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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

-2

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Nickle Service Station

other names/site number KN.662; Airplane Service Station (preferred) ✓

2. Location

street & number 6829 Clinton Highway NA not for publication

city or town Knoxville NA vicinity

state Tennessee code TN county Knox code 093 zip code 37912

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 for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)
Herbert L. Baya 1/30/04
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
 entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
 determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet
 determined not eligible for the National Register
 removed from the National Register.
 other,
(explain:)

Edson H. Beall Signature of the Keeper
3/18/04 Date of Action

Airplane Service Station
Name of Property

Knox County, Tennessee
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

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

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	1	Total

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

Number of Contributing resources previously listed in the National Register
0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/BUSINESS: office building

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: mimetic / programmatic

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls WOOD and METAL

roof METAL

other WOOD

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Criteria Considerations N/A

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

Property is:

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

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce
Architecture

Period of Significance

1930-circa 1954

Significant Dates

1930

Significant Person

(complete if Criterion B is marked)

NA

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Nickle, E. F. and H. C. (designer)

Smith, Wayne L. (engineer, detailer)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

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

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Tennessee Department of Transportation

Airplane Service Station
Name of Property

Knox County, Tennessee
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one acre Powell 137 SE

UTM References

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 16 767574 3988861
Zone Easting Northing
2 _____

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

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

Boundary Justification

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

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jennifer Lehto and Micah Wood
organization University of Tennessee, Department of Urban and Regional Planning date 7/18/03
street & number 1401 Cumberland Avenue telephone (865) 974-5227
city or town Knoxville state TN zip code 37996-4015

Additional Documentation

submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 Or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

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

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

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

Property Owner

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

name Airplane Filling Station Preservation Association, c/o Roch Bernard
street & number 1019 Oglesby Road telephone 865/524-1439
city or town Knoxville state TN zip code 37914

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 listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

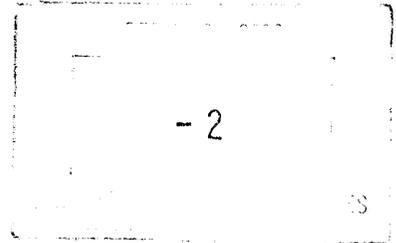
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.



TENNESSEE HISTORICAL COMMISSION
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION
2941 LEBANON ROAD
NASHVILLE, TN 37243-0442
(615) 532-1550

January 30, 2004

Carol Shull
Keeper of the National Register
National Park Service
National Register Branch
1201 Eye Street NW
8th floor
Washington, DC 20005



Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed please find the information needed to nominate the *Airplane Service Station* to the National Register of Historic Places.

If you have any questions about this or if more information is needed, please contact Claudette Stager at 615/532-1550, extension 105, or Claudette.Stager@state.tn.us.

Sincerely,

Herbert L. Harper
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

HLH/cs

Enclosure

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Airplane Service Station
Knox County, Tennessee

Description

Located at the crest of a hill along US Highway 25 W, the Clinton Highway, the circa 1930 Airplane Service station is a compact structure approximately fifty-eight feet long.¹ At first called the "Aeroplane' Gasoline Service Building," the wood frame of the structure is covered with metal strips currently painted white. The body of the airplane rests on a brick foundation. The airplane body is oriented on a southeast-northwest axis, which positions it parallel to the highway. The wings of the airplane are oriented northeast to southwest. The original plans describe the wings as forty-two feet long and twelve feet wide.² The triangular shape of land where the station rests is well suited to its shape. At one time gas pumps were located beneath the wing, but today the gas pumps are gone and the building is not in use.

The wing that faces the highway covers the door to the service station office. It also originally provided cover for two of the gasoline pumps, which dispensed Texaco products when the station opened. The gas pumps and the lights that illuminated them, both of which were located under the north wing, are no longer part of the structure. The side of the building facing the highway contains three windows. The original windows were more vertical than the more horizontal, rectangle-like replacement windows that are now a part of the current building. There were steps at the door, which are no longer there, and the window closest to the door was a large picture or



display window. The nose of the airplane originally featured an eight-foot propeller; however, this no longer exists.³ The tail of the plane body features an eleven-foot rudder.⁴ Plans show that propellers or rotors were designed for the top of the airplane, but these were never built.

