



Survey And Research Report
On The
Southern Public Utilities Company Streetcar Barn



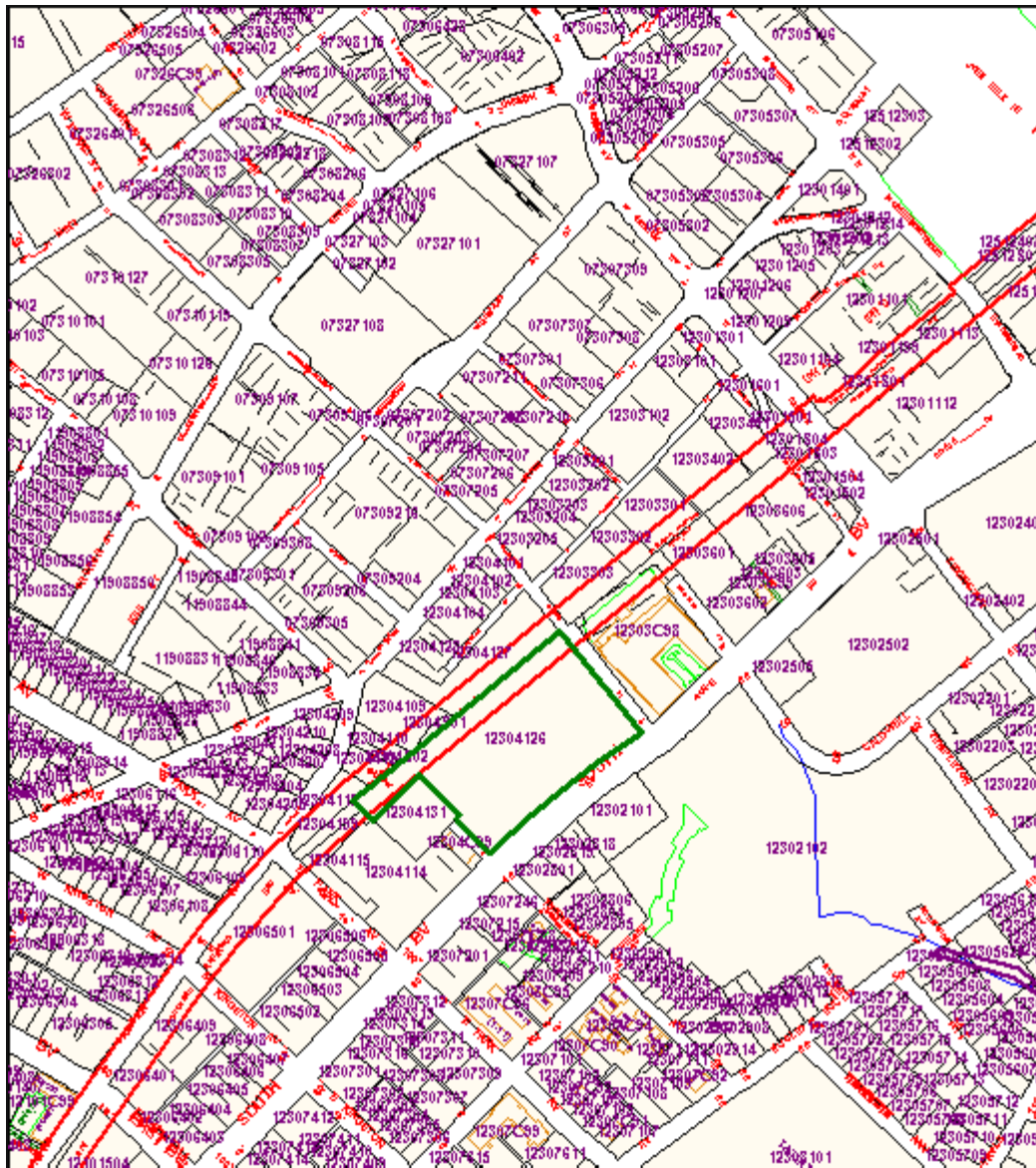
1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Southern Public Utilities Streetcar Barn is located at 1424 South Blvd., at the corner of South Blvd. and Bland St. in Charlotte, N.C.

