

NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 10-90)
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

OMB No. 1024-0019

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name Clark & Sorrell Garage

other names/site number Clark & Sorrell Inc.

2. Location

street & number 323 Foster Street

N/A not for publication

city or town Durham

vicinity N/A

state North Carolina code NC county Durham code 063 zip code 27702

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property XX meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Jeffrey Crow SHPO
Signature of certifying official

7/7/00
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

Cat: transportation: road-related (vehicular)

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Commercial Style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick
roof other (tar & gravel)
walls brick
other concrete

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

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

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

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.

_____ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

=====

11. Form Prepared By

=====

name/title M. Ruth Little
organization Longleaf Historic Resources date Dec. 7, 1999
street & number 2709 Bedford Avenue telephone 919-836-9731
city or town Raleigh state NC zip code 27607

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12. Additional Documentation

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Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps
A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs
Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

=====

Property Owner

=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name _____
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

=====

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 7 Page 1
Clark & Sorrell Garage
Durham, North Carolina

Section 7: Description

Clark and Sorrell Garage stands at 323 Foster Street in Durham, one half-block north of Morgan Street, the north boundary of the city center. Its immediate neighborhood contains such commercial and light industrial activities as tobacco warehouses and automotive service businesses; on the north side of the garage is a tire warehouse, a two-story early twentieth century commercial building to the south. New development is moving into the area as downtown Durham experiences a renewal. A YMCA was recently built across the street, and a high-rise hotel looms nearby on Morgan Street.

The Clark & Sorrell Garage, built in 1932, is a one-story brick building, three bays wide and four bays deep, with a flat tar and gravel roof. Load-bearing walls have random common bond brickwork. The building has a concrete floor and interior steel post and beam framework. The brick facade extends above the roofline in a decorative parapet, with concrete coping. The center bay garage door, originally of metal, has been replaced with a fiberglass door. A brick panel located above the garage door was removed in later years to allow larger vehicles to enter the service area. The north bay contains the original office entrance, with a glazed and paneled door and a plate glass display window. A sign on the window says "Clark & Sorrell since 1923." A metal casement transom provides additional illumination. The south bay contains an identical plate glass display window and transom. Side elevations contain metal windows with wire glass.

The interior contains an open service area where autos are serviced, with brick walls, exposed steel framing, and concrete floors. Service bays flank a wide central open area. The only alterations to the service area are the addition of large florescent ceiling lights and a central heating and air conditioning system that replaced the original small wall light fixtures and a number of pot-bellied stoves.

A two-story office area is located in the northeast corner of the building. The office section, finished with beadboard walls and some original five horizontal panel doors, contains two low-ceilinged levels, the main offices at street level and more offices and the original parts department upstairs. The main office contains a waiting area, a counter and business area, a small bathroom, a closet, and a corner open-string staircase to the upstairs. The partition wall has casement windows overlooking the service area. A smaller private office that belonged to Mr. Clark opens into the main office. Three original bathrooms are arranged along the back wall of the office section. The "ladies lounge" is reached through a small hallway that opens from the service area. Two bathrooms for the employees, originally labelled "white" and "colored," open to the service area. At the front of the upstairs area are two offices, one that belonged to Mr. Sorrell and the other, containing the office safe, to the bookkeeper. The rear upper room served as the parts department. Its casement windows still overlook the service area. Originally, a rear stair linked this directly to the service area, but the stair was removed when a new parts department was added at the rear of the building. The two offices upstairs and Mr. Clark's downstairs office were sheathed in knotty pine paneling at a later date, probably in the 1950s.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section 7 Page 2
Clark & Sorrell Garage
Durham, North Carolina**

The ca. 1941 addition that extends seven bays to the rear to Roney Street, consists of a poured concrete basement, common bond brick walls, and a reinforced concrete interior framework. The Roney Street addition is faced with brick veneer and has an Art Moderne style entrance with a stuccoed surround flanked by metal windows with wire glass. Similar windows occupy the other bays. The basement level of the addition extends the service area of the original building. The upper level, accessible from Roney Street, contains the parts department, with the customer service area in front and storage rooms at the rear. This level has bare brick walls with built-in shelving that is more recent in date.

A historic sign pole, probably installed when the business became an Amoco oil distributorship in the 1930s, stands in front of the building. The cast-iron pole with iron brackets appears in a 1940s documentary photo. It carries a plastic business sign that is a more recent replacement. The sign is one of five landmark signs designated by the Landmark Sign Commission of Durham.

The north side of the building originally had a metal shed awning that sheltered the grease pit. The rear section of the awning is still in place, but the pit has been filled in and is no longer in use.

