

# Spokane Register of Historic Places Nomination

*Spokane City/County Historic Preservation Office, City Hall, Third Floor  
808 Spokane Falls Boulevard, Spokane, Washington 99201-3337*

## 1. Name of Property

Historic Name: Ahrens & Ahrens Automobile Dealership  
And/Or Common Name: Sneva's

## 2. Location

Street & Number: 827 West Second Avenue  
City, State, Zip Code: Spokane, WA 99201  
Parcel Number: 35192.2316

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both		<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> residential
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes, restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes, unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other

## 4. Owner of Property

Name: Chris Batten, Sneva Properties LLC  
Street & Number: 502 West Riverside, Suite 103  
City, State, Zip Code: Spokane, WA 99201  
Telephone Number/E-mail: 509-217-5508/chris@rencorprealty.com

## 5. Location of Legal Description

Courthouse, Registry of Deeds	Spokane County Courthouse
Street Number:	1116 West Broadway
City, State, Zip Code:	Spokane, WA 99260
County:	Spokane

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Title: none

Date:	Federal	State	County	Local
Depository for Survey Records	Spokane Historic Preservation Office			

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

### Condition

☐excellent

☐good

☒fair

☐deteriorated

☐ruins

☐unexposed

### Check One

☐unaltered

☒altered

### Check One

☒original site

☐moved & date \_\_\_\_\_

*Narrative statement of description is found on one or more continuation sheets.*

## 8. Spokane Register Criteria and Statement of Significance

**Applicable Spokane Register of Historic Places criteria: Mark "x" on one or more for the categories that qualify the property for the Spokane Register listing:**

- ☒A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Spokane history.
- ☐B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐C 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.
- ☐D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory history.

*Narrative statement of significance is found on one or more continuation sheets.*

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

*Bibliography is found on one or more continuation sheets.*

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than 1

Verbal Boundary Description: RAILROAD ADD All LT1 & S67' of W25' of LT2 BLK35

Verbal Boundary Justification: Nominated property includes entire parcel and urban legal description.

## 11. Form Prepared By

Name and Title: Jim Kolva

Organization: Jim Kolva Associates, LLC

Street, City, State, Zip Code: 115 South Adams Street, Suite 1

Telephone Number: 509-458-5517

E-mail Address: jim@jimkolvaassociates.com

Date Final Nomination Heard :

**12. Additional Documentation**

*Additional documentation is found on one or more continuation sheets.*

**13. Signature of Owner(s)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**14. For Official Use Only:**

Date nomination application filed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Landmarks Commission Hearing: \_\_\_\_\_

Landmarks Commission decision: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of City Council/Board of County Commissioners' hearing: \_\_\_\_\_

**I hereby certify that this property has been listed in the Spokane Register of Historic Places based upon the action of either the City Council or the Board of County Commissioners as set forth above.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Megan Duvall**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**City/County Historic Preservation Officer**

City/County Historic Preservation Office

Third Floor – City Hall

808 W. Spokane Falls Blvd.

Spokane, WA 99201

Attest:

Approved as to form:

\_\_\_\_\_  
City Clerk

\_\_\_\_\_  
Assistant City Attorney

### Description - Summary

The one-story brick commercial building is on the southeast corner of Lincoln Street and Second Avenue in the west end of downtown Spokane. An early automobile showroom and tire service shop, the building is adjacent to, but outside of the West Downtown Transportation Corridor National Register District. Built in 1919, the 50' -75' x 142' building with basement has been altered but retains its basic form and rhythm with primary facades facing north (front) and west. The building fronts along Second Avenue with three bays, and along Lincoln Street with eight bays. The storefronts have been rebuilt and allude to the original configuration. The front façade is symmetrical with a centered entry bay flanked by a shop-front bays on the east side and the west side. Square brick pilasters project slightly beyond the wall plane of the front and west facades to emphasize the main front pedestrian entry and building corners. The parapet is flat and the original stepped flat pediments over the main pedestrian and vehicular entries were truncated in the 1960s. Decorative brick pattern and terra cotta insets provide detailing. The barrel roof is trapezoidal in shape with a flat wing section over the southeast lobe.

### DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY - CURRENT CONDITION AND APPEARANCE

The ground floor consists of the former showroom in the front, and indoor vehicle parking and service area in the rear. The former showroom has been divided into an office suite with access to the rear garage area. Garage door entries dominate the west façade. The full basement has a garage entrance from the alley in the southeast corner, and an internal stairway at the south end. Although altered by Goodyear during the 1960s, the building maintains its original location, and retains integrity of materials and workmanship. Its association as a commercial building related to the automobile industry is evident as well as its association to the neighborhood with the adjacent commercial buildings to east and the church across Lincoln Street to the west, and commercial buildings to the northwest. Although the original storefronts and garage bays have been altered with respect to material – the original wood sash replaced by extruded metal storefront - the sash configuration is representative to the original design which had been altered in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

Located in the southwest quadrant of the downtown Spokane business district, the building is at the southeast corner of Second Avenue and Lincoln Street, 827 West

Second Avenue, Lot 1, and a portion

of Lot 2, block 35 of the Railroad Addition. The Ahrens & Ahrens building is one-story in height and has a frontage of 50 feet on Second Avenue, the front façade; and a frontage (depth) of 142 feet along Lincoln Street. An east-west alley forms the 75-foot southern boundary, and two adjacent two-story commercial/residential (former Single Room Occupancy hotels (SROs)) buildings are along the east side. At about its halfway point, the east wall jogs to wrap the south end of the westerly building. The building covers the entire 8,775 square foot site. Although the form of the facade has been altered – by removal of the pediments over the entries from original construction in 1919, the removal of the original storefronts and the rebuilding of contemporary storefronts - the building maintains enough integrity to convey the character of the original building.





**Front Façade** (north along 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue)

The one-story rug-face brick building, rises from a full basement and is composed of low concrete bulkhead walls, a wide band of storefront, door, and window openings, and flat brick field terminated by a narrow and slightly projecting square cornice. Four square brick piers divide the symmetrical front façade: one on each corner and one flanking each side of the main entry. The piers that bracket the entry are also projected 8 inches from the façade plane to provide additional emphasis to the entry. Poured-in-place concrete bases, about 12 inches in height support the brick walls. The façade is divided into three



B. F. Goodrich in 1943 - north facade, looking south. L2008-9.5

sections, a centered entry bay flanked by single shop-front commercial bays. The entry bay consists of double glass-panel doors with a six-light transom window above (three rows and two columns). The shop front bays are divided by extruded metal mullions into three sections over a low concrete bulkhead wall. Above each of the large window sections are transom windows divided by three columns and two rows, similar to the entry, but with narrower lights.

The piers are composed with stacked columns of paired headers framing a column of stacked stretchers. At the

bottom, two rows above the concrete base is a terra cotta panel (approximately 18-inches wide by 7-inches in height). Two rows below the line formed by the window heads on the inside header columns are two vertical terra cotta panels, 4-inches wide by 7-inches in height. The entry piers continue to the top of the parapet wall where they have been truncated. Similar to the inset panels at the window heads, terra cotta panels are two rows below the top of the wall. The corner piers with the same brick composition as the entry piers extend to the window heads where they meld into the brick field. But the two courses between the terra cotta panels and window head differ in that they consist of a row of stretchers and a row of header-stretcher-stretcher-header before the field of running-bond courses.

(As shown on historical photographs Libby 1920 and 1943 the main entries on the north and west facades were crowned by flat two-stepped pediments in which the piers extended about six brick courses above the existing. The pediments coupled with the original sash pattern lent an art deco flavor to the building.)

The brick field is flat and subtly patterned into three brick panels corresponding to the three wall sections by single vertical brick headers forming the horizontal frames and stacked horizontal brick



North Facade, looking south

headers forming the vertical frames. Corresponding to the frames, the outside corners of the wall and the entry piers are composed of stacked horizontal brick headers. The corners of the three frames are spotted with 4-inch-square terra cotta tiles. The wall terminates five courses above the frames by

insetting to a continuous concrete cap. The wall section within and including the entry piers extends to the bottom of the slightly projecting cornice which is capped by a sheet metal flashing. The wall sections flanking the entry assembly are at their original height, and as mentioned above, the entry piers and pediments have been truncated. The original photos show that the existing cornice is not original (likely added in 1968). It appears that the concrete coping over which the cornice is set is the original wall cap. The TPO (rubberized) roof is a trapezoidal barrel which rises slightly above the tops of the parapet walls but is not visible from ground level. The southeast section of the building has a flat roof configuration that slopes west down to the main roof section gutter.

### West Facade

The west facade, along Lincoln Street, is asymmetrical and divided into eight unequally-sized bays separated by flat brick pilasters that extend to the bay heads. The composition is the same as the front except that the bulkhead walls are at original height (because of street grade, the wall increases in height from north to south). As with the front façade, slightly projecting piers frame the original main west side entry (stepped pediment truncated). The original first floor showroom-office section (north portion) contained two storefront bays (bays 1, and 2) that have been replaced by an approximation of the original configuration. The west side pedestrian entry (bay 3) was within its original bay but in the 1960s the original sash was replaced by a centered aluminum-frame glass panel door with large glass panel sidelights and a transom above. In the 2022 renovation, the entry door assembly has been removed and replaced by a glass storefront that approximates the sash configuration of the original building. As with the door and window assembly of the original building, the storefront windows are divided into three sections with multiple transom windows above. The same configuration as the front bays, and bays 1 and 2 of the west façade, three large glass panels rest on a low bulkhead wall and each section is topped by transom windows divided into three columns and two rows.



