

**ADDRESS: 5250 UNRUH AVE**

Name of Resource: The Tacony Worsted Mills

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: 5250 Unruh Avenue Association

Nominator: Alex Balloon, Director, Tacony Community Development Corp.

Staff Contact: Megan Cross Schmitt, [megan.schmitt@phila.gov](mailto:megan.schmitt@phila.gov), 215-686-7660

**OVERVIEW:** This nomination proposes to designate the property at 5250 Unruh Avenue and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The nomination contends that the building satisfies Criteria for Designation E and J. Under Criterion E, the nomination argues that the Tacony Worsted Mills is an early and intact example of an industrial complex designed by Walter Harvey Geissinger, a prolific architect who designed several commercial and industrial buildings throughout Philadelphia. Under Criterion J, the nomination contends that the Tacony Worsted Mills was considered locally and nationally to be one of the finest and largest worsted yarn mills of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the property at 5250 Unruh Avenue satisfies Criteria for Designation E and J.



**NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT**  
**PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**  
**PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)  
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE

**1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE** (must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)

Street address: 5250 Unruh Avenue

Postal code: 19135 Councilmanic District: 6

**2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

Historic Name: Tacony Worsted Mills

Current/Common Name: Unknown

**3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

☒ Building      ☐ Structure      ☐ Site      ☐ Object

**4. PROPERTY INFORMATION**

Condition:    ☐ excellent    ☐ good    ☒ fair    ☐ poor    ☐ ruins  
Occupancy:    ☒ occupied    ☐ vacant    ☐ under construction    ☐ unknown

Current use: Cell Tower/Storage

**5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Please attach

**6. DESCRIPTION**

Please attach

**7. SIGNIFICANCE**

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1886 to 1938

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: Buildings 1-5: 1886-87; 7: c1909; & 8: c1911-19

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Walter Harvey Geissinger (1859-1950)

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Unknown

Original owner: Erben, Search, & Co.

Other significant persons: Unknown

**CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:**

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- ☐ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- ☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- ☐ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- ☒ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- ☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- ☐ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- ☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- ☒ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

**8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Please attach

**9. NOMINATOR**

Organization Tacony Community Development Corp. Date March 4, 2019

Name with Title Alex Balloon, Director Email alex@taconycdc.org

Street Address 6742 Torresdale Avenue Telephone 215.501.7799

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19135

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: 4 March 2019

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 13 May 2019

Date of Notice Issuance: 14 May 2019

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: 5250 Unruh Avenue Association

Address: 328 Jackson Road

City: Atco State: NI Postal Code: 08004

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Final Action: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

# NOMINATION

FOR THE

## PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES



Figure 1. Looking west at the subject property. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

### **THE TACONY WORSTED MILLS**

***ERBEN, SEARCH, & COMPANY WORSTED MILLS (1886-1894)***

***ERBEN, HARDING, & COMPANY (1894-1901)***

***ERBEN-HARDING COMPANY (1901-1938)***

✦

**ERECTED 1886 - 87**

✦

**5250 UNRUH AVENUE**

**PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19135**



Figure 2. The boundary for the proposed designation is delineated in blue.  
Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

## 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary for the designation of the subject property is as follows:

BEGINNING at an interior point being the former Port Warden's Line which point is measured South 66 degrees 31 minutes 10 seconds West the distance of 266.515 from a point formed by an intersection of the former Port Warden's Line and the Southwesterly side of Unruh Avenue (40' wide); thence extending from said point of beginning South 66 degrees 31 minutes 10 seconds West along the former Port Warden's Line the distance of 294.002' to a point on the Northeasterly side of former Magee Avenue (Stricken from the City Plan) (Reserved Right of Way for Reconstruction, Repair and Maintenance of Sewer); thence extending North 28 degrees 19 minutes 47 seconds West along the Northeasterly side of former Magee Avenue, crossing the Bulkhead Line approved by Secretary of War, September 10, 1940, crossing the bed of a 30' wide Kensington and Tacony Railroad easement, crossing bed of 40' wide Right of Way reserved to maintain Water Conduit, crossing the bed of 35' wide Pipe Line Easement and crossing the bed of a variable width Proposed Easement the distance of 557.287' to a point; thence extending North 61 degrees 40 minutes 13 seconds East partly passing within the bed of the said variable width Proposed Easement and along the Northerly side of the said variable with Proposed Easement the distance of 288.30' to a point; thence extending South 29 degrees 55 minutes 54 seconds East partly passing within the bed of the said variable width Easement the distance of 166.345' to a point; thence extending South 28 degrees 19 minutes 47 seconds East along the Southwesterly said of a proposed 21.44' wide Easement crossing the Southwesterly end of a proposed 35' wide Easement, recrossing the bed of the said 35' wide Pipe Line Easement, of the said 40' wide Right of Way reserved to maintain Water Conduit, recrossing the Bulkhead Line approved by the Secretary of War September 10, 1940 the distance of 415.86' to a point on the former Port Warden's Line being the first mentioned point of beginning.

OPA Property Number: 884802805

Philadelphia Deed Registry Number: 111N24-0016.



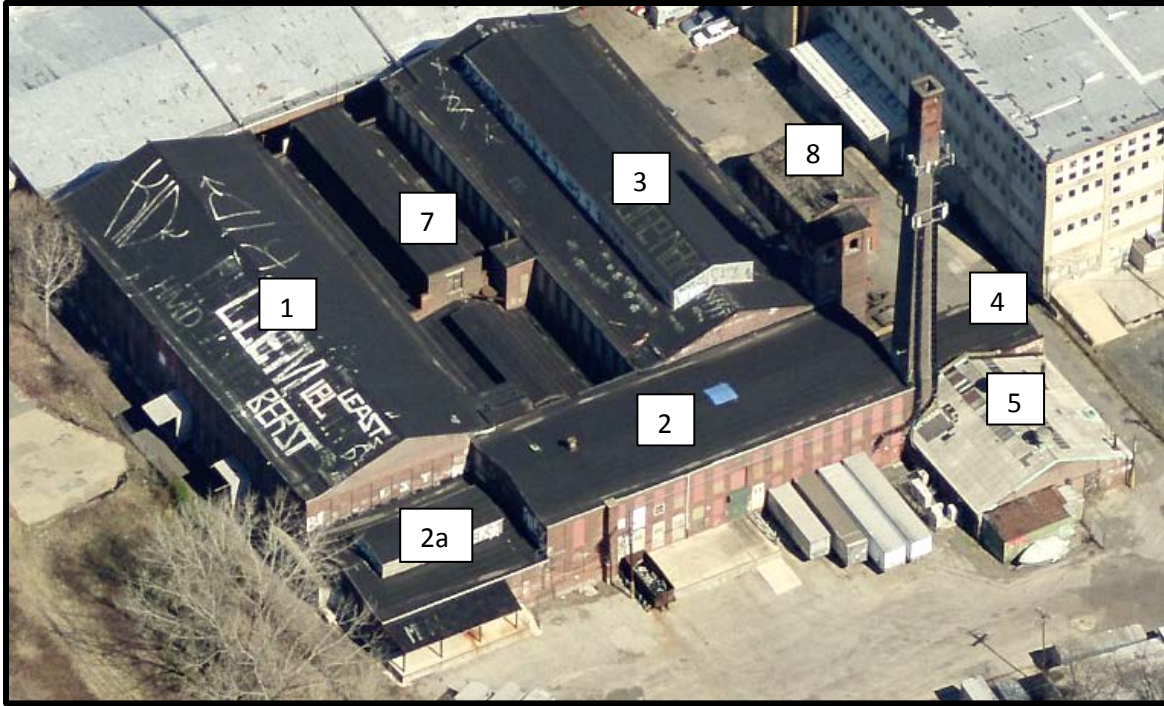


Figure 3. Above: Looking north at the subject property, showing the numbers of each building, which generally correspond to the 1889 Hexamer Atlas. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

## 6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Originally designed and constructed between 1886 and 1887, the Tacony Worsted Mill is an impressive industrial complex at 5250 Unruh Avenue in the Tacony Neighborhood of Northeast Philadelphia. The complex is comprised of seven built components that are within a landlocked parcel that is bound by New State Road to the northwest; Unruh Avenue to the northeast; the Delaware River to the southeast; and Elbridge Street to the southwest. In addition, the property is southwest of the former Keystone Saw Works of Henry Disston & Sons.

The subject property contains the following buildings based on the Hexamer General Survey, volume 24, Erben, Search and Company, 1889. Worsted Mill: Building Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8. Building 6, a blacksmith shop appears to be one of the only that is no longer extant.

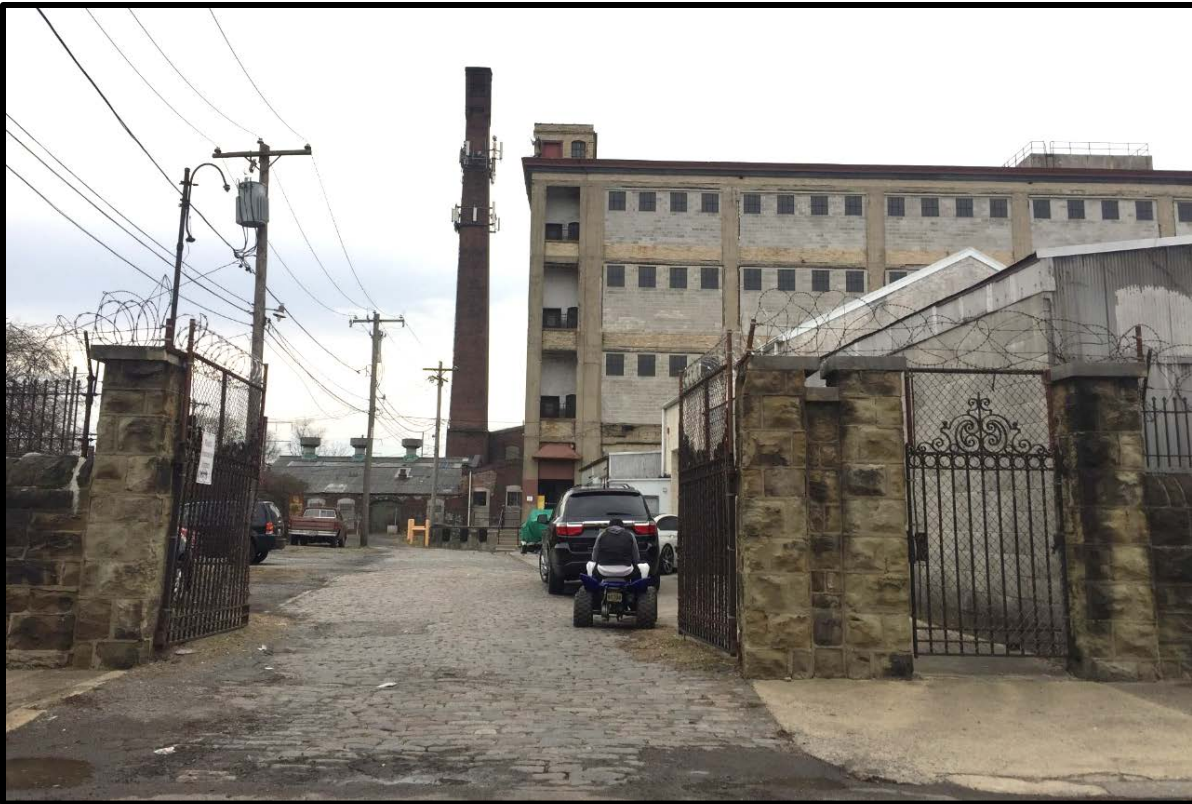


Figure 4. Top: Looking west at the site of the Tacony Worsted Mills with the notable brick chimney stack and tower of the subject property on left. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2019. Figure 5. Bottom: Looking southwest at the gates of the former Tacony Worsted Mills with Building 5 and its notable brick chimney stack on left. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2019.