The Clark & Sorrell Garage has a remarkably high degree of architectural integrity. Because it has continued to serve its original function for some seventy years, almost no changes have been made, with the exception of the parts department addition. A comparison between a 1940s documentary photo of the building and a photo of the building today shows that it remains basically unchanged (see Fig. 1).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Section 7 Page 3
Clark & Sorrell Garage
Durham, North Carolina

Fig. 1. Documentary Photograph of the Clark & Sorrell Garage, 1930s. Original in possession of Ray Allen, owner.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 4
Clark & Sorrell Garage
Durham, North Carolina

Section 8: Statement of Significance

The Clark & Sorrell Garage at 323 Foster Street in downtown Durham was built in 1932. It is the oldest auto repair garage still in operation in the city. Leroy Clark and Donnie Sorrell founded the business in 1922, occupying several existing commercial buildings prior to constructing the modern free-standing garage in 1932 in a tobacco warehouse and light-industrial area north of the central business district. Durham contractor Jesse Cole built the building from plans from an unknown source, perhaps provided by a national company such as Ford Motor Company. In its early years, the garage specialized in Ford auto repair and had an Amoco oil distributorship. Clark, the master mechanic, and Sorrell, the business manager, provided high-quality service to the autos of Durham's citizens until they retired in the 1970s and 1980s. The business remains in operation under new ownership. The functional yet handsome brick and concrete building, with a well-lit facade and nearly unaltered interior, has significance under Criterion A as a tangible expression of the impact of the automobile on the Durham streetscape during its period of significance from 1932 to 1950. As a well-preserved example of an important building type, the auto repair garage, the building has architectural significance under Criterion C.

Historical Background

Leroy Clark (ca. 1895-1982), whose family moved from South Carolina to Durham in 1899, was known as a master mechanic and inventor. His first job was in Rochelle's bicycle shop in Durham as a mechanic. His next job was as an automotive mechanic in the East Durham Garage, then in 1916 he moved to the Durham Motor Car Company. In 1917 he opened his own shop on Parrish Street.¹ In 1922, a young man named Donnie A. Sorrell began a life-long association with Clark. Their company, known as Clark & Sorrell Inc., is the oldest auto repair garage in Durham. For the first ten years the business operated in a series of rented quarters in two-story commercial buildings. The business's first location was in the 200 block of E. Parrish Street, one block north of Main Street, later moving across the street to 217 E. Parrish Street, then to Holloway Street, then back to 217 E. Parrish Street.

Throughout his long partnership with Sorrell, Clark provided the mechanical expertise. In the early years the store specialized in Ford auto repair. Clark retired about 1970 and died in 1982.² Donnie A. Sorrell (1900-1995) was a Wake County native who moved to Durham as a youth. Sorrell, a gregarious individual, provided the business management skill in the partnership and became a pillar of the Durham community. During World War II he served as chairman of the Durham County Gasoline Rationing Board. Other positions of leadership included the presidencies of the Rotary Club, the Durham Chamber of Commerce, and the YMCA. During the 1950s he served a four-year term as a state highway commissioner.³ One of his biggest accomplishments in this post was his involvement in the construction of U.S. Highway 15-501 between Durham and Chapel Hill. Sorrell retired

¹ Wyatt T. Dixon, "Began With Rochelle," *How Times Do Change*, 180.

² Ray Allen, Durham, interview with the author, November 23, 1999.

³ Dixon, "Plaudits Well Deserved," *How Times Do Change*, 326.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section 8 Page 5
Clark & Sorrell Garage
Durham, North Carolina**

about 1986 and died in 1995 at the age of ninety-four.⁴

The December 16, 1923 issue of the *Durham Morning Herald* includes an advertisement for Clark & Sorrell Auto Service, then located at 217 Parrish Street. The ad contains a decorative engraving with a garage, bearing the name Clark & Sorrell, at the top, a Model T Ford at the bottom, and side borders of car parts, including a tire and a jack, and the legend "We repair Fords---Genuine Ford parts" (Fig. 2). Ford Motor Company may have supplied the engraving as a service to their parts distributors. Ford's architectural department likely created such personalized newspaper advertisements, with the image of a modern repair facility, for their service network all over the United States.

In 1927 Clark & Sorrell purchased two lots between Foster and Roney streets, three blocks north of Main Street, on which to build a modern free-standing garage. W. B. Umstead sold the partners a lot on Foster Street for \$100 (Durham Co. DB 84-687). The 1913 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows a livery stable standing on this site at 323 Foster Street, perhaps operated by Umstead. J. W. and Vera Paschall sold them a one-fifth acre lot with a small brick house on Roney Street for \$100 (Durham Co. DB 84-674). Yet Clark & Sorrell continued to lease the building at 217 Parrish Street, perhaps delayed from beginning construction of the new building by the Great Depression.

