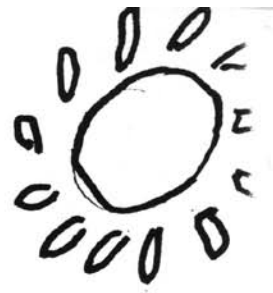
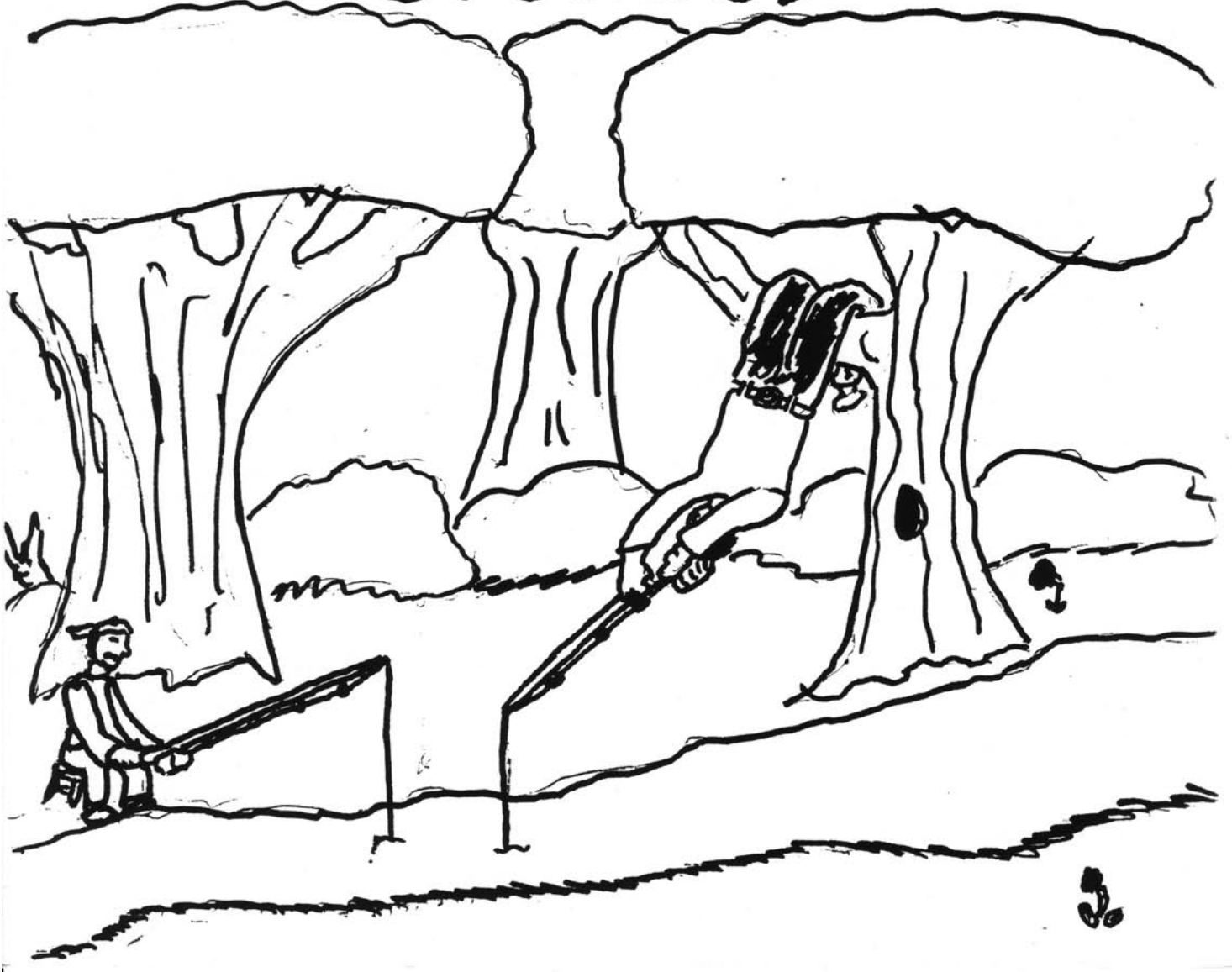


MILL RIVER



STORIES



MILL RIVER STORIES (May 1995)

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We would like to thank all our friends, neighbors, and family members who shared stories with us. We learned a lot about the Mill River and about the adventures that happened there. We met new people, heard some great stories, and learned more about our families. We wish we could try out those favorite fishing spots and swimming holes. We hope you had as much fun reading our stories as we did collecting them.

Mrs. Jepson's
5th grade
Breor Elem.
School
May, 1995

MILL RIVER
From
History of Hatfield - 1660 - 1910

Pg. 27

.....The land for the town of Hatfield was secured in three purchases. The first, made July 10 1660, comprised the land west of Connecticut between the Capawonk Brook, now Mill River, on south, "to the brook called Wunckcompas which comes out of the great pond." following the line of the brook and extending west into the woods for nine miles. The price paid was 300 fathoms of wampum and small gifts, equal in all to 75 in value. The deed was signed by the sachem Umpanchala and approved by his brother Etowong. They reserved for their use the chickens or planting field"--now Indian field--and liberty to hunt and fish, to set wigwams on the common and to cut trees for use.

