

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. Name of Property

historic name: Royal Mill Complex

other name/site number: Greene Mfg. Co., B.B. and R. Knight, Saybrooke Mfg. Co.

2. Location

street & number: 125 Providence Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: West Warwick vicinity: N/A

state: RI county: Kent code: 003 zip code:

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Public-Town

Category of Property: site

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>7</u>	_____	buildings
<u>0</u>	_____	sites
<u>3</u>	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>10</u>	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

___ See continuation sheet.

Frederick C. Williamson
Signature of certifying official

10 March 04
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

___ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this 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
- ___ removed from the National Register
- ___ other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: INDUSTRY

Sub: manufacturing facility

Current: Not in use

Sub:

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

LATE VICTORIAN/Romanesque

LATE VICTORIAN/Italianate

Other Description: 20th-century industrial

Materials: foundation STONE roof ASPHALT
 walls STONE other METAL/steel

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: locally

Applicable National Register Criteria: A,C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: Industry
Architecture
Social History

Period(s) of Significance: c. 1860-1953

Significant Dates: c. 1860 1890 1920 1922

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Thompson, David (1890 reconstruction)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

See continuation sheet.

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) 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 #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: R.I. Historical Society, 121 Hope St., Prov., RI

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: 14 acres

UTM References: Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	<u>19</u>	<u>290780</u>	<u>4621220</u>	B	<u>19</u> <u>290840</u> <u>4621200</u>
C	<u>19</u>	<u>290920</u>	<u>4621040</u>	D	<u>19</u> <u>290690</u> <u>4620860</u>
E	<u>19</u>	<u>290600</u>	<u>4620960</u>		

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification: See continuation sheet.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Edward Connors, Project Manager

Organization: Edward Connors and Associates Date: August, 1997

Street & Number: 14 Brook Street Telephone: 401-433-2871

City or Town: Barrington State: RI ZIP: 02806

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 7

Page 5

Description

The Royal Mill Complex consists of two major industrial buildings connected by an overhead walkway, two secondary industrial buildings, a detached office building, a dam with intact waterways, and a metal truss bridge. The site has seen industrial use since 1814. This irregularly shaped complex of approximately 14 acres is bordered by Providence and Hay Streets, the rail bed of the now abandoned New York New Haven & Hartford Railroad and Royal Mills Bridge No. 27, Dam No. 147 (RI Department of Environmental Management), and a ridge of land that rises at the southern edge of the property.¹ The South Branch of the Pawtuxet River passes between the two main buildings. Providence Street curves to the southwest, separating the main complex from a storehouse. The current Royal Mill (1920) and its historical predecessors have dominated Riverpoint, the neighboring village of worker housing, from the beginning of its industrial activity. The survival of many 19th- and early 20th-century mill houses in the vicinity of Royal Mill and the Bradford Soap Works suggests the possibility of an eligible historic district; only the mill is nominated here.

Inventory

1. **Royal Mill, 125 Providence Street (1890, 1920):** This 5-story, 450-foot long building is of coursed rubble construction,² its facade dominated by a central tower/entrance and a clock tower at the southern end. Much of the granite of this building was reused from earlier construction, probably quarried from the neighboring highlands on the east bank of the river. The width is 50' except for the northern ell discussed below. The two square-plan, crenellated towers have quoined corners and a belt course of granite ashlar. The tower facades have an entranceway, three stories of rectangular window openings and a fifth-story round arch window. The north tower has two inset panels below the belt course. These bear the inscriptions: 1855 (the date of a major addition to the previous "Stone Mill") and 1919 (the date of reconstruction after a catastrophic fire). The south tower is similar to the north but for the addition of an upper extension housing a clock. Below the belt course is a panel bearing the inscription: *Royal Mills*. These towers were still standing after the 1919 fire. The tall, 1890 hipped tower roofs were destroyed; the upper courses of masonry were altered to form the present crenellations.

The 450-foot facade consists of 17 bays, the north tower, 36

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 7

Page 6

additional bays, and the south corner tower. The roof is flat and sealed with asphalt and gravel. Windows have 6/9 sash with margined, rock-faced granite lintels and sills. At the roof line there is a stepped brick cornice and a plain wooden crown molding. The 1922 Sanborn Insurance Map describes the use of the building as follows: speeders and carding (basement and first floor), speeders (second), ring spinning (third and fourth), and weaving (fifth).

The same map shows the northern ell (90' x 60' at the rear) as a picker house (basement, first, and second floor) and a condenser room (fourth floor). An elevated walkway connects the fifth floor of this ell to the weave shed across the river. This ell also has a driveway to the rear of the building.

Interior floors are wooden plank. The floor plan is generally open, although certain areas throughout the building are now partitioned for office space. Columns are wooden.

The general contours of the main section of the Royal Mill still define the location of the 1844 stone or "middle mill;" the break in the building's façade at the clock tower and its southern extensions define the location of the original "upper mill." The area now occupied by the 1920 weave mill on the east bank of the Pawtuxet was used historically as warehouse space served by a spur line of the Pawtuxet valley branch of the New York, Providence & Boston Railroad. The present raceway, parallel to Providence Street along the façade of the mill, is in the location of the extended waterways required by the 1844 construction of a second mill at the water privilege of the original wooden mill.

1a. Middle Extension (1890, 1920): The ground floor and basement of this irregularly-shaped, 5-story building (roughly 400' x 140' overall) are the historic location of the sources of power and heating. Upper floors are open space as in Building No. 1. Its surface treatment is the same as that of Building No. 1. The 1922 Sanborn describes the main body of this extension as a generator room (basement), carding/roving (first floor), speeders (second), ring spinning (third and fourth), and weaving/spooling (fifth). The generator room contains surviving water turbines, diesel, and steam power sources for generation of electricity.

Although physically connected, Buildings No. 1 and 1a and its southern extension vary in function and style. For this reason, this extension will be discussed as a separate building, the South Extension (Building No. 2).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 7

Page 7

2. **South Extension (1890):** This irregularly-shaped, 3-story, coursed rubble building (roughly 110' x 110' overall) has a 9-bay facade with 12/12 sash windows and a simple, widely-bracketed, overhanging wooden cornice. Situated adjacent to the dam, its first floor served as a "supply and wheel house," as indicated on the 1922 Sanborn.

3. **Boiler House (1890):** This roughly 70' square, coursed rubble building is attached to the north-rear elevation of Building No. 1a. It has a more elaborately corbelled cornice, 12/12 sash windows surviving on the northern facade, and an attached 190' tall brick chimney with machicolation at the top and blind Gothic arches. The east (river bank) elevation shows heavy alterations, notably the installation of early-20th century steel-framed windows with cement sills.³ This building houses a mid-20th century steam generating system.

4. **Office Building (1890):** This 40-foot square, coursed rubble building, situated along Providence Street in front of Building No. 1, is of Italianate style. It has a hipped, shingled roof with a central gable on each flank and an elaborate, widely-bracketed, wooden cornice. These brackets are raked along the gables. Each of the 3-bay facades has a central oculus at the gable. First floor windows are 9/9 sash. The entrance on the Providence Street facade consists of a double hung recessed panel door. A steel pipe railing flanks a walkway leading to the south elevation door. An embossed patterned sidewalk leads to the front (Providence Street) entrance. A basement entrance is at the rear of the building.

The first floor is divided into three spaces: a front lobby and two office spaces. A central stairway leads to the second floor--a single space lighted by the two side ocular windows (the front and rear windows have been filled with wooden panels and vents). All first floor rooms are wainscoted.

5. **Weave Shed (1920):** This 4-story, 20th-century addition to the complex represents a typical industrial building of the period--reinforced concrete and steel frame with brick walls, large window openings, and narrow piers and spandrels. The facade consists of 5 bays flanking a square central tower; windows are metal framed. It is roughly 400' x 150' and flat-roofed. The roof is sealed with asphalt.

The upper floors of this building are open space with steel columns

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 7

Page 8

and concrete floors. The basement is narrow in width compared to the upper floors because of the thick east wall needed to retain the land rising from that side of the building.

6. **Waste House (1890):** This flat roofed, 2-story, coursed rubble building, located behind the 1920 weave shed (Building No. 5) dates to the 1890 construction. The side elevation of this roughly 70' x 40' building is incorporated into the river retaining wall. The facade shows significant alteration--a mix of segmental arch, brick lined doorways; double-hung sash windows with granite lintel and sill; and 24-light steel frame windows. The cornice is wooden and bracketed. The roof is flat, sealed with asphalt and gravel.

Interior space is divided into two main narrow areas. A small office is located on the second floor. At the time of its abandonment it housed a machine shop, much of the contents (including overhead shafting and belting) of which remains in remarkably good condition on the second floor.

7. **Storehouse (1890):** This 150' x 100' flat-roofed, 3-story building is of uncoursed rubble with a corbelled brick cornice and a plain wooden crown molding. The Providence Street elevation consists of eight bays of 4/4 sash windows. The roof is flat and sealed with asphalt and gravel.

8. **Waterpower System (ca. 1860, 1890):** This feature includes Riverpoint Upper Dam (RIDEM No. 14), gates, headrace, penstocks, turbines, and tailrace. This dam is of rough-faced, regularly coursed, granite ashlar. Its length is 75 feet; its height is 29 feet. The spillway consists of granite cup stairs.⁴ This structure impounds the waters of the Pawtuxet River at a point adjacent to the south corner of Building No. 2. Six trench gates located in this building allow passage of the water to an open headrace running to Building 1a (middle extension). There, a second gate system allows the water to penstocks for three turbines located in Building 1a. The water is returned to the Pawtuxet through a series of masonry arches below the truss bridge.

