Peace Dale Manufacturing Company

The Peace Dale Manufacturing Company was a woolen firm located in South Kingstown, R.I., and was the mainstay of the diverse Hazard family financial empire from 1802 to 1918. It was at the heart of the Peace Dale mill village, and was noted for its innovative profit-sharing plans.

In 1802, Rowland Hazard (1763-1835) bought half interest in Benjamin Rodman's fulling mill on the Saugatucket River. In 1805, he acquired a carding machine in the same location. This was the beginning of the Narragansett Cotton Manufacturing Company. After 1810, Hazard's son Isaac P. Hazard (1794-1879) left school and assumed an important role in the business. Circa 1813, a power loom was purchased for the mill; the company later claimed to be "the place where the first power looms were successfully operated in America, if not in the world".

Rowland Hazard turned over the operation in 1819 to two of his sons: Isaac, and Rowland Gibson Hazard (1801-1888), who operated it as the firm of "I.P. & R.G. Hazard". In 1826, the brothers bought out the last remaining outside investor. With the addition of a third brother in 1828, Joseph Peace Hazard (1807-1892), the partnership became "R.G. Hazard & Co."

In 1845 one mill building was destroyed by fire; a new mill was built and additions followed. The business was incorporated as the Peace Dale Manufacturing Company in 1848, with Isaac P. Hazard as president and Rowland G. Hazard as secretary/treasurer, though the history of Washington County insists that their actual duties were nearly indistinguishable. Another fire in 1855 destroyed several buildings. With the equipment for producing "Negro cloth" for the declining southern market gone, the company moved into the production of shawls and cassimeres. A new weaving building was constructed in 1882 that covered a half acre of ground.

In 1878, the Hazards announced a new experimental plan to share a portion of the mill profits with their employees, to help instill their conviction that "Capital and labor are interdependent. Their interests are identical." As described in "Cooperation Circular No. 7", no profits were distributed in 1879, but $5842 was divided among the employees in 1880, a 5% dividend. $5999 was distributed in 1881, and $3760 in both 1882 and 1883. Because of sluggish sales, no profits were distributed from 1884 until 1900, when a 2% dividend to employees was declared. A 3% dividend was issued in 1902, the last known use of the cooperation policy.

The company survived two strikes, in 1886 and 1906. In the latter strike, which lasted over three months, weavers walked from their jobs in refusal to operate two machines at once. By World War I, the company was struggling, though military demand for khaki during the war provided a temporary boost. After the death of Rowland G. Hazard II in 1918, the company was acquired by the M.T. Stevens & Sons Co. It had been in the Hazard family for five generations. In 1947, Stevens closed the Peace Dale mills, and it was sold to a Rockingham, North Carolina firm in 1951.

Source:
https://www.rihs.org/mssinv/Mss483sg36.htm#:~:text=The%20Peace%20Dale%20Manufacturing%20Company,its%20innovative%20profit%2Dsharing%20plans.

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