Industrial History of Bowdoinham

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To process the wood generated by Maine's lumbering industry, several sawmills were established along the Cathance River. The mill-right on the Cathance, which included the 1,100 acres of land, a stream referenced in Wheeler's account as "the western branch of the Cathance River," and a small island of land along the river, was acquired by the Pejepscot Proprietors in 1716. In 1750, Samuel Winchell acquired a joint title to 1,100 acres of land along the Cathance River and built several new sawmills along the river. The mill-right on the Cathance, which included the 1,100 acres of land, was known as "the Cathance Falls." The force of the water in the river powered gigantic stone chasers which crushed the rocks into a fine powdery form. The Cathance was the sixth largest ice-producing river in the country. Industrial ice harvesting began in the early 1860s and ended in 1890. While the Cathance supported many local small-scale ice harvesting operations, the industry grew consistently until it was crippled at its peak by the financial crash of 1857. Subsequently, the Civil War and innovations of steam and steel begat the continued decline of Bowdoinham's ice industry. In 1872, the Trenton Flint and Spar Company of Trenton, New Jersey, built a feldspar mill along the Cathance River banks. The feldspar mill operated at the same level as the original mill. Feldspar is a mineral that is used to make pottery, porcelain, electrical insulators, and chemical ware, among other things. The force of the water in the river powered gigantic stone chasers which crushed the rocks into a fine powdery form. The mill produced high-quality feldspar used in the manufacture of porcelain and electrical insulators. In 1876, the original mill building was renovated and transformed into an apartment complex. An additional apartment building was built along side of the mill. The exterior still maintains the older, rustic appearance. In 1872, the Trenton Flint and Spor Company of Trenton, New Jersey, built a feldspar mill along the Cathance River banks. The feldspar mill operate at the same level as the original mill. At one point in time the feldspar mill in Topsham was the second largest in the United States. During the 1970s, however, the mill was renovated and transformed into an apartment complex. The exterior still maintains the older, rustic appearance.