

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name John S. Tilley Ladders Company

other names/site number The Tilley Lofts

associated MPDF N/A

2. Location

street & number 122 Second Street [] not for publication

city or town Watervliet [] vicinity

state New York code 36 county Albany code 001 zip code 12189

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 as 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 [] nationally [] statewide [X] locally. ([] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Nicholas P. Lynch Deputy SHPO
Signature of certifying official/Title

3/10/2017
Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register
[] see continuation sheet
[] determined eligible for the National Register
[] see continuation sheet
[] determined not eligible for the National Register

[] removed from the National Register

[] other (explain) _____

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

5/15/17
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

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>0</u> | <u>0</u> | structures |
| <u>0</u> | <u>0</u> | objects |
| <u>1</u> | <u>0</u> | TOTAL |

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**N/A**6. Function or Use****Historic Functions**

(enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTIONManufacturing facility**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: multiple dwelling**7. Description****Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

EARLY 20th CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTNo Style**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICKwalls BRICKroof SYNTHETICother GLASS, METAL

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 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 that 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 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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance:

(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY

Period of Significance:

1916 - 1964

Significant Dates:

1916, 1920, 1924, 1956, 1964

Significant Person:**Cultural Affiliation:****Architect/Builder:**

Clark, William E: 1924 building

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 Building Survey # _____
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other repository: _____

10. Geographical Data**Acreage of Property** 1.54 acres**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 605703 4729202
Zone Easting Northing3 18
Zone Easting Northing2 18 4 18 **Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary is shown on the enclosed mapping, all of which are entitled "John S. Tilley Ladders Company, Watervliet, Albany Co., NY"

Boundary Justification

The boundary has been drawn to reflect historic conditions and contains only acreage directly associated with the development of this site by the Tilley Ladders Company during the cited period of significance, 1916 to 1964.

11. Form Prepared Byname/title Michael Lopez, TAP Inc.; edited by William E. Krattinger, NYS Division for Historic Preservationorganization NYS Division for Historic Preservation date March 2015; November 2016street & number PO Box 189 telephone (516) 268-2167city or town Waterford state NY zip code 12188**Additional Documentation****Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's locationA **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**

Photographs by William E. Krattinger, NYS DHP; September 2016, TIFF format

Original digital files at NYS DHP, Peebles Island State Park, Waterford NY 12188

- 001 EXTERIOR, view looking west along Second Street showing north elevation
- 002 EXTERIOR, view looking north from First Street; 1964 block to right
- 003 EXTERIOR, view looking north showing 1924 block
- 004 EXTERIOR, view looking east showing west wall of 1964 block
- 005 EXTERIOR, view looking north showing 1920 block
- 006 EXTERIOR, view looking west showing east wall of 1916 block
- 007 INTERIOR, view looking south in main entrance foyer
- 008 INTERIOR, stairwell in northwest stair tower
- 009 INTERIOR, first floor, view looking east in double-loaded corridor
- 010 INTERIOR, second floor, view looking west in double-loaded corridor
- 011 INTERIOR, view contrasting steel support column (foreground) with earlier wood columns

Property Owner (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO)name Redburn Developmentstreet & number 172 River Street telephone _____city or town Troy state NY zip code 12180**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. 470 *et seq.*)**Estimated Burden Statement:** public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, D.C. 20503

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John S. Tilley Ladders Company
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Narrative Description of Property

Summary Paragraph

The John S. Tilley Ladders Company building is located at 122 Second Street in the City of Watervliet, Albany County, New York. This former factory complex, which is made up of five distinct brick and concrete block sections erected between 1916 and 1964, is L-shaped in plan and corresponds with a parcel of land situated between First Street to the south and Second Street to the north. The buildings are largely lacking in architectural elaboration and are of straightforward industrial conception. Sited in Watervliet's Port Schuyler section, the nominated property is the lone industrial architectural presence in a neighborhood largely characterized by small wood-frame houses that once served in large measure as worker housing. The nominated complex has street frontage on its four sides, with the north elevation being situated in closest proximity to its corresponding street. The north elevation faces Second Street while the opposite south elevation, separated from the street by a sizeable parking lot, faces towards First Street. First and Second avenues bound the building and nominated property on its east and west sides.

The 1916 building was constructed to house the nation's oldest ladder factory and accommodated both the assembly of thousands of ladders per year in addition to the on-site storage of lumber and finished goods. This building was followed by four additions to bring it to its current extent, these being constructed from 1920 to 1964. The original 1916 block is a two-story red brick masonry building which was constructed following a 1915 fire, which destroyed an earlier wood-frame factory. The adjoining three-story addition, which closely matches the design of the 1916 block, was added to the original west elevation in 1924. Together they form a long rectangular block that fronts on Second Street, with more than 30 bays of window openings, the openings being for the most part spanned by segmental brick arches. A single-story brick and concrete block masonry lumber storage addition was constructed in 1956, at the west end of this block, and a similar addition was constructed in 1964 at the east end, though it runs perpendicular to the main east-to-west axis of the building. Immediately north of the 1964 section, and engaged with the wall of the 1916 section, is a 1920 two-story brick block with stair tower, which, chronologically, was the second section of the complex to be built.

