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September 2, 2020

CHARLES G. KRATTENMAKER, JR.  
MARY WINSTANLEY O'CONNOR  
KENNETH INGBER

OF COUNSEL: RAYMOND SAYEG

**VIA EMAIL**

Emily Sullivan  
Conservation Agent  
Arlington Conservation Commission  
730 Massachusetts Avenue  
Arlington, MA 02476

Re: 1165R Massachusetts Avenue, Arlington, MA

Dear Ms. Sullivan:

This letter is intended to provide additional information in response to your email of August 31, 2020 to Dan Wells at Goddard Consulting.

Enclosed are plans 1086 and 1088 of 1939, from December, 1939, which clearly show all three mill buildings constructed on land formerly owned by the Theodore Schwamb Co.. These plans also depict the parking field as well. Also enclosed is plan 860 of 1940 which, at the top half of the plan, evidences the fact that the Theodore Schwamb Co. owned everything south of the railroad tracks and east of Ryder Street.

1167R Massachusetts Avenue, which now houses WorkBar, formerly housed the Schwamb Piano Factory, where the company manufactured piano cases. As detailed in the attached article, in 1850, Charles and Jacob Schwamb moved the Dodge Mill to what is now 1167 Massachusetts Avenue to make piano cases. In 1853, Charles and Jacob were joined by Theodore, Peter and Frederick Schwamb, who operated a collaborative piano case business at 1165 Massachusetts Avenue. In 1928, Theodore's nephew purchased the company and discontinued the manufacture of piano casings and began to manufacture architectural woodwork. See the article by Grace Dingee and the photograph attached.

With respect to Lot 8D, a 2,950 square foot lot which is part of what is labeled "0 Ryder Street", directly abuts the Mill Brook and the rear mill building, incorrectly identified as 165R Massachusetts Avenue on Plan 110 of 2019, a copy of which is enclosed, the applicant would suggest to the Commission that it is indeed reasonable for the Commission to conclude that this area given its location was land clearly associated with the historic mill complex use.

It is the applicant's position that the parking fields and the access route to the west along Mill Brook is to be considered land within the historic mill complex which is exempt from the

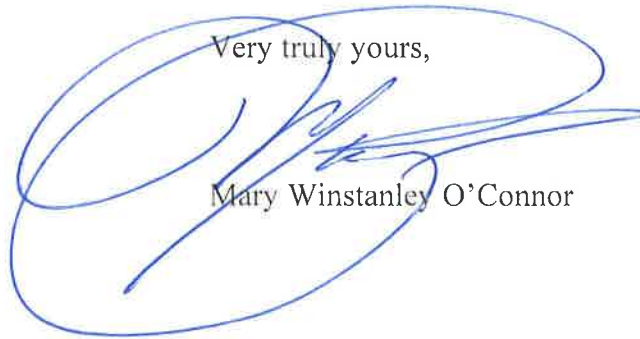
**KRATTENMAKER O'CONNOR & INGBER P.C.**

Emily Sullivan  
September 2, 2020  
Page 2

Riverfront Area since it is land clearly associated with the historic mill complex use. See Matter of 104 Stony Brook, LLC, OADR, Docket No. WET-2017-021, 12 (2018).

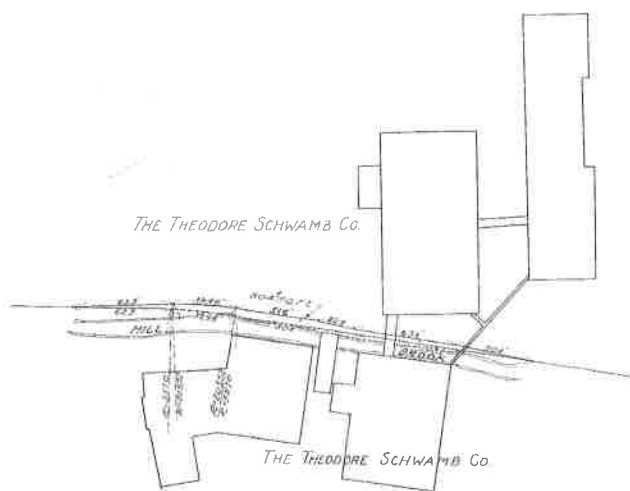
In the event you require any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me or Dan Wells. I thank you.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Mary Winstanley O'Connor', is written over the typed name. The signature is stylized with large loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mary Winstanley O'Connor

MWO/ccg  
Enclosures  
6926



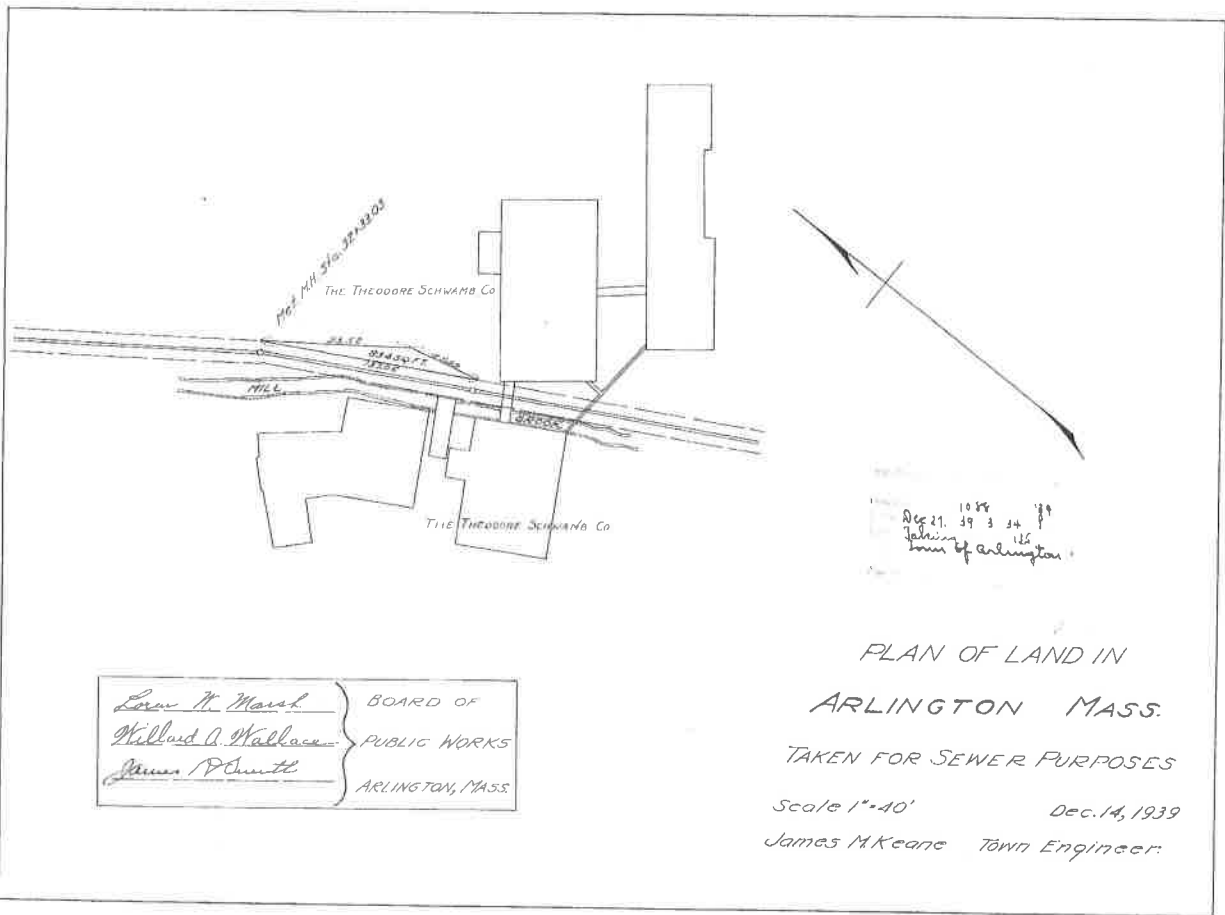
1016 39  
Dec 15, 1939  
James M. Keane  
Town Engineer

