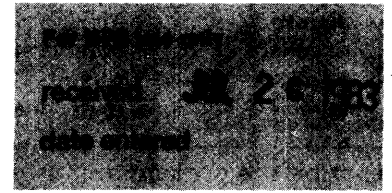


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form



See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

## 1. Name

historic William C. Ellis and Sons Ironworks and Machine Shop

and/or common name same

## 2. Location

street & number 231-245 S. Front Street N/A not for publication

city, town Memphis N/A vicinity of

state Tennessee code 047 county Shelby code 157

## 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

## 4. Owner of Property

name William C. Ellis and Sons

street & number 245 S. Front Street

city, town Memphis N/A vicinity of state Tennessee 38103

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Shelby County Registrar's Office

street & number 160 N. Main

city, town Memphis state Tennessee 38103

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date N/A N/A federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town N/A state N/A

## 7. Description

Condition  
 excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

Check one  
 unaltered  
 altered

Check one  
 original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The William C. Ellis and Sons Ironworks and Machine Shop is located at the northern end of an industrial and warehouse area in downtown Memphis, Tennessee. This section of the city contains late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century commercial buildings and stretches south of the downtown district along the bluff of the Mississippi River. Constructed between c. 1879 and 1925, the Ellis complex is comprised of six brick, concrete, and metal buildings and a recent iron furnace. The structures are industrial vernacular in style and range in height from one to three stories. The complex retains its architectural and historical integrity to a high degree. The company is still a thriving business after over one hundred years in Memphis.

#### 1. Blacksmith's Shop. c. 1879.

This initial building was constructed soon after William C. Ellis purchased the first lot at this location in 1878. It is the small building now in the center of the complex and cannot be seen from the street. The structure is one story, red brick, and has a monitor roof. The monitor roof has been altered to some extent at least by the addition of the existing roof covering material and small windows along the monitor sides. The original building openings are large arches. Some of these have been altered through enlargement.

The blacksmith shop originally made wrought iron straps for carriages and shoes for horses and mules.

#### 2. Front Street Addition. c. 1885, c. 1905.

The second construction on the Ellis site began around 1885 as an addition to the blacksmith's shop. Facing Front Street, this building is a two-story, six-bay brick structure with a flat tar and gravel roof. There are 6/6 double-hung sash windows with segmental arches on the second story. Around 1905 the building was enlarged to the south by a two-story, six-bay addition almost identical to the 1885 section. In its current form, the building is notable in Memphis for its first floor, twelve-bay facade consisting of cast iron pilasters and glazed double-leaf doors and panels.

Evidence supporting phased construction of the building is as follows. First, the structures appear as two buildings from aerial photographs. Second, the lot on which the northern half was constructed was purchased by William C. Ellis in 1878, while the lot containing the southern half was not bought until 1903. Finally, tax records show the first half with a construction date of 1885 and the southern portion 1905. According to tradition, the building occupies the former site of the William C. Ellis house.

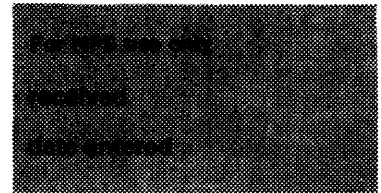
The 1885 (north) half of the building was originally constructed for office space and has continued in that use to the present. The 1905 (south) half has also retained its early use as office, storage, and sales space.

#### 3. Foundry Building. c. 1890.

The foundry building is connected to the original blacksmith's shop and fronts on Wagner Place. It is a one-story, six-bay structure of very dark red brick. Distinguishing features are a very high, vented monitor roof and large arched windows and doors. Windows on the Wagner Place facade are four-over-four triple-hung with wooden sashes and segmental arches. This facade also contains a large arched doorway with a prominent keystone. Presently there are double rectangular wooden doors with a semicircular wooden panel surmounting them filling out the arch. Each bay is slightly recessed between brick piers. Two windows in the gable end contain 6/6 double-hung sash windows.

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Wm. C. Ellis and Sons

Continuation sheet Ironworks & Machine Shop

Item number 7

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This structure continues in its historic use as the building where all of the company's various metal casting is done. The William C. Ellis firm has traditionally cast primarily machine parts with very little ornamental casting being done.

