

Site Inventory Form
State Historical Society of Iowa
 (December 1, 1999)

State Inventory No. 70-00535, 70-00534, 70-00581 New Supplemental
 Part of a district with known boundaries (enter inventory no.) _____
 Relationship: Contributing Noncontributing
 Contributes to a potential district with yet unknown boundaries
 National Register Status: (any that apply) Listed De-listed NHL DOE
 Review & Compliance No. _____
 Non-Extant (enter year) _____

1. Name of Property

historic name Bennett Mill Complex

other names/site number Muscatine Oatmeal Company, Great Western Cereal Co. Ronda Button Co. FS-005-007

2. Location

street & number 221-225 West Mississippi Drive (Main Building), also 217-219 W. Mississippi, 109 Pine

city or town Muscatine vicinity, county Muscatine
 Legal Description: (If Rural) Township Name _____ Township No. _____ Range No. _____ Section _____ Quarter of Quarter _____

(If Urban) Subdivision Original Town Block(s) 10 Lot(s) 1, W1/2 2 (Main)

3. State/Federal Agency Certification [Skip this Section]

4. National Park Service Certification [Skip this Section]

5. Classification

Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property	
	If Non-Eligible Property	If Eligible Property, enter number of:
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Enter number of:	Contributing Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> district	_____ buildings	<u>4</u> _____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____ sites	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____ structures	_____ structures
<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____ objects	_____ objects
	_____ Total	<u>4</u> _____ Total

Name of related project report or multiple property study (Enter "N/A" if the property is not part of a multiple property examination).
 Title Historical and Architectural Survey and Evaluation of the Downtown Commercial District Historical Architectural Data Base Number 70-013

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)	Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)
<u>09A11: Agricultural/Subsistence/grain mill</u>	<u>02A06: Commerce/Trade/Machine Shop</u>
<u>10A04: Industry/Processing/Extraction/Processing Plant</u>	_____
<u>10F01: Industry/Extraction/Shell Processing Site</u>	_____

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)	Materials (Enter categories from instructions)
<u>01: No Style</u>	foundation <u>04B: Sandstone?</u>
<u>09D02: Gable Roof (Main Building)</u>	walls <u>03: Brick</u>
_____	roof <u>08B: Rolled Asphalt</u>
_____	other _____

Narrative Description (SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" representing your opinion of eligibility after applying relevant National Register criteria)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> More Research Recommended	A Property is associated with significant events.
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> More Research Recommended	B Property is associated with the lives of significant persons.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> More Research Recommended	C Property has distinctive architectural characteristics.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> More Research Recommended	D Property yields significant information in archaeology or history.

County Muscatine
City Muscatine

Address 221-225 West Mississippi Drive

Site Number 70-00535,etc.
District Number _____

Criteria Considerations

- 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.
- G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

17: Industry

Significant Dates

Construction date

1851

check if circa or estimated date

Other dates

c. 1860, c. 1890, c.1902 c.1920 c.1964, 2004-05

Significant Person

(Complete if National Register Criterion B is marked above)

Joseph Bennett

Architect/Builder

Architect

Builder

Narrative Statement of Significance (SEE CONTINUATION SHEETS, WHICH MUST BE COMPLETED)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography See continuation sheet for citations of the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form

10. Geographic Data

UTM References (OPTIONAL)

Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	_____	_____	2	_____	_____
3	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

See continuation sheet for additional UTM references or comments

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Devin Pettit Vice-Chairman M.H.P.C. (R.L. McCarley, Consultant)

organization Muscatine Historic Preservation Commission date March 18, 2005

street & number 215 Sycamore Street telephone 563-264-1550

city or town Muscatine state IA zip code _____

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION (Submit the following items with the completed form)

FOR ALL PROPERTIES

- Map:** showing the property's location in a town/city or township.
- Site plan:** showing position of buildings and structures on the site in relation to public road(s).
- Photographs:** representative black and white photos. If the photos are taken as part of a survey for which the Society is to be curator of the negatives or color slides, a photo/catalog sheet needs to be included with the negatives/slides and the following needs to be provided below on this particular inventory site:

Roll/slide sheet # _____ Frame/slot # _____ Date Taken _____
Roll/slide sheet # _____ Frame/slot # _____ Date Taken _____
Roll/slide sheet # _____ Frame/slot # _____ Date Taken _____

- See continuation sheet or attached **photo & slide catalog sheet** for list of photo roll or slide entries.
- Photos/illustrations without negatives are also in this site inventory file.

FOR CERTAIN KINDS OF PROPERTIES, INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING AS WELL

- Farmstead & District:** (List of structures and buildings, known or estimated year built, and contributing or non-contributing status)
- Barn:**
 - A sketch of the frame/truss configuration in the form of drawing a typical middle bent of the barn.
 - A photograph of the loft showing the frame configuration along one side.
 - A sketch floor plan of the interior space arrangements along with the barn's exterior dimensions in feet.

State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) Use Only Below This Line

Concur with above survey opinion on National Register eligibility: Yes No More Research Recommended
 This is a locally designated property or part of a locally designated district.

