

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

1002

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: Powell Avenue Steam Plant

Other names/site number: N/A

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: 1800 Powell Avenue South

City or town: Birmingham State: AL County: Jefferson

Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐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 X C D

Lee Anne Wofford

/Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer October 20, 2014

Signature of certifying official/Title:

Date

Alabama Historical Commission

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government

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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:)

For Edson H. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

12.10.14
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>0</u>	<u>4</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/energy facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: foundation: brick;
walls: brick;
roof: composition tar and gravel

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.)

Summary Paragraph

Located in downtown Birmingham, Alabama, the Powell Avenue Steam Plant occupies the entire 1800 Block of Powell Avenue. The historic power generation plant is sandwiched between 18th and 19th Streets to the west and east, respectively, and the Amtrak and CSX railroad corridor and Powell Avenue to the north and south, respectively. The historic steam plant lies in the heart of Birmingham's Parkside District. Not yet fully realized, the Parkside District will feature entertainment, commercial, and residential development. Two notable District projects have come to fruition. Opened in 2010 and adjacent to the Powell Avenue Steam Plant, Railroad Park stretches across four city blocks from 14th Street to 18th Street. Regions Field, located at 1400 1st Avenue South, opened in April 2013. The Field is home to the Birmingham Barons. The Powell Avenue Steam Plant is built of brick, stone, concrete, and metal. Rising to a height of two stories, the rectangular industrial edifice measures 400 feet (north and south elevations) by 200 feet (east and west elevations). It is 40 feet tall from the base to the roof.

The Powell Avenue Steam Plant retains overall integrity in terms of workmanship, design, materials, location, feeling, and association.

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Narrative Description

The plant was constructed in three stages. Built in 1895, the Powell Avenue Steam Plant originally had a square footprint measuring 150 feet by 150 feet. The first addition, which occurred prior to 1901, enlarged the dimensions to 200 feet by 150 feet, rendering the plant L-shaped. The second expansion in 1905 increased the plant dimensions to 400 feet by 200 feet. Internally, the Powell Avenue Steam Plant is divided into three longitudinal sections known as houses or bays. Each served a different function in the production of steam heat and electricity. The boiler house occupies the middle bay while the meter and generator houses form the north and south sides of the plant, respectively. Common bond courses of brick, every sixth course of which is composed of headers, clad the exterior.

Exterior

A slightly pitched flat roof covers the Powell Avenue Steam Plant. Supported by steel trusses, the exterior skin of the roof consists of a composition of tar and gravel [photos #11-12]. The roof is divided into three sections by parapets and/or monitors so that they correspond with the three internal houses. A parapet separates the generator and boiler house sections of the roof while the north wall of the monitor covering the coal bunker separates the boiler and meter house sections of the roof. All three houses feature two monitors. Providing the interior of the building with light and ventilation, the monitors have metal gable tops, two clerestories, and a metal framework of trusses. The two monitors on top of the boiler house have an exterior skin of metal siding. Additionally, the boiler house has a monitor spanning the entire length (east to west) of the building. It covers a coal bunker. A brick chimney passes through an aperture in the middle house, rising 50 feet above the roof [photos #8-9]. The base to roof height of the chimney is 40 feet.

Additional roof components of the boiler house include a metal stairwell housing, a skylight, and various circular vents. The generator house roof has box-shaped vents. The meter house roof features a capped chimney aperture. The brick smoke stack once projecting through this opening was imploded in 1985; however, the bricks remain in the stack base.

Brick clads much of the 400 feet long exterior of the north elevation of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant. The bricks are arranged in a common bond pattern composed of five stretcher courses and one header course. Diamond-shaped tie rod ends are located toward the top of the wall mass. A continuous cornice featuring staggered three stepped corbels runs across the upper façade. Brick infilled segmental arch openings are positioned at intervals along the base of the wall mass. A rectangular indentation exists in the east half of the meter house. The cut-out lacks a roof and a north wall. These sections of the meter house were removed in 1985. Three concrete silos built in 1985 stand within the footprint of this cut-out [photos #5, #10]. The east, west, and south walls of the cut-out are clad with corrugated metal. The northeast corner of the meter house has a metal exterior door. A free-standing concrete smoke stack stands a short distance north of the steam plant. It was also built in 1985. *These three silos and the smoke stack constitute the 4 noncontributing resources in this nomination.*

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The upper façade of the east side (19th Street elevation) has a continuous parapet topped with stone coping. Second-story fenestration consists of two segmental arch top openings, one outfitted with a door, the other a pair of 6/6 double hung sash windows; three flat top openings equipped with 6/1 double hung sash windows; and two rectangular louvered vents. Stylistic details consist of a recessed panel with corbel work. A continuous corbeled cornice marks the division between the first and second stories. Beneath the cornice a series of segmentally arched windows with stone slipsills have been enclosed with an exterior stack of bricks and an interior stack of blocks. They extend across much of the first floor exterior. The east side of the plan also features a vehicle entrance with an overhead door. Another series of enclosed segmental arched windows runs along the basement level. In addition to the vehicle entrance, there are four openings equipped with doors, three of which feature louvered double leafs. A series of sconces are anchored to the wall exterior at the first-story level [photos #3-5].

A procession of recessed panels with corbel work extends across the upper façade of the south elevation (Powell Avenue elevation). The exception to this is the southeast corner of the building. There are two pairs of 6/6 double hung sash windows set in the wall mass. These windows correspond with a second-story office. Marking the division between the second and first floors, a corbeled cornice stretches across the entire façade. A series of segmentally arched bricked-in windows exists at both the first and basement levels. A vehicle entrance with an overhead door is located at the southwest corner [photos #1-3, #7].

The vehicle entrance to the boiler house visually divides the west elevation (18th Street side) into three sections. The entrance consists of a large opening that rises from ground level to the bottom of a continuous corbeled cornice. The entrance features an overhead door. Decorative elements above the door include a recessed panel. Decorative and functional, a parapet rises above the wall mass. It hides a coal bunker and corresponding ventilator that run the entire length (east to west) of the building. Stone coping and diamond- and star-shaped tie rod ends decorate the gabled parapet, as well as stabilize the wall. The structure also has a porthole vent. The portion of the west elevation corresponding with the meter house features a stone lined parapet, diamond- and star-shaped tie rod ends, recessed panels with corbel work, a corbeled cornice, and three enclosed segmentally arched windows on both the first and basement levels. The west elevation of the generator house has the same design elements as the west side of the meter house [photos #6-7].

Interior

The generator house occupies the southern third of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant. The interior of the generator house contains one, large, open warehouse space, an equipment room and office, and a partial basement [photos #13-14]. Measuring 382 feet long (east to west) and 56 feet deep (north to south), the warehouse space dominates the generator house. The space formerly housed the plant's generators. At the east end of the house, a brick wall divides the former generator room from an equipment room and a second-story office. The footprints of the equipment room and a second-story office measure 18 feet by 52 feet.

Rectangular in configuration, the footprint of the generator house consists of three exterior walls, the south (Powell Avenue elevation), east (19th Street elevation), and west (18th Street

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elevation) walls, and an interior north side partition separating the generator and boiler houses. The exterior walls are composed of a series of brick pilasters with corbeled capitals. Brick panels are set in between the pilasters. Block and brick enclosed voids above and below the panels formerly ensconced basement and first-story windows. The interior partition (north wall) separating the generator and boiler houses is constructed like the exterior walls; however, there are far fewer voids between the pilasters. In the base of the interior wall, enclosed port holes once conducted steam pipes between the two houses. Several doorways in the partition wall permit traffic flow between the two houses.

Corbeled brick brackets located near the tops of the north and south side brick walls support a series of trusses. The Warren trusses are constructed of angle steel top and bottom chords, diagonals, verticals, and riveted gusset plates. Lateral diagonal bracing extends between the trusses, tying them together as rigid steel boxes. The trusses uphold a series of integrated, longitudinal, steel I beams. Together, the beams and trusses form the undercarriage of the generator house roof and its two monitors. The panels (or tile slabs according to a 1911 Sanborn Map) forming the underside of the roof sheathing are exposed. Corrugated metal covers the openings of three no longer extant monitors.

Constructed of concrete, the generator house floor exists at two levels. On the west side of the generator house, the floor rests at street level. Several below ground fuel tanks are set beneath this floor. A line just above the segmental arch tops of basement windows marks the original level of the first-story floor. The remaining portion of the generator house floor is set at the first-story level. Beneath the raised floor is a basement.

The basement contains structural supports for the first-story floor. Beneath the concrete floor are concrete joists that extend latitudinally (north to south) across the generator house. In turn, the joists rest atop truncated, stepped, brick pyramidal piers and brick columns, a number of which feature corbeled capitals. The ends of the joists are anchored in the south and north walls of the generator house. Originally, the pyramidal piers served as structural supports for generators. No longer functional ceramic ducts line the south wall. Several pieces of non-operational equipment, including a fan and transformers, remain in the basement.

The equipment room at the east end of the generator house originally functioned as a generator room. Currently functioning as storage, it now houses some of the original electric production equipment, including a Westinghouse rotary turbine, a General Electric converter, transformers, and a General Electric Thomson Astatic Ammeter. The floor is constructed of concrete slabs and the walls are made of brick. Set into the northeast corner of the generator room, a two-flight stairwell composed of pipe rails, metal treads, and I beam stringers provides upstairs access.

