

**A
BRIEF HISTORY
OF THE
LANDIS MILL,
NEW BRITAIN, BUCKS COUNTY,
PENNSYLVANIA**

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NEW BRITAIN, PA
2012**

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE LANDIS MILL

The story of the Landis' mills begins in colonial times when Jonathan Mason purchased land and relocated to New Britain Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

JONATHAN MASON

David Stephens and Mary his wife sold twenty acres [actually 19.75 acres and 40 perches according to the deed] of land in New Britain Township to Jonathan Mason of Lower Dublin Township, Philadelphia County, a fuller. The price was £24.18.5. The deed was recorded 12 July 1759 in Deed Book 10, page 29. This twenty acre tract was part of a 220 acre property owned by Daniel Stephens in 1740.

Shortly after making the purchase, Mason built a stone home (c.1760) at what is now 100 Aarons Avenue. The home was repaired and expanded in 1830 according to some sources. Mason later constructed a large stone barn near his home. This barn is located at 115 Aarons Avenue and has been converted into a private residence. Since he was a fuller by trade, Mason also erected a fulling mill on Cooks Run creek near its confluence with the Neshaminy Creek. The fulling mill was a short distance from the Mason home. (According to an article written by Edward Mathews in 1882, the fulling mill was also a short distance northeast of the saw mill built by Peter Landis. This means the fulling mill was located between the saw mill and Mason's home.) Mason operated the mill throughout the 1770s, the 1780s and into the 1790s.

(Fulling is a process that increases the thickness and compactness of woven or knitted wool by subjecting it to moisture, heat, friction and pressure until shrinkage of 10% to 25% is achieved. The shrinkage produces a smooth, tightly finished fabric that is light, warm and relatively weather proof. The wool cloth is placed in troughs filled with hot water and fuller's earth, or other cleansing materials. The cloth is then pounded by paddles or stampers.)

The 1790 U. S. Census indicates the Jonathan Mason household consisted of one male under 16; two males 16 and over, and three females.

Jonathan Mason died 6 April 1793 at the age of 77. He was buried next to his wife in the cemetery of the New Britain Baptist Church. (Mary Mason, wife of Jonathan, died in 1786, age 70.)

Jonathan made his last will and testament on 17 February 1790. He left his son Samuel the fulling mill and all his land in New Britain Township. [Bucks County Will Book 5, page 333; Will #2469] Samuel Mason took title to the property and operated the mill for the rest of his life.

The federal Direct Tax of 1798 provides a glimpse of the Mason property. Samuel's 89 acres adjoined lands owned by Peter Haws, Benjamin Mathews and Moses Aaron. The family home was a one story "old" stone house, 48 feet by 20 feet. Adjoining the home was a one story, 16 feet by 16 feet "good stone stove room." There was a "good stone barn," 41 feet by 30 feet as well as a fulling mill on the property. There was no description of the fulling mill.

According to the 1800 U.S. Census, Samuel Mason lived in New Britain Township. Living in his household were one male, age 10-16; one male over 45 years; one female 16-25 and one female 26-34. The 1810 federal census indicates one male 10-15, one male 16-25, one male over 45 and one female over 45 years of age living in the Mason household. The 1820 census enumerator found two people in the Samuel Mason household; one male over 45 and one female over 45.

In 1813 Samuel Mason sold 103 acres and 151 perches to Benjamin Mathews, Senior. The deed was recorded 29 November 1815 in Deed Book 44, page 229.

Isaac Benner, a fuller from Lower Dublin Township in Philadelphia County, appears on the Bucks County tax rolls as early as 1814. As Samuel Mason was getting along in years, he probably hired Benner to help him operate his fulling mill. On 16 May 1815, Isaac Benner purchased one acre of land from Samuel Mason for \$133.33. This plot was at the intersection of the road leading to Doylestown and the road leading to Hilltown. [Bucks County Deed Book 49, page 488] Benner built a house near the New Britain crossroads according to a story related by Edward Mathews. This house was just a quarter of a mile from the mill, an easy walk for Benner. Benner had a devoted cat that followed him to and from the mill every day, just as a dog would. The cat lived to be nineteen years of age.

