

Historic Village of German Mills

Grand River: A Canadian Heritage River

The Grand River provides a common thread that links the many significant natural and cultural resources throughout the watershed. The lands and structures that once surrounded this particular site on Schneider Creek tell the story of the rich industrial history associated with the river. The Grand River and its major tributaries - the Conestogo, Eramosa, Nith and Speed rivers - were declared Canadian Heritage Rivers in 1994.



Le Réseau des rivières du patrimoine canadien

Schneider Creek

The lands you are standing on have been inhabited for over 10,000 years. For generations indigenous people used a trail following Schneider Creek to travel between village sites and winter campgrounds. Upon arrival in the early 1800s, European settlers used this same travel route, renaming it Mississauga Road. Today, Mill Street, Carwood Avenue, Vanier Drive and this area of Manitou Drive roughly follow that original route.

Original Settlement and Early Milling

Many of the areas early settlers were Mennonite immigrants from Pennsylvania. Sawmills and grist mills were some of the first structures built here. They marked the start of early communities and commercial and industrial enterprises. Over the centuries, the village that formed at this location had many names beginning with Bleam's Mills.

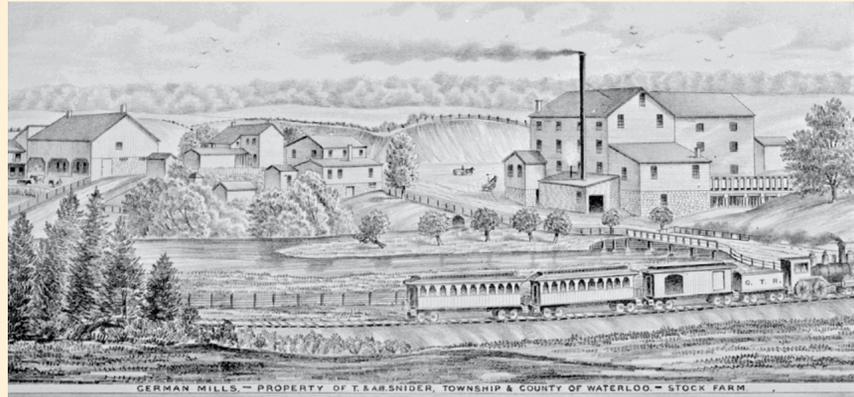
Philip Bliehm and Bleam's Mills (1812-1835)

Philip Bliehm (Bleam) arrived here in 1806 from Montgomery County, Pennsylvania, and began the first sawmill in the area on Schneider Creek in 1812. By 1835, he added a grist mill (1825), woollen mill (1826), distillery, cooperage, store, and a dam and mill pond to power the new mills. During this time, and due to Bliehm's influence, this area was known as Bleam's Mills. Bliehm had hoped to call the village Hopewell Mills, but the name never stuck. Bliehm helped to build and widen Bleams Road, then known as the UnterStrasse (Lower Road in German). This road, which led to the mills, was one of the earliest in the region and helped open Wilmot Township to settlement in the 1820s.

Samuel Liebschuetz and Jewsburg (c.1835-c.1851)

Around 1835, Bliehm sold Bleam's Mills to Samuel Liebschuetz, a Jewish man from Germany who arrived in Preston in 1832 and operated a dry goods store. Liebschuetz laid out plans for the settlement, then known as Jewsburg. In 1837, the Gore District Assessment Role recorded that Liebschuetz owned the mills, 100 cleared and 460 uncleared acres. By the mid-1840s, Liebschuetz had heavily mortgaged the property and eventually sold the mill business.

German Mills was "...the centre of one of the most wealthy and populous settlements ...where six public highways intersect each other, namely the [roads to] Blenheim, Dumfries, Dundas, Woolwich, Wilmot and [the] Huron Road." (Canada Museum, 1835)



German Mills during the Snider era (1860 to 1898) as depicted in Parsell's Illustrated Atlas 1881.

The yellow brick used to construct this plaque base was salvaged from a house constructed for William Snider and his family around 1900. The house was located at 50 Manitou Dr., approximately 100 metres south of where you are standing.



Jonas Berge delivering flour from German Mills circa 1905 to Berlin, on Queen Street South between King Street and Charles Street.



View looking west to the grist mill at German Mills (date unknown). Note Schneider Creek in the foreground and workers' housing to the left of the mill.



Parkway School (SS 5B) class photo taken the year the school opened in 1923. Children from local families, such as the Fishers, Bruders, Lichtys, Seiberts, Sniders, Einwechters and Zellers are shown.

