

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

471

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significant, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Pocasset Worsted Company Mill  
Other names/site number: Pocasset Worsted Mill, Pocasset Mill

2. Location

Street and number: 75 Pocasset Street  not for publication  
City of town: Johnston  vicinity  
State: Rhode Island Code: RI County: Providence Code: 007 Zip Code: 02919

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
Edward Henderson 5/28/2010  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
RI Historical Preservation and Heritage Commission  
State or federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
State or federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Certification

- I hereby certify that the property is:  
 entered in the National Register  See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet
- determined not eligible for the National Register  See continuation sheet
- removed from the National Register  See continuation sheet
- Other (explain)

Edson Beall Signature of the Keeper  
JUL 19 2010 Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
4	0	buildings
0	0	sites
2	0	structures
0	0	objects
6	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listings**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

None

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility

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**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility

COMMERCE/business

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**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Foundation: BRICK

Walls: BRICK

Roof: ASPHALT/RUBBER

Other: CONCRETE/WOOD

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**Narrative Description**

See Section 7, continuation sheets 1-7)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**  
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history

**Criteria Considerations**  
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A** Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** Removed from its original location.
- C** A birthplace or grave.
- D** A cemetery.
- E** A reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** A commemorative property.
- G** Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

**Narrative Description**

See Section 8, Continuation Sheets 1-7

**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

INDUSTRY

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1897-1958

**Significant Dates**

1897, 1902

**Significant Person**

Charles Fletcher

**Cultural Affiliation**

**Architect/Builder**

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets. (See continuation sheets for Section 9, 1-3)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- Preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) has been requested.
- Previously listed in the National Register
- Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- Designated a National Historic Landmark
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey  
#
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record  
# No Number On Card

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

**Name of repository:**

VHB/Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. offices

Pocasset Worsted Company Mill  
Name of Property

Providence County, RI  
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 3.38

UTM References  
(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

UTM grid with 4 rows and columns for Zone, Easting, and Northing.

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is the entirety of Assessor's Plat 2, Lot 134, and Assessor's Plat 3, Lot 368

Boundary Justification

The two lots comprise the entirety of the current property. An adjacent parcel to the west contains a building (former storehouse) that was formerly part of this facility, but is no longer part of this property.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Rita Walsh/Jenna Higgins
Organization: VHB/Vanassee Hangen Brustlin, Inc.
Street & Number: 101 Walnut Street
City or Town: Watertown State: MA
Date: March 2010
Telephone: (617) 924-1770
Zip Code: 02472

Additional Documentation

- Continuation Sheets
Section 7 (#1 -6)
Section 8 (#1-7)
Section 9 (#1-3)
Additional Documentation (#1-8)

Maps

Providence, RI- Massachusetts USGS quadrangle (7.5X15 minute), 1987
Figures 1-5 , showing locations of photographs, site plan, and interior floor plans

Photographs (11 digital images, printed on a HP Printer using approved inks and paper – see photo continuation sheets)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

Name: Pocasset Street Limited Partnership
Street & Number: 6 Faneuil Hall Marketplace, 5th floor
City or Town: Boston State: MA
Telephone: (617) 742-4500
Zip Code: 02109

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response, including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Description**

The Pocasset Worsted Company Mill in the Town of Johnston, Rhode Island is composed primarily of three connected heavy timber-framed brick buildings, one- to three-stories high, which form a roughly U-shaped configuration that contains a central courtyard currently used for parking. A fourth timber-framed brick building, two stories high, is attached to the east elevation of the southern arm of the U. The mill complex fronts on Pocasset Street to the east, south of Plainfield Street. The Pocasset River borders the mill on the property's south side. The surrounding area is mostly residential with single and multi-family housing dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, including double worker houses built by the original owner of the factory. Plainfield Street (State Route 14) to the north is the major corridor in the small village of Thornton and features a number of commercial and combined residential/commercial buildings, as well as the early 20th century St. Brigid's Roman Catholic Church complex.

The four main buildings in the complex are the original 1897 mill building (Mill No. 1), a nearly identical mill to the north built in 1902 (Mill No. 2), the smaller engine and boiler house section connecting the two mills (Engine House/Boiler House), which was built in 1897 (southern half) and 1902 (northern section), and the c. 1897 Office, which is connected to Mill No. 1. The complex includes a brick smokestack and a steel water tower, which are also contributing features to the site and distinctive landmarks in the surrounding area. The smokestack is located immediately to the west of Engine House/Boiler House, along the southern portion of the building. The water tower is directly north of the smokestack. The site falls to the south along Pocasset Street towards the river and is at a lower grade than the surrounding buildings. A stone retaining wall surrounds the property on the north and east sides. A chain link fence is mounted on the top of the north retaining wall only.

A one-story brick storehouse building that dates to 1904 and was formerly associated with the complex lies west of the western parking area. It is no longer part of this property and is not included in the nominated property. Although no longer extant, a wood-frame wagon shed and stable was also built in 1902 and was sited adjacent to the Pocasset River, southwest of the south section. A wood-frame coal shed, dating to 1904, formerly stood in the center of the south parking area west of the engine and boiler houses. A wood-frame automobile shed was attached to the small brick pump house on the rear of the south boiler house. A small tool house and connected hose house were located just south of the south section along Pocasset Street. None of these wood-frame buildings is standing; Sanborn maps from 1945 and 1949 indicate the stable/wagon shed was removed between those two dates, while the coal shed remained until at least 1949.

The property is surrounded by concrete sidewalks on the north and east sides, and paved parking areas to the south and west of the complex. There is also a paved parking area in the central courtyard between Mill No. 1 and Mill No. 2. A tunnel under the west end of the central courtyard connects Mill No. 1 and Mill No. 2 remains, but is now only partially accessible.

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**Mill No. 1 (Original 1897 section)**

The original building from 1897 forms the southern arm of the complex's U-plan configuration. The rectangular building is 3 stories in height with a raised basement level that is visible only on the south side, 27 bays east-to-west and 7 bays north-to-south. It has a shallow pitched gable roof, typical of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century mill buildings, with simple wood brackets in the eaves. The roof is now covered with a rubber membrane.

Mill No. 1 is on a granite foundation and the walls are composed of load-bearing brick. Fenestration consists of close, regular spacing of large single segmental-arched windows with the arches formed by three rows of brick headers. The original sash configuration consists of a large fixed sash with 25 panes, topped by an operable transom window with central mullion and 4 panes in each sash. Many sash have been replaced or the opening has been infilled. Windows on the basement and third floor of the south elevation have modern 2-pane sliding aluminum sash windows with a fixed single pane in the transom. The first and second floors have a 6-pane hopper-style window with a plywood-infilled transom. The transoms retain the center mullions and most have a vent cut into a portion of the plywood.

