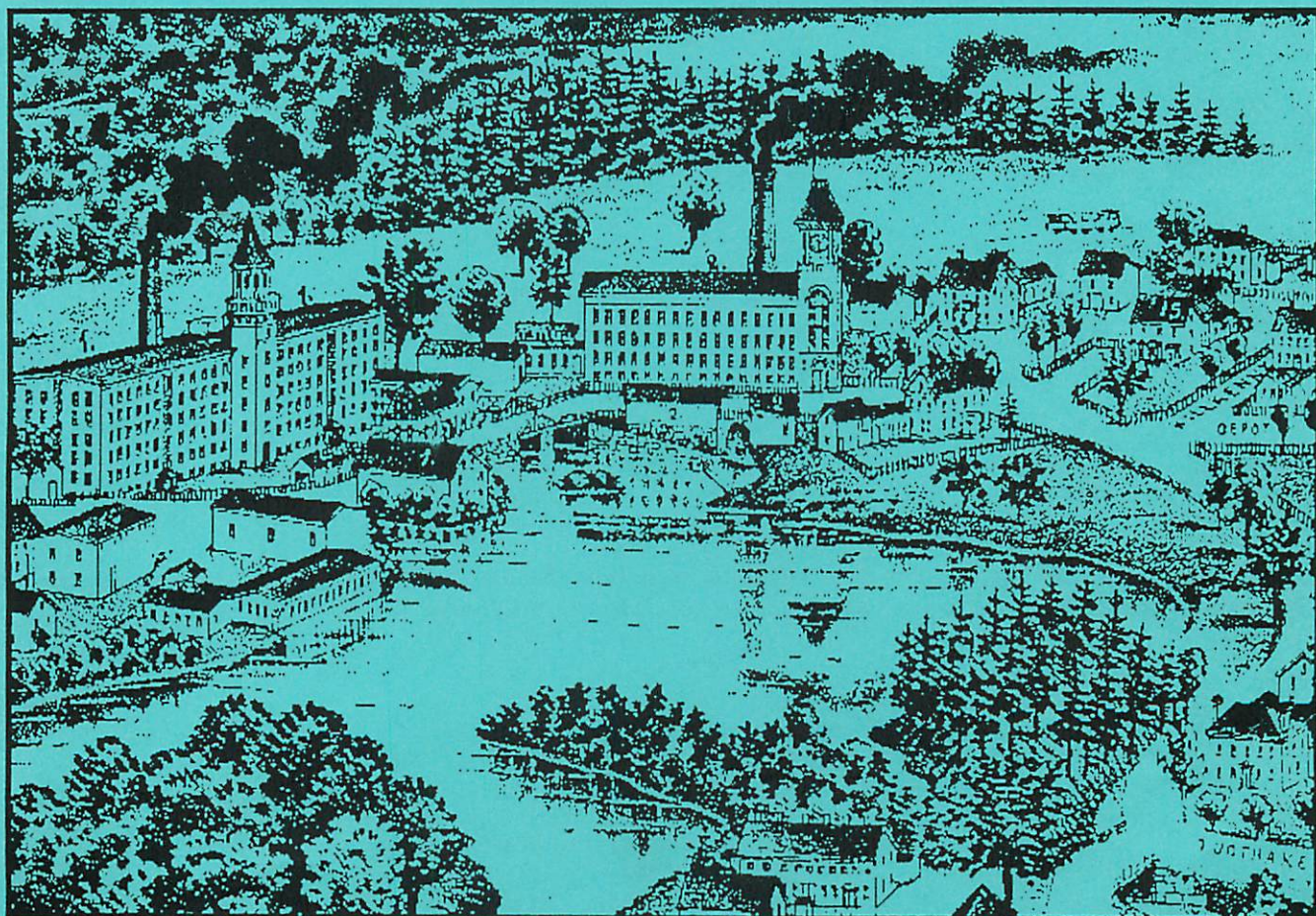


A
Short History
of
The Milldam at North Billerica
1653 – 1995

by Alec Ingraham



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*Cover: Detail from 1887 pictorial map of North Billerica. From the estate of James R. and Catherine R. Faulkner.
Courtesy of Carol Bruyere, Faulkner Kindergarten Director, North Billerica.*

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The Early Years

In Concord, Massachusetts, the Sudbury and Assabet Rivers merge to form the Concord River. This system supports a twenty-two mile stretch from Bridle Path Bridge in East Sudbury through Sudbury, Concord, Bedford, and Carlisle to the millpond in North Billerica. Over this distance the fall of the river is reported to be approximately one inch per mile. In dry seasons this section has minimal current and is subject to the formation of bars and growth of weeds and aquatic vegetation which further impede the flow.

Meadow land was of particular importance to the early settlers and remained so until after 1900. The meadows yielded hay and grass for feed and bedding of livestock, as well as cranberries for nutritional value. Unfortunately the lands near this twenty-two mile portion of the river had been frequently flooded. As early as 1636, the year Concord was settled, and at intervals thereafter, the meadow owners particularly in Sudbury, East Sudbury, and Concord had been seeking relief from the flowage of their property. Efforts undertaken to address the problem had met with little success.

An early map of Billerica, prepared on November 6, 1700 indicates the existence of a series of falls in the Concord River between the present day Fordway (Pollard Street) and Faulkner Bridges (See Figure 1). Prior to the earliest settlement in Billerica in 1653, the Wamesit Indians occupied a "satellite encampment" in this vicinity and quite possibly kept acreage north and northeast of the falls under cultivation. The abundance of Indian artifacts found at the adjacent Call Farm Site and on numerous outcroppings of rocks in the river bed lend support to this conclusion.

In 1659 William Sheldon received a grant of land near the falls under the express condition that he erect a mill to grind corn within two years. Sheldon failed, but settlers, the most notable of whom include the Rogers and Toothakers, did begin to slowly populate the area.

By 1663/64 John Parker, first town clerk, first tax collector, and agent for the town in the distribution of two large grants of land, obtained Sheldon's mill lot, but when Parker died in 1667 his affairs were so intermingled with those of the town that it is doubtful any definitive record of a mill grant west of the Concord River existed here for about another forty years.

On October 4, 1708, Christopher Osgood of Andover was granted acreage on the west side of the Concord River "with the stream and falls" in exchange for the construction and maintenance of a grist mill and a dam. He was to grind grain for the benefit of all citizens and defend the town from potential claims resulting from damage caused by the millpond to lands and meadows upstream. (It was from this grant that all subsequent owners have held title to the waterpower and "mill privilege" at North Billerica.)

By 1710 Osgood had succeeded where Sheldon had failed. He had built a dam to supply power to his new mill. Early recollections by Jonathan Manning of Littleton and Theophilus Manning of Billerica (son of William Manning of *Key of Liberty* fame and sometime resident of the Manning Manse) indicated that the ancient dam was of wood frame and held tight by gravel. The structure was built in three sections, zig-zagging across the Concord River, taking full advantage of all natural obstructions. As far as can be ascertained water was permitted to flow over the middle portion.

