service Station (Former Pure Oil Station)  
103 West 9<sup>th</sup> Street  
Greenville, NC

### **Name, address, and telephone number of current property owner**

Jason B. Adams  
103 West 9<sup>th</sup> Street  
Greenville, NC

### **Chain of Title for the Property**

#### **Pitt County Deed Book U-18, pages 484-485**

This deed, recorded on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of March, 1931, by the Home Building & Loan Association, a corporation which existed under the laws of the State of North Carolina, to Mildred Hines Henderson, of Pitt County, North Carolina.

Under a resolution that was passed by the Board of Directors of the Home Building & Loan Association, it bargained and sold the following described lot or parcel of land to Mildred Hines Henderson:

*“That certain lot of land, located in the Town of Greenville, Pitt County, North Carolina... BEGINNING at the intersection of the southern line of Ninth Street and the western line of Evans Streets and running thence westwardly with the southern line of Ninth Street about 110 feet to a stake; thence southwardly and parallel with Evans Street about 82 ½ feet to a stake in Dickinson’s line; thence eastwardly and parallel with Ninth Street about 110 feet to the western line of Evans Street; thence Northwardly with the western line of Evans Street about 82 ½ feet to the BEGINNING.”*

#### **Pitt County Deed Book T-20, pages 431-432**

This deed, recorded on the 31<sup>st</sup> day of May, 1935, by Mildred H. Henderson and her husband J.M. Henderson, Jr. of the Town of Greenville, North Carolina, to Colonial Oil Company, Incorporated, a corporation which existed under the laws of the State of Virginia, with its principal office in the City of Norfolk, Virginia.

The Henderson’s sold and granted the property recorded and described in the Pitt County Deed Book U-18 page 485 to the Colonial Oil Company. This deed, however, was made subject to the lien of a certain deed of trust from the Henderson’s to J.J. White, Trustee for the Home Building & Loan Association, bearing the date of November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1933 and recording the Register’s Office in book Q-19, page 449. This Deed of Trust conveyed the above described property in trust to secure a debt to the sum of Twenty-Six Hundred

Twenty-Eight Dollars and Fifty Cents (\$2,328.50). The Colonial Oil Company assumed the indebtedness by accepting the deed and agreed to pay the sum when it became due and payable.

**Pitt County Deed Book R-29, pages 44-45**

This deed, recorded on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of January, 1957, by Colonial Oil Company, Incorporated, to The Pure Oil Company, which was an Ohio corporation with the principal office being in Chicago, Illinois.

The Colonial Oil Company bargained and sold with the consideration of its liquidation, the same property described in the Pitt County Deed Book T-20 (the same property also described in Deed Book U-18, page 485), page 431, to its successors, The Pure Oil Company.

**Pitt County Deed Book Y-31, page 537**

This Deed, recorded on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of July, 1960, by The Pure Oil Company to J.E. Ricks and wife, Ethel L. Ricks, of Pitt County, North Carolina.

The Pure Oil Company bargained and sold the same property described in the Pitt County Deed Book R-29, page 44 (the same property also described in Deed Book U-18, page 485) to J.E. and Ethel Ricks.

**Pitt County Deed Book U-44, pages 494-495**

This Deed, recorded on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of June, 1976, by J.E. Ricks and wife, Ethel L. Ricks to the Redevelopment Commission of The City of Greenville, a body politic and corporate.

Gene Adams, Michael Adams, and Sarah Adams, partners of A&B Auto Service, were the Lessees under Lease dated November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1974, recorded in the Pitt County Registry in book A-43, page 120. The partners of A&B Auto Service joined in the deed conveyance for the purpose of releasing and discharging the property described below from the operation and effect of the Lease, and for no other purpose.

J.E. Ricks and Ethel Ricks bargained and sold the following described lot or parcel of land to the Redevelopment Commission of The City of Greenville:

*“BEGINNING at the point of intersection of the southern property line of Ninth Street with the western property line of Evans Street, and from said beginning point running southwest and along the western property line of Evans Street 82.50 feet, more or less, to a stake, a corner with West; thence northwest and along the west line 10.41 feet to a stake; thence northeast 82.50 feet, more or less, to a stake in the southern property line of Ninth Street; thence southeast 10.40 feet, more or less, to the point of BEGINNING.”*

**Pitt County Deed Book 525, page 689**

This deed, recorded on the 18<sup>th</sup> day of July 1994, by J. Ed Ricks and wife, Ethel L. Ricks, to Gene Bland Adams and Robert Michael Adams, partners of A&B Auto Service, as tenants in common.