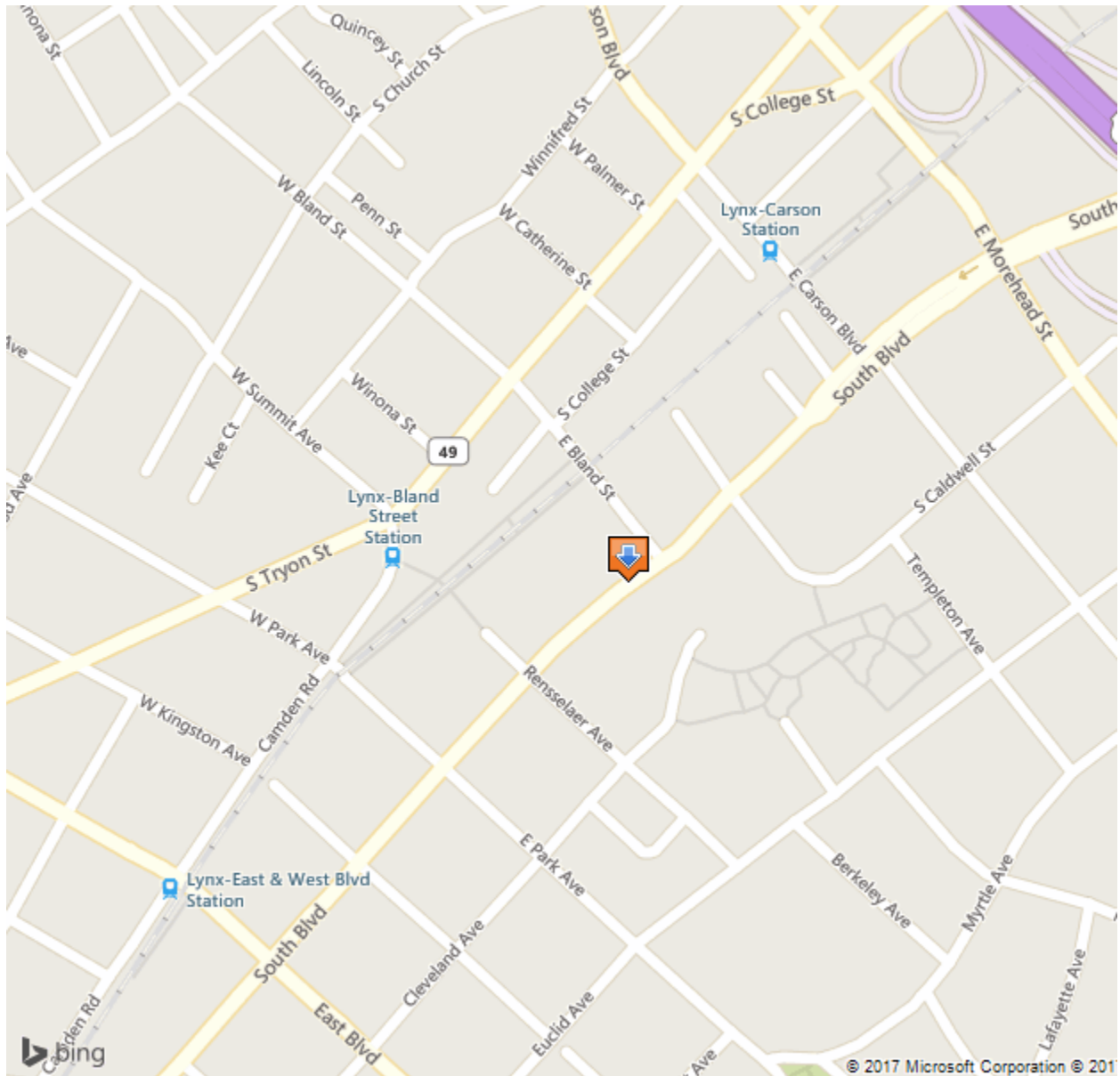
2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property: The owner of the property is:

Duke Power Company
Attn: Tax Dept – PB05B
422 South Church Street
Charlotte, NC 28242-0001

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

4. A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map depicting the location of the property. The UTM is 17 513344E 3896751N.





