



CAROL STUART WATSON

*The Beall-Dawson House, c. 1815  
home of the Montgomery County Historical Society  
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## THE VALLEY MILL ON PAINT BRANCH

by Michael F. Dwyer

In southeastern Montgomery County, Paint Branch flows from north to south, crossing the Prince George's County border and emptying into the Northeast Branch of the Anacostia River. Like most streams in the county it was once the site of mills for grinding grain and sawing wood. A miller's cottage and remnants of the old Valley Mill remain today as reminders of this bygone era.

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Editor's Note: Michael F. Dwyer is Park Historian with the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. This story is excerpted from a study made for the Park and Planning Commission. The complete manuscript, with maps and additional illustrations, is on file in the Library of the Montgomery County Historical Society.

The Valley Mill was located where Randolph Road, formerly the Old Annapolis Road, crosses Paint Branch. The potential for a mill along the fall line here was recognized prior to 1723, when "Iron Master" Richard Snowden patented nearby "Snowden's Mill" containing "a small mill theron."<sup>1</sup> The original Snowden's Mill was probably the first mill ever built in Montgomery County.

The presence of a mill at this early date must be contrasted with the fact that the area was largely a forested wilderness that was still part of Prince George's County. Although good for milling purposes, the fall line tended to inhibit settlement initially. The domination of the old tobacco plantation system with its orientation toward navigable waters kept growth slow until after 1730.

As in Southern Maryland, this section of the state seemed obsessed by a one-crop mentality for much of the eighteenth century. While grains were grown and sold, the planter's corn and wheat did not have the market demand that tobacco did. The dramatic rise in the wheat trade was not to occur until years later, and for a long time tobacco was, most literally, money.

The one commodity even more precious than tobacco was the land itself. Despite the fact that there was an abundance of frontier land available in the early 1700's in what was to become Montgomery County, the prevailing system of distributing it favored speculators - usually men of some wealth and influence from the older, settled areas. The character of Prince George's County was overwhelmingly British, with a sizeable number of residents of Scottish descent. Many of these Scots were hard-working, shrewd traders with a well-deserved reputation for thrift, and they came to dominate the Potomac tobacco trade. Some operated as "factors" or dealers for firms located in Scotland or England, while others combined the roles of planter and merchant alike.

Archibald Edmonston was one of these Scottish planter/merchants who had served as constable and captain of the militia in Prince George's County. He purchased some of his first lands from his father-in-law, Ninian Beall, a feisty military man with a remarkable record of service to the State. Edmonston's plantation was located in the Eastern Branch area near the landing that eventually became the port of Bladensburg. In the early eighteenth century, he began to acquire land farther north near the headwaters of the Paint Branch, in a part of Prince George's County which later became Montgomery County. Between 1714 and 1724, he patented in this area the tracts "Easy Purchase," "Bear Garden Enlarged," and "Deer Park." In 1719, James Beale, Jr., acquired "James and Mary," and Richard Snowden had his "Mill Land" surveyed in 1723. Deer Park and Bear Garden Enlarged consisted of the high, arable land south and east of Snowden's Mill Land, and Easy Purchase lay to the south and west where it abutted Beale's James and Mary.<sup>2</sup>

Patents for land in the eighteenth century were rife with errors. The practice of reserving the most desirable properties while adjacent tracts sometimes went untouched for years created a patch-work pattern of surveys whose boundaries often ran afoul of each other. As settlement increased and the infilling process began to

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1. Prince George's County Unpatented Survey Certificate 337, Hall of Records, Annapolis, MD.

2. Prince George's County Survey Certificates, Hall of Records, Annapolis, MD. 144.

occur, discoveries of overlaps and vacancies resulted in numerous resurveys to correct errors and establish accurate property lines. The neighborhood of Valley Mill was one of the areas where a flurry of patents, resurveys, and law suits took place.

A vacancy consisted of an unclaimed parcel created by gaps between adjacent patents and was usually discovered during the course of a later survey. In 1763, Archibald Edmonston's grandson, Ninian, claimed a seemingly insignificant vacancy of 3 3/4 acres that lay between Snowden's Mill Land and James and Mary. Normally a vacancy of this size would have been of little interest except to a neighboring landowner who might want to add to his holdings. Although Edmonston did own other land nearby, it was not adjacent to this tract, and he apparently sensed a special opportunity involving the unimproved 3 3/4 acres which he patented as "Hamburgh."<sup>3</sup>

Variouly described as a planter and surveyor, Ninian Edmonston may have uncovered the Hamburgh vacancy while running property lines for a relative.<sup>4</sup> Whatever the circumstances, he surely must have noticed that the valley formed a natural bowl at this point, creating an ideal situation for a mill. While he continued to live in Prince George's County, he constructed a small mill on the property.

