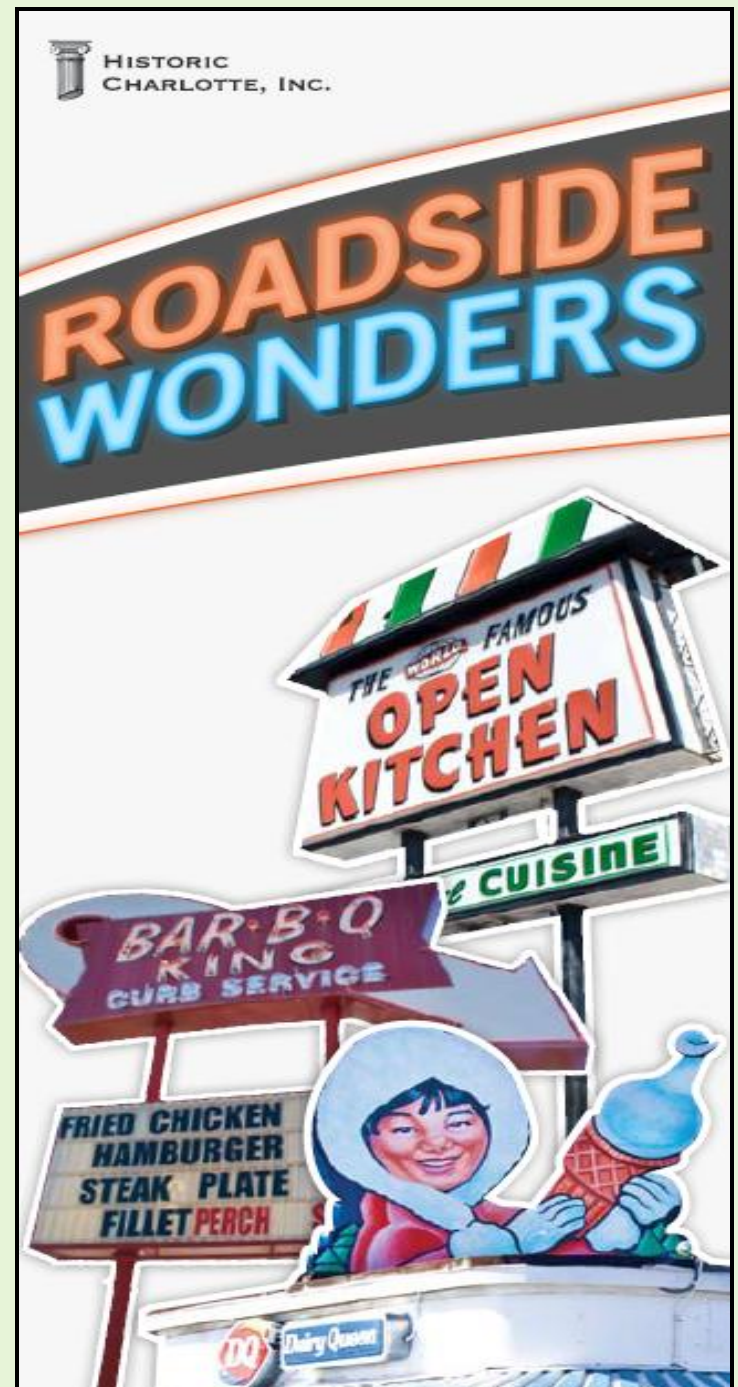
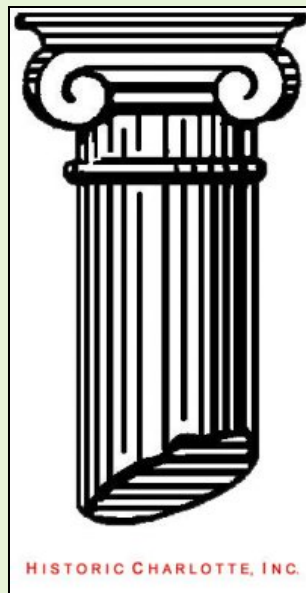


# “Roadside Wonders” and Vintage Signs of Charlotte-Mecklenburg

Historical Survey Report  
Historic Charlotte, Inc.



