

# The MONTEBELLO Voice

an independent gazette

homecoming

July 28, 2022



*Beautifully remodeled Community Center welcomes residents*

# Don't mess with *The Times*

By *Mikhailina Karina*

*The Times'* younger, colorful, rule-flouting, irreverent younger sister here.

I support the age-old practice of distributing paper copies of *The Times of Montebello* under residents' doors. In the last edition of *The Times* (below), the staff wrote that management would like to place printed copies in display racks on each floor. Presumably, the goal is to save on housekeeping staff time, the physical strain of slipping a newsletter under the door, as well as the ability of most residents to read electronic copies on their devices. The annual cost of printing *The Times* is \$15,000, which is 0.15 percent of the \$10.2 million operating budget. While it's a drop in the proverbial bucket, it's a fact that a drop here and there add up until a cup runneth over.

Every few years, this issue is brought up as a cost-saving measure. Old-timers undoubtedly recall the avalanche of notices slipped under our doors several times a week. Now we get electronic notices about lawn care and upcoming

events. The café is the final holdout for using housekeeping to deliver menus for special occasions such as Mother's Day Brunch.

While I understand both sides of the argument, I tilt toward *The Times*. It may seem ironic that I publish the *Voice* as an online gazette and support an old-fashioned format. In my defense, the *Voice* is not printed because it has no funding. My only expense is \$10 a year for the domain name.

As a fellow community newspaper journalist, I appreciate our volunteers working together to create a publication that informs residents about governance, finances, and events. Full disclosure: before starting the *Voice* six years ago, I spent two years with *The Times* as the writer of Our Neighbors features and occasional news stories. I have a lot of respect for the small group of dedicated volunteers who agonize over every punctuation mark and send out proof copies to multiple editors and sources.

I have not researched statistics about reading online versus on paper, but if you've ever walked in our hallways,

## voices on the 37

you've seen numerous editions of *The Washington Post* on residents' thresholds. At the mailboxes, we simultaneously receive our AARP magazines. Sure, we could read them online – but would we? When something is printed and we're holding it in our hands, it's a different level of sensory and intellectual engagement. When the online *Times* arrives in my inbox, I give it a quick read and never look at it again; however, the paper copy stays on the coffee table for a few weeks and I skim it several more times before taking it to recycling.

In an era when print journalism is slowly disappearing, we need to protect our official news source that reliably arrives under under doors on the last day of the month. Please send your emails of support to *The Times* at [times@montebello.org](mailto:times@montebello.org) or to the management. 📧

*Cover photos by Dian McDonald and Scott Compton*

**The** **MONTEBELLO** **Voice**

an independent gazette  
Alexandria, Virginia

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***Editor's note: Management proposes that The Times no longer be distributed under residents' doors. Instead, they want to place the newsletters in a display rack in the lobbies and on each floor's alcove by the freight elevator.***

***The Times asked Management not to make any changes until we hear from residents. The editorial board and staff do not endorse this proposed change for residents who wish to continue receiving it under their doors. If some residents do not want the newsletter under their door, they can opt out, just as has been allowed for other under-the-door notices.***

***\*\*\*This is very important.\*\*\* Please email The Times at [times@montebello.org](mailto:times@montebello.org). Let us know your thoughts on this before any change is made. Thank you.***

***The QI (Quality Improvement) Committee may also formulate a survey on this concern.***

## Music Club is making a comeback

By Carol Coyle

The pandemic may have slowed the Montebello Music Club down, but music is always there. In anticipation of a return to “normal,” whatever that is in this day and age, the MMC has been meeting and planning to bring back the sounds of music to the community, something we all need.

With the membership in flux due to personnel losses and conflicting individual priorities, the MMC is recruiting new members as well as planning an exciting program of fall concerts and community events. President Jane White hopes that new residents who

have not had the opportunity to sing will see this as an opportunity to “join the chorus.” Additionally, it is a fun way to make new friends while showcasing your vocal talents in places other than the shower.

The MMC will return to hosting musical events on Sunday afternoons in the Community Center, featuring local artists whose talents have consistently entertained the community in the past.

