

**BUILDING-STRUCTURE INVENTORY FORM
 NYS OFFICE OF PARKS, RECREATION
 & HISTORIC PRESERVATION
 DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION
 (518) 237-8643**

YOUR NAME: Christine M. Longiaru

DATE: April 2000

YOUR ADDRESS: 183 Anderson Pl., Buffalo, NY 14222

TELEPHONE: (716) 645-2297

ORGANIZATION (if any):

IDENTIFICATION

- 1. **BUILDING NAME(S):** former Farrel-Birmingham Company complex
- 2. **COUNTY:** Erie **TOWN/CITY:** Tonawanda (MCD 02923) **VILLAGE:**
- 3. **STREET LOCATION:** 344 Vulcan Street (A-E),
- 4. **OWNERSHIP:** a. public b. private XX
- 5. **PRESENT OWNER:** Mr. Paul Nichter **ADDRESS:** 344 Vulcan Street
- 6. **USE:** Original: Industrial Present: Industrial/Commercial/Residential
- 7. **ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC:** Exterior visible from public road: Yes XX
 Interior accessible:

DESCRIPTION

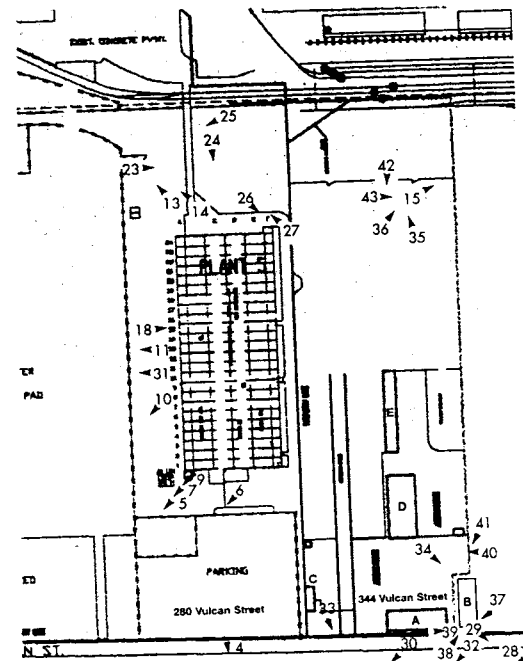
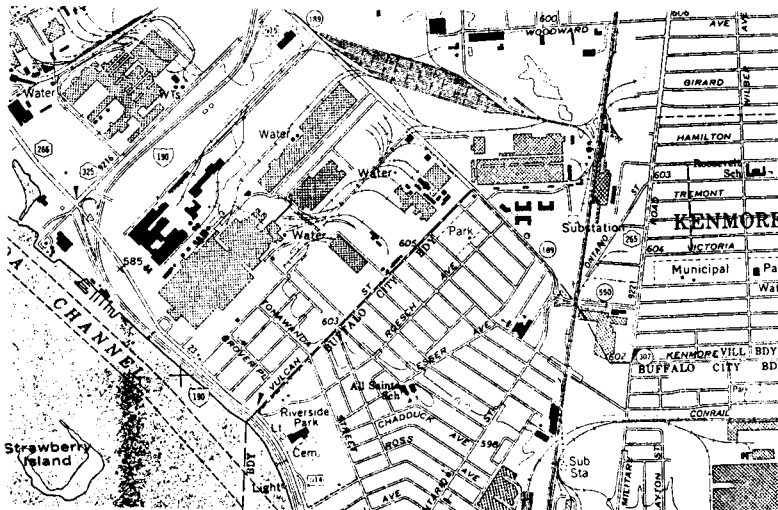
- 8. **BUILDING MATERIAL:** a. clapboard XX b. stone c. brick XX d. board and batten
 e. cobblestone f. shingles g. stucco h. metal XX
 i. vinyl j. other: asbestos shingles

- 9. **STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:** (if known) a. wood frame with interlocking joints
 b. wood frame with light members XX
 c. masonry load bearing walls
 d. metal (explain)
 e. other: brick and frame

- 10. **CONDITION:** a. excellent b. good XX c. fair d. deteriorated

- 11. **INTEGRITY:** a. original site b. moved if so, when?
 c. list major alterations and dates (if known):
 344 A Vulcan Street has replacement windows and interior has been altered.

