AN AUTO-BIOGRAPHY: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MID-CENTURY AUTOMOBILE SHOWROOMS IN VIRGINIA

by

ASHLEN STUMP

(Under the Direction of Wayde Brown)

ABSTRACT

The proliferation of the automobile, and the uniquely American car-culture that came as a result, led to the development of a variety of auto-centric building types, including automobile showrooms. Although Virginia's mid-century architecture has received greater research over the past few decades, the state's mid-century automobile showrooms remain relatively unexamined. Through analysis of architectural design and development patterns, this thesis seeks to answer the question: how are Virginia's automobile showrooms constructed between 1945 and 1974 significant in a larger pattern of American automotive history?

INDEX WORDS: Automobile Showrooms, Mid-Century Modern, Virginia, Historic Preservation, Automobile Dealership.

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DEDICATION

To my family and friends who have listened, assisted, and supported me along the way, and without whom I would not have completed this project or retained any semblance of sanity. To my grandparents for instilling in me a passion and curiosity for all things historic. To my mother and sister for traveling the state and visiting showrooms with me. And to my husband, father, brother, and uncle who actively contribute to keeping American car-culture alive and well.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Recently I had a conversation with the owner of a complex of buildings in Athens, Georgia that were constructed circa 1948 as an automobile dealership, complete with showroom, garages, and warehouse space. This led to a discussion of his thoughts on a proposed historic district and the concerns he had that designation would create hindrances to desired changes to the property. This owner respects historic buildings and most of the ideas of historic preservation. When he explained the changes he would like to make to the front section of the building, he justified, "I mean, it's just an old showroom. It's just a bunch of glass."

Initially my hopes felt much like a pane of that glass, if shattered by some unexpected projectile. But this view, this acknowledgement that even though this building is old, it is "just a showroom," proved just how important it is that not only mid-century architecture, but specifically auto showrooms of the period, be examined and understood for their contribution to America's history and the evolution of our built environment.

The full history of the automobile in America has been discussed at various times in various ways and therefore will not be extensively discussed here.[1] In the early years,

[1] While there are likely many more sources, the principal resources used here include John B. Rae, *The American Automobile: A Brief History,* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), xiv-265; James J. Flink, *The Car Culture,* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1976), x-260; James J. Flink, *The Automobile Age,* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), xii-456; Dan Albert, *Are We There Yet,* (New York City: W.W. Norton & Company, 2019), 1-389; Robert Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* (Osceola, WI: MBI Publishing Company, 1999), 1-156; Chester Liebs, *Mainstreet to Miracle Mile,* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company), vi-259*;* John Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life,* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland &

the automobile, and even its French name, were accepted and brought into American culture by members of high society, such as William Rockefeller.[2] Later, Henry Ford's creation of the assembly line provided the capabilities for mass production that sparked a change in both American consumerism and automobile production.

Originally seen as a luxury reserved for the upper class and used for leisure activities, the economic prosperity experienced during the Roaring Twenties solidified the automobile's shift from a representation of luxury and leisure, to a necessity.[3] Through the Great Depression, Americans' loyalty to and reliance on their automobiles held fast, and even as they lost everything else, most Americans fought to keep their vehicles running.[4] Production of automobiles was restricted during the years encompassing World War II, and the pent up desire for consumerism and the prosperous economy following the war created the perfect environment for the automobile to explode into American culture.

Prior to the immersion of the automobile into everyday life, businessmen operated livery stables and carriage or bicycle shops in commercial downtowns. However, as automobiles grew in popularity, many savvy businessmen saw the opportunity to transition into the auto industry. Many early automobile sales took place in makeshift showrooms in carriage or bicycle shops.[5] These provisional showrooms quickly transformed into permanent showrooms, and by 1910 they were considered "the point of

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Company, Inc., Publishers, 2018), vi-281; John Jerome, *Death of the Automobile: The Fatal Effect of the Golden Era, 1955-1970,* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1972), 1-288; David Jones, *Mass Motorization + Mass Transit,* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), ix-268.

[2] Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life*, 12.

[3] Genat, *The American Car Dealership*, 9.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Liebs, *Mainstreet to Miracle Mile*, 9.

contact between the public" and the rapidly expanding automotive industry.[6] As auto showrooms emerged as a building type in their own right, designs and building materials changed for both practical and fashionable reasons and developed aesthetically along with their eras, changing from one to the next.

The automobile changed America's culture, architecture, and landscapes and the results proliferate the country. These changes are exceedingly evident in America's commercial architecture with the rise of autocentric building types, such as drive-ins, drive-throughs, and shopping malls. As necessary to the rise of the automobile as places to use them, were places the American public could purchase them. Automobile showrooms constructed after World War II demonstrated new, postwar building materials and designs, and illustrated a growing consumerism in America and the ever-increasing grip the automobile would have on American society.

In order to further investigate this mid-century building type, this thesis poses the question: how are Virginia's automobile showrooms constructed between 1945 and 1974 significant in a larger pattern of American automotive history?

Over the past few decades we have begun to see a shift and a growing interest in mid-twentieth century architecture. Lewis Mumford said, "The commonest axiom of history is that every generation revolts against its fathers and makes friends with its grandfathers."[7] This increasing interest can be seen in popular culture through television shows such as AMC's "Mad Men" and retail lines such as Target's "Project 62;" and as we hit the fifty-year mark, the field of historic preservation has moved to embrace mid-century architecture through efforts such as updating state historic preservation office

[6] Liebs, *Mainstreet to Miracle Mile*, 78.
[7] Ibid*,* vii.

style guides. However, even with this increasing interest there are still multiple layers of challenges facing the survival of mid-century architecture today.

While many state historic preservation offices, organizations, and nostalgic individuals have begun to recognize the importance of preserving mid-century commercial architecture, many still stand vehemently against it. In fact, Richard Longstreth argued that the basis for the Historic Preservation Act of 1966 was that modern architecture was 'inferior' to that of the past.[8] This view is often echoed by those in preservation who wish to remove mid-century architectural changes to restore earlier forms. The proliferation of mid-century commercial architecture has also served to propel the mindset that buildings of this era are mundane, abundant, and often sit vacant throughout cities around the country. An additional challenge faced by preservationists today is what to do with the modern building materials used to construct mid-century commercial buildings. Many of the materials used to construct postwar buildings were untested as far as their durability, longevity, and health safety, and many postwar commercial buildings were intentionally ephemeral.[9]

A challenge faced by auto related commercial buildings is that they are inherently designed to reflect the tastes of the present, and therefore face the need to change frequently if they wish to stay in-style. The same motivations that encouraged the construction of new auto showrooms from the mid-1940s to the early 1970s – staying

[8] Richard Longstreth, "When the Present Becomes Past," in *Past Meets Future: Saving America's Historic Environments*, ed. Antoinette J. Lee (Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1992), 1. Accessed March 28, 2019. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5a66103cf14aa1a6716a93e6/t/5a70aa32f9619ae22bb0f00c/1517333042988/When+the+Present+Becomes+the+Past+-+Richard+Longstreth.pdf.

[9] Bradley T. Carmichael, "When Modern Becomes Historic: Preserving the Modernist Building Envelope," in *High-Performance Reconstructed Buildings: The 99% Solution* (Building Design + Construction, May 2012), WP41. Accessed March 28, 2019. https://www.bdcnetwork.com/sites/bdc/files/WP_BDC0512_low%20res_3.pdf.

modern and appealing to customers – are motivations that have the potential to endanger their existence today. Modern auto dealers continue to seek contemporary designs that assure customers that their dealership contains the newest and best products. As a result of this quest for style and modernity, it is not uncommon for automobile dealers to, at a minimum, replace their mid-century showroom facades with contemporary designs and styles. Additionally, auto dealerships have increasingly shifted through the years to large, open lots as their focus and method of selling, rather than the showroom. While many showrooms may still contain a car or two, they are increasingly filled with desks to finalize the sales paperwork.

In order to best investigate the subject of mid-century automobile showrooms, this study is bounded by limitations including geography and a period of significance of 1945 through 1974. Research was confined to the state of Virginia for both personal and academic reasons. I am a Virginia native who has grown up learning about and being surrounded by the state's colonial and revolutionary history. It is unsurprising that the state that began as the first English colony, known as "The Mother of Presidents" for providing four of the first five presidents of the United States, and the site of the British surrender during the Revolutionary War trumpets its early history. However, Virginia's history extends well past this early history or its Civil War history. Virginia has been moving into the study of mid-century architecture, as is evident in the Virginia Department of Historic Resources' (the state's historic preservation office) publication of the *New Dominion Virginia Architectural Style Guide* in 2014.[10] However, many aspects of mid-twentieth century architecture have yet to be thoroughly examined in Virginia,

[10] Melina Bexirdijian and Lena Sweeten McDonald, *New Dominion Virginia Style Guide*, (Richmond: Department of Historic Resources, 2014), i-95.

one such area being automobile showrooms of the era. Buildings of this type represent a significant time in American history, when auto-culture was at its height, that should, at minimum, be researched and documented, as it is unknown exactly how many of this type of resource have already been lost.

However, most significantly, during the post-war period America experienced dramatic growth in both its government and military that was heavily focused on the Washington, D.C. area. The impacts of this growth not only included the expansion of government and military facilities into the state of Virginia, but also included an influx of workers who moved into the exploding suburbs in Northern Virginia.[11] Decisions such as choosing to construct the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia led to a boom in surrounding communities.[12] The Hampton Roads, or Tidewater, area was similarly affected as an increased "demand for arms and ships bolstered the [area's] shipbuilding industry" and drew in workers to meet the growing need for labor.[13] Additionally, the Cold War military industrial complex "ensured a continuation of the federal spending and military-related industry in Virginia," and the construction of highways, interstates, and beltways connected the state like never before.[14]

A period of significance for this research has been established between 1945 and 1974. This period begins with the end of World War II, when new building materials and

[11] "Transportation in Virginia," Virginia Museum of History and Culture. Accessed April 1, 2020. https://www.virginiahistory.org/collections-and-resources/virginia-history-explorer/transportation-virginia; Charles A. Grymes, "The District of Columbia: Shaping Northern Virginia," Virginia Places. Accessed April 1, 2020. http://www.virginiaplaces.org/regions/16dc.html; Bexirdijian and McDonald, *New Dominion Virginia Style Guide,* 2.
[12] Grymes, "The District of Columbia."
[13] Dana Bivens, *A History of Conservation and Preservation in the Commonwealth of Virginia From World War II to the early Twenty-First Century* (Richmond: Virginia Commonwealth University, December 2013), 5.
[14] "Transportation in Virginia," Virginia Museum of History and Culture.

designs began to prevail and a pent up desire for consumer products could finally be unleashed. Following the war, restrictions were lifted on the construction of automobiles, and buyers who had themselves been economically constricted by first the Great Depression and then the war were eager to purchase the freedom and status that auto dealers promised accompanied the purchase of an automobile. As a result of the supply of automobiles provided by reinstated manufacturers, and the demand provided by an eager American public, auto dealers not only needed space to sell automobiles, but they also needed to set themselves apart and convince consumers to purchase from their dealership rather than a competitor's. This led not only to a practical increase in construction, but also to the use of new materials and designs to assure consumers that a dealership was in-sync with the latest trends and styles.

The period of significance extends through 1974, which marked a change in the marketing and selling of automobiles due to foreign imports. When an attempt was first made to introduce smaller foreign, especially Japanese, cars into the American market, they were received as nothing more than a source of comedy by many American consumers who viewed bigger as better. However, following changes in legislation and oil crises, this source of comedy quickly became America's biggest desire. With the enactment of the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 and the Clean Air Act of 1970, manufacturers attempted to redesign their existing cars to meet these new requirements. However, these boats on wheels could not create the same amount of power they were previously marketed with the promise of, and their size meant that they required more gasoline to power.

The oil crisis in 1973-1974 brought with it a desire by the American public to drive smaller, more fuel efficient cars – a demand that was met by Japanese and other

foreign manufacturers. American manufacturers had always released their new models at the same time every year; however, Japanese manufacturers released new models as soon as they were ready and this difference brought about the downfall of the celebrated annual model releases at dealerships.[15] Changes such as these impacted the way automobiles were marketed to the American public, and thus marks the end of our period of significance.

In order to investigate the significance surrounding Virginia's mid-century automobile showrooms, a methodology was developed to gather and interpret the data. The first step in this methodology was to identify the automobile showrooms in Virginia that were constructed within the period of significance. First, the Virginia Department of Historic Resources' database, the Virginia Cultural Resource Information System (V-CRIS), which contains architectural and archaeological survey information from around the state, was consulted. In V-CRIS, surveyed information that has been entered can be searched by various categories including construction date and building type. For this thesis, a report was run for resources built between 1945 and 1974 that were listed with their building type being 'Automobile Showroom.' The category of 'Automobile Showroom' had been used for varying types of auto-sales related properties, so the next step was to determine which resources were truly constructed as indoor automobile showrooms. Once these resources were narrowed down, research was completed to identify additional automobile showrooms constructed during this time period that had not yet been surveyed.

[15] Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 13; Jones, *Mass Motorization + Mass Transit,* 109.

Following the identification of the resources for study, they were entered into a matrix to categorize resource features that could display patterns within this group. Categories included construction date; current and historic uses; whether the resource was extant, demolished or renovated without retaining character defining features; original brand sold, if known; lot characteristics; and character defining features. Current and historic photographs, aerial photographs, and maps were consulted to satisfy the matrix fields; although, since photographs were not accessible through V-CRIS some showroom photos were imprecise and of low quality. Showrooms that could be accessed were visited, and four of the visited showrooms were examined in further detail to demonstrate the patterns revealed from the matrix.

In order to explore the question of significance of mid-century automobile showrooms in Virginia, this thesis has been broken down into chapters. A review of the leading researchers and their bodies of work is laid out in Chapter Two, which will provide the basis upon which the rest of this research and conclusions are built. Chapter Three will be the contextual background in which this question is situated, building largely upon the works discussed in Chapter Two to explore American automotive history, mid-century building materials and commercial architecture, and America post-World War II. The fourth chapter will describe the methodology used and the results from the sample study and case studies, and Chapter Five will analyze these resources for patterns and relationships that situate them in the wider scope of automotive and consumer history in America. Finally, Chapter Six will summarize conclusions and explore potential avenues for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study does not exist in a vacuum and relies upon the works of leading researchers who have significantly impacted their fields of study. The researchers who have most heavily impacted this work are Carol Dyson, Richard Longstreth, Chester Liebs, Robert Genat, John B. Rae, John Jerome, James J. Flink, John Heitmann, Dan Albert, and Gabrielle Esperdy. The works of these authors created a basis upon which to build this argument, and without which there would be no ground on which to stand.

Carol Dyson is the chief architect, tax incentives manager, and deputy state historic preservation officer with the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office. Dyson is a leader in the study of mid-century commercial architecture with much of her work focusing on main street storefronts. An advocate for this misunderstood period of architecture, Dyson encourages communities and preservation commissions to see the importance of mid-century commercial architecture through her publications and presentations. Three of Dyson's articles, published between 2008 and 2017, were used to understand mid-century commercial architecture, its components, and identifiable features – "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism: Design and Materials," "Midcentury Commercial Design Evaluation and Preservation: An opportunity for Commissions," and "How to Work with Storefronts of the Mid-Twentieth Century: A Mid-Twentieth Century Storefront Components Guide."

Dyson's three articles address post-war materials, architectural components, and the significance of this period of architecture. In "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism:

Design and Materials," Dyson establishes a context in which the "architectural expression of modernism" took hold in America.[16] She addresses the new types of businesses, which brought their own building types in the modern styles, as well as the desire of many older businesses to "update or modernize their existing building" for current styles and consumer tastes.[17] New post-war materials, as well as the re-tooling of older materials, and the deconstruction of storefront facades led to 'open' or 'visual' fronts which created "direct visual connection between the building interior and the sidewalk."[18] Finally, Dyson expresses the urgency with which these buildings need to be addressed, explaining that "many fine examples [have been] demolished or irretrievable remodeled and many that remain are endangered."[19]

"Midcentury Commercial Design Evaluation and Preservation: An Opportunity for Commissions," and "How to Work with Storefronts of the Mid-Twentieth Century: A Mid-Twentieth Century Storefronts Components Guide" are both situated in the same mid-twentieth century context that Dyson established in "Design and Materials." In "An Opportunity for Commissions," Dyson provides guidance in how preservation commissions should approach mid-century commercial buildings and storefronts, while arguing for the significance of these materials and buildings in "architecture, commerce, and 20th century mercantile history."[20] Finally, Dyson's "How to Work with Storefronts of the Mid-Twentieth Century," provides definitions, explanations, materials, and visuals

[16] Carol Dyson, "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism: Design and Materials," in Proceedings of the Mid-Century Modern Structures: Materials and Preservation Symposium, ed. Kathryn Doyle, Andrew Ferrell, Frank E. Sanchis III, and Mary F. Striegel, NCPTT, St. Louis, Missouri, April 13-16, 2015: 161.
[17] Dyson, "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism," 161, 165.
[18] Ibid, 164-165.
[19] Ibid; 168.
[20] Carol Dyson, "Opportunity for Commissions," *The Alliance Review* (Spring 2017): 5.

of the components of mid-century storefronts to assist in understanding these styles which are "swiftly disappearing."[21]

Another force in the world of nineteenth and twentieth century architecture, particularly commercial architecture, is architectural historian Richard Longstreth. Longstreth has been active in historic preservation throughout his career, and has "figured prominently in efforts to save numerous mid-twentieth-century sites, locally and nationally."[22] While he has written on a range of topics, Longstreth has developed a body of work which defends and argues for the preservation of the recent past, a period he defines as post-World War II and primarily between 1945 and the early 1970s.[23] Such works include *Looking Beyond the Icons: Midcentury Architecture, Landscapes, and Urbanism;* "When the Present Becomes Past," in *Past Meets Future: Saving America's Historic Environments;* "The Significance of the Recent Past," in the *APT Bulletin;* "I Can't See It; I Don't Understand It; and It Doesn't Look Old to Me," in the *Historic Preservation Forum;* "Integrity and the Recent Past," in *Preserving the Recent Past 2;* and "What to Save? Midcentury Modernism as Risk," in the *Architectural Record.* [24]

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[21] Carol Dyson, "How to Work with Storefronts of the Mid-Twentieth Century," published for National Main Street Meeting, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, April 2, 2008: 2.
[22] "Richard Longstreth," Department of American Studies Columbian College of Arts and Sciences, George Washington University. Accessed September 18, 2019 https://americanstudies.columbian.gwu.edu/richard-longstreth.
[23] Richard Longstreth, *Looking Beyond the Icons: Midcentury Architecture, Landscape, and Urbanism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 223.
[24] Ibid, x-27; Richard Longstreth, "When the Present Becomes Past," in *Past Meets Future: Saving America's Historic Environments,* ed. Antoniette J. Lee (Washington, DC: Preservation Press, 1992): 213-225. Accessed September 18, 2019. http://files.umwblogs.org/blogs.dir/7609/files/Longstreth.pdf; Richard Longstreth, "The Significance of the Recent Past," *APT Bulletin* 23, no. 2 (1991): 12-24; Richard Longstreth, "I Can't See it; I Don't Understand It; and It Doesn't Look Old to Me," *Historic Preservation Forum* 10 (Fall 1995): 6-15; Richard Longstreth, "Integrity and the Recent Past," in *Preserving the Recent Past 2*, ed. Deborah Slaton and William G. Foulks (Washington: National Park Service, Historic Preservation Education Foundation, and Association for Preservation Technology, 2000), 2-1 to 2-6; Richard Longstreth, "What to Save? Midcentury Modernism at Risk," *Architectural Record* 188 (September 2000): 59-61.

Throughout this body of works, Longstreth argues a case for the significance of exemplary, unknown, and commonplace components of the built environment from the post-World War II era. While Longstreth notes in republications of earlier articles that "preserving the recent past, now extending to work of the 1970s, has become a widespread, grassroots-driven activity, as well as one spurred by national organizations, here and abroad," he still addresses the urgency that is required to consider architecture built during the second half of the twentieth century.[25] He explores the ways modern architecture reflects patterns of American societal changes, as well as the ways preservationists are often eager to dismiss this era of architecture with arguments of age and style, but that are actually largely due to taste and subjectivity.

A major theme that reappears throughout his works is explicitly stated in his article "Integrity and the Recent Past." "The purpose of preservation is not to second-guess the past, not to improve upon the past, and certainly not to judge the past by our own standards; it is to preserve the past on its own terms."[26] Longstreth takes this idea and applies it to the study of American architecture constructed during the mid-twentieth century. He implores preservationists to not be restricted by idealized conceptions of 'style' and to remove as much taste and subjectivity as possible in order to appreciate and preserve a period of the built environment that will otherwise be quickly lost due to a lack of appreciation and the idea that in order to stay modern a commercial building must frequently be updated if it hopes to retain economic viability.[27]

[25] Longstreth, "I Can't See It; I Don't Understand It; and It Doesn't Look Old to Me," 35.
[26] Longstreth, "Integrity and the Recent Past," 5.
[27] Longstreth, "The Significance of the Recent Past," 21.

Lastly, Chester Liebs – a landscape historian, preservationist, and international heritage educator – is the founding Director of both the University of Vermont's Historic Preservation Program and the Summer Institute at the University of New Mexico. Liebs is regarded as a "prolific photo-documentarian of cultural landscapes," and includes on his list of accomplishments two Fulbright Fellowships to Japan and the 2004 James Marston Fitch Award from the NCPE.[28] Published in 1985, Liebs seminal work *Main Street to Miracle Mile: American Roadside Architecture* is one of the earliest studies of the mid-twentieth century roadside landscape and auto-related architecture.

An influence on many studies, exhibits, and preservation efforts, this book begins with a history of the motorist and the roadway, and makes its way through the growing commercialization and urban decentralization that was a result of the "commercial availability of the automobile."[29] Liebs then goes on to examine the evolution of building types that developed as a result of this increasing autocentrism, including motels, supermarkets, drive-in theaters, and automobile showrooms. His exploration of the development of automobile showrooms establishes a relationship between urban development, building materials, and the American consumer which places buildings of this type into a contextual pattern in American history.

