

Survey and Research Report
Carolina Rim and Wheel Building

306 North Graham Street

Charlotte, North Carolina

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission

2008

1. Name and location of the property. The property known as the Carolina Rim and Wheel Building is located at 306 North Graham Street, Charlotte, North Carolina. The property encompasses only Tax Parcel Number 07806401.

2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner of the properties.

The owners of the property are:

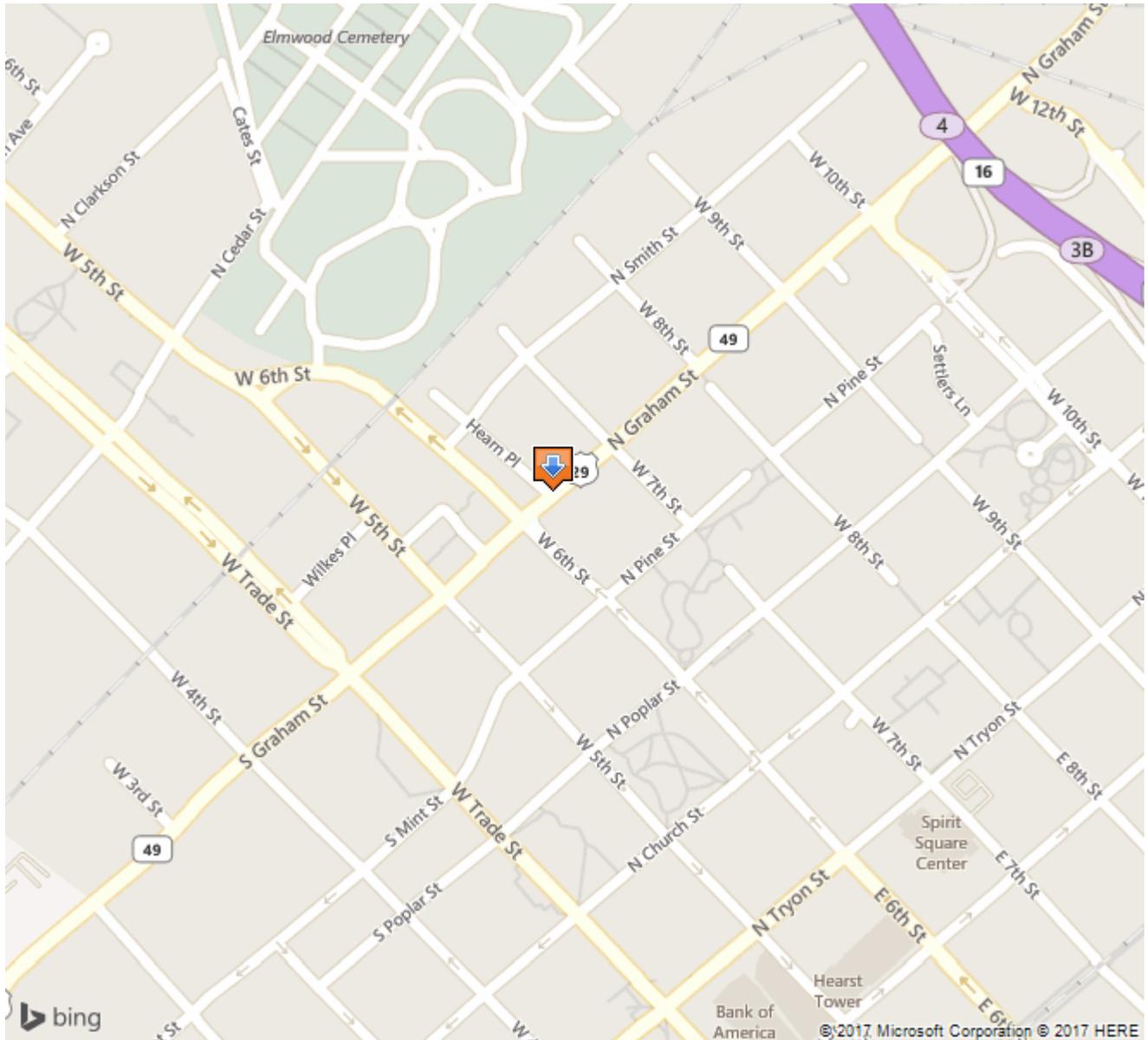
Gerrard Family LLC
7218 Ashbourne Lane
Charlotte, NC 28227

and

James G. Gerrard and Thomas Gerrard
and Gerrard Tire Company
PO Box 790010
Charlotte, NC 28206-7900

