HISTORIC LEWISTON
A Textile City in Transition
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by James S. Leamon

Produced for the Lewiston Historical Commission
By Students in the Graphic Arts Department
Central Maine Vocational Technical Institute
Auburn, Maine 1976
Design, Layout, and Copy Preparation by Chris and Larry King
Halftones, Line Photography and Stripping by Larry King
Plating, Litho Presswork, and Binding by Dot Welch,
Patty Laverdiere, Barry Pollack and John Clark
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INTRODUCTION

Lewiston, like any city, is a living organism; it is constantly changing. When change ceases, the organism is dead. The history of Lewiston, therefore, is the study of origins and of changes. If they are to be meaningful, it is necessary to understand not merely what has taken place, but why things occurred, who was involved, and what impact these developments had. The following study of Lewiston outlines the major phases of the city's economic development from its agricultural origins down to its urban present.

Through the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Lewiston was merely a struggling rural village. About 1820 some local men successfully began to exploit the area's manufacturing opportunities. In 1845 Boston capitalists came on the scene. They financed the canals, developed the power, built new mills, and overnight transformed the agricultural village into Maine's leading textile center. It remained thus through the turn of the century until the mills experienced hard times during the 1920's. They remained in Lewiston only because certain national public utility interests found it more profitable to preserve them as consumers of power rather than to let them go. In 1955 this situation came to an end when control of the mills and control of power separated once and for all. Since then Lewiston's textile base has slipped away, leaving the city with the difficult task of re-establishing its economic reason for existence.

The attempt to bring the city's economic history into focus in so brief a survey is presumptuous indeed. No one is more aware than the author of the issues ignored and the sources left untouched. A hope exists, however, that some readers will be sufficiently interested or annoyed to investigate these issues and sources and make their findings known. Since J. G. Elder laid down his pen in the late nineteenth century, Lewiston history has suffered much neglect. Sources are readily available, however. Much of the Lewiston Journal is on microfilm, the official records of the town and city governments exist in the City Building, and many records of the leading mills are now in the Lewiston Public Library and in the Maine Historical Society in Portland. The Androscoggin County Historical Society in Auburn is also a rich repository of Lewistonia.

A growing number of scholars are beginning to take advantage of these materials, and on their efforts this study heavily relies. Sue Ryan, Daniel Asselin, Sharon Earley, and Margaret Buker as students at Bates College, were a testimony to the truism that teaching is a two-way process in which the instructor is often the chief beneficiary. Many others have also contributed to this effort: H. L. Gosselin, former Assistant to the President of
Bates Manufacturing Company, and Irvin Miller, recent Vice President and Treasurer of that firm, were both invaluable in providing access to data on the mills. The Director of Lewiston’s Department of Economic Development, Frank O’Connell, and William O’Connell of the city’s Planning Department supplied information on Lewiston’s modern economic trends. Clarence March, Curator of the Androscoggin County Historical Society, and Ralph Skinner of Auburn were of assistance on the early history of the area. Earl Shettleworth of the Maine Historic Preservation Commission also contributed important information on the city’s past. The author is also indebted to his colleague Christine Holden, to Brian Lister, University of Maine at Farmington, and to Robert Larrabee, Bates Manufacturing Company, for their efforts to save him from errors of fact and grammar. Recognition should also go to Lewiston’s Mayor and Board of Aldermen. Their patience and financial assistance have supported the Historical Commission in its efforts to publish a series of pamphlets on historic Lewiston — of which this study is one part. Historical Commission members Richard Gross and Gridley Barrows have made significant contributions to the literary and to the pictorial aspects of this study.
Picture Credits

Lewiston Falls; Benjamin E. Bates; Work Notice; View of Canal Street, 1890; Employees of the Hill Mill; Herman Ruhm, Jr.; Robert Braun; Lester Martin, Air View of Lewiston, Courtesy of Bates Manufacturing Company, Bates Manufacturing Company Historical File.


Davis Map of Lewiston, Old Davis House, 1832 Map of Lewiston, courtesy of Androscoggin County Historical Society.

Residence for the Agent of the Bates Mill, courtesy of Sts. Peter and Paul Church.

Pennell Residence, 70 Horton Street, courtesy of Fortin Funeral Directors.

Davis Cemetery, Allen’s Cash Market, courtesy of Gridley Barrows, photographer.

Hathorn Hall, courtesy of Bates College Alumni Office.

Walter S. Wyman, courtesy of Central Maine Power Company.

Samuel Insull, courtesy of Samuel Insull, Jr.

Map of Lewiston, centerfold, drawn by Blanche Biker, Lewiston Planning Department.
LEWISTON'S AGRICULTURAL ORIGINS

During the latter half of the eighteenth century settlers were flocking into that part of Massachusetts called the District of Maine. Some were returning to rebuild towns shattered in the Indian wars; some were war veterans taking advantage of government land grants; still others came seeking less congested areas of settlement. In 1765 Maine’s population was an estimated 21,000. By 1776 the number had doubled, and by 1790 the figure reached 96,540. Companies of land speculators encouraged this influx of people in hopes of profiting from their vast claims to great sections of the area.

One of these land companies, the Pejepscot Proprietors, issued a grant on January 28, 1768 for a tract of land about five miles square along the eastern side of the Androscoggin River starting at the river’s “upper” or “twenty mile” falls. The recipients were two land developers from Newbury, Massachusetts, Jonathan Bagley and Moses Little. Both men were members of the Pejepscot Company and had discovered the potential of the Androscoggin region when they had served the colonial government as Deputy Surveyors of the Woods. Their grant allowed them six years in which to settle fifty families on the tract, each in their own house. The deed further required the building of a road to join with one from the Pejepscot settlement at Topsham and, for no apparent reason, stipulated that the new settlement be named “Lewiston.” Sometime later, a more imaginative generation invented the story of the Indian, Lewis, who plunged to his death and to immortality over the falls, thereby leaving his name to the town.

Paul Hildreth, a native of Dracut, Massachusetts, was the first settler to locate in “Lewistown.” He arrived with his family in 1770 and built a cabin on the bank of the Androscoggin across from the place where the Little Androscoggin joins the main branch, near the present site of the Continental Mill. Fire destroyed the cabin that autumn, but the Hildreths wintered in New Gloucester and returned to Lewiston the following spring to rebuild. In time Hildreth became the operator of a ferry that crossed the river close by his house. Although he sold both house and ferry in 1795, Hildreth remained in Lewiston until 1802 when he moved his family to Gardiner. There he died about 1830.

Several others from the Dracut area followed the Hildreths to Lewiston. Lawrence Harris, Asa Varnum, and Jesse Wright all settled with their families. The Massachusetts towns of Newbury and Gloucester were also well represented among the early settlers, probably because the proprietors also came from that region. The settlement’s population grew rapidly at first. In 1790 there were 532 residents. Five years later Lewiston was officially incorporated as a town, and in 1800 its population reached 948. However, it took another decade before the inhabitants numbered 1038.
Lewiston’s uneven growth rate may have occurred in part from the disputes over land titles that plagued the early proprietors. Apparently Bagley and Little failed to fulfill all the terms of their grant, for in 1771, three years before the deadline, the Pejepscot Company rescinded their title. Nonetheless, Little and Bagley’s heirs secured a belated confirmation of their grant in 1790. Bagley died in 1780, but Little and his relatives remained active in the Pejepscot Company and in buying back land and mill sites that had been sold to original settlers.  

The Pejepscot Company, meanwhile, had troubles of its own. It was enmeshed in legal controversy with competing land companies whose claims overlapped those of The Pejepscot group. At the same time the Pejepscot Company was engaged in a contest with the government of Massachusetts over the company’s ingenious assertion that it was the falls at Rumford, rather than those at Lewiston, that marked one of the boundaries of their original grant. After long litigation the Massachusetts government obtained a court decree rejecting the proprietors’ expanded version of their patent and ordering them to compensate settlers whose land titles and improvements were thereby invalidated. The land company was slow to comply with the court order. Bitterness about this, combined with the settlers’ local grievances against the Littles, spilled over into violence.

