



Community & Economic Development Department
3900 Main Street, Riverside, CA 92522 | Phone: (951) 826-5371 | RiversideCA.gov

Planning Division

CULTURAL HERITAGE BOARD MEETING DATE: MARCH 15, 2023
AGENDA ITEM NO.: 7

PROPOSED PROJECT

Case Numbers	Not Applicable	
Request	To receive and file a presentation on the history of the Food Machinery Corporation Buildings.	
Applicant	Not Applicable	
Project Location	3080 - 3092 Twelfth Street, on the west side of Howard Avenue between Eleventh and Twelfth Streets	
APN	211-201-039; 211-231-024	
Ward	2	
Neighborhood	Eastside	
Historic District	Not Applicable	
Historic Designation	City Landmark #102	
Staff Planner	Scott Watson, Historic Preservation Officer 951-826-5507 swatson@riversideca.gov	

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Cultural Heritage Board receive and file this presentation on the history of the Food Machinery Corporation Buildings.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Food Machinery Corporation Complex

The Food Machinery Corporation (FMC) Buildings were designated by City Council as City Landmark #102 on May 21, 1996. Later studies, including on completed in 2021, found that the buildings were eligible for listing in both the California Register of Historic Resources and the National Register of Historic Places under all four criteria. The following history of the building is an excerpt from that the Landmark designation staff report completed by Anthea Hartig, Senior Planner.

Early Riverside Roots: Stebler, Parker, and Paxton

The origins of the FMC Riverside Plant stem from two sources. The first is that the site, from Fourteenth to Tenth Streets and Commerce Street (Pachappa) to Howard Avenue, has important ties to early manufacturing in Riverside; the second results from the association with the formation of the Food Machinery Corporation, which although had its roots further north in the San Jose area, became an integral factor in the success of Riverside's citrus industry.

Emerging as one of the largest manufacturers in the state, FMC traces its origins to the 1900 Stoner Iron Works (later the Riverside Foundry and Machine Works) which had its foundry, machine shop and other buildings along Commerce (Pachappa) and Tenth Streets, according to the 1908 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. It was there that machinist George Parker got his start, buying the Ironworks and renaming the company the Parker Machine Works in 1909. Parker's significant contributions came in the form of a nailing machines for citrus boxes, and the automatic Orange Box Maker, or OBM, which was instrumental in revolutionizing the citrus industry. The OBM proved to be so useful that by 1920 virtually every citrus packing plant in the United States used Parker's invention.

Concurrently, another mechanic, Fred Stebler, who had arrived in Riverside in 1899 from South Dakota, had been busily inventing citrus processing equipment. Starting his California Iron Works a few blocks to the northeast of Parker's at Ninth and Vine Streets in 1903, Stebler's contributions to the industry included mechanized sizers, fruit washers, dryers, sorters, and handling systems. Parker's success with the OBM and subsequent patent on a nailing machine emboldened Parker to challenge rival Stebler by manufacturing sizing and sorting equipment. After a decade of litigation, the two competitors merged the California Iron Works and Parker Machine Works packing house equipment division in 1921, creating the Stebler-Parker Company at the Vine Street location. Parker continued independent operation of the Machine Works, producing profitable nailing machines, and filing patent infringement suits against other machinist rivals. A formidable rival was found in the young Hale Paxton, who had built a portable nailing machine that proved to be much gentler to the fruit than Parker's OBM.

Early FMC History

Meanwhile in Los Gatos, another transplanted midwesterner, John Bean, had begun making agricultural spray pumps. By 1903 he proved so successful that he formed the John Bean Spray Pump Company. His company expanded and went public in 1928, taking with it several rival companies from Oregon, Washington, and Illinois. He created by 1929 the new Food Machinery Corporation.

That same year FMC acquired the Stebler-Parker Company, the Pioneer Brush Company, Stevens Brothers, and the Roberts & Huntington Company to form the "Citrus Machinery Division" of FMC headquartered in Riverside. In 1936 the merger was strengthened by the Food Machinery Corporation's successful acquisition of the expanded Parker Machine Works at the site along Commerce Street from Eleventh through Twelfth Streets in a court-directed sale, as well as a deal with Hale Paxton for the Paxton Nailing Machine Company. In 1938 all components of the Citrus Machinery Division were combined in Riverside at the newly completed plant on the site of the machine works, between 10th and 12th Streets and the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe railroad tracks and Howard Avenue. Thus, by 1938 with a variety of interests ranging from fruit washers to shipping, FMC was a force to be reckoned with in the citrus industry. Stebler was the first manager of the Food Machinery Company plant in Riverside from 1929 until his retirement some eight years later. Hale Paxton succeeded him but died just six months later. Ogden S. Sells followed, serving until 1948.

