

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service  
**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

**1. Name of Property**

Historic Name: Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company  
Other name/site number: N/A  
Name of related multiple property listing: NA

**2. Location**

Street & number: 2103 Lyons Avenue  
City or town: Houston State: Texas County: Harris  
Not for publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐


**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  
☒ 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 ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria.

I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following levels of significance:

☐ national ☐ statewide ☒ local

Applicable National Register Criteria: ☒ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official / Title  
Texas Historical Commission  
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

\_\_\_\_\_  
State Historic Preservation Officer  
Date 10/11/23

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency / bureau or Tribal Government

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that the property is:

- ☐ entered in the National Register  
☐ determined eligible for the National Register  
☐ determined not eligible for the National Register.  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

## 5. Classification

**Ownership of Property:** Private

**Category of Property:** Building

### Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	1	buildings
0	0	sites
1	0	structures
0	0	objects
3	1	total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

## 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions:** INDUSTRY/PROCESSING/EXTRACTION: Manufacturing Facility, Industrial Storage

**Current Functions:** VACANT/NOT IN USE; WORK IN PROGRESS

## 7. Description

**Architectural Classification:** Other-Industrial

**Principal Exterior Materials:** Brick, Metal/steel (Sheet Metal)

**Narrative Description** (see continuation sheets 7-14)

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## 8. Statement of Significance

**National Register Criteria:** A

**Criteria Considerations:** N/A

**Areas of Significance:** Industry

**Period of Significance:** 1916-1973

**Significant Dates:** 1916-20, 1944-51, 1953, 1955, 1969

**Significant Person** (only if criterion b is marked): NA

**Cultural Affiliation** (only if criterion d is marked): NA

**Architect/Builder:** Alfred C. Finn (Building 1 renovation, Building 2)

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (see continuation sheets 15-22)

## 9. Major Bibliographic References

**Bibliography** (see continuation sheets 23-24)

### Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☒ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested. (*Approved March 28, 2023*)
- ☐ 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 (*Texas Historical Commission, Austin*)
- ☐ Other state agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government (*Dallas Public Library*)
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other -- Specify Repository:

**Historic Resources Survey Number** (if assigned): NA

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property:** approximately 6.9 acres

### Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: N/A

1.	29.771675°	-95.347933°
2.	29.773224°	-95.347952°
3.	29.773925°	-95.347522°
4.	29.774200°	-95.347225°
5.	29.774360°	-95.346733°
6.	29.771680°	-95.346716°

**Verbal Boundary Description:** The nominated boundary for the property "Block 41 and Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, Block 59" within the S.F. Noble Addition and "part of Blocks 1 and 2 D. Gregg's First Addition." The boundary is delineated on Page 25.

**Boundary Justification:** The nomination includes all historic buildings and historic and non-historic additions associated with the core development of the Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Facility. The boundary does not include the former Moncrief-Lenoir warehouses to the west across Semmes Street and to the east across the former Mary Street. These warehouses were owned by the company from c. 1951-58 through the mid-1980s. However, in the last decade, both extant warehouses were significantly and extensively altered with the removal of the majority of the historic features that remained on the exteriors. Furthermore, the warehouse to the east is separated from the main complex by a large vacant lot following the demolition of a separate historic structure in 2014. Because of their lack of historic integrity, these properties are not included within the boundaries of this nomination.

## 11. Form Prepared By

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Telephone: (504) 858-4426  
Date: September 2022; revised and resubmitted October 2023

## Additional Documentation

**Maps** (see continuation sheet 25)

**Additional items** (see continuation sheets 26-40)

**Photographs** (see continuation sheets 41-56)

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**Photographs**

Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company  
Houston, Harris County, Texas  
Photographed by Adam Rajper, June 2022

All photos reflect the appearance of the building at the time of the nomination's submission to the NPS.

**Photo 1**

East elevation of Addition 2, canopy and Building 1 at far left; view northwest

**Photo 2**

East elevation of Building 1, canopy, south elevation of Building 2, and Addition 2 at far right; view northwest

**Photo 3**

West elevation of Addition 2; view northeast

**Photo 4**

West elevation of Addition 5, south façade of Building 1; view northeast

**Photo 5**

West and north elevation of Additions 1 Building 2; view southeast

**Photo 6**

North elevation of Addition 5; view southwest

**Photo 7**

West elevation of Building 3; view northeast.

**Photo 8**

East elevation of Building 3; view northwest

**Photo 9**

Interior, first floor of Building 1; view northwest

**Photo 10**

Interior, first floor of Building 1; view southeast

**Photo 11**

Interior, first floor of Addition 5; view north

**Photo 12**

Interior, first floor of Addition 2; view southeast

**Photo 13**

Interior, first floor of Building 2; view east

**Photo 14**

Interior, first floor of Building 2; view west

**Photo 15**

Interior, Addition 1; view east

**Photo 16**

Interior, Addition 1; view southwest

**Photo 17**

Interior, Addition 2; view south

**Photo 18**

Interior, Addition 2; view north

**Photo 19**

Canopy; view west

**Photo 20**

Canopy; view east

**Photo 21**

Canopy; view south

**Photo 22**

Interior, first floor of Building 3, Addition 6; view southwest

**Photo 23**

Interior, first floor of Building 3 and Addition 4; view north

**Photo 24**

Interior, first floor of Building 3, Addition 3; view south

**Photo 25**

Interior, second floor of Building 1; view southeast

**Photo 26**

Interior, second floor of Building 1; view northwest

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**Photo 27**

Interior, second floor of Building 2; view east

**Photo 28**

Interior, second floor of Building 2; view west

**Photo 29**

Interior, third floor of Building 1; view northwest

**Photo 30**

Interior, third floor of Building 1; view southeast

**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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC

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## Narrative Description

The Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company complex at 2103 Lyons Avenue in Houston, Harris County, is a roughly 6.9-acre parcel approximately two miles northeast of downtown Houston in a historically industrial section adjacent to major railroad arteries. The 109,238-SF tin-can and sheet-metal manufacturing facility is a functionally related complex consisting of three buildings with ten additions and one attached structure (a canopy). With these additions, two of the buildings (Buildings 1 and 2) are now contiguous with internal connections. Construction began in 1916 with Building 1, a three-story brick-masonry and wood-frame industrial building near the corner of Lyons Avenue and Semmes Street, and continued for nearly a century, with extant buildings and additions constructed in 1916-20 (Buildings 1 and 2); 1944-51 (canopy structure); 1953 (Addition 1); c. 1955 (Addition 2); 1958 (Building 3) 1966-73 (Addition 3); 1966-73 (Addition 4); 1974 (Addition 5); 1977 (Addition 6); 2002-04 (Addition 7); 2004-09 (Addition 8); 2010-12 (Addition 9); and 2012-14 (Addition 10). Of the 10 additions, six are on Building 3.

Early twentieth-century buildings in the complex are brick masonry and wood-frame construction. Post-World War II buildings in the complex are steel and concrete construction. Building 1, Building 2, and the canopy structure are contributing resources. Addition 5 (1974) is non-contributing because it dates after the period of significance and Building 3 (1958-2014) is non-contributing because it has been extensively altered with non-historic additions and exterior cladding. Notable alterations to contributing resources include the addition of glass block to windows, red acrylic panels added around one entry on Lyons Avenue and infilling of several windows openings. Despite these alterations, the Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company complex retains a high degree of overall historic integrity to convey its historic significance as an early-to-mid twentieth century industrial complex and is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

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The Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company ("Moncrief-Lenoir") is a 109,238-SF industrial facility in a historically heavy-industrial area that developed in the early twentieth century along the Texas and New Orleans (T. & N.O. RR) Railroad, which connected Houston to the rest of the continental United States. The site consists of three buildings with nine additions and one canopy structure. Of the three buildings, Buildings 1 and 2 are contributing and Building 3 is non-contributing.

## Evolution of the Site (diagram on following page)

Building 1, the first building in the Moncrief-Lenoir complex, was constructed as a two-story brick-masonry and wood-frame manufacturing facility in 1916 shortly after the company's founding. In 1918, it was expanded with a third story according to the design of Houston architect Alfred C. Finn. As the original home of the company's full range of manufacturing, storage, and administrative activities, the building is sited near the corner of Semmes Street and Lyons Avenue adjacent to a Houston & Texas Central (H&T.C.) rail spur, which runs alongside a loading dock on the building's west/Semmes Street elevation and connects to the Texas & New Orleans (T&N.O.) rail line to the north (see Figures 2-4).<sup>1</sup> At this time, the block (Block 41) was bounded by Lyons Avenue to the south, Semmes Street to the west, Opelousas Street to the north, and Mary Street to the east, and the new facility shared the block with several residences.

Quickly realizing the need to expand, Moncrief-Lenoir acquired land to the north and northeast of Building 1. In 1916-20, the company erected Building 2, a freestanding two-story brick and wood-frame building northeast of Building 1, to house shipping and manufacturing. A rail spur on the Gulf, Colorado & Santa Fe (G.C. & S.F.) rail line running north-south on Mary Street was added along the east side of Building 2. In 1924, the company expanded again into a two-story brick masonry warehouse addition erected on the north elevation of Building 1; this addition, which housed can making and printing departments, was demolished in 1973 to make way for Addition 5. Two additional freestanding warehouses were

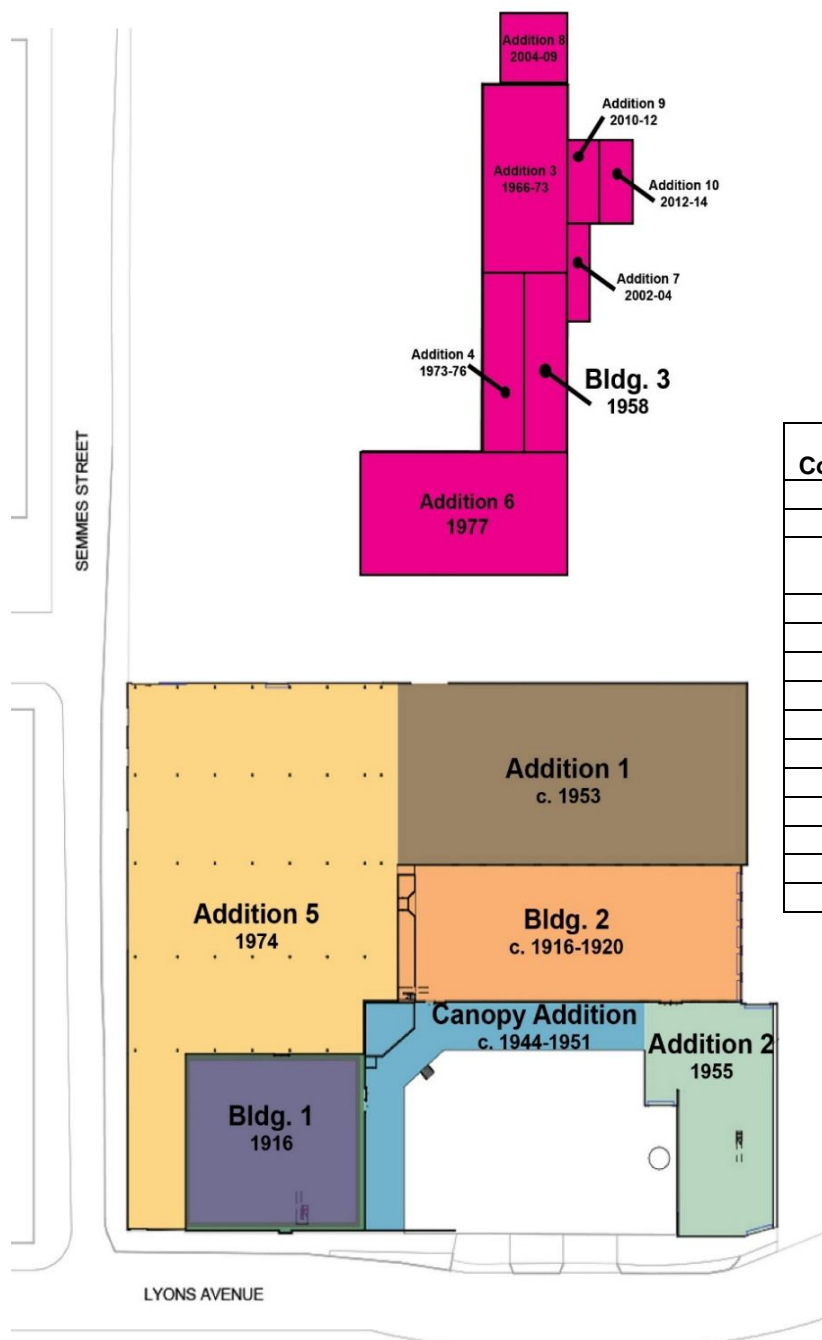
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<sup>1</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1924-51 series

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erected in the 1920s along Opelousas Street; these buildings were demolished in the 1950s to make way for Addition 2. In the 1930s-40s, a one-story storage building was erected on Opelousas Street that was also demolished in the 1950s.

