Article Title: Standard Oil’s “Bungalow” Filling Stations

Full Citation: L Robert Puschendorf, “Standard Oil’s ‘Bungalow’ Filling Stations,” Nebraska History 87 (2006): 82-85

URL of article: http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/history/full-text/NH2006SOSStations.pdf
Date: 7/24/2012

Article Summary: The first filling stations were a far cry from today’s sleek emporiums offering not only gas and oil but everything from lug nuts to latte. In 1914, however, Standard Oil began to make improvements.

Cataloging Information:

Names: Everett S Dodds, John McDonald, Alan McDonald

Nebraska Place Names: Omaha, Grand Island, Lincoln, Norfolk

Keywords: Standard Oil of Nebraska, Everett S Dodds, John McDonald, Alan McDonald

Photographs / Images: a “bungalow” Standard station in Grand Island about 1915; sketch of the new station plan designed by Omaha father-and-son architects John and Alan McDonald that replaced the bungalow stations in 1919 and was used throughout the 1920s; 1935 Standard Oil of Nebraska newspaper advertisement with a picture of the company’s first drive-in filling station, a 1914 galvanized steel building built in Lincoln (inset picture shows the 1935 design)
After the giant Standard Oil Company was broken into thirty-four separate companies in 1911, the newly independent Standard Oil of Nebraska dominated the state’s market for gasoline and petroleum products.
A "bungalow" Standard station in Grand Island, about 1915. Designed by Omaha architects Evers and Dodds, the plan was simple and attractive and could be built by local contractors with locally obtained materials. Lumbard-Leschinsky Studio Collection, Stuhr Museum of the Prairie Pioneer, Grand Island.

Left page: A new station plan, designed by Omaha father-son architects John and Alon McDonald, replaced the bungalow stations in 1919 and was used through the 1920s. York Daily News Times, Oct. 8, 1919.
In this 1935 newspaper advertisement the Standard Oil Company of Nebraska used a picture of the 8-by 18-foot galvanized steel building built in Lincoln in 1914 as the company’s first drive-in filling station. *Inset is the design current in 1935. Lincoln Star, July 9, 1935*

name that suggests a retail oil and gasoline outlet. But given its dominance in the Nebraska petroleum business, Standard, if not the first to employ this revolutionary method of retailing gasoline, was certainly the first company to market statewide with a network of freestanding filling stations.

In 1914 Standard Oil of Nebraska opened its first drive-in filling station. Located in Lincoln, it was a simple metal shed. According to the building permit the 8-by 18-foot “steel frame and galvanized iron building” was belted to a cement foundation. It was eight feet high with “3-inch angle iron frame rafters,” and its estimated cost was $250.\(^1\)

Standard soon adopted a more substantial and attractive design, and built its first station from the new plan in Omaha. The building permit, issued just three months after the permit for the Lincoln location, describes the building as a one-story, 16-by 16-foot brick building. Omaha architect Everett S. Dodds (see sidebar) designed the new plan, essentially a brick “box” with a hipped roof and overhanging eaves. Construction costs for the new stations ranged from seven hundred to one thousand dollars.\(^2\)

Several newspapers described Standard Oil’s new stations as “bungalows,” probably using the term to describe a small house: “[Standard Oil’s] plans are for a bungalow-style filling station with plenty of windows” (Norfolk Daily News). “The supply station will be a brick building... of bungalow type of construction” (Columbus Telegram). “It is a beautiful structure on the semi-bungalow order” (Columbus Journal).\(^3\)

Dodds’ standardized design for Standard Oil filling stations is an interesting early example of the application of a design by a practicing architect. His specialty, “stock” building plans, served the needs of Standard Oil in several ways.

The design was simple yet attractive, and, with plans in hand, company representatives could assure townspeople of their intention to construct an appealing building. When city officials in Norfolk carried on vigorous discussions about the proliferation of gasoline outlets, for example, Standard’s superintendent calmed their concerns by showing them the plans. The Standard superintendent also showed city officials photographs of one of its Lincoln stations. The Norfolk Daily
News reported that the proposed Norfolk station was to be "a duplicate of the Lincoln station." The newspaper also reported that the company representative had promised, "The company's efforts will be a credit to Norfolk." Another newspaper said, "The filling station is to be a replica of one at Lincoln and the councilmen are certain that the building will be an improvement to that section of town." When a station was completed at Hastings, the Hastings Tribune commented, "People are standing about the corner admiring the plant."

The plans were designed to be easy for local contractors to use, and the specifications ensured that materials could be obtained from local suppliers. A superintendent from the Omaha headquarters oversaw construction, but wherever possible local contractors were hired and materials were procured locally. The Hastings Tribune commented,

[The construction superintendent] employed all home labor on the construction, this one item of expense being a little over $500. An idea of the character of the construction is indicated by the fact that 600 sacks of cement were used. All of the material except the piping and tanks was bought in Hastings.¹

From 1914 to 1919, Standard Oil of Nebraska built twenty-four stations from the Dodds plans, the design was short-lived.² In 1919 the architectural commission for Standard Oil Company stations was given to John and Alan McDonald, prominent father-and-son architects of Omaha, and by that fall a new design began to appear in Standard Oil's newspaper advertisements. The company soon replaced most of the small buildings with the new design.

**NOTES**

¹ City of Lincoln Building and Safety Division, Permits and Inspections, Building Permit 5468, Mar. 12, 1914. Also see Rettinger vs. Pierpont et al, Nebraska Supreme Court, 15 N.W. 2d 993, Nos. 31555, 31560, 31561, Filed July 28, 1944, Nebraska Reports, 145:166.

² The Daily Record (Omaha), June 30, 1914, "Building Permits Permit 771 for location at 29th & Hanney streets, June 29, 1914, and various building permits filed for the Standard Oil Company, 1914–1917.

³ Norfolk Daily News, April 20, 1915, 7:4; Columbus Telegram, April 20, 1917, 8:3; Columbus Journal, May 10, 1917, 3:1.


⁶ Rettinger vs. Pierpont et al, Nebraska Supreme Court, 145:166.