Through Mill No. 1, no original exterior doors remain except for the wooden doors in the center bay on the east elevation, which are currently covered over on the exterior by metal panels. In the east elevation, the center bay on each floor is composed of a large double-leaf door set within a segmental arched doorway. Each of the doors is recessed and has granite sills. The first floor door has two rows of brick headers above the door opening, while the second and third doors have three rows of brick headers above the segmental arch openings. Above the third floor door is a pulley beam that extends past the roofline. There is a poured concrete loading dock from the first floor door. The east elevation has identical fenestration to the south elevation, with the exception that there are no basement level windows on the east elevation. The north elevation has identical fenestration to the south elevation, except it does not have an exposed basement level. The windows are identical to the south elevation as well, except that the modern sliding windows are not found on the north elevation. The entrances on the north elevation at the east and west ends are now infilled with modern aluminum and glass door assemblies.

In the center of the roof is a one-story, gable-roofed asbestos-shingled pent house that spans approximately five bays. This addition, which dates from after 1949 and is likely from the 1950s, housed a humidifying system that employed a large motorized fan that blew moisture from a series of large metal panels through a vent in the uppermost floor through ductwork into the top floor to facilitate spinning activities. This is the latest successor to the humidifiers that were used in the mill when it housed worsted spinning.<sup>1</sup> The south section's west elevation has a single bay, four-story brick elevator tower which dates from the mid-20th century in the center bay that rises above the roof line. It has a gable roof that is covered in asphalt shingles. A single-story loading dock addition, which post-dates 1949, projects from the center of the south elevation. It rests on a concrete foundation, has a shed roof and is clad with shingles.

<sup>1</sup> The February 14, 1905 issue of *Fibre and Fabric* reported that the Pocasset Worsted Company would be outfitting its new mill with the same type of American Moistening Company humidifiers it had previously installed.

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**Office (c. 1897, 1923)**

An attached two-story, flat-roofed brick office building extends from the north end of the east elevation of Mill No. 1 and partially encloses the entry to the central courtyard. The building was originally only a single story; the second story was added in an identical style in 1923. The load-bearing brick building is five bays wide and two bays deep on a stepped granite foundation. It has segmental arch windows in each bay, and a segmental arch entry; each of these openings have a temporary covering on the exterior, although the original 2/2 wood window sash is extant on the interior.

**Mill No. 2 (1902, by 1909)**

The north section dates from 1902 and is very similar to the south section, except it has a slightly larger massing and does not have an exposed basement level. It is a rectangular shape that is 29 bays long and 9 bays wide. The eastern two bays on the building are an extension, added sometime between 1902 and January, 1909. It has a shallow pitched gable roof typical of late 19th-20th century mill buildings. The roof is covered with a rubber membrane, and there are simple wood brackets beneath the eave.

The building is on a granite foundation and the walls are composed of load-bearing brick. It has the same regularly spaced segmental-arched window openings seen on the south building, but many of the arched window openings have been infilled with plywood or metal covers. Above each segmental arch are three rows of brick headers. The bottom portion of the sash has been replaced with 2/2 modern aluminum sash.

The east elevation fronting Pocasset Street is 9 bays wide with a central bay containing three large door openings that have been covered over on each story. The openings on the second and third stories are recessed within segmental arches, formed by three rows of brick headers, while the first story center opening is trabeated. The window openings on the east elevation also feature segmental-arches; most remain open but are largely infilled with newer sash. A small number of original, multi-pane lower sash remains in the south end first story openings; while their counterparts in the north end first story all have flush brick infilling.

The south elevation which faces into the central courtyard is similar to the south section's north elevation on the opposite side of the courtyard. This long elevation contains entrances at the east and west ends, and like the south section, has modern glass and aluminum assemblies in place of original door treatments. At the west end, two window openings have been combined and partially infilled with brick and concrete block for their conversion to a single garage-door opening. The window openings in general on this elevation contain a mixture of more recent sash treatments, with very little original sash remaining.

The north elevation is the least visible of all of the complex's elevations, partially hidden by a massive stone retaining wall and trees to the north and houses in close proximity to the north along Pocasset Street. The north elevation is similar in configuration to the south elevation, but contains no exterior entries. Window sash is a mix of original multi-pane sash and more recent treatments. A narrow open area lies between the north

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elevation and the stone retaining wall to the north; due to the change in grade, this area is below the sidewalk level of Pocasset Street.

**Engine House/Boiler House (1897, 1902, 1910)**

The 1- and 3-story brick rear wing connecting the two mill sections originally contained the boiler house in the one-story section. The taller section contained the pump rooms in the basement, the engine room on the first floor and a machine shop on the second floor, with the two-story belt houses at either end. The southern half of the wing was built in 1897 and the northern half added in 1902. In 1910, a third story was added to provide additional textile production space. The Engine House is now a 3-story shallow gable-roofed section that is 12 bays wide and 3 bays deep. A flat-roofed loading dock now projects from the south end of this section.

The Boiler House, which features few openings due to its original use, is approximately 8 bays wide and 3 deep. It was originally built with shallow gable roofs over the north and south halves. The roof on the north half is intact; the south half of the structure has been lowered and now features a shed roof. Ancillary additions on the Boiler House include the 1897 free-standing circular brick smokestack and single-story brick pump house on the west elevation, and a 1916 single-story brick washroom on the north elevation. The brick pump house retains a single door opening with double-leaf doors similar to the loading doors on the interior of the east elevations of the north and south sections. The decorative cap of the brick smokestack has been removed, although the majority of the smokestack remains and is in good condition. A 1-story brick section on the north side of the 2-story section does not appear to be original, but undoubtedly dates to the early 20th century. A partially intact steel water tank lies north of the rear section; a 1926 drawing of the complex shows the decorative scalloped conical top of the tank, which has been removed.

The fenestration of the Engine House consists of segmental-arched window openings grouped in pairs or in groups of four, although there are some single window openings. The Boiler House has fewer and smaller window openings, although they are also segmental-arched with fixed 9-pane sash. There are also some examples of window sash with a 10-pane awning window at the bottom. Some openings have been infilled with brick, while those that remain open now have more recent window sash replacements. There is a single segmental-arched doorway in the west elevation and two garage door openings have been added to its west elevation in the recent past.

