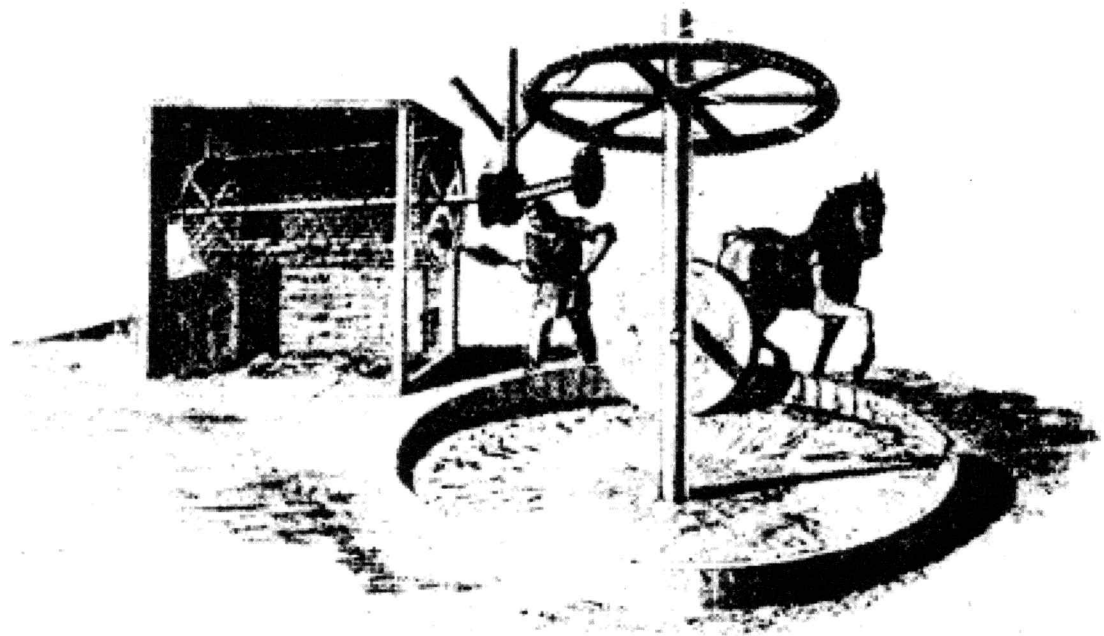


was hard to remove.

West Worthington was the site of most of the local tanneries. In 1837, the height of Worthington's tanning industry, leather was the town's leading product, worth \$32,000. During this time the average wage of a tannery worker was 45 cents a day. Another way to put the earnings in perspective is by comparing it with the value of a tannery. The largest tannery in Worthington sold in 1833 for \$5000 including 145 acres of land. By 1850, the hemlock supply had been exhausted and the industry died out.



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**Lease - From Albert D. Tompkins
To Horace F. Bartlett**

This indenture, made the thirty first day of October in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy-four

Witnesseth, that I Albert D. Tompkins of Worthington in the county of Hampshire and Commonwealth of Massachusetts do hereby lease, demise, and let unto Horace F. Bartlett the building situated on my premises which was built for a Blacksmith Shop and for Repairing Wagons for the purpose of manufacturing baskets.

Basket Shops

Baskets were commonly used in the 1800s to collect and hold produce. Baskets were made of ash which grows plentifully in Worthington.

At least five basket shops were established in Worthington. Some like Theron Higgins shop in South Worthington, which was converted from a blacksmith shop and a tin shop, relied on water power for some of the labor. He employed four laborers. Other shops like Horace Bartlett's of Worthington Corners used hand labor entirely. He employed sixteen workers. According to Helen Bartlett Magargal, a descendant, Horace Bartlett learned about basket making from Indians. His shop was located in the home now called the Spruces. It had been Worthington's only cheese factory when he bought it.

The basket with a handle in this case was made by the Bartlett shop.

Mills

Gristmills and sawmills were a necessity of life for the early settlers of Worthington. The most favorable locations for mills were next to waterfalls where water power could be most easily tapped. Natural waterfalls occur at three sites (see exhibit map):

- on Bronson's Brook at the boundary between Worthington and Chesterfield along Route 143
- on the Little River at the Ireland Street bridge near Sevenars
- on the Middle Branch of the Westfield River in West Worthington where it crosses River Road

From 1760 to the 1840s, sawmills did custom work for local residents who often brought their own logs. With the Industrial Revolution came out-of-town investors and bank loans which made it possible for mills to manufacture specialty wood products for a larger market beyond the town.

From the 1840s to the early 1900s, Aaron Stevens and Sons sawmill in Stevensville produced hoops for drums, banjos, tambourines, and embroidery.

