

WESTINGHOUSE ELECTRIC SUPPLY COMPANY WAREHOUSE
905-915 East Second Street
Los Angeles
Los Angeles County
California

HABS CA-434
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
WESTINGHOUSE ELECTRIC SUPPLY COMPANY WAREHOUSE

HABS No. CA-434

Location: 905-915 East Second Street, Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, California.
Latitude and longitude are 34.047306° and -118.235027°. ¹

Present Use: Office and warehouse

Significance: The Westinghouse Electric Supply Company warehouse served as an electrical goods storage and shipping warehouse for one of the country's largest electronics companies, Westinghouse Electric Supply Company (WESCO), from 1930 to the 1980s. Constructed in 1929-30 with elements of Art Deco style, the building represents the regional distribution network of WESCO and the twentieth century industrial history of Los Angeles, California.

Description: The WESCO warehouse is located at the northeast corner of East Second and South Garey streets in Los Angeles, California. The building consists of two attached warehouses: a two story reinforced concrete warehouse and one story reinforced concrete warehouse. The two warehouses were constructed simultaneously in 1929-30. Both have wood truss roofs.

The two story section is symmetrical and seven bays wide at the south facade. The bays are separated by engaged, raised pilasters. Six bays contain metal louvers in original window openings, while the center bay contains the main entrance to the building, accessed by a concrete stair. The entrance consists of metal frame, glazed double doors with transom set in a recessed surround. A concrete ramp provides additional access to the entrance. A metal sign spans the width of the facade above the louvers and entrance and covers steel sash multi-light windows at the second story. Decorative cast concrete ornamentation is visible above the sign at the parapet. The west facade is twelve bays wide with a combination of metal louvers and multi-light steel sash windows. Cast concrete ornamentation continues at the parapet. At the north end of the west facade, metal roll-up doors cover two vehicle entrances. The south facade is utilitarian and contains no openings. The east facade abuts and is connected to the adjacent one story section of the building.

The one story section is symmetrical and three bays wide at the south facade. The facade projects beyond the facade of two story section, toward the street. Metal roll-up doors cover three vehicle entrances in the bays. Unlike the two story section, the parapet is utilitarian and lacks cast concrete ornamentation. The west facade abuts and is connected to the adjacent two story section of the building. The north facade contains one opening, a freight loading entrance with metal roll-up door. The east facade has three similar freight loading entrances, adjacent to the now defunct rail spur on the east side of the building.

The interior of the two story section contains contemporary dropped acoustical ceilings and office partitions. A wood frame mezzanine is located over a portion of the interior to provide

¹ Obtained from Google Earth, 2013. Measured from approximately southwest corner of building.

additional office space. The second floor is accessed through a stair and freight elevator at the center of the building. It has an open floor plate with visible wood roof trusses.

The remainder of the two story section and the one story section have open floor plates with concrete floors and over-painted brick walls. Wood roof trusses are visible throughout. Loading docks are situated at the perimeter of the building. Natural light is provided through door openings and skylights.

History: The Westinghouse Electric Supply Company (WESCO) was founded by George Westinghouse (1846-1914) in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1886. Westinghouse was a prolific inventor and entrepreneur. He obtained his first patent for a rotary steam engine in 1865 and was credited with over 350 patents at the time of his death in 1914. One of his greatest achievements was the invention of an air brake for rail cars in 1869, which improved the safety and accuracy of braking.² WESCO's success depended in part on the company's early acquisition of Nicholas Tesla's patents for polyphase alternating current systems and induction motors.³ These patents established the company as a formidable rival to Thomas Edison's General Electric Company, the other large electric company operating at the beginning of the industry.

By 1890, WESCO had installed the first long distance power transmission line in the United States, between Willamette Falls and Portland, Oregon. By 1900, the company employed more than 50,000 workers in Pittsburgh.⁴ WESCO continued to make pioneering advances in telephone, telegraph, wireless communication, and radio broadcasting technology. Research divisions spurred commercial introduction of the radio and other consumer appliances. In the 1930s, WESCO catalogs featured products from fuses to street lamps to electric fans to household lighting.⁵ During World War II, WESCO worked on improving airborne radar and manufacturing switchgear, turbines and motors under military defense contracts.