On Sunday, September 11, we will present a program of patriotic music, which will include a sing-along, to commemorate a tragic event in our nation’s history.

Other plans include our annual

## welcome to the clubs

Christmas Bazaar on the Saturday before Thanksgiving, a great time to sell or purchase one-of-a-kind gifts for the coming holidays.

The MMC will again sell the iconic White House Christmas ornaments for less than the normal commercial price. We will let you know who the building representatives are so that orders can be placed early to avoid disappointment when our inventory is sold out. That usually happens each year even though we always increase the quantity available.

Join us! Contact the MMC at [carol-coyle@cox.net](mailto:carol-coyle@cox.net). 📧

## Spanish Club: how other cultures inform us

By Christine Winter

Residents of Montebello appear to be persons of diverse cultural backgrounds, compared to other places I’ve lived, plus so very many have traveled to multiple countries. They bring such a richness to our lives when they share their experiences in our social groups. My experience in the Spanish Club has produced some amusements recently, which should be shared.

We were discussing the words in the U.S. for persons who are aging, such as “elderly.” In Mexico, there is a term called *Tercera Edad*, literally Third Age. That sounds nice! At other times, the elderly might be referred to as *adultos en plenitud*, meaning fully grown adults. Okay, I’m good with that too. In the past, the elderly were referred to as *ancianos*, literally ancients, but that term is now viewed as an insult. Well, I should say so!

Your elderly aunt (or your elderly self) might be called old, *viejo* or *vieja*, but it is much more affectionate to say instead, *viejito*, *viejeta*, little or dear old one. Similarly, it would be a term of affection to call your mother, or other people’s mothers, or any older woman Mamita. Your pet, *mascota*, in Spanish,

might be called *perrita*, for little female dog. Your son Carlos, is called Carlitos. So you see how it is so similar to our Charles and Charlie.

Here’s another U.S. idiom with a comparable Spanish equivalent: If we are being ignored in a conversation, we might say, What am I, chopped liver? In Mexico, *Y yo, que soy? Un florero?* means, What am I, a flower vase?

We have discussed bilingual education in the United States, and our knowledge of the history of immigrant groups becoming acculturated in the past. Our member, George Vargas, said, “To learn the language of another country, you must have the necessity, the capacity, and the curiosity.” Certainly our club has the curiosity!

For more information, contact Lorena Aceff Coorsh at [spanishclubmonte@gmail.com](mailto:spanishclubmonte@gmail.com). 📧

## Let’s get physical

Montebello’s famous Stretchnastics class is back starting next Monday. Join your neighbors for a fun fitness class that focuses on flexibility, balance, strength and light cardio. All abilities are welcome. Exercise mats provided.

The class, which is free of charge and led by Montebello exercise enthu-



## Strikes and spares

After what seemed to be an interminable delay due to Covid and renovation, I am pleased to announce that the Montebello Bowling Leagues are ready to start again right after Labor Day. There are leagues on Monday and Wednesday nights. Residents are welcome to join either or both. Both leagues start at 7 p.m. and are co-ed. No experience is necessary! Balls and fashionable bowling shoes are provided. All you need to bring is a smile. Regular and substitute bowlers are needed to complete the four teams each night. Need more info? Reach out to League President, Mark Woods at 703-498-0143 or [mjddwoods@earthlink.net](mailto:mjddwoods@earthlink.net). 📧

siasts, meets on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 9 to 10 a.m. in the refurbished lower level of Community Center.

For weekend warriors, another free exercise class with some resistance training and cardio will be available on Saturday mornings at 9. 📧

## Beltway Cleaning Services staffs housekeeping in the Community Center

By *Mikhailina Karina*

An outsourced housekeeping service for the refurbished Community Center began working on July 15. General Manager Eric Finke signed the contract with Beltway Cleaning Services, shown on page 22 of the board packet at [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YdHTr6Q-SSz8Z7Z-rUPbnstr\\_jUNKjxOB/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YdHTr6Q-SSz8Z7Z-rUPbnstr_jUNKjxOB/view).

