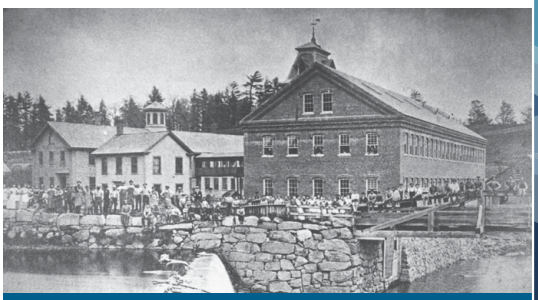


Leeds button mill before the flood

MILL RIVER FLOOD

MAY 16, 1874



Leeds button mill after the flood

The sudden collapse of the Williamsburg dam in western Massachusetts let loose a flood that swept away parts of Williamsburg, Skinnerville, Haydenville, and Leeds. It killed 139 people, all within an hour.

150 YEAR COMMEMORATION

ALL EVENTS ARE FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC.

EVENT SCHEDULE 2024

Cascade of Bells
May 16, starting at 12:10 p.m.

Listen to the relay of church bells from Williamsburg to Northampton, ringing a total of 139 times, once for each flood victim.

Floods Past and Present
May 16, 5:00-6:30 p.m.

Grow Food Northampton
Community Farm, Florence
Registration begins April 1 at
growfoodnorthampton.org/events/

John Sinton and Gaby Immerman of the Mill River Greenway will lead a discussion on the natural and human-driven hydrologic cycles of life on a floodplain farm. From the era of Glacial Lake Hitchcock through 10,000 years of Indigenous land stewardship, to the colonial era, and to our current period of global warming, attendees will reflect on the natural cycle of flooding along the Mill River.

The 1874 Mill River Flood
Talk by Eric Weber
May 16 at 7:00 p.m.

Meekins Library, 2 Williams St., Williamsburg

Commemoration of the Mill River Flood
May 18 at 2:00

First Congregational Church of Williamsburg, 4 North Main St., Williamsburg

The program will feature new musical compositions by Nick Reid and Louise Mosrie, the "May 16th, 1874" ballad by Lynne Bertrand and Penny Schultz, with cellist Stephen Katz, and the story of the disaster in the words of witnesses (arranged by Elizabeth Sharpe) with a reading of the victims' names. A re-enactment of dam keeper George Cheney's frantic horseback ride to warn the village will follow on North Main Street. Two trees will be planted at the church honoring the first two victims of the flood.

Leeds Commemoration Gathering
May 19 at 1:00 p.m.

Church lawn, 195 Main St., Leeds

There will be a recounting of Myron Day's heroic ride warning Leeds, a reading of the names of the 51 Leeds victims, and the performance of an original song by John Daniel. River-inspired art pieces by Leeds artists, original illustrations from *Millicent and The Day it Rained Buttons* by Nancy Meagher, and an art piece made by the Leeds After School Enrichment River Arts Club will be on display. A memorial tree will be planted to honor Myron Day.

Who Was Responsible for the Mill River Disaster?
May 31 at 7:00, June 1 at 1:00 and 4:00

Old Hampshire County Courthouse,
Main Street, Northampton
Registration begins April 1 at
historicnorthampton.org

A readers' theatre presentation about the coroner's inquest into the cause of the Mill River disaster will take place in Hampshire County's historic courtroom. The audience will be invited to participate by reading some of the testimony and commentary from the inquest. Elizabeth Sharpe, author of *In the Shadow of the Dam: The Aftermath of the Mill River Flood of 1874*, will narrate.

Paintings by Frances Kidder
Mill River Disaster of 1874
May 1 - May 31
Talk by Frances Kidder, May 11 at 1:00 p.m.

Meekins Library, Neil Hammer Gallery

Artwork and Poetry Exhibit by Dunphy School 3rd Graders Curated by Nancy Meagher
May 1 - May 31

Meekins Library

Guided Walks to the Dam Ruins
May, June, and September

Registration begins May 1 at
historicnorthampton.org

Historians, naturalists, and engineers will lead walks and discuss the design and construction of the dam, the dam break, and the changes in the natural landscape.

Videos about the Flood
May and June

Historic Northampton, 46 Bridge St.
Wednesday to Sunday, 12:00-4:00 p.m.

Visitors can select from among five videos about the disaster, its impact, and its artistic representations, including the 18-minute 1993 film by Art Donahue for Chronicle, WCVB-TV Channel 5 Boston.

Follow the Flood - Self Guided Tours
May and June

An interactive, online map, designed and hosted by Smith College, will show the length of the Mill River, the span of the flood, and the locations of 75+ historical markers that describe what happened at each site. Markers will be posted in the villages of Williamsburg, Haydenville, Leeds, Florence, and Northampton and at victims' graves in five cemeteries. Click the QR code in the bottom corner (will be live May 1) to access the online Story-Map.

Flood Memorial Tree Project
May 2024 - 2029

A total of 144 trees (one for each of 139 victims and five heroes) will be planted along the river as a living memorial. Each tree will be dedicated to an individual flood victim, the entire family that perished, or a hero of the day. The plantings will take place over five years as the Mill River Greenway shared-use path along the river is developed.

Historic Northampton · Leeds Civic Association · Smith College · The Mill River Greenway Initiative · Mass Cultural Council Williamsburg · Williamsburg Woodland Trails · Meekins Library