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The Quality of Manchester Factory Point

THEY CALLED IT FACTORY POINT

Until after 1800 most of the part of Manchester we know as Manchester Center was owned by one man, Timothy Mead. Mead was one of a small group of men who had explored the valley between the mountains, in the grant called Manchester, and found the land good for farming and manufacturing. Along with twenty-five other men (proprietors) from Amenia, N.Y., Mead came here with his five sons in 1765, the group having purchased the grant from the original grantees. He had drawn for lots with the others, traded and manipulated and finally acquired some 200 acres comprising most of the North Village of Manchester, and his fellow proprietors had deeded him a lot in payment for building the only grist mill in the new settlement.



The Old Mill

Timothy Mead then proceeded to build a fulling mill, a sawmill, a distillery and a store as well as a few houses which he rented to his employees. His own house was built on a lot now occupied by the Northshire Bookstore. Some called the area Mead's Mills, and old Timothy was known to be obstinate in his refusal to part with any of his property. He did allow the Baptist Society to build its meeting house on the hill in 1785, but it was 1791 before he executed a deed to the land. Evidently, Jeremiah Whelpley (another proprietor) owned some land in this northeastern part of the settlement for he and his son, Issac, along with Timothy Soper gave land to the Baptist Society for a cemetery adjoining the meeting house, also in 1791.

When Bennington County was formed in 1781, the original site for the courthouse was in Factory Point. But because Mead refused to sell the lot, it was built in the Village. When Mead died in 1802, his children sold land freely, but it was not until after 1812 that real growth took place in this part of town. Travel between the two villages of Manchester was made easier when in that year a road was built across the "Glebe swamp" (near the Orvis Co. building) by David Brooks, using an innovative bit of engineering and at the bargain price of \$193.25.

By 1820 investment Factory Point land was considered prudent for speculators as prices were low, and the area was expected to grow. The practice of acquiring property and reselling when the time seemed propitious was an honorable and respected pursuit and seems to be one of the things that has changed little in 200 years. When a petition requesting a post office was forwarded to the Postmaster General in 1828, it established need by listing "more than thirty families, three retail stores, two tanneries, one iron blast furnace, two woolen factories and one distillery all in actual operation besides a shoemaker,

cabinet and chair makers, blacksmiths and other merchants." In response to this request Factory Point was born as a post office in June 1828 with Benjamin Roberts as its first postmaster.

Myron Clark arrived in town from Rupert in 1825 and purchased the Mead Mills, as well as the rights to the water power of West Branch. The Clark dynasty had begun. It was the West Branch which provided power for the operation of the mills and factories along its banks. With his son, Augustus, Mr. Clark operated several mills and developed an extensive tannery business which lasted until nearly 1890. It was Myron Clark who was credited with making Factory Point a thriving part of town, and he played a large part in bringing the railroad to Manchester. In fact, he became the President of the Bennington and Rutland Railroad. Later, he was on the first board of trustees of Burr & Burton Seminary. Augustus was elected representative to the legislature and was postmaster for Factory Point as well as responsible for the building of a number of good houses in this part of town. The influence of this family continued as daughters married Mason Colburn and John Whipple,

active participants in the commercial life of Manchester Center for many years. About 1840, Myron Clark rebuilt the old grist mill and operated it for some years, and subsequently, it was operated by a number of proprietors.

Reuben Colvin was an early provider of electricity using water falling over the dam near the grist mill. In 1924, Earl Fowler took over the grist mill and ran a feed and grain business out of the building; and in 1975 Walter Kimball renovated the grand old structure as a real estate office.

In front of the grist mill and behind the buildings along Route 7A ran a narrow road that's still visible. It was the main road for some time and still appears as a road in the Beer's Atlas of 1869. The fragile condition of the stream bank has recently made it unusable even for parking. The Combination Cash Store building, which for a number of years housed the Overland Sheepskin Co., began life around 1804 and was probably built by master builder Aaron Sheldon of Rupert, who had earlier built Ye Olde Tavern. As far as can be determined, it has always been a store, operated at one time by Robert Ames and his son, Charles.