3. Representative photographs of the property. This report contains representative photographs of the property.

4. Maps depicting the location of the property. This report contains maps which depict the location of the property.



5. Current deed book references to the properties. The most recent reference to Tax Parcel Number 07806401 (306 N. Graham Street) is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 11602, page 176.

6. A brief architectural description of the property. This report contains brief architectural description of the property prepared by Richard L. Mattson and Frances P. Alexander.

7. A brief historical sketch of the property. This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Richard L. Mattson and Frances P. Alexander.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the properties meet criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5.

a. Special significance in terms of history, architecture, and cultural importance. The Commission judges that the property known as the Carolina Rim and Wheel Building does possess special

significance in terms of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: Constructed in 1929 for Carolina Rim and Wheel, the property clearly illustrates Charlotte's historical role as an important regional wholesaling and automotive distribution hub. In its brick exterior with decorative brickwork around the main entries, steel-sash windows, and utilitarian interior, including wood beams, wood posts, and steel trusses, the L-shaped facility remains a well-preserved example of the wholesaling businesses that arose around the outskirts of the center city. A portion of the facility was also employed for truck engine repair, reflecting the rise of Charlotte as a trucking terminal. Acquired by the Gerrard Tire Company in 1974, it remains in operation as a tire sales and repair business.

b. integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and association. The Commission contends that the architectural description by Richard L. Mattson and Frances P. Alexander included in this report demonstrates that the Carolina Rim and Wheel Building meets this criterion.

9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal. The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the properties which become designated historic landmarks. The current appraised value of the improvements to Tax Parcel Number 07806401 (306 N. Graham Street) is **\$781,000**. The total appraised value is **\$1,781,000**. The property is zoned UR-3

Date of Preparation of this Report: 10 February 2008

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Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, 306 North Graham Street, Charlotte, NC

Statement of Significance

Built in 1929 for the Carolina Rim and Wheel Company, this two-story, L-shaped facility represents the growth of Charlotte as a significant, regional distribution center in the early twentieth century. Key among the city's distribution businesses were those that specialized in the automotive trade. Carolina Rim and Wheel was founded in Charlotte in 1926 as a distributor of heavy duty truck parts in the Southeast. During the 1910s and 1920s, the city became an important marshalling point for a variety of products, including motor vehicles and parts. Charlotte's excellent rail network, and later good highway connections, made it an advantageous location for both local distributors and national companies that needed regional branch operations to serve their far-flung markets. As with a number of other wholesale distributors, the Carolina Rim and Wheel Company oriented its building to North Graham Street, which developed as one of the principal industrial areas of the city. In addition to wholesaling truck parts, the company also repaired truck engines, reflecting Charlotte's emerging role as a trucking center. With its red-brick walls, decorative brickwork signifying main entries, steel-sash windows, and utilitarian interiors consisting of wood beams and steel trusses, the facility survives as one of the earliest and best preserved properties along the North Graham Street industrial corridor.

Notably, the Carolina Rim and Wheel Building stands today among the rare 1920s buildings associated with the city's emergence as an automotive distribution hub. The only other recorded, 1920s property to represent this important phase of Charlotte's commercial history is the 1924 Ford Motor Plant on Statesville Road.

Historical Background

Carolina Rim and Wheel Company

The two-story Carolina Rim and Wheel Building was constructed in 1929. It arose on the site of a former junkyard near the northeast corner of North Graham and West Sixth streets in downtown Charlotte. Edward MacClements and Raymond Glaser founded the company in 1926. Both men had been employees of the R. W. Norris Company, a distributor of heavy-duty truck parts in Baltimore, Maryland, before establishing their business in Charlotte. In 1930, the partners also opened a branch in Raleigh. Carolina Rim and Wheel prospered, distributing primarily truck rims, wheels, brakes and suspensions, as well as selling electrical parts. The company also repaired truck motors and carburetors in the large south wing. In 1954, the operation relocated into new office and warehouse space on West Eighth Street. Today, still headquartered in Charlotte and family owned, the company continues to expand with modern facilities at the outskirts of the city and branches throughout the Southeast (Rondini 2004).