Evolution of the Site - Diagram



Order of Construction	Date(s)	Property	Status
1	1916	Building 1	C
2	c. 1916-20	Building 2	C
3	1944-51	Canopy structure	C
4	1953	Addition 1	historic
5	1955	Addition 2	historic
6	1958	Building 3	NC
7	1966-73	Addition 3	Historic
8	1973-76	Addition 4	not historic
9	1974	Addition 5	not historic
10	1977	Addition 6	not historic
11	2002-04	Addition 7	not historic
12	2004-09	Addition 8	not historic
13	2010-12	Addition 9	not historic
14	2012-14	Addition 10	not historic



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In the 1930s or 1940s, the company acquired all of the remaining parcels on the block and demolished the residential buildings. Between 1944 and 1951, the company added the one-story canopy structure with small, enclosed office to the east elevation of Building 1 to provide coverage over the Lyons Avenue loading dock area (canopy structure). In c. 1953, Addition 1 was constructed as a metal-clad wood-frame addition to the north elevation of Building 2 to provide additional warehousing space, and c. 1955, Addition 2 was constructed at the southeast corner of the site at Lyons Avenue and Mary Street and attached to the southeast corner of Building 2. It is a double-height one-story steel-frame building designed to house a craneway, an interior loading dock, and storage.

In the 1950s, the company also expanded across Opelousas Street to the north, erecting Building 3 in 1958 as a one-story carpentry and welding shop as well as two covered parking structures (demolished). The property to the west of Semmes Street, 2001 Lyons Avenue, was originally part of another sheet metal company based on the 1924-51 Sanborn map (see Figure 4). The block contains two warehouses – the easternmost warehouse was constructed in 1948 and the westernmost was constructed in 1958 as an addition to the 1948 warehouse. The 1958 Sanborn shows Moncrief-Lenoir as owning these. It is assumed the company took ownership between 1951 and 1958 and owned them through 1986 per tax assessor records. The easternmost warehouse was extensively altered in the last decade with new corrugated metal siding (in a different pattern), the removal of louvered vents on the Lyons Avenue side (from 7 down to 1), removal of the sliding garage doors on the Semmes Street elevations, the removal of four windows openings, and the removal of one of the garage doors on the Opelousas Street elevation. Collectively, all of these alterations have negatively impacted the building's historic integrity. Thus, it is considered non-contributing and is not included within the proposed boundaries of the nomination.

The company also formerly owned buildings located to the east, across the former Mary Street, at 2035 Lyons Avenue. The 1924-51 Sanborn notes the buildings on the property as being owned by the "Houston Industrial Warehouse." It is assumed based on the growth of the company that Moncrief-Lenoir also acquired this property during the same 1951-58 period. The block formerly contained a second large warehouse structure, which was demolished between 2012-14. The extant warehouse was significantly altered in 2014 with the removal of the two sets of double windows on the Lyons Avenue elevation, the removal of all seven window openings on the left side elevation, the addition of flagstone to the bottom three feet of the Lyons Avenue elevation and the left side elevation, the removal of all ten windows on the West Street elevation, the removal of the one remaining garage opening with sliding door on the West Street elevation, and the painting of murals that obscure the entirety of the West Street elevation. Collectively, all of these alterations have negatively impacted the building's historic integrity. Thus, it is considered non-contributing and is not included within the proposed boundaries of the nomination. Mary Street was closed off to public traffic sometime in the early 2000s.

In the early 1970s, Moncrief-Lenoir demolished the 1924 addition to Building 1 in order to build Addition 5 (1974), a large steel-frame warehouse addition on the west and north sides of Building 1. From the mid-1960s through 2014, the company acquired the majority of Block 59 and seven additions were constructed on Building 3. The first addition (Addition 3) was built between 1966-73. Addition 4 was constructed on the rear of the building between 1966 and 1973. Addition 6 was added to the front of Building 3 in 1977, obscuring the façade of Building 3. Addition 7 was built on the east side of Building 3 and Addition 3 between 2002-04. Between 2004 and 2014, Additions 8, 9, and 10 were constructed to the east and north sides of Addition 3. All remaining residential buildings were demolished, and Opelousas Street was closed to traffic in the early 2000s. The southwest corner of the block was converted into surface parking.

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**Building 1, 1916-18 (C)**

Exterior (Photos 1-8)

Building 1 (purple on the plan) was constructed in 1916-18 for the newly incorporated Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company of Houston.<sup>2</sup> The first two floors were completed in 1916 and the third floor was added in 1918 according to the design of Houston architect Alfred Finn. It is load-bearing brick masonry construction with interior wood columns and joists on a concrete foundation.

The roof is covered in TPO and has a low slope with a middle low-lying pitch that connects to drainage gutters connected to the south elevation. There are two non-historic rectangular skylights, the freight elevator penthouse, and various mechanical equipment on the roof.

The primary south facade, facing Lyons Avenue, is seven bays wide (Photo 4). The building's primary entrance is located on the Lyons Avenue façade via a non-historic aluminum framed security-glass door and sidelight with a red acrylic tile surround added after 1973. Painted brick with the word "OFFICE" remains above the door. The windows directly above the door correspond to the historic stairwell and are placed between floors. The second-floor stairwell window contains 11x11 glass block and the third-floor stairwell window is a 12/12 double hung wood sash window. A 1973 photograph shows these windows as boarded over. It is unknown if the glass block was already in place by then.<sup>3</sup> The other six bays, to the left of the main entrance, each have a window opening on all three floors. Windows on the first floor are partially infilled with glass blocks while the second and third floor windows are 12/12 double hung wood sash windows. All windows have concrete lintels and brick sills. Between the first and second floor is a painted sign that reads "Moncrief-Lenoir M'F'G. Co."

The west elevation, facing Semmes Street, became an interior wall when Addition 5 was constructed in 1974. It has five evenly spaced bays per floor. Windows were bricked in c. 1974. A fire door connects Building 1 to Addition 5. A poured concrete loading platform runs the length of the elevation with 2 loading bays providing access to Addition 5. A set of metal stairs provides exterior circulation between the first and second floors.

The north elevation, facing Opelousas Street, is four bays wide and became an interior wall when Addition 5 was constructed in 1974. The brick is painted. The north elevation is similar in design to the west elevation with evenly spaced window bays and a loading platform lined with loading bays. There is one infilled window opening on the first floor and a central metal fire door.

The east elevation facing Mary Street is six bays wide (Photo 2). On the first floor, there are two infilled window openings, a large metal fire door, two more infilled windows, and a second large metal fire door. -Above each of the fire doors, a number is painted on the brick. A metal "L" shaped canopy is attached to this elevation above the first-floor windows and wraps around to the north façade of Building 2. The second-floor windows include a single window in the first bay and paired windows in the other five bays. All windows are 2/2 double hung wood windows and the four middle sets of windows have curved metal awnings. In the first bay, there is an exterior fire escape connecting the second floor to the roof. The third floor of this elevation has no window openings, and the brick is painted to read "Moncrief-Lenoir Mfg. Co. / Sheet Metals - Wire Products - Roofing."

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<sup>2</sup> "Tin Can Lithographing Plant Procured Charter, Moncrief- Lenoir Company Incorporated for \$125,000 - Makes High Grade Sheet Metal Goods." *The Houston Post*, August 1, 1915.

<sup>3</sup> Jim Dunlap. "Moncrief-Lenoir...Built and Maintained on Friendship." *Trucking Business*, Volume 67, 1973, pg. 13.

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Interior (Photos 9-10, 25-26, 29-30)

The interior of Building 1 has an open plan on all three floors with a freight elevator in a concrete shaft that services all floors. A smaller dumbwaiter is located on the west side of the building and travels from the first floor to the third floor. There are two staircases: a partially painted wood staircase in the southeast corner accessing all floors, and a wood staircase behind the landing of the first-floor stairs that leads to the street level entrance and descends below the first floor to an inaccessible sub floor area below the first floor. Square wood columns and joists are exposed throughout. All columns have steel caps. A fire suppression system runs throughout the building and is located below each of the floor joists on the second and first floor and attached to the third floor's ceiling.

On the first floor, the floors are predominantly poured concrete. Some brick exterior walls and wood columns are painted. Metal security bars are present on the interior side of the east windows.

Floors on the second and third floors are wood. On the second floor, exterior brick walls are painted and the elevator shaft is encased in wood framing. On the third floor, exterior brick walls are unpainted. On both floors, hollow core metal doors access the exterior metal stairs on the west elevation.

Alterations

Notable alterations to Building 1 include infill of openings along the west and north elevations c. 1974 when Addition 5 was constructed. Standing seam metal panels were installed over the building's brick exterior c. 1970s or later and were removed in 2021.

**Addition 5, 1974 (not historic)**

Added to the site in 1974, Addition 5 (yellow on the plan) is a 24,000-SF L-shaped warehouse designed by J.M. Monk Co. and constructed by A&S Steel Building Co.<sup>4</sup> It is steel-frame construction and three stories in height with an open interior volume. The exterior is clad in standing-seam metal panels and the shallow double-pitched gable roof is covered in TPO. Its structure encompasses the north and east walls of Building 1 and the western walls of Building 2 and Addition 1. The primary south/Lyons Avenue facade is two bays wide with a 1.5-story overhead garage door entrance (Photo 4). There are similar openings on the west and north elevations.

Within the warehouse are several rail and truck wells accessible from the street. The interior is open plan with exposed steel framing. Metal doors and overhead doors provide internal connections to adjacent buildings.

**Addition 1, 1953 (C) (Photos 6, 15-16)**

Added c. 1953, Addition 1 (brown on the plan) is a one-story, open-air poured-concrete loading and storage platform with a standing-seam metal shed roof. All elevations are virtually identical in design with evenly spaced bays of exposed wood and steel columns. The south and west elevations are attached to Building 2 and Addition 5, respectively. The north elevation provides access to truck loading areas and a large parking lot at the rear of the site. It was originally enclosed in metal panels, which were removed c. 2022 by the previous owner.

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<sup>4</sup> "Moncrief adds space." *The Houston Post* (online), October 6, 1974

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**Building 2, c.1916-20 (C)**

Constructed c. 1916-1920 to the northeast of Building 1, Building 2 (orange on the plan) was designed by architect Alfred Finn as a two-story manufacturing and shipping building and is overall similar in design to Building 1.<sup>5</sup> The concrete foundation supports exterior load-bearing brick-masonry walls and interior wood framing. The roof is flat. Located along the center of the roof are six evenly spaced raised aluminum-frame glass panel 3/3 hinged skylights. Windows are steel casement windows with a center pivot sash. Exterior metal ladders with safety cages provide roof access on the north and south elevations.

*Exterior (Photos 1-3)*

The primary south/Lyons Avenue façade is nine bays wide (Photos 2-3). Three evenly spaced double steel fire doors provide the main entry points. First-floor windows are boarded-over industrial steel sash. The second-floor industrial steel sash windows align with the first-floor bays. The c. 1944-51 metal canopy (contributing) extends across the length of the south façade and wraps across the adjacent elevations of Building 1 and Addition 2.

The west elevation is five bays wide and sits within the volume of Building 2. Windows on this elevation have been bricked in on the first floor; second floor windows are operable and open into Addition 5 (Photo 23). A metal sliding door connects the two buildings on the first and second floors. A poured concrete loading platform adjacent to the door was historically used for rail access.

The north/rear elevation is thirteen bays wide, and the first floor is covered by Addition 1. It is similar in design to the south façade on both floors, with lettered entry bays and industrial steel sash windows on the first floor, some of which have been removed and the openings infilled, and industrial steel sash windows across the second floor.

The east elevation is five bays wide with five evenly spaced overhead doors on the first floor opening onto a poured-concrete loading platform; the rail spur running alongside the platform is not extant. The second floor has five window openings infilled with CMU. (Photo 1)

*Interior (Photos 13-14, 27-28)*

The interior of Building 2 has an open plan on both floors. Wood staircases are located in the northeast and southwest corners and a freight elevator is roughly centered on the western wall. The first floor has poured concrete floors and exposed wood structure throughout. A non-historic buildout on the western wall consists of a metal panel-clad breakroom and bathroom. Brick exterior walls are painted white (Photos 13-14). The second floor has wood floors and exposed structure throughout. Brick exterior walls are unpainted (Photos 27-28). There are no notable exterior or interior alterations beyond the infilling of some window openings.

**Canopy, c. 1944-51 (C - Structure)**

A deep L-shaped canopy (photos 19-21, blue on the plan) structure was added to the site c. 1944-1951 above a raised poured-concrete loading platform along Lyons Avenue. It is constructed of a steel frame with wood decking and corrugated metal roof panels and is secured to the primary south facade of Building 2, the east elevation of Building 1, and a portion of the west elevation of Addition 2. Beneath the canopy is a small, enclosed office addition constructed of brick, which is partially plastered and partially painted. Across the angled Lyons Avenue façade is a row of 1/1 painted wood sash windows. The interior of the office is open with high ceilings consisting of painted steel joists and wood roof decking. The canopy, platform, and office all date to c. 1944-51. There are no notable alterations.

