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**5. CLASSIFICATION**

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**OWNERSHIP OF PROPERTY:** Private

**CATEGORY OF PROPERTY:** Building

<b>NUMBER OF RESOURCES WITHIN PROPERTY:</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTING</b>	<b>NONCONTRIBUTING</b>
	1	0 BUILDINGS
	0	0 SITES
	0	0 STRUCTURES
	0	0 OBJECTS
	1	0 TOTAL

**NUMBER OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES PREVIOUSLY LISTED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER:** 0

**NAME OF RELATED MULTIPLE PROPERTY LISTING:** N/A

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

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**HISTORIC FUNCTIONS:** COMMERCE/specialty store=auto showroom; DEFENSE/arms storage=armory;  
INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility=factory

**CURRENT FUNCTIONS:** WORK IN PROGRESS (DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling=apartment building)

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**7. DESCRIPTION**

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**ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:** LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/Spanish Colonial Revival

**MATERIALS:** FOUNDATION CONCRETE  
WALLS BRICK  
ROOF CONCRETE  
OTHER N/A

**NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION** (see continuation sheets 7-5 through 7-6).

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McDermott Motors Building  
Waco, McLennan County, Texas

The McDermott Motors Building is a two-story concrete and brick commercial building at 1125 Washington Avenue in Waco, McLennan County, Texas. The building is divided into several bays by one- and two-story pilasters, with large storefront windows on the first floor and multi-pane windows on the second floor. A flat red tile roof, Mediterranean-influenced transom windows and decorative terra cotta details are distinctive of the building's Spanish Colonial Revival style. The building is in a mixed-use neighborhood, as residences, commercial and institutional buildings are found within a few blocks. The neighborhood is about one mile southwest of the historic commercial core of Waco. Designed for a Buick dealership in 1928, the building housed the local National Guard unit throughout the 1930s, known popularly as Fort Fiske Wright. The building served a variety of other functions over the years, and is currently being converted into retail space and apartments through the Tax Rehabilitation Credit program.

The McDermott Motors Building was designed in the fashionable Spanish Colonial Revival style with a stripped classical and Art Deco influence. The building presents a basic rectangular plan and features reinforced concrete construction with many large window openings framed in the original rolled steel. The exterior elevations are all faced with buff-colored tapestry brick, cut stone, and terra cotta. The symmetrical three bay facade is restrained in its use of ornament and is articulated by two-story brick pilasters that mark the bay divisions and reference the influence of a stripped classicism. Decorative translucent glass transoms divided into small, narrow lights with round arches surmount the showroom windows on the first story. The profiles of the arches suggest the horseshoe arches found in Moorish architecture. Most of the transom glass is original, but has suffered extensive thermal cracking. The second story of the facade is pierced by a row of symmetrically spaced, rectangular windows divided by small brick pilasters, suggesting a Stripped Classical colonnade. These smaller pilasters rise above decorative corbels with foliate detailing. The squared upper portions of the pilasters suggest capitals and feature decorative panels with relief ornament of an abstract nature, suggesting an Art Deco influence. The entrance canopy as well, with its streamlined contours and abstract geometric patterning applied to its pressed copper veneer, reflects the qualities associated with the style. The pilasters support a continuous stone entablature that extends around the entire perimeter. The red ceramic roofing tile along the roofline contributes to the Spanish flavor of the exterior, as do the miniature brick towers at the corners. The absence of an eave overhang is also indicative of Spanish Colonial Revival influence.

Both the side elevations and the rear are adorned in a manner similar to the front facade, but slightly less ornately. Each side originally had two very wide ground-level entrances, all four of which were secured with a series of wooden multi-fold garage doors. On the west side, these original doors remain, but are in very poor to irreparable condition. On the east side, the original doors have been replaced with a hand-cranked roll-up garage door toward the rear and a wooden stud wall having only a simple 3-foot standard door opening. The ground level windows are currently boarded over. Near the front facade, the east elevation has a brick chimney that rests upon a foliated terra cotta bracket that is cracked but serviceable. Like the other three sides, the rear elevation has many large window openings, but no ground level entrance. Two apparently original roof drains

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course down the rear elevation, emptying their contents into the unpaved alley behind the building. These drains appear to be repairable, but their improper function has resulted in some minor damage to the mortar joints.

The detailing of the interior predominately reflects the Spanish Colonial Revival style of the exterior. The showroom lobby displays spiral columns, scrolled metal balconies, and round-arched casement doors. All of these features are hallmarks of the Spanish Colonial Revival style. The lobby floor, like the Spanish roofline, is of red ceramic tile. It has a small perimeter strip of geometric patterning, giving the interior a touch of Art Deco styling. The design of the fireplace mantel in the lobby is Spanish-inspired, enriched by deeply molded grotesque ornament with foliated scrolls and mythological beasts. A colorful ceramic tile surround further embellishes the mantel. Beyond the front showroom, the utilitarian interior is lacking ornament. Behind the rear boundary of the front showroom is a narrow mezzanine traversing the width of the building. The underside of this mezzanine is partitioned into a series of small offices and restrooms. A small stairway leads to the mezzanine level, where there are two additional offices separated by a large central reception area. Front balconies allow the viewer extensive oversight of activities on the showroom below. From the rear of the mezzanine, a series of fire-damaged windows give an extensive view of a large open work area, punctuated only by rows of rectangular support columns. From the rear ground-floor work area, a heavy concrete ramp runs along the east exterior wall to the upper level.

This upper level is a vast open space flooded with natural light. Parallel rows of concrete columns support a poured-in-place beam and girder style concrete roof. On the east side of this space suspended above the concrete ramp is an enclosed elevated room that originally served as an employee shower and restroom. At least one of the stud walls of this room has deteriorated from a chronic water leak. The rear of the east side is partitioned into three service bays with partial-height walls of hollow clay brick. From the numerous windows along the entire perimeter of the upper level, one has an extensive view of the surrounding environs. Viewing this particular building in the context of contemporary commercial structures, one quickly realizes that the Spanish Colonial Revival theme is a common one throughout the southwest quadrant of downtown Waco, and that the building was designed to fit harmoniously into its developing surroundings.

