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**REPORT OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT  
APPLICATION FOR DESIGNATION  
AS A CITY OF JACKSONVILLE LANDMARK**

**LM-13-05**

**937 North Main Street**

*GENERAL LOCATION:* Northeast Corner of North Main Street and Orange Street immediately north of Downtown Jacksonville and south of the Springfield neighborhood.

Prepared in accordance with the JACKSONVILLE ORDINANCE CODE, SECTION 307.104, the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department hereby forwards to the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission, its "Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations" on the Landmark Designation, **LM-13-05**, sponsored by the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission.

**FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

- (A) At the request of the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission, the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department began preparing a designation application for the property located at 937 North Main Street.
- (B) Consistent with the JACKSONVILLE ORDINANCE CODE, SECTION 307.104(d), the Planning and Development Department determined that the application for designation of the property at 937 North Main Street, as a Landmark was complete. As required, the Planning and Development Department had signs posted in front of the property being considered for designation, as well as sent notices by U.S. Mail to each owner of real property within three hundred and fifty (350) feet of the proposed site. Notice of the public hearing on the designation of the property at 937 North Main Street as a Landmark was published in the *Financial News and Daily Report*. Proof of publication will be attached to this report.
- (C) If designated, any activity affecting the exterior of the property at 937 North Main Street will require a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission. Before issuing the Certificate of Appropriateness, the Commission will review the proposed activity for consistency with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*. Routine repairs and maintenance, alterations, and new construction not seen from the public right-of-way and other projects consistent with the Secretary's Standards can be pre-approved by the Jacksonville Planning and Development Department.

However, the following activities will require a review by the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission.

1. Additions to historic buildings or structures.
2. Window replacement or major changes to or addition of door and window openings.
3. Demolition of all or part of historic buildings.
4. New construction and additions.
5. Enclosure of porch, porte-cochere, or garage.
6. Porch replacement.
7. Relocation of historic buildings.
8. Roof replacement with material different from existing or change in roof form.
9. Storefront restoration or replacement.
10. Other work the Planning and Development Department has determined to be in conflict or potentially in conflict with the Secretary's Standards.

(D) At the close of the public hearing, the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission shall determine, whether based upon the evidence, 937 North Main Street meets the criteria for designation. In preparing the application, the Planning and Development Department has found the application to meet four of the seven criteria. The four criteria include the following;

(A) *Its value as a significant reminder of the cultural, historical, architectural, or archaeological heritage of the City, state or nation.*

The complex of buildings at the northeast corner of North Main Street and Orange Street are significant for housing the pioneering and prominent automobile dealership of the Claude Nolan Cadillac Company for nearly seventy-five years from 1911 until 1985. The first automobile dealership in Jacksonville and the oldest Cadillac franchise in the South, the company was organized in 1907 by Florida native and Jacksonville resident Claude Nolan. Although several individuals had built their own form of a horseless carriage, the first purchase of a factory made automobile, a Stanley #2, by Locomobile Company of America, was in 1900 by funeral director, Charles A. Clark. At the time that Claude Nolan entered the automobile business, cars were still a rarity in Jacksonville with only 166 recorded in 1905. However, the number of automobiles in the city at that

time was considered high, especially in comparison to other parts of the state. Automobiles had made enough of an impression to warrant the necessity of a speed limit that was quickly followed in April of 1904 by the first arrest of a prominent businessman who exceeded the six miles per hour limit for downtown streets.<sup>1</sup>

Although initially in partnership with Hutto & Company in 1905, Claude Nolan established his own Cadillac dealership in 1907 and first shared a showroom on East Church Street between North Main Street and Ocean Street with the Pierce-Arrow distributor. However, with the rapid growth of the city, the demand for automobiles was high resulting in Claude Nolan purchasing the property at the northeast corner of North Main Street and Orange Street for a new location.<sup>2</sup> Anticipating major expansion of his dealership into other parts of Florida and South Georgia, Claude Nolan hired noted Jacksonville architect, Henry John Klutho, to design, “*the largest, finest, and most complete salesroom in the South*”.<sup>3</sup> The first building constructed for the dealership at the new location was a one-story brick garage in 1911 that faced south along Orange Street. Although very simple in design and materials, the garage featured a brick Prairie-style cross motif used by Klutho in some of his other designs.

