

Survey and Research Report On The Armature Winding Company Complex



Armature Winding Co. Building, 1924



Southern Specialties Company

1. Name and location of the property. The property known as the Armature Winding Company Complex is located at 1001 West First Street in Charlotte, N.C.

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

Power Products Manufacturing Company

P. O. Box 32277

Charlotte, N.C. 28232

Telephone: (704) 333-2158

The current occupant of the property is:

The Armature Winding Company

1001 West First Street

Charlotte, N.C. 28202

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 depicting the location of the property. The UTM coordinates for the property are: 17513024E and 3898331N.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is listed in the Mecklenburg County Deed Books #3811 p 0822. The tax-parcel number of the property is 073-242-18.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Ryan L. Sumner.

7. A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Ryan L. Sumner.

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

a. Special significance in terms of its historical, prehistorical, architectural, or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Armature Winding Company Complex does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1.) The Armature Winding Company was an important component of the industrial and commercial infrastructure that allowed Charlotte to become a major textile center of the two Carolinas in the early twentieth century. 2.) The Armature Winding Company's main building, designed by Fred L. Bonfoey, and its associated structures, represent industrial warehouse and mill construction of the early 1900s in Charlotte. 3.) The complex is an important remnant of an industrial district that grew along West Morehead Street in proximity to the Piedmont and Northern Railroad tracks and the Wilmore streetcar line.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association: The Commission contends that the architectural description by Ryan L. Sumner, which is included in this report, demonstrates that the essential form of the Armature Winding Company Complex 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 that becomes a "historic landmark." The current appraised value of the 2.066 acres of land is **\$384,300**. The current appraised value of the improvements is **\$30,000**. The total current appraised value is **\$431,900**. The property is zoned U-I.

Date of Preparation of this Report: September 1, 2002

Prepared by: Ryan L. Sumner and Dr. Dan L. Morrill

Ryan L. Sumner

May 30, 2002

Historical Background Statement

Executive Summary

The Armature Winding Company Complex, erected in 1924-25, is a group of structures that possesses local historic importance because it housed enterprises that made significant contributions to Charlotte's emergence as a major textile manufacturing and distribution center in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Founded in 1907, the Armature Winding Company

repaired electric components for use in looms and textile equipment, essential to the operations of textile mills in the Piedmont sections of the two Carolinas. It also repaired transformers for Duke Power, manufactured transformer-cooling fans, and distributed electric motors for General Electric Company, along with a variety of other electrical items. Without the support of firms like the Armature Winding Company, cotton mills could not have proliferated in the Piedmont sections of the two Carolinas in the early twentieth century.

The Armature Winding Company Complex, the main building of which was designed by local architect Fred L. Bonfoey (c.1872-1933), also possesses local historic importance because it contains a representative example of a type of commercial and industrial structure constructed in Charlotte in the 1920's. The complex's primary building is a one-story brick and steel structure with a low-pitch gable roof. The large windows are multi-pane with metal frames. The building also has exposed beams. The second building, originally a manufacturing plant for silk and cotton products by the Southern Specialties Company, was also constructed in the mid-1920s. This building is brick and has a raised monitor roof with clerestory windows. The owners of the building replaced the original large, multi-light windows with much smaller units on one elevation, and added a storefront. A small house adapted for company use also sits on the property.

