

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

7322

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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



1. Name of Property

Historic name: Buick Motor Company Building

Other names/site number: _____

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

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

2. Location

Street & number: 2917-2937 N. 16th Street

City or town: Philadelphia State: PA County: Philadelphia

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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


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

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

national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A B C D

	<u>3/5/2018</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission – State Historic Preservation Office</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date

Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that this property is:
- entered in the National Register
 - determined eligible for the National Register
 - determined not eligible for the National Register
 - removed from the National Register
 - other (explain:)

Patrick Andrews
Signature of the Keeper

4/26/2018
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION – Manufacturing Facility

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION - Warehouse

Current Functions

VACANT/NOT IN USE

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7. Description

Architectural Classification: Commercial Style

Materials:

Principal exterior materials of the property: **Concrete, Brick**

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Buick Motor Company Building is located on the east side of North 16th Street just south of Indiana Avenue in North Philadelphia. The site, which consists of about six-tenths of an acre, is urban in character and surrounded by several rail lines, industrial buildings, and vacant properties to the east, south, and west and by residential blocks of small rowhouses to the north. The six-story, reinforced concrete building, which has served as manufacturing and warehouse space for much of its history, was built in 1925. For the past several decades, however, the building has been vacant. Of the seven aspects of integrity, the Buick Motor Company Building retains Location, Design, Setting, Materials, Feeling, and Association.

Narrative Description

On the west elevation (facing 16th Street), the building is eleven bays wide (see photo #1). Framed by the building's expressed concrete structure, all bays except the two southernmost bays – and the third bay from the south on the first floor, which has two loading dock openings – contain brick spandrels and multi-light steel industrial windows with operable awning sash. The windows at the basement level have been largely covered by plywood. On the first through fifth floors, although the original steel window units remain largely intact, they are deteriorated and the glazing is missing in many locations. In a small number of bays, the windows are heavily damaged or missing entirely. In the two southernmost bays, there is a single-leaf hollow metal door and a larger metal freight elevator door at the basement level. There is an additional single-leaf hollow metal door in the northernmost bay. On the second through sixth floors, the southernmost bays contain fire balconies and blank brick walls, respectively. At the north end of the west elevation, there is a one-bay wide, two-story reinforced concrete stair tower with brick infill and glass block windows. This small addition was built in the 1940s.

The east elevation faces the railroad tracks (see photos #3-5) and is also eleven bays wide. However, after the first four bays at the south end, which are parallel to the west elevation, the façade jogs one bay toward the west, continues north for another two bays, then continues for another four bays at approximately thirty degrees toward the northwest. The east elevation is otherwise treated similarly to the west elevation with an expressed concrete structure with brick spandrel panels and multi-light steel industrial windows in nearly all of the bays.

The north elevation is irregular in plan (see photo #2). The easternmost bay is formed where the east elevation jogs in toward the west. The angled portion of the east elevation is then partially visible from the north before reaching the north elevation's two westernmost bays, which, like the easternmost bay, are perpendicular to the east and west elevations. At ground-level there is an opening in the second bay from

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the west, which once provided rail access into the building from an adjacent siding. The westernmost bay contains a two-story concrete and brick addition with glass block windows (described above) while the remainder of the bay is faced in white brick. This bay also contains fire balcony openings above the two-story addition. Nearly all of the bays are treated similarly to the east and west elevations with an expressed concrete frame and brick spandrel panels and multi-light steel industrial windows. The only exceptions are the two westernmost bays, where the white brick and polychrome terra cotta frieze details at the sixth floor that once faced the entirety of the east elevation (see figures 13 & 14) remain partially intact (see photo #2).

On the south elevation, only the easternmost bay is visible. This bay is treated similarly to the other elevations. The remainder of the south elevation abuts the adjacent International Harvester Building, which is of matching height.

Interior

On the interior, the building is largely open plan on every floor with regularly spaced concrete mushroom columns in square modules measuring approximately 22' by 22'. The columns become gradually more slender on each successive floor (compare photo #6, which shows a column on the first floor, with photo #17, which shows a column on the sixth floor). The finishes are generally the same throughout the building with concrete floors, painted concrete columns at the perimeter walls with brick spandrel panels between, and painted concrete slab ceilings. On the first floor, the ceilings are approximately 14' tall and on all other floors they are 12'. There is extensive graffiti throughout the interior of the building on the columns and the perimeter walls. There are two concrete U-return stairs, one at the southwest corner of the building and one in the corner on the east elevation where the building angles in toward the northwest. There are also freight elevators located next to each of these stairs. An additional stair is located in the small two-story addition on the north elevation.

Integrity

The Buick Motor Company Building retains integrity. Although the equipment, furnishings and people have long since departed, the aspects of feeling and association are retained in the intact finishes and voluminous interior spaces. These features and characteristics effectively relay the sense of place and the notable industrial history of the once prominent national automobile brands that once occupied this building.

In equal measure, the aspects of design and materials are retained in the distinct industrial form of the building. The building is typical of industrial architecture of the period in its reinforced concrete construction, brick spandrel panels and consistent fenestration pattern, which includes multi-light steel industrial sash windows. Despite the fact that much of the original white brick and polychrome terra cotta treatment on the east elevation is missing, the industrial character of the building is still effectively conveyed through the large, regularly spaced window openings and visible reinforced concrete construction. Additionally, the overall form and massing of the building remains intact.

Lastly, the aspects of setting and location is retained in the surrounding neighborhood's largely intact industrial and residential fabric, not to mention the mid-nineteenth century rail lines – once critical to the building's operation as a manufacturing space – that remain in their original locations and are still used today. The Buick Motor Company Building stands on its original site in an area that retains the general character of a mixed-use neighborhood of industrial, commercial and transportation-related buildings interspersed with blocks of small, two-story brick rowhouses.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- 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

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

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Areas of Significance

INDUSTRY

Period of Significance

1925-1936

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

LeRoy Berman Rothschild, Architect

J.S. Rogers, Builder

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Buick Motor Company Building was built in 1925 as a company-owned branch, which managed all aspects of Buick business – sales, service, distribution and training – in Philadelphia and the surrounding metropolitan area. Located just two blocks west of North Broad Street, which after the turn of the century became known as “Automobile Row” for its dense concentration of automobile-related businesses, the building represents the evolution of Philadelphia’s automobile industry after 1920 when car makers sought ever larger spaces and for the first time began to build away from North Broad Street. The building also symbolizes Buick’s tremendous growth during the 1920s, when it was the third largest auto manufacturer in the country, selling upwards of 200,000 cars per year. Buick remained in the building until 1932, when the company began to suffer from a saturated market and downsized its physical presence in Philadelphia and other cities. However, the building was quickly taken over by the Nash Motors Company, which until 1936 used the building in much the same way as Buick had. For its prominent position in Philadelphia’s automobile industry and its role as the primary regional distribution center for two major national auto brands, the building is significant under Criterion A, Industry. The period of significance begins in 1925, when the building was completed, and ends in 1936, when Nash vacated the building and it ceased to be used for automobile-related purposes.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Early History of Philadelphia’s Auto Industry

On North Broad Street in Philadelphia, the exponentially growing demand for cars after the turn of the century resulted in the construction of dozens if not hundreds of showrooms, assembly plants, and parts stores of every kind between 1900 and 1930. Quickly earning the moniker “Automobile Row,” North

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Broad Street was a natural location for car makers and sellers. For one, the wide avenue lay between the booming central business district of Center City and the then-prosperous residential quarters of North Philadelphia. It was also the main thoroughfare connecting the downtown to affluent suburbs north and northwest of the city, including Elkins Park and Jenkintown. As such, North Broad Street was easily accessible to a wide swath of both the urban and suburban population.¹

As early as 1905, there were over a dozen automobile related businesses on North Broad Street, most of which were located within a few blocks of City Hall. As in other cities, small local firms, which purchased parts from outside suppliers and assembled their own cars in rented garages, were the pioneers. But as the industry grew, national car makers like Cadillac, Buick and Oldsmobile began to open their own showrooms and assembly plants. Local sales agencies, often dealing on behalf of the national brands, also prospered on North Broad Street. As the number of establishments increased, they expanded increasingly northward. By 1910, according to several state and local business directories, there were approximately eighty-five such operations located on North Broad, and by 1915 over 100.²

Buick was an early participant in Philadelphia's Automobile Row. Founded in 1899 as the Buick Auto-Vim and Power Company and formally incorporated as the Buick Motor Company in 1903, Buick opened its first company-owned Philadelphia branch at 235-237 North Broad Street in 1908. Within this three-story building, which remains largely intact today, Buick not only maintained a showroom, but also assembled automobiles on a small scale. At this point, Buick was the largest auto manufacturer in the world, producing 9,000 cars in 1908 versus Ford's 6,000. The tremendous growth of the company after the turn of the century was due largely to the leadership of William C. Durant, who became general manager in 1904 and quickly began establishing a nationwide distribution system that relied on branches similar to the one in Philadelphia. By the end of the decade, there were Buick company-owned branches in twenty-seven cities across the United States, a network that became the foundation of the company's growth through the 1920s.³

Buick's Expansion Under General Motors

With profits gleaned from Buick's success after the turn of the century, Durant in 1908 founded General Motors, which subsequently acquired the Cadillac, Oakland (forerunner of Pontiac), and Oldsmobile brands, among others. But the rapid pace at which these acquisitions occurred led to a vast accumulation of debt that led GM's Board of Directors to force Durant out by 1910. Buick itself had begun to lose market share after 1908, dropping several spots behind Ford, which had surpassed Buick to become the largest automobile manufacturer in the United States.

Now under the management of Charles W. Nash with Walter P. Chrysler as new head of production, Buick began to rebound slightly by 1912, due largely to the streamlining of operations and a reduction in the number of models. Reflecting this recovery, Buick's Philadelphia branch moved to enlarged quarters in the form of a new six-story building at 900 N. Broad Street (the northwest corner of Broad and Poplar Streets), which remains largely intact today. This move also represented an increasing northward expansion of Philadelphia's Automobile Row after 1910. Farther away from the dense downtown, larger

¹ "Improving Quaker City's Auto Row," *The Automobile*, September 20, 1906, 386.

