

BOB PECK CHEVROLET
800 North Glebe Road
Arlington
Virginia

HABS VA-1413
VA-1413

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Addendum to BOB PECK CHEVROLET

HABS No. VA-1413
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Location: Bob Peck Chevrolet was located at 800 N. Glebe Road, at the intersection of Wilson Boulevard and Glebe Road in the Ballston neighborhood of Arlington, Arlington County, Virginia. The buildings were demolished in 2007-08 after the site was purchased by JBG Companies. JBG bought the property in 2006 and plans were put forward for redevelopment of the lot.¹

Significance: When it opened in 1964, the Bob Peck Chevrolet dealership at the corner of Glebe and Wilson, one of Ballston's major transportation crossroads, quickly became one of Arlington's landmarks. Making the most of its location, the site plan featured a distinctive, transparent circular showroom made of glass and chrome with a butterfly roof line that created a frieze of diamond-shaped, blue panels. Lettering within the panels spelled "Chevrolet." The showroom was an outstanding example of automotive-inspired commercial architecture, and it was part of a larger design oeuvre for the industry that peaked in the 1960s. The only rival to the forward-looking, sleek and aerodynamic buildings of the car dealerships were the chrome and fin enhanced machines on display inside.²

Description: Bob Peck Chevrolet is best known for the geodesic-inspired showroom with hexagonal windows and butterfly roof line with diamond panels that spelled "Chevrolet." Behind the showroom with its flying saucer-like canopy was a one and one-half story wing made of brick masonry that housed offices and garage bays. Although utilitarian, the wing had a rounded corner, a flat roof, and swooping details (like the door handles) that were in keeping with the aesthetics of the Modern movement and of the showroom itself. Surrounding the buildings was an asphalt parking lot.

Like the designs for other transportation-related structures, the architecture of Bob Peck Chevrolet was borrowed from the economy of lines and applied ornamentation of the Modern movement that played to a growing obsession with

¹ Leef Smith, "A Sign of Times Past Bows Out in Ballston as Car Dealer Closes," *Washington Post*, 4 May 2006; Matthew Scarpelli, "End of Era in Arlington, JBG Cos. Acquires Bob Peck Chevy Site," *CoStar* (newsletter), 14 March 2006; also Arlington County Land Records, December 2005, Deed Book 3805, p. 1506.

² As early as the 1940s, General Motors sponsored a design competition for plans (or ideas the company said) to help dealers make the most of their sites. The notion of shaping the showroom to traffic (cars and pedestrians), of designing it for the display of automobiles (lighting, glass windows, canopies to reduce glare, etc.), and of choosing an advantageous location at major intersection was not new to the Bob Peck site. These were all on-going concerns, and the plans offered in 1948 were intended as a guide to dealers as they proceeded with individual building specifications. Dealers had both new and used cars to sell, service and parts to sell, and a staff to accommodate. See *Planning Automobile Dealer Properties* (Detroit: Service Section, General Motors Corporation, 1948). Curving walls, and curved plate glass, were in; the round showrooms of the 1960s still to come.

aerodynamic speed. A streamlining of design for buildings servicing the automobile, such as the showrooms, tire stores, and service stations, advertised their relationship to the industry. This included forms that provided an illusion of movement, such as rounded corners and swooping lines, as well as simple motifs like horizontal grooves in lieu of a frieze that were reminiscent of speed lines. Sleek veneers and modern materials such as the steel, glass, and chrome used in the cars themselves also characterized the Modernist structures.³

History: The first Bob Peck Chevrolet dealership was a partnership between Lawrence Kenyon and Bob Peck. They opened Kenyon-Peck Chevrolet in 1939 in a building located on Wilson Boulevard. This structure became the National Tire and Battery Warehouse (HABS No. VA-1278).⁴ Peck took over the business and relocated the dealership to the busy crossroads of North Glebe Road and Wilson Boulevard in Ballston. The building permit was issued in 1963 and the showroom opened the following year.⁵ Peck, like his showroom, was well-known in Arlington. His son Donald followed him into the business in the 1980s, and he ran the dealership for the duration.⁶

The blueprints accompanying the building permit offer insight into the construction, and also provide names of the architect, Anthony Musolino, and the builder, Sharpe & Hamaker. Later permits hint at the site's evolution, with the installation of a waste oil tank in October 1963, a double faced lamp bank in 1964, a parking lot and retaining wall in 1964, and a chain link fence in 1968 that was extended in 1972. The booth (in the parking lot) was spray painted in 1979.⁷

The architect Tony Musolino had a locally-based practice and earned his architecture degree from Catholic University. He became a member of the

³ For more on Arlington's automotive industry, see Laura Trieschmann, Kristyna Mizelle, and Robin Weidlich, "Al's Motors," Nomination 2003, National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service; on showrooms, Robert Genat, *The American Car Dealership* (Osceola, WI: MBI Publishing Co., 1999).

⁴ City directories note the continued presence of the dealership in the mid to late 1950s. *Hills Arlington County (Virginia) Directory 1955* (Richmond: Hill Directory Co., Inc., 1955); *Hills Arlington County (Virginia) Directory 1957* (Richmond: Hill Directory Co., Inc., 1957); *Hills Arlington County (Virginia) Directory 1959* (Richmond: Hill Directory Co., Inc., 1959).

⁵ Building Permit No. 35857, Records of the Arlington County Building Department, Building Permits, Virginia Room, Arlington County Public Library (microfilm)/ "House Numbers and Street Names" Cards, on file, Arlington County Historic Preservation Division. Accompanying the permit are a series of blueprints submitted by architect Anthony F. Musolino; by the contractor (builder) Sharpe & Hamaker, Inc., Arlington; by structural engineers H.L. Keller and Associates, Silver Spring; by consulting engineer Kendrick Redinger, and by Arlington Iron Works.

⁶ Bob Peck died in 1998, but prior to his death the family flirted with becoming Peck Enterprises. Arlington County Land Records, 1991-96, Deed Book 2795, p. 1523; Deed Book 2765, p. 2135; Deed Book 2501, p. 1727.

⁷ Records of the Arlington County Building Department, Building Permits, Virginia Room, Arlington County Public Library (microfilm)/ "House Numbers and Street Names" Cards, on file, Arlington County Historic Preservation Division.

American Institute of Architects in the 1950s, and the AIA directories note his major projects as various motor hotels, high schools, and the Virginia Doctors Hospital in Arlington. In an interview with the *Washington Post* in 2006 Musolino recalled how he had received payment for the building's design, but wanted use of a car as compensation for his supervision of the construction. He was loaned a car in 1963 and again in 1964. Musolino also remembered that Peck asked for a building that was "exceptional" and that he tried to create a billboard roof that floated in his design for the Peck dealership.⁸

⁸ *American Architects Directory* (1962), 505; *American Architects Directory*, 3rd ed., (1970), 653, AIA library.