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<sup>5</sup> Alfred C. Finn, Building Construction and Contract, Project 240—Moncrief-Lenoir, Houston, Texas, 1920.

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### **Addition 2, 1955 (Historic)**

Addition 2 (green on the plan) was constructed in 1955 as a two-story, 10,486-SF warehouse at the corner of Lyons Avenue and the former Mary Street adjoining the east elevation of Building 2.<sup>6</sup> It is steel-frame construction clad in corrugated-iron panels with some translucent polycarbonate panels to introduce daylight; the translucent panels are likely replacements but a similar panel was included in the original design.<sup>7</sup> Large entry bays on the south, west, and north elevations provide rail and truck loading access. The roof is flat.

#### *Exterior (Photos 1-3)*

The primary south/Lyons Avenue facade is two structural bays wide with a 1.5-story overhead door and security gate. A similar bay on the north elevation aligns with the south entrance to accommodate a rail spur from front to rear. The west and east elevations are each five structural bays wide with entry bays on the west elevation, one of which aligns with the canopy. There are no openings on the east elevation. Adjacent to the west elevation is a roughly 30-foot-tall cylindrical metal storage tank dating to c. 1970s or later.

#### *Interior (Photos 17-18)*

The interior of Addition 2 is open plan with an exposed steel frame. A portion of the first-floor slab is elevated to create a platform that runs alongside the grade-level slab and rail spur (non-extant). There is a partial steel-frame mezzanine level above the grade-level slab. There are no notable exterior or interior alterations.

### **Building 3 and Additions 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10; 1955-2014 (NC)**

The historic core of Building 3 (building and all additions are in pink on the plan), a one-story metal-clad warehouse, was constructed in 1958 when Moncrief-Lenoir expanded to the north of Opelousas Street. It underwent several expansions in 1966-1973, 1977, and 2002-2014. The 1977 expansion included the removal of the majority of the original building's south façade and the exterior was re-cladded. Addition 3 was the first addition to be constructed on Building 3 between 1966 and 1973. Addition 4, on the rear of the building, was constructed between 1966 and 1973. The large Addition 6 in 1977 changed the façade of Building 3 to its current look. The last four additions were attached to Addition 3's north and east sides. Building 3's main façade today is actually the 1977 addition, outside of the complex's period of significance. If the original 1958 portion of the building does remain underneath the additions, it was mostly encapsulated between 1973-76. Due to these alterations, it is no longer recognizable as a historic building and is considered non-contributing. (Photos 7-8)

### **Integrity**

The Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Co. complex retains an overall high degree of historic integrity to be recognizable as an early- to mid-twentieth-century industrial complex. The property possesses all seven aspects of integrity, including location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Location & Setting: The property remains in its original location and the surrounding setting has not changed significantly since the period of significance. It remains an active industrial area on the periphery of downtown Houston. The property also remains connected to key transportation routes including adjacent rail lines and Interstate 10.

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<sup>6</sup> "Warehouse." *The Houston Post* (online), 2 Jan 1955 41

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

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Design, Materials, & Workmanship: The majority of buildings in the complex possess a high degree of exterior and interior integrity as related to the period of significance. Building 1, the canopy addition, Building 2, and Additions 1 and 2 were constructed by Moncrief-Lenoir within the period of significance, thereby qualifying as historic modifications. Together, the complex embodies the evolution of industrial building design from the pre- to post-World War I and World War II periods. Buildings 1 and 2 retain many of the original industrial and warehouse style details that were common to industrial buildings of the early and mid-twentieth century. Alterations and additions that occurred after the completion of Building 1 were also constructed in typical industrial styles with the main stylistic details found in windows and doors. Metal cladding, both on walls and roofs, was simplified and utilitarian and was manufactured on site by Moncrief-Lenoir. Generally speaking, intact character-defining features include fireproof brick masonry, concrete, and steel-frame construction, flat and low-slope roofs and blocky massing, an overall industrial appearance with modest stylistic detailing, restrained exterior elements in the form of industrial steel sash windows and double hung wood windows, and poured-concrete loading-dock areas. Interior character-defining features include an overall utilitarian industrial character, exposed structure, including wood and steel columns, concrete-slab and wood floors, and open floor plans.

Notable alterations to the complex include the numerous additions to Building 3 (between 1966 and 2014) and the construction of Addition 5, which was built in 1974 after the complex's period of significance.

Feeling & Association: The property's combined integrity of location, setting, design, materials, and workmanship help to reinforce the integrity of feeling and association. The property continues to feel like a large industrial complex with its exposed structure and materials, open spatial arrangement and fenestration patterns, its position in relation to transportation routes, and its location within a historic industrial area in the city of Houston. The complex would be easily recognizable to any employees who worked in the facility during its more than one hundred years in operation.

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### Statement of Significance

The Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company complex at 2103 Lyons Avenue in Houston, Texas, is being nominated under Criterion A in the area of Industry at the local level of significance for its association with Houston's booming mid-twentieth century manufacturing industry and its important role in the local economy as a manufacturer and distributor in the sheet metal building materials industry. Moncrief-Lenoir was noted as the only independent tin can manufacturer in the region and was a significant sheet metal building materials manufacturing landmark in Houston for more than a century. The complex opened in 1916, with expansions throughout the twentieth century, and the tin cans and sheet metal produced on site were shipped nationally. The company's substantial volume of business, on top of the already significant business of Houston's other manufacturing companies, elevated tin and sheet metal building materials manufacturing from a respectable industry to a leading one. After a decade of operation, the Moncrief-Lenoir was publicly praised for being the only independent corporation of its kind regionally and one of the largest independent can factories in the country. In addition to its success in the tin can manufacturing industry, Moncrief-Lenoir became even more successful in the sheet metal building materials industry by becoming a local and regional manufacturer and distributor of metal building supplies such as siding, roofing, wire nails, and metal wire. Its growth in both industries is evident based on the numerous periods of expansion on the site, which occurred in c.1916-20, 1944-51, 1953, 1955, 1969-73, 1974, 1977, and 2005-12, with all expansions after 1920 related to the sheet metal building material success. The 1918 expansion ("Building 2") was designed by Houston architect Alfred C. Finn. The architects of the other buildings on site are unknown. The period of significance for the complex begins in 1916, with the construction of Building 1, and ends in 1973, the current fifty-year cutoff.

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### Commerce in Houston (1836-1914)<sup>8</sup>

Houston's Chamber of Commerce adopted the apt slogan "Where Seventeen Railroads Meet the Sea" to promote the city in the early twentieth century.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, Houston's distinction as a major American industrial center with a nationally significant port is rooted in its founding in 1836 at the strategic confluence of the Buffalo and White Oak Bayous, the former flowing eastward to Galveston Bay. Despite the Port of Houston's early success, Galveston, with its deep-water port, dominated trade; the stifling policies of the Galveston Wharf and Cotton Compress Company (shortened in 1860 to Galveston Wharf Company) also kept Houston at bay. This inspired organization in 1869 of the Buffalo Bayou Ship Channel Company which sought to bypass Galveston. Importantly, under the direction of New York shipping merchant Charles Morgan who purchased the company in 1874, a ship channel, which could accommodate large ocean-going cargo vessels, was created between Galveston Bay and Clinton, a town he founded on the bayou's north bank near the present headquarters of the Port of Houston in the Harrisburg community of Houston. Morgan achieved this by widening and dredging the Buffalo Bayou. The federal government took over ownership of the channel in 1890. In 1914, following two years of additional improvements, the 25-foot-deep Houston Ship Channel officially opened, bringing ocean-going vessels within only five miles of downtown Houston; a remarkable feat and triumph for Houston which had also surpassed Galveston by this time due to the latter's devastation during the Great Storm of 1900.

Meanwhile, substantial railroad expansion, including the arrival of the Missouri-Kansas-Texas and Southern Pacific lines in the 1890s, positioned Houston as the rail hub of southeast Texas. By the start of World War I, seventeen rail companies operated in the city, the third largest in Texas at the time behind San Antonio and Dallas.

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<sup>8</sup> Adapted from Hannah Curry-Shearouse, Delaney Harris-Finch, Jim Steely, and Anna Mod, SWCA Environmental Consultants, *Re-Survey of the Warehouse District, Houston, Harris County*, Texas, prepared for Harris County Flood Control District, Sept. 22, 2016.

<sup>9</sup> For example, this is the title of an attractively illustrated 1913 promotional publication by Jerome H. Farbar, Director of Publicity of the Chamber of Commerce. Jerome H. Farbar, *Houston: Where Seventeen Railroads Meet the Sea* (Denver: H.H. Tammen Company, 1913).

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## Houston's Fifth Ward

Moncrief-Lenoir is in Houston's Fifth Ward neighborhood, northeast of Buffalo Bayou, downtown Houston, and the original warehouse district. Following the Civil War, this area was settled by freedmen and in 1866, and it became the fifth political ward in the city of Houston. At the time of its founding, its population was half African American and half white. Over time, it would become a primarily African American neighborhood with a rich musical culture and a thriving commercial area. The Fifth Ward, also known as "the Nickel," grew significantly during the 1880s after the Southern Pacific Railroad built a number of repair shops near the rail lines.<sup>10</sup> Fires in 1891 and 1912 slowed growth, but more commercial growth occurred leading up to World War II with many businesses located along Lyons Avenue. In the 1950s, the Fifth Ward's population grew, residentially, commercially, and industrially. The area became home to many industries as it was well suited along the rail lines for export and import of products. The area began to change in the 1960s, however, as racial integration meant that Fifth Ward retailers lost business and suburban growth drew residents from the Fifth Ward to new developments. Furthermore, the construction of Interstate 10 and US Highway 59 in the Fifth Ward "literally crucified the area by creating large freeways in a cross pattern through its heart."<sup>11</sup> In the following decades, the Fifth Ward declined until the 1990s and 2000s, when revitalization efforts focused on new home construction, job training, access to technology, and the arts.

## Canning in the United States Since 1860

The Civil War marked an influential time in the history of the can. In response to the need for large amounts of canned food among troops, canners made improvements to the process by adding calcium chloride to the boiling water, which raised the temperature and helped to speed up the canning process. The addition of this one significant step increased canning production six-fold by 1865.<sup>12</sup> It is key to point out that, prior to the Civil War, canned products were expensive and considered elitist. The addition of calcium chloride made it possible to produce canned foods on a much larger scale, which reduced cost and thus made canned goods available to the masses for the first time. Soon cans became an everyday household item for Americans.

The number of canning facilities nationwide grew significantly between the 1860s and the 1890s. These included facilities that canned their own food and made their own cans as well as facilities that only manufactured cans. In 1901, the Chicago-based American Can Company was formed through a merger of dozens of small can manufacturers and can-making equipment suppliers. The Moore Brothers, who formed American Can, also owned interests in other industries; they were the third-largest holder of steel interests and controlled 90 percent of the nation's tin plate production. They sold their interests in the steel and tin plate industries to J.P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie in 1901, when the United States Steel Corporation was formed, and used their new wealth to begin consolidating the can industry.<sup>13</sup>

American Can Company purchased 123 can manufacturing plants or can-making machinery companies within 60 days of the organization of the company. When acquiring these companies, American Can included restrictive covenants that the sellers could not reenter the can manufacturing industry for a period of 15 years within a 3,000-mile radius of the company's Chicago headquarters. After purchasing the plants, American Can closed the majority of them to eliminate excess capacity, expense, and non-competitive facilities. By 1903, American Can was operating 36 plants out of the total

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<sup>10</sup> Diana Kleiner. "Fifth Ward: Houston." Texas State Historical Association, Handbook of Texas. <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/fifth-ward-houston>. Accessed September 6, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Patricia Pando. "In the Nickel: Houston's Fifth Ward." Houston History Magazine. <https://houstonhistorymagazine.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Fifth-Ward.pdf>. Accessed September 6, 2022.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Gregg Steven Pearson. "The Democratization of Food: Tin Cans and the Growth of the American Food Processing Industry, 1810-1940." Lehigh University, PhD Dissertation, January 2016: pg. 297.