As presently configured, the turbines drive a shaft for generation of electricity. Correspondence in the dam files of the RI Department of Environmental Management describes a proposal submitted by Saybrooke Manufacturing Co. to harness this water potential for hydroelectric purposes in the 1970s. According to the calculations presented in the proposal, the "upper privilege" would generate approximately 350 KW of electricity.⁵ This proposal was never carried out.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 7

Page 9

9. **Truss Bridge (ca. 1890):** This riveted, iron pony truss bridge has a span of 65 feet. It dates to the extensive reconstruction of the mill complex by the B.B. and R. Knight Company. The bridge spans the Pawtuxet River at a 45-degree skew within the mill property. This type of bridge, patented by Thomas and Caleb Pratt in 1844, was commonly used throughout the United States for spans of from 25 to 150 feet in length.

The 12-foot wide bridge deck is of 2" timber plank. The abutments are ashlar and contiguous with the river retaining wall. The bridge consists of five panels of approximately 13 feet each and a panel height of 8 feet from the deck. The verticals (compressive members), inclined end posts, and upper chords are built-up members consisting of two angle irons with open lattice. Flange to flange, these members are approximately 7" in width. The lower chords are angle iron. The floor system consists of built-up I-beams and timber stringers. The diagonals (tension members) are simple pairs of angle irons with no lattice connectors. These diagonals are tied in to the lower and upper chords at each panel point. A horizontal angle iron attached to the diagonals on both trusses serves as a hand railing.

Twentieth-century utility lines running along the west river embankment are covered by a wooden enclosure. This pitched-roof enclosure takes a 45-degree jog as it meets the south flank of the bridge. At this point it is secured to the bridge by I-beam extensions attached to the floor beams.

A plaque on the northeast end post identifying the builder as the Boston Bridge Works is now missing. While many regional bridge works were absorbed into the American Bridge Company in the 1890s, this company, formed in 1876, remained independent and survived until the 1930s.

The Royal Mill Bridge is one of five wrought iron, riveted Pony truss bridges in Rhode Island.⁶ Although the wooden deck is badly weathered, the wrought iron structural components appear to be in very good condition.

10. **Royal Mills Bridge No. 27 (1923):** This modified spandrel, reinforced concrete bridge was built by the Rhode Island State Board of Public Roads and designed by Chief Bridge Engineer, Clarence L. Hussey. Replacing a Pratt truss bridge built ca 1887, it is one of eight surviving bridges of this type.⁷ The modified spandrel design, employed between 1918 and 1930 was unique to Rhode Island roads. This exceptionally strong and elegant design drew from open-spandrel construction and consisted of these

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 7

Page 10

essential elements: inclined spandrel walls, arch rings instead of an arch drum, and a sidewalk carried on brackets integral with the inclined spandrel. This design reduced the amount of concrete (dead load) by about one-half with no sacrifice in strength. In doing so, it obviated the need for an arch drum to extend the full width of the roadway, including sidewalks. The relatively light load carried by the sidewalks was carried by the brackets tied in to the spandrel. These inclined spandrels also formed a trough for the roadway fill. This trough required significantly less fill than the commonly-used closed spandrel bridges of the period. This bridge was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 1989 as part of the R.I. Historic Bridge Inventory.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 7

Page 11

Photographs:

Royal Mill Complex
125 Providence Street
West Warwick
Kent County, Rhode Island

Photographer: Edward Connors

Date: December 1996, August 1997

Original Negatives: Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage
Commission, 150 Benefit Street, Providence, RI 02903

1. Facade of Royal Mill (Bldg. No.1), view south
2. Detail of clock tower, view southeast
3. Rear of Royal Mill and walkway, view north
4. Middle Extension (Bldg. No. 1a), Boiler House (Bldg. 3), truss bridge,
and dam), view south
5. Turbines (Bldg. No. 1a), view south
6. Office Building (Bldg. 3), view west
7. Facade of Weave Shed (Bldg. No. 5), view south
8. Interior of Weave Shed (4th floor), view south
9. Waste House (Bldg. No. 6 and truss bridge), view southeast
10. Interior of Waste House (machine shop, 2nd floor), view south
11. Store House (Bldg. No. 7), view north

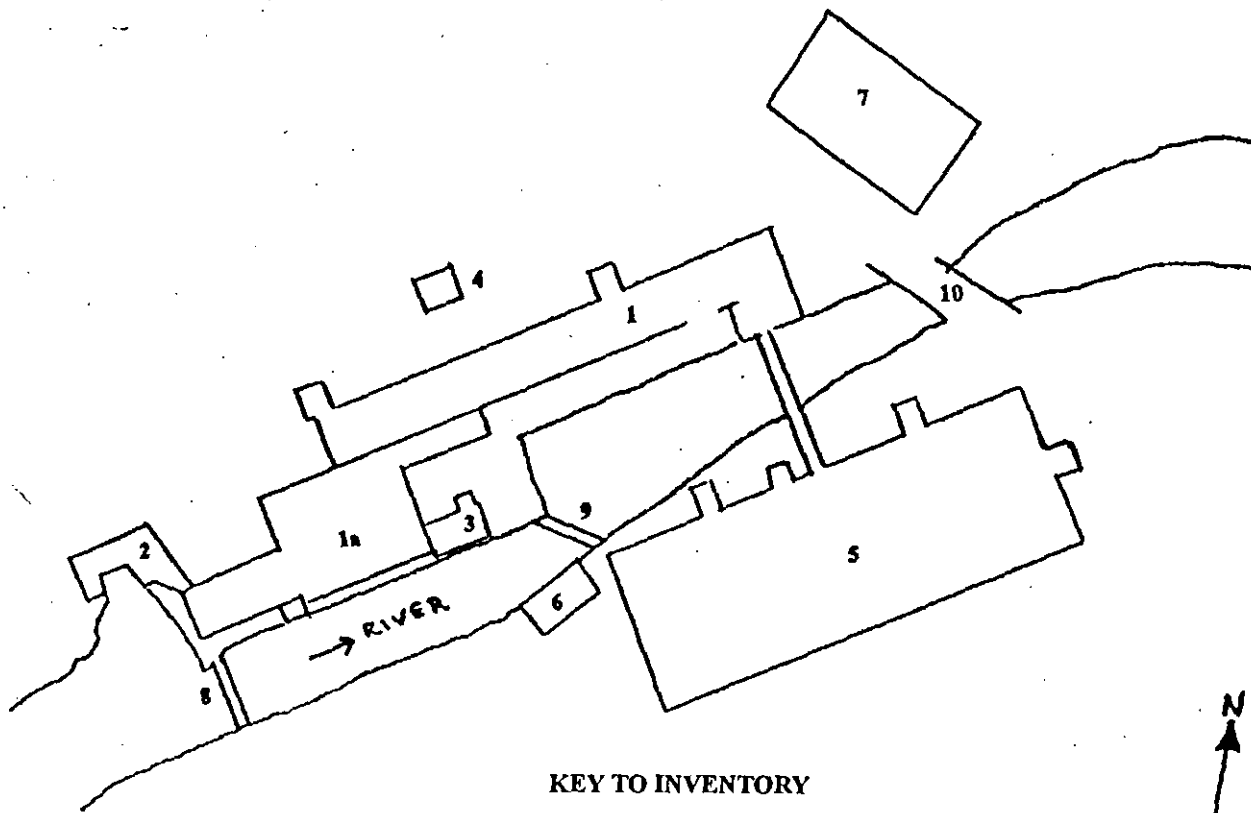
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 7

Page 12



KEY TO INVENTORY

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Royal Mill | 6. Waste House |
| 1a. Middle extension | 7. Store House |
| 2. Southern Extension/Supply House | 8. Dam No. 147 |
| 3. Boiler House | 9. Truss Bridge |
| 4. Office Building | 10. Concrete Bridge |
| 5. Weave Shed | |

