



Pike Manufacturing Company

By ROBERT L. TOPPING



This article was written in 1985, when Mr. Topping was Resident Manager of The Norton Pike Division of the Norton Company in Littleton, New Hampshire. This article was reproduced from the Fall of 1985, issue of Outlook Magazine, The Magazine of Northern New Hampshire, published under the auspices of the White Mountain Region Association.

NORTON PIKE DIVISION of the Norton Company is the result of the efforts of two men... Isaac Pike, who in 1823 settled in the Eastern part of Haverhill and began producing and selling scythe stones quarried from natural deposits near the present Village of Pike, and Frank B. Norton, a native Vermonter, who in 1858 opened a pottery shop in Worcester, Massachusetts, combining and molding abrasives to later form the Norton Emery Wheel Company.



ABOVE — The Pike Manufacturing Company made a world-wide reputation by selling scythe stones quarried from natural deposits near Pike, a village in the Town of Haverhill.

LEFT— The first mill of Isaac Pike was built in 1823 on a small stream that fed Oliverian Brook, about one-half mile from the present village of Pike on Brushwood Road. The building still stands and was owned by Pauline Tobey and is now owned by Pauline and Steve Corzilius.

The two separate companies worked hard to fulfill the needs of the growing demand for the sharpening of metal. These demands were growing in leaps and bounds... from razor whetstones to machine tool grinders.

When Isaac Pike died in 1860, his son, Alonzo was already head of the prosperous Pike business and he called upon his brother Edwin to be head salesman. Edwin entered the business with a strong will and is credited with building the company into the world's largest manufacturer and distributor of "natural" grit whetstones and boasting "1,100 different abrasive products, a whetstone for every purpose."

The original Norton Emery Wheel Company emerged from Frank B. Norton's pottery shop in 1885 when John Jeppson, Milton P. Higgins, Charles L. Allen, George I. Alden, Walter L. Messer, Horace A. Young and Fred H. Daniels purchased and incorporated the budding grinding wheel portion of Frank Norton's business for \$20,000.



LEFT TO RIGHT— The men who made Norton Pike Company: Isaac Pike, who settled in the Eastern part of Haverhill in 1823. He began selling scythe stones quarried from a hillside and established what is now Pike, N.H.; Franklin B. Norton, was a master potter from Bennington, Vermont, who founded a pottery business in Worcester, Mass., in 1858. His artificial grinding wheel operation has become a diversified multinational company; Alonzo Pike, the son of Isaac, was already head of the prosperous Pike Manufacturing when his father died in 1860. He called on his brother, Edwin (FAR RIGHT) to become head salesman and he is credited with building the Company into the world's largest manufacturer of natural grit whetstones with over 1,100 different sharpening products for every purpose.

The new Norton Emery Wheel Company prospered despite the sluggish business conditions of the 1890s. The search for improved products continued. With new steels and alloys available, the potential for the tougher new grinding wheels was promising.

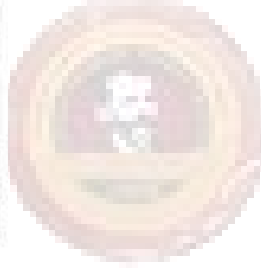
When Alonzo Pike died in 1889, Edwin became general manager and built a new mill on the Oliverian Brook in the village of Pike (a seventy-four foot chimney still stands as a monument to the company).

At about this same time the Cleveland Stone Company of Ohio was purchased by the Pike Company. In 1891 they bought Chase Brothers of Brooklyn, who were established in the production and sales of hard and soft Arkansas stone from the Ouachita Mountains of Arkansas. The Labrador Oilstone Company of Manlius, N.Y. was acquired in 1893. Production continued at these locations giving Pike a most complete line of natural abrasive scythe stones and sharpening stones.

Also in 1891, bauxite, mostly imported from France, was discovered in Arkansas. The Norton Emery Wheel Company found it ideal for use in their manufacture of grinding wheels. During the firing process, bauxite becomes hard and strong. The company acted quickly to negotiate for the exclusive license in the use of all patents connected with bauxite. Eventually the company produced a new artificial abrasive known as ALUNDUM.



LEFT— Hand chipping of sharpening stones to the right lengths after they have been sawed to the proper widths is done today as they were since the beginning. This is just one step where imperfections are removed insuring a quality product.



Intense heat was necessary for the successful production of Alundum—heat produced by electricity which was cheap and abundant at Niagara Falls, New York. Norton Company erected a furnace building there in 1901 to manufacture this tough abrasive.

Four years earlier, in 1897, Norton Emery Wheel Company introduced the first manmade sharpening stone molded from artificial grains and bond which was trademarked "INDIA." On news of this, the Pike Manufacturing Company sought to add this artificial stone to its natural line by offering to become official sales agent in their existing markets. Norton rejected this first offer but when it was made again in 1899 they agreed to license The Pike Manufacturing Company as sole agents.

Through the following years a line of hand tool grinders and razor straps was added which seemed to complete the Pike family of sharpening tools and implements for every requirement.

Having outgrown the smaller mills of Manlius, New York and Pike, and in search of larger quarters, the town of Littleton, as a result of action taken at town meeting in March, 1901, offered the Pike Manufacturing Company certain enticements. This led to the closing and sale of their smaller mills and transfer of machinery in 1902 to a factory building in Littleton on a site now adjacent to the intersections of Washington Street and Pike Avenue which had been formerly occupied by the Littleton Starch Company, the Scythe Company, and the C.F. Harris Carriage Company.



