

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

4/6/19

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.



## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: **Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill**

Other names/site number:

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

Street & number: **92 S. Empire Street**

City or town: **Wilkes-Barre** State: **PA** County: **Luzerne**

Not For Publication:

Vicinity:

## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,


I hereby certify that this  X  nomination   request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property  X  meets   does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national   statewide  X  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X  A   B   C   D

		
<b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b> Deputy SHPO		<b>Date</b>
Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission – State Historic Preservation Office		
<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>		

In my opinion, the property <u> </u> meets <u> </u> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
<b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Title :</b>	<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>

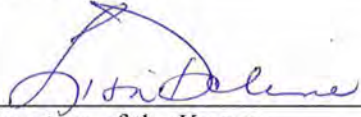
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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

  
Signature of the Keeper

11/25/19  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION – Manufacturing Facility

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE - Warehouse

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## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification** (Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>th</sup> AND EARLY 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS: Commercial Style

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill is a four-story former silk throwing mill on the south side of South Empire Street in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. Built in 1898 by the Bamford Brothers Silk Manufacturing Company with additions constructed periodically through 1962 by the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company and later owners, the red brick, heavy-timber framed building is located on the west side of a largely open site, parallel to Factory Lane. To the east of the building, the site contains grassy areas with some overgrowth, a gravel driveway leading south from Empire Street, and a wooded area separating the property from adjacent houses on Empire Street and Freeman Street. Along Empire Street, there are concrete sidewalks as well as a short wood fence. On the west side of the site (Factory Lane), as well as the south side, a chain-link fence secures the property.

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### Narrative Description

The existing building consists of three interconnected sections and one free-standing structure, a smokestack:

**Section 1** is a four-story, red brick mill building with heavy timber framing. It was built in 1898 and extended approximately 80' north towards Empire Street in 1915. Measuring approximately 50' wide on the north and south elevations and 380' long on the east and west elevations, Section 1 features a low gabled roof with asphalt shingles. It was the first building constructed on the site and is by far the largest, housing what were formerly the primary manufacturing spaces of the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company. On the east elevation, a four-story, approximately 25' by 40' tower, which is also faced in red brick and contains a stairway and former offices on each floor, extends out from the building (**Photos 3 and 4**). The roof of the tower is flat, and the north, east, and south elevations contain a corbeled brick cornice. A small, one-story brick appendage abuts the south side of the tower (see the lower righthand corner of **Photo 5**). The western half of the



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tower, containing the stairway, dates to the original period of construction in 1898. The eastern half of the tower and the one-story appendage were built later, around 1915.

There are two additional, though much smaller, brick towers on the east elevation. One, which contains bathrooms on each floor, is located eleven bays south of the main tower. The other, which contains a freight elevator, is located another fifteen bays south of the bathroom tower and rises an additional story above the fourth floor. A fourth brick tower extends out from the west elevation (flush with the south elevation) and contains a stairway (**Photos 12 and 14**).

Most of the building (except the first 80' south of Empire Street, which comprises the 1915 addition) contains a regular fenestration pattern of sixteen-over-sixteen, double-hung wood windows with segmental arched heads, including three of the towers: the main tower and elevator tower on the east elevation and the stair tower on the west elevation. In a limited number of locations, the windows are missing or are covered by painted plywood panels. Additionally, several of the windows on the fourth floor at the south end of the east elevation, and on the south elevation, have been replaced with plexiglass (**Photos 9 and 12**). All the windows have bluestone sills. The windows in the northernmost part of Section 1, which comprises the addition constructed in 1915 to extend the building north to Empire Street, are differentiated from those to the south. Although the window openings are identical in size, similar in spacing, and have bluestone sills like those in the 1898 section, they contain multi-light steel factory windows rather than double-hung wood windows. Each unit contains twenty-four lights, including an eight-light pivoting unit for ventilation (**Photos 1, 2 and 17**).

Section 1 contains several entrances at ground level. On the north elevation (facing Empire Street), there are glazed wood double doors in the easternmost bay with a prominent concrete pediment above the opening (**Photo 1**). These doors appear to be original to the 1915 addition. On the east elevation, there is a modern hollow metal door in the fourth bay from the north elevation (**Photo 2**), glazed wood double doors in the center bay of the one-story appendage (**Photo 4**), and a roll-down metal door in a former window opening (lowered to the ground) two bays north of the elevator tower. This entrance is covered by a two-bay wide wood-framed awning with a metal roof (**Photo 10**). On the south elevation, there is a roll-down metal door with a single-light transom that open onto a concrete loading dock, which is covered by a wood-framed, gabled canopy (**Photo 12**). On the north elevation of the southwest stair tower, there are paneled wood double doors with a ten-light wood transom, which contains a segmental arched head similar to the windows (**Photo 15**). This entrance is likely original to the 1898 structure. Finally, on the west elevation, there is a modern, glazed metal door in the eighth bay from the north (in the 1915 addition). This entrance appears to be an altered window opening that was lowered to the ground.

In addition to ground-level entrance, both the east and south elevations contain loft doors on each floor, which historically served as a means of moving raw materials and finished products between floors. On the east elevation, the loft doors are located four bays south of the bathroom tower (**Photo 7**) except on the second floor, where a bridge to Section 3, the Engine House, was built around 1910. On the south elevation, the loft doors are located above the first-floor loading dock opening (**Photo 12**). In both locations, the opening contains paneled wood double doors

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with eight-light wood transoms, which appear to be original to the 1898 period of construction. Additionally, heavy timber hoist beams extend out over both of the fourth-floor openings.

On the east elevation, there is a metal fire escape spanning the two northernmost bays (**Photo 2**) as well as metal fire balconies spanning the two southernmost bays on each floor. The fire escape appears to date to the 1915 period of construction, while the fire balconies farther south may have been installed later.

On the interior, Section 1 is divided into several large spaces on the first floor by modern, wood-framed partitions with sheetrock. Each space otherwise contains the vast majority of its original features and finishes, including wood floors, painted brick perimeter walls, painted wood beams and floor decking at the ceiling, and a single row of round wood columns running north-south down the center of the floor plate. In some locations on the first floor, there are concrete floors. The northernmost space on the first floor has most recently been used as an event space while the other spaces have been used primarily for storage. The second through fourth floors are largely open in plan but contain similar features and finishes. The main exception is on the fourth floor, which does not contain columns; rather, the space is open to the gabled, heavy timber roof trusses. These floors are only partially in use for storage purposes.

The stair in the main tower on the east elevation is utilitarian in finish, consisting of simple wood treads and risers with metal pipe hand rails (**Photo 25**). The stair tower has painted brick walls on the exterior side and vertical plank wood walls on the interior side. The stair at the southwest corner of the building was inaccessible at the time of survey due to structural instability, however it is presumed to be similar to the stair on the east elevation.

**Section 2** is a one-story wing alongside the west elevation of Section 1 that was built in two stages in ca. 1900 and 1962. The northernmost part of the building (the first 30') is brick and is the older of the two sections (it appears on a 1904 Sturdevant Atlas in **Figure 8**, which is the earliest to show building footprints, but it is unclear if it is original to the 1898 period of construction). The 1910 Sanborn Map (**Figure 9**) calls this section the Soak House. As seen in **Photos 17 and 18**, the north and west elevations each contain four window openings that are currently covered by painted plywood panels. The ca. 1900 building has a flat roof. In 1965, Section 2 was extended south by about 200'. The addition is the same width but constructed of concrete block. There are a number of short, one-over-one, double-hung metal windows in the upper part of the west elevation.

On the interior, Section 2 has concrete floors, painted brick walls and exposed heavy timber beams in the ca. 1900 building (**Photo 21**) with painted concrete block and exposed steel trusses in the 1965 addition (**Photo 22**). Along the east wall of the interior, the former window openings on the west elevation of Section 1 have largely been infilled with framing covered with plywood panels

**Section 3** is a two-story former engine house (**Photos 6 and 7**). Dating to the original period of construction in 1898, the structure is framed in heavy timber and faced in red brick. The roof is pitched and contains asphalt roll sheathing. The structure is freestanding but is connected to

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Section 1 by an enclosed wood bridge on the second floor (**Photo 8**).

On the north elevation, the first seven bays east of Section 1 contain multi-light steel factory windows similar to those in the 1915 addition in Section 1. These windows appear to be replacements, likely installed around the same time that the 1915 addition was constructed. The easternmost bay on the north elevation, which is set back four bays to the south, contains paneled wood double doors on the first floor and a multi-light steel window on the second floor, matching those described above. The doors appear to date to the original period of construction in 1898.

The east elevation contains multi-light steel windows similar to those on the north elevation in the first three bays from the north on the first floor, six of the seven bays (all but the center bay) on the second floor. The four northernmost bays are setback to the west of the three southern bays. The center bay on the first and second floors both contain paneled wood double doors with four-light wooden transoms that appear to date to the original period of construction in 1898. South of the entrance on the first floor, there is a single window, consisting of what appears to have been an eight-over-eight, double hung wood sash with segmental arched head, although many of the muntins are missing.

The south elevation contains several openings at the second floor that once opened into the former boiler house. Demolished in the mid-1990s, only the brick and concrete foundation of this structure remains.

On the interior, Section 3 is largely open in plan. The first floor was not accessible at the time of survey, but the second floor contains wood floors, exposed brick perimeter walls, as well as heavy timber columns supporting the floor joists and rafters (**Photo 30**).

**Smokestack** Located near the southeast corner of Section 1, the smokestack is constructed of brick and is approximately 125' tall. It has a round shape that gradually tapers toward the top.

