



## **HIGHLAND PARK MANUFACTURING COMPANY MILL NO. 3**

*This report was written on December 3, 1986*



**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Old Highland Park Manufacturing Company Mill No. 3 is located at 2901 N. Davidson Street, Charlotte, North Carolina.

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

Highland Park Group, Inc.  
200 Queens Rd. Suite 200  
Charlotte, NC 28204

Telephone: (704) 377-4700

**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 5223, page 325. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is: 083-078-01.

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

**7. A brief architectural description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Thomas W. Hanchett.

**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation 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 Highland Park Manufacturing Company Mill No. 3 does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Old Highland Park Manufacturing Company Mill No. 3, erected in 1903-04, was designed by Stuart Warren Cramer, an architect of regional note who specialized in textile mill and textile mill village architecture; 2) the Old Highland Park Manufacturing Company Mill No. 3 was prominently featured in Cramer's book, *Useful Information for Cotton Manufacturers, Vol. 3*, and, therefore, influenced the design and arrangement of other textile mills; 3) the Old Highland Park Manufacturing Company Mill No. 3 was one of the first textile mills in North Carolina designed for electric operation; and 4) the Old Highland Park Manufacturing Company Mill No. 3 served as an active mill and the centerpiece of the North Charlotte mill community from 1904 until 1969.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling, and/or association:** The Commission contends that the architectural description included in this report demonstrates that the property known as the Old Highland Park Manufacturing Company Mill No. 3 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 improvement is \$222,330. The current appraised value of the 9.28 acres of land is \$222,020. The total appraised value of the property is \$444,350. The property is zoned I2.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** December 3, 1986

**Prepared by:** Dr. Dan L. Morrill  
Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission

1225 S. Caldwell St. Box D  
Charlotte, NC 28203

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### *Historical Overview*

*Dr. William H. Huffman*

The Highland Park Manufacturing Company Mill No. 3, located in the 2900 block of N. Davidson Street, was built in 1903-4 and was by far one of the largest in the area. Along with two other mills constructed that year (the Hoskins and neighboring Mecklenburg), it was one of the last cotton mills to be built in or near Charlotte, and one of the last to close, in 1969. (Johnston Manufacturing Co., located between the Highland Park #3 and Mecklenburg [later Mercury] mills, was the last built, 1913, and the last to close, in 1975).

When Charlotte made the transition from being primarily a cotton trading center to a cotton manufacturing one in the period from the late 1880s to the early 1900s, a New South industrialization movement spearheaded by Daniel Augustus Tompkins (1852-1914), the Highland Park Manufacturing Co. was intimately a part of this progression. The city's first mill was the Charlotte Cotton Mills (now the location of Speizman Industries on West Fifth Street), which started up in 1881 under the direction of R. M. Oates, a cotton broker. A year later, D. A. Tompkins, a South Carolina native who was educated and trained in manufacturing in the North, came to the city as a representative of the Westinghouse Company.



He quickly became aware of the potential for building cotton mills in the area, and so in 1884 he set up his own design, contracting and machine shop business, the D. A. Tompkins Co. Over a thirty-two year period, Tompkins built over one hundred cotton mills, fertilizer works, electric light plants and ginneries. He also changed the region's cotton oil, formerly a waste product, into a major industry through the building of about two hundred processing plants and organizing one of his own, the Southern Cotton Oil Company.<sup>2</sup> Tompkins efforts started to appear in rapid succession in Charlotte when his company built the Alpha, Ada and Victor mills in 1888-9, the city's second, third and fourth mills. On June 15, 1891, at the first stockholders meeting of the "Gingham Mill," which was to be the city's fifth mill, a board of directors was elected. At the meeting on January 11, 1892, a committee of D. A. Tompkins and two others suggested the name Highland Park Manufacturing Co., which was adopted, and the company's Mill No. 1 was brought into operation on N. Brevard Street at Twelfth later that year. R. H. Jordan, who owned the drugstore at the southeast corner of Trade and Tryon, was elected the company's first president. He was followed by Vinton Liddell in 1893 and W. E. Halt in 1895.

Accepting the offer of J. S. Spencer, president of the Commercial National Bank and secretary of Highland Park Manufacturing, Charles Worth Johnston (1861-1941) also joined the company in 1892, and was elected treasurer and secretary of the board of directors in 1895. Johnston was a native of Cabarrus County, attended Davidson College, and had been superintendent of the Cornelius Mills (controlled by Stough Cornelius), his first place of employment.

