

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received JAN 15 1987

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

FEB 12 1987

1. Name

historic KRAUS CORSET FACTORY

and or common N/A

2. Location

street & number Roosevelt Drive and Third Street n/a not for publication

city, town Derby n/a vicinity of

state Connecticut code 09 county New Haven code 009

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<u>n/a</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

4. Owner of Property

name Sterling Rowe Apartments Limited Partnership
c/o Segul Associates

street & number One Gold Street

city, town Hartford n/a vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Derby Town Clerk

street & number City Hall, 35 Fifth Street

city, town Derby state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1986 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

city, town Hartford ⁵⁹ South Prospect Street state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Kraus Corset Factory is a large brick industrial building, the oldest part of which dates from 1879. Forming an obtuse angle on the corner of Roosevelt Drive (formerly Houston Avenue) and Third Street, the factory directly abuts the sidewalk on both streets. The site is separated from Derby's nearby commercial center by new construction, including a parking garage, an apartment building, and a gas station. Across Roosevelt Avenue is vacant land adjacent to the Housatonic River. A steep hill rises abruptly from the rear of the factory's lot; the hill is partly wooded to the north and northeast.

The 1879 building facing Third Street (Photograph 1) is nine bays wide, has an asphalt-shingled gable roof with four small gabled dormers, and has an interior structure of wooden posts and beams supporting open-joisted floors (Photograph 5). The foundation is a random ashlar of granite blocks. Windows have segmental-arched heads, stone sills, and 6-over-6 wooden sash. There are three entrances placed asymmetrically on the facade or south elevation, the rightmost of which retains its transom and four-panel door; the other two are blocked off. The center entry with its shed-roof shelter is an added loading dock not original to the facade.

A 3-story addition built c.1910 adjoins the older factory's west wall and extends for ten bays along Roosevelt Drive (Photographs 1 and 2), with much of the basement level exposed above grade. It has a shallow shed roof pitched back toward the rear of the building. The wide window openings are fitted with 10-over-10 wooden sash. Interior posts and beams have steel-plate connectors, and the floors are of layered-plank construction (Photograph 6). The north wall is of frame construction with metal, brick-pattern siding; a fire escape is attached at the northeast corner.

Other than simple corbeling found at the cornice of both buildings, there is no stylistic elaboration.

Across the rear of the 1879 part (see sketch plan) is a small flat-roofed brick extension which in its one-story form was probably original to the factory; around 1890 it was raised to its present three-story height. The boiler house, attached to the northeast rear corner of the complex, was also originally a single story in height, but two stories were added c.1910, about the time the large addition on the Roosevelt Drive side of the factory was built. In the 1940s a cinderblock one-story addition was made at the rear of the complex, but it has recently been removed (Photograph 3).

Also demolished was a 1953 cinder-block addition appended to the north side and facing Roosevelt Drive (Photograph 4). An elevator tower (c.1950) is attached to the east side of the old part of the factory.

In general the structural condition of the building appears sound, but the exterior shows some deterioration. Wooden elements such as sash and dormers have become extremely weathered, and mortar joints and roof shingles require repair.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Criteria A,C

Specific dates 1879,c.1910--Built **Builder/Architect** Not Known

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Summary

The Kraus Corset Factory is significant because it is associated with two industries important to the historical development of Derby, corset-making and pin manufacture, and because of its connection with Sidney A. Downs, one of the town's leading citizens of the 19th century. Of Derby's remaining structures associated with corset manufacture, it is the only one which retains a high degree of historical integrity: the others have all been demolished or substantially altered for commercial retail use. At its height, corset manufacture employed hundreds of people in Derby, making the city part of a triangle running from Bridgeport to New Haven and up the Naugatuck Valley, in which much of the nation's production of corsets occurred. Later, the factory was used for the manufacture of pins, another regional metal specialty. (Criterion A)

The structures also embody the distinctive characteristics of 19th-century and early 20th-century mill architecture (Criterion C). The older part illustrates the persistence of an old-fashioned construction detail, joisted floors, in the context of light-manufacturing use. The c.1910 part typifies the standardization of mill construction by the early 20th century.

History

Industrial growth in Derby followed the pattern that characterized much of west-central Connecticut: a proliferation of small, locally based firms making consumer products was eventually replaced by one or two dominant firms in each sector. The consolidation into larger firms generally relied on resources from beyond the local area. For instance, when the Derby Silver Company consolidated local tableware production in the 1870s, its success depended crucially on investment and material supply from the large brass firms located in other Naugatuck Valley towns. The timing of consolidation varied somewhat for different industries. Tableware production was consolidated relatively early, while another of Derby's major industrial sectors, machinery and fabricated metal goods, was not merged into a single large producer until the early 20th century, when the Farrel Foundry and Machine Company of Ansonia bought and expanded Derby's Birmingham Foundry Company.

