

VLR 12/5/7  
NRHP 2/21/8

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If 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 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 Blacksburg Motor Company, Inc.  
other names/site number Doc Roberts Tire Company, Heavener Chevrolet, site # 150-0105

**2. Location**

street & number 400 South Main Street not for publication N/A  
city or town Blacksburg vicinity N/A  
state Virginia code VA county Montgomery code 121 zip code 24060

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets      does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant      nationally      statewide X locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

M. Catherine Krasser  
Signature of certifying official

1/8/2008  
Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

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

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

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

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

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>2</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>2</u>	Total

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register** 0

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

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**6. Function or Use**

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**Historic Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: COMMERCE/TRADE Sub: SPECIALITY STORE: CAR DEALERSHIP

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**Current Functions** (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: WORK IN PROGRESS Sub: VACANT

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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**7. Description**

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

ART MODERNE/ ART DECO

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials** (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

roof METAL

walls BRICK

other BUILT-UP ASPHALT ROOFING (1/4 OF EXISTING ROOF)

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

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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

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

**Criteria Considerations** (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

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

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

TRANSPORTATION  
ARCHITECTURE  
COMMERCE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance** 1924-1950

**Significant Dates** 1924

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

**Cultural Affiliation** N/A

**Architect/Builder** N/A

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

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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

**Previous documentation on file (NPS)**

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

**Primary Location of Additional Data**

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

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources

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**10. Geographical Data**  
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**Acreage of Property** 0.989 acres

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

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	
<u>1</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>552200</u>	<u>2</u>			<u>See continuation sheet.</u>
<hr/>						

**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.)

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**11. Form Prepared By**  
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name/title Lenore W. Duncan, CID, ASID, Assoc. AIA, Project Manager

organization Spectrum Design, P.C. date 6-26-2007

street & number 10 Church Ave. SE. Plaze Suite 1 telephone 540-342-6001

city or town Roanoke state VA zip code 24011

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**Additional Documentation**  
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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)

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

name Town of Blacksburg Adele Schirmer

street & number 300 S. Main Street telephone 540-961-1126

city or town Blacksburg state VA zip code 24060

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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the 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 National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Blacksburg Motor Company  
Montgomery County, VA**

Section 7 Page 1

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**Summary Description**

The Blacksburg Motor Company building is a classic example of an automobile-oriented commercial facility. A combination of the Art Moderne/ Art Deco styles and vernacular industrial, its exterior echoes the functions performed within. It was built in 1924, with a matching addition on its southwest side approximately nine to ten years later. The building is a two-story brick and poured concrete building with only a single story visible from the primary elevation (East). The front portion (East) of the building, intended primarily for public display and including more Art Moderne/Art Deco characteristics, possesses such architectural features as painted concrete details on the façade, and tin ceilings and terrazzo floors on the interior. The rear of the building is of industrial vernacular origins and is not characterized by a particular style. As it was not intended for display and served a mostly industrial purpose, its features appear purely functional, embracing the modernist ideal of stripped ornamentation and form following function. The Blacksburg Motor Company has enjoyed several incarnations, all of which have been related to the automobile industry— a filling and service station, an automobile dealership, an automobile repair facility, and a tire franchise. The building is of medium size possessing approximately fourteen thousand square feet of space (the original structure is estimated to be 10,000). As the first auto dealership in Blacksburg, and through its evolving functions, this building demonstrates the importance that the automobile has held throughout Blacksburg's history.

**Description of Setting**

As one drives north on South Main Street toward the Blacksburg Historic District (DHR # 150-0108), there is a series of rolling hills, with each crest marking an opportunity for the traveler to pause and view the town<sup>1</sup>. The Blacksburg Motor Company was built on the top of one of these hills at 400 South Main Street, giving it a prominent location on the street. This location symbolizes the importance the automobile had when it was first introduced. Additionally, it was ideally located at the transportation hub of the town, next door to the railroad station, and on the outskirts of the commercial district. It was the first retailer seen as one drove into town from the South and the last from the North.

At almost an acre, the site is fairly large, particularly for within the town limits. The front (East) and one side (South) of the lot is paved, while at the rear of the building it is gravel and fenced. Two concrete block, single story, non-contributing buildings (a radiator shop and spray-on bed-liner building) were added in the 1970s- early 1980s. Early photographs taken in this area show gardens adjacent to the North side (at the train station), with a more rural feel (grass, field) surrounding it at the rear (West) of the building. As the resource was across the street from the train station and abutting the tracks, there likely would have been an unloading area for automobiles arriving by train behind or to the side of the building.

