

route traversed the state's spine in 1865 and the Breakwater & Junction Railroad located along eastern Delaware communities in the 1870s (Lichtenstein Consulting Engineers, Inc. 2000:39). With quick access to urban markets now assured, farmers in Broadkilm and surrounding hundreds turned increasingly to truck farming as a livelihood (Beers 1868; De Cunzo and Garcia 1993:24, 89, 99; Hancock 1976:87-90; Herman *et al.* 1989:54). With a lesser emphasis on corn as a cash crop, Ponder's gristmill probably no longer produced cornmeal for export but rather concentrated on grinding for local uses.

The sawmill's production in 1870, by contrast, was noticeably higher than it had been 10 years earlier. A \$1,500 investment in the sawmill resulted in the production of 145,000 board feet of lumber valued at \$2,175. The sawmill was listed as operating one saw and one wheel, perhaps meaning one up-and-down saw (sometimes called a muley saw) and one circular saw (U.S. Census 1870a). The latter were becoming popular at the time. Some of the lumber production undoubtedly went to Ponder's shipbuilding operations.

The final manuscripted federal Census of Manufacturers (1880b) contained only a listing for Ponder's sawmill. The gristmill is not listed. The level of investment at the sawmill remained the same at \$1,500, but a number of changes had been made to increase efficiency and production. The most significant was the replacement of the water wheel with a 20-horsepower "Green Mountain" turbine. Compared to waterwheels, turbines were smaller in size, higher in speed and power, lower in cost, and more efficient in locations with variable water levels and smaller heads (Hunter 1979). Green Mountain turbines were particularly high in speed and would have provided greater power and speed for a mill like Ponder's, where the fall was only six feet (U.S. Census 1880a; Wenthin *et al.* 1999). The two turbine-powered circular saws and one muley saw together produced 300,000 board feet of lumber valued at \$3,650. The mill employed two males and operated full time for four months, part time for four months, and not at all for the remaining four months. The trees came from the district around the mill (U.S. Census 1880a), and clearly, Milton's shipbuilding and other industries were providing a market for Ponder's lumber.

Whether Ponder's gristmill on Sowbridge Branch remained in operation or even in existence at the time of the 1880 Manufacturers Census is not clear. The census lists only one gristmill in all of Broadkilm Hundred. This could mean that the record was incomplete, but it could also indicate that the shift from corn to produce farming had become so pronounced in the hundred that Ponder's and other gristmills either went out of operation or failed to reach the \$500 production level needed to be included in the census. Tax assessment records add to the mystery. For the period 1880 through 1888, Ponder was assessed taxes on only a sawmill. A

gristmill reappeared in his tax assessments for the period 1888 through 1892 and remained on the rolls for as long as the Ponders owned the mill seat (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1884, 1888, 1892).

At least two conclusions can be inferred from the census and tax assessment information. One is that the gristmill was present but not operating and thus did not meet the assessment threshold. But a second explanation is that Ponder razed the gristmill he had purchased from Silas Reynolds and then built another, new mill in the late 1880s. This second explanation seems more logical. If the gristmill building was the original one, it had been standing since approximately 1794. It had been described as being in “middling” repair (a middle ground between good and bad) in 1831. Over the ensuing 50 years it probably deteriorated further, even in light of the capital investment that Silas Reynolds and James Ponder had made in the mill. Ponder could have concluded that razing the mill and replacing it with a more efficient operation was a wise and economical move. In the late nineteenth century, an efficient gristmill could have been as or even more valuable than a sawmill. Although Ponder’s sawmill was still operating strongly at the time of the 1880 Manufacturers Census, shipbuilding in Milton was entering a phase of lesser importance to the local economy. Production was shifting to ports able to accommodate boats with deeper drafts than could be floated out on Broadkill Creek at Milton. At the same time, tree stands in and near Milton, long a potent and valuable raw material, were beginning to be depleted, and more and more land was being put into agricultural production (Hancock and McCabe 1982:160). A businessman of James Ponder’s acumen would have recognized the trends and sought to maximize the value of his property by de-emphasizing the sawmill and constructing a new, more efficient gristmill.

Unfortunately, all this remains in the realm of speculation, as definitive records on the operation of the gristmill during this period could not be located, and the archaeological investigations did not uncover diagnostic material that would shed light on this question.

### **3.3 Urbanization & Early Suburbanization 1880 to 1940±**

Following James Ponder’s death in 1897, the mill seat at Reynolds Pond was bequeathed to his wife, Sallie Waples Ponder (Sussex County Deeds 1905:603). The deed, along with tax assessments taken following the transfer of ownership, indicate that a sawmill and a gristmill were present on the Reynolds Pond property, but that they clearly fell into disrepair during Sallie Ponder’s ownership. Between 1896 and 1900, the mills were valued at \$1,000. For the assessment period 1901 to 1904, the value had dropped to \$600. After that,

the sawmill listing disappears from the assessments. The 1905 to 1908 assessment for the mill property notes only a gristmill and pond, valued at \$500 (Sussex County Tax Assessment 1900, 1904, 1908). No further reference to a sawmill is made, and presumably it did not operate after ca. 1904 and was dismantled.

The mill seat had a variety of owners in the twentieth century. Sallie Ponder sold the gristmill, millpond, dam, and 60 ac of land to William T. and Rozena Chase of Wilmington in 1905. Chase was a miller, but he owned the property only until 1913, when it was auctioned off to pay his debts (Auman *et al.* 2005:2-30; Sussex County Deeds 1905:603, 1913:102). It then became the property of Horatio S. Macklin, who sold it, in 1918, to Fred K. Jensen (Sussex County Deeds 1918:104). The USGS quadrangle topographic map from 1918 (USGS 1918) shows the millpond, as well as the miller's house and the local school and church (Figure 5).