That it was a small mill is verified by a number of indicators, the most important of these being an advertisement in the Annapolis-based *Maryland Gazette* 10 years after the patenting of Hamburgh. The December 1773 advertisement read in part: "To be sold to the highest bidder ... A single geered breast mill that goes by water, with a bolting cloth, and about 80 or 90 acres of land, lying in Frederick county, about 10 miles from Bladensburgh, and 15 from George Town. ..."

Edmonston's mill appears to have been a simple structure of small proportions. Had the mill been a more elaborate enterprise, the advertisement surely would have said so. The advertisement does, however, reveal several interesting characteristics of the mill. "Breast mill" means that it utilized a system where water struck the wheel at about the center or breast. A water wheel of this type would have been fairly wide with the buckets closely spaced. By comparison, most local mills employed the more efficient "overshot" systems where the water struck the top of the wheel. Other mills were also described as double-g geared, which meant that they provided more power to turn the grinding stones than the simple single-g geared mill did. Another telling aspect of the advertisement is the mention of a "bolting cloth" in the mill. This means that the mill was set up to grind wheat since flour had to be separated from the hull or bran by sifting it through a fine silk cloth.

The newspaper description also raised some puzzling questions. At first glance, it appears that the property includes 80 or 90 acres necessary for a mill seat, yet there is no record of Edmonston owning any other land in the area save for his 40 acres of "Edmonston's Chance."

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3. Frederick County Patented Survey Certificate 1788, Hall of Records, Annapolis, MD.

4. Allen Lee Kulikoff, "Tobacco and Slaves; Population, Economics and Society in 18th Century Prince George's County" (PhD. Dissertation, Brandeis University, 1976), p.243; Charles Ninian Edmonston, *My Own Edmonstons and a Few Others* (San Francisco, CA, 1971), p. 80.

"Mill seat" was the term given to a section of land where topography and the fall power of the stream combined to make it a preferred location for a mill. Although a more primitive mill could have operated directly from a stream or pond, an overshot mill required a system which, in addition to a site for the mill itself, would include a mill pond, head and tail races, and room for a miller's house as well.<sup>5</sup> A regulated amount of water was drawn from the pond or reservoir located upstream and flowed to the mill through the head-race or channel dug into the hillside parallel to the stream. This arrangement created the "drop" or fall power necessary to rotate the mill stones which ran off gears connected to the water wheel. After the water spilled over the wheel, it reentered the stream by way of the tail race.

A comparison of the boundaries of Hamburgh with current property lines reveals that it actually lay north of the house near the old dam site.<sup>6</sup> A later deed shows that the 18 acres containing the present house, race and mill foundation are "below Ninian Edmonston's old mill."<sup>7</sup> The fact that Edmonston's mill was described as a breast mill suggests that it may have sat on the edge of a small pond contained within the 3 3/4 acres. The 18 acres were part of 104 acres of James and Mary belonging to Tyson Beall.<sup>8</sup> The Bealls were related to the Edmonstons and had been among the earliest settlers in the area. Walter Beall had acquired the mill in 1771, and Edmonston may have merely been acting as his agent when he advertised the property. At any rate, the mill was sold to William Murdock for 127 pounds despite the fact that Beall had paid 50 pounds for it three years earlier. Murdock in turn sold the mill to Richard Sheckles for 246 pounds after owning it for only one year.<sup>9</sup>

A possible explanation for these rapid turnovers and fluctuations in price may have been the financial crisis that struck the tobacco trade in the early 1770's. Overproduction had caused a glut of the product, and prices fell precipitously. Beall, Murdock, and Sheckles, described in land records as "gentlemen," "merchant," and "planter," respectively, would have suffered financially. Since the entire tobacco system was notoriously volatile, the three men may have been trying to take advantage of the growing demand for wheat. Speculating with any commodity was risky, however, as Maryland's export of grain suddenly plunged in 1771 and 1772 after having doubled the previous two years.<sup>10</sup>

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5. Martha and Murray Zimilies, *Early American Mills* (New York, NY, 1973), pp. 102-104.

