

James McGrew Mills

Alternate Name: Centre Roller Mills

Chronology of Mill Owners

McGrew, James	Pre-1769 ^D	Seekamp, Albert	1838 ^D
McGrew, James and Finley	1769 ^D	Seekamp, Albert (Heirs)	Unknown
McGrew, James	1774 ^D	Duttera, Henry	1841 ^D
Latshaw, Joseph	1781 ^D	Eppleman, Jacob	1855 ^T
Cookson, Samuel	1781 ^D	Smith, Moses	1865 ^T
Eicker, Peter	1794 ^D	Metzer, Washington	1877 ^D
Rex, George Jacob	1794 ^D	Hafer, Warren W.	1877 ^D
Rex, George Jacob (Heirs)	1800 ^E	Hafer, Warren W. (Heirs)	1908 ^E
Rex, George Adam	1801 ^T	Roth, Henry G.	1909 ^D
Ragen, Daniel	1803 ^D	Rhodes, Sarah J.	1914 ^D
Slingluff, Jesse	1809 ^D	Rauscher, C. J.	1916 ^D
Thompson, James	1810 ^D	Thomas, E. W.; Knouse, M. E.	
Keener, Charles F.	1812 ^D	and Snyder, H.	1936 ^D

Source of First-Year Ownership: D - Deed E - Estate Papers T - Tax Record

Mill Type: Grist, Saw and Hemp

Raceway: About 2,100 feet

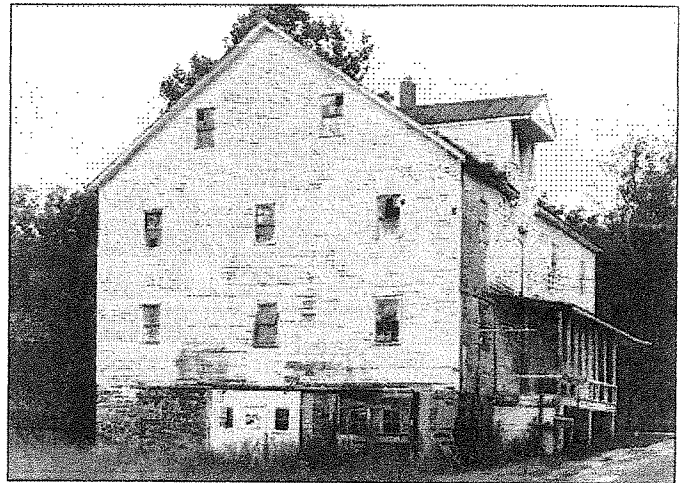
Creek: Opossum

Township: Butler¹

First Year Operation: Pre-1769

Last Year Operation: Unknown

Location: Traveling downstream, this was the fifth of six mill sites on Opossum Creek. It was located in the village of Centre Mills.



Courtesy of Adams County Historical Society

Location Verification: 1770 Road Petition,² 1821 Map, 1858 Map and 1872 Atlas

¹ The mill was situated on land that was part of Menallen Township until the formation of Butler Township on August 20, 1849.

² *Glatfelter Extracts*, p. 109. In 1770 there was a petition for the construction of a road to run from the county line to an existing road running from Black's Gap to York (now SR 394, the Goldenville

Physical Facility: The gristmill was a three-story frame building, 50' by 40'.

Current Condition: The grist mill is still standing. It is now home to a small business devoted to salvaging materials from old buildings.

Narrative: This mill site is located on land that was originally warranted to Nathan Dicks in June 1747 and surveyed for him in October of the same year. Two years later, Dicks sold his right to the warranted land to James McGrew. Twenty years later, in 1769, McGrew sold to his brother, Finley, a one-half interest in five acres of the land and a one-half-interest in a "water Corn Mill and Saw Mill" that was situated on the five acres.³ The deed for this transaction is the earliest known record of a gristmill on this site.

In 1774 Finley McGrew returned his one-half interest in the mill property to James McGrew. Then in 1781 James McGrew sold the mill property to Joseph Latshaw of Menallen Township.⁴

On the same day that Latshaw bought the mills, he sold them to Samuel Cookson of Pipe Creek Hundred in Frederick County, Maryland.^{5,6} Cookson kept the mills for thirteen years, then sold them to Peter Eiker of Menallen Township in 1794,⁷ who in turn sold them two days later to George Jacob Rex, also of Menallen Township.⁸ The deed that conveyed the mills to Rex is the first to refer to the gristmill as a merchant mill.

