

Town's longest continuous business

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Recent utilization of the property at the end of Cushing Place, formerly occupied by the State Line Lumber Company, as the headquarters of a construction business calls to mind the history of that site. There is little question that the sawing of lumber and grinding and distribution of grain carried on at this location set a local record for the longest continuous operation of a single enterprise at the same address.

Rev. Wilkes Allen tells us in his *History of Chelmsford* (1820) that the first gristmill on Beaver Brook was erected in "1678 — John Parker, son of Abraham, built a saw-mill on Beaver Brook, of which some remains are yet to be seen." A plan of the town in 1794 shows a mill at that site, as does Beers' Atlas in 1875.

According to history, a Mr. Roundy owned the mill in the late 1840's. "In 1857 Joseph Stearns sold it to George S. Wood, and in 1864 the transaction was reversed. For about twenty years the Chelmsford Mill Company, consisting of David Perham, Levi Howard, Benjamin M. Fiske and E. K. Parkhursts, carried on the business.

"David Perham sold the mill to Edwin Dutton in 1884. He operated it in partnership with his brother, Lewis M., until 1899, when it was sold to H. C. Sweetser. The firm name was for some years, Sweetser

The way It was

By George A.
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and Day. George W. Day was the owner as late as 1917."

The gristmill burned and was rebuilt during the early years of Mr. Wood's ownership.

"J. Cushing Company, dealers in hay, straw, grain, feed, flour" operated the business for many years, eventually selling out to General Mills.

The old grist mill was located on the left hand side of Cushing Place just beyond the bridge over the brook. It was powered by water flowing out of the Mill Pond through a sluiceway, under the mill, and then returning to the brook. By the 1920's the mill was no longer used and was falling down. A new building at the end of the street served as a warehouse and distribution center.

On the right of the street was a stable for

the company's draft horses. Grain and flour were delivered by large wagons in the summer and on pungs (low horsedrawn sleds) in the winter. Soon the horses fell prey to progress and were replaced by trucks.

A special railroad siding next to the building accommodated the box cars that delivered the grain to the warehouse, much of it in bulk. Young boys in the neighborhood derived great enjoyment in wading through the grain as the men shoveled it into wheelbarrows and hauled it into the warehouse where burlap sacks would be filled. Their enthusiasm was not shared by the company manager who would suggest that we find another place to play.

Chelmsford was no longer a farming community after World War II and could not support a business oriented solely to farm animals. The days of housewives buying flour by the barrel had passed.

Two and a half centuries of the "grain mill" gave way to other use of the land; first, a lumber yard and now a construction business.

But that's the way it was.

George Adams Parkhurst is a Chelmsford historian whose family has lived in town since 1654.