6. Frederick County Land Records, Book O, p. 473 and subsequent property descriptions.

7. Montgomery County Land Records, Book F, p. 122.

8. Montgomery County Tax Assessments of 1783, 1793, and 1795, Montgomery County Historical Society, Rockville, MD.

9. Frederick County Land Records, Book O, p. 473; Book BD, p. 151; Book W, p. 597.

10. Edward C. Papenfuse, *In Pursuit of Profit ...* (Baltimore, MD, 1976), p. 36.

Economic problems such as these had contributed greatly to the tensions between the colonies and Great Britain, and those connected with the mill were affected as a result. Walter Beall was in a position of influence as his father, Col. Samuel Beall, Jr., was an active patriot who owned the old "Burnt Mills" on Northwest Branch and operated an iron forge in western Maryland.<sup>11</sup> In 1774, Walter Beall was appointed to a committee to collect arms and ammunition in Lower Newfoundland Hundred, the neighborhood of the mill.<sup>12</sup> During that same year he sold the mill to William Murdock.

Although Murdock's tenure at the mill was also brief, he was to be particularly affected by events of the Revolution. Described as a Bladensburg merchant during this period,<sup>13</sup> he subsequently moved to London after the war as American tobacco firms now reversed the British practice of sending agents here. Murdock became very successful, initially working for the prominent Georgetown partnership of Forrest and Stoddert.

Richard Sheckles and his son, John, were also loyal to the cause, having signed Oaths of Fidelity. Two years after Sheckles added the mill to his plantation in 1775, he sold it to his son for the same 246 pounds he had paid Murdock. John Sheckles was a planter, and, although he was the first owner to actually live near the mill, he also must have intended for it to be an investment. While he may have supplied grain for the American troops,<sup>14</sup> it is doubtful that he used the wartime shortage to his advantage, as the old mill of Ninian Edmonston was simply described in 1783 as just that "an old mill."<sup>15</sup>

Sheckles was looking to the fertile lands to the north by that date. In 1782, he placed an advertisement for his plantation in a Baltimore newspaper that contained this description: "the *Plantation* whereon he now lives, containing 160 acres of land ... being part of Bear Garden enlarged, on which are the following improvements: Two good dwelling houses, Negro quarters, a good grist mill, a still-house, a paled garden, a good apple and peach orchard; all which are in good repair. There are thirteen bushels of wheat sowed on the land. ...<sup>16</sup> This description of the buildings and crops is another indication that tobacco and wheat were competing for first place on local farms by this time.

John Sheckles had left the area by 1790, having sold his plantation to neighbor Joseph Perry and the mill to Peter Kemp, an industrious German of Frederick County who was to dramatically and permanently change the face of the property. Although his

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11. Frederick County Debt Books, Hall of Records, Annapolis, MD; J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Western Maryland* (Philadelphia, PA, 1882), Vol. II, p. 1170.

12. Scharf, *op.cit.*, Vol. I, p. 129.

13. *Maryland Gazette*, July 14, 1774; Montgomery County Land Records, Book A, p. 195, and Book D, p. 116.

14. *Archives of Maryland*, (Baltimore, MD, 1927), Vol. XLV, p. 86.

15. Montgomery County Tax Assessment of 1783.

16. *Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser*, November 12, 1782, Baltimore, MD.

father had been a farmer, Peter Kemp took up the milling trade as did other members of his family. The 1786 will of his brother, Jacob Kemp, requested that his sons "be put out to a good trade," by Peter upon reaching the age of 16.<sup>17</sup>

At first glance, it seems ironic that Kemp would travel south to Montgomery County at a time when many planters like Sheckles were abandoning their farms for fresher lands. Like previous owners of the property, however, Kemp undoubtedly saw an opportunity here. The Revolution had accelerated Baltimore's evolution as a grain center, and it subsequently became the leading flour market in America. Improvements in internal transportation had also come about as a result of the war, and the proximity of the site to the road to Baltimore was regarded as an asset. The designation of land along the Potomac for the new Federal City was also marked by speculation that the fortunes of those living nearby would inevitably increase. In addition, a series of famines and wars in Europe combined with population growth and industrialization to create the first large demand for American flour on that continent.<sup>18</sup>

This same period also witnessed some revolutionary changes in the technology of the milling industry. A young inventor from Delaware named Oliver Evans had designed a system of elevators and conveyors that automated the movement of grain throughout the mill, eliminating much of the strenuous hand labor traditionally associated with milling. He also invented a device that raked flour continuously, thereby speeding its drying time and aiding its preservation.

