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Reminders:  
Don’t forget to Renew your dues!

Deadline for Submission for the Summer Issue is March 15, 2008

On the Cover:  
Water flows over the Woolen Mills Dam  
Photo by Bill Emory,  
Courtesy of historicwoolenmills.org.

On the Back Cover:  
The river flowing after the dam has been breached. Photo by Bill Emroy,  
Courtesy of historicwoolenmills.org.
The VC&NS President and JRBF Chairman
Robert M. “Buddy” High

It was such a pleasure to be gathered with our friends and batteau family on Saturday November 17, 2007. The day was a beautiful fall day with the leaves in their finest splendor. Nature’s display made for such a good drive up to Lynchburg. We were greeted by the Friends of New London who volunteered to decorate the Ruritan Clubhouse we were meeting at. Glen & Brenda Strewsbury, of the Thomas Jefferson’s Spirit of New London batteau sponsored by the Friends of New London, were our principal contacts and did a wonderful job displaying their hospitality.

We had delicious food, lots of fellowship, and a great meeting. I feel we have already accomplished so much in one short meeting. We have the dates set for our Winter Membership meeting, the festival dates, and the date of our annual fall picnic. We are planning on all the same sites with some adjustment for crowd control and security at some of the earlier stops. Roger Nelson of the Virginia Creeper will head this committee. Everyone present was in agreement with keeping our boat fees the same amount until we could build a cushion for our operating expenses.

We had several reports of activity from various batteau groups: The Rose of Nelson made a trip on the New River along with a river clean-up day attended by the crew as well as several crew members from other batteaux which netted over 2.4 tons of tires and other trash from the James River.

The Thomas Jefferson’s Spirit of New London has participated at a couple of events at Poplar Forest where it has been re-enacting history to educate the public.

The Brunswick Belle is continuing to work with the Roanoke Canal Museum in Roanoke Rapids, NC to get an inside display of a batteau in the basement of their museum. The High Family will be building this on site.

Please make plans to attend and make your voice heard, help us organize your festival. I want to know what you think and hope we can all continue to work as a team to promote the goals of the festival. We are wishing all of you the happiest of holidays. Remember as you are with your loved ones to especially keep all of military and their families in your prayers as they are giving so much to make sure we have the privilege of enjoying our freedom.

Happy Holidays,
Buddy

### Dates to Remember:

- **Winter Membership Meeting:** 2/24/08
- **Scottsville UM Church (tentative location):** 6/14-6/21/08
- **JRBF Festival:** 6/14-6/21/08
- **The Same Sites as Last Year:**
- **JRBF Picnic:** 11/08/08
- **Location To Be Announced**

### The JRBF Officers 2008:

- **Chairman:** Buddy High
- **Vice Chairman:** Ralph Smith
- **Treasurer:** Ellen Blankenship
- **Secretary:** Betsy Healey
The Woolen Mills Dam is a study in passion. It is a dam that invokes passion for many people for many different reasons. It is a reminder of our past, of an industry that many people didn’t know existed. It created a beautiful lake that was shared by many of the inhabitants of the Woolen Mills and surrounding area. And it was a blockade in the spawning of the shad, a fish that is born in a river but spends most of its life in the sea.

One must wonder, why of all these things, the shad won the battle between Dam and no Dam, but I think that we all know the answer:

Passion.

Passion is what drove Jason Halbert to recognize the dam as a problem; and more importantly, do something about it. It is what drove him and the Rivanna Conservation Society to spend six years trying to right something they both saw as wrong.

No matter how you view the dam -- with sadness, gladness or ambiguousness, you have to admire an organization that in one passionate effort changed and challenged the way that we view something as small as a dam. Much as VC&NS did when they discovered the batteaux at the bottom of the canal basin in Richmond, VA.

However, it doesn’t just take passion, but vision, as demonstrated by William Trout, Ph.D. and Joe Ayers’ to see take the boats and use them as blueprints to make more boats, eventually spawning the James River Batteau Festival.

