

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register Of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number E - DRAFT  
3 March 2006

Mill Hamlets of the Oaks Creek Valley, 1786-1956  
Otsego County, New York

Page 1

*Introduction*

In the northwest corner is Caniaderaga [*sic.*] or Schuyler's lake, which discharges Oaks creek, centrally across this town [Otsego] to the head of the Susquehanna, just below its origin in Otsego lake. This is a fine stream for mills, and there are also superior advantages for water-works, at the outlet of Otsego lake, which is in the southeast corner of this town, at the Village of Otsego, or Cooperstown.

—Horatio Gates Spafford, *Gazetteer of the State of New-York*, 1810

The manufacturing operations of the United States are carried on in little hamlets, which often appear to spring up in the bosom of some forest and around the water fall, which serves to turn the mill wheel.

—Zachariah Allen, *The Science of Mechanics*, 1829 (quoted in Kulik, Parks, and Penn, *The New England Mill Village*)

By erecting manufactories among us, we erect an additional barrier against the encroachment of tyranny. A people who are entirely dependant [*sic.*] upon the foreigners for food or clothes must always be subject to them.

—Benjamin Rush, 1775 (quoted in Peskin, *Manufacturing Revolution*, 2003)

Mill hamlets developed along the Oaks Creek and its tributary, Fly Creek, in northeastern Otsego County by the mid-1790s, soon after the region was opened for settlement by Judge William Cooper. Most newcomers, mainly New Englanders, sought farmland, but a handful of mechanical men skilled in harnessing water power eyed the steady and controllable flows of these streams. Such men were often encouraged by land owners because industry placed the production of manufactured goods in American hands, distancing the young nation from British economic dominance. By the close of hostilities with Britain in 1815, power drawn from the gently descending Fly Creek ran several saw and grist mills as well as a trip hammer. Oaks Creek powered additional saw and grist mills, a card and wire factory, and both a paper mill and a cotton mill at Toddsville. Two more cotton mills, Hope Factory and the Otsego Print Works at Oaksville, opened before 1830. About 1845, the fork shop on Oaks Creek opened.

Small communities, or mill hamlets, developed around those mills providing year round employment for people beyond the family who owned the operation. People built houses near their work, or mill owners constructed housing. Blacksmiths, shoemakers, and wagon builders constructed shops; merchants opened stores; and entrepreneurs took out tavern licenses. At some locations, church congregations. The town designated school districts. None of these hamlets become an incorporated village.

As transportation of goods shifted increasingly to railroads in the post-Civil War era, the economic viability of the mills along the Oaks Creek and Fly Creek decreased. By the last quarter of the century, many consumer goods could be both made and brought to the area at less cost than simply making them locally. The last mills ceased operations during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Hamlet function moved from employment center to residential service center. For a time, the electric railway running up the Oaks Creek Valley on its route from Oneonta to Mohawk, which opened in 1901, helped ease the transition. The trolleys allowed people to reach work in larger places along the line while continuing to live in the little hamlets. When it ceased passenger service in the 1930s, automobiles already provided transportation for most hamlet residents. Today, auto travel both erodes and enhances the former mill hamlets' viability as residential communities. It allows people to commute to work far away, while also making it more difficult for small hamlet services to compete with larger companies in more populous communities.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register Of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number E - DRAFT  
3 March 2006Mill Hamlets of the Oaks Creek Valley, 1786-1956  
Otsego County, New York

Page 2

*Patterns of Mill Development in the Oaks Creek Valley, ca.1786-1910*

Many leaders of the young American republic believed that the nation's economic viability lay in domestic manufacturing. So long as the nation produced mainly raw materials and bought its cloth, paper, machines, and other factory-made goods from abroad—an underlying commercial purpose of a colony, its future would be controlled by others. In the quarter century following the constitutional convention of 1787, America struggled to assert her economic independence against the established and far superior strength of industrialized Great Britain. American industrial development relied on flowing water, so streams and falls dictated the location of early American industry. Surveyors working for large landowners preparing to sell land in manageable parcels usually noted potential mill streams. Gazetteers, often published by men interested in promoting the new country's development, provided details about "well watered" areas with potential mill seats. These locales hosted numerous small grist and saw mills serving mainly local needs and also the prototypes of American industrialization.

The cradles of American industry tended to be rural. Places that now seem impossibly remote for economically viable industry thrived—or more often, alternately thrived and rode out economic adversity—as small manufacturing centers from the late 1700s until about 1860. Many early industrialists wished to avoid the much publicized pernicious atmosphere of the British textile mills, and until the mid-1800s, rural mills embodied an alternative model for industrialization.<sup>1</sup> After the Civil War, however, rural mills quickly lost economic ground to larger operations in urban areas, which could take advantage of cheap immigrant labor and corporate investment in larger plants. Mills serving local needs fared better, but these too mostly disappeared by the early 1900s.

The Oaks Creek and its tributary, Fly Creek, might number among those seemingly remote and unlikely places for industry, but early surveyors identified these adjoining valleys as capable of supporting industry. The Oaks Creek, starting at Canadarago Lake near the town of Otsego's north boundary, flows southeasterly into the Susquehanna River. Fly Creek joins Oaks Creek slightly over halfway down its course. Both creeks provided a reliable year round power source for several mills during the nineteenth century. Settled in the 1780s and 1790s by New Englanders, the valley's mill development followed two main patterns of ownership and function, which in some cases intersected with each other. Small family-run mills serving local needs for lumber, flouring, and domestic cloth production rubbed shoulders with larger mills expecting to sell their cotton cloth far from Otsego County. Additional smaller establishments aimed to meet needs generated by the larger ones for machinery and repair. At least one family-run business, the fork shop on Oaks Creek, adopted some practices of the larger cotton manufactories.

