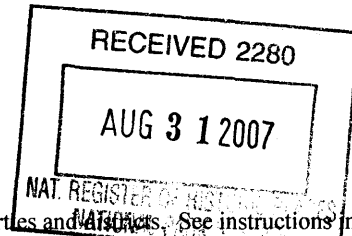


1085

**United States Department of Interior
National Park Service**

**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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Union Auto Company
other names/site number

2. Location

street & number	505 South Barstow Street	N/A	not for publication
city or town	Eau Claire	N/A	vicinity
state Wisconsin	code WI	county Eau Claire	code 035
			zip code 54701

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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date 8/29/07

State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin

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 official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Union Auto Company

Eau Claire

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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.

See continuation sheet.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

Edson N. Beall

10.11.07

for

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as
as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- structure
- site
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources
in the count)

contributing	noncontributing
1	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	0 total

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources
is previously listed in the National Register**

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)
COMMERCE/TRADE: specialty store

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)
COMMERCE/TRADE: restaurant
DOMESTIC: multiple dwelling
RELIGION: religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)
LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN
MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)
Foundation CONCRETE
walls BRICK
roof ASPHALT
other STONE

Narrative Description

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

Union Auto Company
Name of Property

Eau Claire
County and State

Wisconsin

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the 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:

- 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

1917-1956

Significant Dates

1917

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

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.)

Union Auto Company
Name of Property

Eau Claire
County and State

Wisconsin

9. Major Bibliographic References

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

Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

- 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:

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than one acre

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

1 15 618810 4962650
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

See Continuation Sheet

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	Joanne Raetz Stuttgen and Eric J. Wheeler/ Consultants for:	date	July 2006
organization	City of Eau Claire – Landmarks Commission	telephone	715-839-4914
street & number	203 South Farwell Street	zip code	54701
city or town	Eau Claire	state	WI

Union Auto Company
Name of Property

Eau Claire
County and State

Wisconsin

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 SHPO or FPO.)

name/title	John S. Mogensen; Stuart and Marilyn Hagen	date	July 2006
organization		telephone	715-832-0022
street&number	301 Water Street	zip code	54703
city or town	Eau Claire	state	WI

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 7 Page 1

Union Auto Company
Eau Claire, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

DESCRIPTION

The Union Auto Company building (1917) is located on the southeast corner of South Barstow and Gray Street, five blocks south of the Confluence Commercial Historic District (concurrent NRHP nomination) in downtown Eau Claire. This two-story, brick building is associated with the early sales and service of the automobile in Eau Claire. It was the second building in downtown Eau Claire designed specifically for automobile sales and repair; it continued to be used for automobile related businesses for the next 60 years. The core structural elements of the building are made of reinforced concrete, a technology that was just beginning to be widely used at the time the Union Auto Company was organized. 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 or to the second floor for service and storage. This is a design feature that is no longer used, but is of historical significance for the Union Auto Company building.

The original use for which the building was designed is still reflected in the exterior, and to a lesser degree in the interior, of the Union Auto Company building. The architectural adage, "form follows function" certainly applies to this building. The nearly cubic form with a maximum open space on all three floors facilitated the use of this building for automobile sales and service. Even more noticeable on the exterior is the fenestration on both the ground and second floor that provide an abundance of natural light to the interior of the building. The floor to ceiling plate glass windows on the northwest corner of the building extending along the length of the west wall are hallmarks of early 20th century automobile dealerships. Even the casual observer of the urban landscape will notice large window openings, sometimes filled in, on large single story brick buildings as an indicator of previous use in the automobile industry. The Union Auto Company building retains a high level historic integrity in that, despite over 25 years of use for other than auto purposes, the original window openings on the ground floor are intact. This is true of the upper level as well. The multiplicity and proximity of the second story windows seem consistent with the historic use for automobile service and storage. As historically distinctive for its original use, this building is less clearly identifiable with a particular architectural style. The Union Auto Company building is associated with the early 20th century commercial movements in that it features simple geometric ornament of light-colored cut limestone contrasting with the dark brick façade. The building has close association with the early development of the automobile industry in Eau Claire and is a well-preserved example of early 20th Century Commercial architecture.