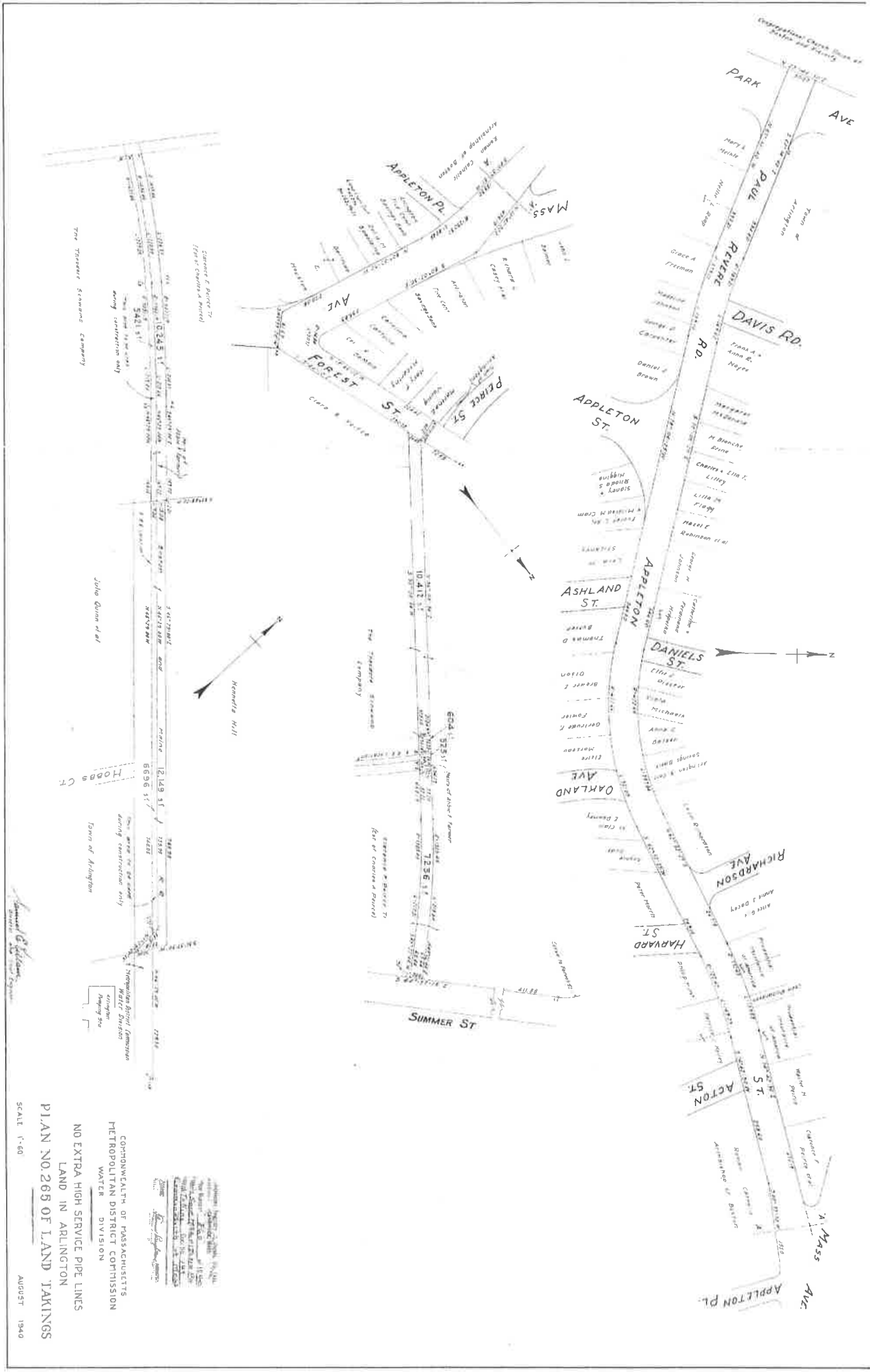
<i>Lowell A. Marsh</i> <i>Willard A. Wallace</i> <i>James P. Smith</i>	BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS ARLINGTON, MASS.
------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----------------------------------------------

PLAN OF LAND IN  
ARLINGTON MASS.

TAKEN FOR STORM DRAIN PURPOSES

Scale 1"=40' Dec. 15, 1939  
James M. Keane Town Engineer.





COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT COMMISSION  
WATER DIVISION

NO EXTRA HIGH SERVICE PIPE LINES  
LAND IN ARLINGTON

PLAN NO. 265 OF LAND TAKINGS

SCALE 1"=60'

AUGUST 1940

even though they were threatened at times in the years when school divestment was the fashion, the premise being that the school-age population would continue to decline. In 1899 also, Peter Schwamb, a long-time member of the Arlington Water Commission, was, in the words of William Cutter, “instrumental in having the town admitted into the Metropolitan water system.” He remained active at Theodore Schwamb Company and joined in its incorporation as Treasurer in 1897.

After Theodore's death in 1909, Peter took early retirement from M.I.T. and worked even more closely with the company until his own retirement in 1924.

While Theodore Schwamb built his company slowly, Charles leapt ahead quickly. From 1864 to 1879, Theodore's expansion was slower than Charles's. In 1878, for instance, when the bulk of the Mill owners were awarded damages for the drastic curtailment of the waters of the Sucker Brook due to the excavation of the Heights Reservoir, Theodore received \$6,024.16. Charles Schwamb, on the other hand, still riding the crest of the vastly popular oval frame business, received \$11,587.58. In 1875, *The Arlington Advocate* noted that Charles Schwamb had acquired “a snug fortune” in his business. In October of that year, he organized a surprise party among his thirty-five mill workers to welcome his twenty-one-year-old son, Carl William, into his business as a partner. “The men in the establishment last Friday evening, despite the unfavorable state of the weather, marched in a body to the residence of Mr. Schwamb to congratulate the new firm.” The “residence” was an impressive new mansard-roof house, which Charles had recently constructed at what is now 22 Fessenden Street. What Carl William, an artistic young man, thought of joining a dusty business (it was apparent later that his lungs were delicate), is a good question.

But if he had to choose sawdust, rather than music, nevertheless, he remained a dutiful son and partner in the firm. He was the only son available at that time. When his only brother, Herbert Page, reached maturity 11 years later, he chose to go west to Denver. Within these limitations, Carl and his parents seemed to understand one another. He served as alternate organist, not only at the First Baptist Church where the family worshipped, but at various churches in the Heights and in Lexington. He was pianist for many years for the Sunday school of the First Baptist; and he designed music curriculum for the Arlington schools. Carl William died at the relatively early age, of 57 in 1912; yet for many decades thereafter a harpsichord stood on the third floor of the Mill as a reminder. In gratitude for Carl



*In the middle : The Theodore Schwamb house as it looks today, without wrap-around porch. The photo shows the whole ensemble of historic buildings. Right to left: Former Theodore Schwamb Company Mill buildings, 1165-1167 Mass. Avenue (mid-19th/early 20th century) Theodore Schwamb house, 1171 Mass. Ave.; (c. 1845); and the Kimball Farmer house, 1173 Mass Ave. (c. 1828).*

William's contributions to the First Baptist Church in Arlington Center, the parish gave him an intricately carved square piano, an instrument which has been lovingly restored in the family of his granddaughter, Dorothy Sweet Fornan, of Macomb, Illinois.

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*The Advocate* reported that “The building is of the olden time construction and the timbers are put together with wooden pins, heavy timbers being used and many of them, quite a contrast to the buildings of today”. In recent years, several nostalgic mill enthusiasts have looked for this treasure, only to leave again cursing the brick-cube apartment building which

has replaced it.)

