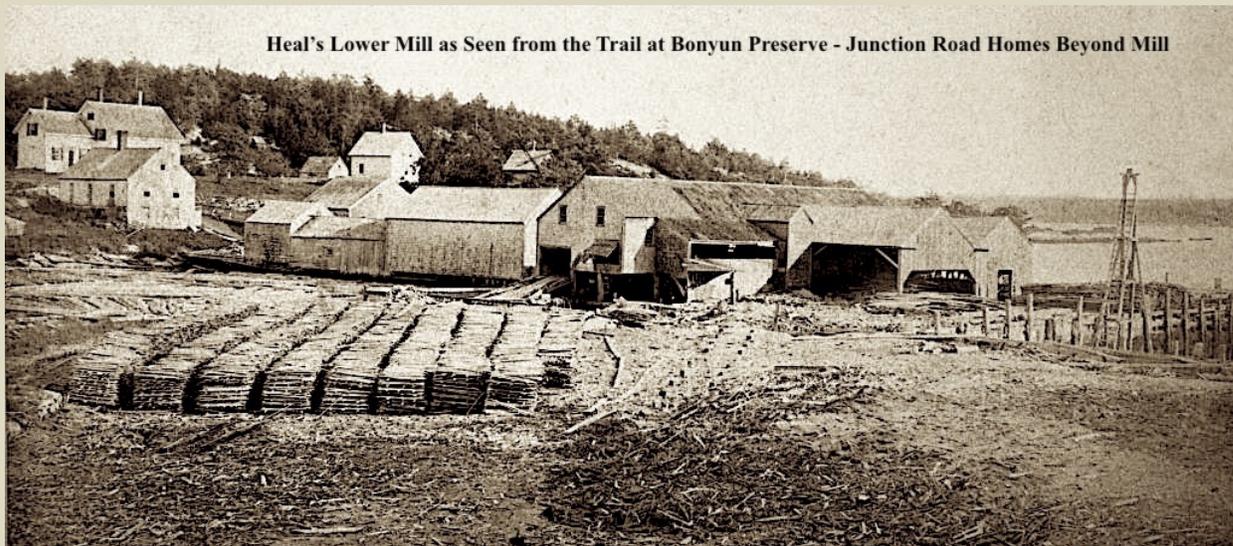


The Mills of Westport Island

A Lost Industrial Heritage

*Transcription of Notes and papers Written by Bea Harriman, Cora Tarbox and Bud Warren
with photos maps and art Compiled by Dennis Dunbar*



July, 2019

The Mills of Westport Island – A Lost Industrial Heritage

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Forward

The Mills of Westport Island – A Lost Industrial Heritage was published in support of the Westport Island History Committee and for the benefit of the Friends of Westport Island History. It is simply a compendium of previously published notes, books and papers written about Westport Island’s tidal mills. For over 100 years, tidal mills were instrumental in the development of the island and town and were an important contributor to the town’s early prosperity.

Three parts are included in this compendium. Each were written independently by local historians. Each had their own focus and emphasis. As such, there may be some repetition in their chronology and some differences in timelines due to different sources of research material. No attempt was made to revise or correct these differences.

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Part 1 - Tidal Mills on Westport Island (from Bea Harriman)

One of the reasons for the early settlements on Jeremysquam was the opportunity for establishing tide mills to get power for grinding grain and, later, sawing lumber. The inhabitants have always done some farming and some fishing to piece out a livelihood, but later most of the men earned their living from the sea, either on trading vessels going to the far corners of the world or on fishing vessels in local or Grand Banks fishing.

The first record we have of a mill was the Heal Mill on the west side, when Levi Shattuck purchased land with mill privileges, from Daniel Dunton in October 1784. There was, however, a grist mill in the cove above the Lower Landing from the early times, as Edward Meader came here from Litchfield Maine to work in that mill, and married Sarah Brookes of Jeremysquam.

The Heal Mill, which was run by Levi and Jonas Shattuck eventually was taken over by James Heal, who married into the family, and by two Shattuck sons and in 1831 James Heal owned ½ sawmill, Jonas Shattuck ½ grist mill and the rest was taxed to David Shattuck, all valued at \$600.

At this same time Westbrook Greenleaf had a grist mill at Greenleaf's Cove on the east side and Hodgdon's Mill at Long Cove was operated by Thomas Hodgdon, William Greenleaf and Henry Kehail, each owning 1/3 of a saw mill and 1/3 of a grist mill.

In 1830, James and Moses Riggs established a saw mill on Thomas Cove – so called, and later added a grist mill and other buildings. This property was known as Heal's Lower Mill as Robbins Heal bought ¼ of the mills in 1847, and in 1871 the mill was owned by William and Robbins Heal.

A record in 1840 shows the annual output of the various mills :

Westbrook Greenleaf (Greenleaf Cove)	400 bushels of grain, ground
Hodgdon Mill (Long Cove)	65 bushels of grain 24,000 ft of lumber sawed
Heal's Upper Mill (Heal's Pond) (Shattuck)	1,250 bushels of grain 400,000 ft of lumber
Heal's Lower Mill (Thomas Cove) (Riggs's)	400 bushels of grain

None of these mills are standing today.

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As late as 1910, Scott Hilton operated the old Hodgdon Mill as a tide mill, but only parts of the old dam remain there as at the Heal Mills. The mill stones for the Upper Mill still lie in 8-feet of mud, but the road has been changed that ran across the dam.

These tide mills were operated with gates that were opened to allow the ponds above the dams to fill by the incoming tides. Then, at high water, the gates were closed and the water going out through the sluice ways turned the water wheels to operate the mill, which meant working hours were regulated by the tides rather than by the clock.

When the town of Westport was established in 1828, there were three tide mills in working order. One grist mill was at Greenleaf Cove, owned by Westbrook Greenleaf and later by his sons Wilmot and Silas Greenleaf. This had been established soon after the Revolutionary War by Josiah Parsons, who purchased the land from John Adams in 1789, but it had been in his possession earlier. The other mills probably began as grist mills, but later added saw mills. There was a smaller grist mill at the head of Junction cove – 1810. The mill at Long Cove was operated in 1828 by three men; William Greenleaf, Henry Kehail, Jr. and Samuel Tarbox, Jr. who had obtained the rights from the Hodgsons. This continued in operation as a saw mill under Hilton, and later by Alvin B. Harriman, and known as Hilton's Mill until the 1910's.

The saw and grist mills on Heal's Cove were begun in 1784 by the Dunton family and sold by Daniel Dunton, a Revolutionary War veteran, to Levi Shattuck. He was joined by a brother Jonas, who purchased land from Nathaniel Knight in 1787. In 1828 they were owned by Jonas and Levi's son, David Shattuck and known as the "Upper Mill", as in March 1830, two Riggs brothers from Georgetown started the "Lower Mill" at the cove near the Junction. The Upper Mill eventually, by purchase and heir ship, came to belong in part to James Heal, who's first and second wives were daughters of Jonas Shattuck.

In 1847, a son of James Heal, Robbins Heal, bought into Riggs "Lower Mill" and in 1871 another son, William, acquired ½ of the mill and Robbins the rest.

None of the mills are in operation today. The grinding of grain by tide power stopped long before the saw mills were obliged to give way to steam and gasoline engines for power. In a record of town business in 1840 we find about 1,200 bushels of grain were ground annually and 425,000 ft of boards sawed. The wharves and old timbers of these mills can still be seen but are rapidly disappearing and the big mill stones lie in the mud.

