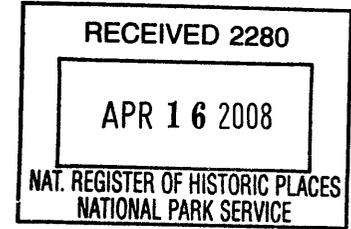


460

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Turner-Todd Motor Company
other names/site number Buick Building

2. Location

street & number 455 St. Louis Street not for publication N/A
city or town Mobile vicinity N/A
state Alabama code AL county Mobile code 097 zip code 36602

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

JRW. White 4/16/08

Signature of certifying official/Title _____ Date _____

Alabama Historical Commission (State Historic Preservation Office)
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other (explain): _____

Edson H. Beall 5.29.08

for
Signature of Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

5. Classification

| Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply) | Category of Property (Check only one box) | Number of Resources within Property | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------|
| | | Contributing | Noncontributing |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> buildings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-local | <input type="checkbox"/> district | _____ | _____ sites |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-State | <input type="checkbox"/> site | _____ | _____ structures |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal | <input type="checkbox"/> structure | _____ | _____ objects |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> object | <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> Total |

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register:
N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Commerce Sub: specialty store

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: vacant/not in use Sub: _____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Early 20th Century American Movement: Commercial Style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: concrete

roof: tar and gravel

walls: brick veneer

other: _____

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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.)

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

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture _____

Period of Significance 1926 _____

Significant Dates 1926; 1940 _____

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A _____

Cultural Affiliation N/A _____

Architect/Builder N/A _____

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Mobile Historic Development Commission

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.5 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

| | Zone | Easting | Northing | Zone | Easting | Northing |
|---|-----------|---------------|----------------|------|---------|----------|
| 1 | <u>16</u> | <u>399580</u> | <u>3395760</u> | 4 | _____ | _____ |
| 2 | _____ | _____ | _____ | 5 | _____ | _____ |
| 3 | _____ | _____ | _____ | 6 | _____ | _____ |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Shaun Wilson/ Preservation Consultant

organization Mobile Historic Development Commission date 6/28/06

street & number P.O. Box 1827 telephone 251-208-7281

city or town Mobile state AL zip code 36633-1827

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps**

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Tilmon Brown

street & number 13 North Dearborn Street telephone 251-432-7577

city or town Mobile state AL zip code 36602

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 1 name of property Turner-Todd Motor Company
county and State Mobile County, AL

Narrative Description

Located at 455 St. Louis Street, the Turner-Todd Motor Company building is sited on the south side of St. Louis Street in the block between its intersection with N. Hamilton Street to the east and N. Lawrence Street to the west. Formerly a dealership for Buick automobiles, the building occupies the entire northern portion of the block, while the remainder of the block, behind the building, is empty. A chain link fence surrounds this rear portion of the property, which fronts St. Michael Street. The main building is a two-story 20th century commercial style building. It is structural tile with brick veneer and rests on a concrete foundation. The roof framing is timber, which is then covered by a built-up roof of tar and felt with gravel on top. The main two-story portion of the building was constructed in 1926. A 1-½ -story addition was added to the east end of the building in 1940, as is announced by its own cornerstone. The east addition's materials are similar to the main building with the exception of a standing seam metal roof. Another addition was added to the rear of the building sometime after 1955, as it does not appear in that year's edition of the Sanborn Company Fire Insurance Map for the area. The rear addition is comprised of concrete blocks on slab with a flat metal roof.

The north facade features a parapet wall articulated by a pair of decorative segmental arches set atop the east and west ends of the parapet. Pre-cast concrete sign panels are centered in both of these curvilinear details and, in raised relief, contain the name "Buick" in cursive script. Four finial balls are located along the roofline between the two segmental arches. Another rectangular sign panel is inset into the brick parapet wall below the finials on the St. Louis Street facade and bears the name of the automobile dealership, "Turner-Todd Motor Company". Seven sets of large, multi-paned metal windows are present along the second story. The first story windows are currently covered with plywood with the exception of a large multi-paned metal window next to a rolled metal door. The covered window is a display window of plate glass. The north facade of the east addition also features three large plate glass windows that have been covered in plywood. With the inclusion of the east addition, canted corner entrances are located on both ends of the St. Louis Street facade. The corner entrance on the western end of the facade (at the N. Lawrence Street intersection) is deeply inset, allowing a drive-through porte-cochere, while the one on the east (at the N. Hamilton Street corner) is a common, glass double-door entrance.

