

II Manufacturing

Manufacturing in Bristol, as in any newly settled township, was limited to the wants of the inhabitants; therefore, the first mills to appear were sawmills, gristmills, and forges. The first gristmill on record is one which was built in 1792 by three brothers: John, William, and James O'Brian. This mill was built in the southern part of the town on the brook which now bears their name. The first sawmill was built by Amos Scott in 1791. Forges were built in various parts of town for making bar iron. The ore used was from Bristol, Monkton, and from Crown Point, New York, the latter being a heavier ore which was combined with other ores in smelting. The bar iron thus made was used in making plowshares, crowbars, cart and wagon tires, and many other tools and necessities. Some of the forges made more bar iron than was used in Bristol and neighboring towns were supplied with the product. There was an iron mine in the western part of the town. Rowland Robinson, in his book, *Three Rivers*, mentions this mine, and says that ore was taken from it to make the cannon balls used by the American fleet in the Battle of Lake Champlain, during the War of 1812.

A gristmill, built of stone in 1818, in the east part of the Village, was one of the four buildings which formed the foundation of the original Drake, Smith & Company. The upper part of the stone mill was used as a pillbox factory. Between one hundred and two hundred cords of white birch were used annually in manufacturing these boxes, and several people were employed here. A sawmill built sometime before 1836, formed the easterly boundary of the gristmill, and shortly after that, a tanbark mill was built close by. About 1845, the fourth building, a carding mill, was added to this group by Israel Eddy who later passed it on to his son-in-law, Sam Hasseltine, who abandoned the mill about 1880, and the machinery was then moved to Hinesburg. In the meantime, Solomon Drake, owner of both the gristmill and the tanbark mill, sold the former but retained control of the tannery which

he left to his son-in-law, Horace Farr. As late as 1865, leather was tanned in the mill, and a cobbler and harness shop was operated in the Farr house on East Street. In 1880, the carding mill building was sold to A. J. Eastman, who manufactured butter tubs there for five years. He then sold to T. S. Drake and E. W. Smith, who formed the original partnership of **Drake & Smith** for the manufacture of beekeepers' supplies. In the early 1880's, Drake & Smith acquired the rights to the gristmill, sawmill, and tanbark mill, thus consolidating the four factories into one plant.

About 1894, Charles McGee purchased several shares in the business. In 1935, in company with his son-in-law, Richard Smith, and grandson, Clement Smith, he bought the remaining shares from the heirs of E. W. Smith. The property for the first time came under the control of one family. After the death of Richard Smith and Charles McGee, the plant was operated by Mrs. Richard Smith. A thriving business was done in the manufacture of wooden boxes, silos, water tubs, door frames and sashes to order. The mill was closed down in June 1946, but reopened in February 1947, with John Cragen, Sr., as owner. In June 1951, the mill was sold to L. Stearns Gay, Jr., of Ludlow, Vermont. In December 1952, manufacturing was discontinued at this location; and eventually, in 1953, the plant on the New Haven River was dismantled. The story of Drake, Smith & Company continues with the story of the Bristol Novelty Company and the Vermont Box Company. The firm continues to this day.

In 1862, **Howden, Daniels & Company** incorporated and began the manufacture of doors, sashes, and blinds in a factory at the foot of Mill Hill. In 1867, David Bosworth bought Daniels' interest and the firm became known as **Howden, Bosworth & Company**. Competition in the manufacture of doors and blinds was too keen for the company to be very successful, and a change was made after the flood of 1869 had caused some damage to the plant. At this time, they decided to

manufacture caskets and the first one made by the firm was put on the market in 1870. In 1877, the name was changed to the **Bristol Manufacturing Company**, known for a number of years as one of the largest casket manufacturing concerns in the country.

The following is quoted from a taped interview of Bernard Bosworth, done in the spring of 1972: "I would like to quote the recollections as written down by Miss M. Helen Bosworth. My Aunt Helen lived with her sister, Grace, for many years in the white house at the corner of North and Park Streets. They were the daughters of the Reverend David Bosworth of Howden, Bosworth & Company. I quote:

"Papa came to Bristol in the Fifties. The family moved here in April, 1868, in our present home. Howden and Bosworth had bought out the Whitney Shop which made sashdoors and blinds and commenced manufacturing of the latter. In August, 1869, there was a cloudburst which took away all the buildings except the lower factory which was flung around on its underpinnings and washed away all the dirt from the island. By the time things were in shape again, sashdoor and blind factories had sprung up all around and taken the trade. In 1870, the company commenced making caskets on a small scale and in 1877 it was incorporated as Bristol Manufacturing Company."

