

The Shoe Industry

Excerpts from
"The Shoe Industry of Weymouth"
1933 Weymouth Historical Society

The making of shoes or "boots" as they were called in the early days, goes back to the beginning of Weymouth's settlement. Each new group of colonists consisted of at least one cobbler who could care for their needs. Our early town records indicate "cordwainers" as they were often called, in the 1600's. These men provided the incentive for the perpetuation of a craft which has lasted for over three hundred years.

Up until the 1800's, boots were made by these "cobblers", who journeyed about from farm to farm, staying only long enough to convert the farmer's cowhides into footwear for the family's needs. Gradually, more and more of the farmers understudied the cobbler and became quite proficient in making their own boots. Soon, small shops sprang up on the farms, known as "10 Footers" by their relatively small dimensions. The farmer was now able to work his land and in spare time, supplement his income by making and fixing boots for his family and neighbors. As the demand became greater, with the increase in the town's population, many took to specializing in one or two operations of the boots' construction; passing it on from one to another until it was ultimately finished and sold.

The feasibility of moving the unfinished product several times was soon outweighed by the establishment of small factories where the skilled men could hire stalls and perform their individual operations under one roof. By 1820, factories were increasing in size, and 369 out of 450 heads of families in Weymouth were employed making boots. They sold from 75¢ to \$2.00 per pair. In 1850, just 30 years later, Weymouth boasted over 1,000 men and women making boots and a good man could earn \$2.00 per day!

The industry thrived with the demands brought on by the Civil War, and the advent of the machine age opened yet another era in the industry for Weymouth. The medium-sized factories were replaced by 1875 with huge buildings where every operation of the boot could be completed under one roof. There was great rivalry and the labor market was soon exhausted of skilled workers. This stimulated the influx of a great immigrant population from Europe to work in the factories. Weymouth's boots and shoes became an export product to the entire world.

Competition failed to diminish a great sense of pride of craftsmanship and by 1920, this quality maintained the shoemaker's scale at Weymouth at .75 pr while its rival, Brockton, making an inferior product had a .57 scale in comparison.

The cheaper labor costs forced an eventual shift of the shoe crown from Weymouth to Brockton until by 1930, only 3 of the huge manufacturers remained. The foreign import competition, and the increased costs of shipping the leather from the tanning plants of the mid-west, have contributed steadily to the decline of the shoe manufacturing here until now we have but one last vestige of the more than 75 factories once operating in Weymouth.

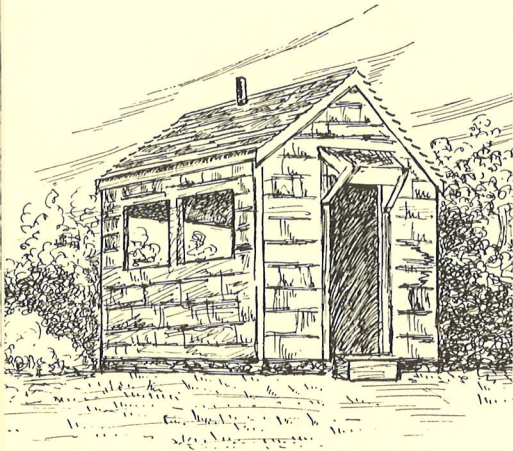
"The old Cobbler"



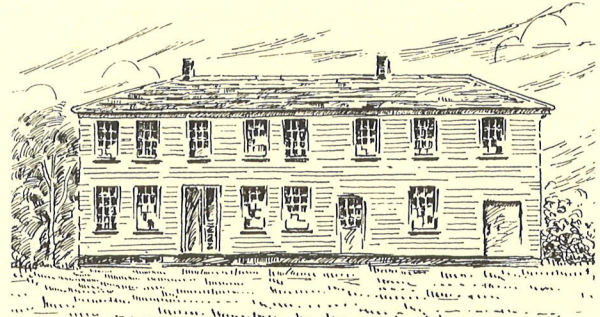
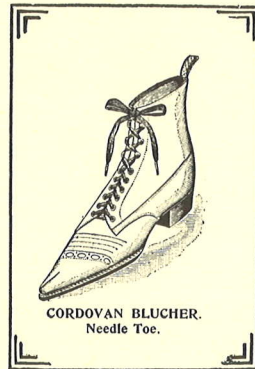
Photo Courtesy of Weymouth Historical Society

Part I — "The Shops"

