

# A Bit of History About Our Putnam River Mills

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## Extracts From River Mill Histories and Commentaries

### History of Industry in Putnam

*Extracts From: History of Windham County, Connecticut, Bayles, Richard M.; New York: W.W. Preston, 1889*

Cotton manufacturing in Putnam dates back to 1807 when, at Cargill Falls, Smith Wilkinson opened the Pomfret Manufacturing Company - a four story wooden building, 100 by 32 feet in dimensions. Its business was to spin cotton yarn to be woven on hand looms into coarse cloth and bed-ticking. Its working force was a few children picked up in the neighborhood, with a man in each room to help and oversee them. They were paid about seven shillings a week. So rapid was the increase of population that in 1812 Mr. Wilkinson built a school house for his village - a brick building erected on a steep hill east of the river. A handsome house opposite the mill was soon built by Mr. Wilkinson, for his own residence, and other houses for operatives and new residents. Mr. Wilkinson took much pride in the great mowing lot near the Upper Falls, and in other parts of his farm. It is said that thirty-five hay-makers might sometimes be seen on a good hay day swinging their scythes in time with each other. A village cow was taken from house to house every night and morning in summer that all the families might have a supply of new milk. Sufficient travel passed through the village to support Malachi Green, a respectable tavern under the old yew tree at the west end of Cargill's block.

The lonely vale, with its rocky hills and heavy forests, rang with the busy clatter of the numerous workmen. With happy forethought Mr. Wilkinson selected the Fourth of July for raising the frame of the factory, when a great concourse of people from all the adjoining towns came together to help about the work and satisfy their curiosity in regard to this novel enterprise. The work of building and reconstruction went rapidly forward. The solitary walk "laid out by Mr. Knight was less attractive to the young manager than a brisk ride to Killingly hill, where he found agreeable society in the hospitable home of Captain Sampson Howe. In a few months he married bliss Elizabeth Howe, and began housekeeping in a small house east of the river (Site now occupied by Putnam Bank). Machinery and all needful appurtenances were hauled up from Providence, and on April 1st, 1807, the first cotton factory in eastern Connecticut was set in motion-a four story wooden building, 100 by 32 feet in dimensions. Its business was to spin cotton-yarn to be woven on hand looms into coarse cloth and bed-ticking. Its working force was a few children picked up in the neighborhood, with a man in each room to help and oversee them. The boys and girls were delighted with the new employment, and thought the glittering machines "the prettiest things in the world." When a heavy snow storm blocked the roads one morning the little girls put on men's boots and waded through the drifts in their eagerness to work. They were paid about seven shillings a week.

The children were not alone in rejoicing over the new industry. To the women who wove the cloth it was a boon beyond expression. It is hard to realize the scarcity of money in those days, especially in farming families, when produce was cheap, markets few, business openings rare and wages low. The privilege of earning things for themselves was thus most joyfully welcomed by hundreds' of active women. A store promptly opened by the company, offered all manner of useful and ornamental articles in exchange for weaving. Women of every rank, the well-to-do as well as the poor, hastened to avail themselves of this golden opportunity. The impulse given by the new mill was felt in many ways. Many workmen were needed for teaming, farming, mill tending, house building and other purposes. The grain mill was kept busily at work. A handsome house opposite the mill was soon built by Mr. Wilkinson, for his own residence, and other houses for operatives and new residents.

So rapid was the increase of population that in 1812 Mr. Wilkinson found it needful to build a school house for his village. A neat brick building was erected on a steep hill east of the river, which was also used on Sundays for a house of worship. Though himself a member of the Congregational church at Killingly hill, and a regular attendant upon its service, Mr. Wilkinson was on friendly terms with all other denominations, and most willingly accorded them the use of the school house. The Methodists held service every alternate Sabbath for some years, under the charge of the Thompson circuit preacher. On other Sundays the Baptists "held the fort," under Elders Grow, Crosby, Nichols, Ross or Cooper. Reverends Daniel Dow or Elisha Atkins or Eliphalet Lyman would often carry on "a five o'clock meeting" in the brick school house. So sober and substantial was the character of the Pomfret Factory residents that there were but two families in fifteen years which habitually refused church attendance. The singing, according to a trustworthy reporter, was as varied as the sect of the preachers. When the Methodists held service choristers like John M. Sabin and Augustus W. Perrin led such a volume of male and female voices as would shake the rafters of the house and waken the soundest sleeper. The Baptist singers were led by Artemas Bruce, especially on funeral occasions, and the Congregationalists by Mr. Jedidiah Leavens, unless Mr. Dow preferred to set his own favorite tunes-Windham, Mortality, Florida or Hebron. Sunday was Sunday indeed under Mr. Wilkinson's forcible administration, and any deviation from its proper observance was promptly noted and punished, and even those audacious youngsters who presumed to play ball upon the day of the state fast had the law enforced against them and were made to pay legal fines.