In 1932 Clark and Sorrell hired Durham contractor Jesse Cole to construct their new building, which was completed by December of that year.⁵ The new building strongly resembles the garage in the newspaper ad, although this appeared nine years prior to its construction. Ford Motor Company or another national automotive company may have supplied blueprints for the new repair garage. The 1937 Sanborn Insurance Map shows the building in place, without the addition. The surrounding area was in mixed usage, partly residential and partly light-industrial in character. The map shows a tin shop to the south, and tobacco factories and warehouses in the blocks to the east. The Durham City Garage was constructed in the late 1930s in the vicinity, and the Durham Bulls baseball park was built in 1939 a few blocks to the north. The auto dealerships of Cadillac, Rambler, and Lincoln-Mercury stood nearby. During the next several decades, the housing disappeared and many tire stores, repair garages, filling stations, used car sales shops, and other related automotive businesses came to the area.⁶

Later (the date is unknown) the Clark and Sorrell Garage had an Amoco distributorship and sold Amoco gas. Throughout its sixty-seven year history, the building has remained almost unchanged. By 1941 the business had outgrown its original quarters, thus the addition was constructed that nearly doubled the size of the building. The addition extends to Roney Street, and has a separate entrance. This section of the business housed the parts department.⁷ Leroy Clark retired in the 1970s, Donnie Sorrell in the 1980s, and long-time employee Ray Allen and his wife Priscilla purchased the business and have operated it since that time. The business has provided

⁴ Ray Allen interview.

⁵ Ray Allen interview; Durham City Directories, 1931-1932; *Durham Morning Herald* advertisements, 1932.

⁶ Durham Sanborn Map, 1937, 1959 update; Durham City Directories, 1930s-1950s.

⁷ Durham City Directories, 1940, 1941.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 8 Page 7
Clark & Sorrell Garage
Durham, North Carolina

quality auto repair to the community since its establishment. Preservation of the building has become a symbol of this continuity of service.

Transportation Context: Auto Repair Garages

At the end of the century of the automobile, it is appropriate to record and preserve good examples of the new automotive building types, including automobile showrooms, auto repair garages, gas stations, tire supply stores, domestic garages, and commercial parking buildings. The Clark & Sorrell Building has local significance under Criterion A as a historic example of the new industry of auto repair created by the advent of automotive transportation in the early twentieth century. The building is also significant under Criterion C as a well-preserved example of the auto repair garage building type. In North Carolina, the automobile showroom, often a bold architectural statement designed by an architect to attract consumers' attention, has been recorded in historic surveys and occasionally listed in the National Register. One example is the M & O Chevrolet Building, (NR 1983), an Art Moderne landmark in downtown Fayetteville. Its counterpart, the auto repair garage, has received almost no attention in the state because it is a utilitarian building type.

During the second decade of the twentieth century, a mass market developed for moderate-priced automobiles as Henry Ford's Model-T became accessible to a wider customer base. The proliferation of autos led to the standardization of new building types. By the mid-1910s several types of auto showrooms had evolved—one for urban settings and another for more suburban locations. The earliest automobile showrooms were built on Main Street and were generally multi-functional and multi-story. The Overland Garage Company in Kinston, Lenoir County, a three-story brick Classical Revival style building with showroom and garage on the street level and offices above, was built about 1918. Another variation is a combination gas station and repair garage, such as the two-story Mission Style building at 400 S. Church Street in Rocky Mount, in Nash County, built in the 1920s, with car space recessed beneath the building.⁸ In suburban locations out of the central business districts, automotive buildings were only one-story. Pridamers Garage was built in 1914 in Southern Pines, Moore County, as an auto showroom and garage. The building represents an early example of the prototype: a one-story masonry building with central garage bay flanked by an office and showroom and rear repair garage. The ornamental facade has a false front, pilasters and a heavy bracketed cornice.

Classic auto showrooms also appeared in Durham in the early 1920s. Carpenter's Chevrolet Company, Johnson Motor Company, and Alexander (Ford) Motor Company were built on E. Main Street during this era as architectural showplaces. Washington D.C. architects Milburn and Heister designed Alexander Motor Company's Classical Revival style building with a terra cotta tile facade. Durham architect George Watts Carr Sr. designed the Johnson Motor Company next door with such elegant Classical Revival style materials as limestone, copper, and marble.⁹ Similarly, the gas station evolved from primitive prototypes in the 1910s into prefabricated,

⁸ Kate Mearns, *Central City Historic Buildings Inventory, Rocky Mount*, inventory pages.