### *Integrity*

The Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill retains integrity in the aspects of design and materials. Both the overall form and the defining industrial characteristics of the building remain, including its brick masonry, cornice detailing, consistent fenestration pattern, and characteristic wood loft doors. The interior of the building also strongly conveys the building's industrial past with its surviving wood floors, exposed heavy timber structural system, and exposed brick perimeter walls. Additionally, the open plan of the building remains largely intact as relatively few partition walls have been installed over the years. Overall, the quality, placement and condition of the construction materials, as well as the building's vernacular form are both highly characteristic of northern industrial architecture during the late-nineteenth century period.

The Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill also retains integrity in the aspects of setting and feeling. The mill remains on its original site and is still surrounded by the small-scale residential neighborhood that has existed here for most of the property's history. The mixed industrial-residential character of the area remains largely intact. Additionally, although the mill's

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equipment, furnishings and people have long since departed, the aspect of feeling is retained in the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill through its intact finishes, largely open spaces, and the periodic building campaigns. These features and characteristics effectively relay the sense of place and the notable history of the prominent silk company that once occupied the building.

As mentioned above, the southern half of Section 3, the Engine/Boiler House, was demolished in the 1990s. Despite this loss, however, the nature of the structure as a support building for the larger mill is still readily apparent. This loss also represents an extremely small percentage of the building's total square footage and, therefore, has little impact on the overall integrity of the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill.

As explained below in *Section 8: Statement of Significance*, the eastern side of the property was once occupied by a one-story, approximately 110' by 365' weaving shed (see the 1910 Sanborn map in **Figure 9**). Built by the Bamford Brothers company in stages between 1899 and 1903, Bamford retained ownership of the building after they sold the original 1898 mill to the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company in 1903. That year, the original parcel was subdivided to reflect Bamford's disposition of the western half of the property (the 1910 Sanborn map reflects this change). Bamford, whose portion would receive the address of 84 S. Empire Street, continued to own and operate the weaving shed until 1923, when the company ceased their operations in Wilkes-Barre. In March 1925, Bamford finally sold the property along with all of the mill's weaving equipment to the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company.

The Bamford weaving mill appears to have been operated by the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company for less than one year, for in January of 1926, the weaving business was spun off into a separate corporation known as the Wilkes-Barre Weaving Company.<sup>1</sup> Although the loss of the weaving shed is unfortunate, the fact that it was owned and operated by the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company for so brief a period means that its loss has little to no impact on the integrity of the nominated property.

The remaining 1898 structure (with later additions) more than adequately conveys the significance of the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill. The existing building, due to its vast size and height – approximately 80,000 square feet versus 40,000 and 4-stories versus one-story – would have dominated the property even when the weaving shed existed and continues to do so today. In fact, due to its still imposing presence in the surrounding neighborhood, the building's current form and appearance would be unmistakable to former employees. Lastly, the surviving building represents the component of the silk manufacturing process – throwing – for which the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company and Wilkes-Barre (the city) were principally known. Therefore, the absence of the weaving shed does not significantly impact the integrity of the property.

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<sup>1</sup> More information on the formation of the Wilkes-Barre Weaving Company is provided in Section 8: Statement of Significance.

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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY

**Period of Significance**

1903-1941

**Significant Dates**

N/A

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

John W. Ferguson, Architect



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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill is significant under Criterion A in the area of Industry. Built by the Bamford Brothers Silk Company in 1898, the mill property was expanded in stages by various later owners through 1962. Many of the later additions were built by the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company, which acquired the property in 1903. Both the Bamford Brothers Silk Manufacturing Company and the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company represent the gradual shift in the center of the silk throwing industry from Paterson, New Jersey, then known as the "Silk City," to Pennsylvania, and in particular Luzerne County. Due in large part to mechanization, many of the skilled silk workers of Paterson were shut out of the business by decreasing wages beginning at the end of the nineteenth century. Manufacturers sought the cheapest possible form of employment for what had become largely unskilled work, as well as proximity to their existing weaving operations. They found both in the anthracite region of Northeastern Pennsylvania, where the dangerous and disaster-prone occupation of coal mining, dominated by men, led many young miners' daughters (and to a lesser degree, sons) to seek alternate forms of employment as a means of supplementing their family's income. Both the Bamford Silk Manufacturing Company and the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company became significant employers in this way, providing work to hundreds of the city's young people. Both also suffered from the perception, inside and out, that they were exploiting a vulnerable demographic, resulting in near-constant labor unrest throughout the early twentieth century. The numerous strikes that took place at the mill between 1901 and the late 1930s were a microcosm of state- and nationwide trends, eventually resulting in the end of child labor in Pennsylvania and the increasing power of textile labor unions across the United States. The period of significance begins in 1903, when the property was acquired by the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company and ends in 1941, when the company, seriously impacted by a nationwide decline in silk manufacturing caused by the start of World War II, closed down. Bamford Brothers had previously left Wilkes-Barre in 1923.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

The Early History of the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill

Beginning in the 1880s, the center of the silk throwing industry in the United States began to shift from Paterson, New Jersey to Northeastern Pennsylvania. Increasing mechanization meant that the production of silk had become significantly less expensive, reducing wages across the board. Because Paterson's silk workers were to a large degree skilled, in many cases still weaving by hand, manufacturers sought cheaper forms of labor for one of the most tedious components of the silk manufacturing process, throwing, or creating silk thread from the raw material. In locations such as Hazleton, Scranton, and Wilkes-Barre, where male dominated industries like coal mining predominated (and were largely unionized), Paterson silk companies found an abundant supply of unskilled female and child labor. Throughout the anthracite region, families frequently sought alternate forms of employment for their children as a means of

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supplementing what was often unpredictable income from coal mining. Increasingly, textiles, and in particular silk throwing, filled this need.<sup>2</sup>

The first silk company to open in Wilkes-Barre was the Hess-Goldsmith Company, which established a plant on Waller Street, about two miles west of the future Wilkes-Barre Silk mill, in 1886. Providing employment to several hundred young people, the mill became one of the largest non-coal-related industries in Wilkes-Barre at the end of the nineteenth century. In addition to cheaper labor, manufacturers like Hess-Goldsmith were attracted to Wilkes-Barre by its relative proximity to New York City, which dominated the fashion world and had fueled Paterson's own growth in silk production, not to mention convenient rail connections via the Central Railroad of New Jersey (CRRNJ), which extended well into Northeastern Pennsylvania, crossing the Delaware River at Easton.<sup>3</sup>

In 1898, Bamford Brothers of Paterson, one of the largest manufacturers of silk ribbons in the United States, announced their intention to open a new silk throwing mill in Wilkes-Barre. In addition to lower wages and a "large field of labor," the company was induced to locate there by the gift of nine acres of land on South Empire Street from the Wilkes-Barre Board of Trade, which had acquired the land for this purpose from the Lehigh & Wilkes-Barre Coal Company. The site was an attractive one. Bamford had received similar propositions from other towns and cities nearby, including Ashley, Kingston and Parsons, but Wilkes-Barre won out due primarily to its larger supply of labor and the site's built-in rail access via the Empire Branch of the CRRNJ. Walter Gaston, president of the Board of Trade, had worked closely with the coal company to lure Bamford into town. Interviewed by the *Wilkes-Barre Record* in May of 1898, Gaston enthusiastically proclaimed the benefits to the city of this new "immense industry." The employment it will give to a "small army of girls will be a blessing to many a family," he explained, "especially in these times, when the coal mines do not afford a livelihood for the families that are depending on them."<sup>4</sup> At the time, the legal working age in silk mills was twelve.

With a location now secured, Bamford hired Paterson architect John W. Ferguson, a well-known designer and builder of mills and factories, to take on the new four-story, 45 by 300 foot brick mill building. Construction on the new building began in early June of 1898 and was nearing completion less than three months later. On August 17<sup>th</sup>, the *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader* announced that when completed, the building would be the single largest structure in the city, providing employment to about 1,000 people, mainly girls and young women. Located in an area

<sup>2</sup> Robert B. Gordon and Patrick M. Malone, *The Texture of Industry: An Archaeological View of the Industrialization of North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994): 129-130; and Bonnie Stepenoff, "Child Labor in Pennsylvania's Silk Mills: Protest and Change, 1900-1910," in *Pennsylvania History* 59.2 (April 1992): 103.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Dublin and Walter Licht, *The Face of Decline: The Pennsylvania Anthracite Region in the Twentieth Century* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005): 28.

<sup>4</sup> "The Mill Coming," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 26 May 1898; "Immense Silk Factory," *Wilkes-Barre Weekly Times*, 28 May 1898.

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of the city that was once “considered of but little importance,” with the arrival of the mill the surrounding neighborhood, then comprised of scattered single-family houses, was “destined to become the manufacturing centre [sic] of the city.” In total, \$90,000 was expended on the new structure, which required 1.5 million bricks, 750 windows, and over 100 men, “constantly employed,” to finish the building by late summer.<sup>5</sup>

During the fall of 1898, machinery was gradually installed throughout the building, which officially commenced operations at the end of December. The furnishing of such equipment and the interior fit-out brought the total cost of the building to around \$350,000. The *Wilkes-Barre Record* later claimed that the mill was the largest silk throwing plant in America, housing 55,700 spindles with a weekly capacity of 12,000 pounds of silk thread. Working those spindles would be around 800 girls and young women (and some men), many between the ages of 13 and 18, although the number of employees never reached that high. It does not appear that the building was ever officially named, but due to its location on Empire Street and adjacency to the Empire Branch of the CRRNJ, it was sometimes informally called the “Empire Silk Mill” in local papers, not to be confused with the Empire Silk Company, which was also located in Wilkes-Barre.<sup>6</sup>

Although the precise arrangement and layout of the manufacturing process at the Wilkes-Barre Silk Mill is unknown, an outline of the silk throwing process is presented below. This account was written by E.A. Posselt, author and publisher of numerous books on the textile industry in, 1918:

Silk "throwing" (from the Saxon "thrawan," to twist) is the technical term used for the processes involved in making yarn from raw silk. As raw silk is already in the form of a continuous strand there is no occasion for the preparatory machinery that is needed for all other textiles, where a mass of short tangled fibers of varied lengths needs to be transformed into a continuous length of roving. In silk throwing the main object is the insertion of twist into the raw silk, with such doubling as may be desired.

