

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name (former) Beam's Shell Service Station and Office
other names/site number C. Grier Beam Truck Museum

2. Location

street & number 117 N. Mountain Street N/A not for publication
city or town Cherryville N/A vicinity
state North Carolina code NC county Gaston code 071 zip code 28021

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)
Stephen J. Crow SHPO 9/4/97
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain): _____	_____	_____

Name of Property

County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
removed from its original location.
a birthplace or grave.
a cemetery.
a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
a commemorative property.
less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Commerce
Transportation

Period of Significance

ca. 1930 to 1938

Significant Dates

ca. 1930
1934

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Beam, C. Grier

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- 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
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

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(former) Beam's Shell Service Station and Office
Gaston County, N. C.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The (former) Beam's Shell Service Station and Office is in the town of Cherryville, North Carolina, which is in the northwest corner of Gaston County. NC Route 150 is the primary east-west artery and bisects the town. NC Routes 274, 279 and 216 also lead to Cherryville. The (former) Beam's Shell Service Station and Office is located on the west side of N. Mountain Street (Route 274) at the corner of W. First Street, which is one block north of E. Main Street (Route 150). The station is just one block north of the center of the town's business district. Brick commercial blocks stand across the street and on the next block, to the north of the site. Adjoining the site to the south is the one-story brick display building of the C. Grier Beam Truck Museum. The service station now serves as gift shop and entry point for the museum. To the south of the museum, a railroad spur line crosses N. Mountain Street.

A cross-gabled rectangular building, the (former) Beam's Shell Service Station and Office is approximately twenty-one feet by forty-two feet, and stands to the rear of a corner lot that fronts fifty feet on N. Mountain Street and eighty-five feet on W. First Street. The building faces northeast. The lot surrounding the building is paved in concrete, with the exception of a gravel strip between the building and the sidewalk on W. First Street. A raised concrete pump island stands between the building and N. Mountain Street, upon which stand two old gasoline pumps. In 1987, a single-story brick veneer museum building was erected next to the old service station. A small gable roof spans the walkway between the two buildings, and is obviously contemporary with the newer structure. Wrought iron gates shut the walkway to pedestrian traffic. They are held in place by anchors, but otherwise don't physically touch either building. Like the gable roof, the gates are plainly contemporary with the newer museum building.

The (former) Beam's Shell Service Station and Office was built around 1930, during a time when gasoline retailers were working to develop identifiable building types in order to build brand loyalty among customers. This station was designed in the Spanish Mission style, a style which is more commonly associated with the southwest than the southeast. Style notwithstanding, it has several characteristics which were typical for a gasoline station of that era: a corner lot, a concrete pump island, a setback wide enough for cars to pull up on either side of the pumps, and a paved lot. The former service station had one service bay, whose entrance was on the side of the building, and accessed from W. First Street. The building, the pump island and both pumps are contributing resources in this nomination.

The building is in near-original condition. The only alterations are the enclosure of the service bay entrance and the attachment of a small gable roof over the (south) side door.

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In 1987, a new museum building was erected next to and to the south of Beam's Shell Service Station. It is a one-story brick veneer rectangle with a flat roof. The building is unadorned on three sides. The facade features corbelled brick buttresses supporting an applied pseudo Mansard-style roof. The Mansard roof section is covered with red Spanish-style roofing tiles, mimicking the treatment on the old service station building. The new museum building is connected to the old service station building by a small gabled roof which spans the walkway between the two structures. The gable roof is attached to the old service station building over the door at the rear of the south elevation. The gable roof is a minor feature and is obviously contemporary with the museum building and not with the c. 1930 service station. The former service station and the museum building are clearly two separate structures, standing on two separate parcels. The museum building is not included in the nomination.

INVENTORY LIST

1. Service Station c.1930 contributing building

The service station building is a single-story, Spanish Mission style structure with a cross-gabled rectangular mass. It is constructed of stuccoed walls with a brick water table and brick trim around the doors and windows. The northwest facade features a linteled central entry with double glazed doors and two arched windows. There is a pent roof across the front-facing gable, and an arched vent in the gable. The entire roof is covered with Spanish-style metal roofing tiles. Two small square chimneys extend from the northeast and southeast roof planes, but are merely decorative. A third small square chimney extends upward near the center of the building, and once served as a stove flue.

