

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



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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. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

### 1. Name of Property

historic name C. P. Stephens DeSoto Six Motorcars  
other names/site number Stephens Motors

### 2. Location

street & number 915 N. Central Ave.  not for publication  
city or town Phoenix  vicinity  
state Arizona code AZ county Maricopa code 013 zip code 85004

### 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

James W. Gantman  
Signature of certifying official

State Historic Preservation officer  
Title

19 DECEMBER 2012  
Date

az state Parks / SHPO  
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

### 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) \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature]  
Signature of the Keeper

2/20/13  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
		district
		site
		structure
		object
1	0	<b>Total</b>

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

Phoenix Commercial MRA

**Number of contributing resources 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)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19<sup>th</sup> AND 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS:

Mission/Spanish Colonial Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: Concrete

walls: Stucco

Brick

roof: Terra Cotta

other: Asphalt

Wood

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### **Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

### **Summary Paragraph**

The C.P. Stephens DeSoto Six Motorcars building is located in Phoenix, Arizona at the southeast corner of Central Avenue and Roosevelt Street, north of the downtown core. The rectangular storefront type building is set back from the corner facing Central Avenue. The yard on the side of the building was once a service station but was cleared and is now used for parking. The building is a commercial example of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, evident originally in a hip-roofed tower at one corner and the application of cast stone detailing over door and window openings; both of these features have been compromised. Currently the style of the building is expressed by the stuccoed front wall finish. The function of the building as an automobile dealership is evident in the large front storefront opening and in the service bay opening onto Central Avenue.

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### **Narrative Description**

The C.P. Stephens DeSoto Six Motorcars building is located in central Phoenix, Arizona on the north edge of the downtown core. The site, at the southeast corner of the intersection of Central Avenue and Roosevelt Street, is part of an early 20<sup>th</sup> century commercial streetscape along Central Avenue. Most nearby buildings on either side of Central Avenue in this area have been extensively remodeled or demolished, and thus represent an appearance dating from the 1940s through the 1970s, although the predominant 1- and 2-story scale and massing of buildings and their locations along their front property lines still define the street character. To the east side of the site, across an alley, is the historic First Church of Christ, Scientist. To the north, across Roosevelt Street, is a midrise building remodeled in the 1970s with a reflective glass curtain wall. Central Avenue, which was originally the main commercial street into downtown from the northern suburbs, was made a one-way street in the 1970s and was modified within the last decade to incorporate a light rail line in the center. A light rail station lies diagonally across the Central & Roosevelt intersection from the Stephens site.

When the building was constructed in 1928, the site included only the land covered by the building itself. A residence existed on the lot at the street corner. In the 1930s the north half of the site was acquired and a Standard Oil service station was constructed, under related ownership. The service station was demolished in the 1960s. The north half of the site was then used for parking and for a billboard, although under separate ownership until the 1970s. The billboard was later removed.

The C. P. Stephens DeSoto building is rectangular in plan, save for small offsets in the façade that provide a measure of dimensionality to it. The façade is architecturally detailed, in contrast to the side and rear walls, which are plain brick walls with simple openings. Facing Central Avenue, the façade has three major components: at the north end is the entry door; in the center is a large storefront window; and at the south end is a vehicle door leading to the service bays. The section with the entry door is a little shorter, and set back from the street a few inches from the adjacent section. The original wooden entry door has been replaced with a steel door, but the original wood transom remains behind a stucco panel. The storefront section is a little taller, and its parapet is capped by decorative mission tiles. The storefront was originally three large panes of plate glass in an opening measuring 33 feet wide and 14 feet tall. The original glazing system was replaced in the 1950s or 60s with a new aluminum storefront, which was itself stuccoed over in the 1970s. The last section, at the south end of the façade, steps back again from the street a few inches and originally was constructed with slightly higher walls topped by a mission-tiled hip roof, suggesting a tower. The roof carrying the Spanish tile collapsed in 2007, leaving an irregular break at the top of the wall. The doors were originally glazed wooden bifold doors; these were removed in the 1950s or 60s and a steel rolling door was installed in their place. An additional original feature of the façade was cast stone detailing placed over the doorways and around the storefront window. Except for false columns on each side of the storefront, all of the cast stone work was removed in the 1950s and the walls were patched with stucco, and painted.

The sides of the building are painted brick masonry. The south side is windowless. The north side originally had four windows, but these were filled in and new openings were made for a roll-up vehicular door and a steel window. The rear elevation, facing the alley, originally had two bifold garage doors flanking a large window. One opening and the window have been infilled.

Except for the tower at the corner, the building has a bowstring truss roof behind parapets. The roof is higher than the parapets and is visible from a distance. It is covered in rolled asphalt roofing and has four skylights.

The interior of the building was divided into a showroom and parts/workshop area separated by a row of offices. The square showroom occupied most of the width of the building and was finished out with 2-tone (pink and blue) decorative plaster walls and coved ceiling, and 2-tone colored concrete floor, scored in a tile pattern, to match. The row of offices occurred just behind the showroom, in a symmetrical composition of alternating doors and windows. The remainder of the floor plan was occupied by the repair garage and parts storage area, and was largely unfinished. The floors were scored concrete. The walls were exposed bricks, and the trussed wooden roof structure above was left exposed.

Interior alterations were few. A mezzanine office was added into the showroom, probably in the 1950s. Structural failure of the roof trusses caused damage to the plaster ceilings and most of the plaster was removed from the showroom. Paneling was added to the walls, obscuring the original plaster. Shoring has been placed throughout the building to support the failing roof trusses.

## Evaluation of Integrity

*Quotes and approaches below on the C. P. Stephens DeSoto Six Motorcars building's integrity are from the NPS description of each aspect in National Register Bulletin [15] on Criteria and integrity (Savage 1995:44-45).*

**Location:** The building retains integrity of location in that it occupies its original site from the period of significance, 1928-62, through the present.

