Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Conrad Rice Mill is located on Ann Street in a working class residential area of New Iberia. The present structure occupies some 10,000 square feet of ground space. It was built in three sections, beginning in 1914. The original section consisted of a two-story structure in front with a three-story rear structure directly behind it. In 1917 the three-story rear structure was extended sideways or northward. In 1930 a two-story storage building was erected to the south of the original structure. At the rear of this building is a gable roof tower which is part of a rice drying mechanism. The rice drying equipment is original to the building and operates to this day. At the front of the building is a covered area where trucks deliver rice to be processed. It contains a hopper into which rice is dumped, a scale for weighing the loaded trucks, and a hoist. The hoist is left over from the days before dump trucks had hydraulic lifts.

Much of the present rice milling process takes place in the 1914-1917 building. Operations conducted here include:

* 1. the separating out of immature (green) grains of rice;

2. the husking of mature grains;

* 3. the step-by-step removal of the bran coating;

4. the application of a protein mixture to the clean grains,

* 5, the grading of rice into categories according to whether the grains are broken or whole;

* 6. the bagging and labeling of the processed rice;

* 7. the shipping of the bagged rice by means of the original carts and the original loading dock.

* Indicates operations which are conducted with old machinery or old equipment,

All three parts of the rice mill are constructed of heavy timbers with corrugated siding of galvanized iron. Most vertical supports are 6" by 6" with angle braces framing into the beams. Vertical supports are heavier in areas where machines are mounted. In a few places the heavy tongue and groove floorboards have been reinforced with steel plates.

The most noteworthy aspect of the mill is the system of power transmission in the 1914-1917 portion. All of the older individual machines are run by means of a central power source. The central engine turns a system of rotating steel shafts which run throughout the building. These shafts have pulleys with leather belts attached. The belts run between the rotating shafts to turn machines. In some cases shafts turn other shafts by means of leather belts. Rotating shafts are secured to the vertical structural members by means of bolted bearings. Shafts run either along the tops or the bottoms of the walls, never in the middle. Leather belt pulleys vary in size from a few inches to several feet in diameter. At one time the main power source was a steam engine, but this has been replaced by an electric motor. The rice is moved through the various processing operations by means of metal pipes which work by means of gravity feed.

Little of the structure has been replaced or altered. A side porch has been enclosed for storage, and a small amount of the siding has been replaced in kind due to rust. Throughout the mill the interior retains its cavernous, crowded, and scaffolding-like character.

Assessment of Integrity:

As has already been mentioned, the structure itself has only been minimally altered. Some of the original machinery is no longer in use. More importantly, the steam engine which originally drove the machinery has been lost. However, this has not lowered the value of the Conrad Rice Mill as an example of a belt drive factory. Most comparable examples have also lost their original power plants. It would not have been possible to continue to operate the mill under steam power. Moreover, the mill's significance is based on the belt drive system itself, not the source of power.

SUMMARY PARAGRAPH:

The Conrad Rice Mill (1914, 1917, 1930) consists of a pair of large, 2-3 story, frame, metal sided structures. Located in a working class residential area, the mill has been altered very little.

Specific dates 1914-1917-1930
Builder/Architect Phillip A. Conrad, Builder

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)
Criteria A and C

The Conrad Rice Mill is significant on the state level in the area of engineering because it represents a type of factory which was once common and is now rapidly disappearing. According to Robert Vogel, Engineering Historian of the Smithsonian Institution, the rotating shaft and belt drive system of power transmission was the "backbone" of American industry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Beginning in about 1900 factories began to introduce the modern system in which each machine operates under its own power. Today less than one percent of American factories currently in production still operate under the shaft and belt drive system. Even these are disappearing year by year. The Conrad Rice Mill is extremely important in this regard because it still operates under the shaft and belt drive system and will continue to do so, both as a production facility and as a museum. It will therefore continue to exemplify a production system which has all but faded into the past.

The Conrad Rice Mill is also locally significant in the area of industry because of the role it has played in the history of rice production in Iberia Parish (which was and is second only to sugar). Before it was built, local rice growers had to ship their crops to New Orleans for milling. Therefore, its construction was a great step forward for rice producers in the parish. At the height of production there were a total of three mills in Iberia Parish. Today the Conrad Mill is the only one which remains. It is probably the most important visual reminder of the history of rice production in Iberia Parish.

SUMMARY PARAGRAPH:

The Conrad Rice Mill is of statewide significance in the area of engineering and of local significance in the area of industry, as follows:

(1) It is significant on the state level in the area of engineering because it is a rare surviving example of a factory operated using the belt drive power transmission system.

(2) It is locally significant in the area of industry because of its historic role in the production of rice in Iberia Parish.

<u>Level of Significance:</u>

A word of explanation is required regarding the designation of engineering significance on the state level. Although the Conrad Rice Mill is discussed within the context of the nation, the State Historic Preservation Office does not feel it can adequately prove national significance. Such an attempt would require an in-depth survey and analysis of extant belt driven factories throughout the country. It is our general feeling that the Conrad Rice Mill is only an average example nationwide.

Statistics do not exist regarding the exact number of belt driven factories remaining in Louisiana; however, the State Historic Preservation Office does feel that one is on safe ground in asserting that the Conrad Rice Mill is a very rare survivor of its type within the state.

Given the above, we felt it best to nominate the mill for engineering significance on the state level.

Also, it will be noted that the mill is of statewide significance in the area of engineering and of local significance in the area of industry. "State" is checked in Item 12 because in cases where two levels of significance are involved, the standard procedure is to check the higher of the two.

Major Bibliographical References

Phone interview with Robert Vogel, Engineering Historian, Smithsonian Institution. October 19, 1981.

Research Report Prepared by Applicant. Copy located in Conrad Rice Mill National Register File, Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office.