

Jones & Faulkner Mills - Mill Corner South Acton

1702 1706 1710 1728 1732 1738 1750 1787 1812 1826 1840 1844 1851 1886 1906 1910 1969

On the 4th of March, 1702, Ephraim Jones, Samuel Jones and Jonathan Knight signed eight articles of agreement establishing a partnership to develop the 600 acres of the Iron Work Farm, near Concord, that they had purchased the previous September.

This was the beginning of South Acton and its long history of business and commerce, and was the earliest concerted effort to make a settlement in the present town of Acton. The business interest established by the agreement of 1702, although its ownership and character have changed over time, is still operating after 300 years. By the Articles of Agreement, Ephraim Jones owned a half interest in the venture, and Samuel Jones and Jonathan Knight a quarter interest each, the two halves being specially laid out as ownership of mills on the south and north ends of the dam. Thus began the long history of Mill Corner.

THE SAW MILL.
was first built in about 1706 by the Jones and Knight partnership, downstream from the falling mill, apparently near the corner of Parker and River streets where the forge of the "New Iron Works" was set up two years later.



THE DAM
was first built in 1702, utilizing the natural waterfall of Fort Pond Brook. It was evidently made of stone and wood, for accounts as late as 1813 mention repairing it with wood.

Acton Town Meeting Warrant, 1740: "To know whether the town will insist on Mr. Faulkner opening his dam 30 days in the year as the law directs, where sawdust and other fish pass in great plenty."

After four years of the town's insisting that the dam should be opened to allow the fish to pass through, Ammi Ruhamah Faulkner and Samuel Jones, the 1740 owners, took the problem to the Middlesex Superior Court, which found that the dam was "so formed in Nature" that opening it would cause "an unspeakable damage" which "cannot . . . ever serve the Public or any Private Interest." Evidence presented to the court also noted that no alices had been seen in the brook for over twenty years. The height of the present dam was established by Robert Lewis Davis, Civil Engineer, in 1848, and its all-stone construction dates from that time.

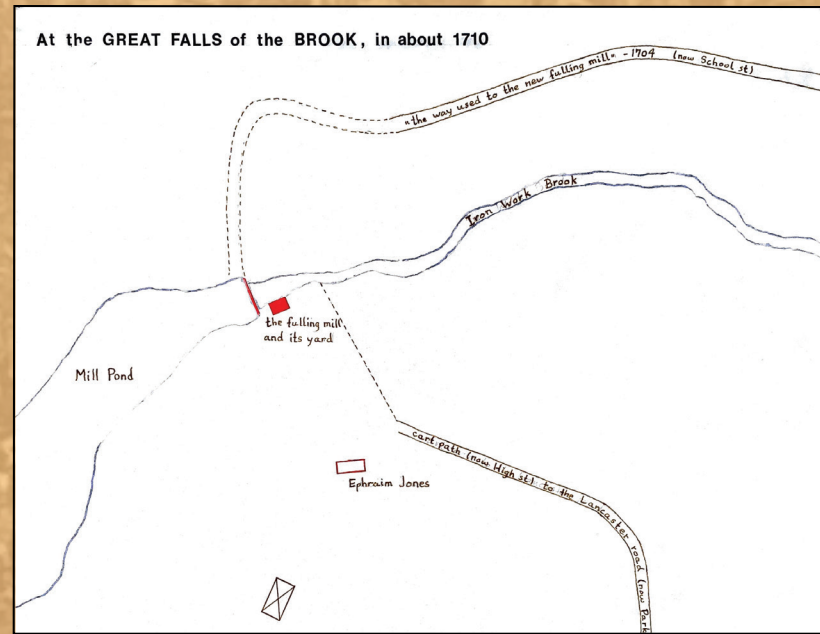
THE FULLING MILL
was built by Ephraim Jones in 1702 on the south side of the dam, and was in operation by 1704. Here the rough home-made cloth was washed and thickened up into finished material, only one of the processes of the clothier's trade. The rest of Jones' textile business was carried on in his house (the Jones-Faulkner House), where he had his wool cards, spinning wheels, looms, clothier's press and shears, and dye kettles.

After Ephraim Jones' death in 1710 the fulling mill was operated by Joseph Fletcher (who married Jones' widow) until about 1728, and then by John Shepard.