**4. Pattern House. c. 1890.**

The pattern house is a three-story, three-bay, red brick building with a raised concrete basement. It is located at the corner of Wagner Place and Linden Street and not physically connected with the other Ellis buildings. Segmental arch windows contain 6/6 double hung sashes and cement sills. On the first floor some windows contain single hung sashes.

Stored in this building are the wooden patterns needed in sand casting, the principal method used by the company. There are unfortunately no known patterns remaining from the nineteenth century.

**5. First Machine Shop. (Welding Shop). c. 1922.**

A one-story, three-bay, brick building with a flat tar and gravel roof. What were apparently originally window openings have been bricked in. There is a large square entrance on the south side of the Front Street facade, a corbel course, and brick piers separating the bays.

The north side of this building shows obvious alterations. On the north side new brick infill and supportive concrete block piers were added at same time after the adjoining Reichman-Crosby Warehouse was torn down in about 1976. Originally this structure was used for the repair and building of machines, especially cotton compresses. Its primary function now is for welding activities.

**6. Second Machine Shop. c. 1925.**

This building is located on the south side of the block adjacent to Linden Avenue and Front Street. It is a one story, three-bay building with a monitor roof. It has a concrete frame and large expanses of multipaned, metal windows. Two doors on Front Street include a large double hung sliding door in the central bay and a smaller door to the side. Twelve large windows line the Linden side of the building and both sides of the monitor roof. On the north side the structure attaches to the main William C. Ellis buildings which face Front Street.

The shop still follows its traditional use in the repair and manufacture of agricultural machines, particularly cotton compresses, and railroad equipment such as brake shoes, switch parts, pump housing, etc.

**7. Iron Furnace. 1970's.**

This recent cupola furnace replaced earlier furnaces. The structure is located in the work yard at the center of the Ellis complex.

The location of the buildings around the perimeter of the site creates an irregularly shaped work yard in the center of the complex. In this paved area there are presently a few open sheds which are attached to various buildings. Also within this space are the furnace and its coal pile, as well as scrap iron, barrels, wooden crates, and other items.

# 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

**Specific dates** c. 1879 - 1925      **Builder/Architect** Unknown

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The William C. Ellis and Sons Ironworks and Machine Shop is being nominated under National Register Criteria A and C. The c.1879-1925 complex is significant as one of the earliest industries in Memphis, beginning initially in 1867 during the period of growing industrialization for the Memphis economy. Architecturally, the buildings, particularly the nineteenth-century ones, are important as representative of the industrial and specifically foundry complexes of this period. One of the oldest continuous businesses in Memphis, the Ellis Ironworks is also the oldest foundry, one of only four remaining in the city.

The William C. Ellis company, originated as a blacksmith's shop and then iron foundry oriented toward manufacturing agricultural implements and evolved into a machine shop producing machinery for various businesses and purposes. The company's earliest beginnings were in support of the important agricultural and particularly cotton trade, as well as in providing some carriage parts. Then with the changing economy, the business also began to produce machines and machine parts. According to tradition, this work included manufacturing for the river trade, especially parts for steamboat engines. In 1883 William C. Ellis and Sons was listed in the City Directory as an agricultural works industry. By 1892 their listing had become as machinists. At some point in this evolution, they developed a growing trade in repairing and maintaining cotton compress machinery and this business continues to be important to them today.

Significant architectural features of the Ellis buildings include the monitor roofs, large arched doorways in the blacksmith's shop and foundry building; segmental arch window openings, and cast iron piers along the Front Street facade. The arrangement of the complex with the three-story building for pattern storage and high gabled building for the foundry is representative of an early foundry business complex. On the inside, remaining early-twentieth-century foundry equipment and machinery contribute to the significance of the buildings.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property Less than one acre

Quadrangle name Northwest Memphis, TN

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 

1	6	7	6	8	1	4	0	3	8	9	2	3	3	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

