



***Harris Machinery Company
501 30th Avenue SE
Minneapolis, MN 55414
612.331.1829 1-800-397-5026
info@harrismachinery.com***

<http://www.harrismachinery.com>







The 1880's "golden" factory with a 1920's red brick addition.

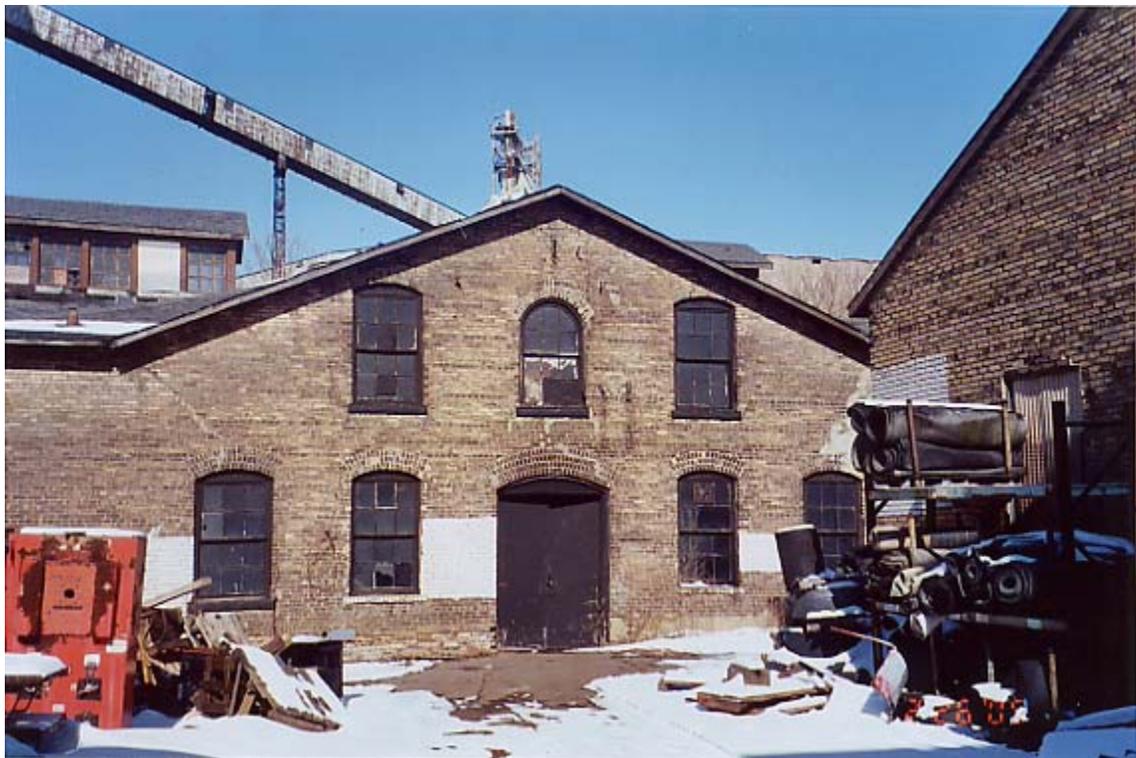




Several cross gable monitors still survive.
The Harris buildings are vulnerable to vandals and surrounded by rusting junk.



Christian J. Laurisch MN Railroad Commissioner





Several of the Harris buildings are boarded and unused. Some may not have been altered since they were built.



Several very old wood structures...possibly barns?



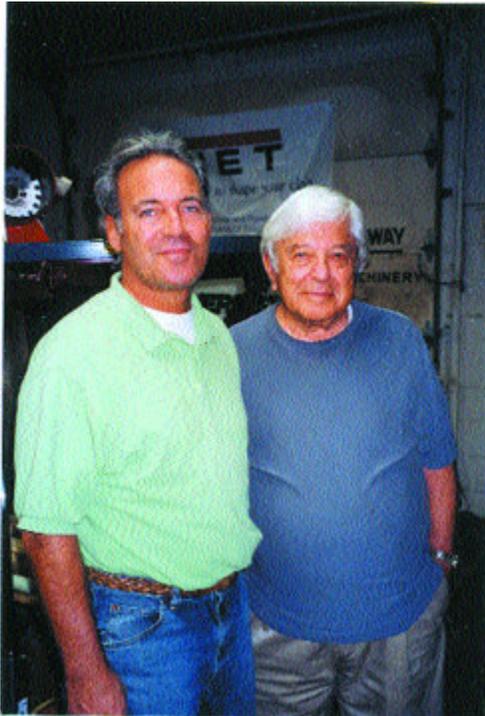


Another old railroad building with possible outlines of demolished structures just down the street behind Factory Lumber Supply at 445 Malcolm Ave SE

The Bridge

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS SPANNING THE RIVER

City's big land chance is here



The Harris Machinery Co., now located in the Southeast Minneapolis Industrial Area (SEMI), is marking its 100th anniversary. Marc Harris (left) and Sigmund (Sig) Harris represent, respectively, the third and second generation of owners.

