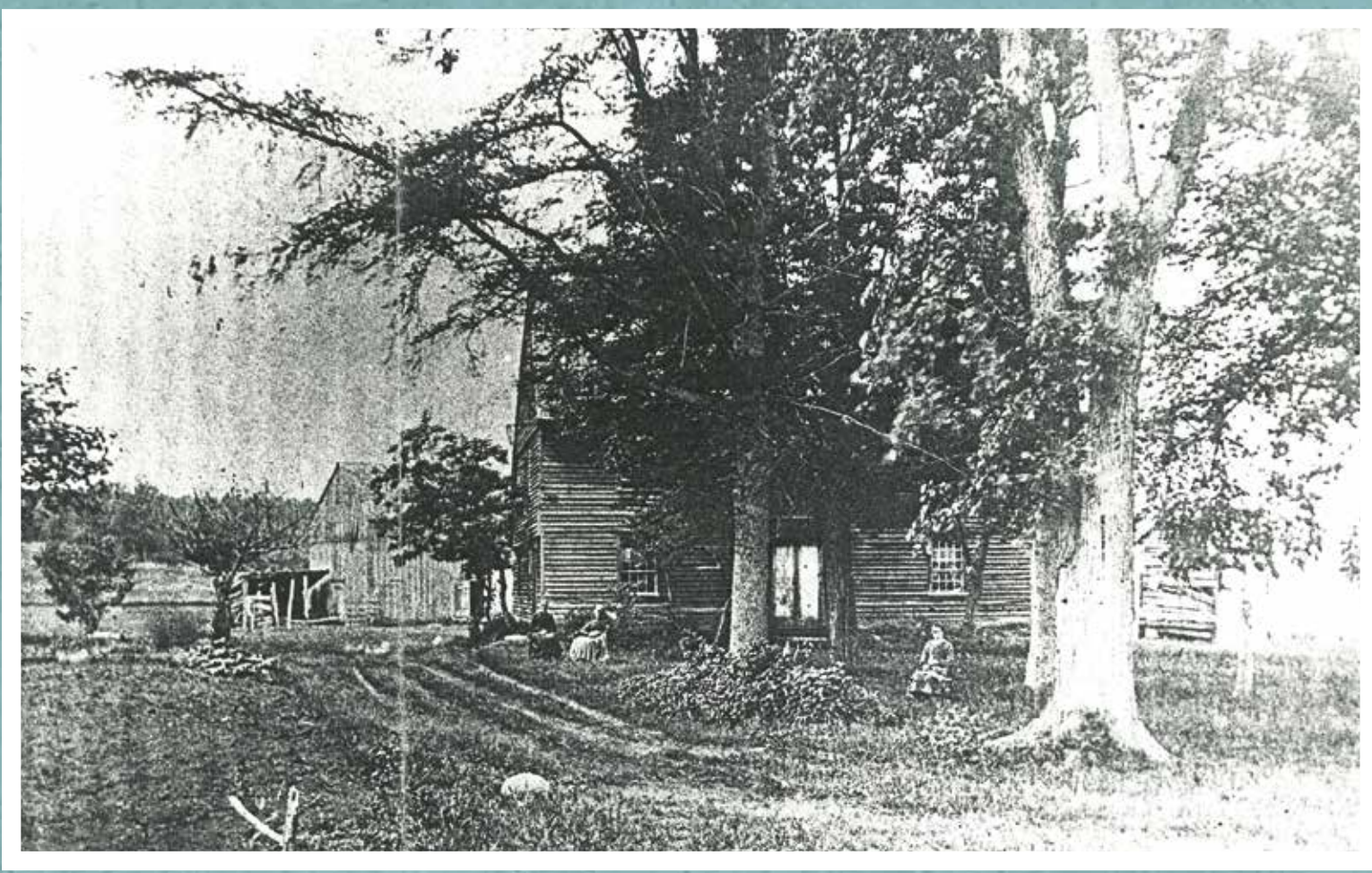


# SOUTHWICK'S SETTLEMENT, INDUSTRIES & TRANSPORTATION

The settling of Southwick began in 1732, when SAMUEL FOWLER, a resident of Westfield and a subject of King George II of England, and others bought land to the south of town in an area formally known as the Outer Commons. This uninhabited area, dubbed "Poverty Plains" by the locals, was reached by a winding trail through the forest which was frequented by unfriendly Indians. By 1734, Fowler, age 23, had married, cleared land, built a house, and had begun farming. More settlers followed and on August 23, 1775, Southwick became an independent town with a population of 800. These were resourceful, hard-working people and in subsequent generations the town's industries included agriculture, the manufacture of