In the early 1890s, America experienced a severe economic panic, followed by a prolonged recession. It is therefore surprising to read that the Theodore Schwamb Company saw constant growth, both in the 1890s and in the first years of the new century. In 1898, the year after its incorporation, the Company was the largest single business in Arlington. Directors were Peter Schwamb, Treasurer, Philip Eberhardt, Clerk and Assistant Superintendent, and Jacob Bitzer, Head of the shop. New property was purchased behind the Mill in 1905. In the same year, a narrow-gauge spur railroad track was added, linking the firm to the railroad and enabling the company to receive and deliver almost in the manner of a private railroad.

Among the new structures, the largest was the four-story brick building, which today still bears uppermost on its facade the words, THEODORE SCHWAMB CO., ready for the passers-by of the twenty-first century.

As the middle class began to upscale its musical tastes in the new century, the vogue for upright pianos gave way to the aspiration for a grand piano. Theodore Schwamb Co. followed the trend, which required not only skill but speed and coordination in gluing veneers to its fine hardwoods. As the new century dawned, however, the first generation seemed suddenly to have grown quite venerable. At Charles Schwamb and Son Co., the heir apparent, Carl William, was on a protracted stay in Denver to improve his health. At the Mill,



TEXT VERSION:

## THEODORE SCHWAMB & THE ERA OF THE GERMAN MILLS IN ARLINGTON

*By Grace Dingee, Mill Historian and Board Member*

In 1838, Jacob Schwamb emigrated to Boston from Untenheim, Rhein Hessen, Germany. Jacob was the first of the Schwamb brothers to emigrate to the United States. By 1857, six of the seven Schwamb brothers had emigrated from Rhineland Pfalz to the United States.

In their heyday, nine separate mills, each with one or two backup mill ponds, dotted the Mill Brook Valley along Massachusetts Avenue from East Lexington as far as Mystic Street in Arlington. The water of the Mill Brook was used by each mill wheel in turn, and the water was then passed on to the next. After 1872 the mills were forced to gradually convert to steam when the Arlington Heights residential plan was laid out and the town dug a reservoir on Lowell Street, in anticipation of the professional class expected to populate the Heights. The influx was not realized because a prolonged recession cut demand and the Arlington Land Company went bankrupt within two years. Complaints were also lodged that the water was not clean. In 1898, Arlington applied to join the Metropolitan water system and in 1899, its petition was granted. Thus, the Heights were able to escape the fate of having the waters of the Great Meadows flow into their sinks.

None of this, however, reversed the draining down of the Great Meadows due to the reservoir. Gradually, the mill ponds lost their vital importance, were drained, filled in or left to grass over; and the great era of the mills was over. The last pond to go, Fowle's Pond near Mystic Street, was still visible in about 1955. Luckily, the town was able use the old mill areas for sports playing fields, particularly at the High School and at Buzzell field. Writing in 1924, Jacob Bitzer noted that, of the nine mills, only four were still running. Only two mills were prosperous enough to run full-time. These belonged to the frame maker and grandson of Charles Schwamb, Clinton W. Schwamb, and to the Theodore Schwamb Company, which at this time focused its business on wooden cases for grand pianos. Bucking the trend of the mills to shut down, these two would continue to work profitably for almost another 50 years, until 1969 and 1972, respectively.

When 17-year-old Karl Schwamb came from the southern Rheinland to apprentice at the sawing and wood-turning firm of Paul F. Dodge at 1175 Mass. Avenue, Yankee names dominated the town. There were Lockes, Winships, Robbinses and, above all, Cutters. The mill barns behind the Dodge house were known as the Stephen Cutter Mill, and the site of the new house built by Dodge came from the Cutter heirs. Similarly, if Karl had stayed in his hometown, Uнденheim, he would have belonged to an equally large clan of Schwambs. The Schwambs were as ubiquitous in Uнденheim as the Cutters were in Arlington. What both families shared was energy and a desire to have their own mills.

When he took on young Karl Schwamb as an apprentice, Dodge had suffered grievous personal losses: In 1836 he lost a son, age two months. In April, 1838, his wife, Maria Perry, died; and finally, his remaining infant son, age seven months, died in August of 1838. There is evidence that Dodge talked early to Charles about wanting to divest himself of the business. Half a century later, Karl Schwamb, renamed Charles Schwamb, consistently stated in his ads that his firm dated to 1850. This was likely the date when Dodge agreed to divestment. We know that the five Schwamb brothers' collaborative firm at this location began only in 1853, when the eldest brother, Jacob, was the first to join Charles in Arlington after several years of making piano cases for the firm of J.C. Lane in Leominster. Brother Peter had arrived in 1850 at age 20 to apprentice. In 1853, Theodore, then age 21, arrived from the vineyards he had tended for several years at his father's new, enlarged farm and public house in Kongemheim. He joined the elder brothers in a joint venture, which would last nine years until 1862. In 1857 the youngest and

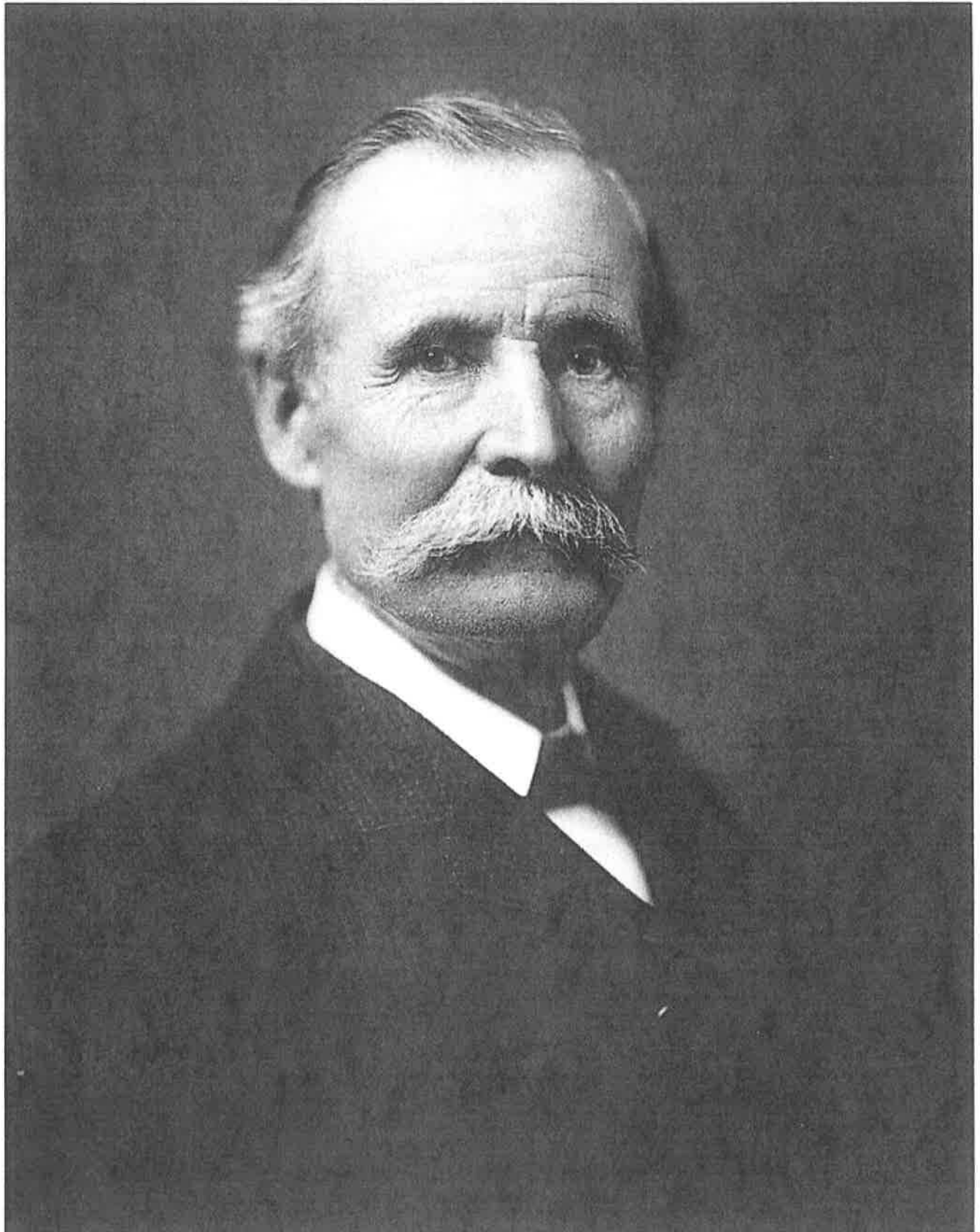
last brother, Frederick, arrived in New York City from Le Havre on the ship, *Princeton*, accompanied by his fiancée, Thekla Breivogel. Five days later Thekla and Frederick were married in the Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church of Boston's South End, an early Greek revival brick building with classic pediment, which Jacob co-founded and helped to dedicate on Christmas Day, 1847.