**Detailed Description: Exterior**

The Blacksburg Motor Company building is particularly interesting in that it combines elements of two different architectural styles (Art Moderne and non-significant industrial vernacular), each of which is typical of the function occurring in that portion of the structure. The showroom and service station portions of the building display Art Moderne/ Art Deco elements including rounded corners, bands of windows with metal frames, brick soldier courses used to define cement panels, stream-lined moldings and appliquéés, and a visually flat roof. These are identical on the 1924 original portion and the 1930s addition. Although it possesses elements of both styles, the building leans more toward Art Moderne.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Blacksburg Motor Company  
Montgomery County, VA**

Section 7 Page 2

=====  
than Art Deco due to its horizontal presence and lack of verticality and stepped or set back façade; however, the small applied chevron-type moldings more often seen in Art Deco buildings, are the primary façade ornamentation.

The walls of the side elevations are laid in five-course American bond brick, while the small amount of brick on the façade is in stretcher bond. The façade consists of large storefront windows between ten original brick pilasters, all capped with decorative concrete details. Large painted stucco panels are situated above the storefront and trimmed with stacked soldier coursed brick. An original garage door opening is located in the center of the façade. The garage door itself and the original showroom steel-framed windows have been replaced with the aluminum storefront and metal roll-down door that currently pierce the façade; however, the existing masonry openings are original to the building, as are the poured concrete sills and coping. The original garage door and hardware has been found inside the building. There is also a brick stove flue visible from the front of the building that is visible in the concealed mezzanine of the building, but plastered over on the main level. At the lower level, the flue and firebox are exposed and located by the original coal bin (no longer extent).

The sides and rear of the building beyond the showroom and filling station areas are typical of an industrial building of this period, with no discernable architectural style. The windows are punched openings with steel frames and operable hoppers in brick masonry walls. The lower level has a poured-in-place concrete foundation wall with cement parging. There is no decoration or ornamentation on these portions of the building. A stepped parapet wall follows the slope of the site and the roof which is hidden behind the parapet on three sides, slopes from front to back with gutters and downspouts along the rear wall. Not visible from the street (even from the rear of the building), the flat roof is primarily standing-seam with a small portion of built-up asphalt roofing that occurs over a portion of the addition. There is no cornice and there is an absence of projecting eaves.

**Detailed Description: Interior**

The interior main level of the building is primarily divided into three sections, an area that was the original showroom and filling station, the repair and service station area, and finally, in the area of the addition, there is a second showroom area. The two showroom areas are divided by a vehicular drive where automobiles were driven to the rear of the facility for service and repair. The original showroom is marked by features typically associated with more upscale commercial facilities such as terrazzo floors, arched mahogany woodwork, and pressed tin cornice and ceilings. The area where the service counter was originally located is evident by a change in flooring material from diamond-patterned terrazzo flooring to a wood plank floor. The plaster in the partitioned areas is heavily textured, while the plaster on the exterior walls is less so. The arched openings form a rhythm along the back of the showroom area, with cased door openings, arched transoms, and sidelights denoting entrances to the Ladies Room and its antechamber (one of the first of its kind in this type of facility), and offices. There are arched openings leading to the lower level and to a corridor that proceeds to the men's room and repair area. Also of note, a separate restroom for African-Americans was provided at the end of this corridor within the repair area. The door to this room is lower than all of the rest and lacking in ornamentation.

While the first portion of the building was built with a basement and concealed mezzanine (entered by a pull-down door within the tin ceiling located in the corridor mentioned above), the addition was built with a crawlspace under the

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Blacksburg Motor Company  
Montgomery County, VA**

Section 7 Page 3

=====

repair area and slab-on-grade in the showroom. Of particular interest is the utilization of “modern” building materials not used to a great degree in the area previously. These include poured-in-place concrete walls and raised-floor slabs, terrazzo, ceramic tile (in the art deco black and white patterning) steel-framed windows, steel girders and beams, and cinder block. These materials were combined with the more familiar traditional materials of wood, brick masonry, and plaster.

