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Douglas M. Reynolds

*Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission*

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# The Legacies of Deindustrialization and the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor

*Douglas M. Reynolds*

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*Creation of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor and release of a master plan for cultural and physical resource development is creating a new standard for private, local, state, and federal partnerships. Actions by the Corridor's partners are shaped by both past and contemporary economic development issues. Using tools of humanistic inquiry — history, economics, preservation, sociology, political science — for social and economic purposes signifies far-reaching shifts and possibilities for public planning and policy philosophies in both public and private agencies.*

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**P**artners in the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, created in 1986 as an affiliate of the National Park Service, are attempting to preserve the historical and cultural fabric of a premier American industrial region. The law creating and defining the Corridor charged a guiding commission with the responsibility of “provid[ing] a management framework to assist the States of Massachusetts and Rhode Island and their units of local government in the development and implementation of integrated cultural, historical, and land resource management programs in order to retain, enhance and interpret the significant [resources] . . . of the Corridor.”<sup>1</sup>

The Corridor Commission, then, is charged with the responsibility of finding and implementing strategies that socially and economically could enhance the Blackstone Valley's material future by protecting its past. The multiple partnerships — between the federal government, two states, a score of communities, and a wide variety of interest groups — combined with the publication of the Corridor Commission's *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan* to mark a turning point in the evolution of public policy planning. This article, by examining history and preservation as an

*Douglas M. Reynolds is historian for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission.*

example of a larger process, explores some of the tensions and hopes associated with such turning points.

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### Formative Forces

For an area that received considerable attention as the “cradle of the industrial revolution,” the forty-six miles of Blackstone Valley running south from Worcester, Massachusetts, to Providence, Rhode Island, also deserves serious historical attention as a cradle of deindustrialization. Indeed, economic historian Bill Hartford has found a long and substantial process of textile mill flight from New England communities beginning in the 1890s, eighty years before Detroit worried about cheap labor from Tokyo or Tokyo worried about cheap labor from Seoul.<sup>2</sup>

From 1920 to the present, textiles and related industries in the valley have suffered more bad years than good. The nadirs of textile and textile machine building production in the valley peaked twice in the years following World War I. The first was from 1922 to 1925; the second, a generation later, was associated with World War II, when plant expansion and market demand both reached new all-time highs. All told, these were only brief explosions of tremendous impact. Almost all the remaining years, however, saw long-term stagnation or decline in the industry.

Plant closings, plant flight, work-force cutbacks, and associated business closings appear to us then as the more persistent and typical situation in the Blackstone Valley during the last century. Deindustrialization, for its longevity, is therefore also an extraordinarily complex phenomenon. The usual reason proffered to explain such problems — that unions drove wages and other costs up so high as to make it impossible for employers to operate — is only a minor part of the story. As it turns out, textile mill owners left well before, during, and after the arrival and decline of organized labor. More correctly, short-term business policy and capital flight can be blamed for economic problems in the valley’s social and cultural history.<sup>3</sup>

There is no doubt that deindustrialization in the Blackstone has had its negative effects. *Ocean State Business*, a periodical whose mission is to speak well of the business community, enumerated some modern, worrisome statistics. In 1980, and today, median family income in Central Falls was the lowest among Rhode Island’s thirty-nine communities. Woonsocket was thirty-seventh and Pawtucket was thirty-fifth. These three cities also had the lowest per capita high school diploma ratios in the state. On the other hand, the rural towns of the valley — and this holds true for most of the Massachusetts half as well — remained better off, had the biggest housing booms, and experienced increased per capita incomes that exceeded the state average.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, suburbanizing bedroom communities, like Lincoln and North Smithfield, Rhode Island, and Grafton and Millbury, Massachusetts, are reaching per capita levels of education and income that exceed state averages. These wages, though, are earned by the 40 to 70 percent — depending on the community — of residents who commute to jobs outside the valley. Residents with long working-class family roots face higher rents, lower job prospects, and little access to exterior job markets. Thus the evolution of a two-class society continues in the Blackstone Valley, as it does elsewhere in the United States.<sup>5</sup> A resurgence of militant unionism for remaining jobs is a benign question.

