

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

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NAME: Conant Thread/Coats & Clark Mill Complex District
LOCATION: most of the block bounded by Pine, Conant, Carpenter, Coleman, Lloyd, and Beecher Streets, Lonsdale Avenue, and Rand Street (Central Falls).

To include the following numbered properties:

Carpenter Street, north side: 5
Conant Street, north side: 200
Lonsdale Avenue, east side: 457
Pine Street (Pawtucket), west side: 390 through 400 inclusive
Pine Street (Central Falls) west side: 430
Rand Street (Central Falls) south side: 280

OWNER: Multiple (see list at Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission)

CONDITION: Good, fair; altered; original site

DESCRIPTION:

The buildings of the Conant Thread/Coats & Clark Mill Complex District occupy a roughly fifty-acre site straddling the Pawtucket-Central Falls line between Pine Street and Lonsdale Avenue in western Pawtucket. Other industrial complexes (and some cleared industrial sites) abut the Conant complex on the southeast; turn-of-the-century residential neighborhoods have grown up around the other sides, with some commercial development along Lonsdale Avenue.

Most of the major buildings on the site were erected in one or the other of two principal periods of plant expansion: the first from 1870 to 1882; the second from 1917 through 1923. The most notable survivors from the earlier period include: Mill 2 (1869-70), a 4-story brick mill with monitor-over-hipped roof and mansarded end towers; Old Bleachery (1870), a single-story brick bleachery whose hip roof is surmounted by a raised gable; Mill 3 (1872), a 3-story brick mill (originally used exclusively for spinning) with a slightly pitched gable roof and a mansard central tower; Mill 4 (1875), a 4-story brick mill with a nearly flat, gabled roof and mansarded end towers; Old Dyehouse (1877), a 2-story, gabled brick building with handsome corbeled cornices, attached to the southwest corner of Mill 2; Mill 5 (1881), a 4-story, brick mill similar to Mill 4; and New Office (between 1880 and 1882), a 2-story, hip-roofed, brick office building near the corner of Pine and Conant Streets.

Other buildings which survive from this period include: a 2-story, brick, box shop just southwest of Mill 2; the southernmost sections of

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the row of brick storehouses lining Pine Street; and a 2-story, brick, shop building standing in front of Mill 5. The original attached boiler houses and engine rooms survive on Mills 2, 3, 4, and 5; the original, attached picker houses survive on Mills 3, 4, and 5; and a 90' long, 4-story brick eastern extension of Mill 2 (added in 1880) still exists as well. There is even a reasonable possibility that the original wooden shop building of 1868-69 (thought by some to have been demolished in the 1920s) may actually exist in altered form and on a new site, as the former carpenter shop building located due west of the 1877 dye house. If this is so, then the only major buildings from this early period which do not survive would be the original brick office and stable buildings on Pine Street, demolished in 1977.

Two major structures erected sometime between the close of this first expansion period and the end of the nineteenth century still remain: a two-story, brick warehouse on Conant Street, put up sometime between 1887 and 1895; and a stone-lined, circular reservoir, roughly 200' in diameter, constructed on the site of Bailey's Pond in the southern end of the complex during this period.

The most notable surviving structures from the second major building period are:

Mills 6 and 7 (1919), a pair of similar 4-story mills of brick-pier construction with flat roofs and crenelated exterior towers;

Recreation Building (1921), a large two-story stuccoed building later converted to a department store and now rehabilitated in connection with the construction of an adjacent 131-unit elderly housing tower (Robinson, Green, Beretta, architects);

New Bleachery (1922), a 2-story, flat-roofed brick building fronting Carpenter Street;

Finishing Mill (1923), a 2-story, flat-roofed brick building in the Central Falls portion of the site; and

Power Plant (by 1917); a 3-story, brick power plant (now heavily remodeled) off Clay Street in Central Falls which was presumably built to generate power for the complex's new twentieth-century mills. In addition to these major buildings, a wide variety of smaller, ancillary structures remain scattered about the site.