The side (north) elevation can be divided into two parts. The front (east) section has an off-center glazed door with a large round-arched window to the left (east) and two smaller round-arched windows to the right (west). The doors and windows throughout the building are surrounded with brick end faces. Similar brick ends demarcate the water table, dividing the wall into brick below and stucco above the line. The rear (west) portion of the north elevation is marked by a side-facing cross gable. Like the front facade, the gable has a round-arched vent. The elevation of this section is opened by what was originally the service bay for the garage. It is marked by a brick soldier arch and trim along the sides. The opening has been filled in with stucco and brick, emulating the wall treatment elsewhere on the building.

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The south side elevation has two round-arched windows in the front (east) portion of the building and a double door in the rear (west) section. A small gable roof (not original) shelters the double doors and bridges the space between the old service station and the new museum building next door.

The rear elevation of the service station has a single, six-over-six double-hung sash window with a brick soldier arch and trim.

The interior space is divided into three main sections. The front section spans the width of the building and was originally the office for the service station. It now serves as the gift shop for the C. Grier Beam Truck Museum. The center portion includes a small office, an interior closet, and a storage room accessed only from the exterior. Both the front and center sections have the original plastered walls and simple door and window trim. It was in this small office that C. Grier Beam headquartered the Beam Trucking Company during the formative years of the organization, which eventually grew into Carolina Freight Carriers Corporation. This function is displayed here now, showing artifacts from this time, including Beam's oak desk. The rear portion of the building is the largest and originally functioned as the service bay for the station. It now holds story boards and display cases for the museum. In this room, the American bond brick walls are exposed. Floors throughout the building are poured concrete.

2. Pump Island c. 1930 contributing structure

An original pump island stands in front of the service station, midway between the building and the curb. It is a concrete slab several inches thick, rounded at the ends and holds the pumps.

3. Pumps c. 1930 contributing objects

There are two old gasoline pumps on the premises. They are both of the "visible pump" type--that is, having a glass cylinder on top, through which the customer could actually see the product as it was dispensed. One pump has a smooth conical support (painted yellow), and the other has a fluted conical support (painted red). Each pump has a glass chamber with gallon markings inside, and a glass globe on top. The glass globe is in the shape of a seashell (the corporate logo) and sports the name "Shell."

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The (former) Beam's Shell Service Station and Office is an exceptional example of the Spanish Mission style of service station architecture of the early 1930s with excellent integrity. It is a one-story cross-gabled structure with brick and stucco walls and a Spanish-style metal tile roof. Standing on the corner of N. Mountain Street and W. First Street, it is near the center of the business district in Cherryville, NC. It is sited to the rear of its paved fifty foot by eighty-five foot lot, leaving room in front for the concrete pump island and two "visible glass" type gas pumps. Leases are on file at the Gaston County Register of Deeds office certifying that it was a Shell station during the 1930s and 1940s. The property retains features characteristic for a service station of that era: a corner lot, a concrete pump island, a setback wide enough for automobiles to pull up on either side of the pump island, and a paved lot. It is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for architectural significance. In addition, it is eligible under Criterion B for its association with C. Grier Beam (1906-1992). C. Grier Beam was the founder of Carolina Freight Carriers Corporation, which had its earliest office in this building. Beam started during the Great Depression with a single used Chevrolet truck, and built a business which was at the time of his death in 1992 the sixth largest trucking firm in the nation.

Historical Background/Commerce and Transportation Context

The Gaston County town of Cherryville grew up around a rural crossroads during the second half of the nineteenth century. The point, then called White Pine, was marked by a general store at the junction of the Old Post Road and the Morganton trail. In 1862, the Wilmington, Charlotte & Rutherford Rail Road Company extended a line to White Pine. (The railroad later became the Carolina Central Railway Company, and then the Seaboard Railway Company.) According to local legend, the name was changed to Cherryville (to pay tribute to the rows of cherry trees that grew nearby) when the railroad came through. The town was incorporated in 1881. In 1891, the Cherryville Manufacturing Company, a textile mill, was formed. The town continued to grow and the present central business district was established early in this century. Three other textile mills came to Cherryville, but no other local industry grew to be as large as Carolina Freight Carriers Corporation.¹

¹A. R. Beam, *Sketches of the Life of J. T. Beam and his Fifteen Children*, (n.p.: 1967), pp. 41-42. Kim Withers Brengle, *The Architectural Heritage of Gaston County, North Carolina*, (Gastonia, NC: Commercial Printers, Inc., 1982), p. 63

"Cherryville is 96 years old." *The Gastonia Gazette*, 30 April 1977, p. 12-G.

