

# *The Hamden Historical Society*

## *Newsletter Spring 2023*



### HHS Update

I say nothing new when I say that the past few years have been difficult. That includes Covid and all of its variants, not to mention the social, economic and technological effects of pandemic. For a local historical organization like the Hamden Historical Society, such conditions, preceded by the infamous tornado of 2018, have been a trial. We've not been able to do many public events for nearly five years. However, after many storm-related repairs, the Dickerman House opened up last summer, and will be open again this July. Also, we will reinstate our annual meeting on May 18, 2023, in Miller Library, so we invite members old and new, and anyone who is interested, to attend and hear a presentation by our own Eric Lehman, as well as to conduct the Society's business--and simply have some fellowship. The Al Gorman History Room in Miller Library is available as well for in-person visits on Tuesdays from 10:00 a.m.-2:00 p.m. For further information, go to the Society's webpage, [hamdenhistoricalsociety.org](http://hamdenhistoricalsociety.org).

-Ken Minkema, President

### Hamden Profiles: William Henry Singleton

William Singleton began his life as a slave in North Carolina, but during the Civil War ran away to do his part fighting the Confederacy. He even met with Lincoln in order to convince him to let him and other former slaves fight for the Union. When Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, Singleton joined the Thirty-fifth U.S. Infantry, fought bravely, and commanded sixty of his troops in Lincoln's funeral procession. After the war, he moved north to Hamden and finally had the time to satisfy one of his life goals: to learn to read. It took this extraordinary American only one month to do so. He died in 1938, but not before writing a book entitled *Recollections of My Slavery Days*.



Singleton in old age

The Web Shop (1876-1940)  
By David G. Johnson, Hamden Municipal Historian

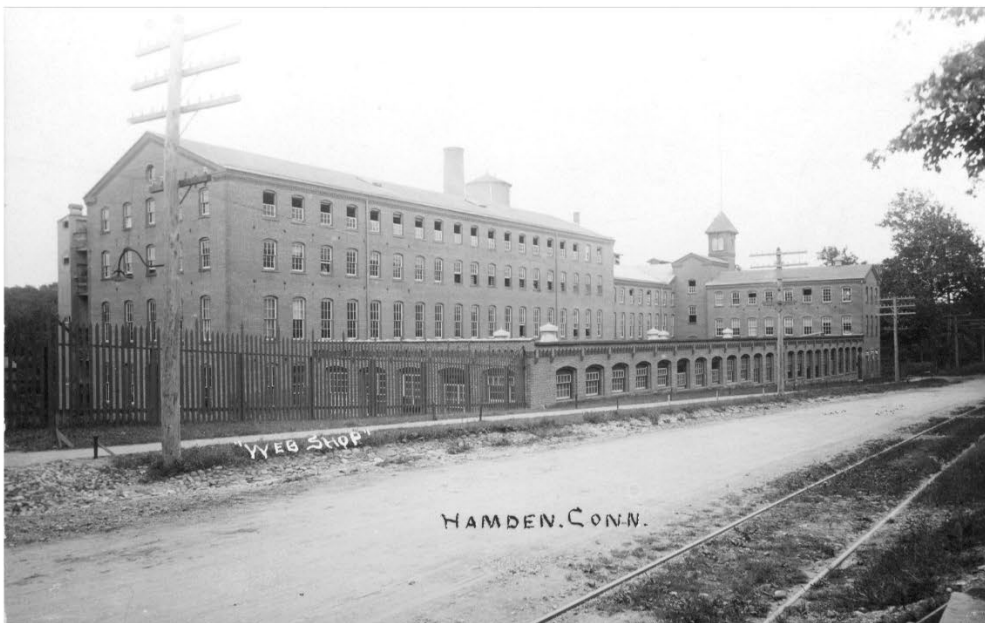
The Web Shop, once our town's largest employer, was among many 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hamden industries, along with Mt. Carmel's upper and lower axle works, the Woodruff Factory, Whitneyville's Augur Shop and, of course, the Eli Whitney Arms Factory, among others. Located on the east side of Whitney Avenue in Centerville, right where the Wilbur Cross Parkway crosses today, the Web Shop was a massive brick factory of typical mill construction.