12. MAP:



344 Vulcan Street (A-E)

- 13. THREATS TO BUILDING:** a. none known b. zoning c. roads
 d. developers e. deterioration
 f. other: all five structures will be demolished as part of the GM plant expansion.

14. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS AND PROPERTY:

- a. barn b. carriage house c. garage XX
 d. privy e. shed f. greenhouse
 g. shop h. gardens
 h. landscape features: large gravel lot
 j. other:

15. SURROUNDINGS OF THE BUILDING (check more than one if necessary):

- a. open land b. woodland
 c. scattered buildings d. densely built-up
 e. commercial XX f. industrial XX
 g. residential XX h. other:

16. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS:

(Indicate if building or structure is in a historic district). The former Farrel Birmingham plant was one of the first companies to locate in the industrial western section of Tonawanda. River Road and the Niagara River lie in close proximity, to the west. Also west of the property, is the former path of the Erie Canal, which is now the I-190. Kenmore Avenue is located a few blocks east of the lot. The lot has a frontage of 344 feet along Vulcan Street and extends north for a depth of 1355. The northern boundary has a width of 400 feet. Vulcan Street serves as the boundary for the division of the southwestern limits of Tonawanda and the northwestern limits of the City of Buffalo. The residential neighborhood of Riverside lies immediately south of the property, south of Vulcan Street. An early twentieth century commercial building is located on the northwest corner of Vulcan Street and Newfield Street, directly opposite of 344-A Vulcan Street.

In 1942, the company constructed the manufacturing plant on the adjacent lot to the west (280 Vulcan Street). Large factory complexes surround the 344 Vulcan Street to the north, west and east. The factory building at 280 Vulcan Street (Plant No. 5) is part of the larger GM Chevrolet Engine Factory complex, which lies to the northwest and north of the property. On the adjacent lot to the north, is the American Axle Corporation. An automotive junkyard and the former J.H. Williams plant are located on adjacent lots to the east.

The original Farrel Birmingham Factory occupied most of the lot its dimensions were 204 feet X 780 feet. Figure 9 is a plan from the Tonawanda Town Assessor's Office Files showing the entire complex. The factory was constructed in 1917. The one-story factory building was constructed of concrete and glass with a steel frame. It had a steel truss saw-tooth roof with wooden sub-roofing. The 160,000-sq. ft. factory housed five 5-ton cranes, six 6-ton cranes and one 20-ton crane.

Around 1963, Farrel Birmingham sold the factory complex to Maislin Brothers Transport, Ltd. Two years later, DMB Real Estate purchased the site and Bernel Foam Products then occupied it. In 1979, the Recticel Foam Company from Belgium acquired the Bernel Company. Recticel made industrial polyurethane foam. A 1983 fire destroyed the facility and the Recticel Company shut down its operations.

17. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING AND SITE (include interior features if known):

344-A Vulcan Street. Constructed in 1943, this two story, brick and frame office building consists of a rectangular block (48' X 165') with a flat roof. The first floor features a cast stone water table. The south and north elevations have been altered with smaller replacement sash. Its original, two-over-two double-hung wood sashes were arranged in-groups of four. Two original groupings are found in the westernmost

344 Vulcan Street (A-E)

bays of the south façade. A side entrance has been added to the east elevation. A continuous cast stone stringcourse accents the upper portion of the building. The second floor features the original sash. Entrances are found on the east and north elevations. The west elevation features a fire door exit with an exterior metal staircase. This building will be demolished as part of the proposed GM expansion.