Pg 35

.....It is not likely that Mill river, the Capawonk brook of Indian times, has changed its winding course to any appreciable extent since the first coming of the white settlers. Some of the swamps have been drained by the residents of the town and some ponds created by artificial means.

Pg 363

.....After the Civil War the Fitch brothers and Porter (John T. and C.K. Fitch and Henry S. Porter) bought the small saw mills previously operated by Henry Wilkie, on Broad Brook, and Harvey Moore, on Mill River and did a business of considerable magnitude at both mills for several years. The Wilkie mill was bought in 1890 by Alvin L. Strong and is still operated by him. Another saw mill was operated by Dickenson brothers at West Brook till about 1890, when it was bought by Francis G. Bardwell, whose heirs have continued the business till the present time. Seth W. Kingsley also makes use of water and power on Mill River at the Hill bridge in connection with his wagon shop and to run a cider mill.

Mill River.

Henry Betsolds story as told to the class.

A number of years ago, there were several favorite spots on the Mill River in Hatfield for swimming.

One was a swimming "hole" off Chestnut Street along the Mullins pasture and the area was called the "Patch". It was a very popular spot and it was on the South Side of the Chestnut Street bridge.

The other was on the north side of the Chestnut Street bridge in the Vollinger pasture, on the West side of the river. Also in the wintertime when the river was well frozen, it was used for skating.

During World War II, some Westover Field servicemen spotted the "patch" flying by it and used the swimming hole.

Also a side note was that years ago there were three bridges in a row on Chestnut Street.

The main one was for the Mill River and there was a bridge on each side of the Mill River bridge. There was a large pond that was bridge-covered and eventually culverts were installed and the bridges removed.

-Henry Betsold-

BY MICHAEL PASZEK told to the class.

I have lived in Hatfield all my life.

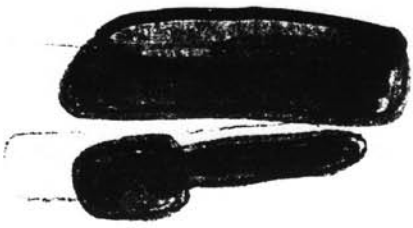
I was born at 25 Elm St, We lived close to the Mill River, with my friend Robert Red Mullany. We did alot of ice skating and playing hockey on the Mill River. We would skate from the ice House.

It was in back of the Mullany home at 24 Elm st. there were times we would skate down to the dam at the Grist mill and the machine shop, where the Advocate is published now. Then we would skate all the way up the river to the webster box shop which is next to the rail road tracks on bridge ST. and back home.

THE ICE HOUSE

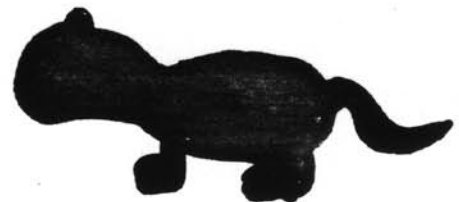
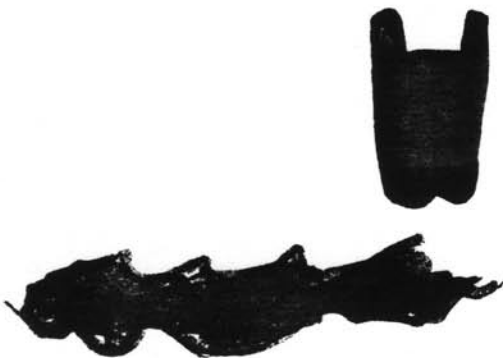
I mentioned the ice house on the MILL RIVER, it was back of the Mullany's home 24 ELM ST.

It was a family buisness. run by H.D. Smith family coal-grain-and ice company they lived on elm st. across from the american legion home. they started the ice company about 1910. their son Herbert Geeb Smith still lives in town. I remember as young boy helping, when they would be cutting the ice. Herbs brother Arther Smith had a gas powered saw made by pie lavette that he used to cut the ice into blocks. Before they had a power saw they cut the ice with a rig pulled by a hourse it was before my time. After the ice was cut into blocks it was floated to a conveyer run by a gas engine that lifted up the blocks of ice up to the ice house to be stored for the summer, it was well insulated with saw dust, to keep it from melting, in the summer it was sold to family's with ice boxes' delivered by horse and wagon. Today where the ice house was, all that is left is the cement foundation.



Ed Paniczko's Story,
as told to Jennifer Paniczko

I lived in Hatfield all my life. I've canoed on the river. When I was young, we caught beaver and muskrat near the river. That was one way we got Christmas money. We swam on the river, but you have to be careful because there are deep parts and sharp corners. There was an Icehouse area and you could go swimming and go ice skating behind the Icehouse. That's why there is a dam near the Advocate. The dam made an oxbow area and you could go ice fishing there. The place where the Mill River dumps into the Connecticut River is called the nook. We're not sure why we call it that.



Dolly Vollinger's story as
told to Brittney Wickles

My first memories of the Mill River go back to over 60 years ago when I was first married and moved to Chestnut St. There were two well known places that young and old gathered to go swimming on hot summer days. The "Big Patch" as it was known was on the south side of the street in John Mullin's pasture. After the boys and men worked in tobacco and onion fields all day in the sun they would walk or ride their bikes for a refreshing and relaxing swim.