Over the next couple of issues, we will be studying the Woolen Mills Dam, its history and its future. In this issue, we begin with an introduction to the story of the Woolen Mills Dam, courtesy of The HooK Magazine of Charlottesville, VA and a look at its environmental impact courtesy, of the Rivanna Conservation Society.
Hot dam: Should it stay or should it go?

By Lisa Provence
Published December 5, 2002, in issue #44 of The Hook

Editor’s Note: This article, while written at the beginning of the Woolen Mills’ Debate, is a great overview of the issues of the Dam. We are so lucky to be able to use both of these articles as a starting off point.

Picture a lazy summer day, floating on an inner tube in the mill pond on the Rivanna. Life doesn’t get much better than that— unless you’re Sally Shad trying to get up the river to spawn before your whole species is extinct, and a dam is in the way.

Okay, make that a lazy summer day, and you’re canoeing down the Rivanna. Life doesn’t get much better until you come to the Woolen Mills dam. Finding there’s no easy portage, you curse as you struggle to get your canoe around the dam and continue your journey downstream. Then, like Sally Shad, you may start to wonder, why is that dam still there?

Certainly it’s not to generate power. Current environmental wisdom even dictates that dams are bad for the health of rivers and the fish that spawn in them. But what happens when the dam in question is an integral part of the history and fabric of a neighborhood?

Such is the dilemma facing the Woolen Mills neighborhood. The crumbling community landmark still provides an idyllic Rivanna River setting that hasn’t changed much since the early 19th century and that many are loathe to lose no matter how many American shad must be sacrificed to maintain the status quo.

On the other side of the dam, so to speak, is the Rivanna Conservation Society, which is investigating the feasibility of getting rid of the dam in part or in whole, and gathering heavy-duty environmental support to do so.

The person who ultimately will make the decision is owner Presley Thach, whose father bought Woolen Mills in 1964 and who has steadfastly professed to be neither for nor against the idea of breaching the dam since it was first broached with him.

Jason Halbert of the Rivanna Conservation Society is spearheading the effort to dismantle the dam. Halbert’s impeccable environmental credentials include employment with the now-defunct green-leaning W. Alton Jones Foundation and now its offspring, the Oak Hill Fund. Even among greens, says a former coworker, Halbert is known for his ecological devotion: He’s the kind of guy who stops on a stroll around the dam to pick up a discarded plastic milk jug.

And he’s rounded up some impressive supporters: The Chesapeake Bay Foundation, the local League of Women Voters, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, the Nature Conservancy, and the Thomas Jefferson Chapter of Trout Unlimited all favor a study on breaching the dam.

What prompted him to take on the Woolen Mills’ sacred cow? Halbert lists a number of motives: improving the health of the river, recreational opportunities, and the community’s connection with the Rivanna.

Perhaps most importantly, it’s the American shad that drives Halbert. “They are a fascinating fish, and I admit I’m consumed by a certain mysteriousness that surrounds the fish, partly because they were an integral part of human and animal life here for millennia, and most people have never even eaten or seen one,” he says.

Halbert compares the American shad (Latin name: Alosa sapidissima, which means “most delicious” or “most tasty”) to the American chestnut. “They’re both Appalachian icons, if you ask me, and they’re largely extirpated from their original range completely due to human interference.”

Like salmon, their better-known Pacific brethren, Virginia’s native fish live out their days
in the ocean, and then are compelled by their genes to make what’s often a last, dying trek back upstream to spawn.

In 1999, the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries released more than a million of the endangered shad into the Rivanna River at Crofton Landing, about 10 miles below the dam. Between 2004 and 2007, they’re scheduled to return from the Atlantic to make their journey up the James and then the Rivanna. Some of the survivors from that long haul will run smack into the Woolen Mills dam.

To Breach, Or Not To Breach...