The landing at the top of the stairs lies adjacent to a metal door. This door serves as an entrance to a two-room second-story office. Concrete slabs cover the floors in both rooms. The walls are made of brick. The ceiling is composed of angled steel and panels. One room features a sink and bathroom while the other has a door that leads to a metal balcony on the east side of the building. The lighting in both rooms of the office consists of suspended fluorescent light islands.

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The boiler house occupies the middle third of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant. The interior of the house contains an open warehouse space, a workshop and material storage room, a brick smoke stack, an employee locker room, and a partial basement. Additionally, the boiler house houses an elevated coal bunker and associated material receiving corridor that extend along the north side of the house [photos #15, #17]. Measuring 400 feet long (east to west) and 72 feet deep (north to south), the warehouse space dominates the boiler house. The space formerly housed the plant's boilers, water treatment apparatus, and offices [photo #16].

In the boiler house, concrete covers the floor while the walls are constructed of brick for the most part. Unlike the partition dividing the generator and boiler houses, which is one continuous brick wall mass extending from the east side of the building to the west side, the division between the boiler and meter houses consists of brick and block walls at the west and east ends of the building. In the middle of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant, there is an opening between the two houses. Formerly, this open space was formally divided by a concrete block control room and boiler apparatus.

The same truss and longitudinal beam system used to support the building roof and monitors in the generator house is implemented in the boiler house; however, there is one critical difference: the Warren trusses do not span the entire depth of the boiler house; they extend from the south wall (partition between the generator and boiler houses) to the south side of the coal bunker. At the east end of the house, a skylight admits sunlight through the roof.

Located in the southwest corner of the house, the workshop and material storage space is divided into three compartments. The east side of the space is currently designated as material storage. Open from the ground floor to the ceiling, the storage room features brick wall and concrete floor construction. Enclosed port holes in the south and east walls once conducted steam pipes between the generator and boiler houses. A doorway in the north wall and one in the west wall provide access to the boiler house and workshop, respectively. A longitudinal wall (running from east to west) divides the workshop into two compartments. The south half is accessible via two ground-level doorways in the partition between the boiler and generator houses while the north half is accessible via ground-level and second-story doorways in the north wall of the room. A metal staircase featuring pipe railings, metal treads and stringers, and pole supports provides access to the second floor of the workshop. Open at the east end, the second floor of the workshop overlooks the material storage room. The floor houses concrete stalls along the north and south walls and a parallel series of stalls in the middle of the room. In all, there are 114 stalls, 84 of which are presently vacant but exhibit signs of prior occupation by switches or meters. Thirty of the stalls in the middle of the room feature switches. This part of the workshop once functioned as a switch house, and was integral to the production of electricity.

A smoke stack stands near the northeast corner of the material storage room. Circular in configuration and 14 feet in diameter at its base, the stack stands inside a square 20 feet by 20 feet housing. Both the housing and stack are constructed of bricks. On the north side of the outer housing, an iron fire door is located at the base. The exterior of the door features the chimney

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manufacturer in raised lettering, "ALPHONS CUSTODIS CHICAGO CHIMNEY CONSTRUCTION CO." A brick arch extends from the fire door to the chimney. From floor to ceiling, the height of the chimney is 40 feet. The stack rises another 50 feet from the roof top to its apex [photos #18-19].

An employee locker room and restroom are located at the east end of the boiler house. In both rooms, steel I beams, bricks and concrete blocks, and concrete compose the ceiling, walls, and floor, respectively. Acoustic batting lines the ceiling above the I beams. Light islands and pendant fixtures are attached to the underside of the beams. Metal lockers and wood benches occupy the middle of the locker room. In the restroom, porcelain sinks, a mirror, and Boraxo dispensers line the east wall. Tile-lined showers are situated on the west side. Two toilets and associated metal stalls are affixed to the north wall. A circular, pedestal wash basin stands near the northeast corner of the room.

Measuring 400 feet long (east to west) and 21 feet deep (north to south), an elevated coal bunker and associated material receiving corridor extend along the north side of the boiler house. Overhead doors at the west and east ends of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant permit vehicle traffic to pass through the boiler house via the receiving corridor. Tram rails run down the center of the corridor. Flanking either side of the corridor is a colonnade composed of riveted steel columns. Riveted steel beams run across the tops of the colonnades. Cross beams and trusses tie the two rows of columns together. The resulting structural steel box is quite rigid. The structural steel box supports a gravity fed concrete bunker and a hoist. The overhead bunker runs from one end of the block to the other end, 18th Street to 19th Street (west to east). A series of concrete boxes with inverted V-shaped bottoms laid end to end form the bunker. Rectangular openings at the base of the inclined planes of the boxes enabled coal to drop to movable bins or carts positioned along the tram line [photos #15-17].

A partial basement lies below the material receiving corridor. The basement floor is constructed of concrete. A narrow passage way runs (east to west) down the middle of the subterranean space. No longer extant rails once conducted Georgia buggies through the basement. Via this means, coal ashes were removed from the plant. On either side of the central passage are large concrete piers. The piers support concrete and steel beams, which in turn support the floor of the material receiving corridor.

The meter house occupies the northern third of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant. The interior of the house contains a workshop, the base of a brick smoke stack, an open warehouse space, concrete silos, and a transformer room. The dimensions of the meter house are 400 feet long (east to west) by 40 feet deep (north to south). The open warehouse space formerly housed boilers and a control room. The structural materials of the meter house are the same as those in the other two houses: the floor is constructed of concrete, the walls are brick, and the roof trusses are steel. Like the south wall of the generator house, the north, east, and west walls of the meter house feature brick and block infilled segmental arch top windows [photos #20-22].

A workshop occupies the west side of the meter house. The dimensions of the shop are 120 feet long (east to west) by 30 feet deep (north to south). Brick walls enclose all four sides of the

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shop. Openings in the southeast and northeast corners of the shop permit access to the boiler house and an adjacent warehouse space, respectively. The majority of the shop floor is raised above the meter and boiler house floors. An L-shaped concrete ramp navigates the difference in elevations. Accessed via a flight of metal stairs, a mezzanine extends along the south wall. The steam plant roof above the workshop includes a monitor and clerestories.

A 20 feet by 20 feet square housing stands adjacent to the east side of the meter house workshop and directly opposite the smoke stack in the boiler house. Constructed of brick, the housing rises from floor to ceiling. The structure contains the remains of an imploded brick smoke stack. The base of the housing once featured an opening and an iron fire door. In 1985, the door was removed and the opening sealed with brick when the chimney was imploded.

The chimney and housing are part of a space within the meter house that measures 140 feet long (east to west) and 40 feet deep (north to south). Open from floor to ceiling and end to end, the space once contained two massive boilers and a control room constructed of concrete block. A monitor tops this section of the meter house. The monitor features side walls composed of metal louvered vents rather than clerestories.

The floor of the meter house is elevated 4 feet on the east side of the former control room. The elevated floor, 65 feet long (east to west) by 40 feet deep (north to south), rests on steel I beams. A structural steel framework, in turn, rests on the floor. This framework includes a second floor which is accessed via metal stairs. Constructed in 1985, the two-tiered decking once provided service access to a boiler. The boiler was added to the Powell Avenue Steam Plant in 1985 and later removed. While the former boiler room and access platforms are open on the west and south sides to the meter and boiler houses, respectively, the north (part of the north elevation of the steam plant) and east sides are enclosed by corrugated metal clad walls. Like the boiler and access platforms, the corrugated metal clad walls were added in 1985.

The corrugated metal clad east wall separates the former boiler room from a space measuring 85 feet long (east to west) by 45 feet deep (north to south). Although this space exists within the footprint of the meter house, it appears like a cutaway of or indentation in the steam plant given that it does not have a roof or north wall. The walls on the west and east and south sides of the space are constructed of corrugated metal and concrete block, respectively. Outfitted with a metal overhead door, the concrete block wall extends between columns of the material receiving corridor colonnade. The space ensconces two concrete silos, each with a diameter of 30 feet. The bases of the silos extend 8 feet below the meter house floor and rise 57 feet 6 inches above it for a total height of 65 feet 8 inches. A third, smaller, concrete silo featuring a diameter of 20 feet stands along the outside perimeter of the meter house. Metal grate catwalks connect the tops of the silos, which are capped.

The extreme east end of the meter house houses an electrical equipment room. A battery of Allen-Bradley switches lines the west wall of the room while Powercon Corporation switch gear cabinets and transformers line the east wall and middle aisle. The room includes conduit, wire bundles, and shelves.

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Evolution of the Powell Ave. Steam Plant

The Powell Avenue Steam Plant has evolved over a period of 119 years. The years 1895, 1900-1905, 1952-1953, 1968-1972, 1985, and 2013 are integral to this evolution. The plant was built in 1895 and expanded twice between 1900 and 1905. After a change in ownership in 1952, the plant underwent a technological upgrade and no longer produced electricity. This improvement project addressed the plant's power and steam production apparatus. Modifications to the building occurred in 1952-1953, 1968-1972, and 1985. In 2013, steam power production equipment was removed from the building.

Built in 1895, the Powell Avenue Steam Plant was originally less than half the size of its current dimensions. Per a 1900 *Street Railway Journal* article cited in Bhamwiki, "The general dimensions of the power house are 150 ft. x 150 ft., which it is proposed to increase to 200 ft. x 150 ft. so as to accommodate the additional machinery that is to be installed" (Bhamwiki 2013). Prior to 1901, the generally square building had a two-tiered roof structure with a lower half gable or shed roof covering the northern portion of the building and a full gable over the rest of the plant (Alabama Power Company [APC] circa 1900). An arcade formed by a series of segmentally arched metal frame windows on the ground and first floors wrapped around all four sides of the plant. Stylistic details included recessed panels and corbel work. An iron smoke stack rose high above the surroundings near the northwest corner of the brick building (APC circa 1900).

