Historic Lewiston

Bales to Bedspreads

Bales to Bedspreads

Photo courtesy of Lewiston Sun Journal

A pictorial account of the processes used by Bates Manufacturing Company

Text was prepared by the members of the Lewiston Historical Commission with invaluable assistance from two long-time employees of Bates Manufacturing.

On Cover: The canal runs along the right of Bates and Hill. Libby Mill is in the upper left corner. Photo courtesy of Lewiston Sun Journal.

A publication of the Lewiston Historical Commission,
Dingley Building, Oak Street, Lewiston, Maine 04240
Email: Lewiston-HC@mail.com

2000 A.D.

Printed by Central Maine Technical College Graphic Arts/Printing Department
1250 Turner Street, Auburn, Maine 04210

Many individuals photographed in this book are not identified. If the reader recognizes anyone, please call the Commission.

Table of Contents

Dedication 4
Preface 5
Common Mill Terms 6
Opening Process 7
Weaving Room 17
Dye Room 21
Rayon Production.....23
A Few Miscellaneous But Important Workers 27
Packing and Shipping 31
Products 35
Spare Time Activities 39

Dedication

Dorothy Henrietta Holland
1927–2000 A.D

When the committee decided to publish this book there was a great need for explanation of terms by an informed employee. Dorothy Holland had worked all her life in several capacities in the textile mills.

She graciously gave her time and knowledge to confer about the significance of photographs. When the time came to make the final proposal she and another employee Sheron Levesque described each step.

Unfortunately "Dot" died very unexpectedly the week when the work went to the printer. The committee dedicates this book to the memory of Dorothy "Dot" Holland.

Preface

Readers desiring knowledge of all the history of Bates Manufacturing Company will find a complete account in an earlier publication in a series of books by the Lewiston Historical Commission. It is "A Textile City In Transition" and can be found in the Lewiston Public Library and the Androscoggin Historical Society Library.

Photographs come from the files of the Bates Manufacturing Company Public Relations Department showing activities from about the last fifty years. They include several mill divisions—Bates (founded in 1850), Hill (1850), Androscoggin (1865)—all in Lewiston as well as Edwards in Augusta and York in Saco.

The persons in a photograph as well as the mill location will be identified when known, but if a reader who has further knowledge would like to inform the Historical Commission, it would be appreciated.

Benjamin E. Bates
1808–1878

Entrepreneur whose name is linked to Bates Mill, Bates Manufacturing Company and Bates College

Common Mill Terminology

There are different meanings sometimes in different departments of a mill and variations from mill to mill.

1. A *lap* is a large roll of raw cotton at the start of the process.

2. *Slubber* is a can into which cotton goes following each process which makes the thread finer.

3. *Spinning frame* turns strands of cotton into bobbins of fine thread.

4. *Warp tying* feeds long thread off from cones through a comb to make a beam.

5. A *Beam* is a large spool of thread cut into lengths to pass through the loom.

6. *Slashing* is making the beams of thread for weaving.

7. To *doff* means to come to the end of a process.

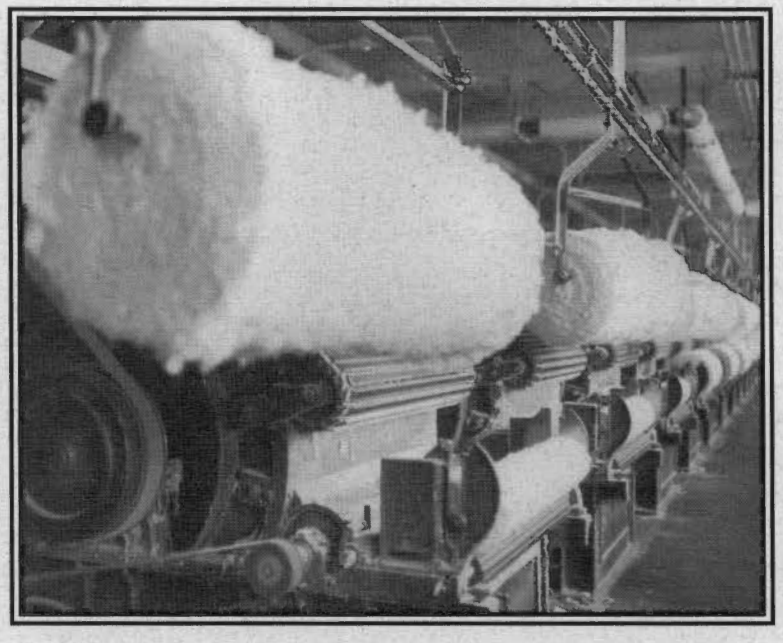
Most of the following pictures were taken during the peak of Bates Mill (1950–00) when it employed 6,000 people and was the largest employer in Maine.

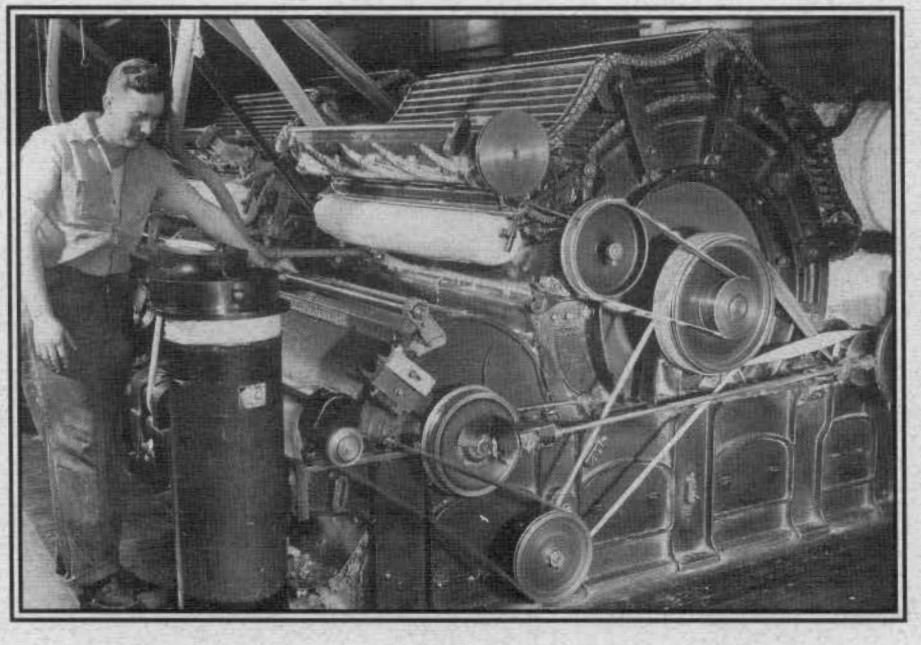
Opening Process

Chapter 1

Previous page: The bales of raw unprocessed cotton have arrived by train from a southern state and will now go through a long complicated process to transfer the cotton to thread for various purposes.

Right: The picker (Edwards division). The raw cotton needs to be loosened by the upper machine to become more uniform on its way to becoming a single thread.

