

Industrial Revolution IN AVON, UNIONVILLE + COLLINSVILLE

Examining the transition from agrarian to manufacturing towns

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AVON SENIOR + COMMUNITY CENTER

635 West Avon Road, Avon, CT 06001

In 1830, when the Farmington Canal was completed through Avon, a decision was made by Town leaders to break away from the 'mother town' of Farmington and to become incorporated as a separate town. The canal literally put Avon on the map, passing through the center of town, under Albany Turnpike, and continuing up to Simsbury. Avon became known as "the crossroads of commerce" and the town prospered, even though it was never really known as a manufacturing town.

Early water-powered fulling /carding mills and clothier's works began to take the labor off the farm and into the budding "manufactories" located in the Sleepy Hollow community in Pine Woods/Old Farm and East Avon. By 1850 Avon had a cotton thread manufacturing company. The Canal Line Railroad came through town in 1849, the Avon Creamery formed in 1860 while the Climax Fuse Company began producing safety fuses for the mining industry and other applications in 1884. Unionville, a part of Farmington, became a center of manufacturing because of its location along the River to help power the mills. By 1845, Unionville had nine mills and manufacturing companies, including clothier's works, sawmills, paper mills, nut and bolt manufacturing, steel products companies and many others.

The Collinsville Axe Company employed many Avon residents and it was powered by water in 1826 before evolving to hydroelectric power. It was known for sharp-edged tools including axes, steel plough shares, adzes and sickles for the farmers. Later it produced some of the bayonets for rifle muskets and pikes for John Brown's insurrection at Harper's Ferry during Civil War years. Steel manufacturing factories both in Unionville and Collinsville required tons of coal shipped in overland by train, by waterway and by the wagon load!

Pictured left: An early postcard of the Climax Fuse Factory in Avon on the site of the current Town Center. Following an explosion that led to 15 deaths in 1905 the company rebuilt and merged into the Ensign-Bickford Company. Fuse making continued in Avon until 1968. Today, many of the original, distinctive red stone buildings are still in use by the Town and private businesses. Image reproduced courtesy of the Marion M. Hunter History Room at the Avon Free Public Library.



Please join us as **Gene Macy**, Social Studies teacher at Avon Middle School, takes us on a journey to examine the changes as Avon and surrounding towns evolved from an agrarian era to enter the "machine age", more commonly known as the Industrial Revolution. Mr. Macy earned his BA in American History + Political Science from the University of Maine and a M. Ed from Tufts University. He commenced his teaching career at the Kingswood-Oxford School in 1983. Mr. Macy received a M. degree in US History from Trinity College in 1995, the same year he began teaching US History and Government at AMS.