

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

LISTED ON:
VLR 03/18/2010
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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Martinsville Novelty Corporation Factory
other names/site number VDHR No. 120-5089

2. Location

street & number 900 Rives Road not for publication N/A
city or town Martinsville vicinity N/A
state Virginia code VA county Independent City code 690 zip code 24112

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

M. C. Hesser 3/31/2010
Signature of certifying official Date
Virginia Department of Historic Resources
State or Federal Agency or Tribal government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper _____
Date of Action _____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- X private
public-local
public-State
public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- X building(s)
district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows: buildings (4, 0), sites (0, 0), structures (1, 1), objects (0, 0), Total (5, 1).

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: INDUSTRY Sub: MANUFACTURING FACILITY

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: VACANT Sub: NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

NO STYLE

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK
roof SYNTHETIC
walls BRICK
other METAL

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- X A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
X C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1929-1960

Significant Dates 1929

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #

Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory

Martinsville, Virginia

Primary Location of Additional Data

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia

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10. Geographical Data
=====

Acreage of Property 3.6

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

Zone	Easting	Northing									
1	17	601710	4	059440	2				3		
											4

___ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

=====
11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title Ashley Neville & John Salmon
 organization Ashley Neville LLC date 12/28/09
 street & number 112 Thompson St, Suite B-1 telephone 804-798-2124
 city or town Ashland state VA zip code 23005

=====
Additional Documentation
=====

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
 A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

=====
Property Owner
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Fred T. & Lowanda M Martin
 street & number P. O. Box 968 telephone 276-340-3993
 city or town Martinsville state VA zip code 24114

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.). A federal agency may not conduct or sponsor, and a person is not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 36 hours per response including the time for reviewing

instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, 1849 C St., NW, Washington, DC 20240.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 1

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The former Martinsville Novelty Corporation factory is situated on a 3.604-acre tract of land wedged between Rives Road and the Norfolk Southern Railway tracks south of Martinsville's downtown commercial area. The factory once occupied the northern edge of an industrial area with the large W. M. Bassett Furniture Corporation factory located on the opposite side of the Norfolk Southern Railway tracks. The Bassett Furniture plant has been demolished and the Martinsville Novelty factory now stands alone. The Martinsville Novelty factory contains a collection of buildings and structures that contribute to the history of manufacturing furniture in Martinsville. The main factory, built in 1929, is a long, three-story, brick building that was constructed for the purpose of manufacturing small pieces of furniture called "novelty" pieces in the furniture trade. Connected to the factory on the northwest end are the wood storage area and the kilns where the wood was dried. A long, metal Quonset hut stands on the southwestern side of the factory parallel to it and the railroad tracks. A railroad spur, visible in the 1932 photograph of the complex, enters from the north and terminates at the southern end of the factory. The tall sawdust collector is located immediately adjacent to the southwestern side of the lumber storage building. Connected to the Quonset hut and factory on the southwestern end by a recent metal shed is a long concrete-block and frame storage building. Standing separately, just off the southeastern end of the concrete-block building, is a small, rectangular, brick building that at one time housed a restaurant that served the employees of Martinsville Novelty and W. M. Bassett Furniture factory. A long metal shed is sited to the front of the factory and abuts the roof of the wood storage building. These buildings and associated structures are tightly located on the property and their close proximity allowed the factory to function efficiently. These buildings maintain a high degree of architectural integrity from the time they were built. The main factory building has changed very little since it was constructed in 1929.

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Martinsville Novelty Corporation factory occupies most of the lot on which it stands. It is oriented northwest to southeast with its long side to the railroad tracks that are located immediately to the southwest. The land between the factory and Rives Road is paved for parking with mature trees in the parking area. The area between the factory's southeastern end and the former restaurant is also paved and was used as a truck loading area. Because the lot slopes down to the railroad tracks, the one-story wood storage section and kilns were built into the side of the hill and their roofs are barely above ground level on the front. The tracks of the railroad spur between the factory and the Quonset hut are still intact as is a railroad trestle shown on the 1936 plat. On the northwestern end of the building, the tracks on which the lumber was moved into the kiln are also still extant.