344-B Vulcan Street. Constructed in 1920, this one story frame building once served as the guard house and personnel office for the Farrel Birmingham Company. It is currently the residence Mr. Richter, the owner of 344 Vulcan Street. The house and its small parcel are excluded from the proposed GM expansion. The building is a simple rectangular block with a rear one-story addition and an attached garage. The five-bay wide south façade fronts Vulcan Street and features a central entrance. Almost all of the windows are covered with particleboard. The original fenestration featured one-over-one double-hung wood sash. The building has an asbestos shingle exterior except for the east elevation, which features stucco. A side entrance is located on the west elevation of the rear addition.

344-C Vulcan Street. This frame, one story three-bay garage (59'X 16') was constructed in the mid-twentieth century (circa 1948). The main east façade has been significantly modified. It now features a single garage bay and two entrance doors, the rest of the façade has been covered with particleboard. Its original clapboard exterior remains intact on the other elevations. This building will be demolished as part of the proposed GM expansion.

344 D-E Vulcan Street. These two modern, multi-bay, garage and storage buildings are set back on the lot, north of the other structures (circa 1990s). They will be demolished as part of the proposed GM expansion.

SIGNIFICANCE

18. **DATE OF INITIAL CONSTRUCTION:** original factory 1917—destroyed by fire 1983.

ARCHITECT:

BUILDER: Farrel Birmingham Company

19. **HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE:**

All of the significant Farrel Birmingham Company factory buildings at 344 Vulcan Street were destroyed by fire in 1983. Despite their association with the company, the extant structures (A-C) do not appear to be historically significant. Presently, the remaining factory structures exhibit visible modifications and have a low to moderate level of architectural integrity. In addition, this largely empty parcel is devoid of its original setting, feeling and association. Historic photographs 8-11 show the original factory building.

20. **SOURCES:**

Buffalo and Erie County historical Society—Files and Photo Collections

Silsby, Robert W. *Settlement to Suburb, A History of the Town of Tonawanda, Erie County New York, 1607-1986.* Tonawanda, NY: Sterling C. Sommer, Inc., 1997.

State Listing of Major War Supply Contracts Active as of June 30, 1945. Washington, DC: War Production Board Program and Statistics Bureau-Military Division, August 6, 1945.

To All the Employees of Chevrolet Motor and Axle. Tonawanda, NY: General Motors Corporation, 1937.

Tonawanda Tax Assessor's Office--Files

U.S. Navy. Commemorative Pamphlet *The Navy "E" Burgee to Farrel-Birmingham Company, Inc., Ansonia and Derby, Connecticut and Buffalo New York, May 10, 1942.*

War Industrial Facilities Authorized, July 1940-August 1945. Washington, DC: Industrial Statistics Division, July 30, 1946.

