

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Watkins, J.R., Products Building
Other names/site number United Warehouse; Watkins, J.R., Medical Company Building
Name of related multiple property listing N/A
(Remove "N/A" if property is part of a multiple property listing and add name)

2. Location

Street & Number: 62-70 W. Crump Boulevard
City or town: Memphis State: TN County: Shelby
Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A Zip: 38106

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

Signature of certifying official/Title: **Date**
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting Official: **Date**

Title: **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	1	structures
0	0	objects
1	1	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE/Business, Warehouse

INDUSTRY/Manufacturing Facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

No Style

Prairie

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Brick, concrete, metal, wood

Narrative Description

The rectangular-plan, six-story J.R. Watkins Products Building was constructed in 1911 as a manufacturing facility with horizontal lines, open floor plans, large multilight windows, a low-pitched roof with elaborated cornice with concrete and brick construction. The 1.2-acre site's manufacturing facility was designed in two phases, the first by the prestigious Memphis architectural firm of Hanker & Cairns. The 1914 annex was designed by George W. Maher (1864-1926), an architect known for his Chicago style buildings. Both the original, main building and the annex were designed as concrete and brick towers with some sixty thousand square feet of floor space each. The annex was designed with a floor load of six hundred pounds per square foot, "to accommodate the large vats of chemicals used in manufacturing the many Watkins items."¹ The buildings have had very few changes and still retain integrity of setting, location, design, workmanship, materials, and feeling which combine to convey the significance of this industrial facility. This property was recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in 1974.

¹ Richard H. Hulan and Robert C. Giebner, "J.R. Watkins Building," Historic American Buildings Survey No. TN-179 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1972, 1985).

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Setting and Site Features

The J.R. Watkins Products Building is located on the southeast corner of West E. H. Crump Boulevard and Kentucky Street which leads to the historic Frisco Bridge (a railroad bridge) completed in 1892 and the Harahan Bridge, which also carries rail and was once used for vehicles, opened in 1916 to carry vehicular and rail traffic across the Mississippi River. Watkins chose this location specifically to take advantage of this easy access to major transportation routes.

The nominated property comprises a 1.02 acre lot. The western half of the property is occupied by a non-contributing asphalt parking lot. The massive 1911 building and its 1914 annex occupies the eastern half of the lot. A sidewalk runs alongside the south and east elevations.

Building Description

The J.R. Watkins Products Building comprises two major sections: the 1911 Main Building and the 1914 Annex. Both buildings were built with concrete to accommodate massive structural loads. Both are six stories tall and comprise sixty thousand square feet of open floor space. Both sections have always been connected and functionally related; thus, they are inventoried as one contributing building. To ensure clarity and due to the fact that each section has distinctive architectural features, they will be described separately below.

Main Building Façade (south elevation)

There are two boarded former entrances with removed steps on the ground floor of the façade. Each entrance has four sidelights. The majority of the façade is characterized by four sets of large multilight metal windows, symmetrically placed on each of the building's six levels. The two inner sets of windows are recessed and have thirty lights within metal frames; many panes are currently missing. Brick veneer is located below each window's concrete sill. At either end of the façade are slightly projecting sections, almost suggesting the appearance of pilasters, topped with a molded concrete cornice. The twenty-four-light windows within the pilaster sections are surrounded with brick veneer. All windows have concrete sills (Photo 1)

East Elevation

Each floor has nine sets of multi-light industrial style metal multilight windows. It mimics the façade with the two end sets of windows surrounded by brick and joined with decorative concrete pilasters culminating in an arched concrete cornice. A five-story metal fire escape is attached to the middle of the elevation (Photo 4).

North (rear) Elevation

The majority of the elevation has four sets of multilight metal windows on each level. The ground level is characterized by an above grade concrete loading dock with a poured concrete porch and sheltered by a concrete overhang, which extends the length of the building. Remnants of a rail line run along the loading dock, as it did historically when this area was used to load and unload materials (Photo 3).

West Elevation

The majority of this elevation is characterized by multilight metal windows. It is attached to the annex building in the middle by a six-story brick veneer connector with a bank of single light windows and a concrete belt course at the top of each level.

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Interior

All floor plans are identical.² The floor are entirely open except for the large square poured concrete columns dividing the space into structural bays. Ceiling heights are identical on the upper floors. The stairs are located in the vertical circulation in the east wall of the middle north-south bay. The floor is reinforced concrete, walls are exposed brick or concrete painted white, and ceilings are reinforced concrete. A small section by the original main entrance on the first floor has wood paneling on the walls. Photos 5-7, 9, 13, 17

Annex Façade (south elevation)

This building is six stores high. The ground level of the building has a concrete base and ground level entrances on either end. The left entry is bricked, and the right door is wood with single glass plate covered by security bars. The exterior walls of this building are a deep red brick veneer laid in running bond. The façade wall has deep vertical recesses for six-light windows up through the fifth story which are contained within brick pilaster strips. The center portion of this facade has five of these window bays while the flanking portions have flat surfaces punctured with window openings. The third story windows are bricked in.

There is applied “Prairie style” terra cotta decoration on the pilasters between the fifth story windows. The original windows are of steel sash with frosted safety glass. The lights pivot about a horizontal axis and are composed in groups of eight and ten lights in a single band across the north, east and west facades. On the first floor there are two levels of lights due to the increased ceiling height. The windows have concrete sills. There are windows midways between floors in the stairway on the east side. A common bond single chimney stands at the northeast corner of the building’s roof. Photo 1

West Elevation

This elevation’s fenestration is primarily characterized by seven banks of vertical-pane metal pivot windows with concrete sills and a concrete stringcourse above on each floor. A small number of windows have been replaced with wood double-hung sash. The majority of the windows have ten lights. The windows in the southern-most bay have five lights; this section is topped by a continuation of the cornice from the façade. Photo 2

North Elevation (Rear)

The fenestration on the rear elevation consists of three sets of multilight metal framed windows on each of the six floors. This rear elevation has an above grade concrete dock for unloading materials from railroad cars, covered by a concrete overhang. There are four delivery entrances on the north elevation and have overhead steel garage doors. Photo 3

East Elevation

The east elevation matches the west elevation and is primarily characterized by banks of multilight windows with concrete sills and concrete stringcourse on each level. This design is also on the connector to the main building, which is located about halfway down this elevation.

² The third and fifth floors were inaccessible at the time of the survey but are presumed to be identical based on available documentation.

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Interior

All floor plans are identical although later partitions have been inserted on some levels. The basement is inaccessible. The standard floor plans are open except for the large round poured concrete columns dividing the space into structural bays. Ceiling heights are higher on the first floor and identical on the upper floors. The stairs are located in the vertical circulation in the east wall of the middle north-south bay. The flooring is reinforced concrete, walls are exposed brick painted white, and ceilings are reinforced concrete. There is graffiti throughout.

The cable elevator is located just to the west of the stairway. Its opening is on the north side of the elevator shaft, and it has a cage door on the cab and a large bi-fold door at each level. The elevator's location allowed it to be used for the main building and the annex. Photos 8, 10-12, 14-16, 18-19.

