

"ASSABET MILLS"
(a history of)

Compiled by Ralph L. Sheridan

The real threat of the settlement of Assabet Village to supersede both Stow and Sudbury began in 1846, when Amory Maynard and William Knight began the operations which established their woolen mills on the Assabet River. The Village began to assume new life. The water power which had been used only by Asa Smith's combination saw, grist and cider mill located near the bridge on what is now called Mill Street, and afterwards called "Jewell's Mill", where spindles for textile mills were made, was purchased. On November 24, 1845, Mr. Knight purchased from Asa Smith the "Jewell Mill" and two houses nearby at Mill Street and Summer Hill Lane(now called Summer Hill Road). In the house now owned by Mr. Maynard made his first residence.

Mr. Knight for some years had owned and operated a carpet factory at Saxonville(a section of nearby Framingham), and which had recently been destroyed by fire. Mr. Maynard had left school at the age of fourteen to enter the sawmill owned by Isaac Maynard, his father, at Fort Meadow, Marlboro, also helping on the farm. The elder Maynard died when Amory was sixteen; the boy took charge of the business, carrying it on successfully, taking on building and contracting and within a short time was employing about sixty

men. In this way he came in contact with Mr. Knight, for whom he had done some building, and this resulted in their partnership for the manufacture of carpets. When the City of Boston took over Fort Meadow Pond, the sawmill lost it's water rights, and Mr. Maynard turned to Assabet Village as the scene of his further operations. On May 19, 1846, he made his first land purchase from Eben S. Brooks, this land being on both sides of the "Elsibeth" River. Land was also bought at this time from Thomas H. and Silas P. Brooks, and of Haman, George and Benjamin Smith, continuing his purchases until he controlled all the available water power, water rights and mill sites in this vicinity. In July 1846, no less than thirty-four deeds are recorded, covering his purchases,--a map of November 1846 shows that he owned one hundred and nine acres of choice land in the heart of the Village. Within a few years he had control of the water rights up the river to Boone's Pond(Stow) and to Fort Meadow Pond(Marlborough). It is related, when Mr. Maynard approached Haman Smith regarding a large tract of land he desired to purchase, Mr. Smith was not favorably impressed by his looks, and doubted his being a desirable citizen and questioned his ability to pay for the land.

To make the river a more stable source of power he bought a strip of land from Haman Smith, two and one-half rods wide, from the river to what is now the mill pond; dug a canal and led the water to what was then a low, swampy hollow with a trout brook running through it. The

tract was cleared of trees, an earthen dam built across from the Thompson Street side to the Main Street side, near where the present railroad crossing is located, making everything ready for the erection of the mill buildings, for which his early training had fitted him.

(Note:- Artemas Whitney, who was born in that part of Stow, which is now Maynard, was closely associated with Mr. Maynard as a friend and advisor, took the contract to build the (Ben Smith's) dam across the river and did the first day's work on it alone. Also, helped to build the present Mill pond, and laid the foundation for the first 100 houses built to accommodate the mill operatives.)

The Ben Smith Dam having been thrown across the river, the water led into the Mill pond, water wheels being installed, they were ready for the mills. The first building was a wooden structure, 50 x 100 feet, and was located at the corner of what was later called Main Street and Walnut Street. (Note:-There was no Main Street when Mr. Maynard came to the village. On September 22, 1848, Stow appointed a committee "to contract for the building of a new road and bridge as ordered by the County Commissioners on the petition of William H. Knight and others." Sudbury voted on April 2, 1849 "to pay for the road and bridge at Knight's factory, \$1,310. The bridge was a two-span wooden one resting on a center pier of stone. Walnut Street was originally built on the south side of the river from Main Street to Thompson Street. In 1872, it was necessary to use this land for additional mill buildings, and Walnut

Street was relocated on the north side of the river and an iron bridge erected.)

In the Spring of 1847, they began to make yarn, and soon after carpets. (Note:-The former Mary Wood, mother of William H. Gutteridge, author of "A Brief History of the Town of Maynard, 1921", wound the first bobbin in the factory. Robert Gutteridge, his father, was a carpet weaver. Worked sixty-six hours per week, 6:30 A.M. to 6:30 P.M., with forty-five minutes rest at noon.) (Note:- A piece of the first carpet made at the factory is now owned by the Maynard Historical Society.) The company was granted a charter of incorporation by the General Court in 1849. In 1855, the industry was contained in three wooden buildings, and consisted of eleven worsted combers, four sets of cards and fifty-two hand carpet looms and employed one hundred and twenty-five hands. (Note:- One of these three buildings was used as a wool shop; it was moved to where it presently stands, Main Street, /now number 165-169, and converted into a factory boarding house and then into separate tenements.)