Map of Lewiston by Amos Davis, dated 1776, showing the location of the grist and saw mills and Paul Hildreth’s house.
A group of angry residents learned that the son of Moses Little, Colonel Josiah Little, an agent for the Pejepscot Proprietors as well as Lewiston’s largest land holder, was in town at the home of Ezra Purinton several miles below the falls. Disguising themselves as Indians, the settlers descended upon the Purinton house in the dead of night and demanded that Colonel Little appear before them. He, however, having no wish for such a confrontation, remained safely indoors. It was Ezra Purinton who faced the taunts and threats of the mob. They shot out some windows, threw rocks, and came close to setting the house on fire. Finally they withdrew leaving the house and its occupants shaken but intact.8

Purinton and Little later took legal action against the rioters. One of those arrested and convicted was David Hildreth, son of Lewiston’s first settler. The court sentenced him to “be set in some public place on the Gallows with a rope about his neck, and the other end therof cast over the Gallows, for the space of one hour; that he be imprisoned for the term of one year, ... [and] that he pay costs of prosecution. ... .”9

From his jail cell in Wiscasset, the young Hildreth wrote a pathetic, rambling letter to an acquaintance in Lewiston professing his innocence.10 In his defense there exists at least one diary whose author privately expressed his own sentiments and those of others, that Hildreth was indeed innocent.11

The bitterness toward the Pejepscot Company and its agents persisted even after they finally conveyed to the disgruntled settlers 20,000 acres as compensation for their invalid grants. As late as 1814 a fire of suspicious origin destroyed one of Colonel Little’s milling establishments.12
The legal troubles confronting the Pejepscot Proprietors and the resulting tensions with the settlers may have retarded Lewiston's growth. The town was further hampered by its isolated location. Although the Androscoggin River provided power for grist and saw mills, the river was difficult to navigate; and until the middle of the nineteenth century when railroads and manufacturing transformed the area, Lewiston remained basically a struggling, self-sufficient agricultural community.

Today there are few physical remains of early Lewiston. Only the old burying ground on Sabattus Street and the David Davis house on Main Street are readily evident. A tombstone in the old burying ground states: "Amos Davis 1741-1815 ... This ground was given by him to this town for a burial place." Amos Davis was one of Lewiston's early settlers. A native of Gloucester, Massachusetts he moved to New Gloucester in Maine and in 1774 to Lewiston, where he lived on what is now the corner of Wood and Sabattus Streets. In addition to being a farmer and a tanner Davis was also the surveyor who laid out the town for the proprietors, Bagley and Little. It may have been the latter who persuaded Davis to move to Lewiston, for Davis' diary indicates he had worked for Little as far back as 1764. 13
Amos Davis was a leading member of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, a religious sect that flourished in early Lewiston. On the site of what became the old burying ground, Davis erected at his own expense a building that the Quakers used as a meeting house until in 1811 they moved to larger quarters on the old Lisbon Road. The Davis building also doubled as a school house, and indicates the private and rather haphazard nature of the town's early system of education. Not until 1795 did Lewiston tax itself to support public education. Since Lewiston was incorporated as a town on February 18 of that year, it is probable that the town's support of public education was a legal requirement of its new status rather than a sudden burst of enthusiasm for education in general.

Amos Davis' son, David, is among the many Lewiston pioneers buried in the Davis cemetery. Mount David, Davis Mountain, or David's Mountain, the rocky prominence on the Bates College campus, perpetuates his name. It was part of the David Davis farm that extended from Jepson Brook to Whipple Street and from what is now College Street to the Androscoggin River. On the "mountain" Davis pastured his horses and cattle amid the tall pines that grew there. Davis himself lived in a house which still stands at the corner of Main and Whipple Streets. Built around 1800, it was once a handsome, substantial structure with portico and sidelights to the front door. At present a variety store and a barber shop occupy the building. Considerable imagination is required to appreciate the building's original architectural lines.
The architecture of several other residences along outer Main, College, Sabattus, and Webster Streets reflect Lewiston's early agricultural origins. Some of these are late eighteenth and early nineteenth century farm houses, modest story-and-a-half frame dwellings. Usually, the only hint of a conscious architectural "style" comes in positioning the building gable-end to the road, and in the treatment of cornices, door and window trim. Here the builders demonstrated a classical, and thereby inexpensive, simplicity.

LEWISTON: THE TEXTILE CITY

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Lewiston emerged as a textile manufacturing center through several inter-related phases. Local businessmen initiated this transition during the period from 1819-1845. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, local capitalists became submerged in a group of more powerful regional entrepreneurs, chiefly from Boston. Under their leadership Lewiston entered its most dynamic period, which extended into the early decades of the next century. In their turn these Boston interests yielded control to financiers with truly national concerns in the late 1920's. This new phase was short-lived, however. Competition from abroad and from newer mills in the South, the Great Depression, and the development of synthetic fibers conspired against Lewiston's continued importance as a textile center. Since World War II the city's economic life has entered a fourth phase, aimed at developing a more diversified economy to replace the manufacture of textiles.

LOCAL INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT, 1819-1845

Local efforts to develop the river power at Lewiston for industrial purposes began early in the nineteenth century. The numerous members of the Little family, the Fryes, and the Garcelons all played essential roles. They were the ones who realized the industrial potential of the falls in the Androscoggin beyond the grist and saw mills that the agricultural community required.

As early as 1819 Michael Little established a small carding and fulling woolen mill. Dean Frye and his son, John, provided managerial skill that made the venture a success. Although the building burned in 1829, they replaced it with an even larger structure, and then in 1834 they incorporated as the Lewiston Falls Manufacturing Company. Samuel Pickard, an in-law of the Littles, was treasurer and Colonel John Frye agent. Among the investors were the Garcelons, William and his son, Alonzo. It was a thriving local enterprise, able to weather successfully two crises in 1837: a spring flood that collapsed one wall of the mill, and the national financial panic of that year. 

The manufacture of cotton in Lewiston had very humble origins in the third floor of a wooden structure built close to the falls. Here Ephraim Wood began the manufacture of cotton warps and batting in 1836. His successor, Joseph Harding, added three looms in 1844, thereby winning the distinction of being the first in Lewiston to produce cotton cloth. The success of these efforts induced Lewiston’s leading entrepreneurs, Edward Little, John Frye, Alonzo Garcelon, James Lowell, Daniel Briggs, and others, to engage in similar activity. In 1845 they incorporated as the Lewiston Falls Cotton Mill Company and began to construct a mill. The new cotton mill went into operation the following year, but the proprietors sold out to a new organization, the Lewiston Water Power Company, even before the mill building was complete. 17
The Lewiston Water Power Company, later re-organized as the Franklin Company, was the business organization which, in its collective capacity as well as in its component parts, came to dominate the life of Lewiston. Originally this enterprise was composed of local capitalists, chiefly the Little family: Edward, Josiah of Minot, Josiah of Newbury, Massachusetts, Thomas, Edward T., and Samuel Pickard. These were the men who had long been ambitious to develop the power site at the falls. Many had been actively buying up strategic land sites and investing in early manufacturing enterprises. In 1836 they devised a Grand Design in the form of a business organization, the very name of which reveals the impressive scope of their vision: The Great Androscoggin Falls, Dam, Lock, and Canal Company. Following the pattern of Lawerence and of Lowell in Massachusetts, they laid out extensive plans for canals, dams, mill sites, and for the sale of power. However, the vision was beyond their means; they lacked the capital and the technical capacity to realize their ambitions. Probably the depression of 1837 was also a deterrent.

In 1845 the proprietors of the Great Androscoggin Falls, Dam, Lock, and Canal Company re-organized themselves as the Lewiston Water Power Company. Much of the new stock they sold in Boston, thereby inducing Boston capital and expertise to underwrite their schemes in Lewiston. Most important of the Boston investors were Thomas J. Hill, Lyman Nichols, George L. Ward, Alexander De Witt, and especially Benjamin E. Bates.

Bates came to inspect the area in 1847. Although he found Lewiston a predominantly agricultural community, there were signs of vitality. The population was beginning a period of rapid growth. In the decade of the 1840's the town expanded from 1,810 to 4,854 residents. Among these existed a group of far-sighted entrepreneurs whose energies had already created a woolen mill and a new cotton mill that stood along the river bank next to the grist and saw mills. In addition these local leaders had acquired legal control of the river and rights of development in the Lewiston Water Power Company.

Benjamin Bates could not have ignored the fact that the railroad was rapidly ending Lewiston's comparative geographic isolation. In 1845 the Maine Legislature chartered the Atlantic and St. Lawrence line to run from Portland to Montreal. Alonzo Garcelon, Samuel Pickard, and Edward Little actively promoted the enterprise in hopes that it would connect with Lewiston. Garcelon became the firm's local agent. When the Atlantic and St. Lawrence by-passed Lewiston some five miles to the west, Garcelon shifted his attentions to the new Androscoggin and Kennebec Railroad that was chartered the same year Bates visited Lewiston, 1847. By the end of the
following year the new line linked Lewiston with the Atlantic and St. Lawrence and was building toward Waterville. Later Garcelon became president of yet another new railroad, the Androscoggin, which ran from Leeds through Jay Bridge to Phillips and the Rangeley region. In 1861 this line passed through Lewiston while extending its connections to Brunswick, thereby giving Lewiston yet another railroad. The era of these small independent lines did not last long. They required large amounts of capital and regional organization. By the early 1870's most had become absorbed into larger corporate structures such as the Maine Central. Nonetheless, these small independent lines and their local promoters had accomplished an essential task in ending Lewiston's economic isolation.