Roof

The flat roof is surrounded by a parapet wall. On the north, east and west sides the parapet is an extension of the brick wall below. On the south front the parapet is reinforced concrete. The covering is built-up tar and gravel. The main building has a brick elevator tower topped by a metal water tower located on the east side of the building.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

N/A

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
less than 50 years old or achieving
- G significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Industry

Commerce

Period of Significance

1911-1971

Significant Dates

1914

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Hanker & Cairns

Maier, George W.

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The J. R Watkins Products Building is being nominated under Criterion A in the areas of Industry and Commerce for the major role the buildings played in the Watkins Company, a major manufacturer and distributor of household goods. The building essentially acted as a regional headquarters, including a company office where Watkins direct sales representatives were organized, and a laboratory for development of new products. The annex was used to manufacture the company’s products. The Period of Significance begins in 1911 with the construction of the first extant building and ends in 1971 when the property was sold to the United Warehouse company after the business declined.

Narrative Statement of Significance

The industrial development of Memphis Tennessee was centered in the area where Watkins Products building is located even though little evidence remains today. The official survey of the property states it is on Lots 6 & 7 and Parts of Lots 11, 12, & 13, an alley and Block 23 of the original town of Ft. Pickering.³ This area had earthwork mounds built by ancient indigenous peoples and used by the historic Chickasaw people, a band led by Chief Chisca. The former fort site is located within what is now the Chickasaw Heritage Park (NR Listed 11/25/1997). The Memphis bluffs were home to a number of military fortifications, including French Fort Assumption was built by French colonists and militia in 1739, Spanish Fort Fernando de las Barrancas, and early American Fort Adams. The first Fort Pickering, a frontier station and trading post, was built in 1798 and remained in operation until 1814. A small town named Ft. Pickering grew up around the fort and was incorporated in 1843. The Irish settled there and after the war, free blacks settled there as well. The City of Memphis annexed the area in 1878.⁴



Figure 1: Map of the city of Memphis: including Fort Pickering and Hopefield, Ark: together with the original grants and their subdivisions, 1868. Accessed January 26, 2026, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/resource/g3964m.la002025/?r=0.321,0.022,1.218,0.499,0>.

³ “Lots 6 & 7 and Parts of Lots 11, 12, & 13, an alley and Block 23, Original town of Ft. Pickering.” ATLS/ACSM Land Title Survey, *Shroyer Engineering Company*, Memphis, TN, May 1999.

⁴ Robert Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street* (Memphis, Memphis State University, 1979), 104; Susan J. Haun and Charles McNutt, “Chickasaw Heritage Park,” National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1997); William Patton, *A Guide to Historic Downtown Memphis* (Charleston: The History Press, 2010), 84.

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By 1890, the growth of railroad transportation contributed to the development of the South Bluffs area into an industrial and commercial center. In 1892, the cantilevered truss Frisco Bridge was completed, making it the third longest bridge in the world and the first bridge on the river below St. Louis. The railroad bridge became a major route of freight and passengers from Memphis west to Arkansas. The line was served by Union Station (built 1912, demolished 1969), and Central Station at Calhoun and Main, which opened in 1914.⁵

Memphis's location and transportation networks soon allowed it to become a major distribution center with the fifth largest wholesale market by the early 1890s. Wholesale businesses included grocers, such as the Piggly Wiggly grocery chain founded by Clarence Saunders; bakery and flour distributors; farm machinery companies, such as International Harvester; and hardware wholesalers, including the Orgill Brothers. Most of these businesses were located in the South Bluffs Warehouse District.⁶ In the early twentieth century, the Watkins Medical Company joined Memphis by building the nominated property, one of Memphis's tallest industrial buildings.

In 1868, Joseph Ray Watkins founded the J.R. Watkins Medical Company in Plainview, Minnesota, a town located about twenty miles northeast of Rochester. He started by manufacturing liniment in his home's basement in Maine Prairie Township. The company's first product was a liniment for aching muscles using camphor and capsaicin (the chemical that makes chili peppers "hot"). The liniment remains one of the company's biggest sellers.⁷

A year after introducing his liniment, Watkins created the "Trial Mark" bottle, believed to be the country's first-ever money-back guarantee. It allowed customers to return a product as long as the bottle's contents were still above a mark located about one-third of the way from the top of the bottle. The company moved to Winona, Minnesota in 1885 and added a number of products to its lineup. Baking materials including pepper and vanilla extract were added in 1895, followed by cinnamon, ginger, cloves, peppermint extract, lemon extract, and numerous other food stuffs.⁸

Watkins chose to build the manufacturing facility in Memphis after learning more about the city from Colonel L.F. Peters, commissioner of the Industrial League, an organization dedicated to industrial development, whose responsibilities were later subsumed by the Chamber of Commerce. Watkins later explained that he had also investigated locations at Atlanta, Georgia; Dallas, Texas, and other southern cities before choosing Memphis due to its strength as a distribution center. Watkins chose a location near the railroads and the Mississippi River, which were the main modes of transportation at that time. It was located on Iowa Street (later Crump

⁵ Sally Jones and Robin Bodo, "South Bluffs Warehouse Historic District," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1986), Section 8; Vance Lauderdale, "From the Vault: Building the Frisco Bridge," Memphis Magazine (June 9, 2021), accessed March 10, 2026, <https://memphismagazine.com/ask-vance-from-the-vault-building-the-frisco-bridge/>.

⁶ Jones and Bodo, "South Bluffs Warehouse Historic District." As noted in the nomination, Memphis continued to advertise itself as "America's Distribution Center" as of the nomination's acceptance in 1986.

⁷ "21st Century Watkins Man," *Twin Cities Business*. Accessed January 7, 2025. <https://tcbmag.com/21st-century-watkins-man>.

⁸ Ibid; Watkins Company, "Our History," accessed March 10, 2026, <https://www.watkins1868.com/pages/our-history>.

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Boulevard) which later evolved into a major highway. He purchased the warehouse's lot for \$8,000 in 1905.⁹ Documentation indicates that the first building for the Watkins Company was built soon after. It was a one-story frame building comprised of two sections.¹⁰

By 1910, the Watkins Medical Company moved to make a substantial investment in their Memphis location. In December 1910 they announced plans to build a large six-story office, laboratory, and warehouse building (see Figure 2). Designed by Memphis architectural firm Hanker & Cairns, the building was constructed of fireproof reinforced concrete with a floor load of 125 pounds per square foot. The sixty thousand square foot building was designed to easily accommodate an addition. Completed in 1911, the building cost approximately \$100,000. Other than its size, its most notable characteristics are the multilight windows and detailing at the corners, suggestive of towers.¹¹



Figure 2: Image of the Proposed Watkins Medical Company Building, 1910. From *The Commercial Appeal*, December 7, 1910.

⁹ "Distributing Warehouse to be Located in Memphis," *The Commercial Appeal*, December 15, 1905; Sigafos, *Cotton Row to Beale Street*, 86; "Will Build Factory Here," *The Commercial Appeal*, December 1, 1910.

¹⁰ Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1907. From Library of Congress.

