

**United States Department of the Interior**  
**National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places**  
**Continuation Sheet**

Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills

Name of Property

Providence County, Rhode Island

County and State

73000005

NR Reference Number

**State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this   X   additional documentation        move        removal  
       name change (additional documentation)        other

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.



Digitally signed by Jeffrey D.  
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Date: 2022.04.26 14:16:45  
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/Interim SHPO

26 April 2022

Signature of Certifying Official/Title:

Date of Action

**National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

  X   entered in the National Register

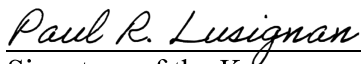
       determined eligible for the National Register

       determined not eligible for the National Register

       removed from the National Register

  X   additional documentation accepted

       other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_



Signature of the Keeper

05/25/2022

Date of Action

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## 7. DESCRIPTION

### Summary Paragraph

The Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills complex was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1973, as a district with Areas of Significance "Industry" and "Architecture"<sup>1</sup> and a period of significance encompassing the 19<sup>th</sup> century with specific dates 1827, 1833, 1859, and c. 1900. The property was also included in the multiple property listing entitled "Historic Resources of Woonsocket, Rhode Island: Partial Inventory, Historic and Architectural Resources" which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. As described in the 1973 nomination form, the Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills complex in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, is situated below Front Street on the steeply-sloping bank of the Blackstone River between Bernon and Court streets. When the nomination for the district was originally submitted, it did not include the two-story, brick Garage constructed in 1904 on the southeast corner of the site, despite it being old enough to be considered for listing in the National Register. Additionally, a portion of a concrete Power House, constructed between 1903 and 1911 to the south of the #2 Mill and adjacent to the power trench, was not mentioned in the nomination form, though it is located within the original district boundary.

The area included in the 1973 nomination comprised all the land and buildings formerly belonging to the Woonsocket Company between Court and Bernon streets. As nominated for the National Register, the complex consisted of five buildings: #1 Mill ("B" on nomination map); #2 Mill ("D"); #4 Mill ("A"); the Power Plant ("C"); and a commercial building at 125 Court Street ("F"). A former Power Trench ("E") was also considered a contributing resource to the district. Currently, the #1 Mill, #2 Mill, #4 Mill, the commercial building at 125 Court Street and a portion of the Power Trench are extant. Around 2008, the Power Plant was demolished, and a portion of the Power Trench filled. The parking area to the east of the mills was included within the 1973 nomination boundary.

This amendment to the nomination extends the boundaries of the Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills Historic District to definitively include the two-story brick Garage (c.1904; map letter G)<sup>2</sup> and the extant portion of the concrete Power House (c.1903-1911; map letter H), as well as a small Gatehouse (c.2007; map letter I) at the Front Street entrance, affording all of the buildings that were historically associated with the Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company and its successor, the Blackstone Valley Gas and Electric Company, later the Blackstone Valley Electric Company, recognition. Additional research and documentation have required the re-evaluation of these resources for their contribution to the mill complex.

<sup>1</sup> National Register Criteria were not included in the 1973 nomination; however, the Areas of Significance "Industry" and "Architecture" would correspond to today's Criteria A and C, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> The 1973 map is noted as not being drawn to scale, however, it appears that the Garage may be within the boundary, despite not being mentioned in the nomination.

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**Narrative Description**

The following description and inventory follow the general format set out in the 1973 National Register nomination form for the Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills Historic District. The following narrative description addresses two categories of resources: those that have been newly added since the 1973 nomination form (Garage, Power House, Gatehouse) and that which has been demolished since the 1973 nomination form was completed (Power Plant), and therefore was removed from the resource inventory count.

The Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills is located on an irregularly-shaped parcel between the Blackstone River and Front Street in the heart of Woonsocket. The approximately 3.74-acre property is bounded on the north by Court Street (Route 122) and a paved parking area, on the east by Front Street and the rear lot lines of buildings on that street, on the south by Bernon Street, and on the west by the Blackstone River.

**AMENDED/ADDED RESOURCES**

*Garage (Map letter G) (1904)*

When the Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company acquired the former Woonsocket Company complex in 1887, several improvements were made to the site in order to accommodate the needs of the new owner. Among these improvements was the construction of a two-story-plus-basement brick Garage in 1904. Sited closer to Front Street and further upslope than the mill buildings, the brick Garage replaced an earlier 19<sup>th</sup>-century wood-framed wagon shed on the site. The building first appears on the 1911 edition of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. The Garage, like most of its counterparts, is a utilitarian industrial building with no extensive architectural ornament. The Garage was not mentioned or included within the boundary of the 1973 nomination, despite the fact that the building is located on the same parcel as the #1 and #4 Mills and was constructed by the company which took ownership of the property in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Occupying a rectangular footprint at the southeast corner of the property, the Garage is set on a concrete foundation and rises two stories to a flat EPDM roof featuring a high parapet on the west side.<sup>3</sup> On the south side, a shallow roof overhang is supported by exposed rafter tails wrapped in tin. The Garage is constructed of red brick with a combination of wood, brick and concrete trim. The building is fenestrated with segmental-arched window openings with arched, header-course, brick lintels and concrete sills on all elevations. Window openings are set with a combination of historic and non-historic, 6-over-6, double-hung, wood sash windows on the second floor and fixed, 6-lite, wood windows on the first floor; several of the openings have been infilled with plywood or concrete masonry units (CMU). The second southernmost bay at the second story on the west elevation appears to have originally been a door; there is an extant concrete sill with brick infill and a non-historic window above.

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<sup>3</sup> The parapet wall is flat now but, based on the photo in Figure 2, it appears to have had a taller center section historically.

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The primary elevation faces north and is six bays wide. The main entrance to the building, located in the center of the north elevation, is a loading entrance with clipped top corners embellished with stepped brick trim,<sup>4</sup> set with a non-historic, four-lite, paneled metal overhead garage door. There is an auxiliary pedestrian entrance located in the westernmost bay of the north elevation at the basement level, accessed via an exterior concrete staircase flanked by concrete walls that at one point after the 1930s were the foundation for an entrance enclosure. The pedestrian entrance is set with a non-historic, wood door. There is an additional historic loading entrance recessed in the easternmost bay on the second floor of the north elevation. This entrance is topped with a metal I-beam lintel and set with historic double-leaf, four-lite, wood paneled loading doors. Historically, it was accessed by an automobile ramp that has since been removed. Architectural ornamentation is minimal and generally limited to the north façade. Here, decorative elements are created using brick and include a triangular hydropower emblem constructed of projecting painted headers, and a metal plaque printed with "WOONSOCKET ELECTRIC MACHINE & POWER CO." centered above the main entrance bay.

The interior of the Garage features an open floor plan with exposed I-beams, heavy timber beams, a combination of wood and steel columns, and exposed brick perimeter walls. The basement is primarily a utilitarian space, with non-historic finishes. The first floor has textured concrete floors and the ceiling is open, exposing the heavy timber beams, wood decking, deep steel I-beams and various mechanical and industrial structures above. A metal spiral staircase near the center of the building provides access to the second story. The spiral staircase does not appear to be original; it sits on what appears to be a new concrete pad and the opening in the ceiling also appears to be new. Additionally, Figures 1 and 2 show that the building historically had an exterior metal staircase and concrete ramp leading to the historic wood paneled loading doors located in the easternmost bay at the second floor, which would have provided a means of circulation between floors. The spiral staircase was presumably added after the exterior staircase and ramp were removed.

The second story has a combination of original wood plank and concrete flooring, with a single row of circular wood support columns running east-to-west through the center of the floor plate. From below, the floor on the second level appears to have pans built into it, which were presumably used for automotive work. The ceilings on both floors of the Garage are flush wood boards (possibly tongue-and-groove). There is an elaborate steel roof truss system on the second floor, supporting the wood ceiling beams above. Some rehabilitation of the interior of the second story was completed during the c.2007-2008 redevelopment of the site.