Thrown silks are known as organzine, tram, or singles, according to the method of manufacture.

Organzine, mainly used as warp, is made by doubling two or more threads which have first been well twisted in the single, and then giving them a firm twisting in the opposite direction.

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<sup>5</sup> “The New Silk Mill Nearing Completion,” *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, 17 Aug 1898.

<sup>6</sup> “Operations Commenced,” *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 20 Dec 1898.

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Tram, mainly used as weft, is made by combining two or more raw-silk threads, and then twisting them together with a slack twist. Strength is not as essential as it is in the warp, and the slack twisted filling permits a more brilliant finish.

Singles are single raw-silk threads, twisted or not. Such yarns, when very hard twisted, are used for the warp and filling of chiffon and kindred fabrics. Some singles are woven in the gum, without twist, and produce cloths which after being boiled out and bleached have a softness and brilliancy unattainable in cloths made of twisted yarns.

When the raw silk in skeins is received at the throwing mill the skeins are first weighed, assorted according to quality, and tagged to indicate the manufacturer for whom the silk is to be thrown, and whether it is for organzine or tram. The skeins are put into light cotton bags and soaked overnight in warm, oily soapsuds (to soften the natural gum), dried, placed on reel swifts, and wound off onto small double-headed bobbins.

Some very dirty and irregular silks may require cleaning. In such cases the silk is transferred from one bobbin to another, passing during the transfer through a cleaner, which consists of parallel plates set just far enough apart to catch any irregularity in the thread.

After winding, the tram goes to the doubling frame, but the organzine goes to the first-time spinning frame. The principle of spinning or twisting consists of winding a thread onto a horizontal bobbin from a vertical one that revolves at a faster speed. The yarn runs through the eye of a little metal flyer on the top of the vertical bobbin, and the difference in speed between the two bobbins regulates the amount of twist. In other textile industries "spinning" is a process by which roving is drafted or attenuated and then twisted into yarn, but in the manufacture of yarn from raw silk no drafting is possible and the spinning process is one of twisting only.

Doubling is a process whereby threads from two or more bobbins are wound together, without twisting, onto another bobbin.

In the second-time spinning<sup>7</sup> the machine is similar to that used for first-time spinning, but, instead of inserting twist into single threads, it twists into one of threads which the doubling machine has brought together. The direction of the twisting is opposite to that in the single thread.

During the spinning process the thread is wound upon bobbins. Before being dyed the thread must be reeled again into skeins. The skeins are laced by running short strings in and out through each skein, dividing each in to four parts, so as to

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<sup>7</sup> Only organzine was spun twice. Tram was spun only once.

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prevent tangling during the dyeing process. These are then made up into compact bundles.

The work of the throwster usually ends with reeling and bundling, and the skeins are then sent to separate establishments, where they are dyed and then sent to the weaving mill.

In tram spinning, the original thread is not twisted, but, after winding, two or more of the raw-silk threads are doubled and then twisted together with a slack twist of from 2 to 6 turns to the inch. They are then reeled and bundled and sent to the dyeing house as in the case of organzine.<sup>8</sup>

Apart from reports of disputes between Bamford and the City of Wilkes-Barre over sewer services in 1899, few accounts of the company's activities or financial condition are available following the building's completion. The mill must have experienced some success, however, as Bamford sought to expand their facilities as early as June of 1899. That month, the *Wilkes-Barre Record* reported that Bamford had yet again hired John W. Ferguson, this time to design a new one-story weaving shed north of the existing building. The structure, measuring approximately 117' by 110', would be the location for weaving the silk used in the manufacture of the company's ribbons. The existing building, on the other hand, would continue in operation as a silk throwing plant. According to the company's plans, the space between the two structures would eventually be developed with dyehouses, further increasing the breadth of the company's operation in Wilkes-Barre to encompass nearly the full silk ribbon production process. Begun in July of 1899, the weaving shed, which appears on the 1904 Sturdevant Atlas (**Figure 8**), was completed in roughly two months.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the company's apparent success in Wilkes-Barre, Bamford began to wind down operations in the Empire Street facility as early as May 1901, with *Fibre and Fabric*, a trade publication, reporting that the company was removing much of their machinery from the city to their main plant in Paterson.<sup>10</sup> The reason behind the move is unclear, although a later report by the *Wilkes-Barre Record* indicated that the company believed Wilkes-Barre to be too far away from their other interests in New Jersey. Labor unrest in the months prior to the move may have precipitated the company's decision. In early 1901, for example, several major strikes over disparities in wages between the Wilkes-Barre and Paterson employees led to attempts by workers to unionize, in one case leading to violent, near riot conditions outside the mill in

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<sup>8</sup> E.A. Posselt, *Silk Throwing: Giving the Most Complete Data Ever Published on the Various Processes Raw Silk is Subjected to When Converting it into Yarn* (Philadelphia: Textile Publishing Company, 1918), 7-10.

<sup>9</sup> "Ribbon Mill Addition," *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 27 Jun 1899.

<sup>10</sup> "Facts Whittled Down," *Fibre and Fabric: A Record of American Textile Industries in the Cotton and Woolen Trade*, vol. 33, no. 845 (May 11, 1901): 7.

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March.<sup>11</sup> The strikes were part of a larger pattern of unrest in the anthracite region silk mills at the turn of the century, influenced in particular by demonstrations and parades led by Mary Harris “Mother” Jones in Scranton in February and March 1901. These strikes were the first to lay bare the fact that the majority of silk mill employees were young girls, prompting early calls for reform.<sup>12</sup> Although it would be difficult to determine the number of child workers at the Bamford mill, secondary sources suggest that the bulk of silk mill employees in Northeastern Pennsylvania during this period were girls between 12 and 16 years of age.<sup>13</sup>

Bamford continued to operate in Wilkes-Barre into 1902 but began actively marketing the throwing mill portion of property that fall. At the time, the mill employed fewer than 300 people. In early 1903, Bamford began negotiations with a new syndicate of silk manufacturers – “among the most energetic in the silk business” – from Paterson. The parties, which included the firms of Doherty & Wadsworth, John Hand & Sons, Post & Sheldon, and Westerhoff Bros. & Napier, among a half dozen others, had for years been outsourcing silk throwing to commission throwsters in Paterson and elsewhere. By establishing their own silk throwing business, which was eventually incorporated as the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company, each of these manufacturers would have a dependable, steady supply of thrown silk. Although not unheard of, a syndicate of this type within the silk industry was fairly uncommon during the early twentieth century. Nearly all of the new Wilkes-Barre Silk Company’s competitors in the region, including Hess-Goldsmith, were founded as and remained independent throwsters doing commission work. In fact, the commission model was so popular that the new Wilkes-Barre Silk Company, in addition to throwing silk for its constituent firms, would work on commissions for other firms. The new company, whose main office would remain with the manufacturers in Paterson, took possession of the property in mid-February with the intention of having the mill in full operation within weeks. Despite Bamford’s intention to leave Wilkes-Barre, the company in fact retained their weaving operation and expanded the building in 1903, resulting in the structure recorded by the 1910 Sanborn map (**Figure 9**).<sup>14</sup>

As it was under Bamford, the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill remained a reliable source of employment to the daughters and sons of coal miners’ families, providing employment to between 500 and 700 young people depending on the year. The vast size of the operation made the mill one of the largest non-coal-related employers in Wilkes-Barre. Among all industries, the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company typically ranked in the top 5-10 largest employers in the city into the 1930s, according to official State industrial directories. Between 1900 and about 1910, roughly 75% of the mill’s workforce was female with many if not most under 16 years of age.

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<sup>11</sup> “Employes Strike,” *Wilkes-Barre News*, 21 Jan 1901; “Girl Strikers in Mass Meeting,” *Wilkes-Barre Daily News*, 29 Jan 1901; “Trouble at Silk Mill,” *Wilkes-Barre Times*, 28 Mar 1901; “Part of the Mill May Be Sold,” *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 13 Jan 1903.

<sup>12</sup> Stepenoff, 108-109.

<sup>13</sup> Francis H. Nichols, “Children of the Coal Shadow,” *McClure’s*, 20 (February 1903): 15.

<sup>14</sup> “The Big Bamford Mill Sold,” *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 18 Feb 1903.



