

LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK PROGRAM

Forsyth County Historic Resources Commission

Chatham Manufacturing Company/Western Electric Company Complex

Local Historic Landmark #129
800 Chatham Road, Winston-Salem
Construction Date(s): 1907-1961
Landmark Designation Date: 12/16/2013

Chatham Manufacturing Company formed in 1877, when its founders enlarged the Gwyn and Company gristmill and store near Elkin. The company relocated to Winston in 1907 and started an executive board of directors. R.J. Reynolds became its first Vice-President. The company's move also included the construction of bungalows south of its property for its employees. Today the housing development is known as the Chatham Heights neighborhood.

In the first three decades of the 20th century, Chatham Manufacturing Company dominated the North Carolina wool industry with high-quality blankets and covers sold nationwide. Between 1943 and 1945, the National Carbon Company took control of the property and used the facilities to test and manufacture submarine batteries and underwater detonators for the United States Navy. After World War II, National Carbon left Winston-Salem, and the complex passed to Western Electric Company. Western Electric manufactured switches and circuits for national telephone companies, employing ten percent of Forsyth



Western Electric, 1946

County's workforce. The Winston-Salem field-engineering complex was one of only three for Western Electric nationwide. Western Electric left the complex in 1966. Between 1970 and 2005, multiple manufacturing operations leased portions of the property.

From the complex's earliest development in 1907 to the midcentury, the owners built buildings and additions in typical mill warehouse form. The main buildings are generally multi-bay deep and wide built of heavy timber frame with brick exteriors, flat or gabled roofs and large multi-pane or casement windows. The 1907 main building is a three-story, heavy timber frame and brick edifice executed in seven-to-one common bond with segmental-arched window and door openings and a very low-pitched gable roof. Building One is a 1937 office building constructed with a flat parapet roof capped with terra cotta tile coping and an Art-Moderne entrance. Flanked by a stepped surround, the entrance features includes a double leaf door and transom capped with a semi-circular metal-edged canopy.

As of 2014, there are plans to redevelop the site with sensitivity as a mixed-use project. The complex, which encompasses numerous buildings, a covered passageway, and a coal trestle, is on the National Register of Historic Places as of 2011.



Chatham Manufacturing Company, 1954 aerial



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