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# Industry in the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood of Newport, Rhode Island, 1820 -1920

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## Industry in the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood of Newport, Rhode Island, 1820 -1920



King Park, Ca. 1905.

Daniel P. Titus

Cultural and Historic Preservation 399

Dr. Zipf

15 December 2003

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Industry in the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood  
of Newport, Rhode Island, 1820 -1920

**Overview**

In the study of Industry in the Southern Thames Street Neighborhood of Newport, Rhode Island from 1820 -1920 we by necessary must touch, even if ever so slightly, on the history of industry in Newport, not just the District, both before and after that time period. We must try to understand what life was like for the residents of the District and the city. We must try to understand what was happening in the area, the city, and in a larger sense, the region to get an understanding of the social and economic forces at play on their everyday lives.

This is at best, a very difficult, complex, and confusing task. Difficult because we must try to piece together a subject that people generally didn't write passionately about. Information tends to be factual; this mill has 8,000 spindles, 220 looms, and employs 175 operatives. Complex because Newport had so much in the arena of business going on in the early years and, to a lesser extent, the years following the wars. Confusing because there are often times incomplete or contradictory information that may even be written years after the fact, or by people unassociated with the event.

It is only a limited look at a very specific topic. But by understanding what industries were active, we can get an understanding, to some extent, of what life was like and how the people lived. We see that in the beginning, trading cargoes consisted of "agricultural produce,



livestock, fish, and wood products such as lumber, barrel staves, shingles, and charcoal. Even William Coddington, the founder of Newport, was exporting sheep, cattle, horses, corn, butter, cheese, wool, and mutton just 20 years after the colony was founded.” (Hale). From this we can at least start to sketch a picture of industrial life.

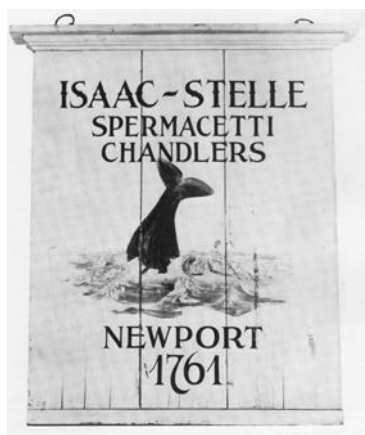
But one must be cautioned, bread crumbs don’t always lead the way home. Value judgments should not be made about the people or even the industries of the period. Our values are vastly different than the values that may have existed back then, products, I am sure, of their world and the forces in play about them. We might not like living, or working, or going to school next to a lead works or coal-gas company. However, in their world the residents may have seen this as employment, food on the table, and the American Dream.

This does not attempt to be the final word on Newport industry or even District industry. Indeed, it would take tomes of work on top of those that already exist to even come close to this goal. What has been attempted is to give a broad overview of the state of industrial affairs in the District in the time period to give us some kind of idea what life *might* have been like for the residents. Granted we will never know what it was like to be a part of that time period; we cannot. We can only try to glean an understanding of what every day life might have been like by reading what the people of the time period left us; written accounts and material culture.

Through this limited set of sources, we get to know our forbearers.

## Waterfront and Industry

Newport, being a maritime city, has always had some degree of industry along the waterfront. From its earliest days in the 1600's, when William Coddington chose Newport with its excellent harbor for a new settlement, to current times, we find the interaction of waterfront industry and the City of Newport. The first maritime manufacturing industry of any significance in Newport was shipbuilding. Since Newport did not have a large supply of local goods or raw materials which they could export, they relied on the shipping industry to supply them with the crafts which allowed them to export and re-export what they did have or what they could procure. Most of this industry was located in the Point and Basin area of town, including Long Wharf, although this industry would never be as large as areas that had unlimited local sources of wood with which to build vessels. Along with this shipbuilding industry was various types of allied industries, such as ropewalks, carpenters, joiners, caulkers, shipwrights, and blacksmiths,



**Figure 1: Early Newport industry.**

to name a few (Jefferys 10).

In addition to this traditional waterfront industry, Newport had a sizable fleet of whaling vessels, most made locally, plying the seas to provide the necessary raw materials for another Newport staple industry; spermaceti candle manufacturing<sup>1</sup>.

Spermaceti candle manufacturing was introduced into Newport by Jacob Rodrigues Rivera in 1748, a prominent Jewish merchant. At

one time Newport held a virtual monopoly on the spermaceti candle business.

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<sup>1</sup> Spermaceti is a white, waxy substance found in the Sperm whales' head cavities which is boiled down and made into a number of products, including candles. It is relatively expensive as compared to other wax candles, but is superior.

Furthermore, the distillation of rum was a staple industry in Newport, along with the importation of sugar, molasses, and slaves as a part of the notorious “Triangle Trade” Newport carried out with the West Indies and Africa. In short, African slaves were traded for West Indian sugar and molasses, which was returned to Newport to be distilled into rum<sup>2</sup>, and then shipped to Africa to purchase more slaves and gold.

Newport, being occupied by the British in the Revolution, lost much of its trade and about a half of its population. The area was devastated, to such a large degree that Newport would not see the quantity or quality of trade like pre-Revolutionary days ever again, although attempts would be made, especially in the Lower Thames Street District, to revive it.

There was, sometime before 1794, a mill by the name of the Cotton duck factory believe to be located by the Basin, but it was taken down in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century (Bayles 537).

After the devastating effects of the Revolution, Newport was once again dealt a blow in the form of the Embargo Acts of 1807 and 1809, the War of 1812 and, lastly, the “Great Gale”, a hurricane, in 1815 (Downing 106, Jefferies 34). However Newport, being the town it is and Newporters, being the resilient people they are, moved on.

Industry, although never really gone completely, returns to Newport. In 1817 the Steamships, “Fire Fly” make an appearance and ushers in a new age of motive power, although it would be a couple decades before the large scale steamship companies call Newport home. There are still some large tanneries and grain mills, mostly in the Broad Street area and by the Basin, but they will all disappeared by the 1880’s. (Bayles 537).

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<sup>2</sup> Apparently Newport exported a high potency “Guinea Rum”, which was preferred to other spirits and would be worth “more” on the market.

In the District, four major textile mills are established in the 1830's, in an attempt to revive Newport's failing economy, which was still felling the effects of the wars (Downing 106). These mills had the capacity to employ 600 or so people, a large number for the population of Newport at the time, which was approximately 8,000 people in 1830 (Sherman 13).

The mills would have their up and downs through the years, employing various numbers of people, probably from the District, and running thousands of spindles and hundreds of looms. However it was fire that would prove to be the mills worst enemy.

In 1860 there were at least two, maybe even three, mills damaged or destroyed by fires. The Coddington Mill, which was the southern most of the mills, was consumed



**Figure 2: Typical wharf view c. 1880's.**

by fire in 1860 or 1869, depending on the source you subscribe to; the Williams Woolen Mill which was also completely consumed, located on what today is Brown and Howard's Wharf, and the Aquidneck Mill, which was damaged and later rebuilt.

In addition to the major industrial mills, there was the Newport Foundry and Machine Company, formed in the 1830's and in operation until 1847, when it was purchased by the Newport Steam Factory. It would, in 1857, become the Newport Shot & Lead Company, which as the names implies, made lead shot for firearms. This business would hang on until 1867 when it too would close.

Harkening in a new age of technology for Newport was the foundation of what would become the Districts longest resident industry; the Newport Gas Light Company, established in 1853 and not closed until 1974 when it was purchased by a larger concern. This business prospered even though in the early 1890 the District welcomed what would become the nemesis

of the Gas Company; the Newport Illuminating Company. The Illuminating Company was formed to provide electric power to the city of Newport and her residents, along with generating electric for the trolley system. This industry would also be a long term resident of the District, not leaving until the 1980's.

There were, however, other industries that weren't as heavy as the previously mentioned ones, like Thomas Galvin's nursery, known as the Newport Exotic Gardens. Galvin, an Irish immigrant, started this business in 1845 and would, through his sons, keep it open past the turn of the century, providing the locals, and summer community, with flowers, shrubs, trees and, for District residents, employment.

In addition, local ponds, to the south and east of the district, were harvested for their ice in the winter months, which was stored in many sections of the city, more especially in the wharf area. As technology progressed, artificial ice began to be manufactured in the District by at least 1890, when the Aquidneck Pure Ice Company started making ice in the Perry Mill.

Other major industries in the city included the New England Steamship Company (known as the Fall River Line) which had a substantial repair shop and landing at Long Wharf since



**Figure 3: Former Basin showing trains and steamships.**

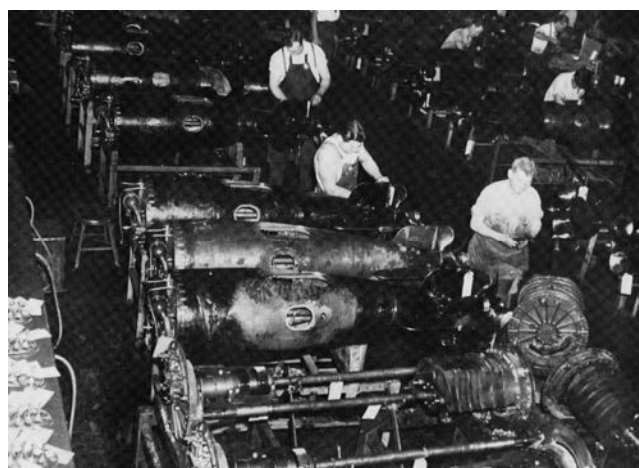
1879, but was on scene in Newport by 1847. In addition, there was the Newport & Wickford Railroad and Steamboat Company, called the Wickford Line, which was operated service to Wickford and Providence since 1871 and called Commercial

Wharf home. Also on Commercial Wharf is the office and main car barn, for some time, for the

Street Railway system. This industry was purposely located there to pick up fares as they left the steamships and transport them to their destinations, for the cost of 5 cents.

The railroad, which came into being in October 1861, with the conveyance of a right-of-way, and with service to Fall River and other places north starting in 1864. They had a large freight station and yard around the “Basin”, which they would eventually fill in with 10,000 carloads of dirt.

Then there was the United States Naval Torpedo Factory on Goat Island, which was located here in 1869 and resident to 1952, when production centers shifted and the technology of warfare changed<sup>3</sup>. Its mission was to develop and experiment with the different naval torpedoes and mines. Its successor is NUWC (Naval Underwater Warfare Center) located on the Naval Station in Middletown (Boss 69).



**Figure 4: Assembling torpedoes.**

Later in our timeframe, the Newport Engineering Works was created and located at Thames Street and Ann Street Pier. It first appears as a build lot on the 1903 Sanborn map. Before that date it is open land, owned at one time by Mary Ruggles.

There were many other industries in the Newport area, but not in the District, such as the Common Sense Gum Factory, located on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street at Training Station Road. This factory was

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<sup>3</sup> Some sources imply that the reason for the Torpedo Factory being located in Newport was in consideration of losing the Naval Academy back to Annapolis after the Civil War, after a short stay here.

built new and opened in January of 1912 with 60 girls employed. The product was “Listerated Gum”, for sale in the NYC subway system. (NDN Gum Factory to be Open for Business and Public Inspection, 1/12/12). There were, at the most, up to 240 Girls working there.

Interestingly, this gum was chosen as the gum for soldiers overseas in WWI.

The Aquidneck Manufacturing Company (Aquidneck Soap Factory) manufactured laundry and other types of soaps at their factory on the corner of Halsey and Rutgers Streets, in the so called “Swamp” section of town. This factory was consumed by a fire on September 20, 1910.

The *Newport Daily News* from December 1919 tells us of a jewelry factory with 75 girl employed, but does not give us a location for the factory.



**Figure 5: Newport Water Works c. 1884.**

On West Marlborough Street, up around the Cove, the Newport Manufacturing Company (a brass and iron foundry) was developed in 1871. It was not particularly successful and, in 1878, became the Newport Water Works (Boss 96).

Throughout the wharfs in the city, and especially in the District, we can see a very diverse collection of uses standing side-by-side. We see dwellings, tenements, sheds for storing all types of raw materials like fuels (coal, wood, oil), finished goods, small business like bakeries, carpentry shops, machine shops, house painters, wagon painters, small

boat builders, and scrap yards. We even have a school on a wharf in the District and a small soap factory strategically located neat the Gas Works, to benefit from their byproducts; lye.

On west side of Thames Street proper, bordering the wharf we see a more typical collection of staple industries, such as fish and grocery markets, candy, cigar, and toy stores, and of course, the news stands.

Although I am sure that this is not a complete accounting of all the industries in Newport and, more specifically the District, it does indeed touch on most of the major ones. More importantly, it gives us an idea what the industrial life of Newport was like.



**Figure 6: Hammett's Wharf before 1925.**



**Figure 7: Ann Street Pier and Newport Engineering Works.**



## Shipbuilding

Historical, trades of the seas have been staple industries for Newport since its founding in 1639. The southerly facing entrance of Narragansett Bay coupled with the protected nature of Newport Harbor and vast areas of harbor front land have called forth to maritime industries.

