

Historic Folsom Dam

Welcome to the Folsom (Bunker Pond) Dam historic site, a half acre of land that encompasses the south and northbanks of the Lamprey River. The name of this site refers to several dams previously located here. The last of these dams, which was built in 1967, was demolished by the State of New Hampshire in 2011.

Four signs document the visible remnants of this site. Use these signs to learn about the history of the structures that stood here over a span of 65 years. Follow the pathway beyond this sign to find the next sign in the series (located near the river's edge).

The location of this site within the Mary Folsom Blair Park is no coincidence. Mary Folsom Blair, one of the heirs of Joshua Folsom, Sr., a primary owner of this site, donated the land for the park to the Town of Epping in 1971. The dam area after 1741 became part of Jonathon, and later his son Joshua Folsom's, 50-acre "range" of land in what was then Exeter in the colonial province of New Hampshire.

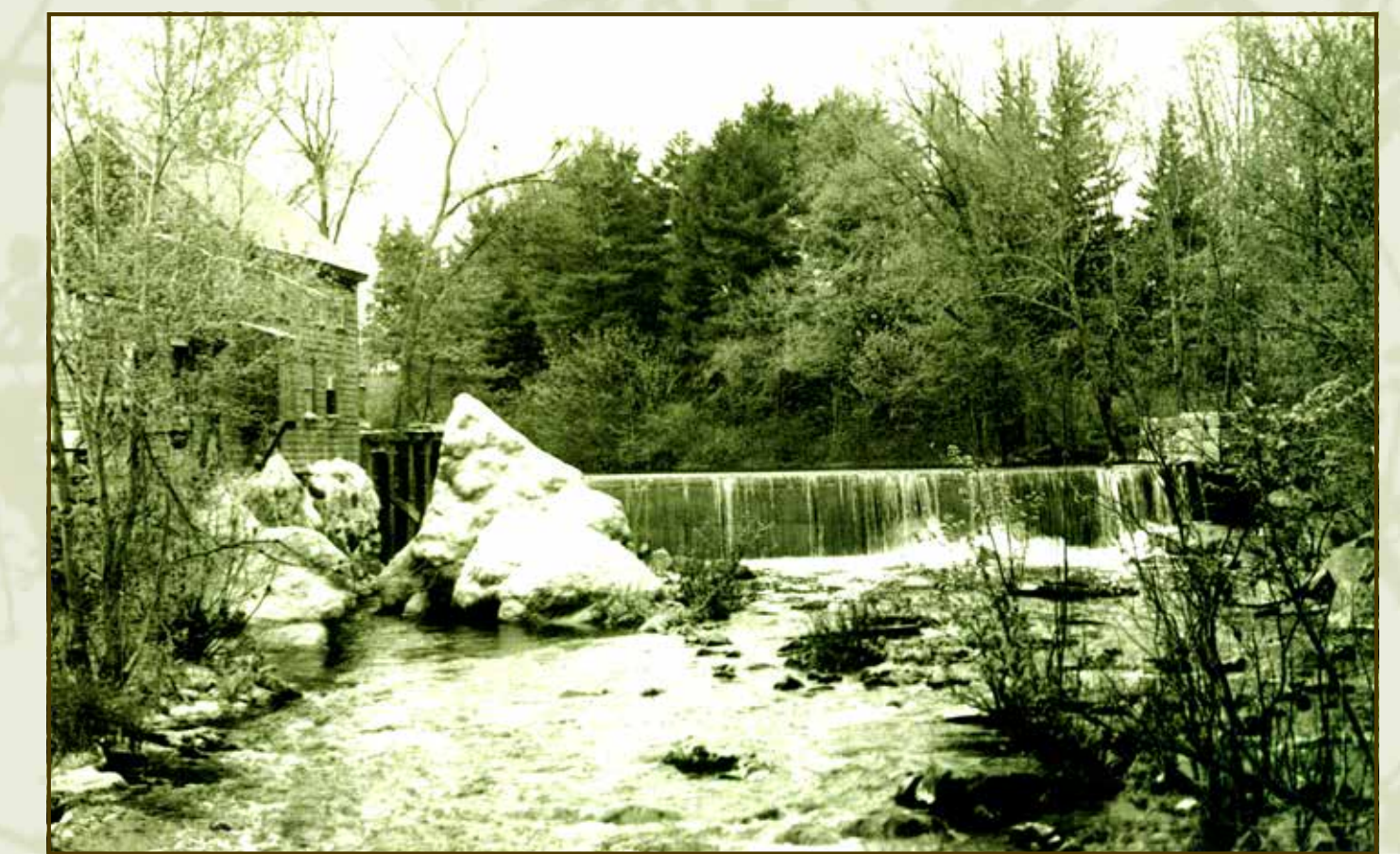
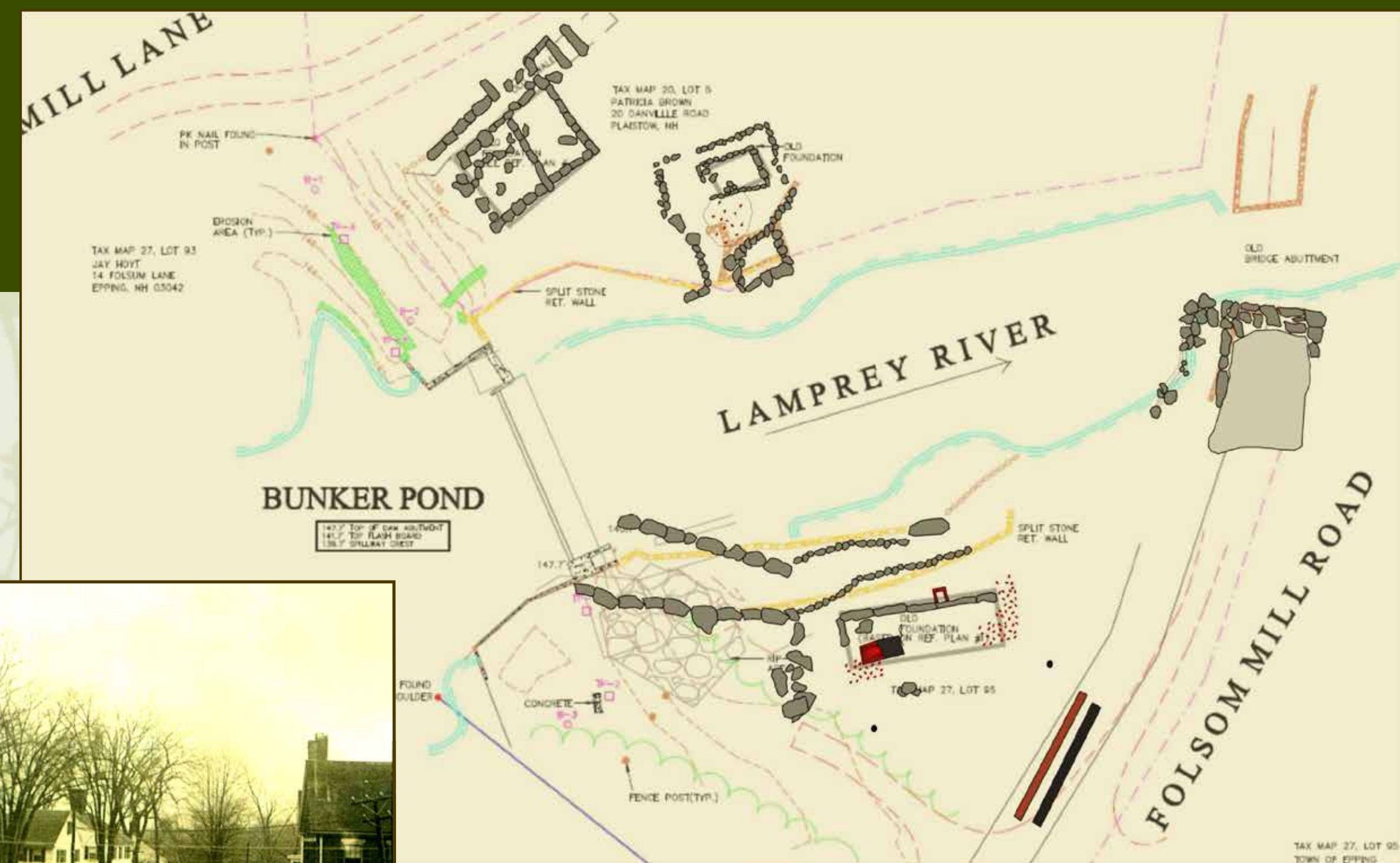
The dam at this site has been known as the Bunker Pond Dam for several decades. Bunker Pond sat on the southerly side of NH Rt. 27 and was named