**Design:** The building's design characteristics are relatively intact and represent adequate integrity. The essential aspects of the design, the "elements that create the form, plan, space, structure, and style" are intact except for the loss of some building fabric that identified the Spanish Colonial Revival stylistic references in the building. First, the original cast stone was removed; however this occurred within the historic period (c. 1955). Second, the original Spanish-tiled tower collapsed in 2007. Taken as a whole, the remaining building features adequately convey the original design of the building, particularly as it appeared prior to 1962.

**Materials:** The physical components of the building "retain(s) the key exterior materials dating from the period of...historic significance" and "reveal the preferences of those who created the property and indicate the availability of particular types of materials and technologies." Most exterior materials are original to the 1928 construction of the building and alterations within the historic period through 1962.

**Workmanship:** Through preservation of the materials present during the period of significance, workmanship retains "evidence of the crafts" of the 1920s, and illustrates "the aesthetic principles of [this] historic period." In addition, workmanship here reveals "individual, local, [and] regional...applications of both technological practices and aesthetic principles."

**Setting:** The physical environment of the building is compromised in the sense that many of the buildings that surrounded it have been lost or altered in recent years; however its context as a part of the Central Avenue streetstape of storefront buildings and its relationship to the greater downtown area is very much intact.

**Association:** The building's physical setting is "sufficiently intact to convey" its period of significance for "an observer," particularly anyone familiar with the area between 1928 and 1962. The presence of important design features including the storefront opening, showroom, and garage bays conveys the association of the building to its history as an automobile dealership.

**Feeling:** The physical features of the building, "taken together, convey the property's historic character." The building's retention of original design, materials, workmanship, and setting relate the strong feeling of commercial development in Central Phoenix between 1928 and 1962.

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

**Period of Significance**

1928-1962

**Significant Dates**

1928

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

McDonald & Morrison, architects

**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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The period of significance begins with the building's construction and first occupancy in 1928. Use of the building as an auto showroom and repair facility continued through 1962, the 50-year cutoff for National Register eligibility.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

N/A

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria)

### Summary Paragraph

The C. P. Stephens DeSoto Six Motorcars building is considered significant at the local level under National Register Criterion A for its association with early commerce in Phoenix, Arizona. It is a good example of a once-common property type associated with auto-dependent architecture in the years prior to World War Two. It represents the importance of auto-related commerce to the development of Phoenix and is today a rare surviving example. The DeSoto Six was a six-cylinder vehicle; the company later added an eight cylinder model (the Desoto Eight). The period of significance for the building extends through 1962 at the fifty-year limit for the National Register; the property continued to be used for automotive purposes until 1970.

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

Scholarly study has documented the significance of auto-dependent architecture as an important element in the commercial history of Phoenix. In 1984, the Junior League of Phoenix, Inc., published the *Historic Phoenix Commercial Properties Survey*. This publication was the first to identify "auto-related business" as a significant property type in Phoenix commerce history. Properties associated with this broad pattern of commerce were those "businesses directly related to the sale and maintenance of the automobile outside the original townsite." These included dealerships, service stations, and tire centers. These properties were significant to the commercial development of Phoenix since "the dealerships located on North Central Avenue where they could develop larger scale facilities with exposure to the maximum number of potential buyers."

The Junior League study identified three significant dealerships from the pre-WWII era: The Roper Building (1920 - demolished), A. E. England Motors (1926), and Stephens Motors (1928). A fourth property identified by the Junior League study, the Stewart Motor Company (1947), is post-War but is in the same Central Avenue location and shares a similar form as the Stephens building.

This particular *location* at this particular *time* – North Central Avenue from after the development of the automobile to just after World War Two – made sense because it was just north of the downtown hub of Phoenix where wealthy businessmen and public officials worked and just south of the densely-populated residential areas north of Roosevelt Street where these individuals lived. In later years – as residential development moved further north, west, and east – the dealerships would follow and relocate to the Camelback Road corridor, along Glendale Avenue in Glendale, and to Scottsdale Road at McDowell Road in Scottsdale. The downtown dealerships would be abandoned. As such, the Stephens Building is evocative of a particular *time* and *place* in the development of auto-related commerce in Phoenix. Dealerships that came after were developed in a much different in location. The Stephens building is one of only two remaining pre-WWII auto dealerships in downtown Phoenix.

A second scholarly study that documented the significance of the Stephens building to Phoenix commerce was prepared in 1989 by Janus Associates for the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office. Titled *Commerce in Phoenix 1870-1942*, the Janus study identified a particular property type -- "20<sup>th</sup> Century Auto-Dependent Commercial Architecture, 1919-1945" -- as being significant to the development of commerce in Phoenix. These are buildings associated with sales, service, and storage of automobiles. The Janus study identified a number of attributes that properties representative of this type shared: revival or modern style, form, and location.

With respect to location, Janus noted that properties representative of this type normally "consumed several lots, usually near a street intersection, and their height was always one story." In addition, "most of the gasoline stations and auto sales and service buildings were situated on major arterial streets, determined by high visibility and convenience to the customer." The Stephens building meets the location characteristic of this property type. It covers several lots and is near the important street intersection of Central Avenue and Roosevelt Street. Both of these are major arterials, and the location is one of high visibility for customers commuting to and from their homes and businesses.

With regard to style, Janus noted the auto-dependent architecture of this era normally employed revival styles similar to that of the surrounding residential areas from which they drew their customers. The Stephens building shares this

characteristic as well. Its Spanish Colonial Revival style mimicked the architecture of the wealthy residential subdivisions developed in the twenties such as Roosevelt, Encanto-Palmcroft, F. Q. Story, and Willo. Later buildings, such as Stewart Motors, were normally executed in the modern style.

