UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY
NOMINATION FORM

Continuation Sheet | Item Number | Page

Name Historic - Columbia Mills Building
Common - Mount Vernon Mill

Location - North of Gervais Street, on the Congaree River
Classification - Building

Owner - State of South Carolina
c/o Mike Copeland, Director
Division of General Services
300 Gervais Street, Columbia, S.C. 29201

Representation in Existing Surveys

Inventory of Historic Places in South Carolina, 1981

Description - The Columbia Mills Building is a massive, four-story brick factory. Construction of the mill commenced on 8 April 1893; the first phase of the factory was completed by June 1894. Lockwood, Greene, and Company of Boston served as engineers and architects; and the William A. Chapman Company of Providence, Rhode Island, was the contractor. The building, which provided for the manufacture of cotton duck fabric, was conceived as a U-shaped structure; however, only two parts of the U were built.[1] The existing complex consists of the main mill building, which is L-shaped; an extension of the north projecting wing; the boiler house with its seventy-eight foot chimney, located at the center of the complex; the cotton sheds on the west side of the complex; a metal water tower; and two one-story detached mill office buildings.

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Significance - During the late nineteenth century the cotton textile industry in South Carolina experienced a period of remarkable growth. By the turn of the century the state was one of the leading manufacturers of cotton mill products in the country.[3] The Columbia Mills Building, which housed one of the largest textile concerns in South Carolina, represents the importance of this industry to the state. In addition, the Columbia Mills Building is believed to be the first textile plant in the nation to be operated by electricity. This innovation meant that textile mills no longer had to be located adjacent to their source of power. By 1923 approximately two-thirds of the horsepower required to operate the textile mills in the United States was generated by electric motors.[4]

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Acreage 5.5

Verbal Boundary Description The nominated property is shown as the red line on the accompanying Richland County Tax Map # 5, drawn at a scale of 1 inch = 100 feet. This boundary includes the historic mill building and its extensions, while excluding the adjacent non-historic property.

UTM Reference Point 17/495560/3761800

Other Information

Description Continued

The main, L-shaped factory building,which is parallel to Gervais Street, has four floors and a full basement. An attached three-story wing (north projecting wing) is parallel to Pulaski Street. (See Plan A.) The foundation of the building is concrete, and the walls are of common bond brick, three feet thick. The regular fenestration consists of large windows with four-course segmental brick arches and granite sills. All of the windows have been bricked in. A shallow gable roof extends over the walls with the rafter ends exposed.

The four-story block has four working floors, consisting of an open hall, approximately 290 feet long and 100 feet wide divided by seven files of wooden columns, twelve and one-half feet on center, with twenty-eight columns in each file, spaced ten feet on center, supporting the ceilings. A smaller hall, at the west end of the four-story block, approximately ninety feet by 100 feet, has three files of wooden columns, twenty-five feet on center, with seven columns in each file ten feet apart, supporting the ceilings. The brick walls are unfinished on the interior. The floors are of maple with one-inch thick flooring laid over a solid subfloor of four-by-six maple beams. The heating, ventilating, and humidifying systems are located in the basement.

The three-story, north projecting wing of the mill originally was approximately 140 feet long and 129 feet wide; nine files of columns supported its ceilings. (See Plan B.) The addition to the north projecting wing, which was conceived in the original plans, added 150 feet to the wing, repeating the design of the original. (See Plan C.) The original mill had 220,000 square feet of working space; the addition added 60,000 square feet. The addition was completed by 1901.[2]

Significance Continued

With the extension in 1891 of the early nineteenth century Columbia Canal as far as Gervais Street, a potential source of power for industry became available in Columbia.[5] (The Columbia Canal was listed in the National Register, 15 January 1979). Soon after the completion of the canal, Charles K. Oliver, formerly with Druid Mills of Baltimore, Maryland, chose Columbia as the site for a cotton duck mill. Aretas Blood of Manchester, New Hampshire, provided much of the financial backing for the mill and served as the first president of the Board of Directors of the Columbia Mills Company, which applied for a charter on 26 January 1893.[6]

