

## THE PARKS-CRAMER COMPANY COMPLEX



*This report was written on 2 June 1993*

**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Parks-Cramer Company Complex is located on South Boulevard, in Charlotte, Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

**2. Name, address, and telephone number of the present owner of the properties:** The owner of the property is:

Mr. David Ford  
South Boulevard Properties, Inc.  
91 Weston Road  
Box 184  
Lincoln, Massachusetts 01773

Telephone: (617) 259-8347

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

**4. Maps depicting the location of the property:** This report contains maps which depict the location of the property.



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

**a. Special significance in terms of history, architecture, and cultural**

**importance:** The Commission judges that the property known as the Parks-Cramer Company property does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) built in 1919 and expanded in the ensuing decades, the Parks-Cramer Company Complex represents the heyday of textile manufacturing and related industries in and around Charlotte; 2) the Parks-Cramer Company Complex is among the finest surviving early industrial properties located in the historic [Dilworth](#) factory district; 3) the Parks-Cramer Company Complex is associated with Charlottean, Stuart Warren Cramer, noted textile-mill engineer and inventor; 4) the Parks-Cramer Company Complex incorporates innovations in form and construction that illustrate the evolution of industrial design and site planning in the early twentieth century.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and**

**association:** The Commission contends that the architectural description by Frances P. Alexander and Richard L. Mattson included in this report demonstrates that the Parks-Cramer Company property meet this criterion.

**9. 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 properties which become designated historic landmarks. The current appraised value of Parks-Cramer Company, Tax Parcel 121-031-09 is \$77,217.00. The total appraised value of the Parks-Cramer Company property is \$77,217.00. Tax Parcel Number 121-031-09 is zoned 12.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** 2 June 1993

**Prepared by:** Frances P. Alexander, M.A. and Richard L Mattson, Ph.D.

Mattson and Associates

309 East Park Avenue

Charlotte, North Carolina 28203

Telephone: (704) 376-0985

Telephone: (704) 342-3076

## *Architectural Description*

### **Architectural Significance**

Constructed in 1919, the Parks-Cramer Company Complex exemplifies the major innovations in factory design which occurred nationally between the turn of the century and World War I. In its form, construction, and layout, Parks Cramer capitalized on advances which came to define the twentieth century industrial complex. The generally low-scale Parks-Cramer structures stand in contrast to the multiple-story factories of the nineteenth century whose heavy, load-bearing walls necessitated small window openings, constricted interior plans, and dark, poorly ventilated rooms. Instead, the Parks-Cramer complex incorporates innovations in engineering design and factory construction that improved lighting and air circulation, facilitated shipping and assembly-line production, and, ultimately, maximized worker efficiency. The main manufacturing building reveals such technological advances of the period as reinforced concrete and steel framing, which allowed for larger windows and spacious, flexible interior spaces, easily adapted to changes in production. The monitor roofs were also an improvement in traditional factory design that increased ventilation and lighting. The Parks-Cramer South Boulevard site also illustrates the trend toward sprawling, campus-like industrial tracts that would characterize factory site planning after World War I. Like the Parks-Cramer property, manufacturing complexes in the early twentieth century increasingly consisted of ensembles of one-story structures--often standardized or prefabricated building types--serving specific functions (Alexander 1991, 104138).

### **Location and Site Description**

The Parks-Cramer Company Complex occupies a roughly triangular five-acre tract of land along the South Boulevard industrial corridor of the Dilworth neighborhood in Charlotte. This parcel is bounded by South Boulevard to the east, Tremont Avenue to the north, the Southern Railway right-of-way to the west, and the Atherton Mill to the south. Vehicular traffic has access to the property from South Boulevard. Spurlines from the Southern Railway serve this manufacturing facility on the west side.

The site includes a large manufacturing building, a long building for shipping, receiving, and pipe storage, and the infill area between these two structures. This portion of the complex is located on the east side of the spurline. Flanking the spur to the west is a long, steel frame storage building. Three pre-fabricated steel storage buildings, situated on the south side of the parcel, across a loading driveway from the manufacturing building, have been demolished. The site includes grassy yard areas

along the east and north sides with mature oak trees defining the corner of Tremont Avenue and South Boulevard. The proposed designation includes the manufacturing building; the shipping, receiving, and pipe storage building; the infill section between manufacturing and shipping; and the storage building.

