The Civil War

Connecticut’s Cotton Connection
A Civil War Exhibit at the Mill Museum

THE PROJECT
The Windham Textile & History Museum (the Mill Museum)

Founded in 1989, four years after the American Thread Company closed its Willimantic plant.
Mission

The Windham Textile and History Museum (The Mill Museum of Connecticut), located in the historic former headquarters of the American Thread Company of Willimantic, Connecticut, is a non-profit educational institution housing a museum, a library, and an archive. Through its exhibits, programs, and collections, the museum preserves and interprets the history of textiles, textile arts and the textile industry, with special emphasis on the experiences of the craftspeople, industrial workers, manufacturers, inventors, designers, and consumers. The museum also promotes greater understanding of major trends and changes in technology, economy, immigration, society, environment, and culture that shaped the history of textiles in Connecticut, New England, and the United States from the colonial period to the present.
What to See and Do at the Museum
What to See and Do at the Museum
150th Anniversary of the Civil War (1861-65)
How Could the Museum Participate?

- What was Connecticut’s cotton connection?
- Were people living in cotton towns MORE or LESS likely to oppose slavery in the Antebellum Era than people living in communities not connected to cotton?
- When the war came, what were the reasons men living in cotton communities joined the Union army?
- What was the impact of the war on Connecticut’s cotton communities?
Lead Curator: Bev York
What Did We Find Out?
Bibliography


*Connecticut State Register and Manual*. 1850-61. (For election results.)


Hubbell, William Stone, and Delos D. Brown and Alvin Millen Crane. *The Story of the Twenty-First Regiment, Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, During the Civil War, 1861-1865*. (Middletown, CT: Stewart Printing Co., 1900.)


Morse, Horace J. *Catalogue of Connecticut Volunteer Organizations, with Additional Enlistments and Casualties, to July 1, 1864. Compiled from Records in the Adjutant-General’s Office, and Published by Order of the Legislature*. (Hartford: Case, Lockwood, and Company, 1864.)

*Record of Service of Connecticut Men in the Army and Navy of the United States During the War of the Rebellion*. (Hartford: Case, Lockwood, and Brainard, 1889.)


*Willimantic Journal*. 7 May 1858 (for Hosmer family); 17 January 1862 (population of Willimantic, list of 126 volunteer soldiers from Willimantic); 15 August 1862 (casualties of 5th C. V. I.)
Cotton and Slavery in Antebellum Willimantic

BEFORE THE WAR
Connecticut’s Cotton Mill Towns Were Economically Dependant on Southern, Slave-Picked Cotton
King Cotton in the South

- Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom* (1853)
- The significance of the Industrial Revolution in the North (began 1793)
- The significance of the cotton gin (1793)
  - Eli Whitney
  - Catherine Greene
- By 1830, raw cotton was the USA’s major agricultural export
- Slavery strengthened and expanded
- By 1850, there were 4 million slaves in the South, compared to only 500,000 free blacks in the entire USA
- Sold South: a massive migration
- While not all slaves worked with cotton (which grew profitably only in the Lower South), the majority:
  - Lived and worked on plantations
  - Did work in some way connected with cotton
King Cotton in the North

- After 1793, cotton slowly replaced wool as the chief textile manufactured in the North
- Cotton mills sprang up throughout New England
- In Connecticut in 1850, most of the textile mills were in the eastern and central parts of the state; most of the factories in the western part of the state were metal mills (although Bridgeport’s and Hartford’s sewing machine factories were related to the production of cotton thread)
- In Connecticut in 1850, most of the textile factories were cotton mills
- By 1830, cotton thread, cloth, and clothing was the USA’s chief manufactured export
- In the North, “free labor” (wage labor) expanded, replacing indentured servitude and slavery – the number of wage workers was even growing at a faster pace than the number of independent family farmers! If King Cotton in the South depended on slave labor, in the North it depended on free labor.
Connecticut Had an Ambivalent Historical Relationship with Slavery and Race
Slavery existed in colonial Connecticut

- The first African slaves arrived in Connecticut in 1639, only a few years after the settlement was founded
- Native Americans were also sometimes enslaved
- There were also indentured servants
- Many colonial Connecticut families owned slaves, although generally in small numbers
- About 25% of colonial Connecticut ministers, lawyers, town officials, and farmers owned slaves
- Most colonial Connecticut slaves worked in agriculture, but some worked in seafaring
- Some colonial Connecticut slaves became free, although even then they did not have equal rights with whites
- Connecticut had more slaves than any other New England colony