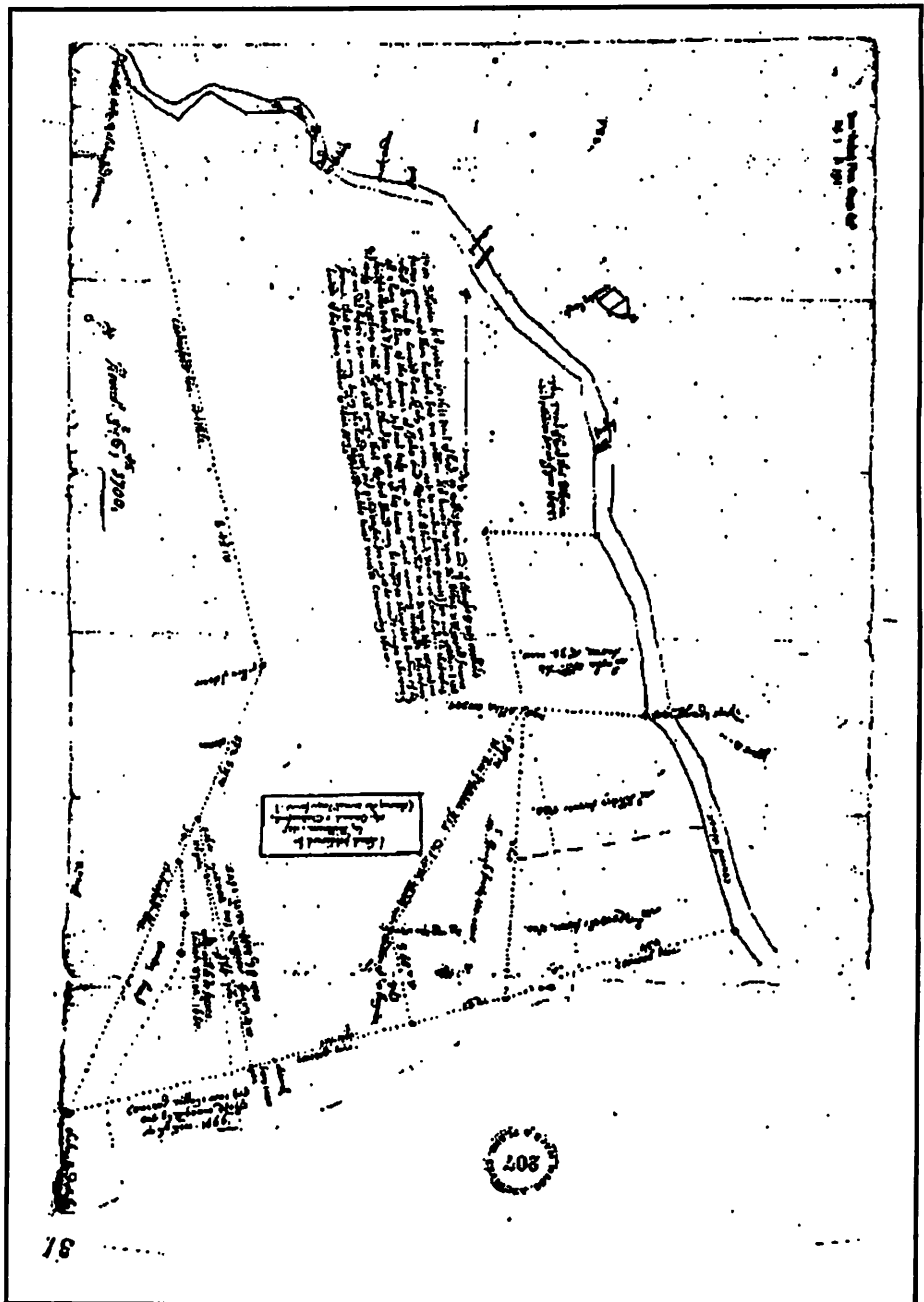


Figure 1. Map of Billerica, 1700, entitled "Land petitioned for by Billerica, 1655 adj. Concord & Chelmsford, (showing also several large farms.)" Inscribed in center of map: "When Billerica did petition for this tract of land, Mr. Welds farme and Mr Houghs & Maj Willards farmes, were not then laid out, but our petition did bound us upon Mr Allins & Nowell-Farmes which do reach to Concord line, (only we were not to hinder former grants) for our petition saith all along the line of the farmes of John and Robert Bloud. Hence we concluded, that what land (in this tract) former grants did not take up, it was granted to us & upon this account we did make an exchange with Robert Bloud for some of his farme, which were Maj Willards. Therefore as we did before, so we do still pray; that Robert Bloud may be caused to shew the bounds of his farmes, that sowe may Enjoy the land we did petition for. For as yet he would never show us the bounds of his farmes, neither is their anything entered in the court records concerning them." (See Bibliography, Maps).

Although not definite, Osgood's dam was somewhere between 5 and 7 feet in height and was situated upstream from the current water stoppage. That same year, Dr. Roger Toothaker's land opposite the milldam and to the east became inundated. In an effort to appease him, the Town, in 1711, awarded Toothaker property in the Second Division in East Billerica.

Three years later William Chandler arrived from Andover and established a fulling mill on the west side of the river in the proximity of Osgood's dam. (Fulling is the cleansing and thickening of cloth by a special process so that it becomes compacted or felted.) This appears to have been the first attempt to establish a textile operation in the vicinity but it did not endure. By the 1730s Chandler had removed to Westford.

In 1721 Dr. Jonathan Prescott from Concord and others obtained an order from the court in Cambridge to remove Osgood's dam if he had not done so by September of that year. The order was carried out, but by 1722, Osgood, probably desperate to maintain his grant, rebuilt the dam. This sent the

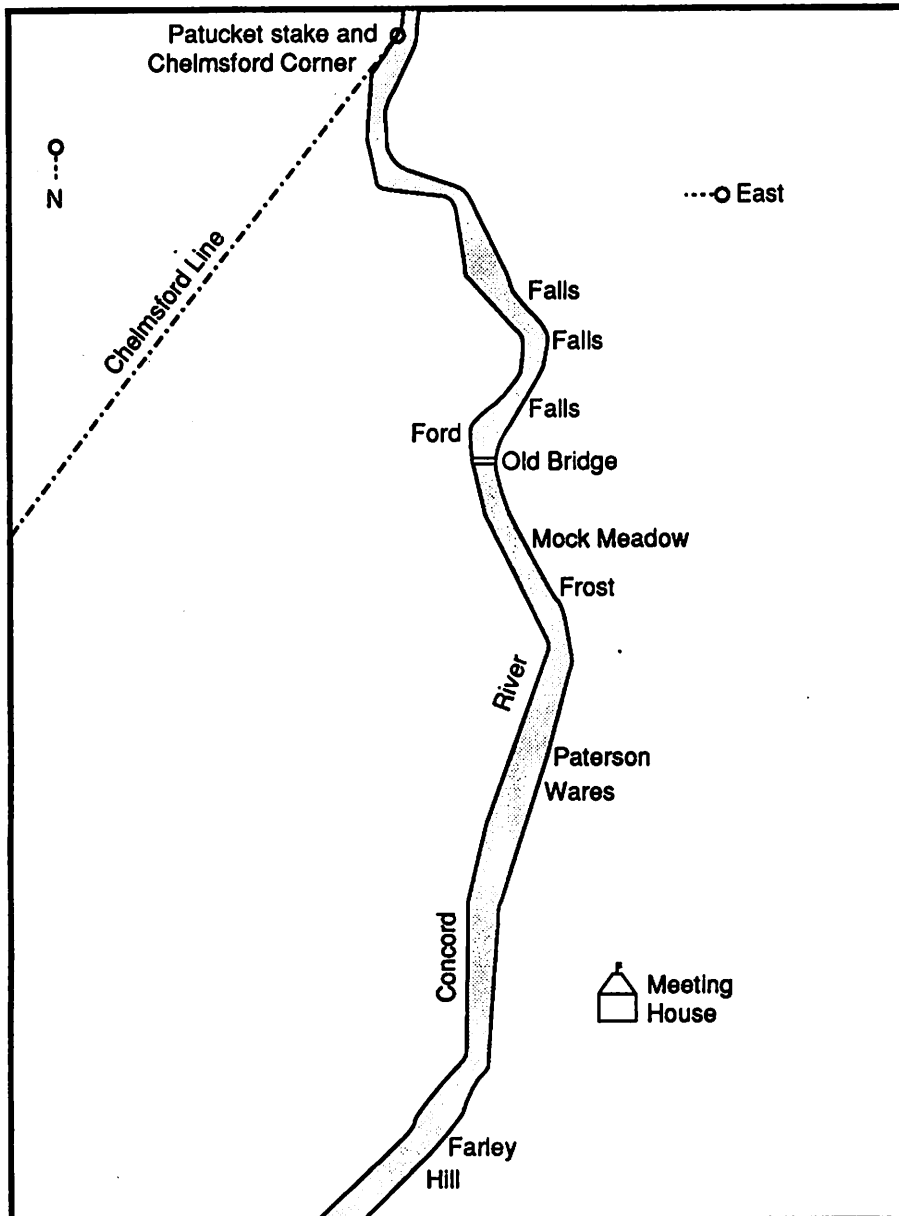


Figure 2. Extract from 1700 map, Fig 1. showing section from Hill and Farley farms to "Patucket stake and Chelmsford Corner" at North Billerica.

complainants back into court to seek a new order for demolition. Instead, the magistrate dispatched Dr. Prescott and his associates to investigate and report their findings. Contrary to the judge's wishes, they removed the milldam by force of arms and damaged the gristmill. This prompted a series of lawsuits by Osgood against the meadow owners, but more importantly the milldam was subsequently spared and rebuilt.

