

### **3.0 REYNOLDS MILL (7S-C-99): PAST**

For ease of reference and use by researchers in the future, the following mill history is organized using the time periods included in the Sussex County historic agricultural context (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993); however, the subject history is specific to the use and ownership of Reynolds Mill.

#### **3.1 Early Industrialization 1770-1830±**

The recorded history of Reynolds Mill dates to December 2, 1793. On that date, a Major Clifton applied to the Sussex County land office for a warrant to survey a heretofore vacant and unclaimed piece of land in Broadkiln Hundred. The warrant referred to Clifton as a “yeoman,” a term meaning the owner and cultivator of a small farm, rather than landed gentry. The warrant implied that Clifton was living on (“seated”) or otherwise occupying the land and that he had “made improvements” (Sussex County Deeds 1793:109).

The land was surveyed on March 21, 1794 although, unfortunately, a plot of the parcel could not be found. It seems likely that, although Major Clifton was listed as a yeoman farmer and not a miller in the warrant, the “improvements” referenced in that document probably included a mill or mills. The patent granting ownership of the land, issued on December 14, 1797, described the parcel as “vacant land situate[d] in Broadkiln hundred called and known by the name of Mill Tract as per Certificate of Survey enrolled in Rolls office for the County aforesaid.” The parcel, like the parcel on which the mill remains were found, was located on the “southside of Sowbridge Branch by the Edge of the Run,” and one of the boundary points used to describe the land was “the middle of the Mill Pond.” This meant the stream had been dammed to create sufficient head, or power, for the mill or mills. The patented parcel was small, measuring five acres and 101 square perches; the amount paid for the land was \$2.81. Interestingly, the patent was granted not to Major Clifton but rather to Unice (also Eunice) Clifton. The deed did not indicate how Eunice and Major Clifton were related, and other genealogical websites do not supply that information. It is assumed that Eunice Clifton was either Major Clifton’s widow or daughter. It is unclear if granting a patent to a woman rather than a man was unusual in eighteenth century Sussex County (Sussex County Deeds 1797:454).

That Major or Eunice Clifton would have established a gristmill and/or a sawmill on their land was not surprising. Gristmills and sawmills were important components of life in rural

Broadkiln Hundred and Sussex County. One of the first priorities of the new settlers was to clear the land for farming and to build houses for shelter. Sawmills processed the area's abundant timber resources, providing the necessary raw materials for houses and agricultural buildings. They also supplied lumber for the shipbuilding industry centered in Milton, Delaware. Located about four miles to the south of the Mill Tract, Milton was a major shipbuilding center from the 1730s to the 1890s (Hancock and McCabe 1982:159). Gristmills ground Sussex County's staple crop, corn, into meal and wheat into flour, essential components of the agrarian diet and cash crops for area farmers (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:22; Herman *et al.* 1989:48; Scharf 1888:1285).

The construction of gristmills and sawmills was considered so necessary that Delaware's colonial government established a system within each county's Court of Common Pleas for the landowner or area residents to petition for their construction. The legislative act granted county governments the right to condemn acreage of land for the purpose of establishing mills (Delaware Public Archives 2007). It proved effective: by 1814, there were eight gristmills and eight sawmills within four miles of Milton, including the Reynolds mill tract (Hancock and McCabe 1982:85).

The condemnation process was related to the need to provide power to the mills. Although streams abounded in Sussex County, the flat topography generally did not provide the necessary fall, or head, to power a waterwheel. Consequently, settlers had to dam existing ravines to create millponds. The sizable ponds required the condemnation of a good deal of land (Moore 1959), and potentially affected landowners' holdings both above and below the dam. Eunice Clifton's patent made clear that a millpond had been created at the Mill Tract.

At an unknown date prior to 1799, Eunice Clifton sold "the Eastward Part" of her patent to Elias Clifton; again, it is not known how or if they were related. In 1799, Eunice Clifton married Wrixam (also spelled Wrixham) Warren. In 1800, she and Wrixam sold the remainder of the Mill Tract to Spicer Warren. Along with the land, Eunice and Wrixam Warren also conveyed to Spicer Warren a one-half part of the mills. The deed provided a key piece of evidence; it stated that the property had upon it "Both saw and Grist Mill" (Sussex County Deeds 1800:767).

