



A Mill 2 Scrapbook

by

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This is an introduction to a landmark building in Amesbury – Mill 2, now the home of Amesbury Industrial Supply Co. on High Street. This distinctive industrial building has been a dominant feature in Amesbury for nearly 200 years.



A millyard view of Mill 2 in 2018. (photo by Frank Gurczak)

Mill 2 was a place of work and industry. First textiles were made here, then finished automobile bodies, then upholstery and accessories. The largest employers in our region have owned the building – and thousands of workers have passed in and out of the door. Today Mill 2 is the home of Amesbury Industrial Supply Co., Inc., an old-style, full service hardware company.

Mill 2 reveals much about our history and provides a window into the story of our community.

What We Don't Know

This essay is a *scrapbook* of sorts. It is a collection of images and historical information that only begins to tell the full story of this building. Unfortunately no one left an archive filled with the information we want to know about the people and businesses who have been part of this history. We are fortunate to have newspapers, maps, photographs and the building itself to begin our story. With each research project we learn there is so much more to discover and share.

Our Beginning - the Early 19th Century

Mill 2 was built beginning in 1825 by the owners of the newly formed Salisbury Manufacturing Company. It took over two years to finish the mill as they redeveloped an area that had been used for by other water-powered mills for over a hundred years before.

In 1820, the mills district of Amesbury and Salisbury and the new workplaces developing there were part of the emerging industrial revolution sweeping New England. At that time, local entrepreneurs and inventors such as Jacob Perkins (who built a nail factory here in 1796), Paul Moody, Ezra Worthen and others contributed to the development of the American textile industry.



**The earliest view of Mill 2 drawn by J.W. Barber in 1839.
(Collections of American Antiquarian Society)**

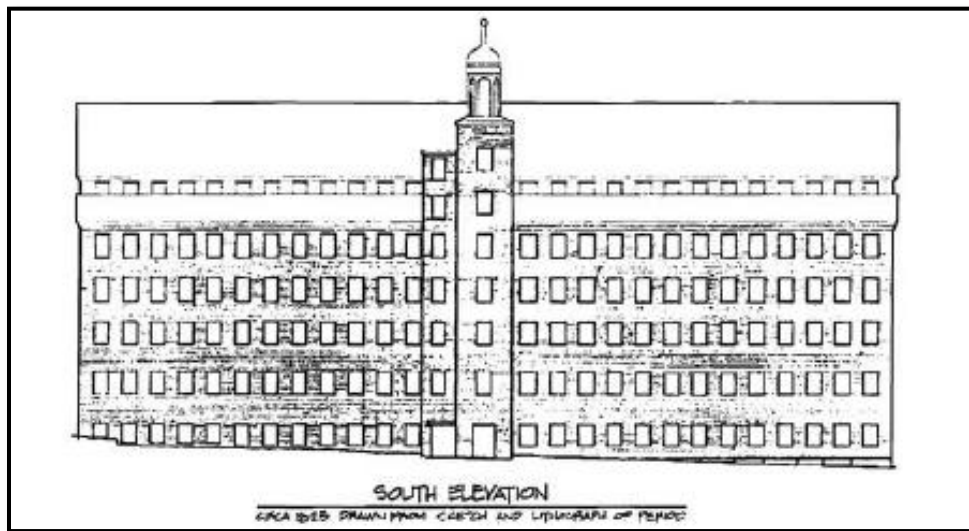
The Building Defined

Mill 2 is 50 feet wide and 210 feet long. The building is five stories tall with a symmetrical floor plan and a central stair tower on both of the long facades. Construction of the building began in 1825 and wasn't completed until 1827.

Mill 2 is typical of industrial buildings of that era – it is made of 28 identical sections or bays, each about 7 feet 10 inches wide. If you sliced through the building you would see five floors – each with a heavy beam resting on a column – and a window centered in each section.

It took a lot of material to construct the mill, including bricks, wooden timbers, iron and more. We do not fully know where these materials came from. This is an important question we continue to explore.

According to period newspapers, there are over one million bricks in the building. Amesbury and Salisbury brickyards would be busy providing the bricks needed for this massive structure. One brick maker, Robert Patten, left an inscription in a brick placed in the stair tower – “Robert Patten, Amesbury, 1826.” In a way this is a maker's mark for at least some of the bricks. The Patten brickyard was off Main Street near the banks of the Powow River.