The *1798 Federal Direct Tax* provides a brief description of the improvements on the property. It lists a log barn (50' by 25'), a log stable (20' by 25'), a gristmill, a sawmill and a hemp mill (no dimensions were given for the mills). It also shows that although Rex owned the property, George Myers occupied it. This indicates that Myers was renting the mills from Rex.

Rex kept the mills until his death in 1800.⁹ His son, George Adam Rex, then inherited them by an Orphans Court decree.^{10,11} After inheriting the mills,

Road). The road would pass by three mills on Opossum Creek: Samuel Wright's mill, Finley McGrew's mill and Benjamin Loan's mill. Plotting the road's course, and then superimposing it on a modern map determined that McGrew's mill was located at Centre Mills.

³ *Deed Book F*, p. 258.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 272.

⁵ *Ibid*, and 276.

⁶ An article in the June 1983 newsletter of the Adams County Historical Society implies that Latshaw acquired the mill property in 1779. Although Latshaw did acquire land from McGrew in 1779 (*Deed Book F*, p. 276), that land was not the mill property itself. Instead, it was a tract of 62 and one-half acres adjacent to the mill property.

⁷ *Deed Book F*, p. 268.

⁸ *Ibid*, and 276.

⁹ *George Jacobs Rex Estate Papers* No. 23, ACHS.

George Adam Rex sold them in 1803 to Daniel Ragen from the city of York.¹² Ragen kept the mills until 1809 when he sold them to Jesse Slingluff of Baltimore, Maryland who sold them nineteen months later to James Thompson, also of Baltimore. Thompson kept the mills for two years, and then sold them to Charles F. Keener of Carlisle, Pennsylvania in 1812.^{13,14}

In comparison with others, Keener proved to be a long-term owner, keeping the mills until 1838, when he sold them to Albert Seekamp of Baltimore.¹⁵ A year later Seekamp offered to sell the mill property at a public sale. An advertisement for the sale gives the following information:

VALUABLE
MILL PROPERTY
AT PUBLIC SALE

. . . Situated in Menallen township, Adams county, known by the name of "Keener's Mills." The Farm contains *Ninety Acres*, more or less, in good cultivation. The improvements are a large and convenient *Dwelling House*, with a good Barn, Stabling and other Out-houses, and a large Orchard; also a *Grist Mill, & Saw Mill*, with good water power, and in the centre [sic] of a finely cultivated settlement. — Opossum Creek runs through a large extent of the Property . . .¹⁶

Seekamp did not sell the mills at the advertised public sale. Instead, he kept them until his death.¹⁷ Ann T. Seekamp, executrix of Seekamp's estate, then sold the property in 1841 to Henry Duttera of Menallen Township.¹⁸

Tax records imply that in 1842 Duttera remodeled the gristmill. In 1842 the mill's assessed value was \$1,000; but in 1843 the value jumped to \$3,000. While Duttera owned the property, he had them insured with CVMP. The insurance company described the property as follows:

A large frame dwelling house two stories high with a Log house attachment (on) the West end one and a half stories high, situate on the North side of the Pine Grove road leading to Oxford about three miles East of Bendersville. -- Also a large Grist Merchant Mill 50 by 40 feet Three Stories high with 4 run of stone situated

¹⁰ *Deed Book D*, p. 489.

¹¹ The year in which the decree was issued is not known. In the **Chronology of Ownership** above 1801 is shown for the first year of his ownership since he was first taxed for the property in that year.

¹² *Deed Book B*, p. 166. Tax records show that Ragen was taxed for the mills in 1802, the year before the property was deeded to him.

¹³ *Deed Book D*, p. 489.

¹⁴ *Deed Book F*, p. 280.

¹⁵ *Deed Book N*, p. 474.

¹⁶ *Sentinel*; April 1, 1839.

¹⁷ The date of Seekamp's death could not be determined.

