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PATERSON'S LANDMARK MILL DISTRICT TORCHED



Above: The morning after, firefighters continue to water down smoldering mill ruins in the Great Falls Historic Industrial District. Below: The gutted Waverly Mill, built in 1855. Mike Riccio photographs for The Paterson News.

A significant section at the heart of Paterson, N.J.'s historic industrial district (NHL, HAER), including the first Colt gun mill, was severely damaged in a massive 10-alarm fire June 24. The Mallory Mill (c1870-90) is totally gone, while the gutted Waverly Mill (1855) retains a standing wall. Both mills once were part of the city's silk industry. The much-altered Colt building (c1836) suffered roof damage but remains intact.

Untouched, thanks to the quick and exhausting work of city firefighters, were the adjacent Phoenix, Essex, and Franklin mills (all 19th-C.), along with a building historically associated with the Edison Illuminating Co. The Essex and Phoenix are being rehabilitated at a cost of \$9 million, and their 169 apartments were to have been joined in time by a much larger complex of offices, restaurants, shops, and apartments located in the destroyed structures.

Also spared was Raceway Park located a few blocks away, a reconstruction of the nation's earliest waterpower system and a component of Paterson's multimillion-dollar restoration of the 119-acre, once-derelict mill area. Major rehab plans for Paterson's Great Falls Historic Industrial District had been announced a year earlier, almost to the day, when then-mayor Lawrence F. Kramer and N.J. Gov. Thomas H. Kean celebrated the opening of Raceway Park (*SIAN* Summer 82:1). Now, Mayor Frank X. Graves could only survey smoldering ruins and declare, "This is a setback for the city, but we are determined to rebuild."

City fire and police departments launched an immediate investigation of the fire. They pointed out similarities to a fire two weeks earlier that destroyed the 1873 Hamil Mill, only two blocks away. A suspected arsonist was apprehended who appeared to have no specific motive for torching the historic structures.

Further complexities involving ownership of the mill buildings emerged in the wake of the fire. The Mallory and Waverly mills



were part of the complex of ATP Processors Ltd., successors to Allied Textile Printers Corp., and later purchased by two realty firms after ATP went out of business in 1981. The realty firms claimed that ownership had been given to the "National Preservation Institute" in Wash., D.C., but the status of the transfer was in doubt.

The Paterson Renaissance Organization (PRO) has since established ownership of the properties, according to Nancy Gay of the Great Falls Development Corp. Immediately following the blaze PRO declared their intention to go ahead with a \$20-million redevelopment of the Great Falls Historic District. Renaissance partners said they would attempt to reuse the buildings' bricks.

Whatever the outcome, the fire—which officials described as an inferno—will remind SIA members of many other destructive blazes, including the Nov. 1982 holocaust at Lynn, Mass., which wiped out many historic buildings from that city's historic shoe manufacturing industry (*SIAN* Winter 82:1-2). The Lynn blaze also was believed to have been the work of an arsonist.