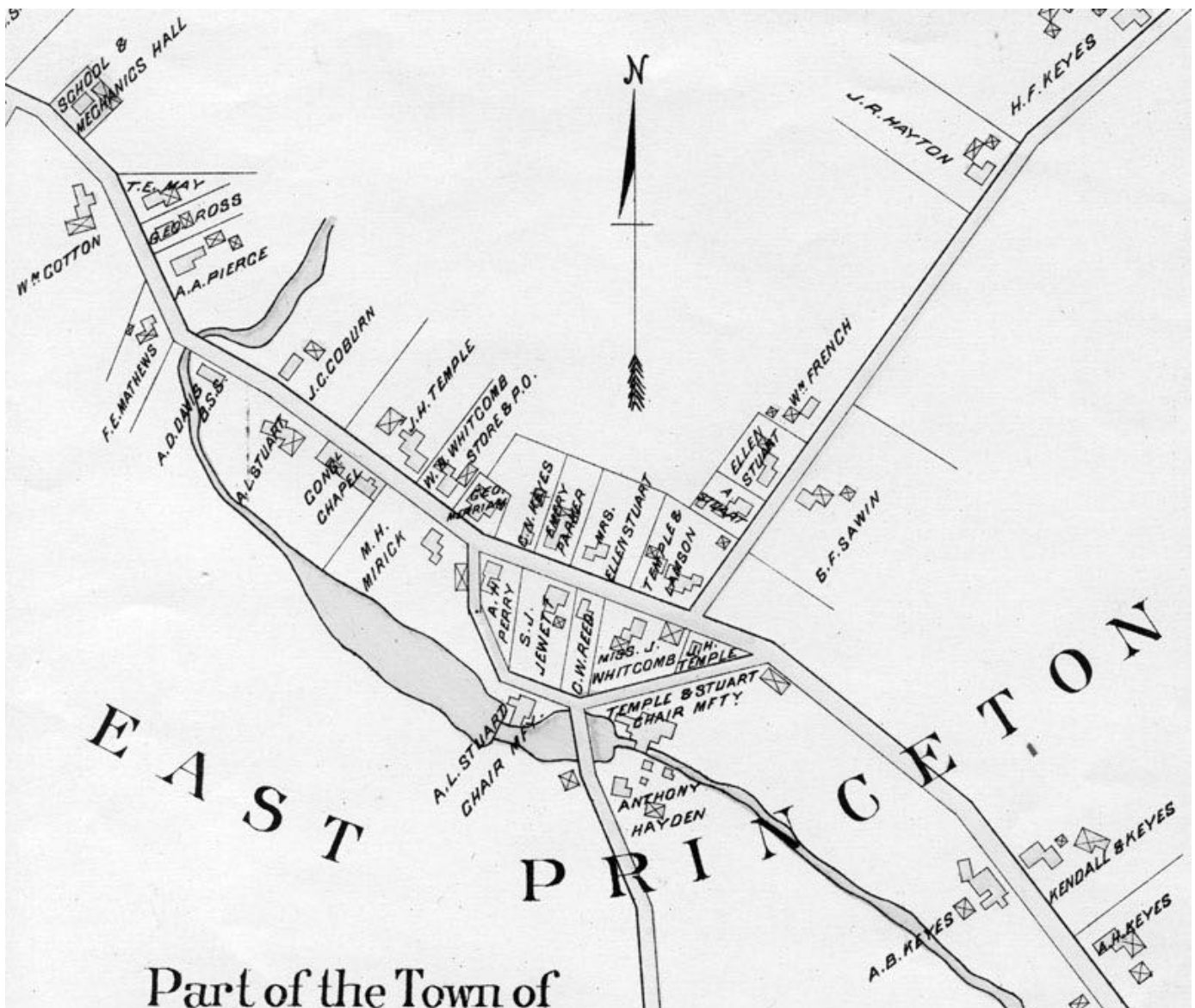


Then and Now – “The Mill and Factory Era Evolves” East Princeton, Massachusetts

As described in an earlier issue of Then & Now entitled [“YE Corne Mill”](#), the first mills in Princeton were Grist, Saw, Shingle and Cider Mills on the west, north south, and east edges of town on small streams. The towns’ population grew slowly from 1740 to 1840, but as it grew manufacturing mills began to also spring up on rivers with a larger supply of water. These key brooks and rivers were the:

- West Wachusett Brook. and Ware River on the west edge,
- South Wachusett Brook. on south end,
- East Wachusett Brook. On the east side,
- Keys Brook flowing from the north through East Princeton. This brook had enough headwater to allow for numerous factories to be built along it.



1898 Atlas Map by L.J. Richards

While most of Princeton's earliest settlers made their living off the land raising crops and livestock, several of these settlers chose East Princeton to establish their mills because it had a stream which provided enough water to power their businesses. As early as 1830, the Amos Merriam map showed the names of Brown and Keyes residing in the area of East Princeton. These two men remained connected to manufacturing well into the 20th century.

Keys Brook - The Shift to a River Community

It was during the 1840's and 1850's, the beginning of the period of industrial development, that a change took place in East Princeton just as it did in many other small towns in New England. While 18th century communities were established around the Town Common, 19th century mill towns, with fast-running streams, became a typical examples of small mill villages.



Temple Stuart Chair Shop

Chair manufacturing began in East Princeton in 1841 in a shop at the junction of Keyes Brook and Gleason Rd. on the stream that ran from Paradise Pond in the north and along today's Rt. 140. It was along this stream that Benjamin Stuart and his son, Joseph, started a chair factory. The business was later continued by another son, John H., and then by the third-generation son, Arthur L. Stuart. In 1904 the business was incorporated under the name of Temple Stuart Company. Chairs and settees were

made in an enlarged plant until the factory burned in 1910. This business then moved to Baldwinville, MA.

In 1849 James Brown began manufacturing chairs farther north on Keyes Brook, near the bridge that crosses Main Street. In the same year William Brown joined his brother and became a

partner and the two continued in the business until fire destroyed their shop in 1861. William rebuilt and continued the business until fire once again destroyed the shop in 1877.



Temple Stuart Workers

A third chair making business was established on November 7, 1881 by Charles Reed and Foster E. Matthews who bought the former saw mill owned by Mark Wilder which was located close to the Temple Stuart Company. Not long after, John H. Temple bought Matthews' interest and the business became Reed and Temple. In 1894 Mr. Temple bought Reed's interest and took into partnership Benjamin Stuart of New York City.



*90 Main St
Coburn Blacksmith Shop*

The factory was enlarged by the addition of a boiler and paint shop where chairs were finished by dipping them in large tanks filled with varnish. Thus began a new era in the finishing of chairs. After a merger with Benjamin Stuart, the firm took the name of Temple and Stuart. When Mr. Stuart died in 1896, John H. Temple continued manufacturing until the factory burned in 1899. Temple built a large paint shop and warehouse where he continued to finish chairs until he died February 22, 1904.

Across Main St, at the corner of Leominster Road and Main Street, stood a house (66 Main St) with a large barn with a sliding door. Here, the finished materials were stored overnight along with the horses and wagons. The next day the chairs and settees were delivered to the train in Sterling Junction. This property was known as the 'Beehive' because there was always a flurry of activity around the house and barn.



66 Main Street - Temple-Lamson Store & Chair Storage

About the same time, further down the stream from Temple-Stuart, was another shop in the vicinity of where Amos Keyes made his woodenware, toys, and parlor brackets. Atwood Keyes, a brother, also had a shop located in the same area. The Keyes brothers shared the occupations of wheelwright, carriage painter, photographer, and makers of stereopticon slides. Their houses were located in the area of 38-46 Main Street.



Temple Stuart Paint Shop - Corner of Gleason Road. & Main Street.