Comments: _____

Evaluated by (name/title): _____ Date: _____

Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

Page 3

<u>Bennett Mill Complex</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Name of Property	County
<u>221-225 West Mississippi Drive</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Address	City

7. Narrative Description

The Bennett Mill Complex is historically associated through use and function, and thus the four main components of the complex have been included on one survey form. The main building was built in 1851. Two additions to this building occurred to the west, including one section that was previously separately surveyed (70-00581). A building to the east was originally built separately, but this building was rebuilt around 1890 when it became associated with this complex during its time as an oatmeal mill, and then further expanded as part of the complex around 1902 (70-00534).

The main building (221-225 West Mississippi Drive) was built in 1851 as a flour mill, replacing Bennett's earlier mill that burned earlier in the year. It is a three-story, three bay brick building with a gable-front roof. It is constructed of common bond brick at a 6:1 ratio. The brick is soft and painted. The first story has a loading entry that may have served carriages long ago due to its size. There is also a window that has been covered with plywood, and an entry that does not appear to be used anymore. The second-story façade includes two six-over-six-light double-hung wood windows. There is also an entry that leads to a fire escape, which leads to the roof of the building. The third story includes two windows, one that is six-over-six-light double-hung, and the other has been covered with plywood. There is also a double door entry, which appears to be historic, centered on the facade. The fourth-story has two six-over-six-light double-hung windows and a centered entry. The fifth story has three windows; one of them (middle) appears to have been an entry at one time. This middle window is six-over-six-light double-hung. The other two windows have been covered with plywood. On the roof level there is a centered opening that has been covered with wood. A star tie-rod is found on the west upper corner of this façade. On the west elevation there are a number of filled-in windows on the second and third floors. The frieze/cornice has brick corbelling typical of the pre-Civil War period. The east elevation does not appear to have any openings. The north (rear) elevation includes windows on the top two stories that are six-over-six-light double-hung windows. There is an old painted sign on this elevation that is faded and hard to read. The roof is rolled asphalt.

To the west of this main building is a one to two story addition that was probably built around 1860, and partially remodeled around 1964. The 1855 bird's eye view of Muscatine does not show this section, only a smokestack on the site. However, the 1869 Graham photograph #132 does show this 1-2 story addition. It appears as the powerhouse on the early Sanborn maps, and according to an article from the *Muscatine Journal* (*Muscatine Journal* February 16, 1965; 2). It appear to be labeled as such historically because it has a two-story façade on W. Mississippi, but slopes to one-story at the rear of the building (Pine St descends to the river along this building). Walls from this earlier building continue to stand along a portion of the Pine St elevation, but the façade has new brick, which continues along part of the side. Around 1954 the front half of this building was rebricked, and the chimney was removed in 1965 (*Muscatine Journal* February 16, 1965, 2). This building has a garage-door entry and a regular entry on the façade. A parapet steps down towards Pine Street, along with a stepped parapet. The new brick along the west elevation along Pine ties into the old brick remaining on this façade. Some opening has been filled with brick.

Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

Page 4

<u>Bennett Mill Complex</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Name of Property	County
<u>221-225 West Mississippi Drive</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Address	City

The third section extends along the rear alley behind (north of) the five-story mill and converted powerhouse, facing Pine Street (70-00581). The construction occurred after 1851, and likely after 1855, but by 1869 the Graham photograph #132 does show this section. It was likely built around the same time as the powerhouse. It is depicted as a warehouse on the earliest Sanborn map in 1883, with a passage from Pine Street, turning in the building, and exiting onto the rear alley. This permitted carriages to pull through the building to load products or drop off supplies, and it likely served this function from its construction. The entry into this passage from Pine Street is still clearly seen as a large arch opening at the south end of this elevation. This entry has been filled in with brick around a later loading entry, and the windows have been covered with wood. Due to the sloping nature of the lot, this entry enters onto the same level as the second story of the mill and powerhouse, facing Mississippi. Towards the back of this elevation there are two modern entries with wood paneling covering this section of the brick wall. There is also one small window. The second story has four windows, two covered with wood, one of them with glass still exposed, one four-over-four-light double-hung window. There is also one larger window or loading entry that is covered with plywood. As this second story is at the level of the third story of the main mill, the south elevation is exposed above the roof of the powerhouse. This south elevation has cement that has been applied over the brick, with three windows that have been filled-in with brick. The north elevation (first story) along the rear alley includes five windows with segmental arch lintels. Four windows are covered with wood, and the other is partially filled by brick, glass block, and wood. There is also an entry on the first story toward the east end. The second story has four two-over-two-light double-hung windows, and there is a loading entry with a steel beam. Notably on the interior, the passage is still a clear path through this section of the building, with the warehouse in the northwest portion.