Automotive Electrical Associates owned and occupied the building between 1955 and ca. 1974, when it relocated to nearby West 28th Street. The wholesale company sold and distributed an array of electrical automotive parts, including generators and starters, as well as repaired and tuned-up Kohler engines (*Charlotte City Directory 1955-1974*).

The Carolina Rim and Wheel Building was subsequently acquired by the Gerrard Tire Company, which also purchased the ca. 1942 building immediately to the south (originally Todd's Tire Service No. 3), at the northeast corner of North Graham and West Sixth streets. Although now attached to the Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, this smaller structure occupies a separate tax parcel and is excluded from local historic designation. It is a concrete-block building that has been extensively altered--including a later brick veneer and a sizable modern office at the west end facing North Graham Street (*Charlotte City Directory 1974-2007*)

Founded by Hubert J. Gerrard, formerly an employee of Todd's Tire Service, the Gerrard Tire Company was permanently established at the northeast corner of North Graham and West Sixth streets in 1974. In addition to this complex on the east side of North Graham, the company also owned a large, multiple-story brick building on the west side of the street (now remodeled and expanded), and three other stores around the outskirts of Charlotte. Gerrard Tire uses the Carolina Rim and Wheel facility for its extensive tire inventory, as well as for servicing vehicles in the large, open, steel-trussed south wing, historically an engine repair facility. In recent years, Gerrard Tire has leased the original Carolina Rim and Wheel office (first floor of the front-facing north wing) to a real estate development firm, but this space is currently unoccupied and undergoing interior remodeling (*Charlotte City Directory 1942, 1974-2007*).

Charlotte's Emergence as an Automotive Distribution Center and Trucking Terminal

The success of the Carolina Rim and Wheel Company reflected Charlotte's growth as a New South industrial city, transportation hub, and regional distribution center. Although cotton and textile production formed the economic mainstay of Charlotte, other industries were also drawn to the city's good rail system, expanding work force, and plentiful and inexpensive electric power. As the Charlotte Chamber of

Commerce boasted in a 1928 advertisement, Charlotte had emerged as a regional commercial center with a 150-mile trading radius and more than 4,500,000 consumers (Charlotte City Directory 1928).

Because of its inland location, the economic success of Charlotte was dependent upon good rail transportation. Sustaining little damage during the Civil War, the city quickly recovered and even expanded its rail network. By 1875, six railroads were routed through the city, giving Charlotte more rail connections than any other city between Washington, D.C. and Atlanta. Charlotte benefited from continued rail expansion and consolidation throughout the late nineteenth century, which created both the powerful Southern Railway system, with its connections to New Orleans and Baltimore, and the smaller, but strategic, Piedmont and Northern (P & N) Railway. An interurban line linking Charlotte to scores of mill towns to the west, the P & N served both passengers and freight on its 150-mile route (Fetters and Swanson 1974: 12; Hanchett 1998: 74 (Glass 1992: 57-58).

With the increase in manufacturing and trade, auxiliary operations quickly followed to serve the expanding textile industry as well as a growing population and an increasingly specialized urban economy. Principal among these secondary operations were large wholesale distributors. In 1925, the *Charlotte Observer* declared,

Many new demands have come upon Charlotte Realtors during the past year for locations for building of warehouses, because Charlotte has come to be known in the sales organizations of national manufacturers throughout America as the best point in the Southeast for distribution of products and for location of branch plants. Some realtors here have become specialists in finding such locations to suit varying requirements, and almost every square foot of railroad footage has been analyzed and compared in price. . . . [The] proximity to street cars, freight stations, express offices and retail districts command the higher prices" (*Charlotte Observer*, 29 June 1925).