**Interiors**

The interiors of all three of the 3-story brick sections (Mill No.1 – south section, Mill No.2 – north section, and Engine House/Boiler House- rear middle section) are mostly composed of open areas divided by two rows of round wood columns that run east-west through the north and south sections of the mill complex and north-



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south in the rear west section. The rear middle section also features a series of brick partition walls that run north-south with an open corridor on the east side. The interior perimeter walls were likely always painted; the lower section was typically a dark color while the upper two-thirds of the wall were painted white to help reflect light. The spaces are enclosed by tall exposed plank ceilings with wood decking and beams which run east-west in all three sections. These features are representative of standard heavy-timber mill construction – a solid layered floor with a tongue-and-groove surface layer on a thick plank floor, all carried on large beams. Sometimes there was a bead-board ceiling layer; more commonly it was just exposed planks.

The exposed wood ceilings remain exposed for the most part, although some office sections have lowered ceilings. Most of the floors are covered with tongue-and-groove flooring, set in both a straight and diagonal pattern. Some areas of original flooring have either been removed or covered with steel plates, masonite, or other materials.

Similar to many industrial buildings from this period, the stairways are located in the east and west ends of the two main sections to provide vertical circulation that did not interfere with machinery operation in the open loft spaces. These stairways feature original beaded board enclosures, paneled wood hallway doors, and metal railings. The eastern stairways of both the north and south sections have been altered through removal of paint on both the brick perimeter and beaded board walls. The rear middle section is accessed by the west end stairways in the north and south sections; only a narrow wood staircase with closed beaded board railing accesses the first floor and basement at the south end of this section. Sliding metal fire doors are located at major openings between the building sections, especially on the west end of the north and south sections.

Throughout the complex, some areas have been subdivided for separate companies' spaces and corridors or have been partially enclosed for offices, bathrooms, and kitchen/dining spaces. Only a small number of original doors, mainly wood panel, are found throughout the building. The loading doors in the central bays of the east elevation of both the north and south sections are visible on the interior, although covered over on the exterior. The 2-story office building at the east end of the south section retains most of its original interior, which is composed of a series of three connecting rooms accessed by a stair hall with an open wood balustrade with simple balusters and newel posts. The original finishes include heavily molded window and door casings, wide wood chair rail, paneled wood doors, and tongue and groove wood floors. Most of this trim has been removed from a single remodeled office on the second floor.

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**Photographic Information**

Photographer: Rita Walsh

Photos: 2,4, 9, 10 & 11

Date of Photographs: November, 2007

Photographer :Richard Greenwood

Photos: # 1, 5 & 7

RIHP & HC

Date: May, 2010

Mercedes Monteiro

Photos: # 3, 6, & 8

RIHP & HC

Date April , 2010

Index to Photographs:

Photograph 1: East elevations of the north and south sections and office, photographer facing south

Photograph 2: East elevation of west section, from the courtyard, photographer facing west

Photograph 3: North elevation of the south section, showing original window sash and humidifier house on roof, photographer facing southeast

Photograph 4: South elevation of the south section, photographer facing northwest

Photograph 5: South elevation of boiler house, smokestack and water tank, photographer facing north

Photograph 6: West elevation of west section and smokestack, photographer facing east

Photograph 7: Interior view, view of older door and opening into north section from rear middle section, first floor, photographer facing northeast

Photograph 8: Interior view, stair in northeast corner of south section, first floor, photographer facing southeast

Photograph 9: View of mill floor at center of north section, second floor, photographer facing east

Photograph 10: Interior view, original loading doors in east wall of south section, third floor, photographer facing east

Photograph 11: Interior view, south elevation of south section, basement level, photographer facing southeast

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**Statement of Significance**

The Pocasset Worsted Company meets the eligibility criteria for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A (Industry) and Criterion C (Architecture). The Pocasset Worsted Company in the village of Thornton in the Town of Johnston was the community's largest employer in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The mill produced a variety of worsted yarns that were sold to other mills in New England and New York for weaving and knitting purposes. It was one of three mills in the village associated with Charles Fletcher (1839-1907), a prominent Providence textile manufacturer, who was one of the founders of the American Woolen Company. The mill complex, with sections dating from 1897-1923 and smaller, more recent, additions, is representative of the mill structures commonly built in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries throughout New England and retains many original exterior and interior elements.

**History of Worsted Wool Industry in Rhode Island**

Rhode Island's worsted wool industry began in earnest after the Civil War, although the state had a much earlier textile history that began with the Samuel Slater's introduction of mechanized cotton spinning in Pawtucket in 1790. While Rhode Island was primarily agricultural at the time, Slater's construction of the country's first cotton factory in 1793 spurred the development of a series of similar textile mills in the state that relied on water power. RI's abundant water power sources, found throughout the state on the larger Blackstone and Pawtuxet Rivers, as well as smaller ones like the Pocasset River, were an important reason for the industry's success here. Additionally, the humidity in the air along the New England coast created an ideal environment for spinning, as threads were less likely to break in a moist climate. Located in a prime location on the Atlantic Ocean, Rhode Island also had a convenient means of shipping goods by water, although Providence also became a railroad center with the railroads' hegemony by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The state's textile industry grew during the Jeffersonian Embargo and the War of 1812, which had imposed restrictions on international trade and caused a sharp decline in Rhode Island's shipbuilding industry. But these events and resulting effects on industries dependent on shipping, helped spur investment in new directions, including that of the textile industry. Prior to the Civil War, the Rhode Island textile industry focused almost exclusively on cotton manufacturing. The growth of the woolen industry in the state greatly expanded after the Civil War, aided by advances in woolen technology before the war, the expansion of sheep-raising in the state, and a labor force augmented by increased immigration in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Following the 1867 Paris Exposition and the 1876 Centennial Exposition, where such items were promoted, worsted wool fashions became more popular than wool. Worsted wool received its name from the place it was first manufactured in Worstead, England. It is comprised of long staple fibers that are combed to remove the shorter fibers. After combing, the fibers lie parallel and are twisted tightly together. When the twisted fibers are woven into fabric, they are much lighter and lie smoother than a regular wool fiber.

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Between 1850 and 1870, the woolen industry in Rhode Island had increased from 45 mills and 1758 employees to 76 mills and 7894 employees. Of the 76 mills in 1870, 11 were worsted mills, most of which had been established after the Civil War. By the close of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century, the state's worsted industry had surpassed its cotton industry with 51 establishments and 14, 896 employees. Providence had become the largest producer of worsted goods in America, and Rhode Island was the third ranking state for the production of worsted goods. Following a general trend toward consolidation in American business and industry, several leading manufacturers including Charles Fletcher of Providence and William Wood of Lawrence, MA, formed the American Woolen Company in 1899. This company, which owned woolen and worsted mills throughout New England, included 26 plants in 1901, 7 of them in Rhode Island.