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Tide Mill Business

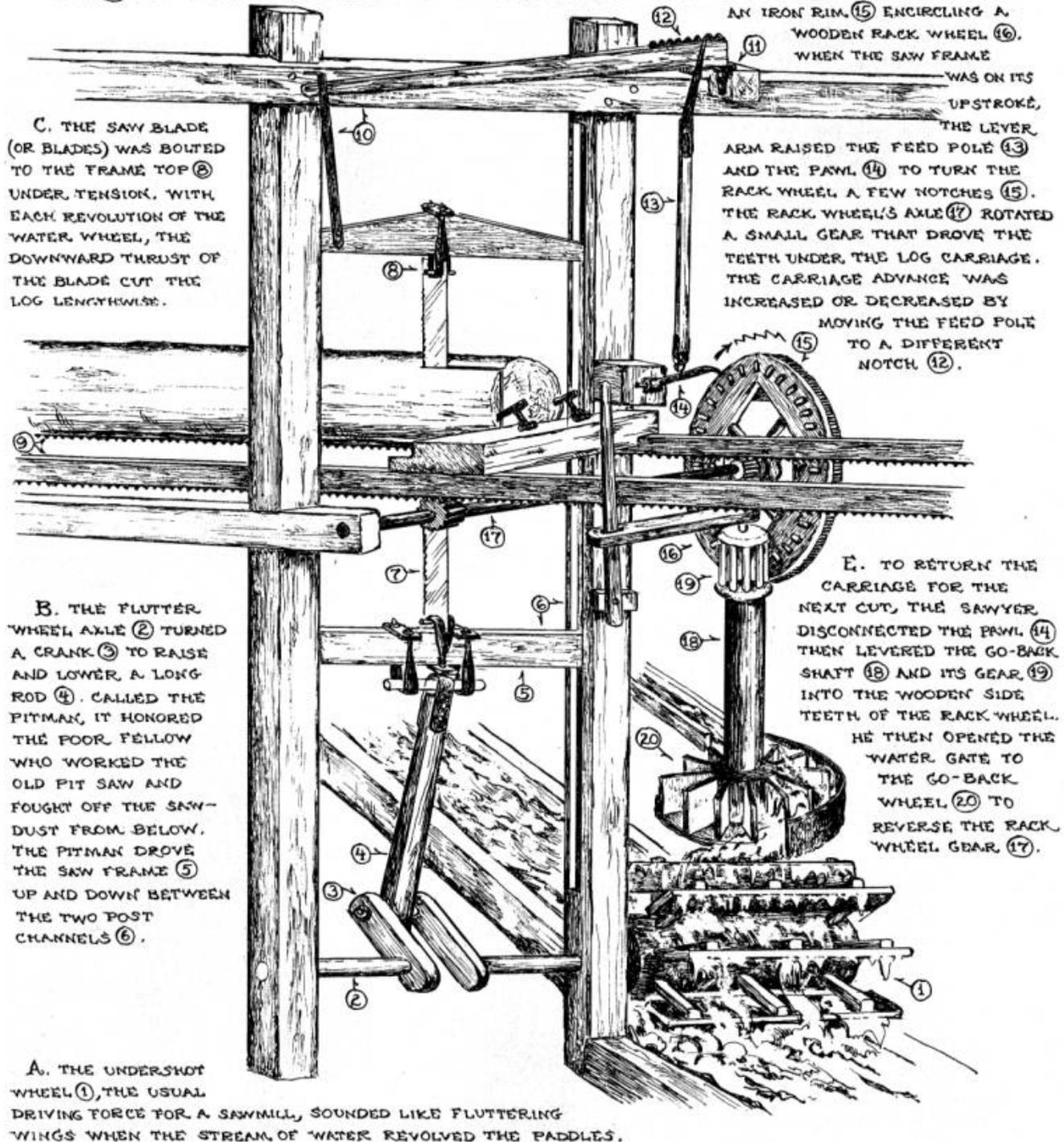
During the heyday of Westport, just prior to the Civil War, when we were called “The richest town per capita in the State”, we find only two businesses large enough to be counted; fishing and the sawmill industry. In 1850, there were 27 vessels taxed to 6 men at a value of \$27,000, hiring about 185 hands, and 4 sawmills (using water power) valued about \$2,200 and employing only 8 men. About 10 years previously, with a population of 655, there were 4 grist mills as well as a shingle mill and several smoke houses listed. At various times there have been grocery stores, but at present there is no industry on the island.

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THE SAWMILL AT WORK

D. TO MOVE THE LOG CARRIER (9) FORWARD, AN L-SHAPED LEVER ARM (10) WAS FIXED TO THE UPPER FRAME. THE OTHER END OF THE ARM WAS HINGED (11). FROM A SERIES OF NOTCHES (12) HUNG THE FEED POLE (13) THAT ENDED WITH A CHISEL-LIKE PAWL. THIS PIVOTING IRON BAR CAUGHT BETWEEN THE TEETH OF AN IRON RIM (15) ENCIRCLING A WOODEN RACK WHEEL (16). WHEN THE SAW FRAME



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Historic Heal Lower Mill Dam Site Permanently Protected by Kennebec Estuary Land Trust



Here is what the mill looked like at peak production in 1850. Only the dam and pilings remain today

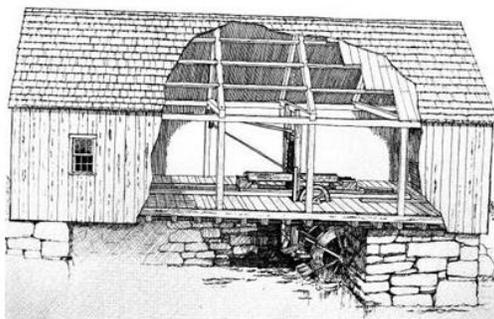
Remains of Heal's Lower Mill dam and wharfs

The photo above was taken from what is now the Bonyun Preserve's Mill Cove Trail. A new interpretive sign has been added to the trail showing what the mill looked like when in operation in 1850. The Kennebec Estuary Land Trust's Management Plan for the Bonyun Preserve calls for preserving this historic site as it remains today.

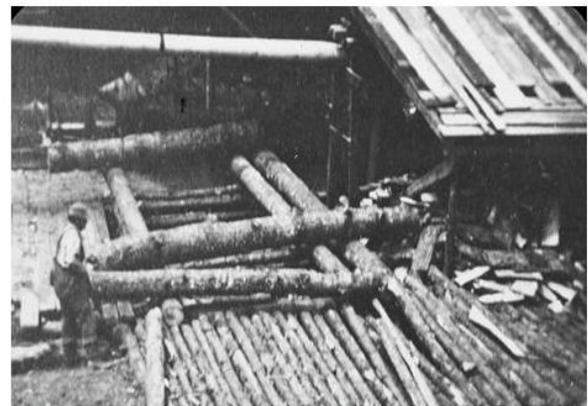
Tidal mills were a familiar site on Westport Island in the 1800's. Looking across Mill Cove from the trail you can see the remains of Heal's Lower Mill, which was used to saw logs into boards and to grind corn into meal (grist). This mill was built in 1830 by James and Moses Riggs and later operated by the Heal family. Production at the mill wound down by 1895 and most buildings disappeared by 1950.

