

## **The Godfrey Mill**

### **AT THE ATWOOD HOUSE**

**by spencer grey**

On nearly any day in the late fall of the 19th century it would have been common to see a wagon loaded with corn moving down Atwood Street ( now Stage Harbor Road) to the top of the high hill above Colonel Benjamin Godfrey's house overlooking the Mill Pond to deliver corn to the mill that had stood there since it was built in 1797. Some horses were frightened by the turning arms of the mill and would refuse to go near it. In that case the driver would have to take the bags of grain on his back to the door of the mill.

There he would be met by the miller or one of his workers, who would carry the bags up the narrow stairs to the top of the mill, where they were emptied into the hopper so that it could flow down on to the grind stones. After being ground by the stones, the resulting meal would flow down to the bottom floor where it was bagged.

Before all that happened, the miller would have gone to work early in the morning to attach the cotton sails to the arms of the mill. From the top of the mill a long pole extended at about a 45- degree angle to a wheel on the ground, where a horse could pull it around until the arms faced the prevailing wind.

Descended from some of the early settlers of Chatham, Benjamin Godfrey was born in 1742 and married Sarah Mayo in 1764. At the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, he was captain of the local military company, and as such he participated in some battles, resulting in his elevation to the rank of colonel.

One day in 1782, a British privateer sailed into Stage Harbor with the intention of capturing some of the local vessels that had sought shelter there. Under the leadership of Colonel Godfrey, the local inhabitants fired on them, causing them to flee.

While Colonel Godfrey and his wife had no children, they had the care of several nephews, and it was to one of them, Christopher Taylor, that he left the mill and the property. It remained in his possession until the close of the Civil War, when it was acquired by Oliver Eldredge, who then was the miller for 19 years, followed by his son, George, who operated it for another four years, until a gale demolished the end of the shaft and the arms in 1907. By this time, however, the need for such a mill was over, as better crops and modern methods made it cheaper to import meal rather than grinding it locally.

In 1908 the mill and its land was bought by Nelson Floyd of Winthrop, who built a summer house on the property. Later he sold it to Charles Hardy of the Chatham Associates, who removed the house and made repairs to the mill so that it could again grind corn, which it did until August 1929, when a severe storm blew off the top, wrecking the arms.

It remained in that condition until the property was acquired by Stuart Crocker, who added it to his adjacent land where his summer house stood. Now that it no longer was being used to grind corn, Mr. Crocker believed that it should be preserved as a historical site. He approached the Chatham Historical Society to see if they were interested in acquiring the property, but they suggested that it would be better to have it acquired by the town. Mr. Crocker subsequently offered to give it to the town if they would remove it from his property. The town accepted the offer and moved the mill to its present location on Rink Hill in Chase Park, where it is operated by the park department and open to the public.

