

Early Industries



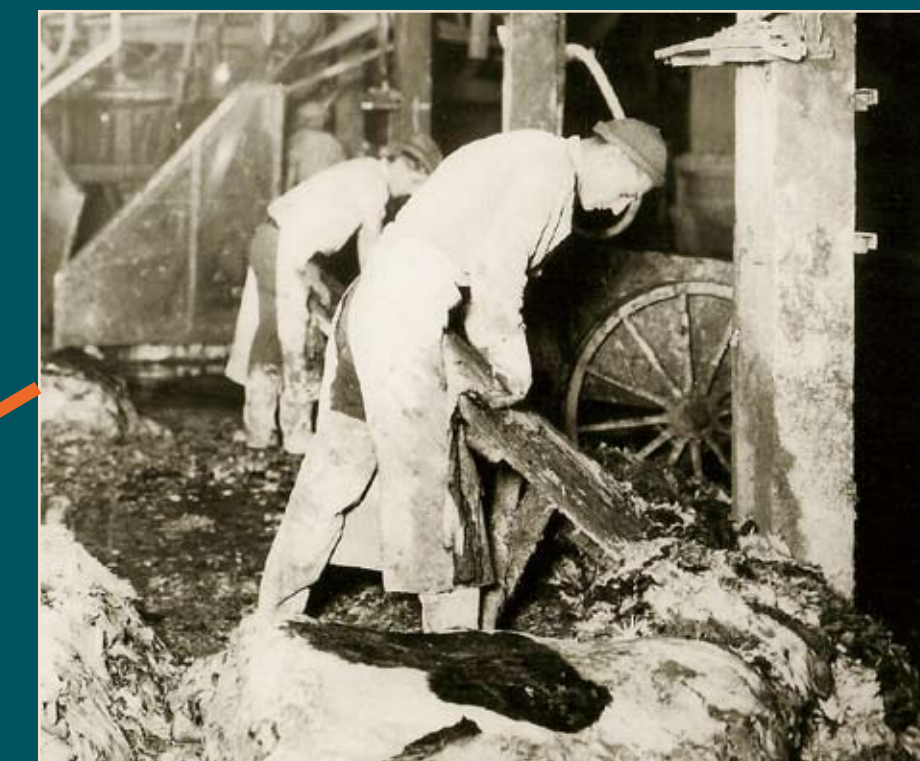
Part of 1869 Beers map, showing the Village of Peru. Water and waterpower were crucial for most of the first industries established by the early European settlers in the region. Can you find the gristmill (G Mill) and sawmill (S Mill)? They were built in 1795, beginning almost 200 years of industrial development on this site.



Pressing the apple pomace to make cider

The apple cider made in Peru nowadays is primarily sweet cider. But back in the 1800s, the demand was for hard cider. Hard cider was a popular fermented drink served regularly at home. It was inexpensive to make, didn't need refrigeration, had a long shelf life, and was safe to drink (sometimes the water was not!). Hard cider not consumed in time turned to vinegar, used to preserve food and as a dressing.

Farmers brought apples from their orchards to the mill. Making cider was a two step process. First, using a water powered mill, the apples were ground. Then, the resulting pomace was stacked in layers, separated by either cloth or straw, and pressed. The juice flowing from the press was purified and stored in wooden casks. Farmers brought the casks home and left them to ferment.



Scrapping the hides. Photo courtesy of the Fulton County Historical Society, Gloversville NY.

If you lived in Peru in the 1800s, you might be wearing leather boots made right here. Tanneries, then one of the most important industries in the area, made leather from animal hides. In 1845 there were 21 tanneries in Clinton County. Leather was in great demand, for shoes, boots, saddles and harnesses. The tannery here, owned and operated by Samuel Hurd Martin and John P. Cate, supplied all the main saddlers in the area and the military.

The process of turning hides into leather took over a year, it was hard, smelly work. The cattle hides had to be washed of flesh and blood, soaked in a lime solution to loosen hair, scraped clean, rinsed, and soaked in vats full of water and ground hemlock bark, for up to 6 months. Finally, they were hung to dry and rolled smooth.



Merino lambs at the Catskill Merino Sheep Farm, Goshen NY. Photo courtesy of Eugene Wyatt.

In mid-1800s Peru, sheep outnumbered people three to one! Farmers raised their own wool and made cloth with spinning wheel and loom. Water power made weaving much cheaper and quicker. In 1836, Richard Heyworth built the stone building on this site as a woolen mill; water was diverted from the river along a channel to provide power. According to the census of 1845, the Peru mill produced 14,000 yards of woolen cloth and 5,500 yards of mixed cotton & woolen cloth. The cloth from that period probably wore like iron but was stiff and uncomfortable. The coming of the railroad in the late 1800s ended the region's economic isolation and many small industries such as this woolen mill ceased to be. People of Peru imported cheaper and better cloth from the great mills of New England.



Inferior grade potatoes brought for sale to a starch factory. Photo courtesy of Library of Congress.

Back in the 1800s, potatoes were a major crop in Peru, covering over 800 acres. While good to eat, they were also used for making starch, providing farmers a market for potatoes they couldn't sell for food. There were 8 starch factories listed in Clinton County in the 1855 census. Starch was primarily sold to the textile mills in the east to make cotton fabric stronger and softer.

After it was used as a woolen mill, the stone building on this site was used to make starch. Potatoes were washed, rasped to break them apart, soaked, and the skins and large fibers screened off. The remaining starch water was poured into vats for further washing and settling; finally, water was drained off and the starch dried. The white, powdery starch was bagged and shipped out by train.



Town of Peru or Other Logo