The drive path is concrete and slopes up to the level of the concrete-floored repair garage section. The walls here are also masonry with a brick water table and cinder block above (a juxtaposition of how it is typically utilized today and an example of the prominence it held as a “new” material). These walls curve as they move toward the repair area, a nod to vehicular movement: form following function and characteristic of the Art Moderne movement. There is a tin cornice and particle board ceiling with battens above. This ceiling (which is also in the repair garage area) is heavily damaged and not thought to be original; it is unknown if a similar ceiling was here originally or the structure was exposed (there is no evidence of support for the original garage door which was center-mounted). This leads to the suspicion that there was no ceiling there originally or that it was higher than the one there now. On both sides of the drive path, there are double garage doors that were for moving automobiles in and out of the showrooms. There are also two pairs of these doors leading from the newer showroom to the garage repair area.

The newer showroom area is similar to the original portion of the building in its masonry openings and in fenestration (from early photographs). The flooring is non-original vinyl tile. The same pressed tin ceiling tiles and cornice are used. Several partial-height partitions dating to the 1980s (after it became a tire franchise) are built in the northwest corner of the room.

The repair garage at the rear of the building is one large room (with two partial partitions—one of which is a portion of the original exterior wall). All of the perimeter walls are painted brick masonry with large steel-framed windows evenly positioned around the exterior walls. The floor is concrete and the ceiling as mentioned above is non-original particle board. There are four large steel framed skylights that bring additional light into the interior of the repair area.

The lower level of the building can be accessed several ways: from the lower level through a garage door opening and concrete ramp, and by two staircases (one of which was covered in the 1970s). The lower level is divided into a series of unfinished rooms with one primary room encompassing the area of the original repair garage above. The walls are poured concrete and the ceiling is exposed, comprised of exposed steel girders and beams and the underside of the concrete slab above. Originally the main room was used for storage, most notably for the Town’s first fire engine. In later years, it was used for specialty repair and housed a paint booth (the blast-proof fixtures are still in evidence), as well as tire storage in its last incarnation. The other rooms include a boiler room with large coal bin and a room for parts storage. This room also has a raised mezzanine area that houses a gasoline tank—the tank was filled through the window into a fuel pipe located in the raised area. The abandoned stairwell is in this room.

**Integrity Statement**

The majority of the building is in its original form with very few alterations. The most prominent exterior changes are the 1970s metal coiling door and aluminum storefront that replaced the original windows on the façade. The original masonry openings and poured concrete sills were maintained when the windows and door were replaced, so that the

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Blacksburg Motor Company  
Montgomery County, VA**

Section   7   Page   4  

=====

overall character of the building is still intact. There were no additions to the building after the 1930s addition, constructed nine to ten years after the original portion. The addition's brick and pilaster detailing is identical and the steel sash windows match.

The earliest photographs show a porte-cochere at the front of the building where the gas pumps were originally located. It was torn down sometime in the late-1950s or 1960s, after the gas station function of the building was eliminated. There was a significant fire at the building in 1933; however, as photographs prior to this fire and shortly succeeding it show the building looking primarily the same, the damage must have been primarily cosmetic and not to the main structural or architectural building elements. The one significant exception is that the later photographs depict the building with the 1930s addition, while in the photographs showing the building during the fire, there is no addition—the building stops at the drive path.

On the interior of the building, most of the original features have been maintained. The only changes are the replacement of the flooring material in the newer showroom (it is believed it was originally painted concrete and the vinyl tile was added in the late-1970s), the partial height partitions added in the 1980s and the removal of the service station desk (at the junction of terrazzo and wood flooring). There is also the probable addition of the particle-board ceiling.

As the building has most of its original interior and exterior features, has not been significantly altered, nor does it have any uncharacteristic additions to it, the integrity of the building appears to be largely intact and has not been compromised beyond what would be expected of a building of this age and type.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Blacksburg Motor Company  
Montgomery County, VA**

Section 8 Page 5

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**Statement of Significance**

The Blacksburg Motor Company, commonly known today as the Doc Roberts building, was constructed in 1924 by Robert and Mason Heavener on the 400 block of South Main Street, at the southwest corner intersection of Clay Street and Main Street in Blacksburg. This building is notable for its combination Art Moderne/ Art Deco architecture, prominent position in the history of the automobile in Blacksburg, and its connection to the Heavener family of Montgomery County. Blacksburg Motor Company is eligible under both Criteria A and C, for transportation and its Art Moderne/ Art Deco, respectively. The Blacksburg Motor Company Building is one of the last surviving examples of these styles of architecture in Blacksburg. It also serves as a fine example of how classic, industrial architecture can mimic an idea, such as transportation, with sleekness and movement integrated within the design, making it the perfect “home to a car” dealership- the function for which it was designed. The building’s history directly associates it with the historical evolution of transportation in Blacksburg and the surrounding area, at the cusp of America’s transition to automobiles and an automobile-oriented society. There are two periods of significance for the Blacksburg Motor Company building. The period of significance runs from 1924, its date of construction, to 1950, when its significance as a force in transportation in Blacksburg declined, due to economic competition and the city’s expansion.