Benjamin Bates returned to Boston in 1847 filled with enthusiasm for the economic potential he found in Lewiston. Although he managed to raise half a million dollars at once, he failed to enlist big capital from cities like Lawrence and Lowell. Possibly the financiers there feared competition from Lewiston. Probably they found western railroads a more attractive investment for their surplus capital. The result was that Bates had to advance his personal credit for much of Lewiston's early development. He thereby became the dominant personality within the Lewiston Water Power Company as that organization led Lewiston into its "Golden Age." Yet the impressive expansion which the city experienced after 1850 should not obscure the fact that it was squarely based on the solid accomplishments of Lewiston's local businessmen working with their own limited capital and unlimited vision of the future.
The seventy-five years following 1850 were ones of momentous expansion for Lewiston. However, the price was high. The Boston-based financiers not only transformed Lewiston into a major textile center, but in the process they also turned it into a “company town.” A single outstanding economic organization excercised predominant control over Lewiston as chief employer, major landholder and landlord, and most important taxpayer. These several roles permitted the Boston capitalists to dominate the city’s financial institutions, its political life, and its religious and intellectual activities.

The essential means of control was the Lewiston Water Power Company that owned most of the land on which Lewiston was built, the mill sites along the river, and the rights to the power from the river. The leading members of this corporation now began forming companies in their individual capacities to exploit the industrial potential of the area. Benjamin Bates, Thomas Hill, and others of the Power Company leased to each other mill sites and power rights. The Bates and the Hill Companies each secured charters of incorporation in 1850, and a third firm, called the Arkwright Company, in 1854. However, this latter organization did not do any business until, as the Androscoggin Company, it built a mill that began operating in 1861.27

This delay and the change in name was probably related to a larger corporate shake-up by which the Lewiston Water Power Company became the Franklin Water Power Company in 1857. A nation-wide financial panic in that year prompted the transition. The Lewiston Water Power Company stockholders had just voted themselves a sizeable dividend rather than plow profits back into capital investment. During the panic year the firm became embarrassed by a lack of operating capital. The principal stockholders therefore decided to scrap the old company and to re-organize under the Franklin Water Power Company, which Bates and his associates had chartered in 1854 to develop power on the Little Androscoggin River.28 Strengthened by the new name and a new stock issue, the same personnel resumed creating new companies and constructing new mills. The Lewiston Bleachery was chartered in 1860, the Androscoggin Mill started up the following year, and in 1865 the Bates group purchased an older mill and re-organized and expanded it as the Continental. In each case the directors included Benjamin Bates, usually associated with Lyman Nichols, George L. Ward, and Thomas J. Hill.29 To be sure, other industrial establishments existed in Lewiston, but these were the giants who dominated the scene economically and physically.

A twelve hour working day at the Lewiston Bagging Mill.
NOTICE.

On and after April 1, 1854, the Bagging Mill will start at 15 minutes past 6 A. M., and run till 12 M. An intermission of 45 Minutes will be given for dinner. After dinner the Mills will start at 15 minutes before 1 o'clock, and run till 7 P. M.

On Saturdays the time for stopping work will be 30 minutes past 6 P. M.

M. FRENCH, Agent.
Lewiston, March 22, 1854.
Their symbols of power were the huge five and six storied brick mills with their Italianate towers and mansard roofs that lined the canal. In the first full year of operation the Bates Mill paid a net profit of $33,000. With two mills operating in 1856 the company enjoyed profits of more than $112,000. In 1857 the Bates Company paid $5,258 in municipal taxes, which amounted to a quarter of the city's tax bill. The Franklin, Bates, and Hill Companies together accounted for over one half of Lewiston's tax receipts.

In 1857 occurred a panic; during the second half of the year profits for the Bates Company dropped to $1,585.93. Six hundred of the company's one thousand employees had to be released, and those lucky enough to keep their jobs were on a four day week. However, prosperity soon returned, and by 1860 the company's profits had passed $200,000.

The Civil War disrupted cotton supplies for New England in general, but Lewiston experienced unusual prosperity. Bates and his associates, gambling on a long war, bought up huge stocks of cotton at twelve cents a pound when the struggle began. By 1864 cotton was worth seventy cents, and a
...and the Androscoggin Mill.

year later it was over a dollar a pound. By contrast managers of mills in Lowell gambled on a short war; and when cotton prices reached thirty cents, they sold their surplus stock at what they considered a huge profit. The War continued, and soon they were trying to buy back at ninety cents the cotton they had sold at thirty. Many mills throughout the country were forced to shut down, and eventually even the well-stocked Lewiston mills ran at three-quarters capacity owing to the cotton scarcity. However, their profits were remarkable nonetheless. In 1862 the Bates Company netted over $400,000; in 1864 and 1865 profits were over $300,000.

Such figures help to explain why so many of Lewiston’s mills were built or expanded during the Civil War. The Androscoggin Mill #1, merely suggested in January of 1861, was ready to receive its machinery in November of that year, despite the fact that the builders even had to make their own bricks. Thanks to government war contracts and to stockpiled cotton supplies, the Androscoggin Mill paid for itself in fourteen months. The Bates Company erected its third mill in 1863; a year later the Hill Manufacturing Company constructed its second mill, consisting of six stories.
Adequate banking facilities were essential for business expansion, and an extremely close relationship existed among Lewiston’s Water Power Company, the textile mills, and the banking institutions. In 1852 Lewiston’s business leaders obtained a charter for the Lewiston Falls Bank, which in 1864 became the First National. Among the early directors were George L. Ward and Albert H. Kelsey, both of whom represented the Lewiston Water Power Company and the Bates, Hill, and Androscoggin interests. The reorganization of the bank in 1864 brought in as directors: A. D. Lockwood and J. G. Coburn, agents of the Hill and the Androscoggin Mills respectively, and Nathaniel W. Farwell, proprietor of the Bleachery. Although Benjamin Bates was not listed as a director, he was the bank’s largest stockholder, and George L. Ward served as his spokesman. Cyrus I. Barker, agent for the Bates and the Lewiston Bag Mills, was president of one bank and director of two more. Apparently the Manufacturers’ National Bank, founded in 1875, was exactly what the name implied. In most cases the leaders of these banking institutions were identical to those who owned the mills and controlled the area’s water power.

The economic power of these men and their mills literally transformed Lewiston. In 1850 although the town was expanding, its population had not yet reached 5,000. By 1900 it was a thriving industrial city of 23,761 people with 70% of its work force in the mills. In addition to the increase in size Lewiston experienced a dramatic change in its national and ethnic composition. The original factory operatives had been young Yankee girls drawn from the surrounding subsistence farms by the lure of cash wages. By modern standards pay was incredibly low; a weaver in 1860 averaged $4.00 a week. Nevertheless, many girls still managed to save enough to send money home. A working day was long, twelve to fourteen hours, six days a week in many cases. However, such conditions could not have been much different from life on the farm. Furthermore work in the early mills was not unpleasant. Girls tended three to four looms and still had time to cover for friends or to relax in the course of a day’s work.

Few of the Yankee girls regarded themselves as permanent factory labor. They often worked in the mills for specific, limited objectives; to help pay off family debts, to accumulate a dowry, or to finance higher education. The first girl to graduate from Bates College paid for her education in this manner. The girls often returned home during short times or depressions and frequently left to get married. To accommodate transients such as these, the mill corporations provided boarding houses that once lined the tree-shaded canal. In a fashion typical of the Victorian era these mill houses offered inexpensive, pleasant, but rigidly supervised living arrangements that guaranteed the residents' good health and sound morals.
Canal Street, Lewiston, about 1890. The Hill and Bates Mills on the right, company-built housing for employees on the left.

