Newmarket

The Millspace Project: Revamping Newmarket's Historic Mill

Written by Olivia Whitton

Newmarket, a small piece of what is now New Hampshire’s Greater Portsmouth area, was once a booming little town, centered around a busy mill on the Lamprey River. The mill, which was opened as a cotton mill in 1823 by the wealthy Newmarket Manufacturing Company, was the center of town and a melting pot of cultures. The Newmarket Manufacturing Company, funded by Salem, Massachusetts shipping merchants, built more than just the mill on the Newmarket waterfront. Housing for mill workers and several dams on the Lamprey River were built by the company, all with the goal of strengthening the community around the seven mill buildings. By the early part of twentieth century, the mill was known for weaving silk cloth, in addition to handling cotton.

Immigrant workers from several European countries—including Poland, Russia, Germany, Italy and Ireland—reported to the mill each day, and “each group brought their food, their music, and their traditions” to Newmarket. (Bolster, 136) Young women were also among the mill’s employees, in search of better pay and to distance themselves from their rural pasts, also bringing their cultural backgrounds with them to the mills.

The mill was a central part of Newmarket and the Great Bay region until the mid-1900s—when it was purchased by Rhode Island’s Textron, Inc. and relocated its operations to Lowell, Massachusetts— and the Newmarket Millspace project is trying to recreate that ideal. In his ‘The Sustainable Learning Community,’ Tom Kelly states, “a cultural self-awareness is so fundamental to the sustainable learning community.” (Kelly, 40) It appears that those at the forefront of the Millspace Project take aligning viewpoints to Kelly’s, as they emphasize the need for an open, accessible space.

On October 13, 2010, a lease of $1 per year for 99 years was signed by Eric Chinburg of Newmarket Mills LLC. The sales agreement stated that the mill buildings would be used to create a civic space which would be open to members of the greater Newmarket community. Plans for the space are grand and will be funded by membership, grants and donations from private and corporate donors, and not through an increase in taxes for Newmarket residents, as Chinburg and his colleagues are committed to providing the space for the people, not at their financial expense.

Many in the greater Newmarket community have been asking exactly what a community space looks like and how it can be used to better the town. “It is going to be a big, empty room,” according to John Herman of the Millspace Committee’s comments in a Seacoast Online article. But, before everyone starts scratching their heads, the ideas for how to use the space is what makes this project so important. “In the coming years, the Millspace will host workshops, art installations, film festivals, and live theater. Local artists like me are very excited,” Herman says in a statement on the Millspace site. One of the most intriguing plans for the space includes a fashion show, put on by Concetta’s Closet, that will feature clothing from the mill era, effectively transporting the audience back to the beginning of the nineteenth century and to the mill’s heyday.

The community’s efforts to foster an environment that is friendly and helpful to local artists and entrepreneurs cannot be overpraised. Developing an atmosphere that caters to the town’s citizens and their talents and hobbies is key to building a successful community. In a community...
where residents feel safe and appreciated, they may be more inclined to do things to benefit their town. This seems like the first logical step to creating a sustainable and economically stable nation. Sustainability starts with individuals, both in the conventional form of recycling and reducing one’s carbon footprint, and extending to taking a look at the history of a place—what makes it special? why is it worth sustaining?—and learning how to use that information to better the community within it. Tom Kelly’s statements about community in the first chapter of his book would indicate that he agrees. He says, “Not only is the community the focus of what is to be sustained, it is also the basis for the ongoing process of sustainability.” (Kelly, 6)

According to Tom Kelly, it is important that equal recognition is placed on ecosystems and the people who live around them when studying and thinking about sustainability. Focus on history is just as important as focus on present practices, and the Millspace Project seeks to honor that idea. Returning Newmarket to the mill-centric community that it was is a lofty goal, but those involved with the revamping of the Newmarket mills are making very impressive strides.

Works Cited:


We are investigating the feasibility of using shellfish to filter out excessive nutrients in the Piscataqua estuary. Using models, field data, and input from stakeholders, we are evaluating aquaculture success, water-quality improvement, economic benefits, and the potential credit for carbon and nitrogen trading as a management strategy. The potential costs, ecosystem service benefits, and broader applicability are also being considered.

For centuries the Piscataqua region was an extended maritime community connected by the Great Bay Estuary, the short seacoast of New Hampshire and southern Maine, and the seven tributary rivers that fortify the Piscataqua River itself. Moving water shaped the region—under its vessels, at its mills, and across its marshes. Carrying the weight of our history and holding out the promise of community-based conservation, this book (and these waters) invite you on a journey of exploration and renewal. The Piscataqua Post of SAME represents Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. Our members meet once a month. The Piscataqua Post also provides funding for local qualified students to attend military engineering and construction camps, provides scholarships for engineering students at the University of New Hampshire and the University of Maine, and supports military focused benevolent activities in the region and across the country.