

Dedication of the Papermill Historical Marker

PAPERMILL

POWERED BY CONESUS OUTLET
VARIOUS MILLS OPERATED ON THIS SITE
FROM c1790 TO 1900. AN EARLY
FLOUR MILL, SAW MILL AND LATER,
A PAPER MILL OCCUPIED THIS AREA.
THE TOWN OF AVON CREATED
PAPERMILL PARK IN 1988.

TOWN OF AVON
HISTORIAN 2020

June 9, 2022, at 4:30 pm

Papermill Park
Papermill Road, Avon NY

Special thanks are extended to the Avon Town Highway Department

Welcome:

David LeFeber, Supervisor, Town of Avon

Introductions and recognition of special guests:

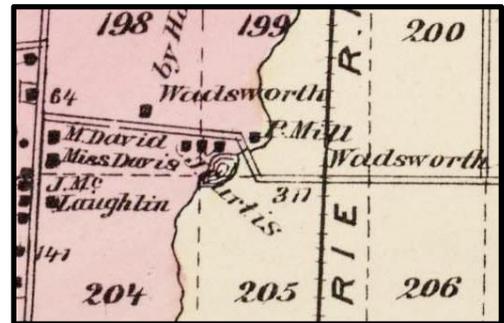
Maureen Kingston and Clara Mulligan,
Town of Avon Historians

Greetings: Holly Watson, Livingston County Historian



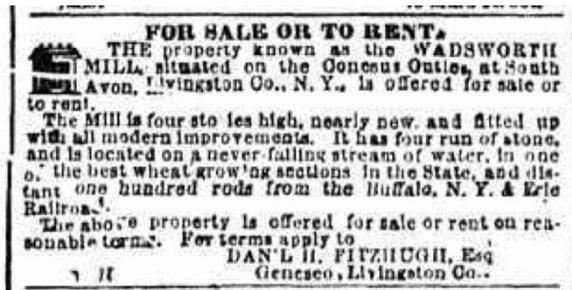
Paper Mill area, c. 1884. *Courtesy Livingston County Historian*

The first white settlers came to the Genesee River valley in the 1790s, bringing with them their ambitions to start new businesses. As farmers opened the land, planting wheat and rye, such products would need refining into flour and animal feed. The Conesus Outlet, sourced from the nearby Conesus Lake, provided a consistent flow for waterpower which was essential for milling. This site provided the earliest permanent mill in the area, serving farmers as far as Dansville.



J. Curtis residence, mill pond and paper mill.
1872 Beers Atlas

James and William Wadsworth, owners of the land at the time, built a sawmill on this site around 1792, soon followed by a flour and grist mill. The flour mill was built on a 40' x 75' foundation of local quarried limestone and field stones, two stories high. The business flourished until 1862 when it was put up for sale, boasting "four stories high, nearly new and fitted up with all modern improvements." Four run of stone - four sets of mill wheels - on a "never failing stream of water" promised a solid future in good wheat country.



Advertisement for Wadsworth Mill
Rochester NY Union and Advertiser, June 2, 1862.

However, the building burned in 1864, leaving behind only the foundation and a loss of \$12,000 in value. Seeing opportunity, Josiah Curtis built upon the same foundation his strawboard mill, producing wrapping paper and sheets of heavy pressboard made of local wheat and rye straw. Like cardboard, such a product was used for making boxes and packing material. If someone came to the site, they would see vats of boiling straw pulp, pressed sheets of strawboard drying in the fields, and finished product in the building. Curtis produced 400 tons of strawboard each year, with the help of eight employees who lived in houses near the mills. After about 25 years, business slowed down. Even with McQueen's Switch landing on the Erie Railroad located only a few hundred feet to the east of the mill, the outsourcing of straw in the western states, supported by the national railroad system made it difficult to continue. Curtis closed his business around 1892, and the building was left to deteriorate.



Remains of the paper mill foundation, c. 1940.
Courtesy Livingston County Historian

The original bridge crossing the Conesus Outlet was built sometime in the 1880s. Sixty years later and in need of replacement, Clayton Stapley, Avon Superintendent of Highways had a good reason to champion a new bridge. In 1942, with the support of landowner William P. Wadsworth, they created a handsome structure, leaving the original bridge in place about 130 feet to the north. Faced with stone, the new bridge was adorned with an original millstone, likely from the early flour mill at the site. On June 9, 1988, the Avon Town Board resolved to name the new town park the Clayton Stapley Memorial Park in honor of his overseeing the building of the bridge.



Papermill Road bridge, installed in 1942. *Courtesy Livingston County Historian*

Another seventy years passed by, and repairs were needed once again. The narrow width of the bridge posed a problem, as well. Though there was hope to save it, the Livingston County Highway Department deemed it necessary to build a new bridge in its place. Design features were considered to reflect the elements of the 1942 bridge. Once again, the millstone adorned the bridge, with arches that offered a more harmonious style than that of the industrial form. By 2021, the new bridge was complete.

As the only designated public space in the Town of Avon, Papermill Park offers the community a blend of natural beauty with a deep history of early European settlers making a living in the area. The original 1880s bridge still stands, used as a pedestrian bridge and a testament to its original need to traverse the Conesus Outlet so farmers and customers alike had access to this highly productive mill site.



Original c.1880 bridge, with 2021 bridge beyond. Photo credit: Tremblay

WORKS CITED

Carpenter, John. "Early Flouring Mill Becomes Paper Mill." *Avon Herald-News*, January 2, 1942.

"Historical Sidelights of Familiar Spots." *Livingston County Leader*, November 11, 1948.

Holly Watson, Deputy Livingston County Historian

Collaborated efforts Avon Town Historians Maureen Kingston and Clara Mulligan 2022.