Last spring, Halbert’s vision for a dam-free river was granted an audience with the Woolen Mills Neighborhood Association. However, at the meeting, held in the old Woolen Mills Chapel, Halbert was placed last on the agenda, and he was introduced as a Belmont resident—signs that could signal that his project will face an upstream swim, or worse: that he’s “not from around here.”

Halbert likes to quote former Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt about this country’s 75,000 dams: Since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, America has, on average, constructed a dam a day.

But now that trend has turned. In November, Portland General Electric announced it was dismantling two dams in Oregon. While the two dams produce 10 megawatts, a drop in the 2,000-megawatt bucket of electricity PGE generates, they’re both fully functioning hydroelectric dams.

Other dam-keepers are looking at less destructive although arguably less effective measures, such as fish ladders. In 1999, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries opened a $1.5 million fish ladder at Bosher’s Dam on the James River above Richmond, the first time spawning fish were able to swim past the dam since 1823, according to the department.

Halbert says the idea of dam breaching is nothing new. In 1987, Virginia signed on to the Chesapeake Bay Agreement with the goal of opening the state’s 415 miles of spawning habitats to migratory fish.

The Bosher’s Dam Fishway opened 138 miles of that goal. And the breaching of Woolen Mills dam would open up not only the 3.4 miles to
the South Fork Dam, but also the 13 miles of the North Fork Rivanna to total another 22 miles for the American shad, which once ruled Virginia’s rivers.

Why is the shad important other than as the draw for politicos at the annual Shad Planking?

“Shad are our salmon,” says Halbert. “We’ve been preventing them from doing their thing for almost 200 years.”

For settlers to Virginia, shad was the other white meat. Shad once “amounted to half a hog crop for the entire population of the basin of the James,” claims a Virginia Commission of Fisheries 1875 annual report.

The James teemed with shad, as well as with stripers, herring, sturgeon, and eel. “In the spring of the year, herrings come up in such abundance... to spawn, that it is almost impossible to ride through without treading on them,” wrote Robert Beverley in 1705.

During the 1700s, as fish populations dwindled, colonists passed laws requiring the removal of obstructions or construction of fish passages, according to Virginia Wildlife magazine, which comments, “Surely a society that can send men to the moon and bring them back, can send fish up a river.”

Halbert cites economic reasons for tearing down the dam. In July of this year, legislation went into effect in Virginia that requires annual inspections of dams, after which they must be repaired or face fines.

“It costs far less to remove the dam once than repair it,” he says. The dam, built in 1830, is eroding and losing stone blocks.

Halbert points to the top blocks on the dam. “Notice that they’re dry, and the stones underneath are wet,” he instructs. “That mean it’s leaking, and that loosens the stones underneath.” He predicts the dam eventually will collapse.

And then there are the safety concerns. The dramatic beauty of the dam cannot help but attract people, and periodically someone is injured on it. In August 2001, a woman fell off and broke her ankle. Unsurprisingly, alcohol is often involved.

Pat Punch has another reason for wanting to see the dam down: “I’d like to canoe down the river, and right now, it’s a real pain to portage around.” He says Albemarle County is working on a new landing at Pen Park. “With the dam out, it would be a heck of a lot more fun to go to Milton,” without having to stop at the dam and carry a boat around it.

And Punch, who’s also a member of the Rivanna Conservation Society, thinks portage at the dam is hazardous. Besides having to climb over rocks and through poison ivy carrying a heavy canoe loaded with gear up a steep embankment and then down again, “There’s always the possibility of snags or tripping.”

What about the dam’s historic significance? “The purpose was to provide power to Woolen Mills,” says Punch. “It’s outlived that. Just because it’s old doesn’t mean it should stay there.”

Punch is sympathetic to “those poor fish,” too.

“The shad really want to go upstream,” he says. “Canoeists really want to go downstream. The dam is in the middle blocking the river for both groups.”