J.E. Ricks and Ethel Ricks bargained and sold the following described lot or parcel of land to the tenants in common, Gene Bland Adams and Robert Michael Adams:

*“Lying and being located at the southwest intersection of 9th Street and Evans Street and BEGINNING at the point of intersection of the southern right-of-way line 9<sup>th</sup> Street (50ft. right-of-way) with the western right-of-way line of Evans Street (70ft. right-of-way), and running thence along and with the western right-of-way line of Evans Street southwest, 92.50 feet to an existing chip in the concrete, a corner with Morgan Printers, Inc.; thence along and with the northern line of Morgan Printers, Inc., and Roy B. Gibbs northwest 165.50 feet to a point located in the northern line of the Roy B. Gibbs’ property, a corner with William C. Heymann; thence along and with the eastern line of Heymann northeast, 82.49 feet to a point located in the southern right-of-way of 9<sup>th</sup> Street, cornering; thence along and with the southern right-of-way line of 9<sup>th</sup> Street southeast, 165.50 feet to the point and place of the BEGINNING...being those same tracts heretofore conveyed and described in Deed Book E-31, Page 280, Y-31, Page 537, less and except so much thereof as has been previously conveyed to the Redevelopment Commission of the City of Greenville by deed appearing of record in Deed Book U-44, Page 494.”*

**Pitt County Deed Book 2536, Pages 844-846**

*(This deed is the most current deed documented on the Pitt County tax map for parcel numbers 018944, 018943, and 024211. All of which are a portion of the current A&B Auto Service property. The building sits on the tract of land recorded in all the above deeds, which is parcel number 018944)*

This deed, recorded on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of August, 2008, by Carol D. Adams, Widow, to Jason B. Adams.

Parcel 1: Widow, Carol D. Adams, bargained and sold the same property described in the Pitt County Deed Book 525, page 689 to Jason B. Adams.

Parcel 2: Widow, Carol D. Adams, bargained and sold the same property described in the Pitt County Deed Book 1092, page 529 to Jason B. Adams. (See Parcel 2 Chain of Title below)

**Parcel 2 Chain of Title:**

**Pitt County Deed Book 1092, Pages 529-531**

This deed, recorded on the 21<sup>st</sup> day of December, 2000, by Morgan Printers, Inc., a North Carolina corporation, to Gene Bland Adams and Robert Michael Adams, as tenants in common, having an address of 103 W. 9<sup>th</sup> St., Greenville, NC 27834.

Morgan Printers, Inc. bargained and sold the following described lot or parcel of land to the tenants in common, Gene Bland Adams and Robert Michael Adams:

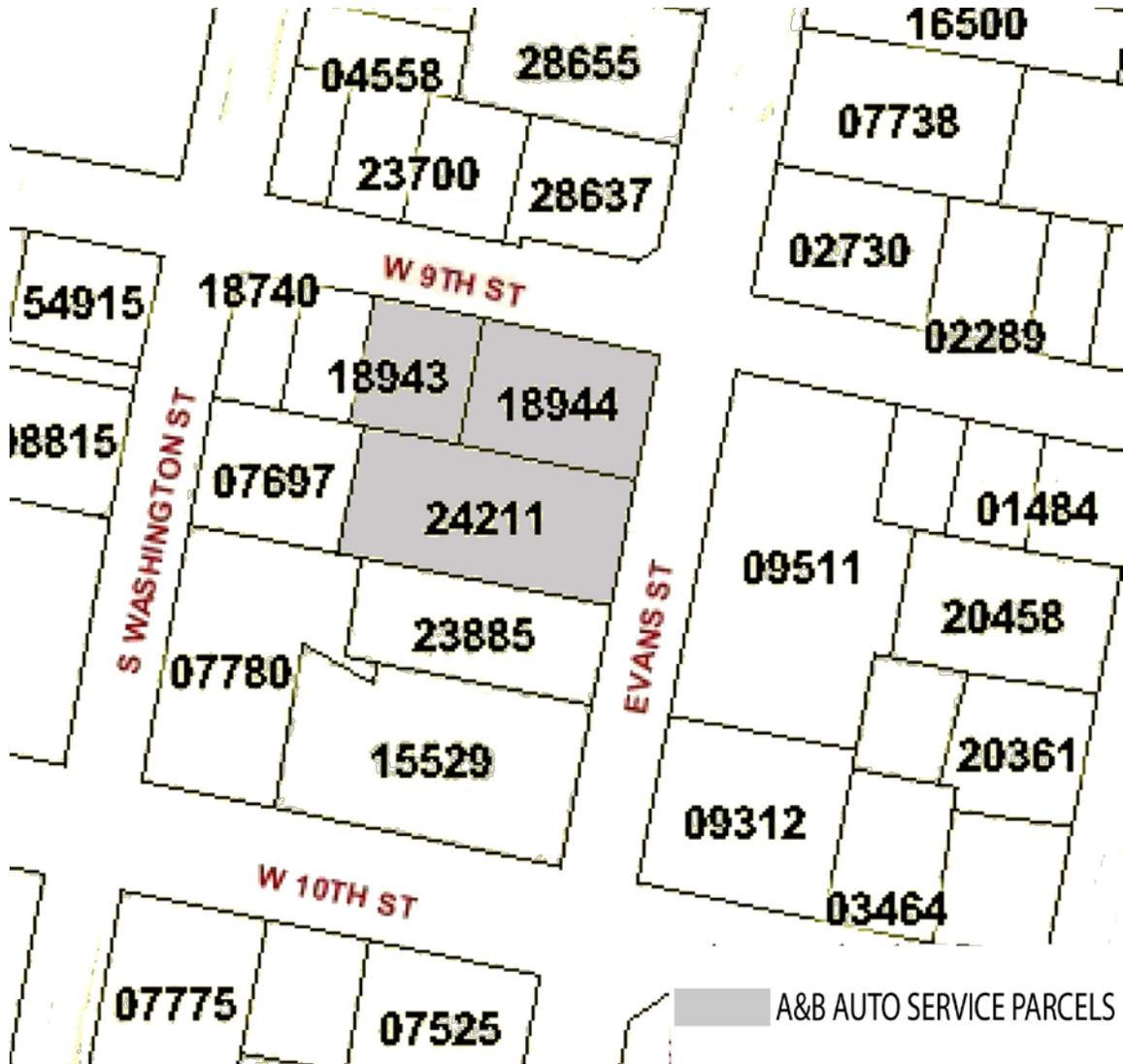
*“Lying and being situate in the City of Greenville, Pitt County, North Carolina, on the West side of Evans Street, and BEGINNING at a point in the westerly live of Evans Street, being 82.5 feet from the southwest intersection of Evans and Ninth Streets; and thence running from said point of beginning, southwest along the westerly right of way line of Evans Street, 83.03 feet to a chip in the sidewalk; thence running along the Century Investors line, northwest 151.48 feet to a bronze disk; thence running along the Gibbs line, northeast 82.58 feet to an iron pipe; thence running southeast along the Ricks line, 152.65 feet to the point of BEGINNING. “*

**Total Appraised Value of the Property**

Building Value:	\$78,443
Land Value (Parcel #018944):	\$36,592
Extra Features Value:	<u>\$2,960</u>
Total Value (Parcel #018944):	\$117,995
Land Value (Parcel #018943):	\$13,000
Extra Features Value:	<u>\$790</u>
Total Value (Parcel #018943):	\$13,790
Land Value (Parcel #024211):	\$57,500
Extra Features Value:	<u>\$530</u>
Total Value (Parcel #024211):	\$58,030

**Legal Description of the Property**

The legal description of the property is illustrated on the Pitt County tax map for parcel 018944 and recorded in the Pitt County Deed Book 2536, pages 844-846. Parcel numbers 024211 and 018943 are also plots of land that are incorporated into the A&B Auto Service Property, owned by Gene B. Adams and Jason B. Adams (Refer to Figure 1.1 below)



**Figure 1.1:** Map showing parcel information; refer to recordation of deed noted above.

**Assessment of the significance of the site or structure:**

- a) *Special significance of the property in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance.*