The arrival of Peter Kemp in the Paint Branch Valley must have been regarded with some interest by the local inhabitants. The German community in Frederick had retained many of its cultural traits long after immigration, and Kemp may have been regarded as something of a "foreigner" in the old Scots-English neighborhood. The original waves of German immigrants had sparked some resentment among the English-speaking Americans, but most of the complaints seem to have stemmed from petty jealousy over the thrift and industry of the new arrivals. The neat and orderly farms of the Germans stood out in marked contrast to the stump-riddled, careless plantations that often characterized the tenanted tobacco regions.<sup>19</sup>

Kemp was probably less affected by these sentiments than his father would have been, but he did experience some difficulty in assembling the land needed for his mill. While previous owners had been able to operate a mill on the tiny Hamburg tract, Kemp was either unable or unwilling to do so. A purchase he made in 1794 indicates that the previous mill may have required additional land for a tail race since the deed described it as "Lying ... below Ninian Edmonston's old mill where the tail race empties into the North West point branch ... ." <sup>20</sup> (This was the 18 acres of meadow that came

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17. Frederick County Wills, Book GM2, p. 204.

18. G. Terry Sharrer, "Flour Milling in the Growth of Baltimore, 1750-1830," *Maryland Historical Magazine* (Fall 1976), pp. 324-326.

19. Frank W. Porter, "From Backcountry to County: The Delayed Settlement of Western Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine* (Winter 1975), pp. 344-347.

20. Montgomery County Land Records, Book F, p. 122.

from Tyson Beall's plantation.)<sup>21</sup> Kemp also purchased sections of James and Mary and Snowden's Mill Land above the mill that would be flooded by a large dam. In 1794, he filed for a patent to consolidate his holdings as "Kemp's Mill Seat." When surveyed, however, it was discovered that several errors existed in the old surveys, and the problem was further compounded by an omission in the new survey. A second survey was made which included a vacancy of 11 acres.<sup>22</sup> Boundary problems would continue to plague him in future years, but, by 1795, Kemp's ownership of the 114 1/2 acres along the stream between the present Fairland and Randolph Roads had enabled him to begin his new mill and handsome residence.<sup>23</sup>

Tax assessments indicate that the mill and miller's house were both completed by 1799. Kemp built his mill in a more advantageous location closer to the Old Annapolis Road where he could also utilize the long race necessary for an overshot wheel. The Dwelling was somewhat unique for the area and remains so today. While most of the county's residents, planter and slave alike, lived in modest dwellings of log or frame, the brick house of Peter Kemp exhibited an unusual degree of architectural style and sophistication. The sturdiness of Peter Kemp's new house was more typical of his native Frederick, where features like the flared wall vents appear in the cellars of some German homes.<sup>24</sup> Despite this, the overall style of the house is reminiscent of dwellings constructed during the colonial period in the tide-water region, possibly the reflection of a local mason.

To say that Peter Kemp lived in luxury would be misleading, as the miller's occupation was always an arduous one. However, the contents of his comfortable dwelling show that he was more successful at his trade than many of his contemporaries. His expensive clock, good feather beds, and Windsor chairs are indicators of his relative taste and prosperity.<sup>25</sup>

Peter Kemp's years at his mill had been good, at least in part because of the demand for wheat as a result of continuing wars with France and Napoleon between 1793 and 1815. The dramatic growth of the wheat trade coupled with the effects of the industrial revolution had resulted in a spate of local mills, particularly between 1795 and 1815. The valley of the Paint Branch reflected this trend as more sophisticated mills of various types began to sprout up along its banks. Two propertied natives of Prince George's County, Benjamin Berry and Isaac Lansdale, had constructed a large "merchant mill" before 1800 downstream at the Baltimore Road crossing. Several other mills and factories appeared on the branch in later years. In 1813, Dr. Samuel Lukens voiced the expectations of the period when he attempted to sell his new sawmill claiming

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21. Montgomery County Tax Assessments of 1793 and 1795.