## **Architectural Descriptions**

### **Manufacturing Building**

The manufacturing building for the Parks-Cramer Company is a large facility with an asymmetrical plan, reflecting several expansion campaigns. This facility is primarily one story in height although portions on the north side have two and three stories. The manufacturing building is divided into six sections. Four large, one-story production areas are located on the south side and occupy roughly two-thirds of the building. The four production areas measure: 110' X 77', 92' X 77', and 202' X 77' (encompassing two areas). Two multiple story sections are situated in the northern one-third of the structure. The two northern sections measure 76' X 78' and 17' X 80'.

The building has brick exterior walls. With the exception of the east elevation along South Boulevard, all exterior walls rest on three foot tall concrete bases. Notably, some of the walls are double construction with concrete mortar filler. The complex has concrete slab foundations and steel I-beam framing. The roofs are flat, and except along the west elevation, the roof line is defined by stepped parapets, lined in either terra cotta or concrete coping. Along the west elevation of the manufacturing building, overhanging wooden eaves and exposed rafters are visible. Each of the four production areas has a flat-roofed monitor with operable steel-sash windows for light and ventilation. The monitors are steel framed with wooden sheathing, eaves, and rafters.

There are numerous entries to the manufacturing building. Rail loading bays are located on the west elevation although some are now interior openings because of the infill area. Truck access bays are situated along the south elevation. The loading bays have double leaf, wooden doors with cross-bracing and fixed light upper sections. There are both hinged and sliding loading doors. There are two pedestrian entrances on the east (South Boulevard) elevation. One entrance, situated roughly in the center of the elevation, leads directly into the production areas, and another to the north provides access to administrative offices, located in the tall mid-section.

The fenestration in the manufacturing building consists of banks of large, steel-sash factory windows. In the two northern, multiple story sections, some windows have been brick infilled. The windows and doors all have concrete lintels and sills.

The interiors of the four production areas comprise large open spaces broken only by series of steel I-beam vertical supports. The roof and monitors are also steel framed with a wooden ceiling. Some of the monitor windows have been painted. The four areas are divided by what were once exterior walls. With additions, the doors and windows were removed. The floors are covered in wooden bricks embossed with the name of the manufacturer, "Geopine, Atlanta." In the southwest room, a track girder is suspended from the roof near the western loading bay, probably for moving the heavy materials or products. The production areas are approximately two feet below the grade of the infill section and the shipping and receiving building, which would have been elevated for ease in rail loading.

Brick fire walls divide the production areas from the two northern sections. There are several segmental arched doorways in this fire wall, most of which are covered by steel covered, counterweight pulley fire doors. Some infilled windows are visible. These doors allow access to the upper floors of the midsection and to the northernmost section. Off the low, narrow corridors are small chambers. The function of these chambers is not clear, but these rooms have no intact windows, and the wall and floor covering have been removed. However, there is evidence that the walls were tiled, and the floors are equipped with drains. It seems likely that these rooms were used for testing the humidifiers and instruments manufactured in the plant. The easternmost door leading from the production areas opens into a small lobby and staircase to the administrative offices on the upper floor. The walls in the lobby and offices are plastered, the floors covered in linoleum, and the ceiling covered by dropped acoustical tile.

The northern section of the building has two floors although the southern portion of the tall first floor has an intermediate level. A decorative iron spiral staircase leads to this floor which is supported by steel girders. Along the west wall, the floor is braced by brick buttresses. The remaining first floor space is open, broken only by the steel I-beam vertical supports. The second story was inaccessible. Along the west wall are floor-to-ceiling wooden loading doors, located directly across from a pipe storage shed.

### **Shipping/Receiving/Pipe Storage Building**

The shipping and receiving building is a one-story brick building, roughly rectangular in plan and divided into three sections. The three sections measure: 77' X 20-24', 63' X 28', and 76' X 32'. Each section projects slightly to fit the curved contour of the

spurline which borders to the west. The brick walls rest on a three foot concrete base. The foundation is a concrete slab. There are tall, steel-sash factory windows with concrete sills and lintels as well as several large loading docks for rail shipment. The wooden loading doors are identical to those found in the manufacturing building. A loading bay on the south side leads to a raised concrete dock and ramp, and the middle section has a timber loading dock. The roof is flat with wooden overhanging eaves and exposed rafters. The short south elevation has a flat parapet lined in terra cotta coping. A brick smokestack rises from the junction of the southern and mid-sections. The narrow area between these two sections and the manufacturing building has been infilled. The interior of the two shipping areas are long, open spaces. The wooden roof is supported by I-beam girders, and there are no monitors. Next to the loading bay on the south side is an industrial scale. The staircase in the northeast corner of the southernmost room leads to the basement boiler room.