*Power House (map letter H) (c.1903-1911; portion remains)*

Among the other improvements made by the Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company after they acquired the Front Street property in 1887 was the demolition of the #3 Mill in about 1900 for the construction of a new power plant (demolished 2008), and the construction of a concrete Power House

<sup>4</sup> This represents a change from the opening as shown in the 1932 photo shown in Figure 1. The opening appears to have been shrunk not long before this photo was taken; there is evidence of repointing and a clear difference in the brick treatment immediately surrounding the entrance. There is currently a steel lintel five courses up from the current top of the door, which comprises the top of the steel garage door frame.

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south of the #2 Mill between 1903 and 1911. The 1970s HABS photographs show the building as a one-story structure with a flat roof and paired 3-over-3 sash windows. The Power House was located within the original 1973 District boundaries but was not referenced in the nomination form.

The western portion of the building adjacent to the river remains, set into the slope of the site, below the grade of the mill buildings and primarily visible from the opposite side of the river. The extant portion is accessed by a concrete staircase and pathway located south of the #2 Mill. The foundation has two arches that allow water to flow underneath the structure. The window and door openings are infilled with plywood and concrete block, and there is much deterioration along the roofline.

The original hydropower system for the site drew water from Bernon Pond, which was impounded by Bernon Dam, located just to the south of the Bernon Street Bridge, south of the industrial site. Woodcuts from 1851 and 1855<sup>5</sup> show water returning to the river from under the west sides of the #1 and #2 Mills, indicating that the power trench must have fed the #1 Mill prior to the #2 Mill being constructed over it. The #2 Mill has an infilled arched opening east of the center of its south wall. By 1903, heat and power in the complex were provided by coal-fired steam, as indicated on a 1903 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map<sup>6</sup>.

*Gatehouse (map letter I) (c. 2007)*

The Gatehouse is a small, one-story, wood-frame building constructed c.2007 at the eastern end of the property, along Front Street. The rectangular-shaped structure sits on a poured concrete foundation and is sheathed in wood clapboards. A single door opening set with a wood paneled door on the north elevation provides access to the interior of the building. The building is fenestrated with rectangular window openings set with fixed, single-lite windows. Flat wood trim marks the corners and base of the building, as well as the door and window openings. The Gatehouse has an overhanging hipped roof covered with asphalt shingles.

**DEMOLISHED/REMOVED RESOURCES**

*Power Plant (map letter C) (c.1900-1930; demolished c.2008)*

The 1973 nomination includes a brick Power Plant constructed in 1900 and expanded c.1910, located between the #1 and #2 Mills. The Power Plant was demolished circa 2008 and the area where it stood is now primarily covered by a paved parking and grassed area.

<sup>5</sup> Historic American Buildings Survey, Creator. *Woonsocket Company's No. 1 Mill, 100 Front Street, Woonsocket, Providence County, RI*. Historic American Buildings Survey Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, Summer 1971. Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record HABS RI, 4-WOON, 2-8, 2-9.

<sup>6</sup> Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Map of Woonsocket, Providence County, Rhode Island*. New York, NY.

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

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**Summary Paragraph**

The Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills (district) was originally listed in the National Register of Historic Places in a nomination prepared in 1972 (NRHP Reference No. 73000005, signed by the Keeper of the National Register on January 3, 1973), with significance at the local level under National Register Criterion A in the area of Industry and Criterion C in the area of Architecture, and a period of significance encompassing the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The purpose of this amended nomination is to clarify and extend the Period of Significance of the district to 1827 through 1968, to extend from the construction of the earliest building on the site (#1 Mill), through the years that the Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company (WEM&P) and its successor, the Blackstone Valley Gas and Electric Company (BVG&E), occupied the site, during which time the nominated property was in continuous industrial use.

Established in 1883, WEM&P played an integral role in the spread of electrical service in Woonsocket in the late-19<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The company quickly became the city's leading local power supplier after being awarded a contract in 1890 by the Woonsocket City Council to light the city for the next five years. In addition to lighting all of Woonsocket, WEM&P also supplied electricity to the Massachusetts towns of Blackstone, East Blackstone, and Millville. In 1912, WEM&P merged with three other public utilities based in Woonsocket and Pawtucket to create the BVG&E. Following the merger, BVG&E was responsible for supplying gas and electricity to most of the Rhode Island municipalities located in or near the Blackstone Valley.<sup>7</sup> The buildings added to the Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills Historic District inventory through the change to the Period of Significance were associated with the earlier industrial buildings on the site and thus contribute to the site's rich industrial history.

In addition to the extension of the Period of Significance, the National Register documentation for the Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills Historic District is being amended to clarify the boundary of the nominated property and update the inventory to reflect both of these changes. The boundary is more precisely illustrated to clarify that it extends east to Front Street and south to the existing property line, correcting the roughly-drawn 1973 district boundary, which does not conform to existing parcel boundaries. The 1973 nomination contained five buildings and one structure. The refined boundary encompasses three additional buildings to better represent the continuum of industrial operations that occurred on the site: two contributing resources dating from the early-20<sup>th</sup> century and one non-contributing resource constructed c.2007 to the east of the 1973 boundary.

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<sup>7</sup> "Industrial, Gas and Miscellaneous," *The Commercial & Financial Chronicle*, February 1, 1913, 363.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

**CRITERION A: INDUSTRY**

**Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company/Blackstone Valley Gas and Electric Company**

The Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills complex is a well-preserved example of 19<sup>th</sup> century textile mill construction, which was later adapted for 20<sup>th</sup> century hydropower use. Following the dissolution of the Woonsocket Company in 1883, the mill complex on Front Street sat vacant until 1887, when the property was purchased by the Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company (WEM&P), the city's local lighting utility and predecessor to the Blackstone Valley Gas & Electric Company (BVG&E). WEM&P and BVG&E continued to operate the site as a power generating station for the next 65+ years, while also leasing space to a variety of 20<sup>th</sup> century manufacturers, including Reliance Worsted, Macrodi Fibre Co., Woonsocket Spinning Co., Hemond, Inc., Perforated Pad Co., and Apex Weaving Co.

The Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company was originally incorporated as the Manufacturers' Foundry, Machine & Power Company in May of 1882.<sup>8</sup> Just one year later, the name of the corporation was changed to the Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company, by an Act passed at the January 1883 session of the Rhode Island General Assembly.<sup>9</sup> The Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company was officially incorporated on April 12, 1883, with a capital stock of \$250,000.<sup>10</sup> The officers were as follows: President, A. W. Buckland; treasurer and general manager, L. C. Lincoln; superintendent, Frank S. Pond; chief engineer, Alvin A. Jewell; assistant engineer, John Green; directors, A. W. Buckland, L. C. Lincoln, E. K. Ray, S. P. Cook, C. E. Thomas, James Murray, J. B. Farnum, Wm. Kent, and Oscar J. Morse. Shortly after purchasing the former mill complex of the Woonsocket Company in 1887, WEM&P was awarded a contract by the Woonsocket City Council for lighting the city for the next five years. By 1892, the company had 283 arc and 4,775 incandescent lights in use, with over 1,000 poles and 44 miles of arc wires, and over 40,000 pounds of incandescent wire throughout Woonsocket. The company also supplied the Massachusetts villages of Blackstone, East Blackstone and Millville with both arc and incandescent lights.<sup>11</sup> The 1892 publication, *Industries and wealth of the principal points in Rhode Island...* praised the Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company, recognizing them "as one of those beneficial and praiseworthy institutions that do credit to the new city."<sup>12</sup> WEM&P experienced a sharp increase in demand for electricity from new and expanding industries during the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>8</sup> *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, Providence, RI: State of Rhode Island, 1912, 452.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> *Industries and wealth of the principal points in Rhode Island: Being city of Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Woonsocket, Newport, Narragansett Pier, Bristol and Westerly*, (1892), New York, NY: A.F. Parsons Pub, 241.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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At the time the mill complex was purchased by WEM&P in 1887, the property comprised six acres of land, eight buildings, and four tenement houses. Additionally, the plant was equipped with one 700-horsepower (HP) Corliss engine, one 200-HP Corliss engine and four Armington & Sims engines of 125, 50, 50 and 65-HP respectively; also, two 100-HP Corliss upright boilers, and four 140-HP horizontal boilers; one 252-HP water wheel, and another of 70-HP; and eighteen dynamos, five of which were used for direct incandescent lighting, four for alternating incandescent lighting, four for commercial arc lighting, and five for street arc lighting.<sup>13</sup> The plant was supplied with electric motors, as well as rooms with heat and power for general manufacturing purposes.