Jensen owned and operated the gristmill from 1918 into 1943, its last years of substantial operation. He was the last miller to grind flour and meal at the mill (Harry Isaacs, Jr., personal communication 2005). A new bridge/spillway structure was built next to the mill ca. 1925. A Delaware State Highway Department as-built plan from 1940 (Figure 6) shows the gristmill; a number of small outbuildings; a two-story frame house on the east side of S.R. 30 as well as agricultural buildings; and the millpond on the west side of the road (Delaware State Highway Department 1940). The body of water is labeled "Jensen's Pond" on the 1940 map; however, the earlier 1918 map and a later 1944 USGS topographic quadrangle both refer to it as "Reynolds Pond" (Delaware State Highway Department 1940; USGS 1918, 1944). One known image of the mill exists; it is a photograph, facing north-northeast, from the 1940s or 1950s (Photograph 15).

In 1943, John S. Isaacs and his wife, Mary, purchased the 60 ac Reynolds Pond mill seat from Jensen (Sussex County Deeds 1943:143). John Isaacs was a very successful farmer who had no real intention of going into the milling businesses, but as he accumulated more land, mill buildings, and ponds frequently came with his land purchases. In addition to Reynolds Mill, Isaacs owned two other gristmills during this period, Cedar Creek and Waples mills. Isaacs was the last operator of Reynolds gristmill, although he used it to crack corn for chicken feed rather than to grind meal. The mill ceased operation in 1950, following his death. The miller's house was destroyed by an accidental fire in the 1950s, and the mill was the victim of arson in the 1970s. The milldam, the bridge over the millrace, the millpond, and the area where the mill and miller's house were formerly located remain in Isaac family ownership as part of a 6 ac wooded tract (Sussex County Tax Assessments 2002). No above ground portions of buildings



*Photograph 15. 1940s or 1950s image of the mill.*

associated with the sawmill or gristmill remained at the time of the Bridge 918 project construction.

### **3.4 Millers and Mill Owners**

Using the variety of historical sources available it was possible to identify the names of the owners of the Reynolds Mill seat from its patent in 1794 to its demise of the gristmill in the 1950s. Information on the mill owners could be gleaned from a variety of sources; however, information about the millers who toiled in the gristmill and sawmill found on the property was less readily available. Based on the historical record, it is likely that tenants ran the two mills associated with Reynolds Pond from at least 1825 through 1904. Unfortunately, their names do not appear on any of the historic records. Sussex County tax assessments, the four censuses of manufacturers, court cases, and deeds failed to provide the name of a single tenant. Consequently, their identities are lost to history.

Below is a list of the owners of Reynolds Mill, the years they owned the property, and a brief profile of each.

#### **3.4.1 Eunice Clifton/Warren and Wrixam Warren, Owners, ca. 1794-1810**

Although Major Clifton applied for the land warrant in 1793, the land patent for the property known as the "Mill Tract" was granted to Eunice Clifton in 1794. In 1799, she married Wrixam Warren and he acquired rights to the mill property at that time.

Little is known about Eunice Clifton Warren or Wrixam Warren. Federal population census data did not begin reporting detailed information like occupants' names, occupations, value of land and personal property, or other information until the 1850 census. The 1800 population census for Sussex County, the only one conducted during the Warrens' ownership of the mills, provided much less information. The census named only the head of the household and the number of inhabitants in that household by race, age, and status. According to the census, Wrixam and Eunice Warren were free, white, and between the ages of 27 and 46. The only other person living in their household was a free, white female between the ages of 16 and 27. This was either a daughter or a servant. As the Warrens had not married until 1799, the daughter would have had to have been from a previous marriage (U.S. Census 1800).

The first detailed tax assessment of land and livestock for Broadkiln Hundred dates to 1803 (Sussex County Tax Assessment 1803). Wrixam Warren was not listed, probably because 1803 was most likely the year he passed away. Eunice Warren, at that point his widow, was credited with owning only 20 acres of land valued at \$20, one-half of a gristmill and sawmill with a \$300 value, one mare, one cow and calf, seven hogs, and two sheep.

No will could be located for Wrixam Warren, meaning he probably died intestate. However, his probate record is on file at the Delaware Public Archives (Sussex County Register of Wills 1803). The probate file, particularly the inventory of his goods and chattel compiled in July 1803, painted a picture of Wrixham Warren at the end of his life. The inventory made no mention of the mill or mills on the property, which would have been considered real estate rather than personal property. The inventory also made clear that Warren was a farmer as well as a mill owner. Based on his livestock and other possessions, Warren was clearly a middle class farmer, certainly operating at more than a subsistence level, but not rich by any means. He owned two cows and one heifer, one sheep, and 10 head of hogs. He grew corn and flax and may have tenanted additional land, because the inventory mentioned "Corn on the Smith lot." He owned tools and implements typical of a farmer of that time, including a plow, harrow, and garden hoe. Household items included two chests, two tables, two beds and bedsteads, frying pans, coarse and fine crockery, a parcel of books, and a gun. Many of the notations refer to the items as "old." The flax grown and the sheep raised undoubtedly provided raw material for clothing, because there were two old spinning wheels, plenty of thread, partially processed flax, and 27 yards of gingham.

Another salient feature of the inventory was that Warren was in debt. The file was replete with I.O.U.s to individuals and to Houston and Hazzard, who appeared to be merchants running a general store. There was also some money owed to Warren, but his liabilities far outweighed his unclaimed assets. The I.O.U.s serve as a reminder that cash was in limited supply in early Federal Sussex County, and that if a person wanted to acquire some necessary item he bartered, ran up credit with a local merchant, or borrowed money. Borrowers such as Warren would often pay back the debts by providing the creditor with a portion of their crops or livestock.

