



Deerpark Diary

Town of Deerpark 1863 School House Museum

Town of Deerpark Historian, P. O. Box 621, Huguenot, New York 12746

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www.schoolhouse.org

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History of Sawmills

Prior to the invention of the sawmill, boards were hand-sawn by two men with a whip saw. Saddle blocks were used to hold the log. A saw pit was dug for the man who worked below. Sawing was slow and required strong men. The top sawyer had to be the stronger of the two because the saw was pulled in turn by each man. The lower sawyer had the advantage of gravity. The top sawyer also had to guide the saw so that the board was of even thickness.

A Roman water-powered sawmill located at Hierapolis, Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) is the earliest known sawmill. It dates back to the second half of the 3rd century AD. It is also the earliest known machine to incor-

porate a crank and connecting rod mechanism.

In America the sawmill was introduced soon after colonization by recruiting skilled men from Hamburg, Germany. Later the metal parts were obtained from the Netherlands. The arrival of a sawmill was a big step in the growth of a frontier community. According to the 1798 Deerpark Assessment Rolls of October 1, 1798, Joseph Ketcham, Samuel Lombard, Timothy Oakelry, Elijah Reeve, and Abraham Stignay owned sawmills in Deerpark. Their average size was about 34 feet by 15 feet.



Early logging camp in the Town of Deerpark —possibly Woodland Park, Huguenot.

Early mills were taken to the forest during the winter months, where temporary shelters were built and the logs could be skidded to the nearby mill by horse or ox teams. Snow provided lubrication for the skids. These early mills used reciprocal saws.

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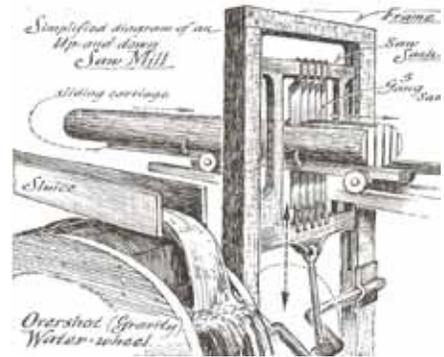


Diagram of an Up-and-down Saw Mill using an Overshot Waterwheel (A Reverence for Wood by Eric Sloane)

As mills grew larger, they were established in more permanent facilities on a river or stream. Circular saws, which are more efficient, replaced the old reciprocal saws. The next improvement occurred soon thereafter, with the use of gangsaws, which added additional blades so that a log would be reduced to multiple boards in one operation.



The Monticello Lumber company located on Port Orange Road. (c. 1907 photo courtesy Brian Lewis)

The introduction of steam power in the 19th century created many new possibilities for mills. Instead of relying on a stream to turn a water wheel, smaller amounts of water were needed to

create the steam to power the engine. Scrap lumber from the mill provided a ready fuel source for firing the boiler.

In the 20th century the introduction of electricity and high technology furthered this process and now most sawmills are massive and expensive facilities in which most aspects of the work are computerized.

Deerpark Mills

There were sawmills in Deerpark during the time of the earliest settlers. The first homes were log built, however in a short time sawmills were built to produce lumber for barns and homes.

John Van Etten had an “up and down” sawmill in the Huguenot area. The Snook and Knight sawmill was located in the Sparrowbush area. In 1783 after the War of Independence, Westfall and Cuddeback built a sawmill in Oakland Valley. These mills were powered by water wheels. An important product at this time were heavy boards to build plank roads.



Improved technology opened additional business opportunities. Millers relied on water from small nearby springs for the boilers to make the necessary energy to run the mill. The mills had to close down when the

springs dried up during the summer.

The Boehlmer family had a steam operated sawmill on their farm. They sawed mostly bridge planks for the local and county highway departments. They also supplied 2x6 lumber and posts for guard rails for the highways. They used chestnut for the posts whenever possible. The Boehlmers cut these posts, rails and planks for many years.

