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THE ANCIENT IRON WORKS.

Among the first industries which were established in the infancy of the Colony of Massachusetts, was that of the manufacture of iron. A company was formed in England about the year 1644, called "The Company Undertakers of the Iron Works," who set up their works at Lynn, Boston, Braintree, Hammersmith, and other places in New England.

We only propose to investigate in this article, those established at Braintree. Many differences of opinion have been held, by those who have written upon the subject, of the location of the works and the time of their erection. Rev. J. A. Vinton, in his memorial of the Vinton family, locates them on the Monatiquot river, in that part of Braintree called East Braintree, and near what is now known as Hobart's mill. Dr William S. Pattee, in his history of Old Braintree and Quincy, locates them "on the Furnace Brook, a short distance south of the Catholic church, on Cemetery street, West Quincy." After some years' investigation, I am satisfied that neither

Vinton nor Pattee are correct as to the location of the works, but that they were located near the corner of Elm and Middle streets, on the site where the factories of "Morrison Brothers" now stand. To substantiate that position is my object in writing this article for the press.

It will be remembered by the reader that the transfer of real estate was not always recorded in the early days of the colony, but according to a vote of the General Court, Oct. 19, 1652, it appeared "that certain in this jurisdiction are apt to rest upon a verbal bargain or sale for houses or lands, henceforth no such sale should be good in law, unless made by deed in writing," and recorded.

For many years this law was disregarded in many cases, as it often is at the present day.

This makes it more difficult to locate the estates of the early settlers, than it otherwise would have been, had the deeds been recorded.

Again the meagre description of the boundaries of the estates render it difficult to locate them. The first mention I can find of the Iron-works was on the "19th of 11th mo. 1643." (Jan. 19, 1644)

"There was granted unto Mr. John Winthrop, Jun'r, and his parteners, and to their heyres and assignes forever, three thousand acres of the comon land at Braintry, for the encouragement of an iron worke, to

be set up about Monotocot river. The said three thousand acres to be layd out in the land next adjoining and most convenient for their said Iron Worke, by the direction of the select Townsmen."

In accordance with the above order on Nov. 23, 1647, the selectmen of the town of Boston conveyed "unto the iron works, two thousand eight hundred and sixty acres of land, at Braintree, bounded on the south and the west with Boston Commons, on the north by divers lots belonging to Boston, on the east by Weymouth lands and Weymouth pond; also one hundred and forty acres of land, being bounded on the south by Mr. Henry Webb's farm, Monatiquot river on the west, and on the north and on the east with certain lots of Boston as appears by the plot drawn up by Joshua Fisher."

While the description of the location of the above land is very indefinite, enough is shown to convince the reader that the general location must be south and west of the Monatiquot river in the present town of Braintree. The east line is well defined, it being bounded by Weymouth lands and Weymouth pond. The south line is shown by a deed of John Bass to Rev. Samuel Niles, dated January 23, 1711, or 1712 as now counted, in which is conveyed thirty acres of Boston Commons land being three shares of the first division of Cochato lands, bound-

ed west on Cochato river and east on the Iron-works land. This plainly shows the western boundary of the Iron-works land, as the land purchased by Rev. Samuel Niles was called the plantation, and is so to the present day. The house which he built on this plantation is still standing, and is occupied by his great-great-great-grandson, N. Augustus White, and is situated on South street, near the Holbrook line.

Rev. Mr. Niles himself designates the locality as being at Cochato, alias Beersheba.

Again, Mary White, widow of Capt. Samuel White of Weymouth, conveys to Samuel Niles, Clerk, Feb. 2, 1712—1713, for fifty-four pounds, 108 acres, being a part of the Iron-work land, and was bounded north on land of Samuel White the elder, west on Cochato line, south on land of Thomas Holbrook, Thomas White and Samuel White the younger, east on Breakneck hill road, running from a chestnut oak on said road direct north 140 rods to a stake.

Again, May 19, 1724, the selectmen of Braintree laid out a way from Nathaniel Thayer, Jr.'s, over Cranberry brook southward, and in description it says, that said road butts on the Iron work land.

The house of Nathaniel Thayer, Jr., is still standing, is owned by the Hollingsworth family, and situated on Washington street near Cranberry brook.

The north line I have been unable to define, but

think it must have been as far north as Union street, perhaps farther.

