

# The Joseph Sykes Brothers Building



**1. Name and location of the property:** The Joseph Sykes Brothers Building, 1445 South Mint Street, Charlotte, NC 28203

**2. Name and address of the present owner of the property:** Petra Properties, LLC, 1445 South Mint Street, Charlotte, NC 28203

**3. Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.

**4. Maps depicting the location of the property:**



**5. Current deed book and tax parcel information for the property:** The current deed reference is Book 13263 page 36. The Tax Parcel Identification Number is 07310103

**UTM coordinate:** 17 512700 3897160

**6. A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property.

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description of the property.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets criteria for designation set forth in N. C. G. S. 160A-400.5:**

**A. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as the Joseph Sykes Brothers Building does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

**1. The Joseph Sykes Brothers Company Building is representative of the diverse manufacturing and distribution operations that made Charlotte the leading manufacturing and distribution center of the Carolinas**

**2. The Joseph Sykes Brothers Company was an international corporation, and the company opened its first plant in the United States in Charlotte, in 1899**

**3. The Joseph Sykes Brothers Company building is one of only six factories to survive in the South Mint Street industrial district from the boom years of the early twentieth century**

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the physical and architectural description that is included in this report, demonstrates that the Joseph Sykes Brothers Building meets this criterion.**

**10. Ad Valorem tax appraisal: The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a designated "historic landmark." The current total appraised value of the building is \$444,600. The current appraised value of the land is \$138,000. The appraised value of features is \$21,800. The current total value is \$604,400.**

**Date of preparation of this report: September 2004**

**Prepared by: Paula M. Stathakis & Mattson, Alexander and Associates**



### **Historical Sketch**

**The Joseph Sykes Brothers Company Building was constructed in 1926. Located within a warehouse and industrial district south of the center city, the well-preserved Joseph Sykes**

**Brothers Company Building is representative of the diverse manufacturing and distribution operations that made Charlotte the leading manufacturing and distribution center of the Carolinas and a flourishing New South city by the early twentieth century.**

### **Post-Civil War Recovery and Growth in Charlotte**

**As part of the economic recovery of the late nineteenth century reconstruction and expansion of the Piedmont's rail network, leaders throughout the region envisioned a new order based on industrialization, specifically cotton production, and urban growth to replace the agrarian society of the past. These proponents of the New South campaigned vigorously for the construction of cotton mills, which by World War I, numbered over 300 within a 100-mile radius of Charlotte.<sup>1</sup> Charlotte, and Mecklenburg County, became the hub of the Southern textile manufacturing industry, and during the 1920s the Piedmont region of North Carolina and South Carolina surpassed New England as the leading textile producer in the world. Between the two world wars, Charlotte, in effect, became the capital of a "textile mini-state," with over 800 mills and a production capacity of ten million spindles.<sup>2</sup> With this wave of industrialization, the population of Charlotte soared from just 7,000 in 1880, to over 82,000 in 1929, making Charlotte the largest city in the two Carolinas.<sup>3</sup>**

**Because of its inland location, the economic success of Charlotte had been entirely dependent upon good rail transportation. By 1875, six railroads were routed through the city, giving Charlotte more rail connections than any other city between Washington, D.C. and Atlanta.<sup>4</sup> Charlotte benefited from continued rail expansion and consolidation throughout the late nineteenth century, which created both the powerful Southern Railway system and the smaller, but strategic, Piedmont and Northern (P. & N.) Railway. While the Southern gave Charlotte connections to national markets from New Orleans to New York, the P. & N. linked Charlotte westward to the textile manufacturing center of Gastonia (in adjacent Gaston County) and the booming mill towns of the region. Indeed, at its height of operation in the 1920s, the P. & N. line generated so much traffic that its motto, "A Mill to the Mile," was accurate for much of its length.<sup>5</sup> Textiles, in turn, attracted other industries to Charlotte, and in the 1920s, the city could boast that its 141 factories manufactured eighty-one different products.<sup>6</sup> By the end of World War II, the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce noted that, in addition to the predominant textile industry, there were also 243 industrial plants in the county manufacturing products valued at an estimated \$50,000,000 per annum.<sup>7</sup>**

**Although cotton production formed the economic mainstay of Charlotte, the city's good rail system, expanding work force, and plentiful and inexpensive electric power made the city attractive to a broad array of manufacturing companies and regional distributors. Tobacco magnate, James Buchanan Duke, and his Southern Power Company (later Duke Power Company) expanded aggressively in the region, supplying both industrial and residential clients with electricity. With a robust industrial economy and urban prosperity came a strong commercial and financial base, which served large areas of the industrialized Piedmont as well as local consumers. As the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce boasted in a**

