

In many ways, Millbury's development was shaped by its proximity to several New England cross-roads. It was near Millbury that Native Americans called the Blackstone the "Halfway River," marking it on their travel from the Connecticut River to the sea. In the colonial era the English established an east-west route "the Bay Road" while a north-south route connected that road to Millbury. By 1828, the Blackstone Canal also traveled north-south from Worcester to Providence. In 1837 the first rail connection to Boston was made, followed ten years later by the Providence and Worcester Railroad. As a result, intersecting waves of people and ideas repeatedly transformed Millbury's historic landscape.

While change is never easy, Millbury has always found ways to innovate, renovate, and renew. It was here that Thomas Blanchard invented the eccentric lathe to turn irregular objects. Millbury was also among the first to print postage stamps, create a lyceum to present public lectures and use water power to manufacture guns. It was local mill workers who, in 1831 published *The Plebian and Workingmen's Advocate*, one of America's first labor newspapers. Local mill owners repeatedly adapted their facilities to new uses and technology over the years. Today, Millbury continues to incorporate innovation and new people, while saving what is special about its heritage. ☺

DIRECTIONS BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR

Exit from Route 146, following the signs to Millbury Center onto Main Street. Stay on Main Street to intersection at Elm Street. Turn right onto Elm. Then left onto School Street. The Waters Mansion parking lot is the first driveway on your right.



ALONG THE WAY

- ✓ The Waters mansion, now owned by the town, is also home to the Millbury Historical Society. To contact the Society for information on Millbury history, tours, historic replicas, and events, please call 508-865-0885.
- ✓ Millbury's Central Cemetery, on Waters Street in Armory Village, contains the graves of many prominent old Millbury families, including that of Asa Waters III.
- ✓ Millbury's Old Common, at Elmwood Street and Carleton Road, is the town's original center. It has many old homes, built as early as 1747, including a former general store, a tavern, and a one-room school house.
- ✓ S&D Spinning Mill on West Main Street (formerly the Wheeler Cotton Mill, depicted on the town seal) was built in 1846. It sits upon one of the oldest mill sites in continuous operation in the U.S. Since John Singletary built a grist mill there c1720, it has been used for lumber, cotton, linen, and wool production.
- ✓ To see a historic working mill museum, visit Slater Mill Historic Site in Pawtucket, RI. For hours and fees, call 401-725-8636 or visit www.slatermill.org.
- ✓ To learn more about the mill workers of the Blackstone Valley, visit the Museum of Work and Culture in Woonsocket, RI. For hours and fees, call 401-769-9675 or visit www.rihs.org.
- ✓ For information on other tours, special events and more in the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, visit River Bend Farm Visitors Center off of Route 122 in Uxbridge, MA. Free maps, trail guides, brochures, and interpretive exhibits with videos, and more. Free parking and admission. Open 7 days during daylight hours. 508-278-7604.
- ✓ Additional Information: Visitor information on lodging, restaurants, events, as well as free maps and brochures are available by contacting the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce at 508-234-9090 or visit www.blackstonerivervalley.com.

Congress established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission in 1986, recognizing the national significance of the region between Providence, RI and Worcester, MA—the Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution. The John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor is an affiliated area of the National Park Service.



This brochure was developed under the direction of The Rhode Island Historical Society in partnership with the Heritage Corridor Commission.

www.nps.gov/blac/index.htm

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MILLBURY, MA

Walking Tour



Explore a village filled with mills, crossed by roads, rivers, and rails.

John H. Chafee

BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY

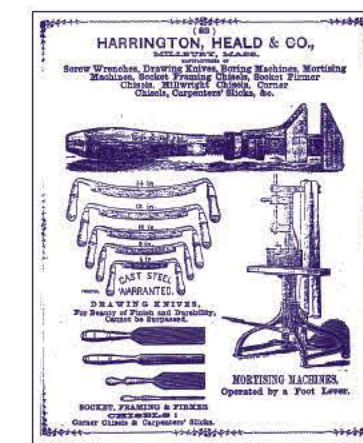
National Heritage Corridor



MILLBURY

Tucked to one side of several major thoroughfares—the Massachusetts Turnpike, Rt. 146, the railroads, and the river—Millbury seems but a modest suburb of nearby Worcester. Yet it is Millbury's geographic position—sitting so close to where things meet—that has given the town a vital role in the industrial upheaval born in the Blackstone Valley.