The one hundred and forty acres must have been somewhere near the lower end of Middle street, as it was bounded on the west by Monatiquot river, and south on Henry Webb's farm. The only line of said farm I can now locate, is the westerly on the Monatiquot river. It must have been near the present residence of George H. Arnold on Middle street. The 140 acres may have been what was afterwards known as the " Mill pasture, " extending from the line of Mrs N. Bunker, northward towards the river.

We have thus described the bounds of the 3000 acres of land granted to John Winthrop, Jr. and associates, plain enough to satisfy a candid inquirer that it was located between Monatiquot river and Weymouth line, and that it could not be located near Milton line as Pattee would make us believe.

This land, which was given by the town of Boston, was to adjoin and be convenient to the Iron works would not have been located where I have shown, if the works had been on Furnace brook, at West Quincy, near Milton line, for they would have been compelled to carry their wood many miles over a rough way. We must then look for a more reasonable solution of the question of the situation

of the Iron works within the old town limits.

The "Company Undertakers of the Iron Works," as they were called, commenced the erection of their works about 1644, or 1645, and continued their operations until they had in their possession property in 1653, to the amount of 666 pounds, which was the appraised value at their failure in that year. Perhaps no better history of these works can be found than is contained in a lease of said works given by certain persons in England to Richard Thayer of Braintree, in 1685. It is a lengthy document, and I copy only a portion, but the main facts are as follows:

"This indenture, made the twentieth day of June, Anno Dom. 1685, between James Dewey of London, Esq., and Samuel Baker and Joseph Lyndsey of London, gentlemen, on the one part and Richard Thayer of Braintree, New England, in the part beyond the seas, Yeoman, of the other part:

Whereas, Cornelius Holland, Lyonel Copley, William Beek, Nicholas Bond, Emanuel Downing, and Gualter Frost, Esquires, William Greenhill, Richard Babington ministers, Robert Child Doctor in Physick, George Sharpulls merchant, and other their associates being well affected to the colony of New England, did in or about the year of our Lord 1644, become undertakers, and made certain

propositions to the General Court of the Massachusetts there, for the raising of the Iron Works and making of iron; and upon full debate and consideration of the matter had encouragement from them to prosecute the design, and many lands, woods, waste grounds, privileges and advantages granted to them and their heirs within that jurisdiction; as by one patent under seal of said colony bearing date at Boston in the month of October in the said year 1644, and another patent bearing date the first day of the eighth month, 1646, and other grants and orders (to which relation being severally had more plainly and at large) it doth and may appear; and whereas, the said undertakers with other adventurers did at their own proper cost and charges erect, build, and set up several houses, furnaces, mills and other buildings and works at Lynn, Braintree, Boston, Hammersmith, and other places in New England, aforesaid, and furnished the same with a large stock amounting in value to many thousand pounds, and did purchase and were possessed of a farm and lands which they permitted John Gifford, their agent, and his family to dwell in, and had also a grant of the town of Boston of 3000 acres of land and wood, and the like from the town of Lynn and other places to them and their heirs, and also did purchase of private persons, viz: of George Tovey the freehold of ten

acres of land at or near Braintree, aforesaid, which cost them ten pounds, and of Mr. Hutchinson the freehold of 200 acres of other lands and tenements for the better carrying on and accommodating the said works, &c., conveyed to Richard Thayer all their purchase and adventures as Iron Works, &c., for and during the full time of 1000 years commencing from the feast day of the nativity of St. John Baptist last past before the date of these presents, the said Richard Thayer yielding and paying yearly to them or their heirs one peppercorn each on the first day of May."

The above instrument was witnessed in Boston June 8, 1686, by Edward Randolph, and then recorded on Suffolk records. It was probably valueless as the company had failed more than thirty years before, and their property had passed into other hands under due process of law.

