

Thrift Mill



1. Name and location of the property: The property known as the Thrift Mill is located at 8300 Moore's Chapel Road in Charlotte, North Carolina.

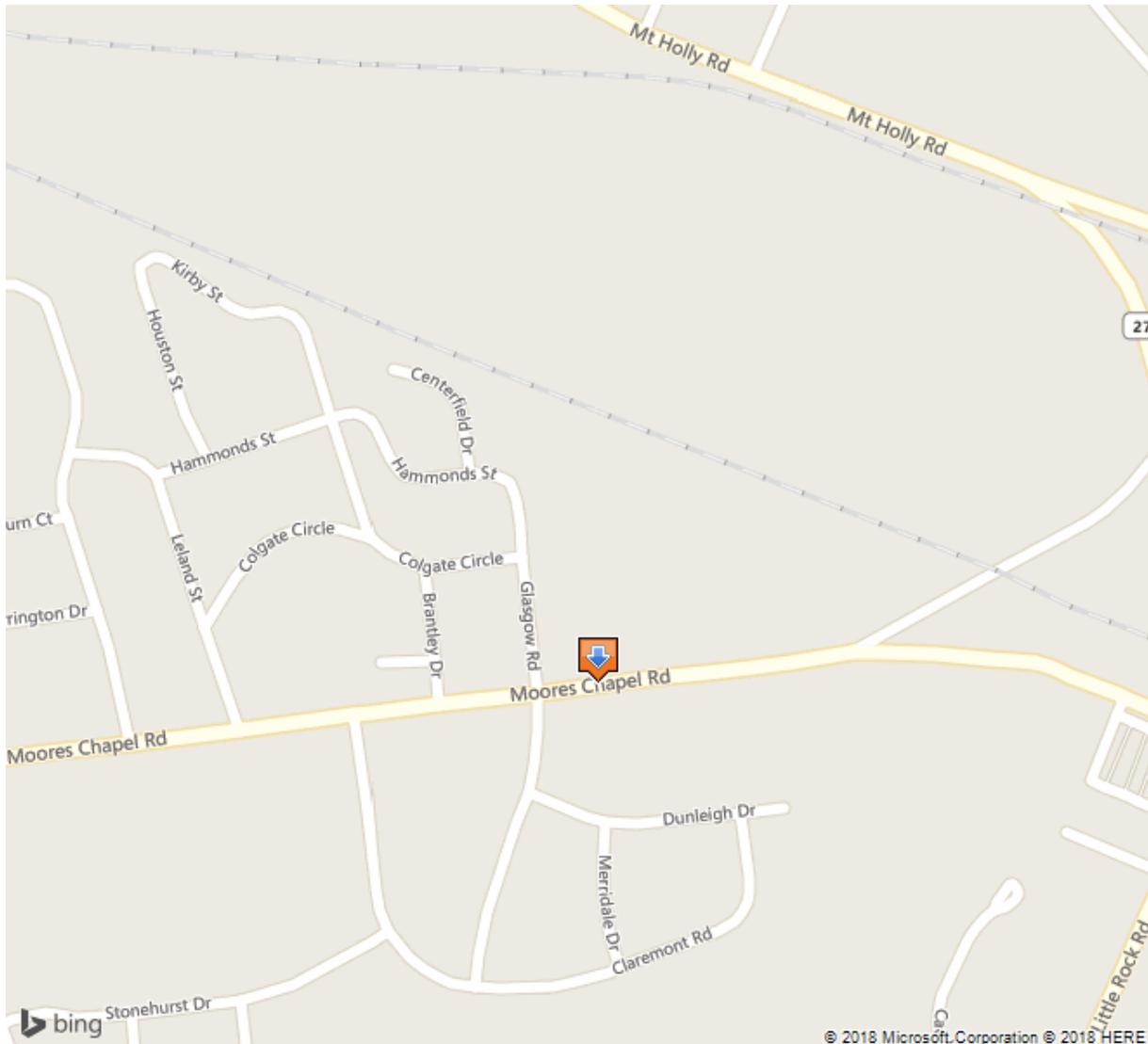
2. Name, address and telephone number of the present owner of the property: The owner of the property is:

Warehouse Investors, Inc.
Drawer 447
Columbia, South Carolina 29202

(803) 771-8880

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.



5. Current Deed Book Reference to the property: The most recent deed to this property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book 6130 on page 926. The Tax Parcel number of the property is #055-011-03.