Later, after Mason sold the fulling mill to the Mathews brothers in 1824, Benner probably stayed on the job since Joseph Mathews had no experience operating a fulling mill.

Samuel Mason continued to operate the fulling mill until 1824. In that year he sold the 20 acres of his land that contained his home and the fulling mill, to Benjamin and Joseph Mathews. [Bucks County Deed Book, 68, page 532]

Samuel Mason, a veteran of the Revolutionary War, died 10 September 1827 at the age of 83. He was buried next to his parents in the New Britain Baptist Church cemetery. [Samuel's will was recorded in Bucks County Will Book 10, page 551; Will #5657] Samuel Mason appointed Benjamin Morris, Junior, and John Riale to be the executors of his estate. [Bucks County Deeds, Book 53, page 592]

Isaac Benner died 10 April 1832 at the age of 88 years, seven months. He was buried in the New Britain Baptist Church cemetery next to his second wife, Christianna. Today, their graves are unmarked.



The graves of Samuel Mason, left with marker and flag, and Jonathan Mason, center.

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JOSEPH MATHEWS

After taking possession of the Mason property in 1824, the Mathews brothers constructed a saw mill on their property. According to an article written by Edward Mathews in 1882 and published in the Doylestown Democrat, Benjamin farmed the land and Joseph built and operated a saw mill. The saw mill used the water from Cook's Run to power a fourteen foot overshot water wheel. The first year the saw mill appeared on the tax records was 1828. The saw mill had an assessed value of \$700, the same assessment as the fulling mill. Some sources state this was the first saw mill in Bucks County.

Sometime after their 1824 purchase, Joseph and Benjamin Mathews built a house near the saw mill. Joseph lived in this house until he retired from operating the saw mill about 1850. Joseph had but a short walk from his home to his saw mill. This fine house is located at 171 Aarons Avenue and is known today as the Groner house. The last owner, Miriam Groner, donated her home to the Borough of New Britain and is presently a rental property.

Isaac Benner died 10 April 1832 at the age of 88 years, seven months. With the death of Benner, Joseph Mathews decided to get out of the fulling business. He tore down the old fulling mill and erected a clover mill in its place. The last time the fulling mill appears in the tax records is 1831. The clover mill was in full operation and on the tax records in 1834. In 1835 the saw and clover mills had a combined assessed value of \$800. Joseph Mathews also owned 52 acres of land in New Britain Township with an assessed value of \$20 per acre. Just how successful the clover mill was is open to debate. The saw mill is always listed in the tax records, but the clover mill is missing from the records in many years.

The first mention of the Joseph Mathews' saw mill is found in the 1828 tax records. It is believed to be the oldest, if not the oldest, saw mill in Bucks County. The saw mill had an assessed value of \$700 as did the fulling mill. In 1840 the saw mill was valued at \$1,200.

By 1841 the clover mill is back on the tax records. According to Edward Mathews, the clover mill was abandoned about 1850 and Joseph Mathews, Senior, retired.

Probably due to failing health, Joseph Mathews, Senior, and Martha, his wife sold their property to their son, Joseph Mathews, Junior, in 1857. [Bucks County Deed Book 89, page 281.]

Joseph Mathews, Senior, died 12 August 1859 at the age of 70. He was buried in the cemetery of the New Britain Baptist Church. His wife Martha and daughter Miriam were later buried next to him.

ELIZABETH STEEVER

In 1858 Joseph Mathews, Junior, and Louise, his wife, sold nine acres of their land and the saw mill to Elizabeth Steever of Franconia Township, Montgomery County for \$3,250. [Bucks County Deed Book 102, page 572.] The nine acre plot was assessed for tax purposes at \$900 and the saw mill at \$200 for a total property value of \$1,100. [Bucks County Tax Records]

A description of the property from the 1 April 1858 Deed [Volume 102, page 572]

Beginning at a stone for a corner on the north west side of a public Road being also a corner of land belonging to the heirs of Benjamin Mathews deceased thence by the same north fifty two degrees and a half east twenty one perches and eight tenths to a corner thence by lands of Joseph Mathews Senr. South fifty degrees east sixty two perches to a corner in a line of John Kepharts land thence by the same south thirty eight degrees and a half west twenty nine perches & one tenth to a corner in the Middle of Neshaminy Creek thence by land of the heirs of said Benjamin Mathews deceased north thirty nine degrees and three quarters west twenty six perches to a corner in the aforesaid public road thence along the same south forty degrees east six tenths of a perch to a corner and north forty six degrees and a half west forty four perches to the place of Beginning. Containing nine acres and one hundred and twenty eight perches.

