Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JAN 14 1980
DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Estey Organ Company Factory

AND/OR COMMON
Former Estey Organ Company Factory

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Birge Street — NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
Brattleboro — VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
Vermont

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Vermont	50	Windham	025

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	__PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	X PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	X COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	X YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Multiple ownership: see list on Continuation Sheet No. 4-1.

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN — STATE

__ VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Office of the Town Clerk

STREET & NUMBER
230 Main Street

CITY, TOWN — STATE
Brattleboro — Vermont

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Vermont Historic Sites and Structures Survey

DATE
1971 — __FEDERAL X STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

CITY, TOWN — STATE
Montpelier — Vermont

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
__EXCELLENT	X DETERIORATED	X UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
X GOOD	__RUINS	X ALTERED	__MOVED DATE_____
X FAIR	__UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The former Estey Organ Company factory comprises a nineteenth century industrial complex of eleven principal buildings together with several outbuildings and related structures. The complex occupies a narrow terrace on a hillside above Whetstone Brook, bounded on the east by Birge Street and on the north by Estey Street. The latter street climbs the hillside to the west, intersecting Organ Street (which parallels Birge Street) on the next higher terrace above the steep slope whose base defines the west edge of the factory complex.

Seven of the principal buildings (Nos. 1 through 7-8) constitute a uniform facade line along the west side of Birge Street, oriented with their longer axes perpendicular to the street and sited symmetrically forty feet apart. Some of the alleys between the buildings lead to the interior yard and driveway of the complex, whose axis parallels Birge Street. Along both sides of the interior yard and driveway there stand several principal and lesser buildings oriented generally parallel to the north-south driveway in contrast to the row fronting Birge Street.

Excepting only the northernmost Building No. 7-8, the buildings in the front row appear essentially identical. The six buildings share the following characteristics: (1) rectangular plans of about 30 feet by 100 feet, or four bays by ten bays (except No. 3, which is 39 feet or five bays wide), (2) height of three and one-half stories, (3) wood frames, and (4) gable roofs oriented perpendicular to Birge Street. And the six identical buildings share with the northernmost No. 7-8 the extraordinary characteristics of being sheathed with slate shingles on their wall surfaces and pressed tin on their corner boards and cornices. Slate shingles also sheath the walls of the wings added to Buildings No. 5 and 6 along with the gable elevations of the similar Building No. 11 that connects the rear elevations of Buildings No. 2 and 3. Several of the buildings in the complex (Nos. 1, 5, 6, 13, 25, and 26) display the more usual use of slate shingles for roof sheathing.

At the south end of the Birge Street row of slate-sheathed buildings stands Building No. 1 of the former Estey Organ factory, which was constructed in 1871. This 31-foot wide building retains its original slate sheathing both on its walls and roof. Its main (east) gable elevation presents to the street a canopied main entrance in the center-right bay. Toward the rear of the left (south) elevation, an added loading dock and shed-roofed entrance serves the furniture moving and storage activities of the current occupant; the same company owns and uses several other buildings in the complex.

Next to the north of Building No. 1 stands the nearly identical, 32-foot-wide Building No. 2, which also was constructed in 1871. The two buildings are connected by two lesser structures: a post-1942, one-story, wood-frame, clapboarded addition that follows the facade line and infills the former alley between the buildings, and a two-story, wood-frame, shed-roofed, partly enclosed gangway (called a "covered bridge" by the Estey company) attached to the rear elevations that provides access between the second and third stories of the buildings.

Building No. 2 varies from the common design only in the treatment of its main entrance, which consists of a doubleleaf doorway surmounted by a rectangular transom. Its roof is now sheathed with composition shingles instead of the original slate.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION	
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE	
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE	
__1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER	
X 1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION	
__1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	X INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		__INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1870's BUILDER/ARCHITECT Unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The former Estey Organ Company factory complex in Brattleboro, Vermont holds national significance both for its historical role in the United States organ industry and its unique architectural character. By the turn of the twentieth century, the family-owned Estey complex had expanded to become the largest organ factory in the world. The company economically dominated the community of Brattleboro and ranked among the largest industries of Vermont. Its owners and employees contributed numerous inventions in the techniques and components of organ building, and were prominent participants in the political and social affairs both of Brattleboro and Vermont. At its ultimate development, the Estey factory comprised nearly thirty buildings, among which a core of seven were given the unusual exterior sheathing of slate shingles. Those seven buildings remain intact and constitute an outstanding rhythmic uniform facade line along Birge Street, the public approach to the complex. This array of slate-sheathed buildings, of similar scale and massing, is unrivaled in the State.

The founder of the company, Jason Estey, entered the organ business somewhat by chance and after it had been established in Brattleboro by its pioneers - including Samuel H. and Joseph L. Jones, Riley Burdett, and Silas M. Waite. The Jones brothers actually founded the organ industry of Brattleboro when, in 1846, they started making melodeons (a variety of small reed organ) in a rented gristmill. Riley Burdett, a prolific inventor of organ components, joined the firm the following year. Late in 1850, a successor firm rented space in a building owned by Jacob Estey, who then conducted a successful pump and lead pipe business.