A small rectangular extension was built below the wing on the southwest elevation. The original entrance to the women's restroom was located at the rear or southwest elevation of the airplane. The location was an attempt to isolate the women's facilities from the male work area of the filling station. The steps to this room are no longer intact and the door has been boarded over. The southwest side of the plane also contained three windows, which are now boarded over. The east section of the wing provided a covered parking area at the rear of the building. The original site plans show the plane body

¹ McClung Collection, Original Site Plans

² McClung Collection, Original Site Plans

³ McClung Collection, Original Site Plans

⁴ McClung Collection, Original Site Plans

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Airplane Service Station
Knox County, Tennessee

divided into six rooms. The main room was the office of the Airplane Service Station. The office is shown to be eleven feet by four feet and contained built-in shelves.⁵ The remaining rooms consist of two storage rooms, two restrooms, and a compressor room. The walls separating the interior have been removed, leaving one interior space. Within the last few years interior was modified with new paneling and new exterior paint was applied.

The Airplane Service Station is currently in a mildly deteriorated condition. The exterior paint is peeling; however, the exposed wood is still solid. The southwest-facing exterior of the structure is in a slightly worse condition than the northeast or highway facing side. The beams supporting the wings and the wings themselves are in a good condition. The entire rear of the structure has become engulfed in a tangle of bramble and vines. A new road has recently been cut into the hill behind the Airplane Service Station, which has created a very steeply descending slope roughly five feet behind the structure. The structure is situated next to a used car lot, and both properties have been isolated from the adjoining properties by the new road that runs behind them. In spite of these issues, the building retains its overall architectural integrity.

There is a one story concrete block shed (date unknown) on the property that is noncontributing.

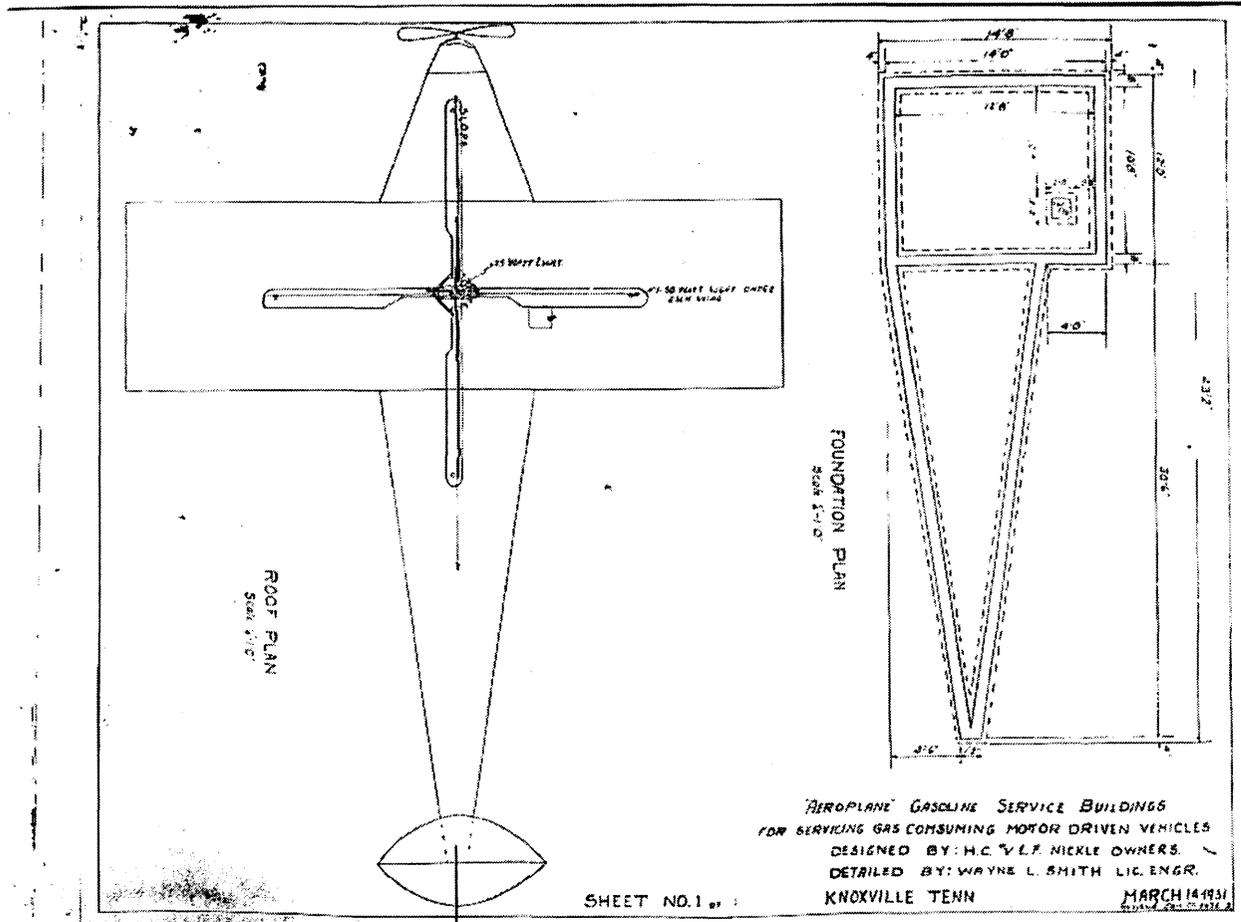
⁵ McClung Collection, Original Site Plans

