
CHESTER HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Volume 4, Issue 1 A Publication of the Chester Historical Society Editor: John Garvey

March 2005

Upcoming Events

Historical Society Meetings

The Historical Society meets the first Wednesday of every month at 9:00am in the Old Jail building. All are welcome.

Saturday, April 9 – 7:00pm

Penny Social

The annual Penny Social will be held at the Railroad Depot on April 9. Doors open at 5:30pm. If you wish to donate new items for raffle please contact one of the members listed on our contacts page.

Saturday, June 4 – 10:00am to 4:00pm

Tag Sale

The society will hold a fundraising tag sale behind Carm's Restaurant on June 4. If you wish to donate new or used items for sale please contact one of the members listed on the contacts page.

Saturday, November 5 - Town Hall

Get an early start on your holiday shopping by visiting the Chester Historical Society Snowflake Festivities which will be held throughout the village. Watch for more details of this big event.

Historical Society Receives Grant For Walking Tour

We have received a grant from the Chester Cultural Council to produce pamphlets for self-guided walking tours of Chester. The first pamphlet will cover the village area and will be available this summer. Walking tours of other areas of Chester will follow, such as Chester Hill and North Chester.

Chester Awaits Work on Three Historic Bridges

In our last newsletter we talked about planned work on two Chester bridges, the Maple Street Bridge and the Old State Road bridge but we ran out of room before we could talk about the third bridge, the Smith Road Bridge.

Smith Road Bridge

The Smith Road Bridge, also called the North Chester Village Bridge, crosses the Middle Branch of the Westfield River in the village of North Chester. At a town meeting in 1887 the town voted to replace the timber bridge at that location and the timber from the old bridge was sold to Joshua Winthrop Bemis of North Chester, son of Capt. Joshua Bemis and grandson of Sylvester Bemis who first settled in North Chester in 1785.

The town contracted with R. F. Hawkins Iron Works of Springfield to erect an iron bridge and the company proposed a Pratt Truss bridge for \$550.00. As mentioned in our last newsletter, Pratt Truss bridges were popular at the time because of their low cost and high strength. Compare the cost of the bridge with what it cost the town to have Edson Fiske, another North Chester resident, build the stone abutments on each side of the river. He was paid \$1,863.69, over three times the cost of the bridge itself. Of the twenty known surviving Hawkins Iron Works bridges in Massachusetts the North Chester Bridge is the second oldest.

Very little has been done to the bridge over the years other than minor repairs. In 1965 the wooden deck was replaced with steel to accommodate heavier vehicles. The bridge has not been safe for trucks or large emergency vehicles for many years and a study done in 1995 found that the bridge could not be rehabilitated to current standards without destroying its historic appearance.

The plan currently under review is to build a new concrete bridge to modern specifications just upstream

from the original bridge and move the old bridge to the University of Massachusetts for use in their "Adaptive Use Bridge Project". The project dismantles and moves old truss bridges to the Amherst campus where students in the College of Engineering rebuild the bridges as pedestrian walkways. The program gives the engineering students hands-on experience while preserving historic New England truss design bridges.



The Hamilton Emery Mills

100+ Years in Chester

Last year marked the 100th anniversary of the continuous operation of the mills of the Hamilton Emery Company of Chester, begun by Frank D. Hamilton in 1904. Mr. Hamilton came a little late to the emery business which began in Chester in 1864, but the company that he began is the only abrasives company to survive in Chester of the many that operated here at one time.

Emery was first discovered in Chester in 1864 by Dr. Heman Lucas, the local doctor and an amateur mineralogist. It was the first such discovery of the valuable abrasive in the United States and the find generated much attention locally and nationally. Dr. Lucas formed the Chester Emery Company and began to develop a series of mines in the western part of town. After selling out to James Ames, of Ames Manufacturing of Chicopee, Dr. Lucas formed a second company, the Hampden Emery Company.

Some years later, in 1880, Frank Grant moved his grinding wheel company here from Manchester, NH. The Grant Corundum Wheel Company was destroyed by fire in 1892 and was followed by Dr. Lucas' death in 1900.

Into this opening stepped Frank Hamilton, a native of Chester and up to that time in the rubber business, first as a salesman for the Boston Hose and Rubber Company and then as Vice President of the Republic Rubber Company of Ohio.