Site

The Union Auto Company building is situated on the south end of the Eau Claire downtown commercial zone which extends six blocks from the Eau Claire River on the north to Lake Street on the south and four blocks from the Chippewa River on the west to Farwell Street on the east. South Barstow Street runs north/south the length of this area and Main Street runs east/west through the center of the historic downtown area. The Union Auto Company building faces South Barstow Street on the west and Gray Street on the north and is therefore a prominent feature in the downtown architectural landscape.

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Section 7 Page 2

Union Auto Company
Eau Claire, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

A concrete city sidewalk runs the length of the west façade and continues along the length of the north façade. A 10-foot alley runs along the rear of the building on the east side and provides a narrow buffer between the Union Auto Company building and the former church building across the alley to the north. The south side of the building is adjacent to a two-story masonry building of later construction. Directly across the street from the Union Auto Company building is a large Classical Revival building that currently serves as the federal district courthouse.

Exterior

The Union Auto Company building is a two-story, dark brown brick commercial building with a cubic mass, minimal limestone highlights and a uniformity of size and placement of windows typical of commercial buildings in the early decades of the 20th century. The main façade faces South Barstow Street to the west and is divided into six bays defined on the street level by a series of columns with simple, flat cut limestone base and capitals. The symmetry of the six bays continues up through the second story to the cornice and parapet by window placement, and simplified geometric ornament appearing as square or prism-shaped forms of cut limestone.

The verticality of the bays on the west facade is complemented by the horizontality of three decorative limestone stringcourses of differing width and depth that extend across the full length of the façade. One stringcourse runs about two feet above the column capitals and defines the top of the first story. A parallel row of stringcourses runs atop the second story row of windows and several feet below the capped parapet. Set between this paired row are smooth-cut limestone squares that match the bay divisions. Six identical sets of three double-hung windows divided by ornamental limestone prisms present a regularity and simplicity to the second story façade. Although the three windows in each set are the same size, shape and scale, there is a suggestion of the Chicago-style window design seen in many commercial buildings of this era. The façade projects above the window line in a slightly raised capped parapet. The visual symmetry of the six bays is continued along the parapet with a row of square drops that match the bay divisions. A diamond shaped limestone inset placed in the middle of this row provides a decorative marker in the center of the upper façade.

Five of the bays at street level have full width and height plate glass windows in three vertical sections. The upper one-quarter of the window openings is separated by a horizontal divider creating a transom across the top of each window. The main entry is in the third bay from the northwest corner and leads into a vestibule that provides entry to the restaurant. The fourth bay, counting from left to right, is a garage door opening that has been partially covered up with wood paneling but still operates as an entry to the parking garage in the basement. The two bays on the south end have plate glass windows divided in a manner similar to those to the north. Canvas canopies shade the three north bays and are of a material and design that complements the historic appearance of the façade.

The north façade facing Gray Street has eight bays but is otherwise very similar to the west façade in overall

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Union Auto Company
Eau Claire, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

appearance. There are, however, some minor differences mostly due to the roughly extra 20 feet length of the west facade. The most obvious difference is the number of windows per bay. The two first bays on the east and west have sets of three double-hung windows identical to the west facade. However, the middle four bays have a pair of double-set windows in the bays next to the triple-set and the middle two bays have either two individual matching windows or a matched window and fire-escape door. The metal fire escape on this facade slopes down to the east at the third bay from the northeast corner. The spacing of this slightly different number and matching of windows is continued and highlighted by the decorative cut limestone squares, diamonds and raised prisms. The capped parapet is flat on the north facade. This horizontal projecting parapet is interrupted by two elevated segments approximately 8 feet wide over the third bay in from each corner. These slightly projecting parapet steps are accented by diamond-shaped limestone insets below. The three belt courses described on the west facade are carried through across this north-facing surface as well.

The street level of the north facade has seen more alterations than the west facade. Two of the central bays have been enclosed to provide a handicapped access and north entryway into the restaurant. A garage door and utility door to an office are located on the northeast corner of the building.