Bunker Pond

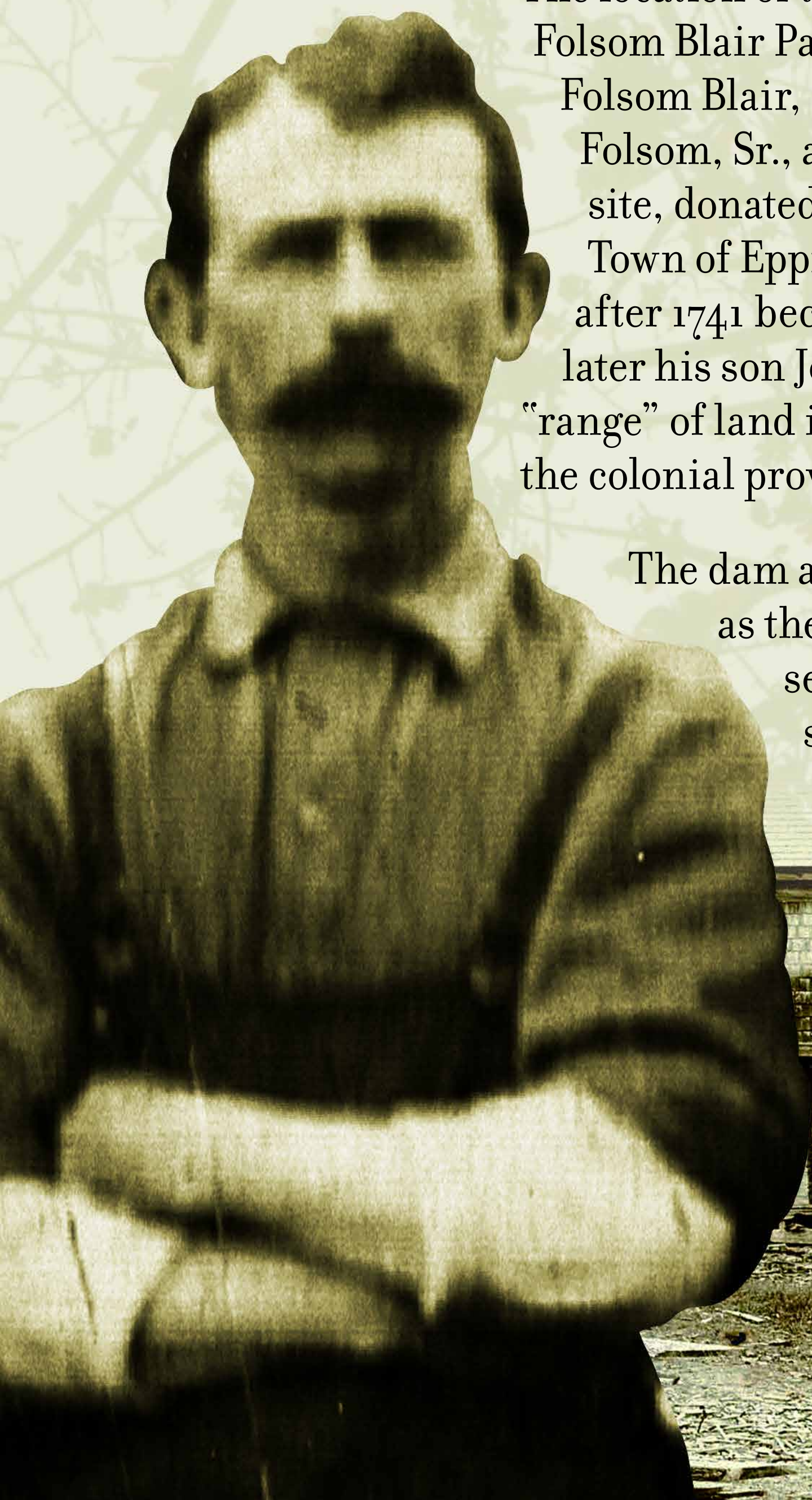


for the owner of the land adjacent to the pond. The name Folsom Dam more properly captures the historic context of the dam, particularly since the dam's demolition caused the demise of Bunker Pond.

