AN ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL SURVEY OF WEBSTER, MASSACHUSETTS
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The historical and architectural survey of Webster, Massachusetts was researched and written by the following staff members of the Webster Historical Commission:

Linda L.B. Kleinerman, Director
Mary R. Davidson, Research Assistant
Richard W. Dery, Research Analyst (1978 only)

Preface

The history of the United States and its small towns has been remembered, researched and written numerous times and in numerous places. History is also represented, however, by the man-made environment. Buildings as well as books contain history. It is only necessary to discover the history and to reveal it.

When buildings have the architectural features of an earlier age and style preserved, they have artistic as well as historic value. If one takes a structure with architectural value and compiles information about its former owners and their lives, history begins to emerge. Such information provides us with a looking glass into previous centuries. It can lead to a better understanding and appreciation of one's community.

THE KINGSBURY DISTRICT

The "Kingsbury District," situated in what was once Oxford South Gore, comprises the general area bounded by Sutton and Cudworth Roads, especially the southerly portion around Kingsbury Road. Whether this traditional name, which must be well over 100 years (probably 200) referred directly to the Kingsbury Farm or to the Kingsbury School District is unimportant; ultimately we arrive at the name Kingsbury.

The Kingsburys were among the first settlers of part of what is now known as Webster. Josiah Kingsbury made the first settlement of the land in the early 1700s. The 600 acres of land he purchased (from Josiah Dwight) had first been granted to Richard Westland of Boston, England in 1630. Mr. Westland had transferred his right to the grant of the land to the Rev. Samuel Whiting of Lynn, Massachusetts. The latter in turn deeded it to his daughter and sole heir, Mrs. Elizabeth Hobart. She in turn sold it to Josiah Dwight of Woodstock, Connecticut who sold it to Mr. Kingsbury of Needham, Massachusetts.

Prominent in civic affairs, members of the family fought in the Revolutionary War as well as involved themselves with matters at home. Two Kingsbury brothers, Theodore and Josiah, were active in the movement to have the province land ("so-called") upon which they had settled annexed to Oxford. In 1732 this area was annexed to Oxford, acquiring the name, Oxford South Gore.

The Kingsburys, fathers and sons, farmed this large tract of wilderness on the outskirts of Oxford for well over 100 years. In the early 1800s, Ephraim Kingsbury in partnership with Jeremiah Davis, conducted a successful venture

in potash making along the banks of the Sucker Brook which ran through a portion of Kingsbury land (near the road leading to the "Tanner District"). This was one of the first known industries in Oxford South Gore.

Much of the Kingsbury farm land went into the hands of Samuel Slater, the cotton and woolen manufacturer, in the first quarter of the 19th century, when he was expanding his manufacturing activities. Some of this land became town owned. A parcel sold by the Slater corporation in 1849 became the site of the Webster Poor Farm. Another portion across the road became the site of a 19th century "Pest House" where people with contagious diseases, such as typhoid and diphtheria, could be quarantined. Additionally, another parcel of Kingsbury land, eventually sold by the Slater's, is that comprising Mt. Zion cemetery.

Until recent years, when much of this area was zoned as an "industrial park" and given over to the Sanitary Department for a town dump, the "Kingsbury District" was primarily residential, though sparsely populated. Other than a few farms, there was only a grist mill and a school (School No. 2, now gone) until the mid-19th century when the Webster Poor Farm and Pest House were placed in the Kingsbury District.(The Pest House was noted for the care of small pox victims. A Dr. Littlefield came to Webster and worked there.)

THE POOR FARM

At an annual town meeting in 1847 it was voted to purchase some land for a town farm, "with which to support the town paupers." Land was purchased from the Slater Corporation in 1849 with additional land annexed in 1850.

The home farm, as it came to be called, was built on the site of Captain Jeremiah Kingsbury's homestead, which had burned to the ground around 1778. Josiah Kingsbury, father of Jeremiah, made the first settlement of this land after acquiring 600 acres. Samuel Slater had acquired much of the Kingsbury property in 1825.

It is speculated that the poor farm was built shortly after 1850 when the land was purchased. It is difficult to pinpoint the date exactly because the information hasn't been found in our research. The earliest town records available are for the year 1862. A copy of the "Pauper Account Out of Poor Farm" is available in the town records for that year as well as the ones that follow. Browsing in them provide an interesting glimpse of the 19th century.

In 1888, and again in 1898, additions were made to the farm, enlarging its capacity. The 1898 addition had an interesting feature which was a windmill built by William Davis of Lowell. George Aldrich, a Webster carpenter, built the 1898 addition.

Every year the Board of Selectmen and selected citizens would tour the home and report on their inspection. Their 1890 report praises the improved quality of the 14 cows and heifers and pronounces the Poor Farm as "...one of the most commodious and convenient institutions of its kind in the country."

The Town Farm, as a home for indigents or elderly people was discontinued in 1957, when the Welfare Board turned the property back to the Selectmen because the cost of boarding out the few persons housed there would be much less than the cost of keeping up a big farm, the house and the salaries of the warden and matron.

The advent of social security and old age benefits cut the number of persons requiring town care to an almost negligible number. Once Worcester State Hospital for mentally disturbed opened, the mentally disturbed were taken there.

The passing of Webster's Town Farm, marked the end to more than 100 years of what seemed to be relative independence for the indigent and elderly poor. Gone are those days when each had his rocking chair on the long porch and his patch of garden to till on the farm.

THE TANNER DISTRICT

Comprising the upper portion of Cudworth Road as well as the area spreading across Worcester Road toward Bigelow Road, the "Tanner District" apparently received its name from the Tanner family who operated a farm in the Oxford South Gore during much of the 19th century. The 1870 survey map of Webster indicates the name W. Tanner near the homestead; approximately ten homes are in the Tanner District at that time. But 1989 (when another survey was made), the name G.A. Tanner appears; approximately 15 homes are indicated. GA Turner, a farmer, died at the age of 70 in 1910 -- no obituary was in the Webster Times.

Most prominent among the early settlers of the Tanner District were the Cudworths and the Larneds. The latter settled the land in the early 1700s, making the "Tanner District" one of the earliest settled areas of Webster. (In fact, this area was probably called the "Larned District" prior to the early 19th century.)

THE GORE

"Webster Gore is a great place, justly celebrated for its independence of the rest of mankind. If the inhabitants want a clergyman, they have their own. If they need a doctor, behold he is among them; they represent all trades and professions, and their contracted though fertile acres yield everything needful for the wants of man from a gooseberry bush to a gold mine". Webster Times, July 12, 1862.

The above words, written in 1862, seems today in 1979, a somewhat apt, though fanciful, description of "The Gore". While the Gore may not provide everything for its inhabitants, it still is a place which attracts people who like some "independence of the rest of mankind." Situated on the eastern side of Webster, and bounded by Webster Lake on one side and the Douglas Woods on the other, it is by today's standards, remote from population centers.

The Gore of today, sparsely populated and somewhat remote from town centers, was shaped by the movements of the earliest settlers. During the 1700s and 1800s when land in the Webster area was being settled, the area comprising the Gore was largely covered by either woods or water, and possessed a soil which did not, in the creation of early town, make it a desirable possession. Thus, according to D. Hamilton Hurd, author of "History of Worcester County", "This Gore was simply a tract of land which had been included in grants to individuals, but in the formation of towns had never been included within their boundaries."

In 1832, upon Webster's incorporation, the Gore was, for the first time, included within the boundaries of a town. The year before it had been surveyed for the first time, under a resolve of the Legislature, and found to contain 4,590 acres. It was irregular in shape, and was bounded by lines running in seven different courses, and by the irregular margin of a part of "Chaubunnagunganug Pond," which separated it from Douglas, Dudley and Oxford.

Interestingly, the word "gore" is defined in the dictionary (Webster's New International Dictionary) as "a minor unorganized territorial division, consisting of an irregular tract, as one between the corners of neighboring counties."

The meaning of Webster's gore, however, is not to be found in definitions, but in the individuals who lived there as well as the romantic legends they spawned.

On such person was Marcus Wood, the Gore Correspondent to the "Webster Times" during the latter 19th century. A resident of the Gore, his column had a folksy tone and covered such topics as gossip, nutrition and farming.

George Ide, who settled in Webster's Gore during the early 19th century was another Gore individualist. A farmer by trade, Mr. Ide was interested in spiritualism and medicine. He was a self-taught doctor who apprenticed under a medicine man, later inventing medical instruments.

Apparently Mr. Ide was somewhat involved in Webster community affairs because he held the position of Fence Viewer in 1838 and was on the Inoculating Committee in 1837. In addition, George Ide, along with Samuel and Dexter Rawson, other Gore residents, worked off their taxes by building roads (1835-1851) from their respective residences to the Gore Turnpike.

According to the book, "The Doctors of Dudley and Webster Massachusetts", George Ide was a staunch abolitionist who died after an attack suffered during a pro-Lincoln rally in Boston. Apparently he stood up at the podium and shouted "Three cheers for Mr. Lincoln!" -- whereupon he was attacked.

The Douglas Woods, which covers much of the Gore, sprouted the seeds of which legends are made.

Apparently metals were found on and off throughout the 19th century in the deep recesses of the woods leading to several mining ventures. One known mining effort was prospecting for iron ore -- a thorough search was made for the mine during the early 20th century. No mine was found, only mining apparatus. Silver and lead were apparently found on the farm of one Amos Lamb in milk quartz.

