

Alpha Cotton Mill



This report was written on September 13, 1983

1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Old Alpha Cotton Mill is located at 311 E. 12th St. in Charlotte, North Carolina.

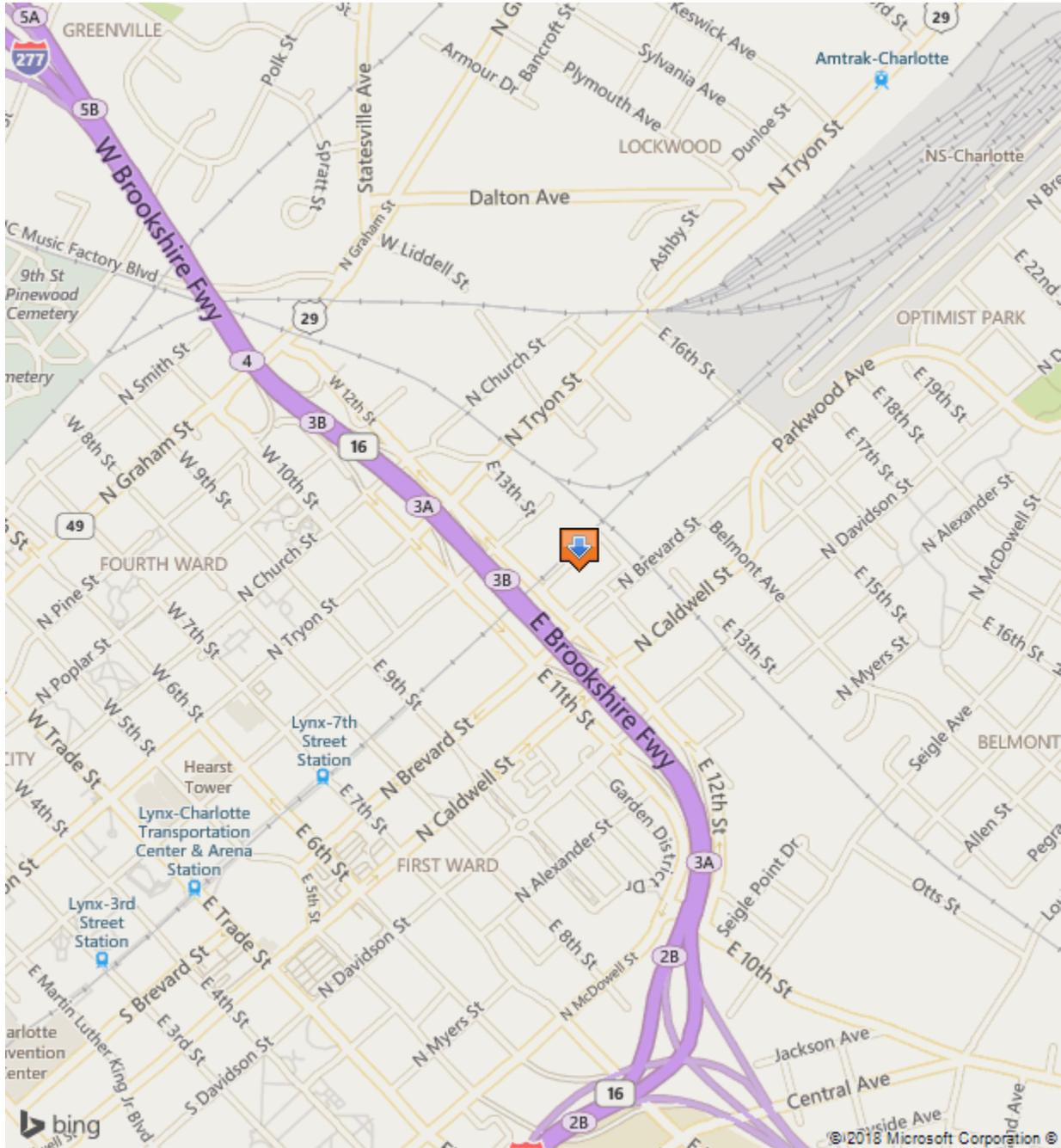
2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property:

Consolidated Engravers, Inc.
Box 33216
Charlotte, N.C., 28232

Telephone: 704/333-0365

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

4. A map depicting the location of the property: This report contains a map which depicts the location of the property.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 2385, Page 365. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 081-033-08.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. William H. Huffman, Ph.D.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains an architectural description of the property prepared by Lisa A. Stamper.