Significant among the city's distribution businesses were those that specialized in the automotive trade. During the early twentieth century the ownership of cars and trucks soared regionally and across the country. Nearly 10.5 million motor vehicles were registered nationally in 1921. During the following decade, the number more than doubled to 26.5 million. By 1955, there were 60 million registered cars and trucks in the country. In Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, the number of cars and trucks jumped from 1,757 in 1917, to 22,159 in 1925. After the World War II, the ownership of motor vehicles in the county skyrocketed, rising from 34,000 in 1945, to 64,411 in 1950 (Jakle and Sculle 1994: 451, 57, 68; Wyatt and Woodard 2000; Hanchett 1998: 200-201).

As early as the 1910s, Charlotte was becoming an important automotive distribution center, with companies selling and shipping cars, trucks, and parts throughout the Southeast. Ford Motor Company established a parts distribution business in Charlotte around 1915. In 1924, Ford constructed a large assembly plant that employed over 600 workers north of downtown along Statesville Road. In 1919, the regional manager of the Willys-Overland Car Company declared, "Charlotte is the second largest automobile and accessories center in the South." (Atlanta was the first.) A 1928 article in the *Charlotte News* ranked the city "as one of the South's great automotive trade centers," employing one out of eight workers and producing \$100,000,000 of retail and wholesale trade annually (Hanchett 1998: 316, n. 8; *Charlotte Observer*, 25 January 1919; *Charlotte News*, 1 April 1928).

By World War II, scores of distribution companies were sited along the railroad corridors and the adjacent roadways that cut through the city. Assorted automotive and industrial supply buildings flanked the Southern Railway, the Norfolk and Southern Railroad, the Seaboard Airline, and P & N Railway. During the 1920s, the highways running parallel to these tracks--serviced by trucks and linked to rails by spur lines-

-attracted similar development. North Tryon, North Graham, and North Davidson streets to the north of the center city, West Morehead Street to the west, and South Boulevard and South Tryon Street to the south all became warehousing corridors boasting sizable storage buildings and truck terminals (*Charlotte City Directory* 1929, 1930, 1931, 1950; Sanborn Insurance Maps 1929, 1951; Hanchett 1998: 90-91, 226).

The city's growing numbers of commercial warehouses and distribution firms were serviced by trucking companies that took advantage of Charlotte's transportation connections. The Good Roads movement of the 1920s and subsequent highway projects that culminated in Federal expressways availed the city to swift routes throughout the region and beyond. By the 1950s, new highways were surpassing railroads as the keys to the city's prosperity. The Charlotte Chamber of Commerce asserted:

These hard surfaced arteries, in a large measure, are Charlotte's lifeline.

The city's pulse is counted on those traffic meters the highway officials

occasionally throw across the roads. Up and down these concrete and

macadam spokes flow tremendous quantities of goods which make Charlotte

the commercial center of the Carolinas. Through these arteries come the

millions of motorized people who find here that which they seek in exchange

for their money (Charlotte Chamber of Commerce 1953; quoted in Wyatt and

Woodard 2000).

Beginning in the 1920s, trucking concerns began appearing along the major, paved roads that ran parallel to the railways. Companies such as Frederickson Motor Express, Harris Trucking, McLean Trucking, and Akers Motor Lines establishing terminal around the outskirts of the center city, and provide long-haul service throughout the region, as well as into Midwestern markets and New York City. By the 1960s, local boosters proclaimed that only Chicago contained more tractor-trailer rigs than Charlotte (*Charlotte City Directory* 1930-1940; Hanchett 1998: 226).

The Carolina Rim and Wheel Company was strategically sited at the northwestern edge of Fourth Ward along North Graham Street. Above Fourth Ward, North Graham Street was becoming a principal industrial and transportation corridor that ran parallel to the Southern Railway tracks. Truck terminals, warehouses, and factories lined the highway and adjacent tracks. The area around the intersection of North Graham and West Sixth streets included a mix of smaller industries as well as residential streets. It was well suited for an enterprise that distributed and serviced truck parts.

