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1821-1852

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A few particulars in relation to

WOOLEN MANUFACTURING

during an Agency in Amesbury of 31 years

commencing in 1821 and ending in 1852.

Written by Joshua Aubin

After his retirement from business.

The first purchase in Amesbury (August, 1821) was made by Joshua Aubin for A. and A. Lawrence, of a small Brick Mill 50 by 40, 3 stories high; in it was some old woolen machinery, worth but little, for the whole property a little short of \$7000 was paid. Mr. Aubin, as directed by A. and A. Lawrence, immediately repaired the mill and filled it with new machinery for the manufacture of Flannels. Soon after the first purchase additional power was purchased on the Salisbury side. Early in the Spring of 1822 the mill was nearly in full operation and owned entirely by A. and A. Lawrence, with the exception of a small interest which Mr. Joshua Clapp and Mr. Aubin had in it. In July 1822 an Act of incorporation was obtained and a company formed in Boston, Mr. Tilden, Messrs. Ap.leton, Otis, Sears, Francis, Gray & others, buying in largely. The company was incorporated under the name of the Amesbury Flannel Manufacturing Company.

The whole property was valued and taken by the new Company at \$100,000, it having cost up to the time the new company was formed a little short of \$60,000. A. and A. Lawrence made a very large sum by this operation. This advance however caused the property to stand on the books pretty high, and it was afterwards always felt more or less when the Real Estate and Machinery was looked over with a view of reducing it. When the Company organized Mr. Amos Lawrence was chosen Treasurer and Joshua Aubin, Agent.

In 1826 the company directed the Agent to enlarge the mill by raising the roof of the old part onestory, and adding to the length 80

* The first Manufacturing concern engaged in by A. and A. Lawrence

feet, and to bring additional water power with a view of making 300 pieces of Flannel per week. Only 50 pieces had been made and this was all the Company at first intended to make. About this time the Company voted to increase the capital \$100,000 making it in all \$200,000. The addition to the mill was soon made and the machinery increased and additional water power bought sufficient for the production of 300 pieces flannels per week.

In 1831 the company purchased of Mr. Rundlet of Portsmouth a small Brick Woolen Mill adjoining their premises, which they enlarged and filled with machinery for the manufacture of Satinets. About the same time they purchased of Mr. Winkley his Nail Factory which was on the same Dam with the Rundlet Mill. By these purchases the Amesbury Company obtained the control on the Amesbury side, of the Dam above the one they had previously bought, and to prevent controversy with the owners on the Salisbury side, who were driving Saw and Grist Mills, they built a division dam which divided the water very nearly equal. The operation of it was found to be all that was expected of it, and entirely satisfactory to all concerned.

In 1837 in order to benefit the stream and control the water above, Mr. Aubin was directed to purchase the Tewksbury privilege on the Cowow River three miles from Amesbury Mills Village. After the purchase the Company built a new Dam and erected a Saw and Grist Mill, keeping up the water during the summer to winter height, thereby making a large Pond and flowing a large quantity of land. The whole of this purchase, buildings, and flowage cost not far from \$14,000. This proved a very good outlay; the Salisbury and Amesbury Mills, below being greatly benefited by it. The Saw and Grist Mills on the privilege paid an interest on the outlay of

about 3 per cent after paying for repairs, &c. Previous to this the company paid quite an amount for flowage around Kimballs pond.

In 18 Mr. Aubin bought for the company the outlet of Kingston Pond, built a dam which when full flows a great quantity of land; this addition also to the water power, proved a good outlay and of great benefit to the Salisbury and Amesbury companies; the whole cost was between \$6000 and \$7000. The Amesbury company paid for flowage in the course of a few years, between \$25,000 & \$30,000.

The company stopped all their mills twice in consequence of dull times; once about the year 1830, again in 1841 losing by so doing a great deal of money (as matters turned out) particularly the last time they were stopped, for had the mills been dorve to their utmost capacity, instead of being stopped, the company would have made a great deal of money; wool and other raw materials and labor being so very low they could have manufactured at extreme low prices. After the mills had been stopped several weeks Mr. Aubin prevailed on the Treasurer Mr. Edwards, to let him start a part of the machinery in the Flannel mill, agreeing to manufacture, Rob Roys, Flannels and Kentucky Jeans at very low rates, finding all the Stock, paying for all the labour and every expense on the goods until landed in Boston. A very nice article of 6/4 Rob Roys, small plaid he agreed to, and did deliver in Boston at 50 cents per yard; Flannels and Jeans in about the same proportion; Extra 4/4 Super white Flannels for 28 cents. This was a great business so far as the company availed themselves of it; Rob Roys costing 50 cents per yard sold readily and in any quantity for 1.00 to 1.12 1/2; the Flannels and Jeans also sold readily yielding very large profits. Had the company then put all their machinery in operation and drove it to its utmost capacity, as they might and ought to have done on

Fancy Cloakings and Rob Roys, they would have made in three years, (about the time the cloaking business was good) at least a quarter of million of dollars net; as it was they made a good deal of money but nothing compared to what they might have done. The trial balance of a certain manufacturing company that drove the cloaking business while it continued good, about three years, shows a net profit for only 6 months, of \$120,000, so the writer of this was told by the man who made up the accounts. By this some idea can be formed of the large amount this company made by keeping a large part of their machinery so long a time on cloakings, Rob Roys &c. They with the Anesbury Company had the entire market nearly three years; during this time the company above alluded to, probably put aside no small amount to show in emergencies that were likely and did in fact happen. This most likely tells the story of their remarkable success. The plaids &c made by the Anesbury Company during the time they were in fashion were placed in the market as low, certain as others made in the neighborhood, and the style and colors were preferred.