Significance of FMC

From 1929 to 1938, the Food Machinery Corporation in Riverside limited its production to citrus packing equipment. It was not until the Parker/Paxton mergers that the citrus packing equipment and nailing machine division were consolidated at the new plant in Riverside. Coordinated growing, packing, preserving, manufacturing, and shipping were critical to the development of world-wide markets for citrus as well as other fruits and vegetables that were the source of Riverside County's wealth.

The box-making machines which evolved from Parker's OBM were perhaps the most important food packing and shipping machines produced at the Riverside plant due to their impact on food processing throughout the world. They were made in widely various sizes and could complete as many as 600 boxes per hour. John D. Crummey, grandson of John Bean and co-founder of the Food Machinery Corporation, was able to assure the California Fruit Growers Exchange of Riverside (Sunkist) and others that FMC could make a more efficient fruit washing machine occupying only 28 feet instead of 125 feet. By 1935, the citrus packing houses were capable of handling three times as much fruit as before.

The Food Machinery Corporation began to diversify early, addressing all aspects of the food industry. A research laboratory was established in Riverside in 1935 and was responsible for several innovations critical to the marketing and distribution of fresh fruits and vegetables. "Flavorseal" which reduced spoilage losses, maintained fruit freshness, guarded flavor, and improved the appearance of fresh fruits and vegetables was developed at the Riverside laboratory in 1939. It proved to be one of FMC's most successful innovations and brought the Riverside plant world-wide recognition. Although borne out of the needs of citrus, the Riverside plant later became more diverse, turning partly to the manufacture of egg packing machinery including egg case nailing machines which logically evolved from the old OBM.

By World War II the Food Machinery Corporation had expanded throughout the country, and the Riverside Plant had gained its place in the history of the food industry. However, wartime metal shortages severely limited FMC's production of nonessential capital goods. In 1941 FMC found an expedient way to keep the engineering organization together while also performing a useful defense service when the Navy order 200 amphibious tractors known as "Alligators" to be produced at FMC's Clearwater, Florida plant. These were based on John A. Roebling's (grandson of the builder of the Brooklyn Bridge) c.1933 "Alligator" which was used for rescue efforts in the Everglades.

In late 1941 the Navy requested a redesign of the "Alligator" to make it an effective fighting vehicle, capable for withstanding the grueling punishment to which it would be subjected. FMC engineer James M. Hait (later President of FMC) developed the "Water Buffalo." The design work and tests were completed in six months and the Bureau of Ships contracted with FMC for the production of the amphibious tanks. Startled Riversideers were treated to the sight of these rumbling war machines making their way through downtown en route to Fairmount Park for testing. Considered to be one of the truly new great weapons of WWII, they were produced at both FMC's Florida and Riverside plants. The "Water Buffalos" first saw combat at Tarawa in direct comparison with boat-type landing craft of all types. The comparative loss of life was so great that the entire plan of attack on the Pacific Islands was modified. Five different LVT (Landing Vehicles, Tracked) models, all FMC developments, participated in twenty different Pacific Island battles. Only the LVT model with gun turrets were made in Riverside and only they carried the name of "Water Buffalo."

With the Navy's order for full production of the Buffalo, proud and patriotic Riverside workers embarked on a crash program to convert production lines to wartime needs-- 45 days later the task was complete. The War Production Board awarded contracts for a total of 15,654 tanks, and FMC produced 11,251 LVTs, more than half of them in Riverside for which the plant was awarded three Army-Navy "E" (for excellence) flags. As the War expanded, the size of Riverside Plant #2

located between 12th and 13th Streets grew to over 400,000 square feet, employing 850 workers and producing \$4 million dollars in civilian goods annually plus over \$3 million dollars in tanks.

