

# Smith and Winchester, Part 2

*By Jamie Eves • February 22, 2020*

## Connecticut as a Maker State: The Smith and Winchester Company of South Windham, Part II

As I wrote in a previous blog, a package arrived at the Mill Museum recently, containing a historical treasure: a copy of *A Century of Pioneering in the Paper Industry*. Published in 1928, it is a short, illustrated history of the Smith and Winchester Manufacturing Company of South Windham, CT, published by the company itself. The book was a gift from Pat Abbe, whose family had once been involved with the Company. Unfortunately, Smith and Winchester, founded in 1828, closed later in the 20th century, yet for a hundred years it was a pioneer in manufacturing paper, a history worth remembering. Typically, it begins with the invention of new technology in Europe, the transplanted of that technology to Connecticut, the application of Yankee ingenuity and Connecticut waterpower, and proximity to New York and Boston markets. Here are some more excerpts from the book. We pick up in 1830, shortly after the Company's founders, James Phelps and George Spafford (the Company was originally called Phelps and Spafford), along with their foreman Charles Smith and a crew of workers, built and sold the first Fourdrinier paper-making machine manufactured in America. They quickly assembled and sold more machines, making technological improvements as they went along.

“A second machine, equally successful, was completed and sold, two years later, to Henry Hudson of East Hartford, and a third, built for the mill of W. I. C. Baldwin, near Bloomfield, N. J., was soon to add to the fame of Phelps and Spafford.”

“In 1830 George Spafford invented the first cylinder dryers, which performed, in a few minutes, work which had previously taken hours, even days. he was first, too, to devise cutters which divided the continuous web into sheets of uniform size.”

“These improvements made possible the first complete paper-making machine in history, built by young Charles Smith and his men. The machine comprised the Fourdrinier part press rolls, steam-drying cylinder, reels, and cutters, operating as a unit. It was now possible for the pulp to be taken in at one end of the machine, the manufacturing process completed, and the sheets in the desired sizes, ready for finishing or packing, turned out at the other end of the machine.”

Phelps and Spafford thus prospered for several years, manufacturing Fourdrinier machines in their little factory in South Windham, Connecticut. Then, in 1837, disaster struck, in the form of America’s first industrial age depression, the Panic of 1837. Sales dropped, and Phelps and Spafford closed their factory. It would be left to their overseer, Charles Smith, to rescue it.

“Charles Smith, however, had faith in the future of the business, and with Harvey Winchester bought out the concern and reorganized as The Smith, Winchester, & Company. The new concern, guided by the maturing mechanical genius of Charles Smith, .. weathered the financial depression....”

“By 1840 the new company had developed a line of stuff pumps and beaters, and in 1854 obtaining the patents of Joseph Jordan and Thomas Eustice, introduced the Jordan and Eustice refining engine.... This machine has been adopted by the paper industry and is in universal use throughout the country....”

“By 1853 the fame of Smith, Winchester & Company had, literally, spread from Maine to California. Oxen had hauled one of the earliest Smith, Winchester & Company machines to Maine. Shortly after, the gold fever ... attracted thousands to ... San Francisco ... and the Pioneer Paper Mill of the west coast came into being.”

“[A] machine went by boat to the Isthmus of Panama and was shipped on skids across the Isthmus. Then schooners took it to [California].”

“Demand for Smith, Winchester & Company machines grew and grew. they were installed in England, Cuba, Mexico, and South America.”

“[By the time of the Civil War], Charles Smith and Harvey Winchester looked back over the years. their bustling plant was somewhat different from the little schoolhouse where they had begun their enterprise, thirty years before.”

In a future blog, I'll continue the story of Smith and Winchester into the next generation, continuing the story of how Connecticut became a “maker state.”