

AMERICAN PRINT WORKS in 1869 was an imposing structure, situated on Water Street, adjacent to the Fall River Line Wharf, the main building was a massive granite structure. Its 110-foot high tower contained a large bell and a clock with four eight-foot dials. The American Print Works was the largest privately owned establishment of its kind in the world.

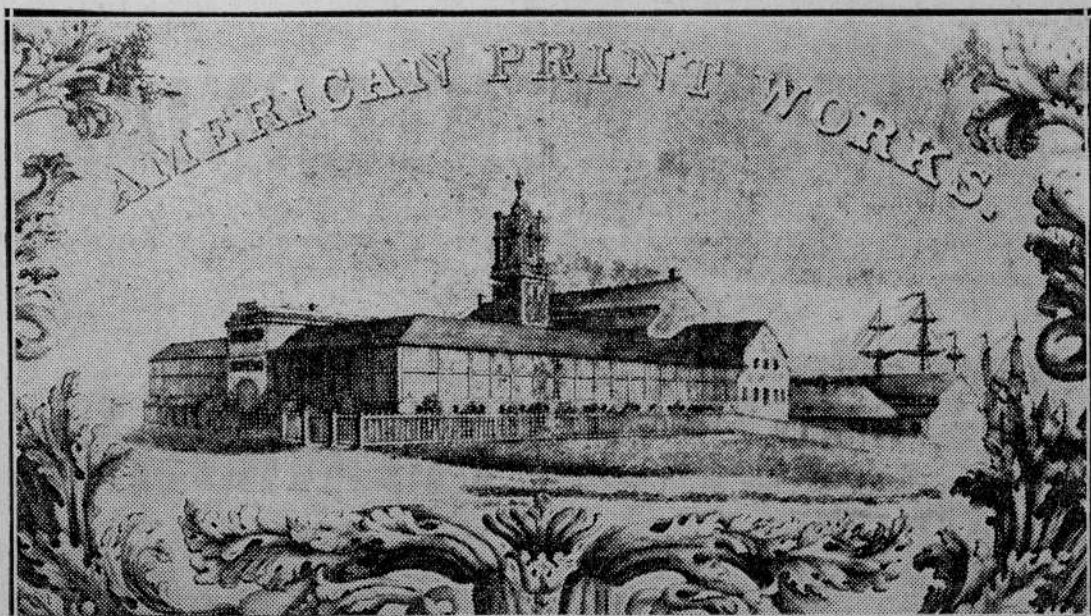
Cloth Printing Grew Rapidly

With early and rapid growth of the textile manufacturing industry in Fall River, the need for finishing and printing plants was obvious.

In the latter part of the last century, the larger plants, American Printing Co., Fall River Bleachery and the Algonquin Print Works Co. were formed and prospered for many years.

During those years, Fall River was the center of the roller printing business, with the American and Algonquin companies producing vast quantities of printed fabrics. The Fall River Bleachery was strictly a finishing plant, with the major portion of the product destined for printeries in this area.

The need for finishers and printers was recognized in Rhode Island about the same time. A number of plants were erected in textile areas in that State. It was the beginning of New England's supremacy in finishing and printing, which in this century was to suffer loss of prestige because of advancement in this



FIRST PLANT OF AMERICAN PRINT WORKS here was housed in this waterfront structure. This was the basis for the plant which subsequently grew to become, in its heyday, the largest cloth printing establishment in the world.

because of advancement in this phase of the industry in southern States.

The largest of Fall River's plants was the American Printing Co., when taken over by the late Matthew Chaloner Durfee Borden, founder of the Fall River Iron Works Co., largest producer of print cloths in the world at the time.

Textile Status Changes

With the coming of changes in the textile picture in Fall River in the 1920s, the finishing and printing situation changed and the three companies eventually were forced to suspend business and ultimately liquidate. With the loss of the print cloth business to the South, there became a surplus of finishing and printing plants in New England.

The big plants had become cumbersome and unwieldy. Needing great volume of cloth to keep in full operation, loss of the print cloth business to New England was the deciding factor in their disintegration.

Loss of this segment of the textile industry was not total, however, because of its replacements by screen printers. Roller printing faded out, with the loss of 57 roller printing machines. The Swansea Print Works, subsidiary of the Bourne Mills, continues roller printing, processing the product of its parent corporation.

Saga In Industry

The history of the American Printing Co., its rise to the peak of affluence in the finishing and printing world and its subsequent decline, represents a saga in the textile industry. It demonstrates what effect changing conditions can have on an industry which seems permanent to a community because of its fundamental capacities and prosperity it enjoyed more than a half century.

When incorporated in 1880 the capital of the American Printing Co. was set at \$2,000,000.

In 1904 it boasted a weekly finishing capacity of 100,000 pieces, (60 yards to a piece), and a printing capacity of the same volume. In those early days it employed 900 workers in processing production of the six mills of the Fall River Iron Works Co.

In addition to the volume of print cloths manufactured by the cotton mills, M. C. D. Borden was a heavy buyer in the open cloth market. These purchases were necessary to utilize fully capacities of the plant. Purchases in the open market were generally sensational, sweeping the market of goods of the width and count essential to needs of the American.