From its peak in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the worsted wool industry experienced a slight decline during the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which was alleviated by government contracts during World War I for worsted cloth for military uniforms. Following the wartime boom, the textile industry entered a marked decline that was exacerbated by the Great Depression and labor unrest. During the Great Textile Strike in 1934 four hundred thousand textile workers went on strike for 22 days, demanding fair wages and hours in both the northern and southern states. The strike eventually failed, but it contributed to the general trend that saw the textile industry leave New England for the American South and then overseas. Finer goods like worsteds fared better than cottons and coarse woolens during the depression years, and World War II generated another boom. However, following the war's close most of the major worsted mills in Rhode Island closed, leaving only small niche producers.

### **Charles Fletcher and his role in Thornton's development**

Charles Fletcher (1839 -1907), an English native, made a significant impact on New England's worsted wool industry, beginning in 1864 when he emigrated to Lawrence, Massachusetts and ending with his death in 1907. He became one of the leaders of the American worsted wool industry in the period of its greatest growth and was called the "wool king" of his day. Born in Thornton, England, Fletcher started his work in the mills at an early age. He worked at several woolen mills in England before emigrating at the age of 25 years old to work at the Pacific Mills in Lawrence. His first visible success in the wool industry was at the Valley Worsted Mills in Providence, RI, where the owners of the mill were finding that their yarn was uneven, often with large amounts of factory debris woven into the material. Fletcher solved the problem using his experience in the worsted yarn industry in England to manipulate the machinery in a way that revolutionized the way wool was combed and spun. He went on to become the director of this department before going on to other ventures.

Fletcher started manufacturing worsteds on his own in 1875 on Valley Street in Providence, producing mohair (from the long silky hair of the Angora goat) and genappe (smooth and lustrous) yarns under the Providence Worsted Mill name. He traveled extensively in order to market his worsted goods, handled each account individually, and became known throughout Rhode Island for his work ethic. Fletcher prospered in his efforts, added more buildings to his yarn-making complex on Valley Street and established a separate operation on an

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adjoining property, which he called the National Worsted Mill. The combined complex included five acres of land and six mills in the late 1880s. The two operations were incorporated as the National & Providence Worsted Mills in 1893. He began another venture in nearby Olneyville (then part of Johnston, RI) in 1884, when he took over the former S.W. Baker Company and its batting mill. Renamed the American Multiple Fabric Company, this mill produced textile hose for the use of fire companies and also manufactured the Baker patent evaporating horse blankets and other similar goods.

In 1883 Fletcher also acquired an industrial property further west in Johnston in the village then known as Simmons Lower Village. The village, one of several in Johnston that were founded in conjunction with early textile mills, was established prior to 1831 by James Simmons, an industrialist and prominent politician. It contained several small mills on the Pocasset River and its tributary, Simmons Brook, that Fletcher soon replaced with modern factories. Fletcher first acquired the Providence Thread Company mill in which he established the Thornton Worsted Company and put it under the supervision of his son Joseph. In 1884, he acquired the former Simmons mill property downstream and built a large new mill for the British Hosiery Company, which was owned by Robert Wright Cooper, a Manchester, England native. Cooper, who manufactured knitted cashmere and cotton hosiery, brought 120 skilled fellow countrymen to the area.

In 1897-1898, Fletcher constructed two multi-story brick textile mills of his own in the village. Close to the former Providence Thread Company property on Mill Street, on the site of a former bag mill, he built the Victoria Mills, named in honor of Queen Victoria. A half mile to the east on the Pocasset River, Fletcher erected the Pocasset Worsted Company Mill on Pocasset Street, a name shared by the adjacent river that referred to the town's Native American heritage. The simultaneous construction of the two mills enabled Fletcher to achieve a degree of vertical integration- the Victoria Mills was a carding and combing plant that produced the wool "tops" that were then spun into yarn at the Pocasset Worsted mill. Harry Hartley, who had married Fletcher's daughter Jane Elizabeth, assumed control of the Victoria Mills.

In addition to building three large modern mills, Fletcher platted several tracts of land on which he constructed dozens of units of company-owned worker housing. In recognition of the transformation that had occurred, Simmons Lower Village was re-named Thornton, in honor of Fletcher's birthplace in England. The village's stature was further enhanced in 1898, when the town offices were moved from Olneyville when its eastern section was annexed to Providence. With Providence's annexation of a section of Olneyville, which had been the densest and most industrialized section of Johnston, Thornton became the leading village in the town, with four mills, a large workforce that was comprised largely of British and Italian natives, four churches and many commercial ventures.

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### Pocasset Worsted Company Mill

The Pocasset Worsted Company quickly became the leading employer in Thornton, with an average workforce in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century around 500 to 600 employees, rising to a temporary peak of 1,000. From 1898 until the 1930s, the company produced fine worsted yarns that were sold to other companies for weaving and knitting. A review of the company's business correspondence reveals a wide array of clients, including the Arlington Mills in Lawrence, MA, Ashaway Woolen Company in Ashaway RI, Amsterdam Woolen Company in Amsterdam, NY, and Baron, Staus and Company, manufacturers of knit goods in Brooklyn, NY, as well as more locally-based concerns especially in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. These companies would weave the yarns into worsted wool fabrics that were very popular for men's suits due to their light weight and crease-resistance. The fabrics were also used for jackets, women's suits, and, during World War I, for war uniforms.

Beginning with a single three-story steam-powered brick mill in 1898, the company expanded its power plant and added the similarly sized Mill No.2 in 1902, which it extended shortly thereafter (see Figures 1 and 2). At that point, the mill operated 10,000 spindles. In 1910, a third story was added to the Engine House to provide additional production space.

The activities and their arrangement in the multi-story buildings in the complex were typical of late 19th century English mode worsted yarn spinning operations. A series of cross-sections of the complex note the activities in the buildings in 1909 (see Figures 4-6). Mill No. 1 had shipping and storage of yarn and tops in the basement level, while the drawing of yarn took place on the first floor. Flyer spinning (later changed over to ring spinning) and twisting took place on the second and third floors, while reeling and spooling was also carried out on the third floor. Mill No. 2 had all of the same functions on the same floors, although its lack of a basement meant no shipping or storage was done here. Twisting was done in the eastern extension in all 3 floors. The engine house had its water pumps in the basement, the steam engines, electric generators and the belt houses for power transmission on the first floor, and a machine shop above. The third floor added in 1910 housed winding and reeling.

