

Greenwich Mills complex listed on National Register

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A building in the Greenwich Mills complex, in Warwick.

Photo courtesy of Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission

WARWICK — The Greenwich Mills complex — which has been called important to the early 20th-century industrialization and growth of Warwick and East Greenwich — has been added to the National Register of Historic Places.

The four-building brick complex, on a 4-acre parcel off Ladd Avenue, just north of the East Greenwich line, is being rehabilitated to house light-industrial and office space.

“The historic Greenwich Mills complex is being rehabilitated with the help of Rhode Island’s state historic preservation tax credit to continue to offer space to Rhode Island businesses,” said Edward F. Sanderson, executive director of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, which reviewed and submitted the mills’ National Register nomination. “Our communities’ historic factories are a resource for economic development.”

The National Register is the federal government’s official list of properties whose historical and architectural significance makes them worth preserving.

Though the complex was built between 1919 and 1927, the property has a much longer industrial history, starting as the location for a manufacturer of woolens.

In 1836, a wood-frame woolen mill was built on the site. That structure and its successor were both destroyed by fire, prompting the next owner to construct a brick building in 1868. By 1884, a complex was in place, with several more buildings and a bustling cassimere company. In 1903, the property was sold to Boston Wire Stitcher Company, now known as Bostitch, and individual buildings were soon rented out to manufacturing and dyeing firms.

In 1917, Granville A. Beals started the Greenwich Mills Company, which, like many Rhode Island mills, produced worsted cloth. Beals soon outgrew the space and purchased more land just north of the East Greenwich line to accommodate expansion. The four original buildings were demolished and replaced with a one-story structure; three more buildings were added in the following decade.

During World War I, the demand for wool products soared and the Greenwich Mills profited handsomely. Consumers continued to buy more “Greenwich Worsteds” in the years following the war. By 1932, the company had 400 workers operating 170 looms.

In 1945, Beals sold Greenwich Mills for more than \$1 million to Boston’s Verney Corporation, which owned rayon fabric mills in New England and Canada. At the time, Verney promised to expand the company’s offerings and modernize its plant. But four years later Verney sold the property to the Crescent Corporation of Fall River.

The remainder of the 20th century brought a string of industries to the plant, including machinery manufacturing, heating items and military equipment.