

The Role of Grist Mills in Our Early History

Grist mills—where farmers could get grain ground for flour—played a major role in the early settlement of European American in this area. It was not unusual for early settlers to have to travel a great distance to get to the nearest grist mill. For example, settlers in the Ovid area in 1790 had to go to Elmira, a distance of some forty miles. Another option would have been to go to Penn Yan, but that would have meant having to travel around Seneca Lake.

The first grist mill in present-day Seneca County was established by Samuel Bear in south Waterloo in 1793. It is reported that he had the grinding stones floated down Seneca Lake and then east on the Seneca River to his grist mill site in Waterloo.

The first grist mill in the southern part of the county was started by Silas Halsey in 1794 on Lodi Creek.

It was not unusual for a man to have to wait a day or longer for his turn at the grist mill. Given that fact, it is easy to understand how the first stores evolved at these early grist mills. While the farmer was waiting for his turn at the grist mill, he would be able to purchase various kinds of supplies at the nearby store, as well as have the opportunity to chat with others waiting their turn. Since the grist mills were the center of commercial life, the first new roads developed were to make it easier for people to get to these grist mills.