He bought the old Timothy Keefe bedstead factory on Middlefield Street, took down the old mill buildings and began erecting new mills suited to the processing of emery. He took on additional investors and in 1904, with \$40,000 in capital, began operations of the Hamilton Emery Company.

Hamilton took advantage of the experienced abrasive workers in town, hiring some of them away from his competitors to work in his mill. One of these was Thomas Haley who had worked with Dr. Lucas in his companies and would now become the Superintendent of the Hamilton mills. Haley would remain as Superintendent until his retirement in 1943 after thirty-nine years of service in the company and fifty-nine years in the abrasives industry.

Hamilton seemed blessed with particularly devoted employees; another, Samuel Donnelly, started with

them in 1910 as office manager and served in that capacity until his retirement in 1960.

Business improved steadily, allowing for a second mill building in 1908 and a third in 1917. By that year sales had increased from \$1,850 in their first year to \$291,402.

Frank Hamilton would resign as president of the company in 1915 although he would remain in the abrasives industry. After he left the Hamilton Emery Company he helped organize the General Abrasive Company in Niagara Falls, NY and then in 1918 formed the Hamilton Abrasives Company in Westfield, MA.

Back at the Hamilton Emery Company, one of Frank Hamilton's partners took over as president, Frank Williams. Williams had, like Frank Hamilton, come from the rubber industry and would serve as president of the Hamilton Company at the same time that he was manager of the New York office of the Tyer Rubber Company of Andover, MA. He would remain president of the Hamilton until his death in 1945.

Another of Frank Hamilton's original partners also came from the Tyer Rubber Company, Frederick Jones. He rose through the ranks from salesman to president of Tyer before he retired in 1925 and spent the rest of his life concentrating on the business of the Hamilton Emery Company. He died in 1947.

Those three men from the rubber industry created quite a successful abrasives company here in Chester. By 1944, the Hamilton Emery Company claimed to be the largest producer of natural grain emery in the United States.

World War II necessitated a change in their business, which up to that time had principally involved the processing of emery ore from Turkey and the Greek island of Naxos (in fact, the name emery comes from the location of the largest mines on Naxos, on Cape Emeri). As supply from those locations became impossible the company created an emery product that was a blend of American sources, mainly from upstate New York and from Georgia and the Carolinas. The Chester mines had been tapped out by this time.

When Frank Williams died in 1945, Selden Tyler took over as president until his death in 1949. Within a few months of his death the Hamilton Emery Company was purchased by the American Abrasive Company of

Westfield. This was a homecoming of sorts, the American Abrasives Company was the renamed Hamilton Abrasives Company, the firm that Frank Hamilton had started in Westfield back in 1918. Of course, Frank Hamilton was long gone, having died in 1928.

The president of the American Abrasives Company, Louis Fuller, now became the president of the Hamilton Emery Company as well. American Abrasives ran the Hamilton Mill for the next 20+ years with Louis Fuller's sons, Dick and William, taking over as president.

The mill was sold to the Bendix Corporation in the early 1970's and during this period became a sister mill to the Cortland Mill located farther downstream. The 1980's saw a succession of two owners, Dresser Industries and Abrasive Industry, before the current owners purchased it in the early 1990's, Treibacher Schleifmittel.

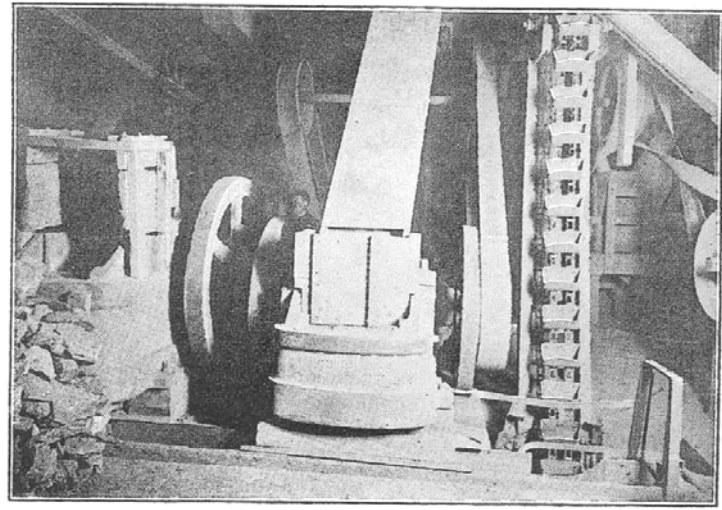
Though it operates today with a limited operation its product is the same as it was when the mill first opened over 100 years ago, high quality natural grain emery.

