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United States Department of Interior
National Park Service

Nat. Register of Historic Places
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Walker Manufacturing Company - Ajax Plant
other names/site number

2. Location

street & number	1520 Clark Street				N/A	not for publication			
city or town	Racine				N/A	vicinity			
state	Wisconsin	code	WI	county	Racine	code	101	zip code	53403-2217

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)


Signature of certifying official/Title

6/15/2016
Date

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer - Wisconsin
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant

Racine County

Wisconsin

Name of Property

County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the
National Register.

See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the
National Register.

See continuation sheet.

removed from the National
Register.

other, (explain):

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many boxes as
as apply)

private
 public-local
 public-State
 public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

building(s)
 district
 structure
 site
 object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources
in the count)

contributing	noncontributing
4	0 buildings
0	0 sites
0	0 structures
0	0 objects
4	0 total

Name of related multiple property listing:
(Enter "N/A" if property not part of a multiple property
listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources
previously listed in the National Register**

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY/Manufacturing Facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/Not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and Early 20th Century American Movements

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

roof SYNTHETICS

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the 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.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY

INVENTION

Period of Significance

1929 - 1965

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant
Name of Property

Racine County
County and State

Wisconsin

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title	Kyle J. Peterson	date	October 15, 2015
organization	Herman & Kittle Properties, Inc.	telephone	(317) 964-1928
street & number	112 E. North Avenue	zip code	60044-2134
city or town	Lake Bluff	state	WI

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Walker Manufacturing Company-Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

Site

Located on the east side of Racine, Wisconsin, the Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant (Walker-Ajax) occupies most of the block bounded to the west by the Union Pacific Railroad tracks; to the east by Clark Street; to the north by 15th Street; and to the south by 16th Street. A small lot at the southeast corner of the block is not part of this site; the crenelated, two-story building on this lot was historically, and remains, separate from the Walker-Ajax complex.

The Walker-Ajax complex is located within a historic industrial corridor that developed along the former Chicago & NorthWestern Railroad tracks beginning in the late-nineteenth century. The plant is roughly U-shaped in plan and is composed of a collection of brick manufacturing buildings that have been expanded to form an almost completely contiguous complex. The earliest structures on the site date to the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries; however, the current configuration of the complex reflects the ongoing additions and improvements made by the Walker Manufacturing Company over their period of ownership from 1929-1965. Buildings range from one to three stories in height and are generally built up to the lot lines, with no setback from the sidewalks. A gravel parking lot is located within the inset at the center east (Clark Street) side of the site.

Though the Walker-Ajax buildings currently occupy nearly the whole city block spanning from Clark Street west to the Union Pacific Railroad tracks and from 15th Street south to 16th Street, the site was historically divided into three smaller blocks by Blake and Adams streets. Blake Street was a north-south oriented street that once bisected the full site; the Walker Manufacturing Company would later construct its own additions to the complex where Blake Street once stood. Adams Street was a short, east-west oriented street that once bisected the west end of the site. Adams Street was abandoned by 1908 as the Higgins Spring & Axle Company expanded northward.

The area immediately surrounding the site consists primarily of industrial and commercial development, which largely follows the railroad tracks and extends along major streets. Frank Lloyd Wright's S.C. Johnson & Son complex is located one block to the east. Residential districts are located within a few blocks to the west and southeast with transition areas that consists of a blend of commercial, industrial and residential construction. The sites on the blocks immediately west and north of Walker-Ajax are presently vacant.

Exterior

Constructed over a period of approximately 75 years, from the late-nineteenth century through the 1960s, the Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant is composed of multiple buildings that were acquired, combined, and expanded over time to meet the needs of the Walker Manufacturing Company. The complex is composed of the following four buildings:

- The former **Higgins Spring & Axle Company Building**, built between 1887 and 1933, located at the southwest corner of the site. The Walker Manufacturing Company constructed an addition to this building between 1950 and 1969. The addition extends east along 16th Street and was constructed as a

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Walker Manufacturing Company-Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

warehouse.

- The former **Racine Merchandise Company Building**, built between 1887 and 1933, located at the northwest corner of the site. Ajax Auto Parts purchased this building in 1919 and it is likely this building housed Ajax administrative offices through 1965; the year Ajax operations left the site.
- The former **Racine Novelty Manufacturing Company Building**, built between 1894 and 1908, located at the northeast corner of the site.
- The former **National Tool & Machine Company Building**, a small two-story building completed in 1924, located just south of the center east loading and parking area.

The complex is composed of four buildings constructed between c.1887 and 1969. Four of the buildings were originally occupied by separate manufacturers including the Ajax Auto Parts Company which purchased the northwest building for its headquarters and primary manufacturing facility in 1919. After Walker Manufacturing Company purchased the Ajax Company in 1929 and occupied the site, the company acquired most of the block. The center of the site became filled in with additions and loading docks for the various buildings and eventually took over most of the remaining space originally designated as Blake Street. This development over time is clearly expressed at the exterior, giving the complex a distinctive presence in the neighborhood. While the complex may be viewed as one contiguous structure, each individual building and addition can also be discerned and the complex overall exhibits a variety of industrial building forms.

Combined, the building is U-shaped in plan, with an inset at the east side that contains a gravel surface parking lot and provides access to a loading dock. All sections of the complex are of masonry, composed primarily of common brick, but with selected street façades of red face brick. Later construction includes concrete masonry unit (CMU) walls. The buildings range in height from one to three stories above grade. Roofs throughout include a variety of flat, shed and gabled forms. Both rectangular and sawtooth roof monitors are located at selected buildings. Parapets rise above the rooflines of selected flat roofs and gable roof ends and include both flat and stepped profiles. Window openings throughout are rectangular or segmentally arched and typically are placed regularly across the façades. Openings for both pedestrian doors and larger doors are located at all façades. Many door and window openings have been either filled in with masonry or boarded up. Limited original wood doors and wood and steel windows remain. Despite these changes, all masonry openings retain their historic size and proportion.

South Façade (16th Street)

The south façade fronts on 16th Street, with no setback from the sidewalk. This façade is composed of a long center section flanked by two, narrower sections. The west and center building sections of this façade were constructed between 1894 and 1908 and were formerly occupied by the Higgins Spring & Axle Company. These façades are part of the large building section that occupies the southwest corner of the site. The east building section was completed by Walker-Ajax between 1950 and 1969 and was used as a steel warehouse for

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Walker Manufacturing Company-Ajax Plant
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the Ajax Plant.¹

- Former **Higgins Spring & Axle Company Building**, built between 1887 and 1933
The west section of this façade is two stories above grade and is composed of red common brick with rusticated limestone heads at window and door openings and smooth limestone sills. The parapet features a raised center section flanked by corbeled brick and has clay tile coping. Four, tall, rectangular window openings are regularly spaced across the second floor. These have been covered with metal panels. Onsite investigation has determined that original wood, double-hung windows with divided-light sash remain beneath this board up. The first floor is composed of two larger window openings, and two door openings located at the center and east edge of the façade. All first floor openings have been filled in with brick and CMU.

The center section is two stories above grade and is composed of a long, 10-bay-wide façade of common brick with stone sills and rusticated stone blocks at the projecting piers of the second floor. The parapet is capped with clay tile coping. Segmentally-arched window openings are regularly spaced, two per bay across the second floor and are interspersed with historic door openings at the first floor. All first floor openings have been filled in with brick and CMU, while second floor openings have been covered with metal panels. Historic wood and steel windows with divided light sash remain beneath these panels.

