STATE OF CONNECTICUT

CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION
2 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106
(203) 566-3005

STORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY FORM
For Buildings and Structures

IDENTIFICATION
2. TOWN/CITY: Middletown VILLAGE: _______ COUNTY: Middlesex
3. STREET & NUMBER (and/or location): 234 South Main Street
4. OWNER(S): Gulf and Western Precision Engineering Company PUBLIC X PRIVATE
5. USE: Present: Vacant Historic: Woolen factory; marine hardware factory
6. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: x yes _ no
Interior accessible: _yes, explain ________________ x no

DESCRIPTION
7. STYLE OF BUILDING: Early 19th Century Industrial DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: c. 1814; addition, late 19th century
8. MATERIAL(S) (indicate use or location when appropriate):
   - clapboard
   - wood shingle
   - board & batten
   - aluminum siding
   - other:
   - asbestos siding
   - asphalt siding
   - stucco
   - concrete: type: 
   - brick
   - fieldstone
   - cobblestone
   - cut stone: type: brownstone foundation
9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM: interior framing
   - wood frame: x post and beam
   - load bearing masonry
   - structural iron or steel
   - other:
0. ROOF: type:
   - gable
   - gambrel
   - shed
   - mansard
   - monitor
   - sawtooth
   - material:
   - wood shingle
   - roll asphalt
   - asphalt shingle
   - built up
   - other:
   - tin
   - slate
   - tile
   - other:
1. NUMBER OF STORIES: 2 1/2 APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS: 40' x 30'
12. CONDITION: Structural:
   - excellent
   - x good
   - fair
   - deteriorated
   - Exterior:
   - excellent
   - x good
   - fair
   - deteriorated
13. INTEGRITY: Location: x on original site moved, when:
   Alterations: _no xyes, explain: Cupola replaced; early interior adjustments; windows altered; south addition
14. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS OR LANDSCAPE FEATURES:
   - barn
   - shed
   - carriage house
   - garage
   - x other landscape features or buildings: two forges;
     two warehouses; two dams located nearby
15. SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT:
   - open land
   - woodland
   - residential
   - scattered buildings visible from site
   - commercial
   - industrial
   - rural
   - x high building density
16. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS: This building is sited on the north bank of Pameacha Creek. It is located in a commercial and industrial area and faces the busy intersection of Warwick and South Main Streets. Nearby are related, later factory buildings. A modern solar-energized bank is located across the intersection to the west.
17. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING OR SITE (interior and/or exterior):

Affixed to the facade of a neighboring building is a section of millstone from a grist mill which stood on the site in 1650.

SIGNIFICANCE

18. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: The main part of this structure was erected in 1814 by John Watkinson as a woolen factory. Pamecha Creek was a prime source of water power in Middletown; a mill had occupied this site since the 1650's. Following Watkinson's death in 1836, this building was occupied by another woolen business, known as The Pamecha Manufacturing Company.

In 1849 William Walter Wilcox, a young and aggressive factory worker, went into business with Ira Penfield, his employer. Together they continued manufacturing Penfield's recently patented grommet (a small metal device used in the raising and lowering of sails) in the basement of this building, and established the firm of Penfield and Wilcox. Wilcox then went on the road, successfully selling this new device, and established a coast-to-coast reputation. When Penfield retired in 1857, Wilcox took in Joseph Hall, Jr. as a partner and the firm known as Wilcox and Hall was established. Hall left the business in 1867. In 1869 the firm acquired the name by which it has been known for over one hundred years, The Wilcox, Crittenden and Company. The firm's prominent managers at this time were William Walter Wilcox, Albert R. Crittenden (a former Middletown mayor), E. Bound Chaffee, and (see continuation sheet)

PHOTOGRAPH

photographer: Elizabeth Loomis
date: 10/78 view: west
negative on file: Roll 46, #11

COMPiled by:
name: Elizabeth Loomis date: 9/78
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19. SOURCES: "A Century of Dependability" (Middletown: Wilcox and Crittenden and Co., Inc.); "Middletown Tercentenary" (Middletown: 1950); Middletown Press (Nov. 14, 1947); 1825 Barnum Map; 1851 Clark Map; 1874 Beers Atlas; 1877 Bailey Perspective Map

20. SUBSEQUENT FIELD EVALUATIONS:

21. THREATS TO BUILDING OR SITE:

___ none known ___ highways ___ vandalism ___ developers ___ renewal ___ private ___ deterioration ___ zoning ___ other: Building and ___

complex are for sale; development plans are unknown.
Former Churchill. This firm brought force and strength to the ships' chandlery business. They constructed additions to the existing structures to meet their rapidly growing needs. Their success was attributed to honesty, paying close attention to the business and having a good understanding of maritime needs.

On a summer night in 1907 a devastating fire attacked the premises. Virtually every building and its contents on the Pamecha ravine was destroyed, except for this small brick structure and the addition to the south. This determined firm rebuilt within two years, without losng a customer or laying off an employee. Except for this building and a slightly larger and later structure on the south side of the Pamecha Creek, all the structures related to the firm were built after the 1907 fire.

This two and one half story brick structure displays some of its early exterior features; brownstone sills and lintels, and two corbelled chimneys. The windows on the west facade were lengthened, the brownstone lintels removed and replaced by segmental-arched brick lintels. The cupola (which appears on an 1825 map) was replaced. The wing, attached to its south wall, probably dates from the late 19th century. More decorative, it displays corbelled brick work and an unusual arched window on the west facade. A large mural of a clipper ship is painted on the south wall.

The Pamecha Creek played an important role in Middletown's early manufacturing operations. The many water-powered factories located on its banks were largely responsible for this city's industrial prosperity in the early nineteenth century. This building is one of the few survivors of that prosperous era.

The site is additionally significant as an archeological site. Not only has it been in continuous use since 1650, but documents indicate that much of the machinery and tools damaged in the 1907 fire were not removed from the steep ravine.