It is important to place matters in historical perspective: since the days of Samuel Slater, Blackstone Valley textile workers have been nonunionized far more often than unionized, and historically earned only one-half to three-quarters the wages of textile workers elsewhere in New England. Two series of oral history interviews, one in the mid-1970s and a second in the late 1980s, proved that the golden age of textiles in the Blackstone Valley, like the period of deindustrialization since 1923, was far more effervescent for mill owners than for mill workers.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, wages in the textile industry were never very good, and the security that paternalistic mill owners once provided was long gone before the advent of Franklin D. Roosevelt's welfare state.<sup>7</sup> The impact of World War II and the ensuing prosperity helped create an atomized society that precluded the re-creation of "the good old days" for mill owners, mill workers, and mill communities. The greatest loss was that sense of neighborhood and community mill workers had enjoyed. However, workers more often than not recognized the pervasive materialism that replaced the close and warm relationships of mill life. Recognizing that atomization would be the direct result of enhanced standards of living and confrontational collective bargaining, workers consciously chose it when they joined and organized unions, and few regretted it. The materialism that they and their children enjoy is something they do not want to lose.<sup>8</sup>

The liberal era and the advent of unionism in the industry after World War II helped workers become more secure, comfortable, and happy, whereupon they joined, not surprisingly, the comfortable and conservative majority. This reflected the shifting of community burden from 1920s corporate paternalism and its 1930s failure to the New Deal security of the welfare state. Nothing was less predicted, as John Kenneth Galbraith pointed out, but nothing, in retrospect, was less predictable.<sup>9</sup> Class violence and an array of political "isms" made periodic and substantial visits to the valley in the 1880s, after World War I, and in the Great Depression. Their sometimes radicalized nature brought social movements, like that of 1934, to open class warfare.<sup>10</sup>

At a broad level, these upheavals and resolutions came to mean that our governments — local, state, and federal — became agents of confidence. It means that where once Blackstone Valley mill owners subsidized our communities, our communities now subsidize mill owners. For individuals seeking to "collect" and institutions in trouble, like Stanley Woolen of Uxbridge, this became American socialism, which Galbraith went on to identify as the failed child of American capitalism.<sup>11</sup>

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### The Intellectuals' Response

There is on the surface little reason to join the ranks of the *Wall Street Journal*, *Forbes*, or other vested publications that see the information/service age in the United States as a force which can afford to jettison manufacturing simply as an icon of history. Microcomputer, biotech, and other new-age industries have failed to make a significant socioeconomic impact in the valley. Yet the view of historical forces as irreversible (but not deterministic) is worthy of consideration and offers us, if we stop to consider it, the proposition that the future is malleable and that a wide array of choices is available.<sup>12</sup>



If we are to believe, for example, in industrialization as a transforming force worthy of the title "revolutionary," we must also look at deindustrialization as a transforming force that holds revolutionary potential in undermining or making socially useful the jobs which industrial workers, their communities, their work cultures, and their children will come to find in deindustrializing areas, and in re-aligning the two-class society so increasingly clear in the valley today.

In this vein, for example, such proponents of wage parity and comparable worth programs as Harvard economist Juliet Schor have effectively argued that it may not be a bad thing when the factory closes and the service industries spring up. Schor's argument is that male "mavens of manufacturing" base their remorse for the loss of industry on the loss of high-wage, blue-collar, male jobs. Where sexists see female workers to be the problem, Schor and other feminists, for good reason, see female wages to be the problem. Sex discrimination is cause to distrust the rise of female-dominated service industries, and vice versa.<sup>13</sup>

Robert Reich and other market-based liberal economists would not disagree, though in a generalized liberal male's interpretation sexism is a component of, rather than central to, the need for statist intervention. In the liberal spin-off from human capital theory, which says a worker will earn wages comparable to the individual's self-investment (by way of education, training, and other tangible self-improvements), Reich calls for government investment in society, as much as in self, to produce an intrinsically more civilized and gender neutral culture. The logic, spelled out at Governor Michael Dukakis's Economic Summit on January 19, 1990, calls for investment in New England's infrastructure and humanist programs such as education in order to continue both growth and prosperity. The result, in this view, is that high "value added" jobs will come to or remain in New England because of its solid infrastructure and wonderful minds.

The implication, depending on the interpreter, is that more computer scientists, biological engineers, or other male-dominated, high-tech, professional jobs are needed, and that nurses, teachers, and other sexually segregated professionals should be regarded as underpaid professionals worthy of a higher wage. In either case, unavailable or underfunded, these are perceived to be those "good jobs at high wages" so common in political pundits' verbiage.

