

A CRAFTSMAN REMEMBERS: RECOLLECTIONS OF THE DOMINION SNATH COMPANY, WATERVILLE, 1920–1939

By Ellsworth Lorimer

Edited and with an Introduction by

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Introduction

Waterville is a hard-working community of some 1,300 inhabitants, situated in Compton Township, a twenty-minute drive south of Sherbrooke. In the centre of town, where the main street crosses the Coaticook River, there is a relatively dense array of commercial and public buildings: post office, town hall, bank, *caisse populaire*, schools, grocery stores, service stations, and churches (there are four at present, though there were several more in the early part of this century). Waterville's streets also contain a rich mix of residential architecture, varying widely in age, class, and ethnic tradition. There are former boarding houses, humble workers' cottages, rows of two-storey, wooden dwellings built by the town's substantial Scandinavian population, and several elegant Classical Revival mansions.¹

Waterville provides important services to the area's many farm families. But the town also has a long history as a rural manufacturing centre. This history began as early as 1812, when Jesse Pennoyer established a grist mill there, reputedly the first such mill on the Coaticook River. From the 1830s until the mid 20th century, a series of sawmills, forges, foundries, and factories of various descriptions—some ephemeral, others more lasting—took up positions on the banks of the river, harnessing, like Pennoyer's mill, the considerable hydraulic potential of the Coaticook.²

Today, though still important in the local economy, manufacturing industry no longer occupies the historic heart of the town.³ The site of the Waterville's early industrial development, in fact, is



Figure 1. Waterville: a rural location, but one in which the Coaticook River provided hydraulic energy for milling and manufacturing, and in which the clearing of the forests supplied raw materials for wood-based industries. Société d'histoire de

Waterville, SR 516.

virtually deserted. There is only a small, terraced park overlooking the dam that supplied water power to local industries for so many decades. Just downstream, however, a dilapidated ensemble of buildings and a rusting water tower can still be seen. These are the vestiges of one of the most durable of Waterville's early industries: the Dominion Snath Company.

Joseph Rice Ball brought Dominion Snath to

Waterville in the early 1890s, after ten years in business on Lower Water Street in Sherbrooke. Ball—known to many as J.R.—was a New Englander who had emigrated to Quebec in 1880. His Waterville operation was described at the turn of the century as “a good sized new factory,” in which was conducted a “large business in the manufacture of Scythe Snaths, Rakes and Cradels [sic].” Dominion Snath got off to something of a stuttering start in its new location, however. Seriously damaged by fire in 1900, the factory had to be rebuilt with the help of a municipal loan. But the Ball family enterprise survived and prospered, becoming an important place of employment for Waterville's population for many decades, until it finally closed in the 1960s.⁴

A snath is a scythe handle: “the pole or shaft of a scythe,” to give the *Oxford English Dictionary's* more elegant definition. Scythes were extremely common tools on Canadian farms in the 19th and early 20th centuries. They were widely used for mowing grass, clearing brush, and cutting hay. Their curving handles were fashioned from pieces of white ash, black cherry, or more rarely elm, cut to a length of about five feet, then shaped, tapered, and bent to the appropriate shape. The snath was fitted with two stubby handles, one in the middle and one near the top, and, at the bottom, with the hardware necessary to secure the long, tapering scythe blade.⁵

Ellsworth Lorimer remembers the Dominion Snath Company very well. Though he never worked there, the snath factory was an important part of the Waterville of his youth. Its machinery fed

his curiosity about mechanical processes and its skilled workers helped inspire his life-long admiration for a “well turned out wooden item.” Born in nearby Barford in 1912, Lorimer moved to Waterville with his family as an infant. He was educated at the Waterville Academy (the handsome school building now serves as a bar and restaurant) and spent a year after graduation at Bishop’s, earning admission to McGill’s Faculty of Engineering. These were Depression years, however, and lacking the means to pay tuition, room, and board in Montreal, Lorimer invested his savings in a good set of carpentry tools instead. Despite the hard times, he managed to find employment in the region, often working on renovations or helping rebuild structures damaged by fire.⁶

