

VA - On the Co. Historical Society Prince William County Public Library Manassas, VA. Piedmont Virginia July, 1977

Beverley's Mill

I-66 will pass by history's doorstep

VA ROOM

VIRGINIANA FILE JUL 16 1980 PWC-Historic Buildings

BY ILL. DOUGLAS

BEVERLEY MILL, the most outstanding and impressive of any mill remaining anywhere in the Northern parts of Virginia, is located on Route 55 on Broad Run in Thoroughfare Gap, on the Fauquier-Prince William county line, midway between Haymarket and The Plains.

Route 66 will soon be extended through Thoroughfare Gap where Route 55 (constructed in the 1930s) cuts through the Bull Run Mountains on its way to Front Royal in the Shenandoah Valley. With bulldozers and dynamite, the road builders will be cutting the new roadway, mostly out of solid rock, on the side of the Gap farthest from the mill. Thus, two highways will run through the Gap — Route 66 within 200 feet of Beverley Mill, with Route 55 on the far side of Route 66.

In their original plans for Route 66 (in the mid 1960s), the Virginia Department of Highways was all set to demolish the mill and use it for road fill. Finally, however, they acceded to the strongly expressed wishes of local citizens and revised their original plans in order to save the mill.

The history of the mill has been a rugged one. It has withstood the onslaught of time for over 200 years, the elements, fire, floods, war, vandalism, and 25 years of idleness and neglect. This is not to say that it has been abandoned during this latter period, but until very recently, it has had no maintenance.

More recently the mill was given a new roof and all of the broken windows have been replaced. The Bull Run Preserve, Inc., its present owner, is doing its best to stop further deterioration until restoration can begin.

In the days of George Washington, the road through the Gap ran on the north side of the mill where the railroad is now located. Some vestiges of the old road can still be seen. John Marshall used this road frequently. When the railroad was built the trains rolled by just outside the mill's second story windows.

Broad Run flows through Thoroughfare Gap and was the main source of power for Beverley Mill until operations ceased a generation ago.

Beverley Mill stands majestically, though idle, astride the Fauquier-Prince William county line, though taxes are paid in Prince William County. (The USGS

topographic maps show all of the mill in Fauquier. Recent highway plans show most of the mill in Fauquier.) Perhaps the reason that taxes were paid to Prince William County was that the mill office was in Prince William. The magnificent stone walls are still intact, though the wooden appendages (offices, shipping room, and platform) on the railroad side have rotted and fallen away. The empty office safe finally fell through the floor to the ground below where it stayed for some time before being hauled away for safe keeping.

When the mill was sold to Walter Chrysler in 1944, it was jointly owned by the Furr family and Billy Wilbur of Warrenton. Mr. Wilbur had become a partner in the business in the early 1930s. Mr. Kerr died in 1939. In 1951 it was bought by Mr. and Mrs. Mack J. West, together with the old house immediately to the East, where Mrs. West operated an antique business until 1973. Nearly in front of the mill is a small stone building which has, in recent years, been used as the Broad Run Post Office (it is in Prince William County). It was built in the 1930s as a gas station and a retail store for the mill.

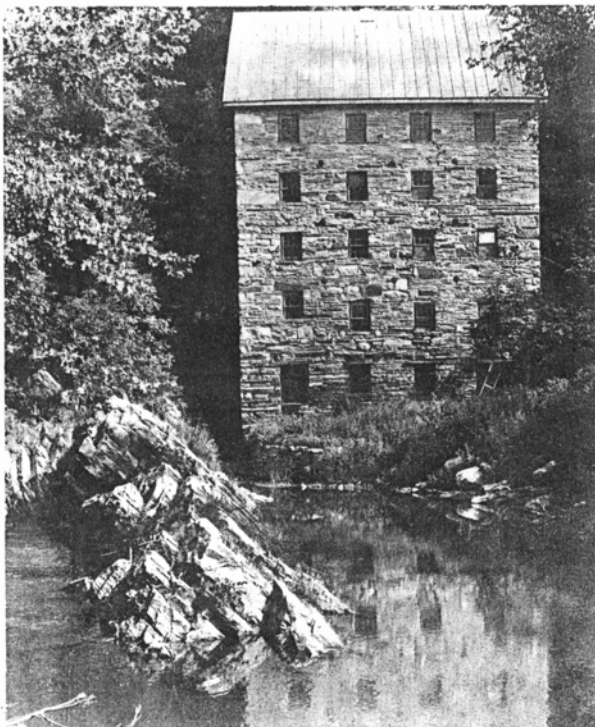
THE Furr family operated the mill during most of the first half of the 20th century.