8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria set forth in N.C.G.S. 160A-399.4.

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Old Alpha Cotton Mill does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Alpha Cotton Mill, erected in 1888-89, was one of the first cotton mills in Charlotte and assisted in creating the momentum which transformed Charlotte into one of the leading textile manufacturing centers in the United States; and 2) the Old Alpha Cotton Mill is the earliest extant mill complex in Charlotte which was constructed by the D. A. Tompkins Company and which introduced installment plan capital creation in the textile industry of Charlotte.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the attached architectural description by Miss Lisa A. Stamper demonstrates that the Old Alpha Cotton Mill meets 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 property which becomes "historic property." The current appraised value of the 5.740 acres of land is \$170,020. The current appraised value of the improvements is \$1,013,700. The total current appraised value is \$1,183,720. The property is zoned I3.

Date of Preparation of this Report: June 6, 1984

Prepared by: Dr. Dan L. Morrill, Director
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Charlotte, N.C., 28203

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Historical Overview

By Dr. William H. Huffman

January, 1984

The Alpha Mills company was one of three cotton mills organized in the years 1888-9, the Alpha, Ada and Victor mills, all of which were built by the D. A. Tompkins Co., and their construction signaled a rapid increase in Charlotte's industrial growth, based on cotton, as part of the general expansion of the New South in the 1880s. The first mill in the city was the Charlotte Cotton Mills, which began operation in 1881, and this, along with Charlotte being strategically located in the heart of a growing cotton trading and manufacturing area, lured the entrepreneur Daniel Augustus Tompkins (1852-1914) to Charlotte. In 1884, Tompkins established the D. A. Tompkins Co. with R. M. Miller, Sr. for the purpose of building and supplying the machinery for cotton mills in the region. The fortuitous combination of Tompkins' energy and foresight being applied in the right time and place resulted in the construction of over one hundred cotton mills and two hundred cotton oil plants (cotton oil was a waste product until Tompkins turned it into a major industry) in the Piedmont over a thirty-year period. New South industrialization of the Piedmont owed a great deal to Tompkins and his company. ¹



D. A. Tompkins

The Alpha Mills was first organized in January, 1888, when, at a meeting of the "Charlotte Manufacturing Company" at the office of E. K. P. Osborne, it was decided that there would be a novel public subscription of the stock as follows:

It was moved that on Saturday, the 7th day of January, 1888, from four to eight o'clock p.m., the subscribers to the capital stock of the company be requested to call at the store of C. Scott, on College Street, and sign the constitution and by-laws, and pay in fifty cents per share on their stock, of which twenty-five cents is the initiation fee and twenty-five cents is the first installment of dues, and the weekly payments will be made at the same place from four to eight o'clock each Saturday. ²

So far as is known, this was the first mill in the region to offer its stock on a weekly installment plan.

The company was formally incorporated on January 23, 1888, and the records show the following as shareholders (of par value of \$100 each): E. K. P. Osborne, 25 shares; W. W. Ward, 30 shares; C. Scott, 10 shares; E. T. Cansler, 10 shares; T. L. Siegle, 10 shares; J. R. Erwin, 10 shares; J. W. Cobb, 10 shares; J. H. Van Ness, 20 shares Wm. Maxwell, Jr., 10 shares. ³ E. K. P. Osborne (1845-1894) was president of the new concern, John L. Brown was vice-president, and R. J. Sifford, secretary and treasurer. Osborne, who was a lawyer and native of Fayette County, Alabama, was elected to the Charlotte Board of Aldermen in 1884, and in 1887 to the state legislature as a Mecklenburg delegate. He also had the distinction of organizing, in 1887, Charlotte's first streetcar system. The horse-drawn line was eventually sold to the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company, the developers of Dilworth, which installed new electric trolleys and extended the lines. ⁴