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Nearly from the outset, the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill experienced labor unrest, continuing what had begun several years prior under Bamford's tenure. In one notable early strike in August of 1907, 400 girls, "without a union and in no way organized," as reported by the *Times Leader*, demanded an eight- rather than ten-hour day. The girls, "of all nationalities" and with "faces bright with the hope of victory," held a mass meeting on August 5<sup>th</sup>, forcing manager Carl Ferenbach to completely shut down the mill pending a settlement of the strike.<sup>15</sup> Like the 1901 strike, this walkout was part of an industry-wide protest that affected silk mills throughout the anthracite region in the summer of 1907, resulting in more than 5,000 workers leaving their posts. Writing in *The Bitter Cry of Children* one year prior, the Marxist intellectual John Spargo described the conditions that the girls would have faced in the mill on a summer day when the artificially moistened atmosphere of the building, required to keep the silk fibers supple, frequently resulted in fainting spells. Work in these conditions, Spargo sympathetically proclaimed, "saps the constitution of the child, robs it of hope, and unfits it for life's struggle. Such child labor is not educative or wholesome, but blighting to the body, mind, and spirit."<sup>16</sup>

Despite the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill girls' lack of organization and the absence of a leadership committee, Ferenbach quickly proposed several minor concessions – a half-hour off each day and a half holiday on Saturdays – which the vast majority of the strikers accepted. The quick resolution of the crisis was likely influenced by the fact that many of the Scranton strikes, which occurred earlier in the summer, were settled in the same way. About 75 of the girls remained adamantly opposed to the terms, but the mill was back in operation on August 6<sup>th</sup>.<sup>17</sup>

Although the gains made by the 1907 strike were modest, progress was gradually being made on the child labor front. Several laws that predated the strike, including a compulsory school attendance law that passed in 1901 and a law prohibiting children under 14 from working in any establishment that passed in 1905, were to a large extent disobeyed by employers, with factory inspectors also frequently ignoring the issue. Still, public opinion against child labor was mounting, thanks to reformers like Mother Jones and John Spargo. In 1909, an additional law passed that banned females from working at night and limited minors to a ten-hour workday. The cumulative effect of these changes was an overall decline in the number of child workers by 1910. Increasing enforcement of the laws led manufacturers, facing mounting fines, to reconsider the age of the workers they hired. Additionally, parents were, according to historian Bonnie Stepenoff, convinced that "no matter how hard it was to support their families, adolescent children needed and deserved a scholastic education."<sup>18</sup>

To a large extent, the place of girls within the silk mills was taken up by working mothers. Since wages among coal miners had risen only slightly since 1900, families still relied on additional income from the silk mills. Although pay was still meager, anthracite-region silk manufacturers

<sup>15</sup> "400 Girls Strike at W.-B. Silk Mill," *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, 5 Aug 1907.

<sup>16</sup> John Spargo, *The Bitter Cry of the Children* (New York: Macmillan, 1915): 174, 177.

<sup>17</sup> "Silk Mill Strikers Return to their Work," *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, 6 Aug 1907.

<sup>18</sup> Stepenoff, 115-118.

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could afford to pay older workers more since by 1911 they had begun to open branches in southern states where child labor remained common and was largely unenforced.<sup>19</sup> By 1916, only 16% of the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill's workforce – 84 out of the mill's 525 total employees – were under the age of 16, according to the official State industrial directory published that year (the 1901 compulsory school attendance law continued to allow children between the ages of 14 and 16 to work if they could already read and write).<sup>20</sup>

Even as some manufacturers opened branches in southern states, the silk industry in the United States remained firmly centered in the Northeast through the 1910s and 20s. Luzerne County, in particular, continued to dominate the silk throwing industry. The Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill, which was enlarged in 1915 with a four-story addition at the north end of Section 1, itself employed around 700 people, or about 25% of the state's silk throwers, according to a 1915 report by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.<sup>21</sup> Although the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill remained strictly focused on silk throwing, the success of the operation led its Paterson owners to consider expanding the business to encompass weaving. In March 1925, two years after the Bamford Silk Manufacturing Company finally left Wilkes-Barre, the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company acquired the weaving shed and its equipment. The cost of acquisition was estimated to be between \$80,000 and \$100,000. The weaving shed appears to have been reopened not long after the sale, providing employment to around 200 more workers.<sup>22</sup>

The Bamford weaving mill appears to have been operated by the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company for less than one year, for in January 1926, the weaving business was spun off into a separate corporation known as the Wilkes-Barre Weaving Company.<sup>23</sup> The new company was created by a syndicate composed of many of the same Paterson firms that founded Wilkes-Barre Silk in 1903 (in the 1930 edition of the *Industrial Directory of Pennsylvania*, the headquarters of both companies is listed as 41 Beech Street in Paterson). The incorporators of the weaving operation, Frederick A. Katterman, William Hand, and James H. Sheldon were all representatives of companies that were partners in the founding of the throwing company 21 years earlier. Despite the overlapping ownership structure, the two businesses were operated independently of each other, and the weaving mill appears to have remained on a separate parcel, 84 S. Empire Street.

Although Pennsylvania's silk industry had largely transitioned away from child labor by 1910, wages remained low and working conditions continued to be harsh for the slightly older workers who now populated the mills, prompting regular strikes from the late 1910s and into the 1930s. One particularly lengthy strike in the fall of 1919, lasting from mid-September through mid-

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Senate, *Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States, Vol. IV: The Silk Industry* (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1911): 21.

<sup>20</sup> Department of Labor and Industry, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, *Second Industrial Directory of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg, 1916): 1111.

<sup>21</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, *Summary of the Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage Earners in the United States* (Washington, 1916): 171.

<sup>22</sup> "Mill to Reopen in City," *The Evening News*, 3 Mar 1925.

<sup>23</sup> More information on the formation of the Wilkes-Barre Weaving Company is provided in Section 8: Statement of Significance.

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November, was the first in which a national labor union, the Textile Workers Union of America (UTW), an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor, became actively involved. On September 16<sup>th</sup>, Wilkes-Barre Silk mill employees, hearing of strikes in Scranton, walked out demanding a 44- hour work week (down from 54) as well as a minimum wage of \$15 per week. Unlike in 1907, when the management was quickly made concessions in order to get the mill back in operation, both the workers and managers remained firm in their positions. After two weeks, the workers of the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill and the Leon-Ferenbach Silk Mill assembled in Wilkes-Barre to hear Thomas F. McMahon, vice-president of the UTW, speak on their struggle. McMahon became the de-facto leader of the strike, organizing the workers around the idea of winning a living wage and better working conditions.<sup>24</sup>

The involvement of the UTW undoubtedly prolonged the strike, but the influence of McMahon also resulted in the first real gains by the silk workers since the mills had begun to open in the late-nineteenth century. On November 13<sup>th</sup>, the manufacturers, having suffered for nearly two months of being shut down, finally offered a settlement to their employees. Three days later, an agreement was reached. When the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill reopened on November 17<sup>th</sup>, the workers were subject to wages that in some cases had doubled, with most increasing from about 20% to 50%. Working hours remained largely the same, but the substantial increases in pay had assuaged some of employees' concerns over working conditions.<sup>25</sup>

Most of the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill employees had signed onto the United Textile Workers Union (UTWU) during the 1919 strike, but in the years following the organization had weakened. In March 1929, the National Textile Workers Union, a Communist Party organization, attempted to fill the gap, making inroads in the anthracite region by organizing workers at the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill. Although most families in the area were opposed to "radical" Communist politics, the young women of the silk mills lacked real leadership and were susceptible to outside influence from the likes of the eager and willing NTWU. Led by Clarina Michelson, a 32-year old Communist operative from New York City, the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill girls struck in the spring of 1929. Honestly seeking better wages, hours and working conditions, Michelson nonetheless faced vehement opposition from the anticommunist AFL, state authorities, and local police. The Communist drive was put down after a series of violent confrontations, some just outside the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill, and mass meetings that lasted through early April. Ironically, the failure of the Communist effort resulted in most of Wilkes-Barre's silk workers signing onto the AFL-UTWU.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> "Strikers Remain Firm," *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, 3 Oct 1919; "Silk Strike Now in Fifth Week," *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, 10 Oct 1919.

<sup>25</sup> "May Settle Strike," *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, 13 Nov 1919; "Silk Workers Return to Work," *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*, 17 Nov 1919.

<sup>26</sup> Walter T. Howard, "'Radicals Not Wanted': Communists and the 1929 Wilkes-Barre Silk Mill Strikes," in *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies*, Vol. 69, No. 3 (Summer 2002): 342-366.

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Despite the defeat of the NTWU, the success of the UTWU once again proved only temporary. Manufacturers were no more happy to deal with the UTWU than they were with the Communists, and resisted calls for increased wages and decreased hours. The onset of the Great Depression brought its own troubles, resulting in layoffs and even lower wages and increased workloads for those who were able to keep their jobs. As in other silk mills, sporadic strikes characterized the early-1930s period at the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill. Hope came with the election of Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1932 and the subsequent passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act (NRA) in 1933, which created the National Recovery Administration in part to guarantee the rights of workers to form unions.

Although the NRA appeared promising at first, the administration's Textile Industry Committee, formed to represent the interests of consumers, workers, and business owners alike, did not have the desired effect. Since the committee was headed by the spokesperson of the Cotton Textile Institute, an industry trade organization, it leaned heavily toward the interests of the manufacturers, frequently overlooking workers' concerns and ignoring recognition of labor unions. Many silk mill employees, following the trend of textile workers throughout the nation, began joining the UTWU in large numbers. By 1934, the organization that had fewer than 15,000 members the year prior now had about 250,000, including many at the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill. As membership continued to increase, the situation came to a head in late August 1934 when, after manufacturers refused to accede to UTWU demands for a thirty-hour work week, minimum wages, union recognition and other items, the union called a general strike to begin on September 1<sup>st</sup>. Around the nation, and especially in the South, hundreds of thousands of workers walked out, leading in many cases to violent confrontations with police, strikebreakers, and in some states the National Guard. At the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill, a "flying squadron," groups of workers who went from mill to mill calling the strike, arrived from Hazleton on September 4th, turning what had been a peaceful demonstration into a conflict with police during which "a barrage of rocks" were thrown.<sup>27</sup>

The scale of the UTWA strike was vast, but the organization was spread too thin to make a real impact, and in many cases failed to feed striking workers as promised. Within weeks, facing a lack of relief assistance from local governments and even churches, the strike was ended without the UTWA achieving any of its aims. Workers at the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill were back at work by September 24<sup>th</sup>.

