

Miller Manufacturing Company Building
311 Bryan Avenue, Fort Worth, Texas 76104

Description

The Miller Manufacturing Company Building is a 2-story reinforced concrete building situated in a light industrial and commercial area in the near south side of Fort Worth, Texas. It is three blocks south of the Texas and Pacific Railroad tracks and one block east of South Main Street, a north/south arterial that connects downtown with south Fort Worth. Constructed 1910-11, the building faces west and has a rectangular massing that is approximately 80' wide and 120' deep (photo #1). The building features steel windows with wire glass panes. The second story windows are primarily of a 4/4 configuration with the lower sash pivoting out (see photo #4). Most of the windows on the first floor, with the exception of the north elevation, have a 2/2 configuration. The façade features a concrete loading dock across the width of the building. Above the dock, the façade is covered with thin concrete panels laid in courses. The first floor is notable for a large arched opening near the north end that is filled with multiple-light sidelights and large transom over a door that is boarded over (photo #2). Near the center of the first floor is another large entrance that is boarded over and has a large 2/2 transom above it. To the right of this is a steel, two-panel door with glazing that also has a large 2/2 transom above it. The four southernmost first floor windows of the façade have been filled in with concrete block.

The north, south and east elevations show the impressions of the wood that was used as forms for pouring the concrete walls. These elevations are also characterized by numerous 4/4 and 2/2 steel windows with wire glass. Four first floor window openings on the first floor of the west end of the south elevation have been infilled with concrete block (photo #3). The north and south elevations each have a covered dock which are likely not original to the building. The north dock has a wood floor and canopy that connect to the concrete block building adjacent to it (photo #5). The south dock is of concrete and has a metal canopy over it (photo #4). A large freight door accesses each dock. One pedestrian door on the south elevation has been infilled with brick (photo #3). Attached to the rear (east) elevation is a 1-story extension measuring approximately 22' deep by 46' wide. It has concrete walls and a flat roof but is open on the north and south ends (photo #6). According to a Sanborn Map from 1910-11, this appendage was originally used as a stable and garage (see Sanborn Map).

The roof is surrounded by a low parapet with a narrow concrete coping (photo #13). The roof surface is flat and also of reinforced concrete with gravel-topped bitumen on top. There are three large, north-facing skylights near the roof's center. Each skylight has two sets of 3/3 wire glass windows (photo #7). At the northeast corner is the headhouse for the elevator (photo #8).

The interior of the building is largely open and is characterized by exposed concrete walls, beams and ceilings (photos #9-12). The ceilings are supported by three rows of square concrete columns. A concrete stairwell with concrete steps is located at the front of the building and is accessed by the single steel door. An elevator is at the northeast corner (photo #11). There is a partial basement that runs the length of the north side of the building.

The Miller Manufacturing Company Building sits on a slight incline so that the north end of the building is lower than the south. Surrounding buildings are typically masonry 1- or 2-story industrial buildings that date from 1909-1950s (photos #13-17). It is one block southeast of the proposed South Main Street Historic District, a one-block collection of one- and two-part commercial block buildings constructed between

1909 and the mid-1940s. Bryan Avenue is a narrow, asphalt topped street that originally had a railroad spur that terminated in front of the Miller Manufacturing Company Building. There is a vacant lot immediately south of the building.

Around 1935, a one-story corrugated iron and wood frame building was added to the south elevation. That may have been when the first floor windows were infilled with concrete block. In 1938, a 1-story corrugated iron garage was added behind it. Both of these structures had been removed by 1982 but a ghost line from where the 1935 addition abutted the main building remains (photo #3).^[1] Another alteration appears to be the widening of the center door on the facade. It is not known when this happened.

The Miller Manufacturing Company Building is in fair condition. It suffers from cracked and spalling concrete and has numerous broken or cracked window panes. As mentioned previously, some windows have been filled with concrete block. Although currently vacant, the building retains its historic and architectural integrity of location, design, materials, feeling, workmanship and setting.

