

THE SUTTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SUTTON, MASSACHUSETTS

— BULLETIN —

VOL. V No. 3 SEPT. 1979

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JOHN MOO (MOE) & SONS SAW MILL

By William B. Brierly

Since its founding in 1704, Sutton has had many small unique shops or mills on streams or on roadways in various parts of the town. It is hoped that many of these small shops can be recorded in future editions of the Bulletin in order to round out the illustrious history of an early American town.

Probably one of the most ingenious mills of this century was the saw mill built by Johannes Moo¹ [or John Moe as he was locally known] on Cold Spring Brook about 200 feet below the old stone bridge on Armsby Road and just above the former Pleasantdale Pond. The mill was conspicuous because it had a very large water wheel in relation to the size of the mill building. Mr. Moo and his family built the water wheel and the mill with their own hands. Mr. Moo, like many of our early settlers, was resourceful having received his early training in woodworking in Sweden. He was born in January 1847 in Wermeland² and migrated to Worcester in 1880 where he remained for 15 years. On 29 April 1895^{3a} Mr. Moo bought 124 acres of the Bainbridge A. Whitcomb Farm from Robert Northridge of Worcester and built a house on the site of the Whitcomb Mansion which had burned in 1886⁴ now the site of the Pleasant Valley Country Club. He also erected a cement-walled barn on the Whitcomb barn site. On or about the year 1900, Mr. Moo built a dam below the stone bridge on Cold Spring Brook,⁵ put in a sluiceway and built an undershot water wheel to power the saw mill. As far as can be determined the mill was primarily built to cut birch and oak strappings or hoops for casks and barrels. The primary customer for these products in the early days was White, Peavey & Dexter Company, sausage manufacturers in Worcester. One of the pictures of the mill [Photo 1] shows a pile of small sapplings protruding from an open shed in back of the mill building. These sapplings were the raw material used in the mill.

The mill had evidently been remodeled or rebuilt because one of the photographs [Photo 2] shows the building adjacent to the wheel with windows, an inclosed back shed with a raised roof and a line of demarcation on the roof showing where they were joined. The building at the wheel is covered with a clapboards whereas the rear part of the building

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shows vertical boards on the side exposed to view. One would conjecture that the picture with the open shed was the older of the two. Photo 2 had a pencil notation as follows: "This water wheel was built by John Moe at Pleasant Valley Farm, Sutton, Mass. year 1900."

From the 25-light window, [Photo 2] and, assuming that each of the panes were about 7x9 inches in size, it is deduced that the water wheel was about 20 feet in diameter, 6 feet wide and the paddles about 1 foot deep. A large water wheel is necessary on brooks of slow moving water in order to obtain an adequate gear ratio that will provide the power necessary to run the saws. The dam appeared to be about 3 feet high. Flash boards are shown in the photograph, as well as, the sluiceway with protective wooden stakes to snag floating sticks [Photo 2]. Depicted also is a dike of rocks 5 or 6 feet high and about 8 feet wide [Photo 1] to protect the mill from sudden floods. Mrs. Phyllis Moe Farnstrom relates that when she was a young girl she remembers seeing a cow get her horns caught in the water wheel and be hanged.

The first reference to the mill in official records is found in the Town of Sutton Tax and Evaluation Report for 1902 where it states that John Moo had a shop valued at \$100. The Tax and Evaluation Report of 1897 failed to show a shop or mill but indicated the following: 4 sheds valued at \$400, a house at \$600, and icehouse at \$50, 7 cows at \$175, 2 horses at \$125, a homestead of 124 acres at \$1860 for a total evaluation of \$3,210 and a tax of \$44.37.

John Moo who had lived in Sutton since 1895 died on 1 May 1923. The Tax and Evaluation Report for 1923 had a penciled note stating that the farm property was transferred to Philip Moe, his son. The History of Sutton, Volume II, however, indicated that the property was leased to Arthur and Philip Moe in 1923 and Philip Moe bought out Arthur's interest in 1926 and that Arthur then moved to the Hoyle House adjacent to the Town Pound in Sutton Center and operated a wayside stand nearby on Boston Road. A Deed 3b dated 25 October 1923, however, shows that Philip took over the property on 23 October 1923. He operated the farm and the orchard and later opened a wayside fruit stand on Route 122A in Wilkin-sonville. His daughter, Mrs. Phyllis Moe Farnstrom of Worcester comments that he had many kinds of fruit trees including many varieties of apples, peaches and pears. Some apple trees are visible in Photo 1. Philip Moe died in 1938 and his widow sold the farm and moved to Millbury.