telescopes, bricks, cigars, and gunpowder. From the earliest times sawmills, a shingle mill, a tannery, and a gristmill were in operation in Southwick.



Shown above is the DAVID FOWLER saltbox built in 1747, about ½ mile north of Samuel Fowler's house. David's house was one of several fort houses built in the area during this time; it contained an inner brick room in which the occupants could hide and defend themselves in the event of an Indian attack. In recent years the house was dismantled and reassembled at a new location.

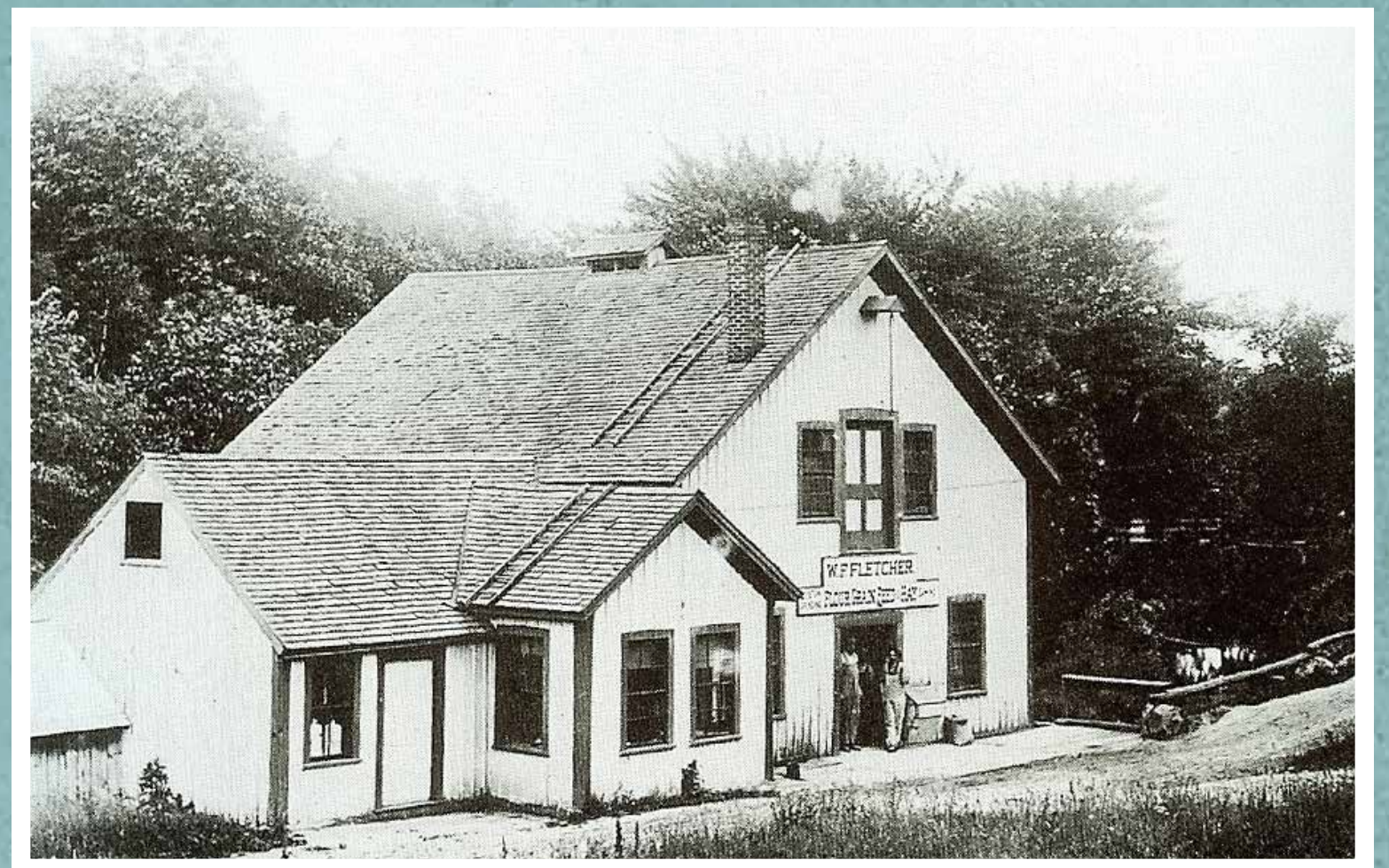
The Samuel Fowler house stood on the west side of what is now called the College Highway, about 1 ¾ miles north of Depot Street. The original house was a small cape which became an ell on a larger c. 1750-1760 addition. The building was destroyed by fire in 1977.