Over the next decade the landholding on which the mills sat was expanded in size. By 1810, the parcel originally patented to Eunice Warren had been combined with land patented to John Smith and included acreage on both sides of Sowbridge Branch in both Broadkiln and neighboring Cedar Creek hundreds. In 1810, Smith, a Philadelphia merchant but formerly a

resident of Sussex County, sold to Nathan Reed of Sussex County two acres on the south side and four acres on the north side of Sowbridge Branch along with:

One half of the lumber yard and one half of all the mills, mill pond, houses Garden fences and buildings of all Sort timber and [?] water and Water courses and all privileges thereunto belonging to said mills now and one half of all profits arising from said Mills now and any other privileges thereunto (Sussex County Deeds 1810:426).

The deed specifically mentioned the sawmill in the boundary description; the consistent use of the word “mills” throughout the document made clear that saw and gristmills were still on the property.

The following year (1811), Nathan Reed bought from Spicer Warren 20 acres of land and a mill seat on the south side of a branch in Broadkiln Hundred. Although the branch was not mentioned by name in the deed to Spicer Warren, it seems likely that this was the other half of the same mill property Reed had bought the previous year (Sussex County Deeds 1811:427). Spicer Warren had acquired the land at public auction to settle the debts of Wrixam Warren. Warren had died *ca.* 1803 carrying fairly heavy debt. A man named Collins Abbott brought three separate lawsuits against Warren’s estate seeking redress. He filed the suits on behalf of Spicer Warren, who would obtain the Mill Tract if Abbott won.

There is an interesting sidebar to the story. The administratrix of Wrixam Warren’s estate, the person responsible for paying off his debts was his widow, Eunice (Sussex County Register of Wills 1803). However, between Warren’s death in 1803 and the sale of his former land holdings to settle his debts in 1811, Eunice had remarried and was then known as Eunice Abbott. Her new husband was Collins Abbott, who was suing Wrixam Warren’s estate to recover the debt he was owed. His wife Eunice was now a party to the lawsuits (Sussex County Court of Common Pleas 1810:112). Thus, Eunice Warren Abbott was, in effect, suing herself.

Thomas Scharf, in his *History of Delaware, 1609-1888*, wrote that Nathan Reed owned “grist and saw mills” in Broadkiln Hundred by 1809 (Scharf 1888:1261). However, the deed record, as noted above, indicated that he did not formally own the property until 1810 and 1811. Sussex County Tax Assessment records from 1809 listed Reed as owning 160 ac of land and a one-half interest in a gristmill and sawmill in Broadkiln Hundred (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1809). The next assessment of real property undertaken in the hundred, in 1816, showed Reed as owning a 50 ac parcel with one gristmill and one sawmill, as well as a second parcel of 200 ac (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1816).

Reed was probably the owner *and* the operator of the gristmill and sawmill. Two requests for new road construction made to the Court of Quarter Sessions in the 1810s, the first in 1810 and the second in 1814, specifically mentions Nathan Reed's mills as starting points. The 1814 petition asking "for a road leading from or near Nathan Reed's Mills to intersect the county road near Milby Simplers" contained a viewers' sketch showing the mills (Sussex County Court of Common Pleas 1814). It showed the gristmill and the sawmill as separate buildings, each on the east side of the road, with the millpond on the west side (Figure 2). It appeared that the gristmill was the southernmost of the two buildings and was fed by a race, while the sawmill sat closer to the road and had a separate race.

The Sussex County assessment of real property undertaken in 1822 listed Reed as owning 250 ac of land, a gristmill, and an "out of repair" sawmill (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1822). The fact that the sawmill was not functioning probably indicated that Reed was having financial difficulties, because he would in short order lose the mill seat. In 1825, following Reed's death, William Mcllvain purchased the 60 ac mill tract at Sheriff's sale for \$460 to satisfy Reed's debts to John D. Smith and Milby Simpler (Sussex County Deeds 1825:58). A handwritten notation added to Mcllvain's tax records confirmed the purchase, although it listed the transfer from Nathan Reed as "40 acres and a saw mill;" no reference was made to the other 20 ac or the gristmill (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1824). Perhaps they were assessed in Cedar Creek Hundred.