Married in 1939, Ellsworth Lorimer and his wife Helen lived for a short time in Toronto. But when the Second World War began, Ellsworth joined the Air Force, trained as an air-frame mechanic, and was stationed in British Columbia. After the war, “captivated by the mild winters and other attractions of coastal B.C.,” the Lorimers retained their home in Chilliwack, where they raised their four children and where Ellsworth found plenty of carpentry work, notably in the construction of schools and hospitals. After retiring in 1979, he and Helen moved to Surrey to be closer to their eldest daughter, Ruth. In retirement, Ellsworth Lorimer retains his energy and his love of woodworking. He is a highly skilled craftsman whose current project is to build eight grandfather clocks: one for each of his grandchildren.

Ellsworth Lorimer is also gifted with the ability to craft lively prose. It is a talent he discovered later in life. As a young student at the Waterville Academy, he “fairly detested anything to do with composition, little realizing that sixty years later [he] would write a few pages now and then just for the fun of it.”⁷ “Recollections of the Dominion Snath Company,” is one of several short reminiscences he has written in recent years about the Waterville he knew as a boy. In it, one hears his distinctive voice: modest, lucid, precise, aware of the importance of the past, yet without any hint of regret or nostalgia. The text reveals Lorimer’s dual fascinations: with mechanical processes and with the people around him. These interests, in fact, provide the piece its structure, as the author shifts back and forth between technical aspects of snath production and personal information about the workers involved at each stage, their families, their foibles, and their accomplishments.

A pleasure to read, Ellsworth Lorimer’s reminiscence is also an historical document of some value. “Recollections of the

Dominion Snath Company” broadens our knowledge of the wood-based rural industries which were a standard feature of the Quebec economy in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Particularly in areas like the Eastern Townships, “agro-forest” economies supplied plentiful raw materials for the production of lumber, door and window frames, barrels and buckets, boxes, furniture, matches, and a long list of other wooden items, including snaths.⁸ Lorimer also provides a rare, detailed look at the labour process in an industry which, in the 1920s and 1930s, had been substantially affected by mechanization, in which the division of labour was advanced, but in which craft skills were still important and worker autonomy was relatively high.⁹ Finally, Lorimer sketches an intriguing portrait of social relations in an Eastern Townships community with a mixed economy and a unique ethnic mix. In Waterville, an important Swedish and Norwegian minority complemented the more usual American, British, and French Canadian components.

Ellsworth Lorimer’s observations, in the end, allow us the rare opportunity to see a community and a workplace from the inside: to see this small corner of the past through the eyes of a careful observer who experienced it first hand. Lorimer’s recollection reminds us of the importance of ordinary men and women in history. He gives a face and a voice to the Kenneth Spaffords, the Francis Fortins, the Fabien Walgrens, and to the working people like them whose daily struggles tend to be ignored in official histories. It is their all-but-forgotten stories, most of all, that this craftsman remembers.

—*Peter Gossage*

Recollections of the Dominion Snath Company, Waterville, 1920–1939

It is pleasant to think back sixty or seventy years to youthful days in Waterville, to the school days and the years immediately following, with the ups and downs characteristic of those times. Industrially, one of the mainstays of the town was Dominion Snath Company, so you may permit me to recall some of the memories pertaining to that manufacturing plant and its workers. In one way, this firm usually seemed to be somewhat overshadowed by the much larger enterprise of George Gale and Sons and by their successors. It was only when the larger firm faltered between owners, and finally ceased operations, that we realized the number of households in town dependent on wages from the snath manufacture. We could say that the two companies cooperated well enough in their close proximity, sharing the water power from the dam, and both making use of the railway spur which branched off from the main line near the railway bridge. One writer has aptly referred to this period as the twin dynasties of the Gale and Ball families.¹⁰

Quite possibly others have written the history of Dominion Snath Company, writers who would be much more capable than I am through knowledge of its origin and development in the early years. My family came to Waterville only in 1912, soon after my birth, and then there were a few years before I took much notice of community affairs. So my remarks apply mainly to the above mentioned time span. Also, I want to recognize the several individuals with practically a life time association with the firm and thus well acquainted with its difficulties and progress. By comparison, I was an outsider, never working there. The one exception was a few hours one day when Stuart Ball gave me permission to use the small lathe to turn some items for a model I was making, before I had any power tools of my own.

