

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Industry
Community Planning & Development

Period of Significance

1851-1930
1851-1930
1851-1930

Significant Dates

1851, 1875

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Croft, Howland

Architect/Builder

Hewitt, George W. Hazelhurst, Edward
D'Arcy, John O'Rourke, Jeremiah

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The South Camden Historic District is a remarkably self-contained working class community dating from the second half of the nineteenth century. The district includes the houses of the area's residents, the commercial buildings in which they shopped, the churches and schools in which they worshipped and were educated, and the mills and factories in which they worked. Few individual properties within the district may be considered to possess architectural significance, but taken as an entity the district embodies the architectural experiences of the average working class citizen during the latter part of the nineteenth century. The district is thus both historical and architecturally significant on account of its typicality.

The district meets National Register of Historic Places significance Criteria A, B, and C. The development of the district as a residential suburb of industrial Camden and Gloucester City, and later as an working class residential neighborhood (the community planning and development area of significance) constitutes an association with the "broad patterns of our history" described under Criteria A. The important role that industrialist Howland Croft, and his Linden Worsted Mill, played in the district's development (the industry area of significance) provides the district with an association to "persons significant in our past" described under Criteria B. The buildings designed by locally significant architects John D'Arcy, George W. Hewitt, Jeremiah O'Rourke, and Edward Hazelhurst, provide additional associations with significant persons. The architectural integrity of the district, the numerous examples of the evolution of rowhouse design, and the individually significant buildings designed by professional architects "embody the distinctive characteristics of a type. . ." and satisfy Criteria C.

Development of the area encompassed by the South Camden Historic District began about 1851. In that year the Kaighns Point Land Company purchased a

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tract extending from Ferry Street to Jackson Street east to near Evergreen Cemetery from Colonel Isaac W. Mickle and various Mickle heirs. The Mickle family had held this land since 1696, when it was granted to Archibald Mickle as part of a larger tract that extended from Kaighn's Run to Newton Creek.¹

The Kaighns Point Land Company, a partnership of James D. Crowley, Thomas Phillips, George F. Miller, and William Jones, began operations in 1849, with the purchase of a large tract of land west of the Camden and Woodbury Railroad Railroad tracks (the present Conrail tracks that form the eastern boundary of the district). The Mickle purchase two years later represented the firm's second large scale venture into South Camden.²

The Kaighns Point Land Company laid out town lots on the Mickle tract, which the firm dubbed Centreville, later changed to Stockton. The new development straddled Broadway (laid out in 1763), halfway between the thriving industrial cities of Camden and Gloucester, hence the name Centerville. Ferry Avenue (laid out in 1820), the principal east-west street in the new development, provided direct access to the Kaighn's Point Ferry (incorporated in 1809) to Philadelphia. The adjacent rail line also provided a transportation link to Camden, Gloucester, and Woodbury.

At the time the tract was platted and surveyed the area consisted largely of cornfields, while oak forest dominated the area south of Ferry Avenue. Development proved relatively slow, despite astute business choices, such as the donation of land on Van Hook Street near 6th Street for the Stockton Baptist Society.³

The Baptist Society later proved something of a thorn in the side of the Land Company, protesting against William Jones' application for a liquor license

¹George R. Prowell, *The History of Camden County, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: L. J. Richards & Co., 1886), 423.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

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for his establishment at the corner of Ferry Avenue and South Broadway. Jones apparently threatened to take back the land donated to the Society as punishment for this affront, but cooler heads within the Land Company's ownership prevailed. Jones' saloon and the local Baptists both continued to exist within the district.⁴

In 1871 the City of Camden annexed the area encompassed by the district as the city's 8th Ward. The annexation resulted in the extension of city services, including water, gas, and street railway lines, into the district, which initiated a period of rapid growth and expansion. The Manufacturers' Land Improvement Company, successor to the Kaighns Point Land Company, and other developers acquired land south of Ferry Avenue from the Isaac W. Mickle Estate and began to lay out lots and build houses. At the time of the annexation the district's name was changed from Stockton to South Camden.

The earliest properties within the district reflect a different aesthetic than those erected after about 1885. The earliest buildings appear to represent an effort to develop the area as a suburban enclave located conveniently near downtown Camden and Gloucester Cities. The oldest houses in the district are almost exclusively of frame, rather than brick, construction and are overwhelmingly laid out as single family residences or duplexes, rather than rows. This type of development is evident on both sides of the 1900 block of Fillmore Street and on the east side of South Fourth Street between Emerald and Winslow. The Fillmore Street duplexes are set back on their lots, separating the houses from the street, and are surrounded by generous side yards. The South Fourth Street houses retain the side yards, but are set flush with the street. Isolated examples of this house type are also evident north of Ferry Avenue, but later construction of brick rowhouses and the demolition of numerous buildings somewhat obscures the original design.