Award winning author and photographer Robert Genat has published over forty books and one hundred magazine articles on transportation and military subjects. Today, Genat is the art director and editor of the RedStar Pilots Association's magazine *Red*

[28] "Chester Liebs," VERTOH. Accessed September 20, 2019 http://unmphotolandscape.org/speakers/chester-liebs-burnette/; "UNM CSWR Chester H. Liebs Papers: About this Collection," New Mexico Digital Collections. Accessed September 20, 2019 https://econtent.unm.edu/digital/collection/liebs.
[29] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 17.

Alert.[30] Genat's book *The American Car Dealership* chronicles the development and evolution of America's automobile dealerships from the opening of the first independent dealership in 1896 to his contemporary period of 1999.[31] Areas of focus within this evolution include the architecture and locations of dealerships, promotions used to attract customers to showrooms, tactics used by salesmen, selling used cars, and the role of service and parts departments utilized after the sale. Within each area of focus, Genat provides a chronological development which allows readers to understand the history behind each component comprising automobile dealerships.

Similar to Chester Liebs' *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* the second chapter of Genat's book, titled "Dealership Architecture and Location: From Store Front to Auto Mall," provides details about the development of auto dealerships and showrooms that was crucial to understanding this building type.[32] This chapter emphasizes style and design components that developed as important parts of the automobile showroom type. Included in these components are colors and materials, lighting and signs, size and physical location, emphasis and importance of the storefront and showroom windows, utilizing interiors as a part of the visual front display, and combining all of these factors for advertising and branding through architecture.

A series of works were consulted to understand the history of the automobile in America. In his 1965 book *The American Automobile: A Brief History*, John B. Rae chronicles the history of the automobile from its 1893 beginnings to the contemporary 1960s automobile. A professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the

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[30] "About Robert Genat," Robert Genat, SmugMug. Accessed December 27, 2019. https://www.robertgenat.com/About-Robert-Genat/i-WXFvjVD.
[31] Genat, *The American Car Dealership*, 17.
[32] Robert Genat, "Dealership Architecture and Location: From Store Front to Auto Mall," in *The American Car Dealership* (Osceola, WI: MBI Publishing Company, 1999), 39-63.

founder and president of the Society for the History of Technology, Rae's work is credited as "creating and legitimizing automotive history as a specialized field of scholarly study," as well as being "the first complete, authoritative treatment of the whole span of the automobile industry."[33]

In his highly critical 1972 work *The Death of the Automobile: The fatal effect of the Golden Era, 1955-1970,* John Jerome means his title quite literally, calling for the death of the automobile by recounting what he describes as its disastrous effects on America. A self-proclaimed "car nut," Jerome worked as an automotive journalist for ten years before he quit, claiming that his "ardor had simply cooled."[34] Characteristic of many disenchanted Americans in the 1970s, Jerome cites financial, environmental, and safety examples as reasons the automobile must go and believes this removal is eminent. He includes in his scathing review the history of the automobile in America and the far reaching influences it has had on America's culture.

Professor emeritus at the University of California, Irvine, James J. Flink addresses the development the American car culture in his 1975 work *The Car Culture* and his 1988 expansion *The Automobile Age.* Developing on the historical narrative set forth by authors such as John B. Rae, Flink analyzes the development of the uniquely American car-culture which took hold in the 1920s and continuously grew during the mid-twentieth century. Flink discusses not only the rise of the automobile industry and its associated technology, but also the impacts that the industry, technology, and increasing mobility had on the American public. He additionally addresses the impacts of foreign manufacturers, the impact of the automobile in other parts of the world, and the future of

[33] James J. Flink, "John Bell Rae (1911-1988)," *Technology and Culture* 30, no. 3 (1989): 720-721.
[34] Jerome, *The Death of the Automobile*, 18.

the automobile as technologies continued to develop. Flink concludes his book by claiming that the "Automobile Age" ended by the early 1970s when the government realized "unlimited accommodation to mass personal automobility" was not viable.[35]

Published in 2018, the second edition of John Heitmann's *The Automobile and American Life* explores the impacts the automobile had on American culture with a more modern lens. Professor emeritus at the University of Dayton, Heitmann's research has focused on the relationship between science, technology, and religion, as well as the history of the automobile.[36] Similar to James Flink, Heitmann delves into the history of the automobile while focusing on its prominent place within American popular culture. With impacts ranging from movies to music, from literature to love, Heitmann explores the way the automobile dug its gears into every facet of American culture for better or worse.

In another modern assessment of the history of the automobile and American car-culture, Dan Albert moves through the past, present, and future of the automobile in his 2019 book *Are We There Yet? The American Automobile Past, Present and Driverless.* With a PhD from the University of Michigan, Albert currently writes for *n+1* magazine about the "past, present, and future of cars."[37] Examining the development of America's car-culture from the approach of his own car experiences, Albert discusses what brought the automobile to such a prominent position in America, how it continued to secure its place, its downfalls, how this culture has changed in the modern world, and where it may progress in the near future.

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[35] Flink, *The Automobile Age,* 408.
[36] "John Heitmann," Directory, University of Dayton. Accessed January 16, 2020. https://udayton.edu/directory/artssciences/history/heitmann_john.php.
[37] Dan Albert, "Dan Albert," GoodReads. Accessed January 16, 2020. https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/18840059.Dan_Albert.

Gabrielle Esperdy's 2019 *American Autopia: An Intellectual History of the American Roadside at Midcentury* examines the way the automobile impacted the American landscape and the development of auto-centric architecture. Associate Professor of Architecture at the New Jersey Institute of Technology and editor of *SAH Archipedia,* Esperdy follows the developments and mid-century critiques of these new types of architecture. She addresses the impacts of both the architecture and the automobile on the landscape and culture as Americans continually choose to adapt their lives more and more to the needs of the automobile.

Overall, the literature that exists on the specific topic of automobile showrooms is limited and is not exclusively comprised of scholarly works. While the subject has been touched on by a few authors, the majority of the literature that includes automobile showrooms primarily focuses more broadly on auto-related commercial building types or the automobile itself. To fully understand the topic, the literature for related contexts was heavily consulted, including mid-century commercial buildings and materials, automobile history, and the automobile in American culture. Extensive work has been done to investigate and document these related areas which provided supporting contextual information for the research on automobile showrooms. By investigating the significance of Virginia's mid-century automobile showrooms, this thesis will assist in filling the void of academic work on this building type.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXT

In order to claim the significance of mid-century auto showrooms in Virginia, the context from which, and in which, they developed must first be understood. This context, however, is the result of multiple layers, which converged to create such showrooms. Beginning with broader themes and narrowing down, this chapter will explore the context surrounding mid-century automobile showrooms. Starting with the rise and sales of the automobile to understand the role of the automobile in the first half of the twentieth century, the chapter then moves into examining the automobile's infiltration into American culture during the second half of the twentieth century. Next, the chapter will explore the development of showrooms and their styles, as well as building materials during the post-war period. The period of significance, 1945-1974, will then be presented to provide context on the specific period being examined. Lastly, the chapter moves through the Virginia Context from the period.

The Rise and Sales of the Automobile

The history and development of the automobile is discussed at length in various publications and therefore will not be intensely regurgitated here. However, it is necessary to understand key moments in the development of the machines that came to dictate American life. Prior to the advent of the assembly line by Henry Ford in 1914, automobiles were expensive to produce and were primarily seen as luxury and leisure

toys for upper class Americans.[38] This changed once the assembly line allowed for cheaper manufacturing, and even more so after Ford offered his workers an unprecedented five dollars a day, thus allowing blue collar workers access to the automobile as an affordable means of transportation.[39]

With more Americans able to afford the luxury of an automobile, manufacturers needed to expand their retail networks.[40] Early agencies, or dealerships as we know them, were run by those who were already in the selling and service business for "horse-age transportation."[41] The increasing volume of automobile sales led to the need for new salesrooms that were larger and better suited for auto sales.[42] By 1918, architectural magazines such as *The American Architect* were already featuring articles addressing "the various requirements or spatial needs of automotive showrooms," distinguishing them from other types of retail.[43] Building "impressive and attractive" showrooms was one way dealers could gain public confidence in their merchandise, and many early examples were designed to be "perceived as civic assets" due to their resemblance to banks, office buildings, and railroad depots.[44] The use of reinforced concrete, beginning in the early 1900s, was the ideal material for showroom skeletal systems as it could support large loads, was vibration resistant, and was relatively fireproof. Architects could then conceal this utilitarian construction under facades matching popular design tastes to appeal to potential customers.[45]

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[38] Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life*, 12.
[39] Genat, *The American Car Dealership, 8.*
[40] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 75.
[41] Ibid; Mary Olds Toshach, "Automobile Showrooms, the development of a building type," Master's Thesis, Ball State University (1985), 12, 31.
[42] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 75-76.
[43] Toshach, "Automobile Showrooms," 39.
[44] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 79.
[45] Ibid, 79-80.

Even as automobiles became more accessible to the American working class, their uses remained primarily centered around exploring, touring, and recreation rather than daily transportation.[46] In addition to being a new form of recreation, automobiles were also a new and mobile status symbol, quickly becoming an example of "conspicuous consumption," which is defined as "the practice of purchasing goods or services to publicly display wealth rather than to cover basic needs."[47] By the 1920s, a car was a family's most expensive purchase besides a home, and with "peer and advertisement pressure" to purchase an automobile, Americans were "anxious to do as much with [them] as possible."[48] This desire for additional uses and the economic prosperity of the period, combined with installment plans such as GM's "GMAC" program, meant that by the middle of the 1920s the automobile had been domesticated. Automobiles were shifting from luxury to a part of everyday life, bringing the American automobile market close to the point of saturation.[49]

During the economic prosperity of the 1920s, dealers actively invested their own money in constructing new, purpose-built showrooms to win the business of the vast number of Americans on the search for an automobile of their very own.[50] Throughout the decade, these dealers participated in a "game of visual one-upsmanship," using architectural imagery to provide credibility for young dealerships, while also

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[46] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 19; Jones, *Mass Motorization + Mass Transportation,* 12.
[47] Michael L. Berger, "The Car's Impact on the American Family," in *The Car and the City: The Automobile, The Built Environment, and Daily Urban* Life, ed. Martin Wachs and Margaret Craford, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1991), 59; "Definition of 'Conspicuous Consumption," The Economic Times. Accessed October 10, 2019. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/definition/conspicuous-consumption.
[48] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 20.
[49] Jones, *Mass Motorization + Mass Transit,* 47; Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 9, 20; Berger, "The Car's Impact on the American Family," 57.
[50] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 81; Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 40.

"symbolizing the power of well-established corporations and the prosperity of successful dealers."[51] This "visual one-upsmanship" was especially common in newly developing commercial districts known as 'automobile rows.' Automobile rows, or 'auto rows,' began to develop in the early 1900s as auto dealers and manufacturers began moving outside of the central downtown. Whether motivated by land or rent prices, the desire for larger lots, or following the lead of other dealerships, dealers began moving their showrooms further from downtown, while remaining along a main road. Once one dealer moved, others quickly followed, aiming to convince customers that their showroom was the better, more fashionable, and more modern option. As more dealerships migrated to these auto rows, repair shops and warehouses followed and soon a commercial district, dedicated to purchasing, servicing, and selling the automobile, was born.[52]

Manufacturers, primarily led by General Motors, adopted strategies such as annual model changes, declining price competition, planned obsolescence, and "trading-up" that were used as attempts to combat the impending market saturation.[53] In the early months of 1929, before the economy collapsed, GM's vice president of research Charles F. Kettering "plainly confess[ed] that his principal job was 'to make people dissatisfied with what they already have.'"[54] This idea that whether a product was useful or not it would be replaced the moment a newer and better product was available expanded into fields such as real estate and city planning, and contributed to a "cult of the new" in

[51] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 81; Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 40.
[52] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 83-84; Marcus R. Pollard and William B. Inge, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Norfolk Auto Row Historic District* (Norfolk, VA: Commonwealth Preservation Group, 2014), 22-24.
[53] David J. St. Clair, *The Motorization of American Cities,* (New York: Praeger Publishing, 1986), 126.
[54] Nathaniel Robert Walker, "American Crossroads: General Motors' Midcentury Campaign to Promote Modernist Urban Design in Hometown U.S.A.," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum*, 23, no. 2 (Fall 2016), 91.

which a deliberate effort was made to create a "new consumer consciousness" that would open Americans' "imagination and emotion to desire."[55] To achieve what GM coined "dynamic obsolescence," manufacturers began releasing annual model changes, as Alfred Sloan CEO of GM put it, "to make you dissatisfied with your current car so you will buy a new one."[56]

In the early days of the Great Depression, Sloan espoused that dynamic obsolescence would fuel the economy with product improvements leading to early replacements.[57] However, rather than an increase, the Depression brought about a steep drop in new car sales.[58] Even though Americans were no longer purchasing automobiles with the same fervor, they were still intrinsic to the ideal American life. Michael Berger describes a public service billboard from the advertising firm Foster and Kleiser during the "depths of the Depression" depicting a "'typical' American family: a Caucasian mother and father, two children, and a dog – going for a drive in their car," and explains that "the family car and its occupants had been chosen to symbolize the best of American life at a time of acute economic, political, and social distress" (Figure 1).[59] Similarly, Will Rogers is quoted as remarking during the Depression that "the United States was the only country where a person could drive himself to the poorhouse in an automobile."[60] So

[55] Walker, "American Crossroads, 91.
[56] Ibid; Kenneth R. Schneider, *Autokind vs. Mankind: An analysis of tyranny, a proposal for rebellion, a plan for reconstruction,* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1971), 179.
[57] Jerome, *The Death of the Automobile,* 55.
[58] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 86.
[59] Berger, "The Car's Impact on the American Family," 57.
[60] Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 9.

while Americans were not in the economic position to continue purchasing new cars, they clung to their old and used autos as a representation of "the American Way."[61]

Figure 1 "World's Highest Standard of Living: There's no way like the American Way," Foster and Kleiser public service billboard, circa 1930s. (Photo from https://timeline.com/great-depression-billboards-were-false-advertising-973ffbee981c.)

The decrease in new car sales not only brought the construction of new dealerships to a halt, but it also left dealers who had invested heavily in lavish dealerships overburdened.[62] During this time many dealers were left to make the best of their existing showrooms rather than constructing new buildings; however, manufacturers saw another

[61] Foster and Kleiser, "World's Highest Standard of Living: There's no way like the American Way," billboard (circa 1930). Accessed February 23, 2020. https://timeline.com/great-depression-billboards-were-false-advertising-973ffbee981c.
[62] Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 9, 42.

way out through modernization.[63] Although modernization in auto showrooms would not gain its full momentum in America until after World War II, modernization was beginning to gain traction in the pre-war years. Following the Great Depression in the mid- to late-1930s, manufacturers began pushing dealers to modernize through publications such as Oldsmobile's "Modern Buildings for Modern Automobile Dealers" in 1936 and Ford Motor Company's *Modern Buildings for Ford Dealers 1938*.[64]

The United States' entrance into World War II brought a sudden stop to both auto manufacturing and the modernization and construction of new automobile showrooms. During this time restrictions were placed on "nonessential construction," and materials required for manufacturing, along with labor, were in short supply.[65] Additionally, many automotive manufacturers had their factories retooled for defense manufacturing of airplanes, tanks, and other wartime necessities.[66] Similar to the mindset seen during the Great Depression, Americans on the Homefront continued to cling to their automobiles throughout the duration of the War.[67] With the end of World War II and the economic recovery from the Depression, Americans had a pent up desire to purchase new automobiles to replace their now decrepit models.[68] Once factories were retooled to allow for automobile production, vehicles "streamed from the assembly lines," and dealers were once again urged to modernize and create "eye-catching showrooms."[69]

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[63] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 86-87.
[64] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 86-87; Toshach, "Automobile Showrooms," 4.
[65] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 87.
[66] Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 10; Albert, *Are We There Yet?,* 114.
[67] Albert, *Are We There Yet?,* 116.
[68] Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 10; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 87.
[69] Ibid.

The Automobile in American Culture

While the automobile played a role in most countries in the world, the culture surrounding the car developed into something uniquely its own in America, especially during the mid-century period. John Heitmann explained that theologian Martin Marty "argued that the enthusiasm and passions surrounding the automobile had created a true, universal, and practical religion."[70] By the post-war period the automobile already had a strong hold on the American people. Prosperity from the war time economy and "easy and abundant credit" allowed Americans to consume like never before, and the freedom and status offered by the automobile was in high demand.[71] However, billboards and advertisements were not the only ways the automobile was pushed to the public.

Popular culture began simultaneously reflecting daily trends and further propelling the automobile into the forefront of the American mind. While dealerships were promoting their stock automobiles for the American public, a major component to the growing car-culture was the 'hot rod,' or an automobile that has been modified for increased power and speed. Hot rods could not be purchased from the dealership, rather they were automobiles that had been modified by consumers post-purchase. Encouraged by racing, the idea of the hot rod was promoted even more beginning in 1948 with the publication of *Hot Rod Magazine*. The target audience for this magazine, and most car sales, during this period was men and the editors quickly realized their best sales came from issues containing two things – "technology and pretty girls."[72] The fascination with hot rods, and their association with "pretty girls," continued into the 1950s in literature

[70] Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life*, 137.
[71] Ibid, 141.
[72] Ibid, 143.

such as Henry Gregor Felsen's book *Hot Rod* (1950) and Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (1957), and films such as *Hot Rod* (1950), *Hot Rod Rumble* (1957), *Drag Strip Girl* (1957), *Hot Rod Gang* (1958), and *Hot Rod Girl* (1956).[73]

In addition to *Hot Rod Magazine*, other periodicals emerged to take their place in the booming automotive market. Publications such as *Car Craft, Rod and Custom, Road and Track, Motor Trend, Mechanix Illustrated, and Sports Car Graphic* appealed to various niches and interests within the American automotive world. This interest in tinkering, fixing, and modifying automobiles was encouraged through these publications, but was also being instilled in a younger generation, since by the early 1960s model car building had become "the number one pastime of young boys."[74] The baby boomer generation was the first generation to be primarily carted around in automobiles as their families relocated further outside of cities into the suburbs, and in addition to working on automobiles, they were taught to "see driving as a higher form of citizenship."[75] By the 1950s, driver education courses were taught in a majority of America's public high schools, and the American Automobile Association (AAA) – the producers of much driver education material – taught children that "buying a car, prudently insuring it, and driving economically were not only vital to the 'driver's personal pocketbook, but to the future welfare of this country and the whole world.'"[76]

Like hot rods, the sports car also made its way into central roles on the big screen in films such as *Rebel without a Cause* (1957).[77] However, two trends emerged in the 1960s that would change film and American car-culture – the action thriller genre and the

[73] Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life*, 145, 165.
[74] Ibid, 138.
[75] Albert, *Are We There Yet?,* 136.
[76] Ibid, 138-139.
[77] Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life,* 147, 163.

height of the muscle car era. The 1949 Oldsmobile Rocket 88 was often accepted as the first muscle car with its lightweight body and V8 engine, but the "Golden Age of muscle cars" was officially ushered in with the 1964 release of Pontiac's GTO and the 1964 ½ release of the Ford Mustang, and lasted until the OPEC oil crises of 1973-1974.[78] Muscle cars became heavily featured in film, such as the mustangs featured in the James Bond film *Goldfinger,* and *Bullitt* with Steve McQueen. To date, the mustang has appeared in "over 200 spy, action, and comedy films," since 1965, and the lasting impact of these automobiles was evident when the *Bullitt* mustang sold at auction in January 2020 for $3.7 million.[79]

The presence of the automobile was also pervasive in the music industry. For mid-century film and music stars alike, "excessive and extravagant" automobiles, and being seen in them, went hand-in-hand with their fame.[80] The car became the subject of songs such as The Beach Boys' "409," Gene Vincent's "Pink Thunderbird," The Delicates' "Black and White Thunderbird," and Wilson Pickett's "Mustang Sally." Rock music "praised the car" for the freedom it offered and its embodiment of a "manifesto of self-definition" and cultural rebelliousness that separated the older generation's auto interests from the younger's.[81]

The automobile even went as far as to permeate amusement parks, becoming an attraction within Disneyland's 1955 Tomorrowland, a place where "hopes and dreams for

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[78] "A Historic Look at the Muscle Car Era," Cars Direct (January 27, 2012). Accessed January 20, 2020. https://www.carsdirect.com/car-buying/a-historic-look-at-the-muscle-car-era; Robert Benz, "Muscle Cars Explained: History, Evolution & Buyer's Guide," Gentlemen's Gazette (July 24, 2013). Accessed January 20, 2020. https://www.gentlemansgazette.com/muscle-cars-explained-history/.
[79] Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life,* 183; Peter Valdes-Dapena, "$3.7 million: Ford Mustang driven in the movie 'Bullitt' sells for record price," CNN Business (January 10, 2020). Accessed January 20, 2020. https://www.cnn.com/2020/01/10/cars/bullitt-mustang-auction-record-price/index.html.
[80] Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life,* 160.
[81] Ibid; Esperdy, *American Autopia*, 165.

the future become today's realities."[82] Disney's Autopia "celebrated cars and the American freeway" that was, at the time, still an idea of the future (Figure 10).[83] The controlled design of this attraction provided children the opportunity to feel as though they were driving their own automobile along the open road of the freeway, reinforcing that driving was fun and provided freedom. American families flocked to the Autopia attraction for the thrill of driving scaled-down imitations of hot rods which instilled excitement in Americans of all ages about the automobile. Autopia remains the last existing attraction from Disney's Tomorrowland and has received numerous updates to the cars and track to keep it up-to-date while continuing to excite new generations about the opportunities of driving an automobile.

Figure 2 "Roadsters in Tomorrowland" advertisement for Disneyland's Autopia attraction in Tomorrowland, 1955 (from https://www.vintagedisneylandtickets.blogspot.com).

[82] Rachel Withers, "Yesterland: How did Walt Disney's vision of a futuristic metropolis become a quaint symbol of a bygone era," Slate (September 4, 2017). Accessed January 20, 2020. https://slate.com/technology/2017/09/disneylands-tomorrowland-wa-once-an-ode-to-a-utopian-future.html.
[83] Withers, "Yesterland."

