“Oliver Ward – the Pioneer of North Brookfield’s Shoe Industry”
... a story that’s never been told.

A special North Brookfield Historical Society and 200th Anniversary Special Presentation by
James Buzzell
and Linda Grace

Saturday, October 27, 2012
North Brookfield Elementary School
10:00 a.m. – Explore Virtual Museum in Hallway
11:00 a.m. – Presentation in Auditorium

The North Brookfield Savings Bank
is the sponsor of North Brookfield’s 200th Anniversary.

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North Brookfield in the latter half of the 1800’s was a successful shoe and boot manufacturing town, with the origin of local dominance of this industry attributed to one man, Oliver Ward. A full appreciation of the importance of Ward to the financial success and population boom of North Brookfield during the 19th century can only be gained through an understanding of conditions in the town both previous to his arrival as well as after his factory was established.

**North Brookfield Previous to 1809**

At the close of the 18th century North Brookfield (then known as the North Precinct of Brookfield) was an agricultural community, producing crops of grain and hay, with livestock and dairy products for domestic use and trade. Several saw and grist mills processed lumber and meal, and a fulling mill at Sucker Brook dressed and finished woolen cloth for domestic manufacture. Shoes were often homemade. Imagine, if you will, a country boy standing on paper on the bare floor having the shape of his foot traced with charcoal or chalk. Sometimes only length was obtained and shoes were constructed with the closest last (form on which a shoe was constructed) in the family’s meager collection that met the measurement.

Rev. Dr. Thomas Snell, who became a pastor in North Brookfield in 1798 and continued as such until his death in 1862, described the townspeople in the early years of his ministry as follows:

“The inhabitants were all husbandmen (farmers) . . . even the few mechanics, who wrought at their trades merely to supply town customers, were farmers upon a larger or smaller scale. There was not more than a single mechanic whose ware was purchased abroad; while we were wholly dependent upon other places for most kinds of mechanical business no less than for merchandise . . . . The population of the precinct was about 1,100 . . . .”

The socioeconomic status of North Brookfield prior to Oliver Ward’s arrival was also described by Dr. Snell.

“Previous to the shoe business, the people of this town with a very few exceptions, were farmers and were making next to no progress in anything profitable or calculated to elevate their character and promote the cause of morality or civilization. They had no productive employment and did but little else through the winter months, but to get their fuel, (sit by the kitchen
fire), drink their cider, and tend their cattle. There were many poor families—poor houses—and poorly furnished. The mechanics were few, and did business upon a very narrow scale. With one or two exceptions, all their customers were their neighbors.”

At that time, the mills at Waite’s Corner and the forge and mills on the Five-Mile River were the main industrial centers in North Brookfield. The itinerant cobbler appeared in virtually all New England towns going from house to house with a kit of tools and lasts rolled in a leather apron over his back or in a wheelbarrow with his cobbler’s bench. The cobbler had either served an apprenticeship to a master shoemaker, had learned from another local cobbler, or was self-taught and felt he could make more at his trade than farming. The cobblers in North Brookfield during that time period were Ezra Richmond, Malachi Tower, Thomas Tucker and Abiel Dean. They had benches in their kitchens, but did much of their work in farmers’ houses, where they brought their kits and often stayed a week or so, mending and making the family’s supply of shoes.

Shoe leather could be obtained in North Brookfield from several area tanneries, including that of Salmon Dean, who tanned his hides in an area known as Spunky Hollow, located south of the geographic center of town. Every community had its bark house and tanning pits for curing hides. Once a year the pit was opened and the bark and leather taken out by the owner/currier who took the hair off the skin, dressed the leather by pounding it, scraping it, and kneading it with oil. Years later, in the 1830’s and onward, the rapid growth of the shoe industry in North Brookfield demanded a more regular supply and higher standard of leather, requiring importation from larger markets. But in the preindustrial phase of shoemaking, the quality of shoes produced was dependent upon the quality of hides tanned in local tanneries, prompting historian Blanche Hazard to question whether a newly arrived shoemaker from a community known for its tannery led to the superior development of the local shoe industry, or whether it was the superior tannery in the community that drew the shoemaker.