During the war with Great Britain Pomfret factory flourished greatly, making one year a dividend of \$86,00. By paying, large prices they were able to secure sufficient supplies of cotton from Philadelphia, the large profit more than reimbursing the heavy outlay. Thus solidly established the company met the reverses that followed without embarrassment, and succeeded in introducing power looms and other new methods of labor without serious inconvenience. Continued improvements were made in the village and surrounding country. The factory farms were brought under good cultivation. Mr. Wilkinson took much pride in the great mowing lot near the Upper Falls, and in other parts of his farm. It is said that thirty-five hay-makers might sometimes be seen on a good hay day swinging their scythes in time with each other. Methodical in all things, Mr. Wilkinson once announced "that he had upon count a cock of hay for every day in the year—365." A village cow was taken from house to house every night and morning in summer that all the families might have a supply of new milk. Each tenant had a garden spot for raising his own vegetables, and laid up his own beef and pork for family consumption. Fresh meat was brought in- occasionally by farmers as they slaughtered, and meat, milk and ice carts were all unknown in those primitive days.

Upon the request of Mr. Wilkinson, a road `vas laid by the selectmen of Thompson from the old road over Parks hill direct to the village in 1818. The town voted to accept the road as laid out and also voted, " That it is the sense of the town that the old road from Pomfret Factory, until it intersects the above reported road, be discontinued." Bundy's bridge was newly covered and a new road laid out to the Brick Factory. Sufficient travel passed through the village to support a respectable tavern under the old yew tree at the west end of Cargill's block. Malachi Green is remembered among its landlords. In 1823 a new stone building was erected, to be used for the manufacture of woolen goods. Its foundations were laid by Asa White, a veteran mill constructor, who had overseen the building of some of the first factories in New England, but who died while this was in progress. In 1826 Mr. Wilkinson became chief proprietor, as well as manager, associating with Mr. James Rhodes in place of the former company. The new stone mill was now used for cotton manufacturing and the old mill for woolen goods. More houses and workmen were demanded and business operations extended. A new interest grew up at the upper privilege, with the building of a brick factory there by Mr. James Rhodes in 1830. Through the good offices of a former resident of this section, we are indebted for an unique Directory, giving a full report of the residents of the old Pomfret Factory between 1815-1830, viz :

"Smith Wilkinson-agent Pomfret Manufacturing company. Superintendents in their order-Augustus Howe, Thomas Dike, Gen. Reuben Whitman. Overseers of weaving shop-David Whitman, John N. Leavens. Machinists--Eden Leavens, Asa White, James Cunningham, A. Blanchard, Alpheus Chaffee. Blacksmiths-John Phipps, `William Phipps, Jonathan Clough. Overseers of carding and repairing-Arthur Tripp, P. Carpenter, Ira Graves, Almon Graves, Benjamin Morris, Jedediah Morris, J. H. Morris, Jr., George Morris, Thomas Chapman, Lyman Lawrence, G.. W. Eddy, William Andrews, Welcome Eddy, Benjamin Matthews, Charles Richmond, Joseph Cundall, Obadiah Grinnell, J. Keach, Charles Chaffee, J. Dike, D. Harrington, S. Harrington, Jr. Manager of Picker Mill and general painter -David Hall. Mule spinners-Green Capron, William Johnson, Jonathan Perrin, George B. Carey, Martin Leach. Clothiers and fullers-A. Thompson, J. Basset. House carpenters-Sylvester Stanley, Joseph Heath, Samuel Truesdale, Jr., Asa Park. Blue dyer-Jedidiah Leavens. Bleachers-Ephraim Con-den, E. Chase, Jacob Mann. The clerks in the store were James Hopkins, William Arnold, S. Davis Leavens, George Howe, Augustus Wilkinson, Henry Wilkinson, Daniel P. Dew, Horace Whittaker, Edmond Wilkinson, William Warren,

Sampson Howe. Clerks in the Domestic department were Lemuel H. Elliott, N. Aldrich, Jedidiah Leavens, Jr., A. W. Perrin. The keepers of the general boarding house were, in order, Stephen Stone, L. H. Elliott (afterward steward of Brown University), N. Aldrich, Willard Arnold, Asahel Elliott, Benjamin Warren, Eleazer Sabin. The grain miller was Frank Pearce; the saw miller, Isaac Moore; the butcher, J. H. Morris; the cow-herder was Thomas Richmond; the freight-teamer to and from Providence was Joseph Stone, with a yoke of venerable oxen, Bug and Bright, and a younger yoke, beside Hezekiah Converse (a-grand bass singer) was farm teamer for many years; his successors were Harvey White and Reuben Hoar. There were 'captain farmers' also Darius Starr, William Martin, Elliot Hammond. Others in the vicinity who plied the plow, scythe and hoe, while their sons and daughters worked in the mills, were Messrs. Bean, Harrington, Chaffee, Faulkner, Brown, Keach, Cary, Weld, Willard, Herandean, Johnson, Kelley, Gallup, Maserve, Chamberlin. Among those who tried to keep them all with a good understanding (the shoe-makers) were S. Truesdale, A. Plummer, J. Harris, G. Glasco."

