

BULL RUN REG LIB



Beverley Mill in 1938. Note the office on the corner of the mill. The sign over the door says: "Beverley Mills Water Ground Flour." From a postcard, courtesy of James Wines.

Beverley Mill

Henry H. Douglas

While now idle, Beverley Mill is the most outstanding and impressive of any mill still standing in northern Virginia. Located on the Fauquier/Prince William boundary, a mere 200 feet from Route 66 and close to Route 55, the mill's history has been a rugged one over nearly two and a half centuries. It has survived the onslaught of time and the elements as well as the more dramatic perils of fire, flood and war. More recently it nearly succumbed to the Virginia Department of Highway plans for the construction of Route 66 but was saved by the strongly expressed wishes of local residents. It now faces problems from vandalism, neglect and idleness although the Bull Run Preserve, Inc., its present owner, is doing its best to stop further deterioration until restoration can begin.

The mill was originally built in 1742 by Jonathan Chapman (d. 1759) and his son Nathaniel (1710-1761) following the elder Chapman's purchase in 1740 of 650 acres on Broad Run in Thoroughfare Gap.¹ Its site was slightly upstream (west) from the present one a short distance on the other side of the present railroad tracks [the Manassas Gap R.R. built in the 1850's]. After it burned in the mid-1750's a new enlarged mill was built (1757-58) on the present mill site. Both mills always used Broad Run as their source of power. No dam was ever necessary. All that was needed was for the water falling 70 feet through the Gap to the first mill and 87 feet for the second, to be channeled into a headrace to the mill. The earlier headrace was almost completely obliterated by the

construction of the railroad bed,² but the second headrace is still plainly visible in the winter.

Chapman's mill was a significant 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. The wagons were augmented and to some degree supplanted by the Manassas Gap Railroad which came to the mill's back door.

The Chapman family prospered, acquired many slaves and continued to live on the same site for five generations. Finally, in 1858 under the ownership of John Chapman, and after another fire damaged the interior, the mill was once more rebuilt and enlarged through the addition of two extra floors. The finished structure was a massive and unique six-story gable roofed structure built of stones of all sizes from the nearby quarry and stream. Some of these stones were massive and it took manpower 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. Master stone mason Burr Powell and his men exerted every effort in getting this huge stone in place without cracking it. Sadly, as it was settling into place it did crack, and the disheartened Mr.

Powell sat down and wept. Yet, even with the crack, good fortune was with them and solid stone covered the entire doorway. The crack was several inches away toward the corner of the building.

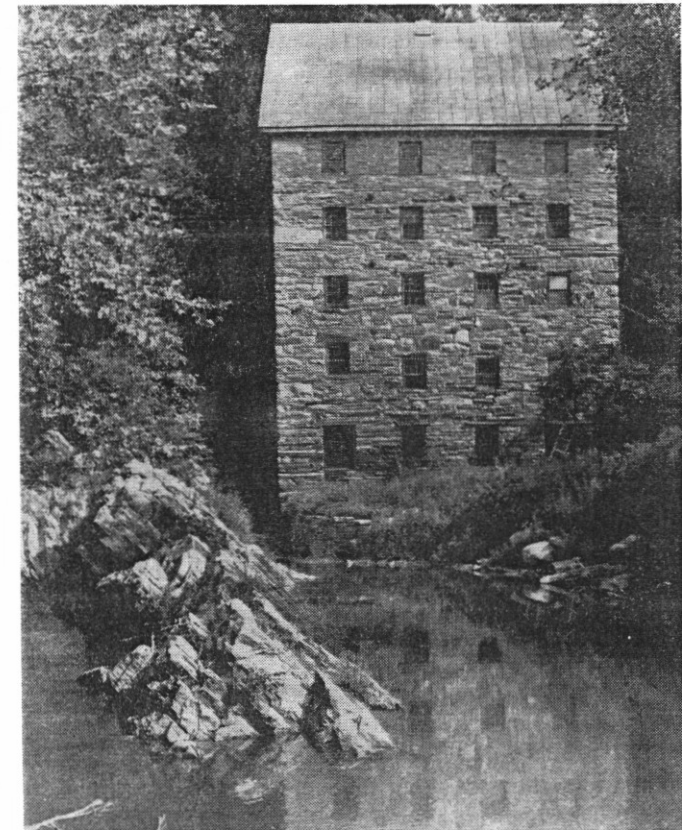
Another gigantic stone was placed over the door at the water wheel end of the building at the same level as the one that cracked. It is at least 20" thick and approximately eight feet long. One of the last stones to be put in place was a "cornerstone"—perhaps capstone would be the better word—set in 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.