The time was when Fall River mills controlled the print cloth market. With the New York goods market stagnated with production, a shutdown of a few days by Fall River mills generally relieved the situation and prices advanced because of threatened scarcity. In dull periods the presence of Borden in the market was eagerly awaited.

American Printing Co. Famed

With the construction of new mills by the Fall River Iron Works Co., facilities of the American Printing Co., were expanded, until in the early 20s more than 3,000 persons were employed in both divisions.

In the meantime, products of the American Printing Co., had won a worldwide reputation. The customer in India and South America, in fact

any foreign country, asked for American Printing Co. goods.

Representatives travelled to far points with the new patterns of the company, generally a full season ahead of their mass production, to ascertain likes and dislikes of customers.

World travellers were likely to meet representatives of the American Printing Co., in far distant lands, so broad was the company incentive and so widely known its products.

In the early part of the century an important adjunct of the American Printing Co. was its "Blue Room," or "Indigo Room," whichever choice one cared to make.

This room had an immense vat filled with indigo dye, with workers the same color because of their contact. This division was an important one in the company's plans as practically all the production was destined for foreign markets, and profitable.

Merchandising Changes

During the depression in textiles which began in 1920, better judgment on the part of finished goods buyers, particularly retailers, served to indicate a change in merchandising policies by many of the larger customers.

On a number of occasions the company became involved in labor difficulties, but the handwriting was on the wall at the time and probably only hastened a situation which was to occur eventually.

Plant Closes In 1934

In November of 1934 the blow struck with announcement the Printing Co. would close and the plant be liquidated. The shock was somewhat lessened as coming events generally cast their shadows before. The action had been surmised for some months. It could not be discounted at the time as more than 3,000 employees were out of work.

During the long closing, reports were current from time to time large corporations were contemplating purchase, but most of the rumors were of the wishful type.

Previously the custom had been to buy in seasonal quantities, large houses taking in their full needs for a three or six-month period. In the new order of things, forced by impossibility of seeing into the future, buyers restricted purchases to hand-to-mouth types, preferring to let the finisher and printer take the chances. In consequence, the volume of sales broke sharply and inventories in finished goods began to soar in the hands of finishers.

New Buying Era

The new era of buying was at hand. Retailers had reached the conclusion there would always be goods available when needed, consequently there was no necessity of freezing funds in inventories.

Eventually the enormous plant was sold to a syndicate headed by Albert A. List and the late Jack Ziskind for a nominal sum. Several of the smaller buildings were sold to individuals, but the general plant was held intact.

At the time of closing, the American Printing Co. had increased its printing capacity by addition of 20 more roller printing machines in a new building to the west of the structure on Water Street, making a total of 42 machines in all.

Machinery Is Sold

During liquidation many of the

machines were sold to the Pacific Mills in Lowell, which increased capacity. The remainder was disposed of to finishing and printing machinery dealers throughout the nation.

The big plant remained idle and vacant three years. At one time an offer was made by the Pepperell Mfg. Co. for the plant as a going concern, which was refused. This was the situation when the sale was concluded to Ziskind and List.

Firestone Locates Here

Desiring a plant in the East, the Firestone Tire & Rubber Co. became interested because of the waterfront facilities. Following a series of the conferences with the new owners, together with civic and municipal authorities, the deal was eventually concluded and the Akron corporation took possession. That ended the saga of the American Printing Co.

The Algonquin Printing Co. was formed in 1891, an upshot of individuals who had previous experience in the field. The capital was set at \$500,000.

The plant did its own finishing and printing and bought goods in the competitive market. For many years its destiny was conducted by James A. Chadwick, who was later succeeded by William H. Jennings.

Algonquin Long Successful

The equipment, in addition to finishing, included 15 printing machines of the roller type. Successful many years, as the American Printing Co., it eventually came under the spell of inactivity and changed hands in 1939 when it was sold to a New York group and liquidated. The buildings were later acquired by Ziskind, who established headquarters of the Crescent Corp. at the site, where they still remain.

The passing of the Algonquin ended the roller printing business in Fall River, although the Merchants & Manufacturers Corp. organized a plant in the former Chace Mills property.

Bleachery Folds In '38

The Fall River Bleachery was liquidated in 1938. It was organized in 1899 with a capitalization of \$600,000. For many years it was directed by the late Spencer Borden, and following his death by Spencer Borden Jr.

With collapse of the print cloth manufacturing business little hope was entertained the bleachery could maintain operations. Liquidation was completed and later the plant became the site of the Excel Foundry & Machine Co. and the Young Corp.

The big, unwieldy finishing and printing corporations are a matter of history. In their places have come the screen printers, more compact in operations and dealing with an entirely different type of fabric than was necessary for survival of other printers in the early part of the century.

FIRST SUPERINTENDENT

Rev. Daniel W. Stevens, a graduate of Harvard, was the first superintendent of schools in this city. He was appointed in 1865.

EARTH QUAKE FELT

In July of 1908 both San Francisco and Los Angeles suffered slight earthquake shocks.

Bourne Mills operatives in June of 1908 received two-fifths of a week's pay under the profit sharing plan then in force.