



NEW HAMPSHIRE DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

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NEW HAMPSHIRE'S WATERPOWER LEGACY

New state, federal, and private initiatives are seeking the removal of a number of dams from several New Hampshire rivers. State conservation agencies have joined with private advocacy groups to create a River Restoration Task Force. The task force plans to return sections of our streams to conditions of natural flow, thus assisting the migration and spawning of anadromous fish.

The Division of Historical Resources has joined the discussion. The Division's job is to ensure that state and federal initiatives for dam removal are balanced by careful observance of the National Historic Preservation Act, which requires a thorough evaluation of effects on historical resources.

New Hampshire's nineteenth-century mills, dams, reservoirs and power canals are characteristic elements of our landscape. They are a physical record of our transition from an agrarian to a manufacturing state. They are embodiments of the social and family history of our people. They represent the largest and most technically

sophisticated engineering works of their time.

The creation of our extensive system of factories, worker housing, dams and canals



West Henniker Dam, rebuilt in 1936 on the site of dams dating back to the 1700s.

(Photograph by James L. Garvin)

began in the 1820s. This great enterprise made New Hampshire a leader in the planning and construction of buildings and industrial complexes on a scale that had never before been seen in North America. The need to harness the latent energy of water for large-scale manufacturing propelled the state into the forefront of hydraulic engineering. The building of our manufacturing cities demanded immense growth in the production of bricks, the quarrying of

granite, and the milling of wood, helping to transform these traditional trades into major industries.

New Hampshire's industrial enterprise made our state an internationally recognized center of manufacturing on an unprecedented scale. Mastery of the many skills needed to process textiles, paper, leather and woodwork also earned New Hampshire a high reputation in engineering and invention, in the production of foundry products, machinery, and machine tools, and in power generation and transmission. The capital generated by our mills helped to make New England a financial center of power and influence.

This same enterprise transformed our society. The bells of our mills taught an agricultural people to work by the clock rather than by the sun. By 1870, New Hampshire employed 46,500 people in manufacturing – virtually the same number then working in agriculture. From that point on, New Hampshire became, and remains, one of the nation's most heavily industrialized states in

proportion to its population. Industry's ever-increasing demand for labor brought wave after wave of immigrants to New Hampshire in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, diversifying our population.

Today, reservoirs that were created to drive industry enrich our landscape, providing beauty, recreation, wildlife habitats, and ample stores of clean water. Even our greatest lake, Winnepesaukee, was enlarged and deepened in the nineteenth century for the needs of

manufacturing, and today remains as industry transformed it. Our dams, built of timber, stone, or concrete, still brace themselves against the ceaseless pressure of stored water. Some of them, especially the earth-filled granite dams that were built in the 1820s to power the mills of Dover and Newmarket, are among the oldest and most massive engineering projects still in service in New Hampshire. New Hampshire's mill buildings enrich our landscape too, impressing the viewer with their immense size, beautiful proportioning, solid

construction, indigenous materials, and their powerful and symmetrical repetition of wall openings and structural details.

New Hampshire's industrial legacy has transformed the state and its people, becoming inseparable from our identity as a society. That is why we must apply all our knowledge and judgment to each proposal to remove a piece of that legacy.

James L. Garvin
State Architectural Historian