¹⁸ *Deed Book R*, p. 309. Ann Seekamp accomplished the sale through her attorney-in-fact, Joseph J. Speed (*Deed Book R*, p. 310).

directly opposite the dwelling on the South side of the road, also a log & frame dwelling one and a half stories high situated about 4 perches East of the above described dwelling house. Also a frame stable situated about 8 perches East of the last described dwelling. – Also a Saw Mill, South of the above described nearly touching.

From 1855 to 1864 Jacob Eppleman was taxed for the mill property.¹⁹ In 1865 Moses Smith began being taxed for it.²⁰ Smith fell into financial difficulty, and his real estate, including the mills, was sold at sheriff's sale in 1877. The advertisement for that sale describes the property as follows:

A TRACT OF LAND, situate in Butler township, Adams county, Pa., . . . containing 90 Acres, more or less, and improved with a Two-story FRAME HOUSE, Bank Barn, Wagon Shed, Corn Crib, Hog Pen and other out-buildings; also a Three-story Stone and Frame GRIST MILL, with four run of Burrs, Saw Mill, Tenant House, and other out-buildings. – Seized and taken in execution as the real estate of MOSES SMITH.²¹

At the sheriff's sale Washington Metzger bought the property and mills.²² Less than a month later he sold them to Warren W. Hafer.²³

Hafer kept the mills until his death in 1908. In his will he instructed his executors "to sell at public or private sale all of my real and personal estate, within three years after my death, except the Hanover property which is not to be sold till after my wife's death . . ."²⁴

In keeping with Hafer's wishes, his executors sold the property in 1909 to Henry Roth of Butler Township.²⁵ In 1913 Roth decided to sell the mill property and an adjoining farm.

PUBLIC SALE Of Valuable Real Estate.

The undersigned will offer for sale September 25, 1913, a farm and mill property, situated at Center Mills, Adams County, Pa. . . .

MILL PROPERTY

The mill is known as Center Roller Mills. It has four floors, and consists of three stands of Butler double rolls, and full Roller system of (the) most improved type; also one large chopping buhr. This is one of the best custom mills in the county, with plenty of grain and feed bought and sold right at the door. Water power strong and constant. Concrete dam and race. Both in excellent condition and

¹⁹ The 1855 tax record has an assessor's note that the property was "transferred to Jacob Eppleman."

²⁰ The exact year in which Smith acquired the mills is not known.

²¹ "Sheriff's Sale," *Gettysburg Compiler*; Mar. 29, 1877.

²² *Deed Book 72*, p. 305.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Warren W. Hafer, *Estate Papers*, No. 8951, ACHS.

²⁵ *Deed Book 62*, p. 324.

chiefly maintained. With the mill there is also a dwelling house of seven rooms, a stable, and a blacksmith shop. There is also a well of good water at this house. . . Reason for selling is old age of owner. . .

HENRY ROTH²⁶

Sarah J. Rhodes of Biglerville bought the mill property from Roth in 1914.²⁷ In 1916 she declared bankruptcy in the U.S. District Court, and G. W. Koser was appointed trustee of her estate. A few months later Koser sold the real estate to C. J. Rauscher of Gettysburg at a public sale.²⁸

Rauscher kept the property until he fell into financial difficulty. In 1935 the sheriff sold the property to H. L. Snyder, E. W. Thomas and M. E. Krouse, trustees of the Citizen Trust Company of Gettysburg with authority to sell. The sheriff's deed states that the property was "Improved with a two and one half (2½) story frame house, bank barn, chicken-house, hog pen, mill, and other necessary outbuildings."²⁹

Tax records show that the trustees were taxed for the mill and property from 1936 to 1938. After that the mill disappears from the records, and we lose track of it. Therefore, its last year of operation is not known.

Note of Interest: For a while the mill hosted the business meetings of a small telephone company. The company was established in 1914 as the Centre Mills Rural Bell Telephone. It operated until 1953, serving residents in and near Centre Mills, Aspers and Guernsey. One of its early officers was C. J. Rauscher, a former owner of the mill.³⁰

A newspaper article in 1953 on the company's closing gives the following information:

The 17 subscribers of the Centre Mills Rural Telephone Co. talked over this 39-year-old line for the last time last week. The company . . . went out of business, and the subscribers were absorbed by the United Telephone Co., which extended new lines through the territory formerly served by the Centre Mills company.

