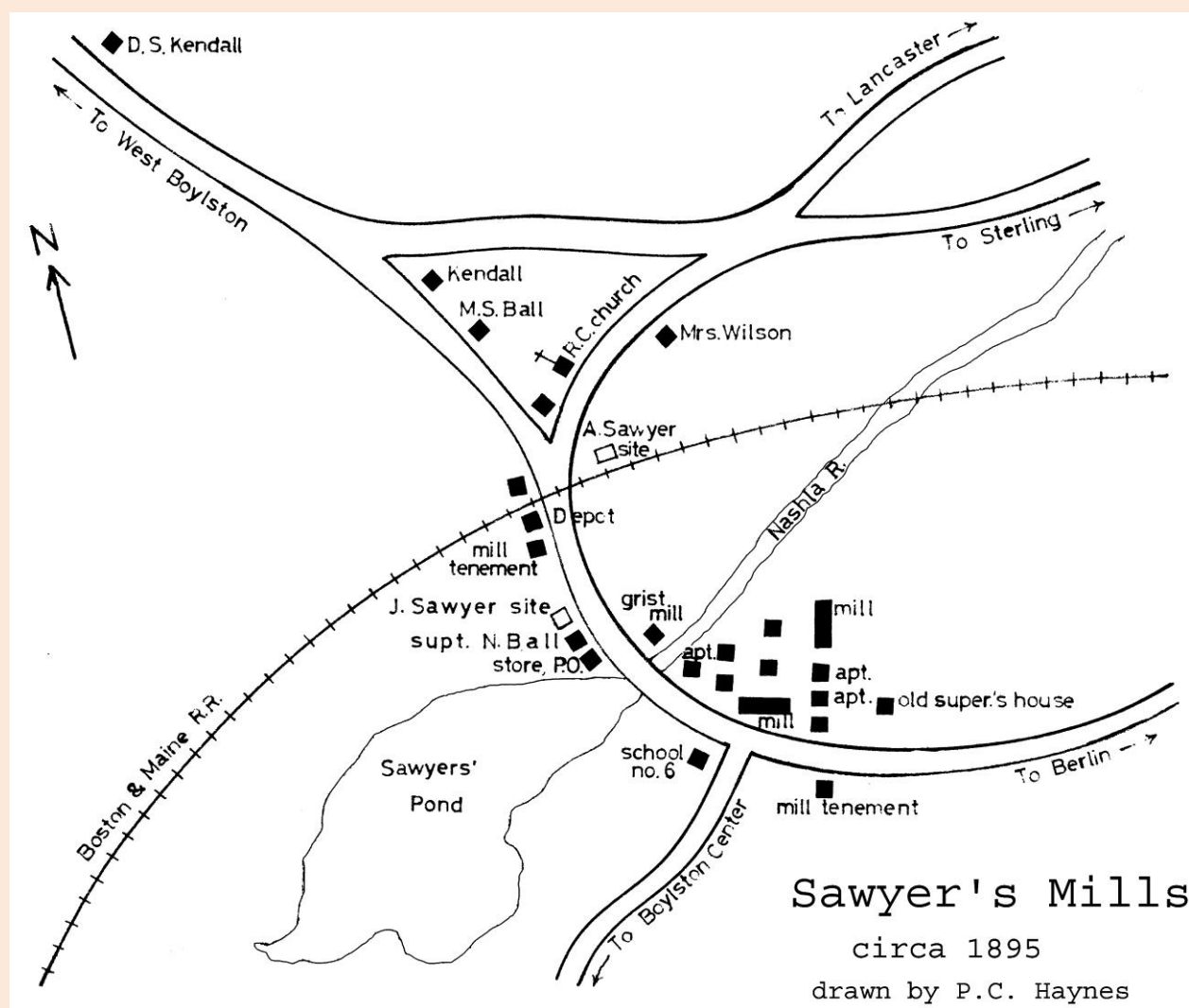


Sawyer's Mills Village

The Later Years

By Inga Milbauer

By the 1890's the section of Boylston which was referred to as Sawyer's Mills had grown into a thriving textile mill complex and village.



MAP OF SAWYER'S MILLS
BOYLSTON HISTORICAL SERIES

As we can see in the map above, the Central Massachusetts Railroad (part of the Boston & Maine Railroad), was situated between the factory area and the cluster of private homes with the Sacred Heart Chapel. The railroad ran from Northampton to Boston and had a stop at Sawyer's Mills known as Boylston Station (for more information about the railroad see *It Began with a Mill and a Bridge, the Beginning and End of Sawyer's Mills* in *Friday's Fascinating Finds*). The village had its own school, store, post office, and housing for the employees of the Lancaster Mills Corporation (for more information about the school see *Sawyer's Mills School* in *Friday's Fascinating Finds*). The housing for the employees included "one brick block of ten tenements, and nine wooden buildings with fourteen tenements, all owned by the Lancaster Mills Corporation."¹