In addition, Janus noted that this property type usually featured buildings that included large display windows or bays to showcase the product. The Stephens building exhibits the characteristic form of this property type as well, with its large storefront display and service bay opening onto Central Avenue.

Because it well represents the specific characteristics of location, style, and form of its property type, the staff report prepared in June of 2012 by the City of Phoenix Historic Preservation Office in anticipation of designating the property for Historic Preservation overlay zoning noted that the Stephens building "*is an excellent example of the property type '20<sup>th</sup> Century Auto-Dependent Commercial Architecture, 1919-1945,' a once common but now rare property type*" (emphasis added).

Scholarly study outside the local Phoenix and Arizona area has also documented that auto showrooms are a significant property type in the development of roadside commerce. In the seminal 1985 work *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture*, noted architectural historian Chester H. Liebs observed "auto showrooms have played an essential role in the commercial ecology of the roadside" (p. 75). These "stores for selling cars" went through a progressive development from standard commercial block buildings after the turn of the century, to object-lesson showrooms of the teens, and eventually to a new type of commercial district – the automobile row of the twenties. Central Avenue north of Van Buren up to Roosevelt was the automobile row of Phoenix, where several dealers jockeyed for position and displayed their wares in shop windows of lavish and stylish buildings designed by architects for the particular purpose of selling cars.

After its construction in 1928, the Stephens building was a standout on the automobile row of North Central, with its dramatic Spanish Colonial Revival design by the architectural team of McDonald and Morrison. There is very little left of this automobile row in Phoenix today, just three buildings. The Stephens building is significant as one of these three and is only one of two pre-WWII buildings.

Liebs notes that the revival style automobile row gave way to more streamlined and modern styles in the thirties, forties, and fifties. This later era was also one of greater specialization, as separate task areas for sales, service, and used cars began to require greater space on lots. The Stewart building on Central (1947) is a good example of this later style, with its Streamlined Moderne style, larger footprint, and areas of task specialization. Another example of this later property type is the Quebedeaux Chevrolet Showroom and Offices, located at 750 Grand Avenue. Constructed in 1954-55, the Quebedeaux building was identified in the Junior League survey of Phoenix Commercial buildings but was not considered eligible at the time due to alterations that compromised its integrity. A significant example of Modern architecture, the Quebedeaux building had a large showroom, a mezzanine with offices at the rear of the building, and a separate service building.

In addition to being important for illustrating a change in form and style that sets it apart from the pre-War era, the Quebedeaux building marks a significant point of comparison because it represents a change in the location of auto dealerships in Phoenix. Constructed on Grand Avenue in the mid-fifties, it was one of the first automobile dealerships to break out of the downtown automobile row. The 2009 City of Phoenix staff report on the Quebedeaux building notes "the Quebedeaux building represents the shift of automobile sales and service centers away from Central Avenue and downtown Phoenix during the years following World War II. New dealerships began to appear on Camelback Road and Bell Road, as well on other major streets such as Grand Avenue." This is in stark contrast to the Stephens building, which represents the earlier era of the downtown auto row.

Liebs documented this shift away from downtown in his national study of roadside architecture as well. The suburban showroom became the norm in the fifties, with its areas of specialization. In the seventies, the roadside itself became the showroom. Dealers parked long lines of cars along the roadway and on the front of their lots. The buildings on the property were set back became secondary to what soon became known as the "automobile supermarket." These new styles of presentation required space that simply was not available in America's downtowns. Liebs notes that this process left the downtown automobile row a relic of an earlier era: "By the early 1960s . . . dealers had a strong impetus to follow the general exodus of businesses to the outer reaches of the suburbs, where large roadside commercial sites were available. Soon the oldest automobile rows closest to town began to empty" (p. 92).

While it is clear that the Stephens building possesses characteristics of the auto-dependent property type, characteristics that set it apart from basic commercial buildings not associated with auto-related commerce, it must be placed in the larger context of Phoenix commerce. The basic question of how important auto-related businesses were to

Phoenix commercial history must be addressed. Here again, scholarly study provides documentation of the significance of auto-related activities to the overall commercial history of Phoenix.

In his recent book, *Desert Visions and the Making of Phoenix, 1860-1909* (2010), noted historian and author Philip VanderMeer addressed the significance of auto-related commerce to the overall business development of Phoenix in the years prior to World War Two. VanderMeer observed that "automobiles . . . held manifold implications for the economy of Phoenix as well as the structure of downtown." VanderMeer goes on to note that "cars directly impacted the economy and urban structure" of Phoenix. This was measured by the growth in auto dealers. According to VanderMeer, "the economic effect is most obvious in the number of auto dealers, which rose from only three in 1909 to thirty-seven in 1925, and then declining in the 1930s." Professor VanderMeer provides a second measure of the significance of auto-related businesses through his research, which documented sales from these enterprises "totaled 50 percent more than all clothing sales" (all quotes VanderMeer 2009: 45). Clearly, auto-related commerce formed a large part of the overall Phoenix economy in the years prior to World War Two.

The National Register of Historic Places has accepted the significance of the automobile row to the development of communities, particularly in the West, and has acknowledged the importance of the dealer showroom to the automobile row and to commercial development. With regard to the automobile row, the Keeper of the National Register placed the *Automobile Alley Historic District* in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on the National Register on March 18, 1999. The overall importance of auto-related business was acknowledged by the Keeper when the *Early Automobile Related Properties in Pasadena, California MPS* received listing in 1996.

