

Thriving Made Villa

Less than a decade after Fall River's founding, its course was already being charted in directions which would see it become to the textile industry what Detroit became to the automobile — a veritable giant.

The industry's embryonic beginning 167 years ago was the Globe Mill at Globe corners, and each succeeding decade brought new growth and greater expansion. By 1918, Fall River boasted the largest spindleage in any textile city in the nation and even eclipsed the mammoth center which was Manchester, England.

Cotton was the virtual center of all of this activity — cotton and the world's reliance on the things into which it could be made. If cotton was king in the South, then surely here it was queen and the single most important factor in the city's growth.

The first mills produced coarse goods, but gave way toward finer weaves and an eventual variety from shoe linings to twills, sateens, curtains, quilts, gingham, thread, twine and whatever else was demanded in the market.

But, the path of the industrial comet was not without its painful turbulences — recessions, depressions, some worldwide, others territorial and applying solely to the textile industry. The most fatal of all setbacks was the Depression of 1929 when corporations folded like empty cardboard boxes.

Despite the catastrophic collapse, there were stout hearts which held firm to a belief in a resurgence which was sure to follow. Out of that optimism sprang new growth in new directions. The prosperity which ended all too soon with the move southward of cotton manufacturers in the post Depression years left millions of square feet of vacant mill space. But, recovery came with a growing garment industry, replacing the mills and other manufacturers with a more diversified industrial base.

The first of the cotton mills erected here was a

in less than half a mile, more than enough water power for industrial needs. Between them, the two mills had a capacity of 3,500 spindles.

Up to this time, spinning had been the sole objective. Changes in the industry began to occur and the question of power weaving was about to be resolved. To achieve it, larger plants and more capital were necessary. Joint stock companies became the prevailing type of organization and textile machinery production began developing.

Capital raising was met with little difficulty. Such progress had been made in the industry that its expansion was a foregone conclusion and there was no shortage of investors. In many instances, plants were constructed on a cooperative basis, contractors accepting stock for their construction costs and machinery manufacturers likewise.

These methods of financing became standard and plants continued to spring up along the banks of the Quequechan River, close to the water power so essential in those early days before the advent of the steam engine.

The power loom was yet another invention thrusting the industry headlong into another building era. Cloth weaving became an important phase, and the combination of spinning and weaving into a single plant broke from the established English method of being either a weaver or a spinner, but not both.

In those early days, 122 mills employed between 25,000 and 30,000 operatives, with virtually the entire city in one way or another economically tied to the only industry that mattered.

The Fall River Manufactory was the first to test the new power loom, but it was clumsy in its early efforts. Later, modifications came along and the loom earned itself a place in textile history.

The mills were building and prosperity was driving those horses of industry. In the second decade of the 19th century came such undertakings as the Pocasset Manufacturing Co., a venture of

The first of the cotton mills erected here was a modest building at the northeast corner of Globe and South Main Streets, in 1811, in what was then within Rhode Island Borders. It was a venture initiated by Col. Joseph Durfee and several others and, operated until 1829, although not all that successfully, primarily because of unfamiliarity with the business.

The rapid advent of textiles is noted from the fact that Fall River in 1800 was a community of fewer than 100 inhabitants. By 1845, it was a factory town of 9,000 persons, 2,000 of whom were employed in the textile industry.

As word spread, the city proved a great attraction to Canadian farm workers and skilled English operatives. The first few arrivals here passed the word back home that employment was available and wages were good. Shortly after the turn of this century there was an influx of Portuguese workers from the Azores and the combination of arrivals proved sufficient to man textile plants and encourage the building of others.

In 1813, two companies were formed for the manufacture of cotton, the Troy Cotton and Wollen Manufactory, and the Fall River Manufactory.

Troy was a syndicated venture, whose leading promoter was Oliver Chace who served as its agent. It was capitalized with \$50,000 divided into 100 shares and was located at the uppermost fall of the Quequechan River, as was the Fall River Manufactory, capitalized with \$40,000 in shares.

At that location at the outlet of the Watuppa Ponds, the fall is 127 feet

as the Pocasset Manufacturing Co., a venture of Samuel Rodman of New Bedford who subscribed to \$25,000 of the \$100,000 investment, then the Anawan and Massasoit Mills, Robeson's Print Works, the Fall River Iron Works, followed by the American Print Works, Chace's thread mill, the Eagle Mill and, in 1846, the Metacomet, an enormous plant built by the Iron Works.

The American Linen was built in 1852. To this time, the mills had been built and controlled by a small group of men, with the influence of the Iron Works very strong. The profits had been extremely large and, in Metacomet's case, are said to have paid the cost of the mill in a single year.

Then, in 1859, came the Union Mills, built with the assistance of numerous small investors. Its success was so immediate that there followed the building of the Granite Mills in 1863, and the Durfee and Tecumseh in 1866.

By 1875, Fall River had become a great cotton textile center with 1,269,000 spindles, the largest number in any New England city. New mills continued to be financed and their number increased with such rapidity that a danger of help shortages presented itself.

If the industry were to expand, as it appeared obvious it would, some means had to be found to increase the supply of labor.

Word of the demand stretched across the northern borders into Canada and there was a great influx of French Canadians about this time and also immigrants from European countries. All found

Textile Industry ge a Boom Town

immediate employment in the mills and proved workers of ability, so much so that industry took yet another surge forward prompting more investors to finance more mills.

Then, in the 1840s, came technological advance in the shape of the Corliss Steam Engine, and with it the ability to operate without waterpower. Prior to this, mills were compelled to locate near a source of falling water for power. Now it became possible to construct mills in areas where there was still water for steam purposes and the expansion of steam driven mills was rapid.

There seemed no end to the boom. In 1843, the Iron Works Co. built the Massachusetts Steam Cotton Mill, the first of its kind, followed by another in 1852 and still a third in 1859. There were 40,000 spindles among the three plants.

In later years, along the

end of the last century and the beginning of this, more plants were built, eventually numbering seven, extending from the shore of the Taunton River to the lower end of Pocasset Street.

With the exception of the last two years of the Civil War, when the market went into decline, the first real setback the industry had encountered, that period was one of thriving activity. And, when the war ended, activity sprang back even more virgorously than before. The industry was continuing to expand with new plants being built from earnings without additional cost of stockholders.

The 20th century opened on still further mill expansion, including the Davis, Lincoln, Pilgrim, Arkwright, Sagamore No. 3 and a host of others, but the greatest expansion was in the 10 years between 1855 and 1865, when spindle age doubled, then

quadrupled in the next 10 years.

Early in the 1900s, a few manufacturers, ever exploring the possibilities of new markets, conceived the idea of finer goods, combed, which, they believed, would take them from the competitive print cloth market. One of the first mills to make the conversion was the King Philip. It later became famous throughout the nation for its broadcloth.

The Sagamore Mfg. Co. also diverted from print cloth to sateens.

Presently, about 14,000 persons are woven into the fabric of the industry which sprang up in the years following the mill closings and the annual payroll is close to \$150 million.

Ninety plants are engaged in the manufacture of apparel and related activities with another 20 directing efforts into cloth preparation and manufacture.