

Wisconsin Word Processing Format (Approved 1/92)

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

**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 an 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 **McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry and Soap Company**  
 other names/site number

**2. Location**

street & number	419 West Vliet Street	N/A	<b>not for publication</b>
city or town	Milwaukee	N/A	<b>vicinity</b>
state Wisconsin	code WI	county Milwaukee	code 079
			<b>zip code</b> 53212

**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.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Name of Property

County and State

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the 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.

See continuation sheet.

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)

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

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- structure
- site
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

contributing	noncontributing
1	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	total

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/TRADE

INDUSTRY – Steam laundry and soap manufacturing

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Vacant

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN – Second Empire

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Limestone

walls Brick

roof Asphalt

other

**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 the National Register listing.)

- 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.
- 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.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or 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)

Architecture

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### Period of Significance

1888

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### Significant Dates

1888 – date of construction

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### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

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### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

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### Architect/Builder

Unknown

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### Narrative Statement of Significance

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

McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry and Soap Company  
Name of Property

Milwaukee  
County and State

Wisconsin

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

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

### Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

- 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 #
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

### Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

## 10. Geographical Data

Acres of Property Less than one acre

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

1 16N 425367 4766376  
Zone Easting Northing

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

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	Bridget Greuel, Preservation Assistant, and Kate Bissen, Preservation Associate	date	09/22/2021
organization	Preserve, LLC	telephone	414-712-1271
street & number	5027 North Berkeley Boulevard	zip code	53217-5502
city or town	Whitefish Bay	state	WI

Name of Property

County and State

**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 SHPO or FPO.)

<b>name/title</b>	Karl Rajani, President	<b>date</b>	09/22/2021
<b>organization</b>	American Telehealthcare, Inc.	<b>telephone</b>	414-581-0582
<b>street &amp; number</b>	2819 West Highland Boulevard	<b>zip code</b>	53208
<b>city or town</b>	Milwaukee	<b>state</b>	WI

**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.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects, (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Methodology**

The basis for this nomination is a Nomination Questionnaire submitted by Preserve LLC to the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office in April 2021. The SHPO determined that the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry and Soap Manufacturer (McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry) building was eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C: Architecture, as an example of a rare, Second Empire Industrial building in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Preserve, LLC conducted a site visit on March 8, 2021, and April 26, 2021, to fully document existing conditions and verify integrity and significance. Preserve, LLC determined that the building's core industrial loft form is intact as are its character-defining features. Preserve, LLC also conducted research on steam laundries in Milwaukee and their history during the period of significance, Second Empire architectural style, and the McCullough and Dixon Company. The State Historical *Society's Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin* was used as the foundation of all research, providing context and direction.

**Summary**

The McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry and Soap Manufacturer (hereafter referred to as McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry) is located at 419 West Vliet Street at the corner of West Vliet Street and Vel R. Phillips Street (formerly known as Fourth Street) in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, amid a collection of industrial and commercial buildings on the northern edge of Milwaukee's central business district. The building's primary elevation and main entrance face north. It is a rectangular, three-story, Industrial loft brick and Indiana limestone building with a heavy-timber structure, mansard roof, and many character-defining elements in the Second Empire Style.

The McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry is one of very few intact industrial buildings in Wisconsin designed in this style, as well as the oldest remaining steam laundry in Milwaukee and the only one left from the Late Victorian period when commercial steam laundries were gaining popularity. The exterior and interior of the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry retain a high degree of integrity. In addition to the stylistic features, many of the components that contributed to the building's intended use as a steam laundry are intact: brick walls, rubble foundation and sturdy floors; basement drain troughs, boiler and coal rooms, and limestone stairs to the sidewalk for deliveries; finely detailed customer lobby; receiving room and dock doors; historic freight elevator and equipment; operable windows; flues; and open industrial loft spaces. This historic laundry serves as a rare, valuable example of the Second Empire style as applied to an industrial loft building type.

**Site and Setting**

The McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry and Soap Manufacturer is located in the neighborhood

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historically known as Haymarket. Today, it is known both as Haymarket and the Hillside neighborhood, due to the Hillside public housing several blocks to the northwest, built between 1948 and 1956.<sup>1</sup> The building stands one block north of West McKinley Avenue, a main east-west artery and the north boundary of Milwaukee's central business district. The Milwaukee River lies three blocks east. North Old World Third Street, a historic commercial district, is one block east with Lake Michigan a mile beyond. Two blocks west is North 6<sup>th</sup> Street, another main artery. The neighborhood today is a mix of industrial, commercial, and residential and includes a wide variety of architectural styles, periods of construction, and building uses.

The McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry is built very close to or on its lot line on the north, west, and south elevations. The building is situated with its main elevation facing West Vliet Street between an empty lot to the east and an electrical station to the west. The electrical station is separated from the building by an alley and surrounded by a brick wall approximately ten feet tall. This brick wall is set back several feet from the sidewalk, as are the buildings directly across W. Vliet Street. In contrast, the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry is adjacent to the sidewalk without any setback from the paving. This sidewalk continues around the corner along North Vel R. Phillips Avenue. A several-foot-wide road verge with grass and mature trees separates the sidewalk from the road. Neighboring the site to the south is a large parking lot separated by a modern-era chain link fence running from the southeast corner of the subject building east to the sidewalk edge.

The empty lot east of the building is part of the current parcel. It is paved with gravel and otherwise unobstructed with two curb cuts (north and east). The lot is relatively level. On the east entrance is a modern-era wood deck and steps rising to the first-floor door located at the top of the water table.

### **Exterior**

The McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry is a three-story-plus basement masonry building with load-bearing exterior walls and a heavy-timber interior structure, capped with a mansard roof in keeping with its Second Empire style. The building features a tripartite composition, dividing the primary facades horizontally. The base is formed by the four-course high rubble-coursed rusticated limestone water table that protrudes slightly where it wraps around the east, north, and west elevations. At the east, north, and west elevations, stone is laid in an ashlar pattern and tooled in a rusticated, or split-face, manner. The water table is flush on the south elevation and reduces to three courses.

The middle portion of the building features exposed Milwaukee Cream City face brick currently painted light blue, with simple protruding sill and header courses, topped with a corbeled cornice visually supporting the mansard roof. Brick is typically laid in common bond with a rowlock every seventh course and various patterns utilized at sill course and header course bands and segmental

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<sup>1</sup> "Hillside," Encyclopedia of Milwaukee, accessed July 3, 2021, <https://emke.uwm.edu/entry/hillside/>.

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arches.

The top portion of the tripartite composition is the mansard roof. The roof was initially finished in slate and featured ten tall dormers, four on the north, and three each on the east and west. The slate and dormers are no longer extant. One off-center central dormer remains to allow access to the fire escape. All other dormers were removed in 1949.<sup>2</sup>

*North Elevation (Primary)*

As the primary street-facing façade and main entrance, the north elevation is also the most decorative. Pilasters at the east and west corners protrude from the main wall faces for the full height of the building up to the mansard roof. There are no other structural bays expressed on the north elevation. The north elevation is roughly symmetrical about the central French doors on each floor with the notable exception of the main entrance, which is located near the west end. These central doors open onto a metal fire escape that rises from the center of the first-floor windows to the third floor, with a landing at the second floor. On either side of the central doors on the second floor are four evenly spaced windows. On the basement and first floor, there are four evenly spaced windows aligned with those on the second floor. West of the central doors is one window aligned with the second floor and then the main entrance. West of the main entrance is a pair of larger windows topped with a transom.

Several bands of brick sill courses and belt courses extend the full width of the north facade and wrap around the pilasters. At the first floor, a two-course high stretcher brick sill course is interrupted by the stone windowsills and door units. Beginning one course below the window tops, an eight-course high stretcher brick belt course defines the window headers. At window headers, this brick course turns upright into soldier courses that follow the line of the segmental arches. Each segmental arch is topped with two corbeled header brick courses, again following the line of the segmental arch. The arches seamlessly meet the likewise corbeled stretcher brick of the belt course. The second-floor sill course matches that of the first floor. The header course is similar, starting one course below the top of the windows and continuing up eight courses. At second-floor segmental arches, courses seven and eight are corbeled stretchers that do not arch up at each window and door segmental arch. An additional eight courses atop the header course corbel outward in ½" increments to form the impression of a cornice. At the top of the masonry, a copper gutter is located directly in front of the termination of the mansard roof slope. The mansard roof is currently covered in deteriorated modern era asphalt shingles.

The basement window units are wood, rectangular three-light awnings. Each unit is sized to match the units vertically above on the first and second floors. A paired three-light fixed casements is located below the central vertical run of double doors. At the west end, below the double window unit on the first floor, is a paired four-light fixed casement window. This conceals a limestone stair leading from

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<sup>2</sup> City of Milwaukee Building Permit, August 10, 1949.



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the sidewalk to the basement. A steel plate covers the opening at the sidewalk.

First- and second-floor windows are composed of equally spaced four-over-four wood double hung units with a few notable exceptions. The central double doors at the first floor feature two lower recessed panels and two upper glass lights each. The unit is topped with a four-light transom. The second-floor double door above is similar with the exception that the west door leaf is intended to appear as a finished tongue and groove wall panel with a two-light upper window; this feature opens on hinges. The third-floor central door is positioned within the last remaining dormer. It is a single wood five-panel door with transom above. One four-over-four fixed casement windows abut the door at its west side.

The most decorative feature on the north façade is the main entrance located between the central doors and the larger first floor windows at the west end. The projecting carved Italianate hood features a finial, open pediment with simple triangular ends and carved buttons on the face, blocks with more carved buttons on the face, supported visually by elongated scrollwork which terminates at the first-floor sill course. The tympanum is decorated with the date 1888 in the center. The solid wood nine-panel door, flanked by side lights, consists of one lower recessed panel topped by two vertical lights. An art glass transom tops the entry, featuring thirty-eight square colored glass lights with a rectangular wavy glass center. A cast-iron lintel with rosettes studded across its length supports the entry openings. The shallow stoop is limestone with a wood threshold. While several details are obscured by paint over the stone and subsequent shaling, the overall effect is Second Empire in its detailing, incorporating Italianate and Eastlake elements with simple geometric forms executed with precision.

West of this main entry piece is a paired four-over four window unit with three-light transom directly above the basement paired window unit. The taller basement unit, which projects above the watertable, ties the forms together to visually comprise one window grouping.

In the spandrel area between the first and second floor windows, the words "Milk," "Butter," "Cream," and "Manufacturer's," can be read through faded and peeling paint. These words were painted in white and date to the period when the upper two floors were used by Champeny Creamery, beginning in about 1900.

*East Elevation*

The east elevation is currently visible from the street due to the vacant lot. It was not originally a primary elevation. Similar to the north elevation, a pilaster projects at the northeast corner. There is no similar pilaster on the southeast corner, nor any other structural bay articulation on the exterior. Evenly spaced windows are positioned on each floor. There are four windows at the second floor and three at the basement and first floor. In lieu of the fourth window, the east entrance is located at the first floor, south end. This entrance is slightly out of alignment with the window above.

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The east elevation materials and detailing are similar to the north elevation with the following exceptions. The sill course is omitted from the first and second floors; each window has a limestone sill. The first-floor eight-course window header band is also omitted; however, each of the three windows have a soldier course header topped with two corbeled header courses.

The east entry door is a single-leaf, flush door with segmented arch header. A simple, modern-era dilapidated wood stair accesses this side entrance. The outline of an end gabled roof form is visible around this entry, indicating either a canopy or a connection to a building to the east that is no longer extant. This building and connection near this location are visible on the 1894 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map. The connected building was part of a rag merchant business; the full extent of the relationship between the two businesses is not known. More on this adjacent business is included in the Statement of Significance.

The basement windows are the building's typical three-light awning windows. Directly in alignment above the basement units are three first-floor wood four-over-four double hung windows. Likewise, the second floor has four wood four-over-four double hung windows.

A downspout with scupper is tucked just to the return side of the north end pilaster. Remnants of a second downspout are located at the southeast corner. Two metal rings are mounted to the masonry between the two northern-most first floor windows. The age and original use of these rings are not known.

*South Elevation*

The south elevation masonry wall is up to six inches thicker than the other load-bearing walls and serves as the backbone of the mansard roof, carrying the load on its more substantial masonry. The masonry wall extends unadorned above the roofline of the flat portion of the mansard roof with steeply sloping parapets at the east and west ends and a long central parapet aligned with the building's two main chimneys. The east chimney has collapsed. Parapet coping and chimney caps appear to be limestone units (this could not be confirmed due to rooftop conditions).

This elevation is plain, with none of the brick ornamentation present on the other elevations and no articulation of structural bays on the exterior. The only windows are located at the second and third floors. At the second floor, a pair of windows is located slightly off-center, both two-over-two double hung steel units. Four smaller two-over-two double hung steel windows are located on the third floor. The center two units align with the larger units below. While these window units are not original to the building, they are certainly historic.

