

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Watkins Mill

AND/OR COMMON
Watkins Mill

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 6 miles northwest of Excelsior Springs in Watkins Mill
State Park

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
Excelsior

VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
006 (sixth)

STATE
Missouri

CODE
29

COUNTY
Clay

CODE
047

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
State of Missouri, State Park Board

STREET & NUMBER
Jefferson Building, Capitol Avenue & Jefferson Street

CITY, TOWN
Jefferson City

VICINITY OF

STATE
Missouri

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Clay County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
Liberty

STATE
Missouri

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings

DATE

1966

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS U.S. National Park Service, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

CITY, TOWN
Washington

STATE
D.C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Watkins Mill complex remained in the hands of Watkins heirs until 1945. In 1957 the mill records and Watkins family correspondence were deposited in the Harry S. Truman Library. A nonprofit organization, the Watkins Mill Association, was formed to operate the mill as a museum under lease from the new owner. It became a State Park in 1962.

Reconstruction and restoration work at Watkins Mill has been extensive. A detailed description of the four standing brick structures follows. Frame buildings due to be reconstructed are: a blacksmith shop south of the mill, a wool shed northwest of it, a scale house further northwest and a horse-powered saw mill north of the woolen mill. Outbuildings near the Watkins Home now standing include: a fruit-drying house, which the Daughters of the American Revolution are restoring; a smokehouse, restored in the late 60's; a modern toolshed; a brick carriage house, built on the foundations of the first cabin home built by Watkins at this site; a summer kitchen and a brick kiln, both in ruins. The foundations of some 9-10 cabins for weavers and slaves exist behind the woolen mill, but only three have been located thus far.

The three-story brick mill survives, together with the manor house and the octagonal schoolhouse. Both the mill and its machinery are in an excellent state of preservation.

The mill has been termed "unique" by an authority on the subject, who stated:

...There is not, to my knowledge, one other example of a 19th century textile mill with all the original machinery...

The textile machines--carding machines, spinning machines, looms, and so forth--represent the finest types manufactured in the United States in the third quarter of the 19th century. Generally speaking, textile machines of this period have not been preserved, as mills in operation discarded them as they wore out or became obsolete. The two ring frames, used as twisters, are the earliest full-size machines of this type in existence. The ring frame was invented by an American, John Thorpe, and patented in 1829. We have several patent models in our collection, but I do not know of a single full-size ring frame in a museum collection in this country.¹

¹Letter from Grace L. Rogers, Associate Curator in Charge, Division of Textiles, Smithsonian Institution, to Ray H. Mattison, National Park Service, October 9, 1961.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1860-1886

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Waltus Watkins and others

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Built in 1859-1860 as the central feature of a self-sufficient community on Missouri's western frontier, Watkins Mill today is probably the best preserved example of a mid nineteenth century woolen mill. Not only the building, but the rare machinery and the voluminous business records also have been preserved.

Waltus Watkins, builder of the mill, was born in Virginia in 1806 and grew up in Kentucky. At the age of 25 he moved to Liberty, Missouri where he operated a gristmill and later, a cotton mill. The baled cotton was brought up the Missouri River from St. Louis. In 1838 he bought the land for his Utopian community and built a log cabin residence. In 1851 he built a large brick manor house and, some time later, an octagonal schoolhouse for his own and the children of his workmen. At first Watkins carried on a grain and stock farming operation, but in 1859 he began to build his woolen mill. He salvaged a boiler from a sunken steamboat and ordered the latest equipment from the East, along with skilled operators. Other labor was hired locally, but many of his employees lived in cottages he built for them. Watkins Mill was called Bethany Plantation by its founder. It is almost unique in American History in the degree to which it succeeded in creating an industrial, self-sufficient, planned community on the Middle West frontier. The mill prospered, but in 1884 Watkins died, and about two years later the mill ceased operation.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Adams, Howard W. "The Story of Watkins Mill," Museum News Vol. 40, No. 9 (May 1962)
- Caldwell, Dorothy J., ed., Missouri Historic Sites Catalogue (Columbia, Mo., 1963)
- Cole, Arthur H., The American Wool Manufacture (2 Vols., Cambridge, 1926).
- Dosch, Donald F., "Watkins Mill," National Register Inventory--Nomination Form, Historic Sites Survey Files, 1973.
- Oberholtz, I.E., and M.T. Shickles, "Significance of Watkins Plantation," unpublished, 1975.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 560 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1 5	3 9 2 9 5 0	4 3 6 3 8 0	B	1 5	3 9 2 9 4 0	4 3 6 2 7 5 0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1 5	3 9 0 0 7 0	4 3 6 1 0 0	D	1 5	3 9 0 1 2 0	4 3 6 3 4 0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The 560-area landmark includes all those buildings associated with Waltus Watkins and his unusual industrial-plantation concept. It includes only land belonging to the Watkins Mill State Park, excepting a 78-acre parcel in the S $\frac{1}{2}$ of the NE $\frac{1}{4}$, Section 16, T.53N., R.30W. This parcel, owned by the Watkins Mill Association, will eventually become park property.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Stephen Lissandrello, Historian, Landmarks Boundary Review Project

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

4-2-76

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street, NW.