- **Walker-Ajax Plant Warehouse Addition**, built between 1950 and 1969
The east section of the south façade is a single, tall story above grade and is clad in red face brick with stone sills and sheet metal coping. The façade features wide expanses of plain brick walls, punctuated by ribbon window openings at the roofline and two door openings at the west half of the façade. These door openings consist of a large overhead door opening and a deeply recessed pedestrian door opening. The windows have been covered with metal panels; however, metal, divided light sash have been found to remain beneath these panels. Existing doors consist of a paneled, overhead door and a wood paneled pedestrian door with a glazed light that has been boarded over.

East Façade (Clark Street)

The east façade extends approximately 525 feet down the length of Clark Street with a recessed parking lot and loading dock access located near the center of the block. The parking lot is flanked by two building sections to the south and two building sections to the north. These flanking sections are generally built up to the sidewalk, with exception of the building section to the far south, which is set behind a separate lot that is located at the southeast corner of Clark and 16th Streets. This lot and the crenelated two-story building that occupies it is not part of the Walker-Ajax complex.

- **Walker-Ajax Plant Warehouse Addition**, built between 1950 and 1969
The southernmost building section at this façade is the sidewall of the Walker-Ajax Plant Warehouse addition, built between 1950 and 1969. This façade section is a single, tall story above grade and is composed of CMU. One rectangular window opening with a divided light, metal window is located near

¹ Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.

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the top of the wall. A section of this façade is raised above the roofline, marking the location of the roof monitor. This façade is partially obscured by the adjacent building.

- Former **National Tool & Machine Company Building**, built in 1924
The building immediately south of the parking lot was built in 1924.² This building is two stories tall with a red face brick façade along Clark Street and common brick sidewalls. The building was built with no setback from the sidewalk. A chimney extends above the roofline at the south façade. A series of additions were added to the north side of this building between 1950 and 1969. These consist of one and two story sections with brick and CMU walls.

The Clark Street façade of this building is simply detailed with projecting brick frames that have limestone accents and limestone coping with scroll ornament. Rectangular window openings are regularly placed at the second floor with two narrow center openings and wider flanking openings. First floor windows are also rectangular, and are roughly set within the grid established by the second floor. All window sills are of limestone. A pedestrian door opening is located near the center of the first floor and contains a non-historic flush door. Window openings have been boarded over. The one-story addition to the north is of red face brick with a large, overhead vehicular door.

- **Walker Loading Dock**, built between 1933 and 1950, and Parking Lot
The inset at the center of this façade has a gravel parking lot. Beyond is a setback façade composed of a concrete loading dock to the north and a one-story building to the south. Both the building and the loading dock are clad with vertical metal siding and have shed roofs. The loading dock is of concrete and has six overhead loading doors. A large wood structure that carries electrical transmission lines is located on the roof.
- Former **Racine Novelty Manufacturing Company Building**, built between 1894 and 1908
This section of the building is two stories tall with common brick façades along Clark Street and at the south sidewall that faces the parking lot. The parapet features projecting brick courses and is perforated with a cross design. Segmentally arched window openings are regularly spaced across both the first and second floors, with a pedestrian door opening located toward the south end of the east façade. A larger segmentally arched opening is located toward the north end of the façade and has been filled in with brick. A rectangular loading door opening and a small glass block window have been inserted at the south sidewall. Window openings throughout have been covered with metal panels. No historic door openings remain.

The building section at the northeast corner of 15th and Clark streets was built ca. 1920. This building section is two stories tall, with primary façades on both Clark Street and 15th Street to the north. These façades are of red brick, detailed with projecting brick courses and diamond patterns at the parapet. The parapet at the east façade is stepped. Large rectangular window openings, with limestone sills are regularly spaced across each façade. The windows have been covered with metal panels. A pedestrian door is centered at the north façade. This opening has been filled in with brick.

² Building Permits, City of Racine Building Department

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North Façade (15th Street)

The north façade is composed of two large building sections joined with a small, one-story section. The entire façade is built with no setback from the sidewalk.

- Former **Racine Novelty Manufacturing Company Building**, built between 1894 and 1908 (Described above)
- **Walker Circulation Structure**, built between 1933 and 1950
The small one-story connector at the center of the north façade was built between 1933 and 1950. The street façade of this section is clad in red face brick with concrete coping. A large, overhead door opening is centered on the façade and is flanked by a pedestrian door opening and a rectangular window opening.
- Former **Racine Merchandise Company Building**, built between 1887-1933
The western most building section at this façade was originally built between 1887 and 1894 and was previously occupied by the E.H. Pease Manufacturing Company and later the Racine Merchandise Company. The building is three stories tall with façades of common brick detailed with a projecting brick cornice. Segmentally-arched window openings with limestone sills are regularly spaced across all façades. Windows have been covered with vertical metal panels. A pedestrian door opening with transom is located toward the middle of the north façade. The historic wood frame and paneled door remain here. The transom has been boarded over. At the west façade, first floor, two square loading openings have been cut into the façade and a larger, segmentally arched opening has been filled in with brick.

West Façade (Railroad Tracks/Junction Avenue)

- Former **Racine Merchandise Company Building**, built between 1894 and 1933
Former **Higgins Spring & Axle Company Building**, built between 1887 and 1933
Running parallel to the tracks, the west façade of the Walker-Ajax complex is angled and extends approximately 675 feet between 15th and 16th Streets. The forms and varied rooflines of the building sections that make up the complex are apparent at this façade, creating a particularly picturesque composition. A tall, rectangular brick chimney rises above the rooflines near the center of this façade and at least eight separate building sections can be distinguished. Generally these building sections are composed of common brick walls, with rectangular or segmentally arched window openings. Most windows have been covered with vertical metal panels or filled in with brick or CMU; however, historic iron window shutters remain at a building section toward the center of the façade. Various loading openings exist along the first floor of this façade. Most have been filled in with masonry or metal panels.

Interior

The interior of the building consists of a series of spaces and building sections connected by door openings and passages. The manufacturing sections of the building are generally large open spaces with concrete floors, brick

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walls and exposed steel columns and roof structures. The larger factory spaces feature rectangular and sawtooth roof monitors. Especially large open spaces include a multi-story, gable-roofed section at the south end of the building (in the former Higgins Spring & Axle Company Building) that is connected to an adjacent open section to the north (in the former Racine Merchandise Company Building) with sawtooth roof monitors, and the Walker-Ajax Plant Warehouse located at the center south end of the site. Another large rectangular open space is located toward the north end of the building, oriented east-west, and features sawtooth roof monitors.

More finished interior spaces are limited, but can be found at the upper floors of the two larger building sections that have façades on 15th Street – the former Racine Merchandise Company Building and a small second floor area at the corner of 16th Street and the railroad tracks within the former Higgins Spring & Axle Company Building. These upper floor spaces may have been used for offices or smaller-scale manufacturing activities and are typically subdivided with frame walls. Finishes include wood floors and plaster walls and ceilings and wood trim at windows and doors.

