

STEEPLIN COUNTY

A Guide to the Steeplin Valley

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Call of Cthulhu Adventures in the 1920s

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Introduction

Steeplin County, A Guide to the Steeplin Valley has been designed to give Keepers, and in turn, Investigators more information and background about the area in which the adventure *The Rise of Xnaaki* is based.

Steeplin Valley and its township are fictional locations created by non-Americans (which may mean that some of the information here within is completely devoid of any real historical reference) to, originally, enhance their own Call of Cthulhu games.

In future issues, as we publish more adventures based in the valley, we hope to bring you more information about this strange backwater county and its odd inhabitants.

Steeplin County

Just outside Newburyport the railway splits, to the north the main trunk line continues on to Portsmouth and beyond, while to the west a narrower track leads through the wooded hills of north-west Massachusetts and the rough frontier country of Vermont.

Once past the town of Rutland the hills and terrain of the great green state become rougher and wilder, until, ahead of the train, two steep unwelcoming mounds seem to move apart and usher the traveller into the strange and foreboding Steeplin Valley!

The Founding of Steeplin

Steeplin was founded in 1765, by the Steeplin family (in particular one Harold Steeplin) as a trading post for frontiersmen and their families. Avoiding the War of Independence, based mainly on its location, Steeplin grew rapidly as men moved into the area to find work with the local mills and forestry businesses and by the turn of the century was a thriving town of 600 souls, mainly men.

This ever-increasing population began a change in the town, as young men started to outnumber the original residence. For the mill owners this was a catch 22 situation - the new independent America wanted Steeplin's lumber so they needed the young male workers, yet the drink and violence limited the quality of work and was turning Steeplin into a rough and unwelcome place (at one point men outnumbered women 10 to 1).

With the arrival of Fredric DuPont in 1809 the town found an inspiration and a leader. DuPont gathered together the old families and stated that with just a single large mill in the town they could control their labour force - by knitting them into one large family. He also proposed that incentives be used to attract

family men from nearby cities and that a Sheriff and deputies be appointed.

The main aim of DuPont's plan was to create a large single Mill which would be able to afford to haul its logs to Lake Champlain and the barge them down river to the quickly growing city of Montreal. All of DuPont's ideas were agreed upon, including forming one mill from the many that littered the area. The new mill was to be run by a 'board', made up of the old mill owners (Fredric convinced them that together they would earn more than they did competing) and by the end of the year DuPont had been elected Chairman of the board and construction of the mill underway.

In 1811 a new church opened in town, preaching free thought and a ritualistic way of life. This congregation did not last long however, as the influx of Christian families meant its membership quickly dwindled.

The War of 1812 passed the people of Steeplin County by with little effect on trade or business although many words were spoken about Murray's Raid in late July 1813 (in which "...the destruction of public buildings, military stores, and vessels..." was achieved by a substantial English Naval force between Plattsburgh, New York and Swanton, Vermont). In 1814 a number of Steeplin men also travelled north to the call to arms at Plattsburg, but arrived too late to be involved in the battle there.

The following year DuPont made a bold move in attempting to take total control of the Mill, when, for reasons unexplained to this day, many of the older shareholding family unilaterally decided to sell their interests in the Mill. Although never substantiated many locals, even today, believe that DuPont somehow threatened many of the owners into selling. Regardless of the circumstances, by the time the dust settled Fredric DuPont was the majority owner of the Steeplin Mill. Obviously pleased with the outcome, little did he know that his actions would forever taint the relationship between his descendants and the townsfolk.

In 1849 the first railroad arrived in Steeplin, opening new avenues of trade for the township. For the rest of the century the town and its outlying regions grew in prosperity, and with it, population.

By the beginning of the 20th Century the people of Steeplin had, for the most part, found their niches in the community. The leading families such as the Steeplins, Abbots, Dobbs' and Moores still own, between them, about half of the mill, (although the DuPonts do still own the share majority, if only by a few percent) while others such as the Jacobsons and the Blakeys have only recently arisen as potential power brokers in the valley.

All in all Steeplin County is fairly typical of most New England communities. Yet behind many a closed door may lay old and dangerous secrets - awaiting the unsuspecting visitor.

Steeplin Today

Lots of very nice things can be said about Steeplin township, the people are friendly, the atmosphere clean and work available (to the hard working). Steeplin is not a community of constant excitement and action, quite the contrary, most of its residents are happy to let the world drift by, as long their little slice of heaven is left untouched.

The township itself is home to just over 4000 citizens, most of whom, either directly or indirectly, make a living through the Mill.

This last point is of major concern to many of the town's most prominent leaders, as if the Mill, which rarely makes a substantial profit, were to close the loss would be the end of the community as it's known today.

