

Mother Brook Historic Walking Trail

By Dan Hart

In 2016, The Mother Brook 375 Committee was formed to commemorate and memorialize the 375th anniversary of the establishment of Mother Brook, the first manmade industrial canal in this country. The Committee consisted of Brian Keaney, Charlie Krueger, Gerri Roberts, Nicole Keane, Rita Mae Cushman, Jean Ford Webb (Mother Brook Arts & Community Center) and Johanna McBrien (Dedham Historical Society) and me, Dan Hart. The committee planned events and began the process to obtain a National Historic Designation to recognize the remarkable achievement in the building of the canal from 1639-1641. Earlier this year, Judy Neiswander provided a wonderful series of articles to the *Dedham Times* capturing the history and story of Mother Brook, the mills, buildings, and neighborhoods created along the brook (available on the History page of this website). With the history that had been uncovered as the foundation, the idea of a historic walking trail came to life.

The Mother Brook Historic Walking Trail identifies historically significant locations and buildings along Mother Brook, with interpretive markers. Benches, plantings, and landscaping have been added along the route. The trail is approximately 1 ½ miles long and utilizes existing sidewalks and walking paths along Mother Brook. Six marker locations are part of the trail starting and finishing at Condon Park (**Fig. 1**).

Using the Dedham Civic Pride kiosk at the park, walkers and historians can view a brief history of the entire length of Mother Brook and the five privileges established by the earliest mill owners. A privilege was a right granted to establish a dam and mill along a portion of Mother Brook. Condon Park is the site of the first privilege and first mill established by John Elderkin in 1641. Condon Park is named for World War 1 veteran and East Dedham resident Corporal Harry Condon. The Park is also the site of the former Merchants Woolen Mills that manufactured wool for many years including fabric used for Union Army uniforms during the Civil War.



Fig. 1: Map showing the interpretive historic marker locations. The pin identifying Condon Park is the location of the first Privilege.

Upon leaving Condon Park, walkers should head east on Bussey Street toward East Dedham Square. The next marker is located at the site of the original East Dedham Fire Station, built in 1855 (**Fig. 2**). The East Dedham Fire House (Hose Company No. 3), was built by the Town of Dedham in 1897 and is significant as the earliest fire station in the town still being used for its original purpose. In 1898, the East Dedham station carried 600 feet of hose and had 12 men employed in the company.