Early business meets high-tech and biotech in former swampland that divides Southeast

By Bill Hoffmann (July 14, 2004)

taken from the **Southeast Angle**

The Harris Machinery Co. is housed in a long, two-story brick building built in 1870. The dirt road in front and grain elevators behind it make its setting feel like a small town. Yet it is only three blocks from the Witch's Hat tower in Prospect Park. It is half a block from the University Transitway where buses speed past. The business is marking its 100th anniversary and is the oldest continuous machinery dealer in the Twin Cities.

Sigmund (Sig) Harris, 82, still visits the office these days. Sig's father and uncle started the machinery company, selling sawmill, creamer and boiler equipment where Peking Gardens restaurant is now on University Avenue SE.

The old building at 501 30th Ave. SE is a treasure chest of new and used machinery--blowers, conveyors, air compressors, belt sanders, chains, drywall carts, ladders, magnetic drills, punch presses, saws, steam cleaners and more. The building originally housed the Peteler Portable Railway Manufacturing Co. Col. Peteler invented and marketed the first dump car used for railroad construction.

Across the road, Harris Warehouse, Canvas and Camping is stacked high with materials. It stocks thousands of zippers, boat covers, canopies, teepees, tents, backpacks, camping gear, government surplus, outerwear, rope, hardware, hundreds of fabrics and so forth. A total of 10 employees work at both businesses.

On the other side of Southeast's industrial area, the Murphy Warehouse Company buildings are landmarks. The two older buildings were built in the early 1900s and housed the Wabash Screen Door Co. The family ownership covers four generations, beginning in 1904. The company moved to the 24th Avenue SE location from University Avenue in the 1960s. The business has almost 800,000 square feet of space in several buildings in Southeast.

Today, the company is one of the largest warehouse companies in the Upper Midwest. It has 70-80 employees in Southeast and 230 employees across the Twin Cities. The family also operates Murphy Rigging and Erecting, Inc. in a separate building on 24th Avenue SE.

Blank spot

The Southeast Minneapolis Industrial Area is within walking distance from Dinkytown, the Como neighborhood, and from University Avenue in Prospect Park, but to many it remains a mysterious blank spot in Southeast. Freight trains crossing the bridge over 15th Avenue appear and disappear into Southeast's Bermuda Triangle. Heavy weekday truck traffic enters the zone off University Avenue onto Malcolm Avenue in Prospect Park.

Of places like this, Bill Holm wrote, “It is mostly invisible to casual shoppers and commuters, but turn down the wrong street, find yourself lost in the railroad yard, or stop to peer in the dusty windows of vacant buildings, and you see not 2003 but 1950 or 1930 or 1910,” in his introduction to “The Quiet Hours,” a new book of photographs, some from Southeast, by Mike Melman.

It’s that huge island of industrial land that blocks driving directly between the Como and Prospect Park neighborhoods. The area is surrounded by the Como, Prospect Park and Marcy-Holmes neighborhoods, as well as Minneapolis’ East Bank campus of the University of Minnesota. On the east, it is bounded by Highway 280 in St. Paul, on the west by 15th Avenue near Dinkytown, on the north by Rollins Avenue and Elm Street and on the south by University Avenue.

The area’s remaining 19th- and early-20th-century grain elevators and silos still create a visible industrial skyline. But, 21st-century high-tech and biotech industry and jobs promise to modernize the identity of the 714-acre parcel.

The name today for this area of railroad yards, historic and new warehouse structures, several university buildings, and ponds visited by ducks and geese is the Southeast Minneapolis Industrial Area, SEMI for short. The historic name is Bridal Veil, for the creek that once flowed there. The future name of the area may be University Research Park.

SEMI describes the kind of trucks that go in and out, but it's a name that can throw off even the most devoted students of the city. City Councilmember Paul Zerby recalled: "The mayor honestly thought trucks were built in SEMI."

For the past 10 years, the city of Minneapolis has been actively redeveloping the SEMI-Bridal Veil area. It is considered strategically located, adjacent to transportation and transit routes and to the University of Minnesota's East Bank and St. Paul campuses. It is said to be the largest developable piece of land in the city.

