

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received **OCT 17 1983**
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Cummins Station

and/or common Same

2. Location

street & number Corner of Demonbreun and ^{10th} Tenth Avenue ^{S.} South N/A not for publication

city, town Nashville N/A vicinity of

state Tennessee code 047 county Davidson code 037

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	N/A <input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Merchants Warehouse Company

street & number 224 Second Avenue North

city, town Nashville N/A vicinity of state Tennessee 37201

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Davidson County Courthouse

street & number Public Square

city, town Nashville state Tennessee 37201

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date N/A N/A federal state county local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Cummins Station is a large four-story concrete and masonry structure located on Tenth Avenue South in Nashville, Tennessee. Built in 1906, Cummins Station is a noteworthy structure due to its size and construction materials. When it was completed Cummins Station was the largest concrete reinforced terminal building in the world, and the building continues to be utilized for warehouse purposes. Despite its great size the building features a variety of decorative elements such as flaired arching over the windows and a double transom arrangement on each of the storefronts. The building has experienced few alterations and retains its original architectural character.

Cummins Station is located on Tenth Avenue South at the corner of Demonbreun Street and is situated adjacent to the Seaboard Line railroad tracks and Union Station. It measures 132 feet in width and 500 feet in length with the four floors containing a total of almost one-half million square feet. The building faces Tenth Avenue on the east, Demonbreun Street on the north, a parking lot on the south and railroad lines on the west.

Constructed as the largest wholesale warehouse in middle Tennessee, Cummins Station was the earliest building in the city which utilized reinforced concrete as its major structural element. Upon its completion the building was the largest concrete terminal station in the world. The masonry exterior was added as a decorative veneer and does not carry any of the weight of the structure. The building is rectangular in shape and runs parallel to the railroad lines. The four-story building also includes a basement level which opens onto the railroad tracks on the west elevation. The design of the structure includes decorative elements both on the storefront and the upper facade which reflects aspects of the 20th century Colonial Revival movement in the jack arching over the windows and prominent keystones on the fourth floor.

The east elevation facing Tenth Avenue South is the main facade of the structure and is thirty-six bays in length with each bay separated by a brick pier. Almost all of the storefronts on the facade are original to the building and few have been altered. The storefronts generally consist of frame bulkheads which support three one-over-one sash windows. At least one frame door is also found on each storefront although some bays contain double doors or have been replaced with sliding overhead doors. Above the windows and doors on the storefront is a transom bar and a four-light transom containing clear glass. Above this transom is a second transom bar which displays a three-light transom of decorative Luxfer glass. This glass, also known as prism glass, is tinted purple and has ridges on one side to break up the light as it shines into the interior. Most of the bays of the storefront are still intact and display this original design.

Separating each bay are brick piers which run the height of the building. Above the storefront level each pier is decorated with a concrete band. The upper facade of the east elevation is recessed between the piers and each bay contains a fifteen light casement window on each floor. Above each window is flaired jack arching, and on the fourth floor a large concrete keystone is inset in the arch. At the roofline is a continuous concrete parapet which runs the length of the building. While many of the windows have been covered with paint the only other alterations to the upper facade are the addition of several fire escapes attached to the exterior.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet Cummins Station

Item number 7

Page 2

The west elevation of the building is also similar in design to the east facade. Each floor contains fifteen light casement windows, and on the fourth floor are prominent keystones in the arching. On the north and south elevations the windows are both industrial type casement and one-over-one sash. Windows on these facades lack the arching and decoration which characterize the main elevations. At the roofline are large platforms which originally supported two large water towers which were removed when modern water sources were added to the building.

The interior of Cummins Station is characterized by open floor space with sections separated by concrete walls. Each floor level also contains prominent concrete piers as visible structural elements. All of the finishes on the interior are of concrete with the exception of wooden partition walls in bay 1 and 14 which enclose offices. Two sets of elevators provide access to all four floors, and concrete stairways are spaced throughout the building. The building was originally heated by a coal fired steam furnace and some of the original steam radiators are still intact.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1906-07

Builder/Architect W.J. Cummins - Oliver Contractors

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Located on Tenth Avenue South in Nashville, Tennessee, Cummins Station is an architecturally and historically significant structure of the early 20th century. The building has been nominated under criteria A and C because of its role in Nashville mercantile history and its innovative structural design. When it was built in 1906, Cummins Station was the largest concrete reinforced terminal building in the world containing some 480,000 square feet. The building was then occupied by prominent Nashville businesses for over seventy-five years. Cummins Station has not been significantly altered and retains the integrity of its original design.

The early 1900s were prosperous years in Nashville and the city grew in wealth and prominence as a center for industry and manufacturing. The opening of Nashville's Union Station in 1900 gave a great boost to the city's role as a rail center, and this surge of economic prosperity enabled many businessmen to erect large factories and warehouses in and around the city. One of the choicest sites was the area adjacent to Union Station and by 1905 this area was examined for development by a group of investors.

