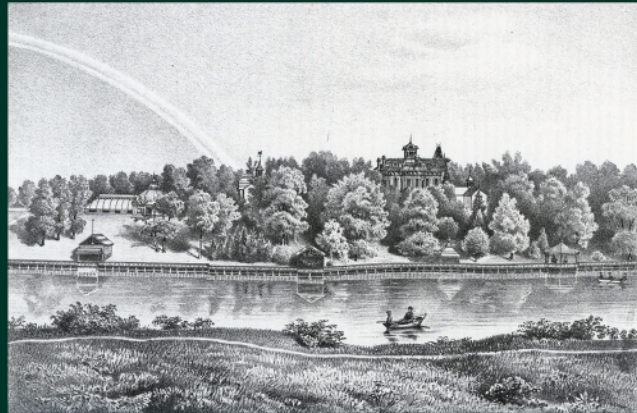


Wild's Mills at Valatie

The history and landscape of the village of Valatie, Dutch for “little falls,” were shaped by the waters of Kinderhook Creek and the Valatie Kill, which provided power for textile mills for over a century.



CHARLES WILD ESTATE

Charles Wild, who ran the Wild cotton mills from 1871 to 1903, owned an estate on scenic Wild's Pond on the Valatie Kill. The Albany-Hudson Electric Trail runs through the foreground today. Source: Franklin Ellis, *History of Columbia County, New York*, 1878.



WILD'S VALATIE MILLS

This 1873 map shows Wild's cotton mills on the Valatie Kill. Properties marked “C. Wild” and “CW” were owned by Charles Wild, whose estate appears at the upper right. Source: Beers's Atlas of Columbia County, New York, 1873.



1846 LOWER MILL

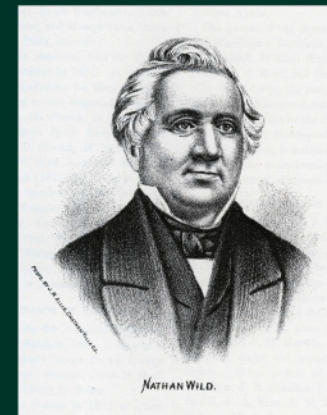
One of Valatie's biggest textile mills, Wild's Lower Mill was powered by water turbines as well as a stationary steam engine in the powerhouse at left. The tower at right contains the staircase. Source: *Village of Valatie* / Guy Gamello collection.

The Textile Industry

Before 1800, Columbia County's small streams powered gristmills and sawmills supplying local needs. Trade restriction acts in 1806–1807 and the War of 1812 interrupted British cloth imports. Columbia County entrepreneurs then built textile mills powered by waterfalls on swift creeks flowing to Hudson River shipping ports. This area was a major textile producer until well after the Civil War. By the mid-1900s, most mills closed in the face of cheap southern US labor, foreign competition, and synthetic materials.

Wild's Mills

Nathan Wild emigrated from Stockport, England, to Pawtucket, Rhode Island, in 1807 to work at Samuel Slater's pioneering cotton mill. Wild later came to Valatie, formed the Kinderhook Manufacturing Company, and built a cotton mill here on the Valatie Kill in 1828. He built a second mill in 1846 and by 1850 was making 1.6 million yards of cotton cloth a year. Nathan Wild died in 1867, and his son Charles assumed control. By the 1870s the company employed two hundred workers and was one of several cotton manufacturers in Valatie, then the largest industrial community in northern Columbia County.



NATHAN WILD
(1790–1867)

Wild gained experience at Rhode Island's Slater Mill, birthplace of the American textile industry, before coming to Valatie in 1828 to establish his own cotton mills. Source: Franklin Ellis, *History of Columbia County, New York*, 1878.



1828 UPPER MILL

This early twentieth-century postcard view looking upstream on the Valatie Kill, under the previous Main Street bridge north to the Wild's Pond dam, shows a portion of Nathan Wild's 1828 five-story brick cotton mill at left. Source: Lee Sharp.

Rensselaer and Valatie Mills

Valatie's cotton industry declined after the financial Panic of 1873. Wild's operations survived, but efforts to reorganize after the Panic of 1893 failed. In 1904, textile magnate William Harder acquired the Wild Manufacturing Company to make knit fabric. Renamed the Rensselaer and Valatie Mills, the business closed during the Great Depression, ran twenty-four hours a day during World War II, and closed for good in 1955.