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### **Theory into Practice**

In textile and other former industrial regions, development questions rarely turn on value-added or gender concerns. Economic development questions posed by workers or work scholars often boil down, in many ways, to "Which of these jobs are exportable and which are not?" The creation of nonexportable, high-value-added jobs can come from two sources. The first is a greater appreciation, and higher wages for, those jobs which better us as a civilization. Teaching, nursing, and the other "nurturing" industries are obvious examples, and wage parity cases raise a host of others, including clerical, information processing, and broader aspects of the health care industry. The second source is the restructuring of male-dominated labor market segments, like engineering and the sciences, to better accommodate day care and other needs.<sup>14</sup>

No one has ever argued that the potential for greater job market equality lies in a greater opportunity for exploitation; it is, after all, the male-dominated segments that remain the most exportable. Those jobs which make us better as a society and culture — the arts and humanities as well as health care and scientific research — are less often exportable, though Harvard, Brown, Cornell, and Yale unionists may believe their institutions are willing to attempt at least preliminary exploration of the potential for off-shore production.

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### **The Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan**

Economic development is one of five central components of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission's *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan*, approved by the two states' governors and the secretary of the interior in 1989. Other central components are historic preservation, interpretation, environmental conservation, and land use management. The plan calls for each of these areas to be pursued as fully as possible, where the Corridor Commission works, by coordinated, linked actions designed to achieve the maximum effect in each area. Thus, a proposed labor and ethnic museum in Woonsocket, for example, is part of a larger Main Street program, an urban park program, canoe put-ins along the river, and regional planning for bicycle paths and a greenway program. Other such complex examples exist the length of the Corridor.

The *Plan* calls for such coordinated, linked actions because possibilities appear to be so extensive and because the region is so large. The Corridor Commission seeks the greatest possible impact from its projects, including "good jobs at good wages," because it wants to serve as a model both for good development and for imaginative planning. Past political and economic neglect and a fear of the future by local business and community leaders are hard to overcome, after all, without either good models or imaginative planning. Hard-hit urban areas like Central Falls, Rhode Island, seem willing to pursue any number of revenue sources, including prisons, trash incinerators, and other industries deemed detestable elsewhere, simply to stay afloat. Even some of the valley's comparatively affluent, relatively rural bedroom communities, like Uxbridge, Massachusetts, have expressed a desire for "development at any cost," because of the shattered mill legacy. Bitter development battles in Uxbridge pit the "newcomer-environmentalist" against the children and peers of former mill workers who have supported race tracks, airports, power plants, and other sometimes questionable development proposals. The arguments turn on all-or-nothing propositions in which compromise is rarely possible.

The Corridor Commission's Plan recognizes the mediation or nonconfrontational opportunities in linked components. Historic preservation issues, for example, embraced by both sides of the development battle, are seen as a cutting edge technique for both economic and cultural development. Once the valley's worst assets — thousands of unemployed workers and hundreds of closed mills, with little interest or support for either coming from Rhode Island or Massachusetts — the legacy of deindustrialization is touted as "the valley's special character." This legacy includes what are in essence nineteenth-century mill villages, farms and market towns, and both small and ponderous mills in rural and urban areas. Thousands of structures and sweeping landscapes representing the complexity and diversity of the industrial

revolution and resulting economic and social relationships still exist. The effect offers an idyllic opportunity for academic study as well as an emotional evocation of America's pastoral myth, what Leo Marx called the "Machine in the Garden."<sup>15</sup>

These resources are, however, threatened by the suburbanization and social malaise that has erased the character and resources of other New England communities, including those born and bred on the "Rhode Island" system of mill village relationships. An imminent surge of haphazard sprawl in the form of strip malls, condominiums, large-lot housing developments, and ever widening and lengthening pavement is likely to engulf the valley character in the next ten years. Both newcomers and heirs of the mill legacy want to preserve their communities because the existing built landscapes recall both a tradition of human activity that appeals to traditional working-class residents, and to the nineteenth-century patterns of open space, and vital village centers that appeal to the preservationist instincts of more recent valley arrivals.

In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, John Ruskin wrote that "the greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, or in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity."<sup>16</sup> This, preservation supporters and detractors alike agree, is what makes the valley special today.

Ruskin's statement, that preservationists ultimately pursue their goals in order to better understand washing waves of humanity, places the efforts of historians and preservationists in a liberal alliance that seeks cultural as well as economic well-being. If symbols differ — from the structure for preservationists to the written word for the historian — it is only in form. There is in fact much that preservation and history have to offer each other. As Ruskin went on to say, a building is a "lasting witness against men . . . its existence, more lasting as it is than that of the natural objects of the world around it, can be gifted with . . . language and of life."<sup>17</sup>

The preservation movement alone has largely failed to reach for historical embodiment, as Ruskin desired in 1907. But the creation of the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor does embody the consummation of a marriage of disciplines for new and different social and economic purposes. Funding comes from both Rhode Island and Massachusetts as well as the federal government. The Corridor, an affiliate of the National Park Service, does not own land, nor does the legislation creating it provide it any regulatory control. But it does represent the federal government's willingness to coordinate the efforts and development of twenty communities in two states for a range of cultural as well as environmental and economic purposes.<sup>18</sup>

