

## Along the Outlet of Keuka Lake

by

**Frances Dumas**

*Index to Frances Dumas's series about mills along the Outlet*

### **Shutt's Millsite**

One of the first true industrial sites in Yates County was set up here during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. At least four separate milling enterprises were joined into one huge complex near the end of the century.

One of the earliest recorded owners of this southeastern corner of Milo's Lot 17 was Henry Mapes, whose land was sold by the sheriff in 1797 to Eliphalet Norris to satisfy Mapes' creditors. Two parcels were reserved from this sale, already sold to Talmage Edwards.

Edwards sold the parcels soon after and in 1812 they were sold again to Jesse Smith, who bought with the property the water rights for a sawmill and a right of passage between the mill and the highway. Smith lost no time selling a half share to Aaron Remer, a former shoemaker who at one time or another had an interest in several of the Outlet's mills.

Smith and Remer evidently had bigger things in mind for their water power than operating a country sawmill. The War of 1812 and the boycott which preceded it had all but strangled trade with Great Britain, the most important source of finished fabrics for the fledgling nation. By 1814 small cotton and woolen mills were springing up all over New England and New York. Stock was issued for the Ontario Cotton Manufactory in September of that year.

The Cotton Factory Mill, as it was called, probably didn't operate as such for very long, though it's possible it was still being used for associated purposes as late as 1825, when the carding machines were sold to satisfy the creditors of Shadrach Youngs, "an absconding debtor."

Only a month after the cotton factory's beginnings, Smith and Remer advertised a new fulling mill "erected at great expense" by them and now ready for custom. The entire property was sold by the partners a year later for the exorbitant price of nearly \$11,000.

The new owners were John Lawrence and Henry Townsend. Townsend's wife was one of Lawrence's daughters and his sister was married to Aaron Remer, so this remained very much a family operation.

Remer kept possession of the sawmill on the south bank of the Outlet and in 1822 sold a parcel and water rights to John Durfey, a blacksmith. Durfey built a water-powered triphammer, supposedly in partnership with Isaac Gambey, but in 1825 the operation is shown on the census under the name of William Johnson.

Henry Townsend died in 1821, still a young man of 40, after being accidentally thrown from a wagon onto the highway; he left a widow and six children, who sought court permission to sell his property to pay his debts. In 1824, his partner Melatiah Lawrence (who had acquired his share from his father, also died, leaving a widow and minor heirs.

Townsend's widow remarried soon, and her husband Martin Kendig went into partnership with his stepson John Lawrence Townsend. They ran the carding and fulling business for some time, but by the end of 1828 the complicated estate was finally wound up and the property sold off.

The fulling mill was sold to Joseph Shepherd and the gristmill to which the cotton factory had been converted went to William Babcock, Eli Sheldon and Aster C. Thompson. The triphammer's water rights were reserved from this sale. At some unknown date about this time, the sawmill ceased operations, though the property remained in the hands of the Remer family for another half century.

The triphammer was leased in 1829 by Willard Hendrick, who made "grass and cradle scythes, straw knives....., having followed the scythe-making business for fifteen years." This business kept up at least until 1835.

Both the gristmill and the fulling mill were acquired by Davison Moshier in the 1830s and were run by him for 20 years. The site was known during the second half of the century as Moshier's Mill, even after it had passed through many other hands. Moshier sold the gristmill in 1850 but kept the fulling mill until 1854, when he sold it to Peter Parshall, who had just emigrated from the Lockport area after spending time in Canada. Parshall was a skilled blacksmith and converted the old fulling mill into a triphammer—the machinery actually wouldn't have been all that different—that operated until he finally sold out in 1882.

Moshier sold the gristmill to Sarah Youngs, who was also involved about this time with May's Mill. Shares were sold to Lewis Dunning in 1852, James and Jehiel Cook in 1854 and Jacob Valentine in 1856. All were part-owners of other Outlet mills, Valentine at May's, Dunning at May's and the Cascade, and the Cook brothers at Seneca.

Valentine mortgaged the property to former Milo Mill owner Amasa Tuell and was never able to discharge the loan. It was sold by Tuell to two New Jerseyites, though Valentine still operated it through at least 1860 and probably until 1866 when Alpine native Robert S. Halsey bought the business. Halsey operated the mill until 1875, when he sold the property to John A. Shutts. The mill is mentioned on the deed as having been "lately burned."

Shutts was the son of Seymour Shutts, who bought some property and water rights from Peter Parshall in 1857 to operate an axe-helve factory. In 1860 his factory was making hoops, shingles and tool handles, a fairly eclectic mixture. In 1861 he installed spoke-making lathes, borrowing money on a mortgage for the purpose.

Seymour Shutts' spoke factory was sold to Charles Bates in 1866 and passed through several other owners during the 1870s. In 1876 the property was sold to John A. Shutts,

the second parcel he acquired in the area. By 1884 he had bought up all the surrounding parcels, and enlarged the spoke-making operation considerably.

In 1887, however, Shutts changed the focus of his business by converting it to the manufacture of paper, the fifth and last paper factory to be established on the Outlet. Shutts himself retired in 1906. The business passed through several hands, including those of E. R. Ramsay the filmmaker. Manufacture of cardboard, beaver board and wallboard was tried at various times; none was particularly successful and by 1925 the mill, an enormous structure that stretched 300 feet along the railroad, having absorbed all the smaller milling operations that preceded it, was being run by the New York Central Electric Corporation as a hydropower substation.

The dam went out in 1929 and four years later on Halloween night, 1933, the abandoned mill was consumed by a conflagration the local paper called "the biggest bonfire of all." It is recorded that hundreds of the area's young people watched the fire from the surrounding hillsides.

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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!