

## DIRECTIONS

From Route 295: Take Exit 11 to Route 114 North (Diamond Hill Road). Follow Diamond Hill north for about 3 miles until you come to a light at Route 120 (Nate Whipple Highway). Turn right onto Rt. 120 and follow for about 1 mile. Turn left onto Sneeceh Pond Road.

## BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY NATIONAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR



## ARNOLD MILLS

### Walking Tour

## ALONG THE WAY

✓ The Blackstone Valley Explorer sails the Valley Falls Marsh during the spring. For information call the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council at 1-800-454-2882 or 401-724-2200.

✓ Blackstone Valley Visitor's Center—175 Main Street Pawtucket. Free maps and information, videos, exhibits and more. Restrooms. Free parking. Open seven days. 401-724-2200 or 800-454-2882. Directions: Take Rt. 120 West to Rt. 114 South. Follow 114 South about 6 miles to Rt. 15 East (Main Street). Center is about 1/4 mile on left.

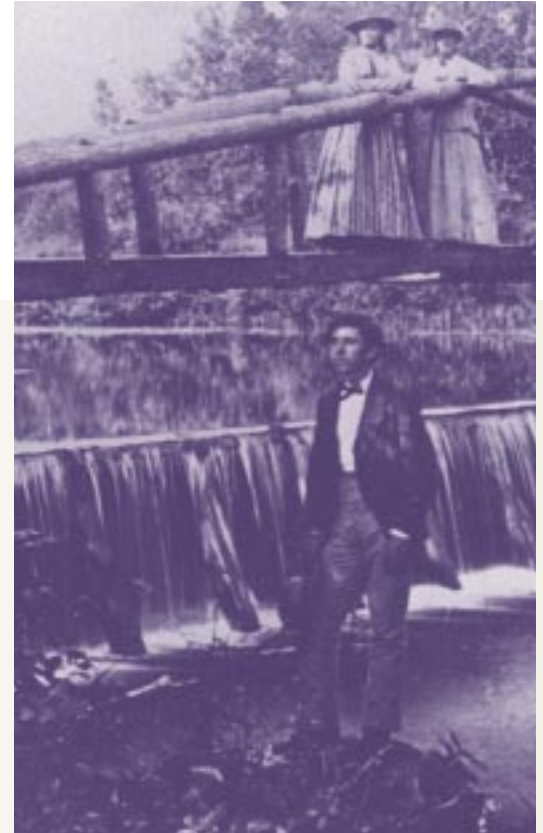
### Other sites in Cumberland:

- ✓ Cumberland features a chain of mill villages along the Blackstone: Lonsdale, Berkeley and Ashton.
- ✓ A popular recreation area in town is the old Monastery on Rt. 114. Cistercian Monks lived here from 1900 until 1951 when a fire damaged much of their complex. The town library is in one of the remaining buildings, and the grounds contain an attractive walking trail. Along the trail is the Nine Men's Misery Monument, where nine colonial soldiers were executed by Native American warriors during the King Philip's War.
- ✓ Blackstone River Theatre, 549 Broad Street (next to Blackstone Memorial Park). Located in a restored Masonic Temple the BRT offers a wide variety of live music performances. Scheduled to open Fall 1997. 401-729-1880.
- ✓ Another walking tour brochure is available for the village of Valley Falls, at the southern end of town. Directions: from Arnold Mills take Rt. 120 West to Rt. 114 South. Follow Rt. 114 South for about 5 miles until you reach Valley Falls Heritage Park on left.