The Corridor therefore represents an interdisciplinary ground floor and cutting edge of several primary policy shifts, which will certainly grow in the 1990s. An industrial-oriented response to the damage done by plant closings is implicitly on the agenda as a forward-looking response based on a suitably backward event: de-industrialization. The question here is Can the Corridor Commission revitalize threatened communities by building on current practices and debates? Or can the Corridor concept even break new ground for government's involvement in local, regional, and federal policy planning? Its ambitious *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan*, after all, has to be implemented.



Another aspect of this ambition reflects the National Park Service's attempts to move into the preservation and protection of cultural and physical resources. The Park Service, charged with the mission of protecting the nation's resources, can no longer simply purchase and manage mountains and other natural resources as it has in years past. The huge Alaskan land acquisitions of the 1970s, and appointment of disassemblers under President Ronald Reagan, in fact spelled the end of the Park Service's acquisitive spirit. Similarly, the "cannonball" mentality of those who traditionally protected the nation's significant historical resources has been challenged by social and other historians for more than a generation. This challenge is finally making headway in places like Lowell, where the everyday rather than the exceptional has been rendered significant.

Blackstone Valley committed bureaucrats are not expanding Park Service influence so much as sharing its expertise for urban and rural locations. This redirection accommodates both Republican and Democratic ideologies. Already historically important, the rural-urban mix of the Blackstone Valley provides a good transition point from which to carry on both the Lowell and Acadia National Park experiences.

Another area of change is the pursuit of public-private partnerships for economic and humanistic development in deindustrializing areas. More than simple consultation with local chambers of commerce, the Corridor's efforts represent the establishment of consensus-seeking agendas and the provision of technical assistance to everything from pollution control to education, to housing and business growth, for cultural reasons. Attempting to maintain the area's architectural integrity is perhaps the most publicly visible of these efforts, but the political and cultural ramifications reach into the human structures as well.<sup>19</sup>

A third area is represented by the multidisciplinary intellectual energy necessary to pursue this work. A concern for current labor, economic, and business historiography is mixing with debates about cluster zoning, community-friendly industrial development, ecological balance and greenways, education, and a dozen other topics and disciplines. The lessons of ivory tower disciplines and practical needs are simultaneous, overlapping, and present in application. If nothing else, the corridor concept represents a renaissance (as opposed to a jack-of-all-trades) approach to preservation and development.

Perhaps most important, the advent of the Corridor and the Corridor Commission's *Cultural Land Use and Management Plan* bespeaks the arrival of an American culture that is educational, informed, and forward as well as backward looking. Japanese criticism of American business practices tends to focus on the lack of long-term commitment to planning use for social and physical resources, a critique provided by Blackstone residents at least since 1904, when mill managers tore down one mill and built a second mill a hundred yards away, across the state line, to punish a community for not granting them a tax break.<sup>20</sup> Yet the business community's recent embrace of preservation (and environmental) issues runs beyond the IBM philosophy that it will go only where IBM managers want to live. One of the curious legacies of the Reagan administration is, after all, a pride in both place and purpose.

Being in on the ground floor of creating educational, cultural, and economic development and other policies with dozens of partners is stimulating. One of the reasons for common cause between residents with different political and economic



interests is the newness, for example, of both modern preservation and historical research in the Blackstone Valley. Many residents are not sure what structures or histories are important. If the Corridor Commission does not remain sensitive to the interests of all, it will be condemned as trivialist, romantic, or even destructive.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, the Corridor Commission is in many ways the new kid on the block. It has the opportunity to define what is important, but suffers, like other government agencies, from widespread "What are you going to do for me?" demands instead of the partnerships that Congress and the Corridor Commission's *Plan* called for through mutual asking of "Will you join us in . . . ?"

Many of us have felt from time to time that preservationists and historians, environmentalists and planners, labor and management, and other sometimes conflicting groups are mostly wandering in the dark. Do we really know, to stick with the preservation example, which structures — mill owners' mansions, the mills themselves, railroad bridges, aqueducts, workers' housing, the Blackstone Canal, or even open spaces — are worth preserving? After all, in the process of making choices, superimposed values are brought to the task. Should Slater Mill, for example, be preserved because of the unique contributions Samuel Slater made to the history of technology in the New World? Superficially, the obvious answer is yes. But why is the history of technology important to us? What did that technology do? Shouldn't Slater Mill be preserved not for the machinery it housed but for the importance of, say, learning the lessons of child labor in Rhode Island? Was not Slater's management model, which provided the management basis for much of American manufacturing, even more important? Should we show people the tools of exploitation when learning the lessons of the exploited can be so much more valuable for us because, finally, are not the lessons of those washing waves of humanity more important to us?