6. A brief historical sketch of the property: This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Mary Beth Gatza.

7. A brief physical description of the property: This report contains a brief physical description of the property prepared by Mary Beth Gatza.

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

a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture, and/or cultural importance: The Commission judges that the property known as the Thrift Mill does possess special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations: 1) the Thrift Mill is one of the last big textile mills that was built in Charlotte-Mecklenburg during the mill-building period which lasted from 1881 to c. 1913. 2) the Thrift Mill is unusual in that it was situated in a rural area and was miles away from an urban workforce when it was originally built.

b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association: The Commission contends that the physical description by Mary Beth Gatza which is included in this report demonstrates that the Thrift 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 a designated "historic landmark." The current total appraised value of the 72,989 square feet is \$1,215,570. The property is zoned I-2.

Date of Preparation of this Report: 19 November 1991.

Prepared by: Mary Beth Gatza
314 West Eighth Street
Charlotte, North Carolina 28202

(704) 334-5255

Historical Overview

The Thrift Mill opened in 1912 in the burgeoning village of Thrift in Mecklenburg County. Thrift is located along the tracks of the Piedmont and Northern Railroad, which ran an electric line from Charlotte to Gastonia. The depot at Thrift was erected in 1911-12, and soon became a busy terminal, as commuter service between Thrift and Charlotte was offered on a daily basis. This, no doubt, made Thrift an attractive location for a textile mill.

The land was purchased in August 1912 for \$15,000 by the Thayer Manufacturing Company. Thayer was based in Massachusetts, but had principal offices in Charlotte. ¹ Unable to pay their debts, however, they were ordered by the court to sell the property at public sale on June 2, 1913. The highest and only bid received was from the Thrift Manufacturing Company, who purchased the property for \$59,000 in cash and \$127,000 in Thrift Manufacturing Company stock. In exchange for the cash and stock, the Thrift Manufacturing Company was deeded 120 acres and the existing buildings. The deed lists a "Factory building 154 x 225, two stories high; and weave shed 163 x 210, with a saw tooth roof, and basement; boiler room 42 x 46; brick chimney 450 H.P.; pump room 21 x 22; cotton warehouse 100 x 100; cotton opening room 31 x 42; also ten cottages for operatives." ² The Thrift Manufacturing Company continued operations for only twelve years. In 1924, the property was transferred to Henry P. Kendall, of Walpole, Massachusetts. ³ A newspaper article in the *Charlotte News* on March 25 of that year, describes Mr. Kendall as a "Boston Capitalist." While they were in town, he and his associates stayed at the newly-opened Hotel Charlotte and Mr. Kendall made a public statement concerning the acquisition. He "spoke with radiant optimism Tuesday of his hopes for the local plant and of his determination to continue it on the same high basis of efficiency in operation as has characterized the administration of those from whom he made the purchase." ⁴ In addition, Mr. Kendall was quoted as saying that the mill was "one of the outstanding cotton goods plants in the entire South, and of the country. Its product...was known Nationally as ranking with the best produced anywhere." ⁵ Of Charlotte, he remarked: "I am delighted with what I have come to know of North Carolina and of Charlotte in particular. You have a wonderful city here and one that is destined to expand into one of the great populous centers of the Southeast. Everything that a city needs to make it develop in a business and industrial way, you have down here."⁶

In the mid-1920s, the mill at Thrift was operating with 30,240 spindles, 676 looms and 60 cards. They consumed about 1,500,000 pounds of raw cotton (one half of it from local sources) and the value of the product (gauze) was about \$1,500,000. ⁷ Kendall's purchase in North Carolina would prove to be but one in a series of acquisitions that would build his company into a giant. At the time of the Thrift purchase, he also owned two mills in South Carolina (the Wateree in Camden, and the Addison in Edgefield), and two in New England (the Lewis Manufacturing Company and the Slatersville Finishing Company). The newspaper article explains: "Some years ago, Mr. Kendall said, he decided that it would be economical for him to develop cotton manufacturing in the South in order to have sufficient goods for use in his Massachusetts finishing plants." ⁸

The Kendall empire had its beginnings in a small bleachery in Walpole, Massachusetts in 1903. At the time, Kendall employed less than eighty people there.