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Airplane Service Station
Knox County, Tennessee



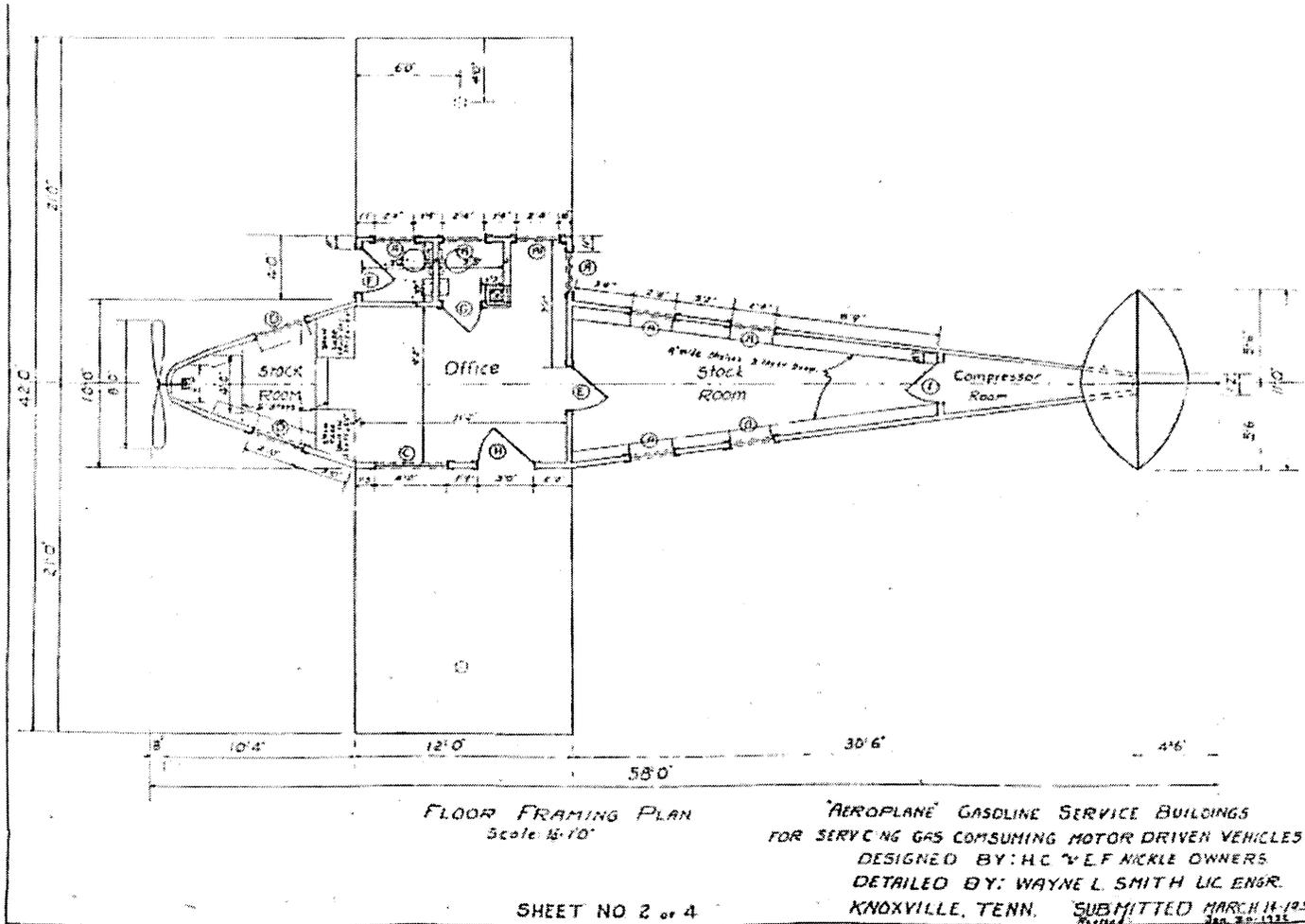
Foundation and roof plan (from McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library)