Beginning in 1887, WEM&P made several improvements to the site in order to convert the former textile manufacturing plant into a power generating station. The company retained and re-purposed the #1 Mill #1, #2 Mill, #4 Mill, and various outbuildings and structures. In 1887, engines and dynamos were installed in the #1 Mill and 300 HP of waterpower was supplemented by steam, supplying incandescent and street arc lamps. Around 1888, the #5 Mill building was constructed as an engine and boiler house to the south of #1 Mill. Two years later, a brick boiler house with four 140-HP horizontal boilers and a 140 ft. tall chimney was built contiguous with #1 and #5 Mill on the river side of the property. Around 1900, the #3 Mill was demolished and replaced by a brick steam power plant (demolished c.2008) located on the river between the #2 and #5 Mills. The building was outfitted with two 750-HP engine-generators, eight horizontal boilers, and a 150 ft. tall chimney.

In 1904, the Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company erected a two-story brick Garage on the southeast corner of the property (Figures 1 & 2), on the site of an earlier wood-frame wagon shed. An article published in a 1904 issue of *Motor Age* under the headline "Garage for Woonsocket," described how "The Woonsocket Electric Machine Power Co., of Woonsocket, R. I., is establishing a garage on Front Street, near Central avenue [sic]. It will include charging room, and there will be room for twenty cars in the garage."<sup>14</sup> The 1911 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company map (Figure 3) shows the building as being two stories with a basement and constructed of brick. The map also reveals that the interior of the building was outfitted with automatic sprinklers manufactured by the Grinnell, Estey & Rockwood Company for fire protection. The construction of the Garage directly coincided with the construction of a new concrete, two-unit hydroelectric Power House (Figure 4) on the river to the south of #2 Mill, between 1903 and 1911, a portion of which is still extant. The brick hydropower emblem projecting from the façade of the Garage is most likely a reference to the company's use of hydroelectric power for the production of electricity.

Between 1903 and 1911, the riverbank at the west of the property was filled approximately 30 feet and the steam station extended the same amount to the west. It is likely that all water turbines were removed from #2 and #4 Mills at this time. In 1907, Stone & Webster, an electrical testing lab and consulting firm based in Boston, took over the management of the Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company.<sup>15</sup> In September of 1912<sup>16</sup>, a formal announcement was made regarding the merger of four public utilities

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> "Gossip of the Garages," *Motor Age* 5 (1904): 20.

<sup>15</sup> "Electric Lighting," *Electrical Review* 51 (October 5, 1907): 569.

<sup>16</sup> An act creating the Blackstone Valley Gas & Electric Company was signed by Governor Aram Pothier on April 23, 1912 (unpublished *Allaire Files*, Woonsocket Harris Public Library, "utilities" file).



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based in Woonsocket and Pawtucket, Rhode Island, into the Blackstone Valley Gas & Electric Company.<sup>17</sup> At the time, all of the utilities were controlled by the Stone & Webster Company and the merger was for the purpose of centralizing the financing and management. The four utility companies that were consolidated under BVG&E were the Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Co., the Woonsocket Gas Co., the Pawtucket Electric Co., and the Pawtucket Gas Co.

The Woonsocket Gas Co. was organized on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 1852, under a charter granted at the May session of the General Assembly in 1851. The original capital was \$25,000, which was soon afterward increased to \$80,000.<sup>18</sup> The company's original gas works was located just north of the Woonsocket Co./Bernon Mills site but was removed when the Court Street Bridge was constructed in 1895. By 1889, the company was had about 30 miles of mains and supplied around 33,336,000 cubic feet of gas to 600 consumers in Woonsocket.<sup>19</sup> That same year, the General Assembly approved a petition by the Woonsocket Gas Co. to engage in electric lighting.<sup>20</sup> By 1892, the Woonsocket Gas Co. was in negotiations with WEM&P relative to consolidation.<sup>21</sup> The Woonsocket Gas Co. discontinued electric service in 1896 and by 1897 had sold all of its lines and generating equipment, presumably to WEM&P, though no official record of the sale has been found. Stone & Webster was appointed manager of the Woonsocket Gas Co. on November 12, 1907.

Industrial production had increased tenfold during the war years, catapulting BVG&E to the forefront of Rhode Island's rapidly evolving electricity industry. Rapid advancements in technology coupled with improvements in transportation and communication had brought unprecedented access to customers across the country. Following the merger, BVG&E "furnished gas and electricity for municipalities located in or near the Blackstone Valley, Rhode Island, including the entire gas and central station electric lighting and power businesses in the thriving cities of Pawtucket and Woonsocket; also Central Falls, Lincoln, Cumberland and North Smithfield, R. I., and other adjacent towns."<sup>22</sup> Based on the 1910 Census, the company served a population of about 150,000.<sup>23</sup> BVG&E was a crucial force in the modernization of Woonsocket's industrial base during the interwar years, during which time the company underwent a period of unprecedented growth.

During the 1920s, Blackstone Valley Gas & Electric built a transformer house and substation to the northwest of the steam power plant. BVG&E continued to utilize the #1 Mill as offices, shops and storage during this time. The power generating equipment and the dam located just upriver of the complex was removed in 1930, though BVG&E continued using the buildings for offices and storage into the 1950s. In the late 1950s, in response to a SEC divestiture order, BVG&E was forced to divest itself of its gas division. This divestiture occurred in several stages over the next decade. In 1965, the Rhode Island General Assembly amended BVG&E's charter, renaming the company the Blackstone

<sup>17</sup> "Financial," *Gas Age* 30 (September 16, 1912): 809.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Mather Bayles, *History of Providence County, Rhode Island*, Vol. 2, New York, NY: W. W. Preston & Co., 1891, 296.

<sup>19</sup> Bayles, 296.

<sup>20</sup> Allaire Files, Woonsocket Harris Public Library, "utilities" file.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> "Industrial, Gas and Miscellaneous," 363.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

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Valley Electric Company (BVE).<sup>24</sup> In 1963, the #2 Mill was sold to Hemond Incorporated, which used a portion the building for storage and office space, while leasing out the rest for textile manufacturing. A portion of #2 Mill continued to be utilized for textile manufacturing into the 1970s, making it one of the oldest operating textile mills in Rhode Island as of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition to functioning as the headquarters of the Woonsocket Electric Machine and Power Company and its successor, the Blackstone Valley Gas and Electric Company, later the Blackstone Valley Electric Company, the former Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills complex housed numerous other industrial manufacturing businesses from the late-19<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In 1888, WEM&P leased the #2 Mill to Valley Falls Mills as cotton print cloth weavery. In 1892, the Miller Press & Machine Co. occupied one floor of the #1 Mill, the Valley Falls Mills occupied the #2 and #3 Mills, and the #4 Mill was occupied by the Simson & Kirkaldy Worsted Manufactory. This occupancy remained the same until 1903, when Reliance Worsted took up space in the #4 Mill.<sup>25</sup> By 1911, WEM&P was occupying the entire #1 Mill and the newly constructed steam power station. During this time, the Macrodi Fibre Co. and Woonsocket Spinning Co. took up occupancy in the #2 Mill and the Perforated Pad Co. began leasing space in the #4 Mill. In the 1920s, the Macrodi Fibre Co. was purchased by the Manchester Co., which continued to occupy space in the #2 Mill. During the 1930s and 1940s, the Apex Weaving Co. also began leasing a portion of the #2 Mill.