In the early 1930s, the Pure Oil Company built cottage, “home-like” gas stations all across the United States. The company hired architect Carl Peterson to design a standard oil station that would domesticate their brand. Peterson thought the English Cottage would be accepted by residents of America’s suburban neighborhoods. Therefore, the English Cottage style was the prototype for the gas station that was built on the corner of West Ninth and Evans Street in downtown Greenville, North Carolina. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Pure Oil Stations are recognized by their cultural value within suburban neighborhoods. Therefore, some of these oil stations are National Historic Properties. They represent the rise and dependency on the automobile in the 20s and 30s, as well as the growing trend of marketing and branding within the corporate world. The American gas station, especially the Pure Oil Stations, should be sought after for its integral part of the American culture.

- b) *Integrity of the property’s design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association.*

The building located on the corner of West Ninth Street and Evans Street in Greenville, North Carolina, is the original structure built by the Colonial Oil Company, a distributor of the Pure Oil Company. Although a service garage was added later, the original brick work, blue tile, and cottage-like shutters remain intact and unharmed. The integrity of this building represents the prototype for many of the Pure Oil gas stations of the 20s and 30s. It remains a perfect example that brings to life the materials and feelings of the “home-like” gas station the Pure Oil Company sought after in the 20s.

**Assessment of the property's suitability for preservation or restoration, educational value, and possibilities for adaptive or alternative use:**

The property now serves its original function as an automobile service station, but the property has the potential for higher uses. The building could potentially be used not only as an automobile service station, but also as a restaurant, small museum, gift shop, small office, and things of that nature. The property is suitable for preservation and restoration because it exemplifies the growing dependency of the automobile in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It also serves as an example of how gas stations began to market their brand through three-dimensional billboards such as buildings. Therefore, this building serves as an educational tool through historical value of the automobile age.

**Why and in what ways the property is of historical importance to the city of Greenville:**

There are few Pure Oil Stations of this character that remain across the country. Most of these early 20<sup>th</sup> century gas stations have been demolished. It is of extreme significance that the city of Greenville owns such a building. Because of this, the building not only becomes a local landmark, but a national landmark as well. Further detailed documentation is given in the following historical narrative.

**Why and in what ways the property is of architectural importance to the city of Greenville:**

The architectural character of the former Pure Oil Service Station exemplifies the important role the Pure Oil Company took on to reform gas stations to a more pleasing, domestic design. Very few of these buildings remain across the country. Therefore, the property is of architectural importance to the city of Greenville. Further detailed documentation of this style is given in the following architectural narrative.

**Why and in what ways the property meets the criteria established for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places:**

The former Pure Oil Service Station represents National Register Criterion C for design/construction as well as Criterion D for information potential. The building's architectural style associates it with an important part of American history. The individuals who operated this gas station are not necessarily of national historic value; but rather, the building itself represents a style that gives significant cultural value within suburban neighborhoods. It represents the rise and dependency on the automobile in the 20s and 30s and the growing trend of marketing and branding within the corporate world. This former Pure Oil Station should be sought after for its integral part of the American culture.

## **Historical Narrative**

The typical American gas station has been, to a large extent, over-looked by many architectural historians, preservationist, scholars, and even the general public. Gas stations have become commonplace among the American landscape and have been taken for granted in our “mundane world of the unimportant,” as historians John A. Jakle and Keith A. Sculle assert. Ironically, it is the American gas station that has been one of the most prominent features of the American landscape, especially the American landscape of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The individuals who owned and operated these stations are not necessarily significant to any historic value. Instead, it is the evolution of the marketing of gasoline which resulted in the design of gasoline stations that give these buildings their significance. Therefore, the American gas station should be sought after for its integral part of the American culture.