Prior to the recent completion of a Federal Historic Preservation Tax Incentive rehabilitation, the interior of the nominated building was largely given over to vast open floor plans at all levels in characteristic period industrial fashion. Framing in the main core buildings, 1916 and 1924, which have load-bearing brick masonry walls, consists of heavy wood timber columns and beams, as well as a system of cross-bridged joists. Before being rehabilitated, a majority of the window openings had been closed off, the sash having been removed; however, approximately 24 12-over-12 wood sash windows survived in storage on site, allowing for the accurate reproduction of missing units. The more modern additions that flank the core of the complex—namely the 1956 and 1964 blocks—are steel-framed with poured concrete floors and roof decking. All five blocks have flat roofs. Together, these buildings have over 76,000 square feet of interior space.

Following rehabilitation, the building now serves as an apartment facility, the Tilley Lofts, and accommodates a total of 62 housing units. This was in large measure accomplished by the introduction of a double-loaded corridor system to the formerly open industrial space. Within these corridors in the earlier sections are, nevertheless, visible, from east to west, the series of wood columns which are part

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of the internal framing system of the 1916 and 1924 blocks, in addition to period wood flooring; in one area a wood beam and riveted steel column are positioned adjacent to one another, thereby articulating the different building systems used in constructing the various sections of the complex and the changes in building technology which had occurred. Other aspects of the original building remain visible, such as in the stair tower between the 1924 and 1956 sections, which retains its cantilevered fireproof concrete stair, metal pipe railing, and exposed brick wall. Artifacts and memorabilia situated in the principal lobby pay homage to the Tilley firm's history and its association with the nominated building.

Narrative Description

Exterior

The north-facing elevation of the John S. Tilley Ladders Company building, which fronts on Second Street, is comprised of (moving east to west) the 1920 section, the original 1916 section, the 1924 section, and the 1956 section. The 1916 section is 20 bays wide, while the adjacent 1924 section, which was integrated with the earlier portion relatively seamlessly, though it is a story higher, consists of a total of 12 bays not inclusive of a projecting stair tower. These two sections form the principal historic core of the building, along with the smaller 1920 block, which was constructed after the original section. All of the original basement windows of the original section, excepting one, have been closed off. At first-story level the windows of this original section, while also for the most part closed off, have been opened up and are again fitted with 12-over-12 wood sash, excepting in one loading bay. Second floor windows are also now fitted with 12-over-12 sash. In addition to on-site evidence, this window configuration also appears in historic photographs of the building. The parapet which terminates this elevation, and which extends across the entire original section, includes a raised section with a plain horizontal panel formed by brick headers; it is a modest decorative flourish to what is otherwise a utilitarian elevation. West of this original section is the 1924 addition, which largely harmonizes with the earlier section. The fenestration of that section has been similarly restored from its former condition, whereby most all of the openings had been closed off and the window sash removed. Projecting forward from the northwest corner of this section is a three-story brick masonry stair tower which has paired wood doors at grade level and a pair of nine-light stationary metal casements at second-story level. These paired casements are situated at the bottom of a vertical recessed wall panel that terminates at third-story level in a brick arch with keystone, below which is a 32-light metal casement window; above this large window is a diamond motif centered in the brick panel that occupies the head of the arch. Beyond the tower, to the west, is the 1956 section, which is utilitarian in nature and three bays wide on the north elevation; the most recent configuration, inclusive of a large overhead garage door, has been reworked so that the fenestration now consists of three windows. On the opposite end of this elevation, the northeast corner is formed by the 1920 addition to the first section, which also includes a projecting stair tower; it is two bays wide with first-story wood doors with twelve-light metal sash providing light for the staircase within. A historic aerial image of the facility indicates that these two towers were once covered with shallow hipped roofs and had an additional stage, now removed, above where they now terminate.

On the south elevation the two original sections, 1916 and 1924, are the most visually prominent and collectively they account for a 22-bay expanse. As with the opposite elevation, the fenestration presents a regulated rhythm here, at first and second-story level of the earlier section and second and third-story level of the 1924 block. Fenestration largely consists of segmental arched openings aligned vertically into regular bays, though the stair tower positioned where the two sections meet employs (with one

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exception) trabeated openings. Twelve-over-twelve wood sash is the typical window type, as it is on the opposite elevation, excepting the square-headed upper tower windows, which are fitted with 12-light metal casements. The three-story 1924 block has 12 bays of regular fenestration, and the company name, "JOHN S. TILLEY LADDERS CO.," is spelled out and visible through faded yellow paint at the roof line, above the arched window heads and below the parapet copping. The original two-story section is 8-bays wide; moving west to east, the sixth and eighth bays are double the size of the remaining window openings; the former is bricked off at both levels and the latter is fitted with paired 12-over-12 sash.

The west elevation of the factory presents as the concrete block wall of the 1956 section, which is blind, behind which rises the west elevation of the 1924 block. At third story level is a band of windows which brought natural light into the upper story of that section; these are fitted with metal casement windows, treated as multiple units predicated on 12-light sash. The 1956 block's south elevation is punctuated by large windows with transom bars which accommodate six-over-six sash and six-light transoms.