Commerce and Industry Context and Historical Background Statement

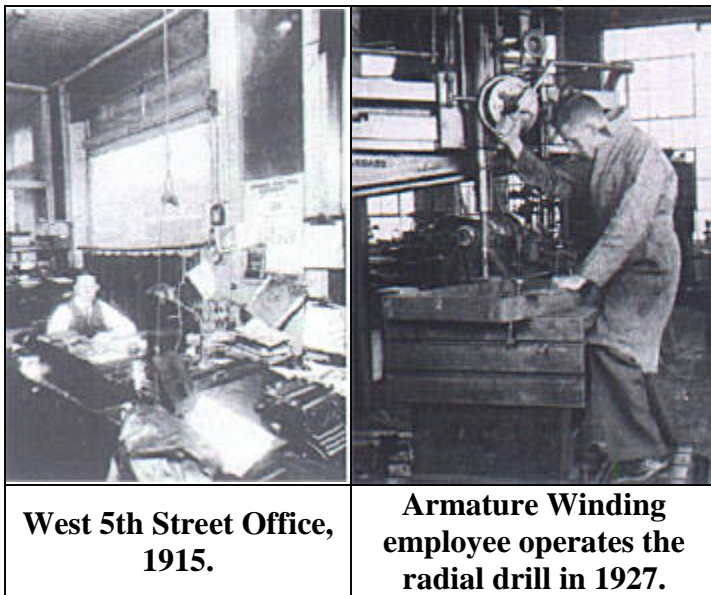
The Armature Winding Company Complex, erected in 1924, housed enterprises that contributed to Charlotte's emergence as a major textile manufacturing and distribution center in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. "Among all of North Carolina's cities, Charlotte enjoyed the most sustained growth and by 1910 had surpassed Wilmington as the largest in the state," writes historian Brent D. Glass. "The significance of Charlotte's development," says Glass, "lay not only in the thirteen textile mills built between 1889 and 1908 but also in the creation of a true urban infrastructure that included engineering firms, financial institutions, and department stores."¹



George and Wilson Stratton

Louis F. Stratton (pres./mgr.), and his two sons: Wilson L. (vice pres.), and George F. Stratton (sec./treas.). founded the Armature Winding Company and Ferrofix Brazing Company in 1907. The business partners first set up shop on West 5th Street, behind the original location of the Textile Mill Supply Company.² The transfer of Charlotte's mills from coal-generated steam to electric power resulted in great demand for Armature Winding's new and rebuilt motors and necessitated that the company expand across the street in 1915.

The company continued to grow through the early 1920s, and the Strattons began to look for a newer, larger facility to house their operations. In 1923, George and Wilson Stratton bought three lots in Charlotte's McNinchville neighborhood.³ This community was intended to be residential, but the proximity to the Piedmont and Northern Railroad, lack of zoning codes, and cheapness of land, encouraged a series of industrial buildings to be built in the area. The Strattons commissioned local architect Fred L. Bonfoey⁴ to design the new Armature Winding Company Building,⁵ which the Thies-Smith Realty Company constructed between May 6, 1924, and sometime in 1925.⁶ The brothers timed their expansion well, because as the Charlotte Observer noted in 1925: "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." ⁷



Machinist-type work characterized the principal labor done at the Armature Winding Company. A 1927 promotion book published by the company shows workers operating drill presses, removing coils from motors, steam cleaning electrical housings, winding coils, and sanding parts.⁸ From the pictures and because of the firm's strong emphasis on repairing motors,⁹ it seems that work at the Armature Winding Company had more variation and required a higher level of technical skill than the monotonously repetitive labor of most textile jobs.

The Armature Winding Company expanded its operations in the 1930s and 1940s. Beginning in 1936, the Strattons acquired two adjacent lots with three single-family houses along McNinch

Street,¹⁰ which were converted for use as storage, a spray booth, and employee dressing area.¹¹ In 1942, the firm bought another adjacent parcel with a warehouse building¹³ built in 1925 by the Southern Specialties Company for the manufacture of silk and cotton products.¹⁴ With the purchase of three vacant lots in 1949,¹⁵ the Armature Winding Company came to control an entire city block—this final purchase allowed the company to construct several small out-buildings, such as a parts cleaning building, sand-blasting shed, oil-fired stripping oven, coal bin, open storage building, and several fuel tanks.¹⁶



Armature Winding Co. in full operation.

On December 31, 1975, George F. and Wilson L. Stratton, Inc., the holding company of Armature Winding Company, was merged into Power Products Manufacturing Company.¹⁷ Power Products Manufacturing Company is the current owner of the property, but still does business as Armature Winding Company at 1001 West First Street. The company ceased refurbishing electrical equipment in the 1970s and now serves only as a distributor for equipment manufactured by the General Electric Company.

Architectural Description

Site Description

The Armature Winding Company Complex is located within Charlotte's Third Ward in the McNinchville community. This community, bounded by Cedar, Morehead, and Second Streets, was divided into lots planned primarily for residential use. However, Mecklenburg County's lack of zoning codes in the 1920s, inexpensive land, and proximity to rail lines made the neighborhood attractive to industry.

