

## **The Sycamore Mill**

### **Research Articles and Notes**

**This History was written by Ernest Palmer Jr. in 1975. He was a member of the Bishop Mills Historical Society in Edgmont Twp.**

### **Sycamore Mill**

In 1717 John Edge Jr., Jacob Edge and Henry Miller formed a co-partnership for the purpose of erecting a "Water Corn Mill", changing hands many times. It was not until 1785 that Thomas Bishop acquired complete control of this mill, which operated until 1867 when sold to Joseph Velotte who continued to operate them. In 1760 a plaster mill was operating until 1810 when it was taken down and a rolling mill built in 1810-11.

In 1785 a saw mill was erected and in 1807 was in operation by Thomas and Amor Bishop.

The rolling mill was about 70' x 50' one story and joined the southern end of the saw mill. This mill was the first to use hard coal for the smelting operation. This mill produced boiler plates, sheet iron and a variety of other material which operated from 1810-11 to 1828.

As a direct outgrowth of the rolling mill and located just above it was a nail factory in a small frame building. This factory was in operation in 1812 and was washed away during the flood of 1843 as well as damage to the above listed mills.

The foundations to the mills are still present as well as the miller's home, the miller's office and library, as well as the tenant homes as described below:

(1) **MILL OWNER'S HOUSE (Wright)**

2 ½ story stone house east of dam on Bishop Hollow Road, date stone 1822. Condition fair. Stone and frame barn adjacent in poor condition and deteriorating rapidly.

(2) **LIBRARY (Mill Office)**

This unusual stone building is known as the Union Library, and is described in the "Proceedings of the Delaware County Institute of Science", Vol. 11, No. 3, April 1907". It was originally a two story building; the library occupied the second floor, and the first floor was used as a mill office. The only indication of early woodwork is in the planed boards on the window inside walls, which are straight sided. Apparently a chimney is contained within the wall, and there appears to have been an opening in the wall at a point just above the first floor and under the chimney. A date stone with the year 1812 appears to the right of the front door.

(3) **BLIVEN HOUSE**

2 story stone bank type house across creek from mill owner's house. Condition good but has been in many floods. Very picturesque since site includes old blacksmith shop turned into a garage.

(4) **JOHNSON HOUSE**

Small stone building next to Bliven House is called Johnson House but is hardly a house. A two store stone structure, probably a springhouse.

(5) SCOUT HOUSE

This small stone house is one of the buildings shown in the 1907 "Proceedings of the Delaware County Institute of Science, Vol. 11, No. 3". Its present occupants say it was used by the Boy Scouts at one time, hence the name "Scout House".

The house faces the road and the dam on Ridley Creek. To the west is a one-story frame addition which encloses the kitchen. There is no cellar under any of the house. The first floor of the stone house was one room and has a fireplace on the west wall. The back part of the downstairs room has been partitioned off to form a bath and heater room. The window inside walls have a slight taper, and exposed joists are chamfered.

The second floor has one room with old floor boards and nails. There is a fireplace directly above the one on the first floor. The door to the third floor is hand planed, mortised and tenoned, but now on slides. The third floor has pegged and numbered rafters, and old flooring. A dormer has been added to the rear.

(6) MILL WORKER'S HOUSE (Harrison)

This is a double stone house with two front doors, now used as one residence. There is no obvious indication that the house wasn't all built at one time. The house lies very close to Sycamore Mills Road, with the dam to the rear. The cellar is divided and separated by a stone wall in the center. Stone corbelling supports corner fireplaces in both first floor rooms. Floor joists were cut by a vertical saw. Joists have been reinforced in the east cellar.

The first floor has chamfered, exposed beams overhead, and beaded floor boards showing between. There is some inside wall of vertical beaded boards. Doors are old and also of vertical planks. Corner fireplaces are in each first floor room.

The second floor has two rooms with corner fireplaces above those on the first floor. There is an odd second floor door but with nothing beneath it.

Windows throughout have a slight taper on the inside walls. The attic is all one room, with the chimney showing. The flooring is old, and the rafters are pegged and numbered.

(7) MILL WORKER'S HOUSE

This tiny stone house was apparently built as a mill worker's residence and is pictured along with the other houses at Sycamore Mills in the 1907 "Proceedings of the Delaware County Institute of Science, Vol. 11, No. 3". The best description of this house, and its charm is obtained by studying the pictures of the outside, for much of the inside work has been replaced, probably due to the different floods already mentioned on Sycamore Mills.

There is no cellar under the house. A fireplace is on the first floor. An addition, of frame, to accommodate a bathroom, has been added since the 1907 picture was taken. There is a single room on the second floor and the attic is reached through a trap door.