² John Rae Bell, *The American Automobile: A Brief History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 18-19; Kevin McMahon, "North Broad Street Historic District," Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 2011.

³ Terry B. Dunham, *The Buick: A Complete History* (Automobile Quarterly, 1987), 71.

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properties could be obtained and more commodious showrooms constructed in the northern stretches of Broad Street.

Meanwhile, another leadership change at Buick was underway. Durant, who after leaving Buick in 1910 had founded Chevrolet with Louis Chevrolet, used some of the profits from that company's success to regain control of General Motors in 1916 in a dramatic takeover that led to the resignation of Nash as president. Once again at the helm of GM, Durant made Chrysler president of Buick and the parent company prospered over the next four years, due in particular to the success of the Buick brand, which by that point accounted for as much as half of GM's profits. Unfortunately, after Durant unilaterally made several major decisions on capital investments that differed from what he and Chrysler had agreed to, the board of GM again forced him out, but not before Chrysler quit as Buick president. Durant was succeeded as the head of GM by Henry H. Bassett. Chrysler would of course go on to found the Chrysler Corporation in 1925.⁴

To supply a growing number of dealerships, showrooms and authorized service centers in and around the city, by 1924 Buick had decided to expand its Philadelphia branch yet again. There are no records to indicate precisely why the site at 16th Street and Indiana Avenue was ultimately chosen, but its proximity to Automobile Row was probably a key factor. It is also likely that by the 1920s there were few if any sites available on North Broad Street that would have been able to support a building of this size, leading the company to explore options to the east or west of Broad Street. Additionally, the site's access to the railroad – it lay adjacent both to the Pennsylvania Railroad and the Reading Railroad – could very well have attracted Buick.⁵

The new building on 16th Street was commissioned by Joseph J. Greenberg, a Philadelphia real estate developer and investor who played a major role in the growth of Automobile Row. Greenberg, who had also developed Buick's previous building at 900 North Broad Street, was also responsible for numerous downtown high-rise office buildings, including the Sun Oil Building at 1608-1610 Walnut Street (extant, 1928), 1616 Walnut Street (extant, 1929), and the Architects' Building at 16th and Sansom Street (extant, 1930), among others. Greenberg acquired the 16th Street property in June 1924 from the Pennsylvania Railroad (PRR), which owned and operated one of the adjacent rail lines. Located just north of the large, five-story Philadelphia Branch House of the International Harvester Company, completed just two years earlier in 1922, the site needed little in the way of new infrastructure, particularly since International Harvester had already created a siding to provide direct rail access to its building.⁶

To design Buick's new Philadelphia branch, Greenberg hired prominent Philadelphia architect LeRoy Berman Rothschild in the spring of 1924. Rothschild (1886-1935) was born and educated in Philadelphia. After finishing high school, he worked for several architectural firms and formed a brief partnership with Carl Zilenziger, later establishing his own office in Philadelphia after graduating with a bachelor's degree in architecture from University of Pennsylvania in 1910. By 1920, Rothschild was one of the region's

⁴ H. Eugene Weiss, *Chrysler, Ford, Durant and Sloan: Founding Giants of the American Automotive Industry* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003), 116-117; Dunham, 111-112.

⁵ "Millions Being Put in Phila. Industries Building Program," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 21, 1924.

⁶ "Joseph Greenberg, 79, Dies," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 17, 1963; Joseph J. and Reynold H. Greenberg, Inc., *A Tour Thru Some of the Most Notable Real Estate Projects of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1931).

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leaders in Commercial Style architecture, specializing in office and commercial buildings.⁷ A few of his downtown projects included the Commercial Style Heymann Building at 213-215 S. Broad Street (extant, 1921, Broad Street National Historic District); the 12-story, Beaux Art style Heymann Brothers Building at 1600 Walnut Street (extant, 1922, Center City West National Historic District); the Colonial Revival style Sylvania Hotel at 1326 Locust Street (extant, 1922); and the Beaux Arts style office building at 1700 Walnut Street (extant, 1925). Rothschild also designed numerous industrial buildings, including the Biberman Building at 611-610 N. 15th Street (extant, 1919), which was individually listed on the National Register in 2007.

Buick's new Philadelphia branch was operational by September 1925. A feature in the *Buick Bulletin* published the following November described the completed building floor by floor. On the first floor was the main service department, where Buick owners could have their cars repaired, in addition to a new car delivery department. The second floor contained the parts department and was "well adapted for this particular work, being particularly well lighted and having the best of facilities for receiving and shipping parts." A railroad siding that came into the building on the east side (see photo #9) kept the parts department well stocked and permitted quick outbound shipments to Buick dealerships and authorized service centers throughout the region. On the third floor was a showroom, which was mainly used for wholesale purposes – dealers would come to see the latest models and to place orders – but was also open to the public. The fourth floor contained an additional repair shop for issues that could not be resolved in the first floor shop while the fifth and sixth floors were devoted entirely to the storage of new cars awaiting distribution. Cars were transported between floors by two large freight elevators, one at the southwest corner and one along the east elevation. Although the building was built to Buick's specifications, Greenberg would continue to own it, leasing it to the company for a period of years. Such an arrangement was common for large auto manufacturers who frequently moved as their needs changed.⁸

The primary goal of the new building, a 1925 advertisement in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* proclaimed, was to enable every Buick Authorized Service Station in this part of the country to "meet the service requirements of Buick owners with increased efficiency and promptness." The building did indeed serve as a regional nucleus for the Buick company, becoming a central distribution facility and repair garage for a network of locally owned dealerships, including the Davis Buick Company at 316 West Cheltenham Avenue in Germantown, the West Philadelphia Buick Company at 4515 Chestnut Street, the Roth Buick Company at Frankford Avenue and Paul Street in the Frankford section of the city, and the Edward Wilkie Motors Company at 1415 North Broad Street, the latter being the largest Buick dealership in Philadelphia. In addition to these four city dealerships, the new building served at least thirteen others in the surrounding suburbs, including those in towns such as Ambler, Jenkintown and Norristown, as well as throughout southern New Jersey.⁹

Rapid growth also generated a need for larger branch buildings in places like Pittsburgh, Boston, Denver, El Paso and Atlanta, among other cities. As in Philadelphia, in these places Buick typically worked with

⁷ In 1920 alone he produced designs for the following buildings in Philadelphia: exterior alterations to the Larkin/Belber Building at 2200 Arch Street (extant, 1913/1920, NR 2002); Bessemer Truck Company; Greenebaum Brothers' Shirt Company at 58th and Market Streets (extant), Keystone Auto Top Company, Federal Container Company, Keystone Table Manufacturing Company, Standard Provision Company. National Register Nomination application for Larkin/Belber Building at 2200 Arch Street, Philadelphia, PA; approved 2002, 8/14.

⁸ "Philadelphia Branch Shows Buick Stability," *Buick Bulletin* (November 1925), 14-15.

⁹ Buick Motor Company Advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 6, 1925.

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local real estate developers, who would build the new facilities and continue to own the properties after construction was completed, entering into long-term lease agreements with the auto manufacturer. In Pittsburgh in 1922, the Commercial Land Company built a new three-story, approximately 50,000 square foot space (Figure 23) – designed by an unknown local architect in the Commercial Style – for Buick at the northwest corner of Baum Boulevard and Rebecca Street (now South Aiken Avenue). Like the Philadelphia branch built three years later, Buick’s new Pittsburgh home became the nucleus in a regional service and distribution network, this one covering 28 counties in Pennsylvania, 17 counties in West Virginia and three counties in Ohio. In Allegheny County alone, eighteen Buick dealerships and authorized service centers relied on the Pittsburgh branch for the distribution of new models and the supply of parts.¹⁰ This operation was repeated in new branches in Denver, El Paso and Atlanta, which Buick built in 1922 and 1923 (see Figures 24-26), and on a much larger scale in Boston, where in 1920 the Noyes-Buick Company, distributor for most of New England, built a new five-story, 200,000 square foot building in the Commercial Style at 857 Commonwealth Avenue in that city (Figure 27). Unlike most other branches, which were operated by the Buick Motor Company itself, the Boston facility was one of about a dozen around the country that was owned by a local company serving as the exclusive authorized distributor in that city.¹¹

Like the other Buick branches around the country, the new Philadelphia branch provided a means by which local dealerships could keep in touch with new company policies and developments. The branch also provided special Buick tools and machinery “to make it possible for the dealer to give the best of service in the shortest time.” Additionally, the branch offered special training to the dealers and their employees “so that they may become thoroughly skilled in their work.” Unlike the earlier Buick branches in Philadelphia, the assembly of cars did not take place in the new branch building since most manufacturing had been consolidated into Buick’s enormous factory complex in Flint, Michigan.¹²

Buick cited a “great increase” in its business as the primary driver behind the move to the new building. At the time the new Philadelphia branch opened, Buick accounted for more than 50% of General Motors’ unit sales. Models 35 and 45, variants of the “Buick Four” and “Buick Six,” respectively, were some of the bestselling cars nationally and allowed the company to regain lost ground; in fact, by the mid-1920s Buick was the third largest automobile company in the country (exclusive of the other GM brands) behind only Ford and Chevrolet. Although production fluctuated from year to year, particularly rapid growth following the recession of the early 1920s – 160,411 models were produced in 1924, growing to 192,100 in 1925 and 266,753 in 1926 – may have accounted for Buick’s move to larger quarters in Philadelphia the following year. Although sales figures for individual cities are not available, it is likely that Buick’s new branch in Philadelphia, which was the third largest metropolitan area in the country at the time, handled a large portion of Buick’s overall annual distribution and sales.¹³

By 1925, when the Philadelphia branch opened, Buick had introduced what many believed to be the company’s most important models to date, the Master Six and the Standard Six. The Master Six sedan, with its extended wheelbases and refined interior finishes, became Buick’s high-end model while the

¹⁰ “Buick Business in Pittsburgh Shows Steady Increase Over a Long Period of Years,” *The Pittsburgh Press*, March 25, 1923; “Buick Factory Branch in New Home,” *The Pittsburgh Sunday Post*, June 10, 1923.