In the Spring of 1912 construction of the three-story reinforced concrete showroom building was initiated by contractor F. W. Long using plans prepared by Klutho. Recognized as an innovative use of reinforced concrete structural members as a decorative element, the exterior of the building featured dark red tapestry brick spandrels and large tripartite windows resulting in the creation of a “glass box” appearance appropriate for displaying automobiles.<sup>4</sup> Above the third floor windows was a projecting cornice highlighted by a continuous geometric design in the fascia. Window shoppers and pedestrians walking along North Main Street in front of the building were protected from the weather by a suspended glass canopy. On the interior, the building featured Welsh tile floors, inlaid stairways, leaded glass partitions, and a mosaic of the Cadillac crest on the floor. The first and second floors displayed new automobiles that were transported by a large elevator.<sup>5</sup>

In 1926 a two-story brick and wood trussed garage addition was constructed on the rear of the showroom building. Designed by the Jacksonville architectural firm of Marsh & Saxelbye, the building also incorporated the decorative cross-motif pattern found on the 1911 one-story garage. During his long career in the business, Claude Nolan established or acquired numerous dealerships across the state that featured a variety of automobile makes and models. His dealership is also credited as being the first to use installment payments for the purchase of an automobile, a practice that was soon used across the

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1 T. Frederick Davis. *History of Jacksonville and Vicinity, 1513 – 1924*. (St. Augustine, Florida: The Record Company, 1925), pp. 379 – 380 (1990 Reprint by San Marco Bookstore, Jacksonville, Florida).

2 *Florida Times Union*, Advertising Feature Section, “Claude Nolan Celebrating Our 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, Cadillac and Oldsmobile 1905 -”, May 21, 1995, I-1.

3 Robert C. Broward. *The Architecture of Henry John Klutho*. (Jacksonville: University of North Florida Press, 1983), p. 163.

4 *Ibid*, p. 164.

5 “Claude Nolan Celebrating Our 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary”.

country. With his death in 1943, and having never married, the Claude Nolan franchises continued to operate under Connor Brown, the husband of his niece, Claudia Peterson. Mainly operating franchises in Jacksonville, Miami, Miami Beach, and Fort Lauderdale, Connor Brown expanded the company with the addition of a White Truck dealership and the Fruehauf Trailer franchise. In the fall of 1985, Claude Nolan Cadillac Company joined with North Florida Lincoln Mercury and Key Buick at the Quality Auto Park in South Jacksonville. The old dealership buildings at North Main Street and Orange Street were sold to E. H. Thompson Restaurant Supply that used them for many years.

(C) *It is identified with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the development of the development of the City, state or nation.*

The Claude Nolan Cadillac Building and Garages at 937 North Main Street are directly associated with the productive life of Claude Nolan, a pioneer in the automobile business in Florida, a champion for better roads, and an early promoter of aviation in the state. Born May 1, 1884 in Sanford, Florida, Claude Nolan moved to Jacksonville at the age of ten. After graduating from Duval High School, he continued his education at Vanderbilt University graduating with a law degree. Shortly, after returning to Jacksonville, he went into the automobile business. In 1907, Claude Nolan opened the first automobile dealership in Jacksonville which was also the first Cadillac franchise in the South. He is recognized as the first dealer to establish an installment plan for the purchase of automobiles, a business practice that spread nationwide and revolutionized the auto business.

The major supplier of Cadillacs east of the Apalachicola River in Florida, as well as in South Georgia, Claude Nolan began to expand in 1915 by buying a Buick and Cadillac dealership in Savannah. In 1923, he became the state distributor for the Oakland Motor Car Company and opened both the Oakland-Tampa Company and the Oakland-Miami Company in 1924. Around that time, Nolan established a new Cadillac dealership on Biscayne Boulevard in Miami that many believed would fail. However, "Nolan's Folly" as it was called by its critics was extremely successful becoming one of the largest Cadillac dealerships in the country. Claude Nolan was also an early leader in organizing professional associations for car dealers. In addition to founding the Jacksonville Automobile Dealers Association, he was active in organizing both the Florida and National Automotive Dealers Association, and served as the Florida president in 1920.