"Between 1900 and 1905, two major additions doubled the size of the 1895 building until it occupied an entire city block" (Thompson 2013). The first addition, which occurred prior to 1901, enlarged the dimensions from 150 feet by 150 feet to 200 feet by 150 feet, rendering the plant L-shaped (APC circa 1900; Sanborn Map Company 1902). In its 1902 configuration, the interior featured one large L-shaped area, two smaller rectangular spaces, and a small office on the second floor, which was tucked into the southeast corner of the building. Brick walls with doorways partitioned off the rooms (Sanborn Map Company 1902). Power generating equipment was assigned to the rooms thus: "It is proposed to have all the direct-connected apparatus installed in the engine room [L-shaped room], while the machines with belt connection will be placed in an adjoining room" (Bhamwiki 2013). The belt driven machines are depicted in a 1901 photograph (APC). In 1902, the generator house contained five dynamos and five engines (Sanborn Map Company 1902). A historic photograph from this period shows five Westinghouse turbines in the generator or power house (APC n. d.).

The north elevation had at least two entrances with segmental arch tops (APC 1901). The facades of the addition and 1895 building core blended seamlessly through the continuation of the original fenestration pattern, materials, and stylistic details. The second expansion in 1905 increased the plant dimensions from 200 feet by 150 feet to 400 feet by 200 feet. The historic footprint, the equivalent of a city block, was set in place at this time. The Powell Avenue Steam Plant has occupied and been associated with the 1800 Block of Powell Avenue since 1905. A 1911 Sanborn Map illustrates the building's early twentieth-century configuration (Sanborn Map Company 1911). The longitudinal division of the building into three sections or houses resulted from the two expansion projects. The south bay contained the generator house; the middle bay contained the boiler house; and the north bay functioned as the meter house.

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In 1911, turbines consumed most of the first floor space of the generator house (Sanborn Map Company 1911). Manufactured by the Birmingham Machine and Foundry Company, the second generation turbines were far greater in size than the original Westinghouse dynamos, according to a historic image (APC n. d.). The photograph also depicts the thickness of the floor, basement support columns, possibly a pyramidal pier, and metal roof trusses.

The west end and basement of the boiler house were added to the steam plant between 1900 and 1905. In the past, ashes from coal dropped into the basement and were moved via Georgia buggies along a narrow corridor to the west end of the basement. Here the ashes were hauled up through an opening in the floor and hauled off via horse or mule drawn cart to a disposal site (Dambach 2013).

The reconfigured roof resulting from the two additions occurring between 1900 and 1905 is illustrated in a 1911 Sanborn Map (Sanborn Map company 1911). According to the Sanborn map, the roof was constructed of steel trusses, wood sheathing, and tile slabs. The meter house had three monitors (labeled as vents or ventilators in a 1911 Sanborn Map); the boiler house had two monitors and a skylight; and the generator house had five monitors. The housing covering the coal bunker in the boiler house was in place then. Also depicted in the map are two brick chimneys, one each in the boiler and meter houses, and three iron chimneys, two of which were part of the meter house, and the third in the boiler house. One of the iron smoke stacks in the meter house is depicted in several historic photographs (APC circa 1900 and 1901). A pre-1905 photograph reveals three smoke stacks (APC circa 1905). One was housed in the meter house and the other two in the boiler house. This image also depicts the five monitors and clerestories or ventilators of the generator house.

The pre-1905 photograph also reveals the exterior appearance of the south and east elevations of the steam plant (APC circa 1905). The entire length of the south façade featured a uniform parapet while the parapet of the east elevation is discontinuous. On the first floor, a procession of 15/15 double hung sash metal frame windows wrapped around the two facades. Below this arcade was another set at the ground floor consisting of ten-pane metal frame windows. Loading bays with overhead doors were set at intervals across the south side of the building. Upper façade details included a corbeled belt course and recessed panels.

In 1952, APC acquired the Powell Avenue Steam Plant and implemented a number of changes. At that time, APC terminated the production of electricity at the plant (Thompson 2013); however, steam production continued. In 1953, APC built two coal-fired boilers and a concrete block control room adjacent to the brick smoke stack in the meter house (Dambach 2013). Concurrently, APC removed the generators from the generator house and transformed the concrete generator platforms into a solid concrete floor. APC constructed a control center on top of this floor (Dambach 2013). Occupying approximately 60 percent of the generator house, the control center featured a series of offices, storage closets, a bathroom, a meeting room, and a relay room. Interior walls were constructed of either concrete block or sheet rock. Floors were covered in linoleum tile squares and the ceiling was suspended and sheathed in acoustic tiles.

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The next major change at the Powell Avenue Steam Plant occurred between 1968 and 1972. This change involved the conversion of steam production apparatus from coal fuel to gas. In 1968, APC gutted and retrofitted the interiors and exteriors of Boilers 1 and 2, as well as added gas pipe fittings (Dambach 2013). APC constructed four gas-fired boilers, two in 1968 and two in 1972, in the boiler house. During this time frame, all of the windows, save for the generator house office windows, were removed and the apertures infilled with concrete blocks and bricks.

In 1985, APC changed Boilers 1 through 6 in the meter house back to coal fuel. Concurrent with this conversion, APC gutted and rebuilt the 1953 control room in the meter house (Dambach 2013). Additionally, APC removed approximately 170 feet of the north side and 40 feet of the east side of the meter house and a portion of the roof (Dambach 2013; Penuel 2013). Engineers then built Boiler 7, concrete silos, and an electrical equipment room in the meter house. Construction of the concrete silos involved the construction of a concrete block wall along the north side of the material receiving corridor and corrugated metal walls on the west and east sides of the silos (Dambach 2013; Penuel 2013). In the space associated with the silos, the roof and north wall of the plant were not rebuilt. APC replaced a portion of the brick wall of the meter house north of Boiler 7 with a corrugated metal wall. A bag house was attached to this wall. The house contained 8 modules each holding 165 bags measuring 8 inches in diameter and 30 feet long. The bags functioned as an ash capture and removal system (Dambach 2013; Penuel 2013).

The generator house was also the subject of modifications in 1985. Contractors removed part of the first-story floor and support structure. This was done to make way for the addition of several below ground fuel tanks (Dambach 2013). This construction resulted in a split level floor with that covering the fuels tanks set at street level and the remaining original first-story floor set approximately 6 feet above the lower level.

In February 2013, APC decommissioned the Powell Avenue Steam Plant. APC then initiated rehabilitation work in consultation with the Alabama Historical Commission. This work has involved the removal of non-contributing components, including Boilers 3 through 6 and associated water treatment apparatus in the boiler house, Boilers 1, 2, and 7, the control room, and bag house in the meter house, and the control center in the generator house. These components were built outside the period of significance, 1895 to 1952.

Archaeology Component

While no archaeological survey has been undertaken on this property, the possibility of subsurface remains that would help us understand and interpret the history of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant remains high.

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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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Transportation

Architecture

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Period of Significance

1895-1952

Significant Dates

1895

1900-1905

1952

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

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 Powell Avenue Steam Plant located in downtown Birmingham, Alabama is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of transportation. The historic steam plant supplied the electricity to power the extensive streetcar network of the Birmingham District which supported the area's industrial growth, the development of its streetcar suburbs and its downtown enterprises.

Additionally, the Powell Avenue Steam Plant is locally significant under Criterion C. The Powell Avenue Steam Plant is an excellent example of eclectic Late Victorian architecture. Though its exterior embellishments are somewhat restrained, the segmentally arched windows, decorative brick corbelling and recessed brick panels still recall the exuberance of late Victorian design and mirror the architecture of the downtown buildings being constructed in Birmingham in the late nineteenth and very early twentieth centuries. The metal infrastructure of the steam plant also contributes to its local significance in architecture.

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The period of significance is defined as 1895 to 1952. This period covers the initial construction of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant, two historic plant expansions between 1900 and 1905, and the acquisition of the plant by the Alabama Power Company (APC) in 1952. At this time, APC terminated the production of electricity at the plant. Concurrently, the electric streetcar system powered by the Powell Avenue Steam Plant ceased to operate.

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

The Powell Avenue Steam Plant is significant at the local level in the area of transportation. From 1895 to 1952, the historic power plant powered Birmingham's electric streetcar railway network. The power plant was the true work horse responsible for all of the "constructive work" in the Birmingham District. The Powell Avenue Steam Plant generated all of the electricity required to move streetcars over 150 miles of inter- and intra-city lines. During the decades preceding and following the turn of the twentieth century, the city limits of Birmingham expanded five times due to the development of the streetcar network. This growth was based, at least in part, on the city's excellent streetcar network. According to an *Industrial Review of the General Interests of Birmingham and the Cities and Towns Comprising the Great State of Alabama*, "The lighting and street transportation facilities of a metropolitan city are two of its most important public utilities. Birmingham is to be congratulated upon the splendid efficiency of its street car system and electric light plant" (Travelers' Protective Association of America 1904:44).

