

INTERPRETING THE HISTORIES OF SENECA FALLS, THE WOOLEN MILL,  
AND ITS WORKERS IN THE NEW NATIONAL WOMEN'S HALL OF FAME

A Thesis

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By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the histories of the Village of Seneca Falls, the Woolen Mill located there, and the workers of the Woolen Mill in order to explore the interpretive possibilities available to the National Women's Hall of Fame (NWHF) when they rehabilitate the Woolen Mill site as their new museum.

The work begins with a look at industry, settlement, and transportation in Seneca Falls in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Chapter 2 investigates the history of the Woolen Mill, its owners, its site, and its manufactured products, particularly in the ways it relates to the industrial development of the Village. Chapter 3 examines the demographics of the Woolen Mill workforce in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. This chapter analyzes the workforce data as part of the Village's social history, an area the National Women's Hall of Fame Museum could interpret on a larger, more detailed scale than any other museum does in Seneca Falls at the present time. Finally, Chapter 4 relates the history of the NWHF and their rehabilitation project as it stands in the spring of 2008, while also describing the Woolen Mill site and resources available for the project.

This work seeks to illustrate the connective threads of the histories and show the steps being taken by the NWHF to rehabilitate the Woolen Mill site. The NWHF has an opportunity with their new museum, not only to expand upon their own collection and exhibits, but also to interpret these histories in a new way, both to the Villagers and to the heritage tourists that visit Seneca Falls.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lindsey Wallace was born in Sandusky, Ohio, on November 22, 1982. In 1984, she moved with her family to Dayton, Ohio, where she would live until 2002, when she left to attend The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio.

While in attendance at Ohio State, Lindsey studied American history and women's studies. In the summer of 2004, she worked as an intern at the National Register of Historic Places, gaining practical knowledge and feeding a growing interest in historic preservation. While in Columbus, Lindsey volunteered at the Ohio Historical Society Museum and interned at the Columbus Landmarks Foundation, a local historic preservation advocacy non-profit organization. In June 2005, she graduated magna cum from Ohio State with Bachelor of the Arts in history, with Honors in the Liberal Arts.

In August 2006, Lindsey began her coursework in historic preservation planning at Cornell University. In the summer of 2007, she worked as the preservation intern at Dayton History, a non-profit organization that oversees the operations of several historic sites in Dayton, Ohio. She will graduate from Cornell University on May 25, 2008, with a Master of the Arts in Historic Preservation Planning.

This work is dedicated first and foremost to my family: Theodore, Molly, Bryan, Nathan, and Jessica Wallace, and Katy, Joe, and Charlotte DeLong. Your support and love through the past few years have been the most important forces in my life. To my classmates of the HPP and MRP Classes of 2007, 2008, and 2009, thank you for your friendship and for the supportive family of which I am privileged to be a part. To my professors Michael Tomlan and Jeffrey Chusid, thank you for the guidance, advice, and support.

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## INTRODUCTION

The story of Seneca Falls resembles those of many other New York Villages during the nineteenth century. Seneca Falls started its industrial production by 1818, with the beginnings of the Cayuga-Seneca Canal.<sup>1</sup> By 1825, the Erie Canal had brought new industrial and economic opportunity and created several centers of production in New York State and all along the Canal's 364-mile route. By the 1860s, Seneca Falls had flouring mills<sup>2</sup>, pump factories, distilleries, tanneries, and a Woolen Mill. Over half the Village's employable population was involved in manufacturing from 1840 through at least 1870.<sup>3</sup> During the nineteenth century, Seneca Falls earned recognition not only as the site of the first Woman's Rights Convention in July of 1848, but also as the third largest flouring center in the world after Rochester and Oswego, the home to the world's second largest producer of pumps, and as an important producer of woolen goods for the United States Army during the American Civil War and World War II eras.<sup>4</sup> Like other New York

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<sup>1</sup> Barben, Arnold. *The Flats, Including the Canal and Industries*. Seneca Falls, NY: Seneca Falls Historical Society, 1981; Carls, J. Norman and Walter W. Ristow, "The Industrial Geography of Seneca Falls, New York," *Economic Geography*, Vol. 12, No. 3. (Jul., 1936), pp. 287-293. Retrieved from the SFHS; Chamberlain, Harrison, "The Seneca Lock Navigation Company," Seneca Falls Historical Society Papers, 1911; Eisenhart, Edward C. *A Century of Seneca Falls History, Showing the Rise and Progress of a New York State Village*. Thesis for an A.B. degree, Dept. of History, Princeton University, 1942.

<sup>2</sup> A flouring mill is the same as a gristmill, in which grain is ground into flour.

<sup>3</sup> United States Census, 1840, 1850, 1860, 1870.

<sup>4</sup> Barben, Arnold. *The Flats, Including the Canal and Industries*. Seneca Falls, NY: Seneca Falls Historical Society, 1981; *History of Seneca Co., New York With Illustrations Descriptive of Scenery, Palatial Residences, Public Buildings, Fine Blocks, and Important Factories*. Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign, & Everts, 1876.

villages, however, Seneca Falls experienced economic decline with the development of alternate forms of transportation by the second quarter of the twentieth century. The Woolen Mill, whose first building was completed in 1844, its last in the 1890s, remained one of the last vestiges of Seneca Falls' industrial past, continuing its historical function until 1999, when it finally closed.<sup>5</sup> In 2007, the National Women's Hall of Fame, an organization created in 1969 in Seneca Falls, acquired the land and buildings to rehabilitate the site as a museum.

Though the Village's history is similar to those of other Upstate New York communities, its story is also unique, particularly in the ways it relates to and is reflected by the story of the Woolen Mill and its upcoming reuse. The investigation into the Woolen Mill of Seneca Falls is important because of the surprising and special pieces of history, some of which have been studied previously, and others that have not. This research explores how the history of the Woolen Mill is intertwined with the history of the Village of Seneca Falls, its symbolic role in that history, and the opportunity it represents in the future.

While most textile mills of the same period and region share similar worker demographics, workers of the Woolen Mill in Seneca Falls reflect the population of the Village much more than they do the other textile mills. These pieces of history provide opportunities for the National Women's Hall of Fame (NWHF) and its rehabilitation project.

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<sup>5</sup> The mill's owners changed six times since it opened in 1844. Its various names include: the Seneca Woolen Mill, Phoenix Mills, Seneca Knitting Mill, Geb and Garvan Yarn Company, and Geb and Souhan. For ease of understanding in the introduction, the building, or rather, set of buildings will be referred to as the "Woolen Mill" as the intricacies of its history will be examined more thoroughly in a later chapter. Also see LaKamp, Patrick, "It's a Bitter Life," *The Buffalo News*, August 1, 1999.

The NWHF is the nation's oldest membership non-profit organization that honors the achievements and contributions of American women. Between 1973 and 2008, 207 women have been inducted into the Hall. Currently located in a stone bank building at 76 Fall Street in Seneca Falls, the NWHF's expanding collection and desire for more storage and office space prompted the organization to search for a different building. In 2007, the NWHF became owners of the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill, with plans to use the building and grounds as a museum to interpret both their own collections and the mill history. With the mill story so intrinsically connected with the buildings and surrounding landscape, the Hall of Fame's interpretation of the Village and Woolen Mill history are crucial to the reception and success of the new museum.

To investigate this project, research began at the NWHF on August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007, to determine the project's timeline and scope, as well as to retrieve any studies conducted prior to the plans for this rehabilitation. Documents reviewed include the Master Plan developed by Ann Beha Architects, the Seneca Knit Development Corporation's 2004 Master Plan, and information about the National Women's Hall of Fame history.

Seneca Falls has two local history museums: the Seneca Falls Historical Society (SFHS) and the Seneca Museum of Industry and Waterways, also known as the Canal Museum. The SFHS holds most of the existing documents concerning the Village's history, and the Seneca Museum features dioramas of Canal construction and interesting artifacts. The SFHS collection includes maps, photographs, newspapers, Seneca County Directories, past Seneca Falls Historical Society minutes and papers, business ledgers, and Village histories. Visits to the SFHS began in September of 2007, with weekly visits continuing through October into November, and additional visits occurring into the spring of 2008.

In addition to the two local history museum, Seneca Falls is home to the Women's Rights National Historical Park, a resource overseen by the National Park Service. Their collections include information about the people involved in the 1848 Convention and American women's history. The park includes several sites, such as the Wesleyan Chapel, where the convention took place, and the Elizabeth Cady Stanton House, home to one of the United States' foremost women's rights leaders of the nineteenth century. Anne Derousie, the historian at the WRNHP shared essential background information on Jacob P. Chamberlain, one of the major players in the mill story in November 2007.

Visits to the Seneca County Clerk Office September 2007 yielded information about the myriad of owners of both the buildings and the surrounding land, with the city directories of the SFHS assisting in the identification of the important players. The Cornell Library holdings included secondary sources on mills, rehabilitation, social and economic history<sup>6</sup>, the New York State Blueforms conducted on the Village in 1989. Tony Opalka of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation provided additional Blueform and National Register nominations and information in November 2007.

A visit to Lowell, Massachusetts, in early November 2007, gave me experiences with a functioning mill. The Boott Mill's vibrating weaving room and looming mill structures supplied mental images that cannot easily be created from reading a book. The research I conducted using the United States Census records from 1830 to 1930 populated the Village with the identities of the mill workers and offered important demographics with which to fully realize the community story. An

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<sup>6</sup> See Bibliography. Aside from Delavan, Dubrow, Watrous, and the *Preservation of What, for Whom?* papers, all books from the secondary sources section came from the Cornell University Library holdings.

interview with the delightful Susannah Jane Beasley, a winder<sup>7</sup> and former Woolen Mill employee provided a personal account of the millwork during the period between 1944 and 1982.

The general timeline examined in this thesis focuses on the period from roughly 1850 to 1920, for several reasons. First, this period most clearly illustrates the rise and fall of industry in Seneca Falls, including several important transportation developments. Second, the Woolen Mill did not fully exist until after 1844, so the demographic information presented in Chapter 3 focuses on the late-nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Third, immigration to the area factored largely into settlement patterns and social composition of the Village, with the largest influx of new citizens coming in the 1850-1920 period.

This thesis consists of four chapters. Chapter One explores the history of industry in Seneca Falls in relationship to the Cayuga-Seneca and Erie Canals, focusing briefly on the C & S Canal construction in the early nineteenth century, the industrial developments in the Village in the second half of the century, and the creation of the Barge Canal between 1909-1915. Chapter Two examines the history of the Woolen Mill from 1829 through 2007, with emphasis on the mid-to-late-nineteenth century. This chapter tells the mill's story in the context of early American textile mills and, more importantly, in relationship to the development of Seneca Falls as an industrial Village. Chapter Three continues the mill's story with a look at the demographics of the workers at the mill and how the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill worker population contradicts the common "mill girl" myth<sup>8</sup> and

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<sup>7</sup> A winder ties knots with the pieces of spun wool that have broken apart as they are spun on spools from roving to yarn. See Chapter 3 and Appendix for more details.

<sup>8</sup> The idea of textile mill workers being mostly female is seen in Lerner, Oakley and Weible (See Bibliography). Early textile mills, particularly cotton mills, like the ones in Lowell, Massachusetts, recruited mainly young, unmarried, rural women for the mill jobs. American wool manufacture often required a more equal male to female

reflect the populations of Seneca Falls. This chapter focuses on the social history of the Village, investigating the workers and their experiences in order to flesh out the mill's history and provide a more detailed look at possible exhibits for the new museum. Chapter Four continues the narrative with a look at the history of the National Women's Hall of Fame in the context of Seneca Falls after 1950. This chapter describes the National Women's Hall of Fame's plans for the mill's rehabilitation to a museum, looking at public opinion in Seneca Falls, projected interpretative and site plans, stakeholders involved, and the possibilities for the future of both the mill and Seneca Falls. While the museums of Seneca Falls do feature exhibits concerning the social history of the Village as described in Chapter Three, the new museum could create a different kind of social history exhibit that tells the story of the mill while connecting its workforce to the Village as a whole in meaningful ways.

The conclusion summarizes the main ideas of each of the previous chapters, discusses the proposed NWHF rehabilitation project as it exists today and as it may exist in the future, and describes opportunities for future research. The conclusion then argues that the NWHF museum must explore Seneca Falls history, including its rise and falls as an industrial center, in tandem with women's history presented at the NWHF and the WRNHP so as to show the Village in full, as the active industrial center it became, and how and why its industrial decline turned it into what it is today, a community which takes pride in its past, and works toward the future.

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worker ratio due to the types of machinery and tasks involved in woolen manufacture. Despite these differences, the idea of "mill girls" is perpetuated seemingly because of the practices of the mills at Lowell being the most well known in the United States.

## CHAPTER 1: NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY SETTLEMENT AND INDUSTRY IN SENECA FALLS, NEW YORK

The Village of Seneca Falls, New York, is located thirty-five miles north of Ithaca, three miles west of Cayuga Lake, and five miles east of Waterloo, the Seneca County seat. Seneca Falls is known as the site of the first Women's Rights Convention, held over two days, July 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 1848, but that is not the only part of the Village's story that merits attention. The Village history resembles other stories of towns and Villages along the Erie Canal, but it is important because it saw two stages of development of the Erie Canal, railroad construction, and the rise of various factories and businesses, particularly in the late-nineteenth century.

The community's nineteenth century industrial success came from various manufacturing enterprises, with two being the most important: the pump factories and the Woolen Mill. Overviews of the history of the pump manufacturing are included in this chapter, but it is the Woolen Mill that remains most pertinent to the Village in 2008, in that the buildings and site remain and hold possibilities for the economy, education, and architectural preservation of Seneca Falls in the future. The history of the owners, production, and site of the Woolen Mill overlaps and influences with that of the Village, in such a way that Seneca Falls could not have existed without the woolen manufacturing and the woolen manufacturing could not exist without Seneca Falls.

This chapter will focus on industrial and transportation development and settlement patterns in Seneca Falls in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. First, the European settlement and transportation development in the early nineteenth century show how Seneca Falls first began to take shape. Second, examining the different types of industry in the Village in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century

illustrates the environment in which the Woolen Mill affected and was affected by the industrial developments in this time period. Third, looking at settlement patterns and population figures creates a demographic background on which the subsequent chapters, particularly Chapter 3, can build. Fourth, mentioning the early twentieth century transportation endeavors, with focus on the creation of the Barge Canal, demonstrates the decline of industry in Seneca Falls by this time. The Village history presented in this chapter will create a background in which to tell the stories of the Woolen Mill and its workers and how those stories might be interpreted in the new National Women's Hall of Fame.

### **Seneca Falls in the Early Nineteenth Century**

The story of industry in Seneca Falls begins with the early European settlement and the creation of the first transportation systems that enabled Seneca Falls' industrial burst in the second half of the century.

In 1779, General John Sullivan commanded a force of American troops that swept through Upstate New York, under orders to rid the land of the First Nations people who inhabited it, which then included the Mohawks, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarawas. The land taken from the people would be given as payment to Revolutionary War veterans to settle. The first European settler Job Smith came in 1787, and developed a water navigation business, in which he helped travelers pass through on the river, whose natural waterfalls created some issues for the novice boater. Smith was soon joined by Lawrence Van Cleef, a Revolutionary War veteran, and Wilhelmus Mynderse, the agent for the Albany-based Bayard Land Company, the company that owned the water privileges<sup>9</sup> in the area. At the time,

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<sup>9</sup> Water privileges were purchased and gave rights over the use of the natural waterpower to the purchasers. Ownership of water privileges was important in places like Seneca Falls, where industry depended on waterpower. In situations like this, wherein a single company owned the entire Village's water privileges, it was difficult

Seneca Falls actually had waterfalls that dropped thirty feet. Seneca Falls established its first sawmill in 1795, first taverns in 1798, first fulling mill<sup>10</sup> in 1806, and Mynderse's flouring mills in 1807.<sup>11</sup>

A woodcut of the Village in 1817 (See Figure 1.1)<sup>12</sup> shows the settlement pattern along the Seneca River. At this time, the small population mostly consisted of Revolutionary War soldiers taking advantage of the land given to them by the newly formed United States government. By 1824, Seneca Falls had three stores, two taverns, a tannery, forty houses, and roughly 200 people.<sup>13</sup> The Village was

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for any one manufacturing enterprise to succeed on their own, as the all of the industrial endeavors in the Village depended on the company to decide who received what rights to the waterpower.

<sup>10</sup> Fulling mills mechanized the process of fulling woolen cloth. Fulling cleans, shrinks, and felts woven woolen cloth. Felting binds the gaps in between the stitches of a woven piece of cloth, making the weave denser. Felting should not be confused with felt, a material that is not woven. Felting is a part of cloth dressing for woven woolen goods. Today, felting can be achieved by putting a piece of knitted woolen cloth in an electric dryer. People often accidentally felt sweaters and other woolen goods this way. Fulling woolen cloth requires skill, so, like carding, it became one of the first mechanized steps in woolen manufacture, as the cloth being turned out by people within their own homes did not produce cloth of high quality, partly due to inexpert fulling techniques. Please also see Chapter 3 for more details on woolen goods manufacturing processes.

<sup>11</sup> *History of Seneca County, New York with Illustrations Descriptive of Its Scenery, Palatial Residences, Public Buildings, Fine Blocks, and Important Factories*, Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign, & Everts, 1876, and Delavan, Elizabeth. *Upstate Village*. Lakemont: North Country Books, 1975.

<sup>12</sup> All Figures, unless noted otherwise, come from the Seneca Falls Historical Society Archives.

<sup>13</sup> Spafford's Gazetteer of 1824, as featured in Eisenhart, Edward C. *A Century of Seneca Falls History, Showing the Rise and Progress of a New York State Village*. Thesis for an A.B. degree, Dept. of History, Princeton University, 1942.

formally incorporated in 1831, from separating the town of Junius, which lay directly to the north.<sup>14</sup>

In 1813, the Seneca Land Navigation Company was formed to create easier transportation on the Seneca River that flowed through the Village. Like Job Smith's water navigation business, the Seneca Land Navigation Company assisted travelers with the difficult waterfalls, while at the same time began working on ways to permanently change the physical landscape to make river navigation simpler, particularly for use in industry. Seneca Falls already saw industrial production by 1818, when the beginnings of the Cayuga and Seneca Canal signaled new developments for industry in the Village.<sup>15</sup> In 1825, the Erie Canal made plans to connect with Cayuga Lake, which they did by formally creating the Cayuga and Seneca Canal, completed in 1825. Upon completion, the C & S was nearly twenty-two miles long, forty feet wide, and four feet deep.<sup>16</sup>

This development brought new industrial and economic opportunity. New York State obtained the water privileges owned by the Bayard Land Company in order to finish the work on the Canal system in Seneca Falls. The Bayard Land Company went out of business, but the residents of Seneca Falls were able to purchase water privileges from New York State, which assisted in furthering

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<sup>14</sup> *History of Seneca County*, "History of the New York State Canals," *Seneca Falls Reveille*, 4 November 1921, 11 November 1921, and Stowell, Henry, "History of Seneca Falls," in Geneva, Seneca Falls, and Waterloo Directory, 1862.

<sup>15</sup> Barben, Arnold. *The Flats, Including the Canal and Industries*. Seneca Falls: Seneca Falls Historical Society, 1981; Carls, J. Norman and Walter W. Ristow, "The Industrial Geography of Seneca Falls, New York," 1936; Chamberlain, Harrison, "The Seneca Lock Navigation Company," Seneca Falls Historical Society Papers, 1911; Eisenhart, Edward C. *A Century of Seneca Falls History*, 1942.

<sup>16</sup> Barben, Arnold. *The Flats*. There are some variations to these figures in different texts, but these appear most often.

industrial development in Seneca Falls. The creation of the Canal system required the reconfiguration of the waterfalls in the Seneca River to create three sets of ten-foot drops so more mills and factories could be built to take advantage of the waterpower (See Figures 1.2 and 1.3).<sup>17</sup>

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1841, the Auburn and Syracuse Railroad Company opened a line through Seneca Falls. The route from Syracuse to Rochester was twenty miles longer than the route by canal, but it passed through more towns and villages, making it more useful for personal travel. The railroad brought competition to the canal system, but both remained useful, as they carried different materials and served different purposes in the early period. Eventually, the route through Seneca Falls would be incorporated into the New York Central Railroad system.<sup>18</sup>

### **Seneca Falls Industry in the Late-Nineteenth Century**

The development of the Canal system in Seneca Falls greatly added to the smattering of businesses and industries that had begun to expand in the years before the first canal system was completed in 1818.

In terms of industrial growth, new businesses developed in the years between 1818 and 1850, with the first incarnations of Cowing and Company (1840), Downs and Company (1840), the Silsby Manufacturing Company (1848), and the Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company, begun in 1829 with the stone building completed in 1844 (See Figure 1.4). In the mid-nineteenth century decades, Seneca Falls saw several manufacturing developments, particularly with the pump manufacturing and

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, and Gordon, Robert B. and Patrick M. Malone. *The Texture of Industry: An Archaeological View of the Industrialization of North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.

<sup>18</sup> Watrous, Hilda R. *The County Between the Lakes: Life and People to be Remembered Seneca County, New York*. Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1988.

the Woolen Mill. These enterprises, with their various mills, foundries, and factories began to reshape the physical, economic, and social landscape, with factories and mills being built along the canal, new and different businesses creating economic opportunities, and industry encouraging people to move to the area for jobs. This reshaping and new development created the need and opportunity for further industrial growth in the future (See Figures 1.5 and 1.6). The industrial growth in 1860s, and 1870s would surpass that of the first half of the nineteenth century in terms of variety, number, and geographic reach.<sup>19</sup>

Seneca Falls would eventually known for its pump manufacturing, as it is today, with four different companies at work on their creation. Pump manufacturing became Seneca Falls' primary industrial endeavor and success, and the development of these factories changed the landscape of the Village, with their various buildings and foundries on the Island and the banks of the canal and river. While three of these companies started their businesses before 1850, the success of their efforts came in the decades afterward.

Cowing and Company, the first pump factory in Seneca Falls, started in 1840, when John Cowing and Henry Seymour began to create pumps for sale outside of the Village. They were moderately successful in this endeavor, though they suffered financial woes in 1849 when they lost their furnace building to fire—twice. By the late 1850s, Cowing and Company manufactured hand-operated, wheel-mounted fire engines, hose carts, axes, speaking trumpets, and wood pipe. In the decades following, their fire fighting products sold in North and South America.<sup>20</sup> In the

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<sup>19</sup> Barben, *The Flats*, 1981, and *History of Seneca County*, 1876.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, and Carls and Ristow, "The Industrial Geography of Seneca Falls, New York," 1936.



Figure 1.1. 1817 Woodcut showing the early European settlement of the Village.  
Image printed from *The Flats*. SFHS, 1981.



Figure 1.2. Seneca Falls, c. 1850s. Note the three sets of waterfalls used for  
waterpower. From SFHS collection.



Figure 1.3. Two sets of waterfalls on the Seneca River. Image printed in *As We Were: the Life and Times of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Seneca Falls, New York*. Seneca Falls: SFHS, 1977.



Figure 1.4. View of the woolen mill buildings, looking southeast, c. 1870. The Seneca River is in the foreground, and the Canal against the mill. SFHS collection.



Figure 1.5. View of Seneca Falls looking west from the roof of one of the Goulds factory buildings, c. 1880s. This more fully illustrates the industrial atmosphere of the Village at the time. Image printed in *The Flats*. SFHS, 1981.



Figure 1.6. View of Fall Street, looking east, c.1890s. Image printed in *The Flats*. SFHS, 1981.

1860s and 1870s, Cowing and Company, later Cowing and Gleason then Gleason and Bailey Manufacturing Company<sup>21</sup>, continued to sell their products. An 1869 newspaper account writes of a visit to the factory “where are made cast-iron pumps, hand fire engines, etc., by the million. A fire-engine was being boxed, as we looked into the packing-room, for South America; and the factories of this firm find their way into nearly every country on the habitable globe.”<sup>22</sup> In 1901, the International Fire Engine Company purchased the company, closing the business in Seneca Falls. Though its success was rather short-lived, Cowing and Company products and manufacturing contributed to Seneca Falls’ identity as a pump-manufacturing Village.<sup>23</sup>

Downs and Company first began in 1840 when Abel Downs (See Figure 1.7), a prominent Seneca Falls merchant, real estate holder, and entrepreneur, made stoves and mostly wooden pumps. His involvement in the pump manufacturing business was intermittent, as he focused on his mercantile efforts in the early years. In 1851, Seabury S. Gould, a brother-in-law of Abel Downs, bought out two of the partners when their business outgrew their building (See Figure 1.8). Re-establishing themselves on the Island between the Seneca River and the C & S Canal, they produced stove parts, sausage stuffers, meat choppers, bells, flatirons, bootjacks, and corn-shellors in addition to the pumps (See Figure 1.9).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> By the 1880s, the Gleason of Gleason and Bailey Manufacturing Company mentioned here was involved in a cotton manufacturing enterprise in Seneca Falls.

<sup>22</sup> “Seneca Falls,” *Seneca Falls Reveille*, 30 July 1869.

<sup>23</sup> Barben, *The Flats, History of Seneca County*, 1876, and Carls and Ristow, “The Industrial Geography of Seneca Falls, New York,” 1936.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, “Grip’s” *Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, 1904, and <[http://www.gouldspumps.com/download\\_files/history/goulds\\_history.stm](http://www.gouldspumps.com/download_files/history/goulds_history.stm)>



Figure 1.7. Abel Downs started a pump manufactory and gained control of the Phoenix Mills in 1864. Image from “*Grip’s*” *Historical Souvenir*, 1904.



Figures 1.8 and 1.9. Seabury S. Gould developed the most successful pump factory in Seneca Falls, known today as Goulds Pumps. This pump, c. 1850s, was one of their first. These images come from <[www.goulds.com](http://www.goulds.com)>

In the late 1850s, the company suffered from poor business, so Abel Downs got involved in the knitting business, with a friend A.J. Goffe permitting Downs and Company the use of his patented knitting machine. The effort proved fruitful, when at one point 200 employees worked on the knitting machines, producing socks and long underwear. In 1859, the “Seneca Knitting Company” as they were known, had a contract with the United States Army for 85,000 pair of socks.<sup>25</sup> In 1864, Abel Downs and Albert Jewett would take control of the Phoenix Woolen Mills as well.

When Abel Downs died in 1869, Seabury Gould, and his sons Seabury the second and James recreated the company into Goulds Manufacturing Company, later Goulds Pumps, Inc. In the late-nineteenth century, Goulds sold pumps in various parts of the world, contributing to the commonly held Village belief that Seneca Falls was at one time the second largest pump-producing center in the country.<sup>26</sup> By 1904, Goulds employed 656 people, with agents working in various cities in the United States and overseas.<sup>27</sup> Goulds is the last pump factory in Seneca Falls today, still functioning as a pump and parts manufacturer.<sup>28</sup>

The Silsby Manufacturing Company began in 1848, with Horace Silsby, Washburn Race, and Birdsall Holly. Holly had invented a rotary pump and engine that gave their company an advantage in their product. Their plant, known as

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, and the *Scientific American* October 4, 1862, p. 214. As found in Chilcoat, Richard, “The Seneca Knitting Mill: a History,” Course paper for Hobart College, Winter 1982. From Women’s Rights National Historical Park, Seneca Falls, NY.

<sup>26</sup> This researcher has not found written, primary evidence of this, though it certainly may exist, but if one visits any of the main attractions of Seneca Falls history, one is likely to hear this repeated by life-long Villagers.

<sup>27</sup> Barben, *The Flats*, and “*Grip’s*” *Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, 1904.

<sup>28</sup> <[www.goulds.com](http://www.goulds.com)>  
<[http://www.gouldspumps.com/download\\_files/history/goulds\\_history.stm](http://www.gouldspumps.com/download_files/history/goulds_history.stm)>

the Island Works, existed on the island between the Seneca River and the C & S Canal, with their first fire steam engine incorporating Holly's pump built in 1856. That year, Holly and Race retired from the company, with Silsby's two sons Horace and Frank joining their father in 1871.<sup>29</sup> The Silsby Manufacturing Company merged with other fire engine manufacturers to form the American Fire Engine Company in 1891. In 1904, it became the American LaFrance Fire Engine Company, which still operated out of Seneca Falls in the 1910s.<sup>30</sup>

Rumsey and Company became the last pump manufacturer to develop in Seneca Falls, in 1864. John Rumsey, who had been a salesman for Cowing and Company, broke off from that enterprise to start his own pump manufacturing business, with his brother Moses and W.J. Chatham. First named the Pump and Fire Engine Works of Seneca Falls, Rumsey's company manufactured pumps, hand-operated fire fighting equipment, and railroad station pumps. When Chatham retired in 1874, the Rumseys renamed their business Rumsey & Company Ltd. The company built worker housing in the northwest section of the Village, calling it "Rumseyville". Like Goulds, American LaFrance, and the Mynderse Flouring Mills, the Rumsey plant had to relocate with the construction of the Barge Canal between 1909 and 1915.<sup>31</sup>

Pump manufacturing dominated the industrial scene and landscape of the Village, and buildings crammed the edges of the waterways of this time, due not only to the Woolen Mill buildings and the pump foundries, but also to the factories

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<sup>29</sup> Barben, *The Flats, History of Seneca County*, 1876, and Carls and Ristow, "The Industrial Geography of Seneca Falls, New York," 1936.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, and "Seneca Falls," *Seneca Falls Reveille*, 30 July 1869.

and mills that developed in the subsequent years. Other industrial enterprises that developed in the late-nineteenth century included Maynard Miller's hand sled operation, Henry Seymour's National Yeast Company's Works beginning in 1870, and the Gas Company's Works, beginning in 1871.<sup>32</sup>

### **Settlement in the Late-Nineteenth Century**

As with many towns and cities all over the United States during the late-nineteenth century, Seneca Falls experienced a change in the characteristics of its population that reconfigured neighborhoods and settlement patterns in the community. The relative ease of travel by the Canal system and the railroad, as well as the various opportunities for work in foundries, factories, and mills, attracted new residents, both American and foreign-born. Immigrants came first from the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Germany in the 1860s and 1870s, then from Italy in the beginning of the twentieth century. While a more detailed exploration of census records exists in Chapter Three, brief mention should be made here to help sketch a picture of the general settlement patterns in the community.<sup>33</sup>

Little is known about the numbers of immigrants coming to Seneca Falls before 1860, when the U.S. Census included questions about countries of birth. In 1830, there were 36 "aliens" living in the Village.<sup>34</sup> Between 1840 and 1850, there was a

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<sup>32</sup> *History of Seneca County*, 1876.

<sup>33</sup> United States Census, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930. There is no available data from the census of 1890. All of the data mentioned here comes from the Village population numbers, not including the town population numbers that were gathered separately.

<sup>34</sup> In the 1830 census, there is a column for "aliens", though this does not exist in the 1840 or 1850 census. It is not clear whether or not this term is synonymous with immigrant.

large jump in total population, from 2836 to 4296.<sup>35</sup> In the 1860 census, there were significant Irish, English, Welsh, and Scottish populations in Seneca Falls, particularly in the Third Ward, located in the southwest section of the Village south of the Canal and west of State Street (See Figure 1.10).<sup>36</sup>

Prior to 1860, the census only divided the population number between the Village and the Town. In 1860 and after, the data was collected in terms of the four wards. The First Ward covers the smallest land area, consisting of the northeast portion of the Village, north of the Canal, and east of State Street. Rumsey & Company and the settlement area known as the “Flats,” which will be discussed shortly, were located in the First Ward. The Second Ward consists of the land north of the Canal and west of State Street, including Goulds Manufacturing (after 1915) and Rumseyville, the neighborhood Rumsey Pump Ltd., had built for its employees. The Third Ward, traditionally known as the Irish, then the Italian, section contained the Woolen Mill and St. Patrick’s Catholic Church. By the 1880s, the Third Ward also had tenements built behind the Woolen Mill on Canal Street, which were likely homes for many of the mill and factory workers.<sup>37</sup> The Fourth Ward was the largest in area. It consisted of the land southeast of the Canal and east of Ovid Street and, along with the First Ward, included many of the grandest homes and most respected families in Seneca Falls.<sup>38</sup> People from other countries lived in all of the wards for

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<sup>35</sup> In 1850, the total population was 2146 white males, 2126 white females, 9 “colored” males, and 15 “colored” females.

<sup>36</sup> United States Census, 1860. The total population for the Village of Seneca Falls was roughly 6120.

<sup>37</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Seneca Falls, 1886, 1892, 1897, 1904, 1911.

<sup>38</sup> U.S. Census, 1830-1930, discussion with Kathy Jans-Duffy, Seneca Falls Historical Society, 30 November 2007, and Map of Seneca Falls, showing wards, Seneca Falls Historical Society, 2007.