No archaeological evidence exists to prove that Native Americans ever used this part of the Lamprey River (spelled Lamperieil or Lampereal in early documents) for any specific activity. Fishing weirs located down-river in the vicinity of the current Epping Safety Complex suggest that they used other nearby parts of the river.



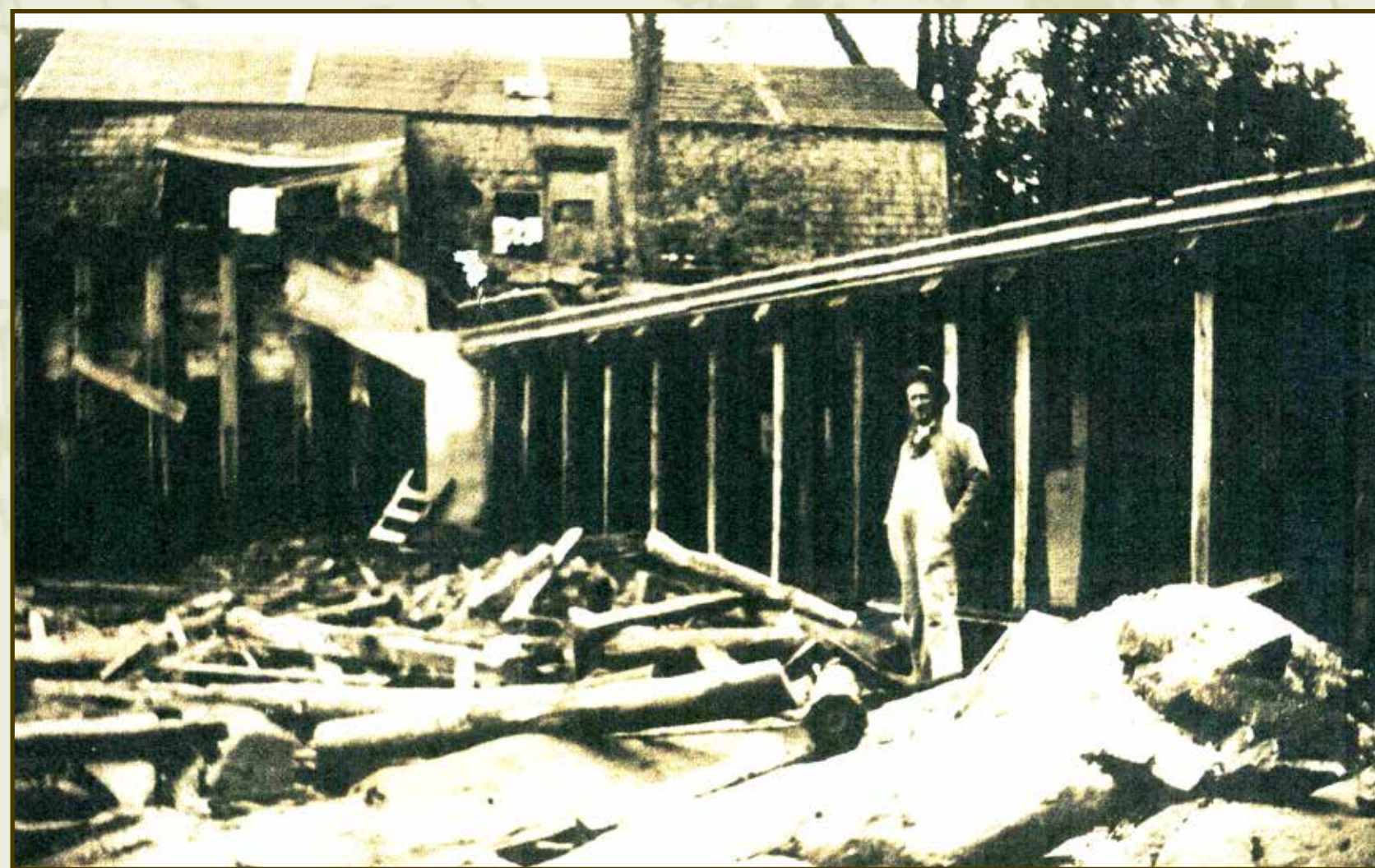
Therefore, it would be reasonable to speculate that Indians may have used this bend in the river, just before its confluence with the Pawtuckaway River, to catch fish and launch canoes. Maps of old Indian trails show that NH Rte.27 was likely an Indian pathway before it became a Colonial, and later, a modern roadway.



