

PEARCE MANUFACTURING COMPANY  
Harrison Avenue West at Wilkens  
Latrobe  
Westmoreland County  
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-291

HAER  
PA  
65-LAT,  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record  
National Park Service  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

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**Location:** Harrison Avenue West at Wilkens, Latrobe, Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania

**Date of Construction:** ca. 1880s, 1904

**Builder:** unknown

**Present Owner:** Opco Company

**Present Use:** manufacturing

**Significance:** Originally a factory for the manufacture of agricultural implements, from 1904 the structures housed the Pearce Manufacturing Company, manufacturer of wool blankets. The Pearce Company, one of the nation's oldest wool blanket makers, was founded in 1805 in Harmony, Pennsylvania as part of the Rappite community's manufacturing and residential complex in Butler County, Pennsylvania. In 1885 the company moved to Greenville and from there to Latrobe in Westmoreland County.

**Project Information:** In February, 1987, the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) and the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) began a multi-year historical and architectural documentation project in southwestern Pennsylvania. Carried out in conjunction with America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), HAER undertook a comprehensive inventory of Westmoreland County to identify the region's surviving historic engineering works and industrial resources.

**Compiler:** Gray Fitzsimons and Kenneth Rose, Editors

**DESCRIPTION:** The Pearce Manufacturing Company complex includes one large building composed of the original three main buildings and the wool store house. These structures are now all interconnected with new additions. The maintenance house (now a garage) and a twenty-two hay wooden garage are also extant. The central office building with octagonal tower, the boiler house and tanks have been demolished. Factory A: first floor for weaving, second floor for mule spinning, third floor for carding and card grinding; red brick, common bond with brick buttresses; three stories; measures 200' x 50'; flat roof with rafters; rubble stone foundation; arched windows with double and triple brick voussoirs; corbelling above bays and fret work at eaves. Storage and Shipping B: first floor for shipping, warping and dressing; second and third floors for storage; red brick, common bond with brick buttresses; measures 200' x 50'; addition of one story. Dying Rooms E: red brick, common bond; one story; measures 165' x 50'; addition of one story; flat roof; corbelling at eaves and over bays; decorative brick work at eaves' arched windows with double brick voussoirs. Maintenance/Garage: red brick, common bond; one story; measures 28' x 20'; hipped roof; arched windows with double brick voussoirs. Wool Storage House: connected to main building by new one-story addition; red brick, common bond; one-and-a-half stories; metal roof; remodeled when Strike-a-light Corporation used the building. Interior: the structural systems of the main buildings were originally timber post-and-beam construction and were reinforced ca. 1940 with iron beams and steel Belgian and Fink trusses. No original machinery is extant. Garage: timber; multipaned windows on double garage doors; twenty-two bays; asphalt roof. Houses: On the south side of Harrison Avenue are two, two-story frame houses with rubble stone foundations that were part of the original complex.

The Opco Company now uses the buildings for the production of polystyrene boxes and insulation. The garage, once an important perquisite for the workers, is abandoned. When repair work was completed to the floor of the wool storage house, brick beehive coke ovens were found.

**HISTORY:** The Pearce Manufacturing Company moved to Latrobe in 1904 after a fire destroyed its facilities in Greenville. Founded by the Harmonite Society, the Pearce Company had established the oldest blanket mill in America at Harmony, Pennsylvania. The firm maintained its facilities there from 1805 until 1884, when Pearce moved to Greenville. The wool for Pearce's primary product, the all-wool blanket, came primarily from the Latrobe vicinity, a major sheep producing area. In 1904 the company relocated in Latrobe, occupying the factory of a former agricultural implements manufacturer. Joseph Pearce was president of the Pearce company from 1904 until 1928, at which time he was succeeded by his son, Joseph, and the Woolrich Company acquired the firm. The firm expanded its product line during the 1930s to include felt goods, worsted, and other woolen products. Woolrich made men's topcoats, overcoats and sports wear and ladies' and children's jackets. The firm employed 150 workers (seventy-three men and seventy-seven women) in 1916, 102 workers (fifty-five men and forty-seven women) in 1919, 201 workers in 1935 and 237 in 1947. Toyad Corporation of Pittsburgh, a producer of rubber products, occupied the Pearce facility after the firm moved to New York state.

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