

A Field Guide to the Rockville Mills: Notes for a Walking Tour

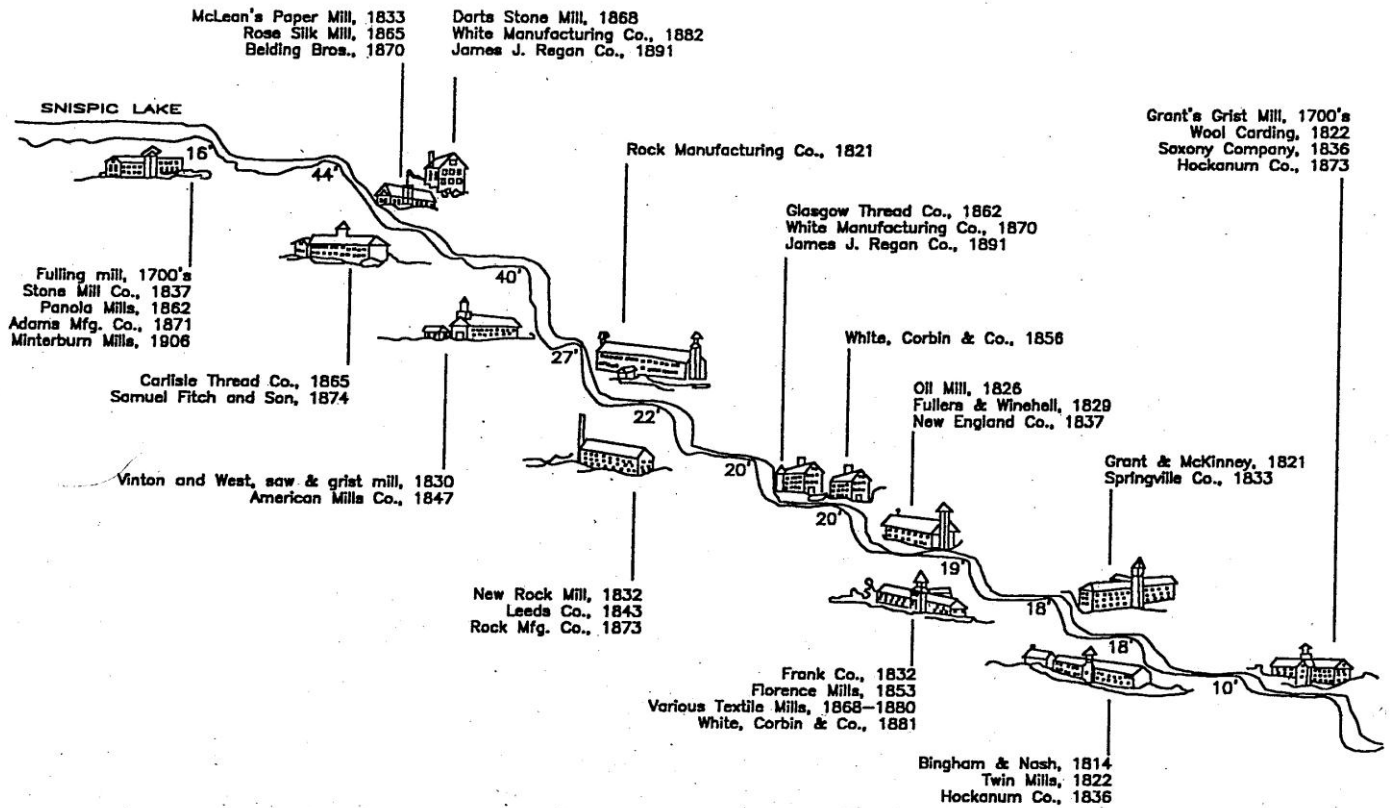
The map included with this article shows the mills that lined the Hockanum River as it flowed through Rockville. For each mill site, the map lists the names and dates of the companies that operated there. The numbers by each site indicate the height of the falls. From the first mill site near Snipsic Lake to the Saxony Mill site on West Street, the Hockanum river falls over 200 feet. This steep drop spread over the length of the river made the Hockanum an ideal source for waterpower in the early years of industrial development in Vernon. Earlier mills were located on the Tankerhoosen River in the Talcottville section of town and over in the Valley Falls region, but the limited strength of the water power restricted the number of viable mills.

In addition to factory locations, this map provides a chronology of manufacturing in Rockville. Before the textile industry was developed in the area, the only mills along the Hockanum were grist mills for grinding grain, saw mills for cutting lumber and fulling mills for processing woolen cloth. During Rockville's industrial heyday, textile mills dominated the landscape, but other local companies utilized Hockanum water power. The White Corbin Company developed a special process to make envelopes and later became known as the United States Envelope company. In the early 1830's a paper mill operated on what is now called Paper Mill Pond.

To see what remains of the textile industry in Rockville, an explorer should start up near the source - Snipsic Lake. The Minterburn/Roosevelt Mill complex is visible from the road, but access to the property is restricted. Follow East Main Street to the intersection of Grove Street, noting that the Hockanum River flows near the road and empties into Paper Mill Pond. At the intersection, the Amerbelle complex includes the former Belding Brothers buildings, the Fitch Mill and the Stone Mill. These buildings dominate the Rockville skyline.

Proceed down East Main Street toward the center of Rockville. The Hockanum River flows under Grove Street and then pours out from under the mills in a spectacular waterfall. (In the winter, spray from the waterfall coats the trees with sparkling ice. In the spring or after a heavy rain, the power of the surging water is awesome.) The water from the falls goes into a mill pond before flowing over the dam which was part of the American Mill building. In 1960, the American Mill was destroyed in a devastating fire.

Once past the dam, the river goes underground through the center of Rockville. The Rock Mill building and the Leeds Company buildings no longer exist. The Hockanum River reappears behind the shopping center across from Rockville Hospital and can be seen from West Main Street or from the end of Brooklyn Street. The river remains visible from the Regan Mills on Brooklyn Street all the way along West Main Street. Three mill buildings have been renovated into apartments or senior housing: the New England Mill facing Vernon Avenue, the Florence Mill and the Springville Mill which face West Main Street. The Hockanum Company complex on West Main Street has the last remaining wooden mill building. By the time the walker reaches the corner of West Main Street and West Street, all the existing mill buildings have been seen. The Saxony mill was located on West Street facing West Main Street. After it was destroyed in a fire in 1994, the site was converted into a park. From here the Hockanum River flows toward Vernon and Manchester, leaving behind the buildings that remain from the days when water powered the looms in Rockville.



To learn more about the textile industry in Rockville,
 see *Building the Loom City: Rockville Connecticut, 1821-1906* by Dr. S. Ardis Abbott

To see photographs of the mills when they were in operation, see *Vernon and Historic Rockville* by Dr. S. Ardis Abbott and Jean A. Luddy