On the north side of the street on one of the bends of the river was a smaller version of the patch near John Vollingers land.

I'm sure many folks feel it was worth all the effort to come out to the western part of town to be refreshed and clean. Like the saying goes...those were the good old days!!

-Dolly Vollinger

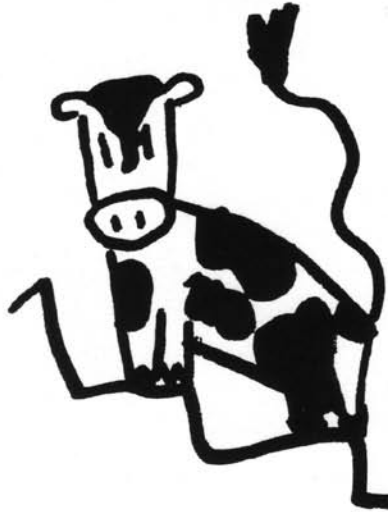
Henry Bokina's story, as told to Liana Barron.



The Mill River starts up there on the mountain, goes down by Linseed Road, past Route Five, comes down Bridge Street, goes into a place called Jerico. From Jerico, it comes down Prospect Street. We have an old Bridge, the Mill River comes under there. Then from there it comes to my house, down Valley Street and into the Connecticut River.



There used to be a shotgun shop there, built by Mr. Shattock. Then they started manufacturing spark plugs for automobiles. Then when they moved out, people started breeding rabbits. Then another fellow came in. He had a grain mill; he ground corn because we had water power there. After that, Mr. Riley went out of business. From there they sold it to a man who made it into an antique shop. Then they sold it to the Advocate.



There's a place by the Advocate where they used to cut ice. The boys and I used to help him cut ice, then we'd put them in storages, then we'd load them onto a team of horses and peddle the ice all over town. Then everybody got a refrigerator.



In 1936 we had a flood in March. At that time everybody had horses so they were trying to get them to swim. This one guy was stuck with some cows and there was a bull. He rescued two cows and one of them got on the porch, ran in the house and, up the stairs. He stayed there for two weeks and when they got him down he made a big mess.

There was also a flood in 1938 but it was not as deep as the flood of 1936.



The Mill River Story as told to
Joey Lavallee.

The Mill River changed when they
put RT.91 in. The river used to run
along West St. RT 5, where the bridge
goes over 91. The river had to be moved
100 feet to make room for the bridge.
That property was owned by the Zapka
family where they raised celery. The
river also had to be moved in North
Hatfield [near Hampshire Constuction
today] to make room for that bridge
over 91.

D.F.Riley owned the rights to the Mill
River. He also owned the grist mill
[which is where the Advocate is today]

He let M+M Tobacco CO. use the water
from the river to irrigate their
tobacco field. If the water got low
from doing this, Riley would use a power
tractor to run his grist mill.
By Michael Paninczko.

My Adventures on the Mill
River -By Ed Wickles

Growing up in Hatfield in the early 30's the Mill River was my source of recreation all four seasons of the year.

In the wintertime during Christmas vacation and on weekends we used it for ice skating and hockey games. Above the dam on Prospect Street in front of McCould's Machine Shop, the river was wide. We used to congregate, and clear the snow off the ice, so that we would be able to skate and have hockey games.

I used to enjoy helping to build a big bon fire on the ice, and skating at night with my friends. At times, the ice on the river was frozen to 18" thick, so that there was no fear of the bon fire melting the ice through. The heat from the bon fire felt great on those cold winter nights.

In the spring, we looked forward to the opening of the fishing season. I spent a good many Saturday afternoons trout fishing along the banks of the Mill River. Everybody had their own favorite spots to fish at. Mine was below the bridge, in front of the Legion Home. I always managed to catch a couple good sized trout.

In the summer, I used the river for swimming, boating, and fishing. When we were out of school on our summer vacation, my friends and I worked on the farms. After work, we would get together for a swim at a bend in the river which we called the "Patch." It was located in a cow pasture behind Johnny Mullins' house on Chestnut Street.

In the late summer and fall, I used to do alot of night fishing at different places on the river. We would build a small camp fire to use as light, and we would fish for bullheads and eels. My father had built me a boat, which I kept on the river above the dam on Prospect Street, and we would use the boat for fishing and rowing along the river.

My favorite place was the "Ice House Pond", which was directly in back of the Hatfield Club, off Elm Street. We would paddle through the lily pads in the shallow water and cast for pickerel. I can remember catching a pickerel that measured 24" long. It was displayed at Toczko's Package Store on School Street.

The Mill River has many fond memories for me over the years.