Slavery existed in Connecticut for more than 200 years, making it seem “natural” to many Connecticuters

Adam Jackson, a colonial Connecticut slave

- Third generation Connecticut slave
- Grandmother Maria (probably a West Indies slave) arrived in New London in the late 1680s on a West Indian trade ship
- Father John Jackson (Maria’s son) also arrived in New London in late 1680s on a West Indian trade ship
- Adam was the property of Joshua Hempstead (1678-1758), a prosperous New London farmer, shipwright, surveyor, stonecutter, and politician
- Hempstead never owned more than one or two slaves at a time
- When Hempstead’s wife died, he never remarried, choosing to raise nine children by himself
- Adam arrived at the Hempstead home in 1727; probably slept in kitchen or garret
- Adam generally assisted Hempstead with chores
- Mentioned on at least 50 pages of Hempstead’s diary
Free African Americans in Connecticut

- Jackson family of Willimantic
- Hall family of Hampton
Connecticut Had Abolitionists, Anti-Abolitionists, and “Free Soilers”
Abolitionists: Abolitionism in Connecticut occurred in two stages.
- 1780s-1830s: movement to abolish slavery in Connecticut (Noah Webster)
- 1830s-60s: movement abolish slavery in the entire United States (John Brown, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Prudence Crandall)

Anti-abolitionists: In Connecticut, opposition to abolitionism after 1830 had several causes.
- Economics: Connecticut cotton mills, shippers, and even farmers relied on Southern slavery.
- Racism: Most Northern whites had racist attitudes about African Americans.
- Nationalism: Many Northern whites feared that abolitionism would divide the country and destroy the Union.
- Party unity: Many Northern white political activists (especially Democrats, but also many Whigs) feared that abolitionism would divide their party and allow the opposition party to come to power.
- Based on anti-abolitionist rhetoric, nationalism and racism were the major motivating factors.

Free Soilers: From 1830 on, Free Soilers wanted to keep slavery out of the North (including Connecticut) and West, but were willing to tolerate it where it already existed (the South + Delaware). Their primary motivation was to preserve jobs and farmland for white wage workers and small white family farmers. (Abraham Lincoln fit into this category.)
The Methodist Melee on Main Street

North View of Brooklyn from *Connecticut Historical Collection* by J W Barber, 1838
“In the abolition excitement in which many of the old Methodists were active participants, in the spring of 1837 a most notable outbreak occurred at the old church. An abolition lecturer by the name of Phelps appointed a meeting at the church to discuss the question of the abolition of slavery. Some of the young hotheads, encouraged no doubt by older ones who should have known better, determined to break up the meeting, and proceeded in a body to the church, where a rough and tumble scrimmage ensued, and the meeting was effectively broken up. The civil authorities were called upon and the riot act read by Deputy Sherriff Webb. The result was the arrest of some fifteen or twenty of our citizens, quite a number of our staid old farmers among them. Some of the most active participants were fined, but most of them were discharged. Among the strong abolitionists was Orrin Robinson, who was arrested and fined. He refused to pay the fine, and Constable Hosmer started to take him to Brooklyn [a town in eastern Connecticut and the location of the Windham County jail]. Making an excuse that he had forgotten his papers, he left Robinson in the road, supposing that would end it, but Robinson kept on and the Constable overtook him and committed him to jail.”
ORRIN ROBINSON

Died
Aug. 8, 1864.
Aged 73 yrs. 3 mos.
8 29 days.
How the Cotton Mill Towns Voted
Connecticut in 1850
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<tr>
<th>COUNTY</th>
<th>TOTAL POP (1850)</th>
<th>FREE BLACK POP</th>
<th>EMPLOYED IN INDUSTRY</th>
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Female Signatures on Anti-Slavery Petitions, by State, December 1825 - March 1849
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# Connecticut Mill Towns, 1850

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<td>Derby</td>
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<td>Killingly</td>
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<td>Woodstock</td>
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The pattern:

- In 1850, Connecticut had two major political parties: the majority Democratic Party and the minority Whig Party. Farmers were the core supporters of the Democrats; businessmen were the core supporters of the Whigs. In 1854, a strong third party emerged, the Free Soil Party, which captured some seats in the legislature (although it had far fewer than either the Democrats or the Whigs). In 1855 the American Party (the so-called Know-Nothing Party) arose, the Free Soil Party declined, the Whig Party collapsed, and in 1856 the Know Nothings captured a majority of the legislature. In 1857 the Know Nothings began to decline, and in 1858 they were absorbed into the new Republican Party, along with old Whigs, Free Soilers, and antislavery Democrats. In 1860 the Republicans became the majority party.