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123 acquired plants.<sup>14</sup> By 1904, the price of cans was roughly 25 percent more than it had been prior to the creation of American Can. While smaller independent can manufacturers entered the industry during these same years, they could not compete with American Can's lowering prices and make a profit.<sup>15</sup> This price lowering practice by American Can as well as their acquisitions of other companies led to a federal anti-trust case in 1913. Records exist showing that Moncrief-Lenoir, along with other smaller can manufacturers, was involved in testifying against American Can.<sup>16</sup> The case took two years and ultimately, a split decision ruled that American Can had been created in order to "monopolize can manufacturing and engaged in restraint of trade, but these unlawful acts were in the past. They were now a company with a very positive reputation."<sup>17</sup>

American Can Company and Continental Can Company (formed in 1904) constituted a duopoly that dominated the canning industry for most of the twentieth century. Together, they controlled nearly 75 percent of the tin can market in the United States.<sup>18</sup> Despite this immense control, some smaller tier canning companies were able to carve out a space for themselves in the marketplace. There were four middle tier companies: National Can Company, Pacific Can, Crown Cork & Seal, and Heekin Can.<sup>19</sup> Below these, there were a few small independent canning companies. It was during this time that the Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company was born. Per a 2016 dissertation by historian Gregg Pearson about the canning industry in the United States, "While the industry behemoths established the major trends within the industry in terms of pricing and technology, there was still a large enough market for firms with a regional orientation to survive."<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, in the long run, the smaller-tier companies were able to outlast the large corporations through the next few decades. In Houston, Moncrief-Lenoir was one of these independent canning and sheet metal companies that would continually operate while adapting to the regional market with its sheet metal building materials business.

In 1906, the US government passed the Pure Food and Drug Act to ensure that the foods, drugs, and liquors sold in the country were safe. One year later, canneries founded the National Canners Association, which became a liaison between individual canning firms and government regulatory agencies.<sup>21</sup> As America grew during the first decades of the twentieth century, the rise of industry helped to expand the canning market. With the growth of the railroad, cans were now shipped across the country and labor forces were needed to work on production lines. Prior to this mechanization, tin cans were made by hand, a laborious process resulting in roughly ten cans a day. With mechanization and the invention of the "sanitary can" (named so because its edges are folded over twice forming a strong seal), the types, sizes, and number of tin cans produced increased.<sup>22</sup> In 1928 Moncrief-Lenoir abandoned the canning side of their business to focus solely on sheet metal building materials, which they produced for another sixty years.

### **Canning in Houston**

The exact beginning of the canning industry in Houston is unknown. However, in 1877, there was only one iron and steel business mentioned in city directories. Through the 1880s and 1890s, there were up to eight tin, iron, and steel working businesses, but no manufacturers noted. Tin plate importers were first noted in the mid-to-late 1890s, namely Peden & Co. and Ralph Smith. In 1907, the first can manufacturer is listed as Houston Can Manufacturing Company. The next year, there were two. One, White-McGregor, was located in a small building on Washington Street. By 1910, White-McGregor

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<sup>14</sup> Pearson, pg. 300.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pg. 302.

<sup>16</sup> "United States of America, Petitioner Vs. American Can Co., Et Al, Defendants. United States District Court,(Maryland), 1916.

<sup>17</sup> Pearson,;;'/'//; pg. 312.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pg. 320.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pg. 326.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. pg. 329.

<sup>21</sup> "History of Canning." <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/canning-industry>. Accessed September 19, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> "History of the Can. [www.cancentral.com/can-stats/history-of-the-can](http://www.cancentral.com/can-stats/history-of-the-can). Accessed September 19, 2022.

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was the only manufacturer and remained so until 1917, when Moncrief-Lenoir made its first appearance in the city directory. Over the next decade, Moncrief-Lenoir and one competitor, Davis-George, were noted as Houston's two can manufacturers (White-McGregor became White Manufacturing and was last seen in 1917).<sup>23</sup> The gradual increase in can manufacturers in the city coincides with the opening of the ship channel and development of Houston as a major port in the gulf and southwest region.

In 1929, Southwestern Can Company is listed for the first time in the city directory. Incorporated in 1927, Southwestern Can leased space from Moncrief-Lenoir in Building 2.<sup>24</sup> They moved from this location by 1931-32 to a new building on Greenwood and Esperson.<sup>25</sup> The Continental Can Company, discussed above as one of the two largest can manufacturers in the nation, opened a plant in Houston in 1936 by taking over the former Southwestern Can Company's building on N. Greenwood.<sup>26</sup> Continental Can had originally planned to build their own plant in 1932 but, for unknown reasons, decided against it. In 1936, the Baltimore-based Crown Cork and Seal Company opened an office in Houston, leasing space from Moncrief-Lenoir that had been previously occupied by Southwestern Can. American Can Company had an office in downtown Houston by 1936 but no manufacturing facility.<sup>27</sup>

### **Sheet Metal Industry in the United States**

The sheet metal manufacturing industry in the United States has its roots in Europe. Galvanized metal, which is iron coated with a protective layer of zinc, was first produced in France in 1837. This discovery meant that iron, pounded into thin sheets, was now strong enough for use as a building material. The resulting material was referred to as "sheet iron," or more commonly "sheet metal." It first came to the US in the 1840s as a British export and was used primarily in frontier areas for rudimentary construction of commercial and residential structures. The invention of the cold rolling press in 1844 made it possible to mass produce sheet metal, and by the 1850s it was being imported extensively for construction in California during the goldrush. Sheet metal had many advantages including its light weight, durability, low cost, and ease of erection, which did not require a highly skilled laborer. Furthermore, the material did not rot like wood and was fireproof. Like the canning industry, the sheet metal industry did not take off in the US until after the Civil War. The Morrill Tariff, adopted in 1861, increased tariffs on imports, which made British imports more expensive and drove domestic manufacturers to enter the sheet metal manufacturing business for themselves.<sup>28</sup>

The industry was further boosted in 1914, when the US Department of Agriculture officially endorsed the use of sheet metal as a building material for agricultural buildings because of its lightweight, fireproof qualities, and ability to withstand pests and the elements. This coincided with the founding of Moncrief-Lenoir as a manufacturing company in Houston. While other building materials were also used at the time, including tin plate and copper, galvanized iron remained the more popular sheet metal for buildings, primarily for siding and roofing. World War I helped to stimulate the sheet metal industry due to limitations on European imports. This new gap in the market was filled by American manufacturers, who began exporting to markets from which they had been excluded, particularly Latin America. Prior to this time, British exports to Latin America were cheaper than American imports due to freight costs. The later years of the war slowed this progress as the US entered the war and faced higher prices on materials, but by that time American

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<sup>23</sup> City Directories, 1877-1918.

<sup>24</sup> "Southwestern Can Company Makes Containers For All Purposes." *Houston Post*. July 29, 1929. Accessed via [www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com).

<sup>25</sup> "Can Company to Build New Plant Here." *Houston Chronicle*. March 8, 1931. Accessed via [www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com)

<sup>26</sup> "Continental Can Co. Plans Factory Here." *Houston Chronicle*. January 8, 1932. Accessed via [www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com)

<sup>27</sup> City Directory, 1936.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Benjamin Hall. "American Galvanized Iron Roofing and Cladding from the 1870s to 1920s." Master's Thesis. University of Pennsylvania, PA, 1988, 8-12.

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companies had gained a firm foothold in the sheet metal export industry and were able to pick back up after the war ended.<sup>29</sup>

Just as the early sheet metal industry saw success on the American frontier in the mid-nineteenth century, the first major domestic sheet metal exports also saw success in rural areas of Latin America and beyond. The lightweight and strong sheet metal materials, particularly corrugated sheet metal, which was stronger due to its crimps, was popular for protecting rural houses constructed of wood and earth. In these locations, it was installed over the extant walls and roofs as well as used for new construction, and it was also exported to places where wood was not as readily available.<sup>30</sup> Sheet metal was used to make siding, roofing, iron shingles, slates, and tiles nationally and worldwide.

Agriculture played a large part in growing the sheet metal business. In addition to the Department of Agriculture's significant endorsement, national trade publications urged sheet metal contractors to take advantage of the rural market as the material could be used on all buildings associated with farming. Not only could it be used as cladding over existing barns and storage buildings (both interior and exterior) to extend their useful life, but it could also be used for new construction. In addition, sheet metal was considered pest proof, which was particularly important in the rural areas. From around 1905 on, sheet metal silos and storage buildings were extremely common.<sup>31</sup>

Lastly, the automobile industry had a significant impact on the sheet metal building industry. Early automobiles had issues with escaping gas fumes, which led to fires. To mitigate this hazard, industry publications recommended that galvanized iron sheet metal (flat or corrugated) be used for detached garages to protect the spread of fire.<sup>32</sup>

It is within this context that Moncrief-Lenoir was founded and prospered. Not only did the company produce general sheet metal supplies for commercial and residential use, but they were also geographically positioned to produce and export materials for ranches throughout Texas and the southwest. During the 1940s and beyond, Moncrief-Lenoir's advertising focused increasingly on ranch supplies, including aluminum ranch gates and fencing.

### **Sheet Metal Building Materials Industry in Houston**

In 1877, Houston was home to only one iron and steel worker, according to city directories. Through the next decade, there were less than ten tin, iron, and steel workers listed. Sheet metal materials were being imported rather than locally manufactured. This difference is noted in all city directories with listings for "Sheet Metal Manufacturers," "Sheet Metal Building Materials," and "Sheet Metal Workers." Of these, sheet metal workers, i.e., those who manipulated the material rather than produced it, consistently had the most listings. Upon construction of their factory in 1916, Moncrief-Lenoir supplied many of these local sheet metal workers with their materials.

Houston's first sheet metal importer, Peden & Co, is listed in directories beginning in 1894. There were a couple of smaller importers in operation over the next few years, but by 1917, Moncrief-Lenoir is noted as the only "Sheet Metal Building Materials" company in Houston. They also were listed as a Sheet Metal Building Wholesale company for many years. Their only competitors during the 1910s and 1920s were companies called Davis-George, which was in operation through 1926, and Burkhead Manufacturing, which appears to have operated through the 1940s. In 1923, the American Rolling Mill Co. is noted as having a location in Houston, though they only had an office downtown. This is because they had chosen Moncrief-Lenoir as their local territory distributor four years earlier and later utilized Moncrief-Lenoir to establish distribution points in other Texas cities.

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<sup>29</sup> Hall, pgs. 21-26.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, pgs. 30-32.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. pg. 73.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pg. 70.

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**Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company**

J. A. Moncrief and W.F. Lenoir first met in Savannah, Georgia, in the first decade of the twentieth century. In 1909, they relocated to Knoxville, Tennessee, where they formed a company called the Knoxville Tinware Manufacturing Company. They made sheet metals, tinner's supplies, wire products, and fencing. Five years later, the pair, along with nine other families related to the company, moved to Houston, where they founded the Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company in 1916.<sup>33</sup>

A 1914 *Houston Daily Post* article about the state of manufacturing in Houston noted that the best evidence of Houston as a metropolis was the growth of its manufacturing industries. Over the previous year, Houston had added a thousand factory workers, which brought the value of manufactured products to \$54,000,000, an increase of \$2,000,000 from 1912. The recent completion of the ship channel helped Houston to become a significant port in the region.<sup>34</sup> It is highly likely that Moncrief and Lenoir saw how Houston was growing as a port and realized that they could create a profitable business there. The company's opening was noted: "While the manufacture of tinware and tin cans is not a new industry for Houston, the latter are now being made in the new plant of the Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing company, which has recently completed at a cost of \$30,000."<sup>35</sup> It was anticipated that the plant would supply a large local demand for tin cans and containers and Moncrief-Lenoir did just that for another 16 years.

The relocation of the company established new trade routes via the city's growing port. In April of 1915, a self-propelled steel barge made its first trip up the ship channel to Houston carrying 120 tons of tin plate for Moncrief-Lenoir. The vessel made the trip in 8 hours, which was 7 hours faster than the time that the steamships normally took to make on the same channel.<sup>36</sup>

Just twelve years after opening, Moncrief-Lenoir spent \$100,000 on an improvement plan expanding the property through the construction of a new building (Building 2). In its coverage of the project, a *Houston Post* article noted that Moncrief-Lenoir was the only independent tin can manufacturing plant south of Kansas City and west of New Orleans. The company's success during this period was significant given the pervasive dominance of American Can and the Continental Can Company. At that time, Moncrief-Lenoir was a million-dollar enterprise manufacturing a variety of cans from small tins for food up to huge containers (see Figures 5-8). The plant made nearly ten thousand five-gallon square gasoline cans per day, coffee cans for Houston's Maxwell House and Folger plants, floor sweep containers, and syrup and honey cans. The plant even had its own lithograph department to print directly onto the cans with paint that the company manufactured itself. In addition to cans, Moncrief-Lenoir also made "all manner of tin and sheet iron such as roofing, gutters, drain piping, etc."<sup>37</sup> Its custom-fabricated galvanized 7/8" corrugated sheets were utilized across the state of Texas and throughout the southwest in the construction of industrial warehouses as well as in other residential, commercial, and industrial uses. At that time, the company was in the process of separating out their two main product lines, cans and sheet metal, into two departments. By 1928, Moncrief-Lenoir had stopped manufacturing tin cans and within a decade was renting their former canning machinery and space to Southwestern Can Company and Continental Can Company.<sup>38</sup>

Moncrief-Lenoir's success continued through the mid-twentieth century as the company focused on their sheet metal building materials production and distribution and adapted to the continually growing industry of sheet metal building

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<sup>33</sup> "J.A. Moncrief Dies." *Houston Chronicle*. August 9, 1935, pg. 1. Accessed via [www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com).