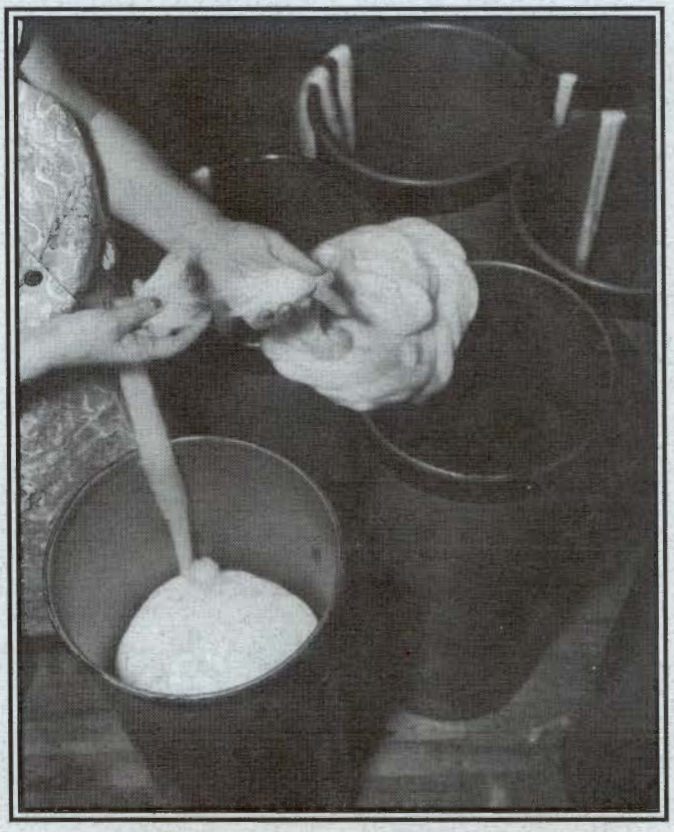




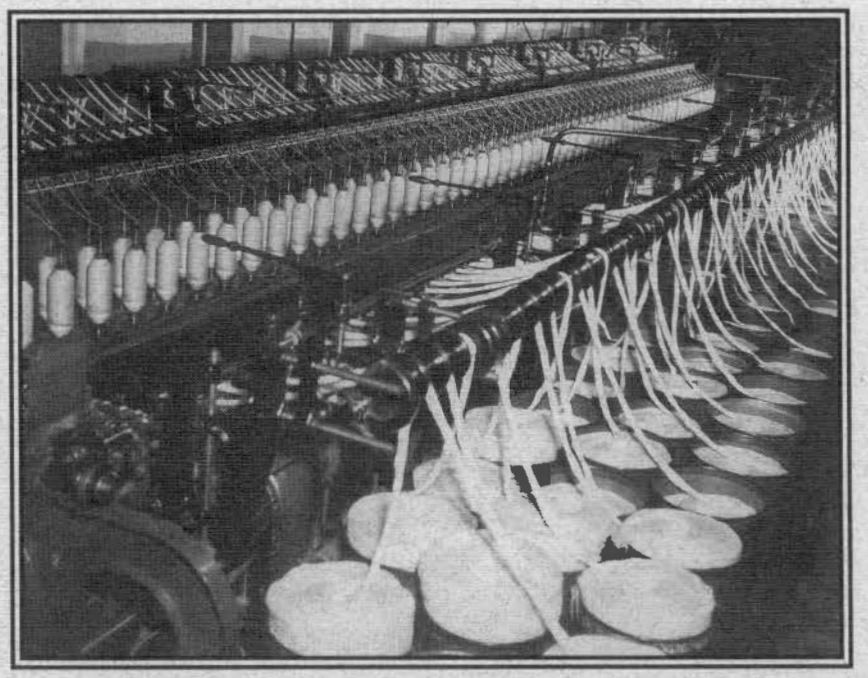
Left: The raw cotton is on the lap in the rear right side. It is being "carded" and as it comes out on the left it goes into a "sliver can". The cotton will be about the size of a thick cord. (Hill Mill)

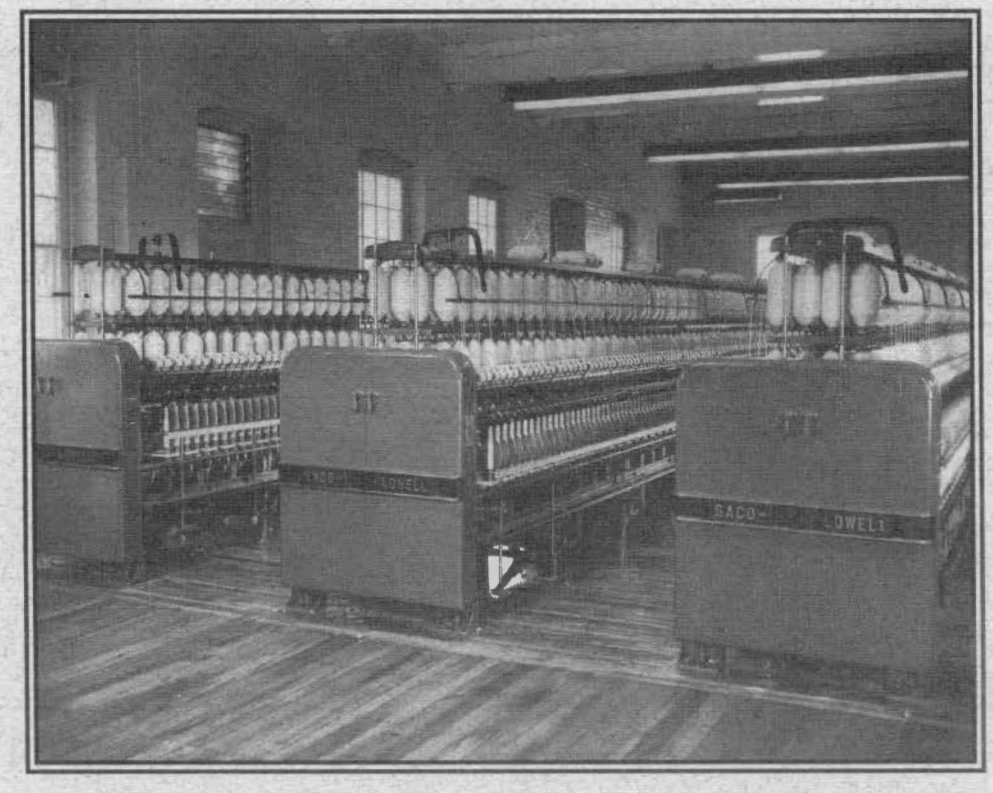
Left: The cotton from the cans on the left comes through the "combers" to reduce the size of the thread. It then goes into larger cans.

Right: The worker is splicing or piecing together a broken sliver.

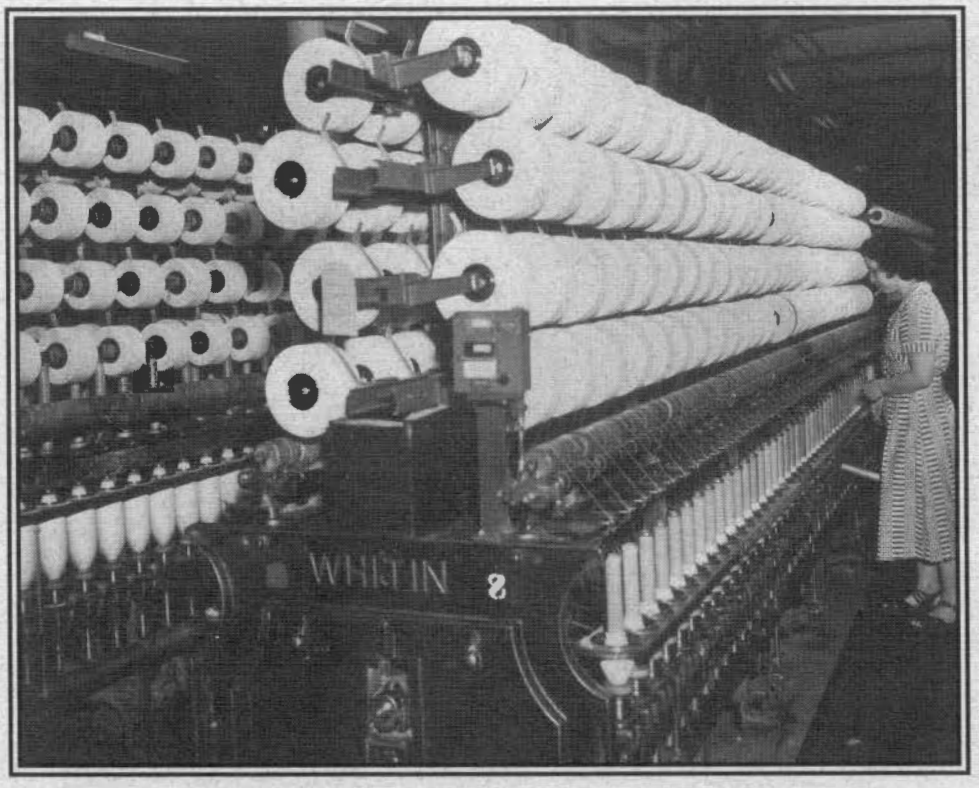


Right: The cotton in the slubbers on the right side goes through a machine which converts it into threads on the row of bobbins on the left, ready to go to the spinning room.



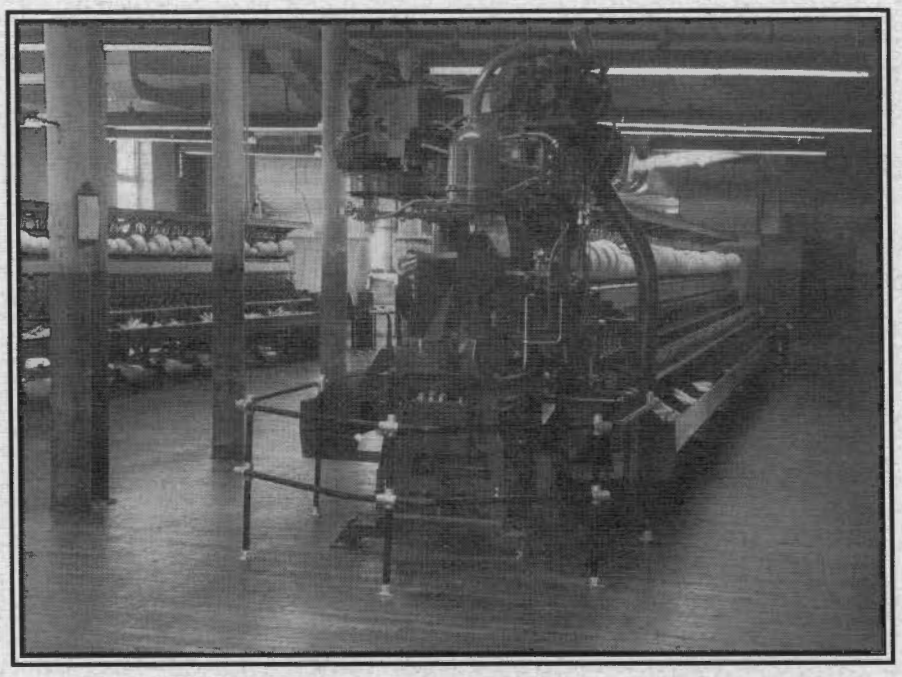


Left: A spinning machine at the Hill Mill. The roving bobbins on the top level have come from the slubber. Now the cotton goes to the bobbins below. Each step makes the thread finer.