# Roadside Signage and It's Importance to Charlotte's Automobile Culture

“Roadside Wonder” - Any property that was constructed with the purpose of attracting motorists in the burgeoning pre or post-World War II automobile-oriented commercial era. These properties highlight an aspect of American culture that sought to cater to the demand of travelers in a society that could experience mobilization on a mass scale.



"Taking their inspiration less from professional architects and more from the business owners who knew the value of catching the attention of someone in a moving car, these structures combine whimsy, practicality, and visual appeal". – Jim Heimann, *California Crazy and Beyond: Roadside Vernacular Architecture*

## MAP OF ROADSIDE WONDERS IN CHARLOTTE, NC

Advertising in the form of signs and roadside architecture followed major thoroughfares:

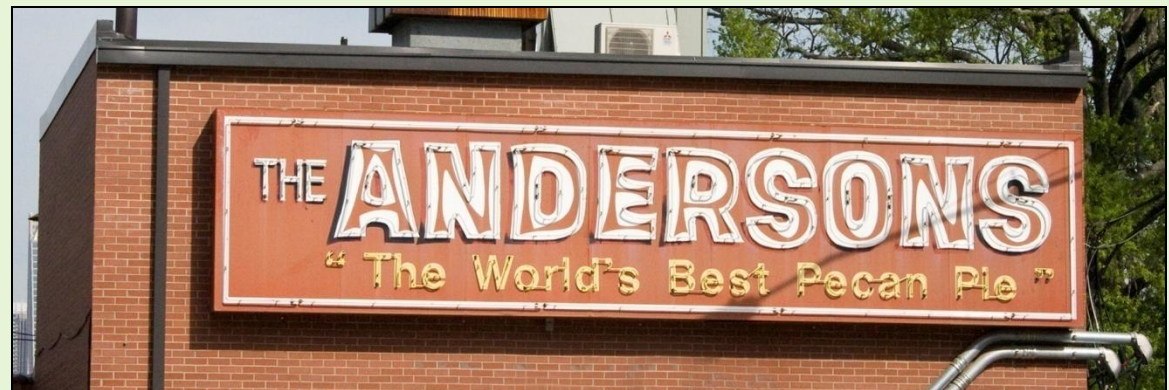
- North Tryon
- South Boulevard
- Central Avenue
- Independence Boulevard
- Wilkinson Boulevard
- Providence Road



# Andersons Restaurant (1946)

1617 Elizabeth Avenue

- Originally opened by Jimmy, Bill, and Pete Anderson, still family-owned.
- No longer operating as a full-service restaurant.
- Andersons sign was built by the Perry Sign Company and can still be seen on the side of the building along Hawthorne Lane.



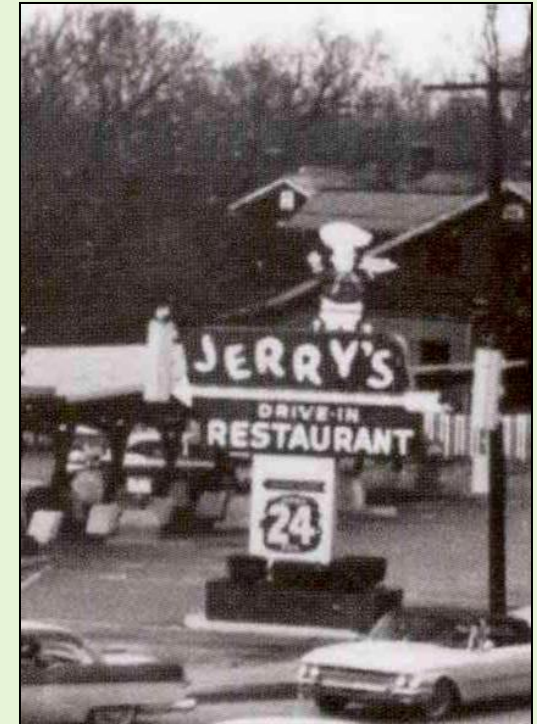
# Athens Restaurant

Sign currently in storage

Original location: 101 East Independence  
Boulevard



- Large neon sign attracted people to round-the-clock authentic Greek dining.
- Once called “Jerry’s Drive-In Restaurant”, the original sign featured a man in a chef hat holding a plate above his head.
- Restaurant closed in 2009 and was demolished. Sign is currently in storage.