Statement of Significance

The Miller Manufacturing Company Building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A at the local level of significance in the area of Labor History for its association with the 1922 strike between the garment workers union and the Miller Manufacturing Company. The Miller Manufacturing Company began producing overalls and other work clothing in 1903 using union labor. However, by 1922 the company began operating as an open shop in an attempt to break a strike. The union workers, who were mostly women, were accused of using violence and other tactics of intimidation against the nonunion workers. Rather than give in to the demands of the strikers and to prevent further violence, the company closed its plant and transferred its manufacturing operations to Paris, Texas. The strike and subsequent factory closing illustrated a growing resistance to union labor between World War I and the Great Depression. The Miller Manufacturing Company Building is also eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C as an excellent local example of an early 20th-century reinforced concrete industrial building in South Fort Worth. Constructed in 1910-1911, the building was the oldest reinforced concrete building documented in the Tarrant County Historic Resources Survey of South Fort Worth (published 1986). The survey identified the building as one of nine buildings eligible for the National Register as examples of industrial architecture. Unlike the other reinforced concrete industrial buildings that were documented, the Miller Manufacturing Company Building is the only example with poured in place concrete walls.

Historic Background and Significance

Fort Worth was originally established as a frontier military outpost in 1849. Although the military had abandoned the fort by 1853, the community that had grown up around it survived and became the government seat for Tarrant County in 1860. When the Texas and Pacific Railway reached the town in 1876, its continued growth was assured. More railroads were to follow and Fort Worth became a manufacturing and industrial center in North Texas. By 1900, the town's population had reached 26,000. With the arrival of the Armour and Swift meat packing plants in North Fort Worth in 1902, the city's population and industrial base surged. By 1910, the city had a population of over 73,312 residents. With further growth, the population numbered over 106,000 by 1920 and over 154,000 by 1930.

The Miller Manufacturing Company was organized in 1903 with Byron Miller as the president and treasurer and local department store owner W. C. Stripling as the vice president. Partners in the firm included Miller's brothers, Clarence R. (C. R.) and E. Burnie (E. B.). The company's initial stock was valued at \$15,000. It reputedly was the first overalls and pants factory in Fort Worth and the first to employ union labor.^[2] The enterprise became very successful and brothers C. R. and E. B. would go on to establish other garment and textile mill operations. By 1918, the firm had eight textile mills in operation.^[3]

As the Fort Worth venture grew, a new factory building was constructed in the city's near South Side in the area that had been reduced to rubble in 1909 as a result of a large fire. The fire may have been one of the leading determinates in building an all-concrete building. According to Mechanics Lien records, contractors Ralph Carroll and J. F. Hughes erected the building for the Miller Manufacturing Company. Work likely started in 1910 and was completed in 1911.^[4] The building's open expanses made it ideal for a garment-making industry. The numerous windows and large skylights helped to provide ventilation and natural light. The loading dock on the facade was advantageous for loading and unloading freight on trains using the railroad spur in front of the building.

The workers at Fort Worth's Miller Manufacturing Company went on strike June 15, 1922 in protest of what was deemed misuse of the union label and the use of nonunion labor in other factories controlled by the Miller organization. By this date, C. R. Miller, now living in Dallas, was the company's president. According to the *Fort Worth Union Banner*, Miller had once been an active member of the Garment Workers Union and that in turn ≥Fort Worth, proud of its first overall factory, [had] been liberal in its patronage, union men especially.≤ The paper also asserted that with union help, Miller was able to end the competition from prison-made overalls. Now, the unions saw his actions as a betrayal of the very workers who had made the company successful.^[5]

The strike by the garment workers kept the factory idle for about seven weeks. On August 14, company officials attempted to break the strike by declaring itself an open shop. From the employer's perspective, this meant that the company had the ability to not discriminate against a worker because that employee was or was not a member of a union. From the workers' perspective, this meant that the employer did not recognize a trade union. The open shop movement had begun to gain ground in the United States after World War I for a variety of reasons. These included anti-union sentiments that grew out of the Red Scare and the radicalism of such labor organizations as the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), the waning of the Progressive era and the push for labor reform, and employer efforts to roll back gains made by the unions during the war. In Texas, the movement began to take hold in 1919 when the Beaumont Retail Merchants' Association declared that it would not sign any union contracts and would begin operating open shops. Other open shop associations followed including one in Fort Worth.^[6] At the time of the strike against the Miller Manufacturing Company, the nation was in the midst of a major railroad strike and locally, workers were striking against the packing plants at the Fort Worth Stockyards. Fort Worth business leaders and residents were likely weary of labor issues and perhaps less sympathetic to unions in general.