21. **THEME:** Industrial architecture

344 Vulcan Street—the former Farrel Birmingham Company

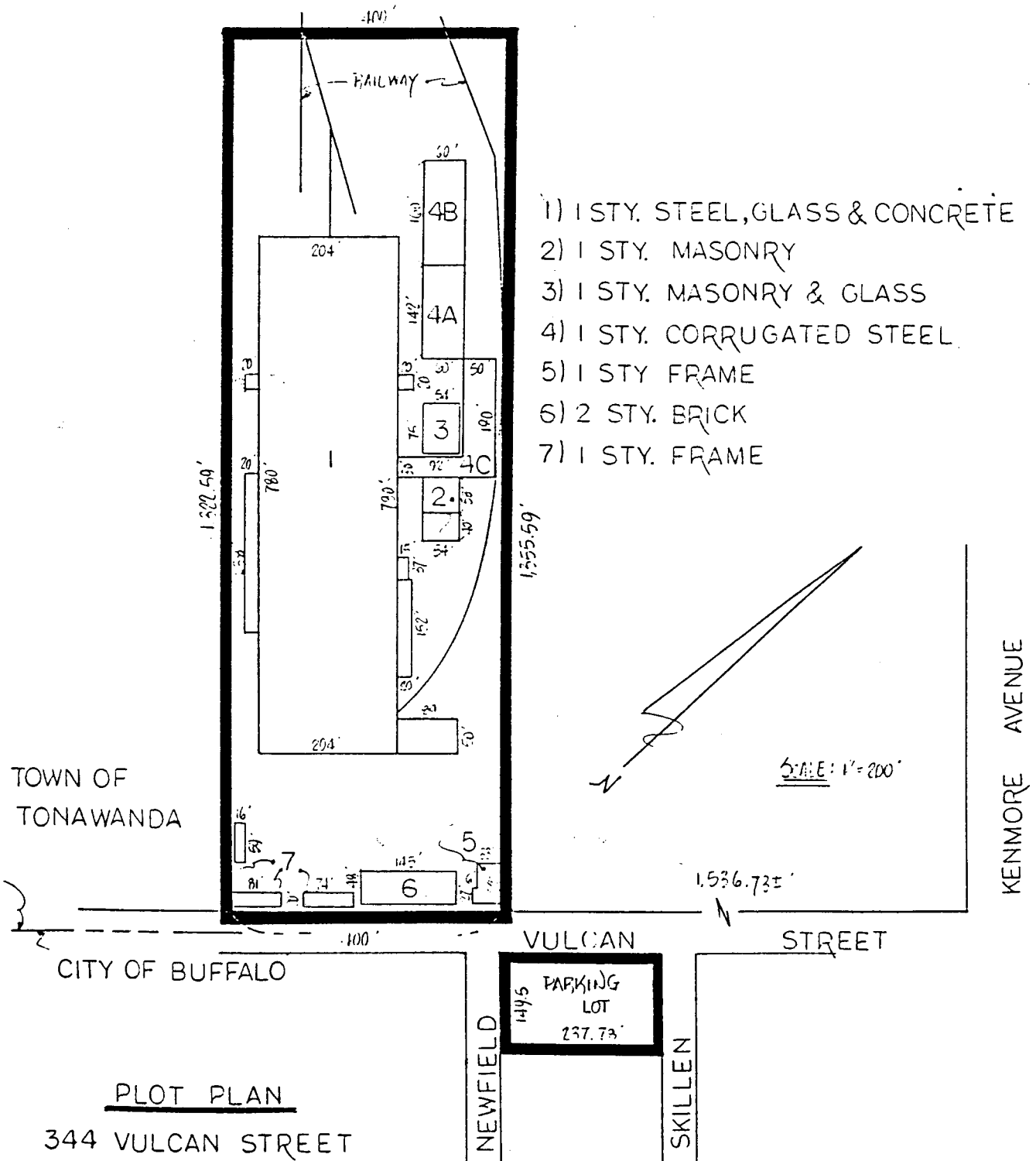
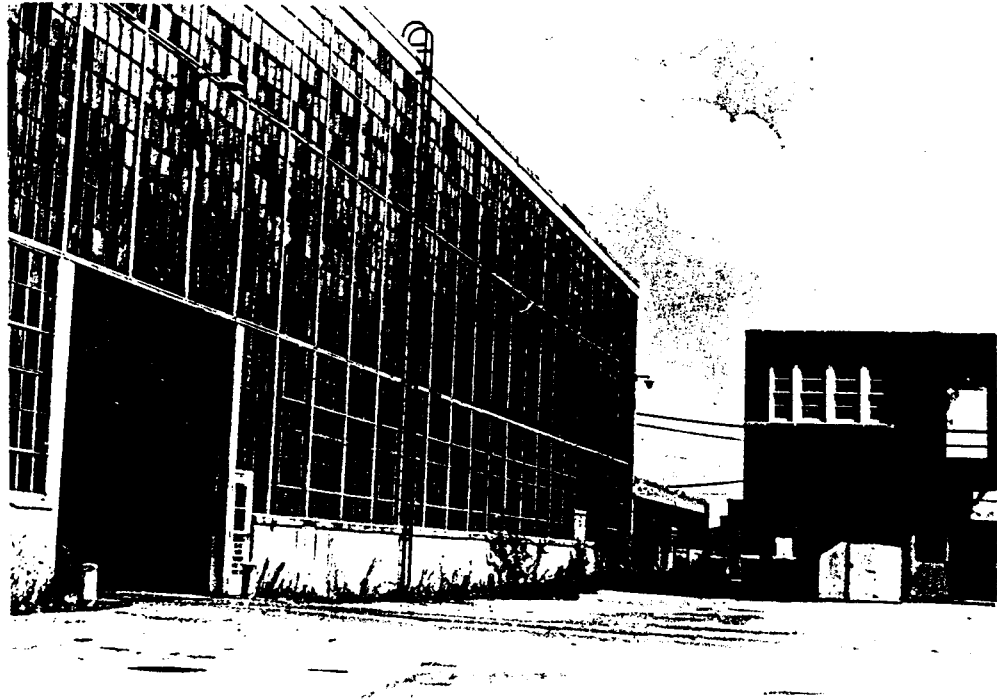
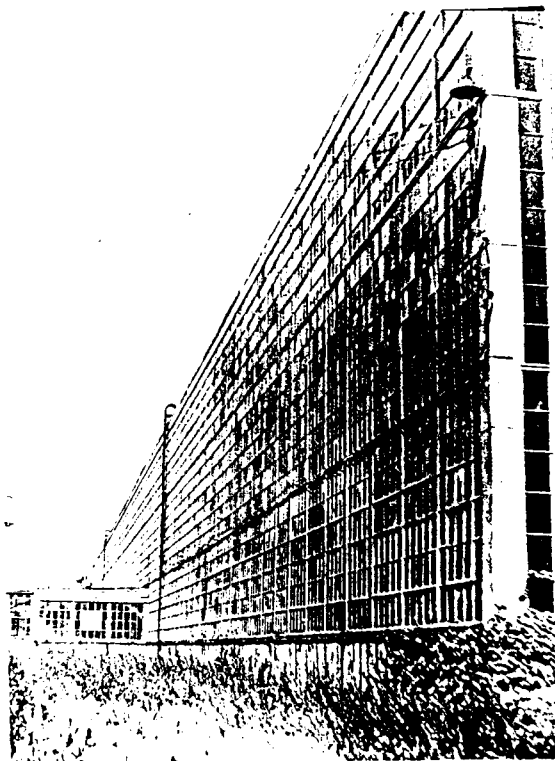