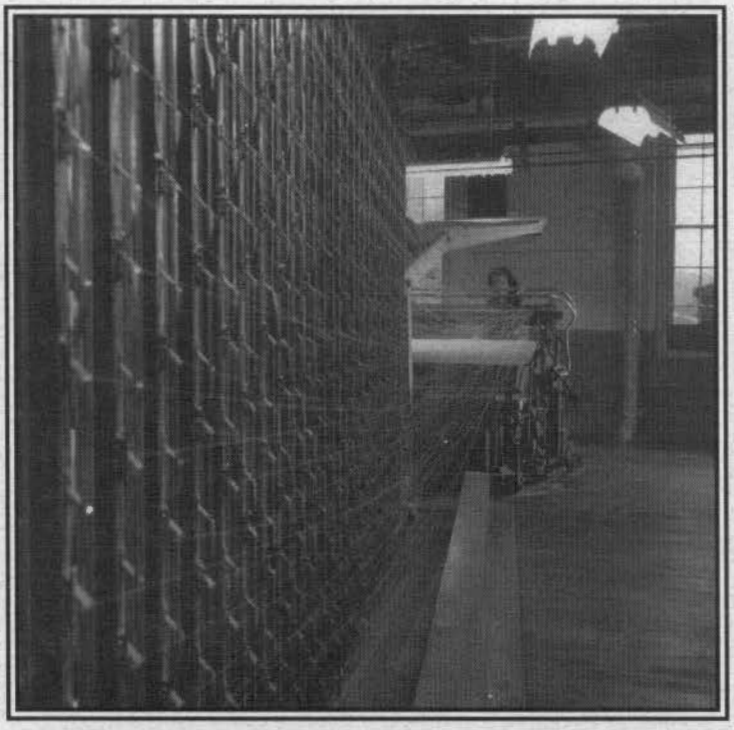


Left: Twisting machine. It starts with the cheese on the top and goes down to bobbins on the lower right.

Right: Spool machine (a different process). The spinning bobbins on the bottom row make a spool on the top which goes to a "warping tender" where beams are made for the slashing process. Spinning cheeses on the top row are converted into a finer twisted thread on the bottom.

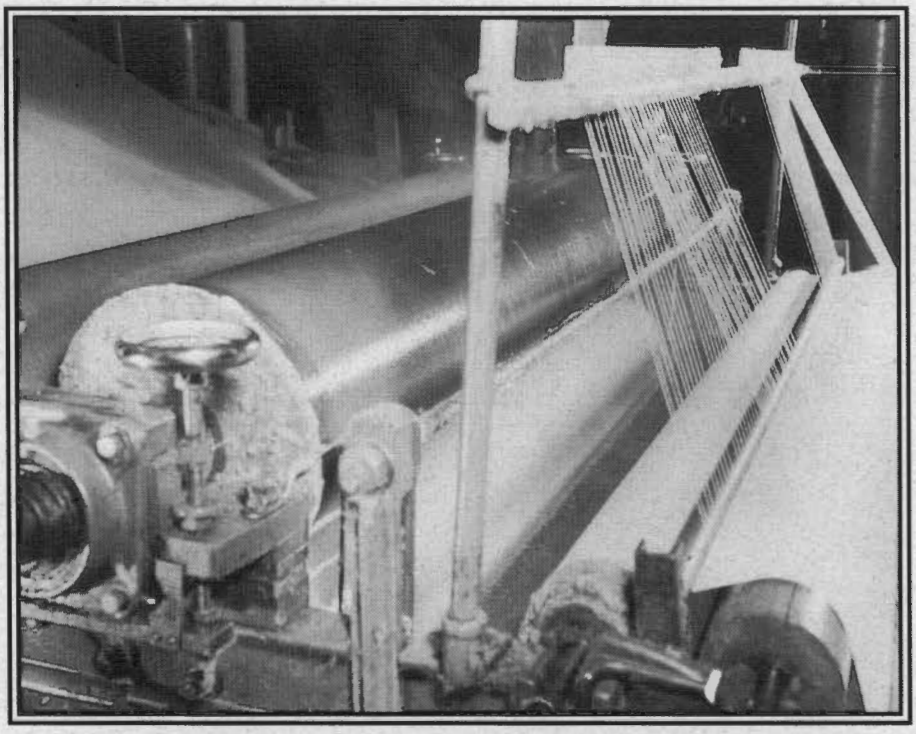


Above: The cotton has now reached the stage called a "cheese". The worker is feeding the cotton off the bobbins in the bin into the machine called a "spooler".

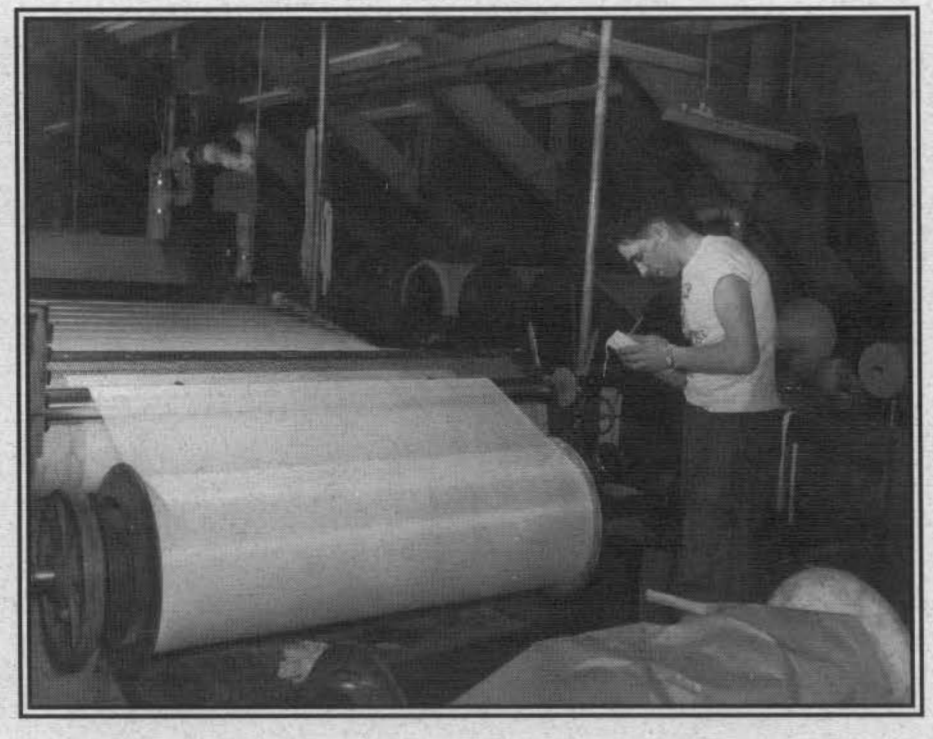


Left: This shows the back of the warping machine at Edwards Mill. There could be as many as 600 ends of yarn to make a beam.

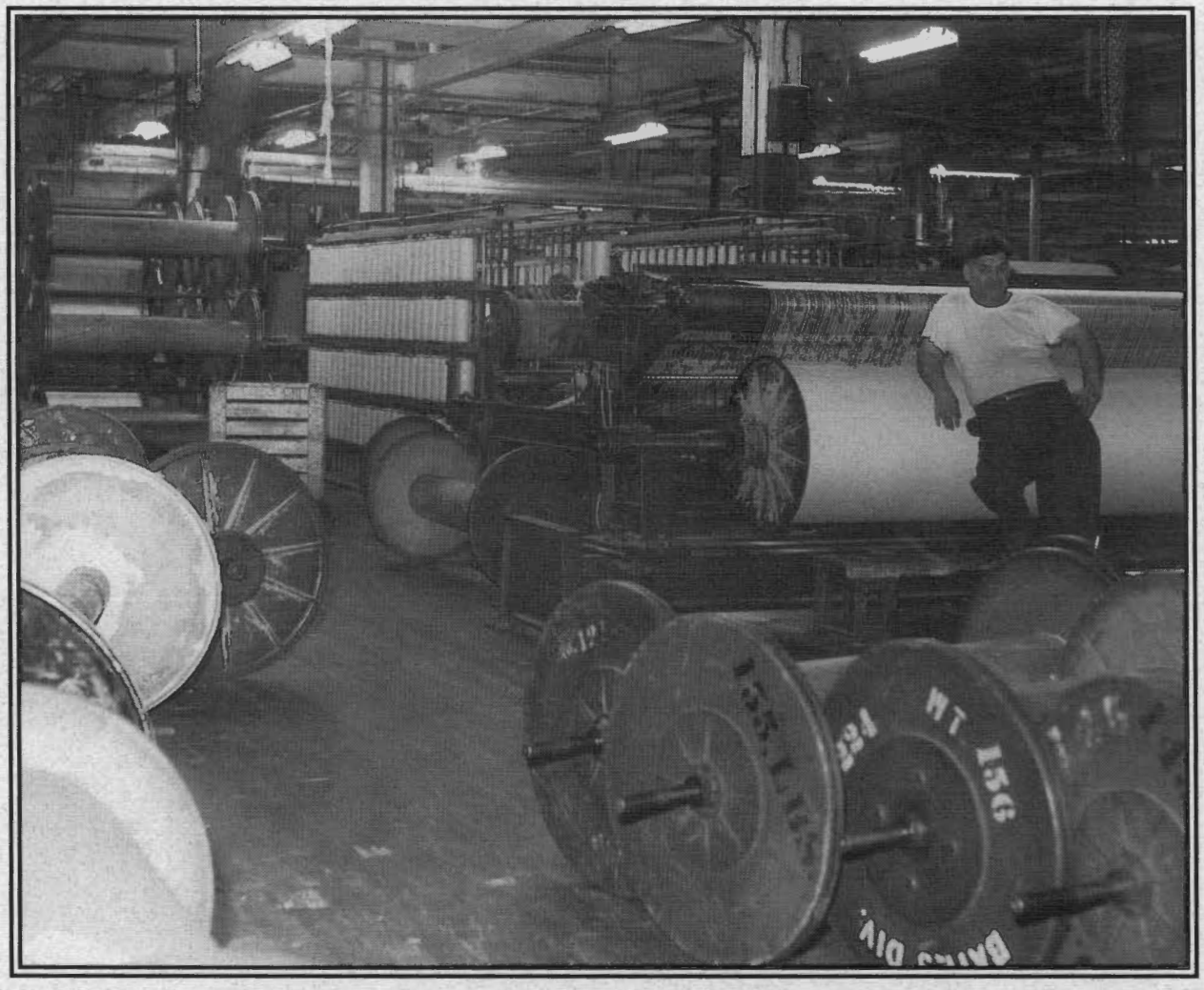
Left: The thread is being starched. Notice the hot steam rising in the upper center of the photo. The machine is going right to left. (Incidentally, one of the starch man's jobs was to put out the flag on the building before the work started.)



