

Chapter XIII

THE RISE OF INDUSTRIAL FALL RIVER

Col. Joseph Durfee was born in April 1750 in what is now Fall River. He was the eldest son of Hon. Thomas Durfee. In 1834, Col. Durfee wrote a story of his reminiscences and this is the most authoritative and the earliest written history of Fall River, though rather limited to affairs which were in his personal knowledge.

He says that the Bordens were the owners of the Fall River stream; that at that time much of the city was a wilderness and a feeding place for goats; that the Bordens and Durfees were the principal owners of the land included in the Pocasset Purchase, including all of the land on Main Street for more than a mile; that Thomas and Joseph Borden owned the south side of Fall River stream and Stephen Borden owned the north side; that Thomas Borden owned the saw mill and a grist mill standing where the old saw and grist mill stood near the Iron Works; that Joseph Borden, brother of Thomas owned a fulling mill near the location of the Pocasset Mill; that Stephen Borden owned the north side of the stream where there was a grist mill and a saw mill near the woolen mill; that in Fall River there stood two saw mills, two grist mills and a fulling mill, but by 1834 there were about forty different mills; that the stream was very small but the falls were so high that there was little need for dams or an artificial pond. That near where Main Street now crosses the stream there was a small foot bridge which afforded the only means of crossing the stream, except that the stream could be forded; that there was formerly a small dam near where the Troy Mill stands and that water flowed over it the greater part of the year; that when the water supply lessened the mill owners on the stream hoisted the gates and let the water down. It was quite usual for the water to be so low and the river so narrow at the head of the stream that it could be easily stepped across and it was often not more than six inches deep.

The development of the cotton industry and the invention of the machinery used in it primarily occurred in England. It was a secret process,

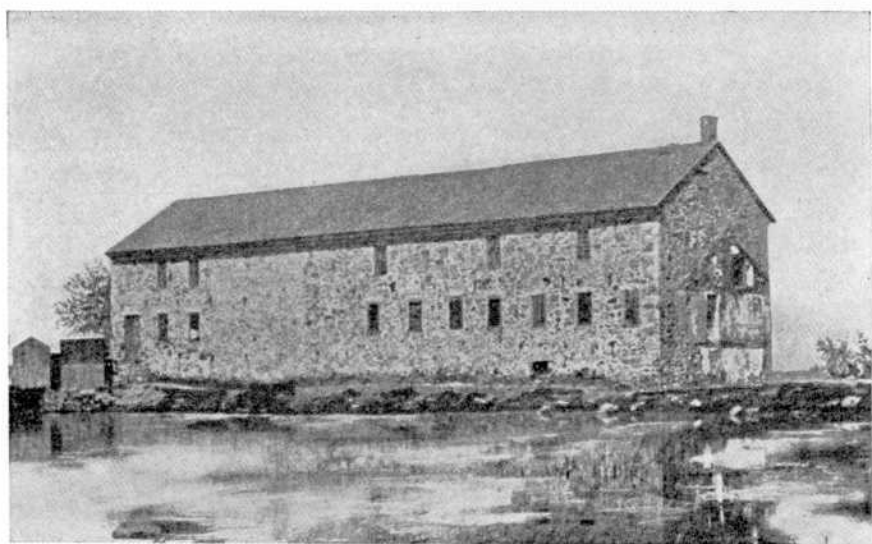
carefully guarded from others than trusted employees. For years it was impossible for a foreigner to have access to any information with reference to it, because the law not only prohibited exportation of new inventions but also prevented the emigration of skilled artisans.

Prior to 1787 whatever cotton cloth had been made in America had been woven on hand looms and the spinning of the yarn had usually been done on the ordinary spinning wheel (operated by foot power) which could be found in almost every household. The Arkwright spinning frames were invented in England during the Revolutionary War and the first attempt to smuggle the model into America was in 1786. These models were seized on the eve of shipment. In that same year Hon. Hugh Orr came from Scotland to Bridgewater, Massachusetts, and from memory ingeniously constructed several carding and spinning machines and these were the first which were used in this country.

Samuel Slater, who had had an apprenticeship in cotton manufacturing in Derbyshire, England, knew that no models could be taken to America, and brought some machine drawings, when he came to Providence in 1798. He succeeded by his own efforts in starting up several cards and spinning machines upon the Arkwright principle. David Anthony of Fall River was in the employ of Samuel Slater at that time, and was one of several who learned the processes, and was instrumental in starting a cotton mill in Fall River. He retained his interest in the cotton business until he died in 1867. The power loom, however, was not put into successful operation in this country until approximately 1814 and mule spinning was not introduced until 1830.