Shipbuilding has had a long and prosperous history here, starting in the north, at the Basin in the Point and Long Wharf, and working south down the waterfront. In the District during our time frame, we have had but one major shipyard; that of Silas H. Cottrell, located at the bottom of Brewer Street. Silas H. Cottrell (1809 – 1880) came to Newport from Westerly, RI in 1834,



**Figure 8: Newport Shipyard ca. 1920. Note ship on marine railway and condition of docks.**

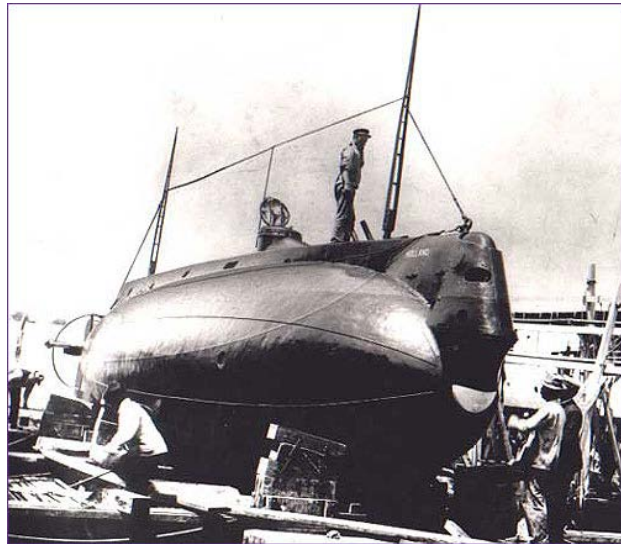
when he was 25 years old, to open a shipyard and chandlery (Newport Ship Yard, 17 April 1950). He would go on to build the last whaler in Newport in 1836, the *William Lee*, at 311 tons (Savings Bank of Newport, 27). In 1856, this ship would be out to sea for four years, returning to Newport in 1860 with only 10 of her original crew remaining and 1,000 barrels of

sperm whale and black-fish oil (Sherman 15). The *William Lee* eventually became one of the “Stone Fleet” ships purposely sunk at the entrance to Charleston, SC in 1862 by the Union (Newport Ship Yard, 17 April 1950).

In 1839, Mr. Cottrell built a marine railway which allowed ships to be launched with ease (and relative safety) and taken back out for service. This was a very large expenditure for the time for a custom piece of equipment.

At the shipyard, the first Brenton Reef Light Ship (1853) would be built. A light ship is an extremely sturdy ship designed to be anchored off-shore at a hazardous location to warn shipping of the danger with a beacon. It was said to be “a fine looking craft, very sharp and smoothly built, and well calculated to ride securely in that exposed situation.” She was 90 feet on deck and 21 feet at the beam (Newport Ship Yard, 14 July 1953).

Mr. Cottrell would build many ships, including the whaler “*Frederick*”, and brigs “*Henry Marshall*” and “*Edward F. Newton*”, the bark “*John Alfred Hazard*”, along with hundred of sloops, draggers, and smaller trade crafts (Sherman 22). A couple notable craft the yard worked on was the *USS Holland*, the U.S. Navy’s first submarine, named after its inventor John Holland (1890), the *USS Morris*, an early torpedo boat and forerunner to destroyers, fast attack, and motor torpedo boats, and not to mention many of the America’s Cup defenders and challengers (Services and Facilities, 1).



**Figure 9: USS Holland, presumably at Newport Shipyard.**

He was also active in other Newport businesses, including serving as the president of the Merchants’ Bank and a director of the Newport Gas Light Company, among others (Boyd 1856).

After the Civil War, Cottrell changed his focus on repair and re-supply of vessels, as opposed to large scale building. The 1878 Galt & Hoy map does show some activity of shipbuilding, but is conjectural at best. The 1883 Hopkins map shows the shipyard in the possession of Merchants' Bank (of which Cottrell was the president of at one time) with George Richmond as the trustee. The maps after this point give no specific information except that it was a shipyard. As the records of the yard before 1898 were lost, our knowledge of the yard is limited (Newport Ship Yard, 17 April 1950). By 1903, the Sanborn maps show a second marine railroad in place, along with more buildings and shops, indicating a more active role in the industry.

Two more yards are in the area, both to the south of this yard, one at Lee's Wharf (after 1896) and one at Spring wharf (before 1884), but are nowhere near the size of Cottrell's yard, at



**Figure 10: Newport Shipyard looking SE ca. 1920. Note Ann Street pier in foreground and large scissor behind that for pulling boilers/engines from ships. Shot tower for the Lead Works is on far right.**

least not until after the 1920. However, the development wave, especially waterfront development, of the 1980's would not be sympathetic to the shipyards. Only the

Newport Ship Yard would survive, and then in a new

location, ironically enough, in the area where Newport's maritime trade began; the Point at Long Wharf.

## **Breweries and Distilleries**

Distilling and brewing have very old roots in Newport and, before the Revolutionary War, was one of the major industries in the area. In Elaine Crane's book "A Dependent People" the number of listed distillers assessed £2 or more in taxes in 1772 was at least 18 out of the 135 on the list.. In addition to them, there were at least 17 people more that were classified as "extensive importer of rum/molasses" (25-29). That is about 26% of the people on the list. This is amazing, given the fact that even at its pre-Revolutionary high, Newport's population didn't reach 10,000 people (49).

However, in the District, I have but three references to distilleries; one on the land of the Williams' Woolen Mill (United States Hazard Block), one owned by Mr. Gidley, who's house was located in the northern part of our District, between Gidley and Fair Streets (Simster), and one "unused distillery building" on Howard Wharf (United States Newport Steam Factory). Obviously, and somewhat regrettably, the distilling trade in Newport is extinct.

In addition to distilleries, there were a number of breweries in Newport, the largest being on Brewer Street (RIHPC 11). This brewery is shown on the 1850 Dripps map (Newport Brewery Hill & Sons) and continued through to the 1883 Hopkins map (W. & A.W. Hill Brewery). In them, the brewery holdings extend from the corner of Thames Street half way up the north side of Brewer Street. By 1884, the Sanborn map shows the old brewery with the text "Removing Old Brewery". Where the brewery was is now a dwelling labeled "Not Completed" and one labeled "To be Mansard Rf". Apparently, the brewery was demolished and housing stock created in its place between 1883 and 1884.

There is also the Bartholomew Brewing Company Building on the corner of Thames Street and Dean Avenue. Although named a "Brewing Company", examination of maps did not

lead to the conclusion of it being a true brewery<sup>4</sup>. It first appears on the 1895 Evarts map and, on the 1896 Sanborn, is listed as a “saloon” and “liquors” on the first floor. The same notation is also listed on the 1903 Sanborn map. Before the building was there, it was open land, as noted on the 1891 Sanborn map. In 1883, Dean Street doesn’t even exist on the maps.

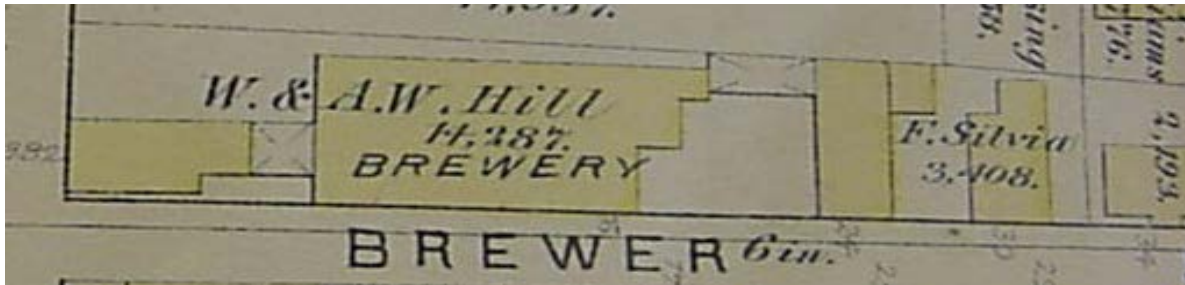


Figure 11: 1883 Hopkins map showing Hill brewery in last year.

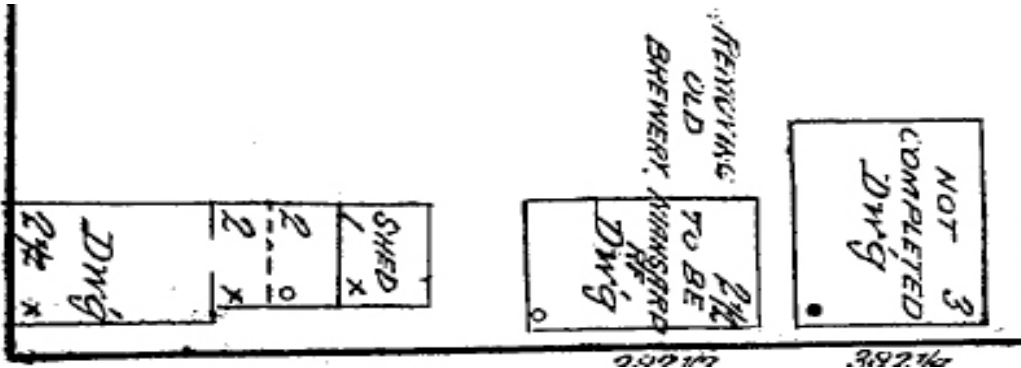


Figure 12: 1884 Sanborn map showing Hill brewery in process of being developed into housing stock.

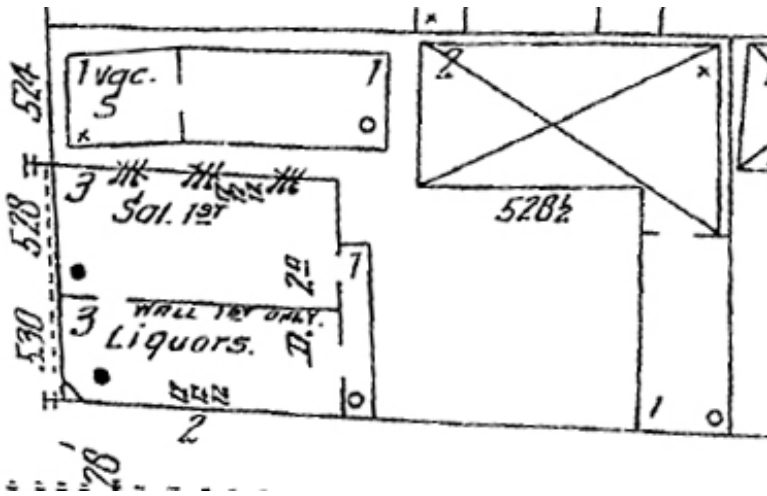


Figure 13: 1884 Sanborn map showing Bartholomew Brewing Company Building as a saloon and liquor store.

<sup>4</sup> See the article on brewing by Wyllie for a good description of how a brewery works.

## Textile Mills

Although Newport can not, by any stretch of the imagination, be labeled a “Mill City”, like Fall River, Lowell, or Lawrence Massachusetts, or even Pawtucket or Slatersville Rhode Island, it did have the largest collection of textile mills in the area. In all, Newport had at least four major mills dating from the early and mid-1830’s; The Aquidneck Mill (Newport Steam Factory - 1831), the Perry Mill (1835), the Williams Woolen Mill (1836), and the Coddington Mill (1837)<sup>5</sup>. For the most part these mills followed the design motifs and layout of their northern counterparts; long, rectilinear stone structures which may contain a clerestory, stair/bell tower, and banks of windows to emit light by which to work.

However, Newport never became that great manufacturing center for textiles. This can be attributed to three major factors; transportation, power, and economy of scale. Newport, being an island, had the distinct disadvantage of delivery methods of raw materials and finished goods. Any materials arriving in or emanating from Newport had to be brought by ship, by wagon over the small Sakonnet River Bridge at the north end of the island, or by train after a railroad bridge was built by the Old Colony in 1864. Even then, the materials had to be moved from ships into the buildings, from wagons down the poor roads of the island to the mill, or from the freight yard, which was two miles away in the north end of the city, to the mill via wagon. So multiple human intervention points with the material were necessary and, of course, increased the costs in the form of labor. Mainland mills, on the other hand, could have railroad sidings

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<sup>5</sup> There are two other textile mills mentioned, the Cotton Duck Factory of before 1794 which was in the north end of the city and demolished in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and the Point cotton mill, which burnt in 1864. Both were out of our district (Bayles 537).

going directly to the mill, thereby being able to acquire the raw materials and ship the finished products with ease and, presumably, at a cheaper cost.

In addition, and just as important, is the matter of power for the mills. In the mill towns, power was normally derived by the force of falling (or moving) water turning some type of wheel or turbine. That in turn, via a series of gears, cogs, and belts worked the machinery on the mill floor. This water was provided by rivers and artificial reservoirs, delivered by sluiceways and canals, and controlled by gates. In Newport, not only did we have none of this, but environmentally we never could; nature providing us with nothing more than brooks. Wind power and tidal power not up to the task of producing this power either. Therefore, Newport mills turned towards steam power, generated by wood, coal, gas, oil, or other fuels. These added expenses added to the cost of doing business in Newport, as compared to other textile mills off the island with powerful, dependable sources.

