

June 28, 1997

## Mill Number Six, 1907-1997 - Part One of Two

**The reproduced 1907 postcard view of Mill Six has been donated by Francois Gamache. Note the lack of window frames, and the two bricklayers at the top of the tower.**



The old American Thread Company's (ATCO) Mill Number Six will soon be no longer with us. It has graced Willimantic for 90 years. In March 1907, ATCO announced its intention to build a new thread finishing mill at one of its New England sites. Eugene Stowell Boss, the agent at ATCO's Willimantic mills, started a campaign to get it built in Willimantic. There was considerable competition from ATCO's

plants in Holyoke and Fall River, but Boss stole a march on his rivals, by surveying and staking out a plot of land just south of the 1899 finishing mill (Mill Number Five), as soon as the announcement had been made.

ATCO's New York-based executive committee toured the Willimantic site on April 26, 1907, and was greatly impressed with the proposed location and the plans that Boss had somewhat prematurely prepared. The committee suggested to Boss that they preferred the new mill's frontage to be parallel to Mill Five, and face the street. In this way ATCO could, at some time in the future, join the two mills to create more production space (The two mills were joined in 1916). The alignment entailed a slight re-routing of South Main Street in an easterly direction. Boss conferred with city officials, and the necessary work was done immediately. A map of the work was completed and sent to ATCO's headquarters in Manchester, England for approval. On June 29, 1907, Eugene Boss' lobbying and hard work came to fruition. To the disappointment of Holyoke and Fall River, ATCO announced that the mill would be built in Willimantic. Boss was greatly pleased, and forecast that when the new mill was finished and fully manned, ATCO's Willimantic plant would be employing some 3,000 hands in total.

ATCO planned to commence production in the new 330' X 75', four-storied Mill Number Six by January 1, 1908, and it asked building contractors to have all bids in by July 15, 1907. A firm from Worcester, Mass., the Bishop Company, was awarded the mill-building contract because they guaranteed a workforce large enough to complete the job within the specified time. At the beginning of August, the Worcester firm brought in a large number of Italian laborers, and paid them \$1.75 a day to dig out the mill's foundations. The Italian workers were housed in a temporary shantytown in the city, some 500 yards from the building site.

Mill Number Six was virtually identical to Mill Number Five, except that it was one

story higher, supplying an extra 111, 600 square feet of floor space. The brickwork commenced in September at the east end of the new mill. Foundation work continued at the west end, and dynamite was used to remove the solid gneiss stone, which had defeated the Italians' pick axes.

Continued next week.