In summary, before 1810, the community in the North Precinct of Brookfield was dependent upon its agriculture, although some weaving was being done for other than home consumption. The local cobblers were attending only to the demands of definite customers. During that era most business conducted by the townspeople was done within North Brookfield’s borders, with very little export relations.
A Young Oliver Ward in Grafton

Oliver Ward was born on December 3, 1783, the youngest child of Nathaniel and Hannah (Batcheller) Ward of Grafton. Hannah was a second cousin of Ezra Batcheller, Sr., father to Tyler & Ezra (see next page where this relationship is further explained).

Hannah’s father later settled in Grafton on Keith Hill, in close proximity to the Batcheller family in nearby East Sutton, led by Abraham Batcheller, Ezra Sr.’s father.

In 1793, when Oliver was nine years old, both his parents died within nine days of each other. Though their cause of death is unknown, it is possible they died as a result of a contagion, as epidemics of small pox, influenza, and malaria broke out in the northeastern U.S. in 1792 and 1793. A double gravestone marks Oliver’s parents’ final resting place in Grafton’s Old Oak Street Burying Ground.

On April 24, 1793, Hannah’s brother, Mark Batcheller (a wheelwright of Sutton) was nominated guardian of the Ward’s four minor children: Sally, Asa, Anna and Oliver. Sutton, the town Oliver Ward would spend the remainder of the decade, offered fertile soil for farms and orchards, powerful waterways and plentiful lumber for its mills in the
Manchaug area. The research suggests that it is here the lifelong close association between Oliver and his cousins, Tyler and Ezra, began.

In the early years of his childhood Oliver Ward's hometown of Grafton (previously a territory of Sutton) had closely resembled North Brookfield in both population size and its predominance of farming. During the period of Ward's adolescence and young adulthood however, particular attention to animal husbandry in Grafton led to the development of a leather tanning and currier trade, and subsequently to the manufacture of boots and shoes. These small shoe factories qualified Grafton as the first town in Worcester County to manufacture shoes for export to the general public. Though the factories of this time each employed just a few men, a large percentage of area townspeople assisted in the process of making shoes through outwork, and it was after moving back to Grafton that Ward would have probably first been exposed to this process. As a young adult he also learned the trade of tanning from Grafton's Clark Brown.

During 1804 and 1805, Oliver served as a second corporal among the ranks of Captain Joseph Merriam's Company, 2nd Regiment, 2nd Brigade, 7th Division of the Massachusetts Militia.

On February 1, 1809, at the age of 25, Oliver married Elizabeth “Betsey” Phillips of Grafton. Three and a half months later a son, Joseph, was born on May 28th. The Wards moved to North Brookfield in the fall of that same year.

As indicated earlier, the Batcheller families in Sutton settled virtually next to the Ward family in Grafton. Without the benefit of actual evidence, we feel these strong Batcheller/Ward ties in Sutton and Grafton provide compelling evidence of the families’ relationships that brought them to North Brookfield. In 1802, Ezra Batcheller, Sr. moved from Sutton with his two sons, Tyler and Ezra, and settled in North Brookfield. (In addition, Oliver’s paternal aunt moved to Spencer in 1788; his paternal grandmother also lived there until her death in 1798.)

The notice for Charles Bruce’s Spunky Hollow property (including the tannery formerly owned by Salmon Dean) appeared in the Massachusetts Spy in March 1809, and in April, Oliver purchased the property through auction. Oliver and Betsey remained in Grafton until their son, Joseph, arrived (born in May), and the deed for the property was recorded in August 1809. Oliver moved his family from Grafton to North Brookfield and assumed the business of tanning. During the same timeframe Tyler Batcheller was completing his shoemaking apprenticeship in Grafton, having gone there at some time during his 15th year (1808).

**His Early Years in North Brookfield**

When Oliver Ward purchased his parcel of land in North Brookfield in 1809 from tanner Charles Bruce, the property contained 5 acres and 25 rods with a dwelling house, barn, tannery, currier’s shop, barkhouse, and it appears also a small shoemaker’s shop at a cost of $1,000. The property bordered the north side of the country road which now bears his name.
According to sources, Ward initially took over Bruce’s tanning business but almost immediately after settling on the property began setting his sights on building a shoe factory. The three story building was completed in 1810. It is this home and factory which comprise the basis of our current historical project, as it was the springboard to the industrial revolution within Ward’s newly adopted town.

