

Along the Outlet of Keuka Lake

by

Frances Dumas

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Cascade Millsite

The twelfth and last dam on the Outlet was built about the same time that agitation for a canal between Seneca and Keuka Lakes was about to bear fruit. The result was a large merchant gristmill designed from the outset to compete in the larger markets outside Yates County.

The dam and mill were built by Meredith Mallory soon after 1827 when he bought the property from the then-owner of the Hopeton Mills downstream, New York entrepreneur Henry Beeckman.

Mallory, who was born in Connecticut in 1773, was a wheelmaker by trade. Evidently his father was interested in the society of the Universal Friends, though there's no evidence Mallory himself was in this area until about 1808, when he bought some land near Penn Yan. His first try at building a mill, it is said, took place at the foot of Keuka Lake where it first pours into the Outlet. Unfortunately for Mallory, Abraham Wagener, who with his brother Melchior owned the next dam downstream, raised its level enough to drown Mallory's tailwater, and the venture failed.

Mallory paid Beeckman \$2000 for the land around the waterfall known as the Cascade. This was the second-highest fall on the Outlet, but almost inaccessibly deep in the gorge. Despite its remoteness, however, the new mill prospered. A way was found to build a road down into the ravine and a bridge across the Outlet. When Holmes Hutchinson made his survey in 1828 for the new canal, he reported that its excavation near Mallory's mills would have to be done through solid limestone and the Outlet moved into a new channel below.

When the manufacturing census was done by the state in 1835, it listed Mallory's gristmill as the largest on the Outlet, processing grain worth \$45,000 each year. Mallory also operated a sawmill at the same site. Other businesses were drawn to the area. John Capell, a respected millwright and Mallory's architect, purchased a two-acre parcel nearby and opened a limekiln. Next door Samuel Rodman had a blacksmith shop and Dewey Woolaver a cooperage.

Mallory, however, was sinking deeper and deeper in debt, perhaps to finance his political career. He went to the state Assembly in 1835 and to Congress in 1840. He bought Samuel Lawrence's big sawmill just below Penn Yan, taking a mortgage for \$11,000. In his need for capital he borrowed an additional \$20,000 on the Cascade property from New York merchant Eli Hart, who attached a \$40,000 penal obligation to the bond.

Mallory, now a resident of Hammondsport, was forced into bankruptcy in 1843 when he couldn't satisfy this debt.

Hart was the beneficiary of Henry Beeckman's bankruptcy as well. He sold both Hopeton and Cascade Mills to his fellow New Yorker John Rice, who had local ties through his marriage to a Hammondsport woman.

Rice renamed the property the Croton Mills and was producing 7000 barrels of flour annually by 1850, and five years later had increased production to 12,000 barrels, plus 18,000 bushels of "ship stuff" worth a total of nearly \$130,000. But he too was caught in debt and when he died in 1859 his estate was unable to pay off his creditors.

The Croton Mills were bought by local grain broker Seymour Tracy, miller Lewis Dunning and Hammondsport financier John W. Davis. The property at that time comprised a flouring mill with four run of stones, an attached storehouse, the dam and a large barn. They processed 50,000 bushels of wheat in 1860 and also sold lime produced in Capell's old kiln, which they bought along with two dwelling houses and another barn.

Right at the end of the Civil War, with New York's grain production ruined by the wheat weevil and a scarcity of farmworkers, a new industry was getting started along the Outlet. William Fox had begun his paper mill upstream and the man who financed Fox was looking for other investments. George R. Youngs, an engineer, surveyor and self-described speculator, bought the Croton Mills in 1866 and formed the Cascade Paper Manufacturing Co.

Interestingly, the paper produced at the Cascade plant was newsprint, the only known instance of this type of paper being made from straw pulp. The new venture was short-lived, however, burning in March 1869 with a loss estimated at \$125,000. The cause of the fire was never determined.

The mill lay in ruins for several years, passing through several owners' hands until Charles Cave of New York bought it and revived paper manufacture there in 1880. Cave produced a light brown wrapping paper, "much of which," said a local newspaper article, "is sent to Cuba and used in the manufacture of cigars. A sheet of thin straw paper pressed between leaves of tobacco gives it so much the appearance and characteristics of the tobacco itself that none but experts can tell the difference."

Cave joined the long list of mill owners forced into bankruptcy. The mill was operated by Baldwin's Bank in Penn Yan for several years and then in 1900 the property was sold once more to St. Lawrence County native Edward R. Taylor, who opened an entirely new chapter in the mill's story.

Taylor was an inventor and an analytical chemist. He was interested in using water power to generate electricity and invented an electrical furnace to produce carbon bisulfide.

This was a substance used first as a pesticide. An account written at about the time of World War I listed its many uses: "It is very valuable in killing pests of the field, the shop, the granary, the mill and the household." It was a potent killer of the grape phylloxera, ants, weevils, mice, woodchucks, moles, rats, gophers and prairie dogs,

moths, carpet bugs "and other pests, but because of its inflammable nature great care must be used... A lighted match or cigar brought into a room filled with it would cause destruction and death."

The chemical was also used, continues the account, "as a solvent in the arts. In olive countries it is used to dissolve out of the olive pulp the oil which remains after the pressings, and the oil thus recovered is used for soap making. A large quantity is used yearly in this country to dissolve gutta percha to make the cement with which shoemakers put on 'blind patches.' Wood fiber, after a preparation with caustic soda, is treated with the sulfide. The resultant mixture is squirted through glass nozzles of exceedingly small dimensions, issuing in fine hairlike threads which are woven into an artificial silk, rivalling the natural silk in brilliancy and beauty."

Taylor travelled the country giving lectures on the uses of hydropower and bought up water rights at several other Outlet locations. Before he died in 1917 at the age of 73 his company owned the Yates Electric Light & Power Corp., which generated electricity at Seneca Mill for much of the local area.

Plans to develop all the water power of the Outlet among other sites led to the formation in 1923 of the New York Central Electric Corp., and at about the very same time the Cascade plant was enlarged to produce an emulsion herbicide, a new use for the product.

The company's headquarters were in Phillipsburg, New Jersey, when its name was changed to J. T. Baker Co. in 1933. The plant continued in operation into the 1960s, one of the last operating Outlet mills, as it was the last to be built.

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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!