

THE STORY OF SHULTZ'S MILL ON BEAVER CREEK

By Herbert H. Beck

The artificial structure of an inhabited region like Lancaster County is primarily determined by its natural topography and its drainage—by surface conditions chiseled out by the geological hand of long past centuries.

Thus it is that just as the beneficent springhead determines the site of the Indian village and the place for the pioneer's log cabin, so the fall of the stream bed and the face of the hillside determine the position of that prime necessity of fresh settlement—the grist mill.

Thus established by natural conditions the mill promptly determines the direction of the roads which must lead to it. Hostelrys, churches, villages follow later, on the road system primarily and largely dependent upon the position of the mills.

After 1710, through a period vague in local history, the famous Hans Herr pioneers and their immediate followers, having cleared, ploughed, planted and harvested their new land, were confronted with the problem and task of hauling their grain to a grist mill on the distant Brandywine.

The friendly Beaver Creek, sparkling and murmuring near us today, helped the settlers solve this problem. Sometime prior to 1733, according to Rupp, not less than three mills were built nearby. They were Emanuel Herr's on the Pequea, Buckley's on the Octorora and William Smith's on Beaver Creek. William Smith's mill, or another unrecorded mill, possibly Martin Bear's, was driven by the present dam about 350 yards upstream and the mill itself stood a short distance below the dam. At this place the rapid Big Beaver had channeled through the limestone leaving a cliffside selectively fitted for a dam; and here were found the millstones of a mill which even tradition seems to have forgotten. These millstones, which may be seen at the farmhouse of Henry Andrews, immediately across the creek from the original mill site, are of an archaic type unusual, in fact locally unique, in having their furrows on the rolling edge instead of on the flat side.

This mill, conjecturally William Smith's, created the road which formerly crossed the creek a short way below the dam and that road leading to Hessdale was changed to its present position when Martin Bear—evidently to gain increased water power by a greater fall—in 1770 erected a new road-way determinant, the now venerable mill on its present site.

Traditionally for some years before or after 1770 the dam was used to operate a nail mill which stood on the Strasburg township side, about 275 yards upstream from the present mill. Considerable structural evidence of this second mill of the Beaver Creek dam remains on this former site.

An outline of the ownership and titles of the lands about these three mill sites is made possible by the research of David F. Magee. This abridged record shows that in 1682 William Penn, the proprietor, set aside to be surveyed 5,000 acres including in part this land to George Shore of Athlone, Ireland, at a quit rental of one shilling per hundred acres. On April 5, 1703, Shore transferred his claim to Amos Strettle, a Dublin merchant, and Amos Strettle, acquiring his warrant in 1712 from the Penn proprietors, in 1721 turned the entire 5,000 acres over to Abel Strettle, also of Dublin.

The first real sale and delivery of the land to a settler came on April 30, 1731, when Irish speculator, Strettle, through his authorized attorney, Thomas Hatton, transferred 350 acres to Martin Bear, for the consideration of one hundred and thirty-three pounds lawful money of the province. The data of this locally important change in ownership is recorded in Philadelphia in Deed Book D, Vol. 2, Page 9; and an admirable map of the Martin Bear tract was placed by H. Frank Eshleman in the pamphlet of the Lancaster

County Historical Society, January, 1924. This map shows that the Martin Bear tract extended north to a point where its northwest corner was cut by the Pequea Creek. Its neighboring tract on its prolonged western side was one belonging to Henry Carpenter. A similar tract on its eastern side belonged to Henry Haines. The map's only error is that the Bear tract does not include the Beaver Creek, as it obviously should, at its southern end.

The great Beaver Creek, as it was first called, which was harnessed by Martin Bear until his death in 1784 and which was the aquatic workhorse for his son and a line of successors, is not without its zoological as well as its economic picturesqueness.

