



MASTERPLAN

VALLEY FALLS HERITAGE PARK

CUMBERLAND, RHODE ISLAND

1991

GATES, LEIGHTON & ASSOCIATES, INC.
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

Prepared for

TOWN OF CUMBERLAND

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in co-ordination with

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□ **WITHIN** a stone's throw of Cumberland's Town Hall, the Valley Falls Mills Ruin is a treasure that has been buried along the Blackstone Riverbank for over fifty years. Hidden by a dense growth of Maples and Honeysuckle, and tucked into the corner of Broad and Mill Streets, the 2.3 acre site also serves as the gateway to Cumberland for those traveling across the Blackstone River from Central Falls. This proposal will transform this currently abandoned, dangerous, and unsightly property into the Valley Falls Heritage Park, also tying it into the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor's historic park system.

The Valley Falls Mill complex, begun at the turn of the 19th century, now holds a wealth of historic remnants, including stone foundations, raceway walls, archways, and water power mechanisms. Hidden by the site's large trees, underbrush, and rubble stone, and largely inaccessible by virtue of the site's steep slopes, these remnants need to be liberated from the site's constraints if they are to tell the story of Valley Falls' past.

The first step in reopening, preserving, and enhancing these elements of the past must be to develop a conceptual Masterplan for

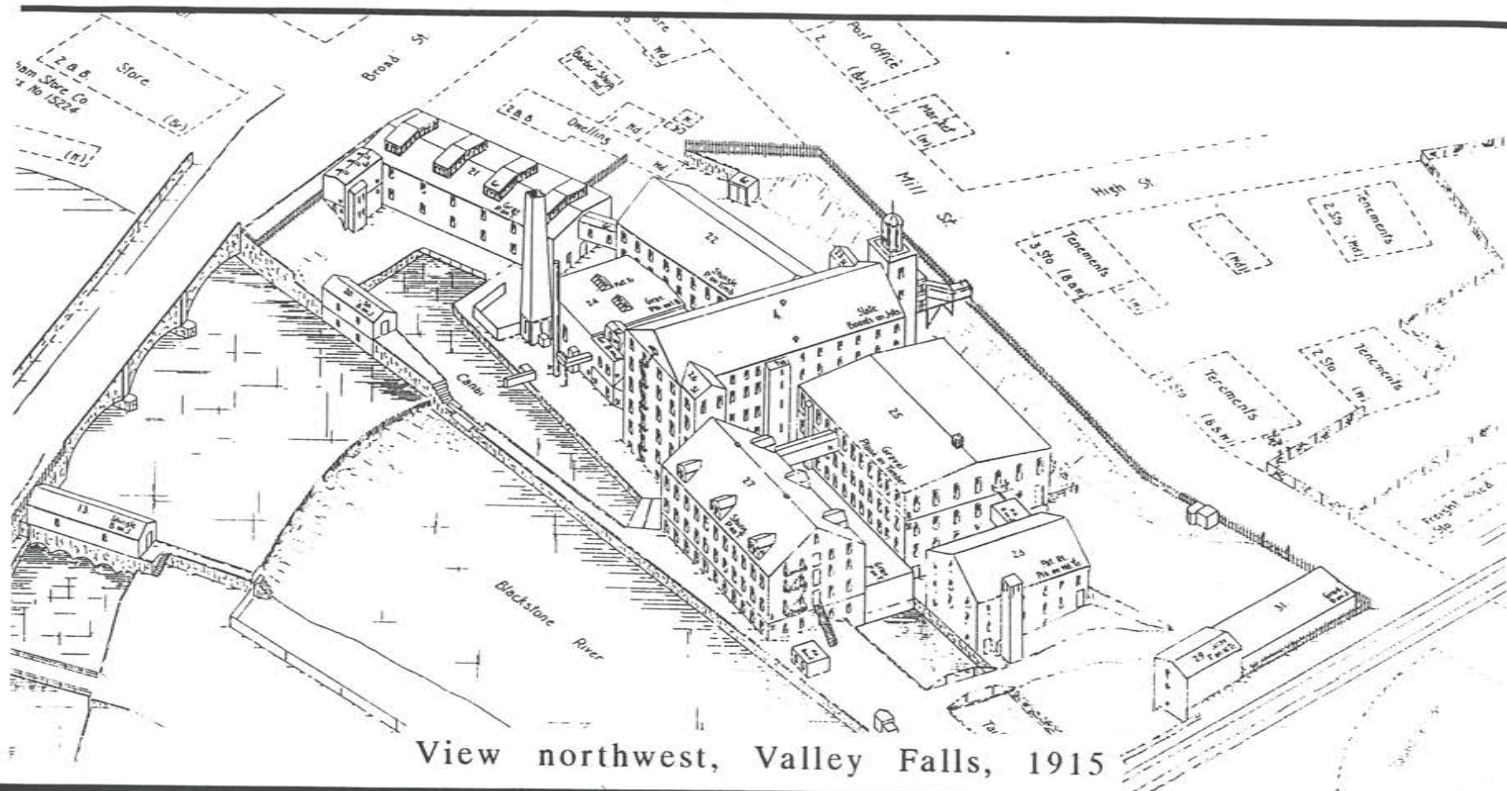
the mill site, showing how Valley Falls Heritage Park could look when completely finished. Master plan development, however, is a multifaceted and time consuming process, combining research and site analysis with an inventory of the needs and desires of those who will ultimately use the park facility.

Over the past several months, much work has been done by designers, working with the Town and experts in historical preservation, to arrive at an overall Masterplan that is sensitive to the needs of both the Town and the site. Enclosed in this booklet are a series of photos and sketches showing how the design of the masterplan has evolved into what could prove to be a tremendous asset to the Town of Cumberland and the entire Blackstone River Corridor. These sketches, showing a path system with bridges, a picnic area, an amphitheater, viewing overlooks, interpretive signage, and areas for handicap visitors and school buses, are intended to be a basis for discussion only, and in no way stipulate that the park's finished product cannot change to suit other needs. Public opinion and additional historical information uncovered during the Masterplan implementation process will lead to further refinement of the original park design concepts.

□ THE Masterplan will be developed in a series of phases over the next few years, beginning in Spring of 1991 with site clearing and construction of a main entrance along Broad Street and a picnic area on an island created by the site's two raceways. The intent of the first phase is to make the site immediately useful as a public recreational facility, while preserving as much as possible the existing mill remnants.

As readers of this proposal for park improvements, please bear in

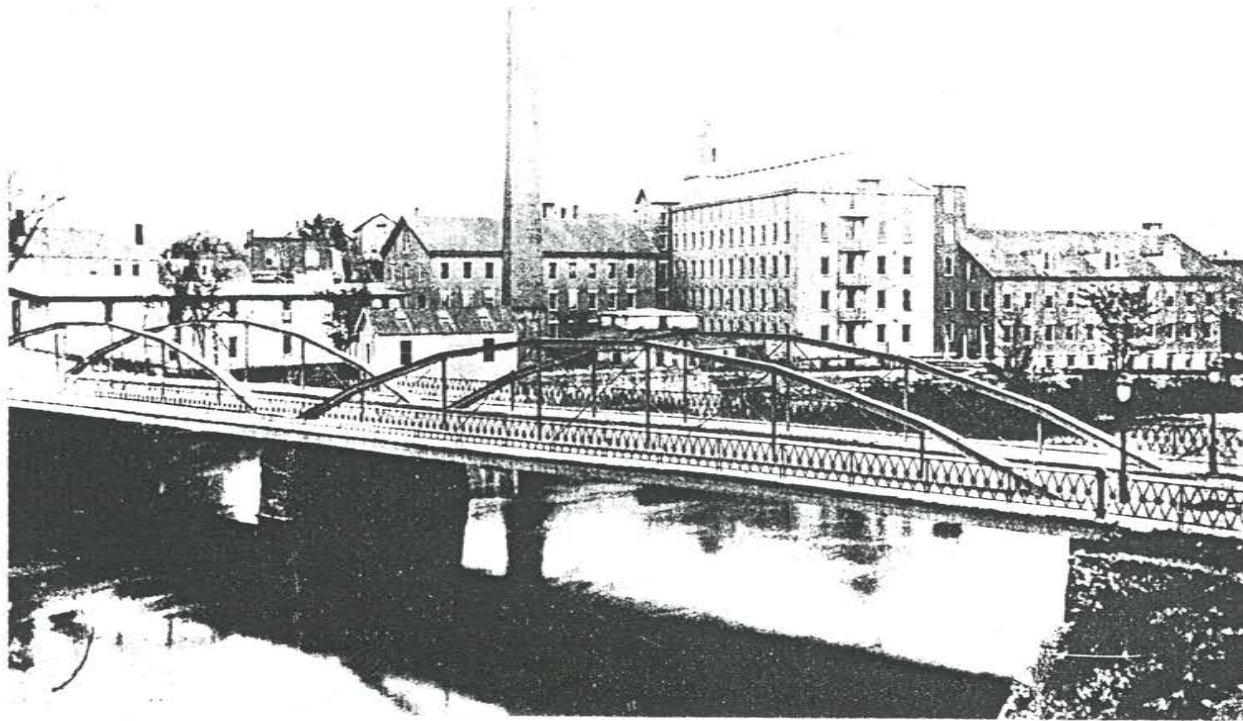
mind that you can become part of the Valley Falls Heritage Park planning effort. Comments pertaining to the Masterplan will be vital to ensuring that the site is developed to meet the needs of its users, and historical data and photographs from those who are familiar with the mill complex will be eagerly received. Consider your potential for involvement as you read through the next few chapters of this work. Public parks are for the public, and only public opinion and support can make them successful.



□ ONCE bustling with activity and crammed with buildings, raceways, and bridges, yesterday's treeless, Valley Falls Mill is today a silent, rubble strewn landscape clothed in greenery.