KEN Widelo's story
as told to Stacy Widelo

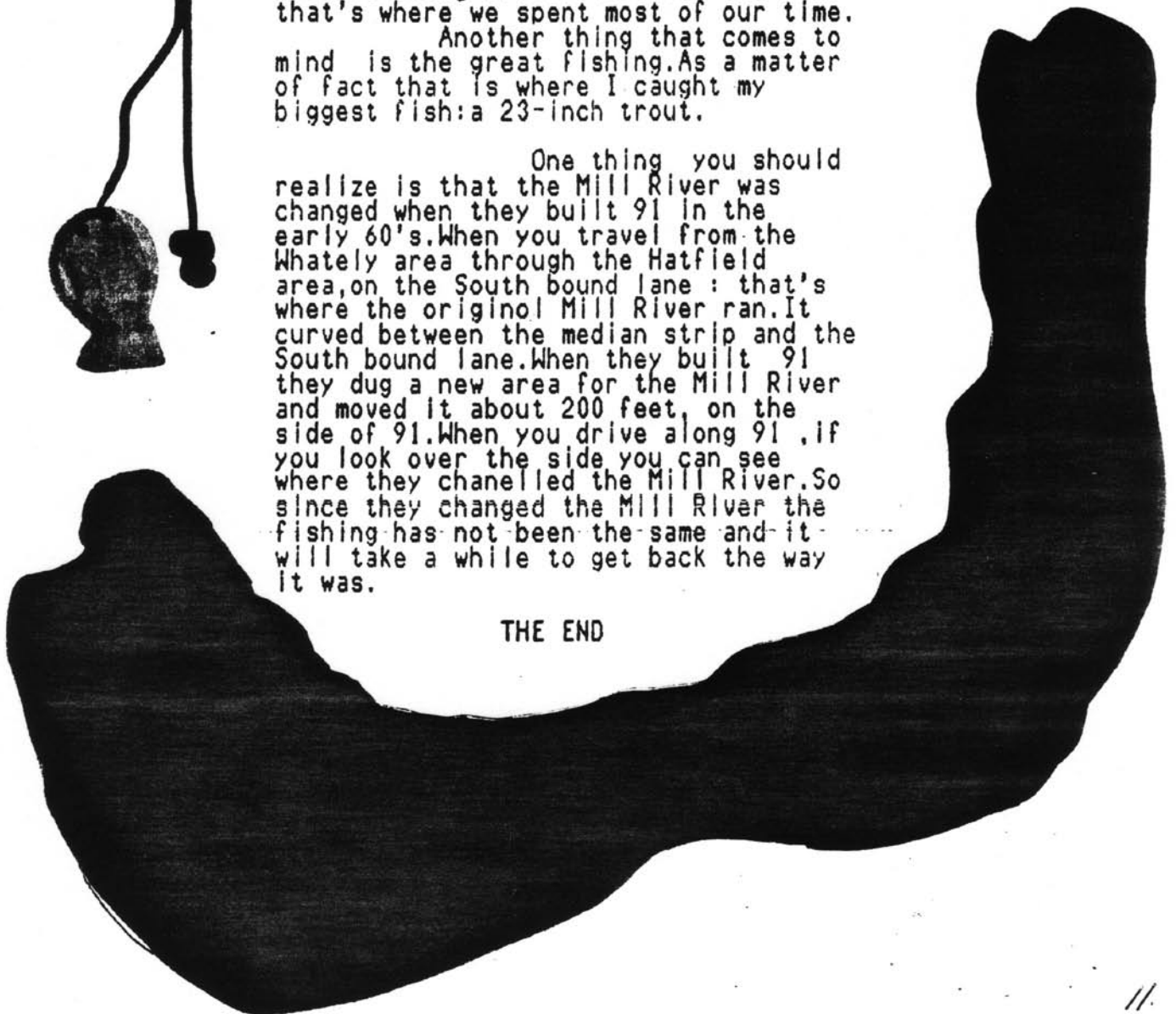
I lived in Hatfield all my life. I think of the Mill River as mostly swimming and fishing. When I was a child people didn't have swimming pools in their back yards. So they had to use the river for their recreational purposes. And because the river is in its old age there were a lot of deep holes.

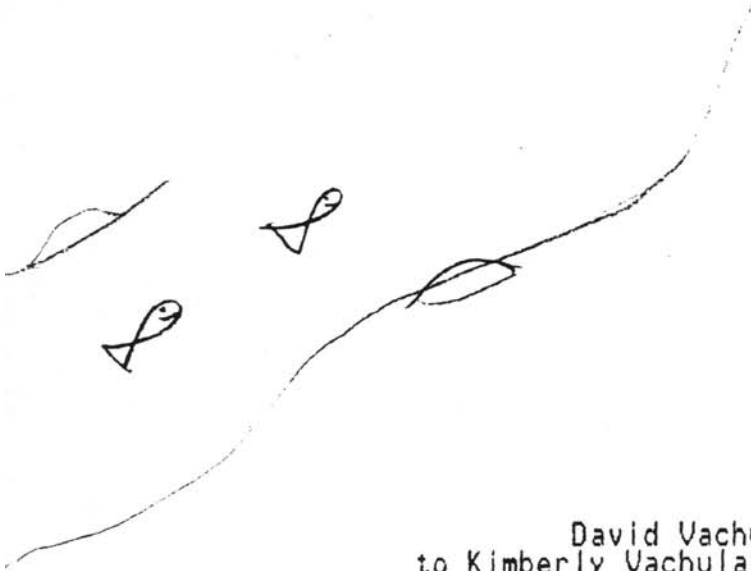
My swimming hole with a group of kids from Hatfield was called the Bender. Everytime we wanted to meet we would say "Meet you at the Bender," at a certain time. And that's where we did our swimming. It was an ordinary deep swimming hole, a nice curve in the river, very deep with lots of trees around it. We had ropes and tires we used to swing off of into the river. And that's where we spent most of our time.