The rear or east facade is covered with lesser quality brick and displays little sign of ornamentation. The first and second story each has a row of six pairs of matched double hung windows symmetrically positioned across the length of the wall. The upper floor windows are 1/1 and the lower floor windows are 6/1 and all appear to be original. The window openings are slightly taller on the second floor. Both rows of windows have flush segmental arched lintels. A standard utility entry door is located in the southeast corner. The facade of the east wall is flush with the roofline. The corner of the projecting parapet wall on the north facade is evident from this perspective. A chimney on the southeast corner extends above the roofline approximately 8 feet. The steel truss supported flat roof is has a standard built-up surface.

Interior

The main Barstow Street entry provides access into what is now a deli-style casual restaurant. The main dining area is about 50 feet square and has seating for about 100 customers at tables and booths. The floor is a multi-colored polished and patterned terrazzo tile that would have been the showroom finish for the original use as a car dealership. The wall finish is painted drywall and dates from the early 1980s conversion to a restaurant. Four massive, concrete support pillars approximately 24" in diameter are positioned every 20 feet and are painted green to match the current décor and add to the period feel of the interior. The ceiling is unfinished and the HVAC system ductwork is visible. Foam rubber acoustical tiles have been glued to the exposed concrete ceiling to absorb some of the ambient sound. Cloth drapes have also been hung along the interior of the upper level of the window sections and along the transom windows on the west and north. These drapes help with sound absorption and with heat gain and loss. Lighting is provided by suspended lamps and illuminated ceiling fans. There is a service counter and food preparation area on the east end of the dining room. Behind and to the north of the counter is a short hallway leading to an office on the right and bathrooms on the left. A kitchen area runs along the rear of the restaurant portion of the building.

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Union Auto Company

Eau Claire, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

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Continuing to the south of the restaurant entry is another entry that is a separate entry/vestibule with mailboxes and security doors leading to a stairway to the upstairs apartments. The garage door entry just to the right/south of this second entry is a garage opening that descends to the basement garage below. Continuing further to the south is another exterior recessed entrance that provides access to what was historically an office area and is now used by a tenant as a religious worship space. This area is about one-sixth of the total ground area and has a tile floor (different from that seen in the restaurant/showroom), exposed brick walls on the south side and drywall partitions and open ceiling.

The north 1/3 of the first floor ground area is unfinished storage area that was historically used as a shop/garage for the car dealership. This area has minimal area lighting and no wall or ceiling finish. This section in the rear of the building, along with a small office used formerly for a taxi business, is currently used for miscellaneous storage. In this spacious open room with concrete floor and 16 foot tall ceilings the details of the reinforced concrete floor above can be seen. The unique structural design of the first and second floors made the both floors available for automobile display and service. Automobiles were lifted to the second floor from an elevator system that was accessed by a ramp descending into the basement from the garage door entry on South Barstow Street.

The basement garage has 8-foot tall concrete block walls, concrete floor and the previously mentioned reinforced concrete ceiling. Rows of round concrete support piers with "lily-pad" capitals provide extra structural support for the basement ceiling. Lighting is provided by fluorescent panels attached to the ceiling. Although no longer operational, the metal elevator cage and motor at the bottom of the basement entry ramp are still visible. The basement parking garage is still in use for tenant parking. When the second floor was converted to apartments in 1977 a second stairway was installed on the southwest corner of the building. The stairway starts at the garage level and continues up to the main and upper floors. To build the stairway the nearly foot-thick concrete main floor had to be opened up in the southeast corner. This project revealed the structure of the nearly 12" thick concrete hollow panel steel reinforced floor. This structural cross-section is still visible.

The main stairway to the upper floor is located just behind the vestibule and leads to the middle of the second floor. The 16 second story apartments are arranged in a ring along the outside wall and in a cluster in the center with a hallway between providing access to both the inner and outer groupings of apartments. A small laundry area is located at the top of the stairs. In the laundry area one can see that the concrete floor of the upper story was covered over by a raised platform covering the entire second story floor. This wooden platform lowered the ceiling height in the apartments but allowed access for wiring and ductwork for the apartments. The heating system is currently electric space heat in the apartments upstairs and forced air in the larger areas on the first floor.