Fortunately, nature has allowed enough of the foundation walls to

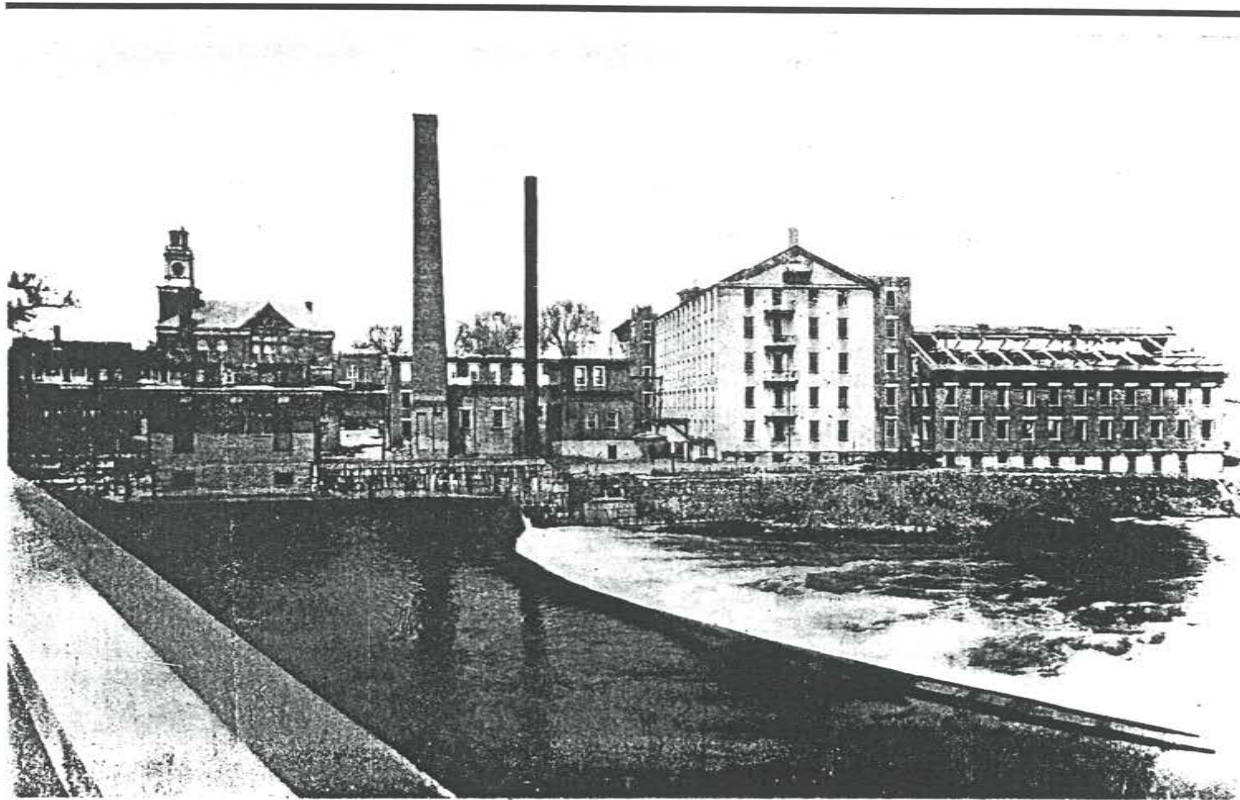
remain intact to indicate that a large complex once dominated the site, but without an historic background, it is easy to overlook the granite blocks and stone walls, and see only a wooded grove, too steep to build on, remaining dormant in its home between the roadways and the river.



Mills at Valley Falls, sometime in the 1880's

□ EXTENSIVE research, completed just prior to this report by RABER ASSOCIATES (Consultants in the Historical and Social Sciences), reveals, however, that the Valley Falls Mills not only generated water power and manufactured goods, but also provided a way of life for thousands of people who worked

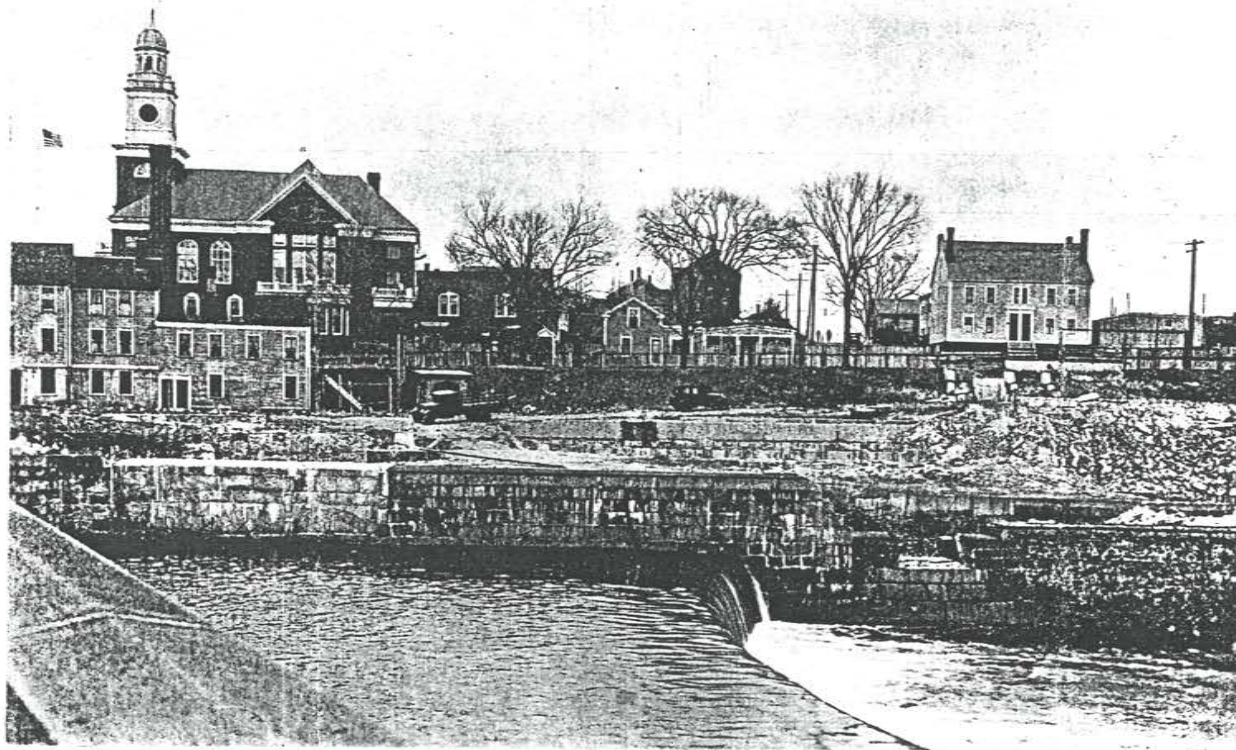
there from 1813 to 1934. Its buildings manufactured a wide variety of textile products during the many years of their operation, including cotton, woven materials, finished wool, and dyed fabrics. None of these production operations would have been possible during this era without the all



Town Hall and Falls at Valley Falls in 1934, showing start of the razing of the Mills

important element of water power, an element that today adds the most charm to the site's setting. The intrigue of exposed gateway gear mechanisms, the beauty of the raceway walls, and the sound of water rushing over man-made dams offer wonderful potential for the site's use as an educational ex-

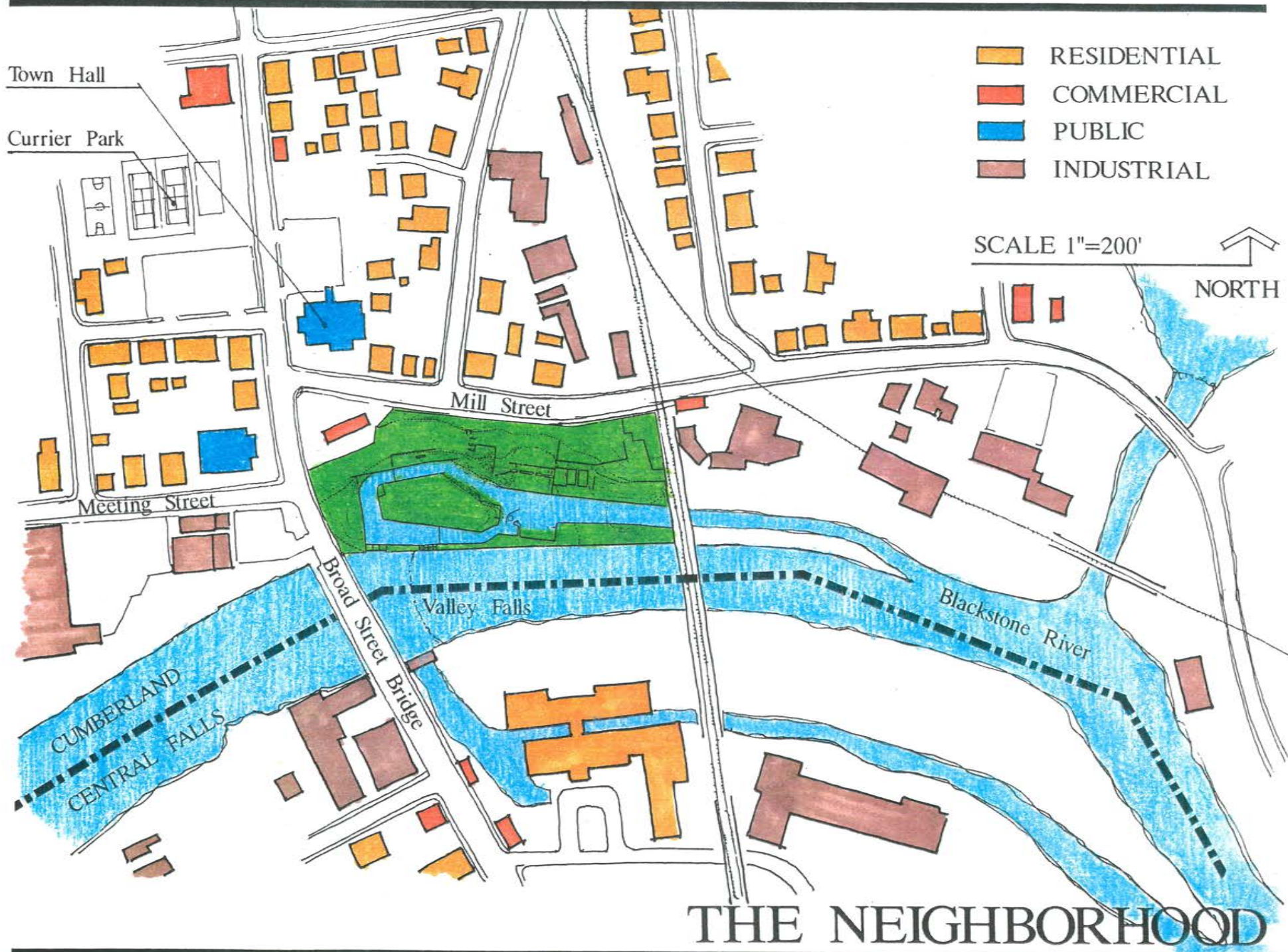
ploration of water power technology and the culture and people it supported.



