

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

FILE

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name General Cigar Company
other names/site number 163-196-53416

2. Location

street & number 223 NW 2nd Street N/A not for publication
city or town Evansville N/A vicinity
state Indiana code IN county Vanderburgh code 163 zip code 47708

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 1/25/00
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Indiana Department of Natural Resources
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:)	_____	_____

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property (Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

- private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal

- building, district, site, structure, object

Table with columns: Contributing, Noncontributing, buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total. Values: 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0.

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

INDUST/PROC/EXTR: Manufacturing Facility

VACANT

Not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

19th & 20th c. AMER.:

OTHER: Arts and Crafts

foundation STONE: Limestone

walls BRICK

roof ASPHALT

other WOOD

METAL

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY _____

SOCIAL HISTORY _____

Period of Significance

1902 - 1949 _____

Significant Dates

1902 _____

1923 _____

1929 _____

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A _____

Cultural Affiliation

N/A _____

Architect/Builder

Harry Boyle and Company _____

Neucks, Alfred E. _____

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Evansville Downtown Development Corp.; The Central Library; The
Willard Library

General Cigar Company _____
Name of Property

Vanderburgh _____ IN _____
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1

1	6	4	4	9	5	0	0	4	2	0	2	7	8	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

3

Zone	Easting				Northing									

2

Zone	Easting				Northing									

4

Zone	Easting				Northing									

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kristen Brennan
organization Preservation Development Inc. date 6/30/99
street & number 400 West 7th Street, Suite 110 telephone 812-336-2065
city or town Bloomington state IN zip code 47404

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white** photographs of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Mantis Corporation
street & number 7424 Darmstadt Road telephone 812-333-7731
city or town Evansville state IN zip code 47710

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The General Cigar Company, Vanderburgh County, Indiana

Section 7 Page 1

Location:

The General Cigar Company building is a three-story, L-shaped, red-brick bearing wall building on a raised basement on a corner lot with facades of two different periods, a 1902 facade whose address is 205 Court Street, and a 1929 facade at 223 NW 2nd Street. The 1902 building has no foundation distinct from the load bearing brick wall, while the 1929 portion sits on a dressed limestone block foundation.

Exterior:

The **223 NW 2nd Street facade** (photos 1 and 2) is that of a three and a half story commercial building with steel ventilator windows, a decorative parapet with 4 merlons, limestone inserts and patterned brickwork, and a stretcher bond veneer of red brick. The first floor fenestration originally included a wide display window that was replaced with 4 single pane windows in the 1950s. The entry door is a commercial aluminum framed, glass door with wide sidelights and is located at the far north corner of the first floor. The second floor fenestration is original 20-pane steel ventilator -sash. The third floor windows were removed and the openings bricked-in at an unknown date. The basement originally contained 5 steel mesh covered 12-pane steel ventilator -sash windows, although the central window has been replaced with a two pane steel frame window. Signage from the most recent occupants occupies the space above the door and between the first and second story windows above the original display window.

The **205 Court Street elevation** (photos 3, 4 and 7) clearly shows the two eras of building – the 1929 facade with its stretcher bond veneer and rectangular windows, and the 1902 portion with its 5:1 common bond and arched lintels. The corner parapet is carried around from the front with the same keyed limestone insert. The decorative brickwork motifs from the front are repeated in the parapet. The original entrance is located at ground level of the 1929 section in place of the second and third windows from the left, and has a wide shouldered architrave limestone surround with keystone. The windows have limestone sills and no lintels on the first two floors, while the third story openings are topped by a brick soldier course which runs the length of the 1929 section. The basement windows are the same as on the 1929 facade with two replacements and one unit covered over. On the first floor, all but one window are 1950s single pane replacements. The window left of the entrance and all the second floor windows are the original 20-pane steel ventilator -sash. On the third floor every other window has been bricked in or replaced with a shorter horizontal, four pane center-pivot, steel window.