By the time of Osgood's death in 1739, he had added a saw mill to his enterprise. His son, also a Christopher, carried on with the mill privilege and erected a forge on an island below the dam in 1741. (See Appendix B)

Until 1745 the Osgoods had confined their endeavors to the west bank of the Concord River. During that year Christopher, Jr. purchased land on the east bank from Thomas Rogers. This deed included a one-fourth interest in an old saw mill. (It was not uncommon for several families to jointly operate a saw mill in exchange for a proportionate share in the enterprise.) It is entirely possible that this was the only mill on the east side of the river at that time. Interesting but totally unsubstantiated testimony made much later in the 1860s also links this building to the Salem witchcraft delusion of 1692. Speculation is justified by the known involvement of the Rogers and Toothaker families in the trials. In 1708 both resided near the dam and to the east.

The power supplied by the falls invited further development. In 1747 Joseph Ruggles, a clothworker, purchased land from Osgood. Despite the instrument of transfer containing an agreement that Ruggles not operate a fulling mill, it is known that he did so by 1748. In fact he obtained a one-third interest in the original mill privilege while Osgood retained the remaining two-thirds. By 1785 Timothy Sprague, also a clothworker, had purchased Ruggles' interests and continued to operate the fulling mill.

On the west bank over a similar period the executor for Osgood in 1749 sold the 2/3 mill privilege along with the grist mill, the saw mill and the forge to Nicholas Sprake (later Sprague). He undoubtedly operated the mills until 1757 when he sold them complete with the 2/3 privilege to William Kidder, gentleman. It is unlikely that Kidder actually participated in the operation of the mills. He was a Latter-day entrepreneur who sold his interests in the area to John Carleton two years later.

During the Revolutionary War the area was commonly referred to as Carleton's Mills, but by 1782 Thomas Richardson had acquired the dam and the 2/3 mill privilege from the Carleton heirs. In a short span of time the vicinity underwent a change of identity and became quickly known as Richardson's Mills. A map of Billerica prepared by Samuel Whiting, great-great grandson of the first minister, includes an inventory of the mill sites: five grist mills, three saw mills and one fulling mill.

The Middlesex Canal Era

On June 22, 1793 the Legislature passed an act incorporating the Proprietors of the Middlesex Canal. John Hancock, who was Governor of Massachusetts at the time, signed the legislation into law. By August of that year Samuel Thompson, a magistrate from Woburn and a self-taught surveyor, undertook without the aid of a leveling instrument to lay out the route of the canal from Medford to the Merrimack River. Although his survey did not reflect the true geography of the region, his visit to the millpond in North Billerica was a harbinger of future events which would profoundly affect the milldam and environs for the next fifty years.

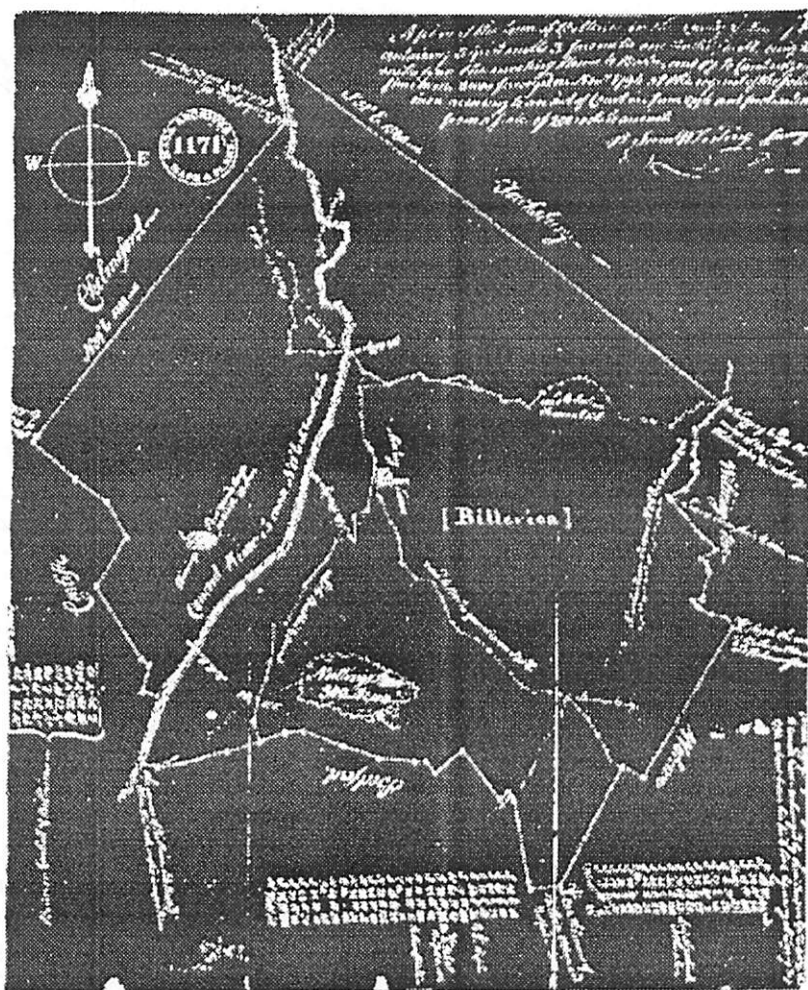


Figure 3. Whiting's 1794 map. "A Plan of the Town of Billerica in the County of Middlesex containing 5 Grist mills 3 Saw mills one Fulling mill, being 20 miles from the meeting House to Boston, and 17 to Cambridge (ye shire town. & was surveyed in Nov. 1794 at the request of the select men according to an act of Court in June 1794 and protracted from a scale of 200 rods to an inch. - Mr. Sam'l Whiting, Survey'r." (See Bibliography, Maps)

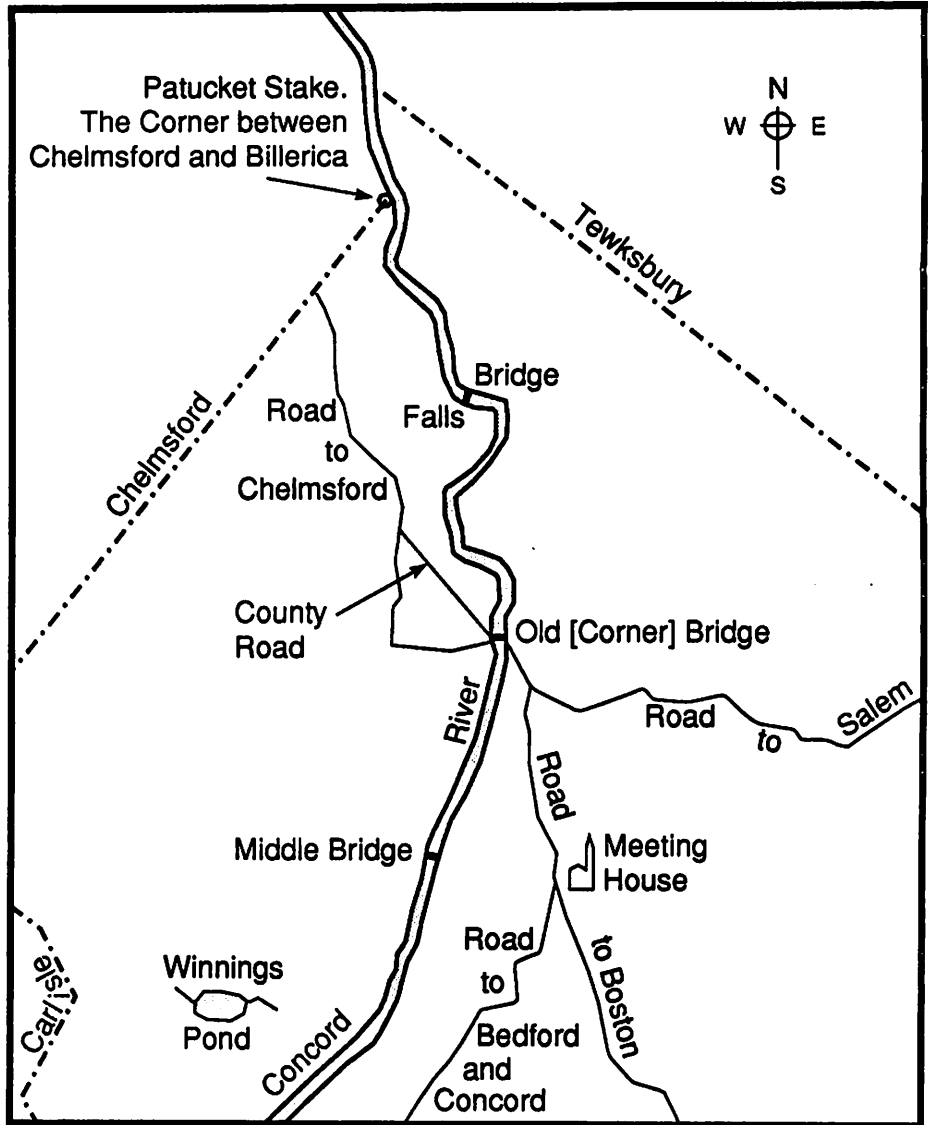


Figure 4. Extract from Samuel Whiting's 1794 map, Fig. 3, redrawn to show north section from Billerica center to Chelmsford and Tewksbury line.