From
 Johnathan John
 Nathaniel George
 Pearson to
 John Chapman
 [rebuilt A.D. 1858]

(Johnathan is so spelled on the stone.)

With stone walls seven feet thick at the base and three feet at the top the building, despite some cracks, seems to be as stable now as it was over a hundred years ago.

As the mill was rebuilt new machinery was installed, probably for plaster grinding. The mill may well have been used as a plaster mill as well as a grist mill. A plaster mill grinds crushed gypsum into "plaster" or "lime" for use as a fertilizer and soil conditioner. This development was doubtless due to the opening of more and more farm land in Northern



The rock outcrop, at and above the mill, was the source of all or most of the building stone. The metal mill wheel is the last of many. A mill wheel undergoes tremendous stress. P.A.S. photo/Wm. Edmund Barrett, 1971.

Virginia, and to the advent of the railroad to handle the heavier hauling that was part of the "plaster" industry.

Where did the gypsum come from? Some have said that it came by boat from Nova Scotia to Alexandria, and by train from there. A much more likely explanation was provided by Robert Beverley Herbert of Avenel, near The Plains, grandson of the first Beverley to be connected with the mill. He said that his cousins, Robert and Bradshaw Beverley, operated a quarry in the Gap where they crushed stone. They also quarried near Winchester in the Shenandoah Valley. He always thought they shipped the gypsum from Front Royal on the railroad. 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, 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 1/32nd 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.

John Chapman's fond hopes for the rebuilt mill, which was expensive enough for some to dub "Chapman's Folly," were blasted by the Civil War. The outbreak of the War brought a halt to the normal functioning of the mill. People in the area could not move 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.

Perhaps the final blow came when the Confederate Army took over the mill and made it into 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.

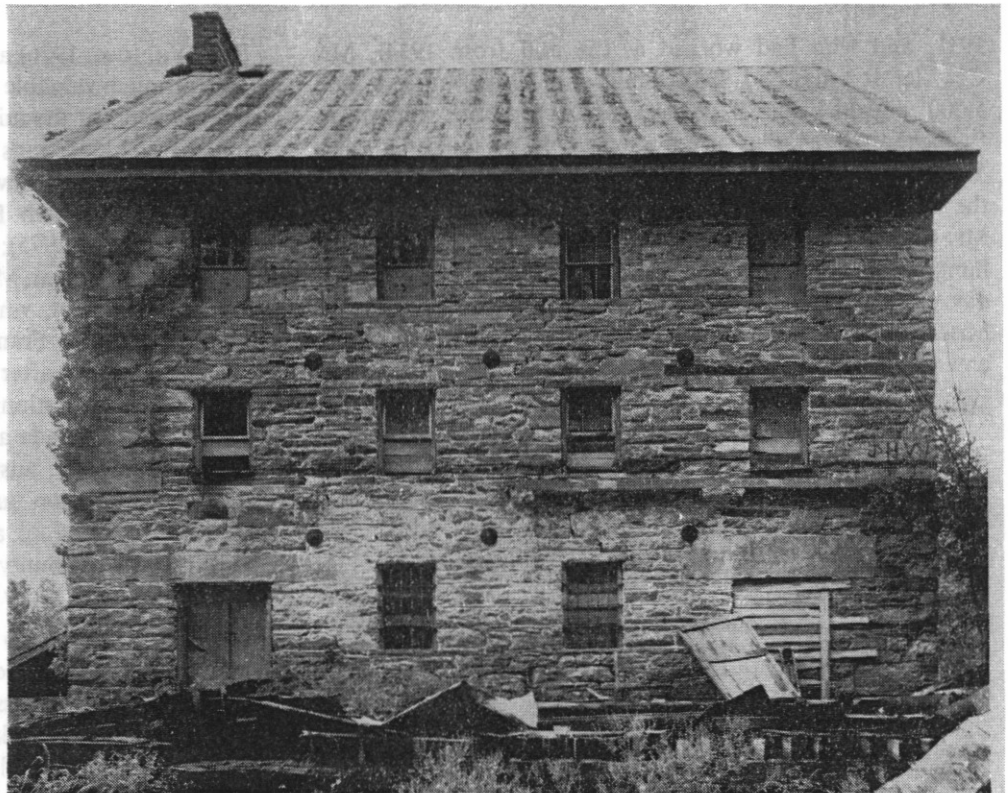
John Chapman lived through the war but was perhaps a casualty of it. He saw his beloved mill raped and gutted—all of his rebuilding came to nothing. He died the year following the end of the hostilities (December 4, 1866)—his last days spent at the State Asylum in Staunton.³ Subsequently, the Beverley family became owners of the mill.