The annexation of the area into the City of Camden, and the concomitant provision of essential city services, attracted a number of important industries to the area. The presence of these mills and factories rapidly

⁴Ibid.

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transformed the area from a suburban development into a working class neighborhood. The largest industrial building within the district is the former Linden Worsted Mills at the northwest corner of South Broadway and Jefferson. Howland Croft and Herbert Priestly established their worsted mill at this location in 1885. In 1886 the mill contained 7,000 spindles and employed 400 men and women. Camden architect John D'Arcy oversaw construction of additions to the mill in 1890 and 1895, and by 1902 the complex had attained its present size and configuration.⁵

Croft was born in Yorkshire, England in 1839 and worked for a time in the worsted mill owned by Priestly's father. In 1867 Croft emigrated to Philadelphia. He worked for about twelve years as a superintendent in the city's largest worsted mills, and in 1879 established Croft, Midgely & Rommel, New Jersey's first worsted mill, at Front and Linden Streets in Camden. In 1884 Croft bought out his partners and brought in Herbert Priestly. Soon after the firm relocated to the South Camden site. Priestly died in 1886 and in 1889 Croft brought his sons into the firm, which reorganized as Howland Croft, Sons & Company.⁶

The industrial enterprises located within or immediately adjacent to the district may be classified into three broad categories. Textile mills concentrated at the southern end of the district. These included the previously described Linden Worsted Mills, the worsted suitings mill of A. Priestly & Company, erected at the southeast corner of Jefferson and South Sixth Streets in 1886, and a small hosiery mill, later converted to a manufactory of glazed leather, and later again to a paint and varnish

⁵Ibid.; Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1985), 185-186.

⁶Prowell, *History of Camden*, 524; *Historical and Industrial Review of Camden, New Jersey* (New York: Commercial Publishing Co., 1890), 177.

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factory,⁷ located on the north side of Van Hook Street east of South Sixth Street.

Chemical works concentrated on the southeastern boundary of the district. These included J. C. Dunn, Jr. & Company's floor oil cloth factory, established in 1882 at Seventh and Jefferson Streets and the dye works of R. H. Comey Company located across Jefferson from Dunn's factory. Additionally, the Keystone Chemical Works operated a large plant on the Delaware River at approximately Jefferson Street prior to 1886.⁸

At the northeast corner of South Broadway and Jefferson Streets a small concentration of firms associated with cattle and leather established themselves. Isaac Ferris started a shoe factory at this location in 1882, and in 1884 the Kifferty Morocco Leather Works were established just north of Ferris' factory. By 1886 a slaughterhouse owned by W. Hills & Brother operated immediately east of Ferris' plant.⁹

In addition to the mills and factories described above, a number of other industries operated within close proximity to the district. As with the mills and factories located within or adjacent to the district, these plants attracted workers to the area. They were all located within easy walking distance, or a short streetcar ride, of the district. These included the enormous New York Ship Building Company yards erected on the Delaware River

⁷Prowell, *History of Camden*, 524; G. William Baist, *Atlas of the City of Camden, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: G. W. Baist, 1886); Sanborn-Perris Map Company, *Camden, New Jersey 1891* (New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., 1891).

⁸Prowell, *History of Camden*, 522; G. William Baist, *Atlas of the City of Camden, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: G. W. Baist, 1886); Sanborn-Perris Map Company, *Camden, New Jersey 1891* (New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., 1891).

⁹Prowell, *History of Camden*, 533, 535; G. William Baist, *Atlas of the City of Camden, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: G. W. Baist, 1886); Sanborn-Perris Map Company, *Camden, New Jersey 1891* (New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., 1891).

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just south of the district in 1899, the somewhat smaller Dialogue Iron Works shipyard established in 1850 north of the district on the Delaware, the large Eavenson & Levering fabric soap factory, located immediately northwest of the district, the Camden White Lead Works established just northeast of the district ca. 1900, the massive Miller & Rittenhouse Licorice Works established on the Delaware between Jefferson and Chelton Streets in 1900, and the Camden City Brewery, established just south of the district ca. 1905.¹⁰

Review of historic maps suggests that the establishment of industrial plants in the vicinity of the district is intimately associated with the area's transformation into a working class residential neighborhood. By 1890 the northern portion of the district, above Ferry Avenue, had been fairly densely developed. The frame houses constructed prior to 1877 were intermixed with new brick rowhouses, generally of fewer than six individual units. The small size of the rows reflects the presence of earlier buildings on the blocks, and the need for developers to build on the interstices between existing structures.