Bay 4 is a high-set window bay (about 4'-6" to sill) with original wood sash. The opening is set within the brick wall and differentiated only by the slightly projecting vertical brick header sill. The sash is in three sections, each divided in the middle by a horizontal muntin. Bay 5 is an aluminum panel roll-up shop door in an original opening. Bay 6 is a wood and glass panel roll-up shop door within a new opening (ca. 1960s, six by six panels with two glass rows). Bay 7, an original opening has the same door configuration as Bay 6. Bay 8 consists of a window opening and pedestrian door in the corner. The door opening is narrow

and maintains the same head height as the previously-described openings. The wood panel door is composed of four recessed panels and a four-light upper section over which is a fixed twelve-light light transom window (three columns, four rows).

### **South Facade**

The building backs to an east-west alley which slopes down to the east allowing a garage door opening in the southeast corner. The basement walls are basalt rubble and brick with five window openings and a solid horizontal-ribbed roll-up garage door in the east corner. The basalt wall terminates at the basement window heads and transitions to brick above. The wall is flat except for a slight projecting continuous sill

of vertical brick headers that extends between the outside jambs of the window band. The windows are wood sash and the sash is the same for all window configurations. From west to east is a paired triple-sash opening (pairs are separated by narrow brick wall section) separated from another window pair by a double-wide brick wall section. A wider wall section marks the middle of the façade at which point the window configuration changes to a group consisting of a single double-hung sash, narrow wall section, triple sash section, narrow wall section, and single double-hung sash. Separated by a double-wide brick wall section, the east end of the window band is identical to the west end, a pair of triple sash openings.



### **East Facade**

The east facade, abuts the adjacent buildings with only a short blank brick wall segment revealed at the corner. A square brick chimney extends about four feet above the parapet corner.

### **Floor Plan**

The ground floor consists of the former showroom in the front, remodeled in the early 1960s and again in the 2000s, and a vehicle parking and service area in the rear. The former showroom extended southward to the pedestrian door in Bay 3. The garage area occupies the remainder of the building. The floor plan consists of a large rectangle with the short side corresponding to the 50-foot width of the front façade, and the long side of 142 feet wall between 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and the alley along Lincoln Street. Attached to the rear half of the east façade is a smaller rectangular lobe corresponding to the 25-foot width of the south wall of the building adjacent to the east side, and 67-foot wall filling the gap between the exposed rear of that building and the alley.

The former showroom consists of an open reception lobby with two office suites and a restroom along the south wall. The floor is terazzo. Walls are plaster and sheetrock. The ceiling is a suspended grid of acoustical tile with three rows of combined 12-inch by 48-inch fluorescent light fixtures. The west bay of the original showroom was opened up during the 1960s—the sash sections of the north bay and two west bays were removed. Additionally, the bulkhead wall of the north bay was removed so that vehicles could enter a porte-cochere. In its most recent alteration, the porte-cochere was walled-in in 2022 to approximate to the original wall configuration of the northwest corner. The interior garage door in the south wall and windows and the wall between the former office suites and porte-cochere remain in place.





*The rear southeast corner of the building where it extends behind the neighboring building to the east.*

The garage has a concrete floor slab that also functions as the ceiling to the basement. Exposed brick forms the outside west, south and east walls, with the northeast corner of the garage being formed by the southwest corner of the ca. 1902 brick building (Daniel Paul Building, SRHP) that the garage wraps around (four bricked-in windows are in the south end wall of this building). The north wall is a combination of poured concrete structure, sheet rock, and plaster on the original office, mezzanine, and storage rooms. The ceiling is composed of the bottoms of two roof systems, the trapezoidal main section covering the full western section the building, and the flat section over the southeast quadrant. Exposed trapezoidal trusses (approximately 20-feet on center), rafters, and the bottom of tongue and groove roof deck, penetrated by four skylights cover the building. Concrete piers and wood posts support the trusses and a heavy north-south wood beam that supports the rafters of the southeast flat roof section.

The garage area is open with two smaller rooms on the north side. A steep and narrow wooden stairway ascends toward the east to a small mezzanine storage room that is unfinished. Along the south wall is an open stairway to the basement.

The basement is open with concrete floor, basalt rubble walls, and a poured-in-place concrete ceiling supported by concrete posts and beams. In the northeast corner is the brick wall with a segmental arch doorway that provides access to mechanical rooms.

#### **ORIGINAL APPEARANCE & SUBSEQUENT MODIFICATIONS**

The Ahrens & Ahrens garage constructed in 1919 and was altered by the Goodrich Tire Company in the 1960s. A 1920 Libby photograph depicts the building as originally configured. A 1943 Libby photograph shows the front façade of the Goodrich Tire Company, also as originally configured.

The original front façade and northern two bays of the west façade were enclosed with wood sash storefront windows with transoms. The symmetrical façade was composed of the centered entry beneath a stepped flat pediment that projected above the flanking wall sections which were capped with concrete coping, slightly inset from the parapet wall edge. Within the entry bay was a set of double-wood-frame glass panel doors with a fixed horizontally-oriented six-light transom window (three columns, two rows). In the openings of the flanking storefront bays, the original bulkhead wall along the front was at the same height as the existing concrete pier and pilaster bases (and the existing wall sections in the two northerly bays of the west façade). The storefronts were composed of three sections with a wide middle section about three times the width of the side panels. The transom windows were the same height as that over the entry and divided to correspond with the storefront divisions – six narrow vertical lights over the side panels and eight wider horizontal lights over the middle section.



Ahrens & Ahrens in 1920 - west facade, looking southeast \_ L87-1.18244-20

The west façade, fronting along Lincoln Street and extending between Second Avenue and the alley was altered in the 1960s. The original first floor showroom-office section (north portion) contained two storefront bays (bays 1, and 2) that were opened and converted to a porte-cochere. The west side pedestrian entry (bay 3) is within its original bay but the original sash was replaced by a centered aluminum-frame glass panel door with large

glass panel sidelights. A vertically-oriented fixed transom window is above the door. In its current form, these bays were restored with an approximation of its original configuration in 2022. The 1920 photograph shows the northwest corner of the one-story building. The west façade has been altered similarly to the north façade, but with the conversion of a double window bay into a garage door bay and widening of other two bays. The two northerly storefront bays were configured the same as described for the front. The entry bay originally featured the same, but wider pediment as the front. Within the opening was a single and centered wood-frame glass panel door and wide glass panel sidelights. Above the door head were transom windows, four square glass lights over the door, and six square lights over the side panels. Two garage doors were in the original façade, with a pair of window bays (same as two remaining window bays). In the 1968 remodel, the paired bays were converted to a garage door. The two original bays were widened, but these may have been prior to 1968.



L87-1.506-65 NW MAC JEF Research Archives Libby Collection – 1965 photo showing the porte cochere corner of the Ahrens & Ahrens Building

The storefront was reconfigured in the 1960s by removing the original multi-light wood sash, lowering the bulkhead wall and adding new glazing. The opening is divided vertically into three equal glass segments with the westerly segment divided into two equal sections by a horizontal mullion. The original entry assembly was replaced with an aluminum-frame single-glass-panel pedestrian door with wide single-panel sidelight and fixed three-section transom window above. The westerly bay front was removed and converted to an open entry setback two bays to a roll-up garage door. The brick corner pier is the same as described above.

Building permits were issued to the B.F. Goodrich Tire Company for alterations in 1957 (value of \$5,100), 1964 (value of \$20,000) for interior alterations and reface portion of building (upper section), and 1968 (\$1,500 value) to change window to overhead door and enclose open stairway from basement.

Subsequent interior alterations have been completed in the front office area, but dates are undetermined.

## **SECTION 8: STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

**Area of Significance:** A – Broad Patterns of Spokane History, Commerce  
**Period of Significance:** 1919-1973  
**Architect:** Arthur W. Cowley and William A. Wells  
**Building Developer/owner:** Owner, A.P. Mitchell  
**Building Contractor:** Mitchell Brothers  
**Business Owners:** Ahrens & Ahrens

### **SUMMARY STATEMENT**

The Ahrens & Ahrens Garage, built in 1919, is significant under Category A as a building associated with the evolution of the automobile and automobile-related business in Spokane. The 1920s was the decade in which most of the buildings were built downtown Spokane specifically to house automobile sales and accessories. The subject building was constructed with a showroom and service facility for the sale of Stephens and Oakland automobiles during the formative stages of Spokane's auto row. The building included both the showroom and garage for new and used cars. First and Second avenues were Spokane's auto row and eight dealerships were constructed between Wall and Cedar in the 1920s. Automobile-related businesses filled in the storefronts of the other commercial buildings along the First and Second avenue corridors. As the number of automobile manufacturers dropped between 1920 and 1929, demand for automobile showrooms declined, and many transitioned to servicing automobiles and eventually to retail and office uses.