The automobile industry experienced massive growth in the 20s and 30s. An increase in automobile usage and ownership resulted when Henry Ford produced and sold cars that the middle class could afford. By 1921, almost 10.5 million motor vehicles were registered and slightly more than 8 million of those were private automobiles. The number grew to 26.5 million registered motor vehicles by 1931, and 23 million of those registered were private automobiles. As gasoline became less expensive to refine, it grew as a complementary product, and that also of a necessity, to the automobile, which was becoming a staple in the growing consumer-consumption culture. Automakers were not pressured to produce fuel-efficient vehicles, causing an increase in the demand for gasoline. The growth of highways initiated by the Federal Highway Act of 1921 provided federally funded two-lane highways, which sparked the freedom provided by automobile travel, further resulting in the dependency of gasoline. With the breakup of the Standard Oil Trust Company, which was deemed as a monopoly by the United States Supreme Court in 1911, new oil companies began to compete over the expansion of automobile services. These new service stations began to brand their identities through various marketing strategies, an example being a three-dimensional billboard such as a building. Corporations began using their buildings to market their gasoline and services with easily identifiable, brand related buildings. Prefabricated metal designs were the most common with an extended flat-roof canopy that was supported by one or two

column. Two fuel pumps typically stood aside the columns. These structures became unsightly buildings that popped up over the American landscape, and even though vehicle owners welcomed the opportunity to fill up their cars virtually anywhere, they also worried about these unsightly buildings overtaking the urban and sub-urban neighborhoods. The architectural directions being taken by corporate gas distributors were less than desirable by the public at large.

The owners of the Pure Oil Company were well aware of the growing disdain to the image of the gas station. Therefore, they planned to revitalize their structures. President Henry M. Dawes sought after a new building style that could easily and distinctively be associated with the gasoline brand of the Pure Oil Company. Dawes hired supposedly self-taught architect Carl Petersen, whose ideas were rejected previously by the Gulf Oil Company. Petersen worked at home to avoid distractions and unwanted ideas and strove to design a unique style to unify the Pure Oil Company brand. Petersen came up with an easily built, inexpensive English Cottage style design that would redefine the gas station on the suburban landscape. On the drawing board was a building with steeply pitched roofs, a side gable, rounded entranceways, prominently located chimneys, and decorative lattice and shutters that gave the building a “home-like” appearance. Petersen thought the English Cottage would be accepted by residents of America's suburban neighborhoods. Petersen was right. The public grew to enjoy the way the Cottage style looked and eventually came to see the style as a symbol for Pure Oil's quality products. Whether the buildings sat on a busy roadside or in a quiet sub-urban neighborhood, the home-like structures fit in very well. Dawes gave Petersen a \$750 bonus check straight out of his own pocket because he liked the drawings so much. A variety of models were then drafted and built all around the country. The design proved economical to build and could be constructed from numerous materials. The house structure then became an accepted architectural form for gasoline stations and adopted by many corporations. It quickly became the most popular form of architecture for gasoline stations and became an architectural asset in residential neighborhoods.

John Jakle and Keith Sculle write in their book, *The Gas Station in America*, "Petersen not only articulated the often unspoken assumptions of Romantic Suburbs, but he also masterfully tapped the domestic urges beneath them." (Jakle & Sculle, p. 172)

Historian David Goldfield notes that early twentieth century suburbs represented an effort by elites to construct an orderly neighborhood in an otherwise threatening, fast-urbanizing environment. "Rapid change," says Goldfield, "Drove Americans to seek some refuge, some port before the waves of innovation drowned their sensibilities and senses completely." (Goldfield, p. 9). Margaret Supplee Smith speaks to the same attraction the suburbs offered. "These nineteenth century suburbs represented more than merely a place to live," she declares. "They offered a return to nature for the American family." (Smith, p. 21) Michael Carl Witzel in his book, *The American Gas Station*, gives a beautiful description of the important role Carl Petersen took on to reform gas stations to a more pleasing, domestic design. He writes, "From the vantage point of the motorist wheeling past, the pleasant trappings of a roadside house conjured up welcome feelings of friendliness and offered the atmosphere that was greatly missed by the traveler when venturing forth on the open road. The mere sight of a white-shuttered window spilled forth memories of Mom and those delicious home-baked pies cooling in the sill. A house meant quiet evenings by the fireside with one's favorite dog or the whole family huddled around the radio listening on the exploits of Fibber McGee and Molly which was a safe, warm and happy place for many and a common association that would be exploited to maximize potential by hundreds of roadside motels and gasoline stations constructed in its image." (Witzel, p. 48)

Such phrases describe the building located at 103 West Ninth Street in Greenville, North Carolina. A quaint building that nestles its way in the streetscape and conjures up feelings of home much like a storybook would do. This building should be recognized for its cultural value within its neighborhood. There are only a handful of these architectural representations left standing in the country. Therefore, the building becomes a three dimensional cultural icon within the landscape. It represents the growth and importance of the automobile and gasoline within the 20s and 30s. It symbolizes the growth of an industry during a time period when the Great Depression took the economy in a downward spiral. Just as the Chrysler Building was a symbol for the importance of the automobile in New York City and Chrysler Corporation's significance; the Pure Oil stations were the automobile's mark on suburban towns such as Greenville, North Carolina.