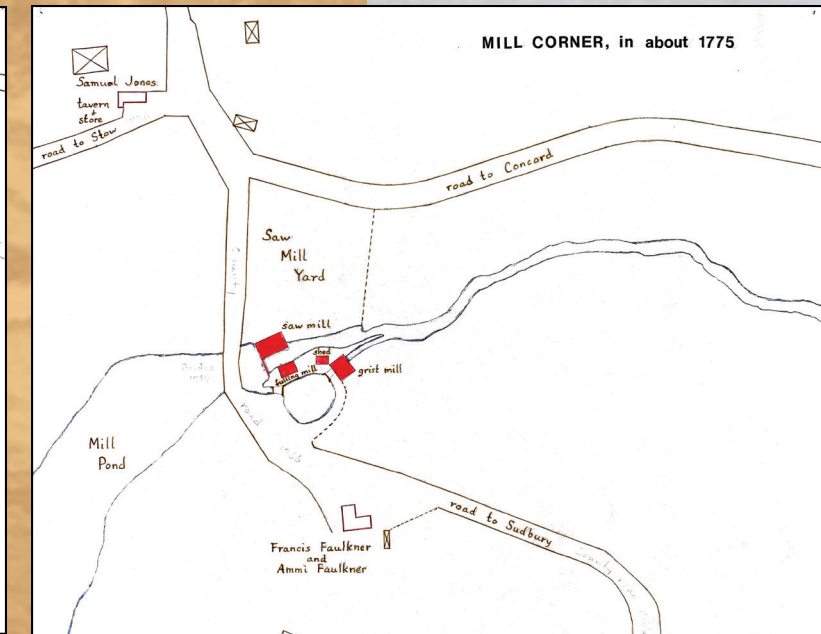
In 1722 Jonathan Knight's heir sold his interest to Ephraim Jones' heir, Ephraim Jones, Jr., who in 1742 sold to Ammi Ruhamah Faulkner. Thus Jones and Faulkner continued to jointly own the mills on the north end of the dam, while the mills on the south end came under sole Faulkner ownership.

After 1728, when the forge site was abandoned, Samuel Jones and Ephraim Jones, Jr., moved the sawmill upstream to the more central location at the north end of the falling mill dam.

