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LAST-DITCH EFFORTS BUY TIME FOR MASSACHUSETTS MACHINE SHOP

PRESERVATIONISTS FACE FEB. 1 DEADLINE

On Tues., Sept. 23, the Institute of Conservation Archaeology (ICA) of Harvard Univ. was involved in a preservation effort which may be a first of its kind. Having run out of time to locate preservation funding, the ICA agreed to a unique eleventh-hour arrangement to at least temporarily preserve what its staff members believe is an important historic resource: the Gardner Machine Works.



The Gardner Machine Works, located in the central Mass. town of Gardner, greatly aided that community's successful attempt to become a major American chair-making center. The shop, which opened in 1894, produced specialty chair-making machinery. Gardner soon contracted with such prestigious local manufacturers as Heywood-Wakefield and Nichols & Stone. During both World Wars, the GMW was under contract to the U.S. Navy.

The Mass. Dept. of Environmental Management, aware of the shops' precarious future since its 1978 closing, contacted the ICA late in Aug. to help determine the commercial and historic value of its machinery. Since the entire contents of GMW was scheduled for an Oct. 1 public auction, time was of the essence. William DeMarco, an ICA staff historian, and Ted Penn, an ICA consultant employed by Old Sturbridge Village, visited the site on Sept. 5. Both quickly realized that this shop, with its array of fully operational belt-driven equipment in place, must be preserved. The discovery of a "company archive" greatly added to the site's historical value.

Penn felt that, while no individual machine was unique, taken together this might well be the most completely preserved facility of its type anywhere in New England. DeMarco realized that the surviving employees possessed a vanishing skill that, because of their advanced age, required immediate oral-history documentation. This mutual agreement of purpose caused ICA director Michael Roberts immediately to launch a drive to preserve the shops in place.

Within ten days solicited letters of support were received from Bernard Finn, Chairman of the Dept. of the History of Science and Technology, Smithsonian Institution; Dean Lahikainan, Curator of the Essex Institute; and Patrick Malone, Director of the Slater Mill Historic Site. Each of the letters expressed genuine interest in the project and pledged to aid in the identification of sources of financial support.

On Sept. 18, the ICA was told that the auction date had been moved up to 10:30 A.M., Sept. 23. Non-stop negotiations immediately began between DeMarco (who was assigned by the ICA as project director) and the James F. Murphy Machinery Co., owner of the shop. By 2 A.M., Sept. 23, an agreement was reached whereby the auction would be suspended provided the ICA put up \$1,000 by 10:30 A.M. the same day and promise to raise an additional \$24,000 by Feb. 1, 1981. If the full amount is not paid by Feb. 1, the ICA's liability would extend no further than the \$1,000 deposit, and the machinery would be auctioned at that time. The agreement depended on a signed letter of intent arriving at Gardner prior to the 10:30 A.M. auction deadline. Secretaries were awakened from their sleep, and financial officers were alerted. The necessary documents arrived at the auction site at 10:26 A.M.

The real work has just begun. If you would like more information on how to help in this most worthwhile of preservation efforts, please contact: Michael Roberts, Director, Institute of Conservation Archaeology, Peabody Museum, Harvard Univ., 11 Divinity Ave., Cambridge, Mass. 02138.

Gardner has been selected as one of the few Mass. towns to receive funding for the development of downtown Heritage Parks. The ICA and its consultants are hopeful that some way can be