Colonel Robert Beverley, descendent of a long line of Beverleys, lived just up the road at Avenel. 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 for \$13,350, and turned it over to his William (Sr.).⁴ Colonel Beverley himself never took an active interest in operating it. The deed to the property was recorded in William's name in 1879 who ran the project as a "plaster" mill for many years.⁵

In 1896 the business was sold to Messrs. Hornbaker and Wolverton, and new facilities for grinding flour were added.

and for son, Jack Kerr, Beverley
material, and to his daughter Polly for
ll; Judge and Mrs. Howard W. Smith
of the post (Judge Smith has son
Beverley Herbert (died 1977) for his many
Blaxton, long-time Broad Run por-
George and Samuel Blight, of
Wife of Warrenton, James Wines,
to live nearby; Elton Wines, Broad
at Fectrich, who carried grain to the
W. W. F. Childs Course, superinten-
of Coin Run Mill; to Miss Francis
handmaid's survey of Prince William
pieces of the Virginia Historic Land-
and the Northern Virginia Planning

Beverley Mill from the railroad side. Only the base of the shipping dock remained in 1971 when this picture was taken. Now it is all rotted away. Note the huge stones over the doorways. The crack in the stone over the left door occurred just as it was lowered into place. The "cornerstone" is in the middle under the eaves. P.A.S. photo/Wm. Edmund Barrett.



In 1901 the mill was sold to William Jordan, and in 1903 to Charles Craig Furr, Jr., and the Furr family operated the mill during most of the first half of the 20th century.

Charles Craig Furr, Jr. (1869-1972) bought Beverley Mill and moved to Broad Run in 1903. He had three daughters, one of whom, Audrey Furr Kerr, 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 (d. 1939).

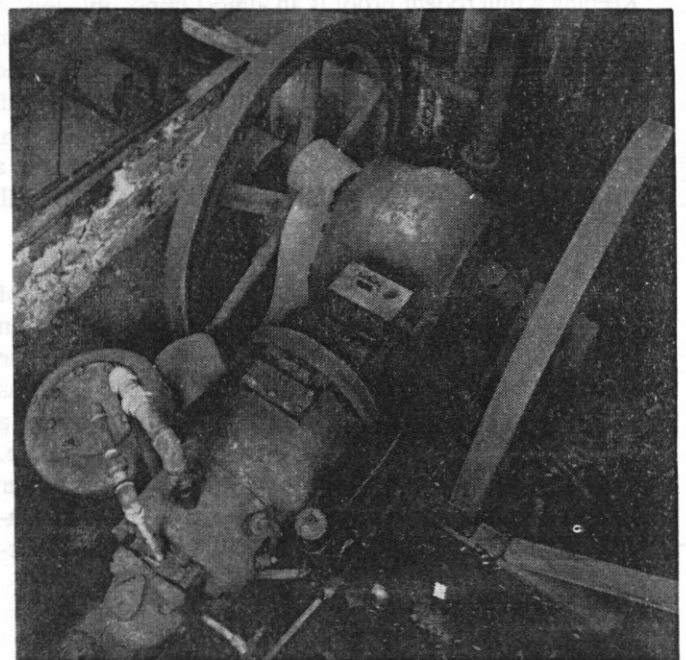
There were busy seasons during the Furr ownership when the mill ran day and night. At some point Virginia did not produce enough wheat and large amounts had to be shipped from Chicago. The mill was able to grind approximately 100,000 bushels of grain annually. In the 1940s the mill did a gross business 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 Machis Kip diesel engine installed by the Furrs in the early 1920s to supply auxiliary power during dry spells. (It was a real brute to activate and is still in place in the mill). Electricity provided lighting. Between World Wars, Mr. Furr installed new and modern flour equipment. The other machinery, in use for decades, continued to be used. Installing costly new equipment was a mistake and Mr. Furr found himself in serious financial difficulties.

