

51 Forest St.



J. Holbrook & Sons Cider Mill. Later, P. J. McCarthy & Son

Form No. 36

Town Sherborn
Address 51 Forest St.

Historic Name J. Holbrook & Sons Cider Mill. Later,
P. J. McCarthy & Son

Uses: Original Cider mill.
Present Storage.

Ownership, 1981 Bernardi Brothers contractors
" **Original** Jonathan Holbrook

Constructed Possibly 1880's or ca.1912.

Source Charles E. McCarthy

Style/Form Utilitarian

Architect

Ext. Wall Fabric Brick, clapboard

Outbuildings

Alterations

Moved No

Acreage 2.00 acres

Setting: Adj. to R.R. Tracks, opposite 1670's Morse-Barber House.
Surrounded by weeds & fields.

Recorded by Edward W. Gordon, October 1981.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

This one and one half story utilitarian structure is said to be a remnant of The Holbrook Cider Mill complex. (1853-1909). It is constructed of brick and composed of 2 segments. The smaller of the two segments has a high brick basement, clapboard covered walls and a hip roof. It projects from the SE wall of a long rectangular structure which is surmounted by a wide gable roof. Its main entrance is located on the W. wall of the smaller segment (via a flight of concrete stairs). An early 1920's photograph shows a delivery door and a narrower entrance on the larger segments southern gable. Adjacent to this structures eastern wall are railroad tracks. This is the only industrial building in Sherborn (not counting certain frame dwellings and small structures which housed light manufacturing). The present structure bears little resemblance to the Holbrook buildings shown in a late 19th century advertisement. It may date to the 1910's.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

From 1853-1909, The Holbrook Cider Mill was located on this site. At the height of its productivity in the 1890's it was know as "The World's largest cider mill". It's "Champagne Cider" was shipped to Europe and the American South and West. Most of the Holbrook buildings burned in 1909. From 1912 until WW II the current structure housed P.J. McCarthy & Son, manufacturers of cider and a popular bottled soda called "Shawmut".

The Holbrook Cider Mill's founder, Jonathan Holbrook, was born February 16, 1809. His parents were Jonathan and Betsey Leland Holbrook. He married Catherine B. Mann, daughter of local master builder Ebenezer Mann, in 1833. Holbroks were among the towns first settlers. To the east of The Holbrook Cider Mill is the 1694 John Holbrook House - the dwelling Jonathan lived in at the time of the cider mills construction.

During the mid 19th century Sherborn supported more than 20 cider mills. Orchards were located in virtually every part of town. The Holbrook's enterprise was by far the most successful. Initially Holbrook made 150 barrels of cider per day. New facilities and technology greatly increased the mills capacity. In 1856 new buildings with cellars to house grinding machinery were erected. By 1859 a branch was opened in Albany, N. Y. By 1868 the mill produced 6,000 barrels per season. The activity At the Holbrook complex was so great that Forest St. was the first street the town voted to widen "to take care of the exceeding amount of traffic at the mill." The prosperity of this family business is reflected in the well crafted Victorian homes of Holbrook's sons - Charles built 137 So. Main St. c.1870 and John's home at 44 No. Main St. was erected a decade later.

In 1869 surveyors hired by Mr. Holbrook concluded that a railroad line from Framingham to Marshfield passing through Sherborn Center and past the cider mill would be a half mile shorter and \$5,000 cheaper.

During the first 15 years of the mill's operation the nearest railroad station was in Natick. Direct access to a railroad line enabled Holbrook to ship his product directly to New York City and close the Albany branch.

During the 1880's Holbrook undertook an ambitious building campaign. In 1886 a store house measuring 365 ft. x 65 ft. was built. A late 19th century advertisement shows two long rectangular mill buildings (brick, 3 stories tall). The R.R. runs through the center of the complex. The grinding rooms of these buildings received apples at the rate of 1200 bushels in 40 minutes (late 1880's). During the peak season (Oct. 1 - mid Nov.) the mill operated 24 hours a day with some 40 men on a shift.

By the 1890's the mill's capacity reached over 40,000 barrels a year. Offices were opened abroad with approximately one third of the output going to Great Britain where it was known as Holbrook's Champagne cider. In addition large quantities were shipped to Belgium, Denmark and Sweden. The cider was shipped as far west as Nebraska and as far south as Texas. In 1909 a disastrous fire consumed most of the mill buildings - late 19th and early 20th century insurance plans and records would shed more light on the extent of the fire damages. According to Charles McCarthy the current brick building on this site was a Holbrook structure.

After the fire, Eben M. Holbrook, Jonathan's son, sold this property to M. H. Rourke of Natick. In 1912 it was purchased by P. McCarthy and Son. This family business made cider and bottled soda. They automated the enterprise and introduced a new line of soft drink called Shawmut. McCarthy's Sparkling Cider was also produced here. This business passed from father to son and was operated by Charles E. McCarthy until the advent of WW II.

This structure currently serves as a storage facility for Bernardi Brothers contracting Co.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and REFERENCES

- Maps of 1857, 1875 and 1889
- Anne C. Shaughnessy - The History Of Sherborn and A Guide to Sherborn, 1974
- Sherborn Past and Present 1674-1924 Pub. by the Sherborn Historical Society