



PRELIMINARY INFORMATION FORM (PIF) for INDIVIDUAL PROPERTIES

Note: PIFs are prepared by applicants and evaluated by DHR staff and the State Review Board based on information known at the time of preparation. Recommendations concerning PIFs are subject to change if new information becomes available.

DHR No. (to be completed by DHR staff) 071-5737

1. General Property Information

Property name: Motley's Mill Dam and Mill Pond

Property address: 572 Motleys Mill Road

City or Town: Chatham

Zip code: 24531

Name of the Independent City or County where the property is located: Pittsylvania

Category of Property (choose only one of the following):

Building ☐

Site ☐

Structure ☒

Object ☐

2. Physical Aspects

Acreage: approx. 7 acres

Setting (choose only one of the following):

Urban ☐ Suburban ☐ Town ☐ Village ☐ Hamlet ☐ Rural ☒

Briefly describe the property's overall location and setting, including any notable landscape features:

The area proposed for designation, shown on the accompanying map, is largely natural and wooded in character. Modern development associated with the Motley's Mill Waterfall Estate is variably visible from the resource, as described more fully in the Integrity Discussion. The southern millpond part of the designated area has views into state game lands (Department of Wildlife Resources). The bluff adjoining and perhaps overlapping the west side of the designated area is rocky in places, especially at the milldam where there is a large outcrop.

3. Architectural Description

Architectural Style(s): N/A

If the property was designed by an architect, landscape architect, engineer, or other professional, please list here: unknown milldam engineer

If the builder is known, please list here: Haymes Brothers construction of Chatham, VA, credited with early 20th century milldam modifications

Date of construction (can be approximate): late 18th c. to early 20th c.

Narrative Description (Please do not exceed one page in describing the property):

Briefly describe the property's general characteristics, such as its current use (and historic use if different), as well as the primary building or structure on the property (such as a house, store, mill, factory, depot, bridge, etc.). Include the materials and method(s) of construction, physical appearance and condition (exterior and interior), and any additions or other major alterations.

Motley's Mill Dam and Mill Pond, located on the Banister River in Pittsylvania County, consists of two potentially contributing resources: a stone milldam probably dating to the first half of the nineteenth century and a millpond with origins in the late eighteenth century. The dam extends over 200 feet across the river with a height above downstream pond level of an estimated twenty feet and a basal width estimated at ten feet. The stones are mostly Triassic sandstone split into roughly rectangular blocks and are thought to have been quarried from the bedrock that anchors the dam at its west end (if so a portion of this quarry may lie inside the proposed boundary). The outcrop has a ramp-like character where the dam abuts it. Attached to the dam at its east end is a roughly cubical stone foundation that may have supported a structure associated with the mill, the stone foundations of which are protected by a modern event platform outside the proposed boundary. The millpond is linear with wooded banks that are steep and rocky on the west side and more level on the east side. A linear swale-like feature believed to be a headrace (a potential third contributing resource) parallels the millpond about 60 to 80 feet in from the shore. The majority of the area proposed for listing is a riverine strip of land for which an owner is not identified in Pittsylvania County GIS.

Like many historic houses and other resources, the Motley's Mill milldam is an evolved structure, and the modifications associated with that evolution enhances its significance and integrity. The stonework that makes up the bulk of its construction appears to be original. The use of concrete in modifications to the dam probably dates those changes to after about 1900 when concrete came into general use in the region. What may have been an original spillway at the east end of the dam was filled in with stonework than appears different than the stonework below it. What appears to be a new concrete-parged spillway was created at the west end. There may have been some reconstruction of the stonework at the west end as well. The lip of the dam was capped with a thin layer of concrete. Close examination of the dam's fabric during a National Register phase will likely correct or modify these preliminary observations and add new detail to the analysis.

In a bullet list, include any outbuildings or secondary resources or major landscape features (such as barns, sheds, dam and mill pond, storage tanks, scales, railroad spurs, etc.), including their condition and their estimated construction dates.