**Woonsocket Co./Bernon Mills District Post-1968**

During the 1970s, Blackstone Valley Electric (BVE) continued to utilize the #4 Mill for office space and the #1 Mill for equipment storage. A portion of the #2 Mill continued to be utilized for textile manufacturing into the 1970s. A two-story connection with a basement was constructed c.1980 between the #1 Mill and #4 Mill, replacing an earlier structure that connected the two mill buildings. Between 2005 and 2007, the interior of the #2 Mill was converted to condominium units. The exterior of the building retains its historic appearance. The small Gatehouse constructed at the Front Street entrance to the complex, as well as the parking lots, driveways and footpaths, appear to date from this effort. The Power Plant and a portion of the Power House were demolished and the portion of the stone Power Trench immediately south of the #2 Mill was covered c.2008 with a paved parking lot. The remaining portion of the Power Trench is still visible along the far riverbank at the southwestern corner of the property. The gate opening and some elements of the gate structure are extant, but the opening has been partially blocked with a poured concrete wall. The remaining buildings retain their historic appearance. Currently, the #1 Mill, #4 Mill, the Garage, and the small commercial building at 125 Court Street, formerly occupied by Pierannunzi Shoe Repair Shop, are vacant, while the Power House is not in use.

<sup>24</sup> "Blackstone Valley Elec. Co. v. Stone & Webster, Inc., 867 F. Supp. 73 (D. Mass. 1994)," Justia US Law, November 7, 1994, <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/867/73/1456139/> (accessed February 25, 2021).

<sup>25</sup> Boucher, Jack E., Historic American Buildings Survey, Creator, *Woonsocket Company's No. 1 Mill, 100 Front Street, Woonsocket, Providence County, RI*, Historic American Buildings Survey Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, Summer 1971, Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record HABS RI, 4-WOON, 2-7, 4.

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Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills

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## #1 Mill and Slow-Burning Construction

Though the #1 Mill is included in the original nomination, subsequent scholarship related its employment of slow-burning factory construction techniques has added to the understanding of its significance and is worth including here. Early factory framing used joisted flooring, with heavy timbers supporting perpendicular joists over which floorboards were applied. In a fire, the joists presented plentiful edges to ignite, and holes burned through the flooring became chimneys that spread the fire vertically through the building.<sup>26</sup> In slow-burning construction, heavy timbers supported a thick, splined or tongue-and-groove plank subfloor with the finish flooring above. The flat underside of the subfloor was less prone to ignition, and if it did ignite, took longer to burn through than the comparatively thin flooring used with joists.

Prior to the 1970s, most accounts credited Zachariah Allen's 1822 mill at Allendale (North Providence, Rhode Island), as the earliest example of slow-burning factory construction in the United States.<sup>27</sup> Assertions to the contrary, however, began to appear in the first years of the 1970s, culminating in 1989, when Richard Candee published evidence to disprove this assertion. Candee's article in *IA, Journal of the Society for Industrial Archaeology*, showed, based on evidence uncovered in 1972, that the 1822 portion of Allen's mill had joisted floors and the earliest use of slow-burning construction at the site was in an 1839 addition. Candee's in-depth analysis of Allen's mill also included the statement that "the Woonsocket Company Number One Mill, begun in 1827, appears to be the earliest surviving example of unjoisted plank flooring in Rhode Island."<sup>28</sup> Candee's scholarship has led *Texture of Industry* author Patrick Malone to declare, "I think it is now safe to say that Bernon #1 is almost certainly the earliest surviving example of slow-burning construction in America."<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Robert B. Gordon and Patrick Malone. *The Texture of Industry: An Archaeological View of the Industrialization of North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994, 302. Gordon and Malone give a more thorough description of slow-burning technology and of the case for the Woonsocket Company #1 Mill being the earliest extant example on pages 302-306.

<sup>27</sup> Kulik, Gary and Julia C. Bonham. *Rhode Island: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites*. Washington, D.C.: Historic American Engineering Record, 1978: 8, 129, 270-271.

<sup>28</sup> Candee, Richard M. "The 1822 Allendale Mill and Slow-Burning Construction": *IA, Journal of the Society for Industrial Archaeology* 25, 1989: 21-23.

<sup>29</sup> Malone, Patrick, correspondence with Jeffrey Emidy, November 2021.

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Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills

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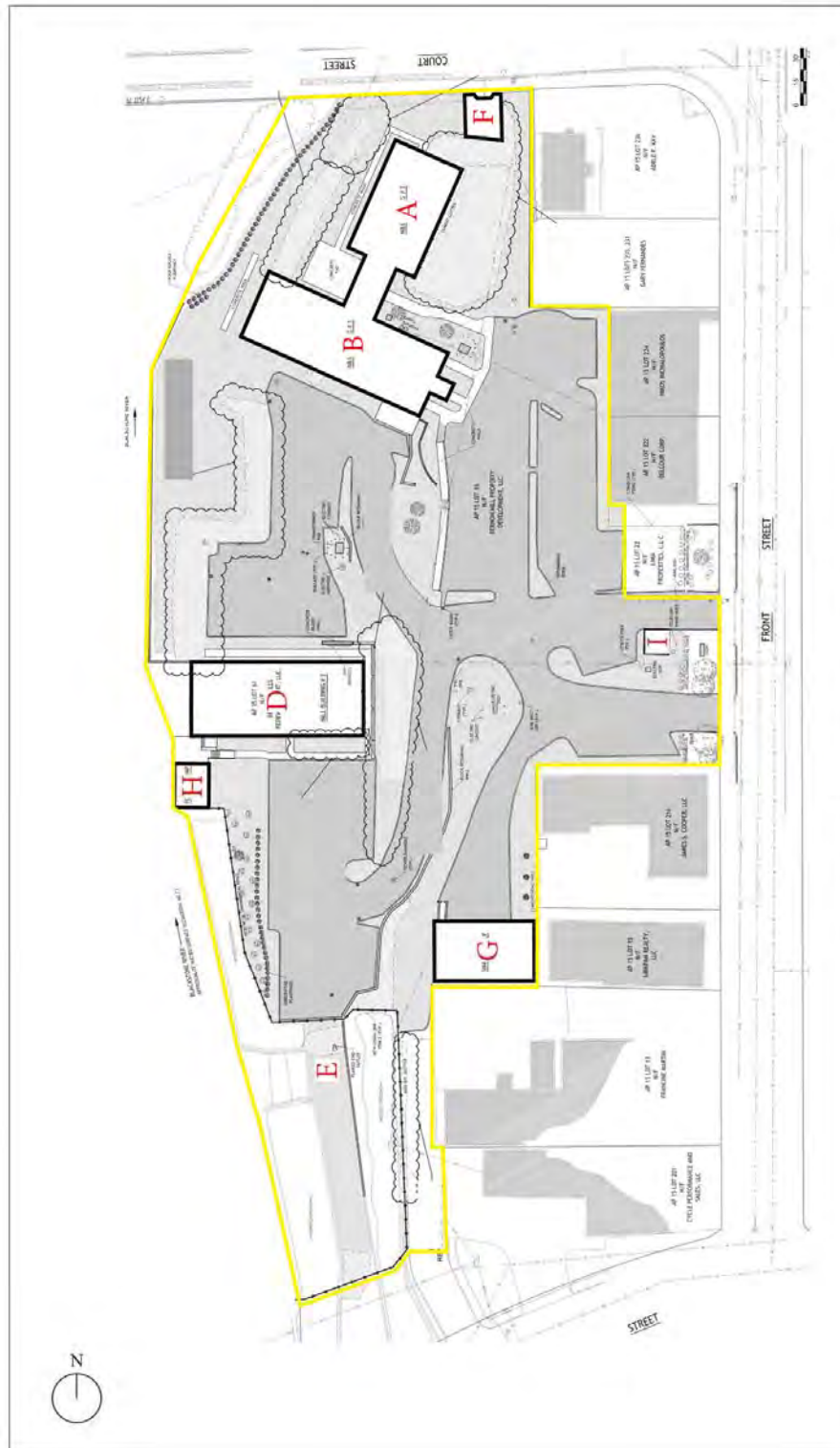
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**Site Plan**



National Park Service  
National Register Nomination Amendment  
Boundary Increase

Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills  
Front Street  
Woonsocket, Rhode Island 02895

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Figures



Figure 1: Historic photo showing the Garage's north elevation in 1932. Source: private collection of Jeffrey Emidy.



