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## Mill Number Two: Then and Now

### Then - The mill in 1894.



The centerpiece of the Windham Mills development, the American Thread Company's Mill Number Two, was built between 1863 and 1864. It remains to this day one of the most striking industrial structures in the entire United States, from its gothic central tower to its self supporting roof, so designed to allow the entire fourth story to be free of supporting pillars.

The Mill is shown here at two periods, 104 years apart. The older photograph details the mill as it appeared just 30 years after its construction. The new photograph was taken this summer. At first glance, it may seem there are few changes. But there are several striking differences. In the recent image, the view is obscured somewhat by utility lines. The older view is more pleasantly obscured by the elm trees which graced the entire length of Main street in the nineteenth century. Also note the white picket fence -- included more for its appearance than for keeping out intruders.

There are several changes to the mill itself. In the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, the attic of the mill was used for cotton spinning. Its interior space was lit by the dormer windows on the roof. Those windows were destroyed by the 1938 hurricane. Also note that the fire escape on the east side of the building has been removed, but the fire escapes on the north walls remain. Since the newer photograph was taken, the old yard of Mill Two has been re-laid as a parking lot, and nineteenth century, wrought iron-style lamps have been added, creating a present day image somewhat more Victorian than the reality of the mill's Victorian heyday.

### Now -- The mill today.

Today, Mill Two is being adapted for multiple, small industrial usage. But at the time of the older photograph the Willimantic Linen Company, despite a lingering economic recession, was employing almost 3,000 people.

Some Mill Two facts and statistics:  
The unique suspended roof created a massive open space on the fourth



floor, which measures 400 feet by 70 feet. It was originally planned to hold a celebratory ball in the largest, interior space in the state of Connecticut. The attractive gothic tower is 125 feet high. The mill is built from gneiss stone quarried from the bed of the Willimantic River. Two hundred and seventy eight acres of meadow land in Columbia were flooded to create Columbia Lake in 1865, to ensure a consistent water supply to drive the new mill's water wheels and turbines.