Right: The cotton thread has now become a beam ready to be doffed and is ready to go to the weave room.



Left: Roger Rioux at Androscoggin is checking the beam before the material goes to the weave room.



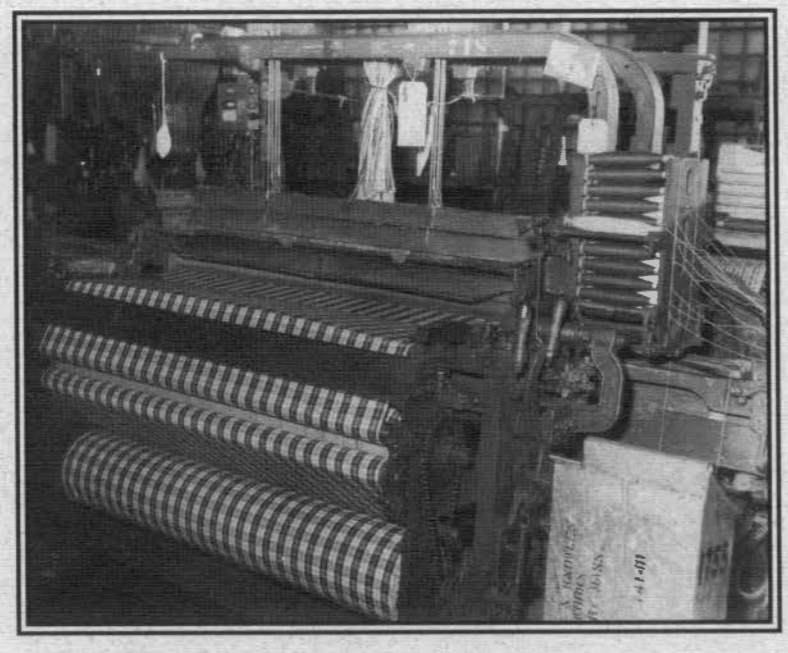
Above: Thread from the bobbins at the center rear is going through a machine to make a top beam, particularly for the Jacquard weave on a Washington bedspread. It is intended to make a knitted effect.

Next page: Delia Lambert is tending the "Battery Operator", a circular holder of bobbins. When a bobbin is about empty, it is automatically ejected into a box below and a full one is inserted so the thread is not broken, and the loom starts up again. A worker tended about 50 looms.

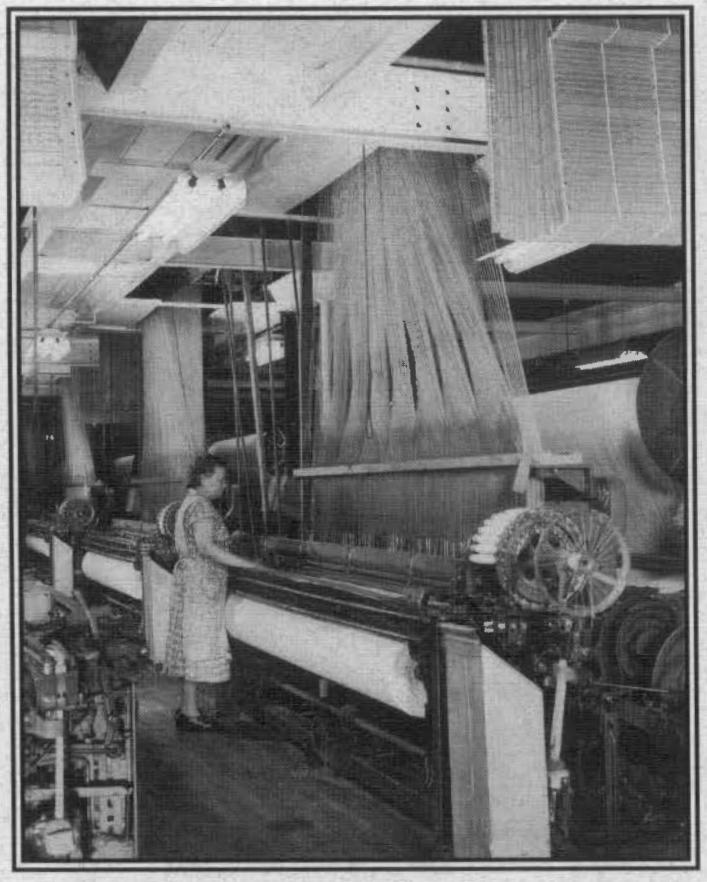
Weaving Room

Chapter 2

Right: Colored bobbins at the upper right are being used in making a checkered tablecloth at Bates Mill. Used bobbins fall into the box on the right side.

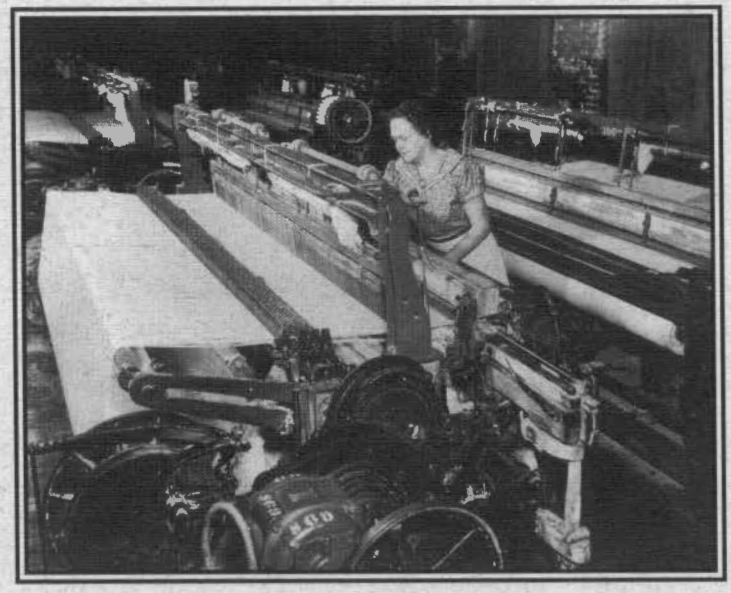


Left: Albert Lizotte is preparing a Jacquard card by following the pattern in front of him. He punches holes in the cards to control the pattern of the fabric to be woven. The operation is called a piano cutter, probably because of the similarity to a player piano card.