The west elevation, facing N. Lawrence Street, is similar to the north facade in its decorative treatment. Another pair of curvilinear parapets on either end proudly bears the name "Buick" in cursive script, while two finial balls are located along the main horizontal parapet wall between the two curvilinear parapets. Five sets of large multi-paned metal industrial windows are located along the second story, while the four first floor plate glass windows are covered with plywood. A wood paneled garage door with windows is located midway along the elevation. Another rolled metal door is present near the south end of the elevation.

The south elevation, facing St. Michael Street, features a variety of window treatments. On the second story, three sets of large, multi-paned metal windows are combined with four smaller metal windows, all

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 2 name of property Turner-Todd Motor Company
county and State Mobile County, AL

multi-paned. The rear addition features a large car entrance, while two windows on the first floor of the east addition have been infilled with brick.

The east elevation, facing N. Hamilton Street, features four sets of large, multi-paned metal windows on the second story of the main building, while two multi-paned metal windows are located midway along the first floor of the east addition. Three window openings near the north end of the elevation have been infilled with brick, while another plate glass window is covered with plywood. A car entrance, now fitted with double metal doors, is located near the south end of the east elevation.

The interior of the main portion of the building originally had an open arrangement for the display of automobiles. The showroom was located near the entrance on the west end, while offices were located to the rear. This was altered with the closing of the dealership in 1943. The building was subsequently used by an auto parts dealer and a large service counter was added. Partitions of particleboard on wood framing further divide the interior. Set on the original concrete floor, these alterations could easily be removed without damage to historic materials. Evidence of plaster is still present on the interior walls of the showroom. The interior walls near the east end of the main building, which was used as a service center, are bare structural tile. The ceiling is now wood paneled. However, visual evidence suggests that this was added later. A distinguishing feature of the first floor is the concrete ramp located at the rear. Entering from the rolled metal door on the south end of the west elevation, cars were driven up the ramp and stored on the second floor. For convenience of foot traffic, a staircase also leads to the second floor. This floor rests on heavy timbers, approximately 6" thick. The walls are brick. The ceiling features exposed wood framing supporting the roof.

The interior arrangement of the east addition has also been altered with partitions of particleboard on wood framing. An office is located on a half-floor. The primary floors are concrete. The walls are bare structural tile. The ceiling has been altered with the addition of particleboard. This non-historic alteration could easily be removed without damage to the underlying historic materials.

The Turner-Todd Motor Company building retains its integrity of location, materials, design and workmanship. The 1-½ -story addition is historic, while the post-1955 addition is located at the rear of the building. The interior alterations, i.e. particleboard partitions and wood paneling, only cover the historic materials, which remain intact.

Archaeological Component

Although no formal archaeological survey has been made of this area, the potential for subsurface remains is good. Buried portions may contain significant information that may be useful in interpreting the entire area.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 3

name of property Turner-Todd Motor Company
county and State Mobile County, AL

Statement of Significance

The Turner-Todd Motor Company is eligible for listing to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C, in the area of architecture. The early 20th century Commercial Style building is located at 455 St. Louis Street, which is known as “Automobile Alley” by longtime Mobile residents. The building is a significant local example of early 20th century Commercial Style architecture that is characterized by flat-faced facades with little projecting ornament. First floor storefronts feature large display windows, while upper floor windows are often paired. Deeply recessed entryways are a common feature, and parapets often hide flat roofs. The interiors feature open floor arrangements for the display of merchandise on the first floor. Additional floors were often used for storage. This particular building exhibits all of these design traits.

The Turner-Todd Motor Company is also significant as an example of a prevalent architectural style that was adapted to serve the needs of the then relatively new but fast growing automobile industry. Additional exterior features included large openings for vehicular access into showrooms or service centers. Large elevators were often located to the rear of the building to move automobiles to additional floors for storage. At this dealership, this function was instead provided by a concrete ramp.