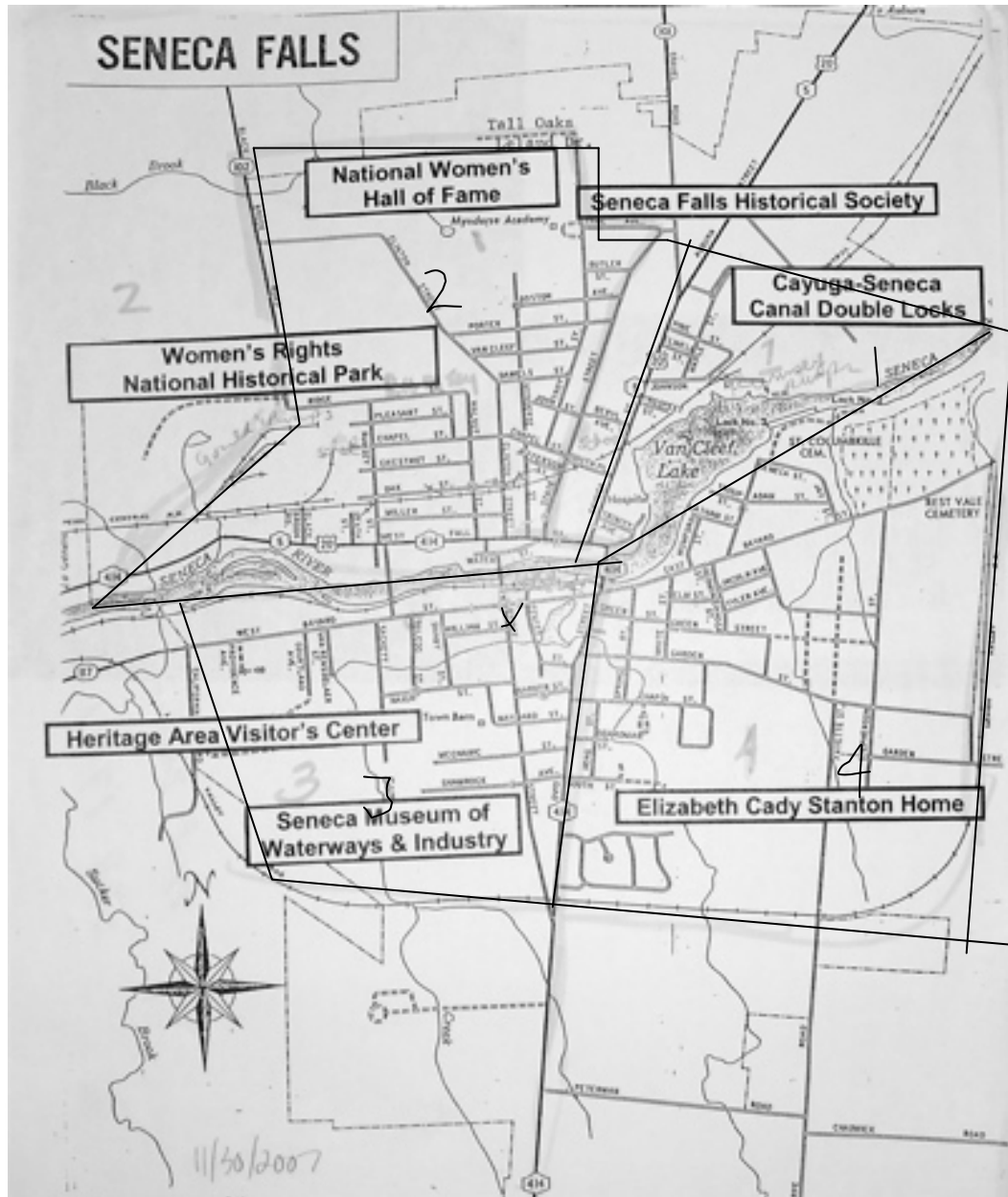


Figure 1.10. Map of the Seneca Falls Wards. The “x” marks the spot of St. Patrick’s Catholic Church. Map wards based on those drawn by Kathy Jans-Duffy. Delineations not exact.

all of the censuses examined, but the Third Ward, and in later years, parts of the Fourth Ward housed a much larger portion than any of the others.

The total population of Seneca Falls continued to increase in the 1850s and 1860s, with the numbers and ethnicities of the immigrant population increasing as well. In 1870, the total population peaked at nearly 7000, with the Third Ward again heavily populated by Irish and English families. In 1880, the total population dipped down to about 6700 people, again with heavy numbers of foreign-born and New Yorkers with immigrant parents living in the Third Ward. By 1900, the population fell to 6600, with a noticeable increase in people from Germany in all four of the wards. Germans had been in Seneca Falls for decades, representing the various states of Baden, Bavaria, etc., but the 1900 census showed a marked increase. Again here most of the foreign-born population and those New Yorkers with immigrant parents lived in the Third Ward.<sup>39</sup>

The 1910 census shows a greater variety of ethnicities. This was the first Census in which respondents had to list their native tongues and those of their parents. A total population of 6450 included Swedes and Poles, particularly in the First Ward, and Irish and Italians, who made up at least 50% of the Third Ward population.<sup>40</sup> This increase in the number of Italians is often attributed to the Barge Canal work in Seneca Falls beginning in 1909.<sup>41</sup> The 1920 census shows similar numbers of Italians, Germans, and Irish, as well as an increase in people from Russia and Poland, for a total population of 6650. Finally the 1930 census the total

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<sup>39</sup> U.S. Census, 1870-1910.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Carls and Ristow, "Industrial Geography in Seneca Falls," 1936.

population edges up to 6750, with a greater number of residents now native New Yorkers with immigrant parents rather than immigrants themselves.<sup>42</sup>

Why did such a large number of immigrants live in the Third Ward? As noted, a series of tenement houses were built by the 1880s behind the Woolen Mill on Canal Street (See Figure 1.11). Demolished by the mid-twentieth century, these tenements could have housed many of the newly arrived workers for a lesser cost and at a close proximity to the mills and factories along the Canal and river. Another reason for the number of Irish and Italians at least, was the existence of St. Patrick's Catholic Church at the corner of West Bayard and Toledo Streets. The first Catholic Church building was constructed in its current location in 1848<sup>43</sup> with a series of priests presiding over the congregation in the following years. By 1876, the Catholic population in Seneca Falls numbered 2300, with the Catholic school set to open in the neighborhood that same year.<sup>44</sup>

There was a significant number of immigrants living in the Flats, in the Fourth Ward, a neighborhood situated at a crossroads of the significant means of transportation in the Village (See Figure 1.12). Mynderse's Mills, the flouring mills known as the Red Mills because of their painted exterior, were first built in the area that would become the Flats in 1807. The first road in Seneca County ran to Mynderse's Mills, right through the Flats. The first turnpike also came through the Flats, as a means of travel from east of Seneca Falls to Fall Street. When the Auburn and Syracuse Railroad Company opened its road in Seneca Falls on July 4<sup>th</sup>, 1841, it

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<sup>42</sup> U.S. Census, 1910-1930, 2000.

<sup>43</sup> The current church structure at this location features a cornerstone of 1929.

<sup>44</sup> Barben, *The Flats, History of Seneca County*, 1876, and "Grip's", 1904.

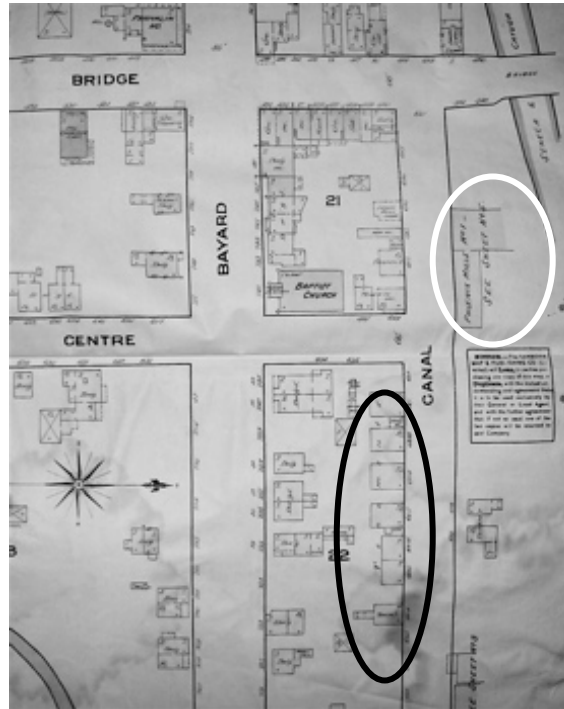


Figure 1.11. This 1881 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows the tenements constructed behind the Phoenix Woolen Mills. The Tenements are circled in black, the location of the Phoenix Mill, is circled in white.



Figure 1.12. View of the Flats, looking southeast, c. 1880s. The road and several dwellings are visible. The railroad ran above this arch after 1841. This arch still exists. Image from "*Grip's*" *Historical Souvenir*, 1904.

passed above the Flats, with Dey Street, the Flats' main artery, running perpendicularly below it, via the "Arch". Goulds Manufacturing Company, the American LaFrance Fire Engine Company, Rumsey Pumps, Ltd., and over 100 other industrial and commercial buildings all existed in the Flats in the middle of the nineteenth century. By the late-nineteenth century, they were joined by fifty houses on Fall, Dey, Lawrence, and Wall Streets, with over 100 residents. Despite all the activity in the small area, the Flats were demolished with the construction of the Barge Canal between 1909 and 1915.<sup>45</sup>

After 1870, the total population in Seneca Falls has remained static. The 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s saw the rise of various large and small-scale manufacturing that brought new settlers who re-created the neighborhoods of Seneca Falls. By the 1890s, the industry of the Village was beginning its decline. One of the major pump factories had dissolved, with another to follow in the following decades. The Woolen Mill had to be sold, though luckily it stayed in Seneca Falls, due to Harrison Chamberlain's purchase, outlined in Chapter 2. Though not precipitous, the Village's decline affected not only the economy, but the landscape and the people as well. When Erie Canal commissioners decided to build the Barge Canal on the Cayuga and Seneca Route, some saw it as an opportunity for re-growth. Despite this hope, the story of the Barge Canal proved to be more complicated, wrought with controversy, and ultimately not the opportunity Seneca Falls had wanted.

### **The Creation of the Barge Canal 1909-1915**

The development of the Barge Canal began long before the builders poured the concrete. By the 1880s, the existing Erie Canal was suffering from decreased use,

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<sup>45</sup> Barben, *The Flats, History of Seneca County*, 1876, and Eisenhart, Edward Charles. *A Century of Seneca Falls History*, 1942.

neglect, and competition from alternate transportation technology. In 1885, a Canal union organized with the goal of obtaining state money for repairs and increasing the use. The main proposal for change was enlargement of the system to accommodate larger commercial boats and thus reduce transportation costs with fewer barges. In 1903, a referendum initiative was proposed for enlarging the Canal. Its walls would be rebuilt in concrete, the lock gates in steel, and the power supply electricity. The majority of New York State voters passed the referendum, but in Seneca County, 4000 were opposed versus 907 who approved. By 1908, forty percent of the expansion work was completed.<sup>46</sup>

In 1909, another referendum was proposed to include the Cayuga and Seneca Canal in the expansion project, due to its direct connections to the two largest Finger Lakes. Two other routes, from Waterloo to Clyde and from Geneva to Lyons were also considered for the \$7 million dollar appropriation. The proposal created quite a controversy in Seneca County, particularly in Seneca Falls.<sup>47</sup> The proposed route followed the Cayuga and Seneca Canal to both its ends in Cayuga and Seneca lakes. It was to be a significant expansion, with the width to be seventy-five feet, the depth twelve feet. In addition, the falls would be removed to create a uniform water level throughout the Village.<sup>48</sup>

The *Seneca Falls Reveille* documented the ongoing disputes within the community, particularly in 1909. In April, the sentiment seemed to be generally favorable, but in May, the debate became more heated. Governor Hughes had signed

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<sup>46</sup> Watrous, Hilda R. *The County between the Lakes: A Public History of Seneca County, New York, 1876-1982*. Waterloo, NY: K-Mark Press, inc., 1983, and State of New York Improvement of the Cayuga and Seneca Canal, 1909.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> "Cayuga and Seneca Barge Canal," *Seneca Falls Reveille* 28 May 1909.

the appropriation, though with the clause that if the surveyors and engineers of the project deemed it necessary, a channel could be built from Geneva to Lyons, diverting the water from Seneca Lake. The State's reluctance to commit to the location created distrust and apprehension among the Villagers, mills, and factories in Seneca Falls, who feared the loss of water privileges that were crucial to their businesses, a loss that seemed possible with the State's involvement and interest in the area.

In October, the Canal Board decided against the proposed diversion to Geneva, and planned to expand the Canal along its original route, which the Seneca Falls Villagers supported. In October and November, the concrete walls began to take shape (See Figure 1.13 and 1.14). The C & S expansion work proved quite dangerous, with nine fatalities by the end of 1911, due to exploding dredge boilers and hits to the head, among other causes. In late 1911, the State modified its plans, deciding to purchase properties in the Flats, relocate or destroy them, and use the land to build a lake, a much needed power supply (See Figures 1.15 and 1.16). The lake would be sixty feet deep, 1000 feet wide, between forty-nine and twelve feet deep, with a bottom width of seventy feet. There would be two locks, and the lake/dam would allow the water level to be uniform throughout the Village.<sup>49</sup>

Unsurprisingly, the Village expressed some distress about the idea, particularly because of the location of Rumsey Pumps, Goulds, one of the Seneca Woolen Mill buildings, and the American LaFrance Company within the proposed area. As a

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<sup>49</sup> Watrous, *A History of Seneca County*, 1983.



Figure 1.13. View on the Canal, looking west, c. 1910. The Woolen Mill can be seen in the background. Image printed in *The Flats*. SFHS, 1981.



Figure 1.14. Barge Canal construction, looking west, c. 1912. Image printed in *The Flats*. SFHS, 1981.



Figure 1.15. View of the Flats, demolished, 1912. From *The Flats*. SFHS, 1981.



Figure 1.16. Map of the Barge Canal system in Seneca Falls superimposed on an 1836 village map, 1921. From *The Flats*. SFHS, 1981.

concession, the Board would rebuild bridges and provide some compensation to the affected businesses in addition to buying their buildings<sup>50</sup>, though the Flats residents seemed to be out of luck<sup>51</sup>: “All of the structures in the “Flats” will be condemned and at least 30 families will have to find other places of abode....”<sup>52</sup> Upon completion, the lake created on the grounds once occupied by the Flats was named Van Cleef Lake, after one of the Village’s first white settlers (See Figure 1.17).<sup>53</sup>

At the end of the Barge Canal project, the State Canal Board offered a settlement of \$460,000 to the twelve factories that claimed destruction of waterpower. Included in this group were Rumsey Pumps and the Seneca Woolen Company, whose waterpower was destroyed and basement was flooded after the ground level had to be buried underground in the creation of the canal walls.<sup>54</sup> The Cayuga and Seneca Barge Canal formally opened in the summer of 1917, though the work had been completed in 1915 (See Figures 1.18 and 1.19). The Village had high hopes for the Canal’s usefulness to its industry and economy, but this would ultimately not be the case. With the railroad service in the area suffering

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<sup>50</sup> “The Barge Canal Plans Approved by the Canal Board,” *Seneca Falls Reveille*, 15 November 1912.

<sup>51</sup> Watrous, *A History of Seneca County*, 1983.

<sup>52</sup> “Canal Board Makes Decision Favorable to Seneca Falls,” *Seneca County Press*, 14 November 1912.

<sup>53</sup> Watrous, *A History of Seneca County*, 1983. Pp. 237-275.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 1.17. View of Canal and Van Cleef Lake, Fall 2007. Remnants of the waterpower plant appear in the background. Image by author.



Figure 1.18. The Barge Canal upon completion, c. 1916. Note diminished industrial landscape in comparison to the 1880s view in Figure 1.5.

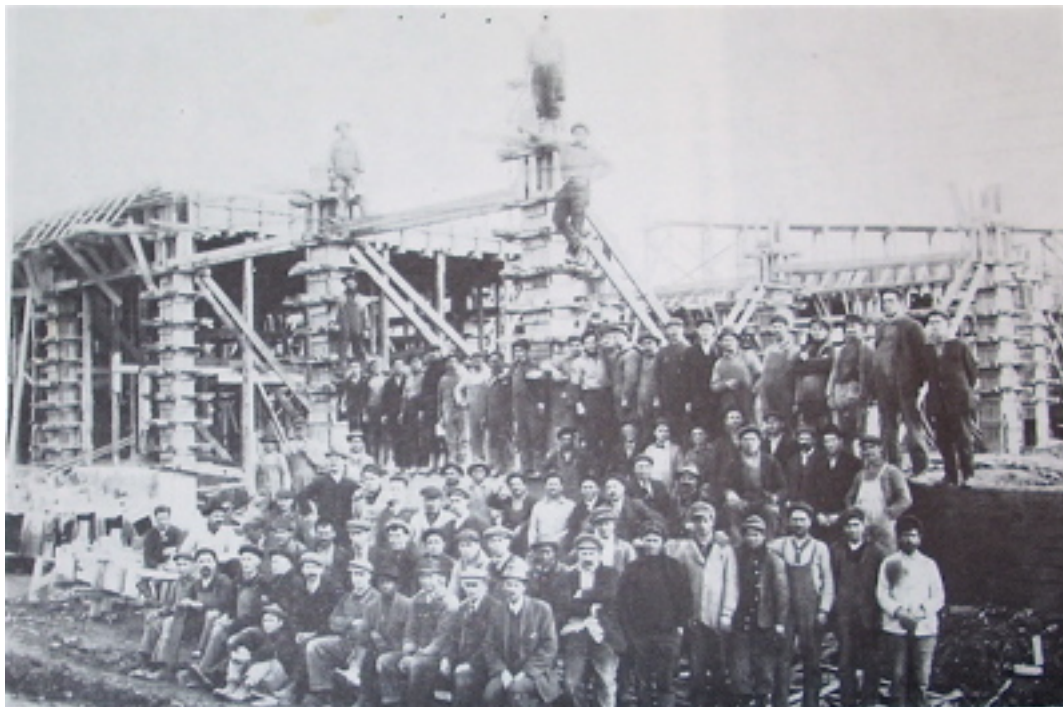


Figure 1.19. Workers on the Cayuga-Seneca Branch of the Barge Canal, c.1915.  
Image printed in Watrous, *The County between the Lakes: A Public History of Seneca County, New York, 1876-1982*. Waterloo, NY: K-Mark Press, Inc., 1983. P. 272.

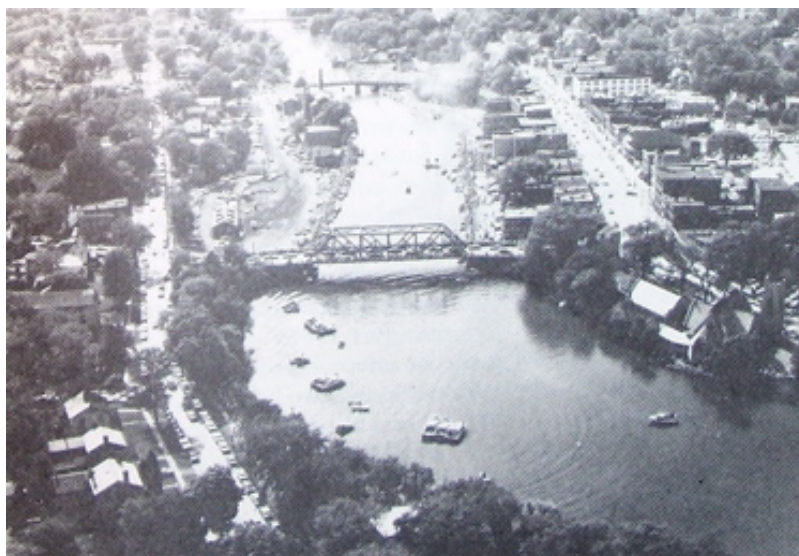


Figure 1.20. Aqua Festival, c.1980s. Ovid Street Bridge in foreground, looking west.  
Image printed in Watrous, *The County between the Lakes*, 1983. P. 275.

from loss of functioning cars, outdated parts, and lack of available workers, the Canal was expected to prosper. The Federal Control Act of 1918 allowed the government control over railroads and canals. Unfortunately, this was not helpful to the Canal's success. In 1920, The State's Superintendent of Public Works deemed Federal government's use of the Canal a "fiasco" "so replete with mismanagement, inefficiency, and incompetency as to defy imagination", and he succeeded in getting the Federal control terminated so the Canal could compete with citizen carriers.<sup>55</sup>

Despite the hopes, the Canal only brought small, intermittent successes. Leaks and infrastructure failures appeared in the 1920s, with continuous drainages and closings necessary for repair. When the Canal's promise as a freight transport did not come to fruition, people began to use it for recreation. In July of 1930, 40,000 people came to see the boat regatta at Van Cleef Lake, with motorboat races and celebratory events marking the occasion.<sup>56</sup>

Indeed, in 1930, the Barge Canal saw its greatest increase in traffic since it opened, but this glimmer of success would be short-lived. Though Villagers and visitors continued—and continue today—to use the Canal for boating (See Figure 1.20), constant repairs and varying freight needs in the Depression and World War II years, caused closings and drainages. Manufacturing companies moved away, leaving their buildings to be vacant or destroyed. Only the Rumsey Pumps, Goulds, and the Woolen Mill buildings remain in Seneca Falls today, though not in their total number that existed at the Canal completion. While Goulds still offers some work in Seneca Falls, the Woolen Mill closed its doors permanently in 1999, after George

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*



Figure 1.21. View of Canal looking west, Fall 2007. The landscape of the canal banks has changed dramatically even from the 1916-era. Boats dock on the north side of the Canal year-round. Image by author.



Figure 1.22. The Woolen Mill, looking south across the Canal from Fall Street. Fall 2007. Image by author.

Souhan sold the company to North Carolina-based Ridgeview, Inc. in 1997.<sup>57</sup> The nearly vacant canal landscape today offers a stark contrast to the crowded, busy industrial landscape of the late-nineteenth century (See Figures 1.21 and 1.22).

### **Conclusion**

There is little in terms of industry that remains from the peak of production in the 1870s. The story of Seneca Falls in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century and the creation of the Barge Canal from 1909-1915 illustrates the Village's industrial rise and fall, with imperfect construction and decreased demand prohibiting the resurgence hoped for by the Canal's creation.

Despite this industrial decline, there exist some possibilities for the future. While women's history tourism has not provided a huge economic boost, it does provide some income to the Village. Residents who live in the Village take care of their National Register Main Street (Fall Street) and are involved in town affairs concerning their history and development. In addition, the population has not suffered any significant decreases since the pre-1870 population decline. This static population figure perhaps reflects the substitution of industrial jobs with work opportunities that developed in the twentieth century, such as in education, highway construction and management, and heritage tourism.

The growth and dissolution of industry, settlement patterns, and attempts at re-growth create a background on which to tell the story of the Woolen Mill, its workers and the opportunities these stories create in the new National Women's Hall of Fame. The history of the Woolen Mill intertwines with that of Seneca Falls, and by placing that history in the context of the greater Village story, one can better

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<sup>57</sup> LaKamp, Patrick, "It's a Bitter Life," *The Buffalo News*, August 1, 1999.

understand the significance of the connection and the possibilities it brings for the future.

## CHAPTER 2: THE INTERTWINING STORIES OF THE WOOLEN MILL AND SENECA FALLS

The history of the Village of Seneca Falls intertwines with that of one its largest manufacturing enterprises: the Woolen Mill. The story of the Woolen Mill has to a large extent reflected the progresses and failures of the Village itself. Examining the owners, manufacture materials, and development of the woolen industry in Seneca Falls is particularly important considering the buildings in which woolen goods production occurred are some of the last vestiges of the industrial life Seneca Falls experienced in the mid-to-late-nineteenth century.

In this chapter, the history of Woolen Mill will be examined. First, a look at woolen goods production in Seneca Falls and the partnerships among mill founders before 1844 provides a foundation onto which the subsequent developments can be built. Second, the Woolen Mill history will be told chronologically, by exploring each owner's tenure and their connections to the Village as a whole. Third, throughout the chapter, connections between the story of Chapter 1 and this chapter will be illustrated. The histories of Seneca Falls and the Woolen Mill are parallel in terms of opportunities from modes of transportation, involvement of major players, and the effect of industries on their successes. By understanding the history of the Woolen Mill, particularly as it relates to the history of Seneca Falls, one can more fully appreciate the story of the Woolen Mill workers presented in Chapter 3, and the interpretation opportunities of the mill's future as the museum for the National Women's Hall of Fame, examined in Chapter 4.

### **Woolen Goods Production and Industry in Seneca Falls before 1844**

The industrial development of Seneca Falls in the early nineteenth century relied heavily upon the creation and expansion of the Cayuga and Seneca Canal,

described in Chapter 1. Development of the woolen industry also relied on the creation of the C & S Canal, though in a different way. New York State's involvement in the canal development in Seneca Falls caused the Bayard Land Company<sup>58</sup> to relinquish control over its extensive land holdings in the area and the water rights that came with them.<sup>59</sup> In 1827, taking advantage of this new opportunity, Judge Gary V. Sackett, future Village President Ansel Bascom, and manufacturer Andrew P. Tillman purchased a large tract of land on the south side of the river, dividing it into lots (See Figures 2.1 and 2.2).<sup>60</sup> Villagers began renting and purchasing this previously undeveloped land, building houses, stores, and businesses in the area.<sup>61</sup>

With the successful development of Seneca Falls' south side underway, Gary Sackett and thirty-three Seneca Falls citizens, including farmers, businessmen, manufacturers, and professionals, met to discuss the formation of a woolen goods manufacturing company in September of 1829. On September 12<sup>th</sup>, a meeting was held at which thirty-four men bought shares in the company for \$50 per share. Though the number of shares purchased by each individual varied, all shareholders

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<sup>58</sup> Please see Chapter 1 for more details.

<sup>59</sup> Watrous, Hilda R. *The County Between the Lakes: Life and People to be Remembered Seneca County, New York*. Interlaken, NY: Heart of the Lakes Publishing, 1988.

<sup>60</sup> This area in Seneca Falls, consisting of the blocks immediate adjacent to Bridge and Bayard Streets, appears on the National Register as the Sackett Historic District.

<sup>61</sup> *History of Seneca County, New York with Illustrations Descriptive of Its Scenery, Palatial Residences, Public Buildings, Fine Blocks, and Important Factories*, Philadelphia: Everts, Ensign, & Everts, 1876, and Chamberlain, H., "Early Industries," Paper for the SFHS. Published in the 1911 Volume.



Figure 2.1. Ansel Bascom, partner of Gary V. Sackett. Image from SFHS collection.

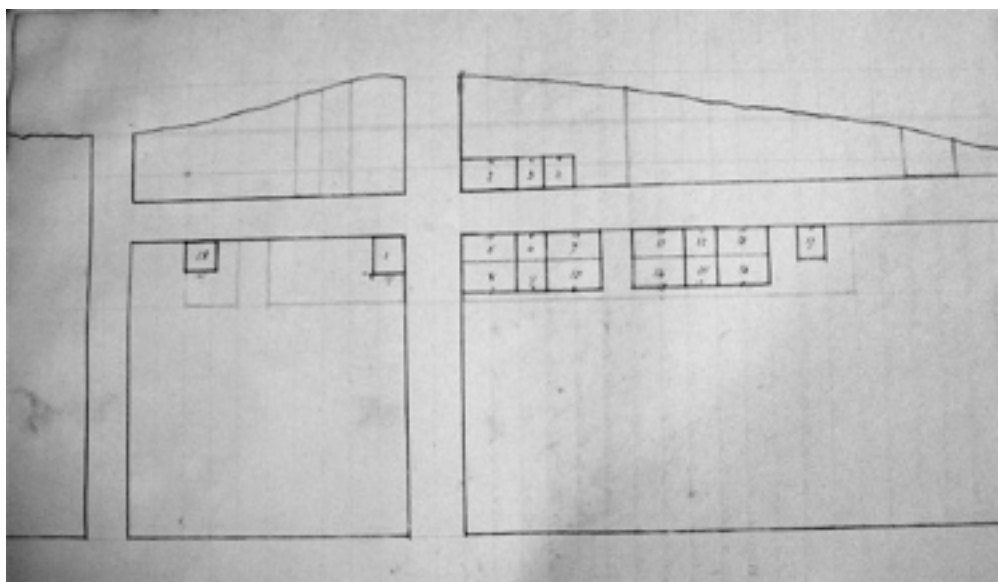


Figure 2.2. Gary Sackett's hand-drawn map of properties purchased by Bascom, Tilman, and Sackett. The east-west axes are Canal Street to the north and Bayard Street to the south. The north-south axis is Bridge Street. Image from Gary V. Sackett Ledger, SFHS.

would become known as Trustees of the Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company.<sup>62</sup> A Certificate of Incorporation was filed in October of 1829. The trustees agreed to pay Gary Sackett<sup>63</sup> to oversee construction of the building in which the company would create the woolen goods to be sold (See Figure 2.3).<sup>64</sup>

Here again, the development of the woolen manufacturing company reflects the development of the Village in that many of its Trustees involved themselves in various other projects, careers, and enterprises throughout Seneca Falls and surrounding areas. Gary Sackett, the company's first president, was a successful judge, lawyer, and landowner. Trustee Andrew P. Tillman was involved in the Seneca Lock Navigation Company and bought land with Sackett. First Vice President Edward Mynderse's father had been an agent for the Bayard Land Company, and their family featured prominently in various manufacturing and business ventures of the Village. Horace Silsby became a successful pump manufacturer. Ansel Bascom, the first secretary of the company, later became the Village's first president. Stockholder and later president Jacob P. Chamberlain, signed the Declaration of Sentiments in 1848<sup>65</sup>, advocated for abolition, and worked

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<sup>62</sup> Sackett, Gary V. Ledger 47. Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company Ledger, c. 1829-1836, SFHS.

<sup>63</sup> Cowing, Janet, "Genealogical and Biographical Sketch of Gary V. Sackett," Paper for the SFHS. Published in the 1905 Volume.

<sup>64</sup> Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company Ledger, c. 1829-1836.

<sup>65</sup> The Declaration of Sentiments was the document Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote and presented at the 1848 Women's Rights Convention held in Seneca Falls on July 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>. Stanton modeled the Declaration of Sentiments on the Declaration of Independence, outlining the rights she and many other women's rights activists of the nineteenth century believed women should have, including financial independence in marriage and the right to vote. Many, including her husband, believed Stanton's Declaration to be too radical and feared it would alienate the attendees of the convention. She presented despite protests, and nearly one third of the convention, or 100 people, both women and men signed it. Notable signers include Frederick Douglass, Stanton and the four other organizers: Lucretia Mott, Mary Ann

in real estate and manufacturing throughout the Village, though he preferred describing himself as a farmer.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, as the years progressed and shareholders changed, several names repeat throughout similar new ventures in the industrial development of the Village.<sup>67</sup>

While the manufacturing of woolen goods occurred in Seneca Falls before 1829, the various steps were spread out among different buildings, including people's homes. Later the woolen goods manufacturing steps occurred in specialized, single-task mill buildings. Seneca Falls saw its first fulling mill by May of 1806, with its first cloth-dressing mill and carding works following soon thereafter.<sup>68</sup> Carding, fulling, and finishing became the first wool-manufacturing processes to be mechanized. Carding blended, cleaned, and joined the woolen fibers to be spun into yarn. Before the process became mechanized, cloth makers would use wire-studded boards with handles, stroking the wool back and forth between them. By the 1780s carding engines were used in England, and by the first decade of the nineteenth century, carding engines became commonplace in New England and New York as well. Cloth dressing consists of three main parts: fulling, napping, and shearing. Fulling washed, shrunk, and felted the cloth. Napping raised the nap of the cloth to be sheared to a uniform height. While napping and shearing remained the

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M'Clintock, Martha Wright, and Jane Hunt, and prominent Seneca Falls residents Charles Hoskins (See this chapter) and Henry Seymour (See Chapter 1).

<sup>66</sup> Derousie, Anne M. *Jacob P. Chamberlain: 1802-1878. A Report Submitted to the Women's National Historical Park, Seneca Falls, New York.*

<sup>67</sup> Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company Ledger, c. 1829-1836.

<sup>68</sup> *History of Seneca County*, 1876.

last processes to be mechanized, as they required skill and precision, fulling could be achieved quite easily on a larger scale.<sup>69</sup>

There are nine main steps in the manufacture of woven woolen goods. First, raw wool is cut from sheep, which is then sorted based on quality. Then, the raw wool is scoured by immersing it in a bath of warm water and stale urine, later sodium bicarbonate, to remove the lanolin (grease) and suint (sweat salts) of the raw wool. After the scoured wool is rinsed and dried, it is picked, wherein it is laid out on a clean, dry surface and beaten with sticks to remove dirt and particles. The picked wool is then carded, as explained. The carded wool is then spun into yarn and woven into cloth through the use of a loom. The cloth is then dressed, by being fullled, napped and sheared (See Figure 2.4. For more illustrations of woolen goods manufacture, please see Chapter 3).

The plan formulated by Sackett and his partners to construct one building in which to house the entire process signaled a new chapter in textile development in Seneca Falls.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps in seeing the potentially significant effects such a large-scale prospect could have on their own businesses, some small-scale woolen goods manufacturers advertised their services mere weeks after the spring 1844 public announcement, when they had not done so previously.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> The Merrimack Valley Textile Museum. *Homespun to Factory Made: Woolen Textiles in America, 1776-1876*. North Andover, MA: Merrimack Valley Textile Museum, 1977.

