JOHN & JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (WEST PARCEL),
BUILDING NO. 15
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5383-N

HABS
PA
51-PHILA,
695N-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
Mid-Atlantic Regional Office
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
JOHN AND JAMES DOBSON CARPET MILL (West Parcel), BUILDING 15
HABS No. PA-5383-N

Location:

4041-4055 Ridge Avenue
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

Present Owner:

Rouse Urban Housing, Inc.
1500 Walnut Street, 19th Floor
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19102

Present Occupant:

Mixed commercial and industrial tenants.

Significance:

Building 15 was originally built in 1879 but the existing building was built in 1915. Its location at the head of the railroad siding documents the close connection between rail transportation and the success of the Dobson Mill.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

Date(s) of Erection:

Original building built 1879, altered 1891. Existing built in 1915. Building 15 first shows up on the 1879 Hexamer Survey with an 1879 erection date.

Architect:

Unknown.

Original/Subsequent Owners:

See Chain of Title.

Builder, Contractor, Suppliers:

Unknown.

Original Plans/Construction:

Building 15 was originally constructed as a one-story, rectangular, stone, wool storehouse with a tin roof and a clerestory. Its basement and first floor ceiling heights were 21' and 31' respectively and its walls were 24' in width. One wooden door was located on each elevation of the building which had an exterior wood platform on its southern elevation. The platform which served to receive shipments from the trains was accessed by a wooden stair. A pond is shown on the 1879 atlas directly outside the northern end of the building.

Alterations/Additions:

In 1891, the original Building 15 was enlarged to the east with a one-story wool storehouse, also of stone with a tin roof. The clerestory roof of the original building was replaced with a pair of gabled roofs and the wooden loading platform was extended. In 1915, the building was completely rebuilt on the foundations of the original storehouse to the four-story structure it is today. Though constructed of the same rubble masonry used throughout the complex, the building's flat roof and iron sash mark the conversion to modern construction methods on the site. At the same time as Building 15 was constructed, Building 16 to its east was erected and the pond/basin at the northern end of the building was infilled. Although these have been known as two structures, they read visually as one building and were both used as wool and finished stock storehouses.

B. Historical Context

The original Building 15 was erected in its location at a time when railroad shipping first became critical to the functioning of the Dobsons' mill. The reconstruction of the existing building in the early twentieth century documents not only the continued reliance on the railroads in the operations of the mill, but also one of the last phases of expansion of the west parcel of the Dobson site. The flat roof and steel sash date the existing building as one of the later constructions on the site.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

Architectural Character:

Building 15 reflects the same rubble masonry construction as the earlier buildings in the complex. Its flat roof and steel sash depart, however, from that earlier architectural character and reflect the shift towards early-20th-century building techniques.

Condition of Fabric:

The masonry is in generally good condition. The roof and upper floors have suffered from deterioration.

B. Description of Exterior

Overall Dimensions:

84'x84'.

Foundations:

Rubblestone.

Walls:

Rubblestone; brick corbeled cornice with terra-cotta coping on south, north and west elevations. Southern elevation reinforced with interior masonry buttresses added at a later date.

Structural System/Framing:

Rubble masonry with interior wood columns carrying timber framing. Southwest corner first floor reinforced with internal rubblestone buttress.

Porches/Stoops/Balconies/Bulkheads:

None.

Chimneys:

None.

Openings:

Doorways/Doors:
West elevation- non-original central loading bay with door. South elevation- second and fifth bays contain ground story entrances recessed behind segmental arches. Northwest elevation- two entrances, one in brick stair tower addition. North elevation- double-leaf utilitarian steel fire shutters.

Windows/Shutters:
West elevation- nine bays of windows under brick segmental arches; the majority are intact with industrial steel sash. South elevation- six bays with similar treatment to west facade. Northwest elevation- six bays with similar treatment to other facades, primarily intact.

Roof:

Flat built-up roof carried on wooden rafters supported by wooden columns. Roof is severely deteriorated.

C. Description of Interior

Floor Plans:

First story- square unpartitioned space with four rows of columns carrying floor joists.

Stairways:

Exterior brick fire tower with single bay of steel sash projects from east side and is shared by Building 16.

Flooring:

First floor- concrete; upper floors- wooden.

Wall/Ceiling Finishes:

First floor- rubble walls; upper floors- plastered rubble walls. Ceilings are exposed timber and planking.

Openings:
Doorways/Doors:

No surviving original or historic interior doors.

Windows:

All windows are recessed in unornamented plaster.

Decorative Features and Trim:

N/A.

Hardware:

Original hardware is presumed to have been utilitarian in character.

Mechanical Equipment:

Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: See PA-5383-C for heating system, air conditioning is N/A, ventilation by window mounted fans, exhaust ducts or air conditioning units.

Lighting: Modern lighting throughout.

Plumbing: Early-20th century, ceiling mounted, sprinkler fire suppression system.

D. Site

General Setting/Orientation:

Building 15 is situated in the southeastern corner of the west parcel of the Dobson site abutting the railroad tracks. Enclosed by buildings and on a lower grade than most of the site, the building is not visually prominent in the complex.

Historic Landscape Design:

See Historic Context Section.

Outbuildings:

N/A.

Additional Information:

The most prominent feature of Building 15 is the coal conveyor and hopper on its roof. This feature was added c.1918 when the centralized boiler system was constructed in Building 3. In 1918 the old system of individual boilers for each building or group of buildings was abandoned. The central boiler radically altered the visual character of the complex which had been previously dominated by chimney stacks throughout the west parcel. The coal used in the boiler was delivered to the site by rail on the Richmond Branch Reading Railroad line immediately south of the building. In order to convey the coal from the rail cars to Building 3 without blocking the road between Buildings 15 and 3, it was necessary to construct a conveyor which brought the coal up to and across the roof of building to the hopper. The hopper is located between Buildings 3 and 15, and is suspended over the roadway by steel framing, allowing the roadway below to remain open.

Description:

Steel framed vertical conveyor covered in corrugated metal (west facade) topped by steel and wood framed conductor's station covered in corrugated metal. The station has small multiple light industrial sash. Large horizontal conveyors and walkway of steel and wood construction, whole suspended above the roof and supported by trussed steel supports. The walls and roof are covered with corrugated metal, and there is a series of regularly spaced horizontal steel 4-light sash below the eave line. Round hopper with conical top and base constructed of riveted steel supported on steel Dunnage framing system.