



Introduction to Amesbury Industries 1790-1930

by

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Amesbury Carriage Museum
Amesbury, MA

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Introduction to Amesbury Industries 1790-1930

what happened, how it happened, how it un-happened



Thomas Edison with a 1910 S. R. Bailey electric auto – Edison was developing batteries for vehicle power

Contents

Buildings you see vs. what was

Enabling Conditions

Textile industry 1790-1914

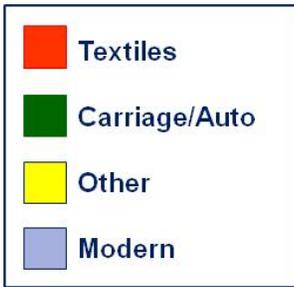
Carriage mfg. 1805-1910

Auto body mfg. 1900-1930

Decline

High industrial employment & capital inflow for a small town

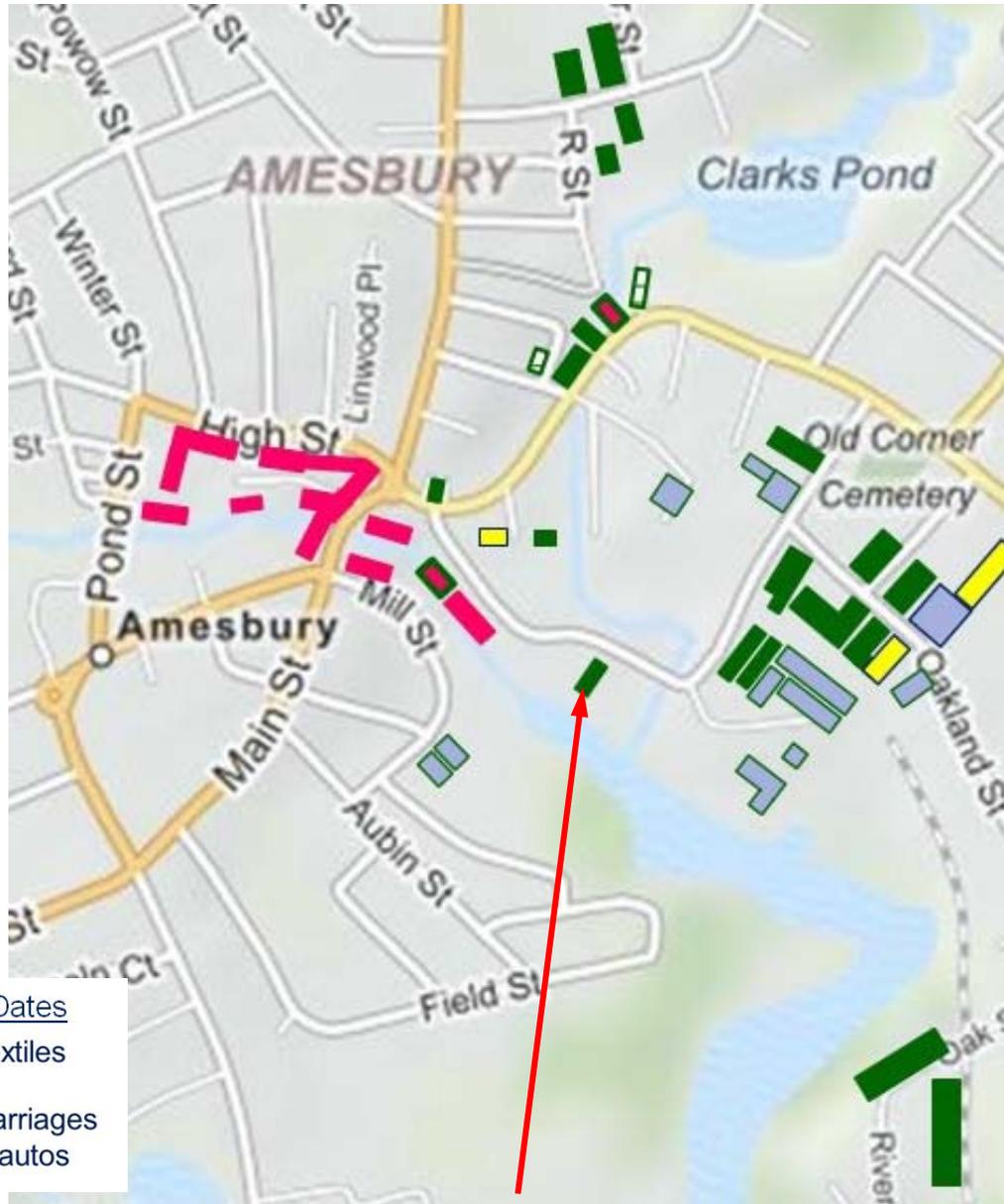
Existing Historical Industrial Buildings & Current Uses