South of the Falls was the Monohansett Manufacturing Company for the manufacture of sheetings, established in 1872. About 175 hands were employed by this company.

The manufacture of cotton goods, the prime element in Putnam's early growth and prosperity, is still its dominant interest, engrossing the largest amount of capital, giving employment to by far the largest number of residents. Rhodesville leads in this manufacture with its mammoth mills and myriad looms. As in former days Mr. Smith Wilkinson stood for the embodiment of manufacturing enterprise, so now one man stands at the head of three large establishments, overseeing the general interests of a business far beyond the highest ideal of previous generations. The Morse mill with its large addition, the fine Powhatan mill erected in 1872. the mills of the former Nightingale Company, including the old Rhodesville mill, are all under the management of the general agent and part proprietor, George M. Morse; G. C. Nightingale, treasurer. A capital of \$600,000 is invested in these manufactories. More than nine hundred looms are run, and about eight hundred hands employed. The former Ballou mill passed into the hands of Mr. Edward Cutler, a much respected resident of Putnam, who carried on the establishment for a number of years. He was succeeded by an association of Providence gentlemen, known as the Putnam Manufacturing Company, which after various reverses, still retains the privilege. South of the Falls, on Meadow street, are the fine new buildings of the Monohansett Manufacturing Company for the manufacture of sheetings, established in 1872 -Estus Lamb and George W. Holt, of Providence, proprietors. About 175 hands are employed by this company-George W. Holt, president; A. F. Lamb, treasurer; George W. Holt, Jr.. resident agent.

The old Pomfret Factory Woolen Company, which under the management of Mr. M. Moriarty, had been doing a very successful business, was seriously crippled by the failure of a large wool house in New York and after a year's struggle was forced to make an assignment. The present Putnam Woolen Company was organized in 1878; E. A. Wheelock, resident agent and treasurer. This company improves the privilege of the former woolen company in the manufacture of cassimere, employing nineteen sets of machinery and over three hundred hands.

With the influx of new blood and capital several new and promising industries have been established. In this aggressive age the supreme authority of King Cotton has been questioned. and wool, silk, iron, steel and even such down-trodden entities as shoes, assert their claim to equal sovereignty.

The manufacture of silk goods was introduced in Putnam by Messrs. G. A. Hammond and C. C. Knowlton, January 1st, 1875. Land and building on, the flat below the falls was procured from Mr. G. M. Morse, one of the contracting parties, and great pains taken with all the initiatory arrangements for this novel enterprise. About thirty girls were ready to begin work, attracted by the inherent fascination of silken fabrics for the feminine mind-with a sufficient number of experienced workmen to instruct and aid. With new machinery, skilled labor and unwearied pains the mill was successfully set in motion, and bales of silken filaments from Japan and China wrought into substantial sewing-silk and twist for American use. The process. though not difficult, required a nicety of touch and observation, and many applicants failed to meet these conditions, but in time all difficulties were overcome and many women and girls rejoiced in the establishment of this agreeable and remunerative industry. At the close of their first decade the Putnam Silk Mills report continued progress and prosperity. In 1885 the business had so outgrown accommodations that the old mill was rented and the works and machinery moved into a large three-story building in the same vicinity, furnishing ample room, abundant light and every convenience. About a hundred and twenty-five operatives, including ninety girls, are steadily employed. A visitor to the mills is struck by the order, neatness and apparent cheerfulness of its inmates. The process by which the slender spinings of the silk worm are transformed into familiar silk and twist and heavy braid is a marvel of mechanical skill and ingenuity. The weekly product is sent immediately to market, through their own agent, no " middle men " being

employed by this firm, and the experiment of silk manufacture in Putnam has proved a financial benefit to all concerned.

## **Factory Girls in a 'Rhode Island System' Mill: the Pomfret [CT] Manufacturing Company 1806-35**

Caroline Sloat (1978), OSV Research Paper - Copyright: Old Sturbridge Inc.

Manufacturing communities have traditionally come to be identified in a kind of historians shorthand. They are either the Rhode Island type or the Waltham type, descriptions based on generalizations about the labor forces of textile factories in southern or northern New England. While this distinction may be true in particular circumstances, the meaning of the Rhode Island definition needs to be evaluated closely, particularly in light of the records of the Pomfret Manufacturing Company.

Pomfret was a Wilkinson company, established in 1806 at the Cargill Falls about thirty miles west of Providence in northeastern Connecticut. With the youngest Wilkinson son, Smith, in charge as resident agent, the company survived the economic crises of the early nineteenth century: the Embargo beginning in 1808, the peace treaty and depression after 1816, and conversion to power looms in the 1820s. When the company was founded, the partners had amassed hundreds of acres around the Quinebaug River, including the buildings which already housed a number of small industries clustered around the Cargill Falls. Immediately, the company hired masons and carpenters to construct the cotton factory to run in conjunction with the saw and grist mills there. The distillery was converted into tenements, called the Still House, accomodating both individuals and families at different times. In the quarter century between the formation of the Pomfret Manufacturing Company in February, 1806, and the 1832 Survey of Manufactures in the United States, published by the Secretary of the Treasury, Louis McLane, the village grew to 300 inhabitants. Unfortunately the information about how many households and single individuals residing there was not recorded. We only know that half the residents were employed by the company, at the factory or in another capacity.

