

# Malone's BALLARD MILL

The sleepy, little community of Malone is experiencing a quiet renaissance in arts and crafts and the focal point of this re-birth is the Ballard Mill Center of the Arts. The new arts center is located on Williams street, just west of the Franklin County Fair Grounds and was once a thriving woolen mill owned by the J.O. Ballard Company. Until 1965 it produced Ballard Woolens, nationally famous for quality and the sheep's wool and a year's vicissitudes.

The restoration of the arts center has been going on since 1966 by the Greater Malone Community Council, an organization comprised of over 50 community organizations and businesses. The property, consisting of the three story brick mill, a crafts island and an airplane hanger, all on forty acres of land, was purchased by the Community Council, with a two thousand dollar down payment and a \$28,000 mortgage.

Ballard Mill and its four acre island will offer both local residents and visitors this unique combination of attractions; a community theater where for modest admission prices, music, concerts, movies, plays, dancing and other performances can be enjoyed. Many of the out-of-town professionals are brought to Malone by the Malone Arts Committee (aided by the New York State Council on the Arts).

The theater's greatest asset is the fact an opportunity now exists to draw upon the talents of North Country residents. There are two local theater groups in Malone and a vast pool of talented actors and musicians who will now have a center to exchange ideas and information. There will be unlimited possibilities for those interested in and dedicated to their particular art form, for there is now a place to grow.

The rest of the island will be dedicated to the production and marketing of crafts. There is already one full time resident on Ballard Mill Island and that is blacksmith Paul Molahan. Paul is a graduate of Skidmore university without walls and received training at Cooperstown New York's farmers museum. He produces decorative and practical iron work in his blacksmith shop and teaches blacksmithing at North Country Community College Malone Extension, Crafts Management program. Paul uses no electricity for his Island Smithy, preferring a strictly 19th century shop.



Scheri Weber, a student in the Crafts Management Program at N.C.C.C., Malone extension is in the process of restoring a 19th century sawmill and converting it into a weaving studio and shop on the island. Scheri should be operational by the first of the year.

There will be one more craftsman on the island by the first of the year and that will be Donald Potter, a leather worker. Don will be located in a log cabin built on the island. The 1901 Mill building has three floors.

The third floor is now being used by the Crafts Management Program of N.C.C.C., Malone Extension. This program provides practical training in making and marketing of crafts. At Ballard Mill there is instruction in weaving, wood carving, quilt making, print making, pottery, and blacksmithing. Other craft courses are offered through the college at other locations.

The second floor at the Mill will be rented out to individual craftspeople who wish to sell their products and set up shops.

The first floor will be used as a reception center and art gallery, with the possibility of the Bartlett Rehabilitation Center in Malone using part of the first floor space to market and sell crafts.

We are struggling to keep it all together. On August 6, the Farm and Garden of Watertown Daily Times did a front page article on the Coop. We were soon besieged by many people as far North as Oxbow and as far South as Greig in Lewis County. "We never knew you were here," was what we heard as we watched our food stock being cleaned out. I was very pleased to write this story to enable Saint Lawrence County to learn where we are and what we've been up to.

Legally, we are the Warehouse Food Coop but in Watertown we're having to be called the Coop Grocery. We carry two kinds of food, natural bulk foods, and packaged, processed, chemicalized and already boxed up foods. There is definitely a power struggle between the two sides.

We're located at 720 West Main Street in Watertown which runs perpendicular to Route 11, just before the Court Street bridge. We are open nine to seven six days a week to members only although we let first time shoppers buy once before they have to join.

The Coop began in 1974 with a small committee. They held two meetings, called together community leaders and tried to enlist their help in applying for a grant from Watertown Foundation which lends money to non-profit organizations. The application was turned down but loans were received from various churches and banks. Two large meetings were held which attracted 300 people from Watertown, to explain to the public what a food coop was and what this group wanted to do in forming a Watertown Coop. Three hundred people joined; the old YMCA Building was rented; a worker from Manpower was secured, Carmen Palumbo, a Banker, helped set up books and helped to explain the grocery business since he had forty years in the business as manager of the Grand Union. Inspections were held and the doors opened May 1, 1975.

The Coop had it real easy from the beginning in regards to volunteers staffing the store, mainly because Manpower supplied the one worker. They were supposed to come in one day a week to relieve her, all the members taking turn. That proved unsuccessful so another worker from Manpower was secured and that was the whole concept of the food Coop. Soon they decided to carry groceries besides the bulk natural foods and that action in my opinion was a real mistake. For once they did, there was no stopping and now the Coop is really two stores in one.

Business was very slow due to very poor parking and being in a location where there were other Markets. On Sept. 1, 1976, the Coop moved to its present location on West Main Street and sales jumped. Business boomed so to speak and we were back on our feet.

