Harling’s Mill site, at western end of Mill Pond, near intersection of Unquity Road & Harland Street, Milton, Mass. From MassGIS.

This report summarizes my research to date on Harling’s Mill, on Harland Street, Milton, Massachusetts. It was located at the outlet of Pine Tree Brook where it flows out of the small ~300 foot elongated mill pond just to the west of the junction of Harland Street and Unquity Road. The exact location from MassGIS is: 42 deg 14 min 17.088 sec N : 71 deg 5 min 42.288 sec W. Significant archeological remains still exist on the site which is located within the boundaries of the Blue Hills Reservation of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). The purpose of this report is to formally record the mill site and its history before the small dam across Pine Tree Brook is removed as anticipated by DCR and Neponset River Watershed Association (NEPRWA).

The mill was originally built at least by 1782 when Harling bought from Milton yeoman Jabez Sumner “land and a share in the privilege of a stream of water running through, Pine Tree Brook, on which was erected a dam and sawmill.”¹ This source does not explicitly state that Harling

¹Ellen F. Vose, Robert Vose and his Descendants (Boston: privately printed, 1932, 106. Suffolk County Deeds, Lib ? Fol ? [Jabez Sumner to Harling 1782 ?].
actually built the mill in 1782 it may or may not have been pre-existing. The mill was still located at this 1 acre (“more or less”) site at least by April 24, 1804 when Jabez Sumner sold to Harling his 3/8 share of the “sawmill & Dam standing on pinetree brook (so called) and all Land wherein they now stand together with the appurtenances belonging to said Mill; Also the privilege of improving one acre of Land on the Northwesterly side of said brook . . .”\(^2\) The deed also permitted Harling to “flow” water necessary for operation of the mill onto Sumner’s remaining adjacent land, and to remove gravel and stone from Sumner’s land for maintenance of the dam. The description of the property boundaries in the deed noted it abutted “the Poormans lott so called” on one side, a reference to the Town Poor Farm to the southwest [?] of “the Road”, now Harland Street. Sumner sold Harling two small adjacent parcels of land on September 24, 1805.\(^3\) Presumably Harling already owned the other 5/8 of the property himself.

A reliable history of the prominent Vose family of Milton states, “In 1782, he [Harling] bought of Jabez Sumner, land and a share in the privilege of a stream of water running through it, Pine Tree Brook, on which was erected a dam and sawmill. Sumner sold his share to Harling in 1806. This was on the present Harland Street which took its name, misspelled, from Mr. Harling. At the time of his death [1810] the lot contained a gristmill. He also had a blacksmith shop and nailer’s shop on the Town Landing [at Lower Mills].”

Several of Jabez Sumner’s relatives also owned adjacent and nearby Milton properties as witnessed in several other recorded deeds of this period.

On July 30, 1805, Harling mortgaged the mill and property for $120 to Jacob Foster (who spelled his name “Forster”, a variant of the period) of Charlestown, Mass., “cabinetmaker”, and to John Vose, “tanner” of Concord, Mass. Foster was Harling’s cousin by marriage, his father David Vose (1702-1752) being a brother of Harling’s first wife Susanna Vose (1756-1777). David and Hannah Vose also had a brother Isaac Vose (1767-1823) who became perhaps the leading and most successful cabinetmaker in Boston during his working years1788-1823.\(^4\) Probate documents for Harling indicate he was in financial trouble at the time of the mortgage.

**Harling’s background and career**

Harling was a millwright by trade who had emigrated from Sedgwick, England sometime before 1772 when he was first taxed in Milton.\(^5\) He was active in events leading up to and during the Revolution. He purchased land and buildings including his house at Milton Lower Mills on west side of the “Main Street”, now Adams Street. This was directly across the street from Daniel

\(^2\)Norfolk County (Mass.) Deeds, lib 21 fol 234-35.

\(^3\)Both recorded Norfolk Deeds, lib 24, fol 172.

\(^4\)Ellen Vose, *Robert Vose*, 39, 104-06.

Vose’s house which became famous in 1775 as the site where the “Suffolk Resolves” were adopted by Boston-area patriot-revolutionaries who had retreated from Boston to meet at this safe location away from the prying eyes of the British authorities in Boston. Daniel Vose was a prominent merchant and mill-owner at Lower Mills. His holdings included a paper mill on the Milton side of the Neponset River and a sawmill on the Dorchester side.

