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A SHORT HISTORY OF WATERVILLE, MAINE

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Independent Study
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Colby College
AUTHOR’S NOTE

THIS DOCUMENT is the unabridged version of a short history prepared for publication on the City of Waterville’s official website. Although neither document is remarkably concise (the abridged, web-published version is still a solid dozen single-spaced pages) nor adequately comprehensive (a book still needs to be written about Waterville’s second hundred years) they each offer a good and fairly complete look at Waterville from its prehistory to roughly January 2007.

The following document offers much more information and depth than the web version, as well as a touch of analysis. It is worth the extra time it takes to read.

Many individuals have helped me with this project, whether providing first-hand information, proofreading, or just offering general support. Most of these people’s names appear in the endnotes, but missing from them are my advisors Tom Longstaff and Elizabeth Leonard, Colby’s special collections librarian Pat Burdick, and my friends and family. Many thanks to everyone for your assistance and patience.

One final word, regarding the photos: in this document I have tried to establish a progression of Main Street’s appearance through the years, but it is not safe to believe the pictures cover the same view or stretch of the street. You will find it clear that they do not. They do, however, illustrate the general changes that have taken place.
INTRODUCTION

IF WE WERE TO SIMPLIFY the story of Waterville to the lightest exploration possible, a good strategy might be to look at the city’s names. True, a good number of important events might be overlooked, but examining the names and name changes in the city’s history offers a unique view into the essence of its identity.

Waterville has a rich history when it comes to names. The city itself went through a number of them in its early days, and these changes reflect the city’s continual reinvention of itself. The first people we know about who lived here, the Canibas people, called the falls on the river and their settlement Teconnet, or Ticonic Village, depending on whose spelling we prefer. From the beginning the settlement was deeply connected to those falls on the Kennebec River, which offered fishing and eventually great industrial potential. When Europeans took over the area, the community became the plantation of Kingfield and then the
town of Winslow, named for the general who established Fort Halifax there. The section of town on the west side of the river, however, grew on its own to the point of demanding its independence, and this section became the town of Waterville. Little is known about why the name Waterville was suggested, besides the obvious river and streams, but it is interesting to consider the fact that this simple name combines English and French words. The town would be shaped greatly by both English-speaking Americans and French-Canadian immigrants in the times to come.

Two final shifts related to the town’s name are relatively minor. In time, like Waterville itself had done before, the western section of the town began to grow on its own and eventually seceded, incorporating itself as West Waterville until adopting the name of Oakland to establish a more distinct identity. The Town of Waterville that remained soon became the City of Waterville, ushering in an era of bustling industry and lively culture. Waterville was dubbed the Elm City for its many elm trees, and as such grew to be considered one of the more beautiful cities of Maine.

Waterville’s other nickname is “The University City of Maine,” and the city’s two colleges are another example of the city’s history of name changes and redefinition. The first college was called the Maine Literary and Theological Institution, which became Waterville College and then Colby University, before
becoming Colby College. The changes mark a progression towards becoming a more secular institution and also reflect who had invested in the school.

Waterville’s second college began as Kiest Business College, then became Morgan Business College and then Morgan-Thomas Business College—all reflecting the private ownership of the school—before becoming Thomas Junior College and then simply Thomas College. With each name change the schools explored new opportunities, and with each new name the institutions had new meaning.

The names significant to Waterville are not limited to the city itself nor its institutions. One final, personal level of name changing to consider occurred among the immigrant populations as they came to the city to establish new lives. French-Canadian immigrants often changed their names for convenience of assimilation or due to their own uncertainty about spellings, although their employers also often simply forced new names or adjusted spellings on them. For example, the name Roi changed to Roy, or Ware, or, by translation, King. The Syrian-Lebanese immigrants faced similar experiences, with their Arabic names often unpronounceable to the Yankee population.

What, in the end, is the significance of Waterville’s names and their changes? If nothing else, they show the history of Waterville to be a dynamic one. The city has grown and shrunk, experienced changing population demographics, shifted economic bases, yet through it all the city remains. The hard-working people of the city are at the root of its successes; they form a community continually eager to reshape their city into the best place it can be. Waterville has been an Indian burial ground, a trade center, a mill town, a regional hub for employment and transportation, a business center, a college
town, and a bustling city. The story of Waterville is one of frequent adjustment, ambition, and perseverance. Like the story told by the city’s names, it is a story of steady development and of dynamic change.
ROUGHLY 20,000 to 25,000 years ago, the last of many glacial advances carved out the terrain that formed present-day Maine. When the ice first melted, its weight left the land depressed, allowing the ocean to initially fill in much of the country, even well north of Waterville, leaving behind the rich silt that made good soil for agriculture. The basins the glaciers had scoured would become the region’s lakes. The glaciers also left behind a mix of exposed bedrock and piles of debris. The Kennebec River, draining Moosehead Lake into the Atlantic Ocean, flowed through this landscape. Waterfalls formed in places where the bedrock was exposed, offering sites where dams could be anchored to the solid rock and positioned to produce convenient water power.¹

For upwards of ten thousand years, there have been people living along the Kennebec River. The climate continued to change after the melting of the glaciers, and the people adapted to the new environments, hunting moose and deer in lands where mammoths and caribou had once been prey.² Various
archaeological sites along the river suggest settlement in the Waterville area as many as four thousand years ago. Among the remains in one site were large quantities of burned acorn pieces, dated at about 3500 years ago, giving evidence of a prehistoric people roasting the nuts in the area. In the centuries directly leading up to initial European contact, the residents of the areas around the Kennebec River were the Wabanaki people. The Wabanaki were the easternmost relatives of the Abenaki, whose name means “people of the dawnland.” These diverse and widespread people all spoke dialects of the Algonquian language.

In general, the Wabanaki were a rather mobile group of people, relocating as needed to maintain their quality of life. Most housing arrangements were fairly short-term, although permanent villages of longhouses or wigwams were established in especially good locations. One such village was formed by the Canibas tribe of the Wabanaki at the junction of the Kennebec and Sebasticook rivers. The rivers were the center of their economy, for fishing and transportation. The villagers named the waterfall on the Kennebec River for their Chief Teconnet, and the general area bore his name for many years.