Thomas Richardson, on March 24, 1794, for a consideration of £1350 sold to Ebenezer Hall of Medford and Samuel Jaques of Wilmington, acting for the Proprietors of the Middlesex Canal, forty acres of land on the west bank of the Concord River. This included a $\frac{5}{6}$ interest in 6 poles (a pole is a rod, 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ feet or a square rod) on the east side bounded by Timothy Sprague's ditch "which conveys water to his fulling mill." This instrument of transfer contained the land originally granted to Osgood by the Town of Billerica together with the milldam, stream, and buildings. The Proprietors, however, were obliged to fulfill an agreement between Richardson and Sprague made in 1791 to maintain a grist mill for the benefit of the public and a fishway to permit fish access to the headwaters of the river. The saw mill and forge (Appendix B) mentioned earlier were immediately put to use by the Proprietors. Some of the materials used in the construction of the Canal were prepared at this site. By 1799 the operators of the canal obtained the $\frac{1}{3}$ interest of Timothy Sprague. The mill privilege was again united.

On August 2, 1794, William Weston, an English engineer, completed an accurate survey of the canal route. Having determined that the Concord River was the highest point on the proposed route, Weston set the height of the top of the water in the canal to be one foot higher than the cap sill of the

milldam. This was done to prevent the flooding of the meadows upstream. Ground was soon broken. On September 10, 1794, Loammi Baldwin, famed canal director and engineer, took the first shovelful of dirt. By November 10, 1797 a celebration marked the completion of the canal from the milldam in North Billerica to the Merrimack River. Passenger traffic on this leg did not actually begin until 1802. By 1800 water had begun flowing east, reaching Wilmington in 1801, Woburn in 1802, and finally the Charlestown millpond on the last day of 1803.

The Canal Company's charter of 1793 was ill-defined, but clearly empowered the Proprietors to undertake the necessary steps for construction and operation of a waterway for transportation. Amendments and additions to the charter in 1795 and 1798 allowed for the holding of real estate and mill seats on waters connected with the Middlesex Canal. This newly defined authority was quickly exercised. In 1798 two individuals from New Hampshire, Eleazer Spofford of Jaffrey and a Mr. Smith from Peterboro, possessing excellent credentials, were employed to oversee the construction of a new grist mill and a new saw mill and quite possibly refurbish the older pair purchased from Richardson.

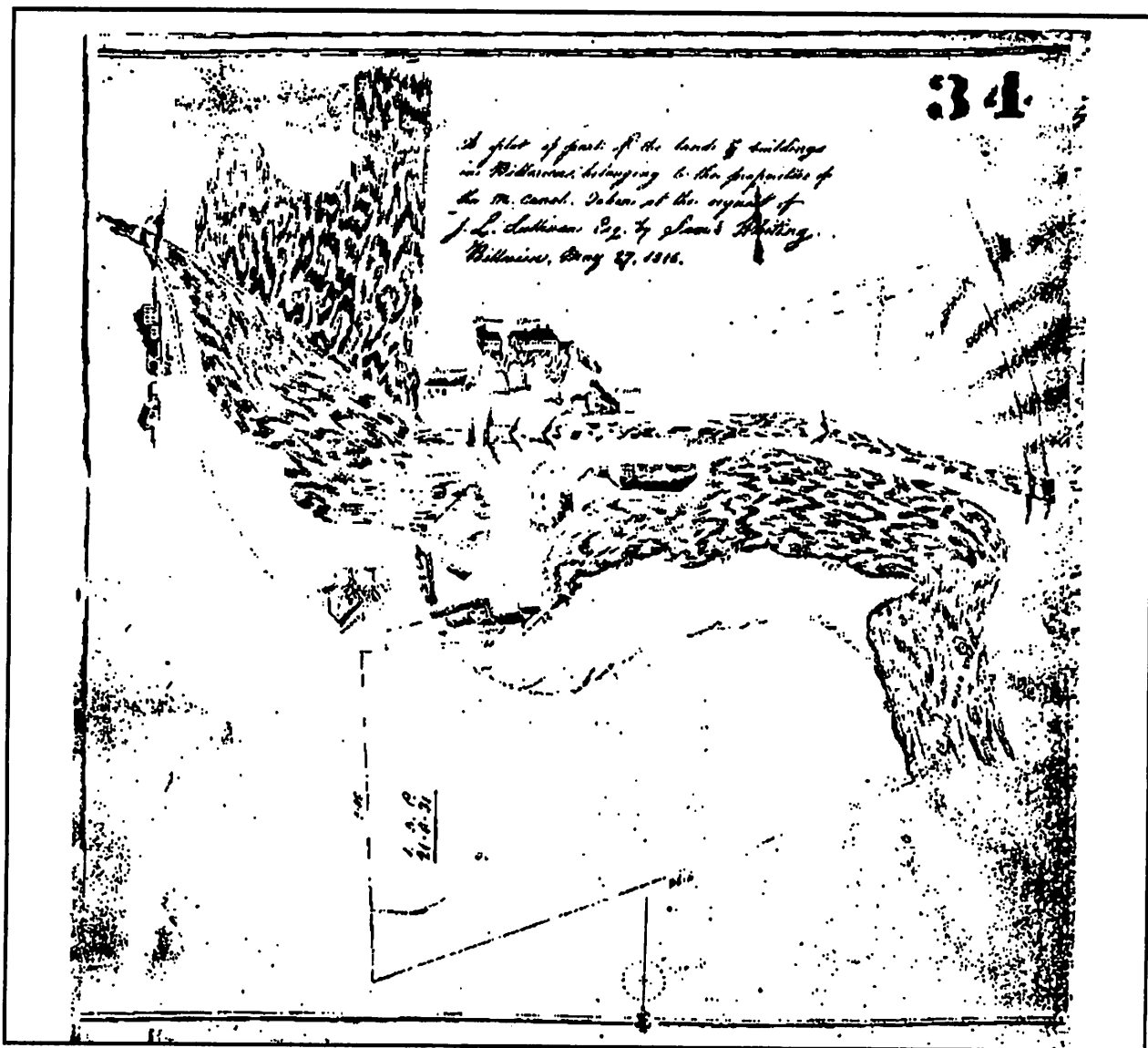


Figure 5. "A plot of part of the lands & buildings in Billerica, belonging to the proprietors of the M. Canal. Taken at the request of J. L. Sullivan Esq. by Sam'l Whiting, Billerica, May 27, 1816." (Courtesy of Dr. Charles E. Stearns)

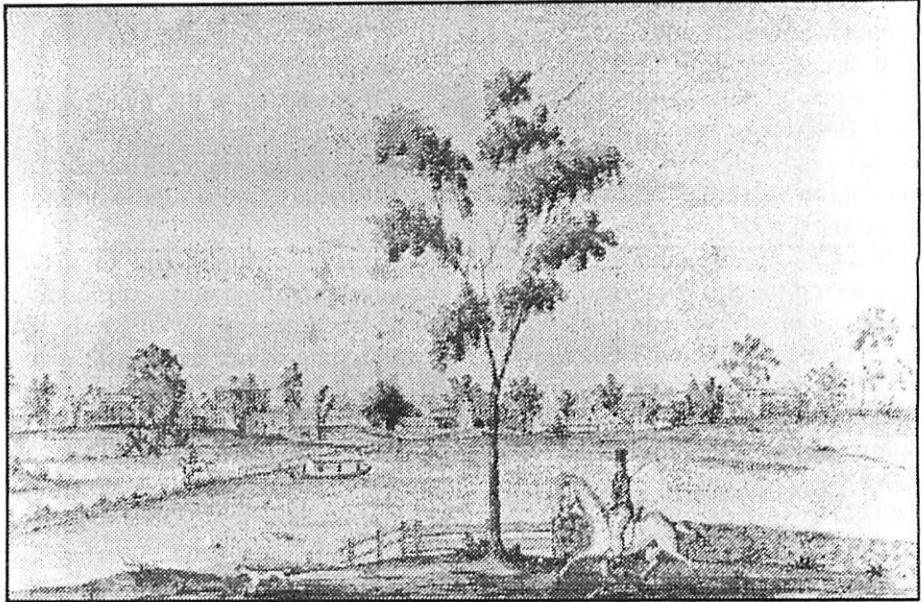


Figure 6. North Billerica Millpond, 1825. From a painting by J. Warren Barton. Milldam is at center with mill village in background. The Middlesex Canal floating towpath with canal boat is seen at left. (Bill. Hist. Soc.)