Not In My Backyard
Three historic brick duplexes line the end of East Market Street. Since 1982, realtor Roger Voisinet has lived in one of them. He says it was built in the 1830s and used to house the manager of the Woolen Mills.

For Voisinet, the loss of the dam, which makes the Rivanna River lake-like at his back yard, would be a “catastrophe.”

Voisinet attended the neighborhood meeting where “some guy who seems to think it’s his business gave a talk,” he says. Voisinet calls Halbert’s slide show “disingenuous,” and adds, “I was too mad to say anything at the meeting.”

If the dam is torn down, he foresees his backyard as a large, wide stretch of mud where nothing will grow.

Halbert says that would be only temporary. Landscaping would be included in any cost projections for breaching or partially breaching the dam, and with active plantings in the rich bottomland soil, it’d be green in a year, Halbert predicts.
With the river no longer a barrier, Voisinet also fears a loss of privacy and security from people walking through his yard.

“My house has taken the brunt of the public’s desire to park trailers” and use the river for boating, he says. “Everyone acts like fishermen and canoeists are so great,” but to Voisinet, they’re “pretty bad neighbors.”

“I’ve been picking up litter for 20 years,” he says, and in the 1980s, vandalism was a problem. Voisinet points out historic aspects of the dam, which was built in 1830 to power what would become Charlottesville’s first major industry.

“This whole neighborhood owes its existence to the Woolen Mills dam,” says Voisinet. He wonders what’s next—tearing down the Woolen Mills Chapel to put in low-income housing?


“There’s a visual environment these environmentalists need to think about.”

Neither the dam nor the mill is a registered Virginia historic landmark, although an archivist at the Virginia Department of Historic Resources says they should be. Woolen Mills was proposed as a historic district in 1983, but nothing happened with that. And the city has protected four buildings in Woolen Mills, including the chapel, with a historic designation.

Lay notes that the dam is the last remnant of the original mill and that aesthetic considerations have merit. “Historically, it’s always easier to tear down something than fix it,” he says. “Once it’s gone, it’s gone. That’s sad.”

Lay asks about a fish ladder, and in fact, there is one across the river on the side owned by State Farm Insurance. The only problem, according to Halbert, is that it doesn’t work. “Shad can’t jump,” he explains.

Another in the dam preservation camp is Pete Runge, an amateur historian with the Virginia Canals and Navigation Society. He opposes the dam being breached. But if it’s done, “It needs to be done properly,” says Runge, with an
The archaeologist present. He’s certain all sorts of artifacts lie at the base of the 170-year-old dam, perhaps even the foundation of an earlier dam.

“I’d be astounded if there weren’t sunken boats” at the dam’s foundation, he predicts.

Even though he’s a kayaker, Runge thinks portaging around the dam is easy, and he’d prefer to see the dam left, or better yet, fixed up. “For the cost both monetary and cultural, breaching it seems a bit much.”

How have other Woolen Mills residents responded to the idea of breaching the dam? “It’s not really any of their business,” Voisinet says, but “one person snidely told me I’d have to find another place to go swimming.”

One resident who favors a dam-less neighborhood and who requests his name not be used, describes Woolen Mills as a hotbed of Democrats, known for their environmental tendencies. “But Democrats feel differently about environmental issues when they lose their own personal paddling pond,” he chortles.

However, Halbert doesn’t think it’s that easy. “I don’t assume anybody is going to jump on board because they’re an environmentalist.”

Like Halbert, Kay Slaughter also sports impeccable environmental credentials. A former (Democratic) Charlottesville mayor who works at the Southern Environmental Law Center, the Woolen Mills resident is well aware that there’s a national trend to remove dams. But the idea of breaching the Woolen Mills dam is one “I haven’t jumped up to embrace,” she says.

“In fact, you’ve got another dam upstream at the Rivanna Reservoir,” she notes. “It’s not like you’re returning the river to its natural environment.”