The three surviving volumes of Memorandum and Contract Books are the prime source for the history of the company, although incomplete and far from handing us everything on a silver platter. From it I have obtained the names of employees, their work and a record of their housing accommodation, which is the basis for this report.

Spinning began at Pomfret in the spring of 1807, with three or four men, and nine children. Some were local residents, others had fathers who were hired as mechanics or to do outdoor work for the company. Mial Pearce was hired to tend the sawmill, while his wife was to "do the company's washing," and the children to work in the factory. In April 1807, Pearce's contract allowed 7/6 per week for Celia's wages and 4/6 for Betsy. Four years later, the contract for the family indicates how the family was keeping pace with the growing production. Mial Pearce was "lent a loom out of the gristmill chamber for Celia to use and she is to allow six pence on a web of 40 yards for the use of said loom." [March 25, 1811]

By that time, the company needed to diversify what it could offer for sale. In May, 1811, the Directors voted that it is highly necessary to get most of the yarn we spin woven into cloth. [We must] extend the deying of yarn . . . and by all prudent means increase the weaving of goods. To be able to throw into the market every week as much as we spin . . . more agents need to be employed in suitable places.

The company worked with storekeepers who distributed yarn to home weavers and returned woven cloth to the factory, a few single women were hired expressly for the job, and as we have seen, older children and some wives already in the factory village were employed, as well. Already the employees and their employment were being modified to fill the company's needs.

Smith Wilkinson was asked in 1826 about the source of labor for the factory. He responded that  
In collecting our help, we are obliged to employ poor families and generally those having the greatest number of children, those who have lived in retired situations on small and poor farms, or in hired houses, where their only means of living has been the labour of the father and the earnings of the mother, while the children spent their time mostly at play.

While that response was made in 1826, a subtle change already seems to have been taking place. To be sure, the hiring policy for the first twenty years had been as Wilkinson had said, finding families headed by a man or a widowed woman, which could provide several workers from one household. What was actually happening was that many of the children hired initially to tend spinning machinery had grown into teenage girls and young women who could be trained to operate power looms. In the early 1820s, mechanics were hired to construct looms and power transmission systems and masons and carpenters brought in to build a second cotton mill.

The 1820 Federal census report indicates that there were 170 residents of Pomfret factory village. The labor force included 15 men, 20 women and 51 children, but soon that figure began to change. In 1832 there were 300 residents, 56 male employees, 75 women and 20 children. In comparing the data for the two years, one finds that the proportions had also changed dramatically. Male employees had increased from 17% to 36% (though this figure also includes seasonal agricultural laborers). Women had increased from 24% to 50% and children had declined from 60% to 30% of the employees. (This is based on the assumption that both 1820 and 1832 figures count those aged 12 and under as children.) During the period from October 1824 through the end of 1835, Smith Wilkinson recorded contracts with 156 women and girls who came to work at the factory. While this is not the entire newly hired labor force it is a place to begin to identify employees, both those named and those not specifically named. Who were they? Not married women. They were generally housewives, they might board workers, or do an occasional piece work task, but they did not work the long factory hours. Also, young women who were about to be married gave notice.

The first young woman named as "hired for weaving on water looms" was 17 year old Lucy Geen of Thompson, Connecticut. She was to "Have the same price as other weavers." Surprise! There were already weavers at work, but this was the first contract. Evidently, it had been possible at first to train weavers from among the individuals already on the payroll. Mrs. Lydia Graves and her three daughters had come to Pomfret before 1816. Cyrena, Silence and Harriet were born between 1800 and 1805 and were listed on the 1820 census as employed in manufacturing. They are not named in the Contract Book however until February 15, 1828. "Harriet Graves agreed to weave at the established prices, say 7 1/2 mills per yard, 64 yards length." At the same time, Cyrena and Silence, the two older women "both agreed to tend the two dressers in the old mill at 17/- per week each. The balance after paying their mother 7/- per week for board, say 10/- all cash at the end of the year, or for such part as they take in goods say 10/6 per week after deducting their board.

Two years to the day after the contract was made, Cyrena was dead. Her estate was worth \$633, primarily in cash, but with a little furniture and clothing. As there is no way she could have earned all that money in the preceding two years, and as we know that she was in her late twenties when she died, she must have worked in the factory for all or part of the preceding twelve years. Her sister, Silence only worked in the factory for seven months after the 1828 contract. In September she exercised her option to give a month's notice, and on October 29 married James Cunningham, a mechanic who was hired to work on the construction of power looms. The year after their marriage, Cunningham, along with several other former Pomfret employees entered a partnership as the Mechanics Manufacturing Company and started their business a couple of miles from Cargill Falls. If Silence Graves Cunningham had accumulated savings like her sister's \$633, it is highly likely that she was able to give James substantial assistance in his new venture.

