

# MANSFIELD MEMORIES: Fulton's history as a little downtown mill pond

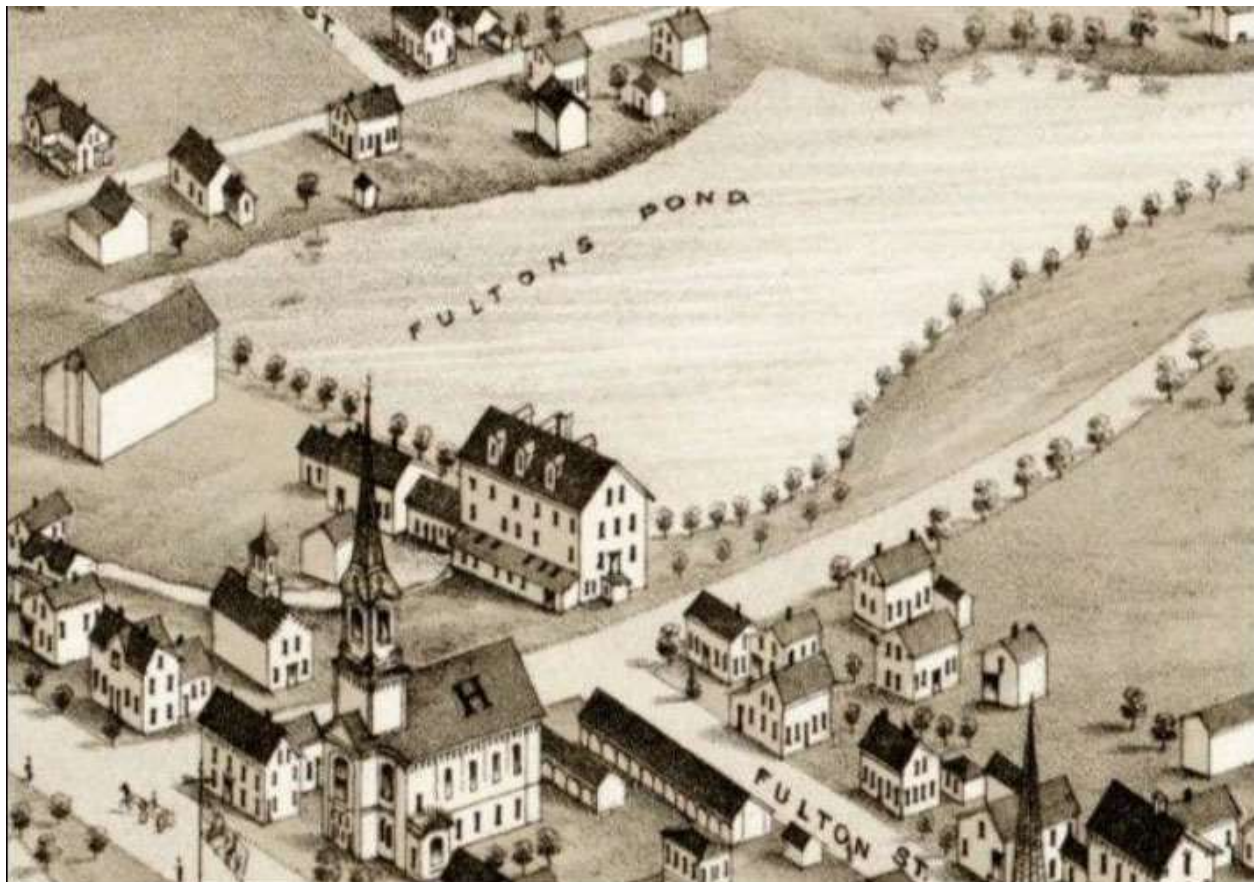
---

By Kevin McNatt and Andrew Todesco

Jan 20, 2020

*MANSFIELD - This column uses the name Fulton's Pond rather than Fulton Pond. Both names are commonly used for the body of water on Rumford Avenue. The Mansfield Historical Society is basing use of the name, Fulton's, on the 1946 deed for the property.*

Like most of Mansfield's ponds, Fulton's Pond was not created by nature. It was formed when the Rumford River was dammed in the early 1830s for the use of the Pratt and Bates cotton factory. Elkanah Bates bought the low lying and swampy land needed to create the pond.



Above is a 1879 drawing of Fulton's Pond on Rumford Avenue.

Bates and his brother-in-law Solomon Pratt then built a cotton mill on the southeast corner of the pond, using the water as a source of power. They conducted business at that location until their deaths in the late 1840s.

The mill burned down in 1850. The site was ultimately purchased by Robert MacMoran and his son-in-law Robert Fulton. They erected a factory that produced a variety of knives. These included boot, oyster, fish, cigar and bread knives. The knives were usually stamped “Moran & Fulton.” Some say this was to save on engraving costs. Others say it was because the stamp between “Mac” and “Moran” would often break, so the Mac was abandoned.

Robert Fulton was known as a talented and generous businessman. Historian



The Fulton's Pond site was once owned by Robert MacMoran and his son-in-law Robert Fulton who erected a factory that produced a variety of knives.

Jennie Copeland wrote that Fulton was shipping as much as \$20,000 worth of goods annually across the country. And during the economic panic of 1857, when money was suddenly unavailable, Fulton cleverly traded his knives for food and clothing for his workers. He promised to pay them when the panic subsided and remained true to his word.

Fulton passed away in 1865. Production continued successfully under his widow's second husband Matthew George until approximately 1900. The location then became a “wet wash” laundry until the 1940s. It operated under several names but was best known as the White Star laundry.

The pond has long attracted Mansfield's skating enthusiasts. In the colder months they competed with Warren Wilson's ice harvesting business. Wilson had multiple ice houses along the pond. And in warm weather one would occasionally see a sailboat on the pond.

The Town of Mansfield took possession of Fulton's Pond in 1946. In later years it acquired the now-familiar public parking lot along Rumford Avenue and the space now known as Robinson Park. The latter was dedicated in 1995 in memory of Theodore (Ted) Robinson who was superintendent of Parks & Commons for more than two decades.

Fulton's Pond was dredged in the 1974. The earthen berm has been improved over the years, and the dam was rebuilt in 1998.

Then there is Rumford Avenue. Built circa 1850 it was originally known as Main Street. By the 1870s it was called Water Street. Its current name was adopted by a vote of the town meeting in March 1887.

There are many historic homes along Rumford Avenue. Among them is Castle Thunder. Its address is 31 West St. and sits at the corner of Rumford Avenue. Castle Thunder was a boarding house for mill workers on Fulton's Pond. The name derives from an incident in 1873 when its residents vacated the house after hearing strange noises in the night.

At 53 Rumford Ave. is the Copeland House, home of Mansfield's greatest historian Jennie Copeland and now headquarters of the Mansfield Historical Society. At 69 Rumford Ave. is the Mears Mansion, built by Frederick Mears, a produce wholesaler.

The Dinsmore-Barnes House is at 79 Rumford. Built by Otis Dinsmore, it was owned for many years by the family of Clarence A. Barnes, attorney general for the

Commonwealth of Massachusetts. And the home at 86 Rumford is believed to have once been rented by Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science, as a summer refuge.

There is quite a bit of history to be found on that little downtown mill pond.



Al Manchester ice fishing on Fulton's Pond in 1898.