In the *Fauquier Democrat* for March 4, 1965, Melvin L. Steadman made the point that the mill is an official boundary marker on the line between Fauquier and Prince William counties, and that it contributed food products in the French and Indian War, the Revolutionary War, and the War of 1812. During the Civil War, the mill was used by both Union and Confederate troops.

BEGINNINGS — 1742

Jonathan Chapman (c. 1759) and his son Nathaniel (1710-1761) built the original mills in 1742, following Jonathan's purchase of 650 acres on Broad Run in Thoroughfare Gap of the Bull Run Mountains (Northern Neck Deed Book F, page 80; N.N. DBG, p. 151). The second mill (the present Beverley Mill) was built where it is still to be found at the eastern end of the Gap.

The first mill was built upstream (west) a short distance on the other side of the railroad tracks and close into the mountain. Both mills always used Broad



Beverley Mill and Broad Run. The metal water wheel is the last of many. A mill wheel endures tremendous wear and tear. (America Pioneer America Society photo by Edmund Barrett.)

Run as their source of power. No dam was ever necessary. All that was needed was for the water falling 87 feet through the Gap, to be channeled into a headrace leading to the mill. The earlier headrace was almost completely obliterated by the construction of the railroad bed.

Chapman's Mill started out as a plaster mill where crushed gypsum was ground into "plaster" or "lime" for use as fertilizer. The other mill started out as a grist mill but some time between 1755-57 it apparently burned. Chapman's Mill was

then (1757-58) enlarged and was used as grist mill for the next 100 years.

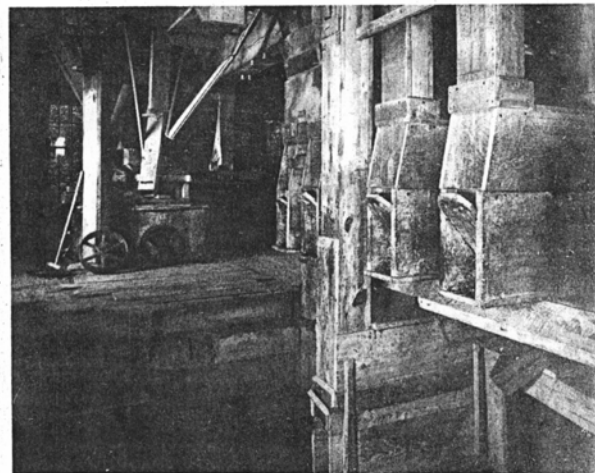
Wagons drawn by horses and oxen brought in wheat, corn, and buckwheat which was ground into meal, flour, and feed, and then hauled away to many points in Prince William, Fauquier, Fairfax, and Loudoun counties and even much farther. This manner of transport continued until the beginning of the automobile age soon after the turn of the century. George and Samuel Bleight remember the wagons that

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Beverley Mill. Johnathan Chapman was the first of the Chapman millers; John was the last. This stone is under the eaves of the railroad side. (Edmund Barrett photo)

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Beverley Mill; the millstone and hoppers. (Barrett photo)

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Beverley Mill and Interstate 66

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came and went. This was the only means of transport until 1854 when the Manassas Gap Railroad came to the mill's back door. This was a great day for the mill, but it also marked the end of an era. The wagons, drawn by horses and oxen from the Shenandoah Valley via the mill to Alexandria came no more.

MILL REBUILT

In 1858 the mill was rebuilt with two additional floors. When finished, it was a massive and unique six-story-gable roofed structure built of stones of all sizes from the nearby quarry. Some of them were massive. It took man and horsepower, together with heavy ropes and pulleys, to put many of them in place. In the northeast corner of the mill, one of the first stones to be put in place was a monster about ten feet long and a foot thick. Part of its length covers a door near that corner. Burr Powell was the master stone mason. He and his men really concentrated on every move in getting this big one in place without cracking it. As it was settling into place it did crack. Mr. Powell sat down and wept. But even with the crack, good fortune was with them — solid stone covered the doorway. The crack was several inches away toward the corner of the building.

Another whopper was placed over the door at the water wheel end of the building at the same level as the one that cracked. It is at least 20" thick and approximately eight feet long.

One of the last stones to be put in place was a "cornerstone" (perhaps capstone), set in the middle of the north wall, under the eaves, identifying the six Chapman men (five generations) most actively connected with the history of the mill.

The cracks in the walls occurred soon after the rebuilding project, but after over 100 years the building seems as stable as ever. At the base the walls are seven feet

thick, at the top, three feet.

John Chapman was devoted to the mill project, but the cost of reconstruction caused it to be dubbed "Chapman's Folly." That and the disastrous course of the Civil War broke him. He died soon after the war ended.

