# Jaite Mill

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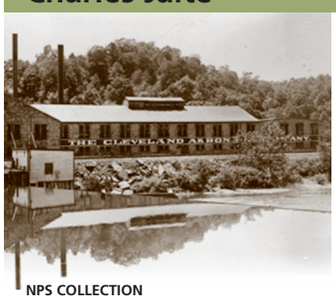
To many passersby, the Jaite Mill site is a discarded industrial wasteland, yet for residents of the valley the mill brought work, family, and community together. In 1908, the Jaite Company was considered by William B. Doyle, in his *Centennial History of Summit County*, "one of the most important business enterprises of this section of Summit County." Jaite Mill stories of industrialization, community, growth and decline are a part of the larger story of Cuyahoga Valley National Park (CVNP).

## Charles Jaite



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Much of the mill's early success can be attributed to the quiet, resourceful founder who studied paper manufacturing since boyhood. Charles Jaite was born in Germany, but immigrated to Cleveland with his parents. By age 13, he worked in a paper mill in Cleveland, alongside other immigrants from Germany and Poland.

He went on to become the president of Standard Bag and Paper Company in 1902 and vice president of the Cleveland Paper Company. These two firms consolidated to form the Cleveland-Akron Bag Company, located across from present day Boston Mills Ski Resort. In July of 1905, he resigned to begin his own papermaking company.

## The Early Mill Years

On September 18, 1905, Charles Jaite founded the Jaite Paper Company with brothers and in-laws as the officers. They purchased 22.76 acres in Northfield Township, deep within the Cuyahoga Valley. They hired local farmers to begin building the mill, using sand dredged from the nearby river to make concrete block. They laid tracks to connect to the railroad and drilled five gas wells and a sixth artesian well that provided water. According to *Centennial History of Summit County*, the water was of such "purity that the paper manufactured with its use is many points stronger than paper made... with ordinary water."

1928 Fourdrinier. NPS COLLECTION

The mill site was carefully chosen for its easy access to transportation via the Ohio & Erie Canal and the Cleveland Terminal & Valley Railroad. The site was also close to the water of Brandywine Creek, which later proved unneeded because of artesian wells. Here, halfway between Cleveland and Akron, land was inexpensive and available. The first product Jaite Mill produced was "Blue Line Paper," used for flour bags and made on a cylinder machine, which creates sheets of paper. Later a second machine was installed that could make paper from rope.

In those first years, after an eight to ten hour day, workers were expected to stay after and mix cement and sand to make more blocks to expand the factory. By 1919, the mill had added another cylinder machine for making single wall bags as the company expanded into fertilizer bags and bread sacks. In 1926, some of the cylinders were rebuilt as two Fourdrinier machines. The Fourdriniers could make continuous long rolls of paper, to be used in making bags with several "walls," or layers. In 1928 the company produced its first successful multi-walled cement bag. In its heyday during the 1920s and 1930s, Jaite Mill was the 11th largest multi-wall paper producer in the nation.

## Heyday Work Force

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Although Mr. Jaite began with a small, private operation, his vision for the mill and its workforce was on a much larger scale: not just a company but a community to support the mill as well. In 1906, Mr. Jaite purchased land on Riverview Road, where he built five two-story buildings as employee housing. He added four small single-family units along Vaughn Road in 1917.

A company town developed with homes, a general store, a post office, and a railroad station. A weekly newsletter spread the latest local news. Unlike the stereotypical company town, here there was no script (company-issued money) and people were not forced to live in company quarters. While life was not luxurious, rents were affordable.

By 1918, 214 employees worked at Jaite Mill, and by the Depression years, nearly 250 people were employed. A third of these were women who sewed the bags and worked in the offices. By 1933, during the height of the Depression, the mill operated 24 hours a day. This was its heyday with jobs enough for the local population and for Polish immigrants who moved here to live and work in the mill. A family atmosphere prevailed. In a University of Akron interview, Willy Ritch recalled, "Everybody was related to one another... in the bag plant: father, mother, daughter, son, brothers, sisters."

At peak production, workers were sleeping in shifts in the dormitory at the intersection of Vaughn and Riverview (now CVNP Headquarters), while others walked or took the company transportation to work from Boston or Peninsula, summoned by the company whistle. The whistle sounded four times per day at set times, creating a rhythm to valley life. When it stopped sounding in the 1950s, it was missed by local residents.

## The Mill's Later Years

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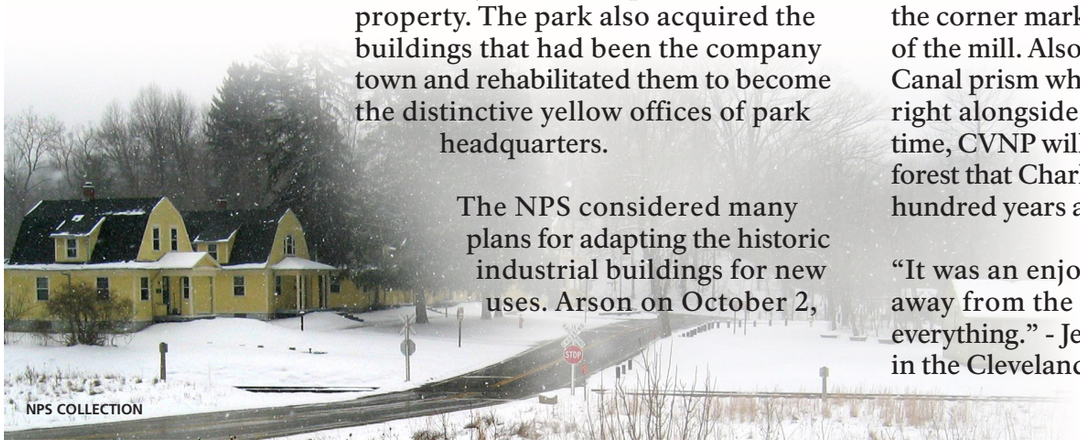
After World War II, the small, private mill was unable to compete with larger mills, particularly those in the south. In 1951 the Jaites made the difficult decision to sell the mill to National Container Corporation. The mill changed hands again, first to Owens-Illinois and then to Tecumseh. One Fourdrinier machine was disassembled, then the bag factory closed, and finally the Jaite Company housing was sold to private individuals.

In 1975, the National Park Service arrived on the scene. Four years later the Jaite Mill Historic District was entered into the National Register of Historic Places. The mill fell silent in December 1984. The next year, CVNP purchased the property. The park also acquired the buildings that had been the company town and rehabilitated them to become the distinctive yellow offices of park headquarters.

The NPS considered many plans for adapting the historic industrial buildings for new uses. Arson on October 2, 1992 snuffed out these plans, leaving the mill a serious safety hazard with unsecured walls and roofs, exposed asbestos, and potential hazardous waste-containing chambers.

The focus changed to rehabilitating the mill site and restoring natural habitat. Lack of funding stalled progress for years, until the legal settlement from the hazardous material clean-up at the Krecji Dump site provided the necessary dollars for the above-ground work work at Jaite Mill. Emergency demolition began in March 2006. Although CVNP removed most material, the park kept an original 1928 Fourdrinier to explain how these machines formed pulp into paper, and the corner markers to indicate the extent of the mill. Also look for the Ohio & Erie Canal prism which is still visible, passing right alongside an old artesian well. In time, CVNP will restore the site to the wet forest that Charles Jaite began with over a hundred years ago.

"It was an enjoyable place to work… away from the hustle and bustle of everything." - Jerry Cervenski, as quoted in the Cleveland *Plain Dealer*.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Cuyahoga Valley National Park

www.nps.gov/cuva
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