By 1948, a mere 45 years later, the company had more than 7,000 employees in eighteen plants. The Fourteen domestic plants were clustered in New England (5), South Carolina (6), North Carolina (1), and the Midwest (2). Foreign plants were located in Canada, Mexico, Cuba and Buenos Aires. They operated a total of 300,000 spindles and 6,400 looms, and used about 100,000 bales of cotton yearly.⁹

Despite the fact that its productivity had already been attested to, Kendall had immediate plans for the mill at Thrift. He announced his intention to enlarge the mill and build new operatives cottages.¹⁰ *Agricultural Mecklenburg and Industrial Charlotte*, published around 1925, verifies that "extensive improvements are contemplated and some already under way, by the new owners."¹¹ That "extensive" improvements were enacted, however, is questionable. No physical evidence on the mill building remains to suggest a 1920s period of construction. All of the principal structures remaining in 1990 were mentioned in the deed of 1913. The existing additions to the mill building date from much later.

By the 1940s, the Kendall Company was well established and produced a variety of products. A self-published company booklet, written in 1948, explains that: "The Company's three divisions--Kendall Mills Grey, Kendall Mills Finishing, and Bauer & Black (surgical dressings)--operate both as independent and as interdependent units. For each division serves the others, as supplier or customer." Kendall Mills Grey produced "grey" cloth, which is the woven, but unbleached and unfinished cotton cloth. It was this division that acted as supplier to the others. The grey cloth was shipped either to the Finishing Division or to Bauer & Black. The Bauer & Black division was known for its line of surgical dressings and products. Kendall Mills Finishing transformed the grey cloth into a number of marketable products, sold under the "Curity" trademark.¹³

The mill at Thrift was the headquarters for the Grey Division, also called the Cotton Mill Division. It was this division which supported the others by transforming the raw, baled cotton into the intermediate product. The grey cloth was then sold to the Finishing Division and to Bauer & Black at prices much lower than the open market. In this way, Kendall Mills was able to keep prices down and thus encourage demand.

After leaving the mill at Thrift, the grey cloth would travel to any of the three finishing plants or six Bauer & Black plants. The finishing plants were all located in New England (Walpole and Griswoldville in Massachusetts, and Slatersville in Rhode Island). There, the cloth was transformed into a number of consumer products, sold under the Kendall, Clex, Perx, Sabel, Webril, Rymplecloth and Curity brand names. Items produced include a variety of fabrics, gauze, cotton balls, mosquito netting, milk filters, diapers. The Webril non-woven fabrics were used for tea bags, permanent wave pads and casket linings.¹⁴

Bauer & Black may not be a familiar household term, but the brand name, it was said, "carries an enviable reputation for quality and responsibility." ¹⁵ Initially, they sold only to hospitals, but eventually expanded the line to include home first aid products. Included in this category are first aid kits, gauze bandages and pads marketed under the familiar Curity trademark. Athletic supporters were sold under both Bauer & Black and Bike brand names. ¹⁶ (For a full listing of Kendall products, see appendix 1.)

Despite this glowing picture of productivity, the Kendall Company sold the mill at Thrift in 1958. A purchase agreement was signed in April of that year between Kendall and U.P.D., Inc. According to a former company executive, Allen Knitting Mills was the actual owner, and U.P.D. was a name used only for the purchase of the property. Allen Knitting Mills had three divisions. Standard Textile Mills was the knitting mill, the Thrift Dye Works was located in the dye house, and the United Bonding Company also operated on the premises. United Bonding Company produced laminated fabrics during the 1960s. Popular for coats and even dresses, the fabric was made by sandwiching a foam core between a backing fabric and a facing fabric. ¹⁷

Operations continued in this manner until 1973 when the property was transferred to Standard Textile Mills, Inc. At that time, the knitting and bonding mills closed and only the dye works remained. ¹⁸ In 1980, Standard borrowed 1.85 million dollars from the Connecticut Bank and Trust Company but was unable to repay the loan. They defaulted, and the property was sold at public auction on October 15, 1981. The highest bidder, for \$250,000, was the Economic Development Administration (an agency of the United States Department of Commerce), who then became the legal owner. They held the property for less than one year before selling to Donrick Trade Center. ¹⁹

Donrick was a father-son partnership, and used the premises for a warehouse and auction center. The elder partner, Don Cox, was known and respected in the community until his death in recent years. Donrick conveyed the property in 1989 to Warehouse Investors of South Carolina who lease space for general warehousing and artists studios. ²⁰

The Thrift Mill is unique in Mecklenburg County because it is the only mill which was built essentially in isolation. Other mills were erected in more densely populated sections where there would be a ready supply of mill workers. Even the mills built outside the Charlotte vicinity were all located in a town of some size (Davidson, Cornelius, Huntersville and Pineville all had textile mills.) In addition, it is probably the last of the big cotton mills built during the mill-building period which lasted from 1881 to c. 1913.