It is only after Ward began his shoe manufactory in Spunky Hollow that we begin to see references to “sale” or “extra” shoes in North Brookfield among the shelves of provision stores in town. In crafting “sale” shoes of all sizes to sell for export to general stores or through private contracts with no specific feet tied to orders at time of manufacture, Oliver Ward’s shoe factory became the first of its kind in Massachusetts west of Grafton. In addition to serving a clientele of retail stores in New England, Ward soon became heavily involved in exporting to southern states, where slaves would be trudging through cotton fields in his shoes. This same market would later be targeted by almost all subsequent shoe manufactories in the Brookfields which, along with Natick, would dominate in the sale of shoes to that portion of the country. On moral grounds this involvement with slavery would create much controversy within a village largely comprised of townspeople with anti-slavery sentiment.

**Growth of The Shoe Industry in North Brookfield**

It was not practical for Ward and his employees to perform the many steps of manufacturing shoes in production of large lots, as his factory was not nearly large enough, nor was there sufficient full-time labor to house a workforce capable of filling the large orders he received. Instead, the more highly skilled tasks, such as cutting the leather into precise patterns, were performed in the factory. The leather was then delivered, or “put out” to area farmers, who made use of their free time performing piece work on the leather. Most of these farmers resided in North Brookfield, but records show Ward also sent out stock to farmers in the towns of Brookfield, Spencer, Sturbridge, Brimfield, Charlton, New Braintree, Barre, Warren, and Wales. Women and girls usually worked at hand sewing together the shoe “uppers” in their homes, while the men did the heavier work of “bottoming” (attaching the soles and heels). The men sometimes worked in their homes, but more often in small detached “ten-footer” shoe shops built on their properties that became common features of the rural landscape. Their tools included awls, punches, bristles, waxes, threads, needles, and wooden pegs. Once the farmers were finished, the shoes were returned to Ward’s factory for finishing, packaging and shipping.

In attaching the upper leather to soles, at first only sewed work was done. After a short time, pegged work was introduced and Mr. Ward made his own pegs by sawing maple logs into sections of the proper length which were then split with a stiff knife, and then the
splint divided into pegs. The next improvement was to cut the points of the pegs in the blocks with a knife and mallet before splitting, and later the process was further revised by cutting the points with a toothed gouge driven in like a carpenter’s plane.

In the early decades of the 19th century most full-time shoemakers working in factories such as Ward’s were under the age of thirty, and virtually all under forty. Shoemakers were paid a cash wage and a steady worker bottoming shoes could earn wages comfortably more than farm labor paid. As a result, many a son of a struggling farmer took to the factories, causing farmers to worry about a shortage of manual labor.

The Ward Influence Upon Young Shoemakers

Tyler Batcheller, who would later own the largest shoe manufacturing business in the world, was about 14 years old when he went to Grafton and learned the trade of shoemaking from Nathan Johnson. At the close of his apprenticeship there, he returned to North Brookfield and was employed as a journeyman for Mr. Ward in Spunky Hollow, living with his family. Tyler was still in his minority during the first three years of his service to Mr. Ward, and his stipulated wages went to his father. He was able to save $500 over and above those wages, which allowed him in 1819, after completing his commitment to Ward, to commence business on his own. He began at the Wetherbee house where he operated a manufactory in the back part of the house (located on the same spot as the present brick home at 331 North Main Street). In 1821, he purchased the Skerry House and farm in what is now the town center. The Wetherbee house and shop were consumed by fire in 1822. Batcheller immediately moved his family into the Skerry House where he resumed business there in an out-building until 1824.

At that point, having taken into his service several additional employees, Tyler built a two-story shoe factory on the site of the current Quabaug Corporation into which he removed his business in 1825. Batcheller’s main customer base, like Ward’s, was also in the south, and it is likely he developed shipping contacts during trips to Boston Wharfs while under Ward’s employ.

