

## **ABOUT JOHN SINTON**

Born in San Francisco in 1939, I spent my first thirteen winters there and my summers on the Truckee River outside Tahoe City, California. I spent the next four years at school in New England, then returned to the West Coast for college, after which I left the Bay Area to spend my graduate school years in Indiana and Paris. After receiving a doctorate in Russian and Early Modern European history, I taught history for two years and then changed my life's trajectory. I went to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst as a post-doctoral scholar in environmental planning where I taught natural resource conservation from 1967-1972.

After a 4-year stint as principal in an environmental planning firm from 1969-1972 in Amherst, I went to the newly-opened Stockton State College in southern New Jersey to help establish an environmental studies department. I spent twenty-seven years there as an environmental planner while teaching environmental planning, history, and geography. I became active in the creation and management of the New Jersey Pinelands National Reserve, co-authored a book on it, and then studied and published articles on rivers both in the US and Europe.

I retired in 1999 and moved to the village of Florence, Massachusetts in the City of Northampton, living some two hundred yards from the banks of the Mill River. I became an environmental activist and an integral part of the resurgent Connecticut River Conservancy for whom I co-authored *The Boating Guide to the Connecticut River: Source to Sea*. I remain an honorary board member of the CRC and an adjunct professor in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the Univ. Massachusetts, Amherst. I am a founding member and current co-moderator of the Mill River Greenway Initiative based in Williamsburg and Northampton.

I have been married to Wendy Sinton since 1970. We have five sons, three grandsons, and eight granddaughters.

### **Praise for *Devil's Den to Lickingwater***

Christine DeLucia, Assoc. Professor of History, Williams College. Author of *Memorylands*

*The Mill River that flows through western Massachusetts forms the centerpiece of John Sinton's fine-grained study of water, land, people, and their complex interactions over extended spans of time. Sinton... weaves together environmental, social, economic, and cultural approaches to illuminate the minutiae and larger significances of this twenty-mile waterway, which flows into the larger Connecticut River. Moving fluently between birds-eye vantages and the perspectives of paddlers, and written in accessible prose, the book is well illustrated with images and maps from local historical collections that illuminate diverse facets of the river's transformations. It blends commitment to critical localism with attentiveness to regional, national, and global developments, offering a compelling lens into the past, present, and future of a dynamic watershed.*

Christopher Clark, Head of the Department of History, Univ. of Connecticut, Storrs, Author of *Rural Roots of Capitalism* and *The Communitarian Moment*

*An important book, Devil's Den to Lickingwater is a fine environmental and industrial history of the Mill River in Williamsburg and Northampton. Its lively text, accompanied by beautiful maps and illustrations, tells a dramatic story of the river's many transformations through community enterprise and development, ecological challenges, disaster, decline, and rejuvenation. Both as an account of how the Mill River came to be as it is, and as an inspiration for ensuring its healthy future in the life of the region, this book will have lasting influence.*

Neal Salisbury, Richmond 1940 Professor Emeritus in History, Smith College, Author of *Manitou and Providence: Indians, Europeans, and the Making of New England* (1982)

*John Sinton has given us a masterpiece that is at once environmental history, local history, and a microcosm of New England, American, and global history. It interweaves the latest findings on all manner of scholarly topics with countless anecdotes of human beings, both inventive and foolish. Especially notable for incorporating Native Americans' presence and perspectives. Beautifully written and illustrated.*

Elizabeth M. Sharpe, co-director of Historic Northampton, Author of *In the Shadow of the Dam: The Aftermath of the Mill River Flood of 1874*

*This is a must read for anyone interested in New England cultural and environmental history. John Sinton is a companionable and knowledgeable guide as he brings to life the cultural and landscape history of Northampton and Williamsburg through the story of the region's lifeblood, the Mill River. Aided by many newly crafted maps and illustrations, Sinton describes in great clarity the river's geologic history, its use and meaning to indigenous people, its industrial phase, and its revived place in the landscape today. A cogent discussion of the environmental impacts of deforestation, pollution, and invasive species places the Mill River in a national context. This highly readable volume should be on every New Englander's bookshelf.*

Bruce Laurie, Professor Emeritus of History, Univ. of Massachusetts, Amherst, Author of *Artisans into Workers, Beyond Garrison, and Rebels in Paradise: Sketches of Northampton Abolitionists*.

*This gem of a book offers an elegant yes to the question "Does nature have a history?" – along with us humans – through a detailed chronicle of the Mill River. This current trickle of water once had a heroic past, a sacred place to the early Native Americans and an invaluable resource to the first Anglo American settlers and later generations that harnessed its power to the first mills and factories. John Sinton, the longtime environmental historian cum environmental activist, captures the history of the Mill in loving detail, exposing the changing shape of its flora, fauna, and aquatic life and larger impact on our landscape. It is beautifully written, richly detailed with maps and other illustrations, and informative throughout – a must and compelling read for everyone from environmentalists to local historians and general readers wishing to learn why we reside in such a special place.*

Helen Horowitz, Parsons Professor Emerita of History and American Studies, Smith College, Author of *Rereading Sex, Alma Mater, and Traces of J.B. Jackson*

*With rich knowledge and clear, evocative language, John Sinton interweaves the natural and engineered history of the Mill River in Western Massachusetts with the complex stories of settlements along its course. Sinton deftly traces the interactions of the river and its flooding waters with the forces that built farms, villages, towns, and cities alongside its banks—forest clearing, agriculture, industrialization, dams, transportation, and politics. Abundant maps and images enhance understanding and help bring this past world to life. Today, inspired by environmental awareness, interest in recreation, and tourism, a growing number of river walks allow new appreciation of the Mill River's beauty. Sinton offers a compelling story and an important contribution to the growing literature of the interplay between nature and human action.*

Ted Steinberg, Distinguished Professor of History and Professor of Law at Case Western Reserve Univ., author of *Gotham Unbound* (2015), *Down to Earth* (2002), *Acts of God* (2000)

*A beautifully written microhistory that will make you care deeply for this winding little New England tributary in ways you never dreamed. A remarkable book and lavishly illustrated to boot.*

Larry Hott, Award-winning filmmaker at Hott Productions and Florentine Films. *Wild by Law*, *John James Audubon*, *Rising Voices* and many more.

*Take a dollop of geography, a tablespoon of industrial history, and a pinch of city planning, blend them together into a compelling tale of a New England river and you've got a recipe for John Sinton's fascinating book. I've lived along the Mill River for decades but I never knew just how many hundreds of mills dotted its banks, or the details of the utopian and abolitionist movements that sprung up nearby, or the impact of the many devastating floods that affected the layout of Northampton. Sinton is a master storyteller who knows that a river's history is far more entertaining when its central players are people who not only changed the course of the river but the character of the region as well.*