Mill 2 elevation as it looked when constructed. The building was altered in 1880 when the roof was made flat. And later, the cupola was removed. (1978 millyard report)

Heavy wooden beams – 12 x 14 inches in section and 50 feet long – define each bay. The beams are supported on wooden or iron columns and, in turn, support the heavy wooden floors above. With 28 bays on five floors – these beams laid end-to-end would stretch about 7,000 feet (about a mile and a quarter). The size and length of these materials are incredible. We wonder how you cut a beam that size and if the trees came from local wood lots or were somehow sourced from a distance. It is interesting!

There are over 300 windows in the building. Wooden sash, trim, panes of glass, and glazing putty all were needed for each opening. An army of workers was needed to build the mill.



The lower level of Mill 2 – brick, stone, iron and wood are prominent materials. The beams are single pieces of wood – each over 50 feet long. (photo by John Mayer)

The Geography of Water Power

Geography plays a critical role in selecting a site for a mill building. Until steam engines were available, flowing water was the essential source of the power needed to drive the water wheels and the machinery inside the mills.

To power the machinery in Mill 2, the builders needed to build a canal (or raceway) to direct water from the Powow River to the building and then a tailrace to allow the water to flow back to the river. Building this engineering feature was a remarkable (and hidden) part of this story.

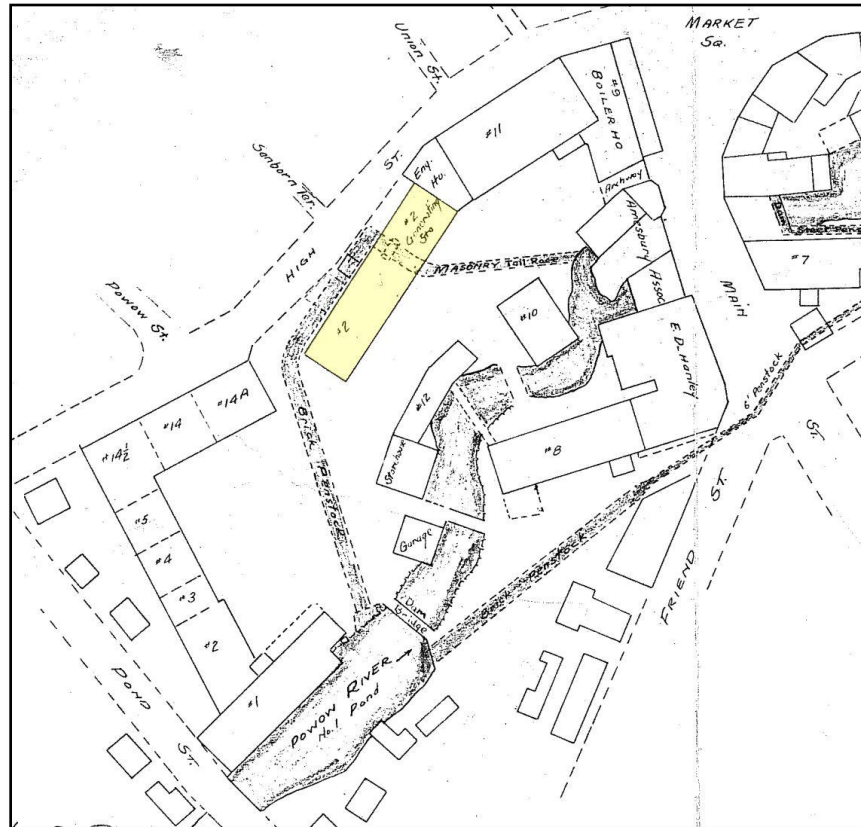
The raceway was dug to a depth of 20 feet and ran 270 feet from the dam to the High Street front of the building, and then another 130 feet to the control gates where the water entered the building.

Workers used black powder to blast through the granite ledge underground and reach the depth needed to allow the water to flow. And homeowners on High Street complained that flying debris was damaging their roofs. One worker – Mister Stearns – died during construction.