Development of Showrooms and their Styles

Following the end of World War II, manufacturers continued their push for showroom modernization through guidebooks that provided ideas for dealers to best identify sales opportunities through "new layout and styling that [would] keep property functional and modern as far into the future as a current knowledge of the business permit[ted]."[84] The heightened supply and demand for automobiles in the late 1940s meant a renewed rush of new showroom construction, and dealers once again were in competition to convince consumers to choose their dealership. To assist dealers, many manufacturers published guidebooks and held design competitions, including Ford's *Plans for New and Modernized Sales and Service Buildings for Ford, Mercury, and Lincoln Dealers*; Studebaker's *Postwar Housing and Facilities for Studebaker Dealers*; GM's *Planning Automobile Dealer Properties* and their "Design Competition for Dealer Establishments;" and Packard Motor Car Company's idea booklet and "free preliminary design services for their dealers."[85] Each of these guidebooks included related ideas that have influenced the basic way dealerships and showrooms were organized from the time of their publication to present day.[86]

New showrooms needed to reflect the modern automobiles they housed and therefore their designs followed the architectural trends of the day in an attempt to stand out from the next showroom.[87] In the nineteen-aughts and -teens, many showrooms were constructed with the same classical features that linked them in the consumer's mind to

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[84] General Motors Corp., *Planning Automobile Dealer Properties*, (Detroit, General Motors Corp., 1948), preface.
[85] Toshach, "Automobile Showrooms," 4, 46, 48; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 88; Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 32, 43; General Motors Corp., *Planning Automobile Dealer Properties.*
[86] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 88-89.
[87] Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 31, 45, 55.

civic assets such as banks and office buildings.[88] These early "motor marts" were typically constructed to be reflective of the commercial blocks surrounding them, with facades that included storefronts, upper-stories, and cornices.[89] Like furniture storefronts of the time, dealership storefronts were typically larger than other retail fronts; however, unlike the scale of home furnishings, the size of the automobiles compared to these storefront windows did not allow for ideal visual access.[90]

Additionally, many of these showrooms were located within city cores, meaning the multi-storied buildings were often directly connected to surrounding buildings and those without "side or rear access" included large doorways to allow the automobiles to be driven in and out of the showroom.[91] This connected, commercial block design also "influenced the interior organization" of the showrooms, with many dealers choosing to lay out their showrooms like "any large retail shop" and planning the "interior layouts and exterior elevations" separately.[92] As a result, the exteriors of many early showrooms "often sported bas-reliefs, grand ornamental cornices, and entrance porticoes."[93]

The 1920s brought a transition in showroom construction and design. In this period an increasing number of showrooms were constructed as one-story buildings, and the economic prosperity and the rising automotive technology of the 1920s ushered in a shift to the Art Deco style, or Zigzag Modern, characterized by color and ornament for decorative effects.[94] The most traditional of the modern styles, it was primarily a

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[88] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 79
[89] Ibid*,* 76.
[90] Ibid; Genat, *The American Car Dealership*, 56.
[91] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 76.
[92] Ibid; Genat, *The American Car Dealership*, 45.
[93] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 79.
[94] Robert M. Craig, "Transportation Imagery and Streamlined Moderne Architecture: A Case for a Design Typology," in *Roadside America: The Automobile in Design and Culture* ed. Jan Jennings (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1990): 16; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 53-55, 83, 86-87.

"substitution of machinelike ornament for classical ornament," consisting of a "variety of geometrical forms in low relief."[95] Often relying on "intricate details," Art Deco showrooms were designed to target slow moving, primarily pedestrian, traffic that allowed for the examination of the architectural details.[96] According to Chester Liebs, Art Deco's emergence occurred before roadside merchants were ready to fully "embrace the Moderne," and by the time they were, Streamline was the fashionable Moderne style.[97]

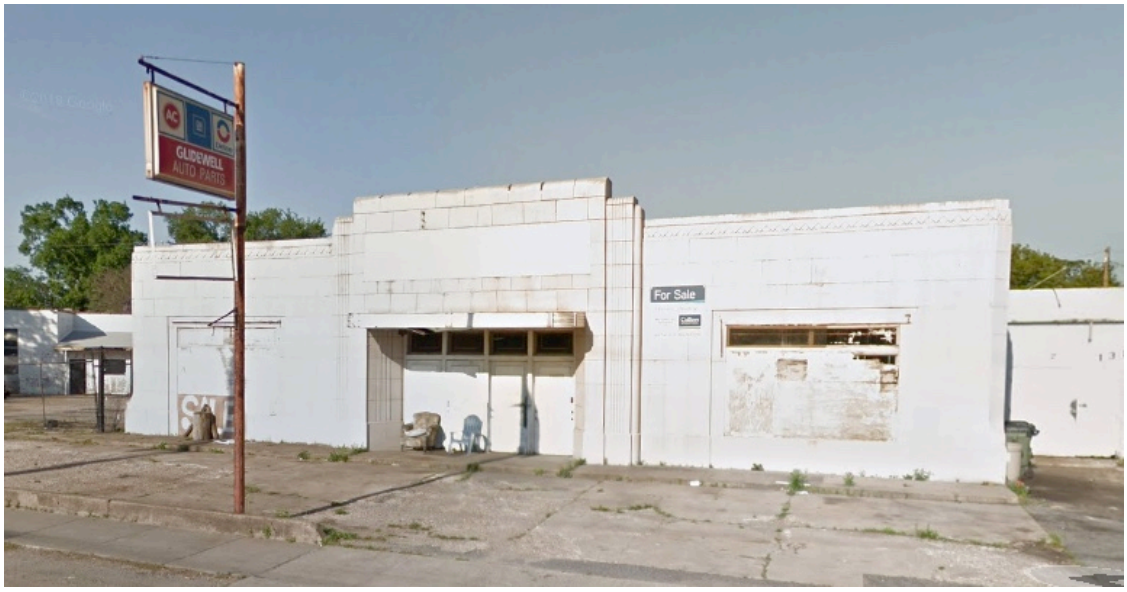

Figure 3 Art Deco automobile showroom constructed in 1940. 211 North Main Street, Chase City, Virginia (photo from Google Maps).

Streamline Moderne emerged as a reflection of "an increasingly modern American society," inspired by the "progressive forms of automobiles and other transportation machines of the day."[98] With its roots in the 1930s, this new style was used

[95] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 54.
[96] Ibid, 48.
[97] Ibid, 55.
[98] Craig, "Transportation Imagery and Streamlined Moderne Architecture," 15.

to symbolize the hope that accompanied "the world of tomorrow," and became synonymous with 'modern' as it was incessantly introduced into public consciousness by businesses linking streamlining to a prosperous future.[99] Architectural historian Robert Craig described the Streamline Moderne style as "adopt[ing] parallel lines of speed, fluid forms (rounded corners and neon lighting), and progressive and shiny building materials to embody in roadside architecture the streamlining aesthetic evidenced in contemporary industrial design."[100] Where Art Deco had aimed to reflect modernity and the machine, Streamline Moderne emerged from the actual designing and selling of machines such as automobiles, airplanes, and ships.[101]

Figure 4 Streamline Moderne automobile showroom constructed in 1950, now demolished. 419-421 North Washington Avenue, Pulaski, Virginia (photo from Google Maps).

[99] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 57, 60.
[100] Craig, "Transportation Imagery and Streamlined Moderne Architecture," 16.
[101] Ibid, 18; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 55.

Initially popularized in America by the Museum of Modern Art's 1932 International Exhibition of Modern Architecture, the International Style did not find a firm footing in roadside architecture until the late 1930s.[102] Influencing both the Art Deco and Streamline Moderne styles, the International Style is characterized by the white box, flat roof, total lack of ornamentation, and often cantilevers. However, far more influential than the characteristics themselves were the ideals that led to them. These ideals, and subsequent characteristics, were developed and spread by Modernist architects such as Le Corbusier. In his manifesto *Towards a New Architecture,* Le Corbusier urged architects not to be "stifled by custom" and historical styles, but to uncover "a style belonging to [their] own period" and to allow the "plan [to be] the generator" in determining a building's form, all while utilizing modern materials and building techniques.[103]

Much like other vernacular architecture, for showrooms and other roadside architecture loyalty was not focused on pure architectural styles, but instead was given to sales.[104] First and foremost these were commercial buildings marketing themselves and their products. It was not uncommon to see the zigzags of Art Deco merged with Streamline Moderne, and in turn the white box and flat roofs of the International Style combined with the "streamlined corners and flowline accents" to produce the 'Modern' look.[105] What Chester Liebs deemed a "pool of features" from Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, and International Modern embodied 'Modern' and were available for commercial businesses to pick and choose from in order to appeal to the devastated

[102] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 58.
[103] Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, trans. Frederick Etchells (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1986), 3, 7, 26, 92, 286.
[104] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 58.
[105] Ibid.

American public and instill a sense of hope in the technological future of America.[106] This period embodied the design idea of form following function, seeking to turn buildings constructed for machines into machines themselves.[107] Following Le Corbusier's idea that "the house is a machine for living," these machine-oriented buildings became "Machines for Selling."[108]

Just as it had in the automobile industry, World War II interrupted new construction and therefore the physical expression of style. Wide spread construction resumed in 1945, and with it the modern styles of the prewar era. However, now that the "world of tomorrow" had finally arrived, Americans were confronted with the same Streamline and International Style construction they had experienced before the war.[109] The pent up consumer demand which followed World War II meant that dealers could no longer simply have a modern building to win customers over. Instead, dealers had to set themselves apart from their competition and convince an increasingly mobile consumer base to notice and enter their showroom.[110]

Though initially seen in the late 1930s and 1940s, 'visual fronts' or 'open fronts' became popular after World War II as a way to attract customers' attention while still retaining Modern ideals by exhibiting function through the displaying of the interior on the exterior.[111] The term 'visual front,' occasionally referred to as 'open front,' was popularized by glass and storefront manufacturing companies in reference to a new style

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[106] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 58.
[107] Jones, *Mass Motorization + Mass Transit,* 40; Dyson, "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism," 164.
[108] Ibid; Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, 4.
[109] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 60.
[110] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 60, 87-88; Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 10.
[111] Mike Jackson, "Storefronts of Tomorrow: American Storefront Design from 1940 to 1970," in *Preserving the Recent Past 2*, ed. Deborah Slaton and William G. Foulks, (Washington, D.C.: Historic Preservation Education Foundation, National Park Service, and Association for Preservation Technology International, 2000), 2-58; Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile*, 61.

of storefront which emphasized vast expanses of plate, or tempered, glass windows rather than the typical view of windows "as part of the wall separating the inside from the outside."[112] With this technique, the showroom itself was now the display, providing around the clock advertising and visual appeal on the exterior, especially when lit at night.[113] As a later advertisement in NADA Magazine explained, "The large expanses of plate glass can establish your showroom as a mammoth showcase, displaying streamlined cars and acting as a continuous "silent salesman" selling service, cleanliness, dignity, and prestige."[114]

As already discussed, postwar America experienced consumerism on an unprecedented scale. However, not only was there a change in the level of consumption, but also in the way Americans interacted with products. Gone were the days of buying new products only after the durable one you owned first wore out. Postwar America was a country of dynamic obsolescence, and as such, products, and the retail establishments marketing them, needed to be in-tune with consumer tastes and current styles.[115] Visual fronts provided a direct link between consumers and products, using the styles and fashion of modernity to display their modern and fashionable merchandise.

A second approach to set businesses apart was the drastic exaggeration of a building's structural components, a style Chester Liebs coined "Exaggerated Modern."[116] In this form of "overstated functionalism," modern building materials were put together in dramatic "displays of technological exhibitionism" rather than for solely structural

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[112] Dyson, "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism," 161, 164-165; Genat, *The American Car Dealership*50; Jackson, "Storefronts of Tomorrow," 2-58.
[113] "Glass Showrooms Lure Customers," *NADA: The MANAGEMENT magazine of the Automotive Retailing Industry*, 35, no. 8 (August 1963), 36.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Dyson, "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism," 165.
[116] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 61.

purposes.[117] This style incorporated earlier modern forms, but emphasized angles and asymmetry on a grand scale, and also included elements inspired by science and technology, features often described as 'space age' (Figures 4, 5 and 6). During its time this style was often referred to as "Ultra-Modern," and today may also be classified as 'Googie.'[118] With new materials, and the retooling of old ones, the Exaggerated Modern style incorporated the new 'visual fronts' and became the popular architecture of the late 1950s and early 1960s.[119]

Figure 5 Example of Exaggerated Modern, constructed 1950. 857 Virginia Beach Boulevard, Virginia Beach, Virginia. (photo by author).

[117] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 61.
[118] Dyson, "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism," 166.
[119] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 64; Dyson, "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism," 167-168.

Figure 6 Example of Exaggerated Modern, constructed 1961 and now renovated without retaining the diamond pattern roofline and exposed plate glass and aluminum framed showroom. 1020 W Mercury Boulevard, Hampton, Virginia. (photo from Bill Cook flickr, https://www.flickr.com/photos/bossmustang/4214813456).

Figure 7 Example of Exaggerated Modern, constructed 1964 and now demolished. 800 North Glebe Road, Arlington, Virginia. (photo from Arlington Public Library).

With the popularization of visual fronts and modern and machine age styles such as Exaggerated Modern, automobile showrooms came into their own. As evidenced by the manufacturer-published guidelines for dealership properties, automobile showrooms had evolved into a discernable type and modern materials and styles ensured that this evolution was done in accordance with current tastes and trends. A major, and most obvious, component of automobile showrooms was the display window. All auto showrooms included this feature, constructing the display windows to "make the separating glass as inconspicuous as possible."[120] Location, lot size, and architectural style all contributed to determining the shape of the showroom in order to maximize visibility; however, regardless of shape, the showroom was always placed prominently in the most visible portion of the lot. Showrooms no longer stood alone on dealer properties, and as such, service wings were now an all but required feature, typically attached to the rear of the showroom. Another significant component for automobile showrooms was signage. Signage was featured as a required and crucial component in all dealership guidebooks; however, it is the component which is most commonly missing from today's extant mid-century auto showrooms.[121]

While the showroom was a key component of mid-century automobile dealerships, dealer properties after this period further shifted their designs away from utilizing the showroom as a critical dealership component. Although these trends began in the preceding decades, by the mid-1970s automobiles were "highly recognizable, standardized product[s]" and showrooms were considered "superfluous."[122] Dealers

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[120]General Motors Corp., *Planning Automobile Dealers Properties*, 69.
[121] Ibid, 70; Ford Motor Company, "Where Can I Find…?" Dealership Identification Program: The American Road (Dearborn, MI: Ford Motor Company, 1965-1969), 1-23.
[122] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 92.

recognized that the automobile itself along with "the price sticker slapped on the side window" were the important elements in selling automobiles.[123] Rather than eye-catching showrooms, cars were the "primary means of attracting attention," and by presenting an entire inventory along the roadside for passing motorists to view, dealers fully embraced the idea of mass-marketing their mass-produced wares.[124] This transition required larger and larger parcels of land and open space to provide unobstructed views of the inventory from the roadway. This mass-marketing approach encouraged, and in some cases forced, smaller dealership to dissolve or be absorbed into larger dealer properties that could market at this scale. Additionally, this change resulted in the further relocation of the showroom away from the road, as well as a shift in its purpose.

While all of these components and changes in design culminated to create modern and machine age showrooms, it is equally important to understand the building materials of the mid-century period that contributed to their development.

Building Materials and Design

Prior to World War II, with the development of styles such as Art Deco, Streamline Moderne, and International, designers had begun experimenting both with new materials and new uses for older materials. However, unlike the pause in development of styles and commercial construction that occurred from 1941 to 1945, the Second World War created a spike in research and development of new materials, new ways to utilize old materials, and production standardization that would benefit new construction following the war.[125] Both before and after the war, automobile dealerships

[123] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 92.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Dyson, "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism," 163.

and other autocentric buildings were "often the first architectural expressions of modernism to reach a community."[126]

Immediately following the war in 1946, the aluminum storefront manufacturer Kawneer ran a national campaign titled "Machines for Selling," promoting their storefronts with emphasis on "efficient machine-age design for a new modernist world."[127] This campaign reflected the ideas seen in architectural styles such as Streamline Moderne, tying the research of the machine-age into the designs of buildings and storefronts, and arguing that "success depended on machine-like coordination of every working part of a store."[128] The rationale of a store functioning like a machine would be mirrored in automobile dealerships, whose properties evolved to include showrooms, parts sales, and service wings to create a one-stop shop for customers.

As evidenced by campaigns such as Kawneer's, aluminum was a prominent component of modern commercial architecture. Aluminum, along with stainless steel, had been used prior to World War II as framing for plate glass windows and structural glass.[129] These pre-war aluminums primarily came with a clear-coat or mill-finish; however, after the war, anodized aluminum and colors of champagne and gold were added to the mix.[130] These variants of aluminums used for framing and support poles became most common in retail storefronts, as they provided a sturdy, yet thin framing which obstructed as little of the view of the interior displays as possible.

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[126] Dyson, "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism," 161.
[127] Ibid; Kawneer Store Fronts, "Machines for Selling," *Architectural Record*, 99, no. 2 (February 1946), 15. Accessed January 1, 2020. https://www.usmodernist.org/AR/AR-1946-02.pdf.
[128] Dyson, "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism," 164.
[129] Dyson, "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism," 162.
[130] Ibid, 165.

Combined with aluminum framing, steel lintels that stretched across an entire storefront allowed for vast expanses of plate glass to be utilized.[131] While this construction method had begun prior to World War II, the trend exploded with the modernization of commercial buildings following the end of the war. Sheets of plate glass as large as ten by twenty-five feet could now be produced and shipped to help create the visual front displays.[132] More impact resistant tempered glass was used to construct clear doors which were similarly framed with minimal hardware so as not to detract from interior displays. During the 1960s, it began to be recognized that float, or plate, glass could be dangerous in areas where human impact could occur. Many states began adopting regulations requiring the use of safety glasses in areas of foreseeable human impact, and in 1966 the "ANSI Z97.1 Standard for transparent safety glazing materials in building materials" was adopted as a national standard and tempered and other safety glasses became the new norm.[133]

Both new materials and older, re-tooled materials were used to develop new designs that were often "strikingly modern" and "expressed a period of American optimism and economic prosperity."[134] Materials such as aluminum, steel, glass and concrete were used to create new and dynamic structural forms that emphasized angles, asymmetry, and often the exaggeration of both massing and the structural forms themselves. Visual fronts paired with dramatic and exaggerated forms emphasized the modernity of the building to draw the attention of customers with the promise that the

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[131] Dyson, "Midcentury Commercial Design Evaluation and Preservation," 4.
[132] Dyson, "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism," 164.
[133] Anthony J. Shinsky, "Building Glass & Premises Safety – Expert Article," Robson Forensic (March 3, 2017). Accessed January 6, 2020. https://www.robsonforensic.com/articles/building-glass-safety-expert-witness/.
[134] Dyson, "Mid-Century Commercial Modernism," 167; Dyson, "Midcentury Commercial Design Evaluation and Preservation" 4.

merchandise inside such modern buildings was equally modern and in-style.[135] Whether angled or curved, the designs of these modern commercial buildings intended to direct the customers into the store, turning the display window into an architectural form and using the expansive visual fronts to provide a "more open relationship between consumers and products."[136]

Period of Significance: 1945-1974

As already noted, the late 1940s witnessed a resurgence of the automobile market and construction of new automobile showrooms. New materials and designs promised "the world of tomorrow" to American consumers and encouraged an unrivaled level of consumption.[137] As early as 1945, manufacturers such as General Motors and Ford Motor Company were holding design competitions for auto dealerships and publishing designs and ideas for modern dealership properties.[138] Early post-war automobiles were essentially dolled-up versions of pre-war automobiles. Even though the factories had been re-tooled to create automobiles again, it would take more time to develop new styles and new molds to produce a truly new design. In 1949, Ford unveiled the first post-war automobile to have a "new look," claiming it to be "The World's Newest Car." This style of automobile represented the first "clean break" from pre-war autos and assisted in ushering in the golden age of automobiles (Figures 7 and 8). [139]

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[135] Dyson, "Midcentury Commercial Design Evaluation and Preservation," 4.
[136] Ibid; Jackson, "Storefronts of Tomorrow," 58.
[137] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 57, 60.
[138] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 88; Toshach, "Automobile Showrooms," 4; General Motors Corp., *Planning Automobile Dealers Properties.*
[139] Albert, *Are We There Yet?,* 130.

Figure 8 1946 Ford Production Line (photo from saltofamerica.com).

Figure 9 "Henry Ford II Driving the First 1949 Ford off Assembly Line at Rouge Plane, 1948." Compared to the 1946 model (left) the 1949 Ford represented a "clean break" from pre-war automobiles (photo from Collections of Henry Ford, thehenryford.org).

The American public's auto-buying fever continued into the 1950s, reaching 39.6 million passenger cars registered in 1950.[140] In addition to still riding the post-war consumption high, American involvement in the Korean War sparked fears that there would be another bout of restrictions on auto manufacturing and sales.[141] Continuing the connection between "patriotism and automobility" that began during World War II, manufacturers created automobiles that Dan Albert claimed, "shouted that the American way was better, better than communism, better than totalitarianism, better than the ways of the peasant nations."[142] These fears of wartime restrictions, and ideas of patriotism and automobility combined to create a mindset of previously unseen consumerism that was further justified as "a reward for winning the war and a way to prevent another Great Depression."[143]

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[140] Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 11.
[141] Ibid*,* 11.
[142] Albert, *Are We There Yet?,* 131-132.
[143] Albert, *Are We There Yet?,* 131-132.

