National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

1. Name of Property

Historic name  Peerless Motor Company
Other names/site number  DO09:0209-039

2. Location

Street & number  2562/2564 Harney Street
City or town  Omaha
State  Nebraska  County  Douglas  Code  NE 055  Zip code  68131

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 [x] 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.)

/s/ Michael J. Smith  October 2, 2007
Signature of certifying official  Date
Director, Nebraska State Historical Society
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 certifying official/Title  Date
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

[ ] entered in the National Register.
  [ ] see continuation sheet.
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register.
  [ ] see continuation sheet.
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register.
[ ] removed from the National Register.
[ ] other, (explain):  

Signature of Keeper  Date of Action
### 5. Classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ownership of Property</th>
<th>Category of Property</th>
<th>Number of Resources within Property</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Check as many boxes as apply)</td>
<td>(Check only one box)</td>
<td>(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X Private</td>
<td>X Building(s)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ Public-local</td>
<td>____ District</td>
<td>Contributing 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ Public-state</td>
<td>____ Site</td>
<td>Noncontributing 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____ Public-federal</td>
<td>____ Structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>____ Object</td>
<td>Total 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter “N/A” if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

### 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce/Trade: Specialty Store

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Commerce/Trade: Work in Progress

### 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century Movements: Commercial Style

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation  Concrete

Walls  Brick

Roof  Wood trusses

Other

**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.)

_X_ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

_B_ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

_X_ 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_ 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.)

Property is:

___ 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.

___ G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Commerce


Period of Significance
1928-1941

Significant Persons


Significant Dates
1928

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

___ Preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

___ Previously listed in the National Register

___ Previously determined eligible by the National Register

___ Designated a National Historic Landmark

___ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

___ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Primary location for additional data:

___ State Historic Preservation Office

___ Other State agency

___ Federal agency

___ Local Government

___ University

X Other

Name of repository: Omaha Public Library
10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property  Less than one

UTM References (place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Zone</th>
<th>Easting</th>
<th>Northing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>252940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[ ] 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  Jennifer Honebrink, AIA
organization  Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture
date  July 2007

street & number  1213 Jones Street
telephone  402-341-1544

city or town  Omaha
state  NE
zip code  68102

Additional Documentation

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/title  Alley Poyner Macchietto Architecture
telephone  402-341-1544

street & number  1213 Jones Street
city or town  Omaha
state  NE
zip code  68102

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:  This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determined 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, (15 USC 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.
The Peerless Motor Company building is a small commercial style building, sited on the North side of Harney Street at the Western edge of downtown Omaha. The area is a mix of older, small commercial buildings, apartment buildings, and vacant lots. A parking lot adjoins the building to the East and has historically been associated with the property. A commercial building is affixed to the Peerless Motor Company building to the West. An alley runs along the rear (North side) of the property.

The building consists of two rectangles, built with slightly different construction methods and reflecting the different interior functions. The first rectangle is 1/3 the depth of the property. It is two-stories tall and two commercial bays wide – sitting with its long side parallel to Harney Street. This portion of the building contained the sales area. The second rectangle is 2/3 the depth of the property. Also two commercial bays wide, it is only one-story high. It contained the service functions of the property.

The front façade is constructed of light tan brick with limestone trim. The first floor storefront consists of the original, low brick sills caped with limestone and a limestone water table below, and a limestone belt course above a series of modern anodized aluminum display windows and a modern steel transom window infill. The front door has been modified and in-filled with anodized aluminum doors set in a pink enamel metal veneer plywood or hardboard surround. The second floor is detailed with double hung, one-over-one wood windows covered in modern anodized aluminum screens. The windows are set between brick pilasters which are supported from below with large brick dentils, and which in turn support a brick beam with limestone dentils below and limestone trim above. A stepped wall gable with limestone trim caps the façade.

The east side and rear (north side) of the building were constructed of common red brick, which has been painted white. Center pivoting steel windows are typically eight-over-eight-over-four, and are set in punched openings. On the East façade, a combination garage and pedestrian door allows access to the south end of the service area, and a single pedestrian door allows access to the north end. On the North façade, a garage door has been in-filled with CMU.

On the interior, the front 1/3 of the building served as the retail area. The area is spacious and entirely open. A steel stair along the east side connects the first and second floors. The original terrazzo floor has been covered with tan 9x9 asbestos tile. The original display windows have been removed and in-filled with modern aluminum windows and 2x4 framing covered in pegboard, painted white. The north wall separates the sales area from the service area. Centered in the wall is a three leaf door with transom above. One leaf could be opened for a pedestrian door, or all three could be opened to allow cars into the display area. To either side of this door are a series of windows and doors that are Moorish in profile which allowed access to sales offices, storerooms and restrooms located on the other side of the wall. Three concrete beams run north/south, dividing the ceiling into four spaces.

The second floor originally consisted of a hallway at the top of the stair with a restroom enclosed at the Northeast corner, and an open room. The original function of this space is unclear. It may have been used for parts storage or office space. When the building was used as a window covering manufacturer, a room with a closet off to the west side was enclosed in the center of the south wall.

The rear service area is very functional. Common red brick walls three wythes thick are one story tall and form the east and north walls. The west wall is the neighbor’s original exterior wall. All walls have been painted white. Several rooms were enclosed at the south end of the space. Half still exist and are finished with rough textured plaster. At the east end is a pair of toilets, one accessible from each side of the wall which divides the sales area from the service area. A service office has been converted to a storage room. Added onto the service office is a modern second office finished with Plexiglass and simulated wood paneling. Steel trusses with wood roof structure span from the east wall to a beam sitting on a series of columns just inside the west wall. The wood structure has been covered with particle board and painted white.
Two skylights bring in natural light from above. A concrete slab-on-grade floor contains several floor drains, a manhole for access to the storm drain, and a small basement in the northeast corner that contained the furnace.

Altogether, the building is in good condition and represents the form and function of a typical sales and service building of the late 1920s.
Synopsis
The Peerless Motor Company building is significant under criteria A for its association with the period of automobile commerce before the Great Depression and the development of “Auto Row”, as well as criteria C for its distinctive characteristics of an early automobile branch sales and service building.

Criteria A
The Peerless Motor Company building is associated with the early rise of automobile commerce and its effects on our built environment. In the early days of automobiles, tinkerers, mechanics and small companies took to the production of automobiles:

“Thousands of people did it. The Standard Catalogue of American Cars, 1805-1942 documents more than 5,000 U.S. makes. Many of these were one-of-a-kind, but perhaps several hundred or more saw serious production. All but a few of these automakers disappeared or were absorbed in a natural consolidation of the industry during the 1920s and the ensuing Great Depression.”

The Peerless Motor Company was one company that did see more serious production. It is now listed among the defunct automobile companies, but from 1900 to 1931, this Cleveland based company made many automobile innovations, including an accelerator pedal and the cut-out fan. By the early 1920’s, they could be driven “well over 200,000 miles without any major repairs.” Like many other companies of its time, Peerless had its share of ups and downs, but in the late 1920s it was picking up steam and was considered stylish. The stock market crash in October 1929, however put a halt to the luxury car market. Peerless and a number of other small automobile manufacturers initially found ways to struggle through the Great Depression, but as it continued many manufacturers folded or consolidated. In November of 1931, Peerless stopped production. The Board of Directors bought the rights to Carlings of Canada and converted the factory to a brewery. Very few Peerless are seen today. During their years of production, they were one of the most expensive cars on the market and, due to the large amount of aluminum used in their production, they brought more money than any other car in the scrap drives during World War II.

Locally, the first automobile dealerships were listed in the 1904 city directory. By 1910, this number had grown to 31; and by 1920, there were 124 dealers, manufacturers and repairers listed in Omaha. This immense growth spurt was due in part to automobile mass production, making the automobile affordable for a middle class family, and the promotion of the freedom the automobile provided. The large number of cars on the road in turn led to the development of our national highway system. The first continuously marked transcontinental highway was the Lincoln Highway.

“The Lincoln Highway is a 3300-mile long road stretching across the United States from New York City to San Francisco. Its creation was the result of the first successful effort to create an all-weather transcontinental highway specifically for automobiles. Carl Fisher, Prest-O-Lite headlight manufacturer, launched the idea of developing a coast to coast highway in 1912. Fisher was soon joined in the promotion of this road, named the Lincoln Highway, by a cadre of executives from the automobile, tire, and Portland cement industries who used patriotic appeal and mass marketing to mastermind a national "good roads" campaign.

The Lincoln Highway began as a miscellaneous collection of downtown streets, country lanes, and old trails marked with signs showing an "L" rectangular graphic emblazoned in red, white, and blue. While the confusing and haphazardly maintained condition of the early Lincoln Highway illustrated the long-neglected nature of the American roads inherited by the automobile, by the 1920s, it had become the nation's premier cross-country thoroughfare and a testing ground for new road and bridge-building techniques. A dynamic, commercial roadside emerged along the

Lincoln Highway and other roads of that era, pioneering the marketing of gas, food, lodging and other motorist services through innovative architectural form and design.\(^3\)