5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deeds to this property are listed in the Mecklenburg County Deed Books 312, page 302; 325, page 330; 409, page 497. An easement given to Southern Railway possibly affecting this property is listed in the Mecklenburg County Deed Book 6025, page 776. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 12304126.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Ryan L. Sumner.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief physical description of the property prepared by Stewart Gray and Ryan L. Sumner.

8. Documentation of how and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-400.5:

a. Special significance in terms of its historical, prehistorical, architectural, or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Southern Public Utilities Streetcar Barn does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Streetcar Barn was the centerpiece of Charlotte's electric streetcar system and along with Streetcar 85 and a few shelters is one of the last remnants of Charlotte's trolley system, which played a decisive role in the physical evolution of this community; and 2) the Streetcar Barn was the scene of Charlotte's most violent labor unrest, the streetcar workers' strike in 1919.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the physical description by Ryan L. Sumner, which is included in this report, demonstrates that the essential form of the Southern Public Utilities Streetcar Barn 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 property that becomes a "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the 6.919 acres of land is \$1,665,890. The current appraised value of the improvements is \$1,787,300. The total current appraised value is \$3,453,190. The property is zoned from I-2 & NS & MUDD & B-1 & MUDD(CD).

Date of Preparation of this Report: November 1, 2001

Prepared by: Ryan L. Sumner
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Historical Background Statement

Ryan L. Sumner
December 1, 2001

The Southern Public Utilities Streetcar Barn (hereafter, "the Car Barn.") was built in 1914 on a parcel of land that had already contained an electric powerhouse and gas plant previously owned by the Charlotte Gas and Electric Company.¹ Southern Public Utilities Company, operated as the retail subsidiary of Southern Power.² It built the structure to house and service the cars for the

electric streetcar system it purchased from developer Edward Dilworth Latta in 1910.³ The structure originally had the capacity to house approximately 40 streetcars.⁴



Charlotte's streetcars left the Southern Public Utilities Streetcar Barn at 5:30 in the morning to begin service and returned to the site at 12:40 am after service ended.⁵ However, the building did not sit quietly while the cars were out; rather, it was alive with the cacophonous din of wrenches turning and hammers banging as car barn workers whistled and sang, while maintaining the city's primary transportation system. Workers in the barn cleaned the cars, their glass, and made them "comfortable so it may increase traffic."⁶ The South Boulevard Car Barn had its own forge and a blacksmith who made the specialized tools needed to work on the streetcars and repair their many iron components.⁷ C. J. Hicks, a worker in the Greenville, S.C. barn, detailed the duties of mechanics in Southern Public Utilities car barns: "We grind the wheels; we set the shoes so they will wear like they were intended; we are very careful in oiling and trying to keep a clean barn, to cut fire insurance expenses."⁸ The "night men" at the barn serviced streetcars by adjusting the brakes, and cleaning brush holders and yokes. They kept the controllers in good order and nightly examined the wheels and armature clearance. Mechanics from the barn also provided service to cars stranded by problems such as damaged wheels, broken glass, and severed trolley rope.⁹

The Southern Public Utilities Streetcar Barn figured prominently in Charlotte's 1919 Streetcar Strike, becoming the site of Charlotte's most violent labor disturbance after five men were killed and 15 wounded by police protecting the Car Barn and its cars from being damaged by striking motormen. The strike began on August 10, 1919, after streetcar motormen and conductors walked off the job for higher wages and recognition of unions. The principal union involved was the Amalgamated Association of Street and Electric Railway Employees of America, a particularly aggressive organization with a violent reputation. When the Southern Public Utilities Company attempted to run the streetcars with "scab" replacements, the cars were met with hooting, rock throwing, and even a brick was hurled through one passing streetcar's window—the strike breakers had to be armed for their protection. Tensions flared and the situation escalated on August 25, as a crowd of 2,000 people gathered around midnight in front of the Car Barn.