Lastly, because Newport was so small of an operation, as compared to other mills, it could not take advantage of the economy of scale inherent in a much larger operation. These economies of scale would be a reduction in the cost per unit because of increased production and, as the theory goes, operational efficiencies.

For these reasons, and probably many more including labor, potential weather, and capital, Newport never realized a great future in the manufacturing of textiles.

## Aquidneck Mill

The first of the textile mills to be established in Newport was that of the Newport Steam Factory, located on Howard Wharf (also known as Factory Wharf)<sup>6</sup>. This factory was built in 1831 at a cost of \$40,000 (Boss 75). It is a very large, rectangular, 11 bay, 3½ story green granite building situated due east/west. There is a centered stair/bell tower on the north façade with large windows, a date stone and, crowing it, a semicircular window. From photographic



**Figure 14: Aquidneck Mill c. 1880 showing belfry, 1865 addition and shot tower in background.**

evidence, we know that the tower once had a belfry. In a July 25, 1831 deed, it was stated that it would contain 4,356 spindles (United States Newport Steam Mill). However, Sherman reported that it had, when finished in 1831, 6,000 Spindles and gave employment to 100 (13).

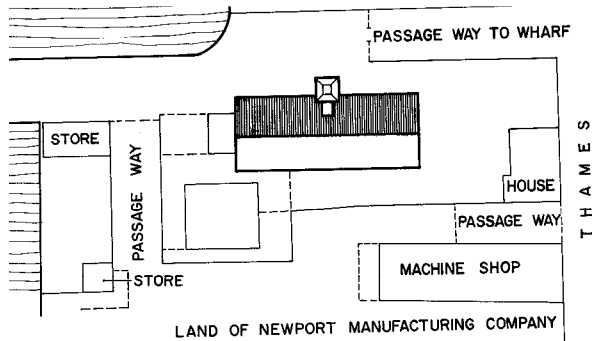
In 1845 the business must have been somewhat successful as the Mill bought the adjoining property from the Newport Foundry and Machine Factory for \$44,500. As far as can be told, no major buildings are erected on this land, but rather, the existing building remains. It is, however, an entirely wood, 3-story building with clerestory roof. The Dripps' map of 1850

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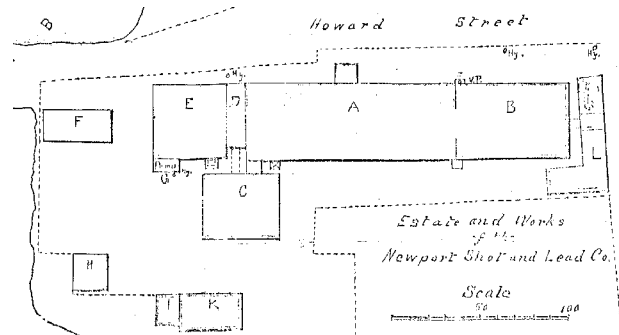
<sup>6</sup> In addition, this wharf was known as “Richmond’s Wharf” when Richmond Manufacturing owned the mill and “Aquidneck Wharf” when it was the Aquidneck Mill. As we can see wharfs could, and did, change names, usually indicating the current owner of the property.



shows this original clustering of buildings well. The mill stops production in September of 1857 due to the depression in the cotton manufacturing business, but is sold in April 1858 to the Rodman's for \$9,500. They in turn invest in machinery and a power plant and open the mill. It may be at this time, or some other time before 1876, that the name of the mill was changed from Newport Steam Factory to "Aquidneck Mill", by which it was known for many years.



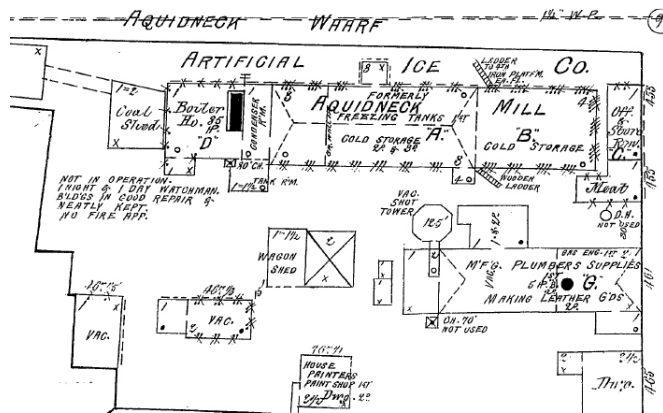
**Figure 15: Original layout of Newport Steam Mill.**



**Figure 16: Layout of Newport Steam Mill after 1865.**

In November of 1860 the mill catches fire and sustains damage to the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> stories, to the picker-house, and other equipment. At that time there were 64 people employed at the mill. In May of 1861 the Rodman's assign the mill for sale and, in 1863, it is sold for \$12,000. After a little over 2 years it is sold again, this time to the Richmond Manufacturing Company for \$40,000. Probably in an attempt to compete with larger mills in Rhode Island and Massachusetts, in 1865 a substantial, 4-story brick addition is built on the east side of the building, along with other structures such as cloth storage and office space, boiler house, shops and more. It would stay in the Company for 25 years. An article in the 1870 *Newport Mercury* informs us that the mill was running 9,632 spindles, 210 looms, and employed about 175 people. It was producing, on average, 200,000 yards of printed cloth a month while consuming about

1,000 bales of cotton<sup>7</sup>. In 1888, Bayles reports that there are 10,000 spindles and 20 looms with a capacity for work for 175 people, but that it is idle at the moment (537)<sup>8</sup>. By 1884 the mill is listed as being “Closed Machinery Removed” and “Boilers Removed”. Also interesting is that the 80’ chimney is listed as “dangerous on top”, maybe an indication of its idleness (Sanborn 1884). By 1891, the Sanborn maps show us the mill formally being used as the “Artificial Ice Company” and for cold storage. This includes freezing tanks, condensers, and meat storage in the old office/cloth storage area. Although the map also states that it is not in operation, it is not known whether they are referring to the mill or the ice factory.



**Figure 17: 1891 Sanborn map showing use as an ice company. The Newport Illuminating Company would purchase it a year later.**

In 1888 Newport steps into the modern age of electric production when the electric light contract is awarded to the “Newport Incandescent Electric Lighting Company” with a plant on what Sherman calls “Coddington Wharf” (38). However, in an article from the *Newport Daily News* of January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1888, the first

electric generation plant, used to interest the general public at-large, and the investing public specifically, was located at Perry Mill (New Departure).

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly enough, the article also talks about former slave pens that were on the site as late as 1869.

<sup>8</sup> One must assume that the Baylor article is mistaken in the number of looms; most probably a typographical error in the publication.

In 1890 the “Edison Illuminating Company” built a new plant on Tew’s Court for the city power needs and continued the electrification of Thames Street, and providing power for the street cars (Sherman 39). This is the first permanent plant specifically built for power generation, the previous, temporary one, being located in the Perry Mill since 1888. This is the year that the Edison Illuminating Company absorbs the other three electric companies in the area forming the Newport Illuminating Company (O’Hanley 93).

In July 1892 the Newport Illuminating Company purchases the mill for \$1.00 plus other consideration and will keep it, in some incarnation of the company, until the 1980’s (United States Newport Steam Mill). The 1896 Sanborn map shows the building as being owned by the “Newport Illuminating Company” and being used for stock rooms, weaving areas, and storage for “Elastic Weaving” and for housing electrical dynamos, engine rooms, and boilers.

Apparently, the mill was too large for the electric company’s exclusive use, they needing only the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> floors, so they leased out the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors to the Thurlow, Burnham Company Elastic Webbing Factory. This company may be the same as the “Newport Elastic Fabrics Company”, which was formally the “Newport Manufacturing Company” who were in the business of making silk elastic webbing and other products since at least 1892 (Sherman 40). After this company closes, thus ends the over 50-year history of milling on such a large scale for both Newport and the Lower Thames Street District. Never again will we hear the clatter of shuttles in the looms and the voices of operators calling for spindles.

Also in 1896, the Company takes a \$100,000 mortgage out from the Continental Trust Company of New York (United States Newport Steam Mill). This money could have been used to upgrade equipment or to gain a controlling interest in the Newport Street Railway Company, the electric trolley line of Newport.

On July 1<sup>st</sup>, 1900, the Newport Street Railway Company was merged into the Newport & Fall River Street Railway Company which, on December 24<sup>th</sup> was joined by the Newport Illuminating Company (O'Hanley 18).

By 1903, the Sanborn map lists it as the Newport & Fall River Street Railway Company (Old Colony Street Railway Company Lessee – manufactures of electric power and light). This map shows the new powerhouse that was built sometime between 1896 and 1903 and contained 3 motor generators, a large boiler, and a steam turbine. This turbine was very historic indeed, being the first vertical Curtis Steam Turbo-generator in history. It was put into service in February 1903 and continued to generate electric until June 1927 (ASME 1, 3). This turbine replaced the direct current, which has limited transmission distance to an alternating current that could be transmitted over a much greater distance (O'Hanley 93). The powerhouse also had an unprecedented 175' brick chimney that was visible through much of the District. The 1<sup>st</sup> floor of the old mill is used to house 22 dynamos and 7 engines while the remainder of the upper floors are for storage. There is also a repair shop on the first floor of the 1860 mill.

Both the Newport & Fall River Street Railway Company and the Newport Illuminating Company were leased to the Old Colony in July 1901. This lease would be for 99 years, but it would only last in its present incarnation until 1911 when the company was swallowed up by the Bay State Street Railway. In 1920/1921 the terms of the lease were terminated and the electric company and trolley line were reorganized as the "Newport County Electric Company", which is exactly where the Sanborn map of 1921 leaves us (O'Hanley 26, 59, 69).

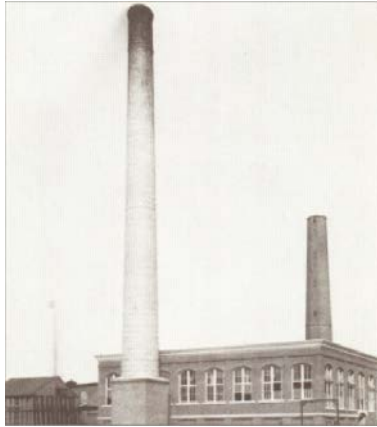


Figure 18: 1903 power plant.

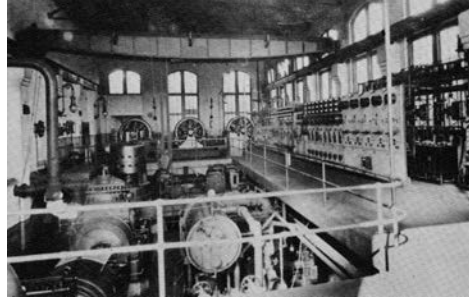


Figure 19: Interior showing 3 motor generators on far wall and turbo on left.

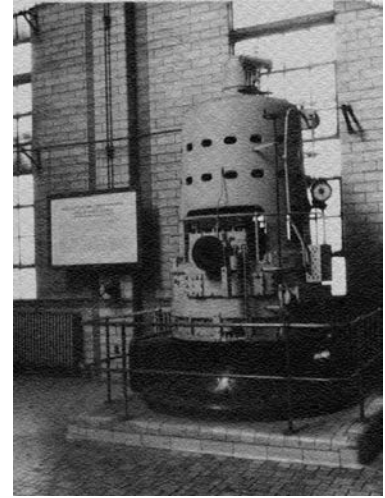


Figure 20: Historic Curtis Vertical Steam Turbine.

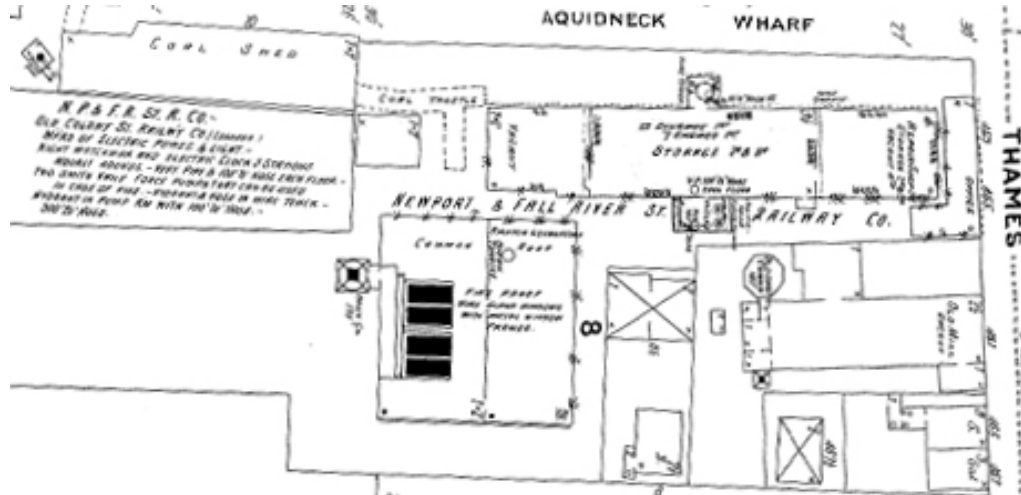


Figure 21: Sanborn 1903 map of former Aquidneck Mill. Note new powerhouse and lessee.

