

LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK PROGRAM

Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company Factory Complex 64

Local Historic Landmark #126

500 E. Fifth St., Winston-Salem

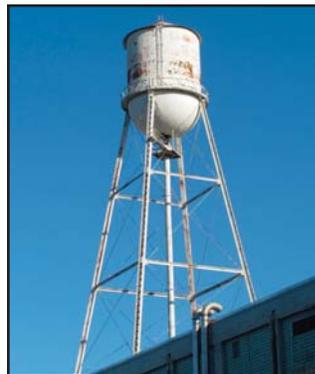
Construction Date: 1916-1960s

Landmark Designation Date: 05/21/2012

The R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company Factory Complex 64 is comprised of buildings and structures ranging in date from 1916 to post 1960 construction. The complex is significant to the industrial heritage of Winston-Salem as a highly intact and comprehensive early to mid 20th century example of the once numerous industrial buildings and complexes that covered most of the city's downtown area. More specifically, it is important as one of the few remaining historic facilities of the nationally-prominent R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, which played a key role in the development of Winston-Salem for over a century.

The 1913 introduction of Camel cigarettes launched Forsyth County as the wealthiest county in North Carolina, and is what drove Reynolds into being one of the largest manufacturing facilities in Winston-Salem. The complex was part of the company's initial expansion phase. Together with its storage and production structures, it is arguably the most complete production facility remaining from the hundreds of buildings that encompassed the eastern section of downtown. Overall, the complex retains strong architectural and historical integrity, and represents the earliest and best remaining example of a complete R.J. Reynolds tobacco processing facility.

Additionally, the Factory 64 complex is significant for its role in the history of American-American employment during the first half of the 20th century. Most workers in the community's tobacco industry from the late 19th century well into the 20th century were African-American. R.J. Reynolds was known for his almost total dependence upon African-American labor and his company sent trains to South Carolina and eastern North Carolina to bring back factory workers. Upon arriving in Winston-Salem, African-Americans moved into specific areas of the city, which were typically close to or within walking distance of their places of employment, largely the tobacco factories. After 1909, the tobacco factories became increasingly mechanized and factory work became year-round, rather



than seasonal. As a result, African-Americans flocked to Winston and the African-American residential areas expanded tremendously. According to R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company records, it is estimated that by 1925, the company was employing 5/6 of the city's African-American population. In this way, the complex is a testament to the thousands of workers, predominantly African-American that worked for decades under difficult conditions and low wages.

Factory Complex 64 is also significant as one of the few remaining sites where the large strikes of 1943 and 1947 took place between the CIO-affiliated Local 22 and the tobacco company, representing an important series of events in the labor history of the city. During the history of Reynolds (and other tobacco facilities), there was a constant struggle by African-American workers to improve their wages and the harsh working conditions in the factories. The 1943 strike occurred when a factory employee died while working, after being denied permission to leave due to illness. Several hundred female stemmers began an immediate strike that spread throughout most of the facilities. Ultimately Local 22 won the right to represent the workers and in 1944, job security for senior workers, vacations, wage increases, and grievance procedures were secured. However, disputes continued and a second strike occurred in 1947. The complex represents one of the last remaining facilities that was part of these significant strikes. Participation in unions exposed many African American workers to voting for the first time and led to successes in local elections.

It should be noted that many of the workers in the complex and leaders in the strikes were women, which signifies an important chapter of local women's history. Among tobacco workers, African-American women were the first to be fired and received the lowest wages. Additionally, women faced substantial discrimination in the work place by managers. Because of these issues, it was the female workers that led many of the strikes and became union leaders.

The first building in the complex was constructed in 1916 and simply named "Factory 64." The building is a five-story with mezzanine, reinforced concrete structure that encompasses 254,353 square feet. The exterior is marked by evenly-spaced bays delineated by concrete piers that extend to the roof. There are 16 large window bays along its north side, which is the E. Fifth Street elevation. The building's roof is flat, with the exception of a crenellated parapet that caps the stair tower at the northeast portion of the building. The northeast corner of the building's roof features a 100,000-gallon steel water tank on a tapered steel frame. The tank is elongated and cylindrical in shape with a conical cap-shaped metal roof. During 1916-1918,



East Fifth Street, looking west, 1951
(R.J. Reynolds Factory 64 shown at left)
Courtesy of Forsyth County Public Library Photograph Collection
via Digital Forsyth (<http://www.digitalforsyth.org>)

a one-story warehouse with three sections was constructed for the purpose of storing cigarettes and cartons. In 1922, the power plant was constructed; it is a two-story, reinforced concrete building with windows featuring arched surrounds with keystones.

In 1923, the original Factory 64 received an addition that extended to the south along the railroad right-of-way. Constructed to serve as a sweat-house, the building is six stories and is also of reinforced concrete. Sanborn fire insurance maps indicate that the roof was originally lined with cork, which would have assisted in curing the tobacco. In 1924 an additional factory building was constructed, which is similar in design and materials to Factory 64. The remainder of the complex consists of three pedestrian bridges linking the various buildings and parking lots.

Today R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company Factory Complex 64 is proposed to undergo a sensitive adaptive reuse rehabilitation project, where the site will become a mixed-use development, home to residences and commercial/retail uses.

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Winston-Salem Tobacco Historic District
National Register Nomination
<http://www.hpo.ncdcr.gov/nr/FY3151.pdf>



This information is also available
at the Forsyth County
Historic Resources Commission's web site:
<http://www.ForsythCountyHRC.org>