Iron, silver and lead were not the only metals thought to lie deep in the Douglas Woods. Apparently, the above mentioned George Ide was convinced that gold lie on his property. A June article in the "Webster Times" (1860) reports on a "party of 18 ladies and gentlemen" who went to visit the "celebrated mineral springs and gold mines of Dr. Ide..." The group marveled at the view from Dr. Ide's house, picked wild strawberries growing along the road, ate a picnic lunch, and sampled the mineral water, but failed to see the celebrated gold mine. They walked to the ledge where

> *...each visitor obtained one or more curious specimens from the locality...We cannot learn that this gold mine has yet yielded anything of greater value or importance than several hundred cords of stone, which have been quarried in his search for gold.*

Adding to the romanticism of the legendary gore is the fact that it was on the way to Webster from Douglas and Sutton as well as the states of Connecticut and Rhode Island, gradually led to the development of a roadway system.

Some rudimentary roads must have existed in the late 1700s as George Washington mentions passing through the Douglas Woods and viewing the lake in 1789.

By 1801 the Mine Road was laid out from the Kingsbury's farm to the farm of Phillip Brown in the gore (The junction of Lower Gore Road and the Douglas Road). The road from Brown's to Douglas Center was completed in 1826. Apparently, a road known as the Gore Turnpike, which connected the Douglas Meetinghouse with Samuel Slater's mill in Webster's East Village area, was laid out in September of 1825. This may have been the same road

mentioned above. At any rate it was the ninth Massachusetts Turnpike Road and a stage coach travelled upon it between Webster and Douglas.

The land which came to be known as Webster's Gore was, in the 1700s, granted to various individuals in England. One of these a Rev. John Campbell received a grant in 1736 of 310 acres by attesting that he needed aid in his work of the ministry at Oxford. Later, the Campbell Grant became the homesteads of George Ide and the Wakefields, the Rawsons, and the Ides.

Today, the Gore is still rather remote from concentrated areas of population, and one can envision a certain wildness in the little populated area that is heavily crisscrossed by neat stone fences, and shows here and there, a craggy apple tree. Unfortunately, few of the old houses remain, many having given way to fire or the inroads of time.

A reporter for the "Webster Times" attended a "Fourth of July" celebration at the Gore in 1862. He rented a stylish horse from Joslin's livery stable and rode out to join the festivities. After music and a picnic, the considerable number of people "proceeded to view the fine and picturesque localities in which this section of our town abounds." The reporter ended by musing upon the glories of nature: "Nature had evidently donned her most attractive garb; woods, hills, valleys, the beautiful lake and babbling brooks, seemed vocal with delight. Wild flowers and grateful shades abounded everywhere."

The Hobart Grant

"Prior to the year 1628, a corporation was formed in London of 'Adventurers for a Plantation intended att Mattachusetts Bay in Newe England in America.' An account of George Harwood, Treasurer, appears on page 1, vol. 2, of the Probate Records of Suffolk County, the heading of which is as follows;

> *-- "In The Name of God, Amen. London, May, 1628"*
>
> *"Sundrie men owe unto the general stock of the Adventurers for a plantation intended att Mattachusetts Bay in Newe England in America the some of ten thousand one hundredth and sixtie pounds, and is for soe much undertaken by the particular persons mentioned hereafter by these several subscriptions to be by them adventured in this joint and general stock...for the plantation, whereunto the Almighty grant prosperous and happy sucese that the same may redound to his glorie the...of the Gospell of Jesus Christ, and the particular good of the...adventurers that are or hereafter shall be interested therein. The persons nowe to be made debt'rs to the gen'll stock (are)as followeth, vizt." (Nearly 100 names are appended.)*

Into the capital stock of this company Richard Westland of Boston, England, paid L50. Subscribers were entitled to lands in proportion to their payment."

(This grant included the "falls" at the head of Webster Lake where a saw mill was built prior to 1728, and where Samuel Slater eventually erected his textile mill in 1812.)

*All quotes from George F. Daniels. "History of the Town of Oxford Massachusetts with Genealogies and Notes on Person and Estates." (Oxford, Massachusetts: by the author with the co-operation of the Town), 1892.

The Roxbury School Grant

"On 16 Oct., 1660, the General Court passed the following: 'The Court Judgeth it meete to graunte the town of Roxbury five hundred acres of land towards the maintenance of a free school.' On 24 Nov., 1715, a petition was presented to the Court signed by several citizens of Roxbury stating that a grant of 500 acres for the free school had been made in 1660, but had never bend laid out, asking that action might be taken in the case; on which it was voted that leave might be given to have a plan made and presented. On 14 Nov., 1718, a plot was returned, and said grant confirmed. According to this plot, now in the State archives, the mouth of Sucker Brook was the first bound, the line ran thence at a right angle southwesterly to the pond, at what was later Mr. Campbell's line, about one-third of a mile south of Brown's cove or pond, including all the long arm stretching into it, to the first bound at Sucker Brook."

The Thompson Grant

"In May, 1683, on account of services rendered to the Province, a grant of 500 acres of land was made to Major Robert Thompson of London, which was confirmed to him Feb., 1727. It was bounded on the west by the Hobart or Kingsbury land, on the north by Oxford Village, and on the east by Dr. Douglas' land. On 26 Nov., 1803, Thomas Corbett and Elizabeth, his wife, she being heir and devisee of Robert Thompson of Elsham, County of Lincoln, England, deeded for $750 for "Thompson farm" to James Benjamin Davis and obtained possession. A large portion of this land is known as Douglas Woods. Reuben Dudley is present owner of a portion, which has been improved."

The Campbell Grant

"Rev. John Campbell, representing that he required aid in the work of the ministry at Oxford, and asking in 1736 for a grant of land, was voted his request. A plan in the State archives is endorsed:

> *"This Plan...describes the boundary of 310 acres of land with a pond, lying south of Oxford on the Southeast side of Roxbury School farm, east from Dudley town on the east side of Chaubunagungamaug Pond, bounded east and south with a line of marked trees on the Province land, surveyed and laid out in pursuance of the grant of the General Court of this Province in their fall session of 1736 to the Rev. Mr. John Campbell of Oxford. By Isaac Larned surveyor, and Samuel Davis and John Larned chairmen. Surveyed 18 Mar. 1737 and ratified Jan. 1738."*

> *"The north line of this grant was about one-third of a mile southerly of what is known as Brown's Pond, and it extended south more than a mile on the lake shore, and east 118 rods from the lake at the southern extremity and 210 rods at the northern."*

The Leonard Grant

"On 24 Jan., 1736, Elkanah Leonard of Middleboro petitioned for a grant of land as compensation for his services in prosecuting persons from Rhode Island who committed acts of violence on the gore of land in controversy between the two governments, which was granted. A survey was made by Isaac Larned, and a plot of 100 acres confirmed to him, lying northeast of Chaubunagungamaug and northwest of the Roxbury School Farm, 1 Jan., 1739. Leonard, 5 Jan., 1739, sold to John Jones of Hopkinton, who in 1748 conveyed the same to Roger Amidown, who in 1765 sold to Abijah Kingsbury. In his deed the bounds are given as follows:--

> *"100 acres, beginning at the northeast corner of the Roxbury School farm, thence southwesterly by said farm to the mouth of Sucker Brook; thence northerly by Josiah Kingsbury's land 120 rods; thence easterly 200 rods; thence southerly to the first bound."*

"On 3 June, 1768, Kingsbury deeded to Ichabod Chamberlin of Dudley, who 2 Sept., 1783, deeded to Joseph Rawson of Dudley. He occupied the place for a few years and removed to the farm known as the Dexter Rawson place, which is now owned and occupied by his descendants."

The Ward Grant

"Eleazer Ward of Newtown, later of Oxford, about 1734 represented to the General Court that he had served many years in the Indian wars, and was in the expedition against Port Royal and was wounded, causing him much expense, that he was old and disabled by his hardships, had three sons, and no land to settle on, and asked for a grant: on which, 10 Dec., 1734, in the House of Representatives it was ordered that 150 acres be granted to him on conditions that he or his heirs or assigns settle the same within three years, build and finish a house at least 18 feet square and 7 feet stud, and break up or bring to five acres of English grass and well enclose the same. In April, 1735, a tract was laid out and confirmed to him, a plan of which is in the State archive endorsed as follows:--

> *"This plan contains 150 acres of Province Land which lyeth S. of Oxford, west from New Sherborn: bounded south on province land, west on a 500 acre farm called ye 'minde farm,' laid out for N. Ingham and his company." Isaac Larned was the surveyor."*

"On 18 July, 1741, he deeded to his son Samuel one-half his homestead in Oxford, and 'two pieces of remote land, being a part of the grant of Gen. Court to me,' and in 1747, 90 acres near the southeast corner of Oxford, bounded, beginning at Manchaug Corner, etc. The easterly line of his original grant ran S. 15 degrees E. 300 rods from Manchaug Corner.

The southernmost part of the Gore was occupied some years previous to 1744 by Joseph Chamberlian, his son Ebenezer, and his son-in-law Josiah Balch. In 1744, the State sold to them 320 acres, bounded on New Sherborn (now Douglas) on the east and the Connecticut line on the south. These several grants did not cover the whole area of the Gore lands. About 1,400 acres remained in lots of various size and form, and in 1769 passed into the possession of the 'twenty proprietors of Douglas.' According to McIntire's survey the Gore embraced 4,590 acres."