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*West Elevation*

The west elevation faces the alley and is similar to the east elevation in that it is a secondary elevation with simplified details and ornament. Like the east elevation, a pilaster projects at the northwest corner, and no other surface articulation of structural bays is present. Windows and doors are positioned according to interior use, with a loose alignment from basement to second floor. The first-floor, eight-course window header band present on the north elevation is omitted; however, each of the three windows present, and one window that is no longer extant (infilled), has a soldier course header topped with two corbeled header courses. This detail at the door likely dates to a building modification as there are twelve courses between the door head and the original soldier course and two header courses detail, indicating that this was once a window location that was converted to a door. A chimney extends above the mansard toward the north third of the west elevation. The remnant of a painted sign is located in the upper northwest corner of the masonry wall under the light blue paint.

At the basement level are three of the building's typical three-light awning windows. The fourth penetration is the location of the former coal chute into the boiler room. All these openings align with either first- or second-floor windows.

At the first floor's north corner is a paired four-over-four window unit with three-light transom directly around the corner from a matching window on the north elevation. Near the center of the west elevation, two wood four-over-four double hung windows mirror unit locations on the east elevation. South of these windows are two large double loading dock doors. The first set of doors feature four recessed panels and one upper light in each leaf. A four-light transom tops this door. The segmental header arch is composed of soldier course units following the arch, which is flush. A thick stone sill rises above the water table height to span the full opening width. Directly south of this door is a second, smaller, double door with four lower recessed, horizontal panels, and a single upper light. This unit also has a thick stone sill above the water table to span the opening width. A small steel ladder is wall-mounted between these two loading dock doors.

At the second floor, mirroring locations on the east elevation second floor, are three wood four-over-four double hung windows. A fourth similarly styled second-floor window unit is located at the south end. Between the two southern-most units and directly above the larger set of first floor loading dock doors is a double door featuring two lower horizontal recessed panels and a large upper light in each. Likely this door featured a hoist way to move materials up from the alleyway that runs parallel to the west elevation.

A downspout with scupper is tucked just to the return side of the north end pilaster, similar to the east elevation. Remnants of a second downspout are located at the southwest corner; this unit appears to be capped. Two metal rings are mounted to the masonry between the two northern-most first floor windows. The age and original use of these rings are not known.

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*Roof*

The roof could not be inspected directly due to safety concerns related to its condition. It is accessed by a scuttle located centrally on the third floor. Satellite images indicate the flat roof portion is an older modified bitumen roofing. Remnants of the southeast chimney are visible, indicating that they may still be on the roof.

The sloped portions of the mansard are finished in green asphalt roofing shingles and in a severe state of deterioration. Several large holes in the sheathing are evident. Framing at the openings of the original dormers remains on the interior side of the roofing.

**Interior**

The building is rectangular in plan with exposed brick on the interior side of exterior load-bearing walls (except for the third floor, on the interior side of the mansard roof). The predominantly intact, open industrial loft plan is bisected horizontally by a row of exposed turned wood columns supporting heavy-timber girders and joists. The main stair that runs from the basement to the third floor is located along the east third of the south wall. The intact historic elevator shaft, which accesses all floors, is located along the west third of the south wall. A circa 1880s freight elevator is extant within the shaft. The 1894 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map depicts an elevator at the current location and the wood enclosure and equipment appear to be consistent with the late nineteenth century.

*Basement*

As the main washing room of the commercial laundry, the basement is simple in design. The brick columns and limestone walls are exposed throughout this space. Milwaukee cream city common brick columns sit on limestone plinths. The concrete floor was added later in the building's history; however, it still features three east-west oriented floor drain troughs of varying lengths that run down the middle.

Near the southeast corner, a remnant of a round freestanding hearth exists that appears to be related to heating large volumes of water for washing (i.e. the water heater).<sup>3</sup> A brick flue (part of the main southeast chimney) against the south wall relates to this feature. Along the south wall, west end (aligned with the southwest main chimney), another brick flue projects into the space. Between these two flues is the building's main stair tower. At this level, the stair is a simple wooden open stair with solid treads and risers and a 2x4 handrail supported by simple wooden posts. Two modern-era steel pipe columns under a wood beam support this stair opening. An additional two 2x4 posts have been added to support the stairway. The hearth and flues are directly related to the building's use as a steam laundry.

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<sup>3</sup> Arwen Mohun, "Why Mrs. Harrison Never Learned to Iron: Gender, Skill and Mechanization in the American Steam Laundry Industry," *Gender & History*, Vol. 8 No. 2 (August 1996), 65.

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At the southwest corner is what is presumed to be the boiler room, as the coal room lies directly to the north with coal stores intact. Portions of the north ends of both the boiler and coal storage rooms were rebuilt with concrete block.

The limestone stair that leads up to the north sidewalk is located in the northwest corner of the basement. It would have allowed the delivery of soiled commercial laundry orders directly to the basement washing area. Directly to the east of the stair opening along the north wall is a brick enclosure with brick stalls. A waste pipe at the back of the west stall indicates these may have been toilet locations. A large cistern is located under the floor off of the north wall toward the east end.

*First Floor*

At the first floor, the main entrance leads to a foyer. The picturesque, art glass window still streams colored light into this small space. Five wood steps lead from lower landing up to the main floor level. Two eight-light fixed-casement interior windows flank the east and west sidewalls of the stair, while a pair of units fills out the south wall. Two offset doors also flank the east and west sidewalls. The east door enters into the main open first-floor space, while the west door opens into the historic lobby. This lobby was more finely detailed than the rest of the space to appeal to the middle- and upper-class customers of a steam laundry in the late 1800s.

The foyer and lobby feature painted vertical 3-1/2" wide tongue and groove wood paneling at all wall faces. Painted horizontal trim placed at chair rail height sets the sill line for interior casement windows. Beneath four of the interior windows and two wall segments, additional vertical trim delineates the chair rail space down to the baseboard. Where this trim occurs, it extends above the baseboard and is finished with a detailed trim plinth (breaking the line of the baseboard). The tongue and groove is positioned at a forty-five-degree angle within five of these spaces below the chair rail. A second horizontal trim band aligns with the interior door top casing. A third trim band aligns with the interior window fixed window casing. Interestingly, neither this top trim band nor the window sill band align with the exterior wall windows; they only align with the interior fixed casements. Rosette blocks demarcate intersections of trim to casing.

The foyer ceiling is composed of alternating smooth and grooved 4" wide tongue and groove wood running east-west. Bisecting this wood is a rectangular grid delineated with wider trim. The lobby ceiling is composed in the same manner. At the ceiling center, two intersections created with angled trim form two diamond shapes in the grid. At the meeting point between these two diamonds, the mount for a light fixture remains. The ceiling perimeter is finished with a robust, yet simple, concave crown molding.

In the northwest corner, a platform at the window sill height accommodates the north elevation

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sidewalk-level basement entry below. The effect in the lobby space is that of a window seat. Two cast-iron radiators with stamping typical of the 1880s are extant.

At the east lobby edge, a wall was removed due to water damage that once separated the lobby from the open industrial space beyond. A modern toilet room is located off the lobby's south wall, west end. Adjoining this toilet room to the east is a small storage room with a historic batten door with intact swivel clay door knob. The space above the toilet room is lofted for use as storage.

A loading dock on the west elevation opens into a receiving room at the building's southwest corner. This space is delineated by the freight elevator on its east side and simple vertical tongue and groove wall remnants. A third cast-iron radiator with stamping typical of the 1880s is located here between the dock doors on the west wall.

The remainder of the floor was used for industrial purposes and retains its open space. The interior side of the exterior walls are exposed masonry. There is no interior window casing. A centerline of round, turned wood columns support the exposed structural beam. Spreader beams with ogee curve outer ends transition the columns to the main beams which span to the load-bearing exterior walls. The ceiling is finished with simple 3" tongue and groove wood, oriented east-west. Tongue and groove flooring is laid in a north-south direction. The main stair along the south wall is enclosed by walls with a combination of modern materials such as unfinished drywall and historic wood framing members. A batten door with swivel clay knob leads to the basement. The door to the second-floor stair is plywood affixed to old door stiles and rails.

*Second Floor*

The second floor is similar in detail to the industrial space on the first floor, including exposed masonry walls, no interior window casing, exposed turned wood columns, and tongue and groove flooring and ceiling. The main difference between the first and second floor is that this floor is fully open; the only partitions are those enclosing the freight elevator and stair along the south wall. The wood elevator shaft and the stair tower are wrapped on this floor with a combination of finished and unfinished drywall. The elevator hoist motor is wall mounted to the north wall of the of elevator enclosure. A secondary motor is mounted to the ceiling to the north of the elevator shaft and primary hoist motor. The door down to the first floor is a modern-era steel door. The door to the third-floor stair is plywood affixed to old door stiles and rails.

A modern-era wood beam is located just beneath the joists along the entire north wall with six wood posts and spreader beam footings. This appears to be a remedy to address the structural settlement of the third floor being caused by roof deterioration and subsequent moisture infiltration.

*Third Floor*

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The interior side of the third-floor walls follows the slope mansard roof structure; the south wall is the only vertical surface. Like the industrial character of the first and second floors below, the structure is exposed. The main difference on the third floor is that the east, north, and west sloped mansard surfaces are finished in tongue and groove laid horizontally. The tongue and groove wall finish is absent where the ten historic dormers were removed; here the rafters, dormer framing, and sheathing are exposed.

The main stair is open at this level. The opening is surrounded by a vertical plank partial-height railing wall with simple rail top. The elevator shaft retains its exposed vertical plank wood surround. In the southwest corner the outline of two sinks is visible along a west partition wall, finished in vertical tongue and groove. Behind this wall to the west is a small room also finished in tongue and groove; the room's use is not known. Given the presence of a waste vent pipe along the room's north wall, it may have once contained a toilet room.

**Modifications and Integrity**

The McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry was clearly purpose-built as a steam laundry based upon research findings and physical building attributes. Many of the features designed for this purpose remain intact. In the 1880s, a steam laundry had to withstand the heavy machinery, water weight, and wet conditions of laundering. This robust structural system, including thick brick walls and masonry basement columns, remains.

The basement was used as the laundry's washroom, typical of steam laundries in this period, as it was near the boiler and could have a substantial floor to resist the large amounts of water used in the process. Machines without lids tended to splash water out, and the wet items were removed by hand from the washers and placed in large centrifugal extractors, resulting in a lot of excess moisture. Portions of the basement floor beneath the concrete appear to be pavers, stone, and gravel, which would have been a logical finish for a wet area prior to concrete. The drain running lengthwise east to west down the center of the basement is another use-specific intact historic feature.

Other intact features critical to the laundry/industrial use include operable windows on all levels to ventilate the heat and humidity from the process and provide ample daylight for starching, ironing, and folding. Before electricity was widely available, daylight and manufacturing would have been essential for the soap manufacturing process as well. Several loading areas allowed for frequent deliveries typical of a commercial laundry enterprise. A conveyor of some type was typical to transfer the heavy, wet laundry from one area to the next; in this building the elevator (shown on the 1894 Sanborn Map) was likely used for this purpose. Lastly, the finished lobby contrasted with the industrial laundering areas to appeal to the tastes of middle- and upper-class customers and instill a sense of cleanliness and

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care.<sup>4</sup> As previously described, the lobby and foyer retains in good condition many details typical of the Second Empire style.

More on the evolution of the building, as well as typical features and usage of commercial laundries, is included in the Statement of Significance.

In addition to the intact features of the laundry, the building retains many of its exterior Second Empire stylistic elements in good condition. Exterior features that evoke this style include the main entry hood, brick ornamentation, and mansard roof. The only major exterior modification is the removal of the dormers (1949). A structure on the lot east of the laundry was built in 1884 or 1885. On the 1894 Sanborn Map, this structure shared the same parcel as the laundry building but is consistently noted in directories as the business of William P. Froehlich, rag and paper merchant. The buildings were linked by a narrow, wood-frame structure. This adjacent building and the connector were later razed. Neither are included in the proposed period of significance. The potential relationship between the two businesses is explored more fully in the Statement of Significance.

The interior is also highly intact and period-specific, with select partitions modified as described above. In 1917, a fire attributed to “crossed electric wires” damaged the building’s third floor.<sup>5</sup> Remnants of the fire’s impact on historic wood paneling and door frames remain near the third floor elevator doors.

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<sup>4</sup> Arwen Mohun, “Why Mrs. Harrison Never Learned to Iron,” 231-251.

<sup>5</sup> “From the Files: Fire Does \$12,000 Damage to Shop,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 21, 1942. Note: \$10,000 damage was in stock loss; \$2,000 in building damage.



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**Summary**

The McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry is locally significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a rare, excellent example of the Second Empire style applied to an industrial building. This building is one of very few documented intact industrial buildings in Wisconsin in the Second Empire style, as well as the oldest remaining steam laundry in Milwaukee. Very few other Second Empire buildings are extant in Milwaukee most others are commercial or residential.

