

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, February 27, 2012

The Mill at 500 Greenbank Road (Part 1): On the present location of the Greenbank Mill, across Red Clay Creek from the depot of the Wilmington & Western Railroad (W & W), there was supposed to have been an early Swedish mill built about 1677. The operating water-powered mill, in outward appearance as it is today, was built by Robert Philips in 1790 and was a grist mill for nearly 200 years. The "Madison Factory" (the stone portion of the mill) was built about 1812 during the administration of President Madison and was primarily a woolen mill. Philips established his home next door with the building of a comfortable house and barn, now called the Philips Farm and operated today, along with the mill, by Greenbank Mill Associates.

By 1782, the colonial inventor Oliver Evans, born in Newport, was operating his grist mill one mile upstream at Faulkland, and in the late 1780s had successfully installed his patented automatic milling machinery there. At the request of Robert Philips, this great advance in the milling industry was installed at Greenbank soon after the mill was built. It was advertised that the miller could get the mill going and work his fields nearby, allowing the mill to run unattended. The creek was dammed about ½ mile upstream, and the mill race fed a water wheel on the outside of the building, partially enclosed when the Madison factory was added. After the Civil War, the water wheel at Greenbank was replaced by an inside water turbine fed by a large penstock under the first floor of the mill.

The Philips family owned and operated the mill for several generations, and about 1925, it was bought by Darlington Flynn, who owned a large farm on all sides of the present Price's Corner. John McDonald was the on-site miller for Flynn, and he hired a young man named J. Roy Magargal as his assistant. In settling Flynn's estate in the early 1950s, the mill, the farmhouse, the barn, and well over 100 acres became the property of Saul Cohen, a Wilmington attorney. By 1958, all the property had been sold off except for the original Philips buildings and about 15 acres, including the dam and the mill race. Roy Magargal was still operating the grist mill, and he had been there so long that most people thought he owned it.

On a beautiful fall afternoon in 1958, Clayton Hoff (founder of the Brandywine Valley Association and the Red Clay Valley Association), George Sargisson (Executive Director of Recreation Promotion & Service in Wilmington), and I walked down the railroad from Yorklyn to Greenbank, inspecting the line as a possible future tourist attraction. As we ended our walk, Clayton said, "We should call on Roy Magargal at the mill." We found him there, running the mill and selling feed, much as it had been done since 1790. Soon Clayton Hoff was telling us we "must" buy the mill to supplement the proposed railroad operation. Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc. (HRCV) was incorporated in 1960, but it was not until 1965 that the B & O Railroad, at the urging of Governor Elbert N. Carvel, agreed to lease its Landenberg Branch for the steam-powered passenger trains. One of the interim activities was to operate the Auburn Valley Railroad; another was to purchase and plan for the future of the Greenbank Mill.

In 1964, HRCV bought the mill and 1.7 acres, including the water rights, from Saul Cohen for \$10,000. Roy Magargal continued his business there, and he was charged no rent. John Walters bought the house and the barn. Soon a small group of volunteers from HRCV was working with Magargal to clean and upgrade the mill to make it more presentable to the public. A problem with water rights surfaced, as Cohen had sold a small square at the end of the mill race to three different buyers. To get HRCV "off his back," he offered an additional 7 acres just upstream from the mill, which offer was accepted. The W & W began operations in 1966. John Tweedy built a nice truss foot bridge on the creek bank, which was lifted onto its new foundations to connect the mill with the parking lot of the new railroad across Red Clay Creek. The bridge was dedicated by New Castle County Executive William J. Connor in July 1967. *(To be continued next week)*