



Upper Oxford Township Historical Commission Newsletter Fall 2008

Volume IV

Issue 1

Village of Cream, its history, the mill

By Hazel Gray Duncan

The Cream mill is located just over the Muddy Run Creek in Lower Oxford Township at the intersection of Union School, Muddy Run and Homeville Roads. The mill was supplied by the Muddy Run Creek, which was joined by McGinness Run, called "McGinney's Run", a half mile north of Cream off Muddy Run Road. McGinness Run divides Upper Oxford and Lower Oxford Townships.

Records of the Chester County Sheriff indicate that on May 15, 1834, 89.03 hectares was sold for a "Griss[sic], Saw and Pa-



Hazel's aunt on the Cream dam.

per Mill" in Lower Oxford to a Mr. Ross, approximately 350 rods up from the confluence of the Muddy Run and Octorara Creeks (a hectare is 2.471 acres or 43,560 square feet and a rod is 16.5 feet). After Ross started his mill, Cream burst onto the scene. The mill was described as "a one vat" mill suitable for making the "best kind of paper", with three presses. It soon became the Valley Paper Company.

I have a parchment deed of the farm to the north that controlled the water-power to the mill and was dated April 15, 1842. There were a total of 256 acres to the farm at the time, which was owned by Samuel Clinger and his wife Sarah, and sold to Isaac Broomall and wife Rachel, on April 2, 1840. The deed contains a section of discussion of the "Mill Dam" below the premises, and water-lowering was limited to a "hole" in a rock on the south side of the dam, 100 feet above and from the dam breast. The 1842-43 deed describes the Mill dam to the south of said property, with a race to



Cream Mill, 2005

power the mill at Cream about one quarter mile to the south.

The mill was called Dickinson Paper, Grist and Saw Mill in 1847. An 1873 county map calls the mill Charles Well and Company. It was also called Wells, Buchanan and Shartle, which was bought for \$8,000. An 1860 map names it the M. Dickenson Mill. In the fall of 1862, the mill was destroyed by fire. Some new machinery was also damaged.

An 1873 map calls the mill Charles Wells and Company. Another project area map of 1883 names it Wells Mill Race and Pa-

(Continued on page 2)

Russellville Grange seeks information about painting

By Sara Beth A.R. Kohut

There was great anticipation on the Sunday afternoon in October when Russellville Grange members gathered at their hall to unroll an old painting that new members never knew was there and older members had all but forgotten. The unrolling was prompted by the acquisition of new stage curtains that require the painting be moved. As a result, the grange is trying to find out more information about the painting to make a decision about its future.

After removing the side curtains, the members carefully lowered the painting. A pipe running the length of the painting's bottom edge stuck through portions where the edge has frayed and ripped. Once the painting was down, the mem-



A painting in the Russellville Grange Hall is believed to depict the Cream dam, which no longer exists.

bers saw a bucolic scene painted on four pieces of canvas fastened together.

Grange members believe the painting depicts the dam at Cream surrounded by woods, apparently during the early fall season. It's a scene that no longer exists in reality. Today, only remnants of the dam remain, but older members of the community remember the dam pond and how it ran under the road to the mill.

Members of the grange believe the painting was already in its place at the Russellville hall when the Grange purchased the building in 1917, but no further information is known about when the painting was created or the identity of its artist(s).

If anyone has any information to share about the painting, please contact Sara Beth at sbarky13@hotmail.com or 484 467 2964 or any member of Russellville Grange.

A message from the Chair

By Frances Reyburn

The Upper Oxford Township Historical Commission needs your help! We are in the process of doing research to identify the significance of our township's historic resources that we have been identifying since 2001 and that have been plotted on our township's Historic Resources Atlas. Our historic resources include houses, barns, buildings, bridges, and other structures in the township that are either older than 50 years or younger resources that have become historically significant. The Commission is documenting these resources by tracing deeds, collecting newspapers and gathering other sources of information. Please consider helping us research these important resources.

The Commission is also looking for volunteers to clip current newspaper articles concerning the township and any aspect of its history, including property deeds of township current or former inhabitants, deaths, births, and school news of Upper Oxford students. For each item, please include the name of the newspaper, city and state of publication, and the date of the issue from which the item came.