My observations, superficial as they may be, were made possible only through the forbearance and patience of management and workers. I am sure that in most manufactures, schoolboys or adolescents would have been promptly escorted out the door unless there on well authorized business. Of course, *sometimes* we could say that we were there on business, such as bringing a pair of skates to be sharpened. It was worth the ten or fifteen cents collected by Arthur Blier or Carl Ball to see the impressive shower of sparks as the nicks were ground out and a good edge produced on the blades.¹¹ Or again, I might have wanted to buy a board or two

for some little project that I had under way. For ease in working, I usually wanted the thickness reduced to one-half inch, a blizzard of shavings from the thickness planer adding to the pile already behind the machine. This might well have contributed to the displeasure of Mr Gustafson, whose task it was to pack the shavings down to the boiler room, between his regular rounds of the property as night watchman.

In my earlier recollections, the Snath Company included a sawmill, on the downstream side of the main building. In winter, when we were walking home from school, we had to share the Main Street hill with the loads of logs heading for the mill yard and coming from "somewhere past the Brûlé" I was told, possibly from the Edgcombe woodlot. The hard packed snow and ice on the road surface was deeply rutted from the necessity of the teamster slipping a chain under one of the sled runners to keep the heavy load from pressing too forcefully on the team of horses. Came the springtime and Percy Parsons took up his position as sawyer, while Svarka Nillson and his husky companions rolled the logs to the carriage and stacked the heavy planks from the green-chain.¹² Further over in the mill yard was a little building where Joe Plouffe sawed cedar shingles, the slow moving chain conveyor gradually building up a pile of cedar shavings to rival the cone shaped pile of sawdust from the log sawing.

My father, Leonard Lorimer, had a grove of hardwood trees along the brook at one side of his little farm on Highland Avenue.



Figure 2. The Lorimer family moved to Waterville from Barford in 1912. Their ten-acre farm on Highland Street supplied vegetables and strawberries to local markets. A young

Ellsworth Lorimer is pictured here catching a ride on the back of brother Albert's bicycle.

Société d'histoire de Waterville, SR 269.

He was reluctant to cut down many of them. (And it is gratifying to observe that subsequent owners have had the same interest in preserving its park like appearance.) But some years he did cut down a few of the trees, other than maples. A couple of white ash had straight trunks which he felt might well make four or five lengths for snaths, so he delivered them onto

the pile of similar logs in the mill yard. That same spring he took in a few elm logs to be sawn into planks to reinforce the barn floor. Later in the season, he received word that there was a balance owing between the saw bill and the ash material, and that he could pick it up at the office. I imagine everyone was some-



Figure 3. The Dominion Snath Company as it stands today, photographed from the opposite bank of the Coaticook. The dilapidated building is currently used by a local recycling company as its sorting station. Photograph by Peter Gossage, August 1995.

what amused that the balance consisted of a very few cents, but better than going into the red, I guess! In the course of time the log sawing and shingle manufacture were taken over by Joe Girardin with his steam powered mill on Main Street South. Joe and his two sons handled the sawing while "Trot" Meigs fired the boiler with the slabs and the edgings.

The snath manufacture, founded by the Ball family, remained in the original location. I understand that in the earlier days the first step was to split the logs into suitable size for the snaths. But then it was deemed more efficient to bandsaw the logs into strips, thus avoiding grain runout and irregularities. So a big bandsaw was installed in the basement and Fred Bell and the faithful horse took time from delivering stove wood to the town's householders to haul the short logs close to the building within reach of the saw emplacement. Then it was up to the good judgement of Hiram Webster and Vincent Holtham to produce the optimum number of strips from each log, avoiding the too skimpy sizes that would make a flat sided snath. One day Hiram had the misfortune to lose a finger to the saw. He then decided that he had had enough of that occupation, and continued to serve the needs of the community as plumber and tinsmith, working out of his garage at home. I never did hear who took his place at the saw.