At Mr. Knight's retirement Mr. Maynard took over the entire business and ran it successfully until the panic of 1857 crippled him so badly that he failed and the mills were sold at auction. In the conduct of his mills, Mr. Maynard's two sons, Lorenzo and William were associated with him. In 1859, he purchased from the City of Boston the Fort Meadow (Marlborough) Reservoir containing three hundred acres, and he had previously, in 1846, obtained entire control of Boone's Pond (Storrs and Hudson), contain-

ing two hundred acres by his land purchases and flowage rights, adding materially to their valuation. In 1862, the mills were reorganized as a corporation, with the name Assabet Manufacturing Company, F.A. Goddard, President; T. Quincy Brown, Treasurer; Amory Maynard, "Agent". The small buildings were replaced by others of more substantial and enlarged capacity. New machinery was installed and the manufacture of carpets dropped,-- blankets, flannels and cloth being substituted. The Civil War was in progress and large Government orders were executed, which enabled the company to undertake an extensive program of expansion. (Note:-In 1864, a large brick icehouse with 40,000 tons capacity, which had been erected in 1850 by N.J. Wyeth where the Front Street houses now stand, and ice cut from the Mill pond and shipped to Boston, was purchased by the Assabet Manufacturing Company, as it was no longer being used. The building was torn down and the bricks used for mill construction. The granite arch and keystone may be seen over the door of No. 12 mill on Main Street (The building in which the Digital Corporation offices are now located.) The business continued successful and several large buildings were added from time to time. The number of employees became so great that tenements to house them had to be built by the company, streets were laid out and an entire community life grew up around the factory.

Mr. Maynard continued as agent until failing health in 1885 necessitated relinquishing the position to

his son Lorenzo, with his grandson, William H. Maynard, as Superintendent. In 1847 the valuation of the business was set at \$150,000, and on the death of Mr. Maynard in 1890(March 5), it was \$1,500,000.

In 1886, the present red brick chimney, two hundred and seven feet high, was erected. It is still in daily use.

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. (Note:-It 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 insolvency on December 31, 1898. Receivers were appointed who kept the mills running on a reduced output until May 1, 1899, 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 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 to the depositors a 25% dividend, and on October 13, 1899 a second dividend of 3%. *5 was announced but was not paid until Feb. 23, 1900.* This was final. The Town of Maynard was

among the depositors and lost \$3333.33. The General Laws now prohibit this type of banking.)

In May 1901, the mill office was enlarged and new rules for entering the mill in effect. The new "Riverside" building constructed,-- the finishing room located on the bottom floor and the finish burlers on the second floor. In 1902, another floor was added to this building. With its modern windows ^{the} ~~this~~ building looked well from the Sudbury Street bridge.

In 1901, to make room for the new weave room, the freight sheds near the old sawmill were moved across Walnut Street to company owned land on Hillside Street. The sawmill torn down and rebuilt on the river bank not far from the freight sheds on Walnut Street.

June 1901, the Reardon estate off Parker Street purchased to build sixty tenements.

July 1901, Agent Amory Maynard, 2nd, and Superintendent George Hinchcliffe assisted in laying the first stone of the new No. 5 Mill on Thompson Street. This building when completed will be the largest woolen mill in the United States,-- 640 ft. long, 106 ft. wide and five stories high. The powerhouse adds fifty feet more. It will be known as a 100 set mill. Dynamos replaced the gasometer. The building was completed in March 1902.

(Note:--Since its birth the plant has been under the supervision of the Maynard family, and it is by singular coincidence that the man who now stands at the head of the mammoth textile establishment should bear the name of the

man who gave it it's birth, that of Amory Maynard. He is to retire on October 1, the last of the family connected with the Assabet Mills---- Amory Maynard, 1st, until 1885; Lorenzo, his son, Superintendent; William Maynard, 1st, Assistant Superintendent; William Maynard, 2nd, Superintendent; Amory Maynard, 2nd, Superintendent and also the first Agent under the American Woolen Company.)

In 1901, a large boarding house with eighty rooms was built on Main Street, and an old mill barn was torn down to make room for it. This was later known as the Assabet and Middlesex Houses, and is now the site of the United States Post Office.

In 1902, the Mahoney estate of Waltham Street purchased and staked out for tenements. In all one hundred and sixty erected. Also, sewerage system installed by the Company to take care of these tenements. To erect another boarding house near the Central House on upper Main Street, where a similar structure was just completed. (Note:- These were the Minto House and the West End House. One was ~~exactly~~ destroyed by fire several years ago and the other is now occupied partly by Buscemi's market.) Also, built five new blocks,-- two on Sudbury Court and three on company property near the Paper Mill dam. With the installation of dynamos in the new power plant, electricity became available and on September 1, 1902, a contract was made between the American Woolen Company and the Town of Maynard for lighting the town, and the old kerosene lamps passed into oblivion.

(Note:-James Hall was the first person to operate a power loom in the Assabet Mills,--he had also worked as a young man in these mills over forty years ago.)