1955 photo of Independence Boulevard  
Source: *Charlotte Then and Now*

# BAR-B-Q-KING (1961)

2900 Wilkinson Boulevard

Mid-Century Drive-in

- Built in 1961, the drive-in was situated along one of the major arteries of transportation in Charlotte-Wilkinson Boulevard.
- Designed for fast service and convenience by allowing patrons to stay in their car while ordering and eating.
- Double-sided neon pink and blue sign was designed with the goal of attracting passing motorists.



# Brodt Music Company (1953)

1906 Commonwealth Avenue

- Music store was founded in 1934 by Cecil Brodt of Madison, WI and moved to the building on Commonwealth Ave in 1953.
- Mrs. Brodt wanted the sign to read simply "Brodt's", since that is how most musicians in the area refer to it.
- Before Independence Ave became a freeway, the bright green neon sign was one of the first things drivers would see as they passed over Commonwealth Avenue.



# Coca Cola Bottling Plant (1930)

1401 West Morehead Street

Pre-WWII Commercial Art Deco



- Building designed by M.R. Marsh.
- Cost nearly \$100,000 to construct and provided steady employment during the Great Depression.
- The signs on the building are carved and molded from an artificial stone.
- A local worker named William Frederick McCandless molded the sign and miniature coke bottles out of sand and cement.

# Coca Cola Wall Sign (Early 20<sup>th</sup> C.)

6<sup>th</sup> Street and Graham Street

- The 1920's building used to be one of Coca Cola's bottling locations in Charlotte.
- The sign a modern reproduction of the original, and spells "Charlotte Coca Cola Bottling Co." along with an image of the iconic Coca Cola bottle.
- Building part of the Cotton Mill complex and was made a Local Landmark in 1985.



# Coffee Cup Soda Grill (1948)

914 South Clarkson Street

Post-War Vernacular Roadside Food Stand

- An example of roadside food stand that was common in the postwar era in Charlotte.
- Restaurant's primary purpose was to provide hot meals for workers at nearby factories and other businesses.
- Building's most distinctive decorative elements were three large octagonal windows as well as the signage that protruded from the structure.
- Building was named a Local Landmark in 2007 but was demolished in 2009.



# Copal Grill

Sign in storage

Original location: 5923 Wilkinson Boulevard



- Copal Grill was started in 1947 by Demetrios Ballas, who also owned Liberty Bell and Pappanick's.
- Copal Grill boasts the first free-standing neon sign in the area.
- The restaurant was owned by the Balatsias family (relatives of the original owner) until it closed in 2009.