Fletcher built forty duplex cottages for his workers on adjacent Pocasset Street, Maple Avenue, and Walnut Street. The company maintained and lighted the village's streets and provided water and electricity for the houses from the mill's power sources. The company had an active industrial welfare program for its workforce, providing recreational facilities that included a soccer field and casino east of the mill. It also instituted a program to encourage gardening and village beautification. Fletcher duplicated these efforts at his Mapleville worsted mill village in Burrillville, in northwest Rhode Island, including the provision of a casino for the workers. This corporate paternalism was a common practice in the New England textile industry from its origins in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century but it came to an end in the industrial depression of the 1920s and 1930s. The company village provided adequate housing in close proximity to the mill and gave owners a level of control over their employees' working and personal lives.

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Charles Fletcher turned control of the Pocasset Worsted Company over to his son Frederick C. Fletcher in 1902. Two years after Charles Fletcher's death in 1907 Frederick Fletcher and his business partners incorporated the company, which remained in operation until the early 1930s.<sup>2</sup> The Walter Marshall Spinning Corporation then took over the complex around 1938 and continued worsted yarn production until 1968. Two smaller textile firms, Glenn of America and Bay Textile Corporation, subsequently occupied the mills. They were succeeded by the Rich Paper Box Company which purchased the mill in 1989. Today this company uses most of the buildings for its production of jewelry boxes, although some spaces are rented by other firms.

### Fletcher's Other Enterprises

Charles Fletcher continued to expand his worsted operations into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, purchasing existing mills and establishing new ones in New England and New York. In 1899, Charles Fletcher joined with William Wood, owner of the Washington Mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts, to form the massive American Woolen Company. The company was initially based in Lawrence, Massachusetts, but moved to New York City early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Beginning with 7 mills in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, this conglomerate grew by 1924 to include over 60 mills in New England (though the Fletchers' Thornton mills never became part of it). In addition to Fletcher's extensive mill ownership and development activities, he was also president of the Manufacturer's Building Company and owned the Narragansett Hotel on Dorrance Street in Providence and other valuable real estate.

In addition to his mill enterprises, Charles Fletcher had a number of other interests. Although mainly non-political, Fletcher was a representative to the Republican National Convention which nominated Benjamin Harrison for President. An avid yachtsman, he belonged the New York, Bristol, and Rhode Island Yacht Clubs. As evidenced at the Victoria and Pocasset Worsted Mills, Charles Fletcher also involved his family in his enterprises. His sons Joseph and Charles took over many of their father's interests and carried them on after his death.

Charles's youngest son Frederick Fletcher was extensively involved in his father's businesses. Frederick, born in 1874, attended Cornell University from 1892-1893 before attending the Bradford Textile School in England until 1894. After his return to Rhode Island, he served as president and treasurer of the Pocasset Worsted Company until he sold his interest in it along with his other mills to others in the 1920s "when there was increasing pressure to unionize the mills which the family had operated independently for two generations."<sup>3</sup> By 1928, William O. Todd was president of the Pocasset Worsted Company and continued its operations until at least 1933.<sup>4</sup> Fletcher also served as president and chairman of the Lawton Spinning Company in Woonsocket, which produced fine woolen and cotton yarns. Another venture was his purchase of the Richmond Print Works

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Fletcher's fellow incorporators were William O. Todd, Henry R. Milner, and Frank Baldwin. (information from Louis McGowan, Johnston Historical Society)

<sup>3</sup> Nina Fletcher Little (daughter of Frederick Fletcher) in a letter to the American Textile History Museum, June 5, 1963.

<sup>4</sup> Information from Louis McGowan, Johnston Historical Society

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property in Providence to establish the Saxon Worsted Company. He later sold the building to the Banigan Rubber Works. Later he served as a member of the executive committee of the Atlantic Gulf and West Indies Steamship Company and the International Cement Corporation, which became the Lone Star Cement Corporation.

### **Contemporary Mills in Johnston**

As noted above, the Town of Johnston boasted a number of mills which successfully echoed industrial developments in nearby Providence, the center of the state's worsted wool industry. The two other mills in Thornton with which Fletcher was associated, the Victoria Mill and the British Hosiery Mill, are still extant and, like the Pocasset Mill, currently house a number of light industrial concerns. The Victoria Mill, at Mill and John Streets, was built at the same time as the Pocasset Worsted Company on the site of the Bag Mill. The much larger mill complex processed raw wool sold in small bundles called "tops" for spinning into yarn; the Pocasset Worsted Company used much of this yarn due to their common ownership and close proximity. The company lasted almost as long as the Pocasset Mill operation. It closed in 1931 due to bankruptcy. In 1941, R.C. Berker Company, a textile machine manufacturer, purchased the vacant building. The American Foam Company now occupies the complex, which has a series of newer one-story concrete block additions to the original 4-story brick structures.

The British Hosiery Mill complex at 27 Mill Street is also extant. Fletcher's first enterprise in Thornton, the mill was constructed in 1884 for fellow Britain Robert W. Cooper who brought his workers and knitting machines from England. The mill's fancy knitted cashmere socks provided a new product for the American market. George E. Boyden was involved with the British Hosiery Company and was listed as treasurer of the company in 1901. In 1910, he was listed as president and treasurer of British Hosiery Company. It appears that the company became George E. Boyden & Sons in 1912 or 1913, although the original name showed up as late as 1921 in a State factory report. George E. Boyden & Sons had their main plant in Providence. By 1921, the factory was then occupied by the Priscilla Worsted Company when it is listed in a Factory Inspection of R. I. Report. A Johnston man in the liquidating business, Henry Armstrong, bought the mill complex from Priscilla Worsted Company in the 1950s and sold it to Barker Chadsey Company.<sup>5</sup> The Baker Chadsey firm was in operation until its bankruptcy in 1982. Today Future Cast Corporation occupies the building. The low scale two-story building complex is largely intact, although many of the window openings have been infilled and several free-standing additions are interspersed in the complex.

<sup>5</sup> Information from Louis McGowan, Johnston Historical Society



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**Architectural Significance**

The Pocasset Mill complex is a fine representation of late 19th-early 20th century mill construction in the region. The mill sections exhibit intact elements of the typical mill building type seen in Rhode Island and elsewhere in New England. These elements include the distinctive shallow-pitched roof, large window openings with segmental arches formed by three rows of brick headers and multi-pane wooden sash (although a good percentage of the sash has been replaced), and the fire-resistant heavy timber framing also known as mill construction, featuring open interiors with two rows of columns supporting heavy beams and tongue-and-groove plank flooring. The north and south sections also retain exterior wood loading doors on the east elevations; these double-leaf doors exhibit the diagonal boarding and chamfered panels characteristic of late 19th century mill architecture. Various sections also retain sliding metal-clad fire doors at major interior doorways. The small two-story office section on the east side of the south section features sophisticated interior features, including molded segmental arch window and door trim and paneled wood doors. Its floor plan of several interconnected rooms on each floor and decorative wood staircase is intact, including a first floor central room enclosed by beaded board wainscot with large 2/2 windows above. No original equipment remains in the building, although at the time of its construction it was considered to have the best worsted yarn manufacturing equipment available.

