

The More Mileage Service Station is a large, single story, brick, stucco and concrete block automotive facility located on Main Street in downtown Jennings a few blocks north of U.S. Highway 90. Although automotive facilities of one kind or another occupied this site for some time, the present building is almost completely the result of a 1938 remodeling and enlargement. It retains architectural integrity to that period.

In 1919 Mr. C. E. Stackhouse purchased the property, which contained a small automotive business known as the City Garage Motor Works. Stackhouse remodeled and enlarged the facility various times, ending with the major enlargement/remodeling of 1938. Bits and pieces of the earlier buildings survive, mostly in the gabled rooflines; but the last remodeling was so extensive that the candidate is a 1938 building.

More Mileage is anchored by an enormous clear-span canopy measuring 109 feet wide by forty feet deep. The canopy is supported by heavy stuccoed brick piers which divide the façade into two large bays of unequal size. This bay articulation is registered in the design of the stuccoed parapet roof, which features a central raised portion to mark each of the bays. The parapet wall turns the corner on the south side, encompassing the south entrance to the canopy, a rear shop area, and connecting with a 1938 concrete block rear wing. The parapet wall does not turn the corner on the north side. Here the roofline behind the parapet is a shallow gabled roof. The previously mentioned rear wing has a flat roof. Of special note is the ceiling of the canopy with its ornamental pressed metal paneling.

The south end of the canopy originally contained six modern (1938) electric fuel pumps. The outlines of the service islands remain. The north end contained electric lifts and a car washing area. At the north end the canopy extends backward to encompass a shallow storage area and is open to the rear, giving the entire canopy an overall L shape. The storage space is composed of planks and corrugated metal.

Behind the south end of the canopy is a sales area set off by a low stuccoed brick wall with glazing above. The shop area features a central entrance door and ventilated bathrooms at the northwest corner. Adorning the entrance are conestoga wagons embossed in the tile and stucco. (As mentioned in Part 8, More Mileage sold so-called "covered wagon" trailer coaches.) Further behind is a storage area and a small office. Back further still is a large mechanic's room. These spaces are unadorned. The flooring throughout is concrete.

The only noteworthy changes since 1938 have been the loss of the electric lifts and the electric pumps. Less serious (cosmetic) changes include the painting over of decorative tiles on the front piers, the installation of paneling in the office, and the addition of a quite small wooden snowcone stand to the façade (under the canopy). There is also general deterioration due to the building being vacant for some time. But on the whole More Mileage looks much as it did during the historic period. There is no doubt that a person from that time would easily recognize the building.

SIGNIFICANT DATE: 1938
ARCHITECT/BUILDER: C. C. Wicker, contractor
CRITERION: A

The More Mileage Gas Station is locally significant in the history of transportation as a rare surviving example of a once considerably more common building type in the Jefferson Davis parish seat of Jennings. Historic filling stations are icons of the early automobile age, but given the ever-changing world of commerce, they are becoming a rare breed.

No transportation system has transfigured the United States as much as the automobile. Automobiles, or "horseless carriages," were first sold in America in the last few years of the nineteenth century, but were initially a luxury that only the rich could afford. In 1900, there were only 8,000 registered vehicles in the United States, which represented less than a tenth of a percent of the population. In 1908 Henry Ford revolutionized the industry with his assembly line method of production and the introduction of the Model T, the first low-priced car for the masses. Over the next twenty years the Model T kept getting cheaper and cheaper as the American buying power was rising. By 1910, there were 468,000 registered cars in America, and by 1920 the figure had soared to eight million. Motor cars had been transformed from a plaything of the rich to an item that people of modest income could afford. And, of course, this new mobility spawned a whole new line of buildings -- roadside industries to service traveling Americans, from gas stations, to diners, to motels, to tourist attractions, to automobile dealerships.

It is not known when the first automobile appeared in Louisiana. In 1909, a world's speed record of 60 miles per hour was set in New Orleans, and it is said that this event did much to popularize the new vehicles. By 1916 there were nearly 9,000 automobiles on the assessment rolls of the various parishes, and thereafter the increase was rapid. It must be remembered that prior to about 1920, very few hard surface roads existed outside the state's major cities. It was progressive Governor John M. Parker who brought Louisiana squarely into the automobile age. His administration, which

began in 1920, undertook a major road building program and established the state highway system. By 1925, there were 208,779 registered cars in the state. Governor Huey Long, elected in 1928, continued the road building program, adding major automotive bridges in New Orleans and Baton Rouge. By 1940, the number of cars had increased to 375,000.

While the early automobile history of Jennings has not been documented, given what is known of other towns its size, the first automobile age-related buildings probably appeared in the 1910s. Given the community's location on U. S. Route 90, linking New Orleans and Houston, it would have had a larger than usual number of buildings to service the motoring public -- filling stations, diners, and motel courts. The Sanborn Insurance Company map for 1950 provides only a clue on the numbers, for it covers only a small area in the downtown (including a perhaps quarter mile stretch of U.S. 90). There are eight filling stations shown, seven of which are in an eight-block stretch of Main Street, which runs perpendicular to Highway 90. More Mileage is by far the largest. There would have been a number of gas stations outside the mapped area on U.S. 90, the interstate of its day -- probably more than in the heart of downtown. One could safely estimate some 15 or so filling stations in the Jennings city limits in 1950 when the Sanborn map was made. Today there are four survivors: one severely altered, one with some alterations but still recognizable as a historic filling station, one well preserved streamlined moderne station, and More Mileage. All date from circa 1940 to circa 1950 (i.e., none are from the early automobile age).

As noted in Part 7, C. E. Stackhouse began in 1919 with a quite small station which he enlarged and remodeled various times. The 1938 candidate opened to great fanfare. The local newspaper reported that the "new" More Mileage was dedicated on a May Saturday night, with the public invited to inspect what is "said to be the most modern and one of the largest stations on the Old Spanish Trail [U. S. 90] from Houston to New Orleans." Six major prizes were given away (outboard motor, bicycle, and the like) as well as gifts for children. Much was made in the fairly long article about the "under cover service drive," which was hailed as "one of the largest to be found in the South." Its dimensions were given as well as the dimensions for various other parts of the facility. The reporter also mentioned that More Mileage employed 12 people, and when the old station was closed to make way for the new one, it was selling 700 gallons of gas a day.

Gas was but one of the services More Mileage provided the motoring public. The north section contained car wash and lubrication facilities. In the retail area were all manner of auto parts plus sporting goods (a Stackhouse sideline). Among other things, Stackhouse also sold what were called "Covered Wagon" trailer coaches (as reflected in the tilework noted in Part 7). To the rear of the station were tourist cabins (long gone).

Stackhouse operated More Mileage until some time after World War II. A newspaper article from 1971 gives Ben Smith as the owner, with the station now being called "Ben's More Mileage." Vacant for years, the station is slated for rehabilitation using the National Register's 20% tax credit. Restaurant use is planned.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Sanborn map, Jennings, 1950.

Jennings Daily News. May 5, 1938.

Historic photos of More Mileage as it appeared prior to 1938. Copies in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.

Jennings windshield survey by National Register staff, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.