



Module 6 Talking Points

- The first European settlers to this area saw places along this stretch of the Baraboo River that would be good locations to build dams to harness water power.
- The first man-made dam ever built on the Baraboo River was built in 1840 at the upper oxbow near what is now Ochsner Park.
- Eventually there were five dams in the Baraboo area. The first dams were made of logs. Later the dams were made of concrete.
- Canfield's map of Baraboo from 1872 shows four dams and mill sites. Each dam provided water power for at least one business or factory. Each dam originally had a saw mill to cut trees into lumber. Other types of mills and factories that could use water power were also built at each location.
- Early settlers built houses near the dams and mills.
- In 1844 a dam and saw mill were constructed along the river in what is now West Baraboo.
- West Baraboo was originally named Lyons and the village was laid out just a couple of years after the dam was built.
- The Lyons dam was originally built of logs. It was often called the Upper Dam because it was the dam furthest up the river in the Baraboo valley.
- When the dam was built a saw mill was built at the same time to use the water power.
- Trees were cut nearby and further up the Baraboo River. The logs were floated down the Baraboo River to the saw mill.
- The saw mill was run by water power and the logs were cut into lumber. The lumber was stacked together on rafts and floated down the Baraboo River to the Wisconsin River where it could get to places where it could be sold.
- Later, factory buildings were built at this site with woodworking equipment. The equipment was powered by the water power.
- A wooden bridge was also built across the river at this point.
- Inside the factory buildings, the water wheel turned other wheels and belts which made equipment like saws and lathes turn. Lumber could be made into many things like furniture, wagons and even wooden bowls.
- During this time most household goods were made out of wood, metal or ceramics. There was no plastic. This factory produced wooden chairs, tables, stools, bedsteads, rocking chairs and cabinets.



- These items were sold to people settling in the area but they were also transported to other communities for sale.
- By the time Mr. Canfield drew his map in 1872 the dam near Lyons was used to power a sawmill and a "Hub, Spoke & Wagon Gearing Manufactory."
- Wooden wagons were a big part of life for hundreds of years. The wagons had wheels made out of wood with a metal band around the outside.
- Rubber wheels were not produced until the 1880s.
- This factory made some of the parts to make wagon wheels especially the round "hub" or center of the wheel and the "spokes" or arms that come out from the hub to support the outer circle of a wagon wheel.
- Near the mill workers built cabins and houses and a small settlement was formed near the dam.
- The water power at the Lyons dam helped make lumber, furniture and wagon wheel parts for over forty years.
- Down the river at the upper oxbow a dam was built on the west side of the oxbow in 1845. A long channel was dug across the peninsula of land to divert the water from behind the dam to the mill on the other side of the oxbow.
- The long channel was called the millrace. The millrace created an island out of the land inside the oxbow.
- If we look at the satellite image for this area we can see what is there today.
- The area where the mills were is now part of Attridge Park. The large tan rectangle near the bottom of the picture is the sand volleyball courts at the park.
- At first there was only a sawmill at this location, but in 1863 the Island Woolen Mill started operation here. Can you guess why it was called the "Island" Woolen Mill?
- The woolen mill was built to turn wool from sheep into fabric.
- After the fur of the sheep was collected it was turned into yarn that could be woven into cloth using machines.
- Giant machines called looms were used to weave the wool yarn together. The looms were run by water power from the river.
- The fabrics from the Island Woolen Mill were used to make blankets and clothing. Later the wool fabric was even sold to automobile makers for use in car interiors.



- The Island Woolen Mill grew to become the largest employer in Sauk County for many years employing hundreds of people. The mill closed in 1949 and the buildings sat idle. A fire later destroyed many of the buildings and the rest were torn down except for one.
- The office building for the Island Woolen Mill was not damaged by the fire and was saved. Today it is the Sauk County History Center.
- The building reminds us today that there was once a large mill here run by water power from the Baraboo River. The mill produced wool fabric for over 85 years. If all of the fabric the mill produced was put together, end to end, it would easily circle the earth.
- Further down the river near what is today Oak Street a dam was built in 1844 by a man named George Brown.
- This dam eventually had a millrace on both sides of the river.
- Today the dam, races and mills are gone but there is still a bridge at the Ash-Walnut Street location.
- While George Brown and his workmen were digging a hole for the foundation of the saw mill they found the skeleton of a woolly mammoth from thousands of years ago. They dug up the skeleton and determined that the mammoth had once been 36 feet long.
- All of the dams along the Baraboo River have now been removed.
- For over 100 years they provided water power for Baraboo businesses to make many different products out of wood, wool, grains and other materials. The dams also provided water power to pump water to city homes and businesses and to make electricity.
- The potential for water power is the reason that European settlers came here. After the dams and mills were built people came to work at them. Other settlers came to provide goods and services to the first settlers. Eventually a community developed which turned into the city of Baraboo and the village of West Baraboo.
- In 1855 a large grist mill was built along Water Street at the Oak Street dam by a man named Patrick Bassett. A grist mill turned wheat and other grains into flour.
- Wheat grows on long stalks with kernels of wheat at the end. After the kernels of wheat were removed they were ground into flour between two large stones which were turned with water power.



- The flour came down wooden chutes and was collected in wooden barrels. Most food during this time was shipped in barrels or wooden boxes. There was no cardboard or plastic.
- Mr. Bassett's grist mill produced tens of thousands of barrels of flour every year.
- The dam at Oak Street also helped power a sawmill and furniture factory for many years.
- The picture from 1866 is one of the oldest pictures of Baraboo. In the background the large building is the Bassett Grist Mill. In the middle is the Ash-Walnut Street Bridge.
- The only buildings in the 1866 photo that remain are a few houses on the hill seen in the background.
- At the lower oxbow another dam was built in 1847. This dam has a very long millrace.
- Today the dam, millrace and mills are gone.
- The dam once provided water power for a saw mill, woolen mill and grist mill. One of the mills even made socks out of wool yarn.
- In 1886 a special building was built at this site to use the water power to pump water from nearby springs to a large tank on the north side of Baraboo. The tank was used to supply water to houses and businesses in Baraboo. Before this time everyone had to get water from their own well.
- The water pumping station is shown standing by the smokestack in this photo. The millrace is in the foreground.
- In Baraboo water from the river was used to pump clear spring water. People used the water to drink and to wash.
- Indoor plumbing was new at this time. Special rooms called bathrooms were designed so that bathtubs, sinks and toilets could use water from the city water system pumped by water power from the Baraboo River.
- Also new at this time was the idea of bringing electricity into your home or business. Before electricity was available people lit their homes with candles or oil lamps. The electric light bulb changed life for many people.
- Three of the dams along the Baraboo River were eventually used to run generators to create electricity that was supplied to homes and businesses.
- Water from the dams turned water wheels which were connected by large belts to generators which made electricity.