FLORENCE

RIVERSIDE DRIVE TO MEADOW STREET BRIDGE

Long the center of Mill River industry, Florence, originally known as Broughton's Meadow, was home to factories that produced silk thread, plastics, and brushes. You'll explore the unique juxtaposition of industrial activity and the abolitionist movement. Sojourner Truth and David Ruggles once lived and worked here as part of a utopian community. This tour ends at the farm of a noted abolitionist.



The Northampton Silk Co. building, former Littlefield, Parsons Co. (1857–1866). (Image: Historic Northampton)

FLORENCE MILL RIVER TOUR WALKING MAP



The Sojourner Truth Memorial statue at the corner of Pine and Park Streets (Image: Sojourner Truth Memorial Committee)

FLORENCE MILL RIVER TOUR

Distance: 1.25 miles
Duration: 1.5 hours

1681
First sawmill on the Mill River in Broughton's Meadow

1807
Josiah White builds linseed oil mill and adds saw and grist mill

1837
Samuel Whitmarsh founds Northampton Silk Co.

1840
David & Lydia Child begin their beet sugar experiment at the former oil mill

1842
Northampton Association of Education and Industry (NAEI) founded

1846
David Ruggles establishes a water cure in Florence

1846
NAEI declares bankruptcy and dissolves. George Benson assumes control of the silk factory, which is renamed Bensonville. Austin Ross purchases NAEI farm

1848
Bensonville Mfg. changes its name to Greenville Mfg.

1849
David Ruggles dies. Charles Munde buys the water cure establishment in 1850

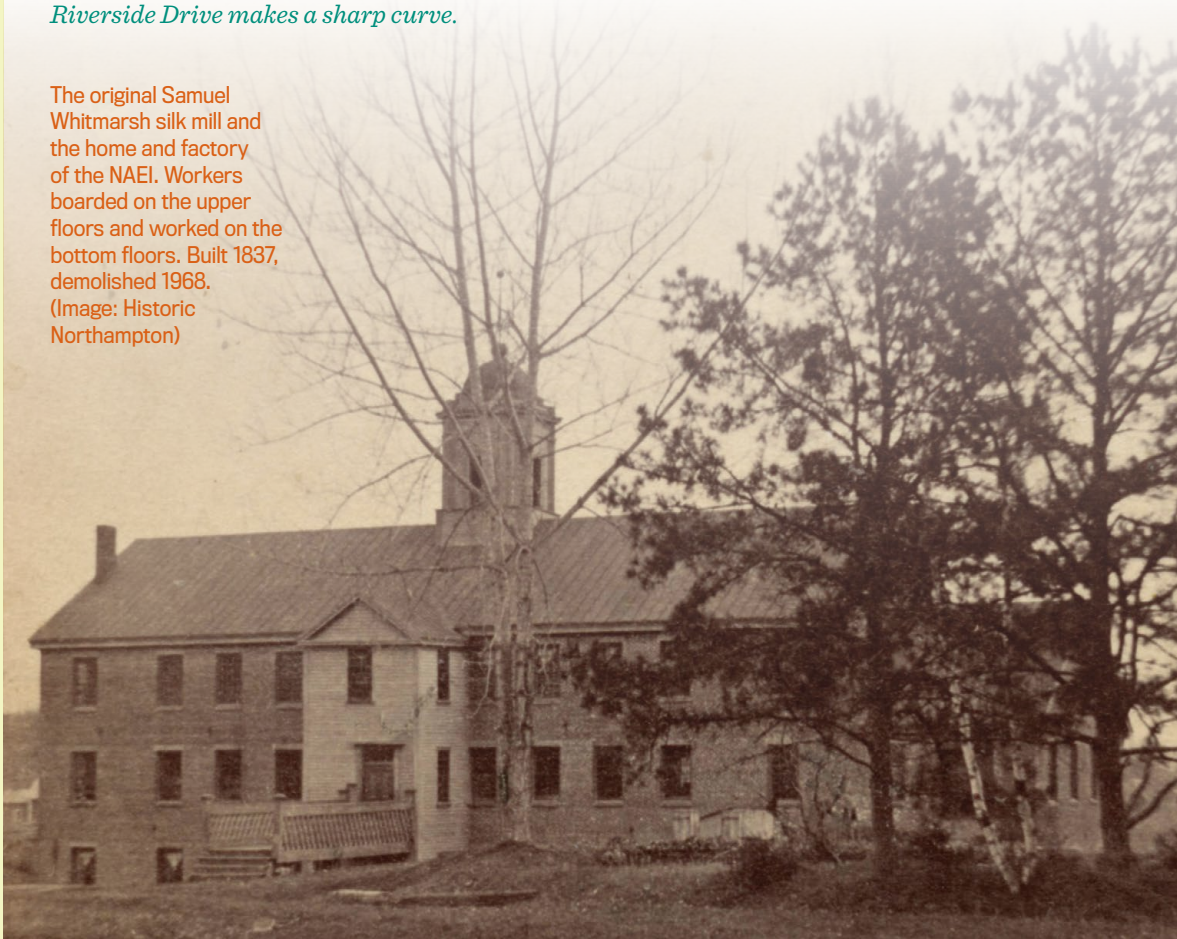
Begin your tour on the grassy area under the trees at the ChemiPlastica building on Nonotuck St. Since this is a linear walk, you may want to park a second car near the Meadow St. Bridge at Florence Fields.