In order to have a correct understanding of the location of the Iron Works it will be necessary to examine the situation of the neighboring estates. About the year 1641, one Richard Thayer, who had previously immigrated to this country from the parish of Thornbury, in Gloucestershire, England, came to Braintree and there settled. He resided there about five years, when he removed to Boston, married Jane Parker, widow of John, about the year

1646, and died there before 1668. He sold his property in Braintree to his son Richard, as appears by the following indenture:

“This indenture, made the fifth day of the seventh month, Anno Dom. 1648, (Sept. 6, 1648) between Richard Thayer of Boston on the one part, and Richard Thayer of Braintree, son of the said Richard of Boston, on the other part, witnesseth that the said Richard Thayer of Boston for and in consideration of the sum of forty pounds in hand paid unto him by the said Richard Thayer, the son, &c., sold to the son Richard one dwelling house and other housing belonging to it; one orchard, or garden, four acres of land lying to the house and upon the river Monoticot. Also, one parcel of land lately purchased by the said Richard, the elder, of Moses Paine of Braintree, upon the river Monoticot.

Also, two and one-half acres lying between Daniel Lovett and James Farr in the fields at Monoticot, bought by the said Richard, the elder, of John Niles together with the lot upon which he built his house, and four acres adjoining on the west to the house lot of Richard Thayer the father, butting upon the river of Monoticot, bought of Dermon Downing, who bought it of his brother, John Downing, being part of a lot sold by William Cheesborough, who had it given unto him by the town of Boston.”

Of the parties mentioned in the above deed Moses Paine died in 1643; James Farr in 1642; Dermon Downing in 1672.

"Feb. 12, 1661, John Gurney, Taylor, conveyed to Richard Thayer for fourteen pounds, one house and orchard on which the house stands, five acres of land bounded south on Monoticot river; east on Richard Thayer, Nathaniel Mott and John [— ? —]; north on Simon Crosby; west on George Aldridge. Also one-half acre west of the last lot, river on the south, highway on the north, George Aldrich on the east." Nathaniel Mott was killed by the Indians in 1675, and George Aldrich and Daniel Lovett removed.

"June 9, 1663, George Aldridge, Taylor, and Katherine, his wife, conveyed to Richard Thayer for thirty pounds sterling, one dwelling house at Monoticot in Braintree, two orchards, eight acres bounded east and west on Richard Thayer, north on Joseph Crosby, south on Monoticot river."

"May 10, 1667, Lyonell Wheatley and Elliner, his wife, conveyed to Richard Thayer, thirty-five acres granted Hugh Gunnison by the town of Boston and of him purchased by Evan Thomas deceased, father of the said Elliner, and is heading on the land appertaining to the Iron Works."

Richard Thayer mortgaged to Simon

Lynde April 10, 1668, thirty acres of land bought of his father, Richard, deceased; five acres of John Gurney; eight acres of George Aldrich; thirty-five acres of Lionel Wheatley, it being the same property mentioned above. Sept 1, 1671, Richard Thayer conveyed by warrantee deed to Simon Lynde the same property. Oct. 29, 1678, Simon Lynde desiring a better description of the land bought in 1671, Richard Thayer gave him another deed with plainer boundaries as will be seen.

Previous to giving the deed as a better description, your attention is called to a purchase made by Richard Thayer of John Paine, dated Sept. 12, 1667, which was not included in the mortgaged estate, but which was mentioned in the confirmatory deed of Richard Thayer to Simon Lynde. "John Paine of Boston conveyed to Richard Thayer, Sept. 12, 1667, dwelling house and coal house, orchards, dam with the land adjoining thereto, on the north side of Monoticot river, part of it formerly in the hands of Quentin Pray, otherwise known by the name of the Iron Works in Braintree (excepting only this pasture of about six acres, and about three acres sold to Thomas Thayer, and four acres sold to John Pray, and a parcel known by the name of Hunnets lot.) Also a parcel of land thirty acres joining up to the south end of his dam: Thomas Thayer tow-

ards the west; Thomas Savage towards the east; Monoticot river towards the north; and other lands towards the south." Quentin Pray died in 1667.

Oct. 29, 1678, Richard Thayer gave another deed to Simon Lynde, as before mentioned.