# Dairy Queen (1947)

2620 Wilkinson Boulevard  
Art Deco Window-Oriented Business

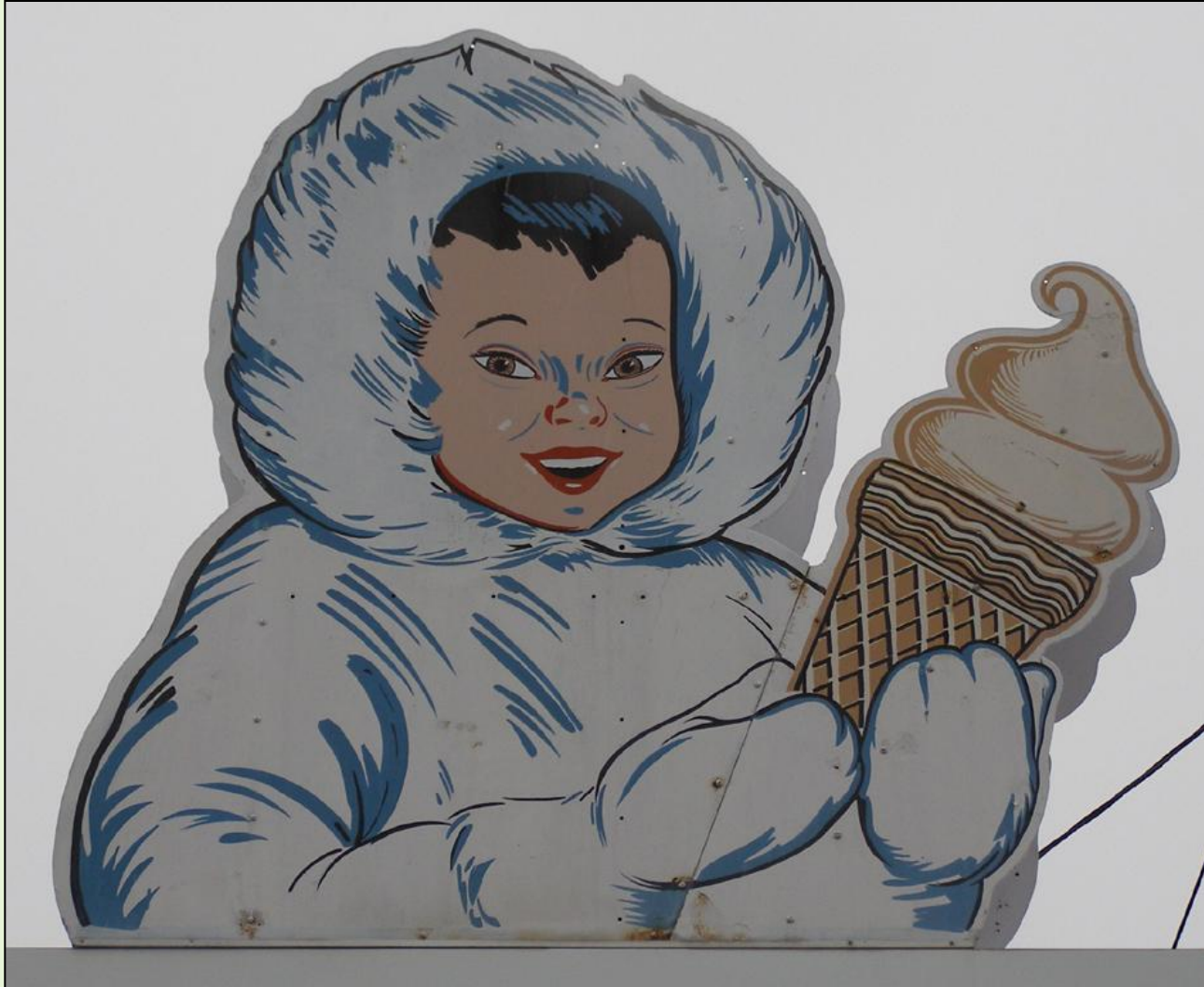
- An isolated one-story structure with curved elements and is completely surrounded by a parking lot, emphasizing its goal of attracting traveling motorists.
- Eskimo signs were placed on the roofs of many Dairy Queens across the country, but the Charlotte Dairy Queen has the only surviving Eskimo sign in existence.
- Double sided to attract motorists from both directions of Wilkinson Boulevard.
- Oldest Dairy Queen franchise in North Carolina and the third oldest in the Southeast.



