

The ACME Research Institute Presents:

Coffee Grounds #22

■ I recently revisited the “*History of Berks County in Pennsylvania*” by Morton L. Montgomery, published in 1886.

On page 701, embedded in a discussion of William Harbster and the Reading Hardware Co., I found:

*“William Harbster is descended from German ancestry. His grandfather, John Harbster, on his emigration to America, settled in Albany townships, Berks County, Pa. Among his children was Henry Harbster, born in the same township, from whence he removed to Lehigh and later to Montgomery County. **He [Henry Harbster] was a blacksmith by trade, but subsequently engaged in the manufacture of coffee-mills, and conducted a thriving business in the sale of these articles.** He [Henry Harbster] married Mary, daughter of Sebastian Bucher, whose children were Matilda (married to Casper Aman), Hannah (married to Jacob Nukerck), Ellen (deceased, married to William M. Griscom), William, Henry, Samuel (who died in youth), Matthan and John (deceased).”*

[William Harbster (1823-1885), John’s son, who was also a blacksmith in his youth, went on to start the Reading Hardware-Works in 1851 which subsequently became Harbster Brothers, then Harbster Brothers & Co, and finally, in 1872, the **Reading Hardware Co.** (see Chapter 139 of “*The MacMillan Index of Antique Coffee Mills*”).]

On page 952, embedded in a discussion of Amityville in Amity Township, I found:

*“Amityville is a beautifully located village, on the Amity turnpike leading to the Yellow House, a little east of the centre of the township. . . . This locality was called “New Storeville” as early as 1782, on account of a new store having been established there by Ludwig Spiese, who first began trading at Weavertown. . . . About 1852 the name New Storeville was abandoned. The place has since been called Amityville. **In the beginning of the [nineteenth] century a man named Luther had a public-house near the angle of the roads, where is now the Schaeffer residence, the building being a quaint log structure, and the sign having a coon painted on it, whence it was called the “Coon’s Nest”. Luther was a coffee-mill maker and had a small shop where he carried on that business.**”*

And on page 1188, embedded in a discussion of Unionville in Union Township, I found:

*“Unionville is the oldest hamlet in the township. The land in that locality was owned by Abraham Brower, and upon part of it John Brower founded a business point before 1820, called Browerstown. When the post-office was established, in 1828, it was called “Brower”, by which it is still designated. The present title of the hamlet was derived from the township. Abraham Brower carried on a small foundry until his death in 1830, after which the business was continued for some time by his son-in-law, Augustus Leopold. Small castings were made. **John Brower had a shop for the manufacture of candle-sticks, lamps and coffee-mills, in which six men were employed; but this business was discontinued before 1830.** . . . A public-house was also kept, from 1820 to 1874, by John Brower, Titus Lavering and Augustus Kerlin.”*

■ The search for Henry Harbster, mentioned above, first led me to the “*Historical & Biographical Annals of Berks County, Pennsylvania*”, also written by Morton L. Montgomery and published in 1909, which clarified the intermingled biographies of John, Henry and William Harbster:

On page 528, embedded in a biography of William Harbster, I found:

*“**Henry Harbster**, son of John, was born in Berks county and educated in the subscription schools. In early life he learned the blacksmith’s trade, which he followed some years. He also **invented and manufactured coffee mills in Berks, Montgomery and Lehigh counties, in which he met with more***

than ordinary success. . . . He married a daughter of Sebastian Bucher, and their children were: Matilda [1817-1890], wife of Casper Aman; Hannah [1822-1908], whose third husband was Jacob Newkirk; Ellen [1828-1864], deceased wife of William M. Griscom; Henry; Samuel, who died in youth; Matthan [1831-1912], of Reading; and William [1823-1885]. Of this family in 1906 were still living Hannah and Matthan."

And on page 536, embedded in a biography of Matthan Harbster, I found:

"Henry Harbster, son of John, was born in Berks county. His trade was that of blacksmith, but he was also something of a machinist and realized an ample fortune from the manufacture and sale of coffee-mills. He married Mary Bucher, and they had seven children, Matthan being the fourth in order of birth. The parents [Henry and Mary] both died in 1860[?]."

