CHAPTER 6

Rhode Island

Providence County

Providence


John Waterman, Jonathan Olney, Jonathan Ballou (also Ballau), and William Goddard formed a partnership in 1764 to build a paper mill on the outskirts of Providence, each holding an eighth share in the venture. It is not known who held the remaining half interest in the mill. An inn keeper and member of the town council, Olney was descended from one of the original proprietors of Providence. Waterman, his son-in-law, managed the mill and also installed on the premises a printing office, which issued the Catalogue of the Providence Library in 1768. Goddard was printer of the Providence Gazette and may have hoped that the mill would provide a steady supply of newsprint for his press, a matter of some concern during the Stamp Act crisis, when the colonists were proposing to boycott British imports. In any case, he sold his share to Waterman in 1766, when he left Providence to join in a printing business in New York. The Providence Gazette was continued by his mother, Sarah Goddard, who printed the 9 August 1766 issue with some of the first paper made by the mill. Jonathan Olney sold his share to his son Christopher Olney in 1767. John Waterman acquired Ballou’s interest in 1771. Chapin claimed that Waterman built a second paper mill on the Woonasquatucket on the basis of advertisements referring to the “Paper Mills” and an undated map identifying one mill as the Brown George and the other as the Rising Sun (a name I have not found in use before 1817). I have not been able to consult this map or verify the existence of a second mill in other sources. It was not uncommon for a single manufactory to be called the “Paper Mills,” for example, Mass. Mills 1 and 3 and Del. Mill 5. If there were two mills, it seems unlikely that both of them would have stopped when Waterman died, as noted below. He also owned chocolate and fulling mills, business ventures mentioned in maps and deeds in such vague terms that they are often confused with paper mills. References: Chapin 1926, 303–5; Hunter 1952, 50–54; Hunter 1950, 76; Olney 1889, 21, 34; Brown 1958, 132.

PROVIDENCE [laid] — Providence Gazette (Providence: Sarah Goddard, 1766; reprod. in Hunter 1952, fig. 8; tracing in Chapin 1926, 304).

The mill closed down for a while after Waterman died in 1777 and then resumed operations under the management of his son John Olney Waterman, who inherited his three-quarters share in the firm, and his uncle Christopher Olney, trading as Olney & Waterman. John Olney Waterman appears in local newspapers as a papermaker, clothier, and chocolate maker between 1779 and 1794. In 1781 he was a partner in the firm of Waterman & Mathewson, clothiers and papermakers, although he was no longer quite so active in that last capacity, Olney having taken over the management of the paper business. Benjamin Talbot advertised for rags for the Providence Paper Manufactory in 1788. References: Chapin 1926, 305-7; Olney 1889, 33; Brown 1958, 164, 175; Hunter 1952, 53.

Christopher Olney operated the mill in partnership with his son Christopher C. Olney as Christopher Olney & Son from around 1794 until 1797, when the son took over management of the mill. References: Brown 1958, 119; Olney 1889, 54; Sellers Moulds Finished, 4 July 1796; vellum post; Sellers Moulds Ordered, 11 July 1797: double cap, watermarked CC OLNEY.

Christopher Olney operated the mill in partnership with his brother Nathaniel G. Olney as Christopher C. Olney & Co. from around 1800 until 1809, when Christopher C. Olney died. References: Olney 1889, 55; Brown 1958, 119; Sellers Moulds Ordered, 5 Dec. 1801: double cap, watermarked CCO and anchor; Sellers Moulds Finished, 17 May 1808: demy vellum.

Christopher Olney, father and son, were both running paper mills when they died, both in the same year, 1809.
According to Chapin, the South Paper Mill, belonging to Christopher Olney & Co., came into the hands of Nathaniel G. Olney, the surviving partner of the firm. However, Brown states that the mill formerly owned by Christopher C. Olney was operated by Olney & Helme [Nathaniel G. Olney and Bernon Helme] until 1810, when Helme left the firm. Chapin says that R.I. Mill 3, the North Paper Mill formerly owned by the elder Christopher Olney, passed into the hands of Olney & Helme. In either case, Helme definitely had an interest in this mill, which he and William C. Bowen offered for sale in 1819. By that time, its prospects as a paper manufactory were not enticing, and Helme’s advertisement suggested that it should be converted into a cotton mill. An unsigned newspaper notice in 1819 announced that it had been converted into a grist mill. It is unclear whether the new proprietors resumed the papermaking business on the same premises or in a new structure. References: Chapin 1926, 308; Brown 1958, 119–20; Sellers Moulds Ordered, 28 Mar. 1809: double foolscap laid; Sellers Moulds Ordered, 26 Jan. 1810: wove super royal and wove cap; [Providence, R.I.] Rhode-Island American, 5 Feb. 1813, 1; Providence Patriot, 9 June 1819, 3.