Typically, 150 to 200 women were employed at the Fort Worth factory. The company planned to hire new workers in groups of 40, train them and then hire additional employees. But shortly after the company became an open shop, union officials claimed that only about 12 workers had entered the plant, all of whom were inexperienced.^[7]

The union workers picketed the plant and within a few days after the open shop declaration they were alleged to have engaged in various forms of intimidation of the nonunion workers. The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* reported that fourteen women and three men kidnapped one of the nonunion workers from her home. The victim ≥was scratched about the face and arms, carried a few miles in the country and returned to

town under the promise that she would resign her place and would also use her influence to obtain the consent of other open shop workers to resign. Strikers allegedly also surrounded the car of a company official who was driving two workers home, called him names and threatened to kill him. On August 17, a striker was arrested at the factory and charged with disturbing the peace after attempting to assault a woman entering the plant. The striker and about a dozen of her compatriots denied any intention of using violence. [8]

That same day it was reported that another worker was kidnapped on her way to work. Mrs. H. L. Hinckle claimed that she was taken by car out to the Grapevine road, stripped from the waist up, had her shoes taken off and cut to pieces and then was flogged and left bound with rope and wire by the side of the road. The assailants included a male driver and four women. A few days later, the newspaper printed a detailed account of the attack. The victim later recanted parts of her story, including the part about being stripped and left out in the country. Although she had been struck with a rope, the beating was not as severe as she originally stated. She claimed she exaggerated her story as to turn the whole world against the Garment Workers Union and to claim damages against the company. [9]

The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* reported on August 18 that another woman worker was hidden in the interurban watch tower at Handley, about seven miles east of Fort Worth, in order to protect her from pursuing strikers. The woman was identified as living in Dallas and was said to be one of the best operators at the plant. [10]

At the end of the first week of operating as an open shop, C. R. Miller, president of the company, announced that the factory would be relocated to another city in Texas. In a letter to the Fort Worth Chamber of Commerce, Miller wrote: We have patiently endeavored in every possible way to operate our Fort Worth factory in the face of every conceivable interference, incited by the Garment Workers Union, and we have reached the decision that we can not afford to jeopardize the lives of faithful employees, therefore the determination to remove our plant to two other cities where we can operate. The letter went on to say that the company had tried to avoid publicity out of respect for the city residents and knowing the damage it would do the city of Fort Worth to have it broadcast that an industry that employs 200 people had left the city because they could not peacefully operate here. Miller also sent a letter to the union stating that the strike was called without giving the company an opportunity to meet with the workers. [11]

On Saturday morning, business leaders met at the Chamber of Commerce to discuss the matter and to give company officials an opportunity to express their concerns. C. D. McCaulay, plant manager at the Miller factory, spoke of the kidnapping cases and other incidents of alleged violence. He said that six police officers watched as strikers harassed a worker and did nothing to stop them. C. D. Williamson of the Williamson-Dickie Company, another garment factory being picketed by striking workers, told of the resignation of a number of workers who had also been harassed. The business leaders passed a series of resolutions condemning the acts of violence and demanded city, county and state governments to give full protection to the women seeking employment at the affected plants. The resolution went on to say that if local law enforcement was unable to stop the violence, then Governor Pat M. Neff should dispatch Texas Rangers to the city to restore order. [12]

Fort Worth Mayor E. R. Cockrell assured residents that the local police were quite capable of handling the situation and asked the businessmen not to send a request for the Rangers. Cockrell ordered an investigation of the alleged incidents of violence and offered his assistance to the Miller Manufacturing Company in getting in touch with international officials of the Garment Workers Union and to request the president of the organization to come to Fort Worth in order to negotiate a compromise between the factory and the striking workers. [13]