As for the 1964 southeastern section, its south elevation is constructed of concrete block and the east elevation, originally blind, is now punctuated by a series of windows grouped as pairs and fitted with six-over-six sash. The east elevation of the 1920 block is divided into three bays, with openings for paired windows on both floors of the first bay, paired wood loading doors on the first and second stories of the central bay and, at the third bay, a bricked-in opening on the first floor and a 12-pane fixed window on the second floor. There is metal coping at the roofline.

Interior

The interiors of each part of the Tilley complex no longer appear as they did historically, at least not in a spatial sense, as the nominated building has been rehabilitated to serve a new domestic function as the Tilley Lofts. The original 1916 building and the 1924 addition were characterized on the interior by painted but exposed brick bearing walls, exposed floor framing consisting of sizeable wood columns and beams and common joists, and wood flooring. In the basement are visible six rows of one-foot-square timbers on concrete footings, which carry the floor loads in the two original sections, in concert with a central row of timbers which rest on two-foot-square brick piers. Joists were aligned on a north-to-south alignment and were notched into metal support brackets where they meet the principal beams. This system varies on the third floor of the three-story 1924 building, as there the joists are supported by wood bracing which in turn bears on the beams. A freight elevator and stair are situated against the rear, south wall, where these main sections meet. There is additionally a staircase at the northeast corner, which connects the basement to first and second floors, and a second staircase projecting from the northwest corner, where the three-story section engages the 1956 west addition.

Still visible within the double-loaded corridors of the 1916 and 1924 sections are the series of east to west wood columns, which provide structural context in what is now a rehabilitated apartment building. Flooring also remains, but wall, ceilings and the doors into the individual apartment units represent newly introduced material. Other aspects of the building as it appeared historically, while still a factory, remain visible, among them the stair tower situated where the 1924 and 1956 sections meet, which retains its cantilevered fireproof concrete stair, metal pipe railing, and exposed brick wall.

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Narrative Statement of Significance

Statement of Significance Summary

The former John S. Tilley Ladders Company building, located in the City of Watervliet, Albany County, New York, is a historic factory complex that satisfies National Register of Historic Places Criterion A, in the area of Industry, given its association with a manufacturing concern the history of which spanned a century and a half. Founded in 1855 by the company's namesake, John S. Tilley, the company was the nation's oldest ladder manufacturer and during its active years manufactured tens of thousands of ladders and scaffolding units which were widely used by consumers for a wide range of applications, among them household chores, in the construction trades, and for the harvesting of fruit. Ladder design for those basic functions changed little during the course of the twentieth century, and during that period the company continued to expand; this growth is apparent in the continual additions made to the original 1916 factory, which in time came to occupy a large portion of a city block in Watervliet. Employing on average 100 workers at a time and owned by several generations of the Tilley family, the company was among Watervliet's larger employers until it ceased operations in 2004, at which time it filed for bankruptcy protection. The nominated building remains a salient reminder of the Tilley family's Watervliet business, the operation of which spanned portions of three centuries, and a once vital manufacturing niche. The building's adaptation and rehabilitation as an apartment facility has provided the former factory with a new use and ensured its survival as a part of the streetscape of Watervliet's Port Schuyler neighborhood.

Watervliet History: An Overview

The City of Watervliet, a municipality situated approximately seven miles north of the City of Albany and west of the City of Troy, in the upper Hudson River corridor, was first used in the early seventeenth century by the French, and later by the Dutch, as an outpost from which to participate in the lucrative fur trade; it was located on lands historically used and occupied by the Mohawk and Mohican Native American tribes. The first period of significant European-American settlement occurred during the 1640s, at which time the lands fell within the Manor of Rensselaerswyck. In the early nineteenth century three separate villages roughly formed what is the present-day City of Watervliet: Washington or Washingtonville, which was absorbed by Port Schuyler in 1827; Gibbonsville, founded by James Gibbons in 1805; and West Troy, first developed in 1823 and, as its name implies, situated immediately across the river from Troy. Largely as a result of the prosperous era of trade which followed the completion of the Champlain and Erie canals in the 1820s, these three communities were merged into a single municipal entity, the Village of West Troy, in 1836, which would later be incorporated as the City of Watervliet. Thus Watervliet has evolved over more than three and a half centuries from a Hudson River trading outpost on New York's northern frontier to a town (1788), a cluster of villages, a single village and, ultimately, to a city in 1896.

Watervliet's largest and most enduring industry, the Watervliet Arsenal, dates to the War of 1812, when the United States army constructed strategic armories to combat the threat of British attacks. Since that time, the arsenal has equipped the army with weapons and ammunition and, perhaps most famously, cannons, for every military conflict since 1812. Located on a sprawling 143-acre campus, which includes 72 buildings, the complex was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1986.