Born in 1814 across the Connecticut River in nearby Hinsdale, New Hampshire, Estey moved to Brattleboro in 1835 and took over an existing plumbing business. Early in 1852, he obtained Riley Burdett's share in the melodeon business (possibly to satisfy a claim for unpaid rent). "Mr. Estey was no musician, but his insight told him that the musical instinct was just awakening in the American people, and that the business had in it promising possibilities."[1] In March-April 1853, the firm built the first large reed organ made in Brattleboro, the forerunner of the hundreds of thousands that would follow during the phenomenal expansion of the Estey business.

The first simple reed organs in the United States were introduced early in the nineteenth century. According to Gellerman, "the reed organ uses a 'free' reed, which is fixed at one end and free to vibrate at the other, as opposed to the 'beating' reed commonly used in pipe organs."[2] Prior to 1846, Gellerman estimates, fewer than 300 reed organs had been built in the United States, the products of hand craftsmen working in small shops.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet 9-1

UTM NOT VERIFIED

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approx. 5

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	18	698750	4746525
B			
C			
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See Continuation Sheet 10-1

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Hugh H. Henry

ORGANIZATION

Division for Historic Preservation

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

Pavilion Building

TELEPHONE

(802) 828-3226

CITY OR TOWN

Montpelier

STATE

Vermont

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE X LOCAL ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE William B. Powers

TITLE Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer DATE 1-3-80

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION DATE 4/17/80

ATTEST: KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER DATE 3/7/80

GPO 892-453

FHR-8-300A
(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JAN 14 1980
DATE ENTERED MAR 17

CONTINUATION SHEET 4-1 ITEM NUMBER 4 PAGE 1

Property owners of the Former Estey Organ Company Factory.

Buildings No. 1, 2, 3, 3A, 4, 9, 10, 11, 18, 19, 23, and 29:

Bolster Warehouse, Inc.
18 Birge Street
Brattleboro, Vermont 05301

Building No. 5:

Louise B. Renaud
Fairground Road
Brattleboro, Vermont 05301

Building No. 6:

Glen A., Philip G., and Ellen C. Bolster and Sherry B. Amidon
R.D. 1, Box 88
Putney, Vermont 05346

Building No. 7-8:

Basketville, Inc.
Putney, VT 05346

Buildings No. 13 and 14:

Frank G. and Constance R. Wilson
Putney, Vermont 05346

Buildings No. 25 and 26:

Alfred L. Root
12 Fairground Road
Brattleboro, VT 05301

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Interconnections also exist between Building No. 2 and the adjacent No. 3, placed at the rear of the buildings. Their facing side elevations are connected by Building No. 3A, a one-story, five-bay, wood-frame, slate-sheathed, and shed-roofed ell that extends 40 feet by 50 feet. And the gangway that connects the rear elevations of No. 1 and 2 also extends to the rear of No. 3.

Constructed in 1870 as one of the four original buildings in the complex, Building No. 3 differs from its five counterparts by having its 9-foot main (east) gable facade subdivided into five bays rather than the usual four. Also, near the rear of its right (north) elevation, a full-height, slate-sheathed elevator tower projects from the wall plane under a transverse gable roof. Both the tower roof and the main roof of the building are now sheathed with composition shingles.

At the rear of Building No. 3, a two-story, slate-sheathed extension connects it to the northeast end of Building No. 11 of the former Estey Organ factory, which is oriented parallel to Birge Street (and connected also to the rear of Building No. 2 by the contiguous gangway). This two and one-half story building extends 35 feet by 105 feet, with five bays across its gable (north and south) elevations and ten bays along its side elevations. The bays are punctuated generally by six-over-six sash windows. Although now clapboarded on its west elevation (possibly the result of alteration), the wood-frame building is sheathed with slate shingles on its gable elevations in the manner of the buildings fronting Birge Street. Its composition-shingled gable roof is distinguished by two short monitors spaced along the ridge; the monitors are lighted by three six-pane windows both on their east and west sides. A one-story, shed-roofed wing has been added running nearly the full length of the west elevation.

Two shed-roofed loading docks extend from the north side of Building No. 3 to the facing elevation of the nearly identical Building No. 4; one dock serves the elevator tower. Also constructed in 1870 as one of the four original buildings in the complex, Building No. 4 presents to Birge Street the most finely detailed main entrance in the row, and possibly the only one that retains its original appearance. A paneled double-leaf doorway is surmounted by a fanlight set in a rectangular transom; a metal plaque reading "Nº 4" is affixed to the transom bar above the doors. The gable roof of this building is now sheathed with composition shingles. A one-story, two-bay, wood-frame, slate-sheathed ell is attached to No. 4 near the rear of its left (south) elevation.

Attached to the rear (west) elevation of the ell of Building No. 4 is Building No. 19, one of two brick buildings remaining in the complex. This one-story, shed-roofed structure extends 28 feet by 45 feet, with two bays across its west elevation and three bays along its south elevation. Its segmental-arched window openings are fitted with twelve-over-eight sash.

