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LOWELL FIRE GUTS 1832 MILL

With the eleven-alarm blaze which ravaged the Lawrence Manufacturing Corp., Lowell has lost another of the major companies on which its fame was based, including the oldest mill buildings in a major complex. Discovered on the evening of March 23, the fire burned furiously into the middle of the next day. This was one of the few remaining complexes which stood visible as a discrete and imposing entity.

Sadly, the central part of the complex, containing the most impressive edifices, including two six-story stair towers, was lost. The two original 1832 buildings and the 1855 connection, with its impressive appearance and imposing towers, were destroyed, as was the 1835 cotton storehouse and numerous nearby structures. Other buildings suffered varying amounts of fire and water damage. Several hundred people were put out of work. Lowell Univ.'s plans to expand into the space apparently will proceed.

Both stair and toilet towers remained standing after their interiors burned. Six-story factory walls crumbled from the intense heat. Despite firefighters' efforts to establish water curtains around the buildings first involved, radiant heat carried the fire from structure to structure. Moreover, the sprinklers in the first building had been shut off, apparently because of winter freeze damage.

The mills' location at the river prevented access from that direction, and the narrow alleyways within the complex, while passable for trucks, could not be used because of the danger of falling walls. Firefighters had to work from the ends of the complex and from the roof of the c1900 structure (which survived) at the top of the yard.

Of the nine major original Lowell companies, only three (Boott, Massachusetts, and Suffolk) still stand as discrete entities. Three others (Appleton, Hamilton, and Lowell) stand, but are not readily identifiable in terms of scale or impact. Since these mills represent the only extant memorials to the hundreds of thousands who labored there, this loss is a particularly harmful one for those who would interpret this history artifactually. The visible record has been seriously diminished.

L.F.G.



LAWRENCE MANUFACTURING CORP., Lowell, Mass.

Left: 1930s view of the two 1832 mill buildings and their 1855 stair-tower connecting unit. *John Coolidge photograph.*

Right: Water from fire hoses plays on the 1855 stair towers at the height of the blaze, midnight on Mar. 23. The roof, floors, and walk have fallen. *Laurence Gross photograph.*

Above: The same view as the sun rises on the morning of Mar. 24. *Laurence Gross photograph.*

All photos courtesy Museum of American Textile History.



More photos on next page.