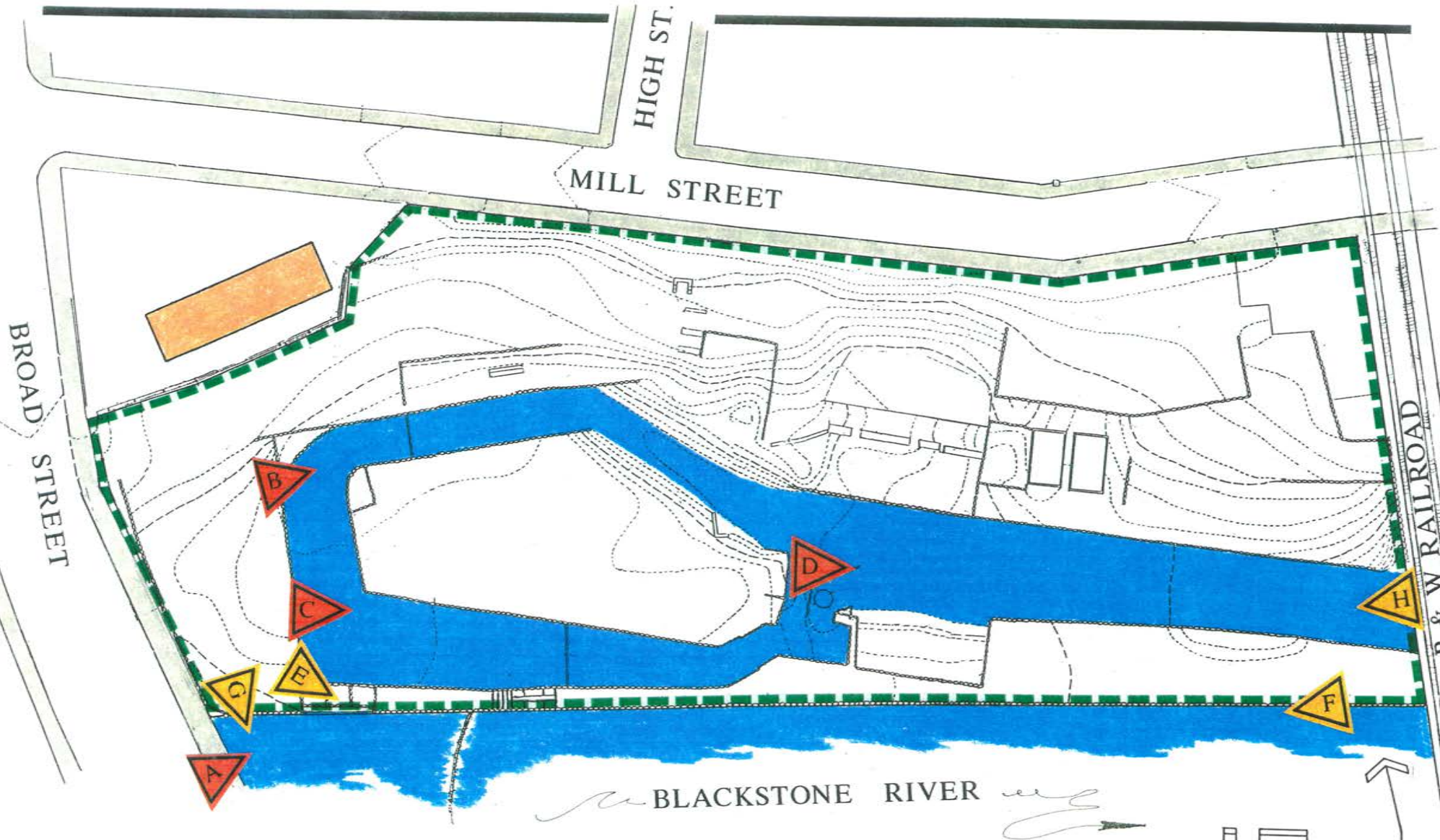
Town Hall and Falls at Valley Falls, December, 1936, after the Mills had been razed

□ THE following inventory documentation was produced over a six month period, during which time numerous site visits were conducted. A concurrent study, undertaken by RABER ASSOCIATES, Consultants in the Historical and Social Sciences, was also underway during this time, and produced a full assessment of the historical and archeological value of the site. As a result of RABER's report findings and their thorough documentation of site features, it became obvious that the inventory phase of the Masterplan should focus on the site's past history as a key factor in shaping the final Masterplan. The plates included in this section will demonstrate the importance, and the challenge, of integrating features of the site's present physical character, and the remaining elements of its past history, in creating a park that is truly unique in its value to the public.