The first pattern—the construction of traditional family-run grist and saw mills—was repeated regularly across the frontier from America's earliest settlement by European-derived peoples. These settlers are often characterized as subsistence farmers who consumed most of their produce, but the evidence better supports the premise that wheat growing for the market was among the highest priorities for farmers in newly settled lands.<sup>2</sup> Their economic future lay in establishing a successful cash crop to sell as quickly as possible: wheat was a valuable commodity. Grist mills to process both wheat and other grains like corn, barley, and oats, which were used more locally, soon followed most settlements. Early arrivals built log cabins and outbuildings as temporary housing until they could build frame houses and barns, once saw mills were established. Saw mills and grist mills tended to be relatively small, sometimes seasonal operations, run by a single family. The businesses might be multi-generational, but they rarely earned enough income to hire additional hands.

<sup>1</sup> Gary Kulik, Roger Parks, and Theodore Z. Penn. *The New England Mill Village, 1790-1860*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: MIT Press, 1982): xxiii.

<sup>2</sup> Look at Newark Valley for sources for this.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register Of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number E - DRAFT  
3 March 2006Mill Hamlets of the Oaks Creek Valley, 1786-1956  
Otsego County, New York

Page 3

In the post-Revolutionary period, family-run fulling, carding, and clothing mills also sprang up along waterways, often partnered with saw and grist mills to take advantage of developed water power. Fulling and carding mills mechanized hand processes preparing wool and cotton for spinning. Clothing mills finished woolen cloth. Textiles of all kinds were among the most ubiquitous of British imports, and domestic textile production grew exponentially in America, in part as a patriotic endeavor to decrease economic dependence on foreign goods. While dress lengths and other fancy goods continued to be imported, American women produced more and more household textiles like sheets, blankets, towels, shirts, and undergarments, as well as coarse goods for men's outerwear during this period. The agricultural schedules of the census duly recorded their output as domestic manufactures on an equal footing with the bushels of wheat and head of neat cattle and sheep.

Samuel Tubbs from Bennington County, Vermont, established the earliest documented saw and grist complex on the Oaks Creek before 1790. In 1786, Tubbs bought 1,565 acres from William Cooper. Of this, he retained 426 acres, selling the remainder to nine other men, who assumed proportionate amounts of Tubbs's mortgage to Cooper.<sup>3</sup> Tubbs's choice of property for his mill was characteristic of one type of seat, where the mill dam was constructed just as the stream descended into a ravine. This allowed the millwright to build a relatively short dam with good head. Tubbs died in 1805<sup>4</sup>, and xxxx Todd bought his property. The Todd family were millwrights from Connecticut, and they quickly moved to expand water power along the Oaks Creek. Toddsville straddles the Oaks Creek, and the hamlet runs along both banks of the watercourse. To Tubbs's grist and saw mill, they added the Otsego Paper Works at the upper end of the hamlet. Lemuel and Jehiel Todd were two of the five partners in the Union Cotton Mill constructed at the lower mill site in 1809. By 1810, bridge crossings located near the upper and lower mill sites provided easy access to each side. The Todds also bought and traded potential millseats and speculated in land. In the period between their arrival in Otsego County and the Civil War, they recorded more than fifty land transactions as grantors.

North of what was soon known as Toddsville on the Oaks Creek, Aaron and David Marvin, settlers in the area now occupied by the hamlet of Fly Creek, were developing the mill seat at the foot of Christian Hill on the east bank of Oaks Creek by the mid-1790s. In March 1798, they advertised for a miller for an established grist operation.<sup>5</sup> The mill complex was described in an advertisement a few weeks later when they offered the saw mill and three-quarters of the grist mill for sale. Perhaps the good terms for a grist miller was the unoffered quarter of the grist mill operation. The mills were offered with "two good dwelling Houses and a good framed Barn, with about sixty acres of LAND, fifteen acres of which is under improvement."<sup>6</sup> With Abraham Mudge, the Marvins sold to White and Osgood the "privilege of ground for setting up a Fulling mill" along with a dye-house and a shop on the north side of the road. White and Osgood announced their clothing mill was completed in September 1796.<sup>7</sup> Eliphalet Williams took over the clothing works in 1800.<sup>8</sup>

Still farther upstream, George Johnson built a saw and grist mill complex in the area sometimes known as Cattown in 1797.<sup>9</sup> The earliest road running west from Cooperstown crossed Oaks Creek at this point. Present day Goose Street and Hoke Road follow this route between Cooperstown and Oaks Creek. A second highway diverged from the Cooperstown-Cattown road, probably following the course of Day and Allison roads, to reach Marvin's

<sup>3</sup> Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's Town. Power and Persuasion on the Frontier in the Early American Republic* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995): 72.

<sup>4</sup> *Otsego Herald*, 7 March 1805. Noted in Irene Dusenbery, "The Old Stone Mill from the Earliest Years," Paper presented to Fly Creek Area Historical Society, 19xx.

<sup>5</sup> *Otsego Herald*, March 1798. Dusenbery, 4.

<sup>6</sup> *Otsego Herald*, 19 April 1798. Dusenbery, 4.

<sup>7</sup> Deed dated 16 June 1796, and *Otsego Herald*, 1 September 1796. (Dusenbery)

<sup>8</sup> *Otsego Herald*, 14 March 1800. Dusenbery, 6.

<sup>9</sup> [Duane Hamilton Hurd]. *History of Otsego County, with Biographical Sketches*. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1878): 249.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number E - DRAFT  
3 March 2006Mill Hamlets of the Oaks Creek Valley, 1786-1956  
Otsego County, New York

Page 4

Mills on Oaks Creek. By 1824, Johnson also had a clothing works, which he sold to Leander Plumb.<sup>10</sup> By about 1810, however, the turnpike from Cooperstown to Oaksville was open, and this became the predominant route.