The Dams

A spillway occupied the area between the two visible concrete abutments on either side of the river. The Dam Bureau of the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services demolished this spillway in 2011. The demolition engineers left the concrete abutments in place to prevent erosion.

The now-demolished spillway likely occupied the same location as the earlier dams at this site. A 1732 map shows what some readers have interpreted as an impoundment and dam, along with claims that Exeter town records refer to this structure as Gilmore Dam. This interpretation is controversial, due to the primitive nature of the map, which was drawn by Peter Gilman (note the similarity to "Gilmore").



The first documented evidence for a dam at this location on the river states that Jonathan Norris received a deed from his father for "land and one-eighth of a sawmill at Petuckaway now or at W. Epping." He sold this parcel to his brother James on June 10, 1741. James Norris's deed describes "one-eighth part of a Upper Tuckaway Mill and one-eighth of the stream privilege" at this location. When Epping incorporated as a separate town, the



dam and mill were located in a "range" of land owned by the Folsom family. A deed recorded in 1750, but likely created earlier, passed land from Jonathon Folsom "to my son Joshua Folsom...one eighth part & one-seventh part of one-fourth part of a saw or frame mill...said mill stands on the Lampereal River commonly known by Purtockeway Lower Mill...near the dwelling house of Caleb Gilman & Ebner Martin." Subsequently, the Folsom family owned the property outright, or in conjunction with others, until Mary Folsom Blair donated the land to Epping in 1971.

Little is known about the dam structures themselves before 1935, although archeological evidence suggests they were built of granite, earth, and timber cribbing.

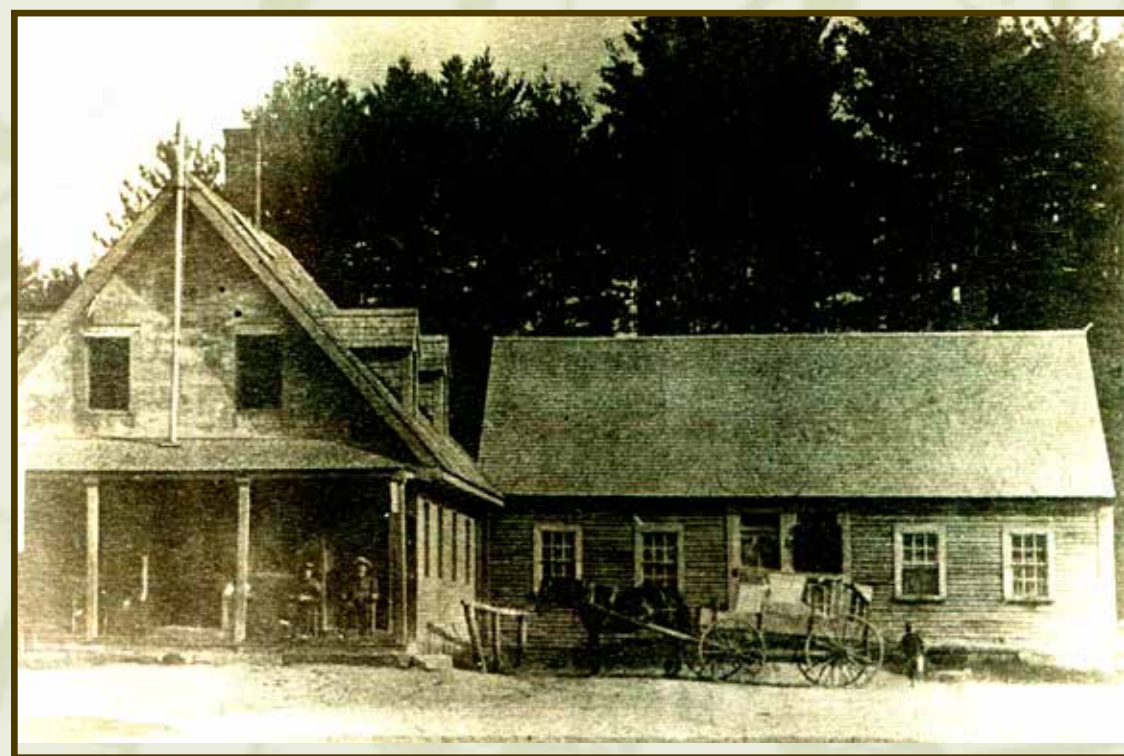
The state demolished the existing dam in 1935 to build a new bridge over the river on the road now known as NH Rt. 27. This demolished dam was rebuilt by the owners without state approval, but was described in Dam Bureau files as an "A-frame