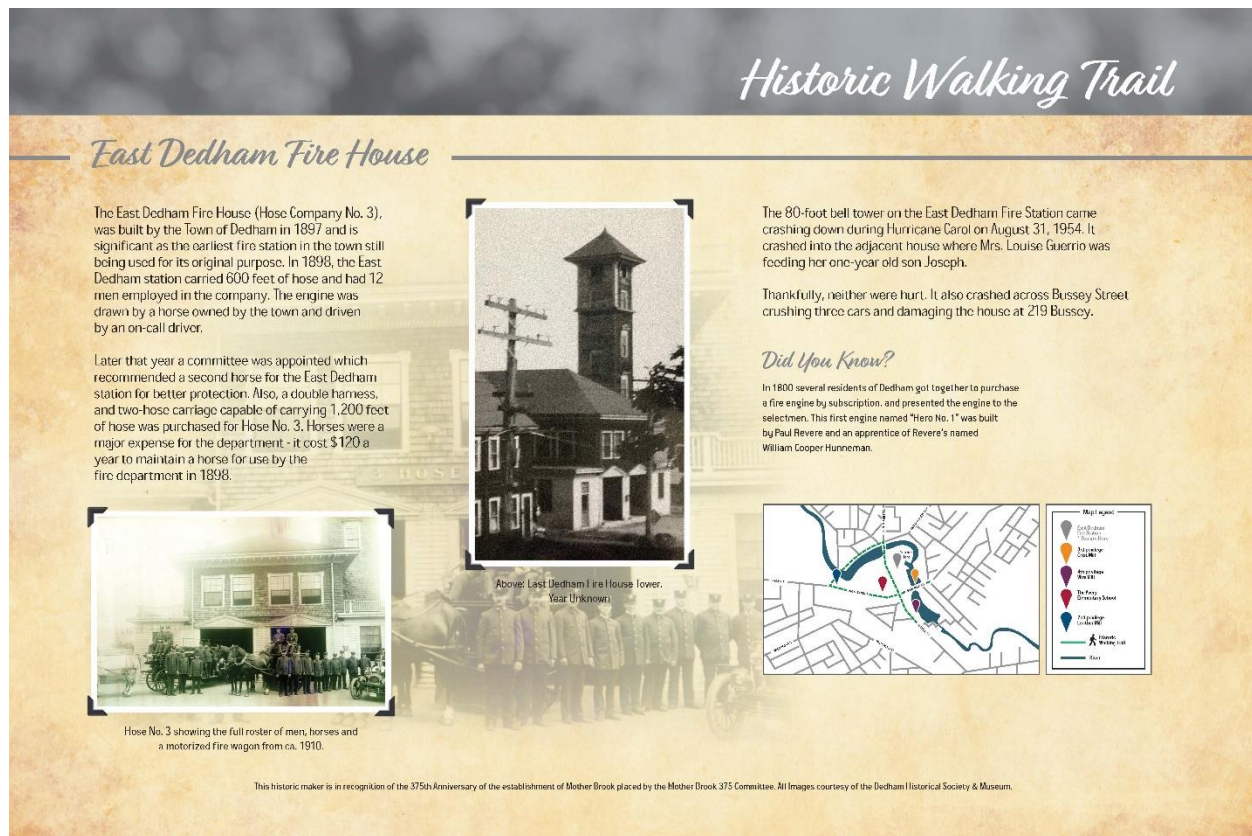


Fig. 2: Historic marker for the East Dedham Fire Station.

Continue toward East Dedham Square and turn left to the newly constructed Saw Mill Lane Bridge. This spot on Mother Brook marks the site of the third privilege (**Fig. 3**). A mill was established at this location in 1682. In the 1800s a saw and grist mill were both operated at the third privilege until the premises were vacated in 1885.

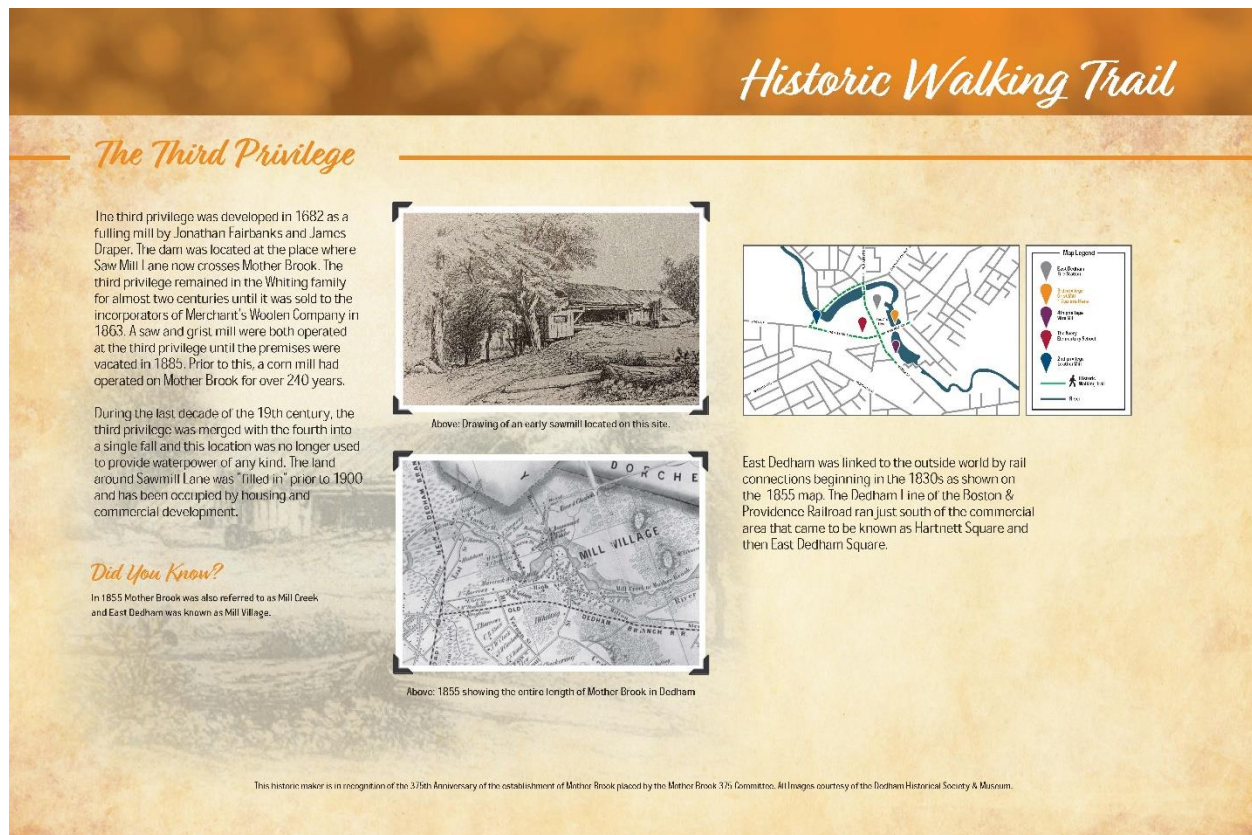
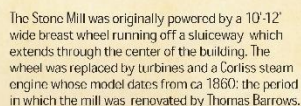