Physical Description

The L-shaped, Carolina Rim and Wheel Building includes the original, 1929 office building, the attached rear warehouse, and the recessed, engine repair wing, which is connected to the south side of the warehouse. The rear warehouse and south wing were also constructed in 1929 or soon thereafter. A paved parking lot and driveway fills the space between the recessed wing and North Graham Street. A large, one-story, brick warehouse (later used for automotive repair) that originally stood directly east of these buildings is now gone. The 1929 office building is a two-story, rectangular, brick structure facing North Graham

Street. It is three bays wide and six bays deep, with a stepped-parapet above the front elevation. Decorative concrete trim around the large windows and doors on the front and south elevations denotes the two entries and clearly defines this section of the building as the company office. The main double doorway facing North Graham is further distinguished by its arched lintel with a concrete keystone above the tall transom. The archway is echoed in the curved concrete trim work above. The doors and windows enframed by the concrete trim have been modernized in recent years, and the windows are currently boarded. The variegated brick walls on the front and south elevations, and on second story of the north elevation, are distinct from the plainer red-brick wall on the north elevation's first story.

The difference in brick between the first and second stories, as well as the absence of first-floor windows along the north side of the office section, suggest that a one-story building may have originally adjoined the building's north elevation. However, this has not been confirmed, and the 1929 and 1951 Sanborn maps provide no evidence of a one-story building once connected to the north side. The north elevation has a modern metal exterior stairway that leads to a modern side entrance on the second floor.

The interior of the two-story office section consists of a remodeled first floor and well-preserved second floor. Although modernized with new tile flooring and partitioned offices, the first story retains the original wood ceilings, brick walls, and heavy, wood post-and-beam construction. The intact second story, which was used for storage, consists of wood flooring, brick walls, and a slightly bowed wood ceiling with wood beams running the length of building and perpendicular steel I-beams supported by a center row of steel columns.

Extending from the rear of this section is a long, two-story, brick warehouse. A bank of ten, rectangular, steel-sash windows defines the second-story bays along the side elevations of the warehouse section, while larger steel-sash windows occupy the first story. A later concrete loading ramp is located on the north elevation, which also holds a large, vehicular entrance with a modern, metal roll-up door.

On the interior of the warehouse, the first floor consists of the original wood floor and ceiling, brick walls, and heavy, wood beams and posts. The ceiling has been reinforced by a later steel truss and steel I-beam posts. The first floor is now used for tire storage and includes a later office on the northwest side. Behind this office, an enclosed, wood stairway with a pipe railing ascends to the second floor. The upper story has brick walls, wood floor, and wood ceiling supported by wood beams running the length of the space, and perpendicular steel I-beams. On the second story, evidence of steel-sash windows, including one converted to an entranceway, mark the wall connecting the warehouse and the front section of the building. These (now interior) windows, the contrast in construction between the first and second floors of the warehouse, the later addition of a steel truss and steel posts on the floor, and differences in brick between the first and second stories of the warehouse, suggest that the upper floor may have been added at a later date for more storage space. But this has not been confirmed, and the second story of the warehouse is depicted in the 1951 Sanborn Map.

Attached to the south side of the warehouse is a large, one-story, brick building that was probably constructed shortly after 1929. It reflects the front elevation of the main office building in its variegated brick facade topped by a stepped parapet. Originally used for engine repair, this structure has steel-sash windows, concrete floor, and slightly bowed wood ceiling supported by bowed steel trusswork. The large, metal-framed roll-up door on the front elevation is modern.

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Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Setting, Looking North. Building in Foreground

Not Included in Local Designation.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Office, Looking Northeast.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Office, Looking East.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Office, South Elevation, Looking North.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Office and Rear Warehouse, North Elevation, Looking Southeast.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Rear Warehouse, North Elevation.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Truck Engine Repair Wing, West Elevation,
Looking East.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Truck Engine Repair Wing, West Elevation,
Looking East.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Office, First Floor Ceiling.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Office, First Floor.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Office, Second Floor, Looking East.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Office, Second Floor, Looking West.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Rear Warehouse, First Floor.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Rear Warehouse, First Floor.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Rear Warehouse, First Floor, Elevator Shaft.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Rear Warehouse, Second Floor.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Rear Warehouse, Second Floor Ceiling.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Rear Warehouse, Second Floor, Looking West
Towards Office Section.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Building, Truck Engine Repair Wing.



Carolina Rim and Wheel Company Building, Truck Engine Repair Wing.



Originally Todd's Tire Service; Remodeled as Gerrard Tire Company. Excluded
From Local Designation.