Almost forty subdivisions were platted out in the Birmingham District over a fifteen year period. Thus were born the Birmingham streetcar subdivisions of Woodlawn Highlands, Woodlawn, South Highlands, Norwood, East Lake, Central Park, Ensley Place, Red Mountain, and others. The railway cars carried merchants and professionals from their homes to their stores and offices in downtown Birmingham, as well as conducted blue collar workers to their industry jobs at the edge of town. The growth of Birmingham's streetcar suburbs emulated a nationwide trend:

The streetcar enabled a boom in suburban construction to occur from the 1870s to 1920. During that time, the magnates of the Industrial Age drew together human labor, raw materials, and machines into factories to mass-produce goods. Cities expanded rapidly, fueled in part by immigrants. The streetcars were the first real mode of mass transit on a daily basis. They covered more extensive routes than the trains and carried more passengers. . . . The streetcar enabled many more people to live in a less crowded setting yet to continue to commute to a downtown job (Daniels 1999:21).

Although ridership declined during the Great Depression and automobile and bus transportation began challenging the preeminence of electric rail transit at this time, rubber shortages and gas rationing during World War II reestablished the electric streetcar as king of the road in the Birmingham District. "By 1942, passenger traffic was more than 6,000,000 a month, the highest in the company's history" (Hudson and Cox 1976:55-56). This fact is particularly significant given that one in three riders was a defense industry worker. Birmingham was a major

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manufacturer for the nation's "Arsenal of Democracy." As the work force behind the work force behind the men behind the guns during World War II, the Powell Avenue Steam Plant did its part to win the war for the Allied cause. Ridership topped out at 93,000,000 in 1948, just a few short years before Birmingham's streetcar network ceased operation (Hudson and Cox 1976:56).

After the last electric streetcar completed its run on April 19, 1952, the cars were sold to a buyer in Toronto (Hudson and Cox 1976:62). The tracks were eventually removed, leaving the Powell Avenue Steam Plant as one of the few remaining vestiges of Birmingham's streetcar history.

The Powell Avenue Steam Plant is significant at the local level in the area of architecture. It is monumental in its scale, occupying an entire city block, and in its solid masonry construction. The Powell Avenue Steam Plant is an excellent example of industrial construction wrapped in Late Victorian stylistic details. Reminiscent of nearby downtown mercantile buildings, the upper facades of all four sides of the building are detailed with recessed panels. The tops of the panels feature corbel work. A finely detailed, corbelled string course wraps around the building. Window bands composed of segmental arches that spring from pilaster to pilaster create a dramatic effect. The exceptional design of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant belies the industrial function of the building.

Typical of the period, the masonry walls are substantial in construction for load bearing purposes. Exterior walls and pilasters (not including corbeled capitals) are four wythe, or bricks, thick to carry the weight of the roof, ventilators, and related structures. Evident in the roof trusses above each of the buildings' three houses are the construction properties of steel. Light weight to reduce the load bearing requirements of the walls below and strong enough to span widths ranging between 40 and 70 feet, steel roof trusses contributed to the construction of massive, unobstructed warehouse spaces necessary for housing colossal steam and electricity generation apparatus and overhead bridge cranes. The material receiving corridor composed of an overhead concrete coal bunker and structural steel support colonnades tells an important story of how coal was delivered to the plant, distributed to boilers, and ashes were removed from the building. Other components of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant, such as the internal division of the building into generator, boiler, and meter houses, smoke stacks, basement, and roof structures, also communicate how steam heat and electricity were produced at the historic plant.

Historical Context

The area that would become Birmingham experienced great change in the 1870s. Two railroad companies built intersecting lines through the heart of an agrarian community, and the area's vast mineral resources gave rise to a great iron, steel, and coke industry. Incorporated in 1871, Birmingham grew rapidly in population. Responding to the need for commercial and residential construction, the Elyton Land Company and Robert Jemison Sr. converted farms and the surrounding valley into town lots. The two developers supplied the power and transportation infrastructure for a growing metropolis. Built in 1895, the Powell Avenue Steam Plant generated power, light, and steam heat for Birmingham's financial district and outlying residential developments, as well as electricity for an extensive electric street railway system. The Powell

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Avenue Steam Plant served residential, commercial, and industrial customers in the Greater Birmingham region for over a century. Although the APC decommissioned the plant in 2013, the plant will continue to function as a significant catalyst for economic growth well into the future.

The region's vast coal and ore deposits played a major role in the development of the area. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the coal and iron industries began taking their first steps in production in Jefferson County. Prior to the Civil War, the ironworks industry entered its fledgling state with the development of the Tannehill and Mt. Pinson Iron Works. Concurrently, David Hanby and his sons mined coal in the vicinity of Turkey Creek (White 1981:41). During the Civil War, the demand for iron increased considerably. Tannehill was a major provider for the Confederate Army, but other ironworks also emerged. The Red Mountain Iron and Coal Company operated in Oxmoor and the Irondale Furnace became prominent. However, in March of 1865, the Union Army came through and destroyed the ironworks of Tannehill, Mt. Pinson, Red Mountain, Oxmoor, and Irondale (White 1981:42).

Interest in developing the region's mineral resources resumed after the Civil War. Toward this end, the State of Alabama charged chief engineer John T. Milner with the responsibility of selecting a feasible route for the construction of the South and North Alabama Railway. Milner opted to build the railroad through Jones Valley based on a suitable intersection with the existing Alabama and Chattanooga Railway and the demands of his business partners in the Elyton Land Company for unlimited tracts of developable land (White 1989:8). Civil Engineer William P. Barker established a grid pattern of streets oriented north to south and avenues oriented east to west based on the intersection of the two rail lines (White 1989:8; Hudson and Cox 1976:7). The Elyton Land Company donated land for parks and churches, and thus came to fruition the city of Birmingham in 1871.

This "city of industry, of homes, of churches and schools, of finance and investment" claimed a population of 3,000 in its first year of existence (Friedman 1924:86). Between 1880 and 1890, the Birmingham population rose to 26,000 and that in the outlying area tripled (Hudson and Cox 1976:7). Birmingham's rapid growth continued in the early 1890s, rising to 50,000 residents (White 1989:6). Entrepreneurs flocked to the Birmingham district. In the vein of Milner and company, many pursued land speculation and mineral development as a pathway to success. "By 1900, more than 90 towns of varied size were thriving throughout the Birmingham district" (White 1989:8).

Between 1873 and 1903, the city limits of Birmingham expanded five times, with 32nd Street as its easternmost limit. Immediately to the east of these limits was the community of Avondale, platted so that the blocks were merely an extension of the Birmingham grid, and East Birmingham. The land beyond the eastern limits of the city was relatively level, providing an area suitable for the location of heavy industries and extensive spur tracks from the main railroad

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trunk lines. A planned industrial suburb, East Birmingham, and other communities such as Kingston and Avondale grew around these expanding industries (Ford and Shelby 2005:132). One of the earliest major industries in this area was Avondale Mills. Built in 1897, it was the city's most important textile mill. Other industries included the Smith Gin Company, which was later absorbed by the Continental Gin Company, and the Avondale Stove Foundry. By 1900, there were "283 manufacturing establishments in the district—including mines, blast furnaces, iron foundries, machine shops, rolling mills, cast-iron-pipe factories and the newly constructed steel plant at Ensley—employed more than 14,000 workers" (White 1981:62).

Industrial prosperity fueled growth in the Birmingham District. Buildings popped up all over previously vacant land. In 1904, contractors erected 1,500 houses in the district and 1,921 within the Birmingham city limits (White 1981:62). Skyscrapers asserted their prominence in downtown Birmingham during the early years of the twentieth century. In 1910, Birmingham annexed most of the surrounding cities and towns. Avondale, Elyton, Woodlawn, Smithfield, Kingston, and Gate City were just a few of those that were annexed and transformed into residential suburbs or bedroom communities. "When a census was taken, 132,685 people were found to be living in the city that sprawled 14 miles from Ensley to East Lake and five miles across from Red Mountain to North Birmingham" (Atkins 1981:103).

The volume of industrial and commercial activity and number of people in Birmingham necessitated the development of extensive transportation infrastructure. No less than eight railroads operated in the district:

Her railroad facilities are excellent. Five trunk lines furnish communication with the outside world, viz: The Louisville & Nashville [formerly South and North], four directions; The Southern Railway, three directions; Alabama Great Southern [formerly Alabama and Chattanooga], three directions; the Kansas City, Memphis and Birmingham, one direction; the Central of Georgia, one; while the Birmingham Belt Railroad, the Birmingham Mineral and the Birmingham Southern belt the city and tap every main line of road in the district. They reach every factory, furnace, quarry and mine, delivering raw material to the factories and finished products to the trunk lines, and opening up territory for unlimited development. Though practically uninterrupted for a number of years, railroad building in the mineral district has taken on new life. The total cost since 1900 of railroad lines has been \$2,330,000 (Travelers' Protective Association of America 1904:44).

In some cases, railroads transported laborers to industrial sites. This practice diminished as industries built local housing and streetcar lines for the express purpose of passenger transportation.

Initially, horsepower, actually mule power, carried people to and from their residences and places of work at the local level. "The first service in Birmingham was offered by the

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Birmingham Street Railway. A franchise was secured by B. F. Roden, W. H. Morris and associates on 19 May 1882 to operate on 14th, 18th, 19th, 20th and 24th Sts.; 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Avenues North and Avenues A, B, C, D and E (now 1st through 5th Aves. South)" (Hudson and Cox 1976:10). Subsequently, the Birmingham Street Railway company opened lines to Avondale and North and South Highlands. Beginning in 1885, steam locomotives (called dummies) serviced short and long routes. The Elyton Land Company operated a steam passenger line from downtown Birmingham to Highland Avenue and a steam freight line through the city (Hudson and Cox 1976:10). The superior hauling capacity and speed of dummies versus mules resulted in dummy lines servicing outlying communities in the Birmingham District and horse (mule) cars working within the city limits. In the 1880s, "Birmingham became the largest operator of surface dummy lines in the United States. The closet competition was to be found in Los Angeles..." (Hudson and Cox 1976:8). Dummy lines extended to all reaches of the district.