Fig. 3: Historic marker identifying the third Privilege.

Backtrack to the intersection of East Dedham Square. Walkers should head east on Bussey Street to the East Dedham Passive Park. The park overlooks the Centennial Dam and Stone Mill Building to the right and the fourth privilege (**Fig. 4**). The fourth privilege is the oldest of Dedham's existing mill structures, the 1835 Dedham granite cotton mill.

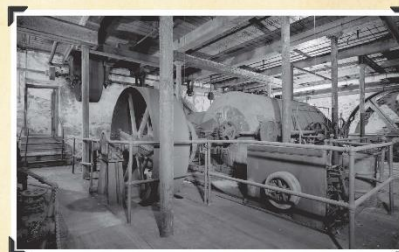
The Stone Mill was originally powered by a 10'- to 12'- wide breast wheel running off a sluiceway, which extended through the center of the building. The wheel was replaced by turbines and a Corliss steam engine. The engine model dates from ca. 1860, the period in which the mill was renovated by Thomas Barrows. The turbines, engine, and leather belt-drive mechanisms to convey power to the mill, from this period are still intact in the basement. It is one of the best complete power plants from that era that exists.

The Fourth Privilege



The mill's machine shop was in the basement of the wing, as was a boiler and steam engine; the first floor of the wing housed the cloth and burling rooms and a storeroom for raw cotton. The second floor was used for weaving and dressing the cloth and the finished product was dried on the third floor.

The turbines, engine and leather belt-drive mechanisms to convey power to the mill, from this period, are still intact in the basement and one of the best complete power plants from that era that exists.



The first mill was established on the 4th privilege circa 1787. Over the years mills located at this privilege have manufactured copper cents, paper, nails, wire, cotton cloth, carpets and colored handkerchiefs.

This historic marker is in recognition of the 375th Anniversary of the establishment of Mother Brook placed by the Mother Brook 375 Committee. All images courtesy of the Dedham Historical Society & Museum

Walkers will turn back on Milton Street toward East Dedham Square, passing a small park on the opposite side of the street. The park is all that remains of Hartnett Square, named in honor of William Hartnett of Dedham, who died at Argonne, France, in World War I. Hartnett Square was the major intersection of what we now know as East Dedham Square, where the following streets intersect: High Street, Sawmill Lane, Bussey Street, Milton Street, and Walnut Street. Prior to renaming the intersection Harnett Square, it was referred to as Boyden Square.