Harling played an important role in Revolutionary-era Boston. He was apparently responsible for construction of a gunpowder mill at Stoughton, Mass. which supplied powder to Massachusetts forces throughout the war. As late as May 1798, Harling found it necessary to Petition the Massachusetts General Court for payment for his services throughout the War some twenty-five years before. As a result he was awarded 1000 acres of “unappropriated lands” in Maine in full compensation. Harling advertised these same 1000 acres for sale in the Boston newspaper *Columbian Centinel* of April 24, 1802, stating they were the Court’s award “for his services in the manufactory of Gun-Powder, and boring of cannon, during the late American War.”

Harling’s work is documented in the financial account book and “waste book” (daybook, recording day-by-day expenses and receipt) of Daniel Vose for his paper and saw mills and store at Milton Lower Mills. These record Harling’s work as millwright working at Lower Mills and for mills in the greater Boston area, including Watertown and Newton. They also reveal that Harling leased Vose’s sawmill at Dorchester Lower Mills for sawing principally mahogany, but also native woods. His customers for mahogany lumber and boards included Benjamin Frothingham, the most prominent cabinetmaker in Charlestown, and for Frothingham’s probable former cabinetmaker apprentices, Jacob Forster in Charlestown, and Isaac Vose on Boston Neck, both first working in the late 1780s as independent young craftsmen on their own accounts.

In a typical transaction, Daniel Vose charged his Boston customers for “lightering” or

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6These are depicted on an ink and watercolor sketch of Lower Mills, 1793, by surveyor Mather Withington, and named in an annotated key on the map. It is owned by the Milton Historical Society.


8Historic New England Archives, Boston, daybook 1791-1801; and ledger/daybook, 1785-1797, “Account books collection.”
“frighting” the mahogany logs from Boston to Milton’s Town Landing docks, carting them to the mill, sawing them into planks and boards, then “carting” or “fraitting” them back to Boston. The account book documents a long-running account between Harling and Vose for lease of the mill, and the fact that Harling had failed to pay Vose for several years’ rent of the mill.

**Thomas Harling death, probate**

Harling died 3 May, 1810 in Milton.⁹ His widow, his second wife Sarah (Wheeler) Vose (originally from Concord), declined appointment as executor on June 5, and Jacob Forster then accepted the role.¹⁰ After a preliminary inventory of assets and debts, Forster represented Harling’s estate as insolvent to the court and creditors were eventually paid only a portion of the amounts due to them. Creditors included Stephen Badlam, a prominent cabinetmaker of Dorchester Lower Mills, Justice of the Peace for Norfolk County, and prominent local surveyor, who was owed $28.78 for unstated work, but was paid only $19.16. This was probably for his surveying the mill property for Jacob Forster in his role as executor. The probate inventory listing included “Also a piece of land on pine tree brook so called Containing about one acre more or less with a Grist Mill on the same”, valued at $200. Harling’s largest debts were for various debt notes and interest owed, including for the a balance due of $127 on the mortgage to Jacob Forster and John Vose for the mill. The Probate Court ordered Harling’s real estate, including Harling’s Mill and mill site, sold at auction to benefit creditors. Jacob Forster was the high bidder at the auction on the mill and thus became sole owner of half of the Mill. John Vose still owned the other half.

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¹⁰Norfolk County Probate, docket 8832, 1810-1814
Stephen Badlam Survey of Mill property

The extensive papers of surveyor Stephen Badlam, working ca. 1776-1814 principally in Dorchester and Milton, survive in a Boston-area archive. They include many of his property survey plans, some with watercolor shading, and most with date and property owners carefully identified. The collection includes a large number of Badlam’s surveyor’s notebooks with detailed transit measurements, chain and link measurements, etc. His notebook covering 1813-1814 includes his survey dated April 28, 1813 of the Harling’s Mill property for Jacob Foster (Forster).

![Survey Image]

Stephen Badlam Survey of Harling’s Mill property, 1813; NEHGS Manuscripts Div.