"He conveys twenty five acres formerly my father Richard's land, formerly Moses Paine's, bounded north upon the highway leading to the Monoticot river; south on the said river; east on Samuel Hayden and Alexander Plumley; being near the form of a triangle. Twenty five acres: five acres bought of John Gurney, two five acre lots of my father Richard, two five acre lots of George Aldridge, bounded south on Monoticot river, east with Zechariah Thayer, north with Joseph Adams, west with land formerly of Quentin Pray. Also, thirty five acres bought of Lionel Wheatley, bounded north on Caleb Hobart, Thomas Thayer and John Paine formerly, east on William Penn, south on Samuel White and west on Monoticot river. Also, forty acres bought of John Paine, bounded north on Monoticot river, east on Caleb Hobart south on the land formerly Lionel Wheatley, and west on Thomas Thayer. Also, one and one-half acres of land which John Paine deemed as belonging to the Iron Works and comprised in the fore-mentioned lands sold by him unto me, although duly and properly belonging to the lands of my father,

Richard Thayer, and by him sold unto me and never alienated to the owners of the Iron Works, but only licensed and permitted to them of the Iron Works, during his pleasure, to occupy some part thereof, the more to advance his lands adjoining to the same, which one and one-half acres is bounded south on Monoticot river; east on the five acres formerly John Downam's; north with the highway to Monoticot river; west with a highway from Monoticot highway down to the mill dam; together with all housing, barns, buildings, corn mill, saw mill, fulling mill, and erectments." From this deed we can see where the Iron Works were located. The southerly boundary was Monoticot river; the northerly, the street now called Elm street, but in 1678, Monoticot highway; the westerly now called Middle street, then the way to the mill dam.

Previous to 1690, there was nothing but a cart path into the woods and fields over the Monoticot river from the street now called Elm street.

In that year the selectmen laid out the northern portion of Middle street as far south as Walnut street, according to the Braintree records: "May the 21, 1690. There being complaint made by Thomas Thayer, Jr., that the way from his dwelling house, over the dam into the country road was fenced up in two places and several of the neighbors desiring

desiring to have that way laid out further than it had formerly been for an outlet into the vacant lands, and for their convenience in coming to meeting and mill, we, the Selectmen of Braintree, this 21st of May, 1690, went to the place and opened the way formerly laid out, till we came near Richard Thayer, Jr.'s house, and from thence till we come to the cart way at the corner of John Staples' land within fence.'

The Richard Thayer, Jr., was the son of Richard, the son of Richard the immigrant, and probably resided on the spot now owned by G. H. Arnold. John Staples owned the land of T. H. Libby, which extended from Middle street to the river. Soon after 1690, he removed to Taunton, where his descendants still reside. The Wheatley lot of thirty-five acres was evidently on the south side of the Monticott river, about River street; the land of Thomas Thayer on the north side of said street, it being the place formerly known as the Penniman place, and recently surveyed and a portion of it sold by Edward Reed.

The Iron Works, in 1688, appears to be in the possession of Christopher Webb, senior, millwright, who with Hannah his wife conveyed on April 11th. of that year, to John Holbrook of Weymouth, housewright, for 180 pounds, all their corn mill, mill pond, waters, water courses, dam, banks,

one and one-half acre of land with barn thereon; bounded north and west on the highway, south on the river, east with Simon Lynde. This seems to be the same lot of land which John Paine deemed belonging to the Iron Works, although claimed by Richard Thayer as before mentioned.

June 1, 1697, John Holbrook of Weymouth sold to John Webb of Braintree, son of Christopher, senior, for 228 pounds, grist or corn mill, one and one-half acres of land adjoining, near said mill, orchard and barn, bounded north and west by the highway, south by the river, east by Simon Lynde; being the same property conveyed in 1688 by the father of John to the said Holbrook. The same property, together with additional, in 1752, was conveyed to Ebenezer Thayer, Jr., by Samuel Hayden and Esther, his wife, in the deed of which it says that it was part of the homestead of John Webb, late of Braintree, consisting of twelve and three-quarters acres of land, the west end of dwelling house in which said Webb lived, and the garden adjoining, barn, shop, two thirds of the grist mill; all standing on the aforesaid land; two-thirds of the pond, dam, &c. One piece bounded southwest on land laid out to Widow Mary Webb, relict of John Webb; southeast on land of Rev. Samuel Niles; east on Elkanah Wales, north on the river and land of Zechariah

Thayer, and so running northwest by said Zechariah Thayer, to the town way between said house and mill. The other piece on which the barn stands, bounded northwest on town way aforesaid; southwest on a town way leading over said mill dam; southeast on the flume; northeast on a lane leading from said house to the said grist mill.

The Ebenezer Thayer, Jr. who was the grantee named in the above deed, was the father of Samuel Miller Thayer and Atherton Thayer, who inherited the mill privilege after the death of their father, and it was sold by them or their heirs; about the year 1832, it came into the hands of Alva Morrison, and his heirs now improve it.