- Textile mill towns (cotton and other) were MORE likely to vote for Free Soil Party (1854) and Republican Party (1860) candidates than an average Connecticut town.

- Farm towns and metal factory towns were LESS likely to vote for Free Party (1854) and Republican Party (1860) candidates than an average Connecticut town [i.e., they were more likely to vote for Democratic Party candidates].

- In 1860, port towns were more likely to vote for Republican Party candidates than an average Connecticut town.

- The core of Free Soil Party (1854) and Republican Party (1860) strength were in eastern Connecticut – where most of the cotton mills were located.
### 1854: Connecticut Legislature: Lower House

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# Windham, CT, legislators, 1850s

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<td>1850</td>
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Underground Railroad

- Metaphor for a series of escape routes leading to Canada or Massachusetts
- Main lines
- Branch lines
- Conductors
- Stations
- Farmington: CT’s Grand Central Station
- Routes changed frequently
Willimantic Conductors

- Source: Horatio Strother, *The Underground Railroad in Connecticut*
  - John Brown
  - J. A. Conant
  - J. A. Lewis
Willimantic-Area Soldiers in the Civil War

“AMONG THE GOOD AND TRUE”
Overview

- Thousands of men from eastern Connecticut joined the Union armies, including hundreds from the Willimantic area.
- They joined for a variety of reasons.
  - To save the Union.
  - To preserve democracy.
  - To halt the spread of slavery.
  - To abolish slavery.
  - For personal glory.
  - For soldier’s pay.
  - It was their duty.
  - They were drafted.
- Unlike soldiers in most U.S. wars (but similar to the Revolutionary War and World War II), the vast majority were civilians.
Overview

- Regiment = 1,000 men
- Regiments organized in each state
- CT had 30 regiments
Gravestones

- The many Civil War gravestones in local cemeteries attest to the large number of men who served.
- Windham Cemetery, Old Willimantic Cemetery, North Windham Cemetery, St. Joseph’s Cemetery, Mansfield Center Cemetery, etc.
- Most are official U.S. Armed Forces veterans’ markers.
On August 19, 1861, just four months after the fall of Fort Sumter and less than a month after the first Battle of Bull Run, at Willimantic, CT, William Smith – an 18-year-old cotton-mill worker born in Ireland – joined Company H of the 7th Regiment of the Connecticut Volunteer Infantry (CVI) as a private. He served for the duration, reenlisting on Jan. 1, 1864. He was promoted to corporal on May 16, 1864, and was honorably discharged on June 19, 1865, almost four years after joining up. It was a miracle he survived. Not only did his unit suffer appallingly high casualties, Smith would be captured and imprisoned in the notorious Andersonville prison. He would serve in two important campaigns: the liberation of the Sea Islands and the Wilderness Campaign.
That we know much of anything at all about Smith is also pretty much of a miracle. He was an ordinary man, the kind that didn’t publish memoirs, hold political office, or inspire biographies. He was literate, but he didn’t write much. If he wrote any wartime letters home to his girlfriend Maggie, none have survived.

But in the fall of 2010, two battered cardboard boxes arrived at the Museum....
Like many cotton mill workers, Smith was an immigrant, born in 1843 in Tipperary, Ireland. (In some census records, he is recorded as having been born in New York – perhaps that meant that he had lived in New York before coming to Willimantic.)

Among Smith’s surviving papers are his citizenship papers; in 1872, he applied for and was granted U.S. citizenship.

Little is known of his early life, of why he came to America, or even why he was in Willimantic in 1861. He does not appear in the city’s 1860 federal census. His parents do not seem to have lived here.

His future wife, Maggie Bradshaw (also an Irish immigrants) did live in Willimantic in 1860, in a rented company row house along with her parents, who also worked for the Willimantic Linen Company.
The Connecticut 7th

From Willimantic, Smith was sent to New Haven, where his regiment was officially organized. Like other regiments, the Seventh had 1,000 men divided into 10 companies of about 100 each. The regimental commander was Col. (later Major Gen.) Alfred Terry of New Haven – a 34-year-old lawyer, Republican Party activist, and clerk of the New Haven County court. Terry helped raise and organize the regiment, after having fought earlier at First Bull Run. He stayed in the Army after the war, serving as military governor of the Dakota Territory. He negotiated the Treaty of Fort Laramie with the Lakota, led the relief column that discovered Custer’s body after the Little Big Horn, crossed into Canada to negotiate with Sitting Bull, chased Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce, and – in a later posting in Georgia – denounced the KKK. He died in New Haven in 1890.
The Connecticut 7th

Second in command of the Seventh was Lt. Col. Joseph Roswell Hawley, a lawyer, ardent antislavery activist, and (at first) Free Soil and (later) Republican Party politician from Hartford. Like Terry, Hawley had fought at First Bull Run. After the war, Hawley reentered politics and was elected first governor of Connecticut and later U. S. Senator. He would also own and edit the *Hartford Courant*.