The first cotton mill (the Globe Manufactory) was built by Col. Joseph Durfee, in 1811, in that part of Tiverton, which is now in Fall River, at the northeast corner of South Main and Globe Streets. It was not a financial success. While the owners exercised great energy, they lacked practical knowledge. It was used as a cotton mill until 1829 when it was turned into a printworks. The printing establishment was burned in 1838.

The raw cotton was given out to farmers' families and they picked out the seed by hand. When the yarn had been spun it was again sent to the farmers' homes to be woven on hand looms into cloth, after which it was finished in the mill and marketed from there. The machinery consisted only of a few Arkwright spinning frames, a few cards, and a calender. It was a valuable experiment but a disastrous investment because of lack of experience in the work. The breaking of threads in the spinning process was very troublesome.



FIRST COTTON MILL.

Two substantial cotton mills were erected in 1813, the Troy Cotton and Woolen Manufactory and the Fall River Manufactory. David Anthony was a leading promoter of these mills, and Oliver Chace and Abraham Bowen were prominent subscribers. Deacon Anthony, as he was socially called was a deacon in the First Congregational Church and president of the Fall River bank. His principal associate was one Dexter Wheeler who had worked with him in starting a small factory in Rehoboth before they came to Fall River.

The Fall River Manufactory was established with a capital of \$40,000, increased to \$150,000 in 1820. A three story mill was built on the Quequechan stream, the first story of stone and the upper two of wood. It was to accommodate 1500 spindles. In 1827 the "Nankeen Mill" was added and in 1839 the original structure was demolished, to make way for a new building, succeeded after a disastrous fire in 1868 by another structure, long known as the "White Mill", eventually acquired by the Pocasset Mill.

The Troy Cotton and Woolen Manufactory beginning operations on the stream in March 1814, was of stone construction, four stories high and intended for 2000 spindles. Oliver Chace, the promoter was agent and Eber Slade treasurer. Burned in 1821, the mill was rebuilt and later enlarged. In 1860 a mill of five stories was erected.

The Pocasset Manufacturing Company was organized in 1821. The land on the stream to the west of Main Street came under the control of Samuel Rodman of New Bedford and his associates. They had intended to enlarge the grist mill but finally associated with Oliver Chace and others and erected what was known as the "Old Bridge Mill" which stood west of Main Street at that time and immediately north of the Fall River stream. They tore down the grist mill but the old fulling mill still remained just south of the stream. This was operated by Major Brayton and here nearly all of the cloth woven in Fall River was cleansed and fullled. All these mills were destroyed in the great fire of 1843. Just to the west of the ell of the old Bridge Mill was constructed a mill for tenants. It was first occupied by Joseph Eddy, who came from New Bedford and later by Edward and Oliver S. Hawes, who began to print calico. In 1824, Andrew Robeson came to Fall River and established a calico printing business which occupied a part of the same building. The south half was occupied by J. & J. Eddy for manufacture of satinets.

West of the printing mill, the Quequechan Mill was built in 1826. It was called the "New Pocasset" and was leased for a yarn mill. In the following year the Pocasset constructed still another stone building which

was known as the Massasoit Mill and later called the Watuppa Mill. It was larger than the needs of the industry then seemed to require but after Holder Borden¹ leased the whole mill in 1831 and filled it with machinery, it was successful from the start. He manufactured sheetings, shirtings and other fabrics. This mill had 9,000 spindles and was three times as large as any other mill theretofore built.

In 1821, the machinery firm of Harris, Hawes & Company occupied two floors of a building put up for their use by the Pocasset Company. The basement was used as a grist mill and as a convenience to the wives and daughters of the leading men who then lived on Central Street, they built a water-wheel to raise the water to a convenient level for their laundry work.

In 1821 the Fall River Iron Works Company was formed. The industry originated in a blacksmith shop operated by Major Bradford Durfee in conjunction with Col. Richard Borden. Major Durfee had learned the shipbuilders trade in New Bedford and he and Col. Borden operated a grist mill at the foot of the Fall River stream. They also constructed small vessels and when the day's work was done they experimented and studied together in the nearby blacksmith shop and gradually established an iron business by manufacturing such items as spikes, bars and rods.

It was from this exceedingly small beginning and with indomitable energy that the Fall River Iron Works Company was started. Thus the original businesses from which it was developed were that of a miller, ship carpenter and sloop builder.

Major Durfee had charge of the manufacturing and Col. Borden did the selling. At first the product was chiefly iron hoops which were delivered in New Bedford but later, when their nails became favorably known in the trade, Col. Borden would get together a cargo and sail with it to New York and along up the Hudson River until it was all sold. Major Durfee on a trip to Europe secured plans of a new type of furnace and boiler which was used in the iron works plant with much saving in the cost of fuel.

