

## NNEC-SIA Spring Tour Report Franklin & Laconia, NH

On May 22, 2010, members from both the Northern and Southern New England chapters toured industrial sites in these two central New Hampshire towns. Although the weather was good, turnout was very light. Those who couldn't or didn't get there missed a good tour.

Franklin had two diverse industries, textiles and paper. In the mid 1800's, the Stevens mills made woolen and cotton textiles. The Aikens made hosiery. The presence of the railroad, coupled with the availability of hydropower, served as a catalyst for a remarkable period of industrial growth as it provided for secure and speedy transportation of raw materials and finished products between Franklin and its markets. The civil war took many of Franklin's young men, but also brought forth many new orders. Franklin saw tremendous growth between 1850 and 1900. With the turn of the century, though, times changed; the mills began to close and relocate. The Stevens mill was the last to close, in 1970.

While the Winnepesaukee River powered the textile mills on the west side of Franklin, upstream it powered several paper mills. Our tour began with a textile mill picture show in the library and then proceeded on foot upriver to view the many remnants of the paper mills. At one point we pondered and together speculated about the curious, short, identical s-curves in train rails, concluding that they must be the result of when teens burned the wooden covering of the bridge's underpinnings. We tried to figure out just why they curved the way they did. The fire must have started here...



Next we walked downstream to the historic Franklin Falls Hydroelectric Station, which is still generating power. The Larter family's restoration of this site is a wonderful example of preservation and sustainability of industrial archeology. The value of historic Franklin Falls Hydroelectric Station is very important

for today's carbon-free clean energy needs.\* This one historic site, during the last 25 years, has offset (or not produced) 120,000 tons of the toxic air pollutant carbon dioxide and such airborne toxins as nitric oxide, sulfur dioxide and mercury into the local atmosphere as it would if the kilowatts were produced by coal.



After lunch we motored to Laconia for a video presentation about the historic Laconia Car Company. They built freight and then passenger rail cars. Laconia Car Company was the largest manufacturer in the area in the mid-1800's, employing over 500 men. They had a reputation for building high-quality railroad cars. The business closed in 1923 as the automobile age took over.

From the library we walked a short distance to Belknap Mill, the oldest unaltered brick textile mill in America. This mill is especially interesting because they designed and built most of the special equipment they needed right in Laconia at neighboring machine companies, the most prominent of which was the famously inventive Aiken family's shop.

David Dunning

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\*According to Gerry DeMuro, SIA member and President of Heritage Mills and the Society for Preservation of Old Mills (Northern Chapter), non-profit educational institutions.