The Canibas people sustained themselves primarily by fishing in the rivers, which were abundant with salmon, shad, and alewives; by hunting moose and deer; and by harvesting berries and nuts. The establishment of a permanent village also went hand in hand with the development of agriculture, so it is likely that maize supplemented the natural bounty of Teconnet. The village was set on the eastern side of the Kennebec River, and while there were no settlements on the other side, the villagers made their burial ground along a good length of the
western side of the river, from roughly modern-day Temple Street to the Lockwood dam.⁸

At first, contact with European traders and explorers was friendly, with trade resulting in material gains for both parties. Before long, however, all the groups of the widespread Abenaki found themselves fiercely defending their land from Europeans, in addition to the neighboring tribes they had long been in conflict with. At the same time that conflicts increased with the French and English, the Iroquois also tried to take over Abenaki land.⁹

Although it would be some time before they would settle in the region, the first Europeans began eyeing the land of the Wabanaki and Abenaki people as early as 1498, when Sebastian Cabot sailed the coast of Maine and across Massachusetts Bay, initially believing he had found Asia. Upon clarifying the geography, he claimed for the English all the country between Labrador and New York. It wasn’t long before another European explorer came to challenge the English. In 1534 Jacques Cartier discovered the St. Lawrence River and quickly claimed all of the adjacent land for France. Then, in 1603 King Henry IV of France granted the territory of North America between 40° and 46° N, known as Acadia, to Sieur De Monts. The following year, De Monts and Samuel Champlain explored the region, ascending the Kennebec River, and establishing their claim to the area. Two years later, English explorers were on the Sagadahoc River, and were soon attempting to set up a colony at the mouth of the Kennebec River, the current location of Popham. The colony failed.¹⁰

In the meantime, the native tribes were juggling the tasks of sustaining their general livelihood and negotiating with Europeans. Far worse for the indigenous people than the land negotiations involving lies and alcohol were the
European diseases, which were wiping out them out at a rapid rate. A 1615 war between the eastern Penobscot and the western Kennebec tribes added to the Indians’ strife, and it was followed by an epidemic that killed off nearly all of the area’s original inhabitants. Another epidemic came in the early 1630s.

As the middle of the 17th century approached, French Catholic missionaries began reaching out to the indigenous people, spreading Catholicism and emphasizing French rights over the land. The French integrated themselves into native communities, in many cases offering their services as advisers and leaders. This closer bond gave them an edge in land negotiations, along with allies for battles against the English. Nonetheless, the English continued to press their land claims, and in 1648 a less than fair treaty with the Indians resulted in a deed granting colonial Governor William Bradford all the land along the entirety of the Kennebec River for fifteen miles to each side. This deed did little to settle land disputes, and the struggle between the French and English continued for almost a century.

Apart from the French missionaries, however, few Europeans tried to actually settle in the Teconnet area. In 1660, a Richard Hammond was operating a trading house on the west side of the river. He is considered Waterville’s first white resident, but he was not a resident for long: in return for his theft of furs from some Wabanaki, he was killed.

In the late 17th century, the native people revolted against the Europeans, sparking several decades of violence. At the height of King Philip’s War, in 1675, native people in the region rose to murder roughly one hundred English men. The English in turn placed bounties on all Indians. After various treaties, including some that were effective and acknowledged the native right to their
land, a shaky peace ensued until King William’s War broke out, now between the French and English, in 1688. Ticonic Village, as it had come to be known, was a stop on the journey for war prisoners until the village was burned in 1692, ending settlement by the Canibas tribe. Skirmishes continued off and on for the next half-century.
SETTLEMENT IN WINSLOW, 1754-1801

THE KENNEBEC RIVER was the main route between Quebec and Maine, and as long as fighting with the French continued, the English came to recognize that a fort at Ticonic Falls would be an asset. Following an expedition led by General John Winslow, they decided to build their fort on the east side of the river. The negotiations with the remaining Wabanaki were uneasy, as the native people had several misgivings about a permanent English military installation, and the English had to rely on old and obscure land deeds to reclaim the land as their own. Nonetheless, in 1754, Fort Halifax was built. The fort was garrisoned until 1766, under the command of Captain William Lithgow. The French and the Wabanaki gradually left the area, both groups retreating to Canada. After the military need subsided, the fort was slowly dismantled, eventually leaving just one blockhouse, which for centuries stood as the oldest wooden building of its type in the United States. A flood in the spring of 1987 washed it away, but the structure has been reconstructed where it formerly stood, and the fort’s location is now a park.

With the security of a fort and the accessibility of a new road (in addition to the river) connecting it to towns to the south, the area began to be settled. The community was first called Kingfield and loosely governed, categorized officially as a “plantation.” When the place was incorporated as a town in 1771 it took the
name Winslow, honoring the founder of Fort Halifax. Residents established farms on both sides of the river, and the fishing industry did quite well. The town’s government also steadily grew more substantial. One of the first men to serve Winslow as county and town representative to the Massachusetts legislature was a Harvard-educated man named Joshua Cushman. Cushman also served a more distinctive and unique office as official town minister, leading nonsectarian worship in the town’s earliest days, before any specific church was established. He would be the first and only person to ever serve this role.

In 1775, Benedict Arnold’s 1,100-man expedition to Quebec passed through the town and had trouble getting their heavy boats past Ticonic Falls, encountering the first of the many troubles they would face. Serving as surgeon when Arnold came through Fort Halifax was the town’s first physician, John McKechnie. A Scottish immigrant, McKechnie came up to Maine as a surveyor for the region from Augusta to Winslow, drawing up town plans that would last for generations. Settling on the western side of the river, he also built a log cabin next to Messalonskee Stream and set up a sawmill.

Many of the men of Winslow eagerly served in the Revolutionary War. One man who fought at Bunker Hill would become one of the town’s doctors, Obadiah Williams. Another of the men who settled in Winslow after returning
from the war was Asa Redington who, in 1792, with his father-in-law Nehemiah Getchell, built the first dam on the Kennebec River, leading to the openings of saw and grist mills, and a mill for a shipyard on the western side of the river. A farmer named James Stackpole, who served as town clerk and treasurer, built one of these sawmills, and his enterprise grew to include shipbuilding. The communities on each side of the river grew and collectively became a distribution center for merchandise brought up the river from Portland, Boston, and beyond.
A TOWN OF ITS OWN, 1802-1865

AROUND THE SAME TIME representatives from Winslow were beginning to engage in serious debates about Maine seceding from Massachusetts and becoming its own state, the town itself was seriously debating its own split. The town was without a bridge, making most affairs between the east and west sides of the river rather difficult to carry out. The settlement on the west side of the river, still called Ticonic Village, was growing steadily and becoming increasingly independent. After much discussion, on December 28, 1801, the town of Winslow sent a petition to the General Court of Massachusetts, proposing “That the now town of Winslow shall be divided through the middle of the River Kennebeck as the river usually runs across the width of said Town; That that part of said Town which lay on the Eastern side of the Kennebeck shall retain the name of Winslow and the part which lay on the Western side be erected into a town by the name of Waterville.” On June 23, 1802, Waterville was incorporated as a town, with a population of around eight hundred people.

Over the next decade, the town’s infrastructures developed quickly and the people of the town eagerly served their community. Abijah Smith, Waterville’s first town clerk, took on the role of schoolmaster as school districts were established. He would also serve as postmaster for years and represent the town in the vote for Maine’s statehood. Moses Appleton was the town’s first official doctor. Before long, Waterville had its own fire department, a handful of banks, and a “Waterville Social Library.”

Meanwhile, the United States was facing continued oppression from Britain, and in June 1812 Congress and President James Madison channeled the country’s resentment into a declaration of war. The burgeoning of the town’s
prosperity was put on hold, and several Waterville men served in the war, among them the doctor Moses Appleton, for whom Appleton Street is named.\

While there was no fighting on the home front, there is a story that the town was “invaded” once during the war: townspeople spotted a small army marching toward Waterville, and quickly assembled a defensive force to intercept it. When the two armies met, the Waterville troop discovered that the “invaders” were American troops marching from the Penobscot River, where they had burned their vessel to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. Both relieved, the two parties returned together to Waterville to celebrate.

