

February 15, 1997

Coventry, Connecticut

Coventry's Central Vermont Railroad Station, pictured here in 1925, was built in 1849 when the New London Northern Railroad passed through town. The railroad sparked significant industrial growth in town.



For people who do not reside in the town, Coventry is quickly passed through via Route 31, by drivers not wishing to risk traveling down Route 6. But beyond the ubiquitous Nathan Hale, it is a town with a rich industrial history, and deserves to be investigated further. For example, there is a museum being developed on Route 44 in Coventry which celebrates its 19th century glass industry. Coventry has a thriving historical society, and anyone there would be only too

delighted to help you delve further.

What follows is a snapshot of the village of South Coventry just after the Civil War. Taken from the *Willimantic Journal* in August, 1866, the article reveals Coventry's rich industrial heritage. On the day after the *Journal* reporter toured the town, the boiler of N. Kingbury's Washington silk mill exploded, killing the night watchman, and causing \$15,000 worth of damage. Here is what the reporter witnessed, that summer's day, 131 years ago.

THE GROWING TOWN OF SOUTH COVENTRY

The mill of N. Kingsbury and Company, and the management of G.W. Capron Esquire has been undergoing many changes. The Company are putting in the new broad loom and have been enlarging the premises to quite an extent. The goods now manufactured are of fine stock. Well finished silk mixtures upon an indigo base, are in no way inferior to the imported fabrics. They turn out over 500 yards per day and expect to increase their capacity next week to 800 yards daily. In addition to the waters of the lake which never fails, the water wheel is assisted in its working power by a steam engine of 40 horse power. Mr. Capron has beautified the village by erecting a fine residence combining utility and convenience with elegance.

W.A. Loomis Esquire, a merchant of long standing has bought the (water) privilege opposite his store and several lots for building. A building is erected on the premises, employing part of the power which is now used by J. S. Morgan for manufacturing paper boxes. A cartridge shop Henry Mason manufacturer, also a hook and eye manufactory, are in operation on this privilege. Mr. Loomis will sell them or combine all the power into one if a party are desirous in aiding the industry of their village, wishes to purchase. The cartridge factory, which has done a lot of business on

government account, moves to Bridgeport soon. The enterprising owners of this power, Messrs. Crittenden and Tibbles, successful machinists and capitalists, will start a new branch or lease the premises.

Fine colored batting for jeweler's use is made by Daniel Green Esq. As we pass down the stream we find three mills engaged upon providing a better grade of goods to the style of Stafford Satinets. D.W. Huntington Esq. has a fine silk manufactory employing a number of workmen. His goods are of fine texture, of even spread and excellent strength. The improvements he has made with the old Stanley Farm in the last two years are more noticeable than any that came under our observation. Mr. H. has proved himself a first class farmer as well as manufacturer.

The hatting interest was formerly a feature worthy of note in this town. Since the commencement of the war it has entirely ceased. Mr. Anson Grover, a returned soldier, contemplates starting a factory getting hats for the southern trade. The Bidwell Hotel, established when the village first began its growth when the old stage horn announced the arrival of the mail, is still kept by a son of the former proprietor and has been improved by the addition of another story, being now three stories high and popular has a hotel. We may have passed by some improvements, but our time is at an end.