Ezra Batcheller, Tyler’s younger brother, lived with the Wards for six years, and joined his brother as a business partner on January 1, 1825. In the ensuing decades the two would prove to be a perfect complement in their business practices. While Tyler attended to the purchase of stock and to all other business abroad, Ezra was the efficient and popular superintendent, always at home and at his post, giving direction to all matters pertaining to the manufactory.
An excerpt from a March 6, 1880 letter to Charles Adams Jr., who was collecting information for the publication of Temple’s *History of North Brookfield*, provides a description of Mr. Ward’s mentoring and leadership abilities from the eyes of an employee. Edmund Smith, the author of the letter, went to work for Ward in the fall of 1832:

“I came to North Brookfield on the first day of March 1831, a poor boy having travelled most of the way from my father’s house in New Hampshire on foot. When I reached there, all my worldly effects were contained in an old fashioned red handkerchief which I carried on my back by the means of a stick. I had no money... I soon found a place to work, however, in the employ of...Joshua Barnard, a leather finisher... I remained with him about six months when a man by the name of John Haven offered me a more profitable situation...I went into his employ at 16 dollars per month which was considered good wages then... I remained there about a year.

By this time, I had acquired a pretty thorough knowledge of the leather finishing business and my services were sought after by one Oliver Ward, a manufacturer of shoes. He offered me 20 dollars per month, the result was I went to work for him as an apprentice in cutting sole leather. I was elated at the idea of having such a large income and was very careful to please my employer who, in return, seemed pleased and took a good deal of pains to learn me the trade. I progressed rapidly and in a short time, that part of the business was placed entirely in my charge.

Mr. Ward seemed to have the utmost confidence in me and I became very much attached to him. We worked hard, commencing at 6 o’clock in the morning and working until 9 o’clock in the evening. I remained in this position 5 years...”

Having received such a fine education in the handling of leather and making of quality shoes, Smith began a successful career as a shoe manufacturer in North Brookfield in the 1840’s. By 1850, his factory on the corner of Maple and North Main Streets employed 66 males and 70 females.

In addition to Edmund Smith and the Batcheller brothers, a number of young men learned the shoe trade from Mr. Ward and some started their own manufactories. Those who served apprenticeships or were employed by Oliver Ward at his factory in Spunky Hollow include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charles Adams</th>
<th>Samuel S. Edmands</th>
<th>William Johnson</th>
<th>Joseph W. Thompson</th>
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<tr>
<td>William Ayers</td>
<td>Solomon M. Edmands</td>
<td>Charles Newcomb</td>
<td>Moses Thompson</td>
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<td>Harvey Belcher</td>
<td>Amphion Gates</td>
<td>Vernon Lawrence</td>
<td>Oren Tomblin</td>
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<td>Samuel D. Bowen</td>
<td>Ezra Green</td>
<td>Dexter Perry</td>
<td>Otis Waite</td>
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<td>Otis Daniels</td>
<td>Levi Hamilton</td>
<td>Elisha Perry</td>
<td>Dennis Ward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheney Dewing</td>
<td>Harrison Harwood</td>
<td>Henry Rice</td>
<td>Hiram Ward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gideon B. Dewing</td>
<td>John Haven</td>
<td>Seth Rice</td>
<td>Daniel Whiting, Jr.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremiah Dewing</td>
<td>Marcus Hitchcock</td>
<td>Tilly P. Snow</td>
<td>Lewis Whiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John F. Dewing</td>
<td>Henry Johnson</td>
<td>William A. Snow</td>
<td>Nymphas Whiting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Duncan</td>
<td>Rice Johnson</td>
<td>Marcus E. Spooner</td>
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7
Oliver Ward’s influence thus spread throughout the village, both during his lifetime and for generations to follow. In addition to exhibiting leadership skills in teaching leather tanning and shoemaking to young men in North Brookfield, Ward represented North Brookfield in the Massachusetts Legislature in 1836.

With Mr. Ward’s work and enterprise, coupled with that of the Batcheller brothers, North Brookfield became a thriving shoe town, moving out of the extra sale shoe phase into specialization for certain markets and the rise of the central shop where stock cutting and inspection, as well as packing and shipping, could be done under the supervision of the entrepreneur.

