

Fry's Spring Filling Station
2115 Jefferson Park Avenue
Charlottesville
Virginia

HABS No. VA-1021

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

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17-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FRY'S SPRING FILLING STATION

HABS No. VA-1021

Location: 2115 Jefferson Park Avenue, Charlottesville,
Virginia.

Present Owner: E. L. Houchens, Jr.

Present Occupant: E. L. Houchens, Jr.

Present Use: Union 76 Service Station.

Present Condition: Good. North and east sides of building obscured
by later addition.

Significance: The Fry's Spring Filling Station was constructed
in 1931. It is a fine example of eclectic,
commercial, roadside architecture of its period.
It reflects a certain importance and presence due
to its location on Route 29 at its southern
entrance to Charlottesville.

I HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and Subsequent Owners.

The Fry's Spring Filling Station was constructed in 1931 by Ernest R. Duff. Duff purchased the lot in 1925 from Gertrude C. Rubin. Rubin bought a parcel of land, including this site, in 1921 from the Commerce Realty and Insurance Corporation. In 1922, following a subdivision of the land, she sold the eastern lot to J. F. Bowyer. The remaining western lot was sold to Duff in 1925.

In 1954, Ernest Duff sold the property to the Pure Oil Company of Ohio. The Pure Oil Company merged with the Union Oil Company of California in 1965. In 1977, the present owner, E. L. Houchens, purchased the station from the Union Oil Company.

Ernest Duff apparently leased the station to the Pure Oil Company, which had the option to buy it. Following Pure Oil Company's purchase of it in 1954, according to E. L. Houchens, the station was leased to a Mr. Settle, then a Mr. Gibson, and finally, to a Mr. Toms. Houchens purchase ended the succession of leases.

2. Construction History/Alterations and Additions

The Fry's Spring Filling Station appears to be a standardized design for a gas station. A similar one exists in Culpepper, Virginia. It may have been designed by the Pure Oil Company and built by Ernest Duff, who then leased it to them.

Houchens referred to a small cabin that preceded the filling station on the site. This reference would coincide with the minor construction indicated in the Charlottesville City Land Book, 1931. This cabin was moved to a Preston Avenue site before the present station was built. Prior to this, the lot was vacant. The 1932 assessment shows major construction activity in 1931 in addition to the remark "filling station added." A minor improvement occurred in 1932. This may have been the rectangular addition attached to the rear of the original structure and utilizing some of the original details.

Major improvements are noted in the 1940 assess-

ment records. This would tend to date the construction of the garage that wraps around the north and east sides of the building to 1939. No further construction activity is reflected in the Charlottesville City Land Books. The extension to the north of the 1939 garage addition might have occurred after the war.

CHAIN OF TITLE OF PROPERTY

Fry's Spring Service Station
2115 Jefferson Park Avenue
Charlottesville, Virginia

Property located in First District until 1935, then Fourth Ward.

Deed books located in Deed Room of Charlottesville City Courthouse.

11 February, 1977

DB 382 655

Grantor: Union Oil Company of California
200 East Golf Road
Palatine, Illinois 60067

Grantee: E. L. Houchens, Jr. and Ruby B. Houchens

1 July, 1954

DB 178 9

Grantor: Ernest R. Duff and Emma R. Duff
Grantee: Pure Oil Company of Ohio

21 February, 1925

DB 49 494

Grantor: Gertrude C. Rubin and Abram Rubin
Grantee: Ernest R. Duff - Title for western half of lot.
Eastern half of lot sold 26 January, 1922, DB 39 418.

25 July, 1921

DB 38 353

Plat of property, DB 38 349.
Grantor: Commerce Realty and Insurance Corporation
Grantee: Gertrude C. Rubin

28 March, 1921

DB 37 361

Grantor: Ellen B. Rixey
Grantee: Commerce Realty and Insurance Corporation

II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character

The Fry's Spring Filling Station is a fine example of eclectic, commercial, roadside architecture of the 1920's and the 1930's. Its prominent location on Route 29 south of Charlottesville demanded a certain monumentality. The small Spanish/Colonial Revival station is increased in scale by the incorporation of a porte-cochere supported by two columns. This type of unique, architectural embellishment of an automobile-generated service is essential to maintaining the character of America's roadsides.