The straight lathe was one of the first machines in line, in which the cutters furiously chipped away the projecting corners and bumps, giving the billet its roughly rounded shape, with the required taper along its length. Then to the steam box for a num-



Figure 4. The wood used in snath production was cut locally and driven to the factory, on sleds which resembled this one, photographed near Waterville. Does the woodcutter's costume suggest Scandinavian origins?
Société d'histoire de Waterville, SR 781.

ber of hours so that the heat and humidity could render the inherent stiffness of the wood sufficiently pliable for bending. On removal from the steam box, the butt was firmly clamped in the steel mould and, with a great deal of pulling and shoving, the remainder of its length was forced into the contours of the mould. After a couple of days in the

dry kiln, this desired curvature was permanent. Next was the crooked lathe, a specialized machine for dressing down these crooked snaths to exact size and a very smooth surface. A noticeable feature of the machine was a sort of grapple at each end, preventing the snath from flailing around dangerously under the impulse of the cutters. At the same time, the length of chain securing each grapple allowed the necessary freedom of movement as the crooked snath worked its way through the machine, contortionist fashion.

Important to the use of the snath was a firm yet adjustable attachment for the scythe blade, so the butt end had to be prepared to accept this hardware. This stage of the manufacture brought the snaths to the router machine, operated by Francis Fortin. I suppose that nowadays this type of machine would be computerized, proceeding through its functions in completely automatic fashion. But it seemed to me in those days to be very much a hands-on operation. The snath had to be placed just correctly to receive its flattened portion and then good co-ordination on foot pedal and hand levers were needed to bring the various cutters into operation, including boring the two holes for the bolts. Production of six hundred snaths per day (according to one report that I read) speaks well for all on the work force.¹³ And when I used to observe Francis Fortin so diligently employed at his machine, I little realized at the time that after a long day at the factory he continued the hours following as an able home maker for his five small boys who lost their mother at an early age.

One person whose duties took him all around the plant was Jim

Moy. Probably a little older than most of the production workers, he had a good eye for the slightest cracks or blemishes in the product and with his coloured pencil would grade them accordingly. I suppose nowadays we would call him the quality control person.

Another person to keep things going smoothly in all areas was Carl Ball as millwright for many, many years. Starting with the boxed-in, massive gears which transmitted the power from the waterwheel to the lineshafts, running the length of the factory, there were the innumerable pulleys and belts leading down to the various machines or up through the ceiling to the floor above. Then there were the machines to keep in trim, and occasionally new ones to be devised to meet changing conditions. One of these was a machine to sharpen the band saw blades. Once started, the blade stepped along one tooth at a time to receive the strokes of the file without any further attention being necessary.

Carl must have passed on his mechanical aptitudes to the young people of his family. Owen was reported to have perfected the crooked lathe mentioned earlier. He made a big generator outfit that could be dragged around as needed to thaw frozen water pipes. He used to cast and machine the aluminum pistons that were so much desired in those days to rejuvenate a well worn car engine. Perhaps most notable was his propeller driven ice boat or snowmobile that drew plenty of attention when he had it parked between Ayer's Garage and the town hall as he brought it to completion. It was powered by a motorcycle engine mounted upside down on the frame. Many a person told him that it would not work in that position, but Owen just calmly went ahead with his plans and showed them that indeed it could and did.



Figure 5. Carl Ball at his work bench. Ball was a nephew of the company's founder, Joseph Rice Ball. As millwright, one of his many responsibilities was the maintenance of the "Little Giant" undershot water wheel that drove the factory's machinery year round until the 1950s, when Carl Ball's son Edward replaced the hydraulic system with an electric one.

Société d'histoire de Waterville, SR 775.