On the West side of Westport Island, two mills were owned and operated by the Heal Family. The Upper Heal Mill was located by the causeway across Heal Pond on West Shore Road just to the north of here. Five tidal mills operated on Westport Island.

The Heal's Lower Mill is sited just below the wharf where the steamer from Bath docked at "the Junction". The homes you see across the cove are on Junction Road which connected the steamer dock with Main Road. Remains of an earlier "inner" mill can be seen in the aerial image above. That mill was noted on a map of Westport Island as far back as 1794. See if you can spot the site along the trail.



Cross Section of Saw Mill Building showing "Up and Down" Saw



Loading Logs into the Saw Mill

Heal's Lower Mill was both a saw and grist mill.

Saw Mill - When first constructed, the mill wheel powered an "up and down" saw to make planks and laths for building construction. The vertical wheel was later replaced with horizontal "tub wheel" and later equipped with two turbines of 20 horsepower each. The mill operated 12 hours each day, during maximum tidal flows, and could cut 700,000 board-feet of lumber each year.

Grist Mill - Corn was ground using two granite stones several feet in diameter and several inches thick mounted one above the other in a horizontal plane. The upper stone was rotated by a shaft fastened to its center. Adjustments to the distance between the stones governed the "fineness" of the meal. Up to 5000 bushels of grain could be ground each year.

Visit the Bonyun Preserve and hike the trails along the Mill Cove and around beautiful Thomas Point. The parking area is at the south end of West Shore Road, just down from Junction Road. Look for the KELT kiosk.

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Part 2 – History of Westport Island Mills (from Cora Tarbox)

Early Mills (Prior to town incorporation in 1828)

With the increase in settlers to the whole region, woodcutters were busy sending wood to Boston as well as communities in York County and New Hampshire. The Rines family, Henry, Joseph his son Joseph, as well as Benjamin Albee had cut wood on their own land and that of Lemuel Norton, one of the early small farmers.ⁱ They paid Stumpage fees to Lemuel. When Lemuel needed to sell his land years later to John Dunton Jr., he claimed his northern boundary line to the property “ran easterly by Stephen Greenleaf’s land to a hemlock tree near the brook leading into Parsons mill stream”, then easterly to Thomas Cove, which is called Rum Cove today.ⁱⁱ This appears to be a small mill used by woodcutters to produce lumber to be shipped out of the cove. Since the cove is called Thomas Cove, it may mean that Benjamin Thomas, customer of Patten, was responsible for the mill.

Josiah Parsons purchased the land from Noah Colby in 1783 that surrounded the cove. He sold it to his nephew John Parsons in 1795.ⁱⁱⁱ Josiah had established a grist mill on the lot he owned at what is now called Greenleaf Cove and had no further interest in the wood mill. John Parsons may have continued the mill.

Fannie Chase quoted a journal of Reverend Paul Coffin, who traveled widely in early Maine, that a destructive fire raged on Jeremy Squam in 1796. This may have been the demise of the mill site.^{iv}

This small mill would be the first on Jeremy Squam. Previously, a mill had been built on Birch Point by Thomas Hubbard or Johnathan Williamson. Job or Jacob Averill had built one about 1759 on a stream that emptied into the upper Sheepscot River. Jacob lived on land owned by a Dr. Whittimore. Job claimed to Whittimore that he could build a mill on the stream if Whittimore could send “100 pounds of rum, molasses, corn or meal and pork.”^v The mill was built and discovered by Dr. Silvester Gardiner, a Kennebec Proprietor, who claimed the land surrounding the mill site. Eventually the issue was settled out of court.

When creating lumber for houses on the island, a small mill could produce enough power in early spring to cut wide board for siding. Posts for the beams were created by hand with an axe.

Two more mills were established about the same time toward the south end of the island. There is no record to tell us when Daniel Dunton started his mill, but it was probably in operation by 1770 after the lawsuit against his father, Timothy, was settled. An island in the cove, now called Heal Cove, was attached to the mainland by filling in the small outlet between the island and the mainland. A stone dam and mill were built on the south side of the island with a sluice to control the flow of tidal water from the Sasanoa River, as well as creating a pond. By 1785, Daniel had sold the island, with mill privileges, to Levi Shattuck, who had been working at a mill on Georgetown.^{vi} Levi established a

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gristmill, doubling the operation of the mill site. This required purchasing additional land to the east of the millpond containing a small creek. This enabled Levi to control all the land surrounding the pond.

Jonas Shattuck came with his brother Levi, but did not participate in the operation of the lumber mill. He purchased a half interest in the gristmill. His home was on the south side of the millpond. He served in the Revolutionary War, fighting at Lexington and Concord. After the Battle of Bunker Hill, he joined General Benedict Arnold's march to Quebec. He did not remain for the siege of that city as his enlistment ran out. He then enlisted as a corporal in Capt. Jewett's Company, Capt. Bullard's regiment at Drummond Island in Lake George, N.Y., Sept. 24, 1777. He was badly injured by British gun fire and subsequently captured by the British. While a prisoner, his badly infected leg had to be amputated above the knee. A year later he was exchanged and sailed with 700 former prisoners to Boston.^{vii} He became a shoemaker.

From his business ledger we learn the price of his work: One pair of shoes—75 cents, two pair---\$1.75, Mending boots---25 cents, making boots---\$2.50, mend Lady's shoes---18 cents, make lady's shoes---75 cents, baby shoes---12 cents. When the account was paid, both he and the client signed the ledger. Payment could be made with a sack of potatoes, a load of firewood or by labor.

James Thomas came from Scituate, Massachusetts with his sons Joseph, John and James. They settled about 1760. There is no deed to verify when their land was purchased, but its borders appear on other deeds as early as 1767. The land extended from the Sasanoa River eastward across two points of land and two coves to the land of Nathan Knight or lot #5.

The family established a small mill at the upper end of a cove, called Wear Cove. James Thomas sold part of his land to James Jr. in 1786.^{viii} The deed mentions a 'mill Creek' that empties into the cove. Within the upper reaches of Wear cove, at low tide, is a line of stones or the dam that once controlled the tidewater for the mill.^{ix} The actual mill building sat upon the sluice bridge on the east side of the dam. James Jr. had taken over the operation of the mill, but he had financial problems in 1793 and sold his whole property to his brother Joseph. Two months later he bought it back from Joseph for less than he had originally received.^x Joseph had moved to New Canaan, Maine, where a larger mill was in operation. This may have been the end of the operation of the Thomas mill. More and more timber was needed to keep the various mills going and the island was running out. James Jr. sold his property to his brother John in 1815.^{xi} Frank Thomas, last member of the Thomas family living on the land, sold all the Thomas land to William Bonyun in August 1941.

