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Spring 4-1-2016

History of Wilcox Dock and the Georgia Pacific Paper Company

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Recommended Citation

Ramsdell, Connor; Hastings, Emily; and Phillips, Keri, "History of Wilcox Dock and the Georgia Pacific Paper Company" (2016). *Center for Earth and Environmental Science Service Learning Projects*. Book 5.
http://digitalcommons.plattsburgh.edu/cees_service_learning/5

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Wilcox Dock/ Georgia Pacific Paper Co. Timeline
Connor Ramsdell, Keri Phillips, Emily Hastings

1. **1881** The first PCBs are synthesized (Krauss 1997).
2. **August 23rd, 1898**- Willard G. Wilcox owns a small point of lakefront property just north of the mouth of the Saranac River, and uses it “for dock and wharf purposes” (Pratt 2014)
3. **1922**- Prohibition arrest made at Wilcox Wharf after a seizure of 72 cases of Canadian beer (Pratt 2014)
4. **1938**- Pumping station for an early sewage disposal plant constructed near the dock (Pratt 2014)
5. **March 1, 1963**→ Georgia Pacific purchases the Vanity Fair Mill
 - a. Right after its purchase, the mill’s fuel to create steam was changed. Originally, the fuel used to create steam was crushed coal, which was not clean burning and left ashes behind that became a growing expense to clean up. An oil burning system replaced the coal, knowing that oil would burn cleaner (Press Republican 1988)
 - b. They were a company that manufactures facial and toilet tissues, toweling, napkins, and wax paper.
6. **1964**- Dr. Soren Jensen (Swedish scientist) discovered large amounts of PCBs in human and animal adipose tissue (Krauss 1997).
7. **July 1965**- Digester and debarking systems were built to produce hardwood pulp for five paper machines (Press Republican)
8. **1968**- “Yusho” incident in Japan. Over 1000 people developed acute symptoms of PCB poisoning, which heightened awareness of effects on the human body (Krauss 1997).
9. **1973** → Angry citizen of Plattsburgh, Doris Levy, wrote a letter to the editor voicing her concerning thoughts about the health of the waterfronts in Plattsburgh. She said that a redemption of the waterfronts was needed to boost ecotourism and revenue of the city. She pointed out that the Imperial Paper was still dyeing the Saranac with hues of the wallpaper that they were manufacturing up until 1973 and it was unacceptable. (Press Republican 1977)

10. The FDA established tolerance levels for food containing PCBs (Press Republican)
11. Plattsburgh Sewage Treatment Plant went into service and began treating waste from local industries (Press Republican)
12. **1975** → Wastewater from G-P was so acidic that it ate through the threads of a discharge pipe spilling raw sewage into Lake Champlain for about 2 days (Press Republican)
13. **1976** - TSCA banned production, sale, distribution, and use of PCBs in “open systems”. PCBs banned in the US (Oregon Department of Environmental Quality)
14. The Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) will by July 1, 1977, required treated water to have a pH of between 6 and 9. (Oregon Department of Environmental Quality)
15. **1980-1984** → The plant was completely changed over to PMLD (Plattsburgh Municipal Lighting Department)
 - a. Outdated machinery was replaced with “state of the art equipment” (Press Republican 1988).
16. **1987** → Net Annual Sales of G-P → \$100,000,000
 - Annual Wood Purchases from local logging firms → \$1,800,000
 - Annual Fees to Water Pollution Control Plant → 2,000,000
 - Annual Fees to Municipal Lighting Department → \$1,500,000 (Press Republican 1987)
17. **1987** → G-P needed greater sewage capacity for it to remain in operation (Press Republican 1987)
18. **1988** → G-P is the largest employer in the area, supplying more than 550 jobs to the people of Clinton County (Press Republican 1988).
19. **July 15th, 1990**- DEC proposes development of a free public boat launch at Wilcox Dock. However, project plans might force G-P to move its 42-inch main water intake pipeline, which supplies the paper mill with 4.2 million gallons of water each day. This procedure would cost G-P hundreds of thousands of dollars to accomplish (Press Republican)
20. **July 22nd, 1990**- DEC plans to build \$400,000 boat launch at Wilcox Dock site. However, construction will not begin until the City of Plattsburgh agrees to maintain the

property (mow lawns, empty trash bins). City of Plattsburgh will not agree until blueprints are made for the site (Press Republican)

21. **1992** → Georgia Pacific named one of the nation's worst corporate polluters (Press Republican 1993)

22. **1993** → GM, Cargill, and Georgia-Pacific taken off list of worst polluters (Press Republican 1993)

June: NYS DEC collected sludge and sediment samples near Wilcox Dock and found it to be contaminated with high levels of PCBs.