By 1889, Calvin Scott, at whose wholesale grocery store the cotton mill was organized, was vice-president, John L. Brown having become head of the rival Ada Manufacturing Company. The mill, which then manufactured warps and yarns 20's to 30's (a type of unfinished, or "gray" goods), had been built at the corner of East Twelfth and "A" Streets (A Street was also the Southern Railroad right of way). ⁵ It consisted of a one-story brick mill building with basement (housing carding, spinning, reeling and warping operations), a cotton warehouse and a waste house. A number of frame one-story houses for the workers were built near the mill, some of which remain today.

About 1893, Calvin Scott (1832-1897) moved up to the office of president, since E. K. P. Osborne retired and moved from the city because of ill health. Born in Alamance County, Scott first engaged in commerce in Chapel Hill, and during the Civil War served as a lieutenant in a company from that town. Toward the end of the hostilities he was captured at Hanover Court House and imprisoned in Ohio. After the war, Scott came to Charlotte as a railroad agent, then time, Charlotte's growth as the hub of the central Piedmont textile industry continued unabated for two more decades. ⁸

In 1901, the Alpha Mill itself underwent a major transformation when it was bought out by a corporation headed by Hiram D. Wheat of Gaffney, S. C., and the name changed to the Orient Manufacturing Co. Instead of a yarn mill, the operation was refitted to be a weaving mill to

produce fine finished goods such as madras cloth, sateens, jenos and momie cloth. For this purpose, the capacity of the plant was greatly enlarged by the construction of a two-story brick building next to the original one. It included a corner tower characteristic of many New England mills, a feature which still makes the structure stand out of the ordinary. Construction of the new building and equipping it required an investment of \$250,000, a considerable sum for the time. The power plant was completely remodeled and equipped with two Sioux 300 horsepower engines and new boilers from Burlington, Iowa. Upon completion, the revamped mill could boast 20,000 spindles and 500 looms (the latter furnished by the D. A. Tompkins Co.), making it "one of the most complete mills in the South for making twisted yarns ... and for weaving fancy cloth..." Orient started up its new operation about January 1, 1902.⁹

For reasons that are not known, Orient Manufacturing went into receivership in 1905 after only three years of operation, and the mill was bought by the Calvine Manufacturing Co., a concern that was organized that year by E. A. Smith.¹⁰ Edward Arthur Smith (1862-1933), a Baltimore, Md. native, came to Charlotte in the 1880s as the traveling representative for Thomas K. Carey and Son, an industrial supply firm in Baltimore. In 1889, the same year the Alpha Mill was built, E. A. Smith, D. A. Tompkins and R. M. Miller, Jr. organized the Charlotte Supply Company to furnish textile mill machinery and parts to the growing industry. In 1900, the three sold their interest in the supply firm, and Smith built and headed the Chadwick mill west of Biddleville (1901) and the Hoskins in 1904 (Hoskins was his mother's family name). By 1907, he was president of the Calvine, Chadwick, Dover, Hoskins, and Louise mills in the Charlotte area, and later built mills in Rhodhiss, NC (1910) and Kings Mountain, NC (Phoenix, 1915).¹¹ In the following year, 1908, Smith began to consolidate his interests by organizing the Chadwick-Hoskins Co., which then took over the Calvine operation.

With some additions and changes as noted in the architectural description, the plant operated until 1946 as the Chadwick-Hoskins Mill No. 3, when the company merged with Textron-Southern, Inc.¹³ Thereafter, the mill operated under Textron-Southern (1946-1948), a new Calvine Cotton Mills, Inc. (1948-1952) and Smitherman Cotton Mills (1953-1955).¹⁴ In 1955, the present owners, Consolidated Engravers Corporation, moved their operation to the 12th Street site.¹⁵ Organized in 1936 as the Carolina Textile Engraving Co. by John Ladley, the company, which engraves patterns for the printing of textiles, floor coverings, and similar materials, formerly occupied the old Wade Loft building on 6th Street.¹⁶

Although on the inside of the old mill buildings one will find state-of-the-art computer engraving equipment, the exterior still retains most of its late nineteenth and early twentieth century textile mill appearance. As the most intact of the city's original mills, its historical place as a remaining part of the industry which was the principal reason for the economic and physical growth of the city is an important one.