Millbury began as Sutton's Second or North Parish in the 1700s, the industrial district of a farming community. Throughout America, ninety percent of all Americans tilled the soil, while most manufactures were imported from Europe or hand-made by artisans. Recognizing the industrial potential of Sutton's



While both genders worked in the textile mills, only men and boys were employed in Millbury's iron-working shops, like the edge-tool business advertised here in 1881.

northern districts, investors established water-powered mills on the Blackstone and Singletary rivers, mass producing flour, lumber, paper, textiles, guns, and other metal products. Villages formed around these

mills, and after several attempts this district was incorporated as the new town of Millbury in 1813. The mills gradually stimulated commerce and inventions, while attracting immigrants from Ireland, Great Britain, and French-speaking Canada.

1 ASA WATERS MANSION

Not all mill money went into banks and businesses, as seen in this estate built in 1826-29. As some of the county's largest landowners and employers, members of the Waters family reinforced community standards of authority and respectability with visible displays of wealth. While church leaders supported republican government, many also believed in a "natural aristocracy" in which white, male land-owners should lead.

Nonetheless, the family drew the line at slavery. They may have supported

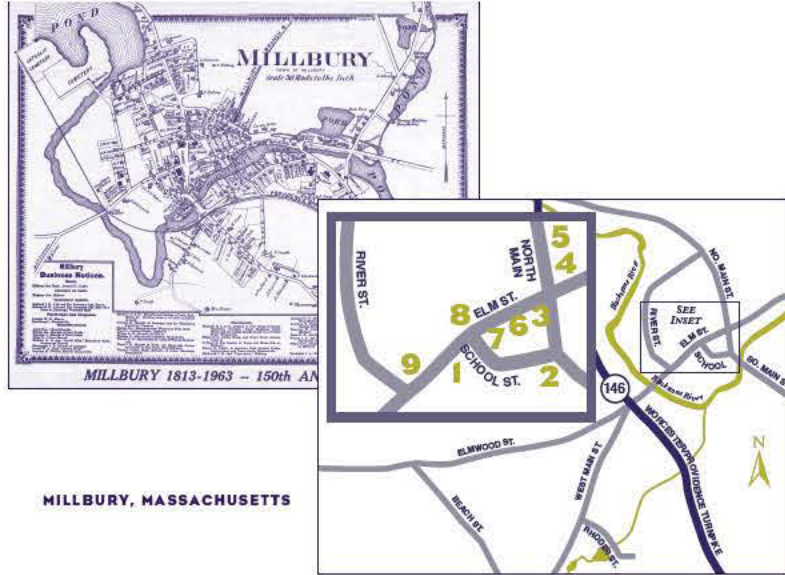
the rights of African-American people on moral grounds, or just believed in the argument that "free soil, free labor, free men" were necessary for industrial capitalism. Regardless, residents proudly keep alive the local folklore that the Waters Mansion was a station on the Underground Railroad, helping runaway slaves escape to freedom. While the truth remains buried in the past, there is no question that Asa H. Waters III—gun manufacturer, lawyer, banker and legislator—was anti-slavery and active in the Free Soil Party.



Asa Waters II spent two years gathering materials for his "honeymoon cottage," shown here in the 1880s. It was one of the last buildings in town to use the Georgian Colonial design. Materials in the house include Southern hard pine and brick, Central American mahogany and Italian marble. The woodwork was handcrafted and the house designer, Asher Benjamin, was brought in from Boston.



Waterpower provides a primary reason for Millbury's industrial history. Both Singletary Brook and the Blackstone River have a steep drop as they pass through Millbury, providing a number of suitable dam-building sites. Particularly stunning is the sharp drop over the Class 3 rapids on the Blackstone River visible from the Main Street Bridge.



MILLBURY, MASSACHUSETTS



As industry grew, a transportation system linked Millbury to the rest of the region. When the Blackstone Canal opened in 1828, two horses slowly towed barges through Millbury's landscape. The nine locks in the canal here made the trip through town slow indeed. Next steam powered railroads rushed raw materials and finished goods between Millbury and major seaports. Then by 1901, two electric powered trolleys ran through town. Here one of those trolleys is seen passing the Old Town Hall, which was later destroyed in a fire.

