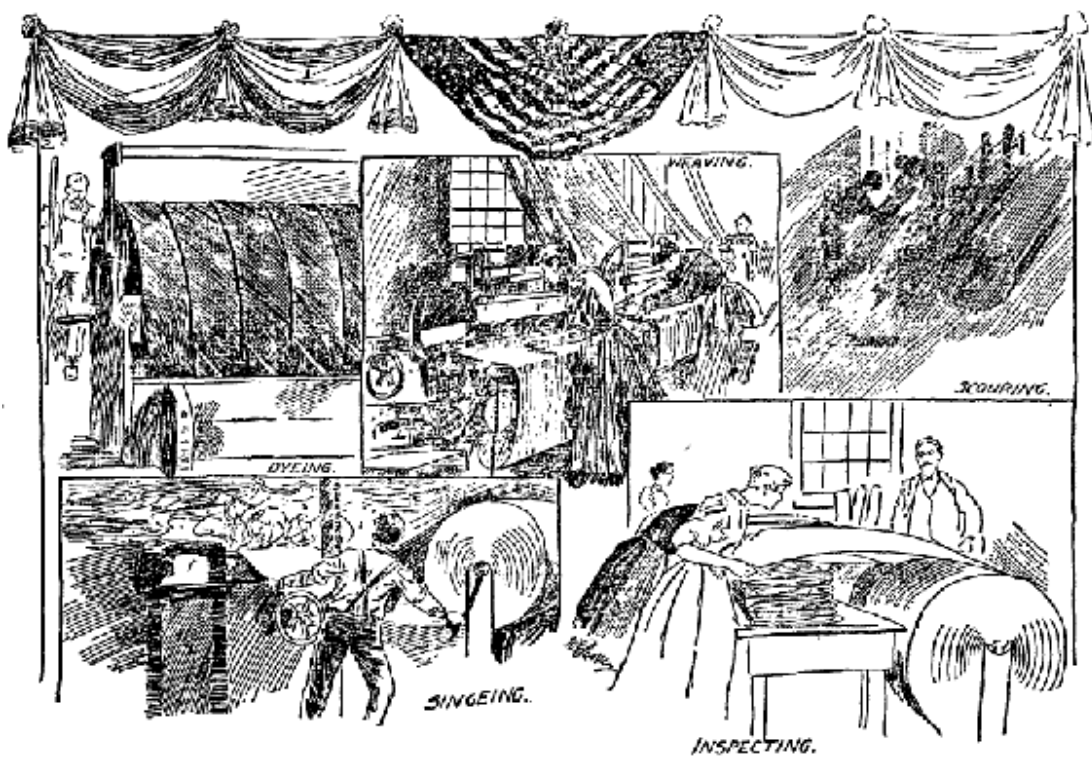


Musketaquid Mill

Early Woolen Mills in Lower Belvidere

The origins of the Musketaquid Mill date from 1850 when John Holt established a wool dyeing and printing works on Howe Street in Belvidere. Born in Dorchester, New Hampshire, in 1812, Holt received a common school education and became a cabinet maker before settling in Lowell around 1840. Initially he worked at his trade (in Lowell city directories of the 1840s, Holt was listed as a cabinet maker and carpenter) with a shop on Howe Street, near the Whitney Mill, where Edward Brierly was engaged in the press printing of woolens.¹ Holt likely became acquainted with Brierly, who received a patent for press-dyeing in 1849.² One year later Holt opened his own mill on Howe Street. He eventually secured his own patents for press dyeing flags, including one in 1870 for an improved American flag.³

Lowell Company Turning Out Large Quantities to Meet the Present Demand.



MAKING BUNTING FOR AMERICAN AND CUBAN FLAGS.

This illustration appeared in the *Boston Daily Globe*, April 22, 1896, depicting several of the steps in the production of bunting at the New England Bunting Company's mill in Lowell.

¹ Lowell city directory, 1844; Brierly's name is misspelled as Briley. A brief biographical sketch of Holt is found in William Richard Cutter, *Historic Homes and Places and Personal Memoirs Relating to the Families of Middlesex County, Massachusetts*, v. 2 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1908,) pp. 852-853.

² The developments in press-dye technology by Bierly and Holt are highlighted in Grace Rogers Cooper, *Thirteen Star Flags: Keys to Identification*, (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1973), fn 40.

