

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

LYONS GARAGE & AUTO COMPANY, 210 & 214 N. FOURTH ST.

HABS NO. ND-38

Location: 210 & 214 North Fourth St., Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota.

Lyons Garage and Lyons Auto Company is located within the “Historic Downtown” historic district of Grand Forks.

Lyons Garage and Auto Supply is located at: latitude 47.9264611 and longitude -97.0342056 W. The coordinate was taken at the center of the buildings and was obtained through Google Earth (WGS84) in November 2019.

Present Owner: Northridge Construction

Present Use: Vacant, slated for demolition

Significance: Lyons Auto Company (1912) and Lyons Garage (1929) are two adjoining commercial buildings that housed a family-run automobile sales, repair, and parts business. The company, founded in 1884, was under the continuous ownership of the Lyons family until the business closed its doors in January of 2019.

Architecturally, Lyons Garage, built in 1929, is one of Grand Forks’ few commercial examples of Tudor Revival. The castle-like Tudor Revival architectural style seen in the Lyons Garage enjoyed limited popularity in the 1920s, when numerous styles associated with pre-industrial society came into vogue. This stylized garage proves to be an interesting juxtaposition between the romanticized picturesque life before industrialization and the modernized world of automobile transportation. Its presence in downtown Grand Forks symbolized the growing importance of the automobile in American life during the 1920s.

From ox-cart trails, steamboats, stagecoaches, and railroads, Grand Forks was an important point in transportation for many years before the advent of automobiles. As the popularity of early automobiles increased at the beginning of the twentieth century, there was a need for better road systems and Grand Forks once again became an important transportation hub. The city stood at the crossroads of an emerging highway system; U.S. 81, the Meridian Highway, and U.S. Highway (or Route) 2, the Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Highway.

The Meridian Highway, established in 1911-12, stretched from Winnipeg, Manitoba, through North Dakota, South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas to Mexico City, Mexico. Originally known as the Meridian Road and later renamed the Meridian Highway, it has been called North America's first

international automotive highway.¹ The Meridian Trail was later assigned U.S. 81 with the U.S. Highway system and the new number was adopted in 1926.

As with many of the original U.S. highways, U.S. 2 occupied routes that had previously been part of named trails and routes. For most of its length, U.S. 2 replaced the Theodore Roosevelt International Highway but also included parts of the George Washington Memorial Highway and the National Park-to-Park Highway.² The U.S. Highway system was finalized in late 1926 and the route was designated U.S. 2.

The junction of these two highways running through downtown Grand Forks made the city an important point connecting the primary north-south highway through America's heartland and the northern U.S. transcontinental highway. With this, the need for automobile sales, repair, and parts businesses such as Lyons Auto Company and Lyons Garage, were fast becoming part of the American scene. In Grand Forks, an automobile sales and service district was focused on the 200 blocks of North Third Street and North Fourth Street of which Lyons is a surviving member.³ Until January 2019, Lyons Garage was the only early automobile-related building of this district still in active use.

Historian: Agatha Frisby - Prairie Centre Architecture (consultant) for the Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission, Nov. 19, 2020.

Description: Lyons Auto Company and Lyons Garage are two adjacent commercial buildings, connected by an interior doorway, that were used by the Lyons Company. They are located on the east side of North Fourth Street between Second Avenue North and University Avenue.

The Lyons Auto Company building is a single-story, flat-roofed brick building. Constructed in 1912, using a Transitional Brick Commercial architectural style, it is comprised of simple geometric patterns and sparse ornament. It is a rectangular building approximately 50-feet wide by 140-feet deep. The front (west) façade is primarily composed of an aluminum storefront between large brick cantons. The entry is centered and recessed in the storefront with windows symmetrically flanking either side. An awning roof covers the storefront. The awning is wrapped with metal trim, although portions of the trim are missing revealing its wood framed construction. Above the awning is a panel of

¹ Wishart, David J., ed. "Meridian Highway." *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*. University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Accessed November 20, 2019. <http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.tra.020.xml>.

² "Highway History." *U.S. Department of Transportation*. Federal Highway Administration, May 27, 2017. <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/infrastructure/us2.cfm>.

