



VIRGINIA
HISTORIC LANDMARKS COMMISSION

File no. 272-2
Negative no(s). 5169

SURVEY FORM

Historic name Merchants Mill House Common name A.K.A. Mill House Museum, Miller's House
County/Town/City Occoquan
Street address or route number ---Mill St., Occoquan, Va.
USGS Quad Occoquan Date or period late 18th - early 19th century
Original owner Unknown Architect/builder/craftsmen
Original use Miller's Residence?
Present owner Fairfax County Water Authority Source of name
Present owner address 8560 Arlington Blvd. Source of date Architectural evidence, local tradition.
Merrifield, Va. 22116 Stories 1 story on a high basement.
Present use Historical museum Foundation and wall const'n Stone foundation and walls.
Acreage 1 lot (included in larger parcel)

Roof type Asphalt shingle-covered gable roof.

State condition of structure and environs Building is in good condition; landscaping of site could be improved.

State potential threats to structure

Note any archaeological interest Beside this building are the ruins of a mill complex built in 1759 and operated as a merchants flouring mill until 1924.

Should be investigated for possible register potential? yes ___ no ___

Architectural description (Note significant features of plan, structural system and interior and exterior decoration, taking care to point out aspects not visible or clear from photographs. Explain nature and period of all alterations and additions. List any outbuildings and their approximate ages, cemeteries, etc.)

The Mill House is a small, one-story, stone and brick structure on a high stone basement. The gray stone, probably quarried locally, is laid up in roughly-shaped blocks of approximate courses. It is pointed with portland cement. There is a brick exterior chimney on the south end, laid in 5-course American bond. Some of the lintels over the door and window openings are keyed stone arches, while others are brick jack arches. The building is three bays long with a central entrance. The front door is a replacement hollow-core door. There is an iron gate across the front entrance. The windows, also protected by iron grilles, are 6/6 (replacement) sliding sash. The exterior door and window trim is plain. There is an entrance in the center rear, main floor, and an entrance to the basement on the left side of the rear. There is a small, fixed window in either gable end under the roof. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles and has a plain cornice. The rafter ends are exposed on the rear wall or water side, while they are boxed on the front wall. The rake has a small strip of moulding.

Prior to leasing the building to Historic Occoquan, the Fairfax County Water Authority made some repairs, including waterproofing the foundation, repairing the roof, re-painting the interior, repairing the floors, (probably) repointing the exterior stone walls and rebuilding the fireplace. The work done on the structure was more of a rehabilitating than a restoration. In fact, no attempt has been made to restore the building. Historic Occoquan has done some work on the building, such as the installation of cabinets for storage and display of museum objects, and the installation of security bars on the front door and windows.

The interior consists of a single exhibition room on the first floor above a partial ~~on the first floor above a partial~~ basement which is used for storage. There is a crawl space in the attic reached by an opening in the ceiling. The floors are old, medium-to-wide tongue
(continued next page)

Interior inspected? Yes.

Historical significance (Chain of title; individuals, families, events, etc., associated with the property.)

Located on Mill Street at the foot of the 18th century stone house Rockledge, the Mill House was probably built in the late 18th century to early 19th century as either a miller's residence or mill office for the merchants mill complex that was built on the Occoquan at the falls in about 1759. The large stone and brick mill, the ruins of which may be seen at the water's edge just off the mill houses's northeast corner, may have existed as early as 1759, the date of the establishment by John Ballendine of "the Occoquan Works," an industrial complex at Occoquan centering chiefly around an iron foundry. The complex comprised forges for iron-making, water grist mills, bolting houses, bake houses, saw-mills, storehouses and dwellings. The enterprise was financed by John Tayloe and Presley Thornton. After 1762, the property, then owned by John Semple, was devoted almost wholly to flour manufacture. In about 1800, the mills were owned by Nathaniel Ellicott, a Quaker whose flouring operation became a model for Northern Virginia. Flour was loaded directly from the mill onto waiting ships anchored in the Occoquan and from there transported downstream to the Potomac, bound for Alexandria, the Carolinas and the West Indies. In 1804, the mill was operated by Elisha and Abijah Janney, who also had an interest in the cotton mill that was later located in Occoquan. According to Joseph Martin's Gazetteer of Virginia, published in 1835, the mill at Occoquan was capable of grinding 150 barrels per day, in addition to the side activities of grinding corn and other grains, grinding gypsum for fertilizer, and sawing lumber. Before long, however, erosion further upstream caused the channel of the Occoquan to become filled with silt, making the river unnavigable, and the town of Occoquan fell into decline. The flour mill continued in operation until 1924, when it was destroyed by fire.
(continued next page)

Sources and bibliography

Published sources (Books, articles, etc., with bibliographic data.)