The rear 1902 portion of the building reveals two colors of brick indicating that the third floor was added to the original two story factory in 1929, but careful attention was paid to repeat exactly the window sizes and lintel patterns from the second floor. Each of the 11 windows has

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The General Cigar Company, Vanderburgh County, Indiana

Section 7 Page 2

segmentally-arched lintels of three header rows of brick, and limestone sills. The window sash is wood double hung with 8/8 in the basement, 12/12 on the first floor, and 8/8 on the second and third floors. Most of the basement sash, all of the third floor sash and one second floor window are covered on the exterior with painted plywood. The 1902 portion of the building is held together with tie rods -- 12 between each first floor arched lintel, 9 on the second floor spaced evenly above the windows, and 16 above the third floor windows.

The **rear of the 1902** portion (far right photo 6) has four arched window openings per floor, each containing a pair of double hung, wood windows (9/9 on the first floor, 6/6 on the second floor). The basement and third floor windows are covered on the exterior with painted plywood. The parapet steps down twice to the southeast with red tile coping.

The **southeast elevation of the 1902** section (right center photo 6, far right photo 5, photo 8 and right photo 9) originally contained 11 openings on each of the three floors and basement, but the 1929 addition of a loading dock covered the southwestern four openings on the basement and first floors. The brick bonding and fenestration is the same as the opposite elevation and the opposing ends of the tie rods are visible. There are door openings leading to a steel fire escape beginning on the third floor in place of the sixth window (from the south), leading down a set of stairs around a chimney to a door in place of the ninth window on the second floor and continuing north to the ground at the north corner of the building. The second floor opening is proportional to the rest of the windows, indicating that this was the terminus of an earlier fire escape when the building was only two stories high. The door from the newer third floor is a modern 6'-8" door without the gesture of an arched lintel. From the bottom of the second floor fire escape to the top of the basement window, a 3' wide section of the wall has been re-bricked. The third floor windows are covered with painted plywood. Only one window -- a two pane, vertically divided steel framed window which is not original -- remains exposed in the basement story, the remainder of the openings have either been filled with brick or covered with painted plywood. Two chimneys approximately 3' square rise from the ground level half a story above the roofline. The chimney to the north is made with the same brick as the 1902 section of the building and is located between the eighth and ninth windows (counting from the south). The top of the chimney flares out in a corbel four rows high. The second chimney is located at the intersection of the 1929 and 1902 buildings, was constructed in 1929, has a sheet metal cap, and is slightly taller than the original chimney.

The building's service elevator and staircase (center photo 5) are located at the heart of the 1929 portion of the building. The elevator shaft rises above the roof next to the newer chimney and has tile coping. Next to the elevator shaft the interior walls of the recessed area have one, 12 pane steel ventilator window on each of the second and third floors. On the first

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The General Cigar Company, Vanderburgh County, Indiana

Section 7 Page 3

floor a steel entrance door opens south into the main area of the factory. A poured concrete loading dock at floor level of the first floor was added after the period of significance by the Pro-Tex-All Corporation. A steel framed, sheet metal roof covers the loading area and is supported by round steel posts.

The **northeast rear elevation of the 1929** section of the building (left center photo 6, far left photo 5 and left photo 10) has one fenestration opening per floor with the exception of the two, one pane high by three pane wide steel basement windows. The second floor window has the only original steel ventilator window, a 30 pane window of which the central 12 panels move in two tilting panels. The first and third floor windows are the more recent windows described in the "window" section below.

The **southeast elevation of the 1929** section of the building (far left photo 6) is composed of two different types of brick -- the higher grade dark brick laid in a stretcher bond wraps around from the facade and changes to a lower grade of commercial brick for the remaining three quarters of the building. The facade wrap-around has a limestone cap and repeats the decorative elements of the facade in the front corner. The fenestration is irregular with a vertical line of 12 pane steel with six panel central pivot sash windows (one per floor) approximately two thirds of the distance from the street to the rear. The second floor contains five openings which originally held 20 pane steel sash ventilator windows, all located to the south of the narrow window, but that have now been removed and filled with brick. The third floor has only one additional 16 pane steel window to the north of the narrow window. Between these two, third floor windows a small parapet rises up indicating the interior location of a brick bearing wall.