Although the automobile row of Phoenix is no longer sufficiently intact to qualify for district status, its development was very similar to that of the National Register listed district in Oklahoma City. The nomination prepared by the City of Oklahoma City notes that "The Automobile Alley Historic District consists primarily of commercial buildings built in the 1910s through the 1930s . . . Originally part of a residential area adjacent to downtown Oklahoma City, Broadway Avenue redeveloped as a commercial area after 1910 with the majority of businesses related to the new, expanding automobile industry" (Section 7, Page 10). This broad pattern of development is very similar to that of the automobile row in Phoenix which was originally a residential area that later developed into commercial use for auto-related businesses.

In Oklahoma City, the preparers of the nomination stated that "the Automobile Alley Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, for its association with commerce as Oklahoma City's automobile retailing center in the first half of the twentieth century . . . Over half the buildings in the district are of the Commercial Style, usually of one- or two-story brick storefronts flush with the sidewalk" (Section 8, Page 22). This statement of significance is similar to that for the Stephens Building, which is significant under Criterion A for its association with early commerce in Phoenix. It, too, is a one-story storefront flush with the sidewalk.

There was an automobile row in Pasadena, California as well. Similar to Phoenix, the remaining group of properties there was not intact enough for a district nomination as was possible in Oklahoma City, but there were enough properties in Pasadena still remaining to prepare a Multiple Property Submission (MPS) to the National Register. Preparer Teresa Grimes noted "Colorado Boulevard, Pasadena's main street, was one of the largest and earliest 'Auto Rows' in Southern California with dealerships intermittently spaced along one hundred blocks." Grimes observed that "the automobile had a profound impact on the American culture and the spatial organization of its cities" (Section E, P. 4). The same forces that were at work in Pasadena were felt in Phoenix, which also had an automobile row and where auto-related businesses such as Stephens Motors influenced the spatial organization of the city.

Grimes, citing Ann Scheid, reported that "automobiles became quickly entrenched in Southern California. In 1915, Pasadena boasted more automobiles per capita than any city in the world with one automobile for every eight residents, while the national mean was one for every forty-three citizens. By 1923, fifty percent of American households owned an automobile" (Section E, P. 4). While it is clear that the automobile was significant to the development of Pasadena, the same is true for Phoenix. The late Brad Luckingham, dean of Phoenix historians, wrote in his groundbreaking work *Phoenix: The History of a Southwestern Metropolis* (1989) that "the number of cars registered in Maricopa County rose from 646 in 1913 to 11,539 in 1920 to 53,064 in 1929, a year in which there was one car for every three people in the Phoenix area" (p. 82). These statistics reveal that the automobile had a significant impact on the Phoenix economy. Auto-related businesses such as Stephens Motors were one reason why.

The Pasadena MPS provides further guidance for understanding the significance of Stephens Motors because it establishes the importance of the dealer showroom as an eligible property type for broad contributions to the significance area of commerce. Grimes wrote in 1996: "Automobile showrooms are significant under National Register criterion A in the area of Commerce. This property type serves as evidence of the important role automobile sales businesses played in



Pasadena's economy, especially during the interwar years. As outlets for new automobiles into the marketplace, showrooms were critical to the introduction of the automobile to the general public." (Section F, P. 19)

In addition, the Pasadena MPS established specific registration requirements for dealer showrooms that properties must possess in order to be eligible for the National Register under Criterion A. The Stephens Motors building meets these registration requirements, which have been accepted by the National Register: "With regard to registration requirements under criterion A, the Pasadena MPS requires that automobile showrooms must have had a strong association with a particular dealership or automobile company. They may also be eligible under criterion A as contributors to districts if they are located in historic auto rows, clusters of showrooms. Resources must possess sufficient stylistic and structural integrity to be identified with the original use and period of significance." (Section F, P. 20) The Stephens building has a strong association with the DeSoto brand. It is located in the historic automobile row of Phoenix and possesses sufficient integrity to be identified with its original use as a showroom during the historic period.

In summary, the Stephens building meets the registration requirements under Criterion A that make it a good example of a once common property type associated with auto-dependent commerce. Its location in the downtown Phoenix automobile row documents how this area was once important to Phoenix auto-dependent commerce. Its style and form are also representative of the auto-dependent property type. The building is significant in Phoenix history because it well represents the location, style, and form of auto-dependent commercial buildings that once formed an automobile row. This auto row was important to the commercial development of Phoenix. The Stephens building shows how these auto-dependent businesses fit with the commercial development of Phoenix.

While it is a good example of a once-common type, the Stephens building has additional significance as a rare surviving example. It is one of only two pre-WWII dealerships still standing along the North Central automobile row in Phoenix, and one of only three auto-dependent properties along the row still in existence.

Auto-related commerce formed a significant portion of all commerce in Phoenix during the years prior to World War Two. As a rare surviving example of a property type important to auto-dependent businesses, the Stephens building is a significant representative of broad patterns in Phoenix commercial history.

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#### **Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)**

The C. P. Stephens DeSoto Six Motorcars building was constructed in 1928 to house the DeSoto dealership in Phoenix. The building was continuously occupied from its completion in 1928 until about 1955 by Stephens Motors and its successor Stephens-Franklin Motors. The Stephens Motors company was established by Claude Powell Stephens (1882-1945). It was a family business, with his wife, Lois M. Stephens, sons C. P. Stephens, Jr., Jack B. Stephens, and Robert S. Stephens listed in city directories as holding positions in the company in the 1930s and 1940s. Stephens Motors also became a Plymouth dealer by the late 1930s. On the death of C. P. Stephens, Sr., in 1945, the company was incorporated as Stephens-Franklin Motors with new partners C. P. Stephens, Jr., L. H. Franklin, and Dale M. Johnson. The company remained in this form at least until they moved the business to east Van Buren Street in about 1952-1955.