Another thing that comes to mind is the great fishing. As a matter of fact that is where I caught my biggest fish: a 23-inch trout.

One thing you should realize is that the Mill River was changed when they built 91 in the early 60's. When you travel from the Whately area through the Hatfield area, on the South bound lane : that's where the original Mill River ran. It curved between the median strip and the South bound lane. When they built 91 they dug a new area for the Mill River and moved it about 200 feet, on the side of 91. When you drive along 91, if you look over the side you can see where they channelled the Mill River. So since they changed the Mill River the fishing has not been the same and it will take a while to get back the way it was.

THE END





David Vachula's story as told
to Kimberly Vachula

I grew up in Hatfield, on Chestnut Street and the Mill river was around the corner. The bridge that is there now was well-traveled. We went fishing on that bridge or dam. The water went splashing over the dam and made potholes. In the potholes there were baby snapping turtles and other fish, that we kept as pets in our aquariums.



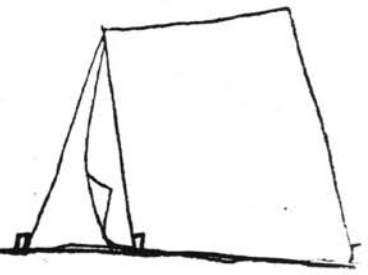
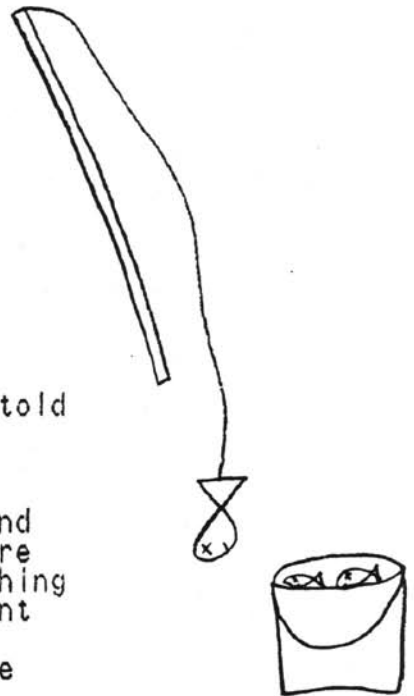
In the water down below the dam, it was about two feet deep. There was a place called the Shattuck Gun Factory, where they made guns back then. Any parts of the guns that were left over or bad they threw in the river. We went and kicked them up, but left them there. By now they maybe would have been worth something, but we took that for granted.

And when we went fishing, the owner of the mill did not mind if we threw our fishing lines out the window.

I remember the dam, when we walked across it. It was about two feet wide, and one of my friends rode across it on a tricycle. It was funny back then, but if you think about it now, it was probably very dangerous.

There also was a time, around the first of April, where everyone pitched a tent and spent the night by the river. About 4:00 in the morning, we went fishing.

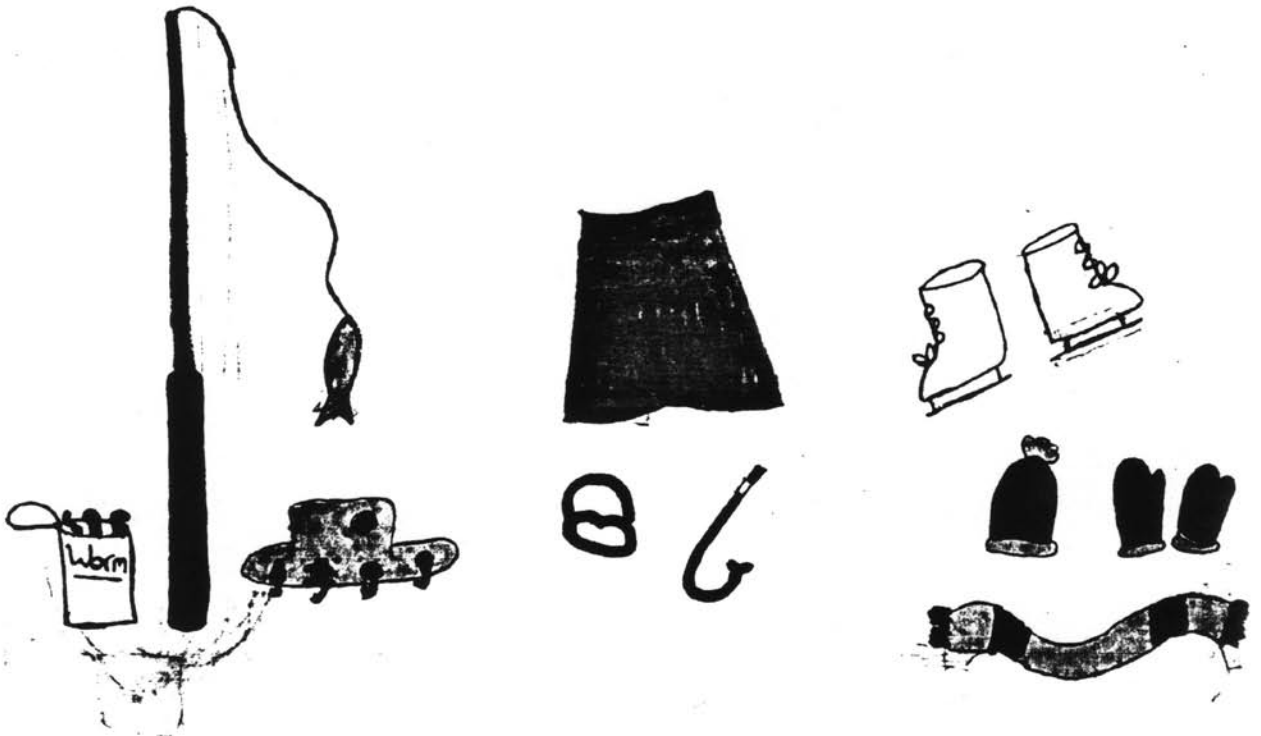
All those times were about thirty years ago, and I haven't been down by the Mill River that much since.



