

## WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO THE NEPPERHAN/ SAW MILL RIVER?

While the Nepperhan/Saw Mill River is not directly included in this waterfront section it is important to look at this part of Yonkers' history and relationship with this river.

**Let's Pollute It** - Beginning with industrialization two of the major industries in Yonkers were the Copcutt veneer mills and Waring's hat factory. The success of these early waterfront industries was like a magnet for additional industrial growth (see chart above). By the 1880's the Nepperhan had become extremely polluted and a potential source for disease. The combination of the dams installed on the river for power and the waste from the factories and mills was devastating to the river. In order to help the river recover from damage a regular flow of water to the river was needed to flush it, so dams on the Nepperhan/Saw Mill were demolished in 1893.

**Let's Drink It** - Some recovery of the waterway did occur and by 1903 the Nepperhan/Saw Mill was again a central feature of the (now) City of Yonkers. The river was used for recreational swimming, fishing and even for drinking water. Its current watershed use is 63% urban, 34 % forest and 1% agricultural. Although not a primary drinking water source since 1983 it is still considered a backup drinking water supply.



Saw Mill River Being covered –  
from Saw Mill River Coalition website



The Saw Mill River today  
where it meets the Hudson

**Let's Cover it** – As development occurred in the early 1900s the Nepperhan/Saw Mill River traveled through prime real estate so it was decided to cover a half-mile section of the river, putting it in a large pipe underground. This began in 1917 in the section of town called “Chicken Island”. By 1922 it was completed, after traveling underneath Getty Square, North Broadway, Larkin Plaza and emptying into the Hudson behind the train station (image below left). The covering of the river was not the only change affecting it. The flow pattern of the river was also altered by the roadways that were installed. The Saw Mill River Parkway in the 1920s, and later the New York State Thruway both had an impact.

**Why Uncover it?** The uncovering of the river is called ‘daylighting’. Today Yonkers is discussing ‘daylighting’ sections of this covered river. Daylighting has occurred successfully in many locations around the country. Why do you think a community would want to ‘daylight’ a river?

*(Photo Phil Mansfield, New York Times - Yonkers Saw Mill River)*