T. K. Vose operated a sawmill in Rio for a number of years. He hired many local residents. The sawyer was Jake Obermeyer, who lived at the corner of Rt. 42 and Whitehead Rd. The mill was located on Obermeyer’s property before it was moved to the Venner property, about 1/2 mile north of Whitehead Road. In those days horses were used to transport the logs and the lumber. Whenever possible, the mill was located close to the timber provided there was a water supply nearby to run the steam engine and boiler. These mills were usually mounted on wheels and could be moved and set up in a few days. Slabwood waste and/or sawdust was shoveled into the firebox to heat the water to make steam to run the mill. T. K. Vose operated the mill for many years before he started a small lumber yard in Sparrowbush which was later owned and operated by John Innella.

The Beardsley Mill, on the Old Mongaup Falls (Plank) Road, was one of the largest in the county. The fire box was 18 or 20 feet long so that full length slab wood could be burned to produce steam. Many thousand board feet of lumber were produced every day.



1911 Ireland #2 circular sawmill

Today Rob Honders, Kennel Road, Cuddebackville, owns a small sawmill which he uses to cut lumber for his personal projects and specialty lumber for local carpenters. In 1974, he purchased a 1911 Ireland #2 circular sawmill with a four foot blade from Walter Ashworth. Originally it had been operated by steam from the Pine Kill. Today it is powered by a 1940s diesel Caterpillar engine.



Rob Honders operating his sawmill in Cuddebackville— 10-23-2012

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Where We Came From— The William Dean Family

A painting from the 1800s of the Dean Mill on loan from the David Dean family will be the center piece of a new 2013 exhibit at the Deerpark Museum. In 1993, Howard J. Dean wrote a history of the family entitled *Where We Came From—The William Dean Family, A History and Genealogy*.

The following are excerpts of the chapter in which he tells the story of the Dean sawmill.

“Sawmills appeared on almost every stream that provided enough water and were located near stands of usable trees. Many of these mills shut down when streams were dry in the summer time or when ice gathered on their water wheels in the winter time. The early mills were often ‘ramshackle’ affairs and in 1855 the census valued them usually at less than two hundred dollars each. An 1880 painting by John Ph. Voalker of the Dean Mill would support this observation...Ruttenber in his *1881 History of Orange County* states that, ‘judging from the sawed materials in old buildings, sawmills must have been in early use in this neighborhood. One having been built in 1760 or 1770. The Shingle Kill (Dutch, SyngleKill) probably originated from the fact that shingles were made along it in frontier times’...

The old Dean Mill was located here before 1877 when my grandfather, Harvey N. Dean,

arrived. Also, on an old map is a George VanEtten (son of John) located on the Shingle Kill. I can recall seeing what appeared to be the ruins of an old dam in this area, —so there were two mills here.

“Water-powered up-and-down saws, like the one in our old mill, were not altogether abandoned in favor of the circular saw or band saws until well into the twentieth century. The original power in our mill was furnished by an old overshot water wheel. This was replaced by two small turbine wheels which powered the saws and planers until a flood destroyed the dam and the mills. For many years the old water wheels, pulleys, gears and other parts could be found buried in the brook below the dam site. The old planer was stored in the barn for many years until it was finally sold. Most of the lumber used in building the ‘Big House’ in the early 1900s was made by George and Howard Dean in this mill. In later years they operated a portable steam-powered sawmill

which was operated in Greenville, Unionville and Montague in the 1920s... The Dean Brothers cut and sold mine ties and props, railroad ties, telephone poles and barrel hoops...