Additional strikes were called in 1937, this time organized by the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), and were largely more successful than those several years prior. Although most of Luzerne County's silk workers had achieved adequate union representation by the end of the decade, larger economic forces had resulted in the gradual shift of the textile industry to the south. Silk throwing plants, as explained above, had already been opening branches in southern

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<sup>27</sup> Christopher M. Sterba, "Family, Work, and Nation: Hazleton, Pennsylvania, and the 1934 General Strike in Textiles, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (January/April 1996): 25.

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states as early as the 1910s, but this trend accelerated during the Great Depression when manufacturers sought ever cheaper labor in areas where labor unions had little power. With increasing competition from manufacturers in southern states, firms like the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company began to suffer. The adjacent Wilkes-Barre Weaving Company appears to have been more significantly affected by the 1937 strikes, as it closed that year.

The final blow to the silk industry in Wilkes-Barre, and to the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill, came in 1941 when the growing global conflict of World War II significantly affected the supply of silk. Not only was the importation of raw silk from Japan curtailed, but the material that was available was commandeered by the military for the production of parachutes and other war materiel. By the fall of 1941, the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company was forced to close the mill and liquidate its assets. At the time it was shut down, the mill employed fewer than 200 people. Although the silk industry recovered somewhat after the war, the introduction of synthetic silk substitutes, including Nylon and Rayon, dramatically transformed the industry and real silk never regained the foothold it enjoyed prior to the war.<sup>28</sup>

After 1941, the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill passed through a number of different owners who leased spaces to various small tenants. Mostly apparel-related, the occupants included a dressmaker, a shoe company, and a discount clothing store. The longest owner-occupant after 1941 was the Lee Textile Company, which manufactured apparel from Rayon. Lee constructed an addition to Section 2 in 1962 and remained in the building until 1974. Although the Empire Branch of the CRRNJ continued to serve the site through the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company's occupancy, the tracks were removed in the early 1960s as later tenants relied principally on trucks for deliveries and shipments (The CRRNJ ceased passenger operations to Wilkes-Barre in 1963 and was bankrupt by 1976). In recent years, the building has been only partially used for storage. Although a precise date cannot be determined, the weaving shed was demolished sometime between about 1970 and 1990, the only significant change to the property (aside from the 1962 addition) since the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company completed an addition to Section 1 in 1915.

#### Comparable Silk Throwing Mills in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties

By 1920, there were over 80 silk mills performing throwing work in Luzerne and Lackawanna Counties, according to the *Industrial Directory of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* published that year. With 627 employees the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company was by far the largest company in Pennsylvania devoted exclusively to silk throwing. Although there were several much larger silk mills in the region and throughout the state, including the Duplan Silk Company in Scranton, which had over 2,200 employees in 1920; and the Stehli Silk Mill in Lancaster, which had about 1,600, these operations encompassed the full silk production process – from the treatment of raw silk to throwing, dyeing, weaving, and finally finishing – and therefore are not directly comparable. The Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill, though small in relation to Duplan and

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<sup>28</sup> “2 Silk Mills Employing 550 Persons Are Closed,” *Wilkes-Barre Record*, 8 Sep 1941.

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Stehli, was immense when compared to its largest competitors, which typically had only between 100 and 300 employees per mill.

One of the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill's largest local competitors was the Hess-Goldsmith Company, which was founded in 1886 and was the first throwing mill to open in Wilkes-Barre. Located about two miles west of the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill at the southwest corner of Waller and Brook Streets, Hess-Goldsmith's earliest building – a two-story brick structure at the northern edge of the property – was shorter in both height and length than the later Wilkes-Barre Silk mill, but was extremely similar in form with its shallow gabled roof and fenestration pattern of double-hung wood windows. Like the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill, the Hess-Goldsmith complex, which employed between 350 and 400 workers depending on the year, was enlarged several times, including with a large, one-story structure with a sawtooth roof that today dominates the property. Another sizeable local throwing mill was the Leon-Ferenbach Company, which was founded in 1909 in part by Carl Ferenbach, who began his career in Wilkes-Barre as the manager of the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill. The Leon-Ferenbach mill was built along Forrest Street east of Hazle Street, approximately one mile west of the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill. Once again, the building, though smaller than the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill, was similar in form and materiality and was expanded several times as Leon-Ferenbach grew. The company was comparable in size to Hess-Goldsmith, employing about 400 workers.

Like the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company, Hess-Goldsmith and Leon-Ferenbach provided employment to many young daughters of miners' families, and for that reason they were subject to the same tumultuous labor situation that characterized life at the Wilkes-Barre Silk mill during the early twentieth century. Both mills were active participants in the 1919, 1929, 1934 and 1937 strikes, which, while in some cases were not successful, led to a gradual accumulation of rights for textile workers and significantly increased the power of textile unions nationally by the 1930s. They were also subject to the same economic conditions – principally the Great Depression and World War II – that dramatically affected the supply of silk and ultimately led to the downfall of the Wilkes-Barre Silk Company in 1941. Unlike their counterpart, however, Hess-Goldsmith and Leon-Ferenbach were able to survive much longer by transitioning to the production of fiberglass fabrics and nylon, respectively. Both companies closed in the 1960s and their mills remain largely intact today, though with some alterations.

The same situation played out not only in Wilkes-Barre, but across the anthracite region. In places as varied as Scranton and Dickson City, where the Bliss Silk Throwing Company employed over 600 workers in two plants, and in Carbondale, where the Klots Throwing Company employed nearly 400, young women not only labored to provide their families with supplemental income, likewise played a critical role in a labor movement that convulsed the Northeastern Pennsylvania silk industry during the early twentieth century. Although both of the Bliss mills have been demolished, part of the Klots mill remains standing on Dundaff Street in Carbondale, serving as a monument to an industry that was once one of the largest employers in the region after coal mining.



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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### **Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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U.S. Senate. *Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States, Vol. IV: The Silk Industry*. Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1911.

### Newspapers (refer to footnotes for specific citations)

*The Evening News*

*Wilkes-Barre Record*

*Wilkes-Barre Times Leader*

*Wilkes-Barre Weekly*

\*see footnotes for specific citations

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**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** ~3.70 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 41.234254 Longitude: -75.872433
2. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_
3. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the property is shown as a dotted line on the accompanying map entitled "Site Plan with National Register Boundary" (Figure 2).

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary of the nominated property conforms to the historic 92 S. Empire Street parcel as shown on the 1910 Sanborn Map (Figure 9). The eastern half of the property, although now consolidated into the 92 S. Empire Street parcel, was historically occupied by the Bamford Brothers and later the Wilkes-Barre Weaving Company mills and has been excluded. This portion of the property had the historic address of 84 S. Empire Street.

**Form Prepared By**

name/title: Kevin McMahon, Associate  
organization: Powers & Company, Inc.  
street & number: 1315 Walnut Street, Suite 1717  
city or town: Philadelphia state: PA zip code: 19107  
e-mail: kevin@powersco.net  
telephone: (215) 636-0192  
date: August 8, 2019

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Wilkes-Barre Silk

City or Vicinity: Wilkes-Barre

County: Luzerne State: PA

Photographer: Kevin McMahon

Date Photographed: February 21, 2019

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

<i>Photograph #</i>	<i>Description of Photograph</i>
1.	North elevation, Section 1, view NE
2.	East elevation, Section 1, view E
3.	North elevation of tower and east elevation of main building, Section 1, view E
4.	South and east elevations of main tower and one-story appendage, Sec.1, view NE
5.	East elevation, Section 1, view SE
6.	East and north elevations, Section 3, view E
7.	South and east elevations, Section 3, view NE
8.	Bridge between Section 1 (left) and Section 3 (right), view N
9.	East elevation, Section 1, view N
10.	East elevation, Section 1 (overall view), view NW
11.	Site east of Sections 1 and 3, view SW
12.	South elevation, Section 1, view NE
13.	South elevation, Section 2, view W
14.	West elevation of SW stair tower, Section 1, view SW
15.	North elevation of SW stair tower, Section 1, view W
16.	West elevation, Section 2, view N
17.	West elevation, Section 1 and north elevation, Section 1, view E
18.	Interior, Section 1, first floor, view N
19.	Interior, Section 1, first floor, view S
20.	Interior, Section 1, first floor, view SE

Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill

Luzerne County, PA

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21.	Interior, Section 2 (ca. 1900 portion), first floor, view NW
22.	Interior, Section 2 (1962 addition), first floor, view S
23.	Interior, Section 1, first floor, view SE
24.	Interior, Section 1, second floor, view NW
25.	Interior, Section 1, stair in main tower, second floor, view S
26.	Interior, Section 1, main tower, second floor, view SE
27.	Interior, Section 1, second floor, view S
28.	Interior, Section 1, freight elevator, second floor, view E
29.	Interior, Section 1, second floor, view S
30.	Interior, Section 3, second floor, view E
31.	Interior, Section 1, third floor, view N
32.	Interior, Section 1, third floor, view S
33.	Interior, Section 1, fourth floor, view NE
34.	Interior, Section 1, bathrooms, fourth floor, view E
35.	Interior, Section 1, fourth floor, view S