As the first German to arrive in 1838, Jacob maintained his connection with the Zion Lutheran Church he helped to found, often "supplying the pulpit" himself in the absence of the minister. By 1853, however, he had begun to think better of settling on the scantily filled lands and commercial wharves of narrow Boston Neck. He had already buried two wives due to illness. He had worked in several piano factories in Boston and after 1842 had lived during an unhappy time of recession when his nearest brother, Ludwig, arrived to apprentice in woodworking, was forced to work in a lead-paint factory and fell ill with typhoid fever as well as lead poisoning. After a return to Germany, Ludwig reappeared in Boston in 1849, but passed through quickly, as if shaking the dust of Boston from his feet. He headed west to do what he had always wanted to do, to farm — first in Indiana and later in Missouri.

Perhaps also, Jacob found Leominster too undeveloped for a boy from the Rheinland. His foray there could have influenced his decision to join his brothers at 1171 Massachusetts Avenue in West Cambridge, a name Arlington retained until 1867. This was a proper town, yet with large tracts of undivided land, particularly in the Heights. The terrain was rougher for farming here than on the fertile eastern plain. But it was attractive for residences and businesses. In the coming decades, the Schwambs bought several of these areas from their Yankee owners. Jacob remarried again after two years, in 1855, to Katherine Guething. The couple added five more children to Jacob's previous five; and the good Katherine had the grace to outlive Jacob by six years and, with two of her sons, to continue until her death in 1887 the piano-case and straight-molding business Jacob had established at 1033 Mass. Avenue. The story of Jacob's mill didn't end there either: Jacob's youngest sons, William and Edward, carried on a furniture repairing and refinishing business together at 1033 Massachusetts Avenue until 1903, the year of William's death. As late as 1926, *The Arlington Advocate* reported that Edward Schwamb was still running the furniture refinishing business in the same place. And a jolly side of Edward came out in his obituary in 1946 when he died at 84. He was characterized as a notable musician who led the music program for the town's Centennial Celebration in 1907 and was the leader of the Arlington Zouaves Band. The Zouave soldiers were originally Civil War regiments with colorful costumes meant to resemble Berber tribesmen. Naturally, the story of Jacob's offspring doesn't end with the childless Edward. It is included to show the endurance, even of the least known of the Schwamb Mills, and the love of making music that ran through the German population in general, and the Schwambs in particular.

The business that the brothers started in 1853 was called, "Charles Schwamb and Brothers." This underlined the role of Charles as organizer. Jacob pioneered by scouting territory and pinpointing piano production as a skill with a future: Now Charles saw strength in numbers for the immigrant brothers and launched the enterprise. The location at 1171 Mass. Avenue had an attractive house, two hams and a mill wheel. During the firm's nine years of operation, the younger brothers apprenticed, became journeymen and joined the partnership. After the partnership was dissolved in 1862, the brothers started three separate businesses. Jacob, ever the restless family member, located himself in West Medford to make organ-cases for home use, a product of Mason and Hamlin Company. At the end of his career, Jacob returned to Arlington at 1033 Mass. Avenue where he ran his own mill until his death in 1881.





Theodore Schwamb

Theodore set his course to acquire 1171 Mass Avenue. It is not clear why he first located for a few years at 1093 Mass. Avenue near Hobbs Mill. He was determined to continue in the piano-case business and his eye was on the original location. By 1871 he was back at the Dodge homestead and had also acquired the Stephen Cutter Mill behind the house. Here, the largest of the three German mills in Arlington grew, the firm of Theodore Schwamb Company destined to last one hundred ten years and to remain important as the first and central location. The brothers all worked and lived close to one another for the rest of their lives, lending a hand in crises, and investing heavily in locations near one another in the Heights section of Arlington.

Sometime around 1850, Charles met Jane Sophia Hinton in the Choir of the First Parish Congregational Church (now Unitarian Universalist) in Arlington Center. Jane had been born in Birmingham, England. In 1852, Charles married his Jane and became the only brother to marry a girl with a non-German name. In this large, close-knit German family, one hopes that Jane managed to understand some German. Although Charles continued to walk often to Boston to attend services in German at Zion Lutheran Church in the South End, he was eager to become American as soon as possible; and an English-speaking wife fitted this plan.

A tragic event occurred in the brothers' collaboration in 1858, when a younger brother, Peter, died on March 24. We do not know the cause, but he had married Clara Buecher, an immigrant from Graach, Rheinpreussen, only one year earlier and his first child, Peter, Jr., was only one-and-one-half months old at the time of his father's death, suggesting a sudden and unexpected event.

Two years later, in 1860, Theodore married Peter's widow and adopted Peter, Jr., showing a trait he would carry through his life—the instinct of a good administrator to bring people together for the greater good of the whole. Charles, who was imaginative as an innovator, did not have the same ability to integrate his personnel. In 1864, for instance, Charles and Frederick opened a niche business on Mill Lane just a short distance upstream from the Dodge location. The Woodbridge Spice Mill had come up for sale after a fire. Here Charles and Frederick installed their lathes and introduced a new technology directed at the thriving market clamoring for oval frames: The business was successful, yet Frederick remained only three years, leaving with his wife Thekla Breivogel for New York State, and ultimately for Blue Island, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago. It was as if Charles instilled his spirit of adventure in others, but not in a manner that was to his own advantage.

The new wooden oval lathes offered technology capable of turning out perfect ovals of all sizes in large numbers, requiring skilled workmanship especially in the final contouring with a hand chisel on the double-axis lathe. The whole system was still powered by water. The enormous waterwheel, 18 feet in diameter was partially recessed under the basement floor, allowing for an "overshot" wheel, which channeled the water over the top. This was all going on, right under the feet of the workmen. Accustomed as we are to contemporary power sources, it is hard to believe this sophisticated shaping and carving was still deriving its energy from rough water flowing over a submerged wooden wheel. It had been so for thousands of years. But it seems somehow incongruous in the context of the burgeoning industrial age of the 1860s.