(A. Rodney Klebart, former Town Engineer, compiled a great deal of information and maps on the Gore.)

THE EAST VILLAGE

The crossroad near the head of Webster Lake known as "The East Village" is an area of historical and possibly prehistoric significance.

Prior to being built up as two country roads, the crossroads may have been an intersection of old Indian trails. The Bay Path, Great Trail, and Mohegan paths converged nearby. These trails were probably among the routes used by the colonists as they gradually spread West.

According to an article published in 1889 in the "Webster Times", during the mid-1700s, people living in this vicinity, and "south upward of 50 to 75 miles," went to Worcester and Boston to trade. "They came through what is now the East Village, and at the four corners near the residence of Mrs. H. N. Slater ("The Hermitage"), stood a sign post, a slab of common field rock, from the Douglas Woods, and bore this inscription 'Right hand road to Boston, Left hand road to Worcester'." (Apparently this sign which had stood at the intersection prior to 1775, was taken by one Nathaniel Mosely in 1782. A deacon from Hampden, Connecticut, he had the sign made into his gravestone marker.)

Since the intersection had importance early in New England's transportation network, a tavern was built near it as early as 1756. At one time a man by the name of Joseph Kelley, owned the building which also served as an inn. Mr. Kelley was driver of the old Webster Stage Coach which made two weekly trips from Webster to Providence via South Framingham (19th century).

The inn has long since been torn down, and in the 19th century, a boarding house associated with Samuel Slater's cotton mill was erected on the site on Pond Street in the East Village. In 1906 the barn, which was an adjunct to the tavern, was torn down.

Some of the earliest industrial efforts in Webster, originated at the head of the lake near the intersection which grew into "The East Village." Prior to 1728, a sawmill and gristmill was in operation in the area, run by Asa Robinson (grandson of George Robinson, the first settler of the land).

Philip Brown and John Healy bought out Asa Robinson in 1798 and added a furnace and forge to the area. They then embarked on what would have to be one of the earliest industries in Webster (then Oxford South Gore), the making of bar iron. The ore was mined on a hill along the Mine Brook (east of Sucker Brook) and taken to Healy and Brown's furnace and forge for smelting and working into bars.

SAMUEL SLATER, THE FATHER OF AMERICAN MANUFACTURERS, EXPANDS HIS TEXTILE MANUFACTURING ACTIVITIES TO OXFORD SOUTH GORE.

As early as 1811 there apparently was an interest in this vicinity in spinning cotton and wool by machinery. John Hudson, Thomas Kendall and Ephraim Edson bought land with water power rights in what came to be known as the East Village, but soon gave up what was an unsuccessful venture in manufacturing yarns. Some say, Edson contacted Samuel Slater to interest him in expanding his manufacturing activities to Oxford. Mr. Slater sent a trusted partner, Bela Tiffany, to look over the land, and in 1811 a property purchase was made. The first deed was given on January 6, 1812 from Elijah Pratt; included were approximately 9 1/2 acres, a dwelling house, barn, grist mill and trip-hammer shop. (This is the land at the northeast corner of the mill pond.)

Samuel Slater was attracted to this area for several reasons. First, cotton manufacturing had increased in Pawtucket, Rhode Island and the vicinity to such an extent that it was difficult to find outlets for all the yarns made, as every family for miles around was employed in picking, spinning, and weaving; the latter at home. It became necessary, therefore, to enter a new territory, and especially a farming country because among the families of farmers were to be found those skilled with the hand loom process

(Not until 1829 did Samuel Slater start "fancy" weaving of cloth by water power. Until that time weaving was done on a small scale by Yankee wives and daughters, mainly at home.)

Oxford in South Central New England was particularly suitable for Samuel Slater's needs. In addition to farming families, skilled in hand weaving, and only too glad to supplement their meager incomes by weaving, Oxford South Gore had a geologic advantage suited to the needs of Slater. Its hilly, rocky landscape, while unsuitable for more than subsistence farming, was ideal for the development of the textile industry. The beds of most rivers, which were abundant, sloped steeply from source to mouth, providing the fall prerequisite to suitable water-power sites.

Slater, whose second Massachusetts mill (the first being in Rehoboth) was in this area, was aided in the expansion of his textile manufacturing activities by the outbreak of the 1812 war. The ensuing war engendered prosperity and created an increased demand for textile goods (uniforms).

Slater's cotton manufacturing activities prospered at the intersection of the old Indian paths until expansion was necessary; in 1822 woolen manufacturing was commenced in the South Village, and in 1824, cotton manufacturing in the North Village. Eventually the prosperity engendered by the Slater Corporation led to the incorporation of the town of Webster.

Apparently a variety of manufacturing activities associated with the production of cotton yarn and cloth were carried out in the East Village (including woolen manufacturing from 1815 to 1821), until December of 1876 when the East Village was entirely given over to the bleaching and dyeing and finishing of cotton goods.

As the East Village was the first center of concentrated industrial activity in the area (which came to be known as Webster), the first post office was located in the East Village. It was established on January 7, 1828 in the old Green Mill office (gone) with George W. Kimball, an accountant at the mill, holding the office of first post master. Also, the first Sunday school in South Central Massachusetts, was established in the East Village in 1820, when Slater was permitted to draw money and open a school. Situated on the north side of the mill pond, it was in session on Sundays, the only day the young operatives weren't working. Mill workers were expected to attend, where they were instilled with Christian values in addition to the "Three-R's."

According to one historical writer, Holmes Ammidown, the men of prominence in the area which came to be known as the East Village, just prior to the arrival of Samuel Slater in 1812, were "...Elijah Pratt, Asa and Samuel Robinson, John and Alanson Bates, and several by the name of Kingsbury, all being men of considerable character and standing, maintaining good moral, social and religious society."

Unfortunately, this crossroad, rich with the ghosts of Webster's past is but today, a tawdry collection of gasoline stations, stores and restaurants. Nothing remains to remind us of the early Indian paths, unless it be a busy, commercial intersection, grown to its logical conclusion. Likewise, nothing remains of the early industries.
Samuel Slater, who, in the annals of American textile history, is treated with respect bordering on reverence, is remembered by a couple of modest monuments and a few, tattered Federal style mill houses across the street from Cranston Print, the successor to the East Village mill complex.

Addition: Asa Robinson who had a sawmill and gristmill in operation in the East Village area in the 18th century was a Minuteman (as was George R. Robinson), reporting to Cambridge for duty immediately following the battle of Lexington.

Addition: Upon Horatio Nelson Slater Jr.'s death in 1899, the management of the three villages was split; the Honorable Charles G. Washburn took over the East Village.

THE SOUTH VILLAGE

Now buried in a mixture of Victorian and 20th century commercial structures, the South Village is barely distinguishable from its surroundings as one travels from one end of Webster to the other. During the early 19th century, it was, however, an easily recognizable village; a cluster of about 12 dwellings, mostly for mill workers, a school, the Baptist Meetinghouse, and dominating the whole, a cluster of about five mill buildings belonging to the woolen mills of Slater & Howard's Woolen Manufactory.

Prior to the erection of Slater and Howard's factory along the banks of the French River in 1822, this area, of what was then eastern Dudley, was sporadically settled by hardy farmers and craftsmen (primarily the Wakefield and Mansfield families.)

The South Village prospered and grew during the 19th century, at first because of its association with the Slater woolen mills, and later because some of Webster's prominent businessmen were attracted to its charms and built their homes along the foot of the hill rising from the river with its factory. Slightly removed from "Depot Village" with its hustle and bustle, the South Village was within walking distance of its shops and churches.

Interestingly, town tradition indicates that prior to the Civil War, homes of some of these businessmen, namely Asher Joslin and possibly Asa Bartlett, were stops on the Underground Railroad. Mr. Joslin supposedly kept a shed on his property behind his Prospect Street house which housed escaped slaves during their flight for freedom in the North. (Erastus Spaulding was another prominent Webster businessman who was active in the Underground Railroad. He was, it appears, close friends with Asher Joslin, but lived several blocks away from Joslin on the road connecting the South Village with the North Village.)

Around the time of the Civil War, an oil painting was found of Webster. Described in the May 16, 1863 "Webster Times" it gives us a good idea of "Webster as it was." Dated by the author of the article in the newspaper as having been painted between 1826 and 1843, it was pictured in the following way.

"The scene is a landscape, in which appears most prominent the South Village; but a portion of the North Village is shown at the left, and a church spire in the back-ground, revealed above the foliage indicates the direction of the East Village." The article continues "...on the highway leading South there appear to have been no houses but those belonging to the mill owners. These number less than a dozen, and all are painted red. The "Slater Mansion" is the only dwelling house recognizable by us at the North Village." The article ends by saying: "This whole picture forms a very pretty landscape. The mills and little red dwellings clustered about them, the old highway, the fine old forest in the background, with a church spire shooting out of the foliage, the river in front threading the green fields in which cattle are grazing, -- all form a very fine representation, doubtless, of "Webster as it was: before the advent of the railroad within its limits."

Prior to the developments in this area brought about by Slater & Howard's Woolen Manufactory, there was on old road that connected the Robinson mills at the head of the lake (now the East Village) with the Dudley Meetinghouse on Dudley Hill which ran roughly parallel to Prospect Street. South Main was first laid out in about 1821. When the early settlers wanted the road from the Robinson mills to the meetinghouse they apparently laid out a road "upon the path as it is now trod." This was part of the Woodstock Trail used by the Indians.