Figure 6. Preston (Pep) Ingham at work in the snath factory. Though many machines were used in the production of scythe handles, highly skilled employees nonetheless did a great deal of the work by hand. Ingham is pictured trimming flaws from all-but-finished snaths with a draw knife. His ingenious work bench incorporates a pedal which allows him to hold the sticks securely in place with his left foot, thus freeing both hands to shave away imperfections.
Société d'histoire de Waterville, SR 740.

firm in the period we are considering. But, even so, he must have worked there a good many years before arriving at the sad task of dismantling the machinery for removal.¹⁴

The corresponding youthful generation in the family of Stuart Ball consisted of Tomkin and H.S. Junior. Tomkin and I were in school together, separated by two or three grades. Following school, Tomkin worked for a time at the Fairbanks plant in Sherbrooke, presumably to gain manufacturing experience for the time when it would be his turn to step into the business in Waterville.¹⁵ One of Tomkin's possessions was his Baby Morris car, at the time when these first came on the market from England. Most of the townspeople who could afford a car had preferences toward McLaughlin Buick, Hupmobile, or Packard, even if they had to be satisfied with a Model T or a Chev 4-90. But that tiny car, with all its components so much in miniature, drew a lot of attention.

Celon used his mechanical skills in garage work, repairing cars, trucks, and motorcycles. Joseph Ball and his sister Mary were classmates of mine in school. Our curriculum was sadly deficient in science subjects, which some of us would have liked to pursue. But when these topics did occasionally come up for discussion, it was Joe who had the answers and explanations in keeping with the principles of physics. For instance, in considering the action of a kitchen pump, most of us were convinced that it was suction which "pulled" the water up. But Joe could point out that the pressure of the air on the surface of the water in the well forced the water up the pipe. Edward, the youngest of Carl's boys, must have been very much a junior member of the

Along with the main part of the snath, two handles were needed for a good grip. The big lathe just inside the entrance was the production centre for these. A short length of two-by-two white birch was thrust into the spinning headstock whose internal threads grabbed the stick to set it spinning in turn. Just one long sweep of a handle and the outside of the "nib" was shaped simultaneously with the boring of the lengthwise centre hole. At almost the same moment a cut-off tool separated this completed handle, which went flying into a barrel with its mates. The process was repeated for five or six handles. Then the short stub remaining was knocked out of the chuck, ready for the entry of the next two-by-two stick, with the chuck continuously spinning. If the nibs were a little rough from such rapid production, they could be dumped into a slowly revolving tumbler drum, where they would simply wear away one another's rough spots or slivers.

There was still needed a firm metal attachment to secure the handle to the snath, and this was where Fabien Walgren's skills in blacksmithing and welding came into play. At his little bench under the stairs he would carefully line up a small metal loop with a threaded shank. A few moments' flashing and sputtering of the arc welding process and the two pieces of metal would be as one. With this hardware item, the handles could be tightened onto the proper places on the snath to resist the twisting and thrust of the most ham-handed user.

Most of the Swedish and Norwegian settlers in Waterville were soon married and raising a family. But Fabien was unique in maintaining his bachelor status. For a time he boarded at Iver Knutson's, next farm to our place. Summer evenings he used to sit on the woodpile in their back yard and play his little accordion—melancholy tunes which must have reminded him of his native Scandinavia. I think that his interest in accordion may have supplied the encouragement for his nephews, Olaf and Frank Knutson, to work towards their fine instruments and accomplished playing as they entertained (Lawrence Welk style) at many public functions in Waterville and vicinity.

I suppose every small community had what could be termed a "matchmaker" or, less kindly, "that old woman with her nose in other people's business." At any rate, Fabien, as one of the few eligible bachelors, could hardly escape attention in that area. Equally noticeable was the fact that nearly every street had a lone lady householder working single handed to maintain house and garden. How much better, it was reasoned, if a matrimonial arrange-

ment resulted in a useful man about the house and, for Fabien, the responsibility of head of the house should be all to the good. But however well intentioned these schemes might have been, none ever materialized and Fabien died still a bachelor. With no descendants, a good part of his savings (if my memory is correct) was bequeathed to the Waterville United Church.

The finishing touch for the snaths was a good coat of varnish. Most of us did not want to remain long in the hot and heavy fumes of the varnish room. But Kenneth Spafford and Charles Maskrey must have been well accustomed to it. They used to joke about the difference in the wear and tear on their overalls. Kenneth, who picked up the bundles of five or six snaths with their projecting handles as he slid them into the varnish vat, could complain that the front of his overalls was continually wearing out, while Charlie, pulling the bundles out of the varnish bath and standing them up to drip-dry, could point out that his overall fabric continually became thicker and stronger with the built up layers of dried varnish.

