

RESEARCH NOTE

THE MUSEUM OF AMERICAN TEXTILE HISTORY

North Andover, Massachusetts

Until September 1984 this institution, founded in 1960, was known as the Merrimack Valley Textile Museum. A researcher into Maine's industrial or social history might have easily overlooked it as a useful repository. The new name gives a far better description of the scope of the Museum's work. This note will sketch the kinds of information about Maine that the several departments of MATH can provide.

The Museum's collections of preindustrial and industrial tools and machinery are unexcelled. They are intended to document the full range of technological developments in the process of producing textiles in the U.S. Included are numerous artifacts with a specific Maine provenance. Among the preindustrial items are several spinning wheels from the Shaker community in Alfred, Maine. The industrial collection goes from the technology of an 1827 wool card used in Waterford, Maine, to a c. 1965 Crompton & Knowles loom from Guilford. Complementing and supplementing the tool and machinery collections are the Library and the Collection of Textiles.

The Library provides a wide variety of resources including many volumes of early and rare technical publications, among them an 1821 pamphlet on wool carding by Isaac Brown printed in Brunswick, Maine. Other less unique but important materials include trade catalogues, business directories, local histories, periodicals, and government publications, such as those of the Maine Bureau of Industry and Labor Statistics.

The Library also has a large manuscript collection* which includes the records of the Amos Abbott Company of Dexter, Maine. This major collection has 160 volumes and 40 boxes

covering the period 1831-1935, with the bulk of the records dating before 1900. One of the highlights of these papers is the wool purchasing records which document the work done on shares with local farmers. The labor records include time books and apprenticeship agreements. Although the Amos Abbott Co. is the only large collection originating in Maine, the manuscripts include fragments of records related to many Maine mills. There are also personal papers, such as letters and diaries, and some of the most interesting Maine materials come from this area.

The papers of the Stevens Companies, based in North Andover, include the papers of the Stevens family. Members of the family had settled in Maine in the early nineteenth century, and there is correspondence from the relatives in Andover, Belfast, and other Maine locations. There are also records of the Cutler Mill Dam Co., 1835-1868, a lumber mill using tidal power. Moses B. Stevens, who acted as agent, corresponded regularly with his uncle in Massachusetts. Moses B. also built trading vessels and the Massachusetts family invested in a number of the ships and their cargoes. The papers related to many of these ships are found with the records of this Massachusetts family.

The records of the Essex Co., the water power company that developed Lawrence, Massachusetts, is another unexpected source of information on Maine. The company's engineers acted as consultants around the country, and the records include notebooks, correspondence, photographs, plans, and other graphics about waterpower sites on the Saco, Kennebec, and Androscoggin Rivers.

One of the most heavily used resources at MATH is the library's extensive print, photograph, and ephemera collection. A selection of examples related to Maine suggests the richness of this resource. There is the c.1795 Osgood Carleton map of the district of Maine, and MATH recently acquired an 1856 lithographic view of the Saco-Biddeford area. Particularly in demand is the collection of insurance surveys which includes almost 100 Maine mills.

RESEARCH NOTE

The Collection of Textiles at MATH is unique in striving to represent the role of textiles at all levels of society. There are hand-woven textiles of the preindustrial period, commemorative printed fabrics, and hundreds of sample books and folders with their pristine swatches. Items from Maine include household linens made by the Chambers family of Otisfield in the mid-nineteenth century, a piece from the Continental Mill in Lewiston from c. 1900 with a view of the mill, and sample books from the North Brunswick Co., 1889-1914, and the Bates Manufacturing Co., 1920-1940.

This brief note can only hint at the potential sources of information about Maine's rich and varied history. Research requests are always welcomed; the staff will be able to tell you if there are materials related to any specific investigation. The Museum is open to the public Tuesday-Friday 9-4, but researchers should arrange an appointment to assure the most efficient use of time.

Another department of MATH of interest to many is the Textile Conservation Center. Here the staff of highly skilled technicians restores and conserves all kinds of textile items for individuals and institutions. These experts also can provide advice and instruction in the care and conservation of fabrics.

DOROTHY TRUMAN
MSS Curator & Archivist

*MERRIMACK VALLEY TEXTILE MUSEUM: A GUIDE TO THE MANUSCRIPT COLLECTION, Garland Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1983.