"I might add here that when the factory opened its doors again, it started to make both baby carriages and caskets. Finding the latter to be more profitable, they continued in that trade.

"The management of the Bristol Manufacturing Company stayed mainly in the Bosworth Family. First, Reverend David Bosworth, then in succession his sons: William H., Birnie B., and David R. After the death of my father, David R., my brother Nichols and I ran the factory until those doors were closed in 1939."

The firm was very active for a period of some forty years, at times employing one-hundred-fifty men and women, and using over a million feet of lumber in a year. Soon after 1910, the business began to decline, and in

1936 it went into the hands of receivers. Under new management, it was reopened, but closed in 1939. The following year the plant was purchased by Perley Eaton, who did some business there until the fire of 1947 which destroyed nearly all of the buildings. A few years later the remaining buildings were leveled by fire.

For a number of years, while the Bristol Manufacturing Company was manufacturing caskets, a separate industry known as the **O.K. Clothes Dryer Company** was housed in the factory belonging to the Bristol Manufacturing Company and manufactured clothes dryers of maple wood. The manufacture of clothes dryers was discontinued several years before the casket factory was closed.

Close to this plant, but independent of it, was the **James Whitney Chair Company**, founded about 1850. Whitney finally gave up the manufacture of chairs and in company with M.P. Varney began making caskets. This enterprise was not very successful, and the plant was sold to the Bristol Manufacturing Company which tore down one of the two Whitney buildings and erected a paint shop on the site.

Another manufacturing concern in Bristol which was very successful for a time, and one of the largest of its kind in the country, was the **Bartlett Plow Manufactory**. Much of the sod on the western prairies was broken by the plows manufactured at the Bartlett plant in Bristol. In 1847, the small plant in which the plows were made burned. It was located near Quaker Street in the town of Lincoln. The plows were made by David Tabor, Russell Tabor, and Stephen Bartlett. A new manufacturing site utilizing water power was sought and finally located at the junction of the New Haven River and Baldwin's Creek. After this land was purchased, the new site was named Rockydale. Five dwelling houses were built. Steam power was used while a water mill and larger, separate foundry and shop for continuing the plow business were built. The Tabors sold to **S. Bartlett & Company** who built a larger water mill containing a sawmill, with flutter wheels to operate the sawmill, and a large Brest Water Wheel

to run the plow machinery. Castings for the large water wheel and sawmill parts were made in the first foundry, as well as parts for the manufacture of road scrapers, cultivators, plows, hay cutters, drags, and harrows. Some years after the larger water mill was constructed, means for utilizing water power were much improved and later makes of water wheels were used. Clapboards, spruce lumber, and nail keg staves were added to the line. After spruce lumber began to become scarce, the manufacture of pill boxes and small turned wood parts from white birch was added.

About 1880, fire destroyed the factory of the Bartlett Plow Works but the machinery and the right to manufacture plows had been previously sold to the Patrick family in Hinesburg.

Near the plow factory was Rockwood Barrett's chair stock and butter tub factory which employed twelve men and used five-hundred thousand feet of lumber annually. Mr. Barrett was a Rutland man and eventually moved the firm to Rutland.

A sawmill in South Bristol, owned by a Mr. Varney, changed hands in the later 1870's and the new firm of **Sumner & Prime** began the manufacture of beekeepers' supplies. Later C.E. Gove bought into the firm which became known as **Prime & Gove**. The mill burned in 1894 and was not rebuilt.

In the last half of the century, several industries developed which had a short existence and in many cases the dates of the starting and closing of the firms cannot be obtained. There was a mill for tar coating of shingles which was situated beside the O'Brian Brook in South Bristol, and the wagon shops of Albert Dunshee & Son (Herbert), Arba Mansfield, and J.H. Wright. Three other wagon makers who also added blacksmithing to their trade were F. Greenough, Octave Cushman, and N. McIntyre. Harnesses were made by Ira Farnham and William Battles and later by Ira Eastman, Heman Hill, and J.Z. Gaudet. Peter Lander operated a cigar-making factory for a time, employing about twenty hands.