Brian Ahearn's Memories of the Mill
River As Told to Kristen Ahearn

I have many memories of the
Mill River. I'll tell you some of my
fondest. I remember spin-casting and
fly-fishing in some of my favorite
fishing holes.

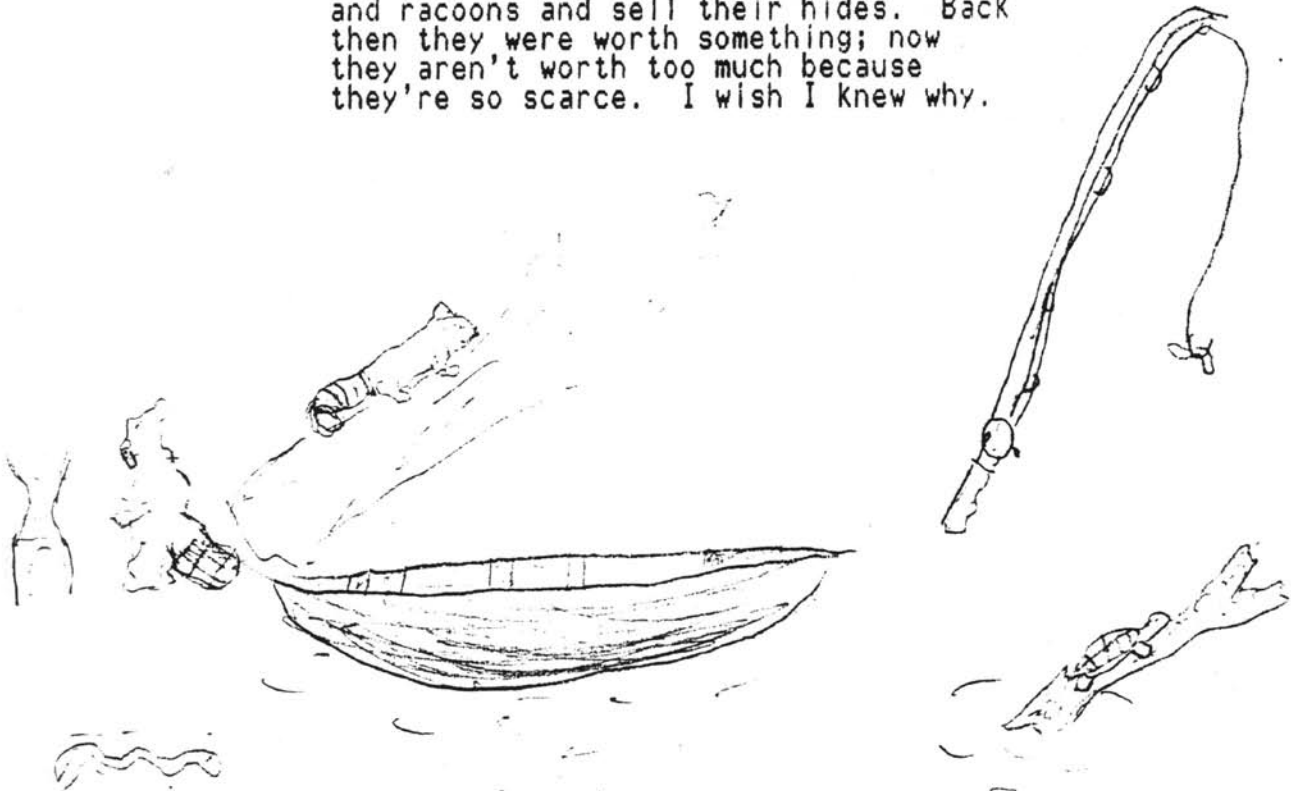
I had some very special
swimming holes that I swam in as a
child, teenager, and as an adult, too. In
the winter the Mill River opens up into
some very nice ponds for ice skating
and ice fishing.

