

GULF FILLING STATION

(Meineke Garage)

Corner of Route 51 and West Liberty Avenue

Pittsburgh

Allegheny County

Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6188

HABS
PA
2-PITBU,
86-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service

Northeast Region

Philadelphia Support Office

U.S. Custom House

200 Chestnut Street

Philadelphia, P.A. 19106

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Location: Corner of Route 51 and West Liberty Avenue,
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USGS Pittsburgh West Quadrangle
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
17.583960.4473940

Significance: The Gulf Filling Station (Meineke Garage) is a good example of early twentieth century transportation-related architecture. This building is an unusual example of an Art Deco gas station dating to ca. 1927. The central tower, with its Art Deco design, is an unusual feature.

Description: This one story brick structure is roughly triangular in plan, consisting of a central tower flanked by service bays. The building is approximately 30.48 meters (100 feet) by 19.81 meters (65 feet) by 24.38 meters (80 feet). The two story tower has a glass front capped by a pyramidal roof. The roof is sheathed in metal. The tower has Art Deco lines and detailing that has been covered with paint. The tower is clad in glass. Most of the glass panels have been covered with paint and, in some sections, the glass has been replaced with other material. The two side service wings, both one story, have single, wood-paneled garage doors on the main facade. No openings are present on the facades of the wings. There are no interior partitions between the service wings. An entry is situated on the interior of the structure between the two story tower and the one story bays.

History: The Gulf Filling Station (Meineke Garage) is located in the neighborhood of Beltzhoover, on Pittsburgh's South Side. The garage lies directly across an intersection from the south entrance to the Liberty Tunnels, which connect the South Side with central Pittsburgh. Although the area lies a short distance away from the central business district across the Monongahela River, early development was prevented by the existence of both the river and the adjacent steep escarpment of Mt. Washington. Construction on the Liberty Tunnels was not completed until 1926, and the adjoining bridge opened in 1928, completing the connection with central Pittsburgh. According to city statistics, the opening of the tunnels and the bridge caused an explosion in population. The South side had a higher than normal rate of car ownership, due to the area's dependence on automobiles for transportation into central Pittsburgh. By 1930, State Route 51, an important West Liberty thoroughfare which passes directly in front of the Gulf Filling Station (Meineke Garage), was one of six federal or state highways which had been built to serve the Pittsburgh area. Gulf Oil chose the site at this busy intersection for the construction of the Gulf Filling Station (Meineke Garage) because of its access to the new thoroughfares of Route 51 and West Liberty Avenue, the tunnels and bridge. During its period of construction, circa 1924-1929, nearly all South Side traffic going into or around the city had to pass by this location, giving the gas station high visibility among the area's rapidly increasing number of motorists. Though the tunnels had yet to be completed, the future value of the Gulf Filling Station's (Meineke Garage) lot was already apparent in 1923 when Mary E. Born sold it to Charles E. McKim for \$45,000. It is not clear if the shop building and auto garage which appear on the lot on the 1924 Sanborn map was put up by Born or McKim, but the structure was subsequently razed to construct the Gulf Filling Station (Meineke Garage).

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The Gulf Filling Station (Meineke Garage) exhibits architectural trends popular in the 1920s. Placing gas stations on corner lots was particularly desirable, as the arrangement could accommodate driveways on either side of a pump island and offered accessibility from two streets. Canopies had fallen out of favor at the time because they had to be built awkwardly high to accommodate vans and trucks, and a 1932 photograph of the Gulf Filling Station (Meineke Garage) confirms that Gulf followed the trend. Stations also began including bays, such as those on either side of the Gulf Filling Station's (Meineke Garage) tower, to accommodate grease pits or car washing equipment. The typical 1920s gas station contained a small office, public restrooms and one or two storage rooms.

