### Determination of Eligibility (DOE)

**Date received:** January 13, 2003  
**Date of group review:** February 12, 2003  
**DHR staff:** Garvin  
**Property name:** South Tamworth Industries Historic Area  
**Address:** off Route 25  
**NH**  
**Town/City:** Tamworth  
**County:** Carroll

**Reviewed for:**  
[X]R&C  
[X]PTI  
[ ]INR  
[ ]SR  
[ ]Survey

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**Integrity:** (Dam)  
[X]Location  
[X]Design  
[X]Setting  
[X]Materials

**Criteria:**  
[A. Event]  
[X]B. Person  
[X]C. Architecture  
[X]D. Archaeology  
[X]E. Exception

**Level:**  
[X]Local  
[ ]State  
[ ]National

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The consultant has evaluated the South Tamworth Industries Historic Area as a district and has concluded that the district "retains integrity of location, but has lost integrity of setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association for the period of significance, ca. 1890-1943." The consultant has evaluated the Ambursen-type dam (1929) individually and has noted (under NR Statement of Significance) that the dam is "in ruins and lacks integrity of design, materials, workmanship and association due to loss of nearly all the timber facing, the collapse of two concrete buttresses, and the idle state of the dam since 1943." Under "Statement of Integrity," however, the consultant states that the dam "retains integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship... The dam has lost some degree of physical integrity due to lack of maintenance... The dam also lacks integrity of setting, feeling, and association. The destruction of the South Tamworth Industry buildings by fire in 1943 erased the historic setting for the structure and rendered it unable to convey the sense of being part of a small manufacturing complex."

The reviewer concludes that the dam (alone) possesses sufficient significance and integrity to be eligible for the National and State Registers under Criteria B, C, and D. Under Criterion B, this example of an Ambursen-type dam was designed by MIT professor of hydraulic engineering W. A. Liddell and built by Ira W. Jones (born 1854) of Milton, N. H., a noted designer and builder of waterpower facilities in the early twentieth century. The dam was planned and financed by Albert Farwell Bevis (1870-1936), a graduate of MIT with an interest in the technology and social implications of American housing who wrote a three-volume study, *The Evolving House*, in 1933. Bevis used the South Tamworth operation to manufacture architectural millwork, experimental and prefabricated housing, and other wooden products, including toys. Under Criterion C, the consultant quotes the USBR as stating that over 200 buttress dams were built in the United States by the Ambursen Company, thus documenting the fact that the concrete buttress dam was a widely used structural type in a national context. We do not presently know whether comparable small Ambursen-type dams were built or survive in New Hampshire, the only other positively identified Ambursen dam in the state is the much larger Ayer's Island hydroelectric dam in Bristol (1923; raised from 50 to 80 feet c. 1932). Historic photographs submitted with the survey form show that the South Tamworth dam retains its original design (with the damage noted above). The timber upstream covering of the dam deteriorated from lack of maintenance over 25 years and was largely removed about 35 years ago, but was intended to be renewed periodically in any case. Lacking a context for Ambursen-type dams in New Hampshire, we may conclude that, in a national context, the South Tamworth dam is eligible for the NR and SR as a structure that embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type and a method of dam construction. Under Criterion D, the South Tamworth dam retains the ability, through further study, to contribute information on the water-power engineering and the technical operation of South Tamworth Industries, a water-powered forest products manufacturing complex. South Tamworth Industries embodied technological complexity and had strong ties to the social history of the Tamworth region.

[ ] ENTERED INTO DATABASE

**ACREAGE:** 12 acres  
**PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE:** 1929-1943  
**AREA OF SIGNIFICANCE:**  
**BOUNDARY:** Footprint of dam only  
**SURVEYOR:** Elaine Stiles, Preservation Company

**FOLLOW-UP:** HAER-level photographic recording is planned and will help to verify the dam's significance under Criterion D.

Final DOE approved by:  

E.H. Muzzy
New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources

AREA FORM

Name, Location, Ownership
1. Name of District or Area: South Tamworth Industries Historic Area
2. City or Town: Tamworth
3. County: Carroll

Function or Use
4. Current use(s): vacant
5. Historic use(s): manufacturing facility, dam, sawmill

Other Information
6. Period of Significance: ca. 1890-1943
7. General Condition: Poor
8. Setting: rural highway
9. Acreage: 12 acres
10. UTM reference Zone: 19,315193E, 4855108N
11. USGS quadrangle and scale: Tamworth, 1:24000

Form prepared by
12. Name: Elaine Stiles
13. Organization: Preservation Company
14. Date of survey: November 2002

South Tamworth Industries Dam, 1929
15. Photo #1
16. Date November 2002
17. Roll #1 Frame #1 Direction: NW
18. Negative stored at: NHDHR
20. Property Map:

See Pages 26 and 27 for current Property Map (and photo key) and Historic Site Plan (South Tamworth Industries)
21. METHODS and PROCEDURES

This project area form was prepared for the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department, Inland Fisheries Program as part of the environmental review process for an application to remove the Bearcamp River Dam II (NH Dam #233.02). This form describes the dam and the related South Tamworth Industries mill site. The form also details the history of South Tamworth Industries, which manufactured wood toys, interior finish work, and prefabricated housing units from 1924 to 1943. This study includes an assessment of the National Register eligibility of the site as an historic district and the individual eligibility of the three remaining architectural features on the site: the 1929 Ambursen dam and diversion canal, the 1929 concrete foundation of the company sawmill, and the ca. 1924 foreman's residence.

