



NHL Executive Summary



Name of Property:	Charleston Cigar Factory
City, State:	Charleston, South Carolina
Period of Significance:	October 22, 1945 – March 30, 1946
NHL Criteria:	1
NHL Theme:	V. Developing the American Economy 4. Worker and Work Culture 5. Labor Organizations and Protests
Previous Recognition:	1980 National Register of Historic Places
National Historic Context:	<i>Labor History in the United States: A National Historic Landmark Theme Study</i>

NHL Significance:

- The Charleston Cigar Factory (ca. 1882), historically known as the American Cigar Company Building, is nationally significant under NHL Criterion 1 for its association with a strike led by African American women during the winter of 1945-46. This strike was highly illustrative of the post-World War II national strike wave, which was the largest in the history of the labor movement in the United States.
- As a work stoppage catalyzed by racial discrimination in pay, working conditions, and treatment on the job, the strike formed a nexus between the labor and civil rights movements, an intersection that shaped the trajectory of both labor and civil rights activism during the mid-twentieth century.
- In Charleston, the Cigar Factory Strike also served as a critical precursor to a large-scale campaign that the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) initiated in 1946 to organize Black and White southern workers (Operation Dixie).
- Workers who participated in the strike regularly sang the song “We Will Overcome,” a modified version of the church song “I’ll Overcome Someday.” They introduced the song to labor activists at Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee where it was subsequently adapted into the civil rights anthem “We Shall Overcome.”



Integrity:

- As a former industrial property that is currently used as a commercial and educational facility, the factory underwent significant alterations in the 1930s, 1960s-1980s (with many alterations occurring in 1979), 2004, and again in 2013-15.
- The property maintains an overall high degree of integrity from its period of significance, with the main mill building and all associated additions from the period of significance remaining extant. The factory is bounded by all streets from its period of construction, and little has changed in terms of its orientation to the surrounding urban infrastructure.
- Currently, some areas of interior open space have been subdivided to accommodate different commercial tenants. The most recent renovations also removed nonhistoric interior features such as drop ceilings. This restored the open ceilings and visibility of the girders and upper flooring common among mills of slow-burn heavy timber construction of the late nineteenth century.
- Many of the recent alterations have removed noncontributing resources on the exterior as well and have restored historical features. The current property owners have replaced all nonhistoric replacement windows and many brick infilled openings, which has restored the fenestration to original size.

Owner of Property: Wecco Development, LLC

Acreage of Property: 4 acres

Origins of Nomination: The property is listed under the National Historic Landmarks Study List in *Labor History in the United States*. The researcher initiated the letter of inquiry for the property to Interior Region 2, which funded the nomination through a cooperative agreement with the Organization of American Historians.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: This property will shed important light on the intersections between the labor movement and the civil rights movement, in addition to highlighting historical actors—namely African American women—who have previously been largely overlooked in the historiography of the labor movement in the United States.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: As a site that has undergone adaptive reuse, the historical integrity of the property's interior has been altered.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of May 21, 2024):

- Anna-Catherine Carroll, Manager of Preservation Initiatives, Preservation Society of Charleston
- Kiernan W. Taylor, Associate Professor of History, The Citadel

Landmarks Committee Comments:

- Add information regarding Albert Tindley, composer of “I’ll Overcome Someday,” and other properties related to the song such as Tindley Temple United Methodist Church (PA) and Highlander Folk School (TN)
- Mention other sites related to Civil Rights and labor history as noted in the meeting minutes



Landmarks Committee Recommendation: The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of the Charleston Cigar Factory in Charleston, South Carolina, as a National Historic Landmark, 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 designation of the Charleston Cigar Factory in Charleston, South Carolina, as a National Historic Landmark.