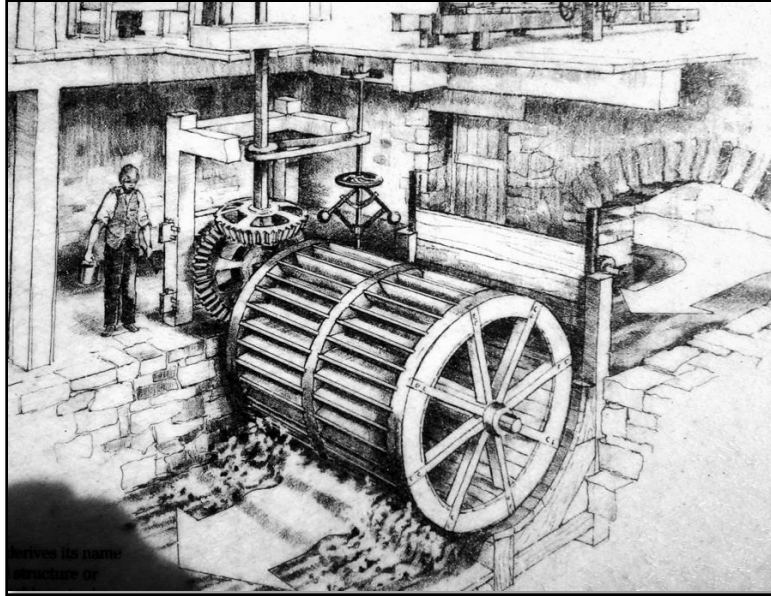


**The falls of the Powow River provided water to power the mills.
(photo by John Mayer)**

It is hard to imagine this today. The water from the Powow actually flowed through Mill 2. A gate outside the building controlled the flow of water into the building. When the gate was open, the water flowed against a 20 foot diameter water wheel. As the wheel turned, this rotating motion powered a series of belts and pulleys that drove the machines on each floor. The water then was channeled through a tailrace and back to the river.



1938 plan view of the upper millyard with Mill 2 highlighted. Shaded areas show raceway channeling water to Mill 2, through the lower level, then back into the Powow River.



Rendering of a waterwheel inside a mill building. (courtesy of Slater Mill)

Mill 2 was a Textile Mill

The textile industry in New England was the “birthplace” of the American Industrial Revolution. And Mill 2 was part of this story. Many people contributed to this important history – business owners, inventors, mechanics, and workers. And changes in society and new markets for manufactured goods created demand for the textile cloth made here. It was a dynamic period in American history with changes in technology, work, and daily life.



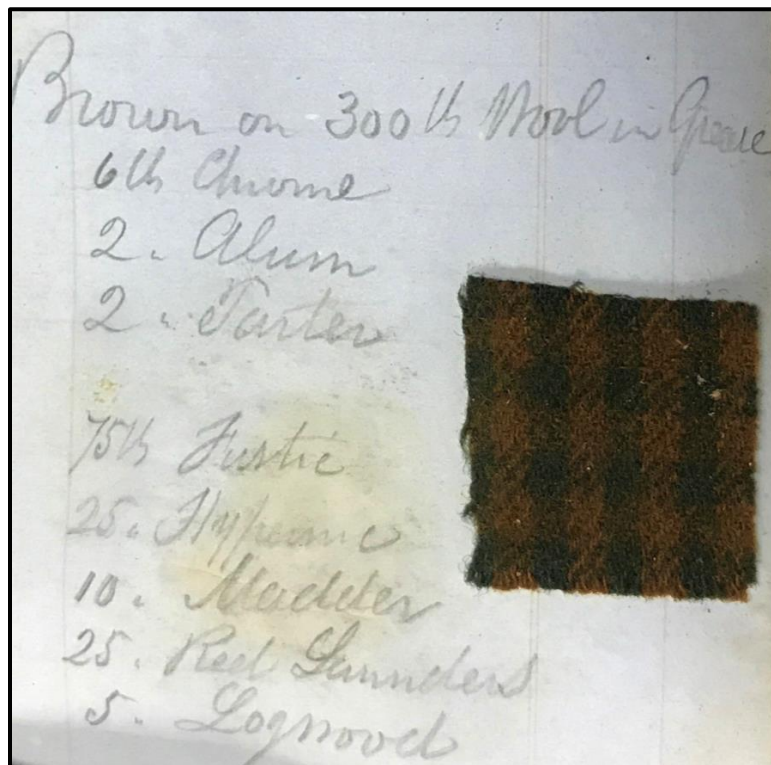
A weave room in the Amesbury millyard. (courtesy Amesbury Public Library, Local History Collection)

The mills in Amesbury and Salisbury made fabric from both wool and cotton. We are interested in learning more about the source of the raw materials used in the mills. Wool could come from nearby farms, and then overseas markets. And cotton would come from southern plantations, where slavery was a cruel aspect of the economy.