At one time the (telephone) lines extended for approximately 20 miles, but when the company finally "gave up the ghost," the lines were only five and a half miles in length. The company's policy through the years was to charge just enough to maintain service, without making a profit. Due to inability to obtain materials,

²⁶ *Gettysburg Times*; Sept. 5, 1913.

²⁷ *Deed Book* 72, p. 305.

²⁸ *Deed Book* 77, p. 400.

²⁹ *Sheriff Deed Book B*, p. 271.

³⁰ Minutes of business meetings in Centre Mills file at ACHS and "Centre Mills Rural Telephone Company Ends 39 Years' Service," *Gettysburg Times*; Apr. 15, 1953.

expert labor and necessary time, the lines depreciated to the point where replacement became necessary.³¹

³¹ "Centre Mills Rural Telephone Company Ends 39 Years' Service," *Gettysburg Times*; Apr. 15, 1953.

Positive Aspects of Centre Mills Property

Approved D.E.R. sewage permit to last 5 years

Two wells on property

Lots of history (note attached sheets)

Quiet, rural location - the hamlet of Centre Mills

Mill (storage) approx. 8,000 sq'

Commercial (zoned)

Residential with approved sewage

Very fertile ground

Construction of some 20 ponds up Oppossum Creek since 1958
have prevented flooding. Hurricane Agnes did not go
over the bridge.

Green House effect on atmosphere has untailed excessive rains.
House contains 1600 sq' storage if it is to be used as shop etc

Electric is already in the house

Oppossum Creek has been continually stocked with trout

89 miles from Washington, D.C.

9.6 miles from Gettysburg

Carlisle and Mt. Holly Springs close by

Fire insurance available upon residence

Low property taxes in Butler Twp.

Approved alternative sewage system with sand mound filter
system allows for discharge into the creek.

Antique building materials available from which to choose
to furnish the house

- 1 Existing 12' x 24' cement block dwelling to the right. Three sides post & beam placed up against cement blocks
- 2 Cement blocks noticeable as building progresses
- 3 showing off cement blocks
- 4 New glass installed in older metal frames (bottom 2)
- 5 Climbing with stone much of which salvaged from 1795-1815 barn between Chambersburg, Pa and Waynesboro, Pa
- 6 Roy Williams & Sons (Painters from York Springs, Pa helped us do some heavy lifting.
- 7 Higher & higher we go
- 8 Tim Brent (mason) made a saddle for the millstone that came from Northumberland County Pa. Note wooden wedges.
- 9 Tim Brent sets millstone in place. Note plastic pipe leading from 2nd floor to the prime sewage tank
- 10 Tim brought 2 of his co-workers from Harrisburg, Pa over to help. Very experienced.
- 11 Needed more mud so pass it up.
- 12 Like swinging an inner-tube.
- 13 Muef logging crane lifting a lintel.
- 14 Taking a short break.

- 15 All important pointing work in action
- 16 Building facing South draws sun
- 17 Cleaning stone of spots of mortar
- 18 Scaffolding getting lower.
- 19 Glumps of conestoga wagon that would appear in the movie "Beloved" starring Oprah Winfrey
- 20 Stone used in construction in rear of building
- 21 East side of mill. Chestnut Log House would end up near the top of Bear Mountain.
- 22 Another view of chest log house. Plus close up views of mortise & tenon / of Centre Mills log house.
- 23 A memorial would be made from these stone which originated from the 5th mill along Opossum Creek; it was known as the Deehl Mill and remains standing.
- 24 $\frac{5}{8}$'s of Centre Mills structure has cement blocks hiding behind the walls. $\frac{1}{2}$ of structure has weathered oak siding covering the cement blocks $\frac{1}{4}$ is stone masonry.

(1)

624 Centre Mills Road

Centre Mills

Mill

Mill is 182 years old. The date 1841 appears above door in front on 2nd floor. Original pulley was found behind door.

So named Centre Mills being middle of 5 mills operating via Opossum Creek.

Mills underneath structure sound & reinforced with concrete blocks.

Ceiling of above first floor needs attention.

Roof rafters appear sound.

Vertical up & down structure could use some attention in the mill.

Dwelling - office

was originally 12' x 24' cement block; one story with a basement.