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 one with modern flour machinery, could not compete with huge mass production plants. 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 1946 when Walter Chrysler bought the mill and the Furr house.

When Walter Chrysler bought the mill, 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 (1946-January



This Machis Kip diesel was installed in the early 1920s, and was overhauled in 1946. It provided power in the absence of sufficient water. P.A.S. photo/Wm. Edmund Barrett.

1951, and who had worked at the mill from 1934), Mr. Chrysler 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. Sales slips of 1946-49 indicate:⁶

Miscellaneous:

5 pounds buckwheat	.45
40 10-pound bags meal	15.20
50 pounds bran	1.15
200 pounds middlings	4.80
To: Mid-Country Feed Store, Warrenton	
20 100-pound bags cracked corn	97.00
To: Herbert Bryant, Inc., Warrenton	
16 25-pound bags meal	22.88
20 100-pound bags cracked corn	97.00
To: Safeway Grocery Co., Warrenton	
50 10-pound bags meal	29.50
50 5-pound bags meal	15.50
16 25-pound bags meal	22.88

Keeping the mill clean was a major undertaking. Dust and spilled meal would constantly accumulate and weevils were a problem. But there was a use for that. It would be swept up, bagged, and eventually 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. 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 major 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 crisis. Finally the situation reached an impasse, and the mill was closed for good on January 15, 1951.

Mr. Chrysler sold the mill to Mr. and Mrs. Mack 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 who hoped 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.

Acknowledgements

In the preparation of this history of Beverley Mill I am indebted to many people: John K. Gott for numerous leads, names and documents; Rev. Melvin Lee Steadman, Jr., for use of certain background material; Mrs. Audrey Kerr, Broad

Run, Va. (dec. 1976) 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 (Judge Smith has now passed on); Robert Beverley Herbert (dec. 1973) for his many memories; Elizabeth Bloxton, long-time Broad Run postmistress (dec. 1975); George and Samuel Bleight, of Haymarket; William M. Wilbur of Warrenton; James Wines, the last millwright, who lives nearby; Elaine Wisner, Broad Run postmistress; Frank Escherich, who carried grain to the mill to be ground after W.W. I; Clifford Currie, superintendent of the restoration of Colvin Run Mill; to Miss Francis Jones who has made a landmarks survey of Prince William County under the auspices of the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission and the Northern Virginia Planning District Commission; and to Mark Spencer of Colvin Run Mill in Fairfax County.⁷ All have cast rays of light into the past to make this story possible.

Our thanks also go to Sigusmunda M.F. Chapman for material we were able to sift 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 forebearers of George and Samuel Bleight.

Plans for the restoration and the money for the project are still to materialize, but members of the Bull Run Preserve still hope for positive developments. The mailing address for the corporation is: Bull Run Preserve, Inc., Middleburg, Virginia 22117. Inquiries may also be addressed to: Mrs. George L. Beavers, Jr., The Plains, VA 22171.

(see page twenty for footnotes)

Mr. Douglas, founder of the Pioneer America Society, is now historical archivist for the Falls Church Historical Commission. He recently completed a book, *Falls Church: Places and People*, having to do with 125 of the city's early houses and some of the people associated with them.

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