This investment group was headed by William J. Cummins a leading Nashville businessman and financier. Cummins owned several businesses in Tennessee and was chairman of the Bon Air Coal and Iron Corporation. Cummins began negotiations with property owners along Tenth Avenue South, and in 1906 he paid \$350,000 of stock and \$75,000 cash for twelve adjoining lots directly east of Union Station and on the main Louisville and Nashville railroad lines. A company was formed with Cummins as president called the Wholesale Merchants Warehouse Company which immediately began planning a large building to occupy the entire lot.

By fall of 1906 construction of the building, now called Cummins Station, was begun. Its design was a significant innovation in Tennessee architecture because of the use of reinforced concrete. Reinforced concrete was first used as a building material during the 1870s in the United States after the discovery that the expansion properties of concrete and iron were similar. Concrete thus strengthened with a grid of iron rods created a firmer bond which could expand and contract uniformly. In 1903 a sixteen-story reinforced concrete skyscraper was constructed in Cincinnati which revolutionized the building industry. This type of construction offered distinct advantages for warehouse buildings. Therefore, Cummins requested that this building material be used for Cummins Station and the Oliver Contracting Company of Nashville undertook the construction.

When the building was completed in March of 1907 it was promoted with great fanfare by the owners. Two hundred guests including Governor M. R. Patterson and Nashville Mayor T. O. Morris attended a banquet held at Nashville's Maxwell House Hotel to celebrate its opening. Cummins Station was noted as the first building of reinforced concrete

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1.40 acres

Quadrangle name Nashville West, TN

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 16 519540 4001091810
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification Cummins Station is bounded on the north by Demonbreun Street, on the east by South Tenth Street, on the west, by the Louisville and Nashville Railroad (Seaboard Line) tracks, and on the south by an adjoining property line. The nomination includes only the land on which the building sits.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Philip Thomason

organization Thomason and Associates

date June 23, 1983

street & number 1700 Hayes Street, Suite 202

telephone 615-320-5732

city or town Nashville

state Tennessee 37203

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Herbert L. Huger

title Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission

date 10/11/83

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Partially so

National Register

date

10/17/83

for *[Signature]*
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Cummins Station Item number 8 Page 2

in the city and the largest terminal building of concrete in the world. Its first tenants were some of the city's leading businesses such as the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company, Continental Baking Powder Company and several leading wholesale hardware companys.

During its early years the operation of Cummins Station proved successful and vacancies were few. The building's owners made use of various promotional techniques and many publications contained advertisements extolling the virtues of the station. Among the claims for the building was the lowering of insurance rates on stock due to its fire-proof construction. Its location on the main railroad lines with access to the Cumberland River was another important selling point. The owners further boasted that the building was a place "where rats cannot live" which appears to have been a strong selling point in the early 20th century.

Tenants of the building varied from year to year although some notable Nashville businesses operated out of the building for several decades. The most important of these was the Cheek-Neal Coffee Company which moved into the building in 1907. This company had its beginnings on Second Avenue and distributed coffee throughout the country. The Maxwell House Hotel specialized in serving the company's brand. During one of President Theodore Roosevelt's visits to the city he pronounced the coffee "Good to the last drop." The fame of this coffee increased, and the Cheek-Neal Company occupied two sections of Cummins Station for their grinding, roasting and packing facilities. Distribution of the brand continued until 1928 when General Foods acquired the company for more than sixteen million dollars.

Another major company located in the station was the H. G. Hill Wholesale Grocery Company which distributed its products to grocery stores throughout the state. By 1930 the company operated over 600 stores in Tennessee after spending many of its years of growth in Cummins Station. Other firms which occupied the building included perfume distributors, wholesale hardware companys, candy companys, and radio and appliance dealers. William Cummins died in 1936 but the company reformed and continued to operate the building. Gradually many of the firms moved into more modern buildings, and today the major occupant of Cummins Station is the Manufacturers Warehouse Company which distributes clothing and furniture.

Cummins Station has been a Nashville landmark since its construction in 1906. The building was one of the largest in Middle Tennessee for many years and it has been occupied by major Nashville businesses during its history. The use of reinforced concrete for its construction was an innovative and successful engineering experiment, and upon its completion it was the largest concrete reinforced terminal building in the world. Few alterations have occurred to the building in recent years and it continues to exhibit its original integrity of materials and design.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet Cummins Station

Item number 9

Page 2

Major Bibliographical References

Clarke, Ida. All About Nashville. Nashville: Private Printing, 1912.

Davidson County Deed Records, 1906.

McRaven, Henry. Biographical Sketch of William J. Cummins. Manuscript section,
Tennessee State Library and Archives.

Nashville Board of Trade. Nashville: Folk-Keelin Co., 1908.

Waller, William, ed. Nashville 1900-1910. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press,
1972.