Claude Nolan was also an early supporter of the good roads movement in Florida. In 1911, he won a trophy for the Glidden Tour organized for the purpose of promoting better roads. The trophy was for his successful trip in a Cadillac from Detroit, Michigan to Jacksonville following the route that became part of the "Dixie Highway". A few years later, he became president of the San Jose Company, established in 1914, that purchased approximately one thousand acres in South Jacksonville with the intent of developing a subdivision along the "Dixie Highway" as it ran south towards St. Augustine. Although never built due to the economic downturn caused by the start of World War I, the proposed subdivision was not developed, but did contribute to the

growing concept of automobile-centered subdivisions located more in the suburbs.<sup>6</sup>

To promote both aviation and automobiles, Claude Nolan sponsored a race in 1910 between a Cadillac and an airplane at Moncrief Park, a mile long horse racing track northwest of downtown Jacksonville. The Cadillac was driven by Dexter Kelly who raced against an airplane piloted by popular barnstormer Charles K. Hamilton. The automobile and airplane stayed neck in neck until the last lap when the Cadillac charged ahead. According to Hamilton, the airplane was slowed by a strong headwind. After the race, Nolan took an airplane ride with Hamilton who flew fifty feet over the track before landing. With this ride, Claude Nolan became the first Floridian to fly over Florida soil in an airplane.<sup>7</sup> In another promotional stunt in early 1928, Claude Nolan and a companion drove an automobile fifty-four miles from Miami to Key West with most of the trip being on the single track of the Florida East Coast Railroad. Driving the first automobile to Key West, Nolan was accompanied by a trainload of reporters and newsreel cameramen. Another claim to fame for Nolan occurred on March 29, 1928 when he became the first person in Florida to make an international phone call by placing a call to Berlin, Germany. While on a business trip between Jacksonville and Tallahassee in 1942, Claude Nolan was involved in a serious car accident. Never recovering from severe back injuries caused by the accident, Claude Nolan died in 1943.<sup>8</sup>

- (D) *It is identified as the work of a master builder, designer, or architect whose individual work has influenced the development of the City, state or nation.*

As originally constructed before being severely altered in 1948, the Claude Nolan Cadillac Building was considered one of Henry John Klutho's most masterful designs that successfully incorporated and blended the reinforced concrete structural system with decorative elements such as the large plate glass windows and a dark red tapestry brick to create, "*a jewel box for the display of the aristocrat of American automobile*".<sup>9</sup> Being constructed on the former marshes of Hogans Creek and because of the anticipated heavy load to be carried by the building, large fourteen foot square footers were sunk three feet into the ground in order to support the weight of the five-foot deep girders. Concrete slabs spanned the girders which are fourteen feet on center. On the ends of the upper floors, the slabs turned up to create a U-shape that nestled the dark red tapestry brick with black mortar. A similar appearance was created for the columns which were faced with decorative brick, as well as had concrete fins forming the jambs for the windows. The visual effect was a strong interplay of horizontal and vertical elements. How much of the original exterior design remains under the skin of the 1948 alteration is not known, however, many of the original interior features are still evident.

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6 Wayne W. Wood, *Jacksonville's Architectural Heritage: Landmarks for the Future*. (Jacksonville, Florida: University of North Florida Press, 1989), p. 270..

7 John P. Ingle, Jr. *Aviation's Earliest Years in Jacksonville, 1878 – 1935*. (Jacksonville Historical Society, 1977), p. 6

8 "Claude Nolan Celebrating Our 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary".

9 Broward, p. 164.

Practicing in New York City at the time, Henry John Klutho was one of the many out-of-state architects and builders attracted to Jacksonville by potential job opportunities created by the Great Fire of 1901.<sup>10</sup> Trained in the Midwest, Klutho became noted for being one of the first architects in the south to incorporate the modernistic design concepts of the Prairie School in many of his early commissions in Jacksonville. This masterful blending of his own personal style with the architectural principles of Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis H. Sullivan reached its zenith with the design and construction of the St. James Building completed in 1912. Henry J. Klutho was Jacksonville's most significant architect during the period between the Great Fire of 1901 and World War 1.