In April 2000, a fire broke out in a furnace behind the ground floor mezzanine. Though the building suffered no loss of structural integrity, there was considerable smoke and water damage. The mezzanine windows all experienced some injury, and some of those along the rear were charred beyond salvage. Indeed, the salvageability of the mezzanine's rear stud wall remains unknown, and it may be necessary to replace it altogether. Some of the exterior rolled steel window frames closest to the flames sustained heavy damage, but should still be usable with added support. The transom windows of the front facade cracked extensively, as did casement windows of the showroom balcony. Some of the stucco applied to the showroom and mezzanine areas sustained heat and water damage. At present, the final stages of fire cleanup are almost done. Unsalvageable material has been removed and smoke-stained surfaces have been repainted as required by city inspectors. Plans to convert the upper level into loft apartments and the ground level into retail space are being formulated.

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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**APPLICABLE NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA**

- 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 VALUE, 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

**AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE:** COMMERCE, MILITARY, ARCHITECTURE

**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** 1928-1953

**SIGNIFICANT DATES:** 1928

**SIGNIFICANT PERSONS:** N/A

**CULTURAL AFFILIATION:** N/A

**ARCHITECT/BUILDER:** Milton W. Scott

**NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE** (see continuation sheets 8-7 through 8-15)

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES**

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**BIBLIOGRAPHY** (see continuation sheets 9-16 through 9-17).

**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 (*Texas Historical Commission*)
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University (Texas Collection, Baylor University)
- Other -- Specify Repository:

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McDermott Motors Building  
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The McDermott Motors Building was built in 1928, and designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival style by noted Waco architect Milton Scott. The building has served as an upscale automobile dealership, a National Guard armory, and an assembly plant for warplanes during World War II. The building also embodies a method of construction and an architectural style that are distinctive of an era, reflecting the community, its economic climate and progress. The McDermott Motors Building is nominated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the areas of Commerce and Military, and under Criterion C in the area of Architecture, at the local level of significance. As McDermott Motors, Fort Fiske Wright, and North American Aviation, activities at this site contributed substantially to the commercial and military history of the area.

In 1927, Wilford Dees McDermott purchased the city lot at 1125 Washington Avenue from Louie Migel, who had resided in a modest house on the site for almost 40 years. A founding partner of the very successful Goldstein-Migel department store, Louie and his wife Rebekah Goldstein Migel had amassed a sizable fortune and could afford to purchase a larger house at 1425 Columbus Avenue. Soon after the Migels moved, Dees demolished the small wood frame house and set aside the salvaged lumber for use as forms for his new Buick dealership. McDermott was born and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas, the son of a traveling salesman and a social worker. After service in World War I, the handsome, sporting young man took a job as a traveling salesman. His route brought him to Stamps, Arkansas, where he met and later married Mary Buchanan, the daughter of the wealthy and powerful "boss" of the rough mill town, Robert Buchanan. He was the hard-nosed younger brother of William Buchanan who was among the wealthiest men in the South, building an empire of sawmills and railroads known as the Bodcaw Corporation after the Civil War. Robert was running the family's large sawmill operation in Stamps in 1921 when Dees McDermott and his daughter were wed. The young couple lived for a while in Stamps, but soon yearned for more exciting environs. In 1925 they followed Mary's older sister Omah and her husband Roy Albaugh to Waco. There they enjoyed a life of conspicuous luxury, with time often spent at country clubs and dining with elite society members. Throughout their lives the McDermotts spent their summers away from Waco at the famous Broadmoor Hotel near Colorado Springs where Dees perfected his golf game and Mary played bridge.

Mary's austere father, who most certainly bankrolled the couple's enviable lifestyle, did not necessarily approve. In an attempt to see the couple off to a productive life, he helped his son-in-law get started in the promising field of automobile sales. Dees opened a Buick dealership in 1926 on Austin Avenue, where it operated until his new building at 1125 Washington could be completed. On November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1928, McDermott Motors opened at its new location. Dees was president, father-in-law Robert Buchanan was vice-president and brother-in-law Roy Albaugh was treasurer. Just like everything else in the McDermotts' life, the new Buick dealership building was lavish. The exterior was finished in a tasteful classical style and the front showroom of the large warehouse-style structure was made to resemble an exotic Mediterranean villa. The more utilitarian portions of the building, including the service department on the second floor, were state-of-the art with several novelties celebrating new forms of technology and accommodations for the triumphant automobile. Reflecting

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the optimistic spirit of the era, the front third of the building was completely overbuilt, designed to accommodate several additional stories at a later date.

The dealership was designed by noted Waco architect Milton W. Scott. Without formal architectural training, Scott managed to design and oversee the construction of many of the city's early architectural landmarks. Before his death in 1933, Scott gave Waco its High School on Columbus Avenue, the Artesian Manufacturing and Bottling Plant (currently the Dr. Pepper Museum, NRHP-listed 1983) the Louie Migel Residence, First Baptist Church, Masonic Lodge, Waco Drug Company, the Goldstein-Migel Building, Spring Lake Country Club, the R.B. Albaugh residence and many other buildings. Scott moved to Waco with his mother and sisters at age 11, after the untimely death of his father, a New Orleans inventor and ship designer who held several patents on early elevator design. At 15 he began his career as a carpenter's apprentice, soon thereafter finding himself employed as a draftsman, a trade that probably came naturally for him, considering his familial background. As his self-acquired knowledge increased and his reputation was earned, he became the region's most in-demand architect. He is remembered as an extremely dedicated perfectionist whose commitment to a client did not end when the blueprints were finished: Scott personally oversaw the construction of his designs. Ordinarily a very reserved person, he sometimes found himself at odds with unscrupulous contractors who attempted to "cut corners" or clients who sought to sacrifice quality for speed of completion. Though facile in the popular design motifs, it appears that Scott attached his "signature" to a project by ensuring its underlying quality, rather than its superficial appearance. He was known to be quite accommodating of the tastes and desires of his individual clients, but he seems also to have been sensitive to the need for aesthetic harmony in the city he helped create. His preferred style was tasteful classicism, and he seems to have been concerned that the ambitious young town's appearance should convey a sense of culture and affluence. That was definitely the way in which Waco wanted to see itself in the 1920s. The hard-working farming community had grown prosperous, and sought to achieve a new level of cultural sophistication.

The onset of the Great Depression and the death of Robert Buchanan in 1930 had an entirely predictable effect on McDermott's dealership. By 1930 he was out of business. Supported by a socialite wife with a sizable trust account, he had little incentive to work for a living. Though he made a few more attempts at business, he spent most of the rest of his life golfing. Hastened by the worsening economy, the local cotton industry continued to decline. Indeed, 1930 marked the closure of Waco's famous Cotton Palace Festival. Prior to that time, all components of the local National Guard used the Cotton Palace grounds as a site for meetings, weekly drills, and weapons storage. Displaced from their traditional home, the local guardsmen went looking for a new one. McDermott's building was vacant, and it seemed to suit the expanding needs of the National Guard. It was spacious, sturdy, and lent itself to the maintenance and storage of motor vehicles as well as other pieces of heavy military equipment. In 1931, the Guard began leasing from McDermott, and continued to do so until all units were activated for World War II. Among the very best in the state, the new armory was named "Fort Fiske Wright" after a revered local officer who had died a hero's death on the battlefields of France during the Great War.