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill  
Name of Property

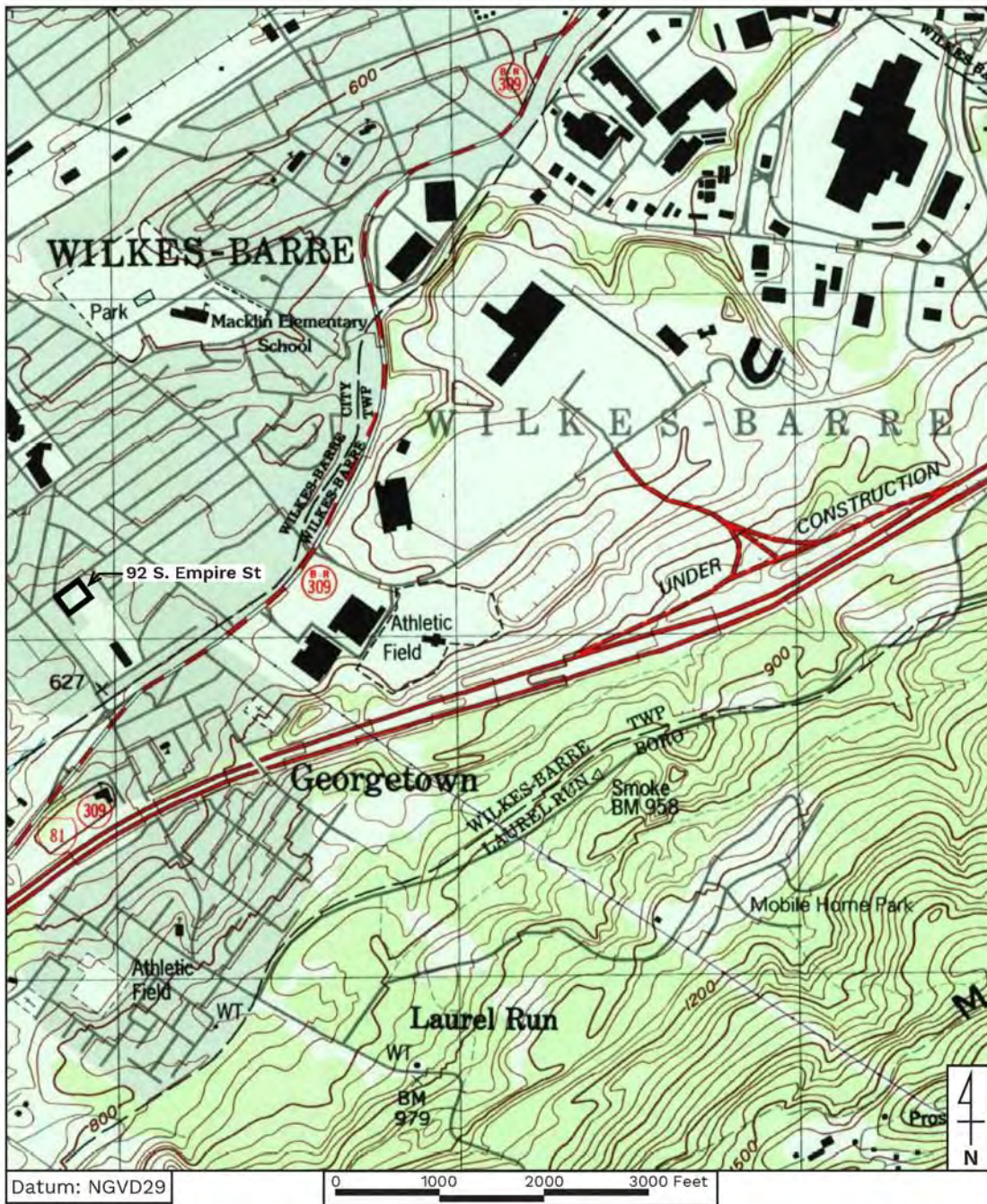
Luzerne County, PA  
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**USGS Map Excerpt - Wilkes-Barre East - Pennsylvania (1999)**  
Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill  
92 S. Empire Street  
Wilkes-Barre, Luzerne County, PA

Latitude, Longitude  
41.234254, -75.872433

**Figure 1 – USGS Map**



Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill  
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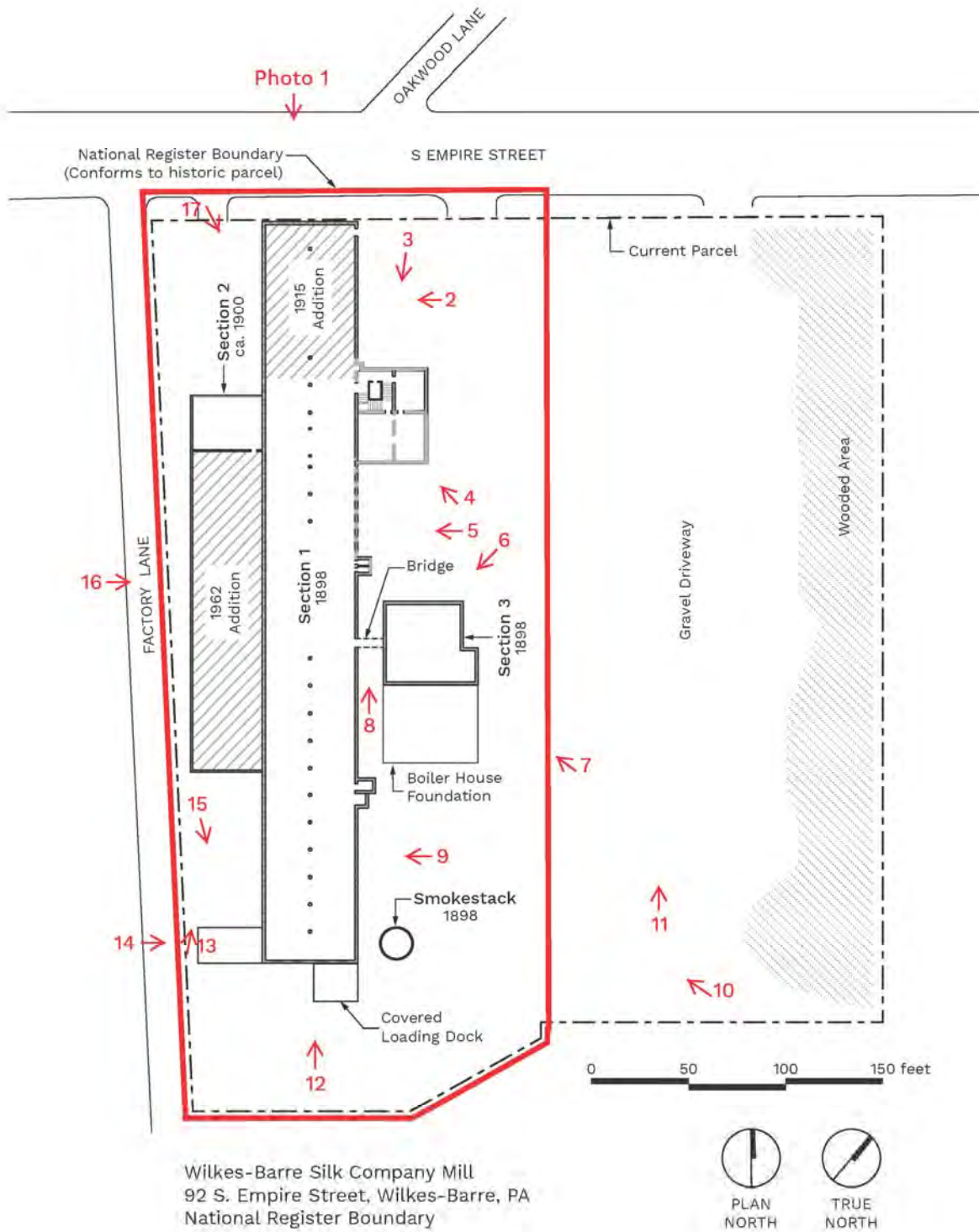
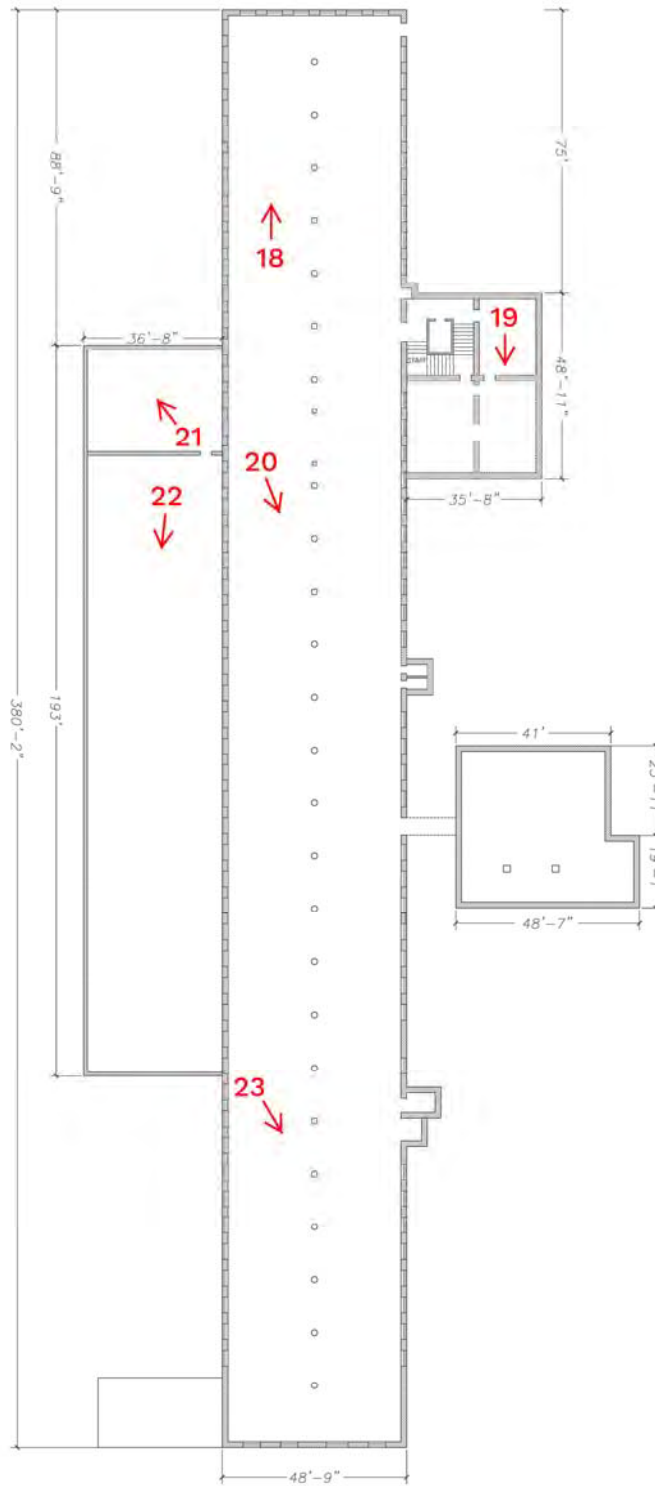


Figure 2 – Site Plan with National Register Boundary and Photo Key.