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Union Auto Company
Eau Claire, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

Integrity

The Union Auto Company exterior has high integrity as an example of early 20th Century Commercial architecture with specific design for the automobile industry. The other two examples of this style of auto-related architecture from the early 20th century are the Tanberg Auto Company (1909) building and the Kappus Building (1925). Both of these buildings have been greatly altered. The Union Auto Company has significance for its association with the developing automobile sales and service business in Eau Claire and its continuing role in the automobile trade for over 60 years.

The interior of the Union Auto Company has been successfully adapted for other uses starting in 1977 with the conversion of the upper story to apartments. The most visible of those new uses is the showroom/display, which is now a popular downtown restaurant. The sustainability of the historic downtown area depends on major projects like the Phoenix redevelopment seven blocks to the north. Equally important in the re-vitalization formula are adaptive re-use projects like the "Acoustic Café" business that opened in the Union Auto Company building in 1994.

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Union Auto Company
Eau Claire, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Built in 1917, the Union Auto Company, located at 505 S. Barstow Street, is eligible at the local level for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of commerce as the home of businesses that supplied Eau Claire's residents with a new consumer good – the automobile. It is the best preserved of three surviving examples of early buildings in the city specifically designed for auto dealerships. Both Tanberg Auto Company (1909), located just one building away at 513 S. Barstow St., and the Kappus Building (1925) two blocks away at the corner of Farwell and Main Street, have been extensively remodeled into professional office buildings.¹ The construction of the Union Auto Company coincided with the rise of the automobile as a popular means of transportation. The period of significance is 1917-1956. The period of significance begins in 1917 with the construction of the building and ends in 1956. This date corresponds with the end of the historic period; however, it also marks a change in the use of the building. This was the final year automobiles were sold at this location (see below).

The Union Auto Company was established in 1917 following the consolidation of two different dealerships. Principal partners were Chester D. Moon, president; W. F. Hon, vice president; O. L. Darwin, treasurer; and C. H. Dickson, secretary. The business offered automobiles, trucks and tractors for sale, later becoming agents for the Cadillac and Buick lines.² The building replaced a frame dwelling and a two and one-half story brick veneered building. The 1920 Eau Claire city directory lists the address as 501-507 S. Barstow St., with the Hohman-Nelson Company, manufacturers of pressure controlling devices, thermometers, and other related items as co-occupant.

By 1923, Arthur Podawiltz was general manager of Union Auto Company. In 1926, the owner was A. C. Erickson. That year, the building's other occupants included E. W. Holmes Auto Supplies (selling Buick parts and accessories and oil and gas), the Churchill Tire Company owned by Ralph Churchill, a dealer in Goodyear tires and service, and Arthur Podawiltz Autos.

The Union Auto Company appears on the 1931 Sanborn map for the first time. The building, with a total capacity of 175 cars, is depicted as being two stories in height with a full basement. A large showroom is located at the southeast corner of Barstow and Gray Street, with a garage occupying the remaining portion of the first floor. A huge business elevator is located in the center of the building. According to Eau Claire resident Fred Kappus, whose father owned the Studebaker dealership in the Kappus Building, this elevator was used to move cars from the basement storage area to the first floor display room and second floor repair shop. Cars entered the building from Barstow Street, as they still do today to access the underground parking garage.³ The elevator cage and mechanicals and the shaft to the second floor are extant.

¹ The Nagle-Hart Tractor and Equipment Company (c.1930), later A. E. Roger's auto dealership, at the southeast corner of Graham and Lake Street is a third related building. It was extensively remodeled into a restaurant in the late 1980s.

² Lois Barland, *The Rivers Flow On* (Stevens Point: Worzalla Publishing Co., 1965): 300.

³ Fred Kappus, telephone interview with Joanne Raetz Stuttgen, 27 January 2006.

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Union Auto Company
Eau Claire, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

While Churchill Tires remained in business, various car dealers came and went as tenants in the building until 1957, when the city directory reports the building as vacant. In 1958, a building permit for remodeling and altering the warehouse was issued to the Austin Company. The remodel may have been for the Montgomery Ward and Company auto accessories and service department, which was located here from 1959-1975.