<sup>70</sup> The notion of containing all pieces of the wool cloth manufacturing process in one building was not a new one to the United States as a whole. The entrepreneurs in Lowell, Massachusetts, had already built such structures at least a decade before Sackett and Co. had proposed the idea in Seneca Falls. The unique concept of housing all the processes in one building, as well as featuring worker housing on or very near the factory buildings became widely known as the Waltham-Lowell System.

<sup>71</sup> “Custom and Woolen Factory,” *Seneca Falls Democrat*. 30 May 1844.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SENECA</b>  <b>Woollen Manufacturing</b>  <b>COMPANY.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>1000 SHARES, OF 50 DOLLARS EACH.</b></p> <p><i>We whose names are underwritten, severally, for ourselves and legal representatives, promise to pay to the <del>President</del> <sup>Trustees</sup> of "The Seneca Woollen Manufacturing Company," Fifty Dollars for every <del>Share</del> <sup>Share</sup> of Stock set opposite to our respective names, at such times and in such proportions as the said <del>President</del> <sup>Trustees</sup> shall require.</i></p>					
DATE.	SUBSCRIBERS' NAMES.	SUBS. SHARES.	AM'T PAID.		
Jan 20 1850	Gary Sackett	Fifty Shares	50	500	
"	George Sullivan, Jr.	Fifty Shares	50	500	
"	Isaac Van Houten, Jr.	Twenty Shares	20		
Feb. 9	J. J. Payne	Ten Shares	10	100	
"	D. W. Brown	Five Shares	5	50	
"	Richard C. Cary	Five Shares	5	50	
"	Wm. J. Gilbert	Five Shares	5	50	
"	Chas. L. Anthony	Five Shares	5	50	
"	James Chamberlain	Five Shares	5	50	
Dec. 20 1850	This stock is done and the building sold for 7500 with interest from date the actual cost of building did not cost over \$1200 but it nearly cost 7600				

Figure 2.3. First page of the Sackett Ledger showing the "Seneca Woollen Manufacturing Company" Trustees. Image from Gary V. Sackett Ledger, SFHS.

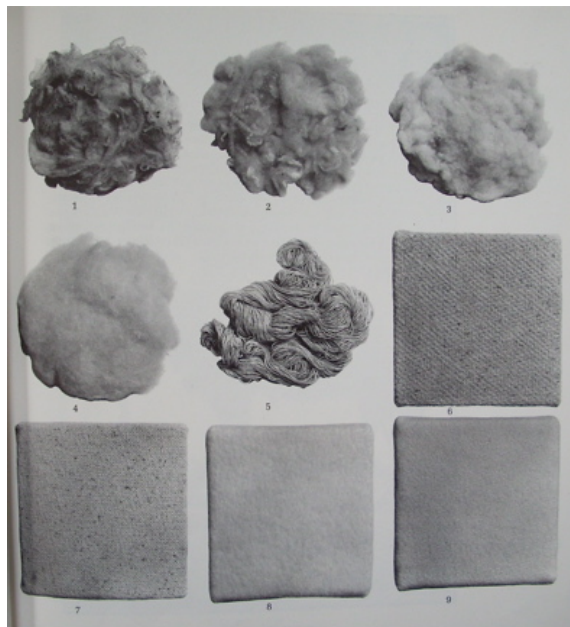


Figure 2.4. This illustration shows wool in each of the nine steps: raw, scoured, picked, carded, spun, woven, fulling, napped, and sheared. From *Homespun to Factory Made: Woollen Textiles in America, 1776-1876*. P. 5.

By the 1820s in the United States, particularly in New York and New England, interest in woolen goods had risen to new heights, as word of financial successes of the textile mills in Lawrence and Lowell, Massachusetts, and Harrisville, New Hampshire, spread through the country. Before 1800, when most of the woolen goods production resided in the private homes of citizens, visiting Englishmen and American craftspeople lamented the almost universally poor wool quality in the United States, particularly in the Southern colonies. By the late eighteenth century, the era of homespun dwindled in the U.S., with progressive-minded businessmen seeking to replicate the mechanization of the industry seen in England. As interest in the industry grew and small-scale fulling and carding factories developed, manufacturers and wool growers alike sought higher quality wool from overseas in order to then try to breed the sheep in the U.S. By the first decades of the nineteenth century, the quality of wool began improving, with centers in Vermont, western Virginia, Ohio, and Washington County, New York, being hailed as the producers of the most superior raw wool. In addition to advances in the quality of the raw materials, advances in the mechanization of the processes, particularly in the unique, Waltham-Lowell System<sup>72</sup> signaled a new opportunity for entrepreneurs, particularly those relatively near wool production centers. The Trustees of the Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company in Seneca Falls seemed to have followed a trend, seeing the possible financial advantages the burgeoning American woolen goods industry could offer.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> The Waltham-Lowell System of Lowell, Massachusetts, incorporated all of the steps in textile manufacturing under one roof. In addition, this system relied on female workers, who were required to live in a series of boardinghouses.

<sup>73</sup> Cole, Arthur Harrison. *The American Wool Manufacture, Vol. I*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.

Though Seneca Falls sat hundreds of miles away from the superior wool center of Washington County, local wool production seemed to be of sufficient quantity and quality for the Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company to propose the creation of a Woolen Mill. The Village's location on the C & S Canal—and by 1841 on the Albany-Rochester Railroad—allowed more convenient transport of the raw material, whether shipped in locally, or, as one 1844 *Seneca Falls Democrat* article suggested, from other parts of the country and overseas. It seemed options for raw material supplies were rather expansive.<sup>74</sup>

With the growth of the woolen industry in Seneca Falls and other Upstate communities in the 1830s, an arrangement developed in which there would be a depot for woolgrowers to bring their crops, and manufacturers could purchase the locally-grown wool at set prices. The location of the depot was meant to be advantageous for both, as the farms and the factories were located relatively closely to one another. Under the tariff that then existed, however, manufacturers could import the raw product from anywhere they chose, with non-local wool usually being cheaper than the product offered by the local woolgrowers. For manufacturers in Seneca Falls, the comparatively higher-priced raw material could be avoided for the lower-priced product easily transported to the center of the Village.<sup>75</sup> Even so, the Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company did purchase wool from local growers, with advertisements proclaiming, “Cash and Cloth for Wool!” appearing after the building's completion in October 1844.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> “The Wool Growers and the Manufacturers,” *Seneca Falls Democrat*. 14 August 1845.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, and “Cotton and Woolen Goods,” *Seneca Falls Democrat*. 8 August 1844.

<sup>76</sup> “Cash for Wool,” *Seneca Falls Democrat*. 29 May 1845, and “Cash and Cloth for Wool,” *Seneca County Courier*. 19 June 1846.

### **The Stone Mill Building and the Company 1844-1855**

The stone building that stand adjacent the canal today began to take shape shortly after the Trustees appointed Gary Sackett to oversee its design and construction in late 1829. Sackett provided a list of projected expenses, noted in the ledger<sup>77</sup>:

The limestone cut for the building came from a quarry only a few miles to the south of the site, on the outskirts of the Town of Seneca Falls. In addition, local contractors signed on, and the Latham Brothers of Seneca Falls were hired as the architects of the project.<sup>78</sup>

A 1936 *Seneca Falls Reveille* article and the 1887 obituary for Oliver S. Latham provide some insight into the architects of the stone mill building. The Latham family consisted of brothers Franklin, Edward, William, Obadiah, and Nathaniel. Though they dabbled in other professions, they all worked at one time or another in the company of Latham Bros., Builders, & Constructors. Obadiah and Nathaniel were formally trained as architects, while Oliver worked as a builder, contractor, and a businessman in lumber and coal.<sup>79</sup> In June of 1878, Obadiah and Oliver were mentioned in Report # 917 of the 45<sup>th</sup> United States Congress, as they sought back payment for two customs houses they built in Buffalo and Oswego in 1855-1856.<sup>80</sup> The 110' x 46' building they designed and built for the Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company was four-and-a-half stories with limestone walls and

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<sup>77</sup> Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company Ledger, c. 1829-1836.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> "History of the Latham Family," *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 20 & 27 March 1936. In Col. 37, Box 11, Folder 11, SFHS.

<sup>80</sup> Latham Brothers Papers, Col. 37, Box 11, Folder 11, SFHS.



Figure 2.5. Image of the stone mill building, south facade, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. From SFHS collection.



Figure 2.6. Image of stone mill building, east façade, with two-and-a-half story brick building to the east, late-nineteenth century. From SFHS collection.

opening lintels, a slate roof, with a full-length clerestory monitor at the attic level. A bell on the roof would signify beginning and shift end times. The initial plans began to take shape 1829, and the actual building was not completed until the end of 1844, fifteen years later (See Figures 2.5 and 2.6).

A second certificate of incorporation was issued in 1844, with a meeting on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1844, approving the plans for construction. The first notice of the “woolen factory” appeared in the *Seneca Falls Democrat* on May 16<sup>th</sup>, 1844, prior to the building’s construction:

WOOLEN FACTORY.—G.V. Sackett, G.H. Daniels, A. Bascom, John Shoemaker, E. Mynderse, M. Hoster, W.S. Gaylord, C.L. Hoskins, and Samuel Holt, have been chosen Trustees of the Woolen Factory about to be erected in this Village. The building will be erected forthwith.

The minutes for the May 11, 1844, meeting of the Seneca Woolen Company show that Gary Sackett had been elected president, Edward Mynderse as Vice President, Charles Hoskins as Treasurer, and Ansel Bascom as Secretary. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the men elected to positions in the company were among those who owned the most stock.<sup>81</sup> Over the next few months in 1844, notifications placed by Secretary Ansel Bascom, and later C.D. Thompson appeared in several of the Seneca Falls newspapers, calling for shareholders to pay percentages of their capital stock as money became crucial to the ongoing construction of the Company’s building.<sup>82</sup>

Though not much is or available that may reveal the various successes and failures of the Company in its first years, some entries in the Company’s meeting

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<sup>81</sup> Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company Meeting Minutes, 1844-1855. Souhan Papers, Col. 30, Box 5, Folder 5, SFHS.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid* and Derousie, *Jacob P. Chamberlain*.

minutes help to shed some light on the story. In September of 1848, a Mr. Bryan reported on behalf of a special investigatory committee for the company's finances a loss of \$11,867.46 in the 1847-1848 fiscal year, ending July 1<sup>st</sup>. With a decline in stock of \$8403.21, the total financial loss hit \$20,270.67. While the loss was blamed on mysterious "circumstances beyond control,"<sup>83</sup> the committee attempted to recoup by offering new stock to the public, rather than ask for loans to cover the debt. Construction along the canal may have been another factor, as the January 1850 minutes suggest a change of plans in the number of locks, most likely affecting the transportation of the goods in and out. In addition, the leadership of the company changed several times, with the Treasurer and Secretary seats being combined and separated in different times in the first years.<sup>84</sup> Whatever the reason, by 1854, the Company was headed toward collapse.

#### **The Phoenix Company and Jacob P. Chamberlain, 1855-1864**

By 1854, Jacob P. Chamberlain, farmer, businessman, and real estate player, owned thirty shares of stock in the Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company. A wealthy and prominent Seneca Falls citizen, Chamberlain had been involved in the successful flouring Red Mills of the Village. Though he did not serve on the Company Board of Trustees before 1854, Chamberlain's expansive reach in the community made him the port Gary Sackett sought during his company's financial storm (See Figure 2.7).

In December of 1853, Sackett and Chamberlain agreed to dissolve and reorganize the company. In June of 1854, Chamberlain was appointed Vice President

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<sup>83</sup> Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company Meeting Minutes, 13 September 1844. Souhan Papers, Col. 30, Box 5, Folder 5, SFHS.

<sup>84</sup> Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company Meeting Minutes, 1844-1855. Souhan Papers, Col. 30, Box 5, Folder 5, SFHS.

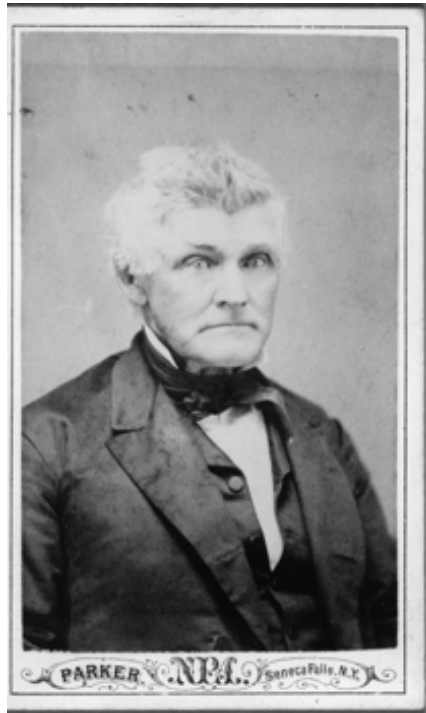


Figure 2.7. Jacob P. Chamberlain. From SFHS collection.



Figure 2.8. Harrison Chamberlain. From *"Grip's" Historical Souvenir*, 1904.

of the Company and President of the Board of Trustees. In the fall of 1854, the Board began the process of shutting down the business, with the stockholders agreeing to petition the state legislature to aid in the dissolution. In 1855, the property was auctioned off, to Henry Stanton for \$20,000. Stanton eventually gave the property back to what would become known as the Phoenix Company, which was essentially a reorganization of the first company, with Jacob P. Chamberlain as the head.<sup>85</sup>

Jacob P. Chamberlain assumed the Phoenix Company presidency, with William Johnson serving as treasurer, and Chamberlain's son Harrison as secretary (See Figure 2.8). In his first few years, Chamberlain kept the wool-buying department that began in the 1840s, and in addition he opened a retail counter for the local citizens to purchase woolen cloths by the yard at wholesale prices.<sup>86</sup> An article in the *American Reveille* dating May 5, 1860, reported positively on the progress of the Phoenix Mill factory, mentioning Chamberlain and Johnson's "judicious management" and the "excellent reputation" of the finished cloth produced there. The article also mentioned the company operated on \$100,000, with approximately 100 employees and annual business of \$125,000.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, and Derousie, *Jacob P. Chamberlain*.

<sup>86</sup> Jacob P. Chamberlain. (Biographical Sketch). Paper for the SFHS. Published in the 1906 Volume.

<sup>87</sup> "The Woolen Factory," *The American Reveille*. 5 May 1860. The number of workers listed for the Woolen Mill in the United States Census of 1860 is 73—42 women, 31 men. This figure of 100 workers had been mentioned in "Seneca Falls," from *The American Reveille* on January 28, 1860. Either the author of the article was estimating or the number of workers dropped between January and June, when the Census took place in the Village.

Villager Henry Stowell's 1862 "History of Seneca Falls" provides some financial and product details about the Phoenix Mills of this time. By that year, the Company manufactured superior quality fancy cassimere on \$65,000 worth of equipment, annually consuming 200,000 pounds of wool. About \$2000 per month was paid in labor.<sup>88</sup>

While Chamberlain's leadership of the mill and the Phoenix Company appeared to be somewhat successful, rival cotton and woolen textile-makers were also gaining successes. This competition demonstrates the industrial expansion and growth of Seneca Falls in the 1860s, a growth that would continue for the next couple of decades. The Phoenix Mills would not miss the opportunity, as Jacob P. Chamberlain transferred ownership of the Phoenix Company and Mill to stockholders Abel Downs and Albert Jewett in 1864, previously mentioned in Chapter 1.<sup>89</sup>

### **Seneca Knitting Company and Phoenix Woolen Mills, 1864-1888**

As described in a previous section, woolen good production existed before the creation of the Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company, and despite the large-scale manufacturing efforts of that company and the Phoenix Company, small-scale woolen good production still existed in the Village after 1844. With the C & S Canal and the railroad expanding options for product transport and bringing new people

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<sup>88</sup> Stowell, Henry, "History of Seneca Falls," in *Geneva, Seneca Falls, and Waterloo Directory*, 1862.

<sup>89</sup> *Abstract of Title of The Phoenix Mills of Seneca Falls, 1873*. Souhan Papers, Col. 30, Box 5, Folder 5, Seneca Falls Historical Society (SFHS), Seneca Falls City Directories 1862/63; 1867/68; 1874/75; 1881/82, Deed Books, Seneca County Clerk's Office, and "Grip's" *Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, 1904.

into the Village, industries could expand and grow, causing competition with existing factories, such as the Phoenix Company.

As described in Chapter 1, Abel Downs, a well known Seneca Falls citizen and businessman, began a pump manufacturing enterprise in 1840. Perhaps due to the competition brought by the three other pump factories that developed in Seneca Falls in the mid-nineteenth century or in response to a new entrepreneurial opportunity, Downs got involved in the production of knitted goods in the late 1850s. His friend A.J. Goffe had patented a knitting machine and allowed Downs and Company to use it. In these few years Downs' knitting employees numbered nearly two hundred, producing long underwear and socks. In addition, as mentioned in Chapter 1, the United States Army contracted the Seneca Knitting Company, as the enterprise became known, to produce 85,000 pair of knit socks in 1859 (See Figure 2.9).<sup>90</sup>

In 1864, Jacob P. Chamberlain sold the Phoenix Woolen Mill and Company to Abel Downs and Albert Jewett, another prominent Seneca Falls businessman. Jewett became the president and L.C. Partridge became Treasurer. The Village directories from 1867/68, the first in existence after 1864, list the Seneca Knitting Company and the Phoenix Company as two separate enterprises, though by the 1881

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<sup>90</sup> *The Scientific American*. October 4, 1862, p. 214, and Barben, Arnold. *The Flats Including the Canal and Industries*. SFHS, 1981. Many Seneca Falls Villagers as well as many written accounts describing the Phoenix Mills attribute this Army contract to the Phoenix Company. There does not appear to be any such contract among the remaining Phoenix Company papers. While there does not appear to be any existing paper contract tying the Army contract to Downs' enterprise either, secondary sources point to that connection. Considering the complexity of the relationship between the two companies in the 1860s and 1870s, and the dearth of information from that period from either enterprise, this confusion is understandable and not entirely clear.

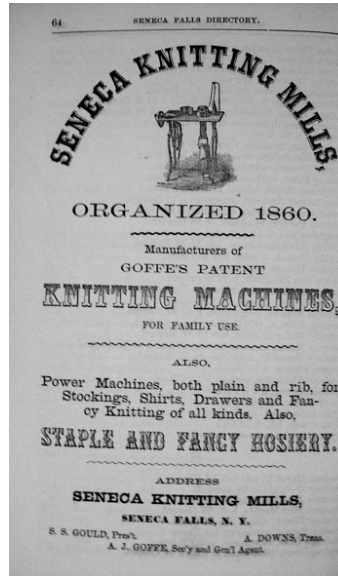


Figure 2.9. Advertisement for the Seneca Knitting Mills in the 1862 *Village Directory*.



Figure 2.10. Modern day photograph of the 1860s brick additions. The two-and-a-half story structure at the west continues back farther than the south façade of the two-story brick structure, forming an L-shape plan. Image by author.

edition, only the Phoenix Mill is listed. It is not known why these factories were kept separate, perhaps due to their end products or to retain separate management.<sup>91</sup>

Though the precise date has not been identified, some time in the 1860s, a two-and-one-half story brick addition was constructed against the west façade of the 1844 stone structure (See Figure 2.10). The 1860s date of construction is cited in New York State Blueforms<sup>92</sup> and on several photographs; the telltale brick smokestack makes the addition easily identifiable in the photos. This brick addition, which created a U-shape plan with the existing building, created the opportunity for increased production for the Phoenix Company. A July 1869 *Seneca Falls Reveille* article helps describe the production of the mill:

The Woolen Mills of the Phoenix Company are an object of interest and well worthy of a visit. They embrace two spacious areas, despite numerous others which are used as store rooms, packing rooms, &c., &c., Here we saw some of the finest specimens for woolen goods designed for men's wear we have ever examined...<sup>93</sup>

A second article on the same day in the same newspaper echoed the sentiments:

Among the many manufacturing establishments we visited, probably the most extensive is that of the Phoenix Woolen Company, where are made woolen fabrics of almost every name and nature—from the heaviest cassimere for the mechanic's wear to the finest broadcloth and doeskin. This concern employs hundreds of men and women, boys and girls; and it costs a small fortune to settle its weekly payroll.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> *Seneca Falls Village Directories*, 1862/63; 1867/68; 1874/75; 1881/82.

<sup>92</sup> The New York State Blueform is the form used to document historic resources in the State of New York. The Blueforms include information on a structure, or site's location, condition, and architecture. Various completed Blueforms document the Woolen Mill buildings, though the 1989 set of Blueforms was published for the historic district in Seneca Falls.

<sup>93</sup> "Seneca Falls and Its Manufactures," *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 30 July 1869.

<sup>94</sup> "Seneca Falls," *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 30 July 1869.

During the 1860s and 1870s, the Woolen Mill appears to have achieved some success. United States Census records show the highest number of employees that mill had yet seen in 1870, and the company remained under control of the same owners.<sup>95</sup> When Abel Downs died in 1869, his share of the company transferred to his wife Ann, who then transferred it to the Phoenix Company.

Just as Downs' Seneca Knitting Company brought competition to Chamberlain's Phoenix Mills, so too would another textile mill bring it to Jewett's Phoenix Mills. A June 1878 article announces the name change of the Seneca Knitting Mills to Gleason Knitting and Manufacturing Company, overseen by Rhode Islander J.N. Burdick and James Aiken of Troy, New York.<sup>96</sup> It seems that by 1874, the Seneca Knitting Company was floundering, so E.P. Gleason purchased it and gave control to Burdick. The Gleason Mills became a cotton goods operation, and a large one at that, employing 250 people by 1881, and ranking fourth in Seneca County in production output and capacity. The Phoenix Mills, meanwhile, were not succeeding as well as in the 1860s and early 1870s. Employee numbers fell under 100, and competition was creating difficulties. A May 1881 article attempts to explain the failures of the Woolen Mill and the success of Gleason's Mill:

For a time, during the war, quite a flourishing business was done, in filling army contract for hosiery, but when this source of demand passed away, the investment ceased to be remunerative and the concern became a thing of the past. In the

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<sup>95</sup> In the 1870 United States Census, the number of employees listed for the Woolen Mill was 280, 145 men, 135 women. For a more detailed examination of the workers of the Woolen Mill, see Chapter 3.

<sup>96</sup> *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 21 June 1878.

meantime, enterprises of a like character in other localities, having assimilated their products to the later demands of their trade, were doing thriving business...<sup>97</sup>

Surprisingly, there does not appear to be further evidence of the existence or fate of the Gleason Mills, other than the fact that Elliot Gleason purchased a portion of the property in 1887. The Seneca Knitting Company was most likely the future incarnation of Gleason's, and it was sold to eventual Woolen Mill owners Francis and George Souhan in 1954.<sup>98</sup>

Little can be drawn from the scant evidence from 1880-1890 concerning the Phoenix Company. The buildings remained, the company employed fewer than 100 people, but no papers remain to add detail to the business' failure, nor do any newspaper articles help explain the downfall. From the description of the Gleason successes, it appears that the demand for the types of products being made by the Phoenix Mills was no longer what it once was, and the failure to attract new demand exhausted the business. At some point in the 1880s, one truth is that Harrison Chamberlain, the Phoenix Company's former secretary and Jacob P. Chamberlain's son, bought the business, and from then to the end of his ownership, attempted to make some drastic changes.

### **Harrison Chamberlain Attempts Reform, 1888-1917**

In the 1888/89 Seneca Falls Village Directory, Harrison Chamberlain was listed as the Proprietor of the Phoenix Mills, in addition to being the manager of the National Yeast Company, and the President of the Exchange National Bank. Harrison Chamberlain would also become one of the founders and first presidents of the Seneca Falls Historical Society. In fact, his purchase of the Phoenix Mills

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<sup>97</sup> "The Gleason Knitting and Manufacturing Company," *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 27 May 1881. "The Gleason Knitting Mills," *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 7 May 1880.

<sup>98</sup> Deed Books, Seneca County Clerk's Office. Bks. 103 (p. 101) and "Seneca Knit Names New Officers, Board," *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 10 June 1954.

returned it to the single-family ownership it had experienced under his father Jacob P. Chamberlain, who died in 1878, as Harrison's son Frank became the mill's manager.<sup>99</sup>

Chamberlain appeared to be eager to reinvigorate the mill to meet the demands of a changing community. He sold two of the buildings in the Village that had been used by the Company, and worked to refit the stone and brick buildings along the Canal with new machinery. By 1900, Chamberlain had renamed the Company Chamberlain and Son Woolen Manufacturing. By 1904, the mill was said to be somewhat successful, with 2,000 pounds of wool going into the building, creating 1200 yards of cloth daily, earning \$350,000 a year.<sup>100</sup> Newspaper articles also suggested that Chamberlain's leadership had brought some success to the operation, noting that during the winter, the factory operated "day and night" "producing large quantities of goods." In the 1890s, the mill produced men's overcoats, suitings, and ladies' cloakings.<sup>101</sup>

In fact, the appearance of success hid the truth from Seneca Falls. Harrison Chamberlain closed the mill on Thursday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1905, having incurred as much as \$160,000 in debt, with his property and holdings coming under investigation. The 1905 *Seneca Falls Reveille* article reporting the mill closing sympathizes with

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<sup>99</sup> *Seneca Falls Village Directories, 1888/89* and "*Grip's*" *Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, 1904.

<sup>100</sup> *Seneca Falls Village Directories*, and "*Grip's*" *Historical Souvenir of Seneca Falls*, 1904. Unfortunately, these figures cannot be trusted completely, as "*Grip's*" *Historical Souvenir*, from which these figures come, though a contemporary resource, would surely have had some purpose in inflating the perhaps negative reality of the Woolen Mill business, it being a souvenir for probable tourists.

<sup>101</sup> "Assignment of Harrison Chamberlain," *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 21 April 1905 and Discussion with Kathy Jans-Duffy, Seneca Falls Historical Society, 30 November 2007.

Chamberlain's efforts to reform the mill's operation, perhaps reflective of his personal and business connections throughout the Village. Despite Chamberlain's efforts, though, the mill closed in 1905 and would not reopen for twelve years.<sup>102</sup>

After unsuccessful efforts by intervening parties to again restart the mill operations,<sup>103</sup> in 1908, the property was sold at auction. It appeared that Chamberlain and his wife Ophelia had already sold part of the property to Elliot Gleason in February of 1887 and more to "Seneca Woolen Company" in 1906. On February 27, 1909, Charles Hawley, Referee of the Village of Seneca Falls, passed the property ownership to Charles Palmer, Norman Gould, Kurt Moebius, Winthrop Dwight, and George Dominick Jr. In both the 1910/11 and 1914/15 Village Directories, the mill was listed as the Seneca Woolen Mills.<sup>104</sup>

The mill's various troubles in these years again recall the events of Seneca Falls during these years. As seen in Chapter 1, the Village's industrial successes had peaked by 1870, with the large-scale pump manufacturing operations and the Phoenix Company seeing profits and expansion. By the 1890s, one of the pump factories had dissolved, with another soon to follow. The closing of the Woolen Mill and its subsequent twelve-year vacancy followed the general trend in the Village itself, where both large-scale and small-scale operations dwindled away, and even the major players had difficulty in remaining viable. A *Reveille* notice reflects the tension that lack of work brought to the Village:

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> "Woolen Mills to Be Sold," *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 20 November 1908.

<sup>104</sup> Deed Books, Seneca County Clerk's Office. Bks. 103 (p. 101), 125 (p.256), 127 (p.276), and *Village Directories*.

Should the Seneca Falls Woolen Mills start up again...it would give employment to many people in this Village, who have had more or less experience in the mills in times past. They have been idle for many months, and are very anxious for work once more.<sup>105</sup>

The people of Seneca Falls were looking for new economic opportunities and chances to reinvigorate their community. In the prospect of the Barge Canal mentioned in Chapter 1, many Villagers saw a chance for change. Among those who attempted to breathe life into Seneca Falls industry were George Geb, a textile manufacturer from Connecticut, and Thomas Garvin, a Boston banker.

### **Geb, Garvan, and Souhan, 1917-1997**

The *Seneca Falls Reveille* announced on March 9, 1917, that George Geb of Connecticut would be leasing the Woolen Mill and would equip the property for the production of yarn. Machinery would run on electricity for the first time, and the newspaper emoted positively of the new opportunity for the mill, predicting jobs and revitalization.<sup>106</sup> Though the mill would see some setbacks under the Geb and Garvan ownership, their tenure—with the addition of Geb's son-in-law and grandson—kept the mill open and operating until they sold it in 1997 (See Figure 2.11).

Thomas Garvan, a Boston banker, helped finance the lease and 1922 purchase of the mill property. Geb and Garvan added new machinery, running water, and electricity to facilitate the production of spun woolen yarns, for which there was said to be “an unprecedented demand.”<sup>107</sup> Due to the construction of the Barge Canal, one floor of the stone mill was entirely buried, and the building experienced

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<sup>105</sup> *Seneca Falls Reveille*, 26 February 1909.

<sup>106</sup> “Lease of the Woolen Mills,” *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 9 March 1917.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

leaks and construction failures as a result. Attempts to gain financial compensation from the state created long, though eventually fruitful, endeavors for the new company.<sup>108</sup>

By 1934, the Seneca Knitting Company located on Fall Street and Geb and Garvan Yarn Company again represented the second-largest employment and production industry—textiles—in Seneca Falls. Geb and Garvan then produced their own woolen and merino yarn and bought cotton yarn from Southern production centers for use in the manufacturing of heavy bundle hose for workmen, sportsmen, and athletes. By this time, 60% of workers were women (See Figure 2.12). The larger percentage of women workers employed at the mill persisted at least until 1982, according to the experience of Susanna Jane Beasley, who worked as a winder from 1944 until 1982.<sup>109</sup>

In 1937, a two-story cinderblock addition was built directly adjacent to the 1860s brick addition. As of 1948, 125 people worked at the Geb's mills performing various tasks, though by that year, both Geb and Garvan had died, leaving Geb's son-in-law Francis Souhan as president, his daughters Clara Geb Souhan and Ida May Geb as vice president and secretary/treasurer, respectively (See Figure 2.13).<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Watrous, Hilda R. *The County between the Lakes: A Public History of Seneca County*, New York, 1876-1982. Waterloo, NY: K-Mark Press, inc., 1983.

<sup>109</sup> Carls and Ristow, "The Industrial Geography of Seneca Falls, New York," 1936, and Interview with Susanna Jane Beasley, 2 November 2007. As explained in Chapter 3, this ratio was not historical. In the nineteenth century, the number of men compared to the number of women was often almost even, with the number of men higher than women in some years.

<sup>110</sup> *Blue Form Survey: An Architectural and Historical Inventory of the Village of Seneca Falls Historic District*. Seneca Falls: The Wilson Press, 1989, and "Seneca Falls Mills Speeded Emancipation of Women—From the Spinning Wheel," 1948. Received from the National Women's Hall of Fame Archives, 14 September 2007. Publisher Unknown.



Figure 2.11. George Geb, c. 1925. From “Seneca Falls Mills Speeded Emancipation of Women—From the Spinning Wheel,” 1948.



Figure 2.12. This map shows manufacturing entities in Seneca Falls, c. 1936. Geb and Garvan Yarn Co. (5), is circled in white, with the Seneca Knitting Co., just to the north (6). From Carls and Ristow, “The Industrial Geography of Seneca Falls, New York,” 1936.

The family-managed business flourished in the 1950s and 1960s, reflecting the general economic success in Seneca Falls at the time. By 1965, Geb and Souhan, as it was then known, sold \$18 million annually, with \$5 million from hosiery, \$3 million from woven cloth, and \$10 million from yarn.

In June of 1954, the Souhans purchased the Seneca Knitting Company, adding 200 workers and expanding production to include men's dress hose and children's socks in addition to its athletic socks, work hose, and women's sportswear (See Figure 2.14).<sup>111</sup>

In January of 1959, one of the company's buildings, located across Bridge Street from the 1844/1860s remaining structures, burned to the ground in the early morning, costing an estimated \$2.5 million in loss of equipment, product, and machinery. All of the workers, including Susanna Jane Beasley, escaped unharmed. Despite its location along the Barge Canal, little water was available to stifle the flames, as the canal had been drained three days prior for repairs to the walls. Business continued in the other buildings, and on October 1, 1959, a new 154,000 square foot hosiery plant opened for business, with a public celebration announced in December (See Figures 2.15 and 2.16).<sup>112</sup>

The importance of the mill was reflected in the reaction of the Village. In the December 2, 1959, edition of *The Seneca Falls Reveille*, advertisements from various community businesses, people, and groups appeared, featuring

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<sup>111</sup> "Seneca's Francis J. Souhan and George G. Souhan," c. 1965. Received from the National Women's Hall of Fame Archives, 14 September 2007. Publisher Unknown, and "Seneca Knit Names New Officers, Board," *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 10 June 1954.

