

# Author explores Saratoga's 'lost industries'

**Book shows there's more to the area than horse racing**

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There's more to Saratoga County history than famous Revolutionary War battles, horse racing and mineral springs. In the 1800s, the region was characterized by heavy industry, a portion of the region's history often skimmed over in textbooks or other historical accounts.

Tim Starr decided to share that back story with the public in his latest book, "Lost Industries of Saratoga County," published Wednesday, Oct. 22 by History Press. In chapter after chapter, he paints a picture of the industrialized communities that linger only by empty buildings or buried railroad tracks.

"There was a lot of iron and clothing industries in the Capital District and Saratoga couldn't really compete with that, so they used a lot of resources in the north country, like lumber. The chief industry within the county were paper mills. Then there were also things like tanneries which used hemlock bark from the forest. There was a glass factory that supplied

bottles for mineral water in Saratoga Springs and there were graphite mines in the Town of Greenfield that have never been described before," said Starr. "It wasn't until the early 1900s that the region started to establish clothing mills for socks and gloves, which really took the place of paper mills as they declined in importance."

Starr works in accounting by day, but from about 7 pm. to midnight every night, he writes; and weekends are spent gathering research.

"I had an interest in local history because I can see ruins and various things, traces of history all around, and I wonder what the story is behind those things. What got me started was, I live in Rock City Falls and stumbled on an old railroad bed in the woods back in 2005. I wondered what that was because never had I heard of a railroad out that way. It turned out to be a little electric trolley that served paper mills and it was so interesting that I started researching that and went on from there," said Starr.

Starr visited historical societies to read newspaper clippings and diaries of workers who made their living in the forgotten



factories. Paper mills, he found, had the biggest impact on the area and started out very small, usually situated along rivers because they were powered by water wheels. Many were operated by one owner and his crew of operators. Over time, the industry grew in size and importance because raw lumber was so close at hand, with the largest mills existing in Corinth and Mechanicville and smaller ones popping up in Schuylerville, south Glens Falls and Ballston Spa.

"Ballston Spa had a series of paper mills that manufactured square bottom paper bags and was the largest paper bag operation in the world at one time," said Starr. "Communities were company towns, with the largest share of the population employed by the mill, and the mill paid



Tim Starr of Rock City Falls recently published his book, "Lost Industries of Saratoga County," which takes an in-depth look at the various factories that ruled the region in the 1800s.

*Submitted photo*

more than half the tax revenues for the villages; they basically took up most of the economy of these hamlets."

Factory workers typically worked long workdays, 10 to 12 hours, and worked without many safety procedures in place today, sustaining more injuries. Starr also describes fires that gutted factories, the trust movement where large corporations from the outside area came in and purchased local

mills and the ice business on different rivers. The cotton mills have rarely been mentioned because they went out of business so long ago and about inventions developed in support of these industries.

This isn't Starr's first brush with publishing little known local history. He has 10 books published all together, two by History Press and the rest self-published. These include "Lost Industries of Albany County" and he's

nearly completed one on the early railroads of the Capital District.

"I might start getting more into the 1900s, so far all have dealt in 1800s, only because that era was the industrial era that's now gone and very little industry exists like that now. At some point, I would like to bring us more up to date," said Starr.

Information about all of Starr's books and how to purchase them is available on his website, [www.historyofsaratoga.com](http://www.historyofsaratoga.com).