The arrival of numerous Irish in the 1850's created tensions and problems new to Lewiston. The Irish were generally unskilled, impoverished refugees from the potato famine in their homeland. In Lewiston the newspaper described them as day laborers excavating canal, mill, and house foundations for a dollar a day, while the women served as domestics in Yankee households. Although the Irish predominated in the less desirable jobs, such as in the Bleachery and gas works, they did not immediately displace the native Yankee operatives in the textile mills.45

The Irish did not seem to pose a serious economic threat in Lewiston's expanding economy, but they brought problems of another kind. For the first time, Lewiston had to contend with the issues of slum housing, sanitation, and public welfare. Without economic resources of their own the Irish settled on vacant lots where they built shacks in congested proximity one to another. Here in their various "patches," as their ghettos were called, they were easy prey to sickness and disease. In the cholera epidemic of 1854 two hundred of Lewiston's inhabitants, mostly Irish, died within several weeks.46

The municipal response to these problems was surprisingly liberal in a "laissez-faire" age. The town fathers set up a temporary "pest-house" for those stricken with disease and provided generous welfare support to the needy. In addition the city government resolved to employ the town's poor on the numerous public projects required by the growing municipality.47

To many of Lewiston's Yankee inhabitants, however, the presence of the Irish did present a real threat, if not economic, then social and cultural. Not only did the Irish require and accept public welfare, but they also brought with them an alien religion and outlandish customs, not the least of
which seemed to be an affinity for strong drink and petty crime. The Irish had little sympathy with the famous "Maine Law" imposing state-wide prohibition of alcoholic beverages. Their resistance to such "official morality" brought them into continuous conflict with public authority. In Lewiston anti-Irish sentiment exploded into violence in 1855 when a mob burned an Irish Catholic chapel on Lincoln Street. Albert H. Kelsey, the Lewiston Water Power Company's agent, recalled the incident many years later:

One night, someone set fire to the little church . . . . The alarm of fire was given and I hurried down to the scene. I found five or six hundred Lewiston people standing on the street opposite the burning building. They were hooting and yelling and jeering. The fire engine had come to the scene but someone had cut the hose. At that juncture I ordered out the hose from the Bates, as the building was almost directly in the rear of the mill. I posted men along the hose and told them that if anyone attempted to cut it, to hold those men on the premises at all hazards. Then I went to the end of the hose and took the nozzle. First of all I turned it across the street and swept that crowd of persons who stood there shouting in an insulting fashion. They scattered like flies before a shower. Then I put water on the fire. [But] the building was ruined. 48

The Irish remained subject to suspicion and discrimination, but popular attention in Lewiston gradually shifted to the crises leading to the Civil War. The Irish were left to make their own way as best they might into the fabric of Lewiston's changing society.

The most significant population change that the mills brought to Lewiston came with the influx of French-Canadians beginning in the late 1860's. Like the Irish before them the French-Canadians were attracted by the city's opportunities for employment, but unlike the Irish they were actively recruited by mill agents with whom the French-Canadians had a reputation for hard work and docility. 49 In the latter years of the nineteenth century very large numbers poured into the city. The Lewiston Weekly Journal kept rough estimates of the number of new arrivals. In 1871 it reported some 2,000 French-Canadians were in the city. For several years the number remained relatively stable, because in January, 1873 the paper indicated an increase of only 150 French-Canadian inhabitants. By April of that year, however, the rate of immigration had picked up. The paper counted between
2,600 and 2,700 French-speaking residents in the city and exclaimed they were arriving at the rate of 100 to 150 a day! If the reports were accurate, the pace slackened again, for by 1875 the Journal counted 3,000 French-Canadians in Lewiston.\textsuperscript{50}

In contrast to the state of Maine where population actually declined between 1860 and 1870, Lewiston experienced a population explosion of over 80\% in which her numbers swelled from 7,424 to 13,600. By 1880 Lewiston’s population topped 19,000.\textsuperscript{51} Foreign immigration accounted for a significant portion of this growth. In 1880 35\% of Lewiston’s total population was foreign born and during the next two decades that figure rose to almost 40\%.\textsuperscript{52} French-Canadians predominated, but around the turn of the century they were joined by Italians, Greeks, Lithuanians, and Jews.

The arrival of these groups distinctive in language, religion, and customs changed the face of Lewiston. Like the Irish most of these later immigrants lived in their own cultural enclaves. The French-Canadians and others experienced discrimination and friction in relations with the Irish and the Yankees, but they do not seem to have suffered major violence. Perhaps the Irish had “broken the ice,” and these later arrivals, by contrast, did not
appear so novel or so threatening to the old-time Lewiston residents. Yet these are the ones, especially the French-Canadians, who rapidly displaced Yankee labor in the mills.

Like many of the former operatives the new immigrants originally intended to return home after a short stay in Lewiston's mills. In fact, most remained to become a permanent urban work force. As such they faced a different situation than the Yankee girls. No longer did there exist a sense of identity and common interest between employer and his employees. The mill owner or his agent not only lived in a different section of town, but also attended a different church and even spoke a different language.

In addition to this growing social and cultural stratification, conditions of labor were changing. The mills were introducing more sophisticated machinery that was vastly more demanding of a worker's time and energy than had been the case in the preceding period. One result of the changing technology was that the mill worker faced a more disciplined and gruelling work situation. Furthermore, as a permanent urban worker these later immigrants were tied securely to the mills, without the easy alternative the Yankee girls had of returning home during times of slack employment.
The depressions of the 1870's and the 1890's brought short hours, wage cuts, and then stoppages accompanied by the inevitable hardships.\textsuperscript{55}

Operatives who sought to use strikes and slowdowns against their employers quickly felt the impact of other forms of industrial discipline. As early as 1856 the mills locked out the spinners and weavers who walked off the job an hour early protesting the twelve hour work day.\textsuperscript{56} In 1898 the Androscoggin Company records tersely report, "Strike in the mills."\textsuperscript{57} Nothing indicates the protest was successful. The agents of the leading mills revealed their awesome disciplinary power in 1902 when they circulated the following letter:

Inasmuch as a demand has been made for an increase of 10\% in wages by the mule spinners of some of the mills in Lewiston and Auburn [,] at a meeting of the agents of all the mills held on Thursday afternoon it was unanimously agreed, after careful consideration, that no increase in wages can be granted in any department. It was also further agreed that in event of a strike in any of the mills all of the mills will shut down all of their departments.\textsuperscript{58}

The mills had brought to Lewiston a dynamic, expanding economy and a population rapidly increasing in size and complexity. At the same time the changes imposed new tensions and burdens upon that society and sharply, sometimes brutally, curtailed its economic freedom.

Like the mills the city itself found it necessary to strengthen the means of controlling its expanding, diverse population. The transformation in Lewiston's police force between the 1850's and the 1880's is one measure of the urbanization process. Lewiston's police during the 1850's usually consisted of three constables, one day officer and two for the night. By 1880, however, Lewiston's police exhibited many of the features of a modern police force. A marshal, deputy marshal, and a dozen officers nattily attired in distinctive caps, vests, and in double-breasted blue coats with military buttons now kept the peace with revolvers and billies. The force concentrated its energies on the turbulent, congested Lincoln, Lisbon, and lower Main Street area. As the residential section moved outward, these outlying regions also demanded police protection. The city responded by providing a mounted officer; but since his horse was old and slow, the experiment in mobility did not prove very successful. By 1880 Lewiston's police were even then facing charges of using undue force in making arrests, of being subject to political influence, and of favoritism in enforcing the law — especially the "Maine Law" prohibiting alcoholic beverages.\textsuperscript{59}
Employees of the Hill Mill about 1900.
It was inevitable that Lewiston's business leaders who exerted so vast an economic power should also profoundly influence the city's political life. The lists of Lewiston's mayors, aldermen, and members of the Common Council are filled with industrial figures, both local and regional. William Frye, Alonzo Garcelon, George Pillsbury, agent for the Franklin Company, Nathaniel Farwell, proprietor of the Lewiston Bleachery; and David Cowan, owner of the Cowan Mill, were all industrialist mayors. The Boards of Aldermen and Common Council were filled with business leaders. William D. Pennell, who was associated at various times with the Hill and Lincoln Mills and the Franklin Company, served as city auditor for a year, was councilman for another, and alderman for three years. Then he served as a long term member of the city's water board. Josiah G. Coburn, who preceded Pennell as agent at the Hill, set something of a record for civic duty. He served as alderman in 1864 and as councilman in 1863, 1868-1872, and in 1883; four times he was president of that body.60

There are many other examples illustrating that the city's business leaders were fulfilling what must have been an onerous civic obligation. At the same time, however, they were spokesmen for their special economic interests, and they tended to shape municipal policy correspondingly. Two key examples demonstrate this, the construction of the Lewiston-Auburn Railroad and the creation of the Union Water Power Company.