Arthur Blier used to make the dismal prediction that *someday someone* would invent a device that would make scythe snaths obsolete. And of course he was right, with the advent of weed-eaters, power trimmers, and chemical herbicides. But even before that, wooden snaths were largely superseded by the tubular metal variety. But for people like me, appreciative of the warmth and characteristics of a well turned out wooden item, steel or aluminum seemed rather cold and unattractive. When I first lived in Chilliwack, I could be reminded of my home town by noting the Dominion Snath, Waterville labels on the wooden snaths at the farmers' supply centre. But soon these were replaced by their metal counterparts. More recently though, a few of the wooden products have reappeared, manufactured by a firm in Minnesota. But it seems to me that these latter are heavy and clumsy compared to the gracefully curved and well balanced ones that you used to make in Waterville.

To us small town boys, any building that included an elevator was something of a novelty. The elevator at the snath factory didn't have an enclosed shaft, but operated in an open space that was unencumbered with machines. It was essentially just a platform large enough to accommodate a handcart of material and the accompanying workman. To the platform was attached a sort of arch which pushed open a pair of trap doors to allow its travel upwards through the main floor to the top floor. For its descent

the same purpose was achieved by an ingenious arrangement of levers activating in scissors fashion to open the trap doors. The story was told (apocryphal, I suspect) of a workman thus delivering a barrel from the top floor to the basement. Taking advantage of a few moments of relaxation as the elevator started out on its slow descent, he seated himself on the upended open end of the barrel. But something slipped, the elevator gained speed, to stop with a resounding thump on the basement floor. Then his fellow workmen had quite a time prying his rear end out of the barrel.

I believe the Dominion Snath came through the Great Depression of the 1930s better than many manufacturers of that era. R. B. Bennett had the dubious distinction of being prime minister during the worst of that decade. The mention of his name brings to mind prairie dust storms, massive unemployment, and financial hardship throughout the country. But Bennett's promotion of the Empire Trade Pact helped somewhat to alleviate these conditions, and I was told that this had a part in making possible large shipments of snaths to Australia, along with other exports to keep the company functioning during those lean years.¹⁶

On the home front, many scythes evidently came into use along the railway rights of way. We can remember when crews of men were hired each summer to mow the weeds and brush on the terrain too uneven to allow machine mowing. But likely this proved an unwelcome expense to the railways and they resorted to using herbicides where they could get away with it. Some of the lines seemingly just let the grass and weeds grow, raising the track on an additional layer of ballast every three or four years to keep above the greenery. And with so few passenger trains nowadays, it is likely not deemed necessary to keep the trackside so trim and neat.

With a decline in snath requirements, we have to give the company credit for its attempts to diversify. Maple furniture was produced in a part of the plant. A variety of handles and specialty wood products which could be closely associated with the main manufacturing were attempted, and the principal subdivision of wooden spoon production received the best efforts of Stuart Blier and Francis Bell. But nothing quite took the place of the demand for scythe snaths in the early days of non-mechanized agriculture.

I have mentioned the names of some of the workers and I should include Miss Parkinson, secretary in the office.¹⁷ Bert Rider made cedar chests and special orders of furniture at his workbench on the upper floor, and (like the others) gave me useful tips on

cabinet work. Dib Peterson, Pep Ingham, and Jerome Rodney were, I believe, long term employees. Bill Fecteau and Herb Harden helped out in high production periods. Other names that come to mind are Joe Tremblay, also Willie Rodney as driver of the company truck. I regret that I can't recall the names of many of the other workmen. The fact that I haven't named them is no reflection on their workmanship or importance to the firm, but just an indication of my poor memory.

It was sad to see the Snath Company building closed and the windows boarded up when we last visited Waterville in 1989. But it is good to see that you have a large enterprise on the former Peasley's meadow, and that this is the labour-intensive industry that many a community desires.¹⁸ Also, it is good that your hard maple still finds appropriate uses in items such as mitre boxes, which in turn find their way to the hardware stores here on the West coast.

