



Boynton's Mill

Coventry, Connecticut

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CHAPTER ONE

BOYNTON AND THE BUILDING OF THE MILL 1815 -1855

John Boynton was born in Coventry in 1783, the sixth child of a farming family. But before the census, the first census of the fledgling United States in 1790, the Oliver Boynton family had packed themselves off to Schoharie, N. Y.. It appears, however, that two of the younger sons, John and Thaddeus, remained behind with an older brother, Lebbeus, who had married a Coventry girl, Elizabeth Robertson.

Little is known of Thaddeus, who farmed and married Sarah Robertson. But John was apprenticed to the textile business, very likely in Lebanon, CT (now Columbia) at the Hop River textile mill of Samuel Guild, whose daughter, Lois, John Boynton married in 1807.

Boynton was obviously bright and very capable, learned his trade thoroughly and at age 28 was issued his first patent for a textile machine in 1811.

Independent and energetic, Boynton also had a shrewd eye on the growing textile business of Eastern Ct. and decided to build his own mill in the town where he was born. In 1814 he purchased for \$30.00, a prime acre of land on the Mill Brook, just above the Porter Grist Mill.

In 1815 he built a two-and-half story mill building of simple construction, 27 feet wide by 70 feet long. The upper floor housed the carding engine which was to serve the farm women for their homespun, charging them, the going rate of seven cents a pound. On the lower level, Boynton manufactured carding machines from his own patented designs. It may be assumed that these machines sold for a great deal more since they were unique.

CHAPTER TWO

HALLADAY AND THE WINDMILL FACTORY 1855-1863

In due course, by 1855, the Tolland Bank became the owner of the Boynton Mill by right of foreclosure. Rufus Chamberlain of Coventry was at this time a director of the Tolland Bank and also president of the newly-formed Halladay Windmill Company of Ellington, Connecticut. There Daniel Halladay had just invented the first self-regulating windmill. This windmill was to be as instrumental in opening the West as were the Winchester Rifle and barbed wire.

Chamberlain knew that the machine-shop in Ellington did not have the facilities to build this revolutionary new windmill so he arranged for the Halladay Windmill Company to move lock, stock and vanes to John Boynton's seventy foot long mill in 1855.

After Halladay rented the mill and began manufacturing, he put down his roots in Coventry. He is found on the voter roll of 1856 and on the town tax rolls until 1863.

From then on the Mill was alive, turning out these remarkable windmills as fast as they could be made. Unfortunately, except for the railroads, the Eastern market for windmills was fast fading. But Daniel Halladay's bustling sales agent, John Burnham., had traveled to Illinois and found that Western markets were booming. So it simply became more economic to move the windmill manufactory closer to its best markets. After eight prosperous years the Halladay Windmill Company left Coventry for Batavia, Illinois. The Boynton mill was placed again on the market by the Tolland Bank in 1863.

CHAPTER THREE

CRITTENDEN, TIBBALS AND THE AMMUNITION FACTORY

1863-1865

In 1863 Boynton's former apprentices and short-time competitors, Ralph Crittenden and William Tibbals, purchased the Mill. By this time Crittenden and Tibbals had given up manufacturing textile machinery and had started making percussion caps as early as 1850. Their purchase of the Mill in 1863 came about because they needed expansion space for their huge output of cartridges. (This was the middle of the Civil War.) Crittenden and Tibbals were the leading manufacturers of cartridges in the United States, if not in the world. At one time, according to the 1860 census they were making 80,000,000 bullets a year.

When the Civil War ended contracts were cancelled. When an offer was made to buy the rights and machinery for a profit of \$32,000, Crittenden and Tibbals took it. So, the cartridge business was moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut along with many of the employees and became the Union Metallic Cartridge Company. This later became the famous Remington Ammunition Company.

CHAPTER FOUR

CLARK AND THE STRING FACTORY 1865-1875

The next owner of the Mill was Daniel Clark of Thompson, Connecticut. For the first time since the Mill was built the owner was an out-of-towner. Clark was a twine-maker and for the first time the Mill was truly a textile mill. For the first time the Mill employees were women and children as well as men, and for the first time there arose dissension among the mill operators along Mill Brook about water flowage rights. Although the dispute never became acrimonious it was of utmost importance to all the mill operators that regulation of the Mill Brook's flow be equably settled so they went to court. The judgment of the court came down hard on "bootleggers" of the flow as well as obstructors. The hours and amount of flow were spelled out clearly and serious fines imposed for violation of the court's order. Everyone now understood the proper usage of the Mill Brook and Coventry's Great Industrial Area went booming along again.