Walter P. Chrysler conceived the DeSoto concept just a few years after he introduced his Chrysler brand in 1924. Chrysler had been an executive for Buick and had observed the success of Alfred P. Sloan and General Motors when it introduced a series of medium priced cars that contained "step up" features that would allow buyers to match amenities on higher-priced vehicles. Thus, Chrysler's plan was to add a low-priced Plymouth on the bottom end of his array of cars to compete with low-priced Chevrolets and Fords, and a medium-priced DeSoto which would be a good match for Oldsmobile and Buick. Another reason for the new line may have been to create competition and leverage with the Dodge Brothers, who were in financial difficulty in the late twenties. While some auto historians are not convinced of this as a reason for the creation of the DeSoto brand, the fact that Chrysler acquired Dodge in the summer of 1928 seems to bear this out.

Arriving as it did during the height of the roaring twenties, when consumer spending drove the American economy to incredible heights, the DeSoto was an immediate success. The initial model of 1929 resulted in sales figures of 81,065 units. This set a record for the most sales for any new model of vehicle that stood for over thirty years, until the introduction of the Ford Falcon in 1960.

A key to the successful introduction of the DeSoto and to its long run as a popular vehicle was the creation of a network of dealerships across the nation. Chrysler eventually developed three sets of paired product dealer networks: Chrysler-

Plymouth, DeSoto-Plymouth, and Dodge-Plymouth. This resulted in an excellent strategic position for Chrysler: its Plymouth competed with Ford and Chevy while the DeSoto functioned as a step-up from Dodge. This dealer network stood Chrysler in good stead in the years after World War Two when it was in an excellent position to meet pent-up consumer demand caused by a shortage of consumer goods during the war. Stephens Motors was part of the DeSoto-Plymouth network.

In order to get a dealership up and running quickly for the introduction of the DeSoto, Chrysler had to partner with local business owners and architects. In Phoenix, Claude Powell Stephens was an Alabama native who had moved his way west to pursue a career in tractor and automotive sales. After a stint in Colorado, Stephens arrived in the heady atmosphere of 1920s Phoenix. Arizona's capital city was in a state of expansion, benefitting from a diverse economy based on transportation and trade that served a productive agricultural area in the surrounding Salt River Valley. C. P. Stephens proved to be an excellent partner for Chrysler and a good choice for the state's premier DeSoto dealership because he already had extensive experience as a farm equipment and automobile salesman.

A second key part of the creation of the dealership network was finding a location. In Phoenix, Chrysler continued his run of good fortune by partnering with Alice S. Hine. Mrs. Hine was a successful business woman who had developed a profitable commercial block in Glendale, Arizona. She was one of the original incorporators of the Phoenix chapter of the Business and Professional Women's Club, and became its President in 1923. In 1913, while an agent for the Phoenix Title and Trust Company, she was responsible for the construction of the Hine Building in downtown Glendale, which she expanded in 1919. In 1920, Hine purchased a home 915 N. North Central in Phoenix. This large home was typical for the era when North Central was the "mansion row" of Phoenix. Over time, as commercial development extended north from downtown Phoenix, this location became less desirable as businesses moved in and wealthy residents moved north to more attractive residential areas.

Alice Hine took advantage of the situation by agreeing to construct the building on her north Central Avenue property and leasing the space for use by the new DeSoto dealership. Her property had the advantage of being on the north end of "automobile row" in Phoenix. This was a concentration of auto sales and service facilities built on the north edge of downtown between the business core of the city and its residential suburbs. The Hine property, at the north end of the row near Roosevelt Street, was an excellent location because it provided visibility on two major thoroughfares.

The final part of Chrysler's plan involved designing an appropriate building for the new DeSoto dealership. This was particularly important for Phoenix, Arizona's capital city, where the new building would stand as a monument to the strength and style of the DeSoto make for the entire state. Chrysler also required a building appropriate to the stature of the residents and city leaders who would be purchasers of the new brand of vehicle. Here again, Chrysler employed the partnership approach by working with a local architect.

Chrysler dispatched company architect R.P. Morrison to Phoenix to develop plans for the new building. Since Morrison was not registered in Arizona, he needed a local architect to partner with on the plans. Chrysler selected Burt McDonald as the local associate. McDonald was a long-time architect in Arizona. He began his career in Austin, Texas, around the turn the last century. McDonald partnered on at least one building in Texas with James Reilly Gordon, who would later design the Arizona State Capitol building. McDonald had a more productive relationship with a second noted early Arizona architect: J. M. Creighton. McDonald formed a working partnership with Creighton in 1915. By 1918 he split from Creighton and established his own practice. This early experience gave him knowledge of the styles popular in Arizona and the Southwest. These increasingly focused on revival styles, particularly Mission Revival and Spanish Colonial Revival in the twenties. Morrison joined McDonald in Phoenix. It appears that the two formed a brief partnership for the purpose of designing the Stephens building using Arizona Board of Technical Registration license No. 86 that had originally been issued to McDonald in the early twenties.

McDonald and Morrison soon began work on the plans. The architects released the plans to the public via an article in the *Arizona Republican* newspaper of September 23, 1928. The article gave a detailed description of the building and included a rendering of the front façade prepared by McDonald and Morrison. The article noted that the building was being constructed in the "Spanish style," was one-story, would cost \$60,000, and would be ready for occupancy on November 1, 1928. The reporter for the newspaper interviewed C.P. Stephens: "In commenting on the elaborate structure, Stephens said: 'It takes this kind of building to do the DeSoto six justice. It's the kind of automobile that will prosper in colorful surroundings.'"

In addition to describing the "colorful" architecture of the building designed to make the facility attractive to customers, the article described specific features calculated to make it more functional. These included "three plate glass windows

and a set of plate glass folding doors" that "will give plenty of vision to the passerby." The building also featured "two large entrances in the rear" that "will give access to the workshops from the alley."

