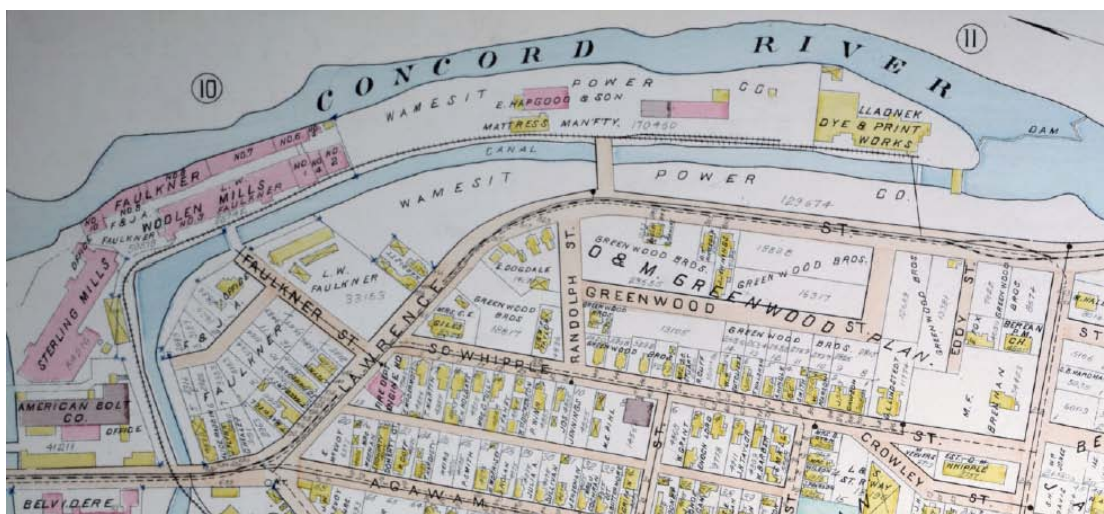


Waterhead Mills

Founding of the Waterhead Mills

The area near the headworks of the Wamesit Canal, initially part of Oliver Whipple's powderworks, was redeveloped after 1855 when Whipple ceased the manufacture of gunpowder in Lowell. By 1866 this included Howe, Taylor & Company's chemical and dye works, L.W. Faulkner & Son's flannel mill, Hosford & Chase's woolen mill, along with a number of smaller workshops and manufacturers. Shortly before William and Otto Hockmeyer established the Waterhead Mills in 1900, the major industrial concerns included R.W. Kendall & Company's Lladnek dye and print works, and the Bay State Mills of the American Woolen Company, which had taken over the Faulkner Mills in 1899.



As seen in this 1896 city atlas of Lowell, the Lladnek dye works occupied the southernmost extent of the Wamesit Power Company property along the Concord River. The Hockmeyer brothers established the Waterhead Mills in 1900 and eventually expanded from the site of the dye works, north to the Haggood & Son mattress factory. These buildings were torn down and replaced by the large brick building that stands today.

The Hockmeyer Brothers

Of German and English parentage, the Hockmeyers immigrated from England in 1888 settling first in Englewood, New Jersey, where they initiated an import business. Otto Hockmeyer subsequently moved to Staten Island, before relocating to Lowell in 1900.¹ He and his brother William assumed control of the defunct Lladnek works. Rufus W. Kendall, of Newton, Massachusetts, who had been a cofounder of the dye plant that he named Lladnek—Kendall spelled backward—had closed this operation a few years earlier.² The Hockmeyers imported English machinery for the processing of corduroy and velvet. In addition, they installed dyeing vats and equipment for finishing cotton

¹ Federal census, Richmond Borough, New York, New York, 1900.

² The Lladnek dye works was also called the Kendall Mills. Rufus W. Kendall and his partner, the Boston-based John W. Alline, were involved in the dry goods trade for many years. Henry D. Kendall, a son of Rufus, served as the plant superintendent in the late 1880s. See *"Blue Book: A Pocket Directory of the Textile Manufactures of the United States and Canada"*, (New York: J.E. Palmer, 1888), p. 68.

goods.³ The Hockmeyers quickly prospered and in 1908 they incorporated their firm capitalizing it at \$50,000. Soon after, they greatly expanded their factory. By the 1910s the plant included a three-story main factory building of brick construction, a steam plant, and a number of wood-frame structures used for storage and repair shops.



This view of the former Waterhead Mills, now used in part as Romahlo's gym, is looking southeast from the Wamesit Canal. Photo by Gray Fitzsimons.

Vertipile, Inc.

By 1920, Clive E. Hockmeyer, the eldest of Otto's of his two sons, became treasurer of Hockmeyer Brothers, Inc., while in his twenties. Eventually he was joined in the family firm by his younger brother Victor. In 1939 Clive Hockmeyer founded another textile company, Vertipile, Inc., to engage in the manufacture of flock and loose flock. For nearly two decades Hockmeyer Brothers, Inc., Waterhead Mills, and Vertipile, Inc., operated nearly side by side. Vertipile rented factory space in the old American Bolt Company plant on Lawrence Street, as well as in the former U.S. Cartridge Company's factory, across the street.⁴ Eventually the Waterhead Mills closed, though Vertipile, led by Clive Hockmeyer, Jr., and his brother Vincent, continued to operate in Lowell into the early 1970s. In 1972 the company relocated to an industrial park in Leominster, Massachusetts. The last of the Hockmeyer family with an interest in Vertipile, Eastham Hockmeyer, sold all of his shares in the company and resigned from the firm.⁵ Vertipile eventually merged with Quaker Fabrics of Fall River, Massachusetts.

³ The Hockmeyers' initiation of the Waterhead Mills is noted in *Fibre & Fabric*, v. 32, (September 1, 1900), p. 30.

⁴ Lowell city directory, 1956.

⁵ Eastham Hockmeyer Resigns at Veripile, Sells Stake," *Wall Street Journal*, December 22, 1978.