- See overall description and history.

4. Property's History and Significance (Please do not exceed one page)

Briefly explain the property's historic importance, such as significant events, persons, and/or families associated with the property.

If the property is important for its architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, or other aspects of design, please include a brief explanation of this aspect.

Draft Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

Motley's Mill Dam and Mill Pond in Pittsylvania County, Virginia, represent a massive stone milldam and its impoundment with construction dating from the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century. The mill seat was developed as early as 1785 and was later owned by Col. William Howsen Clark and Clark's son David H. Clark from 1788 to 1856. The dam indicates a major merchant milling operation during the nineteenth century. A roller mill, the largest in the county, was erected at the site by the Banister Milling Company in 1904, operating until 1955. The mill was the centerpiece of a small community known as Motley's Mill after Thomas Fitzgerald Motley Sr., who purchased the property in 1907. The dam was modified by the Haymes Brothers construction firm, possibly around 1920, to enhance its performance. In the early and mid-twentieth century the millpond was used for fishing, swimming, recreational boating, baptisms, and other activities in addition to its industrial use.

Motley's Mill Dam and Mill Pond are potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the Social History and/or Entertainment/Recreation areas of significance for their use as a historic-period social and recreational amenity for the local community. The resource is also potentially eligible under Criterion C in the Engineering area of significance as what appears to be the largest stone milldam to survive in the county—its stone construction notable in a region where most milldams were constructed of wood during the nineteenth century—with concrete upgrades made during the early twentieth century, illustrating the evolution of masonry milldam construction techniques during the historic period. The potential period of significance extends from 1785 to the mid-twentieth century, potentially as late as ca. 1970. Motley's Mill Dam and Mill Pond are potentially eligible at the local level of significance.

Draft Narrative Statement of Significance

According to research conducted by historic preservationist Kyle Griffith for the 2024 PIF "Motleys Mill Waterfall Estate," the mill seat was first developed by Allen Adams in 1785. William Pigg was Adams's mill builder. The origins of the millpond would date to this period. Whether the original dam stood at the exact current location is unknown, though jutting bedrock on the west side of the river provided an ideal anchor point for the current dam and probably also for the original dam. Col. William Howsen Clark purchased the Adams mill seat in 1788. According to historian Herman Melton, in the 1790s Clark was a strong opponent of navigation improvements on the Banister River intended to make the river more navigable for batteaux, so whether Clark's dam would have incorporated a batteau lock, as the wooden crib dam at Jordan's Point in Lexington, Virginia, did in the 1830s, is a potential research question. Another possibility is the ramp-like outcrop may have been used to haul batteaux around the dam. These possibilities can be explored during a National Register phase.

Col. Clark or his son David H. Clark, who acquired the mill seat after his father's death in 1827, may have had the stone dam built. Based on preliminary comparative literature review/analysis, purpose-built stone mill dams are relatively rare in the region (though stone dams built for canals could double as

power sources). Mill historians Franklin Webb and Ricky Cox write that in Floyd County, with its many large and small mills, “no dams were built entirely of large, shaped stones.” They ascribe this to a lack of quarried stone, a problem not encountered by the builders of the Motley dam. Labor availability may have been a factor as well. In 1860 David H. Clark owned fifty-eight slaves. Assuming similar numbers held true in earlier years, the Clarks would have had ample manpower for quarrying and construction, presumably under the direction of a master mason.

In 1836 David Clark divided ownership of the mill into shares, bringing other entrepreneurs into the picture. In 1904 brothers John Edward and Robert Lee Neal acquired the mill property. They incorporated as the Banister Milling Company in 1905 (State Corporation Commission records list the company’s location as “Bannister [sic] Mills”). In 1907 the mill was purchased by Thomas Fitzgerald Motley Sr., a development of sufficient import to appear in national media. The February 1, 1908, edition of the Chicago-based trade journal *American Miller* reported:

Thomas F. Motley of Cedar Hill, Va., has purchased the Banister Milling Co.’s property on the Banister River, six miles from Chatham. It is understood the consideration was \$10,000 or almost the amount it cost to build the plant three years ago. The mill is the largest in Pittsylvania County and has ground 21,000 bushels of grain since last July 11.