⁹ Roberts, *The Durham Architectural and Historic Inventory*, 36.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section 8 Page 8
Clark & Sorrell Garage
Durham, North Carolina**

standardized designs around 1920. In the 1920s the classic gas station designs derived from Tudor, Georgian and other styles appeared.¹⁰

A published history of the early automobile in North Carolina provides a context for the earliest auto repair garages. Author Robert Ireland notes that auto repair was frequently an extension of the blacksmith's or wagonmaker's role. For example, the Davidson Motor Company in Lexington, Davidson County, was started by John Adam Young, who established a blacksmith shop in the 1890s, then added wagon building, and in 1910 began to sell and service automobiles. For a time, his machine shop fabricated also agricultural machinery for local farmers, but by the 1920s his business began to focus exclusively on the automobile.¹¹ Documentary photographs of this early phase of the building type shows no consistency of construction. John Park's Carolina Garage and Machine Company on West Hargett Street in Raleigh, built circa 1909, was a two-story brick building that resembled a foundry, with a central garage bay.¹² The Carthage Motor Company in Carthage, Moore County, shown in a ca. 1910 photograph, is a frame structure that looks like a livery stable.¹³

The standardized auto repair garage, a free-standing, one-story, utilitarian masonry building with at least one facade garage door, appeared in the 1920s. The West Durham Garage at 774 Ninth Street, built in the early 1920s, follows the standard form, with an entrance in the center bay and flanking wide openings, probably for automobiles. These are now infilled with display windows for the building's current use as Barnes Supply Company. This is apparently the earliest auto repair garage standing in Durham, although it has been substantially altered. Two other early garages exist in Durham. Wallace's Auto Electric Garage, 2820 Hillsborough Road, built in the early 1930s, is a Craftsman style building with stone veneer and casement windows in the standard form. Pete's Garage, located nearby at 2715 Hillsborough Road, built in the early 1930s, is a small two-bay brick building in the standard form, with no architectural character. A well-documented example of the new building type outside of Durham is Central Garage in Plymouth, Washington County, built in 1930. The standard brick building has three open bays across the front.¹⁴

Given that Clark & Sorrell clearly had in hand a general plan of their garage for many years before they had it constructed, it is interesting to conjecture the source of the design. Clearly the building represents a standardized national design type that had evolved by the 1920s, probably through plans distributed by national companies

¹⁰ Scott Anderson, *Check the Oil*, 120.

¹¹ Ireland, *Entering the Auto Age*, 110.

¹² Ireland, *Entering the Auto Age: The Early Automobile in North Carolina 1900-1930*, 39, photo at bottom of page.

¹³ Ireland, *Entering the Auto Age*, 111, photo at bottom of page.

¹⁴ Davyd Foard Hood, Central Garage Survey File, and Plymouth Historic District (NR-early 1990s).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Section 8 Page 9
Clark & Sorrell Garage
Durham, North Carolina**

such as the auto makers, oil companies, or parts manufacturers. The origin of the functional yet handsome design of the Clark & Sorrell Building is unknown, yet the building is clearly eligible for the National Register under Criterion C as the oldest auto repair garage in Durham that retains architectural integrity.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section 9-10 Page 10
Clark & Sorrell Garage
Durham, North Carolina

Section 9: Bibliography

Allen, Ray, owner of Clark & Sorrell, Inc. interview with the author, Nov. 23, 1999.

Anderson, Scott. *Check the Oil*, Wallace-Homestead Publishing, 1986.

Dixon, Wyatt T. *How Times Do Change*, Durham: Central Carolina Publishing Co., 1987.

Durham City Directories, 1930-1941,

Durham County Deeds.

Ireland, Robert E. *Entering the Auto Age: The Early Automobile in North Carolina, 1900-1930*, Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, 1990.

Hood, Davyd Foard. Central Garage Survey File, Plymouth, N.C. State Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh.

Mearns, Kate. *Central City Historic Buildings Inventory, Rocky Mount*,

Roberts, Claudia. *The Durham Architectural and Historic Inventory*, Durham: The Historic Preservation Society of Durham, 1982.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, Durham, 1937.

Section 10: Geographical Data

The boundaries of the property are shown by a black line on the accompanying survey plat, prepared in 1989.