¹¹ "Will Build Factory Here," *The Commercial Appeal*, December 1, 1910; "Among the Many Fruits of the Big Memphis Publicity Campaign, Waged by the B.M.C.," *The Commercial Appeal*, December 7, 1910;

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Though J.R. Watkins died in 1911, the company rapidly expanded. The success of the Memphis location led to its expansion almost immediately. The Watkins company hired Midwest architect George Washington Maher to design an annex. Maher was born in 1864 and his career stretched from the 1880s to his death in 1926. He served as a draftsman to Frank Lloyd Wright and, like Wright, was a leader in the Prairie School aesthetic.¹²

The concrete and brick annex manufacturing building contained sixty thousand square feet across six stories. It was connected to the earlier building via a narrow hyphen. The annex's design was engineered to withstand a load of six hundred pounds per square foot to ensure that it could hold the machinery and chemical vats needed to manufacture Watkins' products. In keeping with Maher's preferred style and the building's function, he designed the annex with a relatively simple expression of the Prairie style with four engaged columns, inset within a five-story recessed portion of the façade. The remaining elevations were primarily dominated by horizontal bands of concrete and symmetrically placed groupings of windows to allow light into the massive interior. The annex cost approximately \$100,000 and was completed in 1914 (see Figures 3-4).¹³

By 1915, Watkins was the world's largest direct-sales company, and the Memphis location played a major role in the company, both as a regional branch headquarters and through its role in manufacturing Watkins products; it often held the rank of the company's second largest producer. By the 1920s and 1930s, the company had 128 product offerings and operations in eight U.S. and Canadian cities. The Watkins Company sold its products directly to consumers through door-to-door salespeople, known as the "Watkins man" or "Watkins woman." Memphis-area job advertisements seeking salespeople directed interested people to write to the Watkins office in Memphis and promised earnings averaging between \$25-\$35 weekly due to the popularity of the company's products. Advertisements included positions in Memphis and nearby counties in Tennessee, Arkansas, and Mississippi.¹⁴

¹² J. R. Watkins Building, Crème de Memph, accessed November 17, 2025, <https://cremedememph.blogspot.com/2020/03/jr-watkins-warehouse.html>; Kathleen Ann Cummings, "The Architect," The George W. Maher Society, accessed March 10, 2026, <https://georgemaher.org/about-george-w-maher/>.

¹³ Richard H. Hulan and Robert C. Giebner, "J.R. Watkins Building," Historic American Buildings Survey No. TN-179 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1972, 1985); "The March of Growing Memphis," *The Commercial Appeal*, May 25, 1913; "Memphis is Praised," *The Commercial Appeal*, September 26, 1913; "Buildings Sold by Watkins," *The Commercial Appeal*, November 28, 1971.

¹⁴ "21st Century Watkins Man," *Twin Cities Business*, accessed January 7, 2025, <https://tcbmag.com/21st-century-watkins-man>; "Watkins Products," *The Commercial Appeal*, February 10, 1937; Employment Advertisement, *The Commercial Appeal*, February 2, 1936; Employment Advertisement, *The Commercial Appeal*, April 14, 1935; Kate Roberts, "J.R. Watkins Company," *MNopedia*, Minnesota Historical Society, accessed March 10, 2026, [https://www.mnhs.org/mnopedia/search/index/group/j-r-watkins-medical-company#:~:text=In%201885%2C%20the%20rapidly%20expanding,a%20range%20of%20baking%20goods](https://www.mnhs.org/mnopedia/search/index/group/j-r-watkins-medical-company#:~:text=In%201885%2C%20the%20rapidly%20expanding,a%20range%20of%20baking%20goods;); "Watkins Men Gather," *The Commercial Appeal*, January 13, 1966.

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Figure 3: Excerpt from the May 13, 1914, edition of The American Architect, with J.R. Watkins' Memphis facility pictured at the bottom. From Josh Whitehead, "J. R. Watkins Building", Crème de Memph, Accessed November 17, 2025, <https://cremedememph.blogspot.com/2020/03/jr-watkins-warehouse.html>.

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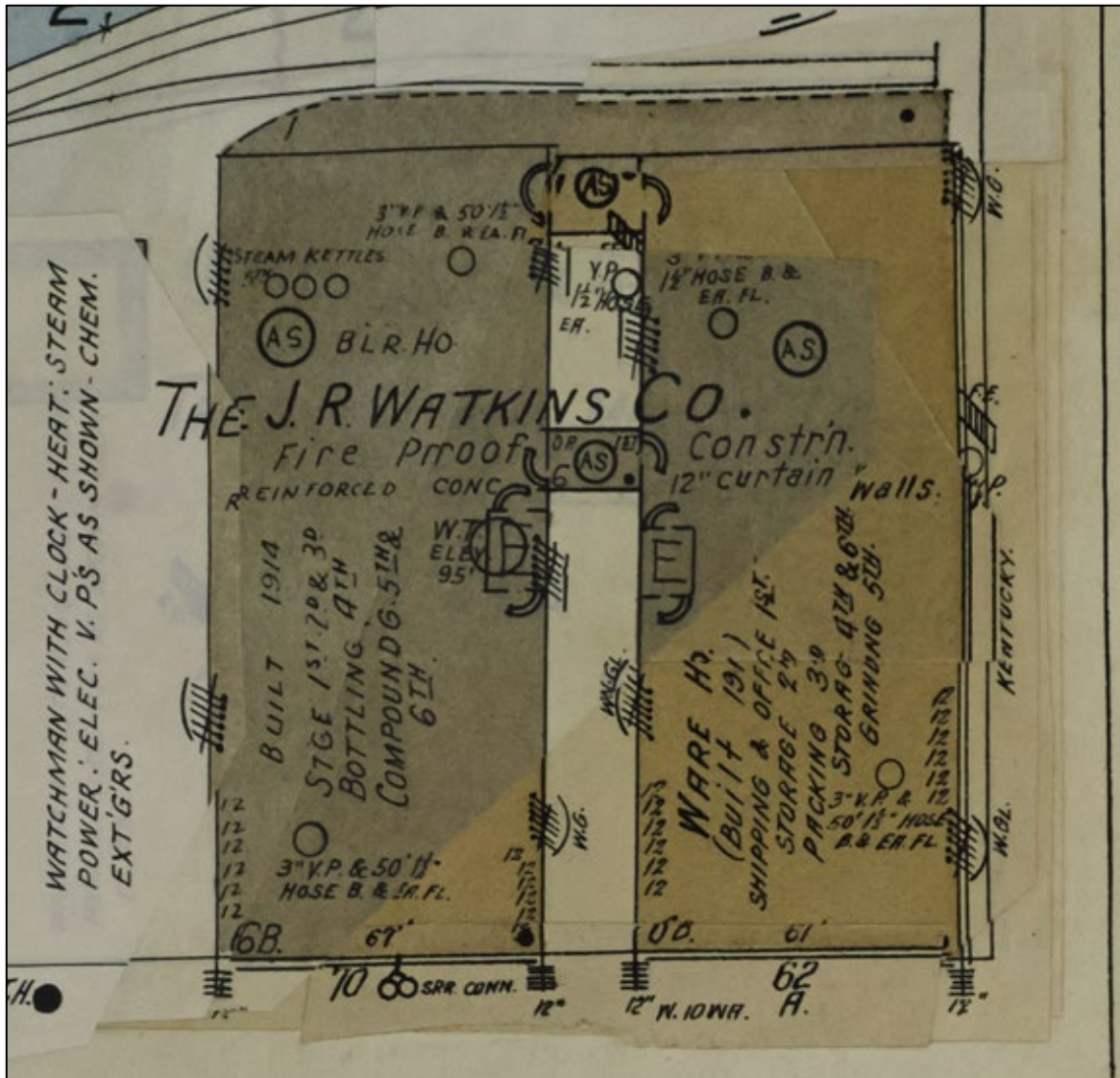


Figure 4: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Image of the Watkins Company Building, 1950. From the Library of Congress.

