

Exhibit shows Newburgh's industrial heyday

By ANN KUZMIK

Imagine a time when Newburgh was a bustling center of industry. Factory after factory lined the banks of the Quassaick Creek and the Hudson River.

You can explore this more prosperous time in the city's history at the Crawford House on Montgomery Street, Sunday, Jan. 21. Local resident Russell Lange is presenting an impressive exhibit of the rise and fall of Newburgh's industry, using digital technology and visually enhanced graphics of old photos and advertisements. It includes a large mural mapping the locations of factories along the Quassaick Creek.

This is the last chance, at least for a while, to view Lange's exhibit in Newburgh. From here, it will go to the 1841 Courthouse in Goshen.

Lange's interest in Newburgh's industrial past was piqued several years ago by an article in an 1883 newspaper commemorating the city's centennial. The contrast between the numerous industries then and the current day was so sharply defined that Lange felt that he had to explore it further. From his research, he has created the display and a slide show on the city's manufacturing history.

Lange traced Newburgh's own industrial revolution to the establishment of the Newburgh Steam Mills in 1844. Working on 17,000 spindles, 400 employees produced 110,000 yards of muslin a week, much of it for export. It continued in operation until the early 1900's then gave way to the Coldwell Lawnmower Factory which moved in after a devastating fire in their original plant on Broadway.

Water power from the Quassaick Creek provided the incentive for many businesses to build along its banks. The Dubois Mill, established in 1734 by Alexander Colden, was one of the first.

In later years came many other factories and mills, including the Newburgh Bleachery, just off Lake Street, Walsh's Paper Mill, on the road which bears his name, the Adams and Bishop Paper Mill, on the west side of Robinson Avenue, and George Reed's Paper Mill, by the Mill Street bridge, which became the Hudson River Woolen Mills, then Diamond Candle. The remains of several of these can be seen today. The smokestack from the woolen mills can be viewed today from the bridge.

"A lot more work was going on 100 years ago then now," Lange commented.

He found that in 1842, the city had more than 30 manufacturing plants and mills, including flour mills, plaster mills, soap and candle makers, rug makers, chair factories, carriage makers, iron foundries, a boiler works, shipbuilders, and a brick yard. The population was around 9,000 people, with 2,500 manufacturing jobs available.

In 1992, the city only had around 20 manufacturing plants, employing around 2,000 people. The population, however, had grown to around 26,000.

Part of the city's industrial demise can be blamed on the panic of 1893, Lange said. This brought about the end of the Wright Engine Works, the Beveridge Brewery and Kilmer Wire, and caused massive layoffs at the Newburgh Steam Mills. Whitehill Engine Works and Coldwell Lawn Mower also suffered.

Newburgh saw many firsts in its proud industrial history, including the first lawnmower produced in this country, at the Coldwell Lawn Mower Company. James Orr, founder of Sweet-Orr, invented overalls. His Newburgh factory continued to flourish until the 1950's.

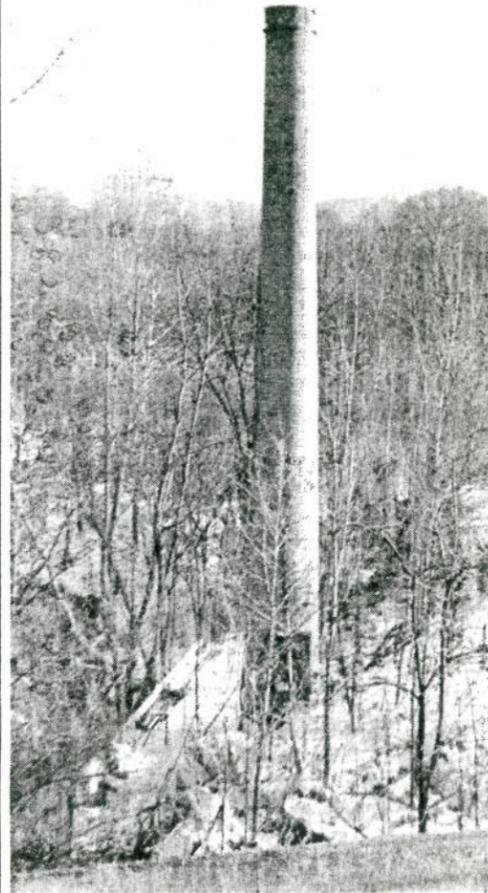
"Factories had a similar lifespan to people," Lange pointed out. Their founders began them with passion and drive, but when they grew old and the businesses were handed down, the successors seldom shared the same feelings.

Improved technology was a bane and a boon. Goods could be produced more efficiently and cheaper, but with the coming of the railroad, bigger ships, and lower shipping costs, the doors were opened for more global competition. Also, it was no longer as important to be near water for transportation.

The lessons of the past are still relevant, Lange said. "People don't realize how vulnerable small factories are. This is not just a story about Newburgh, but about communities across the United States."

There is no longer a need for small cities to be manufacturing centers, he said. Since there is also no need to live next door to the place you work, becoming cultural centers is more important.

The focus today is on community life, Lange summed up. Promoting the place where you live is



The smokestack of the Hudson River Woolen Mills is clearly visible from the Mill Street Bridge.

also important. He and his wife, Allyne, are member of the Historical Society of Newburgh Bay and the Highlands, which is actively engaged in doing just that.

"If you make a place more attractive, people will want to be there," he concluded.

