

Additional details of the history of the Mother Brook can be found in "Historical Sketch of Mother Brook Dedham, Mass from 1639-1900" by historian Erastus Worthington in the Dedham Historical Society & Museum Library & Archives.

The Dedham Historical Society & Museum supports the 375th Mother Brook Committee and the celebration of the construction of the Mother Brook. Committee members include: Brian Keaney, Chair; Dan Hart; Joe Heisler; Nicole Keane; Vicky L. Kruckeberg; Charlie Krueger; Gerri Roberts; Jean Ford Webb.



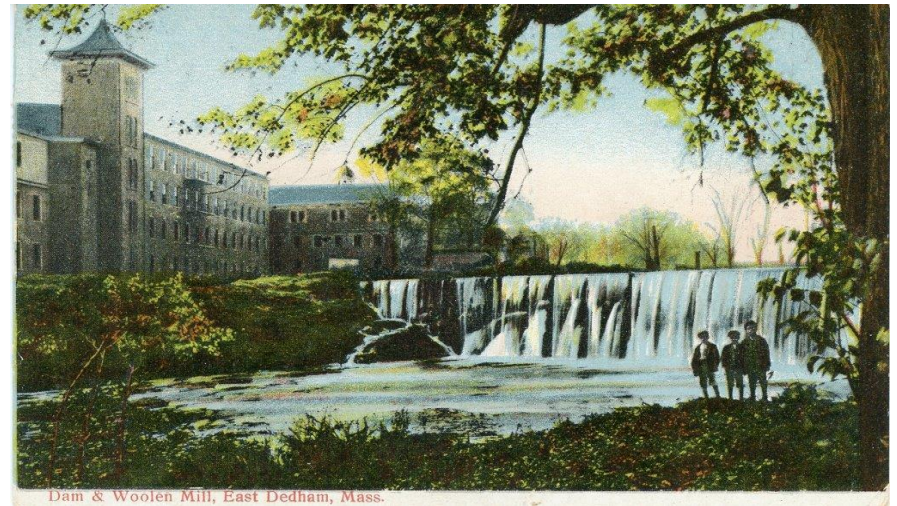
This brochure is courtesy of the
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The Society is a non-profit membership organization dedicated to collecting, preserving, and presenting the history of the local community. The DHS has been located in historic Dedham Square since 1888. The Society museum, library, and archives are open to the public.

- Office: Tuesday – Friday 9 am – 4 pm
- Museum: Tuesday – Friday, 12 noon – 4 pm
- Library and Archives: Tuesday and Thursday by appointment.
- The Museum, Library and Archives are also open even-dated Saturdays, from 1 pm – 4 pm.

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IN CELEBRATION OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MOTHER BROOK IN DEDHAM



Dam & Woolen Mill, East Dedham, Mass.

Historic Postcard from the Dedham Historical Society & Museum Collection

The names "Mill Creek," "East Brook," or "Mother Brook" all refer to a partially artificial and partly natural stream diverting a portion of the waters of the Charles River into the Neponset River. Early records have named this man-made project the first canal dug in America by the English settlers, who began construction on it in 1639.

"On the 25th day of March, 1639, it was "ordered yt a Ditch shalbe made at a Common Charge through purchased medowe unto ye East brooke yt may both be a pteion fence in ye same: as also may serue for a Course unto a water mill; yt it shalbe foun fitting to set a mill vpon ye sayd brooke by ye Judgment of a workeman for yt purpose."

Early Records of the Town of Dedham, MA 1636-1659 Volume III by Don Gleason Hill

A Brief History of the Mother Brook

Dedham was founded in 1636 and just three years later, in 1639, the early settlers realized they needed a water mill to provide power to mills. A committee, appointed by the town, conceived the idea of diverting a portion of the Charles River into East Brook, via a man-made canal which flowed into the Neponset River to provide the necessary water power.

Early records regarding the construction of the Mother Brook canal are scarce and often confusing. There are no documents that tell us the names of the men who dug the canal, how long it took to complete the project, or its cost. The first reference of the completed canal comes in the form of a proposal to John Elderkin, from the town, to build a water mill in return for grants of land. In 1642, Elderkin sold one-half of his rights to Nathaniel Whiting, and the other half to John Allin, Nathaniel Aldis, and John Dwight, who operated the mill until 1649, when Nathaniel Whiting became the sole owner.

Various privileges (according to the Cambridge Dictionary this is “an advantage that only one person or group of people has, usually because of their position or because they are rich”) were given to others in the 1600s for building dams and mills. They were located at five locations on Mill Creek, on Maverick Street, Mill Lane, near Milton Street, and the present-day Readville section of Hyde Park. The 1700s and 1800s brought a variety of mills, including the Norfolk Cotton Manufactory, Lewis Leather Mill, Dedham Worsted Company, Maverick Woolen Company, a paper mill, a silk mill, and wire and nail manufacturing. These mills changed ownership and purposes throughout the years.

The diversion of water from the Charles River to power these mills was not welcomed by everyone and caused trouble with the owners of Charles River mills. In order to control the flow of water, in 1831 an agreement between multiple organizations of mill properties fixed the water to be diverted by the Mother Brook a third of the flow of the Charles River.

By the late 1800s, the Mother Brook was a popular place for swimming and skating. Albert Hale, in his reminiscences of Dedham in the 1870s and 1880s, wrote: "River skating was one of the greatest of all winter pastimes. The youth then gathered on the ice must have numbered in the hundreds."



Historic Postcard of East Dedham Fire Station from the Dedham Historical Society & Museum Collection

The development of these mills required housing, churches, stores, and other businesses to support the workers who were moving into the area. As part of this growth, the East Dedham Fire Station was built. The best known station, built in 1897 on Bussey Street, accommodated a supply wagon, Hose No. 3, and twelve firefighters. The fire station is still operational today.

Many changes occurred during the 20th century including the closing and demolition of mill sites and the piping of part of the Mother Brook underground in the area of Dedham Mall.



Photograph courtesy of Rita Mae Cushman

This photograph, dated February 28, 1987, shows the ground breaking for renovations of the Old Stone Mill on Milton Street into Mother Brook Condominiums. On the left is Nick Civitarese, Town Meeting District Chairman, and on the right is Doug Okium, Construction Committee. Both men, along with many town residents, were committed to preserving the mill and converting it into condominiums, thus saving an important part of Dedham's history.

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