She acknowledges some sympathy to the idea of dam breaching, but she also has sympathy for the several landowners whose property will be affected. “It hasn’t been shown why it should be done,” she says.

Mixed Reviews

UVA student (and occasional Hook contributor) Wesley Hottot has shot two films featuring the Woolen Mills dam. “From a filmic perspective,” he says, the idea of dismantling the dam is “tragic.”

He says the water on the lower side of the dam is like a creek, and calls the stagnant, green water above the dam “primordial” in its beauty when the light hits the algae.

“It’s a really nice, naturally decrepit area,” he says. “Even if you’re not photographing it, it’s a nice place to find solace.”

Hottot wouldn’t go so far as to swim in the waters around the dam. “It’s gross,” he says. When he once fell into the river, his skin was “slimy” when he got out.

And while fully admitting he knows nothing about the environmental issues, it seems to Hottot that the river needs to be moving. “If they need to take apart the dam to make the river more viable, I’m for it.”

“It’s imaginable the benefits would outweigh three people having their own swimming hole,” says another Woolen Mills resident, who does not want his name used. This homeowner says the clouds of mosquitoes in the ‘hood are “like a tundra,” and thinks a downed dam would help that.

Democratic City Council candidate Alexandria Searls also lives in Woolen Mills. She calls the dam “photographically popular.” As for breaching it, she needs to know more. Is the dam safe? How much land and privacy would property owners like Voisinet lose? What would it do for the river?

“I would support a study,” she says. Actually, that’s what Halbert is working toward. In July, he was awarded a $15,000 grant
from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in partnership with the American Rivers organization.

Early in December, he’ll get word on a couple of other grant applications that would provide the $25,000 to $30,000 needed to hire an engineering and design firm to do a study to see if a partial breach of the dam is feasible. “Without the money in place, it’s premature” to go beyond that, and unless he gets the additional grants, the first $15,000 must be returned, he says.

Down at the end of Market Street at the old Woolen Mills building that now houses his moving and storage company, Presley Thach, who owns the dam and who will decide its fate, is keeping his cards close to his vest. “I’m very open minded,” he says.

Even before Halbert talked to the neighborhood association, Thach predicted the opposition of neighbors, particularly those whose property is adjacent to the river.

“We’ve given permission to perform the study,” he says but not for the demolition.

Halbert is almost two years into lobbying for breaching the dam, and it could be another year until it’s time for Thach to make a decision. Meanwhile, Halbert keeps Thach posted on the progress.

One question Thach can’t answer is who would pay for the demolition.

“I don’t intend to pay for it,” Thach says. That would leave Halbert to scrounge up more funding if Thach consents.

Does Halbert think neighborhood opposition will influence Thach? “Sure, if tons of people are against it,” he answers. However, he’s confident the arguments to do it are strong.

“It fits in with the state’s plans for the health of rivers and fisheries,” he explains. “It just makes sense.”

And while some Woolen Mills residents may not agree, “This isn’t some crusade,” says Halbert. “Really, what we’ve done is raise a lot of questions. Now we need to answer them and address concerns.”

Presley Thach has a question. “Have you looked at the dam recently?” he asks. “It’s in disrepair and falling apart.” And whatever decision he makes, that’s a fact of life that’s not likely to change for this ancient structure.
The Rivanna River Runs Free Through Charlottesville: Woolen Mills Dam Breached

By Jason Halbert

Editor’s Note: This article was originally printed in the November 2007 issue of Rivanna Currents, the Rivanna Conservation Society’s newsletter.

After nearly six years of dedicated and tenacious effort by RCS, and its Rivanna River Restoration Committee the breaching of the Woolen Mills Dam took place on August 15, 2007. The result of this time consuming, bureaucratically laden and relatively expensive project (but far cheaper than the alternatives) is that the beautiful Rivanna River is running free through Charlottesville for the first time in 177 years.