The flood of 1869 destroyed the old red gristmill, at the foot of Mill Hill, but the owner, R.D. Stewart, rebuilt it. Later the Bristol Manufacturing Company took it over as part of their plant and Mr. Stewart opened a feed store in the Gale store which had been moved to South Street.

In 1896, Arthur B. Kilbourn and E.W. Smith started a grain and feed store on East Street, where a bakery was once located. The building was rented from Neal Nelson while they constructed the **Cyclone Gristmill**. The gristmill purchased grains from local farmers, specializing in custom grinding. In addition they ran a feed store, where they sold flour, feed, grain and hay. In 1900, Mr. Kilbourn purchased his partner's interest. By 1909, his sons, John and Francis Kilbourn, were helping him with the mill. Soon the grain came in bulk via the railroad to New Haven Junction, where it was unloaded by hand and hauled to the mill in Bristol. This meant that instead of buying from the local farmers, the grain was purchased in larger quantities from grain companies. About 1913, farm and garden seeds were added and John Deere Farm Equipment and parts were sold. Later they began to sell building materials, small tools, kerosene and gasoline. The mill was a busy place and when needed, more modern machinery was added for custom grinding and mixing.

In 1924, a great fire started from a harness shop on South Street, spreading to the south side of Main Street, gutting most of the buildings, and completely leveling the grist mill. The mill was quickly rebuilt with a second structure to be used as the office. It is still standing almost in its original form. Presently, the structure is owned by Freemountain Toys, Inc., and is called the Vegimill.

While the Bristol Railroad was in operation, Kilbourn's grain was hauled from the station on North Street. In 1930, the railroad was discontinued and Mr. Kilbourn purchased a site in New Haven Junction and built his second mill on it. Here custom grinding was done and grain stored. In the 1950's it was closed.

After Arthur B. Kilbourn's death

in 1944, at the age of seventy-nine, his sons continued the business under the name of **A.B. Kilbourn Estate**. In the early 1960's it became the **Kilbourn Brothers**. John became the sole owner in 1963, and continued until his death in 1968. At the time of his death, the mill was the oldest family business in Bristol, having been continually operated for seventy-two years.

In 1897, the **Cold Spring Creamery** on the New Haven River, owned by Evarts and Eastman, was doing a thriving business and had just installed new machinery at its branch creamery in New Haven Mills. At this time, the **Riverside Condensed Milk Company** was formed and built a factory across the river from the creamery at a cost of several thousand dollars. Evarts and Eastman were both members of the Riverside Company which took over control of the creamery. At first the firm prospered, taking in from thirty-thousand to forty-thousand pounds of milk daily, but trouble soon arose. The condensery was closed and the machinery was sent to Worcester in 1901. Mike Hannon bought both the creamery and condensery buildings at auction. In 1903, he leased the creamery to a Boston firm and there is no further record of its activities. Except for two winters when it was used for roller skating, the condensery building remained idle until 1910 when Mr. Hannon sold it to Homer Hewitt and Fred Wright who established a wood turning factory employing from eight to ten persons.

The following is quoted from a taped recollection by Gertrude Hewitt Lathrop: "At one time, in the early 1900's, Homer ran a mill, situated on the west side of the New Haven River, just above the old Sumner Bridge. It was known as **Hewitt and Wright's Mill**." The factory burned in 1914 and was not rebuilt.

The same year the condensery was built, 1897, A.L. Cain leased a section of land at the corner of Pine and Maple Streets and began the construction of a factory for the making of wood novelties which was finished the next year. The factory, which was a successful enterprise, employed from ten

to twenty hands. After the factory burned in 1903, Mr. Cain was too disheartened to rebuild, but local men formed a stock company known as the **Bristol Novelty Company** and rebuilt the plant. After a time, the business ceased and the factory was left vacant.