Each of the Ajax Plant's pre-Walker buildings contain stairs and elevator cores. The former Higgins Spring & Axle Company Building at the southwest corner of the site has two mid-century concrete stairs and a large freight elevator set within a large mid-century metal armature. The former Racine Merchandise Company Building at the northwest corner of the site has a narrow utilitarian wood stair that connects its three floors along with a freight elevator. The former Racine Novelty Manufacturing Building at the northeast corner of the site has a single wood stair connecting its two floors.

Though the complex mostly lacks dedicated circulation spaces – most of the large manufacturing spaces directly connect to each other – the Walker Manufacturing Company created circulation between its older buildings sometime after 1933 and before 1950. This circulation space takes advantage of the space left when Blake Street was abandoned. A roof was put over this area and connects the loading entrance at the center north end of the site and extends south to a loading structure facing the east parking lot. This area is highly utilitarian in character with exposed wood and metal roof structures spanning between the former exterior walls of the complex's pre-Walker buildings.

Integrity and Condition

Overall the complex is largely intact and appears as it did historically when occupied by Walker Manufacturing Company and operated as the Ajax Plant. Non-historic alterations are limited to window and door replacement and infill; however, most historic openings remain and historic wood and steel windows have been found to exist. Few exterior masonry openings have been expanded or changed in size or proportion. Also, some former outdoor areas and courtyards were roofed over to house additional work spaces that are less historically significant than the original blocks; however, overall, the complex retains historic integrity and clearly conveys its historic appearance as a manufacturing complex that has developed over time.

The complex overall is in good condition. At the exterior, areas of significant masonry deterioration have been noted and the roof sheathing is deteriorating. Existing roof monitors and windows range in condition, with areas of significant deterioration noted. Interior materials such as plaster, wood floors and wood trim appear to also be in good to fair condition, with some areas of bowed wood flooring noted. Despite some deterioration, additions,

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and outdoor areas that have been roofed over, the historic materials throughout the complex remain largely intact and the building continues to display the features that make it a significant late-nineteenth and twentieth century industrial complex.

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Walker Manufacturing Company-Ajax Plant
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The Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant (Walker-Ajax) is locally significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of Industry for its association with the Walker Manufacturing Company, a local firm that grew in the twentieth century to become a nationwide industry leader in the design and manufacture of mufflers, jacks and other automotive parts. Walker-Ajax is also significant under National Register Criterion A in the area of Invention as the location where the first Walker Silencer, an innovative automobile muffler design, was invented and first produced. The Ajax Plant played a vital role in the company's development and success as one of the company's earliest production facilities. The plant remains as the last remaining production facility in Racine associated with the Walker Manufacturing Company and is also among the last vestiges of Racine's early role in Wisconsin's automobile manufacturing industry. Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin does not specifically investigate the automobile manufacturing industry although it does acknowledge that, "Wisconsin's final period of industrial growth was marked by the transition to modern industrialized specialization."³ It further acknowledges that industrial development of the mid-to late-twentieth century is characterized by the development of industries that replace the older, traditional lumbering and agricultural implement manufacturing.

Established in the early twentieth century to supply the newly emerging automobile industry, the Walker Manufacturing Company became an industry innovator and leader, and continued to be among Racine's largest and longest-enduring manufacturing concerns, even after most automobile manufacturing had left Racine. Walker Manufacturing played an important role in supporting the growth of the auto industry by providing both original equipment and aftermarket automobile parts. Innovations in automobile parts and equipment helped to encourage car ownership by providing more quiet and efficient vehicles, in the case of mufflers, and the improved ability to access cars for repair, including roadside repairs, in the case of jacks. With headquarters based in Racine for over 100 years, Walker Manufacturing was also significant to the local economy. The company was among the city's top employers and by 1956 boasted nearly \$34.5 million in yearly sales.

The period of significance for the Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant extends from 1929 to 1965, covering the period that the factory was owned and operated by the Walker Manufacturing Company and reflecting the factory's expansion until Walker ended all manufacturing in the building in 1965. The complex overall retains good integrity and continues to convey its historic appearance as a manufacturing complex that has developed over time.

Early Automotive Industry in Racine, Wisconsin

The City of Racine was among the leading centers of the automotive industry in Wisconsin in the early-1900s.⁴ In the early 1890s the first gasoline powered automobile in Wisconsin was built here, designed by Andrew J. Pierce in collaboration with Edward Pennington.⁵ Pierce would go on to organize the Pierce-Racine Company, which produced the popular Pierce-Racine car. Among the largest and most influential

³ Wyatt, Barbara, ed. Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin, Volume 2. Industry sub-unit, page 1-3.

⁴ Racine Heritage Museum, "Walker Manufacturing... Tire Savers and Swirling Gases," 9.

⁵ *The Grassroots History of Racine County*, second printing, (Racine County Historical Museum Inc., 1979), 324-325

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automobile manufacturers in Racine were the Mitchell Lewis Motor Company and J.I. Case Company. The Mitchell Lewis Motor Company was formed in 1910 through the consolidation of the Mitchell Wagon Company and the Mitchell Motor Car Company. In 1911, Mitchell employed between two and three thousand employees at its plant that covered an estimated 25 to 30 acres.⁶ J.I. Case was involved in the production of automobiles from 1910 to 1926.⁷ Case acquired the Pierce-Racine Company in 1912.

The growing automotive industry, in Racine and nationwide, was supplemented by auto part manufacturing and service industries, which were essential for the automotive industry's widespread success. The newly emerging auto industry depended on independent auto part manufacturers, distributors and service garages to supply their equipment and meet customer repair demands. Independent auto part manufacturers, like the Walker Manufacturing Company provided original equipment directly to auto manufacturers as well as aftermarket parts to distributors and service garages. Large distribution networks were essential to provide parts quickly to meet customers' demand for fast service and also allowed garages to not carry large inventories of expensive parts that may quickly become obsolete.

History of the Walker Manufacturing Company

The Walker Manufacturing Company was officially organized in 1915 to provide equipment for the newly emerging automobile industry. The company was formed by William A. Walker and his two sons, Willard and Warren. The Walkers had previously been in the farm implement business since acquisition of the Racine Economy Spring Company in 1908. They entered into the automobile jack business after a chance meeting in 1912 between Willard Walker and John Dwight who was associated with Mitchell Motors. Dwight convinced Willard to manufacture a "tire saver" device. These were essentially jacks that were used to lift cars in order to preserve the tires during long term storage. By 1914, the Walkers had expanded their line of jacks and reported annual sales over \$250,000.⁸ The company soon outgrew its existing factory and in 1916 they had a new plant built near the Racine lakefront at Michigan and Hamilton streets (1201 Michigan Boulevard) which became Walker's headquarters for the next eight decades.

Walker's production continued to increase and during World War I, Walker jacks were standard equipment for U.S. Army vehicles. Through the 1920s, Walker expanded its product line to include hydraulic jacks, service jacks on wheels, and improved mechanical car and truck jacks. By 1928, Walker provided jacks nationwide for garages and as standard equipment in a range of cars including Nash, the Chrysler 80, Ford and Ford truck, the Packard eight, and Pontiac.⁹

Walker Manufacturing Company merged with Racine-based Ajax Auto Parts Company, a major competitor, in 1929 and reportedly became the largest jack manufacturer in the world, with jack production concentrated at the Ajax Plant.¹⁰ Through acquisition of the Ajax Plant at 15th and Clark

⁶ *The Grassroots History of Racine County*, 325.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Racine Heritage Museum, "Industries of Racine," (1956), 46.