Used for pipe storage, the northern section is detached from the manufacturing building. The pipe storage shed also has brick end walls, but corrugated metal sheathing was used above the walls to the roofline and on the east and west elevations. These two side elevations are formed by a series of sliding wooden loading doors. A raised wooden loading door is located on the west side. The shed has no windows. The shed has a steel, I-beam frame with steel Warren roof trusses. The roof is wooden. The interior is open, and metal storage racks are situated along the north wall.

### **Infill Building**

The infill building is a long, narrow space (measuring 15' X 131'), formed by the two adjoining buildings: shipping/receiving/pipe storage and manufacturing. The building provided additional storage space between these two functional areas as well as an intermediate grade. (In order to unload rail cars at grade, shipping and receiving were built approximately three to four feet above ground level.) This area has I-beam roof framing, and there are steel-framed, gable-roofed monitors to provide light in this dark section. There is one small, steel sash window in the south elevation, and a loading door in the north.

### **Storage Building**

On the west side of the spurline is a long, rectangular, prefabricated steel storage building, measuring 210' X 30'. The building has a gable roof, banks of large, steel sash factory windows on the east side, and wire mesh awning windows on the west. The sheathing is comprised of steel panels with notable peg-and-eye connections. In the center is a single loading bay with an overhead steel door, and a solid, steel double door is located in the narrow north side. The building rests on a wooden sill over a

concrete slab foundation. The interior is divided into two open rooms. The roof is supported by a truss, and the floor is laid in wooden bricks. Metal storage shelves are intact. The building has a nameplate which labels the structure a " USCON Standard Building," and identifies the manufacturer as the U.S. Consolidated Steel Company of Youngstown, Ohio.

### **Historical Development of Site**

Like most industrial complexes, the Parks-Cramer Company facility has undergone some alteration to allow for changes in production and expansion. However, from the beginning of construction in 1919, the complex has remained a low-scale, multiple-building site with functions housed in discrete buildings or sections of buildings.

The manufacturing building was originally rectangular in plan, but between 1929 and 1946, two production areas were added (Sanborn Map Company 1929, 1946). One of these expansions extended the building to the south to which another section was extended to the east, giving the building an L-shaped plan and three areas for production lines. During this same period, a third section was added to the shipping/receiving/pipe storage building on the south end, providing more transfer space to correspond with increased manufacturing. The prefabricated "Standard Building" on the west side of the spurline was constructed before 1929 and has undergone little alteration.

In 1929, the site included other ancillary buildings which are no longer extant. Two one-story metal storage buildings, one used for machinery and the other apparently for pipe storage, were both located south of the manufacturing building. Another one-story metal building, which was also used for pipe storage, was located along the tracks north of the shipping building. Finally, a one-story frame house stood at the north side of the tract, fronting on Tremont Avenue. It seems likely that the house predated the Parks-Cramer Company occupancy. The house and auxiliary building on the north side of the property were demolished after 1953, and the three metal sheds on the south side have been recently demolished.

Between 1946 and 1953 (the last year for which a Sanborn Map is available), the site was unchanged except for the creation of the infill between the manufacturing building and the shipping/receiving/pipe storage department and the addition of a third building, for sheet metal storage, on the south side of the property. The 1953 map also indicates that the southwest room of the manufacturing building was used for spray painting. Sometime after 1953, but probably in the late 1950s, the fourth production area was added to the east side (facing South Boulevard) of the manufacturing building. Probably at the same time, a new exterior wall was added along this elevation to create a unified front along South Boulevard. A new brick



vener was added to the tall mid-section on the north, east, and south elevations, covering existing window openings. The older brick wall and now instilled window openings are visible on the west elevation. The entrance to this section may have been cut, or reconfigured, during these alterations to allow access to the stairwell leading to the administration department, located on the upper floor. The staircase and administration departments appear to date to the late 1950s or early 1960s. Probably during this period, the north and east elevations of the northernmost section had a concrete false front added. This veneer has recently been removed, and the original brick exterior and steel-sash windows are being restored. Currently, the Parks Cramer site is undergoing renovation and adaptive reuse for retail and office use.

### *Historical Overview*

#### **Historical Significance**

The Parks-Cramer Company Complex represents the emergence of textile-related factories in and around Charlotte during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The principal Parks-Cramer manufacturing building was constructed in 1919, during the heyday of cotton-textile manufacturing in the southern Piedmont. Located along South Boulevard in Charlotte, near the mainline of the Southern Railway, the complex is among the most significant early industrial properties surviving in the planned Dilworth factory district. A major manufacturer of humidifiers and air-conditioning systems for the textile industry, the Parks-Cramer Company is also associated with Charlottean Stuart Warren Cramer, a prominent textile-mill engineer and contractor, and innovator in the fields of humidification and air-conditioning for the textile industry.