Ownership of the Gulf Filling Station (Meineke Garage) became vested in People's Service Station in 1929. A 1932 photograph and the 1957 Sanborn map show that People's did retain gas pump service (Polk 1928:n.p.; Polk 1929:n.p. and Hoffman 1992:135). With the coming of the Great Depression, gas sales began to deteriorate and companies, such as People's diversified into auto repair. However, stations needed larger display rooms, storage areas and multiple repair bays to meet market demand, explaining why People's gave up the Gulf Filling Station (Meineke Garage) building at some point prior to 1955. The city building inspector reports that the structure had been a used car lot and office since 1955. The 1968 estate of property owner Edward McKenna does not discuss the gas station. However, the estate's receipts do show rental receipts from Lee & Johnny's Auto Repair, and the City of Pittsburgh issued a certificate of occupancy for a used auto body and repair shop in 1976. There was additional income from Gulf Oil which rented advertising space somewhere on the property for \$9.37 per month. In 1978, the building inspector issued a Certificate of Occupancy to the building's final occupant: Meineke Discount Mufflers (Orphans Court of Allegheny County 1969:n.p.; Jakle 1978:529 and Pittsburgh City Planners Office of Zoning Administration 1979:n.p.). The building appears to have been slightly altered after 1978 by an exterior coat of paint that is inconsistent with the Art Deco inspired detailing. Contact with the Gulf Corporation to learn of their historic gas station plans was unsuccessful.

Sources:

Corporate Librarian/Historian

Chevron Oil Corporation, 225 Bush Street, San Francisco, CA 94104

Polk, R.L.

1928 *Polk's Pittsburgh City Directory*. Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk Publisher

1929 *R.L. Polk's Pittsburgh City Directory*. Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk Publisher.

1932 *Polk's Pittsburgh City Directory*. Pittsburgh: R.L. Polk Publisher.

Pittsburgh City Planners, Office of Zoning Administration

1979 File #35195. January 25, 1979.

Orphans Court of Allegheny County

1969 Petition for Distribution by Elizabeth McNicholas in the Estate of Edward J. Kenna. No. 869.

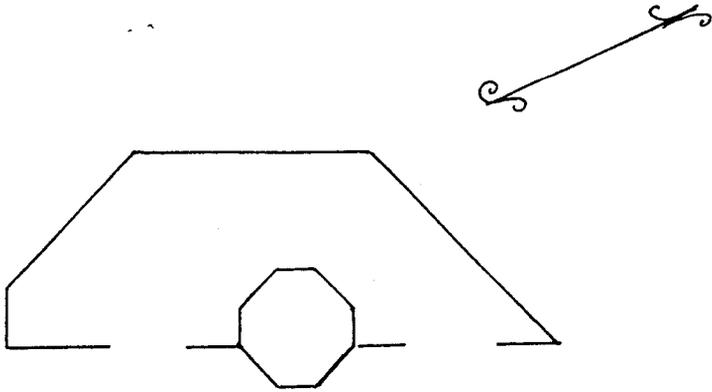
Historians:

Nadine Miller Peterson and Mary M. Daughtrey, CHRS, Inc., May 1996

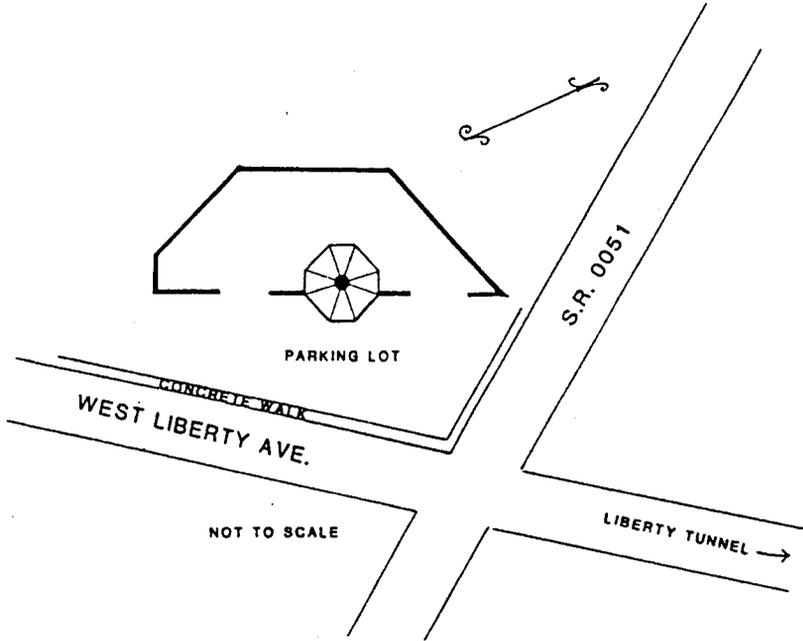
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INTERIOR SKETCH PLAN



SITE PLAN