

# New Owner Rebuilds Original Abbot Mill

by Gordon B Seavey

WESTFORD — In Westford's oldest mill building, abandoned last year because of a disastrous fire, the tower bell will soon call men to work and the water wheel will turn once again.

The revitalization is due to an energetic young businessman with a good assist financially from the Small Business Administration.

The building is the sturdy granite block at the corner of Main Street and Broadway in the Graniteville section of the town. The new owner is David A Allen who founded the Westford Anodizing Company nearby six years ago.

He purchased the two-story, shallow pitch roof building which contains 17,000 square feet on each floor. His plant is to occupy the basement, which is reached on the lower level in the rear. He plans to lease the ground floor for light manufacturing.

The solid building was laboriously constructed more than a century ago with none of our modern-day tools. Its walls are of "coursed" granite rubble, strong enough to withstand the ravages of a fire thirteen months ago. The roof and most of the wooden windows on the upper floor were destroyed. Because the occupants of the mill at the time processed fibrous materials, the inventory became soaked by water poured in by the Westford Fire Department. The soggy mass acted as insulation for the intermediate wooden floor.

According to Allen, the floor will need some repairs but most of it is in good condition. Because his type of business requires considerable electricity, he hopes to hook up the old water wheel to generate current for production.

Stony Brook is dammed under Broadway and the ponded water has a drop of 15 feet, sufficient to run the turbine which generates approximately 75 horsepower. Before the dam

was built, the brook ran through an apple orchard, now Mill Pond.

Released from the Navy in 1964 after four years, Allen found a job driving truck for a metal finishing firm. He was promoted to inside work, became much interested in the process and became a foreman in short order.

After learning the trade, he started in business with one helper in Graniteville. Today he has twenty working for him in a basement plant in the C. G. Sargent complex and will add more when he moves in May.

His company does a variety of metal finish work, from computer parts to decorative finish. They specialize in anodizing aluminum and in zinc coatings.

The building now being reconstructed was the first home of the Abbot Worsted Company, a proud name in this area and still well-remembered in the textile field. It was built as a joint venture by three men.

John W Abbot and his son, John William Pitt Abbot, descendants of one of Westford's first families, came to know Charles G Sargent, for several years an overseer at the Lowell Machine Shop. The latter had come to Graniteville in 1854 and erected a small structure on the south side of Stony Brook. He was interested in designing and manufacturing wool washing and drying equipment as well as wool dusters, pickers, and waste cards.

Sargent needed more space so with the Abbots they built a new building in 1855 on the other side of the brook at the intersection of two streets. Destroyed by fire in 1858, it was rebuilt two years later, using fireproof granite blocks in a variety of sizes taken from quarries on nearby Snake Meadow Hill. This is the building which not only stood the test of time but of fire.

The Abbot Company was one of the earliest worsted manufacturers in the country, bringing in wool from all over



ABBOT WORSTED MILLS in Graniteville as they looked 100 years ago. Original building, on corner of Main Street and Broadway, was built in 1860 and is being reconstructed. Small building at right was located at the edge of Mill Pond and used as an office until demolished twenty years ago. (From a sketch in Hodgman's History of Westford)

the world as well as the United States. It was processed into worsted yarns for upholstery, braiding and carpets. They also pioneered the use of camel hair for yarn.

Business for both Sargent and the Abbots grew from the start. By 1877 the former constructed a new machine shop on the site of his original one. The building, again of granite, is of two stories and is still in use. The Sargent shop then moved into the new building, leaving the original corner structure exclusively for the Abbots.

The Abbots, in the meantime, had built a larger extension on the 1860 mill, more than doubling the space. Later, in 1879, they expanded to Forge Village, picking up the buildings of the Forge Village Horse Nail Co., which had become defunct, plus the water rights.

Their ventures prospered so well that by 1930 the Abbots had

the largest worsted yarn mills in the world. In Graniteville they employed 300, in Forge Village about 800.

Economic conditions changed and the Abbot Worsted Company, after making world history for 103 years, went out of business in 1958. The Forge Village plant was absorbed by the Murray Printing Company and expanded. The Graniteville mill buildings have been used

by various firms.

The original Abbot building, however, is being rescued from possible demolition. Allen is grateful for the help provided by the Small Business Administration. This governmental agency guarantees the funds for the purchase and reconstruction through loans from the First Bank & Trust Company of Chelmsford.