**1928 advertisement, Charlotte had emerged as a regional commercial center with a 150-mile trading radius and more than 4,500,000 consumers.<sup>8</sup>**

### **The Joseph Sykes Brothers Company**

**The Joseph Sykes Brothers Company was one of a number of manufacturers drawn to Charlotte during this period by the dynamic local economy. In particular, the explosive growth of the Piedmont textile industry lured various manufacturers to Charlotte that supplied the various needs of the regional cotton mills. Having been the first to adopt the full-scale factory system, the textile industry was highly mechanized and automated by the early twentieth century, and the industry was dependent upon a wide array of ancillary producers, including tool and die makers, machine foundries, pump and elevator manufacturers, and chemical dye works as well as a number of companies that made specialized equipment. Indeed, so many of these auxiliary manufacturers relocated or opened branch operations in Charlotte that the city became not only the center of the textile industry but also the leading producer of textile mill machinery and equipment in the South.<sup>9</sup> A British company, the Joseph Sykes Brothers Company, exemplified these manufacturers that followed in the wake of the textile industry and opened either distribution warehouses or factories in Charlotte during the first decades of the twentieth century. A producer of steel wire card clothing, machinery used to align cotton fiber for easier spinning, Sykes had international operations, and the company opened its first plant in the United States in Charlotte in 1899, a testament to the rising industrial importance of the city. Walter B. Pratt, the Southern agent for Sykes, stated that although the company "... operated a worldwide business in card clothing and repairing of card clothing machines, it had never invested any of its money in the United States except in the South."<sup>10</sup>**

**Some of these manufacturers, such as the Sykes Company, followed the movement of the textile industry from England to the United States. The United Kingdom had developed and had held the lead in textile production between 1750 and 1850, consuming over seventy percent of all American cotton in the 1820s, but the emergence of an American textile manufacturing sector in New England during the pre-Civil War years threatened not only England's supply of raw cotton but also its preeminence in production. By the late nineteenth century, New England was the principal manufacturing center of textiles in the world, but with the rapid development of a Southern textile industry after the Civil War, suppliers from both New England and Britain set up operations in Charlotte and other Southern textile centers in an effort to retain their client base. In addition to the Joseph Sykes Brothers Company, other textile-related companies followed the movement of the industry. One, the Parks Company of Boston and Fitchburg, Massachusetts, merged with the local Cramer Company to produce the patented air conditioning and humidifying equipment developed by Charlotte mill engineer, Stuart Cramer, for use in the textile mills. (Built in 1919, the Parks-Cramer plant on South Boulevard has been renovated in recent years and renamed the Atherton Mill complex.)**

**By 1910, Charlotte supported five card clothing companies: the Charlotte Manufacturing Company; W.H. Bigelow; Southern Card Clothing and Reed Company; Joseph Sykes; and**



**A.H. Washburn Company. With the exception of Sykes, these card clothing manufacturers were all local companies, although by the mid-1920s at least one, Ashworth Brothers, had branch operations in Atlanta and Greenville, South Carolina. Sykes, A.H. Washburn, and W.H. Bigelow were all located in downtown Charlotte while Charlotte Manufacturing and Southern Card Clothing shared a site on South Caldwell Street in Dilworth. By the mid-1920s, only three card clothing firms, Sykes, Ashworth Brothers, and Charlotte Manufacturing Company, remained in Charlotte, and all had relocated to the South Graham Street and South Mint Street industrial area where they remained into the 1950s. Ashworth Brothers built its new plant at the corner of South Graham and Palmer streets, several blocks northwest of the Sykes plant on South Mint. The two story, brick veneered building that housed Ashworth Brothers still stands, but has undergone some remodeling, including the installation of new windows. By the mid-1920s, the third company, Charlotte Manufacturing, was located across South Mint Street from Sykes, but the factory was razed by the early 1970s. A modern wholesale hardware supplier now occupies the site. 11**

**The Joseph Sykes Brothers Company had its headquarters in Huddersfield, England, located between Manchester and Leeds in the industrial belt of northern England. The company had established its first American operation in Charlotte in 1899 with a factory at 229 South Tryon Street and a separate office, also located in the downtown. Completed in 1926, the new building on South Mint Street merged their administrative and production facilities, and two years later, in 1928, the company incorporated in North Carolina as Joseph Sykes Brothers, Inc. with Edward Musgrave Sykes, Denis Crowther, and Harry D. Lord as directors.<sup>12</sup>**