In the 1930s, the company also opened an experiment farm in Memphis, patterned off one outside of its Winona, Minnesota headquarters. The farm served as a laboratory where the company experimented with growing crops used in Watkins products to lower costs from importing them internationally. It is likely that the farm was also used to test insecticides, since that became the Memphis facility's manufacturing specialty.¹⁵

By 1940, Watkins had more than 10,000 salespeople selling more than 200 products. During World War II, Watkins devoted 90% of its production capacity to support the Allied war effort. To fill government contracts,

¹⁵ "Watkins Farm Plans Nearing Completion," *The Commercial Appeal*, November 15, 1939; "Watkins Plant Here Figures in Sale," *The Commercial Appeal*, February 8, 1962.

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Watkins produced dried eggs, powdered juice packets, vitamin tablets, hospital germicide, and DDT and other insecticide powder.¹⁶ The Watkins company further encouraged use of its products by selling cook books full of recipes that could be made using its foodstuffs.¹⁷

Competition increased from the vast number of consumer products introduced following World War II. To better compete, Watkins increased their reach through mail order catalogues. By 1953, Watkins products were sold in the United States, Canada, South Africa, and Australia.¹⁸

In the early 1960s, the Watkins Company sold the majority of its stock to Charles Pfizer & Co., a major pharmaceutical company. Press coverage speculated whether Pfizer would expand the Memphis plant to produce some of its products, in addition to the Watkins brand products.¹⁹ However, the plant was not expanded, and the Watkins Company declined throughout the rest of the decade. According to a later company Chief Executive, the company failed to see the changing demographics of how consumers purchased products, and the prominent role women played in the marketplace and workforce. As the rates of female employment increased, it left nobody at home to purchase products from Watkins' door-to-door salesforce. Manufacturing activities in Memphis were discontinued in 1966 and moved back to the company's headquarters in Winona. The company filed for bankruptcy protection in the 1970s, and the Memphis facility was sold to United Warehouse in 1971.²⁰

United Warehouse has a long history as well. The company was founded by A.F. Jones and A.S. Parks in Wichita, Kansas in 1915. The company stored a variety of products, including automobiles, farm equipment, and paper. Lee B. Jones became president in 1937 and led the company into a period of growth. In 1945, United Warehouse Company began utilizing new propane lift trucks for increased speed, accuracy and efficiency. In 1955, United broke ground on a new 250,000 square foot facility that quintupled the original warehouse size in order to meet customer demand. In 1960, Kate Jones became president and oversaw the addition of new amenities such as flatbed trucking, rail car unloading, dry van trucking and other first-time services. It was during this time they acquired the Memphis facility.²¹

¹⁶ "21st Century Watkins Man," *Twin Cities Business*, accessed January 7, 2025, <https://tcbmag.com/21st-century-watkins-man>; "Our History," Watkins Company, accessed March 10, 2026, <https://www.watkins1868.com/pages/our-history>; Robert M. Frame III, "J.R. Watkins Medical Company Complex," National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1984).

¹⁷ *Watkins Cook Book* (Winona, MN: The J.R. Watkins Company, 1938), accessed March 10, 2026, <https://archive.org/details/watkinscookbook0000jrwa/page/n1/mode/2up>; Elaine Allen, *Watkins Salad Book* (Memphis: The J.R. Watkins Company, 1946).

¹⁸ "Our History," Watkins Company, accessed March 10, 2026, <https://www.watkins1868.com/pages/our-history>;

¹⁹ "Watkins Plant Here Figures in Sale," *The Commercial Appeal*, February 8, 1962.

²⁰ "History," *United Warehouse*, accessed January 10, 2026, <https://www.unitedwarehouse.com/about-united-warehouse/history>; "Real Estate Transfers," *The Memphis Press-Scimitar*, December 3, 1971; "Buildings Sold by Watkins," *The Commercial Appeal*, November 28, 1971; "21st Century Watkins Man," *Twin Cities Business*, accessed January 7, 2025, <https://tcbmag.com/21st-century-watkins-man>

²¹ "History," *United Warehouse*, accessed January 10, 2026, <https://www.unitedwarehouse.com/about-united-warehouse/history>.

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About the time that the property was sold, this distinctive building was attracting notice in the historic preservation community. The below 1971 letter from John Poppeliers at HABS to William Gaskill, local architect, inquired as to whether the Watkins warehouse was still standing at the time (see Figure 5).

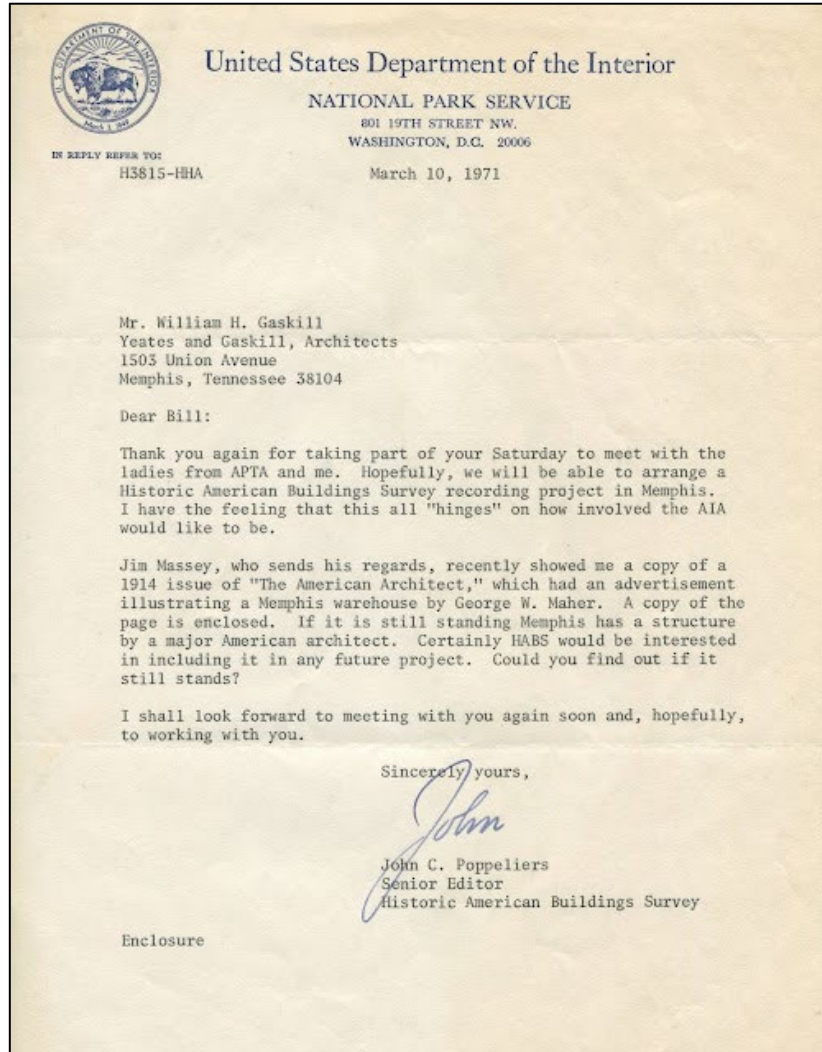


Figure 5: HABS letter to architect William Gaskill. From Crème de Memphis, <https://cremedememph.blogspot.com/2020/03/jr-watkins-warehouse.html>.