¹¹ S.G. Swift, “Boston Home of Noyes-Buick,” *The Accessory and Garage Journal* 10, no. 8 (December 1920): 33-38.

¹² Buick Motor Company, *Buick Six Valve-in-Head Motor Cars* (Flint, Michigan, 1926), 44.

¹³ Dunham, 119.

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Standard Six appealed to more budget-conscious consumers. Because the new models “were well styled, had good performance – and perhaps most important, were introduced with price reductions ranging from fifty to five hundred dollars over the year previous,” they sold “spectacularly well.” Due to the success of the new models, 1925 became Buick’s best year ever, which was quickly surpassed by even greater sales in 1926. Unfortunately, as a result of the intense production during these years, market saturation, which had never before been a problem in the auto industry, increasingly worried company leaders. This led to increasing competition among the many national brands, and was one of the primary drivers behind Buick’s reduction in prices in 1925.¹⁴

As sales began to decline in the late 1920s, a condition that was exacerbated by the onset of the Great Depression, General Motors sought to restructure Buick’s extensive field operations as a cost saving measure. In 1931, GM began to consolidate Buick and Pontiac branch offices since they essentially functioned in the same way. The network of Buick dealerships and authorized service centers remained, but were now overseen by district managers in the various Pontiac field offices. The same happened in Philadelphia and by 1932 Buick had closed its Philadelphia branch on 16th Street.

After Buick: The Nash Motors Company Moves In

Shortly after Buick departed, the building was leased by the Nash Motors Company, an independent auto company that was founded in 1916 by former Buick president Charles W. Nash. Unlike Buick, Nash preferred to leave distribution to independent, local companies in each of its major markets. In Philadelphia, the Roberts-Nash Motor Company at 1231-1239 North Broad Street, under the management of John G. Roberts, handled most Nash business in the city, distributing Nash models to over a dozen dealerships in and around Philadelphia by the late 1920s. In addition to favoring independent distributors to company-owned branches, Nash did not produce cars on speculation but rather as orders came in. Although Nash produced around 130,000 cars annually from the mid to late 1920s, its inventory of finished cars as well as raw materials accounted for only 3.4 percent of its assets at any given time, in contrast to the five biggest brands, including GM, whose inventories typically stood around 30 percent of assets. This allowed Nash to greatly reduce the working capital required to operate.¹⁵

As a result of its lean, “ultraconservative” operations during the 1920s, Nash was initially not greatly affected by the Great Depression. Sales had declined, but the company still earned a profit of about \$5 million in 1931. Some local dealers and distributors were even expanding where sales had been particularly good in relation to other companies like GM, who had saturated the market. This included the Roberts-Nash Company, which in apparent recognition of its de facto position as Nash headquarters in Philadelphia, was renamed the Nash Philadelphia Company in 1932. That year, the company, requiring more commodious repair facilities, relocated from North Broad Street to the former Buick branch on 16th Street. Nash Philadelphia also moved its offices into the building, which became the distribution center for the eastern part of Pennsylvania as well all of New Jersey, Delaware and Maryland. Similar to Buick, Nash had showrooms, repair facilities, and parts storage within.

Despite its relative success during 1931, the company’s fortunes declined significantly as the Great Depression continued. By 1933, the company had recorded its first ever loss, amounting to \$1,888,863. Due to declining sales and the overall economic uncertainty of this period, Nash decided to vacate the 16th

¹⁴ Dunham, 122-124.

¹⁵ Charles K. Hyde, *Storied Independent Automakers: Nash, Hudson, and American Motors* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009), 50-52.

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Street building in 1936, less than four years after it opened. The company downsized and moved all service and distribution operations back into its retail center at 1231-1239 North Broad Street, which had continued in operation since 1932. The closing of the Nash facility on 16th Street was one of many similar moves in Philadelphia during the 1930s, when auto makers increasingly moved their central distribution centers to suburban locations. Although auto dealerships could still be found in abundance on North Broad Street, companies like Ford, which moved its local plant from Broad and Lehigh to Chester, PA, and GM, which built a parts and components factory in West Trenton, NJ, typified how the major auto brands operated regionally after the Great Depression.

After Nash vacated the building, it was leased to Sears, Roebuck & Company, which used it as a distribution warehouse from 1936 until 1943, when it was leased again to the Reyburn Manufacturing Company, a maker of tags and labels that eventually owned the building. In 1961 the Denney Tag Company acquired Reyburn, renaming the company Denney-Reyburn and consolidating manufacturing in its existing plant in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Books and Articles:

Bell, John Rae. *The American Automobile: A Brief History*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.

Dunham, Terry B. *The Buick: A Complete History*. *Automobile Quarterly*, 1987.

Hyde, Charles K. *Storied Independent Automakers: Nash, Hudson, and American Motors*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2009.

McMahon, Kevin. "North Broad Street Historic District." Pennsylvania Historic Resource Survey Form, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 2011.

Weiss, H. Eugene. *Chrysler, Ford, Durant and Sloan: Founding Giants of the American Automotive Industry*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2003.

Newspapers and Periodicals*:

Buick Bulletin

Philadelphia Inquirer

Pittsburgh Press

Pittsburgh Sunday Post

*see footnotes for specific citations

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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository: Free Library of Philadelphia Automobile Reference Collection

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): 206556

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property ~0.45 acres

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 39.998095 Longitude: -75.156714
2. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____
3. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____
4. Latitude: _____ Longitude: _____

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the property is shown as a dotted line on the accompanying map entitled "Site Plan with National Register Boundary" (Figure 2).

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel on which the present complex is situated, which matches its historic delineation. No manufacturing or warehousing resources historically associated with the operation of this complex have been excluded.

Form Prepared By

name/title: Kevin McMahon, Associate

organization: Powers & Company, Inc.

street & number: 1315 Walnut Street, Suite 1717

city or town: Philadelphia state: PA zip code: 19107

e-mail: kevin@powersco.net telephone: (215) 636-0192 date: November 13, 2017

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Buick Motor Company Building
 Name of Property

Philadelphia County, PA
 County and State

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Buick Motor Company Building
 City or Vicinity: Philadelphia
 County: Philadelphia State: PA
 Photographer: Robert Powers
 Date Photographed: June 19, 2017

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

<i>Photograph #</i>	<i>Description of Photograph</i>
1.	West elevation, view east
2.	North and east elevations, view south
3.	East elevation, view southwest
4.	East elevation, view west
5.	Railroad along east elevation, view south
6.	First floor, view south
7.	Second floor, view southeast
8.	Second floor, view north
9.	Second floor, railroad siding, view southeast
10.	Third floor, view north
11.	Third floor, view northeast
12.	Third floor, view north
13.	Fourth floor, view south
14.	Fourth floor, view north
15.	Fourth floor, view south
16.	Fifth floor, view north
17.	Sixth floor, view south
18.	Sixth floor, view north
19.	Sixth floor, stairway, view west
20.	Roof, view north

Buick Motor Company Building
Name of Property

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Index of Figures:

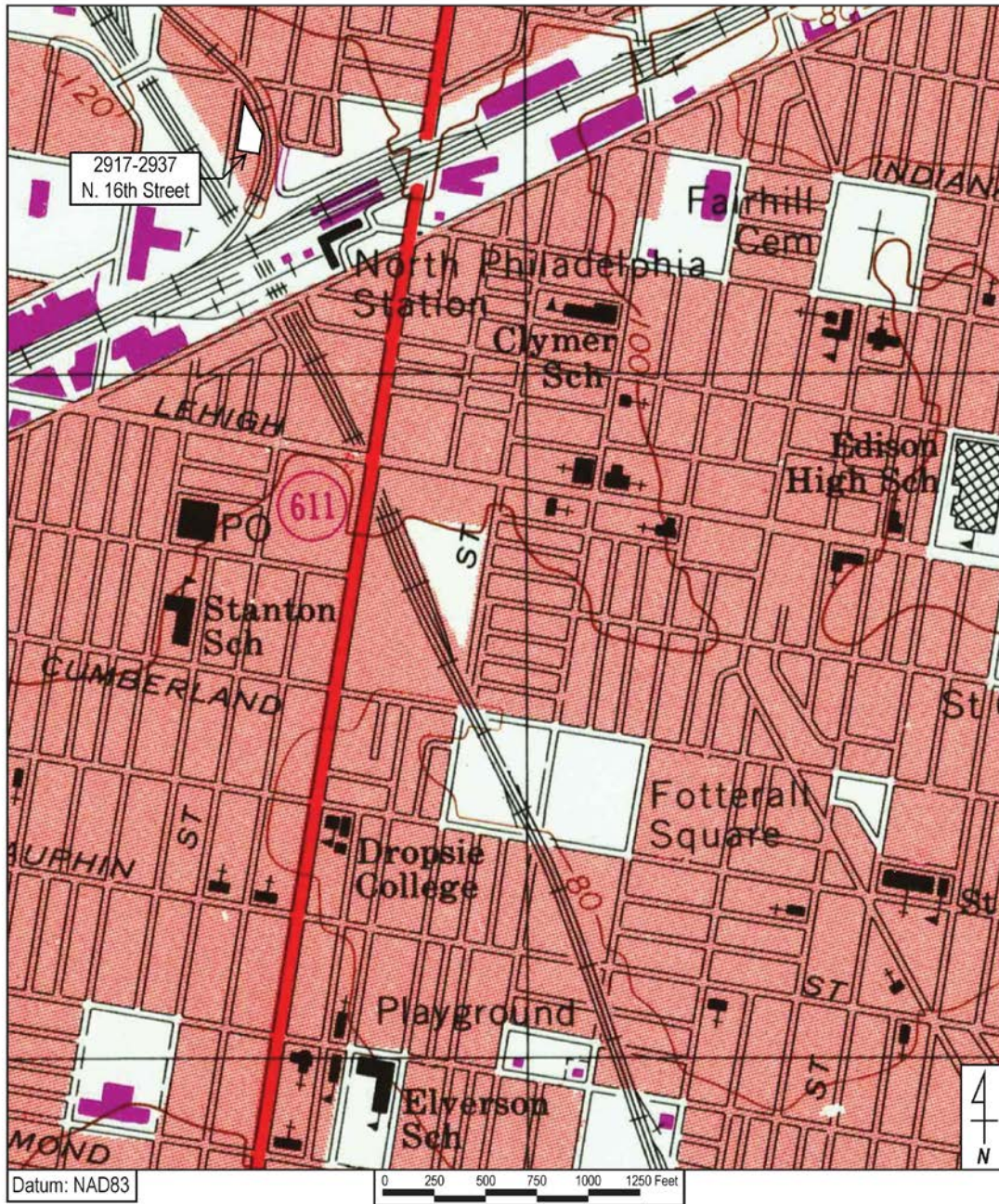
<i>Figure #</i>	<i>Description of Figure</i>
1.	USGS Map
2.	Site Plan with National Register Boundary
3.	Site Plan with Photograph Key
4.	Photograph Key: First Floor
5.	Photograph Key: Second Floor
6.	Photograph Key: Third Floor
7.	Photograph Key: Fourth Floor
8.	Photograph Key: Fifth Floor
9.	Photograph Key: Sixth Floor
10.	Bromley Atlas of Philadelphia, 1925
11.	Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1951
12.	Aerial View, 1931
13.	Artistic Rendering of the Building, 1924
14.	Photograph of the Building, 1925
15.	Photograph – Service Station, First Floor, 1925
16.	Photograph – Parts Department, Second Floor, 1925
17.	Photograph – Showroom, Third Floor, 1925
18.	Photograph – Repair Shop, Fourth Floor, 1925
19.	Buick Advertisement, <i>Philadelphia Inquirer</i> , 1925
20.	Current Aerial View, Looking West
21.	Current Aerial View, Looking East
22.	List of Buick Branches, 1929
23.	Pittsburgh Branch, 1923.
24.	Atlanta Branch, 1925.
25.	Denver Branch, 1925.
26.	El Paso Branch, 1925.
27.	Noyes-Buick Company Building, Boston, MA, 1920