THE SOUTH VILLAGE: SLATER WOOLEN COMPANY. THE UNION MILLS.

Woolen manufacturing commenced in Webster (then Oxford) in 1814/15, when Samuel Slater in association with Edward Howard, began making broadcloths in a mill in the East Village. They were among the first, if not the first, to manufacture broadcloth in the United States. The woolen mill was eventually relocated in 1822 to a spot on the French River which came to be known as the South Village. (This mill was in the process of being built, when a fire leveled the one in the East Village.)

The land upon which the South Village woolen mill was erected had belonged primarily to the Wakefields, an early settler family, in the 18th century. The land purchases were as follows: On July 18, 1821 Edward Howard bought land from William Wakefield and Gibbs Dodge (executors of Solomon Wakefield's estate) as well as David Wakefield and Nathaniel Hall. A further piece was added on July 6, 1822 by deed of Daniel Mansfield. The resulting piece of property, now owned by Howard, was hundreds of acres in size and included several mills and buildings as well as rights to the water power of the French River in that location. A year after the purchase of the property it had all been deeded over to Samuel Slater, who with Edward Howard, had begun the manufacture of woolens.

SLATER AND HOWARD'S WOOLEN FACTORY

Early in the manufacturing activities at the East Village, Slater had made the acquaintance of a fellow countryman, Edward Howard. Mr. Howard had been engaged in the woolen business in Yorkshire, England and was skilled in the processing of woolen yarn and cloth, a much more difficult process than cotton manufacturing.

Holmes Ammidown (Historical Collections, Vol. I) states the Edward Howard became one of Slater's chief managers -- the pioneer and moving spirit who executed the plans of Mr. Slater in founding and operating the woolen manufactory, first in the East Village and then in the South Village.

Until the late 1820's, business grew in the South Village (as well as in the East Village and the North Village, which had begun about 1825) so that all the various Slater textile mills were producing good quality merchandise as well as reaping financial benefits. The year 1829 marked, however, a turning point for Slater and Howard's Woolen Factory.

Howard was called the "Jolly Yorkshireman" by many who knew him, but Slater found him to be a man lacking in character, despite his ability to make good woolens. Though Howard had been his partner for 15 years, Slater came to realize that this was the rare selection of a partner who lacked integrity and business judgment.
While information is scarce on the extent of Mr. Howard's mismanagement, it is known that Samuel Slater had to cover Howard's losses as well as put a clerk into the South Village company store "to see that no property whatever is delivered out on Mr. Howard's private demands." (Apparently one of the items frequently "delivered out" to Mr. Howard was rum.)

Finally, the matter came to a resolution, when Samuel Slater, along with his sons George B. and Horatio N., bought out Edward Howard's interest in the South Village mills, incorporating as Samuel Slater and Sons. Howard sold one-half of his interest in the mills on January 2, 1829; and the other half within the year.

On February 3, 1829, Samuel Slater wrote in a letter:

> *"Samuel Slater & Sons have come to the determination to place that ignoble establishment in Dudley, called 'Slater and Howard's Woolen Factory', in a state of respectability. Whether or not it was got up in iniquity, I can not say; but I fear some things during the life of it are mysterious."*

Howard's mismanagement had hurt Slater's reputation, but he was determined to restore it to respectability, reorganizing under the name of the Dudley Manufacturing Company, which continued in existence after Slater's death (1835).

Adding to the burden of Howard's mismanagement in 1829 was a cotton crisis; both incidents gravely affected Slater's profits. Additionally, he had loaned great sums of money to friends and relatives engaged in cotton manufacturing. Their reduced profits affected their ability to pay Slater the money they owed him.

Slater and his textile mills weathered the financial and business strains of 1829. A return of prosperity brought him, in the words of Holmes Ammidown, to the height of his renown as a manufacturer, and as a clear-sighted, thorough, and practical businessman.

Though spinning cotton and woolen yarns during the years prior to 1829, Samuel Slater did no power loom weaving until the beginning of 1823; he continued to employ hand loom weavers through 1829. It was around

this time (1828/29) that Slater switched from hand loom fancy weaving to power weaving, bringing an end to the last remnant of New England commercial hand weaving.

THE MIDDLE YEARS: SLATER & THAYER AND SLATER AND ROBINSON

Upon Slater's death in the Summer of 1835, his sons, George B. and Horatio N. took over the management of S. Slater & Sons, which included the Slater Woolen Company in the South Village. Upon the death of George B. Slater in 1843, Horatio N. Slater took up the reins of leadership, which he held until his death in 1888. The years up until that time were a period of growth and expansion for the woolen factory in the South Village.

One can get an indication of what the South Village was like, and consequently what a mid-19th century mill village was like, by looking at the old tax records. The Slater Woolen mill was assessed in 1855 for 17 dwelling houses, 2 stone houses, the South Mill, the North Mill, a wool house, a dye house, a dressing room building, new Picker Room, and counting house as well as a Blacksmith Shop, 1 horse and 2 swine.

Until the following year (1856) the Slater Woolen Company appears to be a profitable company, managed ably by Horatio N. Slater, who was also responsible for the operations at the North and East Villages. While it remained profitable, its management appears to have changed.

On November 19, 1856 a certificate of partnership was drawn up, the principals being James J. Robinson of Webster and Edward Thayer of Worcester. The limited partnership of Robinsons and Thayer with "special partner" Elizabeth Slater, was "to carry out the business of woolen goods during the years 1856-1862." This partnership was dissolved on July 6, 1858 with a new one being drawn up on the same day between James J. Robinson and Horatio N. Slater for the manufacturing of woolen goods.

On August 25, 1859 an article in the "Webster Times" reports:

> *"At the mills of Slater and Robinson, at the South Village, are manufactured all-wool cloths, doeskins, cotton wraps, and fancy cloths. Two hundred hands are employed...they make 200,000 yards of broad per year. The goods are all finished upon the premises. The operatives work twelve hours a day."*

The Slater and Robinson association was a timely one. The outbreak of the Civil War in 1861 caused a rapid demand for cloth for uniforms as well as for blankets; Slater and Robinson manufactured both items for use by the "fighting boys" of the Union. The sale of cloth for uniforms climbed steadily after that time.

Deacon J. J. Robinson, severed his connection with Horatio N. Slater in November of 1863 to accept and important position in the manufacturing establishments of Rockville, Connecticut. Upon his departure, the "Webster Times" wrote: This gentleman has become so identified with the religious, social, political and financial interests of this town, that his departure will occasion sincere regret.

THE LATER YEARS

The Slater Woolen Company continued to prosper throughout the 19th century.

The sale of cloth for uniforms contributed in a large way to this prosperity. Since the days of the Civil War, the Slater Woolen Company's profits due to the sale of uniforms had been on the increase. The mills were the main sources of supply of uniform cloths for the Army, Navy, Merchant Marine, the Pullman service, and for railway,

hotel and other uniformed employees. (Later, in the 20th century, the Slater mills were to stop all work on civilian orders when the United States entered World War I. All production activities turned toward the needs of the Army, Navy and the Red Cross.)

Under the leadership of Samuel Slater's son, Horatio N. Slater until 1888 (when he died), the company developed and grew. Horatio S. Slater, Jr., the nephew and stepson of Horatio N. Slater, took charge of the Slater corporation, capably leading the woolen as well as cotton manufacturing activities of the company. Much expansion took place under his leadership especially in the North Village. Upon his death in 1899, the South Village woolen mills were administered by trustees, including Amos Bartlett until 1917. They were sold to American Woolen in 1923.

Manufacturing high-quality woolens, the American Woolen Company operated in the Slater mills at the South Village until 1954 when they divested themselves of the Webster property. The buildings remained vacant for more than one year, until purchased by Edward S. Kunkel who hoped to interest a local group in taking over the mills in order to bring new industry into Webster. Gradually firms started leasing portions of the many sprawling mill buildings; Mr. Kunkel went into business himself manufacturing luxury type piece goods and yarn.

A fire in the late 1960's leveled many of the old mill buildings.

THE NORTH VILLAGE

Situated near the French River in the northwestern corner of Webster, the North Village appears to have been a settled area as early as the late 18th century. The 1795 survey map indicates a grist mill in the area, and Charles Leavens (1866-1960), a self-styled local historian, reports that there was a small settlement in the late 1700s near the North Village called the "Mitten Lot". During those early years, there was also a well-used ford over the French River which was obliterated in the early 19th century when the river was raised to provide power for cotton and woolen manufacturing.

Fairly rapid growth of the area first began with the organization in 1810 of "The Village Cotton, Wool and Linen Manufacturing Company". Never very successful, the company, including its rights to the water power of the French River, was purchased by Samuel Slater in 1824. Expanding his cotton manufacturing activities from the East Village (the first of the Slater mills in the area), the North Village was the site of his first venture in manufacturing cotton thread (The Phoenix Thread Mill) as opposed to cotton yarn.

The North Village was the last of the Slater Villages to be developed and that fact may be a partial explanation for an interesting feature peculiar to it.

Prior to about 1840, mill owners utilized the sons and daughters of Yankee farmers for spinning and weaving in their cotton and woolen mills. By the mid-1800s, as America began experiencing waves of immigrants from Europe (Ireland and England), these same mill owners began hiring immigrants who, eager for a job, would work in the textile mills for less money than the farmers' children.

