

SNEC Spring Tour 2013 Summary

The SNEC-SIA Spring Tour was held in Fall River, Massachusetts on May 18, 2013. The event coincided with the 200th anniversary of the first two textile mills to be established along the Quequechan River. For the morning session, chapter members and invited guests met at Gromada Plaza, across from city hall, built over Interstate-195 along the former path of the river, which drops about 130 feet in roughly one-quarter of a mile on its way to Mount Hope Bay. Now mostly located in underground culverts, the river originally contained a series of eight waterfalls, ranging in height from about 10 to 21 feet. The Quequechan River was adapted for industrial purposes as early as 1703, when Benjamin Church established a saw, grist and fulling mill along the river. In 1803, the town of Fallriver (one word) was split off from Freetown. The following year, the town's name was changed to Troy, and remained so until 1834, when it was changed back to Fall River for good. In 1811, the first cotton mill in the area was established by Joseph Durfee, a few miles to the south in what was still then part of Tiverton, Rhode Island. (The border was moved to its present location in 1862). In March 1813, the Fall River Manufactory and the Troy Cotton & Woolen Manufactory were established by two separate groups of local investors, on the 3rd and 8th falls from tidewater, respectively. The "Fall River Mill" was in operation by October 1813, and the Troy opened in March 1814.

The tour began near the site of the Pocasset Mills, established in 1821 by a group of New Bedford investors. The Pocasset Manufacturing Company once owned three mills just west of what is now South Main Street, including the "Bridge Mill" which began in 1822, as well as the Quequechan and Watuppa Mills further downstream. The Pocasset was destroyed twice by two of Fall River's "great fires", first in 1843, and again in 1928 when it was in the process of being dismantled after it had closed for good in 1926. Further down along Pocasset Street, tour participants passed the site of the Robeson Print Works, established in 1826 by Andrew Robeson, the father of Fall River's famed cloth printing industry. Later known as the Fall River Print Works, the Quequechan Manufacturing Company and the Massasoit Manufacturing Company, the Robeson complex consisted of three small mills located at the 4th falls from tidewater. They were demolished in the early 1960s for the construction of the Milliken Boulevard viaduct. Next along Pocasset Street the tour passed the site of the Fall River Manufacturing Company. Originally a small wooden mill containing 1,500 spindles, the Fall River (aka "White Mill") was rebuilt in 1839 and again in 1869 when it contained about 27,000 spindles and 640 looms. After 1905, it was part of the Pocasset Manufacturing Company, as its Mill #5. The "White Mill" was demolished in 1961 for the construction of I-195.

Continuing downhill along Pocasset Street, tour participants got their first glimpse of the Quequechan River, as it emerges from its culvert and flows under Mill #7 of the American Printing Company. Built 1905-06 at the site of the 1825 Anawan Mill, the red brick mill is irregular in plan, in order to conform to the adjacent hillside. Mill #7 features a unique gothic-styled engine house, and is currently occupied by a variety of businesses. Adjacent to Mill #7 is the 1846 Metacomet Mill – the oldest extant mill in Fall River. The Metacomet was originally built by the Fall River Iron Works Company, with plans brought from Bolton, England, at the lowest of the eight falls, on the site of the company's first nail mill. The Metacomet was enlarged to its current form around 1905. Tour participants got another view of the Quequechan as it emerges from under Mill #7 and drops about 13 feet before it flows under the Metacomet. This is perhaps a good time to explain the importance of the Fall River Iron Works Company to those who are not familiar. Established in 1822 by Richard Borden, Bradford Durfee and several others, the Iron Works was enormously successful in its early years. Profits from the Iron Works were used to build textile mills (such as the Anawan and Metacomet), steamship lines, railroads, the gas works, banks and most notably the American Print Works in 1834. The company even purchased its own coal mine in Maryland. It also controlled valuable water rights along the Quequechan River. By the 1850s, the Fall River Iron Works was one of the largest in New England, employing over 600 workers. However, by the late 1870s, with the advent of cheaper steel from other parts of the country, the Iron Works closed. Several businesses were spun off from its wreckage, including the renamed American Printing Company, the Fall River Gas Company, and the Fall River Machine Company. Under the direction of Richard Borden's son M.C.D. Borden, the reorganized American Printing Company embarked on a major expansion between 1889 and 1905, building five huge new cotton cloth mills along the waterfront, known as the "Iron Works Division", even though they no longer produced any iron. By 1910, the majority of the cotton mills in Fall River were producing but one product – print cloth – mainly to feed the hungry printing machines of the American Printing Company, which had the capacity to print 6,000,000 yards per week!