Exterior alterations to Mills 2 and 3 have been considerable; the

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other major mill buildings have survived with relatively few exterior changes. Among the non-mill buildings, the powerhouse building has been extensively remodeled and its soaring round-headed windows are now filled in with concrete block. The 1921 Recreation Building has been gutted and enlarged, but is now rehabilitated as housing, following Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission guidelines. Only two buildings in the complex are known to have ever been demolished, and the site as a whole still retains the look and the feel of a complete, turn-of-the-century textile plant of enormous proportions.

Inventory of Contributing Structures

Contributing buildings are defined as the mills and mill-related buildings constructed by the Conant and Coats & Clark Companies in the last half of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th centuries. Non-contributing buildings are defined as those constructed later than the period of significance (1868-1923) or not directly related to the milling operations of the Conant and Coats & Clark Companies. Several ancillary structures are scattered throughout the complex: four corrugated metal sheds, two concrete-block garages, a metal water tank, and a small concrete-block pumphouse. There are minor structures of little importance to the complex as a whole. They are not listed as contributing as they cannot be dated positively to the period of significance, nor even dated with assurance to pre-1933; their importance is not great enough to meet the test of exceptional significance required for post-1933 buildings under the fifty-year rule.

Mill 2 (1869-70): Four story brick mill with monitor-over-hip roof and mansard end towers; now the core of a larger building created by multiple late 19th-century additions: a 4-story addition on the Pine Street side (1880); a brigade room; a boiler house, and an engine room on the north side; and the 1877 dyehouse on the west side.

Old Bleachery (1870): A 1-story brick bleachery whose hip roof is surmounted by a raised gable.

Mill 3 (1872): Three-story brick mill (originally used for spinning only) with a slightly pitched gable roof and a mansard central tower; later additions include a late-19th-century and early 20th-century section on the west end; a picker house, boiler room, and engine room are on the north side.

Mill 4 (1875): Four-story brick mill with nearly flat, gabled roof and mansarded end towers; a picker house, boiler house, and engine room are attached to the north side.

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Old Dyehouse (1877): Two-story, gable-roofed brick building with corbeled cornices; attached to the west end of Mill 2.

Mill 5 (1881): Four-story brick mill similar to Mill 4; boiler house, engine room, and picker house are attached to the west side.

New Office (between 1880 and 1882): Two-story, hip-roofed, brick office building; there is a large early-20th-century addition on the north end.

Box Shop (between 1870 and 1882): Two-story brick building set just southwest of Mill 2; the southern addition (between 1887 and 1895) was used as a paint shop.

Storehouses (3 and 4, between 1880 and 1882; 5 and 6 between 1880 and 1887): A long row of single-story, gable-roofed, brick storehouses.

Shop (between 1882 and 1887): Two-story brick shop building, located between Mill 3 and Mill 5.

Carpenter Shop (1868-69? or later in the 19th century): A small wood-frame carpenter shop building; this may be the original Conant mill building moved to a new site.

Warehouse (between 1887 and 1895): Two-story brick warehouse, set on Conant Street.

Reservoir (between 1887 and 1895): A stone-lined circular reservoir, c. 200 feet in diameter, constructed on the site of Bailey's Pond.

Mill 6 (1919): Four-story mill, brick-pier construction with flat roof and crenelated exterior tower.

Mill 7 (1919): Four-story mill, brick-pier construction with flat roof and crenelated exterior tower.

Recreation Building (1921): Large, 2-story stuccoed building, now rehabilitated as part of the construction of an adjacent (but not nominated) elderly housing tower.

New Bleachery (1922): Two-story, flat-roofed building fronting Carpenter Street.

Finishing Mill (1923): Two-story, flat-roofed brick building on Rand Street.

Power Plant (by 1917): Three-story, brick power plant; its sash was

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altered when the attached 4-story apartment building (c. 1975) was built; the power plant was constructed to generate power for the complex's 20th-century mills.

Gatehouse (early 20th century): One-story, hip-roofed, brick gatehouse.

Shop (early 20th century): Two-story red brick mill with a shallow gabled roof; attached by overhead passage to the Old Dyehouse and the Box Shop.

NON-CONTRIBUTING STRUCTURES

Apartment Building (c. 1975): Four-story, concrete block, flat-roofed apartment house, attached to the east end of the Power Plant.