—Ellsworth Lorimer
Surrey, British Columbia

NOTES

- 1 Incorporated in 1876, published census reports give Waterville's population as 576 in 1901, 968 in 1921, and 1,337 in 1991. My thanks to Annmarie Adams for her help with the architectural description.
- 2 Information on early milling and manufacturing in Waterville can be found in *Histoire de Waterville / The History of Waterville* (Waterville: Comité centenaire, 1976) and *Souvenir of Waterville, Quebec and its Environs* (Waterville: Osgoode and Somerville, 1899).
- 3 The town's most important manufacturing concern is now located on its eastern fringe. Waterville TG, a Japanese-owned company, is the largest player in the local economy, employing over 800 people in the manufacture of extruded rubber products such as car-door mouldings and carpet underpadding. See *Waterville, nos industries, notre force* (Waterville: Conseil municipal, 1994).
- 4 Joseph Rice Ball's movements in the early years were traced in the following sources: *Eastern Townships Gazetteer and Directory for the Years 1875–76* (Montreal: W.H. Irwin & Co., 1875); *The Eastern Townships Directory for 1882* (Montreal: The Gazette Printing Company, 1881); *Sherbrooke City Directory for 1890–91* (Sherbrooke: J.P. Royer, 1890): 57 and 85; *Sherbrooke City Directory*

for 1892-93 (Sherbrooke: J.P. Royer, 1892): 76 and 98; *Sherbrooke City Directory for 1894-95* (Sherbrooke: J.P. Royer, 1894): 92; Canada, *Manuscript Census*, 1901, Division 150-T, Waterville: Village. The two short quotations are from L.S. Channell, comp., *History of Compton County and Sketches of the Eastern Townships, District of St. Francis, and Sherbrooke County* (Cookshire: L.S. Channell, 1896): 189 and from the promotional album published in 1899 entitled *Souvenir of Waterville*, n.p. After Joseph Ball's death in 1919, Dominion Snath was taken over by his son Henry Stuart and his nephew Carl. Under their stewardship, but faced with a dwindling market for wooden scythe handles, the firm made repeated efforts to diversify. In 1960, however, the Ball family sold Dominion Snath to American interests and a short time later—probably in 1969—it ceased operations altogether. *Histoire de Waterville*, 37-39, 47-48. Interview with Edward Ball, 18 August 1995.

- 5 It is not clear to what extent Canadian farmers used scythes to harvest grain. Lower Canadian grain crops in the early 19th century had generally been brought in with the sickle, a more precise instrument which allowed less wastage. Scythes were used mainly for haying. By 1900, mechanical reapers had been available for half a century in England and presumably in North America as well. But farm machinery was expensive and prairie farmers, often recent immigrants from Europe, may have used scythe and cradle to harvest certain grains. The availability of grain cradles in turn-of-the-century farm supply catalogues certainly suggests that some farmers did so. See Toronto Agricultural Warehouse, *Illustrated Catalogue* 5th ed. (Toronto: Globe Printing Co., 1872): 93-94 and Rice, Lewis, and Sons, *Illustrated Catalogue of General Hardware* (Toronto: Mail Job Print, 1898): 1054-55. (Both of these catalogues are available in the Canadian Institute for Historic Microreproductions series, numbers 24899 and 12436.) See also Christian Dessureault, "L'inventaire après décès et l'agriculture bas-canadienne," *Material History Bulletin* 17 (1983): 127-38; Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes, 1740-1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985): 30; Alistair Mutch, "The Mechanisation of the Harvest in South West Lancashire, 1850-1914," *Agricultural History Review* 29:2 (1982): 125-132; *Chambers's Encyclopaedia: A Dictionary of Universal Knowledge* new ed., vol. 8 (London, Edinburgh, and Philadelphia: W. & R. Chambers Ltd. and J.B. Lippincot & Company, 1923): 571-73 (s.v. "Reaping").
- 6 This paragraph and the next are based on Ellsworth Lorimer, personal correspondence, 24 May 1995. I have deposited a copy of this letter at the Société d'histoire de Waterville.

