

The Nebel Mill Annex



Name and location of the property: The property formerly known as the Nebel Knitting Mill Annex is located at 127 West Worthington Avenue at Camden Road in Charlotte, NC.

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

Camden Square Associates LLC

c/o MECA Properties

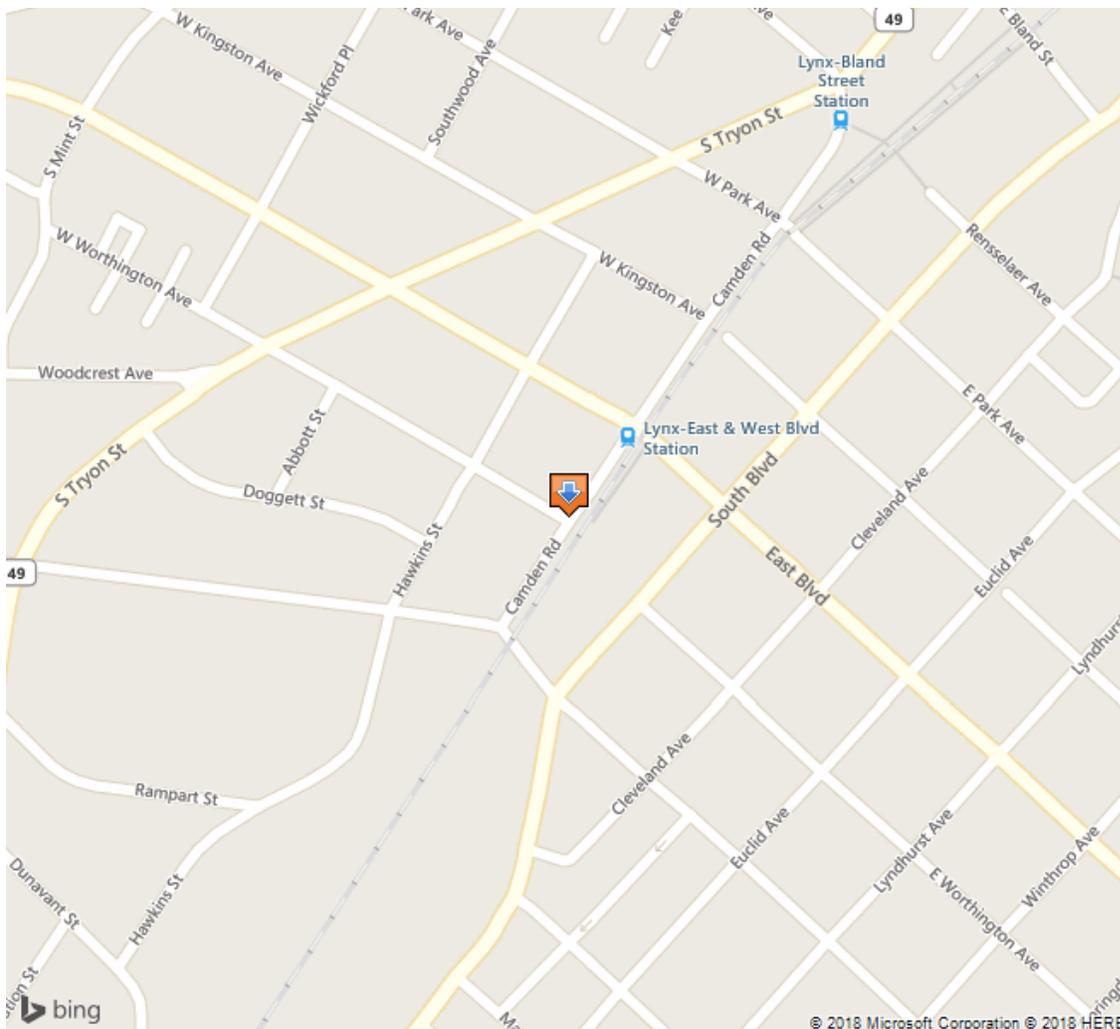
908 S. Tryon St.