⁹ Racine Heritage Museum, "Misfortunes of Motorists Lead to Establishment of Big Industry" *Racine Review* 23 November 1928.

¹⁰ Racine Heritage Museum, "Looking Backward, 40 Years Ago, May 4, 1929"

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streets, the company doubled the size of its facilities and employed a total of approximately 1,000 people.¹¹

With the stock market crash in 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression, Walker's executives saw a need to diversify their business. To this end, the company hired noted automotive engineer, Earl G. Gunn (1885-1968), who set out to develop a new muffler in order to improve on existing technology. This work was undertaken in a small lab at the Ajax Plant in the early 1930s and resulted in the development of the first Walker Silencer.¹² This new muffler design revolutionized the market and was a significant advance over the standard mufflers of the time, which have been described as "glorified tin cans."¹³ Using a louvered tube to swirl exhaust gasses, this new muffler successfully quieted exhausted noise while at the same time reducing back pressure and allowing the engine to run more efficiently than contemporary muffler designs. Walker patented the louvered tube in 1932 and with this new technology the company rose to the forefront of the muffler field nationally.

The Walker Silencer was produced at the Ajax Plant until 1936, when the company acquired the Hup Mobile plant in Jackson, Michigan, to accommodate their growing muffler division. The Jackson plant was used exclusively for the development and manufacturing of mufflers. Walker Silencers were supplied as original equipment first for Nash automobiles and later for Cadillac, Oldsmobile, Buick, Chrysler, Packard, and Pontiac. By 1957, the line of Walker Silencers included over 1,000 different items.¹⁴ Walker, today a subsidiary of Tenneco, continues to promote itself as a leader in the field of muffler design.

During World War II, Walker's Racine and Jackson plants flew "E" flags, an honor presented by the U.S. Army and Navy to recognize a company's excellence in the production of war equipment. These Walker plants produced enormous airplane jacks as well as track jacks, ammunition boxes, fuses, and powder containers for the war effort.¹⁵

The company continued to diversify its product line and by 1948 it had added a new line of oil filters, which necessitated further plant expansions. By 1957, the Walker Manufacturing Company was reportedly "the world's leading manufacturer of hydraulic and mechanical jacks, oil filters, mufflers and exhaust systems."¹⁶ Yearly sales for the previous year totaled nearly \$34.5 million, a \$3 million dollar increase over the previous year. The company's products were reportedly handled by over 3,000 automotive wholesalers and their equipment was sold in over 50 other countries. At this time, the company continued to be based in Racine, with their headquarters at 1201 Michigan Boulevard. They owned a total of six plants with over 1.2 million square feet of floor space. Each plant generally specialized in production of certain products. In addition to the Ajax Plant, which primarily produced jacks, the company had two other plants in Racine. These were located at the company's headquarters at

¹¹ *Racine Sunday Bulletin*, 7 August 1955.

¹² Racine Heritage Museum, "Walker Manufacturing..."

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Racine Heritage Museum, *Industries of Racine*, (1956), 47.

¹⁶ Racine Heritage Museum, "Walker Manufacturing..." 9.

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Continuation Sheet

Section 8 Page 4

Walker Manufacturing Company-Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

1201 Michigan Boulevard. A factory at the headquarters was used to produce hydraulic jacks and exhaust system pipes and a Filter Plant was located just south of the headquarters building. Two plants in Jackson, Michigan were used to produce mufflers. One plant in La Porte, Indiana specialized in the production of oil filters.

Walker Manufacturing was acquired by the Kern County Land Company in 1959, which was then acquired by Tenneco in 1967. Walker discontinued jack operations in Racine in 1971, moving all jack operations to a new plant in Jonesboro, Arkansas. In 1978, the company moved all manufacturing activities out of Racine; however, their headquarters remained there until 1995. The headquarters building and associated plants were demolished in 2000, leaving the Ajax Plant as the last remaining production facility in Racine associated with Walker Manufacturing Company as a division of Tenneco Inc. Walker is now based in Monroe, Michigan and continues to be an industry leader in the development and manufacture of exhaust systems.

History and Development of the Ajax Plant

The earliest existing buildings at the Ajax Plant site consist of the larger industrial blocks at the northeast, northwest and southwest corners of the lot. These were built prior to 1908 and were used by various companies that specialized in production of parts for the carriage and automobile industries. These were: the Higgins Spring & Axle Company at 16th Street and the railroad tracks, the Racine Merchandise Company at 15th Street and the tracks, and the Racine Novelty Company, at 15th and Clark streets.

The Ajax Auto Parts Company was incorporated in 1916 to manufacture automobile parts, equipment, accessories and supplies and was initially located in the Racine Sattley Building (extant), located just west at 1405 16th Street (Junction Avenue and 16th Street). Ajax was founded by John W. Bate, who had previously been involved with the Mitchell Motor Car Company and later the Mitchell Lewis Motor Company, in 1903-1916 and then again in 1918-1923.¹⁷ Bates first joined Mitchell as chief engineer and designed a number of well-received car models.¹⁸

By 1919, Ajax Auto Parts had relocated to the north end of the site, listed in Racine city directories as the intersection of Junction Avenue and 15th Street.¹⁹ In September of 1919, the company broke ground for a brick and steel shop addition. Measuring 65' x 120' this addition more than doubled their existing capacity.²⁰ The company completed a second addition, at a cost of \$25,000, in 1922. In 1923, Ajax acquired the Higgins Spring & Axle Company building at the south end of the site.

Ajax Auto Parts merged with the Walker Manufacturing Company in July of 1929. At that time, Walker was reportedly "the only company in the country that could supply car manufacturers and service outlets with a complete line of jacks."²¹ However, Ajax Auto Parts was a major competitor in the jack market.

¹⁷ *The Grassroots History of Racine County*, 325.

¹⁸ "Car Designer Visits," *The Oregonian*, 12 December 1915.

¹⁹ *Chilton Automobile Directory*, (Philadelphia, PA: Chilton Company), 1919.

²⁰ "Ajax Will Double Capacity," *Automotive Industries, The Automobile: A Journal of Automotive Engineering and Construction*, (New York: The Class Journal Company), 2 October 1919.

²¹ Racine Heritage Museum, "Walker Manufacturing..."

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Walker Manufacturing Company-Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

After the merger, Ajax Auto Parts became the Ajax Division of Walker and was directed by John W. Bate. With acquisition of the Ajax Auto Part Company, Walker “became one of the country’s leading jack producers.”²² The companies together had a total employment of 900 and combined assets of \$2 million.²³

By 1934, Walker Manufacturing was operating its Racine plants 40 hours a week and employed 530.²⁴ The company had recently developed the Walker electric lift, which could be used to lift an entire car for service. The Walker Silencer, which was first developed at the Ajax Plant, was also being produced in “substantial quantities” at the Ajax Plant.²⁵ Muffler production was moved out of the Ajax Plant in 1936 with the company’s acquisition of a plant in Jackson, Michigan.

By 1957, the Ajax Plant was primarily focused on jack production, but also produced oil filter cases. Jacks produced here included mechanical type jacks that were supplied as original equipment for various manufacturers and the Walker and Ajax jack lines, which were sold through automotive wholesalers and dealers.²⁶ The main Racine plant at 1201 Michigan Boulevard was used to produce hydraulic jacks and exhaust system pipes. A filter plant was located just south of the main plant.

