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SOUTH CAROLINA INVENTORY FORM FOR HISTORIC DISTRICTS AND
INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES IN A MULTIPLE PROPERTY SUBMISSION

NAME OF MULTIPLE PROPERTY SUBMISSION: Historic Resources of Columbia

PREFERRED NAME OF PROPERTY: Palmetto Compress and Warehouse Company Building
(Supplement VIII)

HISTORIC NAME OF PROPERTY: Same

COMMON NAME OF PROPERTY: Same

LOCATION: 617 Devine Street (property occupies the entire city block)

CLASSIFICATION: Building

OWNER: Henry B. Thomas
Palmetto Compress Company
Post Office Box 5305
Columbia, South Carolina 29202

DESCRIPTION

The Palmetto Compress and Warehouse Company Building is a vast industrial complex built to facilitate the short-term storage of cotton bales in transit to textile mills. The complex also provided for the mechanical compression of these same bales to expedite their storage and transportation.

A one-story, frame warehouse structure, the shipping, receiving, and compressing shed, built ca. 1912, occupies the east half of the block, adjacent to the railroad lines. An immense, four-story, brick warehouse, occupying the west half of the block, was built in sections in 1917 and in 1923.(1)

The original frame portion of the building, which includes the compress mechanism, the boiler room, and the original office, has a brick pier foundation, a heavy-timber frame, and a saw-tooth roof with seven clerestories. The original vertical plank siding has been largely covered or replaced with corrugated metal. Many of the original timber cargo doors are intact. The shed has coarse timber flooring and sawn timber framing. The original clerestory glass has been replaced with clear plastic.

The hydraulic Webb Patent Compress, which was built by the Reading Iron Works in Reading, Pennsylvania, is located in a four-story, frame tower that rises above the shed. It is powered by a coal-fired boiler. Many of the original hand trucks are still in use in the shed, which has a capacity of some 5000 bales of cotton.

In 1917 the company undertook the first (southern) section of the brick warehouse. Columbia architect James B. Urquhart provided plans for the 208 by 208 foot building. Construction, by day labor, was estimated to cost \$60,000.(2) The warehouse has substantial brick exterior walls and fire walls defining four compartments on each of the four floors. The brickwork is common bond. Each compartment has an arched cargo door on the west elevation, with small paired windows to either side. These windows, which have segmental-arched heads, have had their original sash replaced with clear plastic. The south elevation of this warehouse has four sets of similar paired windows on each floor, with a simple stepped parapet at the roof line. Open, frame walkways line the east elevation between the warehouse and the original sheds. Inclined ramps with endless chains provide for carrying the bales between floors; wooden stairs are also located in these frame walkways.

The northern section of the brick warehouse, which doubled the building's storage capacity, was built in 1923.(3) The new section is similar to the 1917 section with the exception of trabeated window lintels with soldier courses and steel, six-light casement sash. A freight elevator is located in this section.

The warehouses's sixteen compartments have heavy timber floors and slow-burning timber framework, including two longitudinal files of wooden posts. The floors all slope down from the central north-south axis of the building, presumably to help drain water should the sprinkler system be activated.

The complex has approximately 320,000 square feet with a present capacity of approximately 55,000 bales of cotton.

SIGNIFICANCE

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Industry
Architecture

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: S (for office use only)

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Palmetto Compress and Warehouse Company Building is significant for its role in the growth of the textile industry in Columbia and the state. It is one of only four surviving cotton compress facilities in the Southeast and one of the largest cotton warehouses in the state. The building is also significant as an excellent example of warehouse design and construction from the early twentieth century.

Six major textile mills were built in Columbia between 1890 and 1905.(4) The rapidly expanding industry demanded development of related industries and services, including railroads and warehouses. The growing demands of the industry prompted the organization of the Palmetto Compress and Warehouse Company about 1912, with E. Borneman of Savannah as president and W. Scott as superintendent. The company's shipping, receiving, and compressing shed appears to have been built at this time. The company had a capacity of 500 bales.(5)

The Palmetto Compress and Warehouse Company was acquired by W. Gordon McCabe, president; W.M. Gibbes, vice-president; G.L. Smith, secretary-treasurer; and H. Gordon Kenna, general manager in 1917.(6) Construction of the first section of the brick warehouse began the same year; the warehouse was in operation by 1919. With the construction of the second half of the warehouse in 1923, the company had a capacity of 50,000 bales of cotton. By 1936 the Palmetto Compress and Warehouse Company boasted a top capacity of 60,000 bales.(7)

The Palmetto Compress and Warehouse was operating one of only four cotton compresses in the Southeast in 1978.(8) As of July 1985, the Palmetto Compress and Warehouse Company is still active and the buildings are in use for their original purpose.

ACREAGE: 4.0 acres

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: The boundary of the Palmetto Compress and Warehouse Company Building is shown as the heavy black line on the accompanying Richland County Tax Map #10, drawn at a scale of 1"-100'. The boundaries encompass the entire 600 block of Devine Street. This property has been associated with the compress company since its founding and contains only the Palmetto Compress and Warehouse Company Building.

QUAD NAME: Southwest Columbia

QUAD SCALE: 1:24000

UTM REFERENCE POINT 17/496400/3761000

FOOTNOTES

(1) David Duncan Wallace, History of South Carolina 4 vols. (New York: American Historical Society, Inc., 1934), 4: 992; Walsh's Columbia, South Carolina City Directory for 1913 (Charleston, S.C.: The W.H. Walsh Directory Co., 1913), p. 321.

(2) Manufacturers' Record, 11 October 1917, p.77; 18 October 1917, p.76.

(3) Manufacturers' Record, 29 March 1923, p. 101.

(4) The State (Columbia, S.C.), 26 April 1894, 3 June 1894, 12 June 1894, 21 February 1895, 23 December 1897, 10 December 1900; A Proclamation with Illustrated Views of Columbia, The Capital City of South Carolina, The Gem of the South, The Pride of the Palmetto State (Augusta, Ga.: Wolfe & Lombard, n.d. [ca. 1908]), p.4.

(5) Columbia City Directory for 1913, pp. 321, 494; Wallace, History of South Carolina, 4: 992.

(6) Walsh's Columbia, South Carolina City Directory for 1918 (Columbia, S.C.: The Walsh Directory Co., Inc., 1918), pp.358, 584; Wallace, History of South Carolina, 4: 992.

(7) Helen Kohn Hennig, ed., Columbia, Capital of South Carolina, 1786-1936 (Columbia, S.C.: The R.L. Bryan Company, 1936),p. 329.

(8) Interview with Henry B. Thomas, Palmetto Compress & Warehouse Company, Columbia, S.C., 8 August 1978.