THE SILK INDUSTRY (STOPS 1-4)

1 THE WHITMARSH / NAEI BUILDING

The village of Florence grew up around the site where the current ChemiPlastica factory is located. In 1837, **Samuel Whitmarsh** constructed a brick building for his **Northampton Silk Co.** and planted thousands of mulberry trees on several hundred acres in Florence to feed his silkworms. In 1839 the company went bankrupt, and a group of abolitionists from Connecticut, including **Samuel Hill**, purchased Whitmarsh's building and land. In 1842, Hill and partners founded the **Northampton Association of Education and Industry (NAEI)**, a utopian community and silk factory housed in a single building. Eager to run a textile business that didn't rely on slaves, **the Community**, as it came to be known, adopted principles in which "the rights of all are equal without distinction of sex, color or condition, sect or religion." Men and women, whether white or African American, had equal pay and voting rights. **Sojourner Truth**, an early member, went on to become a famous orator against slavery and for women's rights, and **David Ruggles** 7 joined the Community, as well. After the demise of the NAEI in 1846, the factories became known as the **Greenville Manufacturing Co.** headed by abolitionist and philanthropist **J.P. Williston**. It became part of the **Nonotuck Silk Co. (NSC)** in the late 19th century.

Look at the house just to the east of the ChemiPlastica building where Riverside Drive makes a sharp curve.



The original Samuel Whitmarsh silk mill and the home and factory of the NAEI. Workers boarded on the upper floors and worked on the bottom floors. Built 1837, demolished 1968. (Image: Historic Northampton)

1852
Broughton's Meadow's name is changed to Florence

1854
A.P. Critchlow develops the "Florence Compound"

1855
Samuel Hill and associates organize the Nonotuck Silk Co.

1857
A.P. Critchlow is renamed Littlefield, Parsons, & Co.

1866
Littlefield, Parsons, & Co. becomes Florence Manufacturing Co.

1873
Current stone dam built by the Nonotuck Silk Co.

1874
Mill River flood

1884
Florence Manufacturing Co. manufactures first thermoplastic toothbrush

1888
Crown Braid Co. established



1854 Map of Florence showing NAEI building as cotton mill, Northampton Silk Co., Dr. Munde's water cure and Sojourner Truth's house as S.J.Truth. (Image: David Ruggles Center)

2 THE BOARDING HOUSE

Here is the site of a former boarding house for **Greenville Mfg** workers, built ca. 1853.

Walk 50 yards to the small brick building at the east end of the ChemiPlastica building.

