

Baugh's Mill and Dam

Franklin, Tennessee, by Frank F. Baugh

I cannot believe that I did not know more about this place until I was sixty-five!

Here I had lived my entire life in my hometown of Franklin, Tennessee, and *knew little to nothing* about this place. But there I stood with my older brother on the south bank of the Harpeth River looking at the ruins of Baugh's Mill and its massive dam located at the bottom of the loop of Baugh's bend of the Harpeth, now bisected by the By-Pass for the first time in my life in March of 2021.

No, it is nothing like standing in awe at the base of the Great Pyramid of Giza. No, it is not like Hiram Bingham stumbling upon the vegetation-overgrown ruins of Machu Pichu in 1911, but for me, it was danged close!



Brother, Joseph Duncan Baugh, Jr. looking at the ruins of Baugh's Mill and Dam, on March 10, 2021.

My mouth must have literally fallen open. My elder brother, Joe, just calmly surveyed the site in that matter-of-fact way my Baugh predecessors, seeing such things, as was the way of my father, and from what I have seen in photographs must be the classic Baugh observational stance. It is apparently genetic thing passed on through the old DNA as I have also observed my son, Tom, assuming the stance frequently, by genetics or environmental influence, who can say, I have caught myself innumerable times doing the same, standing quietly, observing, as if a vast distance, as if taking-the-whole-thing-in with reverie.

At any rate, I may have done the same, but I defaulted to my second habit of not looking at things live but rather through a viewfinder of a camera, in this case, the camera of my iPhone (which is the best camera I've ever used, bar none!) I started capturing the moments in images.



Large stones of what might have been a spillway near the ruins of the stone foundation walls of the foundations of the mill itself.

The pictures do not do it justice. I have dedicated an entire Google Photos Album to the subject. What the photos, and short videos, cannot do is express what it must have looked like in its heyday, nor can they convey the massiveness of the endeavor, labor, or materials used. It boggles the mind - just a bit.



Remains of the dam still stretch nearly all the way across the width of the Harpeth River a normal to low height

Well, it boggled *my* mind, that is, which does not mean too much since that is not hard to do, but, I mean, this has to do with family, *my family!* The way I was raised lacked emphasis on my father's side of the equation. I suppose I should have thought otherwise since my father's family has been in Franklin, Tennessee since the 1830s. I know that for I found records of my Great-Great-Grandfather, Joseph Wilkes Baugh, buying a house in Franklin in 1834. He actually bought several houses. I know that one of them was found where the large parking lot between 4th and 5th Avenues North behind and belonging to Fourth Avenue Church of Christ on 4th Avenue.



This home owned by Joseph W. Baugh family was once located on Fifth Avenue North where the large parking lot for 4th Ave. Church of Christ is now located

My ancestors were heavily influenced by John and Andrew Campbell. When I was growing up, I often got the impression from older local families, we were still considered "newcomers."

Without mentioning names, I assume those folks have passed on, but they had children who are still about and never mention that probably because it is of no relevance anymore in light of all the "damned Yankees" and "left coasters" fleeing here like refugees from oppressive regimes. Of course, the fear of the "Old Guard"

Growing up I also never heard much about the Baugh Family except from what was interpreted for me through the filter of my mother. My father for the most part was a definite stoic, and a man of few words, at least around me. My mother did more than make up for that often with embellishments. I received much of my information from her while my father sat idly reading a paper, or whatever, never offering commentary or corrections probably because he was dialing the noise out. So, my information was, I fear, less than correct.

The only Baugh relatives I knew were My Grandmother Baugh, who was an absolutely spooky lady, almost as spooky as the old family home, *Richmond Place*. I also knew my uncle, Tom Baugh of Murfreesboro, who was an absolutely fine fellow, and so different from my father. Uncle Tom was jocular but also deeply religious and a strong member of the Church of Christ was so different

Richmond Place was within walking distance of where the mill and dam ruins are today. In the 1970s my father and Uncle Tom decided after my Grandmother Baugh (McCormick - she had remarried to a fellow named Clark McCormick) had passed away that the old home place, *Richmond Place*, was beyond saving. As I remember it, it was in awful shape. It was found, approximately, between what is today the dead end of Brink Place and Edwards Drive in Rebel Meadows. Reese Creek originates from a major spring that was the source of water at the rear of the old home. My father talked about the spring behind the house. I knew the place only in my youth from memories of going to visit my Grandmother Baugh. I vaguely remember Grandmother Baugh's Funeral. When my father and Uncle Tom sold the land of the old home place, they tore *Richmond Place* down because it had fallen into such disrepair it would have cost a fortune to repair it. Unfortunately, it wasn't the craze as it is now to rehabilitate fine old homes, and *Richmond Place* in today's real estate world. Could have and would have been restored - but it would have cost a fortune.

My Uncle Tom built a house resembling *Richmond Place* out of the demolished building materials from the old home in Murfreesboro, TN. He passed away several years ago. That home has since been passed on to one of his children. One strong recollection

I keep of its demolition was that the roof decking had been made out of sawn poplar boards easily two feet wide.



Richmond Place from the 1960s.



Left to right, my father, Joseph D. Baugh, when he was a boy; Grandmother, Beatrice T. Baugh; Uncle Tom Baugh; and Grandfather, Joseph Wilkes Baugh before the front porch of Richmond Place.

My first impressions on viewing the site of the ruins of the old Mill and dam are not necessarily the size. It's really not that big. It only dawns on me later that much of it is gone. Entropy has done its work well and fast. From my further investigation and study, I learned that it must have been a far more significant structure in its heyday. Studying archived maps of the area revealed much. In the time of the Civil War, it was plainly there in some map depictions of U.S. and C.S. cavalry deployed on either side of the river across from each other at the Battle of Franklin, November 30th of 1864.



From maps as late as a topographic map dated 1944 (above) the dam was still used as a means of crossing Harpeth River! That is not an insignificant structure! With that realization I decided that it must have been an imposing and important structure at one time.

Now it is not so imposing, unless one employs their imagination. It must have been blasted to reduce it. I cannot find any information to substantiate that conjecture, or it may have simply given away. The material – the massive quarried stones – must have been removed requiring as much effort as must have been necessary to place them there in the first place.

Consider this, there had to be hundreds of these huge hewn blocks of stone easily weighing tons moved and put in place across a wide stretch of the Harpeth River creating a considerable reservoir. If it was built in the 19th Century, how did those massive stones get placed there?

It must have been an immense effort to reduce it to its current state, and that was as recent as the 1940s or 1950s when Hillsboro Road as we know it now was built.

There is tangible evidence, though, of the size to fuel the imagination, and the former size of the structure. If anything, it is the size of the width of the dam, and the surviving stones.



In a photo taken July 21, 2022, while the river is low shows the rough stone blocks of the dam with the hand hammered drill marks to quarry the stone. My cane is approximately a yard from base to the top of the bend. This stone must weigh tons.



My son, Tom Baugh, gives context to the size of the stones and its base's width in a photo from April of 2021.

Further, there is the issue of the foundations made of these same massive stones found on the south bank of the Harpeth River. They are difficult to see in the winter and impossible to make out overgrown in summer. Once one makes out the foundations that are disguised by overgrowth it becomes clear that they are equally massive! What did they support? How large was it? Are there millstones buried in the silt like the ones that lie exposed at Boyd's Mill?

Certainly, I would like the State Archeologists to investigate.

Maybe I will!