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**Figure 3 – First Floor Plan with Photo Key**

Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill  
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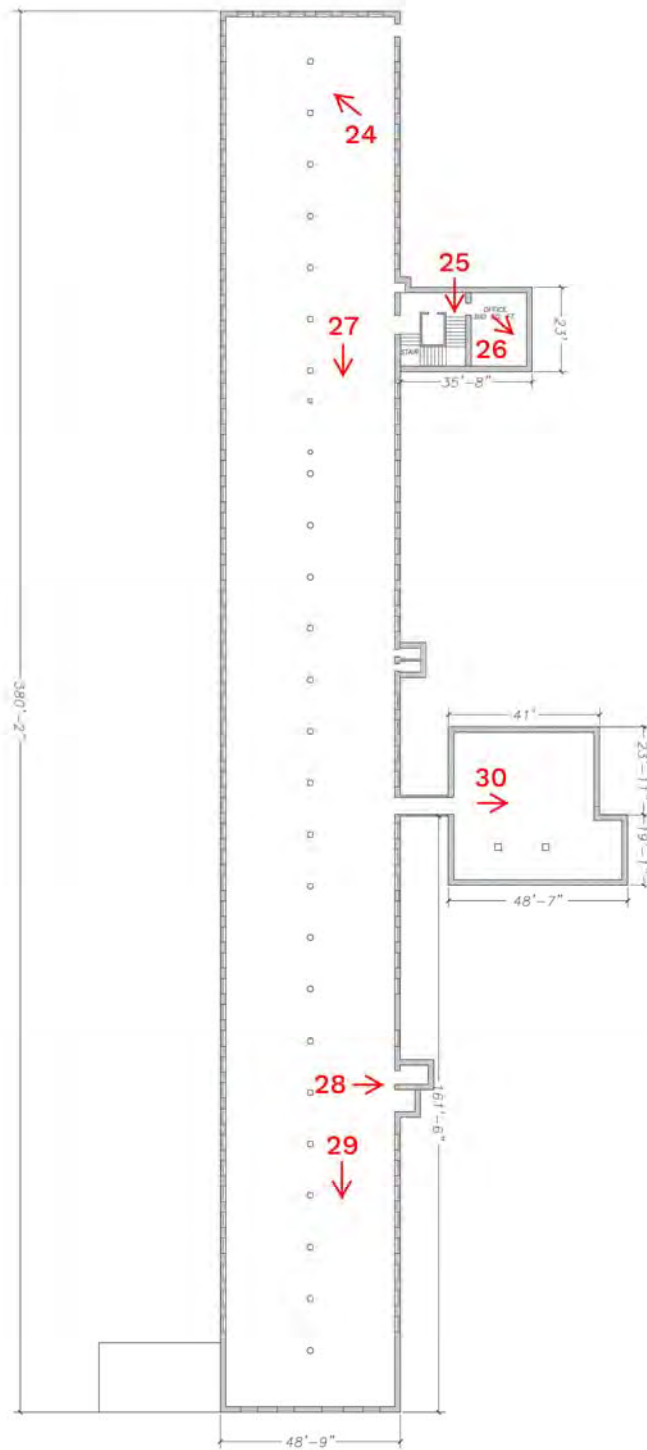
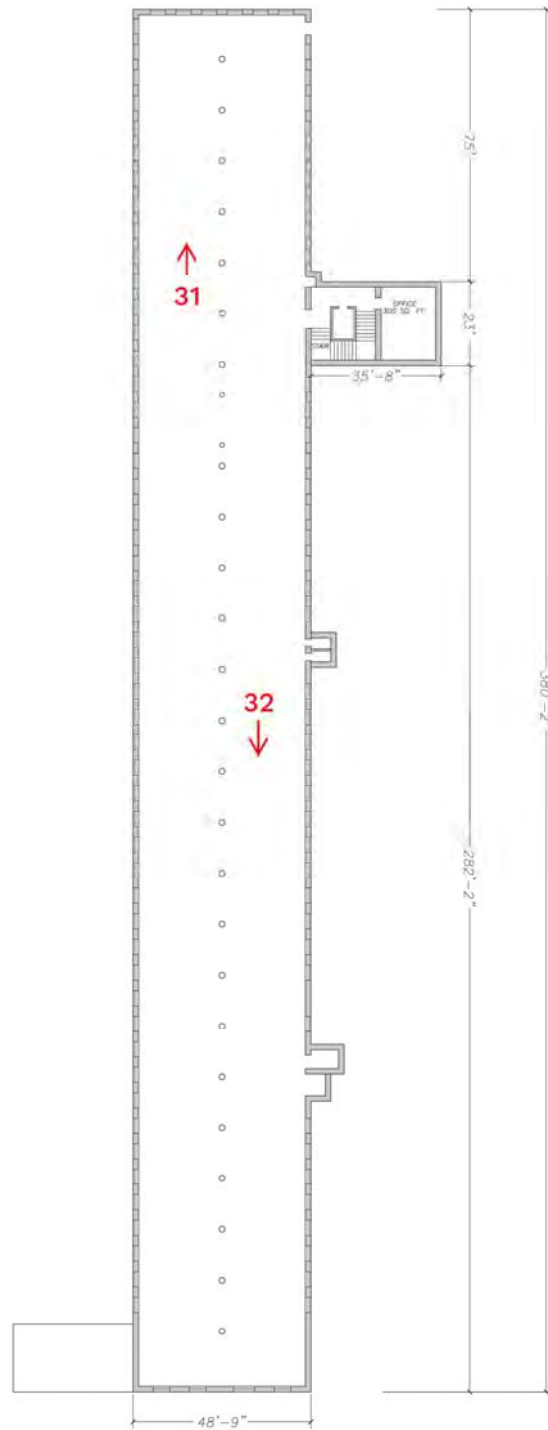


Figure 4 – Second Floor Plan with Photo Key

Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill  
Name of Property

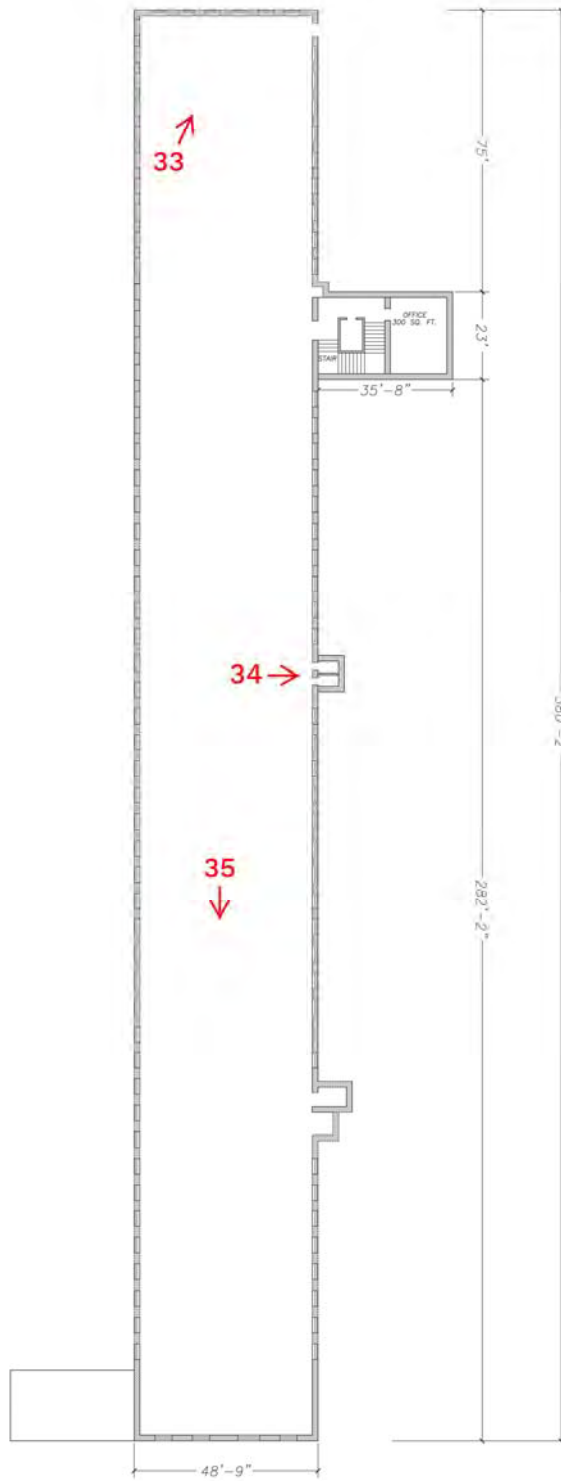
Luzerne County, PA  
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**Figure 5 – Third Floor Plan with Photo Key**

Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill  
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**Figure 6 – Fourth Floor Plan with Photo Key**

Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill  
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Figure 7 – Atlas of the City of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, W.H. Sturdevant, 1894

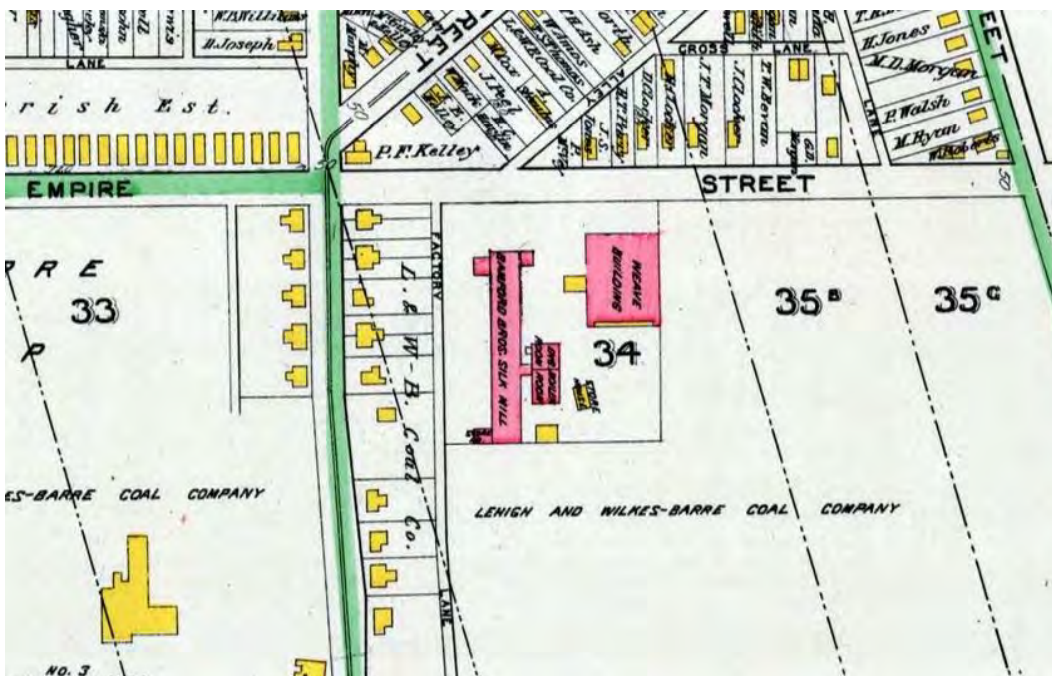
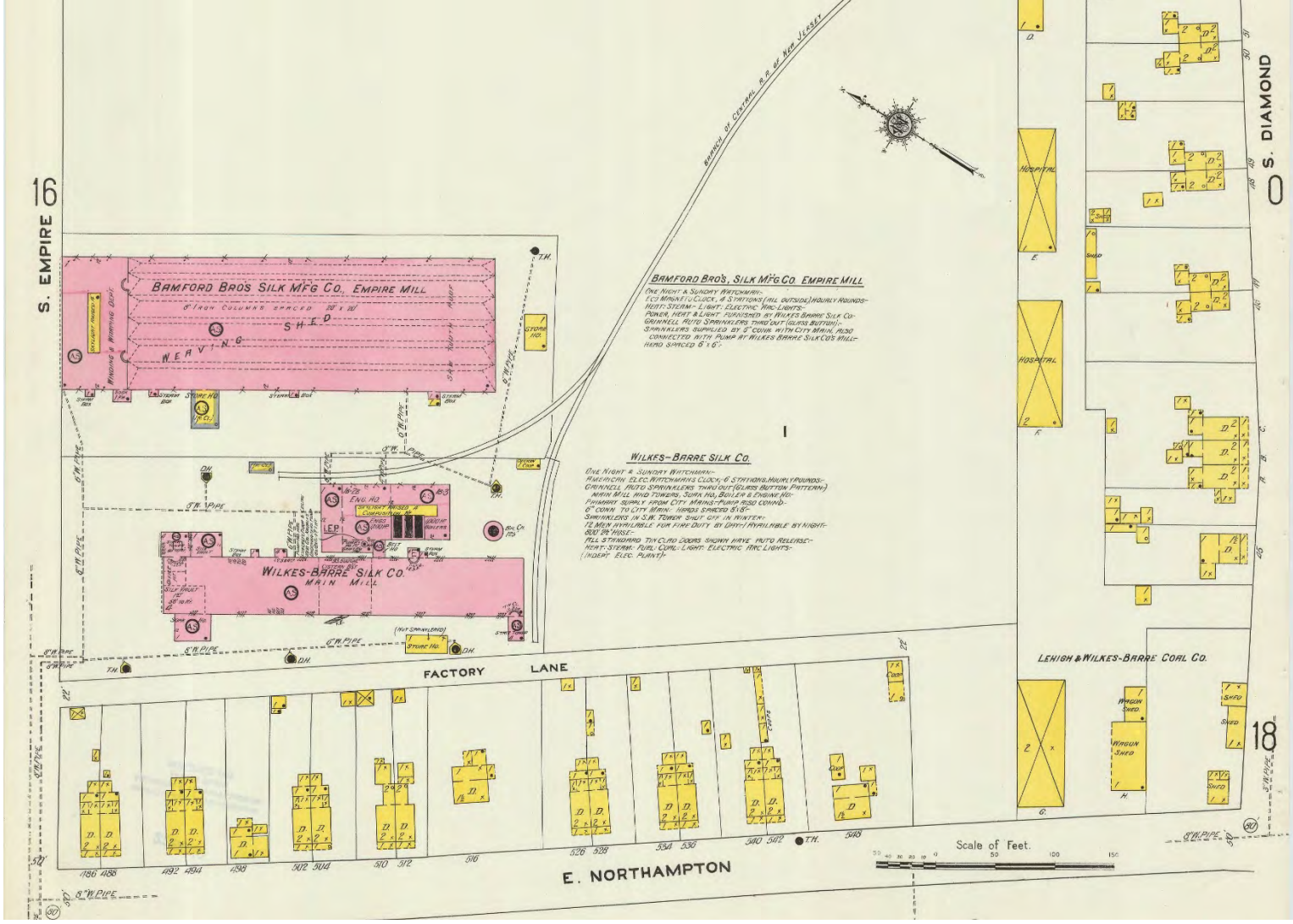


Figure 8 – Atlas of the City of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, W.H. Sturdevant, 1904



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**Figure 9** – Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1910. Shows the original parcel boundaries for both 84 S. Empire Street (Bamford Brothers) and 92 S. Empire Street (Wilkes-Barre Silk Company).









92

















THE POOL FACTORY





THE BARK FACTORY





























Title & Security  
Systems  
92

















Brick &  
MORTAR'S







































































UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill

Multiple Name:

State & County: PENNSYLVANIA, Luzerne

Date Received: 10/9/2019      Date of Pending List: 11/1/2019      Date of 16th Day: 11/18/2019      Date of 45th Day: 11/25/2019      Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: SG100004666

Nominator: SHPO

Reason For Review:

<input type="checkbox"/> Appeal	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PDIL	<input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue
<input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo
<input type="checkbox"/> Waiver	<input type="checkbox"/> National	<input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary
<input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission	<input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource	<input type="checkbox"/> Period
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	<input type="checkbox"/> TCP	<input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years
	<input type="checkbox"/> CLG	

Accept       Return       Reject      11/25/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary NR Criterion: A.  
Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria AOS: Industry; POS: 1903-1941; LOS: local

Reviewer Lisa Deline

Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2239

Date 11/25/19

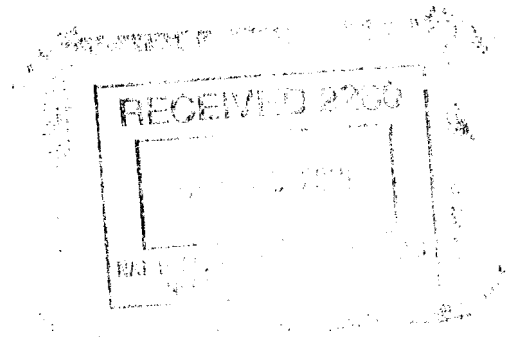
DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No      see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.





**Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office**  
PENNSYLVANIA HISTORICAL AND MUSEUM COMMISSION



October 8, 2019

Joy Beasley, Keeper  
National Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service, US Department of Interior  
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 7228  
Washington DC 20240

Re: Highland Park, Allegheny County  
Humane Fire Engine Company No. 1, Montgomery County  
Stoehr & Fister Building, Lackawanna County  
Wilkes-Barre Silk Company Mill, Luzerne County

Dear Ms. Beasley:

Enclosed please find the National Register of Historic Places nominations for the above properties. Included is the signed first page of each nomination, CDs containing the true and correct copies of the nominations and letters of support, and CDs with tif images. The proposed action for the properties is listing in the National Register. Our Historic Preservation Board members support the nominations.

If you have any questions regarding the nominations or our request for action, please contact David Maher at [damaher@pa.gov](mailto:damaher@pa.gov) or 717-783-9918. Thank you for your consideration of this submission.

Sincerely,

David Maher  
National Register Reviewer

enc.