<sup>112</sup> "Seneca's Francis J. Souhan and George G. Souhan," c. 1965. Received from the National Women's Hall of Fame Archives, 14 September 2007. Publisher Unknown, "Seneca Knitting Mill Destroyed by Fire," *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 28 January 1959, and "Grand Opening Friday at Seneca Knitting Mill," *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 2 December 1959.



Figure 2.13. Francis “Bud” (l) and George (r) Souhan, c. 1960. From “Seneca Falls Mills Speeded Emancipation of Women—From the Spinning Wheel,” 1948 (Reprinted c. 1965).



Figure 2.14. Seneca Knitting Mills Truck picking up goods from train car, c.late-1940s. From SFHS collection.

encouraging messages of support to Geb and Souhan Yarn Co. The public celebration in December of 1959 included various speakers from unions and businesses, and was attended by “thousands”. It seems that by this point in Seneca Falls, the mill and Geb and Souhan had become such a significant employer and symbol of industrial history that the possibility of its failure spurred the citizens to express their support and encouragement to continue.<sup>113</sup>

By this time, George Souhan, son of Francis and Clara, had assumed control as president with his father remaining active as vice president. In May of 1962, the company announced an expansion of the property they purchased from the Seneca Knitting Company in 1954. The \$70,000, 25,000 square foot addition would be used as a warehouse, and increased carding, spinning, and knitting capacity by adding twelve looping machines, two dye baths, twenty-four knitting machines, four spinning machines, and two carding machines. At this point in the mill’s history, an estimated 430 people worked there.<sup>114</sup>

In the late 1960s, Geb and Souhan focused its production exclusively on socks, due to the popularity of polyester and other artificial fibers in Seneca Falls and the United States as a whole. Limiting the production variety of the mill did not cause the Company to fail. In fact, people all over the world, purchased the socks of Geb and Souhan with orders from Eddie Bauer, Ralph Lauren, and the Gap, among others.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> “Thousands Attend Seneca Knit’s Grand Opening,” *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 9 December 1959.

<sup>114</sup> “Seneca Knit to Expand,” *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 9 May 1962 and “Knitting Mill Enlarged,” *Seneca Falls Reveille*. 8 August 1962.

<sup>115</sup> Discussion with Kathy Jans-Duffy, Seneca Falls Historical Society, 30 November 2007. Mrs. Jans-Duffy offered examination of her own research notes connected to the history of the mill, and this note comes from her research.



Figures 2.15 and 2.16. Images of the January 1959 fire that destroyed one of the SKM buildings. Lack of sufficient water due to Canal draining made stifling the blaze impossible. Note also the ice formations. Images from SFHS collection.

In 1974, Francis Souhan died, passing the ownership of the company to George Souhan, who then changed the name of the company to Seneca Knitting Mills. Also at this time, Souhan closed the office on Bayard Street and moved the administrative offices to the 1844 stone mill. The successes of the 1950s and 1960s would not continue through all of Souhan's tenure, however. Souhan would incurred huge debts attempting to keep the mill in business, eventually choosing to sell the company and the mill in order to prevent his debts from affecting his children. In 1995, George Souhan made a controversial move: he sold the Seneca Knitting Mills for \$12 million to Ridgeview Inc., a textile manufacturer—located in Newton, North Carolina.<sup>116</sup>

### **The Mill Closing and the National Women's Hall of Fame, 1995-Present**

Ridgeview's ownership of the mill and its operations received negative responses from workers and Villagers from the beginning. George Souhan had been involved in the mill's operations since the 1950s, and many workers appreciated his empathetic, paternalistic management style. By the early 1990s, however, Souhan had incurred large debts, in part due to inappropriate costs put to the company, such as country club memberships. Souhan claimed he sold the company in 1995 in order to salvage the possibility for a successful future for the mill, as well as to save his family from having to pay his debts when he passed away. The mill workers complained of the out-of-state management, whose infrequent visits to their Seneca Falls mill made the workers lament Souhan's departure. Ridgeview closed the mill in 1999, claiming the changing sock trends cost the company a loss of over 1.3 million dollars. The workers blamed the company's lack of effort and interest in a mill so far

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<sup>116</sup> LaKamp, Patrick, "It's a Bitter Life," *The Buffalo News*, August 1, 1999, and "Ridgeview Announces Third Quarter Results," *PR Newswire*. New York: 9 November 1999. p. 1.

away from its owners. Before it closed, the mill was said to be the last standing textile mill in New York State.<sup>117</sup>

Seeing one of its last vestiges of industrial history in jeopardy, Seneca Falls citizens rallied to preserve it from demolition. Seneca Knit Development Corporation purchased the property in 2000. The SKDC, a non-profit public benefit agency designed to save and renovate the buildings of the Seneca Knitting Mills, passed ownership to the National Women's Hall of Fame in January of 2007, after the organization expressed a desire to rehabilitate the vacant structures for use as their offices, library, archives, and museum. As of 2008, the NWHF has made some progress in creating their rehabilitation plan, one that will be—and has been—of utmost interest to the citizens of Seneca Falls.<sup>118</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The history of the Seneca Knitting Mill companies and property connects to the history of the Village of Seneca Falls mostly due to its existence for nearly the same length of time as the community itself. While at first, Village growth and success affected the development of the mill and its company, by the end of its life, the mill affected the growth and success of the Village. The economic loss of the knitting manufacture left Seneca Falls with little but women's history tourism as their main source of revenue. The story of the knitting mill buildings, companies, and players connects closely to the Village's story through the effect of transportation such as the C & S Canal, the railroad, and the Barge Canal. Also, the manufacturers and businessmen in the early-to-mid nineteenth century that created

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Deed Books, Seneca County Clerk's Office, Bks. 607 (pp.124, 135), 728 (p. 278), and 742 (p.20). The National Women's Hall of Fame and their rehabilitation of the knitting mill properties are the main subjects of Chapters 4 and 5. For more information on these topics, please see these chapters.

the Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company participated in other business and industrial ventures that helped build the foundation for the industrial success experienced in the mid-nineteenth century. Finally, the industrial successes of the various companies and manufactures of Seneca Falls affected both the development of the Village itself and the development of the Woolen Mill by creating a market and a name on which both could capitalize. Neither story would be what it is without the influence of the other; the Woolen Mill's building and company histories could not have existed in the same way in a different location, nor could Seneca Falls have grown and shrunk in the same way without the Woolen Mill.

The connections between the history of the Village of Seneca Falls and the history of the Woolen Mill do not end with the company and building histories. An examination of the demographics of the Woolen Mill workers through the late-nineteenth century and early twentieth century shows not only how the people employed there reflect the Village's population in general, but also how the demographics of the mill workers of Seneca Falls do not resemble the workforces of other similar, contemporary New York and New England Woolen Mills.

### CHAPTER 3: SENECA FALLS WOOLEN MILL WORKERS AND THEIR CONNECTION TO THE VILLAGE, IN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

An examination of United States Census records provides information and clues about the number, gender, age, ethnicity, living conditions, and social networks of the Woolen Mill workers in Seneca Falls that help in creating a picture and concept of the mill and the Village as a whole.

The data on the Seneca Falls mill workers also allows for comparisons between the Village mill workers and those of other New York and New England mills. While there exists a notion that most of the people who worked in textile mills in the nineteenth century were young women, the reality in Seneca Falls and elsewhere is more complicated.

In this chapter more than any other, the timeline is primarily focused on the period between 1850 and 1920. This period was chosen partly in order to limit the scope of the research, but also because it was when new citizens established Seneca Falls' neighborhoods and communities. In addition, the highest Woolen Mill employment numbers exist for these years, and as seen in Chapter 1, the population in Seneca Falls essentially levels off after 1870. Also, the time frame exists here especially because of the patterns of immigration in Seneca Falls<sup>119</sup>, the opening of the mill in 1844, and the rise and fall of industry in the community, most clearly seen in this time period.

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<sup>119</sup> Irish, German, English, and Scots comprising the largest numbers of immigrants in Seneca Falls in the middle of the nineteenth century. These countries continued to present the largest number of people, particularly at the Woolen Mill, until roughly 1920, where Census records show a large influx of Italians, possibly moving to the Village for work on the Barge Canal between 1909 and 1915.

This chapter will begin with a look at labor in American wool manufacture, drawing upon the examples of Lowell, Massachusetts, and Harrisville, New Hampshire, to create comparisons with the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill. Arthur Harrison Cole's *The American Wool Manufacture* supplies a general background on commonalities among woolen manufacturing enterprises in the late-nineteenth century. After examining wool manufacture as a whole, the United States Census data and Village directories provide detailed information about the demographics of the workers. This information helps show how the Woolen Mill population was involved in settlement patterns and the growth of the Village. The information compiled in this chapter creates a framework for the Woolen Mill's social history and how it relates to the history of the Village as a whole. In gathering data and piecing together the stories in this social history, a picture emerges concerning the workforce of the Woolen Mill that could be highlighted at the new National Women's Hall of Fame museum, allowing for a more personal narrative of the history and further opportunity to connect the present Seneca Falls community with its past.

### **Labor in American Wool Manufacture**

The lives of the textile mill workers in Lowell, Massachusetts, are often seen as the norm, though they differ greatly with those of the Woolen Mill in Seneca Falls, as well as with the woolen industry in general.

Originally called East Chelmsford by its European settlers, Lowell, Massachusetts, developed into one of the world's preeminent industrial centers by the mid-nineteenth century. Lowell's development into a textile industry hub began with the "Boston Associates" who acquired land and constructed cotton mills and boardinghouses. Their Waltham-Lowell system, along with the availability of water-power and access to the Middlesex Canal, created a burgeoning textile enterprise,

particularly during 1820s, 30s, 40s, and 50s. Tourists traveled to Lowell to see the mill operation and experience the new city rising up around the success and production of the mills.<sup>120</sup>

The Boston Associates actively sought out the young, unmarried, rural, New England women that came to dominate the workforce. The Waltham-Lowell System became famous not only in its endeavor to house all cloth-making processes under one roof, but also in the ways in which the issues of a workforce were addressed. In order to protect the young female workers' virtue and to assure worried parents at home, the Boston Associates created a series of boardinghouses with strict rules, timetables, and guidelines. The close-knit community that developed as a result of the boardinghouse system eventually provided the strength in numbers it took for the women workers to protest the wage gap between them and their male colleagues. These protests created a shift in employee demographics when the management hired immigrant labor at a lower cost to fill the jobs of strikers (See Figure 3.1)<sup>121</sup>

Post-1850, profits decreased as the availability of cotton decreased, and the mill managers cut wages for workers. Profits and deficits continued unsteadily in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and during the Depression and World War II, most of Lowell's textile mills closed. Lowell suffered through several decades of an unstable economy but experienced a sort of revitalization after the creation of the Lowell National Historical Park (NHP) in 1978, which continues to provide enough income and tourists to be an economic force in the city.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Weible, Robert, Ed. *The Continuing Revolution: A History of Lowell, Massachusetts*. Lowell, MA: Lowell Historical Society, 1991.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

Due in no small part to the Lowell NHP, the stories of the mill workers at Lowell have become well known through the United States. Despite the proliferation of these stories, the mostly female workforce of Lowell's first decades does not appear to be the case in nineteenth-century wool manufacture in the United States in general. Lowell's system was repeated and copied for its innovative, "all under one roof" methods, but not always in the composition of the workforce, for several reasons.

First, the textile factories in Lowell produced mostly cotton cloth, with only one mill of over thirty devoted to woolen goods production. In Harrisville, New Hampshire, the most famous exclusively woolen manufacture town, the boardinghouse and production methods were copied from Lowell, but the operatives were split, nearly half men, half women, and mostly American.<sup>123</sup> Secondly, Lowell's textile production heyday occurred in the early nineteenth century, before 1850, during the transition from homespun methods to industrial production. Before the processes of cloth production became entirely mechanized, women made cloth for their families at home. When the cloth making process began to be mechanized, as in the pre-1850 time period, women could become textile mill workers with less stigma attached to that profession than some others, as making cloth in a factory or mill was seen as an extension of womanly, household duties. Finally, Lowell's textile production exceeded that of almost all other textile operations, in both volume of and number of operatives. If the management had employed mostly men, the labor costs would probably have been much higher. In other, smaller nineteenth-century American woolen mills, there were, unsurprisingly, fewer machines, a smaller workforce, and less room for mistakes in the production of the cloth, so those

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<sup>123</sup> Armstrong, John Borden. *Factory under the Elms: a History of Harrisville, NH*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969.

operations sought to hire men, who at the time were perceived to be more skilled and more able to handle the heavy machinery.<sup>124</sup>

Arthur Harrison Cole's *The American Wool Manufacture* appears quoted in most of the books analyzing the woolen industry in the United States in the nineteenth century, seemingly because there does not appear to be any other set of volumes as comprehensive. According to Cole, male workers often outnumbered female workers in smaller operations, such as the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill, particularly in New York. Men were believed to be more capable in handling the heavy machinery, intricate skilled work, and in producing the finest cloths. In the beginning of wool manufacture in the United States, foreign men, particularly those from the United Kingdom, were often sought after, as many of them had skills Americans did not, having been familiar with machines from the British Industrial Revolution, which began some time before that of the United States. With the introduction of the more easily operated power looms, though, mill managers began substituting female weavers for male, in attempts to minimize the costs (See Figures 3.2-3.4).<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Cole, Arthur Harrison. *The American Wool Manufacture, Vol. I*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926, Oakley, Ann. *Woman's Work: The Housewife, Past and Present*. New York: Vintage Books, 1974, and Lerner, Gerda. *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979.

<sup>125</sup> Cole, Arthur Harrison. *The American Wool Manufacture, Vol. I*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926.



Figure 3.1. Sign in front of the Boott Cotton Mills boardinghouse in Lowell, MA. The "mill girl" workforce of the Boott Mill was not reflected in the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill workforce. Image by author.

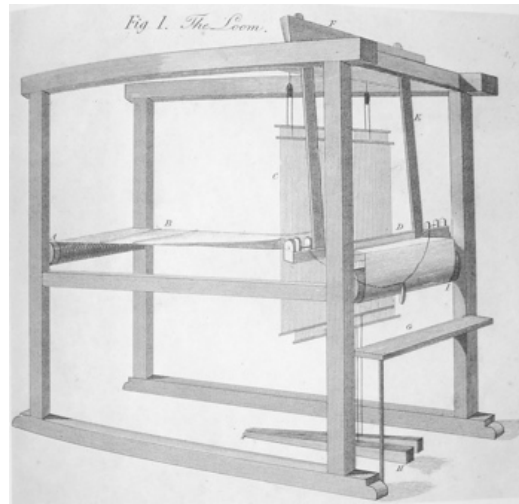


Figure 3.2. The Fly Shuttle Loom. Patented in England by John Kay in 1733, this was one of the earliest textile manufacturing machines. From *Homespun to Factory Made: Woolen Textiles in America, 1776-1876*, p. 39. Image entitled “The Loom,” by Richard Guest, from *A Compendius History of the Cotton Manufacture*, Plate 4. Manchester, 1823.

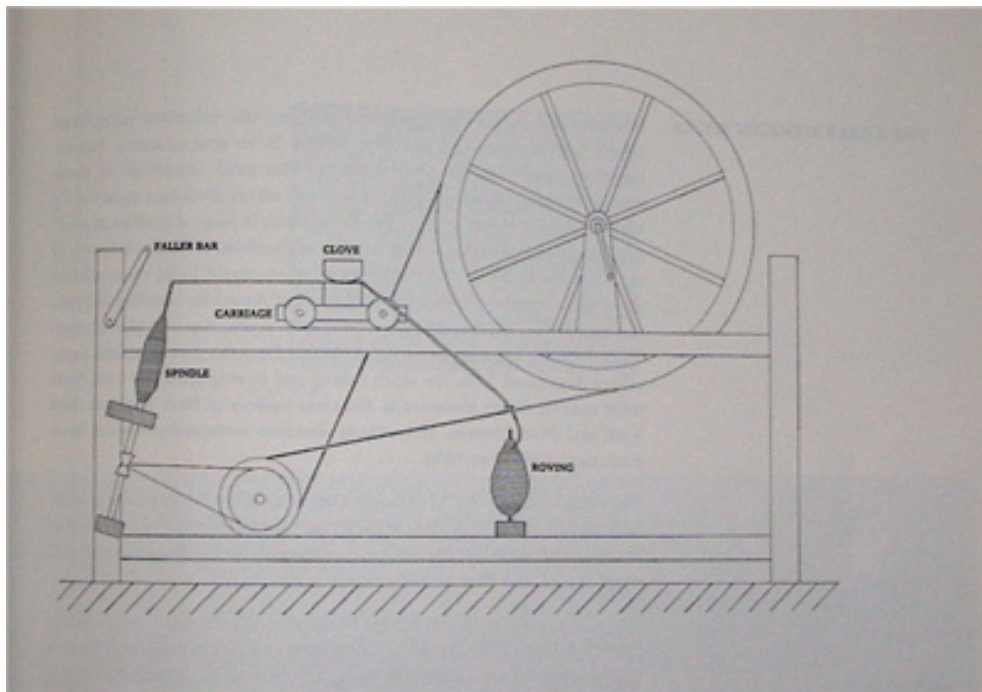


Figure 3.3. Diagram of how a Spinning Jenny (early wool spinning machine) works. From *Homespun to Factory Made: Woolen Textiles in America, 1776-1876*, p. 53. Diagram by John Dugger, 1975.

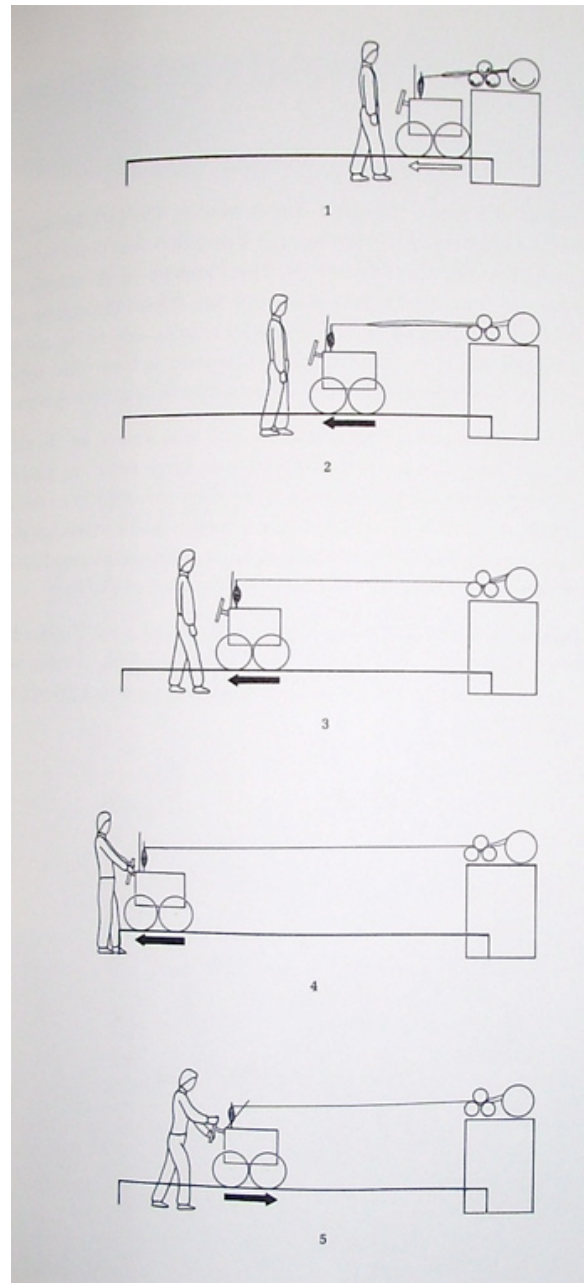


Figure 3.4. The Spinning Jack replaced the Spinning Jenny in American woolen mills by the mid-nineteenth century. Jack spinners were highly skilled and usually male. It was due to machines like this that the gender ratio in woolen mills often hovered near 1:1. From *Homespun to Factory Made: Woolen Textiles in America, 1776-1876*, p. 77. Diagram by John Dugger, 1975.

Female workers cost less than male workers, on average. An investigation of American wool manufacturer practices that took place in 1828 showed that while men were paid about \$20-\$25 per month, women and children, of whom very few were employed in the physically strenuous processes of whole manufacture, were only paid \$10-\$12 per month. As machinery improved and required less physical strength, managers substituted more women for men. These increases in the numbers of women hired created almost equal ratios of women to men in many mill operations. When the numbers of immigrants increased after the middle of the nineteenth century, many manufacturers found that they could employ foreign men for the same amount they had paid American women, so the ratios again shifted, albeit slightly. Woolen mills continued to hire women, both American-born and foreign-born through to the twentieth century, but there was rarely a majority of females in the workforce.<sup>126</sup>

### **Woolen Mill Workers in Seneca Falls, 1850-1920**

The 1850 U.S. Census for Seneca Falls Town and Village<sup>127</sup> shows twenty-two men that most likely worked at the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill, with a total Town and Village population of 4296 men and women. Seven men were listed as spinners, four as “woolsorters”, three as carders, two as weavers, and, one scourer, one picker, one fuller, one shearer, one dyer, and one cloth finisher. Fourteen claimed New York or another U.S. state as their birthplaces, four England, two Ireland, one German, and one Scotland. Of the twenty-two, eight lived with other families, presumably as

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> There is no separation between the Town statistics and Village statistics in the 1850 census data.

boarders. The median age of the twenty-two men fell at 28, while the average age was 30 (See Figures 3.5-3.15).<sup>128</sup>

It should be noted that the youngest male worker was William Mawson, aged 17, the only person under the age of 20. These ages require mentioning as they reflect the possible absence of child labor at the woolen mill for most of its existence, though this may be due to the Census simply not recording other children who worked there. Cole notes the lack of child labor in many woolen mills, due to the strength required for operating the heavy machinery used at woolen mills. From the existing records, there is no indication as to why few children worked at the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill, if in fact there were only a few working in the mill.<sup>129</sup>

These findings from the 1850 Census most likely do not tell the whole story for the employees at the Woolen Mill, for several reasons. First, only men over the age of fifteen claimed employment. No women living in Seneca Falls had occupations listed. It seems unlikely that no women in Seneca Falls worked outside the home in 1850. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that no women worked at the Woolen Mill by 1850, given the numbers that are listed as working there in the 1860 Census. Secondly, with only twenty-two workers in a four-and-a-half story building, the Woolen Mill probably could not produce much cloth, particularly with only two weavers, one scourer, one picker, etc. The twenty-two mentioned above are most likely employees, because of their job titles and the existence of only one Woolen Mill in Seneca

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<sup>128</sup> United States Census 1850.

<sup>129</sup> Cole, Arthur Harrison. *The American Wool Manufacture, Vol. I.*, and United States Census 1850.

The following images illustrate the various tasks woolen mill workers performed:



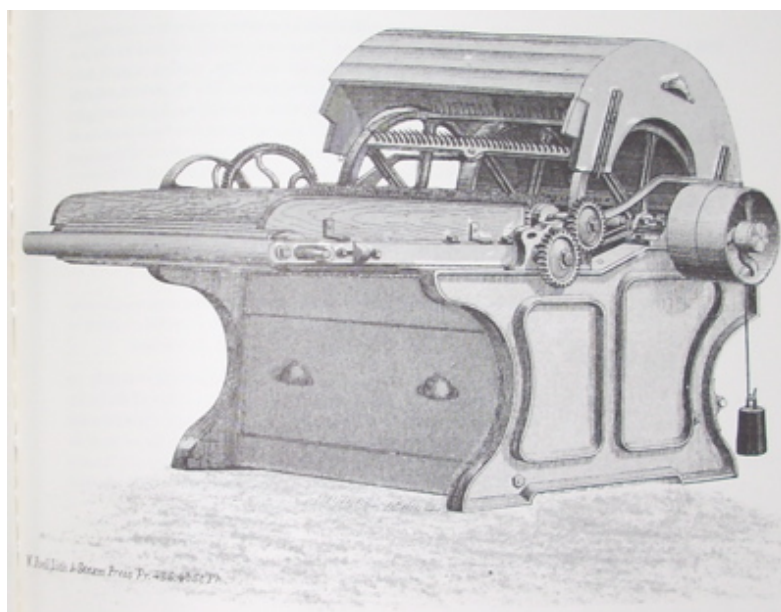
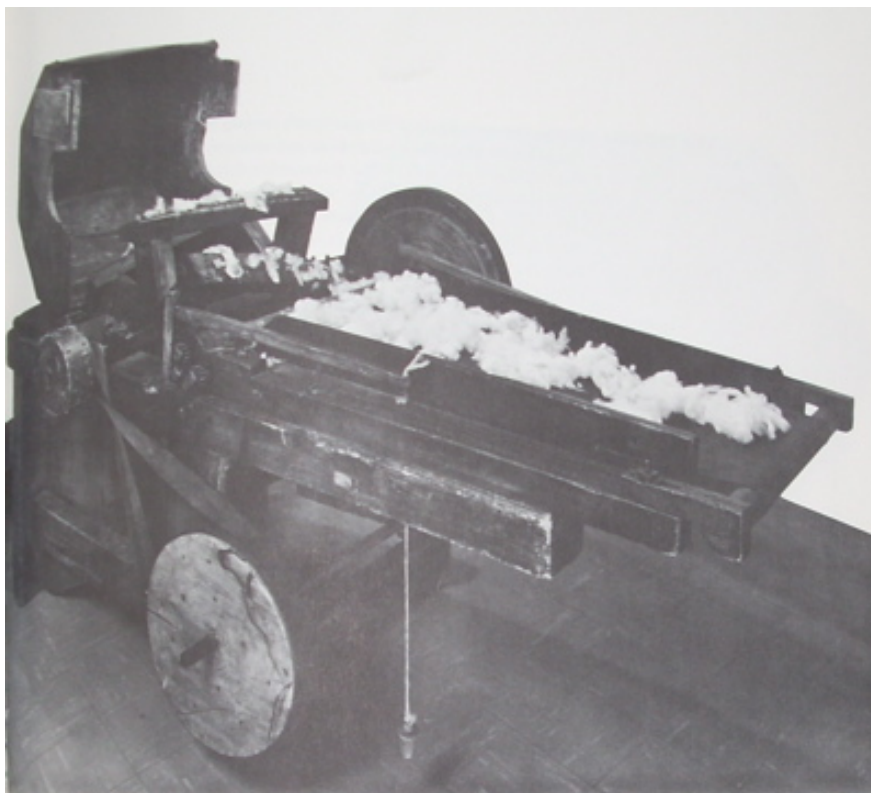
Figure 3.5. Sorting was often the job of men, who separated newly shorn, raw wool into two or three grades. From *Homespun to Factory Made: Woolen Textiles in America, 1776-1876*, p. 11. Image entitled “The Wool Storehouse,” from *Designatio Iconographica Oberleutensdorfenses...*, Plate 6, Prague, 1728. Reproduced in *The Waldstein Woolen Mill* by Herman Freudenberger, Boston, 1963.



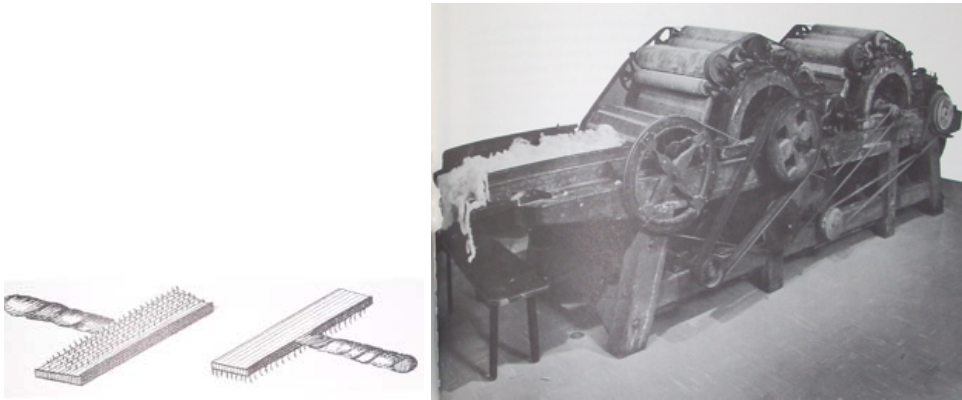
Figure 3.6. After sorting, scouring was performed on the raw wool, in which the lanolin and suint, the wool’s protective substances, were removed by immersing it into a mixture of stale urine and water, then rinsing it with fresh water, and drying it on a rack. From *Homespun to Factory Made: Woolen Textiles in America, 1776-1876*, p. 13. Image entitled “Draperie,” Plate I, Fig. 1, from Denis Diderot’s *Encyclopedie, Recueil de Planches*, vol. IV. Paris, 1763.



Figure 3.7. Picking removed the dirt, dung, straw, and other impurities from the scoured wool. Pickers spread wool on a clean floor, then beat it with sticks to knock the debris loose, which was subsequently collected and discarded. From *Homespun to Factory Made: Woolen Textiles in America, 1776-1876*, p. 15. Images from *The Waldstein Woolen Mill* by Freudenberger, Plates 8 and 10.



Figures 3.8 and 3.9. These images depict mechanized pickers from c.1830 (top) and c.1880s. From *Homespun to Factory Made: Woolen Textiles in America, 1776-1876*, pp. 63 and 65. Bottom image entitled "Wool Mixing Picker," from *Davis and Furber Pattern List*, 1883.



Figures 3.10 and 3.11. Carding blends, cleans, and joins woolen fibers into a mass that can be spun into yarn. From *Homespun to Factory Made: Woolen Textiles in America, 1776-1876*, pp. 16 and 68. Hand card image from Diderot, *Encyclopedie*, Plate III, Fig. 8. 1820s carding engine from Massachusetts.

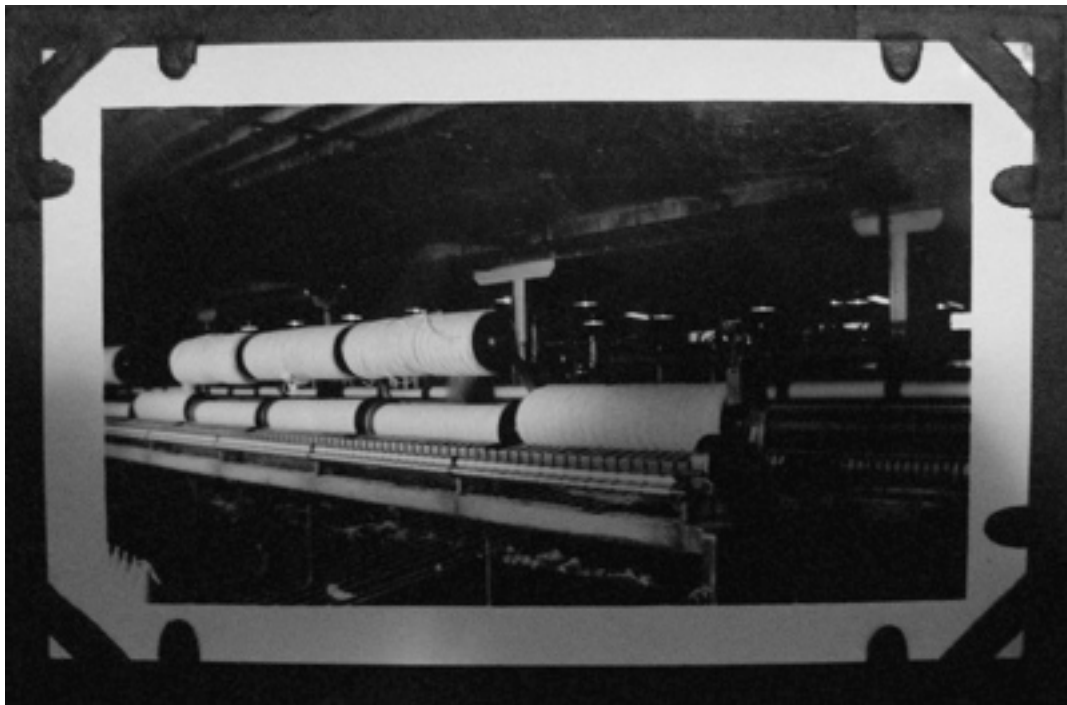


Figure 3.12. Carding Room in the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill, c.1945. Image from SFHS Collection.

