
Same Past - New Understandings

by Caroline de Marrais

While the past never changes, our perception of what happened is constantly changing as new research is done. In the past, *Millwork* has had a number of articles about different aspects of Hanford Mills history. Now that we have learned many new things about Hanford Mills, we should put it together and retell the history of the Mill. We understand what happened at Hanford Mills a little bit differently than we used to.

The story of the Mill starts before anyone ever put axe to tree to build it. The land was known as the Goldsborough Banyar Patent - hundreds of acres awarded to Mr. Banyar in 1770. In 1803, the owners of the patent decided to find out exactly what they owned and they hired a surveyor. From that survey comes the first mention of the lot that would later provide land for the Hanfords' mill as well as half the village of East Meredith: "A midling good Farm - watered by the Kortright Creek & Two other Streams - on which, Perhaps a Mill Seat - Beech, Birch, Maple & Hemlock Timber."

After that survey, people began to buy land in the Patent and came to settle in the Kortright Creek valley. They built log cabins and started farms and schools. In the late 1830s they began to build businesses and homes of sawn lumber. According to an old history of Delaware County, when the first frame house was built "Phillip Garrison went to the top of the building and proposed a toast: 'And since it goes up so nice and complete, we'll name it the flower of Brier Street.'" Brier Street residents probably bought their lumber in



This photograph was probably taken a few years after D.J. Hanford added the gristmill in the winter of 1868/69. It is the oldest photograph of the mill known to exist.

Davenport Center, three miles north on a major road. Brier Street was basically in the "middle of nowhere."

As more people settled in Brier Street, local laborer, Jonathan B. Parris, must have seen a need for a closer sawmill. At 3 miles a hour, a horse drawn wagon trip for lumber in Davenport Center would have taken about two hours on the road - not counting the loading and unloading time. Mr. Parris bought land in 1846 and built a small, seasonal, up-and-down sawmill and a pond on Kortright Creek. This mill would later become Hanford Mills. The mill most likely ran only in the spring, when high water produced enough power to saw rough lumber. It may also have run in the fall, when later rains brought high water. The sawmill was not a money maker. Jonathan Parris owned it until 1851 (about six years), when he sold it to a relative, Truman Parris, who sold it again in 1853.

The mill was then sold to William N. Barber, who tried hard to make it a paying business. Mr. Barber took out mortgage after mortgage, add-

ing timber land and another saw to the mill business. He lost it all in 1858 when his land was foreclosed on and Merritt S. Roberts bought the mill. Mr. Roberts had no real interest in operating the mill himself. He sold it to Ephraim Douglas and held the mortgage. Ephraim Douglas owned the mill until 1860. An early mill daybook seems to indicate that he hired a young man named David Josiah Hanford to operate the mill for him. In 1860, D.J. Hanford bought the mill from his former employer.

D.J. Hanford must have had a vision that no one else saw. He didn't rely on the mill to provide him with a living. He also bought a farm when he bought the mill. He improved this farm through the Civil War years and did quite well as farm prices rose to war time highs. Even after the war, D.J. improved his farm and left the mill to provide a little extra income in the spring and fall. Finally, in 1868 (the year East Meredith received its first post office and its present name), D.J. Hanford began his mill improvements. He hired local men to build an addition to his mill. A Fly Creek,

NY man installed a new gristmill and turbine to grind animal feed and local buckwheat flour. D.J. Hanford also added a planer to his sawmill. With finished lumber, he could charge higher prices for his product. By 1869, D.J. began to operate his mill on more days throughout the whole year.

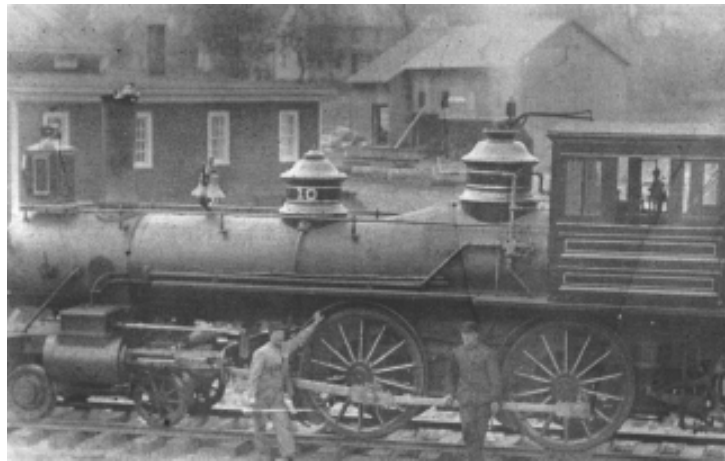
Once D.J. got the ball rolling, he kept it going. In 1876, he added a butter tub head cutter. Perhaps a local cooper talked him into buying the machinery for this business or maybe he saw the opportunity for profit as he watched a cooper shape butter tub heads by hand. Whatever the motivation, the idea worked and D.J. continued to add tub heading machinery, producing about 40,000 heads in a peak production year.

Other wood-working machines were added to produce a number of items including cow stanchions, fence posts, siding, building lumber, wagon parts, etc. In 1881, D.J. installed his first steam engine and perhaps replaced his slow up-and-down saw with a modern circular sawmill. With the steam engine, Hanford Mills could truly be a year round operational mill.

Through the 1880s, D.J. Hanford continued to make improvements and at least one of his sons, Horace, joined the business. Horace Hanford seemed to bring with him a sense of how business records should be kept and maintained. Records that started out as a single "daybook," became daybooks, cash records, check books, letters to and from the Hanfords,

receipts, train shipping records, and employee time records. In 1892, the Hanfords added a room to the mill specifically for an office.