In 1832, the Ward factory alone produced 65,000 pairs of shoes with a cash value of $52,000, considered at the time an “enormous business”. In 1836, the total value of boots (24,170 pairs) and shoes (559,900 pairs) manufactured in all factories combined in the town was $470,316. Successful shoe manufacture led North Brookfield’s population to swell from 1,095 in 1820 to 1,509 in 1837, representing an increase of 37.8 percent.

The Ward Property

Oliver Ward’s original property included a little over 5 acres of land and was situated on the north side of the road (now known as “Ward Street”). Though the property contained a dwelling house, shortly after the purchase Ward began construction of a new home, choosing a location about 1/8th of a mile to the west of Forget-Me-Not Brook in Spunky Hollow (also sometimes referred to as “Ward Hollow”). This residence still stands, and can be found travelling east on Ward Street (from Gilbert Street), sitting left on the ledge just before the dip into Spunky Hollow. Today, the residence is numbered “75 Ward Street,” owned by Lene and Greg Guertin and family. The location of the original house is confirmed by a November 6, 1880 letter from Oliver’s son, Joseph, to the writers of the History of North Brookfield, indicating that “the old house was a few rods south east from the present one.” The 1823 tax records corroborate this information, listing two houses on the Ward property. Ward increased his property holdings over time to include a tenement house and an additional 3 acres east and west of his Ward Street homestead and factory.

A collection of photos by Alfred Stoddard (see acknowledgements) taken in the early to mid-1920s show a structure slightly in front of and downhill from the house (see dark building on the right). Only one end of this structure is visible in the photo, the roof line and window placement to match the separate image of the entire factory building (next page).
Mr. Ward’s factory was located directly on the roadside overlooking Spunky Hollow to the East. Stones of a former wall, believed to be incorporated into the foundation of the factory, are present to the east of the home today. Over time, foliage, trees and lot dissection have distorted the overall lot plan, but photographs confirm the location and layout with the two-story west side (facing the house) and the three-story side on the east as the result of building on the ledge.

An excerpt from the 1878 Chesley Map (left) provides a visualization of the orientation of Ward’s home and factory, which were still standing in the mid-1930s. In North Brookfield’s 1934 Connie Mack Day program brochure, the property was described in its then current state,

“... the first manufactory to make a real name for itself and for the town was the manufacture of boots and shoes. The pioneer in this line was Oliver Ward, whose factory still stands, dilapidated but picturesque, near the Old Ward residence, now the home of Mrs. Finch, in Spunky Hollow.”

(The factory was torn down by the time North Brookfield resident, Carl Gustafson, visited the property in the 1940s, when it was then owned by his grandparents.)

The Ward Family

Oliver and Betsey Ward had a total of eight children including Joseph (1809 – 1879), Betsey (1810 – 1863), Mary (1812-1830), Martha (1815-1831), Sarah (1820-1849), Caroline (1822 – 1896), Elijah (1825 – 1870), and Lucy (1830 – 1895). Their children were well educated by home influence as well as school, and the family occupied a high social standing in the community. Oliver’s wife, Betsey, was considered “a lady of distinguished domestic qualities as well as devoted piety.”
The Panic of 1837

By 1836 Ward and his fellow shoemakers in North Brookfield had been riding a consistent wave of growth that must have seemed limitless to them at that time. However, hard financial times would hit the United States early in 1837, with disastrous consequences for North Brookfield’s manufacturers. The seeds for what became known as the “Panic of 1837” were sown during the second administration of President Andrew Jackson, who made it his personal mission to eliminate the U.S. National Bank in an effort of decentralization. After he succeeded in doing so, federal money was taken from the national banks and placed in state banks. The state banks soon gained the nickname “wildcat” banks for their liberal and somewhat careless loaning practices to speculators looking to purchase land in the rapidly growing young country. The result was a five year depression which caused failure of manufactories of all kinds throughout the country. In North Brookfield, all shoe manufactories failed except that of Freeman Walker, whose own factory eventually succumbed in 1842.