The building designed by Cowley and Wells was one of several automobile dealerships and garages designed by the firm between 1919 and 1923. The building is a simply detailed brick commercial building that was built for the sales and service of automobiles. Occupying a prominent corner lot location, the showroom and sales gallery in the front part of the building was accessed through the north pedestrian entrance, and the garage in the rear with shop doors on the west elevation to accommodate the passage of vehicles. Although altered over the years, the building continues to retain its essential character and place in the continuum of the automobile commerce of downtown Spokane. The period of significance spans from the building's construction to 1973. For a property with continued significance, 50 years from the present date is commonly used as the closing date for the Period of Significance. It continued to have importance as an automobile related building and no more specific date can be defined to end the historic period. (*National Park Service, National Register Bulletin 16A: How to Complete the National Register Registration Form. Washington DC: US Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, 1997 (1977):42*).

Ahrens and Ahrens, as several other early automobile dealers in Spokane, not only sold vehicles out of their Spokane showroom, but also acted as wholesalers to automobile dealerships in eastern Washington, northern Oregon and Idaho, and western Montana—from the Cascades to the Rockies. Don Ahrens, a founding partner in the Spokane dealership would eventually head the Cadillac Division for General Motors and retire as a GM vice president.

### **Historical Context**

The Spokane Falls and its surroundings were a gathering place and focus for settlement for the area's indigenous people due to the fertile hunting grounds and abundance of salmon in the Spokane River. The first humans to arrive in the Spokane area arrived between twelve thousand and eight thousand years ago and were hunter-gatherer societies that lived off the plentiful game in the area. Initially, the settlers hunted predominantly bison and antelope, but after the game migrated out of the region, the native

people became dependent on gathering roots, berries, and fish. The Spokane tribe used the Spokane Falls as the center of trade and fishing.

The first American settlers, squatters J.J. Downing, with his wife, stepdaughter, and S.R. Scranton, built a cabin and established a claim at Spokane Falls in 1871. James N. Glover and Jasper Matheney, Oregonians passing through the region in 1873 recognized the value of the Spokane River and its falls. They realized the investment potential and bought the claims of 160 acres and the sawmill from Downing and Scranton. The Reverend Henry T. Cowley followed in October 1874 as a missionary and Indian Sub-Agent to the Spokan Indians. Glover and Matheney knew that the Northern Pacific Railroad Company had received a government charter to build a main line across this northern route. By 1875, Matheney became doubtful that the Northern Pacific Railroad came to Spokane and sold his stake in the venture to Glover.

The Northern Pacific Railroad arrived in Spokane Falls in 1881, providing connection to the Puget Sound. The line was completed in 1883 when the eastern and western branches of the railroad came together, thus establishing transcontinental service through Spokane Falls.

The newly incorporated city continued to grow through the 1880s. Between 1886 and 1889 the population increased from 3,500 to 20,000 people. In spite of the devastating fire of August 4, 1889, which destroyed approximately thirty-two blocks of the business district from the railroad tracks to the river and from Lincoln to Washington Streets, the city quickly rebounded. Because of city ordinance to reduce fire hazard, brick and terra cotta became the dominant building materials of the rebuilt downtown.

When Spokane rebuilt the downtown after the fire, the new buildings were constructed in an area much larger than the original business district. The business district spread east to Division Street. Sanborn Fire Insurance maps from 1891, 1902, and 1910 show a dramatic increase in the construction of commercial buildings in west downtown. Frame dwellings gave way to commercial buildings that would meet the demand of the influx in population. Among the property types and businesses that were prevalent were hotels, lodging houses, and restaurants.

From the turn of the new century, Spokane's population exploded from 36,848 in 1900 to 104,402 in 1910. This growth mirrored the population expansion of the state that saw its greatest increase in the same decade. Many people moving to Washington settled in the state's three largest cities: Seattle, Tacoma, and Spokane. Various industries rapidly developed and with it a demand for more buildings. Most of the city's urban downtown skyline was created from the late 1890s to 1912 with the construction of office buildings, banks, hotels, department stores and other commercial buildings. As author John Fahey describes, Spokane, which had put up 675 new structures in 1900 as migration accelerated, built 1,500 to 1,900 buildings a year from 1904 through 1909.

The economic boom and population expansion of approximately the first fifteen years of the 20th century was short-lived. Growth in both areas in the next decade slowed considerably. But prosperity seemed to return in 1917. In February of that year, the Spokane Daily Chronicle would announce that "Spokane Banks Made Most Gain," with the largest clearings on the west coast (2/2/1917, p8/3), and a "Rosy Future Seen for Local Business," in reporting that Spokane was named as one of the nine most promising cities in the whole country (2/8/1917, p12/1). New buildings were announced and the downtown saw construction activity. Some 32 projects were listed as proposed or under construction as proclaimed by the Spokane Daily Chronicle on March 6, 1917: "Two Millions And Half for New Buildings Here," for buildings that included the Crescent, Chronicle Building, Elks Temple and Overland Garage among others.

By 1920, the population of Spokane was only 104,437, an increase of only 35 people from 1910 (Decennial Census Counts. OFM). Investors soon realized the city was overbuilt. The region it served (the Inland



Northwest) was not able to sustain the city and keep pace with the speculative growth. The 1920s and 1930s saw similar, but less drastic slow growth due to economic factors. The Inland Northwest region's dependency on extractive products from farms, forests, and mines suffered from declining demand. However, the 1920s also saw the advent of the automobile and the improvement in roads throughout the state. Mechanized machinery including motorized trucks replaced the draft horses on the farm and in the woods. Modern buildings were built specifically to house these new businesses and they were concentrated in the western part of downtown, predominantly between Sprague and 2<sup>nd</sup> avenues, bracketing the Northern Pacific Railroad viaduct.

### 1920s, the Burgeoning Automobile Business in Downtown Spokane

In the United States and Washington state, the 1920s was a major growth period for automobile ownership and at the same time, the improvement of the infrastructure required for citizens to use those vehicles. In the U.S., by the end of the 1920s, the number of registered owners of automobiles almost tripled from the year 1920 to 1930 to 23 million.

In the state of Washington, there were 9,311 registered vehicles in 1910. By 1921, the number of registered vehicles reached 137,000 and by 1934 had increased to 460,000 vehicles. On May 10, 1925, The Spokesman Review reported that 27,022 automobiles had been licensed in Spokane, compared to 25,287 for the same period the previous year.

Downtown Spokane's auto row was also taking shape. That term was first used in the August 20, 1911 edition of The Spokesman Review in captioning a cartoon that depicted the **"Inhabitants of Spokane's auto row."** By 1910, auto supply, auto repair, tire companies, and auto showrooms were beginning to line the business blocks along Sprague, First, Second and Third avenues. The area west of Monroe along First Avenue and west of Wall along Second Avenue became the city's auto row with six auto dealership showrooms constructed along First Avenue and four dealerships along Second Avenue between 1919 and 1926. In addition, garages, auto repair shops, and suppliers of parts and accessories including tires were in this district.

Cowley and Wells were at the forefront of these new automobile serving buildings. Cowley and Rigg designed the Child, Day and Churchill Auto Supply building (2<sup>nd</sup> floor addition) in 1911 as well as three hotels in the block to the east. In 1916, Cowley designed the showroom for the Jamieson Motor Company on the corner of Sprague and Jefferson (razed). The 1919 Ahrens & Ahrens was the first of several automobile showrooms and garages in the Second Avenue auto row. Others include the Doran Building (707 W 2nd 1920, SRHP), the Willis-Overland building at Madison and Sprague (1920, extant), the Chanslor & Lyon wholesale automobile accessories distributors, at the corner of Madison and 2<sup>nd</sup> (razed); the Wells Chevrolet Service Building (115 South Adams Street, SRHP) and Showroom Building in 1926 (1229 W. 1<sup>st</sup>, SRHP). In 1931, Wells also designed the Union Pacific Stages at Adams Street and Third Avenue. Between 1911 and 1931 Cowley designed nine automobile-related buildings in Spokane's Auto Row.



Spokesman-Review, August 20, 1911



The automobile business was transitioning to modern day sales in the 1920s. The automobile and rail were still integrally related, since the new dealerships and the suppliers were along the Northern Pacific corridor as well as the US 10 highway corridor (US 10's 1915 route was located on Sprague Avenue, but was later re-routed to 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue in the 1930s until the completion of Interstate 90).

Between 1919 and 1926, four automobile dealerships were built along the Second Avenue corridor, and six auto dealerships built new buildings in the West First Avenue district. They include Ahrens and Ahrens at 827 W. Second, Doran at 707 W. Second, Chanslor & Lyon wholesale automobile accessories at Second and Jefferson, March-Strickle Oldsmobile at 1126 W. Second, and NW Truck Transport at 1202 W. 2<sup>nd</sup>. Along West First were Riegel Brothers Dodge, Willys-Overland Pacific, Findlay-Studebaker, Chandler Auto, Wells Chevrolet, and Eldridge Buick. According to the West Downtown Historic Transportation Corridor National Register Nomination (1999), "During the two decades after World War I, nine brick buildings, all related to the growing automobile industry were erected in the corridor. Most were built in the mid-1920s, only one was constructed after 1930 ...The building boom of the automobile-related structures that occurred during the twenties was never matched again in the West Downtown Historic Transportation Corridor."