The new mills were equipped for efficient operation, but the demand for water power, coupled with the need to fill the ever lengthening canal to an average depth of three feet compelled the directors, in 1798, to replace the ancient, leaky milldam of Christopher Osgood. This new dam was erected under the supervision of Loammi Baldwin and was near the location of the present dam at the Faulkner Street bridge.

Both Theophilus Manning and Jonathan Manning were in the employ of the Middlesex Canal Company at the time. Their later accounts refer to the new structure as a "figure" dam of wood frame filled and tightened with gravel. Planks two- and three-quarter inches thick were used in building the dam which stretched 150 feet across the Concord River at a height of 8 feet. Further records testify to the attachment of 33-inch flashboards in the shape of a figure four to the cap sill (top of milldam).

Additional attempts were undertaken by the meadow owners to remove the dam or reduce its height. In 1816, the Proprietors of the East Sudbury and Sudbury Meadows were incorporated by the Legislature. The organization was established to seek relief from flowage on the Concord and Sudbury River System.

Suits brought against the Proprietors of the Middlesex Canal for damages were non-productive. Those initiated by the meadow owners were no exception. The charter of the Canal Company specified that damages caused by the waters of the enterprise must be filed within one year's time. It was generally not difficult for the Canal Company to prove the claimed damage had happened over one year earlier.

By the middle of 1817, the operators of the Canal had invested \$1000 in the milldam, but increased industrial activity prompted them to erect another new dam in 1828. This structure was to replace the 1798 "figure" dam which had become leaky. Daniel Wilson was hired by the canal Company after he had completed work for a similar operation in Bow, New Hampshire. He was commonly referred to as "Boss" Wilson. Israel Colson, who was his apprentice and later in-law, was also in the employ of the Middlesex Canal Company. His fine work on the stone guard lock might suggest that he participated in the dam project as well.

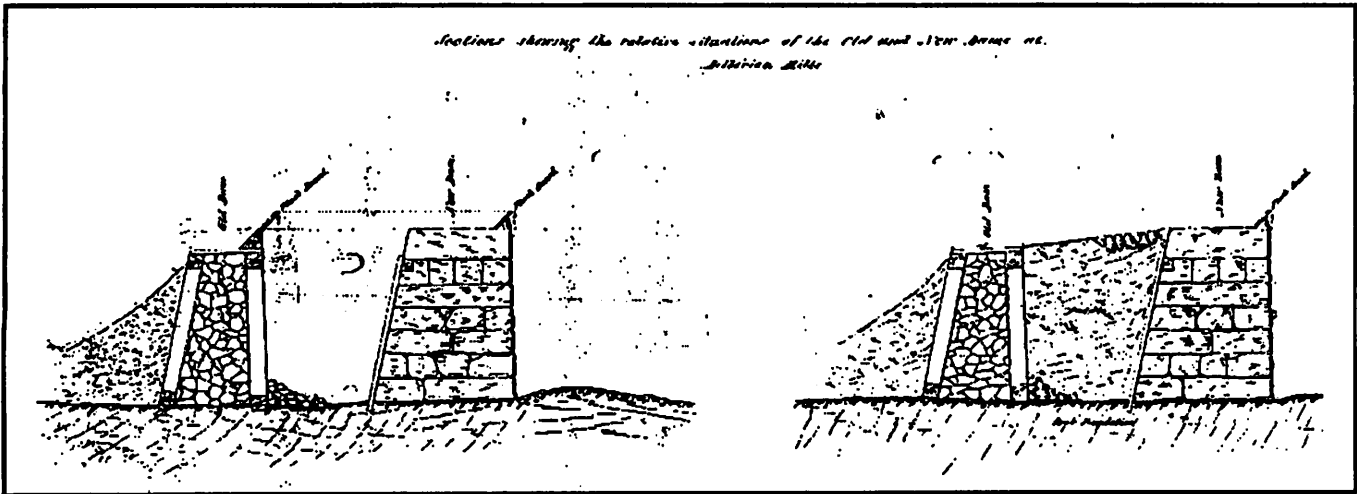


Figure 7. "Sections showing the relative situations of the Old and New Dams at Billerica Mills." (Bill. Hist. Soc.)

The masonry structure was placed at the front or the north of the 1798 milldam, with a fishway at the east end and waste gates on the west duplicating the positions in the previous milldam. The reported 12-foot fall supplied water power for the many manufactures which had located in the area. It also filled the bed of the Canal. This dam is substantially in place today although it does appear that the fishway has been filled with concrete possibly within the last thirty years.

In 1834 the Boston and Lowell Railroad completed its route connecting the two cities. By 1836 a stop situated near the present day MBTA station was initiated. There was no depot until sometime after 1840. Shortly the rails were extended to Nashua, New Hampshire. As the trains rumbled past within eyeshot of the milldam, the Middlesex Canal began to fail.

On their famous journey down the Concord and Merrimack Rivers, Henry David Thoreau and his brother reached the millpond in North Billerica and entered the canal on Sunday, September 1, 1839. Thoreau was quite critical of the Town, referring to it as "born old" and "remaining old." He described the farms as "run down" and the church "grown gray and racked with age." The citizens of that time were probably no fonder of Thoreau. During their 5 3/4 mile journey on the Canal the brothers broke many rules held sacred by the Proprietors. In the first place they were traveling on the Sabbath which was forbidden unless parties were returning home. Thoreau's boat was smaller than the required size appropriate for Canal travel and, in addition, lacked an identifying name or number. While one brother steered, the other ran along the tow path pulling a cord attached to the boat, violating the requirement that either horses or oxen be used as a method of propulsion. Boats plying the Canal were to not exceed a speed of 4 mph, but like many modern day travelers Thoreau broke the speed limit by progressing toward the Merrimack River at 6 mph.

Caleb Eddy, a canal company director in 1843, in a final attempt to salvage the enterprise, tried to convince the Legislature to permit the use of the Concord River in conjunction with the Middlesex Canal to supply water to the City of Boston. His plan called for closing the Billerica Mills to the Merrimack River section, permitting the waters from the Concord to flow along the eastern side of the Canal to Woburn where it would subsequently be piped to Boston. Although the idea had merit, as the wells in and around Boston were polluted, questions could not be answered concerning the alteration of the Company's charter from an enterprise concerned chiefly with transportation to one predominantly involved with water supply.

Unfortunately, by 1851 the Middlesex Canal was nearly defunct and the Directors were seeking permission to dispose of the corporation's real estate. Captain Joel Dix of Billerica is said to have piloted the last boat on April 4, 1852. One month later the Proprietors were to close the books and the charter was finally revoked on October 3, 1859. With the demise of the Middlesex Canal the Faulkners and the Talbots slowly began to establish control of the area which until about 1850 had been referred to as Canal Mills.

