

A TIMELY TALK ON THE TOWN CLOCK

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The new official seal of the Town of Maynard, as adopted at a Special town meeting held on January 13, 1975, features its most familiar landmark--the so-called "Town Clock". The Maynard Historical Society has had very little written information about the clock, and for this reason I made an attempt to gather some interesting facts through personal inquiry with a few people who worked for the American Woolen Company and could perhaps supply the answers to some questions.

One reason that no accumulation of historical data had ever been recorded was, that although the clock has always been referred to as the "Town Clock", Maynard could never claim its ownership, and therefore there are no records to consult. It was given to the Assabet Manufacturing Company in 1892 by Lorenzo Maynard, Agent for the company, and the son of Amory Maynard, its founder in 1848. In 1898 ownership was transferred to the American Woolen Company and in July 1953 to the Maynard Industries, Inc. During the summer of 1974 Digital Equipment Corporation purchased the entire mill complex where it had rented space for fifteen years. Thus, the beloved "Mill Clock" is now the property of Digital.

The clock tower is a complex wooden structure over a brick base on the roof of building 8 annex. It was built by Levi Cheney, well-known Maynard resident, who built many sturdy homes in Maynard in the late 1800's and early 1900's. The outside of the tower was



painted white with a brick-red trim, and these colors were borne for fifty years, until World War II. The red was overlaid with grey to make it less conspicuous from the air. The clock was made by the E. Howard Clock Company in Waltham, Massachusetts. A staging was set up and installation of the machinery was begun on October 11, 1892. The four faces of the clock were installed the following week and all the staging was removed on October 17, 1892. (This charming bit of reporting appeared in the Concord Enterprise under the Maynard news item on October 27, 1892:

"The clock on the mill tower proves to be one of the greatest conveniences in our village and when striking can be heard at quite a distance, the quality of the tones of the bell being rich, penetrating and pleasant. The new dynamo for lighting the tower went into operation Monday evening, (October 23, 1892) and hereafter the clock will be illuminated all night. The mill company are entitled to the thanks of all the community for this great public blessing."

The stairways to the tower number eight landings - three of these from the fifth floor (height of the main building) and boast 124 steps and is 85 feet from the ground. The stairs in the main building are of normal width, but the nearer to the top, the narrower they become. The wooden tower floor is twelve feet across. Into each of four corners are installed heavy iron rods which descend two floors down into the tower. These rods add strength to the wooden edifice and have protected it from being blown away by buffeting

winds. The clock mechanism is in the middle of the tower and extending from the center of the machine to each individual face are four metal shafts. A small clock, nine inches in diameter is used to adjust and set the controls of the large clock, since the outside of it is not visible from the inside of the tower. There are two winders with cables and weights -- one for the timer and one for the striker. They are wound with a crank-type handle requiring much human muscle and elbow grease. The operating machinery is an eight-day mechanism so must be wound every week. Ninety turns of the crank are required to wind the timer and 330 times to wind the striker (which <sup>no doubt</sup> explains why the striker doesn't strike much any more!) The complete winding job takes an hour and a half.

The clock faces are nine feet in diameter and the sides of the tower are twelve feet wide. Behind each face is a metal shield eight feet in diameter and three and one-half feet from each face. These shields hold five 60 watt bulbs a piece and light the clock faces.

Originally the power for the clock lights was operated by a water wheel which generated 40 cycles. When the tower was converted to 60 cycles in 1929 the clock lights were not converted and continued to be lighted by water power until the floods of Hurricane Diane in 1957 inflicted devastating damage to many of the first floor mill buildings. Much re-wiring was necessary and while this was being done the clock lights were put on the regular 60 cycles. It is rumored that Digital is arranging to electrify their rare possession.



I classify it as a rarity because most other tower clocks of the same vintage have been destroyed or become victims of automation. Certainly the latter is more convenient and accurate and the whole town would operate on the same time.

So, this is the story of the "Town Clock". No matter who owns it, supervises it, cares for it -- perhaps even destroys it, it will always affectionally be Maynard's "Town Clock". Long may it tick!

Credits

Concord Enterprise, 1892

Mr. Irving Berg, former resident manager of the Maynard Industries, Inc., for information on the water wheel.

Mr. Arthur Dawson, retired maintenance superintendent.

And especially to Mr. Patrick Murray, long-time Maynard resident, and maintenance man for the mill property who patiently answered a barrage of questions over a two week period and provided the statistics and descriptions.

In 1892, the fine "Town Clock" on the mill was given by Lorenzo Maynard and placed in position in the Fall of that year. The tower was erected by the Assabet Manufacturing Company. The clock is still operating and it serves as a landmark for folks of yesterday and today.

Dull times and poor business during 1893-1894 and later, finally drove the company into solvency on December 31, 1898. Receivers were appointed who kept the mills running on a reduced output until May 1, 1889, when the American Woolen Company bought them for \$400,000. At that time it was the largest woolen mill in the United States, with sixty-six sets of cards and three hundred and fifty broad looms.

The American Woolen Company soon after began to improve the property, replacing the old machinery with new and increasing its capacity. ( Note: - The Assabet Manufacturing Company while in operation had conducted a form of savings bank where the operatives, as well as others, deposited their money. When the company failed the bank did also. The Assignees on August 12, 1899 paid the depositors a 25 per cent dividend, and on October 13, 1899 a second dividend of 33 per cent. This was the final. The Town of Maynard was among the depositors and lost \$3,333.33. The General Laws now prohibit this type of banking.