A similar example of Theodore's approach occurred in 1882. A plea came from Peter's nephew, Philip Eberhardt, in Guntersblum, Germany. Philip's mother, Katarina, was Theodore's sister, who died when Philip was only three. Philip suffered abuse from the husband of a kindly aunt, with whom he now lived. He begged his uncle in a letter to be allowed to come to the States. When Philip's ship arrived in New York, he was met by a Geunan customer of Theodore. But when he arrived in Providence on shipboard to Boston and could no longer hear German but only the "barbaric" English, he fell to weeping: "I was the most homesick boy you ever saw," he wrote many years later. "I laid my head on

the rail of the boat and cried my heart out. An old gentleman came and spoke to me but I cried all the harder until a young man who could speak German spoke to me and sort of straightened me out. I could not go into my stateroom but slept in one of the large chairs in the saloon. The next morning I arrived in Boston and was met by my sister and Mrs. Theodore Schwamb. On the following day, June 17th, I went to work and have been working ever since." For the first two years in Arlington, he remembered thinking that he would have returned immediately to Gettysburg if he could have. Nevertheless, he prospered at Theodore Schwamb, becoming superintendent of the entire plant in 1890, and then partner and director of the corporation in 1897. At Peter's retirement in 1924 Philip Eberhardt became president of the Theodore Schwamb Company. He continued to work there, even after the company was bought out by the Nickerson family in 1931, until the onset of his fatal illness shortly before his death in 1938.

Theodore's great talent for attracting and keeping talent was especially strong within his larger family. After Theodore's only son by Clara died at the age of two in 1866, Theodore set his hopes on his adopted son, Peter, Jr. Peter became, one might say, a perfect adopted son. He completed M.I.T. and rose there to become a professor of Mechanical Design and Mill Engineering, and head of the M.I.T. Mechanical Laboratories. Moreover, in Peter, Theodore had a son who could enhance his own profile in civic affairs, particularly in the 1890s, when Peter served on the committees to build two of Arlington's three most beautiful schools, the old High School on Academy Street, now the Senior Center; and the Cutter and Locke schools, placed at strategic intervals along Massachusetts Avenue as far as Park Avenue in the Heights. For the planning of the Locke, Peter was Committee Chairman. Presumably due to the really outstanding aesthetic of their architecture, and their solid construction, these schools were saved from the wrecker's ball and even though they were threatened at times in the years when school divestment was the fashion, the premise being that the school-age population would continue to decline. In 1899 also, Peter Schwamb, a long-time member of the Arlington Water Commission, was, in the words of William Cutter, "instrumental in having the town admitted into the Metropolitan water system." He remained active at Theodore Schwamb Company and joined in its incorporation as Treasurer in 1897. After Theodore's death in 1909, Peter took early retirement from M.I.T. and worked even more closely with the company until his own retirement in 1924.

While Theodore Schwamb built his company slowly, Charles leapt ahead quickly. From 1864 to 1879, Theodore's expansion was slower than Charles's. In 1878, for instance, when the bulk of the Mill owners were awarded damages for the drastic curtailment of the waters of the Sucker Brook due to the excavation of the Heights Reservoir, Theodore received \$6,024.16. Charles Schwamb, on the other hand, still riding the crest of the vastly popular oval frame business, received \$11,587.58. In 1875, *The Arlington Advocate* noted that Charles Schwamb had acquired "a snug fortune" in his business. In October of that year, he organized a surprise party among his thirty-five mill workers to welcome his twentyone-year-old son, Carl William, into his business as a partner. "The men in the establishment last Friday evening, despite the unfavorable state of the weather, marched in a body to the residence of Mr. Schwamb to congratulate the new firm." The "residence" was an impressive new mansard-roof house, which Charles had recently constructed at what is now 22 Fessenden Street. What Carl William, an artistic young man, thought of joining a dusty business (it was apparent later that his lungs were delicate), is a good question. But if he had to choose sawdust, rather than music, nevertheless, he remained a dutiful son and partner in the firm. He was the only son available at that time. When his only brother, Herbert Page, reached maturity 11 years later, he chose to go west to Denver. Within these limitations, Carl and his parents seemed to understand one another. He served as alternate organist, not only at the First Baptist Church where the family worshipped, but at various churches in the Heights and in Lexington. He was pianist for many years for the Sunday school of the First Baptist; and he designed music curriculum for the Arlington schools. Carl William died at the relatively early age, of 57 in 1912; yet for many decades thereafter a harpsichord stood on the third floor of the Mill as a reminder. In gratitude for Carl William's

contributions to the First Baptist Church in Arlington Center, the parish gave him an intricately carved square piano, an instrument which has been lovingly restored in the family of his granddaughter, Dorothy Sweet Raman, of Macomb, Illinois.

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In the early 1890s, America experienced a severe economic panic, followed by a prolonged recession. It is therefore surprising to read that the Theodore Schwamb Company saw constant growth, both in the 1890s and in the first years of the new century. In 1898, the year after its incorporation, the Company was the largest single business in Arlington. Directors were Peter Schwamb, Treasurer, Philip Eberhardt, Clerk and Assistant Superintendent, and Jacob Bitzer, Head of the shop. New property was purchased behind the Mill in 1905. In the same year, a narrow-gauge spur railroad track was added, linking the firm to the railroad and enabling the company to receive and deliver almost in the manner of a private railroad. Among the new structures, the largest was the four-story brick building, which today still bears uppermost on its facade the words, THEODORE SCHWAMB CO., ready for the passers-by of the twenty-first century.

As the middle class began to upscale its musical tastes in the new century, the vogue for upright pianos gave way to the aspiration for a grand piano. Theodore Schwamb Co. followed the trend, which required not only skill but speed and coordination in gluing veneers to its fine hardwoods. As the new century dawned, however, the first generation seemed suddenly to have grown quite venerable. At Charles Schwamb and Son Co., the heir apparent, Carl William, was on a protracted stay in Denver to improve his health. At the Mill, shop superintendent, John Frederick Bitzer, oldest brother of Jacob Bitzer, carried on as he had for 36 years. One cannot see how much sales work could have been going on.

For Charles, by nature an energetic entrepreneur, looking back from the vantage of 1900 must have been daunting. Of the nine children born to him and to Jane Hinton, seven were dead. Two sons and a daughter died shortly after birth; but the unthinkable happened from 1884 to 1891. His four grown daughters, lovely young women if one may judge from their photos, all died, one after another in successive years. Evidence strongly suggests a family tendency to tuberculosis, though the only written evidence concerns their youngest daughter, Jennie Louise Schwamb Wyman, who had recently given birth to a daughter. Two weakening bouts of pneumonia are mentioned, one before and one after the baby's birth (the baby also died within a few months). When Charles Schwamb died in 1903 at the age of seventy-six, his faithful superintendent, John Frederick Bitzer, resigned immediately and joined his youngest brother, Jacob Bitzer, at Theodore Schwamb, where he remained for the rest of his professional life.

When Carl William returned from Denver he found the mill almost without business and he retired in 1905. This is the point at which the Schwamb energy sprang up again: his two sons, Clinton W., 26, and Louis, 19, suddenly acquired a frantic determination to save their Mill. In 1907, under the new name of "Clinton W. Schwamb and Co.," they hoisted the red, white and blue bunting to the Mill's facade for the Centennial Celebration of the town's independent status. Under the company's name were emblazoned the words, "OLDEST OVAL FRAMEMAKER IN NEW ENGLAND." The firm was old—the partners were young! Clinton and Louis were not shy about invoking antecedents, if it served their purpose. The entrepreneur knows how to pick himself up because risks involve falls, and entrepreneurship is risky. Over years of hard work, Clinton and Louis brought the Mill back to prosperity.

Clinton's son, Elmer Schwamb, was born in 1904. When talking to Patricia Fitzmaurice in earlier years, Elmer remembered how hard his father and uncle worked to save and restore the Mill; and how he himself entered the business in the 1920s, traveling the length the East Coast on sales trips. The Mill stayed profitable and Elmer even added a niche partnership called "Elwayne," involving his son Wayne for the production of specialty frames. In the end, it was the advent of molded plastic and the ever-worsening quality of lumber that forced Elmer Schwamb, after the death of his Uncle Louis, in 1967, and that of Clinton in 1968, to sell what was to become the Old Schwamb Mill.

