Three Dorcheter Tide Mills

> Dorchester Tide Mills

Dorchester has been home to at least three tide mills. Tide mills are water-powered mills that use the tide to fill or help fill the reservoir behind the mill dam. These mills are located on tidal inlets and river estuaries where gates in the dam may be opened as the tide is rising and closed when the tide is full. Then as the tide recedes, there will be a period of time when the level of the mill pond will be enough higher than the ocean water to allow the mill wheel to operate. When the tide rises again to the point where it impedes the wheel, the miller must wait for next tide cycle.

The earliest mill in Dorchester was a river mill at Lower Mills. In 1634 Israel Stoughton obtained permission from the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay to erect a grist mill there above the head of the tide. That mill is remembered by the illustration of the rude mill, with its large wheel, which is seen upon the left bank of the Neponset River in the Dorchester town seal.

The next known mill is a tide mill, however it is not known which of the following two 17th century tide mills is the earlier.

Mill Brook Creek

Clap Mill 17th century

Before the South Bay was filled in, it was connected to the ocean by a passage between Boston and South Boston. Roger Clap was among the first to arrive in Dorchester as passengers in the Mary and John, and some of his siblings and cousins arrived a few years later. They acquired land in the north part of the town fronting on the South Bay and extending to Boston Street, and they owned a tide mill known as Claps Mill. It stood on Mill Brook Creek, a creek that entered the Brook that separates Roxbury and Dorchester, sometimes called Dorchester Brook or Roxbury Brook depending on perspective. It is mentioned in the Clapp Memorial, the family genealogy, that the mill was built for them by a Mr. Bate. This was probably James Bate or Bates, a millwright who arrived in Dorchester in 1635. He lived from 1582 until his death in Dorchester in 1655.