Charlotte, NC 28202

Telephone: (704) 372-9461

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

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



Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is listed in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 8984 on page 972. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 121-022-03.

A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Emily D. Ramsey.

A brief architectural description of the property: This report contains a brief architectural description of the property prepared by Emily D. Ramsey.

Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in NCGS 160A-400.5:

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture and/or cultural importance:

The Historic Landmarks Commission judges that the property known as the Nebel Knitting Mill Annex does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County, based on the following considerations:

The Nebel Knitting Mill Annex is a tangible reflection of the tremendous growth that the hosiery industry in particular experienced during the post-war period in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.

The Nebel Knitting Mill Annex is important for its association with William Nebel, the founder of the Nebel Knitting Company, a pioneer in the southern hosiery business and the man responsible for bringing the hosiery industry to Charlotte.

The Nebel Knitting Mill Annex is architecturally significant as one of the few examples of the Art Moderne building style in the Charlotte area, and represents the aggressive efforts towards modernization within the Charlotte-Mecklenburg hosiery industry after World-War II.

The building was designed by Herman V. Biberstein, noted Charlotte engineer and architect and son of Richard C. Biberstein, who designed the Nebel Knitting Mill at 101 West Worthington in the 1920s.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:

The Historic Landmarks Commission contends that the architectural description included in this report demonstrates that the Nebel Knitting Mill Annex meets this criterion.

Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal: The Historic Landmarks Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a designated "historic landmark". The current appraised value of the improvements is \$469,360. The current appraised value of the .719 acres is \$112,750. The property is zoned UMUD.

Date of Preparation of this Report: 14 August 1999

Prepared by: Emily D. Ramsey

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Statement of Significance

The Nebel Knitting Mill Annex

127 West Worthington Avenue

Charlotte, NC



Summary Paragraph

The Nebel Knitting Mill Annex, erected in 1946, is a structure that possesses local historic significance as a building that reflects, both in its style and its function, the push towards modernization and the tremendous growth that occurred in the Charlotte hosiery industry after World War II. William Nebel, a third-generation German knitter who brought the hosiery industry to Charlotte when he established the Nebel Knitting Company in 1923, was a pioneer in the hosiery industry. His company produced innovative styles for full-fashioned lady's hosiery until the late 1960s, and Nebel himself held over a dozen patents for his original designs. The Nebel Knitting Company initiated a period of rapid growth in the fledgling Charlotte hosiery industry throughout the 1920s and 1930s and created much needed diversity within the city's textile industry, which was dominated by cotton textile manufacturers. The Nebel Knitting Company continued to flourish through the Great Depression, with a newly expanded building located at 101 West Worthington Avenue. William Nebel and his company were in a prime position at the end of World War II to meet the tremendous demand for women's full-fashioned nylon hosiery, and in the post-war period the Nebel Knitting Company became the largest and most productive hosiery concern in Mecklenburg County, and an internationally known name in hosiery. As the center of a large expansion program designed to modernize the Nebel Knitting Company completely, the 1946 annex to the Nebel Knitting Mill is a tangible reminder of this boom time in Charlotte industry, and represents the importance of modernization within the textile industry during the post-war period.

Architecturally, the Nebel Knitting Mill Annex is significant as one of the few buildings within the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area designed in the Art Moderne style. Most textile mills in the area, including the adjacent Nebel Knitting Mill at 101 West Worthington Ave, were "revivalistic structures" which reflected the "conservative philosophy that characterized the political, social and economic thinking of Charlotte's business elite". Herman V. Biberstein's innovative design for the Nebel Knitting Mill Annex broke with this conservative trend. The strong horizontal lines of the facade, emphasized by closely spaced concrete stringcourses and subtly balanced with simple pilasters are elements which characterized the revolutionary art and architecture movements of the early twentieth century. The building was decorated only with its clean lines, understated details and symmetry - elements that were indicative of the Art Moderne style. Such a structure not only broke with the architectural tradition of the Charlotte's textile community, it also reflected the move towards a more modern industry. The Nebel Knitting Mill Annex housed the most up-to-date knitting machinery available after the war, and the modern elements of the structure reflected

the changes taking place within the industry, giving the Nebel Knitting Company a modern image to go along with its revolutionary knitting techniques.