Col. Borden ran the grist mill at the outlet of the Fall River stream from the time he was seventeen years of age. He and his brother Jefferson Borden owned a sloop in which they would bring in about two hundred fifty bushels of corn from farms on Conanicut Island. They could unload their cargo directly into their mill from the creek and when it was ground, sail

¹ The joint stock company which organized the American Print Works was formed by Holder Borden.

with their surplus stock to Warren, Bristol and Providence and, disposing of it, would load with more corn on the return voyage.

Richard Borden and Bradford Durfee were the pioneer promoters of the Fall River Iron Works Company.² Six other persons were interested with them at the beginning and between them raised \$24,000. The company was incorporated in 1825 and ultimately acquired all of the land lying between the original outlet stream of Quequechan River to the bay on the west, and extending southerly, so as to include Crab Pond, which was then a salt water inlet. When in the process of development, they needed fresh water for use in the bleaching processes, the outlet stream of the river was diverted into Crab Pond, at a distance just north of Ferry Street and it was turned into a fresh water reservoir.

The Wamsutta Steam-Woolen Mill manufactured satinets made with cotton warp and wool filling. Samuel Shove and John and Jesse Eddy operated the mill. In 1834, when Shove withdrew, the remaining partners continued the business under the name of J. & J. Eddy, John Eddy being the manufacturer and Jesse the buyer and seller. In 1843 they discontinued the manufacture of satinets and manufactured an all wool fabric known as cassimere. Two years later the business was removed to the Eagle Mill about three and one-half miles south of Fall River in Tiverton. Later the mill was located at a place known as Mosquito Island on the Quequechan, just above the Watuppa dam. Joseph Eddy soon died. Manufacturing was not resumed until 1849, when Jesse Eddy was the proprietor and his son Thomas F. Eddy became associated with him and continued the business for twenty-one years. They began operations with 6 cards and 36 looms. They used about 150,000 pounds of wool each year and the cassimeres manufactured were about 150,000 yards. In 1862 they had 8 sets of cards and employed about 106 persons. They then wove about 200,000 yards of wool each year and made about 175,000 yards of cloth (See Fowler, p. 88). In 1839, 1138 pounds of wool were sheared from sheep in Fall River. (See Fowler, p. 32). In 1873 when Jesse Eddy died, his two sons Thomas F. and James C. continued the business and continued to manufacture fine cassimeres.

The Wyoming Mills established by Augustus Chace and William B. Trafford in 1845 produced twines, batts and warps.

In 1862, after the southerly boundary line of Fall River was extended from Columbia Street to State Avenue, the cotton textile industry com-

² For the early development of the Fall River Iron Works Company see "Centennial History of Fall River" pps. 63-66.

prised the following mills with the capacity, etc. below stated. The Massasoit and Union Mills which were located on the river above the falls and the American Linen below the hill used steam power only. The Troy and Metacomet had auxiliary steam power, but their main power and the entire power of the other mills came from the falls of the river. The Pocasset made sheetings but the others wove only print cloths. The Robeson Mill belonged to the Fall River Print Works Co. but it substituted the manufacture of cotton for printing in 1858. The Metacomet and Anawan Mills belonged to the Fall River Iron Works Co.

Statistical Table

	Incorporated	Spindles	Looms	Yards Made Per Year	Employees	Capital
Troy Cotton & Woolen Mfg. Co.....	1814	38,736	888	9,500,000	430	\$300,000.00
Fall River Mfy.	1820	9,240	209	2,000,000	143	150,000.00
³ Pocasset	1822	18,048	374	3,500,000	297	800,000.00
Pocasset (Quequechan Mill)	1822	16,200	420	4,000,000	260	
Anawan (Iron Works)	1825	7,704	193	1,675,000	135	160,000.00
Metacomet (Iron Works)	1846	23,808	600	6,250,000	312	190,000.00
⁴ Massasoit Steam	1846	14,448	356	3,300,000	225	120,000.00
Watuppa Mfg.	1848	11,000	300	2,000,000	180	75,000.00
⁵ Amer. Linen Co.	1852	31,500	700	7,400,000	350	400,000.00
Union Mill	1859	15,456	368	4,000,500	182	175,000.00
Robeson Mills (Print Works).....	1859	8,480	168	1,600,000	100	80,000.00
		192,620	4,576	45,225,500	2,614	\$2,450,000.00