Henry Harbster was born in Albany Township, Berks County in 1793. He married Mary [or Maria] Bucher (1797-1865) in 1816. In the 1820 U.S. Census record he is listed as "Engaged in Manufactures" in Albany Township. In 1830 he is still listed in Albany Township. Henry Harbster died in Pennsylvania in 1860.

In *Grinder Finder* #91 (page 13), I wrote about a primitive walnut box mill signed "H. H." on the flat serpentine crank. Perhaps this mill was made by Henry Harbster.

■ The search for **John Brower**, the Unionville, Pennsylvania coffee mill maker mentioned above, turned into a very exciting and interesting chase. Several familiar names were encountered.

John Brower was born on September 3, 1779. His wife was named Frances. He is listed in the 1810 and 1820 U.S. Census records. In the 1820 record, there are 3 persons listed as "Engaged in Manufactures". He died on September 21, 1823 and is buried in the Saint Gabriels Episcopal Church Cemetery in Douglassville, Berks County, Pennsylvania. (**W.W. Weaver** made coffee mills in Douglassville, Berks County, Pa. – about 1 mile northwest of Unionville.)

The most enlightening information concerning John Brower came in the form of his estate papers which I found on the Ancestry.com website. John Brower died intestate (i.e. he did not leave a will). His widow, Frances, and a friend, John Bannan, were named executors of his estate. In accordance with Pennsylvania law, John Brower's estate was inventoried. "A true and perfect Inventory and just appraisement of all and Singular the goods & chattles, rights and credits, which were of John Brower late of the county of Berks in the state of Pennsylvania dec..d at the time of his death" included "1 lot of charcoal" valued at \$25, "1 lot of carpenter tools" valued at \$10, "Smith tools" valued at \$47, "1 lot of old and new iron" valued at \$15, "1 stove & pipe" valued at \$4, "lamps locks & candle sticks" valued at \$100 as well as numerous other household items. The former items are consistent with the occupation, "coffee mill maker".

Also listed in the inventory were "Book debts against" (i.e. money owed by) John Brower's customers. Among these debtors were **Jacob Fisher** (\$390.75) and **Jeremiah Putz** (\$2.25). I discussed Jacob Fisher in *Grinder Finder* #95 (page 5). He made his mills in Hamburg, Berks County and Harrisburg, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania. Hamburg is only about 30 miles northwest of Unionville. I discussed a "J. PUTZ" mill in *Grinder Finder* #96 (page 18). That discussion included a list of four potential J. Putzes, one of which was a Jacob Putz, born in about 1836, who was baptized in the Episcopal Church and resided in Douglassville, Berks County, Pennsylvania which, as noted above, is only about a mile northwest of Unionville. Two other J Putzes also resided in Berks County. The "J. PUTZ" mill in question was likely made ca. 1850, long after John Brower died but perhaps the J. Putz who made it was Jeremiah Putz himself or a relative – perhaps Jacob Putz of Douglassville, Johathan [sic] Putz of Pike, or James Putz of Reading. A search for Jeremiah Putz led only to the fact that he married Rebecca Ludwig (1800-1870) of Amity Township suggesting that he was likely about the same age as John Brower.

The total assets of John Brower's estate were \$7,250.77 not including buildings and land. John Brower's outstanding debts, however, totaled \$11,737.73. At the time of his death, John Brower also left "two children to wit Matilda and Jeremiah who [were] yet in their minority [less than 14 years of age]". Because "the personal estate of the said Intestate [was] insufficient for the payment of his debts", the executors of his estate petitioned the court "to make sale of the said messuage [house] & with the appurtenances for the payment of the debts and the maintenance and education of the said minor children of the said Intestate." Thus, "a certain messuage, tenement and tract of land situate[d] in Union Township aforesaid, bounded by lands of Jonas Yocom, William Kirlin, the River Schuylkill and Canal, containing fifty four acres, and improvements consisting of a newly erected Grist Mill, dwelling house, barn and other buildings" were sold at auction to settle his estate. Strangely, the Reading Pennsylvania Orphans Court "appoint[ed] Abraham Brower of the Union Township – in said county Guardian of the persons and Estates of the said Matilda and Jeremiah during their respective minorities." The remainder of the estate's buildings and land were sold by Abraham Brower in 1832 when Jeremiah was 11 and Matilda was 16.