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During the heyday of the Erie and Champlain canals – and before the railroads significantly undercut canal activity (also before the 1918 New York State Barge Canal bypassed Watervliet's canal side-cut) - small businesses and tradesmen, like carpenters and river captains, formed the foundation of the local economy. Although it would never attain the industrial might of the neighboring population centers of Troy, Albany and Cohoes, which emerged as major centers of textile manufacturing in the mid to later nineteenth century, Watervliet in the early nineteenth century nevertheless served as home to a number of modest industries. Most notable among these was the Meneely bell foundry, established in 1826, which manufactured bells and carillons which were known worldwide for their quality and clarity. In addition, Jones car works manufactured carriages and then trolley cars; Roy Mills spun woolens; and the Covert Manufacturing Company fabricated harness gear and chains.¹

John S. Tilley Ladders Co. History

John Tilley (1806-1878) was engaged in the manufacture of barrels and ladders in the rural Rensselaer County, New York town of Grafton, prior to his relocation to the Village of West Troy in 1855. While Tilley continued to be invested in the cooperage trade after relocating, in time he focused his business interests solely on the manufacture of ladders and scaffolding. A native of Massachusetts, in the 1860 federal census Tilley was shown as a resident of West Troy; he listed his occupation as "cooper" and claimed real estate and personal assets amounting to \$12,000. By the time of the 1870 census, Tilley's occupation was noted as "manufacturer ladders," with assets amounting to \$25,000. His son and namesake, John S. Tilley (1852-1913), formally assumed the reins of the business from his father in 1878; this change was apparently underway already, as by the time of the 1875 census the elder Tilley's occupation was noted as "none," while his son's was noted as a ladder manufacturer. Originally established as a small shop at the corner of First Avenue and Second Street, by 1886 Tilley Ladders occupied a modest two-story frame commercial building where its manufacturing operations were conducted. The 1903 Sanborn fire insurance maps indicate that, by that time, the Tilley complex consisted of a three-story building where sawing and planing of wood material was executed, in addition to lumber sheds of various sizes for storage of unfinished material and five company-owned dwellings. Between 1886 and 1896, John S. Tilley filed several patents related to improvements to his step and extension ladders and ladder hooks. Tilley's overarching business goals were somewhat simple and straightforward, centered on the desire to increase ladder strength and make ladders easier and more efficient to operate. A 1907 trade journal reported that Tilley had doubled its manufacturing capacity because of the increasing demand for its ladders, scaffolding and staging, ladder hooks, brackets and flag poles.²

A catastrophic fire in July 1915 largely destroyed the Tilley manufacturing facility, but plans to rebuild were quickly announced later that summer. As noted in a period newspaper account, the fire caused an estimated \$90,000 in losses, and required assistance from the Troy fire department to ensure that the fire didn't spread to adjacent areas.³ Operations were temporarily conducted in an undamaged storehouse on the opposite side of Second Street from the destroyed facility while plans were quickly forwarded to erect a new more modern facility.⁴ To that end a two-story brick factory consisting of over 30,000 square feet of space was built between First and Second streets. By this time, Tilley's son-in-

¹ Lawrence J. Cerri, *The History of Watervliet, New York* (Watervliet, NY: 1989), 49-56.

² *The Iron Age*, vol. 79 (New York: David Williams Company, 1907).

³ "\$90,000 Fire at Watervliet," *The Syracuse Herald*, 20 July 1915.

⁴ Watervliet notes, *The Albany Evening Journal*, 21 July 1915.

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law, Herman B. Gaffers, has risen to become the head of the company, which by that time had been in existence for 60 years. Under Gaffers's tenure the plant more than doubled in size with the 1924 construction of a three-story brick masonry building which joined the west elevation of the original building. That section of the building was designed by the Troy architect William E. Clark (1882-1935), whose work principally centered on alterations rendered to factories, stores and school buildings. The Tilley commission likely ranked as one of his largest; other notable commissions included his role in the expansion of the Silver Bay Association resort complex on the east side of Lake George in Warren County, New York (1925-1926) and an addition to Troy's Leonard Hospital (1932, no longer extant).

The new Tilley addition largely mirrored its older and existing counterpart. For the addition Clark employed neither mill construction – a fire resistant arrangement of heavy timbers particularly common in later nineteenth and early twentieth century American industrial buildings, used in concert with load-bearing masonry walls– nor a reinforced concrete structure, which by 1924 was coming into more general usage. Instead Clark used a structural system which combined heavy timber columns and beams along with smaller common joists, sustained by a load-bearing brick membrane. Limited concrete was nevertheless used for the column bases in the basement.

At about this time, the Tilley ladder line included approximately 17 different models, plus several types of scaffolding and parts such as ladder and gutter hooks. A 1929 sales catalog advertised these various types and touted their uses, and most continued to be manufactured until the company ceased operating in 2004. Model names closely corresponded to their intended uses. The "Electrician" was an especially popular model in the trades because its versatility as a heavy duty ladder-trestle combination. Window dressers favored the "Decorator," given that it was strong but easy to use because its back legs folded over the sides of the front to make it compact. Window cleaners could reach different window and floor heights with a specifically designed sectional ladder, with features such as a narrow, tapered top to fit between window mullions and splayed side rails that widened the distance between the feet, for greater stability. The "Trojan" was a light-weight ladder for painting and general housework, with a V-shaped support between the rear legs for increased stability. The "Omega" was used for fruit harvesting because its design allowed pickers to better position themselves between trees, and it had flared front side rails to accommodate uneven topography. Extension ladders came in various heights, as did tall single ladders. Typically, the ladder rungs were constructed of hard wood, such as ash and hickory, while the remaining parts were fashioned from Western hemlock and Sitka spruce, among other species. The company maintained lumber yards and sheds, which allowed for the seasoning of wood until it was ready for the manufacturing process.