The exact date at which the saw mill ceased to function is not known. Whether the saw mill was sold or just deteriorated from lack of use or whether it was destroyed by fire or by flood of 4 November 1927, as some have reported, is debatable. Mr. Daniel S Smith is certain that it happened before 1927. It is hoped that some of our readers can provide an answer to the saw mill's disappearance and add supplementary information to the above report for future reference.

References

1. Worcester County, Registry of Probate, Johannes Moo
1 May 1923 #80528 Court House, Worcester, Mass.
2. Obituary Report, Worcester Evening Gazette, 2 May 1923
3. Worcester County, Registry of Deeds, Court House,
Worcester, Mass. a.Book 1469, page 489 b.Book 2316,
page 156
4. History of the Town of Sutton, Mass. Volume II
1876-1950, Pp 189, 397 & 521. Published by the
Town 1952

5. Personal information from family and residents. Mr. Fred C. Girard, Mrs. Beulah Hutchinson, Mrs. Clarence Hutchinson, Mr. Daniel S. Smith, Mrs. P.M. Farnstrom and Mrs. Laura Moe Fulton.
6. Photographs No. 1 and 2 courtesy of Mrs. Laura Moe Fulton, West Sutton Rd.
7. Mrs. W.H. Farnstrom, Worcester, Mass.

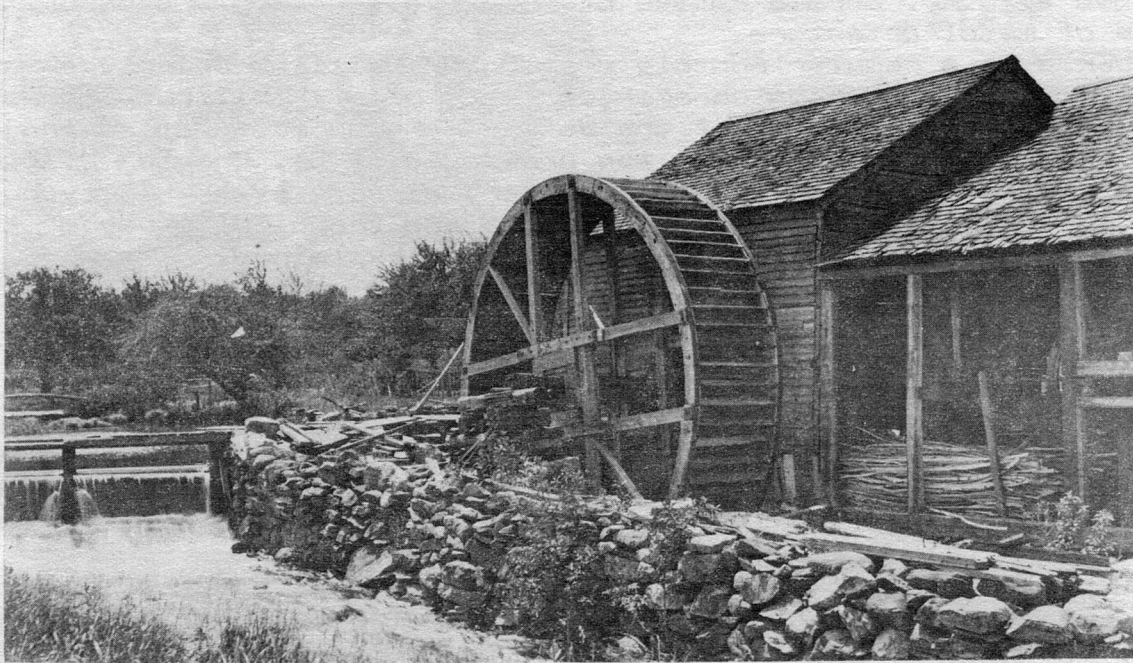


PHOTO NO. 1 - Sapplings are piled under open shed. Road bridge is visible beyond the dam.