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Cherryville saw hard times during the Great Depression of the 1930s, as did the rest of the nation. It was under these unlikely circumstances that C. Grier Beam founded what was to become, sixty years later, the sixth largest trucking company in the nation.

Charles Grier Beam (1906-1992) was one of ten children born to Charles Lester and Nancy Carpenter Beam in neighboring Lincoln County, NC. Raised on a farm, C. Grier Beam had every intention of pursuing an agrarian lifestyle. He graduated from North Carolina State College (now North Carolina State University) in 1931 with a degree in poultry science. With twenty borrowed dollars, he left for a job in Florida with the Hilliard Poultry Association. He worked there for about six months, until the business fell victim to the tough economic conditions of the great depression. He returned to his father's Lincoln County farm in 1932.²

One day in 1932, Beam chanced upon a used 1931 Chevrolet truck on a used car lot in Lincolnton. He arranged for a loan and bought that truck for \$360, eventually satisfying the debt before it came due. By 1933, Grier was using the truck to haul cargo. His first jobs included delivering coal for the Lincoln County schools and carrying produce to and from Florida. He sold the produce he returned with to wholesalers and distributors, but even ended up selling some of it himself, right off of the back of the truck.³

W. Tabor Robinson. Cherryville, NC: A History, (n.p.: Gaston County Bicentennial Commission, c. 1976), pp. 16-19.

"A Town on the Grow." The Gastonia Gazette, 17 April 1971, p. 6-G.

²Atkins. Carolina Freight Corporation, p. 24.

"Couldn't Find A Job, So He Made His Own," The Gastonia Gazette, 29 October 1967.

"Gaston Trucking Magnate Grier Beam's Funeral Today," The Charlotte Observer, 22 March 1992, p. 2G.

"Trucking Magnate Left Mark on Gaston," The Charlotte Observer, 22 March 1992, Gaston Observer section, p. 1.

³Atkins, Carolina Freight Corporation, pp. 24-25.

"Museum Marks Trucking Pioneer's Place in History," The Charlotte Observer, 2 October 1982.

"Truck Museum Tells Beam's Story," Lincoln Times-News, 16 May 1986.

"Trucking Magnate Left Mark on Gaston," The Charlotte Observer, 22 March 1992, Gaston Observer section, p. 1.

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In 1934, lacking confidence in the freight-hauling business, Beam accepted a government job in Lincolnton. His duty was to aid unemployed textile workers to learn to support themselves by farming. He left the truck with one of his drivers, James Homesley. By this time, the 1931 Chevrolet had been traded for a 1934 Dodge. The Dodge suffered a broken axle on a trip from Florida, so it was in turn traded for a brand-new green Ford truck. Beam then lost his government job, and took over the trucking business from Homesley.⁴

Around that time, Beam struck a deal with the owner of Cross Cotton Mills in Marion, NC. They hired him to carry their cotton to New England, and in return helped him finance a second truck. This cotton-handling contract was the foundation of his trucking business and necessitated the establishment of an office. His brother, Guy Beam, was running the Shell service station at 117 N. Mountain Street in Cherryville. The small Mission-style building seemed like a good location for an office. So, in 1934, he arranged to use the middle room of Beam's Shell Service Station rent-free. It was here that the business of the Beam Trucking Company's was conducted during the early years of the firm. He hired Elden Eaker to work in that office and keep the books for his fledgling business.⁵

The Shell station where Beam established his office was erected about 1930. During the early 1930s, Guy Beam managed a Shell Station here. There are leases on file at the Gaston County Register of Deeds Office showing agreements between Shell and the legal owners, O. A. and Olive A. Costner for the period of time from 1936 through 1952. Tracking the leases reveals that Shell underwent transformations during this period--changing its name from the Shell Eastern Petroleum Products, Inc. to Shell Union Oil Corporation and then simply to Shell Oil Company. Shell expanded its territory to include the east coast in 1929. This region of North Carolina has always been "jobber territory," meaning that the product was acquired through a middleman, so that the independent station owner did not necessarily deal directly with Shell.⁶

⁴Atkins, Carolina Freight Corporation, pp. 29-30.

⁵Atkins, Carolina Freight Corporation, pp. 32-33, 42.

"Couldn't Find A Job, So He Made His Own," The Gastonia Gazette, 29 October 1967.

"Museum Marks Trucking Pioneer's Place in History," The Charlotte Observer, 2 October 1982.