Once peace was proclaimed in 1815, Waterville quickly bounced back to its prewar level of activity. Trade along the river especially took off. The shipbuilding industry had been growing steadily even during the war, and 1814 marked the launch of the largest ship ever built in Waterville, the 290-ton *Francis and Sarah*.

Just before the war, a number of Baptists, intent on expanding the denomination, had begun looking into establishing a school for training future clergy. In February 1813, Massachusetts granted a charter to establish the Maine Literary and Theological Institution in Waterville. The war prevented the institution from getting developed for some time, and it was largely thanks to the funds and advocacy of trader Nathaniel Gilman and lawyer Timothy

*First Baptist Church through the trees*
Boutelle, two of the town’s richest citizens, that the college came into being at all. Its first president arrived in 1818, the Reverend Jeremiah Chaplin. Chaplin’s influence was not limited to the college. The same year he arrived, he established Waterville’s First Baptist Church, which opened its own building in 1826. Until the Baptists arrived, Waterville had only had one meetinghouse, offering interdenominational worship.

On March 15, 1820, Maine became an independent state, entering the union to balance Missouri’s entry into the U.S. as a slave state. A year later, the new Maine legislature enlarged the powers granted to the Maine Literary and Theological Institution, and in the process changed the school’s name to Waterville College.

As Waterville College progressed, the need for a strong and reliable applicant pool became apparent. To serve this purpose, the college founded four preparatory schools across the state, including Waterville Academy, which was established in 1828. This school went on to become the Classical Institute, and later Coburn Classical Institute, which was located next to Monument Park in the heart of town until its main building burned in 1955. In its final years, the school merged with Oak Grove Academy in Vassalboro, remaining open until the end of the 1980s.
In 1824, more than two decades after the lack of a bridge over the Kennebec River had contributed to the separation of the town from Winslow, a private company constructed the Ticonic Bridge, which would operate as a toll bridge for most of the century. Waterville quickly became an even more attractive destination for traders, as it continued in its role as an agricultural center and was increasingly offering employment in the shipbuilding and lumber industries. Short-term workers from Quebec were not uncommon, but not until Jean Mathieu came in 1827 did any French-Canadians permanently settle in Waterville. For several years Mathieu’s Water Street home served the population of French Catholics as a religious meetinghouse. A steady trickle of immigrants began to arrive in Waterville, increasing greatly after the 1830 completion of the Kennebec Road (also called the Canada Road), which offered a direct route to or from Quebec, easing both trade and immigration. That route is more or less the path that U.S. 201 now follows.

Eighteen hundred and thirty-two was an eventful year for Waterville. In the spring, the Kennebec River flooded, washing out the recently built bridge. A few months after the flooding, the “Ticonic,” the first steamboat to visit Waterville, arrived in town. Before long a regular route for passenger and freight service was established. Eventually, steamboat traffic reached a point where passenger rides to Boston were available for just one dollar. With its college, Waterville became a stop on the circuit for lecturers, and that summer, the outspoken abolitionist and journalist William Lloyd Garrison visited and spoke to the town, inspiring vigorous growth among local anti-slavery societies. Five years later, the town’s interest in abolition would become passionately intense when their own Garrison-like figure became a martyr for the cause. Elijah Parish
Lovejoy, a Waterville College graduate and former Waterville teacher, was murdered by a mob in Illinois while defending his abolitionist press.  

In 1834 the Reverend Samuel Francis Smith arrived to serve the Baptist church and to teach at the college. Among the hymns he led his congregation in was one he had written shortly before arriving in Waterville, “My Country Tis of Thee.” He also lectured on temperance, a topic received in Waterville with great enthusiasm. The town eagerly adopted ordinances banning the sale of liquor and provided many an advocate for prohibition at the state and national levels.

Although the town’s first newspaper, *The Waterville Intelligencer*, was published in 1823, it took a good deal longer for a popular and lasting newspaper to come along. Among Waterville’s short-lived journals was *The Waterville Union*, the first business venture in the town by man named C. F. Hathaway. This newspaper appeared in 1847 but was out of print within a few months due to its heavy theological content. Soon, however, a few businessmen who had already involved themselves in the newspaper business and were eager to offer useful local news to the town took over Hathaway’s press. Thus *The Eastern Mail* was born. It would stand uncontested as Waterville’s newspaper for several decades, becoming *The Waterville Mail* along the way.

After the collapse of *The Waterville Union*, C. F. Hathaway returned to his previous home in Massachusetts and set up a shirt factory. Toward the beginning of the 1850s he came back to Waterville, eager to establish a factory here. The facility, consisting of various expansions to Hathaway’s own home on Appleton Street, became the primary factory for the Hathaway Shirt Company. Hathaway brought with him a strong business drive and a strong Baptist faith. He provided a new workplace for women and he employed them exclusively,
personally overseeing their production of the shirts, and in little time his name came to stand for quality. The product line was eventually diversified to include lady’s fine muslin underwear.\textsuperscript{50}

By the time Hathaway had returned to Waterville, the town was becoming a railroad center. In 1848 the Androscoggin and Kennebec Railroad came to the town, and seven years later the Penobscot and Kennebec Railroad would be built, offering further rail service to Bangor. Telegraph lines laid along the tracks reached the town in 1854.\textsuperscript{51} Offering better service than steamboats and able to operate year-round, the railroads gradually replaced virtually all river travel, although some decades later, a short-lived revival was tried. However, the ship that was to be the star of the effort ran aground en route to Waterville. Historian E. C. Whittemore in 1902 wrote bluntly of it, “In 1890 an attempt was made by some of our enterprising citizens to restore steam navigation on the Kennebec. July 10\textsuperscript{th} the steamer City of Waterville sailed from Bangor for this port. She has not yet arrived.”\textsuperscript{52}

In 1851, the town’s new Pine Grove Cemetery, its third but most substantial burial ground, was dedicated. Already reflecting the impact of
French-Canadian immigrants, the cemetery contained a Protestant section and a Catholic section. After its establishment, most remains were relocated to it from the town’s other cemeteries, an unmarked site near Western Avenue and Messalonskee Stream and the block on Elm Street that would become Monument Park.\textsuperscript{53} Not all of the remains made the journey, however, and some of the town’s founders were among those left behind. Despite a large monument to him in Pine Grove, Asa Redington allegedly still rests in modern-day Monument Park.\textsuperscript{54}

As the 1860s began, a new group of people began to arrive in Waterville. Syrian-Lebanese immigrants, fleeing a revolution between Christians and Muslims in Syria, began to settle in the Head of Falls area and along Front Street, working initially as peddlers but soon finding other employment in the railroads and mills.\textsuperscript{55} They were responding to job announcements in New York, which bore advertisements for Hathaway and other Waterville companies. The Lebanese were Maronite Catholics, and for the first few decades after their arrival they joined the Franco-American Catholics for mass, until a second Catholic church, Sacred Heart, was built in 1905 for the non-Francophone parishioners.\textsuperscript{56}