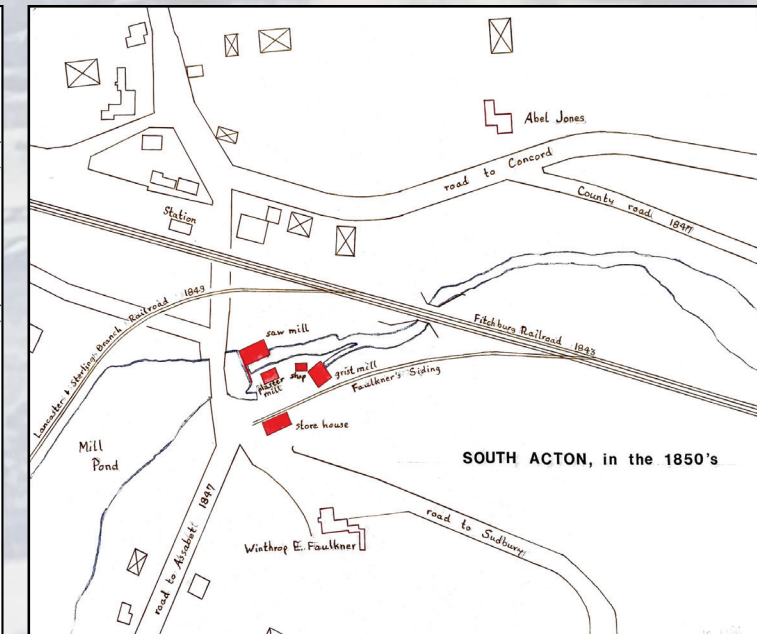
Drawn by Robert H. Nylander



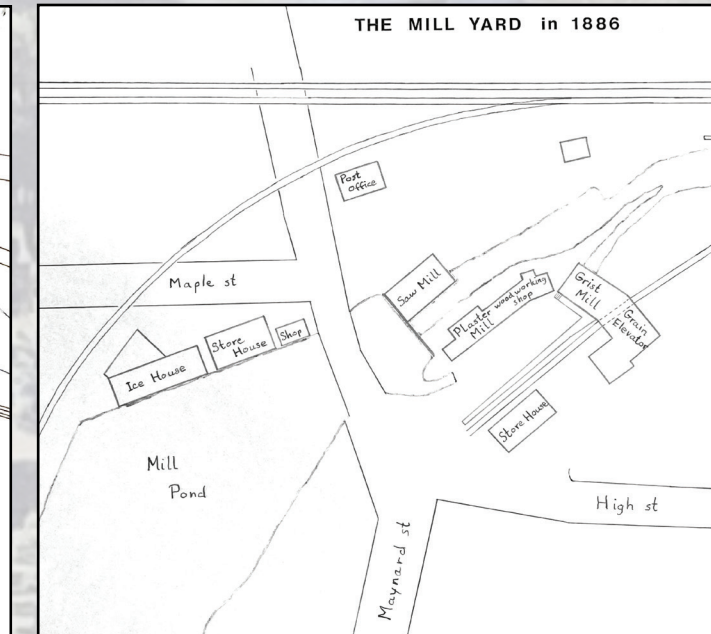
At the Great Falls of the Brook, in about 1710



Mill Corner, in about 1775



South Acton, in the 1850's



The Mill Yard in 1886

The **GRIST MILL**, sometimes called the "Corn Mill", was built about 1750 by Ammi Ruhamah Faulkner and was owned by him until 1756, then by his sons Francis and Ammi jointly, by his grandson Winthrop Faulkner, and then finally by the latter's son Winthrop E. Faulkner. By the late 18th century the mill stones for grinding flour (French buhr stones—a kind of limestone) were operated by a "tail" water wheel, a horizontal undershot wheel located under the mill building.



View of the Faulkner mill yard as they appeared in 1750

THE POTASH WORKS and BLACKSMITH SHOP
In addition to the fulling and grist mills, there was a POTASH WORKS in the Faulkner mill yard, where wood ashes were purified to prepare them for use in making soap. This is first mentioned in 1787, when Ammi Faulkner willed it to his brother Francis. The Jones accounts in 1708 show that Francis Faulkner and Aaron Jones paid John Goldsmith for repairs to the structure and "smith-work" for it, and that James Hargood settled his account by paying "5 cord of pine wood for the Potash - \$8.34".

The exact location of the POTASH WORKS in the mill yard is not known. The BLACKSMITH SHOP was apparently a small building in its own enclosure in the sawmill yard. It is mentioned in an 1856 deed as being then occupied by Aaron Hayward.

A new sawmill building was built in about 1812 by Aaron Jones and Winthrop Faulkner.

Through the 18th and early 19th centuries the sawmill and lumber yard were owned in halves by the Joneses and the Faulkners, but were managed by the Joneses.

Samuel Jones, from 1752 to 1802, Aaron Jones, from 1802 to 1828, "Mr. Jones has accomplished as much, perhaps more, active business than any other man in Acton. His firm, cooper shop, mill and lumber yard received his early and abundant attention."

Abel Jones, from 1828 to 1851, "We enter the saw mill and have a little conversation with Mr. Abel Jones, who is patiently at work upon the great pile of logs which the farmers have delivered to be transformed by his old-fashioned up-and-down saw into boards and timbers of various sizes."

The heirs of Winthrop Faulkner leased the business out until his son Winthrop E. Faulkner came of age in 1826 and assumed control.

The business on the south side of the dam as carried on in the late 1700s and early 1800s is described in the biography of Col. Francis Faulkner as a fulling mill, where "there was first a carding machine which changed, as by magic, the wool into beautiful rolls. These were distributed to many houses to be spun and woven into rough woolen cloth and returned to the mill. Here the cloth was filled under stampers with soapy water which made it foam and helped cleanse and thicken it up. The process of raising the nap with teasels was exceedingly interesting. The teasle was a product of nature. It seemed expressly and wonderfully created for that very process. Then came the shearing of all the inequalities by the swift-revolving shears and the final finishing-up into cloth. When the wool was of fine quality and evenly spun, the result was a passable broadcloth of great durability."

FULLING MILL - PLASTER MILL
With the coming of the Industrial Revolution and the great textile mills of Lowell and elsewhere, (in which the Faulkners, as clothiers, played a significant part), the fulling mill was discontinued in the 1840s.

The mill building was converted to a **PLASTER MILL**, where blocks of gypsum were ground into a powder which was used by farmers on their ploughed soil and was beneficial to growing crops.