Early in the 1870's Lewiston's leading businessmen began complaining of rate discrimination at the hands of the Maine Central Railroad, which had consolidated the city's rail lines. Nathaniel Farwell of the Bleachery, J. G. Coburn, agent of the Hill Mill, William P. Frye, Alonzo Garcelon, and Nelson Dingley, proprietor of the Lewiston Journal, led a movement to obtain an independent railroad connection for the city, thereby gaining the benefit of rate competition. Their scheme was to build a railroad that would connect Lewiston with the former Atlantic and St. Lawrence, now merged with the Canadian National or Grand Trunk. The Maine Central put up a bitter legal and legislative battle in a futile effort to block incorporation of the new line. When its opposition failed there, the Maine Central dropped its freight rate in an effort to divide the opposition. The scheme almost succeeded, but popular referenda in both Lewiston and Auburn strongly supported the project. Consequently, Lewiston purchased 2,230 shares of stock while Auburn acquired 750 shares in the new company. The City of Lewiston thereby became majority stockholder in a railroad five and a half miles long which the owners immediately leased to the Grand Trunk for ninety-nine years. Even a railroad this small proved difficult and expensive to build. The firm constructing the line running from the station on Lincoln Street to Lewiston Junction went broke in the panic of 1873, and the Grand Trunk itself had to finance completion of the project. However, the line opened to business in 1874, a physical manifestation of the co-operation between the
city and its businessmen. Possibly Farwell's leadership in the enterprise aided him in his successful bid for the mayoralty in 1873. 61

The emergence of the Union Water Power Company represents another striking example of municipal and corporate co-operation. The growing city of Lewiston badly needed a reliable water storage system for fire protection and for domestic household use. The Androscoggin River, from which the city had always drawn its water supply, was subject to periodic droughts and floods that interrupted regular use. The textile mills were equally anxious for a steady water supply to prevent days of labor lost through a lack of water or from too much in the destructive spring floods. Although most mills possessed auxiliary steam engines, the mills were still forced onto half-time during the long drought of 1875 - a period serious enough already owing to depression.

Out of these mutual needs evolved a bargain in 1877. The City of Lewiston obtained the right to purchase from the Franklin Company the site for a pumping station at the head of the canal complete with power rights for $200,000. The Franklin Company in return agreed to use the proceeds from the sale to purchase control of the headwaters of the Androscoggin River, the Richardson Lake Dam property. Control of the source assured both parties a regulated flow of the River, and Lewiston obtained legal rights to tap that flow for its municipal benefit. In time the city even generated its own electricity from this site. 62

The Franklin Company now divided its functions by conveying all its power rights and river interests to a new corporation, the Union Water Power Company, organized in 1878. The change was merely one of corporate convenience and efficiency. This new company dealt with the regulation and lease of water power to the various corporations, while the Franklin Company confined itself to speculating in land on which Lewiston was built. The stock of the Union Water Power Company was owned by the Franklin, Bates, Hill, Androscoggin, Continental, and Bleachery corporations whose dominant stockholders were the same small clique of Boston financiers. 63 With the assistance of the city government they had extended corporate control all the way to the headwaters of the Androscoggin. It was a fitting climax to the career of Benjamin Bates, who had done more than anyone else to create this corporate empire. He died on January 14, 1878, just as the Union Water Power Company was coming into existence.

The leaders of the power company and the associated mills did not ignore Lewiston's moral and intellectual life; this they helped mold too. As in the case of the city's banks and government, there existed a strong overlap of personnel by which the industrial leaders and their agents were frequently
active members in the Baptist, Congregational, and Universalist churches. In their corporate capacity as well, Lewiston's industrialists demonstrated a generous concern for organized religion. To each religious society that proposed to build a church, the Lewiston Water Power Company voted a city lot. In addition, the individual corporations, such as the Bates, Hill, and Androscoggin, responded favorably to appeals for funds so the religious groups could complete or renovate their structures.

The Boston capitalists, however, wasted little sympathy on the Roman Catholics. After the burning of the Irish chapel on Lincoln Street the priest, Father Peter McLaughlin, approached the company's agent, Albert H. Kelsey, in hopes the Roman Catholics might also be included in the gift of a city lot. When Kelsey suggested the matter at the next director's meeting, he later recalled, "President Nichols and Director Bates immediately flew up and declared they would not vote for such a gift. They were so powerful in the board and so determined this thing should not be granted that the matter was dropped for the time." Still hopeful of a favorable response, Kelsey urged and even financed Father McLaughlin's trip to Boston to negotiate with Bates, Nichols, and the other directors personally. However, the priest returned vowing that never again would he submit to such humiliation. Kelsey then took matters into his own hands. As the power company's representative he was personally responsible for the smooth operation of the mills as well as for the sale of the company's housing lots. He selected one of the most desirable sites in the city, where Saint Joseph's Church now stands, and sold it to the Roman Catholics at a fraction of its real value. He unobtrusively slipped the deed among a large number of official papers that the Boston directors routinely signed. The transaction was entirely legal; and although Lyman Nichols was furious when he discovered the deception, there was little he could do about it.

To build a church like Saint Joseph's was an expensive undertaking. Since the various corporations had assisted most of the Protestant Societies in erecting their buildings, the Roman Catholics requested equal treatment. In 1869 Rev. Michael Lucey asked, indeed, demanded that the Bates Company "extend to us a liberality — the benefit of which the other Societies here have experienced and assist us in the completion of our Church Edifice." Lucey bluntly pointed out the practical utility such generosity would have for the donors themselves:

... a large number of the Mill Operators are educated in that belief and under that influence — That disregarding entirely all questions of Doctrinal belief, undoubtedly, this Church is very efficient in preserving the peace and good order of this
Community — the observance of the Sabbath, and in restraining and regulating the conduct of a large class, entirely beyond and without the control of the other Religious Societies - and that many of the Children and Youths of this large class, being necessarily deprived of the advantages of our Public Schools on account of the poverty of their Parents, have very little or no means of learning their duties to God and Society — but the Church — So that a cooperator in this department is really necessary. 68

Company records do not reveal the corporate response to this appeal. However, in 1892 the Bates stockholders did approve donating $1,000. to Saint Patrick’s Church. 69 In these ways, individually and corporately, willingly and sometimes grudgingly, Lewiston’s business leaders exercised their power in shaping the city’s religious character.

They were also concerned with Lewiston’s educational institutions. Like Andrew Mellon, Andrew Carnegie, the Vanderbilts, and the Rockefellers, although on a more modest scale, Lewiston’s “industrial statesmen” helped to establish and to support libraries and even a college. In 1860 the several mill companies voted funds to purchase books, to equip reading rooms, and to create the Manufacturers and Mechanics Library Association. When the new city building was completed in 1872, the Association received space there. Thanks to generous annual contributions from the corporations, it accumulated a library of over 11,000 volumes. Most of these were lost, however, when a disastrous fire destroyed the city building in 1890. Those that survived were donated to the Lewiston Public Library. 70

The cost of membership in the Library Association was a modest $5.00 for life or $1.00 per annum. 71 Yet the changing nature of Lewiston’s industrial society suggests the question of really how useful was such an institution. It is hard to imagine that after working an exhausting twelve hour shift six days a week the mill hand possessed the time, the energy, the desire, or even the dollar to “better himself” as a member of the Manufacturers and Mechanics Library Association.

On the other hand, it may be that such an institution was more important to the supporting corporations than to the “mechanics” it was supposed to serve. Like contributions to religious societies, supporting the Library Association may have helped soothe the corporate social conscience. It was widely believed that an educated society, like a religious one, would be more virtuous, and that the virtuous person was obedient and diligent, cherished values in a business community.
For Benjamin Bates and his associates another desirable cultural addition with which to grace their town was an institution of higher learning. In 1855 Maine's legislature chartered a Free-Will Baptist School called the Maine State Seminary. The location of the new institution was undecided; the towns of China, Pittsfield, Hallowell, Unity, Lewiston, and others competed to attract the school to their own localities. Alonzo Garcelon, on behalf of the Lewiston industrialists, offered twenty acres of land and $10,000, later raised to $15,000, if the seminary would locate in Lewiston. As the author of the college's history put it, "These were convincing arguments." 72

Once in Lewiston the institution maintained very intimate relations with the Lewiston Power Company and its leaders. The ceremonies attending the laying of the corner stone for Hathorn Hall in 1856 illustrated this connection. The event was scheduled for the day immediately following that on which the Power Company stockholders would be in Lewiston on official business, and many were expected to attend the academic festivities. Albert H. Kelsey, the Power Company's agent, marched at the head of the academic procession in the role of marshal.73 The transformation in 1864 of the seminary into a college named Bates testifies to the importance of financial support from that source. Benjamin Bates contributed $100,000, and many other industrialists donated funds, time, and energies as trustees. Indeed, the College's governing boards resemble that of the Franklin Company itself. Benjamin Bates, Nathaniel Farwell, George L. Ward, Lyman Nichols, A. D. Lockwood, and others were all there.74 They shared direction of the College with the usual clergy, educators, and politicians, yet nothing could disguise their success in adorning with a college the town they had built. They had bought it; they had brought it to Lewiston, and over it they exercised a paternal concern.

The physical monuments of this period of Lewiston's development — its "Great Age" — still stands: the canal and the imposing mill structures, the equally impressive private residences along Main and College Streets, Little Canada, and Bates College. The unified corporate power that created them no longer exists. The change began early in the twentieth century.