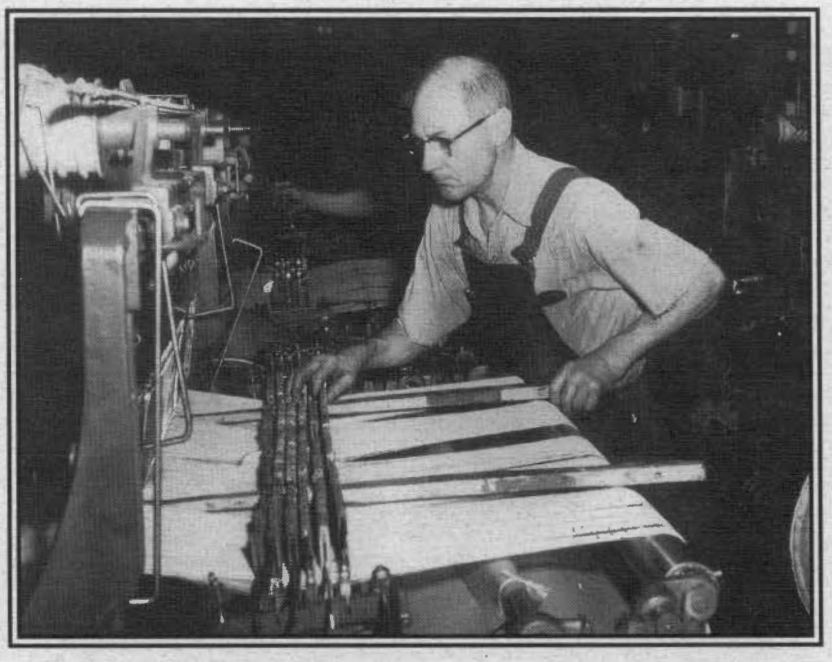


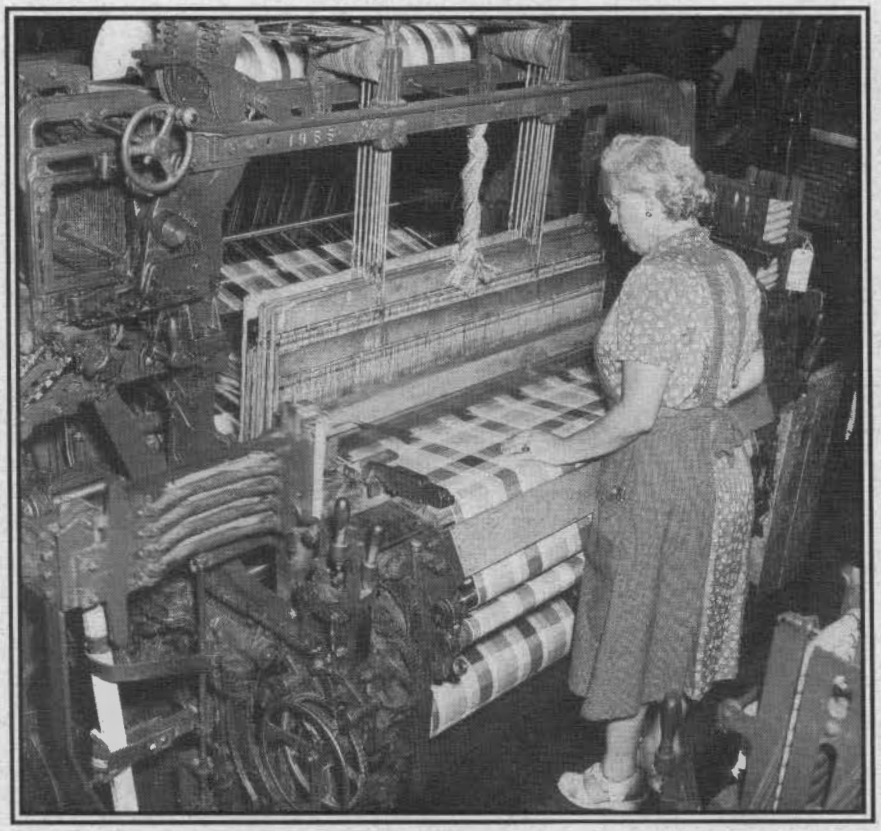
Left: Jacquard weaving at Bates Mill. The punched cards are at the top right of the photo. The similar cards in the middle of the picture are controlling the pattern being woven by the loom into a bedspread.

Right: This is a loom for weaving sheeting or tablecloths. A woman would tend at least 10 to 12 looms, depending on the width of the cloth.



Right: The warp tyer attaches a new warp to the loom. (Romeo Bureau)





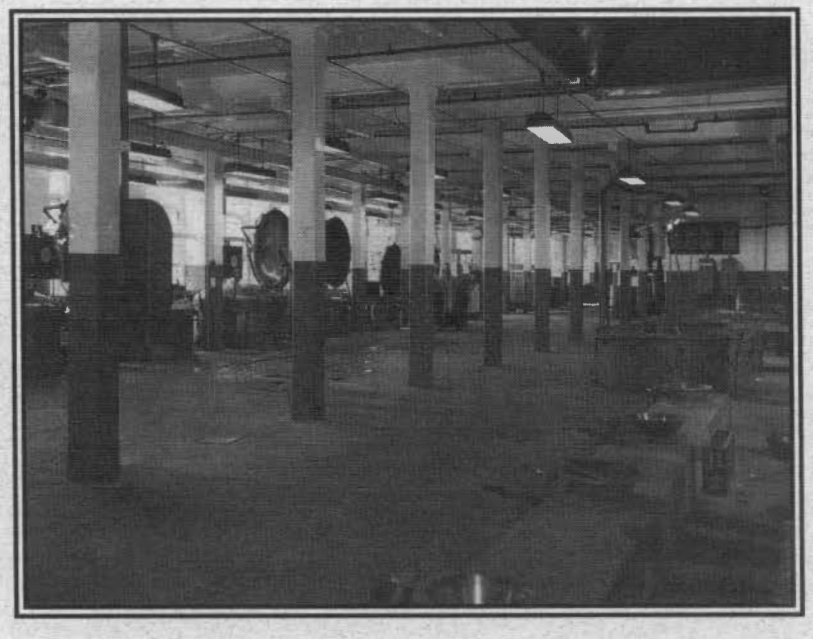
Left: A woman is checking cloth on the loom. Four colors change automatically when the Jacquard card on the far left demands.
The weave room at the Hill Mill had 6 rooms of small looms. One woman might tend 90 looms while at Bates it would be 20 of a larger size. These workers were the best paid workers, other than stitchers.

Dye Room

Chapter 3

Previous page: These barrels contain different colors of dye for whatever purpose was needed. Colors are indicated by the numbers on the barrels.

Right: These are "cheeses" of yarn which have been dyed five different colors. Next they need to be put on bobbins for warping and then weaving.



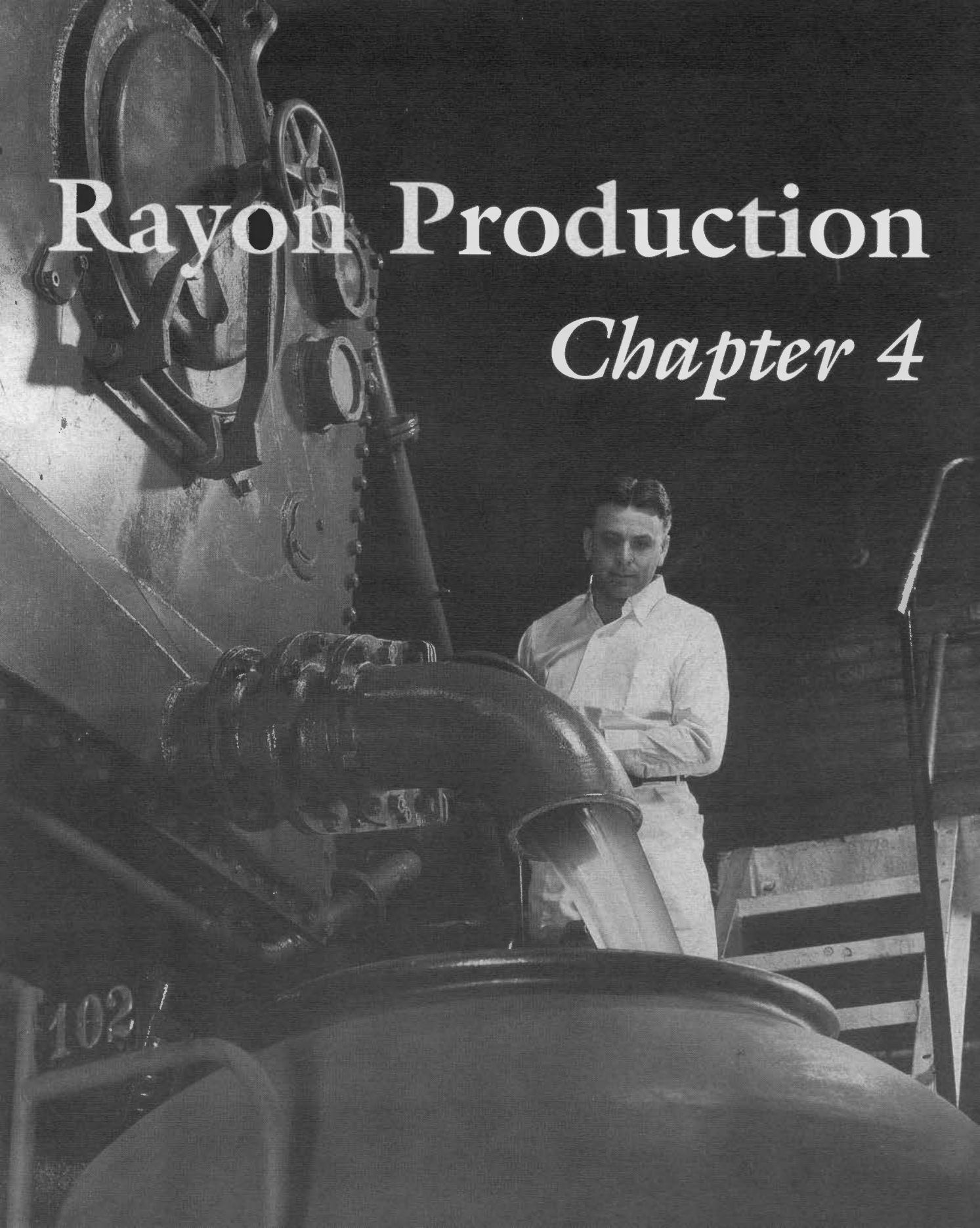
Left: On the left side of the room are vats into which yarn cheeses are placed to be dyed. A hoist picks them up to place them in the cylinder.