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JAN 14 1980
DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

The 100-foot brick chimney that formerly served the boiler plant of the Estey Organ factory remains standing near the northwest corner of Building No. 4. Constructed in 1871, it has been isolated by the demolition (in 1971) of the boiler plant (Building No. 20). Twelve feet square in cross-section at its base, the chimney tapers upward to a corbeled top that displays a recessed decorative panel on each face.

Next to the north of Building No. 4 stands the nearly identical Building No. 5. Also constructed in 1870 as one of the four original buildings in the complex, this building retains slate shingles on its roof. A large double-faced clock projects perpendicularly from the gable end of its main (east) facade. Its foundation is being partly rebuilt with concrete. Attached to its rear (west) elevation is a two-story, four-bay wing also sheathed with slate shingles and capped by a shallow-pitched roof. Building No. 5 is now occupied by a wood-working shop.

Across a gravel driveway to the north of Building No. 5 stands the slightly altered Building No. 6. Also constructed in 1870 as one of the four original buildings in the complex, this building retains slate shingles on its roof. Its main (east) facade is distinguished by a large sign affixed to the wall between the second- and third-story windows that reads "Estey Organs," dating probably from the nineteenth century. (This building formerly contained the Estey company offices.) During its conversion to a storefront in the 1960's, the first story of the main facade was completely sheathed with plywood panels; currently (1979) the storefront is vacant.

On its rear (west) elevation, Building No. 6 has been extended by the addition in 1892 of a three-story wing also sheathed with slate shingles. The side (north and south) elevations of the wing are punctuated by three bays of paired six-over-six sash. Atop the ridge of the shallow-pitch roof stands a full-length, slate-sheathed monitor lighted on each side by a band of five eight-pane windows.

The northernmost building in the slate-sheathed row along Birge Street differs substantially from the other six. Building No. 7-8 constitutes a reconstruction and enlargement of the original Buildings No. 7 and 8 that matched the others in the row, and were constructed in 1872 and 1873 respectively. In 1906-07, the two buildings were joined and raised to four full stories capped by a shallow-pitch roof oriented perpendicular to the street. The resulting main (east) facade extends 100 feet with fourteen bays along the street while the depth of the building remains its original ten bays. On the first story of the main facade, the original slate sheathing has been replaced by wide clapboards and some original windows have been replaced with smaller sizes. Two large sliding doors now dominate the first story and serve the current use of the building as a warehouse for a basket company.

Directly behind Building No. 7-8 and oriented parallel to Birge Street stands the brick Building No. 26, the most finely detailed building in the complex. Now converted to a garage by a trucking company, this over-scaled one and one-half story building was

constructed in 1902 to provide the clear space necessary for the erection and testing of large pipe organs. The building extends 42 feet by 73 feet, with three bays across its main (north) facade and five bays along its side (east and west) elevations. The individual bays are defined by corbeled buttresses that rise to a corbeled frieze under a wood cornice. The gable roof is sheathed with slate shingles.

The main facade of Building No. 26 is now dominated by two large overhead garage doors that have been installed in the enlarged center and right bay openings, replacing the original doorway and window. The left bay retains its original paired nine-over-nine sash under a six-pane transom; the entire window opening is enframed by a segmental-arched brick lintel and a rusticated granite sill. Centered in the gable end is a pair of twelve-pane windows with a similar lintel and sill.

The side elevations of the building are punctuated by symmetrically arranged windows identical to that in the left bay of the main facade. An original central doorway on the east elevation has been closed. A rear entrance on the west elevation consists of a double-leaf doorway surmounted by a transom fitted with side-by-side twelve-pane windows.

Attached to the south elevation of Building No. 26 is the smaller-scaled, two-story, wood-framed, clapboarded Building No. 25. Also oriented parallel to Birge Street, this building extends 30 feet by 73 feet, with four bays across its south gable elevation and six bays along its side (east and west) elevations. Its gable roof is sheathed with slate shingles. A one-story, shed-roofed wing has been added along the length of the east elevation.

Directly across a gravel driveway to the west of Building No. 25 (and parallel to it) stands the two and one-half story, wood-frame, clapboarded Building No. 13 on a rectangular plan of 27 feet by 74 feet. Its fenestration is arranged asymmetrically, with nine bays along the east side elevation and two bays across the south gable end. Although altered on the main (north) facade, the windows consist generally of six-over-six sash on the other elevations. The gable roof is sheathed with slate shingles.

A wood-frame gangway connects the south end of Building No. 13 with the north end of Building No. 14, which is also oriented parallel to Birge Street. Now occupied by a wood-working company, this three-story, wood-frame, clapboarded building extends 39 feet by 105 feet, with four bays across its end (north and south) elevations and thirteen bays along its east elevation. Its fenestration consists of twelve-over-eight sash that are arranged symmetrically. The building is capped by a shallow-pitched roof. A recent one-story, shed-roofed wing and loading dock extend southward from Building No. 14 and connect to Building No. 9.

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JAN 14 1980
DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

The small but unusual Building No. 9 is either constructed or faced with concrete. A nearly 20-foot square, one-story, two-bay building, it is capped by a shed roof above a projecting concrete cornice. Building No. 9 formerly contained the electrical transformers for supplying the Estey factory; now it is used for storage.

