

**Of Water, Grain, & Flour:**

**The Red Mill Complex**

**New Castle County  
Delaware**

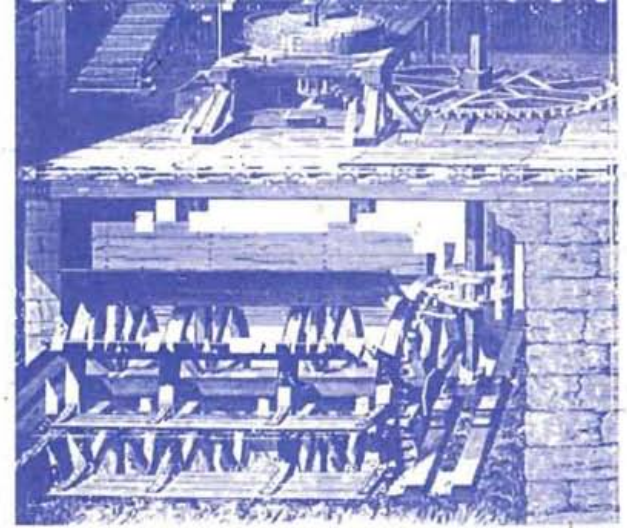
## A Brief History of Red Mill

The Red Mill Complex consists of three major buildings – a brick residence, a frame mill, and a frame residence – as well as two subsidiary structures. The three major buildings illustrate how the complex changed over time.

The brick house to the north of the mill, the England House, is the original residence associated with the property. It was the home of John England, who purchased a 600 acre tract on the north side of White Clay Creek near Muddy Run in 1726. England, part owner of an iron furnace, may have bought the land in hopes of finding iron ore. He reputedly built the first gristmill and dam on the site, as well as a portion of the brick house. Following England's death, his brother, Joseph, acquired the land. In 1747, Joseph apparently built the second portion of the house, either for his family or for the miller operating the mill. Joseph's grandson, Joseph III, acquired the property in 1791. A tax assessment from 1804 lists Joseph England, III as proprietor of one merchant mill and one sawmill. The England family would hold onto the property until 1839, when it was sold to David Eastburn. The Eastburn family kept the house until 1972. David Eastburn, however, sold the mill and an accompanying 17 acre tract in 1870.

The frame miller's house located across Old Red Mill Road from the mill was constructed as the direct result of the sale of the mill tract in 1870. Once David Eastburn separated the mill tract from the rest of the property, subsequent millers needed a place to live. Rathnell Wilson, the second owner after Eastburn, constructed the house in 1876. This date is etched into the plaster of the basement wall, and is confirmed by New Castle County tax assessment records. The house was apparently the home of all subsequent operators of Red Mill.

The mill building consists of two distinct sections. The oldest section, which is lower in height, dates to 1789, according to an inscription in the fieldstone foundation. It features hand-hewn timber framing and tongue-and-groove siding attached by cut nails. The newer, taller section of the building sits over the millrace. It was constructed ca. 1887 by Thomas W. Jones. Jones retrofitted the mill, replacing the mill wheels with rollers and the waterwheel with a more efficient turbine. Jones sold the mill in 1888. The Eastburn family eventually regained possession. In 1925, the mill became the property of Frank Buckingham. The Buckingham family operated the mill until about 1965, grinding corn, oats, and wheat.



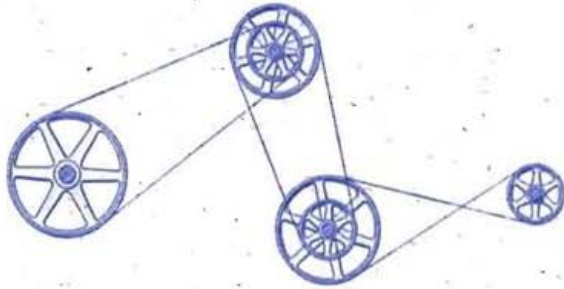
## Red Mill in Operation

According to one historical account, Red Mill originally had an 18-horsepower undershot waterwheel, and grains were ground by one set of Burr millstones. They were replaced in 1887 by a water turbine and rollers. The remaining milling equipment dates from this later period, although the rollers have been replaced with millstones. Of particular interest is the millstone hoist or crane, a device used to raise and lower the millstones. Most cranes are wood; this one is constructed of wrought iron.

David Eastburn was Red Mill's owner until 1870, after which the mill was operated by Joseph Oliver and Charles Allen. At that time, Red Mill was one of four flour and feed mills in Mill Creek Hundred. The mill employed one hand, who was paid \$300 per year. The mill ground wheat, other grain, and grist into flour and feed, and had a total capacity of 20 barrels per day. When retrofitted in 1887, power and capacity reportedly doubled.

## Milling in New Castle County

Gristmilling, the process of turning grains into flour or animal feed, is an essential component of rural, agricultural life. Gristmills have a long history in Delaware. Swedish settlers erected wind- and water-powered gristmills prior to 1650. Under Dutch control, the number of gristmills greatly expanded. Dutch mills employed horses, wind, and water power.



Mill building accelerated under the proprietorship of William Penn and his family. Delaware and New Castle County were part of America's earliest "wheat belt," an area extending from New York to Virginia. These Middle Atlantic colonies quickly gained a reputation as "America's Breadbasket." New Castle County abounded in good mill locations along rapidly flowing streams. Mills of all variety (grain and grist, saw, iron, gun powder, cotton, and spice) sprang up along the waters of Brandywine, Red Clay, Mill, Pike, and White Clay creeks. In 1799, the mills of New Castle County were described as "the most important industrial sources of wealth in the state." Milling continued as a component of Delaware's economy into the twentieth century.

## The Milling Process

Eighteenth century Delaware gristmills used water power to turn a large wooden wheel in order to create power. The waterwheel was connected by a series of belts, shafts, and gears to a set of milling stones. The flat, circular, grooved stones ground the grain into flour or feed. Fineness was controlled by the spacing between the stones.

Eighteenth century gristmills were classified as merchant mills or custom mills. A Merchant Mill produced large quantities of grain and feed for export. Smaller mills, known as Custom Mills, ground grains for local farmers. In return, mill owners generally received a portion of the flour or feed as payment. Merchant and custom mills differed only in size and purpose. Red Mill apparently functioned as both a merchant mill and a custom mill at various times throughout its history.

### For More Information:



#### Delaware Department Of Transportation

800 Bay Road  
Dover, DE 19903

**Contact:**  
Kevin Cunningham  
Division of Planning

**Phone:**  
302-760-2125

#### Skelly and Loy, Inc.

520 Seco Road  
Monroeville, PA 15146

**Contact:**  
Kristen Beckman, Ph.D  
Vice President, Cultural  
Resources

**Phone:**  
412-856-1676