Following World War II, many small, independent automobile manufacturing companies popped up; however, following the "sales blitz" of 1952, few independent companies managed to survive independently from larger companies.[144] Even though Americans were spending a continually increasing percentage of their income on automobiles, few Americans desired automobiles that varied from the mainstream look for reasons of style as well as fears that such automobiles "might not have sufficient future trade-in value."[145] This left the Big Three – General Motors, Ford Motor Company, and Chrysler – to wield control of the automotive industry "defin[ing] the look and feel of the American automobile," as well as the look and feel of the American automobile showroom.[146]

By the mid-1950s, automobile styling was at its peak, continuing Sloan's mission of dynamic obsolescence and annual model introductions. John Jerome describes "consumer interest in the new cars" as "positively frenzied," describing the annual model release as "an event ranking with the Homecoming Game of the local high-school football team."[147] Robert Genat also compared this introduction to "the World Series of the automobile year," where Americans across the country would flock to their local showrooms to see the newest auto creations, and where dealers could take advantage of this visitation and excitement to promote their wares.[148] Annual model releases provided the opportunity for dealers to emphasize the 'show' in 'showroom' to appeal to customers. Leading up to the release, dealers would often cover their showroom windows

[144] Albert, *Are We There Yet?* 129; Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 11.
[145] Schneider, *Autokind vs. Mankind*, 41-42; Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 11.
[146] Albert, *Are We There Yet?,* 129.
[147] Jerome, *The Death of the Automobile,* 25.
[148] Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 65.

in paper or whitewash to increase the community's interest and curiosity.[149] Signs promoted the date of the new car reveal, an event which would frequently be split into a multi-day party. These parties were events for the whole family that were filled with balloons, banners, flags, and pennants all promoting the new models.[150] Some dealerships even went as far as utilizing searchlights that had previously been used to search for enemy aircraft during World War II to create eye-catching displays outside of their showrooms.[151] These parties made use of the showroom as a location to welcome customers in, and encourage them to stay, with refreshments, door prizes, and souvenirs all while displaying the modernity of the newest automobile model.[152]

With the American public under the guidance of auto manufacturers and placing heavy emphasis on distinctive vehicles, General Motors had 75 body styles by 1957, with 450 trim combinations.[153] These mid-1950s automobiles were bigger and heavier than previous models, and an ever growing "pressure of automotive necessity for good highways," led to the creation of a bill to finance the development of the interstate highways that was voted in both houses with only one dissent.[154]

In 1956, the National Interstate and Defense Highway Act was passed and emphasized the source of pride that American motorization had become. Owning a vehicle had become essential, and the development of the Interstate System would interconnect the country like never before, further promoting the necessity of automobiles. Along with the construction of interstates also came beltways, spur roads,

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[149] Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 65..
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid, 66.
[153] Ibid, 12; Schneider, *Autokind vs. Mankind*, 158.
[154] Schneider, *Autokind vs. Mankind*, 49.

and ring roads to assist in the flow of the ever increasing traffic, and to further connect the expanding suburbs to interstates and major cities. This golden age of automobiles could not last forever though, and with the recession of 1958, auto sales severely slowed and marked the beginning of the decline of the automobile industry.

In the early 1960s, Americans were recovering from the recession of the late 1950s and retained their faith in the future, largely demonstrated through the consumption of consumer goods and auto sales.[155] The ever increasing number of highways, freeways, and passenger automobiles had replaced alternative urban transportation systems such as privately owned local streetcar systems, and by 1963 the "United States accounted for 63% of the world's vehicles."[156] The American market was beginning to be taken seriously on a global scale, and in the early 1960s Japanese and European manufacturers attempted to break into this market.[157] However, the compact and sub-compact cars offered by manufacturers such as Toyota were not received with open arms by the muscle car loving American populace who retained their loyalty to the Big Three's American-made automobiles.

This dedication to obtaining the most modern developments out of Detroit encouraged auto dealers to continue to seek modern, effective designs for their showrooms to draw in customers. By this time, modern automobile showrooms were fully embracing the distinctive use of expansive windows for a visual front. Even though architectural styles varied, modern showrooms included large expanses of plate or tempered glass windows, typically framed by aluminum or another metal to create the

[155] Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 12.
[156] St. Clair, *The Motorization of American Cities*, 2; Albert, *Are We There Yet?,* 5.
[157] Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 12-13.

smallest amount of obstructions between passersby and the interior of the showroom. The importance of the "silent salesman" that was a glass showroom was highlighted and encouraged for dealers to adopt through publications such as *NADA: The MANAGEMENT magazine of the Automotive Retailing Industry Published by the National Automobile Dealers Association*.[158] Automobile dealers of the early 1960s continued to be encouraged to improve their dealership facilities by keeping it up-to-date and luring in customers "by the sight of an interesting showroom display" visible through an "all glass front."[159]

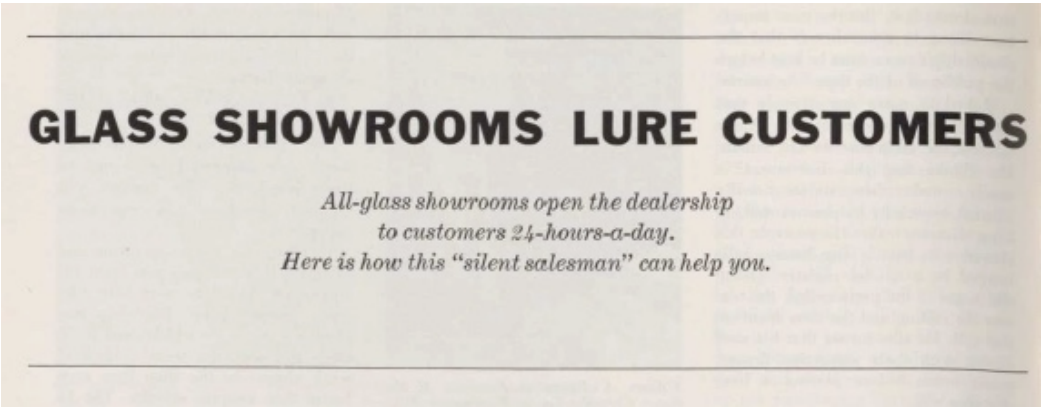

Figure 10 "Glass Showrooms Lure Customers" article title from August 1963 edition of NADA Magazine advertising the advantages of all-glass showrooms.

Even though many Americans continued their love affair with the personal automobile, the 1960s also brought with it concerns about the effects of this "intensive motorization."[160] With an increasing number of passenger automobiles on the roads and the nation's nascent interstate system still being constructed, traffic became a major

[158] "Glass Showrooms Lure Customers," 36.
[159] Ibid; "Liven Up Your Showroom!" *NADA: The MANAGEMENT magazine of the Automotive Retailing Industry*, 36, no. 6 (June 1964), 13.
[160] Jones, *Mass Motorization + Mass Transit*, 19.

concern for now congested cities that were not constructed to accommodate such transportation, let alone in such vast quantities. Additionally, automobiles were not constructed with concerns for environmental effects, and concerns of air pollution and fuel consumption grew quickly.[161] In 1962, Rachel Carson published *Silent Spring,* which called attention to the detrimental effects of modern materials and their construction techniques, a topic which applied to both the automobiles themselves and the showrooms that housed and sold them. Top members of America's automobile manufacturing corporations also began noticing these concerns and acknowledged the necessity to address them. However, rather than addressing changes to the automobiles that caused such side effects, General Motors president James Roche stated, when discussing expansion of the auto market during this time, that such expansion could be accomplished "*if* we achieve the better environment for driving that is necessary to maintain the automobile's utility and appeal at a high level."[162]

In addition to concerns of traffic and smog, the number of automobile related deaths had only continued to climb, even after efforts such as President Eisenhower's 1955 "Safe Driving Day."[163] Automobiles and safety, or rather the lack thereof, had been a subject of conversation since the earliest automobiles arrived in towns.[164] However, between 1960 and 1965, motor vehicle fatality rates had reached an average of 41,020 per year, and safety concerns were now at the forefront.[165] In attempts to lower the number of auto related deaths and create safer roads, the federal government intervened and adopted

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[161] Jones, *Mass Motorization + Mass Transit*, 109.
[162] Schneider, *Autokind vs. Mankind*, 86.
[163] Jerome, *The Death of the Automobile,* 177.
[164] Heitmann, *The Automobile and American Life,* 25.
[165] National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, "Motor Vehicle Traffic Fatalities and Fatality Rates, 1899-2015," *Traffic Safety Facts Annual Report* (February 14, 2017). Accessed December 30, 2019. https://cdan.nhtsa.gov/TSFTables/Fatalities%20and%20Fatality%20Rates%20(1899-2015).pdf.

the National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act of 1966 to impose safety regulations on America's automobiles. Such legislation provided for "recall campaigns with teeth in them," as well as requiring that safety features such as seatbelts and collapsible steering columns become standard equipment.[166] Additionally, insurance rates rose to match horsepower, assisting in the impending demise of the American muscle car.

Automobile manufacturers may have begun to fall under heavy criticism, but they continued to push on in their pursuit to sell their products. While many Americans were beginning to waver in their devotion to the automobile, many other Americans continued to seek individualized embodiments of style. By 1969, General Motors had increased from the 75 body styles and 450 trim combinations it manufactured a decade earlier to 175 body styles and 918 trim combinations.[167] By the late 1960s "the auto population curve [had] begun to bump against the human population curve and level off;" however, *Fortune* wrote in 1967 that "saturation cannot now be considered a serious threat to the auto market," as Americans were continuing to purchase two or three automobiles in a single household.[168]

If automobile manufacturers and dealers hoped the 1970s would bring a resurgence of the golden age of the automobile, they were sorely disappointed. Following the concerns of the effects of automobile emissions that arose in the 1960s, the Clean Air Act was enacted in 1970 to empower the Environmental Protection Agency Administrator to "set ambient air quality standards" and finally provided an avenue for a direct attack on the automobile.[169] With a growing focus on environmental sustainability,

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[166] Jerome, *The Death of the Automobile,* 200; Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 12.
[167] Schneider, *Autokind vs. Mankind,* 178
[168] Ibid, 44; Jones, *Mass Motorization + Mass Transit,* 116.
[169] Jerome, *The Death of the Automobile,* 223.

coupled with the continued worries about safety, there was a sense amongst the American public that everything that was being done regarding cars was wrong.[170] John Jerome wrote his auto-critical book *The Death of the Automobile: The Fatal Effect of the Golden Era, 1955-1970* when anti-automobile sentiments were at a newly reached height in 1972. Jerome's scathing critique amplified the feelings of many Americans during this decade experiencing the effects of air pollution and environmental impacts, traffic, and auto-related injuries or deaths claiming,

> The men who perpetrated the golden era of runaway automobile merchandising will join those other American rogue-villains who, in the pursuit of their niches, managed to wreak visible destruction on a land even so large as this. The buffalo hunters fit the category. The exterminators of the Indians. The lumber barons, strip miners, railroad magnates: the professional rapists of land, water, air, souls. The competition is keen for the dubious honor, but we are beginning to see that perhaps the car-makers are the ones who have destroyed most of all.[171]

Save the large niche of automobile enthusiasts, Americans in the 1970s had become disenchanted with automobiles and the autocentric world they had created. To add to the already prevalent disillusionment with American automobiles, the "new and tighter emission and safety regulations" meant that manufacturers "turned out cars that were uninspired when compared to those of the previous twenty years."[172] Combined with horsepower-matching insurance rates and the new emission regulations, the American muscle car era drew to a close. A final nail in the coffin came in 1973, which changed the tide of the American automotive industry.

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[170] Jerome, *The Death of the Automobile*, 241.
[171] Ibid, 246-247.
[172] Genat, *The American Car Dealership,*13.

Following years of "cheap, plentiful gas," Americans had been lulled "into thinking it would always be available."[173] However, in 1973 during the Arab-Israeli War, members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) "imposed an embargo against the United States in retaliation for the U.S. decision to re-supply the Israeli military and to gain leverage in the post-war peace negotiations."[174] What became known as the OPEC Oil Embargo, OPEC Oil Shock, or OPEC Oil Crisis created a "brief global recession" that contributed to a steep decline in the sales of full-size family automobiles that "were the bread and butter of the U.S. automobile industry."[175] The 350% increase in oil prices in 1973 led to a similarly steep increase in gasoline prices, pushing Americans to seek small, fuel-efficient automobiles that American manufacturers and dealers were unprepared to provide.[176]

The shocking prices of oil and gasoline in the early 1970s provided the ideal environment for the introduction of a second generation of Japanese and European imports. Americans seeking compact and sub-compact cars no longer scoffed at the small and fuel-efficient Japanese models. Imported automobiles provided "superior fuel efficiency" and triggered what would become a 28% decline of U.S. automobile production by 1980, and a 109% increase in Japanese production, largely due to America's demand for subcompact cars.[177] Japanese and European car dealers could not keep their automobiles in stock, and imported vehicles were in the highest demand.[178] In

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[173] Genat, *The American Car Dealership,*13.
[174] "Oil Embargo, 1973-1974," Office of the Historian. Accessed December 30, 2019. https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/oil-embargo.
[175] Jones, *Mass Motorization + Mass Transit,* 19.
[176] "Energy Crisis," National Museum of American History Behring Center, Smithsonian. Accessed December 31, 2019. https://americanhistory.si.edu/american-enterprise-exhibition/consumer-era/energy-crisis; Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 13.
[177] Jones, *Mass Motorization + Mass Transit,* 19, 191.
[178] Ibid, 109, Genat, *The American Car Dealership,* 13.

addition to impacting the demand for and production rates of American automobiles, foreign imports also impacted the strategies for marketing automobiles in America. The Big Three had traditionally released their annual models in the fall of each year, creating competitive annual models and the environment Genat deemed "the World Series of the automobile year."[179] On the other hand, foreign manufacturers released new models "when they were ready" which forced American manufacturers to follow suit.[180] This switch from fall introductions to releases at any point in the year, combined with the growing disillusionment with automobiles as anything more than a necessity, brought a close to the events which drew huge crowds into dealers' showrooms.

Although the OPEC Oil Crisis came to a close in the summer of 1974, the damage to American automobile manufacturing and sales, and the muscle cars and sedans of the mid-twentieth century had been done. With the end of annual model introductions, the pomp and circumstance surrounding automobile showrooms began to decline. Dealers began to transition to properties that presented new cars on vast lots and relegated the showroom to be used for sales paperwork and offices. As with any trend, automobile showrooms reflective of those constructed between 1945 and 1974 continued to be built by dealers who so desired; however, the end of this period, with its transition to imported automobiles and focus on the environment, ushered in a new era of automobile sales.

Virginia Context

Much like the rest of the country, the amount of commercial architecture in Virginia following World War II rose at a rate never before seen in the state's history.[181]

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[179] Genat, *The American Car Dealership*, 65, 67.
[180] Ibid, 67.
[181] Bezirdjian and McDonald, *New Dominion Virginia Architectural Style Guide*, 6.

The development patterns of this new commercial architecture followed trends seen around the United States and were impacted by factors such as the rise of the automobile as a means of personal transportation, the unprecedented amount of disposable personal income and leisure time, and the "growing impact of mass-marketed consumer goods on the overall economy."[182] Virginia's Department of Historic Resources cited some of the major defining features of Virginia's post-WWII commercial architecture as "autocentric [in] design, use of national, standardized architectural motifs, and greatly simplified construction methods."[183]

One of the major trends seen in Virginia's development occurred following President Eisenhower's National Interstate and Defense Highway Act of 1956. The 1950 census was the last census to show that a majority of Virginia residents lived in rural areas of the state, as the state had been rapidly urbanizing since the end of World War II.[184] That year the state's population had reached 3.3 million with the number of registered automobiles reaching 1 million.[185] This expanding, autocentric population was becoming increasingly urban; however, this influx of urbanites did not strictly locate in older, well established cities, but also in areas that were growing as part of development corridors along transportation routes.[186] A total of five interstate highways were eventually built within the state – Interstates 64, 66, 81, 85, and 95 – and with them came new developments. To "supplement and augment" these new interstates, Virginia

[182] Bezirdjian and McDonald, *New Dominion Virginia Architectural Style Guide*, 6-7.
[183] Ibid, 7.
[184] Virginia Department of Transportation, *History of Roads: "The Most Convenient Wayes,"* (Richmond: Virginia Department of Transportation, 2006), 38. Accessed September 4, 2019. https://www.virginiadot.org/about/resources/historyofrds.pdf.
[185] Virginia Department of Transportation, *History of Roads,* 38.
[186] Bezirdjian and McDonald, *New Dominion Virginia Architectural Style Guide*, 2.

additionally established its Arterial Highway System in 1964 to create a "1,855-mile-long system of intra-state highways."[187]

Along with these interstates and highways, Virginia witnessed the construction of auxiliary interstate highways – triple digit roadways often known as beltways, bypasses, and spur roads – to further connect the state.[188] Constructed as part of the National Interstate and Defense Highway Act, the Capital Beltway, originally the "Washington Circumferential Highway," was a "complete freeway bypass of the Washington area" that connected suburbs and counties throughout Virginia and Maryland that were previously connected directly through Washington, D.C.[189] During the period of significance, seven auxiliary interstate highways were constructed in Virginia as: I-195, I-264, I-381, I-464, I-495, I-581, I-664.[190] The growing number of interstates, highways, and auxiliary interstate highways within the state provided more direct routes to previously unconnected cities, towns, and suburbs while facilitating more efficient routes for automobile travel.

By the 1970s the number of registered automobiles in Virginia were continuing to mirror trends across the country and had risen to 2.5 million. The two car family had now become commonplace and the personal automobile was all but a necessity.[191] However,

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[187] Scott M. Kozel, "Arterial Highway System in Virginia," Roads to the Future (July 3, 2004). Accessed January 20, 2020. http://www.roadstothefuture.com/Arterial_Virginia.html.
[188] "3-digit Interstate Highways Primer," 3 digit interstates. Accessed April 1, 2020. https://www.kurumi.com/roads/3di/3di-primer.html.
[189] Scott M. Kozel, "Capital Beltway (I-495 and I-95)," Roads to the Future (September 30, 2007). Accessed April 1, 2020. http://www.roadstothefuture.com/Capital_Beltway.html.
[190] "List of Interstate Highways in Virginia," Wikipedia (April 9, 2020). Accessed April 10, 2020. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Interstate_Highways_in_Virginia.
[191] Virginia Department of Transportation, *History of Roads,* 38.

the OPEC Oil Crisis of the early 1970s and a "significant slowdown in economic growth" caused a decline in the themes seen during this post-war period.[192]

[192] Bezirdjian and McDonald, *New Dominion Virginia Architectural Style Guide*, 3.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY & RESULTS

Methodology

In order to establish the significance of automobile showrooms that were constructed in Virginia between 1945 and 1974, it was necessary to study examples of such resources. The purpose of studying these buildings was not to examine their individual histories or ability to be nominated to the National Register of Historic Places. Rather, the purpose of this study was to demonstrate that automobile showrooms of this era in Virginia are significant through their architecture, lot location, and setting, which reflect a period in American car-culture that no longer exists. This does not mean that every showroom that is assessed is worthy of preservation, but simply that the potential exists.

To narrow down the scope of study, this research focused on the Virginia Cultural Resource Information System (V-CRIS) run by Virginia's state historic preservation office, the Department of Historic Resources (DHR), as well as independent research to identify automobile showrooms within the state. V-CRIS is DHR's cultural resource inventory and contains architectural and archaeological survey information from around the state that is gathered and submitted to the database by surveyors statewide. While efforts were made to include as many of Virginia's mid-century automobile showrooms as possible, this sample does not take into account every automobile showroom in the state.

Within V-CRIS, search results can be narrowed down by a variety of filters. For this study search results were limited to resources entered as an 'Automobile Showroom' building type with construction dates between 1945 and 1974. Due to the nature of V-CRIS data entry, the 'Automobile Showroom' building type category was applied not only to interior auto showrooms, but also exterior car sales lots and garages which had small auto accessory sales offices. Search results were examined, and any resources which could not be confirmed as being originally constructed as interior automobile showrooms were eliminated. Since V-CRIS only includes resources which have been surveyed and entered into the database, independent research was undertaken to identify additional showrooms. Due to the nature of this research, additional resources were limited to those whose original designs could be confirmed through historic photographs or other documentation. Photographs were not available through V-CRIS; therefore, photographs of all showrooms were obtained in alternate ways, resulting in imprecise and low quality photos for some showrooms.

Once the sample of auto showrooms was established it was reassessed to determine which resources were extant with character defining features, which had been renovated without retaining character defining features, and which had been demolished. These categories were used to understand if any threats existed to mid-century auto showrooms, as well as to determine if there were any patterns in those threats. Additionally, resources were mapped to better understand the geographic spread of this sample and to see if any patterns existed (Appendix A).

To better understand the automobile showroom building type, a matrix was created to identify patterns in the resources (Appendix B). The matrix included the following information for each showroom: address; city; year built; if the showroom is

extant, demolished, or renovated without retaining character defining features; currently vacant or in use; current use if applicable; brand constructed for, if known; whether the showroom was constructed as part of a strip of buildings or was a free standing building; if the property was located on a corner lot, interior lot connected or immediately flanked by other buildings, or a larger and open lot; if the lot setting was in an urban core or along a commercial strip of an arterial road; roof type; primary showroom materials; secondary showroom materials; whether there was a canopy, awning, or cornice; the shape of the showroom; location of showroom entrance; whether or not there was an attached service wing; and if any of the original signage forms were extant. In order to complete all of the fields, photographs taken of all of the resources prior to any known changes were examined for the character defining features. For demolished and renovated resources, Google Maps and historic photographs were used to complete this survey based on their characteristics pre-demolition or pre-renovation. Tax records, newspapers, business websites, and business social media accounts were used to identify the construction dates, current uses, and which brand of automobile the showrooms originally sold. Current and historic aerial maps were then used to determine if a showroom was part of a strip or was free standing, the lot location, and the lot setting.

Once completed, this matrix was used to look for changes in the construction of auto showrooms and the significance of any patterns that existed. These patterns could be present in overall trends seen from 1945 to 1974, or patterns that changed with the decade or physical location of the showrooms. To highlight the uncovered patterns, four showrooms were chosen to allow for closer examination based on the given patterns. These four showrooms were visited and researched to understand their developments and impacts on American culture.