Nearly 100 supporters and members of the press gathered at Riverview Park (just a little upstream of the dam) to commemorate the breaching. After a short ceremony, participants walked to the dam site to find that a section thirty feet wide had been removed almost to bedrock. On this perfectly sunny summer morning, the demolition was well underway, with construction equipment pulling blocks of cut stone and the rubble from a section of the dam. Onlookers were delighted to see the river running through the breach.

History: The dam was built some 177 years ago to provide power to the Woolen Mills. After operating as a power source for a number of years, the mill transitioned to electricity rendering the dam, as a power source, unnecessary. Even so, the structure was picturesque and a familiar landmark, so the dam remained in place nearly 18 decades. In recent times the Woolen Mills Dam has been the property of the Thach family who has owned the dam since the closure of the Woolen Mills back in 1964. So the breaching of the dam, proposed by RCS, had to have the blessing and support of the owners.

As civic minded neighbors, the Thach family has for many years allowed the Rivanna Trail to traverse their private property abutting Moores Creek, below the dam, so the RCS was hopeful that the Thach family would approve the breaching of the dam. Having secured the support of the Thach family, the RCS contracted for an engineering study in 2003, to ascertain the viability of removing a part of the dam to allow passage of migratory fish, (shad, herring, and American eel). The RCS also wanted to assure safe passage for canoeists and other recreational boaters, while making an effort to maintain some of the historical characteristics of the existing dam. No small task to say the least.

The Process: The RCS began the process of raising funds to move from concept to reality. Through the gracious funding support of the Charlottesville Area Community Foundation, Bama Works, Canaan Valley Institute, Virginia Department of Game & Inland Fisheries and American Rivers and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) the feasibility study was undertaken. Contractors were selected through a formal bidding process and Rettew, Inc. of Lancaster, PA evaluated the project’s feasibility and did sediment testing, surveying, and breach design. The Rettew study characterized the hydrology, impoundment, bottom topography of the river, composition of river bottom sediment (the tests for heavy metals and other toxins were negative-nothing found), and predicted the end result of removing 195 of the 270-foot dam. Pressure to remove the dam intensified with the tragic, accidental drowning at the dam in 2004.

A kayaker in high water in front of the Dam.
Photo courtesy of David Lee Richardson
Working in concert with Virginia’s Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (DGIF) Fish Passage Coordinator, Alan Weaver, RCS hosted a series of meetings with state and federal government agency personnel, followed by community based meetings with the Woolen Mills neighborhood to facilitate the necessary permit process for removing the dam. Seven permits or waivers were needed. The next step was for RCS to submit applications to the US Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide Permits 27 and 33, Virginia Marine Resources Commission permit, Department of Environmental Quality waiver for Clean Water Act permit compliance, Department of Conservation and Recreation Dam Safety permit, and an Albemarle County demolition permit. All permits were approved.

Not surprisingly, given the age of the structure, the dam qualified for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Sites. This designation required the development of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between RCS and the Department of Historic Resources, to assure historic mitigation. Once the permits were submitted and approved by Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), RCS worked with DGIF, ACOE, and the Department of Historic Resources to draft a MOA outlining each party’s responsibilities during and after deconstruction. This Agreement provided for full documentation of the deconstruction process, historic signage and kiosks on both sides of the river (to be completed), donation of representative block and timber samples to the local Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society and more.

With water quality and aquatic habitat in mind, the RCS, in cooperation with the US Fish & Wildlife Service’s State Fisheries Coordinator Albert Spells, contracted with the University of Virginia to document fish population through a monitoring study conducted before and after dam removal.