Boundary Justification

The boundary contains the .649 acre parcel historically associated with the Clark and Sorrell Garage since its construction.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Photos Page 11
Name of Property/District
County, State

Photographs:

The following information pertains to all photographs:

Photographer: M. Ruth Little

Date: November 1999

Location of negatives: North Carolina Historic Preservation Office, Raleigh

A. Main facade from east

B. Overall view from northeast

C. Overall view from southwest

D. Rear elevation (parts department) from west

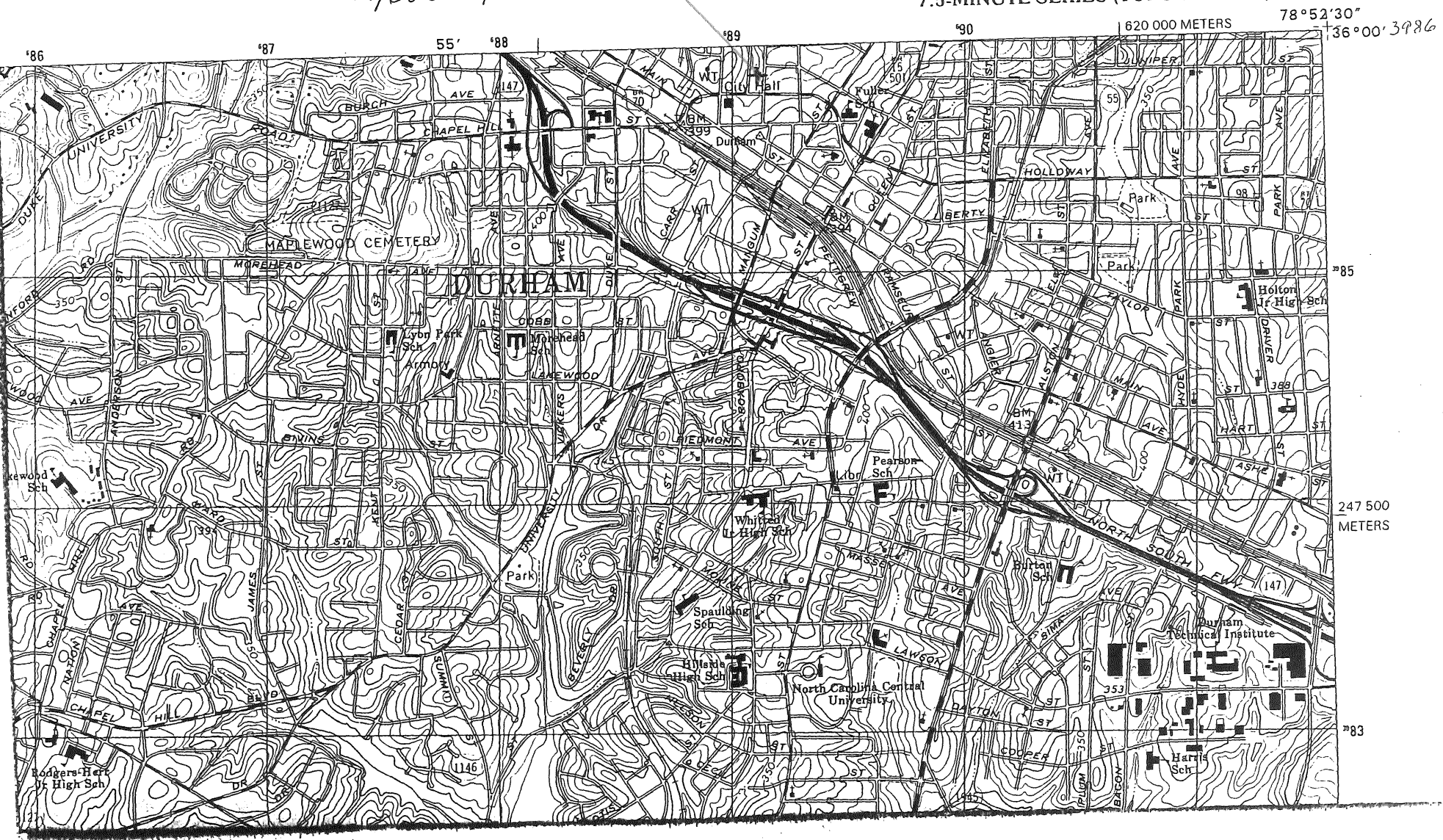
E. Main facade detail, from southeast

F. View of interior service area, from east

G. Interior of main office

D4 2504 Clark & Sorrell Garage
Durham, N.C.
17/688100/3985850

SOUTHWEST DURHAM QUADRANGLE
NORTH CAROLINA
7.5-MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)



78°52'30"
36°00'39.86

247 500
METERS



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INC.

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SPECIAL IN
INSPECTION
STATION

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CDU