On April 8, 1837 in the Massachusetts Spy, Freeman Walker notified creditors that all of Oliver Ward’s property, not exempted by law from attachment, was assigned to him as subscriber, and that the creditors could become parties to the assignment upon application. On the same page in the same newspaper, Walker also acted as the subscriber for the failed North Brookfield shoe firms of Johnson & Edson, T&E Batcheller and Hiram Ward. Another North Brookfield firm that failed that year, though not listed with the others in the assignment ad on April 8, was Dewing & Edmands. Some of these factories would survive and prosper in later years, others would not reopen. Prior to the panic North Brookfield was ranked second in all of Worcester County behind Grafton, producing nearly 600,000 pairs of boots and shoes, and employing 550 men and 300 women. In the wake of the panic, employment and production would not return to pre-depression levels until the late 1840’s.

According to Edmund Smith, Ward’s business had been suffering even before the panic. When the firm failed, Smith was owed $600 by his employer, who was unable to pay him. Ward also became quite ill after the panic, with Smith noting Ward’s health had “been poor for a long time and (was) made worse by the unsettled condition of his business.” Ward suffered from tuberculosis, which killed one in five of the American population in the 19th century. The disease took his life on February 26, 1839 at the age of 55.
Obituaries and Probate

The Barre Gazette
March 29, 1839

In North Brookfield, Feb 20, Mr Oliver Ward, aged 55. Mr Ward was the first, and for many years the only manufacturer of shoes to any considerable extent in that town, or section of country, and may truly be said to be the father of that branch of manufactures, to which the rapid growth, and present prosperity of the town must be mainly attributed. Honesty and integrity were his prominent characteristics. The community have by his death lost a useful citizen, and his family a most faithful and affectionate friend, but, he has left behind him, the assurance that, what to them is loss is to him ‘unspeakable gain.’

The New York Spectator
April 15, 1839

At North Brookfield, Oliver Ward, 55. He was the first one who established in North Brookfield the business of manufacturing shoes for the southern market, a business which now amounts in that town, according to a late estimate, to $470,000 annually, and employs 250 persons of

On December 25, 1839, a Commissioner’s Notice made creditors aware to bring in and prove their claims as creditors to the Estate of Oliver Ward at H. Shedd’s Hotel in North Brookfield on the last Wednesdays of December, February, and April 1840 (National Aegis, Dec. 25, 1839). In total 107 creditors had their names added to that list, presenting notes ranging from $1.72 to $3,318.11. Although Ward’s estate was unable to pay all his creditors, his former employee Edmund Smith was allowed to receive all his back pay. On May 4, 1841, 7 acres and 25 rods of his property on Ward Street were sold at public auction. One acre was set off for his wife Elizabeth on the south side of the street.
Oliver Ward’s gravesite is in the Maple Street Cemetery up the center steps to the right, flanked by the stones of his wife Elizabeth (d. 1863) and three children Mary (d. 1830), Elijah (d. 1870), and Caroline (d. 1896).

**Lasting Legacy**

Perhaps the legacy of Oliver Ward’s influence in North Brookfield can be best understood by examining the town’s successful shoe industry after his death throughout the 19th century. By 1850 the town had easily eclipsed Grafton as the largest producer of shoes and boots in all of Worcester County, with the Batcheller factory alone putting out an approximate equal number of shoes and boots (348,000) as that of all ten Grafton manufactories combined. At this time the Batchellers employed 350 men and women in their factory, a number 100 greater than the second largest factory in the county. The other two large firms in North Brookfield, those of Dewing & Edmands and Edmund Smith, employed 120 and 136 of North Brookfield’s townspeople respectively, figures which do not include those still earning wages in the outwork network. The owners of all three of these factories were trained by Ward.