⁶Gaston County Register of Deeds Office. Deed Book 311, p. 410; Deed Book 359, p. 10; Deed

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During the early 1930s, trucking was an uncertain business. Nonetheless, Beam was in competition locally with two other firms. In 1935, he joined forces with fellow trucker Cone Beam (no relation). Meanwhile, the Motor Carrier Act of 1935 was passed, which regulated the trucking industry for the first time in history. It addressed such issues as driver and vehicle safety standards and rate structure. This federal legislation required all carriers to register with the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC). Beam, and others, did not immediately grasp the full impact of this law, and failed to register. Competitor Mauney Transfer, however, did. In the end, this action would turn out to be propitious for Beam. The next year, Beam purchased Mauney Transfer and thereby acquired the ICC application. Without that paperwork, Beam would not have been able to continue trucking.⁷

In 1936 Grier Beam married Mooresville native Lena Sue Brawley. The couple moved to Cherryville, and rented a house three blocks from brother Guy's service station on N. Mountain Street. Feeling the financial pinch from the continuing Depression, Beam decided to gather investors for his small business. Sheldon Roper of Lincolnton added some capital, which enabled Grier Beam and Cone Beam to purchase Mauney Transfer in 1936.⁸

Grier Beam and Cone Beam found two willing partners in Victor Stroup and C. C. Carpenter. Both men had been involved with the trucking business before. The four men held their first stockholder's meeting in March of 1937 in the Commercial Bank Building in Cherryville. It was at this meeting that Carolina Freight Carriers Corporation was formed. C. C. Carpenter served as president, Cone Beam as vice-president, Victor Stroup as secretary, and Grier Beam as treasurer. Within months, however, the partners were having second thoughts. C. C. Carpenter was the first to back out, selling his stock to Grier Beam in the summer of 1937 for \$125. Soon after, the other two partners also sold their interest to Grier Beam and walked away. C. Grier Beam thus became the

Book 359, p. 14; Deed Book 456, p. 452; Deed Book 538, p. 337.

Harry Bridges, The Americanization of Shell, (New York: The Newcomen Society in North America, 1972), p. 22.

Interview with Mary Ellen Tucker, Shell Oil Company, Houston, Texas, 29 April 1997 (by telephone).

⁷Atkins, Carolina Freight Corporation, pp. 42-47.

⁸Atkins, Carolina Freight Corporation, pp. 45-47, 56.

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sole owner of Carolina Freight Carriers Corporation, though not for long. In 1938, Grier's brother, Dewey Beam, entered the business as a stockholder. Grier's wife, Lena Sue, and Dewey's wife, Sallie, were also stockholders at that time. Sallie Beam made a \$2,000 loan to Carolina Freight in order to keep the company afloat during these uncertain times. The company expanded, due partly to the influx of funds.⁹

The company's expansion necessitated some changes. Carolina Freight Carriers Corporation invested in a small lot on NC 150 in Cherryville. Here, in 1938, they built their first building--a frame structure measuring seventy feet by eighty feet and serving as the office, loading dock and maintenance shop. The entire operation moved to the new facility.¹⁰ Undoubtedly, it was at this time that Carolina Freight vacated Guy Beam's Shell Service Station on N. Mountain Street. The service station remained under contract with Shell at least through the early 1950s. In 1981, Carolina Freight Carriers Corporation purchased the building where the company began. In 1987, a one-story brick museum building was constructed next to the old service station, and C. Grier Beam's vision of a truck museum was realized. Beam's Shell Service Station was converted into use as a gift shop and entry point for the C. Grier Beam Truck Museum.

Despite the continuing economic depression of the 1930s, Carolina Freight grew steadily at the hands of C. Grier Beam and his brother Dewey. They hired additional employees. By 1939, they had a fleet of fifty-three vehicles and rented terminal space in New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island and South Carolina. They were well on their way to establishing their territory all along the east coast.¹¹

In 1942, Carolina Freight moved 65,727 tons of freight and took in over a million dollars in revenue. By the end of the decade, that figure was three million. In 1950, Grier Beam expanded the territory to include Florida. He had his eye on citrus fruit, and was the first trucker to contract with Minute Maid to bring frozen orange juice to northern markets. Carolina Freight undertook an expansion program during the mid-1950s, partly in reaction to the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956,

⁹ Atkins, Carolina Freight Corporation, pp. 47-50.
Gaston County Register of Deeds. Record of Corporations, Book 6, pp. 363-65.

¹⁰ Atkins, Carolina Freight Corporation, p. 51.

¹¹ Atkins, Carolina Freight Corporation, pp. 51, 55, 61, 64.

