

CLINTON'S INDUSTRIES

Clinton Stories: Sites



DeWitt mill in Frost Mills, c.1907"

Clinton's Early Industries: Mills

By Craig Marshall

First the roads came, then settlers built cabins and started farms. Essential to this early growth in towns like Clinton was the establishment of mills to support the needs of these settlers. As farmers cleared their land for planting, saw mills converted the fallen trees to lumber for building barns, homes, and fences. When the crops were harvested, grist mills converted the grain into useable and marketable products. Fulling mills processed raw cloth for personal use and for market. ("Fulling" was the process of compacting or shrinking woolen cloth by the application of heat and moisture.) In later years, mills also produced apple cider, shingles, and plaster. Indeed, progress in the settlement was largely tied to these important milling industries. Clinton was fortunate to have two principal advantages over other regions. Waterpower came from the Wappingers Creek and its tributaries, where most of our mills were concentrated. The other was the "Dover Road" built about 1740; it diagonally crossed the Clinton Precinct (Clinton, Pleasant Valley, and Hyde Park didn't become separate towns

until 1821). This road stretched from Dover to the Hudson River at Rhinecliff, and channeled southern New England settlers to our area. Having found good mill sites and acceptable farmland along the way, many of them established their homes and went about developing land. The Dover Road provided a means to get their products to the Hudson River for shipment to other markets.

In 1986, Eleanor Rogers, CHS lifetime member and researcher, compiled an extensive study of mills in the Clinton Precinct and nearby. Her research identified 42 mills in the Precinct, the earliest known to be DeWitt's mill in Frost Mills on Hollow Road built about the 1760's. The last mills appear to have been operating until about 1900 when milling no longer depended on waterpower. (Saw mills were being located near large timber stands in other regions and powered by steam engines.) Some local mills were seasonal, operating only when the water was high enough to drive the wheels.

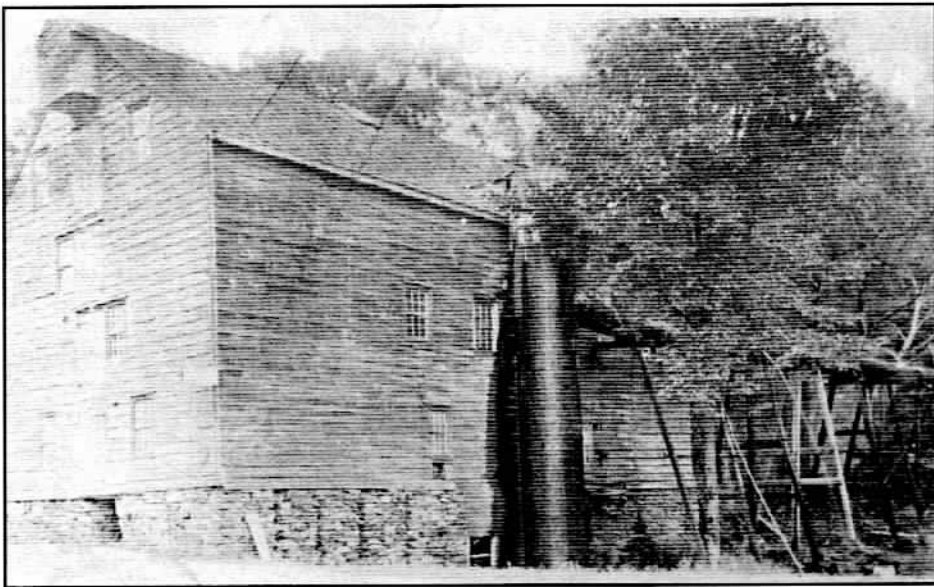
Location of mills was widespread throughout the Precinct. **Hibernia** had

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Schultzville Tour and Luncheon, continued involvement at the annual Town of Clinton Spring Festival and Community Day, and an antiques appraisal day.

We need your support of the planned events and want to hear from you. We would like to offer traditional craft classes and to sell soup or chili before monthly meetings starting in the fall if there is membership interest.

The committee meets one Sunday afternoon each month from 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. at the Creek Meeting House. Tea is served along with other light refreshments. Contact me at 473-7950 or at grabowski@earthlink.net if you would like more information. New friends are always welcome!



DeWitt mill showing flume to direct water to turbine

Mills (Continued from page 1)

grist, saw, and fulling mills in the 1770's. The 1870 directory shows flour, grist, plaster, and saw mills in this hamlet. Today, only a dam and picturesque millpond are reminders of this activity. **Salt Point** had a pair of mill dams, at least one of which existed since 1768. In 1824, the mill produced timber, grain, and plaster. In 1973, Williams Lumber bought the mill site, and donated the dams, millpond, and land between the dams to the Town of Pleasant Valley. **Clinton Corners** had three mills, one run by Abel Peters in the late 1700's, and another operating in 1860 on Schultzville Road near the Taconic Parkway overpass. In the 1760's, a saw mill was operating in **Clinton Hollow**, where the mill dam and pond can still be seen. By 1850, it also milled grain. The owner of the general store in **Schultzville** owned a saw mill and grist mill in the hamlet in 1792. After the owner's death in 1805, John F. Schultz purchased the property along with the mills and store. The business continued in the family with his son Daniel H. Schultz (d. 1858) and grandson Theodore Schultz (d. 1863). In 1850, Daniel was the largest local producer of grain, milling flour worth \$10,500 on his "run" of four stone, indicating a significant mill (a "run" is one set of grind-

stones). The present West Clinton #2 firehouse stands on the old grist mill site, across the creek from the former saw mill.

The DeWitt (later LeRoy) mills in **Frost Mills** (near Pleasant Plains, on Hollow Road), offer a good example of mill operation. A mill pond fed the saw mill downstream at a lower level. The logs were brought to the mill in winter when farm work was slack and "skidded" off the horse/oxen-drawn sleds onto the ice and then floated into the mill at the time of the spring ice break-up. Early saw blades were of straight design with "up-and-down" action. (It is interesting to note that in 1850, New York State was the greatest commercial lumber source in the United States--then production gradually moved westward.) The grist mill was built as a flour mill and predates the American Revolution; flour was milled here for General Washington's army when it was stationed in Fishkill. It later "custom milled" animal feed. The grist mill was a model of architectural ingenuity for labor saving, being three stories high, built against the hillside with waterpower delivered through a flume from the lower pond in the gorge. The farmer delivered his grain (grist) into the third floor peak, and from that point gravity and water power combined to deliver it at a lower

level, a finished product. This mill was torn down in 1948 and the large timbers were used in building the IBM Clubhouse (now Casperkill) in Poughkeepsie.

Generally, millstones were four to six feet in diameter, with their faces grooved, and two stones set in pairs ("run") and mounted horizontally. The bottom stone was stationary, and the power source caused the upper stone to rotate. The DeWitt mills were unique in that instead of a water wheel which most mills had, a "turbine" was employed which was a horizontal set of paddles that were moved by the flowing water to turn a vertical power shaft. In 1850, the LeRoys produced 1600 barrels of flour and 8,000 bushels of grain, using two run of stone. The three-story mill building was 35' x 55' and cost \$8,000 to build.

Little physical evidence remains of most of Clinton's mills, and clues are only found in old deeds, documents, and maps. But they were all important to the development of our area, which enjoys an economy that can be traced directly back to them.

(Many thanks to Eleanor Rogers who's documented research provided the basis for this article.)