Florence K. Lentz and Craig Holstine prepared an inventory and evaluation of historic properties associated with transportation in the state (Lentz, 1995). In that document, the physical form of the auto rows "Downtown Dealerships" were described:

Built between ca. 1900 and 1925, downtown dealerships constructed solely for automotive commerce followed the Main Street formula of zero-setback from the sidewalk, adjoining side walls (in larger towns), and a tri-partite brick or stucco façade. Wood frame or loadbearing masonry construction was the norm. Roof configuration, generally flat, gabled, or bow truss, were hidden behind decorative parapet walls. Downtown dealerships were frequently of two stories (or more in larger cities), requiring interior ramps and /or elevators.

Display windows with transoms were large, offering a view into the street-facing showroom. Often built on corner lots, vehicle access was provided through double-leafed wooden garage doors off the site street or alley. Repair and service facilities were located unobtrusively at the rear.

The Ahrens & Ahrens building exhibits most of the characteristics described above including: zero-setback from the sidewalks on a corner lot, and a tri-partite brick façade, loadbearing masonry construction, trapezoidal truss roof hidden behind decorative parapet walls, two stories in height, large display windows with transoms along both Lincoln Street and Second Avenue, and vehicle access along Lincoln Street.

#### **Chronology of the Ahrens & Ahrens Building**

The subject property is on the southeast corner of Second Avenue and Lincoln Street, or the northwest corner of the block bounded by block bounded by Lincoln Street on the west, Post Street on the east, 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue on the north and 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue on the south. It includes lot 1 on the corner and the adjacent west half (25') of the south 67 feet of lot 2. It should be noted that the north half of lot 2 on which a two-story brick building at 823 2<sup>nd</sup> resides, was originally and is currently in the same ownership as the garage.

The 1889 Sanborn map shows wood frame dwellings on the entire block.

In 1902 a two-story wood frame building occupied the northern half of the corner lot with the addresses 827-826-1/2-829: stores on the ground floor and lodgings above. Two wood frame dwellings occupied

the southern half of the lot. The western half of the adjacent lot to the east was occupied by a "Chine Laundry" with two other wood frame structure. The remainder of the block contained wood frame dwellings, sheds, Northwestern Business College and the 4-story Bump Block on the corner of Second and Post.

The 1910 Sanborn shows two two-story store buildings fronting on Second Avenue and two dwellings at the southern half of the lot. A two-story brick building (ca. 1902) was depicted on the lot adjacent to the east. Brick buildings filled in a solid front along Second Avenue in the remainder of the block.

The building of the Ahrens & Ahrens garage involved two major dealers in the Spokane real estate/construction and automobile markets: the Mitchell Brothers, railroad and road contractors and real estate investors, and Ahrens & Ahrens automobile distribution and sales. Their stories intertwined during the 1920s with the Mitchell Brothers owning real estate and building the garage, and the Ahrens operating a successful automobile agency that reached between the Cascades and the Rockies.

Arthur P. Mitchell, born in Minnesota arrived in Spokane in 1883, attracted to the city to handle horse-drawn freight wagons over the Walla Walla to Colville military road. Joined by his brother Albert L. Mitchell in 1889 they formed a construction company with their father, George, and built railroads and the streets of a growing Spokane. They believed in the growth of Spokane and made major investments in downtown real estate, including the southeast corner of Lincoln and Second which they acquired ca. 1904 (sewer permit to connect to 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue sewer in 1904). They also owned lot on which the two-story brick store/SRO building at 823 West 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue had been constructed ca. 1902. That property had been developed by Spokane real estate investor Fred Zahn (a barber) and Dan Paul (former state legislator from Coulee City). To the west, on the corner, Jacob Postel had established a meat market in the two-story wood frame building that contained shops and lodgings, ca. 1904.



The *Spokane Daily Chronicle* reported on November 5, 1909 that a **"Big Five-Story Block on Second"** was proposed by A.P. Mitchell on Corner of Lincoln Street.

Within the near future definite announcement will be made by A.P. Mitchell, the well-known contractor, regarding his plans for the erections of a five-story block on his property at the southeast corner of Second avenue and Lincoln street. Just what the nature of the building will be has not been decided upon, and what it will cost cannot be determined until other details are worked out, but the cost will probably be between \$60,000 and \$70,000 it is said.

Mitchell's five-story plan apparently did not materialize since the *Chronicle* two years later in June 1911 reported: **"Plans Three-Story Brick on Lincoln."**

At this time, the building had been reduced to a three-story brick building expected to cost in the neighborhood of \$50,000. "The building is proposed for the property belonging to A. P. Mitchell and will be 90 feet by 142 feet in size."

But, Mitchell had other plans that were reported by *The Spokesman-Review* on June 12, 1913. **"Pays \$100,000 Cash For Upton."**

The sale yesterday by the Imperial Investment company to A. P. Mitchell, the contractor, of the Upton hotel [106 Cedar Street, SRHP) at the southwest corner of First avenue and Cedar street, for \$100,000 is the largest cash deal since the purchase of the Curtis block by August Paulson. According to Mitchell, "The money did not come out of the contracting business, either, but through judicious investments in Spokane. The contracting business has reached the stage where it is well to look to other fields and it is for this reason that I have bought the Upton. I consider it a good buy and a good investment.

I have made what I have in Spokane and think well enough of the city to continue to invest it here. I have figured that this is the time to buy real estate when one can afford to carry it, and I believe not mistake can be made.

In the meantime, *The Spokesman-Review* announced a new automobile on the Spokane market on August 25, 1917. **"Stephens Autos to Make Debut."**

**"Ahrens & Ahrens Enter Spokane Field with Initial Order for 300 Cars"**

The Stephens Salient Six, heretofore a stranger in Spokane motor circles, will make its initial bow here tomorrow. Spokane has taken its place with leading distributing centers in America, it is said, and all the standard cars want to find a berth here. The Stephens Salient Six, the latest arrival, comes with a 300-car contract, to be represented by the firm of Ahrens & Ahrens, recently of Portland, Ore. The car is the product of the Stephens motor branch of the Moline Plow company, and the factory I at Freeport, Ill. The Moline company is now constructing a big distributing plant here, to be completed in October, according to D. E. Ahern, junior member of the firm.

**Salesrooms Secured.**

Ahrens & Ahrens will open their salesrooms opposite the Davenport hotel at W901 First Avenue. ...

"George Ahrens, senior member of the firm, has been European wholesale representative of a large manufacturing concern for a number of years, and also has manufacturing interests of his own at Moline. He has traveled the United States for the last 13 years. He has spent the last few years in the northwest. He is optimistic over the possibilities of the Inland Empire and considers it the most favorable for automobile development of any section in the United States.

D.E. Ahrens, his nephew, has been engaged in the automobile business for the last few years in the east, having handled cars in Chicago and Kansas City, and is enthusiastic regarding the prospects both in Spokane and territory tributary." .... Article continues

In September 1917, *The Spokesman-Review* included a photo of George Ahrens and announced the first shipment of the 1918 models of the Stephens Salient Six that would occupy the show rooms of Ahrens & Ahrens, W901 First avenue. Further reported: "The company plans to erect its own building here in the early spring."

Reports in the automobile section of *The Spokesman-Review* and in the *Spokane Chronicle* reported the growth of the automobile industry in Spokane and the success of Ahrens & Ahrens. In December 1917 the company closed a contract with the Franklin-Wicks Motor company of Seattle for distribution of the Stephens in the territory west of the Cascades. They also reached agreements to distribute to dealers in North Yakima, Las Crosse, Corfu, Lind, and Palouse.

In August 1918 *The Spokesman-Review* reported that Don E. Ahrens, junior member of the firm of Ahrens & Ahrens, had recently passed through Spokane enroute to Camp Taylor, near Louisville, Ky., assigned to the officers' training camp there from St. Louis.

Since going over to Camp Lewis this summer Mr. Ahrens was promoted to the rank of Sergeant and passed the officers' training examination. He was one of two out of 25 to pass the examination.

In October 1918, the company had picked up the Fagoel Trucks territory.

"We will have distributors' headquarters at Seattle, Tacoma and Butte, and from Spokane will handle all the business for the Stevens Salient Six in Washington, Idaho, Oregon and west Montana," said Mr. Ahrens today. This company's place of business is @901 First avenue and it also has taken over a garage at W1523 First Avenue.

Lieutenant Don Ahrens returned from his military training in December 1918. He had been an instructor of the conduct of fire school at Camp Zachary Taylor. He was now ready to assume active management of the Stephens and Fageol agency in Spokane was the news in *The Spokesman-Review* on January 17, 1919.

George Ahrens, senior partner in the automobile firm of Ahrens & Ahrens, died last night at the residence 5824 Lincoln place. His widow survives. Mr. Ahrens has been in poor health for three years, but was able to be at his establishment until a few days ago. His death resulted from diabetes, which became serious three weeks ago.