The fourth section is the building/addition to the east of the original building (70-00534). It appears that this building was built in two stages. An earlier two-story building was demolished, and a larger two-story building built between 1888 and 1892, according to the Sanborn maps, which also included the site of the earlier neighboring three-story building at 217 and incorporated a three-story building at 215. A picture from a *Pictorial History of Muscatine* shows a three story building at 219 and two story at 215-217 in 1891. The building looks like the current building except for the lack of the third story at 215-217. The third story appears to be added to 215-217 around 1902. This is the year that that the Great Western Cereal Company took over operations from the Muscatine Oatmeal Company, and other expansions of the complex were also seen. The unified façade likely dates to this period, as the neighboring three-story building has become fully incorporated into this building. It is now a three-story, six-bay brick building. This building is currently undergoing a major renovation/ restoration, and is expected to open in September 2005 as a restaurant/museum. The first story includes four windows with segmental arch lintels that are covered with plywood. There are also two loading entries, one of which appears to be historic. The upper story openings also have segmental arch lintels and brick sills. One opening on the second story appears to be an entry, while the other five are windows. These windows had six-over-six-light double-hung sashes, but they have been recently replaced as part of the remodeling project with one-over-one-light double-hung windows. The third story is the same as the second, with six windows. Originally, the east elevation was a party wall. This elevation was only recently exposed due to the demolition of a couple buildings. The east elevation has had three groups of three windows on the second and third floors carved out of the walls as renovation of this building continues. This building

Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

Page 5

<u>Bennett Mill Complex</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Name of Property	County
<u>221-225 West Mississippi Drive</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Address	City

tapers to a two story building in the rear. The first story in the rear has six half-size windows that are filled and have segmental arch lintels. There is also a historic loading entry. The second story has five full windows with segmental arched lintels, and one larger window.

8. Narrative Statement of Significance

The Bennett Mill Complex appears to be individually eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and B. It also appears to be a contributing set of buildings in a potential downtown historic district.

This complex of buildings is significant for its importance as a home to major 19th and 20th century businesses. It was home to the city's first flour mill, the Bennett Mill. It was an early home of the Huttig Manufacturing Company's sash and door plant, a significant business within the lumber industry context. The Muscatine Oatmeal Company was known as the largest oatmeal mill in the world around in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Finally, the Ronda Button Company was a late entry into the pearl button business, significant for its innovation cutting machines and as the last company producing shell products. Thus, it appears that this complex of buildings is eligible individually for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A. The integrity of the complex is fairly strong, especially the main five story building. There have been relatively few changes to this building, and the few that have occurred are covered windows and entrances. The overall features, scale and design remain intact. The period of significance for the complex spans from the construction in 1851 to the ceasing of the Ronda Button Company in 1966. It also appears to be eligible under Criterion B for its association with Joseph Bennett. Joseph Bennett was significant in the early history and economy of Muscatine, building its first flour mill and building the first steamboat in Muscatine. Although there are other significant people associated with this building; namely S.G. Stein, there are other buildings and a home still standing associated with him, but this is the only building standing associated with Joseph Bennett.

Finally the Bennett Mill Complex is a contributing building at the southwest end of a potential downtown district. It falls within several historic contexts identified for the district: "Early Settlement," 19th century Business and Industry," "Lumber Industry," "20th century Business and Industry, and "Pearl Button Center of the World." The overall integrity of the four main components of the complex is relatively good, with few modifications or alterations.

The original 5-story building was built in 1848 by Joseph Bennett, and then rebuilt in 1851 following a devastating fire. By 1850 this flour mill was producing 520 barrels a day (City Directory 1856: 21). Joseph Bennett was born in Massachusetts, and went west to St. Louis in 1838 via Muscatine, and he returned to Muscatine in 1839. He started employment at the Brownell General Store, and in a short time bought the place. While still at the general store he built the first steamboat in Muscatine. This lasted a number of years until the boat sank in the river near St. Louis in 1858 (*Muscatine Journal*, April 16, 1906). In 1848, he built the flour mill facing the Mississippi on Front Street. The flour mill burned down on August 23, 1851. In addition to the mill, a warehouse, a residence, and a half-a-dozen stables on the alley were

Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

Page 6

<u>Bennett Mill Complex</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Name of Property	County
<u>221-225 West Mississippi Drive</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Address	City

destroyed. It also partially burnt a warehouse belonging to Chester Weed, and threatened the pork house below the Iowa House, as well as some homes from the alley to second on Chestnut. According to an article in the *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, part of the mill's walls were down and that the rest seem to be "tottering". It also said that the cause of the fire was a mystery. Mr. Bennett estimated his losses at \$45,000, with only \$5000 covered by insurance. The losses to the other buildings was at least another \$5000 ("Saturday Morning 5 o'clock," *Iowa Democratic Enquirer*, August 30, 1851, 2).

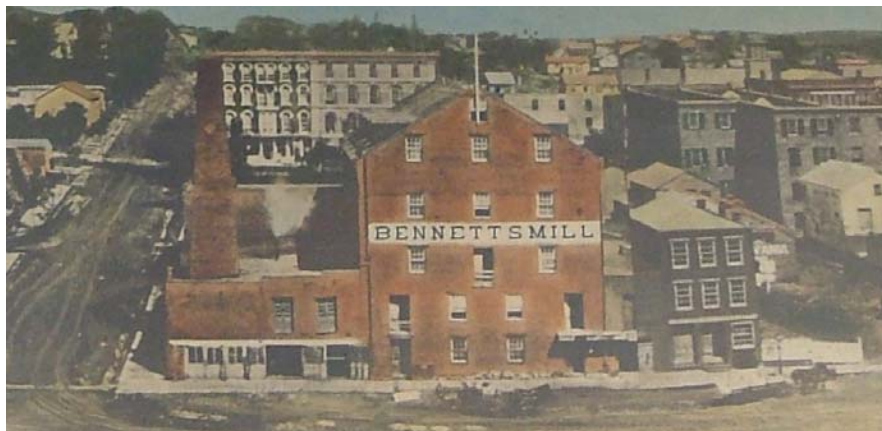
The 5-story mill was then rebuilt within ninety days (in 1851) on the same foundation, with the one to two story addition to the west built a few years later, likely in the 1860s. It shows up in a c.1869 photograph and c.1870 painting. The main building was built to look exactly like the first but was one foot higher (Muscatine City Directory 1856: 21). In 1868 the business was bought by J.B. Hale and called the Muscatine Mills, and stayed at this location until 1875, according to city directories (GR#132).