Interior:

Framing: The floor plan is an open industrial plan with small rooms partitioned off for office, laboratory, and storage use at the northern most end and around the central stairway. The 1929 portion of the building illustrates an early combination of steel and wood framing techniques. Steel I-beams are used for the load bearing joists and at the intersection of the new and old buildings, but the load bearing posts are still wood as are the common floor joists and trusses. The 1902 section of the building uses only wood framing. This early section of the building has a decorative stepped corbeling between each of the windows on the first and second floors (left photos 12 and 14). On the first floor and second floors, this corbeling supports a 6" x 15" beam above the windows on which the floor joists rest or are lap jointed. On the third floor the corbeling disappears and the ceiling joists are pocketed into the brick wall. The 1929 section has no decorative interior brickwork and uses brick pockets to support the floor joists on all floors. The floor decking is tongue and groove hardwood throughout the building, although the

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The General Cigar Company, Vanderburgh County, Indiana

Section 7 Page 4

decking has been covered with hardwood finish flooring in the 1929 portion of all three floors (which in turn was covered with non-historic tile on the second floor), and with non-historic tile in the 1902 section.

First Floor: The current front door is located on the 2nd Street facade at the far southwestern corner of the building. One enters a small vestibule at ground level. A short set of stairs brings one up to the main floor into an area most recently used as a sales room. The recycled maple, 3" floorboards are laid diagonally throughout the front area of the building. The interior walls are painted brick. The windows have no interior trim other than sills added by the Pro-Tex-All Company after 1958. The supporting columns, second floor joists, and mechanical systems are exposed and painted. Three 12" x 12" square, chamfered wood columns support metal I-beams which run from the facade to the rear dividing wall or joist system. The three I-beams are spanned by 3" x 8" wood joists running parallel to the facade. These joists are pocketed into the brick wall at the edges of the buildings with second floor tongue and groove floorboards visible from below. Eight foot high 2"x4" partition walls were added in a recent renovation. The first floor of the 1902 portion of the building contains some non-historic material. Several layers of tile flooring have been installed, most recently a skid-proof rubber tile. The wood columns were encased in wooden trim, a drop ceiling, a sprinkler system, and florescent lighting added. A small eight foot high, L-shaped partition wall was added near the elevator, and a built-in work surface constructed between two central columns. The interior walls are painted brick. A staircase ascends in the northwest direction from the centerline of the building directly opposite the elevator doors. The staircase, installed during the 1929 renovation is eight feet wide and on the south side shares a wall with a narrow shelf-lined room that replaced the 1929 entrance to the building (205 Court Street). A small closet has been framed in under the lower half of the staircase with a door opening to the northwest.

Second Floor: The wide staircase from the first floor is surrounded by a three foot high framed wall and capped on the southeast half for safety purposes. The flooring in the 1902 section is a 12" vinyl tile, and in the 1929 section the same 3" diagonal hardwood as the first floor. All framing and mechanicals are exposed and painted white. The second floor plan is open, with two rooms partitioned off in the 1902 section of the building, and one partitioned from the large space in the 1929 section, in addition to the two rooms on the north side of the bearing wall behind the staircase and elevator. The 1902 northwest corner room is approximately 20' x 20' and is accessed by a 36" door from the southeast. The exterior walls are painted brick, the interior walls are 2"x4", and of gypsum board construction. The northeast corner room is the same with a sliding steel door facing southwest. The 1929 section contains a storage room partitioned by a floor to ceiling, 2"x4" and gypsum board (with battens) wall and is located in the northeastern corner of the large space adjacent to the interior brick bearing wall. The two rooms

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The General Cigar Company, Vanderburgh County, Indiana

Section 7 Page 5

original to the 1929 floor plan located north of the interior bearing wall have a built-in wooden workbench, a concrete floor and storage shelving.

The third floor joists system in the 1929 section of the building consists of a single I-beam running parallel to the facade supported by three 12"x12" square wood columns. From the steel I-beam, 6"x12" oak joists run to pockets in the brick walls. The framing from the interior bearing wall to the 1902 section runs perpendicular to the front framing also consisting of a central I-beam and wood joists. Each floor joist spans half the width of the building.

