Scope

The results of the preliminary analysis raised the question of whether the timber dam was associated with the Albert Gallatin & Company sawmill, known to have been built along Georges Creek ca. 1795. Albert Gallatin, who served as President Jefferson’s Secretary of the Treasury, owned this property from 1795 to 1826 and established several early industries along Georges Creek. Documentary evidence indicated that the Gallatin sawmill was used to prepare lumber for the construction of the town of New Geneva and was also modified for use from 1799 to 1801 as a boring and grinding works for Gallatin’s musket factory.

The prospect of a Gallatin association led to the second phase of the project that began in summer 1994, involving a partnership with Archaeological Sources Consultants, Inc. in the full excavation of the timber dam and adjacent area along the left bank of Georges Creek. IHTIA monitored the excavation, recorded the site with large-format photography and measured drawings, conducted historical research, and wrote a report describing the findings.

Results

The excavation produced startling results: the team found the foundation members of the Gallatin sawmill and several artifacts beneath over 14 meters of silt deposits. The well-preserved timber foundation provided evidence of a 1795 or earlier construction date for the mill and for its conversion to water turbine power sometime in the 1830s or later. After IHTIA completed its fieldwork and photography, the Corps covered the site with plastic and reburied it. There it remains below ten meters of earth and nearly 10' of water, a partial record of nineteenth-century American milling technology.

Background

In September 1993 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Pittsburgh District, contracted with the Institute for the History of Technology and Industrial Archaeology (IHTIA) to monitor the excavation of a grist mill site on the right bank of Georges Creek near New Geneva, Pennsylvania. Construction activity associated with the Grey’s Landing Lock and Dam uncovered the site. Research and field documentation showed that it was the ca. 1838 Eberhart Grist Mill. The Corps’ work necessitated the removal of the remnants of the mill, but ruins of a timber dam spanning Georges Creek remained. During the course of the excavation, IHTIA personnel took a sample from one of the dam’s timbers and submitted it for dendrochronological analysis to the University of Pittsburgh cultural resources lab. The results showed that the tree from which the timber sample was obtained was cut down in 1807, some thirty years before the construction of the Eberhart Mill.

Principal Investigator: Michael E. Workman
Top: Exposed timber foundation of ca. 1795 Gallatin Sawmill with Georges Creek in the background. Bottom: Water turbine wheel pit of Gallatin Sawmill with IHTIA student Donald Duppee in the background. (Michael E. Workman, 1994)