



Photo: Melissa Dirr Gengler/NPS

NHL Executive Summary

Name of Property:	Watkins Mill
City, State:	Lawson, Missouri
Period of Significance:	1860-1886
NHL Criteria:	1
NHL Theme:	V. Developing the American Economy 1. Extraction and Production
Previous Recognition:	1966 National Historic Landmark (concurrent National Register) 1976 and 1983 National Historic Landmark documentation Historic American Buildings Survey Historic American Engineering Record MO-1
National Historic Context:	V. Developing the American Economy

NHL Significance:

- Located near Lawson in Clay County, Missouri, Watkins Mill produced wool yarn and fabric from 1860-1886. The period of national significance encompasses construction of the mill and extends through 1886, when a key piece of machinery ceased to function and stunted fabric production at the mill.
- Watkins Mill is nationally significant under Criterion 1 for its association with the theme Developing the American Economy in the area of Industry. The property captures the small-scale industrial process of



the period through spatial relationships between residential, social, and mill functions. Its built environment reflects the interrelationship between family life and industrial production, contributing to knowledge and understanding of mill operations and functions that supported the labor force at the mill.

- The national significance of the mill is further expressed in the material culture of a fully integrated system to create wool fabric. The historic district tells a story of the wool milling process that is singular in the United States. The site combines a factory on the farm with its collection of outbuildings, archeological evidence of non-extant buildings, and an intact farm landscape. Complimented by an intact collection of wool milling machinery from the 1860s and 1870s, the largely self-sufficient complex outstandingly represents the small-scale milling process.

Integrity:

- Contributing resources to Watkins Mill remain in their historic locations and retain much of their original design intent, including spatial relationships and circulation patterns. Architectural features in the main residence, for example, include the imported balcony railing and interior curved wood stair. Its floorplan purposefully separates distinct living spaces by means multiple stairs.
- Workmanship is evident in the building materials manufactured or harvested on site.
- Material culture, including some original furnishings and the extensive collection of machinery in the mill building, contributes to the understanding of the factory.
- Integrity of setting, feeling, and association at Watkins Mill is expressed through the spatial relationships of buildings and foundations. The lack of modern intrusions offers a sense of time and place that contributes to the experience at the Mill.
- The rural historic landscape includes Osage orange trees used to divide fields, reflecting operation of the family farm during the period of significance. Orchards, family gardens, and wooded lands replicate the areas present during the period of national significance.
- Related to the factory on the farm are the Mount Vernon Missionary Baptist Church and Franklin School. Constructed using brick from the Watkins kilns on site, both buildings retain original architectural features such as the school's octagonal plan and cupola.

Owner of Property: Missouri Department of Natural Resources, Division of State Parks

Acres of Property: 560 acres

Origins of Nomination: This update was completed on behalf of the National Park Service Midwest Regional Office and the Watkins Mill State Park and State Historic Site, Missouri Department of Natural Resources. This documentation confirms the NHL boundary, identifies contributing and non-contributing resources, provides more complete resource descriptions, and updates the discussion of national significance in accordance with current scholarship and NHL guidelines. The NHL boundary and period of significance remain the same as in previous documentation.



Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: Expanding the documentation to explore updated historic contexts and provide a more extensive significance statement and property descriptions will provide the state historic site with a more complete, up-to-date understanding of the property and aid in preservation planning and interpretive materials.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None known.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of January 29, 2024):

- Kim Dillon, Chief, Cultural Resource Management Section, Division of State Parks, Missouri Department of Natural Resources
- Josh Hurlbert, Missouri State Representative, District 8
- Kitty Brinkman, Member, Clay County Museum and Historical Society (via email)
- Tony Meyers, President, Clay County Archives and Historical Library (via email)
- Richard Kline, Treasurer, on behalf of the Executive Committee, Clay County Museum and Historical Society (via email)
- Barbara E. and Stephen Estabrook (via email)
- Chery Carr Holtman, Curator, Clay County Museum and Historical Society (via email)
- Bryan Ivlow (via email)
- David P. Ross Chairman, Watkins Mill Association (via email)
- Kathy Duncan, Head of Operations, Excelsior Springs Museum & Archives (via email)
- Steve Olson, Volunteer, Clay County Archives (via email)
- Kathleen Bird, Board Member, Clay County Archives and Historical Library (via email)
- Betty Bissell, Historic Preservation Chair, Community Development Department Planning and Zoning, City of Excelsior Springs, MO
- Resolution of Support, City of Excelsior Springs, MO
- Toni Prawl, State Historic Preservation Office Director and Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Missouri Department of Natural Resources (rec'vd after meeting)

Landmarks Committee Comments:

- Clarify historic use of the name Bethany Plantation.
- Affirm dates and sources regarding role of slavery at the property. Emphasize that enslaved people's contributions and relationship to the land and industry were integral and warrant future research.
- Cite 1847 Missouri state law that made it illegal to educate enslaved people.
- Clarify extent of cotton cloth production at this location.
- Explore source of the name "Smoky Row."

Landmarks Committee Recommendation: The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the acceptance of the NHL updated documentation for the Watkins Mill National Historic Landmark in Lawson, Missouri, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

Advisory Board Recommendation: The National Park System Advisory Board recommends to the Secretary of the Interior the acceptance of the updated documentation for the Watkins Mill National Historic Landmark located in Lawson, Missouri.