A site visit to the dam and surrounding area was made on October 31, 2002 for initial photographic documentation of the dam and associated area. Investigation of the potential historic district was limited to those areas along the Bearcamp River directly associated with South Tamworth Industries. Historical research for this study was undertaken using primary and secondary resources pertaining to the Town of Tamworth and the village of South Tamworth housed at the New Hampshire State Library in Concord and the Cook Memorial Library and Tamworth Historical Society in Tamworth. The architectural history of the site has been compiled using historic photographs.

22. GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT:

The South Tamworth Industries Historic Area is located in the small, southern White Mountain community of Tamworth, NH. The project area encompasses approximately 12 acres along the south bank of the Bearcamp River, which flows through the southern third of the town. The area is situated immediately west of the village of South Tamworth and is bounded by the Bearcamp River on the north, NH Route 25 and an unrelated tax parcel on the south, the 1929 South Tamworth Industries dam on the west, and the property tax parcel on the east. The site is largely vacant, retaining only the 1929 Ambursen dam, a diversion canal in the river, the concrete sawmill foundation, and the ca. 1924 foreman's residence. The area also includes a small, modern shed placed on the property by the present owners ca. 1990. All other related buildings were destroyed by a fire in 1943 and the foundation holes were filled soon after. The landscape surrounding the project area is lightly settled and predominantly wooded, with low rolling hills to the north and Johnson and Bald Mountains rising to the south. The project area is primarily flat and cleared of trees. Deciduous and coniferous trees grow along the river bank and on the eastern and western edges of the site. The road bed for Route 25 sits approximately six feet above grade along the southern boundary of the project area.

The development of the project area is historically associated with the village of South Tamworth, one of seven named settlements within the Town of Tamworth. The village is located south of the Bearcamp River at the intersection of NH Route 25 and Mountain Road. South Tamworth was well developed by 1860, boasting a store, blacksmith shop, hotel, church and parsonage, several sawmills, a rake manufactory, and approximately a dozen houses (Walling 1860). The village is largely intact today, though industrial activity has ceased and commercial activity is limited to seasonal, tourism-oriented shops.

The Bearcamp River is a fast moving body of water flowing west to east. The river begins in Sandwich near the foot of Guinea Hill and flows approximately 15 miles east through
Sandwich, Tamworth, and Ossipee before draining into Lake Ossipee. The Bearcamp River watershed provided early settlers and later residents with abundant water power (Merrill 1889:740). During the nineteenth century as many as thirteen saw, grist, shingle, and clapboard mills operated along the Bearcamp River and its tributaries (Walling 1860, Hurd 1892).

In Tamworth, the Bearcamp River parallels NH Route 25, a two-lane, paved state highway that begins at NH Route 16 in West Ossipee and runs east-west. This route was initially constructed as a post road. Route 25 turns south after passing through South Tamworth and heads toward the towns of Moultonborough and Meredith on Lake Winnipesaukee. Route 25 was regraded for truck traffic in the 1970s and the road bed in the project area was raised approximately six feet.

23. ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE - Describe important predominant architectural styles and evaluate in terms of other areas within the Town/City.

The South Tamworth Industries Historic Area is nearly vacant, containing only five manmade structures: the 1929 Ambursen dam, a diversion canal in the river, the concrete foundation of the 1929 company sawmill, the ca. 1924 foreman’s residence, and a small, ca. 1990 shed. At its peak, South Tamworth Industries had seven major buildings and numerous small and temporary buildings arranged around the site. The factory complex continuously evolved over its 20-year history, with various auxiliary buildings being added and removed from a core group constructed between 1924 and 1929. The present landscape is the result of a major fire in 1943, which destroyed the entire complex. The company removed the fire debris and filled in the foundations soon after. Descriptions of the site and non-extant buildings have been compiled using historic photographs and oral history accounts. Some buildings and architectural details were not discernable from available evidence.

*Mason’s Mill, Establishment of South Tamworth Industries - ca. 1890-1929*

The earliest building constructed on the South Tamworth Industries site was William Mason’s sawmill, built at the west end of the project area in 1890. When constructed, the sawmill was independently owned and operated by Will Mason. It was later purchased and incorporated into the South Tamworth Industries complex in 1924 (Harkness 1958:170). Historic photographs of Mason’s Mill show a large structure composed of a number of smaller buildings joined together. The central portion of the structure was a long, 1½-story rectangular block with a gable roof. This was attached at the east gable end to a similarly sized 2-story block with a shallow pitched gable roof. A third, smaller 1½-story structure with a gable roof was attached to the southeast corner of the 2-story block. A number of small structures with gable and shed roofs were located at various points around the building, and additional freestanding shelters for cut lumber were situated south of the mill building. Mason’s Mill was powered by a timber crib dam located immediately upstream of the present South Tamworth Industries dam. Mason originally constructed his mill to run on steam, but later converted it to waterpower (Harkness 1958:170; Bookholz n.d.).

Mason’s Mill operated until ca. 1924, when seasonal South Tamworth resident A. Farwell Bemis purchased the business. Bemis planned a mid-sized wood toy, furniture, and interior finish work company on the site called South Tamworth Industries. Between 1924 and 1929, he constructed a large workshop, a small office and store, and drying kilns immediately east of the Mason’s Mill building. Mason’s Mill continued to operate on the premises, cutting lumber for the new venture. Most of the buildings constructed on the South Tamworth Industries site were
utilitarian in design, but the focal buildings in the complex, such as the workshop, office, and foreman’s residence, were built in the Colonial Revival style.

The centerpiece of the South Tamworth Industries complex was the 2-story, 4x11 bay workshop building sited parallel to Route 25. The wood frame structure featured several characteristics of the Colonial Revival style. The workshop had a gambrel roof with two long shed dormers that dominated the north and south rooflines. The building was heavily fenestrated with paired 6/6 double hung sash, a popular division pattern in Colonial Revival buildings. The main entrances were located on the gable ends and had exterior sliding doors with plain surrounds. The exterior walls were sheathed in clapboards and the roof had asphalt shingles. The interior of the workshop was divided into two stories and was unfinished. The wood shop was located on the first floor and finishing (varnishing and painting) was done on the second floor (Larabee 2002).