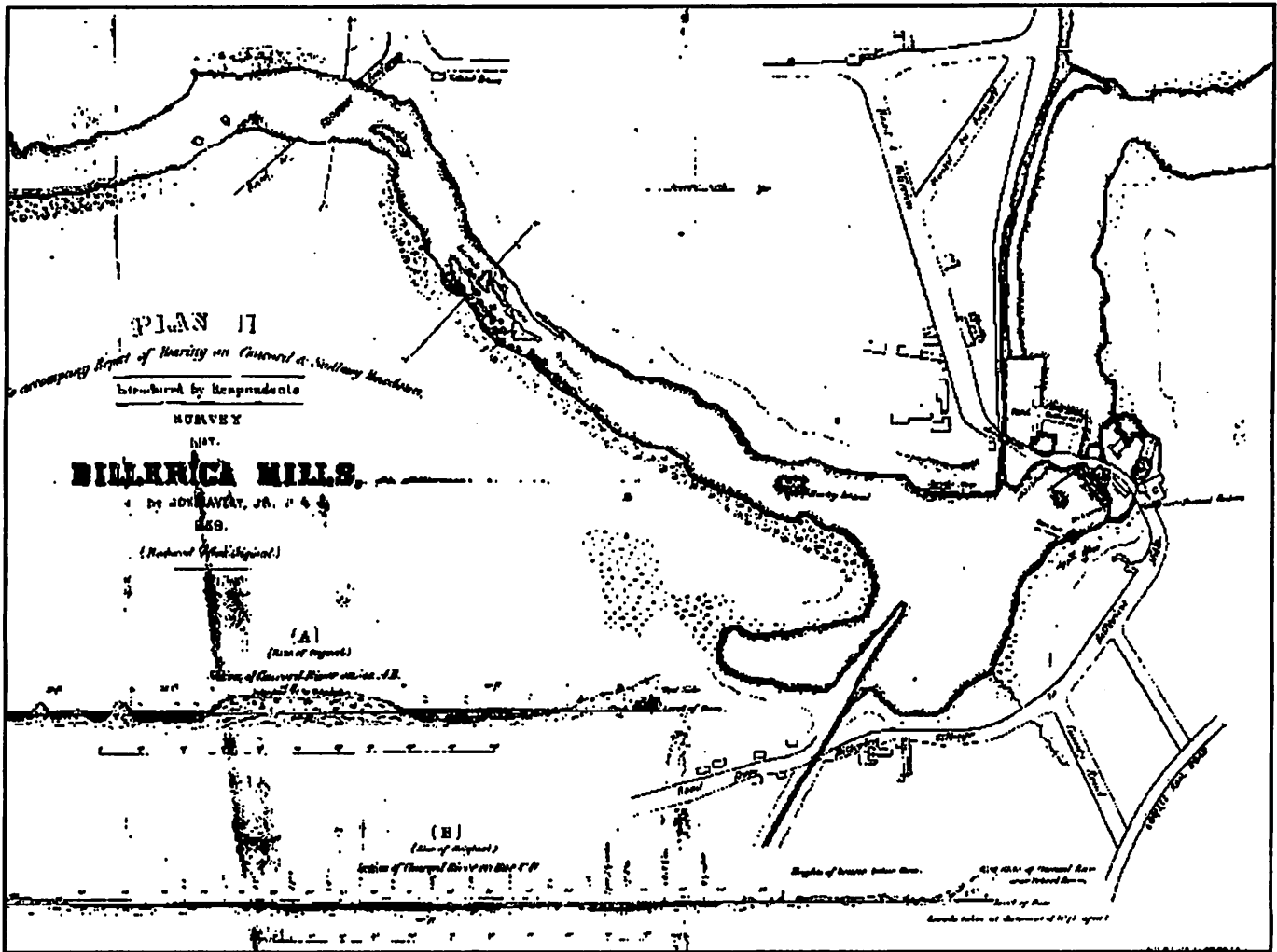


Figure 8. "Survey at Billerica Mills by John Avery, Jr. 1859. To Accompany Report of Hearing on Concord to Sudbury Meadows" (Bill. Hist. Soc.)

The Faulkners

Francis Faulkner began operations on the east bank of the Concord River on April 10, 1811. He apparently leased a fulling mill, previously owned by Timothy Sprague, from the Canal Proprietors. It is said that Faulkner first devoted some time to making chocolate. He soon devoted all of his efforts to textiles. At this time the farmers would bring their wool to the mill to have it carded (carding is the process in which wool is manipulated into sliver form before spinning.) They would then return home to have it spun and woven, after which it was returned to the mill for finishing. Concerning the strength of the finished product, it was said that a powerful team of oxen was stopped in its tracks when a farmer plowing his field caught his pants on a stump.

Within four years Faulkner had erected additional buildings to house machinery for carding, napping, shearing and pressing wool. In 1818, as the result of a fire at which Luther Faulkner (son of Francis) reminisced, "I was so small a child that I danced and shouted as the buildings burned," a new mill was constructed from bricks supplied by a nearby farm.

In the first part of the 19th century weaving was done on hand looms. Faulkner engaged ten Irish weavers from Boston, several of whom were boarded at his home. Eventually by 1825, power looms were imported from England and water power was employed not only for carding and fulling, but also for weaving.

That same year Francis' son James Robbins Faulkner joined the business. The manufacture of inexpensive cloth (satinet) was replaced with flannel. In addition, the Faulkners purchased the property from the Canal Company despite difficult competition from England.

To insure an adequate supply of water for the Canal, "Boss" Wilson, under the direction of James Baldwin, then director of the Canal Company, installed in a rock near the east bank, a bolt, the top of which lined up with the height of the flashboards on the 1798 dam. A mark was chiseled $3/4$ " from the top of the bolt. Should the water level in the millpond fall below the mark, the Faulkners were to cease drawing water or pay a penalty.

In 1831 the Faulkners purchased the interest of Nathan Mears (see Appendix A) in a building which the company had presumably been renting from him since at least 1826. In 1834 a steam boiler was installed to operate the mill machinery in times of low water. By 1836 much of the 1818 structure had been consumed by another fire. Subsequently a three story brick building was erected. This third factory had a steep pitched roof, a wooden stair tower, and a Georgian-style cupola.

During the Civil War the main building, a four story (including basement) brick edifice was added. By this time the Faulkners controlled the east bank of the river near the milldam. Fifteen years later the principal product was twilled flannel the production of which engaged 70 employees, 27 of whom were women and girls.

In 1886 a water cistern tower was added to the northeast corner of the main building, and ten years later three daughters of James Robbins Faulkner founded the Faulkner Kindergarten which was conducted at several Faulkner-owned properties until it was transferred to its present location on the death

of the last surviving Faulkner resident. An earlier arrangement which made it possible for mothers of small children to work several hours a day is said to have been the first day care center in the country. Sometime after 1914 the property was organized as the North Billerica Company. 135 employees were engaged in manufacturing wool blankets and white and colored cloth in 1935.

Despite additions to the factory in the 1940s and again in the early 1960s, foreign competition forced the mill to close about 1987. Today the buildings remain vacant, although interest in converting the property to housing has twice been considered.

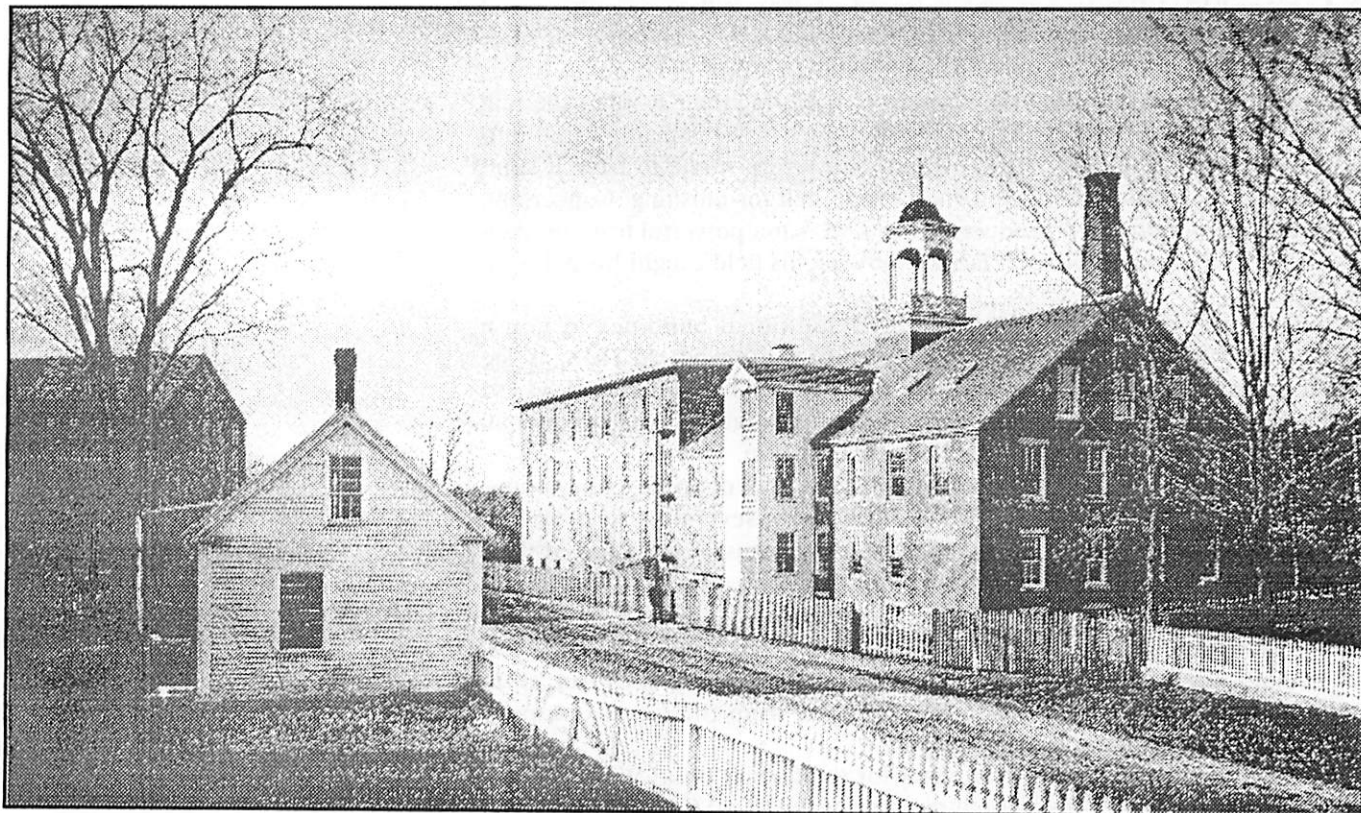


Figure 9. Faulkner Mill ca. 1880. (Hazen, History of Billerica, facing page 279. Bill. Hist. Soc.)