Originally, the Lincoln Highway came into Omaha on Douglas Street, ran east to 15\(^{th}\) Street, down a block to Farnam Street, along Farnam to 40\(^{th}\) Street, up to Dodge, and out Dodge to Elkhorn. In 1921, the Lincoln Highway was officially rerouted outside of downtown Omaha, but its work had been done. The traffic of the early years spurred the development of “Auto Row” on Farnam Street here in Omaha and many other “Auto Rows” across the nation. As Farnam Street filled with dealerships for Hupmobile, Studebaker, and Ford, it also expanded to cover portions of Harney Street. In 1929, Farnam and Harney hosted 49% of all the dealerships and manufacturers listed in the city directory. In the late 1920s, newspaper ads and chamber of commerce journals still discussed local dealerships getting ready for the coming travel season and the expected tourist trade from the Lincoln Highway. By 1940, Omaha’s “Auto Row” was on the decline. More dealerships began to move out to Military Avenue and other suburbs of Omaha. In its wake, the Lincoln Highway and “Auto Row” left Omaha with a number of commercial buildings constructed as automobile dealerships and service stations which would not have been built without their influence.

In addition to the traffic from the Lincoln Highway, rivalry among the manufacturers often dictated the location for new sales and service buildings; similar to the way in which department stores tend to cluster in the same area in order to draw customers in. In the early automotive world, Pierce-Arrow, Packard, and Peerless were known as the three P’s. A competition developed among them for innovativeness and customers of high-end luxury cars. It was not uncommon to find dealerships for all three on the same street. In Seattle, Packard and Peerless dealerships faced off across the street from one another in the roaring twenties. Here in Omaha, the Pierce-Arrow dealership was just down Harney Street from the Peerless Motor Company building.

The Great Depression put a screeching halt to the roaring twenties, and was responsible for a general decrease in the number of automobile dealerships. Early on, there was a wide range of automobile manufacturers represented in Omaha. In any given year between 1910 and 1940, approximately 20% of all dealers and manufacturers listed in the Omaha city directory were clearly distributors of now defunct automobile companies.\(^4\) Through the Great Depression, a considerable amount of consolidation and folding occurred as companies tried to survive. Typically, those companies which were well established locally before the depression hit, were able to make it through. Of the thirteen companies which opened in Omaha in 1929, nine did not survive a year, including Peerless Motor Company, Auburn Cord Company of Nebraska, Plymouth Motor Co and Dodge Bros Corporation. Those that were well established in town, generally made it through the Depression, including Greenlease-Lied Motors, Nash Motors of Omaha, and Dewey Chevrolet Company.

In general, early automobile companies were a short-lived and mobile lot. Most did not survive more than a few years. Those that did manage to stay in business longer, generally moved with-in that time frame. Of the eight companies who were listed in the city directories in 1920 and were still in business in 1929, only three were still at the same location. Additionally, less than ten of the 49 dealerships were in buildings designed for them. As a dealership moved out of a building, the structure typically became another dealership, accessory store, or repair only facility. For example, the Peerless Motor Company building became a used car dealership, than another used car dealership, and then a trailer body manufacturing plant.

http://www.nps.gov/mwro/lincolnhighway/background.htm

\(^4\) For purposes of this study, only those automobile dealers with defunct automobile manufacturers names in their title were counted – if other dealerships also sold now defunct automobiles, they were not counted. I.e. Auburn Cord Company of Nebraska is counted as a defunct automobile manufacturer. However, Western States Motor is not, as it is unclear what brand of automobile they sold.
Physically, the Peerless Motor Company building embodies the distinctive characteristics of a typical branch sales and service building of the late 1920s. Early automobile sales buildings can be separated into four categories; the assembly plant, the district sales headquarters, the central sales and service building, and the small branch sales and service building. The assembly plant was generally a multi-story building focusing on the assembly and distribution of automobiles. Often a small show room and service area were included, but these were very minor in the overall function of the building. Locally, the Ford Assembly Plant (DO09:129-003) is a good example of this building type. The district sales headquarters also had little room for service work. A large show room for the latest models, and plenty of office space for dealers to buy and sell cars to agents in other sales districts were the focus of the building. Here in Omaha in 1929, district sales headquarters were exemplified by the DeSoto Motor Corporation which had offices in the Woodman of the World building at 14th and Farnam (now razed). In the central sales building, the repair area was a significant part of the structure and was almost equal to the show room in size and importance. Finally, in the branch sales and service building, the service portion of the building dominates the floor plan behind a show room that typically fronts the building along the street.5 The Peerless Motor Company building is a good example of this last type. A small sales area in the front connected to a much larger repair area in the back.