William Fairchild and Josiah Stephens had built a grist mill near the turnpike's crossing at Oaks Creek by 1812, when they sold a moiety, or undivided half, of their carding mill just south of Fairchild's and Stephens's grist mill along with water rights to run two carding machines.<sup>11</sup> In the early 1810s, local carding mills could purchase cards manufactured on the west bank of Oaks Creek opposite Marvin's Mills, where the so-called "stone mill" stood until the early 1900s.<sup>12</sup> With the glut of cheap British goods after the end of the War of 1812, the wire works could not compete and failed. By 1819, Russell Williams, Lyman Foster, Shadrack Steel, and B. Carr were making paper at the stone mill.<sup>13</sup> This venture apparently failed, and in 1838, Edwin Spafard had opened a grist mill there.<sup>14</sup> The operation was sold several more times over the next few years. By 1878, when Hurd assembled the *History of Otsego County*, the stone mill housed a "butt-factory."<sup>15</sup> Butts were most likely large capacity barrels.<sup>16</sup>

Among the earliest mills on Fly Creek was the one Robert Blair sold to Asahel Jarvis for \$800 in 1801.<sup>17</sup> This deed, for "land, mills, and all things thereunto" locates the mill on the west side of the creek and provided for access to the mills from the highway east of them, suggesting that it did not lie at a road crossing. Asahel and William C. Jarvis were among the settlers who bought land in the central valley areas of the Town of Otsego in the early settlement period.<sup>18</sup> As early as 1795 they demonstrated their interest in manufacturing when William Jarvis placed a notice in the *Otsego Herald* stating that he planned to seek a patent for his water-powered shingle machine.<sup>19</sup> Over the next fifteen years or so, Asahel bought and sold mill seats (undeveloped) and at least one established mill complex in the valley. In 1812, they sold the south 70 acres of Lot 25 + 26 in the Ballstown Purchase encompassing the Cattown crossing in Oaksville for \$350.<sup>20</sup> On the east side of Oaks Creek, Jarvis sold a quarter acre to Sampson Alton in 1813.<sup>21</sup> A year later, he sold two adjoining parcels on the west side of Fly Creek, running up to where the roads split, including about 400 feet of west bank of Fly Creek.<sup>22</sup> This reference locates this property north of the hamlet where the chapel stood. Also in 1814, Asahel and Abigail Jarvis sold the saw and grist mill at the lower crossing of Stone House Road with Fly Creek to James Parsons for \$1,400.<sup>23</sup>

John Badger of Burlington bought from Bartlett Rogers in 1805 a small parcel on the west bank of Fly Creek and north of the highway.<sup>24</sup> At \$53.80, the site was probably undeveloped. Its location suggests that Badger planned to locate a head race or a mill pond there above the mill where he advertised for "easy terms" an "excellent stand for a blacksmith, near Badger's Mill in Fly Creek . . . consisting of a new shop with excellent trip hammer,

<sup>10</sup> William Johnson to Leander Plumb, 1824, YY/46. Dusenbery, 6. Hurd's *History of Otsego County* states that Plumb was the first clothier in the town of Otsego, but the deeds bely this statement.

<sup>11</sup> William Fairchild to Asahel H. Jarvis, 24 August 1812. P/74.

<sup>12</sup> Peter B. Newton to John Russell and Bille Williams, 14 January 1813, P/306. The deed described the half-acre property as the place where the "building for manufacturing wire and cards now stands." Dusenbery, 10.

<sup>13</sup> BB/473. Dusenbery, 11. Hurd's *History of Otsego County* corroborates this.

<sup>14</sup> 26 May 1838, *Otsego Herald*. Dusenbery, 12.

<sup>15</sup> Hurd, PAGE.

<sup>16</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, DATE. Dusenbery speculates that "butts" were segments of logs or sole leather for shoes. Barrels make more sense in an agricultural region where tanning had all but disappeared.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Blair to Asahel Jarvis, 30 October 1810, *Liber D, page 130 (D/130)*. Office of the Otsego County Clerk, Cooperstown, New York.

<sup>18</sup> Hurd states they were "among the first" in his *History of Otsego County*, PAGE.

<sup>19</sup> Notice of Dr. Bill Jervis [sic.], *Otsego Herald*, 10 April 1795.

<sup>20</sup> P/5.

<sup>21</sup> U/143.

<sup>22</sup> S/307.

<sup>23</sup> Asahel and Abigail Jarvis to James Parsons and wife, 24 October 1814. S/310.

<sup>24</sup> Bartlett Rogers to John Badger, 28 March 1805. F/553.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register Of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number E - DRAFT  
3 March 2006Mill Hamlets of the Oaks Creek Valley, 1786-1956  
Otsego County, New York

Page 5

large coal-house, small but convenient dwelling house, small barn, and good garden.”<sup>25</sup> In 1807, Badger mortgaged a 10-acre parcel on the west side of the creek to Levi Clark of Lanesborough in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, for \$350. He sold the parcel subject to the mortgage eight years later to William, James, and Asahel Jarvis for \$600.<sup>26</sup> In 1826, Badger bought three more acres including a small island on the east side of the creek adjoining the old highway for \$60, suggesting that the land was undeveloped.<sup>27</sup> Badger acquired additional land on the west side of the creek, including the house site at the northeast corner of the burying ground from Abigail Jarvis in 1828.<sup>28</sup>

On the east side of Fly Creek at the turnpike crossing, Asahel Jarvis partnered with Benjamin Todd in developing a foundry and furnace on land south of William C. Jarvis’s property and west of Stephen North. In 1813, Stephen North sold them land with a “water ditch for conducting water from any factory or other machinery which is now or may hereafter be erected on said land in a direction South sixteen degrees West until it reaches the . . . Fly Creek.”<sup>29</sup> In 1814, mechanic Clark Brown came to Fly Creek from Rhode Island, where cotton spinning in rural water mills was in full swing, to work building cotton machinery in the machine shop of Jarvis and Todd.<sup>30</sup> In November 1814, Asahel sold half of the mechanic’s shop to his son Chester for \$1,500.<sup>31</sup> Chester acquired the remaining half interest in the foundry property in 1815.<sup>32</sup> He continued to buy and sell mills and potential mill sites in the town of Otsego into the 1840s, sometimes with his brother Kent.