The exterior of the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry retains a high degree of integrity with character-defining Second Empire style features such as its ornamental entry hood with art glass window, brick detailing, pilasters and multiple openings with exterior passage and dock doors. Its massing clearly portrays the essence of the Second Empire style with its height, steeply sloped mansard roof and segmentally arched doors and windows. Brickwork above the tall, narrow windows creates a hood molding typical of the style. Windows, with the exception of the historic south elevation windows on the back of the building, are original, as are the exterior doors. While nine of ten dormers are missing, there is clear evidence of where they were located and their sizes, including the height above the interior floor due to the tongue and groove wall finish and extant framing around the dormer openings. The elevator appears to date to the period of construction. The front entrance and foyer with lobby are excellent examples of Late Victorian design, including elements of Italianate and simplified Eastlake Styles in addition to elements used in commercial buildings of the Second Empire Style. The projecting carved Italianate hood with its carved buttons and scrollwork and cast-iron lintel with studded rosettes exemplify the type of ornamentation typical of an eclectic Second Empire mix of Italianate, picturesque, and Eastlake details. The building's interior lobby includes the historic paneling, radiators, and layout. Throughout the interior, the open industrial loft layout remains, as do the ventilation flues and elevator. In the basement, purpose-built features related to its use as a laundry are extant, such as drain troughs and a freestanding hearth for heating water.

The building's core industrial loft form is intact and in no way compromised. As a purpose-built steam laundry and example of the Second Empire style as applied to industrial buildings, the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry is unmatched in the city of Milwaukee and perhaps the state. It represents a period of time in which commercial steam laundries were experiencing growth as a "new" industry in the city simultaneous to the waning days of the Second Empire style. This led to a one-of-a-kind industrial building in Milwaukee that is remarkably intact over 130 years later.

**Period of Significance**

The period of significance for the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry is 1888, the year it was constructed. In 1949, nine of the ten dormers were removed. Other than this, no substantial changes, interior or exterior, occurred after construction.

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**Land Acknowledgement**

This nomination recognizes the depth of human presence here, the ancestral home of American Indians for millennia, including the Menominee and Ho-Chunk tribes. From as early as the seventeenth century, inter-tribal conflict, Euro-American exploration and settlement, and ensuing military campaigns, all had the effect of repeated displacement of Indians of many tribal affiliations. This continuous tribal movement resulted in Wisconsin being home to many tribes who originated from other parts of the country, generating a pattern of immigration, relocation, and formation of new homeland. Some of these tribes remain in Wisconsin; other may not, but numerous count Wisconsin as home: Brotherton, Dakota, Fox/Meskwaki, Ho-Chunk, Kickapoo, Mascoutens, Menominee, Miami, Munsee, Odawa, Ojibwa, Oneida, Potawatomi, Stockbridge, Sauk, and Wyandot tribes. We acknowledge that the property that is the subject of this nomination is located on land long occupied by American Indians, including the Fox, Mascouten, Potawatomi, Sauk, Ottawa, Ojibwe, and Menominee groups.<sup>6</sup>

**Historical Context – Milwaukee and the Haymarket Neighborhood**

The city of Milwaukee is located along Lake Michigan at the confluence of the Milwaukee, Menomonee, and Kinnickinnic Rivers. The first mention of a community at this location was during the visit of Father Zenobius Membre to Fox and Mascouten Indians at what is now Jones Island near the mouth of the Milwaukee River. The native population of the area grew in subsequent years, including Potawatomi, Sauk, Ottawa, Ojibwe, and Menominee groups. Settlers of European descent initially used the area as a seasonal trading post during winter months when conditions farther north were too harsh. As early settlement of the United States pushed west, land was forcibly taken from native peoples, many of whom were relocated to Iowa and Kansas. The early European settlements that became Milwaukee were founded in the 1830s by Solomon Juneau (Juneautown, with business partner Morgan Martin), Byron Kilbourn (Kilbourntown), and George Walker (Walker's Point). Each claimed a piece of land and began settlements around the rivers, drawn by the large bay and deep mouth of the Milwaukee River, the deepest on the western shore of Lake Michigan. Although the settlement's growth was driven by commerce, political, religious, and cultural institutions quickly followed. The Town of Milwaukee was officially established in 1839 when Juneautown and Kilbourntown combined. Walker's Point was incorporated in 1845.<sup>7</sup>

Boosted by an influx of European immigrants, Milwaukee's population more than doubled in the four years following incorporation. By 1860, it had doubled again. After the Civil War, the trend increased, encouraged by industrial development. The economy was growing at an astounding rate. In the twenty years following incorporation, Milwaukee became Wisconsin's center of commerce. The railroad, new

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<sup>6</sup> John Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: Milwaukee County Historical Society, 2018), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 49.

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regional roads, and the harbor made Milwaukee a trade hub for many products, most notably wheat from the Wisconsin countryside. It was the greatest shipper of wheat on earth by 1865 and one of the top twenty cities in America in the trade of a wide range of other products.<sup>8</sup>

The Haymarket neighborhood lies just north of the central business district of downtown Milwaukee. Its name is derived from the hay market that developed on an open block south of Vliet Street between Fourth and Fifth streets, immediately to the west of the subject property. The hay market served the horses of the city as well as providing services and supplies to the industries and residents of the neighborhood. The Haymarket was originally part of Kilbourntown, developed by Byron Kilbourn, and centered at the corner of Third Street (today known as Old World Third Street Historic District, NRHP #87000494) and Juneau Street. Lots were generally 50x100 feet.<sup>9</sup> It was settled by some of the original German immigrants to Milwaukee. The area was desirable due to its proximity to Milwaukee's central business district and the fact that it lay on less marshy ground and included a plateau that overlooked the city. The Milwaukee River was the eastern border of the settlement, with Juneautown across the river. The earliest structures (pre-1840) were one- to three-story wood frame, clapboard structures that served as residences, stores, taverns, sawmills, and trade shops.<sup>10</sup> When Byron Kilbourn dammed the Milwaukee River at North Avenue in 1842, widening the river (he had hopes of creating a canal, which never came to fruition), the Haymarket neighborhood became a magnet for industries reliant upon water power: tanneries, breweries, and flour mills. This development brought smaller workshops to serve the larger businesses as well as more residents. These small factories produced such items as horse collars, barrels, church furniture, and corks, as well as ice houses, bottling works, and stables.

By the 1850s, the area was known as "German Town" due to the overwhelming concentration of German immigrants. Additionally, most of Milwaukee's Jewish population lived here, as they were primarily from Germany. They faced some prejudice, but initially language and custom outweighed religious differences. Most Jews worked in mercantile establishments; very few were involved in industry. The 1860s and 1870s brought another wave of German immigrants due to an unstable political and economic environment in Germany. All economic levels were represented in the neighborhood, from new immigrants to blue-collar workers and upper-class business owners.

By the late 1880s, much of the original German settlement downtown was being redeveloped for commercial use and the residential zone was shifting west and north into the Haymarket neighborhood

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<sup>8</sup> Gurda, *The Making of Milwaukee*, 103.

<sup>9</sup> Resource Design Group, *Final Report: North Third Street Area Intensive Historic Structures Survey*, 1983, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Resource Design Group, 10.

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and beyond to the north and west.<sup>11</sup> A flood of immigrants from Eastern Europe, Poland, and Russia, was also moving to the neighborhood, including large numbers of Jewish refugees. The difference in language and habits for these newer residents from the older German Jewish residents created a large chasm between the two populations. The subject property was included within a Jewish ghetto that developed due to the tight housing situation and the residents' status as newcomers.<sup>12</sup>

In the early 1880s, a petition was presented to the Milwaukee Common Council requesting that the city reorganize the informal hay market that had been operating at Vliet Street and Fifth Street since 1835 into a public market.<sup>13</sup> Eventually, the market had three hundred and forty stalls with a roof over seventy-nine of them.<sup>14</sup> By 1908, it had transitioned to a market for fresh produce known as the Central Market.<sup>15</sup> Today, it is an electrical substation with an open lot on the far west side.

In 1888, the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry was constructed on the eastern edge of this bustling market. It was located four blocks west from the two largest flour mills on the west bank of the Milwaukee River and at the approximate midpoint of the two largest breweries: Schlitz and Pabst. It was a prime location for a business that required both industrial space and a commercial presence. According to city directories, it was also a dense residential area without an existing steam laundry of any size, which allowed McCullough and Dixon to grow with relatively little close competition in the early years.

1888 also saw advancements in municipal infrastructure. The year the City of Milwaukee felt electric lights had proven themselves reliable and began installing electric lighting on streets at a large scale.<sup>16</sup> While a horse-drawn streetcar line had run down North Third Street since 1869, in 1890 the first electric car was added.<sup>17</sup>

### **Historical Context – Commercial Steam Laundries**

#### *The Rise of Commercial Laundries*

In the 1880s, the commercial laundry industry was in its infancy. Rising standards of cleanliness and increasingly polluted urban areas plus the introduction of urban water systems came together to create

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<sup>11</sup> City of Milwaukee, Department of City Development, *Central Business District Historic Resources Survey*, March 1986, 23.

<sup>12</sup> Resource Design Group, 49.

<sup>13</sup> "Property in Public Use: Some interesting facts about donations in early days," *Milwaukee Journal*, September 17, 1880.

<sup>14</sup> "Agriculture," *Encyclopedia of Milwaukee*, accessed October 16, 2020, <https://emke.uwm.edu/entry/agriculture/>.

<sup>15</sup> "Food," *Encyclopedia of Milwaukee*, accessed October 16, 2020, <https://emke.uwm.edu/entry/food/>.

<sup>16</sup> Resource Design Group, 28.

<sup>17</sup> Resource Design Group, 28.

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an industry out of a domestic chore.<sup>18</sup> While efforts to mechanize the laborious process of laundering had been ongoing for nearly a century, these factors pushed some individuals to consider steam laundries as an investment. The first American laundry industry journal, *National Laundry Record*, was published in 1884 with its competitor, *American Laundry Journal*, arriving on the scene in 1896.<sup>19</sup>

A commercial laundry gave consumers, nearly always middle- and upper-class women, an alternative to doing laundry themselves. Rather than a single laborer in the home, a systemized process was shared by multiple workers using industrial methods and new technology in the form of specialized machines. Commercial laundries were overwhelmingly run by men, who termed themselves “laundrymen.” They also serviced local industry needs, such as hotel linens.

Despite the growing popularity of commercial steam laundries, some potential customers remained skeptical of the industrial process, worrying their clothing would be damaged by the industrial machinery or preferring not to have their items co-mingled with other customers. Many households continued to do their own laundry, and some women took others’ laundry in their homes to generate income. The main commercial competitor of commercial steam laundries was the Chinese laundry established by entrepreneurial Chinese immigrants in large cities and small mining towns throughout the West since around the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> By the 1880s, Chinese owned and operated over three quarters of the laundry business in cities in California.<sup>21</sup> In Wisconsin, despite a much smaller number of Chinese population, Chinese laundry businesses dated back to the 1880s.<sup>22</sup> In Milwaukee, Chinese laundries prospered from only 12 in 1900 to 58 in 1930.<sup>23</sup> The key distinction between Chinese laundries and other commercial laundries is that Chinese laundries used the same hand laundry methods as households and were not typically steam (or powered) laundries. Some customers preferred Chinese laundries for this reason, even though they could not compete with the efficiency of modern steam-driven pressing machines.<sup>24 25</sup>

To gain more market share, commercial steam laundries began a series of racist and xenophobic

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<sup>18</sup> Mohun, *Steam Laundries: Gender, Technology, and Work in the United States and Great Britain* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>19</sup> Mohun, *Steam Laundries*, 55.

<sup>20</sup> Alexander McLeod, *Pigtails and Gold Dust* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1947), 112-133; David Bernstein, “Lochner, Parity, and the Chinese Laundry,” *William and Mary Law Review*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (1999): 217-220.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Ong, “An Ethnic Trade: The Chinese Laundries in Early California,” *The Journal of Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (1981), 96.

<sup>22</sup> David Holmes and Wenbin Yuan, *Chinese Milwaukee* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2008), 13.

<sup>23</sup> Holmes and Yuan, 31.

<sup>24</sup> Wang, 57.

<sup>25</sup> John Jung, “Did Chinese ‘Create’ the Laundry Business?” September 18, 2013, accessed June 27, 2021, [www.chineselaundry.wordpress.com/2018/09/13/did-chinese-create-the-laundry-business/](http://www.chineselaundry.wordpress.com/2018/09/13/did-chinese-create-the-laundry-business/).

