

# The First Mills



Peru was officially incorporated as a township Dec. 28, 1792. At that time there were no buildings in the location where Peru Village now stands. John Cochran, known as the founder of Peru, built the first house here on the east bank of the Little Ausable River in 1795. Realizing the potential water power the river could provide, he also built a grist mill and another house for his miller, Thomas Morse. Cochran next built a saw-mill at this same location, but on the other side of the river. “Two houses, a grist-mill and a saw-mill made quite a settlement in those days and the place soon became known as Cochran’s Mills” (from Hurd’s History of Clinton & Franklin Cos. 1880). Prior to this time, the early settlers of the area had to travel all the way to Plattsburgh for their milling needs.

The grist-mill and saw-mill were eventually sold to John Hackstaff and the infant village then became known as Hackstaff’s Mills. The mills and surrounding property passed on to the Heyworth family who, in turn, leased them to Albert Mason in 1883. Mason moved his bee-hive business from Goshen to this location and started A. Mason & Sons Lumber Co. The saw-mill expanded many times over the years but the grist-mill was mainly used for storage and as a horse barn. Mason’s teams of horses were housed there right up to the 1940’s.

The grist-mill and original saw-mill were burned and razed in 1967 to make way for the new highway bridge.



The gristmill, where farmers would bring a wide variety of grains, including buckwheat, oats and corn, to be ground into flour or animal feed. Milling was a three-story process. The grain was lifted in sacks onto the top floor of the mill by hoist. The sacks were then emptied into bins, which fed the grain down through a hopper to the millstones on the floor below. The grain then flowed through a sloping trough into a hole in the center of the top stone. The milled grain (flour) was collected as it emerged through the grooves in the bottom stone from the outer rim of the stones and was fed down a chute to be collected in sacks on the ground floor. Photo courtesy of the Town of Peru Historian’s Collection.



The sawmill, as part of A Masons and Sons Lumber Mill, c. 1900. Please note the stone arch on the river that’s still visible today, where water that had carried the logs to the mill flowed back into the river. Photo courtesy of the Town of Peru Historian’s Collection.

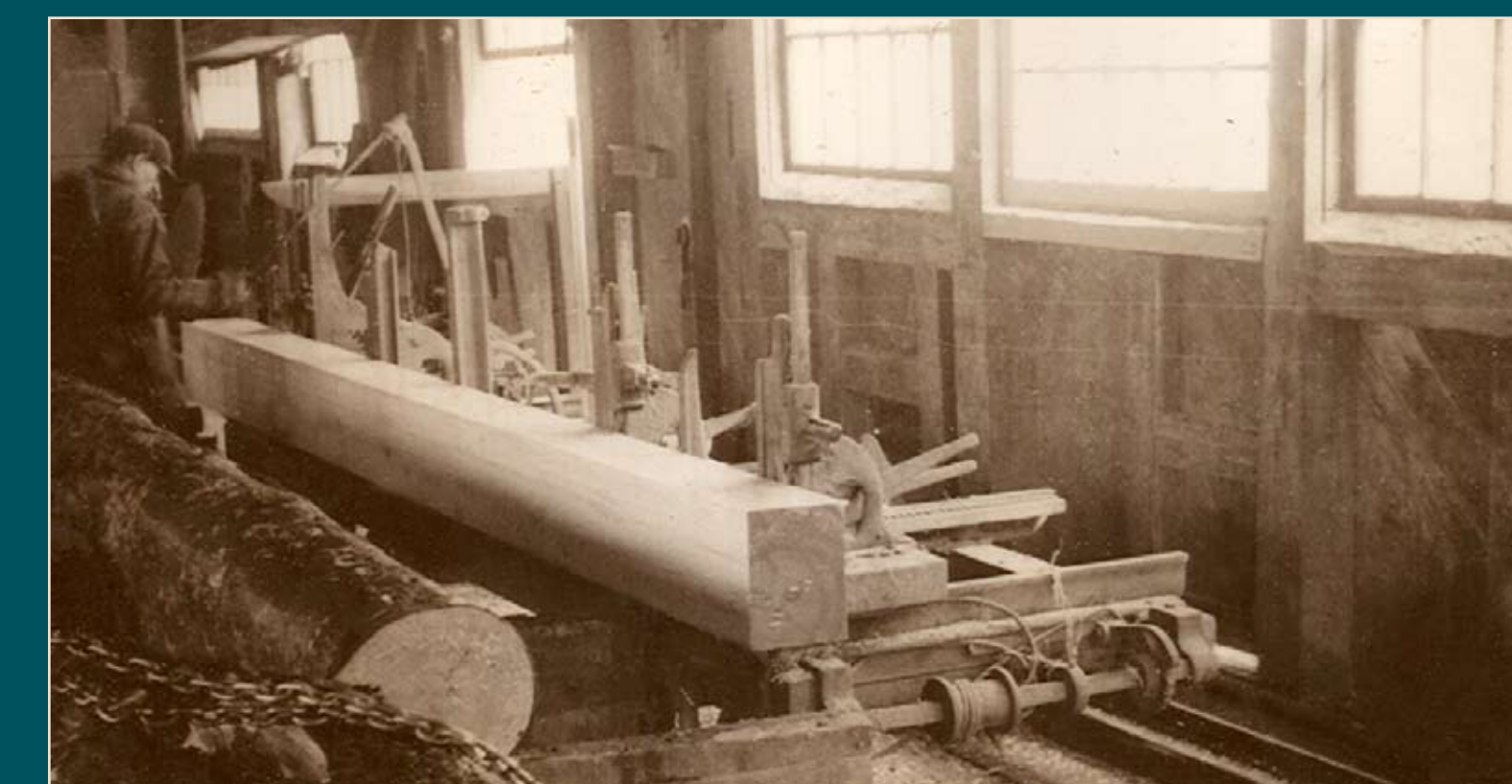


Up until 1890 most of the flour in America was made using millstones. The bottom stone was fixed to the floor, while the top stone was turned by the main shaft, driven by the waterwheel. The distance between the stones could be varied to produce the grade of flour required; moving the stones closer together produced finer flour. Photo from the Henry Ford Museum courtesy of C.A. Sheild.

Ad from The Plattsburgh Sentinel, 1876.



Armed with only axes and cross cut saws, farmers would head into the woods in the winter with their teams of horses to cut and haul logs back to the saw mill. Credit: Town of Peru Historian’s Collection.



In the sawmill, c. 1900, the first cut; turning logs into lumber. Photo courtesy of the Town of Peru Historian’s Collection.