The focal building on the South Tamworth Industries site was the company’s office and wholesale shop constructed ca. 1924. This building was located southeast of the workshop and was sited on Route 25 to be visible to passing cars. The small, 3x2 bay, single-story office had a hipped roof. The centered entrance was sheltered by an entry porch with a hipped roof and paired column supports. Like the workshop, the office had 6/6 double hung sash windows set in pairs on the front elevation. The windows were set singly on secondary elevations. The walls were clapboarded and the roof had asphalt shingles. A large brick fireplace chimney was centered on the ridge.

The ca. 1924 foreman’s residence was located east of the main factory complex, separated from the industrial portion of the site by a side lawn. The 1½-story, 5x3 bay, Colonial Revival style residence is still extant on a separate tax parcel. The house is set back from the road, with the façade oriented toward the street. The residence rests on a poured concrete foundation, and has a gambrel roof with three-bay shed dormers centered on the front and rear roof slopes. The main entrance is centered on the façade and has a pedimented entry porch. The porch is originally open with thin, paired column supports. The columns and side elevations of the porch had wide lattice trellis screening, and the foundation was skirted with smaller lattice. The porch is now enclosed with a solid balustrade and 1/1 double-hung windows. The porch deck and foundation has been replaced with a poured concrete slab. The exterior walls are clapboarded and are fit with original 6/6 double-hung windows. The roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles and a brick chimney is located on the upper pitch of the rear roof slope. The foreman’s residence has been altered in the last ten years with the addition of a deck on the south gable end. A door has been cut into that elevation to access the deck. A number of trees have grown along the north and west boundaries of the parcel, separating the building from the former South Tamworth Industries site. The foreman’s residence had a 1½-story barn with a gable roof located to the northeast. The structure was clad in wood shingles and had a pedestrian entrance located off center on the west gable end. The barn was demolished at an unknown date.

Aside from Mason’s Mill, the largest utilitarian building on the South Tamworth Industries site was the 2-story drying kiln constructed west of the workshop building ca. 1924. The kiln had a gable roof and walls clad in vertical board siding. Catwalks connected the kiln to the second floor of the workshop.

South Tamworth Industries operated within these buildings for the next five years. In 1929, the timber crib dam William Mason constructed ca. 1890 for his sawmill burst (Hidden and Ulitz 1976:23). South Tamworth Industries capitalized on the opportunity to build a new dam and a new sawmill for the complex. The company demolished Mason’s mill building and constructed a new wood frame sawmill on the same site. The new sawmill consisted of a single-story, 3x8-
bay main block with a gable roof and a single-story, 3x4-bay wing on the east gable end, offset to the south. Logs were fed into the mill through a small shelter with a gable roof on the west gable end. The new mill rested on a steel reinforced, poured concrete foundation and was sheathed in clapboards. The main block of the mill had regularly spaced windows, but the division pattern is not discernable in historic photographs.

The new dam constructed on the Bearcamp River was located directly below the old plank dam. Remnants of the plank dam are still visible approximately twenty feet upstream from the new dam. Taking advantage of his connections at his alma mater, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Bemis hired Assistant Professor of Hydraulic Engineering W.A. Liddell to draft the preliminary construction plans for the dam. Liddell’s plans for the dam specified an Ambursen type dam constructed from 15' high concrete buttresses with a timber face and an uncontrolled, 123' spillway. Liddell also stipulated a 25' sluiceway, a poured concrete foundation laid directly on the river rock ledge, and concrete end abutments. He recommended a 3' cut-off trench be dug along the line of the buttress toes to prevent water from seeping under the dam (NHDB Files 1929).

The Ambursen type dam Liddell proposed was patented in 1903 by Norwegian-born engineer Nils Ambjørnsen (a.k.a. Niles Ambursen or Nils Abursen). An Ambursen dam is characterized by an inclined upstream face composed of a thin, impervious layer laid on a series of concrete buttresses. The engineering advantage of the Ambursen design was the inclined upstream face, which allowed for less massive dam construction by equalizing the horizontal pressure the upstream pool applied to the dam. This design also prevented the dam from “skidding” or turning over under the large weights. Ambursen dams achieved greatest popularity in the United States during the 1920s, with over 200 being built around the country by Ambjørnsen’s company, the Ambursen Engineering Corporation of Boston and New York City. Most were used for hydroelectric generation (USBR 1998; Hay 1991:48-49, 52).

The Ambursen dam at South Tamworth Industries was engineered and built by I.W. Jones & Company of Milton, NH. As built, the South Tamworth Industries dam is 231' in length with a 125' spillway. The dam rises to a height of 16' above the river bed. Eleven concrete buttresses measuring 3' in width support an upstream face constructed of 9” x 9” or 10” x 10” timbers. The concrete buttresses are set 12' on center and measure 16' high, and 19' long. The dam has two poured concrete abutments. The north abutment rests against a natural rock ledge on the river bank and curves around the ledge to form a 15' long, 4' high wall. The south abutment of the dam extends as a high concrete training wall to direct water flow to a 14' wide canal. This canal served as the primary discharge area for the water held behind the dam. The canal drops into an old log pond. The south abutment also has a 5' wide controlled gate designed to direct water into a diversion canal that flows toward the sawmill. The gate is fitted with a metal trash rack. There is no evidence from historic photographs or written accounts regarding how South Tamworth Industries utilized the dammed water to generate power, though a dam inspection report from 1939 notes the presence of a 30” Twin Rodney Hunt turbine (NHDB Files, 1982; 1998).

