

THE HAYWARD RUBBER COMPANY

BOON TO BUST IN COLCHESTER:

The agricultural Town of Colchester began a dramatic change in 1847 when Nathaniel Hayward built a rubber plant on Lebanon Avenue. Hayward was responsible for discovering a formula for the vulcanization of rubber, although credit and the patent were given to Charles Goodyear. In the early 1840's, Hayward owned a small rubber shoe factory in the town of Lisbon and was looking for a new location in which to expand his business. Henry Burr, Hayward's partner, suggested Colchester because Burr's new wife was the daughter of Colchester businessman Ralph Isham. Burr owned land on Lebanon Avenue and Cross Street (now known as Mill Street), and construction of the rubber company soon began. Through the 19th century, the Hayward Rubber Company became well known for their quality rubber shoes and boots. Nearly 1,000 people moved into the Town of Colchester, most of them to work as laborers in the factory. New homes were built to house the workers, many of them on Lebanon Avenue and Windham Avenue. Because the majority of laborers were of Irish descent, this area of town soon became known as "Dublin."

Hayward purchased the former Dudley Wright-John R. Watrous house to live with his wife, Louisa, and their four children. As his business thrived, Hayward adorned the house with Victorian details and added the Italianate carriage house and a barn in the back. Located near the center of town the home soon became a hub of Colchester society. Hayward eventually donated most of his front lawn to become Colchester's town green.



Nathaniel Hayward house as it appears today

The Town of Colchester prospered and new businesses developed. In 1854, Nathaniel Hayward helped create Colchester's first fire company, donated funds for the first fire engine, and was involved with the establishment of the Colchester Savings Bank. With a great deal of regional influence, the thriving rubber business brought the railroad into town. A local newspaper, the Colchester Advocate, operated in the area of town still referred to as Merchants Row. An assortment of hotels and saloons opened in the thriving town. By 1860 the population grew to 2,869. Within the following ten years the population reached 3,383.

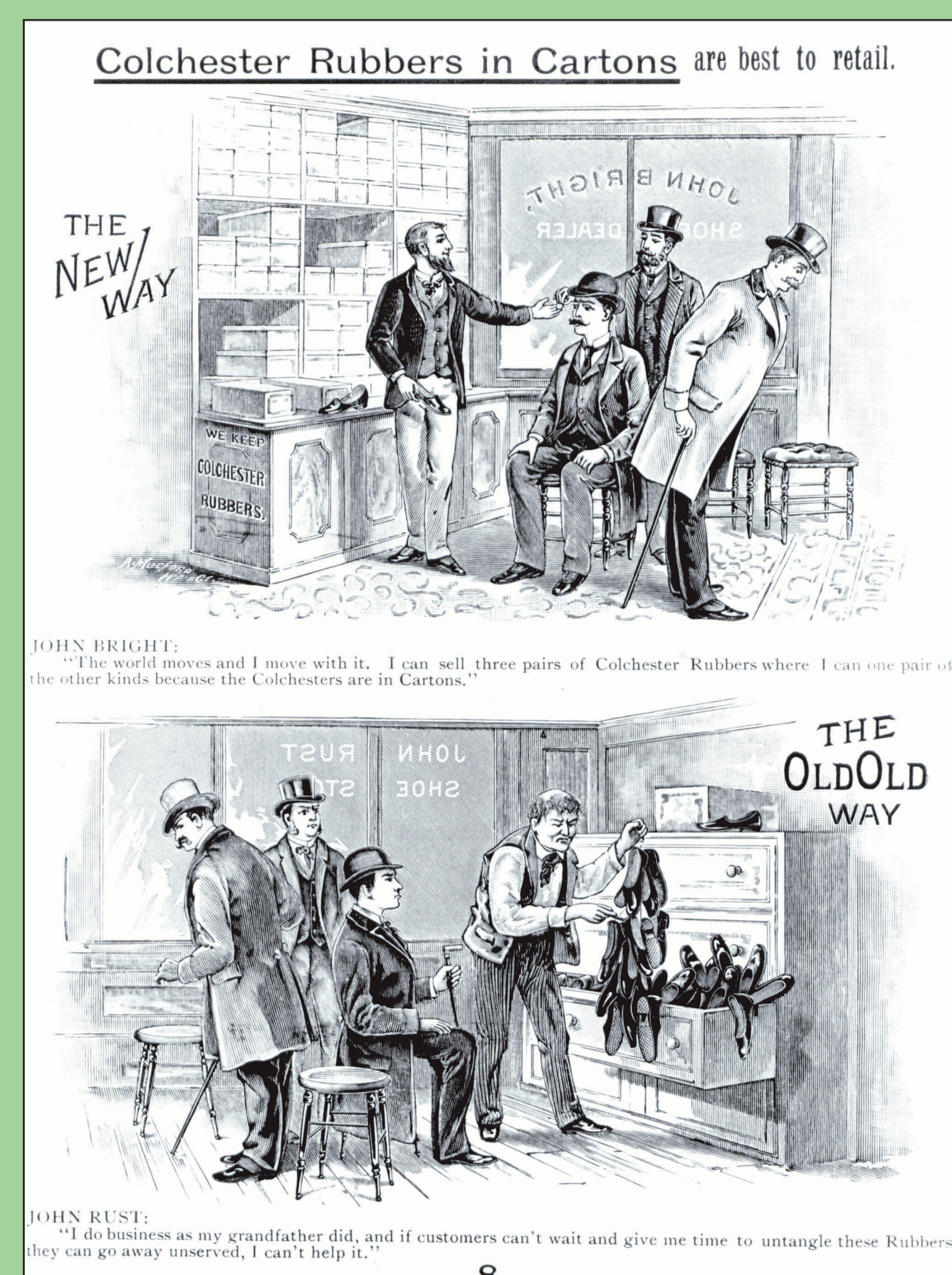
Mills, farms, retail stores, and manufacturing plants were opened in order to serve the growing population. The Colchester Wheel Company, located on Mill Hill adjacent to Meadow Brook, had 11 buildings and shops, which included a brick mill, a carriage shop, a sawmill, a blacksmith shop, a paint shop, housing units and a managers house. Unfortunately, in the early 1880's most of the buildings were destroyed when the dam on the brook collapsed and the area was flooded.

Nathaniel Hayward died in 1865, but the rubber company and the town of Colchester continued to thrive. However, the decline of the town began in 1893 when The Colchester Rubber Company was sold to the U.S. Rubber Company. During the Christmas vacation the new owners closed the plant, ostensibly, for the holiday, but the plant never reopened. More than 600 workers were left without jobs with little or no options in the town of Colchester. The population rapidly decreased as the jobless workers left the town to seek employment in other parts of the state.



Illustration of the Hayward Rubber Company, ca 1850

In 1908, after remaining idle for 12 years, the rubber company plant burned to the ground. The plant, consisting of six wooden and brick buildings two and three stories high, were totally destroyed. It was believed at the time, that the fire was intentionally set, although no one was ever prosecuted. The S & S Worldwide facility is presently located on the site of the Hayward Rubber Company.



Hayward water pump for fighting fires