PERIOD: 1800-1899, 1900-

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Architecture; Industry; Inventions; Social/
Humanitarian

SPECIFIC DATES: 1868, 1870, 1872, 1875, 1877, 1881, 1882, 1919, 1921,
1922, 1923

ARCHITECT: Unknown

SIGNIFICANCE:

The former Conant Threat/Coats & Clark mill complex is architecturally significant as one of the most extensive and well-preserved textile mill complexes in Rhode Island. Historically, the Pawtucket plant was significant nationally, and even internationally, as a key element in the international thread trust dominated by J. & P. Coats. Locally, the operation was for many decades the largest employer in the City of Pawtucket and the largest textile establishment in the entire Blackstone Valley.

The Conant Thread Company of Pawtucket was founded in 1868 by Hezekiah Conant, a talented inventor who had worked out several major improvements in thread winding and dressing. In 1869, Conant brought his fledgling company into formal alliance with the large British thread manufacturer, J. & P. Coats (later, Coats & Clark) of Paisley, Scotland. Under the terms of this alliance, Conant agreed to produce Coats' celebrated six-cord spool-cotton thread in a vast new steam-powered mill complex to be built in Pawtucket. With the construction of Mills 2-5 in the following decade, Conant Thread rapidly developed into a major American thread producer and a key element in the Coats-dominated thread trust, an international organization of thread producers who combined

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to control the prices and availability of thread.

Conant Thread was for many years the largest employer in Pawtucket. No fewer than 1400 people were employed here as early as 1876, and the total had reached 2500 by 1917. At that time, the mills were running 105,000 spindles and the Pine Street plant was the largest industrial complex in Pawtucket while the company which ran it was the largest single-site textile firm in the state. At the very height of the firm's property during World War II, the number of workers employed was over 4,000.

In 1951, J. & P. Coats (R.I.), Inc. (as Conant Thread was known after 1913) was merged into North Georgia Processing. Its offices were moved to Delaware, and the Pawtucket operations began to be phased out. Following a second merger in 1952, the company became Coats & Clark, Inc., and in November of 1964, Coats & Clark announced the final closing of the Pawtucket mill complex. (Coats & Clark itself, however, still survives in other locales, and is still a major thread manufacturer.) The Pawtucket complex today has been subdivided into numerous smaller parcels and the buildings are currently occupied by a wide variety of (chiefly industrial) tenants. The complex as a whole, though, remains surprisingly intact and still ranks as one of the largest and most impressive late-nineteenth-century industrial plants in Rhode Island.

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The boundary of the Conant Thread/Coats & Clark Mill Complex has been drawn to include all extant structures built by the Conant and Coats & Clark Companies and to exclude as much as possible non-contributing components. One non-contributing element has unavoidably been included: a large apartment building built as an addition to the Power Plant. Three buildings (two mid-20th-century commercial blocks and an elderly housing tower) located on the same lot as the Recreation Building have been specifically excluded.

The boundary begins at the northwest corner of Central Falls plat 8, lot 327; the east boundary follows the east lines of Central Falls plat 8, lots 327, 326, 323, and Pawtucket plat 44A, lots 486, 498, 496, 554, 555, and Pawtucket Plat 45B, lot 383; from there, turn west along the south line of Pawtucket Plat 45B, lot 383, and follow the west line of Pawtucket Plat 45B, lot 383 and the west and south lines of Pawtucket Plat 45B, lot 410, to a point opposite the southeast corner of the Recreation Building; the boundary continues along a line from that point to the southwest corner

