

Homan-Gerard Mills
Lower Lake (Lily Lake)
Yaphank, N.Y.

The Homan-Gerard Mill Site is a typical family mill complex with mills along a dammed river, a nearby house, and related out buildings. The first mill, a fulling mill was built in 1762. The addition of a grist mill, a saw mill and a bolting mill were made by the Homans in 1771. There were at least five mill complexes along the Carmans River. The village that grew up along the street connecting the Upper and Lower Mills became known as Millville.

In 1821, the Homans sold the Mills to Robert Hawkins. He worked the mills with his nephew Robert Hawkins Gerard who later inherited the mill and tore down the Old Red Mill and built a larger mill on the site.

In 1836, Robert Hawkins Gerard went into partnership with two local businessmen James Weeks and William Sydney Smith, together they built a cotton mill. They knew that the L.I.R.R. would run through Yaphank in 1844 and they hoped to make money by shipping grain by rail throughout the country. The cotton mill failed within a few years of being built and the railroad plan never worked out. In 1868, he grants his nephew E.L. Gerard to operate a lumber mill. In 1878, E.L. Gerard inherited the mills from his uncle and in 1884, he buys out the interests of Weeks and Smith. E.L. Gerard continued to run the mills and lumberyard until his death in 1899.

After E.L. Gerard's death, an auction was held which sold mill and factory equipment. It seems that Agnes Gerard tried to run all or some of the mills. The milling industry had been in decline since the 1850's as steam and hydroelectric plants took the place of water wheels. She supplemented her income by renting rooms in the house to summer boarders. She advertised in the Brooklyn Eagle. The ads tell of country life with boating and fishing on the lakes. She tried in 1915 & 16, to obtain a \$ 5,000 mortgage to refurbish the property. L.I. Banks were not eager to invest in a declining industry. The mortgage was turned down by both local banks and the mills burned in 1919. The mills were in the Hawkins Gerard family for over a century.

In 1922 Anson Hard purchased what was left the Homan-Gerard Mill complex at auction for \$7,000 and used the property as a game preserve. The house was used as a gameskeepers's cottage. He combined it with property that he already owned.

The estate passed to Florence Deans Hard in 1936 and her son Kenneth Hard in 1936. He turned the property back into a gun club and rented 380 acres north of the Railroad tracks to the Upper River Rod and Gun Club. The club was limited to 20 members. they stocked the river with trout and the fields with pheasant. The extension of the end of the L.I. Expressway was the cause of the end of the club.

The Hard Estate that was south of the L.I. Expressway was sold to Suffolk County in 1963 and became Southaven Park.

The Homan-Gerard House and Mills was placed on the State and National registers in 1988.

Suffolk county and the Yaphank Historical Society have plans to restore the Homan Gerard House. It is #2 on the list of Suffolk County Properties to be restored. Naturally the Mill Pond is essential to the interetation of the Homan-Gerard House and Property. The Carmans River Nature Trail and Sanctuary is on the property and open to the public.

Karen Mouzakes
Historian
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