## THE DEPOT STREET AREA OF SOUTHWICK

Land records show that in 1757, MILITIA CAPTAIN MATTHEW LAFLIN purchased land along what is now Powder Mill Road. Here, assisted by three slaves, he began the manufacture of

gunpowder, some of which was used in the Battle of Bunker Hill. He continued to supply powder to the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War. Three generations of his descendants, all named Matthew Laflin, participated in the manufacture of gunpowder. In the early 1800's the mills were sold to THERON ROCKWELL. Depending on the economy, there were up to five powder mills in operation along the east side of Powder Mill Road. This was a dangerous occupation; explosions and deaths were common. There are about ten people buried in Southwick's Old Cemetery whose demise is attributed to powder mill accidents. The last powder mill in operation exploded in 1893, bankrupting the operator, JOSEPH E. ROWELL. The quaint house located on the right about 0.2 mile north on Powder Mill Road is built on the exact site of this last mill.

Old maps and land deeds record the presence in Southwick of several water-powered mills used for lumber production, shingle-making, and grinding grain.



The most widely known of these mills was located at the foot of Depot Street (then called Broad Street). This mill complex consisted of a grist mill and an adjacent sawmill that were in operation prior to 1775. In 1875, owners JOHN BOYLE and EDWIN GILBERT hired a young man named WILLIAM F. FLETCHER to operate the mill. William bought the business in 1896 and continued operations until 1936, when a flood destroyed the mill dam which was located several hundred feet upstream. Deprived of a water supply with which to operate the waterwheel, Mr. Fletcher closed the mill and retired. The mill stood until 1955, when it was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. The millrace and foundations can still be seen down the embankment at the east end of Depot Street.

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## TRANSPORTATION

When Samuel Fowler built his house in 1734, the movement of people, produce, and merchandise in rural areas remained much as it had been for centuries: roads were muddy trails through the forest and bridges were few or nonexistent. Transportation was limited to the speed and strength of a team of horses or a yoke of plodding oxen. Then in 1830 the Hampshire and Hampden Canal traversed the Congamond Ponds on its route from New Haven to Northampton. The canal operated seven months a year, provided there was sufficient water to float the horse-drawn barges. People and bulk merchandise could now be transported with relative ease and at less expense. But the real social and economic revolution occurred when in 1855, the New York and New Haven Railroad replaced the canal. Six freight and four passenger trains passed through Southwick each day. The canal boat trip which once took three days to complete could now be done in a few hours. The era of rapid, inexpensive mass transportation had begun.



The Southwick rail station was built in 1896 and continued in use until 1932 when passenger service on the line was terminated. It was torn down in 1938. The station stood on the left side of the rail trail at the top of the rise north of Depot Street. A freight shed stood across the tracks. The station faced the brown house at 6 Powder Mill Road in which CHARLES FLETCHER, the brother of miller William Fletcher, lived. This house is visible from the Depot Street kiosk.