Interestingly, the North Village appears to have had, during the mid-1800s, a larger proportion of immigrant operatives than either the South or East Villages. This is, of course, speculation, however, many early issues of the "Webster Times" have articles that lend support to the idea. The August 15, 1859 issue mentions 325 operatives in the North Village -- "...of these about seventy-five percent are foreigners -- nearly one-half Canadian French." Germans are mentioned as residing in the North Village in the May 26, 1859 issue. The February and March 1864 issues are filled with news of the English "factory operatives" housed in the North Village which William S. Slater

had gone to Europe to hire. (By April 1864, the English operatives were on strike citing that the Slater corporation had not lived up to its promises.)

Reasons for housing these immigrants in the North Village are unknown. The trend may have simply arisen innocently; since the North Village was the last mill complex to be developed, and perhaps the largest, the immigrants (who were the last, and largest group to be hired) were placed there. On the other hand, the prejudices held by the "Anglo Saxon protestant" toward immigrants during the early 19th century are well documented. The North Village, the most distant village from the centers of activity, might have seemed an appropriate place to put those people who were regarded with suspicion and often considered rowdy and lacking in morals.

Even as late as the turn of the century, the North Village was somewhat removed from the rest of Webster; not until well into the 20th century did all the land between it and the other villages witness development.

Today, the North Village still shows the effects of being somewhat removed from the rest of Webster; not until well into the 20th century did all the land between it and the other villages witness development.

Today, the North Village still shows the effects of being somewhat removed from Webster; albeit a good effect. Primarily residential, it has been spared the encroachment of 20-thcentury commercialism. Fortunately, much fine Greek Revival mill housing remains in a concentrated area of the North Village -- walking its streets, one can get a real feel for what a textile mill village was like during the early 19th century.

Addendum: "Webster Times", August 3, 1861.

Return of the Sixth. The gallant Sixth Regiment arrived home Thursday. The train conveying them passed here about ten o'clock in the forenoon. The engine halted for water at the North Village, and as the girls in Slater's mills had congregated upon the lawn between the mill and the railroad track, the soldiers flocked from the cars and occupied the few minutes of the halt in most prolonged and indiscriminate kissing, to which the blushing girls submitted with a commendable and becoming grace. The Regiments were the recipients of an ovation at Worcester, from whence they proceeded to Boston in the afternoon.

Charles Leaven's Notes, Volume 2

The road from the Larned Farm was built in 1812 and ran down under the Boston & Albany Railroad bridge. It ran more in a westerly direction toward the river, by the tenement houses near the railroad, down by the old mill office (demolished, 1978), which stands lower down the hill near the track, past the old stone mills built early in the 1800s out through Granite Row, so called (Pearl Street), along the river. This was changed in 1851 to run as at present.

An old road between the North and the East Villages, left Slater Street just north of the George B. Slater barn and ran through the field over the stone bridge (fallen in) at the trench running out through the mill from the pond, winding around the hill at Mt. Zion Cemetery out onto the road to Worcester where the railroad crosses it.

Addition: Between 1820 and 1860, New England saw the erection of a profusion of cotton mills upon the banks of its rivers. Histories of these textile mills distinguish between two patterns of industrialization in the industry; the Waltham System versus the Rhode Island or Southern New England System. The former was founded by Henry Cabot Lowell and the "Boston Associates," while the latter had Samuel Slater as its guiding spirit.

Several characteristics distinguished the two systems: type of ownership, capitalization, power at site, power distribution, on-site management, labor, housing, product, sales and community form.

Webster's North Village, spared by 20th-century commercialism is a good example of the Southern New England System where children and families were the preferred labor. They were housed in family houses and tenements in a village. Much fine housing remains in the North Village, which still seems, on close inspection, a village.

The Slater cotton mills situated in the North Village area of Webster were in operation for well over 100 years (1824-1936) and have a significant history.

The Village Cotton, Wool and Linen Manufacturing Company

As early as 1810, a small mill for the manufacture of cotton yarns was built near the French River in the area which came to be known as the North Village. Incorporated on June 12, 1812, under the name "The Village Cotton, Wool and Linen Manufacturing Company", the following names appear as corporators: Samuel Waters, Amasa Braman, Estes Howe, Titus V. Shepard, Eseck Brown, Isaac King, Nathaniel Bartlet, Silas Chase, George Viner, John Stockwell, Jr., Stephen Bartlet, Nathan Bancroft, Luther Whitmore, Samuel Walker, Daniel Putnam, Absalom Leonard, Francis Sibley, Aaron Hammond, Joshua Waters, and Thomas Kendall, Jr.

Still others joined the company, which under the leadership of Jason Waters, Dana A. Braman and William M. Benedict, hoped to manufacture cotton, wool and flax. Never very successful, the company, whose name had been changed in 1814 to "The Village Factory Company", was sold on November 6, 1924 to Samuel Slater and Edward Howard.

The sale by Braman, Benedict and Waters of the village factory estate to Slater and Howard included dwelling houses, and "all other buildings thereon" as well as the water privileges of the French River belonging to the company (Book 241, page 180).

Slater's North Webster Cotton Mills

Though purchased by Slater and Howard, the cotton mills were mostly under Samuel Slater's direction, while Edward Howard had charge of Slater and Howard's Woolen Factory in the South Village. Slater, who had first manufactured yarns in the East Village area, expanded his textile empire, first with the woolen mill in the South Village and then with the cotton mills in the North Village.

During the early years (1824-1829), the cotton mills, both in the East Village and North Village, were involved primarily in the manufacture of cotton yarns, and secondarily, in the making of cloth. The reason for this is that Samuel Slater continued, for one reason or another, to employ hand weavers for cloth-making until 1829; finally switching to power looms in that year.

As one would expect, the output by hand weaving was lower than on power looms. Interestingly, Slater's switch from hand weavers to power looms was somewhat late by industry standards, resulting in the fact that Webster (then Dudley) was the last pocket of New England where hand weavers were employed.

Once power looms were installed in the North Webster mills, the Slater cotton mills were on the way to manufacture a variety of cotton goods, including cloth, yarn and thread. These products were expanded and refined throughout the mid-19th century.

By 1876, the North Village was entirely devoted to spinning and weaving cotton, while the East Village was engaged in bleaching and dyeing cotton as well as finishing work. It that same year, there were 780 looms in the North Village mills putting out a variety of goods: cotton dress goods, lawns, checks, silegias, jaconets, etc. In the 20th century, after rayon became popular, both rayon and cotton were manufactured at the Slater mills in the North Village.

Though little information has been found pertaining to the early years of cotton manufacturing in the North Village, a glimpse at the tax records for 1855 can give us a picture, if only in words, so that we can flesh out the North Village cotton mill in our imaginations.

The Slater cotton manufacturing company in the North Village was assessed for the following in 1855: 17 dwelling houses, 1 counting house, brick store building, saw and grist mill, machine shop, blacksmith shop, thread room, 3 barns, including the slaughter house and sheds. Additionally, a brick mill, stone mill and additions, freight houses, blacksmith shop and furnace building, warming building and stone house. The following animals belonging to the North Village farm are listed: 65 cows, 60 bulls, 1 brown oxen, 100 brown oxen, 1 brown horse, 1 sorrel horse, 1 black horse, 1 grey horse, 1 red horse, 1 black mare and 6 swine. The assessors' records begin in 1849.

Leadership of the North Village Cotton Mills

The history of the leadership of the Slater Corporation in the North Village is as varied as the kinds of cotton goods manufactured in its mills. It parallels fairly closely the pattern of leadership for all the Slater villages.

Upon Samuel Slater's death in 1835, the business which had assumed the name of Samuel Slater and Sons in 1829 when Edward Howard sold his share, went into the hands of George B., age 31, and Horatio N. Slater, age 27. George Slater, died an untimely death, in 1843 at which time, Horatio N. Slater assumed control of the corporation, ably leading it until his death in 1888. At this time Horatio N. Slater's nephew and adopted son, Horatio N. Slater, Jr. took charge. Much growth and development of the North Village occurred under his leadership. He died in 1899, after which time the company was administered by trustees, with H. Nelson Slater, the great-grandson of Samuel Slater, as President from 1920-1936. The complex of mill buildings was finally purchased in 1938 by Associated Industries who developed it for resale.

Through all these years of changes in manufacturing and leadership the North Webster Cotton Mills, were known by different names. First, as "Slater and Howard," then in 1831 as "S. Slater's Thread Mill." The 1855 map reads "Slater's Cotton Manufactory"; the 1870 map, "S. Slater and Sons Cotton Mill"; and the 1898 map, "H.N. Slater Cotton Mills."