Historical Summary

Although some sources suggest that the French inventor, Nicholas – Joseph Cugnot developed the first steam powered self-propelled automobile in 1769 (“Automobile”, 21 November 2005), credit for the invention of the automobile is given to three German inventors. Working independently of each other, Karl Benz, Gottlieb Daimler, and Wilhelm Maybach each developed their own automobile in 1886 (Ibid, 21 November 2005). However, it would take nearly 20 years before the automobile began its ascendancy as the preferred mode of travel. Afterwards, its impact on society and architecture was equally pronounced.

The first documented sale of a car in the United States occurred on March 24, 1898. It cost \$1,000, a large sum of money at the time (Genat 2004, 6). Because of its steep price, the automobile was relegated to the status of a luxury item. Not until the end of the first decade of the 20th century did the price drop enough to allow the average American to afford a car. This was due in a large part to the enterprising efforts of Henry Ford.

Henry Ford founded the Ford Motor Company on June 16, 1903. Although Oldsmobile began production earlier, in 1902, Ford’s innovative use of the assembly line helped to reduce the price of his Model T to \$400. As a result, the Model T became a best seller. In 1908, 250,000 Model T’s were produced, earning Ford an estimated \$27 million dollars. Other manufacturers built on Henry Ford’s

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 4 name of property Turner-Todd Motor Company
county and State Mobile County, AL

success. By 1929 there were more than 4.5 million automobiles on America's rapidly expanding roadways (Ibid 2004, 8).

The impact of the new automobile industry on the urban environment was astonishing. This impact is depicted along St. Louis Street in Mobile. According to the 1904 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map for Mobile, St. Louis Street was primarily an unpaved residential street with only a few shops located along its length. Only one car dealership is listed on a later addition. However, the 1925 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map reveals several car dealerships on the newly paved street. City Directories also confirm that the residential character of the street had been supplanted by the new industry. Now primarily commercial, the street became known to generations of Mobilians as "Automobile Alley". One of the dealerships was the Turner – Todd Motor Company, which sold Buicks. The building was constructed in 1926 and located at 455 St. Louis Street.

The Great Depression resulted in plummeting new car sales, but an upswing in the used car market. But, the end of the Depression revived demand for new cars, which were now designed utilizing Art Deco influenced styling (Genat 2004, 10). Nineteen forty-two saw another cessation of production because of World War II, but the post-war environment saw another boom. By 1950, an estimated 39.6 million passenger cars were on the road (Ibid 2004, 11).

The success of the automobile lay not only in its practicality and affordability but also in the ability of the salesman to sell the product. The car industry decided at an early date to use a retail system centered on the independent business dealer. The first dealership was established in 1896 and belonged to William Metzger of Detroit. Dealerships operated on an early franchise model. Manufacturers would insist that local dealers utilize proper signage, have an on – premises service center, and operate within a given territory (Ibid 2004, 17-18).

The location and building, itself, were also a key factor for the success of new dealerships. Although early dealerships relied on existing architectural designs, it did not take long for dealers to alter the designs to suit their purposes. The building for the Turner – Todd Motor Company, or Buick Building as it became known because of the cars sold there, is a 20th century commercial style building. Purposely built to suit the needs of the new automobile industry, the building design was modified to include a large open interior space with a highly visible storefront to show – off the new models. Offices were located near the front of the building. Large openings were added to the design to allow for vehicular access to the on-premises service center. It was also not unusual to use the second floor of two story buildings for automobile storage, which was done at 455 St. Louis Street. Although some dealerships used large elevators, the Turner-Todd Motor Company relied on a concrete ramp, which is original to the building.

The distance between a dealership and the local rail yard was an important factor. At that time, new automobiles were shipped by rail and final assembly was undertaken by hand at the yard (Ibid 2004, 20). Being located on St. Louis Street meant that the Turner-Todd Motor Company was only about 2 miles

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 8 Page 5 name of property Turner-Todd Motor Company
county and State Mobile County, AL

away from the local rail yard. The newly assembled cars were driven back to the building by the mechanics and stored on the second floor.