In the 1920s the building was taken apart and was rebuilt as the house now at 274 School Street.

GRIST MILL
Winthrop E. Faulkner enlarged the grist mill building to a three-story structure, with a cupola, probably in the 1840s. About 1870-80 he increased its efficiency by installing a "Blake's Patent Improved Water Wheel", manufactured by Blake Brothers, East Pepperell, Mass. This was an iron turbine, in principle an advancement over the old "tub" wheel.

As business flourished under Winthrop E.'s son-in-law Charles Harrington's management, a tall grain elevator was added to the building, over the railroad siding.

Winthrop E. Faulkner was the prime mover in having the Fitchburg Railroad located through Mill Corner in 1843-44, doubtless realizing that his mills and business would benefit greatly thereby. He even had a plan made of the proposed railroad location and the roads leading to the mills, with the distances noted from several surrounding towns and suggestions for more direct roads from them to the railroad. Together with the owners of the mills, built downstream from him in the 1840s, he increased the force of the brook in 1845 by widening and deepening its channel, especially at its source at Fort Pond.

In 1848 he had the dam heightened to give better water power. He bought out the Jones interest in the business in 1851. "Col. W. E. Faulkner is extensively engaged in carrying on grist, plane, saw and plaster mills..."

He later formed a series of partnerships to operate the mills: with John D. Moulton, from 1859 to 1860, and with George W. Gates, from 1860 to 1866. In 1866 he took his son Winthrop Harrison ("Harry") Faulkner into partnership with him, and the firm became known as W. E. Faulkner & Son. Col. Winthrop retired from business in 1875. In 1877 Harry left the company, and the principal mill manager became Winthrop E.'s son-in-law, Charles Harrington. Charles and Mary Jane Faulkner Harrington lived adjacent to the mills, across High Street from the Faulkner House.

As noted in Rev. James Fletcher's 1890 Acton in History, Charles Harrington "rebuilt and enlarged the Faulkner Mills, [and] put in an ice house, store house, barn and an elevator for the flour and grain business... At the grain and flour-mills, now in charge of F. J. Hastings & Hazelton, a very heavy business is now carried on. No place in this region has a more complete stock of feed, fertilizing garden seeds, farming tools; flour comes in and goes out by the car-load. It is the heaviest grain business between Waltham and Pittsburg; estimated annual amount, \$150,000."

Winthrop E. Faulkner died in 1886. The Faulkner and Harrington heirs sold the mill property in 1908, and it has changed hands several times since. Among the owners have been the Cushing Holding Co. of Fitchburg and Delaware, 1908 to 1922, and General Mills, 1927 to 1942. Occupants of the buildings have included George H. Reed, beginning in 1909, and Acton Supply, up to the 1920s.

The grain business was taken over by Henry Erikson in 1949. In 1943 he purchased the property, which is still owned by the Erikson family and operated as The Erikson Grain Mill.

SAW MILL
Abel Jones sold his interest in the sawmill to Winthrop E. Faulkner in 1851, and the building was evidently enlarged or rebuilt at about that time.

In the late 1800s it was operated by Aaron Marshall Jones, and in the early 1900s by Charles M. Kimball. From the 1920s, the second story space was rented out to various other manufacturers, one of whom was Aaron Hayward, who had a "toy machine shop" and a small pencil factory. Warren Miles also made pencils there for a time. A newspaper article of about 1875, said "Here Miles makes his pencils which make their own mark in the world."



VIEW OF THE SAWMILL
in the background is the building in the sawmill yard that served as the South Acton Post Office in the 1880s. -from a photograph taken in 1906, just before the Main Street bridge over the railroad was built.



Views of the Faulkner mill buildings in 1969.



View of the Mills in 1886

From Lucien Burleigh's 1886 birdseye view of South Acton, this image looks north over the Faulkner House to the mill yard, the brook and railroad, and the intersection of Main and School Streets.



VIEW OF "THE OLD FAULKNER MILLS"
Showing the Grist Mill in the center; to the left is the Fulling Mill - Plaster Mill building and to the right part of the Grain Elevator and railroad siding. -from a photograph taken about 1910.

The old grist mill building and the grain elevator building (except for its back first story) were destroyed by fire in 1976.

Jones-Faulkner House, built 1707; Ca. 1880s photo.