“During these years I can recall the old Cadillac truck with a Knox Unit that they used to haul poles, ties and lumber. I believe it was a 1912 touring car that had been converted into a truck by adding this Knox Unit. They had to go to Newark for it and it was quite an antique even in those days. It was a right-hand drive, had bucket seats, canvas top, aluminum body, carbide gas lights that had to be lit with a match, individual cylinders that had a priming cup on top of each one and it had to be hand cranked to start. The trailer had hard rubber tires on it and was made so that the length could be varied depending upon the length of the materials carried. I can recall that it burned out bearings quite frequently and they always carried a few extra ones and would put in a new one right on the road when necessary. The used ones could be rehabilitated for future use. It also had a horn or whistle that worked off the exhaust and which could be heard for a mile or more. We always knew when the truck was nearly home by the signal they would blow. For years this old truck stood in the shed until in the early 1930s it was sold for junk and I think for about \$15.00...”

In the next edition of the *Deerpark Diary* there will be additional information from Howard Dean’s history dealing with the Deerpark logging and sawmill industry.



1880 Painting of the Dean Mill by John Ph. Boalker



1912 Cadillac truck, c. 1920
Photo courtesy Howard Dean

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Indian Raid Tour

by Lana Giovanniello

On Saturday, July 21, 2012, the Deerpark Museum Committee successfully kicked off their first annual Brant Raid Tour in the Town of Deerpark. Dressed in period attire, Norma Schadt, Deerpark Historian, and six members of the committee led a group of forty-two on a tour along the route Mohawk Indian and British Loyalist, Joseph Brant, and his Tories took when they attacked settlements in our valley on July 20, 1779.

The tour covered areas of attacks along Route 42, Peenpack Trail, and Neversink Drive in the Town of Deerpark. Decker's Stockade Fort, Solomon Davis Grist Mill, Black Rock School, Van Auken Fort, and Solomon Kuykendall Fort were among many of the locations attacked on this part of the route. The tour continued into Port Jervis where Brant had burned the Maghagamach Church, Peter Kuykendall Tavern and Fort Decker. There was an opportunity to visit the old Maghagamach Cemetery where the church resided and where Martinus Decker and Simon Westfall are buried. The tour ended with a colonial-period cooking

demonstration at Fort Decker in West End put on by the Minisink Valley Historical Society. During the Industrial Era, Fort Decker was the site of John B. Jervis' Headquarters when the D & H Canal was being constructed. It now houses the Minisink Valley Historical Society's Museum

Frank Salvati provided extensive background information about Joseph Brant who was born along the Ohio River Valley during a family hunting excursion in March of 1743. He grew up along the Mohawk Valley in Canajoharie, New York with his mother Margaret, older sister Molly, and stepfather, Brant Canagaradunka. Home to the Mohawk Indian Nation, he had close ties with the British and became a paid interpreter for the British Department of Indian Affairs. As a close friend to the Department's British Superintendent, Sir William Johnson, Joseph Brant was granted opportunities that Indians normally didn't receive. He was granted an education at the Wheelock School in Lebanon Connecticut at the expense of the British. He was invited to England in 1776 to meet King George III so he could settle Indian griev-

ances. He was also a paid captain under a distinct branch in the British army through the Department of Indian Affairs. Brant rose to become one of America's most prominent, intelligent, and wealthy Native Americans. Aside from being a paid interpreter and captain, he was also a farmer, a shop owner, and a Freemason. He took his heritage to heart and was extremely protective over his family and people. Between the periods of 1777-1782, Brant's attacks on our valley and across the New York frontier were purely a result of retaliation. After years of attempting to make peace and remain neutral with the white settlers, he refused to let cultural indifferences stand in his way any longer. Brant led his party into battles at numerous villages across the New York frontier such as Oriskany, Cobleskill, Cherry Valley, German Flats, Wyoming, Saratoga and the Minisink Valley (present day Town of Deerpark/Port Jervis).

This tour was so successful that two Brant Bus Tours are being planned in 2013. Additional information will be in future newsletters or call 845-856-2702.



The tour guides from left to right: Vi Sinsabaugh, Joan Applegate, Lana Giovanniello, Frank Salvati, Catherine Westfall, Barbara Johnson, Norma Schadt, Nancy Conod