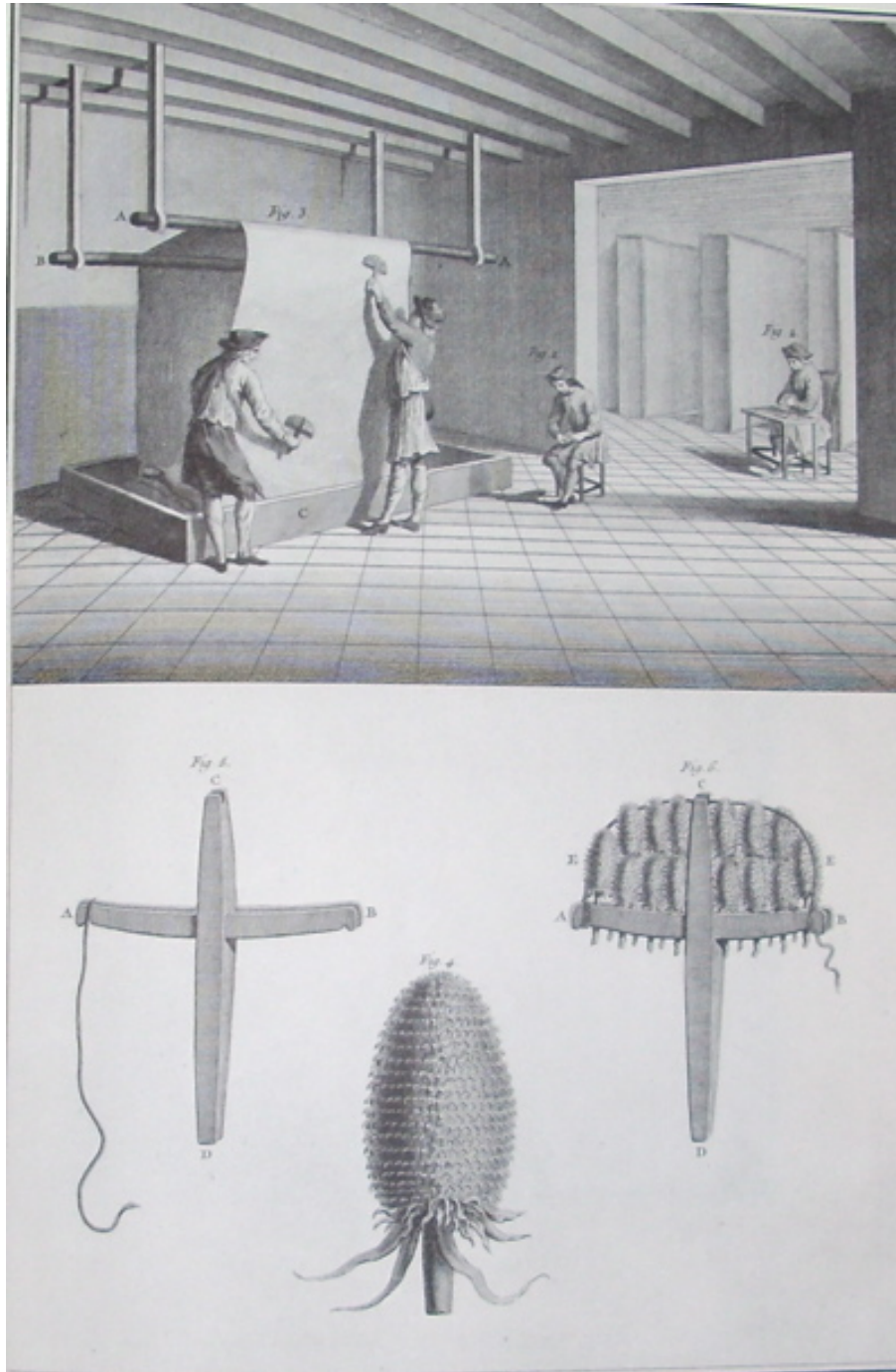


Figure 3.13. Early nappers used teasels to raise the fibers of the cloth to be sheared.  
 From *Homespun to Factory Made: Woolen Textiles in America, 1776-1876*, p.42.  
 Image entitled "Draperie," Plate XIII, from Duhamel du Monceau, "Art de la  
 draperie," in *Descriptions des Arts et Metiers*. Paris, 1765.



Figure 3.14. Shearing involved a high level of skill to get the napped fibers to a uniform length. From *Homespun to Factory Made: Woolen Textiles in America, 1776-1876*, p. 45. Image by Jan Joris van Vliet, from *Les Arts et Metiers*. Amsterdam, 1635.



Figure 3.15. Rotary shear from 1840. New Yorker Samuel Dorr patented the first rotary shear in 1792. From *Homespun to Factory Made: Woolen Textiles in America, 1776-1876*, p. 97.

Falls in 1850. At this time, there were also 215 men listed as “laborers”, twenty-eight as “millers”, and eighteen as “machinists”. Of these rather vaguely described occupations, it is possible that some could be “laborers” at the Woolen Mill, or machine repairmen. Finally, the 1850 census did not separate the data into Town and Village or into Village wards. This lack of data separation makes it difficult to determine where in the Village these people lived and what their neighborhoods at the time were like. The numbers that exist help to illustrate the workforce at the time, though they inspire more conjecture and hypotheses than hard fact.<sup>130</sup>

The 1860 United States Census data provides more information about the workers of the Woolen Mill, at this time owned by Jacob P. Chamberlain. The census counted women’s occupations, separated the Town and Village data, and split the Village into four wards. In total, the Woolen Mill employed seventy-three people, forty-two females and thirty-one males, which would be the only year between 1860 and 1930 in which the female component outnumbered the male. In terms of specific job titles, the majority of women, twenty-four, identified as weavers, with eight as stocking makers, seven as operatives, one as a carder, and two as overseers. With the men, the job titles varied. Ten identified themselves as operatives, fullers, or warpers, eight as spinners, four as wool sorters, three as carders, three as weavers, two as dyers, and one as a stocking maker. Twenty-two females hailed from New York or another U.S. state, while fifteen females were born in Ireland, two in England, one in Scotland, one in Wales, and one in Baden (in Germany). Twelve males were born in the United States, five in Ireland, seven in England, two in Scotland, four in Wales, and one in Russia. The median age for females was twenty, while the average was nearly twenty-five. For males, the

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<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

median age was thirty-two, while the average hit thirty-three. Of the seventy-three workers in the mill, fourteen most likely lived as boarders.<sup>131</sup>

The 1860 census inspires new questions. By collecting information on the Seneca Falls women's employment, a more rounded view of the Woolen Mill's workforce illustrates the separation of men from women in certain jobs. It seems that in 1860, only a few roles within the mill were available to women: weaving and "stocking making"<sup>132</sup>, with the roles of physically strenuous carding and overseers as exceptions here. Men at the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill, however, were spread out among several different types of jobs. This reflects Cole's note that the advances in the woolen production technology created job opportunities for women in roles traditionally filled by men. In addition, the larger percentage of women employed at the Woolen Mill in this census, while reflecting the generally believed conception of "mill girls" as at Lowell, does not continue in the future census data.<sup>133</sup>

The 1860 census also provides important data concerning the ethnicities and ages of the workers. Nearly as many women born outside of the country (twenty)

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<sup>131</sup> United States Census, 1860. In examining the census data, some issues should be explained. Four of the men and women included in this data set listed their occupations as "operative in factory". Though there were several possible factories of various kinds in the Village by 1860, these people were included as Woolen Mill operatives because another person in their families was a spinner, a weaver, etc. Additionally, the people counted as boarders because they were living with non-family members who were listed as the heads of household for their dwellings. Finally, Abel Downs' knitting mill, mentioned in Chapter 1, existed by 1860, so some of the people counted here may have been operatives at his mill. Any person who worked at the "knitting mill" for 1860 was not included, but people who listed their occupations as "spinner" or "weaver" etc., was.

<sup>132</sup> Stocking makers knitted/wove stockings from the yarn created by the spinners, using machines that knitted in the round. These machines created long tubes, with one end being knitted together by hand to form the stocking's toe.

<sup>133</sup> United States Census 1860, and Cole, *The American Wool Manufacture*, 1926.

worked at the mill as those born in the United States (twenty-two). More of the men working at the mill were foreign-born (nineteen) than were American (twelve). The women workers were mostly young, unmarried, and if they were foreign-born, from Ireland. In some cases, when the women lived with their families, particularly when multiple daughters worked in the Woolen Mill, it seems that these young women were supplementing the incomes of their heads of household, which were mostly their fathers or stepfathers, and sometimes their mothers, sisters, or boardinghouse keeper. Notably, eleven of the fourteen boarders were women, with one of them owning the boardinghouse, and ten living in various homes. Eight of the ten women were groups of sisters boarding together at homes, while two lived alone as boarders. The immigrant men came from more varied places and most of them were either fathers or sons living with their families. The larger percentage of men from England, Scotland, and Wales as opposed to other countries, and in comparison with the immigrant women's backgrounds, may be an indication of the highly valued skilled labor mentioned by Cole. Here again, there are few very young people employed at the mill, with the youngest female aged 14 and the youngest male aged 16. Only five female workers and two male were under the age of 17.<sup>134</sup>

With the separation of the data into Town, Village, and Village Wards (See Figure 1.10). the figures also allow some exploration of the composition of Seneca Falls' neighborhoods in 1860. In 2008, the Third and Fourth Wards of Seneca Falls, south and east of the Seneca River, are generally thought to have had the highest numbers of immigrants and their descendants. The 1860 census data supports this claim to a certain extent. Of the seventy-three Woolen Mill workers, twenty-four women and twenty men, twenty-two of their total being immigrants, lived in the

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<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

Third Ward. Fourteen workers, ten of them immigrants, lived in the Fourth Ward. If one recalls the description of settlement in the Village in Chapter 1, it becomes clear why such a large percentage of immigrants lived in the Third Ward, and to a lesser extent the Fourth Ward, including the Flats. For the Woolen Mill workers in particular, the Third Ward offered more to immigrants and the poorer Americans, with a row of tenements and several boardinghouses behind the Woolen Mill on Canal Street available that were not available for them elsewhere in the Village. Boardinghouses, tenements, and neighborhoods will be further discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter.<sup>135</sup>

In 1870, the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill employed more operatives than in any other year before or since. 274 people, 139 men and 135 women worked the Woolen Mill, which now included the two-and-a-half story brick addition constructed in the 1860s. This dramatic increase in worker population, as well as the subsequent plummet in worker numbers in the census years that follow, show how important the Woolen Mill was to Seneca Falls in that year. As indicated in Chapters 1 and 2, the industrial success of the Village peaks in the 1860s and early 1870s, both in the Woolen Mill and in other important factories then functioning in Seneca Falls, such as the pump industry. No other census year between 1880 and 1920 shows a larger group of employees at the Woolen Mill, though the years themselves fluctuate in comparison to one another.

As in 1860, men had a more varied group of jobs. Eighty-two were described as “works in woolen mill”, thirty-five worked as spinners, eight as weavers, seven as

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<sup>135</sup> United States Census 1860, Map of Seneca Falls, showing wards, Seneca Falls Historical Society, 2007, Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Seneca Falls, 1886, 1892, 1897, 1904, 1911, *Seneca Falls Village Directories*, 1862/63; 1867/68; 1874/75; 1881/82; 1888/89; 1892/93; 1894/1895; 1900/1902/1906; 1910/11, and Discussion with Kathy Jans-Duffy, Seneca Falls Historical Society, 30 November 2007.

wool sorters, two as clerks, one as a loom repairer, one as the mill fireman, one as a finisher, one as the Superintendent, and one, Albert Jewett, as President of the Woolen Mill. Eighty-nine women worked in the Woolen Mill and forty-six worked as weavers. Sixty-seven men hailed from the United States (thirty from New York), forty-three were born in Ireland, thirteen in Germany, seven in England, four in Prussia, two in Switzerland, one in Scotland, one in Wales, and one in Holland. Two could not read or write, and three could not write. Eighteen men most likely lived as boarders. One hundred women were born in the United States (ninety-nine from New York), thirty from Ireland, one from England, one from Germany, one from Prussia, one from Switzerland, and one from Canada. One could not read or write, and seven could not write. Twelve women lived as boarders. In 1870, the average age for male workers was twenty-nine, and the median twenty-six. For the female workers, the average age was twenty-one, and the median twenty.<sup>136</sup>

In contrast to the 1860 census, and in support of what Cole described as the common occurrence in woolen factories, the number of men exceeded the number of women, albeit only slightly. As seen in the previous data, though, men worked in various types of jobs, while women worked as weavers or had unknown specific job titles. Since specific titles such as “spinner,” “wool sorter,” and “finisher of cloth” were used for men, it is unlikely that women worked as any of these and did not indicate the specific job title. It is unclear why so many men and women were listed

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<sup>136</sup> United States Census, 1870. Of the number of people counted here as “works in the Woolen Mill” eleven were listed in the census as “works in the woolen factory.” It is not clear in the census records whether the use of the terms “mill” and “factory” both meant the Woolen Mill owned by Albert Jewett or if they were the terms indicated by the workers themselves or the census taker. Notices of the Gleason Mill do not appear until the late 1870s, and Abel Downs died in 1869, so these woolen employees most likely worked at Jewett’s mill. Additionally, the 1870 census featured new information that the 1860 did not. Most notably, the census asked for “nativity” of parents, and whether the individual—and his/her parents—could read and write.

as only “works in the Woolen Mill”, though perhaps being less specific expedited the census taker’s laborious task.<sup>137</sup>

As with the 1860 census data, the 1870 census supplies important information about the ages and ethnicities of the Woolen Mill’s workers. Male workers emigrated from a more varied group of countries than their female co-workers. A slight majority of the male workers were foreign-born (seventy-two) as compared to the number of Americans (sixty-seven). The female workers, though, created a different demographic set when compared to previous data in which only thirty-five women were foreign-born, as opposed to the 100 American-born in the 1870 census. The male workers got younger, with their average age of only twenty-nine, and the median at twenty-six. This lower age factors in the fifteen boys in the set no older than seventeen. The decrease in age may also indicate less of a reliance on the skilled foreign workers. The women’s ages stayed roughly the same, with an average of twenty-one and a median of twenty. Indeed, only twelve of the women employed at the mill in 1870 were over the age of twenty-four, and the eldest was only thirty-nine years old! By 1870, younger workers do appear in greater numbers, with 15 females and 11 males under 17, with the youngest aging 12 and 13 years.<sup>138</sup>

The 1867/68 Village directory offers more information about the population in Seneca Falls. In describing the County Poor House, particular attention was paid to the involvement of immigrants receiving relief or support. No less than 959 foreigners received aid from the County Poor House in 1866, with 719 from Ireland, 111 from Germany 85 from England, 18 from Scotland, 24 from Canada, and 4 from France, as compared to 704 American-born. The existence of such a section of statistics suggests several issues. One, by 1870, immigrant populations numbered in

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<sup>137</sup> United States Census 1870, and Cole, *The American Wool Manufacture*, 1926.

<sup>138</sup> United States Census 1870.

the hundreds in Seneca County. Two, the numbers of foreign-born and American-born people receiving aid was printed in lists, side-by-side, and this illustration of the difference suggests a prejudice against the foreign-born receiving aid. While one cannot draw from this the location of the immigrants or whether or not they worked at the Woolen Mill, the numbers of the Village in general create a context for the Census information.<sup>139</sup>

Unfortunately, the 1870 Census does not separate the data into Village Wards, nor does it list street names, so it is difficult to identify the locations of the individuals' dwellings in Seneca Falls. A look at the Village directories does offer some information, at least about the houses that appear to have taken in boarders. Often, the boarders are not listed, and the boardinghouses are not always listed either. Though the 1867/68 directory yields little information about boarders or their homes, the 1874/75 directory offers important information about the location of boarders. Only one of the boarders, Owen McConnell appears in the directory, living at a home located in the Third Ward. Of the nine people probably hosting boarders, four of them lived in the Third Ward, four in the Second Ward, and one in the Fourth Ward. The possible boardinghouses in the Second Ward abutted the Canal and Fall Street, while the Third Ward locations varied through the neighborhood. These numbers are few in comparison to the number of people who actually worked at the mill, so they do not necessarily indicate an overall settlement pattern, but merely information about workers as boarders. The 1874/75 directory does include a list of population by ward, though there is no separation of population by occupation. 400 men over 21 and 482 women over 18 lived in the First Ward, 339 and 387 in the Second Ward, 330 and 390 in the Third Ward, and 317 and 368 in the Fourth. While

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<sup>139</sup> *Seneca Falls Village Directory 1867/68.*

this information is rather scant, at least it illustrates the neighborhoods and worker locations slightly more clearly.<sup>140</sup>

The 1880 United States Census provides the same types of information about the Woolen Mill employees, and it organizes the data into three Town districts. By 1880, the number of workers at the Phoenix Woolen Mill plummeted, possibly due to the competition from the Gleason Mill, or opportunities at other factories in Seneca Falls. Whatever the reason, the significantly lower numbers help to illustrate the industrial decline of Seneca Falls after 1875. True, the pump factories still functioned through the twentieth century, but they suffered some of the same fate, as seen in Chapter 1.

In 1880, fifty-one people worked at the “woolen” or “knitting” mill<sup>141</sup>, twenty-four women and twenty-seven men. As with the 1870 Census, Albert Jewett is again listed, though in 1880 he is “Retired Woolen Man”<sup>142</sup>. The job titles do not indicate specific jobs among the men and women. Under occupation, the census

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<sup>140</sup> Seneca Falls Village Directories, 1867/68; 1874/75. It should be noted the 1874/75 Seneca Falls Village directory is the only one remaining from the 1870s, at least at the Seneca Falls Historical Society.

<sup>141</sup> The people listed as working at the woolen or knitting mills were counted for the Jewett mill rather than the Gleason factory because Gleason was primarily a cotton factory, and the census names ninety-six people as working at the cotton mill or cotton factory. Of the twenty-four women counted for the Jewett Woolen Mill, eight worked in the “knitting mill”, and of the twenty-seven men, four worked in the “knitting mill”. One reason for the different terminology may be that the workers occupied two separate buildings belonging to the same company owned by Jewett. In addition, there were forty-six people not counted toward the Woolen Mill under whose occupation the census lists “works in factory”. These people do not work in the flour or pump factories, as those occupations are listed quite specifically.

<sup>142</sup> On a humorous note, Ancestry.com has Jewett listed as a “retired woodsman”, presumably due to the nearly illegible handwriting of the census taker for 1880, and for the long day of data entry Ancestry’s intern had to perform.

records show either “works in Woolen Mill” or “wks in Knitting Mills”. Of the twenty-four female workers, nineteen were born in New York, two in Ireland and one in Russia. Of the twenty-seven males, twenty-one were born in the U.S., three in England, and three in Ireland. Notably, twelve of the women had parents who emigrated from Ireland; three had parents from England; and one had parents from Germany. Also, thirteen men had parents from Ireland; two had parents from Wales; two had parents from England; and one had parents from Baden, which was, by then, part of Germany. Eight women and six men lived as boarders. For women, the ages stayed close to the same as it had been in 1870: the average rose to twenty-three, while the median stayed at twenty. Similarly for men, the average stayed at twenty-nine, and the median rested at twenty-eight. In 1880, only three female and two male workers were under 17, though the youngest was nine.<sup>143</sup>

Unlike the somewhat obvious influx of immigrants to the Woolen Mill seen in the previous Census data, the workers themselves in 1880 do not show a high number of foreign-born workers, in comparison to the number of American-born. Only five of the twenty-four women immigrated to the U.S., and only six of the twenty-seven men immigrated. These figures do not mean immigrants were not living in Seneca Falls in 1880, however. These figures show that the major immigrant population had their children in New York or elsewhere in New England. Of the fifty-one Woolen Mill workers, only eight women and nine men had parents born in the United States.<sup>144</sup>

One of the issues with the 1880 census data for the workers involves the small number. It is difficult to relate the workers at the mill with the Seneca Falls

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<sup>143</sup> United States Census, 1880. No other Woolen Mill worker was younger than twelve, if the ages recorded in the Census are to be believed.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

population at large, when only fifty-one of approximately 6800 people work at the mill in this year. Despite the small number, some information about the neighborhoods can be derived, when the data is examined in the Village directories. Village directories from 1881/82 and 1888/89 offer a broader outlook of the neighborhoods of Seneca Falls and the settlement of the Woolen Mill workers. In the 1881/82 directory, nine of the 1880 boarders lived at the home of John Buck, a farmer, whose house was located at 8 Barker Street, in the Third Ward. Of the other two boarders listed in 1881/82, one lived in a dwelling in the First Ward, while the other lived in the Fourth. By the 1888/89 directory, John Buck died, but his wife still lived at 8 Barker, possibly still with tenants who worked at the Woolen Mill. One of the boarders listed in the 1881/82 directory moved from the First to the Second Ward. Again, this information does not provide as much detail as desired, but it does help to show the locations of the homes of these boarders. It should also be remembered that when the Census features the populations by Ward, most of the workers lived in the Third and Fourth Wards, so it is possible that many of the non-boarding Woolen Mill workers lived in the Third and Fourth prior to 1900, when Wards show up in the Census.<sup>145</sup>

Unfortunately, little data remains for New York State from the 1890 Census. Of the entire state, only pieces of the data from Suffolk and West Chester counties remain intact. According to Ancestry.com and the National Archives website ([www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)), which features what remains of United States Census for the years 1790-1930, on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1921, a fire in the Commerce Department building in Washington, D.C., destroyed most of the U.S. Census from 1890, leaving only fragments.

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<sup>145</sup> *Seneca Falls Village Directories*, 1867/68; 1874/75.

The 1894/95 Village directory offers some insight on the Seneca Falls neighborhoods and existence of boardinghouses. St. Patrick's Church, the Third Ward Catholic Church mentioned in Chapter 1, had created a parochial elementary school with 400 students, also located on West Bayard Street. Matthew Hamill, with whom four of the Woolen Mill workers lived by 1900, owned a boardinghouse called the Franklin House, located on West Bayard Street in the Third Ward. Martin Phalen (also Phalon and Phelan), another boardinghouse owner listed in 1900, owned the Maxson House at 10 Bridge Street, also in the Third Ward. Three other people, with whom Woolen Mill workers claimed to have lived in the 1900 Census, are listed in this directory, all living in the Third Ward. Again, with such small numbers, little responsible conjecture can be drawn, but the information should be mentioned.<sup>146</sup>

The 1900 census expands on the types of information taken previously with specific job titles and separation of the data into Village Wards offer new insight into the lives of the workers. The total number of operatives between 1880 and 1900, between Jewett and Harrison Chamberlain's ownership, changed hardly at all, with fifty-two total workers, thirty-six men and sixteen women. This population shows the most uneven ration between men and women the Woolen Mill experienced. Unlike in previous years, both men and women worked in a variety of positions. Twenty-one men worked as weavers, four as laborers, four as spinners, three as carders, two as dyers, one as a twister, and one as a finisher. Three women worked as weavers, three as twisters, three as spoolers, two as sewers, two as cloth inspectors, one as a winder, one as a finisher, and one as a laborer. In keeping with the trend developing in 1880, most of the workers in 1900 came from somewhere in the United States. Thirty-one men hailed from the U.S., while two came from Ireland, one from

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<sup>146</sup> *Seneca Falls Village Directory*, 1894/95.

Germany, one from England, and one from Canada. Fifteen of the women were born in New York, while only one came from overseas, from England. Also as seen in 1880, the birthplaces of the workers parents gives a more detailed picture of the lives of the workers. Sixteen of the men had parents from Ireland, four from Germany, and four from England, while eleven had parents born in the U.S. Of the women, nine had parents from Ireland, one with parents from England, and six with parents born in the U.S. Fifteen men and two women lived as boarders. The average age of the male workers was twenty-seven, with a median of twenty-three. The average age of the female workers stayed close to the same as it was in 1880, at twenty-three, with a median again of twenty. In 1900, only two women and two men were under 17.<sup>147</sup>

By 1900, both men and women worked various types of jobs at the Woolen Mill. Twenty-one men worked as weavers, which had until 1880 been a job most often performed by women at the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill, and of jobs worked by women, none had the majority. By 1900, Harrison Chamberlain owned and operated the Woolen Mill, and by that year he had already installed the new machinery. Perhaps the new machinery offered new types of jobs for women, as Cole had suggested. Another notable statistic is the number of men in comparison to the number of women. Women rarely outnumbered men at the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill, and even when they did, the ratio was nearly equal. With such a small total number of operatives, this unequal ratio may not be indicative of anything, but it is important to notice, particularly considering the mill's employment history.<sup>148</sup>

Despite the low number of immigrants among the mill operatives in 1900, the data concerning the operatives' ethnicities is helpful when attempting to

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<sup>147</sup> United States Census 1900.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, and Cole, *The American Wool Manufacture*, 1926.

conceptualize the demographics of Seneca Falls in 1900. In 1880, most of the mill operatives were American-born with foreign-born (mostly Irish) parents. It seemed in that census that the mill operatives descended from immigrants, and that few people continued to immigrate to Seneca Falls after their parents' generation. With the 1900 statistics, the picture becomes somewhat clearer. In the twenty years between the Censuses, more immigrants did come to Seneca Falls and had their children in the United States, some of whom became workers at the Woolen Mill. The seemingly continuous influx of immigrants to Seneca Falls did not increase the total Village population by a huge margin, though, for as seen in Chapter 1, the total population of the Village has hovered near 6800 since 1870.<sup>149</sup>

With the information the 1900 Census supplies concerning ethnicity, Village Wards, and worker boarding, one can further understand the demographic and neighborhood composition of Seneca Falls in 1900. As described with the 1860 census, the Third and Fourth Wards, including the Flats, are traditionally known as having the largest immigrant populations. In 1900, the data has been split into the Town and four Village Wards. Only eight of the fifty-two operatives lived in the First and Second Wards. Only one of the men living in the Second Ward was born in Germany, and only two people, including the German man, had parents of foreign-birth. None of these eight operatives boarded; rather, they lived with their families, as heads of household, fathers, sons, and daughters. In contrast, twenty-seven operatives lived in the Third Ward, twenty-four men and three women. Five were foreign-born, and twenty had parents of foreign birth, predominantly Irish, though not all of these parents lived in Seneca Falls. Sixteen of the Third Ward operatives lived as boarders, though unlike in 1860, all of the boarders live with non-relatives. Nine of these boarders live in groupings among three specific boardinghouses,

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<sup>149</sup> United States Census 1900.

belonging to Matthew Hamill, Emma McGrier, and Joseph Mahl.<sup>150</sup> Of the ten non-boarders, six were immigrants living with their families. Seventeen mill workers lived in the Fourth Ward, ten women and seven men. All mill operatives living in the Fourth Ward came from New York, but ten had parents from overseas, again mostly Irish, and six of these operatives lived with their parents. Only one worker lived as a boarder, and he lived with his younger brother and his family. Sanborn Maps show a row of “tenements” along the south side of Canal Street, nearly directly behind the Woolen Mill site (See Figures 3.16 and 3.17).<sup>151</sup>

It seems the existence of boardinghouses and close proximity to the Woolen Mill again encouraged workers and immigrants to dwell in the Third and Fourth Wards. It seems likely too, that by 1900, generations of Irish, English, Welsh, German, and Scottish families had been in Seneca Falls, and particularly the Third and Fourth Wards, thus encouraging newly arrived families to gravitate toward those neighborhoods for support and cultural similarity in a new country.<sup>152</sup>

As described in Chapter 2, Harrison Chamberlain fell into debt during his ownership of the Woolen Mill in the 1890s and into the 1900s, so he closed it in 1905. As it did not reopen until 1917, under the new leadership of George Geb and Thomas Garvan, the 1910 census would not offer any information about the operatives because no one worked at the mill in 1910. The 1920 U.S. Census,

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<sup>150</sup> Only Matthew Hamill’s boardinghouse, the Franklin House is listed in the 1900 directory. In 1900, Martin Phalen’s Maxson House still existed at 10 Bridge St, and the Third Ward houses of Elizabeth McArdle, John O’Connor, and Martin Burke also housed Woolen Mill workers. No other Woolen Mill boardinghouses are listed in the 1900 Village directory, so it seems that nearly all the Woolen Mill workers who boarded lived in the Third Ward by 1900.

<sup>151</sup> Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of Seneca Falls, 1886, 1892, 1897, 1904, 1911.

<sup>152</sup> United States Census 1900.

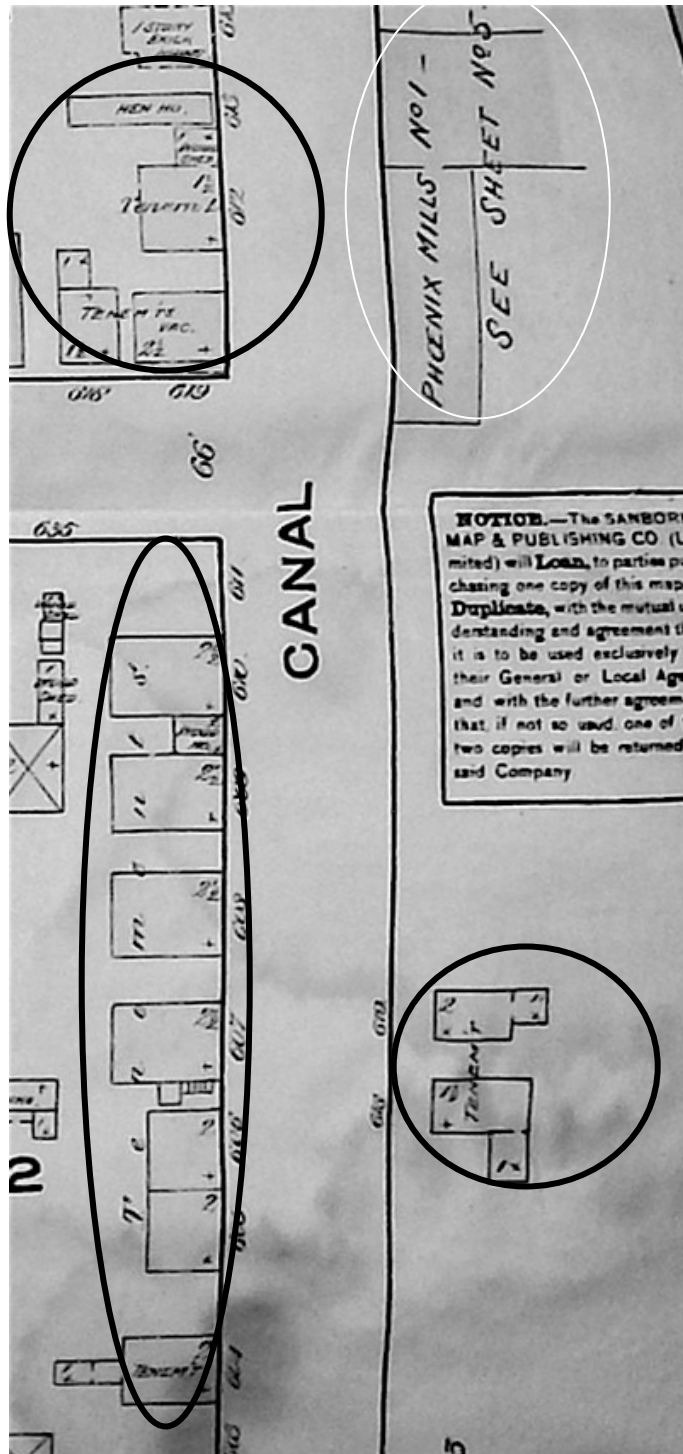


Figure 3.16. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1881, detail. Tenements circled in black, Woolen Mill circled in white. The north-south cross street is Centre Street.

however, contains enlightening information about the Woolen Mill operatives. Again the specific job titles help to add detail to the worker demographics, and the data split into Village wards helps create a sense of the Village in 1920. What makes the 1920 census so important and interesting, though, is that it is in this that the first data after the completion of the Barge Canal, mentioned in Chapter 1, and that the Italian immigration to Seneca Falls becomes apparent.

