

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, January 11, 2010

The Mill Adjoining Auburn Heights: Since the Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve may soon have an opportunity to expand its operations to some of the mill buildings just down the hill from Auburn Heights itself, it seems appropriate to tell a little of the known history of these buildings, accredited in 1971 as the Auburn Mills Historic District. In so doing, I am indebted to the late C. A. Weslager, a great researcher and well-known local historian. One of his books, the *Garrett Snuff Fortune*, and two of his monographs written in the early 1960s deal with the history of this property.

The first mill on what is now Benge Road was built as a grist mill in 1730 by John Garrett I, owner of the property, and his farmer-neighbors. Grain from this mill was hauled by horse and wagon up the steep hill on the public road to the Wilmington-Lancaster County road, now called Old Wilmington Road. Today the public road then used is a portion of Benge Road (until it bends to the west) and Old Public Road, which ran through to Old Wilmington east of the Hockessin Friends Meetinghouse. Over this latter road the wagons rolled to Wilmington and to ships along the Christina River. Garrett died in the late 1750s, but not before he had acquired lands downstream on Red Clay Creek. His son, John Garrett II, inherited about 400 acres covering most of present-day Yorklyn east the creek. He built a small stone home across from the grist mill in 1760, and until the American Revolution, his milling business was highly successful. In the years following the separation from Great Britain, however, the Brandywine millers had greatly expanded their operations, and river boats could pull right to their docks for shipping. Garrett realized he should convert the mill for another use, and he chose the manufacture of paper. Paper mills were scarce, and again he was very successful, but for the second time his business was threatened by competition from the Brandywine. He settled on manufacturing a budding new tobacco product called snuff, and about 1782, he built a new mill ½ mile downstream for its manufacture. One of John II's four sons, Horatio Gates Garrett, stayed at the old mill and continued to make paper, presumably living in the 1760 house built by his father. This house is still intact with a larger 19th-century addition attached. It's known as "the old farmhouse."

Horatio pulled out in the mid-1820s and moved to Steubenville, Ohio. The mill was sold to Thomas Lea, who converted it to a cotton-yarn operation. About 1850 Jacob Pusey of Wilmington bought the property, and his son operated the mill and lived in the farmhouse. Jacob's granddaughter, Emalea Pusey Warner (Warner Junior High School in Wilmington), grew up here. It was sold again in 1862 to James and William Clark, who converted it to manufacture woolen yarn. After William's death, his son-in-law, S. Franklin Ewart, entered into an agreement with the Marshall Brothers, Israel and Elwood, who expanded their paper business at Marshall's Bridge, and modernized the old mill to make paper again. Like the 19th century proprietors before him, in 1890 Israel Marshall and his family moved into the old farmhouse. Soon (if not earlier), in addition to the farmhouse and its barn, there were at least four houses with 10 dwelling units across the road from the mill. The Yorklyn Post Office and a country store were located here. Only one of these houses with three dwelling units is standing today. The farmhouse remains, but the barn is gone.

In 1895, a new, brick mill office was built between the houses and directly across the road from the mill. In 1900, one of the large three-unit houses was razed to make room for the first fibre mill in Yorklyn, called the "Insulite Mill." The fibre business was so successful that the fibre machines remained here for only about 10 years, after which all vulcanized fibre was made in the big new plant closer to the railroad. For most of its life, the Insulite Mill was used only for storage, a carpenter shop, and a garage for road vehicles until the roof collapsed and it was torn down in 2001. A frame three-unit dwelling house had been torn down about 1968. The Marshall Brothers paper mill on Benge Road continued to make paper for NVF until 2008.

In an agreement between the State of Delaware and CCS Investors, the buildings remaining in this complex will be saved and used in one way or another (the Fall 2009 edition of the *Auburn Heights Herald* carried this story). We hope the Friends of Auburn Heights Preserve can play an active role in this exciting development.