Nathan Knight owned lot number five on the southwest side of the Hodgdon lots. Nathan came with his brothers Jonathan, John, Thomas and Nathaniel from Scarborough, Maine to Woolwich and became early woodcutters on Jeremy Squam. Jonathan and Thomas were woodcutters on land formerly owned by Samuel Greenleaf, near Thomas Cove (Rum cove). Jonathan sold his lot #33 to John in 1767^{xii} and moved to the Machias area and Thomas moved to Ducktrap (Lincolnville, Maine) where new cutting was taking place. Nathan sold his lot in 1777 to James Jewett and moved to New Cannan, Maine. Thomas Jr. who owned, with others, a lot at Lower Hells Gate, cut wood for Samuel Hall who owned the mill at

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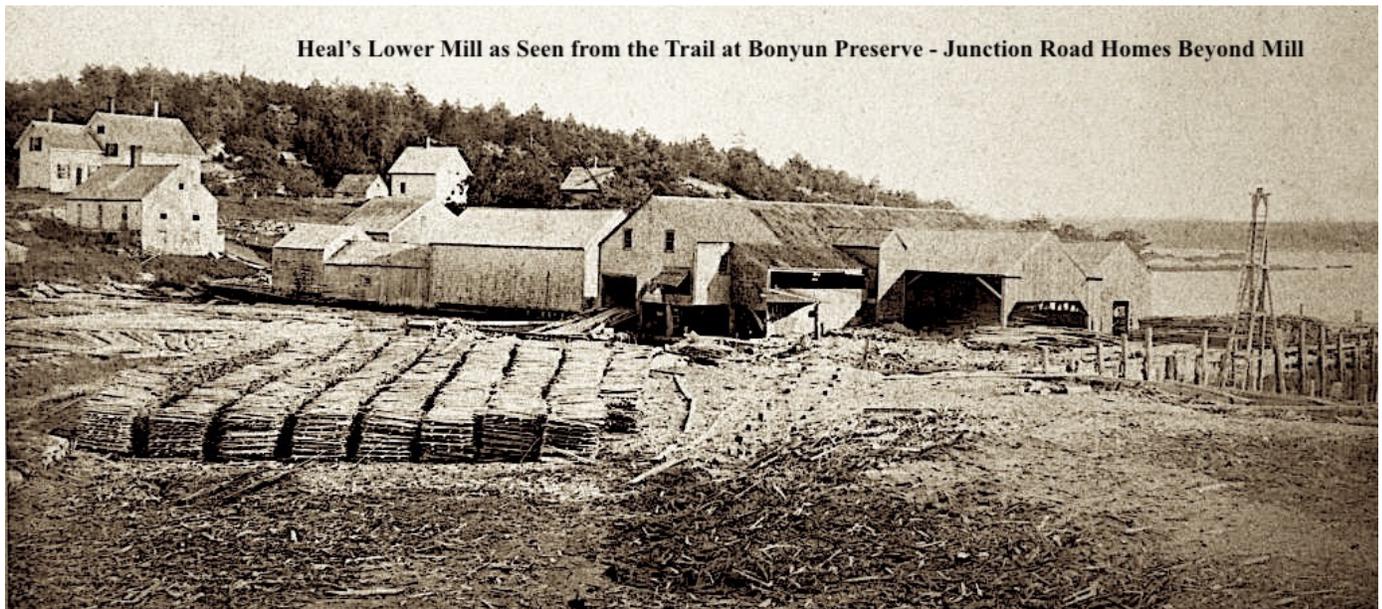
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Newcastle. He also moved to New Cannon. In each case they had cleared most of the timber on their lots. This was the end of woodcutting on the island for a period of time.

Later Mills (after town was incorporated in 1828)

The Lower Mill

Two merchants, James and Moses Riggs of Georgetown, purchased a strip of land from Stephen Jewett on the southeast side of Wear Cove in January 1829. The strip ran along what is Junction Road today. It consisted of the “flats” (low water line) to the high-water line. They also purchased another strip and a small island on the northwest side of the cove from John Thomas in March 1829. This consisted of one and one-half acres.^{xiii} The purchases enabled them to build two dams across the cove, one from the northwest side to the island and the other from the southeast side to the island. A sawmill was built on the southeast dam with a sluice beneath. This was completed in 1830 and valued at \$800. In 1833 they purchased an additional one third acre from Henry Kehale (Kehail) and built a mill house and barn for James. A gristmill was added to the dam. The sawmill was valued at \$1250 in 1836 and the gristmill valued at \$250.^{xiv}



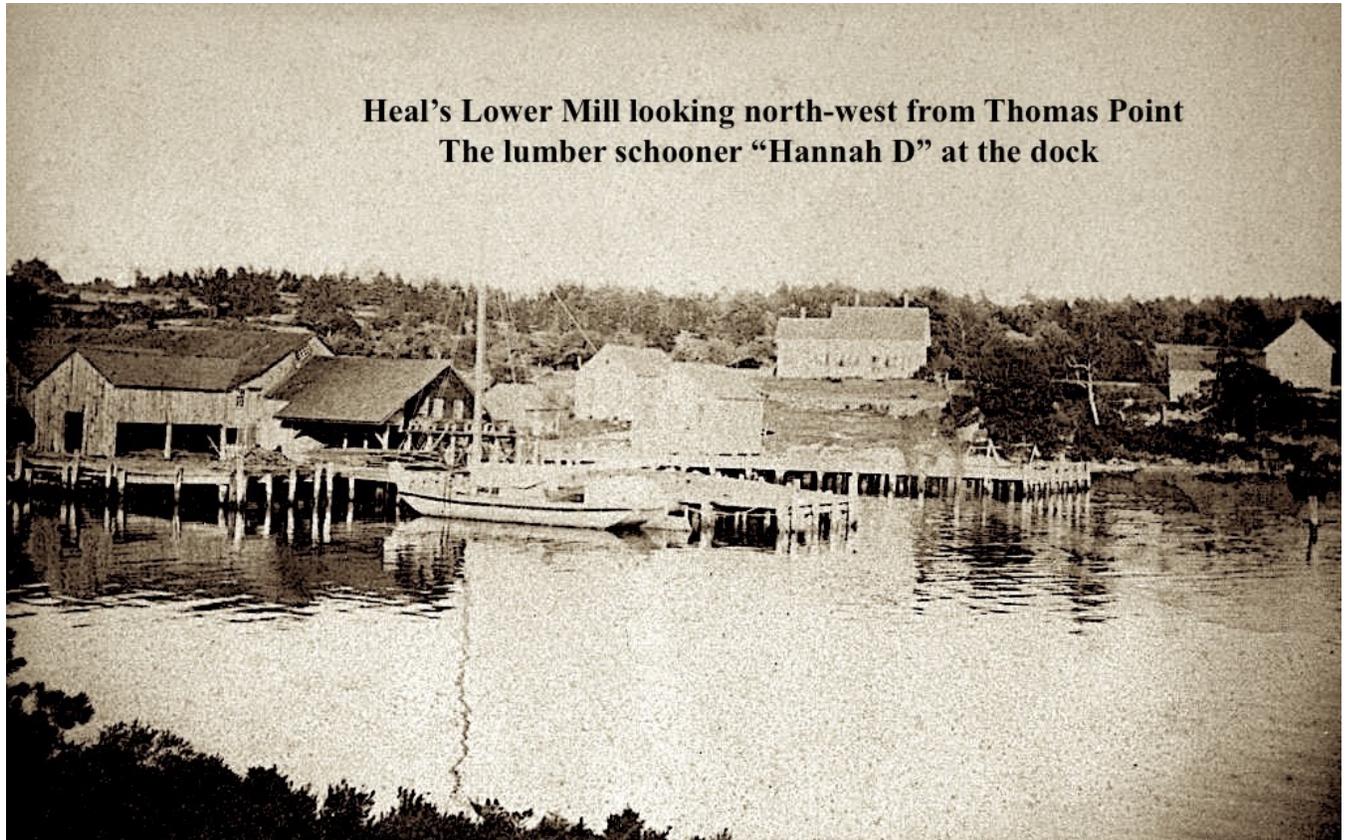
Benjamin Riggs, brother of James and Moses, bought the mills and land in 1840 for \$4800.^{xv} He was a merchant living in Bath and owned land up the Kennebec. He would have been responsible for shipping logs down the Kennebec and Sasanoa by schooner/barge to the mill. This investment enabled Benjamin to sell shares in the mill operation to James Drummond and his wife Eliza of Phippsburg.