1855 Bird's Eye
Ballou's Weekly



1875 Bird's Eye
Andreas atlas



Muscatine in c.1870 (Bawden Bros, 1949)

Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

Page 7

<u>Bennett Mill Complex</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Name of Property	County
<u>221-225 West Mississippi Drive</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Address	City

In 1876, the Huttig Brothers opened their sash and door business here. The Huttig brothers (Fred and William) came from Germany and initially started in the grocery business. They ventured into the lumber industry in 1866, while continuing their grocery business. They soon went into the sash and door business as well as milling lumber, which became the primary business. The city directories indicate that the first location of their sash and door business was on the north side of Second Street east of Pine. In 1876 it moved to this address on Front St and remained until 1879. In 1879, they built a new location on Front Street East of Sycamore Street, but this building burnt a few weeks after they moved in (*Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County* 1889: 281-82, 533-34; Walton 1899: 168-69; "Sash and Door...").

In 1879, S.G. Stein organized the Muscatine Oatmeal Company at this location. The Muscatine Oatmeal Company did most of their production by the barrel. Simon G. Stein came to Muscatine in 1849, and became engaged in the lumber trade, listed among the lumber dealers in the first city directory in 1859. Besides his lumber business he was associated with numerous other businesses and organizations, and served as mayor in 1870 and 1871. In May 1865, he helped organize the Merchants Exchange Bank, which in 1885, became the First National Bank, and for which he served as president for most of the early years. In 1875, he joined Benjamin Hershey, in forming the Hershey Lumber Company. He was also one of the first stockholders, and a director of the Muscatine Water Works, one of the founders of the Muscatine Gas Works, and founder of the Muscatine Fair Grounds and Park Association. Besides being President of the Muscatine Oatmeal Company, he was also President of a number of other local companies; including: Muscatine, Tipton & Anamosa Railroad, Muscatine Western Railroad, Muscatine Spice Mill Company, Muscatine Ferry Company, as well as numerous other companies outside Muscatine. He was also on the committee for the erection of the current capitol building in the state of Iowa (*Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County* 1889: 312).

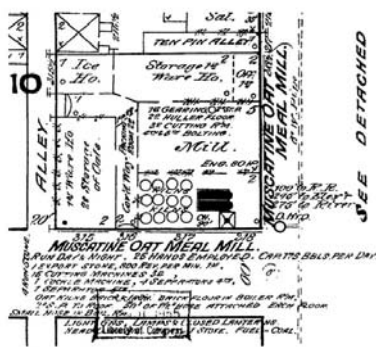
The 1883 Sanborn map shows the complex four years after the organization of the Muscatine Oat Meal Mill. The former Bennett Mill, a five story building facing Front St, still served as the milling operation. The power house to the west is depicted as a two story building with a ninety foot smokestack and several kilns. A second two-story addition to the rear of the mill and powerhouse is connected to the complex by a covered passage. This passage permitted carriages to enter from Pine and exit at the alley. This section was used as a warehouse. A two-story building to the east of the five-story mill served as office and additional storage space (217 W. Front). This is likely the small building depicted next to the mill in the 1875 bird's eye view of Muscatine depicted in Andreas' atlas. The 1883 map also notes that 25 people were employed, with capacity of 175 barrels per day. By 1888, the number of employees increased to 30, with a capacity of 250. The buildings at 217-219 W. Front appears to have rebuilt around 1890, as it is depicted with a larger footprint on the 1892 Sanborn. Though a small office is still located in the section, most of the building was used for storage.

Bennett Mill Complex
 Name of Property

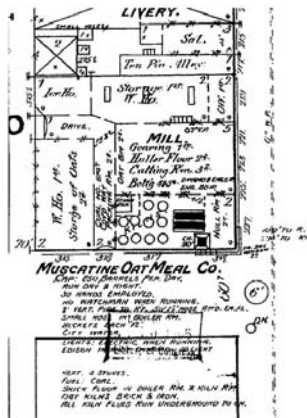
Muscatine
 County

221-225 West Mississippi Drive
 Address

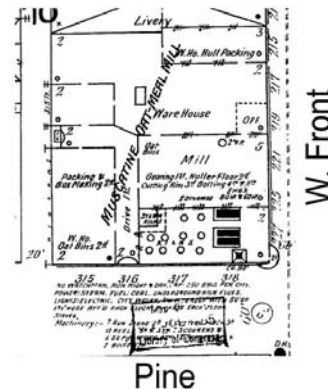
Muscatine
 City



1883 Sanborn



1888 Sanborn



1892 Sanborn

In 1887 the “Friends Oats” product was awarded a gold medal for quality by the International Exposition in Brussels, Belgium. The company employed 250 people, operating both day and night. By 1900, the Muscatine Oatmeal’s two pound package of “Friends Oats”, had revolutionized the business. The company was processing nine-thousand bushels of oats from Eastern Iowa daily with the capacity to produce 60,000 packages a day. A storage warehouse and “Elevator B”, were built on the riverfront and held up to 250,000 bushels of oats. An underground spiral conveyer transferred grain to and from the mill. The cutting machines were inventions of Mr. Stein, and the mill manufactured its own electricity. Three railroads and two steamboat lines served the company. During its day this was the largest plant in the world producing only oatmeal (Bekker 1979: 49; Picturesque Muscatine 1901: 58-9).