HAMILTON MILLS

Refurbished, residential condos

Largely refurbished & in mixed business use



Cedar St. refurbished residential apts., condos & business lofts

Elm St. refurbished but largely empty

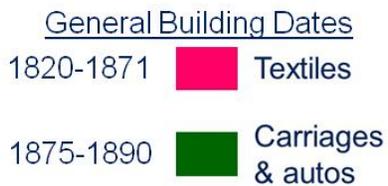
CARRIAGE HILL

Refurbished & in business use

Un-refurbished & mostly empty

Bartley Machine complex, mid-20th century

Oak St. refurbished residential apartments

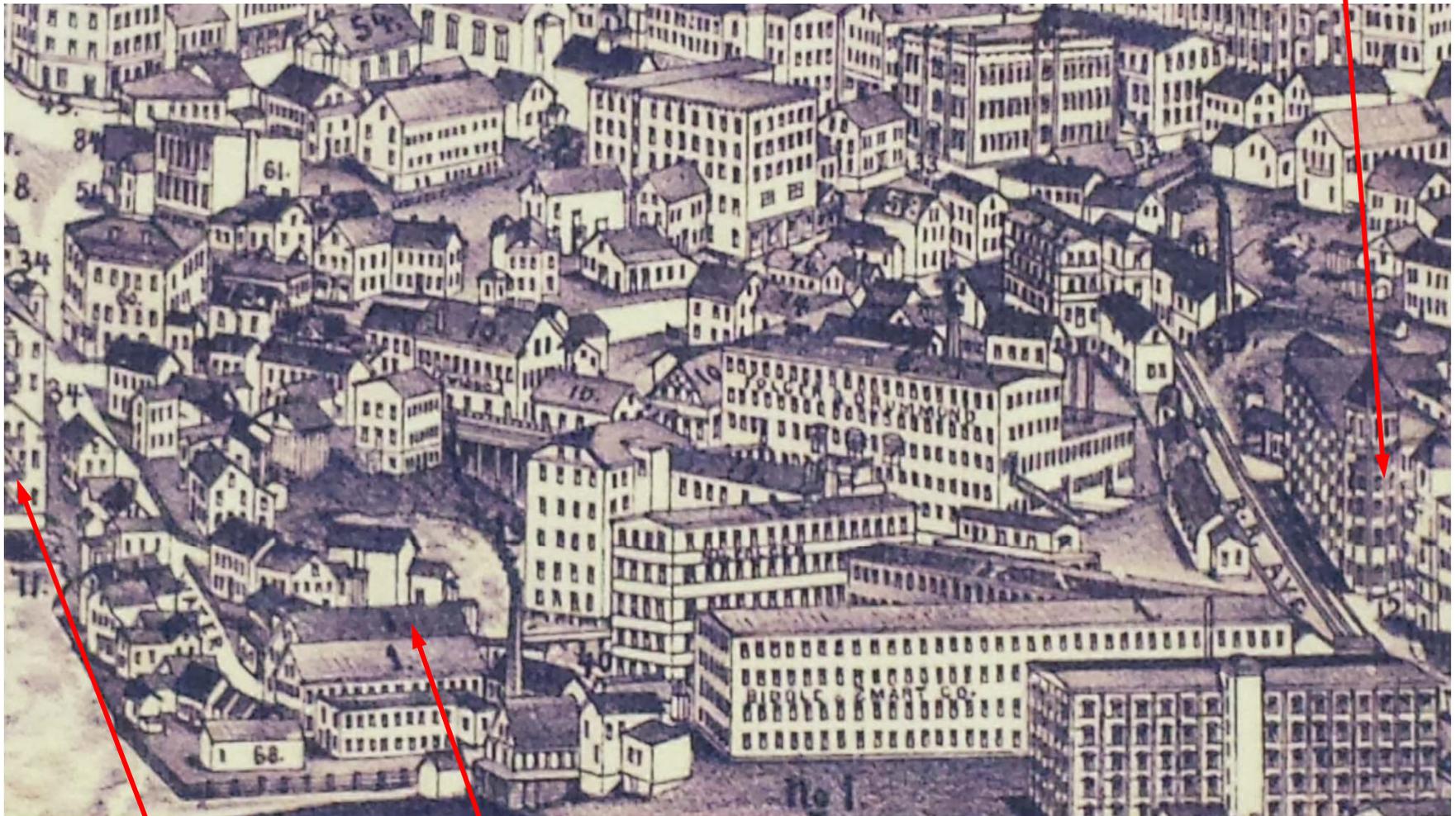


29 Water St. – former Biddle & Smart bldg. currently surrounded by a lot of empty space

1890 Industrial Buildings in the Water St. Area

same Water St. area as seen on previous page

Carriage Hill



Lower textile Mills