After expanding the original mill in 1895 and 1896, Highland Park branched out by buying Standard Mills in Rock Hill, SC at a public sale in 1898, which became Mill No. 2. At a board meeting in January, 1903, it was decided to expand the capital stock from the original \$125,000 to \$700,000 par value to finance the construction of a newer and much larger mill. The site chosen for Highland Park No. 3 was the location of the municipal water works at the far edge of the Wadsworth farm, located about one mile north of Mill No. 1 (the "Gingham Mills") and about two miles from the

Square. Construction on the half-million dollar plant began on March 2, 1903, for which a brickmaking plant was set up at the site. The mill was designed by Stuart W. Cramer, whose engineering firm designed and equipped many mills in the region (see Figures 1-3). Two other contractors on the job were R. A. Brown of Concord, who did the brickwork, and A. K. Lostin of Gastonia, the installer of the woodwork. In addition to the new mill, which had 30,000 spindles, 1,000 looms and over 800 employees, making it fifty percent larger than the second-largest Louise Mill, Highland Park also constructed a \$100,000 power generating plant on Sugar Creek to run both the Gingham Mill (Mill No. 1) and the new Mill No. 3 (see Figure 1). The 2000-horsepower plant made the two factories the first electrically driven mills in North Carolina.<sup>8</sup>

When it was completed in November, 1904, the Highland Park Mill No. 3, which also specialized in making gingham, took its place as the city's largest, and the company as a whole was also the biggest until the Chadwick-Hoskins Co. was formed in 1908 (a merger of the Hoskins, Chadwick, Calvine (Alpha), Louise and Pineville mills.). But it was not just a cotton mill that was built in the then-rural area, it involved the establishment of an entire community, which became known as North Charlotte. Originally eighty mill houses, white frame dwellings in several blocks of neat rows across from the mill, were built, and more were added later. A quarter of a mile up the extension of Brevard Street another mill was being put up in 1904, the Mecklenburg (later Mercury), and eventually a third (Johnston Manufacturing Co., 1913) was built between the first two, both of which also had their own areas of mill houses. The North Charlotte community thrived for many years, complete with hotel, a mercantile business with stores and lodge rooms above, and drug and grocery stores.

In 1906, C. W. Johnston became president of Highland Park Manufacturing, and not long afterward began an aggressive program of expansion by acquisition and consolidation to build what was known as the Johnston chain. Beginning with the acquisition of Anchor Mills, eventually there were thirteen Carolinas mills under Johnston ownership, including the newly-built Johnston Manufacturing Company of 1913. As a visible monument to the success of the textile enterprise, in 1924 the Johnston Building was built on S. Tryon Street to house the corporate headquarters and other offices.<sup>10</sup>

When C. W. Johnston stepped down as president of Highland Park in 1938, he was succeeded by his son, R. Horace Johnston, who led the firm until his own death in the early Fifties. The last president of the company, David R. Johnston, who was C. W.'s grandson, headed Highland Park until its dissolution in June, 1969, when all textile manufacturing ceased at the plant. When the other Johnston mills in North Charlotte closed in 1975, there was a distinct passing from one time into another for the mill community.<sup>11</sup>

The fading paint on the water tower still says "Highland Park Mfg. Co." on it, and the nearly as original North Charlotte mill building and its tidy rows of mill houses still stand solidly as a clear reminder of the base industry which was almost solely

responsible for Charlotte's growth and prosperity in the late nineteenth century and three-fourths of the twentieth: textile manufacturing, mostly cotton. With the city rapidly becoming a diversified commercial and manufacturing center, its all-important cotton-mill heritage is in danger of being forgotten, and thus lost in the rush to modernity.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> William H. Huffman, "A Historical Sketch of the Charlotte Cotton Mills," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, August, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> William H. Huffman, "A Historical Sketch of the Charlotte Supply Company," Charlotte Supply Company, August, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Dan Morrill, "A Survey of Cotton Mills in Charlotte," Charlotte Mecklenburg Historic Properties Commission, October, 1979.

<sup>4</sup> Letter from Highland Park Manufacturing Company, undated (c. 1964) in vertical file at Charlotte Mecklenburg Public Library.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*; *Charlotte Observer*, July 5, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Letter, note 4.

