

THE SQUANTUM MILLS

In 1763, ten years before the incorporation of the town of Jaffrey, Jonathan Hopkinson (see Volume II) bought of Robert Boyes, a speculator of Londonderry, two one-hundred-acre lots of land in the extreme southeast corner of the township, then Middle Monadnock, with a reservation “to the owners thereof of two mills on the premises, Viz a saw mill and corn mill,” so long as they were kept in order for the benefit of the township. Hopkinson was himself a housewright and joiner, and evidently soon afterward acquired ownership of the mills, as in 1764 the Rindge records show that he sawed lumber for the first meeting-house in the place. In 1768 Hopkinson sold his land and mills, the property enhanced by a “Mansion House,” to Ephraim Hunt from Concord, Massachusetts. Ephraim Hunt, the previously supposed pioneer of this section of the town, instead of being limited to the cramped quarters of a log cabin, found himself comfortably established in a “Mansion House,” with two mills ready built.

Tradition and all available records support the assumption that these two mills were those erected by the Rowley Canada proprietors about 1743, upon a gratuity of sixty-one pounds collected on sixty-one settler’s rights in the Massachusetts township of Rowley Canada. This mill was upon the upper mill privilege of the Annett Manufacturing Company in Squantum Village, where a part of the original foundations may still be seen. The old mill remained in operation for practically one hundred years, being replaced by a mill nearly double its size built by Emerson Hale between 1840 and 1843. The grist mill, which in early days served a population for twenty miles around, was in the basement of the mill. The old mill was well remembered by men recently living, and was aptly described by George Stratton as an ill-looking old structure, when as a boy he was sent there with his grist. Nevertheless, could its proper likeness be found to-day it would command its weight in silver as an adornment of the pages of this book.

To this old mill came Richard Peabody with logs for his good house and barn. Here was sawed the lumber for Benjamin Prescott's two-story frame house; here the settlers came with their grists from far up and down the Old Boston Road. There was no busier place in town. The mansion house soon had an annex used for a store that likewise served as center of trade for miles around.

The successive owners of the first mill after the Rowley Canada proprietors were Jonathan Hopkinson, to Ephraim Hunt in 1768, to John Eaton in 1774. John Eaton, a versatile character and Jack-of-all-trades, introduced the business of wood turning and is said to have manufactured flax wheels. He turned the thousands of spindles or balusters that made up the balustrade that crowned the walls of the pews in the old meeting-house at Jaffrey Center. On December 31, 1778, Eaton sold his mansion and mill property to James Cutter of Rindge, and at this time bought lot 19, range 10, which extended from the wall at the rear of the present cottage of Miss Marie Nichols southward to the Rindge line, a considerable part of the lot being covered by Contoocook Lake, and built a house on the lot, the location of which is indicated by a depression in the ground south of the summer cottage of Edward B. Stratton. Two large pines are at present growing in the former cellar.

James Cutter owned the Squantum saw and grist mills until his death, April 12, 1790. On July 16, 1791, Benjamin Prescott, administrator of Cutter's estate, sold the original property with the addition of twenty acres of land across the line in Rindge directly south of the present Squantum Village to Captain David Sherwin, whose father owned the Sherwin Hill, still so-called, in Rindge adjoining the Jaffrey line. Captain Sherwin was a man of character and enterprise (see Volume II). He added to the former business that of taverner and storekeeper, the place being on the old Boston or County Road, and on the Rindge addition beside a never failing spring of pure water he had a "potash" for the manufacture from wood ashes of potash and pearlash. In 1794-5, as shown by the Jaffrey tax record, Sherwin sawed sixty thousand feet of lumber and ground

two thousand bushels of grain. On June 30, 1795, Sherwin sold the property and business he had established to his neighbor, Benjamin Prescott. The successive owners now were Nathaniel Ingalls, son-in-law of Ephraim Hunt, former owner, to 1802; Benjamin Prescott, Jr., 1802 to 1803; Deacon Benjamin Kingsbury, miller, storekeeper, taverner, preacher, and manufacturer of nails, 1803 to 1817. Deacon Kingsbury sold to William Buckley, son of John Buckley of Jaffrey.

