development of Whitin Machine Works, which would overshadow the family cotton mills and become the world's largest textile machine shop.

Explosive industrial growth throughout the Blackstone Valley during the 1800s resulted in ongoing labor shortages in this region. To staff their burgeoning enterprises, the Whitins brought in workers—Irish immigrants beginning in 1847, followed by French Canadians, Dutch, and Armenians. And to house their employees, the Whitins built nearly 1,000 worker dwellings between the mid-1820s and mid-1920s.

In addition to housing, the Whitins built or subsidized the town's schools, churches, town hall, library, and recreational facilities. Like lords of the manor, the Whitins erected grand homes from which they dictated many aspects of the town's political and social life. They perpetuated a system of benevolent paternalism, providing job security and an orderly environment in exchange for worker loyalty.

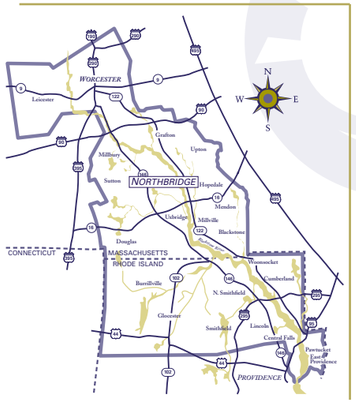
By the late 1940s, worker loyalty was tempered by a tide of labor unrest. When employees voted to unionize, company president E. Kent Swift—the last of six generations of Whitins to run the company—resigned. The Whitins sold their interests in Whitin Machine Works along with their town properties.

With the end of the Whitin era, a new chapter in the town's history began—a chapter that is still unfolding today.

DIRECTIONS

Whitinsville is located in Northbridge. Take Rt. 146 to Lackey Dam Road, Whitinsville Exit. Follow signs to Whitinsville for about 2.5 miles. Turn right onto Elm Place. Parking at James Fletcher Homestead.

BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY
NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR



ALONG THE WAY

- **Parking** is available at the Northbridge Historical Society, at One Elm Place.
- **Refreshments** are available across from the Historical Society, at "The Barn"—formerly Whitin Stables—and along Main Street.
- **If time (and energy) permit,** take a short stroll or drive up Douglas Road past Whitin Avenue to Castle Hill Road. You will see a spectacular view of Whitin Machine Works along the Mumford River. Turn up Castle Hill Road. About 3/10 of a mile brings you to the remains of Castle Hill Farm. John C. Whitin established this beautiful farm during the depression of the 1870s in order to provide employment to his workers. Workers cleared the land and built the magnificent stone wall that surrounds the property. The farm supplied dairy products and produce, which were sold to workers at the company store. The homes on Castle Hill housed the farm employees. The homes and farm are all privately owned.
- **For information** about events, restaurants, and lodging in the Valley, call the Blackstone Valley Chamber of Commerce at 508-234-9090 or visit www.blackstonerivervalley.com.
- **Be sure to visit** the Blackstone River & Canal Heritage State Park and River Bend Farm Visitor Center at 287 Oak Street. Features include canal tow path walk, canoe launch sites, hiking trails, free maps, brochures, interpretive tours, and exhibits with videos, and more. Free parking, free admission. Open seven days. 508-278-7604.
- **Visit a historic working mill museum,** just 22 miles south of Uxbridge at Exit 27 on Interstate Route 95—Slater Mill Historic Site, Pawtucket, RI. Free parking. Restrooms. For hours of operation and admission prices, please visit www.slatermill.org or call 401-725-8636
- **To take a riverboat excursion**—spring, summer, or fall—call for the schedule for The Explorer, Blackstone Valley Tourism Council. 401-724-2200 or 800-454-2882.
- **For further information** about Whitinsville, visit the town library and the Whitinsville Historical Society.

Congress established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission in 1986, recognizing the national significance of the region between Providence, RI and Worcester, MA–the Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution. The John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor is an affiliated area of the National Park Service.

This brochure was developed under the direction of The Rhode Island Historical Society in partnership with the Heritage Corridor Commission.

www.nps.gov/blac/index.htm

Special thanks to Spaulding R. Aldrich for information about Whitinsville. Thanks also to Kenneth M. Warchol's excellent pamphlet, "History of Whitinsville."

rev2012

WHITINSVILLE, NORTHBRIDGE, MA

Walking Tour

Follow the path to riches in a company town.

John H. Chafee
BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY
National Heritage Corridor

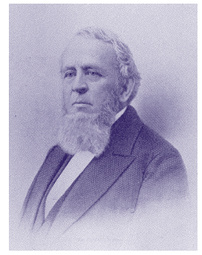
WHITINSVILLE

The historic district of Whitinsville in the Town of Northbridge presents a remarkably complete picture of one of the distinctive by-products of the Industrial Revolution in New England: the company town.

Maintained and controlled by the Whitin family for over 100 years, Whitinsville today reveals its evolution from agrarian settlement to industrial giant, and offers a fascinating glimpse of the powerful family behind it all.