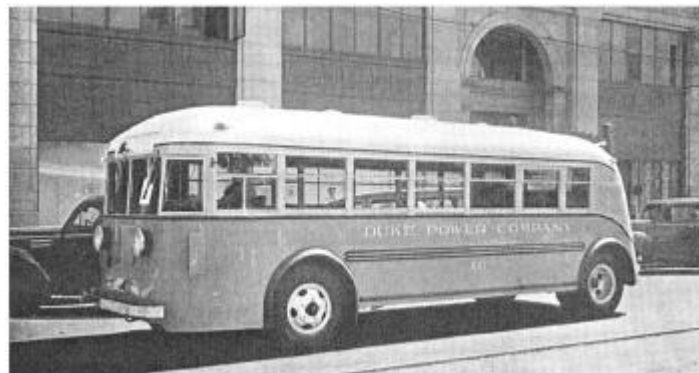
Police Chief Walter B. Orr was in command of 30 police officers who faced the crowd along with about 50 armed strikebreakers. Around one o'clock in the morning, a dispute broke out, as

members of the mob demanded the identity of a police officer that had beaten a youth earlier in the evening. In trial testimony, Orr claimed that the first shot came from the crowd, which had the effect of "touching a match to a powder can."¹⁰ The police opened fire. More than 100 shots were fired as the police and strikers exchanged bullets, killing five and wounding about a dozen more. The horrific scene was described by a Frank Lethco, who lived across the street from the Southern Public Utilities Company Streetcar Barn:

"We went to bed about midnight and were about asleep when all of a sudden we heard shots like from a machine gun and, believe me, being right in front with the bullets coming right toward the house, we were a bit scares...one man who was shot, died in our yard, right under the dining room window."¹¹

The next morning, four companies of the National Guard, soon followed by two additional companies, arrived on the scene. 150 Charlotteans were sworn in as citizen volunteers to walk the streets and preserve the peace. The car barn was heavily guarded by troops and even had a machine gun nest! Additionally, the state militia designated an area with a radius of two blocks in any direction from the barn a "no-man's land." The guard was demobilized a week later and the strike was terminated on September 5, when the two sides settled on a contract and Southern Public Utilities Company retained some of the striking employees.¹²

Duke Power Company (formerly Southern Power / SPU Co) introduced gasoline motorbuses to Charlotte in 1934 in order to extend the services offered by the electric street railway—this action signaled the eventual demise of the streetcar and heralded profound changes for the Car Barn on South Blvd.¹³ The original fleet of Twin Coach 23-S Buses was put into service as a feeder line connecting the end of the Dilworth car line with Hawthorn Lane via Myers Park.¹⁴ In April 1936, Duke Power replaced streetcars with four Mack CW's on the Third Ward loop, the Fourth Ward line, and the Morehead Street line.¹⁵ The Plaza street line was also replaced with buses in 1937.



Motorbuses completely replaced Charlotte's streetcars following Duke Power's November 15, 1937 application to the North Carolina Utilities Commission for authority to "abandon its street railway system...and substitute, operate and maintain in lieu thereof a motorbus system."¹⁶ Duke Power argued that the buses were quiet, more flexible than the old streetcar system, reached residential sections that had been without service before, and were able to take on and discharge passengers at the curb—"which is of considerable importance ...because of the danger

attending crossing the street to reach the street cars."¹⁷ Charlotte City Officials hailed the change as, "one of the most progressive moves that Charlotte has made in quite a long time," and, "one of the biggest and the finest things that has perhaps ever happened to the City of Charlotte."¹⁸ The changeover ceremoniously occurred on March 14, 1938 as the Streetcar Number Eighty-five¹⁹ left the Square, finally ending its last journey at the Car Barn.²⁰