29 Water St. – former Biddle & Smart bldg.

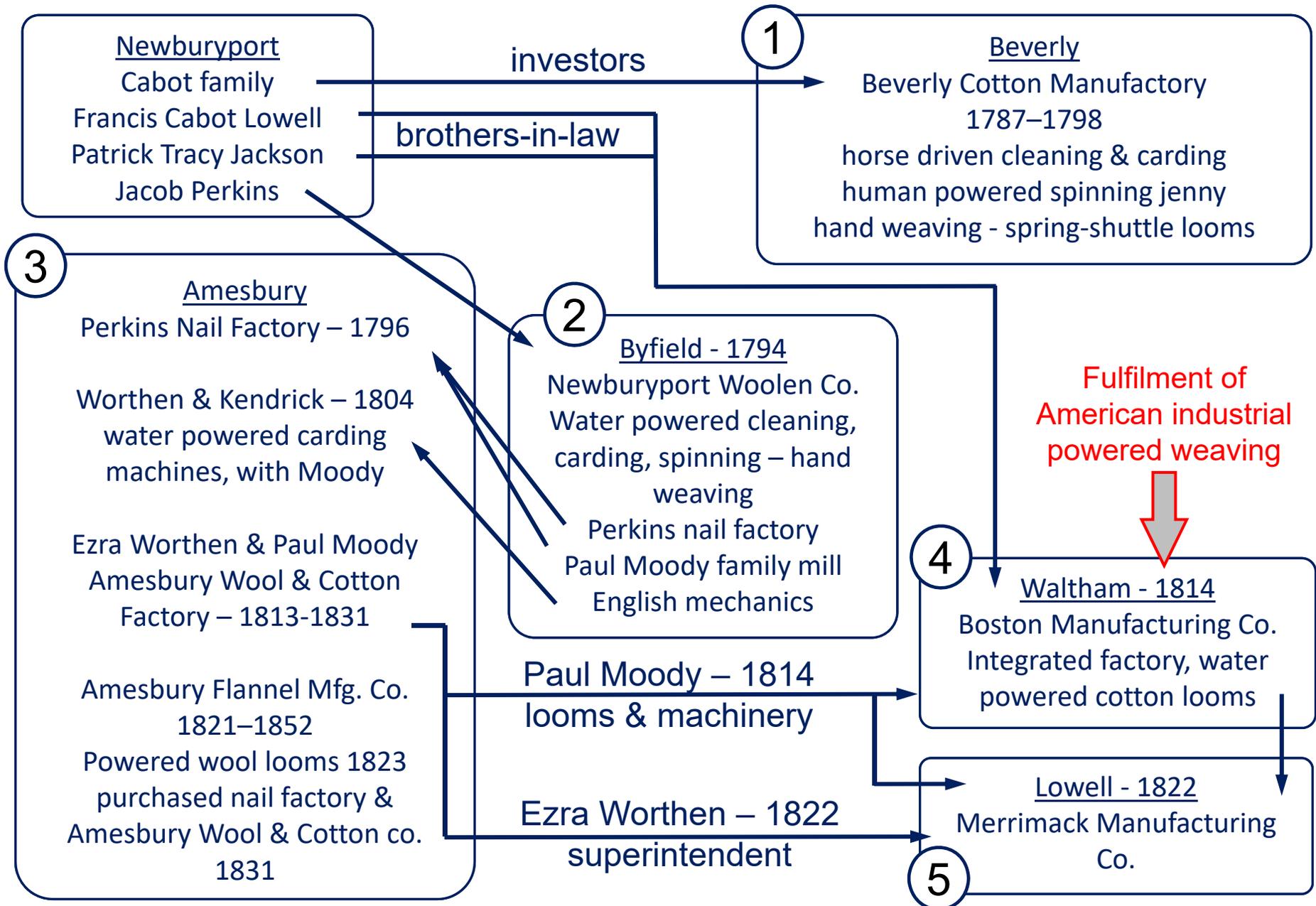
29 Water St. was formerly surrounded by a dense concentration of large carriage factories

Enabling Conditions for Industrial Success

- 1) Powow River – groomed & managed since colonial times
 - 75 feet of drop in 0.2 miles
 - Small enough to be easily harnessed
 - six dams < 50 ft. long in 1825
 -
- 2) Wealth
 - Nearby seaports: Salem, Beverly, & Newburyport, MA, Portsmouth, NH
 - wealthy mercantile investors build local textile industry
- 3) Merrimack River
 - Large transportation route directly to seaport (Newburyport)
- 4) Railroad
 - Eastern Railroad branch line in 1848