**Congress established the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission in 1986, recognizing the national significance of the region between Providence, RI and Worcester, MA—the Birthplace of the American Industrial Revolution. The John H. Chafee Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor is an affiliated area of the National Park Service.**



**This brochure was developed under the direction of The Rhode Island Historical Society in partnership with the Heritage Corridor Commission.**



*Explore a small village  
with a long history*

[www.nps.gov/blac/home.htm](http://www.nps.gov/blac/home.htm)

John H. Chafee

**BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY**

National Heritage Corridor



## ARNOLD MILLS



From the highway, you might catch a glimpse of Arnold Mills—a cluster of historic buildings, a church, a bridge. Arnold Mills today is a small vil-

lage in the Town of Cumberland, but it tells the larger story of early industry in America. A closer look will help you see how industrialization and other forces shaped Arnold Mills. This guide will help you explore the Arnold Mills of today—and envision the village as it was in the past.

Arnold Mills began in the 1700s, when small, water-powered mills located here provided essential services—such as sawing wood, grinding grain, and working metal—for the farmers scattered throughout the area. The village became an attractive community center, with

Though located far inland, Arnold Mills was a thriving boat-building center in the mid-1800s, turning out more than 400 boats a year.



a school, meeting houses, and businesses that served local families. During its early days, the small-scale production of Arnold Mills was typical of American industry. But it also included a blast furnace, which was a major industrial operation for this period.

Arnold Mills weathered the industrial revolution of the early 1800s with a relatively smooth transition. Throughout America, people were making a fundamental shift from selling their work on the farm to selling their time in the factory. The

village remained small, since it lacked the waterpower to support a major factory. However, a new industrial operation—a machine shop—let the village

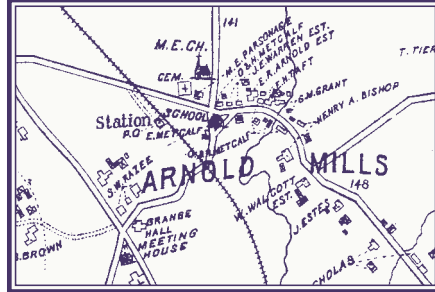
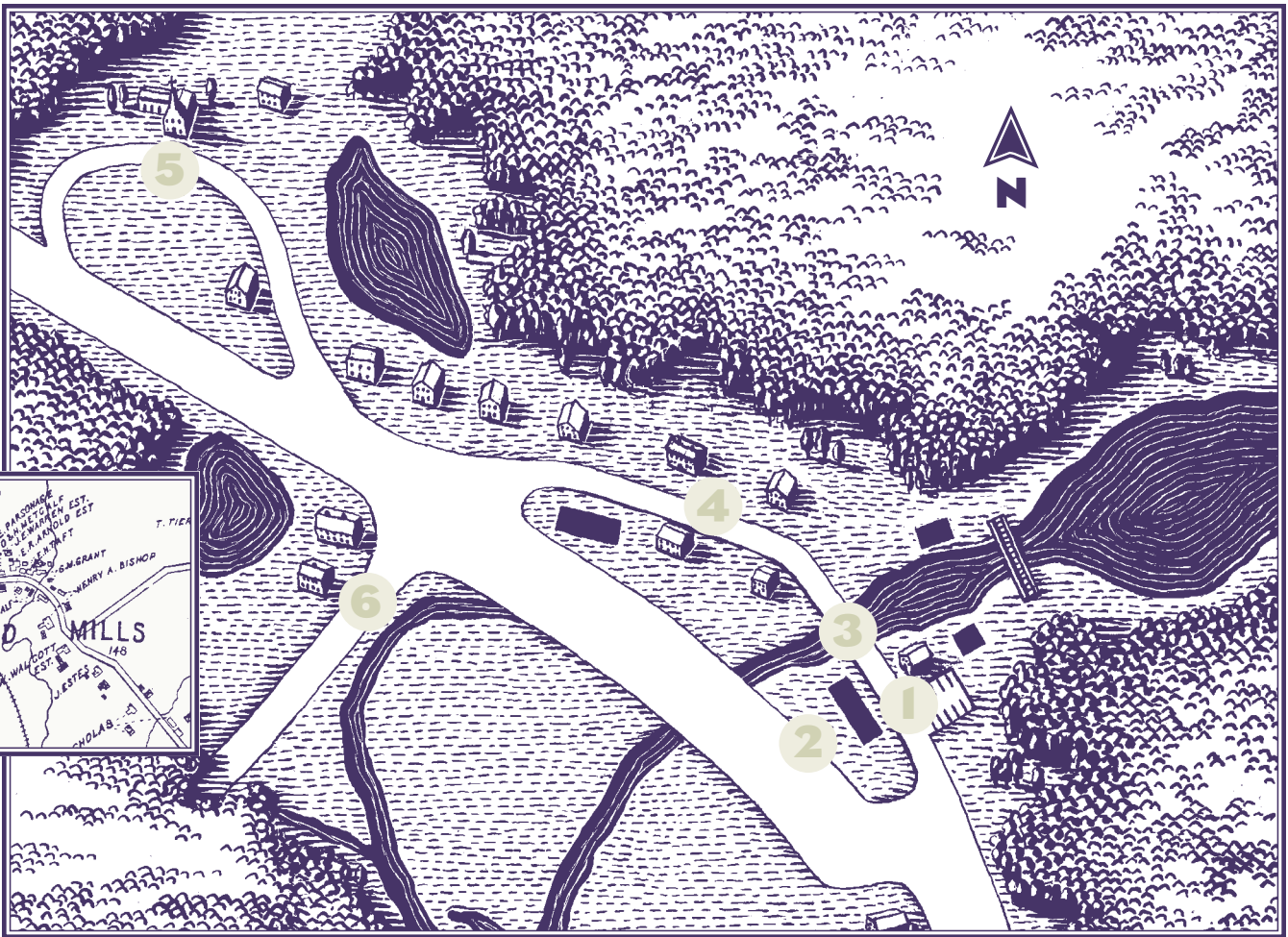