The former Pure Oil Station was built around 1941 when the Colonial Oil Company purchased the land owned by Mildred Henderson in 1935. The building was not owned originally by Pure Oil, but it did serve as a franchise station. The Colonial Oil Company was headquartered out of Norfolk, Virginia, and represented a consolidation of several former Pure Oil distributors. Its stations were spread out across 43 counties in North Carolina and Virginia. Pure Oil moved into the southeast region through distributor organizations such as the Colonial Oil Company. They used these distributors to create capital through territory expansion. The Pure Oil Company purchased the building in 1957 and then sold it to J.E. and Ethel Ricks in 1960. The Pure Oil Company was acquired by the Union Oil Company of California in 1965. The building left such a mark that the service station still serves its purpose within the automobile industry operating as an auto repair station. The building is now property of the A&B Auto Service owned by Gene Adams and Jason Adams.

## Architectural Description

The former Pure Oil Station on West Ninth Street in Greenville, North Carolina is a great example of the English Cottage style, which is an offspring of the Tudor Revival style. The style was popular among 1920s suburban homes based on medieval, half-timbering characteristics and a standard style among the Pure Oil Stations in the 20s and 30s. The building is characterized by its steeply pitched roofs and rustic brickwork. The ornamental shutters give the building a “story-book” like feature. The chimney is a notable feature to exemplify how this building is part of the cottage family and influenced by the Arts and Crafts style. The false, ornamental timbers on the gable facing Ninth Street, give the building the medieval characteristics that were an attribute to the Tudor Revival Style. The letter “P” in an Old English font, which was the trademark for the Pure Oil Company, adorns the chimney and serves this purpose as well. The blue tiled gable roof combined with the rest of the building being painted white with blue highlights serves as the Pure Oil Companies’ trademark. The service bays were added as a necessity to service and lubricate vehicles. The bays are integrated well with the cottage design style.

The building is situated on the corner of Ninth Street and Evans Street and runs lengthwise parallel with Ninth Street. The reception area fills the corner of the building facing both Ninth and Evans Street with storefront glass shaping the corner. The front of the building running about 41 feet parallel with Evans Street includes a simple toilet room, an office, and a small garage. The original building extends about 55 feet parallel with Ninth Street which includes the reception and a two bay garage. The addition of another service garage was added later; the date is unknown.

The building is a representation of the exact models produced by architect Carl Petersen in the 20s and 30s. It is debatable whether or not the building was directly designed by Petersen, but nonetheless, the building serves as a model for the domestication of the gasoline service station that happened during that time period.

## **Bibliography**

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Survey and Research Report On The Central Avenue Pure Oil Station and the Monroe Road Pure Oil Station In Charlotte, N.C.

Survey and Research Report on the Blount-Harvey Building in Greenville, North Carolina.

## Photographs



*Photograph #1: East Elevation (Facing Evans Street)*

Notice the steeply pitched roofs and rustic brickwork; these were common to the English Cottage style. The ornamental shutters and decorative carriage lights give the building a “story-book” like feature. The storefront on the far right side (with the taller gable) is the storefront looking into the reception area.



*Photograph #2: North Elevation (Facing Ninth Street)*

The false, ornamental timbers on the gable facing 9<sup>th</sup> Street, give the building the medieval characteristics that were an attribute to the Tudor Revival Style. The chimney is a notable feature to exemplify how this building is part of the cottage family, a movement in which sprung the Arts and Crafts style.



*Photograph #3: South Elevation (Facing Parcel #24211)*

Parcel number 24211 is also owned by A&B Auto Service, used now as extra parking. Notice the blue and white painted stripes which was a notable feature of the Pure Oil Service Brand.



*Photograph #4: West Elevation*

These garage bays were added at a later date (date unknown).



