Smith and Winchester, Part 3

By Jamie Eves • February 28, 2020

Connecticut as a Maker State: The Smith and Winchester Company of South Windham, Part III

This blog concludes our examination of *A Century of Pioneering in the Paper Industry*. Published in 1928, the book is a short, illustrated history of the Smith and Winchester Manufacturing Company of South Windham, CT, published by the company itself. The book was a gift to the Museum from Pat Abbe, whose family had once been involved with the Company. Unfortunately, Smith and Winchester, founded in 1828, closed later in the 20th century. Yet for a hundred years it was a pioneer in manufacturing paper, a history worth remembering. Typically, the story of Smith and Winchester began with the invention of new technology in Europe, the transplantation of that technology to Connecticut, the application of Yankee ingenuity and Connecticut waterpower, and proximity to New York and Boston markets. Here are some more excerpts from the book. We pick up in 1876, as a new generation prepares to take over control of the Company, new products were being created, and electricity was being installed.

"A catalog published in 1876 states … that 'Smith, Winchester & Company, Manufacturers of paper Machinery of Every Description, oldest and most extensive establishment of the kind on this continent,' had developed 'Many NEW AND VALUABLE IMPROVEMENTS, making the most complete and extensive variety of machinery produced by any manufactory in our line of business.'"

"Charles Smith's son, Guilford, was now fast becoming a force in the concern. Many years before, as a young man of nineteen, he had entered the employ of Smith, Winchester & Company as a clerk. Gradually working his way up, he was winning, in his own right, the ability and judgment which would fit him for future leadership."

“Arthur S. Winchester, son of Harvey Winchester, had also become associated with the concern and had risen to a position of great responsibility in connection with the financial side of the firm’s interests.”

“Nor was progress at Smith, Winchester & Company entirely a matter of personnel. Electricity had come to take the place of flickering lamps, turbines supplanted older types of water wheels. Things moved faster and faster through the world in general and (it seemed) at South Windham in particular.”

“Excellence in one line of work suggests ability in another. When laundry machines came into prominence, Smith, Winchester & Company were called upon to produce the necessary machinery for their work. The result was the Annihilator mangle (the annihilation referring to difficulties, not to clothes). This mangle, first produced in 1891, was an efficient single-cylinder machine for the ironing of flat work.”

“Subsequently this Company produced the Royal Calendar, an improved two-cylinder dryer which, with improvements in design, is now functioning efficiently in laundries throughout the country….”

“On April 6, 1896, the death of Charles Smith, long the guiding genius of the Company, necessitated a readjustment of the concern’s affairs. … The organization, which had been known since 1893 as the Smith & Winchester Company, went forward….”

“In 1899, Smith & Winchester Company absorbed an organization of high standards, devoted to the manufacture of paper cutters and paper-bag-making machinery.”

“In this purchase of the bag-making machine business of the Frank A. Jones Company of New York, Smith & Winchester Company gained control of important patents covering the inventions of the Jones Company’s former owner, Mr. Charles Cranston….”

“In 1905 the Company was incorporated as The Smith & Winchester Manufacturing Company, as at this time Guilford Smith bought out the interest of his partner and assumed control of the Company’s affairs.”

This concludes our examination of the history of Smith & Winchester, a company that flourished in an era when Connecticut was a maker state. There is, however, more in the book, which the Mill Museum will place in its library for access by the general public.