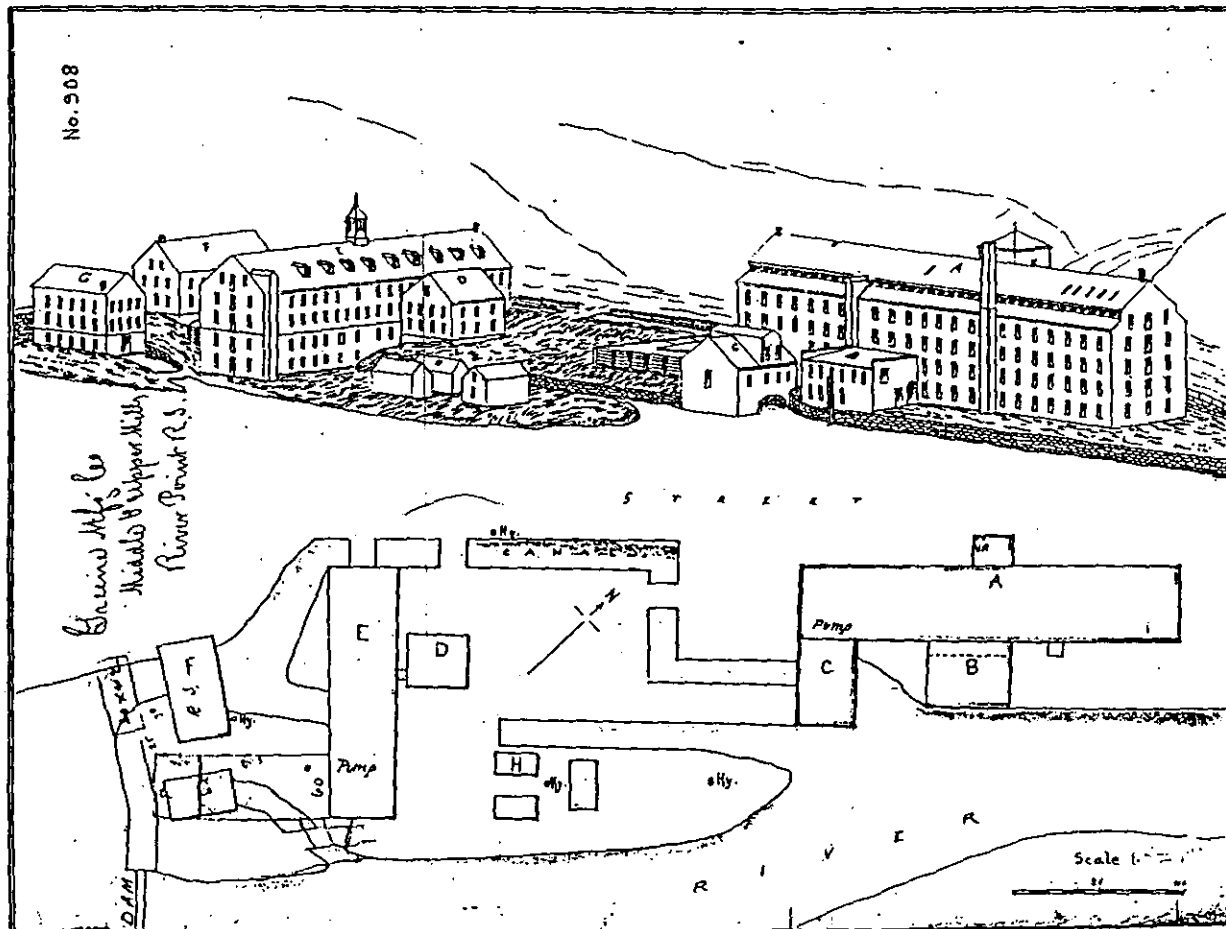
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 7

Page 13



Factory Mutual Map (between 1859 and 1872)

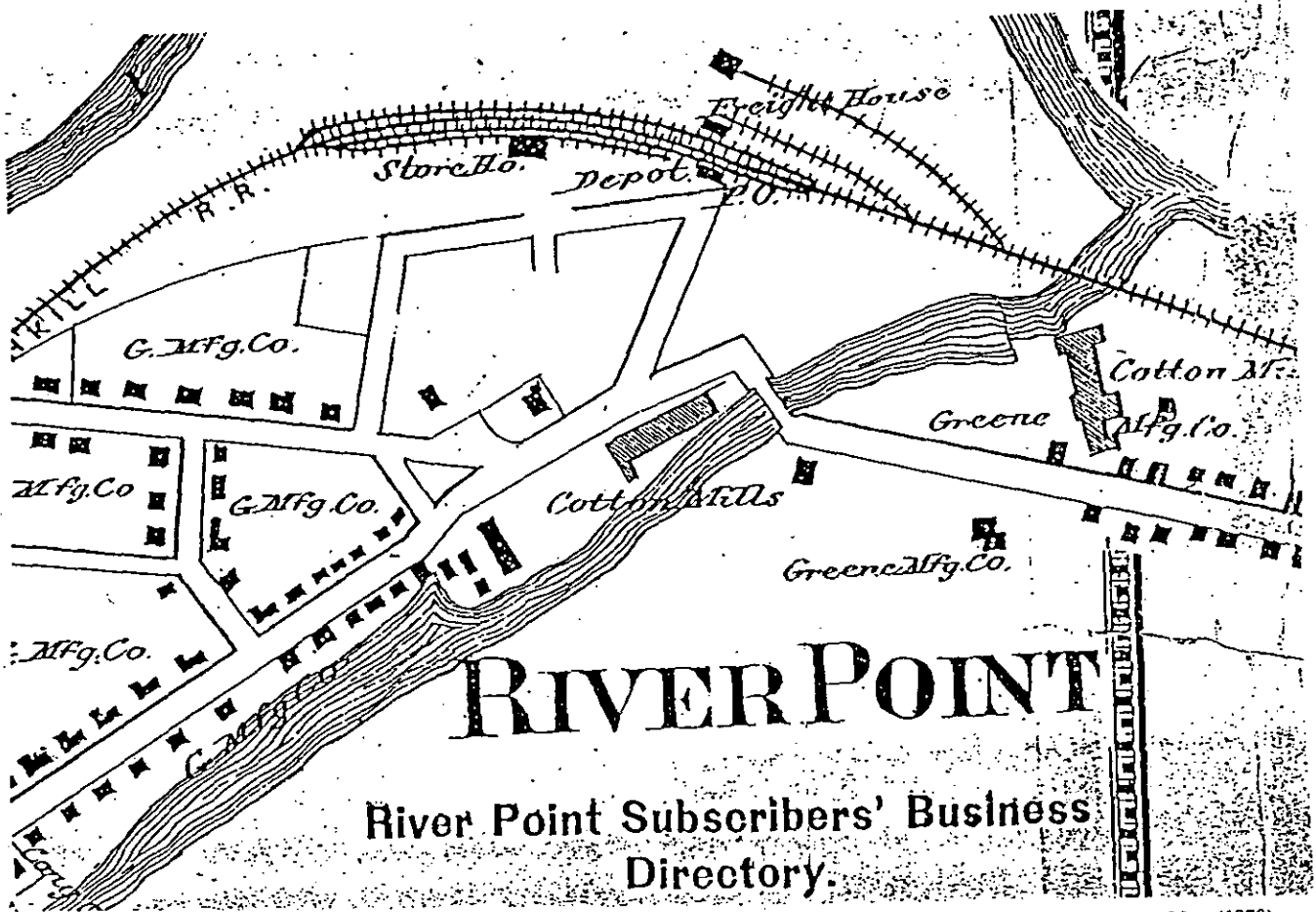
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 7