Manufacturers' Hotel hosted Amesbury visitors, indicative of local mindset for economic prosperity

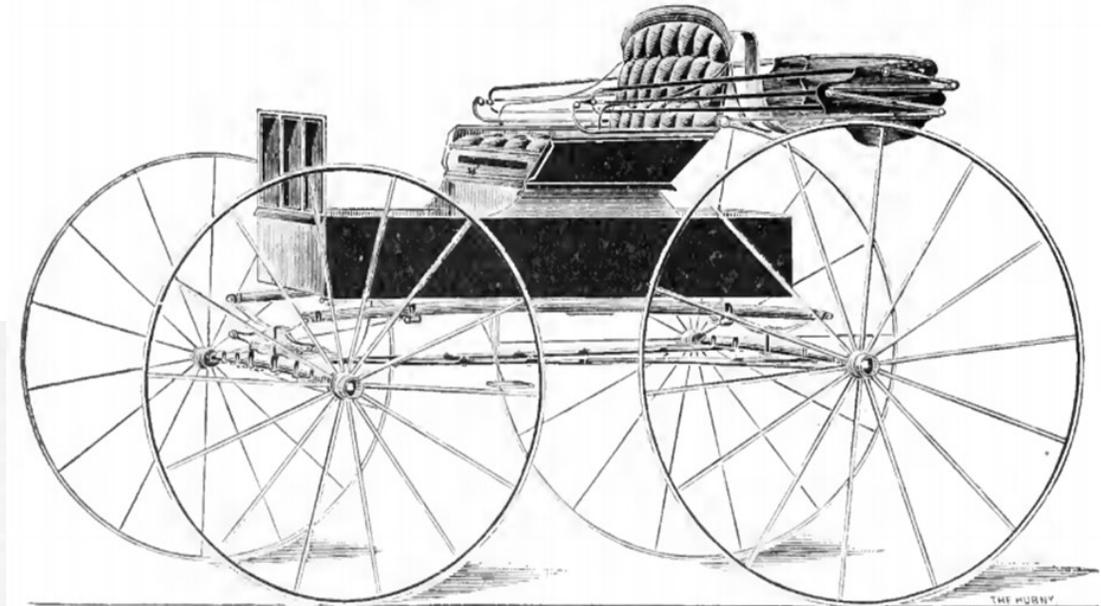
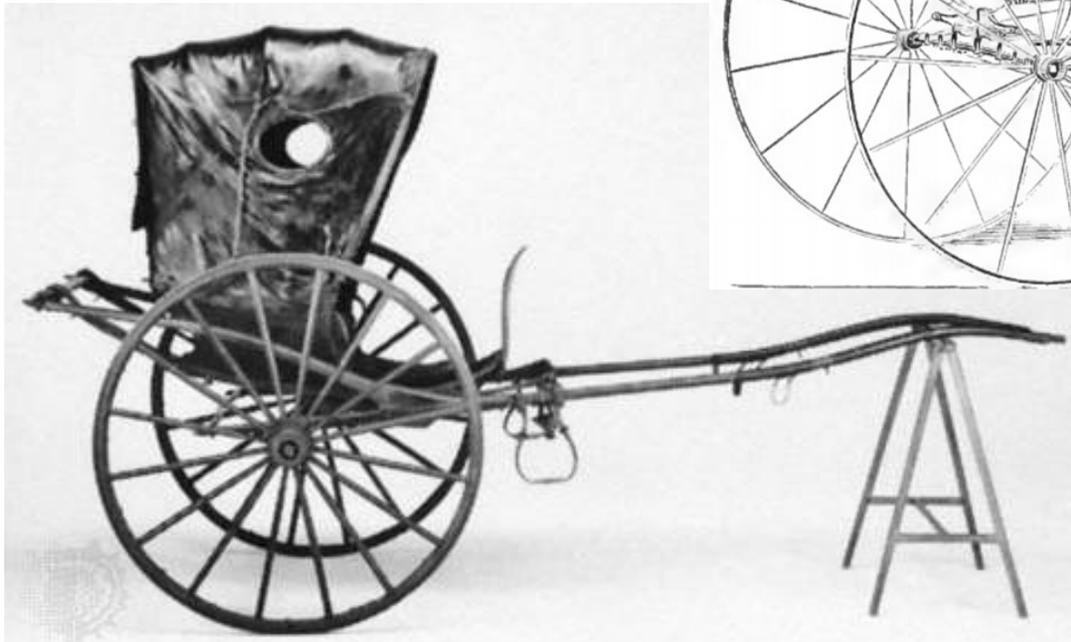
Pioneering of Massachusetts Textile Industry