The Stephens DeSoto building was continuously occupied as an auto sales showroom and service facility from its completion in 1928 until about 1955 by Stephens Motors and its successor Stephens-Franklin Motors. In 1941, Alice Hine lost the property in foreclosure to the Murray Brothers. C. P. Stephens remained in the building and signed a lease with the new owners. On the death of C. P. Stephens, Sr., in 1945, the company was incorporated by his son C. P. Stephens, Jr., as Stephens-Franklin Motors with new partners L. H. Franklin (Vice President) and Dale M. Johnson (Secretary-Treasurer). The company remained in this form at least until the partners moved the business to east Van Buren Street in about 1952-1955.

There is one historic photo available from this period, associated with an event that passed by the building. In 1939, a fire-safety publicity stunt called the Coast to Coast Fire Run involved a unit of volunteer firemen from New York City that trekked across the US in a brand new 1939 Mack fire truck. They arrived in Phoenix on about September 12 and were interviewed on the air by KOY radio, which had offices across the street from the Stephens DeSoto-Plymouth dealership. A photo taken during the visit to Phoenix looking back across North Central Avenue shows a small portion of the Stephens building.

Foreshadowing the demise of the building as an auto-related business, the year 1956 witnessed a substantial downturn for the auto industry. Oldsmobile sales were down by 97,000 units, Buick was down by more than 100,000 units, and Pontiac was down by nearly 150,000. Dodge and Chrysler were down also. However, DeSoto production declined by only 4,347 cars. This resulted in a glut of DeSotos on the market in the late fifties and started a tailspin for the company. A short recession followed in 1958, further curtailing the car market. DeSoto production dived more than 70 percent that year. In 1960 there was management trouble at Chrysler and the DeSoto turned out to be a major casualty. Production of DeSotos came to an unexpected halt on November 30, 1960. A thirty-two year run of quality vehicles was over.

After the Stephens period, the building was occupied by automobile sales and service companies until 1970. A technical school occupied the building for two years from 1970 to 1972 and motorcycle shop from 1974 to 1976. During the years from 1976-2000 the building was occupied by Ledbetter's antique store. The most recent use was as a warehouse for an advertising company. The period of significance for the building extends through 1962 at the fifty-year limit for the National Register; the property was in continual use for automotive purposes from 1928 until 1970.

The building had at least one episode of overall remodeling appearing to date to the mid- 1950s, which could have coincided with the end of the Stephens Motors occupancy. Alterations that likely date to this period include: construction of the mezzanine within the showroom, replacement of the doors in the showroom area, and reconfiguration of the offices. Extension of the parts storage mezzanine in the back of the showroom may also have been done at the same time. There is some evidence that interior decorative elements such as an interior balcony and exterior cast stone also may have been removed during this period.

Alterations occurring post-1960 include enclosure of the showroom mezzanine added in the 1950s; the addition of covering finishes such as carpeting and plywood paneling; covering or reconfiguring some of the openings in the showroom partitions; and the addition of the roof shoring.

Details of the known changes in ownership and tenancy are given in the following timeline:

Year	Ownership Events	Tenant Events
1920	Alice S. Hine purchased 915 N. Central property from Caroline & E. R. Parsons	
1923-8		Alice S. Hine, residence
1928	Alice S. Hine takes out mortgage from Murray Brothers (P. J. & William) to build building – 2 <sup>nd</sup> mortgage from O'Malley Lumber	Building constructed
1929		C.P. Stephens DeSoto (Claude P. Stephens, Sr.)
1939		C.P. Stephens DeSoto Plymouth – confirmed in fire truck photo
1941	Murray Brothers foreclose on mortgage, buy at Sheriff's Sale for \$20,596.26	
1946		Stephens Franklin Motors
1947	William Murray signs lease with ...	Stephens Motors
1948		Stephens-Franklin leases 1150 E. Van Buren
1952		Stephens buys 1150 E. Van Buren
1954	William Murray dies, property passes to Flossie J. & Virgil King	
1956		G. S. Thompson Co.
1960		Stallings Imported Cars
1962	Virgil King dies, ½ interest signed over to First National Bank	
1964		Renault Sales & Service – Joseph Gallant, Nippon-Eiffel Automotive, Inc.
1970	Flossie King places property in trust – Arizona Title Insurance and Trust Co.	Air Trade School Center
1972	Sold to Charles W. Roloff & Renee Roloff	Honda House (motorcycles) – Albert J Wareing
1976	Sold to James William Ledbetter & Suzanne Ledbetter	Ledbetter Antiques and Appraisals
2000	Raymond R. & Ernestina P. Arvizu	Arvizu Advertising
2010	Compass Bank through foreclosure	

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form)

### Primary Sources and Archive Collections:

Arizona Department of Health, Division of Vital Statistics  
 Death Certificate for Claude Powell Stephens, November 23, 1945.

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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 # \_\_\_\_\_

State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): Phoenix Commercial Survey # 20-1

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** 0.39 ac.  
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage)

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 12 400318 3702422  
Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description** (describe the boundaries of the property)

Parcel No. 1:

The North 33 1/3rd feet of Lot 4 and the South 33 1/3rd feet of Lot 5, Block 7, CHURCHILL ADDITION, according to Book 2 of Maps, page 69, records of Maricopa County, Arizona.