3 THE BRAID MILL

This small brick building was likely a silk dye house and a braid company for the NSC, which became the **Crown Braid Co.** in the late 19th century. Braiding was sewn to fabrics to prevent over-wear, for instance on hems that dragged in the street. *Walk back across the grassy area in front of ChemiPlastica to the edge of Nonotuck St. and turn left. Walk up Nonotuck St. to the central portion of the large factory now called Nonotuck Mill.*



ca. 1900 A view over one of the former ponds on Nonotuck Street toward the Whitmarsh/NAEI building. The only standing section is the small building at the far end called the braid mill. The ponds were paved over after 1930. (Image: Historic Northampton)

1921
Nonotuck Silk Co. becomes Corticelli Silk Co.



Advertisement for Corticelli Silk

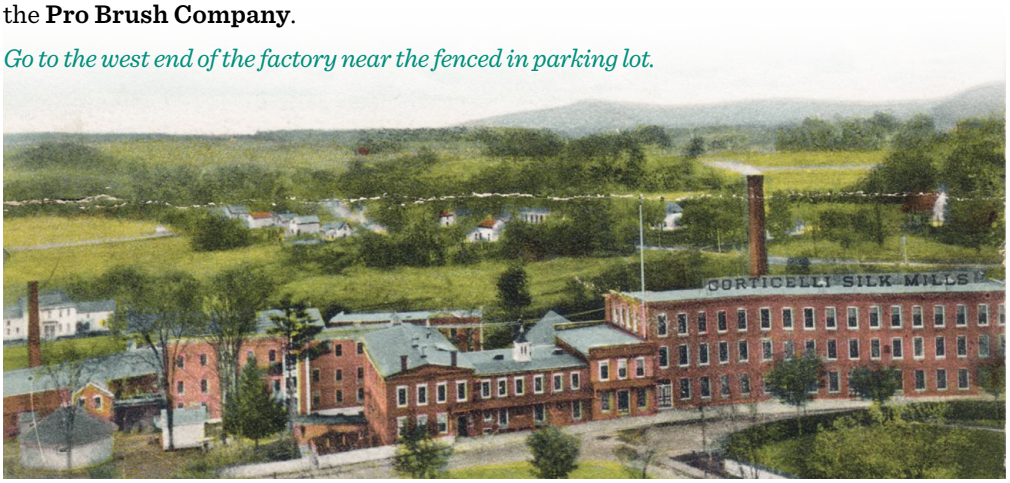
1924
Florence Manufacturing Co. changes name to Pro-Phy-Lac-Tic Brush Co., later called Pro Brush

1932
Corticelli Silk Co. ceases operation

4 NONOTUCK SILK MILL

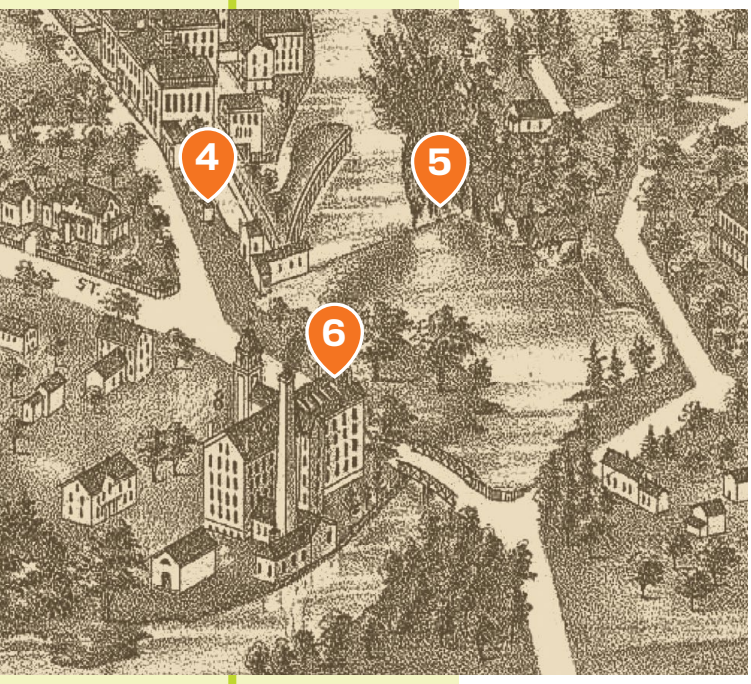
(Note: This building contained both the NSC and the Florence Mfg. Co.) Samuel Hill continued in the silk business and organized the **NSC** in 1855. Several buildings were added along the river and the company expanded into Haydenville, Leeds, and Hartford, CT. Local citizens decided to change the name of Broughton's Meadow to Florence and to call their product **Corticelli silk** in honor of the Italian silk industry. Corticelli became a household brand, and, at its height, the firm employed more than 800 people, producing 5-6,000 lbs. of silk per week. The company name was changed to the **Corticelli Silk Co.** in 1921. The Depression and the invention of rayon doomed the silk industry in Florence, and the company closed its doors in 1932, ceding its buildings to the **Pro Brush Company**.

