

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

received APR 10 1985
date entered MAY 9 1985National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination FormSee instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic DUCK MILL

and/or common DUCK MILL

2. Location

street & number 60 Duck Mill Road

N/A not for publication

city, town Fitchburg N/A vicinity of

state Massachusetts code 025 county Worcester code 027

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
☐ district	☐ public	☐ occupied	☐ agriculture
☒ building(s)	☒ private	☐ unoccupied	☐ commercial
☐ structure	☐ both	☒ work in progress	☐ educational
☐ site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	☐ entertainment
☐ object	☐ in process	☒ yes: restricted	☐ government
	☐ being considered	☐ yes: unrestricted	☐ industrial
		☐ no	☐ military
			☒ other: Apt. units

4. Owner of Property

name Duck Mill Historical Trust

street & number 540 Main Street

city, town Townsend N/A vicinity of state Massachusetts

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Northern Worcester Registry of Deeds

street & number Elm Street

city, town Fitchburg state Massachusetts

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Inventory of the Historic Assets of the Commonwealth has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ nodate 1977 ☐ federal ☒ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records Massachusetts Historical Commission

city, town Boston state MA

7. Description

DUCK MILL, 60 Duck Mill Rd., Fitchburg, MA

Condition

☐ excellent
☒ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Duck Mill is located on a 2.5 acre irregularly shaped parcel on the northeast side of Duck Mill Road in South Fitchburg, approximately 1.5 miles from the city's commercial business district. The property is bounded by Duck Mill Road on the southwest, Bemis Road on the east, and recent commercial buildings on the north and west. The Nashua River flows approximately 500 feet to the north; the millrace that provided power to the mill was filled in in recent years. Numerous small storehouses and sheds were once scattered around the site, particularly to the north and west of the main complex. None of these now remain, and the land on which they stood (lots 20A, 6A, 6B, 6C, and 6D on the Engineers Map) is now under separate ownership.

The prehistoric archeological potential of the Duck Mill site is limited. There are no recorded prehistoric sites in the area. While there may have been prehistoric activity in the vicinity, the site has probably been regraded and otherwise disturbed to an extent that precludes prehistoric survivals. The Duck Mill site has more potential for historic archeological remains. Potential resources would include refuse scatter, the remains of an earlier mill, the remains of small ancillary structures which may have existed, and the remains of technological structures such as power systems.

The mill complex consists of ten attached structures and additions. The main mill building (A), built in 1844, exhibits the features typical of New England textile factories erected between 1820 and 1850. Measuring 46 X 100 feet, it stands three stories on a granite block foundation and is surmounted by a gable slate roof. A gabled stairtower bisects the facade. The hexagonal wooden bell cupola was removed in the mid 20th century, although the square base remains. Near the roof ridge, sixteen skylights once pierced the roof; they were removed and the roof patched in the late 1890s. The plain brick walls are relieved by a projecting belt beneath the dentilated cornice. Along the raking eaves, angled bricks link the cornice to the main wall plane. Fenestration is regularly spaced, consisting of on the lower stories and 8/8 sash on the third story, all set between granite window sills and lintels. Alterations to the main mill include changing the centrally positioned first story entrance of the stairtower to an adjacent window and arched doorway (late 1890s) and creating a wide loading entrance on the first story to the left of the tower (mid 20th century).

To the south of the mill stands a three-story, flat-roofed addition (D), constructed in two phases. It is not known when the basement and first story were erected, though architectural evidence suggests the 1850s or 1860s. The upper two floors were added ca. 1900. The addition's fenestration continues the pattern established on the original mill, except on the top story where the window openings are arched. The dentilated cornice matches that of the original mill. Double wooden loading doors are found on each level of the south elevation.

In 1853, a 2 1/2 story, 36X39-foot machine shop (B) was erected just northwest of the main mill and sited gable-end to Duck Mill Road. Stylistically, it is similar to the

(continued)

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Duck Mill, 60 Duck Mill Rd.

Fitchburg, MA

Item number 7

Continuation sheet

Page 1

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received
date entered

earlier mill. Alterations include the conversion of a second story loading door to a window on the south wall, the addition of an early 20th century door below (in an original doorway), and the replacement of the south slope of the slate roof with asphalt shingles.

The machine shop and original mill were linked in 1887 by a three-story, flat-roofed stairtower. On the west elevation, the tower contains an entrance with double wooden doors and a two-light transom on the first story, a 8/12 window on the second story, and another 8/12 window set in an arched head on the third story.