Early Local Carriage Making

Personal vehicles having upholstery & spring suspension
light construction for high strength-to-weight ratio

2 wheeled chaise
“one hoss shay”



Folding top buggy with
upholstered seat

- Traditional handcraft began ca. 1805 in Merrimac & Merrimacport
- primary driver of those local economies by 1830s
 - high-class vehicles at average price of \$250 during the 1880s

Amesbury Carriage Industry

Brought to Amesbury by Jacob R. Huntington in 1853

- standardized a middle-high-class vehicle around 3 production concepts:
 - part duplication
 - simple assembly line, specific employees & parts at each station
 - wholesale distribution

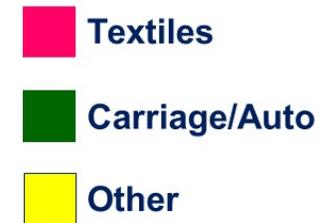
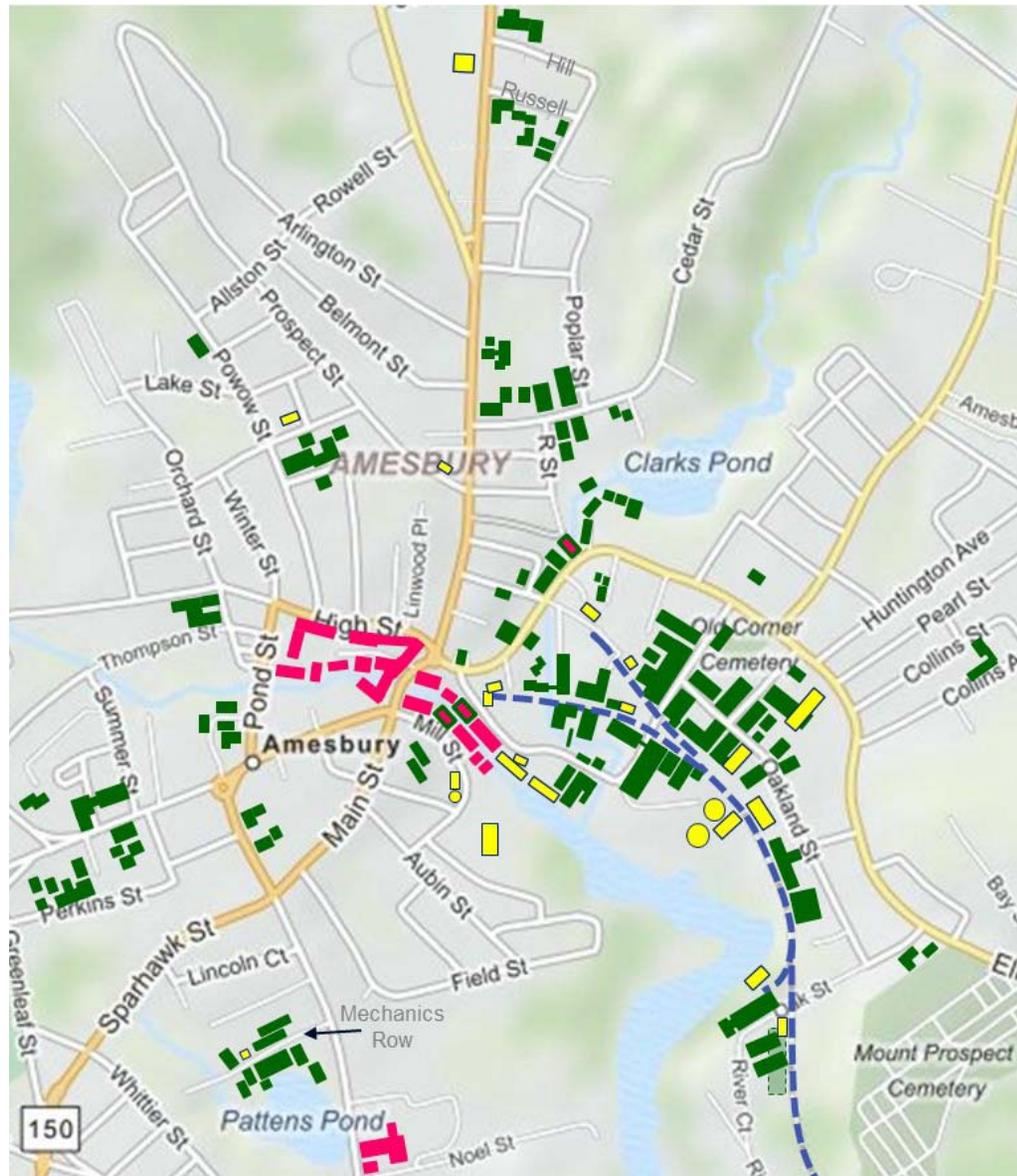


