

SNEC-SIA SPRING 2008 TOUR
Storrs & Mansfield, CT
Date: Saturday, May 17, 2008

Tour Summary

Southern New England Chapter's spring meeting and tour took place in Mansfield, CT, where members had special tours of a state-of-the-art document archive facility, Connecticut's only stone grist mill, and a guided tour INSIDE a flood control dam. The weather was ideal for traveling and exploring each of these places, and members had a good taste of rural northern Connecticut.

SNEC-SIA members first met in the building of the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center on the main campus of the University of Connecticut in Storrs, a part of Mansfield. The Dodd Center was built in 1995 and named after Thomas J. Dodd, former Senator for Connecticut, and father of the state's current Senator, Christopher Dodd. The facility contains special university documents, children's books, corporate records, photographs, maps and engineering drawings, and other industrial documents. After people had breakfast and talked with one another, we gathered into the entrance to the library. Laura Katz Smith, Curator for the library, and our tour guide, made opening remarks, and then took us to the archiving and storage areas normally not seen by people visiting the library. She first led us to the receiving area. The receiving area had a cold room where documents that were damp or contained mold were placed to dry out the documents and kill any mold, which not only deteriorates the document it grows on, but spreads quickly to other nearby documents. She then led us to one of the floors that hold the collections. The library has three floors, 8,000 square feet, each, for a total of 24,000 square feet of storage space. The collections are contained in movable shelves. We returned to the public area where Laura brought out samples of the library's collections. These included engineering plans of specific locations of the New York, New Haven, and Hartford Railroad, photographs of early telephone maintenance crews from the Southern New England Telephone Company (several showed wagons pulled by horses!), and files of area mills

and companies. After more discussion about how the library maintains its collection, the group had a brief meeting, and then broke for lunch.

After lunch, the group reconvened at the Gurleyville Grist Mill about 2.5 miles east of UConn. There, Bruce Clouette provided a detailed tour of the mill and the site of the dam along Fenton River. The present stone building was built in 1835 on a site with gristmill and saw mill activity at this location as far back as 1723. It is claimed that this stone mill is the only one of its kind in Connecticut and one of only three standing in New England, and, much of the original machinery remains intact. Bruce talked and demonstrated many of the tasks that were done in the mill, including how to take out and redress the grinding wheels, sift flour, and remove corn from the cob. Below the main floor, he showed how the shafts and gears transferred power to the machinery above and pointed where the water from the brook would have flowed under the mill. Outside, he traced where the dam would have been (the 200+ year-old dam was breached by a storm in 1959). The group had a few minutes to explore the dam and mill before heading on to the Mansfield Hollow Dam about 5 miles away.

Along the way, the caravan passed by a historical sign for the O. S. Chauffee and Sons Silk Mill that once was located on the Fenton River. No time to make a stop, this time! At the Mansfield Hollow Dam, we were greeted by our tour guide from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, who led us inside the structure. The dam was completed in 1952 as one of several built in the area to control against floods. This one collects water from the Natchaug River, Fenton River and Mount Hope River and controls the flow of the Natchaug River downstream through Norwich, Connecticut. The dam is an earthen rolled levee that has a spillway 690 feet long and 62 feet high. Though there was much controversy over the need of the dam up to the time it was built, its need was demonstrated in 1955 (a hurricane) and 1982, saving lives and property. Today, the lake behind the dam is used for boating, fishing, and other recreational use. Our guide had initial remarks about the dam in the first room, and then we descended one flight of stairs to a room where the pneumatic pumps that operated the gates was located. After the guide explained the system, we walked into the corridor INSIDE the spillway. This corridor was noticeably cooler than the warm air outside! The corridor led to the gate controls and gate housing near the center of the spillway. After walking to the outside, we climbed more stairs and walked outside to view the spillway from the other side. After we had our fill, we again descended into the corridor and returned.

After touring the dam, members were invited to explore the brook downstream, including the dam and building of the Kirby Mill, which was used at various times to make cotton thread, optical parts and accessories, then various metal products until it was closed around 1950.

It was a full day and well worth the trip. Many thanks to the organizers and guides: Laura Katz Smith, Curator for Business, Railroad, Labor and Ethnic Heritage Collections,

Thomas J. Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut, Storrs, CT; Bruce Clouette, Guide, Gurleyville Grist Mill; Dave Poirier Staff Archaeologist, Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism (SHPO); Jason Robinson, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Mansfield Hollow Dam.

The granite industry was (and is) strongly dependent on

Links:

<http://www.lib.uconn.edu/online/research/speclib/ASC/> (web site for the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center)

<http://www.joshuaslandtrust.org/gristmill.html> (web site for the Joshua Land Trust, with a page for the mill owned by them)

<http://www.nae.usace.army.mil/recreati/mhl/mhlnat.htm> (US Army Corps of Engineers' website for the Mansfield Hollow Dam)

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