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Antique dams of Arlington-

First water power mills of America were on the banks of a little stream which rises in the great meadows of east Lexington and flows into lower mystic lake-the industries that have flourished there and gradually disappeared-how cutter pond has become merely a brook.

Of the thousands of sightseers who pass through the historic town of Arlington annually, few, if any know of the existence of the waterway along which were built the first water power mills of America.

The dams are still to be seen, many of them in their original shape and unharmed

Charles s. parker, in his recent researches to get material for his "Arlington Past and Present," has dug up new facts.

These dams testify to the large amount of business done in the olden days, and even up to a time within 25 years. But now there is comparatively little activity along the banks of the stream, and some of the ponds are no more than small brooks, it not being necessary to hold back the water for mill purposes.

Historians at times are at a loss to give a good and sufficient reason why certain locality was chosen by the earlier settlers of a territory in which to erect their homes and establish themselves in business. No such problem as this, however, presents itself to one called upon to answer the question, Why, early in the 17th century, something worthy of the name of a village came into existence in the region now called Arlington?

Nature had been very kind there and had provided one of the most inviting of inducements, a stream of water capable of being utilized for mechanical purposes.

A history of the town of Arlington, of its larger business enterprises at least, might be easily constructed out of what has occurred along the line of that little stream, which, rising in the Great Meadows in east Lexington, that form the westerly boundary of the town, and running through a geographical center of the town, easterly and then northerly, finds outlet in lower Mystic Lake, the northern boundary of the town.

In the early times the stream was a great deal wider than in later years, the railroad bed doing away with much of the section formerly occupied by the pond. The Cutter pond, off Mill st., now nothing more than a brook, was once a large expanse of water and furnished a large supply there.

The stream from its start in the Great meadows to Mystic lake is about two miles long, and the earlier records of the village show it to have been designated as "Mill Brook" and "Bull's Creek", while in later years when the town took it for a water supply it was called "Sucker Brook".

As was the ease with many of the early settlers of the new country, the problem of how to grind corn and convey logs into lumber was a serious one. Because of this old Mill stream, which solved this problem for the settlers under consideration, the history of Arlington can be easily traced back to within 15 years of the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth.

At that time the town was a part of Cambridge. Later a township was formed called Menotomy. Still later the town was known as West Cambridge and then its present name was given to it.

Early records tell that in the year 1635(?) Capt George Cooke accompanied by his brother Joseph and Rev Thomas Shepherd arrived in Cambridge. All were men of money and bought considerable land. About two years later Capt Cooke obtained from Cambridge a grant of land of 20 acres on the border of Mill brook. He saw the possibility of making the water work to good advantage, and after procuring the grant he built a dam and erected a mill on the lowest level of the waterway and not a very great distance from the outlet. Even to this day the site of this mill is plainly marked by a little island in the middle of what is known as Fowles pond, a short distance off Mystic st. It was the first mill in all the new territory to be run by water power, there being nothing but a windmill in the mother town of Cambridge with which to grind corn, and then this could only be accomplished when the wind was blowing from the east.

This new mill was no doubt a great curiosity to the settlers of that time; as no doubt one of the same style would be to the people of present day. The people for miles around took their grain there to be ground.

Capt Cooke amassed considerable wealth. He was a man of great energy and commanded the respect of the inhabitants. He was a selectmen of Newtowne (Cambridge), a speaker of the house and a representative of the general court, also a member of the Ancient and Honorable artillery company of Boston, of which he was captain in 1643. About the year 1645 he returned to England and was elected a colonel in Cromwell's army and lost his life during the war in Ireland, in 1652.

With his departure the mill was abandoned and allowed to go to decay before the lands were transferred to other hands.

On the old site John Rolfe of Nantucket erected a new mill, having purchased the land from Capt Cookes daughter in 1670.

In 1681 a widow obtained a permit to build a dam above the old mill pond, and this dam is the one now plainly seen on mill st.

Some years later the Cutter mill was erected at this point and from this the pond took its name.

The dam at what is known as Fowle's mill, the first one you come to in making a tour of the waterway, was built years before the incorporation of the town, and fire destroyed the little mill buildings which stood there in 1883. The dam is still intact and the pond above is always kept full, the water being used by the big mill now on the site of the old one. This dam is probably the largest of all along the waterway and can be plainly seen from Mystic st.

Now that the old waterway is much changed from years gone by and a few of the ponds are practically dry, many of the old fords across the ponds can be seen. The one leading to the Cooke Mill is still plainly marked and can be easily traced from Water st to the little island and then on to Summer st and to the site of the house occupied by Capt Cooke and his family.

According to historians, the next interruption to the flow of the mill stream was the dam built at what is now known as the Charles Schwamb & Son mill. This was erected about 1778, as near as can be

ascertained, the records of that year showing a transfer of the property. Originally the mill was run by Samuel Cutter heirs, and its history from them down to the present time can be easily traced.

At Grove st two dams may be see. Neither is now used, but both are in their original state. The dam on the northern side, known as "the Flashes," marks the site of the old Tufts mill, many years since demolished. Next below this is the dam for the original saw factory, run for years by Welch & Griffiths. The dam is not used by the occupants of the buildings at the present time, more modern means being used in running their machinery. In this factory years ago large forces of men were employed.

All that is left to mark the old Schouler mill, which was built on the sterns mill property at the foot of what is now known as Schouler ct, is a small island in the center of the brook. The mill was used as a print works for years and then as a shoddy mill until it was destroyed by fire, and with it went the dam.

These last three were very close together and the saw mill was the only thing of its kind in the country at that time. Partnerships changed, but the business was kept up for 55 years.

Next above these is a dam at what is know as the J.C. Hobbs mill property, this being off Massachusetts av across from Robbins road. The history of this dam and mill dates back to the early days of the town. The little dam is intact, and the water held back by it is sent into the present building to turn a turbine engine which runs the jewelry factory in the old mill.

Next above is the Theodore Schwamb Co mill. The dam is one of the best preserved of any along the line of the brook, and is still doing business. The Stephen Cutter mill occupied this site for many years prior to the purchase by Theodore Schwamb.

A short distance above this, off Lowell st, is the site of the old spice mill. The dam may be plainly seen from Lowell st. On the site of the old spice mills as molding concern now does business.

The last along the line in Arlington is at the old Lewis currying mill. This dam and mill are still well preserved and a visit there would repay one for the trip. The old wheel with its bucket shaped catches for the water is still set up, and this indeed is a curiosity in itself. The mill is now used for a paint shop but in year gone by a large amount of business was done there and a large number of men were employed.