The buyer had plans to raze the building and blacktop the lot for parking. But luckily Patricia Fitzmaurice, who was already an ardent preservationist, happened by on her bicycle one fall day and learned the plans. She saw the historic exterior, and even more surprising, the incredible array of period tools and machines within. With the help of a small group of concerned Arlingtonians, she started the process that would result in the creation of a working museum, the Old Schwamb Mill, now in operation for 35 years.

Theodore Schwamb died in 1909. The piano-case business began to lag with the increasing interest in recordings, and especially with the advent of the radio in the early 1920s. Peter Schwamb retired in favor of Philip Eberhardt in 1924 and died unexpectedly in 1928 in the midst of his family at his house at 33 Academy Street. When Philip Eberhardt sold the business to the Nickerson family in 1931, the company name of Theodore Schwamb was retained. A decision was made to switch products to high-end architectural woodworking. This was a felicitous decision, given the extensive interior areas available and the skills, particularly of Italian workers, in the area. During the next forty-plus years, the Theodore Schwamb Co. became known nationwide for large projects of interior wood paneling and woodcarving.

Their work included elaborate projects for Yale University in New Haven; for the Tryon Palace at New Bern, North Carolina; for the original John Hancock Building in Boston and at the Harvey Firestone Library at Princeton, N.J. The firm of Cascieri di Biccari (the late Archangelo Cascieri, Dean of the Boston Architectural Center and Adio di Biccari, Arlington sculptor) opened a studio at Theodore Schwamb. Over four decades, this firm produced a wealth of carving and sculpture, including the exquisite Cascieri carvings for Marsh Chapel at Boston University; and the di Biccari sculpture ensemble opposite West Street on the Boston Common. One photo, taken in Arlington at the Schwamb Studio in the 1950s, shows a giant sculpture of St. Clement. The ponderous saint lies prone on a truck, having made it through of the wide doors of the Schwambs' most attractive structure, a small, classic brick building with brick detail, a building still extant today at 1167 behind the old homestead. After arriving safely at his Brighton destination, St. Clement was hoisted to very top of the facade of St. John Seminary.

The fact that such buildings still exist is to the credit of the Mirak family, a long-time Arlington family whose firm has specialized since 1936 in dealerships and service of cars and trucks. Recently, the firm developed a residential complex in Arlington Center called "The Legacy." Robert Mirak recently commented that "when my father, John Mirak, purchased the property in the 1970s, some of his

colleagues suggested tearing down the buildings to make way for another dealership or a major shopping center. My father decided to keep the buildings and used the property to store excess auto inventory. In addition, he liked the looks of the buildings and especially the handsome red brick and the colonial windows. From that time to the present, my father and in succession, the family has upgraded the buildings. Inside, over the decades, we have upgraded floors and brickwork. Specifically, the original wood flooring, which was blackened by use, was cleaned, sanded and urethaned to a handsome finish. Also, a number of walls were sandblasted to remove the paint on the brick; the results were sparkling."

At this Theodore Schwamb complex, it is gratifying to see how many small businesses have found a home: the Image Inn has run a photographic studio there since 1982, specializing in the rare skills and patience required by traditional techniques; the architectural firm of Rovinelli is upstairs at 1167; and there are many individual artists in residence at the large complex at 1165, as well as the new WorkBar, established in 2016.

The Charles Schwamb Mill at 17 Mill Lane did not grow as large as the Theodore Schwamb Company, and it was never as visible, either. But however much the market fluctuated, Charles Schwamb and his descendants never gave up making fine oval frames. Amidst the final commercial years of competition from inferior wood and plastics, the Mill continued this work, as it does today, thanks to the late Patricia Fitzmaurice and her supporters.

In the end, the Old Schwamb Mill can lay claim to having endured, both as living history and as a working Mill. All three brothers, Theodore and Charles and Jacob, could be proud that their generation of immigrants achieved so much that is still treasured in Arlington today.

### **TIMELINE of the Schwamb Mill & Mill Brook**

**1630** English Puritan colonists first settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1630 during the thirty years of the Great Migration. They brought with them, from England, the waterpower mill technology that was implemented on Mill Brook in Arlington for 235 years (after which a steam turbine replaced the water wheel). The Mill Brook, which drops more than 150 feet in two miles through Arlington, powered mills of various kinds at seven to nine mill sites. The brook has been called successively Vine Brook, Sucker Brook, and Mill Brook. According to one local historian (Edith Winn), the brook was a "mighty rushing river" at the end of the last ice age.

**1637** The first mill on the Brook in Menotomy, or the Northwest Precinct of Cambridge (now Arlington), was the earliest water powered gristmill within the limits of colonial Cambridge. It was financed by Dr. Samuel Read of England and was established in 1637 by Captain George Cooke (b. c. 1610; d. Apr 1652) near the present day location of the Community Safety Building on Mystic Street in Arlington. Cooke's Mill is now commemorated by a park, Cooke's Hollow, and a bronze tablet.

**1638** Edward Winship bought a three-acre estate at the easterly corner of Brattle and Mason Streets and extending through the Cambridge Common (in Cambridge). He was a Lieutenant of Militia in 1660, a Selectman for 14 years between 1637 and 1684, and a Representative in the General court for eight years. He died on 2 Dec 1688.

Cooke had sailed for New England in the ship Defence in 1635, at the age of 25. In Massachusetts, on 3 Mar 1636, he was admitted as a freeman. From there he became a representative in its Assembly, and Speaker in 1645. In addition, he had been appointed Captain of the Artillery Company in 1637 and once returned to Boston with nine Indians captured during an "excursion".



**1639** The Squaw Sachem (i.e. woman chief) of the Massachuset (<http://dickshovel.com/massa.html>) tribe ceded all the lands of her tribe, excepting her homestead (which was bounded on the east by the Mystic Lakes and on the south by Mill Brook), to the English Puritan settlers of Cambridge, for "twenty and one coates, ninten fathom of wampom, and three bushels of corne". Three epidemics of European diseases and warfare with the Abenaki (<http://www.dickshovel.com/aben.html>) tribe from the north had greatly reduced the number of men in the Massachuset tribe. The survivors were too few to defend their land against the invaders from England and had little choice but to agree to the contract. The Squaw Sachem (whose name is unknown) died in 1658. The exchange of property is illustrated in two local WPA murals: *Purchase of Land from the Indians* by Aidan Lasell Ripley, 1934, in the Winchester MA Public Library, and *Purchase and Use of the Soil* by William A. Palmer, 1938, in the Arlington MA Post Office.

Many of the principal inhabitants of Wexford as well as several hundred females gathered around the great cross in the marketplace of Wexford in the hope that their defenseless condition would move George Cooke and his men to compassion. However, Cooke butchered all of them and filled the marketplace with their blood.

**1645** Captain George Cooke abandoned his mill, returned to England, and joined Cromwell's army as Colonel of a regiment of foot soldiers. Puritan "Roundheads" formed the backbone of Cromwell's forces. On 11 Oct 1649, Cooke's regiment captured the town of Wexford (in County Wexford, Ireland). Cooke became governor and "exactd bloody retribution against the defending Irish". Houses and cabins, and stores of livestock and corn were all plundered and burnt. Cooke insisted that this was the only way to subdue the roving parties of Irish, by denying them sustenance and shelter in the region.

Dr. Lynch describes George Cooke, the commander of the Puritans in Wexford, as especially remarkable for his brutality and cruelty. Having given a security to the inhabitants of Wexford that they might reside in their own homes, "Cooke afterwards authorized Captain Bolton, before the extirpation of the stipulated day, to scour that county with his cavalry and plunder it. Then commenced an indiscriminate massacre of men, women, and children, by which not less than four thousand souls, young and old, were atrociously butchered."