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Airplane Service Station
Knox County, Tennessee



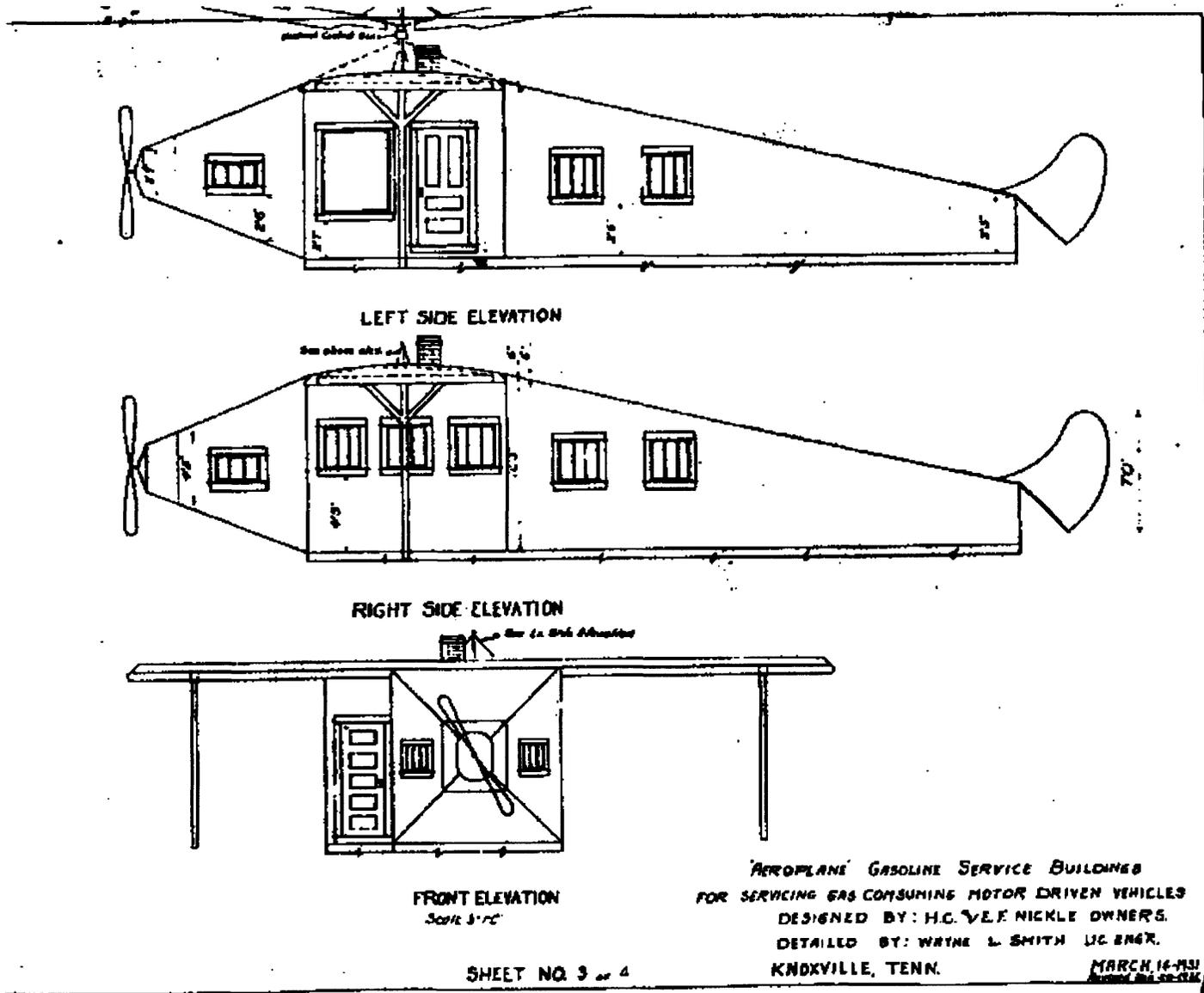
Floor framing plan (from McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library)