The tour continued under the soon-to-be-demolished double-deck Route 79 viaduct, toward the lower part of Anawan Street to the circa-1895 Borden & Remington building. Now known as Boremco and located on nearby Water Street, the company traces its origins to 1834, as a dealer of dyes, paints, starches and chemicals. On the north side of Anawan Street are the three large brick storehouses built by the American Printing Company between 1880 and 1903. Tour participants also got a glimpse of the former Fall River Gas Works complex, including the 1907-08 conical reinforced concrete oil tank containment building, currently scheduled for demolition by MassDOT as part of the project to remove the aforementioned Route 79 viaduct. (See article in the Fall 2012 *New England Chapters Newsletter* for more information on this unique structure).

Next, tour participants got to see the inside two buildings owned by Patricia Tod of the Fall River Mill Owners Association; the former stables for the American Printing Company, located near the end of Pond Street, and the former upper APC storehouse (now commonly referred to as the "Anawan Mill"). Constructed about the same time as the adjacent 1902-1905 New Haven Railroad grade crossing elimination project, the east end of the upper storehouse contains an indoor rail siding with a reinforced concrete ceiling. The track has been mostly covered over with a plywood floor, but is still visible at one end. The first floor of the mill is also occupied by GS Rubber Industries. Owner Joseph Sarlo, who also operates a police dog training business in the adjacent space, gave an excellent

impromptu discussion of his business to the group. The tour continued past the middle and lower storehouses, along the cobblestoned Mill Street, toward the former main site of the American Printing Company. While the sprawling waterfront property has suffered from major fires and demolitions, it still contains a variety of industrial structures, including the 1922 oil-fired electric power plant, and subsequent mid-century constructions by Firestone Rubber Company, Tillotson Rubber and the current owner Borden & Remington (Boremco).

The final stop during the morning session was at the Fall River Marine Museum, which occupies the former (circa 1900) machine and carpentry shop of the American Printing Company. An overview of the building was given by museum vice president Andy Lizak, who explained the tunnel system that used to connect the numerous buildings in the APC complex. Tour participants got to see remnants of the tunnel in the basement of the museum, as well as the old boiler that used to provide heat to the storehouses along Anawan Street.

The afternoon session focused on a portion of the upper Quequechan River valley; an area that developed rapidly in the years following the 1862 annexation of Fall River, Rhode Island the post-Civil War economic boom. The tour reconvened at the corner of Troy and Pleasant Street, near the former site of the 1813 Troy Cotton & Woolen Manufactory, at the uppermost of the eight falls. Despite its name, the company never got around to manufacturing woolens. The Troy Mills closed in 1929, and were occupied by various small business and garment shops until the 1960s, when like many other buildings in the area, they were demolished for I-195. Next, the group headed across the street to the modern gate house of the Quequechan River, which is still used by the city to control the flow of water into the downstream culvert. After a brief stop on Hartwell Street to view the former Fall River Electric Light / Edison Electric plant, and adjacent historic commercial buildings, the group then headed east along Pleasant Street toward the Union and Durfee Mills. The Union Mills were established in 1859, and served as the “model” for the dozens of new mills that were built in the years that followed. It was the first corporation in the city to be established by general stock subscription, with many owners of modest means, rather than just a handful of individuals. It was also the first mill in the city to be powered by a Corliss engine. Union Mill #2 was added in 1865. The two remaining Union mills have more recently been converted into medical offices.

