

A walk through Unionville's Industrial Past

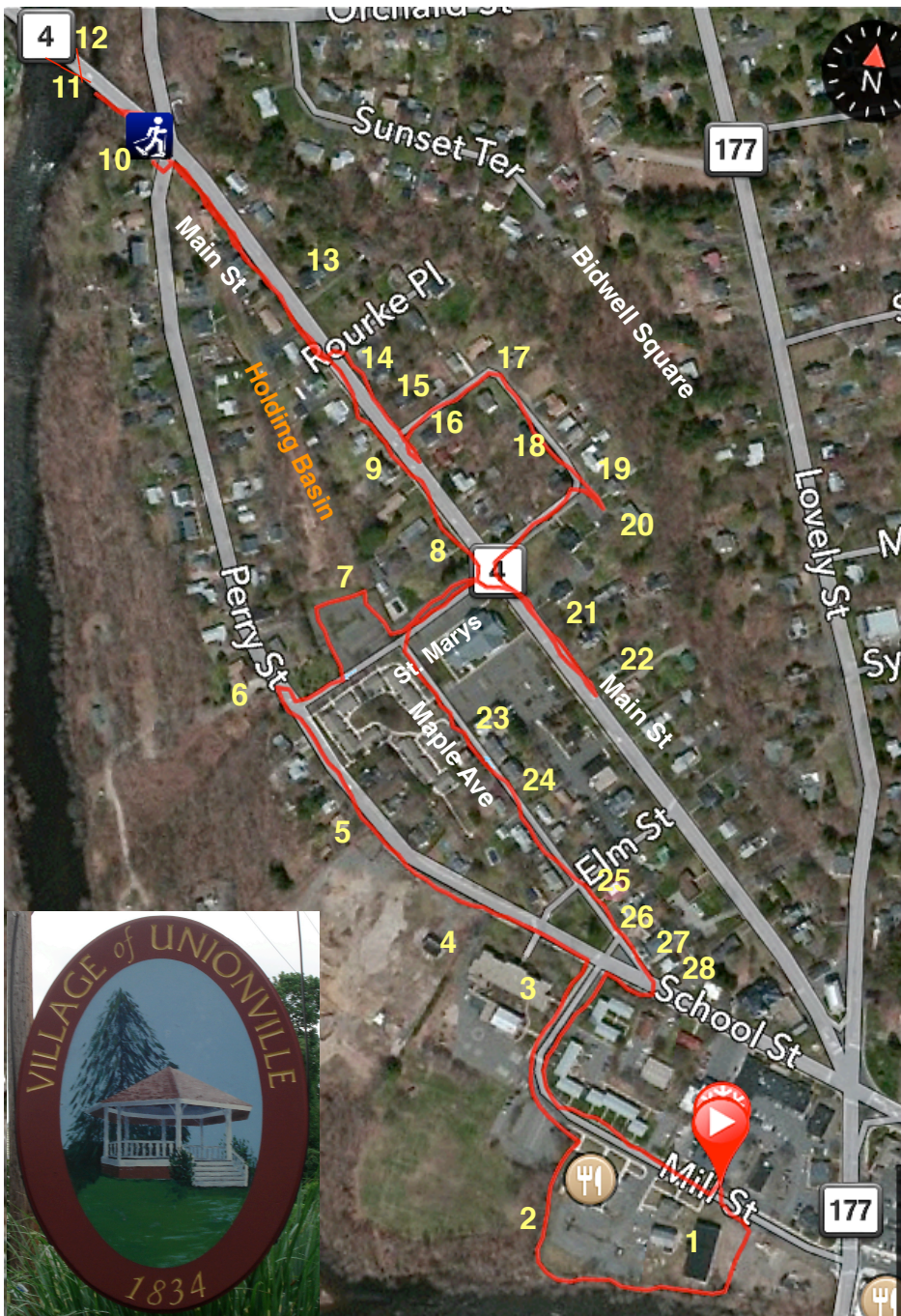
2.2 miles

KEY

1. Union Nut Co 1860 on Mill Street CT
2. Head-race for Delaney & Munson Paper Co
3. 173 School St site of Platner & Porter Paper Mill 1848
4. 19 Perry St Charles W House Pump House 1901 CT
5. 55 Perry St Thomas T Carroll House 1898 CT
6. Canal to the Mill St head-races & overflow canal 1832
7. Holding Basin at it's widest point 1832
8. 175 Main St Albert L. Curtiss House 1910 CT
9. 187-189 Main St Frank D. Lawton House 1885 CT
10. The start of the Holding Basin 1832
11. Richards Mill circa 1780 & covered bridge 1837 CT
12. The Power Canal 1832 HMdb
13. 230 Main St William Griswold House ca 1837 CT
14. 206 Main St Griswold-Mulrooney House 1870 UHD CT
15. 198 Main St Frank D. Lawton House 1912 UHD CT
16. 182 Main St Cowles, Norton, & Bidwell's 1835 CT
17. 82 Bidwell Square Rev Smith Rental House 1863 CT
18. 67 Bidwell Sq. Abner Bidwell Rental House 1869 CT
19. 50 Bidwell Sq. Dr Sage Rental House 1869 CT
20. 42 Bidwell Square Mark Howard House 1872 CT
21. 132 Main St Hubert C. Hart House 1885 CT
22. 120 Main St Frederick Crum House 1836 CT UHD
23. 60-64 Maple Ave Chamberlain tenements 1878 CT
24. 54-56 Maple Ave Nathaniel Hayden Apt. 1875 UHD CT
25. 20-22 Maple Ave George Bean House 1920 UHD CT
26. 16 Maple Ave Platner & Porter rental house 1854 CT
27. 6-8 Maple Ave Platner & Porter rental house 1854 CT
28. 2 Maple Ave Platner & Porter rental house 1854 CT

CT = Connecticut Historic Property
 UHD = Unionville Historic District
 HMdb = Historic Marker database

House numbers can be found near the front door, front gate, or driveway.