In 1901, the Muscatine Oatmeal Company was approached by a promoter who represented one of the largest oatmeal mills in the Midwest. “The plan was to form a combination which would compete with the American Cereal Company, at the time the only great cereal company trust in the United States” (Carlson 1991: 50). The company eventually agreed, and became The Great Western Cereal Company, with the other mills in: Joliet, Illinois; Akron, Ohio; Peoria, Illinois; Fort Dodge, Iowa; Sioux City, Iowa; Nebraska City, Nebraska; Cedar Falls, Iowa; Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Waseca, Minnesota. The office headquarters were in Chicago, Illinois. The company was headed by F.P. Sawyer, a local Muscatine resident. S.G. Stein was President of the local mill, and was also one of its directors (Carlson 1991: 50).

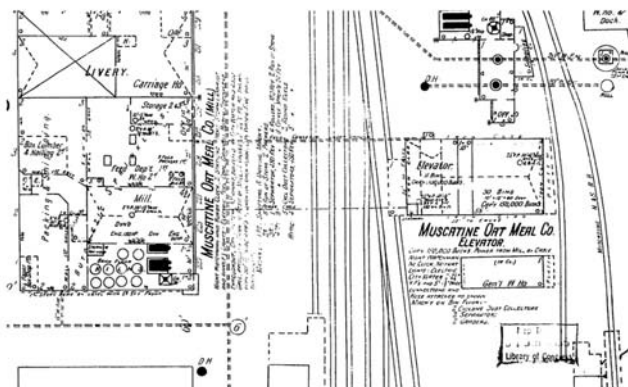
The 1899 and 1905 Sanborn maps show the expanded complex. A number of changes appear to have been made around 1901 or 1902 as it became part of the Great Western Cereal Company. Between these maps, the two-story c.1890 building to the east of the five-story mill was again expanded to a larger three-story building. The 1905 Sanborn map notes the feed department on the first story, packing on the second, and the box department on the third story. Packing and shipping continued to be located at the rear of the complex, and the historic passage through the building is still depicted. The elevator across Front St along the railroad tracks was also significantly expanded in this period. In about 1913,

Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

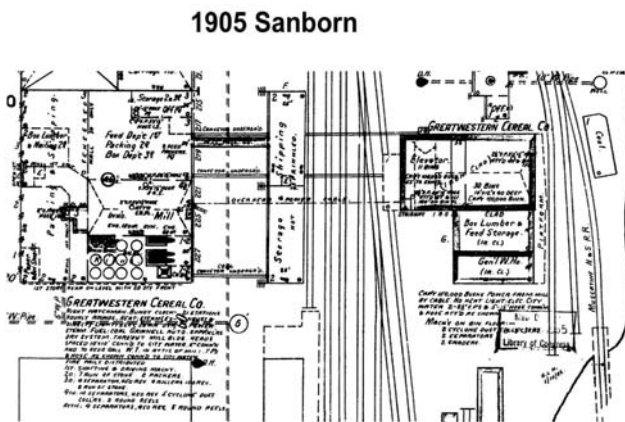
Page 9

Bennett Mill Complex	Muscatine
Name of Property	County
221-225 West Mississippi Drive	Muscatine
Address	City

this mill closed down (Carlson 1991: 50). It is unknown whether this plant's operations moved to one of the other plants mentioned above or if this was the end of the Great Western Cereal Company.



1899 Sanborn



1905 Sanborn

After the mill closed, the complex became used for various businesses. The five-story building at 221-225 W. Front (Mississippi) is vacant on the 1919 Sanborn. It remained vacant for several years until the Iowa Pearl Button Company used this building for storage, from about 1923 to about 1927. The three-story building at 217-219 West Front (Mississippi Drive) was occupied by Hahn Produce from around 1913 until around 1946, according to the city directories. The 1919 Sanborn map also shows them in the original storage addition along Pine connected through the passage as well. Hahn Produce was founded in 1880, and had been in a few locations before this one, however 217-219 was Hahn Produce's main location in the 1919 to 1946 time period.

The old one to two story powerhouse on the west side of the mill became associated with the automotive industry. The city directories show an auto garage here under a couple of different names until 1921, which is also depicted on the 1919 Sanborn. In 1921 a more substantial auto garage, by the name of Parry Auto was located here, and stayed until at least 1946, according to city directories. From 1923 thru 1931 the city directories also indicate that Parry Auto was a dealership. The Hupmobile Company was started in 1909 by Robert Hupp, who had worked for both the Olds Motor Works and the Ford Motor Company. By 1909, 1500 vehicles were sold followed by more than 5000 in 1910. Mr. Hupp died in 1917, but sales continued to climb slowly, reaching a peak in 1928 at 65,000. But in 1929, sales fell to 50,000, before the stock market crash. Problems in the way that the company was run, in combination with the depression, closed the company a couple of times in the 1930's. After the second closing the company only made the engine and chassis. The last Hupmobile rolled off the assembly line on July 8, 1940 (Info.detnews.com/joyrides/story).

Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

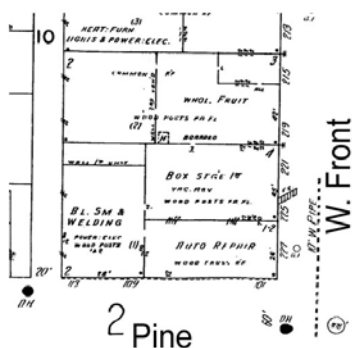
Page 10

Bennett Mill Complex
 Name of Property

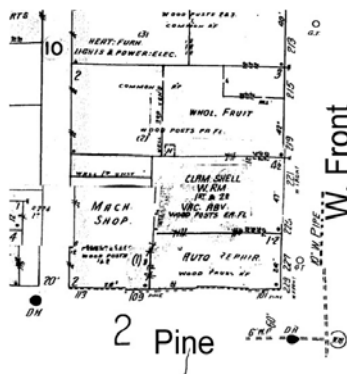
Muscatine
 County

221-225 West Mississippi Drive
 Address

Muscatine
 City

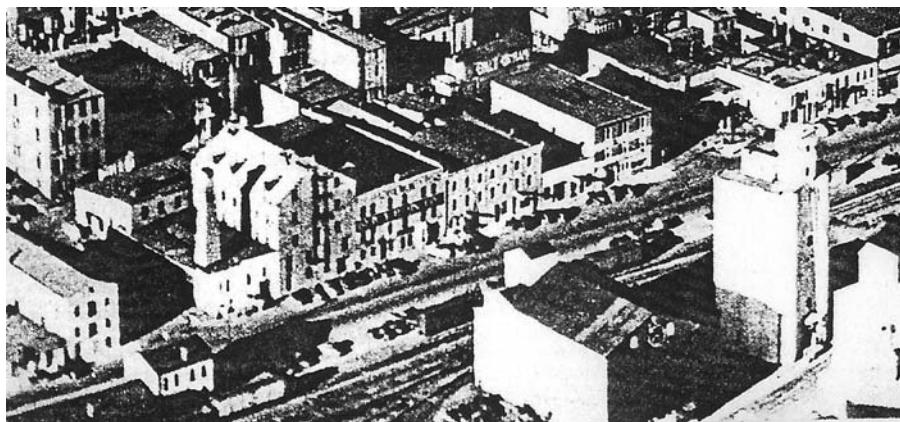


1928 Sanborn



1946 Sanborn

The 1928 Sanborn map shows the individual uses of the four main components of the complex. The large five-story section (221-225 W. Front) is only used on the first story for box storage. Hahn Produce continued their wholesale produce business at 217-219 W. Front. The one-two story old powerhouse continues to be used for automobile repair for Parry Auto. The original storage addition from the conversion to the oatmeal mill at the rear of the complex, fronting Pine, now has its own address as 109-113 Pine. Though the old passage is no longer depicted on the maps, it still existed on the interior. This section was used for as a welding business, which was apparently a part of the Parry Auto repair business, that used 227-229 West Mississippi Drive as its address. This business continued until 1946, according to city directories and Sanborn Maps.



Bennett Mill from aerial of Muscatine - 1946

With the pearl button industry continuing in Muscatine, there continued to be a need for additional innovation in the business. After graduating as one of the first students with a Ph.D. degree in Engineering from the University of Iowa, Clarence Schmarje moved to Pennsylvania where he began working at US Steel Co. He also taught at Carnegie Technical Institute in Pittsburgh. He heard about a

Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

Page 11

<u>Bennett Mill Complex</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Name of Property	County
<u>221-225 West Mississippi Drive</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Address	City

new material, tungsten carbide, from a student who worked for a company that was making cutting tools from the material. Clarence became intrigued and started to do some research in 1930s. Clarence's father was an owner of a button factory, Muscatine Pearl Works. The tools they were using to cut buttons at that time would quickly wear out, so they were interested in finding a tool with a longer life. Schmarje returned to Muscatine and began manufacturing these tools. In 1942, he formed Schmarje Tool Company, and began to operate out of this complex ("History of Schmarje Tool Company," 2005).

In 1942 the Ronda Button Company formed, utilizing new machinery designed and produced by Schmarje. The name of the company came from the Clarence Schmarje's sons, Ronald & David. They expanded from their location at 109 Pine into the larger old five-story mill, utilizing most of the floors. An article in the Journal on August 12, 1948 noted that though patents were still pending, the machines were well beyond the experimental stages. Two different machines were developed for this company for cutting button blanks, which were then used to make buttons. Little innovation had occurred through the early 20th century, after the early innovations of the Barry Manufacturing Company. Of the two machines developed, one was semi-automatic. The other worked somewhat like the traditional button cutting machines except that the operator is seated, and the saw functions on a vertical rather than a horizontal plane. Common to both machines is that the saws cutting edge were made of an extremely hard metal known as a cemented tungsten carbide. The carbide tipped tools were superior to steel in that they retained their cutting edge longer, reduced shell flaking, are more accurate, and give a higher yield of perfect blanks. At this time, Ronda Button Company only produced blanks. The shells came from the Arkansas, White, and Tennessee Rivers, as fishing on the Mississippi had significantly decreased. The firm could produce two million blanks per week, requiring 1500-2000 tons of shells a year. Between 15-50 employees operated 30 of the new cutting machines ("Ronda Button Company..." August 12, 1948; "Schmarje Enters New Field of Computerized Machine Tool Operation," December 30, 1965, section 4, page 6).