With the post – war boom in new car sales, attention to sales became more focused. In 1946, General Motors, which was founded in 1908 as a holding company for Buick and controlled by William C. Durant (“General Motors”, 6 October 2005), produced a book entitled, Planning Automobile Dealerships. The book provided dealerships with detailed architectural plans, which integrated suggestions culled from dealer input from across the United States. The new car dealership required a well-organized storefront to allow for the best possible display of product and allow for advertising (Genat 2004, 44). This was the beginning of the modern auto mall. The older buildings were soon abandoned as dealers became convinced a cramped, outdated showroom had a negative impact on the customer and, accordingly, on sales (Ibid 2004, 55).

The Turner – Todd Motor Company, which had changed its name to the Turner Motor Company in 1932, closed its doors in 1943, but, though now obsolete as a showroom, the building still remained involved in the automobile industry by housing various auto parts stores from 1944 to 2002. The last company to occupy the building was CarQuest Auto Parts. Although currently vacant, the building may be rehabilitated. As an early example of a purpose built auto dealership, the Turner-Todd Motor Company building is a significant local example of a prevailing architectural style adapted to the purpose of the automobile industry.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 9 Page 6 name of property Turner-Todd Motor Company
county and State Mobile County, AL

Major Bibliographical References

“Automobile”; available from www.wikipedia.org; Internet; accessed 21 November 2005.

[City Directories 1921-2005](#), Municipal Archive. Mobile, Alabama.

Genat, Robert. [The American Car Dealership](#). St. Paul, Minnesota: Motorbooks International, 2004.

“General Motors”; available from www.wikipedia.org; Internet; accessed 6 October 2005.

[Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Mobile, Alabama, 1904, 1925 and 1955](#), Municipal Archives. Mobile, Alabama.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 10 Page 7 name of property Turner-Todd Motor Company
county and State Mobile County, AL

Verbal Boundary Description

Commencing at a point on the west side of N. Hamilton Street 55 feet from the northwest corner of N. Hamilton and St. Michael streets, which is the point where the boundary line of property conveyed in Deed Book 404 page 82 intersects the west line of N. Hamilton Street. From this point of beginning, run north along west side of N. Hamilton Street to St. Louis Street, thence run westerly along south side of St. Louis Street to the southeast corner of St. Louis and N. Lawrence Streets, thence southerly along east side of N. Lawrence Street to a point 67 feet northerly from the northeast corner of N. Lawrence and St. Michael Street, thence easterly and parallel with St. Michael Street a distance of 29.3 feet, thence southerly to a point on the north side of St. Michael Street that is 29.3 feet from the corner of St. Michael and N. Lawrence Streets, thence easterly along the north line of St. Michael Street 81.9 feet to the west line of property conveyed, thence northerly along west boundary line of said property 55 feet, thence easterly along north boundary line of said property line to the point of beginning. Section 40 Township 4 South Range 1 West.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel, which has been historically associated with the Turner-Todd Motor Company building since its construction in 1926.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section (photos) Page 8 name of property Turner-Todd Motor Company
county and State Mobile County, AL

Photographic Key

Turner-Todd Motor Company
Mobile, Mobile County, Alabama
Shaun Wilson, photographer
July 2005
MHDC Negative File – BB Roll 1

| Photo # | Description (Roll/ Frame #) |
|---------|--|
| 1 | Buick Building, exterior, camera facing southwest (BB 1/1) |
| 2 | “ “ “, camera facing northwest (BB 1/2) |
| 3 | “ “ “, camera facing southeast (BB 1/5) |
| 4 | “ “ “, camera facing northeast (BB 1/6) |
| 5 | “ “ “, camera facing north northeast (BB 1/7) |
| 6 | “ “ “, camera facing south southeast (BB 1/8) |
| 7 | “ “, interior, camera facing south (BB 1/10) |
| 8 | “ “ “, camera facing southwest (BB 1/11) |
| 9 | “ “ “, camera facing east (BB 1/13) |
| 10 | “ “ “, camera facing south southeast (BB 1/15) |
| 11 | “ “ “, camera facing southwest (BB 1/17) |
| 12 | “ “ “, camera facing northwest (BB 1/20) |
| 13 | “ “ “, camera facing east (BB 1/21) |
| 14 | “ “ “, camera facing southeast (BB 1/22) |
| 15 | “ “ “, camera facing west (BB 1/23) |
| 16 | “ “ “, camera facing southwest (BB 1/24) |