Resources

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 2

Factory/wood storage/kiln (all attached)	Contributing
Quonset Hut	Contributing
Concrete-block Storage Building	Contributing
Restaurant	Contributing
Railroad Spur & Trestle	Contributing Structure
Metal Pole Shed	Noncontributing

Factory/Wood Storage/Kiln (Contributing)

The main factory, built in 1929, is a three-story, flat-roofed building constructed of brick laid mostly in six-course American bond. The long, five-bay-deep building was constructed into the side of a hill with a concrete retaining wall along the front to allow for windows and doors on the lower level. The sides and rear are at ground level. The wood or lumber shed and kiln are attached to the northwestern end of the factory, creating a very long building. Large multiple-light steel windows with center pivoting sections provided the factory with natural light. The northern two-thirds of the building has more windows than the southern third of the building. The windows on the upper floors of the southern third of the factory are widely spaced with only three per floor on each side.

The entrance to the factory office is located on the southeastern (front) corner at the second-floor level and is accessed by concrete steps and a metal stoop that crosses the retaining wall. Typical of many factory offices, the entry is nondescript with a multiple-light, paneled door and two-pane transom. Unusual scalloped awnings constructed of wood and covered with sheet metal shelter the office windows on the front and down the side.

Access into the building is limited. There are loading-sized openings on the southern end and rear of the factory and one into the wood shed on the rear. Across the rear at the lower level adjacent to the rail siding, a concrete loading dock sheltered by a shed roof provided space to load and unload the rail cars. The flat roof has stepped parapets at each end and one dividing the building into two sections, as well as parapets on three sections of the front wall. Three small frame additions hang on the exterior wall at the third-floor level; one on the front and two on the northwestern end. A fourth addition is located on the second floor of the northwestern end and is connected by a large pipe to the sawdust collector. Sheathed with metal, they are supported by metal poles. A one-story, shed-roofed, brick section on the northwestern corner of the plant houses the dynamo and boiler and appears to have functioned as a power plant. For several years, Martinsville Novelty produced its own electricity by burning the sawdust created during the furniture-manufacturing process. Early photographs show a tall smokestack in this location.

A brick wall divides the utilitarian interior into two unequal sections with metal fire doors closing off the single large opening between the two sections. The offices, located in the southwestern corner, are the only finished space, with partition walls of gypsum wallboard. Stairwells, enclosed with horizontal board on studs, are located on the front and rear walls and have wooden stairs with horizontal railings. The rest of the factory is mostly open. The southern portion of the building has wood framing with wooden posts and trusses. The northern two-

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 3

thirds has metal framing with metal posts and trusses. The exterior walls are painted brick, the ceilings are exposed on all levels, and floors are of wood except for the first floor, which is concrete.

Wood Storage

Built by 1936 and possibly as early as the original construction, the wood storage building is attached to the northwestern end of the brick factory. It is a one-story masonry and frame building that sits only about three feet above grade on the front and banks to a full story in the rear. The front part of the building is poured-in-place concrete, while the rear and south walls are frame and sheathed with weatherboards. Bricktex covers the weatherboards on the rear. The rear also has a double-leaf, sliding, loading door of corrugated metal. The front has a shed roof, while the rear part of the wood storage building has a shallow-pitched gable roof. The interior of both sections features wooden posts and trusses. The rear half was the lumber storage area. A recessed section with tracks running from the rear loading door towards the front allowed lumber to be moved into the building. Tracks laid on the ground and running lengthwise in the building (northwest to southeast) and perpendicular to the tracks coming in from the loading door enabled the wood to then be moved into the factory or kiln on low flat-bed trolleys.

Kiln

The kiln, built by 1936 and possibly when the original building was constructed, is attached to the northwestern end of the wood-storage area. The exterior walls are constructed of brick laid in seven-course American bond; a flat gravel-impregnated tar roof with multiple vents covers the building. Steel kiln doors are located on both the northwestern (exterior) and southeastern (interior) sides. These doors were manufactured by the Moore Dry Kiln Company of Jacksonville, Florida, which received a patent on them in 1925. Prior to the issuing of this patent, most kiln doors were constructed of wood or wood sheathed with metal and were subject to fire and rot. There are tracks running out of both sides of the kiln allowing wood to be wheeled into the kiln to be dried and then into the wood storage building and into the factory. On the interior, the kiln is divided into three sections with brick walls separating each section. The kiln is equipped with an automatic sprinkler system to retard fire.