The Seventh featured volunteers from throughout Connecticut, including Redding, Ridgefield, and Southington, as well as Willimantic, New Haven, and Hartford.
Company H was comprised mostly of men from northeastern Connecticut.
The captain, John Dennis, was from Norwich, as were the two lieutenants, Theodore Burdick and Gorham Dennis.
Two of the five sergeants were from Willimantic or Windham, Charles Wood and Charles Ripley.
Other men from Willimantic or Windham included Corporal Charles Hooks and Privates David Cronan, Michael Flynn, Frank Gallagher, Edmund Harvey, Benjamin Sanford, Jerome Snow, and John Walker.
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The Sea Islands

- In addition to the better-known campaigns to capture Virginia and the Mississippi Valley, Union troops also waged a campaign for the Sea Islands. This was part of the Union’s “Anaconda Plan” to strangle the Confederacy by cutting it off from the rest of the world.
- Ironically, the Sea Islands were also a source of much of the cotton that had been imported into Willimantic to be manufactured into thread.
- The hot, humid environment of the Sea Islands was a tough place for Connecticuters to fight – especially in their heavy wool uniforms.
Sea Islands Campaign

- The Seventh was sent to the Sea Islands.
- April, 1862: Fort Pulaski, GA.
- June, 1862: Fort James, SC.
- Oct., 1862: Porotaligo, SC.
- July, 1863: Morris Island, SC.
- Oct., 1863: Fort Wagner, SC.
- Feb., 1864: Olustee, FL. (Just a few weeks earlier, in January, Smith had reenlisted for the duration of the war.)
In the Spring of 1864, the Seventh was ordered to Virginia, to join the Army of the Potomac in the deadly Wilderness Campaign. Smith was promoted to corporal.

- May, 1864: Chester Station, VA.
- May/June, 1864, Bermuda Hundred, VA. On June 2, Smith was captured.
Smith was confined to Andersonville for nine months. He was paroled on Feb. 28, 1865. He rejoined his old regiment and company. But by then the fighting was over for the Seventh. The regiment saw no more combat. Smith was honorably discharged that summer, when the war finally ended. He was twenty-two.
The Cost of War

- Smith was lucky to be alive. He survived seven battles/sieges and a nine-month incarceration at Andersonville.
- During the war, the Seventh had 11 officers and 157 enlisted men killed or mortally wounded, and another lost another four officers and 192 enlisted men to disease, for a 36.4% casualty rate.
- In 1890, Congress voted to provide pensions for disabled veterans, and in 1897 Smith applied, citing a “partial inability to earn a support by manual labor.” In 1899 his application was granted, when the Bureau of Pensions declared him an invalid.
Casualties for Company H, 7th Regiment, C.V.I.

- Capt. Theodore Burdick, Norwich, killed
- Lt. Charles A. Wood, Windham, killed
- Sgt. Charles H. Ripley, Windham, killed
- Cpl. Henry A. Bottomly, Norwich, died
- Cpl. Charles H. Hooks, Windham, disabled
- Musician Lewis Bradford, Sprague, died
- Wagoner Francis Marsh, Norwich, disabled
- Pvt. Jared A. Abell, Bozrah, killed
- Pvt. Joseph A. Brown, Eastford, died of wounds
- Pvt. Theodore D. Bowers, Willington, died
- Pvt. Patrick Donlan, Middletown, disabled
- Pvt. William S. English, New Haven, killed
- Pvt. Robert Erwin, Sprague, disabled
- Pvt. Michael Flynn, Windham, disabled
- Pvt. Allen Fry, Griswold, died
- Pvt. William J. Holland, Mansfield, disabled
- Pvt. Joab Jeffrey, New London, died
- Pvt. Lewis O. Palmer, Norwich, invalid
- Pvt. Arthur D. Pitcher, Norwich, disabled
- Pvt. Horace C. Rogers, Norwich, disabled
- Pvt. Benjamin Sanford, Windham, disabled
- Pvt. George Shay, Plainfield, disabled
- Pvt. George W. Smith, Norwich, disabled
- Pvt. Amos W. Taylor, Sprague, disabled
- Pvt. Perry Yerrington, Norwich, invalid
After the War