Together with

Parcel No.2;

Lot 6 and the North 16 2/3rd feet of Lot 5, Block 7, CHURCHILL ADDITION, according to Book 2 of Maps, page 69, records of Maricopa County, Arizona, EXCEPT that portion, if any, lying within the South 33 1/3rd feet of said Lot 5; and EXCEPT that part of Lot 6 lying North of the following described line: Beginning at a point on the East line of Lot 6 from which the Northeast corner thereof bears North 0 degrees 09 minutes 02 seconds West, a distance of 0.03 feet. being a point on a nontangent circular curve, concave Southerly, the radius point of which bears South 0 degrees 12 minutes 30 seconds East, a distance of 1498.78 feet; Thence Westerly, along the arc of said curve, through a central angle of 4 degrees 37 minutes 49 seconds, a distance of 121.12 feet to a point; Thence South 40 degrees 45 minutes 57 seconds West, a distance of 21.37 feet to a point on the West line of said Lot 6, from which the Northwest corner thereof bears North 0 degrees 09 minutes 36 seconds West, a distance of 22.00 feet and the terminus of the line described herein;

and

EXCEPT that portion of said Lot 6 deeded to City of Phoenix in Warranty Deed recorded in Document No. 2006-246018, described as follows: Commencing at the intersection of Central Avenue and Roosevelt Street, said point also being the center of Section 5, Township 1 North, Range 3 East of the Gila and Salt River Base and Meridian. Maricopa County, Arizona; Thence South 89 degrees 26 minutes 21 seconds East, along the centerline of Roosevelt Street, a distance of 74.70 feet; Thence South 00 degrees 33 minutes 39 seconds West, a distance of 41.04 feet; Thence South 43 degrees 45 minutes 32 seconds West, a distance of 12.47 feet; Thence North 00 degrees 05 minutes 46 seconds East, a distance of 21.41 feet to the beginning of a non-tangent curve, whose 1498.78 foot radius bears South 04 degrees 28 minutes 12

seconds East and is concave Southeasterly; Thence Northeasterly, along said curve, through a central angle of 0 degrees 32 minutes 51 seconds, a distance of 14.32 feet to the point of beginning.

**Boundary Justification** (explain why the boundaries were selected)

Described boundary corresponds to current property ownership.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Robert G. Graham, Historical Architect / Doug Kupel, Historian  
organization Motley Design Group, LLC date July 30, 2012  
street & number 1114 Grand Avenue telephone (602) 254-5599  
city or town Phoenix state AZ zip code 85007  
e-mail rgraham@motleydesigngroup.com

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

---

**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

**Name of Property:** C. P. Stephens DeSoto Six Motorcars  
**City or Vicinity:** Phoenix  
**County:** Maricopa **State:** Arizona  
**Photographer:** Robert G. Graham

**Description of Photograph(s) and number:**

- 1 of 3** 3/28/2012 Overview of building and context, looking southeast  
**2 of 3** 3/28/2012 Building exterior looking northeast  
**3 of 3** 10/12/2011 Building exterior looking southwest (back)

C, P. Stephens DeSoto Six Motorcars  
Name of Property

Maricopa, Arizona  
County and State

---

**Property Owner:**

(complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)

name Select Credit & Leasing, LLC  
street & number 10310 Westbow Blvd. telephone (509) 744-0390  
city or town Spokane state WA zip code 99224

**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 18 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.



PHOTO 1

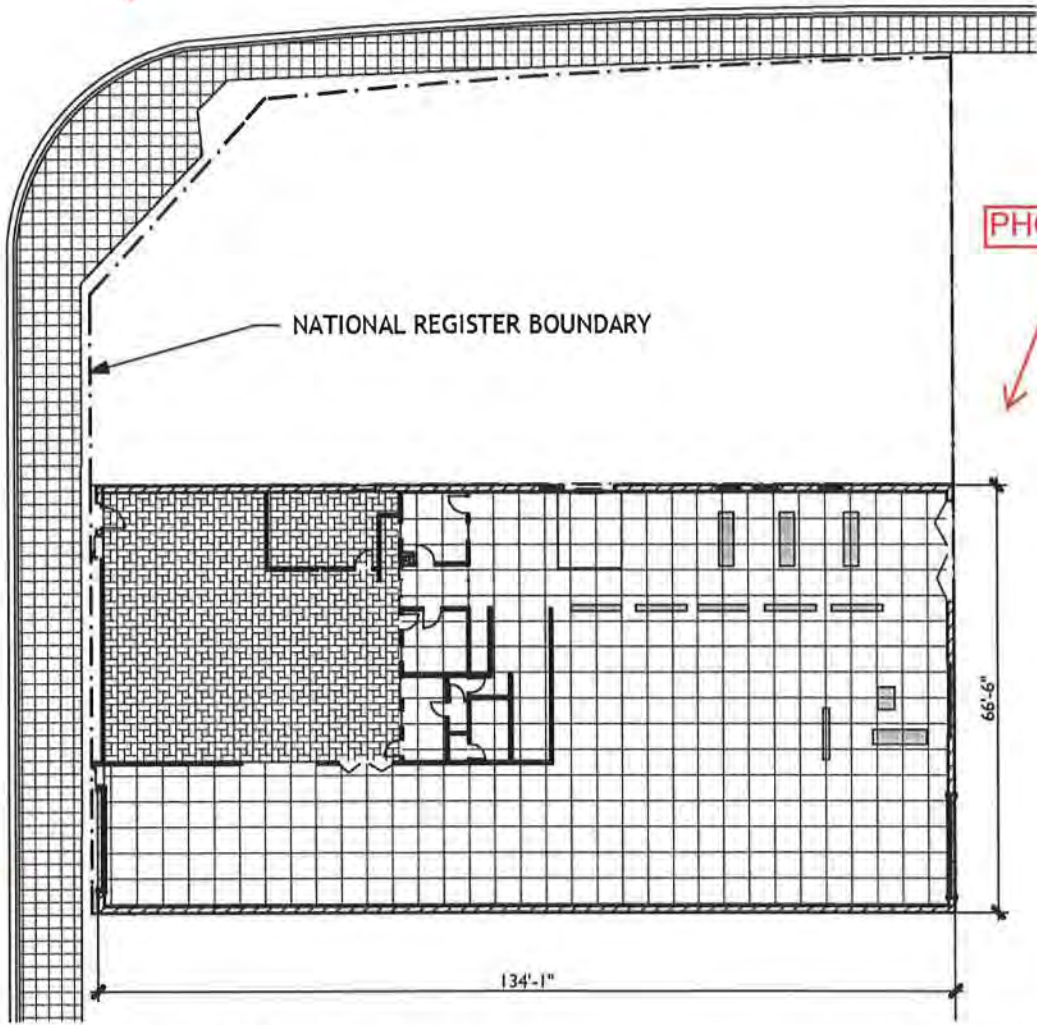
**ROOSEVELT STREET**

**CENTRAL AVENUE**

NATIONAL REGISTER BOUNDARY

PHOTO 3

PHOTO 2



**Existing Conditions Floor/Site Plan**

Scale 1" = 30'