“So far I am satisfied with the results,” GM Finke said at the Board of Directors work session. “Little bugs” about cleaning have been worked out with supervision from Spencer [Hirai]. “We’re off to a reasonably good start,” Board President Jon Kandel concurred.

According to the contract, BCS will provide 96 hours of cleaning services seven days a week at a cost of \$7,695 per month through December 31, 2022 and \$8,225 per month January 1 through December 31, 2023. If Montebello is happy with the level of service in the Community Center, the plan is to eventually outsource housekeeping in all four towers as current housekeepers retire.

“Montebello has a reputation of taking care of its employees with benefits,” Director Heather Click said. She asked GM Finke whether BCS provided its employees with health insurance, vacation, and sick days.

Beltway does not have health insurance for its hourly workers, GM Finke responded. It’s up to Montebello to give them sick days.

He added that outsourcing savings take care of HR headaches. As far as salaries and benefits, BCS policies are in step with the cleaning

services industry.

Director Click said she wanted to be sure that Montebello’s standards are not eroded in the name of savings and she hopes the contract provides us with what we need.

According to GM Finke, Montebello’s housekeeping staff salaries start at \$16 an hour with additional \$3-\$5 in benefits. BCS pays its janitorial employees, such as those working at Montebello, \$12 an hour without benefits. Montebello pays BCS \$18.50 an hour for its staff. Virginia’s minimum wage is \$11 an hour; Maryland’s is \$12.50; and \$16.50 in the District.

How much does a person earn in one year working full-time for \$12 an hour? Before taxes, it’s \$24,960; after is \$18,720. In Fairfax County, median individual income is \$52,708; household is \$127,866.

About five years ago, residents at an unusually crowded board meeting discussed suggestions for cost-saving measures and salaries came up as one of the largest annual expenditures. A surprising nugget of information was that Montebello is one of a handful of local condos that pays full benefits to its hourly employees – professional and office staff receiving full benefits was not mentioned because it’s a given that these jobs includes health insurance, vacation, and sick days. No one mentioned reducing those expenses. Residents then and now fall into two camps about benefits for hourly workers.

Director Tom Harrelson did not see a problem with BCS compensation. He said it wasn’t up to us to tell a company what it can do with the people it employs.

President Kandel said Montebel-



lo has a culture of social conscience and should do business with companies that treat their employees well. He suggested that Montebello provide BCS employees with sick days.

Salaries and personnel matters are generally off-limits to the residents and are discussed by the board in closed executive sessions. However, Montebello prides itself on a strong sense of community (some would say busy-bodyness) and cordial relationships with dozens of staff members who care for the buildings, service the units, and deftly handle bureaucracy in the office. Therefore, it’s normal for the residents to poke their noses into personnel matters and advocate for the employees without whom Montebello would not be Montebello.

While it may be indelicate, intrusive, and downright rude to talk about salaries, living in an HOA is a different case. Each year, condo owners pay thousands of dollars in ever-increasing association fees. As stakeholders, they feel entitled to transparency and accountability from the elected board and the management that serves at board’s pleasure. Condo fees pay management and staff salaries, as well as for the elegant new Community Center, the new dog run, and every other well-maintained amenity. Openly and respectfully discussing these issues in a public forum sends the owners a message that their opinions in the matters of governance matter. 🏠

## beauty shop

### Hazel O. Salon opens its doors

By *Mikhailina Karina*

After 20 years of haircuts, perms, color jobs, curlers, cap and foil highlights, hairsprays, and sitting under dryers, Hair Expressions' beloved sisters Sonia (who passed away several years ago) and Genie left their loyal clientele in search of new stylists. Many took their business down the street to the affordable Hair Cuttery; others patronized more upscale salons with specialized services. The pandemic left even the best groomed uncharacteristically hirsute with long, gray ponytails or wild manes.

The reopening of the Community Center welcomed a new full-service, highly lauded Old Town salon, Hazel O. [www.hazelosalon.com](http://www.hazelosalon.com) No sooner they opened doors to elegant forest green and gold interiors, questions, complaints, and compliments poured in.

