

# Beverley Mill, rich in history, now in decline

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The icy waters of Broad Run tumble through the mountain gap, flowing past the old mill and then, seconds later, under the looming bulk of Interstate 66.

Boarded shut with plywood, the windows of the five-story mill — the largest still standing in Northern Virginia — stare blankly at rushing motorists. Its massive stone walls bow as their mortar decays, and vertical cracks form between the carefully laid stones.

Beverley Mill, a well-known Prince William landmark registered by the state and federal governments as an important historic site, is slowly falling apart from neglect, say historians and neighboring residents.

Unique to the region, the mill at Thoroughfare Gap has stood idle for more than 30 years. Its last miller, Walter P. Chrysler, closed down and sold the business in 1951 after disputes with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration over sanitary conditions inside the mill.

A decade ago, federal highway plans jeopardized the structure as engineers contemplated leveling the old mill to make room for Interstate 66, the new four-lane route between Strasburg and Washington.

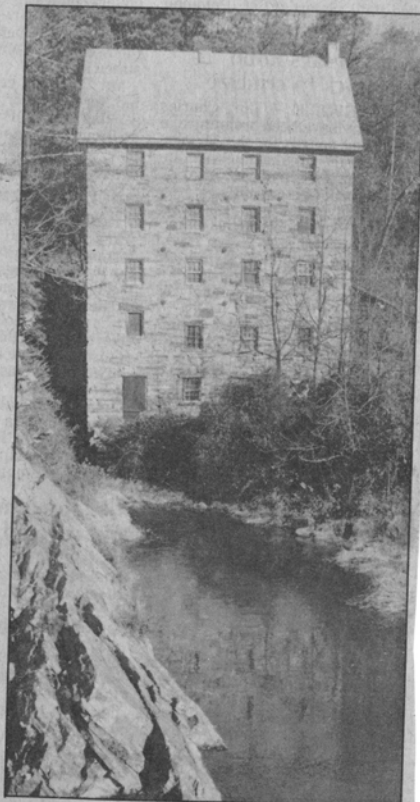
Citizens, however, rallied against that alternative, lobbying the nation's highway planners to move the road and bypass the mill. Relenting, federal officials rechanneled Broad Run, moved the railroad running through gap and narrowed the interstate's median strip to assuage their concerns.

Except for a short time in the early 1970s when new owners stored furniture inside the mill, and sold antiques out of the former miller's house, the site has been unoccupied since Mr. Chrysler sold out.

But for two centuries before, the mill and its site bustled with activity, amassing a rich history.

For 134 years, the property lay in the hands of one old, old Virginia family — the Chapmans.

The family patriarch, Jonathan Chapman, acquired 292 acres including the millsite in 1737 weeks



By Mark Milligan — Potomac News

Northern Virginia's last stone mill, Beverley Mill, crumbles in neglect, its fate uncertain

after Lord Fairfax created the parcel. Historians don't know if Jonathan erected a mill there, but an

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inventory of his son Nathaniel's goods years later refer to a mill.

Indisputably, though, a mill stood in the gap between Pond and Leathercoat mountains in 1759, when Fauquier County was carved from Prince William County. The mill property straddles the county line.

For a while in the 1960s and 1970s, the Wests sold antiques from the Furr House, the two-story frame house associated with the Furr and Kerr families, who owned or operated the mill from 1903 to 1951. The U.S. Post Office for Thoroughfare for years was run out of a small stone building near the mill, moved to a trailer on the mill property, and in 1980 relocated to an old

store across Va. Route 55 from the mill.

The same year, the mill was boarded shut, but vandals have broken inside more than a dozen times since, nearby residents say. Damage to the mill from vandalism has been extensive, as the area — easily visible from I-66 and sparsely inhabited — is a popular destination for drinking parties, they say.

Mrs. Smith, the mill's last private single owner, deeded the 4.5-acre tract eight years ago to the Bull Run Preserve, a non-profit education group she formed to restore the mill and advocate conservation of Bull Run Mountain, the isolated hump rising to its north.

The mountain's southern flank is owned by the Virginia Outdoors

Federation as part of some 3,000 acres in Prince William, Fauquier and Loudoun counties that it holds in trust for the state.

The foundation, which has proposed creation of a Bull Run Mountain Natural Area, examined the mill's potential as a visitor center for the park and recommended its purchase. But the group has lacked

enough money to carry out its plans, according to Ms. Jones.

A few other mills mark Northern Virginia's landscape today.

"Though the mill is privately owned, a legitimate public interest in involved because of [its] recent, serious deterioration," she concluded.