THE NEIGHBORHOOD



PHOTOS A-D, PAGE 9



RIVER & SLUCEWAYS



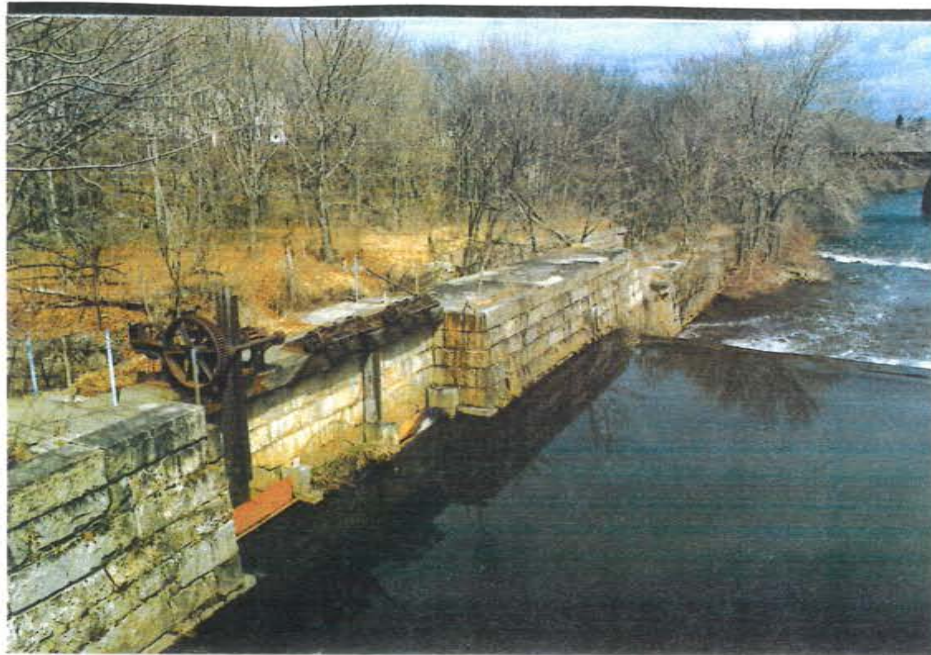
PHOTOS E-H, PAGE 10



LIMIT OF PARK

THE SITE

INVENTORY



A - SLUICEGATE

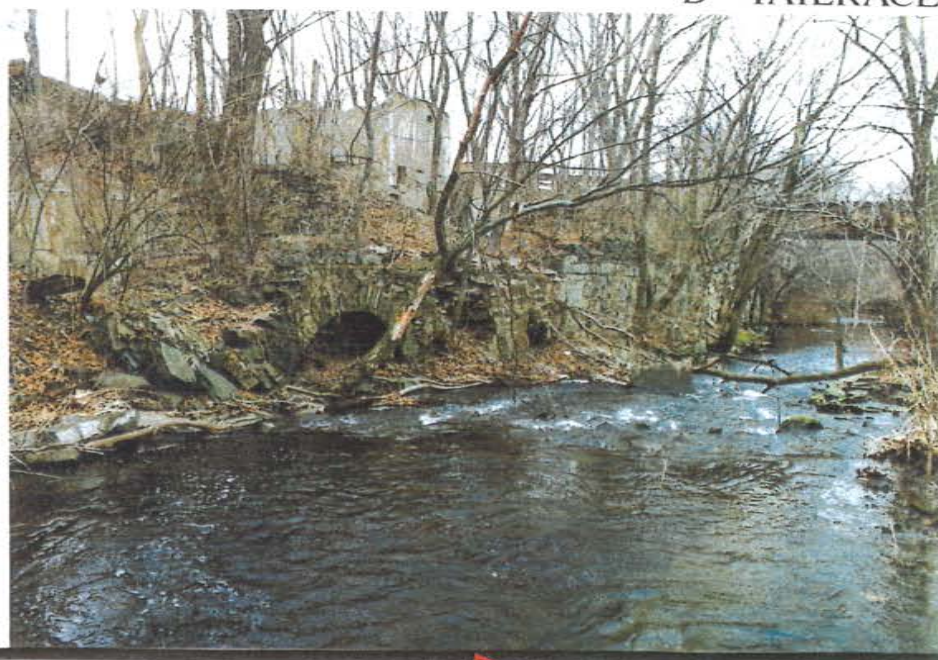


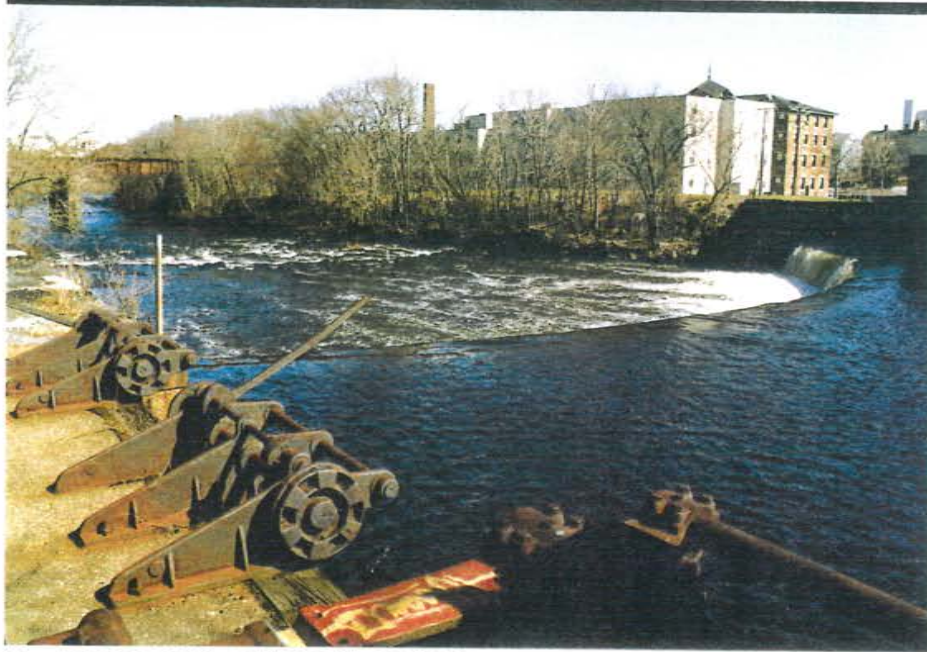
C - SOUTH SLUICEWAY

B - NORTH SLUICEWAY



D - TAILRACE





E - VALLEY FALLS DAM



G - BROAD STREET BRIDGE

F - BLACKSTONE RIVER AND DAM



H - TAILRACE AND RIVER





PHOTOS I-L PAGE 12

PHOTOS M,N, PAGE 13

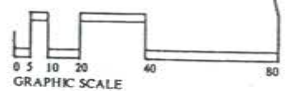


FOOTPRINT OF MILL COMPLEX -1915

ORIGINAL BRIDGE LOCATIONS -1915

ORIGINAL SLUICWAY ALIGNMENT

FOUNDATION WALLS REMAINING TODAY



HISTORIC CONTEXT



I - CORNER OF FOUNDATION



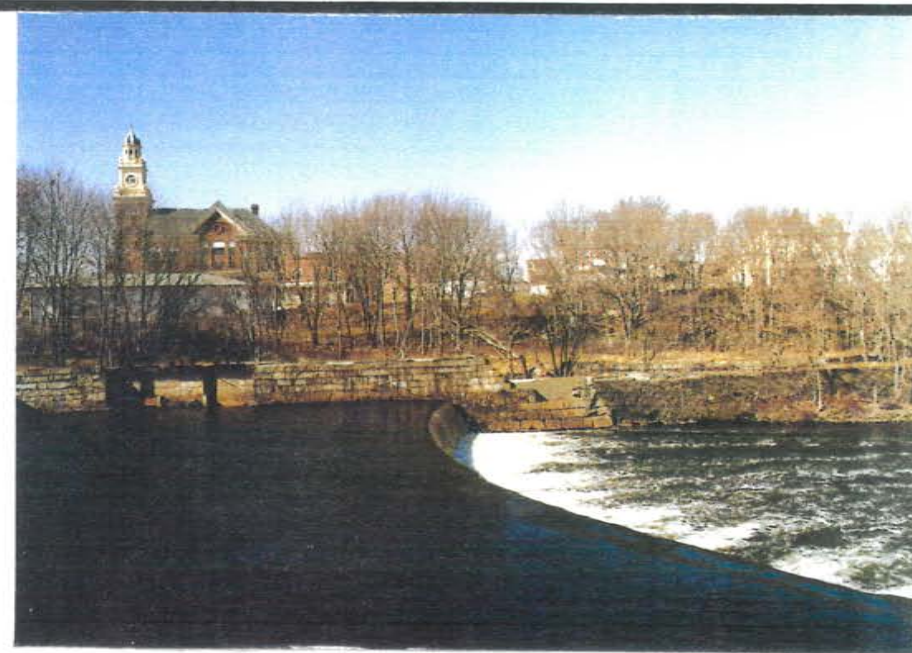
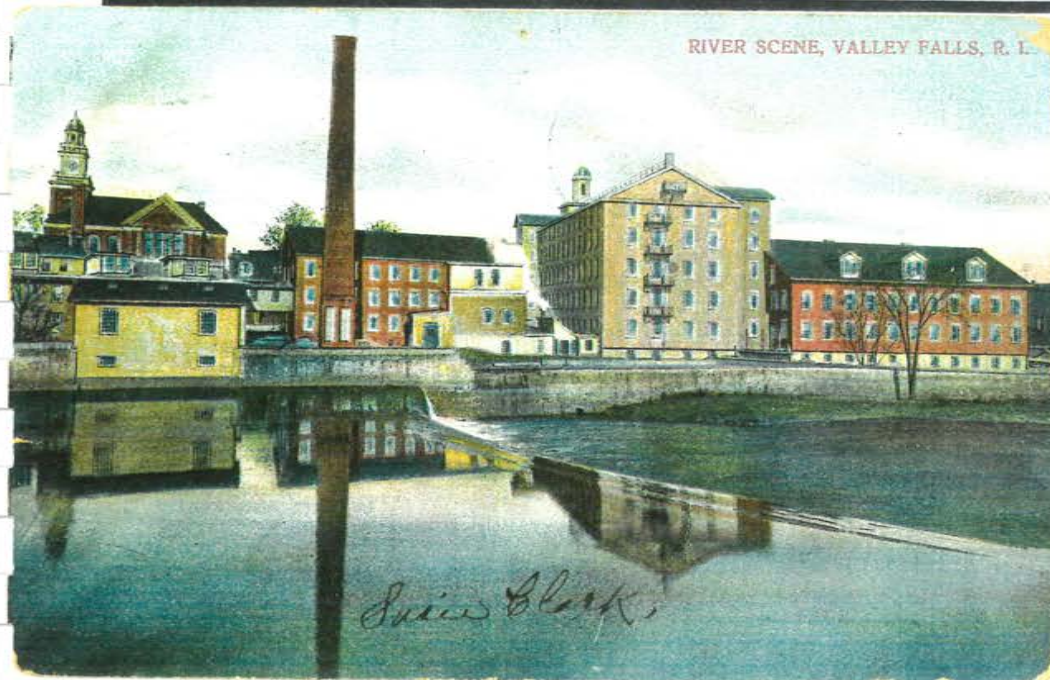
K - PORTION OF BURIED ARCHWAY