- After the war, Smith returned to Willimantic and married Maggie Bradshaw. He took a job at the Willimantic Linen Company.
- He and Maggie had two children: Mary (b. 1866) and William C. (b. 1869).
- In 1872 Smith became a U. S. citizen.
- For a while, the family lived with Maggie’s parents.
- Sometime after 1870 Maggie died. Smith never remarried.
- In 1880 Smith and his children lived on Schoolhouse Hill.
- Later, when William C. was grown, Smith moved in with him.
- Smith died in 1899 at the age of 54.
William C. Smith grew up to be a barber in Willimantic. For a time, he had his own shop. Then, later in life, he became an overseer at the thread mill. William C. was also an amateur actor in local theater, including roles in plays staged to raise money for the G.A.R. He was a member of local Catholic and Irish-American organizations.

Mary Ann Smith married into the Meehan family and remained in Willimantic.

Two of Smith’s granddaughters attended the Willimantic Normal School and became teachers.

His great grandson would own and operate Lake Compounce amusement park in Southington, CT
Cotton mill workers James and Francis (“Frank”) Long – father and son – also joined the Union Army. James was 46 in 1861; Frank was 22.

James Long was born in England in c. 1813. He immigrated to Rhode Island, probably as a child. There, in c. 1834, he married Jane, an immigrant from Scotland. The family moved to Willimantic in c. 1840. James worked as an operative in one of the city’s cotton mills.

Frank grew up in Willimantic and worked as a mechanic, probably in the same mill as his father – although at a more skilled job.

James joined the 18th C.V.I. He was discharged after three months, and survived the war.
Frank Long enlisted in the 21st C.V.I. on August 2, 1862.

He entered as an officer, first lieutenant of Company D, comprised almost entirely of men from the Willimantic area.

Company D’s first captain was Charles Southworth of Mansfield. Southworth resigned his commission only a few months later, in November 1862.

Although Long succeeded Southworth as company commander, he was not promoted to captain until July 31, 1863, when several others were also promoted.

One of Company D’s sergeants was David Conant of Mansfield, a silk worker, whose brother John had been a conductor on the Underground Railroad.
The Army of the Potomac

- 21st organized at Norwich in early Sept., 1862
- Sent to Washington to join Army of the Potomac
- Dec., 1862: Battle of Fredericksburg
- Jan., 1863: Mud March
- Feb., 1863: 21st moved to coastal Virginia, where it remained until Feb., 1864, when it was attached to Grant’s command in the Wilderness Campaign.
- In combat at Cold Harbor, Petersburg, Richmond, Bermuda Hundred, New Market Heights, and Fair Oaks. Also participated in the occupation of Richmond, VA, and Charleston, SC, before being mustered out in June 1865.
- Capt. Francis S. Long was killed in action at Petersburg in July, 1864.
The 21st had five officers and 55 enlisted men killed and mortally wounded, and one officer and 114 enlisted men felled by disease, for a 17.5% casualty rate.

Also among the casualties was Pvt. Henry W. Thorne of Mansfield, KIA near Drury’s Bluff, VA, in May of 1864. (His brother Edwin survived.)

No more the bugle calls the weary one
Rest, noble spirit, in the grave unknown.
We will find you, we will know you,
Among the good and true,
When the robe of white is given
For the faded coat of blue.

Capt. Francis S. Long, Windham, killed
Cpl. John D. Gaylord, Ashford, disabled
Cpl. Dwight P. Peck, Chaplin, died
Pvt. John M. Brackett, Willington, died
Pvt. Theodore F. Bennett, Mansfield, killed
Pvt. George H. Crosby, Mansfield, died
Pvt. Patrick Dunn, Windham, invalid
Pvt. George Edgerton, Ashford, died
Pvt. William Hulse, Mansfield, died
Pvt. Eli Jackson, Lisbon, invalid
Pvt. Elijah F. Owen, Ashford, died
Pvt. William Robinson, Hampton, killed
Pvt. Frank Tucker, Franklin, died
Pvt. Whiting S. Wyllys, Mansfield, died
Pvt. Jonathan Weeks, Eastford, disabled
Other Willimantic-area Soldiers

- Sgt. William B. Hooper of Willimantic, 1st New Jersey Calvary, Congressional Medal of Honor
- Gen. Nathaniel Lyon of Eastford
Conclusion