What about the new workers, like Lucy Green. The records are not complete enough to reconstitute the entire work force at a given point in time, but they do tell us quite a bit about the workers. The Graves family is not unique but they are at one end of a spectrum of the length of time employed. If found "incompetent to weave," a young woman might be dismissed in two weeks, before earning enough to pay for her board. Some left after a short while for health or family reasons, others could be persuaded to serve out their year long contracts. Others worked for four or more years.

What has been most exciting has been to be able to work with the 156 named individuals in the Contract Books, searching in public records for more information. What can I find about their family backgrounds? How old were they when hired? How long did they work in Pomfret? What did they do after leaving the factory? When I can find the dates and places of birth, marriage and death, I can do further hunting in deeds and probate records. Family genealogies have not proved to be a productive source.

Many of the women come from communities in the northeast corner of Connecticut. At least forty were born in the towns surrounding the factory village. Others were listed by Wilkinson as residing nearby when they came to work, although there are no birth records. Still others came from a wider circle of towns within a short distance of Pomfret, including southern Massachusetts and western Rhode Island.

Family relationships drew a number to Pomfret. It would be possible to board with an aunt or uncle's family living in the community. Friendships also played a part. Two or more girls from the same town might come together, or one might return home to do some recruiting. Because they boarded in families, friends could stay together.

The women's ages at the time of hiring ranged from fifteen to over thirty, although the majority were in their late teens. Interestingly, the four women who were over thirty and single when hired, appear in some surviving store records as having once woven cloth from Pomfret cotton yarn at home. The oldest woman to be named is Lucy Morris, who stopped working as a spooler in March, 1833. The first contract with John H. Morris and his family from Oxford, Massachusetts was dated April 4, 1897, when four children were hired to work in the factory including Lucy. She was 17 at the time, so when she left in 1833 (to keep house after her mother's death), she was 43 and still unmarried.

Wilkinson once said that he "generally hired poor families from the farming business." Studying the families' deeds indicates the extent to which this is true. The fathers of a number of young women owned no land, some had three or four acres, possibly even a "small house on twenty acres. Some had once owned land, but had lost it through insolvency and misfortune. Few families appear to have been as prosperous as Pliny Freeman, whose 100 acre farm is interpreted at Old Sturbridge Village.

What did the future hold for the 156 women who came together at Pomfret Manufacturing Company. As they were single, odds are that they would marry within a few years. Some, of course, married their hometown sweethearts, and for them factory work was only an interlude in a rural way of life. Not surprisingly, Cupid was busy among the looms and spindles, as there were fifteen marriages of men and women both employed by the company.

Another group of women who were married ten years after they had stopped working for the Pomfret Manufacturing Company is a group I am trying to learn more about. In the 1830s, and 1840s, manufacturing was expanding in southern New England. In 1831, Smith Wilkinson described the situation as he saw it from the point of view of hiring: Our greatest difficulty at present is a want of females, women and children, and from the great number of factories now building have my fears that we shall not be able to operate all our machinery another year. (McLean's Report)

A group of former Pomfret women who were married in town in the 1840s gave a Rhode Island manufacturing community as their current place of residence. Admittedly, Vernon Stiles was a popular justice of the peace, who was cooperative in performing weddings, but what this also suggests, is that for many women, manufacturing had become a way of life. Women skilled in the operation of textile machinery could find work, but more than that, without farm homes to which to return, these women had to make their own living. Their skill was the operation of textile machinery.

Finding more about the women employed in southern New England textile communities is complicated by the lack of precise information in the 1830 federal census. The questions were not sensitive enough to pick up this critical shift in population, because the households were not described in sufficient detail. If the individuals in Pomfret and other communities like it had been identified by age, place of birth and occupation in 1830 as they were in 1850, the historical record would have been self-evident. Without it we are dependent on records like Wilkinson's, incomplete though they are, bankruptcy records when they can be found, and a lot of ingenuity and luck in being able to trace the women whose names can be found.

We hope that you enjoy walking or bicycling the new River Mills Heritage Trail, and that it will give you a better sense of the historical contribution made by Putnam's River Mills - our first industries and the early foundation of our community.



## OUR RIVER MILLS – THE HISTORIC FOUNDATION OF OUR COMMUNITY

### History of Rhodesville

Extract From: History of Windham County, Connecticut, Bayles, Richard M.; New York: W.W. Preston, 1889

There were many families in the vicinity worthy of notice if space permitted. Noah Perrin, Sr., the Methodist class leader, had now succeeded to the ownership of the Perrin farm, and his numerous sons and daughters were much in demand for teaching school in the surrounding region, their united service amounting to some sixty-seven terms. Captain Joseph Buck, a mile east on the Providence road, was a much respected citizen, chorister at the West Thompson Methodist church, the model head of a most worthy and promising family. South on the Pomfret road another large and promising family was growing up in the household of Mr. Abel Dunn. Near them lived the Sawyers, one of the old Pomfret families, with the blind brother with such marvelous instinct and aptitudes. Their neighbors, the Gilberts, Halls and Garys, had all large families, growing up to be useful men and women in widely separated fields. Another noted family in that neighborhood was that of Captain Alfred Holmes, whose children it is said were all well educated and gifted, their home the center of a "brilliant social circle." Captain Eleazer Keith, old Deacon Deamon, Mr. Darius Seamans, were well known residents upon the mountain road northward.