The Talbots

In 1839 Charles Potts Talbot came to Billerica and was soon followed by his brother Thomas, who eventually became owner of the mills and governor of Massachusetts. It is said that the brothers for a while boarded with the Faulkners. They quickly leased a canal building on the west bank of the river. There they opened a dyewood mill. (Dyewood is any wood yielding a coloring matter used for dyeing.) By 1844, they moved their operation to the east bank, outfitting a saw mill purchased from Nathaniel Stearns (See Appendix A). By 1848 the dyewood business was again relocated to a site near the present day MBTA rail stop and 20 years later moved to a site off Rogers Street. After a fire, the Faulkners purchased the land on which the converted sawmill was located.

On October 13, 1851, despite the renewed requests to remove the milldam by the meadow owners upstream, the Talbot brothers bought eleven parcels of land, which included the mill privilege, from the Proprietors of the Middlesex Canal. They were bound to operate the grist mill, and maintain the milldam, but more importantly had first right to the stream and water power. Keeping open the fishway had been required by an act of the Legislature as early as 1821, but by 1835 it appears that the obligation had been repealed. Whether the Town or County mandated the Talbots to operate the fish ladder is a matter for conjecture, but it is clear that the demand for water often kept the fishway closed, law or no law.

These holdings were valued by the Town at \$75,000, but were purchased by the Talbot brothers for \$20,000. The values of their title to land and water rights were in question, as the Canal Company's charter provided protection from damages, which might not be extended to the Talbots, whose intent was to manufacture textiles, not to provide transportation.

Their first woolen mill was erected in 1857 with assistance supplied by the Belvidere Woolen Company of Lowell. Five years later by a previous agreement among the parties, the mill reverted to sole ownership by the Talbots. Soon thereafter, Charles removed to Lowell where he continued in the chemical business. The first products were flannels and wool cashmeres, and later cheviots (coarse twill) and military olive drabs.

The original brick mill was four stories in height with a steep pitched roof, central stair and tower. With the expiration of the Canal charter in 1859, however, the Talbots and meadow owners were embroiled in a much publicized suit. The height of the milldam was in question. It was considered doubtful that the Talbots could benefit from "the one year notification of damages clause" offered by the Proprietors through their charter. After lengthy testimony, it was decided that the Fordway about 1/4 to 1/8 of a mile above the dam formed a natural barrier and unless the ledge in the river bed could be moved, no beneficial effect would be gained by reducing or demolishing the milldam. In this way the mill owners won this all-important suit.

In 1864 the Town relieved the Talbots of the obligation to grind grain, since it was determined that they were performing a greater service by operating a woolen mill. During the Civil War business had been greatly enhanced, prompting the mill owners to double the capacity in the 1870s. A

four story brick ell was added to the west of the main complex. Again in the 1880s a fifth story with shallow pitched roof was joined to the entire structure. By the middle of the 1880s Thomas Talbot had died and the enterprise soon after became incorporated as the Talbot Company. Until this time the mill had operated exclusively on water power, but a 60-foot square steam boiler and engine house were built to accommodate the renewed growth and provide power especially when the level of the river was low.

By the mid 1890s under Charles Sheldon's direction, the mill was one of the first to electrify, using hydraulics to turn the turbines. Most of the remaining structures directly associated with the textile manufactory were erected between 1880 and 1930.

The Talbot Company provided many thoughtful services for its employees. Many resided in low rent company-owned housing which consisted of approximately 150 residences by 1920. In addition, parks, gardens, pensions, life insurance, and a library were maintained for the workers.

In the 1920s the mill employed about 450 people, but by the late 1930s conditions became unfavorable. Company housing was sold at the time and by the early 1960s a holding company, the Textile Subsidiary Corporation, briefly ran the mill before operations ceased.

CRT Corporation acquired the premises along with the mill privilege, rights to the stream and dam. The property was prepared for tenant occupancy and remains thus currently. Numerous small businesses have since occupied portions of the complex. Today, however, much of the structure appears to be vacant with the exception of Cambridge Tool and Manufacturing Company, Inc., Suburban Printing Company, Plantwide Research and McSpadden Associates, Inc. CRT, however, still remains responsible for the maintenance of the milldam. Recently the Selectmen of the Town denied a request to release CRT from this obligation.

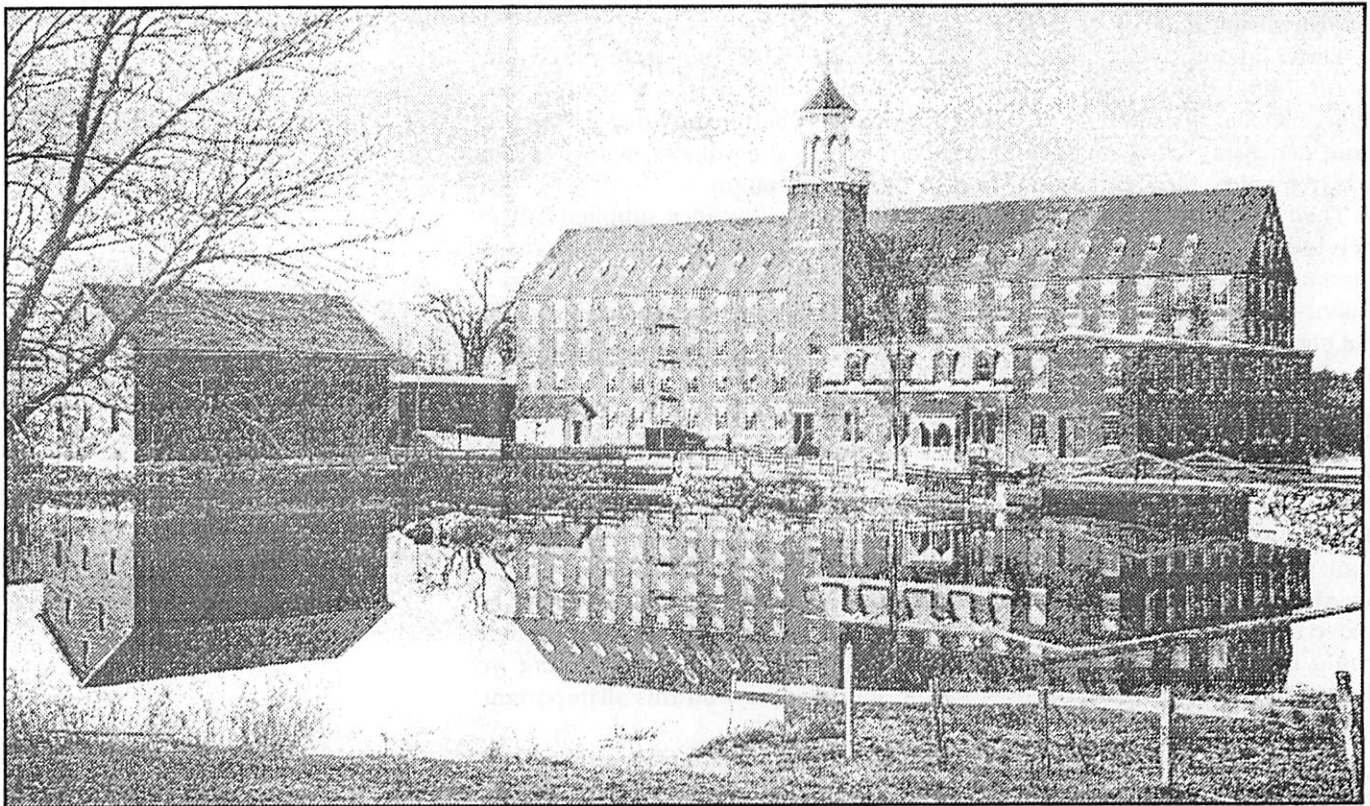


Figure 10. Talbot Mill and Millpond, ca. 1880. Notice steep pitched roof on mill building. (Hazen, History of Billerica, facing page 280. Bill. Hist. Soc.)