## Perry Mill

The second major textile mill established in Newport in this time period was the Perry Mill, located at the corner of Thames Street and Perry Mill Wharf at the absolute beginning of the Lower Thames Street District. It was completed in 1835 by Scottish stonemason Alexander McGregor, who was the best known and most proficient of the stonemasons who worked in Newport, being responsible for some of the largest, and most prominent projects, including Fort Adams, Swanhurst house for Judge Swan, the Artillery Company of Newport Armory, and various other smaller structures.

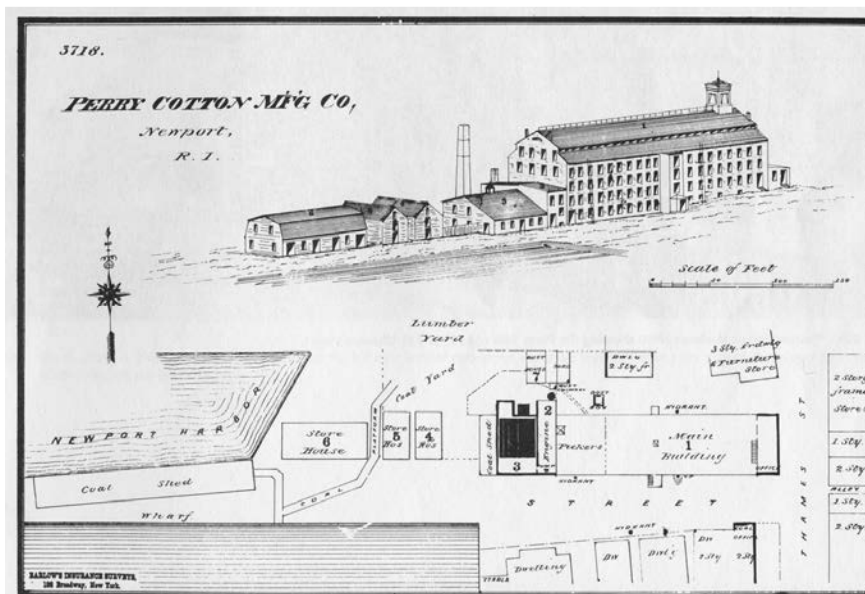


Figure 22: Plan and perspective of the Perry Mill c. before 1880.

Like the Newport Steam Factory of 1831, the Perry Mill was a substantial granite structure 4 bays by 17 bays and five stories high; the clerestory being the fifth floor.

There was, for a hundred years, a very large, prominent Greek Revival belfry on the roof at the front of the building which, in later pictures, was dilapidated. The mill appears on the earliest of our maps, the 1850 Dripps map. It is clear from the maps that there was a one story office running the entire length of the Thames Street side. This addition seems to have gone right up to the street, leaving little, if any, room for pedestrians. This addition is last evident in 1884 and, by 1891, is extinct.

The primary purpose of the mill was for producing cloth and, between the years of 1836-1850, delaines<sup>9</sup> was produced here (Boss 78). After this date printed cotton cloth was produced. According to Sherman, when the mill was finished there were 8,000 spindles and 125 employees (15). By 1878 the mill was said to employ about 150 people who specialized in the manufacturing of print cloth (RIHPC 11, 13).

On the 1884 Sanborn map, we see the mill still being used in the production of cotton goods. There are cotton, coal and kindling storage sheds behind the mill, and a large, obviously newer, boiler-room concatenated on the back of the 1835 structure which includes a 70' brick chimney. The mill is listed as having carding on the first floor, weaving on the second floor, "mule spinning & warping" on the third floor, spinning and warping on the fourth floor, and weaving and machine shops in the basement. There is also a picker house in the rear basement with three pickers using "R. Kitson's Patent" machines.

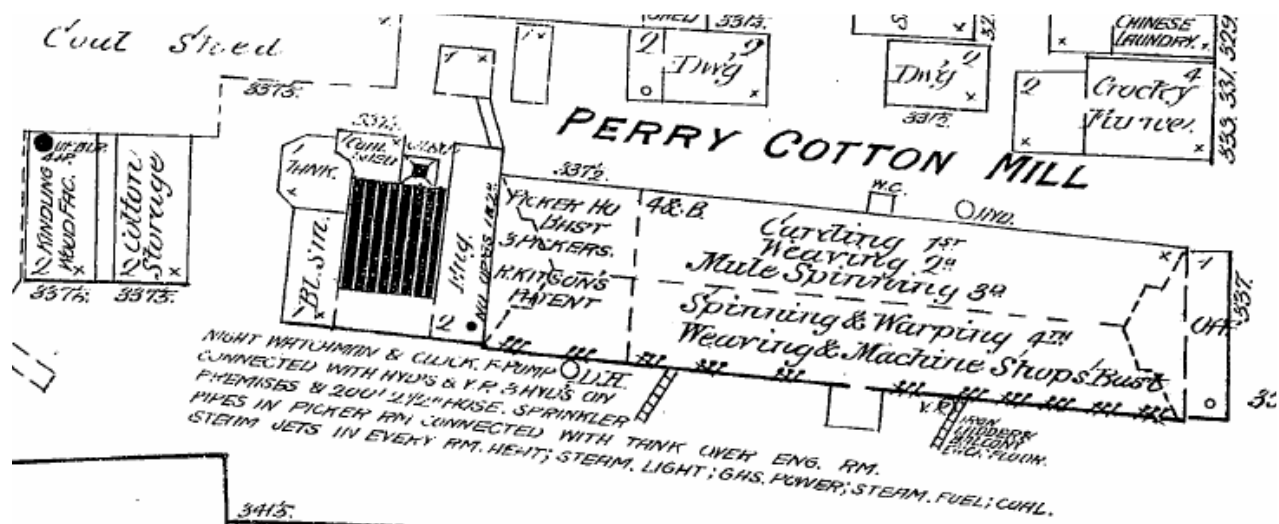


Figure 23: Perry Mill from 1884 Sanborn map.

<sup>9</sup> Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines "delaines" as a "light woolen dress fabric". It is also the name of the American merino strain of sheep.

Unfortunately, by 1888 Bayles state that the mill is idle for milling purposes and that the building is being used for “various mechanical purposes.” (537).

However, life goes on and an article from the *Newport Daily News* of January 7, 1888 states that a new electric light plant has just been established in Newport and that it will be temporarily housed at the Perry Mill until enough interest can be raised to form a stock company and build a power plant. It also states the:

*“(it) promises to completely revolutionize domestic lighting in this vicinity. It is the Edison system and possesses marked advantages over everything else we have seen, from the fact that it combines all the conveniences of gas with the brilliancy of the electric light. The Edison lamp of sixteen candle power are used. Each light is independent of the other and can be turned off and on like gas, and, like gas, is available any time during the twenty-four hours.”*

This is the first electric generation plant in Newport and is used to interest the general public at-large, and the investing public specifically (New Departure).

By 1891 the map lists it as the former Perry Mill and it contains the G.H. Burnham machinist shop and an office on the first floor, and a wheelwright in the rear of the mill at the old boiler-room, along with storage. Interestingly enough, there is an elevator shown in the building (Sanborn 1891). Although the map does not show it, Sherman mentions that in 1890 the



Aquidneck Pure Ice Company is manufacturing 12 tons of artificial ice a day in a plant in the Perry Mill (39)<sup>10</sup>.

Sometime after 1891 a type of weaving is introduced to the Perry Mill, although it is shown as closed by 1896. The Sanborn map shows that the Goodridge Manufacturing Company



Figure 24: Perry Mill after c. 1913.

(Manufacturers of Elastic Webbing) had used the basement for storage, the first and second floors for weaving, the second and third floors for finishing, the fourth floor for braiding, and the attic for beaming rubber. Burnham, the wheelwright, and the office are all still there. In 1903, most is the same, except that the wheelwright is gone and a blacksmith is in his place.

There was, for some time, a roller skating rink located on the second floor of the mill, from about 1913 to 1919 (Boss

78). This is also evident in photographs from the period.

In an article by the *Newport Daily News* of May 1, 1913 the “Providence Manufacturing Company” was to lease the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> floors of the Mill, over the skating rink. The company

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<sup>10</sup> Although the maps are not perfect, Sherman could be confused between the Perry Mill and the Aquidneck Mill, which in 1891 has the “Artificial Ice Company” located in Aquidneck Mill and no ice company listed in the Perry Mill.

was to manufacture “Porterware non-refilled bottles, parcel post containers, cans, cones and spindles, tubes and pie plates....(and) a fire-and- water proof shingle.” It was estimated that the factory would employ 50 men.

Unfortunately, the 1921 map gives no details about what was in the mill at that time, just the footprint and the area of the lot (almost 3 acres). After 1920 the mill was used to house a bowling alley in the 1930, the WAVES and Torpedo Factory Workers during World War II, and from 1947 – 1981 the Monowatt Electric Corporation, a division of General Electric. When GE sold the property in the 80’s it was turned into a commercial and hotel/timeshare development.

Throughout its long history, many things changed on the mill, the most dramatic of which was the loss of its whole roof and Greek Revival belfry. In the 1980, when being redeveloped, the roof and belfry were restored to a similar original appearance.

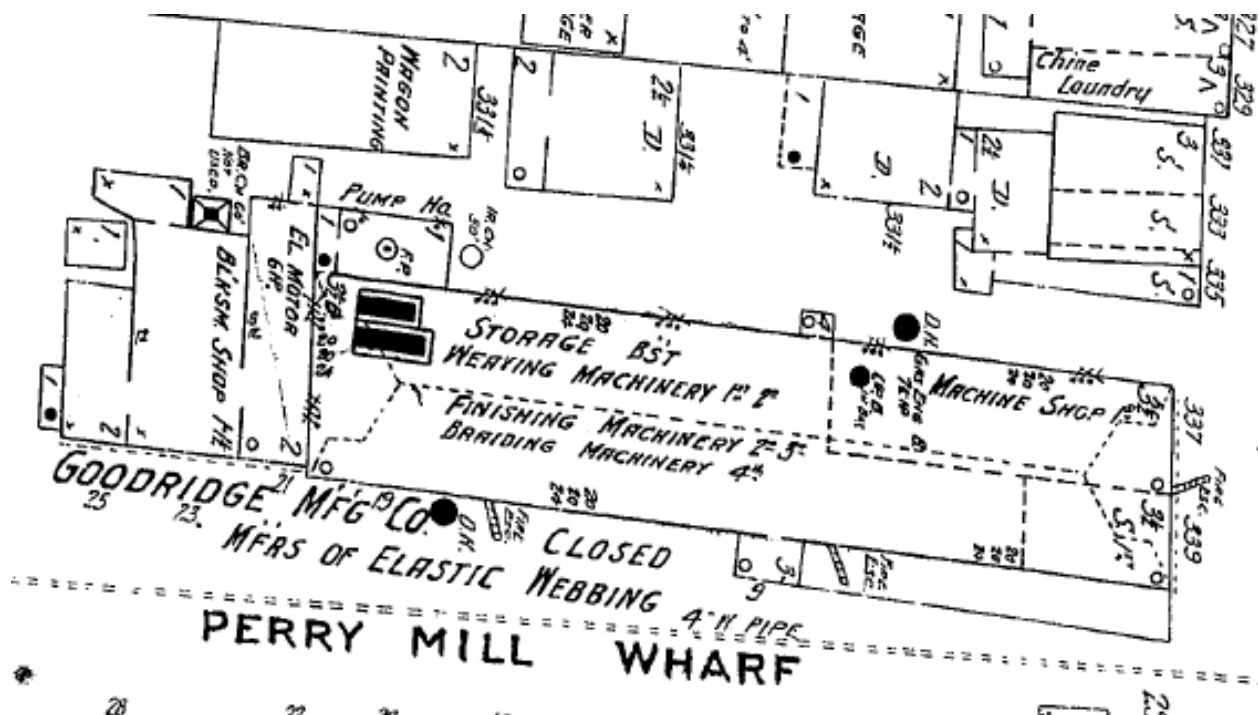


Figure 25: Perry Mill c. 1903.

## Williams' Woolen Mill

Probably the most enigmatic of all the textile mills in Newport is the woolen mill of John D. Williams. The mill was built around 1836 and was located on the north side of what is now Brown & Howard's Wharf but was, back then, known as Williams' Wharf. The smallest of the mills, it was employing but 50 people when it burnt to the ground in April 1860 (Bayles 537, RIHPC 11). Little is known of the mill except that it does indeed appear on the 1850 and 1859 Dripps' maps and not on the 1870 Beers' map. By 1884 Brown and Howard own the property and the city has their coal yard on the wharf. There is a small ice house on the wharf (Newport Ice Company) and sheds for sawing kindling wood and carpentry. By 1891 the ice house is gone, having been converted into a wood storage shed. This basic set-up, the wharf as a coal/wood dealers business, would remain the same right up through 1921.

