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## Mill Five Part of Landscape for Almost a Century, Part One of Two

As long as anyone can remember, the east end of Willimantic has been dominated by cotton mills. The red brick mills at the southern exit to the city will soon be but a memory. They are scheduled for demolition by the Windham Mills Corporation to provide parking spaces for visitors to the river walk and mill complex, and for employees in the new industries currently being located in the complex. This week and next we will take a brief look at Mill Number Five, a doomed Willimantic landmark.

Mill 5 pictured in 1901.



On October 12, 1900, the American Thread Company (ATCO) arranged a dedicatory ball for its new thread finishing mill (Mill Number Five) in Willimantic. British-based ATCO's first large capital investment in the United States since it had taken over New England's cotton thread spinning industry in 1898, in a deal which included the Willimantic Linen Company. The ball took place on the first floor and more than 1,500 people attended, dancing into the early hours to selections from Bizet's *Carmen*, performed by a top Hartford orchestra. Coincidentally, it was twenty years to the day, October 12, 1880, that the Willimantic Linen Company had dedicated its massive Mill Number Four, which was destroyed by fire in June, 1995.

In early 1899, shortly after ATCO took control of the Willimantic Linen Company's mills, it announced the end of cotton thread spinning in Mill Number Three. This old mill, on Recreation Park, was built in 1845 by the Welles Company and became part of the Willimantic Linen Company in 1877. It was demolished in 1926. ATCO transferred production to vacant space in the giant, but under-utilized, Mill Number Four, and announced its intention to build a new thread finishing mill in Willimantic.

Details of the new finishing mill were released in August, 1899. This building was originally referred to as the "new finishing mill," but it became more commonly known as Mill Number Five. The cotton thread manufacturing processes at the Willimantic plant subsequently took place in an east to west, single line direction. Cotton bales were

carded and spun in Mill Number Four, the most easterly mill. The thread passed through to the west end of Mill Number Two to the dyeing and bleaching department, and to the new mill to be finished into spool thread. Finally, it passed under a tunnel built under South Main Street to be stored and shipped in Mill Number One. ATCO's 1899 rationalization plan meant that raw cotton bales were manufactured into cotton thread in straight line processes covering one half mile. Samuel Green, ATCO's Chief Engineer, announced that the Willimantic mills would soon be producing fifty per cent more cotton thread.

The ground for the finishing mill was staked out in Mill Number Two's Yard during mid September, 1899. Eight bids were considered for the brick work, which was awarded to the lowest bidders, the H. Wales Line Company of Meriden Connecticut. ATCO's engineers dug test holes at this site, because the area had been filled with waste building material in 1864 during the construction of Mill Number Two. Gneiss stone was dug from this spot for its construction, and the resultant quarry was filled in to a depth of 20 feet. The fill was removed until the gneiss ledge was located, so that solid foundations could be laid. This operation added several months to the projected building date. The rare photograph of Mill Five featured on this page comes from the collection of the Spellman family. It was taken in 1901 looking toward the northwest and revealing many of the buildings recently demolished by Windham Mills for the River Walk.

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