Newspapers in Bedford, Richmond, and Newport News also picked up the story, though variable mill construction costs of \$20,000 and \$22,000 were reported. A photo shows the 1904 mill to have been a large three-story frame structure with a serviceable attic story. (In 1937 WPA researcher Mabel Moses dated the previous mill at the site to about 1817 and noted that it burned ca. 1904 “at which time a modern roller mill was built.”) The mill stood at the center of a bustling community that included the Motley home, a miller’s house, a tenant cabin, a mill store, and farm buildings, all depicted on a 1985 map by Herman Melton based on the recollections of informants. Melton’s map depicts the community as it was ca. 1910, but it would have had a similar character in the nineteenth century.

Also important to the life of the community was the millpond. According to Mabel Moses, the impoundment was used for recreational boating and fishing prior to 1937. Herman Melton writes: “Motleys Mill had the area’s best swimming hole and best fishing pond during the first third of the Twentieth Century. That is why scores of Chatham natives learned to swim at Motleys Mill or caught their first fish there.” Many older area residents recall swimming in the pond as children. Recreational use of the pond may have been similar to that which occurred at Willow Spring Lake in Montgomery County, formed by the damming of the North Fork of the Roanoke River, where there was swimming, picnicking, and camping during the 1930s. The pond was used for baptisms by nearby Sheva Church of Christ (established 1902) in the 1930s.

The Motley’s Mill milldam was modified in the early twentieth century (perhaps ca. 1920) to improve its performance. The Haymes Brothers construction firm of Chatham is credited with the work. In the first decade of the twentieth century the firm built the Chatham Savings Bank, the Planters’ Savings Bank in Danville, and a high school in Charlotte County. The firm, which also did road work and was active into the mid-1920s, is probably responsible for the concrete added to the dam.

Motley’s Mill ceased operations in 1955 and the mill deteriorated, though the millpond continued in use for recreational and other purposes. Canal historian Bill Trout noted that the mill was in collapsing condition in 2000 and it was taken down after 2016. In recent years the area next to the milldam has been developed as the Motley’s Mill Waterfall Estate, a venue for weddings, corporate gatherings, and other events.

Preliminary Context

The following provides a preliminary context and comparative analysis for other milldams in Pittsylvania County and the surrounding area (most of the dams are pictured in the images pdf). The dams illustrate a range of stone and concrete construction techniques (wooden construction is not represented, though was common in the region in the 19th century). It is currently unknown whether any of the millponds associated with these dams had the historical social, religious, and recreational associations possessed by the Motley's Mill Pond:

- Mount Airy Mill milldam (071-5367) in Pittsylvania County, located on a tributary of Banister River, appears to have both stone and concrete components. Melton dates a mill at the location to 1829, but whether that mill is the current roller mill at the location is unknown.
- Anderson Mill milldam (071-5061) in Pittsylvania County is an unusually elaborate concrete dam from the early 20th century with an arched alcove and battered pier buttresses, one with additional stepped buttressing. The dam illustrates dam-building technology from a later era.
- Piedmont Mill milldam (033-0406) in Franklin County is more typical of the simple small concrete dams from the early 20th century.
- Whittle's Mill milldam (058-5199) in Mecklenburg County, individually listed in the state and national registers in 2019, is comparable in some ways. The Whittle milldam is a composite stone and timber structure though to incorporate eighteenth-century fabric.
- A stone milldam smaller than the Motley dam survives at Bennett's Mill (060-0322) in Montgomery County's North Fork Valley Rural Historic District. Bennett's Mill dates to the 1880s and the dam may date to the same period, though it is also possible it was built for an earlier mill at the same location. The Bennett milldam has damage resulting from a 1947 dynamiting and probably also flood action.
- Morrow's Mill milldam in Orange County, NC, located two counties south of Motley's Mill and associated with a pre-Civil War mill, is a stone milldam with a concrete lip like the Motley milldam.
- Moomaw's Dam in Rockbridge County/Buena Vista, a large stone canal dam constructed in the 1850s by the North River Navigation Company. Like Motley's Mill Dam it is an evolved structure, with stonework added in the late 19th century, concrete added ca. 1900 or in the early 20th century, and a late 20th-century water intake structure that raises individual-eligibility integrity questions.