Walker continued to manufacture jacks at the Ajax Plant until 1965 when it moved its jack production facilities out of this building and into the east section of its plant at 1201 Michigan Boulevard.²⁷ Walker put the Ajax Plant, containing approximately 156,000 square feet of space, up for sale at this time; however, when the plant didn’t sell, Walker began using a portion of the building while the remainder of the space was leased to others, primarily for warehousing. The Ajax Plant was acquired by Triple E Corporation, a metal stamping company, in 1972. The plant was again sold in 1982 to machine shop operator Raymond K. Biddle. The building has been largely vacant for several years, with small-scale auto repair activities remaining in the northeast section of the building.

Conclusion

The Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant is locally significant under National Register Criterion A in the areas of Industry and Invention. It is the only remaining production facility associated with the Walker Manufacturing Company, a leading company in Racine’s industrial history and a company significant for its development, innovation and production of parts and equipment for the automotive industry in Wisconsin and beyond. The Ajax Plant was not only the primary production facility for the company’s extensive line of jacks, but it was also the site where the first Walker Silencer was developed and produced. Already a leader in jack production, the patented louver technology used for this early muffler propelled Walker to become a leader in muffler production also. Walker was headquartered in

²² Walker company website; <http://www.walkerexhaust.com/about-walker/walker-history>, accessed 25 November 2014.

²³ *Manitowoc Herald-Times*, 4 May 1929; and *The Post-Crescent*, 4 May 1929.

²⁴ *Racine Journal Times*, 31 December 1934.

²⁵ *Racine Journal Times*, 31 December 1934

²⁶ Racine Heritage Museum, “Walker Manufacturing...”

²⁷ Racine Heritage Museum, “Walker Completes Moving Jack Production Facilities”

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Section 8 Page 6

Walker Manufacturing Company-Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

Racine from its beginnings in the early 1900s through 1995. This headquarters building and associated plants were demolished in 2000, leaving the Ajax Plant as the only remaining building associated with the Walker Manufacturing Company.

Sources Consulted

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Racine Public Library, clippings files.

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Walker company website; <http://www.walkerexhaust.com/about-walker/walker-history>, accessed 25 November 2014.

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Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

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Continuation Sheet

Section 10 Page 1

Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary is the entire parcel associated with Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant and the address 1520 Clark Street. Clark Street forms the eastern boundary and 15th Street forms the northern boundary. Based on Sanborn maps, this appears to correspond to the historic boundary of this industrial building.

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries encompass the entire parcel of land associated with the Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant building in Racine, Racine County, WI.

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Continuation Sheet

Section photos Page 1

Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

Name of Property: Walker Manufacturing Company - Ajax Plant

City or Vicinity: Racine

County: Racine

State: Wisconsin

Photographer: John Cramer

MacRostie Historic Advisors

53 West Jackson Blvd, Suite 1142

Chicago, IL 60604

Date Photographed: September 20th, 2014

Location of Original Digital Files: Wisconsin Historical Society, State Historic Preservation
Office, Madison, WI 53706

Description of Photograph(s) and Number:

1 of 11: South and west façade looking northeast

2 of 11: West façade looking north

3 of 11: North and west façades at 15th St.

4 of 11: North and east façades at 15th and Clark St.

5 of 11: East (loading dock) façade looking south

6 of 11: East (loading dock) façade looking west

7 of 11: East façade looking west

8 of 14: South façade looking west

9 of 11: Interior view, south end of building looking south

10 of 11: Interior view, north end of building looking east

11 of 11: Interior view, second floor, north end of building

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Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

List of Figures

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Figure 2: Walker Manufacturing Company _ Ajax Plant Existing 1st Floor Plan

Figure 3: 1908 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Image

Figure 4: 1933 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Image

Figure 5: 1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Image

Figure 6: 1969 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map

Figure 7: Image from Walker Manufacturing Company publication, “Walker 100 Years of Leadership”, 1988.

Figure 8: Illustration from patent application for Earl Gunn’s louvered tube muffler design