THE AGE OF INSULL AND WYMAN, 1928 - 1945

Following World War I profits from cotton manufacturing dropped sharply. In part this was due to stronger competition abroad, to changing fashions at home, and to increased use of synthetics like rayon. For the older mills in New England these changes were especially severe since they had to face bitter competition with new southern mills in a constricted domestic market. The rural South offered cotton manufacturers numerous attractions:
Hathorn Hall, Bates College, about 1870.
lower costs for power, transportation, and labor, modern mills with new equipment, and state governments eager to attract business. All this seriously reduced the competitive advantages New England had once enjoyed. By reason of its long establishment the New England textile industry had to compete with other industries for labor which was now protected by unions and by laws passed by state legislatures that took the textile business for granted. In addition new technological changes made many New England mills and methods of manufacture obsolete. For example, Lewiston's system of canals, dams, locks, and individual water wheels had been developed when the only practical way to harness water power to machinery was by wheels, belts, gears, and shafts. The development of hydroelectricity changed all that by the relatively inexpensive production of electrical power and its transmission over long distances. Water power as a magnet in attracting industry became less important than other factors, such as costs of transportation, labor, and taxes, areas in which New England's advantages were also eroding.  

One reason for New England's inability to adjust to these changes lay in the nature of its textile management. Many textile leaders in New England had lost their competitive edge during their long period of supremacy. In the twentieth century they were not as aggressive as before. No longer were they willing to forego dividends and to plow profits back into research, renovation, and advertising. Indeed, southern capitalists seemed to have absorbed the keen business sense that Yankees once called their own.

Lewiston's population figures demonstrate the changing conditions typical of most New England textile cities. Between 1870 and 1910 Lewiston's population had virtually doubled from 13,600 to 26,247. However, in the period from 1930 to 1960 the city increased from 35,000 to only 41,000. Well before the Crash of 1929 it was obvious to persons in the textile business that New England's mills were in the grip of a deepening depression that threatened the very economic basis of cities like Fall River, Haverhill, Lawrence, Lowell, Manchester, and Lewiston.

In 1928 the treasurer of Lewiston's Androscoggin Mill submitted to the directors a gloomy report concerning the mill's economic plight. He pointed out that the only way to reverse the trend of declining profits was to reequip the mill at an estimated cost of $500,000. Even then, he warned, it would be some years before the refurbished mill would show any profits. The only other alternative he offered was to liquidate; this the directors voted to do. Owners of the Hill Mill, presented with similar circumstances, tried to salvage at least some of their investment by seeking a buyer for their establishment before liquidating as a last resort. The Androscoggin Mill employed 900 persons, and the Hill Mill provided jobs for 950 more. If they were to collapse, it was reasonable to suspect the Bates Mill, employing 1,250, would follow suit. The impact on Lewiston would be calamitous.
That such a disaster did not occur was owing to two men who ushered in the next phase of Lewiston's economic development. National interests now came to absorb and to replace the New England capitalists who had directed Lewiston's growth since 1845. These two men were Walter S. Wyman of Oakland, Maine and Samuel Insull of Chicago. The economic interests of these two men became so closely tied to the fate of Lewiston's mills that they literally could not afford to permit the mills to die. In saving themselves they saved Lewiston from the worst effects of the textile depression and even the Great Depression that soon followed. The manufacture and sale of electrical power bound Lewiston, Wyman, and Insull together.

In Maine the development of electrical power and public utilities was evolving in a manner similar to that of railroads and the textile business— from local to regional and eventually to national entrepreneurial control. Central Maine Power Company under the direction of Walter S. Wyman was a regional combination of over thirty separate firms which sold much of its power to Lewiston's population, as well as to the city's mills that were incapable of generating sufficient power for themselves. If the mills were dissolved, CMP would be one of the major losers at the very time that Wyman was committed to a 20 million dollar expansion program involving hydroelectric plants at Gulf Island and at Bingham and a water storage reservoir on the Dead River. Wyman's solution was to seek a merger between CMP and the Chicago-based public utilities empire built up under the direction of Samuel Insull and his brother Martin.

Samuel Insull was an English-born financial genius who had been Thomas A. Edison's private secretary and financial advisor, and at 32 years of age, Vice President of General Electric Corporation. However, he left that position to strike out on his own, and by 1907 he had secured control of the entire electrical business in Chicago. By means of an ingenious arrangement of interconnecting electrical systems and holding companies, Insull came to dominate public utilities throughout Illinois and much of the mid-west. His flamboyant campaign of selling stock to the general public earned him particular notoriety across the country. In this way Insull helped to create the modern gigantic corporation owned anonymously by millions of persons. By 1930 the Insull public utilities empire had assets of 2 billion dollars and provided service to 32 states.

It was in the mid-1920's that Insull, aided by his brother, Martin, began buying up the small public utility companies across New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. When Walter Wyman approached Martin Insull with an offer to sell controlling interest in CMP, he received a favorable response. On July 8, 1925 Middle West Utilities Company, one of Insull's major holding companies, purchased control of CMP. Wyman retained his
poSltion as president, but CMP was now but one of many public utility companies absorbed into the Insull system, and Wyman was but one of Insull's many "lieutenants."  

A short time later the Insulls separated from Middle West Utilities the New England power interests and combined them into a new subsidiary of Middle West called New England Public Service Company (NEPSCO). Eventually Middle West transferred most of NEPSCO's stock to another Insull sub-holding company, National Electric Power Company. Samuel and Martin Insull served as NEPSCO's Chairman and Vice-Chairman respectively, and it is a testimony of their regard for Wyman that they named him President of the new corporation. He in turn included among his directors William B. Skelton of Lewiston. With heavy financial backing from Middle West Wyman now had the opportunity he sought to complete CMP's expansion program. In addition he quickly discovered he was forced to expand in another direction by investing in a series of tottering textile mills.

In 1927 CMP had to make a decision concerning the Edwards Mill in Augusta, which was about to collapse financially. To preserve the firm and its employees as consumers of electrical power, the public utility purchased controlling interest in the Mill and then transferred the stock to NEPSCO. This set the pattern for Lewiston. When the directors of the Androscoggin Mill voted to liquidate in 1928, Wyman made vigorous efforts to stimulate local capital to prevent the threatened closing. When that failed, Wyman discussed with Martin Insull the possibility of purchasing that plant too. With Insull's approval NEPSCO absorbed the Mill. This inspired the directors of the Hill Mill to confront Wyman with a similar alternative: either purchase the company or it would cease production. Although Wyman hesitated, the survival of this mill was as important to him as the Androscoggin or the Edwards. In May 1929 Wyman obtained control of the Hill Company; two months later it was the turn of the Bates Manufacturing Company.

The Bates Mill was the largest and soundest of the textile mills that NEPSCO was to obtain. Yet Wyman foresaw that it too had serious problems that demanded more aggressive management. In addition, the possession of this third Lewiston mill gave NEPSCO controlling interest in the Union Water Power Company, which regulated the flow of the Androscoggin from the Rangeley Lakes area. With the acquisition of Bliss, Fabyan and Company, the New York distributor for Lewiston's textiles, the Wyman-Insull connection totally dominated Lewiston's economic life; the water and the electricity that powered the mills, the mills themselves, and the outlet for the cloth those mills manufactured. NEPSCO had succeeded to the roles of the Lewiston Water Power and Franklin Companies.
Schematic Diagram

of the

Insull System and the Five Maine Textile Mills

(simplified)

Samuel Insull

Middle West Utilities Company
(Martin Insull)

National Electric Company
(sub-holding)

Mississippi Utilities Company
(sub-holding)

New England Public Service Company
(Wyman-president)

New England Industries Company
(Wyman-president)

Central Maine Power Company
(Wyman-president)

Other New England Public Utilities

Union Water Power Company

Androscoggin Company
Bates Company
Hill Company
Edwards Company
York Company
The acquisition of so many diverse businesses forced NEPSCO into another corporate re-organization. Not only did that company own the Edwards Mill in Augusta and the three Lewiston plants, but it had also acquired a textile mill in Saco, the York Manufacturing Company, as well as a paper company in Bucksport. NEPSCO under Wyman's presidency retained the public utilities in northern New England, but it consolidated its industrial interests into a new subsidiary called New England Industries Company (NEICO). The stock of this new company was held jointly by NEPSCO and by another Insull organization, Mississippi Utilities. Walter Wyman assumed the direction of NEICO along with his other duties and began the long hard task of making industrial holdings profitable consumers of NEPSCO electricity.87

To achieve this NEPSCO poured loans into its new subsidiary with which to modernize machinery and to up-date the type and quality of the product. In 1930 the Androscoggin Mill received 649 rayon looms and became one of the largest producers of rayon in the world. Under new management the Bates Mill concentrated on special products: tablecloths, luncheon sets, and the jacquard-type bed spreads. NEPSCO boasted that the Hill Mill had been modernized "from basement to roof."88 By the end of 1933 NEICO had channeled funds totalling $5,379,000. into one paper mill and five textile mills, three of them in Lewiston.89 In addition to this, the mills themselves had each borrowed large sums from banks.