Figure 2: Early-20<sup>th</sup> century photo showing the Garage's north and west elevations. Source: private collection of Jeffrey Emidy.



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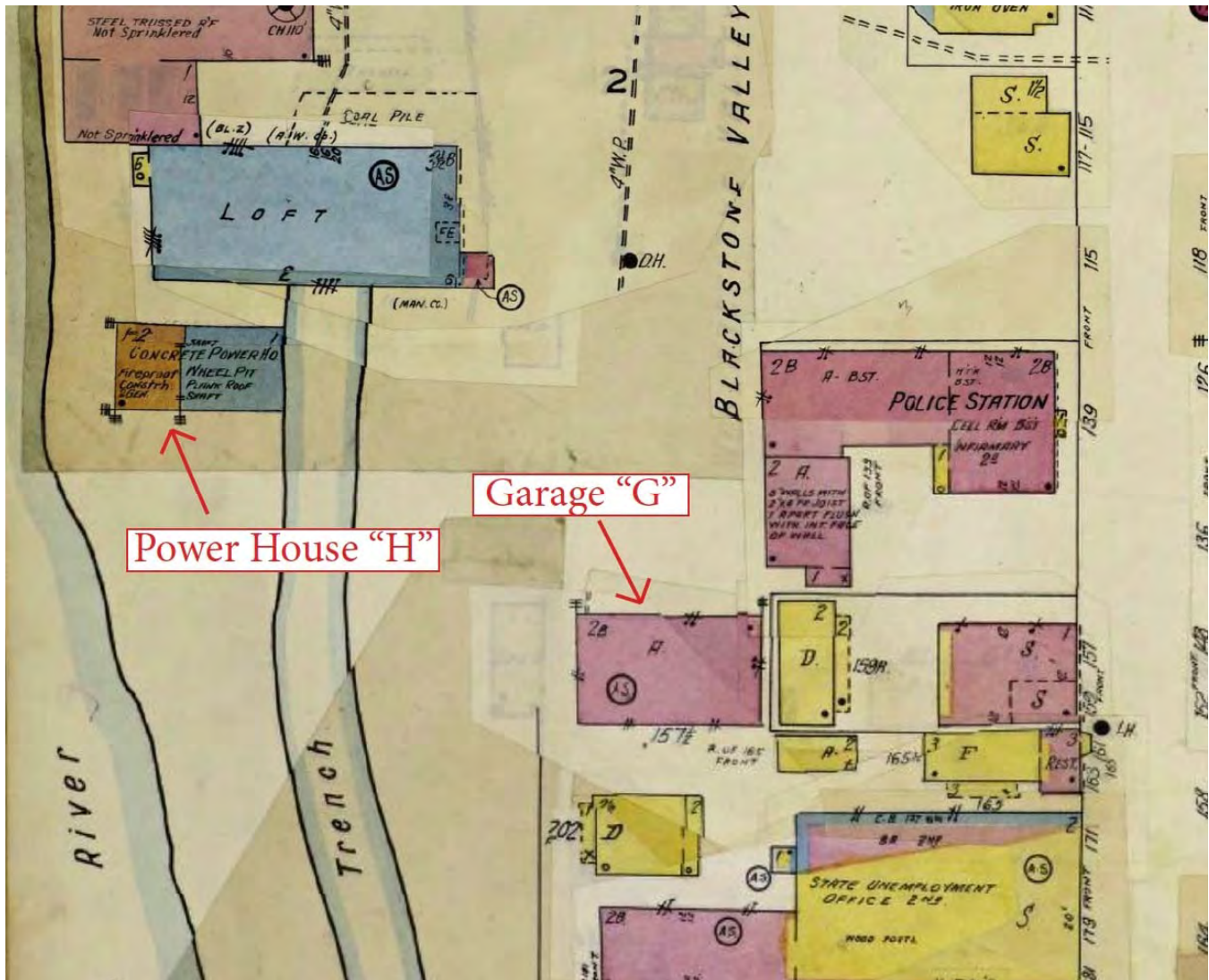


Figure 3: Sanborn Fire Insurance Co. map, 1911-Nov 1950, showing the Garage and Power House.

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Figure 4:<sup>30</sup> May 1969 HABS photo (Survey HABS RI-301) showing the Power House at right.

<sup>30</sup> Historic American Buildings Survey, Creator, *Woonsocket Company, No. 2 Mill, 115 Front Street, Woonsocket, Providence County, RI, Woonsocket, Providence County, Rhode Island, 1933, Photograph*, <https://www.loc.gov/item/ri0288/> (accessed March 5, 2020).

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**Photo Log**

Name of Property: Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills

City or Vicinity: Woonsocket

County: Providence

State: Rhode Island

Photographer: Kim Smith

Date Photographed: February 2021

Photograph 24: Photographer: Jeffrey Emidy

Photograph 24: Date Photographed: April 19, 2021

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 30: # 1 Mill (left) and #4 Mill (right), east elevations, facing northwest
- 2 of 30: # 1 Mill, east and north elevations (left) and c.1980 brick connector (right), facing southwest
- 3 of 30: # 1 Mill, south elevation, facing northeast
- 4 of 30: #4 Mill (left) west elevation and # 1 Mill (right), north and west elevations, facing south
- 5 of 30: # 1 Mill, third floor, facing northwest
- 6 of 30: # 1 Mill, third floor, facing west
- 7 of 30: # 1 Mill, attic, facing west
- 8 of 30: #4 Mill east elevation (left) and 125 Court Street south elevation (right), facing northwest
- 9 of 30: #4 Mill, north and west elevations, facing southeast
- 10 of 30: #4 Mill, second floor, facing north
- 11 of 30: #4 Mill, attic, facing northeast
- 12 of 30: #2 Mill east and north elevations, facing southwest
- 13 of 30: #2 Mill (left) and #1 Mill (right), south and east elevations, facing northwest
- 14 of 30: #2 Mill south elevation, facing north
- 15 of 30: #2 Mill fourth floor, facing northwest
- 16 of 30: #2 Mill fourth floor, facing south
- 17 of 30: #2 Mill (left) and Power House (right), north and west elevations, facing southeast
- 18 of 30: Power House, east and north elevations, facing southwest
- 19 of 30: Garage, north elevation, facing south
- 20 of 30: Garage, west elevation, facing east
- 21 of 30: Garage, first floor, facing southwest
- 22 of 30: Garage, first floor, facing north
- 23 of 30: Garage, second floor, facing northeast
- 24 of 30: Extant portion of stone Power Trench, facing south
- 25 of 30: 125 Court Street, east and north elevations, facing southwest
- 26 of 30: 125 Court Street, west elevation, facing southeast
- 27 of 30: 125 Court Street, basement, facing south
- 28 of 30: 125 Court Street, first floor, facing north
- 29 of 30: Gatehouse, east and north elevations, facing southwest
- 30 of 30: Gatehouse, west and south elevations, facing northeast

