

[Eric Weber](#)

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July 12: On this day in 1823 was born William Henry **Adams** (1823-1874), miller, b. Pittsfield, MA, s/o Capt. Joseph and Mary Brewster Clark Adams. He m. Martha (Benton) Wells (1822-1909), b. Wethersfield, CT. They lived in NY state and in Lee, MA before moving to Chesterfield in the late 1850s. William was a Chfld. highway surveyor in 1859, and he and his wife joined the church there in 1867. His house and mill were on Bronson Brook in West Chesterfield, on the north side of Worthington Road (Rt. 143) where the brook no longer goes [see Beers map of Chesterfield, 1873]. The brook was rerouted later to eliminate two road bridges. The Adamses moved to Williamsburg before the census of 1870, when the family appeared here: William, 46, b. MA; Martha, 48, b. CT; Edwin A., 21, b. MA; James, 12, and Wm. H. Jr., 8, both b. NY. Also living in the household was an Elsie A. Wells, 72 and b. in VT. At the time of the Mill River disaster, Adams managed the grist mill at Mill and East Main Streets (the present Grist Mill Farm Museum building is a very similar post-flood replacement, built on the same site) and a sawmill directly across the river that was never rebuilt. The family's home was the present Kreps house at 2 Mill Street. When word came that the dam had broken, Adams ran from his house to the grist mill, and was returning to check on his family when he and the mills were swept away. His body was later found with only two fingers protruding from the sand that shrouded him. His house was flooded and heavily damaged but not destroyed; his wife and children survived in it. Adams had borrowed heavily before falling victim to the financial panic of 1873. He had recently sold all his real estate in Chesterfield for a considerable sum, but not enough to settle his debts. His neighbor Hiram Hill had taken ownership of the Wmsb. mills (possibly as holder of Adams's mortgage or other debt) and hired Adams to run them. It was Hill's house at 10 E. Main St. and the rocky knoll it stood on that shielded Adams's much lower home from the full battering force of the flood, saving his wife's and sons' lives.