22. Montgomery County Unpatented Survey Certificate 146, Hall of Records, Annapolis, MD.

23. Montgomery County Tax Assessment of 1795.

24. Frederick S. Weiser, "The Origin of Schifferstadt: Frederick's Oldest House." Talk given at 13th Annual Conference of the Maryland Historical Trust, Frederick, MD, October 1983.

25. Inventory of Peter Kemp, Montgomery County Wills, Book WK341, pp. 480 and 481.

that "either a grist, fulling, cotton or wool factory could be built onto the water wheel already built."<sup>26</sup> Luken's mill was located on the old Snowden's Mill tract near Fairland Road.

After 1815, European demand for U.S. grain and flour declined dramatically. By the late 1820's, domestic consumption of flour had superseded foreign exports, and New York had overtaken Baltimore as the leading flour market.<sup>27</sup> Prices for both wheat and tobacco wilted, and, despite an occasional good year or two, the local economy remained generally depressed over the next several decades.

Despite the vicissitudes of the economy, the Paint Branch had evolved into a thriving vale of industry. Luken's, Kemp's, and Lansdale's mills formed centers of commercial activity for the surrounding agricultural community. Not only were mills places where farmers could sell or barter their surplus crops, have their grain ground and timber sawed, but they also often combined the services of coopers and blacksmiths for making barrels and mending equipment.<sup>28</sup>

Wool carding was another service provided at some mills. The coarse fibers gathered from the farmer's sheep were untangled and straightened by a machine that "carded" them with wire brushes attached to rollers that operated off the mill's power source. The inventor Oliver Evans had also designed improvements for this process which helped speed its transition from tedious hand labor performed at home to a mechanical service industry.<sup>29</sup>

Some individuals, such as Washington Duvall, were to prosper regardless of economic conditions. He was born on the "Hermitage" tract along Rock Creek where his father, Dr. Benjamin Duvall, owned the old Newport Mill that dated from the Revolutionary period. He graduated from the University of Maryland Medical School in 1821 and was subsequently elected to the Maryland House of Delegates in that year. He came to the Paint Branch neighborhood after his marriage to Eliza Ann Perry, daughter of a prominent family that had resided there since the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

The young couple settled on the "Rural Felicity" tract located on the Old Annapolis Road southwest of Kemp's Mill.<sup>31</sup> This land had belonged to Eliza's father, James W. Perry. James Perry and Jacob Kemp had been co-owners of the Burnt Mills on

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26. *Frederick-Town Herald*, August 20, 1814, Frederick, MD.

27. Sharrer, *op.cit.*, p. 326.

28. *Frederick-Town Herald*, July 24, 1813. (Peter Kemp's mills are mentioned here and most grist mills of the period did feature sawmills as well.)

29. Zimiles, *op.cit.*, p. 102-104.

30. Roger B. Farquhar, *Old Homes and History of Montgomery County, Maryland* (Washington, DC, 1962), pp. 150-152; Frederick County Land Records, Book J, p. 1065.

31. Montgomery County Tax Assessments of 1795, 1825-1829, and 1831; Montgomery County Equity Court, Judgment Record Book BS1, p. 1.

Northwest Branch at one time, but, by 1835, Jacob owned only his share of the Paint Branch Mill that he and his brothers had jointly inherited from their uncle.<sup>32</sup> Washington Duvall purchased the mill from the heirs of Peter Kemp in that year. Jacob was in his sixties by then, and Peter and John were living in Frederick County. Two of Jacob Kemp's sons had become mill-wrights also, and Jacob was last reported as living with one of them near another mill on Northwest Branch that remained in their family for years afterward. This mill was also situated on the Old Annapolis Road; its location is marked today by Kemp Mill Road.