Figure 6. Top: Erben, Search, & Company in Tacony, c. 1890-1910. Source: Hagley Digital Archives. Figure 7. Bottom: Looking east at the northwest and southwest elevations of Building 1. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

### **Building 1: Wool Warehouse**

Located at the northwestern corner of the subject property, Building 1 is a large rectangular brick factory, measuring roughly 184' in length by 78' in width. Standing two stories with a basement, the red brick building features walls that were recorded as being 21" thick. The building features a low-slung gable roof, which spans from the northwest to the southeast. The southwest elevation is the most visible, spanning twenty-two bays. This elevation features a symmetrical fenestration of twenty-two apertures per floor, which appear to be defined by segmental arch, brick lintels and plain sills. All the windows appear to be sheathed in plywood. Originally the windows in this elevation were all sixteenth over twenty, wooden sash. The northwest elevation features eight apertures per floor, which are defined by segmental arch, brick lintels and plain sills. All the windows appear to be sheathed in plywood. The upper level of the gable end originally featured at least one window. The northeast elevation is largely obscured by Building 7, but the second floor is visible, which is also comprised of twenty-two windows. Like the southwest elevation, the windows within the northeast elevation are defined by segmental arch, brick lintels and plain sills. All the windows appear to be sheathed in plywood. The southeast elevation is largely obscured by Building 2a, but the second floor is visible, which is comprised of eight windows. Like the northwest elevation, the windows within the southeast elevation are defined by segmental arch, brick lintels and plain sills. All the windows appear to be sheathed in plywood.





Figure 8. Top: Looking west at the southeast and northeast elevations of Building 1. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018. Figure 9. Bottom left: Looking east at southwest elevation of Building 2a and the southwest elevation of Building 2. Figure 10. Bottom right: Looking west at the southeast elevations of Building 2 and Building 2a. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

### **Building 2: Wash House**

Located at the south of the subject complex, Building 2 is a large, rectangular, three-part brick factory of loadbearing, masonry construction with a low slung gable roof. Measuring 51' in width and 208' in length, the building is constructed in three sections, about one-third of which stands one story at the southwest and the upper two-thirds of which stands two-stories. The

southwestern third of Building 2, the northwest elevation is obscured by Building 1, and the southwest and southeast elevations of Building 1 are not accessible and are obscured by a loading dock at the southeast elevation. However, a clearly-story still occupies the central section of the roof. The other two-thirds to the northeast are two stories, featuring a fenestration at the southeast elevation of roughly sixteenth apertures per floor. The windows are defined by segmental, brick arch lintels and plain sills. All the windows appear to be sheathed in plywood. The second story of the southwest elevation is five bays in width, the windows being defined by segmental, brick arched lintels and plain sills. The windows appear to be sheathed in plywood. A portion of the second story apertures at the northwest elevation are visible above the roofline of Building 7. A portion of the second story apertures is also visible at the northeast elevation, the lower portion of which is obscured by Building 4. The windows appear to be similar.



Figure 11. Looking south at Building 2. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.





Figure 12. Looking west at the northeast and southeast elevations of Building 3. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

### **Building 3: Combing Mill**

Located at the northern corner of the subject property, Building 3 is a large rectangular brick factory, measuring roughly 184' in length by 78' in width. Standing two stories with a basement, the red brick building features walls that were recorded as being 21" thick. The building features a low-slung gable roof, which spans from the northwest to the southeast gable ends. The northeast elevation is the most visible, spanning twenty-two bays. This elevation features a symmetrical fenestration of twenty-two apertures per floor, which are defined by segmental arch lintels and brick sills. All the windows appear to be sheathed in plywood. The northwest elevation features eight apertures per floor, which are defined by segmental, brick arch lintels and plain sills. All the windows appear to be sheathed in plywood. The upper level of the gable end appears to be blind. The southwest elevation is largely obscured by Building 7, but the second floor is visible, which is also comprised of twenty-two windows. Like the northeast elevation, the windows within the northeast elevation are defined by segmental, brick arched lintels and plain sills. All the windows appear to be sheathed or infilled. The southeast elevation is entirely obscured by Building 2. At the southeast corner of the building is large Stairway & Tank House Tower, which is a prominent feature of the subject property. This building features a clerestory at the central section of the roof.





Figure 13. Looking west at the primary (northeast) elevation of the Building 3 and its tower. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2019.

The tower stands four levels in height, projecting from the southwest corner of Building 3. At the ground floor of the northeast elevation is a large aperture defined by a segmental, brick arched, lintel. Set within this opening is a double wide entrance, featuring double wooden doors, each comprised of six panels. Above the entrance is a twenty-light transom that conforms to the segmental arched lintel. The second floor features a tall, narrow aperture that is missing its window, which is defined by a segmental arch and common sill. The third level features a small window that is defined by an arched lintel in the form of a projecting brick hood. The fourth level features a similar window that is set with a recessed brick panel that features a corbel table at the top. Each facade of the tower features a continuous corbeled cornice. The tower features a hipped roof that includes a ridge, at the center of which is a low cast iron fence and a weather vane that appears to date to the period of construction. Both the northwest and the southeast elevations feature two arched windows set within recessed brick panels like the northeast elevation. The southwest elevation mimics the northeast elevation with only one opening on the fourth level.



Figure 14. Looking south at the northwest and the primary (northeast) elevations of Buildings 7 and 3. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.



Figure 15. Looking west at the primary (northeast) elevation of Building 3. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.



Figure 16. Looking west at the northeast elevation of Building 5; the southeast and northeast elevations of the notable chimney stack of Building 5; and the Stairway and Tank House Tower of Building 3. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2019.





Figure 17. Left: Looking south at Buildings 4 and 5. Figure 18. Right: Looking west at Buildings 4 and 5. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2019.

#### **Buildings 4: Engine & Dynamo Room**

Appending Building 2, Building 4 is a one-story brick building of load-bearing masonry construction with low-slung roof. Measuring 28' wide by 60' long, the building's northeastern elevation is three bays in width with a door at the southeast followed by two windows. The openings feature segmental arch, brick lintels and have been infilled. This section is the gable front. The northwest elevation was not accessible.

#### **Building 5: Boiler House**

Appending Building 2 at the southwest and Building 4 at the northwest, Building B is a one-story brick building of load-bearing masonry construction with a low-slung roof. Measuring 60' by 60', the building features a massive brick stack that stands 150' in height. The chimney is stylized by elaborate brick corbeling. The northeast elevation features a fenestration of five large openings that are defined by segmental, brick arches, some of which are infilled. The side gable roof appends Building 4 and faces southeast towards the Delaware River. This elevation is largely obscured by a shed addition.



Figure 19. The northeast elevations of Buildings 4 and 5; the Tank House & Stairway Tower of Building 3; and the southeast and northeast elevations of Building 8. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2019.



Figure 20. The east elevation of Building 4. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2019.





Figure 21. Looking south at Building 7 at center. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

### **Building 7**

Located in the court formed by Buildings 1 and 3, Building 7 is a low, rectangular shed of brick construction. Measuring roughly 55' in width by 184' in length within the entire court space, the building is two parts the southeastern portion being the lowest and the northwestern being the highest. The northwestern portion features a high brick parapet wall from which a clerestory spans the center of both roofs, featuring at a central window at the southeast elevation.



Figure 22. Looking west at Building 7. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.





Figure 23. The southeast and northeast elevations of Building 8. Note the railroad line that ran through the yard of the complex, a contributing feature of the proposed designation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2019. Figure 24. Inset: Looking south at the northeast and northwest elevations of Building 8. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

### **Building 8**

Detached from the larger complex within yard to the northeast of Building 3, Building 8 is a small rectangular brick building of loadbearing masonry construction with a side gable roof. The primary (northeast) elevation features five apertures per floor with a central doorway that is flanked by two windows on each side. These and the five windows that define the second-floor fenestration are defined by segmental brick arches and common sills. The southeast elevation features two windows per floor, defined by segmental arched windows. All the apertures appear to be sheathed. The northwest elevation also contains two apertures per floor. The southwest elevation features a skybridge to the second floor of Building 3. The roof is very poor condition.



Figure 25. Erben, Search, & Company in Tacony, c. 1890-1910. Source: Hagley Digital Archives.

## **7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The Tacony Worsted Mills at 5250 Unruh Avenue is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The subject property satisfies the following Criteria for Designation, as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code:

- (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; and
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

The period of significance dates from the time the Tacony Worsted Mills purchased and began construction in 1886 until operations were discontinued and the property was leased to Sears, Roebuck & Company in 1938.

ERBEN, SEARCH & CO.,

Philadelphia, Pa.

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FAIRMOUNT WORSTED MILLS.

Mills, 2416 Spring Garden Street.

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TACONY WORSTED MILLS.

Mills. Tacony, Philadelphia, Pa.

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Worsted Yarns—English or French Systems;  
Also Woolen, Mohair, Merino and  
Genapped Yarns.

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Delivered on Cops, Shuttle Bobbins, Skeins, Six-inch  
and Dresser Spools, in Oil or Colors.

Figure 26. *Technology of textile design: being a practical treatise on the construction and application of weaves for all textile fabrics, with minute reference to the latest inventions for weaving: containing also an appendix showing the analysis and giving the calculations necessary for the manufacture of the various textile fabrics.* (Philadelphia: E.A. Posselt, 1892).



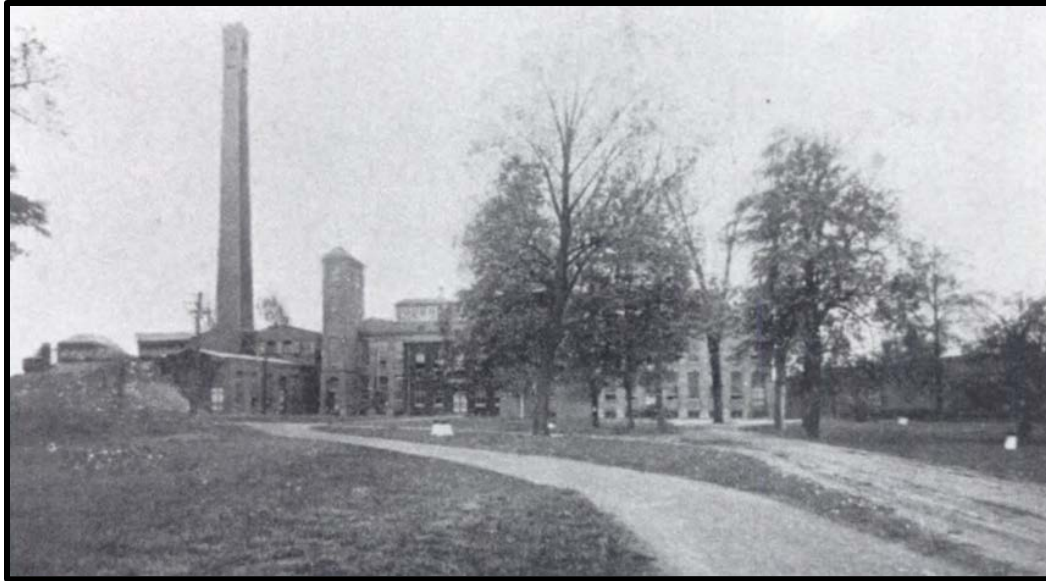


Figure 27. Looking south from Unruh Avenue at the Tacony Worsted Mills. Source: Louis M. Iatarola. *Tacony*. (Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 59.