■ The "*Historical & Biographical Annals of Berks County, Pennsylvania*" written by Morton L. Montgomery (1909) referenced above turned out to be a goldmine of information. In *Grinder Finder* #89 (page 14), Dick Duez wrote about a primitive box mill signed "**I RUSSELL**" on the flat serpentine crank. This mill was quite similar to the more familiar mills signed "J. FISHER". As noted above, Jacob Fisher made his mills in Hamburg, Berks County and Harrisburg, Dauphin Country, Pennsylvania. On page 1273 of the above noted reference, embedded in a biography of Amos Turner, a master mechanic for the Lehigh Valley Railroad Co., I found:

"Amos Turner's grandfather, Joseph Russell, was a native of Union township, Berks county, and for many years carried on the manufacture of gun-barrels and coffee-mill hoppers. In the war of 1812-1815 he served as a corporal in the company of Capt. Jonathan Jones. He died in 1862, aged seventy-five years. He married Elizabeth Reifsnyder (daughter of Peter [Reifsnyder], of Montgomery county), and had nine children: Mary (m. Henry Antrim of Mount Holly, N. J.); Washington [1815-1852] (who became a seafaring man [and was lost at sea]); Peter (m. Sarah Sharp, of Wilkes-Barre, and became a prominent Episcopal rector at Mauch Chunk); George [1820-1891]; Elizabeth [1831-1915] (the only one now living, widow of Samuel Eagle, of Douglassville); Catharine [1822-1824] (died when two years old); Harriet [1825-1826] (died when eight months old); and James [1828-1834] (died at the age of six years, nine months).

Mr. Turner's great-grandfather, James Russell, emigrated with his father, Thomas Russell, from Scotland on account of religious persecution about 1780, and located in the upper section of Chester county in the vicinity of Hopewell Furnace, where he married a widow, Mrs. Green (nee Updegrave).

Joseph Russell was born in Chester County, Pennsylvania, on Feb. 8, 1787, the son of James Russell and the grandson of Thomas Russell. In the 1820 U.S. Census record he is listed as "Engaged in Agriculture" in Douglass, Berks County. From 1840 through 1860, his residence is listed as Amity, Berks County. In 1850 he is listed in the Census as a "Laborer". Joseph Russell died in Berks County on March 7, 1862. His wife, Elizabeth (b. May 6, 1788 in Montgomery County), died December 17, 1855. Joseph and Elizabeth and several of their children are buried in Saint Gabriel's Episcopal Church Cemetery in Douglassville.

■ Encouraged by my success finding coffee mill makers chronicled in the histories of Pennsylvania counties, I moved on to the counties of Ohio. In "*The History of Tuscarawas County, Ohio*" published by Warner, Beers & Co. in 1884, I found, on pages 469-470:

*"On the pages of the Tuscarawas Chronicle, for the year 1821, advertisements of the following New Philadelphia merchants and business men are found: . . . **John White** gives notice that he has commenced the gun-making and repairing business, and hopes to merit encouragement and support. 'Coffee mills sharpened and repaired.'"*

Tuscarawas County is in east-central Ohio. New Philadelphia is about 70 miles south of Cleveland and about 120 miles northeast of Columbus.

■ In “*The Pioneer Scrap-Book of Wood County and The Maumee Valley*” by C.W. Evers and F.J. Oblinger, published in 1909, I found, on page 77, a short tale titled “Going to the Mill – How Wood County Pioneers Took Their Grist to Mills on the River Raisin”. This story ends with:

“Uncle John Gingery has in his possession today, a coffee mill that he purchased in Wayne county, Ohio, in 1826.