Please send us your own stories about Upper Oxford's history. We welcome information about significant events in the township's history, as well as everyday events like what it was like to grow up in Upper Oxford, recent memories and events. To submit an article or for more information about volunteering, please call me at 610-932-9239, email the newsletter editor at sbarky13@hotmail.com, or drop off your information at the township building. Please include your name, address, email address and phone number.

About this newsletter

Editor- Sara Beth A. R. Kohut

Please send comments and/or articles to sbarky13@hotmail.com or mail to the Township. To add or remove an address from the Newsletter mailing list, please call or write Upper Oxford Township, 1185 Limestone Road, Oxford, PA 19363, 610-932-9233

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Sketch of Oak Grove Schoolhouse (on page 1) by Hazel Duncan used with permission.

Cream..... the mill (continued from page 1)

per Mill. The 1891 deed for Spring Lawn Chapel refers to Wells Mill. The company owning Wells, Buchanan and Shartle Company dissolved and reorganized as Charles Wells in association with James B. Ramsey as Charles Wells and Company, who then rebuilt the mill and enlarged its production capacity with three paper presses. Ramsey acquired ownership of the mill between 1883 and 1888, and son James B. Ramsey, Jr., in 1892. After the 1892 fire, Emmanuel Herr of East Nottingham took possession of the mill. He sold to Ferguson in 1893 in three tracts with the latest improvements of "rolled presses". The mill burned again in 1895. James Ferguson, quite the entrepreneur in 1895, used a portion of the mill to process and produce "Philadelphia Cream Cheese" and part as a general store.

A post office was established about the same time. The name Arbutus was proposed but did not take hold because local farmers gave it the more fitting name for a milk receiving station - Cream. The post office remained in operation until 1904.

Ferguson entertained boarders desiring to escape the heat of the city. They came by train to Oxford, were picked up by Ferguson's horse and wagon, and transported to the "villa" at Cream, located just across the Muddy Run from the mill in Upper Oxford Township. Vacationers enjoyed fishing and boating on the lake formed by the Cream dam. Ferguson also had a large ballroom and dining hall for the boarders, with overflow rooms at the Ross Farm, one half mile up Homeville Road to the north. My grandmother, Bertha Cochran, served boarders' meals at the Fergusons in early 1900, prior to her 1904 marriage to Clarence Gray. The power from the mill, provided electric lights to the villa. The "Ferguson Villa" closed in 1910.

A photo of the mill indicated it had burned again before 1910. It was sold to Robert Treat Hogg, Sr., a miller from Colerain Township, in 1907. A general store continued during these years. In 1915, Hogg introduced a sawmill, grist mill and cider press. He continued the general

store, but died in 1945. In 1928, Robert Treat Hogg, Jr., began to take over the mill and transformed it into a custom furniture and cabinet business in the early 1930s. Hogg, Jr., specialized in reproducing Colonial-era furniture, using period tools. Some of his reproductions were used to furnish Philadelphia's Independence Hall and the Newport Courthouse in Delaware. Hogg, Jr., also allowed his employees to produce their own crafts in the evenings.

The mill race ran southwest from McGinness Run and Muddy

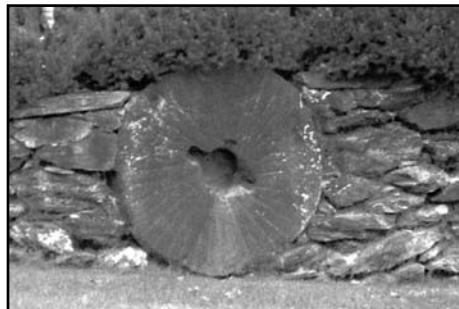
Run Creeks under the Homeville Road to a forebay just west of the road. The overshot water wheel was located in what would now be the center of the cabinet mill shop. The mill race and wheel were removed before 1950 and the dam breast burst from a hurricane around 1980.