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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USGS Map - Philadelphia Quadrangle, Pennsylvania-New Jersey (1995)
Buick Motor Company Building
2917-2937 N. 16th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19132

Latitude 39.998095
Longitude -75.156714

Figure 1 – USGS Map

Buick Motor Company Building
Name of Property

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Figure 2 – Site Plan with National Register Boundary

Buick Motor Company Building
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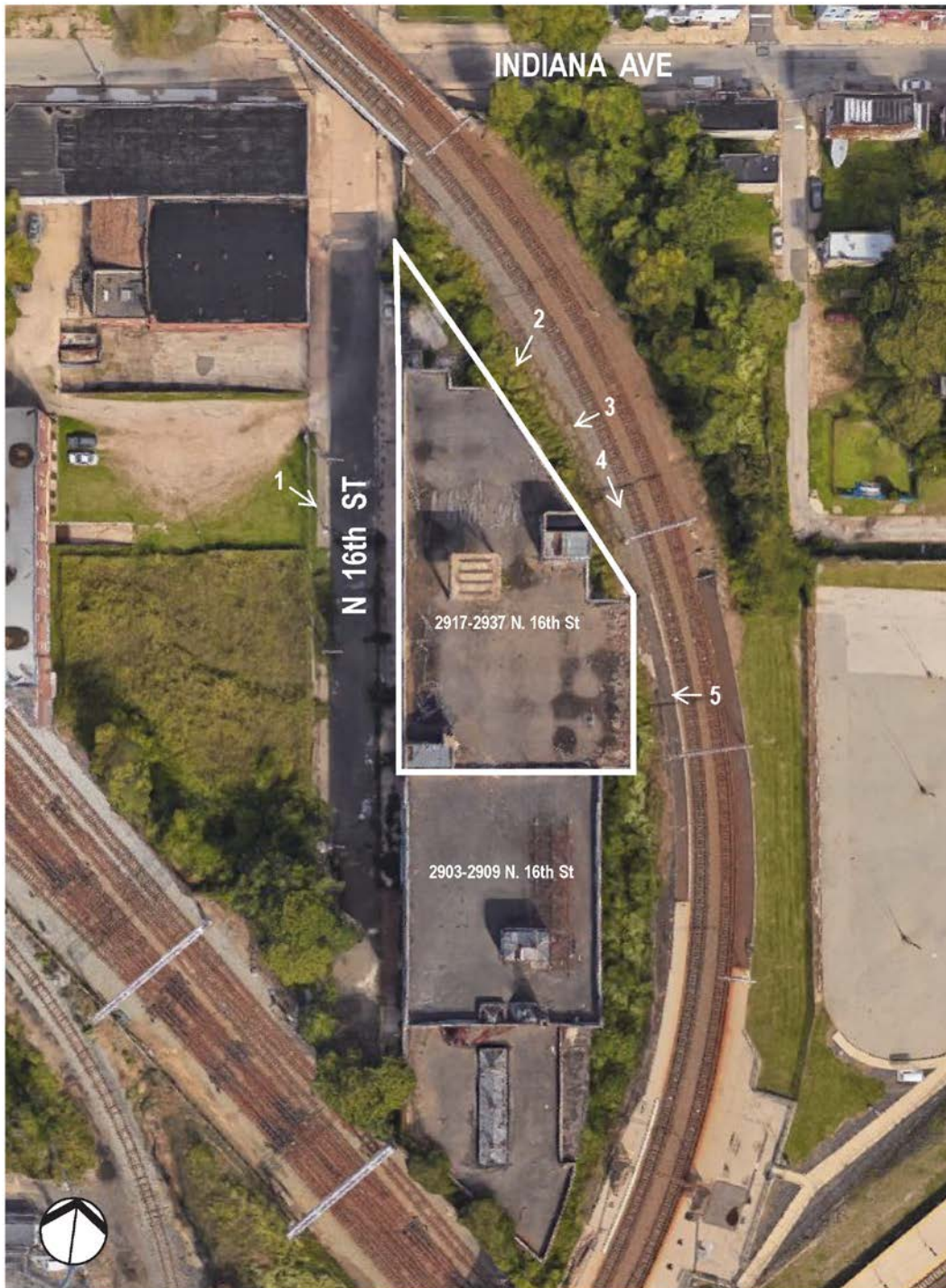
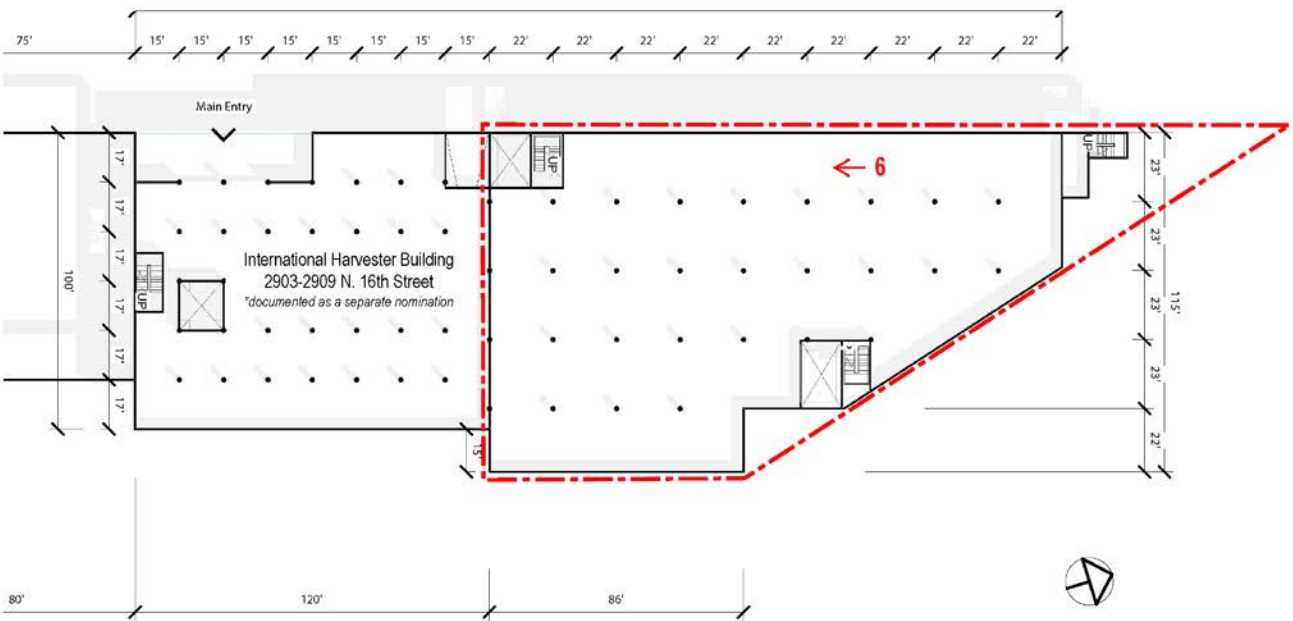


