

MILL MANAGER'S MANSION EXHIBIT

Unlike mill workers, mill owners and managers lived in large houses, often ornate Victorian mansions – various styles of mid-to-late 19th-century architecture that became popular during Queen Victoria's reign (r. 1837-1901). The Museum's Mill Manager's Mansion Exhibit is inspired by (but is not a reproduction of) two Willimantic Victorian mansions: the Eugene Boss house at 100 South Windham Road and the William Eliot Barrows house, which was on Fairview Street, both built around 1880. The Boss house still stands, but the Barrows mansion was torn down in the 1960s. Barrows was the President and General Manager of the Willimantic Linen Company in the 1870s and 1880s, while Boss was the Agent for the Linen Company in the 1890s, and then continued in the same position for the American Thread Company when it bought out the WLC in 1898. Both Barrows and Boss were very much into materialism, and their large, well-furnished homes were meant to show off their wealth and success. Only 5 or 6 people (Boss, his wife, his two children, and one or two live-in servants) resided in the Boss house's 20+ rooms. Boss employed maids and a laundress. Barrows, Boss, and other mill managers were well educated and enjoyed social engagements. Leisure-time activities included music, dancing, peering into stereoscopes, lawn parties, vacations, and entertaining guests.



As you enter the Mill Manager's Mansion Exhibit, notice how it differs from the Mill Workers' Row House Exhibit. You enter through an ornate veranda with copper gutters. Notice the colored-glass window. Why do you think the ceiling of the veranda is painted sky blue?

Passing through the front door, on your left is a closet with a decorative doorknob. A tray for *cartes de visites* sits on table near the door.

The first room you enter has high ceilings, large windows, colorful wallpaper, carpets, lace curtains, and ornate furniture. Did the workers' house have those things? The design of the wallpaper and the subjects of many of the framed pictures on the walls testify to a desire to bring nature indoors, but in a safe, comfortable way.

For display purposes, we have combined this large room into both a dining room and parlor, but in reality those would have been two separate rooms, both large. The spacious dining room table, matching chairs, full set of china, large mirror, organ, upholstered parlor furniture, Tiffany-style lamps, and phonograph are meant to declare to visitors that this family was affluent, and that the owner of the house was successful. Compare the spinning wheel in the



workers' house — brought to the United States by an immigrant from French Canada — with the parlor wheel in the manager's house. Can you find evidence that the manager's family enjoyed the latest technology: indoor plumbing, central heating, a phonograph, a telephone, electricity? What do think is the significance of the photos of Republican politicians? What evidence do you see that the people who lived in this house were educated? (But, at the same time, think about the evidence in the mill workers' house that even mill hands could read and write.)

Unlike mill workers, each family member of this family probably had their own bedroom and dressing room. Notice how large the bedroom is. These are the things one may find in such a place: a child's rocking horse, a doll house, a pink marble table top, porcelain & silver items, a sewing machine and sewing set, and traveling trunks.

Visit the laundry room. Why do you think the decor in this room is so plain? Who do you think did the laundry? All day to wash, all day to iron! Some of the things one might find: a soapstone sink, machines to press shirts and pants, a copper electric washing machine.

Connecting to the Mill Museum's Archives

For seven decades, the Atwood family owned and operated the Wauregan Cotton Mills, located in the village of Wauregan in the town of Plainfield, CT. In the 1950s, facing up to the overall decline of the Connecticut textile industry, James (Jay) Atwood III sold the mill to investors who repurposed it into other industries. During the heyday of the Wauregan Mills, the village of Wauregan contained both worker row houses and the Atwoods' mansion. Before he died, Jay Atwood (who served on the Mill Museum's Board of Directors) donated memorabilia to the Museum, including a number of historical photographs, which are now in the Museum's archives. To see an 19th-century photograph of the Atwood family mansion in Wauregan, CT, [click here](#). To see a 19th-century photo of the mansion's parlor, [click here](#). To see a 19th-century photo of one of Atwood children being watched by a maid, [click here](#). To see a photo of members of the Atwood family, [click here](#). The photos give us a glimpse into the lives of Connecticut's 19th- and early 20th-century mill owners. Jay Atwood also donated the bed, dresser, and rocking horse displayed in the Museum's Mill Manager's Mansion Exhibit. (Connecting to the Museum's Archives made possible in part by a grant from Connecticut Humanities.)

Virtual Tour

For a virtual tour of the Mill Manager's house, the Mill Workers' Row House, and Thread Mill Square for elementary school students, click [here](#). (Virtual Tour made possible in part by a grant from the Last Green Valley.)