Of the 714 acres, 125 acres are occupied by railroad yards and right-of-way. Union Pacific and Burlington Northern Santa Fe railroads are active in SEMI. Also, Minnesota Commercial Railroad leases some track. Amtrak's Empire Builder can be spotted passing through.

A number of legal challenges over land ownership and redevelopment proposals continue to be waged by developers, the university, the railroads, and the city and county.

The city's goal for SEMI is summed up by the master plan: "Create a major new industrial area that creates living-wage jobs, greatly enhances the tax base, is compatible with nearby neighborhoods and reestablishes key elements of the natural ecosystem." The revised plan foresees a 20-year development scenario, creating between 1,700 and 6,250 jobs. In addition, it foresees 650-680 housing units near University Avenue.

The SEMI master plan was approved by the Minneapolis City Council in 1997. It includes building internal roadways, such as finishing Kasota Parkway, adding an east-west road called Granary Parkway (also known as Dinkytown Road) and bridges.

Why here?

Why was the SEMI-Bridal Veil wetland originally developed for industry? “The physical geography lead the railroads to be there and lead to the logical activities around the railroads,” explained Jim Forsyth, senior project coordinator, Minneapolis Community Planning and Economic Development. “Minneapolis was a milling city, and that [land] was a swamp. It was cheap and easy for the railroads to build on. Grain elevators went up around the rail yards.”

Forsyth said funding to redevelop today’s SEMI-Bridal Veil comes from several sources, such as state bond money, developer contributions and assessments, federal Empowerment Zone incentives, tax-increment funds, the city share of state road funds and brown field cleanup funds. Each source of funding has restrictions. “It gets complicated,” he acknowledged.

The city’s request for state bonding funds for the SEMI site improvements is third in priority for the next legislative session. Number one is a planetarium for the new Downtown library. Number two is for continued development of the Heritage Park housing west of Downtown. The fourth is Shubert Theater improvements.

Forsyth is among those who worry about the city's diminishing stock of developable land, where businesses can grow and jobs can multiply. "People have to work someplace. I can see Minneapolis becoming a bedroom community, except for Downtown offices. We all can't be bankers or work at McDonald's," he said.

Biotechnology Zones

Efforts to redevelop SEMI have accelerated in response to legislative activity last year, a governor's biotechnology summit next spring, and the city of St. Paul's investment in a biotechnology business incubator in the nearby St. Paul industrial area at Highway 280 and University Avenue.

The 2003 Legislature passed a law authorizing establishment of zones to encourage the growth of the health sciences and biotechnology industry. The Biosciences Zones are designed to provide local and state tax incentives and credits to attract industries.

In October, the city submitted a request to the state for designation of both the SEMI-Bridal Veil area and one other area as a Minneapolis Biosciences Subzone. The SEMI land covers more than half of the request. The areas could receive state assistance in retaining, growing and attracting bioscience industries. At this point, the city proposes exempting only city sales taxes as a development incentive.

In the application, SEMI is renamed “University Research Park.” The other area in the application is 510 acres called the Minneapolis Life Sciences Corridor along Chicago Avenue to Lake Street. The state asked the cities of Minneapolis, St. Paul and Rochester to submit joint applications, and the state is expected to respond by Dec. 31.

The city expects to work with the university to target three areas of biotechnology and health sciences development in the park: therapies for the medical device and diagnostics industry, biomaterials and bioenergy, and improved food processing.

The site for a possible Gopher football campus stadium covers several university parking lots at the southern edge of SEMI. The university has already developed three research buildings in the part of SEMI close to the East Bank campus. They include the Lion’s Research Building and the Center for Magnetic Resonance Research.

In 1994, the Southeast Economic Development committee was formed by the city to facilitate redevelopment of the area. The committee has two members from each of the four adjacent neighborhoods, four from business associations, and one each from the City Council and the university.

At last month's meeting, committee members questioned renaming SEMI as the University Research Park in the city's Bio-Sciences application to the state. However Paul Zerby, City Council and SEED member, said the mayor strongly endorsed the new name.

The Wall Companies have proposed developing a 65-acre "Minnesota Innovation Center" in SEMI north of University Avenue. The eight-to-10-year project calls for 1.6 million square feet of space in 16 buildings with a potential of 2,500 jobs. Employment on the area now is more than 200.

John Wall, president, said taxes generated there today are low, about \$305,000 a year. He projected that taxes in the future after the land is developed could rise to \$4 million a year.

What will SEMI-Bridal Veil look like in 20 years? Some of the tall grain elevators are likely to be preserved as historic landmarks. Other older industries will be gone and replaced by cutting-edge technology research buildings. The rail yards will still be there, but pressure to redevelop even the rail land will increase. The master plan sees new roads, open space, parks and flood-control ponds in the low-lying land. Two bridges will provide routes over the rail yards.