Commerce and Industry Context and Historical Background Statement

The Nebel Knitting Mill Annex, erected in 1946, housed operations that contributed significantly to the revolutionary growth of the Southern hosiery industry within the Charlotte area during the boom period following World War II. When William Nebel, a German immigrant and third-generation knitter, came to Charlotte and established the Nebel Knitting Company in 1923, the city was "on the crest of the wave" in terms of its textile production and prosperity. Charlotte was, at that time, "the largest center in the South for textile mill machinery and equipment," and the city served as the heart of a large and profitable textile region that covered North and South Carolina as well as large parts of Tennessee and Georgia. Charlotte's reputation within the textile community made it an attractive site for a diverse array of new businesses and manufacturers, including William Nebel. When the Nebel Knitting Company began its small operation on the second floor of a building on East Kingston Avenue, it was the first knitting manufacturer in the Charlotte area. Although other knitting manufacturers soon followed (there were five hosiery mills in Charlotte by the 1930s), the Nebel Knitting Company continued to prosper. The company quickly outgrew its East Kingston Avenue location, and in 1925 Nebel moved his operations into a much larger building at 1822-1824 South Boulevard. By the end of the 1920s, the company had again expanded its production to meet the skyrocketing demand for women's full-fashioned hosiery. The construction of a new building, situated beside the Southern Railroad line at 101 West Worthington Avenue in the heart of the prestigious Dilworth industrial sector, reflected Nebel's tremendous success in Charlotte. The new mill was completed in 1927 and expanded in 1929 to more than double its original size, making it the largest hosiery mill in the city.

The economic devastation of the Great Depression, which destroyed many Charlotte textile manufacturers during the 1930s, did not stop production in the area's relatively new hosiery industry. The Nebel Knitting Company continued to produce nylon hosiery throughout the Depression, and William Nebel would later claim that his company, even during the most difficult times, had "never had a year when it wasn't in the black". The beginning of World War II opened even more opportunities in the hosiery industry. Many manufacturers switched to war-time production of nylon military supplies, which had replaced silk in the manufacturing of tents, ropes, and parachute material.

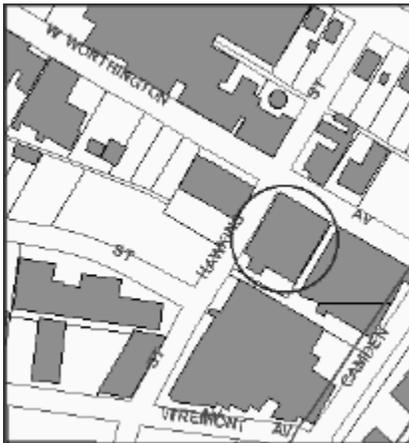
The post-war period was a tremendously prosperous time for the Nebel Knitting Company and for the industry as a whole. After the war, the Southern hosiery industry was poised to enter its biggest boom period to date. As soon as December of 1945, the *Charlotte Observer* proclaimed that there would soon be "a great expansion of the South's knitting industry", brought about by an unprecedented demand for women's full-fashioned hosiery; Taylor R. Durham, secretary of the Southern Hosiery Manufacturers Association, revealed in the article that "quite a number of companies [were] planning expansion of their production capacity". William Nebel, determined to take advantage of the boom in business and the new technologies within the knitting industry, outlined an ambitious plan for the expansion and complete modernization of the Nebel Knitting Mill. The cornerstone of this plan involved the building of a new, modern addition to the existing building at 101 West Worthington, which would give the company a total 125,000 square feet of working space. Nebel commissioned Charlotte architect Herman V. Biberstein, son of Richard C. Biberstein (who had designed the Nebel Knitting Mill) and head of the architectural firm Biberstein & Bowles since his father's death in 1931, to design the new addition. The resulting structure, the Nebel Knitting Mill Annex, was completed in 1946 and outfitted with the most modern knitting machinery available within the next two years. By 1949, *Women's Daily Wear* magazine reported that the Nebel Knitting Company was beginning "production of 60-gauge, 15-denier nylon full-fashioned hosiery" at its newly modernized plant.