By 1920, the number of employees at what was then known as Geb and Garvan Yarn Company again fell, this time to only thirty-six. Of course, as in any census, some people may have been missed, so the mill could have had more employees. The only hard number available though, exists in the Census, with all its shortcomings. Of the thirty-six operatives, twenty were female, sixteen were male, a ratio much nearer to those previous to 1900. Women and men both worked in a variety of positions at the mill. Ten women worked as weavers, again the most common job for women. Five women worked as spinners, a job most often assigned to men, two worked as laborers, one as a cloth inspector, one as a spooler, and one as a carder. Three men worked as laborers, four as spinners, three as weavers, two as carders, one as a picker, one as a clerk, one as a traveling salesman, and George Geb as proprietor. In 1920, the number of Italian-born female immigrants outnumbered all other foreign countries. Eight of the female workers came from Italy, with the other twelve coming from the United States. The male population varied among countries of birth. Nine men came from the United States, two from England, one from Italy, one from Ireland, and one from Canada. Of the operatives, fifteen lived with their immigrant parents, most of them from Italy, Ireland, and, Syria. Three women lived as boarders, all of them in the homes of their sisters. The ages for the female operatives slightly increased, with an average of twenty-seven and a median of twenty-one. For the men, the average age rose to thirty-six, and the median rose to

twenty-five. In 1920, only three women and six men were younger than 17, all but one of those men aged 16.<sup>153</sup>

In 1920, the data again splits into the Town and four Village Wards, supplying information about the neighborhoods in Seneca Falls. Notably, the worker population was more spread out in the community than it had been in previous years. Eight operatives lived in the First Ward, three of them immigrants. Six workers lived in the Second Ward, three from overseas. Fifteen workers lived in the Third Ward, five of them Italian. Seven operatives lived in the Fourth Ward, which by this time did not include the Flats.<sup>154</sup>

The changing immigrant population in Seneca Falls requires some examination. The 1921/23 Village directory offers some general statistics. Of the total 6389 people living in the Village, 3152 were male, and 3237 were female. 3671 were described as “native white, with native white parents”, while 1811 were described as “native white with foreign parents.” 880 Villagers were “foreign white”, and 227 were “Asian and other.” Further breaking down the numbers of the 880 “foreign white” population, the directory listed 84 people from England, 10 from Scotland, 44 from Germany, 12 from Austria, 30 from Poland, 8 from Russia, 7 from Greece, 46 from Canada, 19 from “other”, 134 from Ireland, and 486 from Italy.<sup>155</sup>

Italians started to come to Seneca Falls in the early twentieth century, due to

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<sup>153</sup> United States Census 1920. Calculating average and median age for such a small sample is problematic. Outliers usually play a larger role in a smaller sample. The significant gap between the average age and the median age in both cases shows the outlier influence. The outliers included the fifty-one year old spinner, and the sixty-five year old cloth inspector among the women, and the sixty-seven year old spinner, seventy-one year old salesman, and the seventy-three year old clerk.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Seneca Falls Village Directory*, 1921/23.

job opportunities opening with the construction of the Barge Canal, described in Chapter 1. After the Barge Canal completion in 1915, many of the Italian immigrants remained in Seneca Falls, most likely working at the pump factories or the Woolen Mill, as these were the last large-scale manufacturing enterprises left in the Village by 1915. Worker housing for Rumsey's and Gould's pump factories existed in the First and Second Wards, so many of the Italians and their families, some of whom worked at the Woolen Mill, probably lived in those Wards for that reason. Also, as explained in Chapter 1, the Catholic Church in Seneca Falls, St. Patrick's Catholic Church stood at the corner of West Bayard and Toledo Streets, in the Third Ward, so Italians, many of whom were Catholic, lived in that neighborhood as well (See Figures 3.18-3.20). Despite the sharing of religious beliefs, many of the Irish population in Seneca Falls moved out of the Third Ward when the Italian population in the neighborhood increased. Ovid Street, the North-South artery that separates the Third and Fourth Wards, came to be known as "bloody alley" due to territorial disputes between Irish and Italian immigrants and their descendants. Seneca Falls resident and Collections Manager for the Seneca Falls Historical Society Kathy Jans-Duffy noted that these neighborhoods still have a similar ethnic composition, though they are more varied today and notably more amicable.<sup>156</sup>

After 1920, the number of women working in the mill seems to have increased. A 1936 article suggested that by that date, 60% of the Geb and Garvan employees were women. During World War II, many Seneca Falls men served in the U.S. Army, while the Woolen Mill ran day and night, seven days a week to manufacture socks for the soldiers. According to Susanna Jane Beasley, retired winder of 38 years (1944-1982), she worked with a group almost entirely comprised

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<sup>156</sup> United States Census 1920, Map of Seneca Falls, showing wards, Seneca Falls Historical Society, 2007, Discussion with Kathy Jans-Duffy 30 Nov 2007.



Figure 3.17. Canal Street at present, facing east. The Woolen Mill is west of the photographer. None of the former tenement houses remains. Image by author.



Figure 3.18. The first St. Patrick's Church building, before 1929, corner of Toledo and West Bayard Streets. From "*Grip's*" *Historical Souvenir*, 1904.



Figures 3.19 and 3.20. St. Patrick's Church, built in 1929, corner of Toledo and West Bayard Streets. Image by author, 30 January 2008.

of women. Beasley noted that the only male workers during those years worked the Third Shift from 11pm to 7am. It seems that it was not until nearly the middle of the twentieth century that women were the majority of the Woolen Mill workforce.<sup>157</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The demographics of the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill workers illustrate the life of the mill throughout its history and provide a connective thread between the mill workers' lives and the Seneca Falls community, in the past and today. Investigating the actual numbers of male, female, American, and immigrant workers at the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill presents different pictures of a textile mill workforce than others similar in size and geography. While many hold the idea of the "mill girl" as the norm, the demographics of the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill support the realities as outlined by historians, particularly in reference to workers at woolen mills as opposed to cotton mills. In American woolen mills, men and women tended to work in nearly equal numbers, with men believed to be more capable of operating heavier machinery. Women held specific jobs for most of the nineteenth century, such as weaving, while men worked in a more varied group of jobs, from scourer to finisher. Women tended to be younger, and if foreign-born, most of them from Ireland, while men's ages and ethnicities varied more often. Not many children worked at the Woolen Mill, again unlike the image many people hold in relationship to American textile mill life.

The Woolen Mill workers' living arrangements show settlement patterns in Seneca Falls. While boarders were few and lived in houses all over the Village, by the twentieth century, a majority of them lived in the Third Ward, which, along with the Fourth, tends to be connected with the Irish and Italian immigrants. The non-

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<sup>157</sup> Carls, J. Norman and Walter W. Ristow, "The Industrial Geography of Seneca Falls, New York," 1934, and Interview with Susanna Jane Beasley, 2 November 2007.

boarding workers lived throughout the Village as well, though larger numbers of them lived in the Third Ward than any other. St. Patrick's Catholic Church existed in the Third Ward, possibly influencing the Catholic Irish and Italians to settle near it.

These demographics illustrate unique and connective threads of the Woolen Mill workers and their relationship to the Village of Seneca Falls. Exploring the social history of the Woolen Mill allows for various stories to be told about the workers themselves and their daily tasks. Quantifying and qualifying the data sets and questioning the meanings of the figures represented in the Census makes it possible to reflect upon the similarities and differences of this specific set of Seneca Falls residents with the rest of the community. In terms of the Village's future, these illustrations and stories of the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill workers provide the National Women's Hall of Fame with personal narratives that could speak more directly and more interestingly about the history of the mill and the Village both to museum visitors in general and to the present and future residents of Seneca Falls.

## CHAPTER 4: THE REHABILITATION OF THE SENECA FALLS WOOLEN MILL AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE NEW NATIONAL WOMEN'S HALL OF FAME

The previous chapters have examined the intertwining stories of Seneca Falls, the Woolen Mill, and the mill's workers. Those discussions resonate with the content of this chapter in that the museum that is to be created from the rehabilitation of the Woolen Mill can relate these Seneca Falls narratives in a way that other museums in the Village have not, due to space, money, or thematic constraints. Although Seneca Falls has a complex and varied industrial history, currently the community's focus in terms of heritage tourism is its women's history legacy, remembered with the headquarters of the National Women's Hall of Fame and the Women's Rights National Historical Park locations throughout the Village. While most of the cultural resources in Seneca Falls emphasize the Women's Rights Convention of 1848 and American women's history in general, the National Women's Hall of Fame (NWHF) museum has an opportunity to present detailed information on different, and no less important, stories.

In this chapter, the rehabilitation project and its major players will be explored in further detail in order to better understand motivations and opportunities the museum could create in terms of the expansion of resources for the community. First, the history of the National Women's Hall of Fame helps to explain the influences and decisions made in the rehabilitation project. Second, the architecture of the buildings themselves will be addressed, to give the reader a sense of the site. Third, an exploration of the other Seneca Falls museum's offerings illustrates the need for more of the Village's various histories to be told. Fourth, the timeline of the rehabilitation shows how much has been done, and how much more there is left to

accomplish, and the people involved in each stage of development flesh out the various situations and possible difficulties experienced during the development. Finally, the chapter looks to the future for the museum itself, in terms of its exhibits and collections management. The history of the Village and of the Woolen Mill and its workers speaks to the past, present, and future of this building's life and rehabilitation, and this chapter seeks to explain how.

### **The National Women's Hall of Fame, 1969-Present**

The National Women's Hall of Fame plays the most important role in the rehabilitation of the historic Woolen Mill buildings. The organization has owned the buildings since January of 2007, and since then, has been planning the rehabilitation. In order to understand the motivations and decisions being made by the organization in the rehabilitation project, it is essential that its history be considered.

Today, the National Women's Hall of Fame (NWHF) remains the nation's oldest membership non-profit organization that honors the achievements and contributions of American women. As of 2008, 207 women have been inducted into the Hall.<sup>158</sup> The induction ceremonies are held every two years in Seneca Falls. In addition to these, the NWHF, led by an Executive Director and a volunteer Board of Directors, sponsors educational programs, guest speakers, tours, nationwide student Essay and New Media contest, and various events held during March, Women's History Month. Membership consisting of various members of the public contributes

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<sup>158</sup> Inductees receive nominations from the American public that, if received by September 1<sup>st</sup> of the year before the induction year, are considered for the next induction. A national panel of judges from various backgrounds, not including any staff member of the NWHF, decides on the inductees based on their contributions and the enduring value of their work.

much of the Hall's Funding, though donations and grants contribute to the organization's finances.<sup>159</sup>

The organization exists today much as it did from the beginning, albeit on a larger scale. For the NWHF, the beginning took place nearly forty years ago. In 1969, one of the faculty members at the Eisenhower College, now the New York Chiropractic College, visited the Hall of Great Americans at NYU Bronx, now Lehman College. Out of 110 inductees, only eight were women. Dismayed by the unequal shift, the faculty member gathered men and women in Seneca Falls and formed the National Women's Hall of Fame in order to create an organization that honored American women with various important accomplishments and contributions to American society. The mission of the National Women's Hall of Fame states that the organization will:

. . . honor in perpetuity individual women whose extraordinary achievements in the arts, athletics, business, education, government, the humanities, philanthropy and science, have contributed significantly to society. The Hall is also committed to educating the public about these important women and their accomplishments.<sup>160</sup>

The creation of the organization came at the end of a decade when organizations celebrating and offerings services to women developed all over the country, with the National Organization of Women (NOW) established in 1966. In 1973, the NWHF celebrated its first inductions, with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Clara Barton, and Marian Anderson among those recognized.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Interview with Christine Moulton, Executive Director of the National Women's Hall of Fame, 28 August 2007, and "National Women's Hall of Fame Fact Sheet," from the National Women's Hall of Fame 2007 Induction Ceremony packet.

<sup>160</sup> "National Women's Hall of Fame Fact Sheet," from the National Women's Hall of Fame 2007 Induction Ceremony packet.

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Christine Moulton, Executive Director of the National Women's Hall of Fame, 28 August 2007, 31 January 2008, and "National Women's Hall of

In addition to its induction ceremonies, the National Women's Hall of Fame has been involved in important preservation events in Seneca Falls. In 1978, the fate of several of the sites relating to the 1848 Women's Rights Convention faced uncertain futures. Seneca Falls citizens formed the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Foundation specifically to save Stanton's house on Washington Street. The National Park Service began looking into Seneca Falls as a site for a future historical park. Historical and women's organizations in New York State, including the Syracuse chapter of NOW, the Upstate New York Women's History organization, and the NWHF joined the ECSF in the project. In July, representatives of the organizations created a plan for a Women's Rights Historic District. In 1979, the NPS recommended Seneca Falls to the U.S. Congress as a site for a National Historical Park, and Seattle resident Ralph Peters purchased the Stanton home in order to later give it to the ECSF for preservation. After several years and various investigations, conflicts, and studies, the Women's Rights National Historical Park opened in July of 1982. Without the help of the NWHF and other local, state, and national organizations, the park, and the revenue it brings to the Village, may not have been created or realized.<sup>162</sup>

Despite its involvement and growing profile, the National Women's Hall of Fame's day-to-day existence in the 1970s showed a young organization attempting to realize its potential. During the 1970s, the organization used a room in the Administration Building at Eisenhower College. The induction ceremonies of 1973

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Fame Fact Sheet," from the National Women's Hall of Fame 2007 Induction Ceremony packet and <[www.greatwomen.org](http://www.greatwomen.org)> The first ceremony inducted twenty women, but the subsequent inductions are usually nearer to ten honorees.

<sup>162</sup> Wellman, Judith, "'It's a Wide Community Indeed': Alliances and Issues in Creating Women's Rights National Historical Park," from *Restoring Women's History through Historic Preservation*. Edited by Gail Lee Dubrow and Jennifer B. Goodman. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003.

and 1976 were held in the room, which contained little more than the office supplies and paintings. In 1979, the NWHF purchased the vacant bank building at 76 Fall Street with the money raised from its membership. They rehabilitated the building to house administrative offices, library, and the permanent exhibit, which included portraits and personal artifacts belonging to the inductees.<sup>163</sup>

By the late 1990s, the NWHF had begun looking for a new building, as the space in the bank building was becoming crowded with the increasing number of objects in the collection that came with the increasing numbers of inductees. The Seneca Knit Development Corporation (SKDC) owned the 1844 stone mill buildings and the 1860s brick additions, and they attempted to create a plan for the buildings' rehabilitation and use for a museum. In 2005, Nancy Mangano, SKDC's executive director, and the NWHF discussed rehabilitation plans for the buildings for use as the NWHF museum. In January 2007, the NWHF acquired the deed to the building and began assembling a timeline for the project. As of January 2008, the NWHF has a master plan created by Ann Beha Architects of Boston and will be sending out subsequent requests for proposals this year.<sup>164</sup>

### **The Woolen Mill Buildings and Surrounding Landscape**

A brief, detailed description of the buildings, their stylistic and historical contexts, and current conditions allows for a more complete understanding of the project currently being undertaken by the NWHF. The Woolen Mill site consists of four buildings, with sections of green space surrounding them. The oldest building was constructed in 1844, with local limestone used as the main building material.

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<sup>163</sup> Interview with Christine Moulton, Executive Director of the National Women's Hall of Fame, 28 August 2007, and <[www.greatwomen.org](http://www.greatwomen.org)>

<sup>164</sup> The NWHF sent out the first RFP for the Master Plan in March of 2006, though technically, the SKDC still owned the buildings and grounds. As of April 2008, the NWHF has not set the exact date of the second RFP's completion.

With the basement buried by the construction of the Barge Canal, the building has three stories and an attic level. The rectangular form of the stone building measures roughly 110' x 46'. All of the twelve over twelve single hung windows have stone lintels and sills, with green-painted wood frames. The attic level has a full-length clerestory monitor. At the south façade, a full-height bell tower projects from the wall, encasing the stairway at the interior. As a whole, the building is in fair condition on the exterior, with little original window fabric at the first floor, mortar failures at perhaps 20% of the building, and possible roof instability. The bell tower has been restored, and the roofing has been replaced in the past fifteen years.<sup>165</sup>

The interior of the stone building retains little of its original fabric. The machinery has been lost, stored in North Carolina, or destroyed. The walls, ceilings, and floors are original, however. The floor and wall construction inside the mill relates to rather common interior construction practices of the period and region. Creating what was known as “fireproof construction”, the heavy horizontal beams sat below several layers of perpendicular wood plank flooring, and on top of cast iron columns. The sturdy floor construction also allowed for heavy textile production machinery to be used on floors other than the basement, though the mill operators often still placed those machines in the basement, with lighter activities stationed elsewhere in the building. The stone walls would burn slowly in potential fires as well, or so the thinking went.<sup>166</sup>

Two of the brick buildings are connected to form an L-shape plan. The building connected to the stone building's west façade stands only two stories, with a

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<sup>165</sup> Blue Form Survey: An Architectural and Historical Inventory of the Village of Seneca Falls Historic District. Seneca Falls: The Wilson Press, 1989.

<sup>166</sup> Zimiles, Martha and Murray. *Early American Mills*, 1973, and Wermiel, Sara E. *The Fireproof Building: Technology and Public Safety in the Nineteenth-Century American City*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.

smokestack that rises from it. The front gabled brick building abutting the two-story building has three-and-a-half stories. Where original window fabric remains, they are twelve over twelve, with wood frames. On the three-and-a-half story building, brick corbelling accents the roofline. While seemingly structurally sound, each of the buildings has areas of mortar failure, water damage, window damage, and faunal infestation. These buildings, like the stone building show signs of ghosting as well, with the outlines of other buildings still clearly visible in the exterior walls (See Figures 4.1-4.11).

The stand-alone two-and-a half story front gabled brick building that sits directly to the stone building's east is also in fair condition. Areas of mortar failure, water damage, window damage, and roof issues create problems for the building, though it appears to be structurally sound. It may be slated for demolition, a treatment that has been approved by the New York State Historic Preservation Office,<sup>167</sup> but a final decision has not yet been made (See Figures 4.12 and 4.13).

The landscape into which the mill was built represented a rather ideal situation for powering a factory. By 1844, the Cayuga and Seneca Canal had been constructed, creating an island between the canal and the river. Factories, including a Woolen Mill building that has long since been destroyed, were constructed on this island, using the easily accessible waterpower to run the necessary machinery. By the late-nineteenth century, the Woolen Mill used the stone building and a building on the island connected by a walkway that exited the stone building at the third floor level. Water entered the bottom floor of the stone building onto a water wheel connected to a smaller wheel with leather belts that ran vertically into the building, connected to turning rods at the ceiling level that powered the jennies, looms, and

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<sup>167</sup> Interview with Christine Moulton, Executive Director of the National Women's Hall of Fame, 28 August 2007.



Figure 4.1. Seneca Falls Woolen Mill buildings, looking east. Image by author.



Figure 4.2. 1844 Stone mill building, south façade. Note the window damage and ghosting at the ground floor level. Image by author.



Figure 4.3. Detail of the bell tower. Image by author.



Figure 4.4. Carved stone sign on the south façade of the stone building. Image by author.



Figure 4.5. Stone building, east façade. Note the twelve-over-twelve windows, stone sills and lintels, and the quoins at the corner. Ghosting and window damage also noticeable. Image by author.



Figure 4.6. View of the south facades, looking northwest. Image by author.



Figure 4.7. View in between the brick buildings, facing west. The L-shape of the brick buildings becomes more apparent. Image by author.



Figure 4.8. Detail of south façade of one of the brick buildings. Note the smokestack and the brick corbelling under the eaves. Image by author.



Figure 4.9. Detail of the north facades of the 1860s brick buildings. Notice the bricks curving inward between the windows. See also the first floor window damage. Image by author.



Figure 4.10. West façade of 1860s brick building. The Canal is in the background. Note areas of brick failure, particularly at the ground floor level. Image by author.

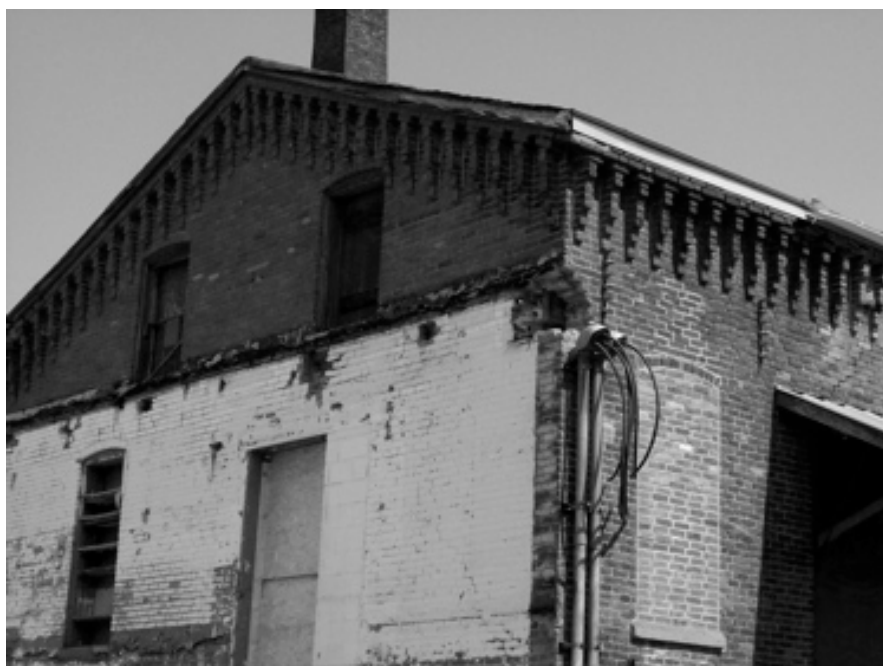


Figure 4.11. Detail of same façade. Notice window damage, holes in the wall and ghosting of the 1930s cinderblock addition.



Figure 4.12. South façade of the brick building to the east of the stone building. Note the windows, brick failure at the roofline, and growth at the ground line. Image by author.



Figure 4.13. North façade of brick building. Note the efflorescence near the base of the building and surrounding the second floor window. Image by author.

other automated machinery. The canal, river, and three-waterfall landscape enabled the mills and factories of Seneca Falls to run efficiently. On the north side of the river, the land sloped upward at a grade of roughly sixty-five degrees until it leveled out at Fall Street. After the construction of the Barge Canal required leveling the Flats, removing the three ten-foot waterfalls, and flooding the island, the landscape changed into one wide canal channel with fewer factories on either side. The south side of the channel was raised so as to make the Canal deeper, which buried the stone mill's first floor. As discussed in Chapter 2, this raising of ground level created water issues in the mill's basement floor.

In 2008, the physical landscape has changed quite dramatically, with the Woolen Mill buildings standing alone on the bank of the Canal, with most of the other nineteenth century factories having disappeared from the water's edge. The Canal remains, as do some of the buildings on its north side facing Fall Street, still situated at a higher ground level. The NWHF owns the land only to a line slightly east of Center Street, with a coal shed and the land on which it sits owned by a separate entity.<sup>168</sup>

The landscape in which the buildings sit suffers from neglect, debris, and waste, both human and animal. The ground on the south side of the building is higher than the ground at the north side, with Canal Street, directly behind the L-shaped building, roughly five feet higher than the ground on the north side of the stone building. Most of the landscape directly around the building is uncut grass, with Canal Street and a gravel parking lot in the rear of the building. The north side of the building sits on uncut grass, with the Canal and its stone walls roughly twenty-five

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<sup>168</sup> Gordon, Robert B. and Patrick Malone. *The Texture of Industry: An Archaeological View of the Industrialization of North America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. P. 97, and Watrous, Hilda R. *The County between the Lakes: A Public History of Seneca County, New York, 1876-1982*. Waterloo, NY: K-Mark Press, Inc., 1983.

feet further north. At the west façade of the L-shaped building, the ground has been filled with concrete, and a concrete wall abuts Canal Street from the southwest corner of the building down roughly fifty feet of the street. South of Canal Street, there are trees in a line, and a perpendicular alley. To the east of this alley tenements existed, some of them homes to Woolen Mill workers. To the west of the building lie Bridge Street and its light green cast iron bridge, supposedly the bridge on which the bridge in *It's a Wonderful Life* was based (See Figure 4.14). To the east, the ground level remains roughly the same, with a green-painted wood coal shed some 75 feet to the east (See Figure 4.15). Further down, the Canal bed ramps up to the edge of Ovid Street and falls back down on the other side as it runs adjacent to Van Cleef Lake.

In terms of repair, much needs to be done to make this buildings and the landscape usable and safe. Briefly stated, several issues need to be addressed throughout the buildings and landscape. First, the flora and fauna intrusions into and onto the buildings destroy the building fabric. Second, water accumulates in areas of the roof and on the facades. The brick and stone walls need to be repointed in the areas of most deterioration. A more efficient roof gutter system can alleviate some of the warping and bowing on the roof at certain points. Third, the immediate landscape needs to be evaluated by archaeologists, just as the buildings have been by preservationists, architects, and structural engineers—to be discussed further later in this chapter. The archaeological study is crucial to the rehabilitation project because it may provide further objects for the museum collection, and it gives value to the possible personal artifacts that may be found, whether of white settlers or First Nations origin.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Archaeological studies provide an opportunity for cultural preservation, whether it is Woolen Mill worker culture or Onondaga nation culture. As noted in Chapter 1, several First Nations groups inhabited the land on which Seneca Falls developed, and contentious issues remain prominent in the area. With the passage of the Native



Figure 4.14. Bridge Street bridge, looking west. Image by author.



Figure 4.15. View of coal shed, facing east. Image by author.

The rehabilitation of the Woolen Mill buildings is in its beginning stages. One of the first steps, already initially addressed in the Ann Beha Master Plan, is the physical treatment of the building and its surrounding landscape. The buildings exist in relatively poor condition, due mostly to neglect and deferment of repairs over the last few decades. Though the NWHF plans to contract one, no archaeological dig has occurred either, leaving the landscape and building grounds full of important information as well as unwanted debris and waste.<sup>170</sup>

The 1844 stone mill building features somewhat common elements of textile mill buildings of its period. Textile mill buildings, whether using cotton or wool, throughout New England and New York bear similar characteristics, mainly for practicality, efficiency, and worker comfort. Contractors and architects working on mill buildings in the early-to-mid nineteenth century often used stone for the primary building material, particularly stone quarried near the construction sites, as with the limestone used in this building. The 110' x 46', four-and-a-half story<sup>171</sup> construction

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American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, performing archaeological studies, particularly in areas historically inhabited by First Nations people, is of utmost importance when undertaking any preservation project. Also, Sprinkle, John H. Jr., "Do Archaeologists Dig, Destroy, and Discriminate? A Critical Look at the Historical Significance and Value of Archaeological Sites," from *Preservation of What, for Whom?* Edited by Michael Tomlan. Held at Goucher College, Baltimore, Maryland, 20-22 March, 1997. Ithaca, NY: National Council for Preservation Education, 1997; Weaver, Martin. *Conserving Buildings: A Guide to Technique and Materials*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1993; and Robert Silman Associates, as part of Ann Beha Architects Master Plan Team. Elevations, 18 October 2006.

<sup>170</sup> Ann Beha Architects. Master Plan for the National Women's Hall of Fame and Museum, November 2006, and Interview with Christine Moulton, Executive Director of the National Women's Hall of Fame, 28 August 2007.

<sup>171</sup> One of the stories was submerged underground by the construction of the Barge Canal in 1915. Though that story cannot be seen today, it still exists and was used in the production of goods until the mill closed in 1999.

was rather large, though not uncommon for the era and for a textile enterprise such as the Seneca Woolen Manufacturing Company. The twelve over twelve double hung windows and the full length clerestory monitor window at the attic level featured prominently in mill architecture of this period, and in later periods as the width and height of the building required a certain amount of light and ventilation for the workers and the machinery. The bell situated on the roof recalls the larger bell towers of other mills of the era, as in the Boott Mills at Lowell, the Harris mills in Harrisville, NH, and the Old Slater Mill in Pawtucket, RI, as well as many others in the region. Unlike those larger enterprises, though, the bell does not feature as prominently into the building's façade, though many of the smaller scale textile mill buildings of this period and region had smaller bell towers attached at the roof level. The bells called the workers back to the building in the mornings and after breaks. With many of the workers living in the Third Ward immediately south and east of the building, the bell system did not have to be massive. The style of the building is often called Greek Revival, mostly due to its 1844 date, stone quoins at the corners, and the window configuration with their stone lintels and sills.<sup>172</sup>

If the buildings and landscape possess such common architectural and topographical characteristics for textile mill buildings and their surroundings, what makes this site important or special? First, this stone mill building, at least at its exterior, remains nearly in its entirety. The roof has been repaired, with the original roofing material replaced, but the windows, the stone, and the interior walls and floors are original. Second, the building is a beautiful example of this style of mill architecture, with locally quarried stone. Third, it being a representation of a typical

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<sup>172</sup> Tyrrell, Henry Grattan. *A Treatise on the Design and Construction of Mill Buildings and Other Industrial Plants*. Chicago: The Myron C. Clark Publishing Co., 1911; and Tyrwhitee, Janice. *The Mill*. Boston: William Fox, 1976, and Zimiles, Martha and Murray. *Early American Mills*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1973.

textile mill building can be seen as a positive, particularly because no other building like it exists in Seneca Falls. Fourth, the stone mill building is one of the last and most physically substantial remnants of the Village's industrial past. Fifth, the Canal and topographical landscape surrounding the building, not factoring in the built landscape that once existed there, remains much the same as it was after 1915, providing a glimpse of the past. Finally, this building housed an industry that experienced and contributed to the development and history of the Village of Seneca Falls, and its possible rehabilitation offers the community a chance at interpreting its complex past in the future in an exciting way—through the museum. The various narratives of the mill's workers can be highlighted there, providing connective threads to the present and future Seneca Falls community.

### **Social History in Current Seneca Falls Museums**

To more fully understand how the NWHF might expand upon the cultural resources of Seneca Falls, it is important to examine the offerings of the museums that currently exist in the Village. The four main museums are the Women's Rights National Historical Park (WRNHP), the Seneca Falls Historical Society, the Seneca Museum of Waterways and Industry, also known as the Canal Museum, and the current National Women's Hall of Fame Museum.

The Women's Rights National Historical Park maintains five structures: the remnants of the Wesleyan Chapel, where the 1848 Convention took place; the WRNHP Visitor Center at 136 Fall Street; the Elizabeth Cady Stanton House on Washington Street; the Hunt House, and the M'Clintock House in Waterloo.<sup>173</sup> The majority of the WRNHP's archives, collections, and exhibits deal primarily with the

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<sup>173</sup> Martha Hunt and Mary Ann M'Clintock were two of the main organizers of the Women's Rights Convention. The organizers met at Hunt's home to plan the event, only days before it took place in July of 1848.

1848 Convention, the lives of the major figures of the Women's Rights Movement, and American women's history. While Seneca Falls is recognized in terms of the Convention and Stanton's life, and traveling exhibits in the WRNHP Museum occasionally deal with Seneca Falls history, the social history of the Village, even of the *women* of the Village, does not usually factor significantly in the WRNHP's offerings. Granted, the National Park Service created this NHP to recognize the significance of the event in American history, not as a site dedicated to the history of Seneca Falls, so it is not surprising that the former is emphasized over the latter.<sup>174</sup>

In terms of resources on Seneca Falls history, the WRNHP sends researchers to the Seneca Falls Historical Society. Their archive features a large, assorted collection of materials, including books, maps, newspapers, scrapbooks, photographs, and ledgers, among other resources. For a researcher interested in Seneca Falls history, this archive holds nearly everything one could need. The SFHS museum exists at 55 Cayuga Street, housed in the former home of famous Seneca Falls residents Edward Mynderse and Norman Becker. The museum features exhibits on the families' lives, the Seneca Falls pump industry, historical toys, and about the Queen Anne architecture. While these exhibits do speak to aspects of the history of Seneca Falls and its industry, and the tour guides provide extensive information in addition to the displays, space constraints limit the scope of what can be exhibited at any given time. The SFHS serves as an incomparable resource for primary source research on various aspects of Seneca Falls history, but a museum with more space could highlight various stories, particularly personal narratives and Village social history in more detailed ways.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Discussion with Anne Derousie, Historian of the WRNHP. 12 October 2007.

<sup>175</sup> Discussion with Kathy Jans-Duffy, 30 November 2007.

Located on Fall Street, the Seneca Museum of Waterways and Industry, also known as the Canal Museum, focuses on the Canal systems in Seneca Falls and industrial history. The main floor exhibits several large dioramas that illustrate the development of the Canal systems at various stages. Exhibits of Villager's inventions, such as irons and Westcott rulers punctuate the dioramas and printed information. One floor below, an exhibit on Seneca Falls' Irish and Italian heritage presents framed photographs of former and current Irish and Italian residents of Seneca Falls, with brief histories beginning each section. The aim of these exhibits is not unlike that of the NWHF mill history exhibit, in that industry, transportation, and social histories of the Village feature most prominently. Here again, space and financial constraints limit the scope of the exhibits and ability of the organization to present the collections and information in the sleek, modern way the NWHF hopes to with their museum.<sup>176</sup>

The National Women's Hall of Fame Museum, currently on Fall Street, houses a collection of personal artifacts of its inductees, and a small archive of information about them. The museum itself is quite small, with large images of past inductees and information panels accompanying the images. With an ever-growing collection, the space constraints will only get worse. Like the other museums, the NWHF does not have the capacity it will have with its new museum to present detailed exhibits or any in depth discussion of Seneca Falls' social history.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>176</sup> Visit to the Seneca Museum of Waterways and Industry, and discussion with Linda Solan, Photographer and Guide, 28 August 2007.

<sup>177</sup> Visits to the National Women's Hall of Fame Fall 2007-Spring 2008, and Interviews with Christine Moulton, Executive Director of the National Women's Hall of Fame, 28 August 2007, 14 September 2007, and 31 January 2008.

While the existing museums and heritage tourism sites in Seneca Falls offer exhibits on various points of Village history, each is hindered in some way, whether it be by space, money, or thematic constraints. The new museum located in the rehabilitated Woolen Mill buildings will have more space in which to present varied, detailed displays. It will present the NWHF with a unique opportunity to interpret the stories of the Woolen Mill and its workers. Immigration, settlement, industry, and transportation all feature prominently into the Woolen Mill's story, and the NWHF could tell them in a way none of the other Seneca Falls museums could, offering the Village new and expanded cultural resources, while still serving as the Hall of Fame.