The WESCO warehouse at 905-915 East Second Street in Los Angeles was used to supply and distribute electrical goods throughout the southern California region. WESCO developed a national supply chain, reaching from the company's headquarters in Pittsburgh to the west coast of the United States. The Westinghouse warehouse was part of a network of regional distribution which included the company's headquarters for Los Angeles branch operations at 420 South San Pedro Street.⁶ A freight spur of the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad located to the east of the building brought goods from across the country for staging and distribution from the WESCO warehouse.

² Quentin R. Skrabec, *George Westinghouse: Gentle Genius* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2007).

³ Westinghouse Electric Company, "History," 2013,

<http://www.westinghousenuclear.com/Our_Company/history/index.shtm>.

⁴ Westinghouse Electric Company, "Timeline," 2013,

<http://www.westinghousenuclear.com/Our_Company/history/Timeline/1900_1939.shtm>.

⁵ Westinghouse Electric Supply Company, "Catalog #72," 1936. Accessed through National Insulator Association, <www.nia.org>.

⁶ Historic Preservation Partners, "City of Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument Application: Westinghouse Electric Building," April 2008.

Surrounding parcels developed from residences in the late nineteenth century into an industrial district by the beginning of the twentieth century. Starting in 1869 with completion of the Los Angeles and San Pedro Railroad between Los Angeles and Wilmington, California, development of freight service rail lines spurred industrial land uses in the surrounding area. By 1906, this neighborhood was serviced by the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad, providing additional freight capacity which supported large-scale industrial land uses and regional and national distributions networks, such as WESCO.

Sources:

City of Los Angeles Department of Building and Safety building permits for 905-915 East Second Street.

Historic Preservation Partners, "City of Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument Application: Westinghouse Electric Building," April 2008.

Sanborn Fire Insurance maps. Digital Sanborn Maps, 1867-1970. Accessed through Los Angeles Public Library, <www.lapl.org>.

Skrabec, Quentin R. *George Westinghouse: Gentle Genius*. New York: Algora Publishing, 2007.

Westinghouse Electric Company, "History" and "Timeline." 2013.
<http://www.westinghousenuclear.com/Our_Company>.

Historian: Marissa Moshier, Chattel, Inc.

Project Information: A Final Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) to satisfy requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act was prepared for a proposed project at 905-915 East Second Street, Los Angeles, California in April 2009. The MND found that the WESCO warehouse may be eligible for the California Register of Historical Resources as a contributor to a potential historic district of industrial resources in Los Angeles. The MND included a Cultural Resources Mitigation Measure requiring Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) documentation of the WESCO warehouse. The language requiring HABS documentation is as follows:

Prior to the issuance of a demolition permit and prior to the commencement of any construction activities, a photographic and narrative documentation report shall be prepared by a qualified architectural historian or historic preservation professional who satisfies the Secretary of the Interior's Professional Qualifications Standards for History and/or Architectural History, pursuant to 36 CFR 61. This report shall document the significance of the warehouses at 905-915 E. 2nd Street and their physical conditions, both historically and currently, through photographs and text. Photographic documentation noting all elevations, details of the key character-defining features, and representative oblique views shall be taken utilizing large format black and white

photographs. The photographer shall be familiar with the recordation of historical resources in accordance with HABS guidelines. Photographs shall be prepared in a format consistent with the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) standards for field photography. Archival produced copies of the written report and photographs shall be submitted to the City of Los Angeles Office of Historic Resources, the City of Los Angeles Public Library (main branch), and the Historic American Building Survey, Washington, D.C.⁷

This documentation has been prepared in fulfillment of the Cultural Resources Mitigation Measure described above. The report was prepared by Marissa Moshier of Chattel, Inc. (Chattel), using the sources listed above. The black and white photographic documentation prepared to accompany this report was completed in July 2012 by Tavo Olmos of Positive Image Photographic Services.

⁷ PCR Services Corporation, "Final Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration: MegaToys Project," April 2009.