The Tilley firm advertised widely in trade magazines and displayed its products at trade shows and other large public events, among them the St. Louis World's Fair in 1904 and the International Convention of the Master Painters in 1922.⁵ While many of the company's ladder designs and staging were in large measure meant for ordinary house work, chores and straightforward trades work, Tilley nevertheless did provide equipment for more specialized projects. Tilley-produced scaffolding was used on church projects and public works projects, such as repairs to the New York State Education Building in nearby Albany, and Tilley ladders were also used in the 1929 construction of the airship *U.S.S. Akron*.⁶ Admiral Richard E. Byrd Jr. notably used Tilley ladders during his South Pole expeditions. By the 1930s, Tilley

⁵ "Manufacturers' Exhibits at the Convention Attract Much Attention," *The Painters Magazine* (New York, 1922)

⁶ Hugh Allen, *The Story of the Airship. The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.*, 1931.

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ladders were being shipped throughout the United States, to Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, and as far afield as South Africa, a testament to the company's success and the quality of its product line.⁷

Herman B. Gaffers, who, by the 1910s, had assumed the leadership of the company, was succeeded by his son-in-law, Lewis S. Holland, who guided another phase in the company's growth by establishing a second manufacturing plant in Davenport, Iowa, in 1950.⁸ Tilley phased out the manufacture of scaffolding and in the 1950s entered into a new phase of history as it began manufacturing aluminum ladders. This period is reflected in the Watervliet factory's most recent additions, the 1964 "Aluminum Building," which was used for storing finished aluminum ladders, at the east end of the complex.

The front loading door into the 1924 portion of the building led to an internal rail system used to transport lumber to the rear, where it could air dry. The entire first floor of this block was devoted mainly to woodworking, including sawing and planing. In later years, aluminum ladders were made on the second floor and then sent through a chute to the southeast "Aluminum Building" and onto trucks in the rear yard for transportation. Here, too, was a bin used to collect wood shavings, once widely used by dairy farmers for animal bedding. Rungs were made on the third story, as were fiberglass ladders when they were introduced, which occurred in the 1980s. Extension ladder assembly in the adjoining 1916 section lined the entire north side of the first floor, with finished ladders loaded at the east corner. The second floor of this building was used for the storage of parts.⁹

While the John S. Tilley Ladders Company had successfully dealt with competing ladder companies since the early twentieth century and while this competition did at times adversely affect the company's interests, it was not ultimately competition that led to the company's closure in more recent times. Instead, it was the soaring cost of liability insurance—with premiums that effectively negated 29 percent of sales revenue—that destroyed the company's profit margins and ultimately forced Tilley to close its doors in 2004.¹⁰ The following overview of the company's demise and the unfortunate circumstances that led to it appeared in the United States Congressional reports for 2004:

Small businesses and workers may suffer the most [from frivolous lawsuits]. The Nation's oldest ladder manufacturer, the family-owned John S. Tilley Ladders Company near Albany, New York, recently filed for bankruptcy protection and sold off most of its assets due to litigation costs. Founded in 1855, the Tilley firm could not handle the cost of liability insurance, which had risen from 6 percent of sales a decade ago to 29 percent, even though the company had never lost an actual court judgement.¹¹

Summary

The John S. Tilley Ladders Company has been associated with Watervliet since it was first established on this site in 1855, at which time the company's founder moved his manufacturing operations there from rural Rensselaer County. The facility consists of the original 1916 building, which grew with a series of

⁷"Tilley Ladder Company Established in 1855, One of the Largest Ladder Manufacturers in the United States." Clipping from unknown newspaper, 26 September 1937.

⁸"Ladder Company Purchases Firm in Davenport, IA," *The Times Record*, 19 January 1950.

⁹ Interview with Robert Howland, former owner, John S. Tilley Ladders Company.

¹⁰<http://www.forbes.com/forbes/2004/0112/052.html>

¹¹Congressional Record, vol. 150, part 13, July 22, 2004 to September 14, 2004, 18350.

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John S. Tilley Ladders Company
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additions rendered in 1920, 1924, 1956 and 1964, these additions mirroring the company's continued growth and vitality during this period. John Tilley and his successors, who guided the company during the course of its storied history, made significant contributions towards the development of this seemingly ordinary and utilitarian object, with ladders customized to accommodate both domestic chores and trade work. The nominated factory, now rehabilitated to serve a new function, nevertheless remains to chronicle their contribution to local industry and manufacturing in Watervliet.

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Section 9 Page 1

John S. Tilley Ladders Company
Name of Property
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9. Major Bibliographical References

Allen, Hugh. *The Story of the Airship*. The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co., 1931.

Cerri, Lawrence J. *The History of Watervliet, New York*. Watervliet, NY, 1989.

Interview with Robert Howland, former owner, John S. Tilley Ladders Company. 11 February 2015.

"Ladder Company Purchases Firm in Davenport, IA." *The Times Record*. 19 January 1950.

Manufacturers' Exhibits at the Convention Attract Much Attention," *The Painters Magazine* (New York, 1922)

"Tilley Ladder Company Established in 1855, One of the Largest Ladder Manufacturers in the United States." Clipping from unknown newspaper. 26 September 1937.

The Iron Age, vol. 79 (New York: David Williams Company, 1907).