Figure 3 – Site Plan with Photograph Key

Buick Motor Company Building
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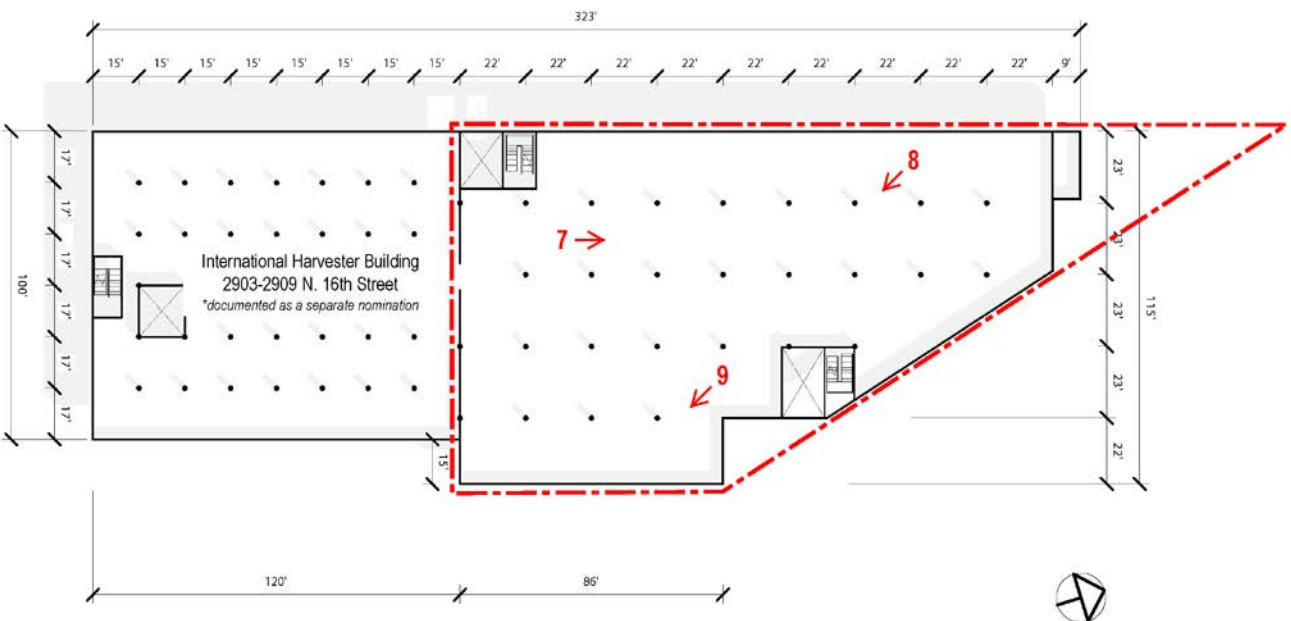
Buick Motor Company Building
2917-2937 N. 16th Street
Philadelphia, PA
HRSF Photograph Key

FLOOR
1

Figure 4 – Photograph Key, First Floor

Buick Motor Company Building
Name of Property

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FLOOR
2

Buick Motor Company Building
2917-2937 N. 16th Street
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HRSF Photograph Key

Figure 5 – Photograph Key, Second Floor

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FLOOR
4

Buick Motor Company Building
2917-2937 N. 16th Street
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HRSF Photograph Key

Figure 7 – Photograph Key, Fourth Floor

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FLOOR
6

Buick Motor Company Building
2917-2937 N. 16th Street
Philadelphia, PA
HRSF Photograph Key

Figure 9 – Photograph Key, Sixth Floor

Buick Motor Company Building
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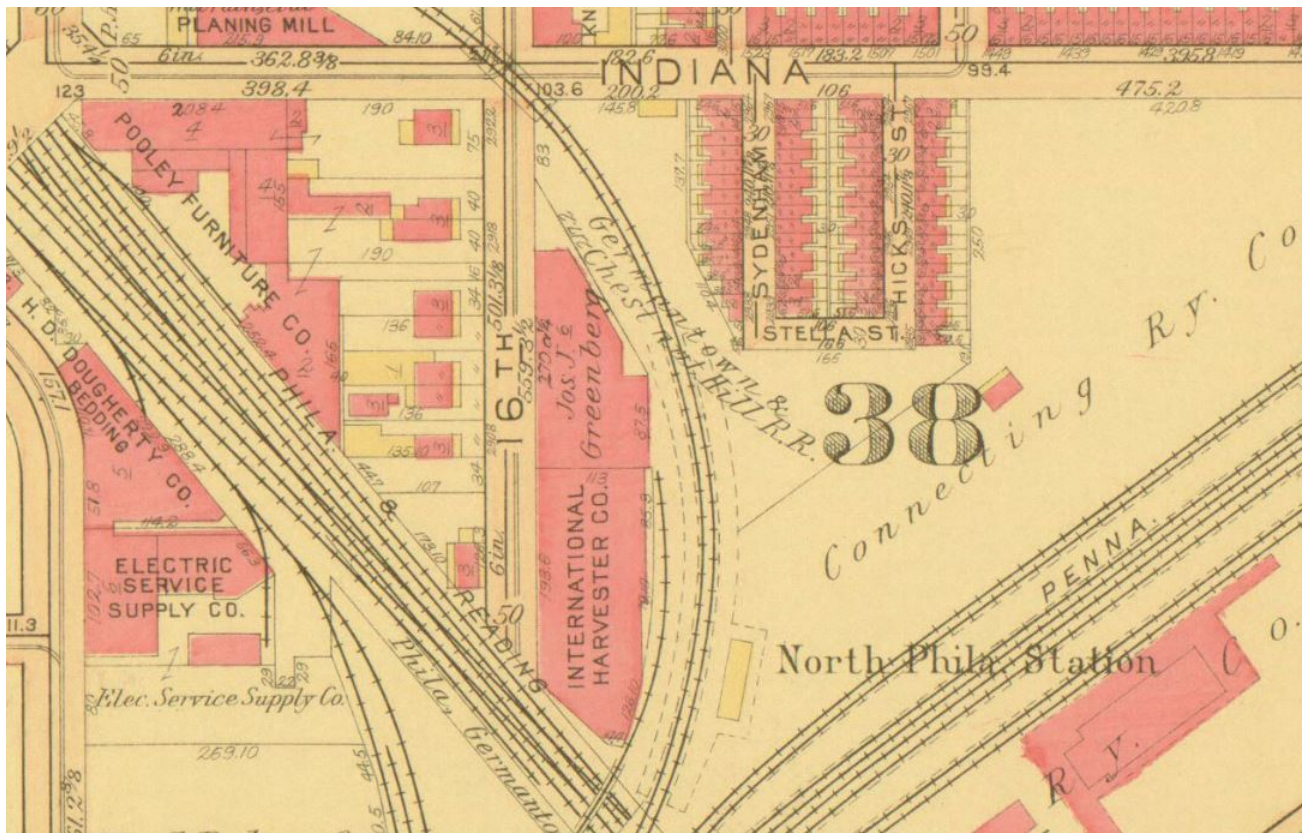


Figure 10 – Bromley Atlas of Philadelphia, 1925.

Buick Motor Company Building
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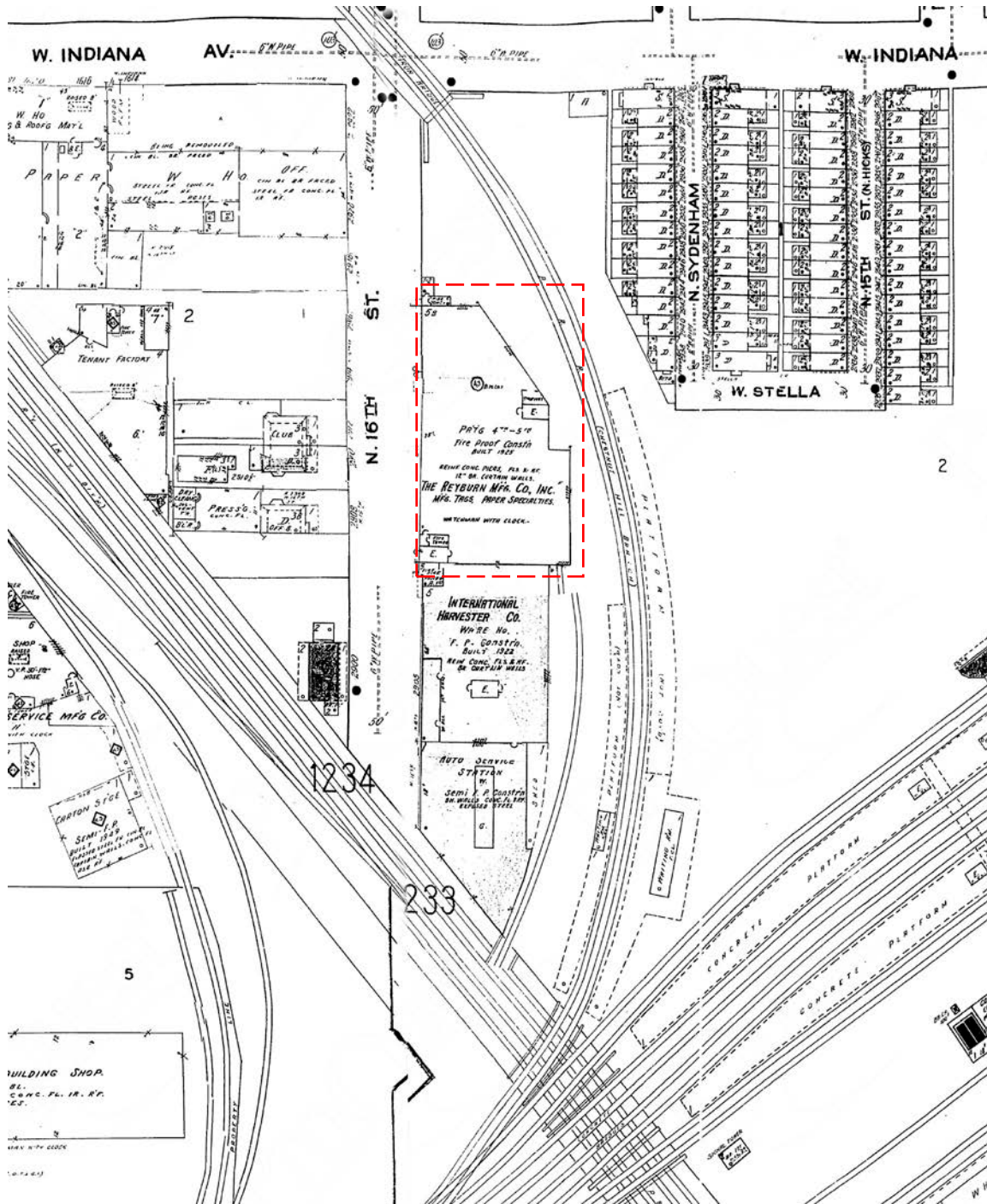


Figure 11 – Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, vol. 13, 1951 (Composite of sheets 1233 and 1234).
The current building is outlined in red.