By 1846, the business was so strong that James Riggs was able to buy back from Benjamin, James and Eliza Drummond a one-half interest.^{xvi} Two years later, he sold a one fourth part in all the property to

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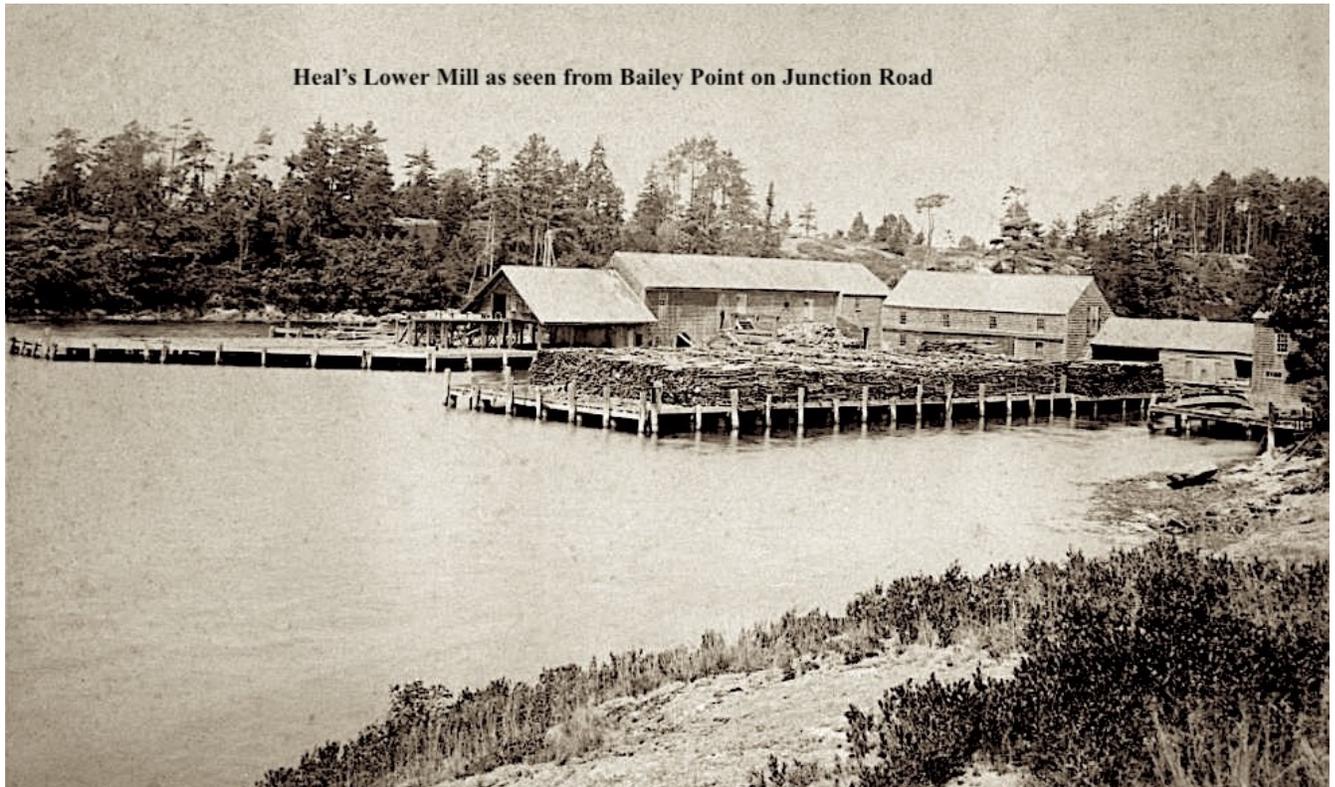
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Robbins Heal for \$900.^{xvii} William Heal, brother of Robbins took over the operation of the mills and moved into the mill house. He was able to purchase his one-fourth interest from James Riggs in 1851.^{xviii} It was not until 1867 that both Robbins and William were able to buy the other half share of the mills and land from Benjamin Riggs Jr., Ruth Fisher and other heirs, for \$750 each.^{xix} Now the mills became known as the Heal Brothers Mill. The operation of the sawmill continued until about 1898. The gristmill ceased many years earlier.



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The Upper Mill

The Shattuck Mill became known as the Upper Mill. It went through many changes as well. James Heal bought in 1821, from his father-in-law Jonas Shattuck, a one half interest in the “eastern” mill.^{xx} This proved to be the sawmill. The other half was owned by David Shattuck, who had gained by inheritance from his father Levi Shattuck one half interest in the saw mill and one half interest in the gristmill. Jonas Shattuck retained a one half interest in the gristmill.

The circular saw came into use about 1820, but James Heal, for financial reasons, was not able to convert one mill to this type of saw until Benjamin Riggs purchased a half interest in the eastern half of the double sawmill in 1838.^{xxi} The conversion of the single gristmill to another sawmill proved to be a promising investment for Benjamin. He could supply the timber. With the new saw, many types of milled cuts could be produced.

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The increase in income gave James and son Jonas Shattuck Heal the money to buy out David Shattuck's one quarter interest in one sawmill.^{xxii} On September 1, 1843 both James and Jonas were able to buy back from Benjamin Riggs for \$108 his interest in the mills. James and Moses Riggs signed as witnesses to the deed.^{xxiii} Their competitor in the mill was now removed. Benjamin Riggs got his logs milled and probably sold the milled lumber for a good profit.

Both Robbins and William Heal joined the business and gained their father's interest upon the death of James in 1861. The business remained productive and very profitable when building of cottages on the various islands began in 1880. A newspaper article of 1879 commented that the upper mill had to "shut down principally on account of a large amount of manufactured material on hand, for which they have trouble to secure vessels to ship." The mill continued in business until about 1890.

The Parsons Mill

Westbrook Greenleaf purchased the land and gristmill of Josiah Parsons from the heirs of Josiah in 1812. By 1840 he was producing 400 pounds of grain. He continued with the gristmill in 1848 and added a shingle machine to a small saw mill he had added a few years earlier. He did not retain the blacksmith business.^{xxiv} Enoch Greenleaf had been running a blacksmith shop on the corner of Greenleaf Road and the main road. He died in 1836 and John Tarbox, who had been driven off his land in Litchfield, returned to Westport and took over the blacksmith business. He lived on the Ebenezer Fowle farm.