After three years of financial hard sledding Buckley sold or assigned the property to William Ainsworth in July, 1820, who deeded the mills, mill yard, water privilege, and five acres of land previously occupied by William Buckley, to Sewell Gould, who lived near-by on the present Garfield farm, and the homestead and other lands to William Walton, who had previously lived in the extreme east part of Rindge. From this time Gould carried on the saw and grist mill business until his death, December 29, 1826. The following month the property was advertised for sale as follows:

Saw and grist mill with two run of stones, situate in the southeasterly part of Jaffrey, one half mile from turnpike Boston to Keene, one half mile from school house, and at junction of five roads. Mills in good repair and as well situated for a great run of business as any mills in the vicinity, and equal to any in a dry season. About five acres of land with a blacksmith shop. The dam is firm and durable, made with stone and gravel. Possession given February next. Inquire at mills or of Oliver Prescott, Admr. Jaffrey, Nov. 1, 1827.

Meanwhile, William Walton, owner of the mill homestead, conveyed, April, 1823, land on the stream west of Gould's mills to his son-in-law, Mark Marvle, as will appear later. Walton sold his homestead seven months later, November 24, 1823, to Isaac S. Whitney of Jaffrey. On October 25, 1825, Whitney sold the lots previously owned by Walton to John A. Prescott, also excepting the house lot on the north side of the road, the present Annett homestead, which he sold ten days later to his mother, Hannah Ockington. On November 29 she quitclaimed to John A. Prescott, property "on which sd I. S.

Whitney's dwelling house, store house, woodhouse and shop now stands.”

John A. Prescott, then thirty-two years of age and beginning a career of development that with the resources at his command has seldom if ever been equaled in Jaffrey, in the next few years built or moved six houses in what is now Squantum Village, a labor to which his brothers, Oliver and Eldad, contributed by building the two starch factories (as will appear later). He owned saw mills and grist mills, built and operated blacksmith shops and stores. As contractor he built the house on the town farm, now the summer home of Clement R. Lamson, Esq., of Boston. He engaged in farming and lumbering, owned mountain pastures, dealt in cattle, superintended the construction of the Baptist Meeting-house, made money, and lost it as a matter of course. He engaged largely in town business; was selectman and County commissioner; built roads and bridges. He liked to play a lone hand; it does not appear that he ever had a partner. He manufactured lumber, chairs, and household woodenware. At some time he came into possession of Mark Marvle's shop on the lower mill privilege, which he probably removed, and built the two-story shop which stood on the premises until about 1920, when it was torn down and an up-to-date saw mill built in its place by the Annett Box Company.

From 1825 to October 8, 1836, John A. Prescott managed his property interests with apparent efficiency and success, when he sold his mill property to Burleigh French and William Emerson of Wilton, New Hampshire, experienced mill builders and operators who made immediate improvements upon their new holdings. William Emerson bought from Prescott the so-called Moors place in Squantum Village, built by John A. Prescott; and Burleigh French lived in the house now owned by Mrs. Anna E. Robbins. In 1838-9 French and Emerson built a new grist mill on the property at the rear of the saw mill and on the site of the brick boiler room and engine house built by Annett Manufacturing Company in 1904. This new grist mill had three run of stones, making it probably the most complete in the vicinity at that date. The following year, 1839, French sold his interest in the mills, the whole property remaining under a mortgage to Prescott until

1841, when the obligation was discharged by sale of a part interest to Emerson Hale of Rindge, who about 1842 built a new and much enlarged and improved saw mill on the site of the old Rowley Canada mill, then nearly a century old. Emerson Hale, a farmer in Rindge and man of considerable wealth for his day, died in 1851. The following year his heirs sold their interest in the Jaffrey property, including the mills and the present Annett homestead, to Moody Hale, who sold his dwelling, the present Robbins homestead, to George W. Benjamin, who remained a resident for many years. During that year, 1852, Moody Hale sold a two-thirds interest in his lands and mill property to Dennis Howe of Rindge and Ephraim Murdock, a wealthy woodenware manufacturer of Winchendon, Massachusetts.

