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Gray's Mill: Baker Correspondence to Philip Marshall

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. Phil - thanks for a great interview. Both Ed and I were inspired by your approach to Historic Preservation.

In thinking about your visit to the Russell Mills Grange I wondered if you needed another place to take your students. If so how about Gray's Mill in Adamsville.

Following is a quick overview:

Adamsville (originally Taborville) was conceived in the late 17th century when a stream was dammed and a mill was built. The mill pond created power to run a grist mill, a saw mill and was a source for cutting and selling ice. The mill, originally powered by a wooden wheel, ground meal for human use, fodder for animals and sawed timbers for construction. A blacksmith, meat market, bakery, harness shop, and ice houses, etc., were some of the businesses that sprung up around the mill. In the mid 19th century the influence of the industrial revolution arrived and the mill's wooden wheel was replaced by a turbine. The turbine, a more efficient source of power, lasted until it was destroyed by the 1938 hurricane. It was replaced by a gasoline engine and continued to serve the community for 50 more years. In 1980 the miller who was then 80, decided to sell the mill.

Ralph Guild, a summer resident, remembered the mill from childhood and not wanting to see it fall into ruin, bought it, restored it, and hired a miller to run the mill. However by 1999 Guild realized that the mill could no longer be profitable, --super markets and fast food had taken over -- and he closed the doors.

In the meantime the pond had silted over, vegetation had moved in and the pond had become half its original size.

In addition, with nobody in charge at the mill, the community didn't know what to do when the pond flooded or became a mosquito infested trickle. They did know that they didn't want to lose the mill or the pond, which have always been the heart of the village. Consequently various people tried different ways to stabilize the pond, compounding the problem and progressively the life of the pond and its relationship to the mill and the village deteriorated.

Guild cares deeply about the mill, the pond and what it means to the village. However he and I are at a loss to know the right direction for its future. I guess I see Adamsville -- a little village that historically came to be because of a dammed up stream -- as a perfect example of the meaning of a community - how it functioned in the past, how it functions today and what we can learn. Its resources include, 300 years of community life, industrial technology, archaeology, ecology, sociology, politics, economics, and recreation.

Interestingly there is no historical society. Perhaps because the mill is in Massachusetts and 90% of the pond and village is in Rhode Island.

There is so much more to its story -- fireman who need to fill their fire trucks with the pond water, the Westport fish commissioners who want to install a fish ladder, pollution

from a near by auto garage, Rhode Island DEM whoare not willing to give a permit to restore the pond while The Westport Conservation Commission is totally for it.

So what do you think ? Is this something that would interest your students? What is exciting about Adamsville is it is like so many other villages that sprung-up in the 18th century except in this case so much is still there and the needs, although different today, are just as strong. Even the change of names from Taborsville to Adamsville is interesting. It came about because of a feud between the Tabors and the Crandells. They couldn't agree on which name should be used so they finally settled on Adamsville because at that time John Q. Adams was president. Democracy at work!

In any case I would love to show you the mill. The Massachusetts Historical Commission have promised to come and look at it soon. Getting the Mill site on the National Registry might be a good beginning.

Pete