23. **1994** → G.P asked City of Plattsburgh to pay nearly half a million dollars in damages in connection with a flood at city sewage pumping station (Press Republican 1994)

a. August 7, a malfunction at the pump station caused millions of gallons of sewage-treated only with chlorine- to flood the pump house and to flow into Lake Champlain

b. November: NYS DOH collected woodchips and sand from the water and local beaches, and found levels of PCBs to be between non-detectable and 210 parts per million (ppm). (In perspective: PCB levels above 50 ppm is considered Hazardous waste by legal definitions.) (NYDOH 1994).

24. **January 18th, 1995**- DEC adds 75 acre sludge bed off of Wilcox Dock in Cumberland Bay to the Registry of Inactive Hazardous Waste Sites Level 2.

NYSDEC awarded and contracted the Environmental Products and Services Inc. to remove PCB contaminated wood chips along Cumberland Bay beaches. The inspections were weekly and the agency would eventually collect 300 tons of wood chips (NYDOH Sept 1995).

Environmental Products and Service Inc. begins collecting wood chips and places them in hazardous waste containers, were transported to labs for chemical analysis. They were then sterilized at hazardous waste plant, where they were properly disposed of, by means of compost, deep burial, or burning. The beaches inspected weekly. If high amount of wood chips present, they were collected Cleanup lasted till 2006 (CERCLA and Brownfields Research Center 2013).

25. **February 26th, 1995**- “Yellow perch Advisory” issued to residents encouraging them not to consume any yellow perch caught in Cumberland Bay, specifically near the Wilcox Dock sludge bed, due to high levels of PCBs found in the fish (Press Republican)
26. **June 28th, 1995**- Collection of PCB-contaminated wood chips found floating near the shore starts, costing the state \$130,000. The DEC hires a consulting firm to begin the remediation process, where they plan on placing a large curtain barrier anchored to the lake bottom and suspended with buoys to remove the contaminated sludge (May 1995).
27. **August 1, 1995**- Rust Environment and Infrastructure Inc. estimated that 40-50 acres of water was covered by sludge. Thickness was between one and two feet, and some areas were even greater than six feet. Volume was between 70,000 and 80,000 cubic yards (Cahill 1998).
28. **October 1996**- Georgia Pacific Corps requested that the department postpone issuance of PRAP to allow it to meet with the department to discuss and evaluate other remedial options and concerns it has about remediation. It was granted.
29. **July 1997**- Proposed Remedial Action Plan (PRAP) for Wilcox Dock issued to the public.
30. **September 1997**- Georgia Pacific Corporation and NYSDEC reached an agreement regarding the liability for the remediation of the sludge bed. (Cahill 1998).
31. **December 30, 1997**- The Record of Decisions is signed and was set to begin on January 30th. This established that sheet piling and silt curtains be used to contain the contaminated sludge. Sludge removal would be done by hydraulic dredging and dry excavating. Prevention methods included constructing and operating a temporary sludge deviation facility and waste water treatment facility, among other actions. Total cost was estimated at about \$18,366,000, not including beach cleaning IRM or post remedial fish monitoring (150,000/year for as long as needed) (Cahill 1998).
32. **2007**- Wilcox Dock opened by the City of Plattsburgh as a public boat launch and recreation area (Press Republican)
33. **March 27, 2013** – Cumberland Bay is delisted from the New York Toxic Superfund Site. (Winslow 2016)

Environmental Summary:

The Wilcox Dock area of Cumberland Bay in Lake Champlain served as an important port and later recreation area for the Plattsburgh/Adirondack region. This site was also vital to Georgia Pacific Paper Co. as a water source and, unfortunately, a dumping ground. Since its opening, GP was responsible for discharging a massive amount of PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, which are man-made organic compounds that are dangerous carcinogens and leave a negative impact on the environment, notably to fish and other organisms that fall victim to bioaccumulation. These PCBs were discharged as solids and as liquid effluent directly into Cumberland Bay, where they were deposited into the sediment and formed a large sludge bed. Remediation of the sludge bed began in 1993 and was officially finished by 2013. Hundreds of tons of contaminated wood chips, sludge and other sediment were dredged out of the lake bottom and properly disposed of. As of today, PCB levels have drastically dropped and the site is no longer considered contaminated. Georgia Pacific is one of many companies responsible for negligent waste removal that have left horrible impacts on the ecosystem of parts of Lake Champlain. Now that modern science recognizes the negative impacts of the use of certain chemicals and old waste removal practices, remediation projects such as the cleanup of Cumberland Bay at Wilcox Dock are necessary to help reverse the damage humans have caused on Lake Champlain.

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