In the early years of operation, the district claimed numerous streetcar line owners; however, mergers greatly reduced competition. "By 1890, the interests of nine different transportation companies had consolidated to form the Birmingham Railway and Electric Company. In 1899, a number of other companies were consolidated to form the Birmingham Traction Company" (APC 1952:5). Rivalry remained intense between the Birmingham Railway and Electric Company and the Birmingham Traction Company; however, competition did not last long. "A series of consolidations brought the formation, in 1901, of Birmingham Railway, Light and Power Company (BRL&P), which became the owner of the property and franchise of all electric railway and gas companies in the district" (APC 1952:5; Birmingham Electric Company [BECO] 1940:1: and *Street Railway Journal* 1900:1041, 1128). "Robert Jemison, Senior served as the first president of the consolidated Birmingham Railway, Light and Power Company, and was a director of Southern Railway, Alabama Great Southern Railway, and First National Bank. Jemison's real estate developments included Glen Iris Park, Birmingham's first subdivision designed by a professional landscape architect, and East Lake, one of Birmingham's first residential suburbs" (Birmingham Public Library 2014).

Robert Jemison, Senior earned high praise for his command of the streetcar industry:

The street railway and lighting interests of Birmingham are controlled by the Birmingham Railway, Light & Power Co., a corporation which, in the conduct of its enterprises, has at all times recognized, in the fullest sense consistent with reasonably profitable management, that its interests and those of the people were mutual. A service unsurpassed in the United States is given the city, and the company is always prompt and alert in making needed improvements. Its most recent purchase was the Birmingham Traction Co., property thereby acquiring the North Birmingham and Gate City lines.

The company's lines reach all the leading suburbs, thriving industrial and manufacturing towns; Bessemer and Ensley-characteristic municipal-types of the active, pushing, progressive spirit dominant in the business life of this remarkable district-are

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within a few minutes ride from the heart of the business center of Birmingham. Neat, commodious and comfortable cars, and a well ballasted track make these especial trips one of much pleasure and interest. All suburbs are connected with the city by car lines. The longest line is to Bessemer a distance of thirteen miles.

East Lake, a residence suburb, is also reached by the lines of the company. Here a large and beautiful artificial lake has been formed. Surrounded by stately trees, with attractive lawns studded with a profusion of flowers, nature has bestowed with lavish hands its rarest gifts in beautifying this ideal resort...

Woodlawn, North Birmingham, Gate City, the North and South Highlands, are each connected by well-equipped lines. In fact, the territory embraced by what is known as the Birmingham district has been made practically one great city by the rapid transit communication afforded by the BRL&P.

The executive affairs of this well regulated corporation are in the hands of capable and experienced men. Mr. Robert Jemison, the President and General Manager, is one of the city's most public spirited citizens. Under his efficient management the company's interests have prospered, and the interests of the patrons well protected. The company has sixty-five motor cars, forty-five trailers, fifteen freight cars and eight locomotives. These will be added to year by year (Travelers' Protective Association of America 1904:44).

Jemison truly commanded an empire.

The growth of Birmingham's streetcar suburbs emulated a nationwide trend:

The streetcar enabled a boom in suburban construction to occur from the 1870s to 1920. During that time, the magnates of the Industrial Age drew together human labor, raw materials, and machines into factories to mass-produce goods. Cities expanded rapidly, fueled in part by immigrants. The streetcars were the first real mode of mass transit on a daily basis. They covered more extensive routes than the trains and carried more passengers.

The streetcar enabled many more people to live in a less crowded setting yet to continue to commute to a downtown job (Daniels 1999:21).

"Over a 15-year period, scores of engineers charted out 38 subdivisions..." (White 1989:8). Thus were born the Birmingham streetcar subdivisions of Woodlawn Highlands, Woodlawn, South Highlands, Norwood, East Lake, Central Park, Ensley Highlands, Glen Iris, Red Mountain, and others.

According to an *Industrial Review of the General Interests of Birmingham and the Cities and Towns Comprising the Great State of Alabama*, "The lighting and street transportation facilities of a metropolitan city are two of its most important public utilities. Birmingham is to be congratulated upon the splendid efficiency of its street car system and electric light plant" (Travelers' Protective Association of America 1904:44). "The first utility to serve Birmingham was a gas plant, which was installed by the Birmingham Gas & Illuminating Company" (BECO

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1940:6). In 1886, the Elyton Land Company accepted an offer from the Thomson-Houston Company to build the first electric plant in the city. In short order, the plant electrified the city's street lights. The Birmingham Gas & Illuminating Company then eliminated competition from the electric plant by acquiring it from the Elyton Land Company (BECO 1940:6).

The Birmingham Gas & Illuminating Company did not retain a monopoly on utilities for long. The Edison Electric Illuminating Company began operating a plant at 1626 Third Avenue North in 1887 (BECO 1940:7). This development prompted the Gas Company to move to Third Avenue and Thirteenth Street and build an upgraded facility. Merchants Electric Company entered the field with a plant at 1602 First Avenue in 1889 (BECO 1940:7). The Edison Electric Illuminating Company soon afterward absorbed the Merchants Electric Company. In turn, the Consolidated Electric Light Company acquired the assets of the Birmingham Gas & Illuminating Company and the Edison Electric Illuminating Company in 1890 (BECO 1940:8).

By the mid-1890s, Consolidated acknowledged that lighting, power, and streetcar electrification demands outstripped supply. Further complicating the supply side problem was the obsolescence of its power generating equipment. Consolidated dedicated \$300,000 to the construction of a modern power plant on a site located at Powell Avenue and Nineteenth Street (BECO 1940:9). "Built in 1895 to provide electricity to the electric street railway system in Birmingham, this 150' square plant replaced two smaller ones. It was situated on the railroad lines in the center of the city to receive the large amounts of coal required to fuel the multiple boilers" (Thompson 2013). A description of this modern facility follows:

The new power plant of the "Consolidated" company was a modern one-story brick building and was considered the best equipped electric generating plant in the southern states. The building was 145 feet by 153 feet with an immense iron stack 150 feet high, a prominent land mark that could be seen from all over the city. Its power house was 145 feet by 38 feet and contained 20 horizontal tubular boilers. Its generating facilities consisted of 14 Thomson-Houston, two Ball and six Edison generators supplying the incandescent lighting, commercial and power circuits. Four 80-kw and one 300-kw generators supplied the current for the operation of street cars. The plant was manned with skilled mechanical and electrical workers under the management of a competent general superintendent (BECO 1940:9).

Consolidated expanded the Powell Avenue Plant again before its acquisition by the BRL&P in 1901. The expansion included construction of a 150 feet tall iron stack, a 112 feet by 104 feet brick addition, five boilers, and seven engines (BECO 1940:10-11).

The following praise of Robert Jemison, Senior's command of the BRL&P contains a significant omission: "The chief impress of subsequent years upon the city made by Robert Jemison, Sr., has been the development and management of public utilities. He has probably done more of real constructive work in this line than any other local citizen" (Cruikshank

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1920:12). The Powell Avenue Plant did not receive any credit for its role in Jemison's success story. The power plant was the true work horse responsible for all of the "constructive work" in the Birmingham District. The Powell Avenue Plant generated all the electricity required to move BRL&P streetcars over 110 miles of inter- and intra-city lines (Department of Commerce and Labor Bureau of the Census 1905:236). This power demand accounted for 60 percent of the output of the plant (BECO 1940:12). The BRL&P acquired a franchise from the City of Birmingham to supply steam heat to downtown business establishments. Exhaust steam from the Powell Avenue Plant boilers supplied this source of heat (BECO 1940:17). The rail and power company supplied power to iron and steel manufacturers throughout the district. Such was the output of these industries that Birmingham came to be known as the "Pittsburgh of the South." The BRL&P did not initially generate electricity for residential use. That changed after "Robert Jemison, Sr. extended a wire from Powell Avenue cable to his home on the corner of 21st Street and Sixth Avenue and became the first residential customer to be served with electricity in Birmingham in 1904" (APC 1952:5).

Expansion of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant between 1904 and 1905 enabled the BRL&P to keep pace with rapid growth in the Birmingham District. Improvements to the Powell Avenue Plant included the expansion of the building footprint such that it occupied an entire city block and the addition of boilers, Dutch ovens, and two General Electric steam turbines (BECO 1940:17; Thompson 2013). Between 1901 and 1919, the total mileage of streetcar lines increased from 110 miles to 154 miles (Moody 1920:1304). Annual ridership climbed from 45,721,854 in 1914 to 62,170,015 in 1923. The company had 1,300 electric customers in 1901 compared to 16,394 in 1914 and 35,475 in 1923 (BECO 1940:16, 22). The Powell Avenue Steam Plant provided 260 downtown Birmingham businesses with steam in the early 1920s.

