

Kingston Chronicles

This week's focus is on one of the oldest and most forgotten treasures in Kingston – the Judkin's Grist Mill located at the old Federhen property at the corner of Little River Road and Farm Road. This historical relic (thought to be the oldest water powered structure to survive in New Hampshire) was remembered fondly in October when it was rewarded with the highest honor from the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance. Every year since 2006, the Alliance has chosen seven historical features in need of recognition in their Seven to Save Awards Program, rallying support for saving endangered historic structures. It was created to focus attention (and perhaps more importantly resources and possible grant funding) on "significant historic properties in New Hampshire that may be threatened by neglect, deterioration, insufficient funds, inappropriate development and/or insensitive public policy." Anyone who has driven by this little gem can see that it qualified under the terms of "neglect and deterioration".

However, that may soon change. The new owners of this property intend to work to restore the working mill and make it a prime example of New Hampshire's revival industry. The Mill is in good company. At the 2011 Seven to Save Awards banquet held on the University of New Hampshire campus in Durham on October 12, 2011, the other six "winners" were announced. They include: the Balsams of Dixville Notch, the Farley Building in Hollis, the Old Town Hall in Middleton, the Pearson Hall of Haverhill (NH), the Wheaton-Alexander House in Winchester and the Charlestown Town Hall. The town of Kingston is fortunate to have received this notable attention.

The following information is taken from two sources: 1. Kingston Gristmill Survey done by D. DeGagne, C Lassiter, Betty Moore, C. Stellmach and J. Steward and 2. the Federhen Grist Mill Assessment completed by Fifield Restoration on Shaker Road in Canterbury, New Hampshire.

Kingston Town records state that the Grist Mill was built by Benjamin and Samuel Judkins between 1690 and 1737, but the exact date is unknown. Set on the Little River, small mills such as this provided focal points for early settler communities and were usually built in tiered systems to reuse the power of the water as many times as possible. Except for a few braces that are up and down sawn, all of the timbers are hand hewn. Although the building is in rather poor shape, the "innards" are as they were when the mill serviced early settlers and were still working well into the 1900's. In the next chronicle, Don Clark will give testament to his visit there as a young lad.

The first floor of the state's oldest timber framed grist mill holds the trough (to receive the grist from the stones on the second floor), the bolting box (which post dates the construction of the mill) and the tenting system (to adjust the space between the bed stone and the runner stone which would adjust the coarseness of the grist). The bolting box where the grist was sifted into meal or flour, is in an inclined drum (of 19th century vintage). The second floor, or grinding floor, is accessed by a stairway where the gearing and the remnants of a tub wheel are located. The bed stone and runner stones are massive - 5 feet wide and 13 inches thick (weighing more than 4-5 thousand pounds) and appear to be made out of locally quarried granite. The hopper, shoe and the case on the stones all appear original and are entirely made of wood. The damsel, spider, and spindle are beautifully made of wrought iron, clearly done by an accomplished blacksmith. It was powered through a 5-6 foot dam, overgrown at this

time, needing some maintenance (clearing brush and re-positioning stones). In the stream, there are remains of a cast iron tub wheel system (a precursor to the turbine) with the shafting and gears to power the runner stone above.

There is much evidence that the Kingston Gristmill has a twin!! After measuring the Kingston gristmill and studying the layout of the machinery, the DeGagne team of engineers concluded that the same team, most likely the Judkins brothers built the Deacon Tuck Gristmill in Hampton. The two buildings are no more than four inches different in overall measurement. The only difference is that the Hampton stream was not deep enough for anything but a small tub wheel. This sister mill, believed to be built in 1688, was fully restored and opened to the public in July of 1988. One of 21 mills in Hampton, the Old Grist Mill is the only one that remains...it had sat idle since 1885. There was much discussion about the Tuck Mill, some saying it was also run by the Leavitt family, so the Hampton sign merely reads....The Old Grist Mill. The Hampton Union reported that "the building is essentially in good repair, although there is little to see inside as the working mill parts are all gone. At this point, there are no immediate plans to renovate the mechanics of the interior of the building."

We can only hope for a brighter future for the Judkins Grist Mill. Our Kingston gem appears to have all of its inner working parts and the new owners are hoping for a complete restoration of this building. The prestigious Seven to Save Award will only enhance these possibilities. As Michael Tule, chairman of the Alliance's Seven to Save committee said, "Preserving the state's historic structures is essential to attracting tourists and businesses to the state. Investments in these buildings will be good for the long term because they help to preserve and enhance our villages, towns and cities, and their ongoing use - and reuse - will help keep local economies going in tough times." Congratulations Kingston and Judkins Grist Mill.

For more information about the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance and its many features, visit their website at www.nhpreservation.org