Behind the main mill is the 40X50-foot picker house (C). When built in 1878, it was freestanding, but with later additions it has become connected to the mill complex on all but the east elevation. It has a pitched asphalt roof (once slate). The east wall was designed with seven arched window openings; it was refaced in the early 20th century and new rectangular openings were cut in to match those of the adjacent cloth room, added in 1907. The picker house originally had 12/12 sash, but they have been altered to fixed multipane lower sash with louvers above.

North of the machine shop are the engine and boiler rooms (E and F), which are single-story brick additions built in 1893 to replace the 1853 boiler house that had been on the same spot. Their primary fenestration is paired 16-pane fixed sash beneath eight-light transoms. On their north elevation are smaller, arched openings with twelve fixed lights. An entrance on the same wall has been blocked up, although the transom remains. On their east elevation, an original arched doorway with transom and double wooden doors survives. A tapered 90-foot chimney rises from their east elevation. (E & F)

Abutting either side of the 1878 picker house is the 1907 cloth room (G) on the south end and the 1910 weave shed (H) on the north. The former is one story tall with 12/12 sash in arched window openings and simple eave brackets. The latter, also a single story, has arched window openings containing paired twelve-light fixed sash beneath paired eight-light transoms. A window on the east wall was converted to a loading door in the mid 20th century. The entire east wall of the mill (including that of the picker house) was painted buff at some time in the early or mid 20th century.

In 1926, two final additions were built onto the complex. At the south end is a single story, triangular-shaped room (J) with small, arched window openings containing eight fixed lights. Double wooden doors lead onto Bemis Road. At the northeast end is a three-bay addition (I), stylistically identical to the adjacent weave shed.

The interior of the entire mill complex is open and functionally designed. Two rows of round columns divide the space of the main 1844 mill. Throughout, walls are exposed brick and floors are wooden plank. The only surviving stairway is in the 1880s stairtower; it features square newel posts with chamfered corners, round caps, and simple turnings. The railing is wood tongue and groove. On the foundation walls of the machine shop, the arched outline of the millrace (now filled in) is visible.

8. Significance

DUCK MILL, 60 Duck Mill Road, Fitchburg, MA

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
☐ prehistoric	☐ archeology-prehistoric	☐ community planning	☐ landscape architecture	☐ religion
☐ 1400–1499	☒ archeology-historic	☐ conservation	☐ law	☐ science
☐ 1500–1599	☐ agriculture	☐ economics	☐ literature	☐ sculpture
☐ 1600–1699	☒ architecture	☐ education	☐ military	☐ social/
☐ 1700–1799	☐ art	☐ engineering	☐ music	☐ humanitarian
☒ 1800–1899	☒ commerce	☐ exploration/settlement	☐ philosophy	☐ theater
☒ 1900–	☐ communications	☒ industry	☐ politics/government	☐ transportation
		☒ invention		☐ other (specify)

Specific dates 1844, 1853, 1878, 1893, 1900, 1907, 1910, 1926 Builder/Architect unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Duck Mill possesses integrity of location, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The building is associated historically with cotton manufacturing, the primary nineteenth-century industry in Fitchburg, and with George Blackburn, a leading local industrialist of the period. The earliest part of Duck Mill is a well-preserved example of the type of factory building erected in Massachusetts between 1820 and 1850. Numerous additions made to the mill throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century demonstrate a well-documented evolution of a mill building over time. As one of the earliest surviving textile mills in Fitchburg, and as a fine example of mill architecture, Duck Mill meets Criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places on the local level.

Textile manufacturing was first introduced to Fitchburg in 1807, when the state's second cotton factory, the Fitchburg Cotton Manufacturing Co., was erected on the banks of the Nashua River. The river, which falls 250 feet as it flows through the community, quickly became the site of additional textile mills; by 1832, seven cotton and woolen factories were in operation. The manufacture of textiles and textile machinery was the leading industry in Fitchburg throughout most of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Fitchburg went through a period of major growth and prosperity in the 1840s and 1850s, and soon ranked third in Massachusetts cotton manufacturing, behind only Lowell and Taunton.