Corded material for bedspreads is woven first and then dyed.

This department was located in the basement of the Bates Mill. It needed to be near the canal in order to get plentiful water in and out. The dye was said to be non-toxic.

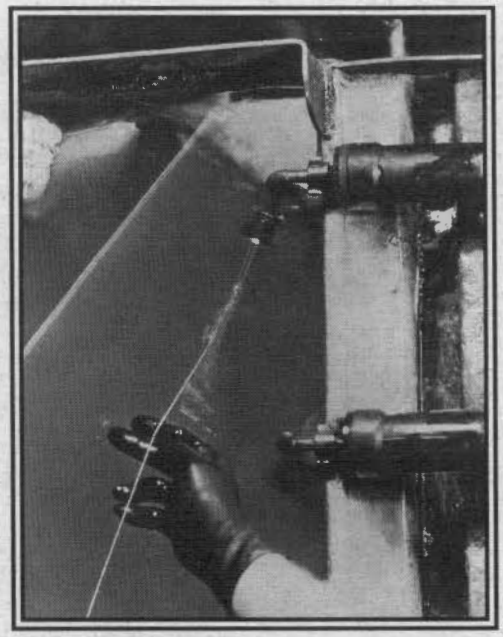
Rayon Production

Chapter 4



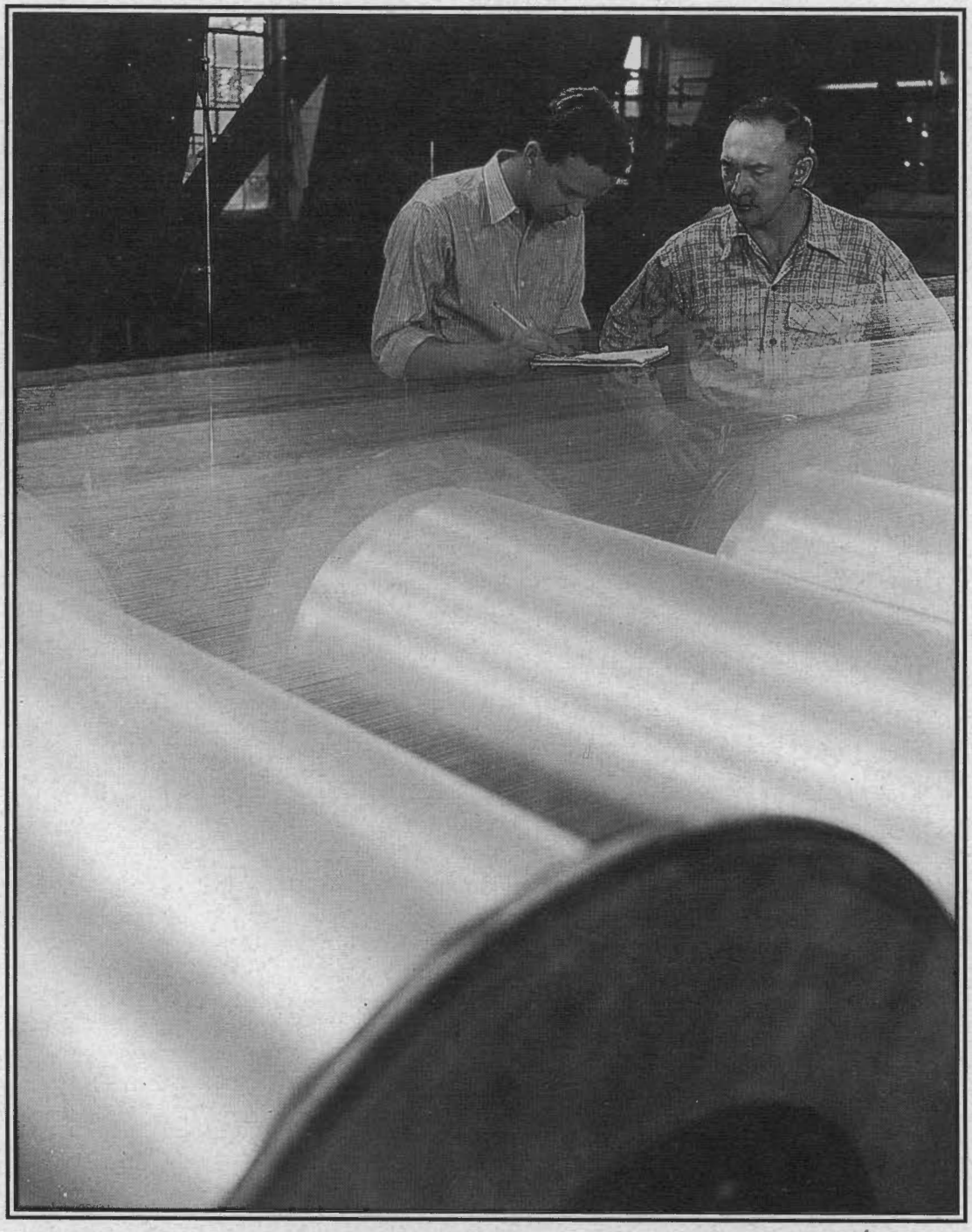
Previous page: The attendant is making thread from the liquid rayon viscose in the vat—a very different process from the cotton of most of the Bates Mills.

Right: The thread is coming from a machine which converted it from a chemical. The spinerette (with the rubber gloves) is twisting the yarn as it is ejected from the vat.



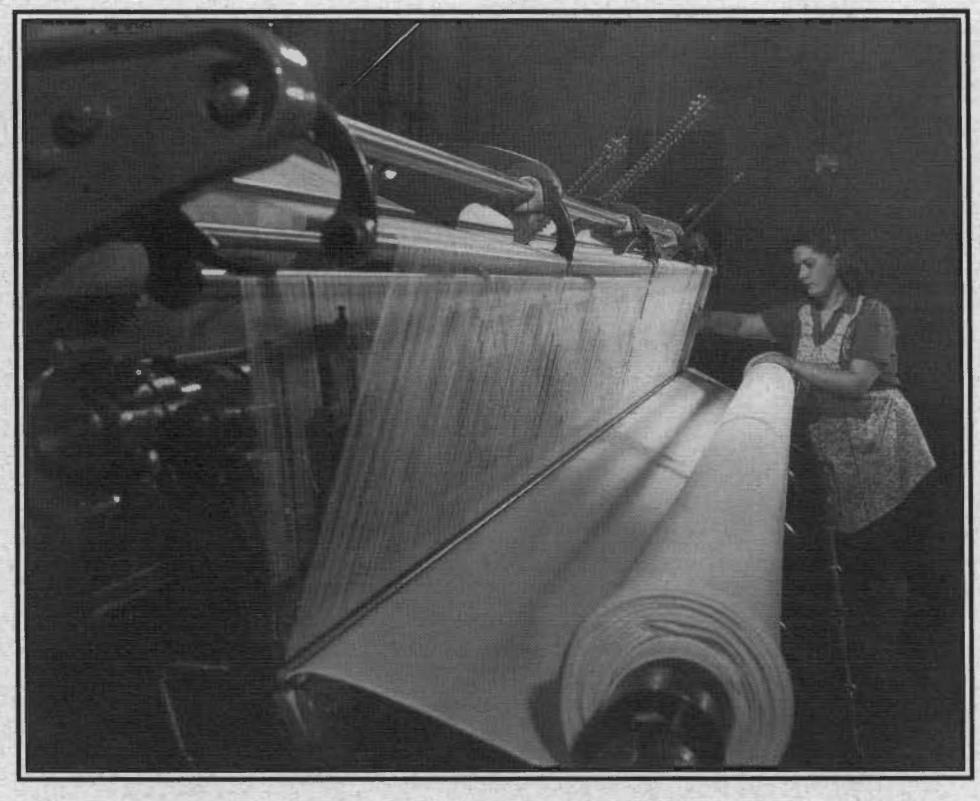
Left: The slasher (Phillippe Allen) puts on a coating to stiffen the thread which is moving from left to right to a finished beam.