(8) DAM HOUSE

Large 2 ½ story stone early 18<sup>th</sup> century house on north side of creek built about 1770-1740. Due to its close proximity to the water it has been flooded often. Very picturesque.

(9) HARKNESS (Tenant house)

This small stone house faces south toward Forge Road. The cellar has hand-hewn joists on the east end, and pole joists on the west end. Sixteen inch original wide flooring can be seen between the joists. At the east end of the cellar, approximately 5 feet up from the floor, is a 13" high hand-hewn timber, approximately 8 feet long, which could be the lintel for a large fireplace. Masonry now fills the space below the lintel. Stone corbelling can be seen to support the first floor corner fireplaces. There is an outside door from the cellar to the south. Also, there is a two foot square niche on the south wall, which has been partially filled in. In the stairway to the cellar there is an unusual niche in the wall, approximately 1 ½ feet square. In the cellarway can be seen numbers on the bottom of the stairs to the second floor.

The first floor has two corner fireplaces in diagonally opposite corners. Window inside walls are slightly tapered. Exposed joists are chamfered. Corbelling stone work to support the second floor corner fireplace is seen from the first floor. Door frames are mortised, tenoned and pegged.

The second floor ceiling is plastered, and roof rafters cannot be seen. There are two very low windows, approximately one foot high by two and a half feet wide, one in the front and one in the back.

HARKNESS

The stone in this house appears to be darker than that of its neighbors. The inside window walls are rounded. The east door has nail heads showing in the vertical planks, and there is a 2 foot high by one foot wide niche in the wall by this door. There was, at one time, a pent eave across the front of the house, except for the last 10 feet to the east. The west section, now one big room, has a fireplace in the west wall, with hand gouged mantle. There appears to have been a large fireplace against the east wall of the west section, or what is now the center of the house.

The cellar under the east end appears to have been dug since the west end. The west end cellar has a stone arch fireplace support at the east end of the early section.

The second floor has straight inside window walls, and floor appears to be original. A fireplace is directly above that on the first floor west wall. A hand gouged mantle surrounds the fireplace.

Behind the house, loose, against a stone wall, is a date stone of 1793.

The east of the house is an interesting stone carriage shed, built at two different times. The building is 1 ½ stories with pole joists in the north, or later section. There is a niche in the wall of the south section.

*Keith Lockhart Collection*

**Bishop's Mills Historical Society**

**Sycamore Mills – Bishop's Mill – Providence Mill**

This is a preliminary outline of our current research information. It indicates, if briefly, the historic significance of the mill community in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. It does not include the architectural significance of the buildings that are standing today...

It is interesting to note the roads that led to Providence Mill, as it was known in the early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century: Bishop Hollow Road from Newtown Square; Ridley Creek Road from Media; Line (Chapel Hill Road) from Blue Hill and Springfield; Barren Road from Lima; Great Road (Middletown Road)...The mill was quite a center....

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## SYCAMORE MILLS – Ridley Creek State Park

Sycamore Mills, the former Mill Property, originally 20 acres in Upper Providence Township along Ridley Creek and 3 acres in Edgmont Township, located today at the intersection of the Bishop Hollow Road, Ridley Creek Road, Chapel Hill Road (Line), the Barren Road and Sycamore Mills Road at the bridge across Ridley Creek. Formerly known as BISHOP'S MILL, from 1785 to 1862; previously known as PROVIDENCE MILL, from 1718 to 1785... Today the following buildings are on the property: on Upper Providence side of Ridley Creek - the Mill Owner's house, the Mill office and Library, the former Blacksmith shop and Wheelwright shop, the barn, the log-hauling shed, and springhouse. The mill burned down in 1901 and the foundations are covered over; on the Edgmont Township side of the creek – two stone dwellings, the ruins of a third dwelling, and further up the creek the ruins of a fourth dwelling; and near the bridge, in Middletown Township, a stone dwelling with garage, and right at the bridge a tiny stone cabin-like dwelling.

Going back in time the owners of the Mill Property were:

Walter M. and Sarah Dobson Jeffords – 1966 to 1920/25;

H. H. Battles – 1920/25 to 1905;

Ann and Sarah T. Sharpless, and Jesse Hoopes – 1905 to 1902;

William F. Lewis – 1902 to 1869;

William L. Lewis (father of William F.) – 1869 to 1868;

Joseph D. Velotte (and Catharine his wife) – 1868 to 1862;

Washington and Louisa Bishop – 1862 to 1857;

Amor Bishop (father of Washington) – 1857 to 1847;

Priscilla Pratt Bishop (mother of Amor and widow of Thomas)... - 1847 to 1833

Thomas Bishop, Jr., (husband of Priscilla) – 1833 to 1785

Thomas Bishop, Sr., (father of Thomas, Jr.) – 1785 to 1781;

Thomas Bishop, Sr., became the sole owner of the Mill Property on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 1781 when he purchased William Hammans third part... Thomas Bishop first obtained an interest in the Mill Property shortly after 1746 through the transfer of a lease from William Hammond...