In a review of the history of preservation, Adele Chatfield-Taylor tied the growth and development of her field, and with it some of these problems, to concepts of time: Heinrich Schliemann's Mycenaen excavations lead us to understand that Homer's poems had been about a Troy that actually existed, that Proust showed us "a minute could be six volumes sliced vertically instead of horizontally," something akin to a Picasso painting, and that Darwin's theories on human evolution placed man himself only as a part of a larger whole, perhaps only as a very minor part.<sup>22</sup>

Ultimately, of course, Chatfield-Taylor came to Einstein, who showed us that time, place, and matter are nothing without one another, and there exists the possibility that they can be rearranged. Implicit in her thoughts is the idea that both our rapidly changing world and the threat of total destruction at the hands nuclear weapons have given life to preservation. Einstein's theories and local plant closings both force us to seek shelter, like threatened beasts, in familiar terrain where somehow remembrance of the "good old days" can make our futures safe.<sup>23</sup>

Using a vision of past days, no matter how inaccurate, as a way to secure the future is a position articulated by both sides of the development debate. The strongest proponents of new industrial development remain the petit bourgeois lawyers, real estate brokers, and storekeepers who were weaned on the now dislocated mill-village relationship. They share a Hamiltonian belief in centralized control and laissez-faire efficiency that is reminiscent of the unshared power expressed by mill owners in an earlier day. Their philosophy is usually expressed in a single property tax rate for both residential and business owners and by support for the ideology of Massachu-

setts's Proposition 2½, which freezes tax increases at a time when federal and state services are being cut.

The most vocal opponents of industrial or large-scale retail development are people who were never exposed to that special mill-village relationship once prevalent in the valley or managed to escape its influence by leaving the valley and returning after exposure to alternative jobs and lifestyles. College educated, commuting to jobs outside the valley, and big believers in a Jeffersonian, pastoral vision of the area to which they moved, they came to raise families in as idyllic a location as they could find within a reasonable commute.<sup>24</sup>

I mention Chatfield-Taylor's fascination with time for several reasons. Labor historians are amused by the historical positions taken in various arguments over the need for development and preservation. They too have been taken by evolving concepts of time. The most obvious example is the shift from task-oriented work ruled by the seasons of the sun, or the chores of the day, associated with agriculture, to the introduction of time clocks and hourly wage work, and ultimately union contracts and regulatory legislation, to guide production. The latter are as much a part of the cultural legacy of the valley as French-Canadian ethnicity or the Italian immigrants' role in the IWW strike at Hopedale in 1913. The concepts, like the people, dwelled in the villages and structures that historical and preservation societies are seeking to protect. For Chatfield-Taylor and other preservationists, time is an external danger. For many labor historians, it is an internalized consciousness made most readily apparent in naked class struggle.<sup>25</sup>

In the end, however, the external and internal are directly related. If public and private groups can take responsibility for our past, the logic runs, they must also be able to shape the future. This Janus-faced ideology bespeaks something that members of long-existing cultures have known for some time: history itself can produce a cultural legacy worthy of building upon. Such pride in place also takes the survivalist's refuge in familiar territory, defensively hoping that history, and our buildings, can be turned against what in more pessimistic moments is seen as the mortality of our society.

It is no accident that the great milestones of preservation history — the Antiquities Act of 1906, the Historic Sites Act of 1935, and the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 — all came into being precisely at the height of the larger social reform movements of Progressivism, the New Deal, and the War on Poverty. In each of these periods — all viewed as times of danger and upheaval — Americans sought to challenge the direction and results of contemporary practice in favor of a better future. In each of these periods, goals consisted of simultaneous protection of what we perceived to be good and using this good as a foundation for building a society that could be made better. These were, above all, activist eras and, like the American Revolution itself, involved a vocal and resolute minority.

The importance of the relationship between preservation and activism ultimately came to more permanent fruition in the Tax Reform Act of 1976, partly as a result of bicentennial emotionalism, but also as a part of preservation's unique passage into maturity. The use of tax incentives for preservation and development signifies acceptance of the status quo, and preservation's advent in directions like the National Heritage Corridor in the Reagan years bespeaks a permanent if unexpected place in American society. For the first time, a generation of American citizens is truly attempting to point to a national cultural tradition — one which encompasses women

and a broad range of ethnic groups as well as the white male American working class — worth preserving rather than simply exploiting or tearing down. The tremendous turnaround experienced by Lowell simply because of preservation and historical interest is unprecedented.