The *Spokane Chronicle* of February 27, 1919 reported more growth for Ahrens. “**Auto Distribution Depot Coming Here.**”

Spokane has been selected as the logical location for a distributing depot for the Fageol truck and tractor company of Oakland, Cal., and here will be carried a complete stock of trucks and tractors and parts for each, from which dealers of the Inland Empire and Montana will be supplied."

This will be the only depot of the kind between the factory and Spokane and will mean a large addition to the volume of Spokane's wholesale business. Special attention will be given to developing the truck and tractor business in Montana, which will be supplied through the Spokane dept. The territory will also take in a considerable part of Idaho and of eastern Oregon and will extend north into Canada."



*Spokesman-Review, August 26, 1917*

The Ahrens & Ahrens company recently closed a contract with a Seattle dealer for 100 Stephens Salient Six automobiles, for which the company is the Washington distributors. ...

Finally, the Mitchells had a project on the property at 2<sup>nd</sup> and Lincoln as reported by *The Spokesman-Review* on July 6, 1919. **"New Home of Ahrens & Ahrens on Second to Cost \$80,000."**

"What promises to be one of the finest automobile display and service buildings in the city is the new home planned for Ahrens & Ahrens, Inc., local distributors of the Stephens Salient Six, and Oakland Sensible Six. The total investment in the building will be around \$80,000. Mitchell Brothers are the owners and builders. Cowley & Wells are the architects.

The floor space in the new structure will be 14,000 square feet. The building will have two stories and basement, with frontage of 75 feet on Second avenue and a depth of 142 feet on Lincoln street. The service entrance will be on Lincoln street and the sales room entrance on the Second avenue thoroughfare. It will be one of the most substantial and artistically finished structures in the city, according to plans. The facade will be of white brick. The display room will be finished in ivory. The room will be large and showy, with a floor area 35 by 50.

The service department will have a 10-car shop, with overhead crane. Ernest Tuttle, former proprietor of the Power City company, will be in charge.

Don E. Ahrens of the Ahrens company declared that the new building is made necessary by the constant expansion of the wholesale and retail business of the company. He expresses it as his opinion that the auto business in Spokane will experience the most prosperous year of its history during 1919, provided car and truck manufacturers can adjust their production schedules so that cars can be obtained. He says the demand for cars has never been so great as now and the only reason why every dealer should not break all previous sales records this year is the inability to get cars.

The new home, which is to be ready for occupancy September 1, will house the business now carried on in three different locations in the city. The Ahrens company recently received the Oakland contract for the factory branch in Spokane and its territory for Oakland distribution will include Spokane city and county.

...

In the new building the stock room will be immense. The Ahrens & Ahrens company's line, with the addition of the new contract, now includes the Stephens Salient Six and Oakland Sensible Six motor cars and the Fageol trucks and tractors, the latter exclusive California products.

Ahrens & Ahrens would continue their strong presence in the Inland Empire automobile market through 1925, when Don Ahrens sold the dealership and moved on to work for General Motors. *The Spokesman-Review* reported that growth in November 1919: **"Stephens Sales Top High Marks."** "Our Oakland retail sales have been averaging 30 to 35 cars a month, the machine, fully equipped bring \$1350 in Spokane. Our territory has been extended until it includes everything between Butte and the Cascade mountains and evidences now point to ditching up with back orders."

February 29, 1920 in *The Spokesman-Review*: **"D. Ahrens Heads Coast Company."**

Backed by Spokane men and Spokane capital, the Cascade Motor company has been incorporated at Seattle, with a capitalization of \$30,000 paid in to distribute Stephens passenger cars west of the Cascade mountains. Don E. Ahrens is president .... The Seattle headquarters opened in a three-story building at Pine and Summit. Contracts have been signed with dealers in Everett, Bellingham, Tacoma, Mount Vernon, Port Angeles,

Aberdeen, Centralia and other Puget Sound centers. Spokane will continue to be Stephens headquarters for Washington.

**"Butte Concern Buys 100 Cars,"** on June 9, 1922.

"Ahrens & Ahrens, Inc., distributors here for the Stephens Salient Six, has just closed a contract with the Butte Velie Sales company, Butte, Mont. For 100 cars.

The *Spokane Chronicle* reported on March 7 1923: **"Ahrens & Ahrens Increase Stock**

Capitalization of the Ahrens & Ahrens company, motor car dealers, was increased from \$100,000 to \$150,000 today. Enlargement of territory and the addition of new lines by the Stephens automobile factory necessitated the capital increase. ...

Also, "Our territory for the Dort car has been enlarged to include all of Washington east of the Rockies, northern Idaho and western Montana. With the additional territory we have accepted a 500-car contract, requiring additional funds to handle."

**"Cadillac Sales Break Records,"** reported *The Spokesman-Review* in January 1924.

Ahrens & Ahrens Company Sells Sixteen High-Priced Automobiles in Eight Weeks. "The last eight weeks of 1923 proved a record breaker for Cadillac sales in Spokane." Sixteen were sold as listed in the article to out of town buyers, as well as leading Spokane citizens among those included: Adolph Galland, E. J. Cannon, Mrs. H. H. Hebert, H. J. Shinn, Mrs. Charles White, and John W. Graham. And, **"Order 350 HUPS for 1924 Trade."** Ahrens & Ahrens "received word yesterday that they have been appointed Inland Empire distributors for the Hupmobile with northern Idaho, western Montana and eastern Washington as their territory." ... "We picked this line because of the well-known quality of the car and the financial standing of the company manufacturing it." .... "The addition of the Hupmobile gives Ahrens & Ahrens four cars, the others being Cadillac, Stephens and Dort." ...

In June 1924: **"HUP Franchise Goes to Ahrens."**

Spokane has been made the distribution center for Hupmobiles in place of Seattle and Butte through the issuance of a franchise to Ahrens & Ahrens for the regions between the Cascade and Rocky mountains. The firm will have wholesale privileges in all counties of eastern Washington, all in Idaho north of Clearwater county and all in Montana west of Butte and south of Great Falls, about 42 counties in all, according to Don E. Ahrens.

Ahrens moved further up the road to success as dealer of the iconic British luxury car when *The Spokesman-Review* announced on February 8, 1925: **"Rolls Royce To Be Handled Here."**

"Rolls-Royce, famous English automobile, will have an agency in Spokane, it was announced yesterday by Don Ahrens of Ahrens & Ahrens, Cadillac dealers, who has arranged to handle this expensive car through the San Francisco distributors." ... The Rolls-Royce is listed at from \$12,000 to \$17,000 and carries a five-year guarantee.

In its April 19, 1925 edition *The Spokesman-Review* paid tribute to Don E. Ahrens. **"His Hat Helps Him Sell Cars."**

Catering to the elite, in the way of motor cars, has been Don Ahrens' job for some years. Mr. Ahrens, who, by the way, is Ahrens & Ahrens himself, sells Cadillac cars to Spokane's smart set. He does business at 827 Second avenue.

Mr. Ahrens, it might be added belongs to the intelligentsia. That is to say, he can write M.A. and B.S. after his name. He is a University of Nebraska man, later emerging from a post graduate course at the University of Chicago. By trade, to put it bluntly, he is an electrical engineer. He was with the Western Electric company in 1914.

#### **Started With Fords**

Opportunity beckoned from Topeka Kan., in 1915, where Mr. Ahrens' uncle was in business. They went into partnership, selling Ford motor cars. In 1916 Mr. Ahrens came west, taking the agency here for the Stephens car and later that of the Oakland. In 1922 the Cadillac and Hupmobile were handled.

The Cadillacs are distributed through Ahrens & Ahrens to a dozen dealers scattered over a wide territory.

You can never mistake Mr. Ahrens, because he is the only automobile man in Spokane who wears a derby hat while on the job. He says he wears it because it is the most comfortable kind of a hat he's got. But he does not deny that wearing a derby hat lends class to his ordinarily distinctive appearance.

Besides selling Cadillacs, Mr. Ahrens sells a line of Hupmobile fours and straight eights. "Nobody ever knocks a Hupmobile," is his slogan, and there seems to be lots of truth to this.

#### **Knows a Good Joke**

In addition to being a purveyor of fine cars, Mr. Ahrens is the most humorous of all the automobile men hereabouts. Funny stories and good jokes, it is said, have done a lot to sell cars when he was on the job himself. Another thing about Mr. Ahrens is that nobody has even seen him angry—for long. He's too good tempered.

Mr. Ahrens was an artillery officer in the war, and his patience may be due to his army training. They push you around and make you wait and push you around some more, while the delay gets longer—in the army. Mr. Ahrens will tell you that. ...

#### **Mascot is Famous**

The Ahrens & Ahrens mascot, quite an important bit of show room attraction, is the 1906 Cadillac, all painted yellow. You may have seen it standing outside the automobile house. It does more than stand, however. It goes. Anyone can take a ride in it, or rather, on it. You crank it by and on the right hand side, and the engine is somewhere under the seat. It has one of these rubber bulb horns which toot-toots in the manner of—well, you remember when they first came out.