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Up until that time, the history of the United States National Guard had been one of gradual progression from a collection of poorly organized local "minutemen" to state-sponsored militias, and eventually to a highly coordinated, truly national guard as the young country emerged as a legitimate world power. World War I proved to be a painful lesson on the hazards of this new role in world affairs, and Armistice left many Americans weary of involvement in matters beyond their borders. Isolationism was the policy of choice, and the National Guard lapsed into neglect: company rosters were short, pay was next to nothing, and armories were often dilapidated. By 1931, however, the federal government sought to change that. More money was appropriated to compensate guardsmen and local companies were given increased funding with which to rent better armory buildings. Government ownership of armory buildings was not common before the late 1950s. Perhaps this was a means of offering some assistance to otherwise out-of-work men, but perhaps it was also a recognition that the world political situation was beginning to darken again.

This was the climate in which Fort Fiske Wright began its life. Waco was hit doubly hard by the near simultaneous onset of the Depression and the decline of the local cotton industry, and as a consequence, there were plenty of men eager to join the Guard for the few dollars of income that membership provided. In addition to a source of pocket change, Fort Fiske Wright became something of a meeting place and civic center for a number of people who could afford few other forms of recreation. The armory was the place where veterans gathered to smoke and play dominoes, where they sent their sons for a healthy dose of indoctrination, and where those same sons could meet young ladies at the regularly scheduled dances in the front hall. Beyond military training, Fort Fiske Wright became a worthwhile social meeting place.

Through increased pay at a time when money was scarce and through an active recruiting campaign, the federal government encouraged this heightened role of the National Guard in society. In 1931 when the local guardsmen began leasing McDermott's building, Waco had just one unit of guardsmen. By that time Company K of the 143<sup>rd</sup> Texas Infantry already had a long tradition. They began as a socially elite militia group known as the Waco Greys after Reconstruction. Their early uniforms bore a more-than-coincidental resemblance to those worn by Confederate officers. Still proud Southerners in 1897, they missed the opportunity to serve in the Spanish-American War because they had failed to obtain the necessary though still somewhat controversial federal designation. However, they served their country in the Mexican border skirmishes from 1914 to 1917 commanded by Preston Weatherred, a prominent Waco attorney, and had a distinguished record of service on the battlefields of France during World War I under William C. Torrence, later to become Waco's city manager. Sharing the nation's disillusionment, Company K did not bother to reorganize itself after the war until 1924. Then, Napoleon Rainbolt, a still youthful veteran, assembled a few dozen committed souls into a small but federally recognized unit.

It appears that Rainbolt was still in command of Company K when the guardsmen moved into Fort Fiske Wright. However, he was rapidly promoted to greater responsibilities as the local guard system achieved an



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unprecedented size and level of sophistication. Throughout the 1930s the Waco Guard added many additional companies as its membership roster swelled. Being an ideal facility, Fort Fiske Wright soon became headquarters for the entire 143<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Regiment, commanded by William Torrence. Virtually all guardsmen in Central Texas reported to Colonel Torrence, who then reported to General Preston Weatherred, his brigade commander. With another former Wacoan, General Claude Birkhead, in command of the entire 36<sup>th</sup> Division, comprising all guard units in Texas and Oklahoma, Waco's military men had considerable influence in the military reserve in the 1930s. Fort Fiske Wright also added a ceremonial band section under Lyle Skinner, longtime music director for Waco Public Schools. The band section was a means whereby younger boys could formally participate in the activities of the Guard. Musicians as young as age thirteen were recruited from Waco High School and Baylor University. It is not known whether these boys received compensation for their participation, but they did accompany the men on their annual camp exercises, whose duration and seriousness increased as war clouds approached in Europe and Asia. A training school for non-commissioned officers was added as well. In less than a decade, the local guard system had grown from a single company into one of the largest concentrations of reservists in the state.

Due in part to the many successes at Fort Fiske Wright, World War II began earlier for Waco's military men than it did for much of the rest of the nation. Almost a year before Japanese bombs hit Pearl Harbor, virtually all of the men of Fort Fiske Wright, and the companies of the smaller towns that called it their headquarters, were displaced from their homes and activated into full-time military service. They were assembled at Camp Bowie near Brownwood (120 miles west) where they underwent a year of intensive training under the command of Colonel Torrence, General Weatherred, Major Rainbolt, and others. Morale was not always high at Camp Bowie, as the men were given very little leave time for returning home to visit their families. Many saw no need to become entangled in the rest of the world's affairs. With the United States' formal entry into the war, however, the men of the 143<sup>rd</sup> Regiment found themselves better-prepared and more highly trained than many of their peers. With skilled officers in particularly short supply, many were borrowed from the 143<sup>rd</sup> by the Colonels and Generals of other organizations. Most of the aging World War I veterans, however, who had commanded the Guard between the wars, were deemed too old for combat, and were sent home before deployment into harm's way. To their chagrin, William Torrence, Preston Weatherred, and Claude Birkhead all spent the war stateside, placed in charge of various aspects of homeland defense. Torrence returned reluctantly to his Waco home, was reappointed city manager, and placed in charge of the city's wartime civil defense system. Being somewhat younger than the others, Rainbolt was a brigade commander in Europe, achieving the rank of Colonel by war's end.

By early 1941, there were not many guardsmen left in Waco. Fort Fiske Wright ceased operations and the keys to the building were returned to McDermott. For a short time he rented the property to his brother-in-law until a defense firm came knocking. In 1943, the property was leased to North American Aviation, and the building became the site of one of Waco's most significant contributions to the country's industrial war machine. At approximately the same time the Waco guardsmen were being sent to Brownwood, North American was

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breaking ground on a huge military aircraft factory in Grand Prairie, Texas near Fort Worth. Consolidated Aircraft would open an equally impressive plant nearby, and Texas' aerospace industry was spawned. Throughout World War II, these two companies produced military planes by the thousands. North American's most successful fighter aircraft during World War II was the P-51 "Mustang," arguably the best of the era. The company also produced the versatile trainer, the T-6 "Texan" and the medium-range B-25 "Mitchell" bomber. It was felt to be more nimble and survivable in the event of enemy attack than other bombers of the day.