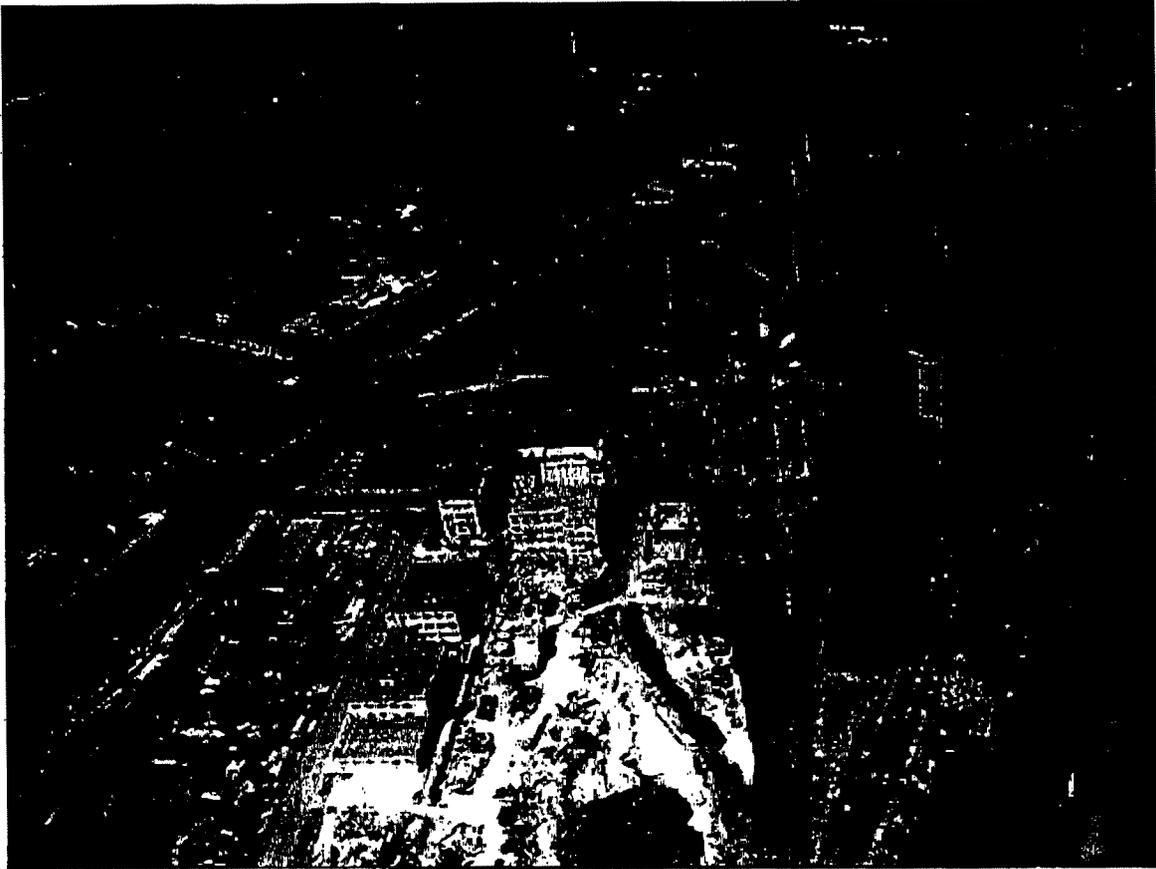
SEMI will probably have a new name, as well as names for areas within the boundaries, likely the historic Bridal Veil name but also advanced biosciences and high-tech names.

At least one octogenarian is curious. "I'd like to be around 20 years from now to see what this area looks like," Sig Harris said.

This is the seventh in a series of articles exploring business, industry and the workplace in Southeast, sponsored by Southeast Publications, Inc., with funds from readers' donations to the annual Anti-Bake Sale.

last revised: March 22, 2006

The Bridge
2600 E. Franklin Ave. #2, Mpls., MN
4406 - 612.436.9160 - fax:
612.436.9199 -
editor@readthebridge.info



*Aerial View, Looking West – 1948
Minneapolis Star Journal (Minnesota Historical Society Photograph)*

THE JUNCTION OF INDUSTRY AND FREIGHT: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUTHEAST MINNEAPOLIS INDUSTRIAL AREA

A NATIONAL REGISTER ASSESSMENT

Prepared for

**Minneapolis Community
Development Agency
105 Fifth Avenue South, Suite 200
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55401**

February 2003

Prepared by

**Charlene Roise and
Nathan Weaver Olson
Hess, Roise and Company
The Foster House
100 North First Street
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55401**