NOTES

¹ Dan L. Morrill, "A Survey Of Cotton Mills in Charlotte," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1979; William H. Huffman, "A Historical Sketch of the Charlotte Supply Company," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, 1983.

² *Charlotte Democrat*, Jan. 6, 1888, p. 3.

³ Record of Corporations, Book A, p. 86.

⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, May 15, 1894, p. 4.

⁵ *Charlotte City Directory*, 1889, p. 46.

⁶ *Charlotte Observer*, April 10, 1897, p. 1.

⁷ See note 1; *Charlotte Observer*, Dec. 28, 1897, p. 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Charlotte City Directory*, 1902, p. 32; Record of Corporations, Book 1, p. 237; *Charlotte Observer*, Oct. 27, 1901, p. 5.

¹⁰ Record of Corporations, Book 1, p. 514; Deed Book 237, p. 633, 23 Dec. 1905. The name "Calvine" is thought to be from one of the women of the Scott family, who was also possibly related to another mill family, the Cramers. See note 16.

¹¹ *Charlotte City Directory*, 1907, p. 245; see note 1; *Charlotte Observer*, May 1, 1933, p. 1.

¹² Record of Corporations, Book 2, p. 313; Deed Book 237, p. 633, 14 Oct. 1908.

¹³ Deed Book 1216, p. 303, 30 Sept. 1946.

¹⁴ Deed Books 1292, p. 8, 3 Jan. 1948; 1604, p. 597, 1 Jan. 1953.

¹⁵ Deed Books 1752, p. 527, 28 March 1955; 2178, p. 137, 8 July 1960; 2385, p. 365, Dec. 1962.

¹⁶ Interview with John Ladley, Charlotte, N.C. 10 August 1983.

Architectural Description

by Lisa A. Stamper

The Alpha Cotton Mill, erected by the D. A. Tompkins Company c. 1889, is located on E. Twelfth Street between the Southern Railroad and N. Brevard Street. Since 1889, the Alpha Mill has grown from a single, one-story mill to a three building plant with several small additions and outbuildings. Today the mill is used by Consolidated Engravers Corporation primarily to produce engraved cylinders which are used to print textiles. Although only a small portion of the original 1889 mill is still intact, all the primary early twentieth century buildings are in very good exterior condition. The interiors have been altered significantly over the years; however, the Alpha Mill is a well preserved example of Charlotte's participation and growth in the textile industry.

The original Alpha Mill consisted of one primary mill building with basement, one cotton warehouse, and one waste house. The mill was built to produce greige yarns. The one-story brick mill was basically rectangular with a pitched roof, its ridge-line parallel to N. Brevard Street. It had many tall, thin windows. The mill building was located on the southwest corner of the property. The warehouse was also rectangular and was located to the rear of the mill. The warehouse had a platform which connected it to the mill and which was next to the railroad tracks (parallel to N. Brevard Street) for easy unloading and loading. The rectangular waste house had a central dividing wall creating two separate houses. It was located between the warehouse and N. Brevard Street.

According to the 1900 Sanborn Map, a service tank and well were located on the eastern corner of the mill building. The mill used water for steam heat and power, plus an automatic sprinkler system. The sprinkler system was an innovative new fire protection feature of the mill. Although it was not required by law to install these systems it was advantageous to the owners of the mill since they then secured substantially lower insurance rates. Lighting was electric. Coal fuel was used to produce the steam. The coal was brought directly from rear railroad tracks, which ran parallel to E. Twelfth Street, to the boiler by an individual track which ran beside the southeastern side of the cotton warehouse. A coal trestle was located at the end of this track. The area on the southeastern side of the mill was eventually filled and paved, covering the well, Southern Railroad track sidings and the coal trestle, all of which had long been obsolete.

