

A Brief History of Milling Families at Anselma Mill -- 1747 to present

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- ▶ Each caretaking family left their mark (literally & figuratively)
- ▶ New technologies were layered on to what was already in existence

In its first 235 years, the Mill at Anselma had only seven different families caring for it

- Lightfoot (three generations)
- Rees & Benson
- Sheneman (two generations)
- Oberholtzer (two generations)
- Simmers
- Collins

The Lightfoots

1747-1812



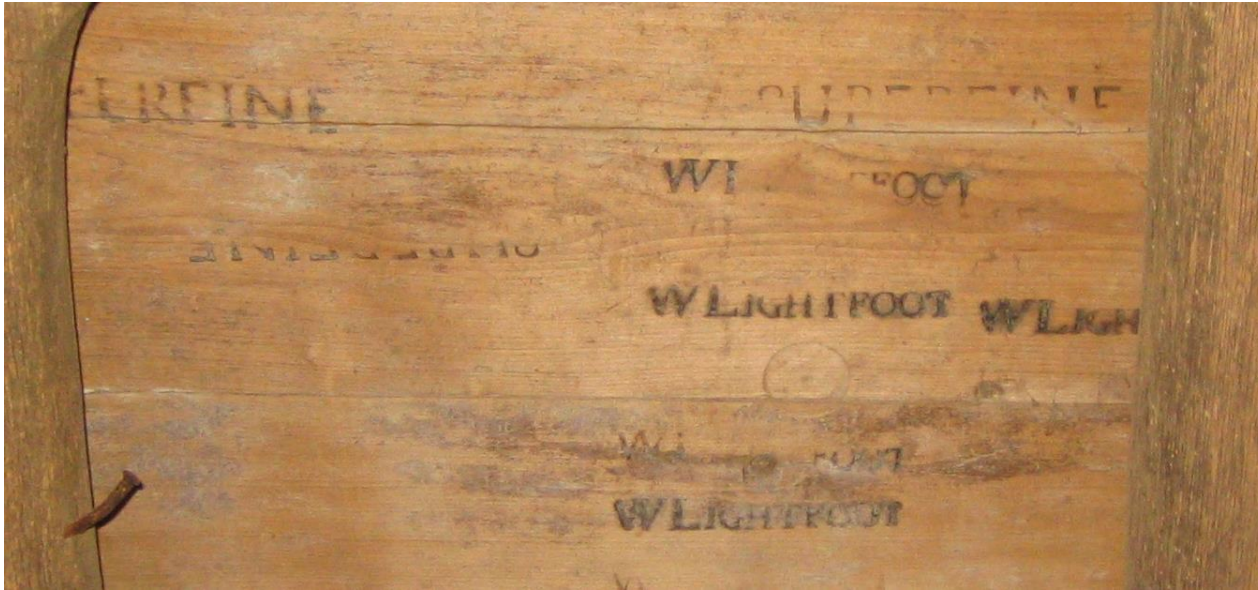
Samuel Lightfoot (1747-67)

- **Samuel Lightfoot** was born to Quaker parents in Ireland in 1701. His family emigrated to Chester, Pennsylvania in 1716.
- Married Mary Head of the New Garden Monthly Meeting on July 30, 1725 (see more next slide).
- Four children born in Chester: Benjamin (b. 1726), Thomas (1728-1793), Samuel Abbott (b. 1729 or 1730, d. 1759), and William (1732-1797).
- A surveyor and justice of the peace, Samuel moved to Pikeland Township and purchased 500 acres from John Pike (one of the land grant recipients from William Penn).
- Spring house constructed first, perhaps as early as 1734.
- Built Pikeland's first mill in 1747. The village of Cambria* grew up around it.
- Divided his land between surviving sons Thomas and William in 1767, when he retired to Chester. Thomas built & operated a steam-powered sawmill on his 250 acres.
- Died February 26, 1777.
- *Cambria is the Anglicized spelling of "Cumru", from the Welsh meaning, "Welsh."