Despite this massive infusion of money the mills remained at best marginally profitable. The advantages, however, were not to be counted in the conditions of the mills alone. CMP in particular, and NEPSCO in general, would have suffered far heavier losses had these mills closed. In 1930 Wyman wrote that despite the business depression all over the country, . . . I do not believe . . . that the territory served by the Central Maine Power Company has suffered as much as many other parts of the United States. In spite of the fact that a good many of our industries have been running on short time, we have actually produced and sold more kilowatt hours than we did last year.90

This meant that the mills did not have to make money to justify their existence. That they were open, operating, and consuming power was a great boon to the manufacturers of that power. In addition, the thousands who worked in the mills also benefited from the steady employment. This, in turn, enabled them to purchase and to consume power from CMP. For Wyman and Insull self-interest shaded imperceptibly into a social service and back again to self-interest. It all came to a shocking climax in 1932 when Insull's empire came crashing down.
Through 1931 and 1932 Samuel Insull was fighting for his economic life. Competing banking circles in New York sought to bring down the Chicago financier by any means whatsoever. When Samuel Insull found it impossible to meet a ten million dollar note, the New Yorkers closed in and forced Insull into bankruptcy. “For want of ten million dollars, a billion and a half dollar corporation went under.”

Politicians sought their own advantage in Insull’s collapse. The Attorney General of Cook County, Illinois, as well as an ambitious presidential candidate, Franklin D. Roosevelt, outdid one another in denouncing Insull as the personification of corruption. An Illinois grand jury indicted him for embezzlement while the federal government in February 1933 charged him and his colleagues with using the mails to defraud and with violating federal banking laws. In every case juries dismissed the charges against him, but Congress moved against all that Insull seemed to represent. The Public Utilities Holding Company Act of 1935 prohibited such companies from engaging in manufacturing. The act required holding companies to restrict their activities to financial matters, and these were to be supervised by the Federal Securities and Exchange Commission. The Federal Power Commission was to ensure that the rates charged by private power companies were “reasonable.” Congress established the Tennessee Valley Authority to help determine what were reasonable rates.

Thanks to Walter Wyman, Lewiston escaped the worst effects of Insull’s collapse. In his dealings with the Insull organization Wyman had been wisely cautious. The Insull enterprises were closely bound together by a system of “interloaning,” and while Wyman readily accepted loans from the parent company, he steadfastly refused to grant “upstream” loans. Should financial disaster occur, any subsidiary which had made loans to the parent company would be left holding worthless paper. Such caution paid off. When Insull did fail, the two firms over which Wyman presided, NEPSCO and NEICO, remained solvent long enough for him to make alternative arrangements.

Wyman put together a financial group called the Northern New England Company, which purchased the stock of NEPSCO and NEICO from the receivers who acquired it when the parent companies fell. In this manner Wyman’s financial combine inherited control of the northern New England remnants of Insull’s once great empire. Despite the Great Depression the Wyman group continued to operate the Maine mills to the mutual advantage of the 4,200 employees and the combined utility companies.

The mills themselves failed to show much profit despite the energetic efforts of Robert Braun, who consolidated the management, and Herman Ruhm, Jr., supervisor of the selling operations. Although 1936 and 1937
were profitable years, the next three were not. The mills lost over a million and a half in 1938, about half a million the next year, and over three-quarters of a million dollars in 1939. World War II and government contracts reversed this trend. Annual profits after federal taxes were two and a quarter million in 1941, over a million in 1942, and a million and a quarter the year following. Succeeding years were even better, but with the end of the war, troubles re-appeared.

The Public Utilities Holding Act had prohibited utility holding companies from developing overly complex structures and from engaging in manufacturing. Just prior to the outbreak of the war the Securities and Exchange Commission had ordered NEPSCO to reform its structure. In response NEPSCO did decentralize control over its utility companies in the three northern New England states. However, the war delayed any further change in the corporate structure until 1945. Then NEPSCO agreed to disassociate itself totally from its industrials by selling them to the highest bidder. It finally accepted $16,500,000. for the five Maine mills from a Boston-based firm known as Boston and Burr.

From start to finish the entire transaction appeared to be a legal maneuver designed to meet the letter of the law while retaining the mills in Maine as consumers of NEPSCO power. Boston and Burr were actually two financial houses dominated by First Boston Corporation, a bank which had been NEPSCO’s financial agent since 1930. Their original bid for the five textile mills had not been competitive, and the firm raised its figure to meet the highest offer at the urgings of NEPSCO, which feared outside interests might purchase the mills and move them away. Having acquired the mills, Boston and Burr consolidated them into the Bates Manufacturing Company. The new owners perpetuated the former management; Robert Braun became Chairman of the Board and Herman Ruhm, Jr., President. Despite the federal government’s success in forcing NEPSCO to separate from its industrial interests, the mills remained in Maine, providing employment for thousands of persons and absorbing the electrical power NEPSCO generated.

LEWISTON: A MILL TOWN IN TRANSITION, 1955-

The delicate relationship between the new Bates Manufacturing Company and NEPSCO ended dramatically ten years later when a New York financier, Lester Martin, announced he had secured control of Bates. Martin, an outsider, had sought to purchase the industrial concerns in 1945. Braun, Ruhm, and the Maine group regarded him with suspicion as a speculator who might remove the mills and who, in any case, would upset the connection with NEPSCO. Although thwarted in 1945, Martin persisted in quietly buying up stock until he announced in 1955 he had 51% controlling interest. There followed a monumental legislative and legal battle as the
Maine group sought to tie his hands. They could not deny him control of Bates Manufacturing, but they could try to limit his power to move the mills. The Mainers introduced into the state legislature a bill requiring the assent of 80% of the stockholders of any Maine corporation before it could liquidate.\(^{101}\) So discriminatory a bill failed to pass, and Martin assumed control without restrictions. Robert Braun had died, but Ruhm and most of the other managerial personnel resigned.

The regime of Lester Martin and his successors from New York confirmed some of the worst suspicions of the Maine group. The Androscoggin Mill closed in 1956 and the York Mill in Saco followed a year later. However, the new owners of the Bates Corporation were not mere speculators. They had the misfortune to assume control of the mills at the very time the American economy was re-adjusting to the post-war era, and the old specters of southern and foreign competition, synthetic fibers, and technological change were all re-appearing. Furthermore, the new owners represented a different set of economic priorities. For the first time in Lewiston's history control of the mills passed to a group who did not possess an intimate connection with the power interests in the area. Lacking this relationship, the new management saw no particular economic advantage to maintaining unprofitable mills merely to consume electrical and water power that different interests owned. If almost 1000 workers lost their jobs when the Androscoggin shut its doors, that indeed was a misfortune, but the purpose of a corporation was to make money for its investors, and even under NEPSOCO the Androscoggin was a losing proposition. As for the York Mill in Saco, it was beset with labor troubles and its products competed with those of the Hill Mill in Lewiston.\(^{102}\) Since the latter was more efficient, the York Mill was the one to be sacrificed.

The other mills remained as long as they made a suitable profit as textile producers, not as consumers of power. Meanwhile, the Bates Manufacturing Company of New York extended its investments to southern textile mills and to iron and coal fields in Virginia, North Carolina, and Georgia.\(^{103}\) The manufacture of textiles in Lewiston and Augusta became only phases of the Bates Company's extensive corporate activities. Of these the Hill Mill was the next to go. It lingered until 1971 as a division of the Bates Mill, then it too closed its doors; two years later, the Bates Corporation sold its Edwards Mill in Augusta. This left only the Bates Mill in Lewiston as a single survivor of the original five mills that had once comprised the Bates Manufacturing Company. Through its reputation for high quality specialty products, such as its famous bed spreads, this mill has been able to withstand the pressure of southern competition, of synthetic fibers, and of the change in corporate control. Yet the fate of the other mills seems to offer a gloomy forecast of what the future holds even for this mill.
The City of Lewiston was no passive spectator to these drastic changes. As textile profits and employment declined and the city’s population stagnated during the 1950’s, a group of local businessmen sought ways to attract new business and to retain the mills that still existed. In 1954 they formed the Lewiston Development Corporation, and a decade later its subsidiary, Lewiston Community Enterprises, purchased the depreciated Bates Mill buildings, assumed the cost of upkeep and taxes, and leased the plant back to the original owner, Bates. This relieved the textile mill from the burden of overhead expenses and allowed the Bates Company to write off as deductions what it paid for rent. This undoubtedly helps to account for the continued presence of the Bates Mill in Lewiston. However, the closing of the Hill division proved it was no cure-all.