By 1890 development had also spread south along South Broadway, the area's major commercial thoroughfare. Historic maps indicate a large number of residences along South Broadway, with small retail establishments clustered near the corners of the blocks. Principal buildings constructed during this period include the two major extant religious buildings in the district, Our Saviour's Church, erected at the southeast corner of South Broadway and Viola between 1880 and 1882 from designs prepared by prominent Philadelphia architect George Hewitt, and the massive brownstone Church of the Sacred Heart, erected in 1886 from the designs of Jeremiah O'Rourke, that dominates

¹⁰Prowell, *History of Camden*, 383; G. William Baist, *Atlas of the City of Camden, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: G. W. Baist, 1886); Sanborn-Perris Map Company, *Camden, New Jersey 1891* (New York: Sanborn-Perris Map Co., 1891); G. W. Baist, *Baist's Property Atlas of the City of Camden, New Jersey* (Philadelphia: G. W. Baist, 1902); Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Camden, New Jersey*, 2 vols. (New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1906), vol. 2.

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the intersection of Ferry Avenue and South Broadway.¹¹ Another significant building constructed along the southern reaches of South Broadway during this period is the Camden City Fire Department's Engine House No. 3, erected at 1813 South Broadway in 1889. The construction of these two large churches and this fire house testify to the area's growth and prosperity. The architectural scale and quality of the churches indicates that the area's population had become prosperous enough to finance the construction of substantial religious institutions, while the presence of the fire house suggests both the city government's commitment to the recently annexed neighborhood and the fact that development of the area had advanced to the point that city government felt justified in stationing a fire company in the midst of the district.

The residential development of the district continued apace during the first decades of the twentieth century. As builders began to construct houses in the southern portions of the district, in areas previously undeveloped, the frame houses and small brick rows of early periods gave way to block-long rows of identical residences. The most impressive of these rows occupies the west side of South Fourth Street between Van Hook and Jasper Streets. Consisting of thirty individual units, one of which has been demolished, the row was erected ca. 1900. It is representative of residential construction throughout the district during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth.

After 1906 a new style of rowhouse appeared in the district, characterized by deeply recessed porches and projecting second story bays. This design represents the culmination of residential development within the district. Good examples of this residential style are scattered throughout the southern and eastern portions of the district, particularly on the 400 block of Winslow Street and the 1800 block of South Sixth Street.

¹¹Charles S. Boyer, compiler, *The Span of a Century: A Chronological History of the City of Camden* (Camden: Centennial Anniversary Committee, 1928), 57; Prowell, *History of Camden County*, 486-487.

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Twentieth century commercial development continued to be strongly linked to South Broadway. Major commercial projects constructed between 1900 and 1930 include the South Camden Trust Company Building, erected at the southeast corner of South Broadway and Ferry Avenue in 1926, the Star Theatre constructed ca. 1910 at the northeast corner of South Broadway and Viola Street, and an automobile showroom and garage, erected between 1906 and 1926 at the northwest corner of South Broadway and Winslow Street.

With the Great Depression, development in the district largely came to a halt. World War II brought a degree of prosperity to the district, as the various industrial plants in the area expanded operations. Following 1945, as major industries moved out of Camden, the district and its residents fell upon economic hard times. At present many buildings within the district are in deteriorated condition, and the once continuous rows of working class housing are interrupted by vacant lots.

Despite the deterioration that has resulted from neglect and economic hardtimes, the South Camden Historic District remains a significant and unique area within the City of Camden. Initially developed as a residential suburb, and transformed into a working class residential neighborhood by the establishment of a significant industrial presence in the immediately surrounding area, the district contains elements of both an early mid-nineteenth century residential suburb and a late nineteenth century working class neighborhood. The fact that the district did not become a part of the City of Camden until 1871 contributes to its unique architectural character. After annexation, frame construction was halted as a result of the City's 1853 fire code. Buildings erected in the district before 1871 tend to be of frame construction, while those built after annexation are mostly of brick.

Unlike other areas of the city, the district did not become intensively developed until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As a result, the building stock is significantly later than that in the city's other working class neighborhoods. The variation between the district and other areas of Camden is perhaps best illustrated by the substantial numbers of early twentieth century rowhouses, some with associated garages (such as those on the 400 block of Van Hook Street, Photograph), located within the district. Other areas of the city, developed as working class neighborhoods

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at an earlier date, did not have the physical space necessary to permit significant residential development during the twentieth century. The South Camden Historic District constitutes a rare opportunity, within the limits of the City of Camden, to observe both nineteenth century suburban and twentieth century working class residential architecture.

The framework of the district is provided by the blocks and rows of residences. Within this framework are a number of individually significant buildings associated with the commercial, institutional, industrial, and religious life of the community. These buildings include the Linden Worsted Mills, the Church of the Sacred Heart and Our Saviour's Church, the Star Theatre, Firehouse No. 3, the South Camden Trust Company, and the Mickle School Annex. Incorporated into the fabric of the community, these buildings constituted local landmarks and centers of activity. They remain distinctive elements within the district and illustrate the fact that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the area encompassed by the South Camden Historic District constituted a vibrant self-contained community.