

Building History

The Lowell Manufacturing Company was chartered in 1828 for the purpose of manufacturing “cotton and woolen goods in the town of Lowell” and was one of the original ten textile corporations founded in Lowell between 1822 and 1839. From the time of its founding, the Lowell Manufacturing Company developed along lines different from those of Lowell’s other major textile corporations, both in its products and in the organization of its millyard.

In 1899, the Lowell Manufacturing Company was purchased by the Bigelow Carpet Company, which undertook a nearly complete rebuilding of the company’s millyard. In 1914, the Bigelow Carpet Company moved its Lowell operations to Thompsonville, CT and during World War I, the millyard was leased to the U.S. Cartridge Company which vacated the property in 1920. After 1920, the millyard was sold off in separate parcels to a variety of small-scale manufacturers and commercial firms and gradually the property fell into disuse with several millyard properties being demolished.

Together with an adjacent mill built in 1902, these buildings were one of the first large mill rehabilitation projects in the region, containing over 284,000 square feet of gross building area. They were identified in early National Park planning documents as critical for the preservation and interpretation of downtown. Although damaged by fire and abandoned by their owners who were unwilling to pay property taxes, the mills were recognized for their tremendous reuse potential.

Renamed Market Mills, the two buildings were cooperatively redeveloped by Market Mills Associates, a private developer, and the Lowell Historic Preservation Commission (LHPC) between 1980 and 1981. The developers created 230 units of subsidized housing for families and the elderly on the upper floors of the buildings while the LHPC was responsible for 42,000 square feet which was most of the ground floor of the complex. Completed in 1982, Market Mills provides the gateway to the National Park and downtown with public uses including the Lowell National Historical Park Visitor Center, Brush Art Gallery, Lowell Telecommunications Corporation, and Children’s Village at the Mill daycare center. The courtyard between the two buildings was also developed and partially funded by the LHPC and creates an attractive, urban setting for a variety of activities.

The total development cost for Market Mills was \$14 million. Once considered for demolition by the City, these former textile mills are now downtown landmarks.

The Italianate style building housing the Brush Art Gallery & Studios was built in 1882 as a weave mill and was erected on the site of former company housing. The mill is the oldest existing building in the former Lowell Manufacturing Company millyard.



This view of the Lowell Manufacturing Company mill that houses the Brush Art Gallery & Studios dates from 1884 (Photo – Lowell Illustrated)