Quonset Hut (Contributing)

A long Quonset hut was built parallel to the factory on the opposite side of the railroad spur. Based on tax records, it appears to have been added some time between 1948 and 1951.¹ Since the Quonset hut was created in 1941 for use during World War II, the Quonset hut at Martinsville Novelty could not have been erected much before the 1948 increase in building value at Martinsville Novelty. Rail cars on the spur could be loaded or unloaded from the factory loading dock or from one of the several loading doors on the northeastern side of the hut. There are no openings on the southwestern side. The Quonset hut sits on a banked concrete-block foundation with a full basement under the northwestern end. The building measures 32 feet wide and 240 feet long and is sheathed with corrugated metal. The south end of the Quonset hut has a central loading-sized opening

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 4

flanked by two metal windows. The Quonset hut is currently connected at its southern end to the factory and the concrete-block storage building by a recently added metal shed. The metal shed will be removed during the rehabilitation project and the Quonset hut will become a freestanding building once again.

Concrete-Block Storage Building (Contributing)

A long, one-story storage building is constructed of concrete block on the front and each end with a frame rear wall. Located at the south end of the Quonset hut, it is now attached to the Quonset hut and the southern end of the factory by a recently constructed metal shed. It has a flat membrane roof with two ventilators and a parapet. The only opening appears to be on the northern end. The interior is utilitarian. The metal shed will be removed during the rehabilitation project and the concrete-block building will again become a freestanding building. A building appears in this location in the 1936 photograph of the complex and may have been incorporated into the storage building. Substantial improvements were made to the buildings at Martinsville Novelty between 1948 and 1958 and the final form of this building may have been created during that period.

Restaurant (Contributing)

This is a one-story brick building with a flat roof with parapet. Storefront windows flank the single-leaf, single-light door. A pent roof sheathed with metal shelters the storefront windows and door. There are small windows towards the top of the wall along both sides and across the rear. Most recently used as a clothing store, one large room occupies the majority of the building with a smaller service room at the rear. This building is shown on the 1947 Sanborn Map as a store and was later a gas station. During the later years that Martinsville Novelty was in business it served as a restaurant that served the workers of Martinsville Novelty as well as the W. M. Bassett complex that was located on the opposite side of the railroad tracks. While Martinsville Novelty owned the building, they did not run the restaurant.

Railroad Spur and Trestle (Contributing Structure)

The single-track railroad spur and trestle appear to be original to the factory. The earliest maps and photographs of Martinsville Novelty show a spur and associated trestle located adjacent to the southwestern side of the factory. The spur enters the property from the north, where it connects with the main railroad, and terminates at the southern end of the building. The trestle is located opposite the power plant section of the factory building where there is a low area and is supported by concrete pillars that support the steel beams that carry the tracks.

Metal Pole Shed (Noncontributing Structure)

A long, modern, one-bay, metal shed stands in front of the brick factory and covers a long concrete ramp down to the woodshed. Corrugated metal sheathes the shed. A shorter open-pole shed is located along the southwest side of the larger shed. Both the large shed and the shorter pole shed have flat roofs. There is a small concrete-block building immediately adjacent to the shed.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 7 Page 5

SUMMARY

Martinsville Novelty Corp. factory was built in 1929 and closed in 1995 and during its 66-year life manufactured small occasional pieces of furniture such as coffee and end tables at this plant. It was planned and constructed so that raw lumber came in one end of the building and the finished pieces of furniture were shipped out the other end. It appears that most of the changes occurred to the main building by 1936 with additional buildings, the restaurant and the Quonset hut added by the late 1940s and early 1950s. The Martinsville Novelty factory retains a high degree of integrity by retaining almost all of its windows as well as its supporting buildings and railroad spur and continues to convey its manufacturing past.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 6

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Martinsville Novelty Corporation Factory is located at 900 Rives Road in Martinsville, Virginia. Constructed in 1929, with additions built in the 1940s and 1950s, the factory operated until it closed in 1995. Martinsville Novelty Corporation manufactured small articles of furniture such as end tables and cabinets. It is significant for its association with Martinsville's moderately priced furniture-manufacturing industry, which contributed to the city's role as an important twentieth-century commercial center. Today, the Martinsville Novelty Corporation building is one of only a handful of early-twentieth-century furniture factories still standing within the city limits and serves as a reminder of this aspect of Martinsville's industrial history.