*Photograph #5: Overall Northeast Corner*



*Photograph #6: North Elevation*



*Photograph #7: North Elevation Entry Door Detail*



*Photograph #8: Carriage Light Detail*



*Photograph #9: Chimney Letter "P" in Old English Font Detail*



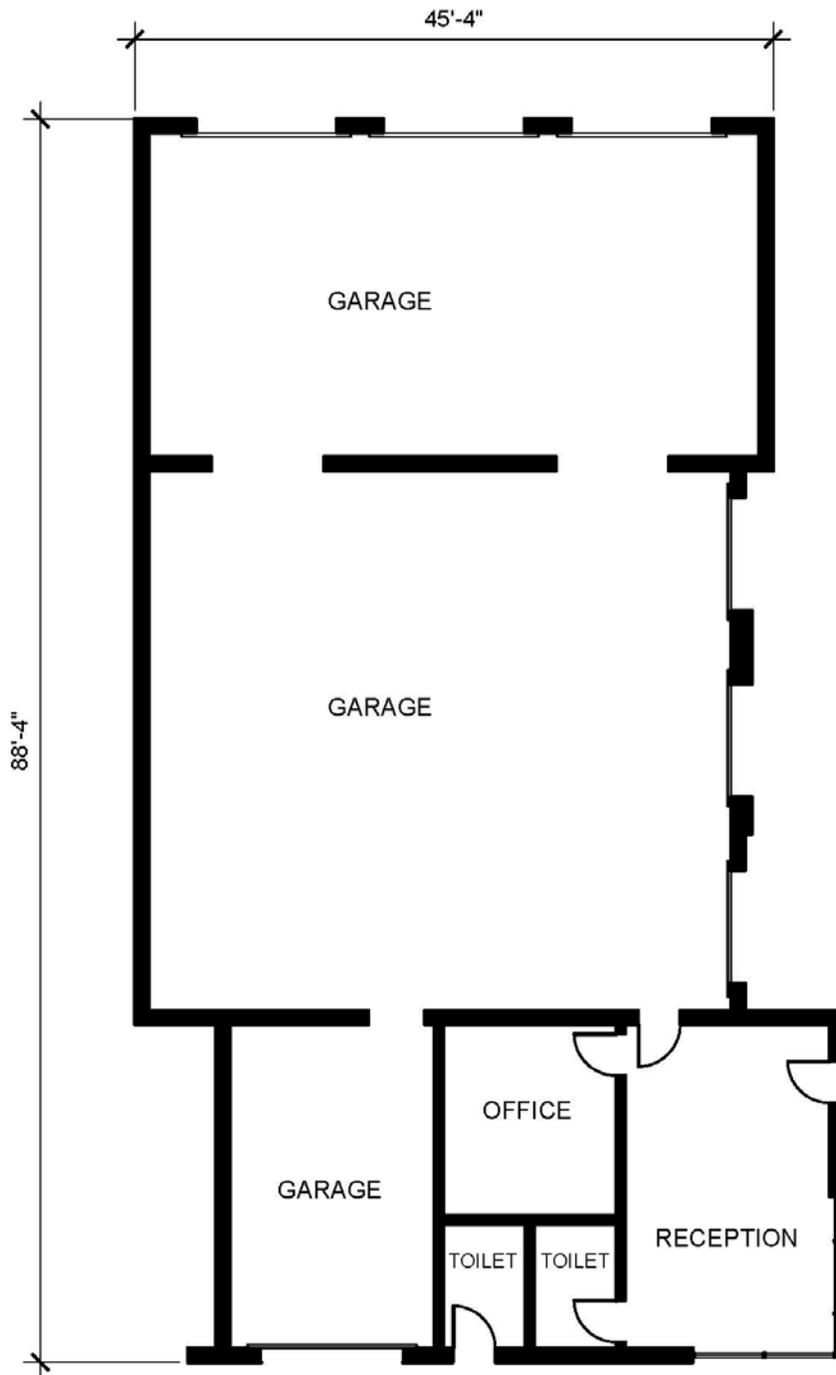
*Photograph #10: Blue Roof Tile Detail*



*Photograph #11: Cottage-style Window and Shutter Detail*



*Aerial Photograph keying to photographs listed above*



**Floor Plan**  
No Scale