³ Roberts, Norene A. and Joe D. Roberts, *Historical Research Report. Summer 1981 Historical and Architectural Survey of Downtown Grand Forks, North Dakota*, Volume 1, Submitted to Grand Forks Office of Community Development, Division of Archeology and Historic Preservation and the State Historical Society of North Dakota, November 1981, 63.

corrugated metal. The brick spandrel and parapet above the storefront opening includes a projection of brick outlining the building's signage, now faded, which reads, "LYONS AUTO COMPANY." The parapet is capped with stone coping. The west facade is primarily composed of dark reddish-brown enameled brick typically observed in a running bond pattern. The signage area above the storefront is smooth, buff-colored brick with painted lettering. Below the storefront, an infill of red, vertical scratch brick is observed, evidence that it was added later.

Historic photo documentation indicate that the storefront observed today is not the original storefront configuration.⁴ Originally, the Lyons Auto Company façade included a large wood and glass store front that included a centered garage door, a 2/3 lite entry door (with divided lites) and large display windows with a continuous transom window across the top. This transom window is reportedly still in place behind the corrugated metal visible today.⁵

The north wall is partially exposed due to Lyons Garage being set back from the street. The unadorned façade of painted stock brick includes an entry door and two windows that were added at an unknown date. Historic photo documentation shows that this wall was once solid brick with painted advertisements that read "Stromberg Service," "Franklin Cars," "Seiberling Tires," and "Lyons Auto Co. Storage."⁶

At the south side facade, several openings have been infilled with brick or plywood. A vertical seam in the brick wall and a change in the parapet step increments indicate that the rear (east) third of the building may have been added at a later date. Painted murals/graffiti art have been added to this wall in recent years. Both the north and south side facades are primarily composed of painted stock brick in a common bond pattern with full headers every sixth course. The parapet steps down at regular intervals towards the east at both the north and south walls and is capped with brick coping.

The rear (east) facade at the alley is utilitarian in nature. It is composed of painted stock brick in a common bond with full headers every sixth course. The wall has three plywood covered windows, a large service door, and an entry door. The parapet is capped with metal coping which is integrated with a metal scupper and downspout.

At the interior of Lyons Auto Company, a retail space is located at the front of the building. A portion of the original maple floor from 1912 is visible with oil

⁴ Lyons Auto Supply, Inc., Photos, Accessed September 20, 2019. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/pg/Lyons-Auto-Supply-Inc-385471208524983/photos/?ref=page_internal.

⁵ Lyons, Jim, telephone conversation with author, January 9, 2020.

⁶ Lyons Auto Supply, Inc., Photos, Facebook.

stains from when this was part of the car showroom (*Figure 9*).⁷ Beyond the retail space are several rooms including offices, storage rooms, and a small restroom. These spaces are carved out of a large open room that was historically referred to as the garage or showroom. The showroom had several skylights which are now covered. Above the retail and office spaces are storage mezzanines at different levels built in as space allowed for headroom. Barn door openings connect the main room to the north garage addition and east “repair shop” addition.

A thick brick wall (that was once an exterior wall) separates the rear “repair shop” addition from the original structure. Another storage mezzanine is in this addition south of the large barn door and reportedly there used to be another mezzanine to the north.⁸ Windows, although boarded up at the exterior, are still visible in this rear room at the south and east walls with niches that likely had windows before the Lyons Garage was added to the north. A work bench is located beneath the windows on the south wall. An entry and garage door exit to the alley (east).

Located just north of Lyons Auto Company, the Lyons Garage is a single-story, flat-roofed brick and structural clay tile building with a rectangular plan approximately 75-feet wide by 100-feet deep constructed in 1929. The garage is set back approximately 40-feet from the street overlooking a large concrete apron that was once used as a service drive between adjoining buildings to the north and south. The castellated Tudor Revival style garage is a distinctive work of architecture in downtown Grand Fork’s city fabric.

Drawing from English Medieval prototypes, the front (west) façade features a crenellated brick parapet, brick false thatched roofs, and Gothic-style embellishments such pointed arches. The facade is symmetrically configured around a recessed garage door with a segmental arch divided lite transom above. The carriage styled garage door with divided lites and horizontal plank construction is in-swinging. Flanking the garage door on both sides are symmetrical battlemented entrance towers with a 15-lite entry door, 6-lite window, and near the top of the tower, a decorative “arrow slit” 3-lite window. A schoolhouse wall light is centered on the towers. Adjacent to the towers are large recessed “show” windows with a divided lite transom above.⁹ At the outside corners, smaller entrance towers each contain 6-lite hinged entry doors and schoolhouse wall lights. Above each entrance door is a lancet arch.