Tuesday night's Board of Directors work session, which included the salon's contract in the board packet, ([https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Y-dHTr6Q-SSz8Z7ZrUPbnstr\\_jUNK-jxOB/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Y-dHTr6Q-SSz8Z7ZrUPbnstr_jUNK-jxOB/view)) worked through some of the issues about how Hazel O. was chosen, off-site clientele coming to Montebello, prices, and rent. At the end of the evening, the directors agreed that everyone wants Hazel O. to succeed while providing the residents a desirable amenity.

Director Bruce Shaw wondered about non-Montebello clients using the salon, something that was not done by Hair Expressions.

General Manager Eric Finke responded that the contract had been reviewed and cleared by Montebello's legal counsel and insurer. He said Nikita Rhodes Montgomery, co-founder and managing partner, would allow off-site clients in case they can't get to the Old Town location or need a specific stylist. Montebello residents would get priori-

ty. Allowing Rhodes Montgomery see outside clients would help her keep the business viable. It would not be public access to the property, but by appointment and via BuildingLink temporary admit.

"I am in favor of allowing outside customers," said Director Heather Click. "I want her to succeed." Another benefit, she said, would be exposing potential buyers to Montebello.

Director Jack Quick brought up some concerns he'd heard about salon's prices, which are markedly higher than what Hair Expressions charged.

Board President Jon Kandel agreed that "cheap, plain haircut" costs seem out of line, but he said the pricing will work itself out.

"We can't dictate prices," Director



*Co-founder and managing partner Nikki Rhodes Montgomery (center) with stylists Diana and Madison*

*Photo by Page Dreher*

Quick said. "We're glad that she's here and it's a great amenity."

When asked how Hazel O. was selected, Board President Kandel said Rhodes Montgomery was the only salon owner who agreed to open shop at Montebello. GM Finke added that a nearby beauty school was also approached for potential providers. "No takers," he said.

For the next five years, Hazel O. will pay \$900 a month, which includes trash collection, extermination services, and electricity. If the contract is continued, it would go up to \$1,300.

To book an appointment, go to <https://squareup.com/appointments/book/j4c0r3t5kvfuk3/412SAEQTGD1MK/services>.

Based on comments from the lively Montebello Facebook page, residents are happy to have the salon; some find the prices high and others say they're in line with better local salons. Those who've been to Hazel O. so far are pleased with their service. 🍷

H A Z E L O.  
*salon*  
at Montebello

Women's Cuts \$75 - 90  
Men's Cuts \$55  
Dry Curly Cut \$100  
Curly Cut w/Styling \$150  
Single Process Color \$125  
Gloss/Toner \$85  
Partial Highlight \$155  
Full Highlight \$265  
Blonde Root Touch Up \$135  
Blowout \$65  
Curly Wash & Style \$150  
Silk Press \$100  
Treatments \$50-75  
Relaxer \$80-150  
Balayage \$270  
Double Process \$250

# Truth. Evil. Forgiveness.

By Chester Taylor

It is hard to sit passively by and not speak up on what we are witnessing. Three words come to mind: truth, evil, and forgiveness.

The truth is in accordance with fact or reality. It is very powerful and precious. We just witnessed examples of this in the honest testimony of a few men (William Barr, Pat Cipollone, and Nicholas Luna) and a couple of brave women (Cassidy Hutchinson and Sarah Matthews) describing the events leading up to the January 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol before the House Select Committee Hearing.

Many people can't deal with the truth. Many are in denial. They find it easier to tell and believe in big lies:

“Ninety-nine percent of Covid-19 cases are totally harmless.”

“Climate change is a hoax.”

“We had an election that was stolen from us. It was a landslide election, and everyone knows it.”

Most embarrassing was the testimony of a retired U.S. Army General, Mike Flynn, who advocated for a military coup in the United States to overthrow President Biden and took the Fifth when asked if he believes in a peaceful transfer of power. President Donald Trump granted a full pardon to Flynn, who twice pleaded guilty to lying to the FBI.

