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Recession Slowed Completion of Mill Number Six, Part Two of Two

The postcard reproduced here from the Gamache collection, reveals Mill Number Six, shortly after its completion in early 1908. Note the busy pedestrian traffic in Thread Mill Square.



Crowds watched the speedy construction of Mill Number Six with fascination, particularly when the Bishop Company employed a giant crane with a 70-foot mast and 68-foot boom. The work on the walls continued until January 7, 1908, when the mortar froze. A mild spell of weather followed, and the brickwork was completed before the end of January 1908. A well-known local firm,

Moriarty and Rafferty, were awarded the contract for the plumbing of the new mill.

The interior work began in early February 1908. However, ATCO deliberately slowed the progress. The textile industry was experiencing one of its regular cyclical downturns, and ATCO were forced to lay off workers and reduce the working week to four days a subsequent 10% pay cut in the summer of 1908 caused a two week long strike by the Company's 200 dresser tenders and spoolers. Some of the machinery, which ATCO had ordered to fill the new mill, was shipped to its Holyoke, Mass. mills as replacements for old plant, and a hold was put on the remainder.

The floors of the mill were laid with maple wood in March 1908. The new building was connected to Mill Number Five by the means of a three story high bridge, consisting of a steel frame covered with corrugated iron, replete with windows at each level, so access was made between the two mills on three levels (This was demolished when the two mills were connected in 1916). During April, 1908, the new mill was fitted with an automatic fire fighting system, and a large band stand and refreshment booths were erected in the center of the mill's first floor in preparation for a dedicatory ball.

A combined dedicatory and charity ball took place in the new Mill Number Six on Friday evening, April 24, 1908. The maple floor was waxed, and over 1,200 tickets were sold. The "gay throng of promenaders and spectators" were illuminated by temporary incandescent electric lights. The resultant profits were donated to the recently completed St. Joseph's Hospital on Jackson Street.

The mill lay empty for several weeks, slowed down by a strike and a recession in the domestic cotton thread trade. Production didn't commence until the late summer of 1908. The mill wasn't fully equipped until 1910, when a boom in the trade called for extra production. Eugene Stowell Boss, ATCO's Willimantic agent, had been criticized

for building such a large unused mill, and for adding an extra floor to the original design. He was vindicated, however, by the rush of orders which led ATCO to build a new bleach house in Willimantic in 1910. It was built directly opposite the Windham Textile & History Museum's building, and was demolished by Windham mills in March, 1995. Mills Five and Six were connected in 1916, and the concrete crosswalk, which connects Mill Number Five with Mill Number One, was built in 1917.