Some very heavy losses were made by the Anesbury company, rather aside from their regular business, In 1825 finding the English flannels were imported largely and interfering very much with the American article, manufacturers generally began to be discouraged, fearing they should not be able to compete with foreign importations; and a large sale of American flannels was talked of to be made at auction in New York in order that Exporters and Jobbers might know that flannels were being made in this country in large quantities and that they would be put in the market and sold, hit or miss. Mr. Amos Lawrence, Treasurer of the company pushed the matter along; and sent a very large quantity of the Companies Flannels to New York advertising them to be sold at auction for the most they would bring, and they were sold with a witness, at extreme low prices and

distributed amongst the Importers and Jobbers who found them on examination much cheaper than they could buy or import English flannels for. This operation had the desired effect, sensibly checking importation and bringing the American article at once into the market and into favor with purchasers. Other Flannel Manufacturers did not send to the sale as was expected and the entire sale was on account of the Amesbury Company, and of course the entire loss fell on them. Flannels of all kinds sold at a great sacrifice, Green Backings nearly 6/4 wide sold at 16 to 17 cents, costing nearly double. The same goods, sold soon after for over 30 cents per yard; The loss was very heavy on this sale, not far from \$30,000. Another very heavy loss was met with by the Amesbury Company on a large importation of Smyrna Wool; the loss on this importation was something over \$25,000; A. & A. Lawrence & Co. being owners of one half of the importation lost as much more. For 10 or 15 years between 1825 and 1840 the company had much to contend with; up hill work and a great deal of it, very large sums were lost by Woollen Manufacturers; many concerns lost their entire capital and some even more. From 1842 to 1852 the Amesbury Company did a very fair business, dividing nearly 10 per cent per annum, besides reserving a large surplus fund.

In December 1852 Mr. Aubin resigned his Agency after a service of over 30 years. In January 1853 all the Real Estate and machinery belonging to the Amesbury Company was sold to the Salisbury Manufacturing company for about \$100,000 this amount being what it stood at on the Amesbury Companies books. In less than six months from the time of the sale of the mills everything in the shape of wool and other raw materials was sold and settled for and the whole business of the company, which had been doing a large business for 30 years, so nearly closed as to enable the Treasurer to pay the Stock-holders the par value of their stock \$1000 per

share, with a good prospect of soon paying \$500 a share more. This prospect has been fully realized, and all of \$1500 per share has been paid to the stockholders, par value \$1000.

The Amesbury Company was the first concern that successfully changed common Flannel and Satinet Machinery, into Fancy Woolens. They also put in operation new machinery for the manufacture of various fancy woolens, earlier than any other manufacturing company in the country, as the following statements will show. And further they put in operation the first Power Loom for weaving woolen warps. Particulars below.

1823. The first Power Loom for the weaving of woolen warps, was put up and started by the Amesbury Company; the first that was ever put in successful operation in this country if not in the world. The Loom was a wide one and was purchased by Mr. Aubin of a Frenchman who attempted to weave with it cotton warp Blankets; it was put up on the top of the wheel house and kept out of sight for a long time, until experiments were tried sufficient to prove that it could be operated to advantage. We then commenced building Power Looms to take the place of hand Looms with all possible despatch. The saving in operating 60 Looms by water instead of the old way, by hand, amounted to about \$40 per day, besides this saving we got rid of 60 weavers the most of them men who in those by gone times were intemperate and exceedingly troublesome; and substituted for them 30 girls, who were easily managed and did more and better work.

1835. Commenced mixing and carding cotton with wool for white flannels, putting in about 25 per cent. cotton with wool. Flannels made in this way were very nice and sold quite as readily as all wool. Also mixed cotton with wool about a quarter part for Satinet filling. This was done in the Amesbury mills nearly two years before it was known by any

of the operatives except one or two men who attended the pickers. The Maverick Mills were the first to use cotton with wool after the Amesbury.

It is believed that no attempt in this or any other country was ever made to mix cotton with wool, carding them together previous to its being used by the Amesbury Company.

About this time, 1835. The Amesbury Company commenced making Kentucky Jeans, the first made in New England,- made a contract with a St Louis man for a quantity for which he paid one dollar per yard.

1838. Commenced making large Plaid Blk & Scarlet Rob Roys and sent the first of American manufacture to market.

1842. Commenced making Tufts, the first made in this country; held the market for a long time & made a great deal of money on them. Made the first mixed Flannel, had the market and did very well making them for several years.

1842. Commenced making Shawls, Fancy Cloakings and Rob Roys. These goods it is believed were first introduced into this country by the Amesbury Co.

1844. Commenced Tweeds, the very first that were made in the country, manufactured them largely for several years and made a great deal of money on them,- had the entire market for some time.

About this time, 1844, commenced the making of Kubans, an entire new article, the first made in the country; had the market for several years, drove them hard and made a great deal of money on them.

1845. Commenced making silk codringtons, first made in the country, also 42^d and Glen Lions.

1846. Started the first Jacquard Looms, made new style of Fancy Tweeds; did not succeed very well at first in consequence of being ahead of the fashion.

1848. Made the first Pressing Machines and put them in successful operation, had a year or two of good business, driving them, no such machines had ever before been seen in this country and no goods had been pressed.

1850. Commenced the Typing business in Acton on a pretty large scale; the first typing done in New England.

The goods manufactured by the Amesbury Company from its commencement to its termination were in good repute in the various markets, and in every instance when their manufactures were exhibited at Fairs they took a premium and in most cases the highest.