In 1912, the factory of the **New Haven Mills Manufacturing Company** at New Haven Mills, owned by M. I. Thomas, burned. A special Village Meeting was immediately called in Bristol, where it was proposed that the Village buy the vacant Bristol Novelty Company factory and present it to Mr. Thomas, with tax exemption for five years, provided that he would locate in Bristol. The Village officers, however, found that they had no authority to buy property. Mr. Thomas offered to pay two-thousand-five-hundred dollars for the building. This offer was accepted and the remaining one-thousand-five-hundred dollars of the purchase price was provided by the townspeople, who were very anxious to have the plant located here. This was the beginning of the **Vermont Box Company**, which was operated by Ford Thomas, son of M. I. Thomas, until his retirement in 1952.

In September 1952, Mr. Thomas' majority stock interest in the corporation was sold to L. Stearns Gay, Jr., the other portion being retained by Reginald B. Sentenne. Stockholders, who were also officers and directors of the new corporation were: Reginald B. Sentenne, President; L. Stearns Gay, Jr., Treasurer; Richard P. Mullin, Vice President; Barbara S. Gay, Clerk; Leon S. Gay, and George E. Squier, Directors.

Shortly after this change of ownership, the manufacture of furniture was begun on a small scale. By 1954, the pine furniture of this company was being shipped throughout all of New England, while at the same time the wooden box business was showing some decline. To more properly identify the firm as a furniture manufacturing concern, the corporation changed its name in September 1956, to **Drake, Smith & Company, Inc.** (Mr. Gay had retained the right to this trade name from the former business.) The company discontinued

manufacture of boxes and concentrated on pine furniture and wooden counter display units.

The Drake, Smith & Company, Inc., now manufactures a complete line of colonial style pine furniture. Their products include bedroom, dining room, and living room furniture. Wooden display units are no longer manufactured.

In 1961, L. Stearns Gay, Jr., became President. He sold his interest in 1965, and Richard Mullin became President. In 1969, Emerson Manufacturing Company of Suncook, New Hampshire, bought controlling interest in the business. Emerson Manufacturing dissolved in 1975, and a new corporate structure evolved, the Drake, Smith & Company, Inc., with corporate offices located in Wakefield, Massachusetts. Bristol is a branch of the Drake, Smith corporation, with Richard Mullin serving as vice President.

After the company changed over to furniture manufacturing, space was created in the plant for a showroom. In 1962, the Drake, Smith Mill Store opened on Main Street. It was a primary outlet for their products in this area. The Mill Store was closed in December 1975. Another Mill Store was opened on Shelburne Road in Shelburne in 1976; it is one of a series of stores established by the new Drake, Smith corporation.

At present, Drake, Smith & Company employs about one-hundred-fifty workers in the Bristol branch.

The **A. Johnson Company** was founded near Saratoga, New York, in 1906 by Andrew Johnson and his sons, Frederick, Frank, and David. The business then moved to Pike, New Hampshire, in 1914; to Lake Dunmore, Vermont, in 1918; and to South Lincoln, Vermont, in 1925. In 1936, the company purchased the Fred Hammond farm on Bristol Flats.

The plant was severely damaged by a flood just before its opening in 1938, and the community of Bristol assisted in some of the rebuilding efforts. At this time, the firm was under the management of Fred Johnson and his son, Andrew. The mill operates on a large scale, buying logs in the vicinity

Fairly extensive dry kilns and planing facilities were added through the years, and in 1979 the plant employed forty-five persons. The operation is a family partnership owned by three generations. The fourth generation is represented in Bristol by Phillip, David, and Kenneth, sons of Andrew and his wife, Evangelyn (Duncan), who was from Salem, Virginia. The company has acquired fairly extensive lands through the years in hopes of supplying its own timber.

Charles Frary started a factory on the New Haven River, east of Bristol Village in 1908 and conducted a successful wood turning business there until 1934, when he sold it to Frank Elliot.

The **Frank E. Lee Company**, manufacturing small turned wooden goods, was started in 1938 in a small building adjoining the home of Mr. Lee. It was then known as **Peterson & Lee**. The following year, as business expanded, more room was needed, so they moved into the barn, which was a larger building. In the fall of 1940, this building was completely destroyed by fire. The following spring, Mr. Lee rebuilt his factory at the site of Charles Frary's factory, out in Rockydale, near the present Rusty Hub Restaurant. Mr. Lee's factory closed in the late 1960's.