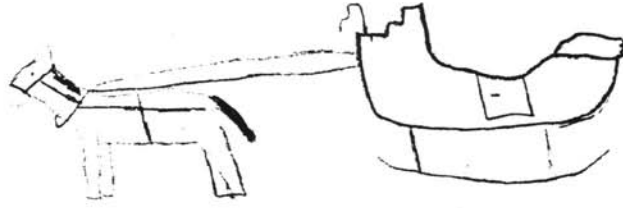


John Renkin's story, as told to
Nathan Davis

The scouts took a canoe trip down the Mill River in the late 70's or the early 80's, sometime around then. We traveled where 91 is now, chopping tree limbs in our way. We crossed Chestnut Street to get to where the Advocate is now. We canoed to the Connecticut River where we were picked up by cars that had been parked there. On the way to the Connecticut River, we fished and caught some bass. We saw some turtles, beavers, and some water snakes. Now you probably couldn't canoe the whole way because of all the fallen trees.

There used to be a lot of game there. My son used to trap muskrats and raccoons and sell their hides. Back then they were worth something; now they aren't worth too much because they're so scarce. I wish I knew why.

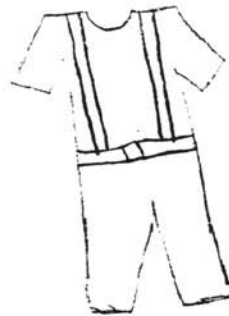
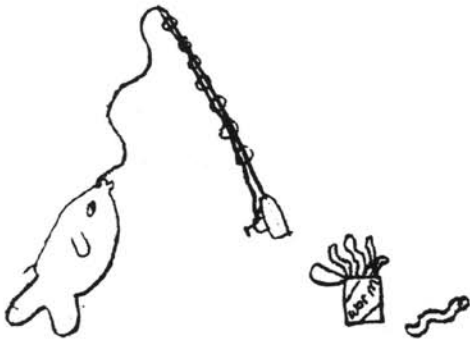
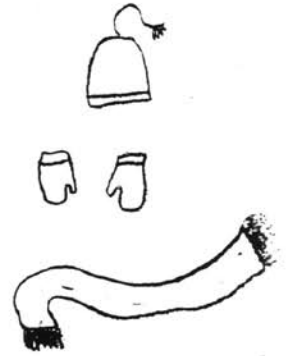




Ruth B. Drury's story as told to Rachel Skorupski.

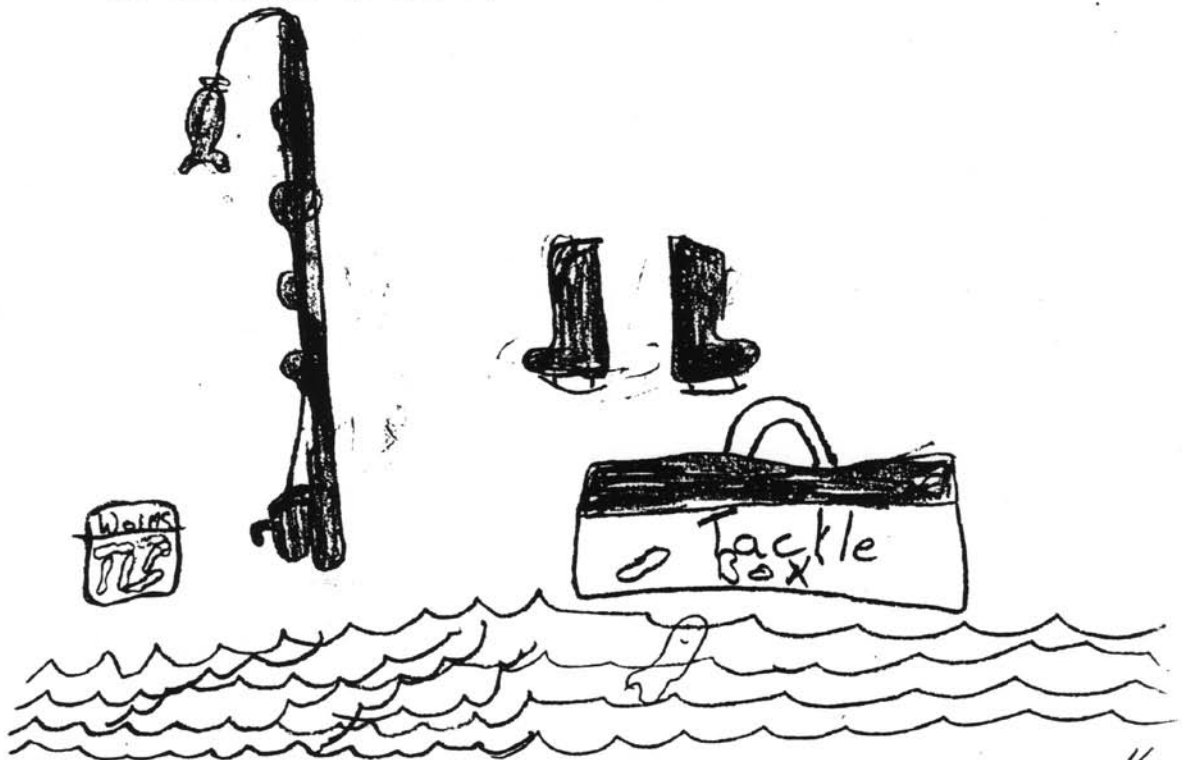
Back in July 15, 1982, we had a sudden summer storm with terrible wind, lightning and hail. The Daily Hampshire Gazette published a big story about the storm which included the following:

"Yesterday's weather potpourri also triggered lightning bolts that struck a herd of cows wading in the Mill River in Hatfield. According to Dolly Vollinger of Chestnut Street, a young boy who had been fishing hid under a bridge near the herd during the storm. When the lightning struck, the animals were all knocked down, he reported. Two of them did not get up again."