To draw attention to the company's newly outfitted and modernized facilities, and to the innovative styles of women's hosiery produced in the mill's modern annex, William Nebel began an extensive and aggressive national advertising campaign in the late 1940s. The new ads, which appeared in prestigious women's magazines such as *Vogue*, *Charm*, *Bazaar*, *Seventeen* and *Glamour*, featured well-known movie star Jane Russell and helped to make Nebel a top name in hosiery not only in the South, but throughout the country. The company's success and its rising prestige within the industry during and after the 1940s made it not only the "largest and most productive hosiery concern in Mecklenburg County" but also one of the largest in the Southeast. William Nebel followed the lead of other major textile operators in the Carolinas and kept an office on the eighteenth floor of the Empire State Building. "Nebel and nylons", the *Charlotte News* declared in 1953, "are two words that are often spoken by the nation's retail merchants".

The Nebel Knitting Company led the Charlotte hosiery industry into a new era of modern manufacturing during the boom period following World War II. William Nebel, Charlotte-Mecklenburg's most successful hosiery manufacturer and a pioneer in the hosiery industry, not only brought the industry to Charlotte, but continued throughout the post-WWII period to push for modernization and innovation within the

hosiery industry. The Nebel Knitting Mill continued to produce women's hosiery and pantyhose until 1968, when the complex (including the original structure and the annex) was sold to Chadbourn, Inc. The Nebel Knitting Mill Annex is currently occupied by Design Center of the Carolinas.

Architectural Description and Historical Background Statement



The Nebel Knitting Mill Annex, constructed in 1946, stands on the corner of West Worthington Avenue and Hawkins Street at 127 West Worthington Avenue. The structure is one of many buildings that comprise the industrial sector of nearby Dilworth, Charlotte's first streetcar suburb. The location of the Nebel Knitting Mill Annex and its neighbors is intimately tied to three important events: the laying of the first Charlotte line of the Southern Railroad along South Boulevard in October of 1852; the development of Charlotte's first cross-town electric streetcar system in 1891; and the subsequent rise of Dilworth, Charlotte's first streetcar suburb. Edward Dilworth Latta and the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company developed the Dilworth area during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The key to Dilworth's long-term success as a residential community lay in the development of a nearby industrial sector, which brought hundreds of families to the area. Large manufacturing plants like the Atherton Cotton Mill, the Charlotte Trouser Factory, and the Park Manufacturing Company formed the basis of the new industrial district, which the *Charlotte Observer* dubbed in 1895, "the Manchester of Charlotte". "Because employees found residences in Dilworth," historian Dan Morrill explains, "the newly established industries in the suburb enabled the residential scheme of the Charlotte Consolidated Construction Company to survive." With easy access to both the railroad and a main streetcar line that ran from Dilworth to the intersection of Tryon Street and Trade Street (the heart of downtown Charlotte), it was inevitable that the area between South Boulevard and the railroad line in Dilworth would develop into a major industrial sector.

When William Nebel came to Charlotte in 1923 to set up the Nebel Knitting Company, the Dilworth industrial sector was a thriving area of diverse businesses and manufacturers of trousers, flour, shirts, textile supplies, elevators and heaters were just a few of the products that flowed out of the district. It was an ideal location for the

first Charlotte hosiery concern, and Nebel set up his modest operation in the second floor of a building on East Kingston Avenue. As the company prospered and expanded, Nebel kept his company near the Dilworth area, first moving to a larger building at 1822-1824 South Boulevard and finally constructing his own plant on West Worthington Avenue, bordering the railroad tracks.