We, my husband Nanyo and I, moved up here from New Mexico last September. Being a vegetarian, I really felt the need to find good food at a cheaper price than the health food stores so I began to think about starting a coop since the didn't know the Coop was here. I read an article one day about the Coop and decided to check it out. I walked into the Coop in January right after a large order from Clear Eye in Rochester had come in. Bags were laying all over the floor so I started hunting for carob, found it and started bagging some up for myself. Joan Duffaney, a real hard worker from Manpower said

Plans are being made and work begun on usage of the acreage around the Mill. There will be a free public park offering fishing sites on Ballard Mill Pond and the Salmon River, scenic nature trails, and picnic facilities. Work on these and all other Ballard Mill projects is being carried out by a wild crew of folks headed by Oholan, Thomas Kleih. Without the manpower provided by this crew woolly bunch there would be no Ballard Mill. There are two annual functions now being held at Ballard Mill Center For the Arts. The first is held in July, the Northern New York Crafts Festival will be going on its third year, the last two years have seen over 3,000 people from 16 states and two Canadian provinces visit the Crafts Festival the runs for two days. This past summer saw over 50 crafts people exhibiting and selling their wares, and a lot of foot stomping and hand clapping to the "Screaming Border Boys" from Plattsburgh.

One of the wildest, most bizarre and exciting experiences Malone has ever seen was held last August fifth, sixth, and seventh. The Foot Hills Pine Arts Festival, marked the unofficial opening of the Ballard Mill Center for the Arts Theater. Sponsored by the Malone Arts Committee, the three day event saw the coming together of Malone residents. People from the entire spectrum of North Country life came together to laugh, dance, sing, and generally have one hell of a time.

The first night started with an incredible puppet show and ended with a night of music provided by local musicians, covering a range of music. "Sympatico" from Malone started with some good listening folk music, then came Frank Chatlain and his square dance band, followed by the "St. Regis Valley String Band", and then some electric blues by "Full House" from Malone. The next day saw mime artists, magicians, and dancers plays filling the afternoon with good times.

Saturday night was the apex of the weekend. The "Paul Winter Concert" drifted into town and proceeded to mesmerize a small but appreciative audience into oblivion. For many there it was more than just a moving musical experience. I think one could go as far as to say it was a spiritual experience as well.

Sunday, Paul Winter and David Darling gave a musical and mental workshop at the Raymond Street Nursery. This was an excellent opportunity for musicians in the area to get together and learn from a true master.

Sunday night saw the closing of a fantastic week-end with a one-act play, a consecration of the island by Donna Hennings, a weaver of cocoons and webs.

There is much to say about Malone and its rebirth, but the best experience is the seeing and doing. We invite you to come. We share with us what we have and what we do. Stop down at the Mill if you are in Malone. You will see many more smiling faces than sad ones and much happiness.

Michael L. Lamite

"Oh, you're a natural health food one. Can you help out here, I don't know where to put all this stuff!"

Here it was, a Coop already waiting for me. I soon became very involved in trying to help Diane Julien with the Natural Food side of the store. The ordering since she had to care for her little girl. The Natural foods were pushed off on one little side with soap, dog food and deodorant close by. Ready to push those all away, we started organizing the foods in bins and on shelves. The groceries had very nearly taken over. Many people tell me it's ridiculous to have two kinds of foods in there. These people are different than further North; they don't know quite as much about good food and how a Coop should run. Education is what we're working on with free tastings and ideas available in the store. For now, we cannot alienate the people who eat the processed foods by dropping them from our store. We carry bulk herbs, spices, cheeses made with vegetable rennet and books besides the usual natural foods.

Membership is only three dollars per year and one hour a month work unless you bring in baked goods or plants for a donation or unless you're a Senior Citizen.

After the publicity in Farm and Garden, I mentioned earlier, Manpower, after two years, pulled out within three days. They said that by Federal standards we were not a non-profit organization since we could not get a tax-exempt number and we were not being of service to the public. Betty Ciles, one of the original leaders of the Coop, consulted her husband, who is a lawyer, for advice. We tried to make Manpower change their mind but no one cared to listen. So we were faced with our first real crisis in regards to who would run the store since we could not afford to pay a worker yet, right in the middle of the summer. Confusion and chaos was running high as we started calling for volunteers to work one hour a week on a regular basis which would enable them to get 10% off their food sales. This is a true test for the Coop since we, the people, should be the ones who run it. We have had problems with cashing up, the deposits, volunteers not showing up due to confusion, and the former policy of giving credit to customers at the time of their grocery store, we are still open; we have many new members; our natural food side is growing rapidly and sales are cleaning us out every two weeks. We are going to have to change many old ways; have meetings to organize these new members and tell the old ones to get in here and help if you want the Coop to continue running.

The women who are working on the weekly basis are all natural food buyers, so we are beginning to wonder where the grocery people are; why aren't they in here now? We are starting a grocery store, we are a Coop. The struggle is never-ending, tempers are flaring and new members are coming in every day.

So as a food coop we are learning what it really means to be run by the people, we have to make the decisions and keep our stores on its feet. Hopefully, within a few months we'll have some of these problems worked out and we can begin to teach others how to start their own buying clubs throughout the North Country and become very strong in the Coop movement.

Mariam Massaro Loper  
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# Growing Pains at the Water- town Food Co-op