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strategies to eliminate the competition of Chinese laundries. They touted the superiority of modern technology over hand-done laundry, maligned the supposed unhygienic conditions of Chinese laundries, price-slashed their own services, and in the early 1900s, supported new regulations that effectively created higher water taxes for the smaller Chinese laundries.<sup>26</sup> By 1879, Chinese laundries were regarded as a “menace” to their white-owned competitors.<sup>27</sup> In 1889, the talk at the Laundry Owners’ National Association Convention warned that the Chinese competition could soon wipe out the profits of the steam laundry industry.<sup>28</sup> “Some manufacturers of steam laundry equipment were reluctant to sell to Chinese laundrymen who would be taking business away from white-owned laundries. An 1892 article appeared in papers around the country in which an effort was made to prevent Chinese from acquiring steam driven equipment with the admonition by one manufacturer that “purchasers of steam machines must promise never to allow them to ‘fall into the hands of the Chinese competitor.’”<sup>29</sup>

While a more manual, less mechanical process was part of the appeal of Chinese laundries, by 1905 about 80 percent of the country’s laundries used some kind of machinery and were classified as “steam” laundries. Still, due to the competition the Chinese laundry posed to steam laundries owned by white individuals, advertisements continued to belittle Chinese laundries as feminine “hand-work” and downplayed the manual labor that continued to be used in the supposedly superior steam laundries.<sup>30</sup>

Chinese laundries were also part of Milwaukee’s commercial laundry market, and by 1890, a separate listing had been created for “Chinese Laundries,” in the city directory, indicating the perceived growing threat of the Chinese laundry to the white-owned steam laundry business. Between the pressure of commercial steam laundries and the technologies that brought electric washing equipment into homes, Chinese laundries slowly fell out of favor, although some laundries following the same business model remain today. Many of the Chinese laundry owners opened restaurants as the laundry business waned.

Commercial laundries became a mainstay of urban centers until after World War II, when home washing machines became more affordable, reliable, and therefore popular. Steam laundries converted to electric machines as the technology improved. Steam laundries became a business unique to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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<sup>26</sup> Wang, 67.

<sup>27</sup> Wang, 58.

<sup>28</sup> Wang, 59.

<sup>29</sup> Jung.

<sup>30</sup> Wang, 63.

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*The Commercial Laundry Process*

In addition to touting the benefits of steam laundering, commercial laundry owners took great care with the public-facing aspects of their business, knowing that customers had to place great faith in them to be comfortable entrusting them with their clothing and linens. Common features in the public areas of a commercial laundry might include stained glass, paneled ceilings, and carpeted floors, and care would be taken to ensure cleanliness and minimize odors.<sup>31</sup> Customers could drop off laundry, or horse-driven laundry wagons would make pickups from and deliveries to the surrounding residences and businesses. Once soiled items were at the laundry, they were sent to the marking room to be checked in, each article marked with the owner's name and sorted by colored goods, flat work, shirts, collars, and so on. This job was considered the best, as the workers would not be subjected to hot, steaming laundry all day.<sup>32</sup> Then they were sent to the basement washing room by being placed in large baskets, slid down a chute, or, as at McCullough and Dixon, conveyed on a freight elevator. The washing room was typically the men's area of the laundry. There, the dirty items were loaded into large washing machines, the drums filled with hot water, and the soap added.

An 1894 book gave advice to those looking to start a commercial steam laundry. It recommends locating the building in a location with plenty of light and air and to place the boiler, engine, dry room, and other machinery with the goal of reducing pipes, shafts, pulleys, belts, etc.<sup>33</sup> As the first point of entry for soiled clothes, the marking room was considered best placed near the office with easy access to the washing room.<sup>34</sup> Lastly, given the odors that would necessarily drift from dirty laundry to the office, it advises that the wash room be located as far as possible from the office.

After agitating in the large washing machines, the water was drained out of the tubs, more water added through several cycles to rinse, and then the water completely drained using only gravity. The heavy, wet items were then removed to a centrifugal wringer to remove more water. Once removed, they were twisted and knotted. Typically, young girls were employed to shake them out. Then, the mangle pressed out wrinkles and dried the items.<sup>35</sup> Workers known as feeders stood at one end of the mangle and pushed flat goods over the metal apron until steam-heated metal rolls caught them. In some laundries, a drying closet would be used, sometimes using exhaust transferred by piping from the main boiler in the basement.<sup>36</sup> Finally, the clothing and linens went back up to the first floor to be starched, ironed, and folded. Typically, there were three starching machines: a collar starcher, a shirt bosom

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<sup>31</sup> Mohun, *Steam Laundries*, 75-76.

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Beardsly Butler, "Pittsburgh's Steam Laundry Workers," *Charities*, 20 (1908), 549-563.

<sup>33</sup> C. A. Royce, *The Steam Laundry and Its Methods with Essays Read at the Laundrymen's National Conventions* (Chicago: National Laundry Journal, 1894), 8.

<sup>34</sup> Royce, 19.

<sup>35</sup> Mohun, *Steam Laundries*, 83-5.

<sup>36</sup> Royce, 72.

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starcher, and a band starcher. Articles were fed into the machine that carried it by conveyor to make contact with rolls immersed in hot starch. Wipers wiped in starch with their hands. The ironing area would have had long rows of machines, consisting of steam presses and rollers. Workers would typically specialize in one area of clothing, ironing only sleeves or cuffs, for example.<sup>37</sup> Finally, the items were folded and packaged and either held for pickup or sent out for delivery.<sup>38</sup>

In a commercial laundry, speed was the primary focus. The basement washroom floor was constantly wet, with troughs under the washing machines to carry off the draining water. Floors would sink in places under the heavy machinery, causing water to pool elsewhere as well. The heat from the steam could become intolerable and the work back-breaking. An average worker lasted only four years in the industry, and tuberculosis was a hazard of the job.<sup>39</sup>

Water has always been the primary requirement for laundering, and this was a concern taken more seriously with the technological advances in the late nineteenth century. Public water supply eased access to water, but public water did not necessarily meet the quality requirements of an industrial laundry. Water that included lime or other minerals, or “hard water,” would hinder the ability of soap to dissolve and leave a residue on fabric and machines. Based on the presence of limestone in the Milwaukee area, it is likely that the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry included a process to soften its water. Typically, a system of tanks and valves would add caustic soda to the water, thereby rendering the minerals harmless. Sometimes merely boiling the water would cause the lime to rise to the top as scum where it could be removed by filtering.<sup>40</sup>

Exhaust steam from the laundering process was commonly used to heat the feed water for the boiler and only sometimes used to heat the building. Given the steam radiators in the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry and the cold climate of Milwaukee, that may have been the case here.

All steam laundries required a boiler and engine, typically a high-pressure boiler. Most were run by coal, although sometimes gas was used. One view was that a horizontal tubular boiler set in a brick furnace was the most economical process to create steam with steam pipes leading from the boiler to be covered in asbestos or other insulating material.<sup>41</sup>

Given the vast amounts of steam used in a commercial steam laundry, ventilation was provided for through operable windows and exhaust fans. When purpose-built as a laundry, flues running from the

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<sup>37</sup> Butler, 549-63.

<sup>38</sup> Mohun, *Steam Laundries*, 88-90.

<sup>39</sup> Butler, 549-63.

<sup>40</sup> Royce, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Royce, 78.



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basement to the roof were installed to help dispel the steamy air.<sup>42</sup>

It was common for commercial laundries to make their soap on site. McCullough & Co. was a soap manufacturer before they expanded to the laundry business; this part of their operation would have been familiar to them. In the late nineteenth century, there were two primary methods of making soap: the boiling process and the cold process.<sup>43</sup> Both processes dissolved caustic potash, and sometimes caustic soda with melted tallow (fat) and left to sit for several days to solidify (saponification) into a soap. Required equipment included, at a minimum, tubs and barrels, but jacketed kettles for the tallow and earthen pots for the potash were recommended, as well as a hydrometer and thermometer.<sup>44</sup>

**Building History**

R.A. McCullough began a successful soap manufacturing business in the early 1870s, moving to several locations within the burgeoning downtown Milwaukee area, before building the laundry in 1888 at 419 West Vliet Street, historically 411-415 Vliet Street. The laundry was purpose-built, incorporating many of the elements described above and included in trade publications at the time as essential to the steam laundry process. The architect or builder of the subject property is unknown.

The building was also purpose-built for soap-making. The 1894 Sanborn Fire Map describes the subject building as steam heat, gas lights, and coal fuel for “steam cooking”<sup>45</sup> on the third floor. “Steam cooking” would have referenced the boiling process required for soapmaking. City directories from this period show that a steam laundry was at this address from 1889 through at least 1911.

In addition to making soap for the laundry, McCullough Soap Company manufactured their Magnetic Soap at the subject property for retail distribution through wholesalers or directly from the manufacturer. The soap was multi-purpose, intended for washing clothes as well as woodwork, carpet, and other household surfaces. They issued a series of lithographed die cut trading cards, a common advertising practice in the period, that claimed the soap could be used without boiling clothing or rubbing fabric against a washboard, which would prevent clothing from becoming stiff or damaged prematurely (see Figures J and K).

Prior to the laundry’s construction, a no longer extant structure was built in 1884 or 1885 in the vacant area between the subject building and the sidewalk. This structure shared the same parcel as the laundry building<sup>46</sup> and was noted in contemporary directories as that of William P. Froehlich, rag and

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<sup>42</sup> Royce, 79.

<sup>43</sup> Royce, 25.

<sup>44</sup> Royce, 28.

<sup>45</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1894.

<sup>46</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1894.

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paper merchant, for the William P. Froehlich Paper Warehouse.<sup>47</sup> The 1894 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows a frame building with brick veneer linked by a narrow, short, one-story frame structure. The outline of this link is still visible on the east elevation near the side door.

Rag dealers in 1880s were middlemen of the paper industry and of the lowest social class. Initial processing of rags involved sorting into fabric types, opening seams, and removing buttons, hooks, and soiled pieces. The rags were then cut into uniform squares. Some dealers and rag warehouses performed this initial processing while others merely stored and sold the rags directly to mills.<sup>48 49</sup> Laundering was also part of the rag paper-making process. Typically, the mills would launder rags themselves, but some dealers may have expanded their services to include boiling rags in limewater for a day to remove dirt, dust, and color, and then bleaching the rags, finishing with a second washing cycle. From this state, the rags would be sent to the paper mill to be shredded into pulp and made into paper.<sup>50</sup>

It is possible but unlikely that Froehlich built the subject building at 419 West Vliet Street to launder rags and then within a year sold it to R.A. McCullough & Company. Regardless, the physical connection between the buildings seems to indicate some coordination between the two businesses.

A “Sale Stable,”<sup>51</sup> which provided animal care and equipment housing and was common in urban areas, was located on the adjacent site to the south is shown on the 1894 Sanborn map. The stable building was not directly connected and on a separate parcel. In 1897 and 1898, Jacob Leyer listed his occupation as hostler at the same address as the subject property. It is not documented whether the businesses had any relationship, and the stable may have used the laundry’s address as its mailing address. The laundry did make deliveries via horse drawn wagons and likely housed its horses and wagons in the stable.

In 1894, the city directory lists Charles Wood as the foreman for the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry. The business changed its name in 1900 to Wood’s Laundry, indicating he may have purchased the business.

Soap manufacturing ceased with the assumed ownership change, and Champeny Creamery took over

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<sup>47</sup> Wright City Directory, Milwaukee, 1874-1891

<sup>48</sup> Corrine Cardinale, “A Penny for Your Rags: Rag Pickers and the Paper Industry in the Later 19<sup>th</sup> Century” (Honors Thesis, University at Buffalo, 2018).

<sup>49</sup> Cardinale, referencing Carl A. Zimring, *Cash for Your Trash: Scrap Recycling in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009), 16.

<sup>50</sup> Cardinale, referencing “The Manufacture of Paper – Paper Made From Rags,” *Scientific American*, September 18, 1869.

<sup>51</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1894.

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use of the building's second and third floors for the sale, and possibly manufacture, of dairy products.<sup>52</sup> The façade still bears the faded painted signage of the Champeny's advertisement for butter, milk, and cream. Wood's Laundry ran advertisements from 1900 through 1911 for their location at the subject property.

The 1910 Sanborn Map shows the Wobst Shoe Company as the main occupant of the building, with offices and shipping on the first floor, lasting on the second, cutting and fitting on the third, with 34' of frontage on the west alley side of the building (which would include the shipping and receiving area but not the lobby at the northwest corner of the building). Electric power and lights were noted. By this time, the laundry business took up less space and the laundry activities were condensed to the lobby and basement.

In 1911, Williams and Williams, a real estate company based in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, owned the building. Williams and Williams placed an ad in 1912 for the top two stories, including electric elevator, suitable for light manufacturing or warehouse purposes, stating "will rent cheap."<sup>53</sup>

The building was then utilized by a variety of companies as industrial, manufacturing, and warehouse space. The Milwaukee Shoe Company occupied the building by 1917, and had to shut down for a week after a fire attributed to "crossed electrical wires" while repairs in the amount of \$2,000 were executed.<sup>54</sup> In 1931, the company, then named Smartstyl Shoe Factory, held a liquidation sale<sup>55</sup>. Krasno Quality Egg occupied the building in 1934 for empty egg carton storage.<sup>56</sup> In 1935, Albert K. Keipper and his Cooping Company made wire chicken coops, feeds, and yeasts for poultry in the building.<sup>57</sup> By 1941, the Schneider Boat Company was in residence on the first floor.<sup>58</sup> It is unclear if Williams and Williams owned the building during the entirety of this period. Advertisements show them marketing the building frequently throughout these years.

