

A Brief History of Woonsocket, Rhode Island

The city of Woonsocket was formed in 1888 by combining six mill villages located along the Blackstone River in the area around Woonsocket Falls.

In 1793, when Samuel Slater built the first water-powered textile mill on the Blackstone River in Pawtucket, it formed the basis for a new economy along the river. With a 400-foot drop in elevation from Worcester to Providence, the river was a natural site on which to build mills in the days before steam-powered machines. The steep drop and many waterfalls provided ideal conditions to power small textile mills, around which the mill villages developed.

Eventually, the six mill villages split from the towns that controlled them — Smithfield and Cumberland. In 1867, the Cumberland villages, including Woonsocket Falls, Social, and Jenckesville, officially became the town of Woonsocket. In 1871, the three Smithfield villages — Hamlet, Bernon, and Globe — were added, and Woonsocket became a city in 1888.

The Woonsocket Harris Public Library was founded in 1866 by woolen manufacturer and abolitionist Edward Harris. The Harris Institute Library opened on October 3, 1868 on the second floor of Main Street's Harris Institute Building (now Woonsocket City Hall), situated right below Harris Hall where Abraham Lincoln spoke in 1860.



Woonsocket Harris Public Library

303 Clinton Street
Woonsocket, RI 02895
Telephone: 401-769-9044
Website: woonsocketlibrary.org
Email: reference@woonsocketlibrary.org

Woonsocket Historical Society

42 South Main Street, Garden Level
Woonsocket, RI 02895
Telephone: 401-356-0067
Website: woonsockethistoricalsociety.com
Email: woonhistsoc@gmail.com

David Lawlor, Documentary Filmmaker

Runofthemillfilms.com @filmmakerdave

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INTERACTIVE Self-guided Walking Tour of Woonsocket, RI



Explore Woonsocket's Heritage:
Uncover the city's historic
landmarks at your own pace.

Let your smartphone be the key to unlock Woonsocket’s historical treasures along the Blackstone River! This self-guided round-trip walking tour spans 2.7 miles through downtown Woonsocket in about one hour. The route takes you past key industrial-era landmarks, civic buildings, and cultural arts venues – with free parking in the Market Square municipal lot. Scan the QR code with Google Lens, then follow the step-by-step directions at the Google Maps link below. Begin your walk at Woonsocket Falls Dam located at the intersection of South Main & River Streets and continue to the heart of Woonsocket's Industrial Revolution mill district. Scan the QR codes to view a YouTube video of each landmark. Visit the numerous shops, restaurants, parks, and other points of interest along the route.

Scan Code for Google Map Tour Directions



<https://shorturl.at/pXp3E>

Woonsocket Falls Dam at South Main St. & River St.



<https://youtu.be/DTVGMe8L3X0>

Woonsocket City Hall 169 Main St.



<https://youtu.be/N9XhXOSlk4c>

~ Return to Market Square ~

Woonsocket Co./Bernon Mills Complex

115 Front St.



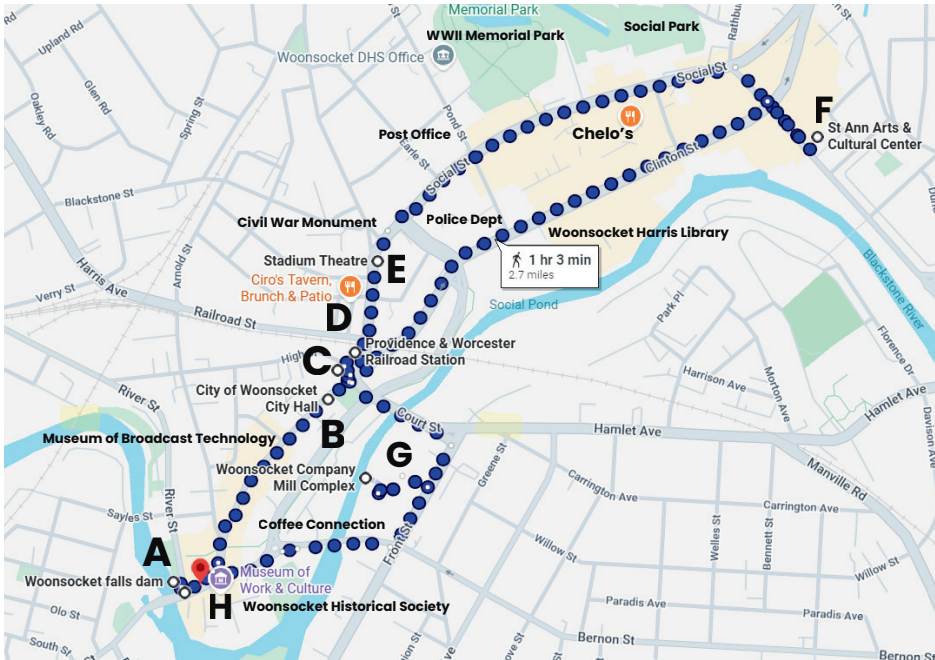
https://youtu.be/-ek1gGHwW_A

St. Ann Arts & Cultural Center

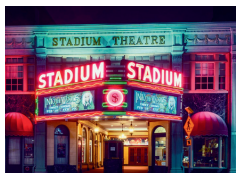
84 Cumberland St.



<https://youtu.be/lz8S1OOWuA>

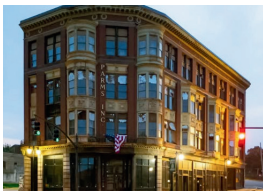


Stadium Theater 28 Monument Square



<https://youtu.be/OEASpxJaLuk>

Longley Building 194 Main St.



<https://youtu.be/eQTpcpy0qdE>

Woonsocket Train Depot

1 Depot Square



<https://youtu.be/bxJ4xIGKdTM>