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The Paper Mill and The Paper Mill Trail



The modern cement bridge that carries Green Hill Road across the Hammonasset River keeps close company with an industry long gone. Standing on the bridge looking north up the river past the tumbling waters one is struck with a sense of contentment and ease. The dark waters of the river run among the rocks and tree lined banks. A trail winds beside the river offering escape from the rush of traffic.

Below the bridge fishermen stand seeking the wily trout. The sound of water obscures the echoes that linger here. Echoes of the past wait silently among the tumbled stones of the ancient dam. They linger in the rough rows of crumbled stonework. Silent iron pins project from the brickwork to tell of other days when roaring fires and hissing steam mingled with the roar of giant presses.

Echoes abound here beside the rushing waters. The clues to their meaning hide tucked away in yellowed documents and faded photos. Once a bustling industry labored here producing paper for growing businesses. Farmers brought their straw and saw it transformed into a coarse paper often used in making cardboard boxes for shipping Connecticut products to the world.

In 1880 eight men worked here at the Cooper Paper Mill including Joseph and Warren Ackley, George Brannan, Pat Corrigan, William Cranker, and Carelton Grave. Their names are noted in the 1880 census. Among the names is also found that of Zenas Cooper, paper manufacturer, and Ralph Goddard, paper seller.

The men are gone, the machines discarded and the product long disintegrated, but the memory remains echoed in the coal heap, the stone foundations and the remains of the great dam that provided the power. The buildings were gone soon after the beginning of the twentieth century. The vast lake that provided the water to run the machinery is gone and the fishermen have replaced the paper mill workers.

The mill, and others like it, fell on hard times and ultimately closed. In the intervening years the machinery was removed and the mill building dismantled and its lumber being used support a new and growing industry – the building of vacation homes on the shore of Long Island Sound. Today two houses on Middle Beach Road in Madison, built with lumber salvaged from the old mill, echo the sounds of the long silent machinery and perhaps harbor somewhere in their cozy corners the faint odor of newly made paper.

The Madison Land Conservation Trust maintains the Paper Mill Trail that begins at the remains of the paper mill on Green Hill Road. As you hike the paper mill trail pause a moment and remember. As you walk along the bank of the river listen for the sound of voices and the faint clank of the giant press. As you climb to the higher portions of the trail look eastward and visualize the vast lake that once lay to the north of the dam. The trail is rare opportunity to enjoy history wrapped in the beauty of the woodland.

Directions: From Madison center drive north on Route 79. At the traffic light at the intersection of Green Hill Road and Route 79 turn right on Green Hill. Follow Green Hill Road crossing Horsepond Road at the traffic light and continue until you come to the concrete bridge over the Hammonasset River. Before crossing the bridge turn left on to Fawn Brook Circle. Park just off the road and follow the trail to the Paper Mill site.