

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Durant-Dort Carriage Company Office

AND/OR COMMON

Arrowhead Veterans Club**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER

315 West Water Street— NOT FOR PUBLICATION 7

CITY, TOWN

Flint

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Michigan

— VICINITY OF

CODE  
26

COUNTY

Genesee

CODE

049**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: <u>Private Club</u>

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

City of Flint (Mayor James W. Rutherford)

STREET &amp; NUMBER

City Hall, 1101 South Saginaw

CITY, TOWN

Flint

— VICINITY OF

STATE

Michigan 48502**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.Register of Deeds, Genesee County Courthouse

STREET &amp; NUMBER

1101 Beech Street

CITY, TOWN

Flint

STATE

Michigan**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**TITLE Michigan Historical Commission;National Register of Historic Places; Historic American Engineering Record

DATE

1974; 1975; 1976 FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDSMichigan Historical Commission; National Register of Historic Places  
Historic American Engineering Record

CITY, TOWN

Lansing; Washington

STATE

Mich.; D.C.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

From 1895 to 1913 the Durant-Dort Carriage Company Office Building, situated in an industrial area near downtown Flint, served as a focal point for William C. Durant's promotional activities in the carriage and automobile business. Here, he built the Durant-Dort Carriage Company into one of the Nation's largest manufacturers of horse-drawn vehicles and directed the early destinies of Buick, which, according to Pound, was "the rock on which General Motors was founded."<sup>9</sup> The Durant-Dort Company played a significant role in financing not only Buick but General Motors and Chevrolet as well. This somewhat deteriorated, three-story red brick structure is the only known extant building that truly reflects Durant's genius as an organizer and promoter. Although the General Motors Building in Detroit was started during his presidency of the company and was to be named for him, Durant actually opposed its construction and had been ousted from General Motors by the time of its completion.

When Durant and Dort started the Flint Road Cart Company in 1886, they established their headquarters in Durant's insurance agency office in downtown Flint. The destruction of company records makes it impossible to determine how long they remained there, but in 1895 they began construction of this office building at 315 West Water Street near their factories. When completed in 1896, it was considered by many to be one of the finest office structures of its type in the country, primarily because it had an especially ornate interior.

Over the years Durant and Dort made several alterations to the structure. Around 1900 they replaced the structure's flat roof with a hipped one with dormers and added an entrance portico. On April 14, 1906, a fire did extensive damage to the new roof, and instead of repairing it, Durant and Dort added an additional story to the structure, making it three-stories-high. They capped it with a flat roof similar to the original. After Durant severed his connections with the company in 1913, his partner J. Dallas Dort retained the office building and used it as headquarters for his own automotive venture, the Dort Motor Company, until 1924. Until well into the 1940's the structure provided office space for service organizations like the Red Cross and Chamber of Commerce. Since 1947, it has been owned by the Arrowhead Veterans Club, a private social club, that currently utilizes it as a combination club headquarters and bar.

(continued)

<sup>9</sup>Pound, The Turning Wheel, 86.

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PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1895-1913

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Durant-Dort Carriage Company

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

William Crapo Durant, says historian George S. May, "was a business genius whose mastery of the techniques of persuasion and promotion have rarely been equaled in the annals of American business."<sup>1</sup> In 1908 he founded General Motors and thereby demonstrated according to distinguished automotive historian John B. Rae, "a clear insight into the future of the automobile industry; its organization has followed the pattern that he initially adopted."<sup>2</sup> Among other contributions, Durant envisioned the creation of a large company that would manufacture not one but several makes of automobiles, as well as parts for them, and he set up the General Motors Acceptance Corporation for consumer financing. He was also responsible for bringing Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., and Charles F. Kettering into General Motors and for GM's acquisition of the Fisher Body Company and Frigidare.

Earlier Durant had been a nationally significant figure in the carriage industry. In 1886 with \$2,000 in capital, he founded what eventually became the Durant-Dort Carriage Company, and by 1900 he made it into one of the Nation's largest manufacturers of horse-drawn vehicles by establishing a nationwide sales network and purchasing a number of subsidiary companies. "Through the development of the Durant-Dort organization," according to May, "one can see at work the same restless, innovative, gambling spirit that later characterized Durant's auto ventures."<sup>3</sup>

From 1895 to 1913, the Durant-Dort Carriage Company Office Building, situated in an industrial area near downtown Flint, served as a focal point for William C. Durant's promotional activities in both the carriage and automobile business. Here,

(continued)

<sup>1</sup>George S. May, A Most Unique Machine: The Michigan Origins of the American Automobile Industry (Grand Rapids, 1975), 176.

<sup>2</sup>John B. Rae, "William Crapo Durant," Dictionary of American Biography, Supplement Four (New York, 1974), 245.

