5. History of Rockland

William Penn's manor of Rockland was reserved for his family, who were entitled to personally collect ground rents beyond the customary proprietary quitrents, which were actually taxes paid to the proprietor's office.

Rockland was one of the earliest and longest-functioning mill seats on the Brandywine. John Gregg[Grigg] and Adam Kirk had a grist mill on the west bank in 1724. The place was known as Kirk's Ford until the first bridge was built on the present site. The east bank is still occupied by the shell of a former mill building, which now contains a condominium residential complex.

A fulling mill, for finishing wool cloth, was built here in 1733. Caleb Kirk in about 1795 began the improvements that eventually became the Rockland mill complex.

In the early nineteenth century, the stone mill on the west bank housed some of the earliest powered cotton spinning machinery in the United States. William Young was making paper here in 1800 for the U. S Treasury. Tradition states that William Young in 1802 built the stone worker houses that are the subject of this investigation (Le Compt n d).

In 1804, the plant made ten reams of paper from American mulberry roots, but the experiment came to nothing. The first paper mill burned in 1814. Papermaking stopped in 1822, when the mill was converted to cotton manufacture. The Rockland Manufacturing Company was incorporated in 1825 to make woollen cloth. William Young died in 1829, and the Company was operated by his sons until the factory burned in 1846.

Alfred Victor duPont became a director of the Company in 1846, and obtained an Act of the Delaware legislature to incorporate the enterprise in 1847. In spite of the attempt at reorganization, the plant was sold by the U. S. Marshal in 1849 (Riggs 1970: 81-82). In connection with the 1849 events, Joseph Taylor drew a remarkably detailed pictorial map of the site (FIGURE 5), which was engraved as an advertisement. A cotton milling operation followed briefly, failing in 1854.

Augustus Jessup bought the property at sheriff's sale and Rockland's second paper mill was begun. Jessup created the partnership of Jessup and Moore when he conveyed the property to this son-in-law Bloomfield Moore and his sons Alfred and Edward as tenants in common. The firm acquired adjacent properties as well, assembling 134 acres. A corporation was formed and management eventually shifted to New York.

The new ownership enlarged the mill and turned the Rockland seat into a paying proposition. By 1880, Rockland had a population of 200, two churches, a hotel, schools, and a large paper mill (Edwards 1880). There were eventually twenty-eight company-owned houses on the property, several of which are still standing (Le Compt nd) on the hill above the project area.

Jessup and Moore made fine book papers at Rockland and at another mill downstream. The mill operated under the name of Jessup and Moore until 1933. Trustees in Bankruptcy sold the property in 1934, and it changed hands several times.

Rockland shrank during the Depression. It was reported in 1940 that the postmistress had resigned because her house was being torn down (LeCompt n d).

Finally in 1940, the mill became the property of a firm called San-Nap-Pack, which later became Doeskin Products, manufacturer of tissue papers. Corporate financial problems, pollution concerns, and a fire in 1958 crippled the operation. New owners, Consolidated Cellulose Products, bought the business in 1967 and continued the Doeskin name.