# Dairy Queen

2620 Wilkinson Boulevard

Original Dairy Queen sign, date unknown

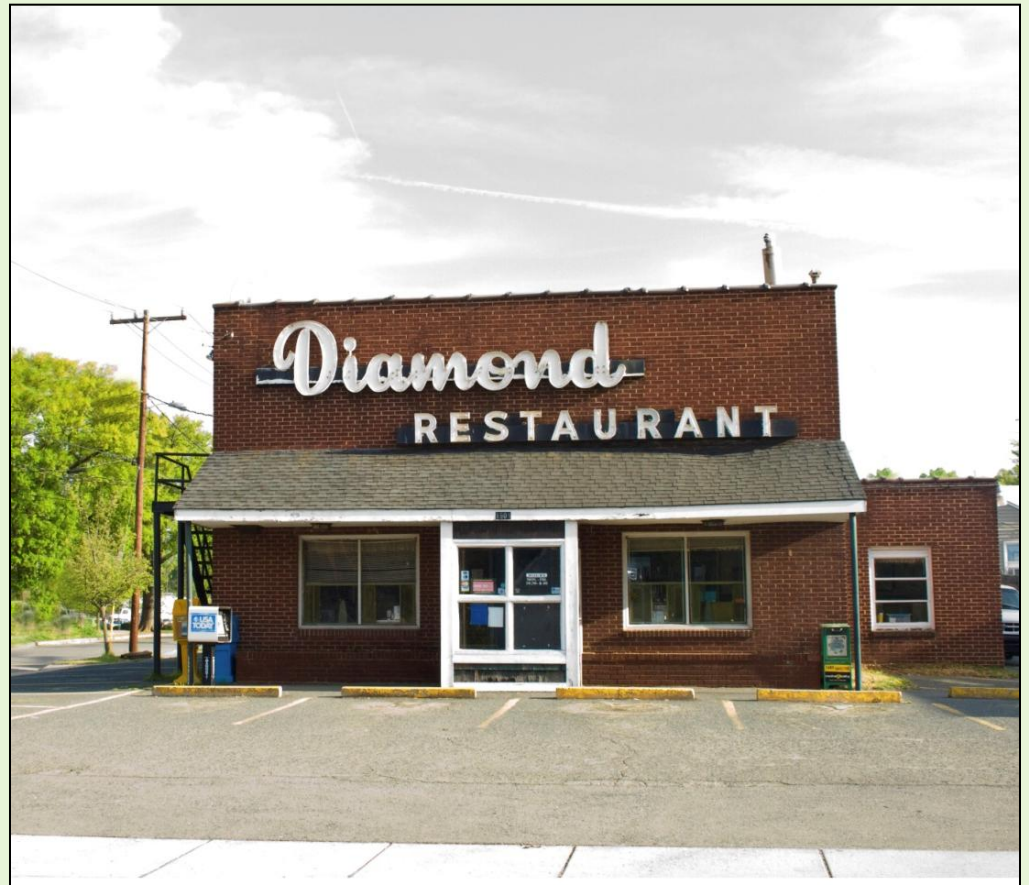


Source: <http://www.agilitynut.com/07/4/dfreeze2.jpg>

# Diamond Restaurant (1945)

1901 Commonwealth Avenue

- Originally opened in 1945 when Commonwealth Avenue was directly accessible from Independence Boulevard
- Large red neon sign provided visibility from the busy thoroughfare, even though it was located a block away.
- Restaurant was originally called "Diamond Soda Grill" and was owned by Flonnie and W.A. James.



# Hall's Clock Shop (1950s)

1512 Central Avenue

Last legal over-hanging sign in Plaza Midwood

- Early 20<sup>th</sup> century building along Plaza Midwood's business corridor. Has the only legal over-hanging street sign in the neighborhood.
- In the 1950's, the building was home to Alexander Jewelers and the sign had neon lights. Later converted to light bulbs because of the cost to maintain neon.
- Has remained in the same location for 60 years. Owner Ken Demert moved Hall's Clock Shop to Central Avenue in 1976 and kept the original sign but resurfaced it with aluminum and paint.



# Herrin Bros Coal & Ice (1929)

315 East 36<sup>th</sup> Street



- Founded by (name) Herrin, the great-grandfather of the current owner, Lee Herrin, nearly eighty years ago.
- The company sign along 36<sup>th</sup> Street is free-standing and was at one time lit by neon. At the top it shows a red devil with a pitchfork between the words “Red Ash” and “Fuel Oil”.
- Neon was eventually removed because of the cost to maintain and replace broken tubes.

# Jesus Saves (1949)

200 Wesley Heights Way



- Garr Memorial Church founded in 1930 by Dr. A. G. Garr.
- In 1932, members of the church and surrounding community salvaged the Charlotte City Auditorium to build Garr Auditorium at 200 Tuckaseegee Road (now Wesley Heights Road.)
- The two neon "JESUS SAVES" signs were erected on the roof of the Garr Auditorium in 1949. At the time, these signs were visible from many locations around Charlotte, and along the flight path into Charlotte Douglas airport.

# JFG Coffee Sign (1960s)

Sign in storage

Original location: Highway 277



- JFG Coffee was founded in 1882 in Knoxville, TN. The initials J.F.G. stand for the founder of the company- James Franklin Goodson.
- The JFG Billboard has been in Charlotte for over forty years, though it is believed the current sign in storage may have been reconstructed with parts of the original billboard. It is currently being restored at SignArt and will be put back up sometime in the near future.
- Some interesting facts about the sign: Mounted on a billboard, it is 14 ft wide x 48 ft tall; There are 800 bulbs in the JFG letters, all of which had to be replaced during its restoration; The JFG letters are 10 ft wide x 8 ft tall and the smaller letters are 3 ft tall.