The next section of the deed transfer promised Elizabeth certain rights to her land.

And the Said Elizabeth Steever shall have and hold all that water running in a certain creek called Cooks run passing and running through the lands of the said Joseph Mathews Sen. And also all that mill dam and mill race or water course now made erected and dug on and passing through the land of the Said Joseph Mathews Sen. with full and free rights and privilege to lead and drain all the water out of said dam along said Mill Race for the use of said Saw Mill or for any other water machinery with full privilege for the occupier and possessor of the said above described premises their heirs and assigns and their workmen into and along the Banks of said Mill Dam and Race one perch in Breadth on each side thereof for the use of horses wagons carts for the purpose of cleaning repairing and draining the water aforesaid along said Mill race or water course at all times and seasons forever. Together also with the right and privilege of a cartway or private road through lands of the Said Joseph Mathews Sen. where or near where the same is at present located leading from the Alms House road to said Mill the same to be kept open at all times and seasons for the use of said Elizabeth Steever her heirs and assigns for the use and for the use of her and their Customers to said Mill. Being the same premises which Joseph Mathews Junior and Louisa M. his wife by their indenture Dated the first day of April 1858 Recorded at Doylestown in Deed Book No. 102, Page 572 for the consideration therein mentioned did grant and confirm unto the said Elizabeth Steever . . .

The cartway that provided access from "Alms House" Road to the mill later became Arons Avenue.

It appears that Henry Steever became the sawyer and operated the saw mill for Elizabeth. The 1858 Bucks County tax records list both Eliza and Henry separately as mill owners in New Britain Township. The 1860 U.S. census has a Hester Steever, age 37, living in Doylestown Township with a David Steever, age 13. Also living with them was Henry Steever, a 37 year old laborer. Perhaps Hester and Henry were related.

From an undated report in the Bucks County Intelligencer found in the Spruance Library:

Accident – On Monday of last week, Henry Steever of New Britain, had his arm broken and was otherwise injured while hauling logs. He was riding upon a log carriage, on his way to the saw mill, when a jolt threw him off. One of the wheels passed over his arm, crushing and breaking it and doing other injuries.

Perhaps this accident was so severe that it incapacitated Henry to the extent that he was not able to operate the saw mill for a time and he and Elizabeth decided to sell the mill. Henry Steever published this auction notice in the Bucks County Intelligencer on 15 November 1859:

PUBLIC SALE.
WILL be sold at Public Sale, on WEDNESDAY, the THIRTIETH day of NOVEMBER, 1859, a valuable SAWMILL and Lot of Land, of TEN ACRES, more or less, situated in New Britain township, Bucks county, one-fourth of a mile from the New Britain Station, three miles from Doylestown, and two from Whitehallville, bounded by lands of Joseph Mathews, John Kephart, and others. The mill is in good running order, with a fourteen-feet overshot wheel, which is supplied with water from the never-failing stream of Cook's Run. There is a building adjoining, in which any kind of machinery can be attached that is desired. There is also a two-story stone house, with two rooms on the first floor, three on the second, and large garret and dry cellar; a frame Barn, Hog Pen, Chicken House, and all other necessary outbuildings. A further description is deemed unnecessary, as any person wishing to view the premises will please call on the subscriber, residing thereon, where all information can be had.
ALBERT PHILLIPS, Auc'r. (Nov. 15.) H. STEEVER.

An interesting aspect of this notice is the listing of all the outbuildings and animals on the property.

If the property was in fact sold at auction, Peter S. Landis was the winning bidder and purchased it on 4 April 1860.

