



NEW HAMPSHIRE DIVISION OF HISTORICAL RESOURCES

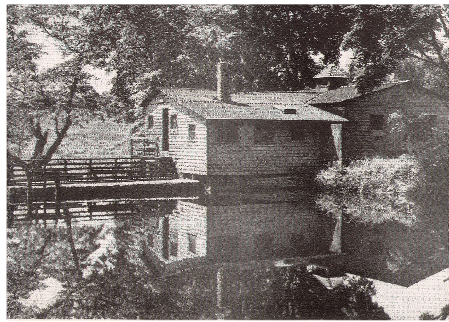
State of New Hampshire, Department of Cultural Resources
19 Pillsbury Street, 2nd floor, Concord NH 03301-3570
Voice/ TDD ACCESS: RELAY NH 1-800-735-2964
<http://www.nh.gov/nhdhr>

603-271-3483
603-271-3558
FAX 603-271-3433
preservation@nhdhr.state.nh.us

NEW HAMPSHIRE'S CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

In 1938, Dr. George Woodbury, an out-of-work anthropologist, returned to his birthplace in Bedford, New Hampshire, to try to earn a living by rebuilding and operating a long-abandoned water-powered mill on Bowman's Brook. Beginning in 1744, Woodbury's ancestors had built and operated a series of mills of every description on that stream.

Looking across the fields from his family home, Woodbury was "greeted by a spectacular panorama of surrounding Hillsborough County. Green and jewel-like in the spring sunshine, it stretched away on every hand." Gathered behind a newly repaired dam, Woodbury's millpond lay "dark, smooth, and steaming in the morning sun." Bedford was then a town of farms, woodlots,



John Goffe's Mill, as reconstructed by George Woodbury in 1939. From the New Hampshire Troubadour, October 1948.

and 1500 inhabitants, safely removed from the teeming industrial city of Manchester by a full two miles. In 1948, Woodbury recorded the saga of his reconstruction project in the best-selling book, *John Goffe's Mill*.

Then, in the late 1950s, the Everett Turnpike arrived. Passing within yards of the mill, it ran headlong over Bowman's Brook and planted a sprawling

interchange just below the millpond. Suddenly, Woodbury's world had changed. So had the quiet farming town of Bedford.

Today, Bedford boasts a population of over 20,000. John Goffe's Mill is a tiny relic hidden behind the spreading wings of a hotel and conference center that was built on the Woodbury and adjacent farms in 1962. The green and jewel-like fields have been transformed into a desert of asphalt parking lots serving shopping centers and department stores. One margin of the millpond is blocked by the wall of a dormitory-like hotel wing; upstream, a second building spans the brook like a bridge.

The fate of Bowman's Brook shows the fragility of New Hampshire's landscape in an era when

population growth and commercial development have outstripped the means to identify and protect our cultural resources. Yet the people of New Hampshire have often revealed an unerring sense of the value of their surroundings when change is imminent.

Recent efforts to protect stone walls, cellar holes, stone culverts, arched stone bridges, rural roads, dams, old barns, and the buildings and machinery of past industries have largely originated with ordinary people whose love for these things has been translated into action when a threat became evident.

These people recognize that New Hampshire is a museum of its own history. What we once had, we still have, at least in part. About 10,000 people lived in New Hampshire in 1730, after a century of European settlement here. The state's population grew to over a million at the dawn of the twenty-first century. Yet things that were familiar to the people of 1730 can still be seen today, along with everything that has accumulated since. Until recently, our state has been so little affected by large-scale change that

many relics of former times have rested safely beside the creations of more recent enterprise. Unlike Bowman's Brook, much of New Hampshire remains a place where we can read our history in the lineaments of the landscape itself.

Almost every human activity has left its trace in our landscape, because almost every human need has been met through the creation of an object. The artifacts of history are everywhere. They can be as enveloping as woodlands, cleared fields, and roadways; as dramatic as hydroelectric dams and factory smokestacks; as familiar as houses, schools, and libraries.

Every artifact embodies the story of its creation, but to read and understand that story we often need the help of people who are familiar with the context in which an object was created. With such help, the landscape and the objects in it can convey our history in a direct and tangible way, proving through our own senses that other people inhabited our land and met the challenges of their day as we meet those of our day. The objects through which

our predecessors carried out their lives' work or embodied their sense of beauty and meaning are often among our most accessible windows to history.

The field of historic preservation derives from the conviction that the cultural landscape embodies human life and memory, that this embodied humanity can be understood and savored, and that it conveys meaning. The act of understanding and preserving cultural resources is a form of environmental stewardship, an affirmation to future generations that we have endeavored to recognize and pass something of value to them.

*James L. Garvin
State Architectural
Historian*