TELEPHONE

202/523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

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

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

9/28/83

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

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Watkins Woolen Mill

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Watkins Factory

The Watkins Factory was built in the year 1860 at a cost of approximately \$30,000. Opened for business in the summer of 1861, it became the center of the local community producing much of the woolen cloth and yarn for the surrounding area. The factory was operated at full capacity between the years 1861 to 1886 under the leadership of W. L. Watkins and his sons. From 1886 to shortly after the turn of the century, its production declined. During this time, the factory's production was primarily the manufacture of yarn.

The factory is a brick, three and one-half story structure 48 feet wide by 84 feet long. The bricks used in the construction were hand made and fired on the plantation. All wood used in the factory were cut from the property. A wooden structure at the southeast corner of the factory was added around 1876.

The Watkins Woolen Factory contains all but a few of the original machines used in the textile industry during the latter half of the 19th century. The third floor contains carding and spinning machines, the second floor the warping mill, looms, ring frame twistlers, skeiner and packaging machinery for yarn. The first floor contains the dyeing and finishing departments.

The entire factory was operated with the use of a steam engine located directly behind the factory. The boiler and steam engine were covered by a wooden structure connected to the wash and scouring room. The boiler was removed from a river boat for use at the factory. The engine produces about 50 horsepower, more than enough to power the factory.

Watkins Home

The structure now standing is the third home built by Waltus L. Watkins on Bethany Plantation. The first two were of log cabin construction. The brick structure was constructed in 1850. This two and one-half story brick building contains 12 rooms; five on the first floor, five on the second and two large rooms in the attic. There is a full basement under the house, also partitioned into five rooms.

There are three staircases in the house, each of which goes to a separate portion of the upper levels. The half circled semi-floating staircase in the entry of the home is made of hand carved walnut and took between two to three years to complete. There are in addition to these three staircases, three others which go to the cellars.

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Watkins Home

This structure was the home of Waltus L. Watkins from c. 1851 until his death in 1884. It remained the family residence until the last of the Watkins children, Miss Carrie Watkins, sold the property and moved to Montana in 1945. A brick porch, added to the back of the house in the 1940's, still stands.

The Franklin (Octagonal) School

The Octagonal School was the second school built in the Franklin School District. Built in the year 1856, it was operated as a subscription school until 1865 when the local area was organized for public schools. It became an academy, but by the mid 1870's, it was in use as a private residence for tenants working on the Watkins Plantation.

Waltus and Mary Watkins had nine children who grew to maturity, and of this number seven or of them attended the Octagonal School. Most of Watkins employees children would also have attended this school. There is also a possibility that some of W. L. Watkins' employees may have received some education in this building.

The school is of unusual construction, built of brick in the form of an octagon. This type of construction would allow the greatest amount of air circulation and admittance of light. It is also a much stronger construction than the usual square, better able to withstand the high velocity winds common to the area.

Finances for the construction of the school came primarily from W. L. Watkins. The school was built on Watkins land, and the bricks were made and fired on Watkins property.

The Mt. Vernon Baptist Church

This brick structure, known as the Mt. Vernon Baptist Church, was built in 1871. It was preceded by a log structure built sometime in the late 1850's. The brick church was build to complement the new brick schoolhouse and to aid in Watkins' plan to establish a permanent community.

The property on which the church was built was donated by Watkins. The building cost approximately \$5,000 to construct, and over half this amount was contributed by the Watkins family. As with the other structures, most if not all of the brick used in the construction was made and fired on the Watkins Plantation.

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CONTINUATION SHEET Boundary

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All the included area was at one time the property of Waltus Watkins, and none of it is slated for recreational or other disruptive use by the Missouri State Park Board. It also provides a historic, unobtrusive setting for the Watkins Mill buildings. The single major intrusion element is the Rock Island Railroad line, installed c. 1930. It has been excluded as far as possible, and that section within the landmark does not contribute to its national significance.

BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

As shown by the black line on the accompanying U.S.G.S. maps, labelled "Holt, Mo." and "Lawson, Mo."; from a point 0.25 miles directly south of the southwest corner of the west arm of Watkins Mill State Park, proceed north to the southwest corner of the west arm of the park, and continue north along the west boundary of the west arm 0.52 miles to its northwest corner. Proceed due east 1.71 miles to the west curb of the road which skirts the east boundary of the park's east arm. Proceed south 0.35 miles along the curb to a point opposite the back property line of the old Octagon Schoolhouse. Proceed west 0.80 miles through the back property line to the west boundary of the Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad right-of-way. Proceed southwest 0.58 miles along the boundary to a point due east of the point of beginning. Proceed west 0.55 miles to the point of beginning.