Like the state of Maine, Waterville did not stand idly by as the Civil War broke out. Just eight days after the firing on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, the town held a meeting to decide what actions to take.\textsuperscript{57} Many of Waterville’s Franco-American citizens enlisted in the army, and coupled with the Union’s recruitment of French-Canadian support they formed a number of Francophone units.\textsuperscript{58} The rest of Waterville was also well represented, and all told, the town contributed over five hundred soldiers to the Union army.\textsuperscript{59} The Hathaway Company made hundreds, if not thousands, of uniforms to outfit them.\textsuperscript{60}
town’s dedication to the cause for the war and their own troops was strong, and before the war was over, the people of Waterville began to make plans for a memorial. The plan was set in 1864, and in 1876 the Soldier’s Monument, in the new Monument Park on Elm Street, was dedicated.61

Waterville College would create its own Civil War memorial as well, although for a while it seemed the college itself would be a victim of the war. The lowered enrollment during the war and lack of funding in the midst of the post-war recession led many to fear the college would perish. A sermon at a Baptist church miles away one Sunday covered this concern specifically, and one of the people in the congregation proved receptive to the message. Gardner Colby had spent some of his childhood in Waterville, and his family had been friends with the college’s first president. Colby had gained some wealth as a merchant in Boston, and in 1865 he offered a grant that saved the school. In return the college changed its name to Colby University. With the school back on its feet, the institution was able to be the first college in the North to create a Civil War memorial library building. Memorial Hall was dedicated in 1869.62
FOR SOME TIME, several individuals in Waterville had begun dreaming of larger industries and grander utilization of the town’s resources. In the mid-1860s, George Alfred Phillips began taking action by buying a great deal of river property around the falls. The Ticonic Water Power and Manufacturing Company was formed in 1866, and two years later a dam was built across the Kennebec River, initially powering some grist and saw mills that were less than profitable. Reuben B. Dunn saw a different direction for the operation and in 1873 bought controlling stock and began building a large cotton mill. Amos D. Lockwood became involved in the project, and soon the Lockwood Company was formed. The first mill had 33,000 spindles; by 1882 the company had seen fit to expand, and a second mill was built. The new building housed 55,000 spindles, and by the turn of the century the mill complex was employing 1,300 people.63

Like the Hathaway Company and textile mills that would follow, the Lockwood Company offered numerous jobs to women. While the concurrent use
of child labor at the plant reveals that the company’s employment choices were primarily driven by profitability, the employment of women nevertheless reflected trends of the new opportunities in industry. In 1871, at the same time that the cotton mill was being built, Mary Caffrey Low enrolled at Colby University as the college’s first female student. She graduated as valedictorian of her class, paving the way for coeducation that could bring women better opportunities than Lockwood ever could.\textsuperscript{64}

By the 1870s, Waterville had several long-established industries. The Hathaway Shirt Factory was continuing to grow, and a foundry that opened as Fairbanks, Nelson and Company in 1833 had also been growing steadily and evolved into the Waterville Iron Works.\textsuperscript{65} Neither of these invigorated the town in the same way the arrival of the Lockwood Company would. Waterville’s industrial revolution was suddenly fully underway; manufacturing offered seemingly unlimited jobs and opportunities. French-Canadians immigrated to Waterville in ever higher numbers, leaving behind their struggling farms and the British government in Quebec for the economic prosperity and relative freedom found in the U.S. Many immigrants had arrived in the Civil War era, either serving as soldiers or filling in the jobs left by local men. With the arrival of Lockwood, however, more immigrants settled down permanently in Waterville, although they continued regularly sending money to families back home.\textsuperscript{66}

The Franco-Americans primarily lived in the same neighborhood, a place called the “Plains,” along the river in the south end of town. The original French-Canadian settler, Jean Mathieu, had his home here as well. The Lockwood Company, situated at the edge of the neighborhood, drew new immigrants to the area, and with the increased population the Plains became a sort of city within a
In 1874, St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church opened, offering the Franco-American Catholics their most permanent place to worship, and eventually a bilingual parochial school. In 1889 the church’s outreach would expand following the arrival of a group of Ursuline Sisters from Canada who set up a convent and school. The current facility of the Mt. Merici Academy and Convent on Western Avenue opened in 1912. In 1887, a mission was made by members of the First Baptist Church to reach the Franco-Americans of the Plains, resulting in the opening of the Second Baptist Church on Water Street. After Peter Bolduc opened the first French store in 1862, dozens of other businesses and services opened and thrived; before long there were stores, doctors, dentists, lawyers, even a theater, all in the Plains. Frederick Pooler, who changed his name from Poulin, was a prominent Franco-American businessman and active participant in the town government. He also opened Waterville’s first grocery store in 1869. The Anglos in Waterville were forced to adjust to the new presence, and although there was some prejudice maintained by the Yankee population, ranging from name calling to anti-Catholic involvement in the Ku Klux Klan, before long most every business had at least one French-speaking employee to serve the Francophone population.

In the decades following the establishment of the Lockwood Company, Waterville underwent a building boom, with most of the bricks produced locally
in brickyards on Water Street and College Avenue. A Methodist and an Episcopal church were opened in 1870 and 1878, respectively. A new railroad bridge was constructed and streetlamps were installed in the central parts of the city in 1874. The town’s first public high school, the Waterville Free High School, was established in 1876. Telephone lines to Portland arrived in 1878, and two years later the *Waterville Sentinel*, the predecessor to the city’s current newspaper and the first competition for the *Mail*, went into print.

At the same time that the center of Waterville was booming, the area then known as West Waterville was undergoing growth of its own. The village had its own industries developing on Messalonskee Stream. Petitions for and against another split of the town had circulated for some time, and West Waterville was incorporated as its own town in 1873. Ten years later, the town would take the name of Oakland.

The pruning of Waterville did little to set the town back. In 1884, Waterville out-bid Portland and other cities to become the home of the Maine Central Railroad car and locomotive repair shops, bringing hundreds of new jobs to the area and thoroughly establishing the town as a railroad center. Interestingly, with the arrival of the railroad shops, three of Waterville’s major industries had virtually single-gender labor forces. The railroad only employed men, and Hathaway and Lockwood
employed almost exclusively women. The latter factory did have children as workers as well, often twelve years old or younger until labor laws went into effect in 1907. Like their counterparts elsewhere, none of the industries offered particularly safe or healthy working conditions.⁷⁹
A CITY EMERGES, 1888-1919

AS THE TOWN GREW, fueled by industry, the question of whether to become a city arose frequently. The state offered multiple city charters, but the town repeatedly rejected them until an amended charter finally won approval, 543 votes to 432, in a town meeting on January 23, 1888. The *Waterville Mail* proudly declared, “Waterville became the fifteenth city in Maine, in the date of her incorporation, but by no means No. 15 in the element which makes a progressive city. Of these fifteen cities, one-third are on the Kennebec. Come Skowhegan!”80 The *Mail*’s encouragement apparently was not enough, however, as Skowhegan remains a town today.