BRICK BLOCK HOUSING - JULY 29, 1896
BOYLSTON, MASSACHUSETTS

PHOTOGRAPH - DIGITAL COMMONWEALTH COLLECTION

The Lancaster Mills Corporation was owned by Erastus and Horatio Bigelow. In 1845, Erastus Bigelow received a patent on a new loom that revolutionized gingham cloth manufacturing. It was woven by hand prior to the invention of the new loom. Gingham cloth is a yarn dyed fabric, originally made of cotton fibers, woven in checks, plaid or stripes.² After the Lancaster Mills Corporation acquired the Sawyer's Mills complex in July 1862, the mill was expanded, and supplied yarn for weaving mills the company owned in Clinton, Massachusetts. In 1877, the Lancaster Mills Corporation operated 1,520 looms, employed 1,115 people, and produced more than 15 million yards of cloth. By 1893, the number of looms increased to 3,500 and the number of employees to 2,000.³ From 1893 to 1899, the superintendent of the Sawyer's Mills complex was J. Nelson Ball, a descendant of the Sawyer family.⁴



TEXTILE MILLS BUILDING - VIEW FROM THE SOUTHEAST - JULY 31, 1896

PHOTOGRAPH - DIGITAL COMMONWEALTH COLLECTION

The Sacred Heart Chapel was a mission of St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church in West Boylston. It was dedicated on Palm Sunday in 1890 and could seat 125 people.



SACRED HEART CHAPEL
BHSM PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION

The store that was built by the Lancaster Mills Corporation in 1862 was replaced in 1890 by the building in this photo. It housed the Boylston Post Office and a hall that was used for socials, meetings and Protestant Sunday School.⁵



LANCASTER MILLS STORE - JULY 31, 1896
PHOTOGRAPH- DIGITAL COMMONWEALTH COLLECTION



VIEW FROM THE WEST END OF BRIDGE, LOOKING NORTH – OCTOBER 28, 1896
PHOTOGRAPH- DIGITAL COMMONWEALTH COLLECTION

The construction of the reservoir was a major event in Boylston's history: 302 people were displaced, 46 dwellings moved or destroyed, and the village of Sawyer's Mills erased. The construction began on August 7, 1895 and the dam was completed on June 5, 1905. A Boston Globe article from Monday April 3, 1899 "*Sawyer's Mills No More*," describes how the Sawyer's Mills residents had to vacate the buildings and their homes by April 1, 1899 to make room for the Wachusett Reservoir. Thus, "a practically deserted village is the picture now presented by this settlement." After the departure of the laborers who will strip the Wachusett basin "Sawyer's mills and its history will be but a memory. All traces of this settlement will be lost to many fathoms of water."⁶

The Nebraska State Journal published an article "*The Wachusett Reservoir - Immense Work Done to Furnish Water to Boston*" on Tuesday December 20th, 1904 with details about the construction of the reservoir. It mentions that local nurseries had, for several years, grown approved seedlings to reforest the area around the reservoir:

"Last year there were planted 117,000 pine seedlings, 285,500 sugar maples, 4,200 chestnuts and oaks, besides three bushels of hickory nuts, and a half bushel of acorns. There remained in the nurseries and are being planted this year 331,218 two and three-year-old pine seedlings, 84,000 sugar maples, 14,000 Norway spruce and 400,000 arbor vitae. These seedlings are placed at regulation distances in such a manner as to give an effect that is both pleasing and salutary."⁷

The next time you take a walk on the trails around Wachusett Reservoir, perhaps you will look at the trees and landscape with different eyes!

Acknowledgements:

¹Boylston Historical Series – Vol. III *Sawyer's Mills* by Norman H. French, A. Sc., 2012, p. 84

² <https://www.ahdictionary.com/word/search.html?q=gingham>

³ <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcpdf/townreports/Cent-Mass/cli.pdf> p. 11

⁴ Boylston Historical Series – Vol. III *Sawyer's Mills* by Norman H. French, A. Sc., 2012, p. 84

⁵Boylston Historical Series – Vol. III *Sawyer's Mills* by Norman H. French, A. Sc., 2012, p. 85

⁶ The Boston Globe. "*Sawyer's Mills No More*", Monday April 3, 1899

⁷The Nebraska State Journal article "*The Wachusett Reservoir*", Tuesday December 20, 1904

Boylston Historical Series by Bruce Filgate, 2012 Vol. III, XI, XII, XIII

Filgate, Nancy, editor

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcpdf/townreports/Cent-Mass/boy.pdf>

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc/mhcpdf/townreports/Cent-Mass/cli.pdf>

<https://digitalcommonwealth.org>

Map from Boylston Historical Series by Bruce Filgate, 2012, p. 504

Photographs from the BHSM archives & Massachusetts Metropolitan Water Works Photograph Collection