Horatio Nelson Slater

One particular leaders, Horatio N. Slater, Samuel Slater's son, is worth mentioning further; he "reigned" longer than any other president (over 45 years) developing the business rapidly and with skill. E. H. Cameron, who chronicled the development of the Slater textile mills ("Samuel Slater, The Father of American Manufactures), said of Horatio N. Slater:

> *"Nelson" seems to have inherited the largest share of his father's genius at management, and he lived to a ripe old age, active almost until his death in the year 1888, after nearly 45 years of responsibility in full charge of the Slater estate. He had supervision over the extensive holdings of the firm in Webster, the Webster Woolen Mill, and the Phoenix Thread Mill, Union Mills, and Sutton Manufacturing Company at Wilkinsonville. Nelson adopted novel methods -- the*

> *establishment of a sales department (1866 - addition mine) instead of sales through agents (which made St. Slater and Sons the oldest commission house in the United States - addition mine)...and the building and operating of a railroad -- the Providence, Webster and Springfield line. He continued to expand the Slater activities, keeping them to the forefront of the rapidly growing textile industry of America." (Page 176)*

Horatio N. Slater, by his expenditures of time and money on the linkage of Webster by railroad with New England, and consequently, the rest of the United States, followed, either knowingly or unknowingly, the policy of his father, Samuel Slater. According to George S. White ("Memoir of Samuel Slater") "The improvement of roads and canals leading towards Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island, from the surrounding districts of greater extent and production, are manifestly of the utmost importance, as they facilitate and cheapen the introduction of raw materials, grain and other productions of the soil of less populous or more fertile districts." "This was a subject of great interest with Mr. Slater," he writes "who was a principal agent in promoting the famous road from Pawtucket to Providence, also what is called the Gore Turnpike, to Webster, and the Worcester and Norwich Turnpike. He was always in favor of the project of the Worcester and Norwich Railroad, now so happily commenced, which will pass through Webster." (Page 238)

Conclusion

Through the development of cotton manufacturing in the North Village by S. Slater and Sons, Webster prospered and grew during the 19th century. Today, while much fine mill housing remains to remind us of those days, only three or four mill buildings are still standing; lonely sentinels keeping watch over history. Addition: Upon Horatio Nelson Slater Jr.'s death in 1899 trustees took over the management of the three Slater villages; Frank B. Smith took over the North Village.

THE CENTRE VILLAGE

Prior to 1830 (when every town in Massachusetts conducted a survey for a map), and just before Webster's incorporation as a town (1832), there were no buildings in this area. However, by 1835, a fledgling town center was in the making.

In the early 1800's and before, this area was part of Dudley and was comprised of woodlots and rolling farmlands. It was intersected by two roads; the Central Turnpike (East Main) and a country road, which connected Thompson Road, leading to Thompson, Connecticut, with a grist mill on the Stoney River (now the French River). The farmers who owned this land were the Robinsons, settlers who had purchased 500 acres of land in 1719. The George Robinson farm extended from the Stoney River across the Dudley Turnpike and over to what is now Thompson Road. The two country roads intersected right in the middle of the Robinson woodlot.

The coming of Samuel Slater in 1811-12 and the erection of the first Slater mill in the area (a cotton yarn mill at the East Village) as well as the later expansion of the Slater mills to the South and North Village areas caused the growth in population that would require the services of a town center. As a matter of fact, the Slater interests were responsible for the incorporation of the town of Webster in 1832. Prior to this, town centers were in Oxford, Dudley and Thompson, considerable distances in the days of horse and carriage transportation.

The 1831 survey map shows population concentrated at the East Village, North Village and South Village, School Street and Lake Street and Main (where there was a store at the site of the present town hall and a Methodist Meetinghouse nearby). Other than this, the land comprising what would become Webster was forested and dotted with farms.

Growth at the four corners which would become the Centre Village began with the erection of a new Methodist Meetinghouse in 1834 (the one on Main Street had been outgrown). Pictures show this building to have been Greek Revival in style; stately with large white columns, pedimented gable and a tower. School No. 1, The Center School was built in 1835-36, also Greek Revival in style. Thus, the people concentrated in the North, South and East Villages were about equidistant from the Meetinghouse as well as the grammar school. (This school was in use until it burned in 1915.)

On the hill behind the school was "the old Center School Cemetery" which was probably an old neighborhood cemetery. (Simeon Sheppard, a soldier of the Revolutionary Wat was first buried there. His body and headstone, an old field stone, were moved at some point (along with the other graves) to Mount Zion Cemetery. He lies now in the clump of trees on the hill (unknown graves) in the Plummer Lot.)

The growth and expansion around the four corners, or the Centre Village as it was called, culminated in 1855 with the erection of a red brick building (next to the Methodist Meetinghouse) which served as a town hall and high school. This building burned to the ground in January 1870. Its burning signified a final end to "The Centre Village" as Webster's town center.

In actuality, the hook up of Webster with rail service in 1840 had foreshadowed the end of this area as Webster's center. The railroad station and freight sheds were erected at the other end of town near Dudley in an area that became known as Depot Village. This, activity and commerce shifted to Depot Village throughout the 1840s and 1850s. One reason for the shift was that merchants had easier access to the railroad for shipping and receiving goods. By 1860 another town hall, Webster Hall, had been built -- this one in Depot Village on the site of the School Street Fire Station.

By 1870 when another Massachusetts's survey was conducted, the area around the Centre Village showed a few changes, while at the same time, remaining fairly isolated from the centers of population. The map shows a small cluster of homes, the Center School, the Meetinghouse (now a French Catholic Church), the Catholic parsonage, a barn and a blacksmith shop, and a depot and freight shed for the Boston and Hartford Railroad line which went to Hartford, passing Webster Lake and continuing on through Thompson, Connecticut.

The railroad line swung toward the north Village (from Depot Village) where it cut across the Slater Farm, coming out on "East Main" (the Dudley Turnpike, a few hundred feet before Slater Street). It then cut diagonally across East Main and ran between the Center School and the blacksmith shop known as the "old Kelley barn." Joseph Kelley had been the driver of the old Webster stagecoach, which made two weekly trips from Webster to Providence by way of South Framingham. Mr. Kelley had his barn in the Centre Village for years.

The Centre Village area of Webster is today a polyglot area of commercial and residential structures. The area is zoned for business and is referred to by some as a "gasoline alley", alluding to the many gasoline stations lining the street.

In the not too distant past, however, the area was still rather unpopulated and rather pristine. The 1898 survey map shows 12 houses, the Church of the Sacred Heart, the Center School as well as the Kelley Barn and blacksmith shop. Surrounding this cluster of buildings were the undulating farm lands and lush green pastures of the H. N. Slater & Co. (textile mills) working farms, fields of hay, produce and grazing cows.

If one studies the 1898 map of Webster, however, one can get an indication of what will happen in the future to The Centre Village. Clusters of building in the East Village, North Village and South Village seem to be edging closer to the four corners of the old town center.

This trend continued past the turn of the century. When the Slater farm lands were sold in the 1920's and 30's, housing rapidly filled the once empty rolling fields.

Two current Webster residents, Sumner Hall and Leo Brophy can, however, remember the days when they were boys and played in the open fields and went sledding on their hills in the winter. They can remember the fine houses which used to be on East Main Street. The "gasoline alley" of today is rapidly covering any traces of Webster's first town center, "The Centre Village."

DEPOT VILLAGE

"Depot Village," Webster's downtown neighborhood encompasses the general area of Main Street (formally laid out in 1851 on a country road that had at one time been the Great Trail used by the Indians) stretching from the Merino Bridge to "Carney's Corner" (the intersection of Lake and Main streets), the village actually started in the area near the railroad tracks.

Prior to 1840, the year Webster was linked with Norwich and Worcester by the railroad, the area had few houses and only one store. The town center was situated at the "Four Corners" (the intersection of Slater and East Main streets). Upon Webster's linkage with the railway system, the station was erected in the western part of town, away from the town center, thus leading to the eventual shift of businesses and population to the end of town with a railway station.

Another early factor in the shift of population growth to the area which came to be called "Depot Village" was the introduction of shoe manufacturing in that section of Webster by Henry E. Bugbee in 1843.

Mr. Bugbee came from Natick, representing the firm of E. & G. Walcott. Upon arriving in Webster he rented a room in the Bradbury Tavern, otherwise known as the "Railroad House." Shoes were cut in Natick factories, and sent to him at Webster for distribution among men and women who would do the shoe binding and bottoming in their own homes. During the mid-1840's Bugbee, who later became a prominent Webster citizen as well as a selectman, employed from 50 to 60 people in Depot Village, greatly affecting the growth of that part of Town.

By the last quarter of the 19th century, when Frederick D. Brown, M.D., a Webster physician, contributed an historical sketch on the town for Davis' History of Worcester County, "Depot Village" was described as the chief business section of Webster.

A unique feature of Depot Village, one which had developed by 1850 was that the railroad tracks, freight shed and buildings formed a "square". It was situated in front of the Holmes Block; a flag pole was there as well as a hitching rail to which people could tie their horses when they came into town and feed them. At the end of the Civil War the town's people built big bon fires in the square to welcome home the soldiers.

The square was described nicely in the May 24, 1860 WEBSTER TIMES:

> *"By this operation (removal of tank house and sheds), some twelve or fifteen hundred square feet are added to the hitherto limited space -- devoted to the use of stages, expresses, and passengers*

at the depot. The heart of the village now presents the appearance of a large, square, unbroken, save where it is crossed by the railroad track. This square gained the name "Railroad Square."

By the1870's, Webster's Depot Village was well on the way to becoming a thriving, busy village. "The prosperity of the town in on the increase, three hotels now in full blast," states the WEBSTER TIMES of May 13, 1876.

Following is a description of Depot Village written in the summer of 1876:

"With these warm, drowsy summer days, Webster begins to assume the legitimate aspects of a country village, albeit it presents a trifle more of life than the typical New England town. In the early morning there is that inexpressible feeling of coolness, activity and buoyancy which comes from the freshly besprinkled steps and sidewalks, the arrival of the morning trains and the news which they bring of the great world about us, and from the cheery calls and playful badinage of the butcher's, the baker's and the barber's assistants.