In 1904, No. 6 mill was built.(Note:-This is the mill in which the Beacon Publishing Company is now located.)

In 1905, a new office for the mills was built on Main Street. In 1906, five new double houses were built on Maynard's hill,--two on Dartmouth Court, two on Dartmouth Street and one on Elmwood Street. In 1911, work started on a new storehouse, 100 x 50 ft x five stories, out over the Mill pond. August 1913, rebuilt the dam and sluiceway at the "Old Paper Mill". (Note:- The Assabet Manufacturing Company had purchased the Paper Mill property in 1895.) In 1916, a chimney of hollow brick two hundred feet high was built near the red brick chimney. This was torn down in October 1956.

In 1918, No. 1 Mill was built over the Mill pond, 500 ft. long, and a steam turbine engine installed. Also, in 1918, the Gorham Brown farm was purchased and several new houses were built. One of the streets being named for Frank J. DeMars, the first Maynard man to fall in World War I.

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August 1920, four houses, a barn and storehouse located on Hillside Street burned with a loss of \$75,000. The barn was one-half of the original Lorenzo Maynard barn that had been moved from Maynard's hill. One of the storehouses was the old original mill building of 1846. It was moved to this location in 1901.

In 1934, the American Woolen Company became solely a manufacturing enterprise. At that time they sold at public auction all their property except the mill buildings, because ownership of mill houses, once a necessity, was no longer economically justified. Most of the houses were purchased by the tenants. The Town of Maynard purchased the old Assabet and Middlesex Boarding House on Main Street to be used as a town hall. This was sold in 1962 and is now the site of the United States Post Office.

The Great Depression of 1929, which lasted until 1939 when trouble again broke out in Europe, placed a serious pinch on the American Woolen Company and the Assabet Mills. Serious labor troubles also haunted them and in October 1931 the mill closed down and all help^{1,200} locked out. This dispute between labor and management saw considerable of the machinery moved to other mills. Maynard was faced with real hard times, which were somewhat alleviated by the various agencies created by the Government to keep some of the people busy.

In 1941, when the United States again became involved across the oceans, and World War II began, the mill was soon booming on a seven-day week, twenty-four hours around the clock, employing over 2000 making blankets, overcoating and suitings for the Armed forces. Following the close of this war conditions came to a standstill and the Assabet Mills became a casualty of the shifting public taste in textiles. No longer were soft woolens such as were made in Maynard in fashion. People wanted the hard woven wors-

teds. Also, the synthetic materials, i.e., rayon, nylon, dacron, polyester, etc., were making heavy inroads in the cloth manufacturing business.

In 1950, the American Woolen Company closed the Assabet Mills for good. These mills had served as a barometer for the Town during its existence. Most of the townspeople and many from the surrounding towns found employment in them. When business was good at the mills the Town flourished; but there were many lean periods. They passed through their share of panics, strikes, shutdowns, and the whole community suffered thereby. With the closing of the mills the people of Maynard were now facing a situation which had become too familiar in New England in recent years; that of a "one-industry" community suddenly bereft of the mill payroll by which the community by and large has existed.*

In July 1953, ten enterprising Worcester business men formed Maynard Industries, Incorporated, purchased the hugh mill property for \$200,000.00, and besides helping the Town to solve its unemployment problem secured the diversification denied the community for more than one hundred years. Maynard had faced the loss of its single, all-important industry. Today some twenty firms are doing business in mill buildings, and no longer are our economic eggs all in one basket. This has also resulted in other well-known industries to locate in the Town.

Assabet Mills
Excerpt from "Stow, Massachusetts, 1683-1933" - Crowell.

Page 48. "An interesting story is told of Amory Maynard, the founder of the large mill in what is now Maynard, then Stow. Amory Maynard was a carpenter by trade; he was employed in a mill in Marlboro, now Hudson, and made frames for buildings. A man by the name of "Knight" came from Saxonville from time to time, noticed young Maynard, and sidered him a most promising young man. So he told Maynard if he would select a suitable site, he would furnish him money to build a mill. Maynard looked up and down the Assabet River for sufficient water power, as there was no electricity in those days, to run his mill. After some deliberation, he selected the present site of the Maynard Mill. Dams were accordingly built, and business was flourishing. In 1846, he purchased land on both sides of the "Assabet" river, and from time to time, from individuals owning land along the river, till he controlled all the available water power, water rights and mill sites in this vicinity. Within a few years he enlarged his possessions in order to control water rights up the river to Boone's Pond and Fort Meadow. His father, Isaac Maynard had a saw-mill at the foot of Fort Meadow in which he had worked, having left school at the age of fourteen. When sixteen, his father died, and Amory took charge of the business, till at one time he had sixty men in his employ. In this way he came in contact with Mr. Knight, for whom he had done some building, and this resulted in their partnership for the manufacture of carpets.