"Mill House Becomes a Museum," in *Manassas Journal-Messenger*, 14 Aug. 1969; W.P.A., Writers Program, Prince William, *The Story of Its People and Its Places* (c1941), pp.79-80; (continued)

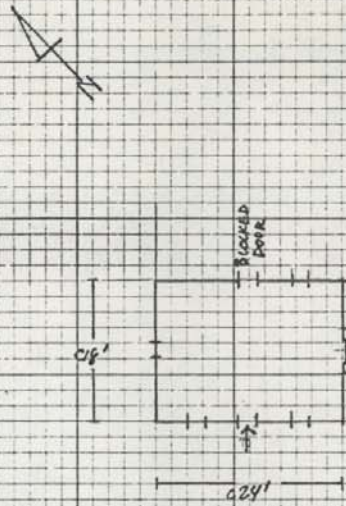
Primary sources (Manuscript documentary or graphic materials; give location.)

HABS 1959 Survey (1 exterior photo; 1 data page).

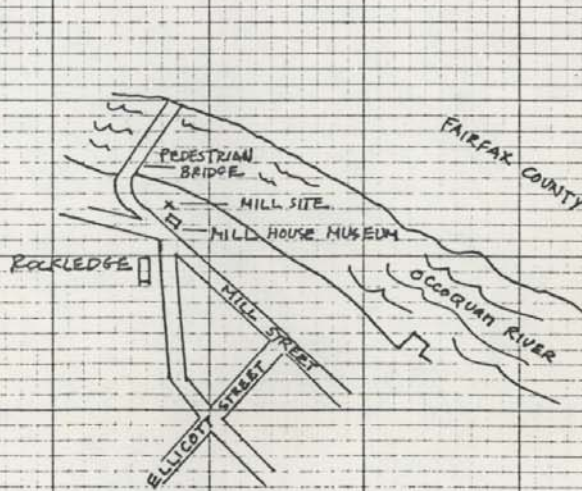
Historic Occoquan has material relating to the history of this building.

Names and addresses of persons interviewed Mrs. Evelyn Lynn, President, Historic Occoquan;
Mr. Corbalis, Engineer-Director, Fairfax Water Authority.

Plan (Indicate locations of rooms, doorways, windows, alterations, etc.)



Site plan (Locate and identify outbuildings, dependencies and significant topographical features.)



CONTINUATION SHEET
MERCHANTS MILL HOUSE

Architectural Description (continued)

and groove wooden floors. There is no mantel above the medium-sized fireplace. The furniture consists of several display cases and chairs.

Display objects relating to Occoquan's history, the history of Ellicott's mill, and the history of the eastern Prince William area generally are placed around the room, and hung on the walls. Opposite the centrally-located front entrance is a presently-sealed doorway which either led directly outside to the building's river entrance, or which gave access to the now-demolished multiple-story flouring mill which was allegedly attached to this small building. The drop to the water's edge is by a steep incline.

