

# Flooding threatens 18th century granary

By CLINT SCHEMMER  
of the Potomac News

Isolated in the uppermost reach of Lake Manassas, tucked beside a rocky hill off Buckland Road, stands an 18th-century stone granary once considered a community fixture.

The three-story mill outbuilding, not eight feet from the water's edge, is a familiar landmark to the few fishermen who angle the lake's narrow headwaters. Called Kinsley granary, the structure is one of four known mill structures left standing in Prince William, a county that once boasted more than 75 grist mills along its creeks and streams.

To most people, however, it has been out of sight, out of mind. Until recently, the granary was unknown to top Manassas officials though it lies on city land, within the ring of land around the lake that Manassas owns.

In two or three years, the city will raise its dam downstream on Broad Run, flooding the granary's lakeside perch.

"There's no way they can preserve the thing and raise the dam," says Dr. Richard E. Debotts, whose family owned and ran the mill and granary for nearly two centuries. "The water's already high up there."

To Manassas historians, that's a disquieting prospect. They're asking the city to help preserve this rare relic from George Washington's era.

"It's valuable — one of the few 18th-century structures left in Prince William County," says Douglas Harvey, curator of the Manassas City Museum.

"Old buildings like it, that had a business or commercial use, are very uncommon today. The others have been torn down ... and this one will be endangered when the water level rises."

The granary, still in sound condition, is believed to date from 1794, when a court granted rights to adjacent Broad Run to John and Charles Love. They were the sons

of prominent landowner Samuel Love, who built nearby Buckland Hall, a handsome three-story stone manse that later was home to members of the Washington and Lee families.

The granary is the oldest structure in the city's hands, Harvey says. It survived thanks to a combination of diligent industry by Debotts and his ancestors, a two-decade-old engineering decision and disinterest by the Fairfax County Park Authority.

In the late 1960s, as Manassas labored to build its 5.8-billion-gallon reservoir, the Fairfax parks agency salvaged Kinsley Mill but left the granary to which it was attached. The agency carried off the three-story mill, paying Debotts \$300 for the damage done in hauling the lumber across his property.

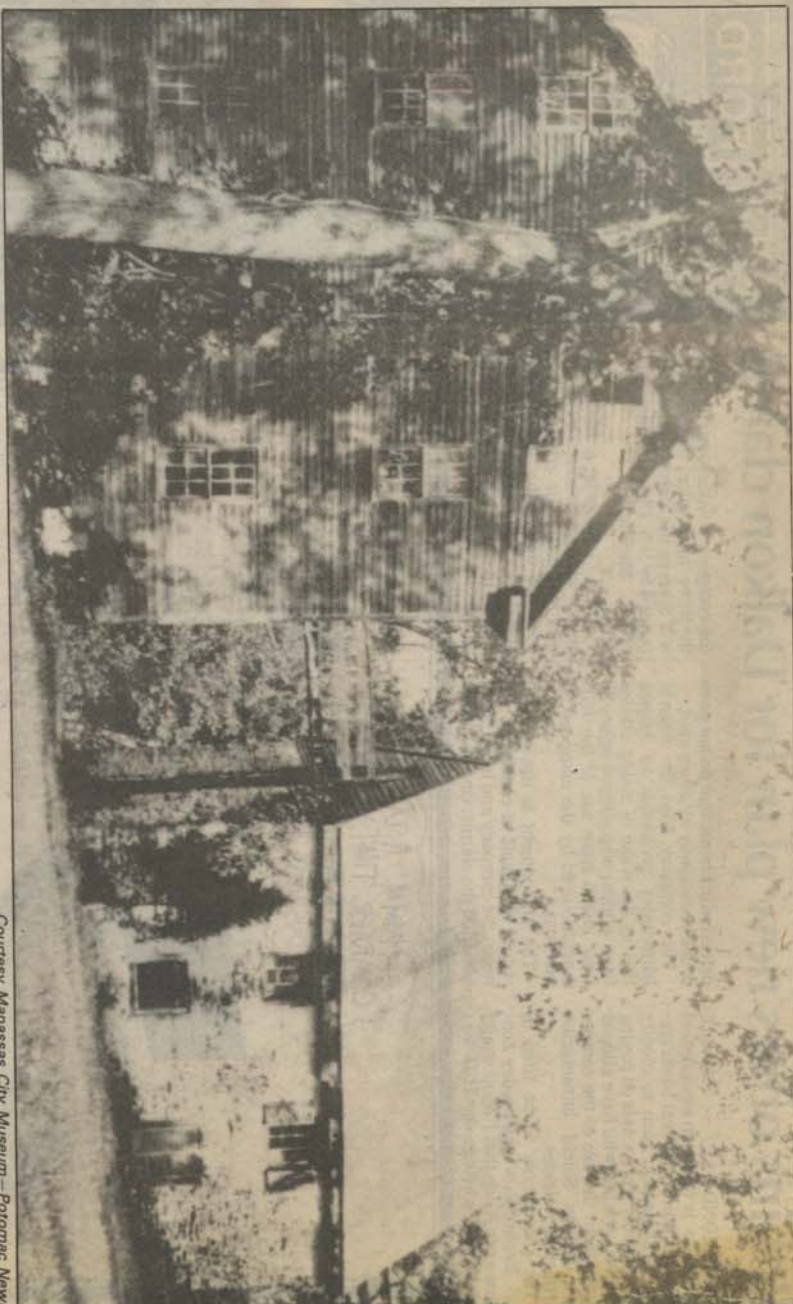
"They were very careful in taking it down, and I was happy for them to have it," recalls Debotts, who lives in Upperville but still owns 15 acres beside the granary. "The reservoir wasn't something I wanted to see built, but Manassas had to have the water. It was a necessary thing."

Today, Kinsley's millstones and big timbers are part of Colvin Run Mill, a restored grist mill that the Fairfax Park Authority operates on Va. 7 between Reston and Tysons Corner.

Fairfax bought the mill at Colvin Run in 1964, spent years reconstructing it, and opened it in 1972 as a county historic site, says Merni Fitzgerald, a park authority spokeswoman. It remains a popular tourist attraction.

In Manassas, history buffs hope the granary will meet a similarly useful fate and avoid a watery grave.

The city, whose dam keeps the lake's surface at 285 feet above sea level, intends to install floodgates that will raise the reservoir another five feet, says Wade Whetzel, supervisor of the municipal water plant.



Courtesy Manassas City Museum—Potomac News

This photograph from the 1960s shows Kinsley Mill, at left, and the adjacent stone granary building.

The project, which Whetzel said the city probably will begin engineering next year and build within two to three years, should increase the reservoir's capacity to about

7.2 billion gallons. It will also inundate the granary's ground floor.

"We want the city to deal with this before they plan to raise the [reservoir] level," curator Harvey

says. "We think it's plain as the nose on your face that you shouldn't flood an 18th-century building."

Harvey remembers his surprise

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