Weeks states that Wheaton & Eddy took over the paper mills owned by Christopher Olney. In fact, Nathaniel G. Olney did grant a deed of some kind to Joseph Wheaton and Alexander Adie. Wheaton & Adie advertised in 1817 for a vatman and a layboy to work in the Rising Sun Paper Mill. References: Weeks 1916, 138–39; Providence, Recorder of Deeds, microfilm index to deeds and mortgages; Providence Patriot, 24 May 1817, 4.

In 1820 Samuel Thurber III reported to the census bureau that he was not able to obtain information about one of two paper mills in Providence, which could mean that this one had been abandoned or was in the process of being sold. Apparently the proprietors went out of business during the Panic of 1819 and defaulted on their mortgage, leaving the property in the hands of the mortgagees A. & I. Wilkinson, who attempted to sell the Rising Sun Cotton Mill and the Rising Sun Paper Mill at auction. The paper mill contained two engines and was situated on eight acres of land, which included the cotton mill, a dye house, and two dwellings. References: Census of 1820, reel 2, item 2; [Providence, R.I.] Rhode-Island American, 20 Feb. 1818, 3, 16 Mar. 1819, 3, and 10 Mar. 1820, 3.

Sometime around 1823 the Olneyville mill passed into the hands of Richard Waterman, who was running two vats at that time. He and George W. Annis obtained in 1828 a patent for manufacturing by hand thick wrappings or board called “double paper.” Providence city directories list some of the journeymen employed in the mill: Thomas Andros (1830), James Calder (1826; an apprentice in Mass. Mill 3 ca. 1775); Edward Lawrence (1832 and 1836); Charles Randall Jr. (1836 and 1854); Isaac Randall Jr. (1853–1855); Josiah Randall (1830); and William Randall (1836 and 1838). Richard Waterman appeared in Providence business directories as a manufacturer of paper and linseed oil between 1826 and 1856; he bought papermaking equipment from Phelps & Spafford in 1833. Pratt contains an entry for a paper manufacturer and dealer R. Waterman, who might be either Richard or Rufus Waterman (see below). While Waterman or the Watermans managed the front office in town, Annis oversaw production at the mill until 1857, when he quit the papermaking business and became a farmer. References: Kayser 1823, 204; Burke 1847, 85; Munsell 1876, 83; Brown 1958, 119–20; Sellers Order Book, 30 July 1834: paper cutter for Richard Waterman; AAD 1831, 122; AAD 1832, 242; Phelps & Spafford Order Book, 1833–1835; Pratt 1849, 267.


In 1780 Samuel Thurber Jr. & Sons (Samuel Thurber Jr., Martin Thurber, Edward Thurber, and Samuel
Thurber III} advertised for rags and a journeyman to work in the New Paper-Mill, no doubt given this name to distinguish it from Olney’s establishment. In 1781 Martin Thurber announced in the Gazette that he could sell at the mill and in his shop writings, printings, wrappings, and clothier’s bonnet paper. Dexter Thurber of Providence purchased moulds in 1804. The mill burned down in 1805 with a loss of $4,000, a comparatively modest amount because “the machinery was principally saved.” Samuel Thurber must have rebuilt it immediately, for he purchased moulds two months after the fire. References: Chapin 1926, 306; Hunter 1950, 74; [Boston, Mass.] Columbian Centinel, 16 Jan. 1805, 2; Sellers Moulds Finished, 28 Oct. 1796; double cap, watermarked ST & C: and anchor; Sellers Moulds Finished, 25 Feb. 1804: royal; Sellers Moulds Finished, 23 Oct. 1804: vellum post; Sellers Moulds Finished, 9 and 22 Mar. 1805: super royal, double cap, and press moulds.