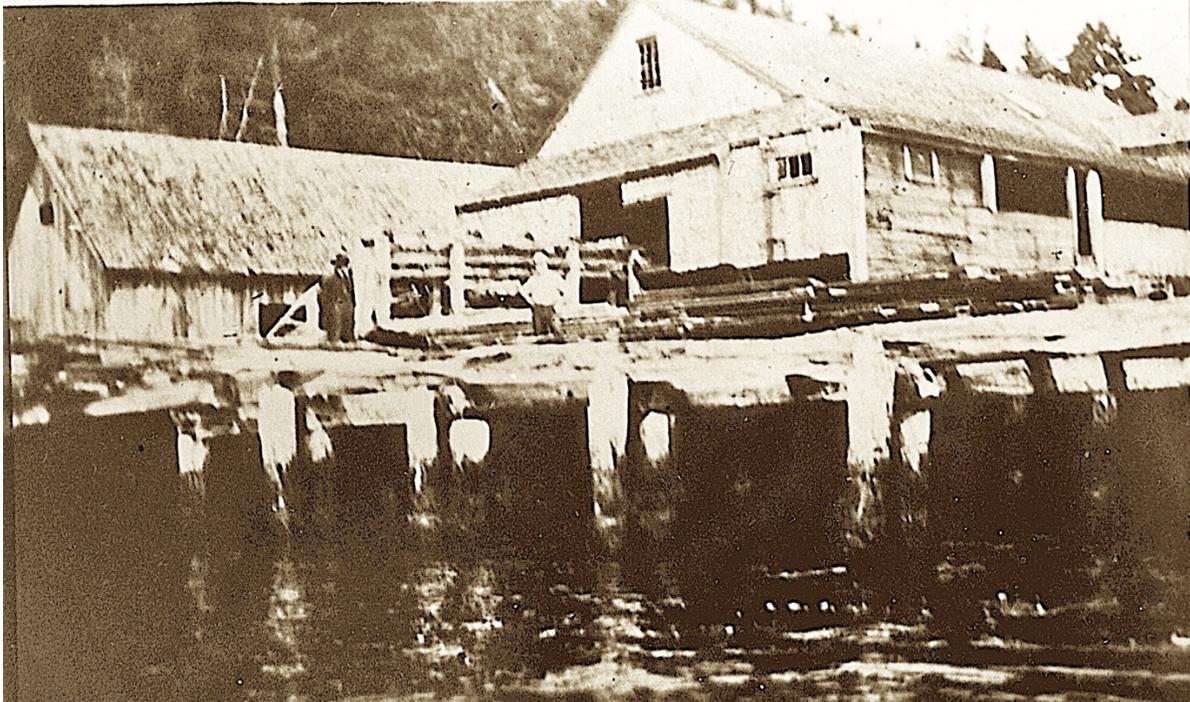
The Hodgdon Mill on Long Cove

As recorded earlier, Thomas Hodgdon III had been deeded, in 1812, the lot on the eastern side of the mill creek which emptied into the millpond on Long Cove. This was done in 1808. Since Thomas III was a fisherman, he may have been involved in the operation of the mill during the winter months. Thomas, son of Benjamin Sr., known as Thomas 2nd, was also included in the business by 1820 when shipping increased and more and more lumber was needed. As time went on, others became interested in the mill site. A large wharf was established for fishing vessels and a store to supply the vessels as well as the surrounding neighborhood.

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Hodgdon Mill at Long Cove - A.B Harriman (L) and Phillip Harriman (R) on the dock



The whole mill property continued to pass from one owner to another and was shared by others. Various land transactions participated in by the family, as well as later exchanges by other individuals, are listed numerically for clarification as follows:

1. Thomas III decided to sell his property to Caleb Hodgdon for \$1500 on August 1, 1823.^{xxv} Caleb was the son of Benjamin Hodgdon Sr. The land included all the land where Thomas lived, all of the point known as Kehail Point, a wharf, a store, a dwelling house and assorted buildings. The actual mills themselves are not listed. The wharf was on the small point of land that extended from Kehail Point to the eastern side of the dam.
2. Thomas Hodgdon 2nd, brother of Caleb, purchased from Alice Jewett on May 6, 1814, fifty acres of land on the west side of the mill pond.^{xxvi} The west end of the milldam was attached to this land and the purchase legalized the attachment. Thomas 2nd took over part of the operation of the mills from his father. Thomas Hodgdon III still had an interest in the mills. Thomas 2nd apparently sold his lot to brother Caleb before 1835 when Caleb sold the lot to William Greenleaf for \$1,000.^{xxvii} William then became a partner in the mill.
3. Thomas III got out of the business, on July 4, 1836 by selling a one third title to the mills with the mill dam from shore to shore, the “red” store and the wharf on which it stands to Samuel Tarbox for \$418.^{xxviii}

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4. Caleb Hodgdon moved to Boothbay about 1829 where he purchased land and established a new business. He continued to hold title to the lands he purchased from Thomas Hodgdon III in 1823 until December 29, 1840. He and Henry Kehail Jr. sold to Moses Jewett all of Kehail Point, thirty acres of land owned in common with Thomas Hodgdon and William Greenleaf and two acres which appears to be the land on which Henry Kehail Jr. lived. This two acres had been mortgaged to Moses Riggs.^{xxix} This cleared Caleb's title to the land attached to the mill. Henry remained on the two acres of land and eventually was able to buy it back. Henry was eliminated from any ownership in the mill and the buildings thereon.
5. William Greenleaf, brother-in-law to Samuel Tarbox Jr., appeared to have financial problems in 1842. He sold to Samuel Tarbox Sr. all his rights and title to his land on the west side of the mill as well as his one third title to the saw and grist mill.^{xxx} The price was \$1296.
6. William Greenleaf must have paid off his debt rather quickly. In 1846 a difference of opinion developed between William, Moses Jewett and Samuel Tarbox Jr. who believed he owned an interest in the mills. (His father Samuel Sr. acquired title from Thomas Hodgdon III) He, Samuel Jr., actually owned the small point of land on the east side of the mills that was attached to the milldam. As Justice of the Peace, William contacted the District Court in Topsham.^{xxxi} The court decided to create an agreement by having disinterested persons look over the property and divide it according to what satisfied the claimant. Samuel's land became the small strip on the north side of what is the East Shore Road today, southerly to the low water line of the cove and the little point containing his house, fish houses, wharf, hog yard, wood house, and garden. A smoke house on the dam was moved to Samuel's yard.
7. The garden fence on the east side divided Samuel's house lot from the lot on which Henry Kehail lived. This satisfied Moses Jewett who gained a title to the mill.

The division signifies the differences in the businesses of William and Samuel Jr. Samuel Jr. was a fisherman. His wharf is where he tied up his schooner. He caught herring in the spring, which required the smoke house. A passage way, between his house and the mill dam, was set aside for customers to get to the store on the dam. William had a one third interest in the sawmill, which had declined. The gristmill had been discontinued. A few years later, William gave up the business and moved to Bath where he established a grocery store.

8. Samuel Tarbox Jr. gained title to the flats surrounding the mill pond, restored the buildings and added a new saw. He continued to operate the sawmill on a small scale with the help of Charles B. Pierce. Charles had purchased the western lot of William Greenleaf and an interest in the mill from Samuel in 1871.^{xxxii} Samuel's interest progressed from fishing to shipping as a merchant to southern ports. In 1870, he moved to Bath and became a commercial agent. The following year his wife sold the house, land and mill rights to Hartley Hilton of Dresden.^{xxxiii} His son, Scott, took over the mill and revitalized it again with Charles Pierce. In 1906 the mill was partly

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destroyed by fire and Scott died in 1909. All the buildings were destroyed in the fire of 1918.

Part 3 - Brother Millers and Tide Mill Economics (from Bud Warren)

The long and narrow midcoast inner island of Westport stretches southward some ten miles from Wiscasset to Georgetown. The Sheepscot River flows along its eastern margin; the Sasanoa River, Knubble, Hockomock and Montsweag Bays along its west shore. There are two tide mills located on the southwestern corner of the island. The background of their founding and ownership pattern may be similar to that of other tide mills in Maine and elsewhere, but the great amount of detail preserved in three surviving account books makes these mills unique for study; their story is a valuable insight into the daily workings and economics of a 19th century tide mill. As such, we give it more attention than most others in this report.

