

A typical day at the mills began with a loud whistle awakening Millville residents, who then arrived at 7:00AM to begin work, with an hour lunch break at 11:30AM followed by a 4:00PM end of shift. When special events occurred in town, such as Boat Race Day, the mills would close at 1PM. The employees, including women, were paid in cash and if interested, could work past their routine retirement age. It was not uncommon for three generations of a family to have worked in the mills.

When the Knox Woolen Mill was running at full speed, the suds from the washed wool would come down over the last Minot Falls, now called Montgomery Falls, turning the entire harbor white! Those who worked in the woolen mills would have unusually soft hands from the lanolin in the wool.

During World War I and World War II, the mills worked double shifts to fulfill War Orders of gunpowder, uniforms, boot liners and blankets. The wool was of a high quality and snow white, therefore being coveted for military hospital blankets.

By 1932, water power was not as essential as it became cheaper to buy power from Central Maine Power. In the 1950s, with the introduction of synthetic fibers, it was understood that measures would need to be taken to keep the woolen mills open. Heavier looms were built to handle the newer fabrics and assist in competing into the 1980s. However, the employee numbers dropped to 65 and in 1988 the Knox Woolen Mill closed and was converted into retail and residence space.



BREWSTER SHIRT FACTORY WORKFORCE

WALK THE MILLS

SUPPORTED BY HISTORIC RESOURCES COMMITTEE



RESOURCES

John L. Locke *History of Camden 1605 - 1859*

Reuel Robinson *History of Camden and Rockport 1907*

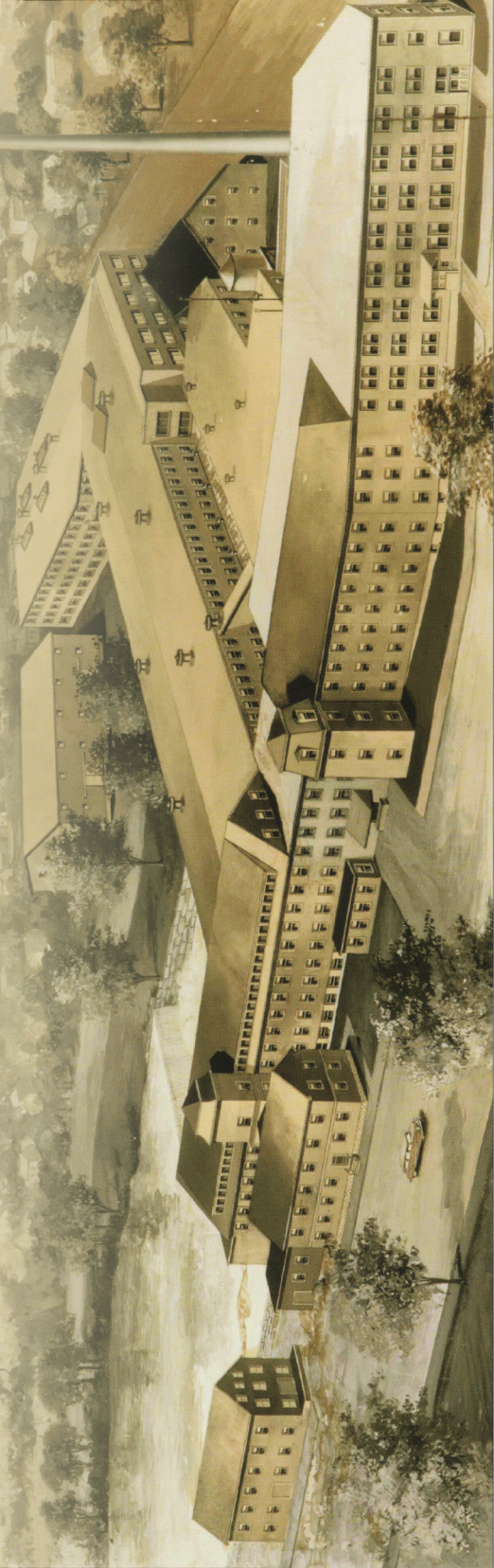
John R. Williams *History of Camden, Maine - 1907 - 1930*

Philip Conkling *History of the Camden Area 1900 - 2000*

THE TOWN OF CAMDEN CURRENTLY OWNS AND MAINTAINS THE FALLS.

CAMDEN MILL WALK

A SELF-GUIDED TOUR OF CAMDEN'S HISTORIC MILLS



Come, take 20 minutes to walk through Camden Mill history which was as significant as the ship building industry to the identity of Camden, Maine. Look, listen and feel the thunderous water that powered over eleven mill sites and two foundries in Camden. The water power still flows through town like a pulse; a heart beat to be heard. Each of the mill sites had several lives under different management and manufactured a variety of products with anywhere from 4 to 800 employees in their businesses.

Taking advantage of water power from the three-mile long Megunticook River for the propulsion of machinery while having direct access to ocean transport, forward thinking farmers and industrialists created saw and grist mills, wool and gunpowder manufacture, anchor works, and a tannery, all of which thrived and contributed to the successful economic and social fabric of the Camden community.

The river, dropping 142 feet over 10 distinct falls, was opened via gates at 4:00AM every morning to send a bolus of water downstream to reach the mills by 7:00AM. The falls, also known as “privileges,” were acquired by mill operators and named for such owners as James Richards, Cyrus Bachelder, and William Minot.