³ Cooper, *Thirteen Star Flags*, see fn 40.

New England Bunting Company

After 14 years of dyeing and printing woolens, Holt expanded his mill to include the production of bunting and worsteds.⁴ Although many of Lowell's large cotton mills shut down or curtailed production during the Civil War, woolen and worsted production continued. Holt experimented with various press-dyeing techniques and with bunting manufacture. After the war he acquired a number of Crompton looms to manufacture a specialty worsted called "mummy cloth."⁵ Joining Holt in the business was his son-in-law Eugene S. Hylan, who was born in Lowell in 1847 and had married Esther J. Holt in 1871. Hylan had no background in the textile industry and instead learned bookkeeping at Lowell Commercial College. Nonetheless he proved to be a capable assistant to Holt and upon his father-in-law's death in 1887 he assumed control of the enterprise. Two years later Hylan incorporated the business as the New England Bunting Company, issuing stock amounting to \$25,000. Hylan served as clerk and treasurer and Ferdinand Rodliff, Jr., whose father was a long-time overseer and superintendent at the Hamilton Mills, was president.

Hylan Family and Local Control of Mills

Although historians have generally viewed the major investors of Lowell's textile companies as being absentee owners who lived in Boston, Hylan and a number of other men associated with the Concord River mills represent a group of Lowell-based capitalists who controlled local factories. Similar to Hylan's New England Bunting Company, these firms were primarily producers of specialty goods encompassing fine worsteds, flannels, and flag bunting. Aided by the money and property he inherited through his wife, Hylan prospered and lived in rather affluent surroundings in the Holt residence on Nesmith Street. He sent his oldest son, Eugene J., to Harvard, and upon graduation in 1897 the younger Hylan entered into the family business. The Hylans enlarged the mill and added new machinery, while running primarily on orders from the U.S. government.⁶ Hylan also supplemented the mill's water power, provided by a 150-horsepower turbine, with a larger 150-horsepower steam engine to replace an older 60-horsepower engine. He did this because during low flow, most notably in the summer months, the Middlesex Mills, on the opposite side of the Concord River, had priority for water from the Concord.⁷

⁴ Holt also produced flannels at his expanded mill. He purchased four spinning jacks, six carding machines, and 12 looms. This mill also drew from the Concord River for its water power, but Holt installed an auxiliary steam engine to power the machinery when the stream's flow dropped during the summer months. See "New Flannel Mill," *Lowell Daily Courier*, February 6, 1864.

⁵ "Howe Street Woollen Manufactories," *Lowell Morning Mail*, December 23, 1879.

⁶ The increase in government orders likely stemmed from the war with Spain. See the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics and Labor, *Annual Statistics of Manufacturing*, (Boston: 1899), p. 291.

⁷ The new engine that Hylan purchased was built by the Rollins & Company of Nashua, New Hampshire. See "Mill Matters—New Engine for New England Bunting," *Lowell Morning Times*, September 6, 1893.



By 1910 the Lower Belvidere area along the Concord River (left) was lined with three and four-story mills. Most of these buildings were demolished, beginning in the 1920s.

The Musketaquid Mills

In 1902 the Hylans reorganized New England Bunting, capitalizing it at \$50,000.⁸ At about this time the Hylans established the Musketaquid Mills with Eugene J. Hylan serving as the company's treasurer. This new venture included a selling agency in New York City, Jolesch, Hylan & Company, led by financier Samuel Jolesch, of Ennis Texas. Jolesch, who had offices on Broadway in New York City and operated as a buyer for a number textile companies, also served as president of the Musketaquid Mills.⁹ This new enterprise, located on Davidson Street in an existing mill building, near the New England Bunting factory on Howe Street, produced dress goods and fine worsted cloth. The younger Hylan's company was soon quite profitable and in 1908 he expanded operations with the construction of a four-story, brick building on Davidson Street. Hylan moved 70 looms from his older mill into the new factory and purchased 70 additional looms, powered by a Morgan-Smith turbine along with a 300-horsepower boiler. Hylan recapitalized his company issuing stock that amounted to \$300,000 to finance this expansion, and the new mill began operations in early 1909.¹⁰

⁸ Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics and Labor, *Annual Statistics of Manufacturing*, (Boston: 1903), p. 6.