Orestes Badger, John’s son, continued in manufacturing. In 1828, he bought the “Establishment formerly owned by C. and K. Jarvis in Fly Creek, Otsego County, 3 miles west of Cooperstown, which he is now putting in complete repair for building cotton and wool carding and spinning machinery, and is now ready to contract for building any of the various kinds of Machinery in use for those purposes. He intends to turn his attention principally to the building of cotton machinery, and is at considerable expense adding the necessary apparatus for this branch of business.”<sup>33</sup>

Badger must have hoped to serve the three cotton mills at Oaksville, Toddsville, and Hope Factory, all on Oaks Creek, as well as others in Otsego County. These mills illustrated a second pattern of industrial development in the Oaks Creek valley, which originated in southeastern New England in the post-Revolutionary period. Like the establishment of the small carding, fulling, and clothing mills, their impetus grew out of the desire for economic independence, but these mills were realized on a much different scale. Along Oaks Creek, partnerships of local men, including the Averills, Steeres, Todds, and Russell Williams, assembled the capital to open three cotton mills along its course between the years 1809 and about 1822.<sup>34</sup> They hired New Englanders experienced in the running of such mills to plan the buildings, buy machinery, and find markets for their products. Charles W. Smith was the earliest of these agents. In 1816, Louis Beebe was the agent at the Union Factory in 1816<sup>35</sup>, and in 1819, Joseph Phelon, formerly of Suffield, Connecticut, moved from the Susquehanna Cotton and Woolen Mills downstream to

<sup>25</sup> John Badger, *Otsego Herald*, 1 April 1809.

<sup>26</sup> Levi Clark to John Badger, 5 October 1807, DEED ref.; John Badger to William C., James N., and Asahel H. Jarvis, 8 September 1815. T/450.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Wood to John Badger, 1 October 1826. LL/430.

<sup>28</sup> Abigail Jarvis to John Badger, 22 July 1828. OO/2.

<sup>29</sup> Stephen North to Asahel Jarvis and Benjamin Todd, 30 September 1813. Q/513.

<sup>30</sup> [Hurd], PAGE. The census provided Brown’s birth state.

<sup>31</sup> Asahel and Lydia Jarvis to Chester Jarvis, 8 November 1814. S/324.

<sup>32</sup> S/385; T/318.

<sup>33</sup> Orestes Badger, *The Freeman’s Journal*, 1 September 1828.

<sup>34</sup> The history of the Union Cotton Mill at Toddsville and its sister mill, Hope Factory, are well documented in the corporate records in Special Collections at the New York State Historical Association. The origins and early development of the mill at Oaksville are more difficult to uncover. Bohls states that the first cotton mill at the site opened in 1822; others date it as late as 1830. The development of cotton printing technology and Bohls’s reliance on primary sources suggests that her date is more likely accurate.

<sup>35</sup> Bohls, xx.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register Of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number E - DRAFT  
3 March 2006Mill Hamlets of the Oaks Creek Valley, 1786-1956  
Otsego County, New York

Page 6

the Union mill in Toddsville. Phelon is credited with initiating printing indigo and madder (red) calicos using blocks at Toddsville. He also traveled extensively to Pennsylvania and western New York to sell the Union factories goods.<sup>36</sup> These locations suggest he was selling directly to dry goods merchants in young settlements rather than to urban markets.

In Toddsville and Oaksville, the cotton factories were established at locations already exploited for water power. At the Union mill's New Factory, later called Hope Factory for a mill at Hope, Rhode Island, Charles W. Smith designed a half-mile long water ditch to create the head necessary to run the wheel. These mills were built on a much larger scale and employed numerous hands. The first of the factories, the Union mill at Toddsville was a frame building. This was replaced with a stone factory in 1824.<sup>37</sup> Mason Lorenzo Bates reputedly built the stone mill buildings at Hope Factory, opened in 1819, and at Oaksville, which opened a few years later.<sup>38</sup> Stone buildings were less prone to fire, a serious risk in a cotton mill where the air was filled with lint.

They engendered different hamlet communities from the smaller family-run mills run by the Badgers, Jarvises, David Marvin, George Johnson, and others in the valley. Their hierarchical organization was reflected in their worker housing. The agents and overseers lived in single-family houses. Mill workers lived in tenements and boarding houses. Single-story and one-and-a-half-story buildings housed two families; two-story buildings housed three or four families. Each of the cotton mills also maintained a multi-story boarding house where unmarried men and women lived. These were run by a families who lived in separate quarters within the houses.<sup>39</sup> Mill worker housing stood near the main factory building and its ancillary structures for picking, carding, dyeing, and storage. The 1868 *Atlas of Otsego County* shows a row of houses near each factory labeled with the factory owner's name.<sup>40</sup> The mill operatives who ran the machinery, prepared spindles, and carried out the daily labor of the factory were hired locally, and often several members of the same family worked in the mill. Until about 1830, when the factories were spinning mills, the factories hired many children and few adults. As the mills shifted to spinning and weaving, adults, especially women, outnumbered children, as the women who once wove at home now minded power looms within the factory walls.<sup>41</sup> Later census records reveal that women were employed in far larger numbers and at half the average wage of men. Their daughters often entered the mill as early as age ten. Some of them may also have worked for the mill "at home," which differed from "keeping house" or "at school" or a blank left in the trade column of the population schedule.<sup>42</sup> Throughout their entire period of operation, virtually all Oaks Creek mill workers were native-born.