dam of wood construction with a concrete sill" in "excellent condition." In 1959, the Town of Epping gave the dam to the state, but due to title discrepancies the Governor's Council did not accept the structure until 1966. The state then rebuilt the dam, finishing it in 1967.

High yearly maintenance costs, plus lobbying from conservation groups to restore the river to its natural state, prompted a 2009 Dam Bureau proposal to demolish the dam, which was approved and finally completed in October of 2011.

The Folsom Mills



In 1746, Joshua Folsom, Sr. operated a sawmill and possibly a gristmill where you now stand. To your left (as you face the

river) a granite boulder sluiceway leads from the dam spillway area to the front of the mill's foundation stones. Water diverted under pressure from behind the dam flowed into the sluiceway to power the wheel that turned the gristmill's pit wheel, which crushed grain and corn on a stone bed. The power wheel may have been a horizontal wheel underneath the building. The stone grinding bed would have been on the floor above, with another floor above that for storage.

In 1842, nearly a hundred years after the establishment of Folsom Mill, Thomas Folsom "purchased the mill privilege at West Epping, then much out of repair" and built and operated two mills, Folsom Sawmill and Folsom Gristmill. An 1870s report to the Governor about the state of waterpower in the state said that Folsom Mill was "out of repair for two years," but could resume operation with minor repairs.