Go to the west end of the factory near the fenced in parking lot.



ca. 1920 A postcard view of the Corticelli Silk Mills (Image: Florence History Museum)

THE PLASTICS INDUSTRY (STOPS 4-6)



1879 Birdseye view map Florence (Image: Florence History Museum)

4 A.P. CRITCHLOW



A daguerreotype case made from A.P. Critchlow's Florence Compound

A.P. Critchlow, well known for employing runaway slaves, established his first shop in the same factory as the NSC building. At the north end of this historic building, Critchlow partnered with Samuel Hill in 1854 to create thermoplastic photo cases made from wood fibers, resin and shellac, for daguerreotypes (predecessors of photographs). His **"Florence Compound"** was one of the two earliest predecessors to plastic. In 1857, the company changed its name to **Littlefield, Parsons and Co.** Parsons ran a retail store and Florence's first post office in this building. By 1860 the company was selling 10,000 daguerreotype cases a year and diversified into jewelry, revolver, cigar, and watch cases. In 1866 the company moved upriver to a new building 6 and changed its name to the **Florence Manufacturing Co. (FMC)**. The NSC remained in this building where it continued to use water power into the 20th century.

Go into the fenced parking lot to look at the dam.



ca. 1900 A view of the Florence Mfg. Co. from the dam at the Northampton Silk Company. Several extensions and a fourth floor were added in the 20th century. (Image: Florence History Museum)

5 THE MILLRACE AND DAM

At the head of the dam is a small building that marks the diversion of the Mill River down a ditch (the headrace) directly under the mill building through a tailrace. You can see 2 ponds on the 1879 map that were used to retain and control water flow to the downstream mill building. The ponds occupied the current grounds of ChemiPlastica. The little house was originally a guard house when Pro Brush had US Dept. of Defense contracts in World War II. At a site near **The Dam** on these exposed granite ledges, Florence's earliest enterprises were built using the power of the Mill River to run grist and saw mills in the late 17th century. In 1807, just upriver from the current dam, **Josiah White** built a dam and oil mill to express linseed oil from flax seed. Abolitionists **David and Lydia Maria Child**, who moved to Florence in 1840, started a sugar beet industry that would replace cane sugar produced by slave labor, but it failed in the 1840s. The Childs used the old oil mill to process their first beets.

Go to the end of Nonotuck St. and cross Pine St. to the big white factory building called Arts & Industry

6 THE FMC / PRO BRUSH CO.

In 1866 the **FMC** constructed a new factory (now the Arts and Industry Building) to continue the manufacture of Florence Compound. As the market for daguerreotypes faded, the company made brushes using Florence Compound for molds. In 1884, they began manufacturing toothbrushes, which became their largest product line for much of the next century. In 1924 the company name was changed to the **The Pro-Phy-Lac-Tic Brush Co.**, generally known as **"Pro Brush."** It closed its doors in 2007.

Go to the end of the Pine St. Bridge and look upstream across the parking lot toward the Elks Lodge.