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John S. Tilley Ladders Company
Name of Property
Albany County, New York
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JOHN TILLEY

Founder and owner of the business
from 1855 to 1878

United States Department of the Interior
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Section 9 Page 3

John S. Tilley Ladders Company
Name of Property
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ABOVE, Tilley firm's shop prior to destruction by fire, July 1915; Tilley ladders on display, 1914



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section 9 Page 4

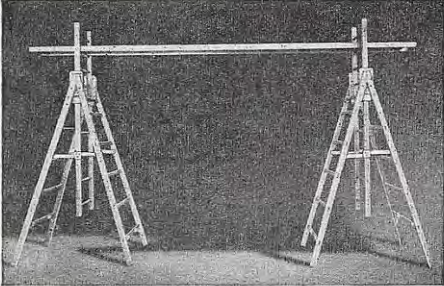
John S. Tilley Ladders Company
Name of Property
Albany County, New York
County and State

HARDWARE AGE—CATALOG AND DIRECTORY NUMBER, JULY 24, 1952 995


The Mark of **TILLEY** *Distinctive Quality*
REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

Ladders and Scaffolding universally known for Superior
Distinctive Features. Complete line of Extension Ladders

EXTENSION LADDER TRESTLES
With patented "Rigid Locks"



Step Ladders with patented Safety Spreaders



Single Ladders
Step Ladders
Sectional Ladders
Orchard Ladders
Plain Trestles
Extension Trestles
Extension Planks
Adjustable Scaffold
Jacks
Toothpick Stages
Swing Stage Plat-
forms

Makers of Tilley
Extension ladders
with famous auto-
matic brass bushed
Spring Locks.

THE JOHN S. TILLEY LADDERS CO., Inc. Watervliet, N. Y. & Davenport, Iowa

ABOVE, 1952 company advertisement; BELOW, Tilley scaffolding, unidentified church

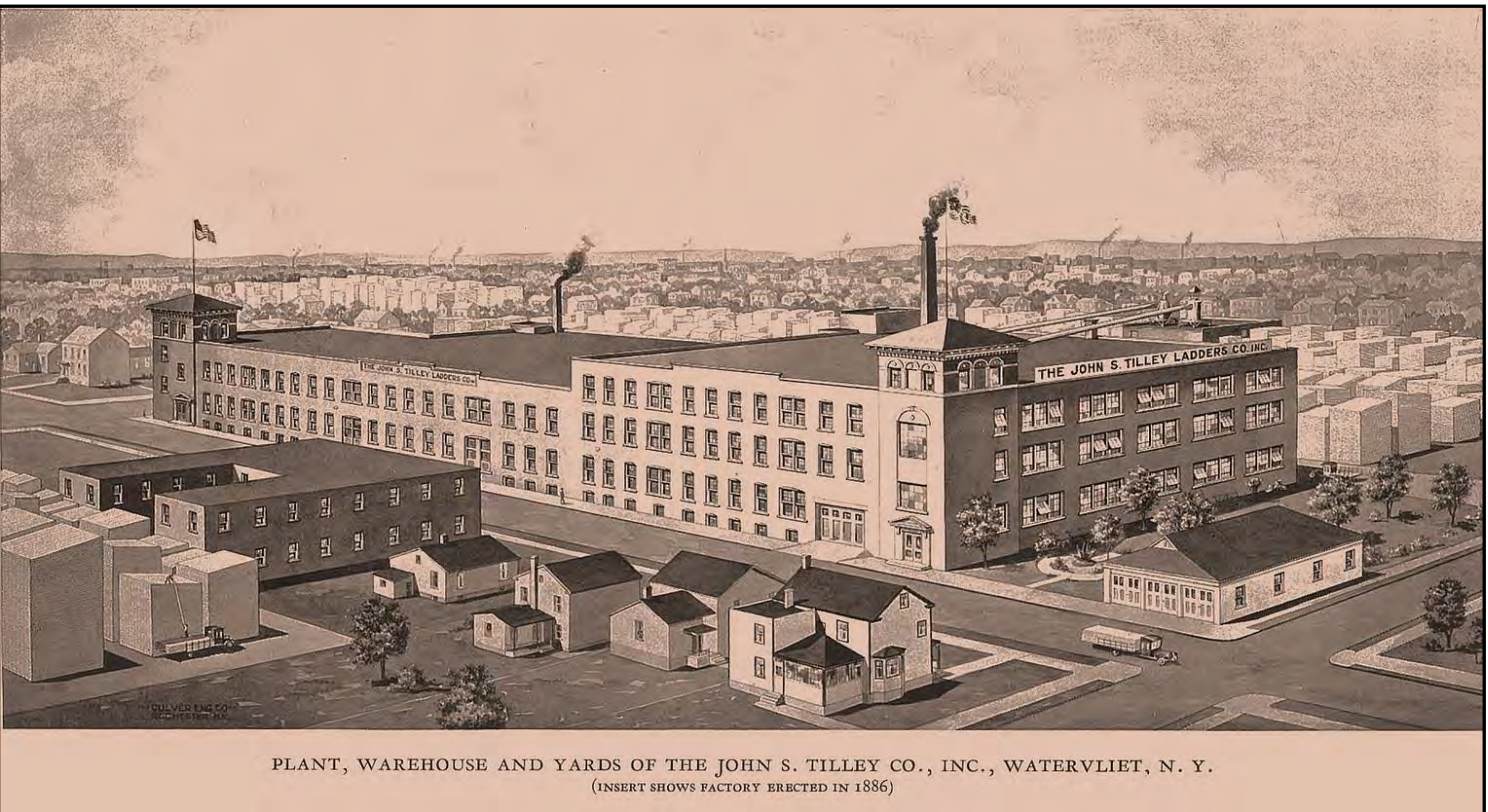


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Section 9 Page 5

John S. Tilley Ladders Company
Name of Property
Albany County, New York
County and State