Page 14

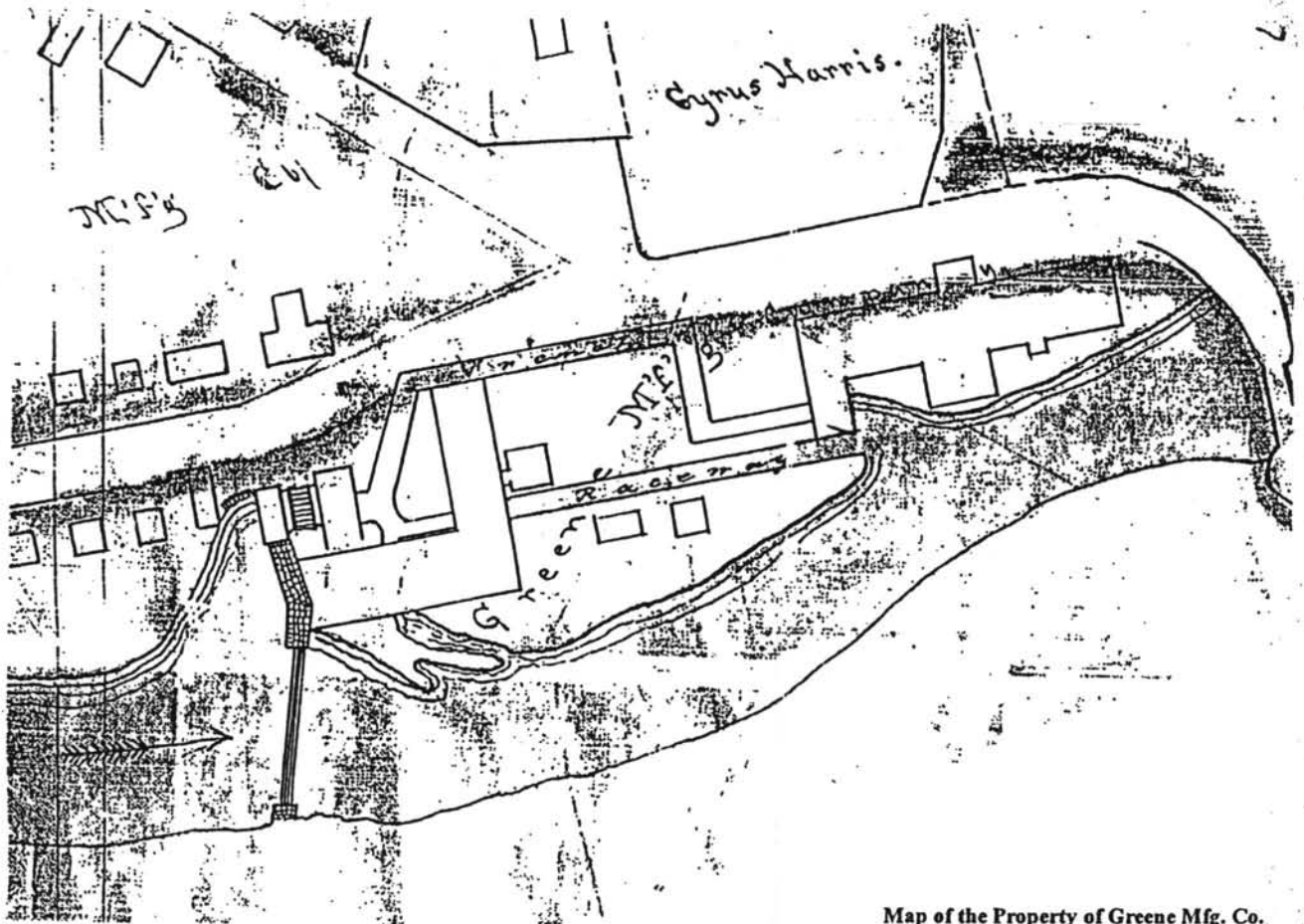


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 7



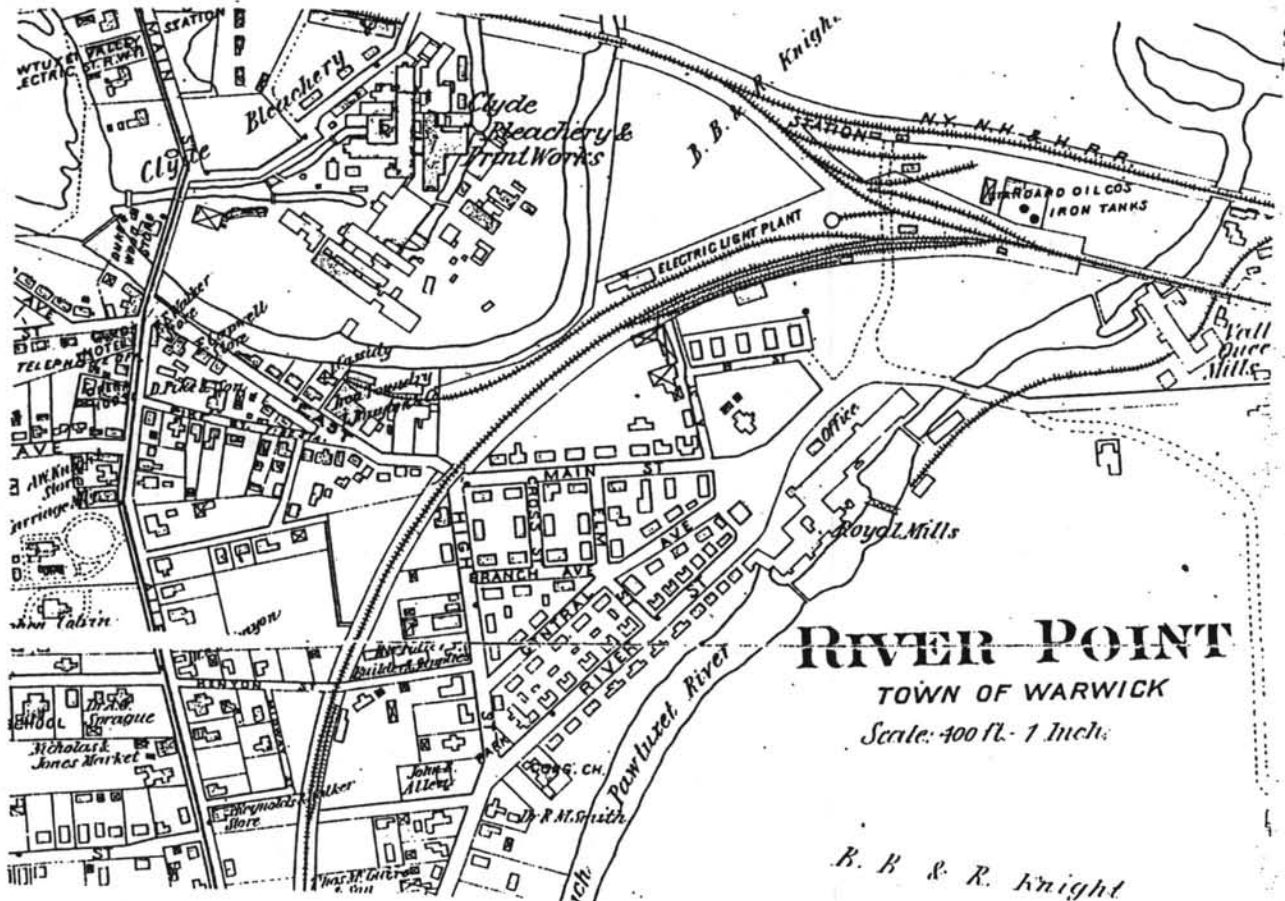
Map of the Property of Greene Mfg. Co.
J.A. Munroe (1872)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 7



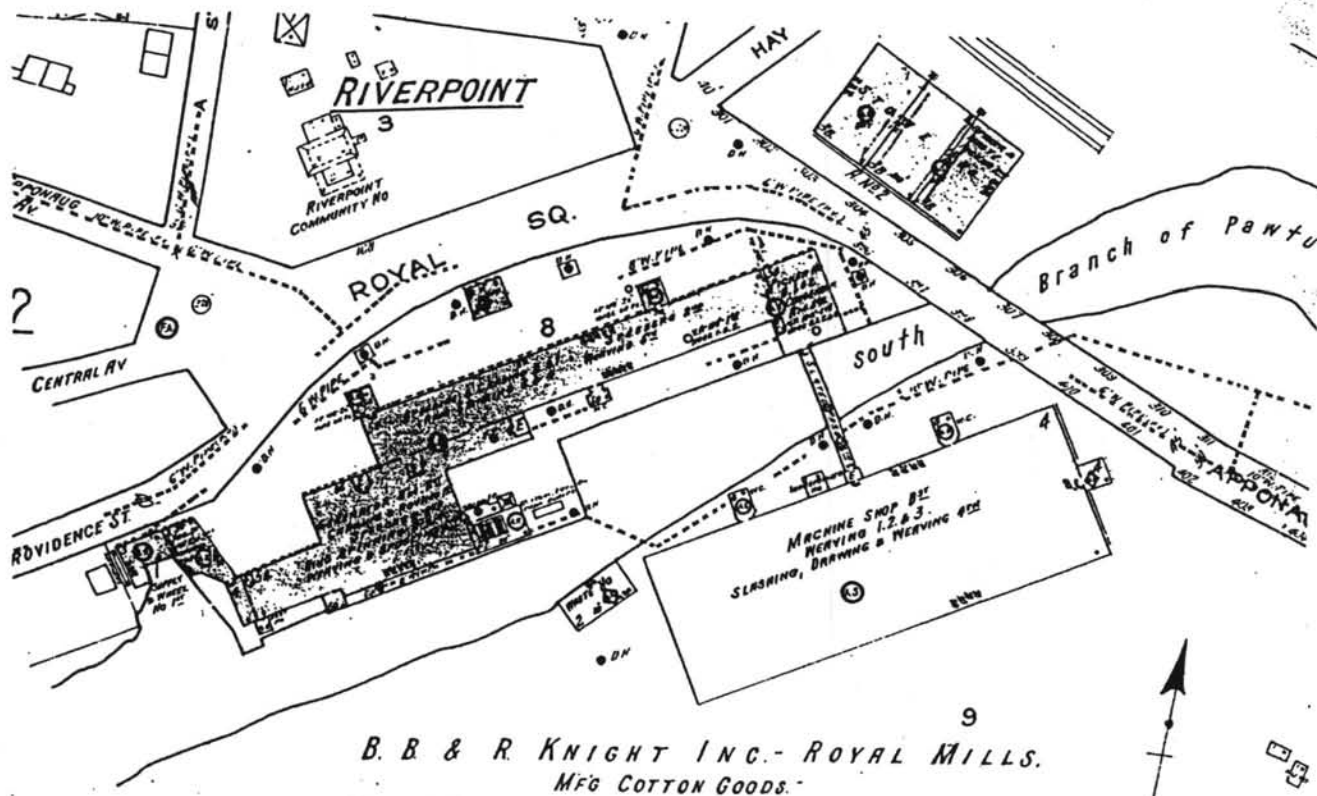
Everts and Richards Map (1895)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 7



3 NIGHT WATCHMEN BUERS CLOCK 21 SITTINGS
 HOURS 40000. HEART STEAM ENGINE 1111 P. 10000
 STEAM & WATER TOWER 1011. K.M. AUTO SPRAY NG. 1001
 & 241 5122 101. SUPPLIED BY FORDSON STEAM PUMP 1000
 WATER. 1 NORTH-WEST 1 1011 PUMP 1000 1000 1011
 ROTARY 1011 PUMP 1000 1000 1000 1011
 VALLEY QUEEN FIRE PUMPS. 1000 & 1000 AS SHOWN 1011
 SIDE HYDRANTS "1000" 1011

Sanborn Insurance Map (1922)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 8

Page 18

Significance

The Royal Mill complex is significant as the physical expression of the development of the B.B. and R. Knight Company into one of the largest textile manufacturers in the world. Located in Rhode Island's most heavily-industrialized community, the mill's corporate history parallels and exemplifies several important themes in the state's industrial history: the consolidation of firms for economies of scale, the decline of the New England textile industry in the early 20th century, and the role of strikes and labor disputes in textile and Rhode Island political history.

