

## Part I

# INTRODUCTION

## DESCRIPTION OF INDUSTRY

### GROWTH AND IMPORTANCE OF INDUSTRY <sup>1</sup>

The commercial laundry business practically began with the laundering of shirts and collars, as this work was difficult to do well in the home. In 1835 starched collar laundries were operating in Troy and for many years the only collar laundries in the country were located there. Somewhat earlier than this, however, in 1832, there had opened in Jersey City the first strictly commercial flat work laundry, which did the laundry work for steamship companies.

The exact date when power was introduced into the business of laundering is not clear. One story places the origin of the first laundry machine in the gold fields of California during the gold rush of 1849. As there were no women to do the washing, a machine was rigged up, made to work by a treadmill, and criminals sentenced to hard labor were put to work on it. One of the first commercial power laundries is said to have started in 1850 near Pittsburgh, another near Chicago, while Rochester claims one of the earliest on record. In 1860, records of the United States Patent Office showed that patents had been granted to inventors of laundry machines which were crude and simple devices compared to present day machinery.

The early power laundries served mainly large commercial establishments such as hotels, restaurants, steamships, and coat, apron and towel supply houses. The use of power laundries by the small neighborhood hand laundries was a development which followed. Family work has been the last field to be taken over by the power laundry business. The many types of service devised to attract the housewife and the conveniences which commercial laundries offer the modern household would indicate a large expansion in this direction as the years go on. In family laundering the flat work and rough dry services and the so-called bundle service developed first, many years before the wet wash service. The wet wash industry started in New England about 1910 and spread from there to Chicago and New York; about 1918 these laundries started to offer a flat work service for a small extra charge. About 1920 the New Way System was introduced, in which the entire family bundle is put through the flat work ironer with a few pieces touched up by hand and paid for by the pound.

<sup>1</sup>Material drawn from "Opportunities in the Power Laundry Industry as a Vocation," published in 1922 by the Laundry Board of Trade of Greater New York in cooperation with the Board of Education of the City of New York.