(original photos available)

Log cabin came from Walnut Bottom, Pa salvaged circa 1984-85. Sewage permit is now permanent

Everything reclaimed except glass in large windows.

2 fire places: basement and first floor.

Bottom residence: propane wall heater, hot water heater BR sink, K sink, shower, water pump, 2 wells (one hand dug). Outside spigot.

All electric done by late Leonard Sites on entire property, dwelling and basement of mill.

Dwelling (cont'd)

Currently attic of Log House dwelling is clean. ②
Lately working to "shape-up" soffit and
tin roof.

Dwelling is insurable; mill is not insurable.

Have 2 properties: mill side just under 4 acres
Across road just over 4 acres. Both properties
flood plain. Since 1986 have endured 2
Flash floods, one in September 1986. Across
The road property now not for sale.

Rural character of these 2 properties have
offered an escape from the radical contents
of unwanted news.

Pole bldg across road constructed by ANISH
using all reclaimed materials except for
pole bldg nails.

2 wells on property mill side. Do NOT drink
water from these wells but is OK and harmless
to use water to: wash dishes, shower and brush
teeth.

Both rooms in basement need "fumigating",
which means you have some company down
there. Logs to log post & beam structure
appear fine and not infested.

Excellent property for "pushing history."

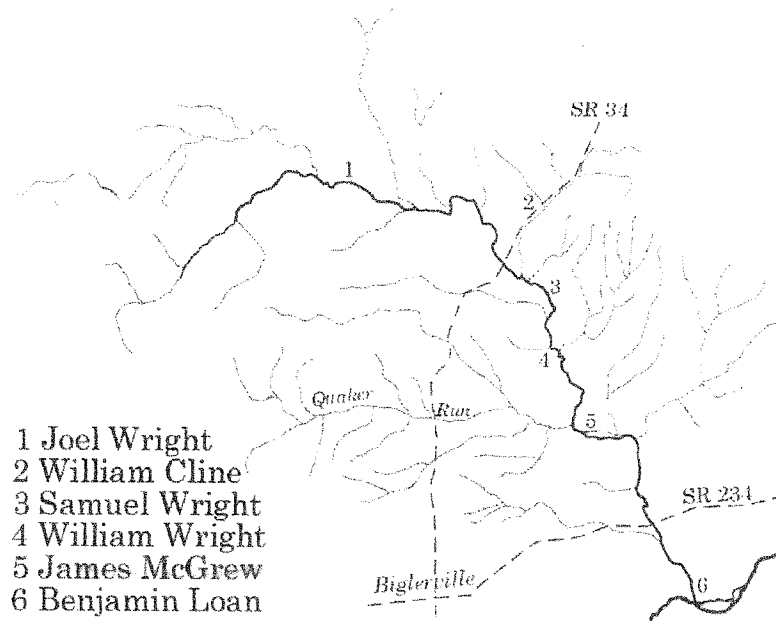
Like every other property has plus & minus!

The mill at Centre Hills might be the only existing
early mill currently for sale in Adams County.

Currently own 4 original paper (have placed in frames)
"peerless" Breakfast Food bags via C. J. Pausher circa 1916

Opossum Creek

1 inch = 2 miles



The Opossum Creek, a tributary of the Conewago Creek, is about nine miles long. The headwaters are in the South Mountains inside Adams County. Confined to the northern and eastern parts of Menallen and Butler Townships, the creek flows in an easterly direction. The Opossum starts on the north side of Bear Mountain near the town of Wenksville, flowing east parallel to the Wenksville-Bendersville Road. Above Bendersville, the creek changes its course to the south through Aspers and meets the Conewago Creek about three miles due east of Biglersville. Over ten runs drain into the creek. All of these runs are spring fed. The water supply is ample and moves at a fast pace due to the hilly terrain. At one time the creek and its tributaries provided waterpower for one fulling mill, five gristmills and 14 sawmills.

top of the ruins of the race and dam on the Opossum Creek which served as the power for the Centre Mills mill. The mill was built in 1841 by Henry Duttera.

Mill still serves community at 150

By JEFFREY B. ROTH
Times Staff Writer

At one time, in its early history, the village of Centre Mills appeared to be on its way to becoming a boom town.