Following the Revolutionary War, Colonel Paul Whitin came from Dedham, Mass., to serve as an apprentice in an iron forge in the budding community then known as South Northbridge. James Fletcher owned the forge, along with most of the land that now comprises Whitinsville.

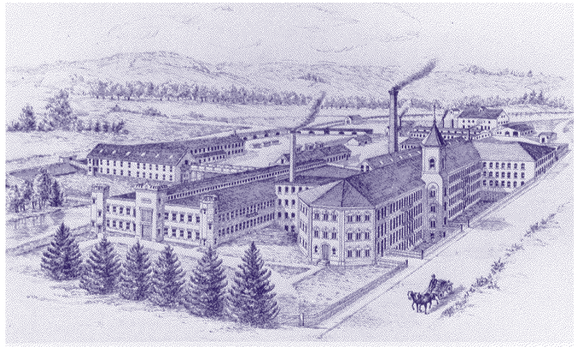
Eventually, Paul Whitin married Fletcher's daughter, Betsy, with whom he had five sons and a daughter. The Whitin-Fletcher alliance was further solidified in 1815 with the establishment of the Whitin and Fletchers Cotton Mill.



John C. Whitin, the inventor and organizational genius who founded the Whitin Machine Works.

In 1826, Whitin bought out the Fletchers and went into partnership with his sons Paul, Jr., and John C., under the firm name of Paul Whitin and Sons. Both sons were astute businessmen, but it was John's inventiveness and marketing acumen that led to the

The tour takes about one and one-half hours.



Whitin Machine Works, as it looked in 1879. At its peak in 1948, the complex employed over 5,600 men and women.

1 JAMES FLETCHER HOMESTEAD

Your tour begins at the James Fletcher Homestead, now the Northbridge Historical Society. One of only two remaining 18th-century structures in Whitinsville's National Register District, this house was built in 1770 by Colonel James Fletcher. Fletcher set up the first iron forge in the community, and later established a cotton mill. He served in the Revolutionary War and held many town offices.

Note the close proximity to the Brick Mill across the street, where Fletcher built his iron forge in 1772. It was then customary for a proprietor to live near his place of business.

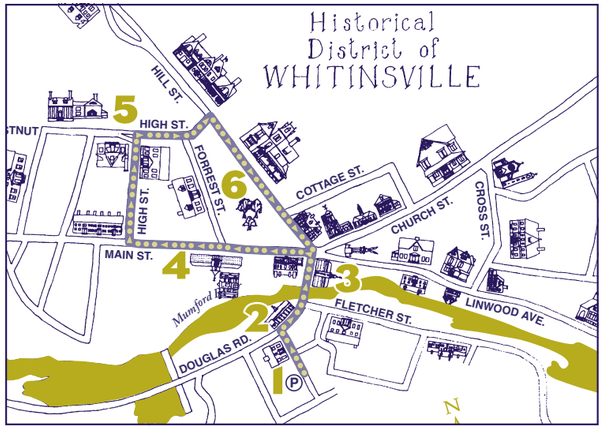
The Whitinsville Brass Band was one of many recreational organizations open to residents.

2 OLD BRICK MILL

Across the street, along the Mumford River, stands the Old Brick Mill. This mill marked the beginning of large-scale industry in Whitinsville. Paul Whitin and Sons built the mill as a cotton and textile machine shop in 1826, on the site of a much smaller cotton mill owned by James Fletcher. The Brick Mill originally employed 40 workers, most of whom were from the village. It was expanded in 1830 and employed 146 workers at the height of its operation in the early 1840s.

By 1845, Whitin cotton manufacturing had outgrown this mill. The company constructed a much larger mill, and John C.Whitin began using the Brick Mill exclusively for machine production and repair. This was the beginning of the Whitin Machine Works, which would come to dominate the town.

The Brick Mill has been renovated by Alternatives Unlimited to serve as a cultural destination for the region see www.alternativesnet.org/whitin_mill.asp for more information.



WHITINSVILLE

Before heading down towards Main Street, take a short side-trip up Fletcher Street to your right. Here you will see three Federal-style workers' houses, numbers 18-20, 26-28, and 36-38, constructed in 1826 in conjunction with the Brick Mill. These houses represent the beginning of the extensive company housing system that the Whitins developed over the years.

The remainder of the workers' houses on Fletcher Street were built in the 1840s, in conjunction with the granite Cotton Mill.

3 GRANITE COTTON MILL

Retracing your steps, turn right towards Main Street. Across the Mumford River on your right stands the massive cotton mill built by the Whitins in 1845. Built of local granite, this mill increased the company's production four times over what had been possible in the Brick Mill. In front of the building stood the Dudley Company store, where residents could purchase basic foodstuffs and dry goods.

The textile industry in the North suffered economic depression following WWI, and cotton manufacturing came to an end in Whitinsville in 1923.The granite mill became part of Whitin Machine Works, used as the company's research branch. The mill was converted to apartments in 1976.

These houses for Whitin employees were built in 1889. Workers with higher status in the mill enjoyed larger, more attractive living quarters than those with lower rank. Eventually, the town contained more than a dozen clearly differentiated levels of housing.