Southeast Minneapolis Industrial Area (SEMI) Survey

Prepared for the Minneapolis Community Development Agency

Site Name: **Peteler Portable Railway Manufacturing Company** Inventory Number: HE-MPC-3611

Description

Originally developed by the Peteler Portable Railway Manufacturing Company, which was founded in 1889, this property is located at 501 Thirtieth Avenue SE. This complex comprises four brick buildings with associated wood storage sheds, a concrete-block office, and a corrugated-metal shed, as well as a concrete-block retail outlet built by Harris Machinery, the present owner. The four brick buildings are situated in a square, with the historic entrances facing a central court area. Directly east of the brick buildings are the wood sheds and office. The corrugated-metal shed is located south of the brick buildings, and the retail outlet is to the southeast. The following description starts with the northernmost of the four brick buildings, which was the foundry building when owned by Peteler, and moves in a clockwise direction.

The brick foundry building is one and one-half stories, and features a rectangular plan with a protruding front (south) room and entrance. The low pitched, cross-gabled roof has exposed rafter ends under a slight eave. A gable monitor roof straddles the east-west ridge on both sides of the cross-gable. Four fixed windows with nine panes appear on both the north and south sides of the monitors. The roofing material is shaped composition shingles, which are laced up the valley of the gable. Walls are mostly yellow brick in a lay of six stretchers per header row; however, red brick appears near the base of the building. Rendering has been added around the south and southwest sides of the building. The main entrance, located on the south side of the building, is a wood double door with single panels topped by an arched double-hung window. Another principal entrance on the north side has a wood door with diagonal paneling beneath a segmental brick arch. Many of the windows and wood surrounds are badly damaged, with only a few original nine-over-nine and four-over-four double-hung sash still intact. All of the windows have stone sills and segmental-arch, tapered-brick lintels. One-story gable-roofed corrugated-metal sheds are attached to both the east and west ends of the building. The overall condition of the building is poor. Bricks have fallen out of the walls, which are sagging in some areas, and the roof droops on the west end.

The building to the southeast was originally a blacksmith shop. This rectangular-plan yellow-brick structure is one and one-half stories high with a front-gabled roof of shaped composition shingles. Like the foundry building, the blacksmith shop has exposed rafters under a slight eave, a monitor that straddles the east-west ridge, and wood-framed, double-hung windows with stone sills and segmental-arch, tapered-brick lintels. On the east end of the building is a corrugated-metal, front-gabled, shed addition. The building is solid; however, like the foundry, exterior bricks have fallen or come loose, and the window frames are deteriorating.

The third building, the largest of the four, was once the machine and erecting shop for Peteler. The two- and-one-half-story yellow-brick structure has a composition-shingled gable roof topped by a monitor running east to west. The north slope of the building's roof is interrupted by a wall dormer. A simple wood fascia and soffit have cornice returns on the east and west gable ends. Window openings, which are taller on the first floor than on the second, have stone sills and segmental-arch, tapered-brick lintels. A few six-over-six double-hung wood sashes survive, but many openings have been filled with brick or concrete block. Garage entrances with wood doors are on the north and south sides; the south side also has a receiving dock. An added, windowless, single-story, concrete-block storage wing extends from the west facade at an oblique angle.

A single-story extension on the east side introduces a hint of the Classical Revival style to the

Southeast Minneapolis Industrial Area (SEMI) Survey

Prepared for the Minneapolis Community Development Agency

Site Name: **Peteler Portable Railway Manufacturing Company**

Inventory Number: HE-MPC-3611

complex's otherwise utilitarian design. Dating from 1931, the addition is faced with brick and the front (east) is ornamented with diamond-shaped tiles. The metal-framed entry has a single glass door with side lights and a transom. Other windows are glass block. A brick chimney rises along the addition's north wall. Both the east and west additions are in good condition and the yellow-brick structure remains in fair condition.

Peteler erected the last building in the square for storage. The one-story brick structure is square in plan and has flat roof edged by a stepped parapet capped with metal tile. Many of the windows have been filled in with glass block or concrete block, but some six-over-six double-hung sash windows remain. The entrance is a paneled wood door. The building is in relatively good condition.

Two rectangular storage sheds located to the east of the four main buildings are in very bad shape. Both wood-framed structures have low pitched gable roofs with composition shingling. The north building has sliding garage doors on the north side that no longer function. The facade of the south building has a false front, double-hung and fixed windows, and a wood door with paneling. A similar door is located on the north side. A shed roof projects from the building's east (rear) side; the north side is open for easy access to storage of long pipes and metal planks.

