

**Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation
Heritage Protection Grant**

**Final Report on Phase One
of the
The Pomperaug Plantation History Project
submitted by
The Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition**

June 2009

Narrative

In May 2008 the Connecticut Trust awarded the Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition (PRWC) a grant of \$9,438.00 to carry out Phase One of the Pomperaug Plantation History Project (PPHP), with the goal of documenting and interpreting the industrial sites of the Pomperaug River Watershed. This report outlines accomplishments to date, challenges and lessons learned and plans for Phase II.

I Documentation of Historic Industrial Sites in the Pomperaug Watershed

The primary goal of Phase One of the PPHP was to document industrial sites in the Watershed dating from the times of earliest European settlement through the 20th century. During the grant period we carried out extensive documentation that was informed by the recommendations of our consultants and enabled by the cooperation of our organizational partners and other local volunteers. Below is a description of the scope of the work to date.

Consultation with Scholars

At the outset of the project we engaged four scholar-consultants who provided advice with respect to the scope of the project, research procedures and interpretive approaches. Their involvement was invaluable and has helped to steer our work throughout Phase One.

- **Brian Donahue:** Associate Professor of American Environmental Studies in the Environmental Studies Program at Brandeis University. Founder of Land's Sake, a non-profit community farm in Weston, Massachusetts and former Director of Education at The Land Institute in Salina, Kansas. Author of Reclaiming the Commons: Community Farms and Forests in a New England Town (1999) and The Great Meadow: Farmers and the Land in Colonial Concord (2004) which won the 2004 Marsh Prize from the American Society for Environmental History.

- **Robert B. Gordon**, Senior Research Scientist in Geophysics, Yale University. A specialist in Northwest Connecticut's iron industry and author of numerous books and articles on industrial history including Industrial Heritage in Northwest Connecticut, a Guide to History and Archeology. He is a member of The Society for Industrial Archeology, Society for the History of Technology, and was advisory editor for the journal *Technology and Culture*.
- **Blake Harrison**, Lecturer, Department of History, Yale University, and Adjunct Professor, Department of Geography, Southern Connecticut State University. A geographer, Harrison studies the interplay between labor and leisure activities and how both have affected land use in rural New England. He is the author of The View from Vermont: Tourism and the Marking of an American Rural Landscape.
- **Selma Thomas**, A public historian, filmmaker and producer of television and web-based documentaries with a special focus on industrial and cultural history. Thomas works, among others, with the Smithsonian Institution, the National Museum of American History, the National Gallery of Art, the Chicago History Museum, the Exploratorium, the Franklin Institute Science Museum and the Library of Congress. She is the author of numerous articles on oral history, new media and museum use of media.

In June 2008 we convened three¹ of these specialists for a day-long session that included review of project plans, examination of field sites, and a meeting/symposium with organizational partners. The consultation started with a morning meeting in Southbury where we discussed the project goals and scope and solicited advisors' ideas regarding research processes and challenges. We then toured three key industrial sites representative of others in the watershed:

- The 18th century restored Gideon Hollister sawmill in Washington.
- The 19th century Hawkins Factory in South Britain.
- The 19-20th century mill village in Woodbury called "Pomperaug Village."

We also drove through the 19th and 20th century factory village in Woodbury called "Hotchkissville" and observed a variety of landscape features providing evidence of prior industrial activity along the Pomperaug River and its tributaries, the Weekepeemee and the Nonnewaug Rivers.

The consultants then met with representatives of 10 organizations in the region that are part of the overall initiative over a luncheon meeting at the Gunn Memorial Library in Washington. Local participants introduced the consultants to their organization. The consultants each presented a brief summary of their perspectives on local industrial history and their recommendations for research procedures, documentary sources and overall project themes.

Over the ensuing months project staff have maintained contact with the scholars, particularly Dr. Gordon and Dr. Donohue, and received advice on specific research issues.

¹ Selma Thomas had to cancel her trip at the last minute due to other commitments.

Scholar Recommendations

The consultants provided many useful recommendations, particularly with respect to the scope of the project and research methods.