These "amphib" tanks once were common sights "swimming" in Lake Evans in Fairmount Park, where one sits today. The occasion of the production of the 10,000th LVT a "Buffalo," from the Riverside plant, was celebrated by such Hollywood names as Edward Arnold and Jeanette MacDonald. Under-Secretary of the Navy Ralph A. Bard participated by radio from Washington, Vice Adm. E. L. Cochrane, Chief of the Bureau of Ships, was present, as was Vice President of FMC and general manager of the Riverside Plant, Ogden Sell. John D. Crummey, Chairman of the Board, and Mayor Walter Davidson were also present. In 1946, the tank on its pedestal was dedicated as a war memorial with the following inscription: "To the Civilian War Workers of Riverside -- Veterans of the Battle of Production and Full Partners in Victory." (Press Enterprise, 1983)

Post-World War II History

Following World War II, the Riverside plant was reconverted as quickly as possible to peace-time production and new products were added to utilize the expanded facilities. Substantial progress had been made in this regard when, in 1951, the Navy once again turned to FMC's Riverside plant to remodel 719 LVTs and to build 239 new ones for the Korean War. The Tank program, long a dramatic part of the Riverside industrial scene, ended in early 1958, and FMC Riverside again returned to peace-time production.

From 1938 to the late 1970s, virtually every consumer in the United States was touched by the innovations and/or products manufactured by Riverside FMC plant, be it packed eggs, citrus juices, fresh fruits and vegetables, or wooden pallets which assisted in conveying numerous products from their original source to their ultimate designation. The FMC Riverside plant was a consistent leader in the food processing industry, solving many problems of automation, and producing machines with brains which proudly carried the "Look of Value" FMC trademark. FMC vacated the site in the late 1970's but continues to maintain customer service facilities in Riverside.

Architectural Significance

The Food Machine Corporation Citrus Divisions plant complex is architecturally significant as one of the largest and most innovative sawtooth industrial buildings of its time. Started in 1936, the main building of the new plant was complete by 1938 under the direction of Architect Herbert Hamm of Pasadena and Jess Beeson, superintendent of installation for the Food Machinery Corporation plant. A second even larger building of similar design was constructed in response to the war effort in 1942. The site was an excellent one, not only because The Food Machinery Corporation already owned the old Parker Machine Works site, but also because it was at the center of the Sunkist citrus growing cooperative, was served by three major railroads, and was near the Kaiser Steel Mill in Fontana.

As early as 1939 additional buildings and improvements were added to accommodate growth in the food processing equipment industry and also for conversion to war ordnance manufacturing. These changes continued through the period of significance. The main plant building and equipment represented an investment of approximately \$100,000 and more than doubled the capacity of the former facility (California Iron Works) on Ninth Street. The main building is 260 feet wide in front and 240 feet deep in the middle and was considered the largest establishment for the manufacturing of citrus packing house equipment in the world (Riverside Daily Press: Riverside, California: Tuesday Evening, March 1, 1938). The concrete block building was painted white with hundreds of steel frame windows with mullions painted blue. It was distinguished by its sawtooth industrial design which was oriented to the north in order to admit diffused light. The building is largely one story, being one large room opened to the exposed wooden truss and beam system and sawtooth skylights. Only the southern bay was two stories.

Originally, the drafting rooms and chemical laboratories occupied the southeastern end with offices in the southwestern end. They were painted sage green with such then "ultra modern innovations" as soundproof ceilings and cork floors, as well as "reeded glass" partitions and doors forming the offices. There was a ten-station telephone system and "inter-office announcing system" through which seven main stations were connected. In addition to these innovations, there was a blower system for removing the dust from the building. The north end was distinguished by a large door through which a spur railroad track permitted the loading of two freight cars from inside the building. According the Riverside Daily Press, nearly all of the work on the building was done by employees of the company itself, in slack seasons.

STRATEGIC PLAN

This item contributes to the Envision Riverside 2025 City Council Strategic Priority 2 – Community Well Being (Goal 2.3 – Strengthen neighborhood identities and improve community health and the physical environment through amenities and programs that foster an increased sense of community and enhanced feelings of pride and belonging citywide).

This item aligns with the following Cross-Cutting Threads:

1. Community Trust: This discussion on the history of the FMC building is being held during a Public Hearing before the Cultural Heritage Board and the public is able to provide comments.
2. Equity: This discussion on the history of the FMC building is open to all residence throughout the City.
3. Fiscal Responsibility: No City General Funds are being allocated as part of this discussion on the history of the FMC building.
4. Innovation: This discussion on the history of the FMC building is bases on extensive research related to the history of the building.
5. Sustainability and Resiliency: The history of the FMC building has been documented for future generations.

EXHIBITS LIST

1. Aerial/Location Map
2. Construction History Map

Prepared by: Scott Watson, Historic Preservation Officer
Approved by: Matthew Taylor, Principal Planner