In the period from 1781 to 1746 a number of farmers had interests in the Mill Property (including Thomas Minshall who owned the 800 acres that now comprise the Tyler Arboretum) and Thomas Bishop had the major interest in the mills...

In the period from 1746 to 1720 the heirs of Henry Miller, John Edge and his brother Jacob Edge, and William Hammons owned and operated the mills...

In the period of 1720 to 1718 John Edge, Jacob Edge (his brother) and Henry Miller operated the mill – a water-corn mill – on the 20 acres of land in Upper Providence Township allotted for that purpose by John Edge. John Edge inherited 300 acres of land (in Upper Providence between Ridley and Crum Creeks) from his father, John Edge, Sr., in 1711; Jacob, John's brother, inherited 200 adjoining acres, and the house in which his father then lived in the Southeastern part of Nether Providence Township.

Henry Miller lived in 1714 in a stone house about one half mile South of the Mill Property, near Ridley Creek. The Miller family celebrated the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of this house in 1914. The house burned down in 1919, the stone ruins are still there on what is now the Richard Borden estate on Ridley Creek Road.

#### The Stone Buildings on the Mill Property...

##### 1. The "Mill Owner's House"...(A farmhouse)...

Almost directly across the Bishop Hollow Road from the area where the mill was, this is a large, stone farmhouse, with the rear wall right against the 'bank' of the hillside...In 1901, when the mill burned down, the William F. Lewis family lived in this house. They were English, and no doubt made changes to the house after Lewis inherited the property from his father in 1868...One of his daughters, Lena, married Roger Fromfield, (later to become President Judge of Delaware County); granddaughters are Mrs. Edward A. G. Porter and the late Mrs. Alfred H. Porter...

Amor Bishop lived in this house, and in his will dated 1857 leaves the house and the Mill Property to his son, Washington, and directs "also use of kitchen, parlour and cellar under them and 3 rooms on the 2<sup>nd</sup> story and use of garden bordering the mill race" to his widow...

From Priscilla Pratt Bishop's will, in 1847, we understand that her son, Amor, is living in this house on the Mill Property...the house and the Mill Property are left to him... "...known by the name of the Mill Property with all the mill buildings, improvements and water rights..." Priscilla directs that "Hawthorne" the house she is living in, off the Providence Road, and which Thomas Bishop built for her in 1805, be sold...

When Thomas Bishop, the younger, began expanding the mills, in the period following 1785, and especially in the period of 1795, 1798, and from 1800 to 1810/12, when he had the grist mill, the saw mill, the rolling mill and the slitting

mill, Amor Bishop worked with his father and assisted with the management of the mills. The mills prospered...in 1805 Thomas Bishop built "Hawthorne", off the Providence Road, for his wife, Priscilla. The house on the Bishop Hollow Road, by the mill, was a farm house. In 1798 Thomas Bishop was tax assessor for Upper Providence Township. He and his wife were then living in a log-type farm house 17 x 45 feet. There is evidence in the Glass Tax of 1798 that this was the house...When Thomas and Priscilla moved to "Hawthorne" in 1805 this left the house by the mill for someone else to live in...We think that as the mills continued to prosper Amor Bishop, probably in the early 1820's remodeled this house for his family – hence the date-stone on the North wall: 1826...

Going back further in time: the deed of William Hammans to Thomas Bishop, Sr., in 1781 states: "the messuage (dwelling house) or tenements, water-corn mill or grist mill and pieces or parcels of the land thereunto belonging...of them all whereon the said messuage and mills...is situated in Upper Providence Township..." (and there follows a detailed description of the location of the property).

In checking the official records in the Court House at West Chester, for prior to 1789 what is now known as Delaware County was then part of Chester County, we find no official record of many of the transactions mentioned in the Minutes of the Delaware County Institute of Science of 1907 and the "Reminiscences" of Minshall and Jacob Painter 1871, probably the most accurate account of the Mill Property...We have been advised that many of the transactions in the early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century were simply made between individual parties and not recorded officially. It is possible some of these records are in Philadelphia...Other sources are old papers, letters and documents wherever they can be found: in the Historical Societies, private and public libraries, and in the hands of individuals...\*

In 1718, we know that Henry Miller lived in a stone house about a half mile South of Providence Mill and that his land adjoined the Mill Property. From the official Road documents of 1724 it is indicated that John Edge may have lived in a stone house on the corner of the Bishop Hollow and Providence Roads...and while Jacob Edge inherited, in 1711, from his father, a house in the Southeastern part of Nether Providence Township, it seems likely he may have built a log type house close by the Providence Mill in 1715 to 1718...And which, more than a hundred years later, would be remodeled and added to by Amor Bishop in 1826...