Whereas Samuel Lightfoot of new garden
County of Chester & Province of Pennsylvania & Mary
Head now of New garden aforesaid having declared their
Intentions of Marriage wth each other before severall
monthly Meetings of ^{y^e people of god called quakers etc} New garden aforesaid according to
y^e good order used among them & having Consent of parents
their f^r proposalls of Marriage was allowed of by y^e f^r
meetings
Now These are to Certifie whom it may Concern that
for y^e full Accomplishing their f^r Intentions this 30th of y^e 1st moth
In y^e year of our Lord 1725 they y^e f^r Samuel Lightfoot and
Mary Head Appeared In a Publick Meeting of y^e f^r people
At New Garden afo^r & y^e f^r Samuel Lightfoot taking
y^e f^r Mary head by y^e hand did In a Solem Manner openly
declare y^e he took her y^e f^r Mary Head to be his wife
Promising wth y^e Lords assistance to be unto her a Loving
& faithfull husband untill death should separate them

Samuel Lightfoot Marries Mary Head

Meeting notes about the union between Samuel and Mary.



William Lightfoot (1767-1777)

- ▶ **William Lightfoot** took over the Lightfoot mill operations in 1767.
- ▶ Served in the Revolutionary War in Captain Eyric's (Eirig) Company in the 1st Class of the Pikeland Militia, Second Battalion of Chester County, commanded by Colonel Thomas Bull.
- ▶ Brother Thomas was an Elder in the Goshen Monthly Meeting and married Susanna Hudson Hatton in 1763, after which she became a member of Uwchlan Monthly Meeting and continued her ministry. Thomas Lightfoot became a minister after Susanna's death in 1781, and he was married a second time, to Rachel Hunt, in 1785.



(Grandson) Samuel Lightfoot (1777-1812)

- ▶ **Grandson Samuel Lightfoot** took over for dad William, presumably when he went off to war in 1777.
- ▶ The Pennsylvania Assembly passed legislation in 1792 to stimulate the construction of paved turnpikes by private companies, which could charge tolls for their use. In the decades that followed, turnpikes threaded their way across the Commonwealth, including the Conestoga Turnpike, which we know today as Route 401. This increased traffic to the area.
- ▶ The first home was built on the property circa 1801 (photo under Rees & Benson).
- ▶ Samuel sold the mill in 1812 to two businessmen.

Lewis Rees & James Benson

1812-1820



Rees & Benson

Very little is known about this brief period in the mill's history, other than James Benson applying for a tavern license, likely at the residence along Conestoga Pike. (His application was rejected.)

The Shenemans

1820-1859



Oliver Evans Technology Added

Rather than destroy the existing colonial power train system, Sheneman cleverly installed the elevators and screws piecemeal between 1822 & 1825 so that both the new equipment and the old worked seamlessly together.

Rees Sheneman (1820-49)

- ▶ More traffic along the Conestoga Turnpike and newer mills with grain elevators created the need for Rees Sheneman to upgrade the mill.
- ▶ Oliver Evans's grain elevator system, buckets on canvas or leather straps, moved grain and flour vertically between the floors of a mill. Archimedean screws shifted the grain horizontally.
- ▶ Previously backbreaking work that required several people could now be conducted by one man with a minimum of exertion.
- ▶ Grain scourer (cleaner) and bolter (sifter) installed around the same time as grain elevators.
- ▶ House enlarged in 1833.



Benjamin Sheneman (1849-57), Jones Sheneman (1857-59)

- ▶ Wagon barn likely built in this time period.
- ▶ Hard wheat (used for bread) production was beginning to move west with the settlement of the plains.



The Oberholtzers

1859-1886



Elias Oberholtzer (1859-72)

Purchased 46 acres of the mill property (including home, barn, mill, farmland, and spring house) in 1859. Lived on nearby Byers Road with wife Catherine (pictured at right) and nine children.

These daguerreotypes were taken circa 1848-50.

Oberholtzer Entrepreneurism

- ▶ This father-son team of industrial-age entrepreneurs ushered in the area's golden age.
- ▶ Elias Oberholtzer owned his own mill on Byers Road, and his son operated the mill in Cambria village. Together, they operated as "Willowdale Mills."

the said Elias Oberholtzer his heirs and assigns forever And the said Jonas Sheneman for himself his heirs executors and administrators doth covenant promises grant and agree to and with the said Elias Oberholtzer his heirs and assigns by these presents that in the said Jonas Sheneman and his heirs the said above Messrs. Ernst Mill and two thirds of land hereditaments and premises hereby granted or mentioned or intended or to be with the appurtenances unto the said Elias Oberholtzer his heirs and assigns against him the said Jonas Sheneman and his heirs and against all and every other person or persons whatsoever lawfully claiming or to claim by force or under him them or any of them shall and lawfully warrant and power defend by these presents In Witness whereof the said parties to these presents have hereunto interchangeably set their hands and seals the day and year first above written