Endnotes

- ¹ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 291, p. 558.
- ² Mecklenburg County Deed Book 312, pp. 275-76.
- ³ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 559, p. 329.
- ⁴ *Charlotte News*, 25 March 1924, p. 1.
- ⁵ *Charlotte News*, 25 March 1924, p. 9.
- ⁶ *Charlotte News*, 25 March 1924, p. 9.
- ⁷ Edgar T. Thompson, *Agricultural Mecklenburg and Industrial Charlotte Social and Economic*. (Charlotte: Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, c. 1925 ?), p. 143.
- ⁸ *Charlotte News*, 25 March 1924, p. 9.
- ⁹ The Kendall Company, *The Kendall Story* (n.p., 1948), pp. 1,9.
- ¹⁰ *Charlotte News*, 25 March 1924, p. 1.
- ¹¹ The Kendall Company, *The Kendall Story*, p. 143.
- ¹² The Kendall Company, *The Kendall Story*, p. 1.
- ¹³ The Kendall Company, *The Kendall Story*, pp. 1-5.
- ¹⁴ The Kendall Company, *The Kendall Story*, pp. 7, 21.
- ¹⁵ *The Kendall Story*, p. 9.
- ¹⁶ *The Kendall Story*, p. 24.
- ¹⁷ Interview with Lou Holtzman by Christina Wright, May 1991.
- ¹⁸ Interview with Lou Holtzman by Christina Wright, May 1991.
- ¹⁹ Mecklenburg County Deed Book 4306, p. 687; DB 4521, p. 843.

Architectural Description

The Thrift Mill complex contains three main buildings, two smaller structures, and a water tower. All extant structures appear to date from the initial, 1912-13 period of construction, though the main mill building has received two later additions.

The main mill building is the largest and most imposing structure in the complex. It is essentially a rectangle, with small tower-like projections at the northeast and northwest corners. The brick building stands two stories tall and seven bays wide. The entire structure is covered by a shallow-pitched, front-gabled roof, with a clerestory which runs the length of the building. All of the windows are large, multi-paned, industrial steel sash windows. All are topped by brick segmental arches and have cast stone sills. A few windows have been bricked in, but the majority are merely boarded up.

There are two later additions to the main building. One runs the length of the south elevation and appears to date from the mid-twentieth century. It is said to have been constructed ca. 1968-69, and thus would have been constructed during Allen Mills' tenure at the site.¹ The other addition, on the northwest corner, enlarges the space which connects the main structure with the weave shed, and is likely from the Kendall period.

The interior of the main building is characterized by large open spaces, pierced only by round iron support columns. The upper floor is illuminated by the clerestory windows which run the length of the building. The structure of the clerestory is supported by massive triangular truss framing.

The weave shed is impressive in itself. Almost as large as the main structure, the salient feature is its sawtooth roof. The building is oriented north-south, with the skylight windows opening to the north. This was so that the space would be illuminated with indirect, natural sunlight by day. Like the main building, the interior is a single open space. It is illuminated from above by the sawtooth skylights, which are supported also by iron columns.

A similar north-facing skylight is found on the office bay of the warehouse building. On this building, however, the roofline behind the window forms a semi-circle, rather than the more usual sawtooth configuration. The office section of the warehouse is all brick, whereas the remainder of the building is frame with brick firewalls. Originally, a short spur from the P & N tracks ran alongside this building, next to the concrete loading platform. Here, raw material could be unloaded from the train directly into the warehouse.

Other structures on the property include a brick pump house, a small brick structure (function unknown), and an original water tower. The adjacent water tower serves the mill village nearby and is no longer a part of this tax parcel.

Although the original mill equipment is no longer extant, the Thrift Mill retains a very high degree of integrity. Only a few of the windows have been sealed, a common alteration in buildings of this type. Virtually all interior and exterior fabric is original and in good general condition. In addition, all of the original structures are still standing. Nearby, the mill village, complete with baseball field, remains intact, though various alterations to the houses have taken place over the years. About one-half mile away, there is an old mill cemetery. It is the only such cemetery identified in either the 1988 County Survey or the 1989 City Survey.

Notes

¹ Interview with Lou Holtzman by Christina Wright, May 1991.