With respect to project scope, consultants agreed on the need to set parameters on the research so that the study would be both doable and meaningful. They noted the challenges of trying to do a “comprehensive” inventory, including: the sheer number of industrial sites in the Pomperaug River Watershed, starting from the time of the earliest European settlements; the extensive transformations of sites over time in terms of size, function and products; and the fact that so many sites have been obliterated by subsequent development. Consultants felt that a complete inventory of industrial sites would be impossible. They recommended creating a data base of sites where there are physical remains and/or that are known to have had major impact on the local economy. By matching the evidence with other documentation from maps, local historical records and personal memories, a picture of industrial activities representative of different time periods could be created. The goal would be to document key features and trends in successive periods of industrial and historical development in order to suggest industrial use patterns over time.

In addition to the inventory, consultants recommended selecting a limited number of sites appropriate for a Case Study. They suggested the following criteria for Case Studies: some remaining physical evidence intact; evidence that the site was either typical or distinctive for its time; and enough illustrative documentary evidence available to “tell a story.”

Research Process

Based on the Scholar recommendations, Project director Sarah Griswold developed a two pronged research approach involving: (1) site documentation, through photos, maps and oral accounts; and (2) source materials documentation. She designed forms for both kinds of documentation, as well as a spread sheet to track the dams and mill sites. (See attachments A and B).

Sarah Griswold and volunteer Diantha Schull carried out extensive field work in Southbury and Woodbury, including; a trip to examine Southbury sites with Southbury Historical Society member John Dwyer; a video-interview of Woodbury and Bethlehem sites with Frederick (Dick) Leavenworth, a long-time resident of Woodbury with expertise in hydrology; examination of sites in Woodbury with Sue Chapman of the Woodbury Historical Society; and one trip to examine site remains in Washington with 18th century mill expert Steve Solley. The overall field work has lead to:

- completion of survey forms for 43 sites in Woodbury;
- completion of initial survey forms for 10 known sites in Southbury;
- partial Completion of survey forms for 3 sites in Bethlehem
- an outline for the in-depth case studies; and
- creation of a digital collection of images, artifacts, buildings, and sites relating to the industrial heritage of the Pomperaug Watershed.

It was determined during the field work that in some cases engineering expertise would be needed to clarify the significance of the physical evidence. The state archaeologist has been contacted and has agreed to visit to examine some of the sites.

In addition to the field work, Griswold identified, examined and digitally copied numerous source materials in historical societies, individual collections and town records pertaining to local industrial activity. Business records, photographs, objects, maps and property records maintained by Town Clerks were among the sources examined. The amount of these materials far exceeded our original expectation, with many items relevant to local industrial development not yet linked to a particular industrial site. One project outcome (see Lessons Learned) is recognition of the need for a means of recording, collecting and making accessible all the various materials relating to the area's industrial history, from both public repositories and private holdings. For now, project staff is maintaining what is becoming a new, regional collection.

Griswold also identified potential Case Study sites in all three Townships and started the process of intensive research in land records, probate records and historical society records to create time-line and clarify mill ownership, uses, and products. The sites to be studied in depth are: The Wakelee Plow Shop in Southbury, the Curtiss Textile Factory at Pomperaug Village, the Hawkins Factory in South Britain, and the Gideon Hollister Mill in Washington. We expect the Bird Mill site to be studied in Bethlehem, although the mill buildings themselves have collapsed and only their foundations remain.

II. Regional Coordination

One of the project goals was to build cooperation among and between the local organizational partners in the Pomperaug Watershed region, most of whom have not worked together before on a thematic project. Another was to start to build their capacities to engage in a cross-cutting documentation project. To these ends project staff carried out the following:

- Convened meeting of collaborating agency representatives with scholars for both learning and exchange (June 08)
- Reviewed the project's Site Survey forms with local historical societies in Woodbury and Southbury and worked with individuals in each group who expressed interest in helping carry out research.
- Carried out research, with historical society members, at historical society collections in Southbury and Woodbury to determine condition, scope and access to records on mill sites.
- Worked with the Southbury Historical Society to organize and present a tour of industrial sites in the South Britain section of Southbury in October 2008. Attended by more than 50 individuals, the tour was led by Hugh Sullivan, a local architect and Stuart Somers, a local resident and long time civil engineer in Southbury. (Attachment C)
- Work with the Woodbury Public Library on a grant funded by Connecticut Humanities Council to develop a plan for assessing, organizing and cataloging historical photographs and other historical documents in the Library collection. This project revealed items such

as photographs, newspapers and scrapbooks with references to mills and related activities.