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Airplane Service Station
Knox County, Tennessee



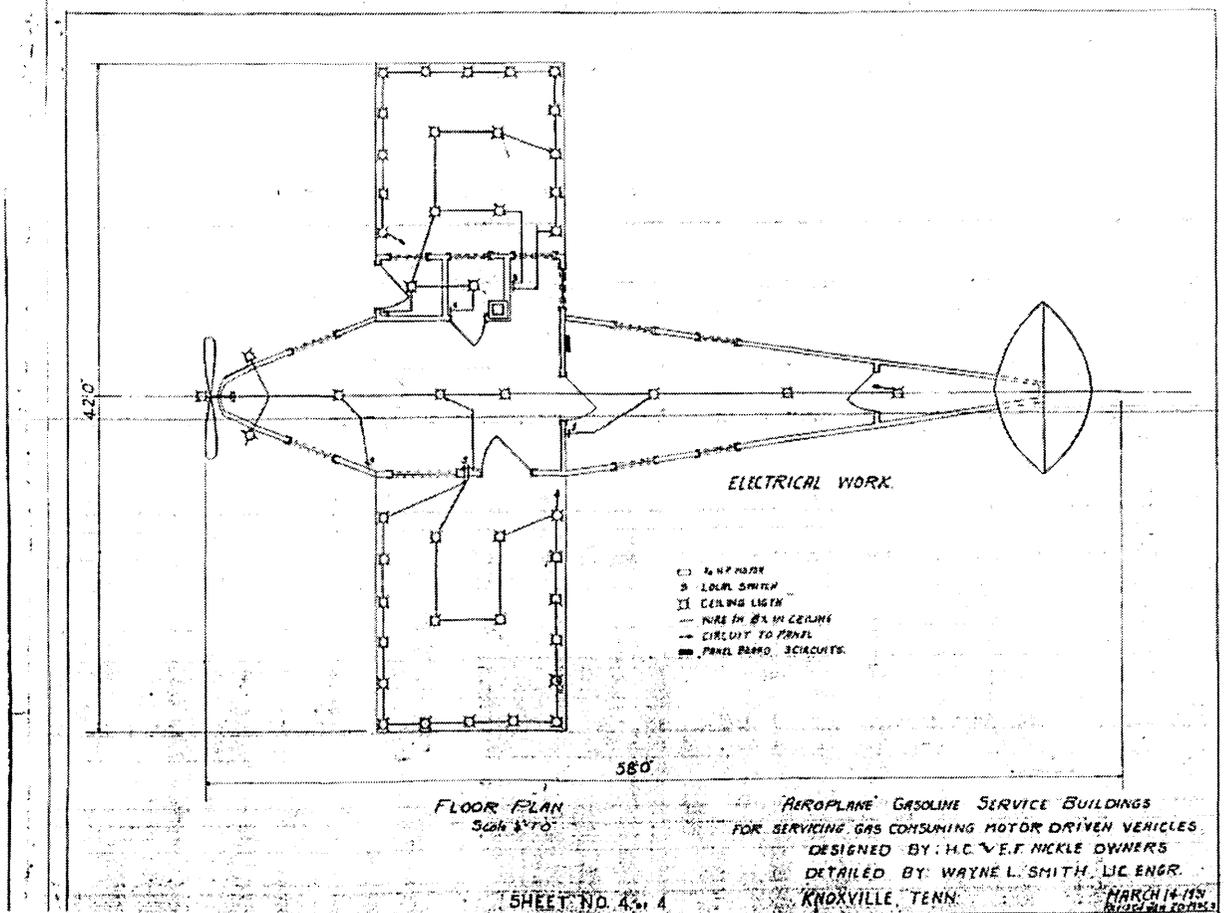
Elevations (from McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library)