...As the day wears on decrepit vehicles from the rural districts, drawn by dispirited, unambitious steeds, jig slowly down the streets, out of which gradually emerge the "horny-handed son of toil" and his "capable wife and proceed to do their weeks "tradin'". Loads of wood from the wilds of Buck Hill, drawn by patient oxen crawl down Main Street and wait for purchasers.

...It is high-noon now and the sidewalk is alive with hurrying feet -- much is done in this one short hour -- and the street has again settled down into its afternoon, quiet. The old farmer and his wife have gone home and now the son comes rattling down the street in a more stylish equipage...

...The engine sleepily and wheezingly wanders backward and forward over the crossing with exasperating persistency, and two urchins are absorbed in open-mouthed wonder of a highly colored circus bull until their attention is distracted by an incipient dog fight.

...now the afternoon is well spent, for a laughing, shouting bustling crowd come swarming down School Street.

...But the day wanes, small boys indulge in the demoralizing pastime of marbles. In the lengthening shadows, our friends, the loafers, grumblingly shift their positions and the laborer plods wearily homeward. Now comes the most delicious portion of the day, its gentle decline.

"Depot Village", was until about 15 years ago, a vital, active downtown. The advent of shopping malls and large discount stores on the outskirts of town slowly drew away its economic base, so that today it is in need of revitalization. Referred to in the 1920s and 1930s as the "Little New York" and remembered by some as a grand town, Webster, and by implication, its center, Depot Village, has many good quality 19th century commercial block buildings.

Webster recently was the recipient of an HUD redevelopment grant; hopes are high that some of "Depot Village's" charms can be reclaimed. Interestingly, over 100 years ago, aspirations for changes in Depot Village were in the air. Perhaps some of the suggestions of one of the writers of the November 11, 1876 WEBSTER TIMES will one day soon be heeded:

"We would suggest to the City Fathers that they purchase the land upon which Mechanics Block stood (site of the Guaranty National Bank now), together with that adjoining it on the west, and fit it up for a park with a Soldiers'

Monument, cushioned seats, shady trees, winding walks, murmuring fountains and a few deer, where meandering couples and lovesick pairs, may sit and coo these moonlit nights."

SCHOOL STREET / FENNER HILL / SNOW'S CORNER / PERRYVILLE

School Street, which connects "Depot Village" with Snow's Corner and Perryville via Fenner Hill in one long, fairly straight line, appears to have been in use as early as 1800 or 1810. Until the mid-19th century it was referred to as Thompson Road, but as it had two grammar schools upon its long length, it sooner or later acquired the name "School Street." In the year 1857 it was straightened and widened.

During the early 1800s there was a store and a cobbler's shop upon the road's length. At the time of Webster's incorporation in 1832 a guide board was placed at the top of the long street outside the home of Joseph Brackett in an area which was later to be called "Snow's Corner." The guide board was for posting notices of town meetings, school district meetings, and so on.

"Snow's Corner", named after Andrew Royal Snow (1844-1923), a prominent Webster citizen, was an area of activity as early as the late 1700s. The bend at the corner from School Street, led left to the "Thompson Road", a much travelled stage coach route which connected Thompson, Connecticut with the Meeting House in Dudley. The "Thompson Road" appears on the 1795 survey map of Dudley and is referred to today as the "old Thompson Road."

In this area of upper School Street lived the Bracketts around 1800, and by 1831, the Freemans. The latter conducted a fledgling cranberry harvesting venture in the swamp which paralleled the old Thompson Road (part of a conservation district today).

Another pocket of early development along School Street was in an area known as "Fenner Hill", which is on a hill where School Street and Hill Street intersect.

In ancient times and Indian trail passed the Narrows at Killdeer Island on Webster Lake and worked its way westward across a vast woodlands across what came to be called School Street, down the present Hill Street and across a small rapids, or falls, on the Stoney River (the French River). This may have been the Bay Path to Agawam (Springfield). The 1795 survey map appears to indicate a bridge on the river at the foot of Hill Street.

By 1816 an industry was nestled at the foot of Hill Street, utilizing the water power, the Dudley Cotton Manufacturing Company, incorporated on February 8, 1816. The mill buildings were located on the east side of the river, near where Hill Street crosses the railroad tracks. This property, which was later called the Fenner Factory, burned on June 1, 1855.

Associated with the Fenner Factory was a boarding house at the foot of Hill Street -- R. B. Eddy operated a store in its basement during the years 1850-55. Records seem to indicate that a trading post may have been in this area as early as the late 1700s. There was a store in Fennerville, "so called" in 1832 which was called "Preston's Store." (The vicinity was called Preston's Village, after a Mr. Preston who operated a factory at that time and was an area chosen to have a guide board for posting town meetings at the time of Webster's incorporation in 1832.)

The crest of the hill where Hill Street intersects with the middle of School Street was, during the 19th century, a special place for Webster's citizens. Due to the fact that few houses were yet built on the hill, the view was a good one and valued. An 1875 WEBSTER TIMES states:

> *"One of the prettiest sites to be seen around this town is from Fenner Hill at about half-past six in the evening, when, looking from the hill, the mills of Messrs. John Chase and Sons and the Stevens Linen Company are both lit up. The lights are like so many bright and brilliant stars. The former used for overtime and the latter for light to finish the day's labor."*

Later, in 1887, an article refers to the view from E. P. Morton's house on "Cady's Hill" (named for a former owner of the property H. C. Cady), an area behind School Street, near Hill Street. (The Plouffe House and the Monroe H. Corbin House were two homes erected on Cady's Hill.) The article states: "This eminence has frequently been used for bonfires to celebrate the nation's independence."

Though an area of sporadic 18th century development -- with a few stores and industry as well as some farms of approximately 100 acres by the early 19th century -- the School Street/Fenner Hill/Snow's Corner section of Webster didn't fully develop until well into the 19th century. The reason this area lagged behind other areas, notably the North, South and East villages, is that it wasn't until the railroad went through Webster in 1840 near the foot of School Street that the area received an incentive to lure prospective businesses, and shortly thereafter, homeowners.

The May 24, 1860 WEBSTER TIMES states "...The street leading toward Fenner Hill...is being widened and straightened at various points, and is being beautified and rendered more attractive by the erection of several buildings upon its line."

Gradually, more and more of Webster's hard-working businessmen built upon the long, tree-lined length of School Street resulting in rows of fairly large cottage houses. A Spring 1874 WEBSTER TIMES article states: "Cottage houses seemed to be all the rage among those who are building this Spring and the question as to whether a small house, rather than the huddling of several families into one building, is not an advantage not only for comfort but sanitary conditions."

Lured by the railroad and the prosperity it promised, the town moved its center away from the old center (near the intersection of Slater and East Main Streets), and erected at the foot of School Street in 1860, "Webster Hall", was a combination town hall and fire barn. This burned in 1873 and was replaced by the School Street Fire Station.

Development along School Street was further enhanced by the linkage of its upper end with "Depot Village," Beacon Park, and even Worcester, by trolley cars.

This occurred in 1898; a substation was built near Snow's Corner. Called the Perryville Substation, it was named after the Perry Woolen Mills which were nestled along the French River a mile or so further down the road (Perryville Road).

School Street, zoned residential, has escaped the inroads of 20th-century commercialism. Some fine old houses line the street. An intrusion into the quiet remnants of the 19th century may exist, however, at the foot of the long street. Some recent commercial structures are sprawled there, and two fine old buildings, the Universalist Church (later St. Anthony of Padua) and the School Street Fire Station met their dates with the demolition ball, in 1978 and 1979, respectively.

WEBSTER LAKE (CHAUBUNAGUNGAMAUG POND)

Webster Lake, with a circumference of approximately 17 miles and cradled between hill, dominates Webster's landscape. Fortunately research has provided us with three long written pieces about the lake:

The Lake (From Now and Then, A Webster Scrap-book, 1832-1932)

The Indians had trails connecting the great rivers, inland ponds, salt water harbors and other places where in season they would congregate for fishing, hunting and sports. Lake Chargoggagoggmanchauggagoggchaubunagungamaugg was the Fishing Place at the Boundary as its name indicates. It was sometime known as "the Nipmuck great pond."

It is believed to have been the boundary or neutral territory of the Nipmuck, the Mohegans, the Pequots, the Narragansetts, and apparently eastern Massachusetts Indians. Today it lies near the boundary of Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island, still retaining the sparkling purity of its waters and setting like a string of gems in the midst of wooded hill, island, peninsulas and bays.

There is a legend it was the abode of the Great Spirit, the Happy Hunting Grounds of their dead, their Paradise where fish and game would abound forever. The Enchanted Islands were their Elysian Fields and there their departed souls would have an eternity of ease.