# Open Kitchen (1952)

1318 West Morehead Street

- Started in 1952 by the Kokenes family and still family-owned and operated.
- The sign was designed by the original owner and built by Perry Sign Company. Has not been changed in over 40 years.
- Created as a stylized version of the building itself, with red, green and white stripes and whimsical iron work and lantern lights.



# Manor Theatre (1947)

609 Providence Road

1948 photo of Manor Theatre.  
Source: *Charlotte Then and Now*



- Opened in 1947 as part of one of Charlotte's first drive-up shopping centers, with ample parking provided for patrons.
- Theater had one screen when it first opened and a v-shaped marquee with the name "Manor" on either side of the sign.
- Marquee has since been replaced but the character very much intact. Added a second movie screen and became premier location for independent films.

# Mr. K's Soft Ice Cream (1971)

1207 South Boulevard

- Opened in 1967 by Theodore Karres. Originally a 500 square foot building along South Boulevard that sold only ice cream,
- Expanded into the current building in 1971 and added hot dogs, hamburgers and other diner favorites to menu.
- Sign along South Boulevard features the likeness of Mr. Karres with a soft ice cream cone.
- Still family-owned and operated, Mr. K's recently received a "Pioneer Award" from the city of Charlotte.



# Park-N-Shop (1959)

3512 Wilkinson Boulevard



**Park-N-Shop on North Tryon Street, now a Compare Foods**

Source:

<http://www/agilitynut.com/p/parkn21204.jpg>

- Charles Reid opened the original Park-N-Shop at 2938 Wilkinson Blvd in 1946. Was moved to its current location on Wilkinson Blvd in 1959.
- 1970's, there were four stores in Charlotte and six more in the surrounding area.
- Roof of the structure displayed single spires each supporting a letter spelling out the name of the business and quickly drawing the eye of those driving by on the busy Wilkinson Boulevard.

# Park Road Shopping Center (1956)

4201 Park Road



Park Road Shopping Center was the first open air shopping center in Charlotte. The property was developed on 40 acres by AV Blankenship. Its large red sign is a trademark of the strip mall.

# Pinky's VW Bug (1966)

West Morehead Street and Freedom Drive

- VW Bug originally owned by Mary Alley (purchased in 1966) and sold to Fred Carter in 1978 for \$250.
- The building was purchased in 2008 by John Nichols and will soon be the site of Pinky's Restaurant.
- Recent approval from City Council to rezone site will allow VW Bug to stay atop the roof of the new restaurant.



# Queen Park Tower (Mid 1950s)

3700 South Boulevard

Post-War Modernist Movie Sign

- Futuristic, “space age” structure from the mid-1950s that advertised for the Queen Park multi-plex cinema. (A concept that was first introduced at this time).
- Although the cinema has been converted to the Queen Park Business Center, the sign remains fairly intact.
- Signs such as these were common in the post-war era aiming to catch traveling motorists’ attention with its spaceship eye-catching appearance.



# Ratcliffe's Flowers

425 South Tryon Street



- Louis Ratcliffe opened the first Ratcliffe's Floral Shop in 1917 next to Latta Arcade.
- 1929, he commissioned architect William H. Peeps to design a new two-story building across the street. The neon "Ratcliffe's Flowers" sign was installed shortly after the 1929 floral shop opened.
- Only remaining overhanging sidewalk sign in Uptown Charlotte. The pink, green and blue neon sign was restored in the 1990's by the *Neonworks* sign company.

# Reid's Fine Foods (1942)

Sign in storage

Original location: 705 Providence Road

- J Arthur Reid founded the first Reid's Fine Foods in 1928, on the corner of Morehead Street and Kings Dr.
- 1931, the second store was opened on Providence Road, currently the Morrison-Smith Jewelers building.

- Sign was built in 1942 by SignArt when the Providence Road store was expanded. There were objections in the 1940's to the original sign- neighbors in Hermitage Court near Providence Road felt it shone too brightly into their windows at night.