Today, at the corner of Gleason Road and Main Street, stands a converted barn (129 Gleason Road). In 1907 it was originally Roland Keyes automobile paint shop, and later, sometime in the 1950's, it was converted into a private residence, as it remains today.

Other Businesses Flourished



78 Main Street East Princeton Union Store & Post Office

While chair manufacturing was growing during the mid-Nineteenth Century, East Princeton was flourishing. There were two stores on Main Street. In 1850 one store belonged to Temple-Lamson (66 Main St) which was still in existence as late as 1941, (although

operating under a different name). The other store, Union Store, operated from 1864 to 1885. In 1875 Union Store was owned by John Mirick. It became the property of Warren Whitcomb in 1885. In 1889, Mr. Whitcomb served two positions, that of post master and store owner. He continued in this position until 1921, and closed the store in 1969. Marjorie Bingham, a former resident, remembered the store being open until 11pm during World War II, so residents who had victory gardens would have access to buy their canning supplies at his store.

The store also housed a post office, which was established in 1849, until it merged with the Princeton Center Post Office in 1984, and it was relocated to the center of Princeton in the Gregory Hill Store. The post office, while in East Princeton, maintained its own zip code 01571.

In 1799, numbered school districts were established in Princeton, and East Princeton was known as School District 3. The first school in this district was built in 1843. It was located on Beaman Road near the intersection of Routes 31 and 140, and was the last district school to close in 1945.

[Click here to read more about Mechanics Hall.](#)

The East Princeton Village Improvement Society held suppers and dances in Mechanics Hall, and later they held parties for the Village children.

In 1903, at a town meeting, \$300 was raised and appropriated to establish and maintain street lights in the residential districts of Princeton Center and East Princeton.

Arrangements were made with the Globe Gaslight Company, and nearly one hundred lights were



Mechanics Hall and District 3 School



96 Main Street - Workers House

installed, with twenty-five of them placed in East Princeton. Edith Hubbard, a former resident, said that a Mr. Anderson, who lived at the southern end of Main Street, would start each afternoon lighting the street lights along Main St., and then in the morning, he would extinguish them and bring the globes home to clean. Eventually electric lights replaced the gas lamps.



Temple Stuart Chair Team Heading to Railroad at Sterling Junction

A sidewalk was laid along Main Street and extended all the way from Leominster Road to the intersection of Beaman Road. The East Princeton Village Improvement Society maintained the sidewalks by raising money from suppers and fairs. With the advent of the automobile, cuts were made in the sidewalks to allow for parking. Eventually the sidewalks deteriorated and fell into disrepair.

A spring was located on the property at the foot of Mill Hill (before the bridge on Gleason Rd.). Water ran from this spring into a cistern from which water was pumped. Pipes were laid along a part of Main Street and Leominster Road making it possible for the residents to have running water. The pipes ran as far as 11 Leominster Road and up to the Chapel. Each property owner was responsible for maintenance of the pipe going into his house. A fee was charged for the use of the water and was collected by the person living in the Beehive (66 Main St).

A bandstand, painted yellow, with a white fence around it, was built in front of the big barn on Main Street (66 Main St). Band concerts featuring Princeton's Coronet Band were held there frequently.

Transportation In and Around Town



Harry Gleason (1874-1952) Delivering Milk on his Route Around

came from Fitchburg and Leominster and ran down what is now Route 12, bypassing Oakdale and continuing into Worcester. In the summer, families and young people travelled by trolley to Wachusett Lake, located in Westminster at the foot of Mount Wachusett, where an amusement park awaited them. Sometime around 1933, the trolley stopped running. The fire department was located in a small barn at 3 Leominster Road. In 1892 the town voted that money be appropriated for two horse drawn pumper trucks. One was housed in the center of town and the other truck was located in East Princeton.