Commercially-oriented Cunningham block, built c.1895. Elm and South Main Streets.



2 BLACKSTONE RIVER/ARMORY SITE

Over the fence, you will see the turbulent rapids of the Blackstone River. The Asa Waters family perceived the possibilities for water powered industry along the river here as early as the 1770s. De-scended from a line of gun-makers, Asa Waters was the first to use waterpower for what had been a labor-intensive handcraft. He built gun works and a powder mill on Singletary Brook, making weapons for the revolutionary army. He also acquired 800 acres of land and passed his wealth and gun making skills on to his sons. In 1808, Asa Waters II built an armory where you now stand. With his son Asa Waters III, he made guns for the United States military and also operated flannel, cotton, sash-and-bind and nail factories. This is now the site of a VFW Hall.

3 MILLBURY CENTER

Many New England towns were created from earlier colonial era towns in response to rising populations, changing resources and new opportunities. A perfect example of this is Millbury where the migration of Sutton residents northward towards the waterpower sites of the Blackstone River led to the creation of a new town in 1813. Armory Village was established in 1808, built around the activities at the Waters Armory. Like its sister textile-based mill villages throughout the Blackstone Valley, Armory Village grew to become a population and commercial center, and later the seat of the town offices. Today, the small common provides a respite from the bustling traffic and business district that surrounds it.

4 CENTRAL DINER

Diners, sites for the original "working-man's lunch," are another product of the Blackstone Valley. Invented in Providence in 1872, horse drawn lunch carts were soon being manufactured in Worcester to serve working people after restaurants closed. With its original wood interior,

steam tables and stained-glass windows, the Central Diner is one of 651 cars made by the Worcester Lunch Cart Company between 1906-1957. It is built in the popular "railroad dining car" style known across the country.



5 MILLBURY FEDERATED CHURCH

A classic example of the New England "white church on the common," the Millbury Federated Church opened in 1828 as the First Presbyterian Church of Millbury. Asa Waters II was one of its founders. In 1834, it became the Second Congregational Church of Millbury. In 1919, the Second Congregational Church and the Methodist Church, founded in 1822, united to form the new Federated congregation.



6 MILLBURY SAVINGS

Growing businesses made banking a necessity to handle their many transactions. Mills required banks to handle their payroll and purchasing accounts.



When the Millbury Bank (later Millbury National Bank) was created in 1825, mill owners were its main stockholders and Asa Waters II was its president. The Millbury Saving Bank, established in 1854, was also run by mill owners, including Asa Waters III. Both banks moved to this site in 1881 and shared it for many years.

7 U. S. POST OFFICE

While human intersections often generate valuable exchanges, diverse and changing cultures also bring conflict. When this building was built in 1941, it held one of America's steel reinforced bomb shelters. In time, local children would practice air-raid drills in its basement. A mural in the lobby, painted by artist Joseph Lasker, shows a different conflict. Lasker was among the unemployed aided by the Works Progress Administrations in the Depression. Invited to paint a WPA mural using local history, Lasker depicted the battle that ensued when colonist met Native Americans in the vicinity of nearby Ramshorn Pond in 1675, during King Philip's War.

8 TORREY HOUSE

Town leaders also extended their influence beyond Millbury. The Torrey House, beyond the fire station, was built in 1824 for Susan H. Waters (daughter of Asa Waters II and Susan Holman), when she married Samuel D. Torrey. Their grandson, William Howard Taft of Ohio became U.S. President in



Over time, men like Bell, Taft and Waters continued to "network" at the Torrey home (shown here in an old postcard) and the Waters mansion.

9 MILLBURY PUBLIC LIBRARY

Across Elm Street from the family home, Delia Torrey, Asa Waters II granddaughter donated her cow pasture in 1903 to be used as the site for a town library. The library opened in 1915, built with \$12,500 donated by steel magnate Andrew Carnegie who had spearheaded a drive to build new libraries across America. Long before then, however, town leaders were shaping local culture. The lyceum movement—organizations presenting public lectures—began here c.1820 by Josiah Holbrook. In 1832, Asa Waters donated land for the Millbury Academy. Abby Kelley Foster, advocate for Women's rights, ran the Millbury Women's Abolition Society.

On Front Cover: Millbury town seal. Graphics and photos have been used with permission of the Millbury Historical Society, Worcester Public Library, and Massachusetts Historical Museum.