The old mill is still hale and hearty, and has good teeth yet for a pioneer of 57 years old. Bushels of buckwheat and corn have met the crushing influence of that old mill, and bolted through a fine meal sieve have furnished “Snap Jack” material that fried in “bar” fat went far toward nourishing the sinewy arm of the old pioneers when by reason of the impassable condition of roads or the inclement weather, they were prevented from going to mill.”

Wayne County is in northeast Ohio and was named for General “Mad” Anthony Wayne of American Revolution-fame. Perhaps an ACME member will encounter a mill that was made in that part of Ohio.

■ A perusal of early histories of all of the counties of New Jersey failed to elicit any hits for coffee mill makers.

■ Not surprisingly, a similar search of early histories of the counties of Connecticut was more rewarding. “*The Memorial History of Hartford County Connecticut 1633-1884*”, edited by J. Hammond Trumbull in 1886, contained some familiar names. **Jared Strickland** of Glastonbury, Connecticut was mentioned on page 214 (see also *Grinder Finder* #18 (page 27) and *Grinder Finder* #94 (page 15)). The formation of **Peck, Stow & Wilcox** of Southington, Connecticut is described on pages 375-6 (see also “*The MacMillan Index of Antique Coffee Mills*”, Chapter 129).

Also on page 376, I found:

“ . . . The bolt-factories of Southington now turn out an average of more than one thousand bolts per day for every man and boy employed. Among those who have developed the business are . . .

A.P. & E.H. Plant (afterward the Plants Manufacturing Company, which was at one time the largest maker of these goods in the Union) . . . Coffee-mills were at one time an important part of the business of the Plants Brothers, who were pioneers in this line; but these are now made by another firm.”

The “*History of New Haven County, Connecticut*”, edited by J.L. Rockey in 1892, also mentioned some familiar names including, on page 351, **Charles Parker** of Yalesville and Meriden, Connecticut, noting that

“In later years the greater part of the Parker shops [in Yaleville] has been devoted to the manufacture of the woodwork for coffee and spice mills, piano stools and packing cases, about 1,000,000 feet of lumber being used annually. Fifty hands were thus employed, in 1889, by the Parker Manufacturing Company, with A.G. Brown as superintendent. An excellent dam produces a motor of 150 horsepower, but since these shops are auxiliary to the works at Meriden they have lost their former importance.”

Additional details concerning the Meriden factory can be found on pages 486-7 of the “*History of Wallingford, Conn., From Its Settlement in 1670 to the Present Time, Including Meriden . . . and Cheshire . . .*” written by Charles H. S. Davis in 1885. The life of Charles Parker (including his early association with **Lewis & Holt**) is also described in detail on pages 611-2 (see also *The Index*, Chapter 126).

On page 353, I read that

*“Some time about 1826 **J. and M. Carrington** began the **manufacture of coffee mills**, on Main street, [in Wallingford, Connecticut] but built a shop on Wharton’s brook, east of the village, being the pioneers in that locality. They discontinued about 1830.”*

(See also *The Index*, Chapter 27.)

Finally, on page 683, I read that

*“Some time about 1830 **Edward A. Cornwall** had a **small shop** [in Cheshire, Connecticut], supplied with water power from the canal, below the second lock, **in which were manufactured coffee mills.**”*

(See also *The Index*, Chapter 41.)

The “*History of Middlesex County, Connecticut*” published by J.B. Beers & Co. in 1884 mentioned a name I was not familiar with. In a discussion of “Manufactures of East Hampton” on page 178, I found:

*Bevin Brothers Manufacturing Company. – The next factory in order, or the first one, in fact, that is now in active operation, is that of The Bevin Brothers’ Manufacturing Company, which stands on the site of the **East Hampton Manufacturing Company’s works, which were organized in 1830 by Butler N. Strong, Harry Strong, Dan. B. Niles, and Alfred Williams. They carried on a limited business in the manufacture of waffle irons, coffee mills, bells, and other metal goods. In 1837, Chauncey and Abner G. Bevin bought out the firm, and in 1838 admitted their brother Philo as a partner, under the name of Bevin Brothers. They manufacture sleigh, hand, house, cow, sheep, door, and ship bells; also preserve kettles and waffle irons. . . .**”*

Of the four men listed above that established the East Hampton Manufacturing Co., the latter two seem to have been the “brains of the operation” while the former two may have simply supplied some of the brawn. Unfortunately, I was only able to pick up their respective trails in 1850, about thirteen years after the sale of their company.