NOTED PLACES OF THE INDIANS

Hubbard's History of New England, 1679, gives the following:

> *"Every noated place of fishing or hunting was a distinct seigniory, and thither all their friends and allyes to the neighboring provinces used to resort in the time of yeere to attend those seasons, partly for recreation, and partly to make provission for the yeere. Such places as they choose for their abode, were usually at the falls of great rivers, or neare the sea side, where was any convennience of cathcing such as every summer and winter used to come upon the coast: att which times they used, like good fellows, to make all common; an then those who had entertained their neighbors by the sea side, expected the like kindness from them againe, up higher in the counry; and they were wont to have their great dances for mirth ath these generall meeting. With such kinds of entercourse were their affayres and commerce carried on, betweem those that lived up country and those that were seated on the sea coast, about the havens and channells that issued into the sea; where there used to be at all times, clams, musseld, and oaystes, and in the summer season, lobster, bass or mullet, and sturgeon, or chich they used to take great plenty, and dry them in the smoake, and keep them for the rest of the yeare. Up higher at the falls of great rivers, they used to take salmon, shad, alewives, that used in great quanitities, more than cart loades, in the sping to pass up into the fresh water ponds and lakes, therein to spawne, of all which they, with their wares, used to take great store for their use. In all such places there was wont to be geat resort."*

Among these noted places in southern New England were what is now the great harbor of Boston; the great bay of the Narragansetts; the falls of the river of the Mohegans, now Norwich, Conn.; the head of the tide waters of the Connecticut River, now Hartford and Windsor; and the big lake at Webster which is the central spot within this semi-circle of harbors. The big lake afforded the Indians opportunity for fresh water fishing. Its bays, islands and projecting points served them in prodigal measure for their pastimes, sports and hunting. Its hills and valleys

abounded in nuts for their winter stores and in game for their larder. In their big hunts games could be driven out on the great points of land that pushing into the lake and sport and plenty be their reward. Numerous convenient yet secluded spots existed for their camps, and they could foregather and enjoy themselves and still be free from interference from one another.

A moment's reelection will show that this semi-circle of "meeting places" comprehends practically every desirable harbor or fishing place within that territory. Important paths therefore connected each of these places with this central and favorite lake.

LAKE CHARGOGG.....

A common belief in Webster is that the long name of the lake means, "You fish on your side, I fish on my side and nobody fish in the middle." Though appealing, this meaning is completely false and was invented by a clever writer (Editor Laurence Daley) of the WEBSTER TIMES in the 1930s.

Following is some information about the genesis of the long name given to the lake, written by Charles Leavens (1866-1960), a self-styled local historian. Reading his words will reveal that figuring out the true meaning of the name of the lake is no easy matter. For those with a desire for more information as to the lake's name, the book "The Great Trail of New England" is recommended.

THE LAKE AND SOME OLD TRAILS

The Indians had trails connecting the great rivers, inland ponds, salt water harbors, and other places where in season they would congregate for fishing, hunting and sports. "Lake Chargoggagoggmanchaugagoggchaubunagungamaug was the Fishing Place at the Boundary, as its name indicates. It was sometimes known as "The Nipmuck Great Pond".

The lake in early days was known as Shawgunagunkawa, Chaubunakonkkomuk, Chabanaguncamogum, Chaubanagogum, Chabanaguncmogue, --- Chachaubunkkakawok, Chaubongum, etc. and later settled into Chaubunagungamaug, as now incorporated at the end of the long name, naturally writers differed as they tried to write out Indian pronunciations. This ancient name, Chaubunagungamaug, entered into early history extensively.

The present lake name is a combination of three names -- Chargoggagogg/manchaugagogg/chaubunagungamaug. Chaubunagungamaug, means the Fishing Place at the Boundary. Amaug is Indian for fishing place. The name Nipmuck, is but a vulgarization of Nippe and Amaug -- Indians of the fresh water fishing place, Nippe means fresh water.

Kinnicut, who seems to have searched all records and authorities for Indian meanings in this territory, re-affirms the meaning of Chaubunagungamaug, and refers slightly to Monuhchogok, but neither her nor any historical writer, nor any library in Boston or locally, nor any state records, were able to show anything respecting the meaning or genesis of Chargoggagogg. Washington authorities, verifies the foregoing as to the last two sections of the name and complete the definition of the whole name. The English equivalent of the name is, Englishmen at Monuhchogok at the Fishing Place at the Boundary. J. Walter Fewkes, Chief, Bureau of American Ethnology, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, J.N.B. Hewitt, Ethnologist of the Staff.

The Monuhchogoks, were a tribe of this country "territory" and this is the genesis of the second part of the name. Lake Manchaug, a few miles northeastward, is a corruption of this tribal name.

In 1795 and in 1831, the towns of Massachusetts, were directed to file a survey map for the purpose of completing a map of the whole state. In those days, the lake was part of Dudley and part of Oxford, Webster was set off in 1832.

The Dudley map, dated March 17, 1795, reads, Chargoggagoggmanchoggagogg (Mass. Arch. Vol. 14, pg. 21). The Oxford map dated May 23, 1796 reads Chaubun Pond (Mass. Arch.) In 1831, both Dudley and Oxford maps read, Chargoggagoggmanchoggagog. (Mass. Arch.)

A survey of the lake along in 1830 reads, Chaubunnagungamaug. (Mass. Arch. Vol. 4 p. 11). A complete change is effected. The ancient name is being dropped and a new name appears. This is the first record also of the name Chargoggagogg, but there is no light on its meaning or where it came from.

The development of the name now seems clear. At the time these maps were made, 1830-31. The big Slater Mills were becoming important enterprises. Also due to the conservation of the waters by the Slater interests the lake was three or four feet higher than anciently (established by the survey of the Commonwealth). Hence it was more -- completely one majestic lake. A new Indian designation had come into use Chargoggagoggmanchoggagogg, Englishmen at Munuhchogok. The ancient name of Chaubunagungamaug was being lost. The final step was a National one. The combination of the latter name and the ancient one, and the lake emerges with the descriptive one. Indian Designation, Englishmen at Monuhchogok -- at the Fishing Place at the Boundary.

Note (At the running out of the lake at the East Village, from Robinson Point at the edge of the lake at the so-called Kingsbury Shore near Bartlet Woods "the old trench kept to the west side, and at the west end of the bulk-head" there was no bulk-head at the time, there was an old fulling mill where the people from the surrounding territory used to bring their home-spun cloth to be filled. This mill stood there before Slater flowed the lake. At low water on a still day I have seen the old timbers, Charles Leavens) The trench flowed down the west side of what is now the mill pond, taking care of a saw-mill and trip hammer flowing out where the print works are now at the corner following the course of the trench as at present into the French River.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE LAKE

People alive today, though enjoying more conveniences that those alive 100 years ago, might be interested in knowing that in 1878 the shores of the lake, were by and large, not yet divided into house lots. Thus, they were widely available for camping. "The camping mania" writes a reporter for the WEBSTER TIMES (July 13, 1878), "has seized the inhabitants of Webster, and many families may now be seen occupying the bluffs, groves and islands in Lake Chau...g enjoying its bracing airs, lovely scenery and picturesque surroundings." In August of the same years, the paper commented that upwards of 100 people were enjoying camp life.

It appears to be around the late 1870s when development of the lake realized its active origins. The year before the above articles, the town voted at its annual town meeting "to let the inhabitants of the Town of Webster and non-resident taxpayers fish in Lake Chau...g at any and all times except on the Lord's Day until the first day of November next."

By 1881 advertisements for some of the amusement areas of the lake start appearing in the paper and an article appears, written by a correspondent of the "Worcester Spy" praising the benefits of Webster's lake. It is excerpted below, for it provides a nice historical sketch of areas open to the public.

"This vast sheet of water, with its many island, forms an attractive part of the east portion of the town. Boating and fishing are there to be had, while for camping purposes it is not to be excelled. The scenery is unsurpassed and those who have camped out on the several islands which dot the romantic spot are enthusiastic in its praises, and when once ensconced there they are easily persuaded to prolong their stay. The lake has grown greatly in favor of late years, and with the facilities afforded at the several points of interest will give ample accommodations to the summer habitués who choose to visit this inviting resort.

On the shores of the lake are different resorts or picnic grounds. The first is that of Father Quan, and is known as "Eliot's Shore", the name being taken from the noted Indian of that name. He has erected here a hall for picnicking purposes, boating houses, etc. It is said to have one of the finest beaches on the lake, being sandy and gradually sloping. It is used for picnics by the Catholic people.

The next place is that owned by William S. Slater, and is called "The Narrows", so called because it is situated between the Upper and Middle basins. The hall was built jointly by Mr. Slater and James H. Howe, and was designed for small picnic parties. Through the narrows a channel has been dug and walled, through which pass the steam launches. The steamer "Indian Queen", which is occasionally used at this point, is the property of H. N. Slater. Many private boats are stationed here.

Union Point is the largest point on the lake. On it is a dwelling house where the lessee lives and there are capacious dining-halls, dance-halls, etc. It is managed during the present season by Charles Lueth, who announces that he has a capable caterer and is prepared to serve meals at any time. The steamer "Flora Belle" runs from this point to different parts of the lake. The boating facilities here are ample, and numerous craft dot the lake on every side.

Point Breeze is opened this season for the first time. It is owned by C. Edgar Jacobs, of the firm Jacobs and Shumway. It has natural advantages not possessed by any other point, the grove is of oak trees, and there is not that likelihood of nice dresses being stuck up with pitch that there is in some other localities. It is situated a little above the narrows between the second and third basins, and, looking towards Union Point, it affords one of the best views on the lake. It is being fitted up, and will be an attractive place for small parties.

The fifth and last place is Bates Grove, also opened this season for the first time, and owned by Ira F. Bates. He has a dining hall and other conveniences, and the surroundings are pleasant and attractive. Parties coming from Connecticut stop at this place, with which they express perfect satisfaction.

With fine hotel accommodations, the trains on the Southbridge and East Thompson branch railroad stopping at the Point Breeze and "busses" running from this place, this lake could be made what its advantages entitle it to be -- one of the finest island summer resorts in southern New England., who will seize this golden opportunity?"