Oliver, who had been elected general manager and treasurer, brought Steven Greene of Lockwood, Greene, and Company as resident engineer for the mill. Because of geographical reasons Greene decided to situate the mill on a bluff about 600 feet east of the canal. With the mill on this site, difficulties were encountered in planning for the mechanical transmission of power from the canal bank opposite the mill, over the canal, and into the mill. As a result Greene and Oliver, with the encouragement of Sidney B. Paine of the General Electric Company, decided to turn to electricity.[7]

In addition to the mill, which was constructed between April 1893 and June 1894, a power house was built on the canal to provide the electricity.[8] (The Columbia Mills Power House Ruins are included in the Columbia Canal nomination.) On 12 June 1894 The State newspaper reported, "Cotton manufacturing on the Columbia canal began yesterday, and the city entered upon the new era of its industrial life."[9] The mill, which had 18,000 spindles and produced cotton duck, was completely powered by electricity. The generators, specially

manufactured by the General Electric Company, were the largest that had ever been made by that company. Revolving fans helped control the temperature and an air moistening system regulated the humidity. The motors were installed on the ceiling in order to leave room on the floor for the textile machinery. The factory had a capacity of 700 looms. Most of the machinery was American-made, except for the carding room machinery, which came from England.[10] A residential community for the operatives was constructed across the Congaree River. (New Brookland Historic District was listed in the National Register 10 October 1978.)

After new machinery was added in 1896 and the old power plant became inadequate, a new plant was constructed at the foot of Gervais Street.[11] (The Columbia Hydro Plant is included in the Columbia Canal nomination.) By 1907 the Columbia Mills Company operated 30,740 spindles and 498 looms. It consumed 18,000 bales of cotton in that year. This was more cotton than any other plant in the Columbia area; only seven companies in the state consumed more. The Columbia Mills Company ranked tenth among the approximately 150 textile mills in South Carolina in value of manufactured product in 1907.[12]

Columbia Mills, which became part of Mount Vernon-Woodberry Cotton Duck Company, Mount Vernon-Woodberry Mills, Inc., and finally Mount Vernon Mills, Inc., continued to manufacture cotton duck until 1981 when the plant was closed.[13] The mill building was recently donated to the State of South Carolina and will be adapted for use as the South Carolina State Museum.

Columbia, S.C. South Caroliniana Library. A. L. Hardendorff, "Plan of Columbia Mills Company," 18 October 1901.

Columbia, S.C. South Caroliniana Library. Lockwood, Greene, and Company, "Plat of Property of Columbia Mills Company, Columbia, S.C.," 26 October 1893.

Kohn, August. The Cotton Mills of South Carolina. Columbia, S.C.: Department of Agriculture, Commerce, and Immigration, 1907.

Paine, Sidney B. "The Story of the First Electrically Operated Textile Mill," 1 June 1930.

Pratt, Horace L. "Bonus Yarn Mill." Textile Industries, June 1966.

Smith, Fenelon Devere. "The Economic Development of the Textile Industry in the Columbia, South Carolina, Area From 1790 Through 1916." Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1952.

Sanborn Map Company, Insurance Maps of Columbia, South Carolina, 1898, 1904, 1910.

The State (Columbia, S.C.), 26 April; 3, 12 June 1894.

U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census. Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Manufactures, vol. 8.

Columbia Mills Building
Footnotes

[1]Lockwood, Greene, and Company, "Plat of Property of Columbia Mills Company, Columbia, S.C.," 26 October 1893, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, S.C.; The State (Columbia, S.C.), 3 June 1894.

[2]Fenelon DeVere Smith, "The Economic Development of the Textile Industry in the Columbia, South Carolina, Area From 1790 through 1916" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1952), pp. 75-76; A. L. Hardendorff, "Plan of Columbia Mills Company," 18 October 1901, South Caroliniana Library.

[3]U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900: Manufactures, 8: 827-829

[4]Smith, pp. 68-74; Sidney B. Paine, "The Story of the First Electrically Operated Textile Mill," 1 June 1930, pp. 1-12.

[5]Smith, pp. 50-63.

[6]Ibid., pp. 64-68.

[7]Ibid., pp. 68-74; Paine, pp. 2-4.

[8]Smith, pp. 75-78.