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which authorized the construction of interstate highways. In 1960, the company entered into an agreement with Sea-Highways, Inc., so that they could ship containers (cab-less truck trailers) of merchandise over water to Central America. Through the 1960s and 1970s, Carolina Freight expanded further by absorbing several small trucking companies. In 1970, it was counted among the nation's top twenty general freight carriers, with an operating revenue of over sixty million dollars. At that time they had forty-two terminals and served twenty states and the District of Columbia. Operating revenue continued to climb--it topped 123 million dollars in 1976, 469 million in 1984, and 800 million in 1992. As a measure of comparison, total United States general freight carriers revenue in 1988 was 65.2 billion dollars. When C. Grier Beam died in 1992 at the age of 86, Carolina Freight Carriers Corporation was the sixth largest trucking company in the nation.¹²

Throughout his adult life, C. Grier Beam was involved with the community. He was a Gaston County commissioner for twenty-six years, serving from 1950 to 1976. He was a major benefactor of Gaston College, and also donated money to Brevard College and North Carolina State University. He was inducted into the North Carolina Hall of Fame. Upon his death, friend and associate John "Buck" Fraley was quoted as saying "Of all the things he did, nobody but the Lord will ever know."¹³

Architecture

Motorized vehicles were first developed during the later years of the nineteenth century. Various would-be inventors experimented with steam- and gasoline-powered engines and "horseless carriages" during this time. Several individuals working independently claimed simultaneously to have developed the first self-propelled vehicle. It is therefore not possible to state that the

¹²Atkins, Carolina Freight Corporation, pp. 74, 79, 84-85, 88-90, 101, 118-19, 124, 136-37, 145. "Trucking Magnate Left Mark on Gaston," The Charlotte Observer, 22 March 1992, Gaston Observer Section, p. 1.

"Truck Museum Tells Beam's Story," Lincoln Times-News, 16 May 1986.

Motor Vehicles Manufacturers Association of the United States, MVMA Motor Vehicle Facts and Figures '90 (Detroit: n. p., 1990), p. 63.

¹³"Trucking Magnate Left Mark on Gaston," The Charlotte Observer, 22 March 1992, p. 1. "Freight Company Founder is Buried," The Charlotte Observer, 23 March 1992, p. 5C.

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automobile had a single inventor. It was simply an idea whose time had come. The automobile quickly became firmly entrenched in our society and brought with it drastic changes in the way Americans traveled, lived and worked. In addition, it spawned the trucking industry and brought all varieties of merchandise to markets heretofore unreachable.

Automobile historians credit the Duryea brothers, Frank and Charles, with having made the first public demonstration of a gasoline-powered vehicle in America in 1893. By 1896, the Duryeas had produced a marketable car, and sold thirteen of them that year. In that same year, the first motor truck was produced in Germany by Gottlieb Daimler. In the United States, trucking as an industry began around 1900. A mere fifteen years later, in 1915, there were about 158,000 trucks on American roads.¹⁴

Automobile sales in America soared during the early years of the twentieth century. There were close to 10.5 million vehicles registered in 1921, and more than 26.5 million a decade later. Gasoline consumption likewise increased--leaping from almost 4 million gallons in 1921 to quadruple that amount by 1930.¹⁵

Gasoline stations, of course, did not exist prior to the invention of the automobile. There was no historical precedent for what would soon become a ubiquitous building type. Early in the century, the motorist would purchase gas from a grocery or hardware store. Precisely when the first free-standing gasoline filling station appeared is arguable. It is known, however, that Standard Oil of California opened a station in Seattle in 1907. Soon, stations sprouted up along motorways in rural and urban areas alike. By one count, service stations numbered around 15,000 in 1920, and close to 124,000 a decade later in 1930.¹⁶

¹⁴Phil Patton, Open Road: A Celebration of the American Highway. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), pp. 41-42.

Frank Donovan, Wheels For A Nation. (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co., 1965), p. 35, 49, 61. Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia, 1995 (electronic media), s. v. "Truck and Trucking."

¹⁵John A. Jackle and Keith A. Sculle, The Gas Station in America. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), p. 51.

¹⁶John A. Jackle, "The American Gasoline Station, 1920-1970," Journal of American Culture (1979), p. 521.

Jackle and Sculle, The Gas Station in America, p. 50, 57.