**In 1926, when the company decided to move away from downtown, they hired the nationally prominent engineering firm of Lockwood, Greene and Company to design the new building and the local construction firm of Blythe and Isenhour as the builders. According to the building permit filed in June 1926, the estimated coast of construction was \$35,000.00.<sup>13</sup> In December 1926, the building was completed, and Edward Musgraves Sykes, president of the company, came from England to inspect the new facility. Lockwood, Greene designed the building with a steel support system that would have allowed the addition of a second and even a third story if business expansion had demanded more factory space. (The freight elevator was apparently installed in anticipation of these additions.) In December 1948, the company also acquired two adjoining lots, one to the north and one to the rear, but the plans for expansion were never implemented.<sup>14</sup>**

**Built on a corner lot at South Mint and Gold (now Summit Avenue) streets south of the center city, the factory was located in a fifteen block area loosely bounded by Clarkson Street (west), Mint Street (east), Summit Avenue (south), and West Morehead Street (north) that had become prime industrial real estate. Prior to the vicinity's industrial development, the land was once part of the forty-acre Rudisill Gold Mine. Early twentieth century deeds to the site where the Joseph Sykes Brothers building is now situated were conveyed subject to the right of the owner to take any and all minerals Rudisill left in the ground, but any excavations had to be dug from mines or pits that could not approach nearer the surface than fifty feet.<sup>15</sup>**

Industrial development, however, proved to be far more lucrative than gold mining, and this section of town rapidly filled with manufacturing and processing firms. Overlapping with the West Morehead Street industrial corridor at its north side, this district was served by the Wilmore trolley line along Mint Street, both the Southern and Piedmont and Northern railways, and the Piedmont and Northern passenger and freight stations. Just to the south, the neighborhood of Wilmore had been platted in 1914 (adjacent to Dilworth, Charlotte's first suburb), and the new neighborhood was reached from downtown by the Mint Street trolley. With easy access to downtown, the railways, and a labor force living nearby, the area between Wilmore and downtown became a good location for manufacturers, warehousing concerns, and commercial establishments.<sup>16</sup> By the end of the 1920s, the district contained over thirty factories, warehouses, and supply companies, including warehouses for building supplies, groceries, soft drinks, beer, and tea, and electrical equipment. There were lumberyards, trucking companies, the main storage depot for Duke Power's electrical equipment, and offices for an assortment of manufacturers' agents.<sup>17</sup> At the time the Sykes building was constructed, there were already several manufacturing and supply firms on South Mint Street, including the Textile Mill Supply Company (1922) and the Charlotte Supply Company (1925, demolished), both designed by Lockwood, Greene. As with the Sykes Company, many in this new factory district were firms relocating from downtown, which, by the 1920s, had become primarily a commercial center.

The new industrial and warehousing districts that were emerging on the fringes of the city benefited from excellent railroads and the new highways that connected the city to the mill towns and cities in the region. Because of its transportation network, Charlotte emerged as a leading manufacturing and distribution center in the years before the Great Depression. As the *Charlotte Observer* noted on June 29, 1925, many national, and even international, companies as in the case of the Sykes company, were making Charlotte the center of their regional operations, capitalizing on the city's good transportation connections and large manufacturing base to serve Southeastern markets:

"Many new demands have come upon Charlotte Realtors (sic) during the past year for locations for building of warehouses, because Charlotte has come to be known in the sales organizations of national manufacturers throughout America as the best point in the Southeast for the distribution of products and for the location of branch plants. Some realtors here have become specialists in finding such locations to suit varying requirements, and almost every square foot of railroad footage has been analyzed and compared in price."

The newspaper also observed that "proximity to street cars, freight stations, express offices and retail districts command the higher prices." <sup>18</sup>

Between the 1920s and the 1950s, scores of warehouses and factories were erected along the railroad corridors and adjacent roadways that cut through the city. Assorted factories and industrial supply buildings flanked the Southern, the Norfolk and Southern, the Seaboard Airline, and Piedmont and Northern rail lines, and by the 1920s, the highways running parallel to these rail corridors attracted similar development. North Tryon, North Graham,

and North Davidson streets to the north of the center city, West Morehead Street to the southwest, and Tryon Street, Mint Street, and South Boulevard to the south became the primary industrial corridors of the city.<sup>19</sup>

Where rail lines and adjoining roadways converged near the center city, factories and warehouses formed concentrated industrial districts. Southwest of downtown Charlotte, industrial activities clustered around the Mint Street yards of the Piedmont and Northern (just north of West Morehead Street) and then spread to the south and west, following the nearby Southern Railway lines to Gastonia and Columbia, South Carolina. Spur lines served blocks of industrial plants, supply houses, storage and transfer companies, and lumber yards, while workers' houses extended from the Third Ward of downtown into the Dilworth and Wilmore neighborhoods. Streets such as Mint, Camden, Graham, Cedar, Summit, West Morehead, South Tryon, and South Boulevard, as well as scores of connecting streets, underwent vigorous industrial expansion as the city attracted both local companies and international manufacturers such as the Sykes Company.<sup>20</sup>

By World War II, downtown Charlotte had become exclusively a commercial and business center, and little of its industrial fabric has survived. South Mint Street and the nearby West Morehead Street continued to attract factories and warehousing facilities through the 1950s. However, larger companies became to opt for less expensive real estate around the periphery of the city, and in the early 1960s, Interstate Highway 85 was constructed on the north and east sides of the city, reorienting much of Charlotte's industrial geography and leaving the older industrial areas vulnerable to abandonment and demolition. Some firms relocated farther south along South Boulevard, others moved to sites near the two new highways, Interstate 77 and Interstate 85. Some businesses disappeared when the city's first belt line highway, the John Belk Freeway, cut a swath through this area in the 1970s. Sykes continued to produce card clothing at its South Mint Street location throughout the 1950s and 1960s, but changes in textile technology and the movement of many textile companies to other countries led to sharp declines in company business. After seventy years of operating in Charlotte, Sykes, Inc. closed its business ca. 1970.<sup>21</sup>

Because of these changes in the textile industry and the suburban movement of industry, a significant number of Charlotte's historic industrial properties have been lost in the postwar decades. Along South Mint, vacant lots and modern low-rise buildings surrounded by parking lots have characterized this once vibrant industrial and warehouse district. In recent years, however, there has been a renewed interest in the area because of its proximity to both downtown and the popular Dilworth neighborhood, as well as its easy access to Interstate Highway 77.

Lefler, Hugh Talmadge and Newsome, Albert Ray, *North Carolina: The History of A Southern State*, (Chapel Hill: university of North Carolina Press, 1973), pp. 474-489.

Glass, Brent D. *The Textile Industry in North Carolina, A History*. Raleigh: Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 1992, p. 57; *Charlotte Observer* 28 October 1928.



Sixteenth Census, 1940.

Hanchett, Thomas W. *Sorting Out the New South City: Charlotte and Its Neighborhoods*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina, 1993), p. 72.

Fetters, Thomas T. and Peter W. Swanson, Jr. *Piedmont and Northern: The Great Electric System of the South*, (San Marino, California: Golden West Books, 1974), p. 12; Hanchett, p. 74; Glass, pp. 57-58.

Hanchett, p. 202.

Wyatt, Sherry and Sarah Woodard. Survey Report for the industrial survey of Mecklenburg County. Conducted for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission and the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, 2000, p. 2.

Charlotte City Directory, 1928.

Glass, p. 57.

"Edward Sykes to Visit Charlotte," *Southern Textile Bulletin* (December 9, 1926), p. 23; Ramsey, Emily. *Survey and Research Report on the Joseph Sykes Brothers Company Building*. Prepared for the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, 10 December 1998.

Charlotte City Directories 1911, 1925, 1927, 1951.

Mecklenburg County Book of Corporations 42 C, p. 31

Building Permit [no registered number] dated June 26, 1926.

Ramsey, p. 4

For example, see deeds 257-696 [October 23, 1908], 436-457 [April 1, 1921], and the deed that conveyed the property to Joseph Sykes Brothers (America), Inc, also included this provision.

Ibid., p. 6.

Sanborn Map Company, 1929; Charlotte City Directory, 1930.

*Charlotte Observer*, 29 June 1925; Morrill, Dan L. *Survey and Research Report on the Textile Mill Supply Company Building*. Prepared for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission, 1998.