Results

Results from Overall Showroom Sample

The original search within V-CRIS returned fifty-four results; however, through examination of historic photos and records, twenty-three of the returned resources either could not be confirmed or were not originally constructed as automobile showrooms. Six additional resources that were discovered during this research were identified as automobile showrooms constructed between 1945 and 1974, and were included in this study to survey the largest available sample. The thirty-seven confirmed automobile showrooms were then mapped and entered into the matrix to discern patterns about their past and present uses, original construction, and existing conditions.

When the showrooms comprising the sample were mapped, it revealed a geographic spread which extended throughout the state of Virginia. The mapped showrooms were then overlaid with a map of Virginia's interstates and highways (Appendix A). This layering revealed that all of the auto showrooms in this sample were constructed along, or very near, various interstates and highways running through Virginia. Further research determined that there were not regional variations in the architectural design of the showrooms within the state, so this mapping was used to explore the trends of the development patterns associated with the showrooms.

Table 1 Number of extant, demolished, and renovated automobile showrooms divided by decade.

	1945-1949	1950-1959	1960-1969	1970-1974	Total
Extant	7	9	8	2	**26**
Demolished	1	2	2	0	**5**
Renovated	1	1	3	1	**6**
Total	**9**	**12**	**13**	**3**	**37**

The thirty-seven showrooms were entered into the matrix to determine what characteristics and patterns, if any, existed in Virginia's mid-century showrooms (Appendix A). When broken down by decade of construction during the period of significance, construction rates were found to be lowest in the 1940s and rose to a peak during the 1950s and 1960s (Table 1). After this peak period, construction dramatically declined in the early 1970s. Today, 70% of the showrooms constructed during this period of significance remain extant with identifiable character defining features.

Table 2 Current uses of extant automobile showrooms within the sample.

Current Use	Food Industry	Auto Sales	Auto Related	Gym	Retail	Religious	Manufacturing	RV Sales	Cleaners	Vacant	Total in Use	Total Showrooms
Number of Showrooms	3	6	4	1	2	1	1	1	1	6	**20**	**26**

Of the twenty-six extant showrooms, excluding those that have been renovated, 77% are currently in use and 23% are vacant (Table 2). The most common current uses for these extant showrooms are auto sales, auto related businesses, and the food industry. Other uses include retail, religious uses, manufacturing, RV sales, and a cleaners. These showrooms represent resources which have been reused while retaining identifiable character defining features.

Table 3 Building situation, type of lot, and lot location for automobile showrooms divided by decade.

	Building Situation		Type of Lot			Lot Location	
	Free-Standing	Strip of Buildings	Corner Lot	Interior Lot	Open Lot	Core Area	Commercial Strip
1945-1949	7	2	8	1	-	8	1
1950-1959	12	-	6	-	6	1	11
1960-1969	13	-	3	-	10	1	12
1970-1974	3	-	2	-	1	1	2
Total	**35**	**2**	**19**	**1**	**17**	**11**	**26**

All thirty-seven of the showrooms and their lots were categorized to identify if any construction patterns existed (Table 3). 95% of the auto showrooms were constructed as part of free standing dealerships. In the late 1940s two showrooms were constructed within a strip of buildings, after which time the remaining showrooms are constructed as free standing. Three types of lot locations were used – corner lots, interior lots with lots on either side and buildings immediately flanking the showroom, or open lots which were larger and provided more space between the showroom and adjacent buildings. Corner lots were the most prominent lot type utilized, and were used throughout the period of significance, although their popularity continuously declined. Open lots were the second most common, picking up in popularity during the 1950s and 1960s. Only one auto showroom was constructed on an interior lot, and this showroom was constructed between 1945 and 1949. Lastly, the lot settings of the showrooms were categorized as core, meaning they were located in central business districts or downtown cores, and strip, meaning they were located along a commercial strip and/or arterial roadway. Although at least one showroom was located within a core area in each decade, showrooms within core areas were most common between 1945 and 1949. Showrooms located along commercial strips dominate beginning in the 1950s, and remained the predominant lot location through 1974.

Table 4 Roof Types of Automobile Showrooms broken down by decade.

	Roof Type							
	Flat w/ Parapet	Flat w/ Stepped Parapet	Reverse Butterfly	Front Gable	Connecting Diamonds	Front Gable w/ Stepped Parapet	Font Gable w/ Slip Cover & Stepped Parapet	Flat Roof w/ Upturned Cornice
1945-1949	8	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
1950-1959	10	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
1960-1969	3	1	1	3	3	1	-	1
1970-1974	-	-	-	2	-	-	1	-
Total	**21**	**3**	**2**	**5**	**3**	**1**	**1**	**1**

Overall seven roof types were identified within this sample of showrooms, including flat with parapet, flat with stepped parapet, reverse butterfly, front gable, connecting diamonds, front gable with stepped parapet, front gable with slip cover and stepped parapet, and a flat roof with an upturned cornice (Table 4). Flat roofs with parapets were the most common roof type, appearing the most in the late 1940s through the 1950s. During the 1950s and 1960s more dramatic roof types such as reverse butterfly, front gable, and connecting diamond roofs appeared. By the 1970s, roof types primarily consisted of oversized front gables.

Table 5 Primary and secondary showroom facade materials divided by decade.

	Primary Showroom Material		Secondary Showroom Material						
	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Concrete Block	Brick	Concrete Block	Brick & Concrete Block	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Metal	Brick & Metal Siding	T1-11 Siding
1945-1949	9	-	6	-	1	-	-	-	1
1950-1959	11	1	5	3	-	1	1	-	-
1960-1969	12	1	6	4	1	1	1	-	-
1970-1974	3	-	1	1	-	-	-	1	-
Total	35	2	18	8	2	2	2	1	1

The showrooms were assessed for both the materials that primarily composed the showrooms, and the secondary materials used, if applicable (Table 5). Overwhelmingly, the showrooms were primarily constructed of plate or tempered glass with aluminum or other metal framing. Uncharacteristically, two auto showrooms were identified as being primarily constructed with concrete block. The most common secondary material used for showroom facades was brick, followed by concrete block, and then a fairly even spread between brick and concrete block mixed, plate or tempered glass with aluminum or other metal framing, metal, brick and metal siding, and T1-11 siding.

Table 6 Automobile showroom shapes and roof extensions divided by decade.

	Showroom Shape						Roof Extensions						
	Rectangular	Rectangular w/ Curved Corners	Rectangular w/ Cropped Corners	Rectangular w/ Cantilevered Windows	Semi-Circular	Circular	Flat Metal Canopy	Flat Metal Cornice	Roof Overhang	Concrete Cornice	Flat Porch Roof	Metal Awning	None
1945-1949	3	2	2	1	1	-	2	2	-	1	-	-	4
1950-1959	7	4	-	-	1	-	5	1	1	-	-	-	5
1960-1969	11	-	-	-	1	1	2	-	9	-	1	-	1
1970-1974	3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1	1
Total	24	6	2	1	3	1	9	3	11	1	1	1	11

Another characteristic examined was the shape of the showrooms, including rectangular, rectangular with curved corners, rectangular with cropped corners, rectangular with cantilevered windows, semi-circular, and circular (Table 6). Rectangular showrooms were the most common and consistently seen shape throughout the period of

significance. The late 1940s and early 1950s witnessed the highest variety in showroom shape and by the 1970s showrooms were exclusively rectangular. Many showrooms also included some form of weather covering for their customers, or an aesthetic protrusion mimicking this look, whether it was a canopy, awning, roof overhang or cornice (Table 6). Of the showrooms that included a roof extension of some kind, roof overhangs from oversized roofs were the most common, followed by flat metal canopies and flat metal cornices.

Table 7 Location of entrances and service wings for automobile showrooms divided by decade.

	Location of Entrances			Service Wing		
	Sides	Central	Sides & Central	Attached	Detached	None
1945-1949	6	3	-	9	-	-
1950-1959	5	6	1	11	-	1
1960-1969	7	4	2	12	1	-
1970-1974	1	2	-	3	-	-
Total	**19**	**15**	**3**	**35**	**1**	**1**

Locations of showroom entrances included side entrances, central entrances, or side and central entrances (Table 7). Side entrances were the most common entrance locations; however, central entrances were a close second with the increased use of plate or tempered glass for entrances. Service wings became a characteristic of the automobile dealership, and during the period of significance 95% of automobile showrooms included an attached service wing (Table 7).

The showrooms within the study appeared to have patterns regarding decade of construction and lot location, lot setting, and architectural design. From this pattern four extant automobile showrooms were identified – 3925 Wilson Boulevard in Arlington, 6

West Nine Mile Road in Highland Springs, 6401 East Virginia Beach Boulevard in Norfolk, and 11700 Jefferson Avenue in Newport News. These four resources were visited and further researched to better understand the patterns surrounding the showrooms.

3924 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia

The automobile showroom located at 3924 Wilson Boulevard in Arlington, Virginia was constructed in 1948 as a Chrysler-Plymouth dealership.[193] Of the 37 automobile showrooms examined, this showroom was the only resource which was entered into the National Register of Historic Places in its own right and not as a contributing resource in a historic district. Constructed as Al's Motors, this resource was nominated to the National Register under Criteria C for being "an excellent example of Streamline Moderne architecture," with a period of significance of 1948.[194] Additionally, Al's Motors was the "oldest Chrysler-Plymouth dealership in Northern Virginia at the time it closed in 2001."[195] However, insensitive changes to the building – including "removal of the original entry, original glazing at the corners of the façade, and removal or covering of Streamlined Moderne detailing along the upper portion of the façade" – resulted in the DHR recommendation that it be removed from the registry in 2013 due to the loss of integrity.[196] Since 2001, the resource has been used as Gold's Gym, retaining the property's original showroom and service wing.[197]

[193] Laura V. Trieschmann, Kristyna Olsen Mizelle, and Robin Weidlich, " Al's Motors," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Arlington, VA: EHT Traceries, Inc., 2002), 6.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.
[196] "Al's Motors Architectural Survey Form," Virginia Department of Human Resources.
[197] Ibid.

This showroom is part of a free standing dealership that is located on a corner lot along the periphery of a core area in Arlington (Figures 11 and 12). Its location along the periphery of the core area allowed for a larger parcel with a larger parking lot that extended along the western and southern sides of the property. The showroom is situated directly fronting Wilson Boulevard, the intersection's main road. The corner location in combination with the wrap around showroom windows allowed for visual access to the showroom from both the intersection and along the roadways.

Figure 11 Map depicting Al's Motors property with the building outlined in red (map from https://propertysearch.arlingtonva.us).

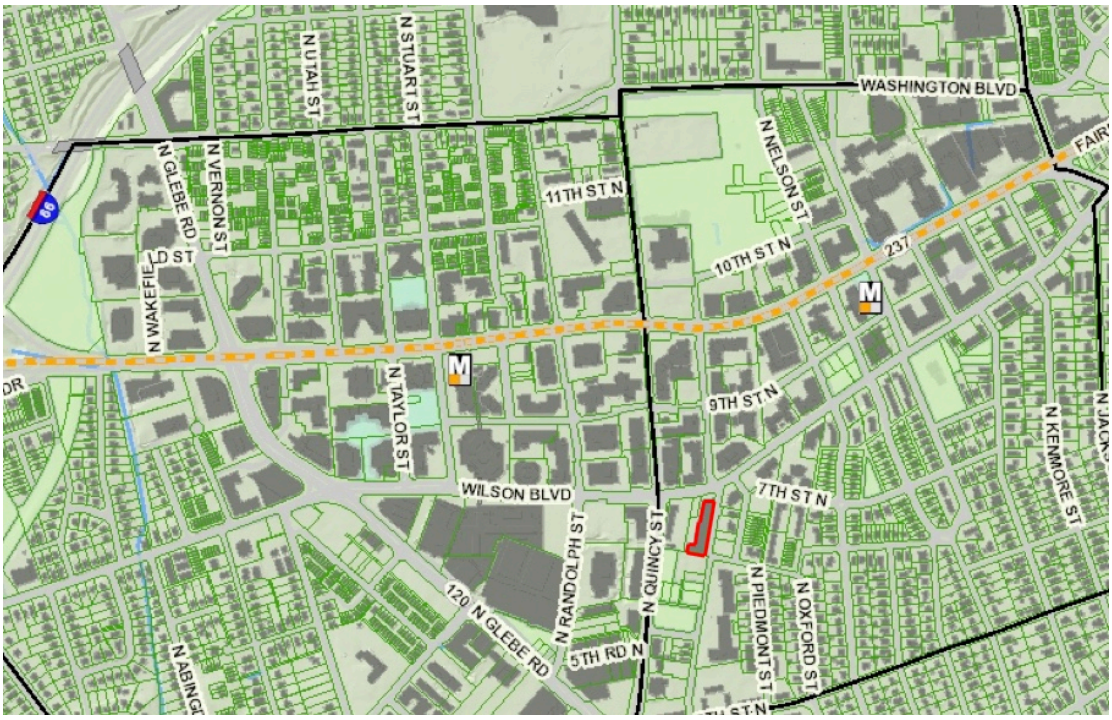

Figure 12 Map depicting Al's Motors in relation to the core area of Arlington, Virginia with Al's Motors outlined in red (map from https://propertysearch.arlingtonva.us).

Designed in the Streamline Moderne style, Al's Motors was constructed as a rectangular showroom with curved corners and a flat roof with a small parapet (Figure 13). Wrapping the front and sides of the brick showroom were large sheets of plate glass and framed with aluminum. A flat metal cornice ran above and along the length of the showroom windows to create a flow line that suggested the movement and machinery associated with Streamline Moderne. A central plate glass and aluminum entrance was framed by glass block sidelights. Extending from the rear of the showroom is a barrel roofed, two story warehouse that was used as the service wing of the dealership.

Figure 13 Al's Motors, now Gold's Gym, before facade altering renovations (Photo from https://www.roadsidearchitecture.com).

With its new use as a gym, the showroom experienced changes to both the interior and exterior of the building. The showroom has retained its original location, and overall its design has generally remained the same. Originally, the showroom had a stuccoed facade in addition to its wrapping showroom windows. Today, the stucco of the showroom has been covered by black standing seam metal siding that additionally replaces a portion of the windows to cover the rounded corners (Figures 14, 15, and 16). The textured aluminum cornice and "reeded metal hood" over the doorway have been replaced by smooth aluminum.[198] While the glass block sidelights remain, the clear glass transom replaced the original glass block transom (Figure 14). Portions of the showroom's interior tile floor remain; however, areas have been covered with rubber flooring. On the interior, the showroom corners are now covered with drywall, corresponding to the areas which were covered by standing seam metal on the exterior

[198] Virginia Department of Historic Resources, "Al's Motors Architectural Survey Form," Virginia Cultural Resource Information System. Accessed September 9, 2019.

(Figure 17). These changes resulted in DHR's decision that the showroom no longer retained its integrity and should be removed from the National Register of Historic Places.

Figure 14 North façade of Al's Motors, now Gold's Gym, after facade altering renovations (Photo by author).

Figure 15 East facade of Al's Motors, now Gold's Gym, after facade altering renovations (Photo by author).

Figure 16 West facade of Al's Motors, now Gold's Gym, after facade altering renovations (Photo by author).

Figure 17 Interior of Al's Motors, now Gold's Gym, after renovations (Photo by author).

While some commercial buildings remain that are of a comparable scale to the showroom, Arlington has grown exponentially in both population and building heights. The showroom still exists on the periphery of the central core in a highly trafficked area, and in this sense the setting remains the same. However, the dramatic change in massing and scale of the surrounding buildings has influenced the feeling and association of the resource. Surrounding buildings are now massive residential buildings with an occasional mixture of commercial properties.

6 West Nine Mile Road, Highland Springs, Virginia

Located at 6 West Nine Mile Road in Highland Springs, Virginia, the former Hechler Motor Company was constructed in 1950. This showroom was originally constructed as a Chevrolet dealership and retains the dealership's showroom and service wing as Fast Lane Motor Works, LLC. While the resource was assessed in 2016 as not being individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, it is a contributing property to the Highland Springs Historic District.[199]

The Highland Springs Historic District was considered eligible under Criteria C and A. Under Criteria C, Highland Springs was considered eligible for its "collection of well preserved houses in a variety of vernacular and definable styles dating from the late 19th century" to 1969.[200] For Criteria A, the district was considered eligible under Community Planning and Development as "an excellent example of a remarkably intact late 19th century 'streetcar suburb' of the City of Richmond," and for its gridded system

[199] Virginia Department of Historic Resources, "Hechler Motor Company Architectural Survey Form," Virginia Cultural Resource Information System. Accessed September 9, 2019.
[200] Laura Knott, Christina Osborn, and Sarah Traum, "Highland Springs Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, (Charlottesville: Commonwealth Heritage Group, Inc., 2017), 145-146.

that saw exponential growth during the mid-20th century. Additionally for Criteria A, the district was eligible under Social History for its association with the Temperance Movement and civic and religious organizations that reflected the founder's "New England background" over that of Richmond or central Virginia.[201] Hechler Motor Company was listed as a contributing property to the district as a "notably good example of an automobile dealership" relating to the district's location "on one of the primary east-west automobile routes" between Henrico County and Richmond.[202]

Hechler Motor Company was a free standing dealership whose property extended from North Holly Avenue to North Grove Avenue encompassing the southwest end of the block (Figure 18). With the showroom centered along the front of the lot and parking lots on either side of the building, the showroom was visible from both the West Nine Mile Road and North Grove Avenue intersection and the intersection of West Nine Mile Road and North Holly Avenue. Hechler Motors was separated from West Nine Mile Road by a sidewalk. West Nine Mile road was a commercial strip that formed the core of Highland Springs, Virginia (Figure 19).

[201] Knott, Osborn, and Traum, "Highland Springs Historic District," 146-146.
[202] Ibid, 153.

Figure 18 Map depicting the Hechler Motor Company property with the building outlined in blue (map from https://gis.henrico.us).

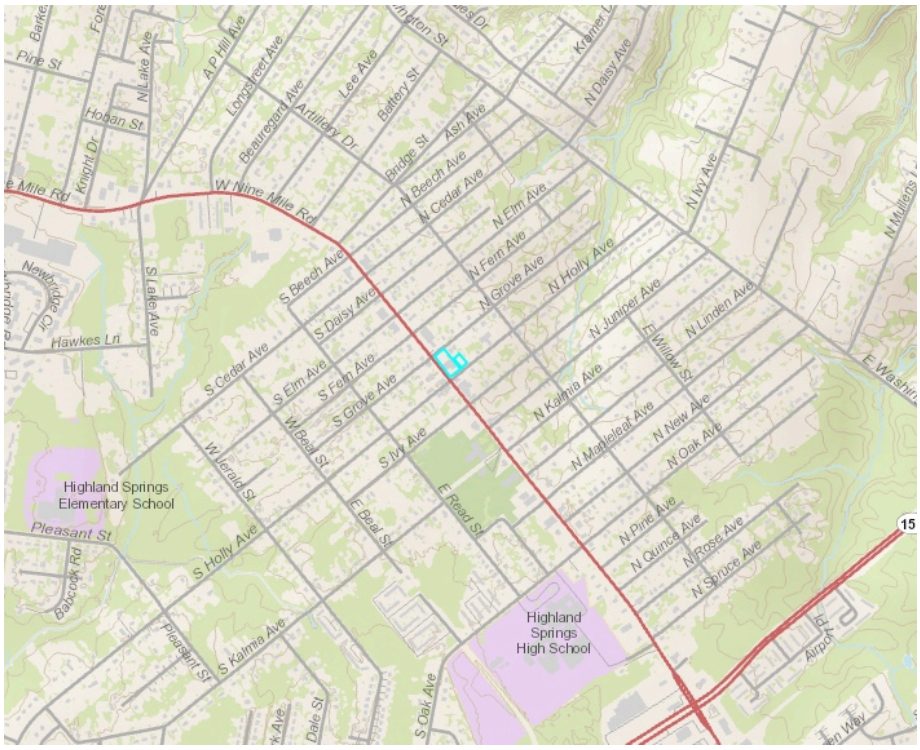

Figure 19 Map depicting the Highland Springs core area with the Hechler Motor Company property outlined in blue (map from https://gis.henrico.us).

Hechler Motor Company is composed of a rectangular showroom perpendicularly attached to the dealership's flat-roofed service wing (Figure 20). Influenced by the International Style, the common bond brick showroom has a flat roof with a small parapet and plate glass windows with aluminum framing that wrap the front and sides of the showroom. Above the showroom windows is a flat metal canopy and below the windows is a concrete bulkhead, both of which wrap the front and sides of the building like the showroom windows. In addition to two side entrances, the showroom has a central entrance that is composed of a single plate glass and aluminum framed door.

Figure 20 Southern oblique of Hechler Motor Company, now Fast Lane Motor Works LLC, showroom and attached service wing (photo by author).

Today, Fast Lane Motor Works, LLC uses the property as an auto repair shop. After acquiring the property from a carpet distributor, Fast Lane Motors has made minimal changes to the building and, overall, this property has a high level of integrity. The building's location has not been changed and the 1950s design has not been altered (Figure 21). A non-structural 'Chevrolet' sign was removed at some point in the property's history. The building's materials appear to remain intact, with exceptions including the two side entrance doors which have been replaced. While it is believed that the showroom's original tile floors are intact, this could not be confirmed since carpet was installed during the carpet distributor's ownership of the property (Figure 22). While 'workmanship' in mid-century architecture may differ from the idea of 'workmanship' from earlier eras, it is characteristic of the mass produced building materials and construction techniques used during the 1950s.

Figure 21 Northern oblique of Hechler Motor Company, 1950 (photo courtesy of Fast Lane Motor Works, LLC).

Figure 22 Interior of Hechler Motor Company, now Fast Lane Motor Works LLC (photo by author).

This strip of West Nine Mile Road that comprises a portion of the Highland Springs Historic District has been in a period of decline; however, the showroom is still surrounded by mid-century and other historic buildings that would have existed when this resource was constructed which assist in the retention of the showroom's original setting. Even though the building is no longer used for auto sales, Fast Lane Motor Works continues to use the showroom as a showroom and storage area and the service wing for auto repairs which preserve both the feeling and association of this mid-century showroom.