In the 1940s, the building was purchased by Paul Riesen, who would continue to own it into the twenty-first century.<sup>59</sup> The Riesen Chemical Group compounded cleaning products in the building. In 1964 Riesen listed the business as a door-to-door vendor of cleaning products.

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<sup>52</sup> Advertisement, *Milwaukee Journal*, March 24, 1900.

<sup>53</sup> Advertisement, *Milwaukee Journal*, April 22, 1912.

<sup>54</sup> "From the Files: Fire Does \$12,000 Damage to Shop," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 21, 1942. Note: \$10,000 damage was in stock loss; \$2,000 in building damage.

<sup>55</sup> Adam Levin, *Fading Ads of Milwaukee* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2020), 34-35.

<sup>56</sup> City of Milwaukee Building Permit, October 3, 1934 and Levin.

<sup>57</sup> City of Milwaukee Building Permit, August 2, 1935 and Levin.

<sup>58</sup> City of Milwaukee Building Permit, March 28, 1941.

<sup>59</sup> City of Milwaukee Building Permit, June 28, 1944 and Bobby Tanzilo, "Urban Spelunking," *OnMilwaukee.com*, accessed May 14, 2019, <https://onmilwaukee.com/articles/urban-spelunking-froehlich-paper>.

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In 1949, a permit was pulled to demolish the dormers and the roof itself was replaced.<sup>60</sup> In 1953, the rag warehouse to the east, by then called a service station office building, was demolished. Throughout the 1960s, a variety of industries rented the building: tool and die, corrugated box manufacturer, and a broom company. In 1971, the building was described as a dwelling. As of 2001, Riesen was still the owner.<sup>61</sup> Currently, the building is vacant and is owned by a development company.

While the building was purpose-built as a laundry, with features specific to this use, the finely-detailed lobby and industrial loft style of the upper floors have made the building flexible for this wide variety of uses, preserving much of its historic character.

**Comparative Analysis – Steam Laundries in the Late Nineteenth Century**

As previously described in this document, the rise of commercial steam laundries is closely linked to available municipal water supply, providing adequate water for commercial steam laundries in Milwaukee as early as the 1870s. The soap-making operation required more space than a typical laundry might require, resulting in a larger-scale building than many others of this type. The space required for commercial laundries decreased and the machinery required continued to improve through the early twentieth century. As commercial laundry equipment increasingly went electric following World War II, and as more homes began to purchase appliances to assist with laundering clothing, commercial steam laundries fell out of favor or required different space, equipment, and features to operate electric equipment. This comparative analysis focuses mainly on the late nineteenth century when the physical needs of a commercial steam laundry was most similar to McCullough and Dixon.

*Milwaukee Steam Laundries*

When the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry was constructed, there were fifteen steam laundries in Milwaukee, in addition to numerous “Chinese laundries” that may or may not have used steam. Historical research indicates that most Chinese laundries during the late nineteenth century were manual and did not use steam power. Therefore, this comparative analysis will focus on known steam laundries. By the 1890 City Directory, sixteen steam laundries were listed under “Laundries;” however, based on the listings, it appears that five steam laundries went out of business, one moved, five changed names and/or owners and six new laundries, including McCullough and Dixon, were started.<sup>62</sup> At the Laundrymen’s National Association annual meeting in 1889, the argument was made that the combination of smaller laundries in urban centers was preferable to excessive competition.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> City of Milwaukee Building Permit, August 10, 1949.

<sup>61</sup> Bobby Tanzilo, “Urban Spelunking”, *OnMilwaukee.com*, Accessed May 14, 2019, <https://onmilwaukee.com/articles/urban-spelunking-froehlich-paper>.

<sup>62</sup> Wright City Directory, Milwaukee, 1888 and 1890

<sup>63</sup> Royce, 96.

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The period around the subject property's construction was a time of rapidly changing circumstances for the steam laundry business.

In the 1870s, a new Public Works department of the City of Milwaukee began to build a water and sewer system. This would have been a necessary precursor for the arrival of commercial steam laundries in Milwaukee, especially those of a similar scale to McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry.<sup>64</sup>

Prior to McCullough and Dixon, a few commercial laundries in Milwaukee thrived for many years. The City Steam Laundry at 332-334 Broadway (today 506-508 North Broadway) was established by Mrs. McNelly in 1870. An earlier publication touted it as a pioneer establishment of the business type.<sup>65</sup> The business was sold to J.P. McCarty in 1886 and does not appear in future directories under that address nor name. The City Steam Laundry building is no longer extant.

An even earlier laundry was established in March 1854 by A. Chaintain at 557 East Water Street (today 1017 North Water Street, razed). It was described as a French Dyer and Scourer but in 1881 was described as having a branch steam dyeing house at 289 Third Street (now 1013 North Third Street, razed).<sup>66</sup> By 1887 it was no longer listed in the city directory. It is not clear if, by "scourer," the concern may have included a steam laundry.

Otto Pietsch owned a steam dyeing establishment at 246 West Water Street (now 810 North Plankinton Ave) in 1881, which had been established in 1858. He had built the 1881 building in 1864 and added a dyehouse in 1875. His was a quite successful business, doing business nationally as well as locally.<sup>67</sup> In 1888, he was still a going concern at his 246 West Water Street location as Otto Pietsch Chemical Dyeing and Cleaning Works. In 1917, this building caught fire and was later demolished.<sup>68</sup> It is not clear if a steam laundry would have been a part of the business.

The Troy Steam Laundry was one of the largest and most enduring steam laundries in Milwaukee, if not the state. Located at 146-148 Michigan Avenue (approximately 177 West Michigan Street today) by 1888, the business had been founded in 1872 at a nearby location by a Mr. Rice and Mr. Pierce. In 1876 or 1877, they built a \$3500 brick building and furnished it with \$10,000 of machinery for a steam

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<sup>64</sup> *Central Business District Historic Resources Survey*, 16.

<sup>65</sup> *Industrial History of Milwaukee: The Commercial, Manufacturing and Railway Metropolis of the North-West* (Milwaukee: E.E Barton, 1886), 154-55.

<sup>66</sup> Alfred T. Andreas, ed., *History of Milwaukee, From Pre-Historic Times to the Present Date* (Chicago: The Western Historical Co., 1881), 1277-1278.

<sup>67</sup> Andreas, 1277-1278.

<sup>68</sup> "News That Is News," *Cleaning and Dyeing World*, Vol. 4, January 1917, 418.

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laundry. By 1881, they employed “35 girls, 6 boys, and [ran] two city delivery wagons” and were proclaimed to be the largest laundry in Wisconsin.<sup>69</sup> In 1888 and 1890 they were still a listed steam laundry in the Wright City Directory. The Michigan Avenue building was razed at an unknown date.

Another large Milwaukee steam laundry, begun in September 1880, was the Campbell Steam Laundry at 514 Grand Avenue (today 514 West Wisconsin Avenue). In 1886, it employed “6 men and 35 women in various departments” and was considered “one of the largest and most complete of its kind in the city.” Orders were taken by mail and messenger, with several wagons delivering orders. It consisted of an original building and a rear premises, purchased later. Power was provided by a large steam engine. Campbell had eight branches throughout the city of Milwaukee and an additional sixteen branches ranging throughout Wisconsin.<sup>70</sup> The original building on Wisconsin Avenue, which was used by the company for at least ten years, is no longer extant.

The Palace Steam Laundry is typical of this era’s Milwaukee steam laundries, in terms of employees, storefront, and a tendency to change locations and ownership. An 1889 photo (Figure I) of its employees in front of the storefront includes 20 people, of whom 17 are women and 3 are men. A delivery wagon is partially seen in the photo. George Deguenther and George Lingelbach are listed as proprietors of this business at 308 Reed Street in 1888, while the 1890 Wright City Directory shows the Palace Steam Laundry at 234-236 Reed Street and a Deguenther Laundry Company at 133 Mason Street. None of these buildings are extant.

Larger hotels were a frequent source of business for commercial laundries. Milwaukee experienced an era of Grand Hotels in the 1880-90s. Hotels became larger, higher quality and with more amenities, attracting a larger clientele, and may have fueled the growth of the industry in Milwaukee.<sup>71</sup>

The only laundry listed in the City Directory in 1888 and 1890 that remains today is the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry. Only one other confirmed steam laundry is extant in Milwaukee, a Commercial Vernacular brick structure at 513-15 E. Smith Street (AHI 116066) commissioned by E. Page as a dwelling and laundry. It is not clear from current photos if it would have been a purpose-built steam laundry. A garage was added in 1954. The storefront and gable are significantly altered. It is unknown if any historic fabric is retained beneath. The building dates to a later period and is far less decorative and intact than the subject property.

Other extant laundries in the city date to 1906 and later, well past the period of significance, or are undated with descriptions such as “coin laundry” or “dry cleaners;” there is no evidence that these

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<sup>69</sup> Andreas, 1277-1278.

<sup>70</sup> *Industrial History of Milwaukee*, 140.

<sup>71</sup> *Central Business District Historic Resources Survey*, 158.

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were constructed as purpose-built steam laundries. All are gabled, commercial vernacular, or astylistic utilitarian in style. A few notable steam laundries in other parts of Wisconsin have survived. While the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry is being nominated locally, the status of other steam laundries throughout the State are noted to demonstrate the exceptional nature of the subject property.

The most intact remaining steam laundry in Wisconsin dating to the same era as the subject property is the 1888 Model Steam Laundry, built and owned by Ernest Petruschke at 111 S. Adams Avenue in Berlin, Wisconsin. It is listed on the Wisconsin Architectural History Inventory (AHI) #49409 as a contributing building in the Huron Street Historic District. This brick Italianate style building is mostly intact on the exterior, with the exception of the entrance, which has had a wooden canopy added. The interior not known to have much, if any remaining integrity, having been converted to the Berlin Area Historical Society Museum after serving as a duplex apartment for many decades.<sup>72</sup>

The owner of the Model Steam Laundry in Berlin outgrew this building after only a few years and built a new steam laundry in Berlin at 110 E. Huron Street in 1893. The Berlin Laundry operated at that location by the same family and their descendants until sometime in the 1970s or 1980s,<sup>73</sup> although it most certainly moved away from steam in later years. This structure is also part of the Huron Street Historic District in Berlin. Its storefront has been drastically altered; it is unknown if original materials lie extant beneath the new storefront. An interior photo of the 110 E. Huron Street laundry is included as Figure H.

A number of additional steam laundries are listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places as part of historic districts but are not necessarily eligible on their own. Lindley's Steam Laundry in Appleton (AHI #39032) dates to 1917 and may be eligible as part of a proposed College Avenue Historic District. It is a commercial vernacular storefront. The Baraboo Steam Laundry (AHI #94648), a 1901 commercial vernacular building in Baraboo, is listed on the National Register as part of the Downtown Baraboo Historic District. The Portage Steam Laundry (AHI #41553) in Portage, a 1921 commercial vernacular brick structure, is listed on the National Register as part of the Portage Retail Historic District. A 1901 commercial vernacular laundry in Green Bay, the American Steam Laundry (AHI #36794), is listed as part of a historic district as well. It has been significantly altered and was not used as a laundry until 1911. In Watertown, a steam laundry was converted to the Archie Brothers Monument Works in 1920 (AHI #73312) and is a part of that city's Main Street Commercial Historic District. Several other steam laundries are extant in the state, but not eligible due to modifications.

The McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry is unique among these in its scale, significance to

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<sup>72</sup> Interview with Bobbie Erdmann of the Berlin Area Historical Society, June 3, 2021.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Bobbie Erdmann.

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Milwaukee, integrity, and Second Empire style. Located in an area with a blend of commercial and industrial concerns, it retains a different character than the smaller, downtown commercial laundries located in many of the above listed historic districts.

*Milwaukee Soap Manufacturers*

Very little information was found regarding Milwaukee soap manufacturers during the period of significance. As the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry was purpose-built as a steam laundry and the soap manufacturing could take place without such a specific building, its use as a soap factory is secondary. In 1892, six soap factories were listed in a local directory, and it was noted that three of these produced 90% of the city's soap. No particular company was directly mentioned. Advertising for the Gross Bros. Soap Works at 952-961 Water Street noted the business had been established in 1867, indicating it had longevity as a going concern.<sup>74</sup>

**Architectural Context**

Beginning in the 1870s, most of the wood frame buildings in the Haymarket neighborhood were replaced by larger brick buildings. Schlitz Brewery, the largest brewer in the country by 1888, continually expanded, building structures on their growing brewery campus in the German Renaissance and Richardsonian Romanesque style (NRHP #99001632). Throughout the neighborhood, stepped parapets with decorative brickwork and capped pilasters were popular, erected by businessmen and builders of mostly German origins.<sup>75</sup> Design services were mostly provided by local architects and builders. The earliest buildings were designed in the Greek Revival style, with Italianate and Queen Anne becoming more popular as the century progressed. Between 1860 and 1890, the Italianate style was the most popular in Milwaukee. Windows and elevations became more ornate. Round and segmental arches were highly decorated. Pilasters, belt courses, and corbel tables were popular, as were overscaled bracketed cornices. A pediment at the cornice might emphasize verticality.<sup>76</sup>

Several significant buildings were erected in the Haymarket neighborhood in the 1880s. By the end of the decade, the area was overcrowded with residences and businesses with the hay market serving as a magnet for the entire district.<sup>77</sup> In addition to hay, vendors sold seasonal fresh fruits and vegetables. A number of other commercial and industrial concerns included cigar and shoe factories, blacksmith and butcher shops, and a weiss beer brewery.<sup>78</sup> The nearby Third Street business district was one of the

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<sup>74</sup> W.J. Andrews and Julius Bleyer, eds. *Milwaukee's Great Industries: A Compilation of Facts...For New or Established Industries*, (Milwaukee: Association for the Advancement of Milwaukee, 1892), 183, 238, 344.