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Airplane Service Station
Knox County, Tennessee



Electrical plan (from McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library)

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Airplane Service Station
Knox County, Tennessee

Statement of Significance

The 1930 Airplane Service Station is being nominated to the National Register under criterion A and C for its local significance in commerce and architecture. Under criterion A, the building is important as a representation of roadside commercial enterprises that were built for the automobile. It is located on a major transportation corridor in East Tennessee, an easy pull-off for travelers. The fanciful building is architecturally significant as a rare example of programmatic or mimetic architecture in the state. Designed by brothers Henry and Elmer Nickle, the building's unique shape was ideal for its location and a novel way to catch the eye of the driver. Although there have been some changes to the interior, the gas station retains its overall architectural and historic integrity.

In 1930, Henry and Elmer Nickle opened this gas station to coincide with the widening of US Highway 25. The gas station quickly drew the attention of both locals and tourists passing by on the highway. It is an unusual example of pre World War II mimetic architecture in Tennessee. At the time of construction of the Airplane Service Station, many gas stations were using programmatic or mimetic architecture as an easy way to differentiate themselves from their competition.⁶ As the price of automobiles decreased, more individuals were able to afford automobiles and automobile tourism became a reality for families. Gasoline, originally sold only at hardware and grocery stores, began to appear in specialized stations along the roadways. The number of gas stations grew to meet the demand of increased mobility. With the increase in the number of gas stations, competition between gas stations increased, as well.



Opening day with the Nickle brothers, Elmer is wearing jodhpurs

⁶ Margolies, *Pump and Circumstance*, p. 8.

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Airplane Service Station
Knox County, Tennessee

Small independent gas station operators needed to be creative in order to survive the competition from the national corporations who were designing standardized buildings with distinctive trademarks. A trend began among gas stations across the country in which designs of the stations were made “not to blend in, but to stick out.”⁷ Historian Daniel Vierya has classified the designs that allowed gas stations to “stick out” into four broad categories.⁸ These include the Functional design with minimalist lines which accommodated the actual use of the building. The Respectable design utilizes known landmarks or architectural styles in order to draw attention to the building. The Domestic design, which encourages feelings of hospitality is another style used by gas stations owners to differentiate themselves from others. The final style identified by Vierya is termed Fantastic design, which utilizes unexpected and whimsical designs which mimic objects one would not anticipate seeing along a roadway, in order to draw the attention of customers. This creative phase of gas station design reached its peak during the 1920-1930s. The Airplane Service Station is a rare example of Fantastic gas station design in the East Tennessee region. More specifically, the building is an example of the Fantastic design style.