In 1863 Henry Steever was listed as a farmer in Doylestown Township. However, the 1870 federal census found Henry Steever living near Lumberville in Plumstead Township, Bucks County. He was a 48 year old sawyer who owned real estate worth \$3,000. In his household were Mary, age 36; William, age 18 and Nellie, age 3. (Henry had married Mary R. Evans in 1866 at St. John's Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. William was a probably a son by a previous wife. Henry also had a daughter, Salinda.) Henry Steever died in 1897.

PETER S. LANDIS

After just two years, 4 April 1860, Elizabeth Steever auctioned/sold her nine acre property to Peter Landis [Bucks County Deed Book 155, page 257.] The property was listed in the tax records in the name of Peter Landis. Peter, who was a carpenter by trade and the son of a miller/farmer, had a different concept for the property. The family name is spelled "Landes" in some records.

Peter Landis was the son of Henry and Margaret Landis of New Britain Township, Bucks County. The 1850 U.S. Census notes that Henry Landis was both a farmer and a miller who owned real estate worth \$8,000. Also living in the Henry Landis home were sons Levi, age 27, a miller, and Jacob, age 19, a farmer, both brothers of Peter. This arrangement seems to follow the pattern, like the Mathews' brothers, where one son was a miller and the other was a farmer. Newly married son Peter Landis and his wife Sarah Ann were living in Warrington Township. Peter was a carpenter.

There were some conditions attached to the 4 April 1860 Deed [Volume 155, page 257] that are almost identical to the previous deed Eliza Steever received:

Containing nine acres and one hundred and twenty eight perches and the Said Peter Landis Shall have and hold all that water running in a certain creek called Cooks Run grading and

mill race or water course now made erected and dug on and passing through the land of the Said Joseph Mathews Sen. with full and free rights and privilege to lead and Drain all the water out of Said Dam along said mill race for the use of said saw mill or for any other water machinery with full privilege for the occupier and possessor of said above described premises their heirs and assigns and their workmen into and along the banks of Said mill dam and Race one perch in breadth on each side thereof for the use of horses wagons carts for the purpose of cleaning repairing and Draining the course aforesaid along said mill race or water courses at all times and seasons forever. Together also with the right and privilege of a cartway or private road through lands of the Said Joseph Mathews Sen. ? or near where the same is at present located leading from the Almshouse road to Said mill the same to be kept open at all times and Seasons for the use of Said Peter Landis his heirs and assigns for the use and for the use of his and their Customers of the Said mill. Being the same premises which Joseph Mathews Junior and Louisa M. his wife by their indenture Dated the first day of April 1858 Recorded at Doylestown in Deed Book No. 102, Page 572 for the consideration therein mentioned did grant and confirm unto the said Elizabeth Steever ...

The 1860 U. S. Census lists Peter Landis, age 34, as a journeyman carpenter. [The census was taken before Peter purchased the mill property.] Peter owned real estate worth \$4,000 and had a personal estate of \$200. Living in his household were his wife Sarah Ann, 31; daughters Emma M., 8 and Sarah M., 3, son Henry E., 7 and George G. Detwiler, 18, a wheelwright apprentice. The Bucks County tax records for 1860 note that Peter still owned the saw mill valued at \$200 and nine acres of land valued at \$900. While Peter and his family lived in the Groner house [171 Aarons Avenue today], the 1860 Bucks County tax records also note that the saw mill was occupied by Adam Cope. [The 1860 U.S. Census lists Adam Cope, age 50 as a farmer. He and his family lived in New Britain Township.]

A 20 August 1861 Bucks County Intelligencer article reported that "Peter Landis had demolished his old saw mill near New Britain, which he lately purchased, and is building it anew." Then, on 8 August 1865 the Intelligencer reported "Peter Landis is erecting a new chopping mill adjoining his saw mill on Cook's Run, near New Britain station. He intends having it ready to go into operation by autumn." This new mill would become known in the area as the Landis Mill.