<sup>7</sup> Record of Corporations, Book 1, p. 337.

<sup>8</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, Feb. 27, 1903, p. 4; *Ibid.*, June 18, 1903, p. 6; Stuart W. Cramer, *Useful Information For Cotton Manufacturers* (Charlotte: Queen City Printing Co., 1906) 2nd ed.; Vol. III, pp. 1227-1298.

<sup>9</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, June 18, 1903, p. 6; *Ibid.*, Aug. 4, 1904, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Letter, note 4; *Charlotte Observer*, July 5, 1941, p. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Letter, note 4; Articles of Dissolution, Record of Corporations, Book 14C, p. 481; *Charlotte News*, March 13, 1975, p. 1.

*Architectural Description*

*Thomas W. Hanchett*

The Highland Park #3 Mill in the Charlotte's North Charlotte industrial district was the largest textile factory in the county when it opened about 1904, one of the state's first mills designed for electric operation.<sup>1</sup> It soon became one of the South's best-known mills, for its architect was Charlottean Stuart Warren Cramer. Cramer, credited with designing and/or equipping "nearly one-third of the new cotton mills in the South" between 1895 and 1915, used this factory as a showcase of his techniques. Over seventy pages of his influential book *Useful Information for Cotton Manufacturers Volume 3* (1906) are devoted to drawings and photographs of the mill and its machinery layouts.<sup>3</sup> Twenty-four of those pages focus on the architecture of the main building itself, including facade elevations, structural drawings, specifications for contractors, and even detailed drawings of cast-iron column capitals and wooden windows and doors.

Highland Park #3 remained a working mill until 1969.<sup>4</sup> Additions were made. Windows were bricked in. Clerestories were removed from the roofs. Cramer's original machinery, including his pioneering efforts at air conditioning, gave way to newer technology. New ancillary buildings were constructed and old ones were demolished. After the mill closed, all of its machinery was sold to industrialists in South America, and today only one small section of overhead shafting (possibly part of Cramer's original layout) survives. Since shutting down, the complex has been used for storage.

Despite all the changes, the Highland Park #3 Mill is a place of exceptional architectural significance to the city of Charlotte and to the South. Highland Park #3 is the only surviving Charlotte building closely associated with Stuart Cramer, the preeminent Southern textile mill architect of his day. Textiles constituted the primary industry in the South for many decades Cramer's work not only had wide impact on the region but also helped the City of Charlotte emerge as a regional center. Cramer's residence in the Dilworth neighborhood and his foundry and offices downtown have long since disappeared.

This factory is believed to be the best-documented example of the designer's work. Taken together, Highland Park #3's buildings and drawings provide an extraordinarily detailed picture of state-of-the-art mill architecture at the turn of the century. Because Cramer published pages of detailed drawings, it is likely that aspects of Highland Park #3's architecture were copied throughout the South and beyond.

### **The Mill Complex**

The site slopes sentry down from north to south. The property is bounded on the north, east and south by Thirty-Second Street, North Davidson (originally North Caldwell) Street, and angling Mallory Street. The single-track mainline of the Norfolk and Southern Railroad (1911) runs immediately adjacent to the west side of the mill, paralleled a few hundred feet away by the mainline of the Southern Railway (pre-



1900). Both tracks have become part of the new Norfolk Southern Corporation system in recent years.

East across North Davidson Street is the former Highland Park #3 mill village. North of the mill, across Thirty-Second Street, is the red brick Johnston YMCA built in 1951 as a community center for all the North Charlotte mills. Several hundred yards south of the mill, across the Norfolk and Southern track, is the brick Transformer House which once supplied power to the mill. Today all of these structures have separate owners, and none are included in this architectural report. The accompanying map, drawn in 1954 for the Johnston Company by the Associated Factory Mutual Fire Insurance Companies of Boston, shows how the factory complex itself looked in its heyday.

In 1986 the factory consists of five buildings, plus a tall steel water tower. The main structure is the massive "L"-shaped mill, one to two stories tall and built of brick [numbers 1,2,3,4,16,19 on the map]. Within the "L" are two smaller brick buildings: the 1910s and 1920s Dye House (attached to the main mill with a brick passageway after 1954[ number 6 ]), and the original 1904 Boiler House (number 8). Another small brick building, erected in 1904 as a Waste House, is located immediately south of the main mill (number 9). A wooden Gate House (number 5) sits east of the mill, facing North Davidson Street. The water tower, a cylindrical tank atop four tall metal legs, marks the southeastern corner of the property, and still bears the legend "Highland Park Mfg." in faded black letters.