Reflecting the changing nature yet continued prominence of the automobile, the building has enjoyed several incarnations, all related to the automobile industry – a gas and service station, an automobile dealership, and an automobile repair facility. Early photographs show a porte-cochere, attached to the façade of the building, where the gas pumps were originally located. A fire damaged this structure in 1933, but the porte-cochere was not torn down until sometime in the 1960s, when the building ceased to function as a filling station.

**Historical Background**

In addition to its connection to automobile travel in Blacksburg, the Blacksburg Motor Company is also connected to the prominent Heavener family of Montgomery County. The family was first documented in Montgomery County personal property tax records in 1797 and played a significant role in Blacksburg for many generations. Robert Heavener, born in 1898, became president of the Blacksburg Motor Company, which he built with his brother Mason Ronald Heavener, born in 1900.

Before building Blacksburg Motor Company in 1924, the two Heavener brothers purchased the Luster-Black garage on what was then the corner of Mcconkey and Main Street (now known as Giles Road) in 1919. Out of this garage they opened the first filling station in Blacksburg, next door to the Heavener homestead. It was the only filling station between Roanoke and Bluefield, WV. Two years later, in 1921, they bought a Chevrolet dealership, the first automobile dealership in Blacksburg. They moved their business to the Blacksburg Motor Company building when it was completed in 1924. The original dealership building no longer stands, replaced in the 1940s by a frame house.

Robert was a personable business owner, who dressed sharply and valued customer service. He was actively engaged in the community, serving on Blacksburg’s Town Council and taking part in the development of McBryde Village. He similarly served on the Board of Directors for the National Bank of Blacksburg, an institution founded in 1891 by Alexander Black, a descendant of Blacksburg’s founder. Robert was also a charter member of the Blacksburg-

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Blacksburg Motor Company  
Montgomery County, VA**

Section 8 Page 6

Christiansburg-VPI Water Authority created in September 1954, and was heavily involved with Virginia Tech, contributing to the construction of its first major football stadium.<sup>2</sup> Robert's daughter, Betsy Heavener Owen, recalls that her father gave small gifts such as sterling salt and pepper shakers to customers interested in purchasing a car from his dealership.<sup>3</sup> His integrity and generosity brought customers back again and again.<sup>4</sup>

**The Automobile in Blacksburg**

The Blacksburg Motor Company defines two unique periods within transportation history for Southwest Virginia as well as the nation as a whole. The first period is the original automotive boom in the country where the car went from being a luxury to being ubiquitous. Subsequently, it progressed to becoming a necessity and in doing so both expanded its relevance and precipitated the demise of small in-town dealerships, facilitating the movement of commercial enterprises out of crowded town centers not conducive to automobiles, to the wide open space outside of town with plenty of room for parking.

Just as residents were fighting to extend rail service from Christiansburg to Blacksburg in 1901, they received word that "a horseless buggy" was entering Blacksburg. Citizens gathered to see an automobile. Only 40 cars were registered in the state of Virginia at the time.<sup>5</sup> Blacksburg celebrated the opening of its railway in 1904, and this mode of transportation served as the primary means for long distance travel for many years, only slowly eclipsed by the automobile. In 1909, a Blacksburg resident owned the only automobile registered in Montgomery County, yet automobile travel increased enough in the next several years to motivate the town council to impose speed limits on Blacksburg streets in September of 1914.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1920s, automobiles mingled with horse-drawn wagons in Blacksburg while the railroad remained a popular form of transportation. Gasoline and cars were delivered to the Blacksburg Motor Company via the railroad. By 1926, Cadets coming to Virginia Tech took the train to the station in Cambria and then took a taxi into Blacksburg while leaving their bags to be transported on the train. The late 1920s and early 1930s brought better roads for travelers and an increasing need for standardized road signs, speed limits, and street lights. In 1929, Montgomery County boasted 76 ½ miles of roadway, with 46 miles hard surfaced.<sup>7</sup>