Although the Powell Avenue Steam Plant worked hard to secure the fortunes of many in the Birmingham District, the BRL&P did not fare well during World War I. War conditions imposed hardships on Robert Jemison's magnum opus: "...material prices, especially those essential to railway operations, increased in some cases as much as 300%. Scarcity of labor made it difficult to retain employees, and the increased wage cost was also imposing a substantial burden, particularly on the transportation department (BECO 1940:23). Financial woes forced the rail and power company into receivership in 1919. The Birmingham Electric Company (BECO) acquired the BRL&P assets, including the Powell Avenue Steam Plant, in 1924 (APC 1952:5).

The Powell Avenue Steam Plant continued to be a solid work horse for its third employer, the BECO; however, competition and sundry economic factors challenged its preeminent role in transportation and power production. By the 1920s, the electric trolley no

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longer ruled the road. The Birmingham metropolitan area claimed 43,000 automobiles in 1926. For the time being, the BECO streetcar service retained 70 percent of the downtown passenger trade (Brownell 1972:33, 36). Increasing demand for electricity compelled the BRL&P to secure additional kilowatt hours from the APC (BECO 1940:21). The BECO relied more and more on APC hydro-electric power. The Powell Avenue Steam Plant no longer had the only dynamo in town. The Great Depression wreaked havoc on the BECO's finances. Transit fares and power revenues declined in the early 1930s. In some cases, City of Birmingham requirements for the paving of railways forced the electric company to substitute buses for streetcars (BECO 1940:35, 44).

That the Powell Avenue Steam Plant no longer drove all of the Birmingham District's transportation and power ways and means is not to say that it had less to do with the commercial, residential, and industrial activities of Birmingham. Quite the opposite was true. The power plant operated at full capacity. In 1925, the BECO built a substation on Red Mountain as a feed-in for APC electricity to "relieve somewhat the load on the Powell Avenue Station" (BECO 1940:35). The electric company continued to make improvements to railway and steam main line infrastructure to keep up with demand (BECO 1940:36). In 1935, the electric company extended a 13,200 volt circuit from the Powell Avenue station to the downtown distribution system. This upgrade from a 2,300 volt circuit was necessary to relieve overloading from increased use of commercial air conditioning and Whiteway lighting in downtown Birmingham (BECO 1940:45).

Rubber shortages and federally mandated gasoline rationing curbed automobile and bus travel nationwide during World War II. These limitations restored streetcar ridership in Birmingham. Alabama in general, and Birmingham in particular, were extremely important to the buildup of the "Arsenal of Democracy" for the Allied war efforts in the Pacific and Atlantic theaters. "Steel mills in the Birmingham area received millions of dollars in contracts for defense related products such as bombs, helmets, and steel for shipbuilding" (Alabama Department of Archives and History 2014). "One out of three persons in the labor force was employed in the iron and steel or mining industries" (White 1989:61). War industry workers traveled to and from United States Steel, Woodward Iron Company, Republic Steel Corporation, and ACIPCO factories via BECO streetcars. "By 1942, passenger traffic was more than 6,000,000 a month, the highest in the company's history" (Hudson and Cox 1976:55-56). Ridership topped out at 93,000,000 in 1948 (Hudson and Cox 1976:56). The Powell Avenue Steam Plant was the work force behind the work force behind the men behind the guns during World War II.

Record breaking ridership did not save Birmingham's streetcar system in the 1950s. "On November 25 [1952] the stockholders of BECO voted to merge the company with Alabama

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Power Company in accordance with the orders of the Alabama Public Service Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission [S. E. C.]” (APC 1952:4). Per an S. E. C. mandate, the APC divested itself of the BECO’s rail lines and cars (Hudson and Cox 1976:59-60). In hindsight, this divestiture proved fiscally prudent. Bus and automobile transportation forced Birmingham’s streetcar transit out of business in 1953.

Although the streetcars and associated infrastructure had to go, the APC retained the Powell Avenue Steam Plant. It was still an asset; however, changes were in store for the power plant. APC elected to end the production of electricity at Powell Avenue after 57 years of service. APC removed the electric generators in the generator house and transformed this space into a control room from which engineers monitored the distribution of electricity throughout the Birmingham District (Dambach 2013). “A few years before Alabama Power merged with BECO in 1952, a high pressure steam system was installed at Powell Avenue. The steam was used for sterilization, heating, laundry, cooking and humidity control needs of the developing medical center, which included Jefferson-Hillman and Veterans hospitals” (Davis 2013:6). In 1953, APC built two coal-fired boilers in the boiler house to meet the demand for steam heat in downtown Birmingham (Dambach 2013). The steam plant served more than 400 customers through the 1950s (Thompson 2013).

The automobile culture that spelled the doom of mass transit also undermined the central business districts (CBDs) of large cities nationwide. The period in American history from the late 1940s to the early 1960s radically altered the American landscape. Spurred by the construction of the Eisenhower Interstate system, millions of Americans fled cities in search of home ownership and a better way of life in the suburbs (Ames and McClelland 2002:52). Following national trends, Birmingham’s population moved out of town and settled in newly developed communities located along Interstates 20 and 59 and U. S. Highway 280. Long time downtown Birmingham merchants relocated to strip malls in the suburbs to keep their clientele. In accordance with dwindling numbers of merchants in the CBD, the list of Powell Avenue Steam Plant’s customers decreased from over 400 to “100 downtown buildings” by 1984 (*Tuscaloosa News* 1984:7). Despite this trend, APC added four gas-fired boilers to the boiler house and converted the original two coal boilers to gas between 1968 and 1972. Then converted the six boilers back to coal, and finally built a new coal-fired boiler in 1985. These efforts to improve steam heat delivery and reduce costs did not prevent the loss of additional customers. “In recent years, the plant’s largest customers have been UAB [the University of Alabama Birmingham], the Eye Foundation, Veterans Affairs Hospital and Southern Research Institute” (Davis 2013:6). APC’s decision to decommission the Powell Avenue Steam plant prompted UAB to construct its own \$72 million steam plant (UABkscope.com 2013).

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In 2013, APC ended steam generation at the Powel Avenue Steam Plant, but not the use of the building:

After more than a century, Powell Avenue Steam Plant will soon change direction, moving ahead into a new future in line with the progressive growth underway in downtown Birmingham. "Although we're shutting down the plant, we're investigating our options," said Birmingham Division Area Manager Tony Smoke. "We want to turn it into a multiuse facility that's complementary to the redevelopment of Birmingham. But no matter what we choose to do, it will be something that will make us all proud." (Davis 2013:6).

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Circa 1900 Exterior photograph of the Powel Avenue Steam Plant. Photograph on file at the Alabama Power Company Archives, Birmingham.

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Dambach, Dale

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Daniels, Tom

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Davis, Carla

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Ford, Gene A. and Thomas M. Shelby

- 2005 *An Architectural and Historical Survey of the Woodlawn Highlands Historic District, Birmingham, Alabama*. Report submitted to the City of Birmingham by the Office of Archaeological Research, University of Alabama Museums, Tuscaloosa.

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- 1924 "Birmingham. The 'Magic City' of Alabama as the Center of Industrial and General Business Development. An Industrial Romance That Thrills with Facts More Interesting than Fiction." *Manufacturer's Record*, May 15, 1924.

Hudson, Alvin W. and Harold E. Cox

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Moody, John

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Powell Avenue Steam Plant

Jefferson County, AL
County and State

Name of Property

Penuel, Chuck

- 2013 Powell Avenue Steam Plant floor plans and elevations. Drawings on file at Birchfield Penuel & Associates, Birmingham.

Sanborn Map Company

- 1902 Insurance Maps of Birmingham, Alabama. New York.
- 1911 Insurance Maps of Birmingham, Alabama. New York.

Street Railway Journal

- 1900 "The Street Railway of Birmingham, Ala." *Street Railway Journal*. (May 1900).

The Tuscaloosa News

- 1984 "Steam Plant Fuel Being Argued." *Tuscaloosa News*, June 22.

Thompson, George M.

- 2013 Birmingham Historical Society Architectural and Historical Resources Survey. Unpublished report on file at the Alabama Power Company Archives, Birmingham. This report was originally written in 1991 and edited by APC Archivist, Bill Tharpe, in 2013.

Travelers' Protective Association of America

- 1904 *An Industrial Review of the General Interests of Birmingham and the Cities and Towns Comprising the Great State of Alabama. Volume II.* Birmingham.

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- 2013 "UAB Gains Some Steam." *Kaleidescope*. Electronic document, <http://studentmedia.uab.edu/2013/02/uab-gains-some-steam/>, accessed on July 8, 2014.

White, Marjorie

- 1981 *The Birmingham District: An Industrial History and Guide*. Birmingham Historical Society: Birmingham.
- 1989 "The Grid and the Garden." *Designs on Birmingham: A Landscape History of a Southern City and Its Suburbs*. Birmingham Historical Society: Birmingham.

