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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/NH2006SOStations.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:

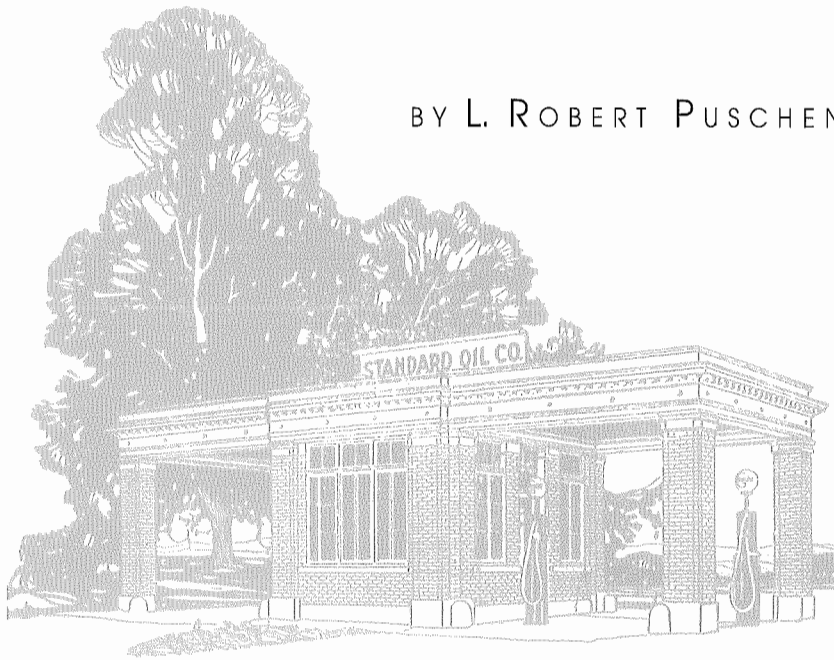
Names: Everett S Dodds, John McDonald, Alan McDonald

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

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

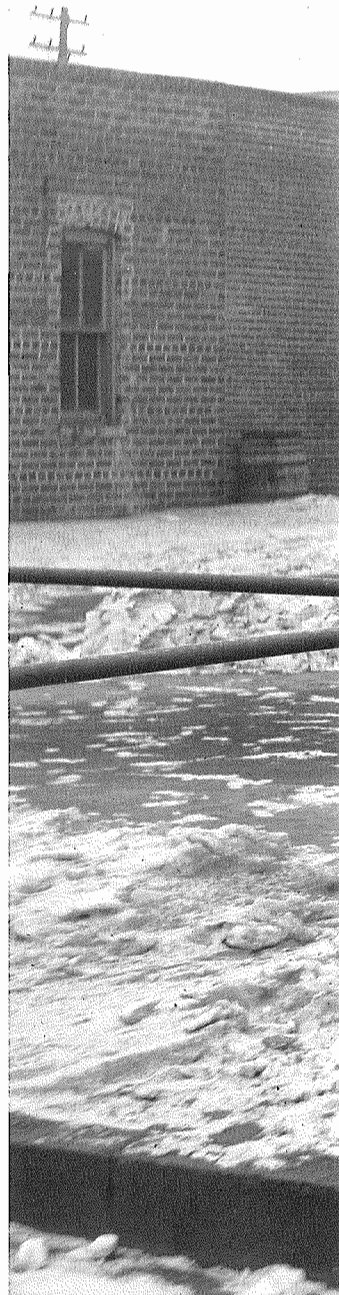
Photographs / Images: a "bungalow" Standard station in Grand Island about 1915; sketch of the new station plan designed by Omaha father-and-son architects John and Alan McDonald that replaced the bungalow stations in 1919 and was used throughout the 1920s; 1935 Standard Oil of Nebraska newspaper advertisement 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)

BY L. ROBERT PUSCHENDORF



STANDARD OIL'S “BUNGALOW” FILLING STATIONS

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 architect Everett S. 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-and-son architects John and Alan McDonald, replaced the bungalow stations in 1919 and was used through the 1920s. *York Daily News-Times*, Oct. 6, 1919



STANDARD OIL IS ABLE TO GIVE YOU MORE FOR YOUR MONEY—AND DOES

LOCAL BOY MAKES GOOD



1914: The first service station in Nebraska

His first job was delivering oil for the lamps of Nebraska to remote farms and homesteads. That was over forty years ago.