From the foregoing and other deeds which are on the records, it appears that there were quite a number of houses at an early date, built upon the rising ground called at that time Monoticot fields, situated on the north side of the river, and extending from what is now Middle street along Elm street to the easterly side of the brook, which crosses the way near the junction of old and new Elm street.

Tradition says that about the year 1675, there was a garrison house situated on the westerly slope of said land, just beyond said brook, and on a path formerly beginning near the old Hannah Clark house, crossing the field to Elm street near the brook.

Richard Thayer occupied the garrison house. Between that and Middle street were the dwellings, probably, of Moses Paine, James Farr, Daniel Lovett, John Niles, John Downing, Nathaniel Mott, George Aldridge and John Gurney. On the westerly slope of the hill on old Elm street was situated the house of John French.

Other evidence shows that the Iron Works were situated at this place. The appraisal of the property at their failure in 1653, gives the names by which the several lots were known.

Thayer's lot (Thayer) 1 acre, 17 rods, is probably the same as the 1 1-2 acres mentioned in the confirmatory deed of Richard Thayer to Simon Lynde.

William Penn owned land in the immediate vicinity and the appraisal mentions Penn's lot as seventy eight acres. We then have Old Ruggles lot of twenty acres; the situation of this lot is established beyond a doubt from the following evidence, "Sept. 29, 1645, George Ruggles of Braintree, conveys to Richard Leader, in behalf of the Company Undertakers of the Iron Work, twenty acres, lying in Braintree, bounded with Monotocot river north, Isaac Shelly east, Hugh Gunnison south, Francis Newcomb west."

Lovett's house lot, forty-one rods, was no doubt the one alluded to in the deed of Richard Thayer, Sen., to his son Richard.

Recent discoveries show that there must have been Iron-works on this spot. The Morrison Brothers dug a well a few years ago on the premises, and found a vein of iron slag below the surface of the ground, which evidently had remained undisturbed for many years. When the pipes of the Braintree Water Supply Company were laid on Adams street, nearly opposite to the factory of the Morrises, the workmen, who dug the trench, found three bars of iron, four feet and four inches below the surface.

Not knowing the value of these ancient relics, they sold them to a junk man who came along at the time.

Further investigation may reveal other deeds which would throw light on the subject; but I feel satisfied from the above records that the Morrison mills are situated on the spot where the first Iron Works were located, about the year 1644.

In answer to an inquiry I have received, as to whether I could find any evidence of the location being near the east part of the town, as tradition says, I would say that I have not found a particle.

On the contrary I do not think it could be situated there, as a large tract of land was bought in 1648, by Samuel Allen, on the north side of Monatiquot river and nearly opposite that portion of the river where tradition says the dam was located. No allusion is made to Samuel Allen in any of the deeds, so far as

I have found. In 1682, or soon after, John Hubbard built a dam and started a forge on that portion of the Monatiquot river, which lies below the Iron Works bridge, and about that time bought land of Joseph Allen, son of Samuel, the first of the Allens who settled in Braintree. Samuel Allen died in August, 1669, and his youngest son Joseph inherited his property, and resided on the same.

This is probably the Iron Works of tradition, and was afterwards in the possession of Thomas Vinton.



APPENDIX.

In the examination of this and other papers, left by the late Samuel A. Bates, for the purpose of preparing them for publication, the following seemed to be of interest in connection with the foregoing pages, inasmuch as they are corroborative of the conclusions therein arrived at.

The results of his investigations of the matter were made public in 1889, and created some comment among historians, as they were directly at variance with the statements of previous writers.

In 1892, however, Hon. Robert C. Winthrop communicated to the Massachusetts Historical Society, (*Proceedings, Oct. & Nov. 1892.*), extracts from the diary of John Winthrop, Jr. who was one of the promoters of these Iron Works.

It is a record of a journey from Boston to Connecticut commenced Nov. 11, 1645 and ended Dec. 5, as follows: viz.