JUSTIFICATION OF CRITERIA

The Martinsville Novelty Corporation Factory is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its association with Martinsville's furniture-manufacturing industry. During the factory's period of significance, 1929–1960, Martinsville was one of the nation's leading centers for manufacturing moderately priced furniture. The factory is also eligible for listing under Criterion C as an example of a utilitarian purpose-built factory that retains the integrity of its historic location, association, setting, feeling, design, materials, and workmanship.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Martinsville Novelty Corporation was organized in 1928 and incorporated at first as the Southern Chair and Novelty Corporation on March 15, 1929. The corporation charter authorized the company to

buy, sell, manufacture, import and export furniture and chairs of every class and description, as well as . . . all other articles that may be manufactured from wood or other material or substance; to buy, sell, manufacture, import and export lumber of all kinds . . . and to buy real estate which may be necessary for the erection of its factory building or buildings, for the erection of residences for its employees, and for any other purposes incident to its business operations.²

Officers of the new corporation included David Hurd Goode, president and treasurer, J. C. Hooker, vice president, and N. S. Goode, Jr., the president's brother, as secretary.

On April 16, 1929, the company's directors decided to change its name to Martinsville Novelty Corporation because a company already in operation in North Carolina had a name similar to Southern Chair and Novelty Corporation. The State Corporation Commission approved the change on June 18, 1929. According to the

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 7

company's second president, Robert O. Minter, Jr., "Novelty in the 1920s was a furniture term that meant occasional table, but which has since fallen into disuse. . . . I always say that they named the company Martinsville Novelty because no one knew how to spell occasional. That's with two Cs and one S, by the way." During the year, the company constructed a three-story brick factory as well as a lumber storage shed and drying kiln on vacant land that the Norfolk and Western Railway owned at present-day 900 Rives Road, on the northern side of the rail line (the Craig Furniture Company factory was located on the south side of the line). A spur line was soon constructed to serve Martinsville Novelty. Its principal products were occasional tables and other small pieces of furniture.³

Lumber, much of it cherry, was dried and cured in the kiln and then entered the north end of the factory on the ground floor to be fashioned into furniture. The pieces worked their way up through the building to the finishing line on the third floor, where employees stood on both sides of the lines and sanded and finished each piece. The line snaked its way through the floor, where spray booths and drying kilns are still visible. After the finished furniture received a top coat, it worked its way back down to the ground floor on a conveyor. The shipping area was located in the south end of the ground level, where the furniture was boxed and shipped out.⁴

When the company was formed, Martinsville's furniture industry was little more than twenty years old. Late in the nineteenth century, the principal industries in and around Martinsville were tobacco factories and flourmills. After the Norfolk and Western Railway was constructed through Henry County and Martinsville in 1891, however, other industries were established near the rail line, including brickyards and lumberyards. In 1902, local lumberman John David Bassett saw another business opportunity when he realized that the lumber from his yards was being transported to furniture factories in Lynchburg, Virginia, and Winston-Salem, North Carolina. He persuaded his brothers, Charles C. Bassett and Samuel H. Bassett, to join him in forming the Bassett Furniture Company in western Henry County. Later, they organized the Bassett Chair Company and the J. D. Bassett Manufacturing Company; eventually the various firms were consolidated into Bassett Industries. Martinsville entrepreneurs followed suit. In 1906, Ancil D. Witten and Charles B. Keesee organized the American Furniture Company (American of Martinsville), and in 1913, Witten established the Virginia Mirror Company. John C. Hooker, who married a daughter of Charles C. Bassett, formed the Hooker-Bassett Furniture Company (subsequently Hooker Furniture Company) in 1924. Also in that year, Thomas B. Stanley (governor of Virginia, 1954–1958), who had worked for furniture manufacturers including Bassett Furniture, and who had married a daughter of J. D. Bassett, organized the Stanley Furniture Company and constructed a factory in western Henry County. William M. Bassett, a son of J. D. Bassett, purchased the Craig Furniture Company, located across the railroad tracks from the Martinsville Novelty site, in 1927, and established the W. M. Bassett Furniture Company there.⁵

These early furniture companies focused on case goods, or large pieces of furniture: bookcases, chests of drawers, and dining tables. They consciously avoided, however, competing with up-scale northern furniture manufacturers, which produced elaborate case goods reminiscent of the great designers such as Thomas Chippendale and Duncan Phyfe, with prices to match. Instead, the Martinsville and Henry County firms