Smithfield


According to Chapin, the firm Olney & Helme {Nathaniel G. Olney and Bernon Helme} took over the North Paper Mill when the senior Christopher Olney died in 1809. Chapin does not mention when the mill was founded but implies that the North and South Paper Mills are later names for the Rising Sun and Brown George mills, both in Olneyville. In any case, Nathaniel G. Olney quit the papermaking business in 1810 to tend his store in Providence, where he was active until 1813. In 1820 Helme was operating this mill in Smithfield, which offers some slender evidence that the North Paper Mill was not in Olneyville, in western Providence, but in another part of town. Of course, Helme could have built the Smithfield mill on his own initiative, in which case Chapin’s account of the two Olneyville mills might be more trustworthy. The Census of 1820 states that Helme was probably making 20 reams of writings and 12 reams of wrappings a week. References: Chapin 1926, 308; Brown 1958, 120; Census of 1820, reel 2, item 8; Pease & Niles 1819, 345–47.

Unable to pay his debts, Bernon Helme turned over to his assignee Gideon Thornton various assets, including his two-vat paper mill on the Woonasquatucket River in Smithfield, along with its tools, equipment, and several tons of rags. Thornton put these properties up for sale at auction in 1821. Whether he succeeded in selling them is not clear because Bernon Helme was said to be operating a two-vat mill on the Woonasquatucket in 1823. Perhaps that information was out of date. References: Providence Patriot, 24 Mar. 1821, 3; Kayser 1823, 201.


In 1823 Daniel Mowry III announced that he wished to employ a “first rate workman” at Mill Perseverance in Smithfield. Reference: Providence Patriot, 5 Nov. 1823, 1.

The products of the Paper Mill Perseverance Co. could be purchased in Providence through the agents Thornton & Lothrop in 1828 and Thomas S. Mowry in 1830. The firm Thomas S. Mowry & Co. dealt in printings, writings, and wrappings “of all descriptions.” References: Brown 1958, 121, 166; AAD 1831, 121.
Kent County

Coventry

5. Greenville Paper Mill. On the South Branch of the Pawtuxet River, eleven and a half miles from Providence.

A lawyer by profession, Theodore Adelphidus Foster started a publishing concern around 1802 and established a paper mill around 1807, when the bookseller Henry Cushing ordered an assortment of moulds for the Greenville company. Foster put all or part of the mill up for sale along with a three-eighths share of an adjoining cotton factory in 1811 and 1815, apparently without success. At that time the mill contained two engines “and all apparatus to carry on the same.” Elder David Curtis and Theodore’s younger brother Peregrine Pynchon Foster were running the papermaking side of the business in 1815 and were in the process of rebuilding one of the engines. In 1817 investors were invited to bid for portions of a three-eighths share in the paper mill and cotton factory. Nothing more is heard of this mill after 1818, when Peregrine Foster advertised for a journeyman, although it is possible that the journeyman was being hired for R.I. Mill 6 rather than this establishment, which could have been abandoned by that date. References: Pierce 1899, 309–10; Sellers Moulds Ordered, 29 July 1807: moulds for Henry Cushing of “Greenville C: R.I.”; Brown 1958, 66; [Providence, R.I.] Columbian Phenix, 11 May 1811, 4; [Providence, R.I.] Rhode-Island American, 3 Nov. 1815, 4; 9 May 1817, 3, and 2 Jan. 1818, 3; Pease & Niles 1819, 312, 370.

GREENVILLE | Co RJ [laid] — ms., Newport, R.I., 1809 (Gravell & Miller 2002, wmk 404); printed doc., Providence, R.I., dated 18__ in type and 1810 in ms. (AAS).

6. On the South Branch of the Pawtuxet River, just below R.I. Mill 5.

Investors who wished to bid for shares of R.I. Mill 5 in 1817 could also obtain one-sixth shares of a “new double-vat Paper Mill, now in operation.” It enjoyed all the requisite water rights, provided that the Pawtuxet could afford sufficient power to sustain the other mill upstream. The papermaking business may have been transferred to this facility before 1818, when the compilers of a gazetteer learned that there were three paper mills in Rhode Island, most likely R.I. Mills 1, 3, and 6. Reference: [Providence, R.I.] Rhode-Island American, 9 May 1817, 3.

Addendum

The Census of 1810 does not specify how many mills were operating in Kent County, but notes that paper worth $19,023 had been produced in that county in the course of a year, a rather high amount for a single mill. Reference: Coxe 1814, tables, p. 27.