The concrete-block building east of the four original buildings served as an office. The square-plan structure has a flat roof surrounded by a parapet. Staggered shingles cover the walls, which hold fixed and double-hung sash windows and a single wood door with aluminum screening. South of the original buildings is a corrugated-metal shed with a roof of corrugated metal. The north end is open.

The Harris Machinery retail outlet is located at the southeast corner of the complex. The square, concrete-block building has a flat roof edged by a parapet with clay tile coping. There are two entrances, an aluminum garage door on the north side of the building and a single glass door for customers on the west side of the building. The customer's door is protected by a concrete-block entryway. Glass-block windows are located on the west and south facades. The structure is in good condition.

History/Significance

The Peteler Portable Railway Manufacturing Company was organized in Minneapolis by Colonel Francis Peteler in 1870, soon after he is claimed to have invented the railroad dump car. According to one source, his invention "was the first dump car ever used in railroad construction and revolutionized the contracting business." Peteler's company moved to several different locations in Minneapolis before it arrived at a site adjacent to Thirtieth Avenue SE, just north of the Northern Pacific Railway's east-west right-of-way in 1888. The company quickly established itself at the new site, and within two years it had erected a two-story, 60-by-200-foot brick shop, a one-story, 50-by-130-foot brick foundry, a blacksmith shop, an office, and several warehouses. Peteler added a one-story, 24-by-48-foot frame building in 1891, and a one-story, 40-by-60-foot frame shop in 1892. In 1899 the company built another office, a one-story, 16-by-24-foot brick veneer structure, as well as a 16-by-24-foot barn. According to permit records, the two structures were the last buildings added to the site until the 1950s.(1)

By 1907 the business had merged with the Kilgore Machinery Company, a manufacturer of "steam shovels, excavators, ditchers, quick-acting sawmill machinery, cranes, and press rolls." The new

Southeast Minneapolis Industrial Area (SEMI) Survey

Prepared for the Minneapolis Community Development Agency

Site Name: Peteler Portable Railway Manufacturing Company **Inventory Number:** HE-MPC-3611

company, called Kilgore-Peteler, produced Colonel Peteler's dump car as well as the products that Kilgore had formerly manufactured. In 1909 Kilgore-Peteler was succeeded by the Peteler Car Company. Peteler continued to make a variety of railcars, but added railcar repair to its business. A Sanborn map from 1912 shows the layout of the plant, including a spur line from the Northern Pacific Railroad that divided into a number of tracks to facilitate repair work. Apparently Peteler, however, experienced business problems and went bankrupt in 1914.(2)

By 1917 the Gray Tractor Company had established itself at the plant. Gray Tractor produced an eighteen-horsepower four-bottom (four separate plows) tractor for general farm work. Gray Tractor's president, J. W. Gray, may have been the same J. W. Gray who was a major shareholder in the merger of the nearby Gas Traction Company with Emerson-Brantington, a farm implement manufacturer from Rockford, Illinois, in 1912. The company became large enough to compete with the International Harvester Company, which ultimately acquired the Emerson-Brantingham plant by 1930.(3)

The Harris Machinery and Company acquired the property from Gray Tractor in 1928 and remains its owner to the present day. In 1958 contractor Adolphson and Peterson built an addition to the company's warehouse, and in 1964 Ace Construction added a 12-by-45-foot loading dock to the plant. Harris has also erected a large concrete-block building since that time that serves as a retail store. Incorporated in 1905, the company describes itself as the "oldest continuous machinery dealer in the Twin Cities." The company buys, rents, and sells new and used machinery and camping equipment.(4)

This property evolved in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in response to the changing needs of its owners. As a well-preserved example of an industrial facility typifying the SEMI during this period, the property qualifies for the National Register under Criterion A.

Sources

- (1) Building records listed within this report are available at the Minneapolis Inspections Department, Public Service Center Building; Horace B. Hudson, ed., *A Half Century of Minneapolis* (Minneapolis: Hudson Publishing Company, 1908), 392; *Tribune's Directory for Minneapolis and Saint Anthony 1871-1872* (Minneapolis: Tribune Publishing Company, 1871); *Minneapolis City Directory 1880-1881* (Minneapolis: R. L. Polk and Company, 1880); *Minneapolis City Directory, 1888-1889* (Minneapolis: R. L. Polk and Company, 1888).
- (2) "Made Up of Natives," *Minneapolis Journal*, February 5, 1903; "Plant to be Enlarged," *Minneapolis Journal*, June 21, 1909; "Many Cars Built in Minneapolis," *Minneapolis Journal*, March 31, 1910; "Car Company Bankrupt," *Minneapolis Journal*, September 29, 1914; *Insurance Maps of Minneapolis, MN* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1912), vol. 8, 949.
- (3) *Davison's Minneapolis City Directory, 1918* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Directory Company, 1918); "\$50,000,000 Rival of 'Trust' Takes in Gas Traction," *Minneapolis Journal*, July 17, 1912; "The Gray Tractor with the Wide Drum," advertisement, ca. 1918; *Minneapolis City Directory, 1928* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis Directory Company, 1928).
- (4) "Harris Machinery Company," in Harris Machinery Company [web site], updated 2000; available at harriscanvascamp.com/machinery.html.