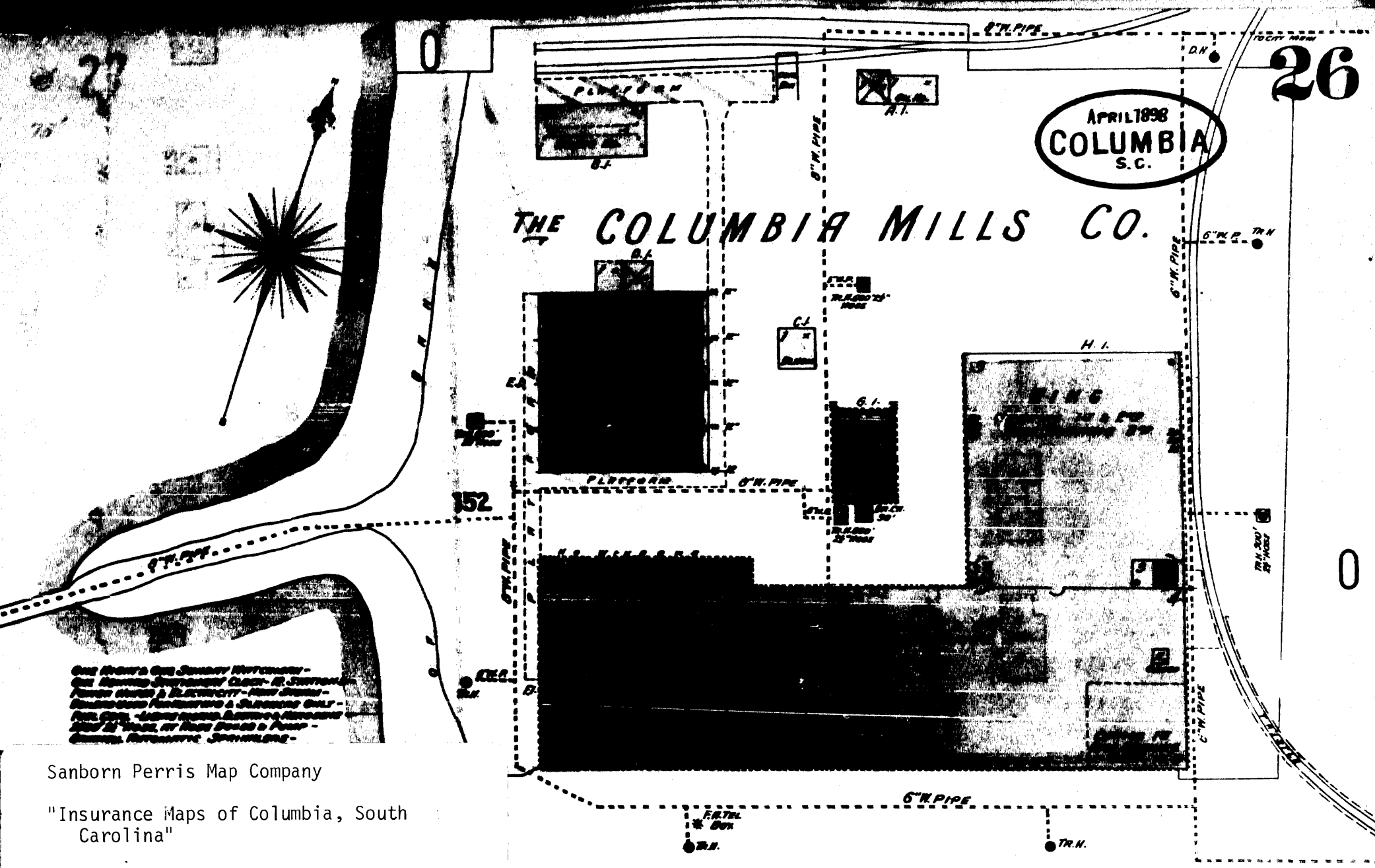
[9]The State (Columbia, S.C.), 12 June 1894.

[10]The State 26 April 1894; Smith, pp. 72-82.

[11]Smith, pp. 84-86.

[12]Ibid., p. 84; August Kohn, The Cotton Mills of South Carolina (Columbia, S.C.: Department of Agriculture, Commerce, and Immigration, 1907), pp. 97, 180-183, 196.

[13]Smith, pp. 90-115; Horace L. Pratt, "Bonus Yarn Mill," Textile Industries, June 1966.



Sanborn Perris Map Company

"Insurance Maps of Columbia, South Carolina"

April 1898

(PLAN B)