According to research performed by the Adams County Historical Society, in 1836, the Menallen Post Office, located in Centre Mills, was ranked ninth in the county in the amount of business it conducted. The "yard stick" used to measure postal business was the value of postal stamps sold per year. For that year, that amount was \$28.54.

Today, the oldest surviving extant structure, the mill, built in 1841, by Henry Duttera, is celebrating its 150th anniversary, said John Longanecker, owner of the property and operator of Centre Mills Salvage.

While walking along the Opossum Creek to the site of the remnants of the raceway which once powered the mill, Longanecker said that the area has not changed significantly since the mill was constructed.

The ownership of property can be traced back to a land grant by William Penn to Joseph Dickson dated

January 1737. Records indicate that two land grants applied directly to Centre Mills.

A 150-acre tract was owned by Nathan Dicks, 1747. Dicks owned the property until 1749 when it was sold to James McGrew.

It is believed that McGrew, a Scottish-Irish immigrant, built the first mill. A 1767 deed records that McGrew conveyed to his brother Finley a five-acre tract of land which included a half part of a water corn mill and messuage (dwelling and land).

The mill and surrounding property changed hands again in 1779 and again in 1781 when it was purchased to a Samuel Cook of Pipe Creek Hundred, Maryland. The land remained intact for 80 years. Tax records, Longanecker noted, were assessed for a grist and saw mill and occasionally a hemp mill and distillery.

In 1821, Charles F. Keener owned the mill which is located at the juncture of two roads. Keener was appointed Justice of the Peace for Menallen and Tyrone Townships. The following year, the Keener's Mill Post Office was established.

Longanecker said there was a

thriving "merchandise business" in addition to the mill and surrounding farm operations. About 10 M.E. Knouse, Thomas and H.L. Knouse, who were trustees of the Menallen Trust Co. Knouse is the namesake of Knouse Foods Inc., and Thomas was the owner of Thomas Brother's Store in Biglerville, Longanecker noted.

The property was then sold in 1943 for \$1 to Arno H. Friedline. Three years later, it again changed hands. In 1986, Longanecker purchased the property.

Longanecker said that the area of the race and dam was once the site of community ice skating parties. Now the dam is gone. The Opossum still draws many trout fishermen and is stocked by the Pennsylvania Fish Commission.

"There will be no parades, no celebrity guest speakers, no official commemorations," he said. "Business will go on as usual with the passing of this milestone of history."

Now the home of his architectural salvage business, the mill is still a landmark of the small agricultural community. The post office has been moved to Aspers, the school is gone, and so are the merchantile businesses, but the spirit of hard work, appreciation of the land, and a belief in the community remains strong.

Salvaging architectural treasures

By JEFFREY B. ROTH
Times Staff Writer

For the old home restorer, finding the right materials can be a frustrating problem.

In Centre Mills, Centre Mills Salvage has become an important resource for architectural treasures. Owner and operator, John Longanecker, said he receives inquiries about materials from around the country and the world, including Japan, Canada, England, Ireland, and Western Europe.

Since 1977, Longanecker has operated his business from the 1841 Centre Mills grist mill. His property is covered with examples of American architecture spanning 200 years.

Listed in such magazines as

"Fine Homebuilding," touted as the best builder's magazine in America, Longanecker and his crews are constantly on the lookout for salvage operations of historic properties. Doorknobs, floor joists, porch columns and flooring, are all valued items targeted for salvage.

"I salvaged my first barn in Hunterstown," he said. "How I locate properties for salvage is a trade secret."

"I am picky about what I choose," Longanecker said. "I have reached a point where I could be blindfolded and go into a cabin and know whether it was built in the 18th or 19th century."

Longanecker is very careful to attempt to document a structure's age which has been targeted for salvage. That is accomplished through

searches of public records as well as architectural clues, such as hand-hewn floor joists and the types of nails used.

"Saw marks on boards are a good indicator of age," he said. "If they are up and down saw marks with different sized gaps between the marks that may indicate that the wood was cut by a water sawmill."

Among the items he has for sale are mantles, flooring, hewn floor joists, doors, log cabins and beams of various sizes. He said salvage operations involved hard, meticulous labor.

When a building is salvaged, individuals' boards are marked noting their location in the building. All of this takes time, effort, care, and a respect for history.