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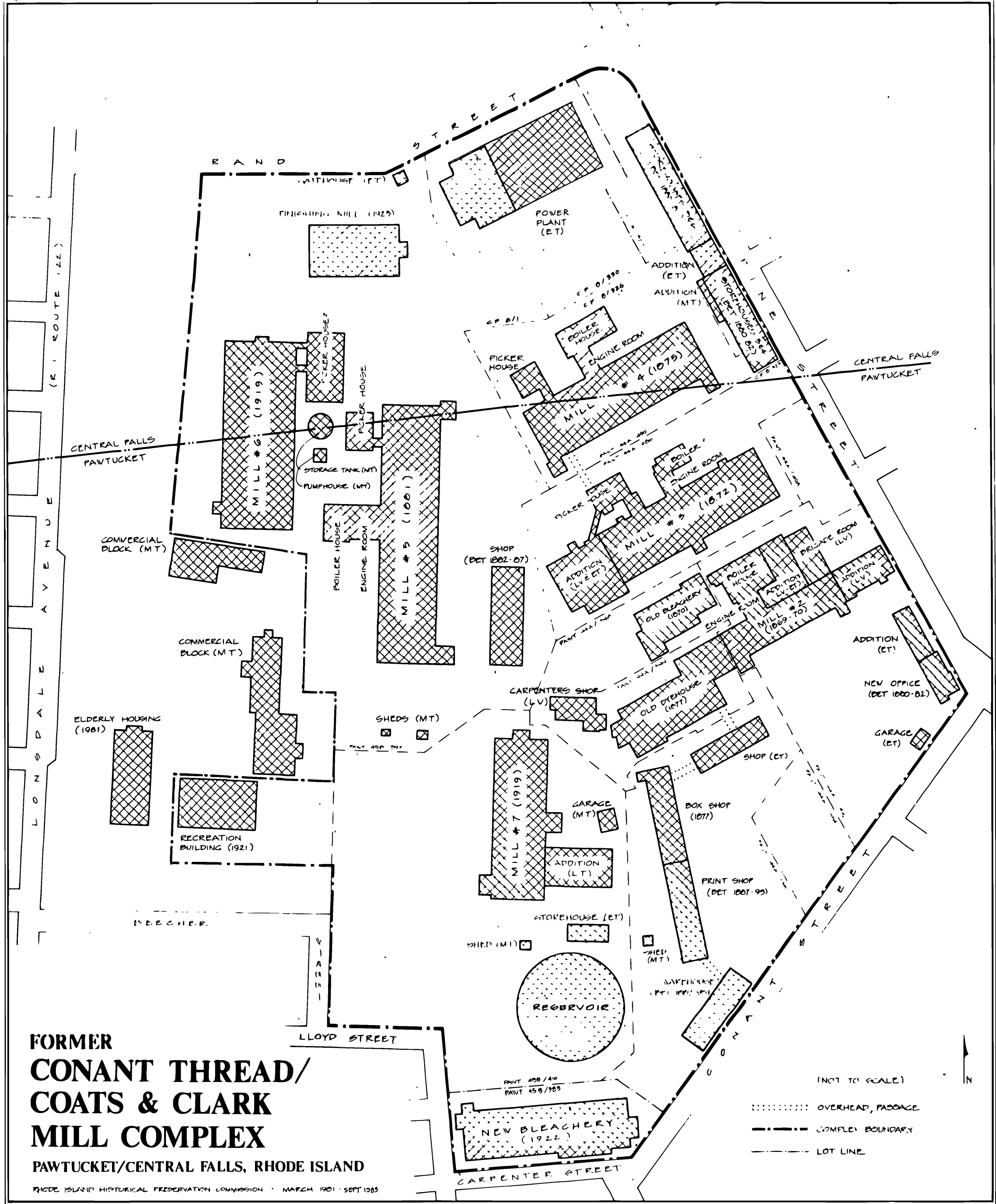
of the Recreation Building, north along the west wall of the Recreation Building, east along the north wall of the Recreation Building, following that line to the west line of Pawtucket Plat 45B, lot 410; from there, north along the west lines of Pawtucket Plat 45B, lots 410 and 397 to the Central Falls-Pawtucket city line; crossing the city line and proceeding north along the west line of Central Falls Plat 8, lot 1 to Rand Street, turning east along the north lines of Central Falls Plat 8, lots 1 and 330 to the northwest corner of Central Falls Plat 8, lot 327, the point of beginning.

ACREAGE: c. 70 acres

LEVEL OF SIGNIFICANCE: National

UTM: A 19 301100 4639500
B 19 301350 4639080
C 19 301100 4638700
D 19 300620 4629220

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**FORMER
CONANT THREAD/
COATS & CLARK
MILL COMPLEX**
PAWTUCKET/CENTRAL FALLS, RHODE ISLAND

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