Lieutenant Colonel Francis Peteler (founder of the Peteler Car Company)



LIEUTENANT COLONEL FRANCIS PETELER.

Born in Bavaria, Germany, April 19, 1828, and came to New York in June, 1840. He enlisted in Company A, Eighth United States Infantry, and was sent to Mexico.

His uncle had been in charge of government forests in Bavaria, and he was accustomed to the woods. Although but twenty years of age, he was promoted corporal on the field of Vera Cruz, the adjutant who read the order being Pickett, afterward a Confederate general. Longstreet, another Confederate general, was first lieutenant of Company A.

After the war Mr. Peteler lived in New York until 1853, and then came to Minnesota, finding employment in August on the Anoka dam. In the spring of 1854 he took a claim near Round Lake. At the outbreak of the Rebellion he drilled recruits at Anoka in the St. Lawrence Hotel, and soon after received permission from the secretary of war to raise a company of sharpshooters, receiving his appointment as captain Sept. 17, 1861.

This was the second body of troops to leave the state, and consisted of the most expert hunters and frontiersmen. It became Company A of the Second Regiment, United States Sharpshooters, of which Captain Peteler was made Lieutenant Colonel. After the second battle of Bull Run Colonel Peteler was granted a furlough on account of the Indian outbreak in Minnesota.

During the winter of 1862-63 he was in command of Fort Abercrombie. After the war he purchased a farm in Bloomington, Hennepin Co., where he lived until 1871 he graded the first six miles of the M. & St. L. Railway.

He was president and owner of the Peteler Car Works at Minneapolis until Jan. 1, 1905, turning the business over to his sons on that date. Colonel Peteler was married in May, 1853, to Margaret Heines. Children: Edwin, Philip, Frank C. (died Nov. 1, 1903), Minnie (Mrs. Edwin Ellingsen, Bloomington Ferry), and Charles.

Johann N. Peterler was a Bavarian army officer during the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. He developed a portable narrow-gauge railroad for transporting military supplies around the battlefields which performed admirably. After the war he set about perfecting his railroad system for peacetime employment in Bavaria.

In 1866 Alois Peteler, a son of the inventor, was sent to the United States to promote the scheme. He settled in West New Brighton, New York, and established an office, complete with sample parts, at 42 Broadway in New York City. He took out two more U.S. Patents, in March 1869 and May 1871. Soon narrow-gauge (16" to 30") portable railways appeared in the United States, Canada, Cuba, and South America.

His older brother, Francis (1828-1910) came to the U.S. when about 12 years of age and lived with his brother Louis who ran a hotel in New York City. He apparently inherited a love for the military from his father for though less than 18 years of age, he joined the U.S. Army in 1846 to fight in the Mexican War. In 1853 he married and immediately settled in Minnesota, acquiring a tract of government land four miles north of Anoka. He lived on, cultivated and improved the farm until October 1861 when he organized a company of sharpshooters to aid the Union cause. He saw active service in Virginia and was promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel. He returned to Minnesota and purchased a farm in Bloomington Township in August 1864.

He established the Peteler Car Works about 1870 in a wheelwright shop located on 1st Ave. So. between Washington Ave and 3rd St., Minneapolis. He is said to have invented a dump car for railroad construction purposes. He received two patents for dump cars. September 1873 and May 1874. However local histories of his life say nothing about the Peteler system previously introduced in New York by Alois Peteler. He built on the same scale as his brother back East but adopted a tip car body style that looked very much like full-sized four wheel ballast cars used on mail line railroads. Francis promoted his narrow-gauge cars for the use of railroad contractors. Peteler took on some railroad construction projects himself and put his tiny cars to work in the process.

He soon outgrew the wheelwrights shop and open a factory in Minneapolis It was enlarged form time to time as the business grew. In 1890 a new \$50,000 factory was built. The location was on five acres at 4th Street S.E. and 30th Ave S.E. adjacent to the Northern Pacific Railway tracks. Peteler Portable Railway Manufacturing Company. 100 men were employed.