After a formal bidding process, the RCS awarded the demolition contract to the lowest bidder: Shelbeck Excavation of Scottsville, VA. Isaac Shelley and his crew (JJ, Thomas, and Billy) took advantage of the low water caused by the summer drought and in early August built a ramp and causeway from the private driveway of Security Storage Allied Van Lines at the end of E. Market
Street. This causeway went down into the river and allowed for the transport of the heavy equipment necessary to complete the demolition. RCS Committee members, including engineer Pat Punch, were on site almost every day to monitor and guide the work. The Shelbeck track hoe operator (JJ) did an outstanding job of removing the blocks of cut stone, one by one. This careful process ensured the gradual release of the impounded water. With precision, each course of block was removed, allowing water to spill over the lowered dam, causing the impoundment behind the dam to fall, foot by foot.

Aided by the mostly dry weather, the entire Woolen Mills Dam deconstruction took less than 3 weeks. The demolition process was extensively documented by a historical resources consultant from Gray & Pape, Inc. The process was also documented by RCS members, area homeowners and the local press. A small of community onlookers gathered each day at the site to watch and talk about the historic process. Personal stories were shared, memories of fishing, swimming and playing in the waters above and below the dam.

The Shelbeck team was moving to completion and using the engineering plans developed by Rettew, Inc. removed approximately 195 out of 270 feet of the structure, leaving short sections of block on both sides of the river for historic interpretation. Stone supports for wooden gates of the old sluiceway that carried water to the mills, will remain on the Market Street side. On the other side of the river, the old lock and a non-functioning fish ladder also remain—both of which can be easily accessed by the newly created Old Mills Trail. The dam materials – 12 inch by 12 inch timbers fastened together by iron spikes and the hand-hewn stone blocks, were returned to the Thach family who still own the remaining structure. A representative piece of the wood structure, one full stone block, photos and historical documentation will be delivered to the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society for their collection.

As the water level behind the dam dropped over the course of several days, the structure and shape of the river bottom began to emerge, revealing dying and decaying algae (algae growth is bad and is the result of the stagnant, oxygen-depleted water behind the dam). Behind the rock face of the dam, the timber cribbing appeared. The breach revealed a short section of another impounding structure—perhaps a coffer dam used to divert water for work on the main dam.

**The Result:** The Rivanna River, through this section of Charlottesville, is now a very different river, returning to a natural state, much like it was before the structure was built in the early 1800’s. In those days, the entire length of the Rivanna, from the Port of Pireus to Columbia, contained a series of flat-water impoundments behind dams, used to harness water power for mills and to fill locks for transport of goods and people. The only remaining structures now on the Rivanna main stem are the dam that created the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir, impounded for our urban drinking water supply, and small dams on the North Fork at Camelot (also for drinking water) and Advance Mills (no apparent use).

The beautiful rock garden now revealed at Riverview Park will be a kayaker’s haven once the rains return and the river level rises again. When the water is up the peaceful sounds of the rippling rapids will return to Riverview Park, a sound that hasn’t been heard there for 177 years. When the shad and eels begin to migrate upstream, the community will witness the events as nature intended and as they have unfolded for countless centuries before the intervention of man.

To help ensure that the shad and other aquatic life return to upstream Rivanna, the RCS and the Department of Game & Inland Fisheries are committed to stocking shad fry at Darden Towe Park. As has been the case the past three years, elementary school children come to help release the shad fry. The intention is to educate the community and its students while providing a future fish stock for the Rivanna. Neighborhood anglers are excited about the potential for improved fishing on the Rivanna and canoeing the river will be much easier and a lot more fun.
Above: This concrete slab that measures 9 feet wide by 160 feet long was once covered by the Rivanna River. How many other treasures will we find?

For more information about this slab, check out the following website: http://www.historicwoolenmills.org/ and click on the September Archive.


Right: An old photo of the Woolen Mills Dam, by an unknown photographer. Photo courtesy of historicwoolenmills.org
I started the festival with my children enjoying the ride and now it is so special to see my grandchildren view the river ride as one of their big adventures. I've always heard everything comes around full circle and I believe the second time around gets better and better.

~Robert M "Buddy" High