Early in its history only one long road stretched down the spine of Westport Island, and any crossroads tended to be bridle paths leading to the mills. Shipping to and from these four or five tide-driven sites was by water. Island roads eventually followed the bridle paths, as wagons hauled home-cut timber to be sawn.¹

For mills anywhere, deed research, though fascinating, can be a title-searcher's intricate nightmare of shifting relationships. The ownership pattern of these two Westport mills is relatively straightforward, and interesting, for it is a tale of three sets of brothers.

The northern, or "Upper" Mill on Westport's western shore was built some time before 1784 by Daniel Dunton, who that year sold his sawmill and the site's water rights to Levi Shattuck from Providence, Rhode Island. Shattuck added a grist mill and was joined by his brother Jonas, and they worked together until 1821 when they sold the property to James Heal who added another saw to the operation. In 1838 Heal sold half interest in the eastern saw, the water rights, the wharf and the dam to Benjamin Riggs (whom we'll meet again later). In 1848, just six years later, it was all bought back by James Heal and his brother Robbins, who worked it for over twenty years. In 1869 three turbines were operating 12 hours a day a cutting a healthy 1,400,000 board feet of long lumber a year.² One time their very productivity got them into a bit of a bind. According to an 1879 newspaper article, the mill had to stop production for a while, because there were not enough vessels to handle the volume of lumber that had been cut for the many summer houses being erected on nearby islands.³

¹ McLean, *Islands of the Mid Maine Coast*, Vol. III, p. 183; Tarbox, 7/20/2002.

² Walter Wells, "Water Power in Maine" (page 503)

³ Tarbox

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Just under two miles south of the Upper Mill, on the same side of the island, lies a long cove, deep within which lie the remains of a small grist mill, probably built by James Thomas some time before 1786 when he sold it to his son James. In 1829 the younger Thomas sold land on the western side of the cove including the “flats” and a small island in the cove to James and Moses Riggs from Georgetown. The other side of the cove belonged to Stephen Jewett who deeded to the Riggs brothers half of “flats” up to the high water mark on his land on the east shore. These men built two dams, connecting from each mainland and across the “flats” to the island/ledge and Riggs then installed a sawmill on the massive structure they had created. Three years later they added a gristmill. This “lower mill” became known locally as “The Riggs Mill.” By then, the early grist mill deep within the cove was long gone.

In 1840 the Riggs brothers sold everything to another brother, Benjamin, who lived in Augusta and was involved in shipping timber from that part of the Kennebec River to mills further downstream. Then Brother James bought back half of it all, and some investors from Phippsburg jumped into the enterprise for a while. Next, still another set of brothers took the plunge. Robbins Heal, who had earlier purchased half of the Upper Mill, acquired a quarter interest in the operation in 1849. Two years later, his brother William bought another quarter share from the heirs of Benjamin Riggs. Finally in 1868 the Heal boys acquired what remained, and they now owned both mills on Westport’s western shore.

The Heal Brothers’ Mills

The physical layouts at these sites are typical, the builders taking advantage of the topography. The pond at the Upper Mill is about 30 acres, the stone-faced dam, still firm in most places, stretches for about 70 feet. The spillway is still well defined.

The long, narrow pond at the Lower Mill was formed by the three-section dam that follows the shape of the small island and its ledge in the cove. The dam’s impressive front section still stands almost twelve feet high at the west end, stretching out from the east shore toward the island a good two hundred feet, its face still plumb and square. There is a 9.5 foot opening on the east end and another 9 foot section of dam wall extending from that shore; some sort of gate would have closed that opening. Behind this mill, well up the long cove, are the remains of a small early grist mill, dating from about 1795.

A wide opening for the gate and sluiceway, lies at the west end of the rock dam. The small island and ledge make up the middle part of the dam and from there, more loosely-piled stone completes it. Wells reports two turbines of 20 horse-power each, operating 12 hours a day, cutting 700,000 feet of lumber and grinding 5,000 bushels of grain a year.⁴ Though ownership had gone completely over to the Heals, he calls it “The Riggs’ Mill” and the name is still used by

⁴ Wells, p 503.

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some of the locals, to distinguish it from the Upper Heal Mill, though “Lower Heal” is used by some.

Photographs

Old photographs show the buildings at both sites. An 1880 image of the Upper Mills building (see page 13) shows a large primary structure with extended porch-like roofs at the inboard end and along the side toward the sluice. An attached two-story gabled ell stands over where a saw or turbine might have been sited. Unshuttered window space stretches along that porch roof extension, for ventilation or perhaps to admit light, or even to allow workers to toss out short waste material. An ell extends waterside from the main mill building, and from that another un-sided, roofed extension. A plank bridge crosses the pond just east of the mill; this is now the causeway carrying the town road. Along both sides of the cove, pilings still in the mud indicate extensive wharf space where lumber could have been piled. Photographs of the Lower Mill show a huge wharf piled with lumber (See page 10).

Account Books

This researcher has found only three sets of account books for Maine tide mills. One of these has been of only marginal use for this study, and one of a tide mill dam has been discussed above.⁵ But the records of the Upper and Lower Heal Mills, covering different activities from 1865 to 1886 are an important window into features of tide mill operation that have not been studied before.⁶ More detailed study of the financial figures that are shown would give a clearer picture of the economics of the industry. We will comment primarily on operational highlights.

Raw material was acquired from various places and individuals. Some of it was cut locally, but as at Winnegance, the bulk of it came by water, rafted down the Kennebec and here the Sasanoa Rivers, towed by steam boat. The Upper Mill’s account shows many purchases of logs, the largest entry of \$3576.48, being for 298,040 feet of logs, at \$12 a thousand. Other entries list simply “logs” or “pine logs.” One payment is for “1 raft of logs” and another of \$688 for a towing bill.

⁵ One set of minute books for the Stroudwater Tide Mill Dam Company is discussed above. Another for the Hodgdon Brothers tidal sawmill in East Boothbay, 1912-1940. Unexamined at present is one that the Beal Historical Society holds, an 1827 ledger book for an early tidal grist mill on Beal Island.

⁶ Three account books of the Heal Brothers mills on Westport, were graciously loaned for study by Charles Howe

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The varied activity carried on at these two mills is representative of any sawmill of the period and is undoubtedly similar to that of other tide mills. Entries titled “Sales of Lumber at the Lower Mill” indicate the types of wood and the quality of the end product:

Cedar, pine, spruce, hemlock, oak; spruce plank, wharf logs, hemlock logs, shingle logs
Joists, frames, sled, pine gutters, deck plank, spar, sloop frame, topmast, boat bods (boards),
forefoot, waterway, planks, clear, lath, finish boards, floor boards, box boards, merch
boards.

Charges for other typical mill activities are listed in other parts of the record:

grinding planer knives, filing cross cut saw, sharpening drill, trucking plank, sawing,
sawing sled, sawing oak.

What was charged for sawing of logs brought into the mill by others is separately listed. There are also numerous entries showing large amounts of lumber being loaded on schooners. One shipment for over a million board feet must have been a large schooner.