Ephraim Murdock was in the true sense of the words a captain of industry. It is said that he made Winchendon the center of the woodenware trade of the world. His method of operation was somewhat on the modern chain system. He formed partnerships with local mill owners in Massachusetts and in contiguous territory in New Hampshire, particularly in Cheshire County. It was an arrangement that afforded to local mills a market that extended across the continent, as well as a share in an export trade that included not only Canada but also Europe and South America. Howe and Murdock soon acquired the entire interest of Moody Hale in the business. Up to this time lumber, pail staves, clothespins, and various articles of turned woodenware were the principal articles of manufacture in the Jaffrey mills, and before 1860 they purchased the former starch mill and installed machinery for the manufacture of pails.

Meanwhile, a new and important industry had developed in Rindge and Winchendon in the manufacture by machinery of round veneer boxes for fruit and berries and boxes for household use called nestboxes, because for economy in shipping they were made in sets which nested one inside of another. This business, said to have had its origin in one of the former hand industries, the splitting and shaving of drum hoops from old growth hard woods, met a need in every household when nearly all groceries were handled in bulk and

small convenient containers for pantry use were needed for sugar and spices. A well equipped pantry called for several sets. These articles, at first sold by peddlers, though now practically out of the market, may still be found in daily use in many households from the Atlantic to the Pacific. New York City, Philadelphia, and Baltimore were constant markets, with a steady demand also from St. Louis and San Francisco, while from exporting houses in New York there was a small but constant demand.

To meet the increasing call for nest-boxes, Howe and Murdock engaged Thomas Annett, a young man who for several years had been employed in the box shops and woodworking mills in Rindge, to develop the manufacture of this line of goods in their recently acquired mills. He arrived in the fall of 1858, a short time before his marriage on January 20, 1859, thereafter making Jaffrey his home. He proved himself the right man for the place.

At this time the plant consisted of the former Emerson Hale saw mill, the starch factory which had been transformed to a pail factory, and a clothespin shop, then and for many years after known as the "Old Shop," on the lower privilege. About 1860 the clothespin machinery was sold to the Baileys of Mineral Spring Village and machinery was installed for the manufacture of round veneer boxes. At first the rims of these boxes were sawed from hardwood bolts of corresponding size and smoothed in a fine planing machine. The process, owing to the extremely thin material produced, required great skill in the several operations. Later slicing machines were introduced for this part of the work, an improvement so marked that it was said one machine did the work of three hundred hands by the former process.

A few years later, as more room was required, the pail machinery was removed from the former starch factory and the main part of the box manufacturing removed to that building. During this construction period Thomas Annett managed the production of goods for the owners on a percentage basis until about 1869, when he purchased the Howe interest, and the business continued as an equal partnership under the name of Annett and

Murdock until the death of Ephraim Murdock in 1882, when Thomas Annett became sole owner.

In 1896 the business was incorporated as the Annett Manufacturing Company, when three sons, Albert, Asahel S., and Arthur S. Annett, were taken into the business, which was carried on successfully until 1918. Additions were made to the mills and the business greatly increased, the company manufacturing from log to finished product a great variety of wood work from lumber, round veneer boxes of many sizes for butter, cheese, figs, dates, and confectionery, also baskets, toys, and novelties, and employing from thirty to fifty hands. In 1918 the Annett Manufacturing Company, which remains in existence as owner of tracts of forest lands and other real estate, sold its manufacturing interests to a new firm under the name of the Annett Box Company, of which James B. Perry is president and manager. The new company has continued the business, in recent years departing considerably from its original lines and devoting more attention to lumber and house finish, maintaining one of the most efficient and up-to-date plants in its line in New Hampshire. As the oldest saw mill in the town and though two and one-half miles from a railroad, it holds a remarkable record for continuous operation, with only temporary shut-downs, for not less than one hundred ninety years.

Annett & Lehtinen, *History of Jaffrey*, pp 354-60