Summary

It is evident that the milldam has played a significant role in the development of North Billerica. Initially, Christopher Osgood erected the dam to provide power for a grist mill to grind grain for the citizens of the area. Less than a century later, the milldam supplied water to fill the Middlesex Canal which created links among Boston, Lowell and Southern New Hampshire. Eventually the Canal shipped supplies used in the construction of the Boston and Lowell Railroad, even in 1834, transporting the first steam locomotive to Lowell for assembly on the last leg of its journey from England.

Industrial development progressed as well with small saw mills and fulling operations giving rise to the larger textile factories of the Faulkners and Talbots. These enterprises dominated and nurtured the vicinity into the latter half of the twentieth century, employing large numbers of workers.

Today the mill buildings, milldam, and mill village are preserved on the National Register of Historic Places and as a local historic district. (Billerica Mills Historic District). The power supplied by the dam has ceased to be of value to the nearly deserted factories, but the contributions directly attributed to the milldam cannot be ignored or denied. Crossing the Concord River on the Faulkner Street Bridge, built about 1910, the dam can be seen to the south with water cascading over the cap sill. The controversies surrounding its construction, pitting agrarian against industrial interests, seem now to be best described as "water over the dam."

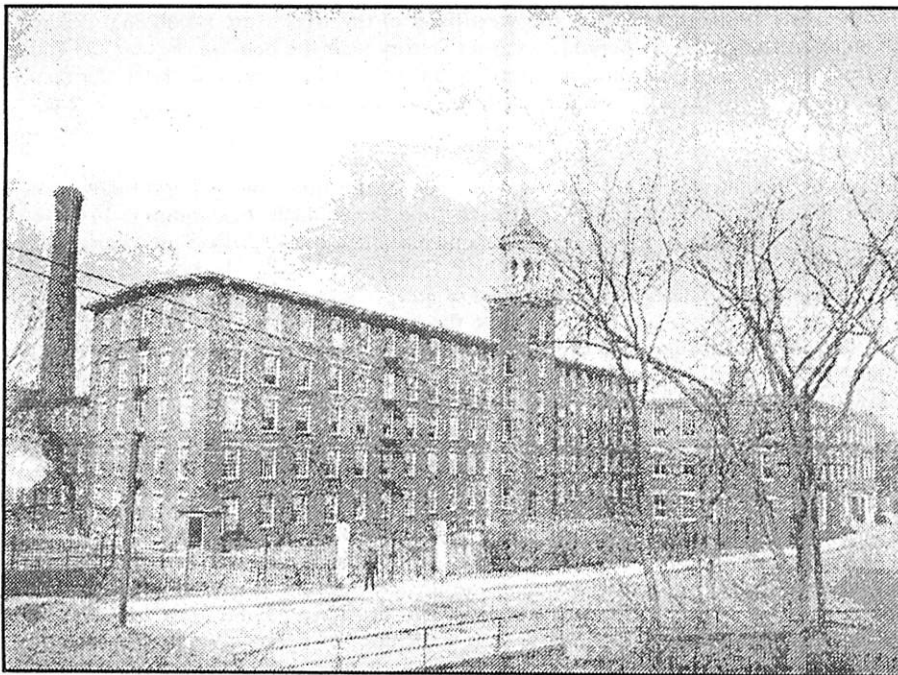


Figure 11. Talbot Mill ca. 1905. (Bill. Hist. Soc.)

Appendixes

A: Nathan Mears

In 1812 the Canal Proprietors sold Nathan Mears a half acre lot of land where he erected a tavern. By 1826 he had acquired three parcels of land on the east bank of the river near the dam. These consisted of a small woolen factory which was eventually purchased by Francis Faulkner from Mears' heirs on 1831; a forge and foundry eventually leased to Roundy and Merrill (see Appendix B) and purchased by James Rice in 1831 and Francis Faulkner in 1836; and a saw mill which Mears erected and sold to Gardner Parker, who sold it to Nathaniel Stearns.

Mears had died in 1828, leaving Nathaniel Stearns as guardian for his two older children and John Baldwin for the three younger. They were far from expeditious in disposing of Mears' estate. In addition it is not clear that all their activities were undertaken with the children's best interest at heart.

B: The Forge and Foundry

It appears that during the early 1800s Jonathan Farmer, a blacksmith, and Henry Merrill obtained the forge from the Canal Proprietors on the east bank below the milldam. Unfortunately by 1819 their assets had been seized and liquidated. Merrill seems to have continued to be associated with the operations as he and a Mr Roundy subsequently ran a foundry and forge at this location on a lease arrangement.

By 1831 James Rice of Tewksbury had purchased the land and buildings, but by 1836 he had died and the property had been acquired by the Faulkners. By 1840 it can be said with a degree of certainty that Roundy and a Mr. Wrenn were running a fulling mill and Merrill and a Mr. Moody were operating a forge and cutlery works at this site. Eventually the forge was procured by a Mr. Lovekin and Mr. Sperry, who for a short time operated an edge tool business. With some reservation it may be said that these enterprises leased buildings and possibly land from the Faulkners.

C: Miscellaneous Operations

In 1820, in addition to the other enterprises, a clapboard mill and boat house were situated on the west bank of the river. The fate of that mill seems to be lost in history, but the boat house was removed about 1900.

By the early 1830s the mills on the west bank of the river were rebuilding. Before 1840 Stephen Lanigan was operating a carpet factory near the dam on present day Old Elm Street. Roger Lang ran a similar enterprise in the rear of the grist mill. On the final day of January, 1846 these factories were burned in a devastating incendiary fire. They were never rebuilt.

D: The Meadow Owners

Since the all-important victory of the mills versus the meadow owners, there have been additional cases presented, but each time the milldam has endured. In 1896 the Concord and Sudbury Rivers Improvement Association asked the State Legislature to approve an expenditure of \$5000, of which \$3000 was to clear the channels of mud and vegetation. In addition, the State Board of Health was requested to contract with the mill owners in North Billerica to reduce the height of the dam in the summer and spend \$10,000 to dredge out the Pollard and Fordway bars. By 1900, however, pollution and sewerage were more of a concern.

Slowly, efforts have been made to improve the quality of the Concord and Sudbury River System. Since the 1950s organizations such as the Sudbury River Trustees have worked to acquire lands along the river bank as well as to try to reduce the level of pollution. On August 21, 1993 the Divers' Environmental Survey Team cleaned debris from the Concord River bed near the Fordway and in October in the area about the milldam. In addition, as of January 30, 1994, the "SuAsCo" (Sudbury, Assabet, Concord) Rivers Study Committee was formed in an effort to preserve and improve the environmental quality of the river systems while attempting to ensure that the water supply and waste water treatment needs of the bordering communities are met. Billerica will be represented by Ralph Bacon, a former Town Engineer, who will meet with official appointees from the towns of Framingham, Wayland, Lincoln, Sudbury, Concord, Bedford, and Carlisle.

Currently the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management has the responsibility for overseeing the milldam. As part of an inspection survey prepared in 1987 by the Office of Dam Safety for the MA DEM the following information was substantiated:

- Length of Milldam: 160'
- Width of Milldam: 6'
- Maximum Height of Milldam: 15'
- Hydr. Height of Milldam: 12'
- Weir Length of Milldam: 128'
- Spillway Capacity: 6,300 cfs.
- Condition: Fair

In addition to these statistics the report indicates erosion caused during the spring of 1987 has occurred on the eastern end of the dam. In order to prevent further decay the cost to mitigate the damage was estimated at \$50,000. The publication, however, is surprisingly unclear as to what parties are responsible for the maintenance of the milldam.

On a pleasant closing note, the January 26, 1995 issue of *The Billerica Minute-Man* indicated that the Concord River may soon be stocked with shad and herring. The fish ladder, which was once filled with cement, may eventually be reconstructed to permit the fish to spawn upstream.

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