Buick Motor Company Building
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Figure 12 – Aerial View, looking northwest, 1931.
(Dallin Aerial Survey, courtesy Hagley Museum)

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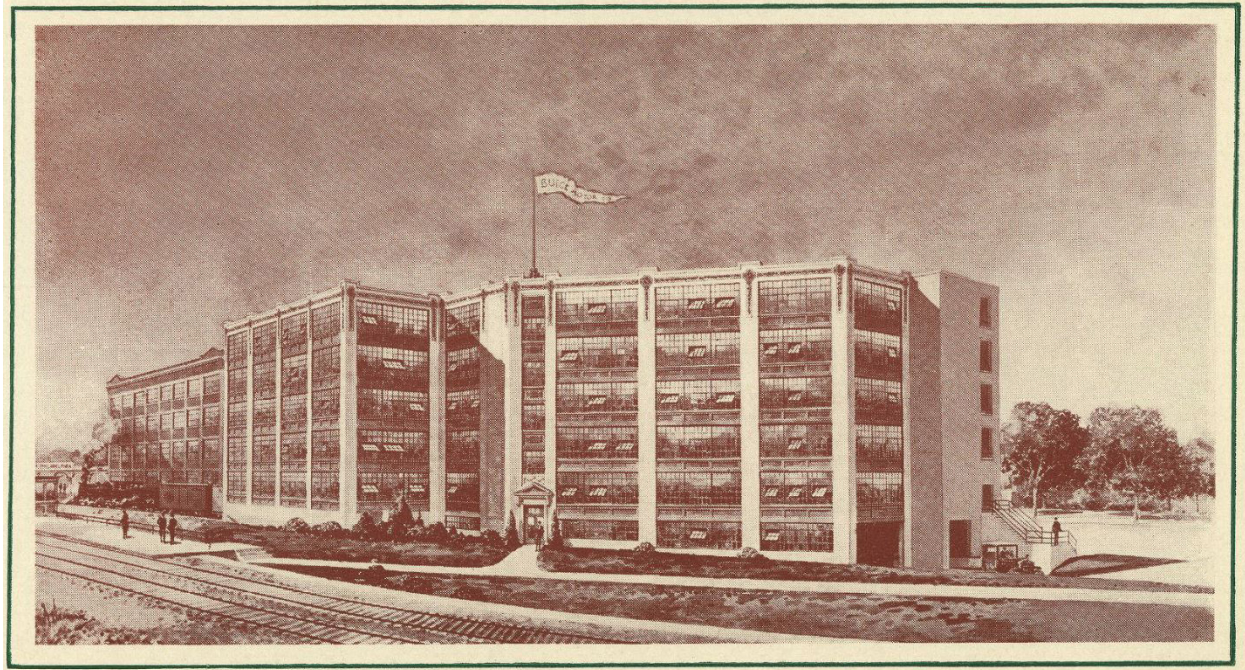


Figure 13 – Artistic Rendering, looking southwest, 1924 (Athenaeum of Philadelphia).

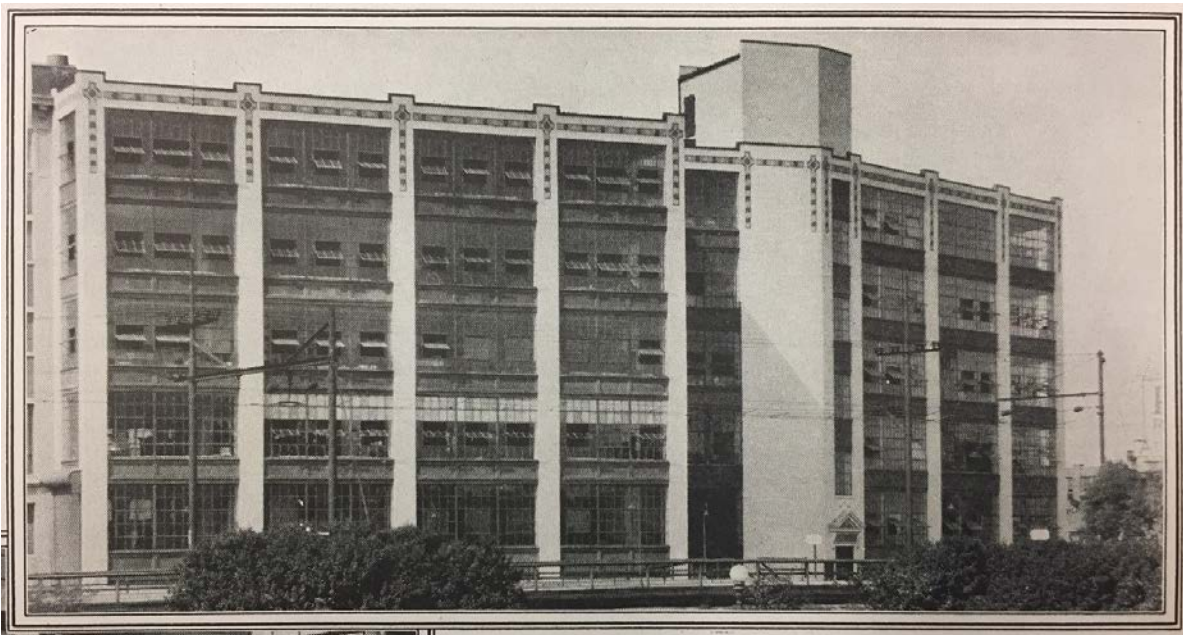


Figure 14 – Photo from the *Buick Bulletin*, November 1925.

Buick Motor Company Building
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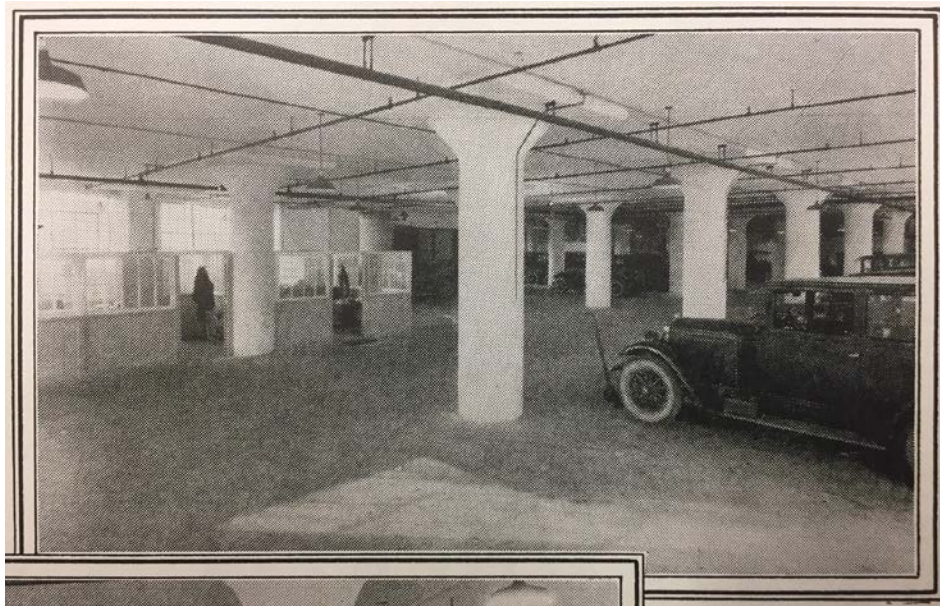


Figure 15 – Service Station, First Floor (*Buick Bulletin*, November 1925).



Figure 16 – Parts Department, Second Floor (*Buick Bulletin*, November 1925).

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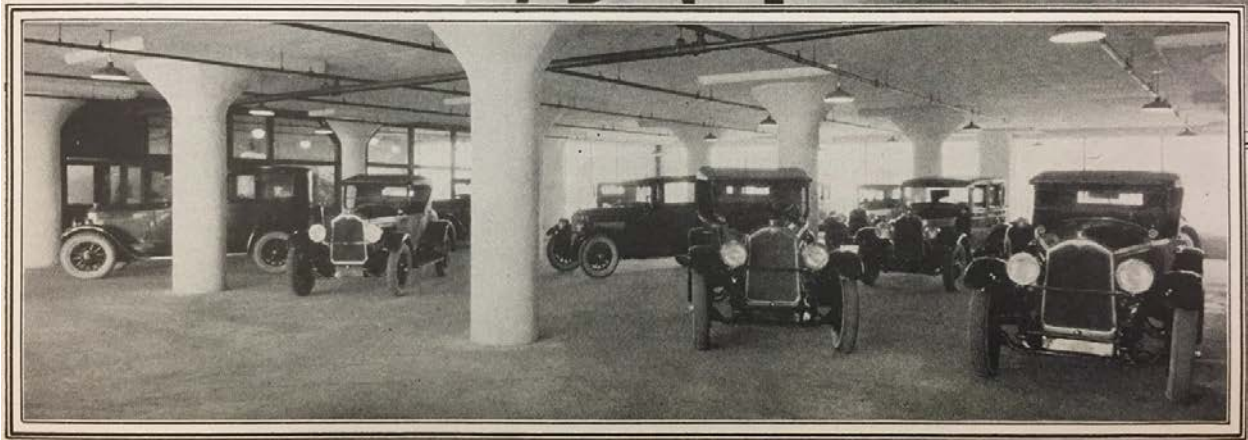


Figure 17 – Showroom, Third Floor (*Buick Bulletin*, November 1925).



Figure 18 – Repair Shop, Fourth Floor (*Buick Bulletin*, November 1925).

