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The John P. Stockwell Grist Mill on the Sibley Brook system

by William B. Brierly and Walter C. Lynch

The dwelling pictured in the photograph [Fig. 1] is unique in the history of Sutton where it has served successively as a grist mill, a shoddy mill, a two family tenement, a store, a workshop for the development and manufacture of shuttle iron tips and clasps, a saw mill for the production of boats, shingles and lumber and finally as a residence. When it was no longer occupied and the Selectmen had denied a request to turn the building into an icehouse, and no other useful purpose could be envisioned, the structure was torn down.



Figure 1. Grist Mill Building

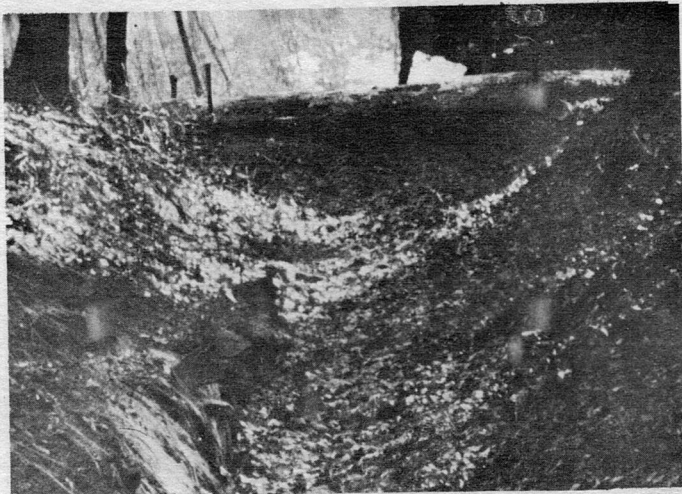
The mill was located on the south side of Boston Road about 160 ft. west of Miller [Woodbury] Pond Bridge. Girard Pond supplied the water which was conveyed to the mill by a flume 246 feet long [Fig. 2]. The remains of the flume and the shut-off gate are still visible from Boston Road. The flume, now dry, ends in a gravel pit and in the past during periods of excessive rainfall, the gravel would wash out on Boston Road. This situation has recently been corrected by a coffer dam at the Girard Pond exit. Girard Pond itself is located behind Harold E. Swenson's house at 99 Boston Road. Water is received via a brook from the Aldrich, Marble, and the former Sibley, ponds. The amount of flow is not known.

The building was a frame structure 30x50 feet at the base and two stories high. The millstones and water wheel were located on the first floor and when tenements were added, the first floor was used for storage and at times as a store while the second floor was modified into two family dwelling areas. There was no cellar under the house but there was a pit where the water wheel was located. The flume was connected to the water wheel by a three foot diameter penstock and the remains of the penstock system can be seen about six feet from the southwestern end guard-rail of the aforementioned bridge. The water wheel disappeared when the building was torn down and efforts to locate it have not been successful.

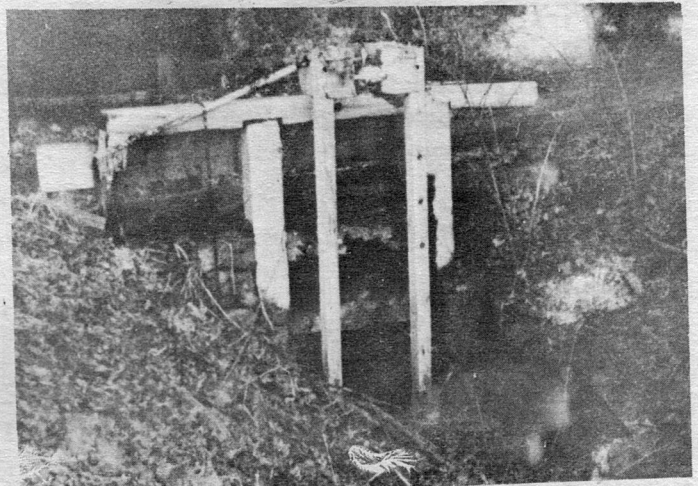
The building was originally built as a grist mill by John P. Stockwell, a son-in-law of Asa Woodbury [who originally owned the land]. It was built sometime between 13 March 1866 when Martha Woodbury Stockwell and Mary Woodbury Servey bought the property from Asa Woodbury's second wife, Harriet [Book 720-173]⁷ and 1870 when it was shown on Plate 81 of Beers Atlas² as a grist mill, not otherwise identified. The History of Sutton states that:

"John P. Stockwell built a grist mill where the store is. He also, had a shoddy mill there, but by floods losing his dam twice, he converted it into tenements which are at present unoccupied. The store in the same building is owned by Horatio Chase and kept by his cousin, Lyman Pratt."