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 8

produced simpler, moderately priced “colonial” furniture. Other companies tapped into the market for smaller articles of occasional furniture such as end tables and light chairs. The first Martinsville factory to concentrate on occasional or novelty pieces was Gravely Novelty Company, which two brothers, Richard P. Gravely and Benjamin F. Gravely, formed in 1926. The Gravely family had long been involved in the tobacco industry, and had later branched out into the manufacture of locust telephone insulator dowels or “pins,” handles, knobs, and brackets in what was called the Pin Factory. In 1929, Hillary Morris founded the Morris Novelty Company, which the Pulaski Furniture Company later purchased. Martinsville Novelty Corporation, also formed in 1929, was the last significant furniture concern established in Martinsville before the Great Depression.⁶

Several of the early furniture factories in Martinsville either no longer stand or have been altered. Almost the entire American Furniture Company complex (located on Hairston Street near Starling Avenue) burned in the mid-1990s; the company no longer operates at that site. The W. M. Bassett Furniture Company (south of the Norfolk and Western Railway off Rives Road, across the tracks from Martinsville Novelty) has been demolished. The Morris Novelty Company factory (Danville Road, south of the then Danville and Western Railroad, across Hooker Street from Hooker Furniture Company) has been incorporated into the Southern Finishing plant there. The Hooker Furniture Company factory (Hooker Street north of the then Danville and Western Railroad) still stands, but no longer operates. The Virginia Mirror Company factory, located south of the Norfolk and Western Railway at 300 Moss Street South, still operates there. Gravely Novelty Company (Lester Avenue south of the then Danville and Western Railroad) still stands and is a contributing resource in the Martinsville Historic District.⁷

D. Hurd Goode, Martinsville Novelty Corporation’s first president and treasurer, was born on October 30, 1902, and as a young man took a job as a clerk with the Norfolk and Western Railway in Roanoke, Virginia. In the mid-1920s, he joined J. D. Bassett Manufacturing Company (later Bassett Industries) in Bassett, Virginia, as a bookkeeper. After two years, he began to work for the Pulaski Furniture Company, then moved to Martinsville a year later to join the Hooker-Bassett Furniture Company (later Hooker Furniture Company). After a brief stint again with J. D. Bassett, where he managed the traffic department, Goode accepted the position of president of Martinsville Novelty Corporation. He served in that capacity until he retired on January 1, 1989. During his long career, Goode also served five years on the Martinsville school board and a term on the city council in the 1950s. In 1952, he was elected president of the Southern Furniture Manufacturer’s Association—a position to which the officers of small firms such as Martinsville Novelty Corporation were seldom elected. Goode died on November 11, 1991.⁸

The factory at first employed thirty-five to forty workers, and by the mid-1970s, its most prosperous period, it had one hundred and fifteen employees. In the early years, it manufactured coffee tables, end tables, and other types of small occasional tables, then expanded its offerings to include hostess carts, gun racks, and bookcases. The products were moderately priced and shipped to all of the states in the continental United States. In 1974, the company’s most profitable year, it shipped about \$3 million worth of merchandise. The figure declined to \$2,450,000 the next year because of the economic recession. Although Martinsville Novelty added storage areas

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 9

to the factory over the years, it was constrained by the small size of its lot, which it purchased from the Norfolk and Western Railway in 1936. The lot was sandwiched between the enormous Bassett Industries plant (which had absorbed the Craig Furniture factory; subsequently, it became W. M. Bassett Furniture Company) on the south side and a residential neighborhood on the north side. In the late 1940s or early in the 1950s, a Quonset hut and other small additions were made. The factory eventually totaled about 100,000 square feet.⁹

Because the Great Depression began soon after the factory opened, the early years were especially difficult. In the depths of the depression, 1931–1932, several federal tax liens were levied against the company but eventually discharged. Perhaps because its products were modestly priced, Martinsville Novelty survived the lean years and quickly began to thrive. A 1936 advertisement noted that “permanent exhibits are maintained in the American Furniture Mart, Chicago, and the New York Furniture Exchange. The company employs 140 persons, and its annual payroll is over \$175,000.00.” When Goode retired in 1989, the company issued an announcement that proclaimed, “He leaves the company Debt Free, the physical plant in excellent condition, and the company with nearly two and one-half Million Dollars in current assets.” Unfortunately, however, the situation soon changed for the worse because of foreign competition, the rising costs of wood, the slow delivery of raw materials, and a slowing rate of orders. “Every year since 1989,” the company’s 1993 financial report noted, “expenses and cost of materials used have exceeded sales.” From a profit in 1989 of \$212,885, the amount dropped to \$86,961 in 1990, a loss of \$302,564 in 1991, a small profit of \$29,360 in 1992, and a huge loss of \$707,616 in 1993. The losses were attributed to the importation of cheap furniture from China, which cut significantly into the firm’s domestic market. On March 9, 1993, Jay Busey replaced Minter as president, but the company’s fortunes continued to decline. The factory closed in 1995, and Fred Martin Associates purchased the property at auction that year.¹⁰