An evil person is profoundly immoral and wicked. Vladimir Putin is evil. He is an insane dictator who is threatening nuclear war against the entire West and the free world. His war crimes have already killed over 10,000 Ukrainians, caused 12 million of them to displace, and destroyed over 98 billion dollars' worth of Ukrainian infrastructure. Putin plans to cut off oil and gas to Europe before this winter, and now his loyalists want to call him the Supreme Leader. Other dictators and governments will be emboldened to follow in evil's foot-

steps. If Ukraine loses, the world loses. Democracy loses.

Forgiveness? Can we stop feeling angry or resentful towards evil people? Ones that murder thousands of innocents and little children. The events in Ukraine are horrific. Here at home, the images of 19 school children between the ages of 5 and 11 and two teachers who were murdered are haunting. Forgiveness implies repentance and restitution. I doubt that evil people have any remorse and will never repent or make restitution. Somethings should never be forgiven.

The truth is that over one million died in the United States from COVID-19, most without a vaccine. Another 1.1 million people would have died and 70.3 million would have had to been

hospitalized without the vaccine. The truth is we are about 25 years behind in reducing our greenhouse emissions goal by 20 percent. Inaction by Congress the past six years and exiting the Paris Climate Agreement during that period, will make it harder to reduce emissions to prevent catastrophic climate change. The truth is that the desperate, violent attempts to stop the peaceful transfer of power, nearly put the United States in the same category as many politically unstable banana republics. Finally, the truth is what Putin has done to Ukraine is evil. What crazed punks have done, shooting our babies with assault rifles, is evil. These acts by liars, traitors, and murderers are unforgivable. We must speak out and act. We can do better in America. 🇺🇸



Photo by Dian McDonald

# Jane Long, the Mother of Texas

By Chester Taylor

When I was a boy, I was raised in Richmond, Texas, named after Richmond, Virginia. That was because many of the first colonists that came to Texas were 300 families from Virginia. They were referred to as the Old 300 and were led by Stephen F. Austin. They wanted things to be just like in Virginia. So, many of the older houses in my small hometown looked like Mary Washington's house in Fredericksburg. White picket fences, walkways made of crushed oyster shells, pea gravel, or brick. Each yard was landscaped with daffodils, irises, and daylilies. There were herb gardens with chives, dill, rosemary, and thyme. In longer rows alongside the herbs were onions, tomatoes, English peas, and okra. There were large live oak trees that provided shade for the sandy lanes that were later covered in asphalt. Separate cooking houses remained but served as storage sheds, and stables that had once kept horses and coaches were made into garages.

The Brazos River was within walking distance of my house. As kids we played there on the sandbars, fished for catfish, and made rafts to float across the river. In the fall we gathered up pecans and in early spring enjoyed the fields of beautiful blue bonnets and Indian paintbrushes. When school started, we ordered our clothes from the Sears and Roebuck catalogue. I got jeans with reinforced knees, cotton shirts, and tennis shoes.

Like most kids in this mostly agrarian town, we walked or rode our bikes to schools. The name of my school was Jane Long Elementary. It wasn't until a field trip with the Cub Scouts to our local graveyard, Morton Cemetery, that I understood the significance of the name. The ladies, who were our den leaders, gave us the history of who this lady Jane Long was, the Mother of

Texas. What an incredible story about an incredible woman.

Jane was born in Charles County, Maryland, on July 23, 1798. Her name then was Jane Wilkerson. Her father, Captain James Wilkerson, a wealthy plantation owner, died a year later. In 1811, Jane's mother, Anne Wilkerson, decided to move to Washington, Mississippi Territory. The following year, Jane's mother died. Jane went to live



with her older sister near Natchez on the Mississippi River. There she met Dr. James Long, a physician. He had served as a surgeon under Gen. Andrew Jackson in the Battle of New Orleans. Jane married James. She was 16. A year later they had a daughter.

Even though James had purchased a profitable cotton plantation near Vicksburg, he dreamed of the Texas frontier. He was chosen and lead an expedition to Nacogdoches, Texas. Jane was expecting another child and was left behind. Twelve days after giving birth, she set out to join her husband with her two daughters and a 10-year-old enslaved girl, Kian. Unfortunately, the expedition failed. Her husband remained in Texas, but Jane with her daughters and Kian returned to Natchez. Tragi-

cally, Jane's baby daughter died.