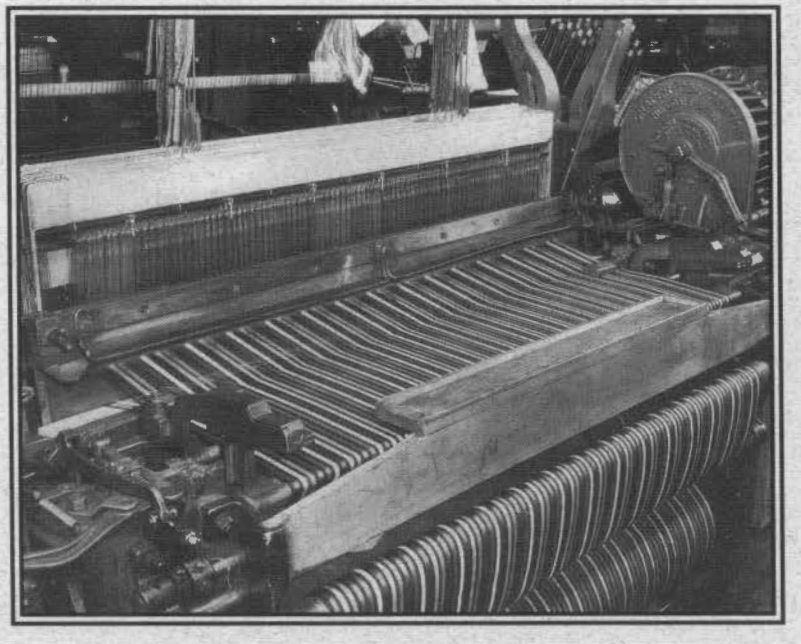
The Androscoggin Mill was the only one producing rayon fabric except for one room at Bates for a short time.



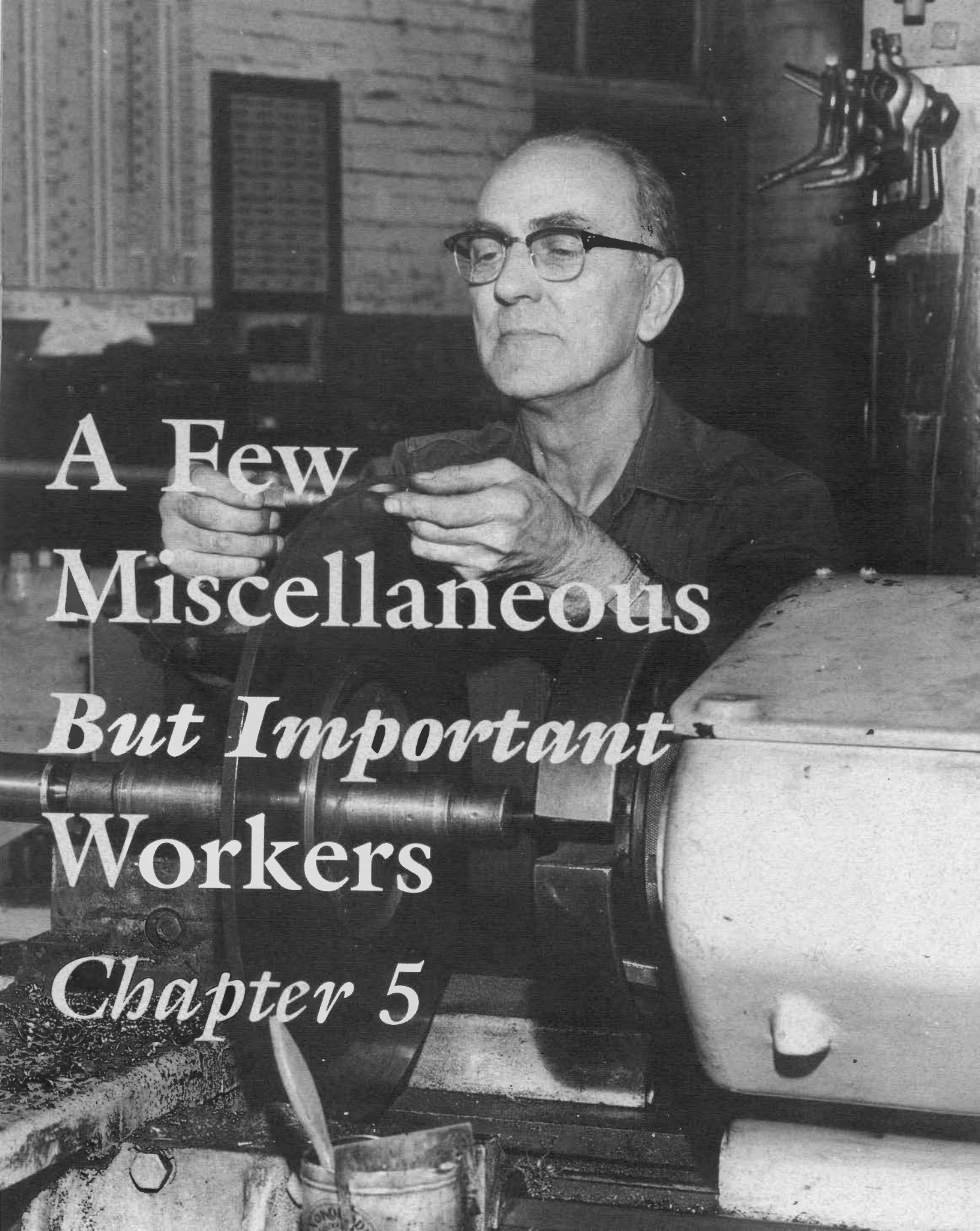
Above: This shows the back end of the slasher manned by Donat Gagne and _____.

Right: Theresa Nadeau is weaving on a Tricot machine.





Left: This is weaving of a multi-colored material.



A Few Miscellaneous *But Important* Workers

Chapter 5

Previous page: Clyde Simmons, a repair machinist, is needed to keep equipment running smoothly.

Above: The Health Clinic. The employees are waiting in line for flu shots probably.

Left: A worker is awaiting Agatha Cloutier R.N. to use the heat lamp.

Right: A design studio is essential to development of new products.

Next page: Company store usually located in Bates, but at times in Hill. All employees were entitled to a 10% discount

Packing and Shipping

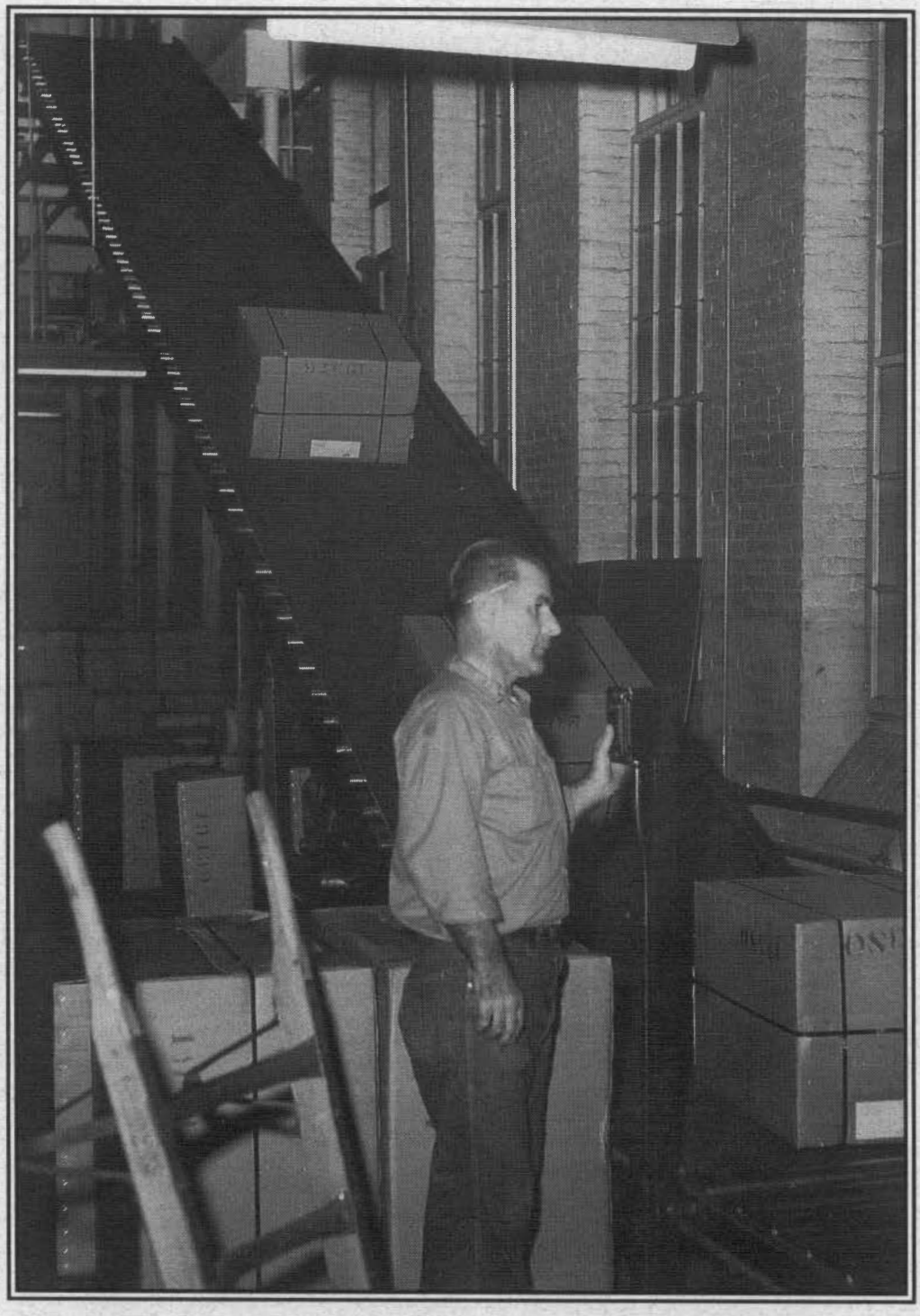
Chapter 6

Right: Storage Room. The finished products are individually wrapped ready to be shipped out to fill an order.