Lewiston has had to face the problem, not merely of keeping the Bates Mill, but of finding new occupants for the huge mill structures that have been vacated. Gradually through the action of Lewiston Community Enterprises and the city’s Department of Economic Development, groups and individuals have purchased the empty buildings and leased the space to a wide variety of new industries. These new enterprises have been attracted to Lewiston by the city’s available factory space and by its large, dependable labor force. The huge Androscoggin Mill once again contains a textile business, but it shares the building with several shoe manufacturers. Five other shoe companies now occupy the building that was once the Continental Mill. Part of the former Hill Mill is now devoted to the manufacture of shoes, while a producer of plastic heels occupies the old Cowan Mill. The Pepperrell Building houses a wide variety of small businesses: a manufacturer of electrical equipment, two shoe shops, a carpenter shop, and a tire retreading plant, as well as an insurance firm, a carpet dealer, and a sheet metal contractor.

Today in Lewiston only the Bates Mill, the Libbey, and the Kimberly Woolen Mills are still entirely devoted to textiles. In 1970 Lewiston’s textile firms employed only 1,800 of the city’s 17,591 working population. For better or for worse Lewiston is free of its dependence on a single economic activity. It is no longer a “mill town.” Yet a large number of its population still make the daily trek to the mill buildings which provide employment for as many or more people as in the “golden age” of the late nineteenth century. Today, however, workers go there to participate in the wide variety of small-scale activities that are carried on inside.

Lewiston’s transition to a diversified economy has come at a high price, and the change has not been totally satisfactory. Among comparable Maine cities in 1970 Lewiston had the highest percentage (17.3) of households in the lowest income group ($0 to $2,999) and the lowest percentage (26.5) in...
the highest income group ($10,000 and up).\(^{107}\) Its general economy, as revealed by average weekly wages in manufacturing, and its unemployment rates compare poorly to the nation and to the state.\(^{108}\) Much of the difficulty is that the industries, such as shoes, that have been attracted into the vacant mill buildings require cheap labor to produce inexpensive products. These industries are very sensitive to labor costs, to foreign competition, and to changes in demand for their products. Since they require little capital investment in their manufacturing process, these industries can easily shut down if they find it convenient. Most shoe industries, for example, lease their equipment as well as their buildings, and so can close their doors and move away if another region appears more desirable.\(^{109}\)

Lewiston's economic base still remains precarious as the city seeks to fill the vacuum created when so many textile mills closed down. Lewiston in its dynamic history has experienced many changes, and today it is still very much a city in transition.
End Notes

List of Abbreviations:

ACHS — Androscoggin County Historical Society, Androscoggin County Building, Auburn, Maine.
BMCHF — Bates Manufacturing Company Historical File, Lewiston Public Library.
LEJ — Lewiston Evening Journal
LPL — Lewiston Public Library, Lewiston, Maine
MHS — Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine.


2. Jonas G. Elder, “City of Lewiston,” History of Androscoggin County, Maine, ed. Georgia D. Merrill (Lewiston, 1891), 344-345; Elder’s notes on Lewiston are in ACHS; Little Family Papers, 1677-1893, Collection 67, Box 2/14, Misc., MHS; Maine Historical and Genealogical Recorder, v (1880), 140.

3. W. F. Stanwood, comp., The Lewiston and Auburn Directory ... together with a History of Lewiston and Auburn (Lewiston, 1864), 46.

4. Elder in Merrill, 345; see William Garcelon’s manuscript history of Lewiston, ACHS, also map dated 1776 showing site of Hildreth’s house, ACHS.

5. Appendix; Elder in Merrill, 345-351.

6. Elder in Merrill, 344-345, 382, 384, 386.


End Notes

10. David Hildreth to William Garcelon, Pownalborough Goal, November 20, 1800, ACHS.


12. Elder in Merrill, 383.

13. Amos Davis, unpublished diary, ACHS.

14. Elder in Merrill, 379; Amos Davis’ will in ACHS.

15. An unsigned letter dated November 29, 1878 in David Davis papers, ACHS, dates the house at 1817.

16. Elder in Merrill, 384-385.

17. Ibid., 386,388.

18. Ibid., 386.

19. Ibid., 387.

20. “Birth and Growth of Textiles in Lewiston, Maine,” 2, manuscript in BMCHF, LPL.


24. Ibid., 27; Chase, 21, states that the railroad to Lewiston opened in December, 1848; Elder in Merrill, 352, claims it was March, 1849.


26. Ibid.

27. Elder in Merrill, 388-389.
End Notes


29. Elder in Merrill, 389-391; LEJ, January 14, 1878, referred to Benjamin Bates as “director or treasurer of nearly all of our manufacturing corporations, and a large owner in all;” quoted in Alfred W. Anthony, Bates College and its Background. (Philadelphia, 1936), 223.


32. Ibid., 4; Lewiston Falls Journal, September 1857 - June 1858, typed notes BMCHF; “Bates Div. Sales, . . . .”


35. Kelsey.

36. Elder in Merrill, 388-389.

37. Ibid., 402.


39. Elder in Merrill, 402. Barker was a director of Manufacturers National Bank and of Androscoggin County Savings, and president of People’s Savings Bank.

40. Ibid., 403; Maine Magazine (1907), 65.


End Notes


44. *Ibid.* In the boarding houses in Lowell girls were required to sign a pledge to attend church regularly, see Merrill, 23-24. Private boarding houses were as strict, see Lord.


46. Buker, 18.


50. *Lewiston Weekly Journal*, June 9, 1870; March 30, 1871; October 5, 1871; February 3, 1873; April 12, 1873; April 17, 1873; June 17, 1875, notes in BMCHF.

51. Appendix.
End Notes

52. A. M. Myhrman and J. A. Rademaker, "The Second Colonization Process in an Industrial Community," unpublished manuscript in LPL.


55. Ibid., 39-40; "Birth and Growth of Textiles ... ", 9-10; Lewiston Weekly Journal, November 1873-September 1875, notes in BMCHF. Notes of Bates Manufacturing Company directors' meetings, June 26, 1875; June 27, 1876: "Order to reduce wages and salaries to the lowest possible point;" June 16, 1894: "Mills cut to 4 days/wk:" October 1: "Mills reopened," BMCHF.

56. Lewiston Falls Journal, October 18, 1856, notes in BMCHF.

57. Notes of Androscoggin Manufacturing Company directors' meetings, BMCHF.

58. Typescript copies in BMCHF.


60. Elder in Merrill, 353-357, 432b-432e.


62. Elder in Merrill, 392; Ralph B. Skinner, research notes for radio talk, "When the Logs Stopped Coming Down," March 29, 1964, Station WLAM, Lewiston, Maine.

63. Elder in Merrill, 392.
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64. Ibid., 357-377, 420-432f.

65. Notes of Bates Manufacturing Company stockholders’ meetings, September 16, 1863; September 20, 1865, September 16, 1868; notes of Bates Manufacturing Company directors’ meetings, October 10, and December 23, 1865, BMCHF; Kelsey.

66. Kelsey.

67. Ibid.

68. Rev. Michael Lucey to Directors and Stockholders of the Bates Manufacturing Co. at Lewiston, Lewiston, Maine, September 15, 1869, original and typescript copies, BMCHF.

69. Notes of Bates Manufacturing Company stockholders’ meeting, September 21, 1892, BMCHF.

70. Ibid., September 19, 1860; September 17, 1902; directors’ meetings, October 5, 1860; Elder in Merrill, 398.

71. Elder in Merrill, 398.


73. Ibid., 141; Lewiston Falls Journal, June 21, June 28, 1856.


76. Appendix.

77. Notes of directors’ meetings, Androscoggin Manufacturing Company, 1928, BMCHF; Earley, 22.

78. Earley, 23.
End Notes


82. Forrest McDonald, Insull (Chicago, 1962), 225; Skelton, 15-16.

83. Earley, 35.

84. Ibid., 35-36; Smith, 75-76.

85. Earley, 36-38; Smith, 76.

86. Earley, 38-40; Smith, 76-77.

87. Earley, 40; Smith, 75-77.

88. Earley, 42-46.

89. Ibid., 60.

90. Quoted in Ibid., 60-61.

91. McDonald, Insull, 301.

92. Ibid., Chap. XII; McDonald, “Insull,” DAB, 334-335.


96. Ibid.

97. Ibid., 297.
End Notes


102. Gosselin interview.


108. Chart in Ibid., Appendix A.

109. Ibid., 3.
## Appendix

### COMPARATIVE POPULATIONS

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<th>DATE</th>
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<td>1,810</td>
<td>501,793</td>
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<td>1880</td>
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<td>41,779</td>
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