- Coordinated with a simultaneous regional history project organized through Litchfield Historical Society -- also funded by the CHC -- to offer series of “History Bites” lunch time lectures spring 2009. Two of these programs focused on mill sites as a *direct outgrowth of project*. (Attachment D)

As the project continues, coordination with local partners will also continue, with plans to involve the Bethlehem Historical Society, the Southbury Library and other entities.

III. Educational Activities

While the primary focus of this first year of PPHP has been on research and coordination, we have also taken steps to create a public presence for the project and to start to put industrial history on the minds and agendas of residents of the watershed, decision-makers and other members of the public. Highlights include:

- We have created a history section to the PRWC website that includes many of the images taken or copies during the research process, indication of key industrial sites on the IM Rivers interactive map, and a blog <http://prwcp.php.blogspot.com/>.
- Various press releases about the organization of the project, its funding source, and the scholar tour were sent to local newspapers.
- A brochure about the project was developed and distributed to area historical societies, libraries, and town offices. (Attachment E).
- Project staff have made presentations on the project to Trout Unlimited, the Board of Directors of the Southbury Historical Society and the Board of Directors of the PRWC.
- Public programs include:
 - The October 18, 2008 tour of South Britain industrial sites
 - A presentation on “History and Science in the Watershed” by PRWC Executive Director Ed Edelson at the Annual Meeting of the Southbury Historical Society in April 2008.
 - Two *History Bites* lectures (see above)
 - Steve Solley, who restored the eighteenth century Hollister Mill in Washington, gave a talk at the Gunn Memorial Library in Washington on April 23, 2009. Ninety-two people attended the program.
 - Sarah Griswold, Project Director, gave a talk on The Hidden Industrial History of Woodbury at the Flanders Nature Center in Woodbury on May

28. Sixty-five people attended. This talk is being converted to a 25-minute slide show DVD that will be made available either through the website or for public programs. (see *History Bites* brochure, Attachment D).

IV. Challenges and Lessons Learned

Challenges. As a new regional project, one without a regional or local model to follow, it is not surprising the PPHP faced challenges over the course of Phase One. At the outset, there was the challenge of project design. Through consultation with scholars and specialists, a two-pronged approach was developed that has proven effective, i.e. a general inventory plus case studies. That approach stood us in good stead when we began to face the second challenge, which was the unexpectedly large number of mill sites along with an unexpected amount of varied documentary material. By capturing mill sites and other physical industrial remains in the overall inventory, and reserving in-depth research for a select group of Case Studies, we were able to cope with a larger-than expected information universe. However, more research and more time than we originally predicted will be required to tell the full industrial history of the Watershed.

A third challenge was to engage partner organizations in the research work with us. Despite high interest in the project as expressed by members and meeting participants, it has been hard to identify an effective team of research volunteers or to organize a research workshop that would address the very uneven needs and skills of participants. We have found it more productive to work with one or two experience individuals from each of the participating communities. However, we expect to move forward on this front in Phase II.

A fourth challenge, as noted above under Documentation, was the discovery that the documentary evidence on industrial activity in the Watershed is not only more extensive than expected but also much more fragmented and scattered. For instance, some important materials are in private hands, while others are in public records in Town Clerks' offices, in historical society or museum collections, or in the state library. One of the major challenges has been to identify, record and create some kind of intellectual control over highly varied kinds of documents.

Finally, the fifth challenge has been fundraising. We have not succeeded in raising the anticipated outside funds towards the original budget. We knew at the outset that extension of the project over time would require additional private funds. We have applied to 12 small family foundations in Connecticut and submitted a Letter of Inquiry to the Connecticut Community Foundation. Even a year ago, these efforts might have uncovered one or more sources of support. It is not an easy time to raise funds, especially for basic research on a topic that crosses disciplinary boundaries (history, environment, water, local culture, etc). Thus, we

are considering shifting gears to a more educational focus during Phase Two, hoping we can attract funding for outreach and dissemination even as we continue the background research at a slower pace.

Lessons Learned. We have become highly aware of the fact that industrial history, especially 18th century industrial history, is to a large extent invisible to the contemporary resident or visitor. There are relatively few extant structures that can be visited, and more recent structures have been changed or abandoned to such an extent that their original uses are hard to perceive.