- 7 *Ibid.*
- 8 Though as Jean-Pierre Kesteman points out, the region was slower to take up these kinds of pursuits than one might have thought. See Kesteman, "Une bourgeoisie et son espace. Industrialisation et développement du capitalisme dans le District de Saint-François (Québec), 1823–1879," (Doctoral dissertation, Université du Québec à Montréal, 1985): 220–241.
- 9 The term "manufactory"—that intermediate stage between the craft shop and full, industrial capitalist production—comes to mind. For an overview of the relationship between mechanization and skill in Canadian manufacturing industries, see Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1986).
- 10 Established in the early 1880s, the George Gale and Sons' bedding factory was the Waterville's largest, occupying the best water-power site, adjacent to the dam, and with easy access to the railway line. In 1899, a promotional pamphlet vaunted it as "the greatest spring bed factory in the world." *Souvenir of Waterville*, n.p. Though this was pure hyperbole, the Gale factory did employ scores of local workers, male and female, in the manufacture of iron and brass beds and spring mattresses. (It is worth pointing out that wire springs and mattresses were still a new technology at the turn of the century, much vaunted for their healthful properties.) In 1901, proprietor Francis G. Gale was surely the richest person in town. In addition to the factory, Gale's 225 Acres of real estate included his own family's impressive, 18-room brick dwelling house: sumptuous accommodations for a family of four. Canada, *Manuscript Census*, 1901, Division 150-T: Waterville Village, Compton County. In 1914, Gale sold the family business to a company which abandoned mattresses and bed springs altogether to produce lumber, plywood, and furniture components on the site. And in 1928, the factory was sold once again, this time to the Johnson Woollen mills which employed a work force of some 150 men and women in the production of tweed fabric until the 1950s. *Histoire de Waterville*, 38. The "twin dynasties" remark is found in a souvenir album entitled *75^e anniversaire de la paroisse de l'Assomption de la Bienheureuse Vierge Marie de Waterville* (Waterville: n.p., 1981): 3.
- 11 The son of a blacksmith, Arthur Blier was foreman at Dominion Snath for many years. He also married into the Ball family; his wife was John Rice's daughter Gussie. *Histoire de Waterville*, 47; Interview with Edward Ball, 18 August 1995.
- 12 The term "greenchain" is, according to the author, west-coast jar-

- gon for “the mechanical arrangement for conveying the sawn lumber away from the saw and log carriage.” Ellsworth Lorimer, personal correspondence, 2 August 1995.
- 13 An estimate of 606 snaths per day is found in *Histoire de Waterville*, 47.
 - 14 Edward Ball worked at the snath factory for seventeen years, from 1952 until its closure at the end of the 1960s, having taken over his father’s position as millwright. The dismantling of the machinery must indeed have been an emotional moment for him. “I scrapped the machines, actually, when the Americans took over,” he remembered in a recent interview, “I hated to do it.” Interview with Edward Ball, 18 August 1995.
 - 15 “The Fairbanks plant in Sherbrooke was located across Belvedere Street from the Ingersoll Rand plant. Their product was weigh scales of the many different sizes. When the Depression cut back on their orders, they began advertising widely to make iron castings or do machine work for any possible customers. At about that time they also embarked on the sideline of making kitchen stoves. And that was where Tomkin Ball had his introduction to the industrial world, apart from the home-town establishment, assembling the sheet metal components of the stoves.” Ellsworth Lorimer, personal correspondence, 2 August 1995.
 - 16 The author is referring to a series of trade agreements between Britain and its Dominions, negotiated at Ottawa in the summer of 1932. This complicated set of accords, which aimed at “the extension of trade within the Commonwealth by means of reciprocal preferential tariffs,” is usually interpreted as a failed British response to American protectionism during the Depression. See Ian Drummond, *Imperial Economic Policy, 1917–1939: Studies in Expansion and Protection* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974): 279–289. The above quotation, from the press release issued after the Ottawa Conference, is cited in Drummond, p. 279.
 - 17 Bertha Parkinson, as secretary at Dominion Snath for many years, was the company’s only female employee. She later became the wife of general manager Henry Stuart Ball, after the death of Ball’s first wife, Bessie Aldridge. The couple married in the 1960s, several years before the factory shut down. *Histoire de Waterville*, 47; Interview with Edward Ball, 18 August 1995.
 - 18 The reference is to Waterville TG; see above, note 3.