The area surrounding the Armature Winding Company Complex has changed considerably since 1923. At that time, Standard Oil Company's regional office stood to the east of the site, while a series of horse stables was located across McNinch Street. Trains from James B. Duke's Piedmont and Northern Railroad rolled past the facility's south side. Today, the Standard Oil

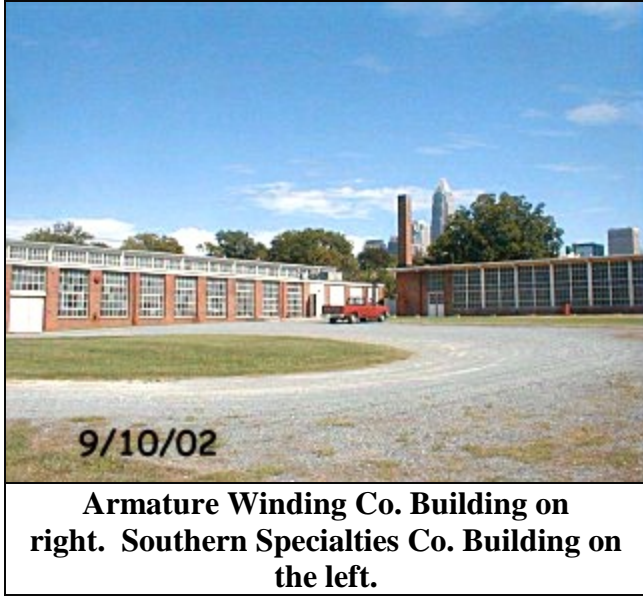
building has become the Charlotte Rescue Mission; newly built houses stand across First Street; and a few former railroad passenger cars are parked on the former Piedmont and Northern Railroad tracks and can be rented for catered functions.



Armature Winding Company Building from across Piedmont and Northern Railroad tracks.

The Armature Winding complex is bounded on four sides by West First Street, Elliot Street, the former P&N rail line, and McNinch Street. The area is very flat and grassy, inclining slightly downward on the southwest side near the train tracks. The site was obviously built up and leveled; it does not follow the northwesterly downward slope of West First Street, necessitating steep plinths along West First and Elliot Streets.

The current size of the Armature site reflects growth and expansion over time. Originally, this area was a city block, divided and sold as twelve residential-sized lots. The Strattons' original one story brick and steel building is located in the southeast area of the block on lots #7—9. The company purchased lots #1—2 in 1933, with three houses¹⁸—only one of which is extant. About the same time that Armature Winding Company established its operations on McNinch Street, the Southern Specialties Company purchased lots #3—5, constructing a building for the manufacture of silk and cotton products.¹⁹ The Southern Specialties Building was purchased by Armature Winding in 1942. Finally, the company purchased the remaining three lots (#10—12) in 1949. (See history section more detail.)



The complex's main building is a one-story red brick (common bond pattern with six course headers) structure with a low-pitch tarred gable roof, with a rectangular plan. Steel columns and heavy wood cross beams support the building throughout. The roof's overhanging eaves and exposed wood rafters evoke the bungalow-style—architect Fred L. Bonfoey's specialty. The building is constructed in the mill/industrial style, with large multi-pane windows with metal frames dominating the structure's architecture.

The north face of the main building is eight bays wide, with seven windows stretching from just under the roofline to about three feet above the ground. These apertures have metal mullions, brick sills, and are laid-out in a 7 pane high by five pane wide configuration, with hopper window insets. A large loading door is on the east (left when facing) side of this wall—this door once connected to a spray booth (adapted from one of the tenant houses)²⁰, but no doubt became an important point for deliveries, as trucks replaced trains as the principal means of receiving and distributing goods to the site. A three-story, non-corbelled, non-shouldered chimney also rises from the north side of the building.