The Arnold Mills Schoolhouse, mid-1850s

benefit from the new industrial economy. While some residents left seeking greater opportunities in more thriving towns, many stayed. Today, some local residents are descended from area pioneers—the Metcalf, Arnold, Razee, Whipple, and Walcott families.

The village character of Arnold Mills is exemplified by the buildings that remain—the Methodist Church, the Grange Hall, the elegant houses along Sneece Pond Road—and by the tight-knit community of people who live and work here today. ☀️

Shown in the 1838 map, Arnold Mills was a gathering of people and activity in a landscape of dispersed homestead farms. The larger map shows how the Nate Whipple Highway was superimposed onto the colonial road system. The highway significantly altered the village by effectively cutting it in half.



Braiding straw for women's hats was one of the cottage industries prevalent in the area during the 19th century. Paid by the yard, local women and girls braided straw around hat molds provided by the hat company. Local residents have kept some of the hats and hat molds as relics from this earlier era.

This carriage repository once stood near the center of Arnold Mills, serving as a showroom for carriages for sale, much like a modern auto showroom. It was destroyed in 1963 to make room for the Nate Whipple Highway.



Nova-Scotia born blacksmith Neil D. MacKenzie ran the Arnold Mills blacksmith shop at the turn of the century. According to one local resident who remembers MacKenzie, his expertise was such that "If he couldn't make it, you didn't need it."



The Arnold Mills Parade was first held on July 4th, 1927, and continues today. This community celebration is an annual event that attracts thousands of visitors to Arnold Mills.

## 1 AMOS ARNOLD'S MILL

Your tour begins where Arnold Mills began. From the 1740s, the farmers of the village relied on the sawmill and gristmill located near this site. The gristmill, erected in 1745 by Amos Arnold, gives the village its name. It provided key services to local farmers, who raised corn, rye, and other crops. Largely self-sufficient, these hardy farmers provided for their families and sold surplus timber and produce at local markets. They brought their grain here to be ground into flour between massive millstones, their timber to be cut into usable lumber.

