

Mills and Milling

Millers looked for an area close to the river with space for a mill race to siphon off a steady flow of water for their needs.

Often a simple frame sawmill would be erected first, which could later provide lumber for a flour mill then a long ditch or mill race had to be dug out for water flow.

A mill race had two sections – the head race bringing in the water from the river and the tail race which led the water back to the river. In between was the mill pond which was constructed by damming the mill race with posts, logs layered at right angles, mud and planks. Maintaining the mill dam required money and hard work as it was often washed away due to frost action and the force of the water in the spring floods.

Power was obtained by water flowing down the head race to the mill pond and then via a wooden flume to the mill wheel. The wheel was attached to the mill which was built beside the mill pond. Water flow was regulated by the mill gate which was adjusted to obtain a steady flow to turn the mill wheel. From there the water was directed to the tail race.

The great mill wheel was attached to a series of cogs and wheels inside the mill to operate the saw in a sawmill or to turn the millstones in a flour mill.

The grist or flour mill was usually a three or four storey building and often operated alongside the sawmill.

