

William Walker & Company

Early History of the Site

In the early 1790s, Nathan Ames, Sr., developed this site at Massic Falls as an ironworks, producing hoes, edge tools, and shovels.¹ Ames' son, Nathan, Jr., later assumed ownership of the property, but sold it and moved to Chicopee, Massachusetts in 1829. Perez O. Richmond, a manufacturer of cotton batting, acquired the property and water rights in 1834, and constructed a paper and wadding mill two years later. Richmond leased part of the property to other manufacturers. This included a flannel mill, constructed by Captain Artemas Young in 1834 and destroyed by fire that same year, as well as carpenter's shop and blacksmith's shops.



Water at Massic Falls was first used for manufacturing purposes in the early 1790s when Nathan Ames established an ironworks on the west side of the Concord River.

Lawrence Street formed the western border of the Richmond property, which was intersected by an extension of Mill Street, which extended toward the Concord River. To the north of the Mill Street extension stood Richmond's paper mill and a blacksmith shop, opposite of which was located a group of frame and masonry buildings, leased to other small manufacturers.

¹ Little has been written about the industrial development at Massic Falls on the Concord River. The earliest textile mill at this site was established around 1834. Its owner, Captain Artemas Young produced flannel goods. It was destroyed in a fire, however, but the subsequent owner, Perez O. Richmond, leased the property to other small manufacturers. Richmond died in 1854 and nine years later Walker & Co. completed a brick factory building and commenced the production of indigo-dyed flannels. See Zina E. Stone, "Before the Power Loom: The Earliest Cotton and Woolen Industries at East Chelmsford and Vicinity and Their Promoters," Contributions to the Old Residents' Historical Association, v. 6, (Lowell, MA: Courier-Citizen Company, 1904), p. 51; Peter M. Molloy, The Lower Merrimack Valley: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites, (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1976), p. 55.



The Richmond paper mill, shown on this 1850 atlas of Lowell, stood on the west side of the Concord River below Massic Falls. Ames Street was named after the Ames family that operated an ironworks at the falls in the late 18th century.

Richmond died in 1854 and nine years later William Walker, William Jowett, and Samuel Greenwood, each of whom was born in England and immigrated to the United States in the late 1840s, formed William Walker & Company and opened a woolen mill at Massic Falls. William Walker came from the textile center of Oldham and settled in Lawrence, Massachusetts, where, after working as spinner, he acquired enough capital to undertake a lucrative dry goods business. Upon opening the mill, Samuel Greenwood, also from Lawrence and an overseer in the Pemberton Mill, managed the operation, which employed about 20 women and men.² Greenwood, his wife Martha, and their three sons lived in a small wood-frame dwelling on Floyd Street several blocks from the mill.³

² Walker began operating the woolen mill in Lowell in late 1863. See the Lowell Daily Courier, October 12, 1863.

³ See entries for the Greenwood family in the city directories of 1866, 1868, and 1870.



The only major part of the William Walker Mill that survives is this granite structure that once served as a woolen storehouse.

Walker's two sons, Charles H. and Daniel G., joined the enterprise and became partners after Greenwood and Jowett withdrew. The company produced indigo blue flannels, yacht cloths, and sackings. After William Walker died in 1888 the sons sold the mill to two New Jersey capitalists, James E. and Wilkinson Crossley, who were brothers and also of English parentage. The Crossleys had gained experience in the woolen industry in East Windsor, Connecticut, and Maynard, Massachusetts, but after acquiring the Walker mill they operated it only about one-and-a-half years before building a new woolen factory in Barre, Massachusetts, in 1891, and relocating there. Although many of the workers reportedly moved to Barre to work in this new mill, about 200 jobs were lost in Lowell when the former Walker mill closed.⁴

Daniel G. Walker died in 1889 and Charles H. Walker was hired as superintendent of Stott's Mill No. 2 on Lawrence Street, along the Wamesit Canal. He died in 1901. By about 1900 the Wamesit Power Company purchased the former Walker mill and may have operated it as part of the United States Bunting Company.⁵

⁴ The Crossley brothers ran a mill in Barre, Massachusetts, just prior to moving to Lowell. They decided to construct a new water-powered mill in Barre and concentrate the production of dress goods there in 1891. See "The Crossley Mfg. Co.," in *Fibre & Fabric*, v. 13, (July 4, 1891), p. 158.

⁵ Molloy, The Lower Merrimack Valley, p. 55.



The blue arrow points to the remains of the Walker Mill. To the right of this structure is a group of industrial buildings which once housed a commercial laundry, formerly the largest in Lowell.