Labor costs, shown on a daily basis for the hundred twenty-three weeks from September 1876 to December 21, 1879, are particularly revealing. Under the heading “Cost of Sawing,” there is a running record of names of men at work each week. The number of days that each was on the job is listed, Six, seven, eight or nine men were employed during eighty-eight of those weeks. The largest number employed any week was eleven, and for two weeks (each in wintertime) only two worked. Unlike some tide mills further inland where the water is less salty than at Westport, the Lower Heal mill did not shut down during the winter as it is only a few miles from the open ocean, though the record does show some curtailment of operations during the cold months of December and January. Weeks of one-day (one each year), a half day and several two and a half and two and three quarters days were listed. In general, fewer men worked those cold weather months. Two of these workers, probably the chief sawyer and foreman, were paid a higher daily wage than others: \$2.00 and \$1.50 rather than the standard \$1.25. When other men were working a short week, these men usually remained on the job.

These records also give insight into the wide variety of jobs that were done at sawmills. The general notation “work,” “labor” or “day’s labor” indicated a man’s time. These specific designations spell out specific tasks to which they were assigned:

gathering chips, around mill, on slabs, sawing, in mill, filing, grind saw, blacksmithing,
running logs, 3 tides hauling logs, slabs, work on slip, 4-1/2 tides saw dust, 3-1/2 days
plaining, on boat, on road, driving piles, moving [pile] driver.

A few of the jobs may need a bit of explanation:

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“3 Tides Tailing” – Chasing down loose logs

“3 Tides Rolling on”- Rolling logs onto the saw carriage

“Troting (trotting)”- Carrying on “edging”. When a board is first cut, one or both sides still have the bark on it; the plank will then be run through a saw to remove it, and the edging may be saved for firewood or for “sticking” (placing between planks when they are piled for storage)

Like many 19th century entrepreneurs, William Heal ran a “company store” supplying his workers with certain essentials, against which costs he charged their labor in his mill. Every once in a while, a settlement was made, the worker receiving cash for his labor after deducting what he’d charged at the store or paying cash for what he owed. The list of what was supplied in this way represents typical supplies for the period, both consumable and non-edible:

Consumables: Sugar, coffee, tea, flour, rice, molasses, beef, veal, pork lard, butter, beans, steak, salt, pepper, fish, soda,, cod fish, hake, crackers, potatoes, cheese, matches, meal, corn.

Non-Edibles: Soap, nails, ax handle, shirts, overalls & jumper, shoes, 1 pair of braces, basket, bean pot, pine boards, pail, broom, K oil [kerosene?].

The Schooner

A special feature of the Heals’ operation was their shared ownership of an old 66 foot long, 74 ton coastal schooner, the *Hannah D*. Like schooners of her day, she was commodious. At 21 feet wide she carried a big lumber cargo. Robbins and William Heal each owned 6/16 of the vessel. From 1877 thru 1886, she sailed to Boston a dozen or so trips every year, packed with lumber, cord wood and laths; all products of their mills. Each voyage took about three weeks out and back. This excellent arrangement allowed the Heals to reach a wide market for their sawn lumber as well as for a large volume of slab wood created by the milling process. The lumber would have likely fetched a better price than they’d have received locally, and the otherwise waste material would have sold readily in the Boston firewood market. Photographs of the Heal operation and several other Maine mills show large piles of this by-product neatly stacked on wharfs. The carefully recorded expenses for *Hannah D*’s Boston trips also include items such as pilotage, hospital dues, rope, paint, etc. -- all the normal costs of operating.

The price that the Heals were receiving for the lumber they sawed is not listed in Hanna D’s record, but the freight they were charging on the schooner account varied from \$1.50 to \$1.70 a thousand. Cord wood, edgings and slab were carried for a bit more, as it must have meant greater handling time by the crew.

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An entry for October 1884 lists the simple word “wreck.” That year there were only nine trips to Boston. Several pages of expenses, a number of them at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, suggest that the event occurred somewhere off the Piscataqua River. The record shows that the vessel sailed again for the Heals for at least two more years.

Hodgdon Mill at Long Cove: “The Dam’s in the Wrong Place!”

Tide millers sometimes realized that where a dam was sited just wasn’t the right place. Long Cove on the south east corner of Westport makes in from the Sheepscot River on an almost straight line from the southeast corner of Westport Island for about a quarter of a mile before making a dogleg right turn and then going another quarter of a mile before ending in a small, gentle marsh. Prior to 1793 an early tide mill was built here by Thomas Hodgdon. Over time, a subsequent owner realized that the amount of water in the guzzle to the marsh wasn’t enough to produce what he wanted to, so he built a new dam a hundred yards or so downstream, taking advantage of an additional small cove gaining almost doubling his pond space. The new mill operated successfully until 1918 when it was burned by a major forest fire and was never rebuilt.

Note: Written by Bud Warren, founder of the Tide Mill Institute, based on his research of Westport Island tide mills (Approx. 2010)

References for Part 2 (Cora Tarbox):

ⁱ Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 57/240-241. This is a deposition pertaining to a suit against Timothy Parsons and the land he held for his brother John Parsons. This record is now in the Lincoln County Court Archives.

ⁱⁱ Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 57/240.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 16/129 & 34/143.

^{iv} Fannie S. Chase, *Wiscasset in Pownalborough, A History of the Shire Town and Salient Historical Features of the Territory between the Sheepscot and the Kennebec Rivers*, (Wiscasset, Maine, The Wiscasset Public Library, 1967), 20..

^v Olivia E. Coolidge, *Colonial Entrepreneur, Dr. Silvester Gardiner and the Settlement of Maine’s Kennebec Valley*, (Gardiner, Maine: Tilbury House Publishing & Gardiner Library Association) 1999. 157

^{vi} Lincoln County Records of Deeds, 17/167.

^{vii} Lemuel Shattuck, *Memorials of The Descendants of William Shattuck, The Progenitor of the Families in America That Have Borne His Name*. (Boston, MA: Dutton and Wentworth, 1855) 148-149.

^{viii} Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 20/72. Beginning at an oak tree standing in Cornelius Tarbox ‘s line, thence running south and by west to James Jewett’s line, thence running west and by north till you come to the Mill Creek, thence running western side of the creek.

^{ix} Department of Commerce, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Ocean Survey Map, Boothbay Harbor to Bath, Maine. No. 13296. The map indicates a cove between Thomas Point and Bailey Point

^x Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 30/173.

^{xi} Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 141/117.

^{xii} Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 6/268.

^{xiii} Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 147/117 & 147/437.

^{xiv} Inventory Book for the Town of Westport, Valuations for the Town of Westport, 1836.

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- xv Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 178/548 - 549.
- xvi Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 188/335.
- xvii Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 190/245-246.
- xviii Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 197/224.
- xix Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 239, 290 & 291.
- xx Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 125/3
- xxi Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 118-119
- xxii Inventory Record Book for the Town of Westport now in the History Committee collection. Dated 1838.
- xxiii Lincoln county Registry of Deeds, 179/ 357-358.
- xxiv Notes of Beatrice Harriman, collection of the Westport Island History Committee. Beatrice Harriman, *Family Records of Westport, Maine, 1970.*
- xxv Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 119/117.
- xxvi Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 92/161- 162.
- xxvii Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 161/405 - 406.
- xxviii Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 165/553.
- xxix Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 174/502.
- xxx Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 180/271-272.
- xxxi Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 185/247 - 249.
- xxxii Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 245/249.
- xxxiii Lincoln County Registry of Deeds, 274/506. This deed is from the Executor of the Estate of Samuel Tarbox Jr., Franklin Reed of Bath and Philena A. Tarbox of Bath.