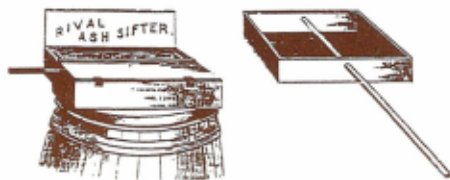


began in Weston as a cottage industry with housewives weaving the long strands and husbands making and mounting the hoops.

Next, thrifty Mr. Gilbert invented a "picking machine" to untangle the short matted hairs so they also could be put to productive use, and his business grew.

### THE OLD RED SHOP

Then in 1830 he set up a small factory on Weston's doorstep, using water power drawn from a small Weston pond above the mill. Where Sasqua Trail is now



Ash Sifters

located next to that pond, there were vats for cleaning and sorting hog, horse and cattle hair. Water from the pond flowed down a wooden flume to turn a great water wheel which powered saws, looms, and the new picking machines.

The original building, called "The Old Red Shop," had two floors. Downstairs long strands of hair were woven into sieves which were peddled to housewives and



Wire Sieve

farmers for sifting flour, meal and grain. Upstairs, picking machines separated the short hairs which were then steamed, curled, wound into hanks and sold for stuffing mattresses, carriage seats, and Victorian horsehair furniture.

Sturges Bennett married Ben Gilbert's daughter and became a partner in the enterprise. Not long afterward, fine wire became available, and these astute businessmen improved their sieves by making them out of wire instead of horsehair. They turned out the first wire sieves

on a carpet loom in 1834. Thus was born the woven wire business in America.

Now the factory could produce many new products - wire screening for windows, poultry netting, ox muzzles, pie and cheese safes, and the aforementioned riddles which Aaron Jelliff copied for his Weston factory that failed. Long before the Old Red Shop was torn down in 1869, the industry had spread out into several new buildings along the Norwalk River on Weston's Wilton and Redding borders.

At the very time that Weston's small industries began to go out of business and most of Weston returned to a rural agrarian way of life, this top corner of Weston was pulled by the magnetic force of the Gilbert and Bennett wire factory into the industrial age.

When the Danbury and Norwalk rail line came by in the 1860's the factory owners built a Georgetown rail depot. The railroad made it very convenient to bring in needed supplies and to transport their ever growing lines of wire products to new markets. It also brought in new workers.

### SWEDISH IMMIGRANTS

Exactly when the first Swedish families came to Weston is uncertain, but at least one family was here by 1865. Within the next twenty years enthusiastic reports to relatives in their homeland encouraged many to follow. Swedish sailors found it easy to "jump ship" in New York and make their way here. One young seaman was so excited he got off in Virginia to the wrong Georgetown before he found his way north.

As many of the Swedes were skilled and committed to a strong work ethic, the mill owners were glad to employ them. Factory representatives went down to the docks to recruit these and other Scandinavian immigrants. The Andersons, Berglunds, Borgesons, Carlsons, Dahlbergs, Ekstroms, Forsbergs, Gustafsons, Hansens, Jacobsons, Jaderlunds, Johnsons, Nelsons, Olsons, Petersons, Quists, Samuelsons, Vidmarks, and Wahlquists all found a secure place to work and many continued at the wire mill all of their lives, some attaining positions of high responsibility. Many of their third and fourth generations are still living in Weston.

Fifteen years ago, when the contents of the Quist house (once the Old Lockwood home) on Georgetown Road

was sold, I was pleased to purchase an old framed portrait of a typical old Swedish couple sitting outside of their Weston home. This large, hand-tinted photograph in a curved frame covered by convex glass shows a man and wife seated on wooden kitchen chairs placed near the wellhouse. It is not a stiff formal portrait, but a relaxed domestic scene, natural and unposed. The woman in her house apron concentrates on her knitting. The old gent, wearing his Sunday hat, white shirt and suspended trousers peers through his glasses at the newspaper he holds.

When I showed it to Gertrude Walker, our former town clerk, she said, "Those are my grandparents, in about 1915. I must tell you their love story. Years ago in Sweden young Anders Gustafson fell in love with cute and lively Augusta Borg. But one day they had a frightful quarrel, and she said she never wanted to see him again. Heartbroken, Anders decided to come to America and he left."

"Not long after, Augusta repented. She blamed herself for the trouble. Now she made up her mind to come to America to find Anders, although she had no idea where he was. She wrote to a friend who lived in Brooklyn asking her to meet her when she would arrive."

"By a stroke of luck, this good friend happened to see young Gustafson on the street and told him the news. So, it was Anders, not the girl friend, who came to meet Augusta. They were married soon after and decided to come to Georgetown."

The old families, the Osborns, and Betts, who were already employed in the wire mill, no longer needed large acreage for farming. Newcomers were happy to buy off the extra land for a cheap price. Those who had worked as ship carpenters now helped the others to build their houses, working late after long hours at the factory.

As relatives and friends arrived from the old country, extra rooms were added and land further divided to accommodate them. No longer a farming community, this part of Weston formed part of a little rural village encircling the factory. While the men toiled at the looms, the women kept house, raised the children and tended a vegetable garden and chickens, sometimes a pig or cow.