Jonas Sheneman
Elizabeth Sheneman

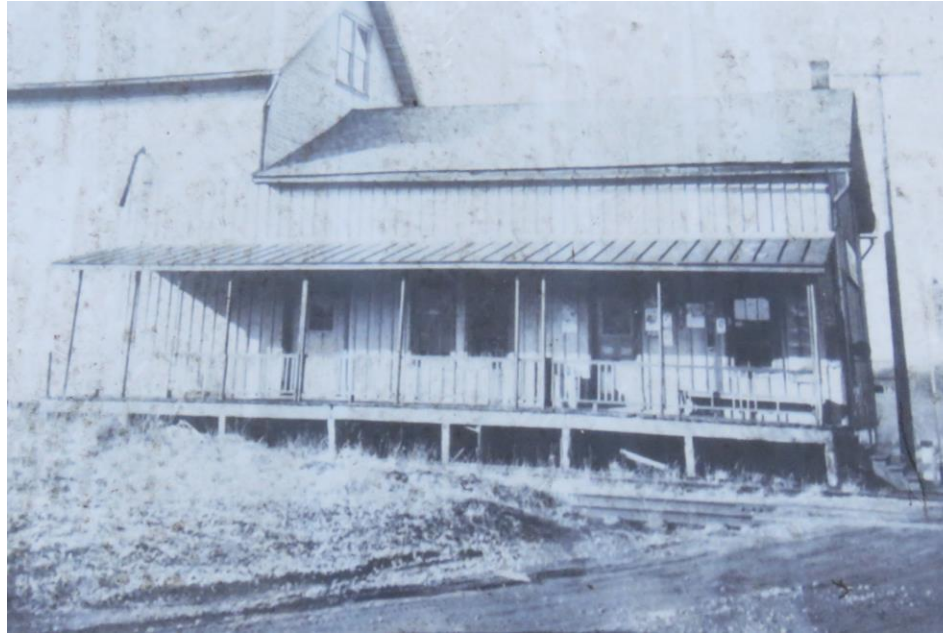
Chester County N.J.

Be it remembered that on the thirtieth day of March in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and fifty nine before the undersigned one of the Justices of the Peace for the County aforesaid personally appeared the above named Jonas Sheneman and Elizabeth his wife and acknowledged the foregoing Indenture to be their act and deed and desired the same might as well be recorded according to law And the said Elizabeth Sheneman being of full age and being first by me separately and apart from her said husband examined and the contents of said Indenture made known to her and she in such separate examination that she voluntarily and of her own free will and accord did sign and seal and as her act and deed deliver the said Indenture without any coercion or compulsion of her said husband Witness my hand and seal the day and year aforesaid.

Recorded March 30. 1860.
Henry Fleming

Deed) This Indenture Made the twentieth day of April





John Oberholtzer: Mill Operator 1859-72, Mill Owner 1873-86

- ▶ John worked at the mill until suffering an injury in 1872 while freeing the water wheel of ice.
- ▶ He hired Levi King to take his place as miller and concentrated on constructing the general store & warehouse with Isaac Hartman as his business partner. There is evidence of barrel packing of flour in the mill, so it's possible that some wheat ground on site was packed for sale at the store.
- ▶ “Night Miller’s House” built circa 1873. At this point, the mill was running 24/6.
- ▶ John devoted more time into rallying support for the newly-formed railroad, especially important for dairy farmers to maintain the quality of the milk on its 11-mile journey (more on this next slide).
- ▶ By 1883, John and Sara were splitting time between Norristown and their summer retreat in Longport, New Jersey.
- ▶ Moved to Philadelphia in 1886 and became a grain merchant. John died in 1904.