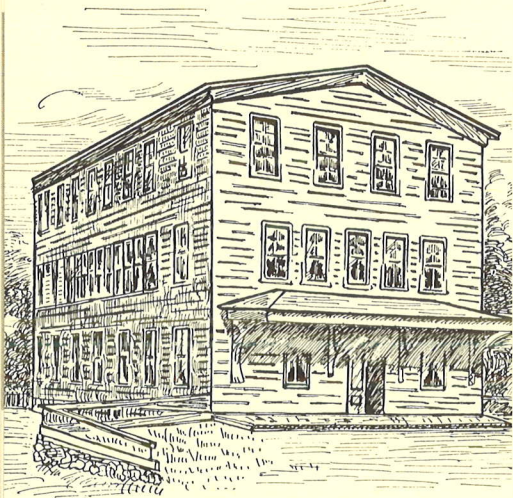
Weymouth's largest industry depicted here — showing its humble beginnings, rising to its achievement as a world leader in shoe production . . . and the steady decline thereafter.



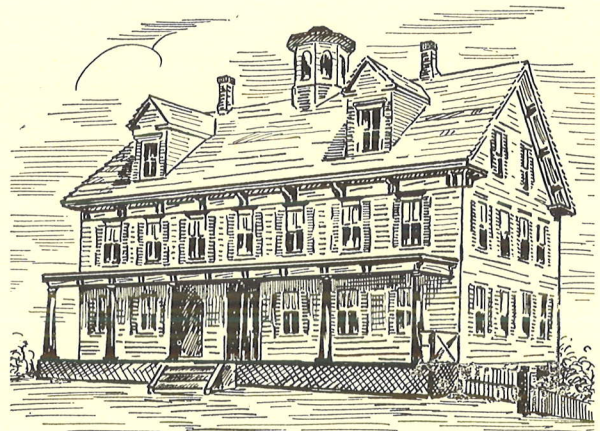
Typical old "10 footer"
where bootmaking first began



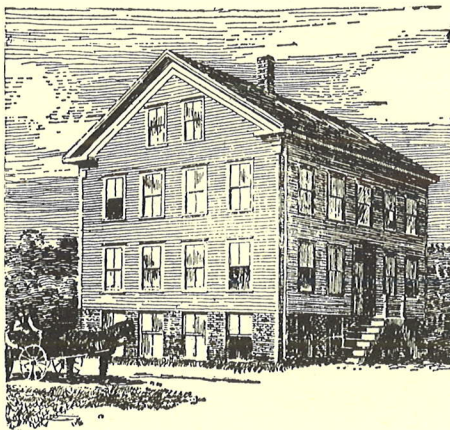
Oldest Shop
built about 1808 by James Tirrell, Sr.
near Reed Cemetery, Front Street



Stetson's First Shop
Main Street ca 1880



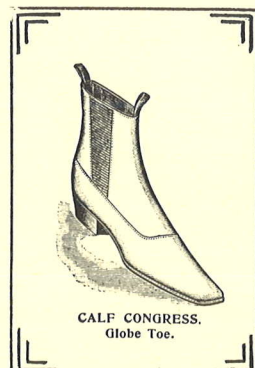
S.W. & E. Nash Shop
built about 1857 corner of
Summer & Federal Streets



First Clapp Factory
corner of Middle & Essex Streets
built 1853



Sheehy's Shop
Broad Street, East Weymouth



Part II — "The Factories"

NOTICE TO WORKMEN

On and after this date the following rules will be strictly enforced in this factory.

A reduction will be made for inferior work, and for mistakes.

When goods are damaged the party who lets them pass without showing the same will be charged for them.

Smoking not allowed.

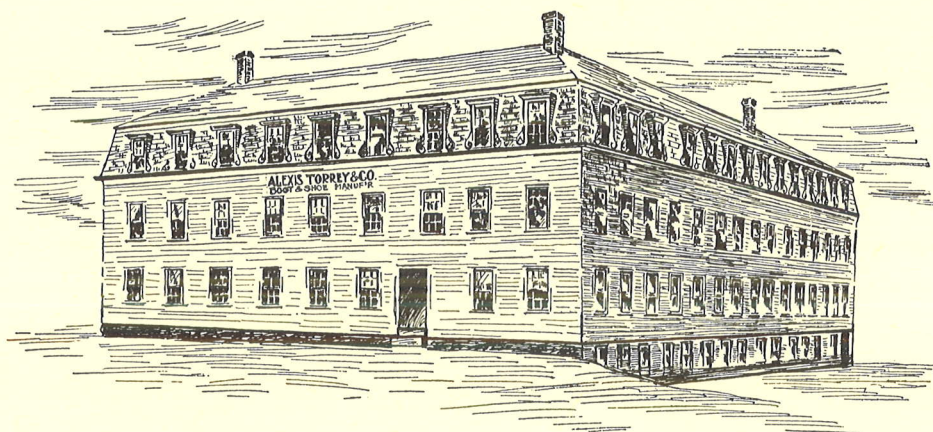
C. & P. H. Tirrell & Co.