J - TURBINE PIT AT SOUTH SLUICeway



L - TAILRACE ARCH AT TURBINE PIT



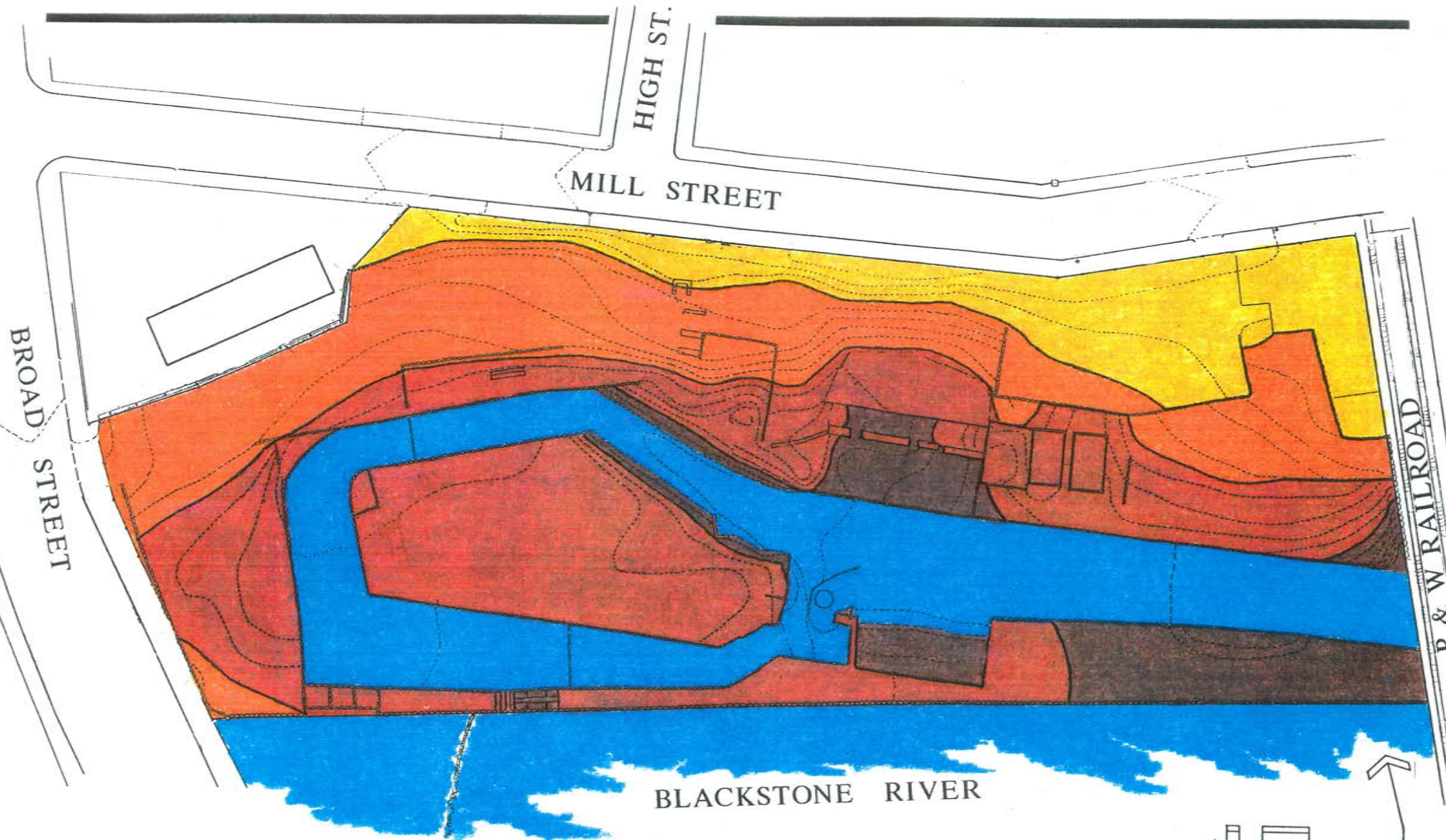


M - VIEW NORTH TOWARDS TOWN HALL

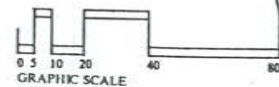


N - VIEW WEST TOWARDS VALLEY FALLS





- 70-80 FT
- 60-70 FT
- 50-60 FT
- 40-50 FT



TOPOGRAPHY

INVENTORY 14

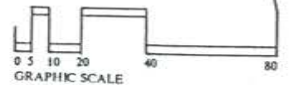
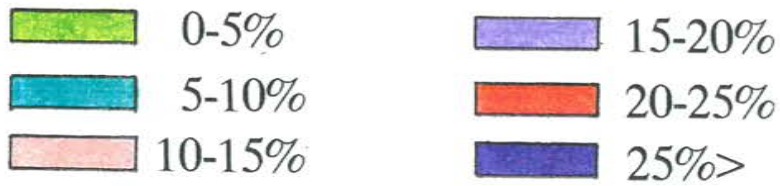
BROAD STREET

HIGH ST.

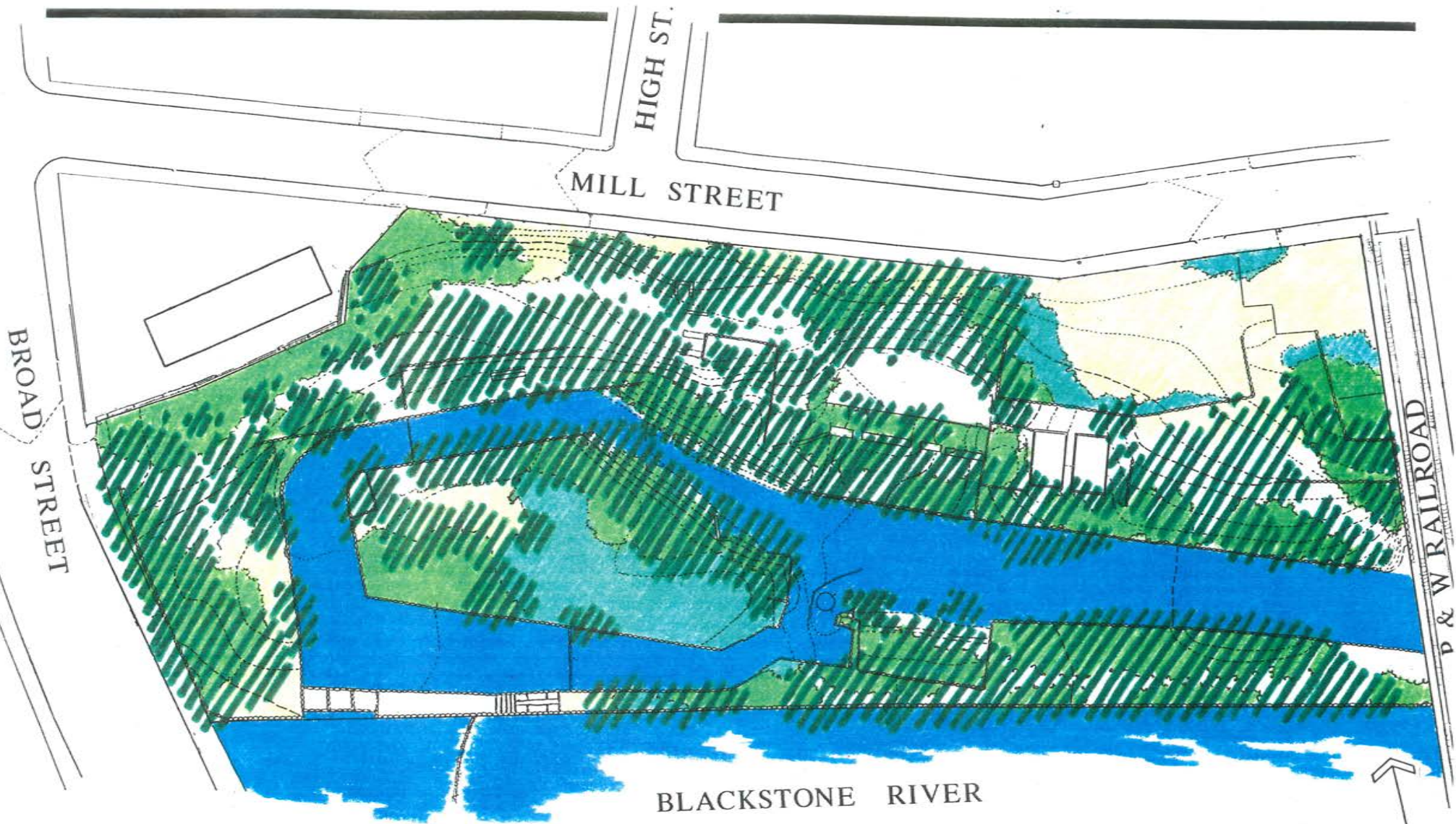
MILL STREET





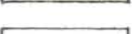
P & W RAILROAD

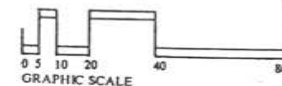
BLACKSTONE RIVER



SLOPE
INVENTORY 15



-  DECIDUOUS TREES - 90% MAPLE, 8% ELM, 2% OTHER
-  DECIDUOUS SHRUBS - 95% HONEYSUCKLE, 5% OTHER
-  OPEN FIELDS - 50% SUMAC, 50% POISON IVY VINES
-  OPEN GRASS AREAS
-  BARREN SOIL - PAVEMENT or STONE RUBBLE or PATHWAYS



VEGETATION

INVENTORY 16

Parking lot at Town Hall
is less than a minute walk

Natural 'bowl' area is ideal for
some type of amphitheater

Steep slopes and stone rubble
makes this area difficult to transverse

Small flat area at street grade is
ideal for limited vehicular access -
school bus and handicap parking

Existing grade would serve
well as main pedestrian
entrance

Park could have excellent
exposure at Broad St. with
trimming of large maples

Direct access to bridge
would 'tie it' to the park

The island is quite serene and offers an excellent spot for
viewing the entire site - good place for a small picnic area

The turbine pit and surrounding walls create lots of interest

☐ **THERE** are two (2) major design objectives that have been established for the Valley Falls Heritage Park.

First: Provide a park setting that incorporates walkways, benches, trees, and grass along an historic riverfront property that collectively offers the visitor a quiet place to walk, relax, and enjoy a view of the river.

Second: Provide information through interpretive sign panels that will explain to the visitor the rich and extensive history of the site as it relates to both the Valley Falls area and the Blackstone River Corridor.

As both of the above objectives are met, the Valley Falls Heritage Park will offer an array of enjoyable experiences to a wide variety of people.

To the surrounding neighborhoods, the park will be a short walk to a riverfront park that will be ideal for eating one's lunch or just taking a scenic stroll.