Waterville’s first years as a city were marked by growth in every sector of the community. In this era elm trees lined many of the city’s streets, earning Waterville the nickname of Elm City. New fraternal and service organizations were formed and old groups found increased membership. The school system continued to improve. Industry, business, and every social institution seemed poised to expand.81 One key benchmark came that related to the city’s water supply. For years there had been debates over how a water system should be implemented and whose control it should fall under. The water from Messalonskee Stream was too polluted from Oakland’s waste when it passed through Waterville, but pumping water from China Lake would be outside of the city’s jurisdiction. Harvey D. Eaton, the manager of the Messalonskee Electric Light Company, which was to become Central Maine Power, finally came through with a solution that would be implemented in 1907: the establishment of the Kennebec Water District. A water district could be its own body, serving
multiple cities and townships without having to reach an entire county. This proprietary model has since been imitated all over the country.82

In the same year that Waterville became a city, the Waterville and Fairfield Railway began a streetcar service between the two communities, running along Main Street and College Avenue. The first cars were each pulled by six horses, but within a few years the system was converted to run on the newly available electric power, after the consolidation of the railway with Fairfield and Waterville’s power companies. Another electric trolley service opened in 1903, the Waterville and Oakland Railway, which ran from Temple Street along Western Avenue, then alongside Mayflower Hill en route to Oakland, passing the site of the Central Maine Fair, which ran from 1904 to the 1930s. In 1906 the Fairfield line was extended to Pine Grove Cemetery, and the two railways consolidated in 1911. The fare for the half-hourly service was five cents.83

The streetcars signaled a trend of people working outside their respective city limits, and not just in Fairfield or Oakland. Winslow was home to one of Waterville’s biggest employers by the turn of the century. The Hollingsworth and Whitney pulp and paper mills opened in 1892, just across the river from downtown Waterville, and many residents took jobs there. The factory’s proximity to the city also encouraged Winslow workers to support Waterville’s
thriving business district. In 1901 a footbridge with a toll of two cents was built between the paper mills and Waterville to make workers’ commutes easier. The appropriately named Two Cent Bridge washed out in floods in 1902, but was rebuilt a year later and has stood ever since. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is allegedly the last known toll footbridge in the nation.

The bridge was built adjacent to the newly established Riverview Worsted Mill, a wool textile mill in the Head of Falls area. Both this mill and the paper mill across the river had to buy property rights from the Lockwood Company, so great had been George A. Phillips’ acquisition of land some thirty years earlier. In 1909, the Riverview mill was bought out and became the Wyandotte Worsted Company.

To provide career training for young people facing the many business opportunities at the turn of the century, Kiest Business College opened in 1894 as a non-sectarian, co-educational institution on Main Street. Two years later one William Morgan bought the school and named it for himself. In 1911, John L. Thomas, Sr., bought the school, renaming it Morgan-Thomas Business College. Under his leadership, the college was quite successful, and over the years its enrollment increased, as did its program offerings and the degrees it conferred. John L. Thomas, Jr., would eventually take over leadership and serve as president until his death in 1980.
In 1896 a number of other improvements came to the city. Levine’s, “The Store for Men and Boys,” founded five years earlier and run by a family of Jewish immigrants from Poland, moved downtown to a location it would hold for a century. The Waterville Mail became The Waterville Evening Mail and served as the city’s first daily newspaper. Nearly a hundred years after the first library was established in the city, this year the Waterville Free Library was established, though without a full building of its own. The public library building that stands today was built in 1905, funded largely by a generous grant from Andrew Carnegie.

In the thick of the lively turn of the century hubbub, Waterville celebrated its centennial. At least twenty-five thousand people came for the occasion, which included the dedication of a new City Hall building that featured an Opera House upstairs. Among the festivities was a parade, which included 95 floats, 594 people on foot, 35 people on horseback, four bands, 22 carriages, and 22 people on bicycles. Also in the parade was a Military Band led by R.B. Hall, a prolific local composer of marches who worked with Colby College’s band in addition to a community military band. Following the centennial celebrations,
the city’s extra enthusiasm about its history led to the creation of the Waterville Historical Society. A house that Asa Redington built, given to the society in 1924, would eventually serve as home for their museum.94

One of Waterville’s prominent citizens at the time of the centennial was an inventor by the name of Alvin O. Lombard. Lombard’s first major creation was a device that regulated the speed of mills powered by water wheels, and his motivation in coming to Waterville was to manufacture his water wheel regulator at the Iron Works. However, his most important invention was the Lombard Log Hauler, the world’s first commercially viable continuous tread tractor and predecessor to tanks and construction machinery. Originally operated by steam and used to pull huge loads of logs over snow, the tractor was patented in 1901. Lombard set up a factory in the north end of the city, gradually modifying the design to allow for more uses and for gasoline power. After various legal battles, the enterprise eventually fell to competition from the Holt Manufacturing Company. Holt would become part of the Caterpillar Company, which had started to develop tread tractors for more widespread use. Lombard died in 1937, but his works would not be forgotten. In addition to his more noteworthy inventions, he built the first automobile to appear in Waterville; like his first log haulers, it was steam-powered.95
Following in the same innovative vein, around the turn of the century a man named Martin Keyes developed a process for creating high quality paper pie plates from spruce fiber. The Keyes Fibre Company, founded in 1901 up the river in Shawmut, relocated to a site straddling the Waterville-Fairfield line and next door to Lombard’s factory in 1907, and for almost a century has been producing paper products for food service, although the company’s name has changed in recent times.96

As Waterville continued to develop and thrive, the city attracted more immigrants. By 1900, enough Jews from Poland and Russia had come to the area, primarily as peddlers, that a congregation could be assembled. Beth Israel Congregation was chartered in June of 1902, but until the synagogue was finished in 1905, they held their services at the fire station on Ticonic Street.97

In the spirit of better serving the growing community, and for the sake of keeping up with the competition, The Waterville Sentinel upgraded into The Waterville Morning Sentinel in 1904, becoming a daily newspaper to rival the Evening Mail. The Sentinel was victorious: two years later the Mail ceased publication.98

Around 1910, a second wave of Lebanese immigrants began to arrive in Waterville. Although encouraged to come to Waterville by the potential for jobs and the already established Lebanese population, this time immigrants were primarily fleeing their country to escape conscription by the Turkish army.99 The new arrivals settled in the same neighborhoods as their predecessors, chiefly in the Head of Falls area, and generally close to the factories that would employ many of them. The increase in the population of Maronite Catholics led to the arrival of a Maronite priest in 1924, freeing the Lebanese to worship on their own
and in Arabic, rather than at Sacred Heart, the English-speaking Catholic Church. In 1951, St. Joseph’s Maronite Catholic Church was built, in the middle of the Lebanese neighborhood. The church would establish a parochial school in 1959.100

A new post office was built on a site previously occupied by the original fire station after the new Central Fire Station opened in 1912. Across the street from the post office sat the Elmwood Hotel, already over sixty years old, one of several nice hotels located right in downtown Waterville.101 Since the days of the steamboat, Waterville had been a destination for travelers and it only became more of one in the railroad’s heyday. In addition to its new opera house, the city offered vaudeville acts and plays, then silent films, and, before long, talkies at its theaters: the Silver, the State, the Haines, and the Bijou.102 Downtown, more and more stores went into business, including the department stores Sterns and Emery Brown, and the clothing store Dunham’s of Maine, while well-established institutions like Levine’s clothing and W.B. Arnold’s hardware store continued to thrive.103