As had been the precedent, the twine mill also prospered. The 1870 Industrial Census showed that Clark was making 22,000 pounds of twine a year which was valued at \$8000. The payroll for twelve employees was \$1600 per annum.

In addition Clark rented out a portion of the Mill to Holman for his mud mill. Bricks were made at a mud mill and it was seasonal. So it is impressive when the 1870 Industrial census shows that Holman made 120,000 bricks a year.

In the midst of this prosperity, Daniel Clark died suddenly in 1875. The Mill was then sold by the heirs, at auction, to Nathan White and Charlotte White Stanley, brother and sister, of Coventry.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHITE, STANLEY AND THE FLOUR FACTORY 1875-1905

Nathan White and his sister, Charlotte Stanley, started right off by modernizing the mill; they installed the latest in metal water turbines made by Bradway Turbine Co. of Stafford, Connecticut. The mill now became a grist mill, much needed in Coventry in 1875 because the Porter Grist Mill, long a neighbor of the Mill, no longer operated as such. Mrs. Stanley's family were the actual operators of the Mill, Mr. White was a silent partner, being an entrepreneur of the time with many other business activities.

Because of the size of the Mill, the grist mill did not take up all of the space, and, in fact the lower level being ideal for heavy machinery it is no surprise that the 1875 town tax records show that Wheelwright Dwight Webler rented a part of the Mill from White and Stanley. Webler operated a successful wheelwright shop there for many years. The strong assumption may be made that Webler manufactured wheels for Coventry's well-known wainwright Henry Armstrong of Armstrong Road.

The Stanleys, with White as a very supportive silent partner, operated the Mill flourishingly for thirty-five years.

In the beginning of the new century, after the passing of both Mrs. Stanley and Nathan White, the Mill was sold in 1905 to Ernest Woodworth of Coventry.

CHAPTER SIX

WOODWORTH AND THE HORSE SHOES, CIDER AND VINEGAR FACTORY 1905-1945

Ernest H. Woodworth was born in Coventry in 1875, the year that Nathan White and Charlotte Stanley had bought the Mill. Young Ernest received his schooling in Coventry and was apprenticed to the Coventry blacksmith, Albert E. Potter of School Street. He trained Woodworth excellently in all aspects of blacksmithing.

In 1898 Woodworth set up as blacksmith for himself. Since he is not found on the tax rolls of the time as owning any property, in all likelihood he rented the lower level of the Mill, which to this day still contains the forge. However, the blacksmith's other necessity, the coal shed was lost to the cause of Coventry's progress. When the Willimantic trolley came through in 1909 Woodworth's shed obstructed slightly the trolley's right-of-way and he gladly removed the shed for the convenience it brought to Coventry residents.

After his purchase of the Mill in 1905, Woodworth became well-known as a highly capable blacksmith for the area for fifteen years. By 1920 blacksmithing was becoming obsolete because of the rise of the motor car. But like most of the enterprising operators of the Mill, Woodworth changed with the times. So the blacksmithing was phased out and he became a cider-and-vinegar-maker, the cider mill having been a small sideline of Woodworth's for ten years. Since apples were still being grown abundantly and people did not give up drinking cider and using vinegar this activity was very prosperous.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TREMONT AND THE FIX-IT FACTORY 1945-1984

Anthony Tremont came to Coventry in 1945 to provide much needed services for repair of the many appliances that the home-owners of even a rural community were beginning to acquire in the booming Forties and Fifties.

"Tony" served Coventry as repairer, friend, and "character" for many years. As he grew older he gave up his repair services but he remained at the Mill.

Tremont lived out his days as a fixture of town life, an interested observer of Coventry's changing ways, and a very good friend to his next-door neighbors South-Coventry Volunteer Fire Brigade, of which he was an honorary member.

After Tremont passed away in 1982, his brother who inherited the Mill, sold it to The Gristmill Associates, in 1984.

* Arnold E. Carlson and Donald Scussel are the Associates and they have purchased the Mill for the sole purpose of preserving it. Carlson and Scussel feel that the Mill is an integral link to Coventry's past and to the importance and power of the little but mighty Mill Brook.

At present the Associates are "merely treading water" regarding the Mill's future. But the income from renting the apartment and storage space (much appreciated by local businessmen) is providing the means for physical restoration and research into the Mill's most interesting history.

* SOLD $\frac{1}{2}$ TO LYNDA SCUSSEL