<sup>75</sup> *Milwaukee's Great Industries*, 183, 238, 344.

<sup>76</sup> *Central Business District Historic Resources Survey*, 19.

<sup>77</sup> Gurda, *Milwaukee: City of Neighborhoods*, 188.

<sup>78</sup> Gurda, *Milwaukee: City of Neighborhoods*, 188.



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first commercial districts to be located outside the central business district. It became anchored by Schuster's Department Store in 1884. A Romanesque Revival-style Turner Hall was built at 1034 North Fourth Street in 1882-83 (NRHP #77000041) to meet the social and athletic needs of the Germans in the city. It is still used by the Turners today. In addition to the dominance of the brewing industry by Schlitz Brewery, the area's tanneries had made Milwaukee the largest leather tannery in the world by 1890.<sup>79</sup> This attracted many shoe manufacturers to the area, including the F. Mayer Boot and Shoe Company, which built a massive, Romanesque Revival-style red-brick structure (NRHP #84003728) at First Street and Walnut in 1880. In 1888, a new Romanesque Revival-style school building was built on Fourth Street by Edward T. Mix (NRHP #84003720), two blocks north of where the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry was under construction. Golda Meir, who grew up in the neighborhood from the age of eight, attended this school from 1906 to 1912. Later, after she became prime minister of Israel, the school was renamed in her honor. Four blocks north on Vine Street, the Frederick Ketter Warehouse (NRHP #84003725) was built in the Romanesque and German Renaissance styles in 1894 by a grocer. It is highly stylized for a relatively small, narrow industrial building, which speaks to the success of this neighborhood at the time.

*Industrial Loft Building Type*

The industrial loft building style was common for early industries in Milwaukee and for many American port cities beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. This building type was characterized by two or more stories with an open floor plan interrupted only by exposed heavy timber or concrete columns. Structure was also utilized to suspend or support transmission machinery such as shafts or belts. Different parts of the manufacturing process might be divided vertically among the separate floors, with heaviest or dirtiest activities on the lowest floors and lighter work, storage, or detailed work requiring significant daylight occurring on the upper floors. Shafts for stairs, elevators, and other hoists would be grouped together when possible or located along party walls to provide the greatest flexibility. Upper floors might later be partitioned to divide the space between storage and manufacturing uses or between multiple tenants. At street level, the building might include commercial space or offices for the associated manufacturer or warehouse. Later examples tended to be dedicated solely to manufacturing and might be part of larger industrial factory complexes.

Industrial buildings were often simple and asylistic, although many would incorporate simple nods toward a popular style around public entrances, at the street level on primary elevations, and at the cornice. At the street level, multiple doors were typical in addition to the main entrance to facilitate loading and unloading from wagons, vehicles, or rail cars. Building footprint sizes were constrained by the need for proper ventilation and natural light, with large, operable wood or steel windows arranged in a regular pattern. Skylights and roof monitors were often used for additional natural light and

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<sup>79</sup> Gurda, *Milwaukee: City of Neighborhoods*, 188.

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ventilation.<sup>80</sup>

The McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry is an excellent example of this industrial loft building type, utilizing open floor plans flexible for a variety of industrial uses with minimal interruptions of partitions or columns. The heaviest, wettest tasks were relegated to the basement where drainage could be facilitated, with lighter and more detailed tasks on the upper floors. It incorporates large windows for ventilation and large doors to facilitate deliveries. It followed all the common features of the building type during the period of its construction.

*Second Empire Style*

The Second Empire Style began in France during the reign of Napoleon III (1852-1870) during a period which was appropriately referred to as the “Second Empire.” The expansion of the Palace of the Louvre in Paris (1852-1870) was one of the first high-profile examples. A key feature of the Second Empire Style is the mansard roof with steeply sloped sides that terminate into a flat or shallow pitched roof, which evokes the style’s French origins. During the late Victorian Era, which spanned from the end of the Civil War to about 1900, the style became popular in the United States, especially for high-profile, urban commercial and municipal buildings. Use of the style was meant to convey quality and prestige.<sup>81</sup> In addition to the mansard roof, other hallmark features of the Second Empire style include complex massing, expansive height, roof dormers on the sloped mansard roof portion, segmentally arched doors, and window openings with emphasized hood moldings. The transition between the mansard and flat roof portion is typically achieved by a decorative curb around the top of the visible sloped sides. Second Empire was popular around the same time as other Late Victorian styles, and often incorporates elements of Italianate or Eastlake styles, such as spandrels around windows, incised, shaped or protruding columns and piers, and decorative buttons on exterior and interior trim are also associated with this style.<sup>82</sup>

True to the Second Empire style, the massing of the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry building is designed to impress, comprising a substantial footprint. As an industrial building, its ornamental features are simpler than more elaborate Second Empire buildings, yet typically stylish for a late 1800s construction and more ornate than many industrial structures of the period. Ornamentation is an eclectic Second Empire mix of Italianate, picturesque, and ornamental, evoking the Late Victorian period. While nine of the ten dormers were removed in 1959, the mansard shape is intact as is the mansard framing on the interior side. All other ornamental features on the exterior are extant, including the stone entry hood and intricate brickwork.

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<sup>80</sup> Mead & Hunt, *Milwaukee Industrial Properties Intensive Survey*, Prepared for the Wisconsin Historical Society, October 2016.

<sup>81</sup> *Central Business District Historic Resources Survey*, 20.

<sup>82</sup> *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*, Vol 2 (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986), 10.

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Wisconsin's Cultural Resource Management plan suggests that Second Empire buildings were once far more common than the current inventory would suggest. The style was once the popular choice for large public and institutional buildings. The style's early popularity and signature details had begun to appear outmoded and obsolete as early as 1900. Rapidly growing cities and technological advancements resulted in much rebuilding during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, replacing Second Empire and other Late Victorian buildings with the range of Period Revival styles that dominate historic building inventories today.<sup>83</sup>

In Milwaukee, several commercial examples of the Second Empire style are extant. Alexander Mitchell commissioned one of the most outstanding and enduring examples in his commercial building at 207 East Michigan St between 1876 and 1878 (NRHP #73000087).<sup>84</sup> In a desire to emulate the French Second Empire fashion, mansard roofs were sometimes added to older commercial buildings to "modernize" their images, such as the Pierce Building at 700 N. Milwaukee Street. This commercial structure was built in 1866 and added a fourth floor and mansard roof in 1879 to update its style to the fashionable Second Empire style at the time.<sup>85</sup> Other buildings have had their mansard roofs removed, such as the Lawrence Block, 602-24 Broadway. Constructed in 1868 as a commercial building, its original mansard roof was removed in 1876 and a full story added with alterations made to reflect the Italianate style.<sup>86</sup> Another significant non-residential example in Milwaukee from this period is the Main Building at the Northwestern Branch, National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers Historic District, built in 1869 (NRHP #05000530). The Edward Townsend Mix-designed building is a fine example of Gothic Revival with strong nods toward Second Empire in the mansard roof and massing.<sup>87</sup>

Regardless of the style's one-time popularity, usage of the Second Empire style for industrial buildings was rare. Industrial buildings tend to be utilitarian structures with little embellishment. Even the most decorative industrial buildings tended to utilize styles that could be suggested with a few key details at cornices, entrances, or window surrounds on an otherwise astylistic industrial loft building, or styles better suited to robust buildings with large footprints. The Second Empire style, with its mansard forms, emphasis on verticality, and Late Victorian preference for highly decorative ornament, was not typically considered for industrial purposes.

The McCullough and Dixon Laundry is one of very few industrial buildings in Wisconsin that were

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<sup>83</sup> *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*, 10-11.

<sup>84</sup> *Central Business District Historic Resources Survey*, 20.

<sup>85</sup> "James Curry and A.J.W. Pierce Building," Wisconsin Historical Society, Wisconsin Architecture and History Inventory, Record #27717.

<sup>86</sup> *Central Business District Historic Resources Survey*, 20.

<sup>87</sup> *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*, 10.

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designed in the Second Empire style. The only other industrial building in the Second Empire style listed on the State or National Registers is the Bichard's and Follansbee's Block at 319-327 East Wisconsin Avenue (1867), which is part of the East Side Commercial Historic District (NRHP #86002325). Part of the building's mansard was removed and the corner remodeled in 1899 to reflect the Italiante style. The remaining block of buildings retain their mansard roofs today.<sup>88</sup> The Bichard's and Follansbee's Block was constructed as an industrial building but converted early in its history to commercial use as industrial activity moved out of this part of the central business district. The varied use, significant alteration, and turn of the century "updating" make it a less intact example of the Second Empire style as applied to industrial buildings in the late nineteenth century.

The Second Empire Style distinguishes the McCullough and Dixon laundry from not only other industrial buildings, but from other steam laundries as well. Commercial laundries during the period of significance tended to be of simple styles. All other extant steam laundries, which were constructed in the twentieth century, are a commercial vernacular style. See Figure I for a photo of the Palace Steam Laundry, which was a contemporary of the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry, designed in a typical commercial vernacular style.

### **Conclusion**

The McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry is architecturally significant as one of the only documented intact industrial buildings in Wisconsin designed in the Second Empire style, as well as the oldest remaining steam laundry in Milwaukee. It also constitutes a good example of the industrial loft building type. No other extant steam laundries from before 1900 exist in Milwaukee. Both the exterior and interior of the building retain high integrity, preserving the unique nature of a Second Empire industrial building in Milwaukee and the competitive environment of late-nineteenth century commercial steam laundries.

Many key characteristics of a Second Empire style building are present in the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry. Its massing and verticality emphasized by brick detailing and pilasters, capped by the classic mansard roof and dormer, are quintessential Second Empire style. Features such as the stone entry hood with Eastlake ornamentation, picturesque window, and lobby detailing contribute to the Second Empire style. At its core, the building is an industrial loft cloaked in Second Empire trimmings to appeal to a middle- and upper-class clientele.

This unique property tells the story of an architectural style, type of building, and bygone industry that is exceedingly rare and of significance to Milwaukee's history.

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<sup>88</sup> "Rehabilitated Building Re-Captures its Cream City Charm," *Wisconsin Historical Society*, accessed July 4, 2021, <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS31>.

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**Preservation Activity**

In recent years, the building has stood vacant and maintenance has been deferred. No rehabilitation or preservation efforts have been made. Temporary stabilization measures are planned to stop extensive water infiltration and prevent further structural degradation. Once the building deterioration has been halted, the owner plans to rehabilitate the building using the Historic Tax Credit program.

**Archaeological Potential**

Archaeological potential has not been assessed, but given the long history of human occupation in the area, there is potential for archaeological finds. According to the Wisconsin Archeological Site Inventory, a campsite or village was identified about three blocks west of the site along Vliet Street between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets, but it has not been further studied. No excavations or earth works are planned on the subject property at this time.

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**Verbal Boundary Description:**

The boundary encompasses the entire legal parcel, legally defined as: Original Plat of the Town of Milwaukee West of the River in Sections 20 and 29 – 7-22- of Block 35, Lot 1.

The boundary follows the parcel line and encompasses an area rectangular in shape with the longest axis running parallel to West Vliet Street. Beginning at the sidewalk edge at the northeast corner where West Vliet Street intersects North Vel R. Phillips Ave, the boundary continues west for 150 feet to a north-south alley at the northwest corner of the subject building. The boundary then turns south along the alley and building edge for 50 feet to the southwest corner of the subject building. The boundary then returns east along the south edge of the parcel and building and continues east past the southeast building corner along the chain link fence dividing the subject parcel from the parcel to the south, 150 feet total. The boundary then turns north along the sidewalk edge for 50 feet to the point of origin.

**Boundary Justification:**

The proposed property boundary consists of the entire legal parcel that is currently associated with the property. At the time of construction in 1888, a second structure was located within this boundary. There are no plans to subdivide the parcel. The 1894 Sanborn Map is also consistent with the current parcel, as described above. Due to Covid-19, access to City of Milwaukee historical tax records is prohibited, restricting research regarding historical property lines.

