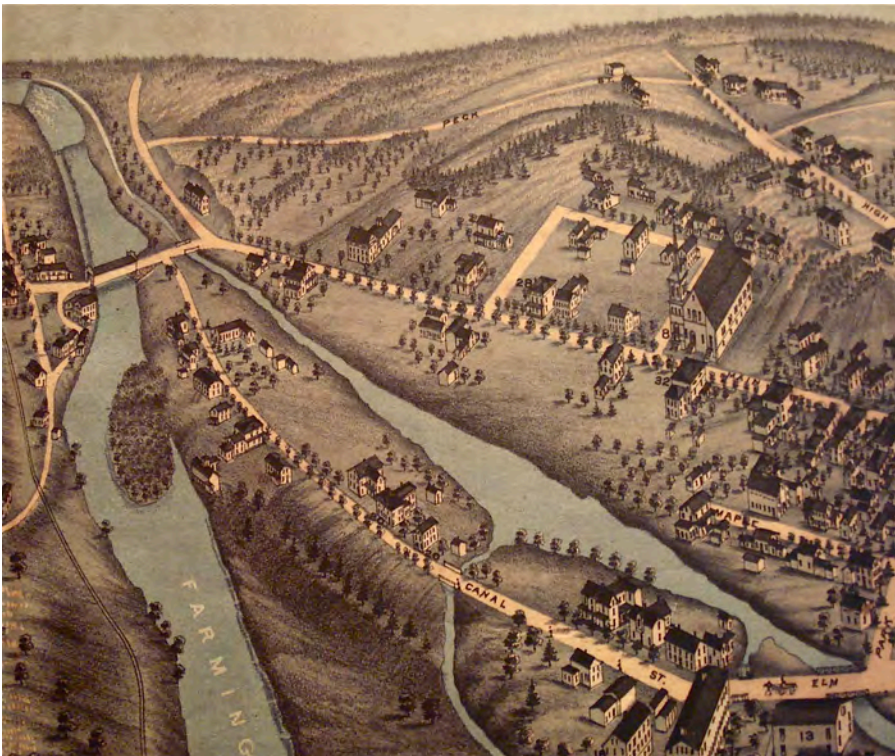


Power Dams Trail

Unionville became the industrial section of Farmington starting in 1832 because it had the two important requirements: water power and access to a modern transportation system. Transportation arrived in 1828 when Unionville's Feeder Canal provided the water for the Farmington Canal, connecting Unionville to the seaport located in New Haven. Trade developed and a dam was completed in 1832 to harness the water power of Unionville. It was located about 0.2 miles upstream from the rt. 4 bridge at a narrow rocky section of the Farmington River. Along with the dam, they built a canal with a storage basin with 8 head-race canals for factories. These canals emptied into a lower canal that had 4 additional head-race canals. In 1832 an advertisement was placed in the Hartford Courant selling and leasing water privileges on these head-race canals of Unionville... "a very low price, if you apply soon". Industrialization started to move at a faster pace.

By 1848, the Canal Era ended, and was replaced by the railroad. By 1850, 24 mills, factories, and shops depended on water power from the 1832 dam and the new railroad. In 1856 James Cowles built a new dam upstream from the old one to increase the power capacity in Unionville. The new dam raised the level of the water higher than the railroad tracks that followed the river. As a result, they needed to also build an earthen dam between the river and railroad.

The lithograph of Unionville in 1878 shows both dams upstream of Unionville center (upper left of photo). The Power Canal is shown filling the storage basin with its canals that powered the industries. The railroad was on the opposite side of the river. A full size copy of this lithograph is in the Town Hall and Library.



Unionville's water power has a long history. The first power dam was built circa 1780 just upstream from the rt. 4 bridge. It was small because it just powered the mill next to Riverfront Miniature Golf. The Power Dams Trail goes by the sites of all 3 dams that powered Unionville.

