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Spring 4-1-2016

History and Environmental Occurences of Keeseville, New York

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Recommended Citation

Hammer, Chad; Provost, Allie; and Vanbrocklin, Hope, "History and Environmental Occurences of Keeseville, New York" (2016).
Center for Earth and Environmental Science Service Learning Projects. 7.
http://digitalcommons.plattsburgh.edu/cees_service_learning/7

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- The Village of Keeseville is divided in half by the AuSable River, and is located in 2 counties (Essex, Clinton) and two towns (Chesterfield, AuSable). Keeseville's river and water power potential as well as its close proximity to rich timber stands and iron ore deposits are what attracted settlers to its location and contributed to its early economic success. During the 20th century, Keeseville has undergone slow economic decline and was also severely hurt by the nearby formation of Plattsburgh.

Pre 1609 - Native American occupation used the land for hunting, fishing, and living.

1609 - Henry Hudson, the first white man, stepped foot on the land in the Hudson Valley.

1754 to 1763 - The French and Indian War took part along the southern shores of Lake Champlain.

1765 - William Gilliland was the first permanent white settler on the western shore of Lake Champlain & first English colonists to explore the AuSable River, from the mouth of Lake Champlain to AuSable Chasm, 3 miles upstream. This was shortly after King George authorized land grants in northern New York State.

1767 - Surveys of the area were completed by Ebenezer Jessup, in which he also bought land.

1767 - William Gilliland explored further into the landscape and into what is known now as Chesterfield, AuSable, Willsboro, Essex, & Westport.

1773 - The land surveyed was then bought by Joseph Totten and Stephen Crossfield.

1777 - During the Revolutionary war, General John Burgoyne, a British Army officer swept through the west side of Lake Champlain with 7,390 men and 1500 horses, destroying all evidence of Gilliland's settlements.

1786 - The State of New York authorized a large-scale survey of the surrounding area, bringing into service a large scale of troops for the general defense of the northern part of the state. This was known as the “Military Tract.” This set the stage for other land grants and patents in the northern wilderness. Permanent white settlement was achieved in the Adirondack-Lake Champlain region at this point.

1787 to 1795 - After the Revolutionary war, the Five Nation Iroquois ceded all rights and titles to any land previously claimed by them, to the Americans for \$1,600.

1790 - Platt Rogers opened the first road, following an old Indian trail from Keeseville. This connected the area to the towns of Chesterfield and AuSable. There were also diverging ways to link to Port Kent, Port Douglas, and the many farms around the area.

1793 - “High Bridge” was built, which was the first bridge to span the Chasm and was very simply constructed (<http://ausablechasm.com/About/historic-bridges>).

1802 - Robert Hoyle began the first settlement in Keeseville.

1802 to 1860 - Communities established in Keeseville due to iron manufacturing and the shipping from Port Kent and Port Douglas. This was a key area connecting shipping routes from Canada and other upper states to New York.

1808 - First dam and sawmill erected in what will later be known as Keeseville. Back then, dams were very primitive in structure and had the capability to disturb biota by altering temperatures, disturbing natural flow regimes, plus induce erosion and eutrophic conditions to areas (McCully 1998). Sawmills also have been known to significantly degrade water quality necessities such as conductivity, dissolved oxygen, biological oxygen demand, phosphorus, nitrogen, and transparency (Arimoro et al. 2007). This was only intensified as the sawmill used the water for lumber transport.

1810 - Even after the Iroquois Indians ceded all of their land rights, their presence was last observed in the vicinity of Anderson Falls, later to be known as Keeseville.

1812 - Robert Hoyle sold his land to Richard and Oliver **Keese**.

1812 - The hamlet of Anderson Falls name is changed to **Keeseville**.

1813 - Keese and J.W. Anderson erected Iron Works & a woolen factory (production of wool) in the center of Keeseville. During this time, iron factories were known to cause severe water and land environmental degradation as many chemicals used in manufacturing were carcinogenic (Viswanathan and Gangadharan 1996). Waste was also known to be directly dumped into waterways without filtration, and also cause noise and air pollution. Wool production during this time was fairly new and not very regulated, so there was a possibility of heavy woolen fibers, chemicals, and fabric dye, all of which were harmful to humans if ingested being released into the waterway (Natural Resource Defense Council 2012).

1813 - The first bridge was built in the center of Keeseville over the AuSable River, at the “Fordway.”

1813 - A road from Port Kent to Keeseville was established, which facilitated the transportation of manufactured goods to and from the wharf at Port Kent.

- A sawmill, dam and store were the first buildings and structures located in Keeseville. Forges and secondary iron manufacturing were the most important source of income for the village’s early settlers.

1816 - The first rolling mill, which presses hot metal into shapes and forms that are desired, in New York State was built here and was run by The Keeseville Rolling and Slitting Mill Company.

Mid 1820's - James and John Rogers recently started the J. and J. Rogers Company and began small-scale commercial operations in Keeseville.