The preservation of former factories and workers' tenements, of industrial landscapes and open space, in the Blackstone Valley, further points not toward a continuation of "great white male" historical pursuits, but of an industrial legacy and multiethnic wage labor force, including children, that was typically 40 to 50 percent female. This is more than simply inclusive history; it is history pursued and used for social and educational as well as economic betterment. Never mind that the highest appropriation ever given to preservation agencies was only \$60 million,<sup>26</sup> or that the National Heritage Corridor's budget is minuscule even by National Park Service standards.<sup>27</sup> The community-oriented shift undertaken by preservationists and ivory tower intellectuals in partnership parks, as in the Blackstone Valley, has been more than worth the price of admission.

In the 1980s, Blackstone Valley developers for the first time began to consult preservationists, without being ordered to do so by a judge, for information and out of sensitivity.<sup>28</sup> And for the first time, local, state, and even a few federal politicians were forced to both undertake and understand preservation, usually in that order. Historians, too, are beginning to approach preservation as something more than an objective pursued by well-to-do, well-meaning antiquarians. Professional jobs are available for serious historians and preservationists, whose work is taken seriously. Quite frankly, there is little as pleasing as feeling needed.

Yet the opportunities and responsibilities in the Blackstone Valley are also so great as to be almost incomprehensible, and certainly beyond the full understanding of any single individual. This vacuum demands that organizations like the Pawtucket Preservation Society provide the glory, watching, and judgments that John Ruskin called for. This vacuum demands, in the context of the 1976 Preservation Tax Act, that policymakers and other analysts force Corridor Commission and other officials to listen and respond to a wide variety of concerns and efforts. The Corridor asks that policymakers too become not just a reactive or political voice, but also undertake an educational mission so that the developers of strip malls, redundant housing, and pollutive industrial concerns — those most able to threaten preservation efforts — as well as children who will be tomorrow's community leaders, become its most vocal supporters.

The Corridor Commission lacks the legal authority to will its desire. Regulatory enforcement was not the intent of the legislation that created it. But the Corridor also lacks the methods to pursue everything that needs to be accomplished. Many policymakers are already aware of the enormity of the tasks in individual New England communities. Both Corridor Commission personnel and corridor partners must address open space and new development issues and learn about the local sources and effects of pollution, housing tensions, transportation problems, park development, and other issues.

Each state's Department of Environmental Management has proposed the creation of visitors' centers that deal with a different theme in the valley's history. In Rhode Island these are to consist of improving the technological base and interpretive tours and exhibits at Slater Mill Historic Site in Pawtucket. The city of Woonsocket, moving forward as fast and as thoroughly as any group in the Corridor, will be



renovating the historic Market Square area. The heart of this project will be a rehabilitation of the Falls Yarn Mill building for mixed use, including a visitors' center emphasizing the valley's labor and ethnicity. The city is working closely with business groups and with state and federal officials in the type of partnerships the Corridor encourages.

These themes — technology, ethnicity, labor, as well as agriculture and urbanization — are among those which make the Blackstone Valley a historically significant place and its buildings worth preserving. They give the valley its highly aesthetic character and make it a working region where people continue to live. The almost completely preserved mill villages, like Ashton, Mannville, Hopedale, and others *are* unique in the nation. The social relations between mill owners and workers are still reflected in these structures and are equally significant for their place in U.S. social history. If the fact that none of this ever happened in Omaha is not important to some property owners or politicians, the fact that large portions of an often bucolic region could soon look like northern New Jersey is.

Hundreds of structures and sites stand as strong physical evidence of the valley's history and significance and contribute to its character. Consequently, it is the Corridor Commission's objective to develop a public committed to historic preservation. After years of neglect by industry and society, valley residents must be encouraged to appreciate that their architecture is special, that, for example, their mill housing really belongs on a National Register of Historic Places.

Perhaps the epitome of the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management's efforts in this direction is the acquisition of the Kelly House, mill site, and open space along the river and canal near Quinnville. Being developed as a park, complete with bicycle and walking paths in addition to historical exhibits, brochures, and other materials, the site lies in the shadow of a huge historic mill, mill housing, a beautiful viaduct, and a dam for mill power. The Blackstone Canal, with tow path intact, slices through the middle of the site. The railroad that replaced the canal is visible across the river, and an open spandrel-arched bridge carrying Route 116, rides 116 feet above the site. The Kelly site is being developed not only because of canoeists' passion for this beautiful stretch of river, but because it represents, culturally and economically, what is best and unique about Rhode Island historically and in the present.