The building's construction in 1924, in an opportune area near the railroad tracks, reflected significant changes not only for Blacksburg residents, but for the nation as a whole. Between 1914 and 1920, automobile ownership rose dramatically with one in fourteen Americans owning a car by the end of this period. Car owners were mostly middle-class, white men who lived in the suburbs, yet the resale market that grew in the 1920s and 1930s made cars more affordable for urban laborers and minorities.<sup>8</sup>

Tourism by automobile also grew considerably during this period. Cars were heralded for giving citizens the ability to escape the pressures of the city and enter the "democratic, regenerative, unifying space of the open road."<sup>9</sup> Icons like Henry Ford believed cars gave Americans more control over open space and a greater sense of community.<sup>10</sup> Blacksburg was also touched by this national tourism trend. An October 16, 1924 article announcing the construction of the Blacksburg Motor Company noted "a very unique feature, as well as a serviceable one to tourists, is a ladies' rest room, which will comprise a portion of the building."<sup>11</sup> The rear of the building included a separate African-American bathroom during segregation.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Blacksburg Motor Company  
Montgomery County, VA**

Section 8 Page 7

After the initial boom in the 1920s, automobiles continued to gain prevalence and ubiquity. The Blacksburg Motor Company was a driving force behind automobile purchases in the town. Amidst this transformation, the Heavener brothers did well, selling a record 129 cars from the Blacksburg Motor Company in 1950.<sup>12</sup> This allowed the Blacksburg Motor Company to become part of the history of numerous individuals and organizations in Blacksburg. The Volunteer Rescue Squad, originally formed in 1950, purchased its first vehicle, a Chevrolet Panel Truck, from the Blacksburg Motor Company for \$1,740.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Blacksburg's Volunteer Fire Department, formed in 1925, housed its fire trucks at the motor company in its early years. As luck would have it, at the time of the 1933 fire, the department's fire truck was stored on the premises.<sup>14</sup>

Following the record year of 1950, the dealership began to lose market share. At this point there were several other dealerships within Blacksburg creating competition, and the town was expanding. As has been typical in many American towns, the dominance of an automobile-oriented society allowed Blacksburg to grow and subsequently move residences and commercial enterprises to the outskirts of town, where there were typically larger open spaces more conducive to automobile lots. When the Blacksburg Motor Company was conceived, very few people owned automobiles. Therefore, there were typically showroom models for demonstration purposes and individual vehicles were ordered and shipped via railroad. With the coming of shipment via tractor trailer, and the resultant decrease in rail shipment, delivering automobiles to more urban areas became less convenient. In addition, Blacksburg removed its railroad in the 1960s, necessitating delivery of automobiles and gasoline outside of town.

The dealership continued to be operated by the Heavener family until 1976, at which point it was sold to Ramey Chevrolet. After two years, Ramey moved the dealership to the outskirts of town near Interstate 81. At the time the Chevrolet dealership was sold to Ramey, the group was purchasing numerous smaller dealerships in the area.<sup>15</sup> This consolidation of resources became common in the 1970s. Once most residents had cars, driving to reach the dealership was not a problem. Consolidation was to the dealership's advantage, because it could then offer a greater inventory and selection, and was more conveniently located near the new interstate system, which facilitated automobile delivery via freight truck.

Apart from the Heavener's dealership being the first to open its doors in Blacksburg and subsequently expanding to the South Main Street location of the Blacksburg Motor Company, the structure is currently the only car dealership designed and built as a dealership extant from that era. After the Heavener Chevrolet dealership came to Blacksburg, several others followed, including Ford, Buick, Plymouth, and Desoto. Of these dealership locations, only two still exist—neither has anything to do with the automobile industry, nor were they constructed for that purpose—both are currently vacant. One was last a health food store and the other was a restaurant. The fourth dealership was located at 100 South Main Street, where the current National Bank is located. There is only one other filling station still standing from that era. While designed as a filling station, it did not offer a service garage or a car dealership. It is now a Carol Lee Donuts franchise.