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

Powell Avenue Steam Plant

Jefferson County, AL

Name of Property

County and State

____ 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: Alabama Power Company Archives, Birmingham, AL

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.8 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:	Longitude:
2. Latitude:	Longitude:
3. Latitude:	Longitude:
4. Latitude:	Longitude:

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☒ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

1. Zone: 16 Easting: 517917.80 Northing: 3707779.32

Powell Avenue Steam Plant

Name of Property

Jefferson County, AL

County and State

2. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
3. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
4. Zone:	Easting :	Northing:

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

The Jefferson County tax parcel identification for the Powell Avenue Steam Plant is as follows: 22-00-36-3-008-001.000.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

This parcel delineates the boundaries currently and historically associated with the property.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Gene A. Ford, Architectural Historian; Susan Enzweiler, AHC NRHP Reviewer
organization: Office of Archaeological Research, University of Alabama Museums; Alabama Historical Commission
street & number: 13075 Moundville Archaeological Park
city or town: Moundville state: AL zip code: 35474
e-mail: gford@bama.ua.edu
telephone: (205) 371.8713
date: July 7, 2014

Additional Documentation

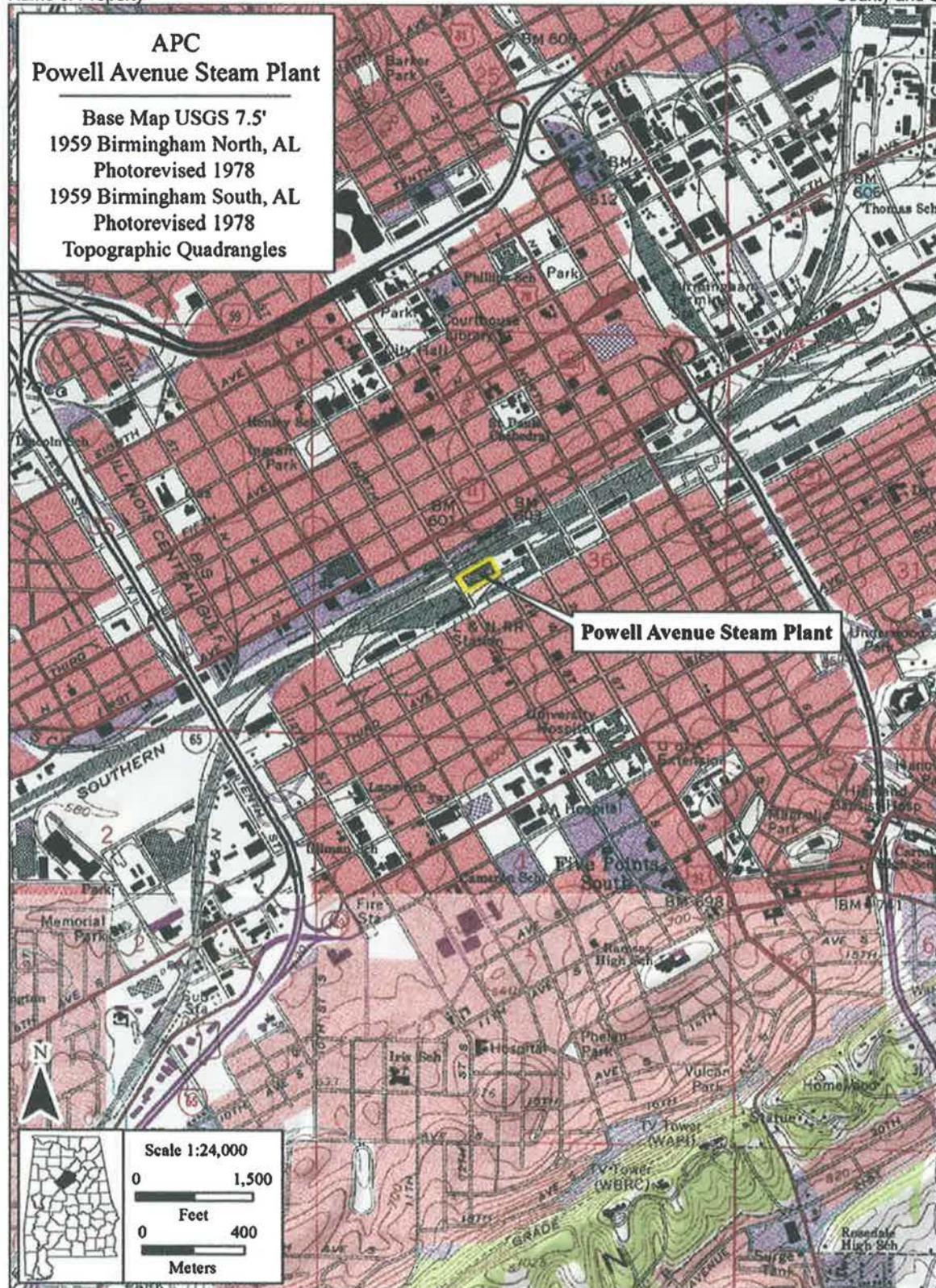
Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **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.)