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Figure 7. 1945, revised to 1949, Sanborn Map Co.

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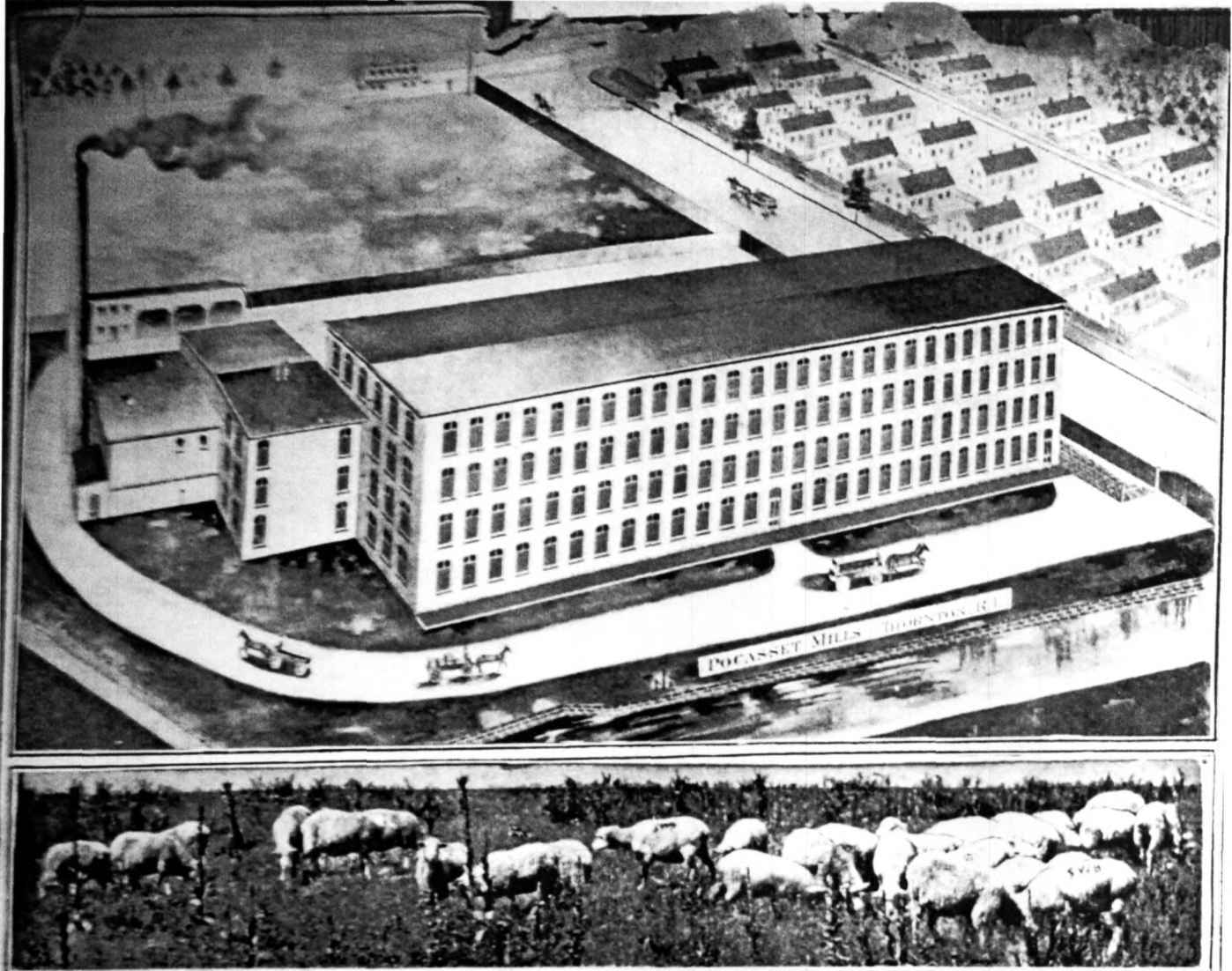
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Figure 1. View of Pocasset Mill prior to 1902 additions



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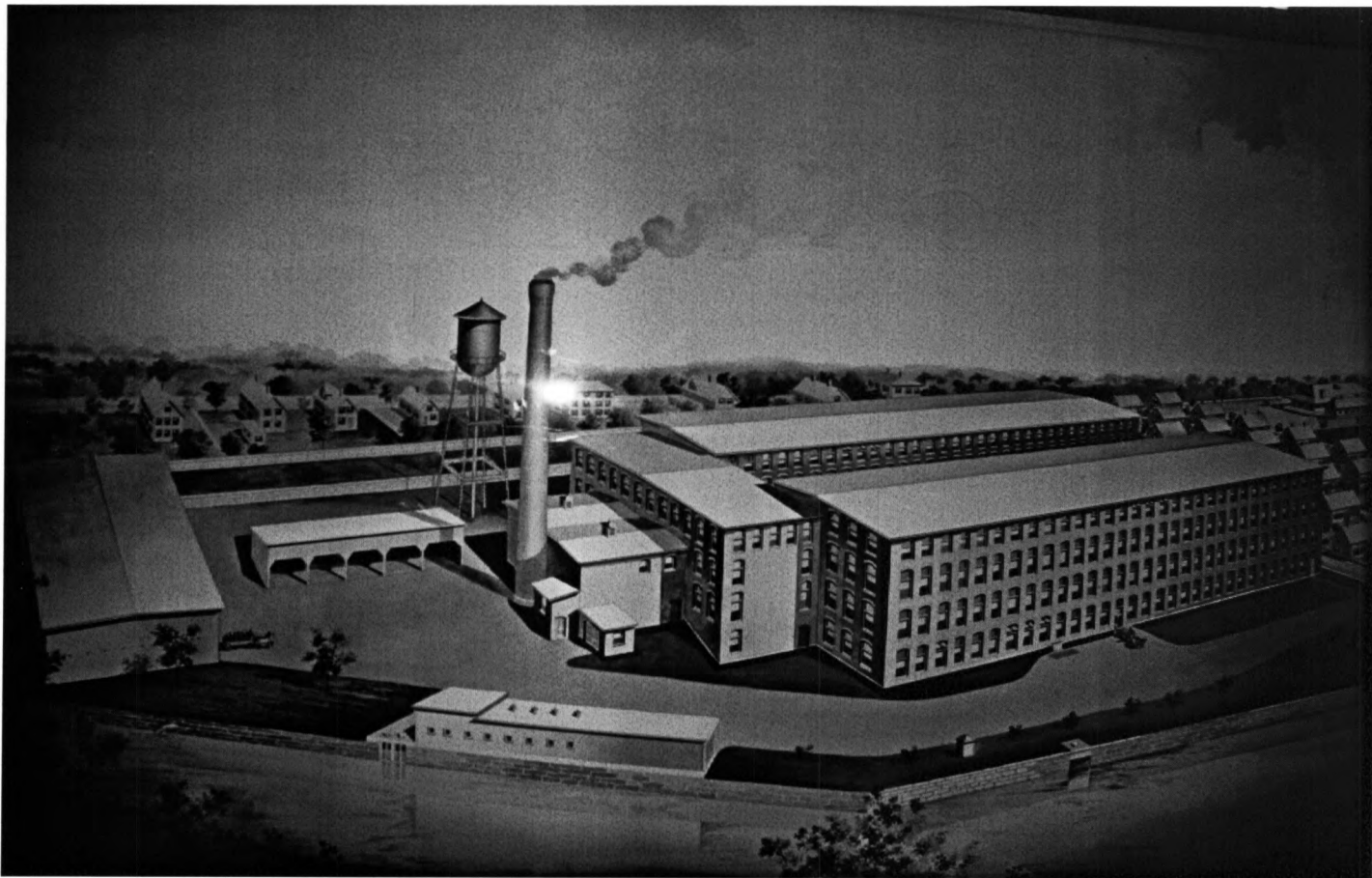
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**Figure 2. Early 20th century view of Pocasset Mill after 1902 and 1909 additions**