Next to the south side of Building No. 9 stands Building No. 23, a small (14 feet by 30 feet) one-story, wood-framed, shed oriented perpendicular to the driveway. Immediately next to the south side of Building No. 23, the one-story, shed-roofed Building No. 10 extends 90 feet parallel to the driveway but only 20 feet wide. One hundred fifty feet farther south and also parallel to the driveway stands a remnant of Building No. 18, another one-story, wood-framed shed.

From Building No. 18, the north-south interior driveway turns eastward, leading to Birge Street and bounding the south end of the former Estey complex. About halfway along the north side of this section of the driveway stands Building No. 29, a one-story, two-stall, gable-roofed garage that faces the street. Apparently the last free-standing building added to the complex by the Estey Organ Corp. (circa 1930), the 26-foot by 33-foot garage is distinguished by its contemporary materials: the main story is built of rusticated concrete blocks while the gable ends are stuccoed.

Several other buildings of various sizes have existed in the Estey complex at different stages of its development. The complex reached its ultimate expansion circa 1925; at that time, it contained about 250,000 square feet of floor area. A plan of the complex drawn in 1942 shows buildings numbered 1 through 29, except for missing No. 27. Since then, nine of those buildings - Nos. 12, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 24, and 28 - have also disappeared.

The 1942 plan shows the uses of the buildings in the Estey complex at the beginning of a temporary surge of activity (precipitated by military orders that interrupted the middle twentieth century decline of the company. There follows a list of the numbered buildings extant in 1942 and their recorded uses; dimensions and locations are also given for those buildings that have subsequently disappeared.

Building No. 1:
- 1st floor: Hammond reed machinery
- 2nd floor: Hammond reeds
- 3rd floor: Dunham footwear (apparently rented space)

Building No. 2:

- 1st floor: box assembling
- 2nd floor: metal pipe and parts, old machinery
- 3rd floor: pipes and pipe organ parts

Building No. 3:
1st floor: mill
2nd floor: old machinery, parts
3rd floor: finished organs
Attic: old parts

Building No. 4:
1st floor: electrical repair and supplies
2nd floor: reed action assembly
3rd floor: cutting reeds and sounding boards
Attic: old organ parts

Building No. 5:
1st floor: stockroom
2nd floor: storage
3rd floor: cases and cartons
Attic: miscellaneous

Building No. 6:
Basement: records
1st floor: office
2nd floor: tuning
3rd floor: tuning, drafting room
Attic: drawing file

Building No. 7-8:
1st floor: woodworking and assembling
2nd floor: pipe chest and assembling, key desk, electrical department, pneumatic makers
3rd floor: wire actions, key makers, setting-up reed organs, pipe organ voicing
4th floor: finishing department, varnishing and polishing

Building No. 9: transformer house

Building No. 10: lumber storage

Building No. 11:
1st floor: sawing, planing
2nd floor: wood turning, saw filing, master music rolls
3rd floor: dip tank, wood pipe storage

Building No. 12: This large building consisted of four sections, mostly one story in height. Its northernmost section, measuring 38 feet by 86 feet, extended from the south end of No. 11 westward to the same end of No. 10, and was used to transfer lumber from the drying kiln on its south to the other buildings. The kiln section measured 50 feet by 90 feet, and contained the kiln for drying the lumber used in organ building. South of the kiln were a 50-foot by 80-foot section used for lumber storage and another transfer shed of 19 feet by 80 feet through which lumber was moved from the adjoining storage yard. In 1979, only a part of the brick east wall of the building remains standing.

Building No. 13:
1st floor: music roll cutting and storage
2nd floor: pipe voicing

Building No. 14:
Basement: storage
1st floor: machine shop
2nd floor: reed organ assembly
3rd floor: sheet metal work

Building No. 15: Located at the northwest corner of the complex with its gable roof oriented perpendicular to Estey Street, this two and one-half story, wood-framed building measured 27 feet by 100 feet.

Building No. 16: This one-story, 16-foot by 21-foot oil house stood about 25 feet northeast of No. 26.

Building No. 17: This 18-foot by 36-foot shed stood next to the southwest corner of No. 12.

Building No. 18: Another lumber shed with two sections that stood immediately west of No. 17; in 1979, apparently the north section remains standing but the south section of 19 feet by 76 feet is gone.

Building No. 19: Its use is not given.

Building No. 20: The boiler room for the complex, this brick structure measured 45 feet by 58 feet and was partly attached to the rear (west) elevation of No. 4; its shed roof reached the second story of the latter building. The boiler room was demolished in 1971.

Building No. 21: Attached to the south elevation of No. 15, this one and one-half story, wood-framed building measured 27 feet by 87 feet and was oriented with its gable roof perpendicular to Estey Street; its use is not given.

Building No. 22: Attached to the east elevation of No. 15, this two and one-half story, wood-framed building measured 34 feet by 100 feet. In contrast to the other Estey buildings, the gable roof of No. 22 was oriented with its gable ends across the longer dimension; a shedroofed loading dock extended the length of the east gable elevation.

Building No. 23: This shed was used for zinc and tin melting.

Building No. 24: This 9-foot by 17-foot pump house stood next to the southwest corner of No. 14; it has been replaced by a smaller concrete block shelter for the pump and well.