Powell Avenue Steam Plant

Jefferson County, AL
County and State

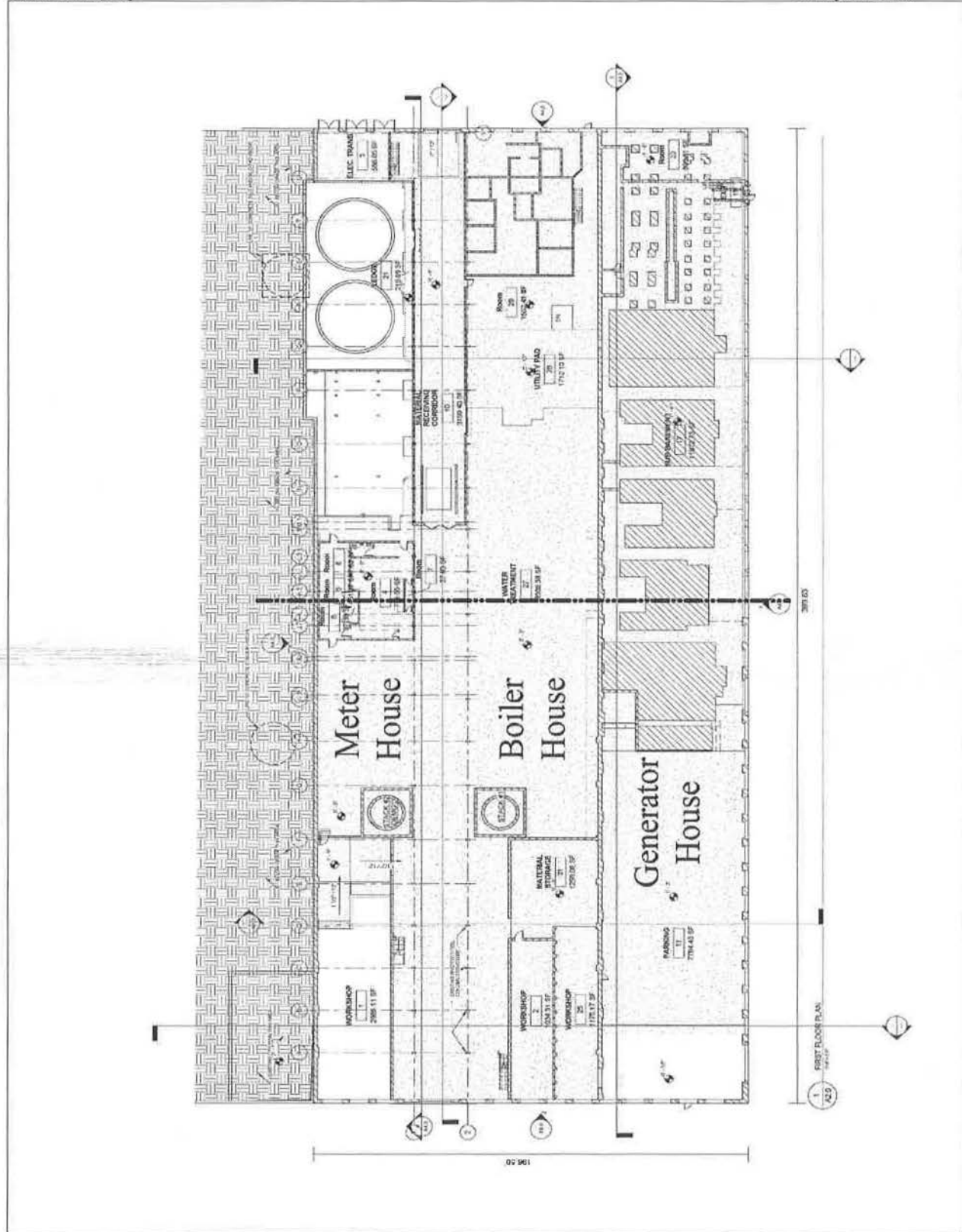
Name of Property



7.5' USGS Birmingham North and South, AL Topographic Quadrangle maps

Powell Avenue Steam Plant
 Name of Property

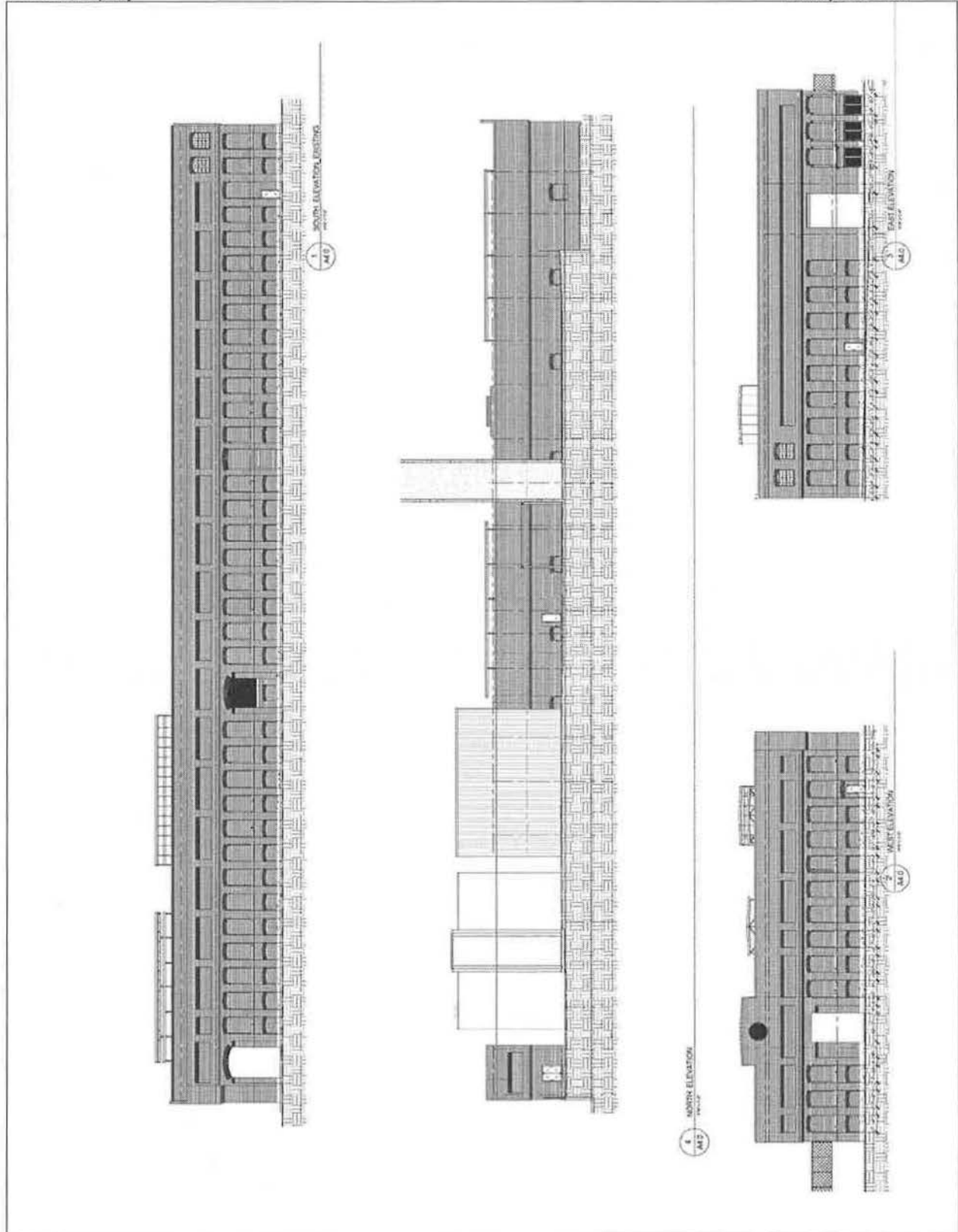
Jefferson County, AL
 County and State



Birchfield Penuel & Associates floor plan. Courtesy of Charles Penuel.

Powell Avenue Steam Plant
Name of Property

Jefferson County, AL
County and State



Birchfield Penuel & Associates elevation plans. Courtesy of Charles Penuel.

Powell Avenue Steam Plant
Name of Property

Jefferson County, AL
County and State

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: Powell Avenue Steam Plant

City or Vicinity: Birmingham

County: Jefferson State: Alabama

Photographer: Gene A. Ford

Date Photographed: February 20, 2014

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

Photo #1 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0001). South elevation. View north.

Photo #2 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0002). South elevation. View northwest.

Photo #3 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0003). South and east elevations. View northwest.

Photo #4 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0004). East elevation. View west.

Photo #5 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0005). East and north elevations. View southwest.

Photo #6 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0006). West elevation. View east.

Photo #7 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0007). West and south elevations. View northeast.

Powell Avenue Steam Plant
Name of Property

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Photo #8 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0008). Smoke stack and boiler house monitor. View northwest.

Photo #9 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0009). Smoke stack roof top base. View northwest.

Photo #10 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0010). Boiler house skylight, coal bunker monitor, and concrete silos. View north.

Photo #11 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0011). Generator house roof. View south.

Photo #12 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0012). Generator house roof. View west.

Photo #13 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0013). Generator house interior. View west.

Photo #14 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0014). Generator house interior. View east.

Photo #15 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0015). Material receiving corridor, coal bunker, and colonnade. View east.

Photo #16 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0016). Boiler house, material receiving corridor, coal bunker, and colonnade. View northwest.

Photo #17 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0017). Coal bunker detail.

Photo #18 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0018). Smoke stack fire door. View south.

Photo #19 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0019). Smoke stack interior. View south.

Photo #20 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0020). Meter house interior. View west, standing on ground level.

Photo #21 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0021). Meter house monitor.

Photo #22 (AL_Jefferson County_Powell Avenue Steam Plant_0022). Meter house interior. View west, standing on mezzanine.

Powell Avenue Steam Plant
Name of Property

Jefferson County, AL
County and State

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.













































UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Powell Avenue Steam Plant
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: ALABAMA, Jefferson

DATE RECEIVED: 10/24/14 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 11/14/14
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 12/01/14 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 12/10/14
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 14001002

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 12.10.14 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in
The National Register
of
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR
CITY OF BIRMINGHAM

WILLIAM A. BELL, SR.
MAYOR



August 20, 2014

Ms. Lee Anne Wofford
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Alabama Historical Commission
468 South Perry Street
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-0900

Re: National Register Nomination for the Powell Avenue Steam Plant
1800 Powell Avenue South, Birmingham, Jefferson County

Dear Ms. Wofford:

As Mayor of the City of Birmingham, it gives me great pleasure to support the nomination of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant in Birmingham to the National Register of Historic Places. In my opinion, the nomination meets the criteria for listing in the National Register. The building is a significant part of our local history, and I enthusiastically recommend that it be listed. Thank you very much for your careful consideration of this nomination.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William A. Bell, Sr.".

William A. Bell, Sr.
Mayor



CITY OF BIRMINGHAM

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, ENGINEERING & PERMITS

710 NORTH 20TH STREET
ROOM 500, CITY HALL
BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA 35203

WILLIAM A. BELL, SR.
MAYOR

ANDRÉ V. BITTAS
DIRECTOR

BIRMINGHAM HISTORICAL COMMISSION

September 16, 2014

Ms. Lee Anne Wofford
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Alabama Historical Commission
468 South Perry Street
Montgomery, Alabama 35130-0900



Re: National Register Nomination for the Powell Avenue Steam Plant
Birmingham (Jefferson County), Alabama

Dear Ms. Wofford:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Birmingham Historical Commission, as its Chairman. The Commission has considered the National Register of Historic Places Nomination for the Powell Avenue Steam Plant in Birmingham, and consequently, we have agreed to support the nomination of the building to the National Register. In our opinion, the building meets the criteria for listing in the National Register, and we are enthusiastic about our recommendation for the inclusion of this listing.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Samuel H. Frazier".

Samuel H. Frazier
Chairman, Birmingham Historical Commission

Mark A. Crosswhite
Chairman, President and
Chief Executive Officer

600 North 18th Street
Post Office Box 2641
Birmingham, Alabama 35291-0001

Tel 205.257.0600
Fax 205.257.5100



September 16, 2014

Ms. Lee Anne Wofford
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Alabama Historical Commission
468 South Perry Street
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-0090



Re: National Register Nomination for the Powell Avenue Steam Plant
1800 Powell Avenue South, Birmingham, Jefferson County

Dear Ms. Wofford:

Alabama Power Company strongly supports the nomination of its Powell Avenue Steam Plant in Birmingham, Alabama for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Alabama Power Company believes that the Powell Avenue Steam Plant has played an integral part in the historical development of the City of Birmingham and meets the criteria for listing in the National Register. The listing of Powell Avenue Steam Plant in the National Register will fully recognize the respective historical significance of this structure.

We appreciate your consideration of the nomination of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant to the NRHP.

Sincerely,

Matthew W. Bowden
Vice President
Environmental Affairs

600 North 18th Street
Post Office Box 2641
Birmingham, Alabama 35291

Tel 205.257.4075
Fax 205.257.4349



September 16, 2014

Ms. Lee Anne Wofford
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Alabama Historical Commission
468 South Perry Street
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-0090



**Re: National Register Nomination for the Powell Avenue Steam Plant
1800 Powell Avenue South, Birmingham, Jefferson County**

Dear Ms. Wofford:

Alabama Power Company strongly supports the nomination of its Powell Avenue Steam Plant in Birmingham, Alabama for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Alabama Power Company believes that the Powell Avenue Steam Plant has played an integral part in the historical development of the City of Birmingham and meets the criteria for listing in the National Register. The listing of Powell Avenue Steam Plant in the National Register will fully recognize the respective historical significance of this structure.

We appreciate your consideration of the nomination of the Powell Avenue Steam Plant to the NRHP.

Sincerely,

Matthew W. Bowden
Vice President Environmental Affairs



STATE OF ALABAMA
ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION
468 SOUTH PERRY STREET
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA 36130-0900

October 20, 2014

FRANK W. WHITE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



TEL: 334-242-3184
FAX: 334-240-3477

Ms. Carol Shull
Keeper of the National Register
U. S. Department of the Interior, NPS
Cultural Resources
National Register, History & Education Programs
1201 "I" Street NW (2280)
Washington, D. C. 20005

Dear Ms. Shull:

Enclosed please find the nomination and supporting documentation to be considered for listing the following Alabama resource in the National Register of Historic Places:

Powell Avenue Steam Plant
Birmingham, Jefferson County, Alabama

Your consideration of the enclosed National Register of Historic Places nomination is appreciated.

Sincerely,

Lee Anne Wofford
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

LAW/sme/nw

Enclosures