Most of the front facade is comprised of buff blend colored brick in a running bond pattern. A darker blend of brown colored bricks is used for the

⁷ Lyons, Jim, telephone conversation with author.

⁸ Lyons, Jim, telephone conversation with author.

⁹ *Grand Forks Illustrated, 1897*. Centennial Facsimile Editioned. Grand Forks, ND: Oxcart Press, 98.

false thatched roofs, lancet arches above the entry doors, windowsills, brick detail outlines, as well corbeling of the brick over the garage door and large “show” windows.

The rear (east) facade faces the alley and is comprised of buff stock brick in a common bond with full headers every sixth course. Although simple and utilitarian in nature, this rear facade features a curved recess for the garage door and seven plywood covered six-over-six windows which are still visible from the interior. The garage door is similar to the front garage door with (covered) divided lites and lower cross-bracing.

The main entrances into Lyons Garage are the doors to the north and south of the garage door. The south side opens to a small reception room, historically referred to as the Ladies Rest room.¹⁰ The room has simple, but fine detailing including a coved ceiling, a single schoolhouse light centered in the room and wood millwork at the baseboard and window. The Ladies Rest Room is connected to both a women’s toilet room and the garage. The men’s restroom is accessed from the garage. The entry door north of the garage doors opens directly into the garage where a ticket booth (no longer extant) once stood. The booth’s outline is visible on the concrete floor.

Except for the Ladies Rest Room (reception room) and adjacent toilet rooms, the interior of Lyons Garage is one large area of unobstructed open floor space. Steel trusses span between pilasters on the north and south walls. The trussed roof design allowed for the building to be constructed without any interior walls or columns and made for an open plan, perfect for moving numerous vehicles within. Between truss bays, three large raised portions in the ceiling with sloped sidewalls are skylights that have been covered over. Within the garage, a 1930s Franklin automobile from the shop’s early years is still present (*Figure 7*).

History: The Lyons Company was started in 1884 by James W. Lyons when he began selling, renting, and repairing bicycles. In the publication *Grand Forks Illustrated*, 1897, it was reported that “Grand Forks has acquired quite a reputation as a bicycle town and it is doubtless a fact that there is not another city of the same population in the country where so many bicycles are owned and used as in Grand Forks. This is doubtless accounted for to some extent by our excellent roads and level streets.”¹¹ Cycling was so popular in the city, that in 1889 a Wheelmen’s Club was organized.¹² The Lyons Company’s utilized the popularity of bicycles in the area to build a successful business.

¹⁰ *Specifications: A Garage for Lyons Auto Co.*, 1929. Wells Denbrook Architectural Records. OGLMC 1487. Series 2, Box 1, Folder 12. Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota.

¹¹ *Grand Forks Illustrated*, 1897, 98.

¹² *They Came to Stay: Grand Forks, North Dakota Centennial 1874-1974*. Grand Forks, ND: Jet Printing Inc./Washburn Printing Center, 1974, 23.

The Lyons Company business later diversified into motorcycles and automobiles. James W. Lyons began auto sales in 1904 as an agent for the Franklin Automobile Company.¹³ Lyons carried a number of motorcycle and automobile brands including Indian, Cadillac, Hudson Motor Car Company, and Hupmobile.¹⁴ Along with the sales of cars came the need for auto repair shops. The Lyons Company began providing repair services for as early as 1916.¹⁵

Originally, the Lyons Company was located at what is now 314 Demers Avenue. James W. Lyons built a new building in 1912 for \$7,250.00 on North Fourth Street (Block 15, Lot 8, Original Townsite of Grand Forks) for the Lyons Auto Company moving the business approximately 3-blocks northwest of the first location.¹⁶ Permit records indicate that the new Lyons Auto Company building was remodeled in 1915 for \$2,000.00.¹⁷ This is likely when the repair shop was added to the east.¹⁸ The Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from 1916 shows this “repair shop” addition and indicates that the Lyons Auto Company held a capacity of 45 cars in its showroom.