These various families, remote from the centers of the three towns in which they dwelt, were drawn in many ways to Pomfret Factory and more or less identified with its interests. In the social life of this pioneer "factory village" there was much that was pleasant and enjoyable. The owner and master was a life-time resident, dwelling among his own people, having a personal interest in all their affairs. A bond of common interest and reciprocal regard united employers and employed as one great family-its central hearth the delightful home of Mr. Wilkinson. Probably no house in the three converging towns entertained so much company. Its hospitable doors were always open, and rich and poor alike, county gentry and village operative, received the same cordial welcome.. The noble and lovely wife of Mr. Wilkinson was indeed the "mother of the village." In health and in sickness, in weal and woe, all were sure of the warmest sympathy and aid.

The Rhodesville enterprise began with the division of the Bundy privilege at the Upper Falls, which was surveyed and laid out in four divisions of about

twenty acres each by Simon Davis, Esq., in 1827. These divisions were then apportioned by lot among the several owners, Abram and Isaac Wilkinson and James Rhodes drawing the two lower privileges, William and Smith Wilkinson the two upper privileges. At this date there were but two houses upon the estate, one on the east side of the river, occupied by Hezekiah Converse, the other on the west side, by the Glasko family. A new dam was soon built and the brick factory completed and ready for work in 1830; Stephen Erwin, of Rhode Island, manager. A row of tenement houses and store building were also constructed; James Bugbee, store-keeper. The operatives were all American. In 1834, the mill narrowly escaped destruction by fire. In 1836, Mr. Nehemiah T. Adams was appointed resident agent and Mr. Leonard Thompson had charge of the store, and was in turn succeeded by Mr. Chauncey Hammett. In 1837, Rhodesville had become so populous that it was constituted school district No. 17, of Thompson, and a school house was built by the company. In the spring of 1841, prosperity was suddenly checked by the burning of the factory building; supposed to be the work of an incendiary. About a hundred persons were then employed by the establishment. The mill was rebuilt under the supervision of Mr. N. T. Adams. The death of Mr. James Rhodes the following year made further changes, and after temporary depression the village entered upon a career of greatly extended prosperity.

In 1835 a road was laid out from Simeon Allen's brick works on the Boston turnpike to the Quinebaug, over the Rhodesville bridge and on east through the South Neighborhood, intersecting the old Woodstock and Thompson turnpike near Sawyer's store, which greatly facilitated the transportation of cotton from Providence. Yet with all the shrewdness and enterprise of the two companies and their managers, the supply of cotton was limited and business operations could not be largely extended. Keen eyes watched with eager interest the experiments in new methods of transportation. Windham county manufacturers noted and encouraged the various schemes for accommodating their own valley, and were prominent among the stockholders of the Norwich & Worcester Railroad Company. The actual opening of the railroad in November, 1839, was joyfully welcomed by business men, though little foreseeing the revolution it would accomplish. The first depot master at the Pomfret Factory was Mr. John O. Fox, removing thither from West Thompson. Amasa Carpenter, from North Woodstock, occupied part of the building, carrying on with Mr. Fox a thriving business in grain and groceries.

Slowly at first business came to the valley. For a year or two there was little apparent movement, and then the tide turned from the hill towns. John O. Fox and Martin Leach were among the first to build dwelling houses on the east side of the street, near the depot. In 1844 a building for stores was erected by Mr. Asa Cutler in the same locality, and first occupied by Lewis K. Perrin, assisted by his brother Charles. The land east of the depot was purchased from Mr. Tully Dorrance, whose wife, Mrs. Sally Dorrance, inherited in the Pomfret Manufacturing Company the right of her deceased father, James Rhodes. Mr. Dorrance therefore owned much valuable land, and also carried on manufacturing in the first old mill built by Mr. Wilkinson. Other Rhode Island manufacturers were now on the field, looking up eligible privileges for prospective enterprises. Hosea Ballou. Allen & Nightingale, M. S. Morse & Co., won the prizes at Rhodesville and soon broke ground for three large factories. With the advent of their masons and carpenters a boom set briskly in. Lafayette Waters, stone mason, who had the charge of much of the stone work in the three mills, bought land in the vicinity and sold out a number of building lots. Houses for dwellings and stores sprang up in various quarters where eligible sites could be procured. Young men from the hill towns engaged in trade or professional work in the two villages.