A November 17, 1967 article in the Springfield Daily News details the delivery of an annual supply of emery ore from Turkey.

"More than 2400 tons of emery ore arrived here recently from the Port of Gulluk, Turkey. This annual event at the local company is always a subject of great interest to the citizens here. Until recently unloading from box cars was done manually with shovels and wheelbarrows. Labor has always been recruited from surrounding areas and local factories. Then, a team of 6 men was allotted to each car, and each team unloaded two cars each day. Today's single piece of heavy equipment can unload 8 cars each day."

Ed Carrington, a longtime employee at the Hamilton Mill who retired a few years ago, recalls those early deliveries before the use of heavy equipment.

"They shut down the mill in order to put all hands to unloading the ore shipment. First choice for the work went to the factory workers who would unload the boxcars at night and on the weekends for extra money. When the factory workers had as much work as they could take, the offer was opened to local townspeople. You were paid 75 cents a ton and that was later raised to \$1.00 a ton. I did it myself as a young man before I went to work for the mill. It was nice to have the extra money but it was hard work, you didn't go dancing when you got home, I'll tell you."

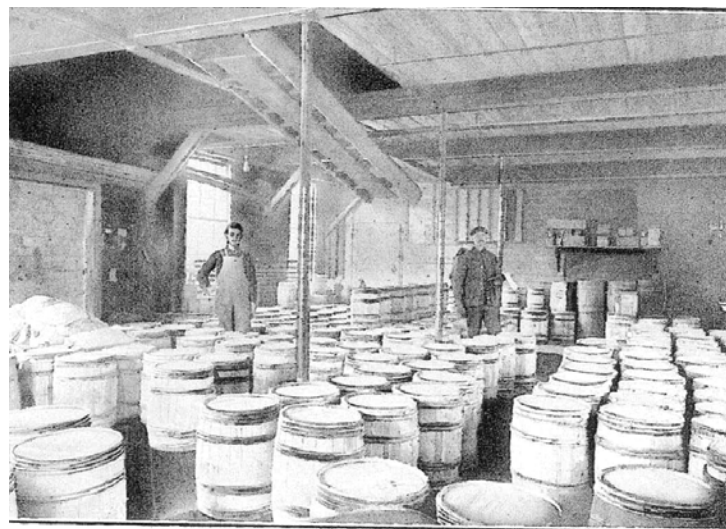


Ore Crusher

Circa 1910



Circa 1905



Shipping Room

Circa 1910

School Days In The Chester Center School

By Harriet Gilman

It is difficult for me to realize that I spent my first eight years in the Chester Center school. My father, grandfather and great-grandfather attended this same school. I still have Grandpa's slate signifying they had little paper available.

The downstairs in this school was used for the classroom and the upstairs for special school programs, as well as community meetings and suppers. Before my time classes were held upstairs for special students who had completed eight grades and wished to study further, I believe called a Select School.

The downstairs classroom held grades 1 through 8, approximately three pupils per grade, and each grade had about five textbooks – reading, arithmetic, spelling, English, history and geography. The paper, pencils and other supplies were provided by the town and if a pupil needed a new pencil they first had to show a very short stub and woe unto them who broke a pencil! We had inkwells in our desks where, when we advanced to that unwelcome age of writing with ink, we dipped our metal-tipped pens. The teacher made the ink from ink powder. My mother used to make the library paste from flour and water, which very easily went sour in warm weather even though she added oil of wintergreen to it.

The teacher was often a city girl recently graduated from Normal School who usually boarded with a local family. She had little support other than that of the Art and Music teachers who came together from town every other week. Her breadth of ability was surely tested, imagine having to cover all the subjects for eight grades! She also had to contend with the slow or reluctant learner who disrupted the class. The use of the woodshed as a location of discipline had been abolished by my time.