South Weymouth, June 1, 1886.



(Courtesy of Mr. James T. Nettles)

*C. & P. H. Tirrell's Factory
built 1854 corner Pleasant & Central Streets
(remodeled in 1907 for a private residence)*



*Alexis Torrey Factory
Bridge Street, North Weymouth*

SOUTH WEYMOUTH
SHOE STORE,
47 PLEASANT STREET.

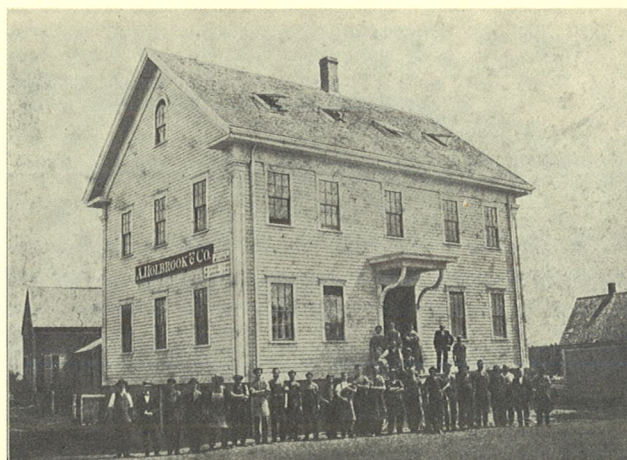
ESTABLISHED
1869.

Headquarters for
Men's, Women's
and Children's

BOOTS, SHOES & RUBBERS.
FINE GOODS A SPECIALTY.
OUR MOTTO:
**GOOD GOODS,
LOW PRICES, and
FAIR DEALING.**

REPAIRING
NEATLY
AND
PROMPTLY
DONE.

D. S. MURRAY, PROPRIETOR.



*Holbrook & Burrell's Factory
Washington Street
Lovell's Corner
(taken about 1875)*

Part III — "The Giants"



Photo Courtesy
Weymouth Historical Society

M.C. Dizers Factory — built 1861 corner of Madison, Filomena & Broad Streets, it was sold about 1910 to Alden, Walker & Wilde who were then situated at North Weymouth. It was torn down in 1929.

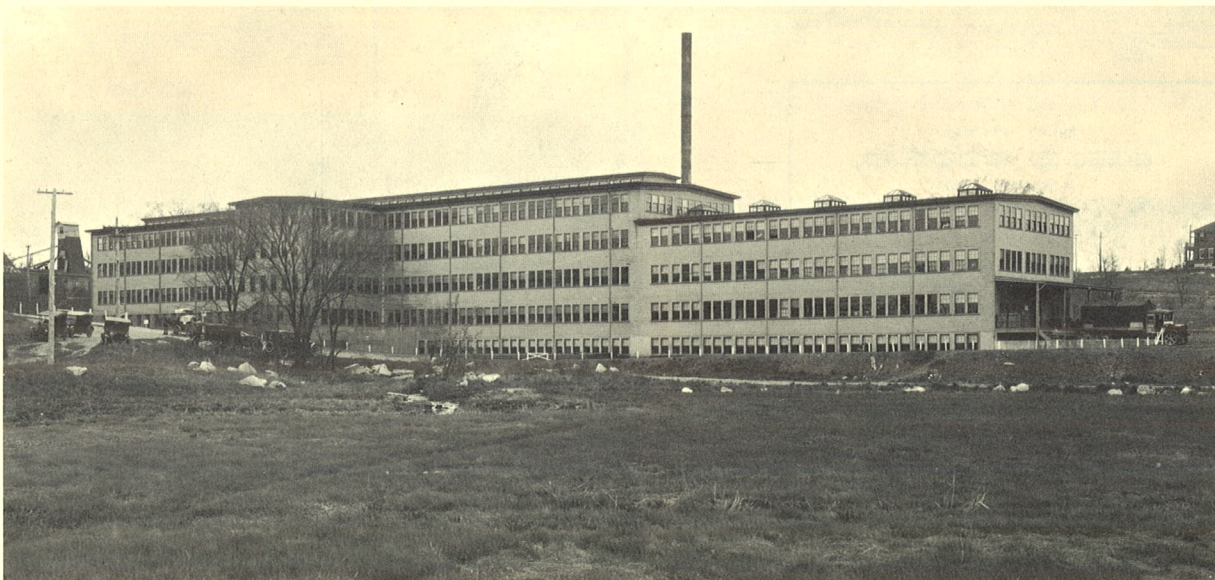
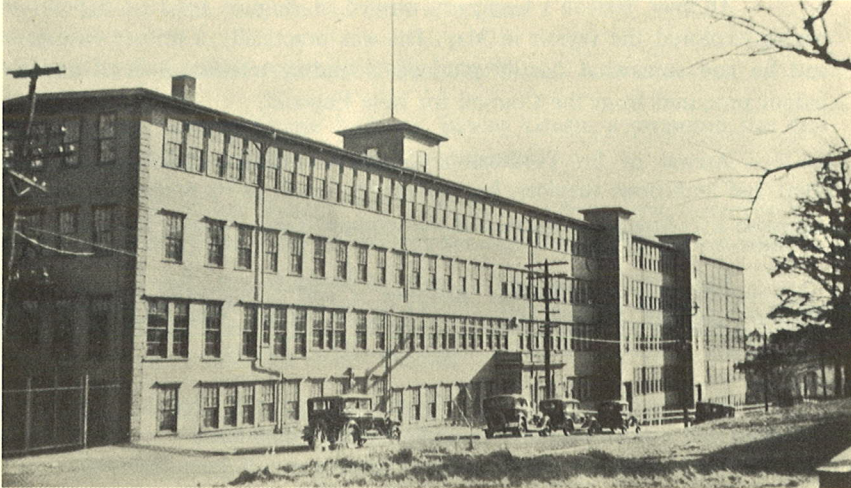