It would seem likely that a house was situated there before the mill was erected in 1718...It is not unlikely that when John Edge inherited the 300 acres from his father in 1711 that he built the log-type house, and possibly lived there for several years...It would almost seem essential that someone should live close by such a mill in that early period...



2. The Barn, adjoining the Mill Owner's house. This large, stone barn indicates that at one time considerable farming was done here. There is evidence in the Glass Tax of 1798 and the Hammans-Bishop deed of 1781 that parts of this barn pre-date 1781...\*
3. The Log-Hauling Shed The Saw Mill was erected on the creek side of the grist mill near the mill race about 1748...The farmers would bring their logs and place them under the Shed until it was their turn to use the saw mill, the use of which 'alternated' with the use of the grist mill...There is evidence the Log-Hauling Shed probably pre-dates the Revolution...\*
4. Spring House Situated across Chapel Hill Road from the barn, the springhouse pre-dates the Revolution as does the original Mill Owner's house, and as a source of water would parallel the building of the house...\*
5. The Library Building and former mill office, with date-stone of 1812 to the right of the front door. The mill office was the room on the first floor, the library above on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor. According to early records the Union Library, one of the first libraries in Delaware County, was organized by the people of the community, mostly farmers, about 1818...\*
6. Reference to map: the Mill Site...\*
7. The former blacksmith and wheelwright shop. This stone building on the creek side of the mill site and the mill race is circa middle 18<sup>th</sup> century, probably well pre-dating the Revolution...\*
8. The small stone house at the bridge is in Middletown Township. It very well may be the oldest building in the Sycamore Mills area...\*
9. This stone dwelling on Sycamore Mills Road, near the bridge has today a garage, formerly believed to have been a blacksmith shop. It is in Middletown Township. It was probably built in the period when the mills were being expanded by Thomas Bishop the younger – 1785 to 1810...\*
10. Garage to stone dwelling (10) – formerly believed to have been a blacksmith shop...date uncertain...\*
11. Stone mill worker's house on Sycamore Mills Road, Edgmont Township...Probably built in the period from 1785 to 1810 when the mills were expanding...\*
12. Ruins, walls standing – house burned down in 1973...former mill worker's house on Sycamore Mills Road near the dam – probably built in the period when Thomas Bishop the younger was expanding the mills – 1785 to 1810...\*
13. Stone mill worker's house on Sycamore Mills Road at intersection of Forge Road...probably built in the period of 1785 to 1810...\*

14. Ruin of mill worker's house, some distance up Ridley Creek on Sycamore Mills Road...probably built in the period from 1785 to 1810...\*

\*The Research Group of the Bishop's Mill Historical Society is actively researching the history of all these buildings and the history of this community...the more we learn the more we realize how little is really known about this community in the 18<sup>th</sup> century...The above is a preliminary outline of current information.

11 July 1975 Ernest Palmer, Jr., Historian  
Bishop's Mill Historical Society

Keith Lockhart Collection

## The Bridge at Sycamore Mills (Bishop's Mills)

The first bridge across the creek at the village thought to have been built in 1763 by public subscription. The bridge survived the flood of 1843. The flood report described the bridge as "36 feet, its breadth 14 ½ feet" and the type of construction as "a sleeper bridge of one span – the abutments being founded on solid rock, with hand rails."

Covered bridges were first introduced to the United States in 1797. The Sycamore Mills covered bridge was probably built to replace the 1763 bridge shortly after the flood of 1843. The photographic evidence is inconclusive to the construction, but the depth of framing at the abutments would suggest a Theodore Burr (patented) arch truss. The reason usually given for covering bridges is to protect the wood joints which, if exposed to the weather, would crack and rot.

In 1927 a concrete bridge was constructed just downstream from the covered bridge. At this time the covered bridge was dismantled. The stone abutments can still be seen by standing on the middle of the current bridge and facing upstream.

Abstracted from:        "*Sycamore Mills: A Study in Industrial Archaeology*," Bernard Herman, manuscript on file at Sol Feinstone Library. Bishop's Mills Historical Institute.

                              "*Sycamore Mills District Registration Application Draft*"  
Bishop's Mills Historical Society, Research Committee  
copies on file with the Society Historian and the Sol Feinstone Library.  
Bishop's Mills Historical Institute

J.P. McCarthy

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