He drove a team of mules then, in all kinds of weather, over roads that hardly deserved the name. Later, in 1914, he opened the first service station in the State.

Who is he? He is the representative of the Standard Oil Company of Nebraska.

Today you can meet him face to face wherever you see the familiar Standard sign.

Nearly twice as many Nebraska motorists go to him for gasoline as go to anyone else. They know that the petroleum products he sells, the tires, the accessories, are the finest money can buy. And they appreciate his unfailing courtesy and helpfulness.

Indeed, these are the things on which he has built his leadership. You can put your car into his hands with absolute confidence.

The Standard Oil Company of Nebraska is a Nebraska corporation, operating in this State only. Some five thousand Nebraskans depend upon it, directly or indirectly, for their livelihood. Last year it paid over a million dollars into the State Treasury, in taxes.



1935: The Standard serviceman or dealer is the personification of the Standard Oil Company. He is the extension of cheerful service to the motorist.

STANDARD

STANDARD OIL COMPANY

FROM SHACK TO
SUPER SERVICE STATION



—a Story of Service and its Rewards

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 bolted 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*

STANDARD WAS ABLE TO SERVE ITS CUSTOMERS efficiently through the substantial marketing network it inherited in the breakup. This distribution system gave the company an advantage over its competitors in supplying the demand for gasoline that paralleled the phenomenal growth in automobile sales and ownership.

The curbside pump, itself called a "filling station," had become the most convenient means for supplying gasoline to motorists, and pumps began to appear in front of hardware stores, general merchandise stores, garages, and other businesses as a sideline to their regular trade. There was little or no precedent for the off-street, drive-in retail outlet devoted primarily to petroleum products easily recognized as today's gas station.

The location of the first commercial venture in modern petroleum retailing in Nebraska is unclear. One possibility is listed in the 1914 Omaha city directory as the Omaha Auto Filling Company, a

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."⁴

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.⁵

From 1914 to 1919, Standard Oil of Nebraska built twenty-four stations from the Dodds plans, the design was short-lived.⁶ 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 5408, Mar. 12, 1914. Also see *Rettinger vs. Pierpont et al*, Nebraska Supreme Court, 15 N.W. 2d 393, Nos. 31559, 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 & Harney 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.

⁴ "Bungalow and Park for Filling Station," *Norfolk Daily News*, Apr. 20, 1915, 7:4; *Norfolk Press*, Apr. 22, 1915, 5:2; "Service Station is an Improvement," *Hastings Daily Tribune*, Sept. 10, 1915, 2:4.

⁵ "Service Station is an Improvement," *Hastings Daily Tribune*, Sept. 10, 1915, 2:4.


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

EVERETT S. DODDS

"Bungalow" station architect, Everett S. Dodds, specialized in residential house designs sold as "stock" plans to prospective homeowners and builders. Born in Minnesota in 1889, Dodds came to Nebraska in 1910 and entered a brief partnership with Fred Peterson in the Omaha firm of Peterson & Dodds. In 1913 he began his own practice.¹

His building plans were soon being illustrated in a weekly feature of the *Omaha World-Herald*, "Some New Home Suggestions," and in 1914 Dodds announced a forthcoming book of house designs. The plans ranged from affordable bungalows to elaborate homes, and any of them could be modified at a small cost to suit individual preferences.²

He is also credited with public buildings, schools, and apartment buildings, but for many years he described himself as a "Specialist in Up-to-Date Residences and Bungalows of the Better Class."³

The Dodds-designed Standard Oil stations were reminiscent of small houses and included some elements suggesting the bungalow style, so it is not surprising that they were sometimes described in those terms. 

¹ *Omaha: The Gate City and Douglas County Nebraska*, vol. 2 (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1917), 580.

² *Omaha World-Herald*, July 5, 1914, 7-W.

³ Sheldon, Addison Erwin, *Nebraska: The Land and the People*, vol. 3 (Chicago and New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1931), 171-72; Everett S. Dodds, *Build a Dodds Home* (Red Oak, Iowa: Thos. D. Murphy Co, nd).

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