**(j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.**

The Tacony Worsted Mills at 5250 Unruh Avenue is a significant industrial complex in the Tacony neighborhood of Northeast Philadelphia. Established on the site by Erben, Search & Company, the subject property consists of seven buildings, five of which date to the original period of construction between 1886 and 1887 with two additions in the early twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> The Tacony Worsted Mills is representative of the advancement and evolution of the local textile industry, which was an important economic driver of the city during the period of significance.<sup>2</sup> Known to be one of the “finest” and “largest” worsted yarn mills in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries both locally and nationally, as well as a leading manufacturer of worsted yarns nationwide, the Tacony Worsted Mills showcases a significant development in the textile industry, when the advent of modern combing techniques enabled yarn manufacturers to create a diversified and modern product that served a growing demand in the textile marketplace.<sup>3</sup> Originally confined to the “Lister” method, the worsted yarn industry was expanded with the advent of the “English” and “French” Systems for worsted yarns, which were improved manufacturing processes employed at the Tacony Worsted Mills.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the firm also

<sup>1</sup> Erben, Search and Co. Worsted Mill, Hexamer General Surveys, Volume 24, Plate 2274, c. 1889. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

<sup>2</sup> Logan I. Ferguson, Powers & Company, Inc., National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form: Industrial and Commercial Buildings Related to the Textile Industry in the Kensington Neighborhood of Philadelphia, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> “Fragments of News,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 February 1887, 3.; “Improved Mill Property,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 October 1887, 3.; and “The Latest News In Real Estate,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 September 1906, 11.

<sup>4</sup> *Tyrone Daily Herald*, 21 February 1898, 51.

produced “Woolen, Mohair, Merino, and Genapped Yarns.”<sup>5</sup> Outside of Henry Disston & Sons’ Keystone Saw Works as the local economic powerhouse, the Tacony Worsted Mills also represents the culture of manufacturing as an important component of the economic and social heritage of the Tacony neighborhood.<sup>6</sup> The location was no doubt chosen to allow for the construction of a large, purpose-built, and modern plant; to enable future expansion of the mills; to secure a localized workforce; and to be near a railroad lines and a water source, the Delaware River.<sup>7</sup> With employment fluctuating between 150 to 250 persons, the Tacony Worsted Mills was one of the larger employers in the neighborhood, being further distinctive as a local employer of females—a noted deficiency of the mammoth Keystone Saw Works in its earlier days.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 28. Looking north at the Tacony Worsted Mills. Source: <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/kt029012ss/>.

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<sup>5</sup> *Technology of textile design: being a practical treatise on the construction and application of weaves for all textile fabrics, with minute reference to the latest inventions for weaving: containing also an appendix showing the analysis and giving the calculations necessary for the manufacture of the various textile fabrics.* (Philadelphia: E.A. Posselt, 1892).

<sup>6</sup> Emily T. Cooperman, Ph.D. National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: Tacony Disston Community Development Historic District (Philadelphia: Preservation Design Partnership, LLC., 2016), 28.

<sup>7</sup> Betsy Hunter Bradley. *The Works, The Industrial Architecture of the United States.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 56-59.

<sup>8</sup> Harry S. Silcox, *A Place to Live and Work: The Henry Disston Saw Works and the Tacony Community of Philadelphia* (Penn State Press, 1994), 60.; and “At The World’s Fair,” *The Times* (Philadelphia), 28 May 1893, 21-22.

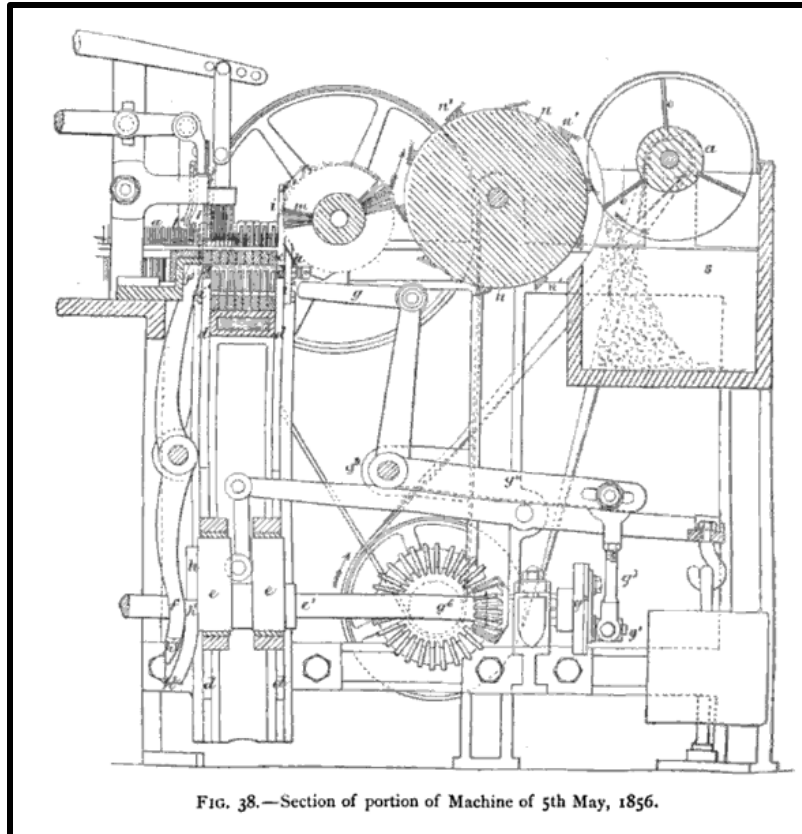


Figure 29. An improved combing machine, dated May 5, 1856. Source: James Burnley. *The History of Wool and Woolcombing* (Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1889).

### **Historic Context: The Development of the Combing Industry and the Manufacture of Worsted Yarns in Philadelphia, 1857-1885**

Prior to the advent improved combing machinery and technologies, developed in Europe in the 1840s and 1850s, “the worsted business” and the worsted yarn manufacturing industry in America was limited the use of the solitary method known as the “Lister” comb type. The process to produce worsted yarn was required a single wool type, known as “wool of a long staple.”<sup>9</sup> With the development and patenting of improved combing machinery and technologies, such as the Noble and Heilmann combs, the worsted industry was enabled to manufacture products using “almost any kind of wool that is grown on the face of the earth.”<sup>10</sup> During the third quarter of the nineteenth century the worsted yarn industry in Philadelphia adapted to compete in this new and improved marketplace. In fact, with the rapid expansion of the textile industry, as well as the increased capability to produce higher quality goods more expeditiously, the demand for worsted and other yarns, especially by small shops, led to the establishment of “dozens of separate spinning plants” in the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>11</sup> These mills went on to

<sup>9</sup> James Burnley, *The History of Wool and Woolcombing* (Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1889).

<sup>10</sup> *Tariff Hearings, Before The Committee On Ways And Means Of the House of Representatives* (Washington, D.C.: Sixtieth Congress, 30 January 1909), 7373-7374.

<sup>11</sup> Philip Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia, 1800-1885* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 331-34.



manufacture worsted yarns using the “English” and “French” Systems.<sup>12</sup> These manufacturers produced “Woolen, Mohair, Merino, and Genapped Yarns.”<sup>13</sup>

Among the mills founded to manufacture worsted yarns, the most successful firms used and improved upon the aforementioned machinery and technologies. By the 1870s and 1880s, firms, like the Tacony Worsted Mills, were being modernized and enlarged to serve a growing demand in the evolving textile marketplace.<sup>14</sup> As part of this shift, many firms removed from the old industrial neighborhoods of Philadelphia to establish new plants for specialized production processes and purposes; to gain additional space; and to attract a localized workforce. During this period, Erben, Search & Company purchased the subject property, and established the Tacony Worsted Mills.<sup>15</sup>

By the turn of the twentieth century, Philadelphia continued to grow as “the leading city in the United States, if not the world,” in the “manufacture of woolen and worsted goods.” According to the Manufacturers’ Census, Philadelphia had an output of \$12 million in woolen goods and \$27 million in worsted goods, totaling \$39 million. In 1904, there were 136 factories engaged in the manufacture of woolen and worsted goods in Philadelphia, employing roughly 17,000 men, two-thirds of whom were employed in manufacturing worsted goods. Less than ten years later, in 1910, there were nearly 200 factories engaged in the “combined industries.” At that time there were 80 firms engaged in the manufacture of yarn.<sup>16</sup>

According to the *Textile Industries of Philadelphia* (1911), the following was stated on Philadelphia’s position in the realm of textile manufacture:

This is the great center for the manufacture of yarns for the carpet and woolen industries; and in the manufacture of worsted yarn Philadelphia has overtaken Bradford, England.<sup>17</sup>

This culture continued through the 1920s and it wasn’t until the Great Depression that specialized firms like the Tacony Worsted Mills were forced to close their doors due to the larger economic climate in the United States and abroad.

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<sup>12</sup> *Tyrone Daily Herald*, 21 February 1898, 51.

<sup>13</sup> *Technology of textile design: being a practical treatise on the construction and application of weaves for all textile fabrics, with minute reference to the latest inventions for weaving: containing also an appendix showing the analysis and giving the calculations necessary for the manufacture of the various textile fabrics.* (Philadelphia: E.A. Posselt, 1892).

<sup>14</sup> Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism*, 317-19.

<sup>15</sup> J.R. Kendrick, “The Carpet Industry of Philadelphia,” *Seventeenth Report* (Bureau of Industrial Standards, 1889), D-10.

<sup>16</sup> Macfarlane and Hicks, *Textile Industries of Philadelphia*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> John James Macfarlane and George W.B. Hicks, *Textile Industries of Philadelphia: With a Directory of the Textile and Yarn Manufacturers Located in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Commercial Museum, 1911), 12.

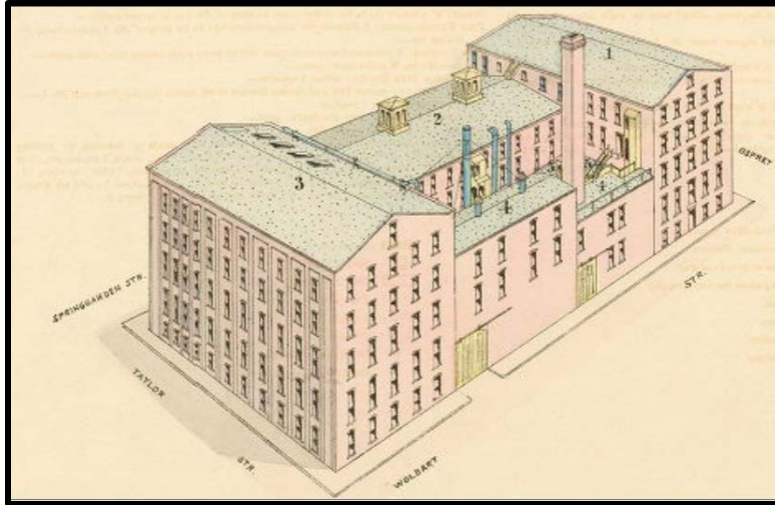


Figure 30. Leased by Fiss, Baner, Erben & Company in 1875, this is the Fairmount Worsted Mill, built in 1865, 1867, and 1869, during the ownership of J.&W. Yewdall, Spring Garden Street between Taylor and Osprey Streets. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

### Historic Context: The Tacony Worsted Mills

The buildings and structures that comprise the surviving Tacony Worsted Mills within the proposed boundaries of the subject property were largely constructed between 1886 and 1887 with two additional building components added between 1909 and 1920. Henry Erben (1845-1906), Theodore Corson Search (1843-1916), Charles Henry Harding (1842-1920), and Walter Erben (1854-1931), partners in Erben, Search, & Company, were manufacturers of worsted yarns, who purchased the subject property from John Yewdall (1828-1901), a co-founder of the original company; his wife Ann Yewdall; and other family members on January 2, 1886.<sup>18</sup>

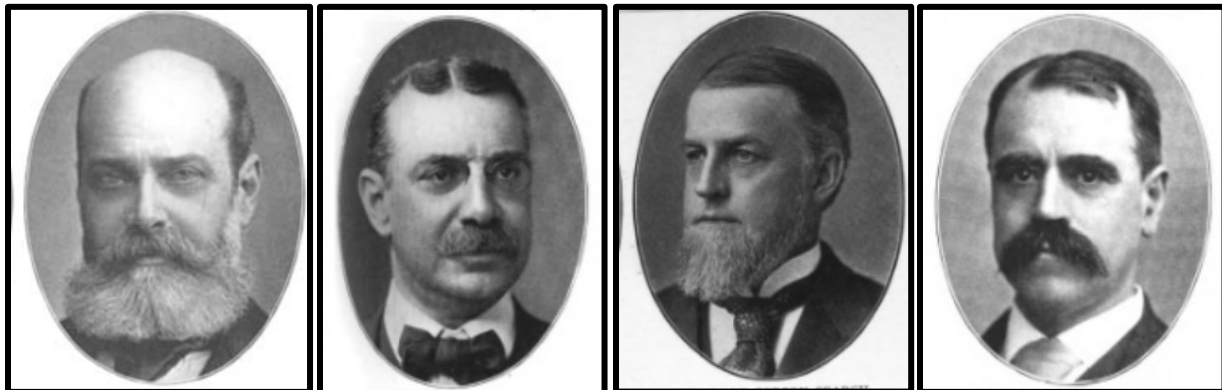


Figure 31. Left: Henry Erben. Figure 32. Middle left: Walter Erben. Figure 33. Middle right: Theodore C. Search. Figure 34. Right: Charles H. Harding. Source: Source: Moses King, *Philadelphia and Notable Philadelphians* (M. King, 1902), 46, 47, and 55.