Born on March 19, 1873 in Breese, Illinois, Henry John Klutho attended commercial college, as well as the Schenk's Drawing Academy in St. Louis, Missouri, where he started his practice working for several local architectural firms. After moving to New York City in 1894, Klutho was employed by several architects in that city including Francis H. Kimball, W. Wheeler, and the firm of Clinton and Russell. After a tour of Europe in 1898, Klutho returned to New York City where he opened his own architectural practice. Reading about the Great Fire of May 3, 1901 and realizing professional opportunities that such a situation provided, he relocated his architectural practice to Jacksonville, arriving in June of 1901. After a short association with Atlanta architect, J.W. Golucke, Klutho went on to establish a very successful architectural practice and is credited with the design of many of Jacksonville's most prominent early twentieth century landmarks.

His earliest designs in Jacksonville tended to be more traditional reflecting the popular revival styles of the period. These buildings included the Dyal-Upchurch Building (4 East Bay Street, 1901-02, Second Renaissance Revival), the Saint Clair Abrams Mausoleum (Evergreen Cemetery, 1901, Neoclassical Revival), the Thomas V. Porter Residence (510 North Julia Street, 1902, Colonial Revival), the First Baptist Church Sanctuary (133 West Church Street, 1903, Romanesque Revival), the Jacksonville Free Public Library (101 East Adams Street, 1903-05, Neoclassical Revival) and the new Jacksonville City Hall (1903, Beaux-Arts, now demolished).

However by 1907, Klutho's designs begun to incorporate elements of the more modernistic styles developed by Louis Sullivan in his Chicago School of high rise architecture and the Prairie School designs of Frank Lloyd Wright. Some of his early designs in Jacksonville reflecting these new architectural influences included the YMCA Building (407 North Laura Street, 1907); the Bisbee Building (1908-09, 47 West Forsyth Street); the Seminole Hotel (1909, demolished), the Florida Life Building (1911-12, 117 North Laura Street), the Morocco Temple (1910-11, 219 North Newnan Street), the Claude Nolan Cadillac Building and Garages (937 North Main Street, 1911-12); the Burbridge Hotel (Floridan) (1910, demolished); and of course, his recognized masterpiece, the St. James Building (1911-12, 117 West Duval Street).

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<sup>10</sup> The life and works of Henry John Klutho is summarized from Robert Broward's *The Architecture of Henry John Klutho*, (1983), and *Jacksonville's Architectural Heritage, Landmarks for the Future* by Wayne W. Wood, (1989).

Klutho also popularized the use of the Prairie School style for residential designs starting with his own residence (1909) now located at 30 West 9<sup>th</sup> Street and apartment building (1913) at 1830 North Main Street in the Springfield neighborhood. Other noted residential designs in the Prairie School style by Klutho included the George A. Clark Residence (2059 Riverside, 1911, demolished); the Alexander St. Clair-Abrams Residence (1649 Osceola Street, 1913-14); the Stockton Broome Residence (1845 Elizabeth Place, 1914); and the Florence Court Apartments (1751 North Main Street, 1911). Klutho also used the Prairie School style in the design of several schools such as Panama Park School (Lola M. Culver, 580 Lawton Avenue, 1916), and East Jacksonville Elementary School #33 (1016 East Ashley Street, 1917, demolished).

