

## **Along the Outlet of Keuka Lake**

by

**[Frances Dumas](#)**

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### **Milo Millsite**

A gristmill was built on this site at a time when the whole surrounding area was still the haunt of wolves.

John Lawrence had been a shipbuilder in the seaport city of New Bedford, Massachusetts. At the age of 36 he decided to move himself and his growing family (his oldest son Melatiah was 15; there were three younger sons and five daughters) to the wilderness of western New York. Lawrence's wife Anna was related to Thomas Hathaway, a leader of Jemima Wilkinson's Society of Universal Friends. Lawrence never joined the new sect, however, remaining a Quaker and all his life keeping the sober dress and old-fashioned speech associated with them.

The Lawrence family arrived during the summer of 1789, pitched a tent and lived in it until a log house could be built. That first winter it was Lawrence's gift of cornmeal that kept some of the families roundabout from starvation. In 1791 he acquired title to a large landholding in what would someday be Milo, and finally built a house and store on a 40-acre parcel along the Outlet in 1800.

This store was one of the first in the area. Many years later Robert Chissom's daughter remembered that the first dry goods she ever saw were in John Lawrence's store. Her father sent her on horseback through the woods to buy loaf sugar "for some doings at his tavern" in what is now Penn Yan.

Besides his house and the store in one wing, Lawrence built a gristmill and perhaps a sawmill. In 1802, the town highway records mention a road "running northerly...to the middle of the bridge near...Lawrence's Mills."

Lawrence gave the property to his son John Jr. in 1820 "in consideration for the love and affection which I have and bear unto him." By 1825 a distillery had been added. The younger man died only a few months after his father, in the fall of 1833. The mill property was sold at auction and Aaron Remer, the executor of John Lawrence Jr.'s estate, was the high bidder.

Remer died in 1841, still owning the establishment everyone called Lawrence's Mill. His executors offered the property for sale, mentioning the gristmill, the sawmill, the abundance of water power and the site's easy access. Despite all these assets his estate was unable to make a quick sale. It wasn't sold until 1845, to a man named Samuel Rail, who paid the same \$2000 that Remer had bid at the auction ten years earlier. Rail sold the property at a loss less than two years later. The conclusion is inescapable that the mills

had fallen into disrepair. By this time there were several gristmills on the Outlet, and perhaps the competition with more modern technology was just too much.

In any case, a Penn Yan grocer and hotelkeeper named Amasa Tuell bought the place in 1847 for \$1195 and sold it less than ten years later for \$9500. In the meantime, Tuell evidently scrapped the old gristmill business and turned exclusively to the more profitable distilling.

Tuell was a local character, advertising himself as "the man what sells groceries cheap." In 1840 he had placed an ad calling in old debts with the announcement the "I must have money or something to pay debts, this is no joke, I am in right down earnest and you will find it so ... Don't forget, if you do you will see the White Horse coming with a genteel rider on him, with a hat full of papers." He also wanted a thousand coonskins with the tails left on.

Calvin Drake bought the distillery in the mid 1850s and by 1860 more men were employed there than in any other mill on the Outlet. They made 5000 barrels of "high wine" that year from 60,000 bushels of corn, rye and oats. As a by-product, the business produced 440,000 pounds of beef and pork; the total annual output of the mill was worth \$67,000.

Drake sold the property in 1868 (he was 81), including a house and orchard south of the mill. He reserved for himself the right to enter the orchard each year as long as he lived, to pick ten bushels of apples.

Two years later the buyers defaulted on their payments, the mortgage was foreclosed and the property once again sold at auction. Calvin Russell and his son were the high bidders at \$10,300. They ran the distillery until 1872 and then turned it into a paper mill.

Russell was probably inspired by the success of William Fox's new paper mill upstream. He didn't have to do much to convert his distillery to papermaking. since the big vats and boilers could also be used to cook straw mash into pulp. The old wooden mill was renamed, though: it was now the Milo Paper Mill.

In 1882 Russell went into partnership with John T. Andrews 2nd. Andrews was a native of Reading in Schuyler County, a 40-year-old lawyer and Civil War veteran. He already owned the Yates County Oil Mill downstream, on the site where the two men would soon build the enormous new Seneca Paper Mill. The partners also owned the two gristmills in Penn Yan, and had joined with other millowners to ensure that a railroad was built on the old canal right-of-way. Papermaking demanded enormous amounts of bulky raw materials like straw, lime and coal. Horse-drawn wagons on the unpaved roads of the time simply couldn't satisfy the mills' voracious appetite.

When the partnership broke up in 1888, Andrews retained ownership of the Milo Mill. He built an entire new brick factory across the road from the old mill on the site of John Lawrence's house. A new race was built and in 1890 the mill began production of straw pulp wrapping paper. Output increased to about 80 tons a week.

The mill was gutted by fire in 1910, but Andrews rebuilt it almost immediately. It was sold along with its water rights in 1927 to the E. L. Phillips hydropower interests and resold ten years later to the National Manufacturing Co. of Tonawanda. Dry felt was manufactured in the mill and shipped to Tonawanda for use in making finished roofing materials. This operation continued until 1961, after which the building was used for several years to rehabilitate old paper-making machinery.

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<http://keukaoutlettrail.org/>

Or you can also contact us at: Friends of the Outlet, Inc., PO Box 65, Dresden, NY 14441. Please support the Trail and give generously to maintain and develop this beautiful historic and recreational Trail!