The following Monday, August 21, the Miller Manufacturing Company did not open for business. On Tuesday, 42 prominent citizens met

with Mayor Cockrell to lodge complaints against the police. Assertions were made by the angry mob that the police would not offer protection to the nonunion workers because they sympathized with the union workers. Police Commissioner John Alderman stated that although some police officers may have voiced support of the striking workers, the department would stand for law and order. As evidence of the police force's commitment to carry out its duties, all parties involved in the whipping of Mrs. Hinkle had been arrested. Alderman also encouraged the Miller Manufacturing Company to get an injunction restraining the strikers from harassing the nonunion workers. The company was able to get a temporary injunction which was later made permanent. The injunction prohibited the strikers from interfering with company shipments and from interfering with the workers. The order did allow the union to station strikers at entrances to the plant and to peacefully dissuade workers from continuing their employment with the company but they could not trespass on company property.^[14]

As one would expect, the striking women received support from local and regional labor organizations. The *Dallas Craftsman* published an article about the strike and what a union label meant to the workers—that they had been lifted out of the sweatshops of the past which represented a hellhole to which young womanhood wore out health and strength—soul and body—for considerably less than enough to pay for food, clothing and shelter.^[15] The *Southwestern Railway Journal*, a monthly publication of allied railroad labor organizations published in Fort Worth, specifically mentioned the strike against the Miller Manufacturing Company in its September 1922 issue. It chastised the company for not paying the workers a living wage and the community at large for not supporting the women. The measly [*sic*] weekly stipend paid by these Open Shoppers would not maintain a woman in the Tarrant County poor house, and yet the people in the community seem to not realize that this is a fact, but accept the propaganda of these cunning agents of business as being [all] that they can [afford] to pay for service upon which they are reaping enlarged profits.^[16] At its annual convention in Enid, Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Federation of Labor adopted a resolution in support of the union women at the Fort Worth factory and other garment workers striking against Miller-owned factories in Waco, Little Rock, Arkansas, Kansas City, Missouri and Chattanooga, Tennessee. It asked its membership to inform other union members of the strike and to refrain from purchasing nonunion-made overalls and shirts.^[17]

The impasse continued through September. Although strikers at the Williamson-Dickie plant were able to negotiate an agreement with the company that recognized the union, the union workers at Miller Manufacturing Company were not so lucky. On September 30, C. R. Miller announced that the Fort Worth factory would be relocated to Paris, Texas. The company claimed that it could not secure protection for its open shop workers. Fort Worth remained a distribution center for the company but production of its overalls and other work clothes ceased in the city.^[18]

The Miller Manufacturing Company Building represents an era in labor history when management asserted its right to declare an open shop and to hire freely between union and nonunion workers. Union members publicly (and sometimes violently) protested the open shop movement, pitting the unions against management and the nonunion workers. In this particular case, management decided to relocate its operations rather than compromise or give in to union demands. The incident also reveals the dynamics between the larger business community and city officials in their struggle to keep harmony, or the appearance of harmony, between employer and employee.

The Miller organization, through Texas Textile Mills, retained ownership of the building until 1937. It was leased to the Southwestern Paper Company until the early 1930s. In December 1933, the Fort Worth City Commission voted to authorize an appropriation of \$55.23 per month from Welfare Funds to rent the building for use by the U.S. Transient Bureau which had been in the building since October. The Transient Bureau was a program of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration designed to give emergency care to non-resident individuals and in some cases, local residents made homeless by the depression of the 1930s. The Transient Bureau occupied the building until c. 1936.^[19] If

more documentation is uncovered regarding the functions of the Bureau as carried out at the Miller Manufacturing Company Building, there may be the potential that the building may have additional significance for its associations with this program.

Following the departure of the Transient Bureau, the building was vacant for a time before being bought by C. M. Prall in 1937. Prall was president and manager of the Prall-Huff Company, Inc., a wholesale beer distributor, and president and manager of the Longhorn Corporation, a wholesale wine and liquor distributor. This type of business would occupy the building for many years. By 1981, it was used as a warehouse for the Universal Blueprint Paper Company. By 1995, it was vacant.^[20]

Architectural Significance

The Miller Manufacturing Company Building at 311 Bryan Avenue in Fort Worth, Texas is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C as an excellent local example of an early 20th century industrial building on the city's south side. Constructed in 1910-1911, the building stands out among its peers as being the only reinforced concrete industrial building identified as being eligible for the National Register of Historic Places in the Tarrant County Historic Resources Survey of Fort Worth's Southside (published in 1986). The building also illustrates the evolution of the use of reinforced concrete in industrial buildings.^[21]