*Stuart Warren Cramer*

#### **Historical Background**

In 1919, the Parks-Cramer Company, maker of humidifying and air-conditioning equipment for the cotton-textile industry, built a factory in Charlotte's streetcar suburb of Dilworth. *Manufacturers' Record*, the publication of record for southern industry in

the early twentieth century, announced the construction. The new brick building, stated the announcement, was being constructed on a five-acre tract and would contain both plant and office space for the Parks-Cramer Company. The building contractor was E. H. Clement and Company of Charlotte (*Manufacturers' Record* 1919). In October, 1919, the *Charlotte Daily Observer* also chronicled the event, describing the erection of an "immense plant" on South Boulevard for the southern operations of the Parks-Cramer Company (*Charlotte Daily Observer* October 9, 1919). The Parks-Cramer Company had purchased the vacant tract from the Great Falls Power Company, a New Jersey firm which had acquired the tract in 1910 from the D.A. Tompkins Company (Mecklenburg County Register of Deeds 1910, 1919).

The organization of the Parks-Cramer Company involved one of the outstanding figures in the development of the southern textile industry in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Charlottean Stuart Warren Cramer. The company was founded in 1918, when the G.M. Parks Company, manufacturers of industrial piping, heating, and ventilation systems based in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, purchased Cramer's business interests. The new company established business operations in Fitchburg, Boston, and Charlotte. Cramer, who had retired from business in 1918, was among the principal inventors and entrepreneurs associated with the region's growing production of cotton textiles. Born in 1868 in Thomasville, North Carolina, he was educated at the United States Naval Academy and the Columbia University School of Mines. In the early 1890s, Cramer was chief engineer and manager of the D. A. Tompkins Company in Charlotte. This firm was one of the South's foremost distributors of cotton-mill machinery and supplies, and its owner, Daniel Augustus Tompkins, was a major builder of cotton mills and a leader of New South industrialization (Glass 1992, 4, 32-38). After a brief two-year tenure with Tompkins, Cramer established his own textile engineering and contracting firm in the city. Cramer is credited with designing and equipping "about one-third of the new cotton mills in the South" between 1895 and 1915, and simultaneously acquiring extensive holdings in textile mills. His own mill at Cramerton, North Carolina included a model mill and village.

Among Cramer's numerous industrial engineering patents were those for improvements in the humidification systems for textile factories in South which contributed significantly to the expansion of the textile industry in the region. In 1904, he introduced an electrically operated heat and humidity control mechanism, and in 1905, an automatic hygrometer. These instruments were predecessors of the Psychrostat, a humidifier control instrument, which was one of the principal products of the Parks-Cramer Company. Perhaps his best known patent was for the "Cramer System of Air Conditioning," which included the automatic regulation of temperature

and humidity. These early innovations in air conditioning resulted more from the need to remove lint from the air (a persistent problem in the textile mills) than to cool the factory atmosphere. Indeed, the term "air conditioning" is attributed to Cramer (Ingels 1952,120-121; Young 1963,51,744; Powell 1979, 455; Glass 1992,33).

In addition to Cramer, another figure instrumental to the success of the Parks-Cramer business venture in Charlotte was William Beach Hodge. The chief engineer for Cramer, Hodge subsequently assumed the position of vice-president and southern manager of the Parks-Cramer Company. Like Cramer, Hodge's contributions to the textile industry included a series of patents related largely to improving air conditioning systems. In 1940, he was recognized as a "Modern Pioneer in Air Conditioning" (*Who's Who* 1947,440).

The production of Parks-Cramer humidifiers and air-conditioning equipment began amidst growing experimentation and innovation throughout Europe and the United States in all forms of industrial ventilating, heating, cooling, and air-washing systems. The well-established textile industry spurred much of this experimentation, particularly after World War I, when manufacturers were increasingly concerned with technological innovations to increase productivity in the mills (Hall et al. 1987, 201-204). Air-conditioning in the cotton mills, which concerned primarily the control of humidity levels and airborne particles, was crucial to maximum productivity. The demand for humidity had been one of the factors in the location of the early mills near the rivers and coast of New England, and the ability to recreate artificially this condition was key to the success of textile mills in the South. Atmospheric moisture helped prevent the yarns from breaking which, in addition to wasting materials and producing a loose weave, caused machines to malfunction. Furthermore, air-washing equipment helped reduce the lint created during textile production which generated static electricity as well as hazardous working conditions (McLaughlin 1938, 235; Ingels 1952, 120-121; 132-136)