The second floor service staircase has two metal fire doors on overhead roller hangers, one opening to the south and one to the west.

Third Floor: The third floor is composed of a circa 1923 addition to the original 1902 factory and the third floor of the 1929 addition. The finishes, framing, and flooring are identical to the second floor with the exception of differences noted elsewhere. There are no additional rooms partitioned out of the original space.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The General Cigar Company, Vanderburgh County, Indiana

Section 8 Page 6

The General Cigar Company building is significant under Criterion A as the only surviving building representative of Evansville's large nineteenth and twentieth century cigar manufacturing industry. The General Cigar Company, operating in the building between 1919 and 1958, was the last company in the mid-western United States to produce hand rolled cigars. The General Cigar Company was also a major employer of women in Evansville, training 50 women each year in a paid, two month apprenticeship in order to maintain a skilled workforce of over 450 - 1000 employees.

Located at the corner of NW 2nd Street (historically Upper Second Street) and Court Street (historically Division Street), close to the business district and two blocks from the river front during the era of river boat traffic, the site was occupied by several important historic businesses prior to the General Cigar Company. Between 1876 and 1884 the corner of Upper Second and Division Street was the site of the Allen House Hotel, a hotel and boarding house owned by the widow Mrs. L. J. Steedman (City Directory). Just two blocks from the bustling waterfront, the site was an ideal location for a hotel. By 1895 a Sanborn map documents, at the corner of Upper 2nd and Court Streets, a 4-story brick structure out of which the Evansville Manufacturer's Association operated (Sanborn Fire Insurance Company Map). Between 1895 and 1917 this building housed several different businesses including: the Crescent City Shoe Company (1903-1905), the Indiana Shoe Company (1905-1908), Hohenstien-Hartmetz Furniture Company (1909-1915), and Jensen's Factory Store (1916-1917). In 1918 John, Phillip, and Edward Grill opened the Grill Cigar Company which did business at 2-4 NW Second Street (the historic address) until it was purchased by the General Cigar Company (based in New York City) in late 1919 (City Directory).

The rear portion of the building was constructed as a two-story addition in 1902 by the Crescent City Shoe Company (Vanderburgh County Interim Report survey card completed by Nancy Long). At an unknown date, possibly 1923 when the Evansville Courier mentions that designer Alfred E. Neucks was hired to make improvements to the General Cigar Company building, a third story was added to the rear portion of the building. Between 1920 and 1924, the Evansville City Directories list the General Cigar Company at 2-4 NW Second Street. For the next three years, 1925-28, there is no listing for a building at the 2-4 NW 2nd Street address, possibly due to the reconstruction of the 2nd Street portion of the General Cigar Company Building. A new structure was built on the southwest half of the block (replacing the Manufacturer's Association Building, but not the 1902 Crescent Shoe Company's addition) with its decorative facade fronting NW 2nd Street. The new address and functional entryway were located, however, at the new address of 205 Court Street. In June of 1929 a new department opened at the General Cigar company, adding 200 new employees, and bringing the total

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The General Cigar Company, Vanderburgh County, Indiana

Section 8 Page 7

employee count to 1000 women and girls. With the additional employees, the General Cigar Company produced 1,000,000 hand rolled cigars weekly (Evansville Courier).

The historic resources of downtown Evansville depict the growth and development of a late-19th century Midwestern commercial city. The village which became Evansville was founded by settlers of Scots-Irish stock in about 1815 as part of the western migration following the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812. The advantages of Evansville's particular site were two-fold: the Ohio River and a tributary waterway --Pigeon Creek -- had their confluence just down river of the village site which became Downtown, and a slight hill existed in the flood plain to protect the location from frequent flooding. Evansville remained a small town until mid century when an influx of industrious immigrants took advantage of the town's location near the confluence of three major rivers --the Ohio, Green, and Wabash -- to develop local resources into industries whose products were traded all over the United States. During the latter half of the nineteenth century Evansville was Indiana's second largest city with a booming manufacturing economy based on a favorable location on both a major railroad and waterway (Morlock).