The survey unfortunately does not locate the property boundaries except by reference to compass directions, “the brook”, the corner of the mill and “a heap of stones.”. It does provide the information that in addition to the main property, “It is said there is about half an acre on that side of the brook belonging to the mill besides the lot first measured.” This appears to indicate the mill was on the southwest side of Pine Tree Brook on this ½ acre portion, but the main lot

\[11\] New England Historic Genealogical Society, Badlam Family Papers 1751-1815, Mss 1053.
including the dam was on the northeast side, which is on level wetlands and bottom land, and on the stream bed. It provides the important information that “The dam extends about 9 rods [148.5 ft] SW over the brook to a heap of stones.” This note is important as it agrees with the present orientation and approximate length of the earthen dam at the site.

Later history of the Mill
The next transaction involving the mill property was on July 12, 1828, John Vose sold his undivided one-half share of the mill to Jacob Forster of Charlestown, merchant. This appears to be Jacob Forster, Jr., son of Jacob Sr., the cabinetmaker.12 So after this transaction, Jacob Forster Sr. and Jr. each owned one half of the mill and mill site. No further transaction occurred regarding the mill and property until July 12, 1828 when Jacob Forster Jr, merchant of Charlestown, sold (presumably his half) to his father Jacob Forster Sr., cabinetmaker of Charlestown, along with other unrelated property on Adams Street at Milton Lower Mills.

1831 Map of Milton
Edmund J. Baker’s map of Dorchester and Milton is the earliest map known which depicts individual buildings with property owners’ names in this part of Milton. It shows the Milton “Poorhouse”, but there is no mill building recorded nearby in the Harling’s Mill location.

1826 Sale of Mill by Jacob Forster to John Preston of Milton
In 1834, Forster, now the sole owner, sold the entire mill and lot to long-time Milton/Dorchester Lower Mills miller and mill owner John Preston.
Norfolk Deeds, Lib 101 fol 316
signed Sept., 25, 1826
registered April 10, 1834

“Know all men by these presents that I Jacob Forster of Charlestown in the county of Middlesex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts Cabinet Maker in consideration of fifty dollars to me paid by John Preston of Dorchester in the County of Norfolk and the State aforesaid Chocolate Manufacturer the receipt whereof I do hereby acknowledge have remised released & forever quitclaim for myself and my heirs by these presents remise release and forever quitclaim unto the said John Preston his heirs and assigns forever a mill site and dam standing on pine tree brook so called and all the land thereto belonging with all the rights and privileges thereto appertaining.

Also half an acre of land joining the poor mans lot so called meaning to convey in as full and ample manner to the said Preston all the land and privileges contained in the deed of Jabez Sumner to Thomas Harling and in the mortgage deed of said Thomas Harling to John Vose & myself.

To have and to hold . . . [boilerplate]”
Signed Sept. 25, 1826 by Jacob Forster and Rebecca Forster
Recorded April 10, 1834

12Norfolk Deeds, lib 85, fol 232.
There are no deeds recorded in Norfolk Registry of Deeds in the next 60 years through 1900 by which John Preston conveyed the mill and mill lot to anyone. It is therefore likely that he died possessing the property, his estate then entered probate, and the property was then either inherited by an heir/relative, or sold by the Executor under his own name, not John Preston’s. The next research step would therefore require looking up John Preston’s Norfolk Co. Probate file. This might be the John Preston, age 69 (born ca. 1787), who died in Dorchester, Mass. On 23 Feb. 1856, son of John and Hannah Preston. I found no other death of a John Preston of the right age who died in any Norfolk County Town. John Preston, probably this John’s father, was the owner of a paper mill at Dorchester Lower Mills as early as the 1793 Samuel Withington map referenced above, so it makes sense that he would lived live and died in Dorchester.
1858 Norfolk County Atlas
A small building in the correct location for Harling’s Mill appears on the 1858 Map of Norfolk County. It is shown as a small, black, square dot at the upper left (NW) corner of the Mill Pond, on the southwest side of Pine Tree Brook as described in Stephen Badlam’s survey. It is approximately below the L. J. Clapp-marked house and across Harland Street. Note that Harland Street was built by this date from the mill pond southeasterly to Hillside Street, in fact sometime in the 1840s according to local deeds.