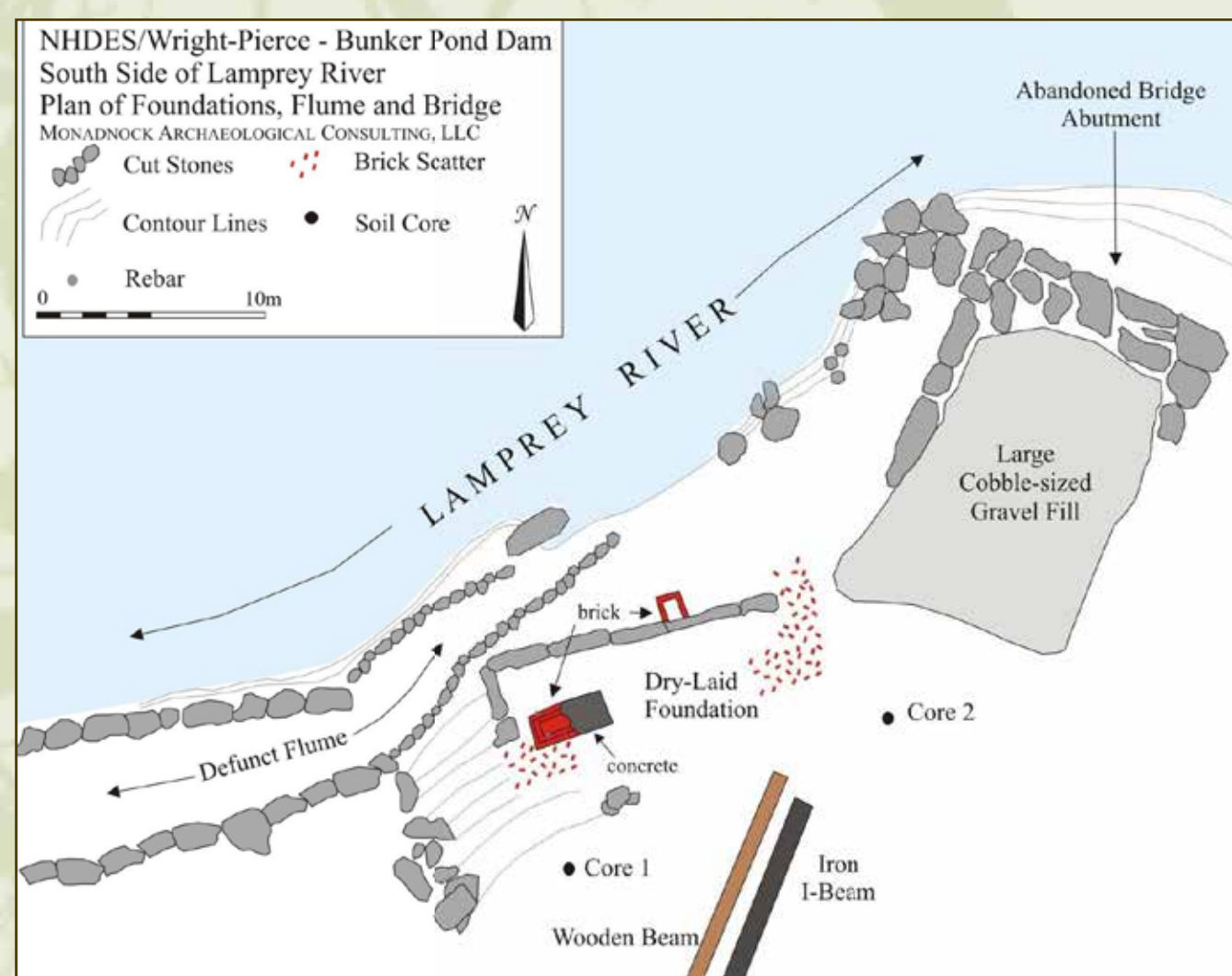
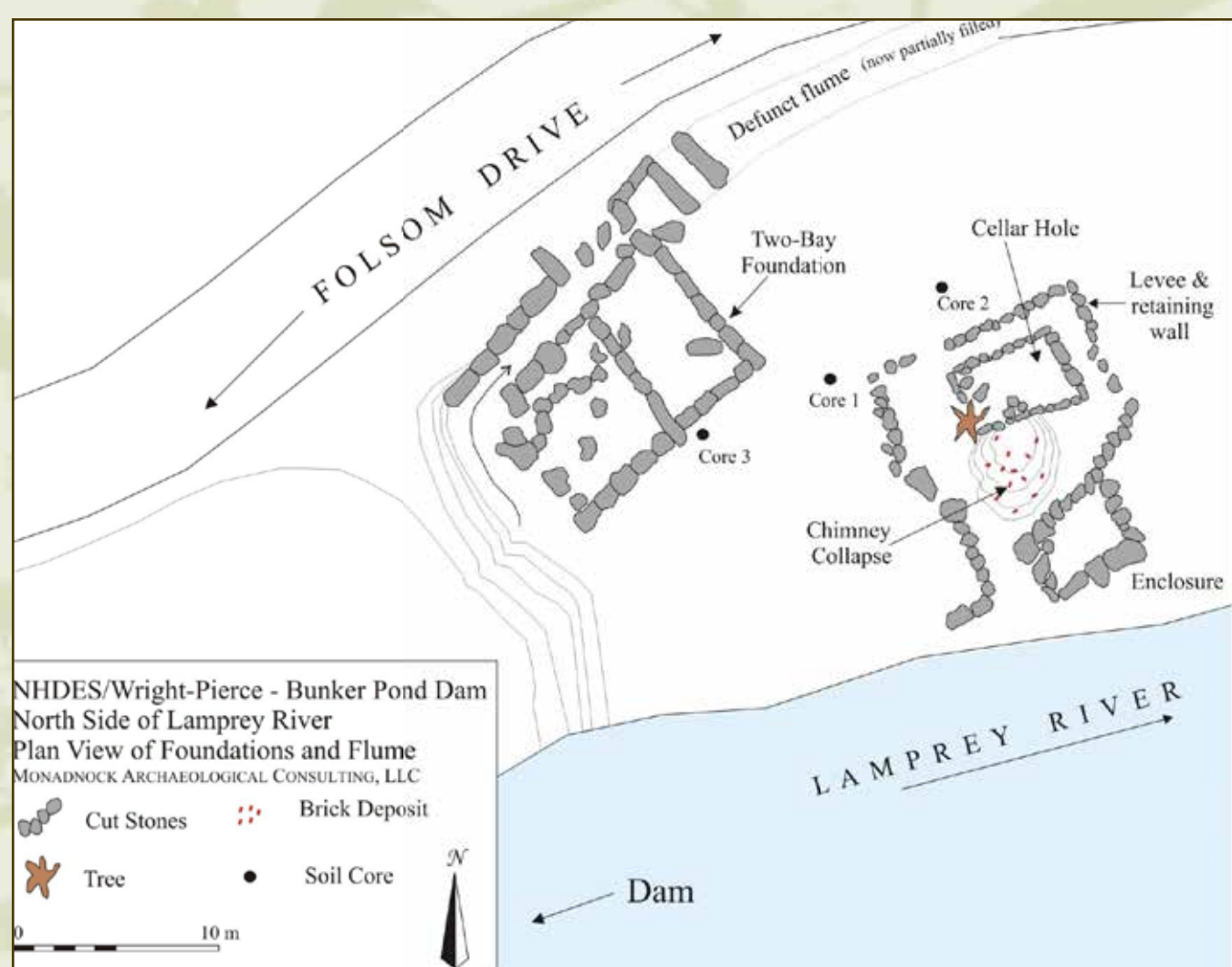