Consolidated Aircraft developed and produced the B-24 "Liberator" sometimes known not so affectionately as the "Flying Boxcar." It was a heavier, admittedly more vulnerable craft than North American's B-25, but it had a longer range and could manage a bigger payload. For this reason, it was in much greater demand by the end of the war when the allies were pounding away at the industrial assets of Japan and Germany. Eventually, the Army's demand for the B-24 simply exceeded Consolidated's ability to produce it. The government called upon North American Aviation to begin producing this plane as well. What proprietary concerns this might have raised between the two competing corporations is not certain, but the Pentagon was writing large checks to both companies and they cooperated without much hesitation. Already operating at full capacity, North American was faced with having to open secondary production sites to fill the Pentagon's new B-24 orders. One suitable site was identified in Waco at 12<sup>th</sup> and Washington, the former Fort Fiske Wright.

Production began in this facility in late 1943 and continued until August of 1945 when the government canceled most orders with its wartime contractors. To maintain a low profile, the downstairs windows were painted over and the public was not routinely allowed access to the Army-supervised assembly site. But, several Wacoans recall discussing the fact that "airplane wings" were being made there, and riveting machines were frequently heard from the street. Parts assembled at the secondary site in Waco were shipped to Grand Prairie for final assembly. About 100 people worked at the Waco assembly site, with approximately 60% of them women.

In the prosperous postwar years the building was once again used as an automobile dealership. From 1946 until 1949, D.T. Hicks, Jr. leased the property, selling Plymouths and DeSotos. He sought to buy the building, but Dees McDermott would not sell. Hicks therefore bought a building on 5<sup>th</sup> Street where he continued his dealership until 1958 when sluggish sales of these particular makes of autos prompted him to abandon his sales career and begin a new profession in banking. McDermott's next tenant was Hill Printing and Stationery, a respected firm that had been in continuous operation in Waco since the 1880s. Raymond B. Goddard was the owner. The company kept large printing presses and bookbinders upstairs while maintaining a showroom of office supplies and commercial furniture downstairs. A dumbwaiter was used to transport completed print orders to waiting customers below.

After a very destructive tornado in 1953, the downtown business district began to decline. Affluent citizens moved to suburbs along the city's western edge, and many businesses followed them. Among these was Hill Printing, moving to its location on the furthest reaches of Franklin Avenue in 1960. There, new banks, shopping

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centers, even entire neighborhoods were appearing where before there had only been empty prairie. After a brief period as an outlet for unclaimed and damaged freight, McDermott's building languished vacant for nearly 20 years. Several people tried to buy the building from him, but he always refused to sell. Reportedly, he did not do a particularly good job of maintaining the property during those many years.

Near the end of his life in 1978, McDermott finally agreed to sell the building to Homer Owen, who soon opened "Rhema The Way." Owen built up a customer base of over 700 businesses across the nation, manufacturing and distributing "inspirational gift items" for gift shops, department stores and religious bookstores. Encouraged by his initial success, he decided to begin his own franchise chain of "Love Shops" in the many new-generation shopping malls that were springing up all across the country. One such shop was opened on site at the Washington Avenue building, where new franchise managers were to be brought to Waco for training. Elsewhere, somewhere around \$10 million in shopping mall retail space was preleased by Owen, effectively reserving the spaces for a multitude of these soon-to-be-trained franchisees. Unfortunately, the national economy slumped in late 1978 and early 1979. Many of these franchisees-to-be reneged on their intentions to open Love Shops, leaving Owen with a devastating financial commitment to shopping mall owners from coast to coast. In the ensuing bankruptcy, Owen was forced to sell Rhema The Way and all its assets to some North Carolina investors known as the Tuscarora Group. The buyout stipulated that Owen would remain as an employee and advisor, which he did for a number of years until the company finally abandoned the endeavor. The Tuscarora Group sold the building to a local Waco charitable organization in 1988.

At that time, Caritas of Waco was looking for a site to open a new second-hand store after demolition of an adjacent building had seriously compromised the structural integrity of their store on Austin Avenue. With an ever-expanding client base in the now economically blighted downtown, the originally Catholic charitable organization wished to maintain a strong presence there. Caritas of Waco would operate a large thrift shop on the site for 13 years, using the proceeds to help fund its many other charitable endeavors. Because of the size of the building, they also used some of the space as a sorting and storage area for their other thrift shops throughout the county. During the night of April 10, 2000, a very destructive fire engulfed the thrift shop and warehouse, seeming to originate from a series of downstairs furnaces just behind the mezzanine. Being entirely of structural concrete, the old building was not irrevocably damaged. The resultant soot and water damage, however, was a slushy black mess that destroyed all the inventory within the building. Thus, Caritas was handed the formidable challenge of determining what to do about the internally charred hulk. After a series of feasibility studies convinced the Caritas board of directors that the fire damage could not be affordably corrected, the building was sold to its present owner, Len Dippel, in May of 2001. Plans are now underway to rehabilitate the building for retail and residential space, hopefully contributing to the revitalization of this area of historic Waco.

Contributing to the building's historical significance are its architectural style and method of construction. A two-story automobile showroom and repair center, it was designed in the fashionable Spanish Colonial Revival style with a stripped classical and Art Deco influence. Viewing this particular building in the context of its

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neighborhood, one quickly realizes that the Spanish Colonial Revival theme is a common one throughout the southwest quadrant of Downtown Waco, and that the old Buick dealership was one of several buildings of the style. Others in the neighborhood were also designed by local architect Milton Scott. This was the direction in which the business district was expanding in the 1920s, and the ubiquity of the Spanish Colonial idiom is testimony to its popularity and implication of economic success. Elsewhere in the city, the style was the preferred language of the more affluent modern residences, and it is therefore no surprise that a dealership of a premier product line such as Buick would be adorned in this manner. The architectural style of this building reflected Waco during the era: prosperous, ambitious, fundamentally conservative, but cautiously embracing a more modern standard.

This was very arguably the city's most prosperous and influential era. The automobile was gaining in prominence, but had not yet surpassed the railroad as a means of transporting people and goods. Waco was still a regional hub of commerce and distribution. Cotton farms still blanketed the fertile Brazos Valley, and armies of salesmen left their Waco headquarters for the local train stations every week, traveling to destinations within a 150-mile radius of the city. By week's end, they were back in Waco with notebooks full of merchandise orders to be filled and shipped back out by train. During that chapter of its history, Waco still regarded itself as among the largest and most powerful cities in the state, on the same plane as Dallas or Houston. Within a few short years, the Great Depression, the decline of the local cotton industry and further centralization of the nation's economy would dash these aspirations, but not before Waco had begun to resemble these larger and more enduringly metropolitan Texas counterparts. Indeed, Waco's surviving legacy of this era is a rim of sturdy steel-reinforced concrete industrial buildings rimming the older core of mercantile storefront structures. The latter were commonly seen in every small town in the country fortunate enough to have had a railroad line passing through it, but the newer style concrete buildings were far less universal.