Ultimately, Eunice Warren, Wrixam Warren's administratrix, would sell the Mill Tract in order to pay off Wrixam's debts. As was common practice at the time, one party would buy up all the debts held by creditors against the deceased person and then bring

suit against the deceased's estate for the full amount. In this particular case, in 1810, Collins Abbott and his wife Eunice brought three lawsuits against Eunice Warren and Wrixam Warren's estate. As noted previously, Eunice Abbott was the former Eunice Warren, meaning she was suing herself. The lawsuits were "for the use of Spicer Warren," who would acquire the money or Warren's land if the Abbotts prevailed. The cumulative amount of debt sought in the three lawsuits was \$76.74. The Abbotts prevailed in all three cases (Sussex County Court of Common Pleas 1810:112). To modern eyes, \$76.74 may not seem like a great deal of money, but in 1810 Sussex County it represented a significant sum. The 1803 inventory of all Wrixam Warren's goods and chattel, for comparison, valued his possessions at a little over 69 pounds, or about \$20.00, based on the exchange rate at the time (Officer and Williamson 2008; Sussex County Register of Wills 1803). A second indication that it was a significant sum was contained in the deed from the Sheriff's sale conveying the Mill Tract to Spicer Warren. It contained a standard clause from the time stating that "good and lawful men" in the area "said upon their oaths that the rents, issues and profits of the lands and tenements with the appurtenances so taken in execution [of the judgment] would not be sufficient in seven years to satisfy the debt and damages" of the lawsuits. Consequently, the Mill Tract was sold to Spicer Warren in April 1811 (Sussex County Deeds 1811:319). Spicer Warren clearly saw the property as a short-term investment to be held just long enough to sell at a profit, rather than as a farm to be worked. In August of the same year Spicer Warren sold the property he had bought for \$76.74 in judgments to Nathan Reed for \$200 (Sussex County Deeds 1811:427).

#### **3.4.2 Nathan Reed, Owner, 1811-1825**

Nathan Reed owned the mill tract from 1811, when he bought it from Spicer Warren for \$200, until he lost the property in 1825. Although the evidence is not definitive, Reed was probably a miller and the owner-operator of the sawmill and the gristmill on his property. He was apparently a well-known member of his community; his name comes up in Broadkiln Hundred Road Papers, Viewers' Reports, and court valuation records. Biographical information on Reed, however, was difficult to find, a function of the records available at the time. U.S. population censuses provide only limited information. There was also no will or probate file on Reed at the Delaware

Public Archives, which is generally the most useful record for presenting specifics about a person's life.

What is known about Reed comes primarily from census records and tax assessments. At the time of the 1810 census, conducted one year prior to his acquisition of the mill tract, Reed (spelled Read in the census) lived in a seven-person household. Three of the people were male and four were female. All were free and white. Presumably, Reed and his wife fell within the 27 to 45 age group, and the two boys and two girls under 16 year of age were their children. The female between 17 and 26 could have been a child or a servant (U.S. Census 1810). By 1820, the composition of Nathan Reed's household had changed. Reed was now older than 45, but presumably his wife had not yet reached that age. There was a second female between 27 and 45 in the household, again, most likely a servant. There appeared to be at least one male child at home between ages 10 and 16. There were two other males listed, one between 16 and 18 and a second between 16 and 25. The column was probably mislabeled and should have read 18 to 25 (U.S. Census 1820).

The 1816 tax assessment of Broadkill (later Broadkiln) Hundred was the first to include the value of land holdings since Reed purchased the mill tract. Reed owned a fair amount of property, 200 ac and 50 ac tracts, as well as a gristmill and sawmill. The record is not clear, but based on deed research, it was likely that the mills were on the 50 ac parcel. Reed also owned one horse, one pair of oxen, one cow and two heifers, two hogs, and twelve sheep. Based on the land and livestock holdings, Reed can be characterized as a relatively prosperous Sussex County farmer for the time (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1816).

The 1822 Broadkiln Hundred tax assessment was essentially the same. Reed still owned 250 ac of land, the gristmill, and the sawmill. His livestock mix was different but valuable nonetheless: one pair of oxen to work the land, one cow, two yearlings, eight goats, and six sheep. There was one crucial difference between the 1816 and 1822 assessments, however -- the sawmill was listed as "out of repair," meaning it was not operational (Sussex County Tax Assessment 1822).

The inoperable sawmill did not bode well for Reed. In 1824, he was sued by Milby Simpler and John Smith in the Sussex County Court of Common Pleas over outstanding debt. Apparently, Reed had been indebted to Simpler for \$237, a large sum of money, since 1817 (Sussex County Court of Common Pleas 1824:93). Perhaps the debt was accumulated because Reed could not process wood, or perhaps Reed could

not repair the sawmill because of his outstanding debt. In any event, following a judgment in favor of the plaintiffs, the Mill Tract was sold at Sheriff's sale in 1825 to William McIlvain. The deed indicated that Reed had died prior to the completion of the sale (Sussex County Deeds 1825:58); however, no will or probate record could be located for him.

### **3.4.3 William and David McIlvain, Owners, 1825-ca. 1830**

William and David McIlvain were in many respects caretaker owners of the mill tract between Nathan Reed's and the Reynolds family's ownerships, although neither McIlvain apparently planned to be caretakers. Each died, however, within a year or two of acquiring the mill tract.

William McIlvain was not listed as a head of household in the 1820 population census of Broadkilm Hundred. His father David was. David was undoubtedly the free, white male over 45 years of age. William was probably the free, white male between age 27 and 45. The census noted that two males in the household were engaged in manufacturing; it was undoubtedly these two. It may have been shipbuilding; a William McIlvain was credited with building two sloops and one two-masted schooner between 1824 and 1825 (Hancock and McCabe 1982:161). Also in the household were four free, white boys, two under the age of 10 and two between 10 and 16. The remainder of the household consisted of three African American slaves, a man between the age of 27 and 45, a man over the age of 45, and a female between age 14 and 26 (U.S. Census 1820).

William McIlvain died in 1826, a year after he purchased the mill tract. By the terms of his will, his property was to pass first to his father, David McIlvain, and then to four other named heirs: Benjamin McIlvain, William C. Conley, and Silas and Miers Reynolds. David McIlvain died ca. 1828, and the mill property formerly belonging to Nathan Reed passed to the Reynolds brothers, "to be equally divided between them and their heirs and assigns forever" (Sussex County Register of Wills 1826).