The growth of North Brookfield’s shoe industry was crippled by the secession of southern states in 1861 and the subsequent Civil War, but the firms of E. & A.H. Batcheller & Co. and Edmands & Duncan rebounded well. By 1880, the town’s population, prospering greatly by its robust shoe industry, reached 4,459.
The Batcheller factory, which by then had been called in many accounts (as early as 1853), the largest shoe factory in the United States, was referred to by fellow shoe manufacturer and historian Seth Bryant in 1891 as the “largest of its kind in the world, making 7,000 pairs of boots and shoes per day.” Main production focused on “stoga” work, consisting of heavy boots, shoes and brogans for the working classes of all sections of the country. In North Brookfield, boot and shoemaking was the driving force in the town’s economy, accounting for at least 90% of the value of goods manufactured in the town each year, while providing much work to makers of shoe boxes, lasts, leather and tools. Agricultural production became more commercially oriented through dairy farming and orchards.

Oliver Ward was noted for leaving an honorable reputation for integrity and faithfulness in every relation of his life and unassuming manners that won the regards of all. While many of his successors enjoyed national and international travel, luxurious homes and activities outside of North Brookfield, he and his family lived modestly in the Spunky Hollow quarters with little or no idea what was to become of the fruits of his labor.

Although very little was written about Oliver Ward in Temple’s History of North Brookfield, published in 1887, his contributions did not go unnoticed. In 1934, North Brookfield’s Connie Mack Day Official Brochure provided the following synopsis of Oliver Ward’s contribution to North Brookfield:

Ward started his business in 1810 and was the first boot and shoe manufacturer in the state west of Worcester. Manufacturing methods were primitive then. Shoe-pegs were whittled out by hand, there was practically no machinery in use and much of the work was done by farmers “after hours” at their homes. For this reason many built little “shops” for treeing, lasting, etc. near their houses. Some of these old-time shops are to be seen today.

Ward was a good business man and made an enviable reputation for himself and his product and, indirectly, for the many early residents of North Brookfield who were to follow his lead.

Tyler and Ezra Batcheller worked in his shop, and S.S. Edmands, the Dewing brothers, Charles Adams and numerous others who later became manufacturers “on their own”, learned the trade under Mr. Ward. We cannot give the names of all these manufacturers here, but among the more prominent were Freeman and Amasa Walker, Hiram Ward, Johnson and Edson, A. and E.D. Batcheller, Dewing and Edmands, Bond and Jenks, and Edmands, Duncan and Hurlburt, whose old factory on Summer Street is now occupied by the Brookfield Corporation.

... Naturally these boot and shoe concerns made the town. It grew rapidly and healthily, minded its own business and so had plenty of business to mind. And it has followed this admirable policy ever since.
**OLIVER WARD FAMILY TREE 1783 - 2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Born</th>
<th>Married</th>
<th>Died</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OLIVER WARD</td>
<td>12/3/1783 - Grafton, MA</td>
<td>Betsey Phillips of Grafton, MA 2/1/1809 (died 5/13/1863 in North Brookfield, MA)</td>
<td>2/26/1839 - North Brookfield, MA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILDREN OF OLIVER AND BETSEY WARD</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Harrison</td>
<td>5/28/1809 - Grafton, MA</td>
<td>1) Charlotte Bates of Barre, MA 5/12/1836  2) Deborah Bond Collins of Yarmouth, N.S. 9/12/1853</td>
<td>9/20/1879</td>
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<td>Betsey Phillips</td>
<td>8/24/1810 - North Brookfield, MA</td>
<td>Jonathan Cary of North Brookfield, MA 10/16/1834 (b. 9/10/1798, d. 1/9/1871)</td>
<td>1863</td>
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<td>Mary Batcheller</td>
<td>10/14/1812 - North Brookfield, MA</td>
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<td>7/3/1830</td>
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<td>Martha Gale</td>
<td>9/9/1815 - North Brookfield, MA</td>
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<td>4/17/1831</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sarah Lyscom</td>
<td>9/19/1820 - North Brookfield, MA</td>
<td>Levi Adams 8/14/1845 (b. 3/7/1817, d. 8/10/1860)</td>
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<td>Caroline Stone</td>
<td>7/19/1822 - North Brookfield, MA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elijah Phillips</td>
<td>2/26/1825 - North Brookfield, MA</td>
<td></td>
<td>10/20/1870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy Batcheller</td>
<td>9/29/1830 - North Brookfield, MA</td>
<td>Mark Bailey of Dunbarton, NH 9/29/1853 (b. 5/20/1827, d. 6/3/1911)</td>
<td>1895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILDREN OF LUCY AND MARK BAILEY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genevieve B.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Ward</td>
<td>6/16/1857</td>
<td>Charlotte Adelia Tilden of Derby, CT 6/11/1890</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILDREN OF CHARLOTTE AND WILLIAM BAILEY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 2nd</td>
<td>5/2/1891</td>
<td>Marcia Elizabeth Egerton of Negaunee, MI in 1919 (b. 1894, d. 2/20/1991)</td>
<td>1946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Ward</td>
<td>6/17/1895</td>
<td>John Herbert Ware of NY (d. 3/10/1964)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILDREN OF ELIZABETH AND J.H. WARE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John H. Ware, Jr.</td>
<td>1919</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul Ware</td>
<td>1921</td>
<td>(deceased)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy Ware Harper – San Diego, CA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Harper Caffall-Davis – Hyde, AK</td>
<td></td>
<td>M. Peter Caffall-Davis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JudyAnne Harper – San Diego, CA Two Children: Katherine Anne and Charles Nicholas – San Diego, CA</td>
<td></td>
<td>Charles Eugene Snyder, Jr.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patricia Ware</td>
<td>1931</td>
<td>Vann</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

