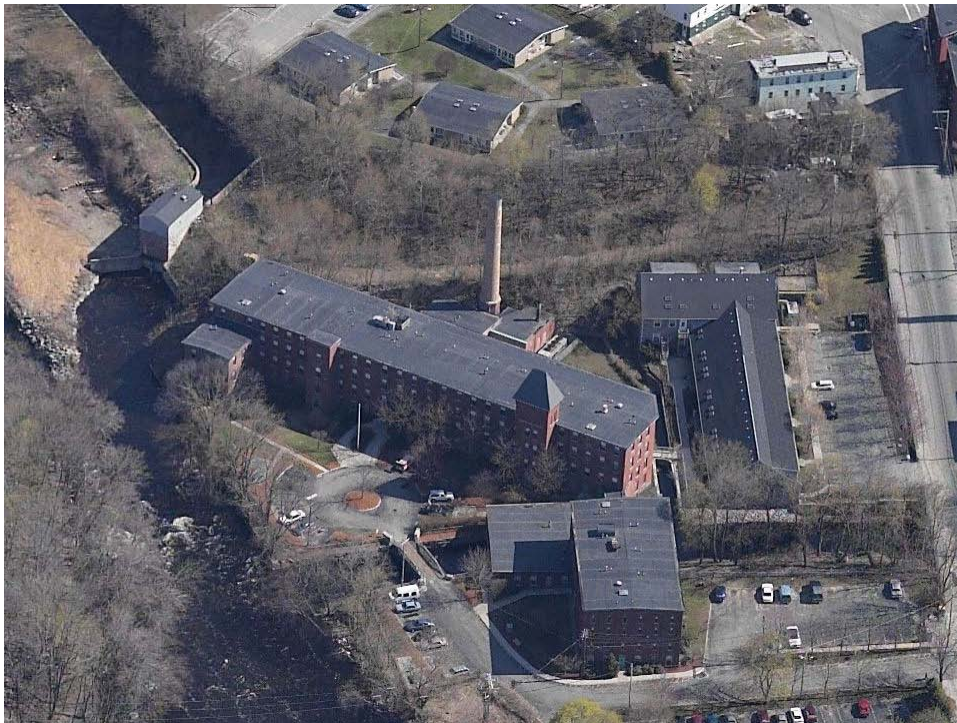


## Stirling Mills

### Origin of the Mill

During the Civil War, when Lowell's cotton mills closed due to a raw cotton shortage, the city's far smaller woolen industry prospered and a number of new factories on the Concord River were constructed. One of these was located near the confluence of Hale's Brook and the Concord River. In 1864 Charles A. Stott, son of the English-born Charles Stott, received his father's financial backing and erected a four-story, brick woolen mill that measured 111 feet by 54 feet. Water provided by the Whipple Canal, which was soon renamed the Wamesit Canal, powered the mill's machinery that included six sets of cards, spinning frames, and power looms, and initially employed about 60 persons. The company produced plain and twill flannels, and ladies' dress goods.



Caption: This recently produced aerial view of the former Stirling Woolen Mills shows the Wamesit Canal (upper left) in relation to the layout of the mill complex.

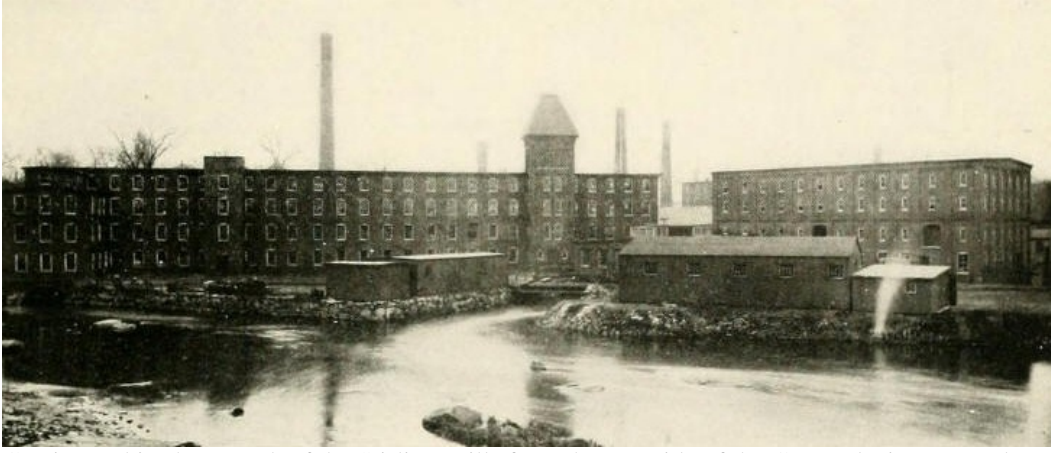
### Bankruptcy

Although Charles Stott was one of the key investors in his son's mill, the Boston-based firm of Parker, Wilder & Company, a successful selling house for a number of textile firms, maintained ownership of the property. As agent, Charles A. Stott managed the mill and it was during its initial years of operation that Stott gained a measure of support among Lowell's working men and women when he spoke in favor of the 10-hour movement. His management of the mill was uneven, however, and he relied heavily on his father for both technical and financial support.<sup>1</sup> In the late 1860s prices for cotton