Before this land was used as a mill, there is some belief that it was a location of a distillery (United States, [Hazard Building](#)).

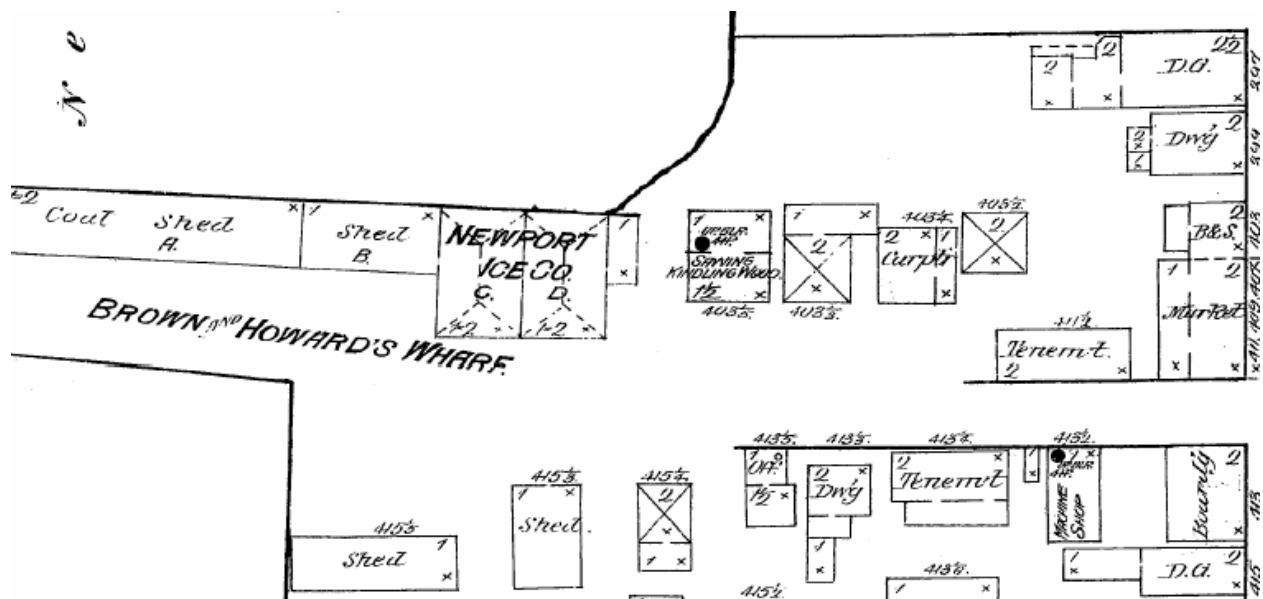


Figure 26: Brown and Howard's Wharf (former Williams' Wharf), site of the John D. Williams Woolen Mill which burnt down in April 1860.

## **Coddington Mill**

The Coddington Mill was a series of medium sized granite and wood framed building located at the corner of Thames Street and Coddington Wharf. The main building ran parallel to Thames and was set back approximately 30 feet. Behind this building, there were two smaller stone structures; one on Coddington Wharf and one on what would later become Goodwin Street.

According to Bayles, the mill was constructed in 1837; he also states that in 1860, while owned by man from Providence, the mill was totally destroyed by fire (537). The Rhode Island Historic Preservation Commission states that it was destroyed by fire in December 1869 (11). In a quandary, we must look to the map for clarification. The 1850 Dripps' map does show an intact enterprise there in its full configuration, and known as Coddington Mill. So to does the 1859 Dripps' map, however it is listed as the Touro Mill and contains a number of buildings, including a large, long liner building and three smaller building behind that. The Dripps' map of 1860 (revised 1870) does not show the mill, but then again, being a revision, it might not. The date of the conflagration will remain a mystery until further research can be done.

In the 1870 Beers' map, the main mill is gone and, in the 1876 Hopkins map, it shows at most three major buildings, all much smaller then the previous complex, one of which is listed as an "Enamel Factory". The operator of the factory is the Richmond Manufacturing company. This information is corroborated to some extent by the 1878 Galt & Hoy birds-eye view map, which shows three buildings, one of which has a factory style smokestack. The theory is that the main long, liner factory building burnt in 1860 and the remaining building were used for industrial purposes. The 1884 Sanborn map shows both buildings, but lists them as "Old", probably a good indication of it being defunct. By 1891 one of the buildings is being used to

store “Masons Materials” while the other has been made into a dwelling with attached wagon house. The 70 foot chimney is labeled “not used.”

At the height of its production in 1860, the Coddington Mill ran 11,000 spindles and operated 275 looms. This produced 50,000 yards of printing cloth weekly and employed 220 people (Bayler 537).

All that remains of the mill today are the three smaller building visible on the maps. All are built of stone. One is located on Goodwin Street and the other two on Coddington Wharf.

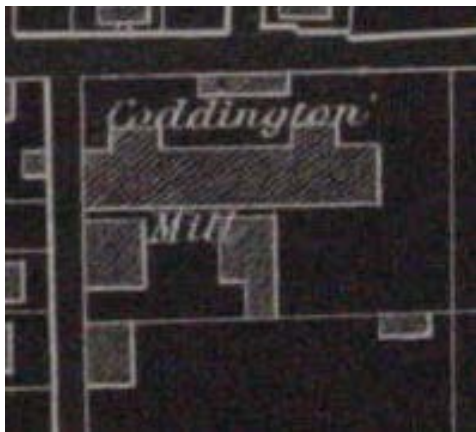


Figure 27: 1850 Dripps' map showing Coddington Mill before fire destroyed main structure.

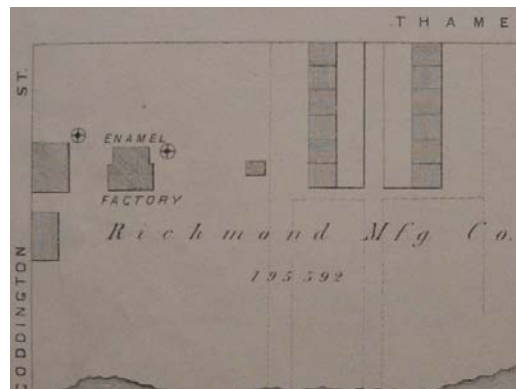


Figure 28: 1876 Hopkins' map showing Coddington Mill after fire destroyed main structure and the Richmond Mfg Co. opens an enamel factory.

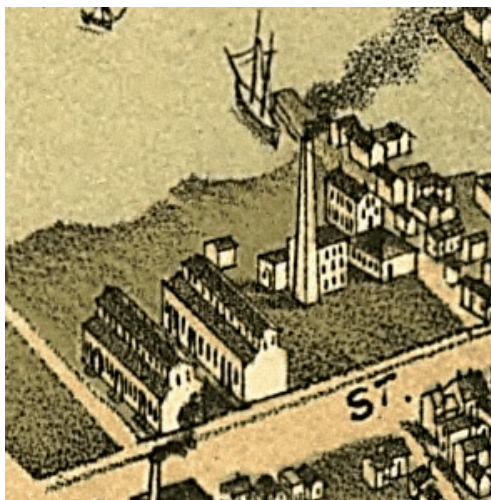


Figure 29: 1878 Galt & Hoy view showing Coddington Mill being used as an enamel factory.

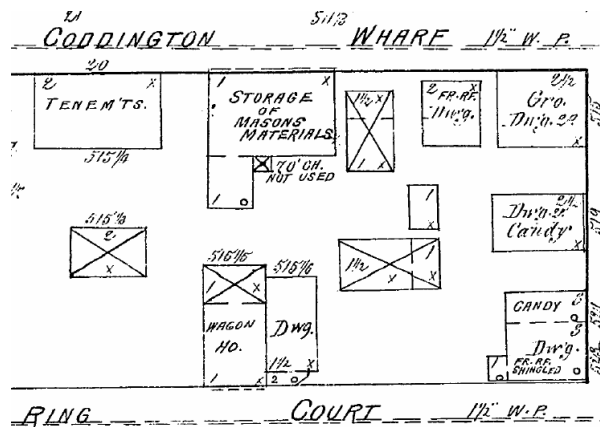


Figure 30: 1891 Sanborn map showing Coddington Mill after being used as an enamel factory.

## Mill Housing

The Lower Thames Street District has had two examples of mill housing, one of which was destroyed before 1952, and one that still exists today at the corner of Thames Street and Brown & Howard Wharf. Unlike the large mill cities to the north, Newport never developed a large stock of Mill housing, leaving employees to find housing in one of the many tenements that already existed or that would be constructed throughout the District. It was quite common to turn existing housing stock into tenements, regardless of their former glory. One needs to look no further than the Francis Malbone House (ca. 1760) on the 1891 Sanborn map or the Samuel Whitehorn House (1804) on the 1896 Sanborn Map to see this phenomenon. Part of this may be that, unlike the large mill cities, Newport was never planned as a mill city, but was more organic in development, which would limit the quantity of tenements that could be built (Mrozowski 39). In addition, erecting substantial quantities of mill housing within the predetermined grid, which was at least partially filled in, would be economically cost prohibitive, especially if existing structures had to be moved or destroyed. In addition, our mills, although impressive to us, are rather small when compared to their larger brethren to the north. The largest mill we had employed only employed 220 people, compared to the thousands that worked in just the Boott Mill in Lowell. Even at the full capacity of all the mills in the District, Newport would be hard pressed to show 600 people in the trade.

In addition to this formal mill style tenement housing, it is entirely possible that the mill owners had limited housing available for their employees. The *Newport Mercury* of October 29, 1860 states that the Richmond Manufacturing Company “owns one two story wooden dwelling house, 65’ x 32’; one two story, 32’ x 28’, two, 32’ x 28’; two tenement houses each 151’ x 28’, one and a half story high, and a boarding house, two storied, 50’ x 30’.” (United States Newport



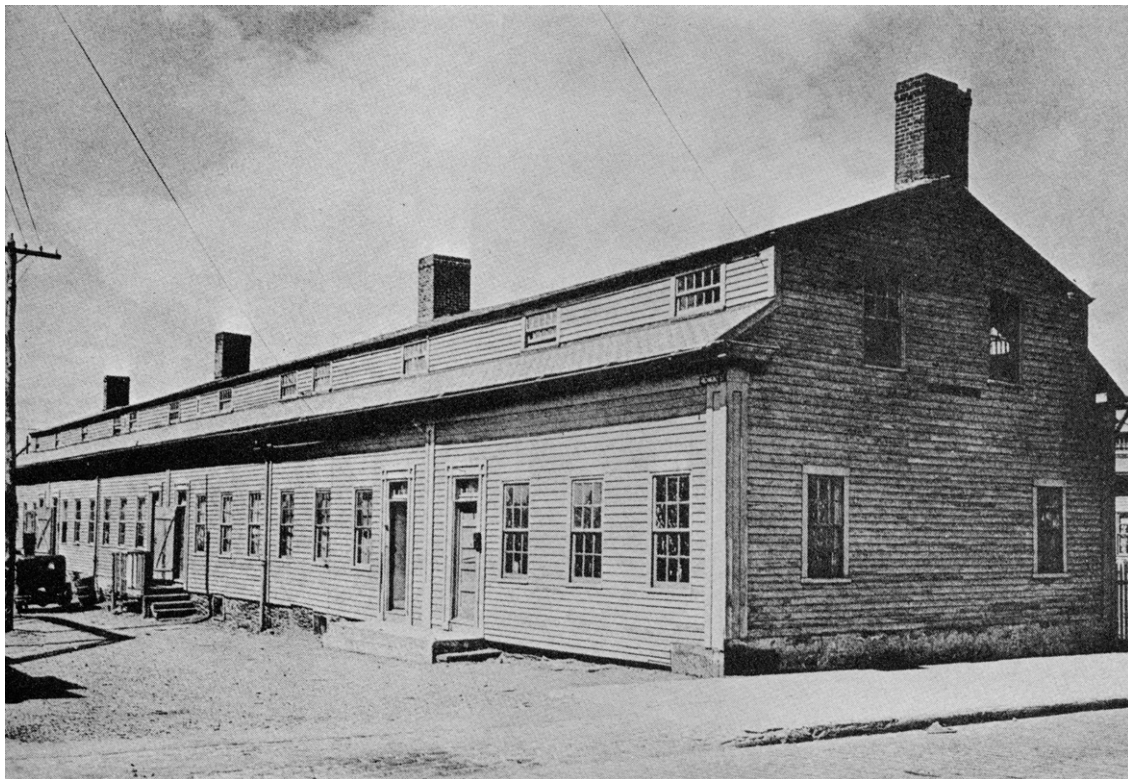
Steam Mill). I believe that the tenement houses were the former Coddington Mill tenements which fit that description. In addition, it is believed that 360 Spring Street, a small circa 1840 cottage, was owned by the Richmond Manufacturing Company as a mill house, as they are the first known owners. (RIHPC 39). There are two benefits to this theory. First, it is literally just a walk down Howard Street to get to the mill and secondly, it would have probably been cheaper to build up the hill verses right by the mill in the industrial/business zone. Although it does seem like a large outlay of capital for such a small dwelling which wouldn't fit that many workers. One would expect to see a tenement style row house.