Relighting of the Reid's sign on Providence Road, 1987



Reid's sign restored and in storage

# South 21 Drive-In

3658 South Boulevard (1955)

3101 East Independence Boulevard (1959)

- 1955, Sam, George and Nick Copsis opened the original South 21 Drive-In along South Boulevard (named for South Boulevard and Route 21).
- The second South 21 was opened along Independence Boulevard in 1959 and still operates today.
- Sam Copsis happened to like the colors red and white, which became the trademark for the drive-ins. Both locations maintain their original exterior -- flashing drive-in lights and a sign that boasts "since 1955."

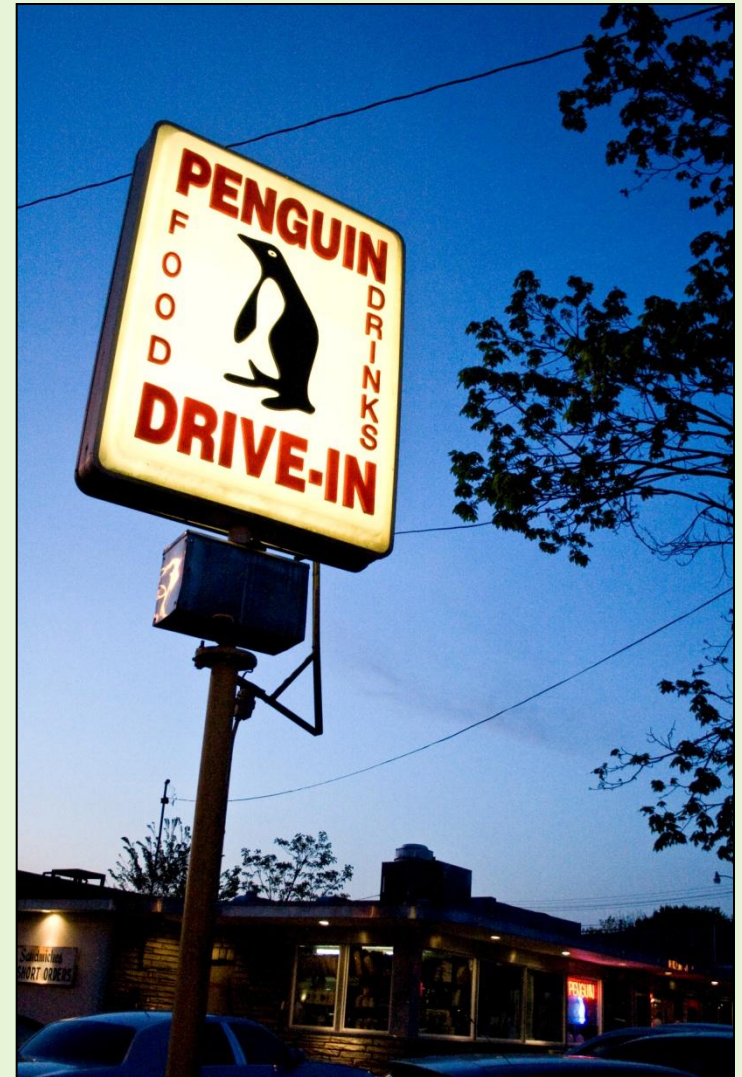
**South Boulevard location,  
no longer in operation**



# The Penguin (1954)

1921 Commonwealth Avenue

- Originally owned by Jim Ballentine in 1954, quickly became a popular local hangout.
- The restaurant was sold in 1999 and the current owners have retained the historic character of the building and its signs.
- Sign sits on the corner of the lot and boasts the revolving image of a penguin. Neon lights affixed to the building spell out the restaurant's name in bright blue cursive.
- Has one of the only remaining rotating signs in operation in Charlotte.



# The S.W. and C.S. Davis Company General Store (1908)

8940 Old Statesville Road



- Built by brothers Silas Winslow Davis and Charles Spencer Davis along the Southern Railroad line just north of Charlotte.
- Store served as the community's post office and sold farm supplies and dry goods. Location provided a prime location for advertising its goods- signs were painted along the sides of the building.
- "S.W. and C.S. Davis Compnay Gen. Store" signs still visible on building as well as a faded advertisement for Coca Cola.

# What-A-Burger Drive-in No. 11 (1960)

210 South Main Street | Mooresville, NC



- What-a-Burger franchise was started by Harmon Dobson in Texas and eventually spread to Virginia and North Carolina.
- Corrugated metal roof of the drive-in, the No. 11 street sign and large letters spelling “Welcome to What-a-Burger” designed to attract and entice passing motorists.