**Interior of Armature Winding Company
Building**

The east elevation of the Armature Winding Company Building (located along McNinch Street) is twenty-one bays wide and is characterized by near continuous band of multi-pane translucent windows running nearly the length of the building and almost the height of the walls. The vast majority of these windows is arranged in four panes by seven patterns and have concrete sills. At the far left (south) of the elevation, a set of double doors, each fenestrated by a three-over-three window, leads to offices. Above this door is a window, five panes wide and four panes high. The last two windows left of the double doors have a slightly smaller three panes wide by seven panes high configuration. At the far right (north), a single door with three-by-three pane inset window leads into the main body of the space. Above this door is a corbelled band of stretchers laid vertically.

The south elevation looks out over the rail line and at the time of its design was likely considered the front of the building. Eleven bays wide, with ten window groups (five panes wide by seven tall), the words "ARMATURE WINDING CO." was boldly emblazoned above the loading dock door in white letters against a black background. Similarly, "ARMATURE WINDING CO. MOTORS BOUGHT SOLD AND REPAIRED," was painted underneath the band of windows to the right (east) of the loading door.

Today the south elevation has lost much of its former glory. The huge windows that defined this view of the building are bricked completely up. A hedge of thick foliage runs just a few feet parallel to the building face, and the area in between has become quite overgrown with plants. The view of the building is further obscured by several defunct train cars parked on the railroad track right in front of the building. Although greatly faded, it is still possible to read the two black and white painted signs on the building. The rollup loading dock door, which once allowed the passage of goods to and from waiting railroad cars, is closed and practically useless.

The west side of the Armature Winding Company Building is 21 bays wide, and like the east elevation, contains more glass than brick. A set of double doors located on the left (north) end open between the shop and service yard, which once contained a massive overhead crane, and various outbuildings. As on the east wall, the most observable feature is the continuous band of

windows, mostly four by seven pattern, with the two right most (south) windows slightly smaller—three panes by seven panes.



Original sink in the bathroom of the Armature Winding Company Building

The steel column and heavy wood cross-beam construction of the Armature Winding Company Building not only allows the extensive use of large windows in non-load bearing walls, it also permits the interior of the building a great deal of openness. The interior of the building is essentially a shop space, the open plan of which is interrupted solely by the centrally located men’s restroom. The flooring inside the space is concrete on the western half of the building, while maple boards are on the eastern side. An overhead crane system tracks below the ceiling in the space. Offices located in the southeast corner of the shop have been partitioned off from the main space by a new wall and have been extensively remodeled with carpet, refinished floors, dry-wall partitions, and modern lighting; however, there has been some efforts at preserving the integrity of the space, such as keeping the original windows and covering them with shades on the inside.

The Former Southern Specialties Building



Originally built for silk, rayon and cotton manufacture by the Southern Specialty Company, this building is used as a warehouse by the Armature Winding Company. The building is a one-story red brick (laid in running bond pattern) and wood-framed structure with a clerestory roof, and an L-shaped plan. At its widest points, the building is fifteen bays wide by six bays deep.

The front (north) face of the warehouse building is thirteen bays wide and consists of three principal masses. The elevation is dominated visually by a non-contributing stucco entrance of recent origin on the left projecting block of the "L-plan." This element contains a recessed set of double doors flanked on either side by a double six-over-six window. Continuing to the right, a post-1956 addition is nestled into the interior angle of the "L"—entry is gained through a door in a recessed vestibule and four fixed windows with three vertical muntins and brick sills are located on this block. Farther down the electric oven, a brick box-like structure with a gable roof, juts out from the side of the building. Farther to the right, along the long shaft of the "L," are four large windows, each with a fifteen-over-fifteen pattern.

The original brick face of the west elevation has been obscured by stucco. The dramatic rise of the clerestory roof is very apparent from this angle. A large overhead service door opens into the building's central hallway, and is flanked on either side by a twenty-five-pane window.

The rear (south) elevation of the Southern Specialties Company Building is fifteen bays wide. Eleven of these bays are in the form of large window units, comprised of thirty-six panes each (six wide by six high). The third bay from the left (west) side consists of a recent plain double door below half a window unit (the original is in storage on the site). The four windows from the right (east) end of the building have been replaced, most being converted into a loading dock. From this elevation the east-west run of the clerestory roof is easily visible, composed of about twenty-eight windows, each comprised of eight panes (four wide by two high)

The east elevation is seven bays wide. The seven original windows have been removed, and smaller double-hung six-over-six windows have been put in their place. To account for the size

difference, each of the new windows is surrounded by stucco. "ARMATURE WINDING CO." is painted on the upper left (north) corner of the elevation.