Left: The man on the left (Richard Grant) is filling an order for a buyer.

Left: In the sample department a product is being shown to a prospective buyer.

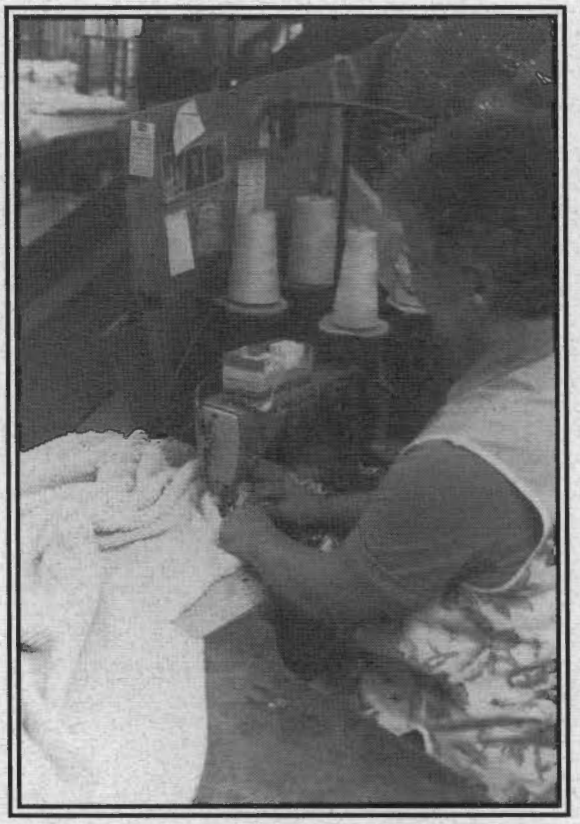
Right: The three men are packing products in cartons ready to ship. Antonio Ferland in rear with Michael Morin and Norman Berube.



Above: Finished products are going up a conveyer belt to the main floor to be placed on trucks for shipment. (Dorian Dumont)

Products
Chapter 7

Right: L. Blais sewing double knit fringe on a Washington spread in the cloth room at Bates.



Left: Bedspread and matching curtains won first prize in 1966 at Bates Back to School display contest in New York.

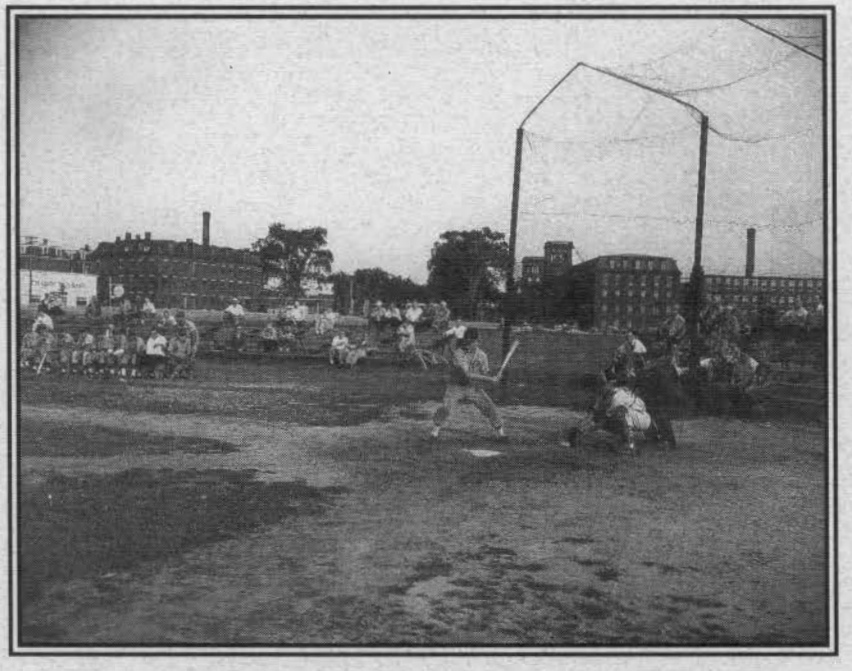
Spare Time Activities

Chapter 8

Previous page: Snowshoer. Notice the black heavy line behind his legs. It is the steam pipe from Bates to Hill to Androscoggin.

Right: Bates Club House located in Cloutier's Field next to Cedar Street.

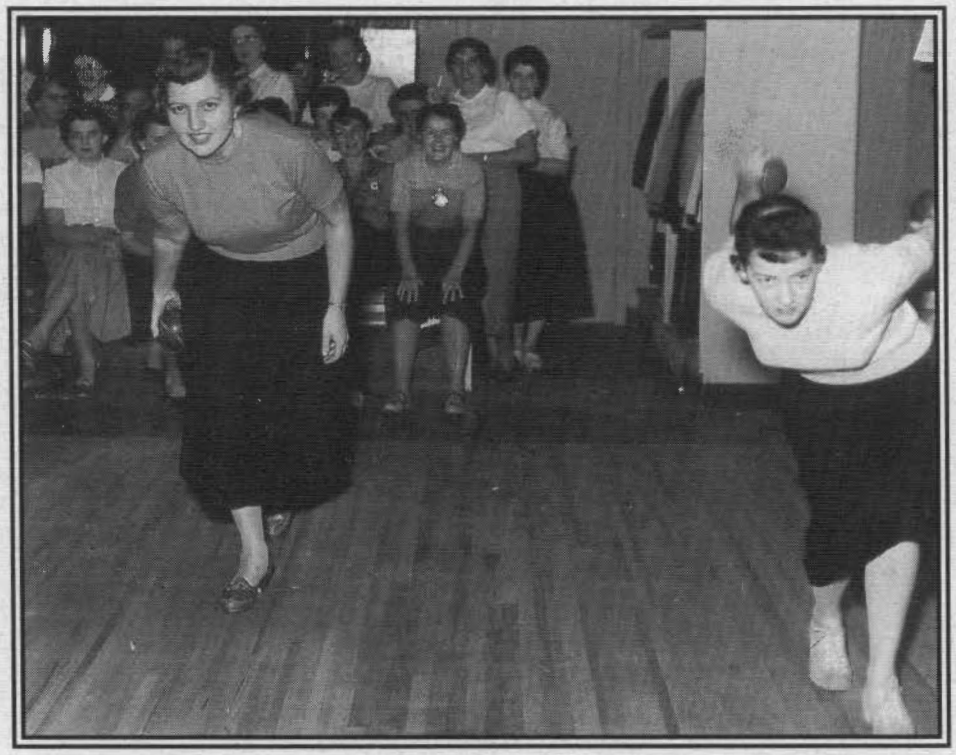
Above: Boy Scout Troop with Donat Boisvert, Superintendent of the Yards Department.



Left: Baseball on Cloutier Field. Jim Bouchles managed the team ten seasons. In 1954 they won Yankee Amateur Baseball Congress of Northern New England.

Above: Hockey Team 1955–56. Second Row Manager Larry Proteau and Chuck Poirier 6th. First Row #2 is Ray Marcotte, #6 is R. Chalifoux.

Right: Golf Team Left to right Merton Parker, Tom Crowley, Ken Dumais, Larry Burgage, Mike Casey, Guy Goulet.



Left: Bowling Team 1956 from Bates Mill. Left Elinor Woodcok, and right Terry Silvia.

Above: Annual Service Night Dinner 1956. Third from left is Erwin Nason (Head Electrician at Bates), fifth is Lucien Martineau (Loom Fixer), and eighth is Adelard McClure (Shift Supervisor).

Right: Barbara Pendleton sings for a WGAN broadcast.

Above: Christmas Party of Hill employees.

Above: High School students touring the mill complex with Maurice Hemond, shift supervisor.

Left: Teachers touring the mill during Business Education Day. Left, Geneva Kirk, Fred McCormack, _____, _____, _____, and _____.

Above: Bates Division participated in Community Chest. Left to right T. Silvia, _____, W. Asselin, _____, T. Nadeau, M. Lemire, R. Guilman, L. Blais, L. Burgess, _____.

Above: Bates Mill Cloth Room Christmas Party 1962. Row one G. Poulin, M.S. Asselin, J. Goulet, L. Brown, M. Moreau, L. Schulze. Row two C. Breault, R. Lebrun, L. Blais, G. Fournier, G. Bouchard.

Left: L. Blais, a reporter and a camera man in the cloth room of Bates. (1970)

Time To Go Home Now!

Above: Note the clothing of the workers. When they arrived for work they were dressed like this. They hung the good clothes on hooks, changed to work clothes and reversed at the end of the day. Women wore skirts until a machine accident caused a change to pant outfits.