Introduction to Amesbury Industries
1790-1930

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Amesbury Carriage Museum
Amesbury, MA

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Introduction to Amesbury Industries 1790-1930
what happened, how it happened, how it un-happened

Thomas Edison with a 1910 S. R. Bailey electric auto – Edison was developing batteries for vehicle power

Contents

Buildings you see vs. what was

Enabling Conditions

Textile industry 1790-1914

Carriage mfr. 1805-1910

Auto body mfr. 1900-1930

Decline

High industrial employment & capital inflow for a small town
Existing Historical Industrial Buildings & Current Uses

**Textiles**

- Cedar St. refurbished residential apts., condos & business lofts
- Elm St. refurbished but largely empty
- CARRIAGE HILL
  - Refurbished & in business use
  - Un-refurbished & mostly empty

**Carriage/Auto**

- Bartley Machine complex, mid-20th century

**Other**

- Oak St. refurbished residential apartments

**Modern**

- 29 Water St. – former Biddle & Smart bldg. currently surrounded by a lot of empty space
1890 Industrial Buildings in the Water St. Area
same Water St. area as seen on previous page

29 Water St. was formerly surrounded by a dense concentration of large carriage factories

Lower textile Mills

29 Water St. – former Biddle & Smart bldg.

Carriage Hill
Enabling Conditions for Industrial Success

1) Powow River – groomed & managed since colonial times
   - 75 feet of drop in 0.2 miles
   - Small enough to be easily harnessed
     - six dams < 50 ft. long in 1825

2) Wealth
   - Nearby seaports: Salem, Beverly, & Newburyport, MA, Portsmouth, NH
     - wealthy mercantile investors build local textile industry

3) Merrimack River
   - Large transportation route directly to seaport (Newburyport)

4) Railroad
   - Eastern Railroad branch line in 1848

Manufacturers’ Hotel hosted Amesbury visitors, indicative of local mindset for economic prosperity
Pioneering of Massachusetts Textile Industry

Amesbury Industries 1790-1930

Perkins Nail Factory – 1796
Worthen & Kendrick – 1804
water powered carding machines, with Moody
Ezra Worthen & Paul Moody
Amesbury Wool & Cotton Factory – 1813-1831
Amesbury Flannel Mfg. Co. 1821-1852
Powered wool looms 1823
purchased nail factory & Amesbury Wool & Cotton co. 1831

Byfield - 1794
Newburyport Woolen Co.
Water powered cleaning, carding, spinning – hand weaving
Perkins nail factory
Paul Moody family mill
English mechanics

Beverly
Beverly Cotton Manufactory
1787-1798
horse driven cleaning & carding
human powered spinning jenny
hand weaving - spring-shuttle looms

Francis Cabot Lowell
Patrick Tracy Jackson
Jacob Perkins

investors

Lowell - 1822
Merrimack Manufacturing Co.

Paul Moody – 1814
looms & machinery

Ezra Worthen – 1822
superintendent

Waltham - 1814
Boston Manufacturing Co.
Integrated factory, water powered cotton looms

Byfield - 1794
Newburyport Woolen Co.
Water powered cleaning, carding, spinning – hand weaving
Perkins nail factory
Paul Moody family mill
English mechanics

Fulfilment of American industrial powered weaving
Early Local Carriage Making

Personal vehicles having upholstery & spring suspension
light construction for high strength-to-weight ratio

Traditional handcraft began ca. 1805 in Merrimac & Merrimacport
- primary driver of those local economies by 1830s
- high-class vehicles at average price of $250 during the 1880s
Amesbury Carriage Industry

Brought to Amesbury by Jacob R. Huntington in 1853
- standardized a middle-high-class vehicle around 3 production concepts:
  - part duplication
  - simple assembly line, specific employees & parts at each station
  - wholesale distribution

Enclosed body Rockaway, suggestive of later entry into wooden auto bodies

Amesbury merged craft and industrial method to occupy a major place in high grade carriage manufacture
Carriage manufacture was dispersed throughout town, independent of water power. A cooperative business community that produced 20,000 carriages per year in late 1880s.

Amesbury among top 5 carriage making towns, with New Haven, Cincinnati, Chicago, St. Louis.

Average wholesale price of $100 (1880).

2.5X more carriages/employee than in Merrimac & Merrimacport.

With accumulated capital, makers later built substantial Carriage Hill factories.
Vehicle is simply a light carriage, having a motor inside.
Note “tiller steering” & rubber tire “bicycle wheels”
Amesbury Auto Body Industry & Automobiles

Started ca. 1900 – a natural outgrowth of carriage making
- early auto bodies were of wood construction

Progressed through metal clad wood, and then all metal construction
- metal forming originally by powered hammers, then presses
- Metal Body Co. relocated to Detroit, was later absorbed by Fisher Body

Dominated by a few companies
- occupied most remaining carriage factories & some textile mills
- 2 companies made complete automobiles
  - S. R. Bailey electric

Also horse-drawn & electric trolley cars, starting ca. 1889
- used Thompson Houston electrics from Lynn, Mass, near Boston.
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Number of Carriage & Auto Related Businesses

- Textile Strike 1852
- Panic of 1857
- Civil War
- Credit Mobiler Scandle
- Recession of 1887-8
- Panic of 1888
- Depression 1890s
- Strike of 1903
- Credit recession 1907
- WW I

Carriages & Auto bodies, or related businesses
American Watch Industry Business Startups

fewer but larger capitalizations, responding to same economic trends

- Panic of 1857
- Civil War
- Credit Mobiler Scandle
- Recession of 1887-8
- Depression 1890s
- Strike of 1903
- Credit recession 1907

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Decline of Historical Amesbury Industries

1) Significant depression 1892-1897, throughout America & Europe

2) Post-depression recovery hampered by changing business demographic
   - textile mills closed 1914, as textiles migrated to deep-south
   - carriage manufacture migrated to mid-west
     - neighborhood carriage factories replaced by dwellings

3) By Great Depression, consumer-product auto manufacture was vertically integrating for efficiency, eliminating farm-out body making

Industrial decline resulted in mass extinction of carriage factory buildings during mid-20th century, & major recasting of Amesbury business economy.