



# THE CHATHAM GRIST

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CHATHAM WINDMILL GROUP

VOLUME ONE  
FIRST EDITION

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## THE BIRTH OF AN IDEA

Chatham's windmill will once again grind corn—at least, on occasion! Visitors to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century wind-powered gristmill that is currently undergoing an historic renovation will be able to relive a bit of town history next summer. Docents will be available to explain the workings and importance of the mill to Chatham's past. On designated days, the mill will even display its restored ability to grind corn.

The impetus for the renovation came about when Chatham resident Frank Messina was on Nantucket last summer and observed the operating windmill there. He was struck with the realization that Chatham, too, had a windmill that could perhaps be brought back to a working state. The restored windmill could be a remarkable addition to Chatham's tercentennial celebration, planned for 2012.

Upon his return to Chatham, Messina contacted Dan Tobin, Director of Parks and Recreation for the town. Dan informed him that there had been an earlier renovation some 25 years ago, but sadly, the site had fallen into disrepair. Messina and a newly formed committee, the Chatham Windmill Group, set out to request Community Preservation funds that might be used to rehabilitate the mill. The Historical Commission and the Parks and recreation Commission approved their request, and townspeople voted in May 2009 to appropriate the funds. Andy Shrake, an expert in windmill restoration, began work in September 2010 and plans to complete the project by early summer of 2011.

Interested volunteers may become part of the team of docents which, beginning in mid-summer, will help convey to visitors a sense of the windmill's role in Chatham's past. The Chatham Windmill Group, in partnership with the Parks and Recreation Department, hopes to hire a miller who will train docents for the upcoming season. Anyone who might be interested in becoming a docent may obtain more information by contacting:

The Chatham Windmill Group

[chathamwindmill@gmail.com](mailto:chathamwindmill@gmail.com)

The Chatham Park and Recreation Department

549 Main Street Chatham, MA 02633 T 508-945-5175

An excerpt from the book *A Sense of Place by the Sea* by Nancy Barr  
With permission from the Chatham Historical Commission 12/1/10

### **The Grist Millers**

In 1789 Col. Benjamin Godfrey (1742-1818) purchased for 17 pounds, five shillings a "dwelling house now standing on a piece of land in Chatham..... Situated by the old Stage Harbor." The typical modest dwelling, built at an unknown earlier date, sat just to the south of Mill Hill, the original location of the grist mill that Godfrey built in 1797 and operated until his death in 1818. In 1800, it was one of seven mills in town, including one on the point at the light and in South Chatham, Chatham Port, and Old Harbor (which was moved to Orleans). However by the late 1800's the Godfrey mill on the knoll north of Stage Harbor was the only Chatham gristmill still in operation (there were other mills in existence at South Chatham and overlooking Oyster Pond, but they were not in use).

Benjamin Godfrey rose to the rank of Colonel during the Revolutionary War. In 1782 when a British privateer entered Stage Harbor with the intent of making off with local vessels, Godfrey led local residents in repulsing the attack with cannon fire. He married Sara Mayo in 1764. Although the Godfreys had no children of their own, they became the guardians of several nephews. Their grandnephew Christopher Taylor, inherited the property including the house and grist mill. Following the Civil War, Captain Oliver Eldridge lived there, retiring from the sea to operate the mill. Eldridge was also responsible for installing the marine railway, moved from Nantucket, at the Stage Harbor wharves. After Eldridge's death in 1884, the property was purchased by Zenas Nickerson, who operated a grain and grocery business just up the street (see 330 Stage Harbor Road). He was a miller for the next 19 years, followed by his son George who operated the mill for four years beginning in 1903. In 1907 the dwelling was sold, separately from the mill, to Charles Atwood, who ran a boat building shop on the Mill Pond. ( In 1954 the old mill itself was donated to the Town by Stuart Crocker and moved to Rink Hill in Chase Park. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.)



REMOVAL OF THE POST STOCK



REMOVAL OF THE WIND SHAFT



WORKING TO REMOVE THE POST STOCK



INTERIOR VIEW OF THE GEAR ON THE WIND SHAFT



This is the Godfrey Windmill located near Chase Park. It is one of the few that remains on Cape Cod. Thus far the Chatham Windmill Group has received grants from The Chatham Community Preservation Fund and the Daughters of The American Revolution.

For those who have an interest in the preservation and maintenance of Chatham history please consider a donation to:

The Chatham Windmill Group c/o  
The Chatham Park and Recreation Department  
549 Main Street  
Chatham, MA 02633  
Telephone 508-945-5175