

78 Garland Mill

273 Garland Road, Lancaster, New Hampshire

The Garland Mill is regarded as the only commercial sawmill in New Hampshire operating on waterpower and a rare example of the industry that thrived in New England during the nineteenth century. In the 1870s, there were around 640 sawmills of the same type in New Hampshire, and more than 200 in Grafton and Coös Counties. Of the thousands that once dotted the landscape, the Garland Mill is one of a few survivors.

Garland Mill takes its name from its builder, Eben Crocket Garland (1817-1891), a carpenter who had moved to Lancaster a few years before he built the mill in 1856. Garland installed and used a water turbine in his mill, rather than a waterwheel on a small stream, because the



turbine provided a more reliable source of power. A reliable source of power to the mill was a necessity as the 1852 extension of the Atlantic and St. Lawrence Railroad to nearby Northumberland and the extension of the Concord and Montreal Railroad to Lancaster in 1870 greatly expanded the market for locally milled lumber.

After about a decade of operation, Garland and his son, Charles, had enlarged and changed the sawmill many times to maintain its competitiveness with other similar operations in the region, and to meet the demands of the market. By 1870, Garland and his son had invested approximately \$6,000 in the sawmill, the equivalent of \$106,337.80 in 2012 dollars. At that time, the sawmill employed six employees, was powered by nine waterwheels (producing 70 horsepower), and operated a number of different saws, including a circular head saw, an upright (reciprocating) saw, a circular clapboard saw and two single saws.

During the 1870s, annual production consisted of 250,000 board feet of spruce lumber, 250,000 shingles, and an unknown number of clapboards—even though the actual sawing of the lumber was limited to three months out of the year. Garland Mill began producing chairs in 1875, along with other furniture previously produced including bedsteads, kitchen and loafer's chairs, bureaus, and sinks, among others.

The Garland Family rebuilt, enlarged and modernized the mill after a fire in 1877, which led to increased production at the mill. Three years after the fire Garland Mill was operating almost at full-time capacity eight months out of the year, employed six employees 10-12 hours per day and offered six more employees seasonal work. The Garland Mill workforce (including the logging crews employed by the Garlands) churned out 450,000 board feet of lumber, 100,000 shingles and 80,000 barrel or cask staves annually.

As advantageous as the railroads were in the 1850s to the sawmill industry, they soon led to a depletion of the timber stocks that many local sawmills depended on, especially with the 1887-1888 construction of the Kilkenny Railroad, which was a logging line. In response to the economic downturn of the sawmill industry in the region, Charles Garland sold Garland Mill to William Alden.

This transfer of property set off a cycle whereby two additional families operated and sold the Garland Mill over multiple generations. William Alden eventually sold Garland Mill to his son, Harold Alden, who operated the mill until 1974. Upon his retirement, Harold Alden sold the mill to Tom Southworth, who along with his brother Harry, has operated the mill in recent years. More recently, Tom and Harry's sons, Ben and Dana, have joined their fathers in the owning and operating of the Garland Mill.

Due to the dedication of three sets of father-son teams, the Garland Mill has survived the modernization of the timber industry in the United States. It has retained its original type of motive power and its mode of power transmission through shafting and belts, even though the specific turbine the sawmill used has changed over time. Impressively, the mill has been a net producer of energy since 1982, and sends that power to the grid when not being used for milling. More power is generated at the mill each year than is used by the company currently operating the mill, Garland Mill Timberframes.

The Garland Mill was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1982.

Sources:

National Register of Historic Places. Garland Mill. Town of Lancaster. Coös County. New Hampshire. Reference # 82000616. <http://www.crjc.org/heritage/N20-1.htm>

"The Garland Mill History: In Depth." Mill History: In Depth. Garland Mill Timberframes. Accessed 19 June 2013 from <http://www.garlandmill.com/history.htm>.