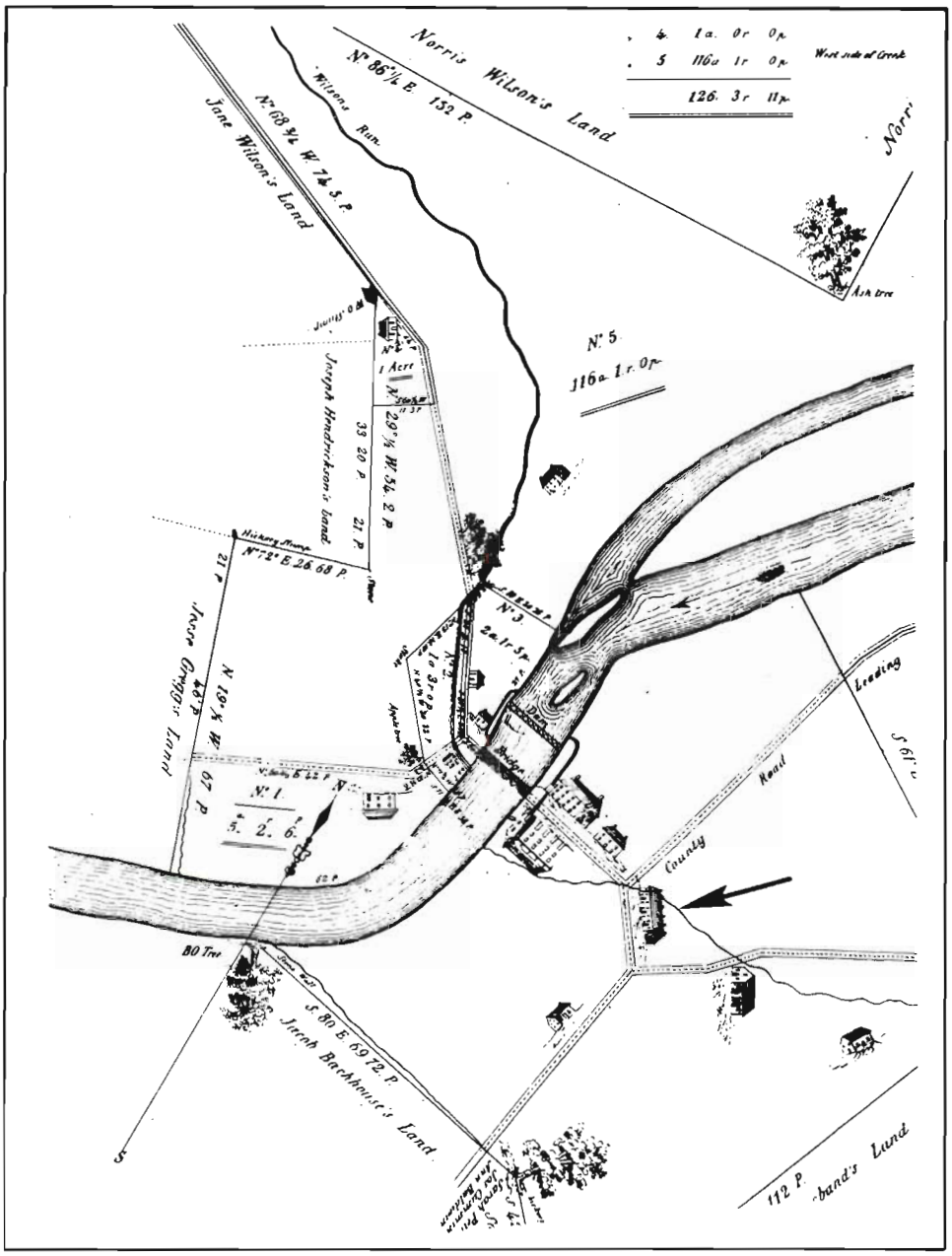
Figure 5

Detail of 1849 map of Rockland

by Joseph Taylor, from a lithograph at the Hagley Museum and Library

Arrow points to the worker housing that is the subject of this report

Approximate Scale: 1 mile



During this period of reorganization and retrenchment, several older buildings, including those in the project area, were demolished.

The plant closed permanently in 1973, when it was sold to Bissell-Vinton Associates, who developed the condominium in the old mill buildings.

PAPERMAKING TECHNOLOGY

During the Jessup and Moore and the later Doeskin ownership, the mill made paper by the Fourdrinier continuous process, rather than the traditional sheet-by-sheet method. Continuous paper machines were introduced into America by Thomas Gilpin at Kentmere on the Brandywine in 1816.

Introduction of continuous machines altered the power and water needs of paper mills. Traditional paper mills used water power to operate their hollanders, machines that macerated old rags to make linen pulp.