The mill building contained carding, spinning, reeling, and warping operations. A small office was located off to the side near the front of the mill. The rear of the building contained the picker room and the boiler. The unengaged chimney stack was to the rear of the mill. The interior plan was typical of the American textile operation where all activities were contained under one roof. The English system had various outbuildings for different operations.

The only section of the original 1889 structure still intact is the chimney stack and the boiler room. The rest of the building was believed to be beyond repair and demolished by the Consolidated Engravers Corporation. They built a one-story, flat roofed, brick building

replacement on the original mill foundations. However, the newer building was not designed to look like the original, and it does not.

In 1901, when the Orient Manufacturing Company decided to expand the mill's production to include weaving, an addition, which more than doubled the plant, was required. A two-story brick building complete with a decorative three-story brick tower was constructed to the southeast of the original mill. The original service tank was demolished. The addition was rectangular and connected to the original structure only in the rear where the boiler room was enlarged and the chimney enclosed. Also, a 130,000-gallon reservoir was placed east of the existing well and a 50 foot steel tower and 20,000-gallon tank, which replaced the original service tank, was erected to the rear of the mill.

The 1905 Sanborn Map shows that the 1889 mill was used by the Orient Manufacturing Company for twisting (located in basement) and weaving (located on first floor) operations. The first-story of the newer mill was used for weaving, spooling, and warping. The second-story was used for spinning and carding.

The square brick tower, located on the southern corner of the 1901 mill, was purely a decorative element. It only contained a wide, three-story stair case. Many mills used towers as an aesthetic focal point to their property. The tower still stands in need of only minor repairs. On its E. Twelfth Street (southwestern) side, a bronze plaque in commemoration of the Chadwick-Hoskins Company's employees who fought in World War I was once proudly displayed. The plaque has since been taken inside the mill for security.

The "roof" of the tower is defined by corbelling underneath crenelles. This helps give the tower a majestic appearance. The exterior walls of the tower seem to be recessed from its corners, adding to the perceived height of the structure. More corbelling is employed within the top of the recess.

Although the interior of the tower contains three levels, the exterior appears to have only two levels. This is done by the placement, shape, and size of the openings. On the southwestern side, a wide, round arched doorway allows one to enter the tower. It has a four-course surround with a corbelled outer course. The half-circle above the late twentieth-century door contains small square glass panes. Above the door opening are two symmetrically placed windows. They have a slight arched shape and six-over-six-over-six lights. The original wooden sash frames are still intact. Above these windows a concrete filled rectangular recess might have once held a sign. The N. Brevard Street (southeastern) side of the tower is similar to the southwestern side; however, there are two windows instead of a door at the first-level, and there is no concrete filled recess. The northwestern side, which is attached to the mill, has a small, plain rectangular window near its top. The top half of the northeastern side of the tower resembles the southern sides of the tower, but its bottom half is covered by a wooden lean-to shaped addition which contains air conditioning units.

All of the 1901 mill building is presently intact, and its exterior is close to its original condition. However, the interior has been considerably altered without concern for historic integrity. The

brick is of American bond creating walls that are approximately twenty-four inches thick. The mill and tower have been painted a uniform light gray color.

Some of the windows have been filled with concrete blocks. The concrete is not flush with the exterior brick wall so the slightly arched window openings have not been visually lost. The wooden window frames are all only several years old, but they were patterned after the original eight-over-eight-over-eight light windows. The sills are of concrete. The windows are evenly spaced and form one row on each level which extend across the total width of each facade.

The low-pitched roof has been repaired. The original simple, sturdy wooden brackets are a continuation of the roof's wide, thick supporting beams. The wide, wooden eaves are also original.

Sometime between 1905 and 1911, more changes were made to the property. The mill was expanded from 13,126 spindles and 501 looms in 1905 to 10,048 spindles and 505 looms in 1911. To house this expansion, the 1901 cotton warehouse was replaced with a two-story rectangular addition connecting to the rear of the original 1889 mill. A new and larger cotton warehouse was constructed where the waste house used to be. Two new waste houses were located to the rear of the new mill. Also, the reservoir was expanded to hold 150,000 gallons. A straight drive was placed between the mill buildings and the mill houses on N. Brevard Street.