The present layout of the complex is essentially that of an extensive reconstruction and demolition carried out ca 1890 by B.B. and R. Knight, incorporating the Greene Manufacturing Company's plant into its holdings of some seventeen separate factories throughout Rhode Island and Massachusetts. Sensing the threat posed by southern competition and rising labor agitation, B.B. and R. Knight sold their complete holdings to a New York-based conglomerate in 1920. Intensifying southern competition and widespread, violent labor strife followed, bringing the company to near collapse in the 1920s. A major textile strike that spread throughout New England in 1922 began in the weave room of the Royal Mill. This strike marked the emergence of Rhode Island's immigrant population into the mainstream of state politics, hastening the demise of the Republican Party as the dominant force in state affairs and bringing the Democrats to power.

Through reorganization, a new corporation nursed the company through the late 1920s until its eventual collapse in the Great Depression. The complex was purchased at a foreclosure auction in 1936 by Saybrooke Corporation and subsequently converted for woolen manufacture. By the mid-1940s Saybrooke had failed, maintaining ownership and leasing parts of the complex to rayon manufacturers, dyers and finishers, and other uses. Ace Dyeing and Finishing, a company owned by the Saybrooke interests, continued operation in the brick weave shed until the abandonment of the complex in 1993.

The Royal Mill complex thus meets National Register Criterion A for its exemplification of the consolidation and rapid decline of Rhode Island textile manufacturing in the period from 1890 to 1947 and for its role in Rhode Island's labor history as the site of a walkout that gave rise to the textile general strike of 1922. It meets Criterion C for its embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of late 19th- and early 20th-century New England mill architecture. It remains a handsome complex of industrial

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 8

Page 19

buildings and warehouses; a vital water privilege on the Pawtuxet River; a largely intact waterpower system comprising a dam, raceways, and turbines; an 1890 metal Pratt truss bridge; and a 1923 reinforced concrete bridge.

NB: The Valley Queen Mill, part of the Royal Mill complex until its sale in 1931, is already listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Pawtuxet Valley and the Industrial Revolution

Soon after Samuel Slater began the water-powered spinning of cotton yarn on the Blackstone River at Pawtucket in 1791, other local entrepreneurs obtained water privileges for the erection of spinning mills along Rhode Island's rivers. Notable among these early experiments was the 1794 mill at Centerville on the Pawtuxet River in Warwick. From this simple beginning, life in the triangle known as the Pawtuxet Valley would come to be defined by textile manufacturing over the next century and a half.

Stephen Harris (1786-1858) studied at Woodstock, Connecticut, and Brown University, eventually completing his studies at Dartmouth College. His course of study had prepared him for the field of medicine, a practice he pursued in Johnston and Coventry until the time of the War of 1812. By this time the profits to be gained in cotton yarn manufacture were well-known. In 1812 Harris, in partnership with Sylvester Knight (a physician and, earlier, a partner in a medical practice), Resolved Waterman, Resolved Slack, and James Greene, purchased 40 acres of land and a water privilege three miles below Centerville along the south branch of the Pawtuxet for this purpose. This site was near the confluence of the north and south branches, a point on the river with considerable water power potential.

In 1809 Harris married Eliza Greene, a daughter of the above mentioned Captain James Greene and one of the original owners of the 1794 cotton mill at Centerville.⁸ As a gesture of respect to his in-laws or in recognition of the investment and guidance provided by his father-in-law in the new venture, the factory was named Greene Manufacturing Company. The village that grew around the mill came to be known as Greenville.

Greene Manufacturing Company

Typical of the modest scale of mills erected along the Blackstone and the Pawtuxet in this early period, the original Greene factory was a two-

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 8

Page 20

story, timber frame building, 65 feet long, housing four throstle frames and two mules.⁹

Peter Coleman's study of the beginnings of Rhode Island's textile industry provides an assessment of the number and size of mills in this period. In 1809 Rhode Island had 25 cotton mills (six of these in Warwick) with a production capacity of 14,696 spindles. Three years later, at the outbreak of the War of 1812, the number of mills had increased to 38, the number of spindles increasing to 56,146. Warwick, by this time, had nine mills along both branches of the Pawtuxet.¹⁰

As was the case with many small textile manufactories in southern New England, the relative prosperity afforded by the embargo and war years faded with the resumption of trade with Britain in 1816. In the same year, the original Greene Manufacturing Company partnership failed. Dr. Harris, who had relocated to Atlanta during the war years to establish a commission house with Resolved Waterman, returned to Warwick and purchased sole interest in the company in 1817.¹¹

By this time, waterpowered weaving had been introduced into Rhode Island factories. When Dr. Harris resumed operations at Greenville in 1818, he installed eight power looms at the mill. Within two years he was operating 18 looms and 780 spindles, with a total capital investment of \$20,000.

The 1820s, though prosperous for Greene Manufacturing Company, saw a flood and damage to the factory's dam in 1821 and a fire in the picker and machine shop in 1827. The mill was enlarged after this fire. By 1832 the factory housed 3600 spindles, with a capital investment of \$90,000. Under the ownership of Harris, the Greene Manufacturing Company expanded in the postwar years to rank among the seven largest textile operations in Rhode Island.¹²

In 1833 Harris acquired a new mill privilege downstream, closer to the confluence of the two branches. This "lower privilege" became the site of Greene Manufacturing Company's "lower mill," a three-story granite mill. The growth of this lower complex will be discussed only in general terms in this report as it was sold in 1934 to Bradford Soap Works and is not at this time part of the Royal Mill complex.

During the years 1844-1846 Harris erected a third mill, also of granite. This mill--situated between the original, now "upper," mill and

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 8

Page 21

the lower mill--came to be called the middle mill. The following description of the village of Greenville appeared in the Kent County Atlas of September 21, 1850.

There are three mills in Greenville, one built of wood and of good old age, the other two of very recent erection and built of stone. The one nearest the confluence [now Bradford Soap] has not yet received more than half the machinery intended for it. The one above this [middle mill] is in full operation, and the wooden mill has continued its rattling for these twenty or thirty years.

In the same year, the Federal census (Products of Industry) describes a vital company producing 2,000,000 yards of sheeting and shirting valued at \$140,000, a capital investment of \$175,000, and a work force of 180 operatives.¹³

By this time a substantial village had grown up around the three mills, comprising a planing mill, a store, a foundry producing machinery castings, mill houses, a school, two churches, and a timber bridge spanning the Pawtuxet below the middle mill. This village has been called, variously, Frozen Point (or Pint), Greenville, and Riverpoint.¹⁴

The middle mill was enlarged again in 1855. Dr. Stephen Harris died three years later, the estate shared by his four children. An 1859 estate map, shows the addition of a pump house behind the middle mill and three frame outbuildings on the land between the upper and middle mill. A \$200,000 tax assessment in 1860--an increase of \$25,000 over that of the 1850 census--indicates the company's growth during this period. The 1860 census describes a work force of 375 operatives and a yield of 3,500,000 yards of cotton cloth from 850,000 bales of raw cotton. As was common practice among manufacturers in this period, the company purchased a 50 horsepower turbine, a replacement of an earlier waterwheel.¹⁵

During the Civil War years the company's tax evaluation rose dramatically from \$210,000 in 1862 to \$300,000 in 1867. This expansion likely took the form of a new gate house and lengthened dam as well as a 100' ell on the upper mill to accommodate the increased production of the war years. This ell appears as a hand-drawn addendum to an undated Factory Mutual Drawing produced between 1859 and 1872. By 1872 the ell appears on an unaltered Warwick plat map.¹⁶

The evaluation of Greene Manufacturing Company remained stable between

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 8

Page 22

1867 and 1872, increasing slightly in 1873 and beginning a noticeable decline in 1877. This decline continued until 1885 despite a \$250,000 recapitalization in bonds secured by the company's mortgage in 1882. This attempt to revitalize the company with an infusion of capital failed. On November 12, 1885 Hospital Trust held a public auction at the mill. The Pawtuxet Valley Gleaner noted the proceedings with the following item:

The auction sale of the Greene Manufacturing Company property took place on Thursday last, as advertised, Mr. C.F. Hill, auctioneer. The terms of sale were read and bids were called for, the first one coming from Mrs. Taft of Whitinsville, Massachusetts, who bid \$110,000. No other bid was offered for nearly fifteen minutes, when Mr. Robert Knight, of B.B. & R. Knight, raised it \$5,000, and principally between the two, the price was run up to \$137,500, and was finally [sold] to Mr. Knight. This is a great bargain, as the property is taxed at \$322,000.¹⁷

At the time of the auction the Greene mill complex housed 570 looms and 27,000 spindles. The Knight brothers wasted little time assessing their new property. An early December item in the Gleaner noted that "the startup of the middle mill was pleasing to many, as the former help who had not moved away were obliged to go quite a distance to secure work."¹⁸

B.B. & R. Knight

By the time of the purchase of the Greene Manufacturing Company, B.B. & R. Knight was one of the largest textile manufacturers in the world. The Knights had purchased the Natick Mills in 1882 after the collapse of the A. & W. Sprague textile empire nine years earlier. From their beginnings in 1851 when Robert Knight sold his brother half interest in the Pontiac Mill, this partnership came to control seventeen mills in Rhode Island and Massachusetts.