<sup>34</sup> "Manufacturing in Houston." *Houston Daily Post*. September 1, 1914. Accessed via [www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> "Self-Propelled Steel Barge Made First Trip to Houston." *Houston Chronicle*. April 24, 1915, pg. 9. Accessed via [www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com).

<sup>37</sup> "Moncrief-Lenoir Co. Spends \$100,000 on Improvement Plans." *Houston Post*, June 6, 1926, pg. 42. Accessed via [www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com).

<sup>38</sup> Dunlap, pg. 12.

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materials needed for residential, commercial, and agricultural buildings). In 1946, the company was recognized as “the leader in metal processing industry of the southwest.”<sup>39</sup> The plant expanded with several additions in the 1940s and 1950s, and again in the 1970s. Based on city directories from the first half of the twentieth century, Moncrief-Lenoir was featured as the only “Sheet Metal Building Materials” manufacturer and Wholesaler in Houston. Searches for information on Moncrief-Lenoir yield hundreds of advertisements and articles for the company in a variety of publications included but not limited to: *The Texas Trade Design and Independent Record*, *Standard Metal Directory*, *Hardware Age*, *Texas Bankers Record*, *American Machinist*, *Paper Trade Journal*, multiple *Congressional Records*, *Chemical Engineering*, *Iron Age & Hardware*, *Metal Industry*, *Power Wagon*, *Farm Building News*, *The Construction Specifier*, *American Paint Journal*, *Modern Maintenance Management*, *Journal of Housing*, *Metalworking News*, and *Farm Supplier*. The company was also actively involved at a national level with involvement in the Defense Production Acts of the 1950s and other congressional records as testifying for small businesses in the industry and to support industry-related research, publicity, and activities.

Moncrief-Lenoir had been and continued to be a large regional distributor of ranch supplies such as gates, fencing, and corrugated sheet metal. The company also expanded into aluminum gutters and downspouts, distributed through Moncrief-Lenoir sales offices in Houston, San Antonio, Lubbock, Temple, Dallas, and Harlingen.<sup>40</sup> Moncrief-Lenoir gradually closed and demolished its sales branches through the 1990s. The subject property was the last to close in 2020 and is the only Moncrief-Lenoir location remaining to tell the story of this significant tin-can and sheet metal industry.

Moncrief-Lenoir’s numerous expansions to increase the capacity of its Houston plant are a testament to the company’s success. Today, it is the most intact early-to-mid twentieth century facility associated with Houston’s canning and sheet metal industries during this period.

**Alfred C. Finn, Architect (1883-1964)**

Houston architect Alfred C. Finn was born in Bellville, Texas, in 1883. He was not formally trained, but rather started in the architecture field by working as a draftsman for the Southern Pacific Railroad and architects Sanguinet and Staats in Dallas (1904-07), Fort Worth (1907-12), and finally, Houston starting in 1912-13. Finn opened his practice in 1913.<sup>41</sup> During the 1920s, Alfred C. Finn worked with real estate developer Jesse H. Jones and designed industrial and commercial spaces within the Houston area, most notably the Gulf Building, Rice Hotel, and the JP Morgan Chase Building.

**Criterion A: Industry – Canning and Sheet Metal Building Materials**

Through Moncrief-Lenoir’s dedication to canning and sheet metal production, they were able to stay in business for more than a century and while doing so, also supported and housed other growing businesses at their plant on Lyons Avenue. After stepping away from canning in 1928, Moncrief-Lenoir refocused its business by adapting to the growing sheet metal building materials industry. They would become the leader and longest surviving sheet metal building manufacturer in the city. Today, there are no other extant facilities that convey the significance of the can manufacturing and sheet metal building supply industries in the city of Houston other than Moncrief-Lenoir.

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<sup>39</sup> “R.F. Moncrief, Industrial Pioneer, Dies.” *Houston Chronicle*, October 8, 1946, pg. 1. Accessed via [www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com).

<sup>40</sup> “Houston Firm Enters Field of Guttering.” *Houston Chronicle*. 1959. Accessed via [www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com).

<sup>41</sup> “Finn, Alfred Charles.” Texas State Historical Association Website, Handbook of Texas. <https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/finn-alfred-charles>. Accessed September 23, 2022.

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### **Other Canning and Sheet Metal Plants in Houston**

As described in the historic contexts for both the canning and sheet metal building material industries, Moncrief-Lenoir had several competitors. However, it is key to point out that Moncrief-Lenoir was the longest-running sheet metal and canning company in Houston with an extant facility. Of the canning plants, only Moncrief-Lenoir and the former Southwestern/Continental Can plant at Canal and N. Greenwood remain today. Of these two, Moncrief-Lenoir retains a higher degree of integrity due to a recent renovation of the Southwestern/Continental Can building for use as a police precinct. This renovation appears to have included a full window replacement and an addition to the primary façade. Furthermore, Continental Can went out of business in the 1980s while Moncrief-Lenoir continued to operate through 2022.

Of the sheet metal manufacturers in Houston, only one other building tied to a sheet metal manufacturer other than Moncrief-Lenoir remains: Burkhead Manufacturing at 1620 Maury Street. The building today appears to be vacant with most of its windows infilled with concrete blocks. The Burkhead plant itself is also a smaller plant than the subject property, with only two buildings to house their operations. One is a historic c. 1920s/30s building and the other is a large corrugated-metal building, built between 1982 and 1995 per historic aerials. Burkhead is still in business today. Comparatively, Moncrief-Lenoir has the oldest industrial buildings forming the core of its sheet metal building materials manufacturing plant in the city of Houston.

### **Conclusion**

Moncrief-Lenoir is being nominated under Criterion A in the area of Industry at the local level of significance for its role as a sheet metal building materials manufacturer and distributor in Houston with a period of significance of 1916-1973. Because of its longevity and influence on the canning and sheet metal building materials industries, and as the oldest surviving sheet metal building manufacturer and wholesaler in the city of Houston, Moncrief-Lenoir is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.



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Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, 2103 Lyons Avenue, Houston, Harris County, Texas  
Google Maps (accessed August 21, 2023)

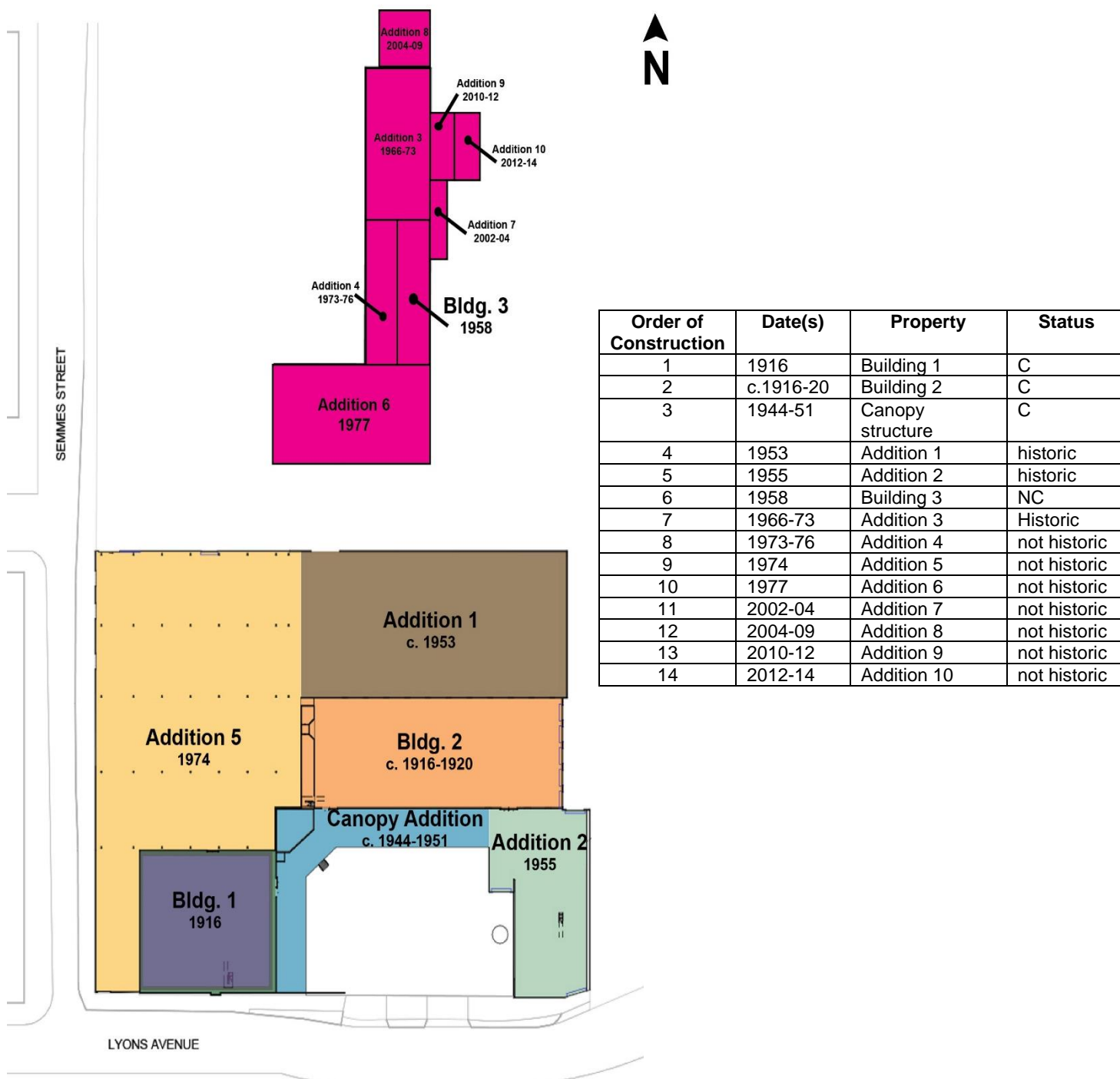


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2.	29.773224°	-95.347952°
3.	29.773925°	-95.347522°
4.	29.774200°	-95.347225°
5.	29.774360°	-95.346733°
6.	29.771680°	-95.346716°

Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

**Figure 1**

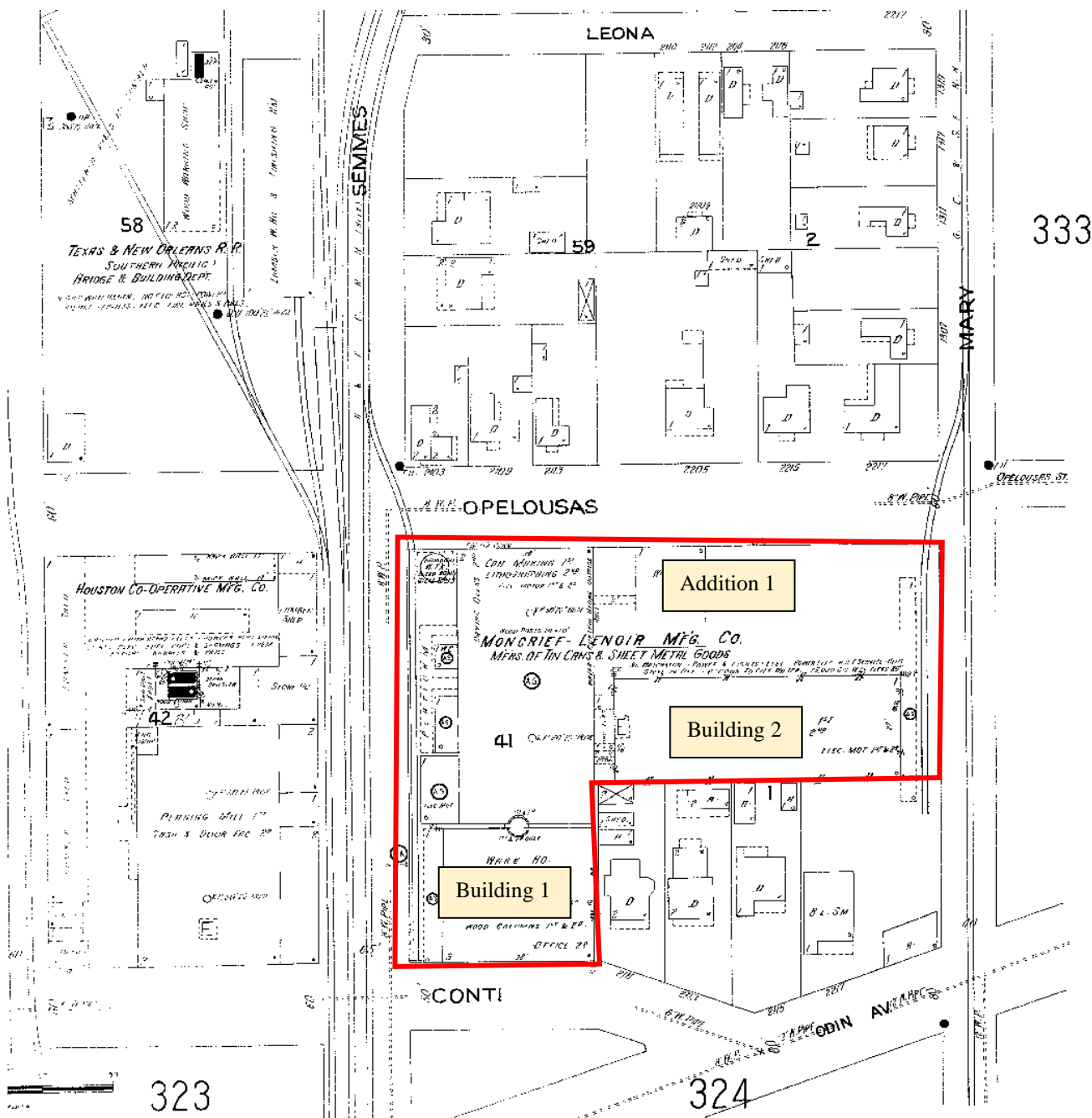
Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Building Chronology



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Figure 2

Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1924-50.