The South Tamworth Industries dam is simple in design, lacking many of the technological innovations developed for the Ambursen type dam by the late 1920s. Many dams constructed at this time featured turbine generators inside the body of the dam to protect them from floods, lightening, fires, and ice. Ambursen also developed a sloped spillway face for his dams by this time to prevent erosion at the dam toe. The South Tamworth Industries dam is also unusual in
that it has a timber upstream face; Ambursen dams typically had a thin concrete upstream face (Hay 1991:48-49, 52).

_South Tamworth Industries Growth - 1929-1943_

Between 1929 and the destruction of the South Tamworth Industries complex by fire in 1943, a number of other small buildings were added to the site. These included several enclosed lumber shelters, which were generally 1½ stories in height with gable roofs and vertical board sheathing. The largest storage building constructed during this time was located southeast of the sawmill and had a shallow pitch gambrel roof, exterior sliding doors with transom lights on the gable ends, and small, 4-pane fixed sash on the side elevations.

The South Tamworth Industries site also served as a showcase for experimental housing designed by Farwell Bemis and the prefabricated housing the company began producing in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Bemis often used children’s playhouses as small models for his prefabricated housing and housing construction ideas. Several of his playhouses were displayed on the company grounds before Bemis’s death in 1936. In the late 1930s, the company erected a prefabricated seasonal camp east of the office building. The single-story building had a gable roof that also covered a full-length front porch. The entrance was centered on the façade and the building was lit with 6/6 double-hung sash trimmed with wood shutters. As displayed, the building did not have a chimney.

_South Tamworth Industries Destruction and Site Decline, 1943-present_

In 1943, a fire began in one of the drying kilns and leapt across the catwalk to the second story of the workshop building. The paint, mineral spirits, and other flammable liquids fueled the fire and it destroyed all the buildings on the site. After the fire, the company cleared the site of debris and filled in the foundations. Only the partially collapsed concrete foundation of the 1929 sawmill, the diversion canal on the Bearcamp River, the 1929 Ambursen dam, and the foreman’s residence remained on the site. The foreman’s residence passed into private ownership during the mid-twentieth century. The South Tamworth Industries site remained in the Bemis Family until the early 1970s, when they sold the site, dam, and water rights to a small power company. The company never made use of the site, and sold it ca. 1987 to the H.F. Saunders Brothers lumber company based in Westbrook, Maine (NHDB Files). Saunders Brothers currently uses the site for timber storage and as a base of operations for logging the timber lands they own in the area. The company constructed a small, single-story, wood frame shed with a gable roof on the property ca. 1990.

The South Tamworth Industries dam was not utilized or maintained after 1943 and was in ruins by the mid-1970s. Most of the concrete buttresses are partially broken, and the northernmost buttress has completely collapsed. The river now pours through the north end of the dam. The original discharge canal on the south end of the dam functions only in seasonal high water. Much of the upstream timber face of the dam is gone, though some original timbers remain at the base of the dam. The dam holds water across the center and southern portions due to approximately twelve feet of river debris that has built up against the buttresses.

_Comparative Evaluation_

There is no database available through which to determine how many Ambursen dams still exist in New Hampshire, but limited data sources compiled by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers lists six buttress type dams existing in New Hampshire constructed between 1918 and 1934. This database is largely limited to dams that pose a danger to human life or property if they fail. The most substantial Ambursen dam listed is the Ayers Island Hydroelectric Dam on the
Pemigewasset River in Bristol, NH. Constructed by the Ambursen Construction Company in 1924, the dam is 550' long with a 300' curved spillway, a powerhouse, and a log sluice (Nabstedt 1923:425-128).

24. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND - Explain historical importance of the area and how the area relates to the development of the Town/City.

South Tamworth Industries was founded on the Bearcamp River in South Tamworth in 1924 by seasonal Tamworth resident Albert Farwell Bemis (1870-1936). The company manufactured wood toys, interior architectural finish work, lumber, and prefabricated housing units until the complex was destroyed by fire in 1943. A. Farwell Bemis was a wealthy Bostonian with an interest in housing and a production philosophy fueled by the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement. South Tamworth Industries reflected his interests and ideals in its operation and products (Anonymous 1976:79; MIT n.d.).

South Tamworth Industries was part of a long history of water-powered mill activity on the Bearcamp River. The fast moving river hosted numerous saw and gristmills beginning in the late 18th century (Merrill 1889:740). The South Tamworth Industries sawmill was powered by an Ambursen dam built on the Bearcamp River in 1929. The company ended the era of waterpower in the town by being the last business in Tamworth to harness the Bearcamp’s flow. After the company closed in 1943, later generations of the Bemis Family sought to use the site for electrical generation, but the project was never financially feasible (Thompson 2002). The family sold the land to a small power company in the early 1970s, which was also unable to reuse the site for electrical generation. A Maine lumber company purchased the site ca. 1987. The 1929 Ambursen dam, the diversion canal to the sawmill, and the partially collapsed concrete foundation of the 1929 sawmill are the only structures remaining on the South Tamworth Industries site (NHDB Files).

Early Mill Development on the Bearcamp River; Will Mason’s Mill - 1768-1924

The Bearcamp River watershed was an early settlement area and center for small industry in the Town of Tamworth. Residents were attracted to the area primarily because of the abundant waterpower supplied by the Bearcamp River. The pattern of settlement in this area was organized linearly along the river and a post road that was constructed parallel to the waterway (NH Route 25). The first mill on the river was constructed shortly after 1768 between the project area and NH Route 16 (Merrill 1889:740). Over the next century, as many as six saw, grist, shingle, and clapboard mills operated along the Bearcamp River and its tributaries. The small prosperity offered by the river lead to the development of the village of South Tamworth. The village is centered at the intersection of Route 25 and Mountain Road and contained a church and parsonage, a store, blacksmith shop, hotel, several sawmills, a rake factory, and about a dozen residences by 1860 (Walling 1860; Hurd 1892).