The **Van Raalte Company** established a branch in Bristol in 1948, renting space in the Tomasi Block. In 1952, Van Raalte purchased the two buildings owned by the Tomasi family and expanded their production. The Bristol plant was one of the three Vermont plants which were part of the Saratoga, New York, unit, the other two were in Middlebury and Randolph. Bristol was a sewing plant, manufacturing nylon underwear from fabric knitted and cut at other Van Raalte mills.

In a taped interview with Mrs. Harold Follansbee, in August, 1979, she relates: "Four girls were scheduled to go to Saratoga, namely Erma King, of New Haven, Anna Wilson, Mabel Smith, and Lottie Follansbee, of Bristol, to learn the mechanism and supervisory programs of Van Raalte in November 1948. After being in the

Saratoga plant a few weeks under the supervision of Mr. Archie Guild and E.C. Carlson, we came to Bristol to supervise the line we had been assigned to. A supervisor had ten or twelve girls, each with a seamer and lockstitch machine."

By 1959, the Van Raalte plant in Bristol employed about one-hundred-fifty people. That number of employees held steady throughout its operation. In 1967, the Bristol branch was closed, as company policy decided to consolidate its operations in Middlebury, doubling its space there.

Quoted from Mrs. Harold Follansbee's taped interview, August, 1979: "January 1, 1967, the Van Raalte in Bristol was moved to Middlebury. A great many changes have taken place at what was the Van Raalte Building here in Bristol. It is the Deerleap Furniture store, operated and owned by Clayton Ladeau, Jr., and the laundry and photography shop owned and operated by Frank James."

The **Claire Lathrop Bandmill**, located on River Street, had its origins in his great-grandfather Noah Lathrop's mill in the Bristol Notch. Noah Lathrop's mill closed in 1925, as the stumpage was gone. His son, William, operated another mill, near his father's on Vincent Brook in the Notch. William's son, Clarence Lathrop, set up a sawmill on his farm in South Bristol (where Harold Butler's farm is now) in 1935. He carried on his business in a manner similar to his father and grandfather, cutting his logs in the winter, and sawing them in the summer. Much of his production was sold locally; white birch to Frank Lee, pine to Thomas, Vermont Box Company, and oak to Barre-Chelsea Railroad, in Barre.

During World War II, a large timber sale was purchased in Waltham, Vermont. Because of the war-time rationing, it was more feasible to operate on site. The mill was moved to Waltham; a diesel engine powered the mill. In the summer of 1944, Clarence Lathrop's son, Claire, purchased the mill and finished harvesting the timber sale. For a time, Clarence continued working at the mill summers. In 1947, the Waltham timber was gone, and

Claire moved the mill to River Street in Bristol. This site was the former lumber yard of the Bristol Manufacturing Company. As transportation of logs and lumber was now done by truck, not horses, the location was permanent.

In 1960, the purchase of a log debarker made logs clean for sawing year-round. Next, a six-foot band saw was installed. Custom planing was available.

A new and larger mill built of concrete and steel replaced the old one in 1971. A six-foot band resaw was added, also a machine shop for maintenance of machines. Six-million board feet of lumber is produced annually. Most of the production is hardwood, with maple the dominant species; the balance is pine and spruce. The lumber is marketed wholesale throughout the United States, Canada, and abroad. Most of it is used for furniture, yard stock, track ties, and pallet material.

The following is an excerpt from a taped interview with Claire Lathrop on July 24, 1979: "Our best ash goes to Taiwan and comes back to America in the form of a tennis racket. Our best oak goes to Germany, Holland, and Belgium to be made into furniture. Our best hard maple is sold to England where it is used in architectural work. Canada uses our low-grade oak for flooring, our white ash for furniture and hockey sticks."

By 1978, with petroleum-based energy at a premium, Claire Lathrop decided to convert to an automatic wood-fired boiler to generate steam needed in the kiln drying of his lumber. His source of energy, wood-waste bark, became valuable fuel. Nearly all the better grades of lumber are now kiln dried.

James Lathrop, the fifth generation, has engineered the installation of the machinery in the new mill, kilns, and energy plant. A second son, Thomas, grades the lumber as it comes from the mill. Bookkeeping is the responsibility of Claire's wife, Ruth. In 1975, Mr. Lathrop incorporated his business under the name of Claire Lathrop Bandmill, Inc.