The business expanded again in 1929 when James W. Lyons built Lyons Garage on Lot 6 and half of Lot 4, situated just north of the Lyons Auto Company building.¹⁹ The new Tudor Revival style garage for Lyons Auto Company was designed by architect Theodore B. Wells of Grand Forks. According Wells architect’s fee invoice, the building was built by Buckingham Bros. and Dakota Plumbing & Heating Company for \$13,836.00.²⁰ The garage was originally built as a storage facility for people to keep their vehicles. It reportedly held 110 Model A or Model T cars.²¹

As the Great Depression swept the nation, car sales dropped, and the number of automakers declined until only a few remained. With this change, the Lyons Auto Company moved into selling car parts and repairing automobiles. As time went on, the original showroom was divided into offices, and the storage mezzanines were added to house these auto parts.

¹³ Roberts, Norene A. and Joe D. Roberts. *National Register of Historic Places nomination: Lyons Garage, Grand Forks County, ND*. National Register #82001330, 1982, 3.

¹⁴ *1909 Year Book (Motor Cyclopaedia)*. New York, NY: Automobile Topics, 1909, 351; Roberts and Roberts, *National Register of Historic Places nomination: Lyons Garage*, 3.

¹⁵ *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota*. Sanborn Map Company, 1916. Map. https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06539_008/.

¹⁶ Roberts and Roberts, *National Register of Historic Places nomination: Lyons Garage*, 4.

¹⁷ Roberts and Roberts, *National Register of Historic Places nomination: Lyons Garage*, 4.

¹⁸ *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota*, 1916.

¹⁹ Roberts and Roberts, *National Register of Historic Places nomination: Lyons Garage*, 4.

²⁰ *Specifications: A Garage for Lyons Auto Co.*, last page (no page number)

²¹ Lyons, Jim, telephone conversation with author.

The Lyons business continued after James W. Lyons' death in 1950 with his son James W. Lyons Jr. and his children Jim, Janie, and John. Until the family-run business closed its doors in January of 2019, the business was continuously used for auto repairs and sales. The Lyons family sold both the Lyons Garage and Lyons Auto Company buildings in September of 2018 to a developer but was given additional time to vacate the property. Lyons Auto Company, Lyons Garage, and two other buildings on the block to the north are currently slated for demolition.

The Lyons Auto Company building appears to have undergone several changes at both the exterior and interior throughout time. It can be concluded that the addition of the Repair Shop at the back of the building occurred between 1912 and 1916 by comparing Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps from those years (most likely in 1915 according to permit records).²² Additionally, an office notated on the 1916 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map in the front (southwest) corner was the only partitioned room separate from the remaining space that was noted as "garage." This is evidence that the present-day offices and store retail space were added later, and this front office was later removed or modified to increase the storefront retail space. Historic photograph documentation indicates that the storefront has also been modified and that the windows to the north of the retail space were added later. Jim Lyons reported that the mezzanines were added as time went on beginning in the 1930s for storage.

Lyons Garage, however, is virtually unaltered from its original condition at the exterior. Within, very little has changed as well. There are a few discrepancies observed today from what was noted in Wells' specifications²³. Presently, the skylights are covered, and the Ladies Rest Room and Toilet no longer have the "Tiffany" effect that was specified for the wall finish. The skylights (in both buildings) were covered up in 1973 when the price of fuel oil increased heating costs. The skylights were reportedly hammered glass with wire. The building's nearly unchanged condition makes this building an excellent and significant example of Tudor Revival architecture in Grand Forks.

Locally, the Tudor Revival style was primarily used in residential architecture, but the style was also frequently seen in America's railroad depots and university buildings, both of which can be seen in Grand Forks. The Northern Pacific Depot and Freight House built in 1929 located on North Third Street, approximately one block east of Lyons Garage, was also built in the Tudor Revival style with the more commonly seen imitation of medieval half-timbered construction. Montgomery Hall, Babcock Hall, and several sororities are also excellent examples of Tudor Revival architecture at the University of North Dakota campus.

²² Roberts and Roberts, *National Register of Historic Places nomination: Lyons Garage*, 4.