During his later years he returned to more traditional styles, and in the 1920s, after some bad investments in Jacksonville's movie industry, formed the short-lived partnership with Fred S. Cates and Albert N. Cole. During the 1920's and 30's, Klutho's designs tended to reflect more the popular revival styles, as well as the Art Deco and Art Moderne styles. Noted designs during this period included the Merrill-Stevens Shipyard Administration Building (2403 Atlantic Boulevard, 1917); Fletcher Park War Housing (off Atlantic Boulevard, 1918); Henry Kite Elementary School # 37 (9430 Lem Turner Road, 1927-28); additions and alterations to West Riverside Elementary School (2801 Herschel Street, 1916 & 1922); Napier Apartments (1530-36 Riverside Avenue, 1924); Drs. Love & McGinnis Residence (2063 Oak Street, 1926); the residence at 2755 Riverside Avenue (1925); the David Saffey Residence (3643 Hedrick Street, 1927); Florida Baptist Convention Building (1924-25 218 West Church Street); the commercial buildings at 3556 – 3560 St. Johns Avenue (1927); the Hogans Creek Improvement Project (1929); U.S. Parcel Post Building (1931-32, 1136 West Bay Street, demolished); and the Kahler Apartments (3225 St. Johns Avenue, 1936).

Klutho's influence on Jacksonville's architecture during the early twentieth century was profound. Many architects, such as Leroy Sheftall and Earl Mark, who later gained prominence in the city, got their start in Klutho's office. Committed to enhancing professional standards for architects, Klutho published a schedule of minimum charges and guidelines for completions that followed the national American Institute of Architects (AIA). In addition, he became the first Florida member of the AIA, as well as was instrumental in establishing the Florida Institute of Architects. Klutho also had significant commissions outside of the Jacksonville area including the Governor's Mansion (1905, demolished) and addition to the State Capital (1921, demolished) in Tallahassee. The quality and diversity of his designs make him one of Florida's most significant architects of the historic period.

(G.) *Its suitability for preservation.*

In utilizing this criterion, it has been the practice of the Planning and Development Department to evaluate proposed landmarks based on evidence of significant exterior alterations that have negatively impacted character-defining features, as well as represent

alterations difficult, costly, or impossible to reverse. Further, the degree and nature of any exterior deterioration, as well as the evidence of long term and potentially on-going neglect are also a factor in evaluating potential landmarks for their suitability for preservation or restoration.

The one-story garage and the 1926 garage addition to the showroom building do not appear to have been significantly altered since constructed except for some window and door enclosures and the concrete block elevator tower on the rear elevation. However, the original 1911 – 12 design of the showroom building, which is the primary structure, was significantly remodeled in 1948. As originally designed the showroom building was considered as one of Henry John Klutho's Prairie style masterpieces as described by Robert Broward in his publication, *The Architecture of Henry John Klutho*, (1984, p. 164);

*“In the Nolan building the architect’s use of reinforced concrete was quite sophisticated and introduced expressive detailing seldom equaled today. To create spandrels at the upper floors, he turned the slabs both up and down with one continuous pour in a U-shape facing outward. He filled between the U with deep red tapestry brick pointed with black mortar. The concrete at the top of the brick formed the sill of the windows above and at the bottom formed the head of those below, creating an excellently detailed glass wall. This design produced dark brick panels at each floor with abstractly designed, dark green tile inserts at the center of each. The concrete columns were detailed in a similar manner so that a dark red brick pilaster effect was carried vertically with exposed concrete fins at each side forming the jambs for the glass. Solids in the other elevations were made of the same dark red tapestry brick with typical Prairie School squares or rectangles outlined in a brick pattern within the area defined by the structural frame.”*

*“As originally constructed, this building went far beyond the glazing usually associated with Prairie School work. Claude Nolan’s auto showroom and garage building was literally all plate glass, the only solids on the Main Street elevation were the articulated columns and spandrels. Klutho had achieved the ultimate glass box framed in concrete and delicate brick. The very nature of the building demanded this approach, for it was indeed a jewel box for the display of the aristocrat of American automobiles.”*

The glass box quality of the building was completely destroyed by the 1948 remodeling which included the removal of the large plate glass windows, the covering of brick and cast concrete details in stucco, as well as removing the cornice and glass canopy. These alterations resulted in stylistically changing the building from its original Prairie style design to the more simplistic Art Moderne style popular in the 1930s and 40s.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the findings of this report, the Planning and Development Department recommends that the Jacksonville Historic Preservation Commission **APPROVE** the designation of 937 North Main Street, **(LM-13-05)** as a City of Jacksonville Landmark.