Actual forming of the paper was a hand process, in which papermakers dipped screens into a pulpy soup of fibers and pulled out the wet sheets, which were then drained and pressed dry.

Continuous machines formed the paper on a porous belt, onto which a slurry of pulp was poured. A roll of dry paper came out the end of the machine at a much higher rate than any hand workman would have been able to match.

The new machinery required more power. It also needed more hollanders, which required more power. The mills also needed large supplies of very pure water, which was kept in a pond on the premises and re-used constantly.

Installation of the new machinery undoubtedly explains the expansion of the mill building under Jessup and Moore, soon after the firm was established.

This is the building that was gutted to form the basis for a condominium complex that retains architectural elements of the original mill. The mill's pond survives adjacent to Rockland Road, on the edge of the project area.

The site of the original mill, which stood above the bridge, probably is covered by the cement-block building that now stands upstream from the condominium complex. It appears on the 1849 survey of the Rockland property (FIGURE 4).

Another consequence of the new machinery was a change in workforce. Papermaking became an industrial operation, rather than a craft.

The 1882 Ferris Brothers directory described Rockland as "A thriving little town near DuPont's Station on the Wilmington and Northern Railroad" that was "fast becoming an important business center." Scharf's 1888 history, however, noted that the inhabitants were mostly Jessup and Moore employees, and "Alexander Colquohoun is the merchant of the village." (Scharf 1888:906)

The project area was part of the Rockland mill property through most of the nineteenth century. The 1849 survey (FIGURE 4) shows a three-unit row of houses in the project area, but the map is ambiguous about the locations and orientations of buildings. The 1835 painting (PLATE 1, PAGE 4), the Beers atlas of 1868 (FIGURE 3, PAGE 5), and the Baist atlas of 1893 (FIGURE 3, PAGE 9) are unanimous in placing the houses between Mount Lebanon Run and the extension of the road over the bridge, an apparently uncharted street.

Inside the intersection of Mount Lebanon Road and Rockland Road was a store, which shows on both the Beers and Baist maps. Locations of the store and the houses are shown on the sketch map of modern conditions, Figure 6, page 19 and on the 1918 survey, Figure 7, page 21, below. In the 1893 Baist atlas map (FIGURE 3), the store is shown in the intersection of Mount Lebanon Church Road and Rockland Road, approximately where the new intersection is to be built.

All of these sources agree on the more or less precise locations of the eight-house row and the post office and store

combination. All that was left for investigation was the issue of integrity.

The mill village is already listed in the National Register of Historic Places, but a site does not remain eligible after it loses its integrity. Since the row houses and store building had been destroyed, they would remain eligible for inclusion in the Register only as non-contributing parts of the district, or as archæological sites.

Accordingly, Bowers (1990) recommended reducing the district to eliminate the site here under consideration, since the revised nomination makes no mention whatever of archæological potential.

A building site can retain archæological integrity and contribute to a district even after it is destroyed.

Archæological integrity of the site, therefore, remained the only question unanswered. Mr. Burl Owens, now the security chief at the condominimum complex, reported that the buildings had been stripped of their wooden parts and then levelled, with nothing surviving above ground.

Mr. Owens pointed out locations of the store, the two worker housing blocks, and other features of the former village. He said that the destroyed rows resembled the one surviving stone row (PLATE 2, BELOW) that aligns with their foundations (PLATE 3).

Plate 2
Rockland project area

At right is a surviving mill worker house, similar to the one investigated, looking eastward from a point opposite the entrance to the former mill building. The road in foreground is the road over Rockland bridge, the extension of which would have passed in front of the houses.

Plate 3

Ærial photograph of Rockland, taken in 1944, while the mill was operating, from an original glass plate in the Historical Society of Delaware. Arrow points to the two worker rowhouses that were identified in this survey. For a larger version of this photograph, see the cover. Numbered features: 1. Railroad spur; 2. Shell of paper mill; 3. Site of earlier mill; 4. Paper mill reservoir; 5. Road from Adams Dam

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