The textiles made in Amesbury mills were everyday fabrics such as flannels or a cotton / wool blend called *satinet*. The finished cloth was sold by agents in Boston, and then shipped to users in other parts of the country.

To make the cloth, workers opened bales of wool or cotton, cleaned the fibers with machinery that carded and spun the fibers into yarn. The yarn was woven on looms into cloth. Dying, printing, washing (or fulling), inspecting and packing for shipping would occur in other buildings in the millyard. And over time, as more buildings were added – eventually a nearly unbroken series of buildings spanned from the upper falls to tidewater. The Amesbury millyard was a large industrial complex.

At its peak in the mid nineteenth century, over 1,300 people worked in the textile mills. In 1860, the combined population of Amesbury and Salisbury was 7,200 people – almost 20% of the community worked in the mills!



This one-inch swatch of wool fabric is the only known existing sample from the Amesbury mills. (collections of the Winterthur Museum)

The history of textile workers is another hidden story and will be told in the future. The Amesbury mills was the site of a major worker's strike in 1852 – called the Derby strike. We want to know about the personal stories of the workers as they experienced the boom and bust cycles of the economy, and found resourceful ways to adapt and support their livelihood in the mills, locals farms or other industrial shops.

Changes in the Use of Mill 2

In 1912 the Hamilton Woolen Company – owners of the entire mill complex including Mill 2 - closed their doors. This brought an end to the 100-year period of textile making in Amesbury. The mill buildings were acquired by new owners and were gradually used for new purposes.

At this time, carriage making, Amesbury's other important industry, was shifting to the making of automobile bodies. At first, this was an easy transition. Amesbury carriage builders used their skills to make wooden frames for automobile bodies and to finish them with aluminum panels and interior trim.

From about 1915 to 1925, Hollander & Morrill occupied Mill 2 and finished automobile bodies there. Then another firm, Biddle & Smart – the largest automobile body company in Amesbury - took over the building and made upholstery for the Hudson Company of Detroit. And in 1938, the Bailey Company acquired the building, and here made hardware and a patented window channel for auto makers until 1978.



**1920 Cadillac body and finish by workers at Hollander & Morrill.
(courtesy private collection)**

The Millyard Renaissance

By the late 1970s, the condition of millyard presented a challenge to the Amesbury community. The huge buildings – many aging and underused – needed to be revitalized. How could this central part of the downtown be developed? City leaders explored the question of whether to demolish or to restore the millyard.

A 1978 study of the Amesbury millyard provided a vision. And with a new commitment to economic development, the restoration of the millyard began. In some ways, this process continues today.

In 1983, local businessman Greg Jardis played a major role in the revitalization process. Jardis purchased Mill 2 from the Bailey Company, and began the process of restoring the 160 year old building and moving his hardware company here. Every window in Mill 2 was replaced. The interior was sandblasted and cleaned. The building was repurposed for commercial hardware business. Bringing new life to this landmark building did much to support the rebuilding of Amesbury's downtown.



A 1980 view of Mill 2 through the Gateway Arch in Market Square. Image by Joseph Fahey, Amesbury's first director of economic and community development and the leader of the process to revitalize the millyard. (Amesbury Public Library, Local History collection)



Exterior view of the sign for Amesbury Industrial Supply on High Street. (photo by Robert Schoen)

The Next Chapter - Looking Toward the Future

The revitalization of Mill 2, the millyard and Amesbury's downtown is about to receive another boost. In 2019, Greg Jardis gifted to the Amesbury Carriage Museum space in the lower level of his building for the development of a new museum and cultural center – the Industrial History Center. Adding a variety of public uses to industrial areas is a proven strategy for community development. And the Industrial History Center will support this effort.

More information about the IHC is available at [AmesburyCarriageMuseum.org](https://www.amesburycarriagemuseum.org) and [IndustrialHistoryCenter.org](https://www.industrialhistorycenter.org). This is another part of the history of Mill 2 and provides a dynamic and new dimension to the growth of Amesbury.



Rendering of the Industrial History Center by Sean Bixby, 2020.



Interior rendering of the IHC program and exhibit areas by Sean Bixby.