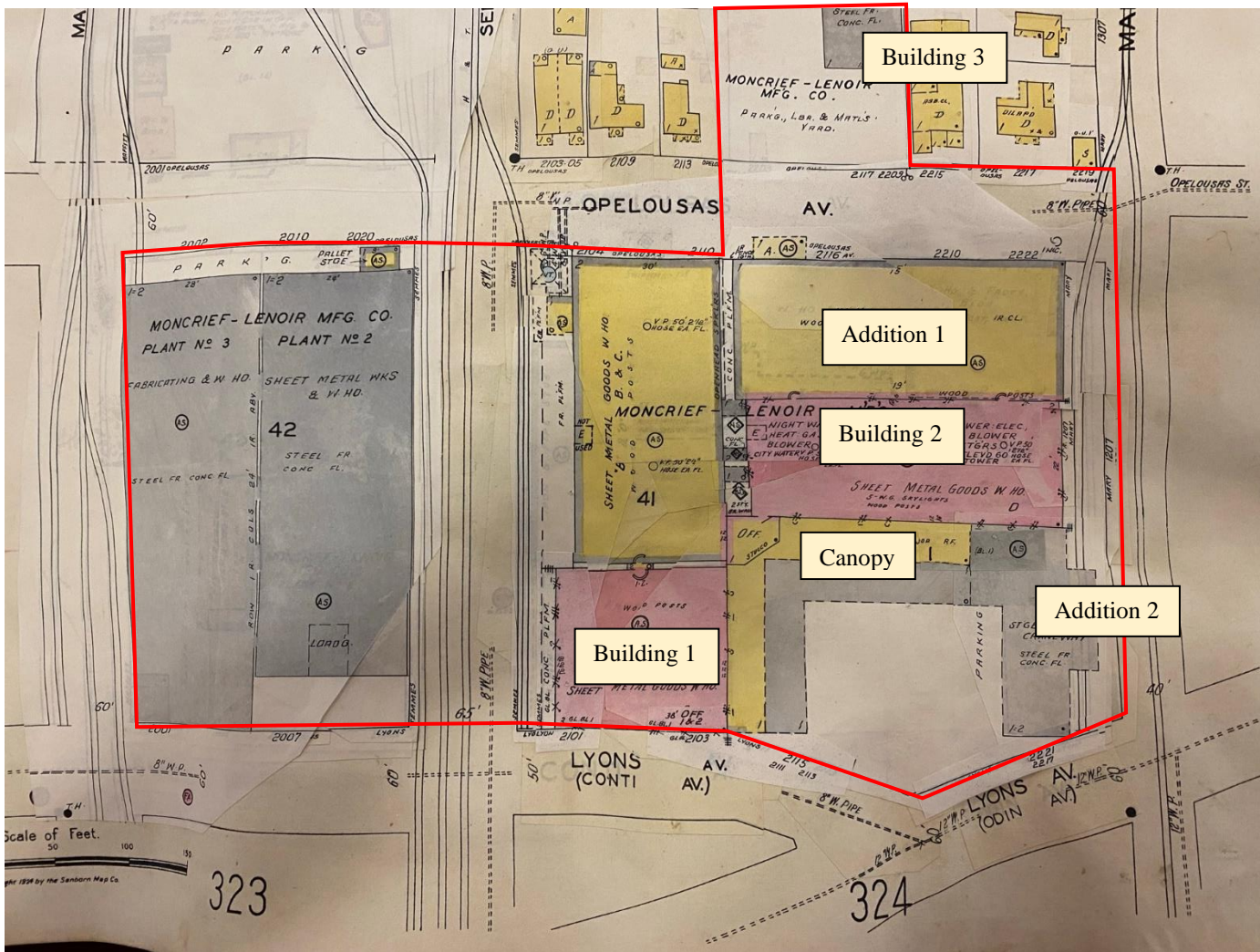




Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

**Figure 3**

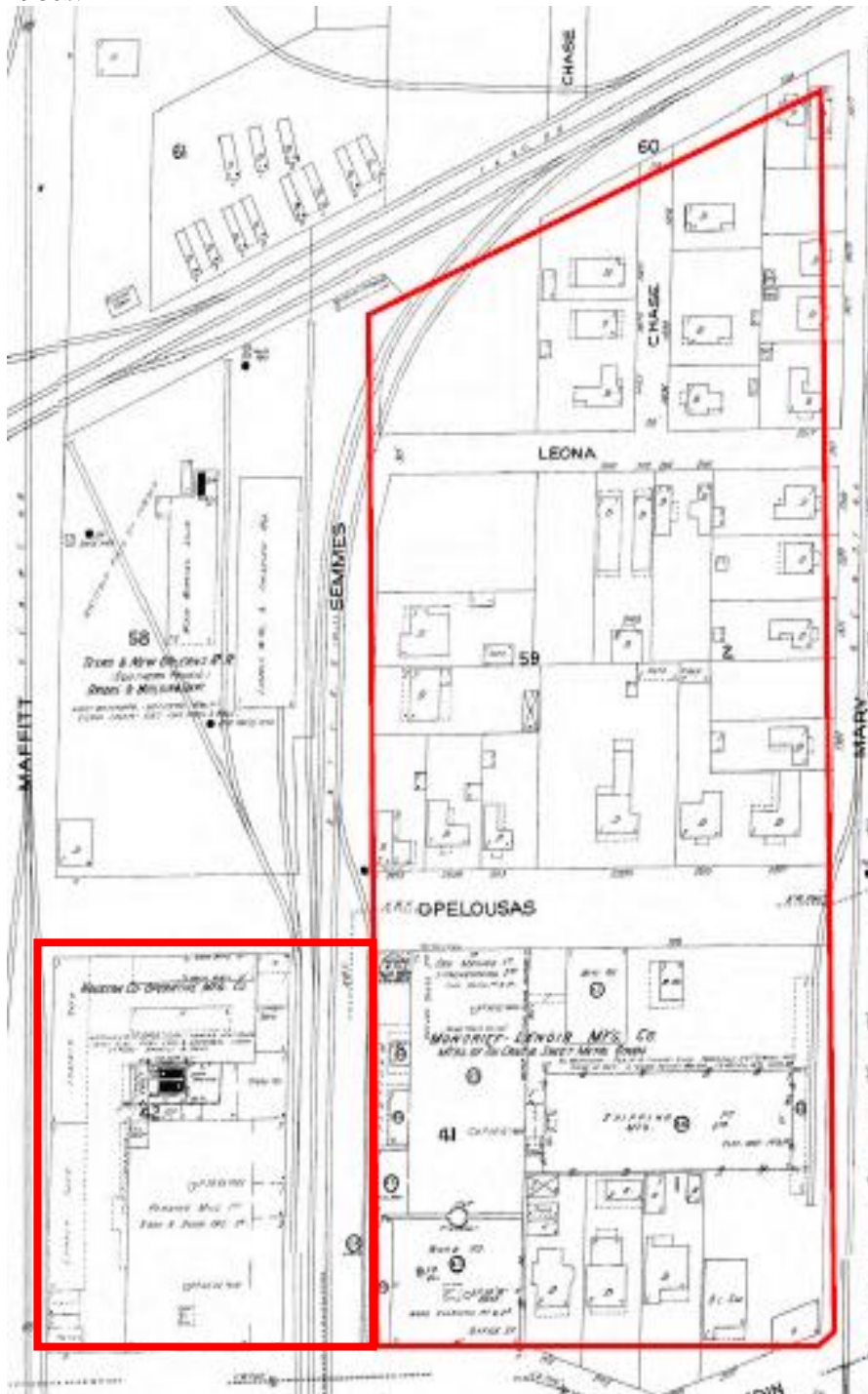
Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1958. The property located on the west side of Semmes Street is not included in the nomination as it was only part of the plant for about 20 years and was sold in the 1980s.



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

**Figure 4**

Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1969. The property located on the west side of Semmes Street is not included in the nomination as it was only part of the plant for about 20 years and was sold in the 1980s.



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Figure 5

1915 advertisement for Moncrief-Lenoir; source: 1915 Polk City Directory.

**Moncrief-  
Lenoir  
Mfg. Co.**

Manufacturers of  
**METAL SHINGLES**—Both Gal-  
vanized and Painted. Sheet Metal  
Building Material

Such as  
Ridge Roll, Eave Trough, Conduc-  
tor Pipe, Valleys, Flashings, Etc.

Also Manufacturers of  
Tin Cans, Plain and Lithographed  
for Coffee, Lard Compound, Etc.  
Wood Jacket Cans for Oils, Etc.  
Tin Cans, Plain, for Syrup, Honey,  
Etc.  
Sheet Metal Specialties of All  
Kinds.

**Semmes and Conti**

Figure 6

1917 advertisements for Moncrief-Lenoir; source: 1917 Polk City Directory.



**FRUIT AND VEGETABLE  
CANS**

Quick Shipments. Write Us  
For Prices.

**MONCRIEF-LENOIR**  
Manufacturing Co.  
Houston, Texas  
Phone Preston 9267

Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Figure 7


1920 advertisement for Moncrief-Lenoir; 1920 Polk City Directory, includes Sketch of the plant.; source: Polk City Directory

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**SHEET METAL WORKERS**

JOHN A. MONCRIEF, President      W. FRANK LENOIR, Sec.-Treas.

# MONCRIEF-LENOIR MFG. CO.



85,000 SQUARE FEET OF FLOOR SPACE

## Manufacturers

### Sheet Metal Goods, Cans, Tinware, Etc.

<p><b>Manufacturers of</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Tin Cans</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">(PLAIN AND LITHOGRAPHED)</p> <p><b>Wood Jacket Cans</b></p> <p><b>Galvanized Cans</b></p> <p><b>Syrup Cans</b></p> <p><b>Honey Cans</b></p> <p><b>Oyster Cans</b></p>	<p><b>Sheet Metal Building Material as Follows:</b></p> <p><b>Galvanized Eave Trough,</b></p> <p><b>Conductor Pipe, Ridge Roll,</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Shingles</b></p> <p><b>Painted Tin Shingles,</b></p> <p><b>Stove Pipe, Elbows, Etc.</b></p>
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WRITE US FOR PRICES