**Architectural Context**

Today there are five buildings standing in the Town of Blacksburg that incorporate elements of similar architectural styles (Art Moderne/ Art Deco and International). The Blacksburg Motor Company is the oldest of these and the only one that represents the automobile industry. The other buildings include the following: The Lyric Theatre (1930),

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Blacksburg Motor Company  
Montgomery County, VA**

Section   8   Page   8  

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The National Bank Building (ca. 1946), The Armory (ca. 1931), and the building containing the restaurant “Boudreaux” (ca. 1940). These other buildings are all much closer to downtown and are located within the confines of the downtown historic district. Of note is the fact that these buildings were always meant to be viewed from one or two elevations whereas the Blacksburg Motor Company was the only one that was either designed to stand alone or still stands in its original context.

None of the five is a pure example of one style of architecture, as it was typical in the vernacular setting for buildings to draw from several styles, particularly at the overlap between designations. The National Bank probably is the closest to being of a pure Art Deco style. The Lyric Theatre is described on their website ([www.thelyric.com](http://www.thelyric.com)) as a combination between Art Deco and Spanish Colonial, and the Armory is depicted as “Other” with an amalgam of architectural styles (International, Industrial, Art Deco, and Neo-Classical) and is located at 201 Draper Road. Built in 1940, Boudreaux is the latest example of an Art Deco façade and is beyond the typical period denoted for these styles of architecture. The Blacksburg Motor Company is the closest example of Art Moderne in the town with elements of Art Deco (in the chevron decorations). With the exception of the Armory building, all of the other extent examples stress verticality of design with the buildings reaching upward. Appropriately, the Blacksburg Motor Company is sleek of design and low to the ground, much more characteristic of a building in the Art Moderne style, and more appropriate for a car dealership.

The mixture of styles is particularly appropriate for the Blacksburg Motor Company due to its following one of the major tenets of modern architecture, form follows function. The building possesses both a very public persona in its image as way station, convenience center for travelers, and automobile dealership as well as a more service function oriented one as a repair garage. It is not unlike the image of an automobile itself, sleek and sporty on the exterior and nuts and bolts on the inside. The chosen styles of architecture suit the image of a new cutting-edge facility very well. Art Moderne/ Art Deco has artistic flourishes and modern sensibility —applicable to the showrooms and selling of automobiles, and the industrial vernacular embodies function and practicality—perfect for the repair functions.

Three of the five buildings (Lyric Theatre, Armory, Boudreaux, and the National Bank building) possess concrete facades with no visible brick masonry. The Armory building utilizes a concrete façade piece at the entrance and then brick masonry and steel casement windows for the remainder of the façade. The Blacksburg Motor Company is unique in its use of cement panels on brick for the entire façade. There is not a predominant concrete entry piece as seen in the other examples.

It is also important to note that the form of the building is uniquely suited for its function. The showrooms possess large expanses of uninterrupted glazing so as to display the new automobile. At the center of the front façade is a coiling garage door that serves a functional purpose as well as hinting to customers of all of the offered services.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Blacksburg Motor Company  
Montgomery County, VA**

Section  8  Page  9

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**Endnotes**

- <sup>1</sup> Donna Dunay, *Understanding a Virginia Town, Blacksburg Town Architecture, c. Penn Washington* (1986), 48.
- <sup>2</sup> Patricia S. Neumann, "Blacksburg Transported: From Wagons to Jet Planes" in *A Special Place for 200 Years, A History of Blacksburg, Virginia*, ed. Clara B. Cox, 104 (Blacksburg: Town of Blacksburg, Virginia, 1998).
- <sup>3</sup> Neumann, 110-111.
- <sup>4</sup> Neumann, 112-113.
- <sup>5</sup> Joanne M. Anderson, "Business and Industry in Blacksburg" in *A Special Place for 200 Years, A History of Blacksburg, Virginia*, ed. Clara B. Cox, 167 (Blacksburg: Town of Blacksburg, Virginia, 1998).
- <sup>6</sup> Kathleen Franz, *Tinkering: Consumers Reinvent the Early Automobile* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania press, 2005) 2.
- <sup>7</sup> David C. Heavener, interview by Lenore Duncan, June 2007 and phone interview September 2007
- <sup>8</sup> Franz, 3.
- <sup>9</sup> Franz, 6.
- <sup>10</sup> "Blacksburg is Booming: Has Citizenry of 1110." *Virginia Tech*, v.22, no.3, October 16, 2004. Virginia Tech Digital Library and Archives. <http://spec.lib.vt.edu/bicent/boom.htm>. (accessed March 23, 2007).
- <sup>11</sup> "Blacksburg Rescue History." Blacksburg Volunteer Rescue Squad. <http://www.blacksburg.gov/rescue/history.php>. (accessed March, 23, 2007).
- <sup>12</sup> Mrs. W.D. Altman, "Firemen Have Had 7 Chiefs", *Blacksburg Messenger*, March 8, 1963. Virginia Tech Digital Library and Archives, <http://spec.lib.vt.edu/bicent/timeline/firemen.htm> (accessed March 23, 2007).
- <sup>13</sup> Dorothy H. Bodell, *The Heavener Family of Montgomery County, Virginia 1797-1983* (Blacksburg, 1983), 1.
- <sup>14</sup> Bodell, 64.
- <sup>15</sup> James J. Owen, interview by Jessica Wirgau and Chip Herman, *WTOB Channel 2* Town of Blacksburg, 1 May 2007.
- <sup>16</sup> Betsy H. Owen, phone interview by Jessica Wirgau, Town of Blacksburg, 24 May 2007.
- <sup>17</sup> Bodell, 71.
- <sup>18</sup> David C. Heavener, phone interview by Jessica Wirgau, Town of Blacksburg, 13 June 2007.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Blacksburg Motor Company  
Montgomery County, VA**