E. and T. Ring Co. in Ringville produced sleds and small wagons. They also made wooden Venetian blinds, in 1837 the third most profitable product in Worthington. In the 1840s, E. and T. Ring Co. developed wooden smoothing planes which became renowned and today are a collector's item.

Cole and Dickenson, who rebuilt the Ring mill after a fire destroyed it in the 1850s, produced the Clipper, a famous children's sled. It continued to be made there until 1886.

The more successful mills operated into the early 20th century. The Ringville mill, the last to go, was demolished in the 1930s.

Map Legend

- #1 East Worthington Falls
Stevens Mills (hoops in exhibit)**
- #2 Sampson Mill**
- #3 Walter Tower Maple Sugar Bush**
- #4 Bartlett Basket Shop
Bartlett Cheese Factory**
- #5 Bartlett-Jones Mill (bedstead in exhibit)**
- #6 West Worthington Falls
Major Tanneries
Parish Mill**
- #7 Howard and Leah Mollison Dairy Farm**
- #8 Home of Judge Elijah Brewster**
- #9 E. & T. Ring Mill (Venetian blinds and planes)
Collins and Rollins Mill (Clipper sleds)**
- #10 South Worthington Falls
Bradley Mill**

Tanneries

An abundant supply of water in the hill country of the Northeast combined with a habitat favorable for hemlock trees made leather tanning a popular and profitable industry in the pioneer towns of the early 19th century. A tannin solution extracted from hemlock bark was used to cure the scrapped and cleaned rawhide. It gave the leather a reddish coloring.

It took a cord of bark to tan eleven cow hides. Though rawhide was available from the Connecticut Valley, better quality hides were shipped in from as far as Africa, Spain, and South America. Bark was stripped from hemlock logs with a bark spud (see exhibit). The rough bark was crushed and ground in a horse sweep mill (a horse following a circular track rolled a stone wheel around in a shallow tub). The pulverized bark was soaked in heated water and tanning solution was drawn off and cooled. Streams supplied water for the tanning vats and carried off the refuse removed from the rawhides. It took several months to complete the curing. The process created a horrible stink from the process of gradually cleaning the hides of remaining flesh and hair. Laborers hired for tanning work lived in boarding houses and had their own taverns because the stink

Worthington Industries

Settlement was begun in Worthington in 1764. The sale by the Massachusetts Bay Province required that within 5 years “not less than sixty settlers must have established their residence in the township, building houses at least twenty-four by eighteen feet in size, surrounded by seven acres of land, cleared and fenced.” Colonel John Worthington of Springfield, one of the original purchasers of the town, paid for a meeting house and a gristmill.

For rapid construction of homes and farms and for survival needs, gristmills and sawmills were needed as the first industries. The abundance of water power and forests of pine, ash, and maple made it easy to satisfy this requirement. The first gristmill was built in 1768 on Bronson’s Brook near the Chesterfield line, a site by a waterfall which later became crowded with many mills.

Worthington was rich in natural resources: good soil, thick forests, and many rivers with several large waterfalls. It grew more rapidly than the other hill towns until about 1815 when its population peaked. After the Civil War the population steadily

declined until a century later when it began to rise again. Reasons for its decline are complex. They include rapid exhaustion of natural resources, washing away of rich topsoil after substantial forest clearing, slowness of transportation of its products by ox-drawn wagons to larger towns and cities, opening up of richer farmland in the Midwest, the Gold Rush, and losing out to Huntington in the competition for a rail line.

Though the initial need for industry was local demand for flour and lumber, profitable export industries soon developed. The abundance of hemlock trees provided tannin used to tan cow hides, first from local farms, later imported from other countries because the quality was better (early global trade). Sheep prospered in the hill towns. Worthington had only one textile mill but provided wool for large mills in Cummington and Plainfield. By the early 1800s sawmills were beginning to manufacture specialty products in addition to offering custom saw work for local construction. In 1837 the most profitable export products were leather from the tanneries, wool, and wooden painted Venetian blinds.

Other specialty products developed by Worthington sawmills

included hoops for banjos, tambourines, drums, and embroidery; children's sleds and wagons; wood planing tools; broom and brush handles; agricultural tools; and whip butts. A well known sled called the Clipper was produced in Ringville between 1850 and 1886. Industrial sawmills survived into the early 1900s often staying in the same families for several generations.

Other industries of Worthington included cider mills, linseed and other specialty oil distilleries, an alcohol distillery, cheese and butter production, a boot and shoe factory using local leather, chicken hatcheries, maple sugaring, potash works using ash from tanneries, brick yards, and artisans like blacksmiths and clothiers. General stores and large inns supported the tourist industry in the second half of the 19th century.

Information for this exhibit comes primarily from Dan Porter's Worthington's Industries (in publication).