He was sole owner until he sold out in 1905 due to age and ill-health. The business was consolidated with the Kilgore Machine Company as the Kilgore-Peteler Car Company. This company manufactured dump cars, steam shovels and sawmill machinery, with the largest output in dump cars, steam shovels and sawmill machinery, with the largest output in dump cars. As of 1908 officers of the company were: Charles S. Hale, president F.B. Snyder, vice president; Frank C. Bester, secretary and treasurer; and Charles B. Peteler, super-intendent. (Peteler's son Philip was general superintendent of the Car Works but died at age 48, being succeeded by another son, Charles.)

Francis Peteler died 4-18-1910 at 2726 Dupont Ave So, Minneapolis.

source: History of Anoka County by Albert M. Goodrich – published 1905



Railroad dump car



Gray Tractor Co. Tractor

Posted on Tue, Jul. 04, 2006

Gadgets and doodads of the Industrial Age

Some people's junk is the Harris family's treasure

BY ARON KAHN

Pioneer Press

A lawyer with an eye for the curious took a small step into Harris Machinery and a giant, wistful stride into the history of a nation.

An odd collection of parts and gadgets — an American rhapsody of metal doodads — stood, hung and sprawled everywhere, courting his eye. The 19th-century cast-iron fire hose nozzle was the clincher. He was in love.

"This is a place that has absolutely everything that nobody thought they wanted anymore," said attorney John Jespersion, who fashions folk art from metal and wood when not buried in legal briefs. "It's a home for lost ingenuity."

Gears, pulleys, roller bearings, foundry ladles and endless ancient devices draw collectors and artisans to the historic, gray brick building tucked away in an industrial area in Southeast Minneapolis, not far from the St. Paul border.

Customers spot opportunity and promise in every corner, where the scent of oil-soaked machinery sets the building apart unequivocally from Wal-Mart. Springs, boiler tubes and hydraulic pumps wait to find their destiny in an improvised hat rack late at night in a home workshop.

Sometimes shoppers choose items without knowing what to do with them — puzzle pieces for an unknown picture. But having those pieces also invites the past into their lives.

"These things take one back," said Karal Ann Marling, a University of Minnesota professor of art history and American studies. "They give people a reassuring sense that there are real things out there in this world, as opposed to the fake things we use every day."

Shoppers in modern stores often buy items in plastic bubble packages, Marling said, without the ability to touch them and sense their sturdiness and reliability. "I cannot think of anything solid in my home today," she said.

Such testimonials likely would have surprised Marks Harris, a scrap-iron peddler with a horse and wagon who started the family machinery business in 1903. It has remained in the family ever since.

"We had stuff around for 20 years and then we'd sell it," said Sig Harris, grandson of the founder and the face of the business since 1945. "All of a sudden a guy would have some use for it."

A U.S. Navy lieutenant who fought in the ferocious Battle of Okinawa in World War II, Sig Harris entered the business at the war's end in 1945. Until recently, he was a fixture in the company, which has been housed since 1927 in the current building at 501 30th Ave. S.E.

But Harris, 84, now spends his days in an assisted-living facility at Shalom Home West in St. Louis Park, while son Mark Harris, 58, officially owns and runs the company now.

"We sold anything," Sig Harris said, sitting in his small living room, his full head of silver hair combed neatly.

There were boilers and garage supplies and farm equipment, and once an entire U.S. Defense Department gunpowder plant, disassembled into hundreds of pieces, of course.

"We thought that was a big deal," said Harris, who outbid other liquidators for the plant. "We were out there for months dismantling the equipment, although there were things that we bought that we never expected to sell."

Harris ended up selling many of the parts to some of the biggest chemical companies in the nation. The gunpowder plant made the news recently because it sat near the Dakota County recreational land that the University of Minnesota will give to the state as part of a multi-layered Gopher football stadium bill passed by the Legislature in May.

A university graduate, Harris said the machinery company was the family's largest revenue source until about 10 years ago, when the family's next-door business, Harris Canvas & Camping, surpassed it. That business sells new and government-surplus tents, sleeping bags and other outdoor gear.

Harris Machinery sells some new items, too.

"We have everything from a used fire hose nozzle for \$10 to a new punch press for about \$18,000," said Mark Harris. "We haven't sold one, but we have one for sale."

But it's the tie to Americana that draws customers like Jespersion back. Asked why he bought the cast-iron fire hose nozzle, the Minneapolis attorney said it was because it is truly American.

"Because it's interesting, because it has its own aesthetic beauty, and because it lets you hold a piece of history that you've only seen in photographs," he said.

"That beauty is completely removed from the application for which it was designed, but it does have a practical use. It will make a fine lamp. I'm making one right now for my 13-year-old son."

Aron Kahn can be reached at akahn@pioneerpress.com or 612-338-6516.