### **3.4.4 The Reynolds Family, Owners, ca. 1830-1859**

Silas and Miers Reynolds were William McIlvain's nephews, the children of William's sister, Sarah McIlvain Reynolds. They were also minors, ages 10 and 8 in 1830, when the mill tract passed to them (U.S. Census 1850a). Consequently, their

father, Roderick Reynolds, was appointed as their legal guardian (Sussex County Orphans Court 1830:78). However, like the McIlvains' before him, Roderick Reynolds died shortly after acquiring control of the mill tract, passing away in either 1830 or 1831. His probate record (Sussex County Register of Wills 1831) made it clear that Roderick Reynolds was a farmer and that he was a member of Broadkiln Hundred's upper echelon. His detailed inventory of goods and chattel, dated December 28, 1831, stretched more than three pages, and included items not common to most Sussex County agricultural households, including two wagons and a two-wheeled carriage, an impressive amount of furniture, numerous looking glasses, carpets and rugs, and four dumbwaiters. The meticulous care with which the estate was catalogued was itself an indication of the value of his possessions.

Silas Reynolds took possession of the mill tract in 1834, when he turned 14, then the age of legal majority in Sussex County. Like their father, Silas and his brother Miers Reynolds became farmers. Curiously, neither appeared in the 1840 federal population census of Sussex County, although Silas was 20 and Miers was 18 years old at the time. The 1844 Broadkiln Hundred tax assessment credited Silas Reynolds with owning 125 ac of land and a small amount of livestock--one horse, one pair of oxen, one cow, one sheep, and one sow (Sussex County Tax Assessment 1844).

In 1850, about the time he acquired sole ownership of the mill tract, Silas Reynolds was a 30-year-old farmer living in Broadkiln Hundred. His wife, May, was 25, and they had three children, Mary E. (age 8), Miers B. (age 7), and Sarah E. (age 4). Also living in the household were two servants, Hannah, a 15-year-old white girl, and Sarah Miller, a 20-year-old mulatto (U.S. Census 1850a). Silas Reynolds' circumstances were not the best. The 1850 Agricultural Census credited him with owning a total of 165 ac of land, but only 40 of those acres were improved. The cash value of the farm was estimated at \$1,300, a relatively low amount. His only crop was corn; he produced 250 bushels. His livestock mix included one horse, two working oxen, one milk cow, one beef cattle, six swine, and eight sheep. Curiously, Silas Reynolds' farm produced no wool products, despite the eight sheep. It appeared his farm operated at or near a subsistence level (U.S. Census 1850b).

Miers, although younger, was much more prosperous in 1850. His farm, consisting of 150 ac of improved and 50 ac of unimproved land in Cedar Creek Hundred, was worth \$2,500. He grew diversified crops, including 19 bushels of wheat, 200 bushels of corn, eight bushels of peas and beans, 400 bushels of Irish potatoes and 10

bushels of sweet potatoes, 100 pounds of butter, and 28 pounds of wool. The wool came from nine sheep kept by Miers Reynolds, along with one horse, two oxen, one milk cow, four beef cattle, and 10 swine (U.S. Census 1850b). He was a comfortable, market-producing farmer. Miers lived with his wife, Mary Jane (age 25), and their three children: George (age 5), David (age 2), and Roderick (age 6 months). Also living in the household were William Morris, a 23-year-old white laborer, and Jane Messick who was 18 years old. Presumably, she was a servant (U.S. Census 1850a).

In 1849, Miers sold his portion of the mill tract to Silas. It may have been that Miers Reynolds used the proceeds to go into the fruit canning business. A Milton history calls him "an early canner" (Hancock and McCabe 1982:21), one of the first to realize the potential of the growing market for fruits and vegetables. He established a business to "evaporate," or dry and preserve, apples and peaches on Mill Street in Milton; the business was later moved to Slaughter Neck (Hancock and McCabe 1982:21, 175). One of the co-investors in many of Miers' business ventures was James C. Ponder, who would own the mill tract after the Reynolds. In 1882, long after he had given up his interest in the mills, Miers and his son purchased a large barn on Willow Street in Milton in order to expand their fruit "evaporation" business. At the same time, Miers also received a patent on an improvement he made to the fruit drying process (Hancock and McCabe 1982:175-176).

Life did not work out as well for Silas Reynolds, who owned the mill tract until 1859, which was 10 years after Miers had sold his share. Silas was not nearly as prominent as his brother. A published history of Milton noted only that he was a mill owner and, in 1851, an incorporating member of the local lodge of the fraternal order of Masons (another incorporator was James Ponder) (Hancock and McCabe 1982:130, 109). In 1852, Silas Reynolds sold 135 ac of land to John Tinley, leaving him with the 60 ac mill seat. Perhaps at this time Reynolds became a miller as well as a farmer, or perhaps he simply got rid of his unimproved land and made a go of it on his improved land. His circumstances seemed to have improved after the 1850 Agricultural Census. He was assessed for one horse, one pair oxen, three cows, three young cattle, 10 sheep, one sow, and four shoats (Sussex County Tax Assessment 1852).

In 1859, Reynolds would sell the mill tract to James Ponder and his father John for \$1,500 (Sussex County Deeds 1859:263). At the time, Reynolds was a 40-year-old farmer married to his second wife, Matilda, age 28. Children in their household were Mary E. (age 19), Miers B. (age 16), Sarah E. (age 14), all from his first marriage, and

William W. (age 2). No value was given for his property in the census, and his personal estate was estimated at only \$200 (U.S. Census 1860b). The 1860 Agricultural Census provides more detail and demonstrates that his situation had worsened. Silas owned only six acres of improved land valued at \$75. He apparently could support his family of six, or perhaps he also rented other land, because the census credited him with keeping one horse, two milk cows, one beef cattle, and three swine, and growing 125 bushels of corn, one bushel of peas and beans, 25 bushels of Irish potatoes, and 10 bushels of sweet potatoes (U.S. Census 1860b).