Evansville's primary industries included the processing of agricultural products into foodstuffs, malt, and liquors, the processing of the abundant hardwood forests into lumber for shipment nationwide, as well as into furniture and farm implements, and the processing of leather and tobacco. In 1859 the tobacco and cigar industry employed 47 people: in 1889, 173; in 1904, 682 and by 1923, 2,830 people were producing \$7, 555,462 worth of tobacco products (Industries of Evansville). Evansville was situated directly across the river from an abundant source of Kentucky burly as well as within easy shipping distance of growing locations in southern Illinois and southeastern Missouri. Prior to the Civil War, New Orleans was a major tobacco processing city, and when the Mississippi River was closed to trade during the war, much of its trade was transferred north to Evansville. By the 1870s, cigar makers' organizations were officered largely by western men, under the influence of the Chicago labor center, according to Samuel Gompers. Prior to the Civil War, cigar makers were, as a rule, independent workmen. In every community where the demand for cigars was sufficient to warrant, the cigar maker worked and sold his own cigars directly to the public. "Rarely did he employ helpers and then not more than one or two journeymen. If the journeyman became dissatisfied for any reason, he needed but small capital to become his own employer. During the Civil War the government imposed an internal revenue tax on cigar work, granted permits to employer and employees, and the factory was bonded. Through this system the small shops were driven out of existence. And the factories developed." (Salvatore, pp37-38) The General Cigar Company was one of Evansville's four largest cigar manufacturing companies, accompanied by the Fendrich Cigar Factory, Metropolitan Cigar Company and the Sauer Brothers Tobacco Company (Morlock).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The General Cigar Company, Vanderburgh County, Indiana

Section 8 Page 8

The H. Fendrich Company, the first cigar company in Evansville, opened in 1855 on Main Street (Evansville Courier, 1969). German and Bohemian immigrants who came in great numbers to the Evansville area between 1870 and 1890 brought with them from their homelands knowledge of cigar making (Morlock). Samuel Gompers, a famous labor leader of the late nineteenth century, and founder of the American Federation of Labor, learned about the troubles faced by working people while employed as a cigar maker in New York City. In his autobiography he notes that in "1870 Bohemian cigar makers began to come (to the US) in appreciable numbers. In Bohemia cigar making was a government monopoly, and practically all the work was done by women." (Salvatore) While Gompers interpreted this as a threat to the newly formed male unions in New York City, the immigrants arriving in Evansville immediately found work in the rapidly expanding cigar factories. In all accounts of laborers in the Evansville cigar factories, the hand rolling and cigar assembly was performed by women.

In his oral history project, Images of America, Professor of History and Director of the Historic Southern Indiana Project, Darrel Bigham notes that "I've gotten the feeling from the women I talked to that it was a common practice if you were a single woman from a German-American family living on a farm to come to Evansville to work as either a domestic or to work at Fendrich (Cigar Company)." (Evansville Courier, 1969) The cigar company managers instituted paternalistic policies in an attempt to make their factories attractive and safe places for young unmarried women to find their first employment. The companies provided lunchrooms for employees, opened employee libraries, and ran apprenticeship programs to train rollers, guaranteeing lifetime employment to women who had completed the training despite leaves of absence for maternity or other child rearing responsibilities. In spite of this rare flexibility, the job was a difficult one, physically demanding and dirty. One ex-employee stated, "It was a dirty job, and we all would stink. You could smell a girl who worked in a cigar factory for a mile away." (Evansville Courier, 1969, p2)

The rooms were large and hot in the summer. In the addition built by the Crescent City Shoe Company, the large double hung windows of the General Cigar Company were ideal to provide cross-ventilation, and the 1929 building was equipped with large steel ventilator windows.