Until 1986, the complex also included several other buildings. Most interesting was a large multi-bay cotton warehouse (numbers 11-15), facing Mallory Street and built of wood with brick firewalls. It was part of Cramer's original design, and included a pneumatic piping system to blow cotton directly into the mill. There were also a pair of newer free-standing concrete water tanks near the boiler house (a huge cylindrical 350,000 gallon main reservoir (number 22) and a smaller square back-up tank, two Valve Houses which controlled flow from the tanks, a pair of small free-standing wooden Pump Houses, and a large wood-frame shed (number 10) attached to the machine shop. A small frame Waiting Room stood next to the North Davidson Street gets. According to the owner, these structures had become deteriorated, and all were bulldozed.

### **The Main Building**

The main mill, taken as a whole, is a large "L"-shaped brick structure. The brick was made on the site. A gentle gable roof with virtually no eaves runs the length of each leg of the "L." The wood and glass clerestories, shown running along the ridgelines in Cramer's drawings, are gone except in one small area. Most of the tall, segmental-arched windows which originally lit the main floors have been bricked in, though a number of basement window openings remain. The interior structure is primarily of

wood, with regularly-spaced round columns topped by cast-iron capitals, upon which rest massive wooden beams and floor-planking.

Exterior towers in a variety of sizes are placed at irregular intervals around the perimeter of the building. Wooden mill construction could be surprisingly fire-resistant, but only as long as there was no way for flames to spread from floor to floor. All stairways, elevator shafts, and even bathrooms with their vertical plumbing shafts were confined to towers outside the building itself. The smallest towers shown on Cramer's plans were windowless and held elevator shafts. Next in size were the stair towers, each of which had a water tank at the top. Largest were the "closet towers" which held men's and women's washrooms (fixtures still extant). The outsides of the stair towers and closet towers boasted the mill's fanciest brickwork: segmental-arched windows, corbelled brick cornices with round "bullseye" windows above, and castle-like crenellated parapets. Today the cornices and bullseye windows may still be seen, but the segmental arches have been filled in and the parapets have been rebuilt, except on one tower. The exception, fortunately, is the tall main tower lasted on the west side of the building. It served as the front entrance to the mill (the original stair with tongue-and-groove woodwork and painted advertisements for textile machinery components is well-preserved inside). This tower's elaborately corbelled cornices and windows and doorways were intended to impress visitors to Charlotte, which is why it faces the Southern Railway mainline rather than Davidson Street.

The huge building may be thought of as a number of smaller structures joined together to form the "L." Though conceived and executed at the same time, these units are divided by thick brick firewalls, which in fact make them into distinctly separate spaces. As we move through the factory from south to north (approximately following the manufacturing path from raw cotton to woven cloth) we shall use the space names designated on Stuart Cramer's published plans.

The Card and Spinning Room (number 1) takes up two-thirds of the south leg of the "L," a space 214' x 128' in size. It is two stories tall with no basement. An addition to house massive air-conditioning equipment (still extant) was made to the west side sometime between 1929 and 1954. Inside the main space, four rows of close-spaced wooden columns ( 8'x25' costars) provide interior support. The second story housed the spinning machines. The first story held clubbing and recording machinery, driven by an arrangement of electric motors, metal shafts and leather belts. Today four long shafts run one-third the length of the space, suspended from the ceiling beams over the area where the "Revolving Top Flat Cards," originally stood. An electric motor still drives each shaft. The shafting corresponds with that shown in *Useful Information for Cotton Manufacturers*, and it may hold a high degree of significance as a last remnant of Cramer's machinery design.

The rest of the south leg of the "L" is devoted to the Lapper Room and Dye House (number 2 and 3). As designed by Cramer these were two separate units divided by a brick firewall, with different window arrangements and even different floor levels.