Integrity Discussion

The two constituent resources—the Motley milldam and millpond—retain excellent integrity of design, materials, and workmanship from the historic period. Integrity of setting varies. The area around the millpond preserves excellent integrity of setting, being undeveloped and natural in character, though presumably more wooded than historically. The milldam's integrity of setting includes a view of modern development associated with the Motley's Mill Waterfall Estate in one direction, though the viewshed is undeveloped and natural in all other directions. Archaeologically the dam and pond area were unaffected by recent development, with potential for wooden dam remnants, boats, and other material culture in the pond sediment. The proposed boundaries are designed to exclude the developed area including the mill foundation with its modern event platform covering. The resources convey a sense of the particular period of time during which they were created and used, and they are directly linked to the historical developments that formed them.

Please list all sources of information used to research the history of the property, such as deeds, census and tax records, and/or published articles and books. (It is not necessary to attach lengthy articles or family genealogies to this form.)

Interviews with Ben Davenport, Dave Miller, Joe Motley, and Dave Willis. September 2024.

American Miller (Chicago, Il.).

“Banister Scenic River Report Halifax County.” Richmond: Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, 2012.

Bedford Bulletin (Bedford, Va.).

Daily Press (Newport News, Va.)

Jordan, Lisa Vaughan. “Whittle’s Mill Dam.” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2019.

Kalbiam, Maral S., and Dan Pezzoni. “Removal Report on Jordan’s Point Concrete Dam and Timber Crib Dam.” Report, 2019.

Martin, Jennifer F. “Morrow’s Mill.” Survey documentation for the N.C. State Historic Preservation Office, 2015.

Melton, Herman E. “Motleys Mill.” Map, 1985.

_____. *Picks, Track and Bateaux: Industry in Pittsylvania County, 1750-1950*. Chatham, Va.: 1993.

_____. *Pittsylvania’s Eighteenth Century Grist Mills*. Chatham, Va.: Pittsylvania Historical Society, 2004.

Miller, Diane. “Motleys Mill Waterfall Estate.” Virginia Preliminary Information Form, 2024.

Moses, Mabel. “Motley’s Mill.” Works Progress Administration of Virginia Historical Inventory Report, 1937.

Mutual Assurance Society Index.

News Leader (Richmond and Manchester, Va.).

Pezzoni, J. Daniel. “Columbian Paper Company.” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2023.

_____. “Jordan’s Point Historic District.” National Register of Historic Places Registration Form,

2016.

_____. "North Fork Valley Rural Historic District Additional Documentation." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2020.

Third Annual Report of the State Corporation Commission of Virginia. Richmond: Davis Bottom, 1906.

Times Dispatch (Richmond, Va.).

Trout, William E., III. *Dan River Atlas: Discovering River History on the Dan, Smith's and Banister*. Virginia Canals and Navigation Society, 2003.

Webb, Franklin F., and Ricky L. Cox. *The Water-Powered Mills of Floyd County, Virginia*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2012.