Some advertisements in the Bucks County Intelligencer:

Corn meal, cake meal and wheat bran constantly
on hand. Also feed ground at the shortest notice,
at my mill in New Britain 16 Oct. 1866 Peter Landis

Corn Wanted
For which the highest market price will be paid,
At Peter Landes' Mill at New Britain
Jan. 31 3tp Peter Landes

In 1870 Peter Landis was listed in the federal census as a miller. He owned real estate worth \$5,000 and had a personal estate of \$400 according to the census enumerator. Living with the Peter

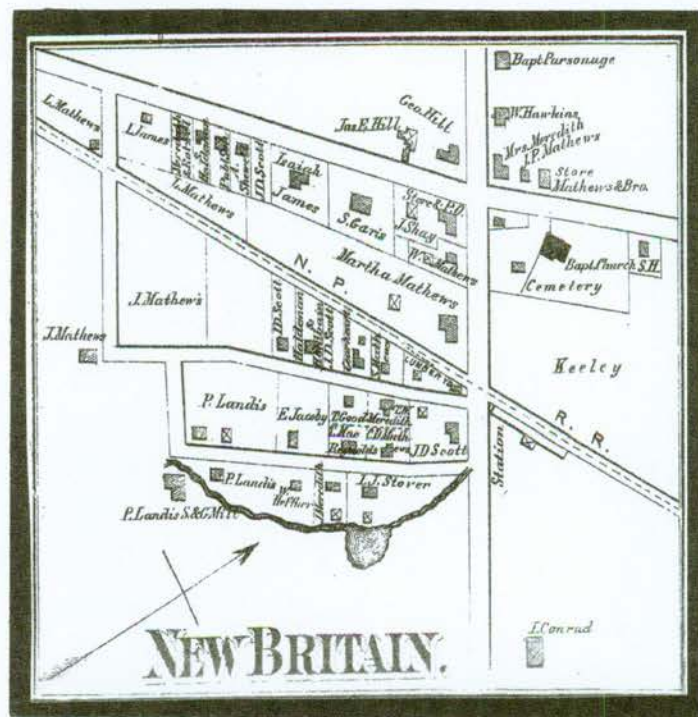
Landis family was Levi Landis, a brother of Peter. Levi was 47 years old and a miller. Levi had a personal estate of \$2,000 but owned no real estate.

An article in the Bucks County Intelligencer on 8 March 1870:

Mills on the Upper Neshaminy - Peter Landis is about erecting a new grist mill on Cook's Run, near New Britain village, at the point where the latter stream falls into the Neshaminy. It is to be three stories in height and fifty feet square. It will be built adjoining the saw and chopping mills, so that all kinds of grain and feeds can be ground under the same roof, as well as sawing lumber. Arrangements will be made for the introduction of steam to run the mill. This improvement will make no less than five merchant mills in that vicinity, and located within a circuit of less than two miles, on the waters of the Neshaminy or near the junction of its immediate branches. . . .

In 1877 Peter and Sarah Ann Landis purchased three acres of land next to the lands owned by Levi Landis and Jacob Landis, brothers of Peter. [Bucks County Deed Book 249, page 172.] This three acre plot had been purchased by Sarah Landis from Benjamin and Mary Ann Schuyler, but the transaction was never recorded. It only came to light in this land deal. [Sarah Ann was probably adding her husband to the deed.]

This map of New Britain in the 1876 Bucks County atlas published by J.D. Scott in Philadelphia clearly shows the location of the property of Peter Landis, including his mills.



Evidence indicates Peter Landis gave up the milling business by 1880. In that year he is listed in the federal census as a huckster in New Britain Township, Bucks County. His two brothers, Levi S. and Jacob, are listed as living next door to Peter and Sarah Ann according to the U.S. Census record. Levi S. was a miller and Jacob was a farmer.

Peter Swartz Landis died 5 March 1898 in Philadelphia at the age of 73 years, one month

cemetery, Chalfont. [Peter was born 25 January 1825 in New Britain Township.] His wife, Sarah Ann Landis, who was born 19 October 1828, died 8 January 1910 at the home of her daughter in Philadelphia. She was buried next to her husband.



LEVI S. AND JACOB LANDIS

Peter and Sarah Ann Landis transferred three acres of their land to Levi and Jacob Landis on 30 July 1888 for \$200. [Bucks County Deed Book 249, page 172] Levi continued to operate the mill while Jacob farmed.