Within a few years of the purchase of the Greene property, the Knight brothers announced plans for a massive rebuilding of the three mills. The upper mill (as enlarged in 1827, 1855, and ca. 1862) was demolished during 1889-90.¹⁹ The Gleaner noted the piecemeal removal of the frame mill during these years:

Messrs. B.B. and R. Knight have removed the second half of the old wooden mill formerly standing in front of the store, to the rear end

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 8

Page 23

of the garden near the cotton store house and will make it into tenements. The front end of the mill was removed last season on to the main street and fitted up for tenements. The large, two-story wooden building occupied as a machine repair shop for the mills has also been removed up near the cotton house.²⁰

Two weeks later the newspaper added the following details of the transformation of a mill into worker housing: "[the Knights] have taken another slice of the old wooden mill across the street into the village for a tenement, each piece being large enough for four or more tenements."²¹

The massive new mill, in the location of the Greene upper and middle mills, was christened the Royal Mill after Royal Knight, the deceased son of Robert Knight. The Knights retained David M. Thompson, a mill engineer who had directed a massive reconstruction of the Knight's Natick Mills in 1882, for the project. While nominally a reconstruction of the mid-19th century middle mill (salvaging and re-using the granite of the outer walls), the 1890 mill was by all appearances a new building. At the center of the 750-foot long, 5-story, flat-roofed complex was a 276-foot tower of granite, wood, copper and iron commemorating the centennial of American cotton manufacturing. 175 feet above ground level was an observation deck offering a commanding view of the Pawtuxet Valley. Approximately 50 feet above the deck was a golden sphere, ten feet in diameter. This sphere rotated on a vertical plane while a ring of attached stars rotated horizontally. Below the observation deck in the roof of the tower was a bell and clock. On the four sides of the tower were inscribed: "Royal Mill," "1890," "1790-1890," and "To the Cotton Centenary." The capacity of this new structure was planned to be 45,000 spindles, powered by a combination of water, steam and the labor of 600 employees.²² By 1898 this projected capacity was exceeded by 2,840 spindles.²³ Between 1888 and 1892 the tax valuation of Knight's Riverpoint holdings more than doubled--from \$150,000 to \$377,600.²⁴ The layout of the present Royal Mill complex, but for the addition of the 1920 weave shed, is essentially the same as that created in the 1890 construction. The general contours of the main section of the Royal Mill still define the location of the 1844 stone or "middle mill;" the break in the building's facade at the clock tower and its southern extensions define the location of the original "upper mill." The area now occupied by the 1920 weave mill on the east bank of the Pawtuxet was used historically as warehouse space served by a spur line of the Pawtuxet valley branch of the New York, Providence & Boston Railroad. The present raceway, parallel to Providence Street along the facade of the mill, is in the location of the extended waterways required by the 1844

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 8

Page 24

construction of a second mill at the water privilege of the original wooden mill.

Fire, Labor Troubles, Depression, and Multiple Use

B.B. and R. Knight continued operation of the Royal Mill until a spectacular fire broke out in the commemorative tower on the evening of January 27, 1919. The upper portion of the tower was of timber frame and, collapsing onto the main flat roof of the 1890s renovation, it caused the fire to spread rapidly through the rest of the building. This spread was abetted by the collapse of a water storage tank in the very tower where the fire had begun. By 2:30 on the morning of the 28th most of the building had collapsed; the loss estimated at \$1,250,000.²⁵ 1200 operatives found themselves out of work. The Knights began a complete reconstruction of the property the following May; this work included a new, 4-story brick weave mill on the opposite (east) bank of the Pawtuxet.

Wartime prosperity continued briefly in the immediate postwar years. By June of 1920 B.B. and R. Knight were secretly negotiating with Frank K. Rupprecht of the Consolidated Textile Company for sale of the complete Knight holdings. This \$20,000,000 sale was effected on September 17, 1920.²⁶

Postwar prosperity evaporated in a serious recession that began in 1921. The Knights, as it turned out, had acted wisely in selling their textile empire when they did. The mortar had barely dried on the 1920-22 rebuilding of the Royal Mill when arose the twin specter of labor agitation and southern textile competition--two themes that were to change forever the relationship between Rhode Island and textile manufacturing.

In early 1922 the new owners, still operating under the name of B.B. and R. Knight, imposed a 20% pay cut and an increase in work hours to 54 a week--this following a 22% cut a year earlier. This action, in concert with other New England cotton manufacturers, was an effort to roll back concessions gained by mill workers during the war years. On January 23, 250 weavers walked out of the Royal Mill, a move that idled 733 operatives. The walkout spread to the nearby Valley Queen and Natick mills. Within a week the strike had idled 4,000 workers in the Pawtuxet Valley alone. After a 33-week strike that saw the involvement of national trade unions, armed National Guard protection of the Natick Mill, widespread acts of violence, extensive government mediation, and a loss of \$1,000,000 to an

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 8

Page 25

already stricken industry, the strike was settled with a reestablishment of wages at the level of the previous January 1.

An important aspect of this strike was the involvement of non-union, immigrant workers. In addressing chronic labor shortages, it had been the practice of B.B. and R. Knight to post hiring agents at U.S. ports of entry. Notable among the immigrant populations employed in the Pawtuxet Valley mills were Italians, Poles, and French-Canadians.²⁷ The significance of this strike--particularly the emergence of Rhode Island's immigrant populations as a political force--is described by Susan Jaffee:

Local immigrant and foreign-language communities emerged with a heightened sense of their class position. Immigrant workers were growing more politically active, and while this activity was limited in scope and direction, it would subsequently shatter the political supremacy of the Republican Party in the State.²⁸

Another 11-day strike erupted in November 1925 when the corporation attempted to impose a 32-loom system on the mill's 90 weavers, each of whom had been tending 16 looms. The weavers walked out, effectively shutting down the whole mill. At issue was the company's introduction of the "battery hand system," a plan to introduce unskilled workers to fill the batteries with bobbins and double the number of automatic looms tended by skilled operatives. The skilled weavers would earn an added 15% in wages.

A statement by Colonel G. Edward Buxton issued early in the strike and published in the Providence Journal described the move as an attempt to "meet savage competition and of insuring a better prospect for continuous employment at the present high wages which the company wishes to maintain."²⁹ The strike was settled on November 23, the weavers guaranteed their original jobs tending 16 looms at a wage reduction of 10%.

The company struggled on through a reorganization in 1926 that established a new corporation, "B.B. and R. Knight of Rhode Island." This corporation sold off the Valley Queen property in 1931 to the Bradford Soap Works, a company that continues in that location. In 1935 the bankrupt Knight Corporation liquidated the Royal Mill, which at that time housed 94,000 spindles and 2,838 looms, employing 1325 operatives.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 8

Page 26

Recent History

A year later, in April 1936, the Saybrooke Company, a woolen manufacturer based in Hope Valley, RI, purchased the Royal Mill at auction for one dollar. By the late 30s this company was leasing industrial space to related textile concerns, most notably rayon manufacturers,³⁰ and producing woolens until its failure in 1946. Despite Saybrooke's failure as a woolen manufacturer, it maintained ownership of the complex. Hope Valley Dyeing began leasing space in the weave shed shortly after the Saybrooke purchase. When Hope Valley Dyeing left the complex in 1948, Ace Dyeing and Finishing (owned by the Saybrooke interests) continued operation in the weave shed until the abandonment of the complex in 1993. Although Saybrooke technically owns the property, a tax default auction in August 1993 assigned tax title to West Warwick. The property is now vacant but will soon be converted to housing. A suspicious fire in December 1996 damaged the second floor of Building No 1.³¹ Town officials determined that the damage did not compromise the integrity of the structure.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name

Section number 9

Page 27

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Property name

Section number 9

Page 28

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name

Section number 9

Page 29

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Property name

Section number 9

Page 30

Beers Atlas map of River Point (1870).

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section number 10

Page 31

Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundaries of the Royal Mill Complex conform to those of West Warwick Assessors Plat 26, Lot Nos. 10, 11, and 18. Buildings No. 1, 1a, 2, 3, and 4 are located on lot 11. Buildings No. 5 and 6 are located on lot 18. Building No. 7 is located across Providence Street on lot 10.