Today, only a grain storage shed, now restored, remains from the old Arnold Mills. Behind the storage shed, you can see the stone foundation of the gristmill (c. 1745-1962). The sawmill (c. 1734-1862) was located on the west end of the dam across the river. The millrace—the fast moving stream that powered the mill—now runs under the parking lot to the site of the machine shop.

## 2 METCALF MACHINE SHOP RUINS

Across the street from the remains of Arnold's gristmill you can see where Joseph and Ebenezer Metcalf founded a small machine shop in 1825. Taking advantage of water power, the factory produced textile machines used at factories in other towns—Arnold Mills' participation in the Industrial Revolution. The machine shop housed a number of businesses after 1870, including a gristmill, a blacksmith shop, and a wagon repair shop. It was destroyed by fire in 1987, but you can still see some remnants of the water-power system—including the turbine, wheel pit, and tailrace.

## 3 ABBOTT RUN BRIDGE

You cross the Abbott Run on a steel bridge with Victorian details that replaced a 19th-century wooden structure shown on the cover of this guide. The Abbott Run powered many mills and factories in the region, including an iron furnace called Furnace Carolina (c. 1735), in honor of the wife of England's King George II. Plentiful iron ore was the original attraction of the region in the Colonial era, drawing families such as the Metcalfs, whose descendants would later build the machine shop. Local lore has it that cannon were cast here for use during the French and Indian Wars.

## 4 SNEECH POND ROAD

Sneech Pond Road was Arnold Mills' Main Street, where the heart of the village's residential area lives on in an intact section of houses built by prominent area settlers. The Colonial-era Amos Arnold house (c. 1750) survives in fine shape, as do a handful of 19th century houses. Houses here are situated at varied distances from the gently curving road—rather than an organized pattern like today's housing developments.

Faster, more direct transportation arrived with the Nate Whipple Highway in 1963—named in honor of Nathan W. Whipple, Jr. a popular resident of Arnold Mills, its first fire chief, and one of the last operators of the grain mill. But this road also changed the character of the village significantly by separating the village into two parts.

## 5 METHODIST CHURCH

Settlers drawn to Arnold Mills came from many religious and ethnic backgrounds, seen in the many types of churches and cemeteries in the area. Dedicated on February 17, 1827, the elegant, white church before you is the second oldest Methodist church in Rhode Island and the oldest in northern Rhode Island. The congregation traces its origins back to meetings held in the 1790s.

The village's churches and the nearby Cumberland Grange #2 were the centers of social life in 19th-century Arnold Mills. Then, as today, these organizations supported a wide range of projects and events. Perhaps the most well-known is the Arnold Mills Parade (or Parade of Horribles), originally sponsored by the Methodist Church's Reverend Horatio H. Crawford in 1927. The Arnold Mills Parade Association took over the parade in 1964 and also sponsors a four-mile road race.



## 6 ARNOLD MILLS SCHOOLHOUSE

Literacy in New England was almost universal at the time of the American Revolution. But by 1900, more than half of the school-age children in nearby mill towns were illiterate or barely literate, especially in mill communities where child labor was widespread. While the New England tradition of public education was threatened in some milltowns, Arnold Mills was known for educating its children.

Current residents remember attending classes in this one-room schoolhouse (c. 1850s), heated by a pot-bellied stove. In spring, the sound of ringing anvils from the nearby blacksmith shop drifted through the open windows of the schoolhouse. That the church, schoolhouse, and blacksmith shop were all within shouting distance attests to the small scale of Arnold Mills. To preserve the school, local residents relocated it across the Nate Whipple Highway in 1964.

Just down the road from the schoolhouse is the rest of the original village, including the Friends Meeting House (c. 1810), and the Cumberland Grange No. 2 (c. 1895), the first grange organized in northern Rhode Island.

The Doric columns along the facade of the Dr. Addison Knight house (c. 1844-46) exemplify the Greek Revival style—and the idealism and belief in democratic ideals popular in the new nation.