As the United States entered the First World War, the city experienced the same effects of war as it had in the Civil War. The colleges faltered in their enrollment, and Colby began running military drills for its students. Over five hundred soldiers from Waterville fought in the war.104 A young Franco-American man named Arthur Castonguay was the first Waterville citizen killed in the war,
and the square next to City Hall was named in his memory.\textsuperscript{105} A bridge over Messalonskee Stream at the foot of Silver Street also was to be a war memorial, featuring a plaque that has since been relocated to Monument Park.\textsuperscript{106}
NOT LONG AFTER Charles Lindbergh completed his solo flight across the Atlantic Ocean, the Waterville Municipal Airport was established. Two years later, on August 9, 1933, Amelia Earhart flew into the airport to deliver one of two planes that would begin serving the city on the new Boston Maine Airways line. The trip was her first visit to Maine, and Earhart said of the city, “Your scenery and your people are all so wonderful that I'll never forget them and will always hope that I can return to your dear old state.”

As the city had grown, so had Colby University, although the institution changed its name to the more modest Colby College in 1899. In the meantime, the city’s industrial growth had boxed Colby in, with the Iron Works and Maine Central Railroad’s shops on one end, businesses filling the other, and the Kennebec River and railroad tracks confining each side. The college had nowhere to expand, and in 1929 the trustees decided to move away completely from the current site. Most of the potential relocation sites were in Waterville, but one offer was made for a site in Augusta, leading to a small panic among the city leaders. The mayor at the time, F. Harold Dubord, who happened to be the city’s first Franco-American to
serve that office, championed a fundraising effort to keep the college in its home
city. The effort was successful, and to calm everyone’s nerves the day after the
college trustees voted, on November 22, 1930, the Sentinel ran a large headline:
“Colby Remains in Waterville.” Eventually, Mayflower Hill was selected as the
future location of the college, and by 1952 the entire campus had moved to the
new site.

Despite Waterville’s clear status as an industrial center, it took some time
for labor movements to take hold in the city. The diversified industry prevented
any single interest from developing widespread support. The first real strike
didn’t occur until the summer of 1922, when about 490 Maine Central Railroad
workers joined in a national railroad strike lasting roughly three months. Textile strikes also had some effect on the city, causing the Wyandotte Company
to close temporarily, but the Lockwood mill had no unions and remained open.
In 1934, a national textile strike led to violence in many New England
communities, and Waterville experienced what the Sentinel described as the
“worst riot ever staged in this usually quiet Kennebec Valley city.” All the
employees of the Wyandotte mill had gone on strike, but only about a sixth of
the Lockwood workers had joined the cause. George Jabar, the head of the Maine
Textile Council, led picketing at the Lockwood plant. The picketing turned into a
mob scene, with some participants chasing out of the mill the employees who
had stayed at work. Some stones were thrown, and eventually the National
Guard was dispatched and the crowd had to be dispersed with tear gas.

Meanwhile the nation was in the midst of the Great Depression, and many
striking workers survived and fed their families only thanks to federal relief
grants. By and large Waterville fared better than many similar cities during the
Depression, but the times were tight for everyone. Among other things, the Depression led to a decline in use of Waterville’s trolley services, although the drop was counteracted through promotional activities. However, the discounts involved in the promotions rendered the service unprofitable. Additionally, the automobile had grown exponentially more popular every year since the first Model T was rolled out in 1908, and Waterville’s streets were getting too crowded for streetcars. With the relief of traffic congestion as the primary stated reason for the decision, the Waterville, Fairfield and Oakland Railway was abandoned in 1937, and the last electric streetcar ran on October 11. The Sentinel reported, “Other than a few stakes and a fire burning on the tracks opposite the Colby College campus the last trolley encountered no hazards on the final trip. These obstacles failed to produce any delay.” The same day, new bus services were inaugurated, although they were considered less reliable and failed to achieve long-term success. In the end, Waterville catered to individual automobiles, and most residents were content with it.

The city did continue to develop, despite the depression and then the Second World War, for which over two thousand citizens enlisted. In 1942, the ten-year-old Waterville Airport took the name of a local star football player and Colby student lost in the war, becoming Robert LaFleur Airport.
World War II, the Jewish population of Waterville grew, leading to the construction of a new, larger Beth Israel Synagogue.\textsuperscript{118} Downtown Waterville remained a popular destination for tourists, accessible by passenger train or automobile. The Bay View, Exchange, and Elmwood Hotels continued to offer their services to visitors, and the shopping and entertainment along Main Street was unbeatable.\textsuperscript{119}

Local opportunities for recreation were abundant. In the Plains, the South End Arena offered a venue for ice hockey games for all sorts of area teams, with an adjacent heated cabin providing a place for socializing and watching the games. In the summer, the arena was open to outdoor boxing matches. In both seasons, the arena launched several careers, including the locally legendary goalie Florian “Biddie” Poulin who tried out for a few NHL teams and Ray Lemieux who made the 1932 U.S. Olympic hockey team. The Kennebec River itself also served as a place to skate and play hockey.\textsuperscript{120} For a while, Waterville also boasted its own rather steep ski slope off of Upper Main Street, with a 400-foot drop in just 1400 feet. In the late 1940s, the rope tow was Maine’s longest, measuring about 1700 feet.\textsuperscript{121}
In 1923 Waterville had gained its first modern hospital, built by the Sisters of Charity on College Avenue. In the 1930s, a group of Waterville doctors opened Thayer Hospital on Main Street, and not long after that, another group of physicians bought an old hospital building on Western Avenue and renovated it into the Waterville Osteopathic Hospital. In 1951, a new Thayer Hospital was built on what is now North Street. Ten years later, the Osteopathic Hospital relocated to a large facility that would much later become Inland Hospital. The Sisters Hospital was last to move and expand, but it too did so, becoming Seton Hospital on a site near Mt. Merici Academy in the mid-1960s.122

A local radio station, WTVL, was launched on the AM airwaves in 1948. Among the favorite programs was a weekly, 15-minute segment hosted by Ernest C. Marriner, a local historian and Colby graduate. Among the items on his resume were services as an English professor, dean of the faculty, dean of men, and historian at Colby College; president of the city’s historical society; and president of the public library. His show, “Little Talks on Common Things,” lasted from 1948 into the beginning of the 1980s, and covered various bits on local history and culture.123
He set a record for the longest running radio show in the nation with the same sponsor: Keyes Fibre Company backed every one of his weekly broadcasts, which in the end numbered over 1700.\textsuperscript{124}

For many years Marriner would also serve as Chairman of the board of trustees for the other college in town, after it became a non-profit institution in the mid-1950s. The school was renamed Thomas Junior College in 1950, and, following in the footsteps of Colby College, it relocated from its downtown building to a new site, in this case a large house and estate on Silver Street in 1956. In 1962 the school’s final name change occurred: upon being granted status as a four-year college able to confer bachelor’s degrees, it came to be known simply as Thomas College.\textsuperscript{125}

Meanwhile, founded in a time when cotton wasn’t processed near where it was grown, the Lockwood Company was facing different circumstances in a new century. New textile plants opening in the southern United States offered cheaper goods and Lockwood could not keep up. In the 1930s the factory had reorganized and cut back on its numbers of spindles and looms, but even so when it closed in the mid-1950s it was a blow to the community.\textsuperscript{126} Sadly, although Lockwood was the first major employer in the community to shut its doors, it would not be the last.