Pickering Valley Railroad, 1871-1958

- ▶ The Pickering Valley Railroad company was incorporated on June 4, 1869, and organized June 22, 1869, with the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad Company (or, Reading Railroad) subscribing to the bulk of the stock. It opened in September 1871.
- ▶ The railroad's principal business was primarily as a "milk run" line, transporting mainly agricultural products, but also iron ore and graphite from Byers Station (near Eagle) to Phoenixville, for connections with other railroad lines, especially Philadelphia.
- ▶ With railroad access, business at the Mill boomed and the Supplee Milk Company, which leased a loading station in Cambria, became one of the largest creameries in southeastern Pennsylvania but closed in 1929 after the stock market crash. The general store was also repossessed at that time.
- ▶ Because of mail and freight confusion with another Cambria Station near Johnstown, the village of Cambria was renamed to Anselma. Sara Oberholtzer is credited with the renaming in 1886.
- ▶ Revenues barely covered operating costs for most of the railroad's existence. In 1906, the line was more formally merged into the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad system, becoming known as the Pickering Valley Branch of the Reading. By 1934, the Pickering Valley Railroad ceased operations.



Sara Louisa Vickers Oberholtzer

- ▶ Sara Louisa Vickers was born into a wealthy abolitionist family near Lionville (think Vickers Tavern).
- ▶ She began to write for newspapers and magazines at the age of eighteen. She was an active president of a soldier's aid society, which rendered efficient assistance to the Union Army during the Civil War.
- ▶ On January 1, 1862, she married John Oberholtzer, of Norristown. Their children were Ellis Paxson and Vickers.
- ▶ She published several books, three of which were written while living in Chester County: *Violet Lee and Other Poems* (1873); *Come for Arbutus and Other Wild Bloom* (1882); and *Hope's Heart Bells* (1883).



Sara Louisa Vickers Oberholtzer (continued)

- ▶ Sara was extremely busy after she and John moved to Philadelphia. She was a member of the Anti-Tobacco Society, the Longport Agassiz Microscopical Society, the Soldiers' Aid Society, the World Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Pennsylvania Woman's Press Association, and the School Savings Bank of Pennsylvania. Beginning in 1890, Oberholtzer devoted much of her time to the introduction of the school savings banks system into the public schools of the United States and Canada.
- ▶ Her published works after her move included *Daisies of Verse* (1886), and *Souvenirs of Occasions* (1892), poems read by the author on public occasions. She also wrote extensively for periodicals and magazines on economic subjects, biography, travel, ornithology and other topics, and even some local reporting.
- ▶ Sara spoke at the first meeting of the National Council of Women in Washington, D.C. (1890), at the World's Congress of Women in Chicago in 1893, and at the Geneva, Switzerland meeting in 1903. Sara died February 2, 1930.

The Simmers'

1886-1919



Allen and his wife, Annie. They had two children, Katie and Moses.



Allen H. Simmers, 1886-1919

- ▶ Originally an apprentice under James Laird, who worked for John Oberholtzer.
- ▶ Purchased mill, night miller's house, barn, springhouse (six acres total) in 1886.
- ▶ The original miller's house and general store were no longer part of the mill property.
- ▶ What used to be known as the "night miller's house" was now the primary residence for the milling family.

Below: the mill circa 1906



20th Century Upgrades

It is during this era that the wooden sluiceway was replaced with a cast iron pipe and steel forebay and the wooden water wheel was replaced with a Fitz Steel Overshoot Wheel. This allowed for a more efficient production (and fewer replacements of waterwheels!). That first wheel, replaced between 1906 & 1909, lasted 90 years before requiring extensive repairs in 2002. Also installed during the Simmers era was the Cider Press (apparatus shown at right of mill in photo at the left).