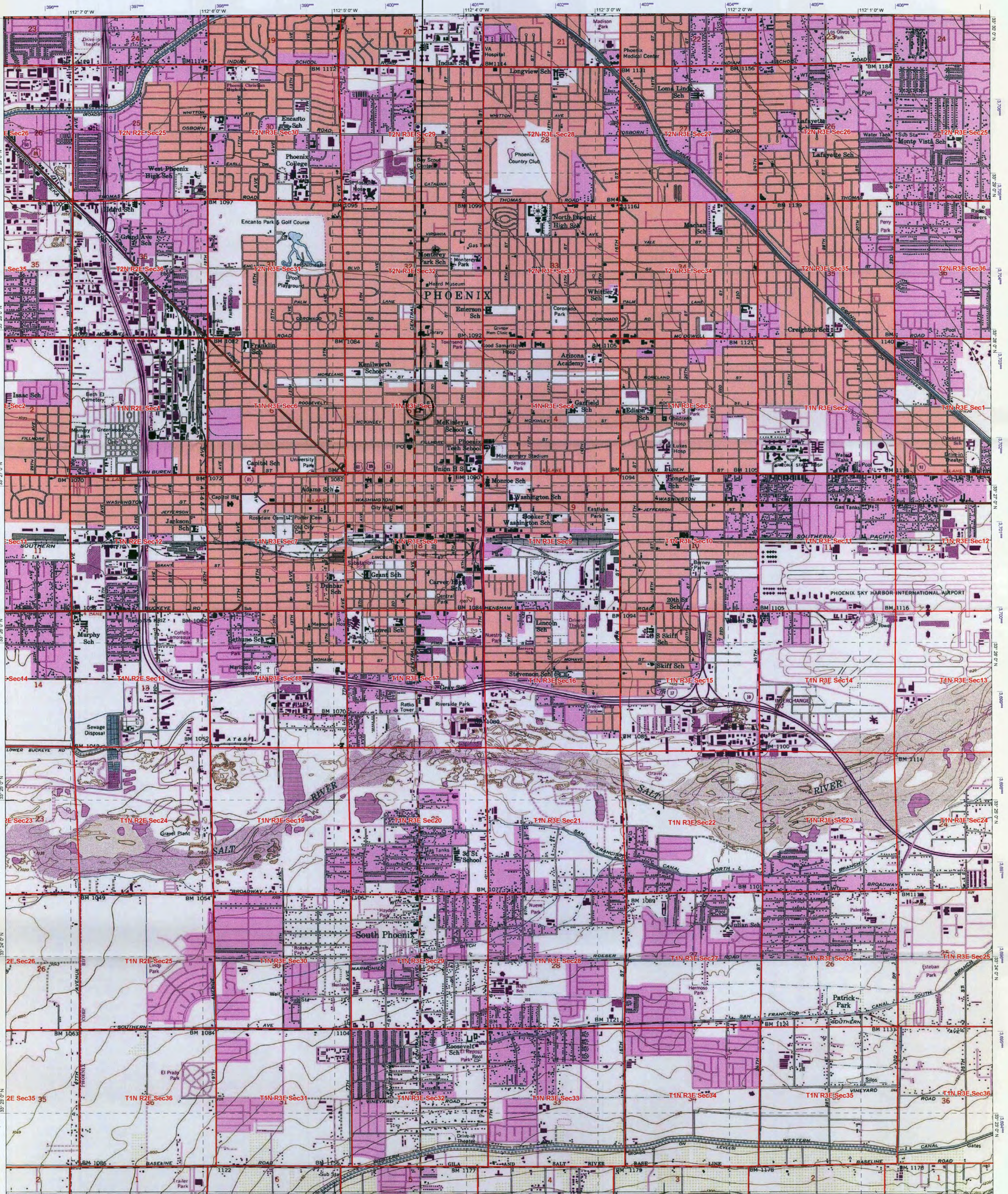
**C. P. Stephens DeSoto Six Motorcars**  
915 N. Central Avenue, Phoenix, Maricopa County, AZ



**NORTH**

C.P. STEPHENS DESOTO SIX MOTORCARS  
 MARICOPA COUNTY, AZ  
 UTM: 2 12/400318 E/3702422 N

CIK



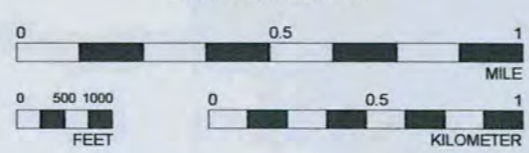
NAD27 Horiz. Datum / UTM Zone 12S

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Magnetic Declination  
 On 9/7/2007

Scale 1:24,000  
 Contour Interval 10 ft



1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

1. Glendale, AZ '92
2. Sunnyslope, AZ '92
3. Paradise Valley, AZ '92
4. Phoenix, AZ '92
5. Tempe, AZ '92
6. Phoenix, AZ '92
7. Laveen, AZ '73
8. Lower Laveen, AZ '73
9. Guadalupe, AZ '92

Phoenix, AZ  
 21169