Building No. 25:
1st floor: packing and shipping room
2nd floor: pipe tuning

Building No. 26: Erecting and testing room for pipe organs.

Building No. 27: Missing from plan.

Building No. 28: This one-story garage, measuring 25 feet by 25 feet, stood at the corner of Estey and Birge Streets.

Building No. 29: A garage that remains standing in 1979.

The 1942 plan also shows both "open" and "covered" bridges connecting the second and/or third stories of several buildings in the complex. The longest bridge extended almost the entire length of the complex, from the rear of Building No. 1 northward about 650 feet to the southeast corner of No. 22; along the way, it connected (in geographical order) Nos. 2, 11, 3, 19, 4, 20, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Branches of that bridge extended to Nos. 14, 25, and 26 while another bridge connected No. 14 and No. 13. Most of those wood-framed bridges have subsequently been dismantled, and the remaining sections have deteriorated.

The Estey complex formerly possessed its own water supply and distribution system. The concrete-lined main reservoir lay about one-eighth mile uphill to the west; a large cistern fed by a deep well underlay the alley between Buildings No. 4 and 5 to augment the supply. Recently the cistern has been closed and backfilled for safety. Other than Building No. 5, the remaining buildings in the complex are now connected to the municipal water system.

South of the buildings, a large lumber storage yard for the organ factory formerly occupied the remainder of the terrace along Birge Street. During the twentieth century, a large industrial building unrelated to the Estey complex has been constructed on the

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

site. Therefore, the land is excluded from the property being nominated to the National Register.

The general condition of the remaining buildings in the former Estey complex ranges from fair to good. In certain cases, however, lack of proper maintenance during recent decades has lead to cosmetic or even structural deterioration. The current owners are working to stabilize the condition of their buildings.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

In 1855, Estey bought out his partners for $2,700 and devoted himself to his new enterprise. The small workshop had eight to ten employees, who produced six or seven melodeons per month. Estey himself became the traveling salesman, driving wagonloads of the instruments all over northern New England for sale at $75 to $225 - or barter for saleable farm products or animals.

Two years after Estey took over the company, fire destroyed the first workshop located at the foot of Main Street beside Whetstone Brook. A larger replacement, constructed across the street, also burned in 1864 but was rebuilt on the same site. The next year, Estey with three partners (including Riley Burdett) formed a new company under his name, and established a branch in Chicago. Early the following year, however, that partnership dissolved, with Burdett taking the Chicago branch and Estey retaining the Brattleboro property.

By this time, the reed organ had begun a spiralling ascent in musical popularity in the United States. Its moderate cost compared with the piano and the increasing affluence of the public lead to an annual domestic production of 15,000 instruments by the middle 1860's. Responding to this demand, Estey continued to expand his operations. Early in 1866, he took into partnership both his son, Julius J. Estey (1845-1902), and his son-in-law of one year, Levi K. Fuller (1841-1896), thereby creating a triumvirate that directed the company's operations until the senior Estey died in 1890.

The same year (1866), the company moved to a larger factory farther upstream along Whetstone Brook, and within three years its workforce increased to 170. The great flood of 1869 interrupted the progress by sweeping away most of the firm's lumber and threatening the factory itself. At that point Jacob Estey decided to make what proved his last move to a new site well above the reach of the brook.

The tract along Birge Street contained sixty acres, ranging up the hillside (an area later called "Esteyville") from a prominent terrace where the new factory would stand. During 1870, the first four slate-sheathed buildings (later numbered 3 through 6 by the company) were constructed fronting Birge Street along with an equally large "dry house" (for drying lumber) to the rear. The new shops were occupied in the fall of the year and enabled a substantial increase in monthly production to 250 organs, whose prices then ranged from $50 to $750; the number of employees rose to 225.

Apparently, however, the burgeoning demand for organs almost immediately outstripped the capacity of the new factory. The next year, two more slate-sheathed buildings (Nos. 1 and 2) were added to the row. At the beginning of 1872, the company employed 350 persons and produced 500 to 600 organs per month. Still the expansion continued: later that year, the seventh slate-sheathed building (now part of the enlarged No. 7-8) was constructed at the north end of the row, and monthly production increased to 700 instruments. The eighth slate-sheathed building was added to complete the row the following year.

Through this period of continuous expansion, Jacob Estey found time to engage in other activities, including politics. In 1869-70, he represented Brattleboro in the Vermont General Assembly; then for the 1872-74 term, he advanced to the State Senate to represent Windham County. During the first year of Estey's Senate term, the Legislature approved an act of incorporation for the Estey Organ Company, with the senior Estey as president, Levi K. Fuller as vice-president, and Julius J. Estey as secretary and treasurer.

Jacob Estey also pursued his religious interests, for which he became known as Deacon Estey. A life-long Baptist, Estey belonged to the Brattleboro church for fifty years, and contributed substantially to Baptist churches in several other towns to assist their efforts at spreading the faith. Similarly he assisted the establishment of Vermont Academy, a preparatory school in Saxtons River, Vermont, and subscribed much of the cost of Estey Seminary (later called Estey Hall) on the campus of Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. (Estey Hall was constructed in 1872-74 as probably the first building in the United States intended specifically for the high education of black women; it was entered in the National Register of Historic Places on May 23, 1973.)