Photo Courtesy
of Mass. Electric Co.

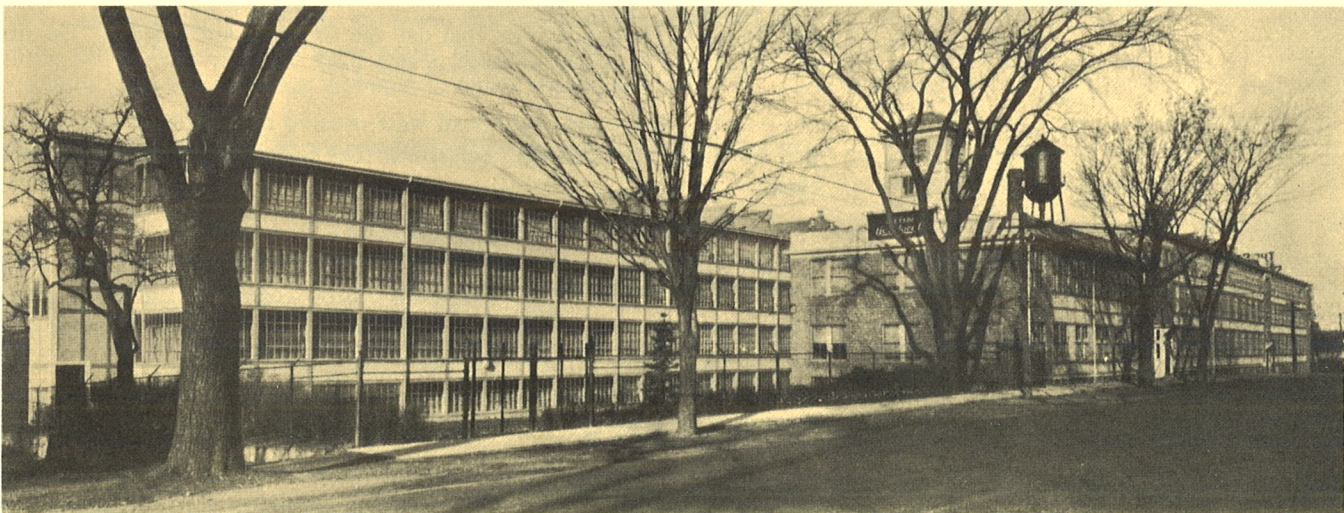
Factory #8 on Wharf Street, East Weymouth was but one segment of the George E. Keith Company of Brockton, manufacturers of world-renowned "Walk-Over Shoes" . . . Built 1907-8, it gave the lagging industry a much needed boost and many jobs resulted from its establishment.



Edwin Clapp & Sons built in 1882 on Charles Street, East Weymouth, was next to the last operating factory in our town until the 1960's.

The Last of the Giants — Sole Survivor of over 100 factories & shops

Photos Courtesy Weymouth Historical Society



*The Stetson Shoe Company Main Street
(picture taken about 1930 and is essentially same today)*