Michael Mendyk's Story
as told to Raymond Romero.

The Mill River flows through most of Hatfield. We used to fish here and skate here as kids. Years ago it powered some mills in Hatfield. There used to be an ice house on it. I can remember fishing there, catching a lot of trout that they used to stock for the fishing derby. I can remember one time we were fishing and an older guy was fishing with his three sons and one of his sons knocked down the tackle box off the bridge and all the stuff went to the bottom of the river. I never had any bad experiences with the river. I can remember it used to be kind of scary because there used to be some deep sections and we used to go boating on the river and a lot of kids used to be scared. The last time I went on the river was this past summer when I went on the mouth of the river.



Mark Wickles' story as told to
Brittney Wickles

I used the Mill River when I was a kid and I had three fond memories:

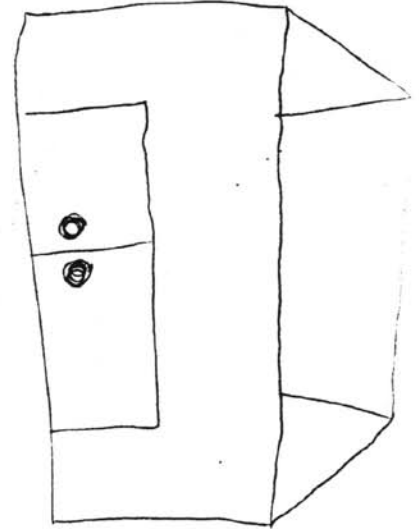
One of my memories was when I went fishing on the dam which was located below the Hatfield Montees. I remember coming to the river in the morning and the river was totally packed with young and old all ages waiting for the sun to come up and everyone would throw their lines out. In the weeks preceding the state of Massachusetts and game warden would stock the river with trout, and I remember being up on the bridge and seeing the trout swim around. Fortunately one year I was able to catch a twelve-inch trout. I received six dollars.

Another memory I have of the Mill River is in back of the Hatfield Barn and that section of the river was called the Ice House. A long time ago before refrigeration, ice was cut into chunks at that particular junction of the river and was placed in a house that was built there. That house is no longer there, but the name of that particular section of the river remains. It was called the Ice House.

My grandfather had built us a row boat by hand; he was a carpenter and I remember fishing with him and my brothers at the Ice House where there was excellent fishing for bass and pickerel with our family off in our rowboat.

A third memory I have is that there is a stretch of land between the river and the Hatfield Barn which was very sandy, it was almost like a white fine sand. In that area there used to be all kinds of painted turtles living there. I remember collecting them and placing them in a cooler which stood on four legs. The cooler was used by the Hatfield Barn to store sodas in glass bottles with ice. I remember finding an old cooler and at one time I had 25 to 30 painted turtles in the cooler in water.

These are my three fondest memories of the Mill River.



Michael Stoddard's story as told to
Patrick Stoddard.

I have one story to tell you. It happened several years ago in the town of Hatfield. It was one of the sadder days in town when there was a young family that lived on Elm Sreet right across from the legion. They had 4 or 5 children. One day in the spring time the river was up high. One of the little boys went out to play at the river because the river's always interesting. He decided that day it was really neat how the river was so high. He went out and played and he had a terrible accident.

They called out rescue crews to save the little boy and it was a great effort on the part of the fire department but then it tragically ended.

The point of the story is that you should never go near the river alone especially when it's up high. You should always have an adult with you.

From The Hatfield Book

1936 flood

The flood in 1936 was one of the greatest floods ever in Connecticut valley's history. It was caused by excessive snow accumulation, heavy rainfalls, rising temperatures, and deep frost. On a Wednesday morning residents began to watch rising waters with some concern. However, at 3pm. the previous record was passed and the downpour continued. Live stock was moved to higher ground.

The water was not very deep but there was a swift current and floating ice. The water got up to 10 feet on School St.

One resident on Prospect St. recalls that they could get in a boat and "travel clear to Amherst.

After the flood some animals were still alive but were injured. Some roads were washed out at the depth of 10 feet. However by the middle of May, the town was returning to its natural beauty.

1938 HURRICANE

Hardly had the scars of the disastrous flood healed when Hatfield was once again dealt a staggering blow. This time was a hurricane on September 21, 1938. Trees were toppled, numerous barns filled with tobacco and onions were blown flat to the ground, ruining most of the contents. Water swept through the town and reached St. Joseph's Church on School St. and the First National Store on Main St. It was over one foot higher than the water level of the flood in 1927, and only four feet lower than the record of 1936. Families on Main, Valley, Maple and School Streets were forced to leave their homes and seek shelter in Hill School on Elm St. The entire Main St. section, from Bradsreet to the south meadows, was deeply flooded. The dike at Center School, which was ruined in the 1936 flood and had been rebuilt, was again washed out.