In 1880, only ten years after the opening of the Birge Street complex, the Estey company produced its 100,000th organ. Estey production apparently reached its historical peak during that same decade. In 1882, output ranged between 1600 and 1800 organs per month, and the company's sales exceeded $1,000,000. A newspaper article from that year notes that the firm had more than 500 employees, many of whom were women who were paid equally with men for the same work.

To augment its flourishing domestic market, the Estey firm extended sales to many foreign countries. By 1876, forty organs were being shipped to Europe every week. A Gazetteer and Business Directory of Windham County, Vt. published in 1884 exclaimed that "the extensive organ business in Brattleboro has made for the village a world-wide fame, and the music of its organs probably is heard to-day in every civilized country on earth."[3]

Estey's resourceful vice-president, Levi K. Fuller, contributed significantly to that international reputation by becoming a leading authority on musical pitch. Largely through his efforts, musical instrument manufacturers in the United States adopted in 1891 a standard musical pitch. Fuller also contributed substantially to contemporary mechanical progress, accumulating more than 100 patents for his inventions especially in the field of railroad equipment. And he surpassed Jacob Estey in politics, being elected successively to the Vermont Senate in 1880, the lieutenant governorship in 1886, and ultimately the governorship of Vermont in 1892.

The company continued to expand and improve its factory complex throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. In 1882, a large brick dry house or kiln (now demolished) was constructed, after which the existing dry house was converted to an additional shop for milling lumber. (At that time, the firm used four carloads per week of black walnut

alone for making organ cases.) Other buildings in the complex included (by 1884) "a storehouse, one hundred feet square; an engine-house, containing seven large boilers and a Corliss (steam) engine of one hundred and fifty horse-power; and other outhouses for various purposes, including a building in which is kept, for ready use, two steam fire-engines . . ."[4]

In 1888, Jacob Estey witnessed the production of the 200,000th Estey organ. But the founder of the company died two years later, leaving the presidency to his son, Julius J. Estey. Julius' sons, J. Gray (1871-19--) and J. Harry Estey (1874-1920), became in turn vice-president and treasurer respectively. Like his father, Julius Estey engaged in politics, representing Brattleboro in the Legislature in 1876 and then advancing to the State Senate in 1882. But his overwhelming avocational interest related to military affairs. In 1874, he organized a National Guard company called the Estey Guards in Brattleboro (promptly complemented - if not rivaled - by the Fuller Light Battery company that Levi Fuller founded the same year). Estey was promoted in 1892 to the rank of brigadier-general in the Vermont National Guard (and served, beginning the same year, under the administration of Governor Levi Fuller).

The Estey Organ Company also achieved probably the zenith of its public prominence in 1892. On August 17th of that year, "in the presence of the Governor of the state and his staff, and of other distinguished Vermont citizens (including the Hon. Hugh Henry of Chester), of the company's five hundred workmen and their families, of its agents in many places, of members of other leading concerns in the music trade, of a large representation of the press, and - best of all - of a great assemblage of the company's fellow townsfolk, the Estey Organ company held exercises fittingly commemorating the production of the 250,000th organ at its work in this place."[5] Ironically, this event also marked the peak of the reed organ's popularity in the United States; pianos were already beginning to displace organs, especially in the cities. The Estey management did not overlook that trend: in 1885, the Estey Piano Company was established in New York, and by 1892 its productive capacity had been doubled to 250 pianos per month.

With the turn of the twentieth century, the Estey management made another decision that reflected the decline of the reed organ. In 1901, the company introduced its first pipe organs, and installed the first production instrument in the Brattleboro Methodist Church. The following year, the overscaled Building No. 26 was constructed to provide a suitable hall for the assembly and testing of large pipe organs prior to shipment. Also in 1902, the next Estey generational transition occurred when Julius Estey died and his son, J. Gray Estey, succeeded to the presidency.

Another major addition to the factory complex occurred in 1906-07 when the northernmost pair of slate-sheathed buildings (Nos. 7 and 8) were enlarged and joined. The resulting building, numbered simply 7-8, was sheathed entirely with slate shingles to match the other buildings in the Birge Street row.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

By 1916, the company's business became divided about equally between reed and pipe organs. Prior to the disruption caused by the First World War, more than half of the remaining reed organ production had been exported, with most of it going to Europe and Australia.

During the 1920's, the pipe organ apparently became the dominant product of the Estey company. A son of J. Gray Estey, Jacob P. Estey, had joined the management of the company by 1925, when he described the firm's contemporary operations in a speech. Between 75 and 100 companies were then building pipe and reed organs in the United States. Estey declared that his firm was the only one in the industry that made every part used in its instruments. At that time, the company employed a network of salesmen and service technicians throughout the country, and maintained retail salesrooms in New York and Boston. The factory complex reached its greatest expansion - containing 250,000 square feet of floor area - and a company booklet from the period describes it as "the largest and best equipped (organ) factory in the world."[6]

But the prosperity of the 1920's did not endure, and with the Great Depression the organ market collapsed. In May 1933, the Estey Organ Company, whose sales had dropped from $600,000 to $200,000 per year, was adjudged bankrupt and the factory was closed. The following September, the Estey family sold the assets of the company to an outsider, thereby breaking the eighty-year tradition of Estey ownership. Later the same year, a new corporation was formed with Jacob P. Estey as president, and about 60 employees returned to the factory with equipment being concentrated in a few buildings.

