

The Chagrin River Dam and Mill Runs

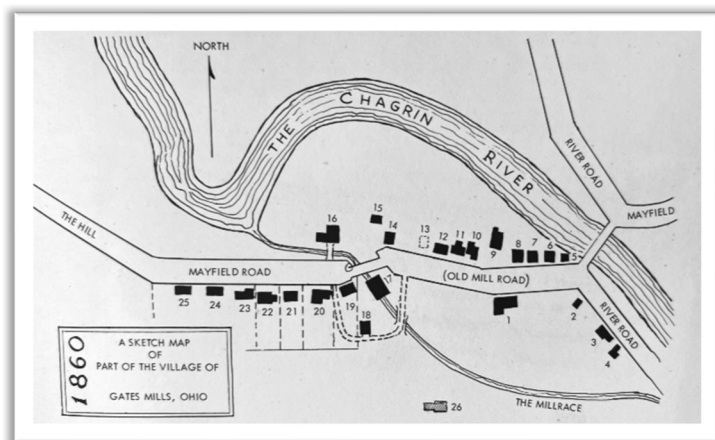
A mill site was often the center around which a village developed. Saw mills and grist mills provided for almost every necessity. They provided production for food and shelter, lumber, tools, linseed oil, leather, cider, axes and cheese.

“Holsey Gates, the builder of the first dam and Gates Mills’ namesake, was a master miller and purchased a 130-acres mill site in the Chagrin River Valley in Mayfield. In 1826, Mr. Gates began damming the river, dug a mill race and erected a sawmill and a gristmill. The water-powered industries and the 18 structures designed and erected by the Gates family stimulated the development of the village. (Excerpt from *The Times*, September 24, 2015)

The Holsey Gates dam on the Chagrin River, just south of the village bridge, was rebuilt in 1869 by Selach W. Knapp. Dam gates for a mill race were built about 30 feet above the dam at Chagrin River Road. This dam was later rebuilt in 1906 by Ernest Hunscher. On February 26, 2011 the remaining dam at that location collapsed and was not rebuilt. A commemorative plaque is mounted on a rock near to the original location, on River Road between Deerfield and Old Mill Roads.

The mill race, dug to carry water from the dams to the mills, regulated the flow of water to the mills for controlled movement of wheels and gears. The mill run would harness water at one spot of the river, flow to the mill site, and release the water at another spot further downstream. Water to the Gates’ mills flowed from the original dam, across Chagrin River Road, behind what is now Southwick House, and back across Old Mill Road into the river downstream.

Today there are remnants of four mill runs. They are located behind Southwick house (*Gates Saw Mill*); near The Church of the Vale (*Willsons Saw Mill*); on private property just north of Wilsons Mills Road (*Sherman’s Steam Sawmill*); and at the original site of the Southwick house, on Chagrin River Road at the north end of the village (*Southwick Shingle Mill*).



Map of the Mill Run in 1860,
Gates Mills Village