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Section figures Page 2

Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

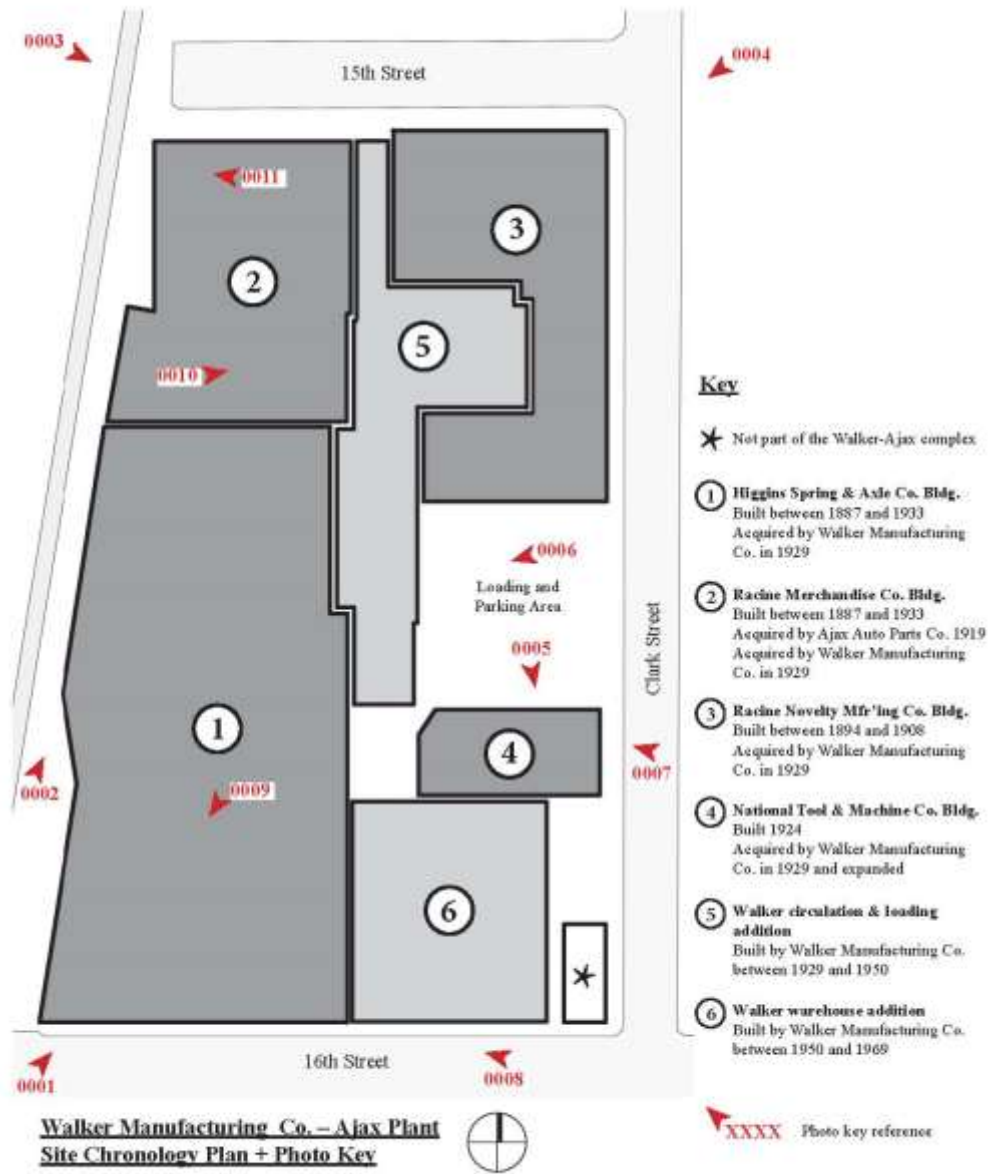


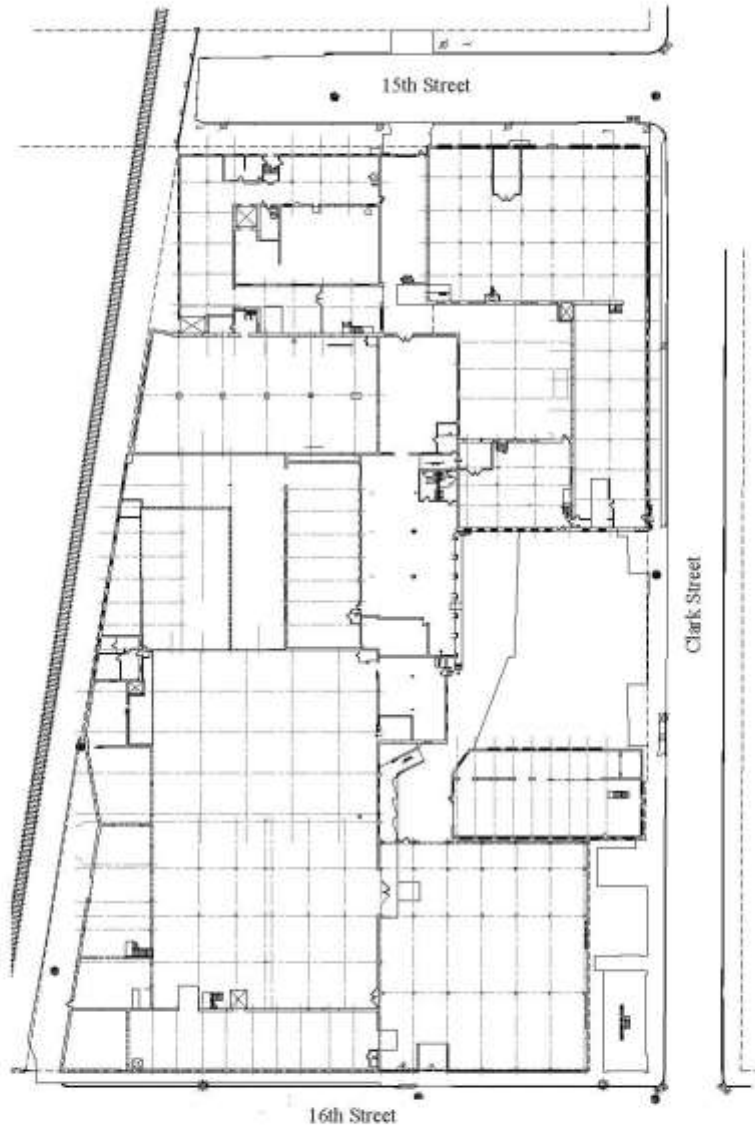
Figure 1

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Section figures Page 3_

Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin



Walker Manufacturing Co. – Ajax Plant
Existing 1st Floor Plan



Figure 2

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Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

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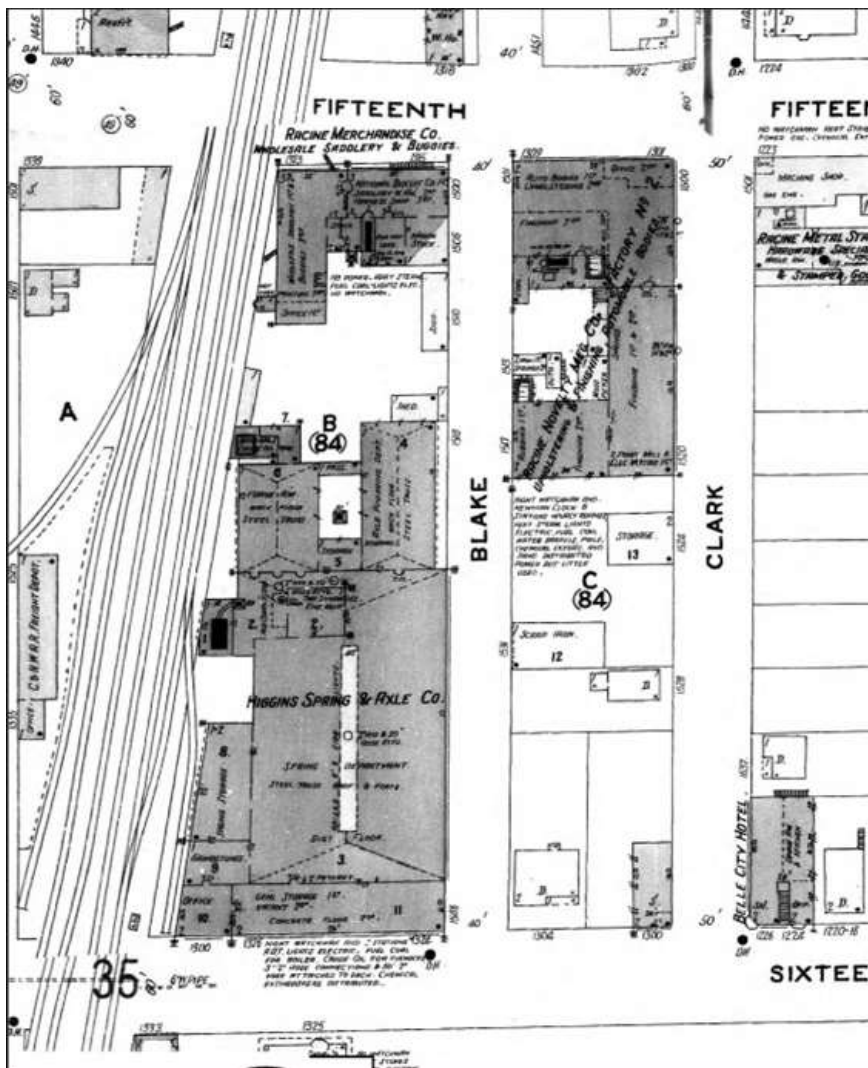


Figure 3: 1908 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Image

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Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

