

# Was Your Town a Mill Town?

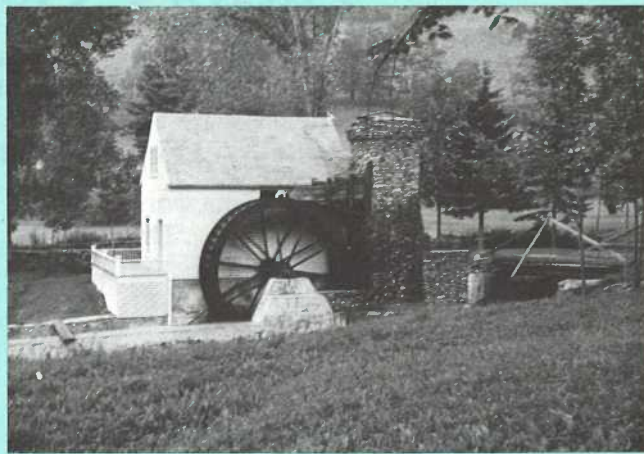
Have you ever walked along a stream looking for a spot to fish or swim and come upon stone walls or concrete piers? If so, perhaps you have discovered the site of an old mill. Most likely, your town had at least one mill and probably several. Perhaps you like playing by streams. Maybe you go to one near your home to picnic or enjoy nature. Early settlers admired Vermont's streams and rivers, too, but for a different reason. They viewed running water as a source of energy that could be harnessed and put to work.

Early mills were equipped with huge wooden waterwheels that had fins. Water flowing past the fins pushed the wheel in much the same way that blowing on a pinwheel makes it turn. The turning waterwheel powered machines inside the mill. A grist mill ground wheat or corn into flour. A sawmill cut logs into boards.

Mills were expensive to build. Machinery was costly. So were the heavy timbers the buildings were made of. They had to be sturdy to outlast the vibration of the waterwheel and spring floods. In the late 1700s many towns offered free land or reduced property taxes to someone who would build mills to serve people. Sometimes it happened the other way around. Someone built a mill along a stream and people settled nearby, attracted by the activity of the mill.

As time went on, Vermont mills made everything from woolen cloth to windows. But the invention of steam and electric power meant that Vermont's streams and rivers were no longer needed to run the mills. Also, some mills could not afford to modernize their equipment. Others were damaged by floods or fire. Slowly these buildings began to disappear. Today, there are only a few left.

Mills live on through their names. Consider these Vermont villages: Brockways Mills, Gallup Mills, Ewells Mills, Eden Mills, Post Mills, Goulds Mills, Mill Village, Morses Mills, New Haven Mills, Stevens Mills, Rickers Mills, and Rices Mills. Some of you may live on a Mill Road or Mill Pond Lane. Or perhaps you know someone named Miller. Guess where that name comes from?



Water-powered mill in Dorset.

## Find the Missing Mill in Your Town:

Find an old map of your community. Check your library, local historical society, or town clerk's office. Because mills were important town resources, they are often marked on nineteenth-century maps.

Examine old business directories and almanacs, such as *Walton's Vermont Register*, that list the names of mills and their owners. Town histories will also have this information.

Find people who have lived in your town for a long time. Often they will remember where mills were located. Perhaps someone in your family worked in a mill.

Organize a field trip to a working mill, such as a lumber or cider mill, in your area. There are also several restored mills in Vermont to visit:

The Old Red Mill, Jericho  
Adam's Old Stone Grist Mill, Bellows Falls  
Robinson Sawmill, Kent's Corner, Calais  
Up and Down Sawmill, Shelburne Museum  
American Precision Museum, Windsor