The trail crosses the intersection with High Street and walkers will turn left heading west on High Street. The next marker is located at Mother Brook Arts and Community Center (**Fig. 5**). The first school on this site was constructed in 1825 to serve the children of millworkers employed in the textile mills that rose on the banks of the nearby Mother Brook. Initially known as the Mill Village School, it was replaced by a second structure in 1844 named The Avery School in honor of William Avery, who had donated funds for a Latin School in 1680. In 1894 the Town voted to expand the lot and construct a larger, more modern building that would also house a branch of the public library. In a disastrous fire on January 14, 1921, this new school burned to the ground. The current building, described in *The Engineering News Record* as “brick and steel with reinforced concrete, about \$200,000,” opened in 1923. It was designed by architect Luther C. Greenleaf, who also designed the Ames Schoolhouse on Bryant Street. The center of community life for the neighborhood, the Avery School hosted plays, shows, motion pictures, and political meetings in its spacious auditorium, and served the children of East Dedham until 2012 when a new Avery School was built further up High Street. The Mother Brook Arts and Community Center opened its doors in 2013 and continues to be a center of community life for the entire Town of Dedham.

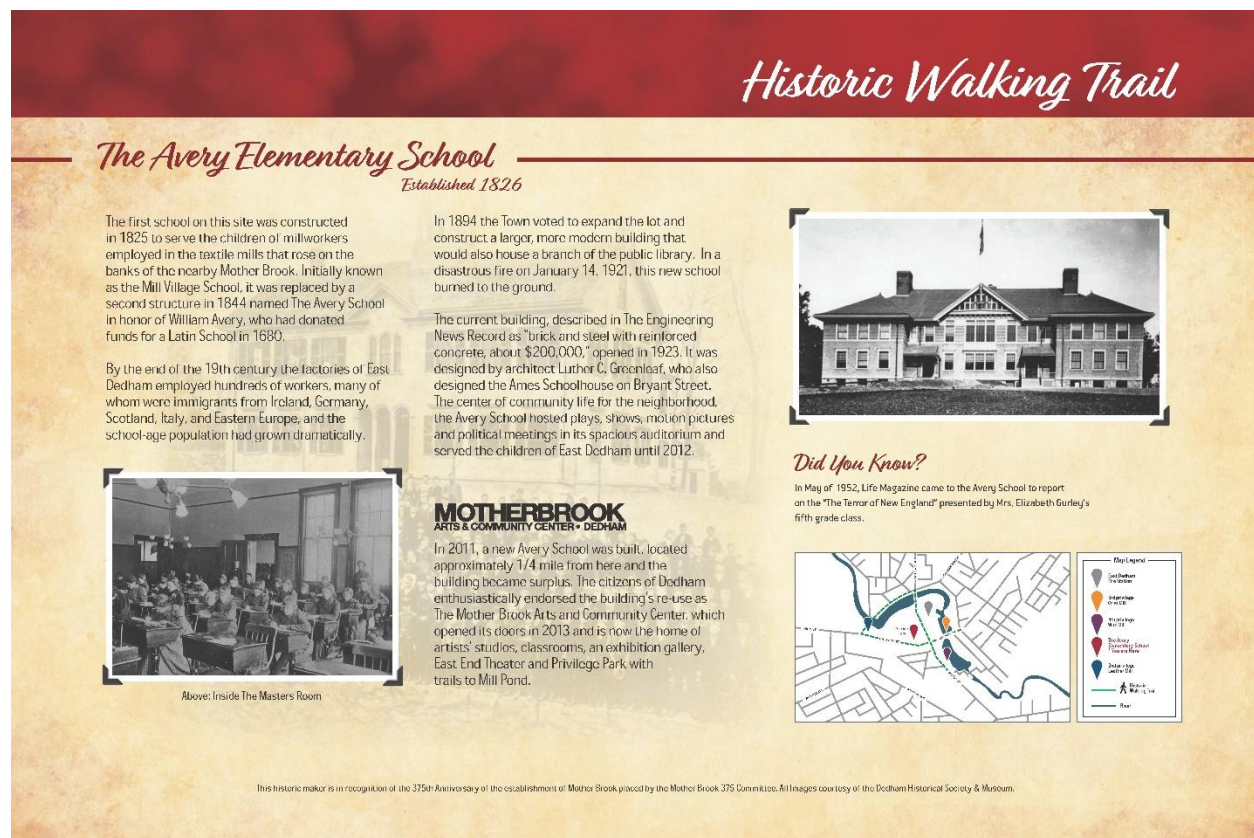


Fig. 5: Historic marker about the Avery School.