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<sup>1</sup> The financial and managerial difficulties of Charles A. Stott in the operation of the family's textile companies are seen in the reports on him filed by an agent of R.G. Dun & Co. For the years 1866 through 1871, see R.G. Dun & Co., v. 49, p. 301, at the Baker Library, Harvard University.

and woolen goods dropped and the industry suffered a short-term depression. Charles A. Stott's mill never recovered from this downturn and in 1871, Parker, Wilder & Company purchased the property, which was eventually renamed the Stirling Mills.<sup>2</sup>



Caption: This photograph of the Stirling Mills from the east side of the Concord River was taken ca. 1899. Its distinctive stair tower with a pyramidal roof is seen in the center.

### Expansion

Soon after it assumed control of the mill, Parker, Wilder & Company appointed Edward D. Holden mill agent. Born in West Concord, New Hampshire, in 1848, Holden received his education in public schools and a private academy before working at his father's woolen mill of the Concord Manufacturing Company.<sup>3</sup> He moved to Lowell in 1874 and remained agent of the Stirling Mills until his death in 1902. It was during Holden's tenure as agent that the woolen company became profitable and significantly expanded its factory. The powerhouse, containing a 96-horsepower turbine and a 200-horsepower steam engine, which substantially increased the capacity of the mill for additional machinery, was completed in 1883. In addition, a new dye house was constructed that same year. A large four-story addition to the mill was erected in 1896-97, extending the factory to its current configuration of 240 feet by 60 feet.

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<sup>2</sup> For the takeover by Parker, Wilder & Company and the subsequent reorganization of the former Charles A. Stott mill as the Stirling Mills see *Lowell Daily Courier*, November 13, 1871 & May 27, 1872.

<sup>3</sup> Edward D. Holden's father, Daniel Holden, was born in Billerica in 1802 and after working as a laborer on farms in his native town he obtained a job in the flannel mill of H. G. Howe on the Concord River. Having gained knowledge in woolen manufacturing in Howe's mill, Holden accepted the job of superintendent of a woolen mill in nearby Dracut. Ten years later he joined his brother in a woolen mill partnership in West Concord, New Hampshire. This concern continued until his death in 1874. See an obituary of Daniel Holden in *Bulletin of the National Association of Wool Manufacturers, 1899*, v. 29, (Boston, MA: Rockwell & Churchill, 1899), pp. 156-157. A short biographical sketch of Edward D. Holden is found in William Richard Cutter, *Historic Homes and Places and Genealogical and Personal Memoirs, Relating to the Families of Middlesex County, Massachusetts*, v. 3, (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1908), p. 1237.



Like a number of Lowell's mill agents, Edwin D. Holden was active in local Republican party politics and served as an alderman in 1888 and 1889. He was the Stirling Mill's agent for nearly 28 years.

*Edwin D. Holden*

## 20<sup>th</sup> Century Operations

The Stirling Mills was one of the longest operating woolen manufacturers in Lowell and was one of the first mills to use carbonizing machinery to scour raw wool. This wool scouring process entailed a series of acid baths for removing oils and cellulose fibers from the wool. The company constructed a building to house the carbonizing equipment in 1907 and the structure extended across Hale's Brook. This permitted waste water and acid to be dumped through the floor directly into the brook.<sup>4</sup>



As seen in this 1924 city atlas of Lowell the Stirling Mills (its name is misspelled) is located along the Concord River and Hale's Brook. The mill derived its water power from the Wamesit Canal to the left. The carbonizing building spans over the brook in the center.

<sup>4</sup> Peter M. Molloy, The Lower Merrimack Valley: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites, (Washington, DC: National Park Service, 1976), pp. 54-55.

The peak years of production for the Stirling Mills occurred during World War I when the company employed about 250 workers.<sup>5</sup> By the late 1920s the mill contained 14 sets of cards, some 7,000 mule spindles, and 94 broadlooms. Its main products included broadcloths, flannels, and women's suitings.<sup>6</sup> The Stirling Mills closed in the 1970s but much of the mill complex is still used today as elderly housing.



This late 1970s view of the Stirling Mills along the Wamesit Canal is looking north. The long-brick building in the foreground is the wool storage and sorting facility built in 1897. It was demolished soon after this photograph was taken.

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<sup>5</sup> Frederick W. Coburn, *History of Lowell and Its People*, v. 2, (New York: Lewis Publishing Company, 1920), p. 417.

<sup>6</sup> .Molloy, *The Lower Merrimack Valley*, p. 55.