The South Tamworth Industries site was initially developed for waterpower in 1890. That year, William Mason constructed a steam-powered sawmill on the south bank of the Bearcamp River near the west end of the modern-day South Tamworth Industries site. Mason built a plank or timber crib dam immediately above the present location of the 1929 Ambursen dam to power the mill. The sawmill logged the hills around the site and cut between 120,000 and one million feet of lumber per year. According to advertisements, Mason’s mill manufactured chair stock, lath, shingles, clapboards, sheathing, and flooring (Anonymous 1906). Mason converted the mill to waterpower only a few years after he constructed the building, presumably because of
the difficulty of keeping the steam machinery operating properly (Mason 1956; Bookholz 1956:3; Hidden and Ulitz 1976:22). Another major mill site was located less than a quarter-mile upstream from Mason’s Mill. The Bartlett Brothers’ rake mill was constructed in 1845 on the north bank of the Bearcamp River. Founded by brothers Henry W. and George Bartlett, the company later operated as the Bartlett Mill Rake Factory. The mill employed twelve men who manufactured up to 40,000 wooden lawn and hay rakes a year during peak business. This mill operated off a second dam located immediately south of the extension of Mountain Road north of Route 25. Together, the Bartlett Rake Factory and Mason’s Mill employed the majority of male residents in South Tamworth (Hidden and Ulitz 1976:9; Merrill 1889:741).

*Bemis Industries, South Tamworth Industries – 1924-1943*

Both the Bartlett Mill Rake Factory and Mason’s Mill were cycling to an end by the early 1920s. William Mason was planning to retire, and the last in a succession of Bartletts who operated the family rake mill died suddenly, leaving only his widow and a young son. With both major sources of employment in South Tamworth suddenly threatened, several of the workers from both businesses approached seasonal Tamworth resident Albert Farwell Bemis for help. Farwell Bemis was a Bostonian who began summering in Tamworth in 1911. His family spent their summers at the former Johnson Farm at the top of Johnson Mountain south of South Tamworth village. Bemis acted philanthropically toward his summer home, purchasing abandoned farms, setting up scholarship programs for the town’s youth, and even purchasing a large home to serve as a school for South Tamworth children after the one room schoolhouse system shut down. The employees of the Bartlett Rake Mill and Mason’s Mill hoped he would also purchase the businesses and keep them in operation (Anonymous 1976:79; Gregg n.d.:1).

Bemis agreed to purchase both businesses and did so between 1922 and 1924. The rake mill continued to operate until 1938, when competition from mass production put them out of business (Harkness 1976:23). Rather than simply continuing to operate Mason’s Mill, however, Bemis chose to use the site as a venue in which to advance his personal interest in housing theory and technology and as a testing ground for the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement. Born to a manufacturing family in St. Louis, Missouri, Bemis was educated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and graduated in 1893 with a degree in civil engineering. Though his primary professional interests lay in the areas of modular and prefabricated housing technology, after graduating from college Bemis reluctantly entered his family’s business manufacturing grain bags. The Bemis Brothers’ Bag Company of St. Louis was one of the first companies to use the sewing machine to assemble grain bags, and owned several paper, cloth, and bag manufacturing mills in Missouri and Tennessee. Bemis moved the company’s headquarters to Boston and purchased a home in the suburb of Chestnut Hill before 1902 (Thompson 2002; MIT n.d.; Anonymous 1950).

Throughout his life, Bemis strove to mesh his business interests and personal interests where the opportunity arose (Thompson 2002). The most striking example of this effort is the community of Bemis, Tennessee. In 1900, Bemis began working on a design for a model company town around the Bemis Cotton Mill in Madison County, Tennessee. The community was based on new ideas in town planning and worker housing Bemis absorbed during his years at MIT. Using his connections with the institution, Bemis engaged MIT classmates Andrew Hepburn as architect and Arthur Shurecliff as landscape architect on the project. Both Hepburn and Shurecliff later worked on the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia. As built, the Town of Bemis featured wide streets, freestanding single-family homes in the Craftsman and Spanish Revival styles, and ample recreation and green space. The town has since grown, but the
original section designed by Bemis, Shurcliff, and Hepburn was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1991 (Anonymous 1950). Bemis also wrote a three-volume work on his housing ideas entitled The Evolving House, published in 1933.

In South Tamworth, Bemis transformed Mason’s Mill into a small wood products manufacturing company he initially called Bemis Industries. Bemis designed the business to operate according to the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement, with an emphasis on cooperative labor, the importance of the worker, and the use of local materials (Kaplan 1987:208-213). Bemis believed that a region’s raw materials should provide jobs for its residents; thus, he chose to start a wood products manufacturing company in a region where the forest and waterpower were the greatest natural resources. Bemis also had a keen interest in land stewardship, and hoped his company would serve as a model for using forest products wisely. At the outset, Bemis wanted the company to operate cooperatively, with each worker having a stake in the success of the business. He held a meeting in the South Tamworth Union Hall shortly after purchasing the mill business. Though the meeting was well attended, no one spoke in favor of the idea, and the plan never went forward (Gregg 1955). Regardless, the name of the company was changed to South Tamworth Industries soon thereafter to reflect the cooperative ideals behind the venture.

