

ALBION FALLS - 220 YEARS OF MOUNTAIN HISTORY

A combined grist and saw mill was built on this site in 1794 by millwright Henry Van Wagner (Van Wagner beach) for United Empire Loyalist, William Davis, who settled on his 500 acre Crown grant in 1792. The mill may have at least one claim to fame. It is believed that the first discovery of natural gas in Upper Canada occurred during the excavation for the wheel pit. Natural gas was used to light and heat the mill for over a century. Another claim to fame is not true. This is not the mill referred to in the ballad, "When You and I Were Young Maggie". It was in the Glanford area of Twenty Mile Creek.

In 1840, William Cook, a prosperous contractor who had made a fortune working on the Welland Canal, bought all the property shown in the sketch and built a beautiful mansion on the high ground overlooking the mill. His lavish estate had formal gardens, planted orchards, arbours, walkways, and ponds. His neighbours described his display of grandeur as "Cook's Folly". In 1880, Cook's son installed a boiler in the mill to provide continuity of power during low water periods in the stream. Hence the mill sprouted a tall chimney.

Also at that time, quarry operators, Waddel and Carpenter improved the road that bridged the falls and built a tollgate at the bridge. The village of Albion Mills, out of frame to the left was named Mount Albion and Cook's grandson, constructed a two-and-a-half-story frame house on the right of the sketch, overlooking the ravine. It served as a post office and general store until 1926.

The last building to survive this 1880 scene was the storehouse beside the millpond. Originally built as a hop-kiln for drying hops to brew beer, it served in modern times as the popular Carpenter's Lunch until destroyed by fire in 1947. Replaced by a banquet hall called Club Albion, it too disappeared when the Hamilton-Wentworth Conservation Authority took over the site in the 1980s. It is now a parking lot for hiking trail access.



Albion Falls c. 1880

Drawing adapted by Robert Williamson, from a sketch by John Nugent 1998.

Robert Williamson writes **Mountain Memories** for The Hamilton Mountain Heritage Society. For more information about HMHS events and publications see their website: hamiltonheritage.ca

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