<sup>18</sup> Deed: John Yewdall, et. al. to Henry Erben, et. al., trading as Erben, Search and Company, 2 January 1886, Philadelphia Deed Book G.G.P., No. 78, 527, City Archives of Philadelphia (hereafter CAP). Henry Erben and Walter Erben, partners in Erben, Search and Company, were also brothers, being the children of Peter C. Erben and Mary Davis. The life dates of John Yewdall were obtained from the following source: *Find A Grave*. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi>.

Erben, Search & Company also owned the Fairmount Mills, a concern that opened its labors when Samuel Yewdall “set up his first power combing-machine in Philadelphia” about 1857.<sup>19</sup> Samuel Yewdall’s brother, John Yewdall, later operated a second machine about 1860, manufacturing “fine yarns from merino wool.” By 1860, the Yewdall brothers appear to have founded the Fairmount Mills. The firm was apparently quite successful even in its early years, requiring 250,000 pounds of worsted wool for yarn manufacture in June 1866.<sup>20</sup> The untimely death of Samuel Yewdall, that same year, may have hastened the eventual sale of the business.<sup>21</sup> In 1870, John Yewdall sold the Fairmont Mills to the newly established firm of Fiss, Baner & Erben, a partnership between George Washington Fiss (1835-1925), Charles Henry Baner (1831-1897), and Henry Erben. The firm operated for two years until Theodore C. Search was admitted to the partnership, creating Fiss, Baner, Erben & Company. Around 1881, George Washington Fiss “began making a collection of ... micro minerals,” which led him down an alternate path.<sup>22</sup> But it was only when Charles H. Baner decided to retire from active partnership to become a special (likely silent) partner in 1883 that another reorganization of the firm occurred.<sup>23</sup> The new partnership of Erben, Search, & Company was formed in 1883, at which time Henry Erben became head of the firm.<sup>24</sup>

After purchasing the subject property in January 1886, Erben, Search & Co. later applied for building permits in the fall of 1886 for what was referenced as a “3-story woolen factory” at Tacony.<sup>25</sup> The company appears to have commissioned Walter Harvey Geissinger (1859-1950), architect, to design the Tacony Worsted Mills.<sup>26</sup> While little has been written about Geissinger’s career specifically, he primarily designed “manufacturing and business buildings.” Incidentally, around the time he was commissioned to design the Tacony Worsted Mills, Geissinger went into partnership with Edward M. Hales (1855-1923) to form Geissinger & Hales, Architects, Engineers, & Building Superintendents. The firm would go on to become what is known today as Ballinger Co.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Bulletin of the National Association of Wool Manufacturers* 23. The life dates for Samuel Yewdall were obtained from the following source: *Find A Grave*. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi>.

<sup>20</sup> *Statement of Facts Relative to Canada Wools and the Manufactures of Worsted* (Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1866), 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Find A Grave*. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi>.

<sup>22</sup> Brian Stevenson, “George Washington Fiss, 1835 – 1925,” updated June 2017 <http://microscopist.net/GWF.html>

<sup>23</sup> *Journal of the Franklin Institute* 143 (1897): 307-10.

<sup>24</sup> “Obituary: Henry Erben,” *Bulletin of the National Association of Wool Manufacturers* 36 (1906): 163.

<sup>25</sup> “Building Permits,” *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* (hereafter *PRERBG*) 2, no. 48 (6 December 1886): 590.

<sup>26</sup> “Mechanics’ Liens,” *PRERBG* 2, no. 38 (26 September 1887): 452.

<sup>27</sup> Pennsylvania Death certificates, 1906–1963, Series 11.90, Records of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Record Group 11, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission; and Sandra Tatman. “Geissinger & Hales (fl. 1887-1894),” *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings*. [https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar\\_display.cfm/32382](https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/32382). Accessed on 14 February 2019.



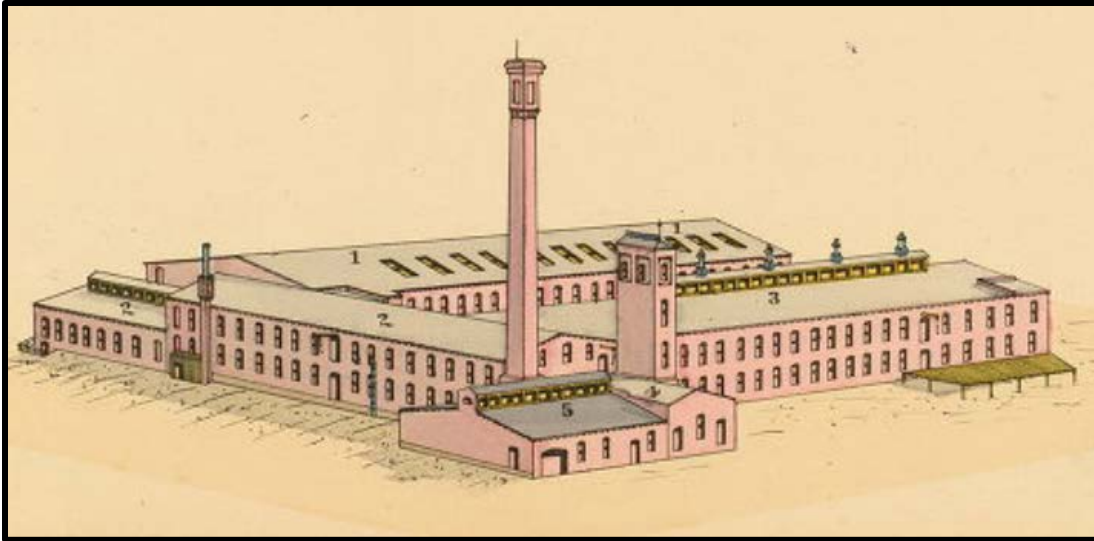


Figure 35. Erben, Search and Co. Worsted Mill, Hexamer General Surveys, Volume 24, Plate 2274, c. 1889. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

By October 1887, most of the buildings and structures that comprise the subject property were constructed. In fact, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* provided an update on the “Improved Mill Property” in October 1887 when “the finishing touches” were being completed at “the new mill.” By October 1887, Building 1: Woolen Warehouse, Building 2: Wash House, Building 3: Combing Mill, Building 4: Engine & Dynamo Room; and Building 5: Boiler House appear to have been completed at a total cost of \$150,000.<sup>28</sup>

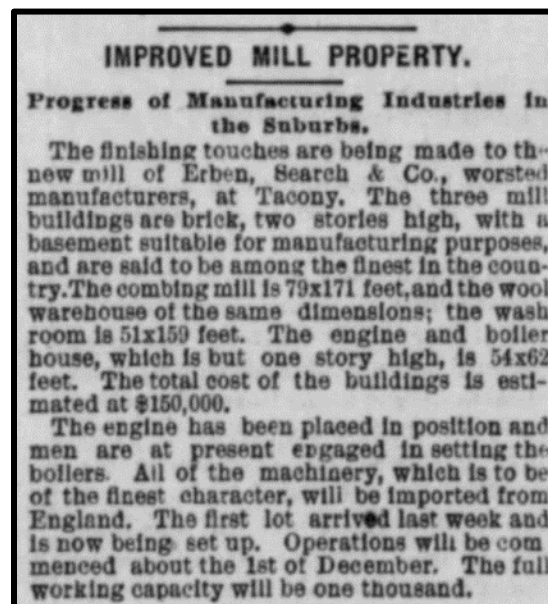


Figure 36. “Improved Mill Property,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. 6 October 1887, 3. Source: Newspapers.com

<sup>28</sup> “Improved Mill Property,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 October 1887, 3.

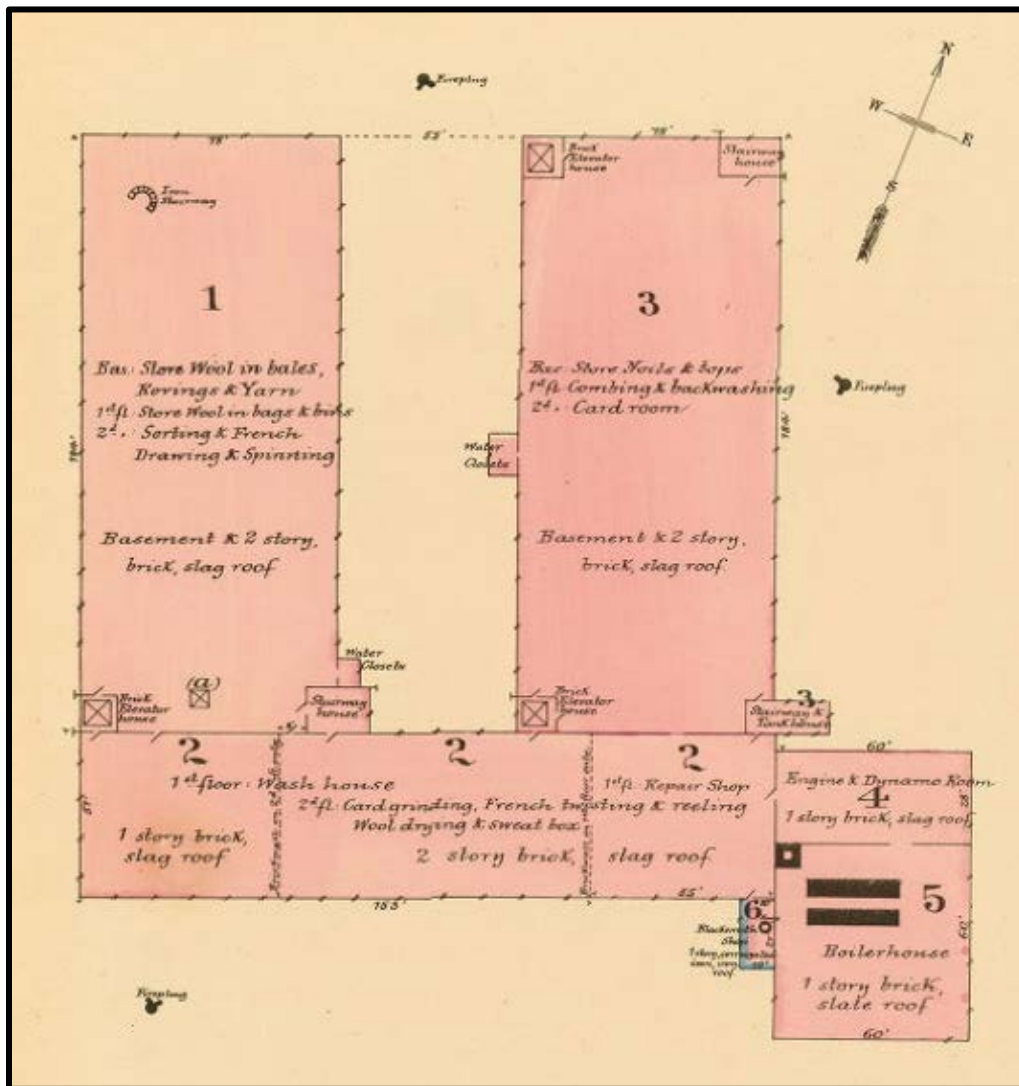


Figure 37. Erben, Search and Co. Worsted Mill, Hexamer General Surveys, Volume 24, Plate 2274, c. 1889. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

Newspaper announcements stated that Erben, Search & Company would begin operations on December 1, 1887.<sup>29</sup> According to the Hexamer General Surveys, c. 1889, the Tacony Worsted Mills were manufacturing “scour and comb wool,” and were spinners of “worsted yarns by the French system.” At this time the firm employed roughly “165 hands.” Machinery in the new plant included the following: “22 worsted cards, 17 Noble combs, 6 backwashers, 2 card grinders, 1 Yankee grinder, 40 grill boxes, 3 wool scourers, 1 set French drawing, 4 mules, 2 twistors, 2 reels, 1 winder, 2 lathes, 1 planer (metal), 1 drill press.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> “Improved Mill Property,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. 6 October 1887, 3. Source: Newspapers.com

<sup>30</sup> “Erben, Search and Company Worsted Mill,” Hexamer General Surveys, volume 24, 1889, Plate 2274.