When it was again safe, Jane returned to Texas. It was 1820. Her husband had established a headquarters at Fort Las Casas on a peninsula opposite Galveston Island. It was there that James and Jane allegedly dined with the "dread Jewish pirate," Jean Laffite\*, who with his men operated in the Gulf of Mexico spying for the Spanish in the Mexican War of Independence. This was the same Laffite who helped Andrew Jackson defend New Orleans from the British in the War of 1812 and won legal pardons for himself and his men.

It was in September of 1821, that James left Fort Las Casas on another excursion. Jane was expecting another child and stayed behind at the fort. She vowed to remain there until James returned. Unbeknownst to her, James was captured and killed in Mexico City. As supplies ran out in the fort, the other inhabitants left. Jane, who was pregnant, was alone with her 6-year-old daughter, and Kian, now 12 years old. Then on December 21 in an ice-covered tent, Jane gave birth to Mary James Long. They were surviving on the little remaining cornmeal and salted fish. They were able to collect oysters from the bay. To keep nearby Karankawa Indians away, Jane developed a deception plan to make it appear that soldiers remained at the fort. One measure she took was to run a flag up over the fort each morning. Since her husband had taken the fort's flag, Jane substituted her red petticoat that was flown on the flagpole each day. That winter had been an unusually severe one. Finally, in March, Jane received the news that her husband was killed and was persuaded to leave.

Remarkably, Jane, now 25 years old, with her determined character, bounced back. In 1822, she and her family moved first to San Antonio. She left for a while and returned shortly with Stephen F. Austin and the other 300 families from Virginia. She ran a



for social and political activities pertaining to Texas independence.

Jane was a very independent woman for the times. She was one of very few women who owned a vast amount of land, grew cotton, and raised cattle. She had owned and operated three boarding houses. She made her own dresses from cotton that had been grown, spun, woven, and dyed on her own farm. She smoked a pipe with home-grown tobacco. She had been orphaned at age 14 and a widow at age 24. While she had many admirers, she rejected all offers of matrimony. She died a widow of James Long on December 30, 1880 at the age of 82. Her simple gravestone was inscribed “Mrs. Jane H. Long, The Mother of Texas.”



boarding house in San Felipe de Austin (now just San Felipe), an important commercial center. According to Texas historical accounts, “During the Texas War for Independence, Jane Long held rallies at her boarding house, stored arms and munitions, and worked to collect information from Mexican officers. By this time, Mexico controlled Texas. She played an important role in the fight for Texas Independence. Like the rest of the residents of San Felipe de Austin, she was forced to flee the area during the Runaway Scrape: General Sam Houston’s army retreated through the town after the Alamo fell, all of the residents were ordered to evacuate, and the town was destroyed to keep it from falling into the hands of the Mexican army.”

In 1824, she received land in Fort Bend County and in Waller County from Stephen F. Austin. She sold a portion of her Fort Bend County land to Robert E. Handy, who later developed the town of Richmond. In addition to her ranching and farming endeavors, Jane opened and operated two boarding houses. The first in Brazoria in 1832. And the second in Richmond in 1837. Both served as gathering places

*\* Lafitte claims to have been born in Bordeaux, France, in 1780, the child of Sephardic Jewish parents whose converso grandmother and mother fled from Spain to France in 1765 after his maternal grandfather was executed by the Inquisition for Judaizing.*



Photo by Dian McDonald



## A company town

By Bob Shea

Close your eyes and imagine a company town. You will probably think of a small coal mining town in an Appalachian valley where miners in bib overalls, lunch buckets in hand, trudged out to dig and load coal all day in dark and dangerous mines. Perhaps you recall Tennessee Ernie Ford's song about loading 16 tons and "owing my soul to the company store." All accurate and part of Americana, but there were other company towns, even company cities.

