

"Devries Paper Mill"

Carroll County Times article for 18 November 2001

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Carroll County's abundant water supply and fertile ground proved ideal for the establishment of numerous water-powered mills. A little known chapter in local milling history relates to paper making. An article, "An Old Paper Mill: A Page in the History of Primitive Paper Making in Maryland," originally appeared in a Baltimore newspaper and was reprinted in the August 22, 1885 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper:

"A correspondent of the Baltimore Sun writing from Marriottsville, under the date of August 11 says:

Devries old paper mill, on Piney falls, in Carroll county opposite this village, destroyed by fire about a year ago while under lease of Mr. George F. Jones, has been rebuilt by Messrs. Mr. Ralston & Mr. Walden of Philadelphia. The new lessees will use it as a saw mill for preparing of soapstone for the market, which is an important industry along the Piney falls, where the valuable soapstone quarries abound.

The old paper mill, which now becomes obsolete has an interesting history as an industry that prospered for over seventy years amid the wild and romantic scenery of Piney falls, and is being contemporaneous with the earliest manufacture of paper in Maryland, if not in the union. The property is owned by Mr. John B. Devries, brother of the late Wm. Devries, a wealthy Baltimore merchant, and of Christian and Henry Devries, well-known citizens of the state.

Christian Devries, the father, came to this country in 1802 from Ober Eyssel, Holland to superintend the manufacture of paper for Messrs. Hammond & Pringel of Baltimore. The contract was that he should remain two years, and if at the end of that time he became dissatisfied, he was at liberty to return to Holland, the expenses of the trip to be paid by the firm. While on his way to America John was born at sea. Christian Devries was first located on Deep and Birch runs near Elkridge Landing where Hammond & Pringel had a mill.

In 1809 Mr. Hammond died and Mr. Devries left the employ. He removed to Piney falls, of which I write, where for \$6,000 he purchased the fabric of an old flour mill, known as Valley Mill, and owned by Mr. Miller, of Baltimore. After adding new machinery, the elder Devries turned it into a flour and paper mill. Although he purchased the property in 1809, the rebuilding, procuring and transporting of the machinery occupied the time until 1811, when operations were begun.

Paper then was made wholly by hand the 'rag engine' or paper grinder, was nearly the same as now, but the process was widely different. After leaving the grinder it went into the reservoir, or 'stuff chest,' then dipped out in buckets and put in the sieves the size required for any sheet of paper, and not cut as now. On the sieves it passed to a man who placed it on a cloth, and 128 sheets thus laid on another were called a 'post.' As soon as the 'post' was completed, the whole was passed to the press where the water was squeezed out of it. This formed the body of the sheets. The 'lay boy,' as an urchin was called, then arranged the sheets in packs placing a board between each post and again the press was brought to bear upon the mass. Then the paper in this stage was taken to the drying-room, which was the loft of the mill, where the sheets now formed were hung on lines like clothes, where they remained until dry and ready for shipment. To get the printing paper in marketable condition, it was necessary to press it

several times and to pick out the 'moats,' as small protuberances on the surface were called. Writing paper required great attention and had to be sized.

In the days of this primitive process with four hands--including a coucher and a 'lay boy,'--four reams of printing paper could be made in a working day; eight reams of fools cap and ten reams of common wrapping paper of a very inferior quality. With the same force, seventy years after, the production is incomparable.

In 1827 J. B. Devries commenced the erection of a paper mill below that of his father and completing it in 1829, began operation as a hand mill. In 1827 he put in a 'wet machine,' a then new contrivance to run off the paper in place of sieves, beyond which stage of manufacture, the hands perform the work. As far back as 1811, a Massachusettes paper maker named Ames had this machine in use, although he managed to keep it a secret, it at last became known, and some Eastern mechanics began manufacturing the machine, (whether or not with Ames's consent is not known,) and offered them for sale. A Philadelphian named Sellers appeared as an agent of that city. J. B. Devries and a Mr. Metier, a paper-maker of Cecil county, met by agreement in Sellers's shop to inspect the new invention and its value to the business of paper-making. Mr. Devries left an order for one to cost \$750. Mr. Metier declined purchasing at that time, but later added the machine to his mill.

Two years more saw other and more important improvements in paper-making machinery, and to keep pace with the advancement, the younger Devries added each new invention as it came out. His father, Christian Devries, worked his mill till 1832 as a hand-mill, when the progress noted also induced him to have recourse to the march of invention.

J. B. Devries's mill was burned down in 1852, supposed by a colored man who had been previously arrested for stealing from him. The same year it was rebuilt, with the addition of the new machinery costing \$4,000 when placed in position. The father carried on the original mill until the opening of the civil war when finding the tax too great he shut down and never resumed operations again. The great flood of July, 1868 which devastated the Patapsco Valley was severely felt along Piney falls. It rose so high as to destroy the mills of both the father and son. The machinery of J. B. Devries's mill fortunately was not wholly ruined, and after being recleaned, was restored to a new mill built on the same site at the cost of several thousand dollars. It remained in operation until 1884, when it was again destroyed by fire. In early life Mr. J. B. Devries kept a store at Piney Falls and made much money from the army of men who built the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, in 1829. Previous to the introduction of the railroad, the paper was taken to Baltimore by teams.

Mr. J. B. Devries is living yet, and resides near his old mill. Some time ago he was stricken with paralysis, which incapacitated him for work."

The Devries Mill site is doubly interesting for it was used to produce paper and soapstone, two less well known mill products. Most other Carroll County millers ground grains or produced sawn lumber for building projects.



A detail of the Marriottsville area from the Lake, Griffing and Stevenson "Atlas of Carroll County, Maryland" shows the Devries Paper Mill, a soapstone quarry and the locations of several Devries family homes in 1877. Historical Society of Carroll County Collection.