Hogg, Jr., built a house across the Homeville Road on the south side of the mill shop in 1934 (in Lower Oxford) and resided there with his wife Eveyln. My father, Clifford Gray, Sr., built the stone wall and steps about the house in about 1935 and placed the large millstone in the wall, as can be seen today. Daddy worked for Bob along with Mike Butler, Ferris Wiggins and others, between 1938 and 1942. Daddy and others made many lovely trays and gifts while at the mill.

Hogg, Jr., died in 1972 and the cabinet shop was bought by Steven Morris and Bill Dillon in 1976. Downtown Cream has remained unchanged since 1834. The saw mill and cabinet shop still make great reproductions and commissioned furniture, bowls and trays. These are sold in the gift shop under the ownership of Bill Dillon. In 2006, they were making custom lecterns that could be easily raised and lowered for the speaker's comfort for the University of Pennsylvania.

Attention alumni of Upper Oxford schools!

Another school house reunion is being planned for September 2009 to be held at the Upper Oxford Township Park (rain location is Russellville Grange). More information will be forthcoming. Please contact Philip Edwards at 610-869-2655 if you would like to help plan the reunion.



Mill stone in wall.

Learning About Sears Roebuck Houses

By Iris Gray Dowling

On November 29, 2007, Iris Gray Dowling, Hazel Gray Duncan, and Frances Reyburn went to West Chester to attend a Chester County Historic Preservation Network program on Sears, or Catalog Kit, houses. Prior to the lecture by Jane L.S. Davidson, retired Chester County Heritage Preservation Coordinator, the attendants could walk through a Sears house on 712 West Nields Street previously owned by the Eachus Dairy.

The Walton style house on Nields Street had recently been moved 300 feet from its location along Route 52 to its present location behind the Route 52 Shopping Center, which sits where the Eachus Dairy used to be fifty years ago. This house shows the lay out of the kit houses ordered from the Sears Roebuck Catalogs; that of three small bedrooms and bath, pillars on the front with a porch, hip roof, and dormers on the roof. There was also a concrete foundation and cellar. This is one of many Sears houses in Chester County.

The Walton type of Sears house on 712 Nields Street is presently owned and renovated by Bill Freese, a developer in the construction business. He owns the shopping center along Route 52 to the left of the house. Additional rooms were added in back from the original kitchen to adapt the building for office use. The original cellar steps were moved to the new addition to allow more room space. The cost to move the house one mile was \$18,000, much less than it would cost to build that house from scratch. The current replacement value for a small house in Chester County is between \$75,000 and \$128,000. It was mentioned they are changing the name to Saratoga Sears house.

From the Nields Street location we went



A Sears House in Upper Oxford Township.

to the West Bradford Township Building to hear Jane Davidson's lecture on Sears Catalog Houses. She displayed large panoramic pictures of the types of Catalog houses found in Chester County. Hazel Duncan submitted pictures of Sears houses from Upper Oxford: that at 5060 Street Road constructed in 1923 by Eugene Windle, the Donald Snook house on Limestone Road, and the Lamborn house on Homeville Road in Homeville bought by Mary Baldwin in 1922. These houses show lumber that is marked and mitered to fit.

Houses could be ordered from these sources: Sears Roebuck, Montgomery Ward, and Aladdin. They were also featured for sale in the Dover Catalog in New York. Most of the houses were shipped from Cairo, Ill., on box cars. These houses can be identified in three phases: beginning (1908 to 1914), middle (1915 to 1920), and late phases (1927 to 1940). The Rembrandt, a Dutch colonial, was built in the middle phase. The three houses in Upper Oxford show examples of each period. The Windle house on Street Road was built in the Beginning Period; the Lamborn house was built in the Middle Phase, and the Marion #13333 on the Snook farm was built between 1933 and 1940. It has the typical hip roof. Another type, the Garfield, was built in the late phase before the Depression hit.

Chester Country history one hundred years ago was ripe for families to own their own homes. Men were no longer indentured servants of big companies. Railroads were the main source of transportation and shipping. Sears saw the opportunity to sell the kits which produced these houses. This enabled the working class to afford their own homes.