In the same period, the Lombard Factory closed down, but in both cases at least the physical voids were filled by the city’s other industries. Under the new
leadership of Ellerton M. Jetté, the C. F. Hathaway Shirt Company had begun making its clothing line more stylish and now its factory expanded by moving into the number two mill of the Lockwood facility. The rest of the Lockwood space was leased, and in the 1990s was occupied by a Marden’s Salvage and Surplus store and Central Maine Power. The Lombard plant was taken over by its neighbor, the Keyes Fibre Company.

*Main Street in the middle of the 20th century*
URBAN RENEWAL AND BEYOND, 1960-1989

ALWAYS A PROGRESSIVE CITY alert to national trends and paying attention to its own opportunities for innovation, Waterville reshaped itself substantially in the 1960s. Ushering in the new era, the last passenger train left Waterville in 1960.\textsuperscript{128} To take the railway’s place came Interstate 95, passing through the city with two exits into town, one on Oakland Road (soon to be Kennedy Memorial Drive) and the other on Upper Main Street.\textsuperscript{129}

In 1960, the establishment of the Urban Renewal Authority, headed by Paul Mitchell, set Waterville’s urban renewal initiative in motion. Among the many old and historic buildings lost during the process were the Elmwood Hotel, Colby’s Memorial Hall, and the First Congregational Church.\textsuperscript{130} An old YMCA building, built by Timothy Boutelle in 1842, was also among the wreckage. The process of destruction lasted roughly a decade, eliminating old
buildings and substandard residences in an effort to improve the city and traffic flow. Charles Street and the buildings along it were cleared to create the Concourse, a large parking lot and shopping complex next to Main Street. Many buildings along Water Street and in the Head of Falls area were also torn down, including the old Wyandotte Worsted facility at Head of Falls after the company relocated to West River Road in the southern part of the city. The move cleared the industry out of an otherwise mostly residential area. Although many long-neglected buildings were rightfully razed and traffic flow did improve, in the end Urban Renewal left many areas empty, earning the process the nickname “Urban Removal.”

In many ways pure coincidences led to Waterville’s decline. Although one goal of Urban Renewal was to improve the accessibility of downtown Waterville, downtown Waterville was simultaneously losing some of its vitality. The new interstate exits proved to be the hot areas for business development, most of it in the form of suburban chain discount stores that out-competed many downtown businesses. Waterville’s population began to drop, due to a lull in the national economy and a nationwide penchant for more suburban and rural living. Even if people could
still work in Waterville, they began to move elsewhere to live. In 1960, Waterville had a population of 18,695, but by 2000 it would be 15,605. All these factors came in addition to Urban Renewal’s removal of more than a few historic buildings. Thomas College, still increasing its program offerings, began to want a larger space, and in 1971 the college relocated yet again to a new site on West River Road. One final unfortunate circumstance that came in the same decade affected the city’s trees. The “Elm City” steadily began losing its elm trees to Dutch Elm Disease, and before long only a few of the large old trees remained. Just as Waterville was opened up, it began to feel empty.

Nevertheless, as the city was gradually shrinking, a number of individuals in Waterville rose to regional, national, and even international prominence. Three of them essentially began their careers as lawyers of Waterville’s highly respected bar association. The first was a man from Rumford named Edmund S. Muskie, who opened a practice on Main Street in 1940. After World War II he was elected to the Maine House of Representatives, and in 1955 he became governor of Maine and served two terms. Muskie was then elected to the U.S. Senate, serving four terms, and at one point (1968) taking a spot on the Democratic ticket as Hubert Humphrey’s vice-presidential running mate; later he ran in a presidential primary himself. Muskie also served as Secretary of State under President Jimmy Carter.
George J. Mitchell, a Waterville native from an Irish and Lebanese family to whose prominence he would add, became Muskie’s executive assistant in 1962, shortly after finishing law school. Mitchell was appointed to fill Muskie’s Senate seat when Muskie became Secretary of State, and he was elected twice to the post himself. In 1989 Mitchell became Senate Democratic Majority Leader, and served in that post until the end of his term. President Bill Clinton tried to recruit him to the Supreme Court, but Mitchell declined. After finishing his Senate term, in 1995 he became Clinton’s special adviser to Northern Ireland and helped broker the Good Friday Accord between Protestants and Catholics in that country. For these efforts, he received the Presidential Medal of Freedom.\textsuperscript{136}

Beginning his career around the same time as Mitchell was a man from Auburn named Morton A. Brody. Brody opened his practice as a trial lawyer in Waterville in 1961, and throughout his long career in the city and elsewhere he avidly served the community, teaching judicial process at Colby and serving on the board of directors for the local Boys and Girls Club. In 1980, he became a justice of the Superior Court of Maine, serving for five years before becoming chief justice, in which role he served another five years. In 1991, a new seat was added for the U.S. District Court’s District of Maine, and Brody was appointed to the post, in which he served until his death in 2000.\textsuperscript{137}

The most influential businessman in Waterville’s recent history did not originally come from Waterville, nor did he operate his business in the city. At an early age, a son of Russian immigrants and Massachusetts native named Harold Alfond came to Maine, following his father’s work in the shoemaking industry. His first company was established jointly with his father in a vacant shoe factory in Norridgewock in 1940, and three years after its opening he sold it for $1.1
million. The same year, he married Dorothy “Bibby” Levine, the daughter of William Levine who founded the clothing store bearing his family name, and they settled in Waterville. A few years later, Alfond bought a vacant mill in Dexter, about forty miles northeast of Waterville, and opened the Dexter Shoe Company. Dexter Shoe expanded profoundly over the years. While most of the domestic shoe industry went overseas, Dexter Shoe remained in Maine, in no small part thanks to dedicated employees who endured the intense work. In 1993, the company was sold to Berkshire Hathaway, for two percent of the firm’s stock, at that time worth $420 million (in 2005 worth roughly $2.1 billion). Before too long the shoe production was outsourced, but much of the money went to the Alfond Family Foundation, which was established in 1950 and has been a primary agent of philanthropy all over Maine and especially in Waterville. The foundation has given money to the people who lost their jobs when Dexter closed down, and has also given well over $100 million to charities, colleges, schools, and hospitals, almost always in matching grants. Countless buildings in Waterville and central Maine bear the Alfond name, usually meaning the facility is absolutely top-of-the-line. The Alfond Youth Center, which opened in 1998 in Waterville, was the nation’s first combination Boys and Girls Club and YMCA, and has been considered the organization’s biggest and best facility.138
Meanwhile, Waterville was undergoing many changes. The people of the city elected their first female mayor, Ann G. Hill, to serve from 1982 to 1986. She took office in the midst of times of closure and consolidation. In 1969, the four Catholic churches, all operating parochial schools, had consolidated their schools into one, which stayed open until 1973. Later, the Protestant and Catholic hospitals, with declining funding, were forced to consolidate, and Thayer and Seton Hospitals became the Mid-Maine Medical Center. Another consolidation for the city’s Catholic churches came in 1996, when Sacred Heart, Notre Dame, and St. Francis de Sales merged into a single Parish of the Holy Spirit. The three buildings continue to be utilized. A year later, the hospitals were consolidated again, this time the Mid-Maine Medical Center joined with the Augusta General Hospital to become the MaineGeneral Medical Center.
THE END of the twentieth century was accompanied by the closing of many of Waterville’s factories and mills. The Wyandotte Worsted Company had shut its doors in the 1980s. Scott Paper, which had acquired the Hollingsworth and Whitney Mill, cut back its operations in 1993. Two years later, Kimberly-Clark bought the company and continued cutbacks until the plant closed in 1997. The same year, the Cascade textile mill in Oakland closed.