As the year 1925 came to a close, so did Don E. Ahrens business career in Spokane. As *The Spokesman-Review* would report on December 6, 1925, "**Ahrens Disposes of Auto Agency.**"

Don E. Ahrens, president of Ahrens & Ahrens, Inc, one of the best known automobile men in the Inland Empire, has sold his interest in the Cadillac and Hupmobile automobile business at W827 Second and leaves Sunday for California, where he will look into several business enterprises. He will drive south via Portland.

The stock of Mr. Ahrens has been taken by his associates. William H. Potts, secretary of the company will succeed Mr. Ahrens. M.R. Swift, formerly with the Portland Hupmobile distributors, will be sales manager. The company name will be continued. The firm is capitalized at \$150,000.

With his uncle, Mr. Ahrens organized the firm here more than eight years ago. Since then the concern has grown to a position where it is one of the largest distributors of cars in the Spokane territory. It has the general agency for Hupmobiles and Cadillacs in eastern Washington, western Montana and northern Idaho.

Approximately \$8,000,000 worth of automobiles have been sold by the company since its establishment, Mr. Ahrens said yesterday.

"I have several good opportunities to engage in the automobile business in California," Mr. Ahrens declared, "and I cannot afford to pass them up. I am going to Los Angeles and San Francisco, and later to Detroit and Chicago. One of the propositions offered me is in connection with a Cadillac factory branch and another with a big Hupmobile distributor. I am exceedingly sorry to leave Spokane ..."



At the departure of Don Ahrens in pursuit of his fortune with General Motors, the Mitchell Brothers remained in Spokane and continued to invest in the downtown they helped build. The quickly found a new automobile dealer to occupy their building at W. 827 Second. A.L. Mitchell also owned and managed the two-story brick store and lodgings with which the automobile garage shared a wall, at 823-823-1/2 Second. In an article of May 15, 1927, *The Spokesman-Review* reported that A. P. Mitchell, railroad contractor, and D. F. Pierce [a nephew] purchased the Antlers Hotel [(former Fisher building)] at 917-19-21 First Avenue. The photo caption noted that this is one of six buildings that Mitchell and his associates have purchased since the first of the year. Apparently, Mitchell was following the lead of L. N. Rosenbaum who had purchased a site only a "stone's throw" away for a \$1,300,000 theater [the Fox, 1931, NRHP, SRHP].

The company, Ahrens & Ahrens, remained in the building for only a year before moving to their garage at 1318 West First. In James L. Elam, Inc. also an automobile dealer—Graham-Paige distributor--occupied the building from 1926 to 1932, followed in 1932-1933 by John Dee Moore automobiles (Packard), and finally in 1933, G.F. Goodrich Silvertown, Inc listed 827 W. Second Avenue as the place for Goodrich tires. Thus, the space in which to display automobiles was now longer necessary. That space would transition into smaller display area and larger floor area for auto service.

Several articles in the next couple of years reported the financial exploits of the Mitchells. An article of June 17, 1929 featured A.P. Mitchell's investments in Spokane and included a photo. **"Backs Spokane With His Coin,"** reported *The Spokesman-Review* revealing that he "Invests Fortune in Spokane Business Property." He had been investing in Spokane real estate for the past twenty years and was still buying. His most recent purchase at that time was a half interest in the Felix building (razed) at the northwest corner of First and Madison. Since 1926 he had acquired the Bybee apartments at S321 Lincoln (razed); a half interest in the Michigan block, W420 Main (razed) to own it fully; half interest in the brick building at 328 Main (razed); the Unique theater (razed); half interest in the Albany Hotel (razed); half interest in the Pershing apartments (razed) and the Elgin apartments. He retained ownership of the Hotel Upton. The article ended: "A notable fact about his property dealings is that he buys much but sells little."



New \$50,000 Garage Gives Good Return

Better than 7 per cent net will be realized by A. P. and A. L. Mitchell, who have just completed the new one-story garage at the northeast corner of Third and Adams, occupied yesterday by the Union Pacific Stages, Inc., under a 10-year lease. The building is 100x142 feet and covers all of two lots with 100 feet frontage on Third and 142 on Adams.

According to information obtained from real estate dealers, the two lots are put in at \$20,000 with a rental estimate based on a net return of 6 per cent. The building is valued at \$30,000 with a net rental return of 8 per cent. A. P. Mitchell, when asked about these figures, said he disliked to disclose the details of lease but that the terms were satisfactory.

The plans for the new garage were drawn by Arthur Cowley, and the building erected by Charles L. Muller. Steel trusses support the roof, leaving the space below free of posts. The outside walls are finished in glazed brick and glazed tile of varying shades of brown and buff, made by the Washington Brick, Lime and Sewer Pipe company.

One of the Mitchells' final investments in downtown was the one-story glazed terra cotta garage built for Union Pacific Stages in 1931. *The Spokesman-Review* reported on January 4, **"New \$50,000 Garage,"** and included a photo of the nearly completed building that occupied the northeast corner of Third and Adams (razed). "Better that 7 per cent net will be realized by A. P. and A. L. Mitchell" under a 10-year lease. Arthur C. Cowley, who also designed their former Ahrens and Ahrens

building at Second and Lincoln, was the architect. In the late 1930s and 1940s, the Mitchells began selling their properties: the Union Pacific Stages in 1938 (to Martin Woldson); Pershing apartments in 1941, Grand Coulee (Upton) in 1943, The Felix apartments in 1946, but would still leave estates that included real estate.

*Spokesman-Review, January 4, 1931*



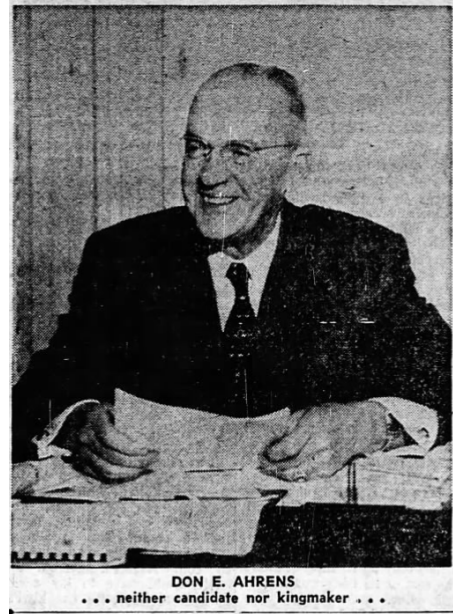
The *Spokane Daily Chronicle* in its November 25, 1935 edition brought Spokane readers up to date on the career of Don E. Ahrens. He had recently been appointed the general sales manager of Cadillac Motor Car company. Following his career in Spokane from 1916 to 1925, he became the sales manager Cadillac factory in Chicago, the Philadelphia, and in 1933 he was promoted to the company's largest retail branch in New York city. He had been personally responsible for creating sales exceeding \$50,000,000. He was named general manager of the Cadillac Division and a GM vice-president in 1950 and retired in 1956. He passed away in the Detroit area in 1975 at age 84.

B.F Goodrich sold and maintained tires at 827 W. Second Avenue until 1972. While operating under a lease from the Mitchells, they made a couple of alterations to the building. In March 1957 they received a permit for alterations valuing \$5,100 (not specified); again, in November 1964, they received a building permit for interior alterations and to reface a portion of building (upper section) with a value of \$20,000; and finally, in April 1968 to change a window to an overhead door and enclose the open stairway from basement, a \$1,500 value. These alterations resulted in the open porte cochere in the northwest corner; replacement of the storefront windows on the north façade; changing of entries, both the doors and sash; the removal of the exterior stepped pediments; and the addition of the garage doors on the west façade.

Thus, the building evolved to facilitate the operational and aesthetic needs of the tire sales and service business in transition from the display and sales of automobiles. Although not specified in the building permit, the first major alteration in 1952 was likely the addition of the garage door in the center of the west façade. Larger doors responding to the increase in the size of automobiles from 1919 to the 1950s provided a more efficient entry to the service area. The next modification was in 1964 when exterior alterations removed the pediments over the pedestrian entries, likely to provide a cleaner modern and more streamlined appearance and to deemphasize the pedestrian access. Finally, in 1968, the removal of the northwest corner window opened a porte cochere that allowed for access from 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue to the service area via a new overhead garage door. Essentially, better access and more floor area were devoted to moving vehicles in and out as a service operation as opposed to the less frequent movement of automobile display and sales.

Local tire dealers, Ritchie, Riley and Shook Tire Company, formed in 1968 in the Spokane Valley, expanded operations to downtown and replaced Goodrich in 1972. They operated in the building until 1988 and were followed by the Snevas in 1990. The Snevas operated a used car and an automobile detailing business in the building until ca. 2002.

The Mitchell family held the "Ahrens & Ahrens" building until November 2001 when they sold it to Edsol Sneva, former race car driver and father of Indy winner Tom Sneva. Edsol and Joan Sneva transferred it to son Blaine and his wife in 2002, then Blaine sold it to Evergreen Parking on the same day. Evergreen sold the property to Diamond Parking in 2015. Since then, the building has been used to park and store automobiles. It is under new ownership in 2023 and rehabilitation of the building is underway.