B 

Zone	Easting				Northing									

C 

Zone	Easting				Northing									

D 

Zone	Easting				Northing									

E 

Zone	Easting				Northing									

F 

Zone	Easting				Northing									

G 

Zone	Easting				Northing									

H 

Zone	Easting				Northing									

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary L. Baker  
William Gatchell

organization Memphis Landmarks Commission  
William C. Ellis and Sons date January, 1982

street & number 22 N. Front Street, Suite 901  
245 S. Front Street telephone 901/528-2834  
901/525-0567

city or town Memphis, state Tennessee 38103

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer signature Herbert L. Hays

title Executive Director, Tennessee Historical Commission date 7/19/83

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

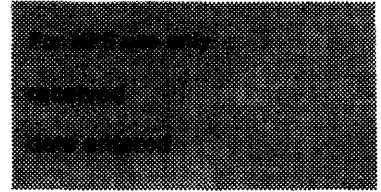
for Allene Byers Entered in the National Register date 8/25/83  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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Continuation sheet Ironworks & Machine Shop Item number 9 Page 1

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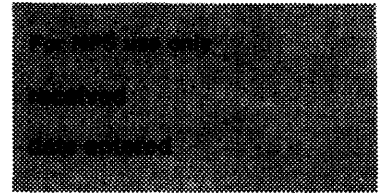
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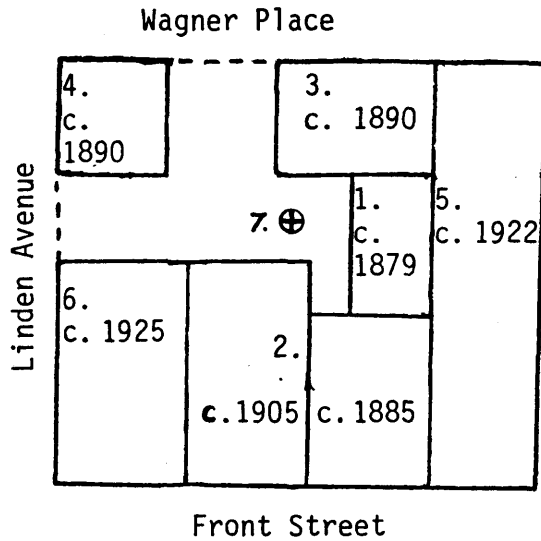
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Continuation sheet Wm. C. Ellis and Sons Item number 10 Page 1  
Ironworks & Machine Shop

Property includes seven (7) lots. 1. Lot No. 12 in Block No. 14 on the plan South Memphis fronting fifty-six (56) feet on each Shelby and Clinton Streets and housing a depth between parallel lines of two hundred (200) feet. 2. Lots fifteen (15) and seventeen (17) in Block No. fourteen (14) lying at the northeast corner of Linden and Clinton Streets and from 100 feet on Linden Street and one hundred and ten (110) feet on Clinton Street. 3. Lots 13-14 and 16 Block 14 of the South Memphis addition. More particularly described as follows: Beginning at the northwest intersection of Linden and Shelby Streets running thence north with the west line of Shelby Street, one hundred and ten (110) feet to the south line of Lot No. 12, thence west with south line of Lot No. 12, one hundred (100) feet, thence south parallel with Shelby Street one hundred and ten (110) feet to the north line of Linden Street, thence east with the north line of Linden Street, one hundred (100) feet to the beginning. 4. Lot No. 11, Block 14, on the plan of South Memphis, being more particularly described as follows: Beginning at the southeast corner of Lot No. 10 in Block No. 14; thence south with the west line of Shelby Street 55 feet; thence west parallel with Linden Street 200 feet to Clinton Street, thence north with Clinton Street 55 feet, thence east 200 feet to the beginning. The nominated lots include only the property historically associated with the company, i.e. the land on which the buildings are located and the work yard.



Wm. C. Ellis & Sons Ironworks & Machine Shop  
 231-245 S. Front St.  
 Memphis, Shelby Co., Tennessee

Site Map

*Not to scale*

N →

1. Blacksmith Shop c. 1879
2. Front Street Addition  
c. 1885, c. 1905
3. The Foundry Building c. 1890
4. Pattern House Buildings  
c. 1890
5. First Machine Shop  
(now labeled welding shop)  
c. 1922
6. The Last Machine Shop  
c. 1925
7. Cupola Iron Furnace