Beginning in 1924, Bemis constructed a large workshop, office, foreman’s residence, several drying kilns, and various lumber storage facilities immediately east of Mason’s sawmill. This group formed the core of the South Tamworth Industries operation. Bemis initially intended for the company to produce prefabricated housing units, but instead began manufacturing German style wooden toys and children’s furniture. German style toys were extremely popular at the time, but were largely unavailable because they could not be imported from Europe after World War I (Gregg 1955). The company also made small playhouses for children, which Bemis used as models for his housing ideas. South Tamworth Industries employed between 60 and 70 people continued to use Mason’s sawmill to supply lumber for the toys and furniture and also for direct sale. The company kept a small shop in the company office where they sold seconds and surplus toys and furniture directly to the public (Gregg n.d.).

William Mason’s sawmill and plank dam serviced the South Tamworth Industries site until 1929, when the dam burst. Bemis capitalized on this opportunity to rebuild the sawmill building and to construct a new Ambursen type dam immediately south of the former dam site. Bemis again took advantage of his MIT connections, employing Assistant Professor of Hydraulic Engineering W.A. Liddell to draft preliminary design specifications. Liddell recommended an Ambursen type dam, which was patented in 1903 by Norwegian engineer Nils Ambjørnsen (a.k.a. Niles Ambursen or Nils Abursen). Ambursen’s dam design featured an inclined upstream face made of a thin impervious layer laid on concrete buttresses. This feature allowed for less massive dam construction by equalizing the horizontal pressure applied to the dam by upstream water. The dam was engineered and built by I.W. Jones & Company of Milton, NH and was used to power the sawmill. The dam and sawmill were the primary capital improvements conducted on the South Tamworth Industries site after initial construction in 1924 (NHDB Files, Hay 1991:48-49, 52).

Despite the high ideals on which it was founded, South Tamworth Industries was never highly profitable. South Tamworth Industries toys did not enjoy widespread popularity among children; many came as kits that children had to put together, and consumers found them too complex. Competition from metal toys eventually forced South Tamworth Industries to shift their product focus back to building materials in the 1930s. The company produced fine interior
finish work and cabinetry as well as stock lumber. The company also began manufacturing prefabricated housing units and ready-made cabinetry at this time, returning to Bemis’ original vision (Gregg n.d.). One of their products was a prefabricated “Tamworth Camp,” and a full size example of the building was constructed on the grounds in 1939. South Tamworth Industries also dabbled in other specialty wood products such as dog sleds. These were most likely manufactured for Chinook Kennels, located in the Tamworth village of Wonalancet. Founded in the mid 1920s, Chinook Kennels bred several of the dogs used by Admiral Richard Byrd on his 1927 Antarctic expedition (Chinook Kennels, n.d.). Unfortunately, Bemis did not live to see the company return to his vision of manufacturing prefabricated housing; he died in 1936 at the age of 66. South Tamworth Industries continued to operate after his death under the management of company foremen.

South Tamworth Industries came to an abrupt end in 1943 when a fire began in one of the drying kilns. The fire leapt across a catwalk connecting the kiln to the second story of the workshop building. The paint, mineral spirits, and other flammable liquids stored in the workshop fueled the fire, and it consumed all the buildings on the site before it was extinguished. After the fire, South Tamworth Industries cleared the site of debris and filled in the foundations. Only the partially collapsed concrete foundation of the 1929 sawmill, the diversion canal on the Bearcamp River, the 1929 Ambursen dam, and the ca. 1924 foreman’s residence remained on the site. The foreman’s residence passed into private ownership during the mid-twentieth century. The Bemis Family maintained ownership of the site, timber lands, and water rights on the Bearcamp River. Farwell Bemis’ son-in-law Charles Thompson lived year round on the family’s farm in Tamworth at this time, and had a strong interest in using the dam to generate electricity. Unfortunately, the project was not financially feasible at the time, and the site remained idle (Thompson 2002).

South Tamworth Power Company and H.F. Saunders Brothers – 1973-present

Charles Thompson sold the South Tamworth Industries site to South Tamworth Power Company ca. 1973. A private undertaking, the South Tamworth Power Company was a subsidiary of the Nashua-based Old Mill Power Company (NHDB Files). Because of the energy crisis gripping the United States in the 1970s, many idle dam sites were being reinvestigated for generating electricity. Cities, towns, and private companies were also encouraged through various financial incentives to seek out methods by which they could meet their energy needs locally. The energy crisis made reuse of the South Tamworth dam site more financially feasible than in previous decades (Thompson 2002). Unfortunately, by this date, the South Tamworth Industries dam was in ruins; the timber upstream facing was badly broken and some of the concrete buttresses and abutments needed repair. For reasons that are not known, South Tamworth Power Company director William Spalke did not file federal and state permit applications to rebuild the South Tamworth Industries dam until 1982. Though permitting was granted, the project was never undertaken because it again proved financially infeasible. The South Tamworth Industries dam was not maintained during this time and fell into greater disrepair. Some time after 1982, the second concrete pillar on the north side of the dam broke, allowing the river to flow unimpeded through that side of the structure. Most of the timber facing also broke, leaving only a few planks near the bottom of the dam. As river debris accumulated behind the dam, the structure again held water on the south and central sections (NHDB 1982).

The South Tamworth Power Company sold the South Tamworth Industries site, dam, and their water rights on the Bearcamp River to the H.F. Saunders Brothers lumber company of
Westbrook, Maine ca. 1987 (NHDB Files). The H.F. Saunders Brothers company manufactures wood dowels and presently uses the South Tamworth Industries site for lumber and vehicle storage and as a base of operations for logging on their timber lands in the area.

