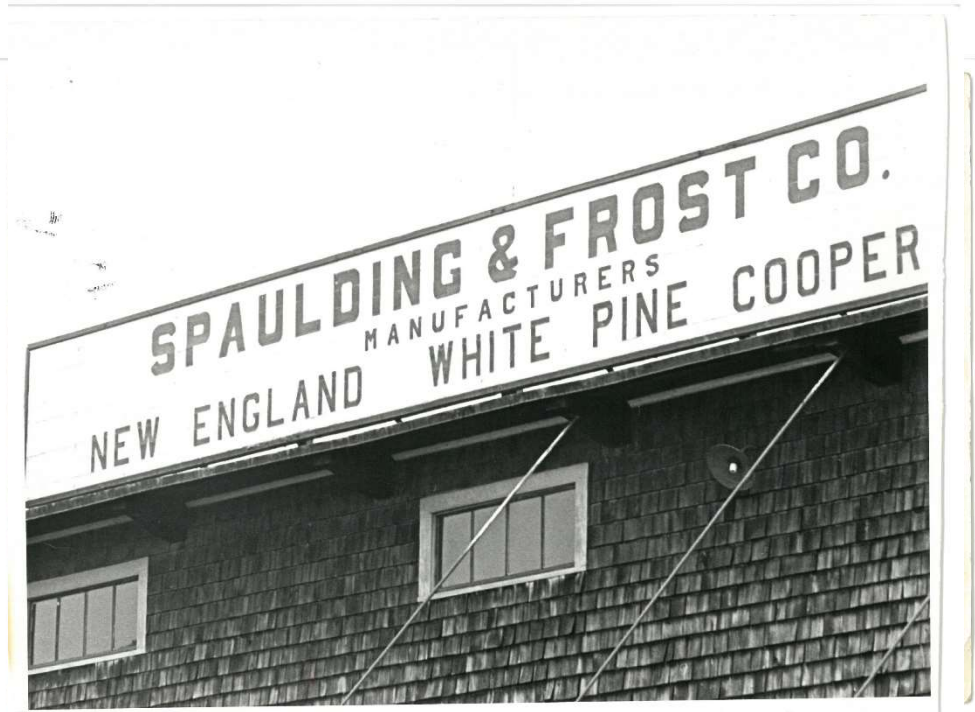


## Spaulding & Frost Cooperage ~ Historical Perspective

The Spaulding & Frost Barrel Cooperage that operated in Fremont for 125 years between 1874 and 1999 was the largest white-pine barrel-making cooperage in the World. In August of 1874 Jonas Spaulding who operated a Cooperage in Townsend, MA decided to build a second cooperage in Fremont since

the Worcester, Nashua & Rochester Railroad was going to open up in November 1874 through Fremont. Fremont was in the middle of a large white-pine tree growing area and a second barrel-making operation would be a profitable undertaking for the Spaulding Family.



This extensive business became one of two large businesses in Fremont that were drawn here because of the new railroad – the other being Russell H. Fellows Brickyard on Martin Road in 1884/85. Both operations gradually grew to employ upwards of 75 to 100 employees.



On June 17, 1921 the expansive cooperage property was destroyed by a large fire that completely destroyed most of its buildings. It also burned down the nearby 1865 Union Church, a one car garage, and the 1894 Fire Engine House.

The Spaulding Brothers, Rolland & Huntley, both prominent Governors of New Hampshire decided with the encouragement of local Fremonter Stephen

Frost to rebuild the Cooperage in 1922. This new factory structure with its 125-foot-high brick chimney, was a three story, roughly 175 foot long, wood shingled building that had a sawmill on the west end, barrel-making sections in between, and the finished product loading dock section on the east end of this long imposing structure. The Fremont Fire Station built in 1936, stood about 40 feet east of this factory building on land leased by the Cooperage for 99 years. The

Fire Station was later replaced with a new fire/police complex built in 1998 on Main Street opposite Beede Road. Who can forget the smell of fresh sawn pine trees permeating through the Village, or the constant sound of the buzz saw cutting through the huge pile of logs?

**On December 6, 1973 – 50 years ago – the Cooperage was destroyed in a massive late afternoon fire for the second time in its history.** This was one of the most

devastating days in Fremont's history! It put roughly 100 local employees out of work just 2 ½ weeks before Christmas. The fire was so hot that steam could be seen coming out of the top of the black-painted water tank (now 101 years old as of 2023), and the massive



The Cooperage Fire of December 6, 1973.

fire so huge & spectacular that the glow in the sky could be seen 13 miles away on Portsmouth Avenue in Exeter!! The flames were so hot, that nearby neighbors were hosing down their homes in

hopes of preventing them from catching fire. The Fire Whistle attached to the black water tank sounded its alarm for an hour, before the sad declining wail of its whistle gradually died down during a long and mournful demise. Bystanders will never forget that long mournful sounding whistle. It was like a long woodworking era had now come to its official end.

As another testimony to Fremont's incredible sense of resilience, townspeople quickly stepped up with determination and formed the *Fremont Development Corporation* with townspeople buying \$100 corporate shares to be used towards rebuilding the Cooperage. Along with these shares, and the help of state & federal funding, Spaulding & Frost Cooperage rose from the



ashes like a Phoenix and were able to once again rebuild and re-open in a new building in August 1974 –ironically the exact 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of Jonas Spaulding's Cooperage. The Cooperage employed 40 employees and managed to survive another 25 years until 1999 when then owner William "Bill" Cahill permanently closed down the business due to mis-management and dwindling orders. Much of the remaining barrel-making equipment was later sold to the Lewiston, ME Bucket Company, which has also long-since closed.

The Spaulding & Frost Cooperage was, at the time, one of the oldest operating businesses in New Hampshire. The Spaulding Brothers went on to own numerous business ventures around

New England and New York, became respected governors & philanthropists who donated money to build local schools before they died in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. They even wanted to build a High School in Fremont back in 1920, but townspeople felt that the town wasn't big enough to support it.

Stephen Frost, part-owner & manager of the Cooperage, died in 1935. Thanks to him, and sound fiscal management, Spaulding & Frost outlived thousands of cooperages nationwide, and survived the Great Depression, World War II, and the introduction of cheap plastic containers that replaced barrels as the primary source for shipping container goods.



So, when Fremont's Spaulding & Frost Cooperage closed in 1999 a true & genuine piece of early Americana and American craftsmanship sadly disappeared forever. A New Hampshire State Historic Marker was erected in 1989 to honor this historic old landmark. The tall, rusting black-painted water tank and the 125-foot-high brick chimney still stand as quiet testimony to this once-thriving, prominent industrial enterprise that formerly put Fremont on the map for over a century.



Compiled by Matthew E Thomas, Town Historian  
Photos courtesy of Matthew Thomas Collection