So in 1858, the mill building still apparently existed, although it is unknown at this point if it was still in operation as a grist or other mill.
The section of Harland Street leading from the mill pond northwesterly to its intersection with today’s Canton Avenue was pre-existing. It is referred to simply as “the Road” in at least one of the early deeds to the mill. This was the only access to the mill from its earliest existence, since the site was bordered by steep slopes to the northeast and southwest, and by extensive wetlands to the southeast. This oldest section of Harland Street still exists today as a wide, flat, level grassy road to Canton Avenue with buried water line and sewer lines. The southeasterly portion opens onto Unquity Road behind a locked DCR swinging metal security gate. At the northwesterly end, the road is paved and still called Harland Street, with houses numbered 31-73 Harland, and 970 Canton Avenue. The house now at 22 Harland Street was until about 5-7 years ago a very old woodworking and cabinetmaking shop, torn down when the house at 22 Harland was built.

On the grassy portion of “Old Harland Street”, about 150 feet northwest of the locked DCR gate, the street crosses Pine Tree Brook on relatively modern bridge bridge with concrete support abutments and abutments against the stream slopes. At the southeast end of the bridge, the slope abutments retain old cut stone abutment walls. These appear to be remnants of very old abutments for a bridge which would have been required at this site since Harling’s Mill was first built. The 1858 Norfolk County Atlas Map shows a house labeled “L. J. Clapp” immediately to the east of the eastern end of this brook crossing, where an early bridge would have been required. I am not qualified to estimate how old the cut stone abutments are.

1876 Norfolk County Atlas
The next known map of Milton, the 1876 Norfolk County Atlas, does not show a building on the Harling’s Mill site. So either the mill had disappeared by that time, or the map maker’s record of extant buildings was less than thorough. Additional research, perhaps in Milton tax and deed records, would be required to document this later 19th century history.

Metropolitan Park Commission ownership
The Blue Hills Reservation was created in 1893. Land takings for the Blue Hills Reservation portion of the new park system included the Harling’s Mill site. 1905 Norfolk County Atlas map for Milton shows that by then, the new Unquity Road had been built as far as it’s intersection with Harland Street near the Harling’s Mill site, but the dotted road lines from that point Northwest towards Blue Hills Parkway presumably indicates that this last section had not yet been built by then.

The current site includes a short, low concrete dam extending across the outlet of Pine Tree Brook from “Harling’s Mill pond” towards the end of the original earthen and rock dam. Judging from the age of the concrete, this probably dates from sometime around the time the Metropolitan Park Commission acquired the site. Future research in DCR archives and maps from this early period around 1893-1910 would probably reveal further details about construction of this later concrete dam, and might include details about any remains of the mill at that time.
Harling’s Mill site at present
I made an extensive visit to the site on Oct. 28, 2015 with Tom Palmer (naturalist, botanist, wetlands expert of Blue Hill Terrace, Milton) to see what evidence remains of the early mill(s). Although I am not a trained industrial archaeologist, we observed numerous natural and man-made features that constitute considerable evidence to witness the mill. The largest part of the earthen and stone dam still remains extending on a southwest to northeast direction towards Unquity Road. It extends in a direction towards two huge erratic boulders. At the SW end, a portion of the earthen dam is breached and missing where it would end/butt against the northeastern most and largest boulder. It appears to me that this wide breach in the earthen dam occurred sometime after the DCR created the concrete dam, probably in some large flood event. Currently, this breach is the main watercourse for Pine Tree Brook.

The land on the southwest side of the brook is fairly flat for at least 30 feet, then slopes upward significantly. Extending southwesterly up the slope from the flat bottom portion, and directly in line with the dam, is a large U- or V-shaped cut in the slope which clearly appears to be a “borrow pit” from which the stone, gravel and earth were used to create the dam. The dam is directly downhill from this cut in the earth which would have allowed gravity to aid workmen in hauling the dam materials down the hill to the bottom. This “borrow pit” is clearly visible as a feature in line with the earthen dam in some of the aerial photos viewable on Mass GIS.

Each end of the current small concrete dam terminates at short, low cut-stone masonry walls of considerable age. These are topped with irregular later additions of macadam/blacktop with coarse aggregate inclusions, displaced by later flooding and erosion. The earlier stonework appears to me that it could be the early, 18th century abutments for the original water flume that fed the mill just downstream. Following typical practice, a series of dam boards may have been fit between these stone abutments to raise or lower the level of water in the mill pond just upstream. The line of these 2 stone abutments is also southwest to northeast, pointing towards the earthen dam. After passing over this small dam, the water would have flowed down a flume feeding the mill. It appears to have been down a slightly curving path between the two huge boulders. This was a logical place to confine, compress and slightly speed up the water flow for a mill. Alternatively, there may have been a wood trough following this course between the boulders which served as a flume to feed the mill.