Around 1832, George Blackburn erected the first mill in South Fitchburg, a hamlet of only a few houses on the main road from Boston to Keene, New Hampshire. Blackburn's mill was a cotton factory, manufacturing the type of cloth known as "shoddy". This mill burned to the ground ca. 1843. The next year, Blackburn built the main building of the present complex on the site of his earlier factory. This new mill produced cotton duck cloth instead of shoddy cloth. Within the following decade, Duck Mill grew significantly, and Blackburn added a machine shop and boiler room. Growth was facilitated by the arrival of the Fitchburg Railroad from Boston and the Fitchburg and Worcester Railroad from Worcester in 1845. Tracks reached South Fitchburg by 1854.

Though one of many textile mills in Fitchburg, Duck Mill was the only one producing heavy canvas cloth, or duck. Its primary customer was the locally burgeoning paper industry, to which the mill supplied heavy canvas cloth for belting used to carry the paper through the manufacturing process. Duck Mill was capable of producing cloth in widths from 18 to 22 inches. During the Civil War, the mill manufactured cotton duck cloth for hammocks, army tents, awnings, sails, and trousers for the Union Army. In succeeding years, the mill became the largest American producer of sail cloth for high-masted schooners.

As was typical of most mid-nineteenth century mills, Duck Mill originally operated solely on waterpower. Its source was the Nashua River, which was dammed by Blackburn

(continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Crane, Ellery B., History of Worcester County, NY: Lewis Historical Publ'g Co., 1924, Vol. Emerson, William, Fitchburg Past & Present, Fitchburg: Blanchard & Brown Press, 1887. Fitchburg City Directories.
Fitchburg Daily Sentinel, (6/18/1892, 12/20/1938). (con't.)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2.5 acres
Quadrangle name Fitchburg, MA Quadrangle scale 1:25,000
UTM References

A

1	9	2	5	7	5	0	0	4	6	5	8	7	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

D

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E

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F

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property includes entire parcel of land on which the building is sited and as outlined in red on attached engineering map. The property includes the entire industrial complex of Duck Mill. The dwellings on the opposite side of Duck Mill Road,

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries (continued)

state	code	county	code
N/A			

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary Kate Sampson, Mass. Historical Commission, with Elizabeth Durfee Hengen, Preservation Consultant
organization Massachusetts Historical Commission date July 5, 1984
street & number 80 Boylston Street telephone (617) 727-8470
city or town Boston state Massachusetts

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

☐ national ☐ state ☒ local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Valerie A. Talmage
Executive Director, Mass. Historical Commission
title State Historic Preservation Officer date March 21, 1985

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date

5-9-85

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
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received

date entered

Continuation sheet Duck Mill, 60 Duck Mill Rd.
Fitchburg, MA Item number 8 Page 1

several hundred feet upstream and diverted into a raceway that ran through the basement of the machine shop. In 1853 a supplementary steam engine was installed. As late as 1929, water supplied more than half of the mill's power, supplemented by electricity. The original raceways are now filled in.

At the time of his death in 1871, Blackburn also owned a second mill in nearby Ashburnham, which provided the spun yarn for Duck Mill's weaving operation. Other Blackburn properties in the vicinity of Duck Mill included numerous storehouses and three Greek Revival dwellings, including a brick boardinghouse. North of his dam, Blackburn owned additional cotton mills, and across Water Street, a fine residence. Of the buildings in Duck Mill's immediate area, only two smaller dwellings on the opposite side of Duck Mill Road survive. They are not included in this nomination because their relationship to each other and to the mill is no longer intact, the southerly building has been severely altered, and they are not in common ownership.

Upon Blackburn's death, his property passed to his daughter, Harriette Nevins of Framingham, who continued to manage and expand Duck Mill for thirty-five years. In this period, the company's salesrooms were located on Chauncey Street in Boston. In 1905 Mrs. Nevins sold the mill to Fitchburg Duck Mills, a group of businesses under the direction of Walter F. Stiles. The physical plant was enlarged, with new weave and cloth rooms built on either side of the rear picker house. By 1922, nearly 200 people were employed at the mill, operating 1800 twister spindles, 3072 spinning spindles, and 65 looms. In addition to producing cotton duck and felt, the mill diversified to include tire fabric and automobile upholstery in its production.

Like most northern textile mills, Duck Mill suffered losses during the Depression and, later, faced extreme competition from cotton manufacturers in the South. Yet the mill continued production through the 1940s. By the time it closed in 1947, it had been manufacturing cotton for over one hundred years, longer than any other mill in Fitchburg.