5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: _____ Public\Local _____ Public\State _____ Public\Federal _____

Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: _____ See attached _____

organization: _____

street & number: _____

city or town: _____ state: _____ zip code: _____

e-mail: _____ telephone: _____

Legal Owner's Signature: _____ See attached _____

Date: _____

• • *Signature required for processing all applications.* • •

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: _____

Daytime Telephone: _____

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: J. Daniel Pezzoni

organization: Landmark Preservation Associates

street & number: 6 Houston St.

city or town: Lexington state: Virginia zip code: 24450

e-mail: gilespezzoni@rockbridge.net telephone: (540) 464-5315

Date: October 2, 2024

_____. "North Fork Valley Rural Historic District Additional Documentation." National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, 2020.

Third Annual Report of the State Corporation Commission of Virginia. Richmond: Davis Bottom, 1906.

Times Dispatch (Richmond, Va.).

Trout, William E., III. *Dan River Atlas: Discovering River History on the Dan, Smith's and Banister.* Virginia Canals and Navigation Society, 2003.

Webb, Franklin F., and Ricky L. Cox. *The Water-Powered Mills of Floyd County, Virginia.* Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2012.

5. Property Ownership (Check as many categories as apply):

Private: ☒ Public\Local _____ Public\State _____ Public\Federal _____

Current Legal Owner(s) of the Property (If the property has more than one owner, please list each below or on an additional sheet.)

name/title: The Mill House at Motleys Mill, LLC / Diane Miller

organization: Motleys Mill Waterfall Estate Venue, LLC

street & number: 572 Motleys Mill Rd

city or town: Chatham state: VA zip code: 24531

e-mail: motleysmillestate@gmail.com telephone: 434-202-3350

Legal Owner's Signature: 

Date: 9-30-24

•• Signature required for processing all applications. ••

In the event of corporate ownership you must provide the name and title of the appropriate contact person.

Contact person: _____

Daytime Telephone: _____

Applicant Information (Individual completing form if other than legal owner of property)

name/title: J. Daniel Pezzoni

organization: Landmark Preservation Associates

street & number: 6 Houston St.

