



# Preservation Grant Provides New Grist For Old Mill



By TAO WOOLFE Dec 6, 2017

A \$75,000 request by the Nye Family Homestead & Museum to continue refurbishing a historic mill on Old County Road was one of only two projects approved this week for community preservation funding. The community preservation committee unanimously endorsed helping the Nye Family of America Association, Inc. continue to restore the 1889 building—which is built upon the foundation of a mill dating back to 1669. “The Nye family has done so much for this town. This is not about taking money from us—it is the Nye family giving a wonderful historical asset to the community,” said preservation committee member Robert King. “I support the application.”

The grant, which would come from Community Preservation Act funds, must also be approved by voters at Town Meeting in May. John Nye Cullity, who has overseen the mill restoration project, attended the committee meeting on Monday night. Mr. Cullity said he was surprised and delighted by the unanimous vote. “It’s something new for us—we haven’t ever applied for anything and didn’t know what to expect,” Mr. Cullity said after the meeting. Mr. Cullity, an antique mill aficionado, said the old mill has had many lives. Here is a brief history culled from his archives: The grange mill was built in Centerville in 1858 to grind corn and rye, but fell into disuse after the death of builder and miller Oliver Jones. In 1889, the mill was purchased and moved, piece by piece, to its current site. The mill became a part of the East Sandwich Grange Hall, which was organized in 1887 by the National Farmers Organization to elevate the conditions of farmers and their families. Samuel H. Nye was its first “master.” The mill was not a success, however, and the building was sold in 1897 to John Armstrong, who ran a small electroplating and jewelry store in it until 1905. He and a friend, John Carleton, simultaneously operated a trout hatchery on the grange property. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts purchased the mill and four and a half acres of trout hatchery in 1912, enabling the Commission on Fish and Game to rebuild the hatchery operation. The mill building was used as a workshop and office space. In 1990, the fish hatchery was abandoned, and in 1991 Hurricane Bob took out two tide gates under a nearby railroad crossing, causing freshwater ponds on the property to again become salt marshes. By 2002, the

property was completely overgrown and the mill's basement filled with water.

That same year, the Nye Family association signed a five-year renewable management agreement with the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. The agreement allowed the association to clean out the collapsing mill and prop up its timbers, and to clear the surrounding land and trails.

By the time its basement was drained, the mill's insides had rotted so badly that the building had to be propped up to avoid total collapse.

In 2009, with the mill still drying out, the Nye Family association engaged in a land swap with the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

Three years later—as the association celebrated 50 years of homestead ownership and 40 years open as a museum—restoration work began on the mill and the grounds.

Mr. Cullity said there was so much decayed timber in the old mill building that they debated tearing it down. He started photographing it in case a hurricane knocked it down before a decision could be made.

The turning point came in 2016 when historical archaeologist and timber framer David Wheelock, and timber framer Prett Woodburn, agreed to repair the mill.

The old mill is now stabilized, but more work is needed, and the Nye family has exhausted its budget. Not knowing where else to turn, Mr. Cullity put in his request to the CPC.

Although the building will not be a working mill, it will be a historic exhibit that can be used for small meetings and craft demonstrations, Mr. Cullity said.

He added that the mill was part of a thriving industrial/agricultural village that surrounded the Nye homestead. In the 1830s—within a quarter-mile radius of the mill—stood blacksmith and shoemaker's shops, a small tannery, a boat-building business, a tavern and stage coach stop, a post office and a one-room school.

“Part of our job at the homestead and museum is to interpret this village context of our Nye buildings, and bring historic and present day life to the neighborhood,” Mr. Cullity said.