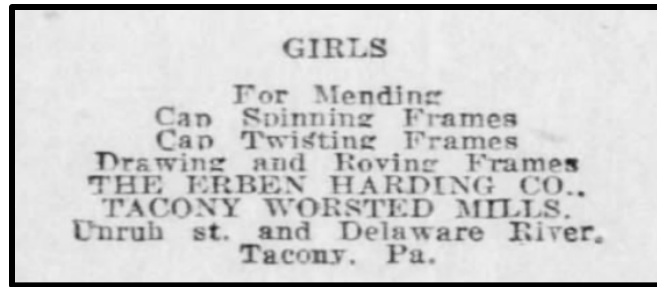


Figure 38. “Girls,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 April 1918, 20. Source: Newspapers.com.

Even in its early days, the Tacony Worsted Mills was a formative concern in the local community, offering employment to females, which was often a bonus for families that lived near textile firms.<sup>31</sup> Located immediately below the colossal industrial giant that was Henry Disston & Sons’ Keystone Saw Works, the Tacony Worsted Mills served as a positive counterpart to the male-dominated, restrictive field of saw manufacture, which, being one of the few large employers in Tacony, had left women, that might otherwise find work in the older manufacturing districts of Philadelphia, without an option for local employment.<sup>32</sup> According to an interview in 1988 with Marguerite Dorsey Farley, a native of Tacony, “when [the] “Erben-Harding Woollen [sic.] Mill came to the community, a large number of people moved into the area, so they could get work at the textile mill.”<sup>33</sup> As explained by Emily T. Cooperman, Ph.D., Architectural and Landscape Historian, in the National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: Tacony Disston Community Development Historic District, the Tacony Worsted Mills was one of a few firms, unrelated to the Disstons or the Keystone Saw Works, to have influence over the development and economics of the neighborhood. The other important concerns to locate in Tacony were Gillinder and Sons’ Franklin Flint Glass Works, arriving in 1883; and the Tacony Iron and Metal Company, arriving in 1887.<sup>34</sup> With the Keystone Saw Works as the largest employer in Tacony, as well as the arrival of both the Erben, Search, & Company and the Tacony Iron and Metal Company by 1887, it is no surprise that plans for a new or enlarged railroad station near the subject property were mentioned in *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* late that year and on G. M. Hopkins’s 1887 Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 23rd Ward.<sup>35</sup> Interestingly, by 1910, the Tacony Worsted Mills was known for “hiring newly immigrated Italian and Polish women from nearby Bridesburg.”<sup>36</sup>

By 1892, the Tacony Worsted Mills was producing worsted yarns with the “English” and “French” systems.<sup>37</sup> The firm was producing “Woolen, Mohair, Merino, and Genapped

<sup>31</sup> Harry S. Silcox, *A Place to Live and Work: The Henry Disston Saw Works and the Tacony Community of Philadelphia*, (Penn State Press, 1994), 60.

<sup>32</sup> “At The World’s Fair,” *The Times* (Philadelphia), 28 May 1893, 21-22.

<sup>33</sup> Silcox. *A Place to Live and Work*, 87.

<sup>34</sup> Emily T. Cooperman, Ph.D. National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: Tacony Disston Community Development Historic District (Philadelphia: Preservation Design Partnership, LLC., 2015), 28.

<sup>35</sup> *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builder’s Guide* (14 November 1887): 536.; and Emily T. Cooperman, Ph.D. National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: Tacony Disston Community Development Historic District (Philadelphia: Preservation Design Partnership, LLC., 2015), 27.

<sup>36</sup> Silcox. *A Place to Live and Work*, 60.

<sup>37</sup> *Tyrone Daily Herald*, 21 February 1898, 51.



Yarns.”<sup>38</sup> For many years the firm also manufactured Germantown yarn until it was no longer profitable.<sup>39</sup> The Tacony Worsted Mills operated under the partnership of Erben, Search & Company until 1894, when Theodore C. Search was offered a position at the John B. Stetson Company. Search removed as an active partner in the firm. Reorganizing yet again, the newest partnership was between Henry Erben, Walter Erben, and Charles H. Harding, establishing Erben, Harding & Company in 1894. Charles H. Harding had joined the firm in 1872 as a bookkeeper, and, over time, would become one of its important wool buyers. In 1894, Harding was Vice President and Treasurer of the company—he would later become the first non-New Englander to be President of the National Association of Wool Manufacturers.<sup>40</sup>

*The Bulletin of the National Association of Wool Manufacturers* describes the management of the firm as follows:

In 1894 the firm became Erben, Harding & Co., Henry Erben managing the Fairmount Mills, Walter Erben managing the Tacony Mills and Charles H. Harding directing the buying, selling and financial departments.<sup>41</sup>

In May 1895, Erben, Harding & Company commissioned a one-story office building, measuring 30’ by 40’, located “bet[ween] Unruh and Satter Lane.”<sup>42</sup> This building appears to have been located near Unruh Street, north of the subject property and its survival is unclear. That same year architects Hales & Ballinger were engaged to design a large \$15,000 warehouse at the growing Tacony Worsted Mills. This warehouse was a one-story building, measuring 100’ by 208’, for the storage of wool.<sup>43</sup> J. Sims Wilson was selected as the contractor and began work in August 1895.<sup>44</sup> This building appears to survive immediately adjacent to the northwest of the subject property, but is located on a separate parcel and not included in the proposed designation. The construction of this massive warehouse is a further testament to the continued success of the firm into the mid-1890s. This also confirms that Geissinger, Geissinger & Hales, and the later firm, Hales & Ballinger, were involved in the original design and its continual progression through 1895.

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<sup>38</sup> *Technology of textile design: being a practical treatise on the construction and application of weaves for all textile fabrics, with minute reference to the latest inventions for weaving: containing also an appendix showing the analysis and giving the calculations necessary for the manufacture of the various textile fabrics.* (Philadelphia: E.A. Posselt, 1892).

<sup>39</sup> *Tariff Hearings, Before The Committee On Ways And Means Of the House of Representatives* (Washington, D.C.: Sixtieth Congress, 30 January 1909), 7373-7374.

<sup>40</sup> “Charles H. Harding, Veteran Wool Manufacturer,” *Bulletin of the National Association of Wool Manufacturers* 50 (1920): 273.

<sup>41</sup> “Obituary: Henry Erben,” *Bulletin of the National Association of Wool Manufacturers* 26 (1906): 163.

<sup>42</sup> “Building Permits,” *PRERBG* 10, no. 18 (1 May 1895): 237.

<sup>43</sup> “Architects’ News,” *PRERBG* 10, no. 31 (31 July 1895): 453.

<sup>44</sup> “Building and Real Estate News,” *PRERBG* 10, no. (14 August 1895): 487.



Figure 39. Top: 1895 Bromley Philadelphia Atlas. Source Greater Philadelphia. Figure 40. Bottom: An 1898 advertisement for the Tacony Worsted Mills. Source: *Tyrone Daily Herald*, 21 February 1898, 51.

In 1899, the Tacony Worsted Mills was classified as among the top twenty-one spinners of worsted yarns nationwide.<sup>45</sup> The firm operated under the partnership of Erben, Harding & Company until the formal incorporation of the business as the Erben-Harding Company on July 1, 1901, which had a capital of \$1,300,000.<sup>46</sup> At the time of incorporation Henry Erben retired as an active partner, remaining somewhat involved due to his interest in the firm as a stockholder.<sup>47</sup>

According to the *Directory of the Textile Establishments in the United States and Canada* (1905), the firm then specialized in the following worsted yarns: Bradford System, Fancy Mixtures; French Spun,  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{3}{8}$  Blood, White or Natural; French Spun, Fine Qualities; and French Spun, Fancy Mixtures.<sup>48</sup> The French system was the name often give to the improved

<sup>45</sup> "Yarn Trust Formed. Includes 19 of the Biggest Spinning Concerns," *The Topeka State Journal*, 18 May 1899, 8.

<sup>46</sup> "Obituary: Charles H. Harding," *Bulletin of the National Association of Wool Manufacturers* (1920).

<sup>47</sup> "Obituary: Henry Erben," *Bulletin of the National Association of Wool Manufacturers* (1906).

<sup>48</sup> *A Directory of the Textile Establishments in the United States and Canada* (Philadelphia: Lord & Nagle Co., 1905), 431-32.

combing methods and technologies of the 1840s and 1850s, and the other systems no doubt stemmed from that original period of improvement.<sup>49</sup>

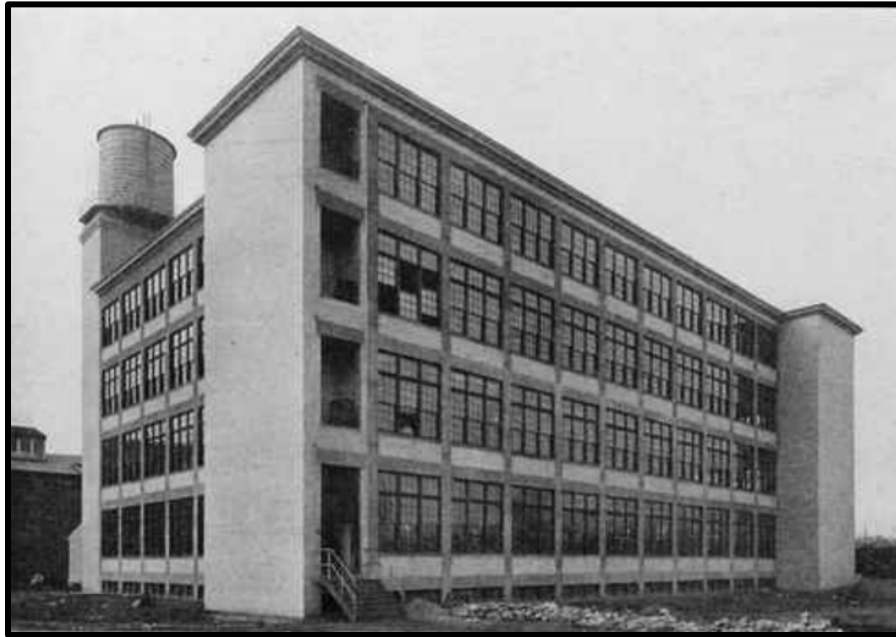


Figure 41. “Exterior of Factory Building for the Erben-Harding Company, Philadelphia, Pa.” Source: Chestofbooks.com.