25. NATIONAL REGISTER STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

Criterion A: The South Tamworth Industries Historic Area is not eligible for the National Register under Criterion A. The site was significant for its association with a long history of water powered manufacturing and wood product manufacturing on the Bearcamp River in Tamworth. It was also significant for being a local model of the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement as interpreted by company founder A. Farwell Bemis. The fire that destroyed the majority of the buildings on the site in 1943 left little to no evidence of the company’s presence on the property. Out of approximately seven major structures built on the site between 1924 and 1943, only the partially collapsed concrete foundation of the 1929 sawmill, the 1929 Ambursen dam, and the ca. 1924 foreman’s residence remain today. These structures are insufficient to convey the historical associations of the site or its local significance in the history of South Tamworth.

Criterion B: The South Tamworth Industries Historic Area is not eligible for the National Register under Criterion B. A. Farwell Bemis is individually significant within the industrial and economic history of Tamworth for his founding of South Tamworth Industries, which was the major employer in the area between 1924 and 1943. Bemis started South Tamworth Industries during his productive life, while he ran his family business and indulged his personal interests in prefabricated housing and the ideals of the Arts and Crafts movement. The South Tamworth Industries Historic Area is not eligible under Criterion B because other properties may be more significantly associated with Bemis’ life. His design for a company town outside his family’s paper manufacturing plant in Bemis, Tennessee is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is more representative of Bemis’ personal interest in housing and community planning. The site is also ineligible under this criterion due to a lack of integrity. The fire that destroyed South Tamworth Industries in 1943 left little evidence that the company was located on the site. Out of approximately seven major buildings on the property, only the partially collapsed concrete foundation of the 1929 sawmill, the 1929 Ambursen dam, and the ca. 1924 foreman’s residence remain today.

Criterion C: The South Tamworth Industries Historic Area is not eligible for the National Register under Criterion C. The fire that destroyed the complex in 1943 left little evidence that South Tamworth Industries was located on the site. Out of approximately seven major buildings on the property, only the partially collapsed concrete foundation of the 1929 sawmill, the 1929 Ambursen dam, and the ca. 1924 foreman’s residence remain today. These structures are insufficient to convey the sense of an early twentieth century mid-size wood products manufacturing complex.
The 1929 Ambursen dam on the former South Tamworth Industries site is not individually eligible for the National Register under this criterion. Although the dam possesses many of the defining characteristics of an Ambursen type dam, it also lacks many of the innovative design conventions developed for the dam type by the late 1920s and early 1930s. Like most Ambursen dams, the South Tamworth Industries dam has an inclined upstream face and a structure composed of poured-in-place concrete buttresses. The dam is unusual in that it had a timber facing on the upstream side rather than the more common thin, poured concrete slab. The dam lacks many of the other technical innovations developed for the Ambursen dam by this period, such as turbine generators located inside the dam structure or a curved downstream spillway to prevent erosion near the dam toe (Hay 1991:48-49). The dam is also in ruins and lacks integrity of design, materials, workmanship, and association due to the loss of nearly all the timber facing, the collapse of two concrete buttresses, and the idle state of the dam since 1943. The remnants of the dam are no longer sufficient to convey the feeling of an Ambursen dam used to generate waterpower. There are also more substantial examples of Ambursen type dams in New Hampshire, most notably the Ayers Island Hydroelectric Dam on the Pemigewasset River in Bristol.

The ca. 1924 foreman’s residence would not be individually eligible under Criterion C. The dwelling has lost integrity of design due to the encroachment of the front porch and replacement of the porch decking and foundation, the creation of a new entrance on the south gable end, and the addition of a deck. The house has lost integrity of setting due to the destruction of the South Tamworth Industries buildings in 1943 and the demolition of the associated barn at an unknown date.

27. STATEMENT OF INTEGRITY:

The South Tamworth Industries Historic Area retains integrity of location, but has lost integrity of setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association for the period of significance, ca. 1890-1943. The site retains only a small section of mortared stone foundation from the ca. 1890 William Mason sawmill, which became part of South Tamworth Industries in 1924. The mill was completely rebuilt on the same site in 1929. The ca. 1890 plank dam constructed by Will Mason burst in 1929, and though remnants are still present on the river bed north of the 1929 Ambursen dam, these remnants give little information about the dam’s construction or form beyond its location. The massive fire that destroyed the company buildings in 1943 removed most evidence of the site’s use as a wood product manufacturing company and sawmill. The partially collapsed concrete foundation of the 1929 sawmill, the 1929 Ambursen dam, and the ca. 1924 foremen’s residence which remain on the property are not sufficient to convey the historical or architectural significance of the South Tamworth Industries site. The site also lost association with a manufacturing context in 1943. Since that time, site owners have tried to develop the dam for electrical generation and presently use the land for vehicle storage and logging access to adjacent timber lands. The area setting has also
changed since 1943, with much of the cleared land growing over and the realignment of Route 25 creating a large rise on the southern property boundary.

As an individual engineering structure, the 1929 Ambursen dam retains integrity of location, design, materials, and workmanship. The dam remains as built in 1929, with concrete buttresses and plank facing. The outlet canal, gate, log pond, diversion canal, and abutments remain in their original configuration. The dam has lost some degree of physical integrity due to lack of maintenance. Most of the plank facing is gone and many of the concrete buttresses are damaged. One buttress on the north end of the spillway has collapsed completely and a second is partially collapsed. The dam also lacks integrity of setting, feeling and association. The destruction of the South Tamworth Industry buildings by fire in 1943 erased the historic setting for the structure and rendered it unable to convey the sense of being part of a small manufacturing complex. The dam has not been used to generate water power since 1943 and has therefore lost integrity of association with that context.