The Union Auto Company Building became a mixed-use property in 1977, when the second floor was converted into 16 apartments by River Terrace Properties. In 1980, the first floor was converted into a bar and restaurant. Since 1995, the north unit has been occupied by the Acoustic Café. In 2006, the south unit is home to Restoration Church. Fifteen apartments are found on the second floor. The building is currently owned by John Mogensen.

Historical overview

The automobile was first introduced to Eau Claire in May 1901 when Dr. Ashum purchased a steam-powered touring car. The second automobile was owned by Dr. Lyman. By 1904, several other prominent men had their own cars. The first real accident occurred that same year, when Dr. Lyman's car crashed into a curb while turning the corner at N. Barstow and Madison Street. It went out of control and hit a delivery wagon, smashing both right wheels and splintering the dashboard. Consequently, a city speed limit of 10 miles per hour was established, with six miles per hour the limit on Barstow Street.⁴

Eau Claire residents were quick to embrace the automobile. By 1905, there were 13 cars in the city. In 1909 there were 49 cars in Eau Claire County, with 83 in 1910 and 93 in 1911.⁵ The first auto dealer in Eau Claire may well have been the W. H. Hobbs Supply Company, a contracting business in heating, plumbing, and tin and sheet metal work.⁶ In the 1910 city directory, it is listed along with Tanberg Auto Company, then located at 202-04 Gibson St., as the only auto dealers in the city. Tanberg Auto Company opened a Buick dealership at the corner of Gibson and River Street in 1907. Its Barstow Street building was built in 1911. By the beginning of 1913, it had sold 700-800 cars throughout northwestern Wisconsin. Officers that year included J. C. Tanberg as president and Arthur Podawiltz, who would later join the Union Auto Company, as vice president.⁷ The first auto show in the city was held in February 1913. The four-day show featured seven dealers, including Hobbs and Tanberg.⁸

By 1916, a year before the organization of the Union Auto Company and the construction of its Barstow Street showroom and garage, the city directory lists nine different automobile dealerships, more than double that reported in 1914. The number of auto dealers in Eau Claire increased steadily until reaching a high of 16 in 1929. Surprisingly, the Depression did not appear to have had a major impact on the number of men willing to

⁴ Lois Barland, *Sawdust City* (Stevens Point: Wozzalla Publishing Co., 1960): 117.

⁵ *The Rivers Flow On*: 201.

⁶ *The Rivers Flow On*: 293.

⁷ *The Rivers Flow On*: 300.

⁸ *The Rivers Flow On*: 201.

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Union Auto Company
Eau Claire, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

enter the business. In 1931, there were 14 dealers listed in the city directory. In 1933, there were 13. A high of 23 dealerships were in business in 1949, with a steady decline to only 11 by 1960. The Union Auto Company and its successors endured nearly as long, finally closing out the sale of automobiles in 1956. The service of automobiles and sale of parts and accessories continued until 1981 with the Montgomery Ward operations.

The Union Auto Company represents the emergence of a new type of business in the early twentieth century – the automobile dealership. The very earliest dealers and auto shops started out as other businesses, such as a blacksmith shop or farm implement store. The sale and service of automobiles was often a sideline to an earlier business. Unlike today's specialization in one make, the early dealers often represented various manufacturers. Eau Claire's local auto companies, including the Union Auto Company, acted as dealers or agents for a number of different manufacturers. For example, the Taylor Motor Car Company sold Ford, Reo, Hudson and Stevens-Duryea and the Tanberg Auto Company sold Buick, Cole, American, and Franklin autos. It is known that the Union Auto Company represented at least Buick and Cadillac. This trend began to change in the 1920s toward a more exclusive relationship between the dealer and the manufacturer, with the manufacturer having closer supervision of the dealer, the advertising, and even the appearance of the showroom.