The first physician on the ground was Doctor H. W. Hough, who removed his practice from Killingly hill to Pomfret Factory in 1846, buying the first building lot sold by Mr. Smith Wilkinson, on which he soon erected his present residence. He was soon followed by Doctor Thomas Perry, who remained a few years. The first lawyer to open an office was Mr. Harrison Johnson, of Killingly. One of the first merchants was Nathan Williams, of Pomfret, associated for a time with Ely, of Killingly. Manning & Plimpton soon followed on the east side of the river. Both these stores were largely patronized by residents of the hill towns, and business grew and multiplied in true Western style. Doctor Plimpton also engaged in medical practice. Doctor Benjamin Segur opened a drug shop opposite Perrin's store, near the railway crossing. Jeremiah Shumway's tailor shop stood next to Perrin's store, across an alley, and the first saloon, kept by Cyrus Thornton, occupied Perrin's basement. Three churches meanwhile were pushing their way along, striving for precedence and building lots.

The opening of the three great factories in Rhodesville in 1846-47 added some hundreds to the population and gave additional impetus to the growth of the villages. Mr. Wilkinson, now advanced in years, foresaw the future importance of this business center, but did not care to engage in new enterprises. For some years he was much occupied in settling the affairs of the Pomfret Manufacturing Company, making division of its large assets among its few claimants. The general business of the company was now managed by Mr. Edmond Wilkinson, who was also deeply interested in the development of his native valley. Much land was now thrown into market and bought up by eager customers. Mr. Asa Cutler, a shrewd business man

and successful manufacturer, was very prominent in this connection, buying land and building many houses. In 1848 he associated with Thomas Dike, John O. Fox and Newton Clark in building a large brick block for stores, with a fine hall above for public purposes. Lafayette Waters had charge of building this block, using 220,000 bricks in its construction. "Quinebaug Hall" was soon followed by a fine new "Quinebaug House," built by Mr. Abraham Perrin, the occupant of another pleasant Perrin farm " on the road to Pomfret.

Several new roads were needed for the accommodation of builders and travelers. One of especial importance-the present Elm street-was laid out by Thompson selectmen in 1847. upon petition from Tully Dorrance and others, viz., "Beginning south side the present road at Rhodesville," thence partly by a bank: wall to the southwest corner of the porch of the school house, thence to a corner of the wall east side North Meadow street, thence to a corner of a barnyard belonging to Smith Wilkinson, thence to a post in the corner of a fence, thence to a point where it intersected the Pomfret Factory road. This road brought many new building lots into market, and served as an important link in bringing the villages together. The last road laid out by the Thompson selectmen was the present School street, in 1854, beginning on the south side of the road leading to Thompson, near the hew school house, thence n land of Edmond Wilkinson, crossing a corner of Henry Thurber's lot, by land of Martin Leach and Asa Cutler, to the southeast corner of Doctor Henry Hough's lot, on the north side of the Killingly road. But it was found very difficult to procure all the accommodations needed in this rapid development. People were pouring in on every side; new stores and business operations were constantly set in motion, and demand kept pace with expansion.

## Church History of Putnam Connecticut

Extract From: History of Windham County, Connecticut, Bayles, Richard M.; New York: W.W. Preston, 1889

Putnam, like other modern manufacturing towns, embraces now a large foreign element. In the former days of " Pomfret Factory and Rhodesville," masters and workmen were alike of New England stock,, descended mainly from old Puritan families, to whom the very name of Catholic was the embodiment of false doctrine and usurped authority. The advent of the first French Canadian, Peter Donough, in 1843, with a large family of children, their foreign tongues and outlandish ways, excited much curiosity and interest. Other Canadians followed with troops of children, and after the opening of the three great factories in 1848, foreign operatives were very generally employed. Reverend Michael McCabe was sent by the Catholic bishop of Connecticut to look after these wandering sheep and hold religious services. For a time most of these foreigners only staid to earn a little money and take it back to Canada, but as their numbers multiplied a portion became permanent residents.

Holy Mass was now celebrated monthly in Quinebaug Hall, and an acre of land purchased for religious purposes. Putnam parish, as then constituted, embraced also Pomfret, Woodstock and Thompson. Reverend William E. Duffy, Pascoag, R. I., was placed in charge as a missionary in 1858, and in the following year laid the foundation of the first Catholic house of worship in northeastern Connecticut. It was a small wooden structure, costing when completed a little over two thousand dollars, but leas considered quite an achievement for this migratory and scattered population. Little progress was made till the advent of Reverend Eugene J. Vygen, in 1865, a newly ordained minister from Belgium, consecrated to missionary work in the United States. Sent to administer the sacraments to the Catholics of Putnam, he was greatly moved by the spiritual destitution of the people. Without resident priest, schools or burial ground-, it was no marvel that " scandals became frequent and the Church of God suffered." The keen-eyed young missionary saw at a glance the great capabilities of the field. Some half-dozen large cotton manufactories in Putnam and Thompson were bringing in hundreds of Catholic families. Putnam village gave promise of becoming an important business center, and was the natural church home of this increasing Catholic population. With much earnestness Father Vygen laid the need and opportunity before the bishop of the diocese, and was allowed to enter upon the Putnam pastorate.

The result has far more than realized his most sanguine anticipations. Giving-- his whole time and energies to the work, within two years he had secured the laying out and consecration of a convenient Catholic cemetery, purchased other land, and erected a pastoral residence, and fused the scattered elements into a united and reverent congregation. Before proceeding to erect a worthy church edifice he returned to Europe and gathered aid from many friends, and then entered upon this great work with redoubled energy and enthusiasm.