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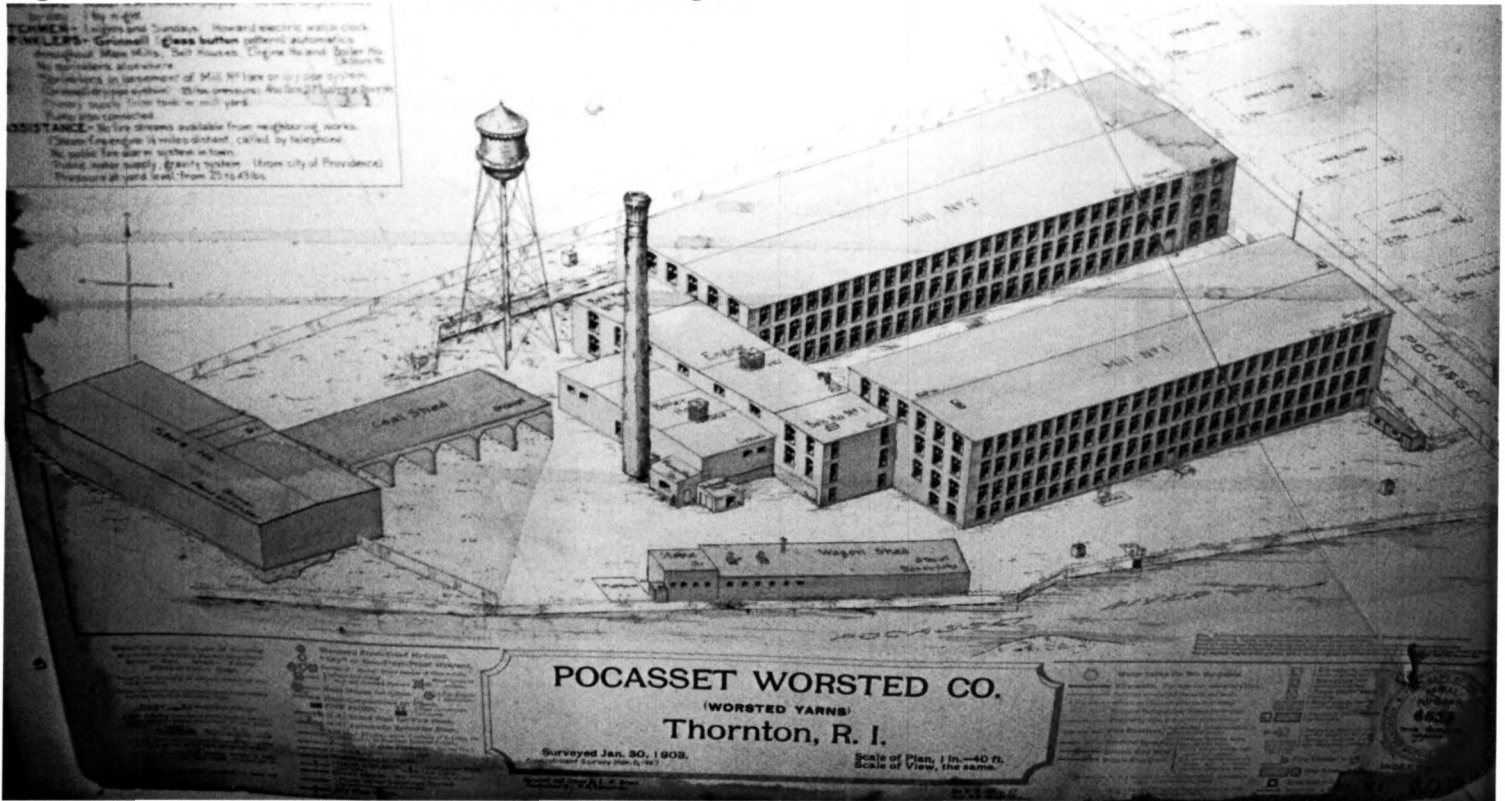
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Figure 3. Detail of 1909 View of Pocasset Mill complex