1963-2007
Standard Oil of Ohio buys Pro Brush; Rexall Drug buys Pro Brush in 1980

1968
Whitmarsh/NAEI mill torn down, replaced by current plastic moldings factory (Perstorp/ ChemiPlastica)

2007
Pro Brush closes its doors



ca. 1925 The Florence Mfg. Co.building after it changed its name to the Pro-phy-lac-tic Brush Co. (Image: Florence History Museum)

7 DAVID RUGGLES' AND CHARLES MUNDE'S WATER CURE

David Ruggles was credited with assisting over 600 fugitive slaves to freedom, including **Frederick Douglass**. By 1842, Ruggles, almost blind and in poor health, moved to Florence and became a member of the NAEI. After the NAEI disbanded, he erected the Northampton Water Cure at the site where the Elk Lodge stands. After he died in 1849, **Dr. Charles Munde**, an emigrant from Germany, constructed an elaborate facility, which was destroyed by fire in 1865.

Walk back across the Pine Street Bridge and continue walking up Pine St. past the mini mall on the right. Turn left at the next street, Corticelli. Walk down Corticelli.

8 LOVERS LANE

As you walk down Corticelli Street, look at the row of houses to your left. On the steep bank below them is a little used trail by the bank of the Mill River that Victorians, either romantically or ironically, called "Lovers' Lane."

Continue down Corticelli to the end and turn left onto the Meadow St. Bridge. Walk down the multi-purpose path until you are opposite a barn and farmhouse.

9 HILL-ROSS / NAEI FARM

Samuel Whitmarsh grew his mulberry trees here in Broughton's Meadow at the start of the silk industry. This land then became the farm fields of the NAEI, and the 1825 farmhouse was home to two important figures in the abolitionist movement, **Samuel Hill** and **Austin Ross**. The farm was a stop on the Underground Railroad for fugitive slaves. The land has been farmed since the 17th century, and was in the Ross family for almost 100 years. The property is still farmed today under the management of **Grow Food Northampton**, a nonprofit organization promoting local food security, and the land along the banks of the Mill River is a conservation area belonging to the City of Northampton.

After the Williamsburg Reservoir Dam gave way in 1874, much of the flood's tragic remains came to rest on these fields.



1906 postcard view of the Ross Farm and barn built in the 1820s. It was home to abolitionists Samuel Hill and Austin Ross and harbored fugitive slaves on the Underground Railroad. (Image: Florence History Museum)

9

THE RIVER RUNS THROUGH US...

The Mill River Greenway Initiative and **Smith College** are creating a series of self-guided riverwalks along the Mill River in Northampton and Williamsburg, Massachusetts. Our goal is to celebrate the river, attract residents and visitors to its natural and historic heritage, and spur action to preserve and enhance the river's treasures.

In this brochure we introduce you to the amazing industrial and social history of the village of Florence in the City of Northampton. Florence was the industrial center of the Mill River watershed for 150 years from the mid-19th through the 20th century and a center for industrial innovation. It became an important station on the Underground Railroad and home to a community of utopians who hoped to change the face of America.

We welcome you to join the Mill River Greenway Initiative and add your voice and support in our efforts to open up the river for exploration and recreation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: The text and photos came from sources provided by **Elise Bernier-Feeley** at the Forbes Library, **Marie Panik** at Historic Northampton, **Steve Strimer** at the David Ruggles Center, and **Jason Clark** at the Florence Historical Museum. We are greatly indebted to **Dianne Jester-Wieland** and **Julia Franchi Scarselli** of Smith College for research and writing as well as to **Scott Laidlaw**, who helped develop the maps and text for the walking tour. The brochure was designed and executed by **Transit Authority Figures. Wendy Sinton** of the Sojourner Truth Memorial Committee and **John Sinton** of the Mill River Greenway Initiative are responsible for the content. Thanks to **Terry Minnick** for information on Pro Brush.

MILL RIVER GREENWAY INITIATIVE

millrivergreenway.org

SMITH COLLEGE

smith.edu