## MONCRIEF-LENOIR MFG. COMPANY

PHONES: OFFICE, PRESTON 2946-2947-2948

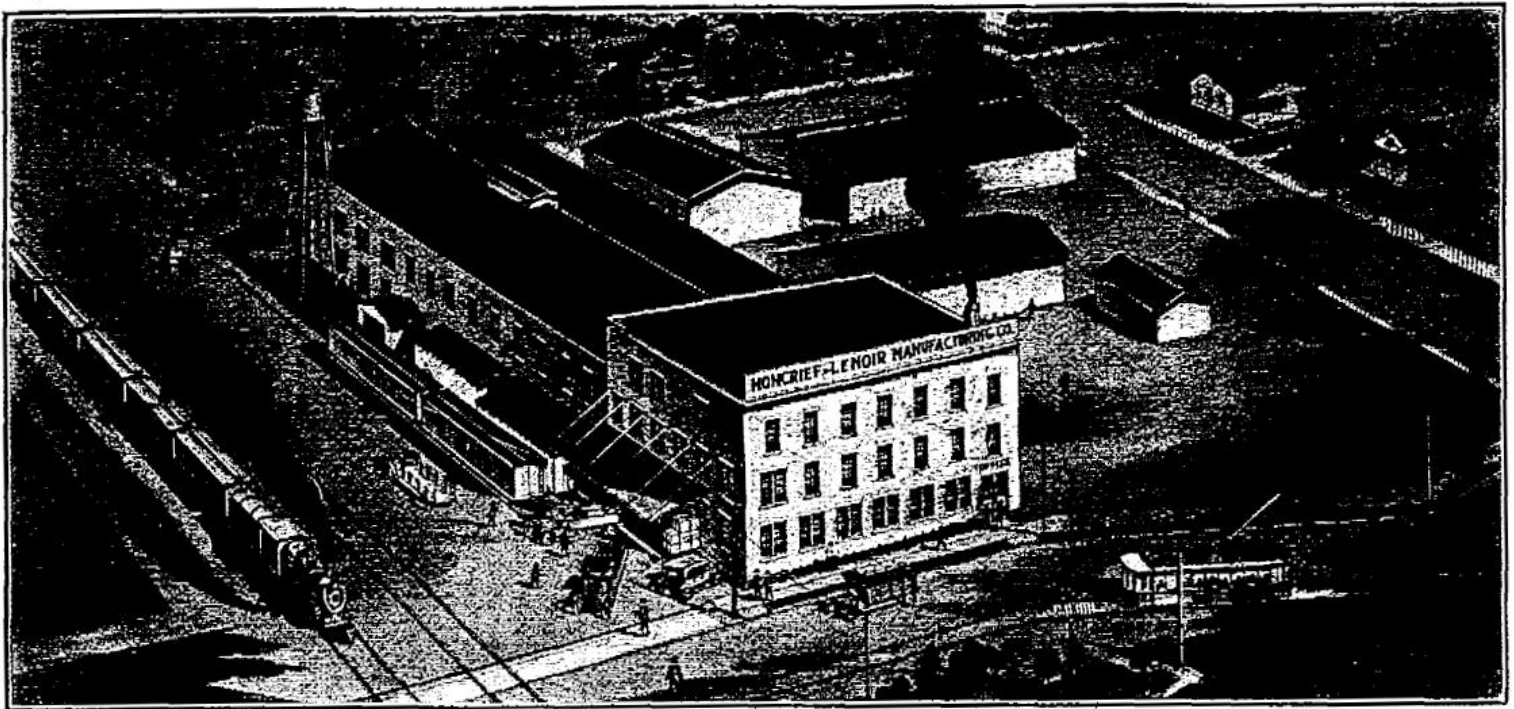
**SEMMES AND CONTI STS. HOUSTON, TEX**



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

**Figure 8**

Closer view of the 1920 sketch of Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company in 1920 City Directory; source: Polk City Directory.



**85,000 SQUARE FEET OF FLOOR SPACE**




Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Figure 9

1927 advertisement of Moncrief-Lenoir as an ARMCO distributor, source: 1927 Polk City Directory.

**"ONE OF HOUSTON'S LEADERS"**

**MONCRIEF-LENOIR MFG. CO.**



**ARMCO**  
Ingot Iron

DISTRIBUTORS OF

**ARMCO**

INGOT IRON

**MANUFACTURERS OF**

Sheet Metal Goods	Lithographed Coffee Cans
Galvanized Cans	Lithographed Lubricating
Conductor Pipe	Oil and Grease Cans
Eave Troughs	Honey Cans
Stovepipes and Elbows	Wood Jacket Cans
Tin Shingles	Syrup Cans
Lithographed Lard Pails	Oyster Cans

*See Us for Prices or Write*

VISIT OUR DISPLAY AT THE HOUSTON-MADE  
PRODUCTS EXHIBITION AT THE  
CITY AUDITORIUM

**Moncrief-Lenoir Mfg. Company**

Telephone Preston 2946, 2947, 2948  
Senneker and Conti Streets Houston, Texas

Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

**Figure 10**

1927 Advertisement for Moncrief-Lenoir, source: 1927 Polk City Directory

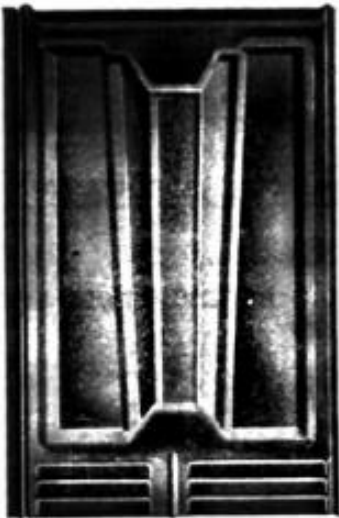
127 **CAN MANUFACTURERS**

**J. ARTHUR MONCRIEF, President      W. FRANK LENOIR, Sec.-Treas.**

# **Moncrief-Lenoir Mfg. Co.**

**MANUFACTURERS**

## **SHEET METAL GOODS, CANS**



**MANUFACTURERS OF**

**Tin Cans, PLAIN AND LITHOGRAPHED Wood Jacket Cans, Galvanized Cans, Syrup Cans, Honey Cans and Oyster Cans**  
**Galvanized Eave Trough, Conductor Pipe, Ridge Roll, Shingles, Corrugated Roofing, Stove Pipe, Elbows, Etc.**

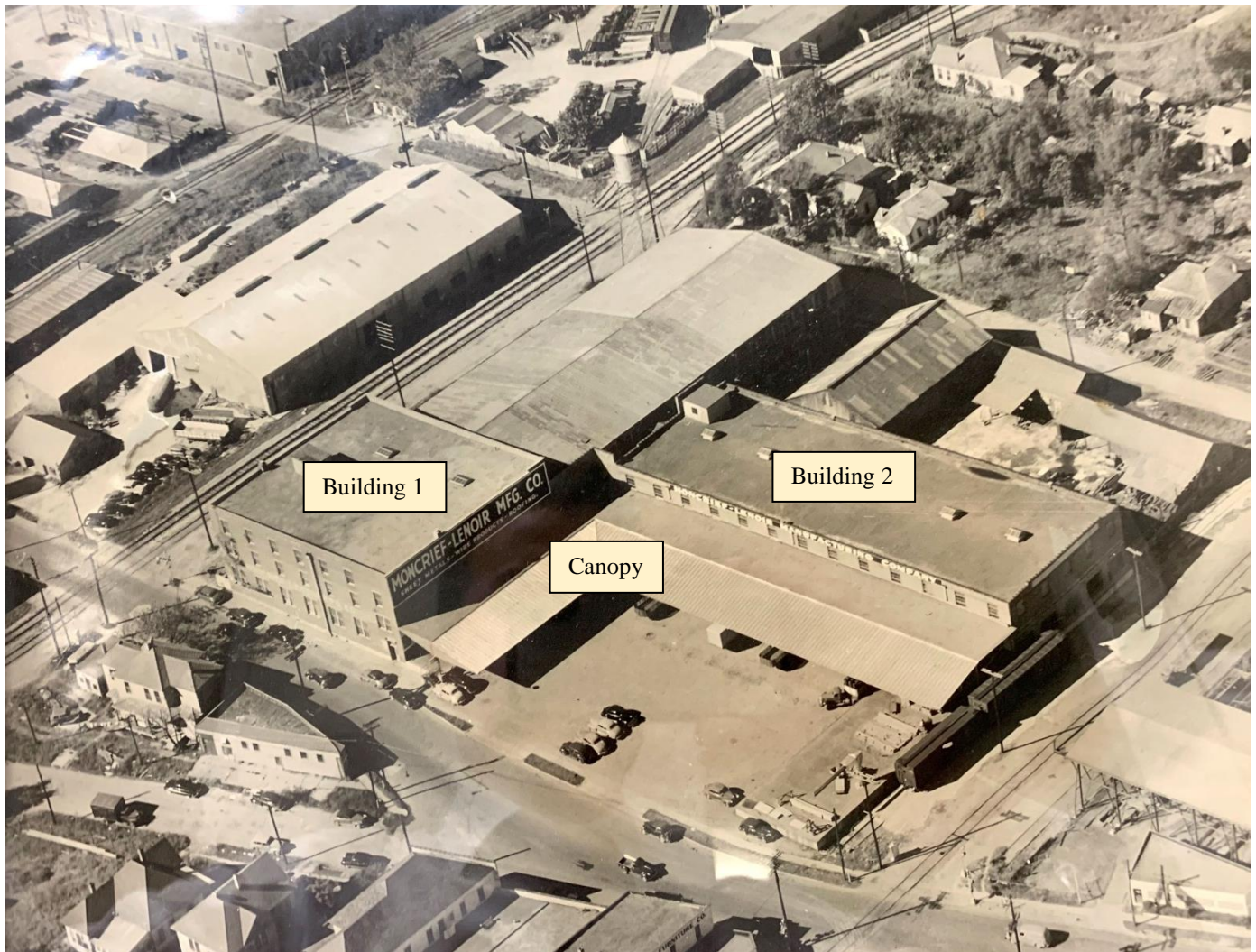
**Phones Preston 2946-2947-2948      HOUSTON, TEXAS**

Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Figure 11**

Undated aerial of Moncrief-Lenoir, likely dates between 1950 and 1958 per Sanborn maps



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

**Figure 12**

1953 advertisement for Moncrief-Lenoir, source: 1953 Polk City Directory.

# We Cover TEXAS

We cover Texas from end to end and dip into Oklahoma too with our friendly service. When you need sheet metals, wire products, roofing, nails, and the numerous other items we stock, there is a Molenco warehouse near you. Our trucks are on the go from us to you.  
  
 We add one ingredient to our sales not found everywhere. It is friendly service. Call the nearest warehouse for your needs.

## MONCRIEF-LENOIR MANUFACTURING CO.

Houston—2103 Lyons Ave. . . . .	Phone CApitol 7221
Dallas—2735 Coombs S. . . . .	Phone HUnter 5161
San Antonio—701 San Fernando . . . .	Phone FAnnin 1228
Fort Worth—206 Texas & Pacific Terminal Warehouse	Phone FAnnin 2231
Lubbock—E and 26th St. . . . .	Phone 3-2839
Harlingen—LaFeria Highway . . . . .	Phone 2165
Temple—South 4th and Avenue B . . . . .	Phone 3-6863



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

Figure 13

1954 advertisement for Moncrief-Lenoir as a Reynolds aluminum distributor; source: *Houston Chronicle*.

**REYNOLDS** *Do-It-Yourself*  
**ALUMINUM**

● No special skills . . . no special tools required to make and repair 1001 things around your home.

● Comes in tubes, rods, bars, plain sheets, embossed sheets, angles, fasteners, screen and storm sash sections, window hardware, Reynolds Reynolon film (plastic sheet), tape moulding.

● So easy to use you can even make your own aluminum storm sash!

Approved by  
Atlas - Delta  
Disston - DeWalt  
Black & Decker  
Stanley  
Skil Corporation  
and other leading  
Tool Makers

Come in and see this self-service rack! Get your free copy of the Reynolds Do-It-Yourself Aluminum instruction and project booklet!

**MONCRIEF-LENOIR MFG. CO.**  
*Distributors*

Visit our booth. See display and receive list of lumber and hardware dealers from whom you can purchase and receive full information.

Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Figure 14**

1973 photo of Moncrief-Lenoir, Lyons Avenue façade of Building 1; source: *Trucking Business*, Volume 67, 1973.



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Figure 15**

2001 Lyons Avenue, a warehouse to the west that was formerly part of the Moncrief-Lenoir complex from c. 1951-58 through the mid-1980s. The top image is from 2017 while the bottom image is from 2022. As the building has been extensively altered with metal cladding of a different style and numerous historic openings have been removed, the building no longer retains historic integrity and is not included within the proposed boundaries of the complex.





Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Figure 16**

2035 Lyons Avenue, a warehouse to the east that was formerly part of the Moncrief-Lenoir complex from c. 1951-58 through the mid-1980s. The top image is from 2013 while the bottom image is from 2015. As the building has been extensively altered with new cladding and numerous historic openings have been removed, the building no longer retains historic integrity and is not included within the proposed boundaries of the complex.



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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## PHOTOGRAPHS

### Photo 1

East elevation of Addition 2, canopy and Building 1 at far left; view northwest





Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Photo 2**

East elevation of Building 1, canopy, south elevation of Building 2, and Addition 2 at far right; view northwest



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Photo 3**

West elevation of Addition 2; view northeast



**Photo 4**

West elevation of Addition 5, south façade of Building 1; view northeast





Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Photo 5**

West and north elevation of Additions 1 Building 2; view southeast



**Photo 6**

North elevation of Addition 5; view southwest



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Photo 7**

West elevation of Building 3; view northeast.