The ca. 1924 foreman’s residence retains integrity of location, but has lost varying degrees of integrity of setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The residence has lost integrity of setting due to the destruction of the South Tamworth Industries complex in 1943 and the subsequent separation of the house lot from the site by tree growth. The building has lost integrity of design, materials, and workmanship through the enclosure of the front porch, the replacement of the porch deck and foundation with concrete, the creation of a new entrance on the east gable end, and the construction of a deck in the same location. The site has lost integrity of feeling and association through the destruction of the South Tamworth Industries complex in 1943 and the sale of the home into private ownership during the mid-twentieth century. The building and site are no longer associated with South Tamworth Industries and can no longer convey the sense of a stylish foreman’s residence within a larger manufacturing complex.

28. BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES:

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Tamworth Historical Society, Tamworth, NH

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Bookholz, Ed; South Tamworth Industries employee; transcript of 1956 interview; Collection of the Cook Memorial Library, Tamworth, NH.

Gregg, Marjorie; South Tamworth Industries employee, Bemis Family relation; transcript of 1955 interview; Collection of the Cook Memorial Library, Tamworth, NH.

Larabee, Raymond “Link”; Tamworth resident and son of South Tamworth Industries foreman; October 2002

Thompson, Katie; Bemis Family descendant; November 2002

Surveyor’s Evaluation

<table>
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If this Area Form is for a Historic District: # of contributing resources: N/A

# of noncontributing resources: N/A
Photo 2 description: West end of South Tamworth Industries site, showing relation to Route 25
Roll: 1 Frame: 17 Direction: NW

Photo 3 description: Central section of South Tamworth Industries site, showing ca. 1990 building
Roll: 1 Frame: 18 Direction: N
Photo 4 description: East end of South Tamworth Industries site
Roll: 1 Frame: 16 Direction: NE

Photo 5 description: Larabee House
Roll: 1 Frame: 19 Direction: N
Photo 6 description: View of dam from south bank of river
Roll: 1 Frame: 9 Direction: N

Photo 7 description: View of dam from upstream on Bearcamp River
Roll: 1 Frame: 14 Direction: SE
Photo 8 description: View of dam showing river debris piled behind buttresses
Roll: 1 Frame: 10 Direction: S

Photo 9 description: Downstream face of south end of dam showing discharge canal and log pond
Roll: 1 Frame: 3 Direction: NW
Address: 600 Bearcamp Highway (Route 25) Date taken: November, 2002 Negative stored at: NHDHR

Photo 10 description: Downstream side of south end of dam, showing gate and rock outcropping
Roll: 1 Frame: 2 Direction: W

Photo 11 description: View of top of dam from south end near gate
Roll: 1 Frame: 7 Direction: N
Photo 12 description: Detail of debris on upstream side of dam, showing sloped face of buttresses
Roll: 1 Frame: 8 Direction: N

Photo 13 description: Detail of collapsed northern buttresses
Roll: 1 Frame: 12 Direction: S
Photo 14 description: View looking downstream from north end of dam, showing island to right
Roll: 1 Frame: 11 Direction: E

Photo 15 description: View of remnants of ca. 1890 plank dam upstream from 1929 concrete dam
Roll: 1 Frame: 15 Direction: S
Photo 16 description: Detail of remnants of ca. 1890 plank dam
Roll: 1  Frame: 13  Direction: S

Photo 17 description: Concrete foundation of 1929 sawmill, with ca. 1890 stone foundations to right
Roll: 1  Frame: 4  Direction: SE
Photo 18 description: East end of 1929 sawmill foundation, showing collapsed state
Roll: 1 Frame: 5 Direction: SW

Photo 19 description: South wall and interior of 1929 sawmill foundation
Roll: 1 Frame: 6 Direction: SW
Historic Photographs

Historic Photo 1. Will Mason’s mill (photo before 1929) (THS Collection)
Historic Photographs

Historic Photo 2. Lumber mill of W.N. Mason, South Tamworth (Anonymous 1906)

W. N. MASON
SO. TAMWORTH ... N. H.

MANUFACTURER OF
Chair Stock
Laths
Shingles
Clapboards
Sheathing
Flooring, Etc.
And Dealer In Hard and
Soft Lumber

Historic Photo 3. (Anonymous 1906)
Historic Photographs

Historic Photo 4. General view of STI site showing ca. 1924 office and workshop, looking west (photo undated) (Ulitz and Hidden 1996)

Historic Photo 5. Workshop, south elevation (photo undated) (THS Collection)
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Historic Photo 6. East end of ca. 1924 workshop (photo undated) (Private Collection of K. Thompson)

Historic Photo 7. West end of ca. 1924 workshop (photo undated) (Private Collection of K. Thompson)
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Historic Photo 8. Second floor of ca. 1924 workshop – finishing room (photo undated) (THS Collection)

Historic Photo 9. Ca. 1924 STI office and wholesale shop (photo undated) (THS Collection)
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Historic Photo 10. Ca. 1924 office and wholesale shop (photo undated) (THS Collection)

Historic Photo 11. Ca. 1924 office and wholesale shop (photo undated) (THS Collection)
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Historic Photo 12. Ca. 1924 office and wholesale shop (photo undated) (THS Collection)

Historic Photo 13. Ca. 1924 foreman's residence and barn (photo undated) (THS Collection)
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Historic Photo 14. Ca. 1924 foreman’s residence and Tamworth Camp Model (photo undated) (Private Collection of K. Thompson)

Historic Photo 15. Ca. 1929 STI sawmill, looking northeast (photo undated) (THS Collection)
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Historic Photo 40. Complete concrete form structure from downstream (photo 1929) (Private Collection of K. Thompson)
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Historic Photo 56. View taken from a position downstream from the dam (photo 1929) (NHDES Water Division Dam Bureau)
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Historic Photo 64. A. Farwell Bemis (Private Collection of K. Thompson)

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Historic Photo 67. Bartlett House and mill dam (Anonymous 1906)