In September 1906, the Tacony Worsted Mills commissioned a four-story and basement manufacturing building of reinforced concrete construction, measuring 101’ by 153’, constituting “the largest in Tacony.” The building was constructed by William Steel & Sons Company at an estimated cost of \$110,000. This building survives on a separate parcel to the northeast of the subject property and is not included in the proposed designation.<sup>50</sup> Construction began after October.<sup>51</sup> Regardless, this construction project and a latter addition is another testament to the continual eminence of the firm. Plans to double the building in size were underway by November 1916.<sup>52</sup>

After the retirement and death of his brother, Walter Erben would go on to be both President and a Director of the firm. Charles H. Harding remained the Vice President and Treasurer of the firm until July 1919.<sup>53</sup> George K. Erben was also a Director of the firm.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> James Burnley, *The History of Wool and Woolcombing* (Low, Marston, Searle and Rivington, 1889).

<sup>50</sup> “The Latest News In Real Estate,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 September 1906, 11.

<sup>51</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 October 1906, 14.

<sup>52</sup> “With the Builders,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 November 1916, 19.

<sup>53</sup> “Obituary: Charles H. Harding,” *Bulletin of the National Association of Wool Manufacturers* (1920).

<sup>54</sup> *Directory of the Directors of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: 1915), 54.



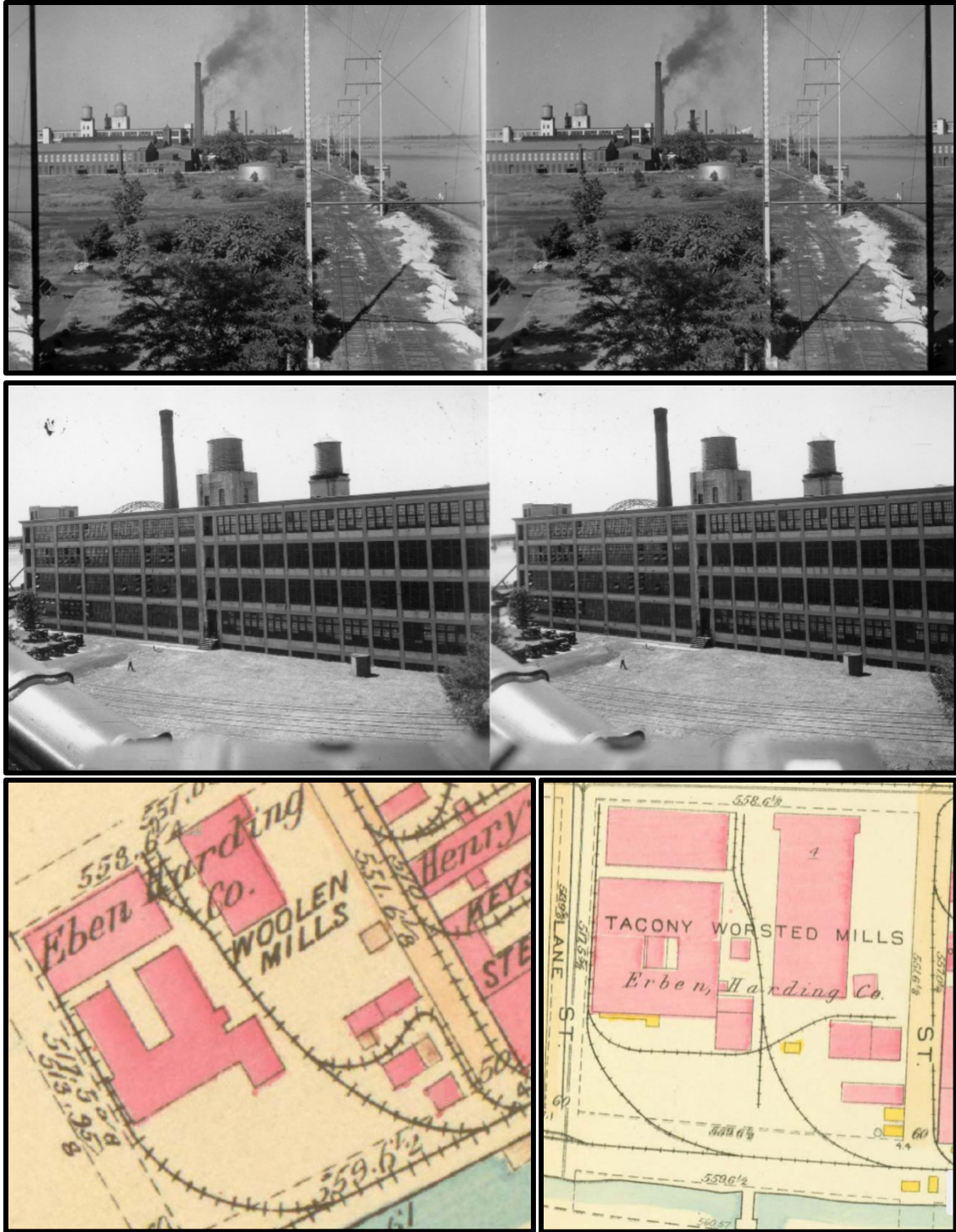


Figure 42. Top: Looking north at the Tacony Worsted Mills. Source: <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/kt029012ss/>. Figure 43. Middle: Looking south at the Tacony Worsted Mills. Source: <https://calisphere.org/item/ark:/13030/kt029012ss/>. Figure 44. Bottom left: 1910 Bromley Philadelphia Atlas.

By March 1909 it appears that Building 7 had been constructed, at least in part, being the only one-story building on the site, measuring 50' in width and containing 150' in length. Building 7 is a long, shed-like structure that was constructed within the court created by Buildings 1 and 3. Containing the degreasing machinery, storage tanks, and the distilling apparatus, Building 7 appears to have been constructed for employment of the “new continuous process” of wool degreasing, which required both a “new method, and the [degreasing] machine.” The improved process of degreasing led to greater efficiencies and decreased costs.<sup>55</sup> Between 1911 and 1919, the Erben-Harding Company another improvement was made to the property with the construction of Building 8.<sup>56</sup> Building 8 is a small rectangular building that was constructed to the northeast of Building 3, the two of which were later connected by a wooden hyphen between the second floors.

In 1913, the Tacony Worsted Mills was compared to seventeen firms, at which time it ranked tenth in the number of combs it was operating. The largest company at that time was the American Woolen Company with 430 combs. Ranking second through ninth in the number of combs being operated went as follows: Arlington Mills, 96 combs; Pacific Mills, 85 combs; United States Worsted Co., 65 combs; Far Alpaca Co., 50 Combs; Cleveland Worsted Mills Co., 50 Combs; Amoskeag Manufacturing Co., 44 Combs; Lorraine Manufacturing Co., 40 Combs; Forstmann-Huffman Co., 36 Combs. The Tacony Worsted Mills had 27 Combs, being the largest in Pennsylvania.<sup>57</sup>



Figure 45. Left: An article that contextualizes the Tacony Worsted Mills with the other leading manufacturers of woolen products nationally. Source: “Woolen Mill Additions,” *The Greenville News*. (Greenville, SC: 19 January 1917), 7. Newspapers.com. Figure 46. Right: 1929 Philadelphia Atlas (29<sup>th</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> Wards). Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

<sup>55</sup> “Wool Degreasing, The New Continuous Process,” *The American Sheep-Breeder and Wool-Grower* 29 (1909): 192.

<sup>56</sup> George W. Bromley and Walter S. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia Complete in One Volume* (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1910); George W. Bromley and Walter S. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia 23<sup>rd</sup> and 41<sup>st</sup> Wards* (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1920).

<sup>57</sup> William C. Hunneman, “Who Gets the Benefit of Free Wool,” *The National Wool Grower* 3, no. 5 (May 1913): 23.



Figure 47. The Pennsylvania Museum's School of Industrial Art. (Circular of the Textile Department, 1932-33).

According to Historian Harry C. Silcox, the Tacony Worsted Mills was forced to file for bankruptcy in the 1930s, implications of the Great Depression.<sup>58</sup> However, the firm was still operating using both the "English System" and the "French System" for manufacturing worsted yarns in 1933.<sup>59</sup> Even in 1935, the firm was still employing workers, when one of the foremen committed suicide, and on January 21, 1938, George H. Erben was elected President of the Tacony Manufacturers' Association.<sup>60</sup> Eight days later the firm announced its "Liquidation Sale" for March 3, 1938.<sup>61</sup> Later that year, the subject property, then 130,000 square feet of space, was leased to the Sears, Roebuck & Company.<sup>62</sup>

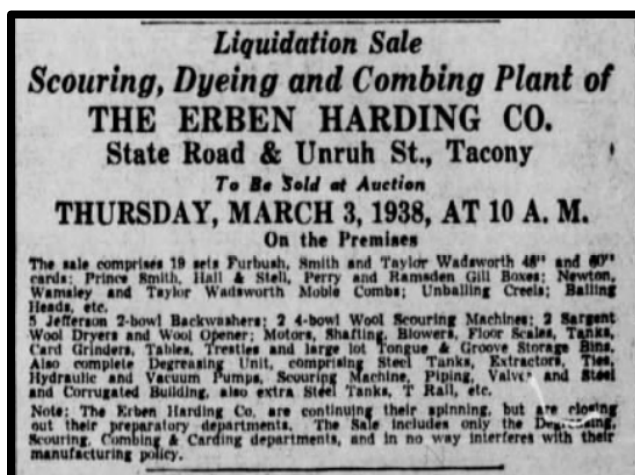


Figure 48. Advertisement, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 January 1938, 23. Source: Newspapers.com.

<sup>58</sup> Silcox, *A Place to Live and Work*, 60.

<sup>59</sup> The Pennsylvania Museum's School of Industrial Art. (Circular of the Textile Department, 1932-33).

<sup>60</sup> "G.K. Erben Elected," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 January 1938, 27.

<sup>61</sup> Advertisement, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 January 1938, 23.

<sup>62</sup> "Acquires Plant," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 June 1943, 59.



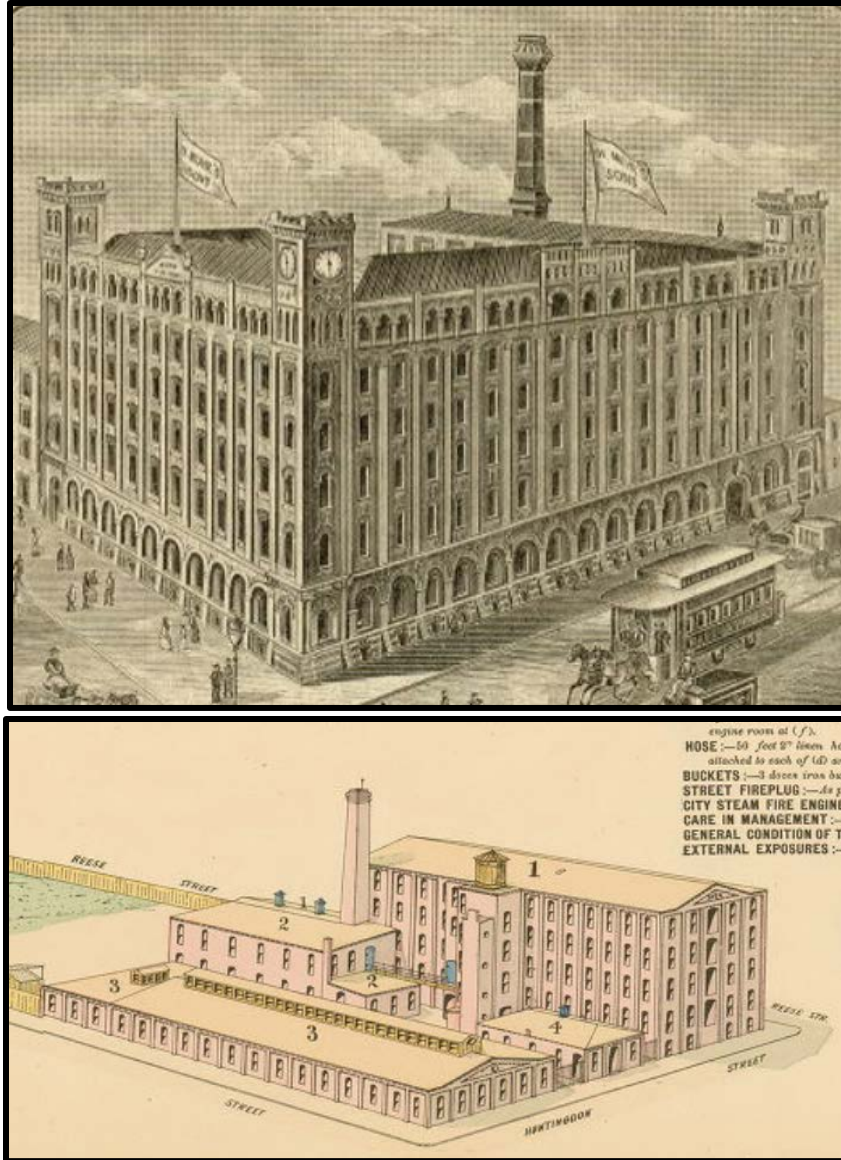


Figure 49. Top: H. Muhr Sons, Manufacturers of Watches, Broad and Race Streets. Source: “A Broad Street Improvement.” *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* 1, no. 1 (9 January 1886), 1. Figure 50. Bottom: Stinson Brothers and Kurlbaum’s Mill. Hexamer General Survey, vol. 18. Completed in 1882. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

