

VF Industries 3

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*Cannon Balls for Washington's Army
Once Rolled from Kingston Iron Mills*

Industry Thrived for Century From Their Water Power

By EDITH S. COBB

Idle curiosity over a rust colored swamp, an apparently man-made brook, and an abandoned cellar hole prompted some research on the area around Russell's pond in Kingston. A little delving into the history of the town revealed that this charming residential neighborhood of scarcely more than a dozen homes was the scene, from the early 1700's to the late 1800's, of the greatest concentration of industry of any comparable area in Kingston.

Within a radius of half a mile there were at least five mill groups operating under what was known as the "Trout or Furnace Brook privilege." In those days, the air resounded to the swish of the waterwheel, the hum of the sawmill, and the clang of the anchor forge and foundry. The mute remains of these industries lie half hidden today, barely out of reach of the passerby. The dense growth of summer completely hides them from view, and even at other times of the year they have to be sought out to be seen.

This area of activity extended from Furnace pond—a small body of water now traversed by Elm street—to Russell's pond, which is situated between Elm street and Indian Pond road at a point just south of the connecting way known as Sylvia Place road.

POWER CAME FROM THREE SMALL BROOKS

All of these mills depended entirely on the water from three small brooks—Trout brook, Winter Meadow brook and a tributary—which had their origin in the vicinity of Indian pond. It was to accommodate these industries that the ponds in the area were created. Of the four ponds, only Furnace pond is natural. These man-made reservoirs are an example of early engineering feats, the result of back-breaking toil, to obtain and store up water for power.

The first pond, known as Bryant's Mill pond, and situated at the southerly edge of Sylvia Place road, was undoubtedly made for the first enterprise in this group, a sawmill which was established prior to 1721. The mill was on Trout brook and probably stood where the old foundation can still be seen below street level on the north side of Sylvia Place road.

FIRST ANCHOR WORKS ESTABLISHED IN 1794

In 1794 when the first anchor works in Kingston was established, the owner undertook an ambitious project to secure the use of the water from the Winter Meadow brook and divert it into Bryant's pond. The brook, with its two branches, originally flowed between the two houses on the south side of Sylvia Place road and continued to the other side of the

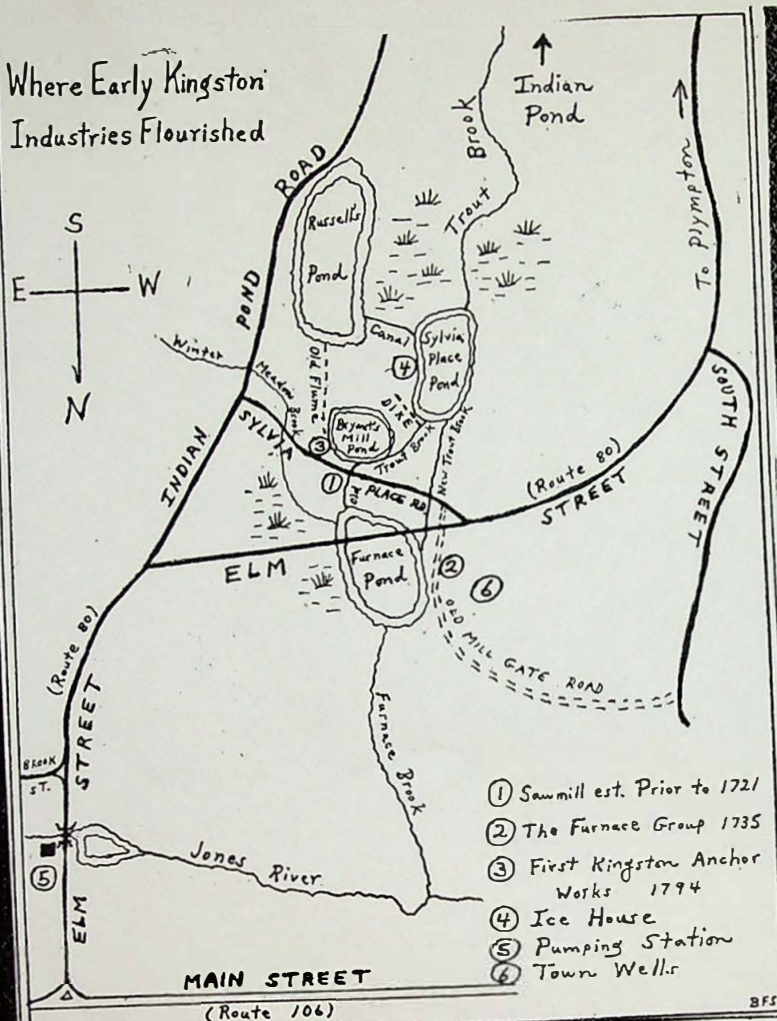
street and into Furnace pond. Today only the tributary, the Little Winter Meadow brook, follows the original course. A dam was placed across the brook, then the water was led by a ditch or canal along a higher level into the iron works pond. The reservoir thus formed became known as Canal pond, now Russell's pond. The foundation of this old anchor forge remains today on the south side of Sylvia Place road, at the edge of the pond and obscured by trees and underbrush. It was used successively as a spade and shovel works, an iron works, a tack mill and finally as a saw and boxboard mill. It was abandoned in about 1900, and the building burned sometime later.