Continuing west on High Street, Pottery Lane will be on your left, once the location of the Dedham Pottery factory (1896-1943). Turn right at Maverick Street at the Alimed Building; the remnants of Envelope Park will be on your left across the street from Alimed. This park was once a landscaped garden filled with flowers and ornamental trees. As you walk along the sidewalk you will cross a small bridge. In this area was a raceway that diverted water under the factory. This is the site of the second privilege established along Mother Brook (**Fig. 6**).

After crossing Mother Brook, turn right onto Colburn Street. At the crest of the small hill is the marker for the second privilege and for the Boston Envelope Company, founded in 1936. The first mill at present day Maverick Street was constructed in 1664 by Daniel Pond and Ezra Morse to grind corn. This was the second mill on Mother Brook. In 1936 the last mill building was purchased by the Boston Envelope Company and replaced with a modern "daylight" factory. During World War II, the Boston Envelope Company contributed to the war effort by manufacturing all the envelopes that were used to mail ration books throughout New England. They also produced all the draft board envelopes to the prospective military forces nationwide.

Historic Walking Trail

The Second Privilege

The first mill at present day Maverick Street was constructed in 1664 by Daniel Pond and Ezra Morse to grind corn. This was the second mill on Mother Brook. The right to dam a stream to turn a mill wheel is called a "privilege," this area became known as the Second Privilege. During the 18th century a leather mill was located here, followed in 1807 by the first of a long series of cotton and woolen mills under various owners.



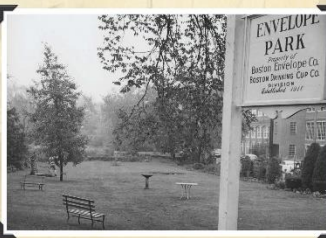
Above: Women at work on the manufacturing floor at Boston Envelope. Year Unknown.

Mill workers, primarily immigrants from Ireland, Canada, Italy, and Eastern Europe, lived nearby in boarding houses, tenements, and dwellings, many of which survive today. In 1936 the last mill building was purchased by the Boston Envelope Company and replaced with a modern 'daylight' factory with a largely female workforce. On the west side of Maverick Street the company established Envelope Park, a landscaped garden filled with flowers and ornamental trees, traces of which still remain.



Above: Boston Envelope Company. Year 1936

During World War II, the Boston Envelope Company contributed to the war effort by manufacturing all the envelopes that were used to mail ration books throughout New England. They also produced all the draft board envelopes to the prospective military forces nationwide.



Above: Envelope Park

Did You Know?

In 1795, as the above map indicates there were 4 mills located along Mother Brook in Dedham. A grist mill was located at the 1st privilege (present day Condon Park), a leather mill at this location the 2nd Privilege, a grist mill at the 3rd Privilege (Saw Mill Lane) and a wire mill at the 4th Privilege (Stone Mill Condominium).



The war effort surprisingly required hundreds of different kinds of envelopes ranging from those that were used for pre-packaged foods to large envelopes holding confidential messages. The factory was capable of making 2,500,000 envelopes a day ranging in size from 2"x 2" to 20" x 20". One entire section of the factory was dedicated to the production of a new product known as "envelope drinking cups".

This historic marker is in recognition of the 375th Anniversary of the establishment of Mother Brook placed by the Mother Brook 375 Committee. All Images courtesy of the Dedham Historical Society & Museum.

Fig. 6: Historic marker identifying the second Privilege.

The historic trail leads down Colburn Street passing by Mill Pond Park. The park was created through a grassroots effort lead by the Mother Brook Community Group. The fish sculpture, created by Gints Grinbergs of Dedham, was the first permanent public art installation on town property. The trail finishes back at Condon Park.

The Mother Brook 375 Committee would like to thank the Dedham Historical Society & Museum for their assistance and use of images in creating the historic markers. We would also like to thank Dedham Civic Pride with the help in procuring and installing the benches. To the Select Board and Parks and Recreation Commission, thank you for your support on the project, and to Assistant Town Manager, Nancy Baker, for her help and guidance in getting approvals and the procurement of the markers.