



*"Knowing our past, guides our future."*

## **HISTORY OF THE SLOCOMB SITE**

by Brian Chiffer

*Dr. Chiffer, a life-time Glastonbury resident, has written a series of articles about the manufacturing enterprises conducted along the banks of Glastonbury's Roaring Brook. This article is about what happened at one site on Roaring Brook, a site recently purchased by the Town of Glastonbury.*

Just upstream from where Matson Hill Road crosses Roaring Brook is the former J. T. Slocomb Company plant — a site with a long commercial history.

### **Early History**

According to the records, the first business at this location dates back to 1769, when John Hodge was granted a permit to build a grist mill here. About 60 years later, the prominent New England families of Amos Dean of Glastonbury and Sprowell Dean of Great Barrington, Massachusetts purchased the property with water privileges and erected a mill and dam to manufacture woolen goods.

It was from the Deans that the mill and the surrounding area got its name. It is said that one night while the woolen mill was being constructed one of the Deans came home and his wife asked him what he was going to name his mill. "I don't know," replied Dean, "but we'll hope well on the mill, whatever we call it." From that reply, two words were put together and the area has been known as "Hopewell" ever since.

The Deans made a good living manufacturing all wool satinets until 1848 when they sold their interest in the business to Martin and Horatio Hollister who operated a fulling and carding mill further downstream near the site of the present Tryon Street bridge. The Hollisters continued the manufacturing here, calling it Naog Manufacturing, and improved the quality of the wool fabric that was being made.

### **The Glazier Era**

On November 7, 1860, company president, Martin Hollister, and its business manager, Franklin Glazier, acquired control of the company and began doing business here as Hollister & Glazier making woolen uniforms for the Union Army. On February 26, 1870, Glazier purchased his partner's interest, and after some time, he began running the company with his son, Franklin D. Glazier, as Franklin Glazier and Son.

When the son assumed direction of the mill, it thrived. Many additions were made to the building, and the product line was expanded to include sackcloth, flannel, melton, broadcloth, serge, raglan, auto kersey, pedestrian cloths, golf and bicycle wear, smoking jackets, and rainy-day cloths for men.

The younger Glazier was evidently ahead of his time in areas such as plant safety. He built a state-of-the-art automatic fire sprinkler system. He also had a high regard for his worker's morale, building them a reading, music, and game room and company-subsidized housing, located on a bluff overlooking the mill in an area called Hopewell Heights.

Evidence of some of the younger Glazier's innovation can still be seen today. Upstream from Hopewell Pond, the pond created by the mill dam, is a tributary of Roaring Brook, called Slab Gut Brook. Old piping still lies along this tributary. A walk several hundred yards up this brook from where it empties into Roaring Brook reveals a second dam made of cut stone. Water from this dam was used to supply fire hydrants, part of the elaborate fire prevention system built by Franklin D. Glazier. It is said that later on this dam also supplied water to some area homes.

### **Recent History**

The Glazier family operated the mill until the 1930s, when the depression and cheap labor in the South forced them out of business. The last people to operate a woolen mill here were Ben Landry of New York City and Norman Landry of Glastonbury, who used the name Matson Mill. In the mid-1950s environmental issues surrounding their use of dyes forced the company to move to Vermont, and the J. T. Slocomb Company purchased the site.

Using the name of a respected manufacturer of micrometers, this company, as a minority owned firm, went into business producing jet engine parts and other items for both military and commercial aircraft. By 2006, J. T. Slocomb Company had gone out of business and the property was sold at auction to Killarney Farms, LLC. In early 2008, the 21-acre site was purchased by the Town of Glastonbury.

### **Challenge for the Future**

Although over the years there have been many alterations to the building, physical evidence of its long history still exists. In the basement, axe hewn supporting beams indicate a part of the building that may have been first constructed in the 1700s. Nearby, is the old Rodney Hunt water turbine wheels, installed by Glazier, to power the mill.

Overall, the main mill built in 1836 still stands, surrounded by multiple additions. Outside, although mostly replaced by cement, remnants of the old stone dam still exist. The penstock that carried water from the dam to the turbines is gone, but another system that carried water through the building, past the old dye pits and back underground into Roaring Brook is still there.

As the new owner of this historic property, the Town of Glastonbury is now in the process of deciding how it will be used. Not only is this a site of great natural beauty, it also retains several historic structures, some or all of which could be used to tell about making fabrics--a once important Glastonbury industry which no longer exists here.