In September 1875, decades before Hamden had any organized firefighting forces, several wood framed buildings of the New Haven Web Company along Mill River in Centerville were destroyed by fire. According to William Blake's *A History of Hamden - 1786-1886*, following the fire the company immediately began rebuilding. The result was an impressive three-and-a-half story brick structure completed only four months later. Over the next several decades, numerous additions and alterations were made to the sprawling complex, which eventually totaled 18 buildings. Often mistakenly called the "Webb Shop," apparently because it was believed by some to have been connected to James Webb, who developed Spring Glen in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was actually a manufacturing facility for webbing.

In the early 1900s, Thomas Doherty came to Hamden from Taunton, Massachusetts, to work at the Web Shop. His 86-year-old grandson and namesake, retired Hamden Fire Department battalion chief Tom Doherty, says that while working there his grandfather developed a permanent dyeing process, the patents for which were owned by the company.

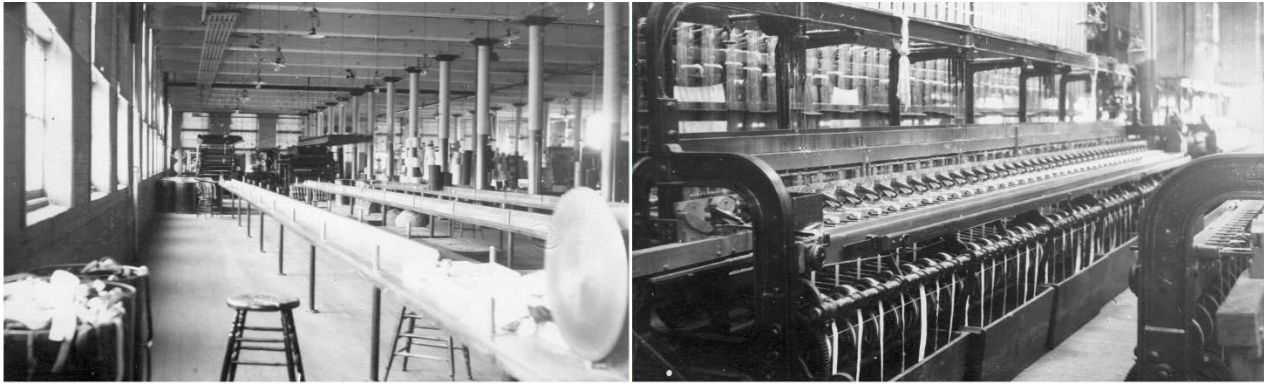
In her *History of Hamden, Connecticut - 1786-1938*, historian Rachel Hartley wrote that the American Mills Company of Waterbury purchased the complex in the early twentieth century, where they manufactured cartridge and machine-gun belts and gas mask straps for the U.S. Army during World War I.

Sadly, operations at the Web Shop shut down by the mid-1930s, another victim of the Great Depression. Hoping to attract potential buyers, the Hamden Chamber of Commerce printed an elaborate brochure in 1937 touting the massive complex's many manufacturing possibilities. However, two years later the state of Connecticut took possession of the site under Public Domain for the planned route of what became the Wilbur Cross Parkway. Hamden's 1940 annual town report states that a demolition permit was finally issued for the complex in August that year. Just how soon thereafter the demolition actually took place isn't recorded.



Photograph of the Web Factory, n.d. Collections of the Hamden Historical Society.





Web Factory, interior photos. Courtesy of Joe Taylor.

*For more articles on Hamden's history, and information on how to become a member, go to  
[hamdenhistoricalsociety.org](http://hamdenhistoricalsociety.org)*

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