



Jaite Mill

February 2006 image of Jaite Mill.
NPS Photo.



Jaite Mill Floor.
Peninsula Library & Historical Society Photo.



To many passersby, the Jaite Mill site is a discarded industrial wasteland, yet for residents of the valley the mill brought work, family, and community together. In 1908, the Jaite Company was considered by William B. Doyle, in his *Centennial History of Summit County*, “one of the most important business enterprises of this section of Summit County.” Jaite Mill stories of industrialization, community, growth and decline are a part of the larger story of Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP).

In the Beginning: Charles Jaite

Much of the mill’s early success can be attributed to the quiet, resourceful founder who studied the manufacture of paper since boyhood. Charles Jaite was born in Germany, but immigrated to Cleveland with his parents. By the age of 13, he worked in a paper mill in Cleveland, alongside other immigrants from Germany and Poland. He went on to become the president of Standard Bag and Paper

Company in 1902 and vice president of the Cleveland Paper Company. These two firms consolidated to form the Cleveland-Akron Paper Company, located across from present day Boston Mills Ski Resort in CVNP. In July of 1905, he resigned to begin his own paper-making company.

The Early Mill Years

On September 18, 1905, Charles Jaite founded the Jaite Paper Company with brothers and in-laws as the officers of this new venture. They purchased 22.76 acres in Northfield Township, deep within the Cuyahoga Valley. They hired local farmers to begin building the mill, using sand dredged from the nearby river to make concrete block. They laid tracks to connect to the railroad and drilled five gas wells and a sixth well that provided Artesian water, that according to the *Centennial History of Summit County* was of such “purity that the paper manufactured with its use is many points stronger than paper made...with ordinary water.”

The mill site was carefully chosen for its easy access to transportation via the Ohio & Erie Canal and the Cleveland Terminal & Valley Railroad. The site was also close to the water of Brandywine Creek, which later proved unneeded because of artesian wells. Here, halfway between Cleveland and Akron, land was inexpensive and available.

The first product Jaite Mill produced was “Blue Line Paper,” used for flour bags and made on a cylinder machine, which creates sheets of paper. Later a second machine was installed that could make paper from rope.

In those first years, after an eight to ten hour day, workers were expected to stay after and mix cement and sand to make more blocks to expand the factory. By 1919, the mill had added another cylinder machine for making single wall bags as the company expanded into fertilizer bags and bread sacks. In 1926, some of the cylinders were rebuilt as two Fourdrinier machines. The Fourdriniers could make continuous long rolls of paper, to be used in making bags with several “walls,” or layers. In 1928 the company produced its first successful multi-walled cement bag. It was soon the 11th largest multi-wall paper producer in the nation in its heyday in the 1920s and ’30s.

The Heyday Work Force

Although Mr. Jaite began with a small, private operation, his vision for the mill and its workforce was on a much larger scale, creating not just a company, but a community to support the mill as well.

In 1906, Mr. Jaite purchased additional land on Riverview Road, where he built five two-story buildings as employee housing. These were not enough and in 1917, four small single-family units were built along Vaughn Road. A company town of sorts developed with homes, a general store, a post office, and a railroad

"...Mostly all Polish...75% or 80% Polish... working there." Willy Ritch, quoted from University of Akron Interviews.

"Everybody was related to one another... in the bag plant: father, mother, daughter, son, brothers, sisters." Willy Ritch, quoted from University of Akron Interviews.

station. Unlike the stereotyped company town, here there was no script, or company-issued money and people were not forced to live in company quarters.

By 1918, 214 employees worked at Jaite Mill, and by the Depression years, nearly 250 people were employed. A third of these were women who sewed the bags and worked in the offices. By 1933, during the height of the Depression, the mill was in operation 24 hours a day.

This was the mill's heyday with jobs enough for the local population and for Polish immigrant workers who moved here to live and work in the mill. On the mill floor, one might hear both Polish and English spoken. While life was not luxurious, the rent for homes or for dormitory housing was affordable.

At peak production, workers were sleeping in shifts in the dormitory at the intersection of Vaughn and Riverview (now CVNP Headquarters), while others walked or took the company transportation to work from Boston or Peninsula, summoned by the company whistle. The whistle sounded when it was time to get up (6:30 a.m.), time to be at

work (7 a.m.), time for lunch (11:30 a.m.), time to go home (3:30 p.m.) and sometimes in times of emergencies. That whistle dominated the rhythm of life in the valley and when it stopped sounding in the 1950s, it was missed by local residents.

Unlike other company towns, a family atmosphere prevailed, with uncles, cousins, parents and sons often working alongside each other. A weekly newsletter was published with the latest local news, including news of sporting events held within the mill.



Jaite employees playing horseshoes.
Peninsula Library & Historical Society Photo.

The Mill's Later Years

In changing post WWII times, the small, private mill was unable to compete with larger mills, particularly those in the south. In 1951 the Jaites made the difficult decision to sell the mill to National Container Corporation. The mill would change hands three more times, first to Owens-Illinois, then Tecumseh, and finally to the National Park Service. Change was beginning at the mill, as first one Fourdrinier machine was disassembled, then the bag factory closed, and finally the Jaite Company housing was sold to private individuals.

In 1975, the National Park Service arrived on the scene and soon realized the historical value of the Jaite Mill. Four years later the Jaite Mill Historic District was entered into the National Register of Historic Places. The mill fell silent in December of 1984. The next year, CVNP was able to purchase the property. The park acquired the buildings that had been the company town and rehabilitated them to become the national park's headquarters area.

The NPS considered many plans for the use of the former Jaite Mill, including leasing the site for adaptive re-use through the historic leasing program. Arson on October 2, 1992 destroyed further hopes of rehabilitating or using the area. The fire left the mill a hazard, with unsecured walls and roofs, exposed asbestos and potential hazardous waste sites.

The mill was removed from the Jaite Mill Historic District listing and plans began to rehabilitate the mill site and restore the natural habitat. CVNP struggled for years to procure funding for natural restoration. The settlement from the Krecji Dump site hazardous material clean-up has provided the necessary funding to begin the demolishing of what had been the Jaite Mill. In March 2006, the first phase of demolition began.

Yet the Jaite Mill is a significant part of the story of CVNP. To share this story, some historic fabric will remain to share the significance and the scope of what was here. An original Fourdrinier from 1928 will remain, along with corner markers, to indicate the extent of the mill. Pending structural integrity, the water tower will also remain, along with the railroad spur which will provide trail access to the site from the west. The Ohio & Erie Canal prism will still be visible, passing right alongside the old Artesian well. In time, the site will be restored to the wet forest that Charles Jaite began with over a hundred years ago.

"It was an enjoyable place to work...away from the hustle and bustle of everything."

- Jerry Cervenski quote in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*.

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**Cuyahoga Valley
National Park**