**Figure 31: Potential tenement house (c. 1840) for the Richmond Manufacturing Company (Newport Steam Mill) at 360 Spring Street.**

### Coddington Mill Housing

The Coddington Mill tenement was located on Thames Street, filling the space between current day Harrington and former Richmond Streets. It consisted of two linear, parallel Greek Revival building set end to Thames Street and comprising six “townhouse” units each. The “front” or the building faced each over an approximately 60 foot passageway. Besides its Greek Revival trim, such as the simple Doric columns as corner boards and unit dividers, cornice, and wonderful door trim, it featured full-length gabled monitor (clerestory) roof emerging from a typical Greek Revival gable. This, of course gave the occupants use of a more spacious 2<sup>nd</sup> story.



**Figure 32: Coddington Mill tenement housing, ca 1930's. Note Greek Revival details.**

Built with, and for, the Coddington Mills in 1837, it appears on our earliest map, the 1850 Dripps' (see Figures X and X). Throughout the Sanborn series, it is listed as “Tenements” without owner information, except for 1921, when it shows “Max & Annie Teitz” as the owners.





## Hazard Block

In addition to the Coddington Mill tenement housing, there was another example of this type of mill housing; the so called Hazard Block, located at the corner of Thames Street and current Brown & Howard Wharf (formerly Williams' Wharf). The building runs parallel to Thames Street and abuts the sidewalk, having no setback. Built in approximately 1836, it was believed to be associated with the John D. Williams Woolen Mill that was located directly behind the building from 1836 until it burnt down in 1860 (Downing 513). Like the Coddington housing, this too is a Greek Revival structure and features simple Doric columns as corner boards and unit dividers, along with cornice molding. It also has a full-length gabled monitor (clerestory) roof emerging from a typical Greek Revival gable. However, unlike the Coddington housing, this structure is 2 full stories in height, with the monitor on the third. In addition, the first floor is broken into three retail units that, over time, have been many different establishments, such as a market, a grocery, dwellings, and coal & wood company office space. For most of the period 1884 – 1910, the two southern units seem to be combined as one place of business.



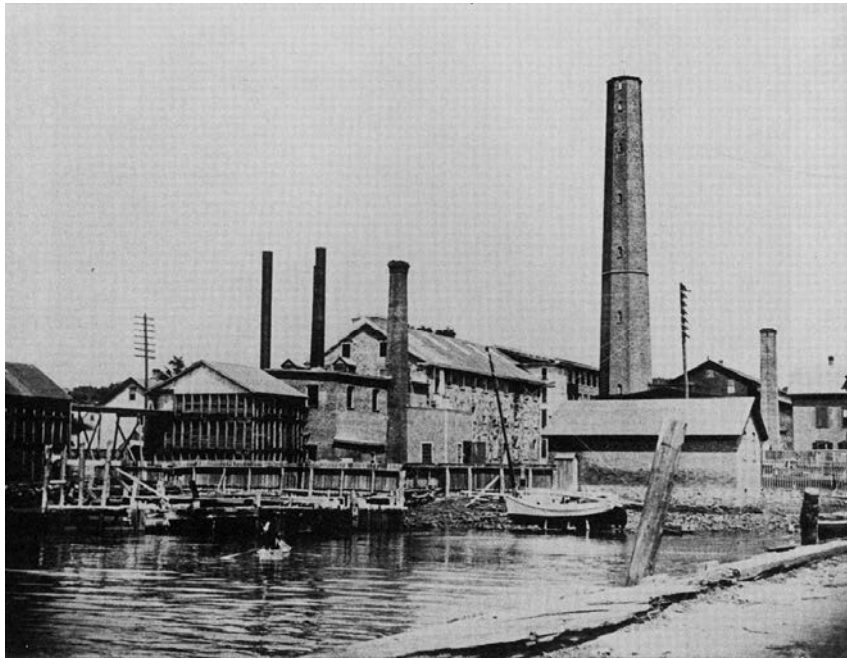
**Figure 34: The Hazard Block in ca. 1910 view. (HABS).**

### **Newport Foundry & Machine Company**

Currently, little is known of the Newport Foundry and Machine Company. There is one reference to this industry in Sherman's "Newport and the Savings Bank", where he states that in 1838 "the Newport Foundry and Machine Co. opened a factory and workshop at the south end of Thames Street." (16). There was also a reference made to a defunct date of before 1857, which is when the Newport Shot & Lead Company occupied the site. However, the most creatable of evidence is the deed of sale between the Newport Foundry and Machine Company and the Newport Steam Mill, which was recorded on December 27, 1847, and effectively sold the plant and property for \$44,000 (United States, Newport Steam Factory). As for the building, in an interview with Philip Connell, a local historian, he stated that the building that the Newport Shot & Lead Company owned was previously a "mill", presumably the Newport Foundry and Machine Company building. The Shot and Lead Company simply moved in and modified the old building for their needs.

## Newport Shot & Lead Company

The Newport Shot & Lead Company was built circa 1857 on Thames Street, next to the Newport Steam Factory (Aquidneck Mill) and was in operation approximately 10 years before being closed prior to 1870. The purpose of the Company was to turn raw lead into various sizes,



**Figure 35: Pre 1903 picture of shot tower and Newport Shot & Lead Company on right, with Newport Illuminating Company on left.**

grades, and types of shot.

This was accomplished by bringing lead up to the top of the “shot tower”, melting it, mixing it with arsenic<sup>11</sup>, and then pouring it through a hole in the floor of the tower. As the lead fell within this tower, which was at least 160’ high, it passed through a screen to cut the

lead into smaller molten masses. It reached the bottom of the tower, which contained a pool of water for cooling and hardening, and was then transferred to the mill building proper for drying, rolling, sorting, bagging, and eventually shipping (Lewis 48, *Newport Mercury*, n.p.).

Not only does the article in the *Newport Mercury* on 4 November 1865 describe the operation of processing the lead into shot, but also tells of its underutilization from its inception until the start of the Civil War.

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<sup>11</sup> Arsenic was being used to prevent the oxidation of the lead, which, although resistant to corrosion does tarnish (oxidize) upon exposure to air.

On the 1883 Hopkins map, J.N.A. Griswold is listed as the property owner, but no use for the building is listed. The 1884 Sanborn map, on the other hand, list the building as “Painting & Storage of Furniture” and shows both the shot tower and the smaller (70 foot) chimney for the main building, and a smaller dependency building with a caved-in roof. By 1891 the building is listed as “M’F’G’ Plumbers

Supplies” and “Making

Leather Goods”. In 1896 it is

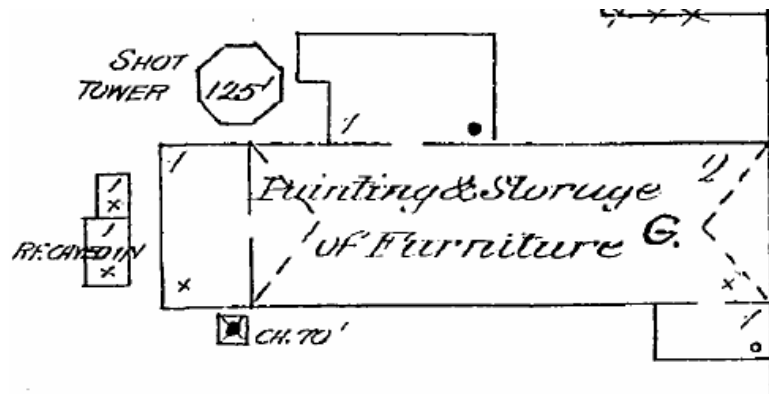
listed as “Vacant Mill. In Poor

Repair.” The last year

anything is listed about the

building is 1903; “Old Mill.

Vacant.” By 1921 the land



**Figure 36: 1884 Sanborn map of former Newport Shot & Lead Company.**

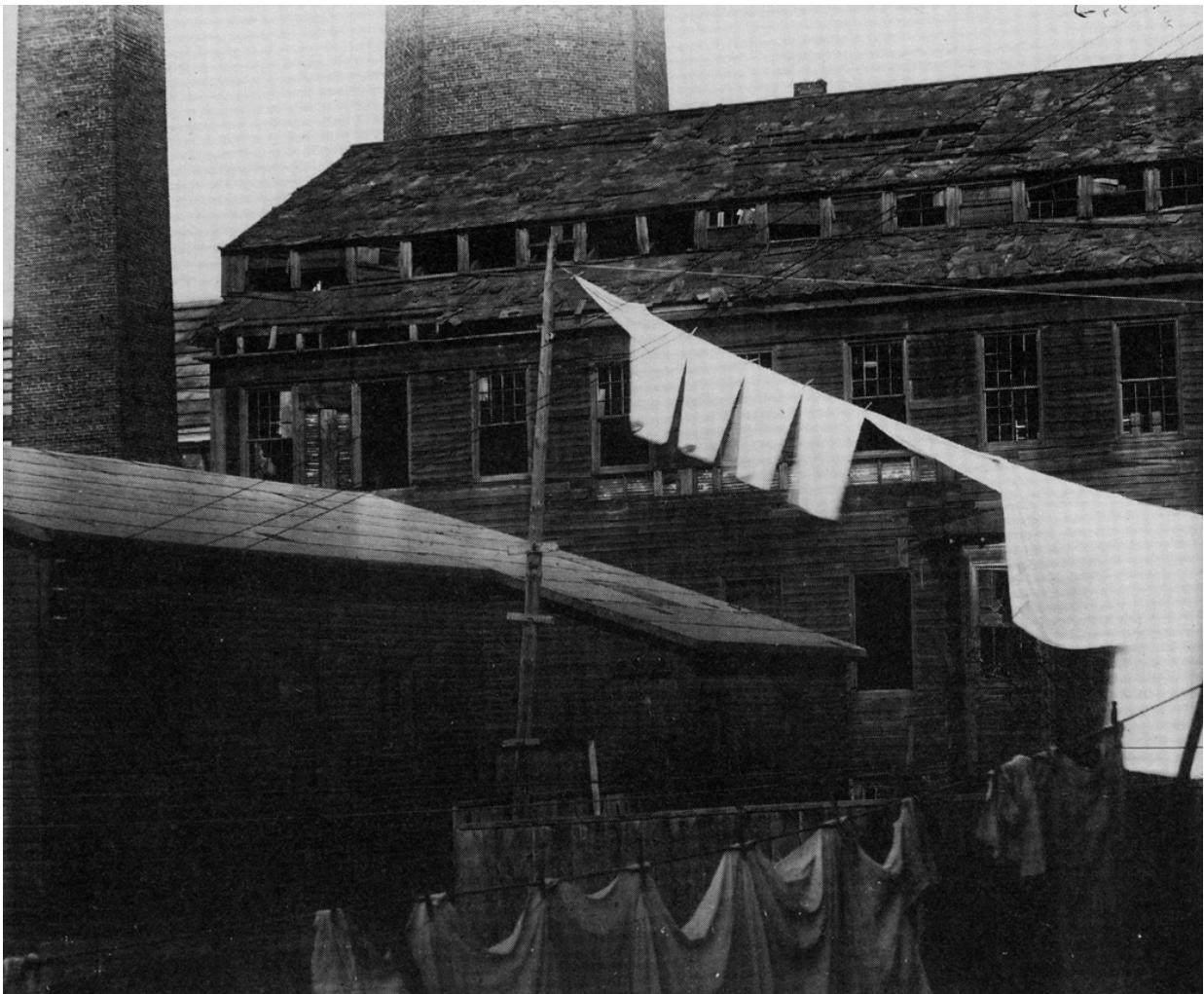
on which the factory was located was devoid of a building, indicating the complete destruction of the building, which was made of wood. Photographs from circa 1916 show a severely rotted building (Lewis 48). The tower on the other hand was taken down in two stages, first approximately 70 feet in 1938 courtesy of the hurricane and the remainder in the late 1950’s, which should serve as a testament to the quality of the workmanship in the tower.

After 1921 the electric company eventually purchases the property. They use it for outdoor storage, general parking, and build enclosed transformer storage units.

Interestingly enough, in 1922, the American Cigar Company objected to this land as the site of their proposed factory, stating that the price of the adjoining land was too high, if they decided to expand their business. They eventually built on Commercial Wharf. (Newport Daily News, Plan to Organize Monday)

Arsenic, as you can imagine, is carcinogenic and can, with poisoning, affect the nervous system, immune system, and brain. Children are especially susceptible as their bodies and systems are still developing. In some circumstances, arsenic poisoning can be deadly.