The purchase of Kemp's old mill by Dr. Duvall was but one of a series of acquisitions that he would make in the Paint Branch valley. Duvall began to buy and sell properties much as his wealthy predecessors had. In 1830, he purchased the mill seat on Fairland Road at public auction from the estate of Dr. Samuel Lukens.<sup>33</sup> Duvall apparently purchased Luken's mill for investment purposes since he sold it to Thomas Fawcett after mortgaging the machinery as collateral.<sup>34</sup> Under Fawcett's ownership, the mill was converted into "The Paint Branch Woolen Factory," offering a wide range of services from the fulling and carding of wool to the manufacture of cloth.<sup>35</sup>

In 1840, the Commissioners of Montgomery County were presented with a petition to make public the Old Annapolis Road that bisected Duvall's property. The petition was granted because "public convenience has kept open, time immemorial a private way the whole distance for the accommodations of a large portion of citizens to church, mill, market and for many years past to Coalsville (sic) the place of voting in the 5th district ..." <sup>36</sup> The dedication of the road was accompanied by a survey plat that showed the proximity of the mill to the doctor's home farm, "Fairview." This was the center of Duvall's estate, and he had constructed a handsome new dwelling there following his marriage in 1825. The fact that the plat included a blacksmith's shop on the mill tract gives rise to the question of improvements made by Duvall to the property.

Duvall was initially assessed at the same rate as the Kemp heirs, but a sudden jump in value from \$4.10 to \$20.00 per acre between 1841 and 1842 indicates that Duvall either rebuilt or substantially remodeled the mill during his ownership. The new mill retained the 30- by 30-foot dimensions that Kemp's mill probably had, but it may have taken on a new appearance as it was described as three and one half stories in height including the basement level.<sup>37</sup>

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32. Montgomery County Tax Assessments of 1804, 1813, 1831, and 1838.

33. Montgomery County Equity Court, Judgment Record Book BS2, p. 359.

34. Montgomery County Land Records, Book BS8, p. 523; Book BS12, p. 165; and STS3, p. 357.

35. *Maryland Journal and True American*, July 4, 1846.

36. Montgomery County Land Records, Book BS12, p. 341.

37. Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Montgomery County, Maryland, Policy 657.

The mill seems to have assumed a new character in its operations as well. As a result of improvements in transportation and changes in marketing, most wheat now went directly to the larger, more central merchant mills, and most of the "country mills" were occupied with grinding corn and sawing lumber by 1850. A survey of mills in the county in that year showed that only Seneca and Burnt Mills were engaged in the flour trade to any extent. Most of the smaller mills now concentrated on grinding other grains (primarily corn), and all but one of them included a sawmill in their operations.<sup>38</sup> These country mills were generally limited to grinding only a few thousand bushels of grain a year, but the records show that the Valley Mill was far busier than any of its competitors. While the value of lumber sawed in 1850 was about average at \$475, it was the county's leading producer of corn meal with a total value of \$5500.<sup>39</sup>

The doctor's youngest son, Ben, apparently assumed the role of farm manager while his father practiced his profession and wintered in Annapolis. The mill and blacksmith shop were occupied by a series of tenants whose fortunes rose and fell during the 40 years of Duvall's ownership. Slave labor was employed on the farm, and corn meal from the mill was an important source of food for them. Current residents of adjacent Smith Village on Randolph Road are reportedly descendants of these slaves, and free blacks with that name appear next to Duvall as domestics and farm laborers in the 1870 census.

Dr. Duvall died in 1874 and left no will, so the disposition of his vast estate continued for a number of years. A partial plat of his land showed the mill property with about 22 acres. This tract was purchased from Duvall's heirs by Franklin Pilling who had recently arrived in the neighborhood from his native England.

Testimony given by Pilling at a bitter trial in 1885 left a graphic account of the events that took place after Dr. Duvall's death. Pilling had given up a successful business in England and had emigrated very reluctantly, and then only at the insistence of his wealthy Aunt Alice. Alice Pilling owned a large farm downstream at Columbia Pike but was elderly and in poor health. She had allegedly promised to convey the property to her nephew if he would come manage the farm for her. Pilling claimed he kept his end of the bargain but was put off repeatedly when he requested the deed to the farm. Finding himself pressed financially, he had made all the arrangements to return with his family to England when his aunt begged him to stay. She promised that she would give him the money to purchase and repair a local mill that was for sale.

Pilling received \$5000 from his aunt and purchased the mill property for \$2100 from the heirs of Dr. Duvall. The balance of the money was "used to put the mill in thorough order," and carry the business "until the same should become self supporting." According to further testimony, however, "the business proved to be very poor and unremunerative in the locality and he lost all the money invested in the same and had to abandon it and has nothing to show for the money he brought here with him from England

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38. Federal Manufacturing Census, Montgomery County, Maryland, 1850.