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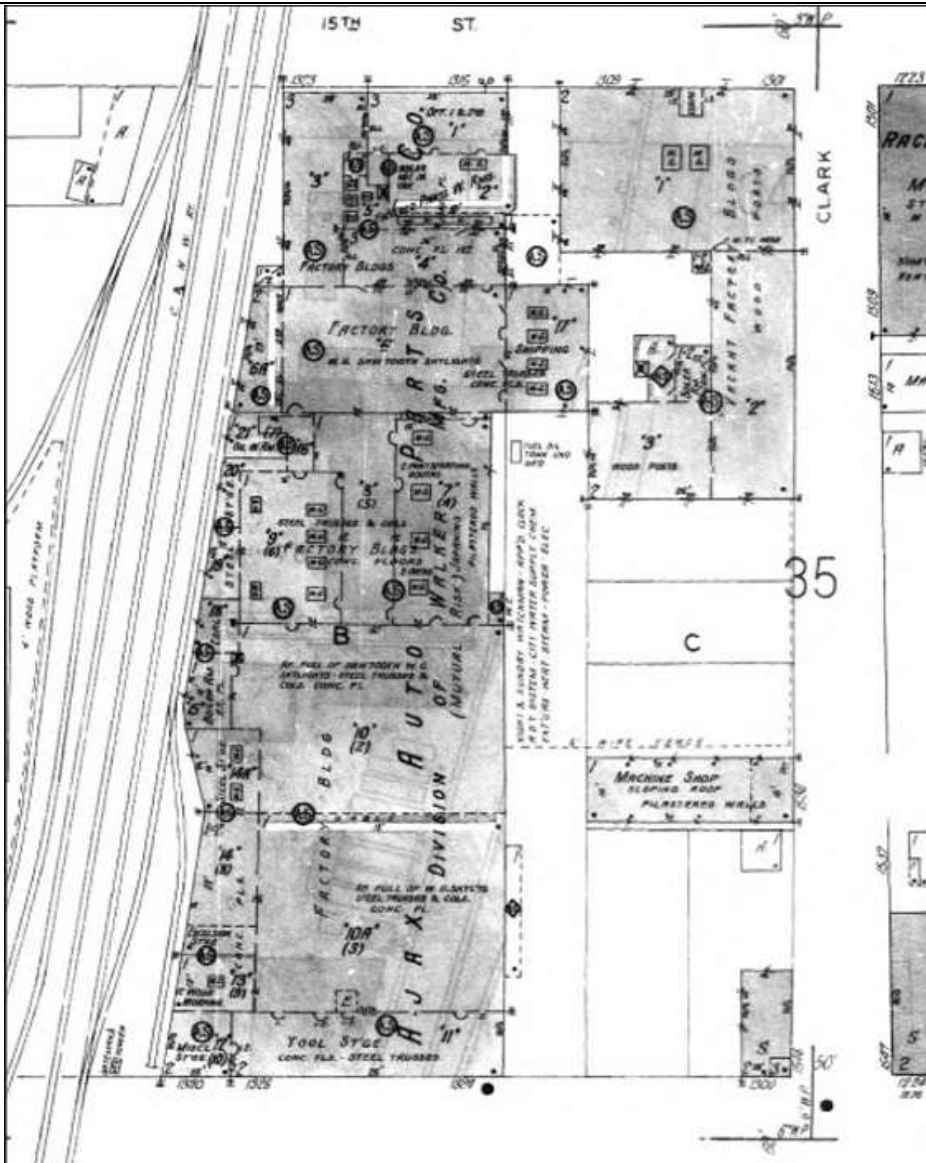


Figure 4: 1933 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Image

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Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

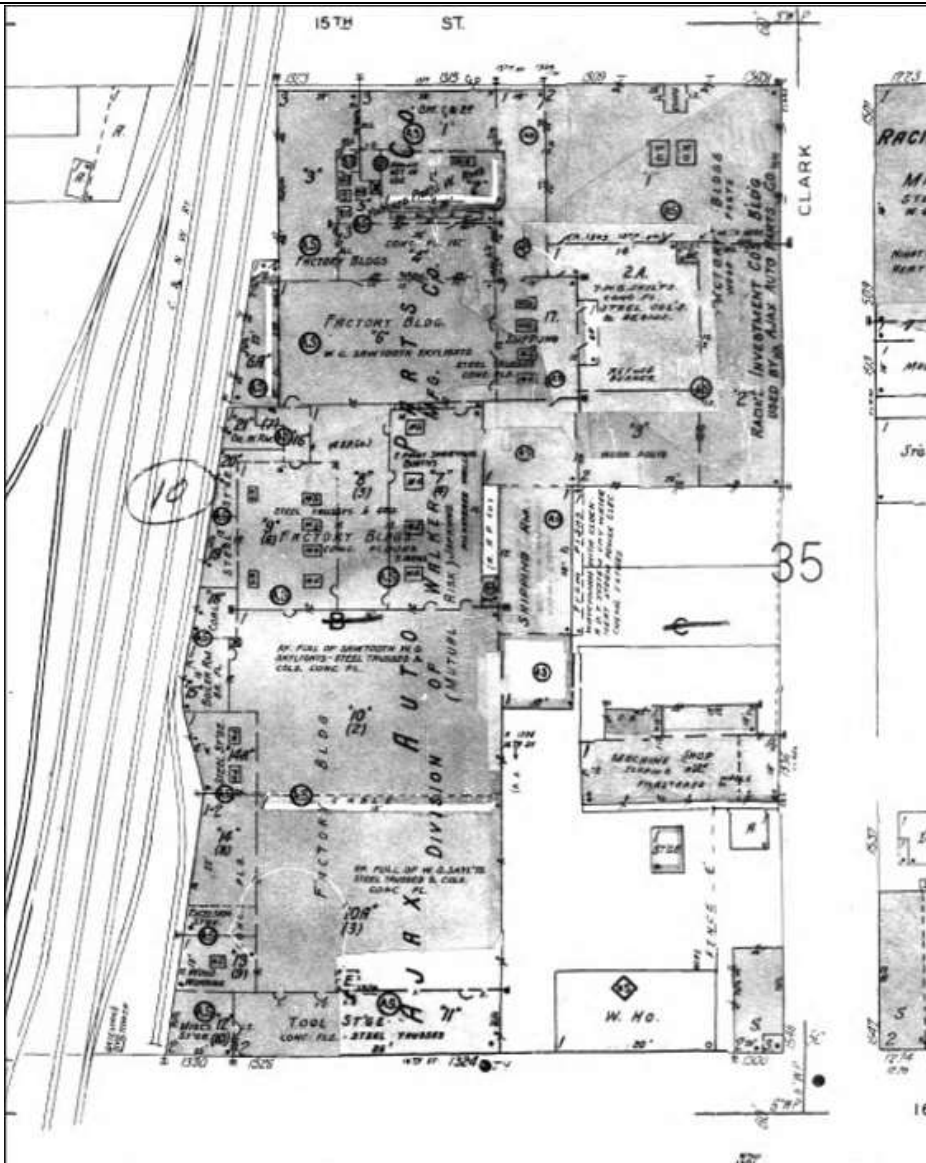


Figure 5: 1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Image

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Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