Program Writers and Organizers: James Buzzell and Linda Grace

Homeowners: Greg, Lene, Gregory, Jr., Nicholas, Lucas, Jacob and Skye Guertin (75 Ward Street)
Rev. and Mrs. Kenneth Winters (77 Ward Street)

Oliver Ward Descendants: Patricia Ware Vann (5th Generation), Martha’s Vineyard
Wendy Ware Harper (6th Generation), San Diego, CA
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Gary Jean, Highway Department

Historical Marker Art: Russell Buzzell

Gravestone Photography: Ann Parker Neal

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Eugene Caille, Town Historian
Louis B. Grace, M.D., Historical Society Director
Carl Gustafson, Descendant of Ward Street Property
Anthony Holway, Mining Artifacts and Identification
Peter Shipman, North Brookfield Public Schools

The photos of Oliver Ward’s house and factory and Sucker Brook Mills were discovered by Jim Buzzell while performing research on a book he is writing on the early shoemakers of North Brookfield.

Among stored items in the Quaboag Historical Society Museum was the photo book of Alfred Stoddard, containing a series of rare photographs taken in the 1920s, the source of our initial undertaking to identify the location leading to the development of this brochure and highlighting this presentation for North Brookfield’s 200th Anniversary.

Alfred C. Stoddard 1910
THE OLIVER WARD
SPUNKY HOLLOW HOMESTEAD AND FACTORY

In 1809, Oliver Ward purchased the property here on the north side of the road which now bears his name, in this section of town which was then known as Spunky Hollow. In 1810, he built a three-story shoemaking factory, the first of its kind in Massachusetts west of Grafton, making “sale or extra” shoes for New England provision stores, and later exporting them to southern and midwestern states.

Oliver Ward was considered the father of shoemaking manufacturers to which the prosperity of North Brookfield must be mainly attributed. His talent and industry were the catalysts that led to North Brookfield's evolution into a shoemaking empire during the 1800's. He apprenticed virtually all of North Brookfield’s early shoemakers. His influence thus spread throughout the village, both during his lifetime and for generations to follow. He operated his modest factory here until the late 1830's. This factory, which sat just to the East of Ward’s home, was torn down in approximately the late 1930's.

Oliver Ward was laid to rest in the Maple Street Cemetery on February 26, 1839. “The community have by his death lost a useful citizen, and his family a most faithful and affectionate friend — but, he has left behind him the assurance that, what to them is loss, is to him ‘unspeakable gain’.”

North Brookfield Historical Society
in recognition of
North Brookfield’s 200th Anniversary
2012

Rte. 67N to New Braintree
Rte. 148N to Oakham

Maple Street
Cemetery

Maple Street

Town Center

South Main Street
Rte. 67/148S

Bates Street

Gilbert Street

NB Elementary School

North Main Street

Oliver Ward Historic Site

Rte. 67/148S

To West Brookfield

To East Brookfield

Ward Street