The wooden structure was soon replaced by a substantial brick building, with trimmings of light gray granite. Its interior was very fine, fitted up with

much care and taste. The altar was "a gem of art," adorned with angels wrought in Munich, of the highest order of art, ideality and beauty." Above and back of the altar were three stained glass windows. The semi-dome over-arching the altar was divided into five panels, colored in deep blue and studded with gold stars; in each was the representation of an adoring angel, each carrying an emblem of the passion of our Lord. The first carries the crown of thorns; the second the cross; the third the palm of victory; the fourth the chalice; the fifth carrying wheat, significant of the Eucharist. Pulpit and organ were in keeping. This beautiful structure, capable of seating fifteen hundred people, was formally consecrated as St. Mary's church, by Right Reverend Bishop McFarland, November 24th, 1870, and for nearly five years had served the purposes of its construction, receiving thousands of joyful worshippers, when almost in a moment it was reduced to ashes. So rapid was the fire that not one of its valued treasures was rescued—library, organ, altar, chalice, were all consumed. The building with its contents was valued at \$85,000.

With his accustomed energy Father Vygen (Father Vygen died in October, 1889. - Ed.) at once commenced the erection of a chapel, celebrating mass on Sundays meanwhile at Quinebaug Hall. November 1st, 1876, St. Joseph's Hall was dedicated by Right Reverend Bishop Gal-berry a neat and tasteful building in the rear of, the blackened ruins, furnishing seats for eight hundred people. The erection of Catholic church edifices in other towns has somewhat diminished the number of regular attendants at Putnam, so that this hall has continued to accommodate the congregation. In 1873 Reverend H. Martial, afterward the much-beloved and respected pastor of Grosvenor Dale parish, was appointed assistant of Father Vygen. Reverends Thomas P. Joynt, Alphonse Van Oppen and Edward Chapdelaine have also served as curates: Father E. J. Vygen, now the senior minister in Putnam, is much beloved by his people and respected by all for his consistent Christian character and faithful labors in behalf of temperance, morality and all salutary enterprises.

A recent survey of Putnam, accomplished under the direction of the Connecticut Bible Society, gives the following denominational statistics:

Church	Families	Individuals
Advent	29	105
Baptist	194	825
Congregational	162	529
Episcopal	17	74
Methodist	68	248
Roman Catholic	593	3,135
Universalist	34	115
Scattering	11	31
Total	1,108	5,062

The number of Catholic families and individuals thus considerably exceeds those of all other denominations combined. In regard to nationalities, the report shows: American families, 588; individuals, 2,198. French families, 464; individuals, 2,604. Irish families, 105; individuals, 433. English families, 21; individuals, 109. Others, nine families with fifteen members.

The Catholic church grounds include the ruins of St. Mary's church, St. Joseph's Hall, a convent, school house, parsonage, gas building, music stand, park, flower garden. They also have laid out and own St. Joseph's Park upon the Quinebaug, south of the village, a part of the old Perrin farm. Within the last twenty years there has been a great change in the character and standing of the "foreign element." It is more and more manifest that it has come to stay.

Children of these families growing up in the town are truly citizens. Many own their own homes and farms, engage in agriculture and trade, and are identified in many ways with the growth and development of the town, sharing in the administration of government. Very interesting services have recently been held in Putnam in commemoration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Father Vygen's ordination. Jubilee services began Monday evening, April 1st, at Exhibition Hall, when all the societies connected with the church were present in regalia, with all the school children, members of the boarding school and hundreds of spectators. A brilliant procession accompanied the Reverend Father to the church the next morning, where high mass was performed, Bishop McMahon and a dozen priests assisting. More than twenty Catholic clergymen were present on this occasion. A vast audience filled Exhibition Hall, where an ovation was given by the young ladies of the convent school, consisting of music, song and addresses. Very interesting congratulatory and historic addresses were made by Doctor La Rue in behalf of the Canadian element of the parish, and by Mr. Patrick O'Leary in behalf of the Irish.

In summing up- the results of twenty-three years' faithful labor, it was noted that in 1866 the whole property of the Catholic church in this section was one little wooden building with the site on which it stood, while in 1889 it numbers five churches, five priests, two convents and two large parochial schools.

**History of Industry in Putnam**, Connecticut - Extracts From: History of Windham County, Connecticut, Bayles, Richard M.; New York: W.W. Preston, 1889

**History of Rhodenville** - Extract From: History of Windham County, Connecticut, Bayles, Richard M.; New York: W.W. Preston, 1889

**Factory Girls in a 'Rhode Island System' Mill**: the Pomfret [CT] Manufacturing Company 1806-35 - Caroline Sloat (1978), OSV Research Paper - Copyright: Old Sturbridge Inc.

**Church History of Putnam Connecticut** - Extract From: History of Windham County, Connecticut, Bayles, Richard M.; New York: W.W. Preston, 1889