In 1947 the building was bought by the Brown Bag Filling Machine Company, a local business of some interest. Founded in 1892 by the Brown brothers, the company designed and manufactured packets for samples and merchandise sold in small units. The company also invented and manufactured machinery capable of filling such packets. The company's customers could either ship their products to the factory for packaging or rent or buy machinery and packets to do their own filling. Manufacturers of seeds, nuts, candy, gelatin, and nails were among their customers, and the Brown Bag Filling Machine Company had markets throughout the United States and Canada. The company remained in Duck Mill for twelve years.

During the 1960s, the mill was occupied by J. L. Delisle Company, apron manufacturers. By 1970, an assortment of plastic manufacturing companies, representing northern Worcester County's rapidly developing plastics industry, were

(continued)

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received

date entered

Continuation sheet Duck Mill, 60 Duck Mill Rd.
Fitchburg, MA Item number 8 Page 2

sharing space with Delisle. Azarian Molded Plastic Company eventually purchased the building and remained there until 1983. In that year the mill was bought by the current owners, who are converting the space into apartment units.

The prehistoric archeological significance of the Duck Mill site is low. Since Duck Mill is such an evolutionary building, the potential for documenting that evolution through archeological investigation provides the site's primary archeological significance. Although the dates of most additions to the mill are known, archeological investigation might provide further insights into patterns of alteration to the mill. Refuse scatter and other surviving subsurface features may also help to document the changing ethnic, social, and economic patterns of the mill's occupants.

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National Park Service

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Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only:
received _____
date entered _____

Continuation sheet

Duck Mill, Fitchburg, MA

Item number 9 & 10

Page 1

9. Bibliography (cont.)

Fitchburg Industrial Survey. Prepared by Technical Advisory Corporation (New York) for Fitchburg Chamber of Commerce, 1925.

Hayward, John, Gazeteer of Massachusetts, 1841, 1849.

Hurd, Daniel, History of Worcester County, Mass., Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co., 1889, Vol. 1, p. 271.

Kent, Lillian Wallace, "Fitchburg and Leominster, Mass: A Comparative Study of Two Small New England Cities". Thesis prepared for Clark University, Department of Geography, 1964.

Kirkpatrick, Doris, The City and the River, Fitchburg Historical Society, 1971.

Nelson, John, Worcester County: A Narrative History, New York: The American Historical Society, Inc., 1934, pp. 624-25.

Northern Worcester County Registry of Deeds

Stone, Orra, History of Massachusetts Industries, Boston, 1930, Vol. 1, pp. 1825, 1836.

Torrey, Rufus, History of the Town of Fitchburg, Fitchburg, 1836.

Maps and atlases: 1830, 1854, 1870,

Insurance maps: 1887, 1890, 1892, 1893, 1896, 1897, 1910, 1929, 1948.

Steinitz et al, Historic and Archeological Resources of Central Massachusetts, Massachusetts Historical Commission, 1985.

10. Boundary Justification (cont.)

brick Greek Revival structures, have not been included since their relationship to each other and to the mill is no longer intact; in addition, the southerly dwelling has been greatly altered.

(6D)

City of Fitchburg Engineers' Map, Sheets 11302 and 11303, 1975 and revised to present.
Scale: 1" = 50'

ZICHELE

CAR WASH

5,128 #
J. HEBERT
(6B)

(6C)

(20A)

MODERN
RUG

DUCK MILL

ROAD

9,386 #
(27)

10-268
535J
131.44'