The majority of the mills were locally owned and at their peak in the 1920s, with most stock held principally by Camden residents. The woolen mills, in particular, employed both male and female workers who lived in Millville on the west side of Camden in small-framed houses within walking distance to their jobs.

The wool was cleansed, graded, combed, spun, twisted and plied, then woven on looms by hard-working employees. In order to cut down on costs, experienced loom fixers would act quickly to pull out empty shuttles and throw bobbins with refilled yarn back in place without shutting down the loom. This maneuver was called “changing on the fly!”

WATER-WHEEL TURBINES PRODUCED POWER FOR THE FOLLOWING MILL INDUSTRIES:

1769 JAMES RICHARDS, SAW AND GRIST MILLS
Grist mill built on the Megunticook River to grind corn.

1771 WILLIAM MINOT, SAW AND GRIST MILLS, MEGUNTICOOK GRIST MILL, CAMDEN GRIST MILL
All located at same site at the head of Camden Harbor. The water power was of such great force, the fire department maintained their pumps here.

1786 WILLIAM MOLYNEAUX, SAW AND GRIST MILLS
Erected on the Molyneaux River.

4 1813 MOSES PARKER, TANNERY
Produced leather and suede from sheepskin for harnesses and the garment industry. Later became Thorndike, Scott and Co.

1824 LEWIS AND ABRAHAM OGIER, WOOL CLOTHING AND CARDING MILL
Carding wool is a brushing process that separates and straightens the fibers for easier spinning.

2 1842 HORATIO ALDEN, OAKUM FACTORY
Oakum, made of hemp fibers and tar, was used for caulking and sealing the seams of vessels. Yearly bales manufactured equaled 60 tons. Block Factory made “dead-eyes,” a thick round, wooden disc with holes in it used in the rigging of traditional sailing ships. Also owned Saw and Grist Mills, and a bakery producing a famous Camden bread delivered by carriage throughout central Maine.

1846 BISBEE, MARBLE AND CO. POWDER MILL
Saltpeter and brimstone were mixed to create blasting gunpowder for use in the limestone and granite quarries in Camden, Rockport and Rockland. Numerous explosions occurred, some of which proved fatal to human life. Previous site of Mt. Battie Woolen Mill.

1855 AMASA GOULD, PLUG AND WEDGE MILL
Produced wooden plugs used in shipbuilding.

1858 CYRUS ALDEN, WOOLEN FACTORY
Only brick mill on the river, ran 300 spindles to yearly manufacture 36,000 yards of woolen fabrics including cashmere and flannel as well as 15,000 pounds of yarn.

1859 NATHAN PIERCE, MEGUNTICOOK GRIST MILL
On Main Street in Camden, ground 35,000 bushels of grain per year.

3 1863 JOHNSON, FULLER AND CO. FELT FACTORY
Manufactured first papermaker’s endless felts from wool. Later became Knox Woolen Company.

1866 HORATIO AND WILLIAM ALDEN, CAMDEN ANCHOR WORKS
The largest anchor manufacturing plant in the United States. Anchors were made from recycled railroad tracks! The “blazing fires and ringing hammers are seen and heard for miles across Penobscot Bay.” Weighing up to 4 tons, “they are carried on the bows of vessels sailing all the waters of the world.”

3 1868 KNOX WOOLEN CO.
The largest and most profitable mill produced 500 foot long felts for the newspaper industry. Felts were tightly woven mats which separated water from wood pulp. Previously, all felts for paper making had been imported from Europe. Previous site of Johnson, Fuller and Co. founded in 1863.

5 1881 D.P. ORDWAY PLASTER CO.
A believed home remedy, consisting of, among other ingredients, black pitch, white pine turpentine, and oil of cedar. Recommended for lung ailments, rheumatism, indigestion and backaches. Employed 75 women and 4 men. Their extensive mail order patent medicine

business was so successful, the Camden Post Office was first class and the highest paying post office in the state. At one point, an attic floor collapsed and an employee was injured. The question that arose: “Was the woman treated with an Ordway plaster?”

1 1883 KNOWLTON BROTHERS CO. IRON FOUNDRY AND SAW MILL
Melting and casting metal, capstans were produced which were used on ships to wind rope and cables during anchoring and mooring. David Knowlton was an ingenious machinist who supported the Plug and Wedge Mill as well as Block Factory.

1887 CAMDEN WOOLEN AND TEXTILE CO.
Manufactured men’s fancy woolens and women’s dress goods. Instituted a “fine list” assessing penalties for careless or imperfect weaving. On site of Gould Plug and Wedge and previous Grist Mill.

1888 MEGUNTICOOK WOOLEN CO.
Manufactured Woolen Felts and Blankets. Became Seabright Woven Felt Co in 1905 which made pressed felt washers used in modern appliances and felt cloth for the Army and Navy.

1892 THE MOUNT BATTIE MANUFACTURING CO.
Made men’s and women’s fancy woolens. On previous site of Bisbee’s Powder Mill.

6 1893 JOSEPH BREWSTER, SHIRT MANUFACTURING
150 workers produced 200 shirts per day. Also known for parkas and indestructible, yet colorful snowsuits in green, blue or red! Made of wool, they were described by children as being scratchy, itchy and heavy when wet. When purchased, parents received a guarantee of free patches and repairs for the life of the garment.