Silas Reynolds died around 1869, which would have made him only 48 years old. His 1868 Sussex County Tax Assessment was crossed out and the notation "Dead" was added (Sussex County Tax Assessment 1868). Apparently he and his wife had been quite prolific prior to his death. The 1870 population census listed Matilda Reynolds as living with four children, all under the age of nine, including four-year-old twins (U.S. Census 1870b). The circumstances of Silas' death are not known. No death notice, will, or probate inventory for him could be found at the Delaware Public Archives. The most enduring legacy of Reynolds family ownership of the mill tract was that their name became associated with the property. Despite several succeeding owners, including one of Milton's and Sussex County's most prominent families, the mill tract and pond has retained the Reynolds name.

### **3.4.5 John and James Ponder, Owners, 1859-1897**

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).

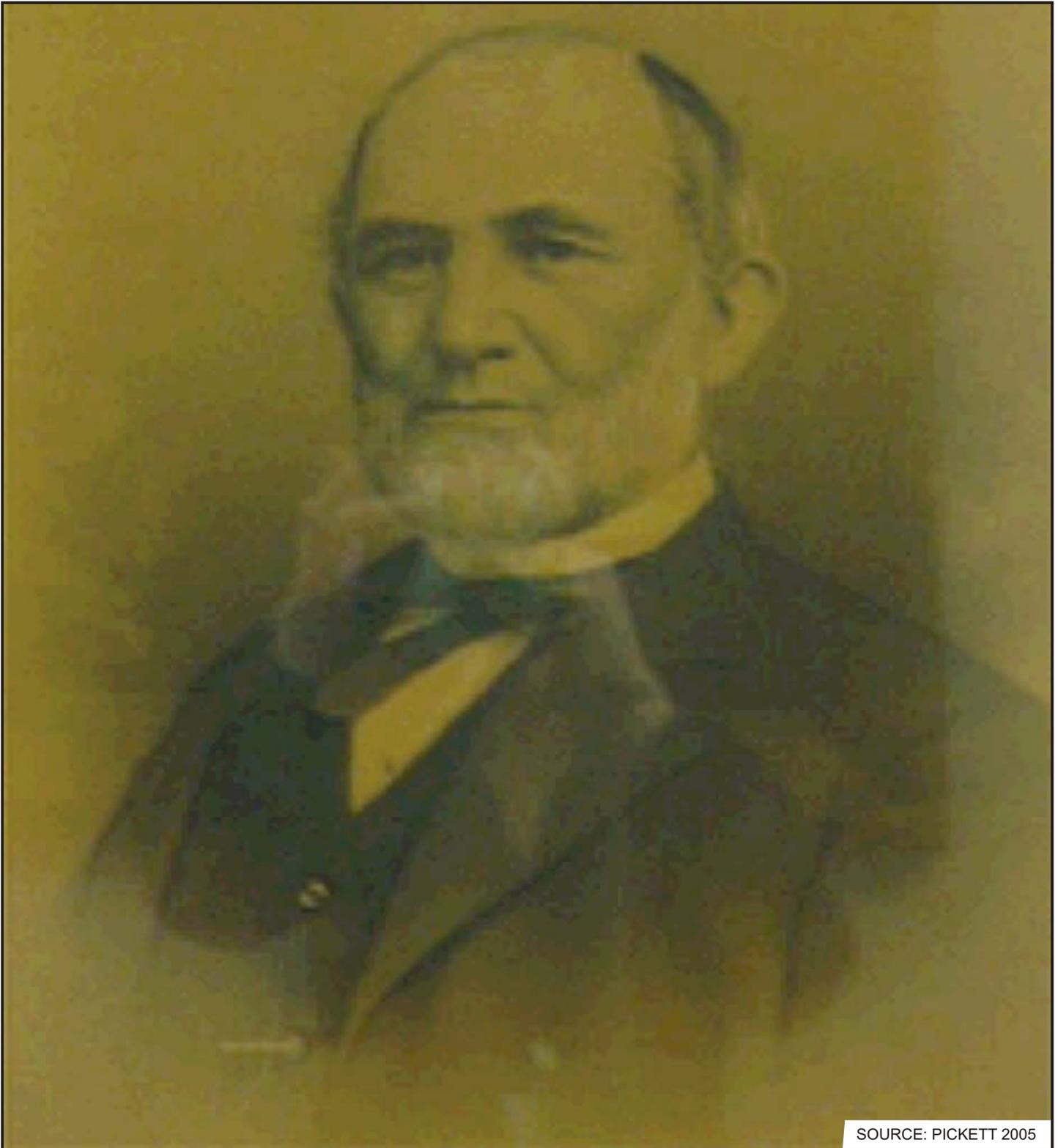
John Ponder was born in Broadkiln Hundred in 1791. In 1809, at age 18, he became a clerk in the store of Major Hazzard. The store was one of the parties to which Wrixam Warren, an early owner of the mill tract, had owed money. Following service in the War of 1812, Ponder increased his land holdings, receiving land warrants in return for his service. He formed Milby & Ponder in partnership with Arthur Milby. The business dealt in general merchandise, lumber, grain, wood, and quercitron bark (used for tanning). It also purchased and shipped Sussex County iron. The iron was shipped principally to New Jersey on vessels owned by the company.

In 1830, Ponder and Milby dissolved their partnership. Ponder operated his own business until 1843, when his son James, his oldest child, became his partner. John Ponder & Son would remain in operation until the father's death in 1863. In addition to his business dealings, John Ponder was also politically active. He served repeated terms as a Commissioner of the Levy Court of Sussex County and representing the Milton area in the State Senate from 1852 to 1856 (J.M. Runk & Company 1899:197).

Sussex County Tax Assessment records noted John Ponder's financial well-being. He owned extensive tracts of land, a mansion house, a tavern, rental houses, and numerous mill seats. One of them was the Reynolds mill seat, which he and James Ponder purchased from Silas Reynolds in 1859. They owned the property jointly until John Ponder's death in 1863. In addition to his individual holdings, in 1852 John Ponder & Son was credited with owning a wharf and granaries (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1852, 1856, 1860). Population census records from 1860 referred to Ponder as a grain merchant, and a very wealthy one at that. His real estate was valued at \$11,000 and his personal estate at \$27,000. His son, James, however, was even wealthier. His real estate was worth \$41,500 and his personal property \$29,500, staggering sums for the time (U.S. Census 1850a, 1860b).