4732000

4731000

4730000

4729000

4728000

4727000

4732000

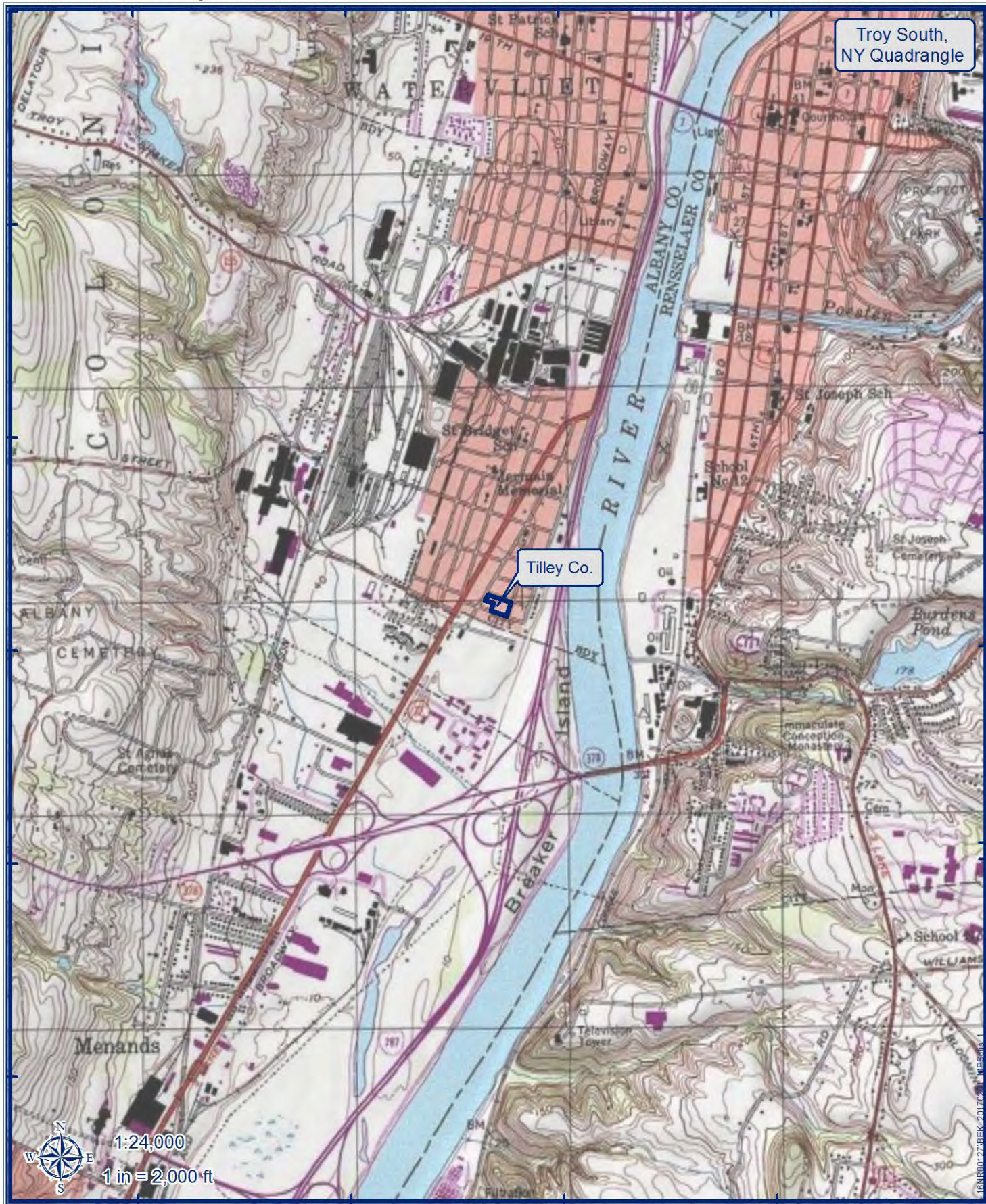
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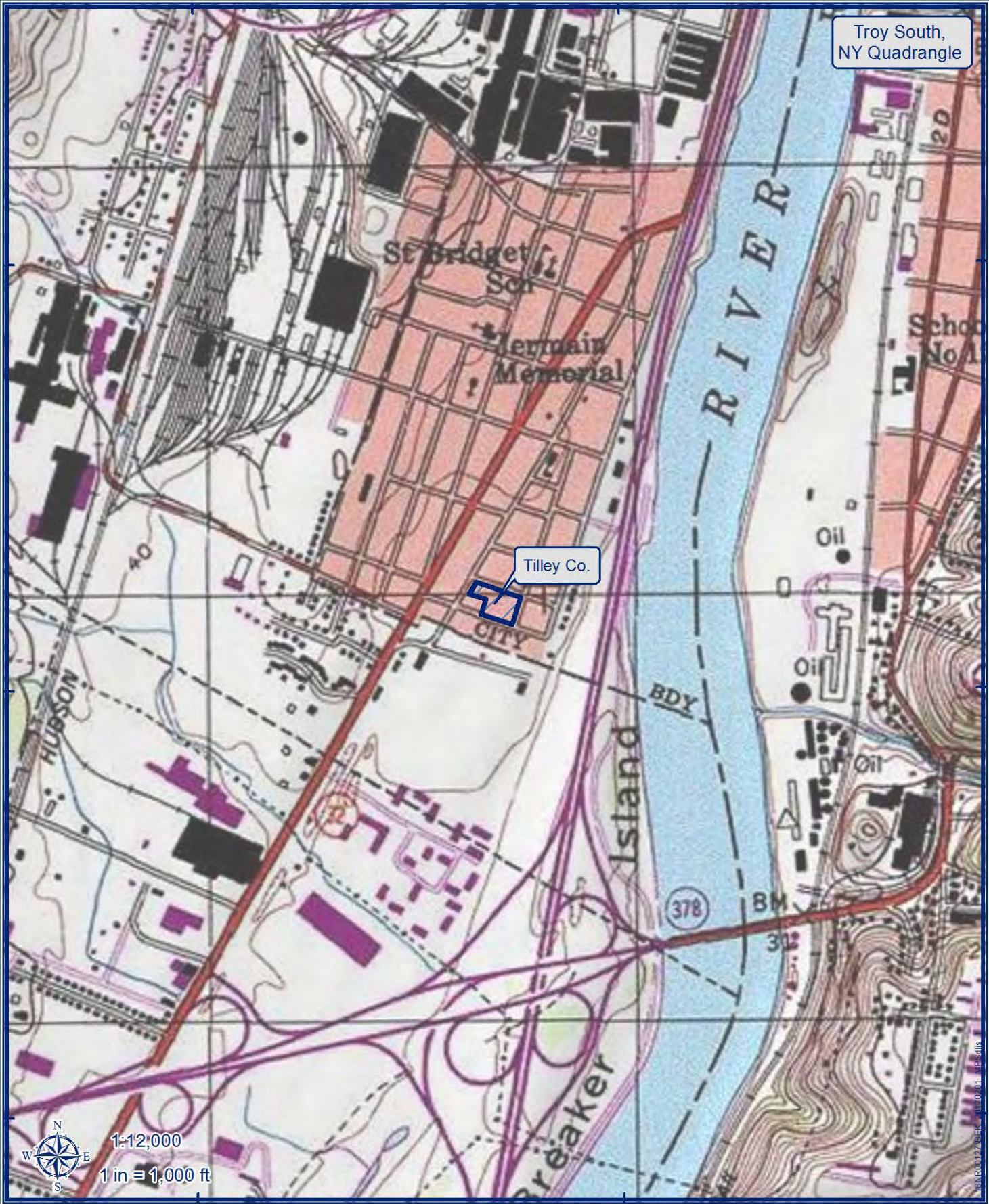
4727000