By the time plans for a modern annex to the Nebel Knitting Mill were drawn up in 1945, the streetcar line was gone, and an ever-expanding network of paved highways that had begun converging in Charlotte during the 1920s made trucks a rival to the railroad as a means of transporting goods. The end of World War II signaled the beginning of a

modern era for the hosiery industry, and William Nebel's ambitious plans for the expansion and modernization of his plant and his products reflected the post-war boom in hosiery. The new, modern annex, which would house \$500,000 worth of top-of-the-line knitting equipment that Nebel had ordered, was the center of the expansion plan. The contract was awarded to the Atlanta Building Company in December of 1945, and a building permit was issued on January 29, 1946. Herman V. Biberstein, son of noted Charlotte architect Richard C. Biberstein, was chosen as the architect for the estimated \$150,000 project.



Designed in the distinctive 20th century Art Moderne style, which stressed the reflection of a structure's function through emphasis on the utilization of new technologies, simple massing and very little ornamentation, the building was a fitting symbol for the new direction that the Southern hosiery industry, led by the Nebel Knitting Company, was taking. Not only would the 30,000-square-foot, steel, concrete and brick

structure be outfitted with the most modern equipment, it would also feature "the most modern type of air-conditioning and artificial lighting" and a new form of insulation which would be "inside the masonry". Although Nebel intended the new annex and the existing plant to operate essentially as "one unit," the Nebel Knitting Mill Annex, with its distinctive and atypical Art Moderne elements, must have seemed an odd contrast to the more conservative style of the Nebel Knitting Company's main building, a traditional "revivalistic structure" that reflected "the conservative political, social, and economic thinking" of the past decades. H. V. Biberstein's innovative

design for the annex broke with these traditions, creating one of the few Art Moderne structures in the Charlotte area.

The Nebel Knitting Mill Annex consists of a single structure located on a rectangular lot on the corner of West Worthington Avenue and Hawkins Street, to the southeast of the center city area on the west side of South Boulevard and the Southern Railroad line. It borders the sidewalk on both the northeast and northwest sides, and faces West Worthington Avenue. The building is a two-story, square-shaped red brick building in common bond, five bays wide by six bays deep, with a flat roof interrupted by a centrally located arch which indicates the location of an interior atrium.

The facade of the building is done in a deep russet face brick. The strong horizontal lines of the facade are emphasized by closely spaced concrete stringcourses which lead the viewer to the front entrance, a centrally located recessed entryway covered by a curved metal roof which bears the name of the current occupant, the Design Center of the Carolinas. The entrance itself is highlighted with alternating rows of stack-bonded brick and concrete which surround the recess. The strong horizontal emphasis of the first floor of the facade is subtly balanced with simple brick pilasters in stack bond. A plain concrete stringcourse runs along the facade and visually separates the upper and lower floors. The fenestration of the building is regularly punctuated along the facade. Two groupings of three windows flank each side of a large central window that rises to the top of the arched roofline of the atrium. The windows have a rectangular, 5 over 6 configuration with clear glass panes and blue-painted metal muntins. Four grouping of two windows with the same configuration can be seen on the northwest side of the building.

The interior of the Nebel Knitting Mill Annex was remodeled extensively in the mid-1990s. The original layout, two separate stories of uninterrupted space designed to accommodate Nebel's large knitting machines, has been converted into a series of small business spaces surrounding a central atrium. Much of the second floor was removed to create the atrium; the original wood flooring was used to create the new second floor balconies. A new metal staircase rises to the second floor balconies at the front of the atrium. The fenestration on the facade and the northwest side, as well as clerestory windows above, were added to light the new space.

Although the building was altered during this 1995-96 remodeling, it still retains many of its important exterior features, and no changes have been made to the overall massing of the structure. The building retains its clean lines, understated details and symmetry - elements that were indicative of the Art Moderne style. The Nebel Knitting Mill Annex is a structure that is significant not only because it broke with the architectural tradition of Charlotte's textile community, but also because it is reflective of the move towards a more modern industry in the post-war years. The Nebel

Knitting Mill Annex housed the most up-to-date knitting machinery available after the war, and the modern elements of the actual structure reflected the changes taking place within the industry, giving the Nebel Knitting Company a modern image to go along with its revolutionary knitting techniques.