A short report in the Doylestown Intelligencer, 26 March 1890: "Jacob Landis of New Britain is confined to the house by a severe attack of pneumonia, and his brother Levi, residing with him is very much indisposed by rheumatism."

Levi S. Landis died 1 August 1891 at the age of 67 years, two months and sixteen days. He was buried in the cemetery at the Line Lexington Mennonite Church next to his parents. [Levi was born 15 August 1822.]

Levi's share of the land he owned jointly with his brother Jacob was transferred in its entirety to Jacob by order of the Bucks County Clerk of the Orphans' Court on 18 July 1893. [Bucks County Deed Book 259, page 255.]

Jacob Landis continued to live in New Britain Township in 1900 when the census enumerator came around. He was seventy years old, (born in March 1830) was single and had no occupation. Living with him was Lydia A. Halde[r]man, age 49. Lydia was his unmarried niece. Her mother, Eliza Landis Haldeman, was a sister of Levi, Jacob and Peter.

In 1905 Jacob Landis sold four acres and 22 perches of his land to Frank B. Fretz for \$900. [Bucks County Deed Book 322, page 380]

Jacob Landis died 26 March 1907. He was buried in the cemetery at St. James Lutheran Church in Chalfont. [Row 5] Jacob Hagerty, executor of the last will and testament of Jacob, late of New Britain Township, sold 22 acres and 115 perches of land owned by Jacob Landis to H. Elwood Haldeman on 20 March 1908. [Bucks County Deed Book 339, page 321.] The transfer does not mention the mill.

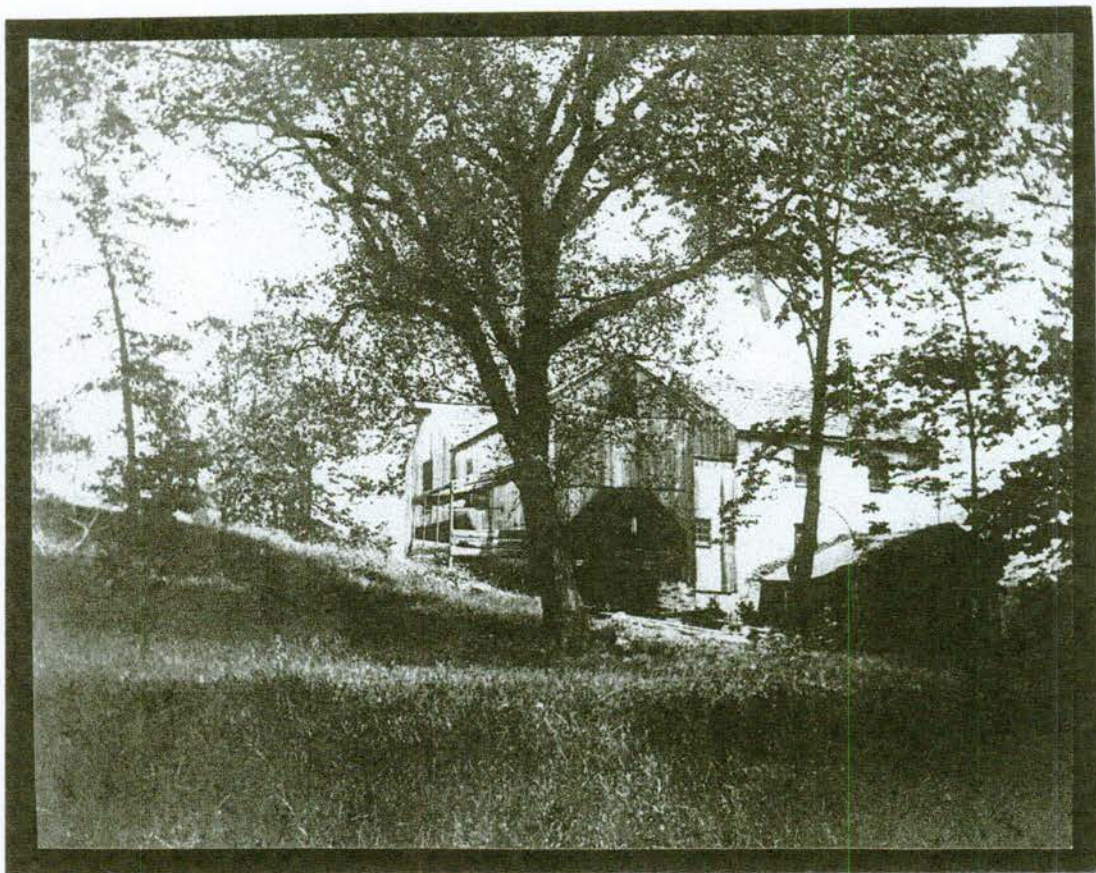
[illegible]