In the late 1960s, the Hathaway Company had been purchased by the Warner Brothers Company, which was later called Warnaco. Facing international competition, the company decided to lower the quality of the shirts to make them less expensive, while retaining the consumer loyalty to the Hathaway brand. In 1996 the company, on the verge of closure, was taken over by a group of local business and government leaders. The factory was kept open, with the shirts returning to their original famed quality, but the competition was too much, and in 2002 the factory closed for good. Colby College and MaineGeneral became the two largest remaining employers in the city.

Downtown Waterville had long been undergoing changes as shoppers had set their sights on the chain stores found by the highway exits or in Augusta’s malls. Sterns department store had closed in the 1980s, as had Dunham’s clothing. Levine’s clothing store closed in 1996 after operating for a hundred years on
Main Street. The department stores that had long been attractions for the whole region had all faded away by the end of the century.

Waterville carried on as always, and some old fixtures remained. The Keyes Fibre Company, self-nicknamed “The Pie Plate Company,” did not share the same fate as Hathaway or the mills. Bought by the Chinet Company in 1994, which in turn was bought by a Finnish corporation called Huhtamaki, the plant continued to operate into the new millennium. Downtown, many of the long-standing stores remained in business, including Berry’s Stationers, L. Tardif Jewelers, and Al Corey’s Music Center. Until his death in 2003, Corey, a local legend and member of the Lebanese community, also led a big band that played at many area gigs, including the city’s Bicentennial Grand Ball, one of the many festivities of the city’s two hundredth birthday celebration in June 2002.

The time of transition surrounding Waterville’s bicentennial was met by the community’s long tradition of pulling together for city improvement. Revitalization efforts were underway everywhere. Since 1973, an organization had taken up caring for the Waterville Opera House, keeping the building in good condition and keeping the venue a major attraction. The Opera House regained its former glory as a movie theater when the Maine International Film Festival was instituted in 1998. In 2005, the Opera House hosted the first screening of the HBO movie “Empire Falls,” which was made in and about the central Maine area.
Theatrical productions have also remained popular: in 2006, the local production of the musical “Chicago” sold out. Other downtown efforts included transforming the Sterns building into a non-profit Waterville Regional Arts and Community Center, which opened in 1996, funded in large part by the city’s colleges and hospitals. Waterville Main Street, funded by a statewide downtown restoration initiative, was organized to help downtown businesses and promote cultural events to attract people to downtown Waterville. The city also worked on beautification projects, including a redesign of the controversial Concourse parking lot.

Simultaneously, the city underwent a reawakening of interest in its multicultural history. The Kennebec Valley Franco-American Society was formed and put together the “Museum in the Streets,” a set of historic markers and interpretive information about Waterville’s Franco-American heritage along Main and Water Street. Following suit, a Lebanese-American community organization initiated a project of a downtown mural to pay tribute to their past.

New industries and commercial areas also were coming into Waterville’s picture, moving away from manufacturing to focus increasingly on services and creative activity. The shopping centers by the freeway exits continued to expand. An L.L. Bean call center opened in a shopping center on Kennedy Memorial Drive. Other development was collaborative with other communities in the region: Waterville was the biggest member of a 24-town consortium that
established the FirstPark campus, offering space in Oakland for high-tech industries and businesses.\textsuperscript{151}

The city government itself forged on, adopting a new charter in 2005 to distribute power more evenly among the city council, city manager, and mayor. The city renovated and expanded the Central Fire Station and also replaced an old municipal swimming pool next to the Alfond Youth Center.

As the 21\textsuperscript{st} century took hold, plans continued for new developments to fill in the empty spaces left from urban renewal and closed factories. The plans marked a return to the Kennebec River as a center of the community, no longer for industrial purposes but for aesthetic value. A private developer began to remodel the old Lockwood facilities, transforming them into the Hathaway Creative Center, a multi-use complex for stores, apartments, and studios aimed at local artists. Plans were set in motion to develop a park and amphitheater in the long-cleared Head of Falls riverfront property where the Wyandotte Mill once stood, and the city completed an ambitious infrastructure improvement to allow for future residential and commercial development at this site.\textsuperscript{152}
LOOKING AHEAD

IN HIS Centennial History of Waterville, E. C. Whittemore predicted that the communities of Waterville, Winslow, and Oakland would soon reunite and share in collective development and vision. Over a hundred years have passed since Whittemore made his prediction, and, despite the existence of good bridges and roads, it is unlikely the boundary lines will be erased in the near future. However, as the 21st century begins, development projects and municipal services are indeed increasingly being shared between the communities. Waterville and Winslow have one fire chief, and all three communities share the Oakland garbage transfer station. Along with Fairfield, the communities also share one economic development office, the Central Maine Growth Council.

Throughout the history of Waterville and its neighbors, the communities have collaborated and shared each other’s resources, and as the communities try to pull themselves out of hard times they especially lean on one another. Waterville is the urban hub for its surrounding towns and countryside, but ultimately the area is all one large community with a common future.

It is difficult to predict the future of Waterville, however tempting it is to try. The Lockwood mill complex was for a long time the anchor of the city’s economic boom. When it left, Hathaway filled in the physical space and in turn served as an anchor for the city. At present, the Lockwood/Hathaway facility sits empty, but soon it will become the multi-use Hathaway Creative Center. Time will tell, but the complex may once more be an anchor, fostering a creative economy and offering Waterville a new foundation and sense of direction for the years to come.
Whatever the case, Waterville will survive and improve, in ways that are quite possibly unforeseeable. The citizens have a tradition of banding together for the good of the city, and in the end they will always get what they strive for. Waterville, though over two hundred years old, is still youthful and dynamic. The city is alive and well, and will continue to be so for many years to come.

*Main Street in early 2007*
NOTES


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Photos: Alfond Youth Center, Thayer Hospital, Museum in the Streets, and Main Street (2007) taken by the author. All others appear courtesy of the Waterville Historical Society.