

## History Of The "Factory" or Woolen Mill present home of the M. V. Garden Club

As written by Mrs. Eleanor Mayhew

Our Garden Club Centre is one hundred and thirty four years old; perhaps not antique as Vineyard buildings go, but certainly heavy with tradition. It is the only remaining mill of many on the Island, and the site it commands, near the head of the "Path that leads to Edgartown called the Mill Path", has been of importance since before the first purchase of Takemmy from the Sachems in 1668. Although positive documentary evidence is lacking, it can reasonably be assumed that a grist mill was erected here by order of Thomas Mayhew, Sr. soon after the settlement of Great Harbour, utilizing the nearest available water power; otherwise the proprietors must have hired Indian women to pound corn for them. It is known that Mayhew sent off Island to John Winthrop of Connecticut for a millwright in 1651, stating "we have greate want of a mill", and without doubt some sort of rude affair was built following this appeal on the stream early designated in Tisbury town records as the Old Mill Brook.

The mill site, according to Banks, was part of the home lot of Josiah Standish, son of the redoubtable Myles, and one of the original grantees. In 1688, it passed into the possession of Edward Cottle, whose grandson, Sylvanus sold Samuel Cobb his dwelling house, barn, and "my Mill with every utensil, etc., in 1760. This is the first mention of a mill at this location in any of the records of property transfers.

The mill changed hands several times during the troubled years of the latter half of the eighteenth century, and was purchased finally in 1809 by David Look who already owned the mill built in 1668-9 on the New Mill River (Tiasquin.) Look, a man with his eye on the main chance, decided to branch out, since there were by now several other grist mills in town besides his own. So he installed carding machinery in the former Cottle Mill to comb the fleece from the local herds of sheep, and later, looms to weave the wool into cloth. David died in 1837, leaving his widow to run both grist and woolen mills, a charge she evidently found arduous, for she disposed of the latter to Captain Thomas Bradley in 1845.

Chances are the purchase price of \$1800 was for the mill privilege and equipment as the building itself was referred to as the "dilapidated Look mill" in an article in the Gazette of July 9, 1846, which described in glowing terms the new edifice erected by Bradley on the old site, and enumerated its advantages to the townsfolk. "It will", the writer asserted, "permit our people to take a portion of their wool to the mill and have it converted into satinets of a stronger texture than they have usually worn, and at a less price than they have usually paid." Bradley himself, emphasized the worth of his manufactures in an advertisement in the Gazette that first appeared Feb. 16, 1849. "Those who have taken my goods for a long sea voyage have made the discovery that one half the number of garments made from my cloths will answer the purpose of a voyage, keep them better clothed, and keep them longer from the slop chest. I do not expect store keepers to recommend them very highly as they cannot make so much profit on them, nor sell their customers so often on account of their wearing such a length of time".

Bradley ran the mill until 1859 when it was sold to Henry Cleveland. The last advertisement for its products appeared in 1873, and ran in part: Vineyard Satinet. The subscriber is now having manufactured at the factory in West Tisbury 1000 yards of the real old-fashioned Vineyard Satinet. These goods will be far superior to any other goods of their class, as they are made of the best Vineyard wool after the old fashioned pound to the yard rule... There are three colors- black, light and dark brown. Retail price \$1.25 per yard, William J. Rotch, West Tisbury".

In 1874, Thomas G. Campbell purchased the mill from his father-in-law, and thereafter, it produced little or no revenue. For several years, the villagers brought in their clip in the fall to be made into rolls or carded, but that was a matter of a few days at most. Then, in 1897, the old English machinery and looms were sold by Mrs. Campbell for junk. The iron millwheel, which measured some 6 feet in diameter was foisted off as a joke by Thomas's young son on the local blacksmith, who bought it for scrap and then had to use dynamite to break it up. And the roof to the small shed that leaned against the west and where the extension to the assembly hall now stands, fell in from the weight of too many years. Occasionally the bereft old building was pressed into service for auctions, and later as a tea room and art gallery, until 1937 when the Garden Club voted unanimously to rent the building with an option to buy, and to restore it for use as a Centre. The mill became the property of the Club in 1942.