William Mcllvain did not own the mills long. He passed away shortly after purchasing the property. By the terms of his will, his property was to pass first to his father, David Mcllvain, and then to four other named heirs. David Mcllvain apparently wasn't well, because he passed away *ca.* 1828. Two of William Mcllvain's four named heirs, Silas and Miers Reynolds, acquired the Nathan Reed property "to be equally divided between them and their heirs and assigns forever" (Sussex County Register of Wills 1826). Silas and Miers Reynolds were William Mcllvain's nephews; they were also minors, ages 10 and 8 in 1830 (U.S. Census 1850a). Consequently, their father, Roderick Reynolds, was appointed as their legal guardian (Sussex County Orphans Court 1830:78).

### **3.2 Industrialization & Early Urbanization 1830-1880±**

When the mills passed from the ownership of Nathan Reed, they apparently entered a period where they were tenant operated rather than owner operated. For a period of approximately 80 years, Reynolds Mill appeared to have been owned by people who were not

millers. Ca. 1830, those owners became Silas M. and Miers W. Reynolds. The Reynolds family would own the mill for approximately 27 years. The subsequent owners, the Ponders, would hold the property for a much longer period of time, 46 years, but the Reynolds name became attached to the mills, millpond, and road despite multiple later owners.

Minors and brothers, Silas and Miers Reynolds, were clearly too young to operate the mill themselves. Because they had not yet reached legal majority (age 14 in Sussex County in the early nineteenth century), their property was placed under the guardianship of their father, Roderick Reynolds. The Sussex County Orphans Court ordered “three judicious freeholders” to view the lands owned by the brothers and estimate the yearly rental value of the property. The viewers report, delivered to the court in March 1831, gave a snapshot of the mill property at that time (Sussex County Orphans Court 1831:174):

We find on said premises a Dwelling House, Stable, Corn Crib, an old Smoke House & Black Smiths Shop all in Bad repair, Five hundred panels of worm Fence one half of which is in bad repair, Thirty apple Trees one half of which old and on the decline, about fifty peach Trees small. Through said farm or premises runs a Mill stream on which is erected a Saw and Grist Mill in Midling repair [we] are of the opinion and say [the premises] are worth annually the sum of seventy-five dollars.

The viewers’ report provided a good deal of information about the property. It showed that the mills were situated on a farm and that the farmstead buildings included a house, stable, corncrib, smokehouse, and a blacksmith shop. The fact that all farm buildings were in bad repair indicated that all would need to be repaired, rebuilt, or replaced. Crops grown on the farm included corn and orchard crops. Animals (probably a horse or horses) supplied the power. The peach trees were apparently planted relatively recently but nevertheless well before Sussex County’s peach boom of the mid and late nineteenth century. Unfortunately, the report did not provide any useful information on the mills, mill equipment, or mill operator.

Sussex County tax assessments provide only a limited amount of additional information. In 1832, a handwritten notation marked the conveyance of the mill property from David McIlvain to the Reynolds. A second notation in 1834 stated that Silas and Miers Reynolds owned 40 ac of land and a mill seat. The 1836 tax assessments contained no listing for Silas and Miers Reynolds. Rather, the gristmill and the sawmill, valued at \$400, were listed under Roderick Reynolds’ name (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1828, 1834, 1836). Silas and Myers (as it was now spelled) Reynolds reappeared in the 1844 tax assessments as owners of a sawmill and gristmill (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1844). They remained in partnership until 1849,

when Silas, now 29 years old and married, bought out the share of Myers and his wife, Mary Jane. The deed conveying the property to Silas included the mills and 60 ac of land (Sussex County Deeds 1849:260). Silas would own the property for 10 more years; he was listed in the 1850 population census as a farmer, not a miller, which probably indicated that he rented the buildings (U.S. Census 1850a). The Price and Rea (1850) map of Broadkiln Hundred labeled the mill seat as “Reynolds G & S M,” indicating that the mill seat was being used for both saw and gristmilling at that time (Figure 3). Although the tax assessments stated that Myers conveyed to Silas his interest in both a gristmill and a sawmill, the 1850 United States Census of Manufacturers for Broadkiln Hundred credited Silas only with operating a water-powered sawmill (U.S. Census 1850b). The most likely explanation for this was that the gristmill was a small portion of the operation; generally, to be listed in the Manufacturers Census, production had to reach \$500 (GAI Consultants, Inc. 2004:40). Silas Reynolds had invested \$600 dollars in his sawmill, and had sawed 1,000 logs into lumber valued at \$500 (U.S. Census 1850b). That Reynolds’ sawmill operation was more valuable than his gristmill is not surprising. In the mid-nineteenth century, wood was an important commodity in Milton, located about 4 mi to the southeast. The town was known for lumber processing, shipbuilding, and furniture making (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:23, 30; Hancock and McCabe 1982:20).