Enclosed body Rockaway, suggestive of later entry into wooden auto bodies

Amesbury merged craft and industrial method to occupy a major place in high grade carriage manufacture

Geographic Distribution of Amesbury Carriage Making

Composite of bldgs. from ca. 1860 to 1925



Carriage manufacture was dispersed throughout town, independent of water power. A cooperative business community that produced 20,000 carriages per year in late 1880s

Amesbury among top 5 carriage making towns, with New Haven, Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis

average wholesale price of \$100 (1880)

2.5X more carriages/employee than in Merrimac & Merrimacport

With accumulated capital, makers later built substantial Carriage Hill factories

First Car to Climb Mt. Washington - 1899



Vehicle is simply a light carriage, having a motor inside.
Note "tiller steering" & rubber tire "bicycle wheels"

Amesbury Auto Body Industry & Automobiles

Started ca. 1900 – a natural outgrowth of carriage making
- early auto bodies were of wood construction

Progressed through metal clad wood, and then all metal construction
- metal forming originally by powered hammers, then presses
- Metal Body Co. relocated to Detroit, was later absorbed by Fisher Body

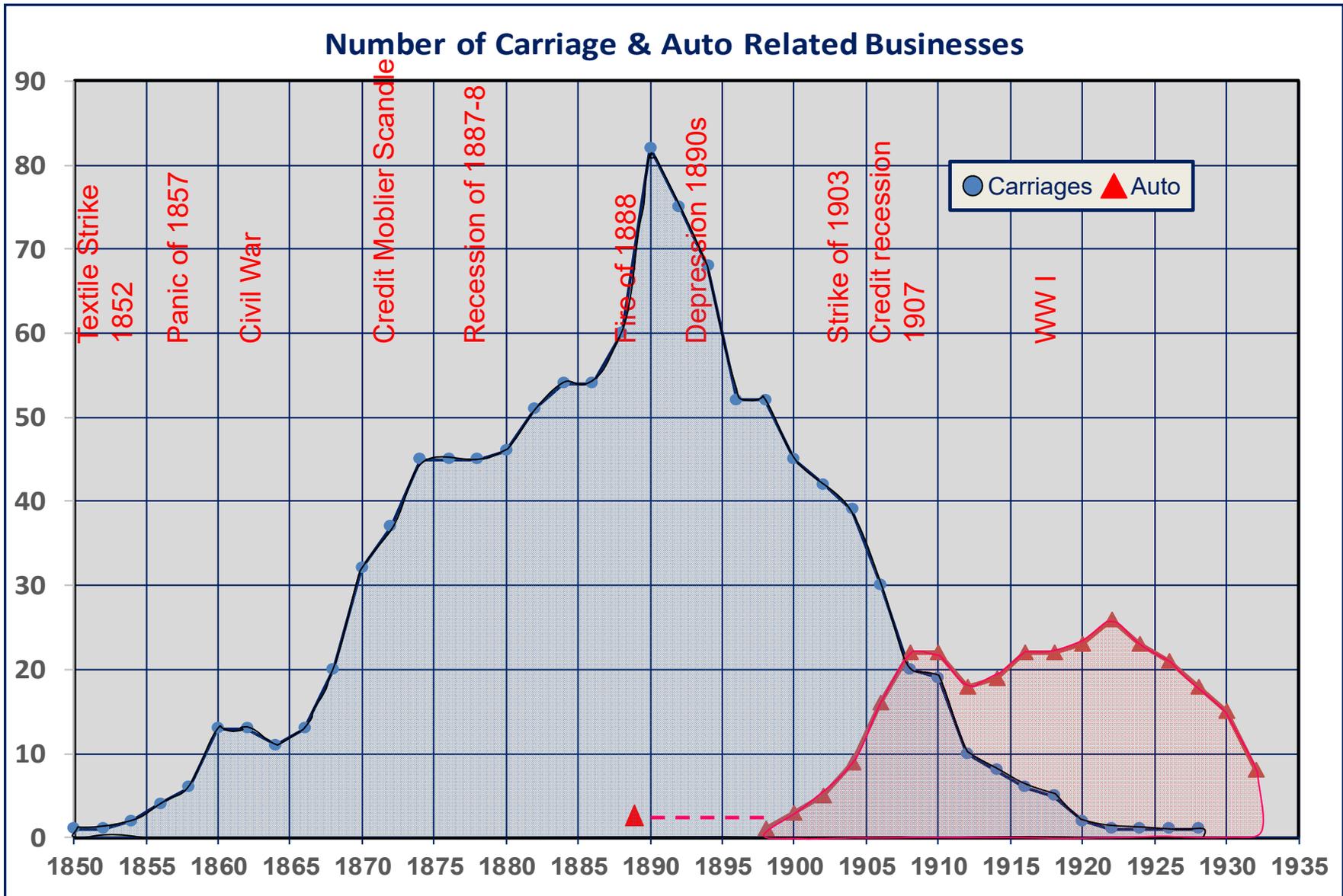
Dominated by a few companies
- occupied most remaining carriage factories & some textile mills
- 2 companies made complete automobiles
- S. R. Bailey electric
- Boston & Amesbury Mfg. Co.

