

Historical Significance of Achey's Mill

The property has been owned by a series of notable and financially astute individuals since the earliest settlements of the Colony.

Today the land comprises a small part of a great tract of 1,490 acres of land granted to a Quaker, J. Joseph Growdon, on March 20, 1715/16. It was surveyed per warrant of Jan. 2, 1716.

Joseph Growdon was speaker of the State Assembly and one of the most powerful leaders in Pa.

Joseph Growdon sold 663 acres to Robert Fletcher on April 25, 1725. Fletcher's heirs sold the 663 acres to Reynard and Grace Tyson on June 18, 1750. A mill is mentioned in this deed.

The Nicholas Scull map of 1750 identified the "Swamp Mill."

Reynard Tyson died between 1750 and 1759, since a road was laid out in 1760, beginning at the "Road from Saucon to Philadelphia, by the Widow Tyson's Mill."

This ad appeared in Ben Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette in 1786: To be Sold – "A plantation, dwelling house, barn and grist-mill, situate in the County of Bucks, about 38 miles from Philadelphia, containing 120 acres of land, most of which is well timbered, bounded by lands of Christian Clymer, Jacob Clymer and Swamp Creek. It is in an extraordinary good situation for country work, on a steady stream of water, and has been in great repute as a country mill a great number of years. The conditions of sale will be made known by applying to Robert Morris, miller, near Frankford."

The 1798 tax census listed the following buildings and occupants on John Geissinger's land in Milford Township:

- 35 x 30 Log Gristmill

- 2 Story Sawmill

- 24 x 14 Old Stable

- 25 x 22 hued log 1 story house

- 20 x 18 hued log 2 story house with 24 x 14 attached 1 story log kitchen

Total valuation was listed at \$3,600 and Henry Fratz was listed as the occupant of the mill and one house, and George Coow, the occupant of the other house. Apparently, Geissinger continued to run another mill he had owned previously in the Saucon area and hired a miller, Fratz, and a helper, Coow, providing log homes for each on the property.

On December 12, 1805, survey was begun for a public road 30 feet wide, leading from the road to Northampton to Philadelphia eastward 646 perches (about 2 miles) crossing the road from Philadelphia to Allentown, ending at the Swamp Mill. The project was completed and recorded in May, 1806. This road appears to be a western extension of the road of 1760 mentioned above.

Information is slight on the next 2 property owners. Abraham Geissinger paid 2,200 pounds for the parcel in 1806, and sold it to Michael Baum, storekeeper, in 1810 for 8,000 pounds.

John and Sara Heist purchased the property in 1815 for 3,000 pounds in gold & silver money. Many Heists were moving into and staying in the village at this time; so it was known as "Heistville" in the early 1800s. The name was changed to Milford Square between 1850 and 1876.

Daniel L. Heist and his wife Mary purchased the property in 1839 for \$6,500. He operated the mill until his death in 1864 at the age of 55. His son, Daniel S. Heist sold the property to Jacob and Catherine Scholl in 1866 for \$8,619. Scholl sold the property to William Scheetz in 1869 for \$12,000. Scheetz hired Benjamin Achey to run the mill for him in 1870. Mr. Scheetz could not hold onto the property and Benjamin Achey bought it in 1875 for \$4,000 at 'sheriff' sale.

Benjamin Achey and his younger brother, Michael F, were enterprising Dutchmen developing the property into a very diversified and thriving business. Benjamin born November 15, 1846, lived on his father's farm until the age of 12 when his father died. He worked among the area farmers until 19 years of age, when he began to learn the miller's trade from Levi S. Moyer of Hellertown.

Benjamin Achey sold the property to John P. Nice in 1886 for \$12,000. John Nice died in 1889. Michael Achey, younger brother of Benjamin bought the property in 1890 for \$7,800. Before purchasing the mill and miller's home, he attended Normal school and began teaching at the age of 19. He was appointed Milford Square grammar teacher at the highest salary paid, \$36.

In 1890, improved turnpikes were coming into existence, and Michael Achey seized a business opportunity.....Free Press article of December 5, 1890....."M.F. Achey, Esq. of Milford Square has just received a machine to crush stone for macadamizing purposes. He will set it up on his property where stones abound and no doubt the turnpike companies will avail themselves of this opportunity."

In November of 1892 Michael Achey was elected Treasurer of the Quakertown-Spinnerstown Turnpike Co.

The Achey's impressed the community to such an extent that now, over a century later, the property is referred to as Achey's Mill. It is generally considered to be the oldest mill property in Milford Township.

Guy Graybill purchased the property in 1916. Little is known of him, but times must have been increasingly difficult, for the property was sold at sheriff's sale in 1926 to Daniel and Lavina Mack (daughter and son-in-law of Michael Achey). The Macks continued to live in Trumbauersville and shut down the mill operations as the age of water driven mills came to an end.

The next owners were Roy and Josephine Smith (1937 – 1943). After that Joseph Millard (one of the writers of the comic strip, Dick Tracy) owned the mill (1943 – 1945). George and Mary Gibbs were the next owners (1945-1951). Aubrey & Jean Shea (1951-1965) purchased the property in 1951 and made many improvements at the miller's house. Robert & Viola McClean purchased the property in 1965 and promptly listed Achey's Mill 'for sale.'

That is the first time the Grist Mill and the Miller's house were separated on the deed records since 1715. In 1966, we took possession of the Mill and 22 surrounding acres and started renovations on Achey's Mill.

It is evident that this site has been not only of interest locally through the nomenclature of "Heistville", the fact that it is the oldest mill property in the township, and the daily regimen of life that surrounded the Miller's home in the 18th, 19th, and 20th century: but county-wide, it is the preservation of the brilliance of Henry Mercer. The miller's home is filled with Mercer tiles and Achey's Bridge rebuilt after a major flood in 1906 is the first reinforced concrete bridge in America.....designed by Henry Mercer.

Milford Township recently (2000) purchased a deed that shows its first major subdivision in 1725. According to The Intelligencer of January 16, 2000 in an article entitled "Milford gets a glimpse of origins":

"Certainly the tract's name, Great Swamp, listed on the 1725 land conveyance, lacks modern market appeal. Yet the elegantly lettered land document just purchased by Milford Township supervisors is more than mere sheepskin.

The sale of 663 acres along Swamp Creek by Joseph Growdon, Esq. and Anne of Bensalem to Robert Fletcher of Abington arguably marks the first major subdivision at the heart of what eventually became Milford Township. Moreover, the creek-side parcel just southeast of Milford Square very likely included a mill from which the area adopted its name.

The 1,490-acre parcel was granted to English statesman J. Joseph Growdon in 1715 from the William Penn Land Grant. A portion of the original log home remains as the kitchen of a private home at the southwest corner of Milford Square Pike and Hillcrest Road. (*the miller's home*)

Growdon was someone English officials sought to humor, a one-time speaker of the provincial assembly whose daughter married David Lloyd, appointed chief justice of the colony two years later.

.....Following a 1785 survey, Robert Morris subdivided his acreage, the next year advertising for sale the following in Ben Franklin's Pennsylvania Gazette: "A plantation, dwelling house, barn and grist mill, situate in the County of Bucks, about 38 miles from Philadelphia, containing 120 acres of land, most of which is well timbered.....it is in an extraordinary good situation for county work, on a steady stream of water, and has been in good repute as a county mill for a great number of years.

The newspaper article continues and repeats much of what has already been stated.