Evolution of the Complex

Martinsville Novelty was built in 1929 and early photographs indicate that the main building reached its current form by 1936, if not earlier. A 1932 photograph shows that the southwestern elevation and southern end of the brick factory has changed little since that time. The wood storage building and kiln were outside the view of the 1932 photograph but it is possible that they were also standing at that time. The 1932 photograph shows the existing power plant with a tall smokestack that is now gone. It also shows the railroad spur and a loading platform along the southwestern elevation. Several changes had been made to the brick building by the time an aerial photograph was taken in 1936 with about the same view as the 1932 photograph. This later photograph shows the power plant with the smokestack as well as the wood storage building and the kiln, which were outside the view of the earlier photograph. Two windows had been added by 1936 on the southern end at the second floor level, probably for the offices that are located in that area. The westernmost window on the ground floor of the southern end had been converted to a loading door, which exists today. The railroad spur is shown as it exists today along with the trestle. Several smaller buildings had been constructed near the southern end of the railroad spur. The north end of these buildings appears to be masonry and they may have been incorporated into

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 10

the long concrete-block building that stands in this location today. The 1936 photograph shows the front of the property to be more wooded than it is today.

The Quonset hut had not yet been built at the time of the 1936 photograph and the former restaurant/store is located beyond the view of the photograph. The restaurant was standing by 1947 when the Sanborn Insurance Company published a plan of the property.¹¹ The manufacture and use of Quonset huts occurred during World War II and it is likely that the Quonset hut at Martinsville Novelty was added between 1948 and 1951 when the value of the buildings increased in the tax records.

The different fenestration and method of interior framing in the two parts of the brick building suggests that it could have been constructed in stages. That seems unlikely, however, due to the short three-year period between its initial construction and the earliest photograph. The difference in fenestration and framing might instead suggest changes in functions in those parts of the building. The physical evidence and oral history suggests that the manufacturing process took place mainly in the northern two-thirds of the building, which has more windows. The wood storage building and kiln are located on the northern end of the building and the unworked wood would enter that end. The wood next worked its way up conveyors to the top floor as it was crafted into furniture and then descended again to the ground level of the southern end where the boxing and shipping departments were located.¹² The southern end, where the offices are also located, apparently served more passive functions. The only freight elevator is located in the northern end of the building while a conveyor system that transported the wood up and brought the furniture down is located in the southern end of the building.

Comparison with other Furniture Factories

The Martinsville Novelty Corp. factory was one of at least six plants in Martinsville that manufactured furniture or furniture related items during the twentieth century. At least two of these plants are no longer standing. The W. M. Bassett Furniture plant across the railroad tracks from Martinsville Novelty has been demolished and the large complex of American Furniture burned in the 1990s. The Virginia Mirror Company (120-5001-0059) and Gravely Novelty Furniture Company (120-5001-0119) are the only two furniture-related sources to be documented in Martinsville and both are contributing resources in the Martinsville Historic District. The one-story Virginia Mirror Company building is now a bank and greatly altered as an industrial building. Gravely Novelty Furniture Company produced the same type of furniture as Martinsville Novelty and was located in a two-story brick building with a decorative corbelled cornice on the original section. The original building was constructed in 1907 with additions in the 1930s and 1940s and most of the windows and doors have been infilled. Many large brick mills and factories had their original large industrial-style windows removed and the openings enclosed when air conditioning and artificial light became more readily available in the mid-twentieth century. This common alteration greatly changes the appearance of these types of buildings. The Gravely building appears not to have been built specifically for the manufacture of novelty furniture and its appearance, with its decorative brick cornice on the original section, is more reminiscent of earlier factory and warehouse design than

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 11

the explicit industrial design of the Martinsville Novelty plant. In addition, almost all of Martinsville Novelty's windows and door openings remain open and intact.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 8 Page 12

END NOTES

¹ Martinsville Land Tax Books, LVA Records Center, Richmond, VA

² State Corporation Commission, Charter Book 152, pp. 225–226, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. (LVA). Much of the text of the articles of incorporation is boilerplate; the company never erected workers' housing (there was no room for it on the small lot it eventually purchased).