The interior of the Southern Specialties Building is a curious mix of the extensively remodeled and well preserved. In the 1970s, the building underwent an extensive modernization. The owners added a storefront addition to the north elevation and gutted extensive portions of the northern and eastern sections of the building.²¹ Very little original material remains in these areas—even the windows are gone. However, a great deal of historic fabric is concentrated along the central spine of the building in an open space underneath the dramatic clerestory roof. Here the wood plank floor and ceiling are still in place, as are the hanging lights, elements of the overhead hoisting system, and the heavy wood beam and steel column support system. A cellar (inaccessible to this writer at the time of his visit) purportedly used by the Southern Specialties Company to store silkworm cocoons exists under the building and is reached via a centrally located interior staircase.

Tenant House

This house was likely built by the Standard Oil Company²² as worker housing around 1926²³ and purchased by the company in 1936 as a storage building. It is a one-story gravel-veneered concrete block structure with a cross gable roof and slight "T"—plan. The roof is rusted tin; the three paneled doors are wood painted white; and the windows are all double-hung six-over-six.



Unknown residents of the tenant house, c. 1920s.

The east elevation is four bays wide, with two principal masses. The forward sitting cross gabled-end has a six-over-six window and a white panel door. To the right on the crossing mass is another similar door followed by another six-over-six window. Two windows are on the north elevation; the gabled end is on the left half. Two bays, a door and a window characterize the west side of the house with the turned gable on the right side. The southern wall of the house is flat and contains two windows, situated near the ends of the wall.



The interior of the house is comprised of four equally-sized rooms. There is no facility for cooking other than a fireplace and no indication of plumbing. The floor and walls are quite unstable, making entrance inadvisable.

1. Brent D. Glass, *The Textile Industry In North Carolina. A History* (Division of Archives and History, North Carolina Department Of Cultural Resources, 1992), p. 44.
2. Charlotte City Directory (1911), p47.
3. Mecklenburg County Deed Books (DB488/273; DB488/272; DB481/246).
4. Bonfoey was came to Charlotte from Connecticut in 1918. He developed a reputation as a bungalow architect, and is responsible for the design of numerous homes in Elizabeth, Dilworth, and Plaza-Midwood. His lived at 1509 North Davidson Street. (Charlotte Observer (January 24, 1933); Hanchett, Sorting Out the New South City, p163)
5. Charlotte Building Permit No. 5184. Application: May 5, 1924; Approved: May 6, 1924.
6. Interview of Mrs. Virginia Woolard by Ryan Sumner (July 2002).
7. Charlotte Observer (June 29, 1925) p2.
8. This book is in the possession of Virginia Woolard, president of Armature Winding Company.
9. Charlotte City Directory (1925), p129
10. Mecklenburg County Deed Books (DB894/33).

11. Sanborn fire Insurance Company, *Charlotte, NC, Maps of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company* (1927 and 1953—1962) p318.
12. Factory Insurance Association, *Insurance Map* (Hartford, Connecticut: December 26, 1956)
13. Mecklenburg County Deed Books (DB1070/249).
14. Sanborn fire Insurance Company, *Charlotte, NC, Maps of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company* (1927 and 1953—1962) p318.
15. Mecklenburg County Deed Books (DB1379/276).
16. Factory Insurance Association, *Insurance Map* (Hartford, Connecticut: December 26, 1956).
17. Mecklenburg County Deed Books. *Certificate of Merger*, (DB3811/0822)
18. Interview of Mrs.Virginia Woolard by Craig Fleming (September 22, 1998).
19. Charlotte City Directory (1927).
20. Factory Insurance Association, *Insurance Map* (Hartford, Connecticut: December 26, 1956)
21. Interview of Mrs.Virginia Woolard by Ryan Sumner (July 2002).
22. Interview of Mrs.Virginia Woolard by Ryan Sumner (July 2002).
23. Factory Insurance Association, *Insurance Map* (Hartford, Connecticut: December 26, 1956)