Figure 9. A plan of the former Farrel Birmingham Plant from the Tonawanda Tax Assessor's from an appraisal dated December 21, 1979.

344 Vulcan Street—the former Farrel Birmingham Company

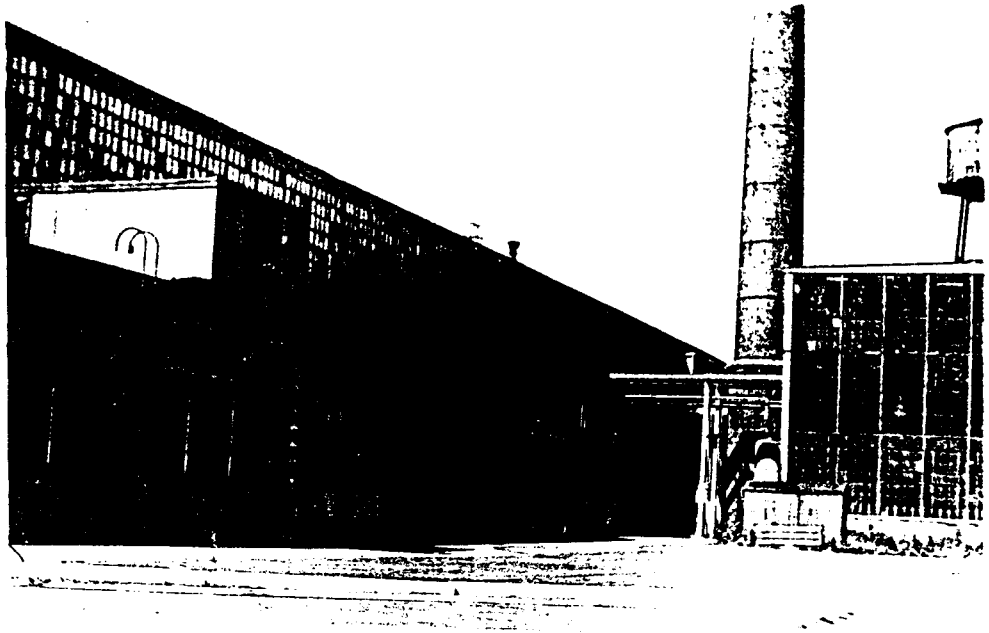


Historic Photo 8. The main south façade of the mostly glazed, one-story factory building of Farrel Birmingham with the two-story brick office at right.

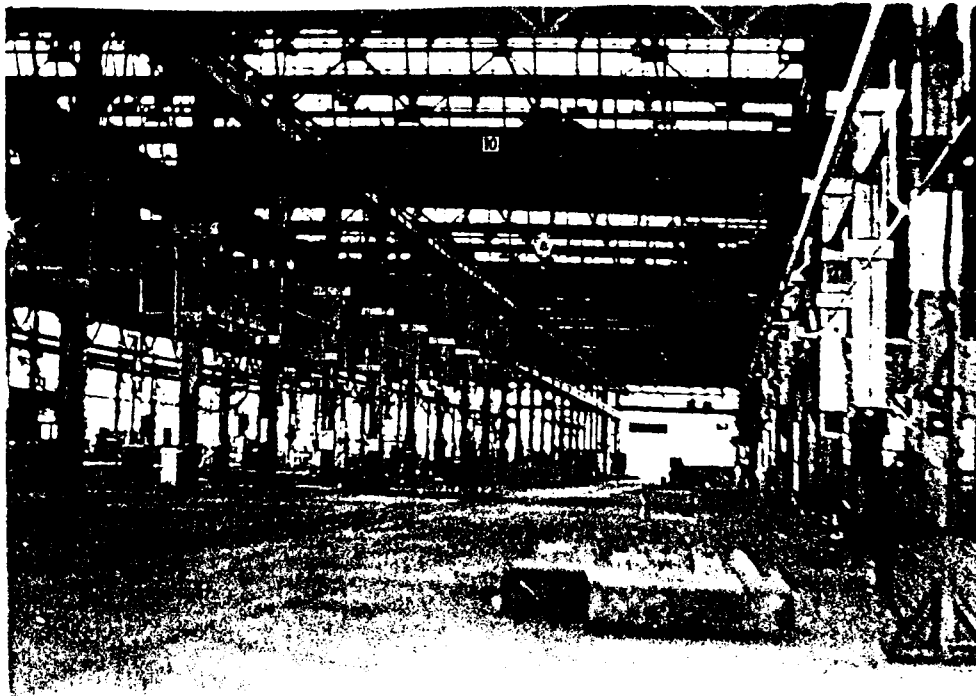


Historic Photo 9. West elevation of the main manufacturing plant showing its large glass curtain wall. The photograph was taken for a 1963 appraisal.

344 Vulcan Street—the former Farrel Birmingham Company



Historic Photo 10. A view of the east elevation of the main factory building showing the powerhouse and electrical building at right. The photograph was taken for a 1963 appraisal.



Historic Photo 11. An interior view of the former plant. The factory had a saw-tooth roof system.