³ State Corporation Commission, Charter Book 153, pp. 492–493, LVA; *Martinsville Bulletin*, Feb. 26, 1989, interview with Minter in "Martinsville Novelty" folder, Virginia Windle Collection, Bassett Historical Center, Blue Ridge Regional Library, Bassett, Va.; Sanborn Insurance Company, Fire Insurance Maps in the Library of Congress, Martinsville, Va., 1885–1948, Microfilm, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va. (LVA).

⁴ Personal communication, Fred Martin, Jr., to Ashley M. Neville, Dec. 15, 2009.

⁵ Martinsville Historic District Nomination, DHR File No. 120-5001, Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Va. (DHR); Virginia Stone Windle, *The Way it Was in Henry County and Martinsville, Virginia* (N.p.: Virginia Stone Windle, 1996), 29–32, 35–36; Dorothy Cleal and Hiram H. Herbert, *Foresight, Founders, and Fortitude: The Growth of Industry in Martinsville and Henry County, Virginia* (Bassett, Va.: Bassett Printing Corp., 1970), 10–91, which tells the stories of American Furniture Company, Bassett Furniture Industries, Gravely Furniture Company, and Hooker Furniture Company; Alison S. Blanton, Helen R. Hill, Mary A. Zirkle, and Stacy L. Marshall, "Historic Architectural Survey of Martinsville, Virginia," June 1998, pp. 16–17, 46–47, DHR.

⁶ Windle, *Way it Was*, 35–36; Cleal and Herbert, *Foresight*, 69–81.

⁷ Martinsville Historic District Nomination, DHR File No. 120-5001, Gravely Novelty Furniture Co. (DHR File No. 120-5001-119), DHR; *Miller's Martinsville, Va., City Directory, 1937–1938* (Asheville, N.C.: Southern Directory Co., 1938), 103, 108, 147, 163, 184, 191; Martinsville-Henry County Woman's Club, *Martinsville & Henry County Historic Views* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Hunter Publishing Co., 1976), 110–111; Personal communication, Fred Martin, Jr., to Ashley M. Neville, Dec. 15, 2009.

⁸ State Corporation Commission, Index to Charter Books, Microfilm, LVA; *Martinsville Bulletin*, Nov. 11, 1991, and undated, in "Industry—Martinsville Novelty Corp." and "Martinsville Novelty" folders, Virginia Windle Collection, Bassett Historical Center, Blue Ridge Regional Library, Bassett, Va.

⁹ *Martinsville Bulletin*, July 4, 1976, interview with D. Hurd Goode in "Industry—Martinsville Novelty Corp." folder, Virginia Windle Collection, Bassett Historical Center, Blue Ridge Regional Library, Bassett, Va.; *ibid.*, partial photocopy of advertisement hand-dated "1935–36"; Henry County, Deed Book 57, pp. 451–454, deed, Apr. 28, 1936, N&W Railway Co. to Martinsville Novelty Corp., recorded May 26, 1936, Henry County Courthouse, Figsboro, Va.; Auditor of Public Accounts, Land Tax Books, 1947–1964, LVA.

¹⁰ Henry County, Deed Book 52, p. 184, certificate of discharge of tax lien, Jan. 25, 1932, for taxable period of Apr. 1, 1930–Mar. 31, 1931, for \$549.05, recorded Jan. 28, 1932, Henry County Courthouse; *ibid.*, 404, notice of tax lien, same amount and period as above, recorded June 28, 1932; *ibid.*, 407–408, certificate of discharge of tax lien, same amount and period as above; Henry County, Deed Book 53, pp. 408–409, notice of tax lien, Jul. 31, 1933, for taxable period of Apr. 1, 1931–Mar. 31, 1932, for \$347.65, recorded Aug. 1, 1933; "Martinsville Novelty Corp. Financial Report, November 30, 1993," in "Martinsville Novelty" folder, Virginia Windle Collection, Bassett Historical Center, Blue Ridge Regional Library, Bassett, Va.; Personal communication, Fred Martin, Jr., to Ashley M. Neville, Dec. 15, 2009; *Martinsville Bulletin*, Mar. 10, 1993, "Busey Takes Over Helm at Martinsville Novelty" in "Industry—Martinsville Novelty Corp." folder, Virginia Windle Collection, Bassett Historical Center, Blue Ridge Regional Library, Bassett, Va.