A school was never built in German Mills. Children attended the nearby Parkway School. Constructed in 1923, it was administered as SS 5B with Centreville School SS 5A. Interestingly, a boy who tried but failed to burn down the Centreville School was sent to reform school. His brother, in revenge, burned down the Parkway school in September 1939. It was rebuilt as SS 30 in 1940.



Parkway Mill in 1961, the year the mill was closed by the Waterloo County Supplies Co-operative, the last owners.



Newly constructed bridge over Schneider Creek circa 1958. Looking east across Manitou Drive, note the rail crossing and surrounding agricultural landscape.

Snider Brothers and German Mills (1851-1941)

In 1860, Elias Snider (Snyder), son of Waterloo mill owner Jacob C. Snider, purchased the mill and 559 acres of land from Toronto mortgage brokers for \$23,000. Prior to Elias' ownership the village became known as German Mills. He ran the milling operation with his sons until 1898.

In 1862, at the age of 20, E.W.B. Snider, Elias's third son, became the mill manager. This arrangement was in place until 1871 when he moved to St. Jacobs and purchased a flour mill. E.W.B. Snider was the Liberal member for North Waterloo in the Provincial Legislature from 1881-94. In 1903, he became the Chair of the Ontario Power Commission, which laid the groundwork for the establishment of the provincial electric power utility.

When E.W.B. Snider left German Mills in 1871 he was replaced as manager by his younger brother, Tilman. This was the time of the Franco-Prussian war. Demand for flour was high and so were profits. For the next two decades, Snider brothers Tilman, Amos and William successively ran the mill.

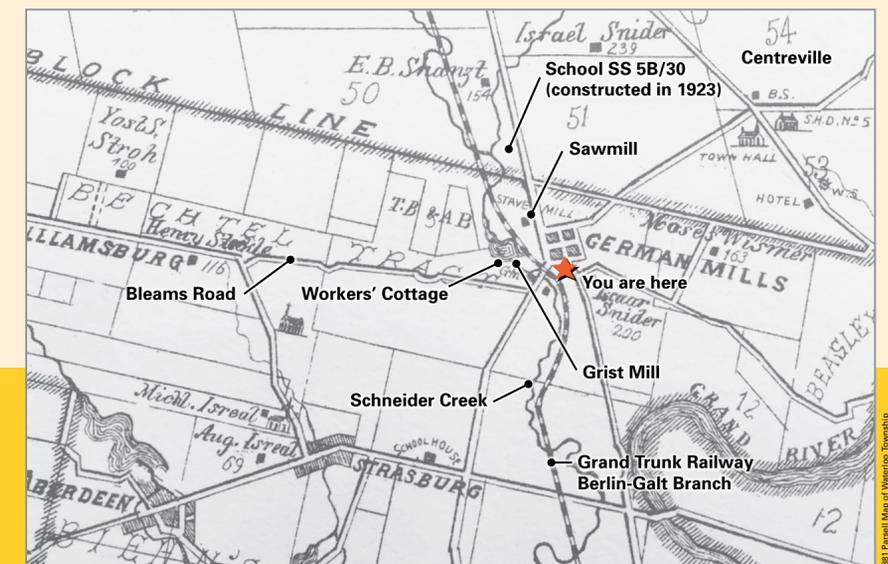
The Decline of Milling

By the early 1890s, the stave mill, general store and cooper were gone and only the grist mill remained in German Mills. In 1890, William Snider hired Lehman Shirk, a local miller originally from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, to run the mill. Shirk went on to own the mill from 1898 to 1928. Due to the demand to feed troops in World War I, Lehman Shirk saw the last profitable period of flour production. After 1928, several others owned the mill, which had switched to producing feed, until it was closed in 1961 and demolished in 1963.

The Railway and Parkway (1941-1960s)

In 1857-58, German Mills was a stop on the short-lived Preston and Berlin Railway. The line reopened in 1872 as part of the Grand Trunk Railway Berlin-Galt branch and closed in the 1950s. In 1941, during World War II, residents voted unanimously to change the settlement's name from German Mills to Parkway after the nearby Parkway School (SS 5B/SS 30). The railway station was also renamed Parkway.

Despite its location on a rail line, the settlement only had a population of 75 in 1891, which fell to 25 in 1913. Parkway remained a village until Fairway Road was developed in the 1960s. Very few structures from the historic village remain today.



Historic map of Waterloo Township illustrating the early layout of the village of German Mills in 1881.



Region of Waterloo