

Upper Lake Mills at Yaphank

At a meeting of the Town of Brookhaven in February of 1739, Capt. Robert Robinson was granted permission to construct a mill or mills on the Connecticut River above the going over, for the consideration of six shillings. He built the first grist and saw mills in what is now Yaphank. The mill pond that was formed became known as Willow Lake or Upper Lake.

(CAPT. ROBINSON'S BEAUTIFUL HOUSE STILL STANDS. IT IS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE BEST DUTCH COLONIAL HOMES ON L.I. AND WILL BE FEATURED IN NEWSDAY THIS DECEMBER. ITS CORNER STONE (1726) IS WHAT IS USED TO DATE THE FIRST SETTLEMENT OF WHAT IS NOW YAPHANK. TODAY IT IS THE HOME OF ROSS AND KATERINA DALY. SEE ATTACHMENT)

Another mill was in operation, a mile above the Robinson Mill, in 1792. Ebenezer Homan paid one pound to build a fulling mill for the making of cloth. (SEE CENTER POSTCARD ON DISPLAY BOARD)

Minerva Hutchinson mentions it in her diary, "July 28, 1808. At night our rolls were brought home from the carding mill down the river. I began to spin them. Very good rolls."

By 1815, the Robinson Mill was owned by Christopher Sweezy. His sons Van Ransellar and Daniel Downs Sweezy worked the mill with their father. The mill was passed on to the sons. Van Ransellar sold out his interest to his brother Daniel. Daniel ripped down the old mill and built a bigger mill near the original. (SEE ATTACHMENT ON DANIEL)

Village millers were prominent businessmen. The community was dependent upon them to process lumber, grain and cloth. The millers's prosperity was shown in his fine home. The Sweezy Avey House was the home of Van Ransellar Sweezy and it remained in the Sweezy family until the Town of Brookhaven bought it for a Town Park in 1965. Siegfried Park was also part of the Sweezy homestead.

By 1875 the Sweezys had already been working the mills for 60 years. The Sweezy Saw Mill remained the Sweezy family business until it burned around 1914. (SEE PICTURE BOARD STATEMENT BY RALPH HOWELL)

By 1762, the Lower Lake Mills had been built. By 1771, the village had grown along the street connecting the Upper Mills with the Lower Mills. The village became known as Millville. In 1845 when Millville applied for a post office; there were already twelve by that name in New York State. The name Yaphank was suggested by local resident William Weeks.

"The name Yaphank was familiar here, as applied to a boundary line passing through the eastern part of the village." (L. Beecher Homan, Yaphank As It Is and Was)

Since the first dam was built in 1739, the community has looked to the Mill Pond that was formed for recreation. People swam off the dam until the Town Beach was created behind the Sweezy-Avey House in 1965. Boating and fishing are popular pastimes here, as is ice skating in the wintertime. Though Yaphank is no longer dependent on its mills for lumber, grain and cloth; we are dependent on our mill ponds for our recreation and our quality of life.

Yaphank Historical Society
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