

Gordon's Mill



Overview

What is the story relating to Gordon's Mill? Most know about the Georgia Historical Society's other museum building, the Brick School House Museum. But the Society also owns Gordon's Mill (Museum). It is located on Stone Bridge Road and next to Stone Bridge Brook. The Georgia Historical Society (GHS) stores its larger artifacts, such as agricultural tools and equipment, furniture, and a wood-fired kitchen stove - even a whole, intact, staircase can be seen there. Many more items of the past are there as their sizes make them prohibitive to store and exhibit at the one-room, brick school house. This site became a museum for the GHS after the organization purchased it from Robin Pierce on May 10, 1998. This included the mill site with dam rights to Gordon's Pond and Pierce's storage building (built by the Pierces for use in their pallet business). But the interesting history of this site will always be significant. First, Gordon's Mill was the only mill in Georgia to survive well into the twentieth century. Also, it was located near Stone Brook in Georgia Plains. There was, it was believed, a stone bridge created by natural means, across the brook. Because of this, the dam at this location was built over and around it, which, by the way, was how the brook got its name. A wooden, covered bridge was later built. Then, finally, a cement bridge would be constructed, replacing the covered bridge, for traffic. The construction of that bridge was done by Asa Pattee and was dedicated in 1934 to

Frank Pierce, the owner of the mill at that time and who died in 1933. One of the workers on the cement bridge was Fred Conger from Georgia (a cousin of our director, Colin Conger's Grandfather). Frank Pierce's house was located on one side of the bridge with the Baptist Church where Mr. Pierce was taken when he died, on the other. A note - The cement bridge of 1934 was replaced in 1994, with the first car crossing the new bridge on Sept. 28th of that year. Construction was completed by Blow & Cote, Inc. of Morrisville. That bridge is what stands there today. In the Georgia Town records, the first owner of the land with an interest in a sawmill operation in the area near Stone Brook in Georgia Plains was Nathan Graves. On July 3, 1806, he sold it to Stephen Howard. To quote the Georgia History Book on Page 590, Graves "sold to Stephen Howard his right and interest in a certain Saw Mill with the privileges and appurtenances thereto belonging." There would be at least nine owners of the site before Henry Gordon's purchase on Feb. 12, 1863. In between that time and Gordon's purchase, Alvah Sabin, a prominent citizen of Georgia, purchased, on Nov. 6, 1840, "one acre of land and mill privileges." Apparently, the history of the mill really began with his construction of the building, which included the purchase of an artificial channel or trough for conducting water, as one used to transport logs or provide water power, plus the dam. Henry Gordon then built his own sawmill, a gristmill, and later, the store, which was established by 1882. From the time of Gordon's ownership to this day, the mill and mill pond have retained the Gordon name. The mill was a true center of activity and business. Logs were converted into lumber; equipment such as a planer for dressing the lumber; wood sawed for creating shingles out of cedar blocks; slabs cut up into stove length for fuel. During nearly the entire existence of the mill, it would be a primary location for getting what was needed as wood was the only fuel used in the area of cooking and heating. Besides all of this, Mr. Gordon housed a gristmill. This was a wonderful tool for the farmers in their need for ground animal feeds, and occasionally, corn meal and flour for human intake. But the mill would not be without its own tragic happenstance. On Sept. 20, 1872, an employee of Gordon's Mill, John King, age 40, was rafting logs in the mill's pond. He fell into the water and though he was considered a good swimmer, he drowned, leaving a wife and four children. The 1871 Beers' map displays grist and sawmills on the northwest side of the bridge and reveals a large mill pond on the east side. Of particular interest, though, is that the Walling map shows the "sawmill" on the southwest side of the bridge. In the 1890s, ice was cut out of Gordon's Pond for the surrounding community to use for storage of food during the "good ole summertime!" It was also a great place for recreation in the "gay nineties" - 1890s, that is. Mr. Gordon successfully ran and operated his business for 39 years. During that time, he bought and operated a general store situated on a small parcel of land contiguous to the mill site. Also, at some point during this progression of success, he purchased an added one acre of land located across the road from the mill and adjacent to the pond for the purpose of building a home in which he dwelled until the end of his days. On March 12, 1902, Mr. Gordon would sell the mill and store to Burt H. Wood as a result of his advancing age. The mill at this time was in great need of renovations. The dam was constructed of wood and that was rotting. The equipment at the mill was in very poor condition or even obsolete as was the machinery. And so, Mr. Wood took on an extensive renovation and modernization project for the mill. The dam

would be completely reconstructed with concrete – a metal penstock; e.g., a sluice, channel, or pipe used to control or supply the flow of water would replace the flume – the water turbine (wheel) would be replaced by a new one. Mr. Gordon also added an entirely new system for sawing logs. The principal feature of this was the circular saw that would replace the outmoded up-and-down type. Mr. Wood even installed a metal grinder to replace the previously used millstone in the gristmill. Burt Wood continued the undertaking until July 1, 1914, when he sold the mill to his brother, Fred Wood. However, he held onto it for only two years when he sold it to his brother-in-law, Frank T. Pierce – on Oct. 5, 1916. Frank. Pierce continued the operation until his death in 1934. His sons, Allen and Robert then took it over. In April – 1943, a huge and totally devastating fire engulfed the mill – destroying it to the point where the site would end up in its original state before the mill was built. The final owners, before it was sold to the Georgia Historical Society, were Robert and Madge Pierce. In 1962 they bought a sawmill rig, which was purchased in Northfield, Vermont, and placed that at the Gordon’s Mill site for the purpose of cutting and making pallets. In January of 1964, Bob then moved the operation to Georgia Center at what is now Rocky Ridge Storage. Robin Pierce, Bob, and Madge’s son, would later (1998), as previously stated, sell the mill site with the dam rights to Gordons Pond, to the Georgia Historical Society. And so this wonderful enterprise – the mill – with its natural setting – the dam – the land – the stone brook – was extremely significant to the community and Georgia’s economy for more than 139 years only to succumb to a merciless and ruthless inferno. To see the Gordons Mill Museum, it is recommended that a request be made from one of the GHS directors listed on the first page. The curator of the Museum is Colin Conger. Because of the valuable and sizeable artifacts located there, it is locked up. The season for our two museums begins in late June and ends in late September. Also, from time to time, the GHS will have a tour through this museum and history explaining the antique treasures that it has accumulated over the years. These opportunities will be posted through the news media, on our new website, <http://georgiahistoricalsocietyvt.org> or, if you’re a GHS member, you’ll get a notification through the mail