Troy South,
NY Quadrangle

Tilley Co.

1:24,000
1 in = 2,000 ft



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter



Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation















61

62

63

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

| | | |
|-------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Requested Action: | Nomination | |
| Property Name: | Tilley, John S., Ladders Company | |
| Multiple Name: | | |
| State & County: | NEW YORK, Albany | |

Date Received: 3/31/2017 Date of Pending List: Date of 16th Day: Date of 45th Day: 5/15/2017 Date of Weekly List: 5/25/2017

| | |
|--------------------|-------------|
| Reference number: | SG100000993 |
| Nominator: | State |
| Reason For Review: | |

 X Accept Return Reject 5/15/2017 Date

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Abstract/Summary Comments: | A PDIL signed by Roger, the Tilley Ladders Company is eligible. |
| Recommendation/ Criteria | |

| | | | |
|-----------|-------------------------|------------|---|
| Reviewer | <u>Alexis Abernathy</u> | Discipline | <u>Historian</u> |
| Telephone | <u>(202)354-2236</u> | Date | <u> </u> |

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

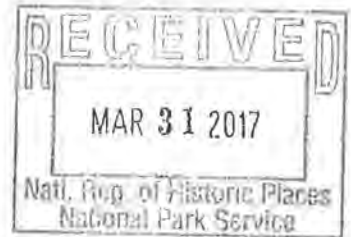
If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

ROSE HARVEY
Commissioner



24 March 2017

Alexis Abernathy
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1201 Eye St. NW, 8th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005

Re: National Register Nomination

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following MPDF and seven nominations, all on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Southold Town Milestones, Suffolk County
Southold Milestone 7 (Southold Town Milestones), Suffolk County
Winans-Huntting House, Dutchess County
Reformed Church of Melrose, Bronx County
PS 186, New York County
Henry's Garage, Essex County
Nelson Methodist Church, Madison County
John S. Tilley Ladders Company, Albany County

This is the last batch until your move is completed. Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office