Directly across the street is the Northbridge Town Hall. Built in 1876 by John C. and Charles P. Whitin and donated to the town of Northbridge in honor of their parents, the building was erected on the site of the original Paul Whitin homestead. Whitinsville then became Northbridge's political center.

Turn left onto Main Street and you will immediately come to the imposing Whitin Machine Works.

Loom fixers at work. Rent for Whitin company houses in the 1860s ranged from $3 a month for an unskilled worker's multi-family house to $12 a month for a single family upper-level manager's house. The average weekly pay was around $6.60 for a 60-hour week.

4 WHITIN MACHINE WORKS

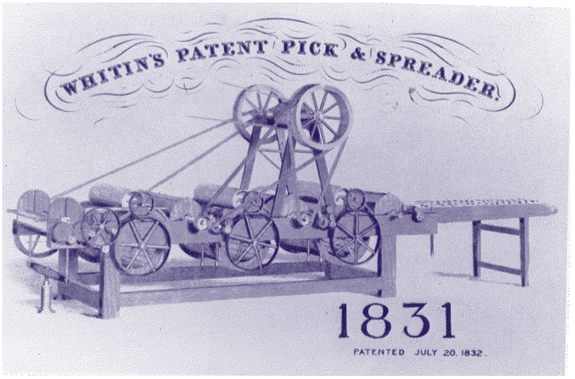
What would become the largest textile machine manufactory in the world began with the building of Whitin Machine Works along the Mumford River in 1847. The original two-story mill, with its octagonal corner towers and crenelated battlements, accommodated 200 workers and was devoted exclusively to the production of textile machinery.

The mill was expanded decade by decade as the company came to dominate the manufacture of machinery for picking, carding, and spinning cotton and wool. Additions to the plant included machine shops, foundries, and specialized structures that ultimately gave it a floor space of 1 3/4 million feet. The 1923 addition facing Main Street features a ceremonial balcony and large clock face.

As you continue along North Main Street, you will pass the Whitin Community Center, which was built by the Whitins in 1922, was and remains the social and recreational hub of the town. Further along you will see a series of row houses on your right. Built in 1864, these dwellings were so unpopular with employees that the Whitins did not build row houses again until the early 1900s.

Turn right up High Street, where you will pass a number of duplexes built for Whitin employees between 1847 and 1864.

Betsy Whitin, matriarch, business partner, and civic leader.



John Whitin excelled at making machinery to improve the production of cotton. This picker, which removed dirt and seeds from raw cotton, was his first product and the foundation of the family's subsequent dominance in the textile machinery field.

5 WHITIN MANSIONS

The Whitin mansions reflect the mill owners' rise to power and the social stratification that came to characterize Whitinsville. At the top of High Street, turn left onto Chestnut Street. Immediately on your right is the first mansion built by John C. Whitin, a Greek Revival structure erected in 1840. It originally stood across from the Whitin Machine Works and was moved in 1870 to make room for Whitin's second, and grander, mansion.

The Whitins brought in Dutch immigrants to tend to the herds of Holstein cattle on Castle Hill Farm, the company-owned farm that supplied food to employees and their families.

Turn back to where Chestnut Street merges with High Street and continue northeast to Hill Street. Across the street to your left stands Oakhurst, built in 1890 by Chester Lasell, son of Josiah Lasell and Jane Whitin, daughter of John C. Whitin. Chester Lasell succeeded his father as president of Whitin Machine Works. He bred some of the finest race horses in the country and entertained guests, including President Taft and Booker T. Washington, on a grand scale.

Turning right on Hill Street towards the town center, you will pass Whitin Park on your right. This was the site of John C. Whitin's second mansion, a 32-room Victorian structure that stood at the top of this landscaped estate. Built in 1875, the estate boasted three greenhouses, several swan ponds, and trees imported from all over the world. The house was torn down in 1943, but much of the foundation remains.

Across the street, at 46 Hill Street, is the Victorian home built in 1875 by Gustavus Taft, John C. Whitin's Superintendent of Works.

These bicyclists may have belonged to the Whitinsville Bicycle Club, which sponsored an annual race for many years.

6 MEMORIAL SQUARE

At the intersection of Hill Street and Main Street is the heart of Whitinsville—Memorial Square. The Whitin family transformed an existing pasture into the village common in 1890 and in 1905 added the Civil War Memorial. Across from the Square stand the imposing Congregational Church and Whitinsville Social Library—both given to the town by the Whitins. The white mansion beside the Library is the Congregational Parsonage, donated to the Congregational Society by the Whitins in 1864.

Cross through Memorial Square to the central intersection, and a short walk up Douglas Road brings you back to the Historical Society.

The Ancient Order of Hibernians in their Irish Jaunting Car. Irish immigrants first came to Whitinsville in the 1840s. By 1863, they made up nearly one quarter of Whitinsville's population.

On the cover: Early delivery wagon. All photos courtesy of Spaulding Aldrich. For further information, refer to the *Town of Northbridge Bicentennial Commemorative Journal (1772-1972)*, or *The Whitin Machine Works Since 1831*, by Thomas R. Navin.