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By
Jeremy's Stream

BEING A SHORT HISTORY OF THE
C. H. NORTON COMPANY, 1886-1935



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A SHORT HISTORY
OF THE
C. H. NORTON COMPANY
1886 - 1935

ONE of the oldest water rights in the State of Connecticut is located on the small but beautiful tributary of the Salmon River which has long been known as Jeremy's Stream. The little river starts somewhere in the hills of Hebron and flows down through the pleasant valleys and meadows of Colchester. In the southeastern part of the town of Colchester the Jeremy joins the Black Ledge Stream and together they make the well-known Salmon River which flows on into the Connecticut.

The power produced by this ancient water right has run some mill continuously through the years and has been the center of the life of the village of North Westchester, long known to older generations as the Ironworks.

The first owners of the water right were Andrew Carrier and Nathaniel Skinner and the grant was made to them by the Town Meeting of Colchester on December 13, 1725. The power was used to run one of those old-time feed mills which were so necessary to the life of New England and were so plentiful along its streams.

In the course of time the mill site came into the hands of one Captain Joseph Buell who had a small iron foundry in which iron bars were made from swamp iron brought from a nearby vein of ore in the Unionville district of Colchester. There is still in existence in the village a crude iron cannon which is sometimes brought out on the eve of the Fourth

of July and used by boys who are descendants of Captain Joe to remind the surrounding country of the historic events of 1776.

In Civil War days a small shoddy mill kept the Jeremy Stream busy turning its wheels in a little red wooden building which a few villagers still remember. That red building eventually became the small paper mill which Mr. C. H. Norton bought in 1886 and which, through the ups and downs of the years, has become the large brick Fibre-Board mill of today.

For a few years before 1886 Mr. Norton operated a grist and saw mill handed down from his grandfather, a son of Captain Joe Buell of the Ironworks, but he felt, even at that date, that there was a poor future for his business and so bought the old water privilege, the mill site and the abandoned red paper mill with its rusty old machinery. In a small way he commenced the manufacture of binders board.

For several years the output of the mill was small and was limited to that one line of paper board. Then came the years when paper and paper board were suggested as substitutes for various other more expensive products and Mr. Norton, through experiment with his own particular product, became a pioneer in the making of board used to manufacture buttons—shoe and upholstery—and more recently clothing buttons. At the same time he went into the then new line of paper and fibreboard for shoe findings, and these two lines, together with high grade binders board, constitute the principal products of the mill today.

In 1893 the little old red mill was burned to the ground and a new mill was built which grew larger through the years until in 1928 it was partially burned in a serious fire, following which the modern equipment of today was installed. The waters of Jeremy Stream still turn many of the wheels of the modern mill but steam and electricity have been added to furnish the power to meet present day demands.

In 1926 the business was incorporated with Mr. C. H. Norton as president, Mr. Edward H. Norton as secretary, and Miss Sylvina C. Norton as treasurer.

Through all the history of the company Mr. C. H. Norton has been personally in charge of its management, with Mr. R. S. Brown holding the position of superintendent for over 35 years. The present superintendent is Mr. Andrew H. Gilmour and Mr. Edward Norton is the manager, although his father, Mr. C. H. Norton, is still active in the determination of the company's policies.

Until early in the nineteen hundreds the workmen employed in this mill were almost entirely of the local New England families, living in their own small homes or on nearby farms. With the 20th century came a small Polish group from the mining country of Pennsylvania. The men of that group became workers in the mill and their families tilled the small farms which they acquired. As a result the present employees in the mill are of native stock or first and second generation Polish, many of them owning their own homes and most of them living in the simple homes built in the village a century or more ago. There is little of the appearance of a factory village about North Westchester. It has a simple village street with white houses surrounded by green lawns and gardens and shaded by the maples and elms planted long ago by thoughtful fathers and grandfathers.

This rather remote village of Connecticut with its little busy mill carries along the traditions of which we are so proud. The stream with its water power is still turning the wheels of industry although they are not the old wooden water wheels and the great stone grinding mills, and the blood of old Andrew Carrier of the first feed mill and of Captain Joe of the Ironworks runs in the veins of the manager of the present mill and of some of the workmen in the mill. This is indeed the land of steady habits. May it long remain so!