*Lansing State Journal, December 1, 1967 - Don Ahrens had been appointed the chairman of the Republican state finance committee in Michigan*

**Architect - Arthur W. Cowley**

Arthur W. Cowley, born in Spokane, practiced architecture in Spokane from about 1906 through his death in 1949. Cowley was recognized in the West Downtown Historic Transportation Corridor National Register Nomination (1999) as designer of three major apartment buildings in the same block: the Otis Hotel, the Alberta Hotel, and Jefferson Hotel. Also in the district but at the time of the nomination were not attributed to Cowley, are the Norman Hotel (adjacent to the Jefferson) also a contributing building, and the Child, Brothers and Day Auto Supply (at 1217 W First, 1910, altered and non-contributing). Wells Chevrolet Service building and Showroom (115 South Adams Street and 1229 West First Avenue 1926, SRHP), Doran Building (1920 SRHP), Jamieson Co Salesroom (1916, 1229 Sprague-razed).

Cowley's early work was noted in *The Spokesman-Review* in its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition marking Spokane's economic progress on June 17, 1909, featuring Spokane's economy and prominent citizens, included a sketch of "New Apartment House of N.W. Durham" with "Arthur W. Cowley Architect"

A little over a year ago this gentleman opened offices at 631-632 Peyton bldg. for the purpose of carrying on a general architectural business. Mr. Cowley was formerly an engineer of the Great Northern railroad and for a time was chief draftsman for that system. Since entering the architectural field Mr. Cowley has met with flattering success. During the year he has been actively engaged here he [sic] erected the Wellington apartments Sixth and Stevens street; the Buckman apartments, First avenue and Elm street; the Windsor store and hotel building, First avenue and Jefferson street, and several of the better class apartments in Spokane. He is now putting up the new N.W. Durham apartments at Third avenue and Lincoln street, a cut of which appears on this page. Mr. Cowley has also designed and prepared the plans for several handsome residences. Mr. Cowley is an enterprising young man, full of ambition and thoroughly conversant with this business.

N.W. Durham, in his history of Spokane (1912), wrote the following about Cowley, still early in his career in Spokane:

Spokane has grown rapidly and Mr. Cowley has had his share of the business in his line, his intelligently directed effort bringing him substantial reward while his work has been an element in the city's improvement. He has introduced many innovations in building lines and the structures which he has erected are the principal ornaments of their respective neighborhoods, pleasing to the eye and constructed with conscientious regard for real utility, and the comfort and health of their occupants. Because of his operations unsightly vacancies have become occupied by attractive edifices and real estate in all parts of the city have rapidly advanced in value.

Cowley is noted for his apartment and industrial buildings, several of which remain in use in Spokane. The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Building is one of five known industrial/ commercial buildings that are extant in Spokane, and retains the best integrity of those buildings. Besides the Child, Brothers and Day Auto Supply (1911, 1217 West First Avenue), which is totally altered, are the Consolidated Motor Freight Warehouse (1935, 126 S. Sheridan/Pacific), and Inland Auto Freight Warehouse (1929, 159 S. McClellan).

An article in *The Spokesman-Review* (January 20, 1949), at his death in 1949 included below, recaps Cowley's life in Spokane and his important contributions to the city's architectural legacy.



*Arthur Cowley, Spokesman-Review, January 20, 1949*

#### **Arthur Cowley Taken By Death**

Arthur W. Cowley, one of Spokane's first native citizens whose life and that of his family have been interwoven in the history and development of this city since its establishment died yesterday in a hospital following a short illness.

The city's growth is full of evidence of Mr. Cowley's life, as he was a prominent architect here for nearly 43 years. He drew plans for some of Spokane's most substantial business and industrial buildings and fine homes which are monuments to his skill and ability. He remained active in his profession until shortly before he died.

Mr. Cowley was born October 9, 1878 in Spokane. He was the son of Henry Thomas Cowley, an early-day missionary who was one of the first settlers in this region. The only other white families here at the time the elder Mr. Cowley arrived were those of A.M. Cannon, J.J. Browne, and James N. Glover. Arthur Cowley was one of the first white children born in Spokane.

His father answered the invitation of the Spokane Indians to settle among them and the younger Mr. Cowley grew up under frontier conditions. He began his life in the home which his father and friendly Spokane Indians built in the center of the

Spokane's camp, a beautiful wooded site now the location of Cowley park on Sixth between Browne and Division.

When the Cowleys arrived at Spokane Falls the little town had only one store. The Spokanes welcomed them, bringing them dried salmon, lean venison and a pail of milk.

After they had settled, the elder Mr. Cowley was able to build his first church at the site which is now Bernard and Sprague.

[A list of buildings designed by Cowley is included in the Spokane Register Nomination for "Goodyear Tire and Rubber Store & Warehouse."]

#### **\*Architect - William A. Wells (1878-1938)**

Architect William A. Wells is noted for having designed some of Oklahoma City's early-day buildings. Born in May 1878 to Abijah and Lauretta Wells in Seneca, Kansas, he received his education there. He attended the Art Institute of Chicago and worked in Frank Lloyd Wright's Oak Park, Illinois, studio. By 1902 Wells had set up an architectural practice in Moline, Illinois, but in 1903 he relocated to Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Territory, to join his brother Frank, a partner in the law firm of Shartel, Keaton, and Wells. The next year William Wells married Lucy Dolling, an Art Institute of Chicago graduate and, later, a well-known artist, in Chicago.

Wells was comfortable with a variety of architectural design types, including Classical Revival, Romanesque Revival, Sullivanesque, and Art Deco. In Oklahoma City he designed a number of downtown's most architecturally significant commercial buildings, often partnering with Arthur J. Williams. They competed with other noted architects, such as Solomon Layton and the firm of Hawk and Parr, and together these other important designers created historic streetscapes that are no longer extant. In 1907 Wells was a founding member of the Oklahoma State Association of Architects.

He often applied the principles of Chicago architect Louis Sullivan's progressive construction design and geometric/floral terra cotta ornamentation in multi-story commercial buildings, "skyscrapers." Wells's Pioneer Building (401 N. Broadway, 1907; extant) was the city's first to offer a Sullivanesque three-part design (base, shaft, and cap) with terra cotta decoration. He also designed the Oklahoma County Courthouse (520 W. Main, 1906, Romanesque Revival; razed 1930s), the Terminal Building (1909–10, 313 W. Grand, Sullivanesque, razed 1980s) and the Colcord Building (1909–10, 15 N. Robinson, Sullivanesque, extant). He is credited with the expansion wing for the 1901 Carnegie Library (razed 1952), a 1912 clubhouse for the Oklahoma City Golf and Country Club on 39th Street, and residences for prominent Oklahoma Cityans, including Charles M. Colcord's home at 421 Northwest Thirteenth Street (1903, Classical Revival, razed 1960s).

A Universalist in faith, a Mason in fraternal affiliation, and the father of two sons, William A. Wells left Oklahoma City for Washington (state) in 1914. He continued in practice in Spokane and later in Seattle, where he died on October 1, 1938. Oklahoma City's Colcord Building is listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR 76001571), and in Spokane, Washington, the John R. Rogers High School (1932, Art Deco) was listed in 2012.

*\*Taken from Everett. Dianna. "WELLS, WILLIAM A. "(1878-1938)."* <https://www.okhistory.org/publications>

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- . "Oakland Branch To Sell Retail." 11/27/1921. p8:2.
- . "Butte Concern Buys 100 Cars." 6/9/1922. D3p3:1-4.
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- . "Rolls Royce To Be Handled Here." 2/8/1925. p5:3.
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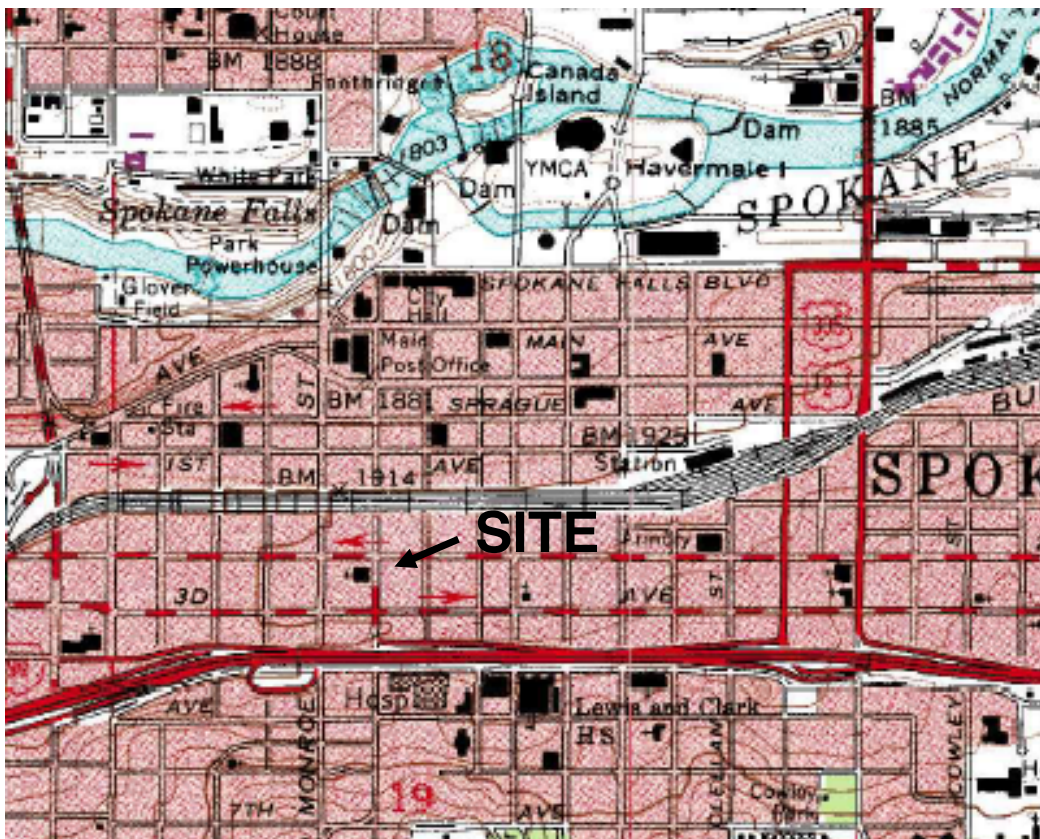
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## **Maps, Drawings, and Photographs**