<sup>3</sup>May, A Most Unique Machine, 191.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See continuation sheet.)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	<u>17</u>	<u>280290</u>	<u>4766040</u>	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the nominated property coincides with the boundary of the legal lot known as 315 West Water Street, Flint, Michigan.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Ralph J. Christian, Historian, Historic Landmarks Project

ORGANIZATION

DATE

American Association for State and Local History March 1977

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1400 Eighth Avenue South

615-242-5583

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Nashville,

Tennessee 37203

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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CONTINUATION SHEET Durant-Dort      ITEM NUMBER 7      PAGE one

The Durant-Dort Carriage Company Office Building is a rectangular-shaped, three-story red brick structure measuring 40 by 60 feet. It rests on brick foundations, has a full basement, and is capped with a flat roof. Exterior ornamentation is minimal except for a deteriorating sandstone watertable along the base of first-story windows, a bay window on the front (southeast) facade, and a decaying, bracketed, wooden cornice with dentils near the roofline. Most windows are set in flat-arched, wood surrounds with vertical joints and are of the sixteen-over-one wood sash variety. Windows on the rear (northwest) facade, however, are set in round arched surrounds with radiating voussoirs. The entrance portico has been removed, leaving a main entrance on the southeast facade flanked by narrow windows and topped with a transom.

Inside, the structure has managed to retain a number of its original features despite extensive alterations over the years. Much of the woodwork, particularly the wainscoting on the first floor, remains, as does some marble flooring. Generally, however, the interior, like the exterior, is somewhat deteriorated. Located in a primarily industrial section near downtown Flint, the structure was virtually ignored until recently. At present, a drive is underway in the city to purchase the building from its current owners and restore it as a memorial to Durant.

During his period of greatest national significance, Durant often resided in hotels or lived in his private railway car. His home in Flint has been torn down as well as a palatial mansion that he owned in Deal, N.J. A few Durant Motors factories, particularly the plants in Lansing and Flint, are extant, but they reveal little about Durant's promotional ability and represent one of his less successful forays into automobile manufacturing. Clearly this office claims a unique and extremely important niche in the physical history of the American automobile industry.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Durant-Dort ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE one

he built the Durant-Dort Carriage Company into one of the Nation's largest manufacturers of horse-drawn vehicles and directed the early destinies of Buick, which, according to historian Arthur Pound, was "the rock on which General Motors was founded."<sup>4</sup> The Durant-Dort Company played a significant role in financing not only Buick but General Motors and Chevrolet as well. This somewhat deteriorated, three-story, red brick structure is the only known extant building that truly reflects Durant's genius as an organizer and promoter. Although the General Motors Building in Detroit was started during his presidency of the company and was to be named for him, Durant actually opposed its construction and had been ousted from General Motors by the time of its completion.

History

William Crapo Durant was born December 8, 1861, in Boston, Mass., to William Clark and Rebecca Crapo Durant. Billy Durant's father was a somewhat obscure figure who combined the occupations of banker and stockbroker. Billy's mother was the daughter of Henry H. Crapo who, after making a fortune in whaling in New Bedford, moved to Michigan, became a timber baron, and eventually won that State's governorship. Details about Billy's Boston childhood are sparse, but it is known that in 1871 his parents separated because of his father's heavy drinking and reckless stock speculation, and Rebecca Durant and her two children moved to Flint, Mich., to be near the Crapos. Because Billy's grandfather had left his mother a small fortune, the family lived quite comfortably, and he received a fairly good education.

Apparently a restless youth, Durant dropped out of high school in 1878 just a few months before he was scheduled to graduate. For a time, he worked for the family lumber company, but eventually he found his niche as a salesman. After trying his hand at selling patent medicines, cigars, and real estate, Durant turned to insurance, and by the mid-1880's he headed one of the largest agencies in central Michigan and enjoyed a well-deserved reputation as one of Flint's most promising and successful young men.

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<sup>4</sup>Arthur Pound, The Turning Wheel: The Story of General Motors Through Twenty-five Years, 1908-1933 (Garden City, 1934), 86.

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The turning point in Durant's career came in 1886 when he rode in a friend's road cart. Unlike similar vehicles, this one had a spring suspension which gave a smooth ride, and Durant, realizing its potential, tracked down the inventor and purchased the patent and manufacturing rights for \$2,000. With J. Dallas Dort, a Flint hardware dealer, as partner, Durant started the Flint Road Cart Company. While Dort handled administrative details, Durant took charge of selling and promoting the finished product. During the company's first year of operation it sold 4,000 carts, a figure that was greatly surpassed with each passing year. Durant developed a nationwide sales network, selling his vehicles under his own "Blue Ribbon" brand and supplying farm implement and mail order companies as well. In 1895 the firm changed its name to Durant-Dort Carriage Company, due in part to Durant's activities in acquiring subsidiary companies which made not only a variety of horse-drawn vehicles but produced components for the vehicles themselves.