James Ponder was born on October 31, 1819 (Plate 1). He entered his father's business as a store clerk in 1838. Five years later he was made a partner. During their partnership, John Ponder & Son was "very largely engaged in the building, purchase and sale of trading ships," a business venture continued by James following his father's 1863 death. His large shipyard was in Milton and appears on the 1868 Map of Broadkilm Hundred (see Figure 4), bounded by Front Street, Round Pole Branch, and a branch near Walnut Street (Hancock and McCabe 1982:159). James closed the firm's general store after his father's death. In addition to shipbuilding, James Ponder erected a steam-powered sawmill in Milton for the manufacturing of lumber, ship timber, and quercitron bark. He expanded his family's already extensive land holdings, becoming the largest landowner in Sussex County. He divided his agricultural lands into tenant farms that he cultivated using the principles of scientific management.

James Ponder was also an organizer, director, president, and agent of the Kent County Mutual Insurance Company and on the board of directors of the Farmers' Bank of Delaware (J.M. Runk & Company 1899:197-198). In the 1880s, he went into business with Silas Reynolds' sons, opening a "large cannery" and a fruit drying operation in Milton (Hancock and McCabe 1982:163, 175). At the time, Sussex County farmers were



SOURCE: PICKETT 2005

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|  | DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION                      |   |
|  | BRIDGE 918 ON S.R. 30<br>AT REYNOLDS POND<br>SUSSEX COUNTY |   |
|  | <b>JAMES PONDER</b>  |   |
|  | PLATE 1  | SKELLY and LOY Inc.<br>CONSULTANTS IN<br>ENVIRONMENT - ENERGY<br>ENGINEERING - PLANNING |

shifting from a historic dependence on corn as a staple crop to extensive fruit and vegetable production, and canning and fruit “evaporation” were booming businesses (Hancock and McCabe 1982:164-177). In the 1890s, he was part of a group of men who joined together to build a new cannery in Milton after a fire destroyed an existing one (Hancock and McCabe 1982:166). Near the end of his life, he was listed in Milton business directories as “Dealer in Grain, Bark, Lumber, Lime, Coal, Guano, Fertilizer, Etc.” (Hancock and McCabe 1982:270).

Like his father before him, James Ponder became interested in politics. He served as Milton’s postmaster and then was elected to an at-large seat in the Delaware State House for one term between 1856 and 1860. Ponder introduced the bill calling for the incorporation of the Junction & Breakwater Railroad, an engine of economic development for eastern Sussex County. In 1864, he moved to the State Senate, becoming Speaker of that body in 1867. He still found time in 1865, however, to serve as a commissioner incorporating Milton as a town (Hancock and McCabe 1982:16). In 1871, at the age of 52, Ponder became Delaware’s 44<sup>th</sup> Governor, easily outdistancing his opponent (J.M. Runk & Company 1899:198).

Ponder’s tenure as governor was not without controversy. The election of 1870 was the first Delaware political contest in which African Americans could vote. Ponder, a Democrat, was not supportive of the change, telling Delaware’s General Assembly that the Federal government was wrong to extend the franchise to “uneducated Negroes.” The election featured rigged voter lists that effectively denied the vote to most African Americans and resulted in all the seats in the General Assembly going to Democrats. In response, two years later President Ulysses S. Grant sent in federal troops to police Delaware’s 1872 election, enabling a few Republicans to win seats. In response, the Delaware Assembly passed, and Governor Ponder signed, some of the state’s earliest Jim Crow laws, including a poll tax and the Assessment Act of 1873, which effectively allowed tax collectors to remove people from voter lists for allegedly not paying their taxes (Wikipedia 2007). This resulted in the further disenfranchisement of African Americans.

At the time, however, Ponder’s most controversial action was not his support of the Jim Crow laws, which had popular support. Rather, it was appointing his brother-in-law, former United States Senator Willard Saulsbury, as Chancellor of Delaware, which is the Chief Justice of the Court of Chancery, which hears equity cases. Saulsbury had left the Senate in disgrace as an alcoholic; in 1863, while apparently drunk on the

Senate floor, he personally lambasted President Lincoln, calling him, among other things, “an imbecile,” and threatening the Senate Sergeant-At-Arms with a gun when he tried to remove him. Ponder promised Saulsbury the appointment, but only if he changed his ways. Saulsbury apparently did and served as Delaware’s Chancellor until his death in 1892 (Wikipedia 2007).

Ponder died in 1897 at his home in Milton. At the time of his death, he was quite rich. His tax assessment from the previous year listed him as owning 2,000 ac of land, his personal house plus eight rental properties, two wharfs, one shipyard and house, one hotel, and the Reynolds sawmill and gristmill (Sussex County Tax Assessment 1896). Despite all the property, his will consisted of a single page, leaving all his real and personal property “to his beloved wife, Sallie Ponder.” Neither the will nor the estate valuation included information on the Reynolds mills (Sussex County Register of Wills 1897).

#### **3.4.6 Sallie Ponder, Owner, 1897-1905**

Sallie (also Sally) Ponder, born Sarah Elizabeth Waples in 1835, was a progeny of one of southern Sussex County’s most prominent families. The Waples, of Milton, and a related family, the Careys, were central to the economic development of Broadkiln Hundred, as were the Ponders, the family she married into. Her father, Gideon Waples, was a large landholder, manufacturer, retailer, and entrepreneur noted in the 1830s for bark production. He also owned a cotton factory, gristmills and sawmills, and was involved in iron ore and dyeing operations (Donatello 2002). Waples Pond, site of one of the milling operations, is located northeast of Reynolds Pond, at the confluence of the Sowbridge and Ingram branches of Primehook Creek (USGS 1992). Historically, there was also a Waples Mill west of Milton and south of Reynolds Mill (Price and Rea 1850).