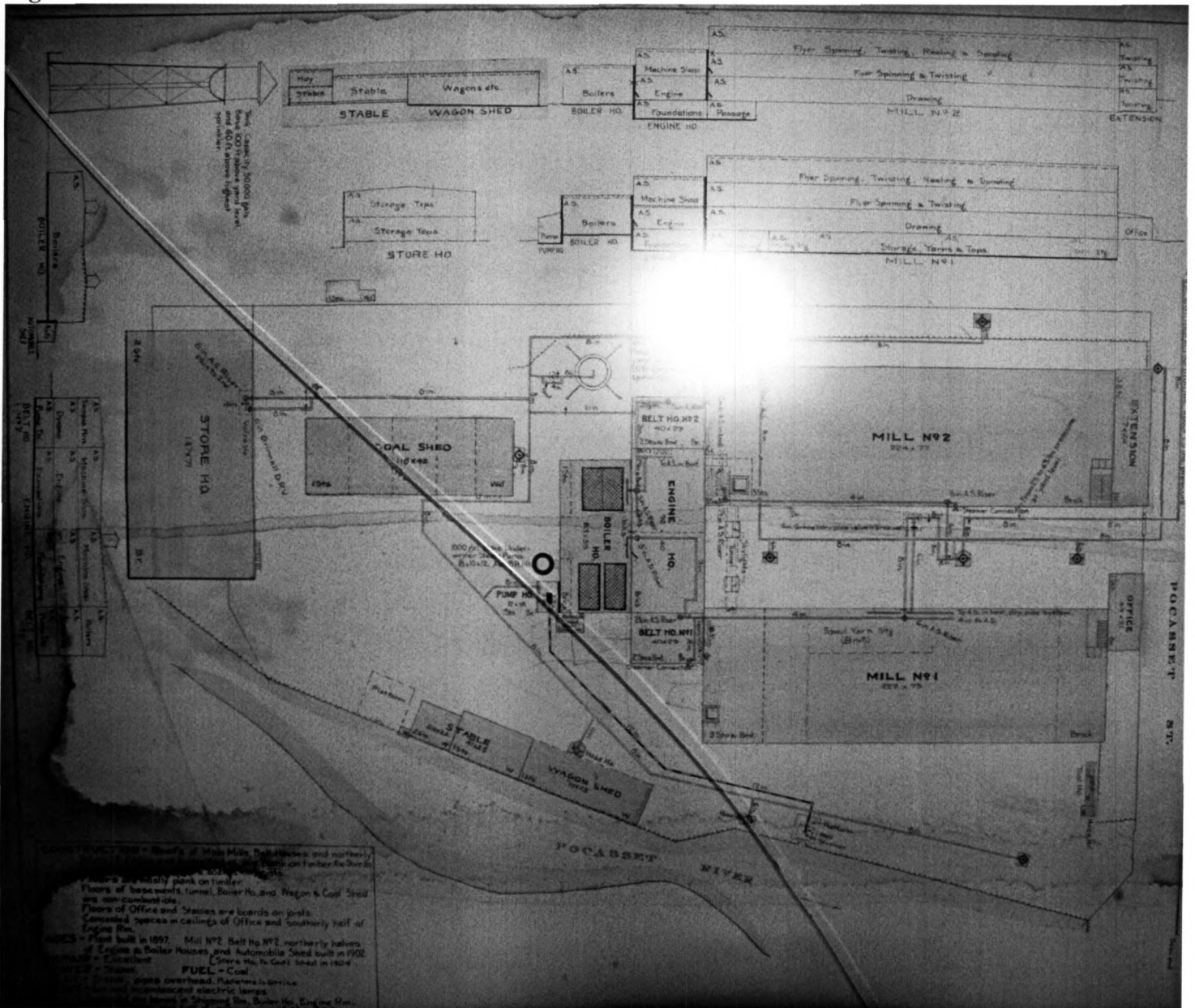
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Figure 4. Detail of 1909 view of Pocasset Mill



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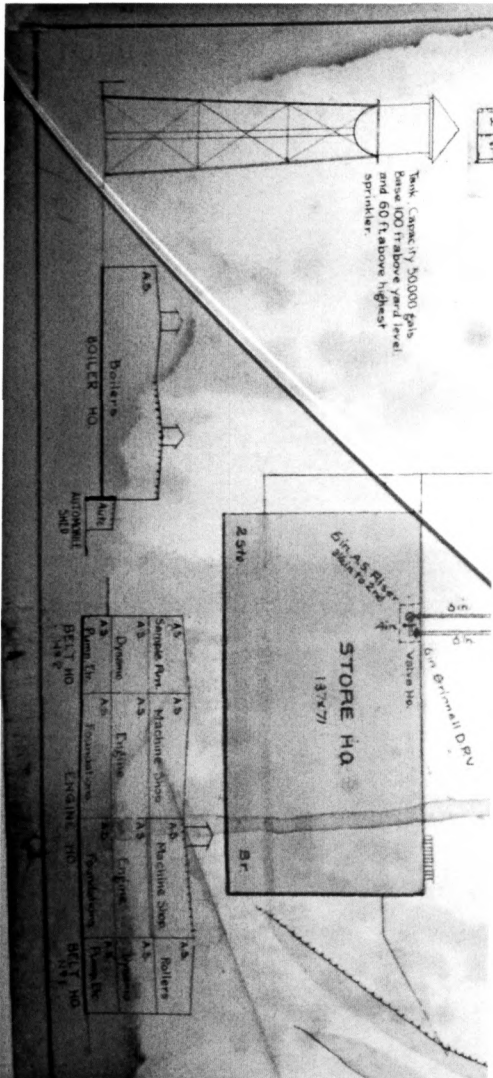
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Figure 5. Detail of 1909 view of Pocasset Mill



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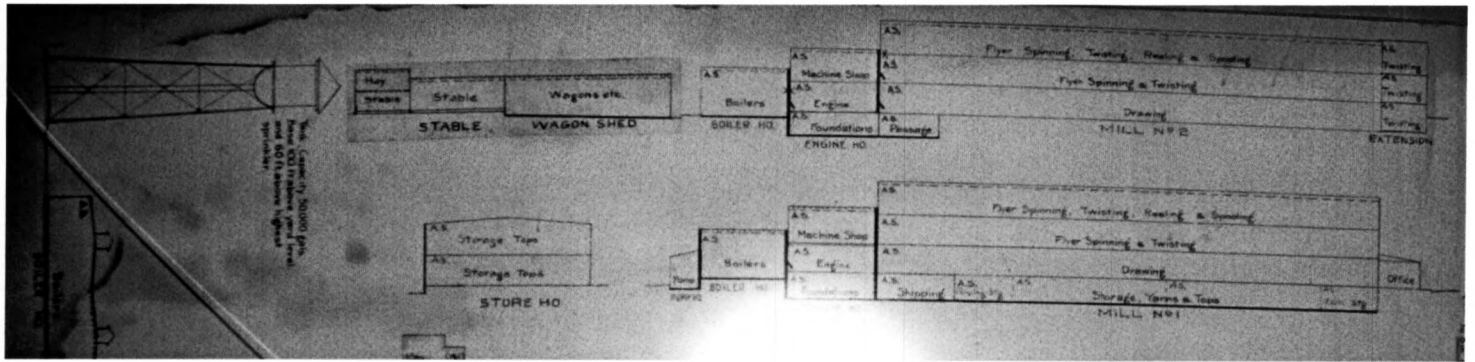
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Figure 6. Detail of 1909 view of Pocasset Mill



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Figure 7. 1945, revised to 1949, Sanborn Map Co.