The Union Auto Company building was constructed in the midst of a boom of automobile ownership. While there were 1492 cars registered in Wisconsin in 1905, by 1916 the number had jumped to 124,603. In 1945, 693,666 vehicles were registered in the state. The construction of the Union Auto Company coincided with greatly increased auto production. In 1916 nationwide auto production rose to 1.5 million, a nearly double increase from the 800,000 the year before.⁹

Auto companies, such as this example, helped supply the new consumer commodity at a time of increased supply and affordability. With the growth in automobile ownership, businesses that only sold or serviced vehicles became possible. The Union Auto Company building fulfilled the associated needs of automobile owners. In addition to automobile sales, the building housed businesses that provided accessories, such as tires, and servicing. Holmes Auto Supply, located in the building, sold oil and gas as well as parts and accessories. Further, the underground garage provided automobile storage.

The Union Auto Company building represents a building specifically designed for use for a new type of business - the automobile dealership- and to house associated automobile needs and servicing. In its design, the building reflects contemporary commercial architecture of the 1910s and 1920s. The brick facing, the banded windows, the simple parapet, and the minimal geometric embellishments and cornice are typical of commercial buildings of the period. Only the greater height and the large windows of the first floor denote its use as a showroom. Historic images of automobile showrooms across the country show that these windows were often treated similarly to display windows in large department stores with automobiles depicted in Christmas scenes or surrounded by mannequins dressed for parties or travel.

⁹ Art Spinella, et al., *America's Auto Dealer: The Master Merchandisers* (Van Nuys, CA: Freed-Crown Publishing Co., 1978), 31.

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Union Auto Company
Eau Claire, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

In its size and location the Union Auto Company building is typical of auto dealerships of its period. While many dealers occupied single story buildings, two story (or more) buildings often were found in larger communities. The upper stories housed inventory or storage, and, as in this example, were served by a large freight elevator. These businesses were also located downtown among other commercial buildings. This trend changed in the post World War II era, when dealers began to move outside of town to parcels with large lots able to handle the growing volume of car sales. At this time, the downtown commercial building type was replaced by large one-story buildings.

Conclusion

In 2006, to commemorate the historical significance of the Union Motor Company, the Eau Claire Landmarks Commission and John Mogensen, owner of the property, are seeking its listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The Union Auto Company building is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A in the area of commerce as a largely unaltered location of early, automobile associated businesses in Eau Claire. The Union Auto Company was constructed at a time of tremendous growth in automobile ownership and sales. As such, the building represents a new type of business in Wisconsin's communities.

Criteria Consideration A

A small portion of the building is currently used as a church. However, this use is not related to the significance of the building, nor was it part of the building during the period of significance.

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Union Auto Company
Eau Claire, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 1

Union Auto Company
Eau Claire, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the Union Auto Company building is defined by the lot lines of Lots 9 and 10 Block 14 Village (now City) of Eau Claire. The Union Auto Company Building sits entirely on this lot. This nearly square parcel has 105.5 feet of frontage on the west side facing South Barstow Street and equally on the alley bordering the east lot line. The north and south lot lines extend 125 feet from west to east, the north line bordered by Gray Street and south line bordered by the building adjacent to the south. The parcel size is estimated to be about .30 acre.

Boundary Justification

The boundaries encompass the immediate setting of the historic Union Auto Company building and correspond to the building's legal boundary.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Section photos Page 1

Union Auto Company
Eau Claire, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin

PHOTOGRAPH DESCRIPTIONS:

The following information pertains to all 10 photographs:

Union Auto Company
Eau Claire, Eau Claire County, Wisconsin
Photographer: Eric J. Wheeler, April 2006
Negatives in the collection of the Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin

Photograph 1 of 10
Street scene, looking east from Gray Street

Photograph 2 of 10
Street scene, looking north from South Barstow Street

Photograph 3 of 10
Street scene, looking south from South Barstow Street

Photograph 4 of 10
West facade, looking east

Photograph 5 of 10
North facade, looking southeast

Photograph 6 of 10
North façade detail, looking south

Photograph 7 of 10
Street scene, looking south from South Farwell Street

Photograph 8 of 10
East façade, looking southwest

Photograph 9 of 10
Interior of restaurant, looking southwest

Photograph 10 of 10
Interior of basement parking garage, looking northwest