Our stream took the name of Beaver for natural reasons—as did a large tract of swampland in Clay Township—doubtless at an early date. Peter Bezallon and other traders rated the beaver as the prince of fur bearing animals. Beaver pelts, which these Frenchmen bartered from the Indians, were the chief factor in attracting the early traders, who took advantage of their rich opportunities before the Hans Herr settlers knew the Pequea Valley. Under the relentless demand for beaver pelts which came from the European markets the beaver was soon exterminated from Lancaster County. In fact in the presence of the stream which is honored with the picturesque name of Beaver it may well be said that of two aquatic mammals which shared this meandering waterway abode throughout long centuries, the beaver's associate—the humble muskrat—was far more intimately connected with the grist mill economy of our region. For whereas the beaver soon passed honorably away, the muskrat remained in the stream course, often in greatly increased numbers, dishonorably to undermine the dams and race banks and to bore leaks potentially fatal to the milling business. Few, if any, of that great line of Lancaster County grist millers have known the beaver personally for it was probably locally extinct long before 1750; but many, if not all, of that ancient and honorable white-hatted guild at one or more times in their lives, in one or more languages, silently or otherwise, have negatively blessed the muskrat.

Under the records of 1784 Martin Bear willed the land, apparently reduced from the original 350 to 262 acres to his son, Martin, who seems at this time to have changed his name from Bear to Barr—in which form it regularly appears in subsequent records of family transactions. (This alteration from Bear to Barr is curiously coincident with the fact that the black bear also disappeared from the county at this time or shortly after.)

This is the first deed upon the original tract in which the mill property alone, separate from the accompanying farm on which stood the dam and race, was granted to anyone. At the time this transfer was made a distillery stood in the meadow immediately across the road from the mill.

The land was further divided by the time Martin Barr 3rd acquired a part which is recorded to include the Mansion on the east side of Beaver Creek together with the privilege of keeping up the dam on certain lands granted to the daughters.

This deed referring as it does to "certain merchant mill, grist mill and saw mill" on the tract indicates by its words "merchant mill" that the traditional nail mill, 275 yards up the meadow and previously referred to, was still available for use sometime after 1784.

The saw mill stood on the north side of the present mill. It was removed about 1870. One of the well-known neighborhood sounds prior to that time was the shrill voice of the old upright saw resounding from these hills.

In 1831 the mill property, now reduced to 3 acres, was sold to Christian Shultz for \$4166. The deed included water rights of the dam and its parts.

Passing on through a short series of ownerships the old mill property came in 1913 into possession of our host of the day, Henry C. Miller. Mr.

Miller, by happy historical and ancestral coincidence for this region, is a great-great-great-grandson of the Jacob Miller who came on the ship Mary Hope with Hans Herr and a few others to America and to the Pequea Valley in 1710.

The mill as originally built by Martin Bear in 1770 was a two story building, essentially as its lower part is to-day, with a fourteen foot fall on its overshot wheel. The original mill office was apparently on the first or basement floor as is indicated by the remnant of an old fire-place which is there. Sometime after Christian Shultz purchased the mill, which was in 1831, he added the frame third and fourth stories and later also repaired the stone walls on the northern and western sides. When this change was made the original date stone of 1770 was removed.

The experiences of the millers were not always pleasant ones in the old mill, for the Beaver Creek, always lively and usually docile, has a way at times of becoming riotous and raging and sending its turbulent waters into the basement. One day in June, 1884, the race and the meadow were one sheet of wild water. Withal, when it is remembered that the Beaver has been grinding garden spot grain for nearly two centuries in these mills the temperamental character of the spirit of the stream can easily be overlooked.

The Civil War was probably the period of the mill's greatest prosperity. It was a trade center there. Most of its flour was shipped to Philadelphia through Adam Witmer's warehouse in Paradise.