In 1851, when Sallie Waples was 16 years old, she married Milton merchant and entrepreneur James Ponder, who was 15 years her senior. They would stay married until Ponder’s death in 1897. Censuses beginning in 1860 did not denote an occupation for Sallie Ponder or they stated, as they did in 1870 and 1880, that she was “keeping house.” These same censuses noted the presence of two live-in domestic servants. More properly, Ponder was running the household, which included children Ida (b. 1852), John (b.1855), and James W. (b. 1861). After 1864, the household also included her niece, Clara (U.S. Census 1860b, 1870b, 1880b). Following the death of her

brother, Gideon Burton Waples, Sallie's husband became the legal guardian of Clara (Donatello 2002).

Despite being from one prominent Sussex County family and marrying into another, little historical information about Sallie Ponder could be found. Sussex County Tax Assessments noted the transfer of her husband's property, including the Reynolds mills, to her following his death. The final assessment conducted before her death valued her "Mansion House" at the princely sum of \$4,000. She also retained five rental houses, the Reynolds mills (valued at \$600), and 1,800 ac of land (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1908). Sallie Ponder died at age 72 in 1907, shortly after she sold the mill property to William T. Chase.

#### **3.4.7 William T. Chase, Owner, 1905-1913**

William T. Chase was living in Wilmington in 1905 when he bought the Reynolds Mill property from Sallie Ponder. According to the 1900 population census, prior to buying the gristmill, Chase was a 49-year-old white motorman working for a streetcar company in Wilmington. He and his wife, Rozena, 40 (also spelled Rosine and Rosina) had been married for 19 years. They lived in a rented house with four of their five children: Charles (age 18); William, Jr. (age 15); Myrtie (age 10), and Edna (age 5). Although both William and Rozena Chase were Delaware natives, their two girls had been born in New Jersey, indicating that the family had lived there at one point (U.S. Census 1900).

Apparently, like so many other Americans of the time, the Chases dreamed of owning a farm, because when the next census was taken in 1910, Chase, his wife, their daughter Edna, and a nine-year-old son, Paul, had moved to the Reynolds Mill property in Broadkiln Hundred. He was listed as a self-employed farmer living in a house he owned; that is, there was no mortgage (U.S. Census 1910). For the assessment period 1909-1912, Chase was credited with owning 49 ac of land with a mill and a house on it. The land was valued at \$10 per acre. He also had 12 ac of more valuable land assessed at \$30 per acre. The only livestock listed in his assessment was a single horse (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1912). In the prior assessment period the gristmill and pond were valued at \$500 (Sussex County Tax Assessments 1908). It is not known if Chase operated the mill himself or rented it.

Apparently, Chase's dream of a pastoral life was not to be. In 1913, the mill seat and accompanying 60 ac of land was sold at Sheriff's sale to Charlotte E.W. Burton. The Chases were indebted to Burton for a mortgage of \$2,500 (Sussex County Deeds 1913:102). The 1910 population census had noted that the Chases owned their house free and clear. Perhaps the mortgage had been taken out to make improvements to the gristmill; Chase's 1913 assessment noted the mill, house, and stream were then valued at \$1,000 up \$500 from the previous assessment (Sussex County Tax Assessment 1916). This is purely speculation, as the mortgage document could not be found. William and Rosina Chase remained in Sussex County after losing the mill property. At the time of the 1920 population census, the now 69-year-old William was living in a rental property in Lewes with Rosina and working as a salaried steamboat captain (U.S. Census 1920).

#### **3.4.8 Horatio S. Macklin, Owner, 1913-1918**

Charlotte Burton, the mortgage holder to whom the Chases were indebted, almost immediately sold the Reynolds Mill property to Horatio S. Macklin of Georgetown. Clearly, Macklin purchased the property as an investment and did not operate the mill himself. In both the 1910 and 1920 censuses, Macklin was listed as living on Chestnut Street in Georgetown. In 1910, Macklin was a 47-year-old, self-employed house carpenter living with his wife, Laura H. (age 44) and their five children: Helen G. (15), Bessie L. (11), Laura C. (9), Walter V. (5), and John M. (8 months) (U.S. Census 1910). Ten years later Macklin was a self-employed lumber dealer. His wife and four of his children remained at home; only Bessie was absent. Helen was employed as a clerk at the post office. Laura worked as a clerk at the county tax office (U.S. Census 1920).

Macklin sold the Reynolds Mill property in 1918 to Frederick K. Jensen (Sussex County Deeds 1918:104). Jensen's tenure as owner of Reynolds Mill, 25 years, would be the third longest, trailing only the Reynolds and Ponder families in duration.

#### **3.4.9 Frederick K. Jensen, Owner, 1918-1943**

Frederick K. Jensen was a miller by profession and undoubtedly an owner-operator of the Reynolds gristmill. At the time of the 1910 Sussex County population census, before he had acquired the title to the Reynolds Mill seat, Jensen was

enumerated as a white male running a flourmill in the town of Milton. Curiously, his occupation is listed as “engineer,” rather than miller. He was listed as neither an employer nor an employee, but rather as “working on his owns account,” which seemed to mean he was a self-employed, sole employee of the operation. Jensen had been out of work for 10 weeks in 1909, apparently when the mill shut down for the winter. The 30-year-old Jensen had been married for seven years to Ella E. Jensen. They lived with their two children, John Wesley (age 6) and Lena (age 2). The name of their son suggests that they were probably Methodists (U.S. Census 1910).

By the time of the 1920 population census, the Jensens had purchased the Reynolds Mill property. They were living in the mill house on Reynolds Church Road in Broadkiln Hundred; they owned their house free and clear. Frederick Jensen’s occupation was listed as a self-employed farmer and miller operating a gristmill. Jensen was now the father of three children, the aforementioned John and Lena, as well as four-year-old Clifford (U.S. Census 1920).