According to city directories, by late 1946 the Ronda Button Company was located at 217-219 West Mississippi Drive, and then into 227-229 West Mississippi Drive by 1949. By the 1952 directory the Schmarje Tool Company had located toward the back of 227-229 West Mississippi Drive, which became known as 109 Pine Street (the old warehouse with the drive through lane). The company continued to manufacture carbide cutting tools and form tools for a variety of governmental and private clients, as well as producing button machinery.

The Ronda Button Company expanded in the 1950s to also producing pearl buttons, not just the blanks they had been producing, as well as pearl novelties. During this period after World War II, the seven button companies that continued to produce pearl buttons gradually switching to plastic products, leaving only the Ronda Button Company. Around 1964, the old powerhouse section, part of Schmarje Tool, was remodeled with a new south façade and some new brick on the west elevation. In 1966, the Ronda Button Company ceased production of its pearl products, but continued to be listed in city directories until 1968, at this complex. Clarence Schmarje citing the higher cost of pearl button production as the reason for the death of the pearl button industry (Arpy 1969; Raffensperger 1966).

Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

Page 12

<u>Bennett Mill Complex</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Name of Property	County
<u>221-225 West Mississippi Drive</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Address	City

After the Ronda Plant closed, Schmarje Tool and Engineering continued and expanded at this site. Clarence had been doing some research expanded into the world of computerized machining in the mid-1960s. The Schmarje Company began to use the "Milwaukee-Matic" to do precise milling, drilling, and boring tool operations. Perforated tapes controlled the machines, with programs set up by engineers using calculators or computers. By this time there were six engineers working here with a total employment going to thirty-five from twenty-two in 1965. These machines helped work on parts from companies such as Fisher Governer Company, Clinton Engines, Gardner-Denver Company, International Harvester, J.I. Case, Thatcher Glass, and Home-O-Nize (HNI). The Schmarje Company also continued its production of carbide cutting tools. Some of the tools include the drills and cutters of the type used on the Milwaukee-Matic machines. They were also used in producing rocket engines, airplane instruments, computers and various electronic parts. Among the customers for these carbide tools were Sheaffeer Pen Co., Clinton Engineering, Maytag, International Harvester, Honeywell, IBM, Bendix Aviation, J I Case and Elgin Watch Co ("Schmarje Enters New Field of Computerized Machine Tool Operation," December 30, 1965, section 4, page 6). The company expanded into 221-225 West Mississippi Drive in 1965 and 217-219 West Mississippi Drive in 1969. By the late 1960's Schmarje was the largest CNC machine shop in the area, doing machine work for companies like John Deere, J.I. Case and Caterpillar Tractor Company. Schmarje Tool company worked 24 hours a day, not only machining parts for all the largest corporations, but manufacturing tooling and machining fixtures to meet the needs of the Midwest ("History of Schmarje Tool Company," 2005).

The company acquired the most modern and efficient machine tools available in the 1970s - equipment that few if any other comparable companies had at this time. With these machines, plus supporting equipment such as modern milling machines and surface and cylindrical grinders, the company became the only fully equipped carbide form tool specialist in the state of Iowa, and one of the best equipped shops of its type in the country. The business was hit by the recession in the mid 1970s when recession hit the company hard. After 1976, it appears to only occupy the 109 Pine Street location (and front portion), and continues to operate here today. This is the old warehouse portion with the passage and the partially rebuilt old powerhouse section. Ron Schmarje continues to operate the family business, though it was acquired by the Milwaukee based Tool Fabrication Corporation on April 27, 2001 ("History of Schmarje Tool Company," 2005).

The main five-story building at 221-225 West Mississippi Drive is currently vacant. Old machinery, shells, and pearl products remain throughout the upper stories of the building. It does not appear that the upper stories of the building have been used for anything other than storage since the Ronda Button Company closed in 1966.

Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

Page 13

<u>Bennett Mill Complex</u> Name of Property	<u>Muscatine</u> County
<u>221-225 West Mississippi Drive</u> Address	<u>Muscatine</u> City



Photographs by R.L. McCarley in August 2004.

Hahn Produce moved out of 217-219 W. Front in 1946, as the Ronda Button Company also moved into this building. In 1969 the Schmarje Tool Company expanded into this location and stayed until 1976 when the company "downsized". No listing occurs for this address after 1976, but can be assumed it was used for storage for Schmarje during the years that followed. The building at 217-219 West Mississippi Drive, is currently undergoing a major renovation/restoration to be opened as a restaurant in September 2005.