According to his obituary in the *Washington Post*, Mr. Poppeliers served as senior editor at the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) for nine years; created during the Great Depression, HABS was a joint effort by the Park Service, the Library of Congress and the American Institute of Architects to catalog the country's historic buildings. A Fulbright scholar, he later worked at UNESCO. As for the late William Gaskill,

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his most lasting work may very well be the Simmons Bank Liberty Stadium in Memphis.²² It was sold a few months later on November 15, 1971, to the United Warehouse and Terminal Corp. Despite the former owners' misgivings, as stated in the letter in Figure 4 below, this property was recorded by HABS in 1974 (see Figure 6-7). The documentation focused on the Maher-designed Annex building, clearly not realizing that it was actually the younger of the two sections as it mislabeled the Maher building as the original building and the earlier Hanke & Cairns building as an addition.²³

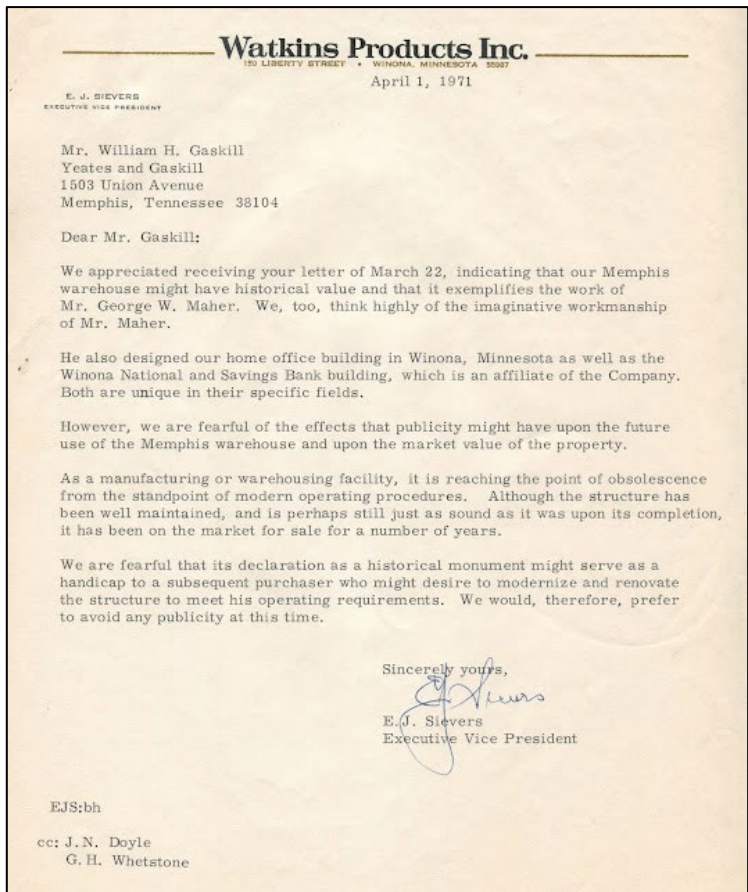


Figure 6: Response letter to Mr. Gaskill from Watkins Company. From Crème de Memph, <https://cremedememph.blogspot.com/2020/03/jr-watkins-warehouse.html>

United Warehouse sold the property to the current owner in 2013. A new buyer is acquiring it for mixed-use redevelopment. The surrounding area is experiencing revitalization and the listing will make the Historic Tax Credit available to assist in redevelopment of this historically important building.

²² Josh Whitehead, J. R. Watkins Building, Crème de Memph, Accessed November 17, 2025, <https://cremedememph.blogspot.com/2020/03/jr-watkins-warehouse.html>

²³ Richard H. Hulan and Robert C. Giebner, "J.R. Watkins Building," Historic American Buildings Survey No. TN-179 (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1972, 1985).

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9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

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Shroyer Engineering Company. Lots 6 & 7 and Parts of Lots 11, 12, & 13, an alley and Block 23, Original Town of Ft. Pickering.” ATLS/ACSM Land Title Survey, Memphis, TN, May, 1999.

Sigafoos, Robert. *Cotton Row to Beale Street*. Memphis, Memphis State University, 1979.

United Warehouse. “History.” Accessed January 10, 2025. <https://www.unitedwarehouse.com/about-united-warehouse/history>.

Whitehead, Josh. “J. R. Watkins Building”. *Crème de Menth*. Accessed November 17, 2025. <https://cremedememph.blogspot.com/2020/03/jr-watkins-warehouse.html>.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):		Primary location of additional data:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)	X	State Historic Preservation Office
<input type="checkbox"/>	previously listed in the National Register		Other State agency
<input type="checkbox"/>	previously determined eligible by the National Register	X	Federal agency
<input type="checkbox"/>	designated a National Historic Landmark		Local government
X	recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # TN-179		University

Watkins, J.R., Products Building
Name of Property

Shelby, TN
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	recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #		Other
	recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #	Name of repository: National Park Service	
Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):			

Watkins, J.R., Products Building
Name of Property

Shelby, TN
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property 1.02 **USGS Quadrangle** Northwest TN, Ark

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum: WGS84

A. Latitude: 35.125145 Longitude: -90.064777

B. Latitude: 35.125257 Longitude: -90.064219

C. Latitude: 35.125250 Longitude: -90.063756

D. Latitude: 35.124820 Longitude: -90.063764

E. Latitude: 35.124848 Longitude: -90.064791

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary for the J. R. Watkins Building is illustrated on accompanying maps. The boundary corresponds to the legal parcel boundary for Shelby County Parcel 012044 00004C. The property is approximately bounded on the west by an alley, on the north by an abandoned rail line on the north, West E. H. Crump Boulevard to the south, and Kentucky Street to the east. The latitude/longitude coordinates noted above correspond to the approximate corners of this boundary.

