

ISRAEL HOLMES

"The man who found the manufactures of Waterbury wood and left them brass."

— The Town and City of Waterbury

Considered the primary force behind the brass industry in Waterbury, Israel Holmes, born December 19, 1800, began work as a clerk in the button store operated by J.M.L. and W.H. Scovill in 1820. The Scovills, engaged in the manufacture of metallic buttons, were dependent on England for the importing of brass. With an eye toward manufacturing brass here, they sent Holmes to Birmingham in 1829 to acquire the necessary men and machines.

Though he had to conceal his intent to bring skilled workers back to America because of English laws prohibiting it, he was successful in persuading a group of gilders, burnishers and die-sinkers to join him. Strict surveillance by the English authorities was circumvented by concealing the men in empty wine casks aboard ship until they set sail from Liverpool. Encouraged by his success, he went back in 1831 and this time brought back a company of casters, rollers, wire drawers and tube-makers along with the machinery needed to begin the manufacture of brass. This was the impetus for Waterbury to develop into "The Brass Center of the World."

Tariff legislation in 1833 became a threat to the Waterbury industry. Holmes and Israel Coe persuaded Congress to classify sheet brass and brass wire as manufactured articles, thereby giving Waterbury firms a competitive edge over the British.

In 1845 Holmes became the first president of Waterbury Brass Co. which was at that time the largest rolling mill in the country. In all he was responsible for the creation of five brass companies in Waterbury, including the firm of Holmes, Booth and Haydens.

He was a member of the Connecticut Legislature in 1870, helped build the Naugatuck Railroad and wrote political verse.

The American Brass industry lost one of its most creative, influential and prominent pioneers when Holmes died on July 15, 1874.