Shortly following the Duke's conversion to motorbuses, the Car Barn was converted to meet the needs of the new transportation system. The number of buses operated by Duke Power grew from just 15 in 1937 to approximately 60 at the time of the 1938 changeover.²¹ The principal adaptations to the barn occurred in January 1938 and included: the sinking of a below ground gasoline tank (so that the buses could be refueled on site), the removal of the arched classical façade to facilitate moving the building closer to South Blvd, the construction of a new front façade, and the pouring of 6" concrete slab in the front of the new façade to allow the buses to enter the barn from Bland Street.²²



1946 marked the end of a small restaurant that appears to have been located in or on the grounds of the Bus Barn. Established as "Giles M. Teague Lunches," in 1922 eatery appears to have been established in 1922 and is most closely associated Iverson (Ivey) M. Horne, who managed the eatery along with Frank and Sophie Wyant from 1925 until to 1946. Rechristened the "Car Men's Café" in 1925, the eatery was also know as the "Car Barn Café" (1934—1939) and the "Bus Barn Café" (1939—1945).²³

The Bus Barn was leased beginning in April and May 1955, after Duke Power sold the Charlotte bus transportation system along with their bus systems in Winston Salem, Greensboro, Greenville, Durham, and Spartanburg to City Coach Lines Inc.²⁴ This Detroit based company set up local subsidiaries for each of these cities that was directed from a central office established in Charlotte.²⁵ The total sales price of the bus systems was \$750,000 and included all the buses, and bus equipment. Duke power retained ownership of the Bus Barn and other buildings used by

the transportation system, but leased them to City Coach until the summer of 1957.²⁶ City Coach moved to a new garage at the corner of Brevard and 11th Street—it was demolished in 1997. The South Blvd. site was doubly attractive to City Coach, since the old Dilworth substation, which also sat on this property, had recently been converted into the central bus garage to service Duke's buses in eight Carolina cities.²⁷ Duke Power's sale of the bus system was in line with a national trend, as electric power companies across the nation began to get out of the transportation business and limited operations to power sales and development.²⁸

After City Coach's tenancy, Duke Power again integrated the former Bus/Car Barn into its operations. Beginning in the late 1950s, Duke Power began using the building as their Truck Garage and Storage Facility.²⁹ The structure's principal purpose during these years was to house and maintain "cherry-pickers" and other service vehicles that the power company used to service its electrical lines. In addition, several key Duke Energy offices were moved to this site, including the service, engineering, district construction, and stores departments.³⁰ The former Bus/Car Barn served this role until the late 1980s.³¹ The barn was expanded to meet these needs with additions on the south and east (Bland Street face) sides of the building during the 1960s and 1970s—most notably a three story office wing designed by noted Charlotte architect Jack O. Boyte.³²

Today, the Former Southern Power Streetcar Barn still sits at the corner of Bland and College Streets. The gas plant was demolished in 1996, and power station is long gone.³³ The building is vacant and is under consideration for extensive renovation and adaptive reuse.

Brief Architectural Description

Stewart Gray, with archival assistance by Ryan L. Sumner
November 1, 2001

The Southern Public Utilities Company Car Barn, later known as the Duke Power Truck Garage Repair and Storage Building, is a large sprawling building located at the corner of South Boulevard and East Bland Street in Charlotte, N.C. The building is situated on an essentially flat lot. It fronts on South Boulevard, bordering the sidewalk, and sits only a few feet from East Bland Street. The Car Barn's setting is presently evolving from that of an industrial neighborhood into urban offices, retail, and apartments.