1824 - Power from Birmingham falls was harnessed to run rolling mills, paper mills, grist mills, clothing mills, and starch factories for the whole area.

1826 - Founding of Lake Champlain Transportation Company, ferry between Port Kent and Burlington, Vermont.

1829 - A foundry was built by Joseph Goulding, manufacturing metal castings. One of the first foundries on the west side of Lake Champlain.

1830 - The Rolling and Slitting Mill Co evolved into a nail manufactory, and was taken over by the enterprising Edmund and Nelson Kingsland.

1830 - James and John Rogers established the J. and J. Rogers Company to develop industry and residential area; connected Port Kent, Keeseville, Clintonville, AuSable Forks, and Black Brook.

1830-1860 - Keeseville had six schools (3 private, 2 public, 1 academy).

1832 - Goulding & Peabody firm was formed and manufactured machinery for the forges and mills of the area here.

1832 - Other industries that produces cotton, wool, and furniture were built here.

1832 - Business proprietors of Keeseville & Birmingham Falls organized the Great AuSable Railroad Company, for the purpose of building a railroad from Port Kent to Keeseville to transport products downstate, although later plans bypassed Keeseville.

1840 - Prescott Furniture and Sash manufactory in Keeseville. (R. Prescott and Sons), South side of the river.

1843- AuSable Horse Nail Company formed in October with a capital of \$40,000. Nail works were located on 3 dams on the AuSable River. This was and still is a major industry for the town, and requires a lot of power to run. Environmentally, this largely impacts the sediment load of which the water transports, which enhances erosion; plus, water flow and wetland habitat are also negatively altered (Kuenzer et al. 2012).

1842 to 1843 - The Stone Arch Bridge was started and completed. Built under the supervision of Solomon Townsend and made out of local river stone. One of the oldest such bridges in the U.S., and spanned 110 feet across the river.

1848 - A Catholic community established as Immaculate Conception Church of Keeseville in which services were held in English.

1856- Daniel Dodge patented a machine for making horse nails and was used by the Ausable Horse Nail Co. The first successful machine used in the U.S. was made in Keeseville.

1858 - A local blacksmith, Daniel Dodge invented a horse nail-making machine which would later become the village's largest industry.

By 1860 - The AuSable River has been dammed at 2 points and Keeseville had two extensive rolling mills, three nail manufacturers, a machine shop, an axe and edge tool factory, a cupola furnace, an axletree factory, horseshoe factory, planing mill, two grist mills, and a nail keg factory. With 3500 tons of nails, 1500 tons of merchant iron, and 70,000 nail kegs were manufactured here. Quarrying of sandstone, granite, and limestone was done here since the beginning of Keeseville and was used in building many early buildings of the area.

- Keeseville's industries and manufacturing has developed into a more diversified industry than other settlements and towns. Other early industries were cotton, wool, and furniture manufacturing. Clothing, food, drug, book stores, saddle and harness stores soon opened, contributing to Keeseville's thriving economy.

1860 - Six churches were built (Methodist Episcopal Church, Baptist Church, Congregational Church, Church of Immaculate Conception, French Catholic Church, and St. Paul's Church).

1800 to 1860 - Mines, forges, lumber & iron as well as secondary manufactories created a wave of industrial development in this area, and inspired the most significant residential growth in the history of the surrounding towns. The development of transportation and agriculture followed shortly after. The community of Keeseville was created during this time.

By 1860 - Keeseville had over 250 dwellings with 2,569 inhabitants.

1863 - AuSable Horse Nail Company was organized and started with \$40,000, capitalizing on the earlier invention of Daniel Dodge's horse-nail making machine.

1863 to 1978 - AuSable Horse Nail Company established populations Keeseville and was a big industry in making horse-shoe nails.

1870 – The AuSable Chasm was opened.

1873 - Keeseville became a big tourist town as Routes 9, 9N, and 22 were all built and intersected here; many attractions were built in according.

1874 - New York & Canada Railroad was constructed along Lake Champlain, making Keeseville much more accessible to travelers.

1874 - The Dietade Mineral Spring Company opened and locally distributed mineral water.

1875 - Swing Bridge that was built to break up log jams and ice floes, collapsed after a 3 foot snow fall and high winds.

1878 - The Upper Bridge was constructed (built in place of the Swing Bridge) by Murray, Dougal and Co. of Milton Pennsylvania.

1878 - Keeseville officially became a village at a population of about 3,000.

By 1880 - The AuSable Horse Nail Company has expanded to 10 separate buildings covering 2 acres of land on the north side of the river, in the center of the village. These buildings contained 55 nail machines, a sawmill, a rolling mill, machine shop, and a box shop, providing employment to over 200 men and boys. By this time, this company produced 1000 tons of nails, and 1000 tons of hard coal and 1000 tons of soft coal were consumed in doing so.