During the progressive era, a growing awareness about child labor abuses encouraged policies similar to the one in place at the General Cigar Company -- all women under the age of 18 had to go to school at least one day per week in order to keep their jobs with the company (Evansville Courier, 1969, pp1-2). Superintendent Georges Sigg stated "It is our aim to make our Evansville plant ideal from the standpoint of working conditions with every advantage of the modern industry towards [sic] employee welfare represented. All our employees are members of

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The General Cigar Company, Vanderburgh County, Indiana

Section 8 Page 9

our mutual benefit society an organization sponsored and promoted by the company.”
(Evansville Courier, 1969, p2) Citing a new refrigeration unit installed to guarantee a constant supply of cold drinking water, and new shade awnings installed during the 1929 renovation, Sigg was defending himself from the vocal critics of the cigar companies’ practice of hiring only non-union female employees. Many of Evansville’s other industries had strong unions, yet the cigar company employees were not unionized until the 1930s and 40s as the industry was already on the decline.

Although the locally grown tobacco was the impetus for the development of the cigar industry in Evansville, Americans quickly developed a taste for the mild flavor of Cuban tobacco. By 1941 at the peak of employment, the General Cigar Company made Robert Burns Panatela brand hand rolled cigars using Cuban tobacco and Sumatran wrappers (Evansville Courier, 1941). Georges Sigg, superintendent of the General Cigar Company ran an apprenticeship program every year which trained 50 women in the art of cigar rolling. In 1941, an observer reported:

To watch one of these girls wrap a cigar is to watch an art of high efficiency. The rough cigar, made up of carefully sorted imported filler tobacco, is passed to the hand wrapper. She has on her table a Sumatran half leaf which must be rolled with either the right or left hand, depending on the curve of the leaf. The roll is started with a fold-over, then smoothly and quickly rolled across a hardwood board until the other tip is covered. It is then trimmed with a specially curved knife and the end twisted and scaled. The entire action takes less than a minute... Many of the 450 employees are girls and a large number wear gold star pins as emblems of 5 years or more of service with the company (Evansville Courier, 1941).

By 1941 the General Cigar Company was the only company in the mid-west still manufacturing hand-rolled cigars. In an effort to compete with the growing popularity of cigarettes, most cigar manufacturers switched to mechanized production processes. Because a large number of Robert Burns Panatela cigars, the General Cigar Companies flagship cigar, had been exported to Europe, trade embargoes during WWII cut into the company’s cigar market. The company ended its hand rolling operations in 1958, closing the Evansville plant and moving production to a mechanized facility (Evansville Press, 1969).

The General Cigar Company building has undergone very few physical alterations since its days as an active production plant. The front portion of the first floor is the only portion of the building modernized by the addition of partitioning half-walls. The original fabric of both the 1902 and the 1929 buildings has been well preserved and the mechanical systems regularly maintained. In summary, the building is an excellent example of early nineteenth century industrial architecture, and was the site of several companies that played an important part in the economic and social development of Evansville.

United States Department of the Interior

National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

The General Cigar Company, Vanderburgh County, Indiana

Section 9 Page 10

Bigham, Darrel. Images of America: Evansville, IN. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 1998.

“Cigar Company To Be Closed by May 15th,” Evansville Courier, February 11, 1969.

“Cigar Ladies: Young Tri-State women supported their families by rolling tobacco.”
Evansville Courier, January 24, 1999. Pages C1-2.

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The General Cigar Company, Vanderburgh County, Indiana

Section 9 Page 11

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Primary location of additional data:

The Evansville Downtown Development Corporation. A private, non-profit downtown re-development organization located at 209 Main Street, Evansville, IN 47708.

The Central Library. The central library for the Evansville Public Library System, administered by the City of Evansville.

The Willard Library. A private library run by the Willard Foundation and open to the public. Evansville’s main repository for local history and genealogical information.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

The General Cigar Company, Vanderburgh County, Indiana

Section 10 Page 13

Verbal Boundary Description: The General Cigar Company property consists of lot # 120 of the original downtown Evansville plan. The lot is located on the northeast corner of Court (historically Division Street) and NW 2nd Streets, with 74' of frontage on NW 2nd Street and 149' - the length of the lot from 2nd Street to the alley - fronting Court Street.

Boundary Justification: The property boundaries are the boundaries established in 1929 by the General Cigar Company, and are the current boundaries of the property as recorded by its current owner, the Mantis Corporation.