6401 E Virginia Beach Boulevard, Norfolk, Virginia

Constructed in 1963 as Kimnach Ford, this auto showroom was constructed in its current location at 6401 E. Virginia Beach Boulevard in Norfolk following a relocation forced by the construction of Interstate 64.[203] The Kimnach Ford property is now operated by The Auto Connection, a used car dealership with locations across Virginia. Unlike the Al's Motors or Hechler Motor Company showrooms, this property has not been surveyed for independent or multiple property nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Kimnach Ford's showroom is a free standing building that is part of a complex of buildings which composed the Kimnach Ford Dealership (Figure 23). Located outside of the central city core and along a commercial strip, the open lot allows for maximum visibility for travelers along Virginia Beach Boulevard (Figure 24). Rather than constructing the showroom immediately fronting the road, a large parking lot is situated between the roadway and the showroom, in addition to parking lots along the side and rear of the building.

[203] Carolyn Shapiro, "Kimnach Ford to close its Norfolk dealership," *The Virginian Pilot*, (July 14, 2011) Accessed January 21, 2020. https://www.pilotonline.com/business/consumer/article_454d213c-4f12-5188-9c5e-ca41a55b08d5.html.

Figure 23 Map depicting Kimnach Ford, now The Auto Connection, property with the building outlined in red (map from https://www.air.norfolk.gov).

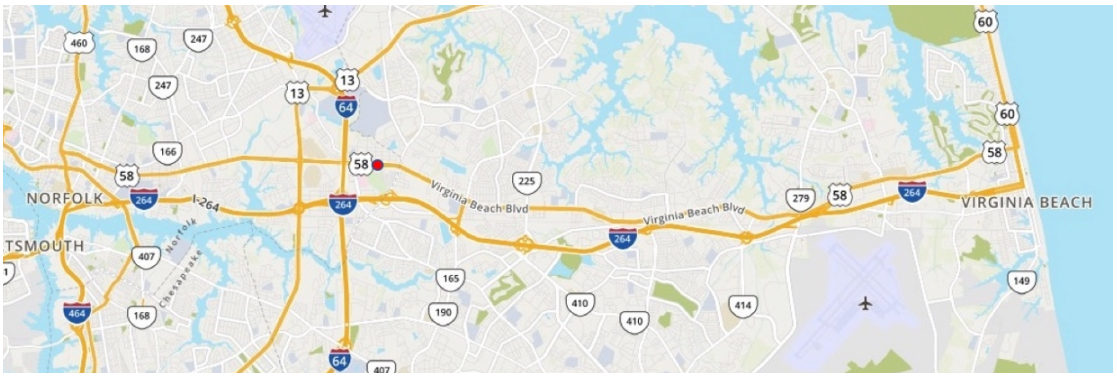

Figure 24 Map depicting the location of Kimnach Ford (central red dot) in relation to the core areas of Norfolk (left) and Virginia Beach (right) (map from https:///www.mapquest.com).

The rectangular showroom is raised on a concrete foundation that rises roughly four feet above grade (Figure 25). The raised foundation additionally creates a railed walk-around that rings the front and sides of the showroom and connects the stairs and an accessibility ramp with the showroom entrance. The front and sides of the showroom are comprised of full plate glass windows with aluminum framing. The central entrance is composed of plate glass and aluminum framed double doors. The showroom's oversized

Exaggerated Modern roof is in the shape of three connected diamonds, and the roof overhangs the walls of the showroom to create a canopy over the walk-around. A rectangular warehouse, sided with ribbed metal, extends from the rear of the showroom.

Figure 25 Northeast oblique of Kimnach Ford, now The Auto Connection (photo by author).

While no longer Kimnach Ford, the showroom continues its use for automobile sales, serving primarily as office space rather than to display new vehicles. The showroom continues to stand in its original location, and retains its original setting amongst other auto-centric and commercial businesses along the commercial strip of East Virginia Beach Boulevard. The design of the building does not appear to have any alterations, and the exterior materials appear to have only received cosmetic changes. Modern, superficial updates have been made to the exterior such as the installation of

flood lights. Similarly, the interior materials appear to retain high integrity, with only a few acoustic ceiling panels having been replaced with non-matching acoustic panels (Figure 26). Again, the workmanship of the building is reflective of mid-century, mass-produced commercial architecture. Although the showroom is now used for desk space, its continued role in automobile sales and its location amongst other commercial and auto-centric businesses contributes to its retention of both feeling and association.

Figure 26 Interior of Kimnach Ford, now The Auto Connection. Replaced acoustic ceiling tiles are identifiable through their lighter coloring.

11700 Jefferson Avenue, Newport News, Virginia

Located at 11700 Jefferson Avenue in Newport News, Virginia, Casey Chevrolet's circular automobile showroom is one of the few showrooms that has not changed hands since its construction. Constructed circa 1965 as a showroom for Casey Auto Group's Newport News Chevrolet location, this showroom is currently used as office space for the dealership's used car lot. Like Kimnach Ford, Casey Chevrolet has not been surveyed for individual or multiple property nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

Casey's circular showroom is a free standing building that is part of Casey Chevrolet's dealership complex (Figure 27). The property is located at the corner of Jefferson Avenue and J. Clyde Morris Boulevard, a major intersection of a Virginia state highway and a U.S. highway. While the dealership's property encompasses the entire corner of the intersection, the showroom itself sits prominently in the southern corner of the property. The showroom is surrounded on all sides by a parking lot, including a strip that separates the showroom from the intersection. Located outside of Newport News' central core, the Casey showroom is situated along a commercial strip (Figure 28).

Figure 27 Map depicting the location of the Casey Chevrolet Showroom outlined in red (map from https://maps.nnva.gov).

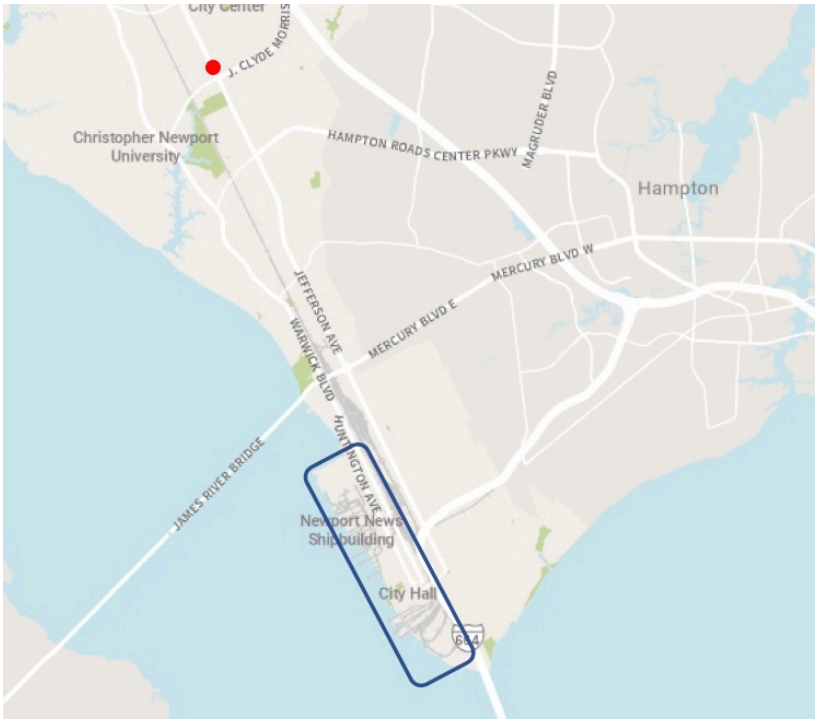

Figure 28 Map depicting Casey Chevrolet (red dot) in relation to Newport News' core area (blue rectangle) (map from https://maps.nnva.gov).

This unique showroom is circular in form and sits on a concrete foundation that rises approximately four feet above grade (Figure 29). On opposite sides of the showroom concrete steps lead to small platforms outside single plate glass and aluminum framed doors. Plate glass and aluminum framed showroom windows create the walls of the showroom which form an almost complete circle. On the northeast side of the showroom, a masonry C-shaped projection extends from the ground to above the roof line and includes large red letters for "CASEY" along with the Chevrolet logo (Figure 30). A concrete ramp wraps around this semi-circular projection, leading to the location of the original garage door entrance to the showroom. Today this entrance has been replaced with a plate glass and aluminum framed door and a small addition made of reflective plate glass and aluminum. The circular roof overhangs the showroom to create a canopy and is composed of red rectangular panels that correspond with the width of each plate glass window below. The metal framing that separates the window panes extends up to the roof to divide the rectangular panels.

Figure 29 West façade of Casey Chevrolet (photo by author).

Figure 30 East facade of Casey Chevrolet (photo by author).

While some changes have been made to the Casey showroom due to its switch from automobile showroom to office space, the building is largely intact and retains much of its integrity (Figure 31). The showroom remains in its original location, with its original setting along a major intersection that includes other commercial uses. The design of the building has remained the same, with minimal changes where the garage entry to the showroom once was. Excluding minor updates to features such as lighting, the exterior materials of the showroom remain intact. As with the other showrooms, the workmanship is reflective of the mass produced materials and construction techniques of the 1960s. The feeling and association of the showroom are slightly changed since the interior is now utilized as office space rather than displaying new cars; however, the building is still utilized by the original dealership for automobile sales.

Figure 31 Historic photo of the southeast façade of Casey Chevrolet (photo from https://www.caseyauto.com/aboutus.aspx).

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

Analyzing the results from the sample of automobile showrooms revealed various patterns that were reflective of trends in America from 1945 to 1974. In addition to the remaining thirty-three showrooms, auto dealerships such as Al's Motors in Arlington; Hechler Motor Company in Highland Springs; Kimnach Ford in Norfolk; and Casey Chevrolet in Newport News highlighted the important role showrooms held on dealership properties. Trends represented by these showrooms included developmental patterns, design, and construction materials that reflected a period of American car-culture that no longer exists today but has contributed to the development of modern automobile dealerships.

The thirty-seven showrooms were first mapped to understand the geographic implications of the sample. When mapped, the showrooms displayed a spread across the state of Virginia that, when overlaid with a map of the state's interstates and highways, aligned with the locations of the state's major transportation routes. This mapping not only insured that the sample spread beyond an individual region of the state, but was also used to understand development patterns. That these showrooms were predominantly located along major routes within the state reflected a larger development pattern that was seen nationwide. As described by Virginia's DHR, development corridors occurred along the nation's growing number of transportation routes following the National Interstate Highway Act of 1956, and Virginia's development followed the same

pattern.[204] The locations of these mid-century automobile showrooms not only supports this explanation of development corridors occurring alongside transportation routes, but it also demonstrates how central the automobile was to these developing and growing cities.

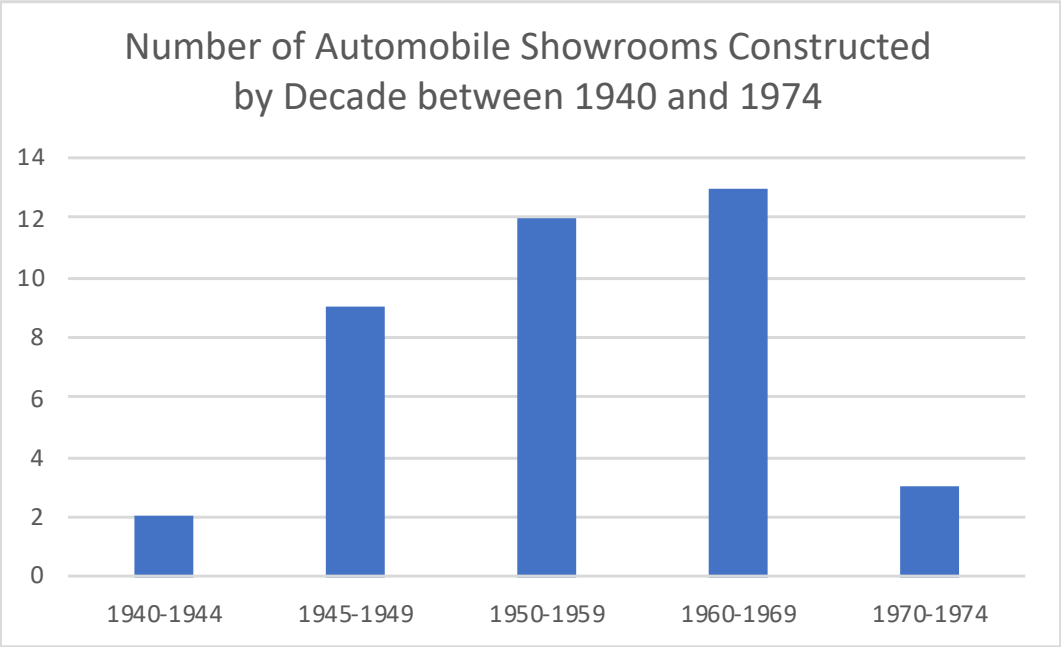

Figure 32 Graph displaying the number of automobile showrooms constructed by decade between 1940 and 1974.

The first step in understanding the results of this research was to analyze the number of automobile showrooms constructed within each decade during the period of significance. The total number of showrooms constructed during each decade reflect the post-war construction patterns discussed in Chapter Three (Figure 32). In order to understand the totals for 1945 to 1949, the V-CRIS results for the first half of the 1940s were consulted. In 1940, two auto showrooms were constructed; however, from 1941 to 1944, there were not any auto showrooms constructed that have since been surveyed for

[204] Bezirdjian and McDonald, *New Dominion Virginia Architectural Style Guide*, 2.

the V-CRIS database. While this database is but a sample of auto showrooms in Virginia and does not represent every showroom constructed, this pattern reflected the restrictions placed on the automotive industry during America's involvement in World War II. During the post-war years of the 1940s, however, there was a marked increase in the number of auto showrooms constructed. This increase reflected the automobile boom that occurred immediately following the war once restrictions were raised and the auto-hungry American public could once again be provided with automobiles.

During the 1950s, the number of auto showrooms constructed in Virginia continued to rise as America progressed toward the height of its auto culture. Manufacturers produced an unprecedented number of vehicles, and planned obsolescence was in full effect with annual models encouraging consumers to stay in-style and update their automobiles as frequently as possible. The release of annual models was a widely celebrated event and dealers were in high competition to persuade consumers to purchase from their dealership – often leading to the complete modernization of an existing auto showroom or the construction of an entirely new showroom.

While the 1960s began to demonstrate changes in the public perception of the automobile, American car-culture continued with full force well into the mid-1960s. Of the automobile showrooms within the sample that were constructed between 1960 and 1969, 77%, or ten showrooms, were constructed between 1960 and 1965. During the 1960s, America witnessed the enactment of the 1966 National Traffic and Motor Vehicle Safety Act and various movements to increase the safety of America's enormous and deadly modes of personal transportation. Additionally, during this decade awareness of the harmful impacts automobiles and modern construction materials and techniques had on the environment were beginning to be noticed and discussed. Picking up traction

around the mid-1960s, Americans were slowly becoming disenfranchised with constantly purchasing large, traffic-causing, deadly, environment-endangering vehicles; however, these changes in views were not readily reflected in automobile showroom construction or sales.

By the early 1970s, construction of auto showrooms in Virginia was at its lowest; however, much like the meteoric rise in showroom construction, this free-fall was not limited to Virginia but was a sign of a nation-wide change. As a result of the environmental movements which had begun in the 1960s, the Clean Air Act was adopted in 1970 which implemented requirements and limitations on emissions produced by automobiles. New car purchases may not have slowed, but many began questioning and critiquing the automotive industry, calling for continued and necessary changes by citing the aforementioned environmental impacts, traffic, and astounding numbers of auto-related deaths. Another factor in the plummeting rate of showroom construction was the high rate of construction seen in the decades prior. Even if, or when, these older showrooms fell out of style, many dealers chose to keep the still functioning bones of the buildings and instead give the showroom a face lift. A final blow to auto showrooms came in the form of the 1973 to 1974 OPEC oil embargo which led to a 350% rise in the price of oil and opened the door for foreign importers to entice Americans with their smaller, more fuel efficient cars, thus changing the game of automobile marketing and sales.[205]

[205] "Energy Crisis," National Museum of American History Behring Center, Smithsonian.

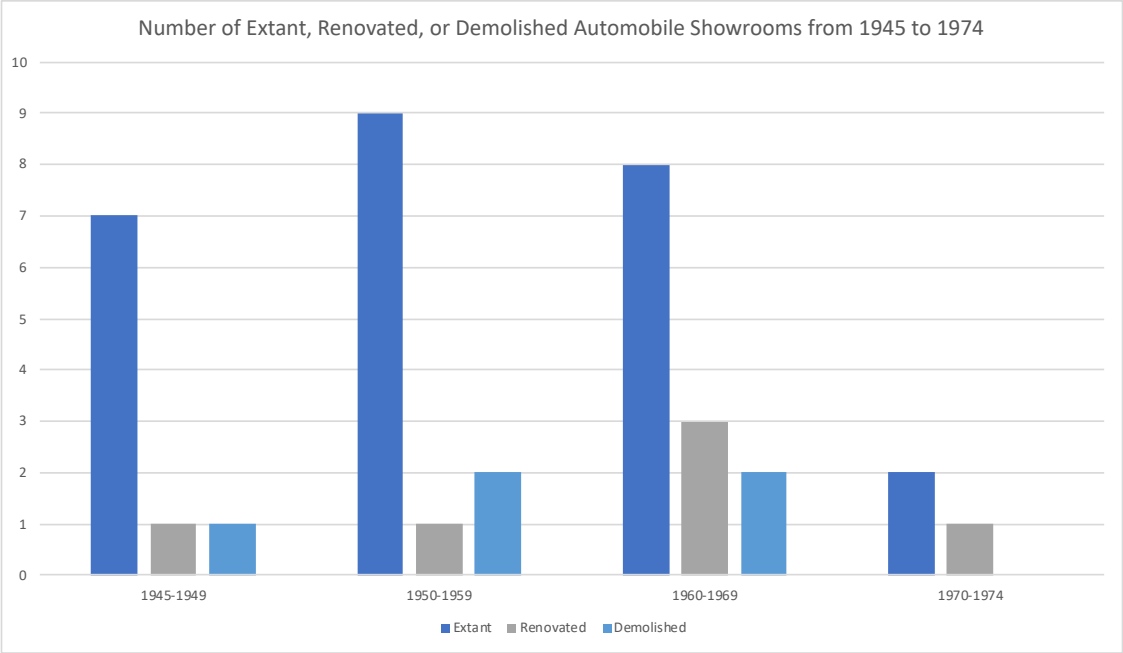

Figure 33 Graph of the number of extant, renovated, or demolished automobile showrooms constructed between 1945 and 1974.

Results for the number of extant, renovated, and demolished automobile showrooms reflected that a high number of Virginia's showrooms constructed between 1945 and 1974 are still extant today (Figure 33). This optimistic result seems to minimize the threat to these mid-century resources; however, it should be taken with consideration. Although these resources have been categorized as 'extant,' this does not mean all twenty-six retain their integrity. Changes due to reuse have removed important features, such as the removal of the "Pontiac" Pylon on the former Woodson Pontiac showroom in Roanoke, Virginia (Figures 34 and 35). Richmond Ford Lincoln retains its original glass showroom with aluminum framing and exterior support poles, as well as its central and side entrances; however, it has received an updated aesthetic casing and the glazing is now reflective since the showroom is used for sales desks rather than a car showroom (Figures 36 and 37). Even showrooms which have been recognized as significant, such as

Al's Motors in Arlington, are not safe from insensitive alterations that can harm, or completely remove, their integrity. Additionally, resources provided by the V-CRIS database only included showrooms that were extant at the time of surveying and additional research was limited to showrooms that had accessible historical photographs, so it is unknown how many additional resources have already been lost or were not included in this sample.

Figure 34 Woodson Pontiac historic photo, before the removal of the pylon signage (photo from roadarch.com).

Figure 35 Woodson Pontiac current photo, after the pylon signage was removed (photo from Google Maps).

Figure 36 Richmond Ford Lincoln prior to renovations (Photo from Google Maps).

Figure 37 Richmond Ford Lincoln current photo (Photo from Google Maps).

A significant consideration when constructing automobile showrooms was determining the location of the lot and how the building would be situated on the lot. In the early years, automobile dealers occupied locations in central business districts to appeal to the foot or streetcar traffic that could in turn become first-time car buyers. However, the rise of the automobile in American life meant people could more easily expand to suburban areas and perpetuated the development of what would come to be

known as sprawl. This also meant that automobile dealers were no longer primarily aiming towards first-time buyers, but instead towards repeat customers who were already traveling by automobile. Additionally, as dealerships more regularly included both new and used car sales, as well as service features, they required larger lots of land.

Through this sample of automobile showrooms, it is evident that Virginia's automobile showrooms mirrored national trends by beginning in core city areas and migrating over time to locate further outside of the central core to commercial strips and arterial roadways. Like all retail businesses, the purpose of the automobile showroom was to attract customers and sell its merchandise. However, unlike other retail businesses, the merchandise being sold was of a much larger scale and brought with it a much larger monetary investment.

By 1945, the target audience was no longer pedestrian window shoppers, but an increasingly mobile society. In the late 1940s, remnants of the old ways of downtown commercial cores as the primary location for selling automobiles were still apparent, as was demonstrated by two showrooms constructed during this period as buildings within a strip in a core area of town. However, with the need for larger parking lots on the property, as well as the advertising appeal of having an independent building that quite literally stood apart from the rest, automobile showrooms quickly moved away from locating within a connected strip of buildings. By separating their showroom from other buildings around them, dealers could make use of more than just the front facade and utilize architectural design to advertise from multiple angles of the building. This change was evidenced by the other thirty-five (95%) Virginia showrooms within the sample that were constructed as free standing buildings.

With this move to free standing buildings and requirement for more on-site parking lots came the relocation from the traditional core areas of the city out to commercial strips along major roadways. This transition from core locations to commercial strip locations can be seen through the decades of the period of significance (Figure 38). In the late 1940s, core locations were still the dominant location for Virginia's showrooms. Even though showrooms had moved away from being physically connected to, or even immediately flanked by, other buildings to now being free standing buildings, they still tended to locate within a city's central core.