Unlike the old mercantile buildings that had outer load-bearing walls of brick or natural stone, capable of supporting only comparatively lightweight wooden cross members, these newer industrial buildings reflected a more advanced construction technology, made possible locally in the mid 1920s by the penetration of the gasoline engine into the building trades, the reduced cost of Portland cement, and the rise of the relatively new field of modern engineering that defined the properties of the new building medium. It was now economically practical to mix and transport to the desired height the many tons of concrete slurry of predictable quality that went into modern buildings. Their primary structure was of steel-reinforced concrete, with a series of heavy, poured-in-place columns separated, or altogether hidden, by an outer veneer of more aesthetically pleasing brick. Lateral concrete beams supporting the upper floors and roofs were capable of supporting much heavier objects. Indeed, some of these buildings, including Dees McDermott's Buick dealership, were specifically designed to allow vehicular traffic across the upper floors. The comparative vastness of these buildings' interiors was interrupted only by heavy columns of still more steel-reinforced concrete. The superior strength of this relatively new building material allowed these buildings to have larger, more frequent window openings. Indeed, they were nicknamed "daylight factories" and represented a definite improvement in the typical working

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Waco, McLennan County, Texas

environment.

Technological advances made these more modern industrial buildings commonplace in the years between World War I and the Great Depression, at a time when the country was continuing its slow progression from a chiefly agrarian and cottage industry base to a more centralized urban industrial system. Hence, buildings of this type are rare in smaller towns, but plentiful in larger population centers in the South such as Atlanta, New Orleans, and Dallas. The cities along the East Coast and Great Lakes with their longer industrial history are even more abundantly endowed with this type of construction. However, steel-reinforced concrete buildings outside the South tended to have a different appearance. That Waco, with a current population of just a little more than 100,000, is so abundantly rimmed with construction of this type, is testimony to the fact that, in the 1920s, the town was a regional center of manufacturing and distribution that seemed destined to become a major metropolitan center, and only narrowly missed that destiny. It now ranks among the second tier of Texas population centers, but is distinguished within its current peer group by the number of old industrial buildings on the perimeter of its downtown district. A decade ago these largely vacant behemoths would have been regarded as a collective eyesore, but with the loft conversion movement gaining momentum, Waco is very busy transforming these buildings into upscale apartments.

These concrete industrial buildings comprising the outer rim of Waco's old downtown tended to be quite generously ornamented. Their location so close to the central business district is a reflection of the fact that the working class of the era did not necessarily enjoy the luxury of automobile ownership. Predictably, their design style ranged from Classical Revival to Art Deco. Designed as an automobile dealership for the consuming public and not as a warehouse or manufacturing plant, McDermott's building at 1125 Washington was a little more ornate than most others, but not by much. These large buildings had a major impact on the overall appearance of Downtown Waco and it was important that they present the proper aesthetic message. The young city ambitiously sought to convey a sense of urban sophistication to its visitors and needed the contribution of its warehouse district in this effort. This was in sharp contrast to the appearance of similar industrial buildings elsewhere in the country. The cities along the East Coast and Great Lakes were more mature, and had a far more extensive network of downtown architecture. Hence, they did not feel a need to adorn their warehouse and manufacturing buildings with exterior ornament. Instead, they tended to reflect the philosophical ideals of their industrialist owners: progressive functionalism without historical reference and clean efficiency. They proudly displayed the structural elements as celebrations of the new building technology and puritanically viewed unnecessary embellishment as wasteful excess that would send an undesirable message to their employees and increasingly corporate clientele.

The Buick dealership at 1125 Washington appears to have been among Milton Scott's first ventures into the new medium of reinforced concrete construction. He chose the beam and girder technique of ceiling and roof support over the more popular and economical flat roof design, suggesting that he was still more comfortable with more traditional methods of construction. It also suggests that the technique of construction was without a

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lot of precedent in the area when the building was conceived. The building featured a concrete ramp to the second floor, designed to accommodate vehicular traffic. This was a design element pioneered a decade earlier under the direction of Henry Ford as an economical alternative to the elevator in his multistory assembly plants. It was also the first and only truly multistory car dealership in Waco. This was intended not only as an attention-drawing novelty, but also as a means of saving money. It allowed the dealership to have twice the work area without increasing real estate cost. Automobile ownership among the local population had not yet attained critical mass, and it was still advantageous to locate retail sales establishments within the central business district. Of course, the next generation of car dealerships would be conveniently located further from the city center where land was more available, eliminating all need to accept the many impracticalities of a multistory dealership.

The McDermott Motors Building is significant in the development of Waco for several reasons. It is an intact and well-developed example of an architectural and construction style used during Waco's most prosperous era when the town seemed destined to become a major urban center. Its functional reinforced concrete body is dressed in a traditionally ornate veneer of a Spanish Colonial Revival style with minimal Art Deco features, making it representative of the prevailing local architectural fashion of the 1920s. It is very likely the best building of the era designed specifically for the sale and repair of automobiles in Waco. It demonstrates the technological advance of poured-in-place reinforced concrete and exhibits the local tendency to elaborately adorn these industrial buildings. It is an intact and representative work of Waco architect Milton Scott. It played an unquestionably significant role in the city's history, namely serving as the National Guard armory during the difficult and pivotal decade leading up to World War II, and later housing a major component of Waco's civilian industrial contribution to that war effort. Its later history mirrors the downtown district's struggle to survive urban blight brought about by an exodus to the suburbs. Despite some alterations to first-floor openings, the building retains integrity of design, materials, workmanship, location, setting, feeling and association to a high degree.

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McDermott Motors Building  
Waco, McLennan County, Texas

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National Park Service

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McDermott Motors Building  
Waco, McLennan County, Texas

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### **BIBLIOGRAPHY (continued)**

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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

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**ACREAGE OF PROPERTY:** less than one acre (approximately 0.824 acres, approximately 165 feet by 217 feet)

**UTM REFERENCES**

<u>Zone</u>	<u>Easting</u>	<u>Northing</u>
14	676660	3492120

**VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION** Portion of Farm Lot 20, original survey of City of Waco, McLennan County, Texas. For complete boundary description, see continuation sheet 10-18.

**BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION** The boundary includes all property historically associated with the resource.

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY** (with assistance of Bob Brinkman, Texas Historical Commission)

---

**NAME/TITLE:** Lennis Kyle Dippel

**ORGANIZATION:** N/A

**DATE:** February 16, 2003

**STREET & NUMBER:** 2319 Loy Lake Road

**TELEPHONE:** (903) 465-9705

**CITY OR TOWN:** Denison

**STATE:** Texas

**ZIP CODE:** 75020

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**ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION**

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**CONTINUATION SHEETS** (see continuation sheets FIGURE-20 through FIGURE-21)

**MAPS** (see continuation sheet MAP-19 and topographic map)

**PHOTOGRAPHS** (see continuation sheet PHOTO-22)

**ADDITIONAL ITEMS**

---

**PROPERTY OWNER**

---

**NAME:** Lennis Kyle Dippel

**STREET & NUMBER:** 2319 Loy Lake Road

**TELEPHONE:** (903) 465-9705

**CITY OR TOWN:** Denison

**STATE:** Texas

**ZIP CODE:** 75020

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National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 18

McDermott Motors Building  
Waco, McLennan County, Texas

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning all of that certain 0.824 acre tract conveyed to Caritas of Waco, Inc., by a deed dated July 13, 1988, and recorded in Volume 1638, Page 697, of the McLennan County, Texas Deed Records.

Beginning at an "X" found in concrete at the southwest corner of said 0.824 acre tract, being at the intersection of the north line of Washington Avenue with the east line of North 12th street, and being the southwest corner of this,

THENCE: N 44 deg, 36'44" W 165.08 ft. along the west line of said 0.824 acre tract, the east side of North 12th Street, to a 1/2" diameter iron pin found at the northwest corner of said tract, being the intersection of said east line of North 12th Street with the south line of a 20' alley, and being the northwest corner of this,

THENCE: N 45 deg 01'18" E 217.61 ft along the north line of said 0.824 acre tract, the south line of said alley, to a 1/2" diameter iron pin found at the northeast corner of said tract, being the northeast corner of this,

THENCE: S 44 deg 37'37" E 165.00 ft. along the east side of said 0.824 acre tract to a 1/2" diameter iron pin found at its southeast corner, being in the north line of said avenue, and being the southeast corner of this,

THENCE: S 45 deg 00'00" W 217.65 ft. along the south line of said 0.824 acre tract, the north line of said Washington Avenue, to the point of beginning.

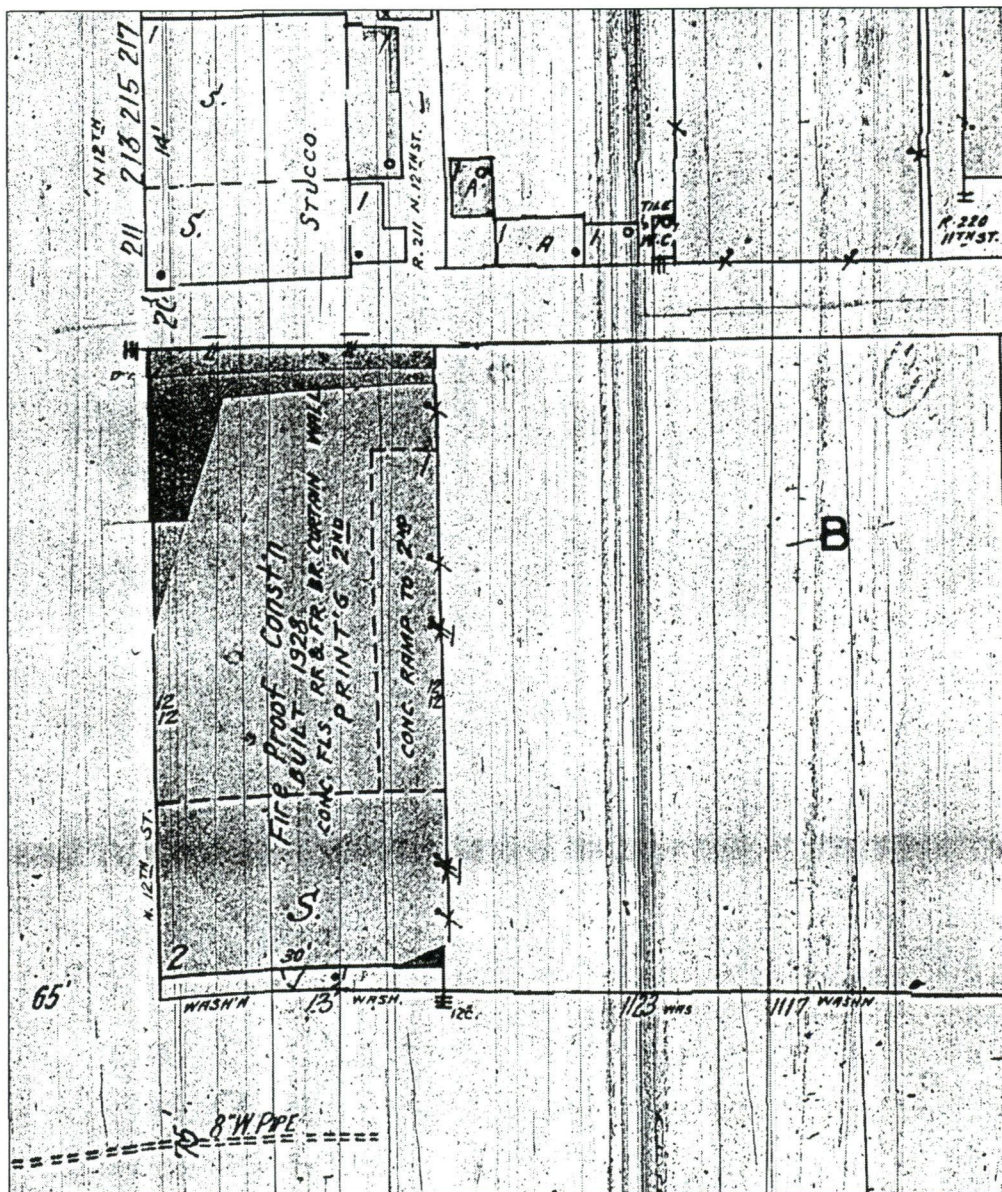
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National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

McDermott Motors Building  
Waco, McLennan County, Texas

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Site plan of McDermott Building (center left) and surrounding block, north at top. Source: Sanborn Fire Insurance map, Waco, McLennan County, Texas, revised 1951, Vol. 2 sheet 204.