Not every Derby industry survived the era of consolidation: some firms were relocated or closed down by absentee owners, and others simply succumbed to the competition from larger firms elsewhere. The Derby corset industry followed the latter pattern. Corsetmaking was a volatile business that was difficult to sustain in the best of circumstances, since it was subject to sudden shifts in demand based on changing fashions. And none of the half-

(continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .5 acres

Quadrangle name Ansonia, Conn.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	8	6	5	9	7	4	0	4	5	7	5	8	7	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is that shown as Lots 1 and 2, Derby Assessor's Map 8-5 and recorded in the Derby Land records on Page 69, Volume 169. This parcel represents the historical extent of the factory property.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

n/a

state n/a code county n/a code

state n/a code county n/a code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Bruce Clouette and Matthew Roth, edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Historic Resource Consultants

date August 12, 1986

street & number 55 VanDyke Avenue

telephone 547 - 0268

city or town Hartford

state Connecticut

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date January 8, 1987

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

after... in the National Register

Keeper of the National Register

date 2-12-87

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Kraus Corset Factory

Continuation sheet Derby, CT

Item number 8

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Significance (continued):

dozen corset shops operating in Derby during the 1870s and 1880s achieved sufficient stature to survive the competition from the giant companies that formed elsewhere in the late 19th century, such as Warner Brothers in Bridgeport, Strous-Adler in New Haven, and R & G in Norwalk. Nonetheless, corset production played an important role in the industrial growth of Derby. It employed hundreds of mostly unskilled and semi-skilled workers, most of whom found jobs in the town's other industries after corset-making declined. It provided a means for well-to-do local people to diversify their financial positions. Because it relied on purchased hardware (spring-steel stays, hooks-and-eyes, etc.) from shops throughout the region, corset production brought Derby more fully into the Naugatuck Valley's industrial community, strengthening the financial ties that would eventually lead to the formation of larger firms in other sectors, such as the silver and machinery companies noted above. One consequence of consolidation in Connecticut's industries was the loss of the manufacturing facilities from the earlier era. Plants were rebuilt in a larger scale at the same site, or the older, smaller plants fell into disuse and were either demolished or substantially altered from their original appearance. Kraus Corset is Derby's only extant, substantially unaltered corset factory; it embodies an era and scale of corset production that was important in the town's development but that is unrepresented by any other standing structures in the town. Statewide, the early development of corset production is represented by only this factory and a handful of sites in Bridgeport.

The factory was built by Sidney A. Downs, one of the pioneers of Derby's corset industry. Downs (1817-1890) started his business career as a merchant and diversified into hardware production, renting space above a Main Street commercial block. In the 1850s, in partnership with R. N. Bassett, he began the production of spring-steel hoopskirts, and when that fashion faded, he started making corsets. Small-scale metal-related factories like these made Derby a thriving industrial center in the 19th century.

By the 1870s Derby had a half-dozen other corsetmaking companies, though Downs and Bassett remained the leading firm. Sidney Downs was one of Derby's leading citizens: he served for many years as town clerk, assessor, and selectman, and he was a director of both the Derby Savings Bank and Birmingham National Bank. In 1879 Downs built this factory and soon thereafter ended his partnership with Bassett.

Downs leased his new corset factory to be operated by Austrian-born Leopold Kraus. Kraus employed up to 100 people (nearly all women) and reported making \$80,000 worth of corsets in 1880. While employment levels varied, these fluctuations tended to be industry-wide rather than specific to any single producer, and this plant consistently employed approximately one-

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Significance (continued):

quarter of the corset workers in Derby. In 1890 Kraus increased his capital by incorporating with several out-of-town partners as the Derby Corset Company. Nevertheless, by 1896, Kraus had left Derby, a victim of the Depression of 1893 and the increased consolidation of the corset industry in the hands of a few Bridgeport, Norwalk, and New Haven companies. Kraus apparently moved to New York City, where he worked as a tailor.

After Kraus left, Downs' heirs rented the building to a succession of manufacturers, including the R. N. Bassett Company, makers of spring steel, clasps, and other corset hardware, and S. G. Redshaw, a paper-box manufacturer. In 1907 the building was sold to the Sterling Pin Company. Sterling Pin enlarged the plant around 1910 and manufactured hooks and eyes, pins, hairpins, and other wire products (as well as continuing the paper-box business) until the 1970s, building new additions as business warranted. Pins and associated wire products were a regional specialty in the Naugatuck Valley, one which continued the area's industrial prosperity through the post-World War II era.

Architectural Significance

The historical significance of the factory is reinforced by its retention of a substantial degree of its original appearance. Its brick walls, post-and-beam interior construction, repetitious bay-spacing, and lack of stylish detailing are all typical of the mill architecture of the period, though the joisted floors in the older part would not have been acceptable in most factory situations. Joisted floors were common in pre-Civil War factories, but insurance companies judged them a fire hazard and they soon disappeared from mill architecture. Their appearance at this late date (1879) probably was due to Downs's background in light manufacturing: he started his career in a loft above a store and many of his competitors still made their garments on the upper floors of commercial buildings. Thus it is not surprising that Downs would build using a technique appropriate to the commercial architecture of his day but outmoded for factory construction. The building technology thus represents the small-scale phase of the corset industry, before it had matured to the point where a few large companies hired mill engineers to build huge factories.

The c.1910 addition, with its wider windows, low-pitched roof, and unjoisted floors illustrates the standard mill construction which had become nearly universal by the early 20th century. The two connected buildings illustrate clearly the evolution of industrial architecture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

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KRAUS CORSET FACTORY
Derby, Connecticut

Sketch Plan