The location of the Parks-Cramer facility reflected both Charlotte's status as the hub of the flourishing Piedmont textile industry and Dilworth's planned role as an industrial as well as residential suburb. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Charlotte was transformed from being principally a trading town for local cotton farmers to a premier textile center and symbol of the New South. After the Civil War and the rebuilding and expansion of railroads in the South, leaders of the region began a drive for a New South based on manufacturing and urban growth rather than agriculture (Lefler and Newsome 1954, 474-489). The South's new economic base was to rest largely on cotton textile production. As southern historian C. Vann Woodward has stated, "The mill was the symbol of the New South, its origins and its promise of salvation" (Woodward 1951, 31). As early as 1906, Charlotte boosters celebrated the fact that "within the radius of 100 miles of Charlotte,

there are more than 300 cotton mills, containing over one-half the looms and spindles in the South" (Hanchett 1985, 70). By the 1920s, the Piedmont South had surpassed New England to become the work's preeminent textile manufacturing region, and Charlotte, boasted a local newspaper article, had become "unquestionably the center of the South's textile manufacturing industry (Mitchell and Mitchell 1930; *Charlotte Observer*, October 28, 1928)." The city had emerged as a major New South metropolis, with a population that had soared from approximately 7,000 in 1880, to over 82,000 by 1929, the largest urban population in the Carolinas (Sixteenth Census 1940).

Charlotte's boom reverberated throughout the environs of the city where, by the 1920s, New South investors had developed a ring of streetcar suburbs. Dilworth, situated southeast of downtown Charlotte, was the first of these neighborhoods, beginning in 1891, the same week that [trolley](#) service went into operation. Developed by the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company (locally known as the Four Cs), whose president was Edward Dilworth Latta, the original Dilworth plan included not only residential streets and a recreational park, but also a factory district. A predecessor of the modern suburban industrial park, this district was located at the west edge of Dilworth, between South Boulevard and the Southern Railway (Morrill 1985, 302-303; Hanchett 1986; Oswald 1987).

Reflecting the burgeoning textile manufacturing in the Piedmont, the district was soon filled with factories geared largely to this industry. In 1892, the D. A. Tompkins Company launched the expansion of factories into Dilworth as well as spurred residential development when the firm began construction of the [Atherton Cotton Mill](#) facing South Boulevard (Morrill 1985, 302; Huffman 1987). Within a few years the Dilworth industrial district also included such factories as the Charlotte Trouser Company, the Southern Card Clothing Company, the Charlotte Pipe and Foundry Company, a sash cord plant owned by O. A. Robbins, the Charlotte Shuttle Block Factory, and the [Park Elevator Company](#), producers of pumps, heaters, and elevators (Morrill 1980, Morrill 1985, 302-304; Hanchett 1986) . In October, 1895, the *Charlotte Daily Observer* described Dilworth as "the Manchester of Charlotte," and several months later the newspaper observed, "It does one good to go out to Dilworth and see the signs of prosperity and progress. The factories draw the people. Dilworth is beginning to be not only a social but an industrial center" (*Charlotte Daily Observer* October 23, 1895, January 31, 1896)

The corridor between South Boulevard and the railroad tracks continued to expand throughout the early twentieth century. By the 1920s, the district had also attracted not only the Parks-Cramer complex, but the Lance Packing Company, makers and distributors of snack-food crackers which occupied the 1300 block of South Boulevard, the Tompkins foundry and machine shop (located just north of Parks-

Cramer) the [Nebel Knitting Mill](#), the Hudson Silk Mill, a pipe and foundry plant, and assorted laundries, wholesalers, building suppliers, stores, and residences. The first suburban fire station in Charlotte was located near the north end of the corridor, near Morehead Street, while just west of South Boulevard stood the Exposition Hall for the Made-in-the-Carolinas expositions, which were held during the 1920s to promote the industrial progress of the Carolinas (Miller's Charlotte City Directory 1929; Bradbury 1992, 53-63).

Although the Dilworth industrial corridor began to lose factories by late 1920s and during the Great Depression, as firms shut down or started relocating to larger industrial tracts, the Parks-Cramer Company continued to expand its operations through the middle twentieth century. While the company employed 52 men and two women in 1930, by the 1950s, the work force had grown to over 100 employees (Charlotte Chamber of Commerce 1930; Charlotte Observer, April 19, 1986). The Parks-Cramer Company functioned on the South Boulevard site until 1988, when the firm sold its operations and leased the factory. Currently, the Parks-Cramer Company Complex is undergoing renovations and restoration for a mixed-used facility accommodating a variety of retail and office spaces.

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