Condition of Fabric: Good

B. Description of the Exterior

1. Overall Dimensions:

This one-story building measures 31 feet 11 1/2 inches long by 17 feet 10 1/2 inches wide. A porte-cochere extends 26 feet 11 inches to the south and covers the pump area.

2. Foundations:

This structure appears to be supported by a slab on grade.

3. Wall Construction, Finish, and Color:

The exterior walls are brick veneer with concrete lintels and sills at the openings. The red brick remains unpainted while the wood and concrete trim are painted white. The mortar joints and brick surface are in good condition.

4. Structural System:

A wood frame construction system is used, with composite wood beams most likely spanning the pump area.

5. Chimneys:

Any evidence of a chimney on the roof is not visible from ground level. There is what appears to be the lower section of a chimney at the rear of the original building and on axis with the front door. A pot bellied stove may have once used this as its flue.

6. Openings:

a. Doorways and Doors:

The main entry, on the south elevation, is incorporated into the center of a three arch composition that opens the major room of the building to its sheltering canopy. The exterior entries to the restrooms on the east elevation were originally sheltered by wood canopies roofed with metal Spanish tiles. In conjunction with the large garage addition of 1939, one canopy was removed and placed on the west elevation of the addition's new restroom while the other was altered to allow access to a car bay.

b. Windows:

The windows on the north and east elevations are one over one, double-hung sash. The south elevation has two, one over one, double-hung sash and two, large, fixed panes contained within the arched openings. The west elevation has two, six over six, double-hung sash.

7. Roof:

The building is covered by a gable roof surfaced with metal formed to imitate clay tiles. This gable is perpendicularly intersected by the gable roof of the porte-cochere, similarly treated. The gable end facing south is hipped.

C. Description of the Interior

1. Floor Plans:

a. Basement: None

b. Main Floor:

The floor plan of the original structure has been altered slightly. The wall separating the two offices to the west of the main room has been removed. The two restrooms to the east of the main room are intact and accessible from the exterior. The main room still contains what I believe to be the original cabinetry. The many shelves once supplied the Fry's Spring area of Charlottesville with everyday items. This was a general store as well as a filling station.

c. Attic Space: Unused and not easily accessible

2. Stairs: None

3. Flooring:

The wood flooring of the main room and offices has recently been covered with vinyl asbestos tile. The original gray and black, vinyl floor tile remains in the women's restroom.

4. Wall and Ceiling Finish:

The walls and ceilings of the main room, offices, and restrooms are covered with a plaster finish and painted light brown, light green, and white, respectively. The restrooms contain a wainscoting of tile. The tile pattern in the women's restroom reflects an influence of Art Deco design.

5. Doors:

The original five-panel doors remain in place.

6. A five inch, wood molding surrounds all openings and is detailed with a plinth at floor level.

7. Hardware:

Standard Brass

8. Lighting:

The original single light bulbs remain in the restrooms. The offices and main room have more recent florescent lighting.

9. Heating:

A pot bellied stove may have been the building's only heat. The existing radiator's exposed piping gives it the appearance of a later improvement.

D. Site

1. General Setting and Orientation

The Fry's Spring Filling Station is situated on a polygonal site at the intersection of U.S. Route 29 (Jefferson Park Avenue), to the south, and Maury Avenue, to the west. The site is bounded on the north and east by residential properties. Jefferson Park Avenue turns south at this intersection to serve the residential area of Fry's Spring. The length of the station is

oriented east/west along Route 29. The porte-cochere is perpendicular to Route 29, or north/south. The site slopes very slightly to the south.

III PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the School of Architecture at the University of Virginia, under the direction of K. Edward Lay, Professor of Architecture, during the Spring Semester, 1981. The documentation was prepared by Robert P. Brennan, Graduate Student in Architecture. This material was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey. It was not produced under HABS supervision, nor edited by members of the HABS staff.