The Corridor Commission intends to continue its inventory of historic sites, structures, and archaeological resources, preserving key historic districts, properties, and areas that define the character of the Blackstone Valley. It does not intend to place the entire valley behind a velvet rope, as at a museum, but it does plan to encourage the development of a region inhabited by educated and sensitive people whose focus and energies are vital to simultaneous growth and preservation. The Corridor Commission's master plan also calls for identifying properties threatened by development pressures, deterioration, and inadequate resources.

The Corridor Commission plans to focus on strategies that can achieve these goals. Obviously, a number of options are open, including the use of historic easements, adaptive reuse, program assistance, matching grants, marketing strategy, evaluation of interpretive programs, assistance in training guides, assessment of management alternatives, negotiations with owners, and acquisition of development rights. We can also work with local organizations, including governments, to gain listing on national and state registers of historic places for those which meet criteria.



assist in establishing districts and zoning plans that remain sensitive to history, and bringing tax incentives and other existing tools to light for use by developers.

In addition, we can create or help create new target programs, including loan, assistance, or grants, for existing structures and areas. Perhaps most important, the Corridor Commission is working with local historic commissions and societies, as well as business groups, to better define specific goals and strategies for the overall planning of simultaneous preservation and development efforts. Where and how far all this gets, like so much else in public policy, remains open to question. But the current prospects are new and bright. The Corridor is already a model for proposed similar projects across the nation. Following the prospects as they develop in New England should be constructive. ■

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## Notes

1. Ninety-ninth Cong., 100 Stat. 3625, Public Law 99-647, November 10, 1986.
2. Bill Hartford, "Unions, Labor Markets, and Deindustrialization," 1, paper presented at the Massachusetts Symposium on Labor History, Westfield State College, March 1989.
3. John Mullin, "From Mill Town to Mill Town," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 52, no. 1 (Winter 1986): 47-58.
4. "Northern Rhode Island: An Economic Profile," *Ocean State Business* 6, no. 12 (April 10-23, 1989): 12-13; Labor Research Center, University of Rhode Island, "Executive Summaries of Labor Resources and the Rhode Island Economy" (Kingston, 1992), 15. The Bureau of Labor Statistics and the *Providence Journal* reported in 1989 that, nationwide, more than 300,000 textile workers lost their jobs between 1980 and 1988. In 1989, 1,800 workers lost jobs at Health-tex in Pawtucket alone. Since then, textile and related employment in Rhode Island declined by an estimated 8,000 jobs. *Providence Journal*, June 2, 1989; Rhode Island Department of Employment and Training, "Rhode Island Establishment Employment Calendar Years 1990-June 1992" (Providence, unpublished data, 1992).
5. "Northern Rhode Island," 13.
6. See 175 oral history interviews in the Rhode Island Mill Life Oral History Collection (conducted 1971-1976), Department of Special Collections, Main Library, University of Rhode Island, Kingston, and approximately 180 interviews in the Shifting Gears Oral History Project (conducted 1988-1990), sponsored by the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities, housed at the Center for Lowell History, University of Lowell.
7. See Nancy Frances Kane, *Textiles in Transition: Technology, Wages, and Industry Relocation in the U.S. Textile Industry, 1880-1930* (Westport, Conn.: 1988), and Alice Galenson, "The Migration of the Cotton Textile Industry to the South," Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1975. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities reports that in 1989 more than 5 million American households were headed by people who work full time, year round, and live in poverty. That figure has grown by 20 percent since 1980 and moved us back to that era moments before the advent of the Great Depression when Blackstone Valley mills were already in trouble. See *Providence Journal*, June 2, 1989; Thomas Navin, *The Whittin Machine Works Since 1831* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 356.
8. I conducted the following oral history interviews for the Shifting Gears program: in Uxbridge, with Steve Jezierski, March 1989, and with Ralph Borden, May 1989; in Lincoln and North Smithfield, with Mary LaFerrier, February 1989, and Amy Langolois, May 1989, respectively.
9. Galbraith quoted in the *Boston Globe*, March 25, 1989.
10. See, for example, Gary Gerstle, *Working Class Americanism: The Politics of Labor in a Textile City, 1914-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989); Gary Kulik, "Textile Mill Labor in the Blackstone Valley: Work and Protest in the 19th Century," paper presented at the

