

Remembering the Mill That Built Millville

By Macey Wommer

From grinding grain to gathering neighbors, the Millville Grist Mill was more than just a building. It was the heart of community life.

The Millville Grist Mill was first constructed in 1785 or 1786 by John Eves, an Irish Quaker and the first settler in what is now Columbia County. After arriving in America, Eves secured 1,200 acres in the Fishing Creek Valley, which would grow to include Millville, Madison, and Greenwood Township. Though Eves temporarily abandoned the property during the Revolutionary War due to fears of attacks and suspicion toward pacifist Quakers, he and his family returned in 1785 to resume work, which included the construction of the mill.

Over the next two centuries, the mill changed hands, growing and evolving with each generation. John's son Thomas rebuilt the mill in 1830 and sold it to David Masters in 1834. After a fire in 1849 and its reconstruction on a larger scale in 1852, ownership passed through prominent local families—Masters, Betz, Heacock, McHenry, Shoemaker, Reece, and Greenly—each contributing to its expansion and modernization.

In the early 20th century, it became the first mill in the county powered by steam, diesel, and electricity. The mill was more than just a place of industry, however. From 1809 to 1825, it served as the first site of Methodist worship in the Quaker-dominated area, creating ties beyond economic needs. With improved roads and the arrival of the railroad in 1887, the mill was thriving and served hundreds of local farmers and families, and acted as a point of contact for members of the community and beyond.

At its peak, the mill produced up to 800,000 pounds of wheat flour and 700,000 pounds of buckwheat annually and shipped its flour, especially buckwheat, to butchers in Southeastern Pennsylvania for making scrapple. But times changed. By the 1960s, new farming techniques and centralized grain processing had reduced the need for local mills. The Millville mill, once serving 500 to 600 customers per year, had only 150 customers, and on April 1, 1966, operations ceased.

The property was sold to the neighboring Girton Manufacturing Company for its water rights. The building lived other lives in its final decades, housing a pizzeria, arcade, and video store, until it was destroyed by fire again on February 23, 1995. The Girton family chose not to rebuild, instead leaving the foundations exposed as a reminder of the mill's and the town's legacy.

The Millville Grist Mill was not just a mill. It was the first non-residential building built by the county's first settler, a place of community, a marker of development, and a lifeline for the local economy. Its history reflects not only the story of a town, but the resilience and adaptability of rural industry in America. From 1785 to 1966, the mill shaped, and was shaped by, Millville itself.

The mill foundations are viewable to the public at 160 W. Main Street, Millville, PA 17846.



*The Millville Mill, located
right on the edge of Little
Fishing Creek, c.1940*