**Charlotte City Directory, 1929,1930, 1931, 1950; Sanborn Map Company, 1929, 1951; Hanchett, pp. 90-91.**

**Charlotte City Directory, 1929, 1930, 1931, 1950; Sanborn Map Company, 1929, 1951; Hanchett, pp. 90-95, 117.**

**Charlotte City Directory, 1930, 1940, 1950, 1960, 1970, 1980, 1992; Ramsey.**

### **Architectural Description**



**Detail of Main Entrance**

**The Joseph Sykes Brothers Company Building is a relatively small, one story factory. Divided unequally into a small office section in the front and a large machine shop to the rear, the building has a brick veneer, steel sash windows, and restrained Classical detailing ornamenting the facade and side (south) elevation along West Summit Avenue. The office has a concrete base, stylized brick pilasters defining the window bays, brick quoins at the canted corners, a concrete cornice and stringcourse, and a flat parapet with concrete coping. The symmetrical, five bay facade features a tall, central entrance with double leaf, wooden sash, glass doors capped by a glass transom. The entrance is framed by a pediment**

and pilasters, all executed in concrete. A concrete nameplate reading, "Joseph Sykes Brothers," is centered across the parapet. Beneath the flat arched windows are decorative brick spandrels. With their brick pilasters, decorative quoins, concrete cornices and stringcourses, and brick spandrels, the north and south elevations of the office section repeat the architectural elements found on the facade. The rear machine shop is simpler in its detailing with brick walls, steel sash windows, and a stylized concrete cornice. Before rehabilitation, the south elevation had a large loading bay, with a modern overhead door, a steel pedestrian door, and covered, steel sash windows. As part of the rehabilitation, a metal sash window was installed in the loading bay opening, the windows have been uncovered, and the modern pedestrian door has been replaced with a metal sash window, identical to one in the loading bay. Originally, the rear (east) elevation had no openings, but a simple, double leaf entrance, with metal sash, glass doors (replicating the main entrance) has been added, opening onto a paved parking lot. The north elevation of the machine shop has a concrete base, a series of tall, steel sash windows, divided by brick pilasters, and a simple, concrete cornice. A half basement, situated beneath the middle shop room, is lighted by several smaller, steel sash windows.



The interior of the one story building consists of a front administrative section, behind which are two manufacturing rooms and an interior loading dock. The furnace and coal rooms are found in the half basement. The front entrance immediately opens to a short, open staircase with marble steps and walls and wrought iron railings. The staircase was required by the upsloping grade along West Summit Avenue. At the top of the stairs is an open office area, with private offices lining the two side walls. Dropped acoustic tile ceilings and modern partition walls had been added ca. 1975, but as part of the rehabilitation, the original stucco plaster walls and ceiling have been restored. Some of the wood and frosted glass partition

walls and doors survived the alterations of the mid-1970s, and these features have been retained. A walk-in safe stands at the back of the office along the hollow tile and brick partition wall that separates the office from the shop areas. The safe remains in place and now houses electrical systems.



**Business Safe**



**Coal Chute Cover**

At the rear, the office opens into a short service staircase, constructed of concrete, which leads down to the basement coal room and up to the rear factory rooms. The rear shops have open plans, exposed brick walls, concrete floors, tongue and groove wooden ceilings, and steel girder horizontal and vertical supports. A freight elevator, situated along the partition wall between the office and shop areas, has been secured in place as part of the rehabilitation. An inset loading dock is located along the south side of the middle shop room. Original tongue and groove, freight doors, with divided upper lights, open into the middle and rear shops from the dock area, but with the conversion, the doors have been fixed in place. As noted on the exterior, the loading dock had a modern overhead door, which has been removed, and a metal sash, floor-to-ceiling window has been installed. In the rear shop, a series of small offices (ca. 1975) had been built along the south wall, and these offices have been removed. New offices have been built along the south wall using glass partition walls that allow light to penetrate the center of the former shop room. A freestanding block containing the restrooms also has been added to the middle of the rear shop room, opposite the new rear door.





**The basement has an original, metal clad fire door leading into the furnace room. Adjacent to the furnace room is the coal room, which has a sloping floor rising up to the south wall where the coal chute is located. The coal room has concrete floors and walls.**

**This former factory has undergone a certified rehabilitation and maintains its architectural integrity. The building retains all its original windows and doors, and only a single entrance has been added to the rear. On the south elevation, one loading bay and one modern door have been replaced with simple windows. Alterations to the interior are limited to the removal of later partitions within the administrative office section and the rear shop area, the addition of office partitions along one wall, and the addition of a restroom in the rear shop room.**