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*RESOURCE:* McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry and Soap Manufacturer Building

*PHOTOGRAPHER:* Bridget Greuel and Donna Weiss, March and April 2021

*LOCATION OF ORIGINAL DIGITAL FILES:*

Wisconsin Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office  
816 State Street, Madison WI 53706

*LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS:*

Photograph 1 of 20 (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0001)  
Looking south at the north façade.

Photograph 2 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0002)  
Looking west at the east elevation.

Photograph 3 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0003)  
Looking north at the south elevation.

Photograph 4 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0004)  
Looking east at the west elevation.

Photograph 5 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0005)  
Detail of the main entrance on the north façade.

Photograph 6 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0006)  
Detail of loading dock doors on the west facade.

Photograph 7 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0007)  
Interior side of main entrance and stair.

Photograph 8 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0008)  
Lobby looking northeast toward foyer.

Photograph 9 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0009)  
Interior lobby wood ceiling.

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Photograph 10 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0010)  
Interior looking northwest at windows.

Photograph 11 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0011)  
Detail of elevator on the first floor.

Photograph 12 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0012)  
Interior looking southwest on the first floor.

Photograph 13 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0013)  
Interior looking southeast in the basement.

Photograph 14 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0014)  
Detail of freestanding hearth in basement.

Photograph 15 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0015)  
Interior looking northwest in basement.

Photograph 16 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0016)  
Detail of drain troughs in basement.

Photograph 17 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0017)  
Interior looking southeast on the second floor.

Photograph 18 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0018)  
Interior looking southeast on the third floor.

Photograph 19 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0019)  
Interior looking southwest on the third floor.

Photograph 20 of 20: (WI\_Milwaukee County\_McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry\_0020)  
Interior looking northwest on the third floor.

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**List of Figures:**

Figure A: USGS Quadrangle Map of Property

Figure B: Sketch map with exterior photo locations

Figure C: Basement floor plan with interior photo locations

Figure D: First floor plan with interior photo locations

Figure E: Second floor plan with interior photo locations

Figure F: Third floor plan with interior photo locations

Figure G: Historical photograph of McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry building.

Figure H: Historical photograph of the interior of the laundry in Berlin, Wisconsin, at 110 East Huron Street showing typical laundry activities of the period.

Figure I: Historic photograph of Palace Steam Laundry, a contemporary of the McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry

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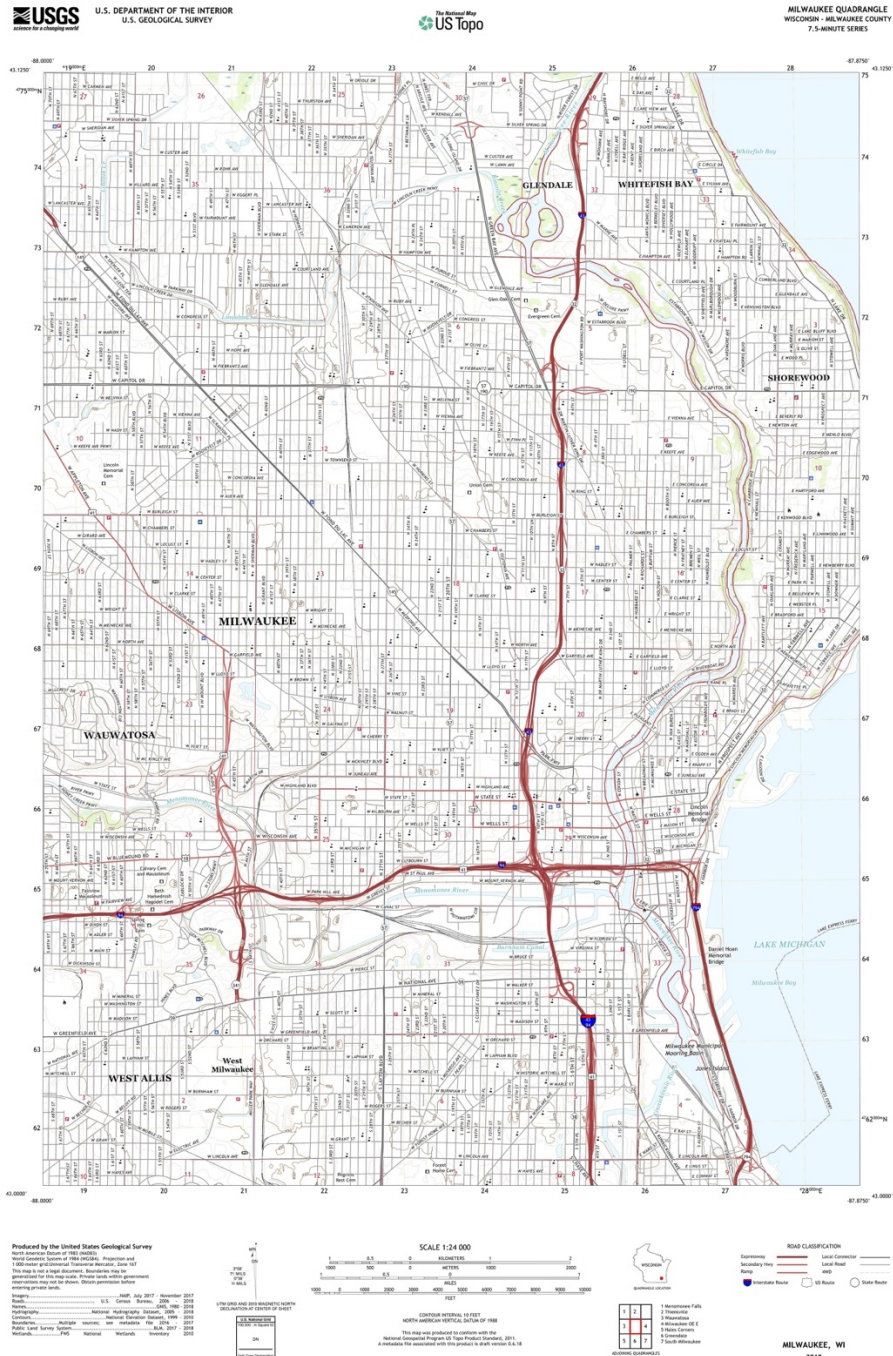
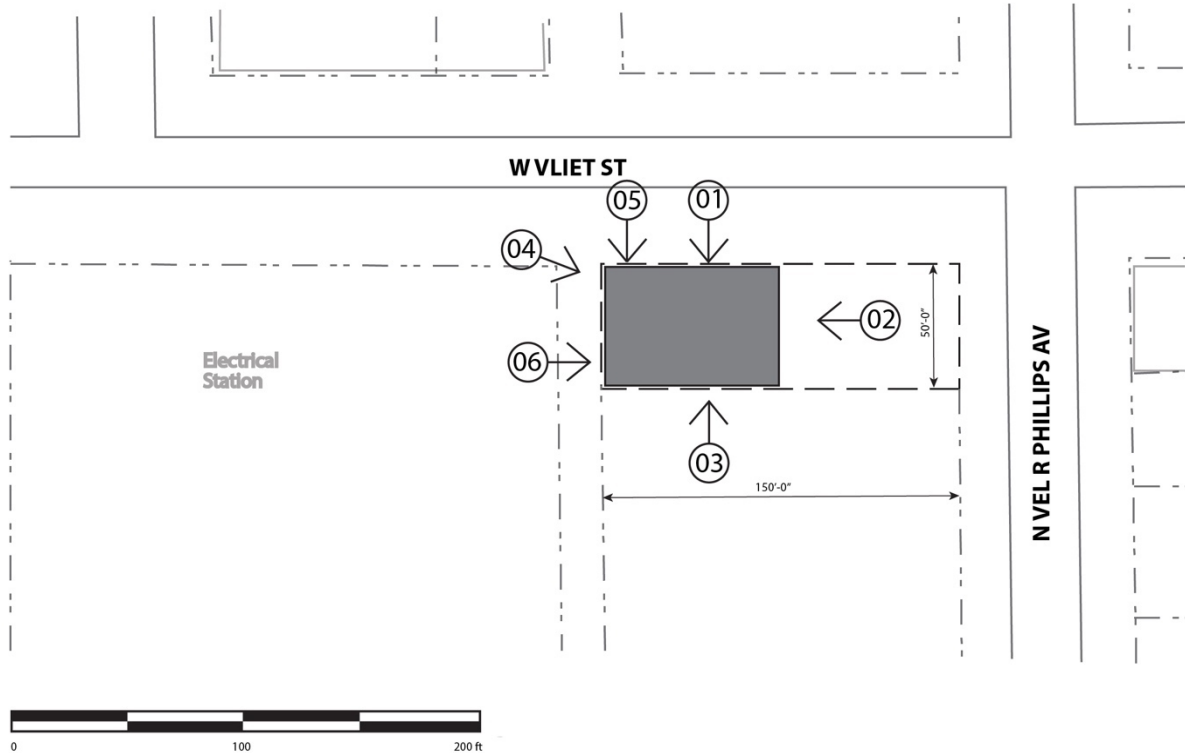


Figure A: USGS Quad (7.5 minute) map including subject property and UTM coordinates.





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Source: Milwaukee County  
LEGEND

-  Photo Location
-  Historic and Proposed Property Boundary
-  Parcel Lines
-  Contributing Resource



**McCullough & Dixon Steam Laundry and Soap Manufacturer Building**  
419 West Vliet Street  
Milwaukee County, Wisconsin  
**SKETCH MAP**