39. *Ibid.*

and his years of labor but, the said mill ...<sup>40</sup> Pilling contended that the mortgaged loans were actually intended to be gifts, but the court ruled in his aunt's favor, and a public sale of the property was ordered.

Although it proved to be his downfall, Pilling did make some interesting changes to the mill. Despite the fact that the advertisement for the sale of the mill described it as "built in 1879," Pilling appears to have retained the old three and one half story, 30- by 30-foot structure and concentrated on upgrading the machinery. His addition of an efficient Poole and Hunt turbine to replace the old water wheel was something of an innovation, as only a few local mills featured them.<sup>41</sup> This turbine remains at the mill site today.

The three pairs of stones for grinding wheat, corn, or "chop" (feed) were more typical of the mill's tradition. In spite of an 1886 promotion that it was capable of grinding fine flour, a census for the period showed that most of its work continued to be "custom," i.e., not for market, and was restricted to corn meal and feed. Although operated only half-time for most of the year, it now employed a maximum of three men who worked 10-hour days for wages of approximately \$1.00 an hour.

After 1888, the mill was owned by a series of owners, most of them from Washington, D.C. The first of these was Albert C. Prather who apparently engaged in another futile attempt to operate the mill successfully. Although no mention of an operating sawmill



1936 Historic American Buildings Survey Photograph of the Valley Mill with the Miller's Cottage in the Background

40. Montgomery County Equity Court, Case 590, original papers.

41. *Montgomery County Sentinel*, May 14, 1886, Rockville, MD: Montgomery County Equity Court, Case 590, original papers; Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Montgomery County Policies 657, 24617, and 50708.

had been made in recent years, a dilapidated old one "with no roof on it," was mentioned in Prather's 1896 insurance policy.<sup>42</sup> A letter from Robert B. Tenney in that year notes that he was "forced to buy (Prather's) property to protect my interest in it."<sup>43</sup> Although Tenney was a principal in the Capital Mills of Washington, his "interest" was merely as a creditor since the small water-powered country mills were starting to become obsolete, especially in the down-county area as growing markets in Washington shifted the focus to poultry, dairy, and truck farming.<sup>44</sup>

Captain Winfield Scott Overton acquired the farm in 1909 and took advantage of this latter trend as his "Valley Mill Farm" stationary mentions "leghorns, hatching eggs, dairy products," etc. The captain purchased several other tracts that had once belonged to Washington Duvall including the old home place Fairview.<sup>45</sup> The management of the Valley Mill property was left to his brother-in-law, Robert Veirling. In 1947, the property was willed to his sister, Helen Veirling, who transferred it to her daughter, Mabel McEwan. The McEwans operated the "Valley Mill Day Camp" at the site for a number of years until it was purchased by the Parks Department in the 1970's. Mr. McEwan was a native of Scotland, so the private ownership of the property ended with a Scotsman - much as it had begun.

The mill building itself remained as a stubborn reminder of the site's lengthy history. Probably having ceased operation by 1920, the shell of the building was still standing in 1936 when it was included with the miller's house in the Department of Interior's select Historic American Buildings Survey.<sup>46</sup> Photographs taken for this depression-era project show that the salvageable machinery had already been removed, reportedly to a mill in Virginia. Mrs. Veirling had wanted to preserve the structure, but the building was dismantled in 1941 when the timbers and gears were used in the construction of the old Weathered Oak Herb Farm in Bethesda.<sup>47</sup>

The realignment of Randolph Road in the 1960's eliminated the former winding bucolic lane and made the property clearly visible to thousands of passersby. In addition to the picturesque old miller's cottage, the park contains the remnants of the old mill site which includes the foundation, turbine, and mill-stones. Traces of the old dam site and head and tail races can also be seen.

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42. Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Montgomery County, Maryland, Policy 24617.

43. Letter attached to above policy.

44. Eldon Ray Hiebert and Richard K. McMaster, *A Grateful Remembrance* (Rockville, MD, 1976), pp. 242 and 243.

45. Farquhar, *op.cit.*, p. 152.

46. United States Department of Interior, National Park Service, *Historic American Buildings Survey* (Washington, DC, 1941), p. 142.

47. Helen P. Veirling, personal communication of August 1972; *Washington Star*, November 9, 1941, Washington, DC; *The North Bethesda Banner*, August 1983, Bethesda, MD.

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