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Filling the vehicle's tank with gasoline in the early days was problematic. The gas had to be drawn by hand from barrels or tanks and poured by the motorist into the vehicle's gas tank using a funnel lined with chamois cloth. It was a sloppy and unsafe practice. The earliest pumps evolved from various configurations of the basic elements: a tank, a hose and a faucet or valve. Who invented it first and when can not be stated. Pumps specifically designed for dispensing gasoline were known to be in use by the 1910s and 1920s. Around this time, the aptly-named "visible pump" was invented. This featured a glass cylinder on a stand. The gasoline was fed into the glass cylinder, which had gallon markings inside. As the fuel was transferred into the vehicle's tank, one could watch the level of liquid in the cylinder drop. This was popular with motorists because the customer could actually see what he was buying. Some petroleum companies tinted the gasoline (an inherently unprovocative product) different colors in order to distinguish their product from the competitors, at least in the customer's mind.¹⁷ There are two visible pumps in front of Beam's Shell Service Station in Cherryville.

Service stations by definition were functional buildings, which had to meet certain conditions in order to serve their purpose. First and foremost, the site had to feature a pump or pump island for dispensing gasoline. Second, the building had to be set back from the curb far enough to make maneuvering into and out of the pump area easy. The building usually had two distinct parts--the office and the service bay(s). Beam's Shell Service Station in Cherryville meets these criteria.

Another important quality that early service station designers thought was essential was an easily-recognizable and friendly image. One reason for this was the perceived need to help the customer identify with a particular company while in unfamiliar surroundings (such as on a motor trip). This concept led to the development of corporate logo buildings--buildings that were similar, or identical, regardless of the location. Many petroleum companies hired architects to draw standardized plans which were then used nationally or regionally.

Chester H. Liebs, Main Street to Miracle Mile, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1985), p. 97.
John Margolies, Pump and Circumstance: Glory Days of the Gas Station, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1993), p. 9.

¹⁷Margolies, Pump and Circumstance, pp. 4-8.

Daniel I. Viyera, "Fill 'Er Up: An Architectural History of America's Gas Stations", (New York: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1979), pp. 8-11.

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Many service stations erected during the first years of the twentieth century borrowed design elements from residential architecture in an attempt to promote homey associations and also to blend in visually with the (often residential) surroundings. The Pure Oil Company had an especially successful design in its architect-drawn English Cottage style buildings which were popular throughout the region from the 1920s through the 1940s. The Spanish Mission style is another type that drew on the same concept, yet was clearly dissimilar from Pure Oil's image. While more commonly associated with California and the southeast, the Spanish Mission style stations were erected in North Carolina, and the old Shell Station in Cherryville is a rare surviving example.

Three other gas stations in North Carolina which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places are worth mentioning. Two are located in historic districts: the Cottage-style Pure Oil Station (c. 1925) in New Bern and the Craftsman-style station (c. 1925) in the Moore Square Historic District in Raleigh. The third, also a Shell station (1930), is a novelty-type building erected in the shape of a giant seashell in Winston-Salem. None of these former gasoline stations are currently being used for their original purposes. Beam's Shell Service Station is the only Spanish Mission-style service station in the state being nominated to the Register.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the nominated parcel correspond with the legal description found in Gaston County Deed Book 1833 on page 519 (tract one). They are as follows: Beginning at the intersection of North Mountain Street and West First Street and runs with the south side of West First Street, South 72 degrees 30 minutes West 85 feet to an iron stake on the east side of alley; thence with the east side of alley South 16 degrees 15 minutes East 50 feet to an iron stake; thence North 72 degrees 30 minutes East 85 feet to an iron stake on the west side of North Mountain Street; thence with the west side of said street North 16 degrees 15 minutes West 50 feet to the BEGINNING.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries of the nominated parcel include the (former) Beam's Shell Service Station and Office and its lot. The entire fifty-foot by eighty-five foot lot is legally and historically associated with the property. The 1987 museum building is not included in the nomination. It is a separate structure on a separate parcel, and is not being nominated at this time.

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The following information is the same for each of the photographs:

Name of Property: (former) Beam's Shell Service Station and Office

Location: 117 N. Mountain Street
Cherryville, NC

County: Gaston

Name of Photographer: Mary Beth Gatza

Location of Original Negatives:

Survey and Planning Branch
North Carolina Department of Archives and History
109 E. Jones Street
Raleigh, NC 27601-2807

Date of Photographs: March 1997

Photographs:

- A. Front (east) elevation
- B. Side (north) elevation
- C. Interior: front room
- D. Interior: Beam's office
- E. Interior: service bay



SHELL

SHELL

Closed