The concrete framed factory building began to make its appearance in the United States in the latter part of the 19th century. Early examples were made of cast in place concrete. As builders and engineers experimented with its weight-bearing and stress load capacities its use became more widespread. By the 1920s, concrete had mostly replaced brick and stone as a structural material.^[22]

The solid concrete walls of the Miller Manufacturing Company Building were unique among the industrial buildings documented in South Fort Worth in the Tarrant County Historic Resources Survey. The exterior of the other industrial buildings were either of brick or a combination of brick and concrete that used a concrete grid system with components articulated in the exterior framework of the building (usually with large expanses of windows between the concrete components). A close contemporary of the Miller Manufacturing Company Building was the Artesia Bottling Company Building at 1315 E. Lancaster Avenue. It was constructed c. 1908 as a 2-story brick industrial building that was similar in size to the Miller building. Two buildings with the articulated exterior concrete framework are a 4-story warehouse at 1324 E. Lancaster Avenue (c. 1919) and the 4-story Williamson-Dickie Manufacturing Company Building at 509 W. Vickery Boulevard (1924). The latter two buildings represented the latter phase of reinforced concrete construction whereas the Miller Manufacturing Company Building represented the earlier phase.^[23]



Location of the Miller Manufacturing Company Building
1910-1911 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map, Fort Worth, Texas
Volume 2 Sheet 129

[1] Building permit notes found in the file for ≥311 Bryan Avenue, ≤ Tarrant County Historic Resources Survey, Historic Fort Worth, Inc., Fort Worth, Texas [hereafter referred to as TCHRS-HFW].

[2] *Makers of Fort Worth* (Fort Worth Newspaper Artists Association, 1914), n.p.

[3] *Dallas Morning News*, December 25, 1952.

[4] Notes from file for ≥311 Bryan Avenue, ≤ TCHRS-HFW. Notes regarding a contractor's lien were dated January 9, 1911. The 1910-11 Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map depicts the building with the note ≥From Plans ≤ Later maps indicate that it was constructed in 1911.

[5] As reported in the *Dallas (Texas) Craftsman*, June 23, 1922.

[6] Allen M. Wakstein, ≥The Origins of the Open-Shop Movement, 1919-1920, ≤ *Journal of American History*, 51 (December 1964): 460-475; *Dallas Craftsman*, August 24, 1922.

[7] *Dallas (Texas) Morning News*, August 15, 1922.

- [8] *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 17, 1922.
- [9] *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 18, 20 and 21, 1922; *Dallas Morning News*, August 21, 1922.
- [10] *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, August 17 and 18, 1922.
- [11] *Ibid.*, August 18, 1922.
- [12] *Ibid.*, August 19, 1922.
- [13] *Ibid.*, August 20, 1922.
- [14] *Dallas Morning News*, August 24, September 7 and September 20, 1922.
- [15] *Dallas Craftsman*, August 24, 1922.
- [16] *Southwestern Railway Journal* (Fort Worth, Texas), September 1922: 6.
- [17] *Dallas Craftsman*, September 29, 1922.
- [18] *Dallas Morning News*, September 23 and October 1, 1922; *Fort Worth Press*, October 2, 1922.
- [19] Notes from Board of Commission Minutes dated December 20, 1933 found in the file ≥311 Bryan Avenue, ≤ TCHRS-HFW; Herbert Jenkins, ≥The Negro Transient, ≤ *Opportunity: Journal of Negro Life* (January 1935), <http://newdeal.feri.org/opp/opp3513.htm> (accessed January 3, 2008); Fort Worth City Directories.
- [20] Fort Worth City Directories, various years from 1936-37 through 1995.
- [21] *Tarrant County Historic Resources Survey: Phase III Fort Worth's Southside* (Fort Worth: Historic Preservation Council for Tarrant County, 1986).
- [22] Carol Rifkind, *A Field Guide to American Architecture* (New York: New American Library, 1980), p. 293.
- [23] *Tarrant County Historic Resources Survey: Phase III Fort Worth's Southside*, pp. 48, 66. The Artesia Bottling Company Building was demolished in 2001.

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