Manchester, New Hampshire, was such a company city during much of the last century. It was a city with a population of 70,000 in the 1920 census, where over 17,000 of its citizens worked for one company. That is over 24 percent, or one in four of the people who lived in the city.

That is even more startling when one recognizes that some of the census-counted inhabitants were either children or people too old to be employed in addition to non-working students and the hundreds of its citizens who worked in supporting businesses such as retail stores and restaurants, municipal workers, transportation staff, or in the small but viable local shoe manufacturing industry.

Manchester was a company town with one overarching company, the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company (pronounced AMMOS'keeg), a Pennacook Native-American word meaning "place of small fish"). Maybe the fish were small, but the looms were huge. It

was purely and simply a textile mill city.

The company began in 1810, well before the city was incorporated in 1846. It used water power from the falls of the Merrimack River to power its early looms. With waves of immigrants from Europe and especially thousands from nearby French-speaking Canada, the company grew until the mills and Manchester were synonymous. Its founders envisioned a Manchester of America, patterned after its namesake in England. The owners wanted a utopian factory city.



The mill owners played an integral role in the early city, planning the layout of downtown just three blocks east of the mill buildings with its wide main street running parallel to the mill. The company donated land for parks, municipal buildings, firehouses, and even churches with deed stipulations that exist to this day that should the land usage ever change, the title of the land reverted to the company or its holding companies. It was generous to Manchester but very self-serving.

The company eventually built 30 high-ceilinged brick mills, each either 4 or 5 stories tall, on both sides of the

Merrimack River. The mill buildings had almost 6,000,000 square feet of industrial space with the mill yard" covering almost 160 acres in the city center. The biggest was Mill Number 11, called the Merrimack Mill, 900 feet long and 105 feet wide, five stories tall with over 4,000 looms in it.

At its peak, the Amoskeag mills collectively wove over 50 miles of cloth every hour, 18 hours a day, 6 days each week – 5,400 miles of cloth every week. That is enough, each week, for a ribbon of cloth stretching from Washington, D.C. to Los Angeles and back.

The looms were so noisy that workers had to shout into each other's ears to communicate, with loss of hearing an occupational hazard in addition to lung problems from breathing cotton dust.

Growing up in a non-textile mill family, and even well after the mills had closed, one of the worst pejoratives, non-racial or ethnic, one would hear was

to refer to someone as a "loom fixer." Why that word, with a negative meaning for some citizens lingered long after there were no more such jobs would be an interesting study. Possibly it was a carry-over from the days when being a mill worker provided an economic stability that others did not always enjoy, a long-term occupational jealousy?

In the three blocks between Elm Street, the wide retail main street, and the mills was "the corporation." These were hundreds of company-owned brick row houses that housed many of the skilled employees, plus low- and mid-level managers who could walk to

work. The company's philosophy was defined as "benevolent and paternalistic," but a family's occupancy of corporation housing depended on one's continued employment as did the availability of company medical clinics and other benefits. The company-owned housing was not available to non-English speakers, leaving these workers to rent in privately-owned multi-storied wooden tenements, or slums, usually a long walk or a streetcar ride to the

mills paid its workers on Thursday of each week, and all downtown stores stayed open until 9 p.m. on Thursday. That custom remained, despite the mills no longer existing, well into the 1960s when suburban malls, with unlimited hours and 7-day business weeks, decimated the Elm Street downtown retail area.

It is also interesting to note that in an era when New England abolitionists were vocal and strident, the Amoskeag

comprised almost 35 percent of the workforce. Often entire families worked in the mills – husbands, wives, grandparents, and children of all ages. In 1911, the law was changed to mandate that one had to be at least 13 years old to work in the Amoskeag mills, and the work week was reduced to 48 hours. Historical documents suggest that a false birth certificate could be easily



mill yard. It was, at the time, the largest concentration of company-owned employee housing in North America.

Unlike some other corporations, Amoskeag Manufacturing Company never opened company stores or a company-connected bank. They nevertheless owned the city and its citizens simply by employing large numbers of them.