Section   9   Page  10 

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**Bibliography:**

Altman, W.D. "Firemen Have Had 7 Chiefs, Part II." *Blacksburg Messenger*, March 8, 1963. Virginia Tech Digital Library and Archives. <http://spec.lib.vt.edu/bicent/timeline/firemen.htm>. (accessed March 23, 2007).

"Blacksburg is Booming: Has Citizenry of 1110." *Virginia Tech*, v.22, no.3, October 16, 2004. Virginia Tech Digital Library and Archives. <http://spec.lib.vt.edu/bicent/boom.htm>. (accessed March 23, 2007).

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Dunay, Donna, *Understanding a Virginia Town, Blacksburg Town Architecture*, Penn Washington, 1986.

Franz, Kathleen. *Tinkering: Consumers Reinvent the Early Automobile*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005.

**Video:**

James Owen interview: May 1, 2007 3pm. Interviewed by Jessica Wirgau, Museum Coordinator, and Chip Herman, WTOB Channel 2 Station Manager

Harry Saville interview: May 17, 2007 10am. Interviewed by Jessica Wirgau, Museum Coordinator, and Lisa Sedlak, WTOB Channel 2 Producer

Adele Schirmer interview: May 22. Interviewed by Jessica Wirgau, Museum Coordinator, Lisa Sedlak, Producer, and Josh Rosenfeld, Production Assistant for WTOB Channel 2.

David Heavener interview: June, 2007 and September, 2007. Interviewed by Lenore Duncan, project manager, Spectrum Design.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Blacksburg Motor Company  
Montgomery County, VA**

Section   10   Page   11  

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**Geographic References**

**Verbal Boundary Description:**

The boundary of Blacksburg Motor Company is shown on the accompanying aerial map, titled "existing site," and is listed in the Town of Blacksburg as tax parcel 001908, and described in Deed Book 2007, Page 003999.

**Boundary Justification:**

The boundaries chosen coincide with the original city lot, which retains its original street boundaries and are justified by the property survey conducted by Draper Aden Associates, and designated as site boundaries in the legal deed of the property.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Blacksburg Motor Company  
Montgomery County, VA**

Section Photographs Page 12

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The following is the same for all photographs:

**Blacksburg Motor Company, #150-0105**  
Blacksburg, Montgomery County, Virginia  
Photographs taken by Spectrum Design (Bill Huber)  
Digital Images stored at VDHR  
August 26, 2006

1. Façade (East side) of Blacksburg Motor Company
2. North-West exterior (rear) of Blacksburg Motor Company
3. South-West exterior (rear) of Blacksburg Motor Company
4. South side exterior of Blacksburg Motor Company
5. North side exterior of Blacksburg Motor Company
6. Roof of Blacksburg Motor Company
7. Main level, Interior Detail photograph, with Tin Ceiling Views. Blacksburg Motor Co.
8. Basement Interior Photograph, towards North side of Blacksburg Motor Co.
9. Main level, Interior photograph, facing South side of Blacksburg Motor Co.
10. Main level, Interior Detail photograph, Blacksburg Motor Co.

VIRGINIA  
SOURCES

BLACKSBURG QUADRANGLE  
VIRGINIA—MONTGOMERY CO.  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

1958 IV SE  
MC DONALD'S MILL