¹¹ Sanborn Insurance Company, Fire Insurance Maps in the Library of Congress, 1885–1932, microfilm, LVA.

¹² Personal communication, Fred Martin, Jr., to Ashley M. Neville, Dec. 15, 2009.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 9 Page 13

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section 10 Page 14

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property encompasses the following three City of Martinsville tax parcels: 53(05)00/03, 53(05)00/03A and 53(02)00/19R.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property includes the lot occupied by the Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory and includes all historically associated buildings.

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Martinsville Novelty Corp. Factory
Martinsville, Virginia**

Section Photographs Page 15

All photographs for Martinsville Novelty Corporation Factory, Martinsville, Virginia, were taken by Ashley Neville on January 7, 2010. The digital images are on file with the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, Richmond, Virginia.

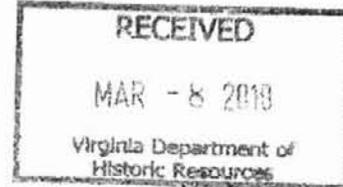
1. Factory, front (northeast elevation) and southeast end, view to the west
2. Factory, rear (southwest elevation) and Quonset Hut, view to the east
3. Factory, northwest end, view to the southeast
4. Railroad spur between factory and Quonset Hut, view to the southeast
5. Factory interior, first floor, southeast end, view to the northwest
6. Factory interior, first floor, northwest end, view to the southeast
7. Wood Storage area showing tracks to move lumber, view to the northeast
8. Factory interior, third floor, southeast end, view to the northwest
9. Quonset Hut, exterior southeast end, view to the northwest
10. Quonset Hut, interior, northwest end, view to the northwest

Council Members
Kathy Lawson, Mayor
Kimble Reynolds, Jr., Vice-Mayor
M. Gene Teague
Mark C. Stroud, Sr.
Danny Turner



City Manager
Clarence C. Monday
City Attorney
Eric H. Monday
Clerk of Council
Clarence C. Monday

March 4, 2010



Department of Historic Resources

2801 Kensington Avenue

Richmond VA 23221

Re: Martinsville Novelty Corporation, City of Martinsville

Dear Sir or Madam:

It is my pleasure to endorse the application for historic consideration of the former Martinsville Novelty Corporation building located on Rives Road in the City of Martinsville. The building was constructed in 1929 and holds significant historic value to our community.

I request your favorable consideration to place this building on the National Register of Historic Places and for inclusion in the Virginia Landmarks Register. Please advise if you have any questions of me or if I can be of further service. Thanking you in advance.

Sincerely,

Kathy C. Lawson

Mayor, City of Martinsville

KCL/m

Rec'd / Copy
2/24/10
MCW



February 24, 2010

Mr. Marc Christian Wagner
Director, Resource Information Division
Commonwealth of Virginia
Department of Historic Resources
2801 Kensington Avenue
Richmond, VA 23221

Dear Mr. Wagner:

Subject: Martinsville Novelty Corporation, City of Martinsville

Per your letter dated February 10, 2010, the City's Community Development Department has read the Summary Description, the Summary Statement of Significance, and map of the Martinsville Novelty Corporation. We are also familiar with the building, since its reuse has been a topic of discussion since the mid-1990s, after it became vacant. It is a building that symbolizes the City's furniture heritage and the exodus of manufacturing due to NAFTA, is a short walk from our Uptown, and is one of the few remaining manufacturing buildings in the City.

I would like to express my support of a favorable recommendation for the Martinsville Novelty Corporation nomination to the National Register of Historic Places and for inclusion in the Virginia Landmarks Register, and wish to see the nomination move forward to the National Park Service.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at (276) 403-5185 or CMonday@ci.martinsville.va.us.

Sincerely,


Clarence C. Monday
City Manager

C: Wayne D.P. Knox, Community Development

MCW - 2009 - 3/4/10

To: State Historic Preservation
2811 Kensington Ave.
Richmond VA. 23221

From:
Michael L. Craig
P.O. Box 4328
Martinsville VA 24115

Dear, Board Members,

I want to comment on the review boards project for the Martinsville Novelty Corporation Factory, Located on Rives Road, Martinsville VA. I own property across the street approxly 5 acres. And I am writing to show my support for the project. It will improve and save a very importance piece of history for out town, my hopes it will add needed job and housing to our community as well. I hope you will see fit to add this property to the Virginia Landmark Resistor and save this for future generation to see and use. If I can be of any further help feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,



Michael L. Craig