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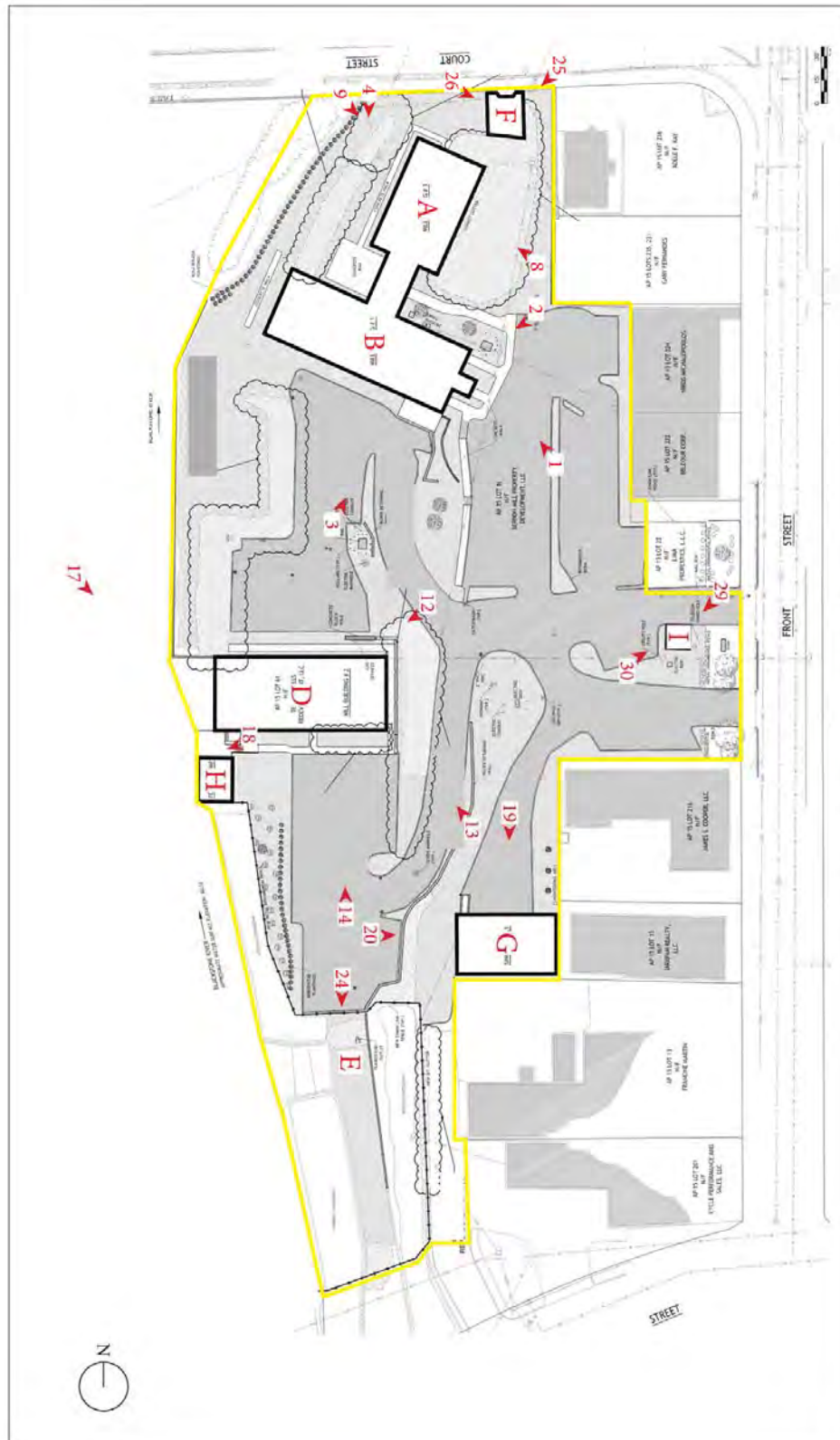
Name of Property

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National Park Service  
National Register Nomination Amendment  
Photograph Key: Site Plan