By 1900 Durant was a millionaire and the principal figure in a company that could produce 400 vehicles daily, and which in 1905 and 1906 produced nearly 150,000 vehicles of all makes and descriptions. At its peak the Durant-Dort Company owned vehicle plants in Michigan, Georgia, and Canada; large tracts of timberland in the South; several lumber mills; a spoke company in Arkansas; the Imperial Wheel Company in Jackson, Mich., said to be the largest wheel plant in the world; the Flint Axle Works; the Flint Varnish Works; and a harness making plant. "Through the development of the Durant-Dort organization," says May, "one can see at work the same restless, innovative, gambling spirit that later characterized Durant's auto ventures."<sup>5</sup>

In 1904 Durant turned his attention to the infant automobile industry after assuming control of the financially troubled Buick Motor Car Company. Using the resources of the Durant-Dort Carriage Company, particularly its sales organization and supply plants, Durant quickly put Buick back on its feet. By 1908 Durant had made Buick the Nation's best selling car, surpassing the earlier leaders Ford and Cadillac.

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<sup>5</sup>May, A Most Unique Machine, 191.

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About this same time, he began to envision the creation of a large company which would manufacture not one but several makes of automobiles. After an abortive attempt to merge Buick with Ford, Maxwell-Briscoe, and Reo, Durant founded the General Motors Company on September 16, 1908. A holding company, it soon controlled not only Buick but Oldsmobile, Oakland (later Pontiac), Cadillac, and several lesser known automobile manufacturers and parts suppliers. With the exception of Cadillac which required a large cash outlay, most companies were acquired simply by an exchange of stock. Durant's "vision," says Pound, "was always running far ahead of his treasury," and by 1910 he faced a shortage of cash for operating expenses. This situation, combined with losses caused by unwise acquisitions like the friction-drive Cartercar and the Heany Lamp Company with its fraudulent patents, placed General Motors in severe financial straits.<sup>6</sup> As a result, Durant lost control of the company to a consortium of bankers.

Determined to regain control, Durant in 1911 became Louis Chevrolet's principal backer in the Chevrolet Motor Car Company. The Chevrolet proved so successful that Durant was able to regain control of General Motors again in 1916 by simply exchanging Chevrolet stock for that of General Motors at a very advantageous rate. According to Gustin, many "heralded the news of Chevrolet swallowing giant General Motors as one of the greatest achievements in the history of American finance," and "writers of the time likened the situation to Jonah swallowing the whale."<sup>7</sup>

Durant's return to General Motors was followed by another period of rapid expansion. In 1916, to insure a steady flow of automotive components, he organized United Motors, a holding company of parts suppliers which 2 years later became a division of the General Motors Corporation. This acquisition also brought in Alfred P. Sloan, Jr., and Charles F. Kettering, both of whom were to play significant roles in General Motors' future development. A year later, in 1919, Durant engineered the purchase of a controlling interest in Fisher Body, the world's largest producer of automobile bodies, set up the General Motors Acceptance Corporation for consumer financing, and purchased, for \$56,366.50, the company that eventually became Frigidaire.

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<sup>6</sup>Pound, The Turning Wheel, 86.

<sup>7</sup>Lawrence R. Gustin, Billy Durant, Creator of General Motors (Grand Rapids, 1973), 176, 181.



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Despite his accomplishments, Durant came under increasing criticism. His acquisition of the Samson Tractor Company proved unprofitable and eventually cost General Motors nearly \$33 million. Of even greater concern was Durant's apparent inability to delegate authority and his sloppy administrative methods. Finally, late in 1920, Durant, under pressure from the DuPont interests which had helped finance his comeback, relinquished control of the company. His departure, says Chandler, "resulted less from financial mismanagement within the corporation than from his own personal financial difficulties" caused by an effort to maintain the price of General Motors stock.<sup>8</sup>

Six weeks after his ouster, Durant started a new company, Durant Motors, Inc., apparently hoping to use it as a tool to regain control of General Motors. His first stock issues were quickly subscribed, and within a year he had more stockholders than any other corporation with the exception of American Telephone and Telegraph. For a time, Durant Motors stock sold for a higher price than that of General Motors, and Durant started a stock exchange program similar to the one that had enabled him to make his comeback in 1916. As General Motors recovered from the effects of the 1920-21 depression, this plan had to be quickly scrapped. Although some Durant Motors cars like the Durant, the Flint, and the Star sold fairly well, others like the Locomobile did not and drained off the corporation's assets. By the mid-1920's Durant had become absorbed in stock speculation and went on to make and then lose a fortune in the market.

In 1933 Durant Motors was liquidated, and 3 years later, Durant declared personal bankruptcy. Shortly afterwards, he opened a supermarket in Asbury Park, N.J., and soon he began to talk of establishing his own chain. In 1940 he returned to Flint to establish what he planned as the first in a chain of family-oriented bowling alleys. In 1942, however, he suffered a stroke that left him almost an invalid. On March 18, 1947, he died in New York City at the age of 85.

<sup>8</sup> Alfred D. Chandler, Jr., (ed.), Giant Enterprises: Ford, General Motors and the Automobile Industry (New York, 1964), 72.

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\_\_\_\_\_, "The Fabulous Billy Durant," Business History Review, XXXIII (Autumn, 1958), 255-71.

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