In its present configuration the building consists of a very large car barn or garage divided into a north and a south section. Each section is approximately 300 feet long and 50 feet wide, and sits parallel to the other, separated by a center wall. To the south of the barn, office space, an expanded loading dock, and a machine shop were built. Attached to the southwest corner of the building is a double-bay paint shop.

When it was built in 1914, the north section of the barn, which borders East Bland Street, may have constituted the entire building. Looking at the brickwork one can estimate that the original

building was about two-thirds of the length of the present building. The original sections of the north and center walls were each formed by twenty-four large brick piers, approximately twenty feet tall, in-filled with brick curtain walls laid in Common Bond. The piers protrude from the interior and exterior faces of the curtain walls, giving the piers the appearance of pilasters from the inside and the outside of the building. The close spacing of the piers, which support the roof framing, may indicate that wood was the original roof framing material. Every other bay features a round-arched window or door openings. Most have been filled with brick. A simple belt course accentuates what were originally the windowsills. While relatively simple, and unadorned, these walls show the influence of the Classical Revival Style, with the belt course and the arched openings being elements of this style.

The many arched window openings in the center wall dividing the north and south sections of the barn, and the belt course of brick and windowsills that project into the south section of the barn are indicators that the center wall may have been intended as an exterior wall. Another indication that the north section of the barn may have stood alone is that the construction of the north and center walls differs from that of the present south wall. In the present south wall the piers are flush with the curtain wall on the exterior side.

Perhaps another early modification to the building was the addition of water closets to the north exterior wall of the barn. This small brick addition features parapet sidewalls, topped with terra cotta tiles, which hide a low-sloped shed roof. A blueprint from the 1950's indicates that the addition had been separated into "white" and "colored toilets," with the "colored toilet" being three times larger.

If the north section of the barn did originally stand alone, then at some point between 1914 and 1923 the building more than doubled in size. Photographs of the barn from 1923 show a brick Classical Revival facade, featuring a corbelled cornice, a parapet wall and eight round arch openings through which the trolleys could enter or exit. In the center of the facade, in a raised section of the brick parapet was a clock face. However, a photograph from----- shows that the clock face had been removed, and that the brickwork was altered slightly leaving the raised center section of the parapet with only a brick bulls-eye detail. This photograph also shows that the bare brick building had been painted at some point.

By 1929 according to the Sanborn maps, the barn had been expanded westward to its present size, and its roof framing at that time consisted of steel trusses. The brick construction of the expanded walls changed visibly in the interior, with the piers becoming flush with the curtain walls. The fenestration and the details on the exterior remained the same. The center wall in this expanded section, however, contains no piers or arched openings.

The back or west side of the barn is eight bays wide, and features a low-pitched gable. At some point, the shared center wall between the north and south sections of the barn was raised so that it extended above the roof, and was capped with terra cotta tile. While not visible from the front, this wall extension is a prominent feature of the rear facade. The roofing material is corrugated metal. The northern half of this large rear gabled wall appears to be of a more recent construction with unpainted brick laid in a Running Bond, while in the southern half of this wall the bricks are painted and laid in Common Bond. The fenestration includes six large door openings big enough

for large trucks. Four of the openings have metal overhead doors, and two of the openings have been filled with concrete block. The north and southernmost bays each contain a conventional commercial steel door. A large louvered steel vent is located in the gable, left of center.

Also in existence by 1929 were the paint and the machines shops. The paint shop is a two-story brick building, featuring an asymmetrical stepped parapet. The building faces north and features two large overhead doors and one conventional commercial steel door. The west exterior wall features six segmental arched window openings now bricked in, at a second-floor height. Seven brick buttresses extend halfway up the wall. The Machine shop is hemmed in by a later addition.

The front of the barn, which faces east onto South Boulevard has been altered greatly over the years and has been expanded toward South Boulevard. The form is gable-front, and is eight bays wide. The bays are symmetrical, and are separated by cast "stone" concrete pilasters. The wall material is concrete block covered by a brick facade with Running Bond. The fenestration is limited to two rolling overhead doors in the second and third bays from the north, and a single modern steel door located in the base of the pilaster between the fourth and fifth bays. The gable is covered with blue metal panels that form a low parapet.