²³ *Specifications: A Garage for Lyons Auto Co.*, 11, 16

Lyons Garage was individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982 and Lyons Auto Company was listed as part of the Downtown Grand Forks Historic District multiple property listing in 2005.

Sources: “Central Business District: Grand Forks CBD Intensive Survey.” Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission Records. OGLMC 1378, Box 4, Folder 7 & 8. Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota, Grand Forks.

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Specifications: A Garage for Lyons Auto Co., 1929. Wells Denbrook Architectural Records. OGLMC 1487. Series 2, Box 1, Folder 12. Elwyn B. Robinson Department of Special Collections, Chester Fritz Library, University of North Dakota.

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https://www.loc.gov/item/sanborn06539_007/.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Grand Forks, Grand Forks County, North Dakota. Sanborn Map Company, Jun, 1916. Map.
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<http://plainshumanities.unl.edu/encyclopedia/doc/egp.tra.020.xml>.

Illustrations:



Figure 1: Floor Plan of Lyons Garage (left) and Lyons Auto Company (right) with key notes, 2020.
Source: Measured and drawn by author.

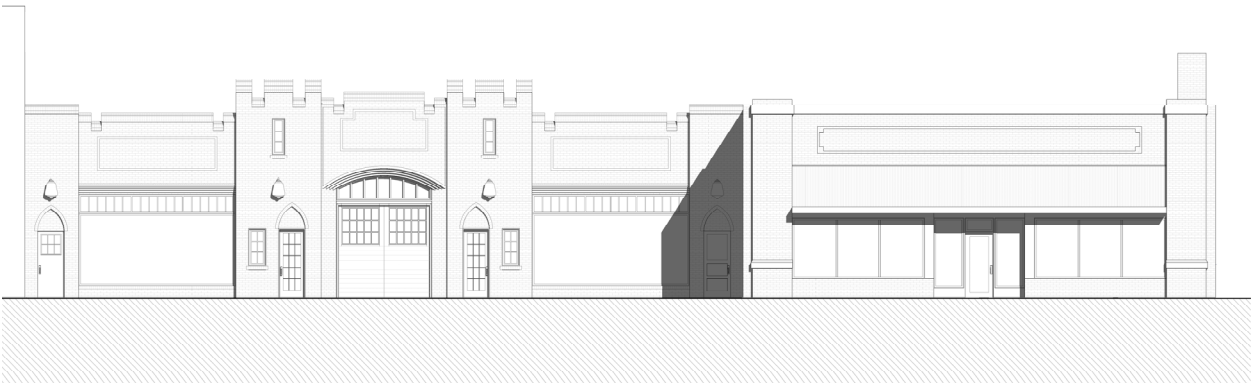


Figure 2: Elevation (west elevation) of Lyons Garage (left) and Lyons Auto Company (right), 2020. Source: Measured and drawn by author.



Figure 3: Perspective view (front) of Lyons Garage (left) and Lyons Auto Company (right), October 2019. Source: Field photo by author.



Figure 4: Elevation view of Lyons Garage, October 2019. Source: Field photo by author.



Figure 5: Elevation view of Lyons Auto Company, October 2019. Source: Field photo by author.



Figure 6: Perspective view (rear) of Lyons Garage and Lyons Auto Company, October 2019.
Source: Field photo by author.



Figure 7: Interior view of Lyons Garage with 1930s Franklin car and former skylight, October 2019.
Source: Field photo by author.



Figure 8: Interior view of Lyons Auto Company looking east, October 2019.
Source: Field photo by author



Figure 9: Interior view of Lyons Auto Company at retail space looking west with original maple showroom floor, October 2019. Source: Field photo by author

RELEASE AND ASSIGNMENT

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Survey Number: HABS No. ND-38

Types of Materials (please check all that apply):


Photographs X Illustrations X Textual materials X Oral History/Interviews _____
Audiotape _____ Videotape _____ Other (describe) _____

Detailed Description of Materials (attach additional pages if necessary):

HABS Short Format Historical Report for Lyons Garage and Lyons Auto Company and
accompanying Figure Pages

Disposition of Materials After Use (please check one): _____ Return to owner
X May be retained

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Organization You Represent If Applicable