Also horse-drawn & electric trolley cars, starting ca. 1889
- used Thompson Houston electrics from Lynn, Mass, near Boston.

Amesbury merged craft and new metal working technology to become a major producer of high grade & boutique auto bodies

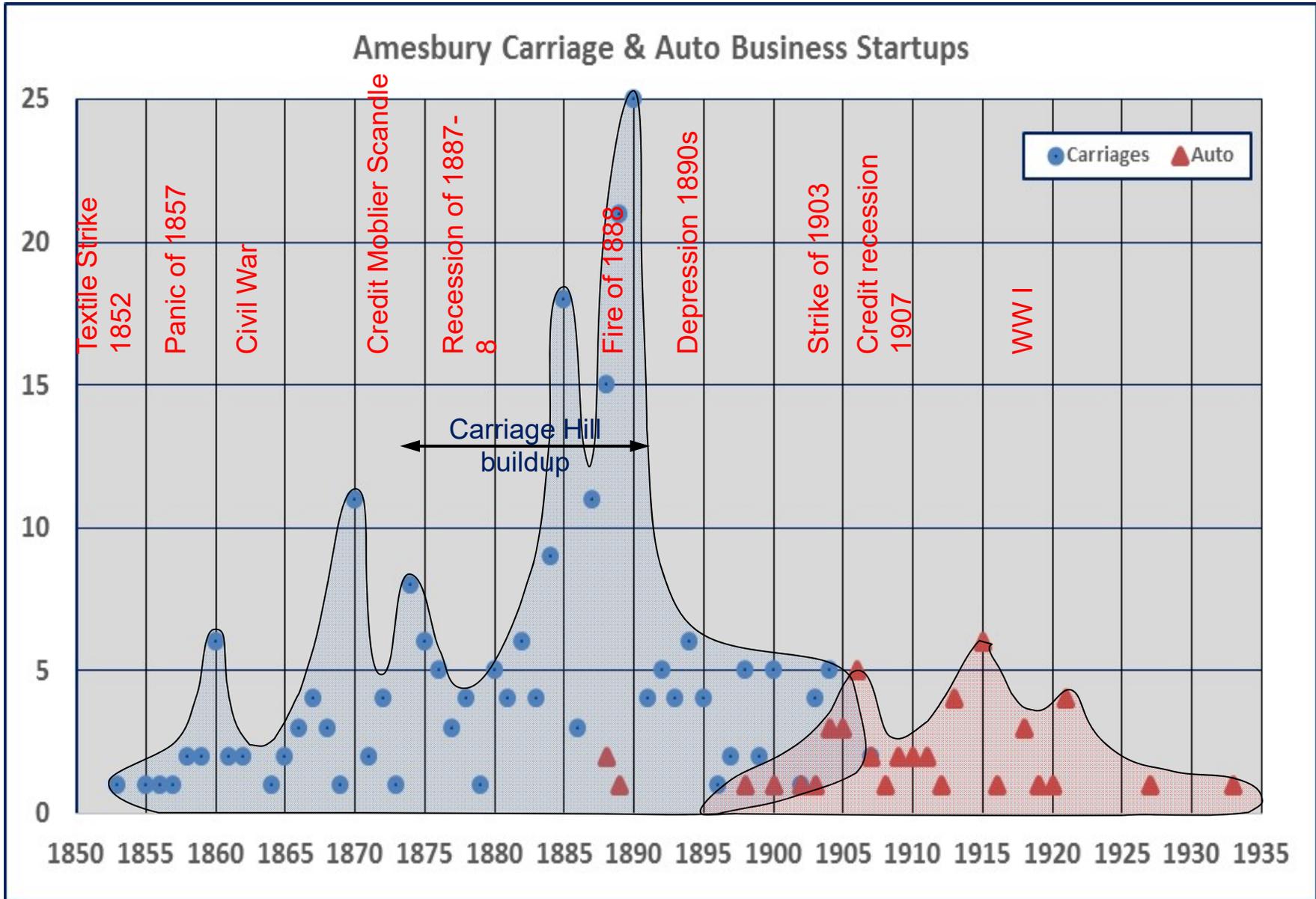
Quantity of Carriage & Auto Body Business Entities