city or town: Lexington state: Virginia zip code: 24450

e-mail: gilespezzoni@rockbridge.net telephone: (540) 464-5315

Date: September 26, 2024

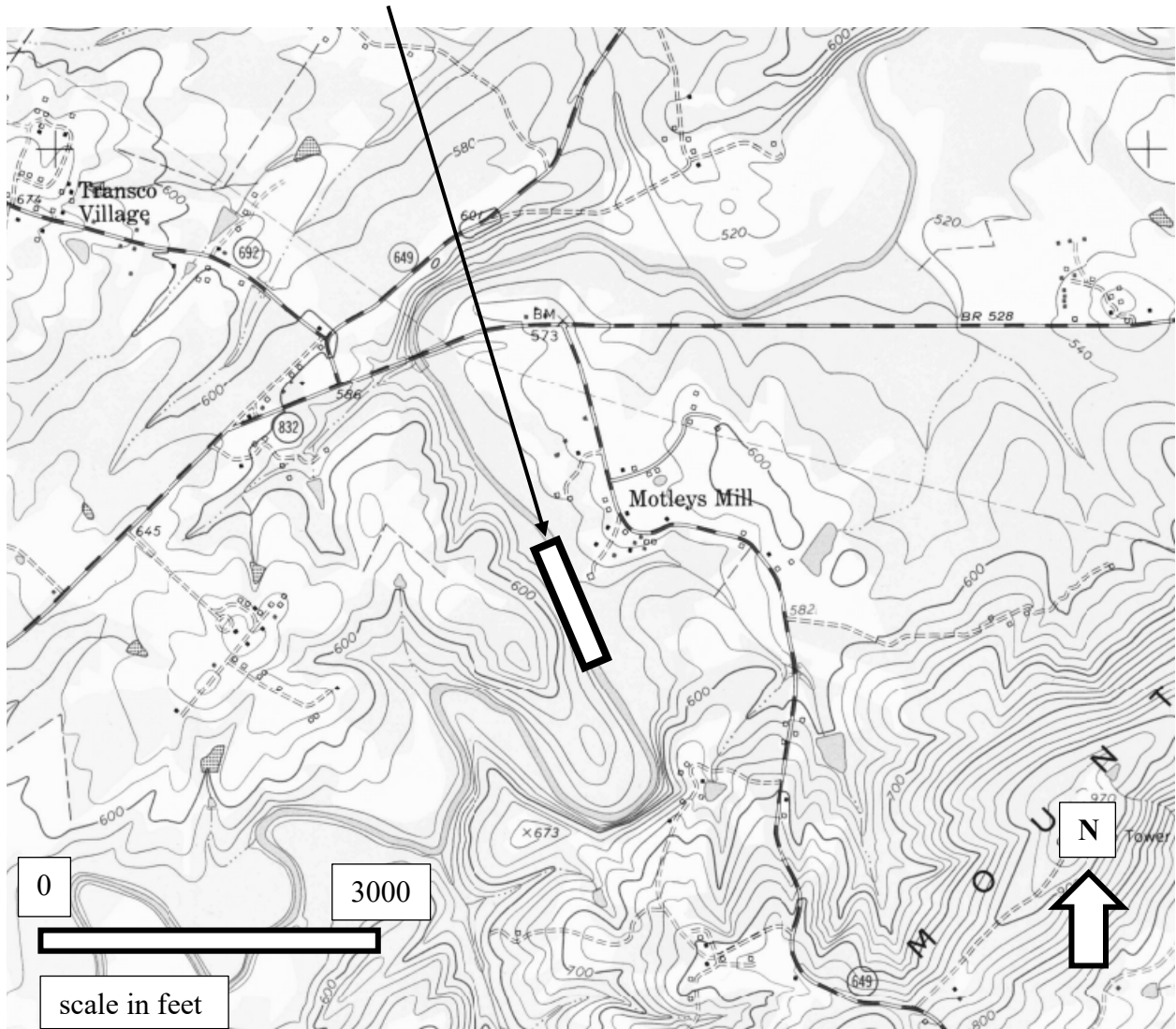
PLEASE DO NOT ATTACH CONTINUATION SHEETS TO THIS FORM. THANK YOU!

Motley's Milldam and Millpond – DHR File No. 071-6576
572 Motleys Mill Road
Chatham, Pittsylvania County, Virginia

Oct 2024 PIF Location Map

Detail from 1985 Spring Garden, Va. USGS quad map

Approximate location of resources



Motley's Milldam and Millpond – DHR File No. 071-6576
572 Motleys Mill Road
Chatham, Pittsylvania County, Virginia

Oct 2024 PIF Sketch Map

Heavy black line indicates proposed boundary. Detail from Pittsylvania County GIS.



500 ft

Motley's Mill Dam and Mill Pond
572 Motleys Mill Rd., Chatham vic., Pittsylvania Co., Va.
DHR ID# 071-6567