The Airplane Service Station is located along US Highway 25 in the unincorporated community of Powell, just outside of Knoxville, Tennessee. It is a remarkable landmark in the Powell community and is often used as a marker when directions are given. The service station was designed by two brothers in order to take advantage of the new tourist corridor of US 25. The design of the service station is a reflection of Elmer Nickle’s enchantment with airplanes.⁹ The Nickle brothers may have sought a patent for their design around 1936.¹⁰ Plans from 1931 note that H.C. and E.F. Nickle designed the station, with “detailing” done by Wayne Smith, a licensed engineer from Knoxville. The plans are entitled “*Aeroplane Gasoline Service Buildings for Servicing Gas Consuming Motor Driven Vehicles.*” Originally the gas station was known as the Nickle Service station; however, the city directory began to list it as the Airplane Service Station after 1950.¹¹ Texaco products were sold here when the station opened, but the gasoline brand changed over the years. This station sold only gas; no auto servicing was available. The Nickle brothers had other gas stations in the Knoxville area, but only the one Airplane Service Station. The Nickles sold the property in the 1970s and the building has been used for a variety of things, most recently as a used car lot and an office.¹²

The Nickle brothers located this rare example of mimetic architecture along this highway because it serviced many tourists who traveled the highway from the North and Midwest to Florida in the 1930s-1950s. The Airplane Service Station, with its location along a major thoroughfare, was in a

⁷ Margolies, *Pump and Circumstance*, p. 59.

⁸ Vierya, “*Fill ‘er Up*” *An Architectural History of America’s Gas Stations*, pp. 15, 27, 41 and 56.

⁹ Carver. Tennessee Department of Transportation Historical/Architectural Assessment, p. 4.

¹⁰ Carver. Tennessee Department of Transportation Historical/Architectural Assessment. Carver and Stager, “The Airplane Gas Station Revisited, p. 4.

¹¹ Knoxville City Directories, 1930-1950.

¹² Carver. Tennessee Department of Transportation Historical/Architectural Assessment, p. 4.

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Airplane Service Station
Knox County, Tennessee

prime area to attract those customers in this new era of tourism by automobile. The highway along which the Nickle brothers located their gas station was originally a part of the eastern route of the Dixie Highway. The Dixie Highway was a project conceived by Carl Graham Fisher as a road system that would connect Ontario, Canada to Miami, Florida. He created the Dixie Highway Association in 1915 at a meeting in Chattanooga, Tennessee to oversee the construction of the ambitious project.

The US Federal highway department designated the route along which the Airplane Service Station is located as US Highway 25 and it became a connection that stretched from Detroit to Miami. After the creation of Tennessee's state highway department in 1915, the highway was designated as State Route 9. The highway was improved in the 1920s under the influence of Tennessee Governor Austin Peay who was nicknamed Tennessee's "Road-Builder Governor" because of his relentless dedication to spend federal and state money to improve the transportation system in Tennessee.¹³ Governor Peay guided his budget so that during the 1920s, road building received more money than all other state program combined.¹⁴ At the beginning of Governor Peay's administration, the state maintained only 382 miles of roads, but by the end of Governor Peay's administration, more than 6,000 miles of state highways had been completed.¹⁵ The segment, along which the Airplane Service Station sits, known locally as the Clinton Highway, was completed during Governor Peay's road-building administration.

In the 1930s and 1940s, the route became a corridor through which many travelers and tourists passed. The tourist traffic gave the Clinton Highway a unique atmosphere in the East Tennessee region. Several tourist camps were located in this area of Knox and Anderson counties during the 1940s-50s. The Nickle brothers saw an opportunity at the crest of a hill along this highway to capitalize on these passersby. In addition to the visual advertising of the building itself, the Nickles capitalized on their association with another roadside businessman, Harlan Sanders, by having business cards printed with Sanders' Corbin, Kentucky restaurant on one side and the Airplane Service Station on the other.¹⁶ The "Colonel", after selling his gas station in the 1960s, began selling fried chicken with a special recipe and soon built his new restaurant into the Kentucky Fried Chicken empire.

While the Nickle brothers did not create an empire like their friend in Kentucky, they did leave behind a remarkable architectural structure, which still retains its playful and friendly aura some seventy years after it was built. The Airplane Service Station is a unique structure in East Tennessee. It is an example of pre-World War II mimetic architecture, which is increasingly rare across the United States. It allows a look back into an era when automobiles were newly available to the public-at-large. The Airplane Service Station is a remarkable roadside landmark in Tennessee and is arguable the best pre-World War II mimetic design in the state.