### **Rehabilitation of the Woolen Mill: History, Precedent, and Present**

The rehabilitation of mill buildings for alternate uses is not a new concept, whether in the United States or abroad. For decades, preservationists, developers, and entrepreneurs used the space and structure of vacant mill buildings for various new functions, most commonly living spaces and museums. Often, the museums represent the history of the mill and its products, while undertakings such as the NWHF's planned rehabilitation that highlights both the mill and NWHF history and collections, do not occur as often.<sup>178</sup>

Textile mill buildings existed in the United Kingdom decades before they existed in the United States. It seems to follow then, that textile mill rehabilitation projects have taken place there for decades. Examples of the rehabilitation of buildings into apartments and studios include the Huddersfield Mill in Yorkshire & Humberside, and the Dunkirk Mill in Nailsworth, Gloucestershire. In the case of the former, the University of Huddersfield and organizations in the area provided grants and other assistance to entrepreneurs looking to rehabilitate the vacant building stock

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<sup>178</sup> Stratton, Michael, Ed. *Industrial Buildings: Conservation and Regeneration*. London: E. & F.N. Spon, 2000, and Zimiles, Martha and Murray. *Early American Mills*, 1973.

for use as apartments or educational space. In the case of the latter, local council oversaw the marriage of rehabilitation of some of the many vacant textile mills in Gloucester with an effort to boost the local economy by turning the mills into apartment complexes and restaurants. Many other examples of mill building rehabilitation exist in the United Kingdom, but this brief look gives some sense of the precedent there.<sup>179</sup>

In the United States, one the most important preservation projects concerning textile mill buildings have been at Harrisville, New Hampshire, and more famously, at Lowell, Massachusetts. The preservation of the textile mills at Harrisville, New Hampshire, does not have the grand scale or the success of the Lowell project, but its has been significant in that the Harrisville mills were entirely woolen goods producers. Located in the Monadnock region of southwest New Hampshire, much of Harrisville features preserved nineteenth century architecture, including many of the mill buildings involved in woolen good production. In addition to the mill buildings, several of the boardinghouses created for the workers still stand as well. The Harrisville Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971 and became a National Historic Landmark in 1977. Despite these recognitions, there is not excessive funding for a particular reuse project for the buildings, though Historic Harrisville Inc., an organization of citizens, preservationists, and entrepreneurs oversees the buildings' and grounds' upkeep. Instead, they stand in good condition on their little-changed landscape and serve as a visual museum of Harrisville's industrial past (See Figure 4.16).<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Stratton, Michael, Ed. *Industrial Buildings: Conservation and Regeneration*, 2000.

<sup>180</sup> Armstrong, John Borden. *Factory under the Elms: A History of Harrisville, New Hampshire, 1774-1969*. Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1969, Tyrwhitee, Janice. *The Mill*. Boston: William Fox, 1976, and Harrisville



Figure 4.16. Harrisville, New Hampshire, features a National Historic Landmark District, with mid-nineteenth century woolen mill buildings. A much smaller operation than Lowell, Harrisville's operation and workforce were more comparable to those of the Woolen Mill in Seneca Falls. Image from [http://www.bc.edu/bc\\_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/mills/harrisv2.jpg](http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/cas/fnart/fa267/mills/harrisv2.jpg)



Figure 4.17. The weave room recreated at the Lowell National Historical Park provides the visitor with a memorable sensory experience. Image by author.

The preservation projects of Lowell, Massachusetts, offer another example of precedent for the rehabilitation of historic textile mill buildings (See Figure 4.17). Unlike Seneca Falls and Harrisville, Lowell textile mills worked primarily with cotton, though one of the buildings in the complex served exclusively as a woolen factory. The preservation projects in Lowell also differ from Harrisville and Seneca Falls in the large scale by which they were accomplished. Of course, Lowell produced more goods than either village did.<sup>181</sup>

In 1978, Congress approved the creation of the Lowell National Historical Park, after having already been placed on the National Register with two Historic Districts in 1975 and 1976. The creation of the Lowell NHP resulted from prolonged efforts by U.S. Senator Paul Tsongas and other citizens, when the increasing demolition of mill buildings during the 1950s, 60s, and 70s, caused the city to rethink economic possibilities and heritage conservation. The creation of the Lowell NHP also ushered the creation of the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission, technically also a federal entity, that provides grants, assistance with obtaining funds, and other counseling to businesspeople and entrepreneurs who purchase historic properties with the intention of rehabilitating the structures for new use. Because of the federal money and increased interest in preservation, rehabilitation projects have occurred throughout the city, with many being mixed-use, including the mills owned and operated by the U.S. Department of the Interior. In fact, the Boott Mills, where the famous weave room and most of the NHP's museum objects and written interpretation exist, consist of several five story brick buildings, only one of which is

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Historic District National Historic Landmark Designation, National Register Number 71000072.

<<http://tps.cr.nps.gov/nhl/detail.cfm?ResourceId=1066&ResourceType=District>>

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, and Interviewer with Becky Warren, Supervisory Park Ranger, Lowell National Historical Park, 9 November 2007.

used for the museum, with the others used for apartments. The last remaining boardinghouse structure, located on the Boott Mills grounds, houses mill employee exhibits, highlighting everything from dormitory living to common meals. Also, the mill structure that houses the NHP's visitor center also features an art gallery, restaurant and elder apartments on the upper floors. The preservation and rehabilitation of Lowell's mill buildings serves as the premier example of a relatively successful and large-scale project in the United States. While the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill buildings and grounds will most likely not become a National Historical Park nor receive much money from the federal government, the rehabilitation in Seneca Falls can draw from other somewhat similar projects, particularly in terms of exhibits and collections management.<sup>182</sup>

The rehabilitation of the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill buildings and grounds is not itself a new concept. In June of 1974, George Souhan began planning the "conversion" of the canal-side Woolen Mill buildings into a commercial complex to include a "living museum" on the third floor, 3200 square feet of office space, 55,166 square feet of retail purposes, apartments and industrial warehousing, and parking. These plans never came to fruition, however, as his yarn company continued to use both the canal-side buildings at the East Bayard Street factory into which he intended to move his whole enterprise.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Interviewer with Becky Warren, Supervisory Park Ranger, Lowell National Historical Park, 9 November 2007, Stratton, Michael, Ed. *Industrial Buildings: Conservation and Regeneration*, 2000, and Ryan, Loretta, "The Remaking of Lowell and Its Histories," from *The Continuing Revolution: A History of Lowell, Massachusetts*. Edited by Robert Weible. Lowell, MA: Lowell Historical Society, 1991.

<sup>183</sup> Hindy, Steve, "Brighter Future for Falls Mill?" *Genesee Shoppee*, 2 June 1974.

This 1974 plan was not the only time the buildings' owners attempted a rehabilitation plan. In 2003 and 2004, the Seneca Knit Development Corporation contracted several studies and created a master plan concerning the property to determine the possibility of the creation of a museum in the existing buildings. All of the plans proved unsuccessful, however, as the necessary funding did not materialize. When the National Women's Hall of Fame expressed interest, the SKDC provided them with their studies and have been supportive of the NWHF rehabilitation as it has progressed.<sup>184</sup>

### **Ann Beha Architects Master Plan for the Rehabilitation Project**

According to Christine Moulton, the National Women's Hall of Fame searched for a new building for a number of years until the SKDC was willing to offer the Woolen Mill buildings. The bank building could no longer comfortably accommodate the museum's collections or library, and the collection would only expand with each subsequent induction. After the NWHF gained ownership of the Woolen Mill buildings and grounds in January of 2006, they quickly began composing a Request for Proposals, which they ultimately sent out in March of 2006. In April of 2006, Ann Beha Architects of Boston sent their proposal and were chosen to create the Master Plan for the rehabilitation project.<sup>185</sup>

According to their proposal, Ann Beha Architects, headed by Ann Beha FAIA and Pamela Hawkes FAIA, have worked with museum, cultural, and

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<sup>184</sup> Hunt Engineers, Architects & Land Surveyors, P.C. (HUNT). *Phase I Environmental Site Assessment, Seneca Falls Knitting Mill*, September 2003, Mangano, Nancy. Renderings, 2006, and Seneca Knit Development Corporation. *Master Plan Document, Seneca Falls Canal Corridor Revitalization Project and Rehabilitation of the Seneca Knitting Mill*, November 2004.

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Christine Moulton, Executive Director of the National Women's Hall of Fame, 28 August 2007, and Ann Beha Architects. Proposal for Master Planning Services, April 2006.

educational clients for over twenty-five years. Their work at various American museums and archives have won awards and garnered praise in the field, with projects including the Charles Street Jail in Boston, the Cedar Streets Art Center in Corning, NY, the New York State Capitol in Albany, and the recently completed Mary Baker Eddy Library for the Betterment of Humanity in Boston. Their work includes rehabilitation of historic structures, with clients including the National Park Service, and earning accolades from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Victorian Society of America, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, and the Preservation League of New York. In addition, their work in creating sustainable, LEED-certified properties especially interested the NWHF, who planned to aim for a Silver rating in the rehabilitation.<sup>186</sup>

For the Master Plan, Ann Beha Architects worked with several organizations to create a cohesive, comprehensive plan. Those involved would be separated into the “Core Team” and the “Consultant Team”, and consisted of professionals working in Boston, New York City, Albany, and Rochester. Pamela Hawkes served as the Principal-in-Charge, with Ann Beha as the Consulting Principal, Anne-Sophie Divenyl as the Project Manager, with Phillip Chen of the firm also consulting in the project. Exhibit Designer Andrew Merriell and Theming and Art Consultant Ramona Sakiestewa worked on exhibit ideas, holding brainstorming sessions with the NWHF staff to conceptualize the various themes and stories they wished to cover and how to do so. Arthur Cohen of LaPlaca Cohen Marketing Professionals offered ideas for branding and marketing of the project and the museum, when completed. Anne Butterfield of the Butterfield Company helped with concepts for fundraising. All involved in the Core Groups specialized in museum work in their various services.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Ann Beha Architects. Proposal for Master Planning Services, April 2006.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

The Consultant Team consisted of four players. John Amodeo ASLA of Carol Johnson Associates Landscape Architects served as the consultant on landscape design. Joseph Tortorella PE of Robert Silman Associates Structural Engineers, a firm with preservation experience in projects like the Guggenheim in New York, and the National Center of the American Revolution at Valley Forge, worked as the structural engineer for the Master Plan. Other consultants on the Consultant Team included Quantum Engineering for the HVAC system, Baer and Associates for Cost Estimating, Preservation Architecture for building and fire safety, and Batwin+Robin Productions for the media design.<sup>188</sup>

Completed in November of 2006, the Master Plan includes an Identity Plan, Architectural Concepts, Exhibit Concepts, Project Budget and Schedule, Operations and Business Plan, and a Capital Campaign Plan. The Identity Plan dealt mostly with branding, the creation of a Position Statement, and the recreation of the NWHF's Vision Statement. LaPlaca Cohen suggested that the NWHF shift the relationship to the induction ceremonies so the museum is not overshadowed, and maintain communication with the public about their ideas in the rehabilitation projects. The NWHF Trustee endorsed Vision Statement was also included:

As the nation's leader in recognizing women's achievements, the National Women's Hall of Fame & Museum uses its recognition and education programs to inspire young people, the broader public—and the world—to positions of leadership, innovation, and accomplishment. To fuel this inspiration, the Museum:

- Aspires to relate and interpret the profound stories of American women's achievements through its historic and unique Seneca Knitting Mills facilities and comprehensive website.

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<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

- Aspires to increase awareness of exemplary American women to emulate, through a variety of recognition programs/
- Aspires to contribute significant economic development to Seneca Falls and the area as one the region's most valuable cultural amenities taking full advantage of the Village's heritage in women's history.
- Aspires to create a renewed spiritual hearth for Seneca Falls and the region through its central Village location.
- Aspires to document and promote access to American women's achievements through its Education and Research Center providing popular and academic programs on inductees and women's history for the public and scholars.<sup>189</sup>

Ann Beha Architects' Architectural Concepts included ideas for the site, the buildings, the visitor experience, education, performance space, and sustainable features. Unsurprisingly, the site plan heavily emphasized the need for parking, creating a total of fifty-eight spaces to the south of the buildings, interpretive light towers, and more clearly defined traffic ways on Canal and Center Street. On the north side between the buildings and the canal, the plan called for the creation of a canal walkway, outdoor dining area, and interpretive outdoor space and amphitheater where the concrete area to the west of the buildings now exists. The Architectural Concepts described all four of the buildings, despite the desire by some involved in the project to demolish the two and a half story building to the east of the stone mill. Though the building is included in the site plan, there is no illustration of it in the floor plans. Because the property is zoned as industrial, the NWHF, with the help of Preservation Architecture, will have to petition the Village Board of Trustees to extend an adjacent Commercial zone to the site, so it may function as a museum. The

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<sup>189</sup> Ann Beha Architects. Master Plan for the National Women's Hall of Fame and Museum, November 2006.

main exhibits, library, and permanent collections would be in the stone mill, with a café, atrium, classrooms, kitchen, gift shop, and restroom in the 1860s brick additions. Notably, as described in the Master Plan, the mill history portion of the building would be located on the second floor of the smallest building, the two-story brick addition immediately adjacent to the stone mill. The major exterior changes involve glass additions between the 1860s brick additions and above the main entrance on the north façade, in the two-story building. The section also highlighted the sustainable features of the project, noting how the large window openings, vegetative roof, hybrid air conditioning system and landscaping would assist the project making a more sustainable structure and museum (See Figures 4.18-4.23).<sup>190</sup>

Andrew Merriell focused on two main themes in the design of the exhibits for the museum. First, he described the exhibits relating to the mill history. As described, the main mill history exhibit would exist on the second floor, featuring a timeline, with photos, maps, artifacts, interviews, and profiles of the mill owners and workers. In addition, satellite mill history displays would be scattered throughout the museum in areas and other exhibits to which they relate. Second, Merriell focused on the National Women's Hall of Fame exhibits, featuring the Book of Lives & Legacies. On the first floor, changing exhibits inhabit the main area of the stone mill section, with an orientation room, welcome booth, recent inductee exhibit, video projection, and the nomination/induction ceremony exhibits in the brick additions section. The second floor contains the permanent exhibits, with the "Your Path to Greatness" exhibits showing the inductees and their stories in their various fields in the stone mill portion. The mill history exhibit would be in the brick addition sections, with the Book of Lives and Legacies books and computer stations and the

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<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

reading room. The upper floors of the buildings would be reserved for collection storage, research library, and administrative offices (See Figures 4.24-4.26).<sup>191</sup>

The Ann Beha Architects Project Budget and Schedule consists of three phases, with the first focusing on roof replacement, window repair, and abatement of floral and faunal destruction, costing \$1,076,900. The second phase would concentrate on masonry repair and further window repair, with a cost of \$2,539,900. The third phase would cover “all remaining work”, allowing \$10,675,500. With \$4,744,400 estimated for exhibits, the total “hard costs” reached \$19,036,700. Factoring in “soft costs” such as consultant fees, graphics, furniture, events, and insurance, while expecting a \$6 million endowment, the total cost for the project was estimated to be nearly \$37 million. While these costs might not change too drastically over the next few years, the project is already off-schedule. With the induction ceremony of 2008, the NWHF allocated nearly all of their time to the event, postponing the subsequent RFPs and bids until the ceremony was complete. The date of the second RFP, which is projected to address stabilization, window repair, and limestone repointing, has not yet been set.<sup>192</sup>

Anne Butterfield’s Operations & Business Plans covered a wide range of topics, with both an initial business plan and a staffing plan. The business plan explores earned income, membership, program fee income, admissions, Book of Lives and Legacies, functions rentals, store and café income, endowment income, raise income, Board and Individuals, corporate and foundation support for operating, percent of grants to operating, and fundraising events. The expenses included employee salaries, education and art

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<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

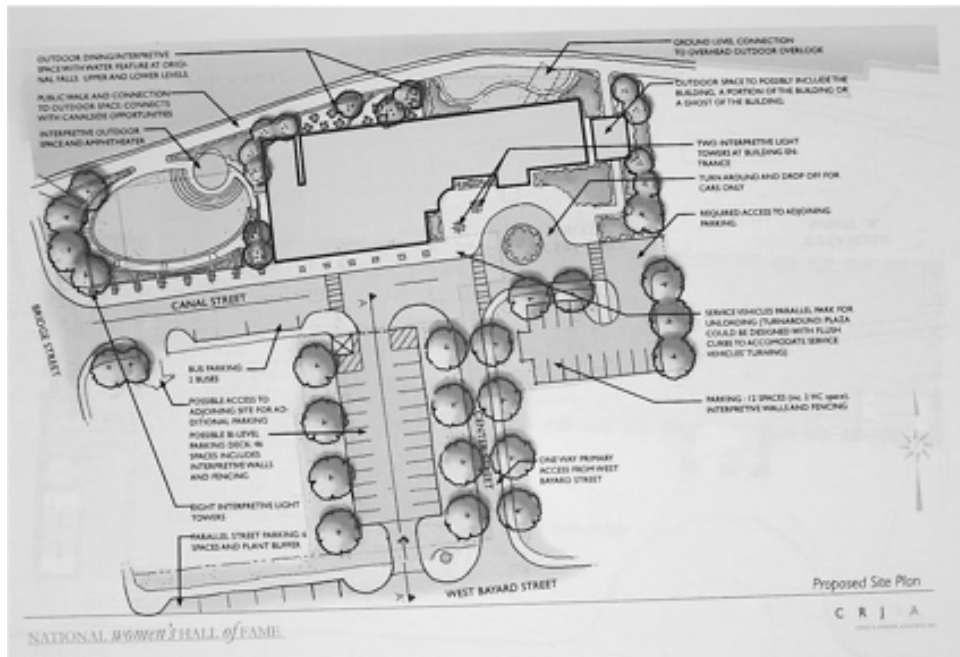


Figure 4.18. Ann Beha site plan, from the Master Plan, 2006. Note the parking lots and the proposed amphitheatre.



Figure 4.19. Ann Beha rendering, north façade, from the Master Plan, 2006. Note the glass project from the stone building, meant to recall the walkway to the island building.



Figure 4.20. Ann Beha rendering, south façade. Note the glass addition between the brick and stone buildings. From the Master Plan, 2006.



Figure 4.21. Ann Beha renderings, main entrance, facing east. From the Master Plan, 2006.



Figure 4.22. Ann Beha rendering of the space beneath the glass addition, in the crook of the L of the brick buildings. From the Master Plan, 2006.



Figure 4.23. Image of the same space, April 2008. Image by author.

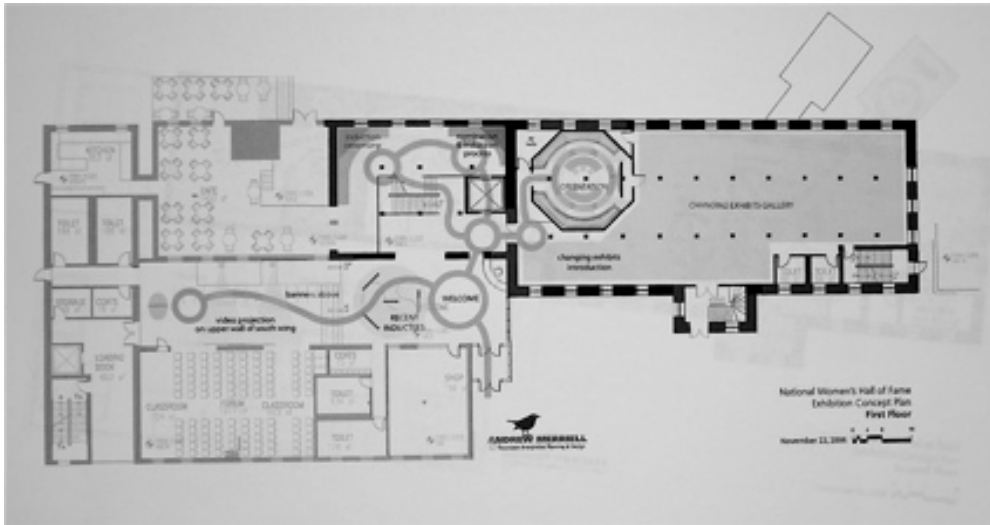


Figure 4.24. First floor exhibit plan by Andrew Merriell, from the Master Plan, 2006.

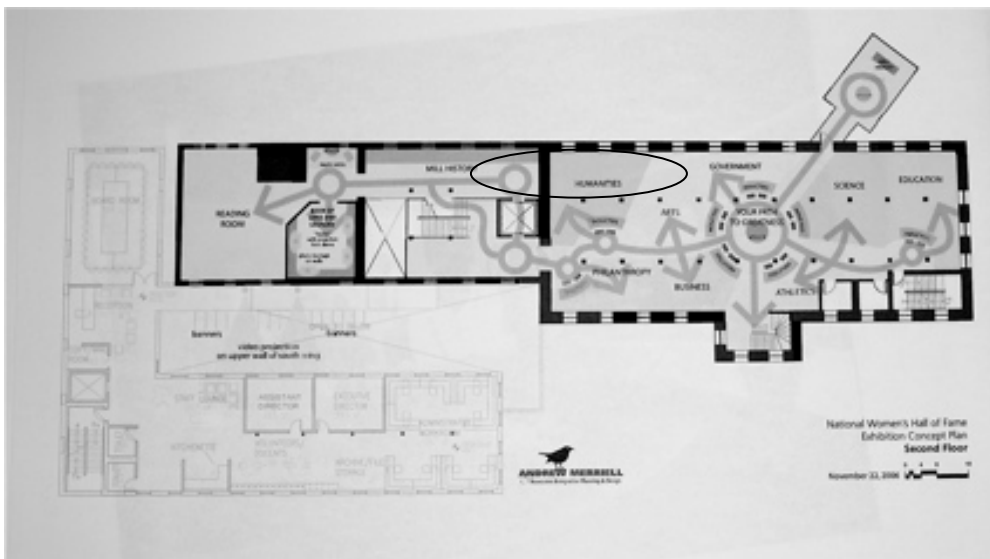


Figure 4.25. Second floor exhibit plan by Andrew Merriell, from the Master Plan, 2006. The space for the mill history exhibit, circled by the author, could be expanded.

materials, exhibition repair, development and membership, marketing and PR, and utilities and insurance. The first year of the plan predicted a surplus of \$5,240.00. The second year factored in a decrease in the number of visitors, but a surge in surplus, particularly with the presence of volunteers--\$348,701. The third year also saw a surplus, of over \$60,000.<sup>193</sup>

In the Capital Campaign Plan, Anne Butterfield described the sources of funds and responsibilities of the NWHF staff. The executive director would devote 80% of her time to the capital project, while the deputy director and campaign manager would devote 50% of his/her time and attend functions and events. A temporary campaign director would work on the capital campaign full time for three years. With sources of funding, 10% would come from the Board, 30% from individual contributions, 20% from corporations, 10% from foundations, and 30% from the government.<sup>194</sup>

While the Master Plan appears to cover most of the points the NWHF requested in the RFP, the rehabilitation process is slow moving. As described, the timeline put forth in the Master Plan has already passed by nearly a year. Despite the ongoing efforts of the five part-time and three full-time staff members of the NWHF, the project has met with some difficulty. As it is the primary function of the organization, the induction ceremony of October 2007 required all of the time from the NWHF, as the inductees, families, members, and many other individuals attended, with several events taking place over several days.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Interviews with Christine Moulton, Executive Director of the National Women's Hall of Fame, 28 August 2007, 14 September 2007, and 31 January 2008.

Money plays an enormous factor in the success and progress in the project as well. Senator Hillary Clinton, an active supporter of the rehabilitation project, initially promised \$800,000 in funding from Transportation and HUD sources, but the appropriation that passed allowed only \$246,100, as of January 2008. The NWHF has been actively fundraising, applying for grants from the Restore New York Program, and the Save America's Treasures program. As of January 2008, the NWHF received news that they did not receive either the Restore New York grant or the Save America's Treasures grant. Also, Republican State Senator Mike Nozzolio has actively investigated possible funding for the project, offering bipartisan support and working with Senator Clinton to engage lawmakers and the public. With the transfer of the \$353,000 already awarded to the SKDC's rehabilitation efforts<sup>196</sup>, the NWHF has accumulated approximately \$1 million of the estimated \$37 million necessary to complete the rehabilitation (See Figure 4.26).<sup>197</sup>

Despite these setbacks, the NWHF remains confident and excited about the project, and actively engages the citizens in Seneca Falls to get an understanding of the Village response. The citizens of Seneca Falls seem to have a detailed understanding and keen interest in their community history, and with the final closing of the mill occurring but nine years ago, many of the employees eagerly await the progress of the project. Susanna Jane Beasley, retired winder of the Seneca Knitting Mills, has said that while she would rather the industry return to Seneca Falls and the mill buildings, she is glad the NWHF has been working on using the

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<sup>196</sup> The money awarded to the SKDC included an Empire State Development grant and money from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation.

<sup>197</sup> Interviews with Christine Moulton, Executive Director of the National Women's Hall of Fame, 28 August 2007 and 14 September 2007.

buildings and grounds again for something useful. The NWHF has held community meetings, where Villagers have been able to ask questions and voice opinions. According to Christine Moulton, the meetings have gone mostly smoothly, with strong support and interest coming from those that attend. With the Village's support and interest in the rehabilitation of one its oldest standing structures comes a responsibility to the people and to the history that made the buildings and grounds exist in the first place (See Figures 4.27-4.29).<sup>198</sup>

### **The Future of the Rehabilitation and the NWHF Museum**

The creation of a museum in the Woolen Mill site offers the Village opportunities in economy, education, and architecture. Though the return of a viable industry to the Woolen Mill site would create more jobs, the museum offers some assistance to the local economy. The physical construction work of the building presents job opportunities for local contractors and craftspeople, and the completed museum will create jobs for retail clerks, collections managers, and curators. Granted, some of the jobs created would be temporary, and the museum jobs would be few in number, but at least they are *additional* employment opportunities for the community. Also, the museum could bring in new visitors and tourists. Women's history already brings people from many geographic locations to Seneca Falls, but an added attraction that addresses women's history and the Village's history in a new way will bring visitors as well, though probably not to the extent anticipated in the Master Plan. In terms of education, the rehabilitation provides opportunities for exhibits on the Village, mill, and NWHF history, with possible field trips, special lectures, and possible programming covering a number of topics. The Master Plan shows the physical

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<sup>198</sup> Interviews with Christine Moulton, Executive Director of the National Women's Hall of Fame, 28 August 2007 and 14 September 2007, and Susanna Jane Beasley, former winder at the Seneca Knitting Mills, 2 November 2007.



Figure 4.26. Andrew Merriell rendering of a National Women's Hall of Fame exhibit, from the Master Plan, 2006.



Figure 4.27. Senator Hillary Clinton stands in front of the stone mill building, September, 2006. Senator Clinton remains a supporter of the project, despite the financial disappointment. From <[www.womensrightsfriends.org](http://www.womensrightsfriends.org)>

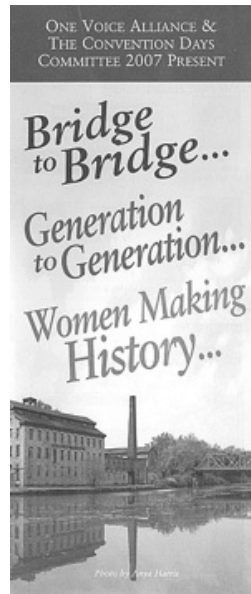


Figure 4.28. A pamphlet from the Convention Days celebrating the 1848 Women's Rights Convention during the Summer of 2007 uses the image of the Seneca Falls Woolen Mill. The site is well known and celebrated in the community. In addition to pamphlets, the Seneca Museum of Waterways and Industry held an art contest in which participants created images of the Woolen Mill, competing for prizes. From [www.womensrightsfriends.org](http://www.womensrightsfriends.org).



Figure 4.29. Seneca Falls Woolen Mill buildings, looking south from Fall Street across the Canal. Image from [fli.hws.edu](http://fli.hws.edu)

work to be performed on the buildings and the grounds, which will make the building inhabitable and will return the exteriors to their intended beauty. As the buildings and grounds feature so prominently along the Canal and have become an engrained image of the Seneca Falls Canal vista, the rehabilitation will save an important visual landscape.

All of these aspects of the rehabilitation project matter because this museum will work not only for the NWHF, but also for the people of Seneca Falls. The buildings and grounds represent one of the Village's last remnants of its nineteenth century industrial history. Seneca Falls citizens seem to be aware of their history, and many take active roles in the telling of the stories, whether volunteering with the Historical Society or simply answering questions visiting researchers may pose. The NWHF works on a national scale, but they also invest in their immediate community. The interest and dedication the Villagers and the NWHF have to preserving and remembering Seneca Falls history could translate into the museum's exhibits and offerings in amounts equal to that of the NWHF collection. This can be accomplished through preparing for visitors of various backgrounds and interests, and more importantly, in their collections management and exhibit design and content.<sup>199</sup>

One of the most exciting aspects of the rehabilitation project is its potential in the future. Though the project is still in its infancy, it could be an important economic force and ultimately a place in which the past, present, and future of Seneca Falls is represented and honored in possibly new ways. To get the project through to its completion and to create a museum that works for the Villagers and the NWHF, several aspects need to be considered: collections management and exhibits.

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<sup>199</sup> Lord, Gail Dexter and Barry Lord. *The Manual of Museum Planning*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2001.

In considering collections management, one should examine the physical spaces in which the objects will be stored or displayed. Not only will the physical repair to the buildings make them inhabitable and beautiful, but also prepared for new loads, materials, and the display of potentially sensitive objects. The main considerations any museum must take when preparing for a new collection are storage and environmental controls.

Most museums struggle with the availability of storage space. Considering four of the five types of museum collections—study, reserve, demonstration, and archival—will live most often in the storage space, this is of utmost importance to the conservation of the objects. The main reason the NWHF searched for a new building lay with its need for more storage and display space. In the first years of the museum's life, storage space will be ample. The NWHF's collection is small, consisting mostly of personal papers, photographs, clothing, and personal mementos of their inducted. Often effective are compact storage units, which can often be temperature and humidity controlled. Another option that may be well suited to demonstration and study collections is visible storage, with pull out drawers and vitrine cases taking up little physical space but being directly available to the visiting public. When preparing a space for these units, however, the project managers must be sure to measure possible loads on the floors and ceilings, as a long-vacant building might not be initially equipped for the shift in weight. Of course, even during the creation of storage space, the most significant concern should be environmental controls.<sup>200</sup>

The environment in which a museum's objects are displayed and stored must be carefully controlled in order to assure the safety of the objects. The NWHF

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<sup>200</sup> *The Manual of Museum Planning*, 2001.

collection consists mostly of delicate materials that require thought and care in their conservation. The most important factors in creating a stable environment are temperature, humidity, light, pest management, and security.<sup>201</sup>

No matter what efforts are undertaken, remedial conservation will always be necessary in collections management. Deliberate, well-researched precautions can help limit the amount of conservation necessary. Temperature and humidity affect each other in that stability in temperature makes it easier to also stabilize humidity. Water tends to have more of a detrimental effect on organic materials than temperature does, which is an important consideration for the NWHF's collection. As Seneca Falls exists in a climate of varied seasonal temperatures and precipitation, maintaining a temperature and humidity level will be more difficult. Sensors and electronic systems like heat and air condition can certainly help to alleviate temperature and humidity issues, but there are steps the NWHF can take to lower their costs. The masonry and brick walls of the Woolen Mill buildings provide a good foundation to environmental control, but the windows should be sealed to prevent seepage of air and moisture. When it would not affect the historic fabric, surfaces should be painted to seal out dust and particulates that would pollute the air. The repointing and exterior wall repair suggested in a previous section will also help seal out extra water and outdoor environment.<sup>202</sup>

In addition to temperature and humidity, the attention paid to light, both natural and artificial, can remove some of the danger to the exposed objects. Light fades ink, dye, and photographic chemicals, particularly in historical objects, so the NWHF should be aware of the limits and placement of each of their objects, particularly their display collection, and understand the ways in which the natural

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<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

light streaming in from the windows affects different areas of the buildings. Often, placing the display objects under glass in the middle of a large room, on the middle floors, exposes the objects to the least natural light. Cases in which the objects are placed often have easily controllable lighting systems. In addition, there exist many different types of lighting available for different exhibits, and research into tube lighting and track-lighting, as well as other variations, can offer sensitive solutions in the various displays the NWHF will maintain. Coupled with the effect of light is color, with different colors reflecting or absorbing light. Special attention must be paid to choice of wall color and light in every exhibit and room, so as to avoid inadvertently overexposing object to light. Removable and movable gypsum wall-board can protect the historic building fabric and function as a flat, easily painted surface for objects and exhibit design.<sup>203</sup>

As the effects on the woolen buildings can attest, pest management and security also factor prominently in the need for environmental controls. The sealing of windows, cracks, and doorframes helps in preventing larger pests from entering the building. Routine upkeep of the grounds and the buildings also negates some of the potentially difficult situations. Most of the current pest issues on the grounds today are birds and bats, most of which can be avoided with proper sealing of the roof and windows. Security measures include fire controls and alarm systems. As water is one of the primary sources of degradation for objects, it is recommended that a mist system be installed rather than a sprinkler system, as the mist does not harm the objects as readily as a steady stream of water. Security guards and alarm systems would be necessary as well.<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*

While all of these measures to control the environment will help ensure the safety of the objects and the buildings and grounds, the potential exhibits and programming really present an exciting opportunity for the NWHF and Seneca Falls. When creating these exhibits, at least during the rehabilitation process, consulting the Village public could help maintain a report and a trust that this new use and rehabilitation of a site so important to Seneca Falls and its history factors in the concerns of the public while also furthering their own objective. By emphasizing the mill's social history, opportunities may arise in which mill workers' family members donate personal items, which would serve to connect them even more closely to the exhibits and museum, as well as adding to the museum's collection. The physical space devoted to the mill history could be expanded to make the museum more relevant to the Village and more informative for the visitors from other places. The subject of mill history itself offers many potential exhibit ideas, including social, scientific, and historical subject matter. Some possible exhibits include:

- Immigration and the Woolen Mill: how people shaped the workforce and the surrounding community
- Development of neighborhoods around the Mill, including boardinghouses and the Catholic Church
- The Mill and the Village: parallel and intertwined development
- Outlines of demolished buildings and tenement houses made of stone or wood at the ground level
- Transportation Developments in Seneca Falls and their impact on the Mill
- Woolen Mills vs. Cotton Mills: Textiles in the United States in the nineteenth century
- Industry of Seneca Falls: various types and successes
- Science of the woolen industry

Undoubtedly there are many more potential exhibits, but these seem to approach the most detailed topics related to the Woolen Mill. The science related topics are often popular with children, as science museums tend to be the most successful museum in the United States. In addition, the NHP at Lowell frequently employs scientific displays and activities that explain the processes and industry in what appear to be effective ways, with replicas of machines, hands-on stations, and touchable fabrics and materials.<sup>205</sup>

In addition to exhibits, programming can bring in new visitors, bring back repeat visitors, and in general further expose the museum to the public. With several universities in the area, a lecture series of professors, students, and professionals on relevant topics could attract visitors, members, and revenue. As briefly discussed, scientifically-oriented or craft day programs for children and families in the summer could again add to the revenue accrued by the museum. The museum could hold special events in addition to the induction ceremony, such as fundraising dinners. Spaces could also be rented out for birthday parties, weddings, and other events. In other words, programming offers the museum new ways to involve and/or reengage the public, and by extension earn more money for future exhibits, repairs, or events.<sup>206</sup>

## **Conclusion**

As described, the rehabilitation of the Woolen Mill offers new opportunities to the NWHF and to Seneca Falls. For the NWHF, a group of buildings and an expanded physical site creates the opportunity for growth and a healthy maintenance

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<sup>205</sup> *Ibid*, and Interview with Becky Warren, Supervisory Park Ranger, Lowell National Historical Park, 9 November 2007.