Beginning about 1818 and running through the 1820s, the Union mill and the Hope Factory were moving from spinning and "putting out" runs of cotton yarn to be woven in surrounding homes to weaving on power looms the yard spun in the factory.<sup>43</sup> In 1828, Badger emphasized carding and spinning machines rather than looms, but in 1831 that he was making "quantities of kinds of cotton machinery, which can be seen in the first establishments of the country. [He] continues making spreaders, drawing frames, dressers, throstles, mules, power looms, and [other machines used in] cotton or woolen factories. Also engine lathes, turning lathes, gear-cutting

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<sup>36</sup> Florence Peaslee Ward Files, "Mills." (Cooperstown, New York: New York State Historical Association, Special Collections)

<sup>37</sup> Bohls, 19.

<sup>38</sup> James Fenimore Cooper, *Legends and Traditions of a Northern County* (New York: Scribner's, 1921). Noted in Bohls, 19.

<sup>39</sup> Bohls, 19.

<sup>40</sup> Beers ATLAS

<sup>41</sup> Bohls, 28.

<sup>42</sup> *New York State censuses for 1855, 1865, and 1875; and United States censuses for 1850, 1860, and 1870.* (Cooperstown, New York: Otsego County Clerk's Office)

<sup>43</sup> Bohls, 26.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register Of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number E - DRAFT  
3 March 2006Mill Hamlets of the Oaks Creek Valley, 1786-1956  
Otsego County, New York

Page 7

engines, iron turnings, screws for cider mills, paper mills, and presses. [He] has erected a furnace, connected with the above business, and makes castings to any pattern not exceeding 700 pounds in one piece.”<sup>44</sup>

The shift to power looms, completed about 1830, increased production more than threefold, but the price per yard of goods produced fell from an average of 30 cents per yard in 1820 to eight cents per yard in 1830.<sup>45</sup> Thus, as production increased, income fell. This probably contributed to transiency among mill workers, as wages in the cotton factories were generally lower than in other mills in the Oaks Creek valley by the mid-century.<sup>46</sup> The types of goods made also changed. The earlier home weavers made a wide range of weave and color patterns recorded in the mill account books. By the early 1830s, the Union mills sold a narrow selection of coarser goods like shirting and sheeting suited to power loom production.<sup>47</sup>

During this period, Russell Williams, who owned the Otsego Print Works at Oaksville invested in copper cylinders used to print fabrics, but he could not compete with less expensive British imports.<sup>48</sup> In 1833, Williams bought the furnace from Orestes and Polly Badger for \$4,000, possibly in hopes of manufacturing his own machinery for the Print Works to defray costs.<sup>49</sup> As the national economy collapsed in 1837, Williams, now residing in Homer, New York, sold part of the foundry property to Charles H. Metcalf for \$500.<sup>50</sup> Two years later, Metcalf mortgaged the portion bought from Williams for \$1,200, an amount suggesting he used the mortgage to raise money to expand the furnace, which he now apparently owned.<sup>51</sup> In 1840, Williams was in the Chancery Court of New York due to financial collapse.<sup>52</sup> The same year, Charles Childs joined Williams in refinancing the Oaksville mill.<sup>53</sup> Childs, an Otsego County native, had learned the cotton business in VanHornesville,<sup>54</sup> and may have acted as Williams’s agent. During the five years Childs was a partner, the Oaksville mill apparently prospered, but after he sold his portion to Williams in 1845, the mill was again on hard times.<sup>55</sup>

Such ups and downs were characteristic of the rural cotton mills here and of their sister mills in southeastern New England. Changes in technology, the Panic of 1837, competition with British imports all combined to make it more difficult to produce cloth that would sell. The Hope Factory closed in 1848 and reopened in 1850.<sup>56</sup> After that it ran sporadically until the Civil War period, when the southern cotton supply was interrupted. By 1870, Rufus Steere owned all three of the mills, which he retooled at considerable expense, but without long term success. The much larger mills at Lawrence and Lowell and other towns along Massachusetts’s fall line outstripped them in production while also keeping costs much lower through the use of immigrant labor. While there were interludes of activity at all three mills, only Hope Factory continued any sort of production into the twentieth century.

The largest industry in the hamlet of Fly Creek, the furnace and mechanic shop, and the fork shop on Oaks Creek both began as small family run mills. As each operation grew, it adopted practices characteristic of the larger mills. North & Denio’s fork factory, opened in the mid-1840s was a larger and more costly operation, and it

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<sup>44</sup> Orestes Badger, *The Freeman’s Journal*, 27 June 1831.

<sup>45</sup> Bohls, 27.

<sup>46</sup> *United States Census for 1850*, Towns of Hartwick and Otsego; *New York State Census for 1855*, Towns of Hartwick and Otsego.

<sup>47</sup> Bohls, 27.

<sup>48</sup> Ward Files, “Mills.”

<sup>49</sup> Orestes and Polly Badger to Russell Williams, 22 January 1833. XX/210.

<sup>50</sup> Russell and Clara Williams to Charles H. Metcalf, 14 February 1837. 199/346.