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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 20

McDermott Motors Building  
Waco, McLennan County, Texas

Figure 1. McDermott Motors Building, c. 1928, view from southwest. Photocopy from owner's files.



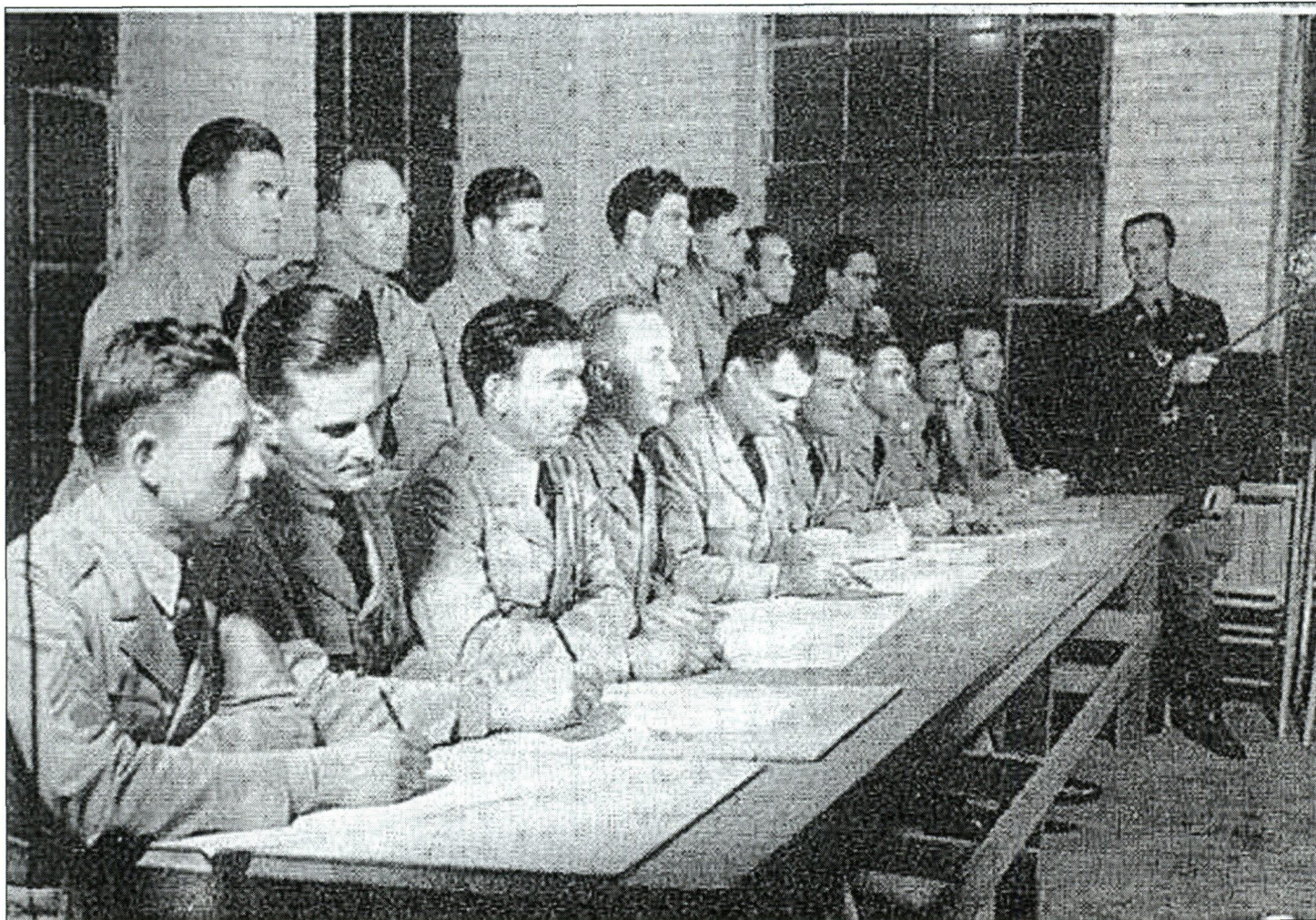
United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section FIGURE Page 21

McDermott Motors Building  
Waco, McLennan County, Texas

**Figure 2. Non-commissioned Officers (NCO) training class at Fort Fiske Wright c. 1939. Photocopy from owner's files.**



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# **National Register of Historic Places**

## **Continuation Sheet**

Section PHOTO Page 22

McDermott Motors Building  
Waco, McLennan County, Texas

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### **PHOTOGRAPHIC INVENTORY**

**McDermott Motors Building**  
**1125 Washington Avenue**  
**Waco, McLennan County, Texas**  
**Photographs by Lennis Kyle Dippel, February 2003.**  
**Negatives in owner's possession.**

Photograph 1 of 3  
South elevation  
Camera facing north

Photograph 2 of 3  
Southwest oblique  
Camera facing northeast

Photograph 3 of 3  
First floor interior  
Camera facing northwest

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: McDermott Motors Building

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: TEXAS, McLennan

DATE RECEIVED: 12/04/03      DATE OF PENDING LIST: 12/16/03  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 1/01/04      DATE OF 45TH DAY: 1/17/04  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 03001415

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N    DATA PROBLEM: N    LANDSCAPE: N    LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N    PDIL: N    PERIOD: N    PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N    SAMPLE: N    SLR DRAFT: N    NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT     RETURN     REJECT    1/14/04 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