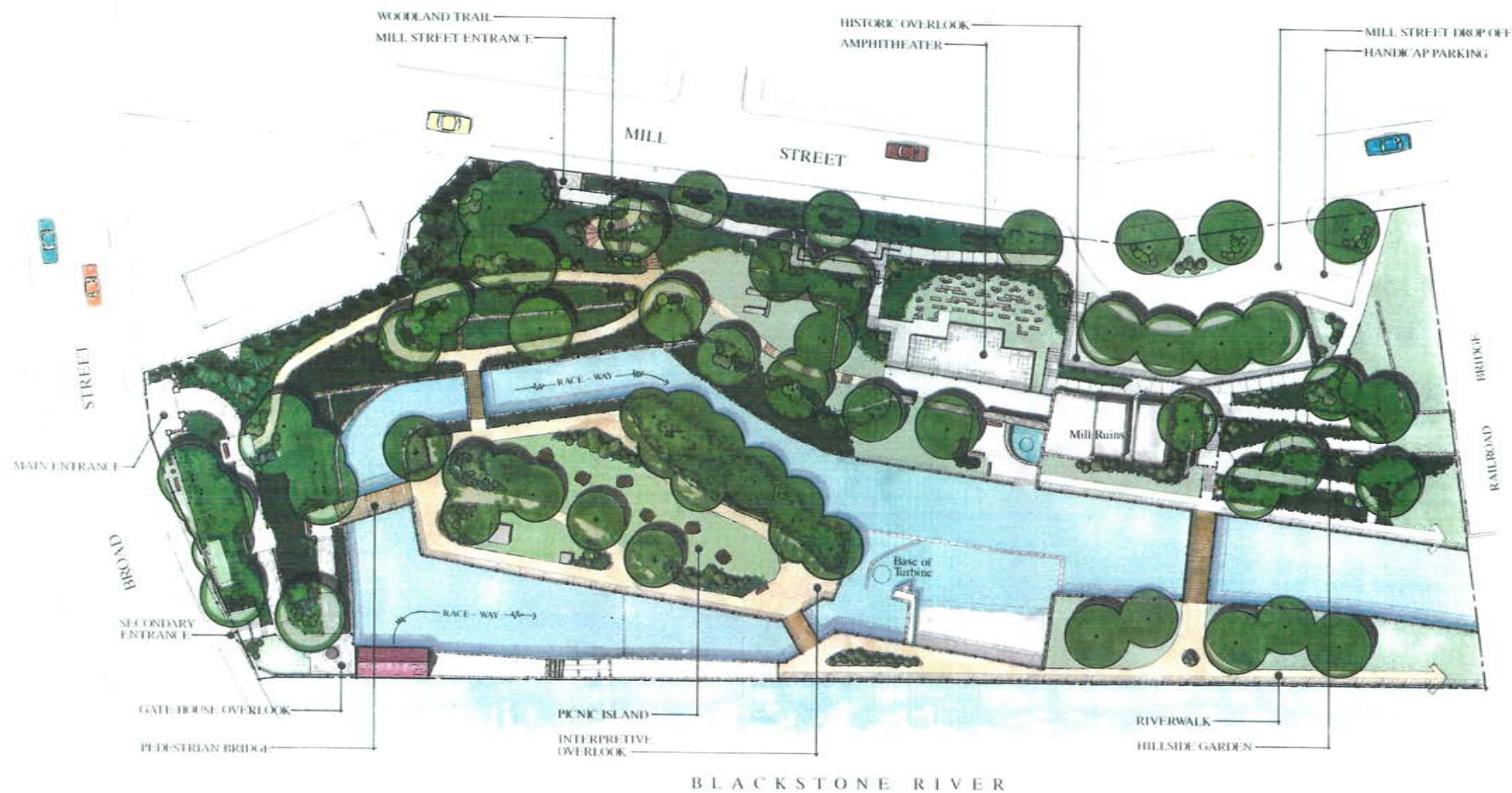
To the Valley Falls community, the park will be an important slice of their own heritage and will salute the workers and their families whose lives revolved around the now forgotten mills.

To the Cumberland community, the park will be both an entry way to the Town as well as an anchor for economic stimulus in and around the Broad Street area.

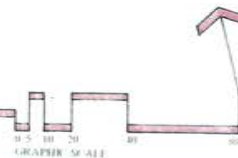
To Rhode Island, the park will be a model of good park design that will strive to set new standards for handicap accessibility issues, allowing everyone to enjoy its scenic beauty and historical richness.

To the schools, the park will be an educational tool, allowing students a chance to walk back into history and discover how the industrial age that changed their lives operated on riverfront sites like Valley Falls.

To the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, the park will be a short drive to an historic riverfront park that will offer the visitor a piece of history as it relates to the entire Blackstone Valley Corridor.



MASTER PLAN **VALLEY FALLS HERITAGE PARK** CUMBERLAND, RHODE ISLAND



□ UNITING the components of the Valley Falls Heritage Park Masterplan together is the park's circulation system. This system of ramps, paths, and stairways leads park visitors from entrances at Broad and Mill Streets, and through a series of looped connections that take them back in time to the Industrial Era.

Beginning at the main entrance at Broad Street and continuing on to the picnic island, riverwalk, hillside garden, Mill Street overlook, amphitheater, and woodland trail, approximately 1/2 mile of trails offers almost complete access to the 2.3 acre site. Where access is limited, factors such as safety, preservation of scenic views, and/or protection of historic remnants have made foot traffic in these areas undesirable. The majority of the site, however, will be safely and easily explored on paths of stamped concrete, stonedust, and woodchip.

Of top priority in developing the park's circulation system was the provision of safe, manageable paths for all park visitors - the elderly and disabled, as well as the able bodied. Designing suitable access routes for those with special needs was a particularly challenging part of the Masterplan, as the site's topography made meeting sloped ramp requirements difficult. Even with grade changes as great as 30 FT on some hillside slopes, however, the Masterplan shown has provided ramp systems, gracefully blended into the landscape, to provide access to those in wheelchairs or with other physical limitations.

It should be noted that these ramps will not function as segregated systems to distinguish the disabled from the rest of the park visitors, but rather they serve as primary access routes for all visitors, thus encouraging integration of the mobility impaired

into the path mainstream. Valley Falls Heritage Park will be, then, a park that everyone can enjoy, and will serve as an example of innovative circulation design that is sensitive to meeting the needs of an often overlooked population in society.

One area of the park, where circulation has not been shown on the Masterplan, is in the waters of the Blackstone River and its associated raceways. Many factors at present make access into the waterways difficult, but should interest from canoeist groups indicate that this needs to be a priority, methods of facilitating canoe travel within the park should be explored.

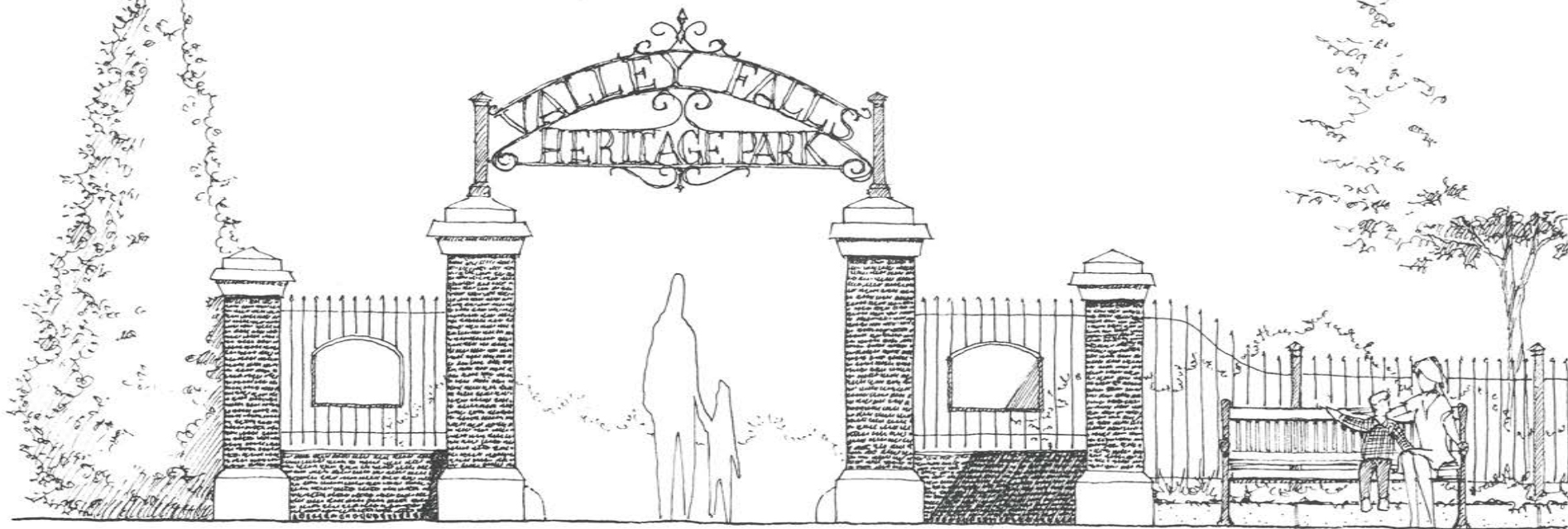
The two main factors that hinder or complicate the current situation are the drop at the Samoset Dam and the shallow depth of the water in the raceways. If, to avoid the dangers of the dam, it were possible for canoeists to exit the Blackstone before passing under the Broad Street Bridge, carry their canoes across the street and into Valley Falls Heritage Park, and reboard in the raceways, they could safely navigate their vessels back into the Blackstone further downstream. Rewatering the raceways, creating safe portages, and obtaining the proper environmental and water rights permits, however, are only a few of the hurdles that would have to be cleared in order to make such a system possible. For these reasons, integrating canoe travel into the park will probably take place at a much later phase of the Masterplan.

□ THE character, or the "look" of the park, is very much hinged on historical research that has been an integral part of the planning process. An array of early photographs has displayed a mill complex, clearly built for manufacturing, constructed of elements that were simple and rugged. These simple, rugged elements have stood the test of time, and reinforce the idea that durable materials are precisely those needed in any park created for public use.

While focusing on the mill complex's simplicity, it should be noted that minor flairs of detail need not be prohibited from the

site. Historical evidence reveals, in fact, that ornamental features, such as iron fencing, may have been used at entrances and along street perimeters. Combining durability, then, with simple, yet detail conscious design elements, will help convey the "look" of Valley Falls Heritage Park.

As one walks through the park, the detailed amenities of the proposed fencing, entranceways, and benches located along the streetscape will give way to a simple rugged "look" that will fit the riverfront landscape of heavy stone walls and steeply sloped terrain.



AT Broad and Mill Streets, park users will be greeted by well defined entrances of brick columns and adjoining steel picket fences. These gateways will welcome them in to wide, graceful, paved walkways meandering in and around large existing trees. Along the park's perimeter, low hanging tree branches will be removed, allowing both light and visual access into the park. As the walkways reach further into the park, four pedestrian bridges will span the raceways and connect to the small half acre wooded island and riverfront area.

Pathways located on the island and along the riverwalk will change from concrete to stone dust edged with cobblestone. Benches along these pathways will have a more heavy, industrial appearance than those located along the perimeter of the park. Landscaping, which will be more interesting and colorful along the street, will become very natural and simple as it reaches the river. Two reasons for this dramatic change in the park's appearance are:

1. The park should convey a sense of stepping back into history. The four pedestrian bridges should not only span the existing raceways, but also provide passage into the heart of the industrial age. Once park visitors cross a bridge, they will know they are in a special place. They have entered into an age where form unquestionably follows function; an age of design that bows to the natural beauty of the surging river.