Park next to the Post Office. Walk south across Mill St., passing through the metal arch to the left of Upson Market Place (note the arch details). In 1832, Mill St. was next to the Lower Mill Canal which provided the water power for the mills next to the river. The Union Nut Company (1) was formed in 1860. In 1883 it was reorganized as the Upson Nut Company and is now preserved as a registered Historic Building in Connecticut (CT). Follow the side walk down to the river. Below it was the head-race that brought the water power to the Upson Nut Company. Continue west along the path that follows the river. It make a right hand turn back to Mill St. behind Pomona Pete's. The head-race (2) for the Delaney & Munson Paper Co. is to your left. When you reach School St, notice the street sign. It was named after Platner & Porter Paper Mill (3), Unionville's biggest employer in the late 1800's. Union School replaced it when it in 1939. It was a WPA project during the Great Depression. Continue on Perry St passing a number of homes built in the mid 1800's (5). Stop when you walk under several major power lines. This is the location of the Lower Mill Canal and an Overflow Channel for the Holding Basin. Back track the short distance to the Maple St. Extension, turning left and left again into the lower overflow parking lot for St. Marys Church. This was the widest section of the holding basin (7) which held water until the Flood of 1955. Turn left at Main St. When you reach the junction with Perry St, turn around to observe the start of the Holding Basin which follows the power lines (10). Use the cross walk to continue to almost the center of the bridge. The oldest structures of the walk, Richard's Mill (11) and the west abutment of the 1837 covered bridge is on the other side. The foundation of Richard's Mill dates back to circa 1780. It burned down and was rebuilt in 1887. Retrace your steps back to the stoplight. The power canal of 1832 (12) can be best seen on the north side of rt. 4 when the leaves are off the trees (use the crosswalk). Retrace your steps along Main St. If you want to get a close look at the buildings on the other side of Main St, including Bidwell Square, carefully cross near Rourke Place. Return to St Mary's parking area and turn left onto Maple Ave. At the end turn right onto Platner St. to return to your car. Please respect the homeowners by staying on the sidewalks for any photos. This walk can be followed by using your cell phone and enhanced by clicking on the **links listed below**:

Link to An Industrial History of Unionville, 1780-1880 Marker <http://hdl.handle.net/11134/660002:2241>

Link to the houses on Main St, Bidwell Square <http://www.farmington-ct.org/home/showdocument?id=2615>

Link to the houses on Maple, Elm, School, Perry Streets <http://www.farmington-ct.org/home/showdocument?id=2617>

Link to Connecticut historic buildings (CT) Click on the street address. <http://historicbuildingsct.com/towns/farmington/>

Unionville has used Farmington River water power since the late 1700s. The first dam, built circa 1780 (item **D1** on map below), was just 200 yards upstream from the Route 4 bridge. The canal from this dam was on the west side of the river and was used to power Richard's Mill (map item **17**) next to Riverfront Miniature Golf. Unionville's early industrial growth was limited due to its lack of a modern transportation system. That changed in 1828 when the Unionville Feeder Canal was opened. This canal, which provided most of the water for the Farmington Canal, was also constructed as a transportation canal. Barges were now able to dock downstream of the South Main Street bridge. Unionville could now import raw materials and export finished goods to the seaport at New Haven or north to the Upper Connecticut River Valley. The increasing demand for water power resulted in a larger crib dam (map item **D2**) being constructed 300 yards upstream from the first. This dam, completed in 1832, was much taller and included a significant canal system with a holding basin (map items **C1**, **B1**) on the east side of the river. Richard's Mill now received power through a canal (map item **C2**) from the new dam. In 1832, the Hartford Courant ran an advertisement selling or leasing water privileges on the head-race of these canals at... "a low price, if you apply soon". The ad emphasized the abundant supply of water, the transportation canal system that was just a quarter mile away, and the 20 foot vertical drop from the holding basin back to the river. The railroad, with its year-round transportation, arrived in 1850, and increased the demand for water power. In 1856 James Cowles built a new dam (**D3**) further upstream which went through a series of upgrades as the demand for water power increased.

By the 1870's Unionville had a solid industrial base. Paper production was the major industry because of the water power and the abundant supply of high-quality soft water from the underground aquifers (map items **1 - 4**). There were also a variety of industries producing metal products (items **5-12**), wooden furniture (items **14-16**), as well as saw & grist mills (items **17-18**). Water from the holding basin would power the upper level of factories. This water would drain into a canal that follows Mill Street, which powered the industries next to the river. This canal went under South Main Street to power other industries. Roaring Brook was an additional source of water power for industries near West Avon Road.

Alan M. Perrie 6 / 12 / 2023