In 1877 James Cowles sold the entire operation to the Union Water Power Company, which in 1886 further raised the height of the dam. The flood of 1955 destroyed the dam, but after over 150 years, you can still walk on top of 1,000 feet of the earthen dam to the remains of the western stone dam abutment with its wing-wall. If you like an easy 2 mile walk back through time, this is the trail for you.



The Power Dams Trail forms a letter "P". The trailhead is located at the parking lot for the Farmington River Trail, just west of the route 4 bridge (arrow symbol on satellite map). The 1780 dam was opposite the kiosk. Most of the hike follows the paved River Trail that was built over the railroad bed. You will pass the site of the 1832 dam and discover why the location was a good one. The trail to the 1856 dam is east of the River Trail and forms the arc of the "P". Half of this trail is on the long earthen dam that rises about 10 feet above the river floodplain and ends at the western stone dam abutment with its impressive wing-wall.

To preserve this historic trail, one-way directions were created. You might want to print the next page and bring it with you or have it on your cell phone.

The trail starts from the kiosk for the Farmington River Trail (41° 45' 59.63" N 72° 53' 58.00" W) and heads north. You will shortly reach a black metal fence, which is opposite an arc shaped bench. Look at this section of the Farmington River. The river narrows down here and bends to the east because of the major rock outcropping slightly downstream on the west side. Behind you, the elevation rises very quickly. The river bank on the Avon side has a narrow floodplain before it reaches Huckleberry Hill. The east side was formed from glacial till. This was the location of the 1832 Power Dam and canal to Unionville (note the river bending east on the satellite map and the power canal on the east side). Crib dams were common in the 1800's for direct-drive water power mills. A crib dam was constructed of a heavy timber frame, filled with earth and stone. It took a year to build at a cost of \$9,000. This crib dam was washed away in the 1955 flood. The Power Canal is still there on the Avon side, but has no public access. This was the start of Unionville's industrialization. After 25 years, there was a demand for even more power. James Cowles decided to build a bigger dam upstream.

Continue north on the River Trail to the Burlington Town line, just past 2 arc benches . Reverse your direction & count 25 paces to the short gravel path on your left which is the start of the 1856 Power Dam Trail. (A pace is the unit of length every time you place your right foot on the ground) This hike takes you on and to fragile historic artifacts. To preserve it and to present the history, became the Eagle Scout Project for Satchel Moll, Troop 170, in Unionville. Satchel created a one-way narrow foot path that takes you on top of the long earthen dam to the west Power Dam abutment with its large wing-wall. The 1856 Power Dam trail starts & ends on the Farmington River Trail. It has a number of other trails crossing it. Satchel has placed 7 numbered signposts (camera symbols on map) at trail junctions and at the midpoint of long sections. The first 4 are the most important. You will need to bring the directions below with you.

After reversing directions at the Burlington town line, and locating the gravel trail heading east from the River Trail.... hike 25 paces to signpost #1. Turn **right** hike another 25 paces to #2.Continue **straight** ahead hike another 75 paces to #3. Make a 90° **left** turn hike another 100 paces to #4. Bear **right** at the junction. hike another 140 paces to #5. It follows the top of the earthen dam. Approaching #5 you descend across a major breach in the dam. Continue **straight** past #5 and return onto the dam hike another 140 paces to #6 ending at the "T" junction Turning left brings you to the 1856 Power Dam Turning right brings you back to the Farmington River Trail. Hike 80 paces to #7 Continue **straight** to the River Trail. The parking lot is 0.4 miles to the left.

A summary to the "T": **Right, Straight, Left, Right, Straight**

The bonus Satchel provides on this hike, is an information kiosk on Unionville's industrial growth during the middle 1800's. It is located just before signpost #6.

After viewing the west abutment and wing-wall, hike to the river to see the east abutment. This had a very long wing-wall made of stone that was also used as the wall for the Power Canal. Most of the stone Power Canal wall remain and the water in the Power Canal can be seen in this satellite map from 2015.

Use this Historic Marker for more information: <http://www.hmdb.org/marker.asp?MarkerID=90197>
This is the link for the kiosk: <http://www.hmdb.org/PhotoFullSize.asp?PhotoID=336591>