Nothing is known about the origin of the mill equipment or of the production figures of the mill.



MESSIER'S SAWMILL FLUME



Gate on Flume to Stockwell's Grist Mill

On 7 March 1894, Mary Josephine Lynch, wife of Peter Lynch, bought the mill building with five acres and 137 rods of land from Martha W. Stockwell [Book 1435-494]⁷ and it was on the ground floor of this building that Peter Lynch who, during the daytime worked for G. T. Dudley & Son, shuttle manufacturers, in his spare time and using available water power and machinery he was able to assemble manufactured shuttle iron tips and clasps which were sold to D. T. Dudley & Son. From this modest beginning Peter Lynch was able to expand his efforts by establishing a machine shop to produce shuttle irons for John Shambow originally [Archambeau] at the Shambow Shuttle Co. in Woonsocket, R. I. Later at the Prescott Mill on Boston Road in Sutton and at the Charles Buck Factory buildings on Grafton Street in Millbury, he continued to successfully manufacture shuttle irons.

While the Lynches owned the mill building, the first floor remained commercial and the tenements were on the second floor which were reached by a single set of twelve steep stairs entering from the front of the building facing Boston Road. On 19 November 1902, Charles Bouvier was fatally injured when he fell down these stairs and struck his head against the stone threshold.³ Later the stairs were removed to the outside of the building on the west end where they could be more easily ascended.⁵

At the time the photograph of the building was taken (Fig. 1) the right side of the building upstairs was occupied by the Bouvier Family and the left side by the David Tebo Family. A barn was constructed during the Lynch ownership and this is shown in the Valuation and Tax

Report⁶ for 1902 where it lists the Lynches as living in Woonsocket. One of the authors of this paper [W.C.L.] was born in this house on 27 August 1895.

On 19 March 1904, the Lynches sold the property to Peter Sophronie and Joseph N. A. Messier [Book 1777-56]⁷ and soon after the Messiers installed machinery to produce lumber and shingles. Later, they built boats which sold for \$8.00⁵. Trees for lumber for the mill came from surrounding hills.

On 4 March 1919, Peter Messier sold this property to his son Napoleon J. Messier [Book 2169-383]⁷ who continued the business until he died a few years later.

On 2 June 1922, Mary Messier Roberts, administratrix of the Estates of Napoleon J. Messier, deeded the property to Joseph H. Shambo who had an interest in the property [Book 2270-250]⁷. The building from this time on was used as a residence: first, by Oliver LaPlante who bought the property on 28 June 1922 from Joseph H. Shambo [Book 2272-485]⁷ and lived there until 1933 when he moved back to the Stockwell farm, which had been owned by his mother, Marie, across Boston Road.

Roy LaPlante, son of Oliver, who lived in the house remembers using water power to cut wood for the kitchen stove. He, also, stated that water from the flume was piped into the kitchen for cooking and washing. Potable water had to be carried from a spring across the road. The spring is still flowing today.

The property was obtained by George T. Young on 1 March 1928 [Book 2461-500]⁷ who after the LaPlantes moved in 1934 had the building and barn torn down.

On 27 August 1936 George T. Young sold the land to the present owners Fred C. and Edna B. Girard [Book 2689-495]⁷ who originally had intended to utilize the water power potential for production of electricity for residents of the area. However, Town agreements with Massachusetts Electric Company prevented that usage.