<sup>51</sup> Charles H. and Huldah Metcalf to Laban Mathewson of Hartwick, 25 March 1839. *Book of Mortgages X/45*. (Otsego County Clerk’s Office, Cooperstown, New York)

<sup>52</sup> Chancery proceedings relative to the Oaksville Manufactory are recorded in the Otsego County Clerk’s Office, Cooperstown, New York, in 67/146, 148, and 150.

<sup>53</sup> Bohls, 40; and Hurd, 255.

<sup>54</sup> Hurd, 255.

<sup>55</sup> Hurd, 256.

<sup>56</sup> Bohls, 9.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number E - DRAFT  
3 March 2006Mill Hamlets of the Oaks Creek Valley, 1786-1956  
Otsego County, New York

Page 8

dominated the surrounding community in a way similar to the cotton factories until it moved in 1865. Between the two operations, \$18,000 was invested. The mill made 60,000 forks valued at \$25,000. It also made \$5,500 worth of hammers as it had combined plants with xxxx & Cheney's business.

At Fork Shop Corners, the mill dominated the community in a way similar to Oaksville and Hope Factory, but the census recorded better wages (\$26 per month) than at the cotton mills where male employees earned an average of only \$20.<sup>57</sup> At North & Denio, several young apprentices boarded with the owner's family, but like the cotton factories, North & Denio owned worker housing on the east side Oaks Creek along the highway running through the hamlet of Fly Creek and past Todd's Paper Mill. There is no evidence of a boarding house.<sup>58</sup> North & Denio's fork shop moved to Baldwinsville, Onondaga County.<sup>59</sup> With neither canal nor railroad nearby (the railroad reached Cooperstown in 1870), the mill could not compete from its present location. When it moved, the little hamlet, previously inhabited mainly by mechanics and their families, shrank. Other than the mill itself, it had no gathering places like a church, school, or tavern to attract people.

The hamlet of Fly Creek, on the other hand, with its diversity of smaller shops, stores, and two churches, weathered changing economic patterns of the Civil War period more successfully than both the fork shop and the textile mills. In the furnace's case, a portion of its output during the 1830s and 1840s depended upon the cotton factories, but the percentage is unclear. In 1850, Hugh Livingston, a Scot, had joined Charles Metcalf in the business, which was capitalized at \$5,000. It consumed 150 tons of iron and 50 tons of coal to make machinery valued at \$6,000. The largest single employer in the hamlet of Fly Creek, 15 men worked there at an average of \$26 a month.<sup>60</sup> Livingston & Metcalf owned limited worker housing on a small lane running northeast from the furnace, but most of their workers rented or owned their accommodations. A few of the latter lived in shared housing, but most maintained independent households. They lived among storekeepers, owner-mechanics of smaller operations making agricultural machinery like churns and fanning mills (demonstrating the increasing importance of dairying focused on the export of butter and continued grain culture), ministers, tavernkeepers, and farmers. Its smaller, family-run operations performed tasks necessary to the region's largely rural economy, which can be examined in detail in the federal and the state censuses of the period.

By the 1840s, the rate at which potential millseats and mills changed hands dropped as the valley's milling families stabilized. By the 1850s, saw, grist, and carding mills were largely seasonal operations, running from three to six months a year, and supplemented by farm income. Except for the Village of Cooperstown, well over three-quarters of the town of Otsego's population lived on farms. As late as the third quarter of the nineteenth century, agriculture remained the nation's primary industry, and the census recorded agricultural production for both individual farms and "Industry other than Agriculture." Local mills continued grinding grain, increasingly for local use as wheat growing faded, and farmers grew maize, oats, buckwheat, and barley for livestock and their own tables. Sawmills and carding mills also served a local clientele. Although the region's population had stopped growing, people continued to construct new buildings and enlarge old ones. Even the pail shop located on Fly Creek at John Badger's mill seems to have supplied the Cory hardware store in Cooperstown rather than selling farther afield.<sup>61</sup>

Even as the nation's web of railways reached farther into the nation's rural areas and steam power diminished the importance of water power, some entrepreneurs invested capital in new and existing operations during the optimistic period of the 1850s. Horatio N. Todd & Brother replaced the old water-powered paper mill built in Toddsville in the early 1800s with a new stone building and a 35-horsepower steam engine after the plant

<sup>57</sup> *United States Census for 1850, Town of Otsego, Schedule Schedule of Industry other than Agriculture.*

<sup>58</sup> Cyrus Gates, *Map of Otsego County, from Actual Surveys.* (Philadelphia: A.O. Gallup, 1856). (Cooperstown, New York: New York State Historical Association, Special Collections)

<sup>59</sup> "Otsego Fork Shop," n.p., n.d. Framed advertisement and history in collections of Fly Creek Area Historical Society.

<sup>60</sup> *United States Census for 1850, Town of Otsego, Schedule of Industry other than Agriculture.*

<sup>61</sup> CITE?

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register Of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number E - DRAFT  
3 March 2006Mill Hamlets of the Oaks Creek Valley, 1786-1956  
Otsego County, New York

Page 9

burned in 1852. The new machinery included a cylinder machine that could produce a continuous sheet of paper.<sup>62</sup> The mill represented a combined investment of \$25,000 in real property and \$9,000 in tools and machinery. In 1855, it made 161 tons of paper using 312 tons of rags. Ten men were paid wages averaging \$26 per month; twelve women were paid an average of \$10 per month.<sup>63</sup> By 1860, the mill's production was halved, wages were lowered, and it was relying at least partly on less costly water power.<sup>64</sup> The mill burned a second time on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1867 at a loss of about \$6,000. It was uninsured<sup>65</sup>, and apparently its owners, Rufus Steere and Everett S. Colburn did not reopen it.<sup>66</sup> Its building still stood on the east bank of the Oaks Creek as late as 1903.<sup>67</sup> In 1853, Stephen Estes of Milford leased the Hope Factory. The *Freeman's Journal* wrote, "It is to be hope that other factories in the country which have been standing idle for some time past, will soon be again in operation."<sup>68</sup> The 1855 New York State census recorded the Union Factory in Toddsville in operation with little change in capital invested.