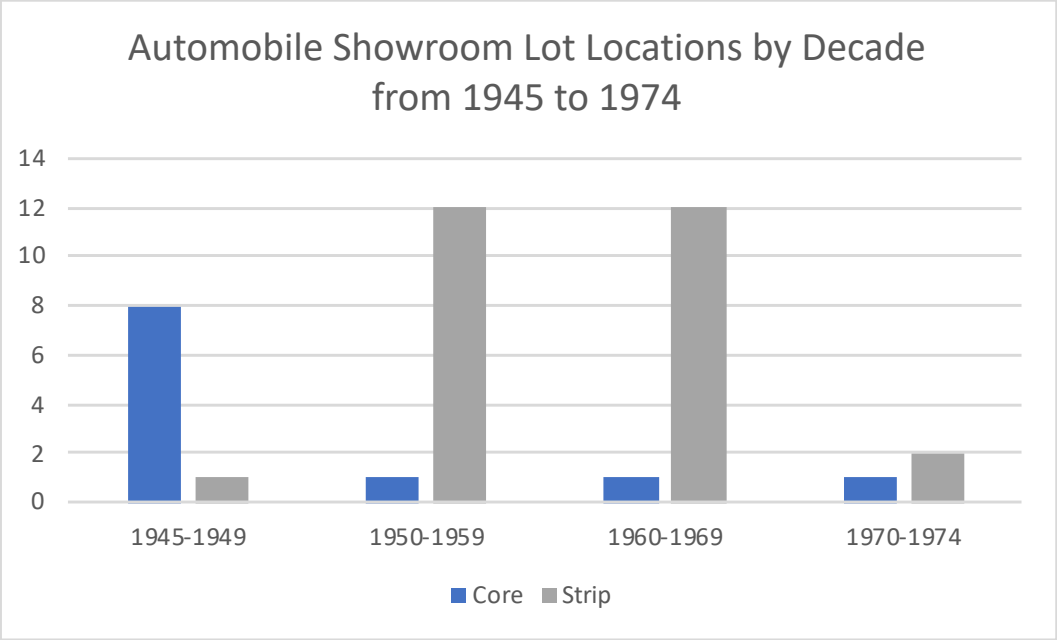

Figure 38 Graph of automobile showroom lot locations between 1945 and 1974.

Beginning in the 1950s, however, a drastic shift is seen when dealers requiring more space, and no longer restricted to foot traffic, expanded outside of the central core onto a commercial strip. Movement of one dealership out to a commercial strip often

influenced other dealers to locate out to the same vicinity, creating 'auto rows.'[206] Geographer Dennis Lord explained that clustering such as this is often attributed to the "comparison shopping opportunities" it provided for customers in the days before the internet, as well as the "advertising advantages" it provided to the sellers.[207] This trend continued not only into the 1960s and early 1970s, but has also shaped the way dealerships today are located, even though today comparison shopping is done almost exclusively online.

It was not a new idea that visual access to multiple facades of a building provided additional advertisement to passing potential customers, which is why corner lots have always had such a high commercial value. The importance of this visual access to multiple facades is evident in the high number of corner lots utilized for automobile showrooms, especially when located within a central core area. Of the twelve showrooms located within a core area, eleven (92%) are located on a corner lot. In these more compact, core areas it was necessary for dealers to utilize the traffic provided by intersections since their most convincing advertising could be done by providing visual access to the automobiles themselves.

However, as automobile showrooms moved out into commercial strips, lots became larger and the buffer space provided around the showrooms meant that multi-facade visual access could be obtained without locating on a corner lot. While corner lots continued to be seen as desirable locations, an increasing number of showrooms located on larger, open lots that allowed for similar visual access along commercial strips (Figure

[206] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 83.
[207] Dennis Lord, "Locational dynamics of automobile dealerships and explanations for spatial clustering," *The International Review of Retail, Distribution & Consumer* Research, 2, no. 3 (1992), 283.

39). Additionally, as Virginians continued to move out of cities and into suburban areas, these commercial strips provided the showrooms with exposure to the daily commuters who were the target audience of dealerships' push for replacement automobiles.

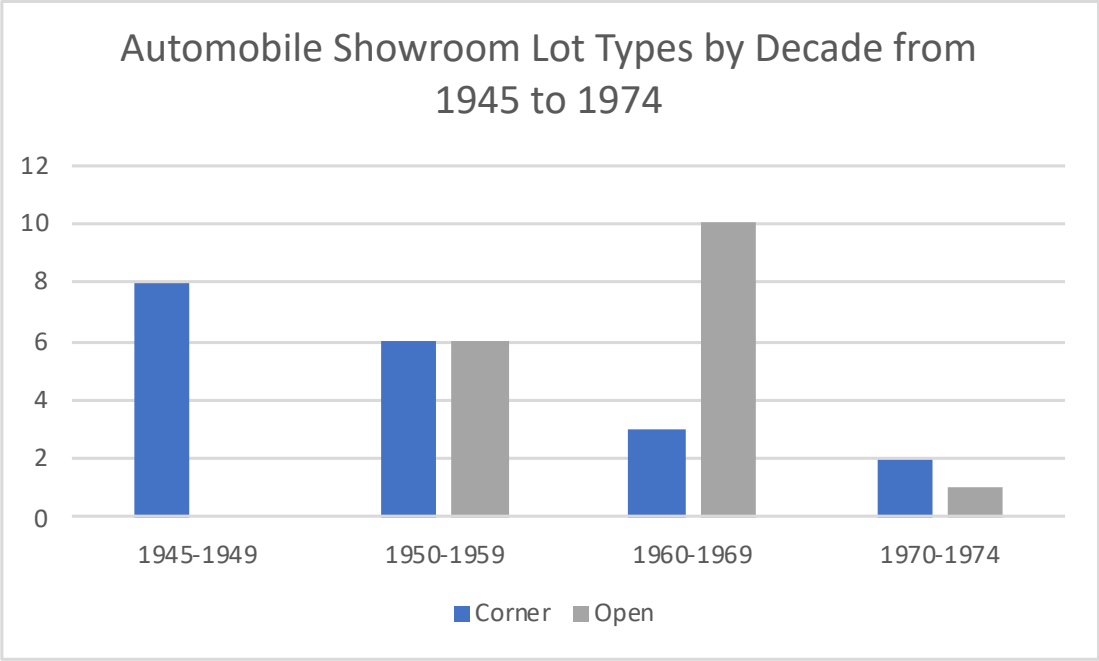

Figure 39 Graph of automobile showroom lot types between 1945 and 1974.

Once a lot had been chosen, it was time for the showroom itself to be constructed. During this period, automobile showrooms emerged as a building type of their own. In a world before the internet, these showrooms were designed to emphasize the machine and call attention to their dealership as the most up-to-date and reliable option to travelers passing by. The key feature to all of these showrooms were expansive stretches of glass windows that provided visual access to the automobiles day and night. All thirty-seven of the Virginia showrooms in the sample utilized plate or tempered glass in their construction and thirty-four (92%) had plate or tempered glass windows as their primary showroom material. A modern feature utilized along with the plate glass was aluminum

or steel framing, rather than wood. Additionally, rather than masonry support columns, smaller aluminum or steel poles were often utilized for supports around the windows to obscure less of the showroom's interior. Aluminum had been fairly common in commercial construction before World War II; however, following the war it became a primary construction material for mid-century commercial buildings. The inclusion of these materials and construction techniques displayed that the dealers were following the trends of auto and other retail buildings, utilizing the "silent salesman" and creating a visual front to appeal to consumers.[208] It also demonstrated the new materials that had quickly become commonplace and a defining feature of this building type.

It has been established that auto dealers needed to convince their customers that their automobiles were the most modern, stylish vehicles, and to do this a dealer must also have an up-to-date showroom. In the early years of the period of significance, the showrooms were largely reflective of the Streamline Moderne, International, and Modern styles seen across the country. Categorized by flat roofs and metal cornices and canopies, Virginia's early showrooms from this period embodied the idea of being "Machines for Selling."[209] With early changes in the 1950s that were increasingly seen in the 1960s and early 1970s, showrooms transitioned from being machines reflecting both the automobile and the "World of Tomorrow," to embodying the Exaggerated Modern style with overemphasized roofs that often extended well past the showrooms edges.[210]

While each of these features - lot location and type, construction designs and materials - were influential in their own right, when viewed together they culminated to

[208] "Glass Showrooms Lure Customers," 36; Dyson, "Opportunity for Commissions," 4.
[209] Kawneer Store Fronts, "Machines for Selling," 15.
[210] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 60-61.

create a building type that was significant for its role in American car-culture. From a young age, children were indoctrinated to view owning an automobile as a patriotic and civic duty. Furthermore, American automobile manufacturers had convinced the American public that the automobile was a mobile symbol of social status and retaining that social status included regularly updating your automobile.[211] While print advertisements were utilized to entice customers into buying the newest, most fashionable models, the automobile showroom provided a way to capture the immediate interest of potential repeat customers. The emphasis was on drawing the customer into the showroom through its architectural appeal and visual access to the automobiles it presented and to provide a space that a salesman could convince customers that this new vehicle was the one for them.

The four showrooms that were more closely examined further demonstrated the important role Virginia's automobile showrooms held between 1945 and 1974 in auto sales, and the ways they evolved to maximize their success. The earliest of these four showrooms was constructed in 1948 as Al's Motors at 3924 Wilson Boulevard, Arlington, Virginia. The choice to design the former Chrysler-Plymouth dealership in the Streamline Moderne style followed Chrysler's 1947 campaign "The Beautiful Chrysler," which "focused on elegant lines and luxurious interiors of cars."[212] Following World War II, automobile manufacturers and other retailers alike promised a "World of Tomorrow," emphasizing the technological innovations that had started with the war and would continue into the future.[213] The Streamline Moderne style of Al's Motors promoted this

[211] Berger, "The Car's Impact on the American Family," 59.
[212] Trieschmann, Mizelle, and Weidlich, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Al's Motors,* 7.
[213] Liebs, *Main Street to Miracle Mile,* 60.

idea and emphasized the building as a machine itself, reflecting the streamlined look of the automobiles it sold. Like most Streamline Moderne showrooms, it included plate glass windows with aluminum framing that wrapped around the curved showroom corners to cover the three facades of the showroom.

Al's Motors was constructed in 1948 when it was still common for automobile dealers to locate within, or immediately along the edges of, a city's core area. Following this development trend, the showroom was constructed along the periphery of Arlington's central core and occupied a prominent corner lot along Wilson Boulevard, a road historically connecting Falls Church, Arlington, and Washington D.C. Locating along a well-traveled roadway increased the visibility of the showroom, but this visibility was further increased by its corner lot and its Streamline Moderne design. The wrapping plate glass windows maximized the visibility provided by the intersection and ensured that travelers could see their displayed automobiles from as many directions as possible. Further assisting in this visibility was its location directly along the roadway, only separated by a sidewalk.

By this time, dealership guidelines provided by manufacturers had led to dealers including both sales and service on their property. Not only did this encourage customers to return to have their cars serviced at their location, but it also provided the opportunity to push new cars on customers who were having their cars serviced. Al's Motors follows this trend and includes an attached service wing that extends from the rear of the showroom. The showroom's central entrance encouraged customers to enter directly from the sidewalk into their showroom before progressing further. Additionally, the showroom's streamlined design with modern materials contrasted with the utilitarian

design of the service wing to draw the customers' eyes to the glass case presenting the newest and best automobiles.

A similar pattern is visible in the 1950's Hechler Motor Company dealership at 6 West Nine Mile Road in Highland Springs, Virginia. Highland Springs developed in a grid around West Nine Mile Road as a "streetcar suburb" of the city of Richmond and experienced peak development following World War II.[214] Hechler Motor Company opened in 1950 as a Chevrolet dealership whose design demonstrated the influence of both the International and Streamline Moderne styles on Modern architecture. While the curves of pure Streamline Moderne have been abandoned here, this flat-roofed box incorporated a sleek, flat metal canopy along the length of the wrapping windows to invoke the streamlined feeling and reflect the modernity of the automobiles within its showroom walls.

Although situated in the middle of the property, Hechler Motors had a unique advantage of occupying the entire end of its block, meaning it utilized two corner lots. Surrounded on either side by parking lots, the Hechler Motors showroom was separated from the street by only a sidewalk which provided daily commuters the opportunity for direct visual access to the newest Chevrolet models. Hechler's use of expansive plate glass windows with thin aluminum framing and aluminum support poles provided twenty-four hour access to passersby, and the central plate glass entrance ensured the automobiles inside were not obscured, but passing pedestrians were still easily welcomed in from the sidewalk. Similar to Al's Motors in Arlington, the location of the service

[214] "The History of Highland Springs," Highland Springs Historic District, 2. Accessed January 21, 2020. https://historichighlandsprings.com/wp-content/uploads/HSLongHistory.pdf.

wing is submissive to that of the showroom, guiding customers to the showroom no matter the reason for the visit.

The location of Hechler Motors additionally displays the rising impact of the automobile on Virginia. The showroom fronts West Nine Mile Road, which is a stretch of U.S. Highway Route 33 that connects directly to Richmond. Truly a suburb of Richmond, the distance from Hechler Motors and Highland Springs to the heart of Richmond is a miniscule 6.8 miles via Route 33. This short and direct route to Richmond made Highland Springs an ideal location for Virginians wishing to work in the state's capital while living out of the city, but it also made it an ideal location to sell automobiles to a commuting community, especially following the end of Richmond's streetcar system in 1949.[215] The location within a suburb's core while also being located on a growing commuter strip demonstrated the shifts that were slowly occurring to appeal to a mobile clientele while not fully letting go of the idea of locating in a core area.

Over a decade later in 1963, Kimnach Ford opened its relocated showroom at 6401 East Virginia Beach Boulevard in Norfolk, Virginia. Starkly contrasting with the earlier Al's Motors and Hechler Motor Company showrooms, Kimnach Ford embraced the transition to dynamic architecture with bold designs that sought the attention of an entirely mobile consumer base. Automobile dealerships were continuing to require larger lots of land and were locating farther outside of core areas during this time. Construction of Interstate 64 forced the dealership to relocate from their previous property, and Kimnach Ford chose a commercial strip of East Virginia Beach Boulevard. Virginia

[215] NBC12 Newsroom, "On This Day in 1949: Richmond's electric street car system comes to an end," NBC 12 (November 25, 2019). Accessed January 21, 2020. https://www.nbc12.com/2019/11/25/this-day-richmonds-electric-street-car-system-comes-an-end/.

Beach Boulevard, or U.S. Highway Route 58, was the main road connecting Norfolk and Virginia Beach, and as such would have been heavily trafficked by commuters traveling to either city.

Located outside of Norfolk's core area along a commercial strip of an arterial highway, Kimnach Ford occupied a larger, open lot rather than a corner lot. This open lot ensured that travelers passing at top speeds could still see their showroom, especially with its Exaggerated Modern style. The Kimnach showroom also demonstrated the growth in parking lot sizes, and their slow relocation to the front of the lot. Gradually, dealers were beginning to use the cars on their lots as the displays themselves, a trend that would continue to take hold and come to define dealerships as we know them today. However, at this time, the showroom retained its place on the pedestal and, like the service wing had done for earlier showrooms, the Kimnach showroom served to draw customers in and past the rows of new cars located in the front of the lot.

Although the location of the showroom had been moved farther away from the roadway, it was intentionally designed to capture the interest of potential customers speeding by. The oversized triple diamond roof appeared to float over the three entirely plate glass and aluminum framed showroom walls that stood beneath it. Additionally, compensating for its removed location, the showroom was elevated approximately four feet, above grade. From the highway, the Kimnach Ford showroom stood proudly above the sea of automobiles surrounding it, once again calling the customer in off the road.

Finally, Casey Chevrolet opened its uniquely shaped circular showroom at 11700 Jefferson Avenue in Newport News, Virginia in 1965. Unlike Kimnach Ford, Casey Chevrolet's expansive 7.3 acre property was situated both along a commercial strip and on a corner lot. The showroom occupied a large corner lot at the intersection of Jefferson

Avenue – Virginia State Route 143 – and J Clyde Morris Boulevard – U.S. Highway Route 17. Prior to the construction of Interstate 64, State Route 143 was the major roadway connecting the cities of Hampton, Newport News, and Williamsburg. U.S. Highway Route 17 runs from Punta Gorda, Florida to Winchester, Virginia, providing a major thoroughfare for North-South travel. Locating at the intersection of these major roads, Casey Chevrolet was again targeting customers already traveling by automobile.

Similar to Kimnach Ford, Casey Chevrolet's showroom embraced the unique forms of the Exaggerated Modern to draw the eyes of the fast moving customer base. The showroom was situated prominently in the corner of the lot, and its circular shape ensured the automobiles inside could be viewed from any approach to the intersection. Again, Casey's showroom was not constructed directly along the roadway, but was set back and surrounded by parking lots. Like Kimnach Ford, this transition, along with the location along significant highways, demonstrated that pedestrian traffic was no longer the focus of advertising. These showrooms were designed to appeal to those passing by in their automobiles, and not only did this prominent parking allow for the additional display of automobiles for sale, the spacious lots also provided customers who were driving to these showrooms the space to park their vehicles.

For Casey Chevrolet, the patterns that were beginning to form in the early 1960s, and seen in Kimnach Ford's showroom, were slowly progressing towards the development of today's dealership properties. With Casey's expansive lot, the emphasis was no longer placed exclusively on the showroom, as could be seen through the showroom's smaller size and vast surrounding parking lots. However, the showroom was still a vital piece to the dealership, evidenced by its design and prominent location on the property. Again similar to Kimnach Ford, Casey's showroom was elevated approximately

four feet above grade to allow it to stand above the surrounding automobiles. Its circular shape constructed from large sheets of plate glass and aluminum framing allowed for maximum visibility at the intersection, as well as creating an interesting visual for passersby. A chunky, red, rectangular paneled, circular roof topped the showroom, but the most eye-catching component of this showroom was its white, C-shaped, silo-esque tower. This projection provided additional space within the showroom for sales staff, but also rose above the showroom's roof to create a dramatic and eye-catching sign with the bold, red letters of 'CASEY' contrasting against the sign's white background.

For all of its similarities with Kimnach Ford, Casey's design was unique amongst Virginia's automobile showrooms in the sample. While some showrooms did include semi-circular designs, Casey's was the only circular showroom, and was also the only showroom detached from the dealership's service wing. Although the exact motivations for this choice of design are unknown, the design takes advantage of the expansive corner property, and could represent a dealer grappling with the gradual changes occurring within the auto sales industry. The separation from the service wing and the circular design allowed for maximum visibility at the intersection. In addition to the unobstructed view of the automobiles this design offered, the circular shape and the Exaggerated Modern roof and towering c-shaped, silo-esque sign created an eye-catching showroom that was sure to stand out amongst other dealerships and commercial buildings. Additionally, its location within the large sales lot demonstrated the transitional stage that still valued the important role of the showroom, but recognized the growing success and necessity of the sales lot.

The showrooms of Al's Motors, Hechler Motor Company, Kimnach Ford, and Casey Chevrolet demonstrated the important role automobile showrooms had in auto

sales, emphasizing the physical experience that mid-century auto sales were intended to be. Their architecture was designed to be eye-catching and draw in customers, but unlike many other retailers, automobile showrooms were attempting to convince customers through their architecture and visual access to the products to upgrade their automobiles *while they were in their current automobile.* And while this approach was also used in displays for products such as clothing or jewelry to create comparisons to the items the customer was currently wearing, automobile showrooms were attempting to persuade customers to make one of the largest purchases they could afford to make, or even one they could not afford.

The showroom's job did not end once it convinced the passing driver to stop and pull into the lot. Whether a customer was encouraged to visit the showroom by its architecture or another form of advertisement, the showroom became the first meeting room between a customer and what could be their new automobile. The showrooms were centers for annual model reveals and sales events, and using modern materials that reflected the machines created environments that highlighted the modernity of the vehicles inside. By the mid-century period, Americans no longer needed convincing that they should own an automobile, with some claiming as early as the 1920s that they would "rather do without clothes" or "go without food" before giving up their car.[216] However, this period "perfected the annual model change," and convinced Americans that it was no longer enough to simply own an automobile, but that they must have the newest versions to retain their social status.[217] The showroom existed in the center of this ploy, setting up

[216] James M. Rubenstein, *Making and Selling Cars: Innovation and Change in the U.S. Automotive Industry*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 307.
[217] Rubenstein, *Making and Selling Cars*, 272.

shop along the most traveled roadways to visually appeal to automobile owners and draw them in to allow the smooth-talking auto salesmen to sell their wares.

Many of these patterns have continued to evolve and have come to define modern day automobile dealerships. A modern dealership must still include an up-to-date showroom; however, today these showrooms are typically home to sales desks and the occasional unobtainable, high-end or antique automobile. As was starting to be seen in Virginia's dealerships of the 1960s, expansive parking lots filled with new and used automobiles have become the showroom. Today's automobile dealerships are constructed around their car lots, with the customer typically only visiting the showroom to complete sales paperwork or use the restroom. The modern "showroom" has become the car lot or, even more commonly, the "showroom" exists on the internet.