**(e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation.**

Architecturally, the Tacony Worsted Mills is an early, intact, impressive, and important example of an industrial complex designed by Walter Harvey Geissinger (1859-1950), a largely forgotten, but significant architect, who’s work greatly influenced the commercial and industrial built environment of the City of Philadelphia during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Practicing throughout The Gilded Age, from the time he entered the field of architecture in c1878 through his retirement in 1894, Geissinger was a dominant force in field of commercial

and industrial architecture and engineering. At the time of its construction, the Tacony Worsted Mills was purported to be one of the “finest” and “largest” worsted yarn mills in the United States, a contention that no doubt held merit given the firm’s high stature among its competitors.<sup>63</sup>

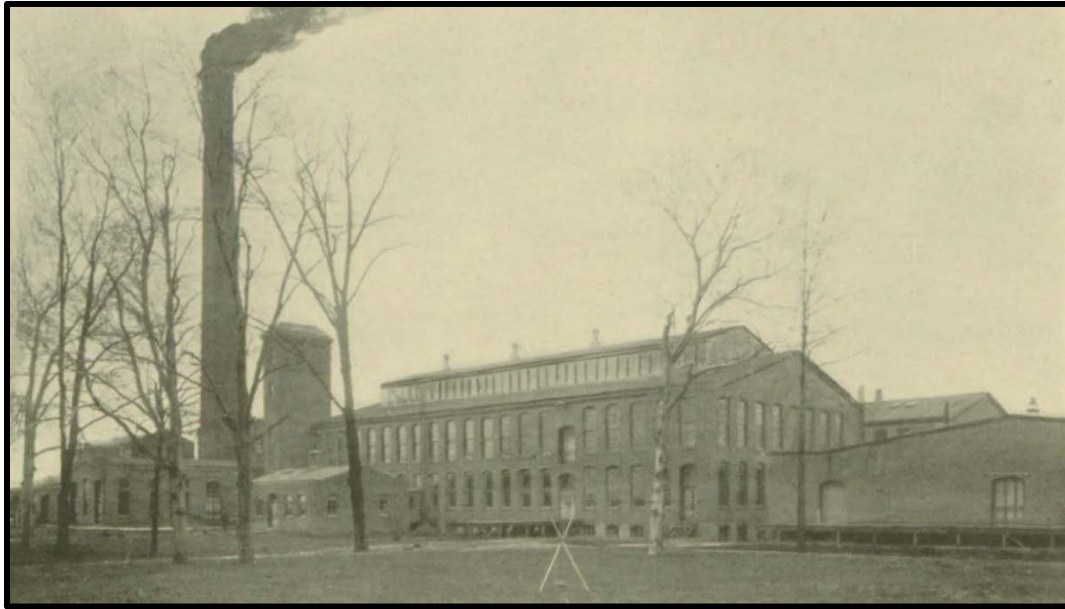


Figure 51. The Tacony Worsted Mills. Source: Philadelphia Architects and Buildings.

Geissinger was noted as the architect in a lien notice in October 1887, just two months before the completion of Buildings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, which proves him to be the architect of the Tacony Worsted Mills. This attribution is further justified in 1895, when the successors to Geissinger’s firm, Hales & Ballinger, were commissioned to design additional warehouse space.<sup>64</sup>

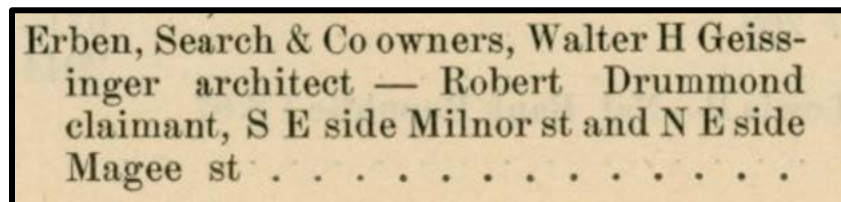


Figure 52. *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* 2, no. 38 (26 September 1887): 452.

Geissinger was no stranger to designing large, modern plants for manufacturers across the city. In 1880 alone, just two years into his career, he designed a substantial “Iron Manufactory” for William H. Bilyeu; a large factory for Campbell & Richards; and another sizable complex for E.A. Glenson; as well as St. Michael’s Lutheran Church in Trenton Avenue, all of which were located the mill district of Kensington.<sup>65</sup> Another large commission occurred in 1882, when

<sup>63</sup> “Improved Mill Property,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. 6 October 1887, 3.

<sup>64</sup> “Architects’ News,” *PRERBG* 10, no. 31 (31 July 1895): 453.

<sup>65</sup> *American Machinist* 3, no. 37 (11 September 1880): 10; “Summary of the Week,” *The American Architect and Building News* 7, no. 218 (28 February 1880): 88; “Summary of the Week,” *The American Architect and Building News* 7, no. 233 (12 June 1880): 265.

Geissinger was commissioned as the architect for eight separate buildings for Stinson, Brother & Kurlbaum's Mill, said to be "...a tapestry Brussels carpet and rug manufactory of large proportions."<sup>66</sup>

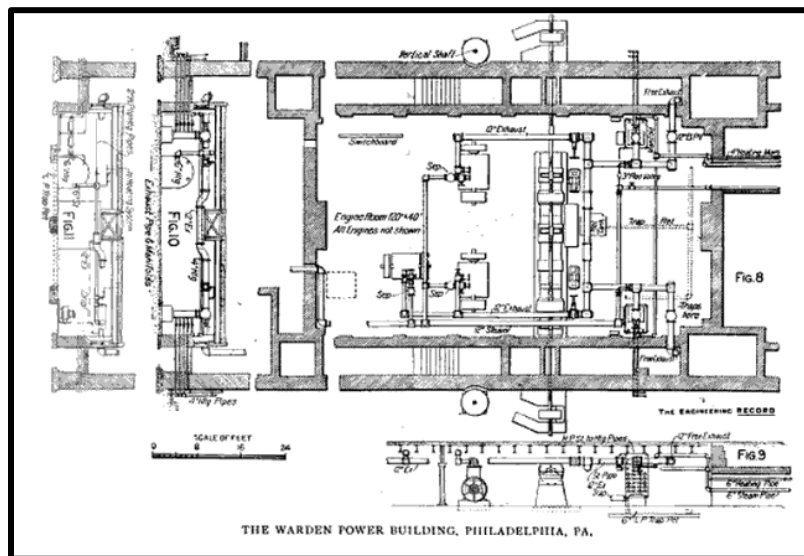


Figure 53. Henry Coddington Meyer and Charles Frederick Wingate. "The Warden Power Building, Philadelphia, PA." *The Engineering Record, Building Record and Sanitary Engineer* 31 (19 January 1895): 135.

Around the time that Geissinger was commissioned to design the Tacony Worsted Mills, he went into partnership with Edward M. Hales, architect, to form Geissinger & Hales, Architects, Engineers, & Building Superintendents. During this partnership, Geissinger & Hales, as well as Geissinger, individually, was prolific, designing numerous commercial and industrial buildings, one of which included a seven-story factory for John B. Stetson in 1890, which was purported to be one of the largest hat manufacturing buildings in the country.<sup>67</sup> Geissinger went on to design "one of the largest factories and office buildings in the city" at 19<sup>th</sup> Street and Allegheny Avenue for William G. Warden in 1893.<sup>68</sup>

That same year *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* summarized Geissinger's work:

Walter H. Geissinger, Twelfth and Chestnut Streets, may be noted as one of the busy men in construction of several large factories and mills in which he is quite a specialist.<sup>69</sup>

The above-referenced commissions are just sampling of the notable works that comprise Geissinger's significant oeuvre. This nomination documents what is perhaps the most comprehensive list of works by Geissinger and Geissinger & Hales, designed between c1878 and 1894. This list presents roughly fifty projects, among which roughly thirty-two have been

<sup>66</sup> "The Manufacturers," *The Record of Growth* 1, no. 1 (January 1882): 23.

<sup>67</sup> *PRERBG* 5, no. 24 (18 June 1890): 354.

<sup>68</sup> "Architect Notes," *PRERBG* 8, no. 23 (7 June 1893): 349.

<sup>69</sup> "Architect Notes," *PRERBG* 8, no. 35 (30 August 1893): 553.



demolished; ten are of an unknown status, though may likely be demolished; and roughly four appear to be extant, not including the subject property.

The firm would go on to become what is known today as Ballinger Co.<sup>70</sup>

**Table of Projects of Walter H. Geissinger and Geissinger & Hales**

<b>Walter H. Geissinger, Architect</b>			
<b>Client</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>
Abram Cox Stove Co.	Warehouse	American and Dauphin Streets (Demolished)	3 March 1892 <sup>71</sup>
John W. Bromley	Tank and Storage House	American and Somerset Streets (Demolished)	4 May 1892 <sup>72</sup>
B.F. Solomon & Sons	Factory	Garnet Street south of Somerset. (Demolished)	27 June 1887 <sup>73</sup>
Campbell & Richards	Factory	Howard and Huntingdon Streets (Demolished)	28 February 1880 <sup>74</sup>
Carey Bros. Mill	Mill	10 <sup>th</sup> Street and Susquehanna Avenue (Extant)	20 September 1886 <sup>75</sup>
George Miller & Son Company	Factory (Six Stories)	259-63 S. 3 <sup>rd</sup> Street (Demolished)	22 November 1893 <sup>76</sup>
Hoyle, Harrison & Kaye	Factory	Indiana, Front, Fillmore, and Tusculum Streets (Extant)	13 January 1892 <sup>77</sup>
Ivans, Deitz & Magee	Carpet Mills	Marshall Street and Lehigh Avenue (Demolished)	23 March 1892 <sup>78</sup>
James Whittaker	Factory	Trenton Avenue and	20 September 1886 <sup>79</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Pennsylvania Death certificates, 1906–1963, Series 11.90, Records of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Record Group 11, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission; Sandra Tatman, “Gessinger & Hales (fl. 1887-1894),” *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings* [https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar\\_display.cfm/32382](https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/32382), Accessed on 14 February 2019.

<sup>71</sup> *PRERBG* 7, no. 9 (2 March 1892): 987.

<sup>72</sup> *PRERBG* 7, no. 18 (4 May 1892): 1132.

<sup>73</sup> *PRERBG* 8, no. (27 June 1887): 292.

<sup>74</sup> “Summary of the Week,” *The American Architect and Building News* 7, no. 218 (28 February 1880): 88.

<sup>75</sup> “Builders’ Items,” *PRERBG* 1, no. 37 (20 September 1886): 437.

<sup>76</sup> “Architect Notes,” *PRERBG* 8, no. 47 (22 November 1893): i.

<sup>77</sup> “Architect Notes,” *PRERBG* 7, no. 2 (13 January 1892): 876.

<sup>78</sup> “Architect Notes,” *PRERBG* 7, no. 12 (23 March 1892): 1035.

