Noble and Cooley, founded in 1854 as a manufacturer of toy drums, has continued to produce toys, professional drum sets and drum related furniture for 150 years. They produced marching drums for the Union Army during the Civil War. The "Old Drum Factory" as it is known in its home town of Granville Massachusetts was one of the highlights of SIA's 1998 fall tour of the Connecticut Valley. The historic enterprise is finding it increasingly difficult to manufacture drums at a competitive price. Intense foreign competition, changing marketing systems and competition from electronic and a wider variety of toys for children have decimated the toy drum market.

The drums are made with a fascinating group of historic vernacular machinery; much of it invented and built by the owners around 1900. The "new" mill building, dating c. 1870, is a well maintained example of "country factory" of the period and preserves some overhead pulley and leather belt drive systems and artifacts of the original water power system.
The firm is now engaged in selling off the existing inventory and is considering alternative uses for the manufacturing space in their plant. A committee of volunteers is developing a plan to examine possibilities for preservation or reuse. One idea under consideration visualizes establishing a museum dedicated to "Yankee Ingenuity" with a mission of preserving the manufacturing technology of small, late-19th century establishments. The old mill would also be a good location for setting up a period toy museum. The committee welcomes suggestions from SIA members and the general public. Contact Bob Stewart at <robert.stewart13@att.net>.

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