Woonsocket Company/Bernon Mills  
Front Street  
Woonsocket, Rhode Island 02895

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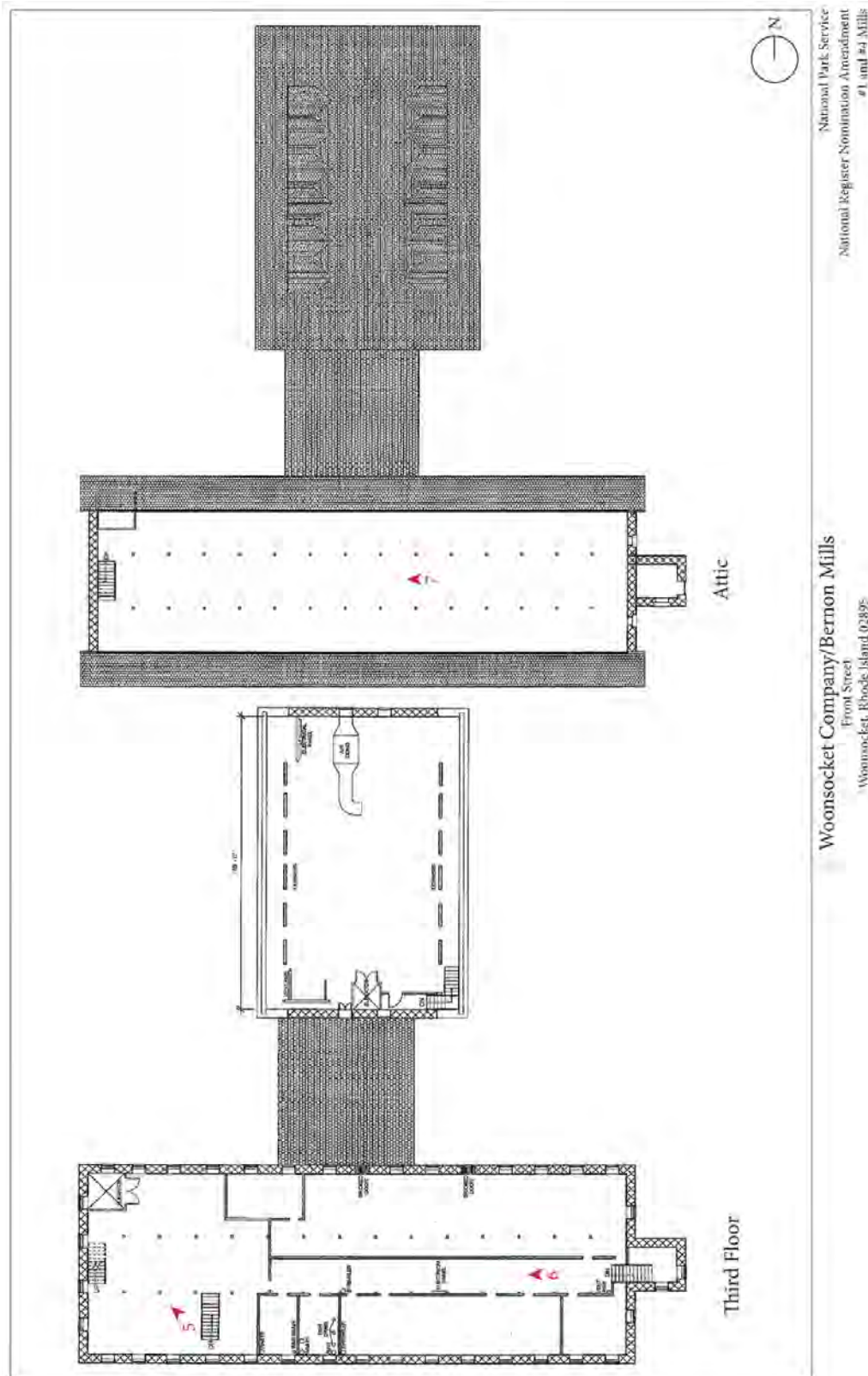
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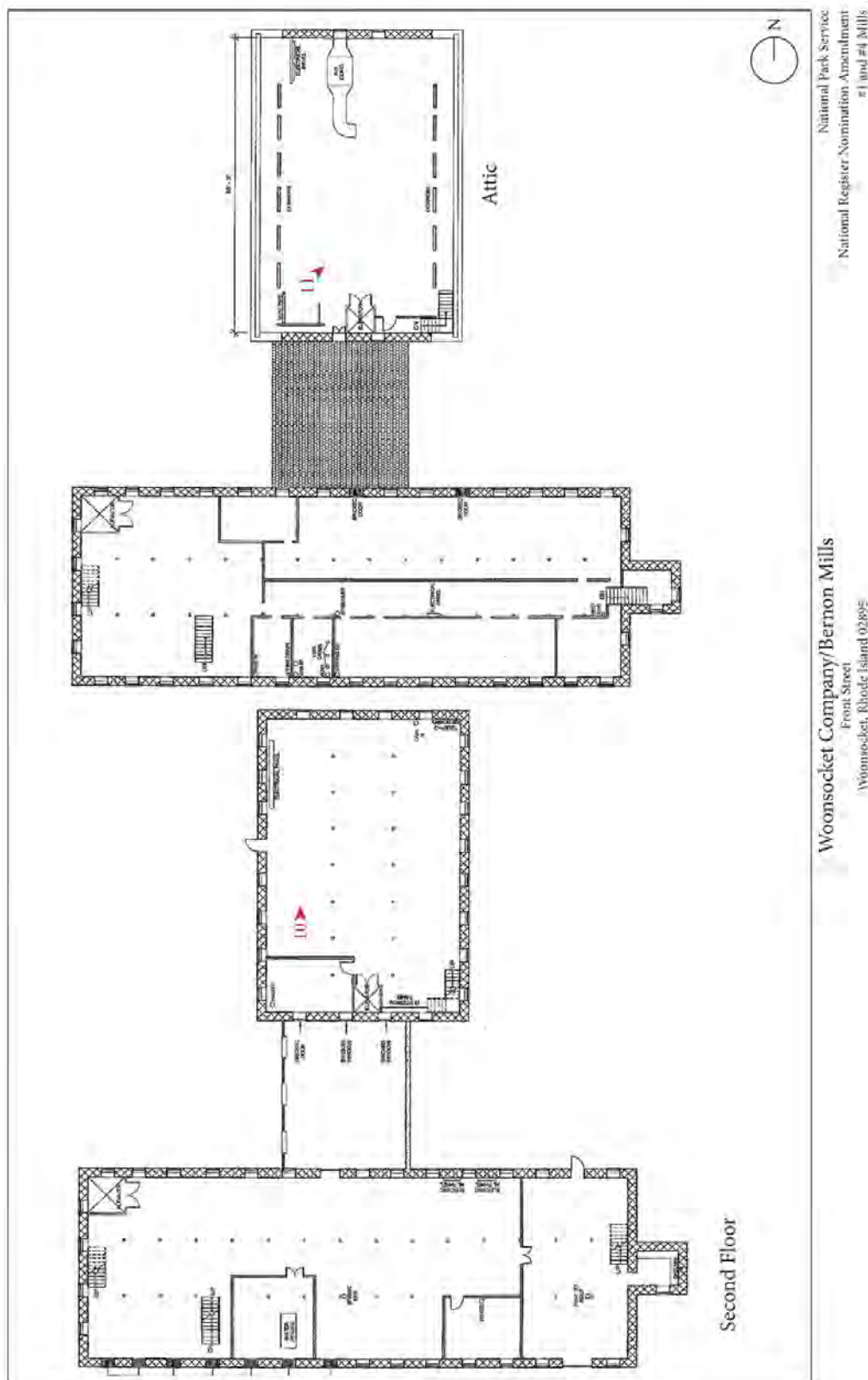
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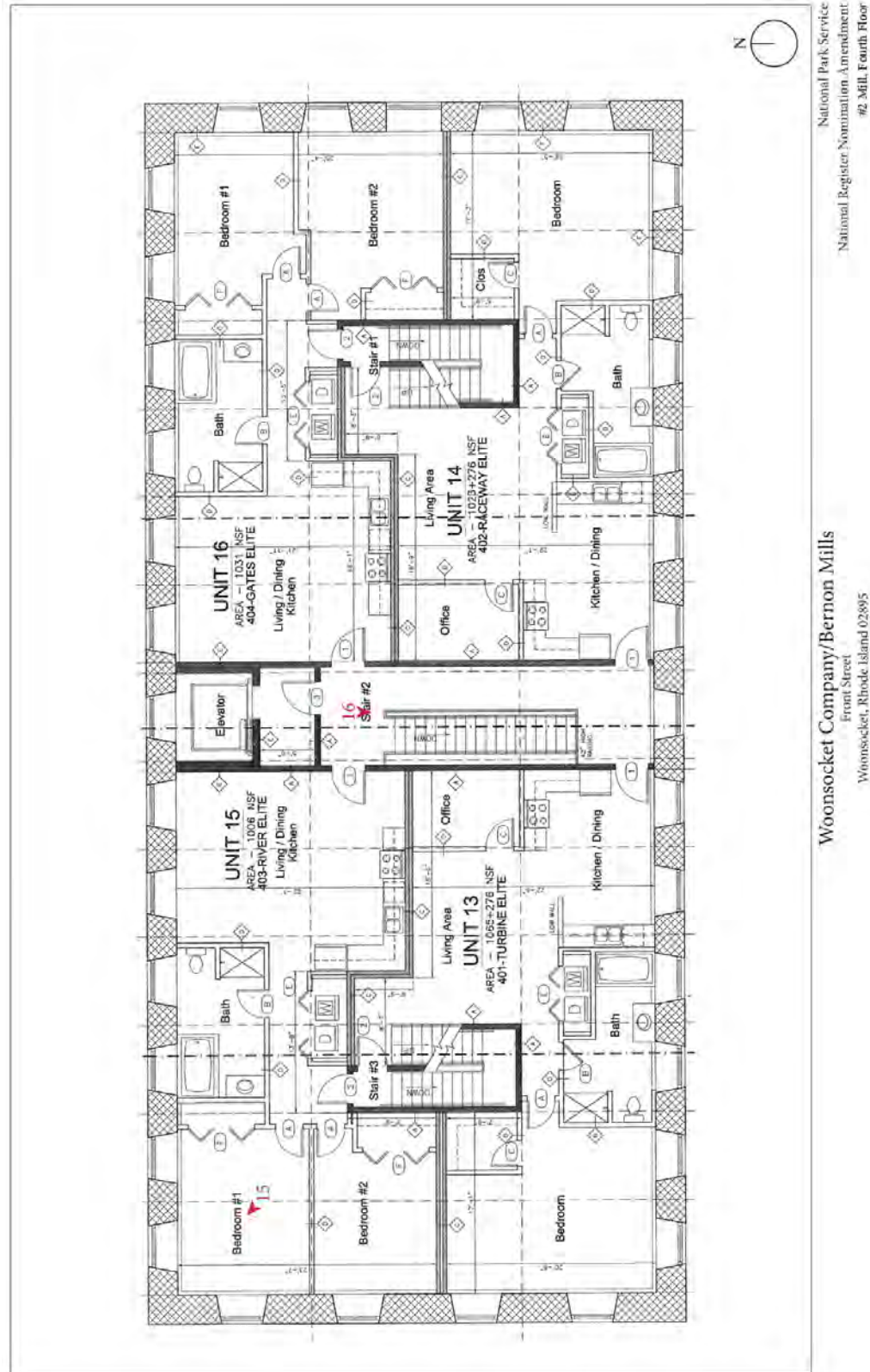
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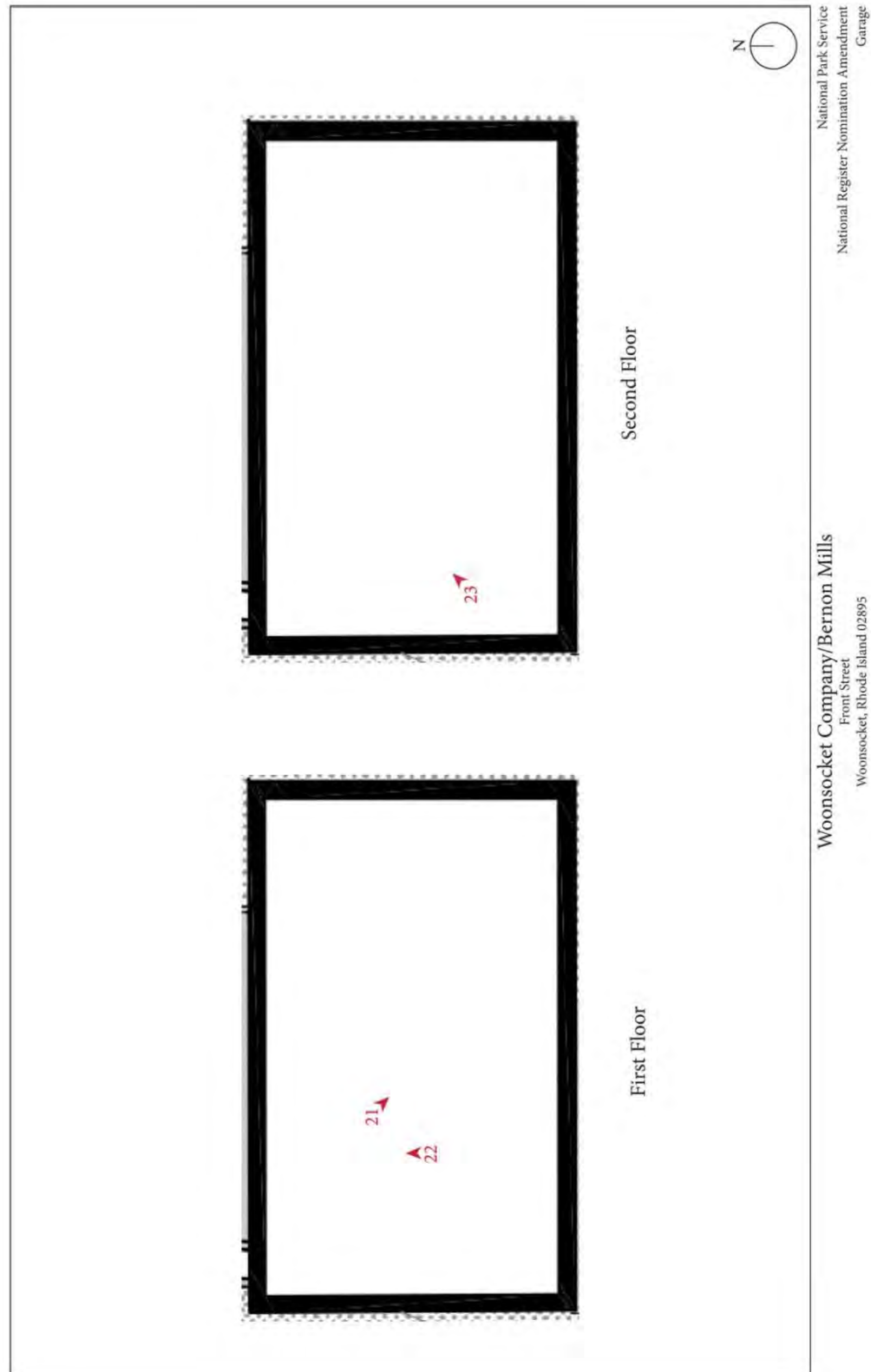
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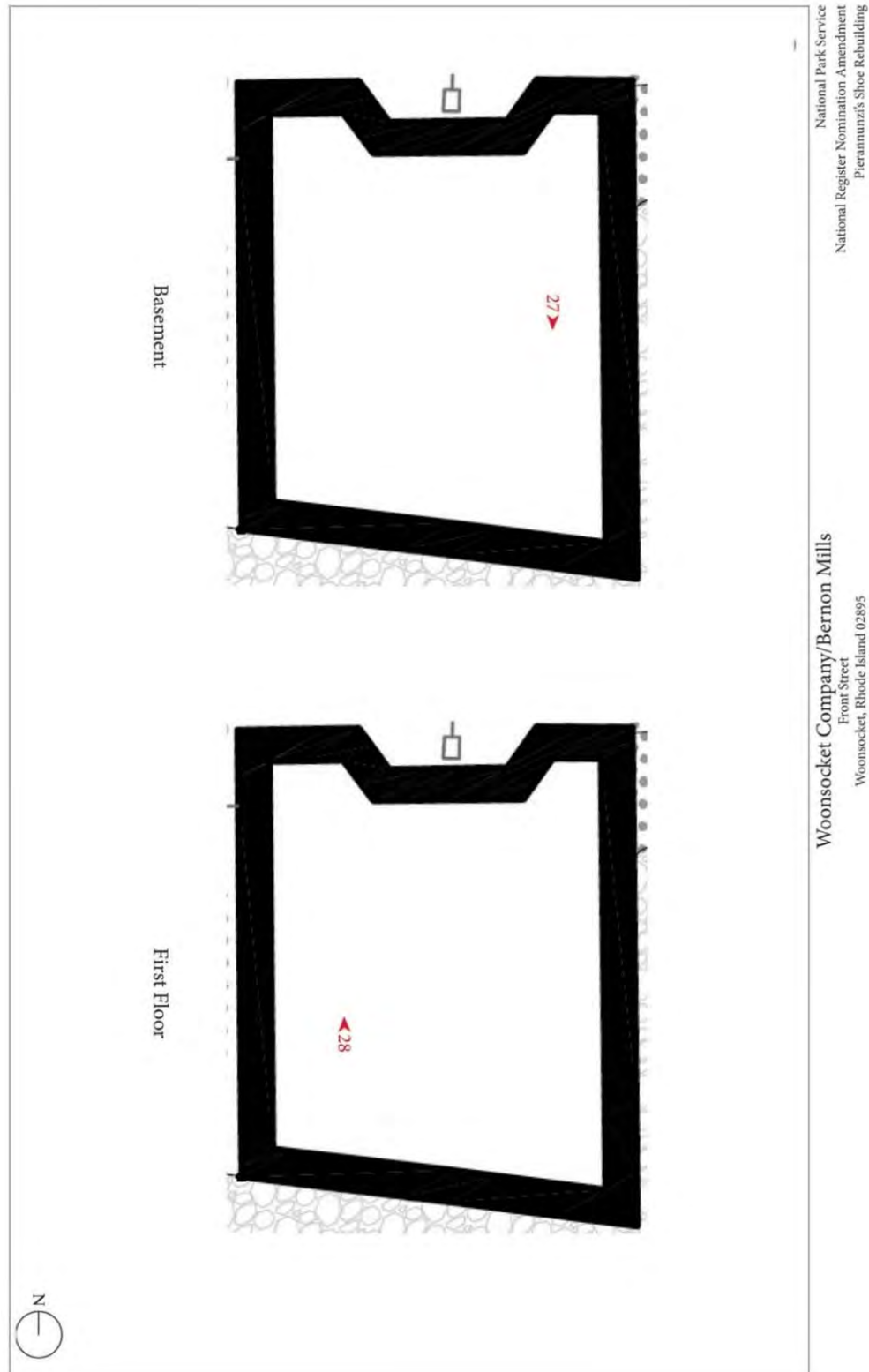
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2 of 30: # 1 Mill, east and north elevations (left) and c.1980 brick connector (right), facing southwest



8 of 30: #4 Mill east elevation (left) and 125 Court Street south elevation (right), facing northwest





13 of 30: #2 Mill (left) and #1 Mill (right), south and east elevations, facing northwest



17 of 30: #2 Mill (left) and Power House (right), north and west elevations, facing southeast





18 of 30: Power House, east and north elevations, facing southwest



19 of 30: Garage, north elevation, facing south





22 of 30: Garage, first floor, facing north



23 of 30: Garage, second floor, facing northeast





25 of 30: 125 Court Street, east and north elevations, facing southwest



29 of 30: Gatehouse (non-contributing), east and north elevations, facing southwest