1885 - Keeseville had 3,000 inhabitants and was described as “a very thriving, prosperous and enterprising village.” Keeseville was the most diversified and largest settlement of the AuSable Valley with furniture, sash, door, blind, sleigh, carriage, starch factories, along with grist, plaster, and planing mills.

By 1885 - other industries thrived such as Prescott’s furniture, sash, door, and blind manufactory, flouring, plaster, and planning mills, two starch factories, a grist mill, and a carriage and sleigh manufactories. Businesses opened and catered to every need of the populace.

1888 - The Swing Bridge, a pedestrian suspension bridge was built by the Berlin Iron Bridge Co.

1890 - The Keeseville, AuSable Chasm and Lake Champlain Railroad Company was formed. A separately owned 5.6 mile line was built from the Delaware and Hudson line at Port Kent, to AuSable Chasm, and on to Keeseville.

1890 to 1900 - Decline of the mining era saw declines in industry and population in many areas in the AuSable Valley, but Keeseville remained with its diversified industry of transport and manufacturing.

1924 - The Keeseville-AuSable Chasm line of the Railroad ceased operation due to industry declining and popularity of automobile transportation.

1925 - R. Prescott and Sons purchased the former AuSable Horse Nail Company buildings, greatly expanding their operations and products, including furniture, sash and blinds, doors, millwork, coffins, radio cabinets, and electric clock cases. Later also manufacturing television and phonograph cabinets.

1925 - Route 9 bridge that spans the upper portions of the Chasm was built (<http://ausablechasm.com/About/historic-bridges>).

1930's - The Shirt Factory opened for business located at Kingsland's old nail works, near the upper bridge.

1932 to 1933 - AuSable Chasm Bridge was built

1940 to 1950 - Many lumber camps established along AuSable River near Keeseville.

By 1940 - The roads in Keeseville were hard topped and the best in the surrounding area, while many were gravel or dirt, and impassible in the winter.

1940's - The Dietade Mineral Spring Company became a Pepsi-Cola bottling and distribution plant and employed 75 people.

1950 - George Moore Trucking and Equipment Company became the largest car crushing company in the country located here.

1952 - Barn fire on Port Kent Road killed 4 cows, a sow, and at least 8 pigs. Cause of fire unknown.

1960 - By this time all wood & textile industries had closed.

1960's - Some of Prescott's Factories along the river burned in fire, which would later become a river-front park.

1967 - The Northway, (Route 87) was completed, and all north-south traffic now bypassed Keeseville, dealing Keeseville's economy a heavy blow. Around this time is when local motels were converted to housing developments.

1969 - R. Prescott and Sons firm closed which was the major employer of the time and a textile business, Grover Knitting Mills operated in Prescott's Plant #2 Building.

1970 - The dam built in the 1800's washed away due to natural causes and left concrete abutments behind.

1972 - AuSable Forks and Keeseville schools merged.

1980 - Riverside Park established where Prescott factory stood and since burned.

1986 - Keeseville's 3 historic existing bridges are designated a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark.

1988 - In June, huge brush fire destroyed 10 acres of timber in the Keeseville area. Since the last week of May of the year, more than 80 fires have been reported.

1996 - The AuSable Chasm sustained devastating damages from record high flood waters and massive ice dams. 60 foot tall trees were uprooted and swept away. Campground trailers were destroyed and swept up. Steel bridges up to 70 feet were lifted from their foundation and swept up as well. President Clinton declared that the Chasm was a Federal Disaster Site (<http://ausablechasm.com/About/floods-of-1996>).

Environmental Implications:

Since the early 1800s to the early 1900s, Keeseville has been in a state of constant economic boom and industrialization. This factor is the highlight of the many environmental complications that came about in that era. Any industry built and run at this time would have been primitive in its manufacturing techniques and technologies, which results in a more likely harmful implication on the environment it surrounds and uses for resources. This is the case for the iron, wool, sawmill, and many other various factories back in that time period. Iron and wool industries often contributed to leaching of various harmful chemicals directly into the waterways as waste, which could have affected the level of carcinogens and habitat degradation (Viswanathan and Gangadharan 1996; Natural Resource Defense Council 2012). Sawmill industries often degrade water quality in lumber transport on the water as well as shavings from excrement (Arimoro et al. 2007).

Another major factor influencing Keeseville during the substantial increase in manufacturing was the major level of damming going on in the waterways. This was necessary as harnessing hydroelectric power was the major way of fueling machinery. With this, though, came the consequences of a large quantity and size of dams. Often, dams alter wetland habitat and function for both the biotic and abiotic qualities of the system, as well as contributing to erosion and sedimentation (McCully 1998; Kuenzer et al. 2012).

Both manufacturing and dams have major implications on altering the way Keeseville's natural environmental regime occurred. This may have not been directly seen, but can be inferred from the plethora of literature. Overall, Keeseville's major industrialization was both a headway for growth and potential setback for the environment.

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