The horse and buggy was replaced by the new and popular automobile. In 1909 a new mail route was established from East Princeton to Oakdale. Although the train did not run directly through East Princeton transportation was available on the South side at Princeton Depot, as well as, the two surrounding towns, Sterling Junction and Westminster. The trolley, an open car,

The Village Chapel

A center of activity was The Congregational Chapel, built in 1885, and located on Main Street. During the early part of this century the minister from the Congregational Church, in the center of town, came each Sunday at three o'clock. Here, Reverend Love conducted services for the residents of the village. The church was active for many years and remained an important part of the community. Despite the fact that there was no water in the church, and it had to be carried from across the street, the Ladies Aid Society held suppers once a month. The Chapel continued to be used for services until it closed June 25, 1960. Today it is a private residence.



81 Main Street - Congregational Chapel

The End of an Era



38 Main Street - Amos Keyes Shop

available to them as their world became wider.

Electricity and steam power, replaced the water wheels by the millstream. The mill owner no longer had to worry about the weather, and the possibility of interrupted production caused by droughts in the summer or freeze-ups in the winter. The new power sources freed manufacturing from river sites.

Princeton's population decreased to 713 in the 1940s, and many small stores closed from lack of revenue. Like so many towns that began in the mid 1800s, East Princeton, a typical small mill village, became part of a vanishing way of life.

The advent of the automobile was the biggest factor that caused the most significant change in East Princeton. As people became more mobile, they were no longer confined to the small village. Instead of taking a horse and buggy or trolley transportation, travel was brought to a new level. Earlier generations spent a day getting to their destination, but with an automobile it made it possible for people to travel greater distances in much less time. People discovered there were more choices

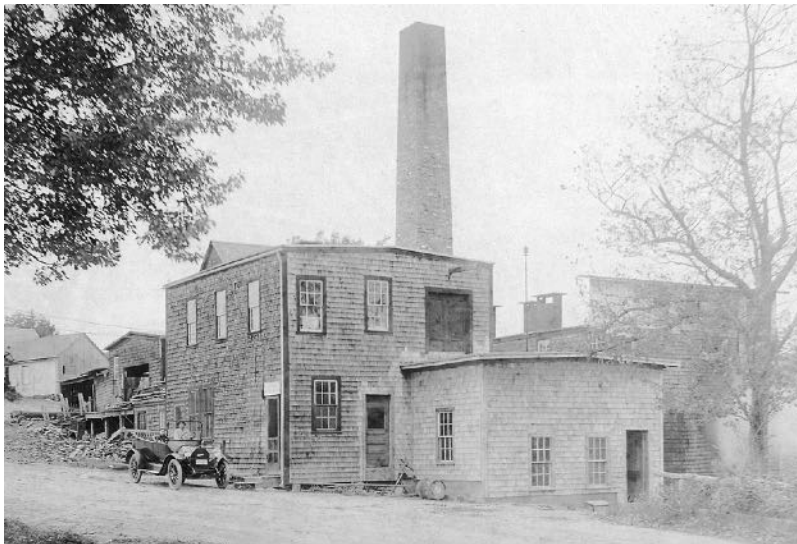
Recently, Rt. 140, through the center of town, has been repaved, the old bridge replaced, modern street lighting added with paved, curbed sidewalks, as well as new traffic calming measures have been installed. The homes have pretty much stayed the same and new young families have moved in. Mechanics Hall has badly deteriorated and is currently condemned.

On East Wachusett Brook many a few of smaller businesses operated:

- The Flavel Smith Grist and Saw Mill operated from 1864 to 1883 behind the Trow residence at 249 Sterling Road.
- Near the bridge on Town Farm Rd, Jonathan Howe ran his saw mill from 1852-1885.
- Nearby, on Tenney's Pond off Route 62, Otis Woods ran a saw mill
- But the one mill that lasted the longest and was the most successful was the Buck Chair Factory.