But beyond the tales of its structural and economic problems and its trials and tribulations, yonder Beaver mill, like certain other ancient mills in the county, has much to entertain the imagination that loves local history—that has an appetite for those human interests which, like old vintages, are mellowed and blessed by the hand of time. Yonder mill, the type of others similarly abandoned and delapidated in the shifting winds of industrial affairs was once a center about which pulsed the arteries of traffic and trade. It was the associate of the Conestoga wagon and the staunch comrade of long lines of honest draft horses, which deserving of better fate, have gone "unwept, unhonored and unsung." Its mill office for many years a center of community chatter and the transfer of information has listened to the thrilling tales fresh from Lexington and Brandywine, has heard about the boy Steele from a few miles away who treked to New England when his ear caught in Drumore the Concord shot heard round the world; it has listened to unnumbered discussions on social, political and religious affairs, sound arguments qualified by profound wisdom, dogmatic sureness and ultimate decisions; and it has heard that vast amount of common talk among those whose gardens of pleasure are running barrenness and who seek their thrills in the world of the loose tongue. It has felt the excitement which came when Sumpter was fired upon, it has caught the local spirit of Thaddeus Stevens and its solemn walls have reflected the sorrow which fell into its flour dust atmosphere with the death of Lincoln. These and countless thousands of other themes of human interests, profound and permanent, fragile and fugitive, are coupled with the memories of those old limestone walls.

This stone house, which replaced the simple dwelling against the eastern wall of the mill, was built by Christian Shultz in 1843, twelve years after he purchased the property. This dignified old house is connected with the name of Shultz literally from the ground up, for not only did three generations of Shultzes actually live here but no less than five generations of Shultzes drank water from the spring now in the spring cellar of the house.

The first was Christian Shultz who, in 1774, built the old barn on what is now the Jefferson Herr farm near Refton and who lived on that farm.

Christian Shultz, the second, lived one-half mile down the Beaver Creek where he conducted a distillery. This distillery property is of notable and

more recent local interest, for after Christian Shultz the distillery was owned by Patrick Reynolds, a man of forceful personality, and it was on this property that of his son, John Reynolds, was born. John Reynolds became a member of Congress, then, under Grover Cleveland, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, and later Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania.

Across the Beaver Creek from the Shultz-Reynolds property and adjoining it lived another man locally prominent. This was John Strohm, who was in Congress from 1845 to 1849. Strohm was a man as humble and unassuming as he was respected and beloved. He is still known hereabouts, as "honest John Strohm." It is doubtful if there is a stream anywhere which divides the home tracts of two congressmen, as does our friend the Big Beaver a short way below.

Christian Shultz, the third, purchased this property and built this house. He ran the mill during the heyday of the milling business.

Christian Shultz, the fourth, lived here for a time and operated this as well as the Comargo mill in Eden Township and the Stauffer mill on the north branch of the Octorora.

His nephew, Edwin W. Shultz, who was born in the small house adjoining the mill, later became a member of the Connecticut legislature and subsequently a member of the Hartford County Commission.

Christian Shultz, the fifth, lived here as a boy and later was lost in the Klondike rush.

In introducing Beaver Mills and their historic relationships, as the reader has briefly attempted to do this afternoon, he is re-impressed with a truth which has impressed him on other similar occasions. It is that time and the shifting winds of life follow an obstinate and relentless course.

They do not recognize permanence, and they pass on leaving only fragments of history to be picked up in their wakes. All that we could possibly see or hear to-day would reveal but the merest vestige of that vast range of human interests and physical and mental experiences that were in the lives of those who have had their day and have gone their way about an old place like this.

Aware of this fact, that at its best history is only fragmentary, that the most it can do at any time is to suggest pathways for the fertile imagination to follow, the reader turns with more confidence to remind his audience of the aesthetic charm of the place. Possibly lacking an appetite for those vintages mellowed by the hand of time, that he has modestly attempted to present, he is assured that his audience will be ready to enjoy the seclusion and pastoral setting of the old mill; that they can feel the rugged charm of these hillsides; and that perchance they may be entertained by the music of the bob white, the scarlet tanager and the yellow breasted chat, birds whose ancestors similarly entertained the Martin Bears and the Christian Shultzes for the past two centuries in the Beaver Valley.

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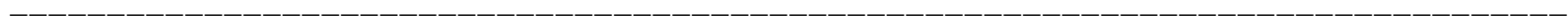
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