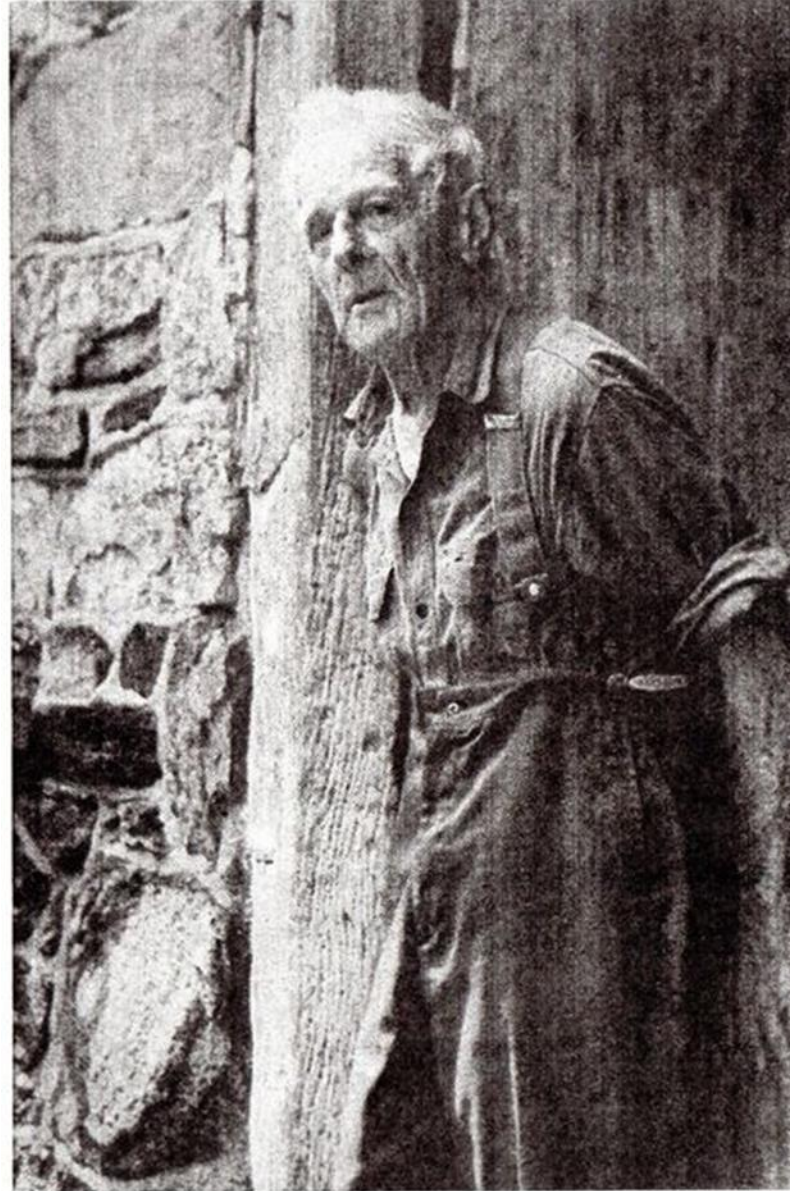


Other Product Offerings

Products such as corn, cracked corn, chicken feed, oats, sacks of corn meal, and four kinds of flour were also sold by Allen Simmers. His stamp is above to the right.

Oliver E. Collins

1919-1982



Oliver Collins' Ingenuity

- ▶ Born in 1888, Oliver Collins had an 8th grade education and a Grade-A cleverness that served him well in tough times.
- ▶ Milling was on the decline by the time Allen Simmers sold the Anselma mill to Oliver Collins, thanks in part to portable hammer mills.
- ▶ Oliver Collins was keen on using the power of the waterwheel for other ventures, including a saw mill.
- ▶ Collins would continue grinding the animal feed upon request by his neighbors.
- ▶ Collins also reconditioned an old cider press installed by Simmers, for apple cider production, which still thrived in the region.
- ▶ In order to save his property and put food on the table for his wife and two children, Collins embarked on many ventures:
 - Post Office opened in their home starting in 1933 (an idea by Mrs. Collins),
 - Ran a machine shop on the first floor of the Mill using water power,
 - Repaired farm machinery, lawn mowers, and wagons, and
 - Cut hair in his office on the Mill's second floor (barber chair at right).



Changes to the Miller's House



Above left: the Miller's House in the 1930s

Above right: the Miller's House as it looked prior to restoration in 2002.

A New Kind of Family Takes Over - 1983

- ▶ After the last miller's death in 1982, the property was “preserved in place” by the French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust starting in 1983
- ▶ Mill at Anselma Preservation & Education Trust formed in 1998
- ▶ Restoration began in 2000 & was completed in 2004
- ▶ Open to the public since 2004.
- ▶ Grinding roasted corn and two types of wheat since 2005.
- ▶ Generally open weekends, mid-April to early December for tours, with monthly demonstrations of the mill in action.
- ▶ Board of Trustees and approximately 40 volunteers (and currently four interns) are hard at work planning for 2021.



Thank You!

Please Visit the Mill at Anselma
website at
www.anselmamill.org for
details about the 2021 season.