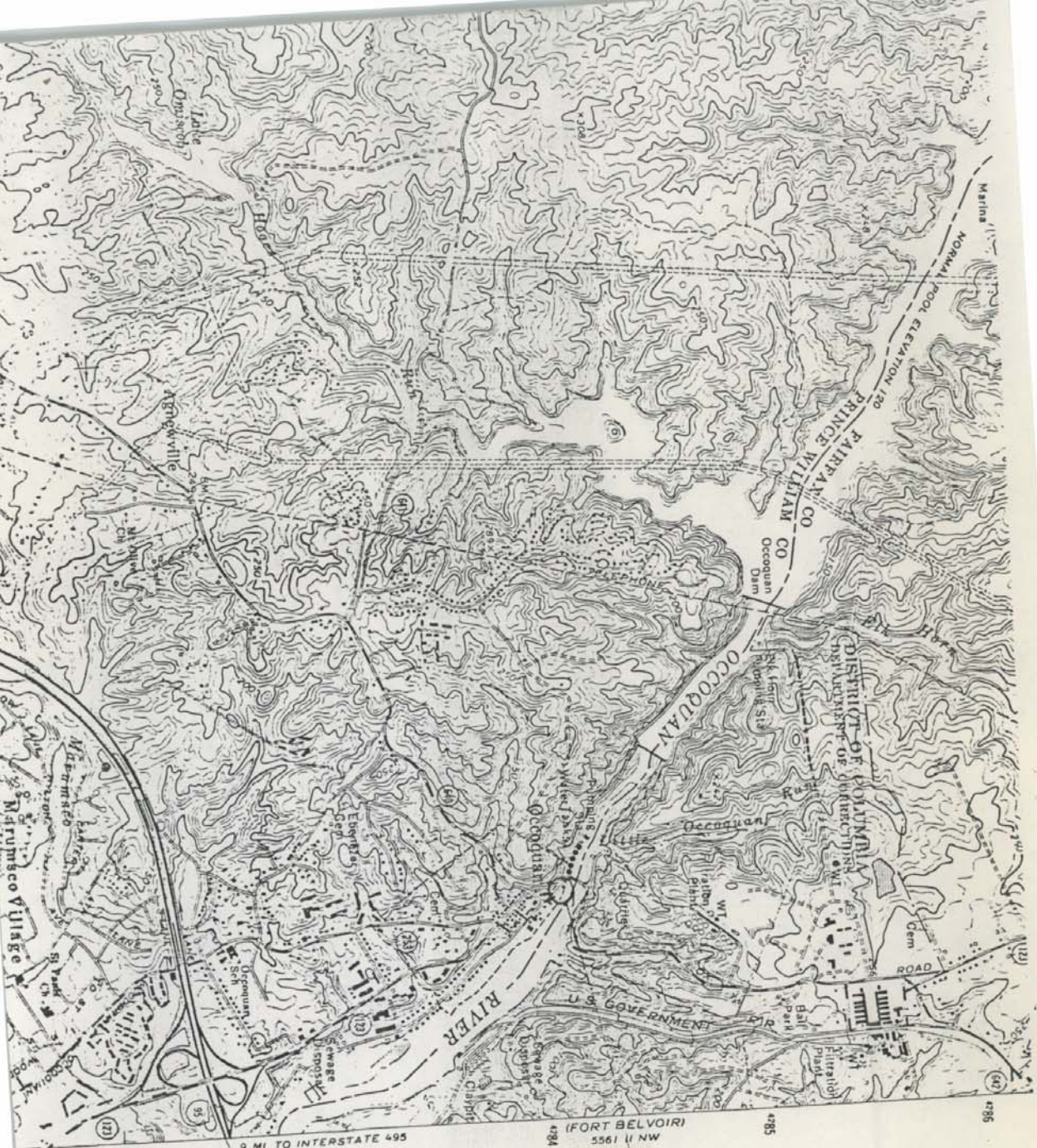
A note about the site. The mill house is located at the end of Mill Street at the foot of and across the street from Rockledge, a mid-18th century stone house that was destroyed by fire in early 1980. Just past the Mill House, Mill Street turns into a private road leading to the Fairfax County Water Authority plant. About 40 feet below the Mill House flows the Occoquan. Upstream from the Mill House is the Water Authority's lower dam, creating an impoundment which supplies water to much of Fairfax County and the City of Alexandria. Between the Mill House and the dam is a pedestrian bridge across the river, located approximately where the first bridge from the town of Occoquan to Fairfax County was erected in the 1790s. It is also the location of a historically-important iron truss bridge which was washed out in 1972 during Hurricane Agnes. Across the river in Fairfax County is a large stone-quarrying plant. Its heavy trucks lumber over the narrow, winding road that was once the principal thoroughfare between Fairfax County and the town. After the flood of 1972, a new concrete bridge was built downstream at the lower end of Occoquan, and the highway (S.R. 123) was rerouted for safety and easier access. Next door to the Mill House is the steel-frame drydock of Prince William Marine Sales, a large imposing structure that probably could have been better designed to compliment rather than detract from the two historical structures beside and in front of which the drydock was erected. To the left of the Mill House is a small gravel-covered parking lot used by visitors to the museum, tourists and fishermen. While there has been an attempt at landscaping around the Mill House, the grounds are neglected and could do with maintenance and new plantings, especially at the sides and rear. Incorporating the ruins of the old mill would enhance the museum's ability to interpret the site.

Historical Significance (continued)

The miller's cottage was acquired by the Alexandria Water Co. and was used as their construction office in the mid-1940s. The Alexandria Water Co., which built the first dam to impound the Occoquan, had purchased the property from the defunct Occoquan Power Co. In 1967, the Fairfax County Water Authority acquired the property and, finding no use for it, leased the building to Historic Occoquan, Inc., as a historical museum.

Published Sources (continued)

HABS, Virginia Catalog (1976), p. 185.
Ratcliffe, R.J., This Was Prince William (c1978), pp. 30-32, 94-95.
Lynn, Martha and H. H. Douglas, "Occoquan, Prince William County, Va.," in Echoes of History, Jan. 1971.



OCCOQUAN R.
 MILL
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9 MI TO INTERSTATE 495
 D.C. LINE 20 MI

(FORT BELVOIR)
 5561 W NW