

NARRATIVE SECTION

Study Unit	Other	Date Of Construction: <u>1913</u>
Architecture/Landscape Architecture	<u>Women's History</u>	Architect: <u>Joseph Wohleb</u>
Commerce		Builder:
Manufacturing/Industry		Engineer:

Property appears to meet criteria for the National Register of Historic Places: Yes
Property is located in a historic district (National and/or local): No
Property potentially contributes to a historic district (National and/or local):

Statement of Significance The Olympia Knitting Mills were an important part of the small manufacturing history of the city. The concrete manufacturing center built during a high growth period in Olympia was joined in 1929 by a Mission Revival Style office structure designed by Joseph Wohleb. The buildings represented an intact small manufacturing complex of early 20th century Olympia. The firm was organized in 1909 in a small downtown wooden building under the name "Washington Knitting Mills." The company was begun by Sol Meyers who was a foreman in the Blauvelt Knitting Company of Newark, New Jersey and worked for Saxony Knitting Goods of Seattle before coming to Olympia. Prominent local businessmen George Mottman, Mitchell Harris and C. A. Springer were investors. The mills in 1910 were turning out sweaters, coats, mufflers and mittens. A newspaper article of the period noted a large shipment was being sent to China. Beginning with four employees and four knitting machines, the firm could boast 21 knitting machines and 38 employees by 1911. Embossed with "Made in Olympia," golf and hunting coats, scarves and other knitted goods were sent from Alaska to Mexico through mail order. Yarns were shipped from Philadelphia and Washougal, Washington and dyed with imported aniline dyes. The firm moved to the modern concrete factory on South Jefferson Street in 1913, which boasted the most modern in electrically powered machinery. That year the firm was recapitalized with the issuance of \$25,000 in stock. With raw materials and dyes in short supply during World War I, the factory languished but returned to full capacity in the 1920's producing knit swimsuits, sweaters and athletic jerseys. After the war, the yarns were dyed in California and shipped to Olympia. Three-strand, double twist yarns were placed on automatic tubular knitting machines to produce swimming suits. The fabric was then cut in layers of 12 and assembled with rubber button closures. Marketed under the "Wil-Wite" name for Will Ingraham, president of the concern and H. L. Whiting, secretary, the suits boasted a shield and wings as their trademark. A wing was added after the war for increased capacity on the south side of the original structure. The suits were in national demand on the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts, around the Great lakes and even in the areas where only indoor "natatoria" lured swimmers, according to a 1925 article. The company produced jacquard knits, the rage of the 1920's. Here also were fabricated letter sweaters for area universities and athletic knitwear for high schools and universities, with turtle-necks a specialty. The firm added the Mission Revival style office in 1929 and enlarged manufacturing area, but by 1939 the company had ceased production. Many employees of the Knitting Mills were women who were also officers in the Union organized at the mills.

Description of Physical Appearance The Olympia Knitting Mills is an expansive, U-shaped structure of stucco-clad concrete with a flat roof with an east wing extending to Cherry Street which was added in 1929. The original building was at the north side of the U and a second portion added after World War I perpendicular to it. A one-story Mission Revival building is on the southwest front corner. Both structures abut Jefferson Street. The two-story section, which housed the manufacturing operation, is lit by rows of large multi-paned metal sash, some of which are double-hung and some fixed. The one-story office built in 1929 has a flat roof bordered by a tiled parapet with a central arched section on the front (west) facade above the main entry door. The walls have engaged pilasters with brick caps, alternating with newer metal windows topped by metal awnings. The exterior manufacturing section of the Knitting Mills is completely intact. New metal frame windows replace the original materials on the office structure which has been altered to accommodate new office uses. The manufacturing area is currently used for warehousing.

Major Bibliographic References "Knitting Mills Extends Its Business," Morning Olympian, March 15, 1916.
 Morning Olympian articles dated: February 13, 1909; July 13, 1911; December 31, 1910; May 30, 1909; June 3, 1909; October 30, 1910.
 Puget Sound Electrical Journal, November, 1925, p. 3.

PHOTOS



View of SW corner
taken 10/17/1985
Photography Neg. No. (Roll No./Frame No.):
27-7A
Comments: