



## HAPPENINGS BACK THEN AT CAPE HENLOPEN AND BEYOND STORY OF RED MILL POND



Red Mill Pond DENY HOWETH PHOTO

By Harrison\_Howeth May 4, 2019

RED MILL • RED MILL POND DAM • RED MILL POND

38.7601122 LATITUDE: -75.2035194 LONGITUDE

LEWES AREA OF SUSSEX COUNTY.

Red Mill Pond located 38.76 latitude x -75.20 longitudes, Lewes area of Sussex County, on Delaware Highway 1, between Nassau and Overbrook when you travel north. The elevation at Red Mill is 7 feet. Also, it is in Broadkill Hundred, on the southeastern boundary, of Broadkill and Rehoboth-Lewes Hundreds. You can say it 'feeds' into the Broadkill River. Some will want to say the Broadkill River, through Coolspring Branch, feed it. The eastmost 'branch' off of the mill pond is also known as Old Mill Creek or Branch. Going westward, the branch or creek is the Coolspring's.

### The Beginning

Coolspring Branch begins several hundred feet from the 'mouth' of the Broadkill and on this branch was Red Mill, a gristmill, owned by Samuel Paynter. Remember we are talking about the pioneer days, around **1750**. 'Up' this branch, up meaning going west, was a wool carding mill and a leather tanyard, probably owned by Helmanus Wiltbank on the land granted him by the Duke of York. It is known Red Mill was sold to Elijah Register, timberman and ship owner, and then to Robert Hammond, who is said to have owned it when it burned in **1885**.

A local Prime Hook old timer by name of Otis Clifton II or maybe III has told that his grandfather, Joseph D. Sharp, operated the Red Mill grinding 'grist' for flour., in the **1920s**. He also tells that Mae Ritter Dorman; who at one time lived on the SE bank of the pond and Coolspring Creek, Old Mill Creek, whatever, let's say in the vicinity, with her husband, deceased, Albert Dorman. Mae was a Ritter, sister to long-time farmers, descendants of Frederick Ritter, here during the **1920s and 1930s**, and still around; was the last to operate the grist mill, I will say, one of the last.

At the start of WWII, in **1941**, there was an aircraft observation post located at Red Mill Pond, local Legionnaires from Diamond State Negro Post of Lewes were assigned to man it.

### Grist Mill Gone

**February 25, 1927**, the Red Mill grist mill, between Overbrook and Nassau, was destroyed by an early morning fire, a loss of \$15,000 partly covered by insurance. It is the property of Arthur Sharp of Nassau.

### Quakers

A Wilmington Morning News item of **October 13, 1930**, tells that a Quaker Meeting House, the only one in Sussex County existing at the time of the founding of the Cool Spring Presbyterian Church, stood one mile in a northeasterly direction on Cool Spring Creek facing what is now Red Mill Pond.

### Fish Report

The Wilmington News Journal, **August 9, 1952**, reported Red Mill Pond, one of the larger ponds in Delaware at 150 acres, has a water depth from 6 to 7 foot, has an abundant stock of pike and largemouth bass, Crappies too, sunfish bluegills, and numerous bullhead. Harold Shaffer operates a gas station and stores on the roadway over the dam, also rents small rowboats, has picnic tables and offers soft drinks and ice cream for fishermen. The pond is fished very lightly and has a considerable distance of shoreline for fishing.

**1959**, or thereabouts, The Cool Spring Power & Water Company created interest in view of that company's plan to acquire ponds for its future use as a water supply. John S Thatcher as principal owner, known as 'The Water King', squelched rumors that fishing was prohibited on Red Mill Pond and that fishing without charge is permitted.

## Selling Ponds

**1962, the January 27th**, Wilmington Morning News reported the Millsboro and Red Mill Ponds had been sold and the control of John S. Thatcher's, Cool Spring Power & Water Company, was acquired for \$50,000. H. Rodney Sharp, III, was now president of the new company. Other officers were Jesse Loven of Odessa and Thomas Burrough, also of Odessa and Mrs. Thatcher. Sharp said the deal also includes an option to purchase Wagamon's Pond at Milton.

## Rebuild and Restore

Another Wilmington News Journal article of **February 14, 1968**, by Dover Bureau Chief, Larry Martin, gives the account of a carpenter, nearing retirement age, John McVerry, a native of Pittsburgh living in Delaware for the past 30 years, who had dreams of building a water mill driven woodworking shop, leased the mill in late 1965, to expire in 1967, from Cool Spring Power and Water Company, owned by Norma Thatcher and her husband, John S. of Berlin, Maryland. Terms were that McVerry would not pay any money but devote his labor to the rebuilding of the waterwheel and machinery and restoring the building which had been vacant five years or more. This he did and spent seven months restoring the mill, machinery and shed. He built an undershot waterwheel which was running his woodworking machinery. He was in the process of connecting a stone burr wheel when his lease ran out. He had hopes of grinding grains and selling the product to the local markets. Since he lost the lease, he has removed his machinery and moved out of the one-room shed.

While in full bloom the operation McVerry did furniture repair and built dog houses. Plans were to build truck bodies, and have a roadside snack bar. The lease was not renewed as Jesse Loven, secretary-treasurer of Cool Spring Water & Power Company, announced the company had been put up for sale and needed to rid itself of long term leases. Also, McVerry had suffered physical damage from a fall when he slipped on ice and fell into the waterwheel, bringing his 'dream' to an end.

## Water King

In the Wilmington Morning News, **Thursday, January 24, 1974**, Keith C. Myers, Sussex Bureau wrote "John S. Thatcher, Delaware Water King, has said he will drain five prime fishing and recreational ponds in Sussex county if two area developers don't but them.

## Hudson, Thompson, and Thatcher

Joseph Hudson and Stanley Thompson of New Dimensions Inc., a Lewes realty agency, have a \$478,000 option to buy Red Mill Pond, three ponds in Milton, Wagamon's, Diamond and Lavinia, and Millsboro Pond. This option expires April 12, this year, and Thatcher says "the draining is no threat, it is a promise". "I will drain the ponds at high noon on April 13th, then I will plant wild rice, harvest it at \$8 per pound. Thatcher feels the 16-foot deep soil beneath the waters of the ponds is richer than the bottom of the Nile. Hudson & Thompson have said they intend to buy the ponds and sell water rights to property owners near the ponds.

Thatcher had purchased the ponds in **1958** and took the "water king" title since he owned more water than did the state.

Hudson & Thompson have said the main reason they will purchase is for long term investment of selling water to the growing towns and communities and it is possible some arrangements would be made to allow public fishing".

Hudson and Thompson bought the ponds from Thatcher in **1974**, says the main edition of the Wilmington Morning News on **Friday, June 6, 1975**.

**February 20, 1989**, Joseph Hudson obtained a permit to dredge 3106 cubic yards in Red Mill Pond at Overbrook Shores.

## Cleanup Efforts

At Lewes, a meeting was held at 7 pm **Wednesday, March 16, 1994**, for Red Mill cleanup efforts to be presented to local residents, Red Mill Pond Citizens Advisory Committee and state officials. The privately owned pond becomes overloaded with waste from a cattle feedlot upstream, the septic tanks of residential developments on its banks and the runoff from yards and fields near.

## Dam History

Wilmington News Journal, Monday, **October 27, 2008**, Molly Murray wrote: "Lewes Man Hopes To Rebuild Red Mill and Its History". During Colonial days a dam was built on Cool Spring Branch, northwest of Lewes, and Red Mill Pond formed. A grist mill ran on the power from the swift water and grain was brought by the local farms for grinding into flour and feed for their livestock.

Now today Craig Hudson hopes to recreate that early mill which sits on his family owned property on highway Delaware 1, the Ocean Highway. Problem is, no one is sure just what the first mill looked like. The building there now is a replacement and in poor repair. It is well over fifty years of age, but still a local landmark. During the deconstruction, he has run into red tape with variances', etc, of the state due to its location on a major highway. The only history of Red Mill he has comes from Hazel Brittingham. Lewes historian, who has told him Red Mill was burnt at least two times to ashes, one time in **1885**, that it was owned by Samuel Paynter, early Delaware Governor, who had Peter Parker run it for him. The second fire was in **1927**, it is told.

*The above are abstracts of Wilmington newspaper articles, some WWW internet data, gathered by Harrison Howeth of Lewes, Delaware, May 6, 2017.*

*This document will be an ongoing project with items inserted as they may be received in the future.*



I'm Harrison and this is a blog about 'local' history. I research topics through many means but mostly I find local newspaper articles from newspaperabstracts.com (<http://newspaperabstracts.com/>). Sometimes they are relative to something that is happening now. Sometimes it is just interesting and worth sharing.

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**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

**Today**

(All day)

**Sussex County Annual Food Drive**

(All day)

**LHS Virtual Christmas Tour of Lewes**

7:45 am to 8:15 am

**Walk Aerobics Class DVD Led**

8:00 am to 11:00 am

**Wood Carving Group**

8:00 am to 4:00 pm

**Fitness Room open**

8:00 am to 9:00 am

**Cardio Blast Class**

8:00 am to 4:00 pm

**Billiards**

8:00 am to 4:00 pm

**Lewes Senior Activity Center open**

9:00 am to 2:00 pm

**Tomorrow**

(All day)

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**Billiards**

8:00 am to 9:00 am

**Tai Chi for Beginners**

8:00 am to 4:00 pm

**Lewes Senior Activity Center open**

8:00 am to 4:00 pm

**Fitness Room open**

9:00 am to 2:00 pm

**Ceramics & other crafts**

9:00 am to 11:00 am



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