<sup>79</sup> “Builder’ Items,” *PRERBG* 1, no. 37 (20 September 1886): 437.

		Sargent Street (Unknown)	
John H. Bromley & Sons	Mills	Same Location	6 April 1892 <sup>80</sup>
John Weiseman and T.F.Wallace	Syrup Refinery	Front Street above Poplar near Canal (Demolished)	9 November 1892 <sup>81</sup>
John G. Caruth	Factory	NE cor. Indiana Avenue and Rosehill Streets (Extant)	6 December 1893 <sup>82</sup>
Keystone Watch Case Company	Factory	Nineteenth and Brown Streets (Demolished)	7 February 1887 <sup>83</sup>
Mr. Long	Store (four story)	3 <sup>rd</sup> and Ontario Streets (Demolished)	6 February 1889 <sup>84</sup>
Marks Brothers	Store	Eighth and Arch Streets (Demolished)	5 March 1888 <sup>85</sup>
May & Bro.	Store	Arch Street below 8 <sup>th</sup> (Demolished)	20 September 1886 <sup>86</sup>
McNeely & Co.	Factory	Sixth Street and Columbia Avenue (Demolished)	5 December 1887 <sup>87</sup>
Richardson & De Long Brothers	Factory	Broad Street and Indiana Avenue (Demolished)	1 February 1893 <sup>88</sup>
Stinson Bros., & Kurlbaum	“...a tapestry Brussels carpet and rug manufactory of large proportions.” “eight separate buildings”	Huntingdon Street between Fairhill and Reese. (Demolished)	January 1882 <sup>89</sup>
William G. Warden, Esq.	“one of the	19 <sup>th</sup> Street and	1893 <sup>90</sup>

<sup>80</sup> “Architects’ Notes,” *PRERBG* 7, no. 14 (6 April 1892): 1067.

<sup>81</sup> “Architect Notes,” *PRERBG* 7, no. 45 (9 November 1892): 1581.

<sup>82</sup> “Architect Notes,” *PRERBG* 8, no. 49 (6 December 1893): i.

<sup>83</sup> “Among the Architects,” *PRERBG* 2, no. 5 (7 February 1887): 55.

<sup>84</sup> “Architect’s Notes,” *PRERBG* 4, no. 5 (6 February 1889): 55.

<sup>85</sup> “Architects’ Notes,” *PRERBG* 3, no. 9 (5 March 1888): 99.

<sup>86</sup> “Builders’ Items,” *PRERBG* 1, no. 37 (20 September 1886): 437.

<sup>87</sup> “Architect Notes,” *PRERBG* 2, no. 48 (5 December 1887): 575.

<sup>88</sup> “Architect Notes,” *PRERBG* 8, no. 5 (1 February 1893): 62.

<sup>89</sup> *The Record of Growth* 1, no. (January 1882): 23.

	largest factories and office buildings in the city”	Allegheny Avenue (Unknown)	
William H. Bilyeu	Iron Manufactory	Trenton Avenue and Margaretta Street (Unknown)	11 September 1880 <sup>91</sup>
<b>Geissinger &amp; Hales</b>			
<b>Client</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>
Barnes & Beyers	Factory	NE cor. Indiana Avenue and Fillmore Street (Unknown)	11 February 1891 <sup>92</sup>
Deborah A. Jay	Residence	2002 N. Broad Street (Extant)	5 June 1889 <sup>93</sup>
E.T. Steel & Co.	Weave Shed	Bristol, Pennsylvania (Unknown)	30 September 1891 <sup>94</sup>
George V. Cresson	Foundry & Machine Works	18 <sup>th</sup> Street, Allegheny Avenue, Westmoreland Street (Largely Demolished)	2 April 1888 <sup>95</sup>
German Lutherans	School House	Trenton Avenue and Dickerson Street (Demolished)	14 May 1890 <sup>96</sup>
Hebrew Education Society	School House	SW cor. 10 <sup>th</sup> and Carpenter Streets (Demolished)	18 June 1890 <sup>97</sup>
John H. Dearnley	Addition to Mills	8 <sup>th</sup> and Somerset Streets (Demolished)	27 March 1889 <sup>98</sup>
John B. Stetson	Factory	Cadwallader Street, south of Montgomery Avenue (Demolished)	18 June 1890 <sup>99</sup>

<sup>90</sup> *PRERBG* (1893).

<sup>91</sup> *American Machinist* (11 September 1880): 10.

<sup>92</sup> “Building and Real Estate Notes,” *PRERBG* 6, no. 6 (11 February 1891): 82. The construction was being completed by William H. Steele & Son.

<sup>93</sup> “Architects’ Notes,” *PRERBG* 4, no. 50 (18 December 1889): 597.

<sup>94</sup> “Architects’ Notes,” *PRERBG* 6, no. 39 (30 September 1891): i.

<sup>95</sup> “Architects’ Notes,” *PRERBG* 3, no. 13 (2 April 1888): 149.

<sup>96</sup> “Architects’ Notes,” *PRERBG* 5, no. 19 (14 May 1890): 274.

<sup>97</sup> “Architects’ Notes,” *PRERBG* 5, no. 24 (18 June 1890): 354.

<sup>98</sup> “Architects’ Notes,” *PRERBG* 4, no. 12 (27 March 1889): 55.

<sup>99</sup> “Architects’ Notes,” *PRERBG* 5, no. 24 (18 June 1890): 354.

John Bromley & Sons	Mill	Lehigh Avenue and Leamy Street (Demolished)	7 August 1889 <sup>100</sup>
E.A. Glenson	Factory	American and Susquehanna Streets (Demolished)	28 February 1880 <sup>101</sup>
F.A. Bochman	Textile Factory	2 <sup>nd</sup> and Somerset Streets (Demolished)	10 September 1890 <sup>102</sup>
Florence Cotton Mill	Cotton Mill	Florence, Alabama (Unknown)	15 January 1890 <sup>103</sup>
Fuller Building	Building	18 <sup>th</sup> and Market Streets (Demolished)	25 February 1891 <sup>104</sup>
Horner Brothers Carpet Works	Mills	Lawrence Street and Lehigh Avenue (Demolished)	23 September 1891 <sup>105</sup>
Klauder & Co.	Factory (4)	Leamy and Lippincott Streets (Unknown)	4 March 1891 <sup>106</sup>
L. Solomon & Sons	Dye-House	Unknown Location (Unknown)	18 December 1889 <sup>107</sup>
Laird, Schober, & Mitchell's	Factory	19 <sup>th</sup> and Buttonwood Streets (Demolished)	26 August 1891 <sup>108</sup>
Powell Brothers	Mill	28 <sup>th</sup> and Parish Streets (Demolished)	15 July 1891 <sup>109</sup>
St. Michael's Lutheran Church	House of Worship	Trenton Avenue and Cumberland Street (Extant)	28 February 1880 <sup>110</sup>
Schaum & Uhlinger	Mill	1030-38 New Market Street	3 April 1889 <sup>111</sup>

<sup>100</sup> "Architects' Notes," *PRERBG* 4, no. 31 (7 August 1889): 367.

<sup>101</sup> "Summary of the Week," *The American Architect and Building News* 7, no. 218 (28 February 1880): 88

<sup>102</sup> "Architects' Notes," *PRERBG* 5, no. 36 (10 September 1890): 545.

<sup>103</sup> "Architects' Notes," *PRERBG* 5, no. 2 (15 January 1890).

<sup>104</sup> "Architects Notes," *PRERBG* 6, no. 8 (25 February 1891): 114.

<sup>105</sup> "Architects Notes," *PRERBG* 6, no. 38 (23 September 1891): i.

<sup>106</sup> "Building and Real Estate News," *PRERBG* 6, no. 9 (4 March 1891): 130.

<sup>107</sup> "Architects' Notes," *PRERBG* 3, no. 13 (2 April 1888): 149.

<sup>108</sup> "Architects Notes," *PRERBG* 6, no. 34 (26 August 1891): i.

<sup>109</sup> "Building and Real Estate Notes," *PRERBG* 6, no. 28 (15 July 1891): 448; "Architects' Notes," *PRERBG* 4, no. 24 (19 June 1889): 283.

<sup>110</sup> "Summary of the Week," *The American Architect and Building News* 7, no. 218 (28 February 1880): 88

<sup>111</sup> "Architects' Notes," *PRERBG* 4, no. 13 (3 April 1889): 55.



		(Demolished)	
Stead & Miller	Factory Addition	Fourth and Cambria Streets (Demolished)	23 December 1891 <sup>112</sup>
Thomas Devlin & Co.	Factory	3 <sup>rd</sup> Street and Lehigh Avenue (Demolished)	23 November 1892 <sup>113</sup>
Thomas Scattergood	Factory	Chester, Pennsylvania (Unknown)	15 January 1890 <sup>114</sup>
Unknown	Factory	Lawrence, north of Lehigh Avenue (Demolished)	16 September 1891 <sup>115</sup>
Unknown	Factory Buildings (4)	Glennwood Avenue east of Fifth Street (Unknown)	22 October 1888 <sup>116</sup>
Unknown	Stable	16 <sup>th</sup> Street and Allegheny Avenue (Demolished)	19 June 1889 <sup>117</sup>
William Sullivan & Co.	Factory	2 <sup>nd</sup> Street above Somerset (Demolished)	5 November 1890 <sup>118</sup>

<sup>112</sup> “Building and Real Estate Notes,” *PRERBG* 6, no. 51 (23 December 1891): i.

<sup>113</sup> “Building Permits,” *PRERBG* 7, no. 47 (23 November 1892): 1619.

<sup>114</sup> “Architects’ Notes,” *PRERBG* 5, no. 2 (15 January 1890): 15.

<sup>115</sup> “Architects Notes,” *PRERBG* 6, no. 37 (16 September 1891): 591.

<sup>116</sup> “Architects’ Notes,” *PRERBG* 3, no. 42 (22 October 1888): 498.

<sup>117</sup> “Architects’ Notes,” *PRERBG* 4, no. 24 (19 June 1889): 283.

<sup>118</sup> “Architects’ Notes,” *PRERBG* 5, no. 44 (5 November 1890): 685.

## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Funded and sponsored by the Tacony Community Development Corporation with specific input by Alex Balloon, Director and Corridor Manager, this nomination was completed by the Keeping Society of Philadelphia. The primary author was Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian and Historic Preservationist. Assistance was also provided by J.M. Duffin, Archivist and Historian.

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# **5250 UNRUH AVE**

Correspondence Received  
by the Philadelphia Historical  
Commission

**19 JUNE 2019**



# HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF TACONY

*Allen W. Wetter, Founder*

Louis M. Iatarola  
President

Michael Barone  
Vice President

William J. Pulaski  
Treasurer

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*Louis A. Iatarola, President Ex-Officio*

March 13, 2019

Philadelphia Historical Commission  
One Parkway, 13<sup>th</sup> Floor  
1515 Arch Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

Attention: Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D., Executive Director

Dear Dr. Farnham:

The purpose of this letter is to convey the strong support of our organization regarding the nomination of the Tacony Worsted Mills property to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Located at 5250 Unruh Avenue, this complex has been a fixture along our industrial riverfront since the days when Philadelphia was known as the "Workshop of the World."

Situated just south of the sprawling Disston Saw Works complex and designed by Architect Walter Harvey Geissinger, this seven (7) building complex played a significant role in Philadelphia's thriving textile industry of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The property retains much of its historic character, including the prominent chimney stack and tank house tower.

This designation will help to assure that this historic array of structures can continue to be used as industrial space or adapted for alternative uses. On behalf of our membership and Board of Directors, I would like to thank Oscar Beisert and Alexander Ballon for their fine work on this nomination and thank the Historical Commission for its consideration.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Louis M. Iatarola".

Louis M. Iatarola  
President

cc: Alexander Ballon  
Oscar Beisert

6913 Tulip Street, Philadelphia, PA 19135 (215) 338-8790  
Tacony-Disston Community Development National Historic District