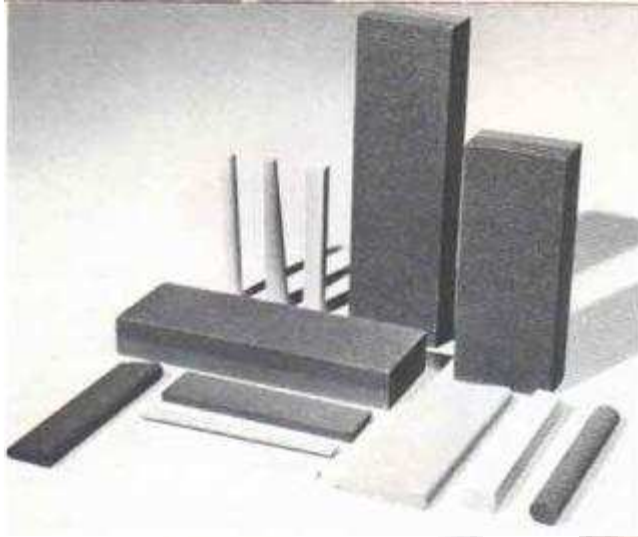
LEFT— The original Pike Manufacturing Company made a worldwide reputation by selling scythe stones quarried from natural deposits near Pike, New Hampshire beginning in 1823.

When Edwin Pike died in 1908, his son E. Bertram Pike became president of all the company's holdings. During his reign as head of the company, Pike Manufacturing would reach its peak. Over two hundred Pike Station townspeople worked at the company along side the Olivarian Brook and at the quarries. More were kept busy transporting supplies and guests to the Lake Tarleton Club, an exclusive retreat for up to two hundred guests, which was built by Bertram in 1911.

In March 1922, Factory #2 in Littleton was purchased from George A. Veazie, being the so-called "Excelsior Mill" on Highland Avenue. In the early summer of 1923, Factory #1 was destroyed by fire and production came to a halt until Factory #2 could be retooled to absorb the full production requirements. It was decided at this time to move office operations, which had always been carried on at Pike, into the new factory building in Littleton to afford central control of all operations. Office personnel commuted from Pike to Littleton daily until they could relocate permanently.

Again in 1926 fire destroyed part of the Highland Avenue plant, which temporarily halted production. It was also in 1926 that E. Bertram Pike, the son of Edwin, died and shortly thereafter Herbert E. Smith was elected general manager to oversee the general operations of the company for the Pike family.

There had been several renewals of the 1899 sales arrangement between the Norton and Pike companies, as well as a financial interest by Norton in 1909 which was dissolved in 1915. Norton Company (as the Norton Emery Wheel Company successor) had acquired the BehrManning Corporation of Troy, New York, manufacturers of coated abrasives or sandpapers, in 1931, and Norton management agreed that an abrasive line under the Norton name was not complete without sharpening stones.



LEFT— Just a sample of the more than 350 different sizes and shapes of sharpening stones manufactured at the Littleton plant from over twenty different compounds.

Consequently, in 1932 Norton acquired one hundred percent interest in the Pike Manufacturing Company and a new corporation, Norton Pike Company, emerged as a subsidiary of Norton Company. Sales for the new corporation were handled by the Behr-Manning Corporation since they were covering much the same markets as Pike had covered. This arrangement has continued to the present day.

Plans were made in Littleton for new manufacturing facilities and in 1946 ground was broken on the south side of Highland Avenue for a new, one-story brick and steel building which was completed and occupied in 1947. The former wooden structures on the north side of the street were razed and grounds landscaped after the move to the new building.

In 1948, Norton Company agreed that the new Littleton plant was in a position to manufacture the INDIA and CRYSTOLON products which they had originally introduced. Previously, Littleton had performed only the finishing operation on these same products after they were shipped from the Worcester plant in a semi-finished condition. These two products currently represent better than eighty percent of the production at the Littleton plant.

Production methods have improved over the years, as have working conditions. Sales and merchandising under the intra-corporate efforts reach far greater markets than Isaac Pike ever anticipated, (yet, Russia, before their revolution, was the earlier company's largest customer). The product itself remains essentially the same, although changing times and requirements have had their toll on specific items which were once in great demand.



ABOVE— The main entrance of the Norton Pike plant at Highland and Brook Road in Littleton as it looks today.

The advent of power mowing machines outmoded the hand scythe and demand for natural stone scythe stones decreased. In 1945 operations were suspended at the old Pike quarries and material quarried during this last operation provided for the limited demand of the mica schist scythe stone until 1961 when sales efforts were discontinued.

The original scythe stone product thus brought to market by Isaac Pike in 1823 had run its course, but it had seen much demand, much travel, and much usage before going into obscurity. (The making of a more efficient artificial abrasive scythe stone is still continued on a limited basis by the Company.)

Nearly one hundred area residents are employed at the Littleton operation and five to maintain quarries in Arkansas. The Company's products are sold in some fifty different countries around the world. Our work force is uniquely distinctive for their remarkable with the Company. Nearly half of the entire work force have been employed at Norton Pike for over ten years.

The Norton Company and our Littleton division, Norton Pike, comprise an industry of world stature. Our diamond drill bits, coated abrasives, grinding wheels, fluoropolymers (medical profession products), material for the petroleum and mining industry, and sharpening stones are marketed as leaders in their fields.

The Norton Pike family is proud of an identity that spans two centuries from the days when Pike Manufacturing started in 1823 to 1902 when Pike Manufacturing came to Littleton... to when our modern plant was erected in 1946, and continues as an industry that is an important adjunct of the Norton Company and an important contributor to the economic health and well being of Littleton and vicinity. We are proud to be here. By R.L.T. — Written in the Fall of 1985