

The Former Mills

The milling trade prospered in rural Ontario during the 1800's. In a small community, it was not unusual for more than one mill to be in operation. Such was the case in the hamlet of Utopia which had three operating mills in the late 1800's.

"Along with the church and the schoolhouse, the mill was considered essential. While the church served the needs of the soul, the school the needs of the mind, the mill served the needs of the body."¹³

A sawmill was being run by a Mr. Edmundson in 1870 which was later sold to a gentleman named Mr. Dawson. In 1874, another mill was set up by a Mr. James Raymesbottom, situated below the 6th line bridge on Bear Creek downstream of the present mill.¹⁴

In 1864, Mr. James Spink established a grist and sawmill on Bear Creek. The gristmill sat where the Bell Mill now stands; the sawmill was just downriver on the opposite bank from it, where a marshy channel still exists. Mr. Spink's mill was sold in 1879 to Mr. Richard Bell; the mill remained in the Bell family until being assumed in 1967 by the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority.

At the time when both the sawmill and the gristmill were in operation, it was necessary to run one at night and one during the day as there was insufficient water in Bear Creek to operate both simultaneously.¹⁵ The sawmill on the north side of the Creek probably operated only into the 1880's. Evidence of Mr. Raymesbottom's mill's foundations may still be seen on the north side of Bear Creek west of the 6th Concession of Essa.

In the era before other sources of power, water energy was of great importance, and it was because of the waterflow of Bear Creek that Utopia came to be such an important rural centre.