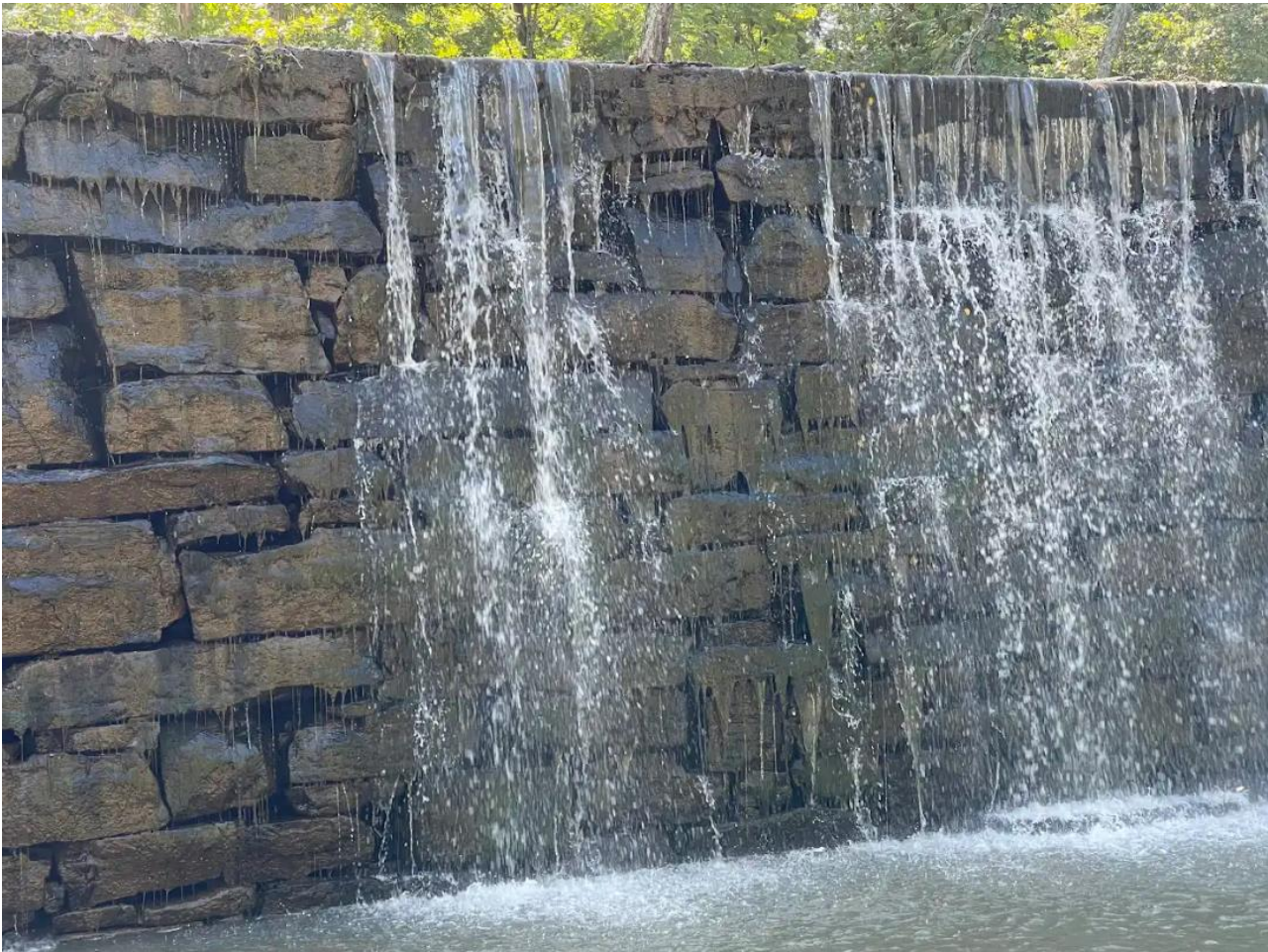
Milldam and millpond looking west.



Milldam looking southeast.



Milldam looking south (Diane Miller for scale).



Milldam showing stone construction with concrete lining at top.



Milldam with ramp-like outcrop at west end.



Mass of masonry (foundation?) at east end of dam (*right*).



East end of milldam showing stonework with concrete lining and iron bar.



Mount Airy Mill milldam (071-5367), Pittsylvania Co., Va. (photos courtesy of Michael Pulice and DHR).



Anderson Mill milldam (071-5061), Pittsylvania Co., Va. (photo courtesy of Michael Pulice and DHR).



Piedmont Mill milldam (033-0406), Franklin Co., Va. (photo courtesy of Michael Pulice and DHR).



Bennett's Mill milldam (060-0322), North Fork Valley Rural Historic District, Montgomery Co., Va.



Moomaw's Dam, Maury River, Rockbridge Co., Va.



Morrow's Mill stone milldam,
Orange Co., NC (Photo by Jennifer Martin, 2015).