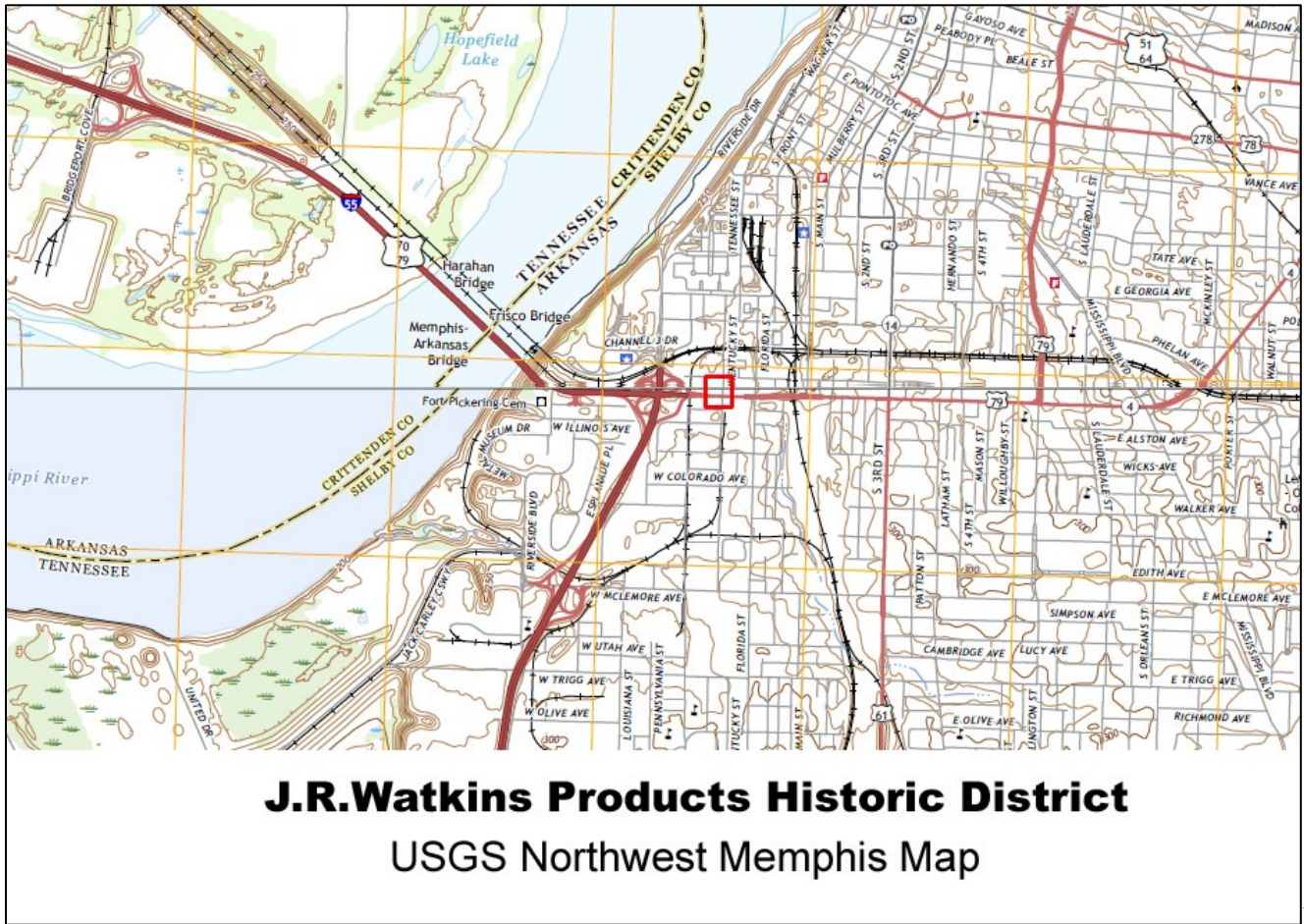
Boundary Justification

The boundary for this property was chosen because it encompasses the resources historically associated with the property.

Watkins, J.R., Products Building
Name of Property

Shelby, TN
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USGS Topographic Map

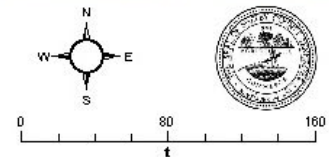


The approximate location of the J.R. Watkins Products Building is indicated by the bold red rectangle centered on the map. Original Map Scale 1:24,000

Watkins, J.R., Products Building
Name of Property

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Boundary Map



The National Register Boundary is depicted by the bold red polygon, accompanied by the keys for the latitude/longitude coordinates noted in Section 10. Map courtesy of the Shelby County Property Assessor Viewer.

Watkins, J.R., Products Building
Name of Property

Shelby, TN
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

Name Judith Johnson; Rebecca Schmitt (Tennessee Historical Commission)

Organization J. Johnson & Associates

Street & Number 475 S. Perkins Rd. #612 Date January 10, 2025

City or Town Memphis Telephone 901-603-0054

E-mail judithjohnson73@gmail.com State TN Zip Code 38117

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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National Park Service

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Watkins, J.R., Products Building
----- Name of Property
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Photo Log

Name of Property: J. R. Watkins Products Building

City or Vicinity: Memphis

County: Shelby

State: TN

Photographer: Bill Yerian

Date Photographed: August 2024

Description of Photo:

- 1 of 19 Façade of main building and annex. Photographer facing north
- 2 of 19. West elevation of annex building with parking lot in foreground. Photographer facing northeast.
- 3 of 19. Oblique view of Annex's west elevation of annex and the rear/north elevations of annex and main building. Photographer facing southeast.
- 4 of 19. Oblique view of east and north elevations of main building. Photographer facing southwest.
- 5 of 19. First floor entry area of main building. Photographer facing west.
- 6 of 19. First floor area of main building. Photographer facing north.
- 7 of 19. Main building to annex pass through. Photographer facing west.
- 8 of 19. Annex first floor. Photographer facing north.
- 9 of 19. Second floor of main building. Photographer facing south.
- 10 of 19. Second floor of annex. Photographer facing north northwest.
- 11 of 19. Third floor of annex. Photographer facing northwest.
- 12 of 19. Third floor of annex facing passage to main building. Photographer facing east.
- 13 of 19. Fourth floor of main building. Photographer facing north.
- 14 of 19. Fourth floor of annex. Photographer facing north.
- 15 of 19. Fifth floor of annex. Photographer facing north.

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- 16 of 19. Fifth floor of annex facing passage to main building. Photographer facing east.
- 17 of 19. Sixth floor of main building. Photographer facing south.
- 18 of 19. Sixth floor of annex. Photographer facing north.
- 19 of 19. Annex Roof. Photographer facing south.