The Lapper Room held warping machines on its upper floor and lapping machines on its lower floor. The Dye House had no lower level. Instead, its upper floor was dropped six feet to accommodate dyeing machinery. Sometime between 1911 and 1929 a larger Dye House was erected outside the main building and after 1929 major changes were made to the old area. The second story of the firewall between the Lapper Room and the original Dye House was torn out, and a new floor was put in, making the area one large space. A small addition was made to the west side about 1945. It is interesting, however, that despite the interior changes, this area is the only part of the building which retains its original clerestories. Two wood and glass units rise above the roof-line to provide abundant natural light to the interior.

The largest part of the main mill is the Weave Room (number 41), which makes up the entire north leg of the "L." It is 446' x 128' and is one-story tall with a partially exposed full basement. Its main floor is at the same height as the second story of the Card and Spinning Room, due to the natural slope of the site. The original wooden columns in the high-ceiling main space have been replaced with metal ones. An interesting detail that remains is the "tobacco spit gutter" that runs at baseboard level around the outside walls. A wood and glass interior wall, now partially destroyed, divides the west end off from the cavernous main space. In the basement, structural changes have also been made, but some of the wooden columns survive.

The last era of great prosperity for Charlotte textile mills was the mid 1940s, when World War II military production pumped money into the industry. About 1946 Johnston Mills added a New Weave Room to Highland Park #3 (numbers 16 and 19). Located on the north side of the original Weave Room, the new one-story building featured brick exterior walls and a steel structure. At about the same time, the stairtower on the north facade of the original Weave Room was demolished and a new tower was constructed at the southeast corner.

### **The Boiler House and the Waste House**

The Boiler House (number 8) shown in detail in Stuart Cramer's drawings still stands near the Card and Spinning Room. Its trapezoidal shape conformed to a now-vanished railroad siding. Though its crenellated parapet has been rebuilt, and its arched door and windows have been bricked in, one can still see the corbelled cornice.

Nearby is the Waste House (number 1), a flat-roofed rectangular building angled to fit the same rail siding. Cotton waste would be collected here from the plant for shipment to companies which converted it to bearing-packing for railroad cars, among other uses. Cramer did not publish drawings of the structure, but its segmental arched windows match those elsewhere in the plant. Unlike the main building, much of Cramer's original window work remains intact here.

### **The Dye How and the Gate House**

The Dye House, a separate one-story brick building added between 1911 and 1929, is the mill's largest ancillary structure, 54' x 174.' It retains its monitor roof. The building may be built atop a natural spring, for there is a large pump set into one side of the main floor. Between 1929 and 1954 an large awkward-looking addition was made at the southeast corner. Inside this addition is a raised concrete floor intended to hold dye vats. After 1954 a one-story brick passageway was added to connect the Dye House to the main mill.

Near the Dye House is the one-story frame Gate House. Cramer's plans showed a smaller guardhouse near this spot facing North Davidson Street. The more spacious Gate House was probably erected soon after 1911 when the new roadbed of the Norfolk and Southern crowded next to the west entrance tower. The Gate House has a high hip roof with triangular side vents. The wooden walls have been covered with artificial siding, and an addition has been made to the front. Its interior has been remodeled as well.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Eighteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of Labor and Printing for the State of North Carolina, 1904, pp.93-97. Experiments with electric textile production been in the late 1880s or early 1890s, but have not been well documented. The first new mill in the United States constructed expressly for electric operation was the 1899 Olympia Mill in Columbia, South Carolina. The February 27,1903 *Charlotte Observer* proclaimed that Highland Park No. 3 would "be the first electric driven. mill in North Carolina." For more on electrification see Sydney B. Paine, "Electric Power as Applied to Textile Machinery," in Marjorie Young, ad. *Textile Leaders of the South* (Columbia, SC: James R. Young, 1963), pp.884-686.

<sup>2</sup> Young,ad. *Textile Leaders of the South*, pp.50-51, 744. Themes R. Navin, *The Whitin Machine Works Since 1831: A Textile Machinery Company in an Industrial Village* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1950), pp.217-235.

<sup>3</sup> Stuart W. Cramer, *Useful Information for Cotton Manufacturers*, volume 3 (Charlotte?: Stuart Cramer, 1906), pp. 1227- 1297. It is likely that photos of machinery layouts elsewhere in the books were taken at Highland Park # 3.

<sup>4</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, September 7,1986. The "Mecklenburg Neighbors" section is devoted to North Charlotte.

<sup>5</sup> *Charlotte Observer*, June 18,1903.