*Figure B: Sketch Map showing surrounding context and exterior photo locations.*

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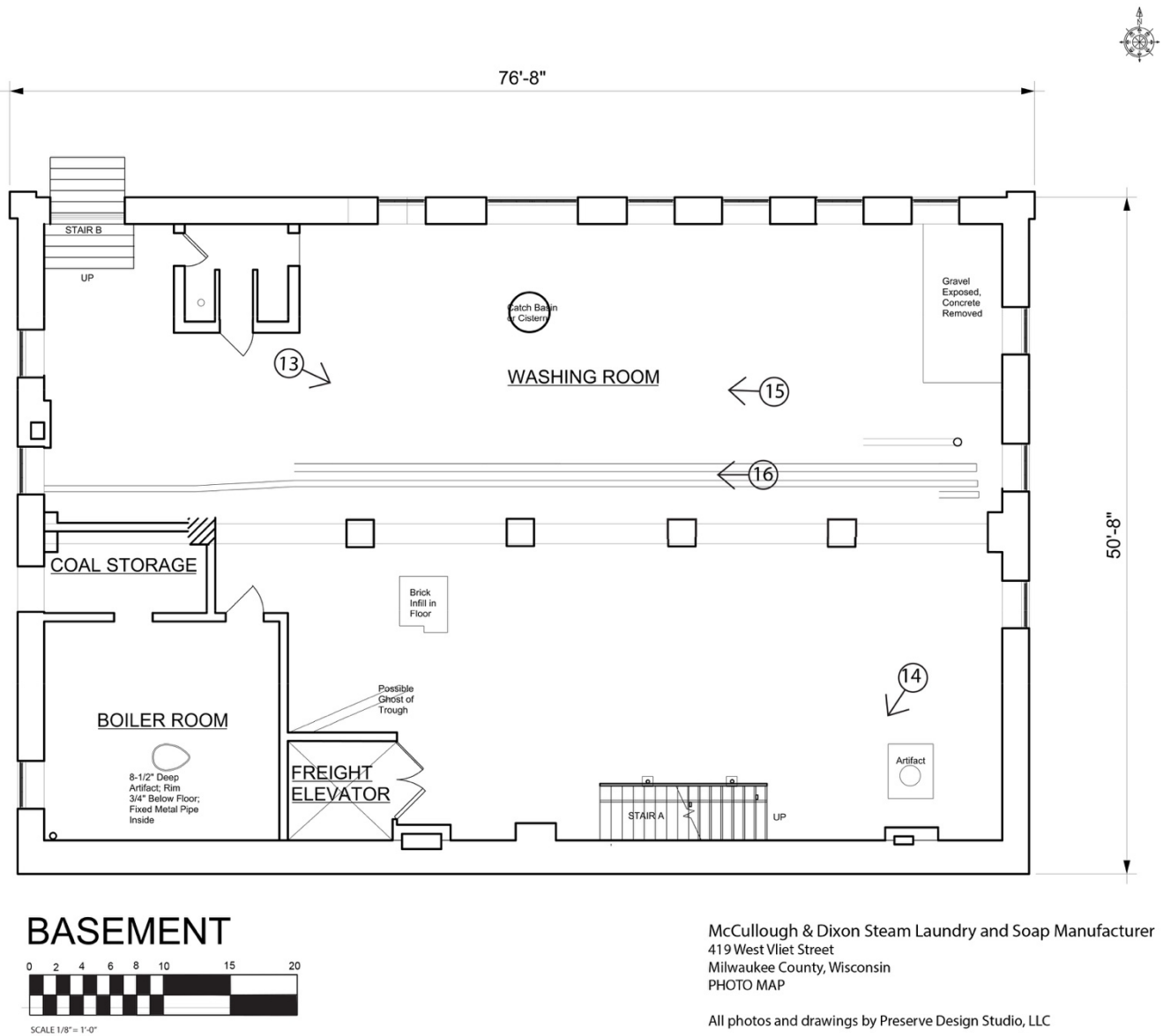
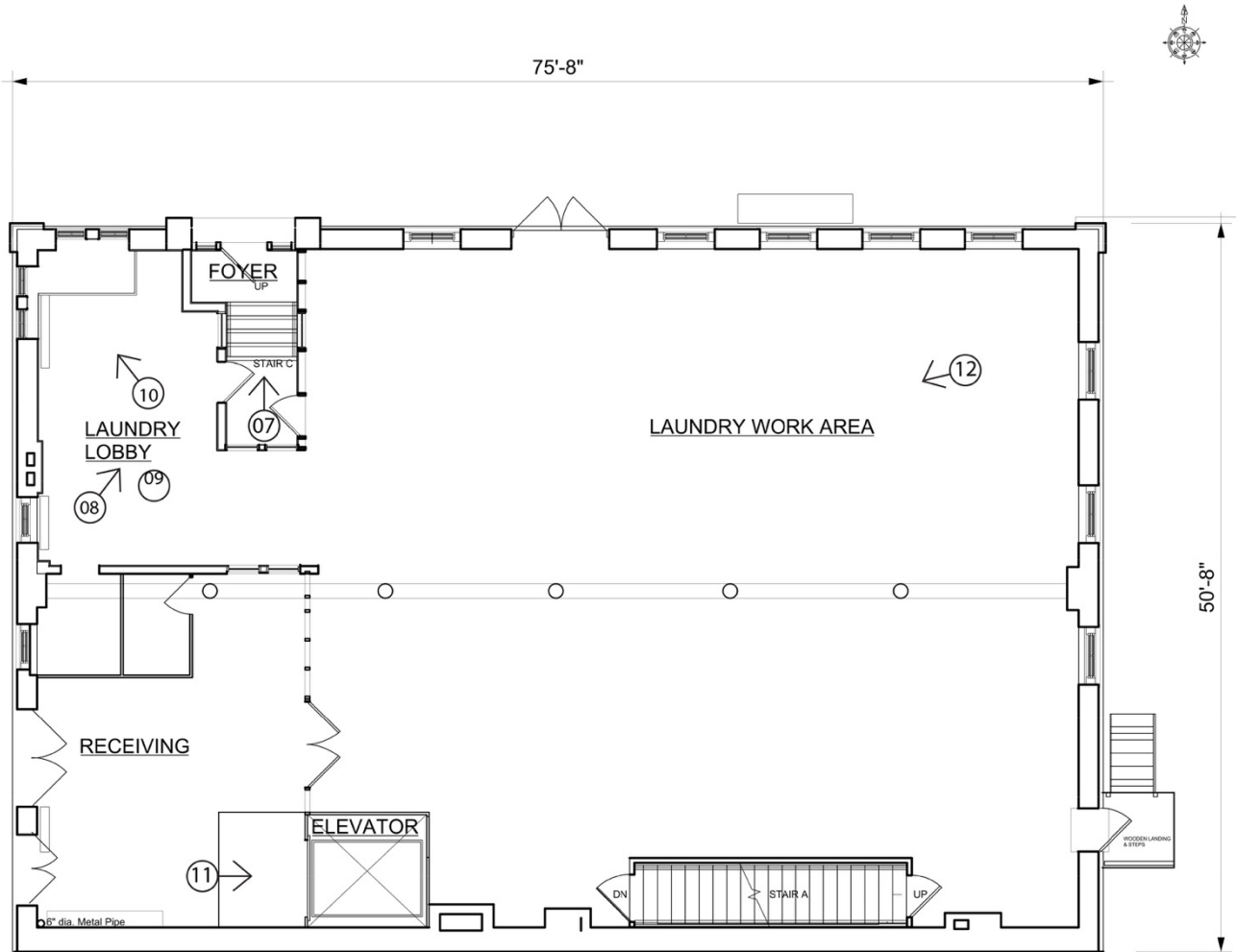


Figure C: Basement floor plan with interior photo locations.

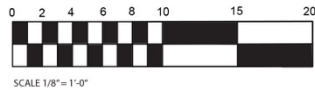
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**First Floor**



McCullough & Dixon Steam Laundry and Soap Manufacturer  
419 West Vliet Street  
Milwaukee County, Wisconsin  
PHOTO MAP

All photos and drawings by Preserve Design Studio, LLC

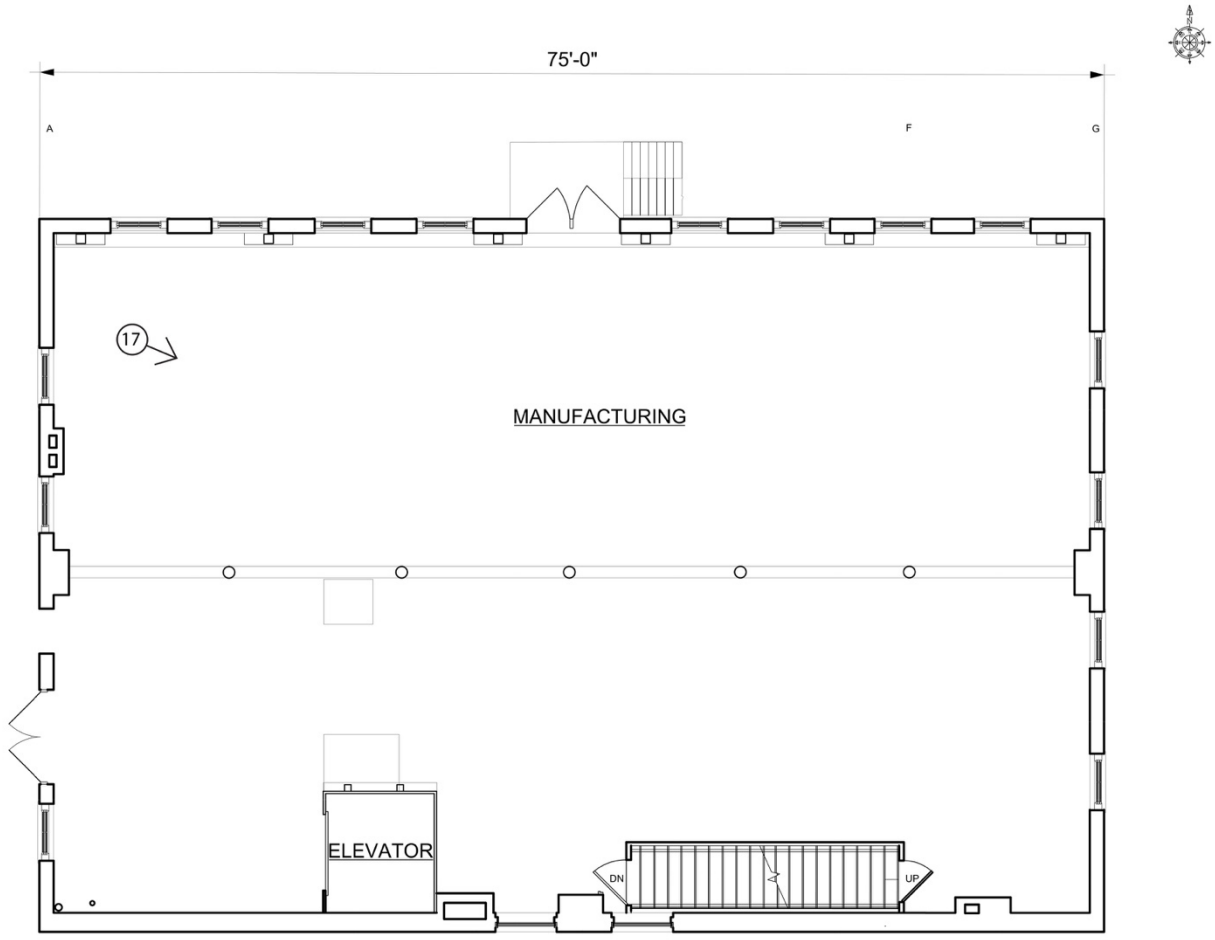
*Figure D: First floor plan with interior photo locations.*



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Second Floor



McCullough & Dixon Steam Laundry and Soap Manufacturer  
419 West Vliet Street  
Milwaukee County, Wisconsin  
PHOTO MAP

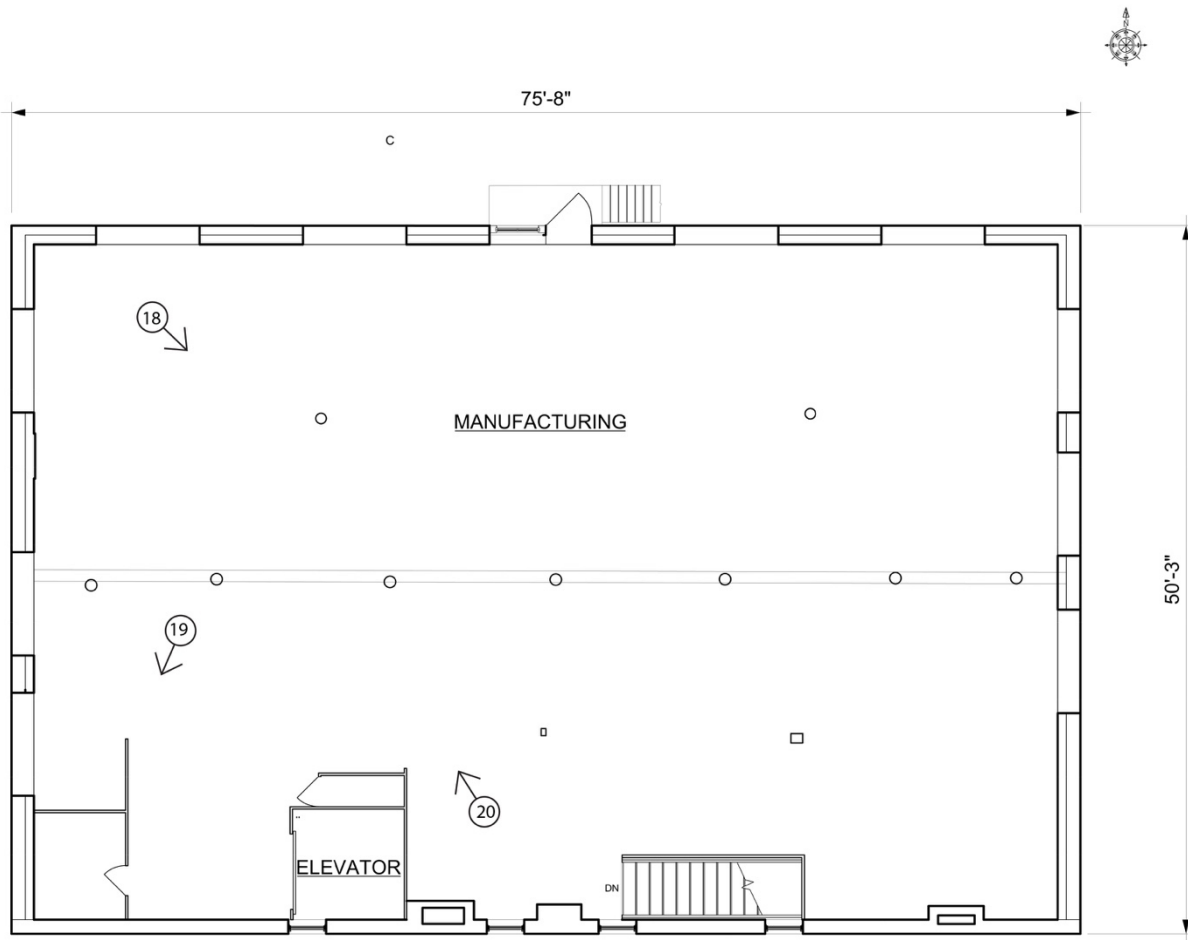
All photos and drawings by Preserve Design Studio, LLC

*Figure E: Second floor plan with interior photo locations.*

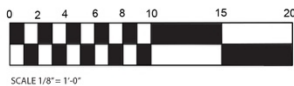
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Third Floor



McCullough & Dixon Steam Laundry and Soap Manufacturer  
419 West Vliet Street  
Milwaukee County, Wisconsin  
PHOTO MAP

All photos and drawings by Preserve Design Studio, LLC

*Figure F: Third floor plan with interior photo locations.*

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*Figure G: Undated historic photo of McCullough and Dixon Steam Laundry, courtesy of Milwaukee County Historical Society.*

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*Figure H: Laundry interior at 110 East Huron Street in Berlin, Wisconsin, courtesy of Berlin Area Historical Society.*

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*Figure 1: 1889 photograph of workers in front of Palace Steam Laundry, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, Milwaukee County Historical Society*



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Figure J: Victorian trading card (c. 1880s) issued by the McCullough Soap Co. to promote their Magnetic Soap. (Private collection)

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Figure K: Victorian trading card (c. 1880s) issued by the McCullough Soap Co. to promote their Magnetic Soap. (Private collection)