In 1652, General Cooke shut up 300 men and many infants in a house in the county of Wexford, and then setting fire to the house, all were burned in the flames. But Captain Gore, one of the officers under Cooke, succeeded in concealing on his horse, under his cloak, a little boy who had escaped out of the house. Cooke, discovering the fact, severely condemned the captain, and returning himself with the boy, hurled him into the flames.

In April 1652, Cooke and his mounted escort had a running fight with the troop of the Irish patriot, Captain Nash, on the road from Gowran to Loughlin. Both Cooke and Captain Nash were found dead after the battle.

Cooke's mill in Menotomy was allowed to decay and eventually crumble away.

**1670** Cooke's daughter Mary, then living in England, sold her father's 600-acre farm at Cambridge Farms (now Lexington) as well as the twenty acres of land in Menotomy (now Arlington) to John Rolfe of Nantucket. (Ref. 7, page 235.) Rolfe erected an entirely new waterpowered mill on the old site.

**1681** John Rolfe died. His widow, Mary (Scullard) Rolfe, sold a fifth of the Cooke farm at Cambridge Farms, or 120 acres of land. She and her son Moses laid out the second Mill Brook watermill power system of pond, dam, mill, and mill race at what is now Mill Street in Arlington. They first built a dam but then waited several years before completing the entire mill raceway system.

**1684** The third watermill power system of ponds, dam, mill, and mill race had been laid out before 1684, and a mill built by David Winship, at the Foot of the Rocks in the Menotomy section of Cambridge. This is the site of the present Old Schwamb Mill.

This third mill privilege, at the Foot of the Rocks, was willed to Joseph Winship (b. 21 Jun 1661; d. 18 Sep 1725; resided in Menotomy) by his father, Lt. Edward Winship, who had also built mills in Lexington at the edge of the Great Meadow. Evidence of a mill pond is still visible as a grassy park near Bow Street.

**1688** Lieutenant Edward Winship died on 2 Dec 1688 and left to his son Joseph "a certain gristmill in Cambridge, with all and singular the dam, flooms, mill-pond", etc. This mill was on the site of what is now called The Old Schwamb Mill.

**1704** William Cutter built a dam 18 feet high near his home at the present Mill Street, raised the level of the pond, and erected a sawmill.

**1714** Moses Rolfe, a son of John Rolfe, sold 130 acres of Cooke's farm to John Cutter (a glazier b.1690), a son of William Cutter.

**1718** Moses Rolfe sold 100 acres of the Cooke's Farm to his brother-in-law, William Cutter, husband of Moses Rolfe's sister.

**1732** On 27 Dec 1732, the General Court designated the part of Cambridge on the west side of the Menotomy River (now called Alewife Brook) as the Second or Northwest Precinct of Cambridge. This was the beginning of the First Congregational Parish, the parish being simply the precinct in its religious relations.

After several changes of name the First Congregational Parish eventually evolved into the First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington.

**1775** On the first day of the American Revolution, Paul Revere and the British regulars all passed at a distance of about 200 yards from the Mill at the Foot of the Rocks on their way to Lexington and Concord. The British returned by the same route, fighting their way through Menotomy on their way back to Charlestown.

**1807** In 1807, Menotomy (which was officially called the Northwest or Second Parish of Cambridge) became a separate town, West Cambridge.

**1808** In 1808, Stephen Cutter constructed another sawmill on the pond at Mill Street.

**1827** In 1827, Mary Cutter, the widow of Stephen Cutter, granted land abutting the Mill Pond to the Baptist Society "for the erection of a meeting house with the privilege of using so much of the mill pond as necessary for the ordinance of baptism." Sylvia Brazy was baptized on 3 June 1827.

**1838** Jacob Schwamb emigrated to Boston from Untenheim, Rhein Hessen, Germany. Jacob was the first of the Schwamb brothers to immigrate to the United States. By 1857, six of the seven Schwamb brothers had emigrated from Rhineland Pfalz to the United States.

**1846** The Lexington and West Cambridge Rail Road commenced service between Bedford, Lexington, Arlington (then called West Cambridge), and Boston.

**1847** Charles Schwamb emigrated to Boston from Udenheim, Rhein Hessen, Germany to join his older brother Jacob in the burgeoning Boston piano industry.

**1850** Charles and Jacob Schwamb moved to the Dodge Mill (built by Gershom Cutter) on Mill Brook (1167 Massachusetts Avenue) to make piano cases. They were joined by brothers Peter, Theodore, and Frederick.

**1853** From 1853 to 1862, Charles, Jacob, Theodore, Peter, and Frederick Schwamb operated a collaborative piano-case business at 1165 Massachusetts Avenue in West Cambridge (now Arlington).

**1858** Peter Schwamb died suddenly, leaving a widow and a two-month-old son, Peter Schwamb, Jr.

**1860** Theodore Schwamb married the widow of his brother Peter. Theodore adopted Peter Jr. who would become a professor and Director of the Mechanical Laboratory at MIT and Treasurer of the Theodore Schwamb Company at 1165-1171 Massachusetts Avenue in Arlington.

After ownership of the Foot of the Rocks Mill property had descended through many generations, it was acquired by Henry Woodbridge for grinding spices. The mill was severely damaged by fire in 1860.

**1861** The Woodbridge Spice Mill at the Foot of the Rocks was rebuilt on the old foundations circa 1861.

**1862** Theodore Schwamb founded the Theodore Schwamb Mill to manufacture piano casings. The address later became 1165 Massachusetts Avenue in Arlington, Massachusetts.

Frederick shortly left for Chicago and the lumber business. Frederick and his wife (Thekla Breivogel) were living in New York State in 1871.

**1864** Charles Schwamb and his youngest brother, Frederick, acquired the Woodbridge Spice Mill at the Foot of the Rocks. Using skills that they had developed in their native Germany and in their American apprenticeships, they converted the mill to woodworking, especially for making oval frames for portrait photographs. They installed shaft and pulley belt-driven machinery, including German eccentric faceplate lathes and a moulding machine. Four generations of descendants of Charles Schwamb operated the Mill until 1969.

Theodore Schwamb and Peter Schwamb acquired the Dodge Mill. Jacob Schwamb, the oldest of the Schwamb brothers, opened his own piano case business.

**1865** The popularity of the oval portrait frame arose just after the Civil War along with the increasing accessibility of photography. Beginning then, the Old Schwamb Mill became the leading maker of hand-turned oval and circular portrait and mirror frames in the United States.

**1867** In order to distinguish itself from its parent community and to honor its Civil War heroes, the town changed its name from West Cambridge to Arlington on 30 April 1867.

**1869** A new three-story wing was added to the Old Schwamb Mill in 1869 to provide for a four-sided moulding machine on the first floor and finishing rooms above.

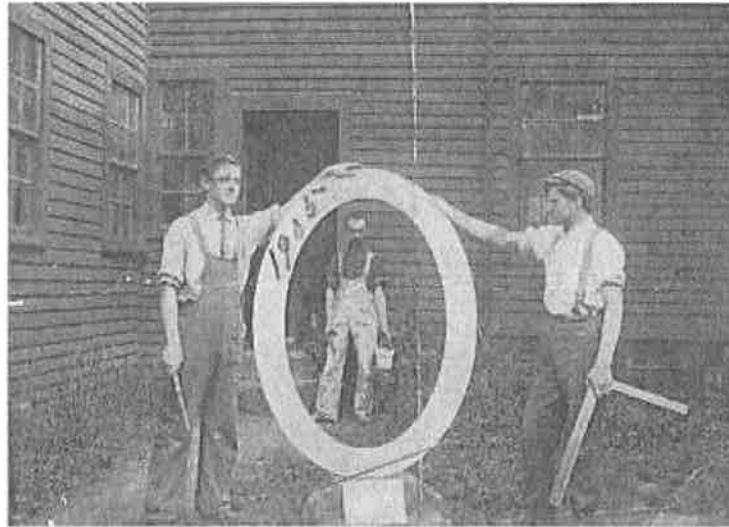
**1872** The Town of Arlington took Mill Brook for a public water supply. The Charles Schwamb Mill at the Foot of the Rocks installed a steam engine in the cellar of the barn. A 40-foot-long underground drive shaft transmitted power to the Mill machinery.