Original Wilder Mill Bought by the Buck's in 1880

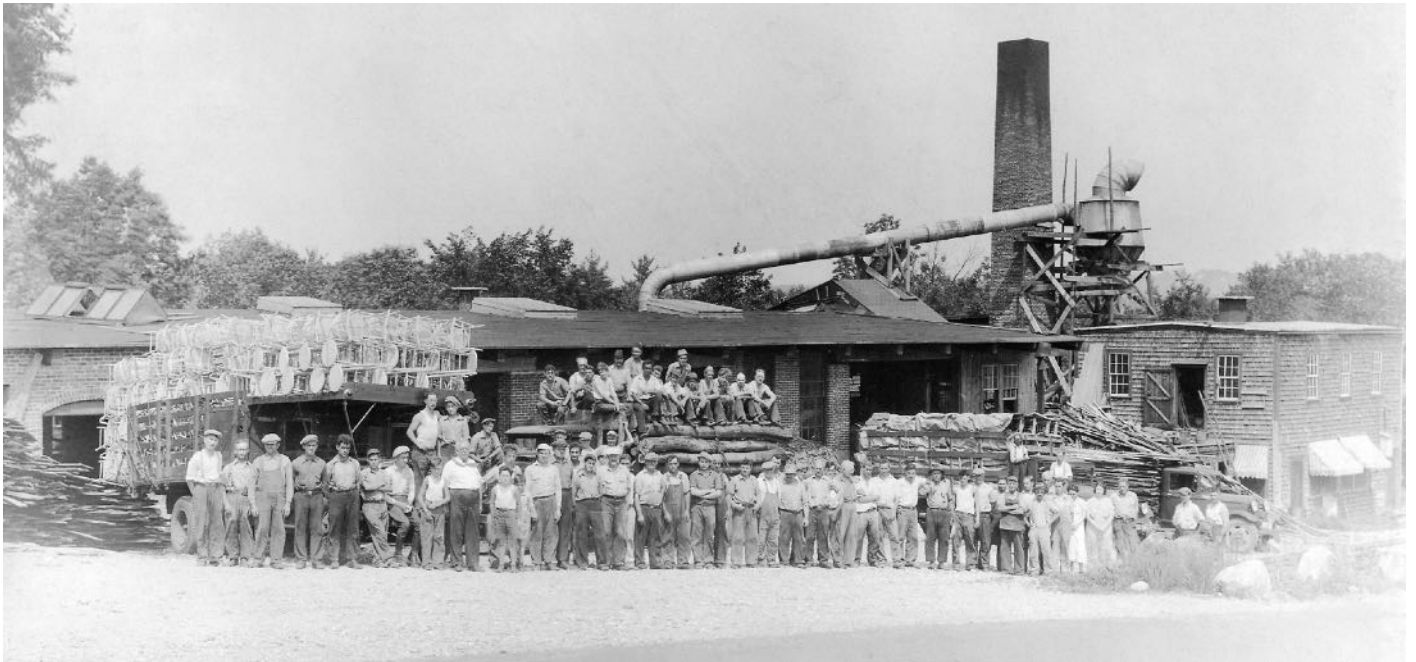


Rebuilt After Fire 1927

In 1880, brothers Thurston and Eugene R. Buck purchased the Ephraim Wilder chair manufacturing mill on this brook on Sterling Road near the Princeton/Sterling town line, today's Rt 62. They renamed this factory, The Buck Chair Factory. The mill burned in 1883, but was soon rebuilt.

Through the years, extensive additions were made, and the mill prospered under the ownership of Harry Buck – Thurston's son. Chair

stock, finished chairs of various styles and other furniture were made here. By 1914, the power system was doubled with the addition of two 65 horsepower motors that could turn out 1,000 chairs a day.