During the adventure *The Rise of Xnaaki*, the mill's nominal owner and major shareholder, Henry DuPont, meets an unfortunate end. Although most of the locals cared little for the 'lord' of DuPont Estate (rumours spoke of Henry trying to shut down and move the mill - although no one knew it was actually for the good of the town), they are all concerned about the fate of the Mill.

Once DuPont is buried and arson claims the late man's manor, the majority shareholding past on to Henry's distance cousin in England. Gerald Berrit, a prominent London lawyer has no wish to 'uproot' and move to the 'colonies', instead offering his interest in the mill to the other shareholders. Although rich in local terms the remaining owners had no way of purchasing the outstanding shares by themselves. Rather they hatched on a plan to approach the large state wide milling company, Heildenburg & Sons, to gauge its interest in the offer.

What the Future Holds

Although it is outside the scope of this guide it may be of interest to Keepers what exactly the future holds for the town and the mill.

In three months time, after long protracted negotiation, Heildenburg agrees to purchase Berrit's interests and as a result gains nominal control of Steeplin Mill. This brings a new era of odd unease, especially once to the town as strangers begin to enter town and take up important roles at the mill. During this time the Heildenburg Board makes it quite clear that the mill must make more profit if it is to have a viable future.

Steeplin Township

Steeplin is divided into three 'suburbs' each catering for the different types of people who live and work in the town and valley. These are Railside, situated to the south of the railroad which bisects the township,

Downtown, the town's main business hub and Mill town, situated 10 minutes north of the town, the home to many of Steeplin Mill's single and unskilled labourers.

Railside

The area unofficially known as Railside is situated to the south of Steeplin's main street across the rail bridge from Downtown. Although home of many of the town poorer inhabitants, it is actually its newest suburb. Sub divided about twenty years ago as a result of the increase demand for labour at the Mill and Abattoir most of the homes in the suburb are quite new. They are, however, generally occupied by the valley's older generation (as their own homes have been snatched up by the better waged Mill workers) and as a result very few of these homes are very well maintained. This has resulted in the area looking as if it is much older than it actually is.

Most of the more affluent people of Steeplin avoid Railside, unless absolutely necessary. If fact if you ask most non-Railside residents they will tell you that the only thing worth crossing the bridge for is either the train or the Event Grounds.

Mill town

Almost a village in its own right, Mill town is built around the main road leading from Steeplin proper to the Mill. It is home to most of the younger and poorer workers of the Mill and their families. Mill Town began life as a collection of temporary shelters but has grown over the last hundred years to today house nearly 500 souls.

Pleasant enough during the day, at night this closely-knit group of homes can be a dangerous and unpredictable place for the non mill worker. Although Mill town officially has no businesses or shops, a number of mill workers wives offer services such as clothes cleaning, mending and meal cooking from home, to supplement their families' income.

Big Bill Haskins, a big vivacious ex-mill worker, is the most well known Mill town resident. Running the local speak easy from an abandoned house near the edge of the small community, Big Bill is full of stories and rumours about Steeplin and the valley. To many Haskins is seen as the unofficial mascot and leader of Mill town, a cherry face amongst a sea of dull and repetitive hard work.

People from Mill town rarely mix with those from Steeplin proper, both sides viewing each other as an unwanted necessity in ensuring the town's survival.

Downtown

Downtown is the heart of Steeplin township, encompassing the area to the north of the Steeplin rail

line and is the home of the majority of the valley's wealth.

Almost dividing Downtown in two is Main Street, the locale to most of Steeplin's Municipal buildings and businesses. Along this stretch of road one finds hardware stores intermixed with fruiterers and butchers while stationers set up shop next to clothing and convenience stores. On Steeplin's main street all businesses are equal.

The streets behind both sides of Main Street are home to most of Steeplin's business owners as well as the more affluent citizens of the town for the most part houses here are well maintained with large expansive properties and pristine gardens.

Locations in Steeplin Township

The Town Hall

The Steeplin Town Hall is home to most of the township Municipal offices. Also the site of the old Xnaaki Church this old building dates back to the days of the first settlers in the valley. Now fully restored, it is home to the Mayor's office, the Council chambers and the collection of books and journals that make up Steeplin's Community Library.

The Librarian, Mrs Agatha Beasley, is new to the post, although she is a life long resident of Steeplin. Agatha Beasley is a wealth of knowledge when it comes to Steeplin and its environs, not to mention the ins and outs of most of Steeplin's well-to-do.

McFarlane's

This is a small diner/family restaurant, which although does not have a vast or even changing menu offers a decent meal for a good price.

Joel McFarlane runs a popular establishment, which to outsiders seems to have more than its fair share of young and middle aged male patrons. This interesting observation can actually be attributed to the fact that McFarlane's also doubles as Steeplin's speak easy.

Although outlawed by Prohibition, McFarlane's openly sells liquor to the locals. This includes members of the local constabulary!