9. Major Bibliographical References

- "23", E.L. Graham Collection-prepared for the P.M. Musser Public Library by E.L. Graham in 1908-1910-historic photographs with captions collected by, not photographed by E.L. Graham
- "132" E.L. Graham Collection-prepared for the P.M. Musser Public Library by E.L. Graham in 1908-1910-historic photographs with captions collected by, not photographed by E.L. Graham
- Andreas, A.T. *Illustrated Atlas of the State of Iowa*. Chicago: Andreas Atlas Co., 1875.
- Arpy, Jim. "Death of an Industry," *Times-Democrat*. February 10, 1963.
- Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, Boston, MA: Aug. 4, 1855, p. 73.
- Bawden Bros., Inc, "1870 Muscatine 1950," Painting in City Council chambers, City Hall, of Muscatine in 1870 and 1950." Bawden Bros., Inc., Davenport, Iowa, 1949.
- Bekker, Marilyn. *Heritage Vignettes*. Muscatine, IA: Muscatine Area Heritage Association, 1979.
- Carlson, JoAnn, ed. *More History of Muscatine, Iowa*. Muscatine: Musser Public Library, 1991.
- City Directories, Muscatine. Various Publishers, 1856-present. Available at Musser Public Library.
- "History of Schmarje Tool Company," Tool Fabrication Corporation website. URL: www.schmarje.com/schmarje/about.html
- "Old Settler Dies," *Muscatine Journal*, April 16, 1906, 1.

Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

Page 14

<u>Bennett Mill Complex</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Name of Property	County
<u>221-225 West Mississippi Drive</u>	<u>Muscatine</u>
Address	City

Picturesque Muscatine. Muscatine: H.W. Lewis, 1901.

Portrait and Biographical Album of Muscatine County. Chicago: Acme Publishing, 1889.

Raffensperger, Gene. "The Passing of an Era in Muscatine," *Des Moines Sunday Register.* August 7, 1966, 20.

"Ronda Button Company Pioneers Dramatically Improved Button Cutting Methods in "Proving Ground" Plant here," *Muscatine Journal,* August 12, 1948.

"Schmarje Enters New Field of Computerized Machine Tool Operation," *Muscatine Journal,* December 30, 1965; section 4, page 6.

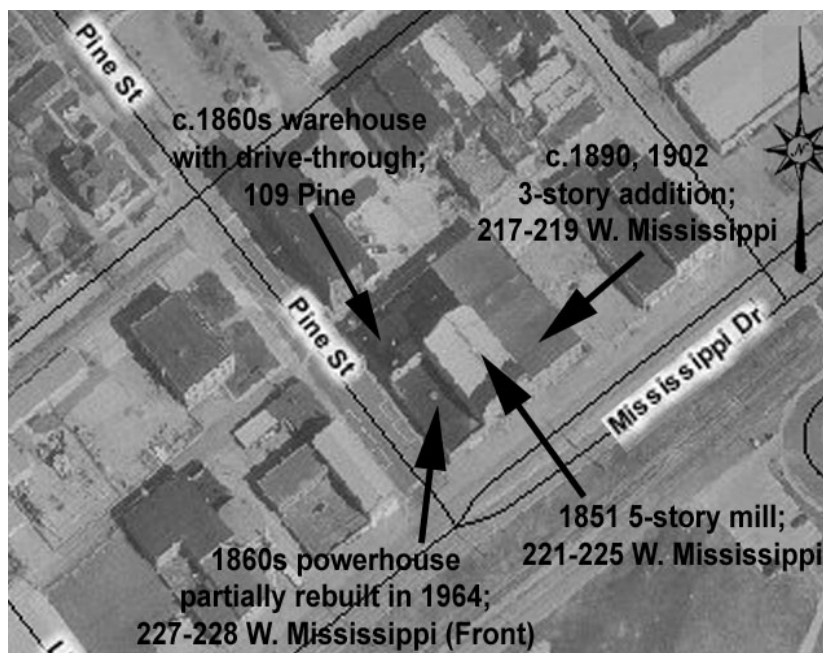
Sanborn Map Company. "Muscatine, Iowa," Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Pelham, New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1883, 1888, 1892, 1899, 1905, 1912, 1928, 1946. Accessed online at: sanborn.umi.com.

"Saturday Morning 5 o'clock," *Iowa Democratic Enquirer,* August 30, 1851, 2.

Walton, Josiah. *Pioneer Papers, comprising a collection of the recollections of early events of Bloomington, Iowa, now Muscatine, and its surroundings.* Muscatine, 1899.

Wright, Richard, Hupmobile's Styling Grace Belied its Financial Troubles *Detroit News* November 29, 1999. Found online at: info.detnews.com/joyrides/story

Location Map and Site Plan



Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

Page 15

Bennett Mill Complex
Name of Property

Muscatine
County

221-225 West Mississippi Drive
Address

Muscatine
City

Photographs of buildings (digital images)



221-225 W. Mississippi Dr (70-00535)



109 Pine (70-00581)

Iowa Site Inventory Form Continuation Sheet

Site Number 70-00535, etc.

Related District Number _____

Page 16

Bennett Mill Complex
Name of Property

Muscatine
County

221-225 West Mississippi Drive
Address

Muscatine
City



217-219 W. Mississippi Dr, June 2004 (70-00534)



217-219 W. Mississippi Dr, May 2005 (70-00534)