So the current watercourse through the breach in the dam does not appear to have been the original one. It appears that recently, at times of high water in the spring or at other flood times, water flows through this presumed original “flume” channel also – there is a lot of debris currently in the channel, including a delaminating wood chair seat, indicating it channels overflow water at times of high water. The channel also has a large number of stones, most rounded and uncut, lying in the bottom. These may have formed part of a stone wall or embankment associated the actual mill, or a part of its foundation, but have now collapsed into the water channel below.

What is almost certainly a fragment of a curved mill stone that would have been an estimated 4-6 feet in diameter was found at the SW edge of the current watercourse which has curving
and intersection grooves cut in it. This appears to be a typical of a grist mill stone of the period. It is located next to the largest boulder beside the brook, downstream from the northeastern most cut stone abutment of the original dam. From Tom Palmer’s and my initial survey, the is one of the most important remaining archaeological artifacts firmly documenting this as a mill site.

Fragment of mill stone adjacent to largest boulder next to current watercourse below dam

Its curving line of break appears to match or almost match the curving line of break of a larger stone beside it, though this may be an illusion and mere coincidence. The two may have been part of the same stone originally, but we did not try to excavate it further to confirm this. The mill stone may have been incorporated at some later date into the stonework of the later dam or dam abutments.

The actual mill building is depicted in the 1858 map on the southwesterly side of the brook (and described in Badlam’s property survey) and must have been on the elevated bank above the southwest side of the brook. I was unable to find any obvious signs of where it was located. It is not shown on the 1876 Norfolk County Atlas map and had presumably disappeared by that time. Any wood timbers would have rotted long ago, or were possibly scavenged and reused for another building. If any remained in the period 1893-1910, the MDC would have probably removed them. I
looked for any evidence on the large boulders that mill building timbers might have been anchored into either one, but found no holes, ridges or other tool marks from a cursory inspection.

To my mind, this is a somewhat marginal location for a mill given the fluctuating flow of water in Pine Tree Brook throughout the year. In this year (2015) of considerably reduced precipitation, there is only a slow flow over the dam and down the brook. It could not have been a mill that operated at full power and full-time, year-round. It could be that it was operated only for episodic periods – vertical planks were perhaps added to the top of the dam to allow the mill pond to fill, and when full, the planks removed one at a time to feed the mill, which was then operated for a period until the pond was emptied. This would have been repeated at intervals, depending on the actual flow of water.

Nor is there any evidence to suggest what type of water wheel this had – a breast wheel, the more efficient design, where the water entered the “buckets” in the wheel part way up one side; or a less efficient undershot wheel where the water ran down an inclined flume and pushed against the buckets of the wheel at the bottom. In the first type, gravity of water powered the wheel. In the latter, only the speed and force of the moving water powered the wheel.

Without measuring, my by-eye estimation suggests that the level of the top of the dam (maximum height of water) was about 7 feet above the level of the water on the outflow side of the brook. This would be an adequate fall of water to power a breast wheel.

An industrial historian with special knowledge of early New England could probably look at the site and make more educated theories about the original mill building location and its possible design.

**Recommendations**

**Significance of the mill and the historic site**
To my knowledge, there is no other remaining 18th century mill site in Milton with direct physical evidence which remains. All of the remaining mills at Milton and Dorchester Lower Mills, and along the Neponset up to Mattapan, are from much later in the 19th century, on sites where there has been considerable 19th and 20th century industrial development. All of the dams are also much later than the remaining dam at Harling’s Mill.

**It is probably unique in Milton.**

- The site should be fully researched and documented, including earlier and later deed history, tax history, other Town of Milton town records.
- An archaeologist should do at least a basic survey of the site and document it, including mapping, photography, and perhaps a metal detector survey, etc. He/she should make
recommendations on which aspects of the site should not be disturbed when the current dam is removed as currently planned. This report with recommendations should be formally communicated to and recorded with the DCR, the Massachusetts Historic Commission, NEPRWA, the Milton Historic Commission and the Milton Historical Society.