

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, June 9, 2014

J. Roy Magargal (1892–1972): For nearly 40 years, Magargal's Mill and the Greenbank Mill were one and the same. The longtime (and last) miller there never owned the mill at 500 Greenbank Road, but since he was always there and in charge of the operation, most customers thought that he did. History tells us that the currently restored mill was owned and operated by at least three generations of the Philips family starting about 1790. By the late 19th century, Franklin Flinn's farm encompassed most of the real estate around present-day Price's Corner, and he acquired the mill property with its farmhouse, barn, and three dams on Red Clay Creek. Darlington Flinn, Franklin's son or grandson, lived in a farmhouse on the east side of the overall farm near the location of a present-day Walmart store. While Darlington owned the mill in the 1920s, John McDonald was the miller who ran the business and taught Roy Magargal his trade.

Living with his wife, Pearl (who died in 1955), on Newport-Gap Pike in the Cedars, less than ½ mile away, Roy Magargal could be found at the mill about 10 hours each day. A one-man operation, he kept the mill race and its dams and gates in good condition and ran the stone grinding burrs and conveyor belts from a water turbine and its penstock under the first floor of the mill. In addition to the grain (flour and corn meal) from local farmers that he ground at Greenbank, he sold a few other expendable farm products. From the 1930s on, Roy Magargal WAS the Greenbank Mill.

On a beautiful fall day in 1958, Clayton Hoff, George Sargisson, and I walked the six miles of the Landenberg Branch of the B & O Railroad from Yorklyn to Greenbank, as I was trying to sell them on the idea of helping me promote a new tourist railroad in the Red Clay Valley. As we approached Greenbank, Mr. Hoff said, "We must stop in and see Roy Magargal at the mill." That was the first of my many visits, although I had passed on Greenbank Road many times. As usual, he was on the job and gave us a quick tour. Darlington Flinn soon passed away with no surviving family, and his estate was in the first stages of settlement. To go with a future Wilmington & Western Railroad and the development of Greenbank Station as a boarding point, Clayton said we HAD to buy the Greenbank Mill if at all possible. In the early 1960s, Saul Cohen, a Wilmington attorney, was involved in settling the Flinn estate and had himself acquired the western part of the large property, including the Greenbank Mill. In 1964, through agent John K. Walters, who lived in the old Philips farmhouse, Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc. (HRCV) bought the Mill and 1.7 acres of land from Cohen for \$10,000. HRCV assured Magargal that he could continue his business as usual.

Since there was no Wilmington & Western operation until 1966, a number of new volunteers were attracted to HRCV because of their interest in the Greenbank Mill. Magargal, while maintaining his old-fashioned ways, welcomed these volunteers who took an interest in what he was doing, and he shared with them his vast knowledge of milling. HRCV painted the mill, volunteer Will Molinari got the old diesel engine operating (as back-up power), volunteer Joe Mitchell planted some sweet corn on the property, and the annual or semi-annual sheep shearing took place on the grounds. Starting in 1966, other HRCV volunteers opened the mill for visitors on the weekends of train operation across the creek. In 1967, a footbridge, built by local contractor John Tweedy and dedicated by the first County Executive William J. Connor, spanned the creek between the mill and the W & W parking lot. Although farming was fast disappearing from the area around Greenbank that diminished Magargal's business, he continued running the mill as he had for many years.

All water-powered mills had "water rights" to the Red Clay Creek, and Roy knew his rights. Often in dry weather when the flow was insufficient to run the mill, he would find Hercules using a lot of creek water to irrigate its golf course upstream. He would walk up the creek to Hercules, find the right person, and put a stop to it. He also understood how fast the crest of a flood traveled during high water. The water seemingly moved very fast, but the crest moved about 3 m.p.h. I came along Route 82 below Yorklyn one day and found water over the road. I phoned Roy Magargal and told him. Immediately, he opened the flood gates just above the mill, and within two hours the crest passed Greenbank without damaging the penstock or the turbines. He thanked me many times over.

About 5 A.M. on a humid August morning in 1969, I got a phone call from Mrs. Walters in the Philips farmhouse, telling me the mill had burned. When I got there shortly thereafter, fire companies had extinguished the flames, water was dripping from everywhere, and the roof and most of the interior had been destroyed, leaving only the walls standing. The cause was deliberate arson, and the suspects were caught and tried, but they were acquitted. Roy Magargal was heartbroken, but he was determined to continue on, even though the milling machinery was damaged beyond repair.

An Amish carpenter named Aaron Lapp put a new shingle roof on the frame portion of the mill, but the stone walls of the Madison factory were unsafe and were torn down. Magargal boarded up what he could to keep out the weather and continued his limited retail business without operation of the mill machinery. Although never the same after the fire, he was always at the mill during business hours, and his faithful dog that lived inside kept away strangers during the night. On a winter night early in 1972, Roy Magargal died in his sleep without prior warning. Magargal's Mill is now owned by the Greenbank Mill Associates and is still going strong as a non-profit tourist attraction; the Philips Farm next door has been acquired, and the Madison factory has been completely rebuilt.