**Entered in the  
National Register**

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N





1125-A

MCDERMOTT MOTORS BUILDING  
1125 WASHINGTON AVENUE  
WACO, MCLENNON CO., TEXAS  
PHOTOGRAPH 1 of 3



1125-C

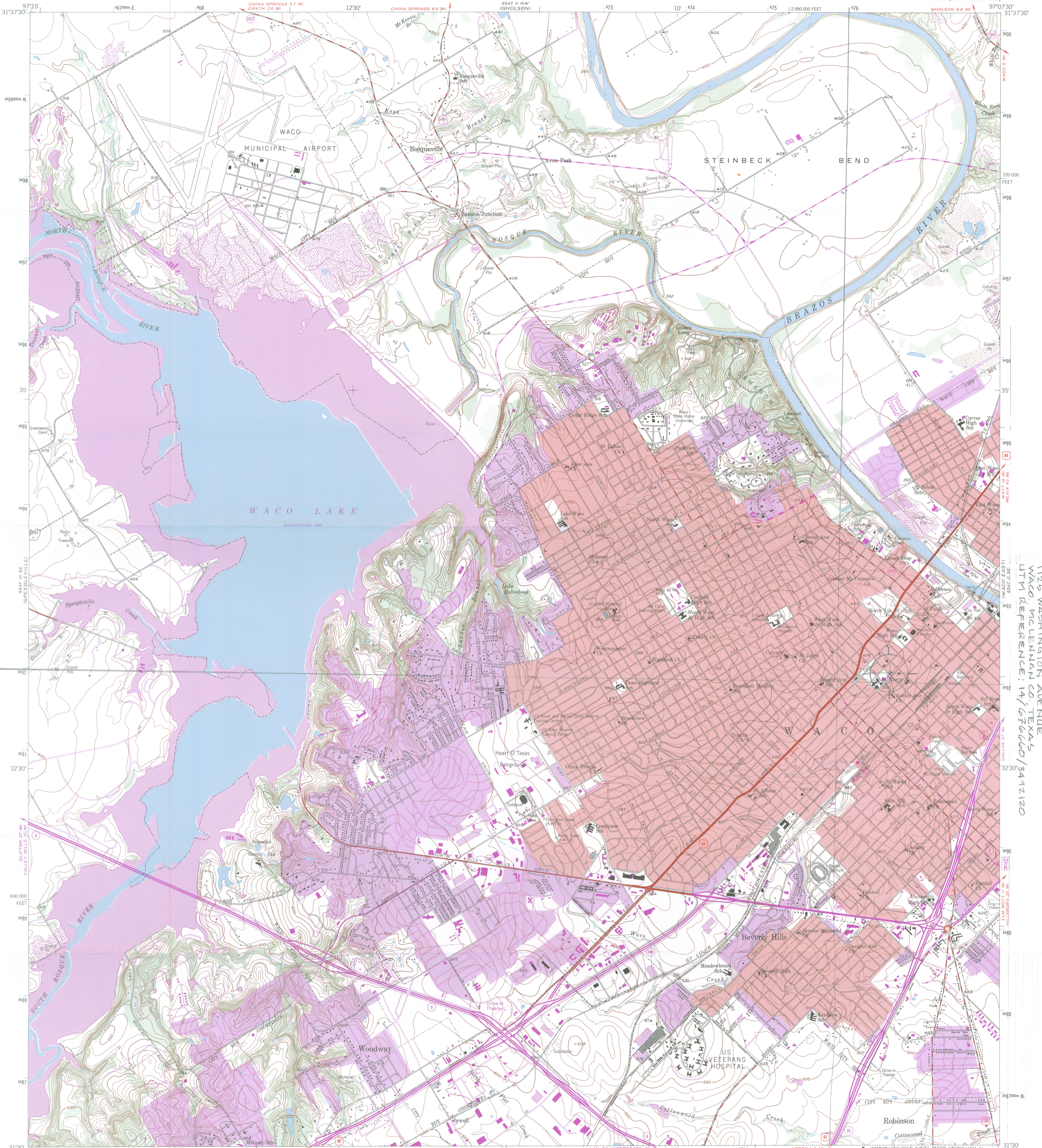
McDERMOTT MOTORS BUILDING  
1125 WASHINGTON AVENUE  
WACO, MCLENNON CO., TEXAS  
PHOTOGRAPH 2 of 3



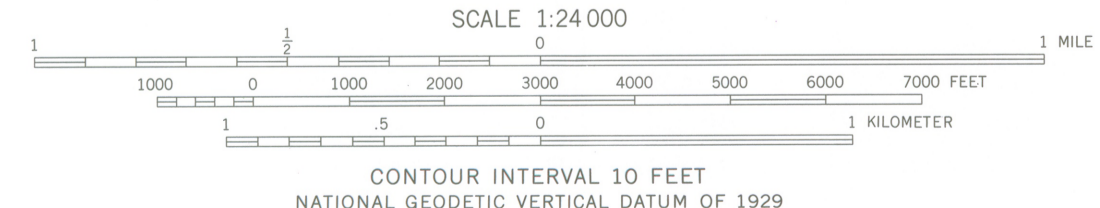
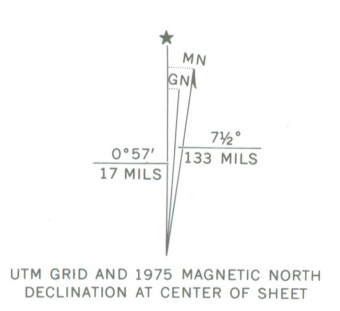
1125-I

MCDERMOTT MOTORS BUILDING  
1125 WASHINGTON AVENUE  
WACO, MCLENNAN CO., TEXAS

PHOTOGRAPH 3 of 3



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and NOS/NOAA  
Topography from 1956 planimetric surveys and by ER-55 plotter  
Aerial photographs taken 1955. Field check 1957  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Texas coordinate system,  
central zone  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 14, shown in blue  
Red tint indicates areas in which only  
landmark buildings are shown  
Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs  
taken 1970 and 1975. This information not field checked  
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, hard surface	Light-duty road, hard or improved surface
Secondary highway, hard surface	Unimproved road
Interstate Route	U. S. Route
	State Route

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

3197-412

WACO WEST, TEX.  
N3130—W9705.7/7.5  
1957  
PHOTOREVISED 1970 AND 1975  
AMS 6547 II SW—SERIES V82

HEDERMOTT MOTORS BUILDING  
1125 WASHINGTON AVENUE  
WACO, MCLENNAN CO., TEXAS  
UTM REFERENCE: 14T676660/3442120



**TEXAS  
HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION**

Rick Perry • *Governor*  
John L. Nau, III • *Chairman*  
F. Lawrence Oaks • *Executive Director*

*The State Agency for Historic Preservation*

TO: Carol Shull, Keeper  
National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Gregory W. Smith, National Register Coordinator  
Texas Historical Commission

RE: McDermott Motors Building (Fort Fiske Wright), Waco, McLennan County, Texas

DATE: December 2, 2003



The following materials are submitted regarding: McDermott Motors Building, Waco, McLennan County, Texas

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Original National Register of Historic Places form
<input type="checkbox"/>	Resubmitted nomination
<input type="checkbox"/>	Multiple Property nomination form
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Photographs
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	USGS map
<input type="checkbox"/>	Correspondence
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other:

COMMENTS:

Please ensure that this nomination is reviewed

The enclosed owner objections (do ) (do not ) constitute a majority of property owners

Other \_\_\_\_\_