The interior usage was again altered from 1905 to 1911. The basement usage of the 1889 structure was changed from twisting to storage. The picker room was converted to the cloth room and the new picking room was moved to the rear of the 1901 building. It appears that the ceiling of the new picker room was lined with iron metal sheeting at this time (the iron sheeting exists today), and a first-level wall was put in to create the new room (the wall has since been removed). The rest of the first level of the 1901 building was being used for only carding while the second level was being used for spinning. The new mill was being used for weaving on the second level while the first level was vacant, probably for future expansion.

A comparison of the 1911 and 1929 Sanborn Maps shows that a few changes were made to the Chadwick-Hoskins Mill No. 3 within that time frame. First by 1929, the reservoir contained 200,000 gallons of water; an increase of 50,000 gallons. Second, a row of "auto houses" (no longer standing) was built behind and to the east of the warehouse. Also, the Chadwick-Hoskins Co. was described as a manufacturer of sheeting.

Because of the change in activities in the plant by 1929, the interior use of the spaces changed. The cloth room became the drawing room and the front half of the weaving area became cloth storage. The rest of the areas were described as Main Mill, Main Mill No. 2, and Main Mill No. 3; therefore, the activities in these buildings are unknown.

The newest mill strongly resembled the 1901 mill's construction and style. It was also made of brick. Its roof was also slightly pitched and of wood. The roof's brackets were also a continuation of the beams; however, brackets of the newest mill were cut to be slightly more

decorative. The windows, although slightly wider were also slightly arched and evenly spaced just as those of the 1901 building were.

Today, the windows of the Chadwick-Hoskins mill building have been filled with concrete blocks as some of the 1901 windows were. The building has been painted light gray, as have the rest of the early buildings. The roof has been repaired retaining its original shape and decorative features. A post-1952 rectangle one-story addition has been constructed on the northwestern side of the mill. This addition is made of concrete blocks and has a flat roof.

The newer cotton warehouse was at least twice the size of the original. It was two stories high with an elevated wooden platform which was connected to the warehouse at the rear and continued around the side to be parallel to the railroad siding. The roof was slightly pitched with the ridgeline running perpendicular to the railroad siding. The warehouse was constructed of wood with brick foundation and a brick fire wall which divided the warehouse in half. A squarish brick walled opening picker room was built within the first floor southwest corner of the warehouse. The floors were of concrete, and large, round wooden columns supported massive beams. Large double-doors which slid on a track allowed easy access and removal of cotton bales. These doors had diagonal wooden siding and were located on the first-and second-levels in the front, rear, and N. Brevard Street side of the warehouse.

Presently the warehouse is being used for storage. The interior has had many columns and much flooring replaced with little consideration for the original appearance. The exterior has not changed as much. Only the rear section of the elevated platform remains, a concrete platform was placed at the front of the warehouse sometime between 1911 and 1929, and sometime after 1929 a one-story, small rectangular room was constructed of brick on the southwestern front site of the warehouse.

As early as 1900, mill houses were built on both sides of N. Brevard Street and across from the mill on E. Twelfth Street. A small mill village was located behind the houses on N. Brevard Street. The mill houses across E. Twelfth Street and on the northwestern side of N. Brevard Street no longer exist. The rest of the mill village, approximately twenty houses, still stands. It has potential for recreating the ambiance of a historic neighborhood from Charlotte's textile mill past as well as adding to the historic character of the existing mill buildings.

The early twentieth-century Alpha Mills buildings are in stable condition and the contrast between the old and new in these buildings prove that the historic character of a city can be preserved without inhibiting progress. Although the interiors have been modernized to accommodate the highly advanced operations, for which Consolidated Engravers Company presently uses the buildings, the exterior buildings and outbuildings retain the historic character and ambiance of a early twentieth-century cotton mill. Also, this particular mill visually tells the story of Charlotte's rapid textile growth.