# Zack's Hamburgers (1976)

4009 South Boulevard



- Restaurant opened in 1961 as a Bell's Burgers (owner of Taco Bell). After Bell's Burger, it became Big E and finally Zack's Hamburger, started by the Demopolous family in 1976.
- Building essentially unchanged, with exception of extending canopy and changing the colors.
- "Zack" portion of the sign has the capability to spin, but cannot because of current zoning restrictions.

# **Other Signs and Roadside Wonders...**

# Beef 'n Bottle Restaurant

4538 South Boulevard



# Coachman Cleaners

2447 Park Road



# Fuel Pizza

1501 Central Avenue





House of Pizza  
3640 Central Avenue

# Kimbrell's Furniture

4524 South Boulevard



# Knife & Fork Restaurant

2531 North Sharon Amity Road



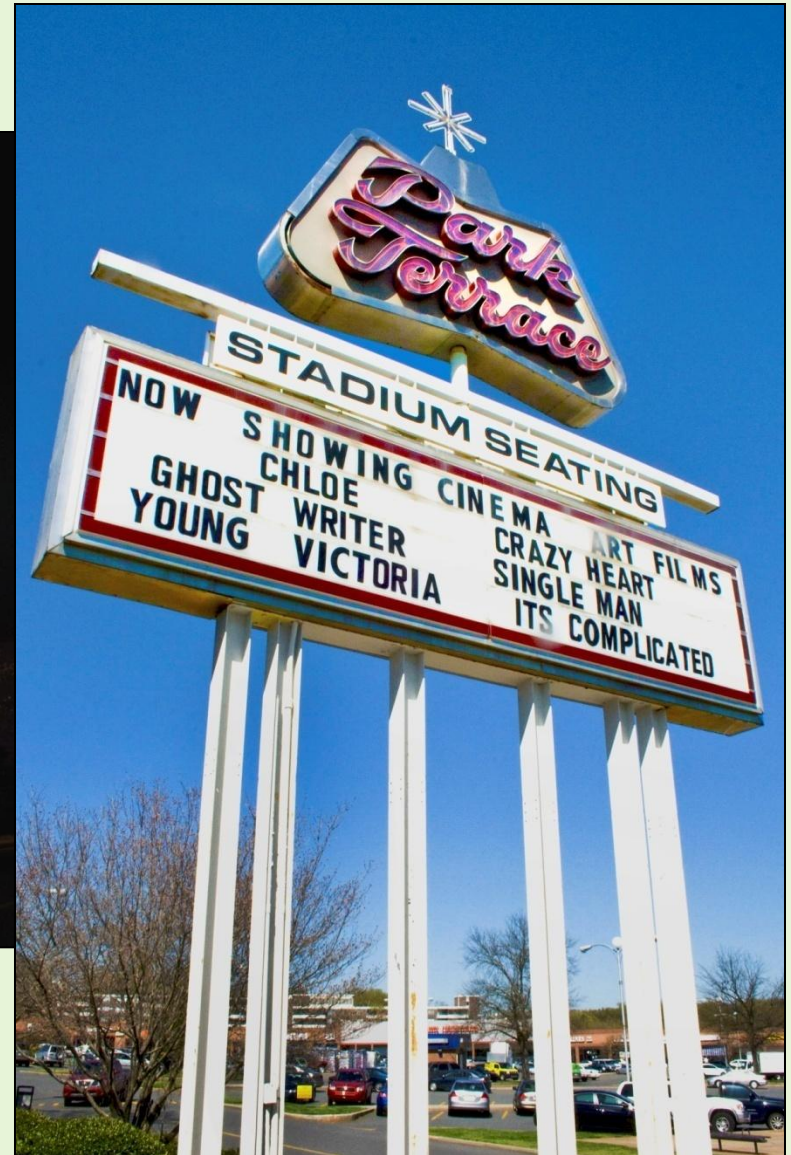
# Pappas Park Lanes (1982)

1700 Montford Drive



# Park Terrace Theater

4289 Park Road



# Price's Chicken Coop (1962)

1614 Camden Road



# Town & Country Drive In (1955)

2441 Wilkinson Boulevard



Source: <http://www.blog.globalyp.net>