The Civil War all but strangled the flow of cotton during the early 1860s, but by 1867 Rufus Steere had reopened the Hope Factory. The *Journal* noted in an optimistic tone:

Hope Factory, so long a conspicuous institution of the valley, is in full operation and is owned by Rufus Steere. The "village" is made up of cotton mills, the flouring mills, the factory store, the dwellings for the managers and operatives, and a few shops. They are in very good order looking quite like profitable industry. Just above this place Mr. Steere is erecting a handsome residence close by the border of a beautiful wood, and just far enough from the highway to give a fine effect to the scenery. When the grounds are laid out and trees and shrubbery arranged it will be one of the most elegant homesteads in the county. Mr. S. is reported to have made very successful speculations in cotton during the war, and to be using his wealth for the general good.<sup>69</sup>

By 1870, Steere had invested a total of \$216,000 in the three Oaks Creek cotton mills. Two hundred thirty-six looms and associated processing, spinning, and printing machines were tended by a combined workforce of 54 men, 61 women, and 33 children. That year, Hope Factory and Oaksville made 1,000,000 yards of printed cloth. One of those mills also wove 784,000 yards of cheese bandaging for the rapidly growing New York State cheese industry. The Union mill in Hartwick produced 525,000 yards of sheeting.<sup>70</sup> The 1875 state census did not list either the cotton factories or the Toddsville paper mill in the industrial schedule, but the population schedule records clusters of people who stated that they worked there. In the 1890s, Hope Factory went through a quick succession of owners, and by the 1900s it remained the only mill still manufacturing cloth. By the 1920s, all three mills were demolished by the Clark family, who salvaged the stone for building projects in Cooperstown, including Bassett Hospital, the Fenimore Farm, and the village gymnasium.

Few of the valley's mills of any size survived into the twentieth century, and all of these had ceased operation by the 1920s. Randall's Mills, opposite the old stone mill at the base of Christian Hill on the west bank of Oaks Creek, recorded that it was sawing lumber and making shingles in 1903. The mill, with nine feet of head on a "never failing stream,"<sup>71</sup> was among the oldest, and apparently continuously used, water powers in the valley. Other

<sup>62</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, FALL of 1852. Quoted in Carpenter.

<sup>63</sup> *New York State Census for 1855, Town of Otsego, Second Election District, Industrial Schedule.*

<sup>64</sup> *United States Census for 1860, Town of Otsego, Industrial Schedule.*

<sup>65</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 20 November 1867.

<sup>66</sup> *New York State Census for 1875, Town of Otsego.* Neither the industrial nor the population schedule suggests that paper making continued in Toddsville in 1875.

<sup>67</sup> New Century Atlas, ETC.

<sup>68</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 6 May 1853.

<sup>69</sup> *The Freeman's Journal*, 18 October 1867.

<sup>70</sup> *United States Census for 1870, Towns of Otsego and Hartwick, Industrial Schedule.*

<sup>71</sup> New Century Atlas, PAGE.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register Of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number E - DRAFT  
3 March 2006Mill Hamlets of the Oaks Creek Valley, 1786-1956  
Otsego County, New York

Page 10

smaller mills mapped in the 1903 Atlas of Otsego County were the saw and grist mill complex established by William Johnson at Cattown (north part of Oaksville) and the mill at the lower crossing of Stone House Road over Fly Creek. A tin shop was noted at the site of the Pattern Shop of the old Fly Creek furnace on the turnpike (now NY 28). The mill pond at the pail shop on Goose Street (now part of the Fly Creek Cider Mill complex) was drawn, but no active mill noted. The mill pond at the old furnace had been filled in and turned into Bliss Park.

Few buildings survive long if they lie unused. The valley's large cotton mills were built of a desirable building material, and in the tradition of "robbing out," or salvage, dating at least to Roman times, the mills were demolished for their already quarried and cut stone. How the stone mill at the base of Christian Hill and the paper mill in Toddsville met their ends is unknown. Of the smaller mills, probably all frame buildings, little survives save stone foundations and shallow ditches and hollows marking old raceways and ponds. The two-story stone grist mill near Hope Factory and the frame pail shop, now the Fly Creek Cider Mill on Goose Street, are the only surviving mill buildings in the valley of the Oaks and Fly creeks.

*Development of Mill Hamlets in Oaks Creek Valley, 1790-1956*

At the developed millseats on the Oaks and Fly creeks, including both main road crossings of Fly Creek, both main road crossings in Oaksville (the northern crossing is referred to as Cattown by some), and at four locations farther down Oaks Creek, hamlets of different sizes and configurations grew up during the first half of the nineteenth century. While the mill buildings themselves are gone, the hamlets engendered and supported by the valley's nineteenth century industries survive with varying degrees of historic integrity. As a group they delineate the historical geography of the exploitation of water power and the optimism and endeavor of a young nation. They are connected by the waterway and the highways built along both banks of Oaks Creek and paralleling the lower reaches of Fly Creek. This general course was incorporated into the trolley's route, continuing the historic orientation along the stream in the 1900s. Routes crossing the valleys linked the hamlets with Cooperstown to the east, the Chenango River to the west, and the Mohawk to the north.