DUCK

MILL

ROAD

Duck Mill
60 Duck Mill Road
Fitchburg, MA

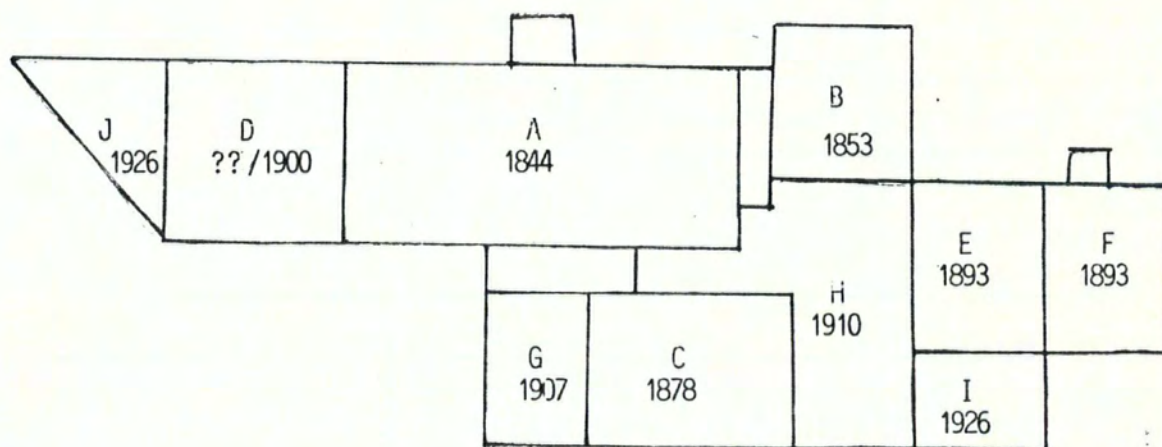
UTM: 19/257500/4658780

(25)

11,226 #

DUCK MILL
Fitchburg, MA

Chronological development of mill
complex



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Ref#
85000982

Duck Mill
Worcester County
MASSACHUSETTS

- ☐ resubmission
☐ nomination by person or local government
☐ owner objection
☐ appeal

Entered in the
National Register

Working No. APR 10 1985
Fed. Reg. Date 2/4/86
Date Due: 5/9/85 - 5/25/85
Action: ☒ ACCEPT 5-9-85
☐ RETURN
☐ REJECT

Federal Agency: _____

Substantive Review: ☐ sample ☐ request ☐ appeal ☐ NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria _____
Reviewer _____
Discipline _____
Date _____
_____ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: _____ technical corrections cited below
_____ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	☒ Public Acquisition	☐ Accessible	

4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☐ no

7. Description

Condition

- | | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ☐ excellent | ☐ deteriorated |
| ☐ good | ☐ ruins |
| ☐ fair | ☐ unexposed |

Check one

- ☐ unaltered
☐ altered

Check one

- ☐ original site
☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- ☐ summary paragraph
☐ completeness
☐ clarity
☐ alterations/integrity
☐ dates
☐ boundary selection

8. Significance

Period Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates Builder/Architect

Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*)

- ☐ summary paragraph
- ☐ completeness
- ☐ clarity
- ☐ applicable criteria
- ☐ justification of areas checked
- ☐ relating significance to the resource
- ☐ context
- ☐ relationship of integrity to significance
- ☐ justification of exception
- ☐ other

9. Major Bibliographical References

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property _____

Quadrangle name _____

UTM References _____

Verbal boundary description and justification _____

11. Form Prepared By

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

____ national ____ state ____ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title

date

13. Other

- ☐ Maps
- ☐ Photographs
- ☐ Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to _____

Signed _____ Date _____ Phone: _____



DUCK MILL

60 Duck Mill Road, Fitchburg, MA

Photographed by Carl Baker, July 1983

Negative filed at 540 Main St., Townsend, MA

#1 of 2: View looking northeast at west (front) elevation, showing original mill in center (A), machine shop at far left (B), and 1885/1900 and 1926 additions at far right (D & J).



