

## Lamprey River Mill History



This map, produced by Neatline Associates, shows where mills were once located in the watershed of the Lamprey rivers. Some dots represent more than one mill.

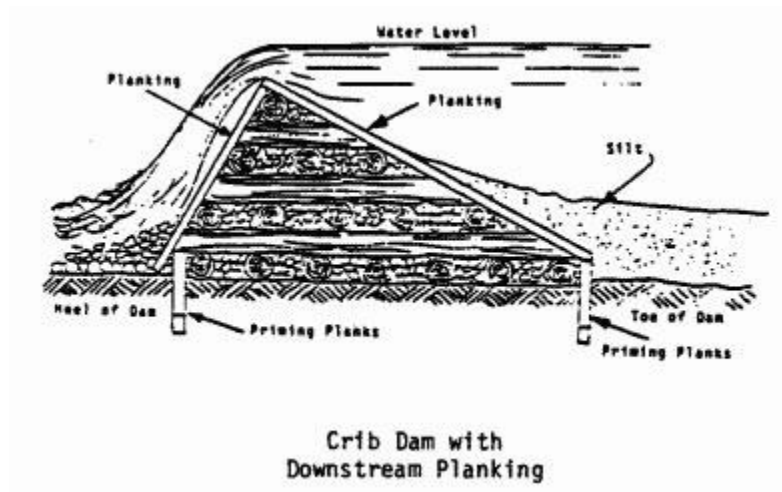
In 2009, the Lamprey River Advisory Committee awarded a Small Grant for a project that sought to make the area's mill history come to life. Neatline Associates of Deerfield located and mapped the various dams and mills that once populated the Lamprey and its many tributaries. Their research found the historic presence of an impressive 100+ mills in the watershed. Most of these mills were small, seasonal operations, but some mills served as the industrial hub of their communities. There were numerous sawmills and grist mills, but also many specialty mills that catered to small "niche" markets.

### Colonial Mills

Mills of the colonial period were usually small, family operated enterprises. English kings recognized that mills and rights to the river were essential for colonists, so they granted "privileges" to certain landowners. These privileges

guaranteed the right to access and use not only the river's water, but also the land around the river.

Mills were built of locally harvested wood and had foundations made of locally quarried granite. Water power was captured by water wheels and converted to mechanical energy to saw wood, grind locally grown grains, or manufacture a variety of consumer goods. Some of these mills ran only seasonally, such as during spring time snow-melt. Others operated all year and were located on sites with a steady river flow and steep drop. Mills were such an important asset to communities that small villages often developed around them. A good example of this was the village of Wadley located near Wadleigh Falls in Lee.



*Most early dams were made of wood, such as in a crib dam, although some were made of rocks.* Image by [www.autonopedia.org](http://www.autonopedia.org)

## Early Industrial Mills



Remains of the Folsom Mill in Epping. Photo by RC Grimsley

## *Wiswall Mills, Durham*



**Mill at Wiswall Dam**

The mill complex at Wiswall's Falls in Durham was originally constructed in 1835, when brothers Moses and Issachar Wiggin built a wooden dam and sawmill on the river. Recognizing that water wheels were no longer the technology of choice, they installed turbines that more efficiently captured the flow of water. They built other small mills on the site to take advantage of the abundant water power. Over the years, the mills here produced many goods: lumber for buildings and ships, flour, gingham cloth, knives, hoes and pitch forks, wooden measures, nuts and bolts, bobbins, axe handles, carriages and sleighs, chairs, and matches. In 1853, a large paper mill was added to the site and sold to Thomas Wiswall & Co. for the manufacture of wall paper. In addition to his own grand house, Wiswall built houses for the mill workers and added several more work buildings to the site. For years, Wiswall and the men and women at the paper mill oversaw the production of a ton of paper per day.

Fire, a common plague among mills, destroyed the Wiswall paper mill in 1883. A flood in 1896 forced the closure of the sawmill that had remained in operation on site. J.W. Burnham (of Newmarket Light, Heat and Power Co.) bought the property in 1900 and built a hydropower station, bringing electricity to Durham for the first time. The wooden dam was replaced by a concrete dam in 1912. Electricity was produced here until 1930. As the University of New Hampshire grew, the school became the focal point of the Town of Durham and economic interest in the Wiswall site waned. The Wiswall Dam is still important to Durham, because it creates a valuable reservoir of water for the university in late summer and fall.

Although the buildings are gone, visitors to the site can still see granite foundations and the sluice way (originally built in 1854) that directed water into

the mill's turbines. The site is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the "best remaining example in Durham of the town's nineteenth century manufacturing base." These remains were partially restored in 1999 by the LRAC and the Town of Durham with funding from the Wild & Scenic Rivers Program. In 2010, the LRAC and a volunteer committee from Durham installed an informational kiosk at the park. Plans to develop the park and make it more visitor-friendly are on-going. A two-part video history of Wiswall's Mills is available at [www.LampreyRiver.org](http://www.LampreyRiver.org) under the video section and on You Tube. For Part 1, visit <http://youtu.be/GXtzNdfWWHU> For part 2, visit <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWGFbKlyA6M&feature=BFa&list=ULLWGFbKlyA6M&lf=mfu>

### **Wadley Village Mills, Lee**



Photo courtesy of Lee Historical Society

When Dr. Isaiah D. Egerly came to Lee in the mid-1800s, he employed school children from Wadley Village to gather medicinal herbs, roots, and bark, such as slippery elm. Eight water-powered mortars and pestles became a part of the mill there. The resulting medicine was bottled and sold region-wide.

Later, in the late 1800s, a leatherboard factory became part of the mill complex at Wadley. Scraps of leather were ground up and mixed with rags to create a slurry which was then dried in large sheets. This leatherboard was used to line shoes that were made in a factory nearby.

### **Industrial Mills**



Newmarket Manufacturing Company, Photo courtesy of Newmarket Historical Society

The first Newmarket Manufacturing Company mill was incorporated in 1822. Over the years, the mills got bigger and more complex. After starting with cotton textiles, the company later added silk. At one point, the weaving room at the mill was the largest room in the world, with over 700 workers and 906 looms.

The mills dominated life in the community and on the river. The company built and owned the seven textile mills, a machine shop, office, storage buildings, agent's house, and multifamily residences built for the workers – some 140 sites in all. All are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. They represent “a unique example of a New England mill town developed as a Waltham-type cotton textile manufacturing community.” The granite mill buildings are among “the most beautiful of all textile factories of the period” and are the best preserved examples in New Hampshire.

The Newmarket Manufacturing Company's influence went well beyond Newmarket. It also built and controlled dams at Pawtuckaway Lake and Mendums Pond. Water releases from these distant ponds supplemented flows in the Lamprey during dry periods and guaranteed power year-round in Newmarket.

Textile mills operated continuously at this site until 1929 when a dispute between mill owners and workers erupted. The mills closed, the jobs went to Lowell, Mass., and life as many knew it collapsed. It took many years, but the mills and the community are undergoing a rebirth of sorts. The mill buildings have been modernized and now serve as offices, light manufacturing facilities, and residential space. The downtown area has a variety of small shops, galleries, and an active calendar of events. With its long history, Newmarket is a nice place to “mill around.”