The company continued production on a limited scale until 1941 when the onset of the Second World War brought lucrative military contracts. A new model of organ - the portable chaplain organ - soon became the principal product of the firm, with an output of 500 per month. The organs were accompanied by production of ammunition and bomb boxes and pontoon bridges.

Another major corporate change followed the war when, in September 1945, Jacob P. Estey and Joseph G. Estey together with another person repurchased the company; the Estey brothers became president and vice-president respectively. The firm then employed 165 persons, and had diversified its output to silverware chests and phonograph cases along with organs (the latter including a new Minshall-Estey model).

Four years later and for the first time since 1933, full control of the company returned to the Estey family when Jacob P. Estey together with his nephew, Wilson G. Estey (son of Joseph G. Estey), and his son-in-law, Robert Cochrane, Jr., established a new partnership. A brochure published probably circa 1950 advertises organ models ranging from a $60 portable to a $60,000 four-manual concert pipe organ. The text notes that cumulative production of reed organs by the company had reached 440,000 instruments augmented by 15,000 portable organs and 3,000 pipe organs.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

The restored Estey ownership of the company lasted only three years. In 1953, Rieger Organ, Inc. of New Jersey bought the company outright, planning to build the compact Rieger pipe organ then being made in Europe. The following year, the company introduced electronic organs, the first ever built by Estey. By 1956, the company had increased its workforce to 325, the highest level in decades. Concurrent with this apparent success, however, there occurred a series of corporate and financial manipulations that undermined the company, and in 1958 the factory closed again with the firm being declared bankrupt.

A reorganization enabled the factory to reopen the following year with still another new line of reed chord organs. Two thousand five hundred of the chord organs were built in 1959, but toward the end of the year production of the electronic organs was discontinued. At the beginning of 1960, the chord organ was the only model still being built at the Estey factory, and within another year organ production ceased completely when the corporation (whose name was altered to Estey Electronics, Inc.) removed its operations from Brattleboro to California. In 1961, the 115-year tradition of organ building in Brattleboro came to an end with the sale of the Estey complex to other interests. Subsequently, the remaining buildings have been converted to various other commercial uses.

The property being nominated to the National Register comprises the nineteen remaining buildings (Nos. 1, 2, 3, 3A, 4, 5, 6, 7-8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14, 18, 19, 23, 25, 26, and 29) of the former Estey Organ Company factory together with a generally rectangular tract of approximately five acres of land bounded by Birge, Estey, and Organ Streets and historically occupied by the Estey complex. To the residents of Brattleboro (and Vermont) the row of slate-sheathed buildings on Birge Street represents the essence of the Factory in its entirety, and this image has not been diminished by the removal of several buildings in the interior of the property. The most visually exciting part of the complex -- Nos. 1 through 7-8 -- remain intact, a reminder of Estey's contribution to the community and the state.

[1] Mary R. Cabot, comp. and ed., Annals of Brattleboro 1681-1895 (Brattleboro, Vt., 1922), II, 632.
[2] Robert F. Gellerman, The American Reed Organ (Vestal, N.Y.: The Vestal Press, 1973), p. 1.
[3] Hamilton Child, Gazetteer and Business Directory of Windham County, Vt., 1724-1884 (Syracuse, N.Y., 1884), p. 88-89.
[4] Child, p. 91-92.
[5] "250,000," The Vermont Phoenix, LIX (August 19, 1892), 1.
[6] The Estey Organ (Brattleboro, Vt.: Estey Organ Co., 1925), p. 5.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Cabot, Mary R., comp. and ed. Annals of Brattleboro 1681-1895. 2 Vol. Brattleboro, Vt.: Press of E. L. Hildreth and Co., 1922.

Child, Hamilton. Gazetteer and Business Directory of Windham County, Vt., 1724-1884. Syracuse, N.Y., 1884.

The Estey Organ. Brattleboro, Vt.: Estey Organ Co., circa 1925 (pamphlet).

Gellerman, Robert F. The American Reed Organ. Vestal, N.Y.: The Vestal Press, 1973.

"Tells of Estey Organ Co. Growth." Brattleboro Daily Reformer, XIII (October 21, 1925), 1-8.

"250,000." The Vermont Phoenix, LIX (August 19, 1892), 1-8.

Numerous other articles both from The Vermont Phoenix and the Brattleboro Daily Reformer, 1870-1961; bound volumes available at the Brooks Memorial Library, Brattleboro, Vermont.

Personal interviews of Louise B. Renaud, Fairground Road, Brattleboro, Vermont (owner of Building No. 5) by Hugh H. Henry in July 1979.

Plan of the Estey Organ Corp., Brattleboro, Vermont, February 27, 1942, scale 1 inch to 50 feet; in possession of Louise B. Renaud, Fairground Road, Brattleboro, Vermont.

