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— HISTORY —

## The Hartsons: A mainstay of North Windham life

In the 1890s, today's quiet suburban community of North Windham was a thriving manufacturing village with its own railroad depot on the New York and New England Line.

The Spafford House Hotel, attractively located opposite the Natchaug River, attracted visitors from across the Northeast. Edwin Hall operated a prosperous thread-manufacturing mill, powered by the fast-flowing Natchaug. Charles Harris produced gold and silver jewelry in the village.

William Sibley manufactured woolen goods in the old Lincoln woolen mill, and Orin Colburn operated a grain mill adjacent to the railroad depot.

However, North Windham's most successful and long-lasting manufacturing operation was owned and operated by the Hartson family.

Thomas Hartson had arrived in Windham around 1700 and operated a saw and gristmill. His

descendants became successful farmers in Mansfield, where Daniel Hartson manufactured inkstands and combs from cattle horns in the years before the revolutionary war. Daniel's son Nathan married into Chaplin's Lincoln family, and had six children.

The youngest of those, Albert Hartson, was born in Mansfield in 1820, and in 1832 his father sent him to Willimantic to serve an apprenticeship in a cotton mill machine shop.

Albert Hartson's machinist skills were in much demand across antebellum, industrializing northeastern Connecticut, and in 1856 he was hired by Justin Swift to maintain and build machinery in his North Windham cotton mill. The mill burnt down in 1860, but



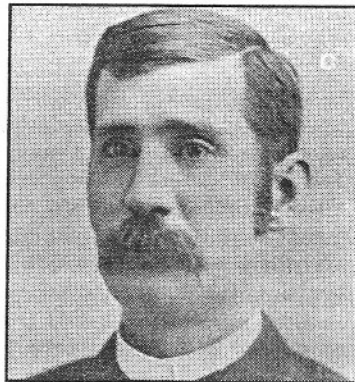
Tom  
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Swift rebuilt it and hired Hartson to equip it with machinery.

Edwin Hall acquired the mill, and leased a section of it to Hartson, who applied his machinist skills to manufacture supplies for the growing number of silk mills being established in Willimantic after the Civil War. Hartson was considered to be a man of "mechanical ingenuity and inventive ideas" and he patented a number of mechanical devices which were employed in silk mills across the United States.

Albert Hartson retired in 1882 and handed the lucrative mill supply business over to his son, Lester Monroe Hartson. Lester was born in Mansfield in 1845, and was introduced to his father's trade at an early age.

Shortly after taking over the business, Lester Hartson left the premises his father had rented in the Hall cotton mill, and built a manufacturing plant, several hundred yards away, powered by steam.

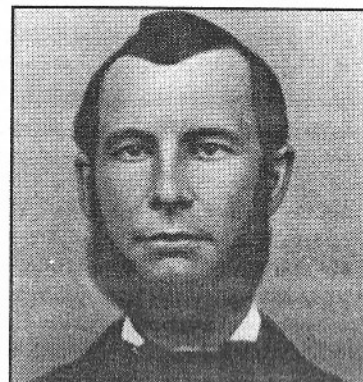


Lester M. Hartson

He expanded the range of products, and his team of machinists turned out steel silk bobbins, spinner flyers, travelers, spooler guides and wire risers.

The finished silk mill supplies were then transported from the plant by wagon, down Station Road to the North Windham railroad depot, where they were distributed across the United States and Canada.

Lester M. Hartson suffered



Albert Hartson

from ill health throughout his life, and he spent every winter in Florida. He prematurely died in June 1895 age 49.

Hartson's partner Harry Smith took over the business, and in 1901 he moved the operation to Willimantic where he had become a partner in the Windham Silk Co., thus ending almost half a century of silk machinery manufacturing in North Windham.