Boundary Justification:

These boundaries define the land and buildings historically associated with the Royal Mill. Although the Bradford Soap/Valley Queen property was a part of the complex until 1931, it is now a separate property, and is separately listed in the National Register.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section: Endnotes:

Page 32

1. The actual orientation of the property is northeast to southwest, roughly parallel to the flow of the Pawtuxet River at that location. For ease of description, the orientation of the property will be simplified to north-south.
2. There is some variation in the character of the stone masonry throughout this complex. In general, there is a continuum from uncoursed, wet-laid rubble to a more precisely laid rubble, to ashlar appearing at quoined corners. It should also be noted that an incised stucco coating (incisions roughly suggesting the alignment of rubble below) has been applied to much of the complex. This coating, showing much wear, is a 20th century treatment.
3. Progress on the construction of this chimney is described in a series of Autumn 1889 items in the Pawtuxet Valley Gleaner. See 9 August 1889, p. 1 and 27 September 1889, p. 5.
4. A ca. 1860 photograph of Greene Manufacturing Company's middle and upper mill indicates construction on the dam. In the photo, angled timber struts and planking provide support to the face of the dam. Much of the length of the current dam may date to this construction.
5. See files for Dam 147, RI DEM, Office of Compliance and Inspection.
6. The Rhode Island Historic Bridge Inventory (Clouette and Roth, 1988) identifies 14 metal highway truss bridges in the state. Of these, nine are of the Pratt type--but this general category includes movables, through trusses, and deck trusses. It also includes both wrought iron and steel as construction materials. The current count of wrought-iron, pony truss bridges is five: RIDOT bridges No. 301, 307, 459, 460, 842. The two pony trusses at Albion, R.I., (Nos. 163 and 164) were recently retrofit to allow modern loadings. This retrofit involved the construction of a new steel beam bridge with the original trusses reattached as non-structural elements.
7. Royal Mills Bridge No. 27 is currently slated for replacement. For a thorough study of this bridge and Hussey's origination of the modified spandrel idea, the reader is referred to Rhode Island Historical Resources Archive (RIHRA) WERK-0001.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section Endnotes:

Page 33

8. James Greene held a 1/9 share in the Centerville Mill. His daughter, Eliza, died in March 1820. Two years later, Dr. Harris married Maria, the daughter of Edward Manton of the Manton Mill.
9. This wooden mill is described in a 4 July 1889 Gleaner article as "...formerly standing in front of the store." This would place it across Providence Street from the small park defined by the intersection of Central Avenue, Providence Street and Apponaug Avenue. This park is in the location of the B.B. and R. Knight company store that appears in the 1893 bird's eye view.
10. Peter J. Coleman. The Transformation of Rhode Island (Providence: Brown University Press, 1969): 85-8
11. Oliver Payson Fuller. History of Warwick (Providence: Angell, Burlingame and Co., 1875): 241
12. See Louis McLane, Documents Relative to the Manufacturers in the U.S. U.S. Department of the Treasury, 1932
13. The above-cited Kent County Atlas article gives a different assessment of the capacities, products, and work force of Greene Manufacturing Company: "245 looms and 12,000 spindles are now in operation, running on numbers 28, 33, and 40 yarn, and turning out 48,000 yards of 7-8 and 4-4 goods per week. 275 hands are employed."
14. By some accounts, the name Frozen Point was derived from an incident concerning a mechanic associated with the original mill. The story has it that a pint of "spiritous liquor," left out overnight, was found to be frozen solid the following morning. Despite attempts to establish the name of the village as "Greeneville," it never took hold. By 1852, through the efforts of Reverend S.B. Goodenow of the First Congregational Church, the earlier name--with its unfortunate liquor association--was dropped in favor of Riverpoint, a name that referred to the confluence of the two Pawtuxet branches. A year later, when the Providence, Hartford & Fishkill Railroad laid its tracks along the edge of the village, it christened the depot Riverpoint.
- 15.. This turbine and associated shafting and belting is described in the 1860 Contract Book in the manuscripts department of the RI Historical

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section Endnotes:

Page 34

Society.

16. See Warwick Plat Book 8, p. 13. "Map of River Point."
17. "Riverpoint." Pawtuxet Valley Gleaner (14 November 1885): 8
18. "Riverpoint." The Pawtuxet Valley Gleaner (5 December 1885): 4
19. This frame mill appears contiguous with an extension of the middle mill in a Bailey 1889 birds-eye view of Clyde, Riverpoint and Arctic. It is worth noting that a Providence Journal article (7 June 1931, p. A10) mentions a rebuilding of the Knight property at Riverpoint after an 1890 fire. No further corroboration of this fire is available at the time of this writing.
20. "Riverpoint." The Pawtuxet Valley Gleaner (4 July 1890): 1
21. "Riverpoint." The Pawtuxet Valley Gleaner (18 July 1890): 8. An 8 August 1890 item also relates that "B.B and R. Knight have "staked out locations for several cellars and have commenced digging two of them, fronting the street leading past the Odd Fellows Home."
22. "The Royal Mills, River Point, R.I." The Providence Journal of Commerce 2 (December 1891): 318
23. At this time B.B. & R. Knight controlled 15 mills and 425,000 spindles, representing a capital investment of \$6,375,000. The work force numbered about 5,000 workers with a weekly payroll of \$35,000. Source: Providence Journal of Commerce 6 (December 1898): 356
24. It should be noted that this valuation includes the Valley Queen mill.
25. "Royal Mills at Riverpoint Burn." Providence Journal (28 January 1919): 1 and "Royal Mills Now Smoldering Ruins." Providence Journal (29 January 1919): 3
26. As recounted by Pawtuxet Valley historian, Mathias Harpin, Rupprecht, aware of the close paternalistic oversight of the company by the Knight family, offered Robert L. Knight, grandson of the founder, a titular position in the Providence office of the company. Rupprecht believed that a

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Property name Royal Mill Complex, Kent County, West Warwick, RI

Section. Endnotes:

Page 35

Knight presence would smooth over the transition to a large, New York-based conglomerate. Knight adamantly refused. Benjamin. B. Knight died in 1898, Robert in 1912. See Mathias Harpin. Trumpets in Jericho (by the author: 1961) p. 330-1.

27. As pointed out in Susan Jaffee, Ethnic Working Class Protest: The Textile Strike of 1922 in Rhode Island, "Immigrants and their children provided the overwhelming amount of the manpower in Rhode Island's cotton textile industry. Of the 3,448 males employed as unskilled laborers in cotton mills, approximately 2,000 were foreign-born and 1,000 native born of foreign parents." (p. 3-5). The key role of Italians is described in "Born Out of Strikes: An Interview with Luigi Nardella." Radical History Review 17 (Spring 1978). Nardella's brother, Guido, is reputed to have started the strike.

28. As quoted in James Celenza's introduction to "Born Out of Strikes: An Interview with Luigi Nardella." Radical History Review 17 (Spring 1978): 153.

29. "150 Mills Operatives Quit." Providence Journal (13 November 1925): 3

30. These rayon manufacturers have included: Davidson Brothers, Philip Liberman Co., Kent County, River-Tex Mills, Marven Looms, and Mill Bridge Mills. Other dyers and finishers have included Riverpoint Finishing Co. (related to Guerin Fabrics, Inc.) and Worsted Finishers. Sunbury Dress Co., a dressmaker, occupied space in the Royal Mill from 1946 until the late 1950s.

