

F.A.H.P. News, February 27, 2012

The Mill at 500 Greenbank Road (Part 1): On the present location of the Greenbank Mill, across Red Clay Creek from the depot of the Wilmington & Western Railroad (W & W), there was supposed to have been an early Swedish mill built about 1677. The operating water-powered mill, in outward appearance as it is today, was built by Robert Philips in 1790 and was a grist mill for nearly 200 years. The “Madison Factory” (the stone portion of the mill) was built about 1812 during the administration of President Madison and was primarily a woolen mill. Philips established his home next door with the building of a comfortable house and barn, now called the Philips Farm and operated today, along with the mill, by Greenbank Mill Associates.

By 1782, the colonial inventor Oliver Evans, born in Newport, was operating his grist mill one mile upstream at Faulkland, and in the late 1780s had successfully installed his patented automatic milling machinery there. At the request of Robert Philips, this great advance in the milling industry was installed at Greenbank soon after the mill was built. It was advertised that the miller could get the mill going and work his fields nearby, allowing the mill to run unattended. The creek was dammed about ½ mile upstream, and the mill race fed a water wheel on the outside of the building, partially enclosed when the Madison factory was added. After the Civil War, the water wheel at Greenbank was replaced by an inside water turbine fed by a large penstock under the first floor of the mill.

The Philips family owned and operated the mill for several generations, and about 1925, it was bought by Darlington Flynn, who owned a large farm on all sides of the present Price’s Corner. John McDonald was the on-site miller for Flynn, and he hired a young man named J. Roy Magargal as his assistant. In settling Flynn’s estate in the early 1950s, the mill, the farmhouse, the barn, and well over 100 acres became the property of Saul Cohen, a Wilmington attorney. By 1958, all the property had been sold off except for the original Philips buildings and about 15 acres, including the dam and the mill race. Roy Magargal was still operating the grist mill, and he had been there so long that most people thought he owned it.

On a beautiful fall afternoon in 1958, Clayton Hoff (founder of the Brandywine Valley Association and the Red Clay Valley Association), George Sargisson (Executive Director of Recreation Promotion & Service in Wilmington), and I walked down the railroad from Yorklyn to Greenbank, inspecting the line as a possible future tourist attraction. As we ended our walk, Clayton said, “We should call on Roy Magargal at the mill.” We found him there, running the mill and selling feed, much as it had been done since 1790. Soon Clayton Hoff was telling us we “must” buy the mill to supplement the proposed railroad operation. Historic Red Clay Valley, Inc. (H.R.C.V.) was incorporated in 1960, but it was not until 1965 that the B & O Railroad, at the urging of Governor Elbert N. Carvel, agreed to lease its Landenberg Branch for the steam-powered passenger trains. One of the interim activities was to operate the Auburn Valley Railroad; another was to purchase and plan for the future of the Greenbank Mill.

In 1964, H.R.C.V. bought the mill and 1.7 acres, including the water rights, from Saul Cohen for \$10,000. Roy Magargal continued his business there, and he was charged no rent. John

Walters bought the house and the barn. Soon a small group of volunteers from H.R.C.V. was working with Magargal to clean and upgrade the mill to make it more presentable to the public. A problem with water rights surfaced, as Cohen had sold a small square at the end of the mill race to three different buyers. To get H.R.C.V. "off his back," he offered an additional 7 acres just upstream from the mill, which offer was accepted. The W & W began operations in 1966. John Tweedy built a nice truss foot bridge on the creek bank, which was lifted onto its new foundations to connect the mill with the parking lot of the new railroad across Red Clay Creek. The bridge was dedicated by New Castle County Executive William J. Connor in July 1967.
(To be continued next week)

Work Report: On Tuesday night, the electric train layout was inspected, and plans were made for its improvement, including repair of the small electric water pump in "Auburn Mill," so the water wheel can turn again. It was determined that the glass doors surrounding the popcorn bin on the Cretors popper needs attention, and Mark Russell has taken on this project. The bottom head of the 20" boiler for the Model 607 was swaged and nearly completed, and the Rauch & Lang electric parts were further refined, coated, and painted. Frame and trim work continued on the Model 607. The fuel line to the pilot on the 725 was reconfigured and secured. The accession tags were attached to the two steam locomotives.

On Thursday, one side of the 725's bonnet was strengthened, and further sorting and preparatory work was done on the 607. The 1902 Stick-Seat Runabout, having been thoroughly cleaned and polished, was loaded on the trailer for the trip to Hershey, where it will be loaned to the AACA Museum for three months. The swaging was completed on the new boiler for the 607. Measurements were taken from the springs of our Models H-5 and 71, fulfilling a request from Allen Blazick.

Those in attendance Tuesday were Steve Bryce (in charge), Bill Schwoebel, Jeff Pollock, Jerry Novak, Ted Kamen, Mark Hopkins, Mark Russell, Tim Ward, Tim Nolan, Bob Stransky, Lou Mandich, Kelly Williams, Dennis Dragon, Anne Cleary, and Tom Marshall. On Thursday, those who worked were Richard Bernard, Ted Kamen, Bob Jordan, Eugene Maute, Gerhard Maute, Steve Bryce, Bill Schwoebel, Robert Young, Tim Nolan, Jim Personti, Geoff Fallows, Dave Leon, Jerry Novak, Chuck Erikson, Mac Taylor, and Tom Marshall (in charge).

Auto Lectures at Winterthur: Our very own Greg Landrey (esteemed Vice President of the Board) will be sharing a lecture at Winterthur on Thursday, March 8 at 12:15pm: "Built to Outclass: Slogans and Images of Early Automobiles." He will discuss the advertising of early automobiles and the insight it brings to the early auto age. Members free. Included with admission. See the **Winterthur website** for admission details.