¹³ Carver. Tennessee Department of Transportation Historical/Architectural Assessment, p. 2.

¹⁴ Carver. Tennessee Department of Transportation Historical/Architectural Assessment, p. 4.

¹⁵ Carver. Tennessee Department of Transportation Historical/Architectural Assessment, p. 4.

¹⁶ Carver. Tennessee Department of Transportation Historical/Architectural Assessment, p. 4.

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Airplane Service Station
Knox County, Tennessee

Bibliography

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Carver, Martha and Stager, Claudette. "The 'Airplane Gas Station' Revisited." Society for Commercial Archaeology *News*, Winter 2001.

Jakle, John A. and Sculle, Keith A. *The Gas Station in America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994.

Knoxville City Directories: 1930-1955

McClung Historical Collection, Knox County Public Library System. Drawings donated by Mrs. Elmer Nickle.

Margolies, John. *Pump and Circumstance: Glory Days of the Gas Station*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1993.

Vieyra, Daniel. *"Fill 'er Up" An Architectural History of America's Gas Stations*. New York: Collier Books, 1979.

Witzel, Michael Karl. *The American Gas Station*. Osceola, WI: Motorbooks International, 1992.

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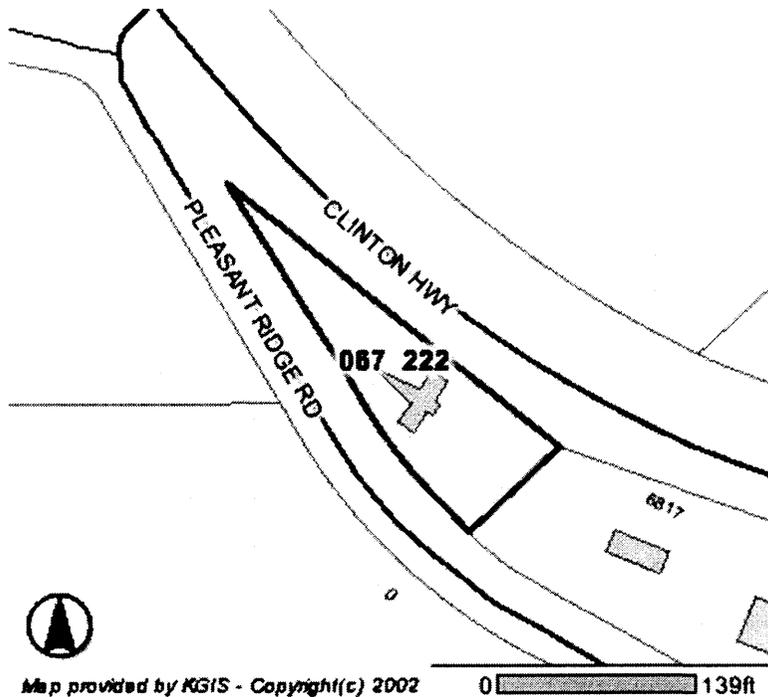
Airplane Service Station
Knox County, Tennessee

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary is being the property shown as CLT Map number 067 parcel 222 in the Knox County Records.

Boundary Justification

The boundary contains all the property associated with this building.



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National Park Service

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Section number photos Page 12

Airplane Service Station
Knox County, Tennessee

Photographs

Photo by: Micah Wood
Negative: Tennessee Historical Commission
Date: March, 2003 and November 2003

Northeast elevation, facing south, also showing side extension
1 of 8

Northeast elevation, facing southeast
2 of 8

Southwest elevation detail, facing north, showing nose and side extension
3 of 8

Detail of nose, facing north
4 of 8

Detail of northeast elevation, facing south
5 of 8

Southeast elevation, facing northwest
6 of 8

Southwest elevation detail, showing side extension
7 of 8

Interior, facing tail (November 2003)
8 of 8