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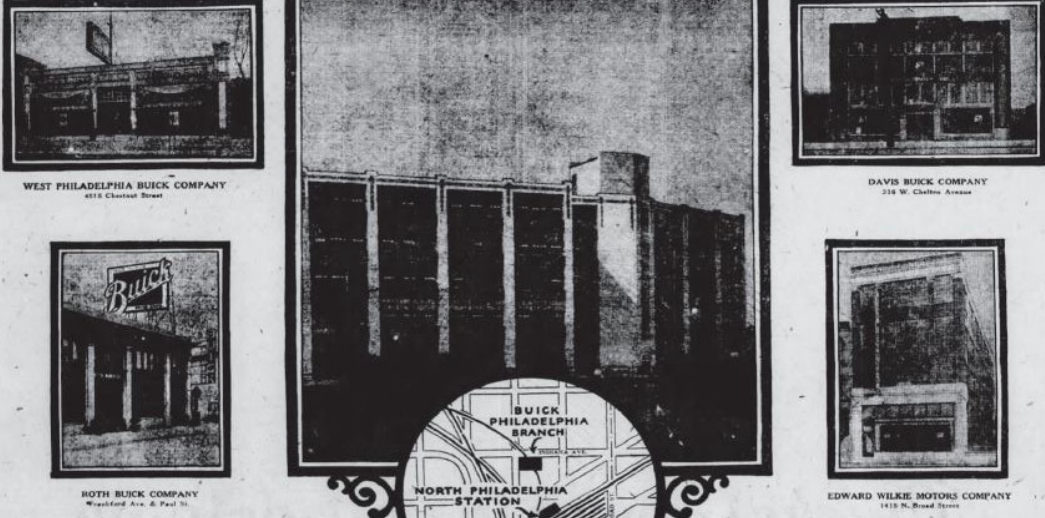

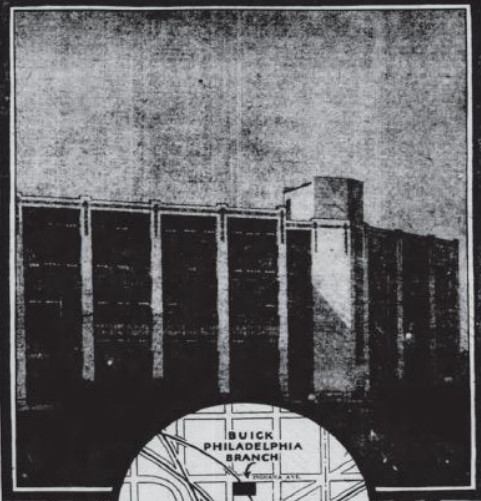
THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER, SUNDAY MORNING, DECEMBER 6, 1925 3 21

The new location is well out of traffic and very accessible. To reach it, turn west at Indiana off North Broad, go two blocks west to Indiana and 16th, and there it is; the big white building just west of the Pennsylvania tracks—next door to the North Philadelphia

Roth Buick Co., Frankford Ave. and Paul St.
Edw. Wilkie Motors Co., 1415 N. Broad St.

The Buick Motor Company will operate an Authorized Service Station for the convenience of Buick owners in the neighborhood of the new Branch. Each of the dealers listed above also

provides Buick Authorized Service, making 5 stations within the city limits. Neighborhood service is the aim and the achievement of Buick, anywhere you go, throughout America. The growth of Buick in Philadelphia, as reflected by this new building, is



WEST PHILADELPHIA BUICK COMPANY
4515 Chestnut Street

DAVIS BUICK COMPANY
316 W. Chelton Avenue

ROTH BUICK COMPANY
Frankford Ave. & Paul St.

EDWARD WILKIE MOTORS COMPANY
1415 N. Broad Street

Station—only three miles north of the City Hall.
Retail sales within Philadelphia will continue as heretofore in the established retail dealer locations:
Davis Buick Co., 316 W. Chelton Ave.
West Philadelphia Buick Co., 4515 Chestnut Street

BUICK MOTOR COMPANY
Philadelphia Branch: 2917-2937 North 16th St.
Bell Phone—Tings 9400

BUICK MOTOR COMPANY, FLINT, MICH.
Division of General Motors Corporation. Pioneer Builders of Value-in-Head Motor Cars.
Branches in all Principal Cities—Dealers Everywhere

typical of Buick growth everywhere. People here, and all over America, have found more value in Buick motor cars, more dependability, more of the essentials to safe, comfortable, and economical motoring.

Buick

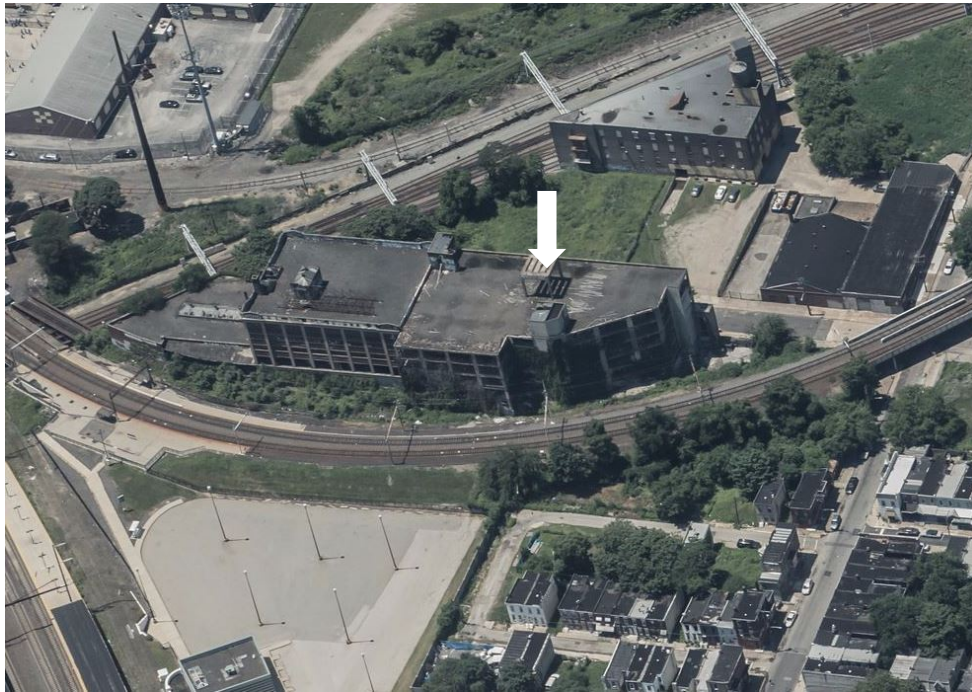


When Better Automobiles Are Built, Buick Will Build Them

Figure 19 – Buick Advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 6, 1925.

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Figures 20 and 21 – Current aerial views looking west (above) and east (below).



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62 BUICK REFERENCE BOOK

BUICK BRANCHES AND DISTRIBUTORS

Atlanta.....	Buick Motor Company, 512-516 Spring St., N. W.
Boston.....	The Noyes-Buick Company, 857 Commonwealth Ave.
Buffalo.....	Buick Motor Company, 1094-1100 Main Street
Charlotte, N. C.....	C. C. Coddington, Inc., 500 West Trade Street
Chicago.....	Buick Motor Company, 2031 Calumet Ave.
Cleveland.....	The Ohio Buick Co., 1900 East Twenty-fourth Street
Cincinnati.....	Leyman-Buick Company, 630 Walnut Street
Dallas.....	Buick Motor Company, 1420-24 Young Street
Denver.....	Buick Motor Company, 690 Lincoln Street
Detroit.....	Buick Motor Co., Cass at Amsterdam Ave.
El Paso, Texas.....	Buick Motor Co., 415 West San Antonio Ave.
Flint.....	Buick Motor Company, 605 N. Saginaw Street
Grand Rapids, Mich.....	Buick Motor Company, 60-66 Sheldon Ave.
Indianapolis.....	Buick Motor Company, 730 East Washington Street
Jacksonville, Fla.....	Buick Motor Company, Riverside at Roselle
Kansas City, Mo.....	Buick Motor Co., Admiral Boulevard and McGee Street
Lincoln, Nebr.....	Nebraska-Buick Auto Co., 1300 Q. Street
Los Angeles, Cal.....	Howard Automobile Co., 1367 S. Figueroa Street
Memphis, Tenn.....	Buick Motor Company, 739 Union Ave.
Milwaukee.....	Buick Motor Company, 156-160 E. Wisconsin Ave.
Minneapolis.....	Pence Automobile Co., Hennepin Ave. and 8th Street
New York City.....	Buick Motor Company, Broadway at 55th Street
Oklahoma City.....	Buick Motor Company, 10th and Broadway
Philadelphia.....	Buick Motor Company, 2917 North 16th Street
Pittsburgh.....	Buick Motor Company, Baum Boulevard and Rebecca St.
Portland, Ore.....	Howard Automobile Co., Burnside at 13th
Rochester, N. Y.....	C. L. Whiting, 342 East Ave.
Saginaw.....	Garber-Buick Company, 204-206 N. Washington Ave.
St. Louis, Mo.....	Vesper-Buick Auto Co., Grand Ave., at Lindell Blvd.
Salt Lake City.....	Randall-Dodd Auto Co., 47-53 South Second St. East
San Antonio, Texas.....	Buick Motor Company, Tenth and Broadway
San Francisco.....	Howard Auto Company, 1601 Van Ness Avenue
Seattle, Wash.....	Eldridge-Buick Co., Harvard at Pike St.
Washington, D. C.....	Buick Motor Company, 1021 Fourteenth St., N. W.

Figure 22 – List of Buick branches in 1929 (*Buick Reference Book*, 1929).



Figure 23 – Pittsburgh branch, 1923 (*The Pittsburgh Press*).