FHR-8-300A
(11/78)

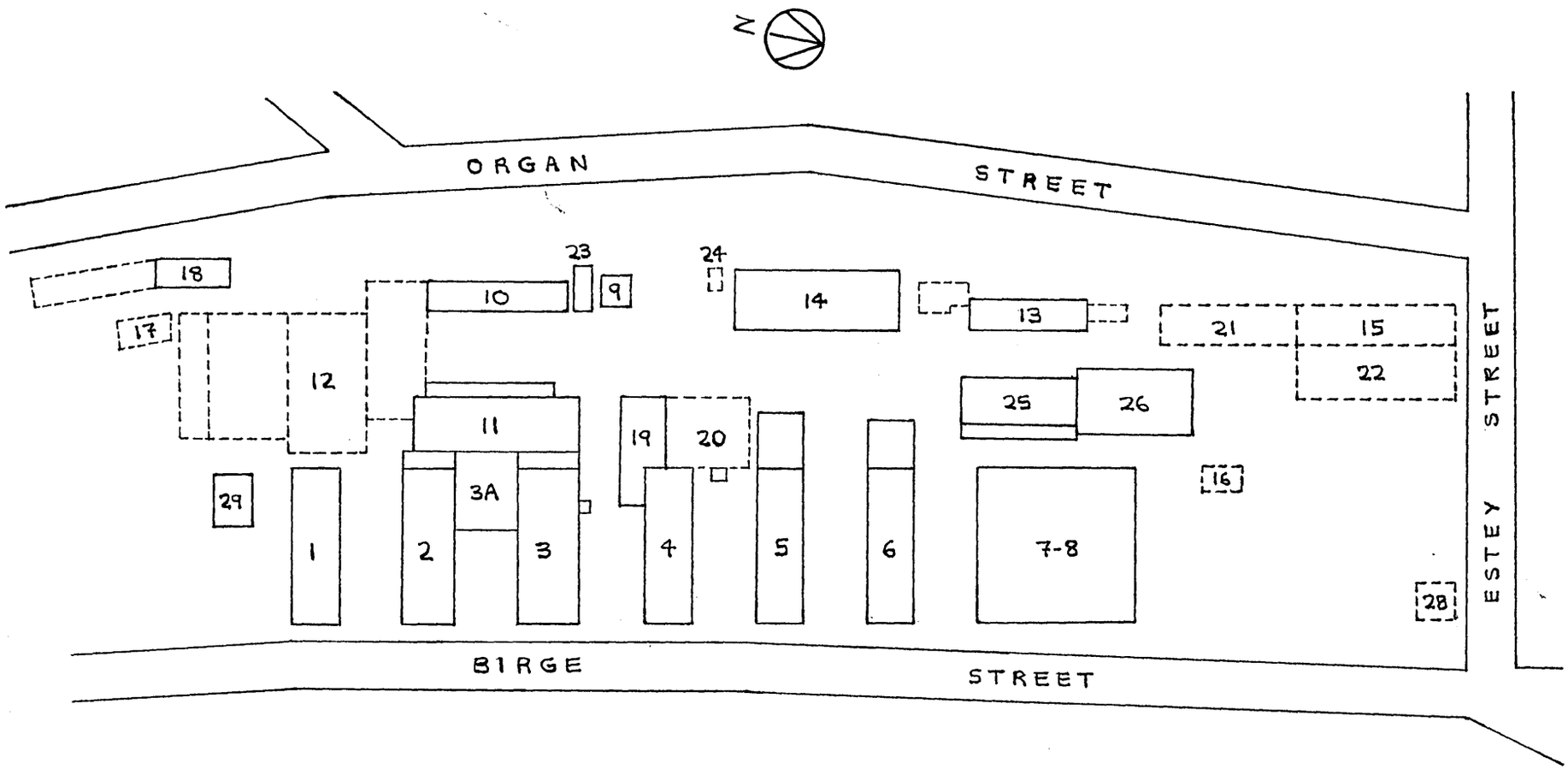
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JAN 14 1980
DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET 10-1 ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

The boundary of the former Estey Organ Company factory complex begins at a Point A located at "an iron pin on the west side of Birge Street, 65.1 feet southwest of the southeast corner of Building No. 1;" thence the boundary follows a property line that extends 164.2 feet on a bearing of South 55° 35' West parallel with, and 5 feet north of, the north side of an adjacent factory building to a Point B at a property corner that is 5 feet north and 3.5 feet west of the northwest corner of said factory building; thence the boundary continues westerly in an extension of said property line to a Point C in the east edge of the right-of-way of Organ Street; thence the boundary turns northerly and follows the east edge of said right-of-way to a Point D at its intersection with the south edge of the right-of-way of Estey Street; thence the boundary turns easterly and follows the south edge of said right-of-way to a Point D at its intersection with the west edge of the right-of-way of Birge Street; thence the boundary turns southerly and follows the west edge of said right-of-way to the point of beginning.



(FORMER) ESTEY ORGAN COMPANY FACTORY

BRATTLEBORO, VERMONT

August 1979

Scale: 1" = 100'

Buildings Existing in 1979

Buildings Existing in 1942
(Gangways Not Shown)