Buck Chair Factory & Workers 1933

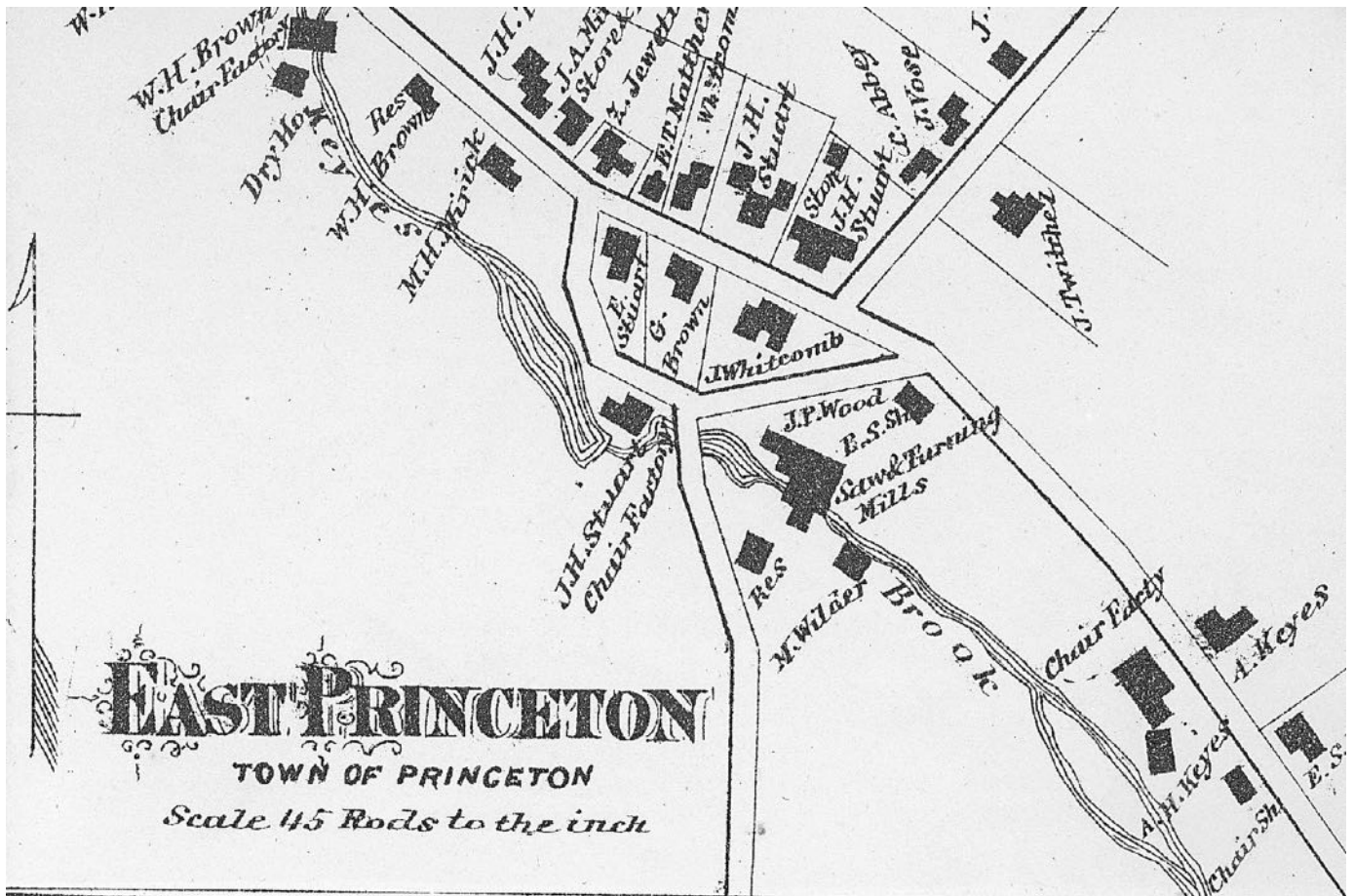


Buck Chair Factory 1940's Before It Closed

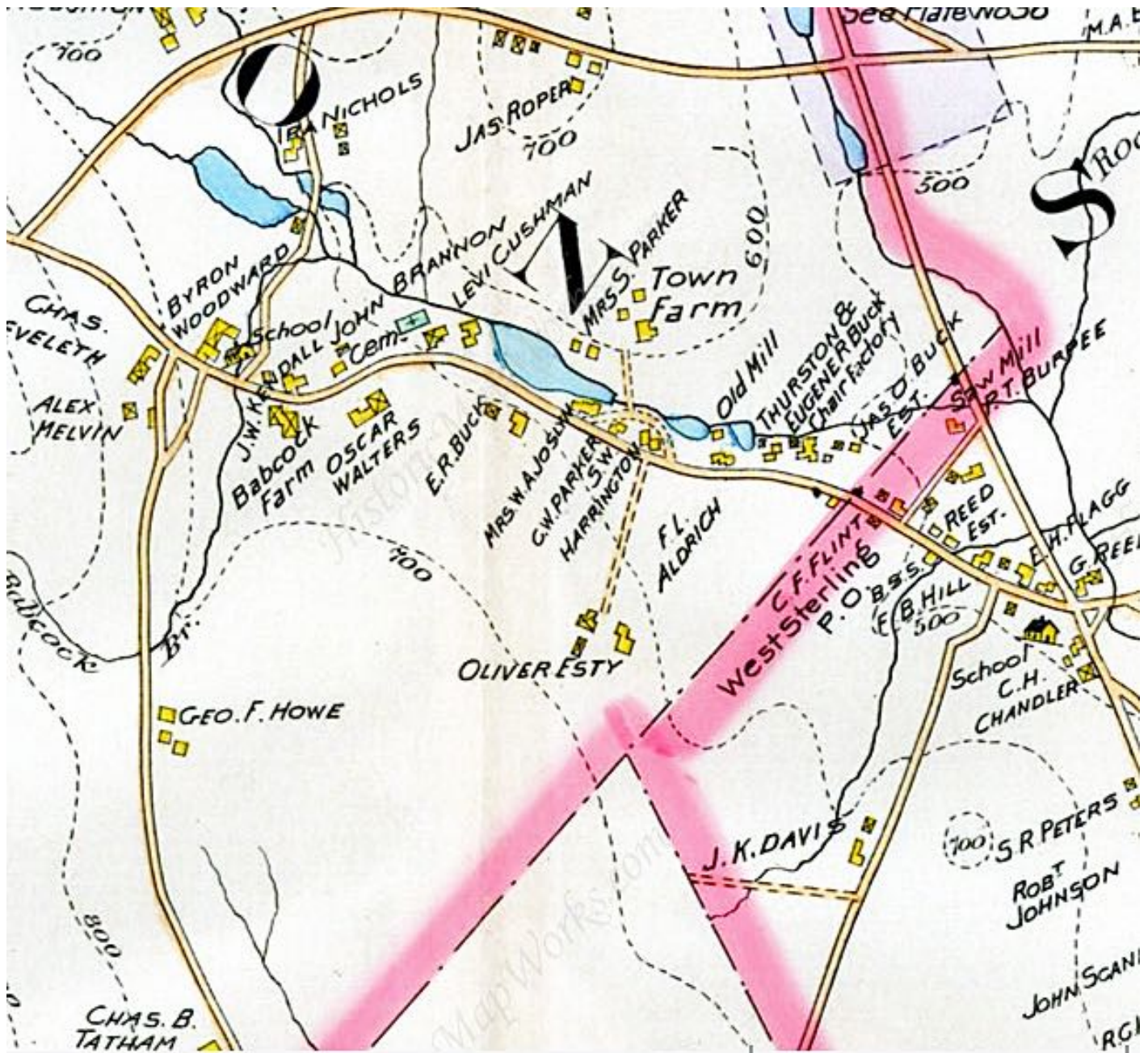
The mill continued to operate into the 1940's, until the land was taken Met. District Water Supply Commission in 1948, and the buildings were then removed.

Many Thanks to Joyce Anderson for researching and crafting this original document.

In 2023, Bud Brooks updated her work by adding street locations (in parentheses) and images from the PHS collection.



1865 Map



1898 Richards Map of West Wachusett Brook in Princeton

Please feel free to write us, if you have any questions or information to offer at

princetonmahistory@gmail.com

To learn more about Princeton's rich history, please visit:

<http://www.princetonmahistory.org>

Key Word = Factories