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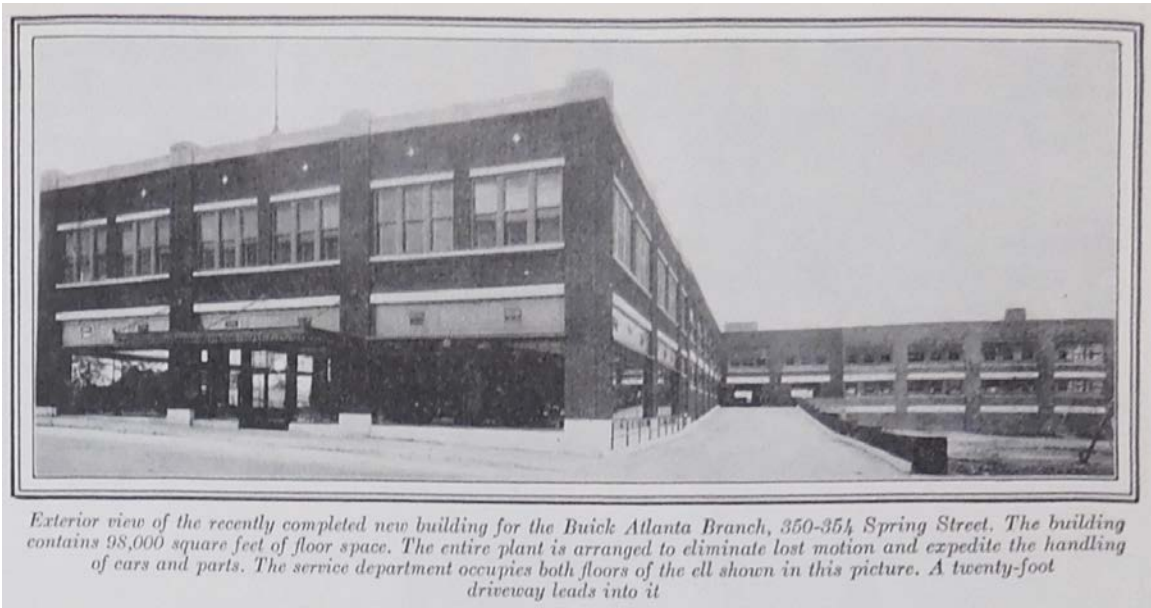


Figure 24 – Atlanta branch (*Buick Bulletin*, October 1925)

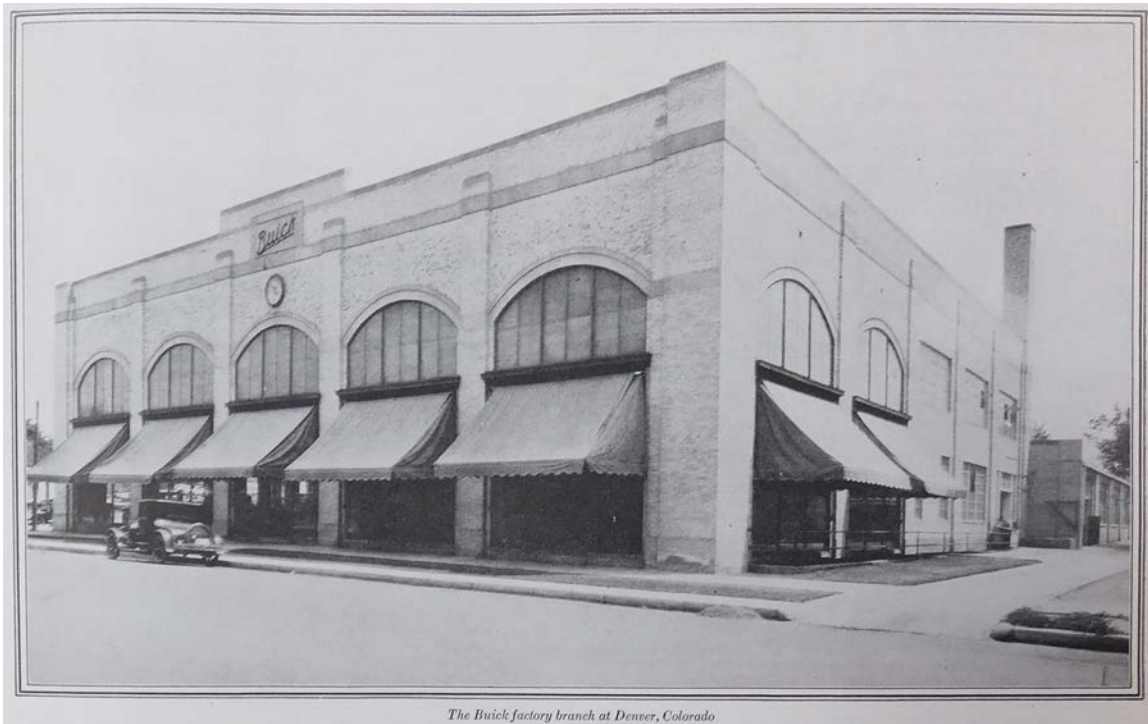


Figure 25 – Denver branch (*Buick Bulletin*, November 1925)

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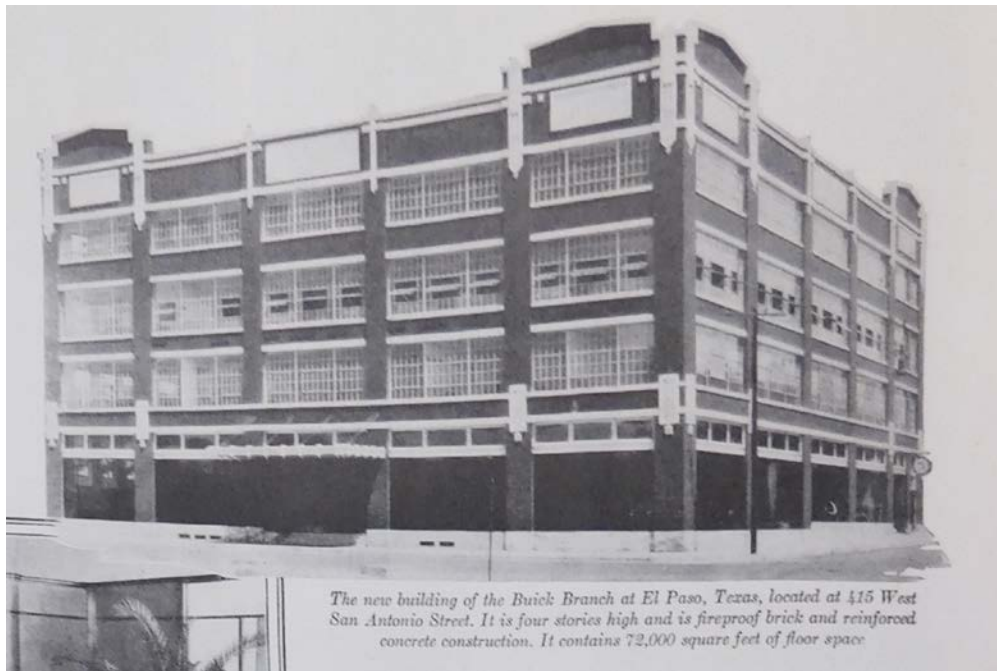


Figure 26 – El Paso branch (*Buick Bulletin*, October 1925).

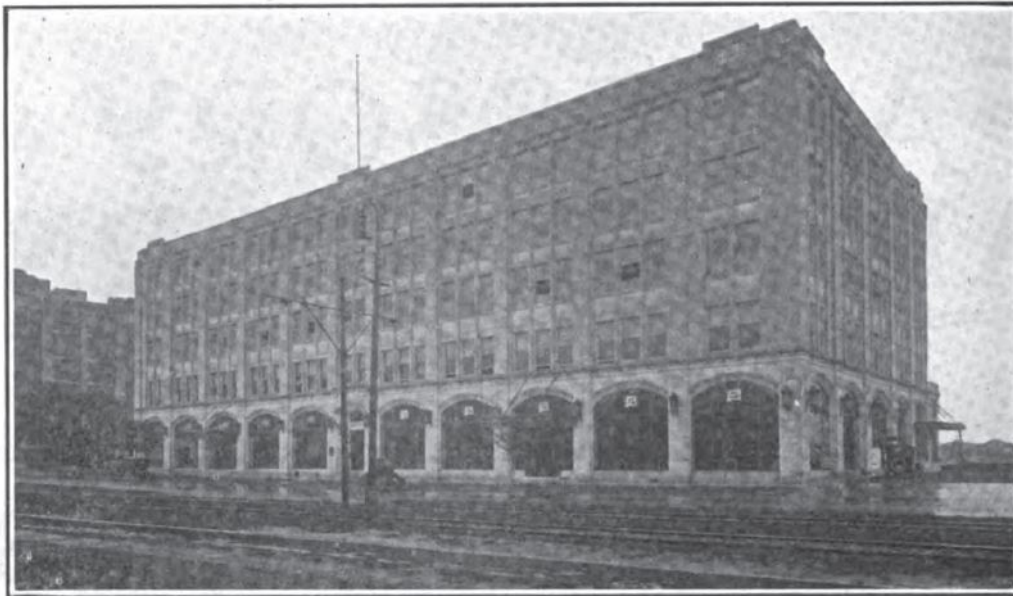


Figure 27 – Noyes-Buick Company, Boston (*Accessory and Garage Journal* 10, no. 8, December 1920)



KNEPENDE

ESTRIPIT

KNEPENDE

ESTRIPIT

ESTRIPIT

FALSE

BEER

WETZ

LEZ

MEDICAL

ZEND

Three people standing near a black SUV on the left side of the image.

Three people standing near a silver car behind the fence.

A black pickup truck parked behind the fence.



PULSE BEER

AVON!

Large graffiti tag at the base of the building.





BWC
shop

VK VK

ALICE

ADY

ADY
MAY
CITY

































UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Buick Motor Company Building

Multiple Name: _____

State & County: PENNSYLVANIA, Philadelphia

Date Received: 3/14/2018 Date of Pending List: 4/11/2018 Date of 16th Day: 4/26/2018 Date of 45th Day: 4/30/2018 Date of Weekly List: _____

Reference number: SG100002372

Nominator: State

Reason For Review:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PDIL | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver | <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG | |

Accept Return Reject 4/26/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary
Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria Accept, National Register Criterion A.

Reviewer Patrick Andrus *Patrick Andrus* Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2218 Date 4/26/2018

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

7
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL
COMMISSION

1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102
Tel: 215.688.7660

Robert Thomas, AIA
Chair

Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D.
Executive Director

24 January 2018

Elizabeth Rairigh, Division Chief, Preservation Services
Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission
PA State Historic Preservation Office
400 North Street, Second Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Re: 2917-2937 N. 16th Street, Buick Motor Company Building

Dear Ms. Rairigh:

I am writing in response to your request that the Philadelphia Historical Commission provide its official Certified Local Government recommendations on the nomination proposing to add the Buick Motor Company Building, located at 2917-2937 N. 16th Street in Philadelphia to the National Register of Historic Places. At its monthly public meeting on 12 January 2018, the Philadelphia Historical Commission reviewed and discussed the nomination and accepted public testimony. The Commission agreed that the building satisfies National Register Criterion A, in the area of industry, and recommended that the building be added to the National Register of Historic Places. The Commission contends that the property retains sufficient integrity, and notes that it is proposed for adaptive reuse in the Philadelphia City Planning Commission North District Plan. The property is not listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Thank you for providing the Philadelphia Historical Commission with the opportunity to comment on this nomination.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jon F.", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D.
Executive Director