“Dec. 4. Thursday. Waded over Naponset, the tree being carried away by the thaw flood also another little river before. A third made a bridge

over, felling a small tree. Passed over Monotaquid at twilight. Came by the direction of the noise of the falls to the forge. Lodged at Th. Facksons. Mr. Hoffes farmer. (*Foot Notes.* He probably crossed the Monatiquot in South Braintree, having come by way of Canton, crossing the Neponset river near its source. Faxon had been for some time a tenant farmer on the estate of Atherton Hough, and in 1656 bought of his son, Rev. Samuel Hough, four hundred and fifty acres of land in Braintree. The site of his house was about half a mile distant from Morrison's mills. It was undoubtedly at this house that John Winthrop passed the night.)"

During a visit to England, in 1642, John Winthrop, Jr., had persuaded a number of his friends to invest money in this undertaking, and, at the outset, acted as their agent. Among his papers was found the draft of a petition to Parliament setting forth that, in May, 1643, he "at great costs and charges did imbarque himselfe in the good ship An Cleeve of London, wth many workmen, servants, & materialls for the said setting up of iron workes".

Soon after his arrival in New England, he, with his miners, visited "Braintre, Greeneharbour [Marshfield], Plimouth, Richman Iland [Richmond Island, near Cape Elisabeth, Me.]," and along the shore between that place and Massachusetts, having heard

that there was ore at "Pascataway [Portsmouth], Agmaenticus [York], Sako [Saco], & Blackpoint [Scarborough]." At many of these places he found iron ore, but on account of the scarcity of laborers, and inferiority of the ore, he preferred Braintree, where these difficulties did not exist. He writes early in 1644: "Although this place at Braintre — was principally in my thoughts — both before I went into England and since my last arrivall here, for the fittest and most convenient place for the first setting up of an Iron worke; yet being a worke of consequence, I conceived it necessary to have other places searched. — This sort of ore at Braintre is of the same sorte w^{ch} they call in Ireland the Bogge mine. We have tried it since we came over, — and the finer hath made good iron; that w^{ch} we sent into England was made of that from Braintre.—Therefore necessity seemes to drive us to accept of this place."

In the same volume from which the last two extracts were made, we find the following letter from the Promoters of the Iron Works in England. as follows:

*To our worthy friend John Winthrop Junior Esq'r, in
New England, present these.*

London, 4 Junij 1645.

S_R, —According to what we have formerly written unto you we now send over our agent, Mr. Richard

Leader, with full power & instructions from us to undertake & p'ceed in our affaires there. Wee doe heartilie desire yo^r help & assistance to him therein, which (with that you also have done already for us) wee shalbee thankfull to you for. Wee also pray you to deliver him an accompt of all the moneys that you have received & disbursed for us, and to deliver unto M^r Leaders hands & custodie all such materiall, stock & other things as any way belong to the generall stock, according to o^r instructions given to M^r Leader in this behalfe; whose acknowledgm^t under his hand for what he shall receive from you shalbe yo^r sufficient discharge in that behalfe. Thus wth hearty applica'con of yo^r welfare we rest

Yo^r assured loving friends,

NICH. BOND.

ROBERT CHILD.

THO. WELD,

ROBERT HOUGHTON.

LIONELL COPLEY.

THOMAS FOLEY.

JO: POCOCK.

JOSHUA FOOTE.

GEO. SHARPULLS.

(*Foot Note.* Leader had been concerned in mining operations in Ireland. For a letter from Emmanuel Downing about him, see *4 Mass. Hist. Coll.*, Vol vi *IF.* 61, 62.)

At the February meeting of the Quincy Historical Society, in 1895, the author of the fore

going pages these facts, showing that Richard Leader did not come to this country until 1645, thus disposing of the claim that the first iron works in this country were set up by said Leader in Saugus, a suburb of Lynn, in 1642; and a study of the references contained in these pages, will prove that he was not here before that date, as he was then engaged in the same work in Ireland; moreover, the indenture, on page 6, shows that the works at Saugus were simply an adjunct to those at Braintree, both of them being under control of the same company.

Note by the Editor.

I desire here, to acknowledge my obligations to Messrs. Robert C. Winthrop, Charles Francis Adams, and to William G. Spear, librarian of the Quincy Historical Society, for their kind assistance in preparing these pages, and for their permission to use extracts from their works.

Frank A. Bates

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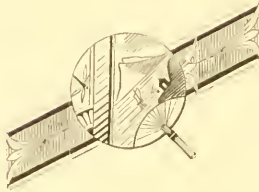
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