It is unsurprising in our rapidly digitizing world that auto sales have not escaped this transition. Today, the potential car buyer can compare makes and models of automobiles from the comfort of their home, and with new digital companies such as Carvanna, Shift, and Vroom, they can complete the purchase and have their new automobile shipped directly to them without ever going to a dealership.[218] Companies such as CarMax are following this trend by delivering vehicles for customers to test drive, allowing them to "spend less time on the lot" (Figure 40).[219] Other third party companies, such as Auto Trader, CarGurus, and True Car, provide opportunities for online comparison shopping that allow the consumer to access a higher transparency in

[218] Srikant Inampudi, Nicolaas Kramer, Inga Maurer, and Virginia Simmons, "As dramatic disruption comes to automotive showrooms, proactive dealers can benefit greatly," McKinsey and Company Automotive & Assembly (January 2019). Accessed January 15, 2020. https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/automotive-and-assembly/our-insights/as-dramatic-disruption-comes-to-automotive-showrooms-proactive-dealers-can-benefit-greatly.
[219] "Get your test drive delivered," CarMax. Accessed February 22, 2020. https://www.carmax.com/home-delivery.

pricing and become more educated before their purchase than ever before.[220] Another even more removed option includes companies such as Automatch Consulting and Authority Auto that will assist buyers in determining which vehicle they want as well as assisting customers in the buying process to "negotiate with dealers so you don't have to."[221] So even while many customers still want to see a vehicle in person before finalizing their purchase, by the time they arrive at the dealership they typically already know exactly what they are looking for, or know the limited options they want to consider.[222]

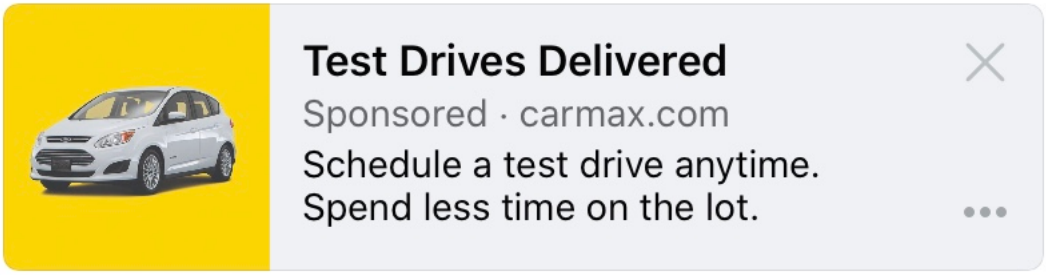

Figure 40 "Test Drives Delivered," CarMax sponsored advertisement promoting "less time on the lot" (photo from CarMax sponsored advertisement on Facebook).

Gone are the days of visiting an automobile showroom to learn about the newest deals, or mass visitation to see the newest model unveiled. More than ever, automobiles are today viewed as utilitarian necessities, with a 2006 Pew Survey reporting that 75% of Americans view their car as nothing more than "a means of transportation."[223] The

[220] Inampudi, Kramer, Maurer, and Simmons, "As dramatic disruption comes to automotive showrooms, proactive dealers can benefit greatly;" Ben Geier, "Car dealerships turn to iPads, not sign twirlers, to win business," Fortune (September 2, 2014). Accessed January 15, 2020. https://fortune.com/2014/09/02/car-dealerships-turn-to-ipads-not-sign-twirlers-to-win-business/.
[221] "Home Page," Authority Auto. Accessed January 20, 2020. https://www/authorityauto.com.
[222] Geier, "Car dealerships turn to iPads."
[223] Paul Taylor, Cary Funk, Peyton Craighill, "Americans and Their Cars:
Is the Romance on the Skids?" Pew Research Center (July 2006). Accessed January 15, 2019.
https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2010/10/Cars.pdf.

prominent location and architecture of Virginia's mid-century automobile showrooms were designed to attract customers into their dealerships to experience purchasing an automobile at the height of American car-culture. The use of modern materials and designs reflecting the machine and providing dramatic visuals was intended to provide an enhanced visual and physical experience that equaled the public's devotion to the automobile. Showrooms such as those operated by Al's Motors, Hechler Motor Company, Kimnach Ford, and Casey Chevrolet represented the evolution of Virginia's love affair with the automobile, reflecting the growth and decline, the changes in designs, and the changes in consumer needs.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

This thesis posed the question: how are the architecture and development patterns of Virginia's automobile showrooms constructed between 1945 and 1974 significant in a larger pattern of American automotive history? Through the analysis of the thirty-seven automobile showrooms, it was discovered that while the architecture of these mid-century showrooms plays an important role, they are primarily culturally significant for their role in mid-century American car-culture and a now defunct way of selling and purchasing automobiles.

Virginia's mid-century automobile showrooms reflected the architectural trends of their time, embodying characteristics that were seen in showrooms nationwide. However, these trends were often used on varying sorts of commercial buildings. While features such as expansive glass windows became essential to the automobile showroom building type, architectural historian Carol Dyson explained how this characteristic dominated storefronts of all kinds of businesses. The architecture of these showrooms most certainly played an important role in creating a recognizable building type; however, their significance in American automotive history lies in their social and cultural impact.

Virginia's automobile showrooms reflected the changes in American life seen during the period between 1945 and 1974. In the early years of this post-war period the showrooms remained located within a central core that was easily accessed on foot or via

public transportation such as street cars. Gradually, as the auto industry had successfully become a necessity in American life, Virginia's auto showrooms began relocating further outside of central cores onto commercial strips. This relocation signaled the transition from appealing to pedestrian traffic purchaseing their first automobile, to marketing directed at automobile traffic hoping to lure current owners into upgrading their vehicle or adding a second or third automobile to their family. Not only do the lot locations change during this time, but there is also a shift in the type of lot utilized. Larger lots along commercial strips meant that dealers no longer had to rely on corner lots to receive maximum visibility. Instead they could utilize large, open lots along major routes that provided visibility and convenience for customers traveling via car.

In addition to the development patterns, automobile showrooms ingrained themselves into the lives of Americans during the 1945 to 1974 period. Robert Genat and other automobile enthusiasts placed the annual model release at auto showrooms on the same level as a town's homecoming football game, or the world series of the auto industry. These automobile showrooms became a central place for events and a place to draw in customers for a feeling of excitement and community for all ages. Community members of Martinsville, Virginia reminisced about such events on the Facebook page "This Is My Town's History – Martinsville, Virginia," in response to Ray Hooper's post of a photo captioned, "Mitchell Howell Ford in the 60s on Main Street--Rania's Rest. is there now !":[224]

[224] Ray Hooper, "Mitchell Howell Ford in the 60s on Main Street," in "This Is My Town's History – Martinsville, Virginia," Facebook (January 10, 2020). Accessed February 17, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=3752437574781398&set=gm.1438301869684628&type=3&theater&ifg=1.

S Ann Knight Clausen: *I remember it was almost a social affair when the new models arrived*

Bill Bouldin: *Oh, it was! Remember how the dealerships would paper over their showroom windows to keep their new models hidden until the big unveiling. And they always had candy and soft drinks for the kids at the showroom.*

S Ann Knight Clausen: *And there were lots of people walking around. Did the models arrive about the same time of year? September?*

Bill Bouldin: *I recall each dealership having an unveiling sometime in September or October for the following model year – i.e. the 1965 models were unveiled in the fall of 1955.*

These mid-century automobile showrooms and the automobiles within represented hope, freedom, prosperity, technology, and modernity. The automobile had become entrenched in the American psyche, creating a uniquely American car-culture. The showroom encouraged and mirrored the desire for physical and technological growth. They perpetuated these ideas by centering on creating an experience by drawing customers onto the property and into the showrooms. However, with the entrance of foreign manufacturers into the American market and the continued development of automobile marketing, this way of selling the automobile to the American public, this experience, has all but vanished.

Today, the emphasis of auto dealerships is placed on the expansive lots filled with new and used cars featuring well-kept showrooms as the backdrop and location of offices. However, Virginia's mid-century dealerships proudly emphasized the showroom and the role it played in securing sales. The use of modern materials and designs created visually and physically inviting spaces that highlighted an open relationship between the consumer and automobile. They were developed into spaces that generated excitement by hosting annual model unveilings, holiday sales and celebrations, and the experience of

interacting with a new automobile, all of which were encompassed within a building that mirrored the automobiles they were selling.

Although some today view these buildings and have the same thought that the owner of the 1948 automobile showroom in Athens expressed to me, "I mean, it's just an old showroom. It's just a bunch of glass," many others, like the members of the Martinsville community, know the significance, whether they recognize it or not, of this unique period of American automotive, and social, history. Since my first conversation with the owner of the showroom in Athens, the evidence of this research has proved just such a point. When this project began, all versions of the future plans for the 1948 dealership complex included demolishing the showroom. However, through conversations utilizing the findings of this study, along with building specific research, the building committee has done an about-face, now situating future plans for the property around preserving, and making the best use of, the Streamline Moderne automobile showroom.

Future areas of research

The pursuit of the answer to this thesis question has also produced areas of future research. One such question that arose in analyzing and visiting the automobile showrooms within this sample of Virginia, is how these showrooms could be reused while retaining their integrity and significance. Many of the showrooms within this sample are today used for the food industry, retail, auto sales, or in some other auto-related capacity. As with any commercial building, the businesses within change through time and with it their names and needs. More thorough analysis could be done into the relationship of the interior and exterior, the level of integrity retained in all extant showrooms, and the best approaches to the adaptive reuse of Virginia's mid-century

automobile showrooms while retaining their significance. Lastly, further research could be conducted surrounding the advocacy, education, and resources for mid-century building types such as automobile showrooms. As seen with the auto showroom in Athens, advocacy and education are crucial elements to the preservation of mid-century automobile showrooms.

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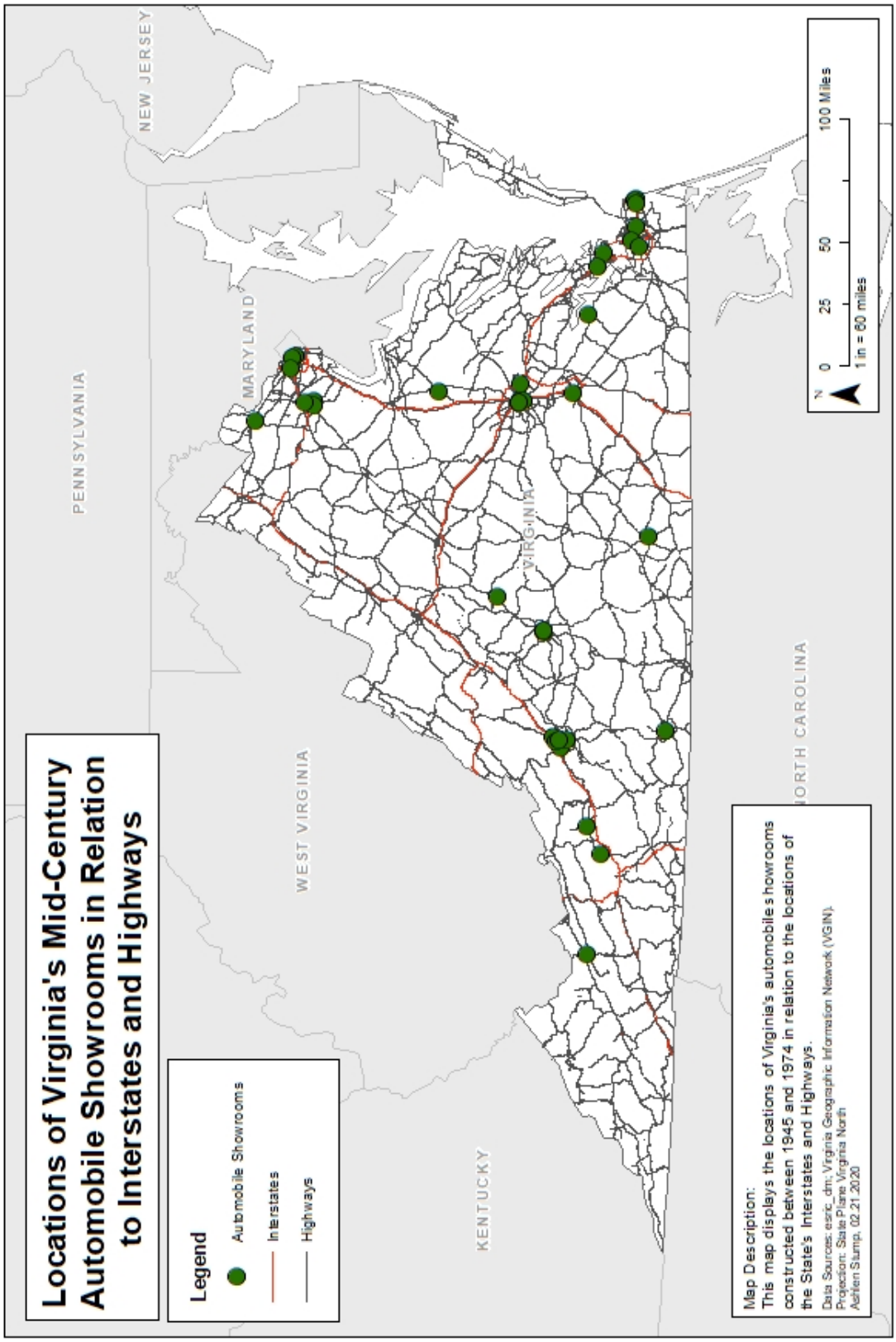
APPENDIX A


Locations of Virginia's Mid-Century Automobile Showrooms in Relation to Interstates and Highways
Legend
Automobile Showrooms
Interstates
Highways
Map Description:
This map displays the locations of Virginia's automobile showrooms constructed between 1945 and 1974 in relation to the locations of the State's Interstates and Highways.
Data Sources: esric_dm; Virginia Geographic Information Network (VGIN).
Projection: State Plane Virginia North
Ashlen Slump, 02.21.2020
N
0
25
50
100 Miles
1 in = 60 miles
PENNSYLVANIA
NEW JERSEY
MARYLAND
WEST VIRGINIA
VIRGINIA
KENTUCKY
NORTH CAROLINA

Address	City	Year Built	Extant, Renovated, Demolished	Vacant or In use	Current Use	Brand Constructed for, if known	Strip or Free Standing	Lot Location	Lot Setting	Roof Type	Primary Showroom Materials	Secondary Showroom Materials	Canopy/ Awning/ Cornice/Etc.	Showroom Shape	Location of Entrances	Service Wing	Original Signage/ Forms?
1124 Church Street	Lynchburg	1945	Extant	In Use	Food Industry		Free Standing	Corner	Core	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	Flat metal canopy	Rectangular	Sides	Attached	
149 E Main St	Martinsville	1945	Renovated	In Use	Food Industry	Ford	Free Standing	Corner	Core	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing		Flat metal cornice	Rectangular w/ Curved Corners	Sides	Attached	Roof sign - Removed
318 W Main Street	Tazewell	1945	Extant	In Use	Brewrey		Strip	Interior	Core	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick		Rectangular	Sides	Attached	
1300 Court Street	Lynchburg	1945	Extant	In Use	Brewrey		Free Standing	Corner	Core	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	Flat metal canopy	Rectangular, Cantilevered Windows	Sides	Attached	Pylon form, surrounding entryway, rising above roofline
2107-2115 Granby Street	Norfolk	1947	Extant	In Use	Retail		Strip	Corner	Core	Flat w/ Stepped Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	-	Rectangular	Central	Attached	
2220 Turnpike Rd	Portsmouth	1947	Demolished	-	-		Free Standing	Corner	Core	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	-	Semi-Circular	Sides	Attached	
3924 Wilson Blvd	Arlington	1948	Extant	In Use	Gym	Chrysler-Plymouth	Free Standing	Corner	Core	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick & Concrete Block	Flat metal cornice	Rectangular w/ Curved Corners	Central	Attached	Free standing sign
342 Mecklenburg Drive	Chase City	1948	Extant	Vacant	-		Free Standing	Corner	Core	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	-	Rectangular, Cropped Corners	Central	Attached	
1101 Fifth Street	Lynchburg	1949	Extant	In Use	Auto Related		Free Standing	Corner	Strip	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	T1-11 Siding	Concrete Cornice	Rectangular, cropped corners	Sides	Attached	Sign Banding
419-421 N Washington Ave	Pulaski	1950	Demolished	-	-		Free Standing	Corner	Core	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	Metal Cornice	Rectangular w/ Curved Corner	Sides	Attached	
15478 Antioch Rd	Milford	1950	Extant	Vacant	-	Chevrolet	Free Standing	Open	Strip	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Concrete Block	Flat metal canopy	Semi-Circular	Sides	Attached	
6 W 9 Mile Rd	Highland Springs	1950	Extant	In Use	Auto Related	Chevrolet	Free Standing	Corner	Core	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	Flat metal canopy	Rectangular	Central	Attached	Free standing sign - removed
1001 W Broad St	Falls Church	1950	Extant	Vacant	-		Free Standing	Corner	Strip	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Concrete Block	-	Rectangular w/ Curved Corner	Sides	Attached	
857 Virginia Beach Blvd	Virginia Beach	1950	Extant	In Use	Auto Sales		Free Standing	Open	Strip	Reverse Butterfly	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Metal Framing	Roof Overhang	Rectangular	Sides	Attached	

Address	City	Year Built	Extant, Renovated, Demolished	Vacant or In use	Current Use	Brand Constructed for, if known	Strip or Free Standing	Lot Location	Lot Setting	Roof Type	Primary Showroom Materials	Secondary Showroom Materials	Canopy/ Awning/ Cornice/Etc.	Showroom Shape	Location of Entrances	Service Wing	Original Signage/ Forms?
214 Cowardin Ave	Richmond	1950	Extant	In Use	Religious	Chevrolet	Free Standing	Corner	Strip	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Concrete Block	Flat metal canopy	Rectangular w/ Curved Corners	Central	Attached	Fin/Pylon Intact
3321 W Broad St	Richmond	1951	Extant	In Use	Auto Related		Free Standing	Corner	Strip	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	Flat metal canopy	Rectangular	Central	Attached	
3400 Columbia Pike	Arlington	1955	Demolished	-	-	Chevrolet	Free Standing	Corner	Strip	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	-	-	Rectangular w/ Curved Corner	Sides	Attached	
4017 Thomas Nelson Hwy	Arrington	1955	Renovated	In Use	Salon	Ford	Free Standing	Open	Strip	Flat w/ Stepped Parapet	Concrete Block	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	-	Rectangular	Central	Attached	
7106 Williamson Rd	Hollins	1955	Extant	In Use	Auto Related	British Imports	Free Standing	Open	Strip	Flat w/ Parapet & Pediment	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	-	Rectangular	Central	-	
625 Campbell Ave Southwest	Roanoke	1955	Extant	In Use	Manufacturing		Free Standing	Open	Strip	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	Metal Canopy	Rectangular	Central	Attached	
4600 W Broad St	Richmond	1957	Extant	In Use	Auto Sales	Ford	Free Standing	Open	Strip	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	-	-	Rectangular	Central & Sides	Attached	
4400 W Broad St	Richmond	1960	Demolished	-	-		Free Standing	Open	Strip	Front Gable	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Concrete Block & Brick	Roof Overhang	Rectangular	Sides	Attached	
435 E Colonial Trail	Surry	1960	Extant	Vacant	-	Ford	Free Standing	Open	Strip	Flat w/ Stepped Parapet	Concrete Block	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	-	Rectangular	Central	Attached	
1020 W Mercury Blvd	Hampton	1961	Renovated	In Use	Auto Sales	Ford	Free Standing	Open	Strip	Diamond	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	Roof Overhang	Rectangular	Sides	Attached	
834 E Main St	Salem	1961	Renovated	In Use	Auto Sales	Ford	Free Standing	Open	Strip	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	Flat Metal Canopy	Rectangular	Central & Sides	Attached	
6401 E Virginia Beach Blvd	Norfolk	1963	Extant	In Use	Auto Sales	Ford	Free Standing	Open	Strip	Diamonds	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Concreate Block	Roof Overhang	Rectangular	Central & Sides	Attached	
11700 Jefferson Ave	Newport News	1963	Extant	In Use	Auto Sales	Chevrolet	Free Standing	Corner	Strip	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Concrete Block	Roof Overhang	Circular	Sides	On Property	C-shaped tower
800 N Glebe Rd	Arlington	1964	Demolished	-	-	Chevrolet	Free Standing	Corner	Strip	Diamonds	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Concrete Block	Roof Overhang	Semi-Circular	Sides	Attached	

Address	City	Year Built	Extant, Renovated, Demolished	Vacant or In use	Current Use	Brand Constructed for, if known	Strip or Free Standing	Lot Location	Lot Setting	Roof Type	Primary Showroom Materials	Secondary Showroom Materials	Canopy/ Awning/ Cornice/Etc.	Showroom Shape	Location of Entrances	Service Wing	Original Signage/ Forms?
8104 Centreville Rd	Yorkshire	1964	Extant	In Use	RV Sales		Free Standing	Open	Strip	Front Gable w/ Stepped Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	Flat Porch Roof	Rectangular	Central	Attached	
3926 Williamson Rd	Roanoke	1965	Extant	In Use	Auto Sales	Pontiac	Free Standing	Open	Strip	Flat w/ Upturned Cornice	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	Roof Overhang, metal service canopy	Rectangular	Sides	Attached	Pylon removed, Service sign Intact
6832 Lee Highway	Fairlawn	1965	Extant	Vacant	-	Ford	Free Standing	Open	Strip	Reverse Butterfly	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	Roof Overhang	Rectangular	Sides	Attached	Roof sign
401 Laskin Rd	Virginia Beach	1966	Extant	In Use	Cleaners		Free Standing	Corner	Core	Flat w/ Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	Flat metal Canopy	Rectangular	Central	Attached	
623 Virginia Beach Blvd	Virginia Beach	1968	Extant	In Use	Retail		Free Standing	Open	Strip	Front Gable	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Metal	Roof Overhang	Rectangular	Sides	Attached	
847 E Market St	Leesburg	1968	Renovated	In Use	Auto Sales	Ford	Free Standing	Open	Strip	Front Gable	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Concrete Block	Roof Overhang	Rectangular	Central	Attached	
130 Bollingbrook St	Petersburg	1970	Extant	Vacant	-		Free Standing	Corner	Core	Front Gable w/ Slip Cover & Stepped Parapet	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick	Metal Awning	Rectangular	Central	Attached	
8010 Centreville Rd	Yorkshire	1974	Extant	In Use	Auto Sales		Free Standing	Open	Strip	Front Gable	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Concrete Block	-	Rectangular	Central	Attached	
8820 Centreville Rd	Manassas	1974	Renovated	In Use	Auto Sales	Ford	Free Standing	Corner	Strip	Front Gable	Plate/Tempered Glass w/ aluminum/metal framing	Brick, Metal Siding	Roof Overhang	Rectangular	Sides	Attached	