Thomas Russell conceived the idea of making a second reservoir, this time on Trout brook. Across the foot of the Sylvia Washburn meadows (to the south and rear of Bryant's pond) he threw up a huge earthen dike, which soon created a fair sized pond for the works below. He made a new ditch connecting the old Canal pond with what became known as Sylvia Place pond.

BOG ORE FOR THE IRON MILLS

When Mr. Russell built a second tack factory, used later as a stave mill, he dug a flume from Canal pond to his wheel, discharging into the iron works on Bryant's pond below. It was then that Canal pond became known as Russell's pond. Freshets have removed most of the evidence of the earliest canal, but a slight indentation still marks the course of the tack factory flume, and the dike at Sylvia Place pond and the newer canal which connects it with Rus-

Where Early Kingston Industries Flourished



sell's pond are practically intact today. The recent hurricanes left the little ditch straddled by fallen trees and underbrush, and a few stones from the sides have tumbled into the stream. One can still follow the path at its edge to Sylvia Place pond. Just off this path is a cellar hole, the site of an ice house which was used as late as 40 or 50 years ago.

From the huge earthen dike that Mr. Russell created, down to the right is visible a swamp tinged bright orange from the natural iron ore deposit. Several large trees have been uprooted from

this swamp mire and lie with their roots exposed, caked with this colorful mud. During the winter when most swamps are brittle with frost, this mud remains soft and oozy to a depth of several inches. Local bog ore was dug from the swamps and streams of this and neighboring towns for use in the various Kingston iron works. The growth of the iron industry was the chief development in the first 50 years of the Town's existence. Pots, kettles, skillets, mortars and pestles were made there. A variety of items ranging from anvils to andirons were cast, and during the Revolutionary war

cannon balls were made at "The Furnace" for General Washington's army.

Of the mill groups in this area the one known as the "Furnace Group" was situated on Mill Gate road, one of the town's oldest ways and not shown on any of the modern maps. It leaves Elm street near the O. Wellington Stewart house and curves in by Furnace pond and through the woods to South street, emerging adjacent to the Ertman property. The "Furnace Group" was founded in 1735, and at the height of its prosperity it comprised a blast furnace, a boarding house for workmen, sheds for the storage of charcoal, a casting house, a warehouse for finished goods, a pot house, a blacksmith shop and a retail store. It used the dam on Furnace pond, the knoll to the rear of the pond where in more recent years the house of Howard Constable stood, and space on either side of Mill Gate road. In those days this was an open field, but it has since grown up to pines.

20 FOOT WATERWHEEL SALVAGED FOR IRON

On this site there was also a sawmill in 1761, a nail and tack works in 1840, a gristmill, and finally, Constable's workshop,

which burned in 1918. The site of the old forge is still discernible. A stone-reinforced ditch with almost motionless, rust-colored water stands to the rear of the knoll. The water used to come underground from Furnace brook to the huge water wheel, which was 20 feet in diameter. For many years after the mill was abandoned the wheel lay there, until it was salvaged for iron during World War I.

This stream is now inactive, because the course of Furnace brook has been diverted and is now part of the fish run system. The Trout brook has also been diverted from its original course, and each spring the herring make their way from Jones river to Furnace brook and thence to Trout brook and Sylvia Place pond by means of a cement fishway built about 20 years ago.

The sloping land from Indian pond down to Furnace pond is Kingston's water shed. The town now owns the property back of Furnace pond, lately owned by Mr. Constable, and has installed 24 wells there. The main line of water supply emerges from this group of wells and flows by natural gravity down to the pumping station on Jones river. Although the natural flow is sufficient to meet normal conditions, a deisel pump has been installed at the site of the wells for use in the summer to speed the flow of water into the town.

From time to time other industries have thrived in this locality. Eleazor Faunce, a dairy farmer, built his house on the easterly shore of Russell's pond and cooled his milk in the water of Winter Meadow brook, just across Indian Pond road from his home. For his purpose he built a shed with a bulkhead bridging the stream. Around 1900 fish hatcheries were maintained on this same brook.

The Russell Loring cranberry bog, off Indian Pond road, originally known as Slugg's bog, makes use of Trout brook, which is dammed up there to form a reservoir. From there the brook winds a leisurely course through swampy land into Sylvia Place pond and emerges at the concrete fishway.

A relatively new enterprise is the Stewart blueberry plantation, which occupies ground on both sides of Trout brook and adjacent to Furnace pond.

Russell's pond is one of the beauty spots of Kingston. Unchanged for nearly 200 years, it has all the charm of a natural pond, framed in lush green foliage during the summer, reflecting the brilliant foliage of fall and placid in the icebound hush of winter. This has been a favorite swimming place for many a generation