Continuing east along Pleasant Street is the Durfee Mills complex, the largest and most intact group of mills in the city. The Durfee Mills were established in 1866 by the heirs of Major Bradford Durfee, one of the founders of the Fall River Iron Works, who died in 1843. His estate passed to his only son Bradford Matthew Chaloner “BMC” after his eighteenth birthday, but was largely controlled by his mother and his uncles. The Durfee Mills are laid out in a generally symmetrical plan, with Mills No. 1 (1866) and No. 2 (1871) flanking a central office building (1872). Other buildings and additions are as follows: Mill No. 3 (1880), cotton storehouse (1887), weave shed (1893), cloth room and repair shop (1895). Mill No. 2 also includes a large ell containing the boiler, engine and picker houses, while Mills No. 1 and 3 share a similar combination. The Durfee Mill complex is currently occupied by a variety of businesses, although some of the buildings (particularly the upper floors) appear to be vacant.

The Union, Durfee and Metacomet Mills were recorded in 1968 as part of the New England Textile Mill Survey II, led by Robert M. Vogel. Photos, drawings and narratives are available online at the Library of Congress website. I’d also like to extend special thanks to Tom Paterson of the Fall River Mill Owner’s Association (and also an SIA member), who assisted with tour details.

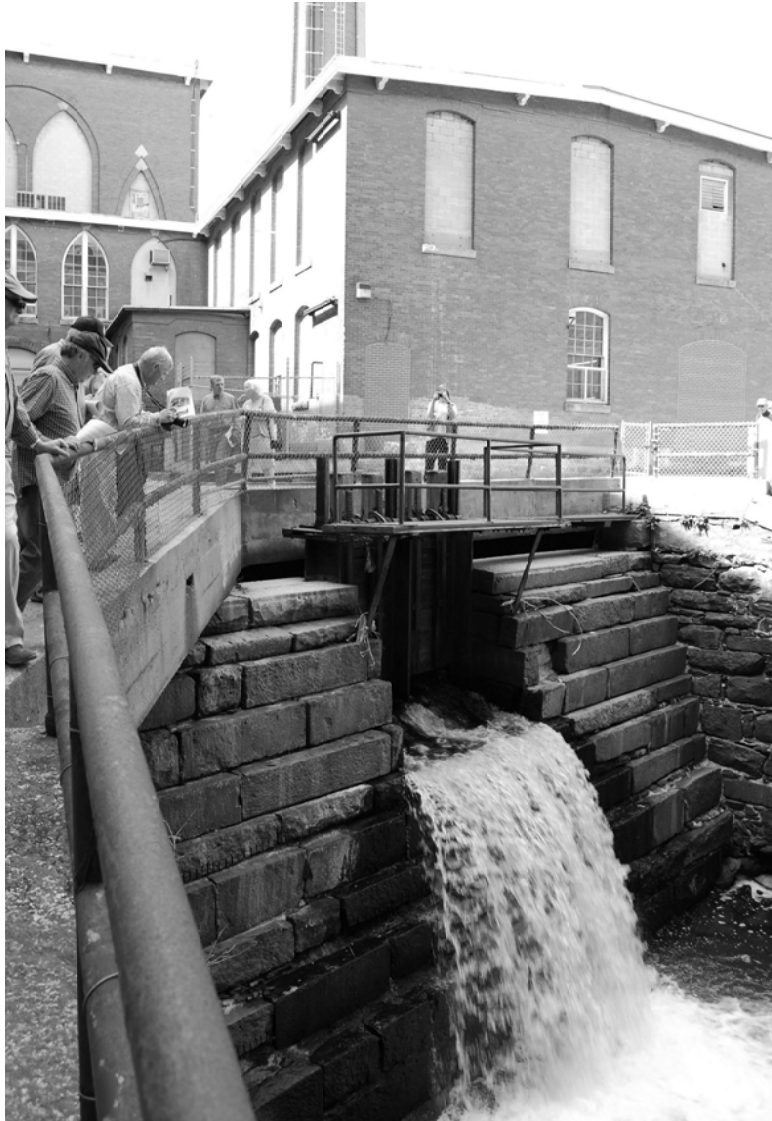
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Joseph Sarlo of GS Rubber Industries explains his business to tour participants, May 18, 2013



View of Mill Street, Fall River, MA



View of Quequechan River falls at Metacomet Mill



Inside the stair tower of Durfee Mill No 1 (1866)