**Photo 8**

East elevation of Building 3; view northwest





Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Photo 9**

Interior, first floor of Building 1; view northwest



**Photo 10**

Interior, first floor of Building 1; view southeast





Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Photo 11**

Interior, first floor of Addition 5; view north



**Photo 12**

Interior, first floor of Addition 2; view southeast



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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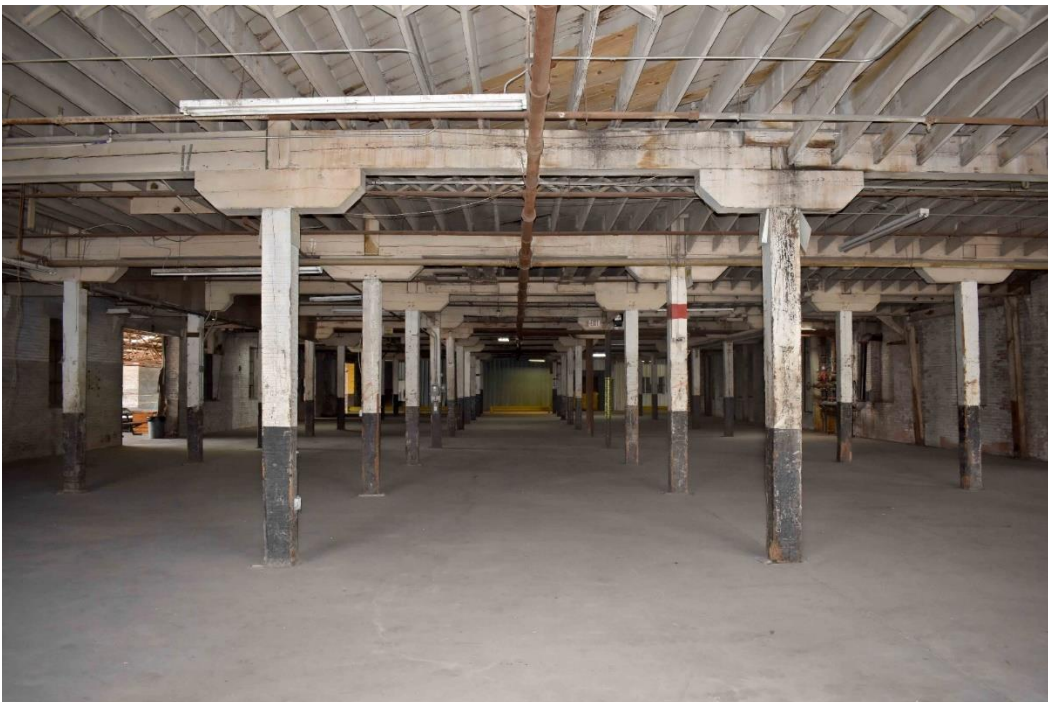
**Photo 13**

Interior, first floor of Building 2; view east



**Photo 14**

Interior, first floor of Building 2; view west





Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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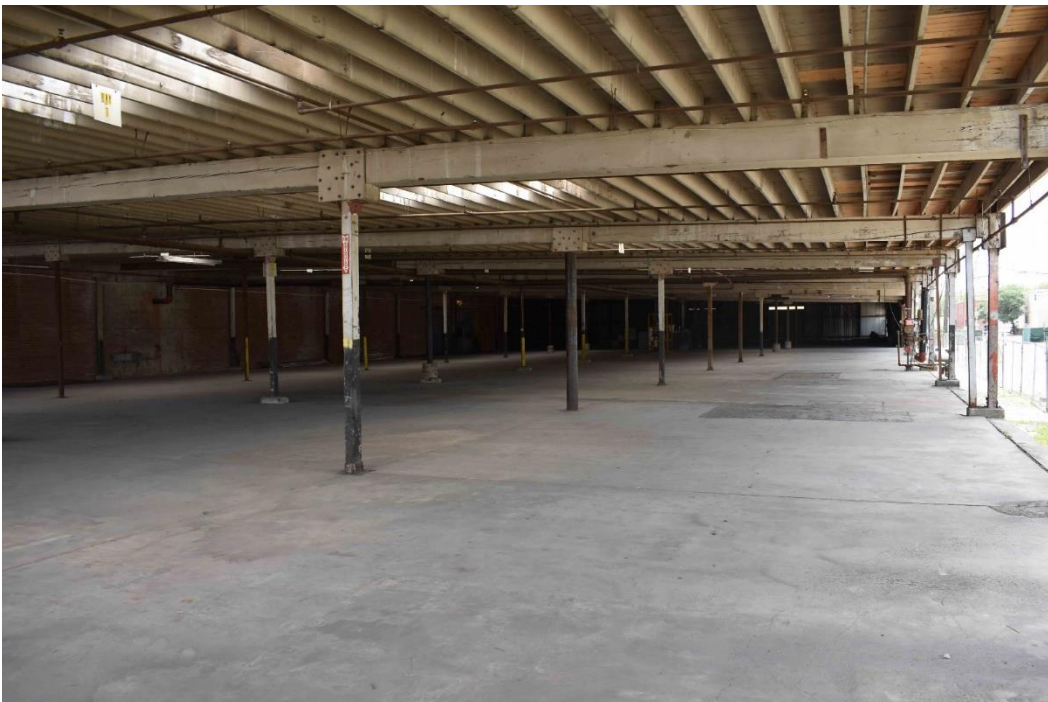
**Photo 15**

Interior, Addition 1; view east



**Photo 16**

Interior, Addition 1; view southwest



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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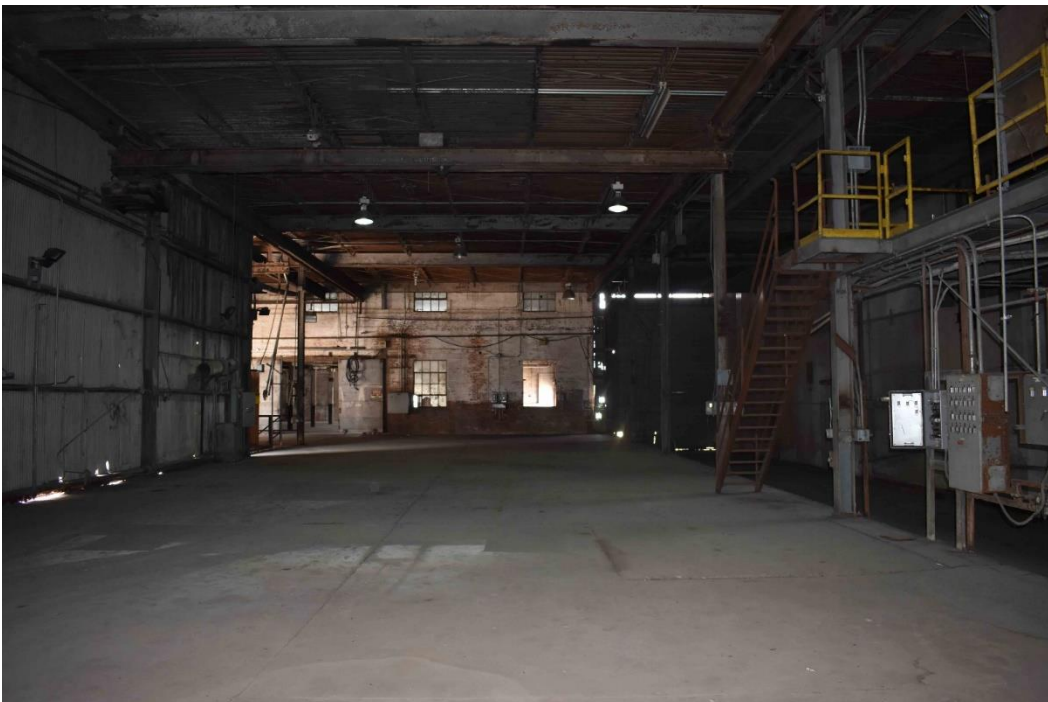
**Photo 17**

Interior, Addition 2; view south



**Photo 18**

Interior, Addition 2; view north





Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Photo 19**

Canopy; view west



**Photo 20**

Canopy; view east



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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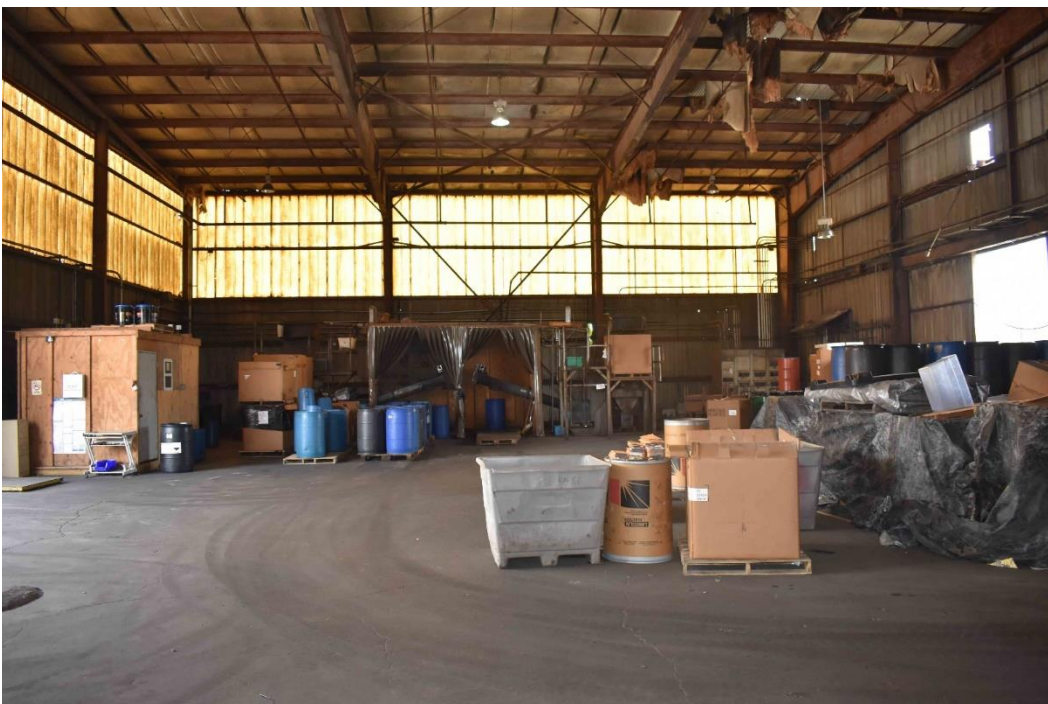
**Photo 21**

Canopy; view south



**Photo 22**

Interior, first floor of Building 3, Addition 6; view southwest





Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Photo 23**

Interior, first floor of Building 3 and Addition 4; view north



**Photo 24**

Interior, first floor of Building 3, Addition 3; view south





Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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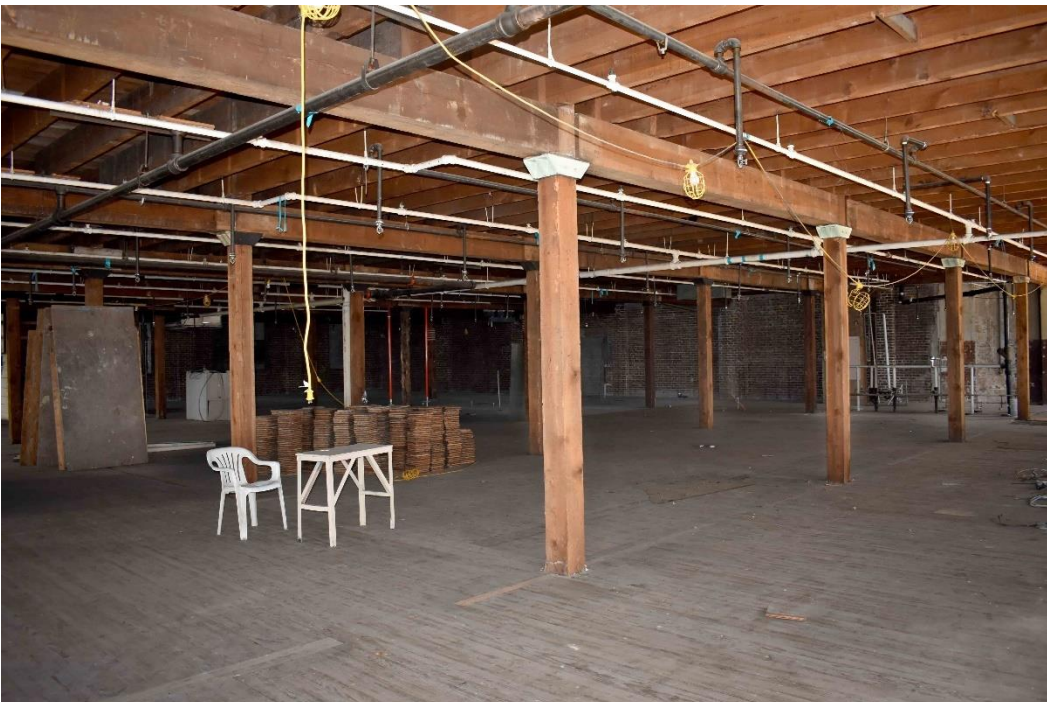
**Photo 25**

Interior, second floor of Building 1; view southeast



**Photo 26**

Interior, second floor of Building 1; view northwest



Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Photo 27**

Interior, second floor of Building 2; view east



**Photo 28**

Interior, second floor of Building 2; view west





Moncrief-Lenoir Manufacturing Company, Houston, Harris County, Texas

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**Photo 29**

Interior, third floor of Building 1; view northwest



**Photo 30**

Interior, third floor of Building 1; view southeast



- end -