Adjoining the front facade of the barn, but set back slightly is a six bay two-story brick addition built in 1969. The front of the addition contains offices, and in the rear, a loading dock. This addition abuts the machine shop, and also connects to a small three-story single-bay office building that dates to 1960.

Endnotes:

1. Charlotte City Directory, 1911—1915.; Mecklenburg County Deed Book 312, p302. The first listing for the Car Barn occurs in the 1915 Charlotte City Directory, indicating that it was built the previous year. Additionally, the directory only lists the electrical and gas plants are in previous editions. This coincides with the purchase of this land parcel by the Southern Public Utilities Company on April 2, 1914, as indicated in Charlotte Mecklenburg Deed Book 312, p302.
2. Dunn, Robert F. *Electrifying the Piedmont Carolinas*, The North Carolina Historical Review, January 2000, p56.
3. Letter from H. W. Anderson, President of Archival Consultant, Inc. Winston-Salem, N.C. to Marilyn Usher, Charlotte, N.C. January 10, 1987.
4. Maps of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Co., Charlotte, 1929, p39.
5. *Southern Public Utilities Contract*, offered August 16, 1919. Reprinted in Shaw, City in Conflict, Appendix A-1.
6. Southern Public Utilities Magazine, March 10, 1915. Adicks, C. J., *Greenville Car Barn*, p29.

7. Southern Public Utilities Magazine, December 10, 1915. p25; Southern Public Utilities Magazine, March 10, 1915. p29.
8. Southern Public Utilities Magazine, March 10, 1915. p29.
9. Ibid.
10. Bradbury, Tom, Dilworth: The First 100 Years, p78.
11. Bradbury, Tom, Dilworth: The First 100 Years, p75—76.
12. The most comprehensive examination of the 1919 Streetcar Strike can be found in Carol Shaw's A City in Conflict: The 1919 Streetcar Strike, available in the Robinson-Spangler Carolina Room of the Main Branch of the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County.
13. Diesels were put into service in early 1950.
14. Kelly, Kevin, *Charlotte*, Motor Coach Age: The Journal of the Motor Bus Society, p4.
15. Ibid; Duke Power Magazine, May-June 1936, p34.
16. Docket no. 1128. Courtroom of Utilities Commission. Raleigh, North Carolina. November 15, 1937, p1.
17. Duke Power Magazine, November 1937, p1-2.
18. Nance, J. S. Docket no. 1128. Courtroom of Utilities Commission. Raleigh, North Carolina. November 15, 1937, p. 9. ; Boyd, Basil M. Docket no. 1128. Courtroom of Utilities Commission. Raleigh, North Carolina. November 15, 1937, p. 5.
19. This car has been found, restored and is again providing service to Charlotte. It is based in the Charlotte Trolley Museum.
20. Charlotte Observer, March 14, 1938.
21. Duke Power Magazine, November 1937, p1-2.
22. The construction surrounding this adaptation was extensively photographed and the images are available in the files of Duke Energy Corporate Archives, Charlotte NC.
23. Charlotte City Directory, 1921—1946.
24. Duke Power Magazine, April 1955, p2.
25. Ibid.

26. Ibid; Charlotte City Directory, 1954—1958; Earl Guedge, *Charlotte Transit Historic Recollections*, available from the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.
27. Duke Power Magazine, March—April 1954, p17.
28. Duke Power Magazine, April 1955, p2.
29. Charlotte City Directory, 1958.
30. Charlotte City Directory, 1956—1996.
31. Charlotte City Directory, 1988.
32. Maps of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Co., *Charlotte*, 1953 Revised to 1969, p39; Charlotte Mecklenburg Building Permits: #CID 75069 11/6/63; #3218 5/2/69; #5572 5/28/74.
33. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Building Permit No. 517.