**1875** Charles's son Carl William (or "Will") was taken into partnership. Carl often played the organ at the First Baptist Church in Arlington. There is a report that Carl was the organist at the Follen Church (Unitarian) in Lexington.

**1883** A two-story ell was added to the Mill in 1883 to provide a first-floor office and a shipping room above.

**1888** A water turbine was added to the Charles Schwamb Mill at the Foot of the Rocks in 1888 to supplement the existing steam engine power.

**1905** Carl's sons Clinton and Louis acquired the Mill property and business, which they named the Clinton W. Schwamb Company.



*In the  
photo  
above,  
Clinton  
is on the  
left and  
Louis is  
on the  
right. The  
date  
"1905"  
was  
written  
by pencil  
on the  
print that  
was  
scanned,  
not  
written  
on the  
actual*

*wooden  
frame.*

**1922** The Theodore Schwamb Mill included seven buildings and had about 100 employees.

**1928** A nephew of Theodore Schwamb assumed ownership of the Theodore Schwamb Mill. He discontinued manufacture of piano casings and began to manufacture architectural woodwork.

**1931** The Theodore Schwamb Mill was reorganized by Donald E. Nickerson, Donald A. Davis, and Alvin W. Davis.

**1940** The Theodore Schwamb Mill added an ecclesiastical department which included Arcangelo Cascieri as resident sculptor.

**1942-1945** For the duration of World War II, the Theodore Schwamb Mill discontinued all civilian work. It produced millwork and cabinet work for military bases, Liberty ships, and PT boats.

**1954** The Clinton W. Schwamb Mill installed electric motors and sold its steam engine. The original 19th century shaft and pulley belt-driven system remained in place to transmit power to the individual machines throughout the Mill.

**1969** Deaths of Clinton and Louis Schwamb, and the approaching retirement of Clinton's son Elmer, prompted Elmer Schwamb and Louis's widow to enter into a purchase and sale agreement with neighboring lumber terminal truckers to honor Clinton's promise to the truckers to provide additional truck access to their property. The plan of the truckers called for demolition of the three Mill buildings.

The Schwamb Mill Preservation Trust, a nonprofit charitable educational trust, was formed by four Arlington Conservation Commission members:

Patricia C. Fitzmaurice (1923-2001)  
Doris Atwater (now Bouwensch)  
Rudolph Kass  
David D. Wallace

The purpose of the Trust was — and is — to raise funds to save the Mill, to maintain the production of oval frames, and to exhibit the Mill's collections and traditions. This was apparently the first case of grassroots historic industrial preservation in America.

**1970** On 16 Jan 1970, the Old Schwamb Mill was acquired by The Schwamb Mill Preservation Trust with contributed funds from two Boston foundations, a Cambridge bank, and several individual donors. The Trust appointed Patricia C. Fitzmaurice as Managing Trustee, a position which she held until her death on 15 Feb 2001.

During the years following the acquisition, frame makers working at the Mill included

- David Graf: Current woodturner
- David Hogan
- Walter Horak
- Ronald J. McLellan (15 May 1924-30 Dec 1995)
- Gordon E. Richardson (10 Aug 1902 — 23 Jan 1990)
- Gordon Whitemore.

After being acquired by the Schwamb Mill Preservation Trust, the Old Schwamb Mill continued to manufacture museum-quality frames but relied on the additional income that it received from donors and appropriate tenants.

In the summer of 1970, the Old Schwamb Mill created a Craft Center which offered 10-week courses in:  
Silver Jewelry Making taught by *H. Val Fay*  
Printmaking taught by *Anthony Pilla*  
Pottery and Ceramics taught by *Nadine Hurst*  
Clay Sculpture and Pottery taught by *Lisa McLean*  
Furniture Refinishing taught by *Bron M. Warsaskas*  
Waste Conversion taught by *Richard Darling*

In the autumn, the Mill added courses in Life Drawing, Water Color Painting, Italic Lettering, Gold Leafing, Furniture Stenciling, Weaving, Leathercraft, and Basic Oil Painting.

Part of the second story of the Mill was rented to The Hart Viol Workshop. The proprietor, Richard Hart, manufactured Viols da Gamba, Vielles, Psalteries, Rebecs, Fiedels, and other Mediterranean and Renaissance string instruments.

Two potteries were started at the Mill: the Barn Potters, Cora Pucci and Kathy Ingoldsby; and the Mill-Race Pottery with Telle Bjork and Nadine Hurst.

**1971** The Theodore Schwamb Mill closed. That property was acquired by another immigrant entrepreneur, John P. Mirak, partially for use by his automobile dealership and partially for lease to numerous small businesses.

The Old Schwamb Mill was listed in The National Register of Historic Places by the Secretary of the United States Department of the Interior for the Mill's national historical significance.

**1972** The Old Schwamb Mill held its first annual "barn sale." This fundraising event was continued for at least three years.

**1975** The Old Schwamb Mill obtained the last remaining timbers from the "Washington Elm" (under which General George Washington assumed command of all colonial troops on 3 July 1775). The Mill manufactured for sale 75 spandrel frames using wood from the Washington Elm. Each frame contained a print showing Washington taking command of the Continental Army.

**1976** At the request of the Commandant of the First Naval District, artisans from the Old Schwamb Mill made an oak jewel chest from timbers of the USS Constitution.

J. William Middendorf II, Secretary of the United States Navy, gave the chest to Queen Elizabeth II at the time of her bicentennial visit to Boston.

**1979** Shaker Workshops became a tenant of the Old Schwamb Mill in May 1979. They occupied the westerly half of the first floor of the main Mill building.

The Mill offered classes in Design, Advance Calligraphy and Manuscript Illumination, Life Drawing, Painting, Silver Jewelry, Stained Glass, Pottery, Woodworking with Hand Tools, Woodworking in Miniature, and Researching Old Houses.



**1981** Artisans of the Old Schwamb Mill produced 13 oval display cases as part of the renovation of the throne room in the Iolani Palace in Hawaii. The cases are being used to display the jewels which kings, queens, and emperors gave to the Hawaiian royalty during their travels covering a period of 15 years. Each case has an oval shape and has a royal crest at the top. The oval cases were carved out of seasoned poplar. The crests were carved out of maple from the town of Wellesley.

**1983** In Dec 1983, Shaker Workshops expanded its operations. They established their office in the upper level of the barn and used the lower level of the barn for production. Their showroom remained in the main building of the Mill.

**1985** Sometime in 1985, Shaker Workshops moved its production to Fitchburg and expanded its showroom at the Old Schwamb Mill to occupy both floors of the barn. By Jan 1986, they had moved completely out of the main Mill building.

**1988** The Massachusetts Historical Commission gave a 25th Anniversary Preservation Award to Patricia C. FitzMaurice for her preservation activities in connection with the Old Schwamb Mill.

**2000** On 17 May 2000, Patricia Fitzmaurice received the Ayer Award from the Bay State Historical League for being “a visionary preservationist who recognized the historical and educational value of the Old Schwamb Mill property in Arlington in 1969 and since then has worked tirelessly in leading efforts to fulfill its mission.”

**Today** The site of The Old Schwamb Mill is now the oldest continuously operating mill site in the United States. The earlier mills are either long gone or no longer operating.

Schwamb frames and mouldings are in every major art museum in the United States and are included in the collections of the White House, the Vatican, Buckingham Palace, the Palace of the Kings of Hawaii, and the collection of Queen Sylvia of Sweden.

[WORDPRESS.COM.](https://oldschwambmill.org/schwamb-family/)