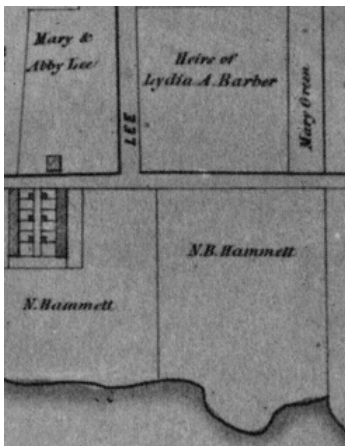
In addition, lead itself is a fairly toxic substance, especially by ingestion and inhalation and often poisoning (which is cumulative) will have no obvious symptoms. Like arsenic, lead is carcinogenic and can affect most of the bodies systems, leading to learning disabilities, behavioral problems, and with long term exposure and high levels, seizures, coma, and even death (Effects of Lead Poisoning).



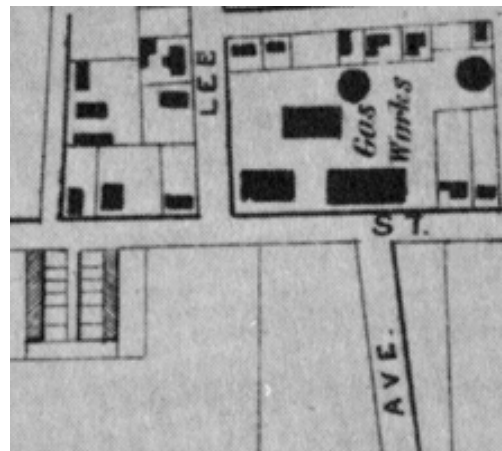
**Figure 37: Circa 1916 photo of the former Newport Shot & Lead Company mill with the 70' boiler chimney on the left and 160' shot tower in center. The dilapidated building is the original Newport Foundry & Machine Company (Lewis 52).**

## Newport Gas Light Company

At the lowest end of Thames Street is one of the longest lasting and largest industries in the District; the Newport Gas Light Company. The company first light the streets of Newport on 20 August 1853<sup>12</sup>, although they were busy laying pipes and setting-up shop during the previous year (Sherman 22). The Dripps' map of 1859 shows the development of the lot of land at the corner of Lee Avenue and Thames Street with a gas storage tank, a retort house and other buildings. Previously, the 1850 map shows little development in that immediate area, save the Coddington Mill housing.



**Figure 38: 1850 Dripps' map showing future land of Newport Gas Light Company.**



**Figure 39: 1870 Beers' map showing first location of Newport Gas Light Company.**

The process of illuminating is by use of “coal gas”. Coal-gas is natural gas made from the “distillation” of coal under heat and pressure. A simple look at this complex operation will serve us well<sup>13</sup>. Coal is brought in from the coal docks via wagon or barge (depending on the

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<sup>12</sup> Although this was the first large scale lighting, gas was used in 1817 (or 1806) by Mr. David Melville to light his own house and a part of Pelham Street (Sherman 22, Bayles 495).

<sup>13</sup> A majority of this information is contained in Paton's article and Elliott's book .

year) to the storage yards of the Company. This coal, bituminous being preferred<sup>14</sup>, is transferred to the retort house, which is a collection of air-tight furnaces where the coal will be “cooked” at a very high heat. This cooking of the coal forms a reaction that releases many chemicals in the coal, like gas and coal-tar. The gas, with other chemicals in tow, rises through a system of pipes and first passes through a “hydraulic main” which serve to condense some of the tar and keep the gas from being reintroduced to the retorts. From there the gas is sent through a number of processes, including a condenser to cool the gas to ambient and remove more tar and impurities, a scrubber or wet purifier to dissolve ammonia and other impurities out of the gas, and a lime purifier used to rid the gas of sulphuretted hydrogen and carbonic acid. Additives may then be introduced to the gas to aid in flame color and intensity (Connell). From here the gas is metered to determine how much was made and is then pumped into the storage tanks, called “gasometers”.

The lime used for this process was made right on site. In 1884 we see a small structure attached to the purifying house labeled “Lime Kiln Burning Oyster Shell”. In 1896 we see a larger “Lime Kiln”.

The byproducts of the process include coal tar, carbonic acid, ammonia, sulphuric acid, benzoil, gasoline, naphtha and others which have uses such as fertilizer, pharmaceuticals, soap, fuel, dyes, and many more. By far, the largest byproduct was a type of coke, which basically is what was left of the coal after it was run through the retort. It was described as a large, coal-nugget shaped mass that was light and airy. Apparently, the coal expanded in the retort and lost weight. This coke was removed from the retort and stored in an open-air yard where locals

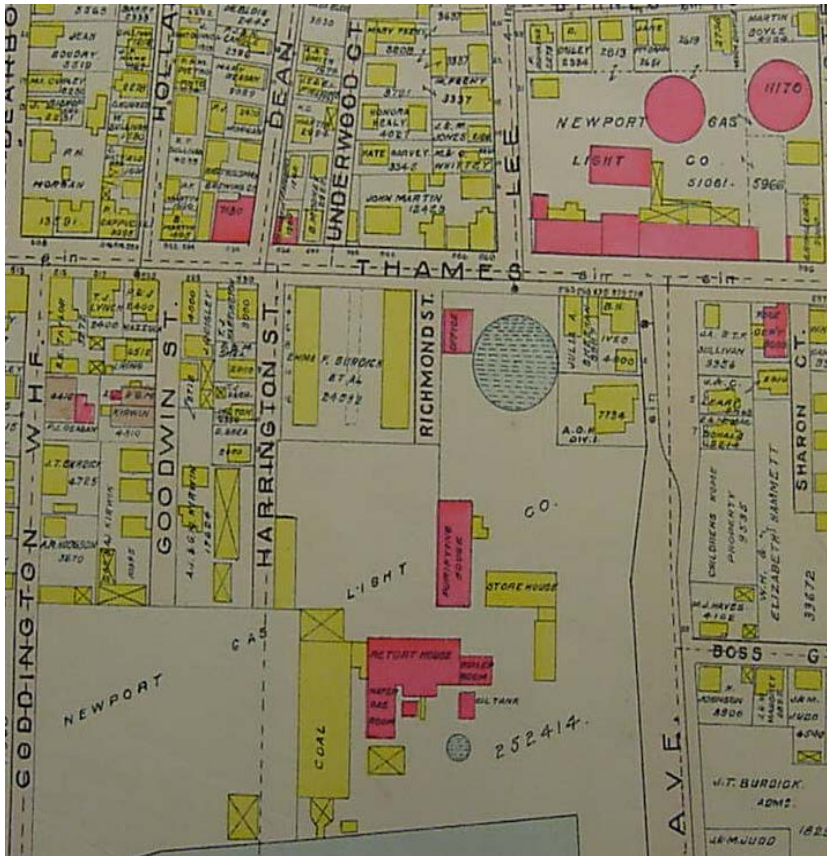
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<sup>14</sup> Bituminous is preferred as it has more releasable products such as gas, coal tar, benzol, and coke, to name a few.



would go and “steal” it for use in their homes as fuel (Connell). Even according to Paton, a gas works “at best, the works do not improve the amenity of any neighborhood.”

Obviously, the growth of the Company was rapid; by 1856 the gas pipes have been laid



**Figure 40: 1903 Sanborn map showing Newport Gas Light Company in full operation.**

up to Long Wharf in the north end of the city and, a year later, have made it to Bellevue Avenue as far as the Wetmore Estate (Sherman 23, 24). In addition, with the conflagration at the Coddington Mills in 1860, just north of the Gas Company, an extended area of waterfront owned

by the mill was made

available. The Company started their moved from their tight, land locked urban site across the street to the much larger, waterfront site sometime in 1883-1884. One can only imagine that the relocation was spurred on by the need to move the raw material (coal) and byproducts (coke and tar) to and from the site more efficiently. Moving thousands of tons of coal down Thames Street in horse-drawn wagons, even if only from one wharf away, is not efficient. This new property gave them the harbor frontage necessary to build their own coal bunker and elevator, which we can plainly see on the 1896 Sanborn map.

Even with the move, the Company retained the ownership of a majority of the former property, using the buildings themselves or leasing to other business concerns, like the Diamond Ice Company (Sanborn, 1896, 1903, 1921). The property was vacant for some time in the late 1880's and early 1890's, except for the two old brick gasometers, which were always used to augment the 200,000 cubic foot iron gasometer across the street.



**Figure 41: A ca. 1950's view of the Newport Gas Light Company. Notice the large 200,000c/f gasometer, coal bunker, retort house, and coke storage.**

By 1874 the Company opened a new office up town by Market Square, in addition to their office on the industrial site<sup>15</sup>. At this office building in 1877, the first telephone exchange

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<sup>15</sup> This was a rather large iron front office building designed by Dudley Newton. It also contained a Gas Company workshop and retail store. It was destroyed in "Redevelopment."

would be located. The first call was from Fall River of singer Lyman Freeze singing a song (Sherman 33).

The Gas Company continued providing service to Newport until 1975, when it was purchased by, and consolidated into, the Providence Gas Company. The Newport operation was closed and the plant destroyed. In the 1980's, the site was developed by Providence Gas into a large resort timeshare. The original property at the corner of Lee Avenue and Thames Street was also developed into a retail/living area.



**Figure 42: View of former Newport Gas Light Company property ca. 1985. (Hopf)**





also included landscaping and landscape gardening along with the growing of “hot-house fruit” . In addition, the local populace was not the only source of sales, rather the summer colony and their colossal need for fresh flowers, landscaping, and greenhouses (RIHPC 20). Records for the business and its employees could not be found but, being a labor intensive industry, employment of District residents would seem probable. By right of being in business so long and at that particular point in time, Mr. Galvin probably did teach the trade to generations of employees as Ms. Warburton suggest in her book “In living Memory” (25).



**Figure 45: View looking east over Thomas Galvin's florist shop Ca. 1888. Note retail shop in foreground, large dwelling, and greenhouses in background. Tower in back is Newport Fire Department Holland Street Bell Tower. From Bayles.**

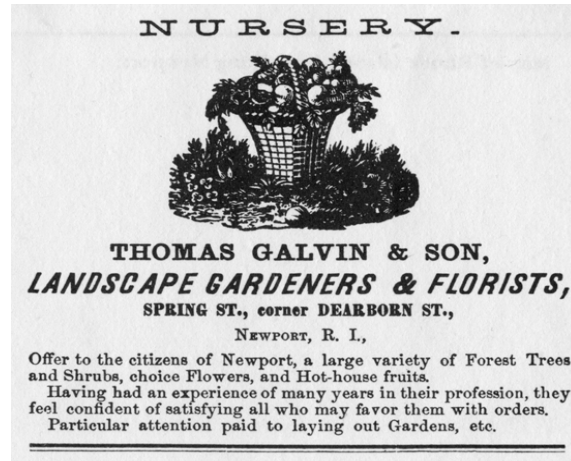


Figure 46: Advertisement for Thomas Galvin & Sons.

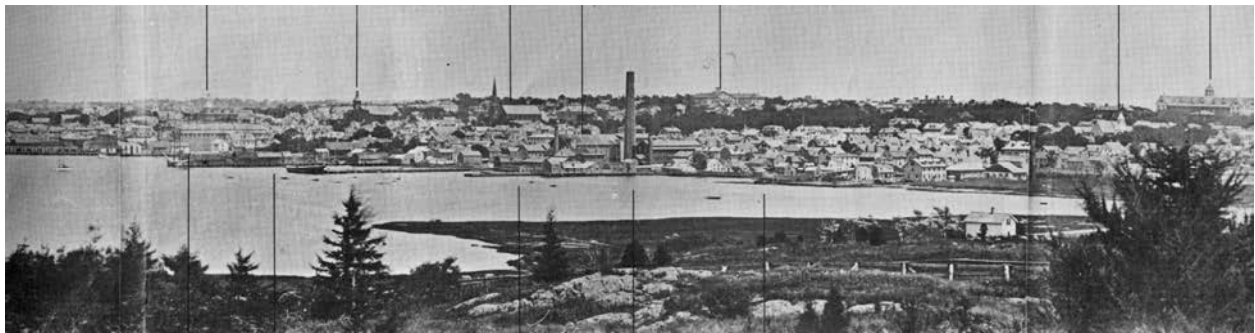


Figure 47: View of the southern Thames Street district from Halidon Hill by J.A. Williams ca. 1872 (RIHPC).



Figure 48: View of Long Wharf to Shot Tower, ca. 1870 (Newell).

## Ice Manufacturing

A relatively late comer to the District's industrial base was that of artificial ice manufacturing. For the most part, this was due to the lack of available technology in the freezing process; reliable, cost-efficient methods just did not exist to freeze water. Before the technology



**Figure 49: Cutting ice on Green End Pond with the Newport Ice Company ice house in the background.**

existed, ice was harvested in the winter months at the local ponds by horse-drawn cutters, which looked like a sled with extremely sharp runners. The pond would be scored over and over again by this apparatus until the blocks could be broken apart by men with hand tools. The ice block would float

free and then be sent to a large insulated storage building (the ice house) to be covered in sawdust, hay, or some other media used to keep the ice from melting.