Our day started when the teacher called us in by ringing the big handbell. Then we saluted the flag and said the Pledge of Allegiance, in good weather remaining outside to raise the flag on the flagpole. We sang "America The Beautiful" or "The Star Spangled Banner", after which the teacher read a passage from the Bible.

The classroom was heated by a woodstove. Some of the older boys were paid to come early and start the fire with wood donated by parents. In winter we kept our lunch boxes under the stove instead of in the back hall where the heat did not reach. We used a three-holer toilet which was located at the back of

the hall. There was no danger of pupils asking to go out there just to get out of class work! The water pail with a dipper was located in the hall along with the coat hooks. The water was carried from a nearby house and we had our own drinking cups hanging on a hook.

We had 15 minute recesses in the morning and afternoon and one hour at noon. We were warned not to play in the cemetery or on its walls, around the DeWolf buildings, in the road or at the "Black Pool" (a water-filled pit south of the school leftover from a quartz mining operation). I recall doing all of these things, as well as using the church for a backstop when we played baseball. I don't remember anyone getting seriously hurt but my early teacher, Mrs. Ellis, would take us across the road to her home to be patched up when necessary.

We played games such as Fox and Geese, Run Sheep Run, Pom Pom, Pull Away, Steal Stones, Mother May I, London Bridge, and Hide and Seek. Our favorite hiding places were behind the gravestones and in the stalls of the horse sheds next to the church where church-goers hitched their horses.

We'd bring our sleds to school, sometimes tying them together and "ripping" down the hill behind the church in a chain.

The teacher's desk opened from the top, tempting some brave soul to put a mouse in it while Mrs. Ellis had gone across the road for lunch. We were amused yet apprehensive when she stood up on her chair, as we had not realized how frightened of mice some people are!

Preparation for Christmas and Memorial Day programs provided great excitement. We put on plays and memorized poems or "pieces" to be spoken for our parents. Sometimes the Christmas program was held at night with a Santa Claus and one year I noticed Santa was wearing my father's shoes!

Every Memorial Day we had a war veteran speak to us. In my father's day it was Mr. Crossett, a Civil War veteran. In my day it was my Uncle Joe Sherwood, who had his leg and foot severely injured in World War I. After the program, we marched out to the cemetery carrying a flag and a bouquet to decorate the grave of a soldier, usually of the Revolutionary War. I remember one blustery winter day sitting around the woodstove with the teacher, studying John Greenleaf Whittier's "Snowbound" and looking out the window to see Father coming with the horses and sled to fetch us home.

A sound will ring in my ears as well! It's the school bell calling us. Hurry or you'll be late!

The top two photos are undated – probably circa 1900.
The middle two photos are from 1934, notice the addition of windows on the first floor to provide more natural light.



The bottom two photos show the school building today as it has been restored by the Chester Hill Association.

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If you have comments on this newsletter please contact the editor, John Garvey, at:
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Item	Price	Size	Qty	Total
"Chester Folks - The Founders of the Town, Their Ancestors and Descendants" by William Mills	\$18.00			
"Memories of the Boston and Albany Railroad" by Norvel Parker	\$15.00			
"Gravestone Inscriptions for Chester" by Francis O'Leary	\$18.00			
"Gravestone Inscriptions for Huntington" by Francis O'Leary	\$20.00			
"Gateway District Towns - A Pictorial History"	\$16.99			
"Chester Cookbook" - A reproduction of a 1960's-era Chester PTA cookbook	\$8.50			
"Entering Chester" magnets - A miniature version of the state highway signs	\$1.00			
"The Mystery of the Old Mine" a mystery for children by Gertrude Whitcher	\$10.00			
Chester Historical Society pens	\$1.00			
Chester T-Shirts - Over 40 illustrations of Chester scenes (S - XXL)	\$10.00			
Chester Sweatshirts - Over 40 illustrations of Chester scenes (S - XXL)	\$20.00			
Shipping + handling				\$3.00
SUBTOTAL				
Annual Membership in the Chester Historical Society (fully tax deductible)	\$5.00			
Lifetime Membership in the Chester Historical Society (fully tax deductible)	\$25.00			
Additional tax deductible contribution				
TOTAL				

Make check payable to the "Chester Historical Society" and send to:
Chester Historical Society
15 Middlefield Street
Chester, MA 01011

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