Pits & Bieces

Although Steeplin isn't well known for its tourist trade, it does cater for the occasional visitor and culture seeker with Pits & Bieces, the town's arts and crafts store (which also doubles as a second hand junk shop). Aames and Polly Roundtree have run the store for about 10 years and although they do not make a lot of profit from the business, the trade is steady.

Interesting most of the art and craft goods are of local origin. These range from the mundane woollen and

leather clothing through to hand crafted furniture dating back to the first settlers of the region. There has also been, on more than one occasion, singular odds and ends discovered amongst the usually junk that litters the back room of Pits & Bieces. Oddly, many of these strange pieces are unfamiliar to even the oldest and most knowledgeable of Steeplin locals.

People and Places in the Valley

To many Steeplin township seems as though it is the heart of the valley, yet a number of the communities main economic contributors (and by extension, a good deal of its political power-base) are actually scattered out amongst the farmlands that cover the County. In total another 3000 souls inhabit Steeplin Valley, most of whom work the small to medium sized farms that litter the rich growing pastures of the valley's hillsides.

Steeplin Mill

Although 'owned' by the DuPont family since the take over of 1815, Steeplin Mill is still, in essence, a community run company. A new board is elected every 4 years by the company's shareholders and although shares and seats do change hands, it is rare for anyone outside of the more prominent Steeplin families to be elected. Of the 10 seats available only one is always spoken for, the head of the DuPont family. Owning near half the company's shares the DuPont's are always guaranteed the Chairman's spot on the board.

The current Mill board sees Jonas Steeplin (a direct descendent of the towns founding father Harold Steeplin) as the deputy Chairman, who along with 2 Abbots, a Dobbs and a Moore.

Unlike large companies elsewhere the shareholders of Steeplin are the stakeholders of the company (its workers, customers and community). Stock is rarely bought or sold in the conventional sense, rather shares are usually passed on as inheritance or gifted as presents, and as such the majority of Steeplin Mill's shares remain in the township.

Employing anywhere up to 450 men at one time (most of whom work as loggers or haulers in the Pine forests on the far side of the valley) Steeplin Mill is more than just the town's main employer, it's one big happy family (well most of the time).

Steeplin Valley Farms

There has always been an abattoir in Steeplin, at first it was to feed the hungry workers at the Mill and then, as the years passed, to support the growing township. In 1890 the slaughterhouse was purchased by Jacob Jacobson, a young well-educated Boston man (who for reasons of his own wandered into Steeplin), and begun to make a tidy profit. With the advent of commercial liquid refrigeration (in the late 1890s) and smart marketing and sales Steeplin Valley Farms now

supplies cool stores from Boston to Syracuse. Usually only supplying manufacturing companies such as canning or bulk food plants - one major client uses purchases Steeplin meat to supply the US Army with beef soup - the once tiny Steeplin abattoir has eked out a good sized niche in the meat packing market.

Jacob, now in his late 50s, still runs the abattoir and shows no signs of letting up soon, although his son Morris is now in charge of company's sales and marketing. The business is now Steeplin's second biggest employer with almost 50 full time staff. Coupled this with the large number of seasonal workers employed and is now a major player in the town's future.

As a result of this increased prosperity a small community of workers has sprung up around the abattoir. In general these homes are solid settler type cottages, all within walking distance to the slaughterhouse. Some slightly larger structures sit apart from the rest, most of these acting as accommodation for the influx of seasonal workers during the slaughter months.

The Blakey Farm

Ronald Blakey owns the largest farm in Steeplin Valley, running cattle and sheep on the massive hillside property. Although he could well be a leader in the community, Blakey, who must now be in his 70s, keeps well clear of town business, preferring to remain with his close family in a small house high up in the Valley.

Today the farm is run by his children and grandchildren, who although regularly visit Steeplin township have little to say about life and even less about their patriarch.

Greenwood Corner

This small, out of the way community resides little more than 5 miles east of Steeplin township. Consisting of a general store (with petrol pump) and a couple of run down houses, most of the residents of this community are strangers to the more 'refined' citizens of Steeplin.

Rumours abound about Greenwood Corner - strange noises are heard late at night and the occasional out of town visitor speaks of seeing strange sights in the paddocks and fields that surround the settlement.

Steeplin Events Ground

Situated just south of Steeplin proper, the Events ground is home to the agriculture and farming displays that are held in the town each year. The Grounds are also become home to the travelling shows that occasionally stop by on their tours north.

Steeplin Lake

If there is one place in the entire valley shrouded in more legend and rumour than others then it is Steeplin Lake. Although the road from the township to the lake is well maintained, it is rare that any of the locals frequent the spot, except during the height of summer.

When people visit such a lonely and odd place they are often drive off by the feeling of being watched or followed by someone or something that cannot be seen. Too many locals and visitors have last been seen near Steeplin Lake for people not to be suspicious of the stories told about it.