<sup>206</sup> Lord, Gail Dexter and Barry Lord. *The Manual of Museum Planning*, 2001.

of their collection and their mission. The physical rehabilitation of the mill buildings and grounds offers the Village a preserved visual representation of their industrial heritage. The planning process allows for conversations among organization of architects, preservationists, artists, and citizens in order to create a museum for the NWHF and for Seneca Falls itself. The museum's possible exhibits and programming provide a way in which to tell the stories of the past, present, and future of Seneca Falls in ways the current museums of Seneca Falls cannot. These present an opportunity to revisit commonly held Village beliefs and myths, and to look at women's history in a new way, through the eyes of the NWHF and those of the mill workers, both men and women. The museum could describe the mill's history in various new ways, highlighting the social developments, scientific advances, and the industry's effect and relationship with the Village itself. With this project, the National Women's Hall of Fame can further their nationally-scoped mission while continuing to connect and offer new opportunities to the Village in which it operates. This rehabilitation project would save and honor Seneca Falls' heritage, while mixing history, historic preservation, and traditional trades with innovative architectural ideas, exhibit design, and environmental concern.

## CONCLUSION

Seneca Falls is an historically important Village with an opportunity to revitalize its future. Though in some ways its history resembles that of other Upstate New York towns and Villages, its story, including the creation of canals, railroads, bustling industry, and social history, features unique events, successes, and failure that make it unique and worth exploring. While it is mostly remembered for being the location of the First Women's Right Convention, the creation of the NWHF museum from the rehabilitated mill site offers the Village a chance to reevaluate its story and honor all of the aspects of its past and present.

The history of Seneca Falls, particularly its Women's Rights National Historical Park sites, serves as its primary force in heritage tourism. When researched in detail, the history of the Village tells various stories, including transportation, the reshaping of the natural landscape, manufacturing, industry, immigration, and settlement. The importance of Seneca Falls lies not only in its women's history events, but the context into which those events took place and the successes and failures in the decades following.

The rehabilitation of the Woolen Mill and its sites calls for the investigation of the history of the Woolen Mill industry in Seneca Falls, particularly in the ways it connects with the history of the Village itself. Both influenced and were influenced by each other. The creation of transportation thruways and the reshaping of the Village's physical landscape encouraged growth and industry, of which the Woolen Mill was one of the largest. The Woolen Mill's financial successes and failures caused money and people to move into Seneca Falls, and, alternatively at points, unemployment and loss of capital.

In addition, the story of the Woolen Mill intertwines with the history of the Seneca Falls through the lives and experiences of its employees. The influx of

immigrants, particularly from Ireland and the United Kingdom in the late-nineteenth century and from Italy in the early twentieth century, shaped the social landscape and influenced the settlement patterns developing in the Village. They supply information on tenements, boardinghouses, social networks, and religion. The demographics of the Woolen Mill workers dispel the myths of the “mill girl” due to their nearly equal numbers of men and women from various countries and states, and while doing so, provide a more truthful representation of American woolen industry workers in the nineteenth century. The workers of the Woolen Mill retell a commonly viewed “women’s” history—textile mills in nineteenth century America—allowing for a more nuanced juxtaposition of histories, those of all Villagers, male and female, American and foreign-born.

All of these stories play important roles in the rehabilitation of the site and in the finalized NWHF museum. Knowing what developed in the buildings and what the workers produced informs treatment decisions about the buildings and their surrounding landscape. In the finalized museum, these stories influence the collections management and exhibition design and content, for the museum is not only for the NWHF, but also for the history of the mill and for the Villagers of Seneca Falls. The NWHF has a unique opportunity to interpret the social history of the Woolen Mill and the Village, as the current museums in Seneca Falls lack the finances, space, or thematic flexibility to do so.

Clearly, the rehabilitation has pitfalls. Progress is slow-moving, with induction preparation stifling the project, and an eight-person staff managing daily activities while attempting to move the project forward. Arguments over demolition, history, and architectural treatment both stymie and invigorate the project, promoting further research and exploration of options. Money seems to be the main issue, with little toward the necessary—and likely undershot—\$37 million raised in a year.

Though the content of the future requests for proposals has nearly been decided, the deadlines remain unset. The 2011 projected date of completion is unlikely, despite the NWHF staff's best efforts. Still, though, positive attitudes and the prospect of the completed endeavor offer hope for the future.

The NWHF seeks to create a new economic opportunity for the Seneca Falls, in terms of heritage tourism. By expanding on the offerings of women's history tourism, the museum they build could provide the community and its visitors with a more fully realized history, thus creating educational opportunities. The Woolen Mill site, one of the last vestiges of the Village's nineteenth century industrial past, is important, both in its recognizable aesthetics and what its industry meant for 150 years. The NWHF's rehabilitation of the Woolen Mill buildings and grounds offers Seneca Falls economic, educational, and architectural opportunities in the future by freshly investigating its past.

The National Women's Hall of Fame's rehabilitation of the Woolen Mill site offers much in terms of future research. With the project in its infancy, the various snafus and successes of the project's future stages will allow for continued investigation into architectural treatments and uses for archaeological findings. Discoveries in documents and historical materials could continue to shed light on issues in the histories that remained unsolved. As the museum's audience becomes more apparent, and the collections increase, reevaluation of possible exhibits will come to the fore. In the meantime, expecting change and offering suggestions for the future allows the project to progress, even if slightly. With a project this exciting and important to Seneca Falls, every step will prove valuable.

## APPENDIX

Interview with Susanna Jane Beasley, 2 November 2007

Transcript Composed and Edited by Lindsey Wallace

*[We begin the phone conversation by discussing Miss Beasley's help and quick updates and references to people we know and our previous conversations.]*

**Lindsey Wallace:** *I have some questions for you.*

**Susanna Jane Beasley:** *Could you please speak up? I have a hard time hearing.*

**LW:** *Yeah. Yes. Is it better now? Can you hear me?*

**SJB:** *Yes, it's better now because I have a hard time hearing. These hearing aids are terrible. I have problems.*

**LW:** *Ok. No I can definitely, just let me know if you can't hear me. I can just speak louder. I'm trying to record it. Remember how I told you I was going to record it?*

**SJB:** *Yeah. You got a recorder did you?*

**LW:** *Yeah. And it works pretty well.*

**SJB:** *That's good.*

**LW:** *Yeah, so if you have any problems hearing just let me know and I can speak up. No problem.*

**SJB:** *Yeah, please, I'd appreciate that.*

**LW:** *And if at any time you feel tired, or you don't want to talk anymore, just let me know we can--*

**SJB:** *We can talk there for a while.*

**LW:** *Yes, just let me know if you feel tired and we can talk again another time*

**SJB:** *Ok.*

*LW: Great, well we talked before about your employment at the mill, yes?*

*SJB: Pardon?]*

**LW:** We talked before about your employment as a winder.

**SJB:** Oh yeah, I was a winder for almost 38 years.

**LW:** Okay, and you said you retired in 1982 right?

**SJB:** Yes, 1982. March 1<sup>st</sup>.

**LW:** Okay. So when you were employed at the mill, were you a winder for 38 years?

**SJB:** Oh yeah, I was hired as a winder.

**LW:** Okay.

**SJB:** I was hired for the winder job.

**LW:** Okay, before you said that was tying knots right?

**SJB:** Yeah, tying knots all day they had special kind of knot. One time, you know, they said the boy scouts used to make knots. Boy scouts made that kind of knot.

**LW:** Oh.

**SJB:** I really can't say much about that. I was a winder. I tied knots all day, that's what I tell people. They laugh about that.

**LW:** But you enjoyed it?

**SJB:** Oh yeah. Definitely, yeah.

**LW:** Yeah, when you were employed there, what was the name of the mill? Was it Geb and Souhan at that point?

**SJB:** No, we...it was Seneca Knitting Mills. That's the place. It was Seneca Knitting Mills. That's the one shop that was on the canal, next to the canal, where the rec center is today. The rec center is there today. Seneca Knitting Mills burned to the ground on January 29, 1959.

**LW:** Yeah, you told me a bit about that before. You had just gotten there in the morning?

**SJB:** Yeah, we were there that morning right at the start at six o'clock, and the boss came over and said, "Come on girls. Get out of here--there's a fire downstairs in the cotton room." I don't know—they don't know how it started I don't think---

**LW:** No, I don't know, I haven't...I don't think they do.

**SJB:** And the canal that day—there was no water in the canal, not water they could bring in to fight the fire.

**LW:** So at that point, when you worked at the mill, was it the stone mill that exists there today? Was that also used by Seneca Knitting Mill?

**SJB:** You mean, the one that's Seneca Knitting Mill today? Where the rec center is?

**LW:** Well, I know that the rec center is on the site where the other building burned to the ground, but the other building—

**SJB:** Yeah that was Seneca Knitting Mill. This one where Seneca Knitting Mill is today was Geb and Souhan Yarn Mill.

**LW:** Ok.

**SJB:** Geb and Souhan.

**LW:** Ok. Now did Geb and Souhan and Seneca Knitting Mill come together at some point?

**SJB:** Yeah, after. We did a lot of work together. Times during the War when Geb and Souhan needed extra, they needed help to get the work out, they needed extra, so they asked us girls to work a couple hours over each day, once or twice two days a week. Maybe we worked over there in their shop a little bit.

**LW:** Ok.

**SJB:** After the fire, I don't know what you would say. It was just gone and that was Seneca Knit. Gone, but then they turned Geb and Souhan. They turned Geb and Souhan into Seneca Knitting Mill after a while after the fire

**LW:** Ok, so then when you worked at Seneca Knitting Mill, who was the main boss, employer?

**SJB:** Let's see. Bud Souhan owned the place. Geb and Souhan--they were related somehow, they were.

**LW:** Yeah.

**SJB:** They were family, so they owned that place, so then after the fire, then they-- Bud Souhan, the boss of Seneca Knit built down on Bayard St, where Gould's is now.

**LW:** Ok.

**SJB:** Then when Gould's bought that place, they moved us down to there Seneca Knit is today. We worked there.

**LW:** So you worked in the large stone building that's there today, you worked there after the fire?

**SJB:** Yeah.

**LW:** Ok. Where was the winding station located?

**SJB:** Could you please speak up?

**LW:** Sure. Where in the building were you? What floor did you work on?

**SJB:** We were on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, the ground level, down below—they had the card room downstairs.

**LW:** Ok.

**SJB:** That's where that was. But we were, right when you walked in from the street.

**LW:** Ok, Ok, so then you were on the ground floor. So then what was above you, on the second floor?

**SJB:** Upstairs, we had knitters. Knitting machines ran upstairs. They had inspectors. They had washers—they washed socks and dried. They had machines that they had them, but they was turning the socks, they had to turn them inside out. I don't know how they did that, but they called it turning.

**LW:** Oh, I see. When you worked there, how many people worked with you? When you worked in the building that's there today?

**SJB:** Well, in the winding dept we had maybe 6 people on the shift, we had 3 shifts at 7.5 hours each plus half hour for lunch so that made it an 8 hr day.

**LW:** And that was in your department per shift?

**SJB:** Yeah.

**LW:** Ok.

**SJB:** The spinning department was on the same floor.

**LW:** Okay. So do you think that each department had about six people working in it, or did the number vary from department to department?

**SJB:** It varied, ya know, sometimes it was less. Depended on how many winders they had. Sometimes they had a full shift sometimes they didn't.

**LW:** Ok. You said also before that as a winder you often had to instruct the new employees how to use it? You were a trainer as well? When the new employees came in, didn't you say that--

**SJB:** Yeah. They hired girls extra help for other shifts, they had me do that sometimes. I taught the girls. Some of them.

**LW:** You liked that as well?

**SJB:** Oh yeah, I liked that.

**LW:** So were most of the employees when you were there women?

**SJB:** Yeah, the girls, in the winding department, they had a shift there, there were a few guys at night, men on the late shifts, but it wasn't men only, only a couple.

**LW:** So then on the late shifts, there were men and women?

**SJB:** Yeah.

**LW:** Okay. ...Sorry, I'm looking at my questions right now. Okay, when you worked at the mill, was it strictly a woolen mill, material wise?

**SJB:** Yeah, they made socks there, Seneca Knit, we made socks at the old place too. During the War years we made socks for the government. That was government work we did. And then they used to make yarn that was shipped out. I don't know what it was used for.

**LW:** So they made yarn as well, in addition to the socks?

**SJB:** Yeah I don't know what it was. Some of it was nylon, though, but they did strictly socks.

**LW:** Do you know where the wool came from, like what part of the country?

**SJB:** No, I don't know where it came from. We never heard.

**LW:** Okay. Do you have old photos and that kind of thing from your days at the mill?

**SJB:** What? I didn't catch what you said.

**LW:** Oh, sorry. Do you have old photos or documents from your days at the mill?

**SJB:** Do I have any sweaters from my days at the mill?

**LW:** No, photographs.

**SJB:** There was photos in the paper a long time ago, but I don't have any. If I run across any I could let you know.

**LW:** Oh ok. I would really appreciate them. I would make copies of them.

**SJB:** One time, we had a picture of the winding department but I don't know where that papers went to.

**LW:** Ok. I was just curious in any case. Do you mind describing what a day was like for you there? Like the atmosphere in the room? Was it hot or humid?

**SJB:** You mean if there was fighting and scrapping?

**LW:** Oh, just temperature wise—well, anything you'd like to tell me, of course.

What was the room temp? Was it hot?

**SJB:** Oh boy it was hot in the summer, it was really hot. Then you go outdoors in that nice hot weather it—you didn't know which was the hottest.

**LW:** Oh yeah. You had to keep the windows closed right?

**SJB:** Oh yeah, you couldn't have breeze, even a small one. If there was a breeze it would be bad for the knitters. Even for the winders it was bad. It didn't bother me because we were on the floor there facing the canal, so we didn't notice it. You know. But they had a steamer there where they sued to steam all that yarn. We got paid by the pound. It was all piecework.

**LW:** You got paid by the pound of work, so you didn't actually get paid hourly?

**SJB:** Yeah.

**LW:** Oh wow.

**SJB:** Piecework. It was not hourly, it was piecework all of it.

**LW:** So what you did, was it generally the same everyday?

**SJB:** Yeah, the same thing day after day.

**LW:** Okay, so were they steamed, the pieces, was on the same floor as you?

**SJB:** Oh yeah.

**LW:** Oh gosh. So then it must have been really humid and hot.

**SJB:** Oh yeah, it was hot, summer was really hot. It was hot in the wintertime too because of that steamer the place.

**LW:** Yeah. I read some accounts of working in mills and fibers in the air. Your breathe in fibers sometimes---

**SJB:** Oh yeah.

**LW:** Was it like that for you?

**SJB:** Oh yeah, there was dust. It was quite dusty you know, you would be surprised at what would be on the floors when you went home at night because you had to sweep it up, the dust would fly from the yarn onto the floor.

**LW:** Wow yeah. And you worked 7.5. Did you usually work the morning shift?

**SJB:** Yeah, after the fire I worked the 3<sup>rd</sup> shift at Geb and Souhan and after we got back to Seneca Knit and our department, named Seneca Knit after that, that was all Seneca Knit. I got back on the day shift. I didn't work the third no more, that third shift was rough.

**LW:** Yeah. What were the times for that? What hours?

**SJB:** 6-2. 7-3 after that.

**LW:** Now, when you worked the third shift what were your hours?

**SJB:** Oh 7.5, like 11 o'clock a night to 7 in the morning.

**LW:** Oh wow.

**SJB:** You're not used to that kind of work are you? It was rough.

**LW:** Oh yeah. So the entire 38 years you worked there were there 3 shifts the whole time?

**SJB:** Most of the time, yeah. Especially during the war years they were going 7 days a week.

**LW:** Wow. So the mill functioned constantly.

**SJB:** Yeah, after the fire we were they put us at Geb and Souhan, and we worked 7 days a week. We had a seven-day week. 24 hrs right around the clock.

**LW:** Oh wow. Geez.

**SJB:** That was after the fire. That was to keep the business going.

**LW:** How long did you have to work 7 days a week?

**SJB:** I don't know, I don't know how long it was before we got our own shop after the fire, everything was all...It was hard to get adjusted.

**LW:** You said too that you walked to work?

**SJB:** Yeah I walked to work and I walked home.

**LW:** Did you live in Seneca Falls?

**SJB:** Oh yeah, I lived where I live today. I've lived in this house since 1942.

**LW:** Oh, ok.

**SJB:** I walked to work, walked home. People told me to slow down.

**LW:** Wow, you lived in the house since 1942. So you said your brothers Harry and Al--they lived there too?

**SJB:** Yeah my dad, my brother they were sick. Yeah I took care of them as well as worked at--

**LW:** Did they live with you in your house?

**SJB:** Yeah I lived with them. I took care of them my dad was sick for years.

**LW:** Oh.

**SJB:** My brother Al was sick though. It was from the War.

**LW:** I'm sorry to hear that. Your brother Harry—he's in Seneca Falls, right?

**SJB:** He's in Waterloo.

**LW:** Ok. You moved to Seneca Falls in 1924?

You mean if I was born here in SF?

**LW:** Well, you weren't right? Where were you born?

**SJB:** I was born in Shohola, PA (???)

**LW:** Ok.

**SJB:** But I didn't live there. We only lived there long enough until I came into the world, then we moved to? NY.

**LW:** Ok.

**SJB:** From there we moved to Fayette, NY.

**LW:** I remember you said you lived in Fayette.

**SJB:** I've been around here a long time.

**LW:** Well, it's a nice place to be, it's so beautiful.

**SJB:** Yeah, I like it around here. You hear about all these countries, those states with hot weather, that hot weather is not for me.

**LW:** Not for me either, I can understand that.

**SJB:** Not for me.

**LW:** Well, we've been having really lovely weather lately.

**SJB:** We had a real heavy frost this morning.

**LW:** Oh yeah.

**SJB:** It was bad.

**LW:** Yeah, it really was.

**SJB:** They said snow on Tuesday.

**LW:** I didn't know that. Well it's getting cold quickly, winter is coming.

**SJB:** I'm not looking forward to it I tell you.

**LW:** Yeah, me either. Well I wondered about--so you know that stone building that's there, and the brick buildings along the canal...

**SJB:** Seneca Knit now.

**LW:** Right, right.

**SJB:** Yeah, they're supposed to turn it into a museum or something?

**LW:** Right, right. I was going to ask you about that. Because actually what my project is, I'm looking into how they're going to turn that into a museum.

**SJB:** I can't understand it. They've been debating I don't know how long. They were supposed to have it fixed a while ago. I wished they'd turn it right back into a factory. They could get people to work we don't have anything in this town, it is hard

**LW:** It was a mill until 1999, right?

**SJB:** It was—these factories along the canal they got waterpower from the canal.

**LW:** Right.

**SJB:** That's before they put the canal in, that's a different story

**LW:** Right, well it's an interesting story, a really detailed history. I was curious about how you felt about them turning it into a museum. So you'd rather them turn it back into a factory then?

**SJB:** Yeah. I don't know, these people at least need to turn it into something useful.

**LW:** Right, right. Exactly.

**SJB:** It's too bad that we don't have factory where we can give people work we made the best socks around, right there at Seneca Knit.

**LW:** Well, do you feel that by turning the building into a museum that at least they're turning it---

**SJB:** Well, I don't know what happened. Who knows? What did they say about it? I don't know.

**LW:** Well, I've spoken with the people at the Hall of Fame, with Steve [Mitchell] and Christine [Moulton].

**SJB:** What did they say?

**LW:** Well, they're working on--

**SJB:** Are they going to start doing something with the building?

**LW:** Well, they're working really hard right now, because they have to raise money. It's difficult because it is such an expensive project. But they're working really hard.

**SJB:** Oh yeah, it's really expensive. We have a lot of buildings there. You know George Souhan, after his father passed away, he was building a warehouse, you know for places to stick their yarn and stuff I guess, socks maybe.

**LW:** Right.

**SJB:** And they demolished part of Seneca Knit.

**LW:** The buildings that are there now, I think they're going to keep there, and they're really beautiful.

**SJB:** That's the original buildings.

**LW:** Right.

**SJB:** Anything that was there onto the building was what they added to it to run the business and for room for putting the machinery for the yarn.

**LW:** Right, yeah--

**SJB:** You would not believe it, you would be surprised to see the amount of work that was done there and amount of work that goes into making socks.

**LW:** I wish it were still operating so I could see.

**SJB:** I tell you, you would really learn a lot

**LW:** Yeah.

**SJB:** By seeing the job firsthand, to see how things is done, but we don't have that no more. It's too bad.

**LW:** Yeah, I'm sure a lot of people would like to see that.

**SJB:** I went up to the bazaar this morning, the Methodist church, I met 3 or 4 people who worked at Seneca Knit, but I didn't even know their names anymore.

**LW:** Wow.

**SJB:** They remembered me, everybody remembers me. You don't know how it made me feel to see all these people come up to me. They called me Susie all over the place. It was great to see them, you know I hadn't been there since 1982.

**LW:** Its wonderful to reconnect. It's wonderful to see the people there. When you were there were you able to make friendships with women not just in your winding dept?

**SJB:** I knew a lot of people I was there year after year and I got to know them to know their names, I couldn't tell you half of their names, because I only knew the ones I was working with.

**LW:** Right.

**SJB:** I knew these other people just seeing them day after day. I had a lot of friends. When I retired, the knitting room--the boss in the knitting mill asked the spinning, knitting, and winding departments to go out to lunch the day I retired.

**LW:** Oh wow.

**SJB:** Yeah, I never forgot that. Awful nice girl.

**LW:** Yeah, that's nice.

*[Inaudible].*

**SJB:** Just an awful nice girl. Up in the knit up in the [inaudible]

**LW:** Yeah. Would you mind telling me a little bit about...you were saying the carding room was below you and then in your room it was the winding, the spinning, and the knitting? Right?

**SJB:** Ya know the knitting room was upstairs, the card room over there at Geb and Souhan Yarn Mill, they hard the yarn...the carding room downstairs.

**LW:** Ok.

**SJB:** It was the spinning and winding department in our department.

**LW:** Ok.

**SJB:** That was then they had the dryers, they washed the socks outside of our room they did that the washing and drying. Then they had turning. They had the small like room where we ate lunch, like a restroom or whatever you like to call it. It wasn't a cafeteria room where we could sit down and eat.

**LW:** Ok. Now were those all on your floor?

**SJB:** Well, those were on our floor, but on the other side they had a door so if you went into the next room, went into another room, when you left our room, and then into the room and sit down and eat, the bathroom, and then they had the other department right there too. The knitting and inspecting was upstairs.

**LW:** Ok. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. Was there anything on the top floor?

**SJB:** No, that was it.

**LW:** Ok, I see, and this was all in the stone mill that's there now?

**SJB:** Yeah.

**LW:** Ok, I see. So then after the fire in '59, after the fire--

**SJB:** Mr. Souhan was offered a factory in Canandaigua to start up the business, but Souhan said, "No, I want to give my workers a place to work, keep the factory in town, and I want to give these people a job."

**LW:** Um hmm.

**SJB:** They put the shop on his homestead, his father's homestead over the bridge.

**LW:** Wow.

**SJB:** Bayard St, the railroad. That's actually still there, but Gould's owns it.

**LW:** Ok.

**SJB:** That's when Souhan died. George sold the place. He couldn't keep both places, so he had to sell it and Gould's wanted it, so we lost it to Gould's. So then we got all over to where Seneca Knit is today. They put us all over there. Some of us that were winders got transferred to other jobs because there wasn't enough work for them.

**LW:** Oh wow.

**SJB:** They were happy because they liked the jobs even better than winding. Some people didn't like winding.

**LW:** Oh wow, okay.

**SJB:** They didn't, but I did.

**LW:** How did you end up doing winding? When you applied was that the job?

**SJB:** Yeah, yeah.

**LW:** Ok. That was the department that was open?

**SJB:** Yeah. I always liked it. My mother worked in a suit mill in Jersey. She often talked about it. I thought, you know, if I had a job, I'd want to work in a place like my mother did.

**LW:** Um hmm.

**SJB:** That's why Seneca Knit was just the place for me.

**LW:** Yeah. Were you ever able to do any of the other jobs, or did everybody pretty much stay in their own department?

**SJB:** Everybody had their own jobs, yeah. I'd help out if they needed it, other jobs. Something, we had to put numbers on all the yarn. We had to put the numbers on the cones. When the cones got so filled up with the stickers and they didn't know what number the yarn was anymore, then we'd take them. And after scraping all that stuff out, put the cones back again. So we had little jobs like that when there wasn't much work. There were a lot of layoffs...

**LW:** A lot of layoffs, is that what you said?

**SJB:** Yeah, because when things got slack, and there wasn't any work, they couldn't keep you, so you got laid off and wait and they'd hire you back again.

**LW:** Now when did you say that was? The layoffs?

**SJB:** Oh, that was when they had no work, it wasn't any special time.

**LW:** Oh, ok, I see.

**SJB:** We had a lot of orders to fill, they did during the War. They made socks for the government.

**LW:** Now when the orders weren't for the government, like after the War, and later on--

**SJB:** We still made socks--boot socks, tube socks, they didn't have no toes or feet in them, they were all one tube, one sock...

**LW:** Yeah, I know what you're talking about.

**SJB:** Yeah, they had boot socks, they even had Indian head labels.

**LW:** Yeah I've seen those--

**SJB:** The paper, that went over the pair of socks. They paired them off, and put the Seneca Indian head on the label.

**LW:** Um hmm. Now, do you know where the socks were sold?

**SJB:** All over. They were sold all over I guess, as far as I know.

**LW:** Okay. Now, you said you weren't there when Ridgeview came in later--

**SJB:** No, I wasn't there when was it Ridgeview came in, I was retired in 1982, so they came after that, and they came after that because I used to come down to pay my insurance paid our insurance, we had to go down to pay it. As long as Seneca Knit was there, all of us retirees could pay our insurance in the office down there, and I said I hope it's okay forever. They wasn't, they didn't know what to say.

**LW:** Did you know anybody who worked there when it closed in 1999?

**SJB:** No, I have no idea.

**LW:** Oh. So, was Mr. Souhan your boss the whole time you worked there?

**SJB:** Oh, George Souhan? He passed away several years ago. George Souhan. His father died quite a few years ago, the George died too. And they wanted his son to take over I guess, but his son didn't want it, so then George...I don't know what happened. He sold it, he sold it to that company in the south. They came up here and moved them out. Everything they could take--they went south with it. I don't know anything about that because I wasn't working there then.

**LW:** Right. Did you enjoy working for Bud, and then George Souhan, though? Did you like them?

**SJB:** Yeah, they were good bosses. They were good bosses, I have no complaints with them.

**LW:** Yeah, I read an article from the newspaper from about 1999 when the mill closed and people said really nice things about them as bosses.  
Yeah.

**LW:** Well, that's good.

**SJB:** Yeah. There's pictures in the papers from those years.

**LW:** Yeah, the historical society has a lot of that kind of stuff if you ever want to look at it, they have all that stuff.

**SJB:** Yeah, maybe they have a lot of pictures, maybe from the old the days of the old Seneca Knit, where the old Seneca Knit, all about the fire and everything, they might have pictures somewhere about that--

**LW:** They do, they have a lot of that kind of stuff. Well, if you don't mind me asking one other quick question about them turning it into a museum...the reason they are looking into that is because right now there really isn't a way they can get it back into the mill.

**SJB:** Yeah, because the company that took over took everything they had there, they took all the machines and all of the business and went back to the south with them. That wasn't right either.

**LW:** Um hmm. Do you like the idea? When they turn it into a museum, do you like the idea of the mill history being put on exhibit and that kind of thing, at the museum?

**SJB:** I don't know. I was really sad to think that Seneca Knit is gone, that it's now factory anymore, because we need factories so bad in this town to give people work, you know? They don't have that.

**LW:** Well, hopefully-

**SJB:** If that's what they're going to do then, they're going to do it regardless of what anyone says.

**LW:** Yeah, well I think the idea of turning it into a museum, I think they're going to try to create jobs there, that way.

**SJB:** Oh, are they?

**LW:** Yeah, there's going to be a lot of space for people to be like tour guides.

**SJB:** Oh yeah.

**LW:** So they're going to try to do that. I think one of the main reasons they're going to do a museum is that people will come to Seneca Falls, in addition to all of the really great historical sites you already have, because there's wonderful things there now too, they're hoping that the museum will draw people, draw tourists that way.

**SJB:** I don't know what kind of museum they're talking about, if they're talking about a museum about factory and what went on there and what it stood for, then I think that that's okay.

**LW:** Yeah, it is--

**SJB:** Because I think that will give people some idea of what went on there.

**LW:** Right.

**SJB:** What that work was all about.

**LW:** That's going to be part of the exhibit, I think.

**SJB:** Now, I hope so. I do, I really do. At one point, I heard them talking about the canal. Now what does that have to do with Seneca Knit?

**LW:** Well, like what you were saying before, that mills used to get power from the water, I think that's because early on--

**SJB:** Started in the early 1800s

**LW:** Yeah, right.

**SJB:** Before that canal went through in 1915. That canal was put in 1915.

**LW:** Yeah.

**SJB:** The funny part of that was, I had two uncles. My mother had a brother and my dad had a brother, and they came up here in 1915. They drove a team of horses. They were helping to pull the buildings out of there, moving the buildings to the top of the ground.

**LW:** Wow.

**SJB:** So they could fill the canal with water.

**LW:** Wow, um hmm. That's really interesting.

**SJB:** Those men are dead too, so I don't know more about that.

**LW:** Yeah, but that's very interesting.

**SJB:** Yeah, so that was a sad thing too. There's a lot of history in our family about...there's history, but I can't tell you anything about it.

**LW:** Yeah, but it's interesting that you know something about it.

**SJB:** Yeah.

**LW:** I think what the museum was going to show is a little bit about the canal history. Mill history and what everybody did there, the jobs and the work, that's going to be a big part of it. I think, that's what they're looking to do. Now, it is owned--

**SJB:** I hope they get started pretty soon, what they say they're going to do. Because, you know it's getting pretty...so you wonder what's going on next.

**LW:** Yeah. Well, I think what they're trying to do is raise money, they want to go get started soon too. They're working really hard to get it started.

**SJB:** Yeah, well, it was a great place to work, I tell you.

**LW:** Oh that's wonderful.

**SJB:** I liked it. I liked the job and I enjoyed it.

**LW:** Well, that's wonderful. Well, I don't want to tire you out too much.

**SJB:** Oh no. Well, I'm glad I could talk a little better today than I could the last couple of days.

(46:23) *[In the next few minutes, we discuss her illness.]*

**SJB:** Well, thank you so much Lindsey, you're my new friend.

**LW:** Oh thank you! Again, Miss Beasley, I really appreciate it. If you have any questions at all, please ask. Thank you.

**SJB:** You're welcome.

(48:25)

*[Until 1:01:44, we discuss laryngitis, addresses for further correspondence, old photos, and thank yous. The last few minutes are OFF THE RECORD.]*

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