Sears homes were only sold from 1908 to 1940 when people could afford to buy their own home. *The Book of Modern Homes* showed that houses sold for \$495 to \$4115, schoolhouses sold for \$11,500, and barns, garages, out houses, and chicken coops were also available. Mortgages and easy payment plans were offered. In 1929, 57,000 of these kit homes were sold in 447 different designs. The house was cut into 30,000 individual pieces and shipped in two box cars from Cairo, Ill. A seventy-five page instruction book and full set of blueprints was also sent for \$1. After 1914 each piece was marked with numbers and letters. Looking for these numbers would



A Sears House in Upper Oxford Township.

give assurance that a house was really one of these kit homes. When the pieces arrived, local carpenters were hired to assemble the house.

There were 1,300 beveled cement blocks for the foundation. Some kits could produce two different images, providing personalized options to the owner. Some builders took the liberty to change the plans.

From 1908 to 1914, there were 25 designs. From 1913 to 1922, the Arlington was introduced. The Magnolia is considered the Queen of Sears houses and was shown on the cover of the 1918 catalog. It sold from 1915 to 1920 for \$5140. The Windle House in Upper Oxford on Street Road is the Chelsea #111 which was offered from 1908 to 1914 for \$943 to \$2740.

Many other Kit Houses were sold by Pacific Homes in the West; Aladdin up to 1981; Montgomery Ward, 1935-36; Warway Homes; Gordon Var Tyme Homes; Sterling; Lewis; and Harris Brother Homes.

Facts which identify Sears homes include lumber made from three products - mostly yellow pine, but sometimes maple for the kitchen and bath. Lumber is marked after 1920 and not with Roman numerals. Internal pieces like windows came from Norwood, Ohio. In order to document the Sears houses, one must do an internal inspection if possible. Deed research and clippings from historical archives will help identify them.

Bibliography Resources for information:

- *Notes of Jane L.S. Davidson*
- *Houses by Mail, K.C. Stevenson and H. Ward Jandle*
- *The Houses that Sears Built, Rosemary Thornton. (Documentarian of Sears Houses)*
- *Sears Archives.com*
- *About.com/Architecture*

A History of Newcomer's or Bower's Bridge (1888-1962)

By Hazel Gray Duncan

said it was 90 feet and another said 98 feet long. The cart way was 15 feet wide. Newcomer's covered bridge was completed on December 29, 1888, according to a local news clip. The spot was originally named in honor of Lewis R. Newcomer, who had an 82-acre farm on the Chester County side of the Octorara Creek where the bridge was. Currently there is a concrete slab in the Octorara Creek where the bridge was. Amish horse and carts and other horsemen use it to ride across the creek.

Information wanted for research By Hazel Duncan

I have been researching the older homes in the Homeville area, copying publicly-filed deeds back to the 1700s and most to the original land patents. Among other things, my research has shown that there were 24 doctors in the Upper Oxford area from 1819 to 1940 and six mills once operated in the Homeville area. I would be glad to hear from anyone about any additional information regarding these or other people and places. Please email me at hazelnut@kennett.net.



A 2007 photo shows the remains of Newcomer's Bridge.
Photo by Hazel Duncan.

John Melton and Alfred Wood, who lived in the Faggs Manor and Avondale areas. The wood work cost \$1,870. Newcomer's bridge spanned the Octorara Creek between Colerain Township in Lancaster County and Upper Oxford Township in Chester County. One reference is found in the Homeville area, copying publicly-filed deeds back to the 1700s and most to the original land patents. Among other things, my research has shown that there were 24 doctors in the Upper Oxford area from 1819 to 1940 and six mills once operated in the Homeville area. I would be glad to hear from anyone about any additional information regarding these or other people and places. Please email me at hazelnut@kennett.net.

Upper Oxford Township 1185 Limestone Road Oxford, PA 19363



Upper Oxford Township Historical Commission Board

- Frances K. Reyburn, Chair
- Hazel Duncan, Vice-Chair
- Blair Fleischmann, Sec.
 - Phillip Edwards
 - Margaret Hickman

The Upper Oxford Township Historical Commission meets on the 4th Tuesday of each month at 7 p.m. in the Upper Oxford Township building. Anyone interested in Upper Oxford and local history is invited to attend.

For more information, contact Frances Reyburn at 610-932-9239.