The Combination Cash Store

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Manchester Center, VT. March 14, 1888. The Blizzard of '88

Included in the cluster is the venerable building currently called Ye Olde Tavern built in 1790 by Aaron Sheldon, a year before Vermont became a state. Distinguished by its high square columns and a third floor ballroom, this more than 200 year old tavern has, since 1811, been a landmark on the main street road. Before that year the road passed behind the information booth and up by the cemetery to emerge nearly opposite the tavern. The Stage coach Inn, Lockwood's Hotel, The Thayer Hotel, The Fairview Hotel, The Old Tavern, Ye Olde Tavern - Aaron Sheldon built well. Up until the mid twentieth century, the mix of residential and commercial property along route 7A in Manchester Center continued. Owners of businesses lived beside their stores or in apartments above them.

From thirty families and three retail stores in 1828 to the business activity of the July 4th week-end in 1993 is a quantum leap. The change is both physical and attitudinal - our expectations are different, our needs are different, our capabilities are different - we are different from those early folks. We no longer need shoemakers, nor milliners, nor stove makers, nor buggy makers, nor tin smiths, nor harness shops.

What's the oldest building in Manchester Center? Probably Ye Olde Tavern; second oldest: the building where the Overland Sheepskin used to be. Oldest continuous business? Heinel's, dating from 1879 and Factory Point Bank from 1883. Factory Point may have got off to a late start, but Manchester seems to have more than made up for lost time. Mary Hard Bort, July 1993



The feed store below the Combination Cash Store at the back of the grist mill
Photographs From: "The Town of Manchester, Vermont" 1976
Bicentennial Publication of The Manchester Historical Society

(Continued from the other side)

Already some residents from this part of town, while maintaining businesses here, moved to Manchester Village to locate their homes. Accordingly, once again a petition was sent to the Postmaster General; this time requesting a change in the name of the post office from Factory Point to Manchester Centre. This request was granted and that spelling persisted until well after the turn of the century.

The brick "drugstore building", until most recently housing Ben and Jerry's, was built in the 1870's as a drugstore for Vincent Grover. In 1874, the first soda fountain in town was installed there, and it continued through Clark Wait, John Whipple, Harris

The adjoining Howe Block housed a meat market, furniture store, and funeral parlor. In 1970, the bank bought the Henley Block and razed it as it expanded again.

True to the customs of the early settlement, clusters of dwellings and commercial buildings formed the villages, often with a church at the center. Thus we have the Baptist Church cluster (that building dates to 1833), and north on Route 7A in the vicinity of the Zion Episcopal Church, another cluster. The Zion Episcopal Church was built in 1821 (though the church had been organized in 1782) at a cost of \$4500. Major renovations in 1861, 1882, 1939, 1955, and over the past five years,



"The Elm at the Crossroads," Manchester Center -1915

Whipple, Gene Kayatta, and Ronald Wilcox to be a drugstore. On the second floor, the tradition of the practice of law has continued from Frank Archibald, to James Campbell and to his son, Edgar.

The Pierre's Gate building was erected in the 1893 and began life as a harness shop, then as a barber shop, then as a pool room, later as the post office, then as a radio shop and then Gaudette's Children's shop. Just north, a vacant lot was used by Al Hammond, the barber, for space for his lunch cart, until it was bought by James Hill and a building there in 1939 became Hill's Restaurant. Later a real estate office and then the Northshire Bookstore, it was purchased by Factory Point Bank in the 1980's as it expanded its offices. With no question the centerpiece of this part of town is Factory Point Bank which was chartered in 1883. It first occupied space in the Estabrook Opera House building. The original building in this group had been built about 1815 and was a hotel for many years. Estabrook added a third floor for his Opera House, called the hotel the Commercial House and added a skating rink (roller skating).

past five years, have created the buildings that we see today. The rectory was built in 1886, and the parking lot was formerly the site of the Center school, razed in 1969. Just south of the parking lot, the brick Zullo house was built about 1828 by Lyman Harrington who also built the old News Guide, blacksmith shop and dwelling.

In 1893, on December 22nd, at 11PM, the whole block burned in one of the most devastating fires Manchester has ever seen. Rebuilt the next year by Henry Bundy, the new Hanley Block contained temporary quarters for the bank as well as a meat market, barber shop, apartments, and an office of the school superintendent. The new Opera House was completed in 1896 with the Factory Point Bank on the ground floor separated by a stairway from two stores which had moved from the Lugene Building across the street - Young's shoe store and Heinel's men's clothing store. At the back of the ground floor were Bennett's funeral parlor and the Union Club rooms. Beginning in 1948, the bank acquired first the club rooms, building as a store, perhaps as early as 1821. That building was a store until 1914, when it became the George Robert's Garage.

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