Reynolds Mill was a node of community activity in a rural area of Broadkiln and Cedar Creek hundreds during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:23). Other community buildings in proximity to the mills included a schoolhouse and the Reynolds Methodist Episcopal Church (1872), both of which were located southeast of the intersection of what is today S.R. 30 and Reynolds Pond Road (Beers 1868; Reynolds Methodist Episcopal Church n.d.; United States Geological Survey [USGS] 1918). The schoolhouse and church, like the mill, are no longer extant, although the graveyard associated with the church remains. The latest burials in the cemetery date to the mid-twentieth century.

Silas Reynolds’ ownership of the mill seat and pond that bear his family’s name ended in 1859, when he conveyed the 60 ac mill seat, sawmill and gristmill, and millpond to John Ponder and his son James (Sussex County Deeds 1859:260). John Ponder had been one of the “judicious freeholders” who had assessed the value of the Reynolds Mill property in 1831, so he was undoubtedly familiar with the mills and their operations. Upon John’s death in 1863, James Ponder became the sole owner of the Reynolds Pond mill seat (Sussex County Deeds 1905:603). The Ponders were local capitalists and entrepreneurs from Milton, with a variety of business interests that included selling general merchandise, lumber, grain, and iron ore; building, buying, and selling sailing ships; operating various saw, grist, and bark mills; and

farming (Auman *et al.* 2005:2-26, 29-30). James Ponder also served as Milton's postmaster, as a Representative in the Delaware State House between 1856 and 1860, as a Senator in the Delaware State Senate (including a term as Speaker of the Senate) between 1864 and 1870, and as the Governor of Delaware between 1871 and 1875 (Pickett 2005).

In light of his political service and multiple business enterprises during the time he owned the mills on Reynolds Pond, James Ponder undoubtedly rented the mills rather than operated them himself. This was confirmed by the view of the mill seat in the 1868 Beers atlas, which showed a miller's house present on the property (Figure 4); Ponder himself lived in Milton. The atlas also shows, on the maps of both the Broadkiln and the Cedar Creek hundreds, that there were two separate mill buildings, one housing the gristmill with the second housing the sawmill. The gristmill was located on the southern end of the dam on the east side of the roadway. The sawmill is shown on the map, approximately one-half to two-thirds of the way up the dam to the north, in an area that is now under modern fill. Each of the mills had a separate race. This 1868 representation of two separate mill buildings is consistent with the older 1814 road sketch, when the property was under the ownership of Nathan Reed.

Although they did not operate the mills themselves, the Ponders took an active interest in the businesses, investing money in them. The 1860 Census of Manufacturers indicated that the Ponders invested \$1,200 in the gristmill, ground 3,200 bushels of corn, and produced a similar amount of cornmeal valued at \$2,240. The sawmill received a smaller investment of \$800, and yielded higher production than during Silas Reynolds' tenure. The sawmill processed 50,000 logs, resulting in 50,000 board feet of lumber valued at \$500. The Manufacturers Census also noted that the mills were water powered and operated seasonally. Each employed one man at \$20 per month for part of the year (U.S. Census 1860a).

Ponder's water-powered gristmill and sawmill were going strong at the time of the 1870 Manufacturers Census (U.S. Census 1870a). Ponder now had \$1,500 invested in the custom gristmill (meaning it ground corn for a local market), which operated one wheel. However, it ground much, much less corn than it had 10 years earlier, producing only 475 bushels of corn valued at \$600. The lower production possibly indicated two things: first, that the gristmill may have been in poor repair; or second, that Sussex County was shifting from its historic dependence on corn as a cash crop towards a more varied agricultural mix. In the late nineteenth century, dependence on corn husbandry was giving way to a greater emphasis on fruit and vegetable production, so there was less of a need for the gristmill. Historically, corn had been Sussex County's major staple crop, but this began to change in the late nineteenth century, particularly following the construction of two railroads, the Delaware Railroad whose