The storage of this huge quantity of ice took place at the main “factory” on the ponds and at a number of off site storage facilities throughout all of Newport, including the District. Photographic and map evidence show a number of ice storage facilities, including one at Brown & Howard’s Wharf in 1884, the former location of an early distillery and mill and where, ironically, the only modern day ice company in Newport exists (Sanborn 1884). Being a working waterfront, there would have been a need for a great quantity of ice for packing goods in, along with raw export of the ice itself. To appreciate the quantity of ice Newport needed for

trade we just need to look at one week in May of 1876 when 10,000 barrels of scup were sent to out via the Sound steamers (Sherman 32).

The District's first experience with artificial ice was in 1890 when the Aquidneck Pure Ice Company started making ice in the Perry Mill, with a stated capacity of 12 tons of ice per day (Sherman 39). In addition, the Artificial Ice Company had a plant in the Aquidneck Mill in 1891, according to the Sanborn map. This does not imply, however, that natural harvesting of ice ended with the introduction of artificial ice manufacturing. In 1901 the Artic Ice Company and Newport Ice Company cut over 35,000 tons of ice from Lilly Pond and Green End Pond<sup>17</sup>. This led to the employment of approximately 275 people, some of whom may have lived in the District, as the Artic Ice Company, which cut the Lilly Pond, was located a very short distance south of the District.

In the Sanborn maps of 1896 and 1903, we can see the previously vacant Newport Gas Light Company's plant on the east side of Thames Street is now used for artificial ice manufacturing, complete with ice house, freezing room, engine room, filter rooms, pump room, conveyer belts, and offices (Sanborn, 1896, 1903). It is interesting to note that the 1903 Sanborn map lists the Diamond Ice Company as having a "Ammonia Condenser", which is how the plant froze water and which is potentially an extremely dangerous operation, as ammonia is a very toxic, reactive, and corrosive gas that will produce illness, and death, as it irritates the mucous membranes and affects the respiratory system and central nervous systems.

By 1921 the ice house on the Lilly Pond, although there, is owned by the Newport Hospital, probably an indication of it being defunct. The Diamond Ice plant is not listed as

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<sup>17</sup> It is interesting to note that certain ponds were preferred for domestic use ice, like the Lilly Pond, while others were used for commerce use only, like the Almy Pond (Warburton 40).



operational and the current Brown & Howard's Wharf plant is not shown either. However, the 1921 map is, at best, a detail poor map.

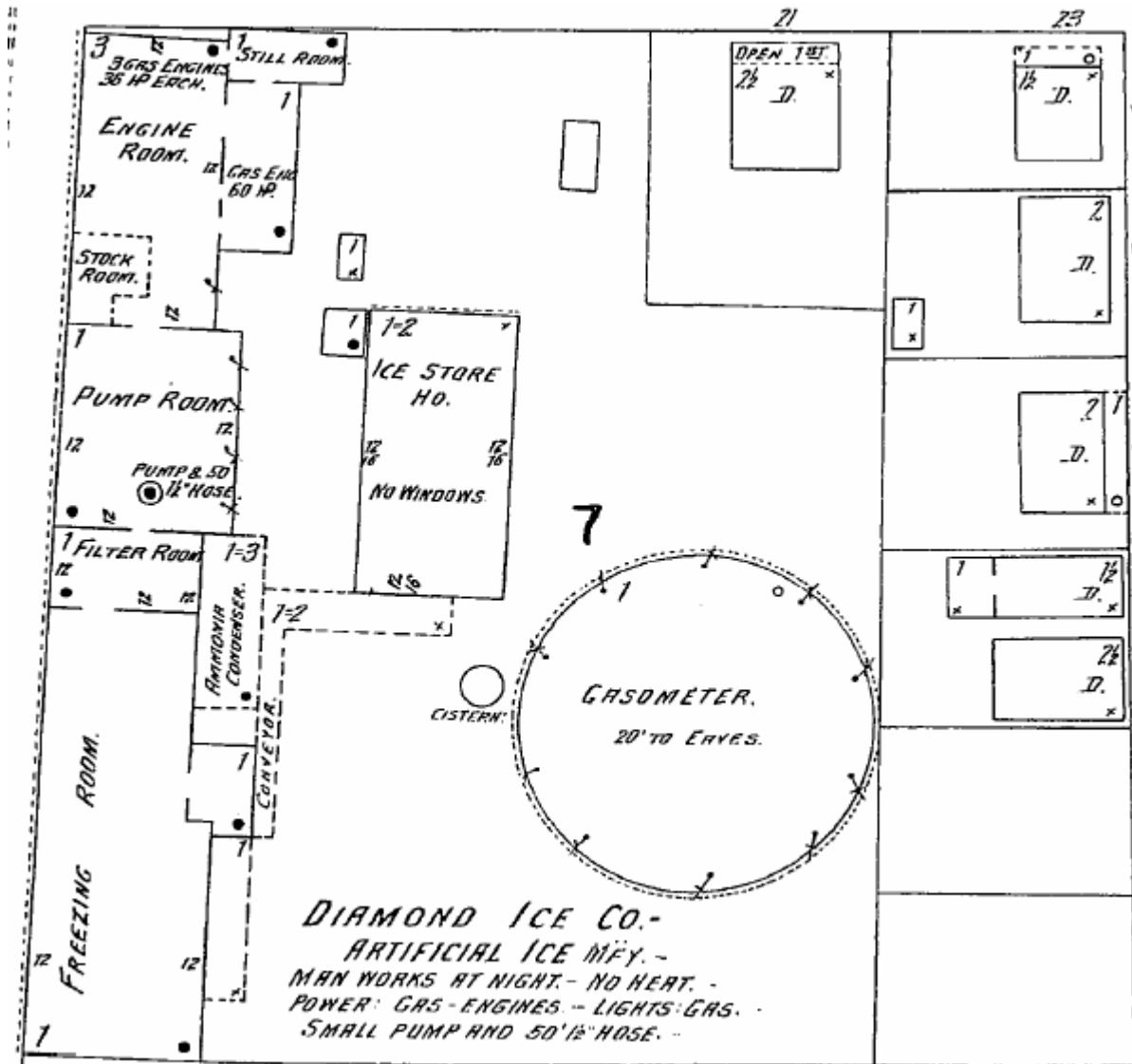


Figure 50: Diamond Ice Company, Thames Street at Lee Avenue. Sanborn Map, 1903.

## Epilogue

Our trip through the past is drawing to a conclusion and many changes have happened since 1920. These changes have not been all good or sympathetic to the District, or Newport, but happened nonetheless. In the 1920's America was riding a wave of economic prosperity and Newport, although not as successful as some areas, did well in attracting industry to its shores. Keeping it here, however, turned out to be a different story.

The American Cigar Factory, a part of the American Tobacco Company opened a brand new 4 story factory (built for them) on Commercial Wharf. In its wake the old street railway car barn and other ancient building were destroyed to make way. It opened in September 1923 with over 200 girls finding employment and closed in November 1929, leaving 90 people out of work.

The Cartoning Machinery Company, in the business of manufacturing machines to package products, opened a brand new factory (built for them) on Commercial Wharf. They outgrew their first two locations, a side corner at the gum factory, and a floor at the Richmond Mill (nee Newport Steam Factory, nee Aquidneck Mill) which was rented to them by the illuminating company. They had 60 people working for them, 15 of whom were trained mechanics. The depression would close this factory too.

The Common Sense Gum Factory eventually sold to the Wrigley Company, although they never moved into it, but sold it instead to the Blatz Brewing Company to make grape gum. Like the others, this would not last through the 1930's, and was turned into a warehouse.

In June 1929, the New York and Suburban Air Lines started flying from New York to Newport. It was sponsored by Mr. Carroll Dana Winslow, a wealthy summer resident who used seaplanes and landed them in the inner harbor. They would then taxi to J.K. Sullivan's dock to be tied up. The flight took 70 minutes.

With the coming of World War II, Newport would experience an unprecedented build-up of military personnel and materials. Commands were started here, schools opened, land taken and used for defense purposes. For the most part, most of this took place in the north end of the city, leaving our District to serve as transient housing.

After the war, the Cold War would keep the areas major employer here in force, the United States Navy. This, however, would not last. For political spite, many of the Navy commands were pulled out and sent to other ports. In a panic, the wags of the City cried fire and touted the concept of “Redevelopment”. For Newport, redevelopment meant wholesale destruction of its oldest industrial base, the wharfs from the Cove to the beginning of our District, Perry Mill. Very few building would survive the wrecker’s ball and the ones that did were often ripped from their context and placed on quant little lots away from their original locations. Once again, the District survived this affront with little physical effects, but the bells of time were tolling, and even the Lower Thames Street section of town could not escape the next assault; tourism.

Although redevelopment would not immediately affect the District, it was the vehicle in which tourism would ride. And ride it would, right down Thames Street through the heart and soul of the District. Tourism would bring back to Newport what had been missing for 200 years; capital. Developers would spend millions buying the waterfront property and turning these lots into circuses of wood and steel, throwing up huge developments that would destroy the fabric of the streetscape and the feel of the former industries. Gone were the last three working shipyards of any size. Gone was the Gas Works and tenement housing. Even the might of the electric company and General Electric could not withstand the building pressure. The GE plant move

out to Middletown for a short period of time before moving to Mexico, thereby freeing the Perry Mill and Cigar Factory for development. The Newport Electric Company also moved, but fortunately their property, including the old Lead & Shot Company, became a school for building and restoring wooden boats, IRYS.

Even old Thomas Galvin's Nursery did not survive. There was just too much land calling to be developed and, in the 1980's his Newport Exotic Garden became a new condominium development.

You can, however, still buy locally produced ice from the Eastern Ice Company, located on Brown & Howard's Wharf, directly across from where the Williams Woolen Mill was located and, later, an ice storage building.

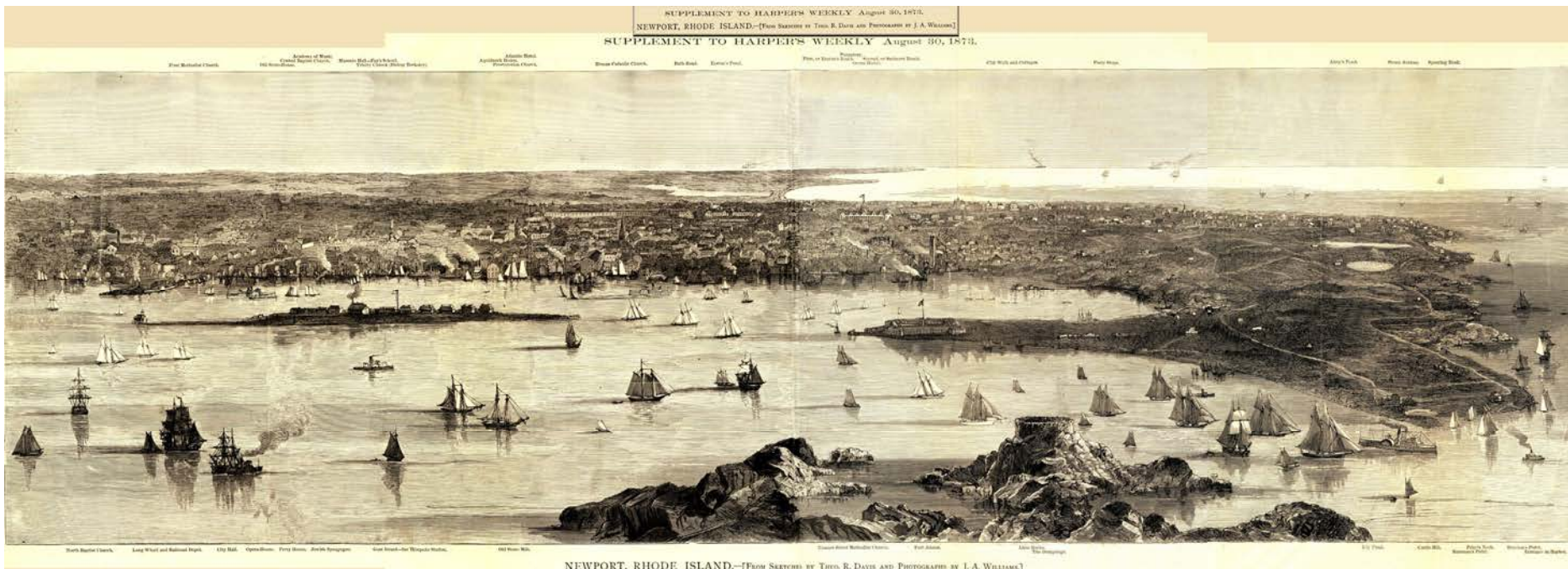


Figure 51: Harper's Weekly showing Newport waterfront in August 1873.

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