USGS 7.5 Minute Quadrangle. Spokane NW, Wash. 1974. Photorevised 1986

**AHRENS & AHRENS GARAGE**  
**827 WEST SECOND AVENUE**  
**SITE LOCATION**

↑  
N  
1' = 2000'

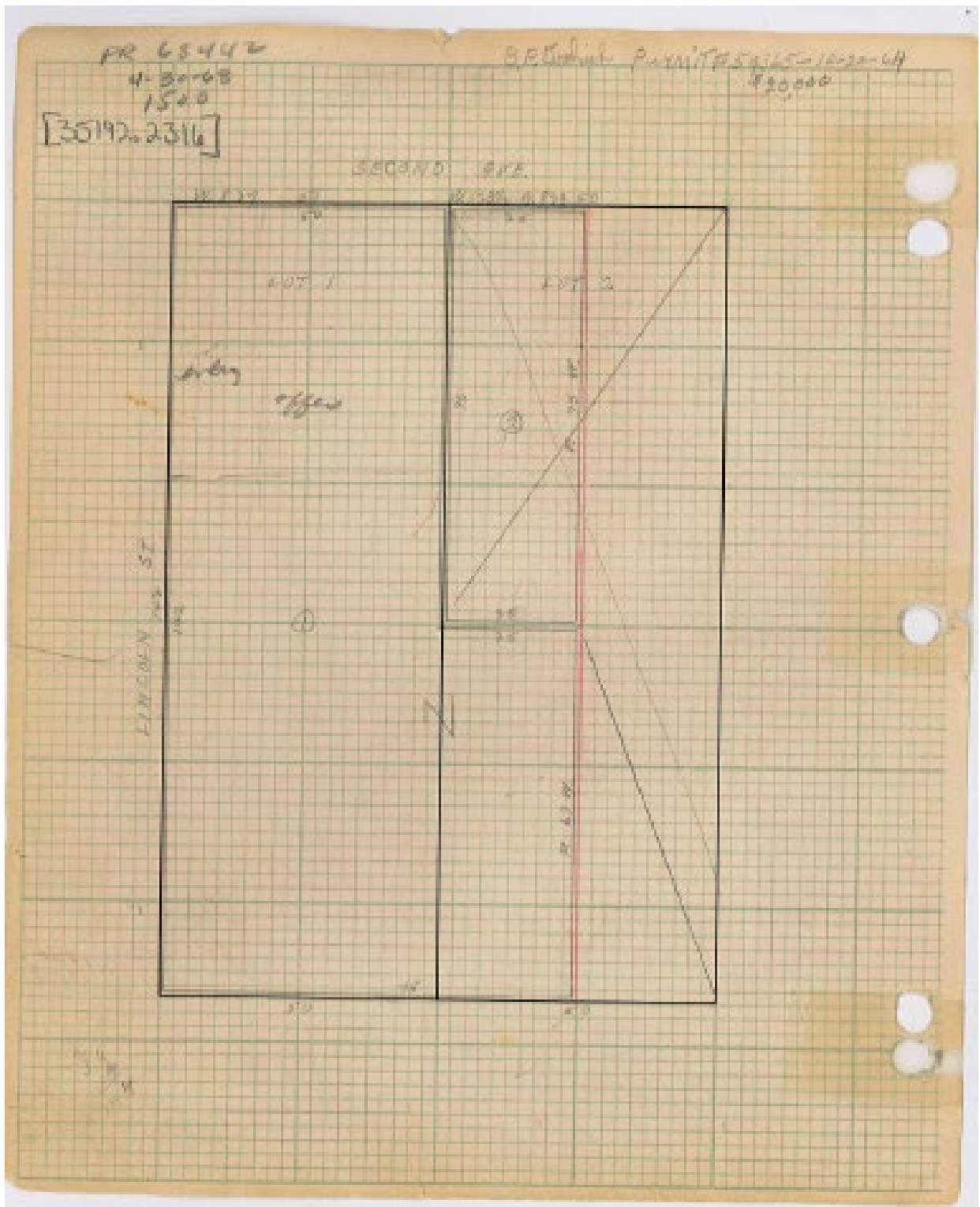


**AHRENS & AHRENS GARAGE  
827 WEST SECOND AVENUE  
SITE LOCATION**

↑  
N  
1" = 2000'

[illegible]





ASSESSOR FIELD FILE PLOT SKETCH



1. Context along Second Avenue - looking southeast along south side of street



2. Context along Second Avenue - looking southwest along south side





3. Northeast Corner - front facade, looking southwest



4. Front facade (north), looking south



5. Northwest corner - north and west facades, looking southeast



6. West Facade -north half, looking east





7. West Facade -south half, looking east.



8. Southwest Corner - west and south facades, looking northeast



9. South facade - ground floor and basement, looking north



10. Southeast corner, looking west





11. Ahrens & Ahrens in 1920 - west facade, looking southeast \_ L87-1.18244-20



12. Goodrich in 1943 - north facade, looking south. L2008-9.5



13. Main floor - east bay office/reception area



14. Looking south from reception and porte-cochere entry (enclosed as office space in 2022)





15. Main floor - west bay cochere entry, looking south at roll-up garage door



16. Garage, looking north from south end



17. Garage, looking northeast toward southwest corner of adjacent building



18. Garage office and stairs to mezzanine storage room, looking east





19. Garage area, looking east from Bay 3



20. Garage, looking east along south wall



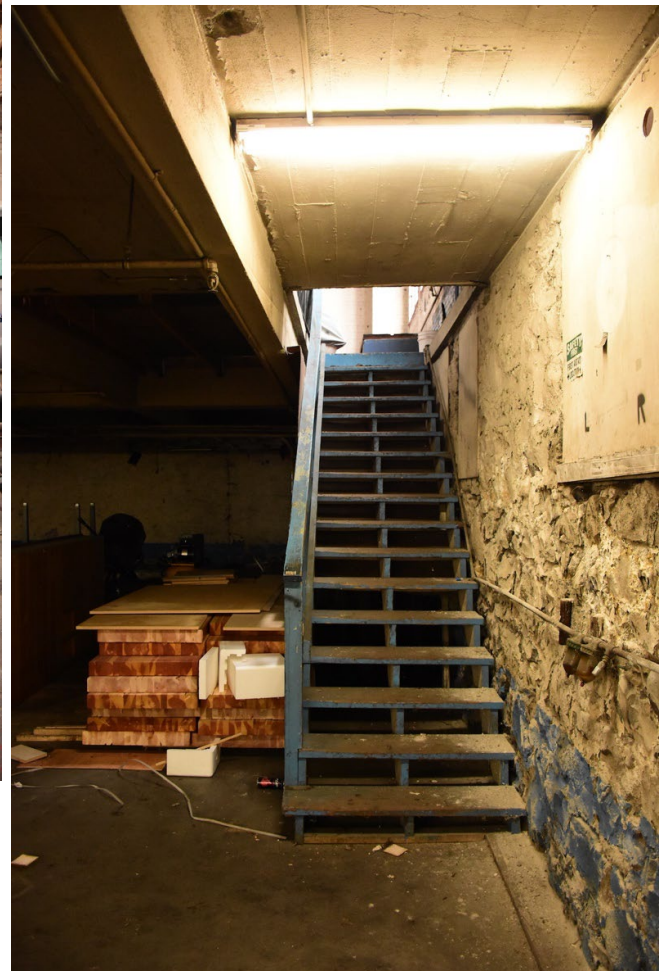
21. Garage, looking west toward west wall door bays



22. Garage looking south and up at south window bays, truss and skylight



23. Garage, looking west along south wall showing stairs to basement



24. Basement, looking east up the stairs to garage



25. Basement, looking west



26. Basement - mechanical room in northeast corner, looking north





27. Basement - southeast corner garage door to alley, looking south