

National Register Nomination South Willington Historic District Willington, Connecticut

The South Willington Historic District was added to the National Register in 2017. It includes the mill complex and housing, church, school, and barns built and owned by the Gardiner Hall Jr. Company, in a roughly linear area located primarily along River Road (Route 32) in South Willington, with 67 contributing and 14 non-contributing resources. A group of mill workers' tenements is clustered close to the mill complex. There are a few multi-family houses but most are single-family dwellings, built ca. 1840 to 1930, with most between 1880 and 1910. Many houses have been well maintained and the district retains a high degree of preservation and historic integrity. The Clara Hall Elliott Memorial Church (1911) and the Hall Memorial School (1922) were built to serve the mill community. The company also built several large barns and an earthen community cold-storage structure for produce. The original layout of the mill complex and residential village is essentially unchanged, and the district retains a high degree of integrity.



The South Willington historic district is significant on the local level because of its association with one of New England's most important industries in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: the production of cotton textiles. The Gardiner Hall Jr. Co. was a mid-sized company compared to other cotton factories in Connecticut, but in Willington its thread mill was the largest industry. At the turn of the twentieth century, it employed about 150 people and produced the equivalent of about 36 million spools of thread annually. The district is also significant as an example of a company-planned mill residential village. While workers' single-family dwellings were constructed along River Road as needed, evolving as a linear community, the cluster of worker tenements reflects much more conscious planning, with carefully placed rows of almost identical buildings along one block. The overall design of this small village is not unusual but it is rare example for its time, late in the development of the Connecticut textile industry. Most of the mill buildings remain in use for commercial and light industrial businesses.