- Woonsocket Labor and Ethnic History Symposium, "The Hardest Working River: The Blackstone's Legacy," Woonsocket, June 10, 1989; Gerstle, "The Mobilization of the Working Class Community: The Independent Textile Union in Woonsocket, 1931–1946," in *Radical History Review* 17 (Spring 1978): 161–172; Adena Myers, "Rhode Island Women in the 1934 General Textile Strike," in Douglas M. Reynolds and Marjory Myers, eds., *Working in the Blackstone River Valley: Exploring the Heritage of Industrialization* (Providence Labor History Society, 1991), 165–176.
11. *Boston Globe*, March 25, 1989.
  12. *Forbes*, April 11, 1983, 149; "Steel Collar Workers: Lessons from Japan," *Wall Street Journal*, February 16, 1982.
  13. Juliet Schor, "Art of Service," *Zeta Magazine*, December 1988, 43–46.
  14. Alice Kessler-Harris, "Can We Control Our Economic Destiny?" paper presented at the conference "Shifting Gears: The Changing Meaning of Work," Worcester Polytechnic Institute, November 18, 1989.
  15. Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), passim.
  16. John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1913), 191.
  17. *Ibid.*
  18. Some current corridor agenda items, either by watchfulness, support, or direct action, include the development of a Route 146–Mass Turnpike interchange, waste pretreatment facilities and combined storm-sewer problems, greenway development, a Providence–Worcester bikeway, implementation of cluster zoning, and overlay by-laws, historic interpretation, curriculum development, and adaptive reuse of historic structures including barns, mills, and department stores as well as preservation.
  19. Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor* (Uxbridge: Corridor Commission, 1989), 40–46.
  20. The Blackstone Manufacturing Company case is documented in business and town correspondence held by the Blackstone Historic Commission. North Smithfield, Rhode Island, was the beneficiary of the move.
  21. No synthesis of Blackstone Valley history exists. A number of completed scholarly works relating to the valley and the Rhode Island system of labor exist. These include Rick Greenwood's unpublished "History of the Blackstone Canal," written for the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management, and his "Zachariah Allen and the Architecture of Industrial Paternalism," in *Rhode Island History* 64, no. 4 (November 1988). Jonathan Prude's *The Coming of Industrial Order: Town and Factory Life in Rural Massachusetts* (Cambridge, 1983) is an important and influential study of Samuel Slater's largest undertakings at Oxford, Dudley, and Webster, Massachusetts. This work, though it largely omits Slater's equally significant undertakings at Slatersville, Rhode Island, is crucial for understanding the historic context and nature of the Rhode Island system of management. Also see James Garner, *The Model Company Town* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), on Hopedale; Louise Lamphere, *From Working Daughters to Working Mothers: Immigrant Women in a New England Community* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), on Central Falls; and Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), on Worcester. The best thematic overview of the valley's history, Reynolds and Myers, *Working in the Blackstone River Valley*, focuses on labor and industry.
  22. Adele Chatfield-Taylor, "From Ruskin to Rouse," in Beth Sullenberger, ed., *Historic Preservation: Forging a Discipline* (New York: Preservation Alumni Inc., 1989), 28. I might note that looking at our national leadership over the last generation — Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush and Dan Quayle — is an exercise that well lends itself to disproving the accuracy of Darwin's and Spencer's theories.

23. Ibid.
24. Blackstone Valley Regional Development Corporation and Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission, "Economic Impact Analysis Study of Blackstone River and Canal State Park, unpublished, Worcester, 1988; Timothy Tyrell and Patt Manheim, "Economic Assessment of Blackstone Valley National Heritage Corridor [sic]," Kingston, R.I., 1989.
25. E. P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past and Present* 38 (December 1967): 56-97; Herbert Gutman, *Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966); Daniel Nelson, *Managers and Workers: Origins of the New Factory System in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975).
26. Chatfield-Taylor, "From Ruskin to Rouse," 29.
27. The commission received \$250,000 each for fiscal years 1988 and 1989. The commission's operating money was boosted to \$350,000 in fiscal year 1991 and \$346,000 in 1992. Similar funds were appropriated to the National Park Service for technical assistance in each of those years. A fiscal 1991 authorization gave the commission \$1 million a year, for three ensuing fiscal years, to carry out demonstration projects. This money was appropriated in 1992, but the commission had not received it as of July 1992.
28. Excellent examples include conversion to senior housing of the Whitin Cotton Mill in Northbridge and of the Crown and Eagle Mill in North Uxbridge, which suffered a devastating fire in the mid-1970s. Blackstone Valley preservation efforts received two of the ten Massachusetts Historical Preservation Commission awards given on May 17, 1990.