

Holland Family

Willimantic's Holland-Manufacturing Co. prospered in the Thread City for almost 75 years.



Tom Beardsley

It manufactured high-quality silk thread from mills built on the northeast and northwest junctions of Valley and Church streets.

The company's east mill stood on the site, which the Willimantic Food Co-op will shortly occupy.

Two Massachusetts-born brothers, James and Goodrich Holland, had manufactured silk thread with Charles Bottum in the Conantville section of Mansfield during the 1850s.

To ensure a steady supply of labor, the brothers relocated to Willimantic and built their first mill on Valley Street in 1866. The brothers died shortly afterwards, James in 1868 and Goodrich in 1870.

Goodrich's widow Jane Holland became titular head of the concern and the company remained in Willimantic until 1934, when it relocated to Stroudsburg, Pa.

The city demolished the company's mills just before World War II and a supermarket was built on the site of the east mill shortly afterward.

The Holland family's obelisk is one of the grandest and tallest in the Willimantic cemetery. However, the silk manufacturing Holland brothers had an elder brother, Josiah Gilbert Holland (1819-81), a writer who became known as America's Charles Dickens.

J.G. Holland was born in Belchertown, Mass., the son of Harrison Holland, a silk machine mechanic and inventor, and Anna Gilbert Holland. James and Goodrich followed in their father's footsteps, but Josiah embarked upon a very different route.

The father's jobs took the family to Heath, South Hadley, Granby and Northampton and elsewhere in central and western Massachusetts.

As a boy, Josiah worked in small factories with his father and brothers, but then left to train as a schoolmaster. In 1840, he began studying with two physicians in Northampton and then attended Pittsfield's Berkshire Medical College.

Holland graduated in 1844 and moved to Springfield, but was to develop a practice there. He tried

his hand sporadically at writing and founded a short-lived weekly magazine in 1847; Holland then went south and worked as a school superintendent in Richmond, Va., and Vicksburg, Miss., between 1848 and 1850.

Returning to Springfield in 1850, Holland began a long association with Samuel Bowles, the editor of the Springfield Republican newspaper. Holland had already published minor pieces in Knickerbocker Magazine and the American Whig Review, but now his literary career began in earnest.

At one time when Bowles was business manager of the Republican, Holland was its editor and principal writer and bought into a profitable partnership with Bowles in 1852.

Holland wrote moralistic, human interest essays contrasting town and rural life. He also wrote serials for the Republican, which were republished as books: "History of Western Massachusetts" (1855); "The Bay-Path: A Tale of New England Colonial Life" (1857), a novel about theological intolerance in 17th century Connecticut; and Titcomb's "Letters to Young People, Single and Married" (1858) on social and domestic morality.

In 1857 Titcomb's "Letters" was a nationwide success and he subsequently published more books of fiction and advice. Holland's most successful was "Kathrina: Her Life and Mine, in a Poem" (1867), which outsold everything except Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "The Song of Hiawatha" (1855).

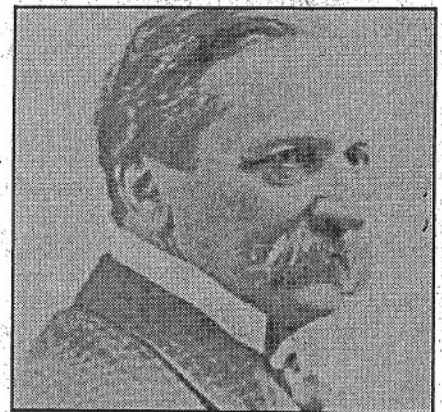
Holland's next venture was with Charles Scribner and Roswell Smith. The trio established Scribner's Monthly, a magazine to encourage American art and literature. Holland edited it, Smith became business manager and Scribner provided imprint and title.

Holland helped with Scribner's fine design, readable format, attractive illustrations and writings by well-known authors such as Edward Everett Hale,

Bret Harte and Henry James.

Holland serialized three of his own novels in Scribner's, all reissued in book form, "Arthur Bonnicastle" (1873), "Seven Oaks: A Story of Today" (1875), and "Nicholas Minturn: A Study in a Story" (1877). Critics consider Sevenoaks as Holland's best work.

It features a gilded-age mill owner whose ruthless greed leads to total ruin. Holland describes the milltown of Sevenoaks in the book's opening chapters and its stark similarities to Willimantic suggest that America's Dickens had often visited his silk manufacturing brothers in the Thread City and walked its streets.



J.G. Holland, pictured in 1870.