⁹ This partnership between a New England Protestant, namely Eugene Hylan, and a Jewish financier like Jolesch was somewhat unusual in the textile industry. Information on this partnership is sketchy. See *The Trow Copartnership and Corporation Directory of the Boroughs of Manhattan and the Bronx*, (March 1909), p. 396; "Miscellaneous Notes" in *Fibre & Fabric*, v. 44 (January 12, 1907), p. 26).

¹⁰ This expansion of the Musketaquid Mills is noted in "Mill News" published in *Textile World*, v. 36 (February 1909), p. 117.



Caption: The former mill of the United States Worsted Company, called the Musketaquid Mills, is one of the few surviving textile mills in Lower Belvidere.

United States Worsted Company

The same year that Hylan began production in the new mill he sold the company to the recently formed United States Worsted Company. This concern, incorporated in Maine in 1908, was headed by P. Robert G. Sjostrom, who was born in Sweden in 1859 and, at the age of 13, had immigrated to the United States.¹¹ The worsted company operated four New England plants by 1910, including the Musketaquid.¹² Meanwhile, Hylan commuted to Lawrence, Massachusetts, where he served as agent of a woolen company. By 1922 he was operating the Wachusett Mills under the aegis of E. J. Hylan Textile Company, with factory space in part of the former Middlesex Mills. His father continued

¹¹ U.S. federal census, Westfield Township, New Jersey, 1900. Sjostrom was living with his wife and three children in Westfield Township at the time of this census. By 1910 he resided with his family in New Rochelle, New York. In addition to his position of treasurer of United States Worsted, Sjostrom was also president of the Hungarian-American Bank of New York City. See "Predicts Industrial Gain," *New York Times*, October 9, 1910. While serving as treasurer of the company, Sjostrom relocated to Lawrence, Massachusetts, by 1915. The company's main office was on State Street in Boston. See Boston city directory, 1915, p. 1781.

¹² The origins of United States Worsted date from early 1908 when a group of investors assumed control of the Saugus Manufacturing Company, a worsted producer that fell into bankruptcy following the Panic of 1907. By 1910, United States Worsted operated the Iroquois Mills (Saugus), the Lawrence Dye Works in Lawrence, Massachusetts, the William Tinkham Company in Harrisville, Rhode Island, and the Musketaquid Mills in Lowell. The company employed about 3,000 workers in its plants. See "Saugus Company to Reorganize," *Fibre & Fabric*, v. 47 (April 11, 1908); *Moody's Magazine*, v. 9, (January, 1910), p. 69; "Predicts Industrial Gain," *New York Times*, October 9, 1910. U.S. Worsted purchased one additional mill in the Lowell area. This was the woolen mill of George Moore on Stony Brook in North Chelmsford. Renamed the Silesia Worsted Mills, U.S. Worsted operated this factory into the 1920s. See Wilson Waters, *History of Chelmsford, Massachusetts*, (Lowell, MA: Courier-Citizen Co., 1917), p. 371.

to serve as treasurer of the New England Bunting Company into the 1920s, when it ceased operations and the mill building was subsequently demolished.

Under the aegis of United States Worsted Company, the Musketaquid Mills passed from local control into the hands of a Boston-based corporation. During its initial years the company was a financial success and became the largest worsted producer in New England. Aided by government contracts during the First World War, U.S. Worsted remained profitable through 1919. Beginning in 1920, however, sales rapidly dropped and the company curtailed production. By 1922, a year marked by labor struggles and an industry-wide textile depression, the company was teetering on the verge of bankruptcy. A creditors' committee proposed a reorganization plan that stockholders adopted and U.S. Worsted recovered by the end of 1922, posting a modest profit while operating all of its plants.¹³

The Musketaquid Mills continued to produce worsteds through the 1920s, but the company faced intensifying competition with Southern mills paying lower wages and operating with far fewer labor laws. By 1931, the United States Worsted Company was bankrupt and in the hands of a receiver. Loring Young of Boston, appointed receiver for U.S. Worsted, received permission from a federal judge to liquidate the company's property, including the Musketaquid Mills.¹⁴

¹³ "United States Worsted: Reorganization Plan Adopted—Improvement Made in 1922, All Plants Operating," *Wall Street Journal*, January 15, 1923.

¹⁴ "United States Worsted," *Wall Street Journal*, July 1, 1931.