The corporate executives created what was locally called The North End. It was where palatial homes were built well away from the more plebeian downtown blue-collar city center. The North End was an island of wealth and privilege where few people went except those who lived there and those who worked as domestic staff.

During an era when most retail businesses closed at 6 p.m., Amoskeag also impacted local business hours. The

Mills did not hesitate to weave fabric from cotton that was produced by Southern enslaved people. Available bales of cotton were more important than troublesome and contentious social issues. Slavery was someone else's problem.

During the Civil War when Southern cotton was not as readily available, the company adapted. It launched a subsidiary that manufactured steam locomotives, steam fire engines, and firearms for the Union Army in addition to limited weaving, using vast stores of cotton that had been accumulated and stored in anticipation of the war. After the war, the company-wide weaving of cotton resumed with continued growth and expansion.

Until 1911, the standard work week at Amoskeag was 54 hours with no restrictions on using child labor. Women

obtained from city agencies and even churches. Thus enforcement of minimum age employment was lax at best.

The high point in production was during World War I when peak employment topped 17,000. After the Armistice, competition from Southern mills and changes in demand for varieties of popular cloth began to hurt the mills. As Southern mills opened and prospered, it became obvious that it was cheaper to have textile mills closer to the source of cotton. Massive savings in transportation costs and even lower Southern prevailing wages were attractive business options. Additionally, Amoskeag was slow to change from gingham to other fabrics that fashion placed more in demand.

Management decisions were required, and strangely, some very ill-advised decisions were made.

## fabric of our lives

To cut costs and to ramp up production, on February 13, 1922, the company announced simultaneous increases in the work week, back to 54 hours, coupled with a 20 percent cut in wages: over 11 percent more hours for 9 percent less money at the end of each week, not a pleasant impact on the workers. Suddenly the historical mantra of Manchester being a “strike free” city changed. A long and bitter strike ensued with the company eventually reversing its work week expansion and wage cuts, but it was too late. The company had been mortally wounded.

Amoskeag Mills was on the decline. The end was in sight. On Christmas Eve, 1935, the Amoskeag Mills declared bankruptcy. Merry Christmas, Manchester! The city had a local depression on steroids, in addition to the national economic crisis, from which it did not fully recover until the 1970s.

What does a city do with 30 multi-storied brick mill buildings and related real estate almost in the city center? The process was slow and painful with tax revenues sharply down and massive unemployment. The city government

worked tirelessly, and showed foresight in that they never demolished a single mill building, probably because demolition was an expense that they could not afford. They still exist today, visible for over a mile along Interstate 93 that passes through the city.

Today, the city claims that 99 percent of the Amoskeag Mills buildings and property are occupied. There are upscale condominiums, corporate offices, high tech start-ups, apartments, restaurants, small and large non-manufacturing businesses, and even a college campus. The University of New Hampshire opened its new satellite Manchester campus in the mill yard in what used to be the Pandora Mill.

The old company city has emerged from its economic ashes like the mythical phoenix, reborn and re-purposed. It is a credit to the tireless local leaders who managed to do all that, even if it took 40 plus years, and more than a few missteps and bad decisions to do it.

While Manchester was the crown jewel of New England textile company towns, similar economic disasters hit countless other cities along rivers where water power for looms had been

so easily available. Lowell, Lawrence, and Fall River, Massachusetts; Sanford and Biddeford/Saco, Maine; Nashua, New Hampshire. They all faced crushing depressions and pain for former textile workers and their families. When the most important industry in an entire six-state region collectively closes its doors, the viable options are initially somewhere between slim and none, and always extremely painful in human terms.

As one who grew up in Manchester, I watched all this happen.

I smile when I hear of Southern cities complaining about the adverse impact of their textile industry relocating to employ less expensive workforces in India, Vietnam, Bangladesh and the like, with all the resulting problems of unemployment and declining tax revenues. A less than charitable reply to my Southern brethren might be, “What goes around comes around. Now you know how Manchester and the citizens of New England felt when our mills all moved well south of the Mason-Dixon Line.” But that would be uncharitable, I guess. 🐾



# homecoming







# homecoming





*Photo by Sherron Harward*