Precisely when the Landis Mill finally ended operation is not known at this time.

Tom Price, who lives on Aarons Avenue one house from South Tamenend Avenue, said the mill race ran through his yard. Exactly where the race started is not known, but it must have run along present day Aarons Avenue.

Ken Miller informed Peter LaMontagne the swale nearest his drive way just off Aarons Avenue and across from the Groner House, is part of the mill race and the mill pond. The tail end of the mill race down to Cook's Creek and the Neshaminy Creek is still visible, but the last twenty feet or so was filled in by the sewer line construction.

The building in this old photograph is supposedly the Landis Mill, but that can not be confirmed at this time.



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"Inventory of Mill Structures in Bucks County" File
"Landis Family" File
"New Britain Township" Vertical File.

APPENDIX

1850 U.S. CENSUS

MANUFACTURES SCHEDULE

NEW BRITAIN TOWNSHIP, BUCKS COUNTY, PA

Name: Joseph Matthew

Name of Business: S[aw]. Miller

Capital Invested in Real and Personal Estate in the Business: \$500

Raw Materials Used: Timber – Logs Value: \$400

Kind of motive power, machinery, structure or Resource: Water power – 1 Saw

Average number of hands employed: 1

Average monthly cost of male labor: \$16

Annual product: Lumber Value \$700

Other millers listed in New Britain Township in 1850:

Henry Landis

Martin Echart

Samuel Weatheral

Martin Tyson

Christian Moyer

Silas Friess

We were unable to find any millers listed in the **1860 Non-population schedule** for New Britain Township. Hard to believe.

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1880 U.S. CENSUS

SPECIAL SCHEDULES of MANUFACTURES - Nos. 7 and 8.

NEW BRITAIN TOWNSHIP, BUCKS COUNTY, PA

During the twelve months beginning June 1, 1879, and ending May 31, 1880,
as enumerated by me; Simon Matthews

FLOUR AND GRIST MILLS

Name of Corporation, Company, or Individual Producing to the Value of \$500 annually:

Levi Landis

Capital Invested in the Business: \$3,500 [Smallest amount of the 5 mills in New Britain Township]

Greatest number of hands employed at any one time during the year: 2

Number of hours in the ordinary day of labor: May to November: 8; November to May: 12

Average day's wages for a skilled mechanic: \$2; Average day's wages for an ordinary laborer: \$1

Total amount paid in wages during the year: \$100

Months of operation on full time: 12

Number of runs of stone: 2

Estimated maximum capacity per day, in bushels: 75

Do you do custom work or only for the market? Customer

Is there an elevator connected your establishment? (Blank)

Power used in Manufacture:

On what river or stream: Cook's run

Height of fall, in feet: 14

Wheels: 1 Turbine Breadth, in feet: 3 Horsepower: 15

Steam power: Number of boilers: 1 Number of engines: 1 Horsepower: 25

Number of bushels of wheat: 500 Value: \$650

Number of bushels of other grain: 2,000 Value: \$1,000

Value of mill supplies: \$100

Total value of all materials: \$1,750

Number of barrels of wheat flour: 100

Number of pounds of corn meal: 90,000

Number of pounds of feed: 20,000

Total Value of all products: \$1,969

Other mill owners in New Britain Township in 1880:

A. S. Godschalk - capital invested: \$12,000

Philip Thierolf - capital invested; \$ 5,000

Frances Hartzel - capital invested: \$ 15,000

Philip Grove - capital invested: \$ 14,000

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