Each of the hamlets has its own community history, determined in part by the type and size of the mill or mills on which it centered, but also by the circulation system of roads and railway, and probably also by the individuals who lived in each place. Mill hamlets based largely on a single factory like Oaksville, Fork Shop Corners, and Hope Factory, share similarities. In these hamlets, the factory owners acquired much of the existing property around the mill site. Houses became worker housing. The agents directed construction of mill outbuildings. The mill corporation even owned farmland and the local store, opened to provide supplies to mill operatives living several miles from other villages. It should be noted that in other similar communities in New England, these stores were not meant to exploit the workers, but to provide necessary items of trade.<sup>72</sup> Factory families tended to be transient as wages were low, and few owned their dwellings. This made establishing churches and other institutions that would attract people from beyond the mill community itself less important to the residents. The town established school houses, but the censuses for 1850 and later show that many children in these hamlets left school early, usually before they were 12 years old, to work in the mill. At the fork shop, no child labor was recorded. Single-purpose hamlets like these had difficulty surviving when their factories closed. Residents moved away, and little remained to draw newcomers. The mill buildings were demolished, and sometimes their building materials were salvaged. At Hope Factory and Oaksville, a grist and saw mill complex and a carding mill at Cattown

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<sup>72</sup> Gary Kulik, Roger Parks, and Theodore Z. Penn, eds. *The New England Mill Village, 1790-1860*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London: MIT Press, 1982): xxvii.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register Of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetSection number E - DRAFT  
3 March 2006Mill Hamlets of the Oaks Creek Valley, 1786-1956  
Otsego County, New York

Page 11

outlasted the cotton factory, but these were small, seasonal operations earning supplemental income for family members. Dwellings are the primary survivals in these hamlets. This pattern of disappearance is also identified among the rural mill villages of southeastern New England, which provided the models for the Oaks Creek cotton mills.<sup>73</sup>

Toddsville and Fly Creek sustained hardship better. While the former's largest employer from 1809 through the Civil War was the Union Cotton Factory, but there were additional employers. Maps note many individual home owners and several small businesses, probably one-man shops as well as a hotel, a schoolhouse, and, possibly most importantly, a multi-sect church oriented residents to their own hamlet. Even after the cotton mill closed, a new Methodist Episcopal congregation built another church in the late nineteenth century. And, the stone general store, built in the early years of the mill's operation, continued as an independently owned business for many years. Greater economic diversity and a community center combined with its location at an important crossing and, later, along the trolley line helped Toddsville survive relatively intact.

Fly Creek had geographical characteristics similar to Toddsville's. Fly Creek's single largest employer, the furnace, however, did not dominate to the degree of any cotton mills. The furnace retained fewer employees, and virtually all were men better paid than many who worked in the cotton factories. The census shows that most of these employees were heads of household, occasionally with a son or boarder also working in the furnace. These men were largely homeowners rather than tenants. These conditions engendered more autonomy and greater stability than those of the cotton mills. This is reflected in the establishment of two church congregations and a small commercial district centered on the crossroads, where the turnpike crossed the creek and the highway paralleling the creek's west bank. Mills north and south of the village, on Oaks and Fly creeks, and additional small shops making agricultural implements, shoes, pails, and other products diversified the hamlet's employment base. As much of Otsego County slipped into agricultural depression in the 1890s, the downturn spread to many of Fly Creek's small mills and shops. The electric trolley running from Oneonta to Mohawk helped soften the blow, as the Fly Creek station was an additional draw, beyond the churches, stores, and hotel, for people living in the upper reaches of Fly Creek valley. It moved from small industrial endeavor to providing a range of services to its own residents and those farther afield in the Fly Creek valley. Of all of the mill hamlets of the town of Otsego, Fly Creek has weathered the ebb and flow of the area's economy with the greatest success, due in part to geography and in part to the independent enterprise of its citizens.

*Architecture associated with Mill Hamlets in the Oaks Creek Valley, 1790-1956*

The mill hamlets of the Oaks and Fly creek valleys—Fly Creek, Oaksville, Fork Shop Corners, Toddsville, and Hope Factory—display a variety of building types and styles. These include domestic buildings and their associated outbuildings, churches, cemeteries, stores, hotels, railroad buildings, and shops in addition to the mill buildings themselves and their ancillary structures. Most properties within the hamlets have characteristically small lots, large enough only for a small garden and possibly an outbuilding. In most cases, the main structure stands close to the road. Each hamlet has varying degrees of infill and loss, but the overall settings retain a property density and overall massing similar to that of the period when these hamlets had functioning mills.

In general, stone and wood buildings were constructed in the mill hamlets. The main mill buildings were constructed either entirely of local stone or with high stone foundations supporting frame upper stories. None of the large cotton mills survives. Of the smaller grist, saw, and carding mills, only the stone grist mill at Hope Factory

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<sup>73</sup> Kulik, Parks, and Penn, xxxii.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register Of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

**Section number E - DRAFT  
3 March 2006**

**Mill Hamlets of the Oaks Creek Valley, 1786-1956  
Otsego County, New York**

**Page 12**

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remain. Of other stone buildings, only the large mill owner's house overlooking the site of millpond at Oaksville and the main floor of the overseer's house, which stood next to the Otsego Print Works in Oaksville, still stand.

Most mill hamlet buildings were frame, vernacular interpretations of building styles popular in the first half of the nineteenth century, when the mills were strongest economically and the hamlets first developed. These styles include the Federal, Greek Revival, Gothic Revival, and early Italianate tastes. Smaller numbers of later examples of the Italianate, Queen Anne, and Colonial Revival styles stand alongside earlier buildings, some of which were remodeled in these later tastes. There was very little new construction after the turn of the twentieth century as population was falling and most of the mills had closed.