A Coda

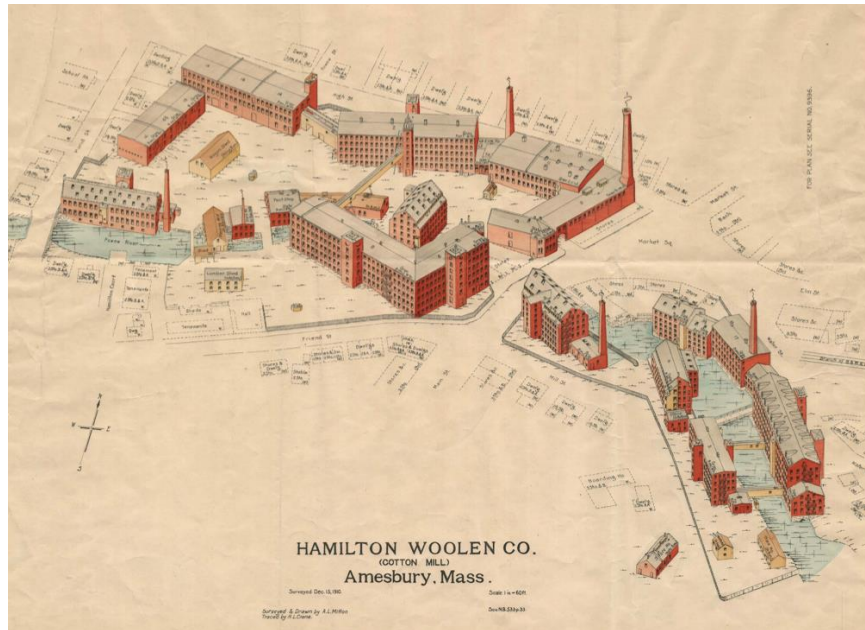
The history of Mill 2 will be incorporated into the orientation program planned for the Industrial History Center. An important focus for the IHC program is *to connect people to the community and provide a sense of place for school students, families and visitors.*

Further research will provide information and content for exhibits and programs in the IHC. This is a fun and exciting project for the Amesbury community.

Other Views



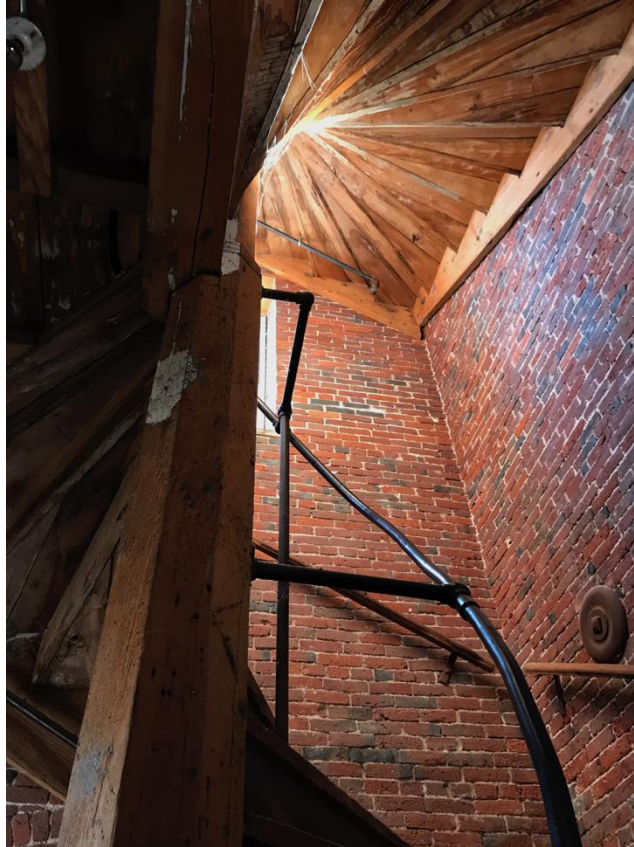
1880 view - Hamilton Woolen Company. (Collection of Amesbury Carriage Museum)



1910 Insurance Map – Hamilton Woolen Co. (Courtesy private collection)



The front desk – Amesbury Industrial Supply. (photo John Mayer)



Mill 2 Stairs. (photo by John Mayer)

Resources

Amesbury Carriage Museum – web resources:

“Digital Library”

<https://amesburycarriagemuseum.org/digital-library>

“Researching People & Place”

<https://amesburycarriagemuseum.org/researching-place>

Amesbury Newspaper Archive (courtesy of the Amesbury Public Library):

<http://amesbury.advantage-preservation.com/>

Lowell National Historic Park – website:

<https://www.nps.gov/lowe/index.htm>

The site includes exhibits and finding aids to collections