The small branch sales and service buildings were all about the cars. Unlike the assembly plants or district headquarters which stressed the importance of the company, the branch sales and service building’s overall emphasis was on showing off the latest models. Sales and service buildings developed a number of design requirements; a large show room with a high ceiling, windows wide enough for the whole car to be seen, low window sills, a large door from the service portion of the building, a central information desk, space for sales offices, a waiting room, and a place for sale of accessories and parts that was also accessible to the service area. In the late 1920s, they had also developed a number of stylistic features in common – including little or no awning, neon signage, and minimal exterior decoration.

The Peerless Motor Company building exemplifies these attributes. The first picture of the building was not published until a month after it opened, when the building was used as a backdrop for a photo-op of the new sales manager, a customer, and the car that was just purchased. On the first floor of the exterior, as much room as possible is given over to the display windows, which have low sills and are wide enough to display an entire car. On the interior, the show room meets all the requirements for volume and organization, while allowing the repair area to best fit its own needs for light, ventilation and durability.

Nationally, there are several other Peerless Motor Company buildings listed on the National Register. These include their factory in Cleveland Ohio, and two central sales buildings – one in New York and one in Boston. The Omaha Peerless Motor Company building would represent the branch sales and service buildings of the company as well as its renewed effort to be an elite automobile.

Conclusion
In conclusion, the Peerless Motor Company building is significant at the local level under criteria A for its association with the early rise of automobile commerce and its effects on our built environment, as well as criteria C for its distinctive characteristics of an early automobile branch sales and service building.

Although the Lincoln Highway was no longer routed along Farnam when this building was built, the Highway established Omaha’s Auto Row. Dealerships such as the Peerless Motor Company added to the density of dealerships and service stations in the area and competition for customers; and rivalry between manufacturers led to the spread of dealerships.

---

beyond Farnam to Harney Street where companies such as Peerless and Pierce-Arrow could vie for the attention of the upper-class.

From 1910-1930, dealerships did not typically survive more than a couple of years, but the number of start-up dealerships and service stations continued to grow until the Great Depression. The Peerless Motor Company dealership was one of many new start-ups who were not well established locally during the Depression, and that did not survive the Great Depression. Like many others, the Peerless dealership in Omaha quickly folded and the building was converted to a used car dealership.

Today, the Peerless Motor Company building is an excellent functional and aesthetic example of a typical branch sales and service building of the late 1920s. Its large, low display windows, and minimal decorative features on the front façade clearly designate the show room, while its garage door on the East façade unmistakably indicates its functional rear service wing as an automobile service center.
Local Newspaper Articles on Peerless

1928


“New; the Beautiful 1929 Six-81,” Advertisement; Omaha, Sunday World Herald, p. five-C, Sunday September 9, 1928.


“Peerless has style; 1929 Models Built to Serve Owners Many Years, Officials Say,” Omaha, Sunday World Herald, p. five-C, Sunday September 16, 1928.


“Peerless Sales Show Big Increase Abroad,” the Omaha Bee News, Sunday, October 14, 1928, Section B, p. 8.

“Peerless Extends Foreign Outlets,” the Omaha Bee News, Sunday, November 4, 1928, Section B, p. 9(?) .


“Peerless Company to Show New Models,” the Omaha Bee News, Sunday, December 9, 1928, Section B, p. 7.


1930

“Peerless Business Shows Big Profit,” Sunday Omaha World Herald, August 10, 1930, Part 2, p. 3-O.

1936


1958


Related Local Articles


“10,048 in Auto Industry in Omaha,” Omaha Chamber of Commerce Journal, April 21, 1928, p. 12.

**Related National Articles**


**Books**


Omaha City Directories 1904-2007.
National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Peerless Motor Company
Name of Property

Douglas County, Nebraska
County and State

Section  10  Page  1

Verbal Boundary Description
Capitol Add Lot 6 Block 0 S10 E30 W90 Ft Sl 10 + W 95 Ft Sl 7 Lot 6.
(See Sanborn Map)

Boundary Justification
This includes all of the property historically associated with the Peerless Motor Company and its successors.
Sanborn Map, Omaha Nebraska, 1934
# National Register of Historic Places
## Continuation Sheet

**Name of Property**

**Peerless Motor Company**

**County and State**

**Douglas County, Nebraska**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photograph</th>
<th>Description of Photograph</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Ad from opening day in local paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Photo of building a month after opening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photograph</th>
<th>Description of Photograph</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Front (South) Facade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Rear (North) Façade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Front Façade Detail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Front Façade from the SE Corner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Front Façade from the SW Corner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Side (East) Facade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Showroom Looking to the South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Showroom Looking to the NW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Showroom Looking to the NE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Second Floor Stair Hall</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Second Floor Main Room Looking SW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Second Floor Main Room Looking NW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Repair Area Looking to the SW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Repair Area Looking to the S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Repair Area Looking to the N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>