Dan B. Niles was born in Connecticut in about 1797. He and his wife, Maria (b. ~1801), appear to have had four children: Jane (b. ~1827), Wickliff (b. ~1829), Henry (b. ~1831) and Maria (b. ~1831). In the 1850 and 1870 U.S. Census records he is listed as a “Bell Maker” living in Chatham, Middlesex County. In the 1860 Census record he is listed as a “Manufacturer” living in East Hampton. (Chatham was officially renamed East Hampton in 1915. In the nineteenth century, Chatham was the U.S. bell manufacturing center. The Bevin Brothers company was in business until 2012 when it was burned down.) Dan B. Niles died in East Hampton in 1878.

Alfred William Williams was born in Hampton, Connecticut (about 30 miles northeast of East Hampton) on Feb. 1, 1803, the son of Thomas and Betsey Williams. He married Harriet Bailey (1806-1844) in 1826 and the couple had three children: Natrunid (b. ~1828), Francis Eugene Williams (1833-1866), and Charles (b. ~1844). After Harriet’s death (possibly in childbirth) in 1844, Alfred married Mary A. Brainard (1821-1912). In the 1850 U.S. Census record, Alfred Williams is listed as a “Bell founder” living in Chatham. In the 1860 Census he is listed as a “Clerk” living in Carbondale, Luzerne County, Pennsylvania. In the 1870 Census he and Mary are listed as living with the Brainards (possibly Mary’s parents) in Windham, Connecticut. Alfred is “Without Occupation”. In the 1880 Census he is again listed as a “Manufacturer” living in Hampton with Mary. Alfred Williams died on Dec. 5, 1887 in Hampton.

Butler Newton Strong was born in Connecticut on Mar. 4, 1808. He married Juliann (or Julia Ann) Comstock (1812-1890) in about 1832 and the couple had six children: William F. (b. ~1834), Henry N. (b. ~1836), James G. (b. ~1840), Susannah C. (b. ~1842), Newton B. (b. ~1852) and Anna C. (b. ~1854). In the 1850 U.S. Census records he is listed as a “Seed Grower” living in Wethersfield, Hartford County and in the 1860 Census record as a “Seed Grower” living in Portland, Middlesex County. In the 1870 Census record he is listed as a “Seedsman” living in Portland. He died that same year in Portland.

Harry (or Henry) Strong was born in Connecticut on Oct. 5, 1791, the son of Seth Strong (1761-1818) and Rachel Robinson (1764-1850). He and his wife, Barbara Scranton (1797-1885), had five children: Jane E. (1827-1909), Edwin Madison (1829-1903), Susan Ellen (1832-1898), Talcott (b. ~1840) and Harriet (b. ~1843). In the 1850 U.S. Census he is listed as a “Laborer” living in Durham, Middlesex County, Connecticut. In the 1860 and 1870 Census records he is listed as a “Farmer”. Harry Strong died in Durham on Jan. 21, 1876.

I am not aware of any coffee mills bearing the “East Hampton Manufacturing Co.” name but in *Grinder Finder* #18 (pages 16-17), Judy Sivonda wrote about the “R.U. Richmond – Chatham, CT” cast iron side-mill. She theorized that the East Hampton Manufacturing Company may have made this mill for Robert Usher Richmond. The information in the “*History of Middlesex County, Connecticut*” quoted above is another data nugget that might support such a theory. In *Grinder Finder* #50 (page 19), Judy also noted that the R.U. Richmond mill was made in two sizes. The mill in question is pictured in White & Sivonda’s “*Antique Coffee Grinders*” (page 25).