D.J. continued to expand, adding milk crates to his product list and a larger, more powerful steam engine in 1895. What had started out as a small, rectangular building was now a sprawling mill manufactory with many rooms. The Hanfords also began to handle other businesses on site including hardware and agricultural equipment sales. If the Hanfords



This photograph c. 1900, shows an Ulster and Delaware Railroad engine stopped behind the mill. The mill building is on the left and the lumber shed is in the background on the right.

couldn't make it for you, you could order it from one of their many catalogs.

Then at the age of 63, in 1897, D.J. Hanford was struck with "paralysis," what we believe today was a stroke. He could no longer participate in the running of his business, though he maintained ownership until his death in 1899.

Horace Hanford took over running the business with the help of his older brother, Herbert Willis. Will (or Bill) had the machine and animal sense, while Horace had the business sense. Together they continued their father's tradition of improving the business. In 1898,

they remodeled the gristmill and put in a new steel plate attrition mill that could grind more grain faster than the old style stones. They also added an electricity generation plant to light their mill, and, eventually, East Meredith.

The first train finally rumbled behind the mill in July of 1900. Horace must have seen the advantages of having a railroad in his backyard just as his father had twenty years ago (when D.J. sold the right-of-way to the railroad). The Hanfords could get their products to a

wider state market. They bought machines for making broom and tool handles, which they sold to companies in New York City, Ohio, and New Hampshire. Unfortunately, what Horace didn't see was that his mill was not big enough to compete with large factories. The same trains that brought his handles to larger markets also brought cheaply made products to sell in East Meredith. He may

not have seen it at first, but Horace was quick to adjust. The handle business did not work - he shut it down. Instead, he became a retailer of the items that the railroad was bringing. The Hanfords built warehouses along the railroad, and began to sell hardware, coal, gasoline engines, more agricultural equipment, and even millwork that could be made cheaper in a larger factory than their own mill.

With their retail businesses, a steady business in milk crates (tub cover sales dropped off with the advent of refrigerated railroad milk cars), the Hanfords continued work using both old

fashioned and modern means of power. In 1910, they added a gasoline engine to power their generator. Later, in 1926, they replaced their old water turbines with an overshot waterwheel - the Hanfords still made use of waterpower whenever they could.

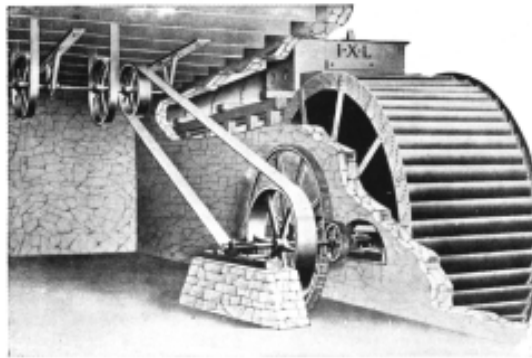
In 1929, Will Hanford died, but Horace continued the business. At the end of World War II, in 1945, Horace was 75 years old. He finally decided to retire, and sold the business to three employee brothers - Frank, Mike, and Joe Pizza. He sold them a mill that was doing less sawing and grinding, but had a solid business of retail and feed sales.

The Pizzas maintained the mill and ran the feed and hardware business for another twenty years. In 1956, Frank sold his interest in the mill to his other two brothers. Then in 1961, they took one of the mill warehouses, used for the storage of feed, and converted it with elevators to a feed mill. This was probably an attempt to shore up a declining business. By the 1960s, the railroad was failing. Trucks were replacing trains as a way of moving products, and because of the automobile, retail sales were becoming centralized in larger urban centers. Large feed and lumber companies in Delhi and Oneonta were centers of train and truck shipping. They could offer lower prices than the Pizzas. The Pizzas auctioned off their mill machinery on August 8, 1965, and sold the mill, feed mill, and horse barn to West-Nesbitt (a feed company). They kept the hardware store. Mike Pizza then sold his interest to the last brother, Joe, in 1966. When Joe Pizza died in 1967, his heirs sold the last part of the business, the hardware store. It looked as if the mill in East Meredith was doomed.

Ken Kelso, a local farmer, watched the demise of the village. He hated to see East Meredith's history demolished with its businesses and buildings. When the Pizza auction started he began to buy things. The common machines, still useful in 1965, went for higher prices, but machines like a hand hole cutter, doweling machine, or a tub cutter were useless. Ken Kelso bought them and other machines for almost pennies, including the waterwheel (for \$45!). What was he supposed to do with all this old "junk?" West-Nesbitt was asking when he was going to remove his waterwheel from their property, and so instead of taking it out, Ken offered to buy the mill. After the Pizza closing in 1967, Ken Kelso made his own museum, and he let people visit what he had saved. Although the mill had changed hands, it was still in business, though the type of business had changed. The mill was accustomed to that - its business had

always been changing and evolving to meet new needs.

Eventually, the museum became too big for Ken Kelso to handle alone. He interested others in Delaware County in the museum, including the late Dr. Frank Cyr. Together, a nonprofit corporation was formed and Hanford Mills Museum came into full being in 1973. Since then, Hanford Mills Museum has restored the Hanfords' waterwheel, pond, and power system; purchased other property related to the Hanfords; restored machinery to working order; planned many special events and workshops; and educated and entertained thousands of museum visitors - adults and children. Museum staff continues to research the history of the mill and the area, learning all we can to tell the story of Hanford Mills and East Meredith as accurately as we can. While the past may stand still, we hope that our understanding of its history will keep up with the times.



SPUR MASTER WHEEL ON END OF WATER WHEEL SHAFT

In 1926, a Fitz waterwheel, like the one pictured to the left, cost the Hanfords a little over \$1,000. Forty years later, in 1965, it cost Ken Kelso \$45!

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