The reconstruction of the mill in 1858 was necessitated by a fire which destroyed most of the inner structure and machinery. The date of the fire is unknown. On the walls that were left intact, two stories were added and new machinery was installed, probably for plaster grinding. This development was doubtless due to the opening of more and more farm land in Northern Virginia and to the advent of the railroad to handle the heavier hauling that was a part of the "plaster" industry.

Following the rebuilding of the mill in 1858 it may have been used either as a plaster mill, a grist mill, or both at the same time. The outbreak of the Civil War brought a halt to the normal functioning of the mill. People in the area could not move about freely and railroad cars were at the beck and call of the military, not to mention the fact that the track was frequently damaged or torn up.

CIVIL WAR

The final stopper came when the Confederate Army took over the mill and made it a meat curing warehouse and distribution center. In July 1861, when General J.E. Johnston came through the Gap on his way to the First Battle of Manassas, he reported that more than two million pounds of meat were on hand at the mill as well as vast herds of cattle and hogs in hastily built pens and large enclosures.

The gap and the mill felt the effects of the Civil War during both first and second Manassas, as troops from both sides shuttled back and forth.

END OF THE WAR

John Chapman lived through the war, saw his beloved mill raped and gutted — all of his rebuilding came to nothing. He died at Meadowland, a stone's throw from the mill, only a year following the end of hostilities. For most of that decade the mill, as a mill, was a total loss.

Colonel Robert Beverley, descendant of a long line of Beverleys, lived just up the road, toward The Plains, at Avenel. The original house at Avenel was built in 1823. Chapman's Mill had long been of indirect interest to Colonel Beverley. Following the end of the war, the death of John Chapman and the rebuilding of the railroad, he saw a new potential in the solid stone building. He bought the mill and 512 acres from the Chapman estate and turned it over to his son William. William Beverley, Jr.'s present property on the side of the mountain above Millbrook was part of the 512 acres. Colonel Beverley never did have an active interest in operating it. This was verified by Robert Beverley Herbert, who, in later years, spent much time with his grandfather. The deed to the property was recorded in William's name in 1879.

William ran the project as a "plaster" mill for many years.

In 1896 the business was sold to Messrs. Hornbaker and Wolverton, and facilities for grinding flour were added. In 1901 the mill was sold to William Jordan, and in 1903 to Charles Craig Furr, Jr.

The late Judge Howard W. Smith thought that, around the turn of the century, or just before, the mill may have had idle periods. As a young man he attended dances at the mill, though the mill would not have had to be shut down for this to happen.

The late Robert Beverley Herbert's first recollections of it were as a grist mill. He frequently hauled wagon loads of grain, drawn by ox team, to the mill for grinding.

Mr. Herbert also had distinct memories of its use as a plaster mill. He thought it was a grist mill for a considerable period before 1910 or 1912, and then for ten to twelve years it was a plaster mill. If this be true, C.C. Furr would have bought it as a grist mill, converted to plaster, and then back to grist. Mr. Herbert used to ride the train, which made a regular stop at the mill. He had a distinct recollection of seeing freight cars — gondolas — covered with lime dust on the mill siding.

THE FURR FAMILY

Charles Craig Furr, Sr., lived in Augusta County, near Staunton. He had eleven children and was one of the first apple growers in the Shenandoah Valley.

Charles Craig Furr, Jr. (1869-1962) bought Beverley Mill and moved to Broad Run in 1903. He had three daughters. Audrey Furr Kerr still lived at Broad Run until her death in December 1976. He acquired a partner and a son-in-law, about 1920, in the person of James Newton Kerr. Mr. Kerr died in 1939.

There were busy seasons during the Furr ownership when the mill ran day and night. At some point Virginia did not produce enough wheat and large amounts had to be shipped from Chicago. The mill was able to grind approximately 100,000 bushels of grain annually. In the 1940s the mill did a gross business of between \$8,000 and \$18,000 monthly, as it had for many years.

Water power was used continuously in the twentieth century with the aid of a big Fairbanks Morse diesel engine installed by the Furrs in the early 1920s to supply auxiliary power during dry spells (it was a real brute to activate. It is still in place in the mill.) Electricity provided lighting. Between World Wars, Mr. Furr installed new and modern flour milling equipment. The other machinery, in use for decades, continued to be used. Installing the new equipment was a mistake and Mr. Furr found himself in serious financial difficulties. When, in 1937, payments on a loan made in 1925 could not be kept up, William Wilbur (of Warrenton) came into the picture as a full partner and business agent. Operations continued until 1944 when Walter Chrysler bought the mill and

the Furr house.