In the 1930 census, Fred Jensen was listed as the owner of a feed mill in Broadkiln Hundred. It was not clear whether the Jensens had moved or not. The census noted that they lived on a farm located on Hyland Road. All three children still lived at home. John, the oldest at age 24, was a cutter in one of Milton’s button factories. Although enumerated in the Jensen household, he was listed as married. Lena, age 21, worked as a secretary in a private office. She was single. The youngest child, 14-year-old Clifford, was single and lived at home (U.S. Census 1930).

Attempts were made to find the Jensen children or their descendants. But according to the current owner of the mill property, the only Jensen child he ever knew, Clifford, has passed away and he never had children (Harry Isaacs, Jr., personal communication 2008). In 1943, John S. Isaacs purchased the Jensen Farm, which included Reynolds Mill (Sussex County Deeds 1943:143).

#### **3.4.10 John S. Isaacs and Sons, Owners, 1943-1950**

John S. Isaacs was a twentieth century success story. Born in 1888 near Greenwood, Delaware, by the time of the 1910 census he was a married farmer. Eventually, he and his wife, Mary, would have three sons and a daughter. According to one of his sons, Harry Isaacs, Sr., John Isaacs was a tenant farmer during his early adulthood, first near Greenwood and then in Slaughter Neck. In 1929, he purchased his

first farm, on what is today called Hummingbird Road, north of Reynolds Pond. A portion of the original farmhouse remains, as does a brick farmhouse he built across the road at a later date. Farming conditions were “dismal” when Isaacs moved to the area. He set up a sawmill, cleaned up “acres and acres” of woodlands and used the boards to construct chicken houses and other buildings (Harry Isaacs, Sr., personal communication 2008). In addition, he drained swamps and marshes to create more arable land. Gradually, Isaacs acquired additional parcels of land in Broadkilm and Cedar Creek hundreds between Milton and Milford east of Ellendale, eventually amassing more than 9,000 ac (Harry Isaacs, Sr., personal communication 2008).

By the 1940s and 1950s, the extent of Isaacs’ farming operations was quite large. They included 3,500 ac of tillable land and 4,500 ac of marshland, woodland, and untillable acres. He raised and sold one million chickens annually, along with 300 head of beef cattle, 150 head of sheep, and 100 head of hogs and pigs. Principal crops grown by him included lima beans, peas, grains, and grasses (New Castle County Court of Chancery 1958). According to his grandson, in the 1940s, Isaacs was the largest producer and packer of lima beans in the country. He packed them in his own cannery and marketed them under the Isaacs and Ellendale Brand names (Plates 2, 3, and 4). In the early 1940s, he operated the world’s largest chicken processing plant (Harry Isaacs, Jr., personal communication 2005; Harry Isaacs, Sr., personal communication 2008), as well as the cannery, a sawmill, gristmills, sheds, and storage barns. He owned houses and other property he rented. But the farms he had acquired and consolidated were the foundation of his business enterprise. Beginning in 1943, the business was operated through a partnership composed of Isaacs, his wife Mary, and their children, J. Howard, Harry H., Earle, and Dorothy. In the late 1940s, the business grossed more than one million dollars of income per year. In 1948, the partnership was superseded by the corporation John S. Isaacs and Sons, Inc. (New Castle County Court of Chancery 1958).

Isaacs was also politically active. He served as Delaware’s State Treasurer and as Sussex County’s tax receiver (Harry Isaacs, Jr., personal communication 2008). In 1944, he was a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Chicago (Kestenbaum 2008).

Isaacs acquired Reynolds Mill and millpond as a by-product of his farming operations. As he purchased farms, they sometimes came with gristmills on them. In 1943, he purchased the Jensen Farm, which included Reynolds Mill (Sussex County Deeds 1943:143). In addition to Reynolds Mill, Isaacs owned two other gristmills in the

ISAACS' FARM  
BRAND

GREEN AND WHITE  
LIMA BEANS

CONTENTS 2 LB. 4 OZS.

PACKED BY  
JOHN S. ISAACS,  
ELLENDALE, DELAWARE.  
U. S. A.

PRODUCT  
OF  
U. S. A.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.



|  |   |
|--|---|
| DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION                      |   |
| BRIDGE 918 ON S.R. 30<br>AT REYNOLDS POND<br>SUSSEX COUNTY |   |
| ISAACS AND ELLENDALE BRAND<br>LIMA BEAN CAN LABEL          |   |
| PLATE 2  | SKELLY and LOY Inc.<br>CONSULTANTS IN<br>ENVIRONMENT - ENERGY<br>ENGINEERING - PLANNING |



DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

BRIDGE 918 ON S.R. 30  
AT REYNOLDS POND  
SUSSEX COUNTY

ISAACS AND ELLENDALE BRAND  
PEA CAN LABEL

PLATE 3

SKELLY and LOY Inc.  
CONSULTANTS IN  
ENVIRONMENT - ENERGY  
ENGINEERING - PLANNING



DELAWARE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

BRIDGE 918 ON S.R. 30  
AT REYNOLDS POND  
SUSSEX COUNTY

ISAACS AND ELLENDALE BRAND  
ASPARAGUS CAN LABEL

PLATE 4

SKELLY and LOY Inc.  
CONSULTANTS IN  
ENVIRONMENT - ENERGY  
ENGINEERING - PLANNING

area, Cedar Creek and Waples mills. Isaacs used the mills to crack chicken feed for his poultry operations (Harry Isaacs, Sr., personal communication 2008).

Isaacs passed away in July 1950. The mill was shuttered at that point and never operated again (Harry Isaacs, Jr., personal communication 2005), making John Isaac the last owner of the operating mill. From 1948, the corporation, John S. Isaacs and Sons, Inc., owned the mill (Sussex County Deeds 1948:380). In 1962, it was sold to one of Isaacs's sons, Harry H. Isaacs, Sr. (Sussex County Deeds 1962:296). It was still in his ownership when the mill burned down in the 1970s. In 2007, his son, Harry H. Isaacs, Jr, owned the mill tract.