In the late 1800s, David and Thomas Folsom sold part ownership of the box factory to Cyrus Dow. The factory made boxes for shoes and used 1,200,000 board feet of lumber per year. In 1942, Edwin Folsom answered a questionnaire about his dam and stated that he used waterpower to run "a sawmill and small musket box factory." He sold the business shortly thereafter due to "failing health" and died in 1943. A fire started by an overheated electrical motor destroyed the building on November 23, 1950 just hours before the start of the Epping Fire Department's annual Fireman's Ball.

The north side of the river saw much mill activity as well. A history of Rockingham County published in 1915 stated that the Lamprey River in the western part of Epping was used in running "a sawmill, gristmill, box factory, and the manufacture of stockings and other woolen goods." It goes on to state, "For more than a hundred years, a gristmill and a sawmill stood here and were patronized from far and near.

There was also a shingle mill and a wheelwright shop. At one time there was a manufactory of rubber goods." This listing probably included the mills just off Blake Road, near that road's current bridge. An 1806 map shows the word "mills" at this location, as well as "mills" on the south side of the river. An 1858 map designates the north-side structures as belonging to the "Higley and Prescott's Cloth & Woolen Factory." An 1849 New England Merchantile Union Business Directory lists a Higley & Prescott in Epping under the "Woolen Goods Manufacturers" category. An advertisement in "Fiber & Fabric: A Record of American Textile Industries" in 1895 offers for sale by Prescott Bros. of West Epping a variety of woolen mill manufacturing equipment. A letter to a textile journal confirms the Prescott exit from the woolen trade.

An 1892 map shows three buildings labeled as "shoe shops." An entry by an Epping journalist in the early 1900s speaks of her granddaughters going to the stores in West Epping to buy "fashionable dancing shoes." These shops were likely located on what is now Depot Road.



The Folsom Mill Road & Bridge

The two abutments at this location provided the foundation for a bridge over the Lamprey River. The road, known today as Folsom Mill Road, traversed this bridge and connected to Blake Road about one half mile beyond the river, passing over the Pawtuckaway on a bridge no longer useable. A second road on the other side of the river connects to Folsom Mill Road at the northern terminus of the bridge. That road is named Folsom Mill Lane. One of these roads will likely be renamed for the emergency 911 system.



Maps of the area show no bridge at this location in 1805 or 1806, and no road connecting to Blake Road. A petition in 1822 by several nearby landowners requesting that the Town of Epping build a bridge was refused, likely because of the cost and the proximity of the nearby bridge on Blake Road. The landowners then petitioned the Rockingham County Court and argued that a bridge would make it easier to travel from Nottingham to Chester on the newly built highway through Raymond. This argument apparently convinced the court, which looked after the interests of all county citizens, and it ordered Epping to construct the bridge.



An 1858 map shows the bridge on Folsom Mill Road over the Lamprey intact as do maps dated 1898 and 1919. But the bridge no longer appears on maps drawn after 1957. Folsom Mill Road also passed over the much smaller Pawtuckaway River near its intersection with Blake Road. The Pawtuckaway River earned a curious nickname sometime in the late 1700s. The builder of a mill being constructed up the river in Raymond was said to be "stingy" with the daily portion of rum he paid his workers. The river soon became known as Stingy River, and the currently unmaintained road that connects upper Blake road to what is now NH Rt. 156 earned the name Stingy River Road.