The mistake as far as Mr. Furr was concerned, was in not realizing that in the country's economy the milling techniques that had served so well, had already been completely superseded by more sophisticated methods, and that a small mill even with modern flour milling machinery, could not compete with huge mass production plants. If he had been content to keep the mill as it was, the business though more limited in scope, might have continued indefinitely. The mill would have been a big attraction as well as being the only source of water ground meal in this part of Northern Virginia and Maryland.

When Walter Chrysler bought the mill in 1944, he had already established a huge poultry business on his North Wales estate near Warrenton. His poultry population varied, of course, but according to James Wines, the millwright for Mr. Chrysler (1945-January 1951, and who had worked at the mill from 1934) he at times had 30,000 chickens, 30,000 turkeys, and 5,000 pigeons. North Wales, aptly, became known as "Chicken City."

The pigeons were sold as squabs in New York City, and during the war there was a ready market for the chickens and turkeys. They took a carload of feed a day. Mr. Chrysler bought Beverley Mill as a source of feed for his hungry flocks, but they still turned out 100 barrels of flour a day which went to Baltimore for shipment overseas. Miscellaneous grinding was also done for the farmers in the area.

Keeping a mill clean was a major undertaking. Dust and spilled meal would constantly accumulate and weevils were a problem. But there was a use even for that. It would be swept up, bagged, and would wind up in somebody's moonshine brew somewhere on the mountain, north or south of the Gap.

Keeping a mill rodent proof is an almost impossible job and, of course, a feed and flour mill is a happy hunting ground for rats and mice. Regular inspections of the mill were made by the Food and Drug Administration. There was no problem with what was to be animal feed, but when the quantity of rodent hair in flour went beyond an allowable point, there was a problem.

Finally the situation reached an impasse, and the mill was closed for good on January 15, 1951. For the next 12 years, James Wines worked for the Washington Flour Company in Georgetown.

Mr. Chrysler sold the mill to Mr. and Mrs. Mack J. West, of McLean, in 1951. Mrs. West used the old Furr house as an antique shop for the next 22 years.

In 1973 the mill, the miller's house, and the headrace extending up Broad Run was sold by the Wests to Mrs. Morton W. Smith of Middleburg. Her thought in the purchase was to restore the old mill as an operating showpiece.

Though still very much involved, Mrs. Smith has turned over the title to the mill to the Bull Run Preserve, Inc., a non-profit preservation corporation with headquarters in Middleburg. Plans for restoration and the money for the project are still to materialize, but it has been stated by members of Bull Run Preserve that some concrete developments may well materialize in 1977. The mailing address for the corporation is Bull Run Preserve, Inc. Middleburg, Va. 22117.

PLASTER MILLING

In talking with various people about the mill some knew that "plaster" was ground there, but none knew anything about the process. Calls to the Department of Commerce and the Department of Agriculture revealed nothing. The following is based on information supplied by Clifford Currie, superintendent of the restoration of Colvin Run Mill on Route 7 (Leesburg Pike) Fairfax County.

"Plaster" was finely ground limestone used as fertilizer and soil conditioner. After quarrying, it was crushed into pieces not more than 1/2" in diameter. At some point, either at the quarry or near the mill,

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The Mill

it was subjected to intense heat to ease the final grinding process.

A mill could operate as a "plaster" mill as a grist mill, or both at the same time, using separate pairs of stones. The grinding process was essentially the same for meal and for "plaster." The fineness of the grind was determined by the separation of the burrs (mill stones), varying from 2-1,000th to 1-32d of an inch. The same pair of stones could be used for either "plaster" or meal by the mere expedient of cleaning the stones when making the switch.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: In the preparation of this history of Beverley Mill I am indebted to many people: John K. Gott for numerous leads and names; Rev. Melvin Lee Readman, Jr., for the use of certain background material; Mrs. Audrey Kerr, Broad Run, Va. and her son, Jack Kerr; Wm. Beverley, Jr. for much valuable material, and to his daughter Polly for her drawings of the mill; Judge and Mrs. Howard W. Smith for their recollections of the past; Robert Beverley Herbert for his many memories; Elizabeth Bloxton, long-time Broad Run postmistress; George and Samuel Bleight of Haymarket; Wm. N. Wilbur of Warrenton; James Wines, the last millwright, who still lives nearby; and Clifford Curry, superintendent of the restoration of Colvin Run Mill for information on "plaster" milling. All have cast rays of light into the past to make this story possible.

Our thanks also go to Sigismunda M.F. Chapman for material we were able to lift from her *A History of Chapman and Alexander Families*, Richmond, Va. Dietz Printing Co., 1946. 305 pp., illus., relative to the six Chapman men named on the stone in the wall of the mill, and to the forerunners of George and Samuel Bleight.

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