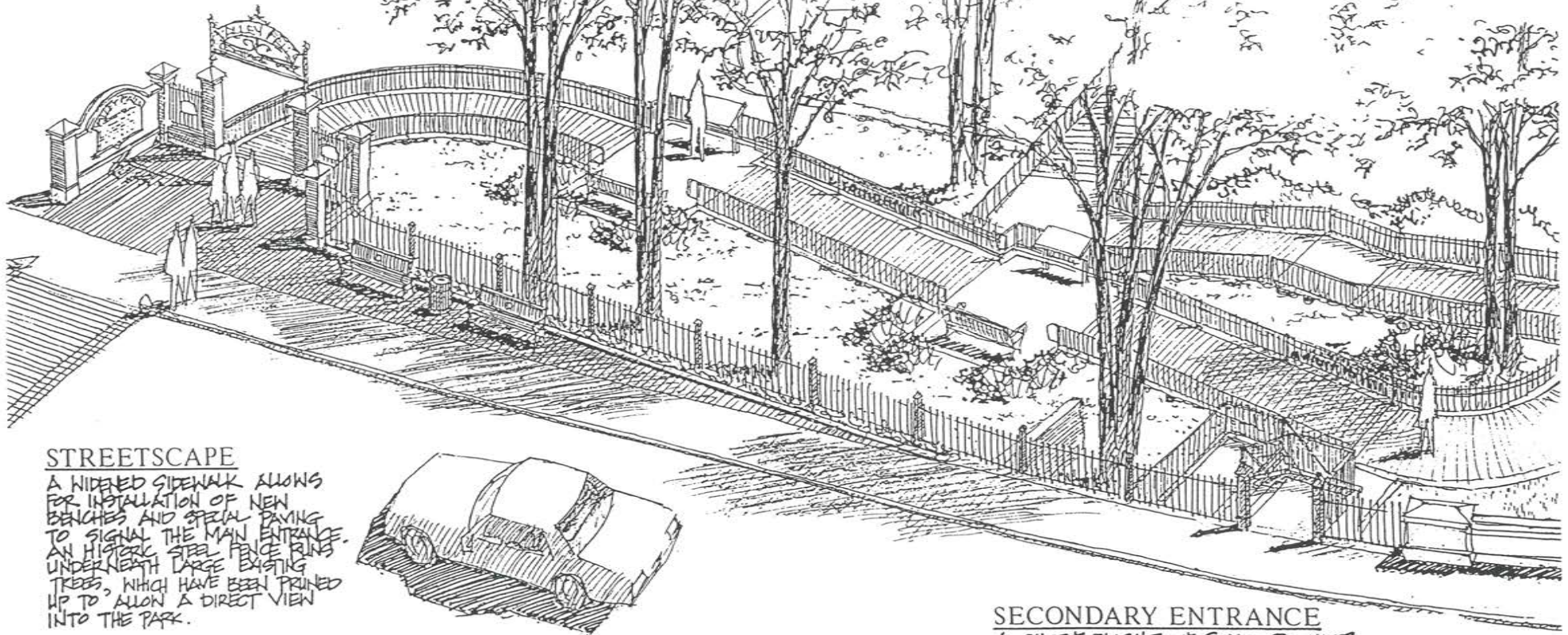
2. The practicality of providing a safe, durable park demands that amenities such as benches and landscaping endure the use and abuse of the general public. This will truly bear out the design rule of "form follows function", due to the necessity of "beefing up" the inner park areas where security will not be as easily enforced as it is along Broad and Mill Streets. The raceways separating the island and the riverfront areas serve as a natural demarcation of the park's less visible locations, emphasizing where great care need be taken to provide a safe, durable park.

MAIN ENTRANCE

BRICK AND STONE CAPPED COLUMNS WITH HISTORIC STEEL FENCE FRAME THE ENTRANCE AND PROVIDE SPACE FOR THE PROPER SIGNAGE AND DEDICATION PLAQUES.

ENTRANCE RAMP

AN 8' WIDE RAMP PROVIDES HANDICAP ACCESS INTO THE PARK AS IT INTERSECTS A SERIES OF SMALL OVERLOOK PLATFORMS. FUTURE PLANS CALL FOR INTERPRETIVE SIGNS WHICH WILL PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO THE PARK'S HISTORY TO BE LOCATED AT THESE PLATFORMS.



STREETSCAPE

A WIDENED SIDEWALK ALLOWS FOR INSTALLATION OF NEW BENCHES AND SPECIAL PAVING TO SIGNAL THE MAIN ENTRANCE. AN HISTORIC STEEL FENCE RUNS UNDERNEATH LARGE EXISTING TREES, WHICH HAVE BEEN PRUNED UP TO ALLOW A DIRECT VIEW INTO THE PARK.

SECONDARY ENTRANCE

A SHORT FLIGHT OF STAIRS PROVIDES DIRECT ACCESS FROM THE PARK TO THE BROAD STREET BRIDGE.

BROAD STREET ENTRANCE

□ "WHAT are these 'canals' for?" "What do these gears do?" "What did this place used to be?" These questions, and many more that are likely to be asked by park visitors as they stroll through Valley Falls Heritage Park, will be answered by the Park's proposed interpretive sign panel system.

Because the site has such a rich and extensive history, interpretive panels will be essential in helping visitors understand that the park, a "slice" of the industrial age as it once existed along the Blackstone River, has a fascinating story to tell.

Sign panels will be installed throughout the park, providing information on a variety of topics, ranging from general historical background, to the dynamics of early water power. At the sidewalk, where people passing by can see into the park, interpretive panels will provide a general historic overview of the Mill complex and its relationship to the Blackstone Valley Corridor. As visitors proceed into the park, information will become more site specific, and will provide an explanation of the remaining walls, archways and raceways. Some panels may be located where an early photograph, displayed on the panel will demonstrate the amazing change from the dominating

mill buildings of the early 1900's to the serene wooded park of today. Other panels will be specific to key locations within the park, such as the turbine pit or the gate mechanisms at the head of the raceway.

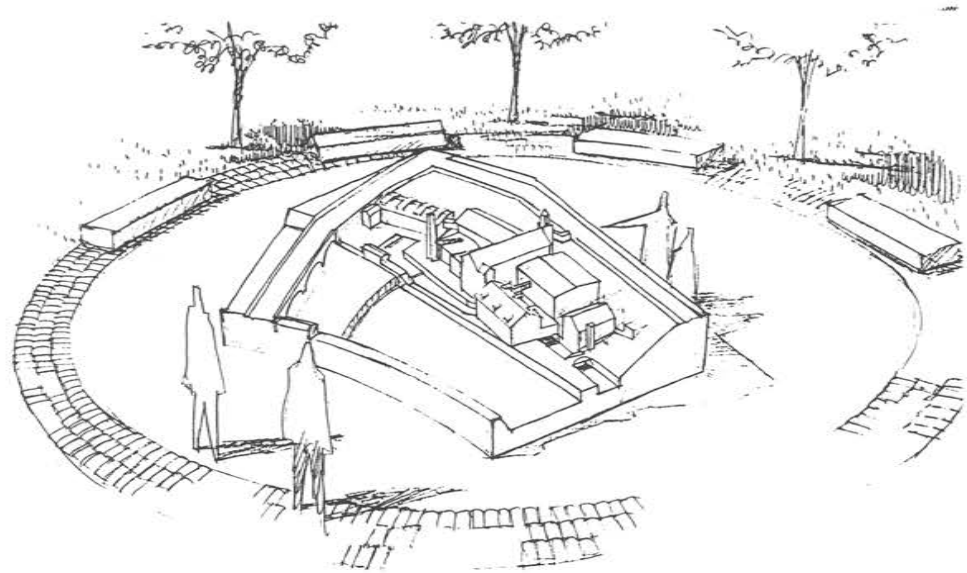
One panel concept that has already generated great enthusiasm would deal with identifying the numerous stone arches that remain on the site, at least a dozen of which can still be found today. Some are completely intact, while others have only a few stones remaining or are mostly buried. A panel identifying the location of the original raceways and the mill building footprints, would prompt the inquisitive park visitor to explore the site in an attempt to discover the remaining arches.

□ **INTERPRETIVE** sign panels will not be the only means of revealing the park's past history. Another tool that could be used to help visitors understand the massive dominance of the early mill structures, would be an outdoor granite model, showing the complex as it once stood along the Blackstone River.

An on-site, scaled model would instantly help orient the viewer to the site's existing features (i.e., raceways, river, Valley Falls, Broad Street Bridge, existing gate house on the river's south side), as well as the numerous structures that once composed the Valley Falls Mill complex.

One possible location for a model of this kind would be at the east end of the "island", at the "interpretive overlook". At this spot, one can view all of the river, falls, bridge and gatehouse, which aid tremendously as references for size and scale of the mill's original components. By seeing these existing features and locating them on the model, observers would realize the impact that the enormous Mill buildings once had as they collectively sprawled over the site.

Incorporating this model into the park is certainly not one of the Masterplan's first priorities. The creation of a safe, clean, well-used park must come first. Once the park is established, however, the model (which now might seem a bit extravagant) should be considered as an "interpretive working monument". It could easily become the park's focal point, helping visitors envision the Valley Falls of days gone by.



☐ BOTH the projected cost of converting the deteriorated Valley Falls Mill site into an historic Riverfront Park, and the fact that present funding is limited, make it necessary to develop a construction phasing plan realistic to total anticipated funds available over the next several years. It is estimated that the total cost for the Valley Falls Heritage Park will be in the range of 1.5 Million to 2 Million Dollars. Our goals in the phasing plan are to:

1. Provide a safe, attractive park that can be used immediately after the initial phase of construction and expand as each phase is completed.

2. Balance each construction phase with available and/or anticipated funding, providing design options that will allow each

phase to range between \$250,000 to \$400,000.

3. Create a strategy of phasing that will allow construction access to each phase without adversely impacting already completed work.