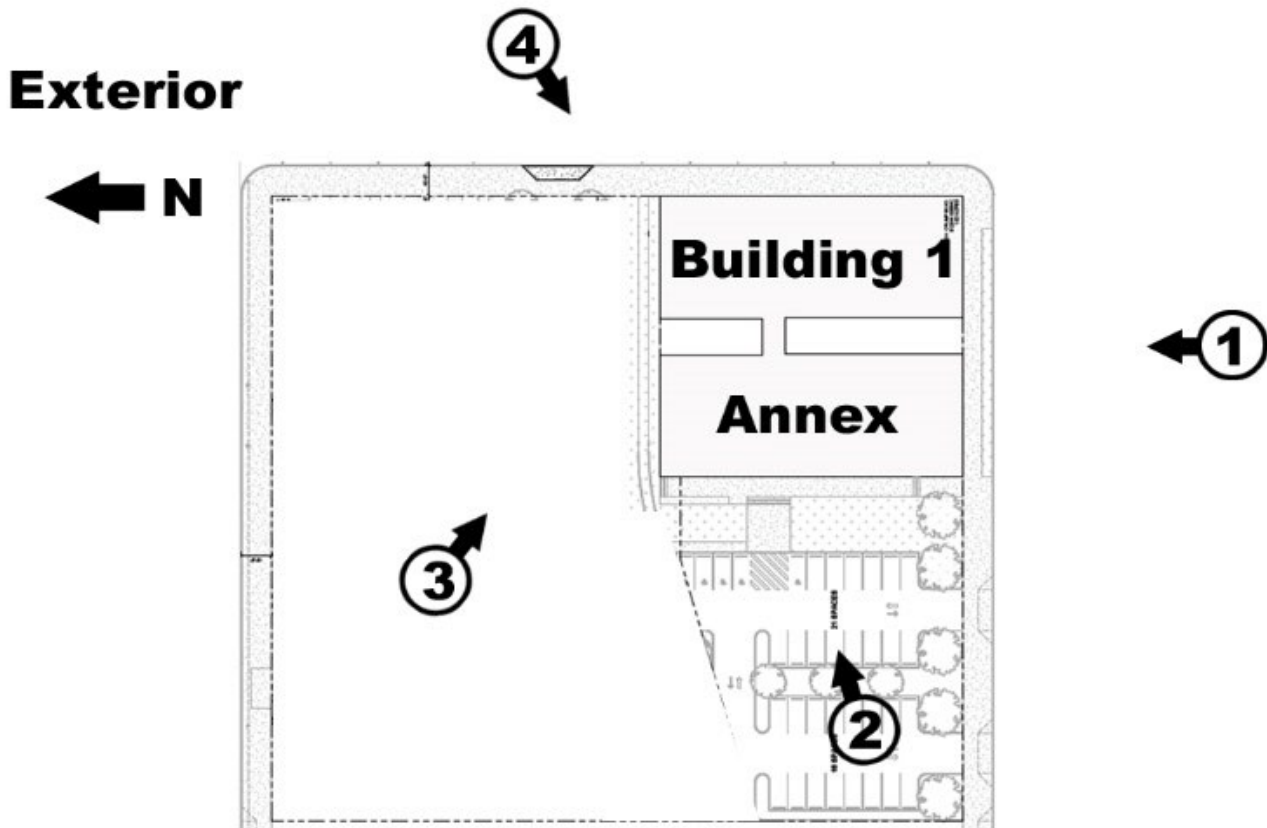
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Site Plan



J.R. Watkins Products Building

Floor plans

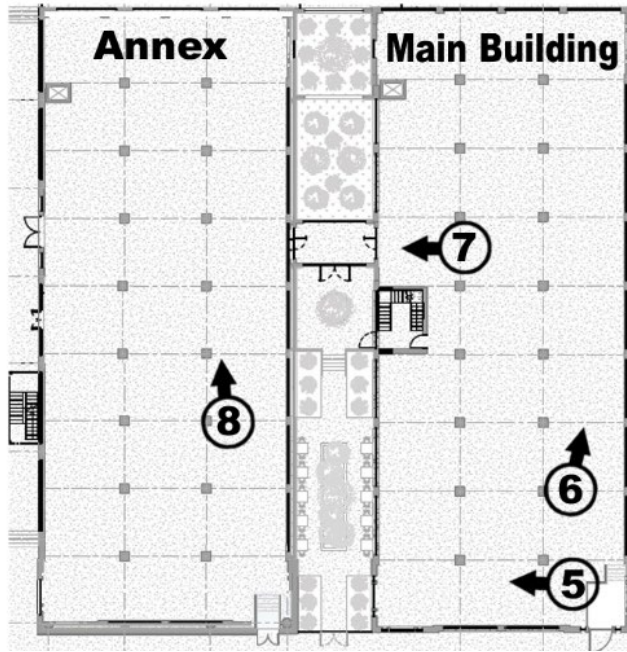
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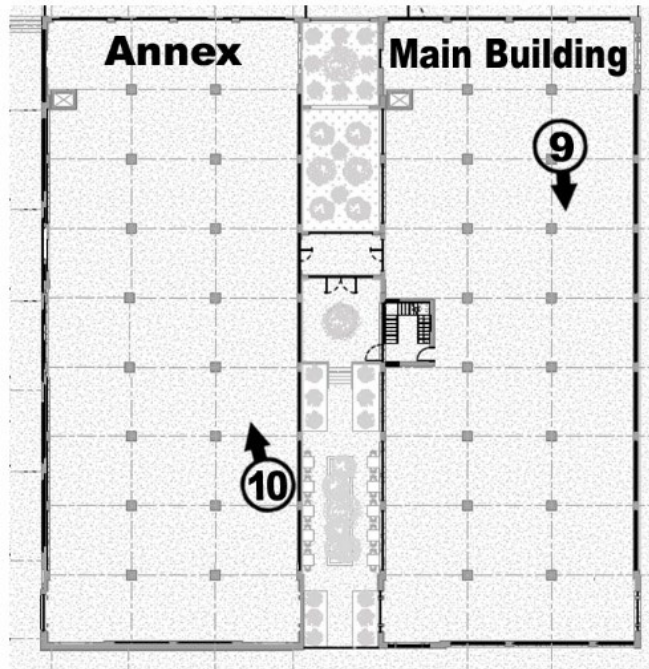
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Floor 1



Floor 2



J.R. Watkins Products Building

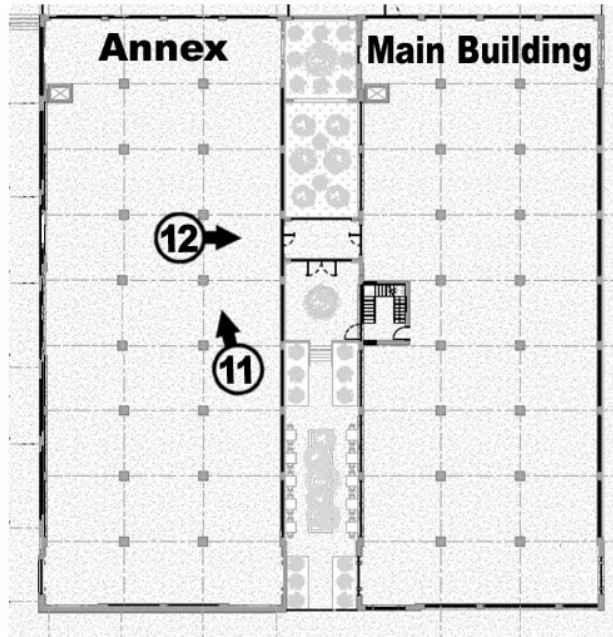
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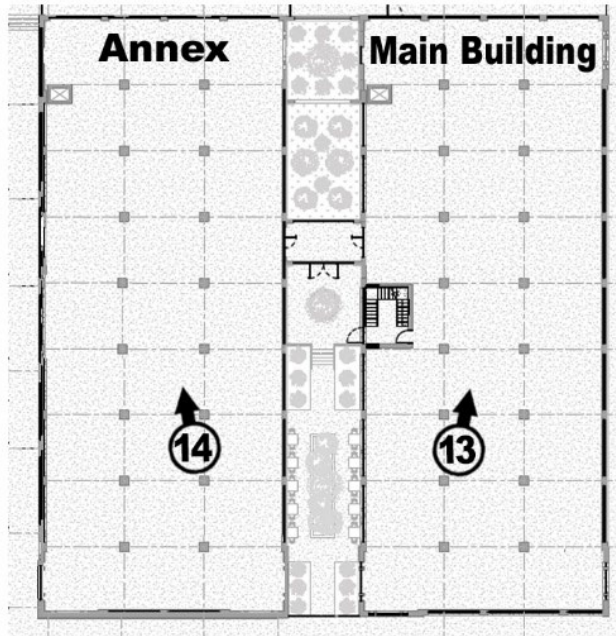
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Floor 3