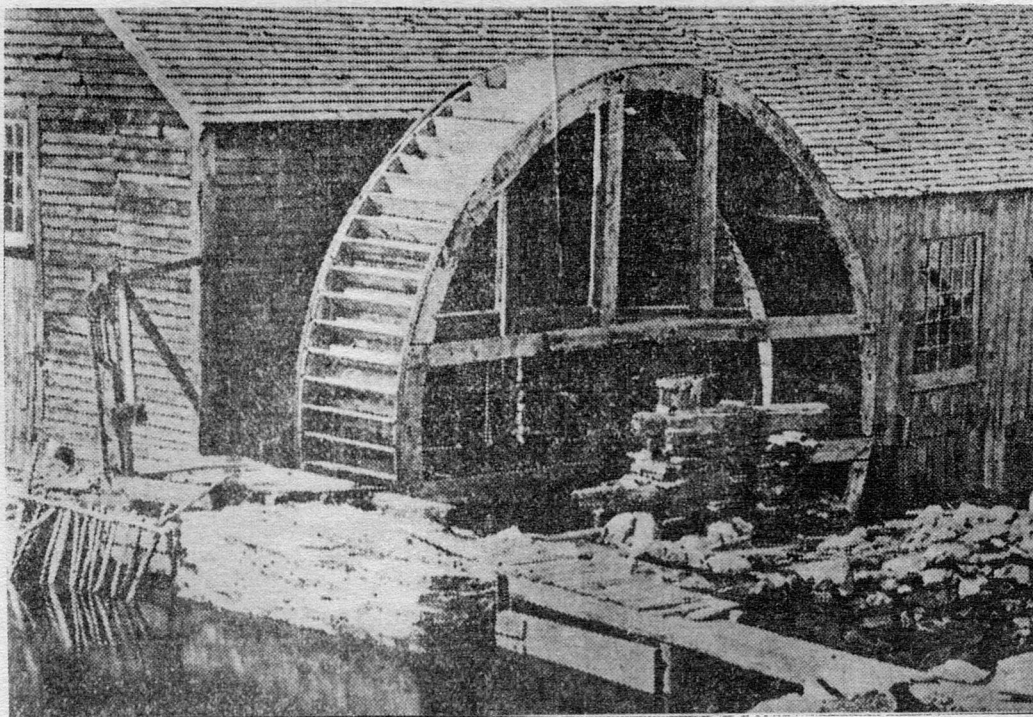


PHOTO NO. 2 - Detail of dam, sluiceway, and water wheel. Window to right of wheel indicates later extension of building.

MONTHLY MEETING PROGRAM REVIEWS - (A Short Synopsis)

July - Following a potluck picnic supper at the EIGHT LOTS SCHOOL HOUSE, several members (and guests) related many anecdotes of historical interest.

August - For a third consecutive year the Society members enjoyed a potluck supper repast at the home of Mrs. Dorothea (Waters) Moran. Prior to the evening meal, several members toured the unique 1757 Waters' home with its generations of family items. The evening program concluded with Mr. Gerald Pattee of Auburn discussing and demonstrating the use of metal detectors.

September - At a regular monthly meeting Dr. William Brierly announced the open house dedication ceremonies to be held in Millbury on September 29 and 30th in observation of the Waters Mansion restoration project. A slide and discussion program was presented by Dr. Preston J. Sturdevant, Jr. and Mr. Arthur Wilder on the military aspects of the Gettysburg Battle in the Civil War. A most intense and technical study of the battle's strategy was graphically shown and explained.

1979 - July, August, and September - WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

Peggy Duffy Kent

Floyd Cranska

Mrs. Charles (Caroline) Duke

Olive Warner

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Paine

Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Chase

Mr. and Mrs. Franklin Roberts

Mr. and Mrs. Holland Shaw

Mr. and Mrs. Anthony Coppola

IN MEMORIAM - Mrs. Arthur (Celia) Donaldson * Mrs. Yvonne Bibeau *
Mrs. Anne Nelson * Mr. Frank Paine *

From
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