

Mill Owners and their Families

Samuel Lightfoot born 1701, son of Thomas and Sarah Lightfoot, immigrated to the colonies in 1716. His brother Michael was the first to immigrate in 1712. Thomas his son Michael and daughter Catherine from his first marriage were ministers of the Society of Friends.

Samuel married Mary Head, September 30, 1725 and settled in Chester, he was a surveyor. Their children were Benjamin and Thomas also surveyors, Samuel Abbott, and William. Mary died three months after the birth of William at 28 years of age. Samuel had another son with his housekeeper, Margaret Smith, his name is, Jephtha.

Samuel signed a petition with the Friends of Chester County to King George II of Great Britain in 1735, asking for help to settle the dispute with Lord Baltimore over the border of Maryland and Pennsylvania. In the interim the Penn family hired two surveyors from New Jersey, and they hired Samuel to record the field notes. Thus, a temporary line was surveyed prior to the official line. In 1763 King George III finally sent Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon to survey the line. They finished the 233 miles in 1768.

In 1740 Samuel was made Deputy Surveyor for Chester and Lancaster County.

Samuel also became a Justus of the Peace for Chester County and a county commissioner.

In **1747** Samuel built the **Lightfoot Mill**. Samuel owned 500 acres of land in Pickland. Eventually he gave 250 acres and the mill to William and 250 acres to Thomas to run a sawmill on the other side of the Conestoga Pike. A barrel head stencil, seen in the mill, could indicate that as well as Custom Milling, William also did merchant milling at some time. William's stencil can be seen on a floorboard between the 1st and 2nd floor of the mill.

The Lightfoots operate the mill for 65 years until **1812** when Williams son Samuel sells the mill to **James Benson** and **Lewis Reese**.

Not much is known about James Bensons eight years at the mill, other than he applies for a Tavern license, which is denied. He sells to **Rees Sheneman** in **1820**.

Ancestry list him as **Zachariah "Rees"** Sheneman, born 17 May, 1788 to Benjamin Sheneman and Anna Maria (Anomarriah) Rice.

Rees marries Juliann Jones and together they have 13 children. Using Juliann's last name, they name their first son Jones. The other children's names are - Sarah Ann, Benjamin, Pamela J., William, Elizabeth, John, Rees, Joseph, Edwin D., Thomas Jacobs, Davis, and Milton.

Sometime between **1822** to **1825**, Rees Sheneman adopted **Oliver Evans** concept of elevators and augers. He did merchant milling as well as custom milling. The Sheneman barrel head stencil can be seen in the mill on the inside of the door and the wheat bin on the 2nd floor. I can only speculate that the Bolter and Barrel Packer were added at this time as well.

During this time the Sheneman family must have also done extensive renovations to the Miller's house exterior appearance. The 1833 the tax record shows a significant increase in the taxes.

January 1841, Rees Sheneman in a letter to William Darlington is asking for a court date to try and stop someone from damming the water on his premises. More research is needed but I am assuming that the someone who is damming the water from his property is a person named Mr. Kimes. Kimes is a neighbor and owns properties around the mill. He is mentioned in the letter, but it is unknown if he is the perpetrator, witness or someone also affected by the damming.

The transcribed letter can be viewed on the CatalogIt site.

In **1849** the property passed to **Benjamin Sheneman**.

The property then passes to **Jones Sheneman** in **1856**.

Elias Oberholtzer (wife Catherine) purchases **Beidler's** sawmill in **1853**, across the Pickering creek from the Sheneman mill and constructs a steam powered grist mill.

In **1859**, **Elias Oberholtzer** purchases the mill and Millers house from Jones Sheneman.

Elias operates the upper mill, and his son John establishes “John Oberholtzer Mills”. Currently John also receives his provisional teacher’s certificate from the Lancaster Normal School.

John marries Sarah Louisa Vickers in 1862. Sarah is a woman wearing many hats. She is a Quaker, poetess, suffragette, member of the Christian Temperance and Anti-Slavery society. They have two sons, Ellis Paxton and Vickers.

In 1863 John receives his license as a wholesale dealer at Willowdale Mill. John also did merchant milling as his barrel head stencil can be seen in the mill on the 2nd floor corncob breaker bin.

In 1871 John is seriously injured while freeing the water wheel from ice and subsequently retires from milling. He employs Levi King, followed by James K. Laird as Millers and builds the night millers house.

In 1872 John constructs a store and warehouse under the proprietorship of Oberholzer and Hartman. At the request of John Oberholtzer, local businesses and the farmers in the area, the Pickering valley railroad is established, and **Cambria Station** is in the store. John Oberholtzer becomes the first postmaster.

In 1877 John's father Elias dies while helping with the construction of commercial ice house. His son-in-law Wilmer Pennypacker manages the steam powered gristmill until 1886.

The 1880 census shows James Laird as the Miller, and Allen Simmers, age 19, as a mill apprentice.

James Laird, Alan Simmers and Oliver Collins initials can be seen carved in the newel post at the bottom of the steps second floor.

John Oberholtzer sells the store to Oliver and Horace Moses in **1884** and Horace becomes the 2nd Post Master.

In **1886** Cambria Station is renamed “Anselma”, and John sells the Mill to **Alan H. Simmers** and the Oberholtzers move to Norristown.

Alan Harrison Simmers and Anna Mary “Annie”, his wife have two children, Oliver Roscoe and Katherine May “Katie”.

During the years 1906 to 1909 Alan Simmers upgrades the millrace, replaces the wooden sluiceway with an iron pipe and forebay and, installs a Fitz Steel Overshoot Water Wheel. He also has a cider press. We don't believe that Allen Simmers ground wheat for flour, but his day books do indicate that he did sell flour.

In **1919** Allen sells the Mill and House to **Oliver Ernest Collins**

Oliver Collins and Ella Ethel Lachman were married in 1909 and have three children, John Alfred (Jack), Horace and Mary.

Oliver, a carpenter by trade, intends to set up a sawmill, not a Grist Mill. Early on in 1920 farmers persuade Oliver to recondition the mill to grind animal feed. He starts a 24 hour feed production during the winter months. He ground 4 tons of feed in an 8 hour day. He also reconditioned the cider press and pressed apples for the farmers during prohibition, operated a sawmill producing lumber for construction and a lawnmower sharpening business. He never ground wheat for flour.

Early on in his mill ownership he introduced electricity to the mill and the Millers house by purchasing six World War One submarine batteries, charging them once a week, using the waterpower to operate a generator that he reconditioned.

In 1933 at the urging of his wife Ethel, Oliver takes the civil service examination and is appointed postmaster for Anselma. He adds an addition to his house for the post office and his wife Ethel with the assistance of Mary operate the post office. In 1958 the Post Office closes.

After the passing of Ethel, Oliver marries Mabel Viola Pennypaker in 1941.

In 1982 Oliver Ernest Collins dies and the mill property is purchased by the French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust.

Presented by
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