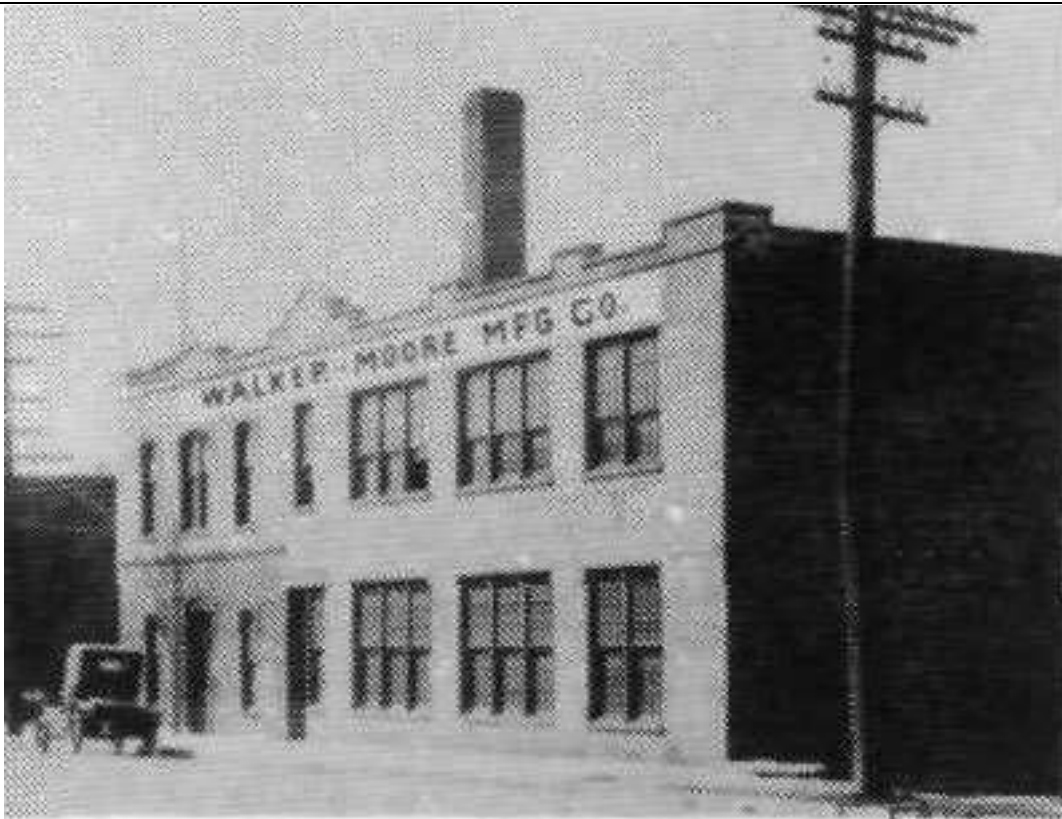


Figure 7: Image from Walker Manufacturing Company publication, “Walker 100 Years of Leadership”, 1988.

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Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant
Racine, Racine County, Wisconsin

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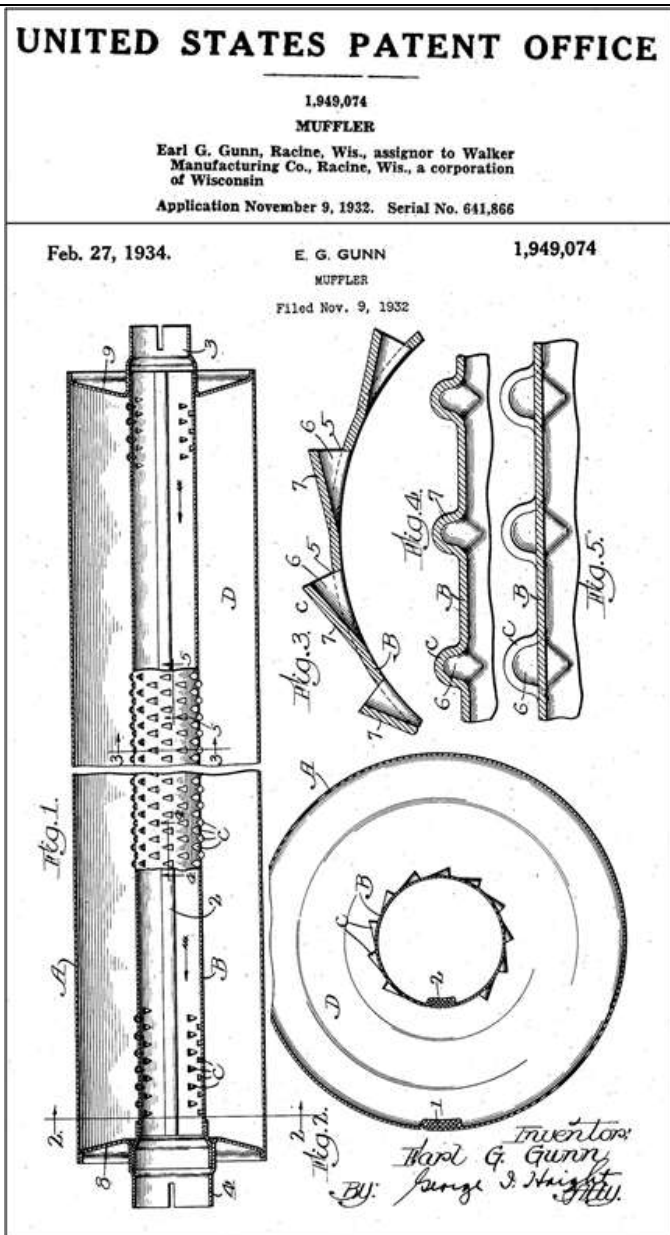


Figure 8: Illustration from patent application for Earl Gunn's louvered tube muffer design



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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Walker Manufacturing Company--Ajax Plant
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: WISCONSIN, Racine

DATE RECEIVED: 6/24/16 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 7/15/16
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 8/01/16 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 8/09/16
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 16000519

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 _____ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

~~Return.~~
Please see the attached
National Register Evaluation/Return Sheet
for an explanation.

owner withdrew
objection on
8-9-16

RECOM./CRITERIA

REVIEWER Barbara Wyatt DISCIPLINE Historian

TELEPHONE 202-354-2252 DATE 8-8-16

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.



WISCONSIN
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

RECEIVED 2280

JUN 24 2016

TO: Keeper
National Register of Historic Places

Nat. Register of Historic Places
National Park Service

FROM: Peggy Veregin
National Register Coordinator

SUBJECT: National Register Nomination

The following materials are submitted on this Twentieth day of June 2016, for the nomination of the Walker Manufacturing Company – Ajax Plant to the National Register of Historic Places:

<u>1</u>	Original National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form
<u>1</u>	CD with NRHP Nomination form PDF
<u> </u>	Multiple Property Nomination form
<u>11</u>	Photograph(s)
<u>1</u>	CD with image files
<u>1</u>	Map(s)
<u>8</u>	Sketch map(s)/figures(s)/exhibit(s)
<u> </u>	Piece(s) of correspondence
<u> </u>	Other:

COMMENTS:

<u> </u>	Please ensure that this nomination is reviewed
<u>X</u>	This property has been certified under 36 CFR 67
<u> </u>	The enclosed owner objection(s) do or do not constitute a majority of property owners
<u> </u>	Other:

Summit Industrial Park LLC
1900 Clark Street
Racine, WI 53403
262-637-3977

July 25, 2016

Edson Beall
National Register Control Unit
1201 Eye Street NW (2280)
Washington, D.C. 20005

Mr. Beall:

As a representative of Summit Industrial Park LLC, owner of the Walker Manufacturing Co.-Ajax Plant property at 1520 Clark Street, Racine, Wisconsin 53403, I **do not consent** to the building's listing in the National Register of Historic Places and request that the building's National Register **nomination be removed from consideration.**

I would appreciate confirmation from your office that the National Register nomination has been removed from consideration and that the building will not be National Register listed. Please contact me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Barbara J. Lange
Trustee

262-995-1059 (direct line)
blange@rbgrinding.com

*Ms. Lange
withdrew
this objection
by phone call
to B. Beall
8-9-16*