Floor 4



J.R. Watkins Products Building

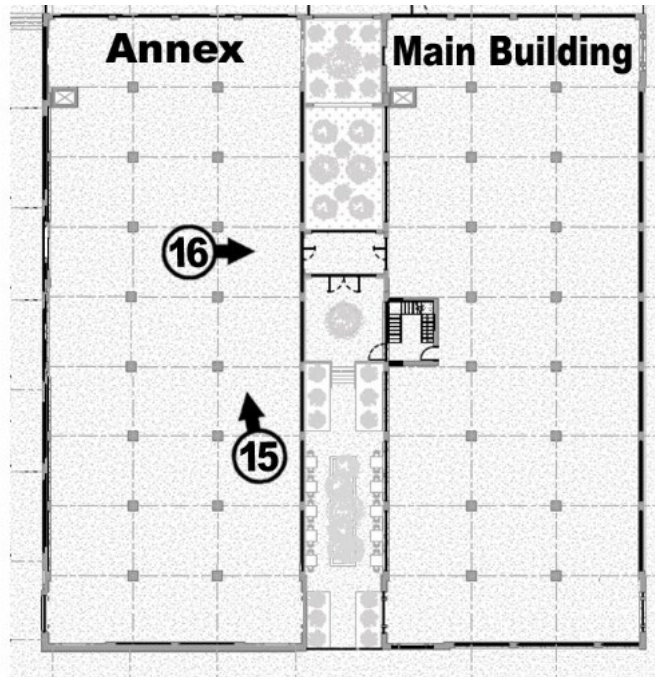
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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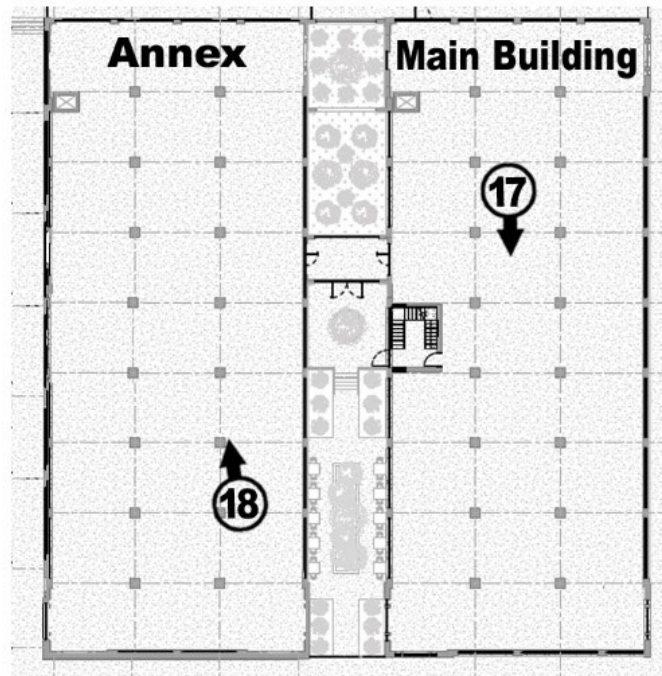
Watkins, J.R., Products Building
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Floor 5



Floor 6



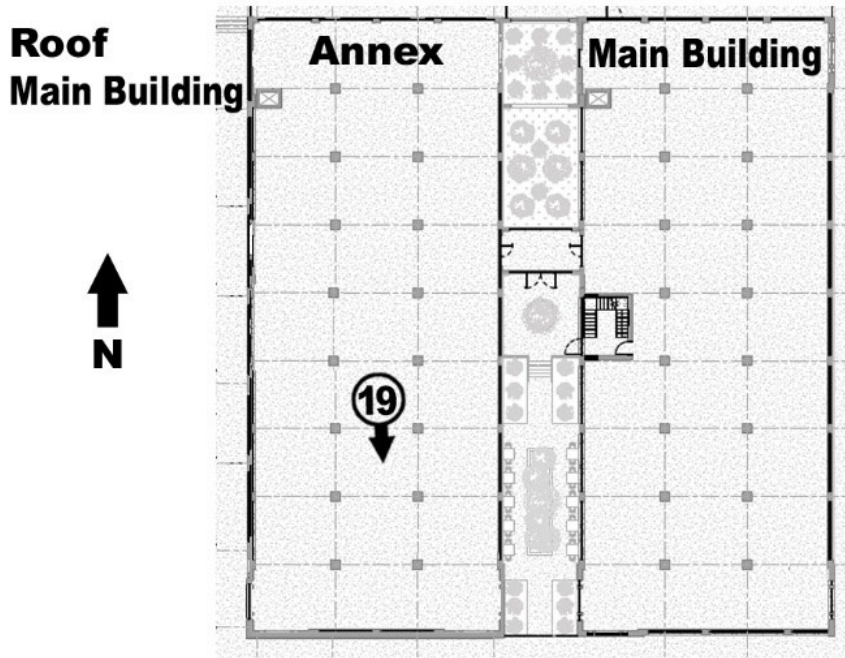
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Figure 7: Photo from the HABS Collection, 1974, shortly after United Warehouse purchased it. Whitehead, Josh. "J. R. Watkins Building", Crème de Menth, Accessed November 17, 2025. <https://cremedememph.blogspot.com/2020/03/jr-watkins-warehouse.html>.

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Figure 8 Mural on United Warehouse Memphis, Downloads\United Warehouse _ Memphis, Tennessee _ Decal art of a little girl_ Flickr.mhtml

Property Owner(s):

(This information will not be submitted to the National Park Service, but will remain on file at the Tennessee Historical Commission)

Name **Harahan Land Company LLC**

Street &

Number **823 E. Holmes Road**

Telephone _____

City or Town **Memphis, TN**

State/Zip _____

38116

**J.R. WATKINS PRODUCTS BUILDING
MEMPHIS, SHELBY COUNTY, TENNESSEE**



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**J.R. WATKINS PRODUCTS BUILDING
MEMPHIS, SHELBY COUNTY, TENNESSEE**



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