

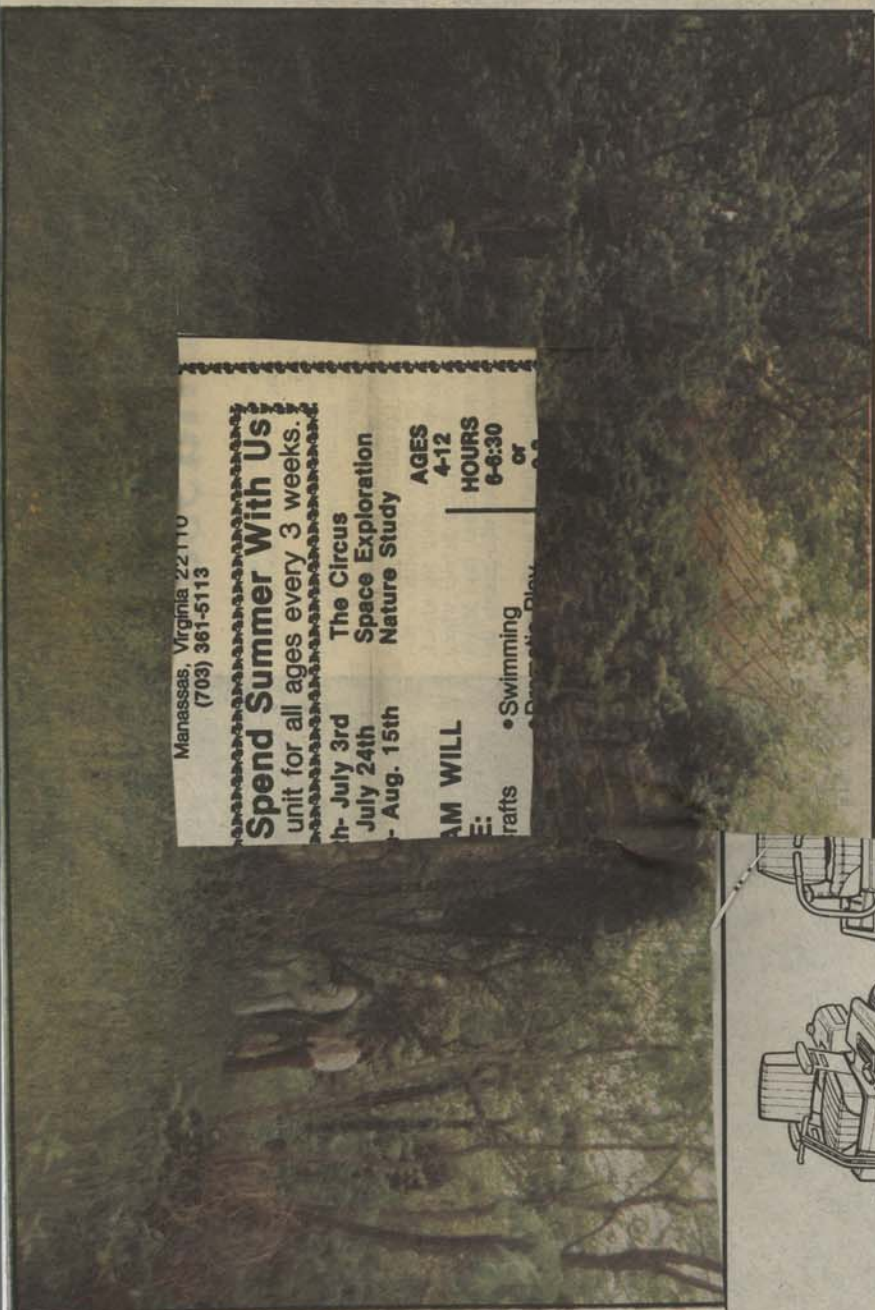
WESTERN PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY

PROFILES



Above, light filters in a window at the Kinsley granary building on the edge of Lake Manassas. At right, Manassas city officials visit the granary to see how it might be used.

Photos by Steve Sawyer—Potomac News



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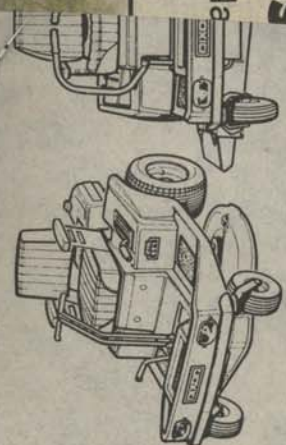
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City considers fate of 18th century stone granary on Lake Manassas

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. Debuts, 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 Debuts 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 Debuts \$500 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 Debuts, 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 Merri 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.

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," cur-

for 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 two years ago in learning of the granary's existence on land that Manassas controls.

The tipoff came from the Prince William County Historical Commission, which was researching sites to be incorporated within a historic district proposed around Buckland. Kinsley granary could fall in the district, whose boundaries have not been decided, says Mavis Stansfield, the county planner who assists the commission.

Manassas councilmen, told 17 months ago of the granary's precarious position, discussed it for the first time this past March. They reviewed a February 1986 memorandum from the city Historical Committee, which suggested three ways to save the granary:

- Negotiate with the developers of an adjoining golf resort, the Robert Trent Jones International, to move the granary to their site, much as Ridge Development Co. reconstructed a mill in Lake Ridge as the centerpiece of Tackett's Mill shopping center.
- Move the building, at the city's expense, to a Manassas site such as the 12-acre city park planned near Quarry Road and Liberia Avenue.
- Salvage its cut stone and hewn beams for some city building project, or sell the granary for private salvage.

The City Council indefinitely postponed any action, leaving it to staff members and the Historical Committee to propose a more specific solution.

The most sensible answer, City Manager John Cartwright says, is to find a private individual or organization that will salvage the building.

"To relocate it and set it down by itself on a piece of public land, as a granary, wouldn't have much educational or public interest value," Cartwright says. "It's got to be made part of a whole story about how mills operated in

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Undergrowth and brush have sprung up around the building with the approach of summer. The mill has been forgotten by all but the history buffs who study Manassas' past.