Carriages & Auto bodies, or related businesses



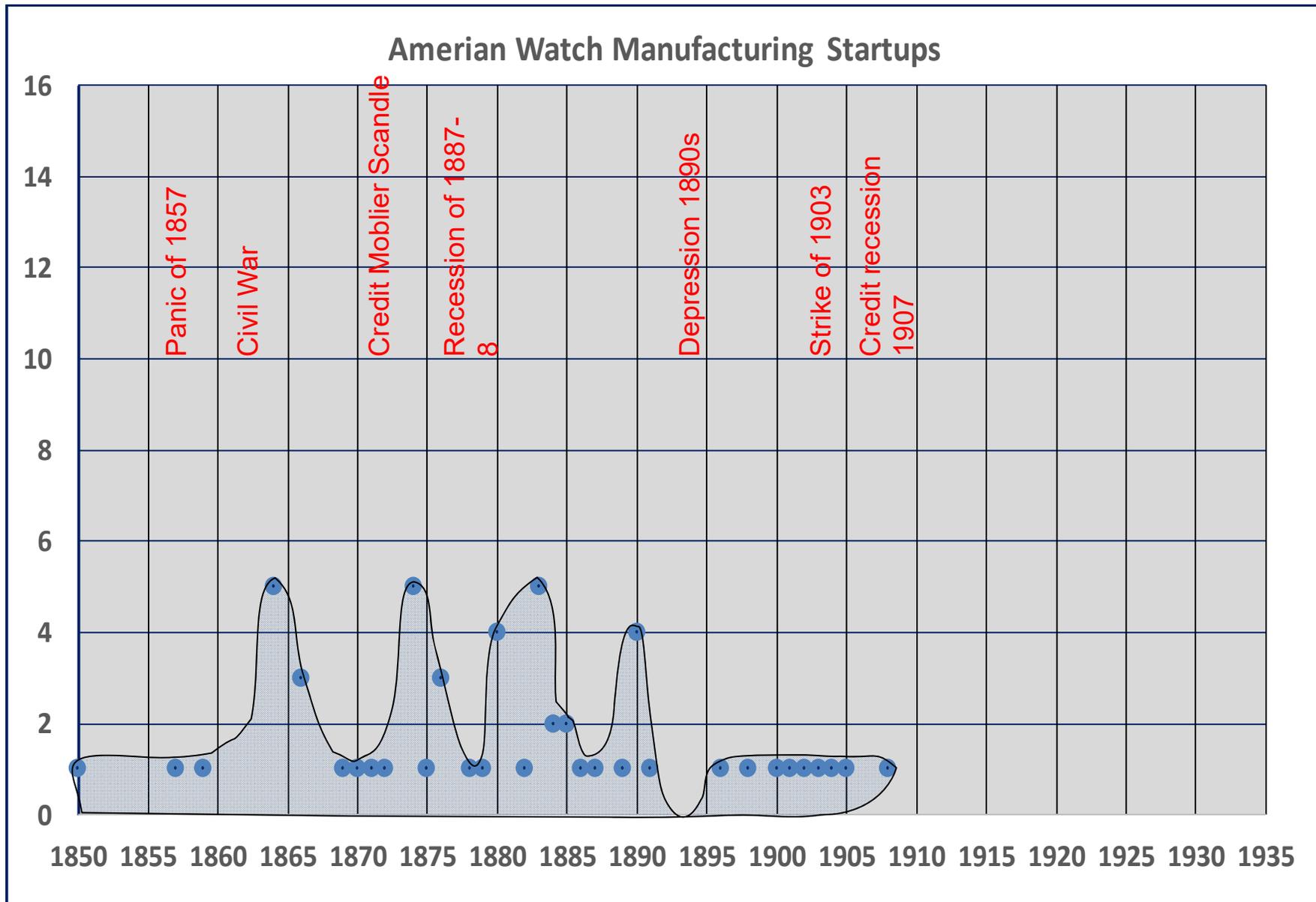
Carriage & Auto Body Business Startups

Carriages & Auto bodies, or related businesses



American Watch Industry Business Startups

fewer but larger capitalizations, responding to same economic trends



Decline of Historical Amesbury Industries

- 1) Significant depression 1892-1897, throughout America & Europe
- 2) Post-depression recovery hampered by changing business demographic
 - textile mills closed 1914, as textiles migrated to deep-south
 - carriage manufacture migrated to mid-west
 - neighborhood carriage factories replaced by dwellings
- 3) By Great Depression, consumer-product auto manufacture was vertically integrating for efficiency, eliminating farm-out body making

Industrial decline resulted in mass extinction of carriage factory buildings during mid-20th century, & major recasting of Amesbury business economy