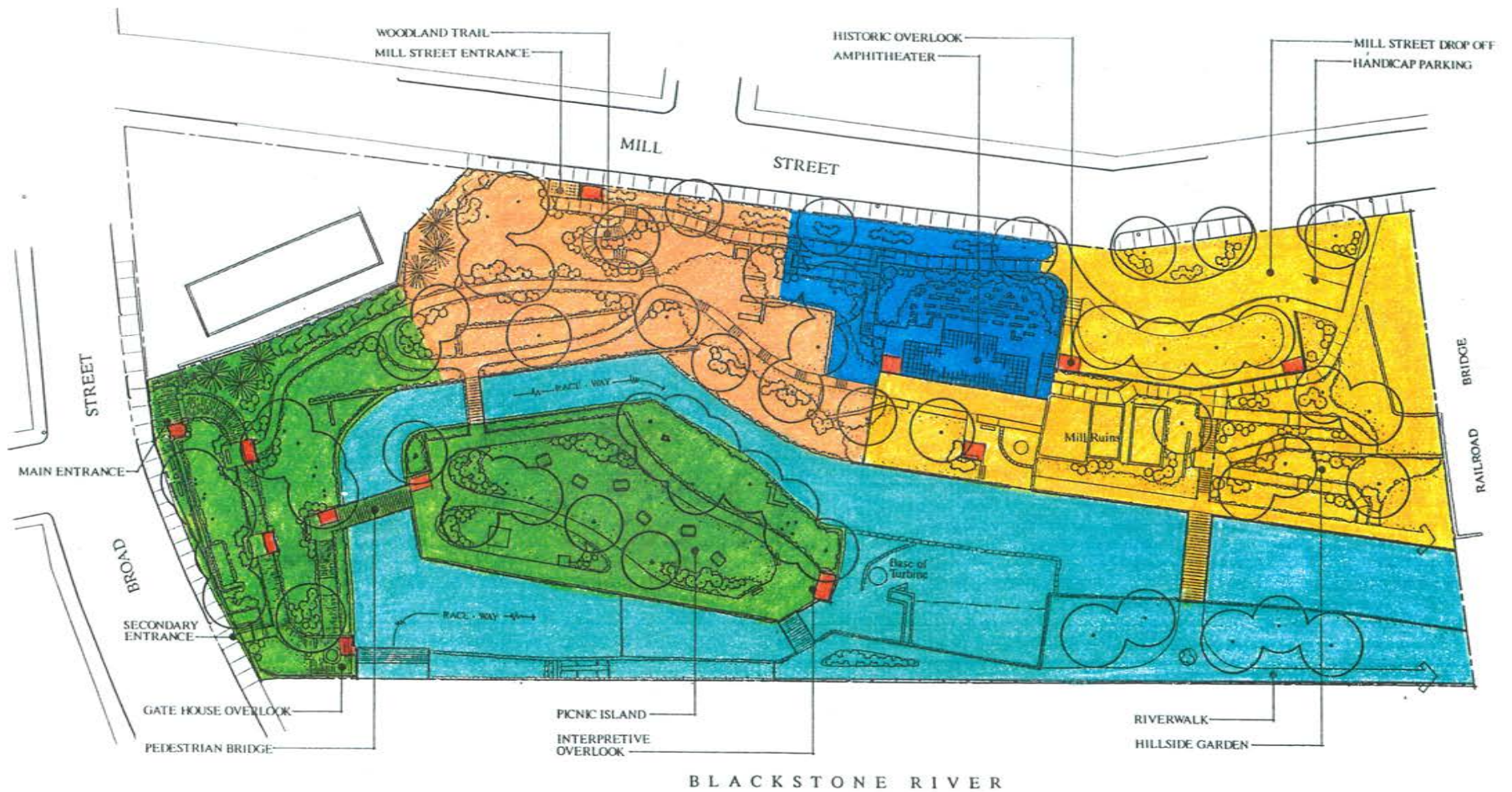
4. Arrange the phasing so that initial work will establish a high level of quality design and park visibility, and thus encouraging further enthusiasm and public support for the remaining phases.

5. Arrange the phasing so that initial construction is not contingent on acquiring formal wetland permits from RI DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT or the US ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS. Obtaining permits to clean debris from the raceways, for example, may take over a year.

PHASE

TOTAL AMOUNT

1 BROAD STREET ENTRANCE and ISLAND	\$300,000 - \$400,000
2 INTERPRETIVE SIGNS	100,000 - 150,000
3 RIVERWALK and SLUICeway CLEAN-UP	250,000 - 400,000
4 MILL STREET ENTRANCE and DROP-OFF	250,000 - 300,000
5 AMPHITHEATER	250,000 - 400,000
6 WOODLAND TRAIL and ENTRANCE	250,000 - 300,000



PHASE ONE



PHASE FOUR



PHASE TWO



PHASE FIVE



PHASE THREE



PHASE SIX

□ THE measure of Valley Falls Heritage Park's success can not be determined simply by examining what happens within the limits of its property line. The Park's success, rather, should be measured by observing how activities occurring within the site impact neighboring properties and communities as well.

INSIDE THE PARK

The park's greatest success will come when the multi-phased, Two Million Dollar project is completed. As funding becomes available for each phase, each distinct portion added must be carefully designed to be a safe, clean, handicap accessible "piece" of the park, offering both valuable recreational and educational experiences to visitors. The completion of the park's many phases, and the subsequent measurement of their combined success, will be governed only by the availability of local, state, and federal funding. With the initial phase of park improvements budgeted at roughly \$300,000, the true creativity in park planning will be how to secure additional funding for Master Plan completion.

The next step, then, for further development "inside the park", is to garner the monies essential for creating a public park that reclaims a piece of the Blackstone River's past history. One advantage that Valley Falls Heritage Park can claim in its funding strategies is that of combining three strong interests - recreation, education, and historic preservation - into one facility. All three of these interests have the support of various funding organizations at state and federal levels - organizations which look even more favorably on public recreational facilities that are designed to be handicapped accessible.

This unique combination of interests, designed with sensitivity to the needs of the handicapped, will make Valley Falls Heritage Park a "model" park that will undoubtedly rank high in many funding applications.

OUTSIDE THE PARK

As the park Masterplan becomes reality, it will be vital to coordinate its growth with new opportunities that will be created outside its boundaries.

On Broad Street, the park should be expanded across the roadway, enabling it to become a major focal point and an entrance gate into the Town of Cumberland.

At the adjacent commercial property, at the corner of Broad and Mill Streets, the park's entrance should tie into some aspect of the building's function. The possibility exists, for example, of reorienting the existing building to accommodate features that would benefit the park, such as public restrooms, while also providing a marketing opportunity for commercial businesses that could cater to park users, such as ice cream parlors and coffee shops.

At Mill Street, the park should extend to both sides of the street, creating a new streetscape to enhance the historic character of the existing residences.

At the P&W Railroad Line, the park should take steps to strengthen its connection to the existing railroad station building, thus providing another attraction to the many tourists presently exploring the Blackstone Valley via train.

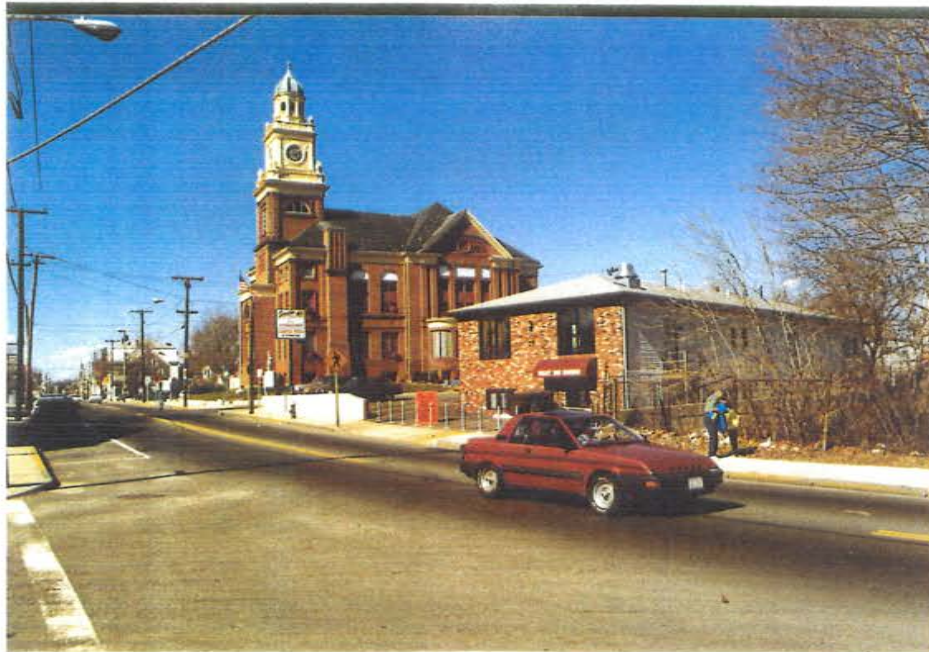
At the Town Hall and adjacent area, the park should stimulate interest in strengthening a safe pedestrian link to the nearest parking lots available to park visitors, as well as to other locations along Broad Street, such as the Currier Playground.

The future success of Valley Falls Heritage Park will be greatly hinged on the response of its neighbors to meet it at its borders. If the park's development sparks interest in areas such as those listed above, it will, in effect, spill out into the Cumberland community, and will bring together opportunities for creating a better recreational and business environment for everyone.



THE PLAN

THE NEXT STEP [31]



O - STRENGTHEN PEDESTRIAN CONNECTION FROM
PARK TO TOWN HALL

Q - BRING HISTORIC CHARACTER BACK
TO MILL STREET

P - REORIENT ADJACENT COMMERCIAL BUILDING TO
FACE THE PARK (See Page 33)

R - UPGRADE EXISTING PARKING FACILITIES
AT TOWN HALL