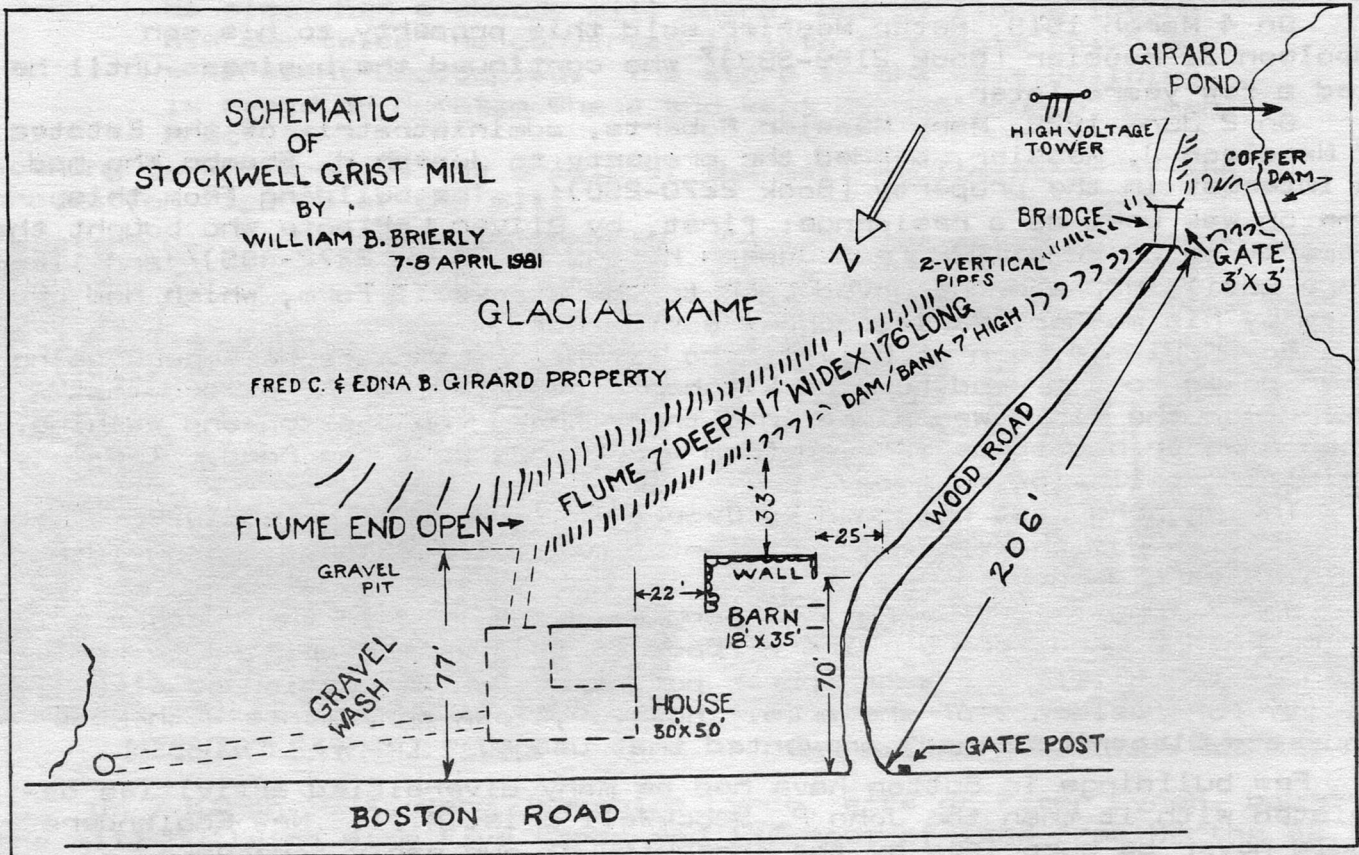
Few buildings in Sutton have had as many diversified activities associated with it than the John P. Stockwell Grist Mill. New Englanders should never be surprised by the ingenuity of our early forebears.

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7. Consolidated Grantor/Grantee Index 1740-1889 and 1890-1940 Registry of Deeds, Worcester County District Court, Court House, Worcester, Mass.
8. Marden L.O. 1962
Plan of Boston Road in the Town of Sutton

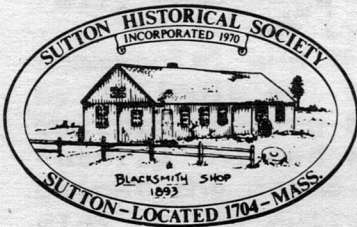


1981 - JULY, AUGUST and SEPTEMBER - Welcome to New Members

M/M John J. & Mary Connor
M/M Frederick J. & Lillian Harrigan
Laurance C. Laythe
M/M Ernest Minor
William J. Mongean

M/M Charles B. & Rita Radzik
Lyla M. Ragar
M/M Adelard J. & Viola Renaud
M/M Raymond E. & Gretel Smith
M/M Richard L. & Gladys Stewart

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