Long-time employees include Wendell Mason, George Forand,

David Weaver, and Ray Martin. In 1979, more than thirty-five men were employed at the mill, in addition to several crews working in the woods.

Kennedy Brothers located in Bristol in 1943, moving into a former garage building on Mountain Street (the present site of the Bristol Trading Post). There, John and Paul Kennedy manufactured and distributed gift-ware, specializing in woodenware and items of wood combined with other materials, chiefly pottery, glass, and metal. Some of the pottery was manufactured there by John Kennedy, and decorated by hand by his mother, Mrs. Franklin J. (Edna) Kennedy.

In 1959, the operation was moved to Vergennes, where it continues to prosper today. At present, there is a branch store on Church Street in Burlington.

John Kennedy sold his interest in the business to his brother in 1969, and established his own pottery shop, the **Pittsfield Potters**, that year. The shop is presently run by his daughter, Nancy, and in the spring of 1980, a branch of Pittsfield Potters opened in New Haven Junction.

On January 1, 1966, Clayton Ladeau, Jr., began the manufacture of hand-rubbed pine furniture, near his home on Briggs Hill. From this site, there is a magnificent view of Deerleap, the name of the rocky ledge at the south end of Hogback Mountain; hence, the name, **Deerleap Furniture Company**.

At first, the showroom was in the shop. In 1971, Deerleap Furniture moved its showroom to the south side of Main Street and located in the Tomasi Block where Van Raalte's had been. It is the only outlet for their products, which include bedroom, dining room and living room furniture. In addition to the pine furniture, the store carries compatible sofas, bedding, and accessories.

It is a family business involving Mr. Ladeau's wife, Zelva; their son, Brian; and a few employees.

After the death of John Kilbourn in 1968, the Kilbourn Mill closed down. In the early 1970's, Roy Campbell purchased the mill for the purpose of manufacturing and distributing his

personal design of wood block toys.

In 1976, Beverly Red, a native of Ohio, purchased the Kilbourn Grist Mill from Campbell to house her **Freemountain Toys, Inc.** This site combined the necessary ingredients of a suitable building within an area of experienced had sewers for a cottage industry.

Beverly Red's main product is a durable cloth toy called a Vegimal. The copyrighted, animated Vegimals include a carrot, peas, broccoli, cauliflower, peanut, tomato, corn watermelon, orange, etc. They are completed by approximately thirty-five hand sewers living in the Bristol area. Utilizing the original grain bins, the grist mill, now called the "Vegimill," is where the material are cut, assembled, boxed, and prepared for the thriving wholesale business.

The product won a Certificate from the Public Action Coalition on Toys. They conform to all fire-safety standards, are constructed from materials without any buttons or minute loose parts, and are used in nutrition and child-care programs as learning tools because of their educational value. The toys are distributed to a wide range of quality outlets throughout the United States and Canada.

A seventeen-inch zippered velour pea pod, housing five smiling pea brothers, has proven the most popular of these Bristol products. Other Beverly Red machine-washable creations are a velour zippered can of sardines with four fish attached with velcro fasteners; a mother sheep of white sherpa fur and brown velour, with a baby lamb; a twenty-inch Emile Bearheart, with a pocket for a red stuffed velour heart; and an eleven-inch tan velour pyramid, with a blue velour mummy inside. The newest addition to the line is a series of hats with various attachments to the sides: horns, wings, lightning bolts, and ears included. Because the hats are so popular, Freemountain Toys now employs between one-hundred and one-hundred-forty sewers.

In June, 1980, Beverly Red sold Freemountain Toys, Inc., to Vernon Michael Balsler. Mr. Balsler's plans for

Freemountain Toys are expansion, particularly the toy line, and continuation of the business as a cottage industry with the company headquarters remaining at the Vegimill.

Information for this chapter was provided by the *History of Bristol, Vermont*, Second Edition; the *Three Rivers* by Rowland Robinson; V. Michael Balsler; Bernard Bosworth; Miriam Kilbourn Burke; Lottie O. Follansbee; Andrew Johnson; Barbara Kennedy; William A. Kilbourn; Clayton and Zelva Ladeau; Claire Lathrop; Gertrude Hewitt Lathrop; Beverly Red; and Rutherford W. Smith.