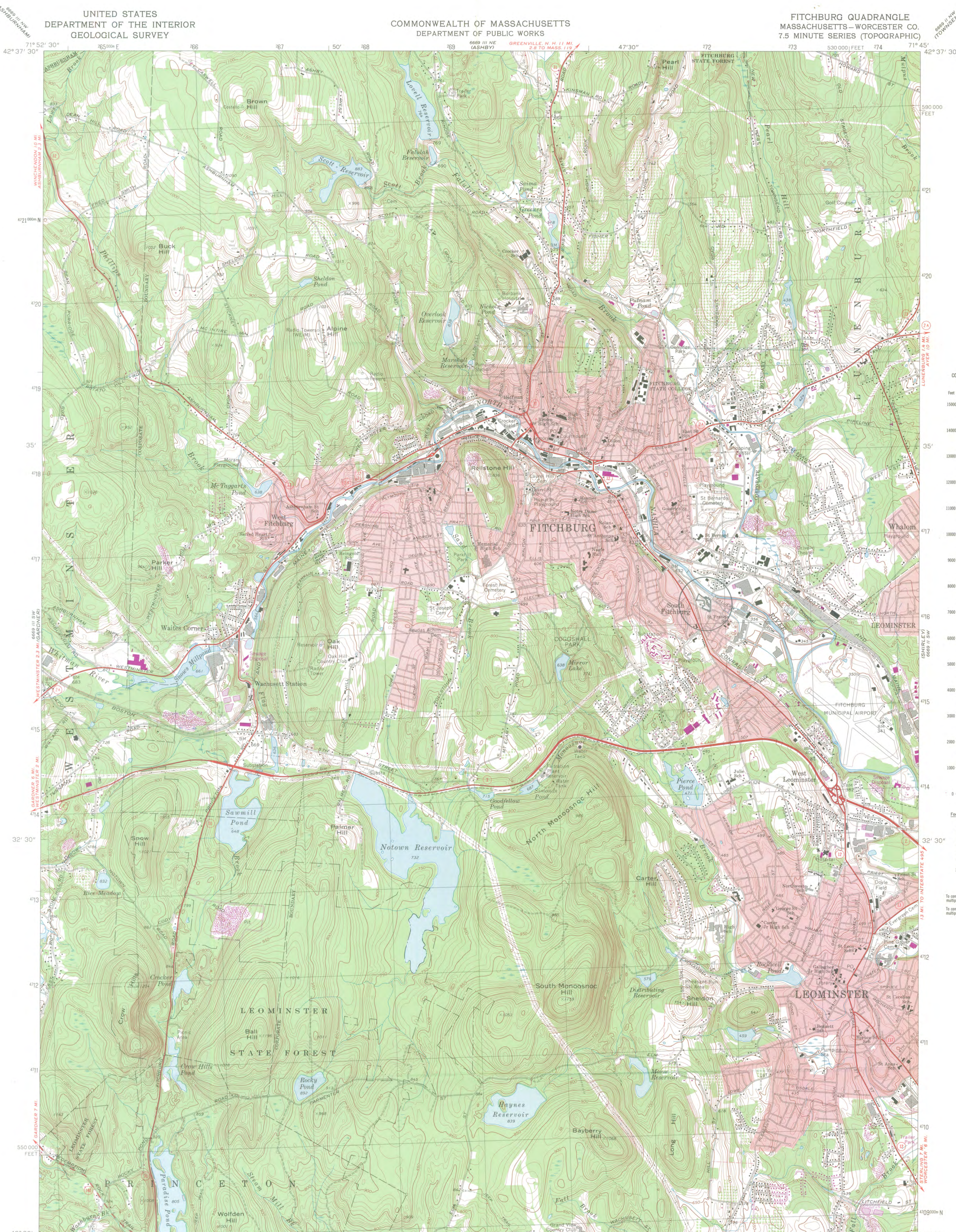
DUCK MILL

60 Duck Mill Road, Fitchburg, MA

Photographed by Carl Baker, July 1983

Negative filed at 540 Main St., Townsend, MA

#2 of 2: View looking north at west and south elevations, showing 1926 addition (J) in foreground and original mill (A) at far left.

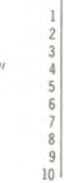


CONVERSION
SCALES



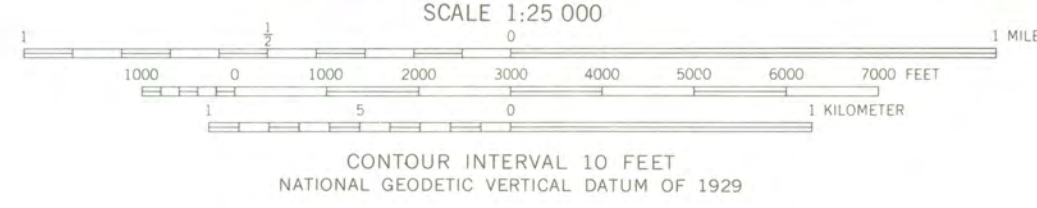
DUCK MILL, Fitchburg,
Mass.
Worcester County
UTM: 19/257500/4658780

Feet Meters



To convert feet to meters
multiply by 3048
To convert meters to feet
multiply by 3.2808

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, USC&GS, and Massachusetts Geodetic Survey
Planimetry by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs
taken 1938. Topography by planimetric surveys 1943 and 1944
Revised from aerial photographs taken 1968. Field checked 1969
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grid based on Massachusetts coordinate system,
mainland zone
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid,
zone 19
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of
the National or State reservations shown on this map



ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway, all weather, hard surface
Secondary highway, all weather, hard surface
Light-duty road, all weather, improved surface
Unimproved road, fair or dry weather
State Route

FITCHBURG, MASS.
N4230—W7145/7.5
1969
PHOTOREVISED 1979
AMS 6669 III SE—SERIES V814

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Revisions shown in purple compiled in cooperation with the State of
Massachusetts agencies from aerial photographs taken 1975 and other
source data. This information not field checked. Map edited 1979

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