Major Bradford Durfee and Colonel Richard Borden

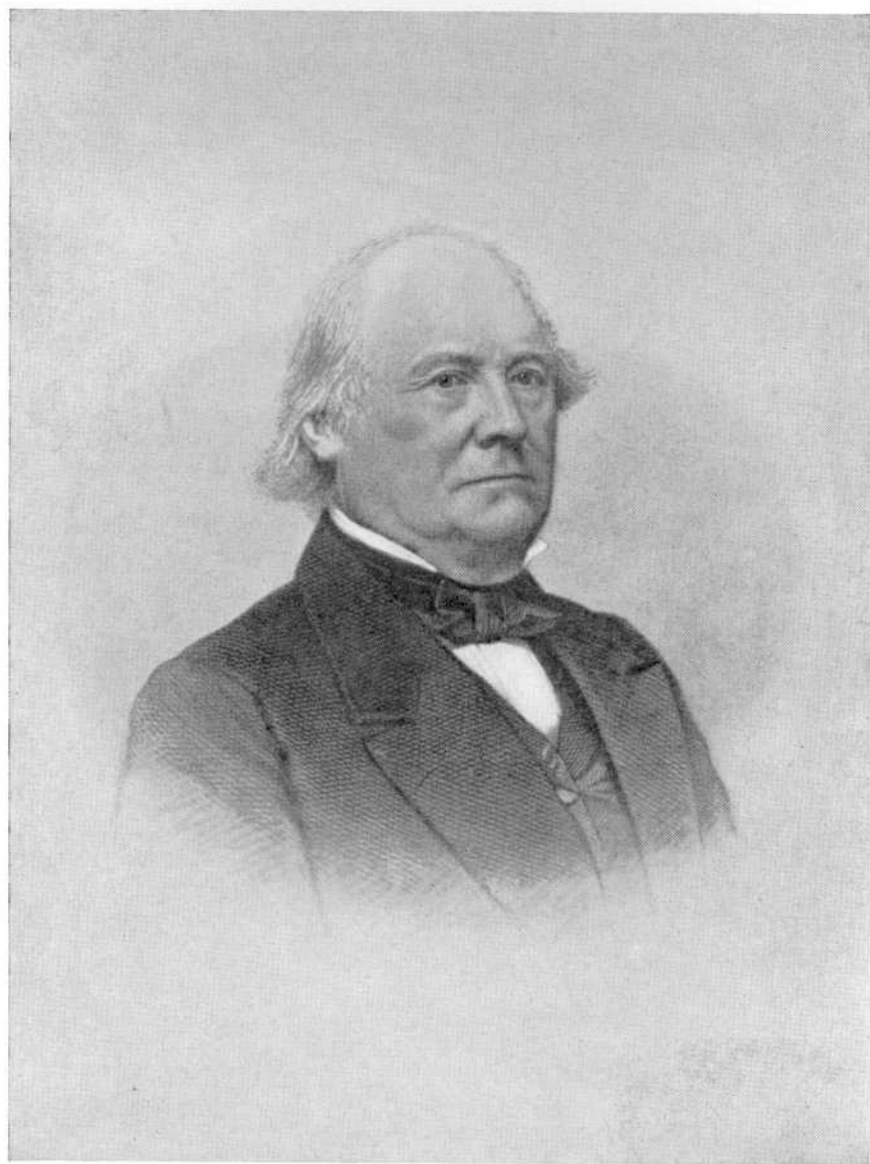
In an effort to epitomize important sectors of the history of Fall River, by recording events which directly resulted from the activities of those of our citizens who were inordinately prominent in accomplishing special civic growths, I record services rendered successively by Major Bradford Durfee and Colonel Richard Borden, which services were fundamental in our industrial and manufacturing growth.

Major Bradford Durfee was the originator of plans which were the inception of Fall River's industrial life. In the founding of the Fall River Iron Works Co., the construction of our cotton mills, and the conservation of our water power, Major Durfee had the able assistance of a few out-

³ Also manufactured 33 inch sheetings on part of its looms. The average capitalization was 12.90 per spindle.

⁴ Began manufacture of woolen goods in 1849, 6 cards and 36 looms manufactured 150,000 yards of cassimeres per annum and employed 100 persons.

⁵ Discontinued weaving linen in main building in 1858 when cotton machinery was installed there. The linen was then woven in the finishing building. The linen of 3,500 spindles and 50 looms were moved to an ell, producing yearly 1,500,000 yards of huckaback, toweling, crash and diaper. 200 persons employed.



COL. RICHARD BORDEN

standing men, and of these Col. Richard Borden^o was the most prominent and the most successful. When Major Durfee died on account of his almost superhuman work at the time of the great fire of 1843, Col. Borden was his outstanding associate and was deemed by all to be the one who could best carry out the work which was being done, so that the continuous and successive work of these two men brought about Fall River's success as a manufacturing and a textile center.

^o For the life of Col. Richard Borden, see "History of Bristol County, Massachusetts" pp. 374-377.