This phenomenon has fed local historical organizations' tendencies to focus attention on residential structures and, to some extent, agricultural structures. Without awareness of their industrial past, many local residents have distorted historical understanding of the forces that have shaped their locality and limited understanding of the basic relationships between a natural asset such as a river and the subsequent development of a community or region. The value of a project such as PPHP is to help restore industrial history to local consciousness through documentation and education.

Despite the relative lack of attention to industrial history, we have become aware that there is a strong local audience for information and educational programs on industrial history, and also for history as it relates to the state of the environment. The variety of individuals who have attended PPHP programs -- from decision-makers and residents to educators and environmentalists -- and the amount of interest expressed by individuals contacted in the process of Phase One research affirm the need to expand local audiences' understanding of industrial history as it relates to the Pomperaug River and the overall Watershed.

V Phase II

Our planning for the next phase of PPHP is informed by the accomplishments, challenges and lessons discussed above. All aspects of the work need to be continued, while, at the same time, there will be greater emphasis on public education. The following summarizes our plans to date.

Research. During Phase II we will:

1. Using the inventory of sites in Southbury and Woodbury, refine our catalog of related historical and visual materials relevant to particular sites.
2. Document field sites and related historical resources in the Town of Bethlehem. We will meet with individual members of the Bethlehem Historical Society who have provided initial information on industrial sites in the township and we will complete documentation forms on where there is some physical evidence extant. In addition, we will do a videotaped interview with Joe Shepenis, a former high school history teacher and local historian who has spoken on the topic of Bethlehem's industrial activities.
3. Complete the five case studies noted above, including use of historical documentation uncovered during Phase One in the various historical societies, museums and private collections in the region. Oral history interviews will be involved in at least three of these case studies.

4. Continue to develop a system for intellectual control of the multiple historical materials encountered in the research process, with the expectation of a “catalogue” that will be available to participating organizations.

Coordination and Capacity-Building. During Phase Two we will develop a curriculum for a workshop for local historical societies, museums and other collecting organizations on “Documenting Your Community’s Industrial History.” We will offer this workshop at least once for the organizations participating in the PPHP. In addition, we will work with the CT League of History Organizations to develop a plan for offering the workshop to other organizations in the state.

We will also involve members of local participating organizations in the process of completing the five case studies and the regional exhibit (see below) .

Public Education:

We will continue to improve the industrial history section of the website, updating it with information about the locations of industrial sites on IM Rivers interactive map, adding multimedia presentations and other information about the area as it becomes available.

We are examining the options for communicating the full results of this project beyond the PRWC website. One approach will involve development of a small travelling exhibit that could be mounted in each of the participating towns’ libraries and could also be the focus for a related public presentation or discussion. There is ample material for an exhibition; a DVD could be part of the traveling program along with the project brochure. Additional guided walking or driving tours of sites appear to hold a great deal of interest and could be used in conjunction both with the exhibit and public programs.

Another option that we are considering is to develop a program for middle school and high school teachers in the region who are responsible for history studies as well environmental studies. We believe educators could use the Pomperaug Watershed and its industrial history as a laboratory for field work and analysis that would benefit students in both types of classes. As a start in process, we plan to meet with the Curriculum Directors of the two school systems within the Pomperaug Plantation region to explore the feasibility of this kind of cross-disciplinary study in today’s education climate, as well as with individual teachers from independent schools nearby.

Finally, regarding funding, we will continue to seek additional funds for this multi-year, multi-phase project. We will seek funding for continued research and the development of public programs and educational resources as described above. We will continue to add material to the PRWC website, including a map that people could use for a driving tour of the Pomperaug Plantation area industrial sites.

VIII Personnel

Project staff has not changed since the original proposal. Project Director has been Sarah Griswold, with support for logistics from PRWC, assistance in planning, coordination and research by Advisor Diantha Schull, and assistance in research by individual historical society members. Ed Edelson, Pomperaug Watershed Coalition Executive Director, has served as overall Project Manager.

IX Budget

As presented in the attached Revised Final Budget and Actuals for Year One, the actual expenditures plus shared costs, totals \$10,368. Revenue has totaled \$9,438 from the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation and \$2,380 from PRWC's cost-share. In-kind contributions were on budget at \$20,010. Cash expenditures have not deviated significantly from the original budget submitted with the proposal with the one exception that we only paid for 3 scholar consults.