31. Peter Dujardin. "Latest W. Warwick Blaze Ruled Arson." Providence Journal (28 December 1996): 1



ROYAL MILL COMPLEX
KENT COUNTY, RI
No. 1



ROYAL MILL COMPLEX
KENT COUNTY, RI
No. 2



ROYAL MILL COMP
KENT COUNTY, RI
No. 3



ROYAL MILL COMPLEX
KENT COUNTY, RI
No. 4



ROYAL MILL COMPLEX
KENT COUNTY, RI
No. 5

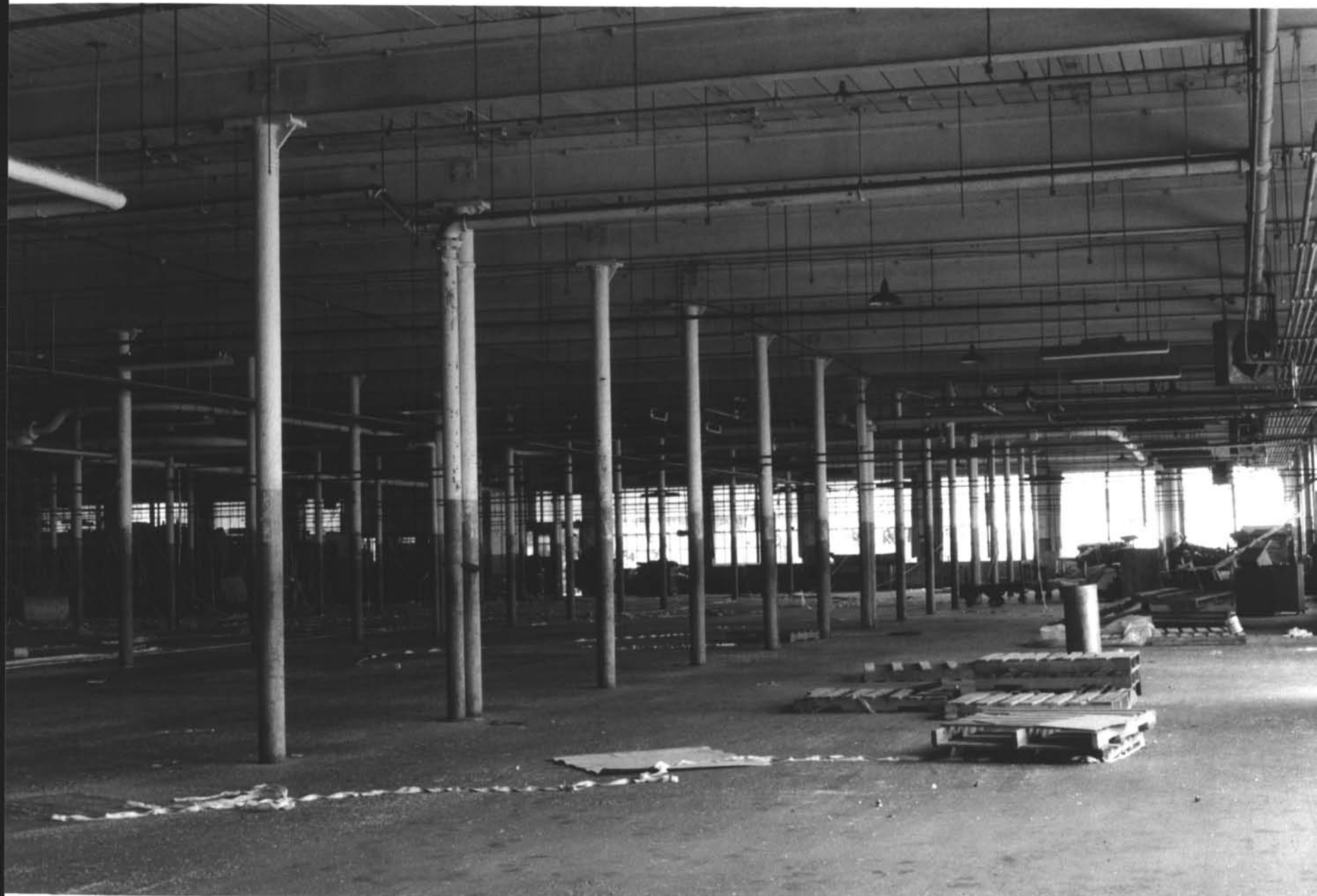
SAYBROOKE MFG. CO. ROYAL MILLS



ROYAL MILLS COMPLEX
KENT COUNTY, RI
No. 6



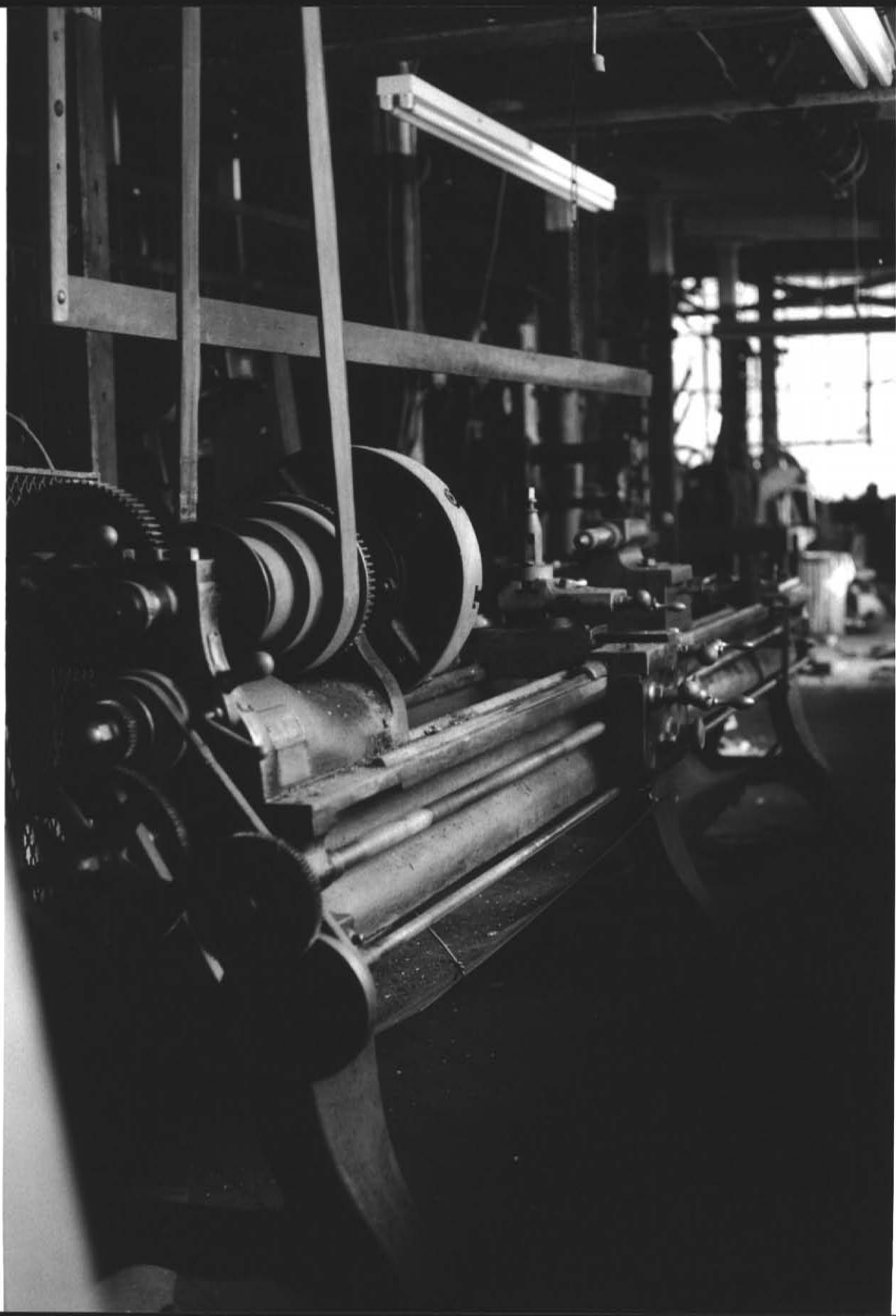
ROYAL MILL COMPLEX
KENT COUNTY, RI
No. 7



ROYAL MILL COMPLEX
KENT COUNTY, RI
NO. 8



ROYAL MILL COMPLEX
KENT COUNTY, RI
No. 9



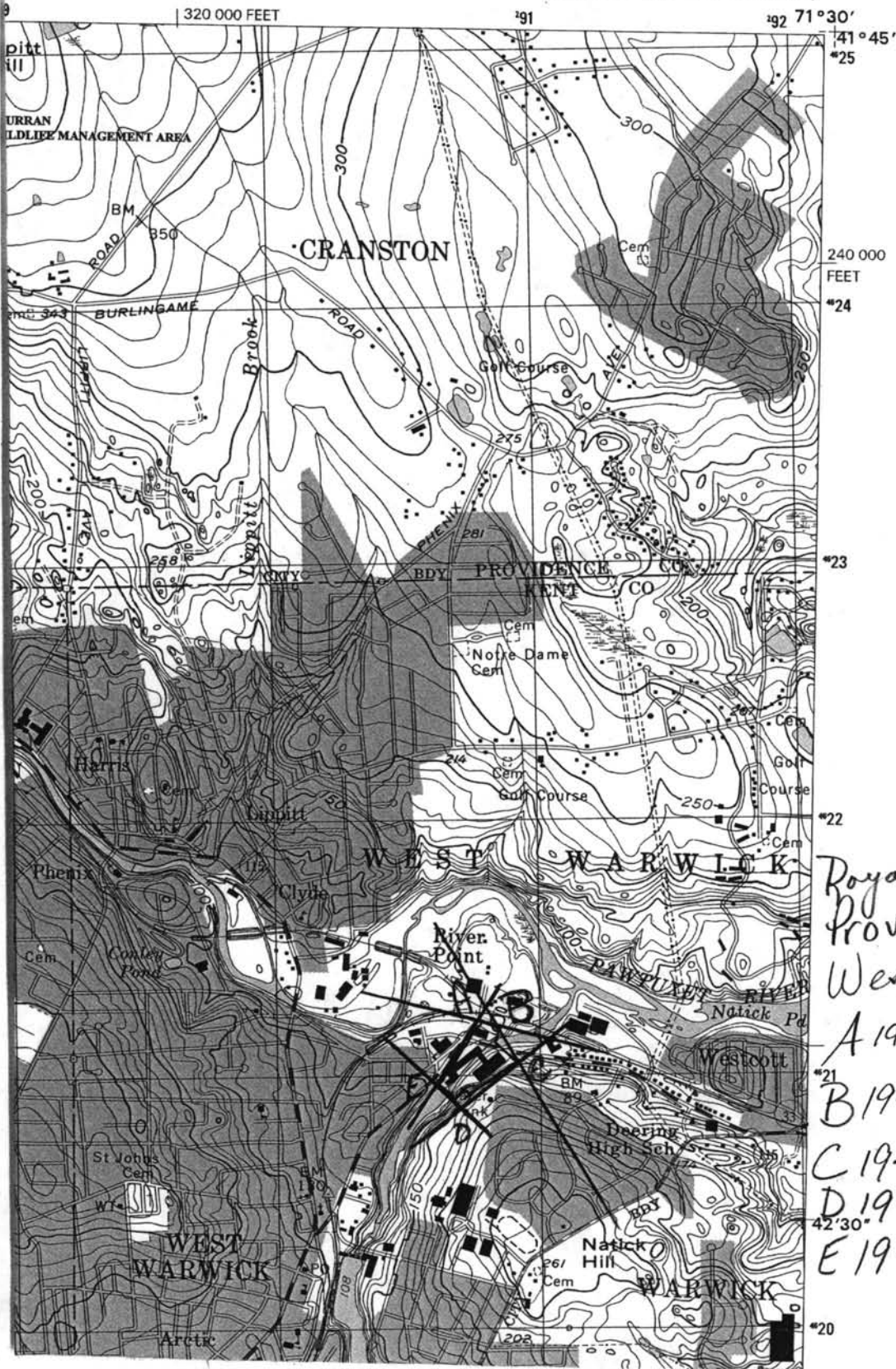
ROYAL MILL COMPLEX
BENT COUNTY, RA
No. 10



ROYAL MILL COMPLEX
KENT, COUNTY, RI

No. 11

CROMPTON QUADRANGLE
RHODE ISLAND
7.5-MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)



Royal Mill Complex
Providence County
West Warwick, RI
A 19-290780-4621220
B 19-290840-4621200
C 19-290920-4621040
D 19-290690-4620860
E 19-290600-4620960