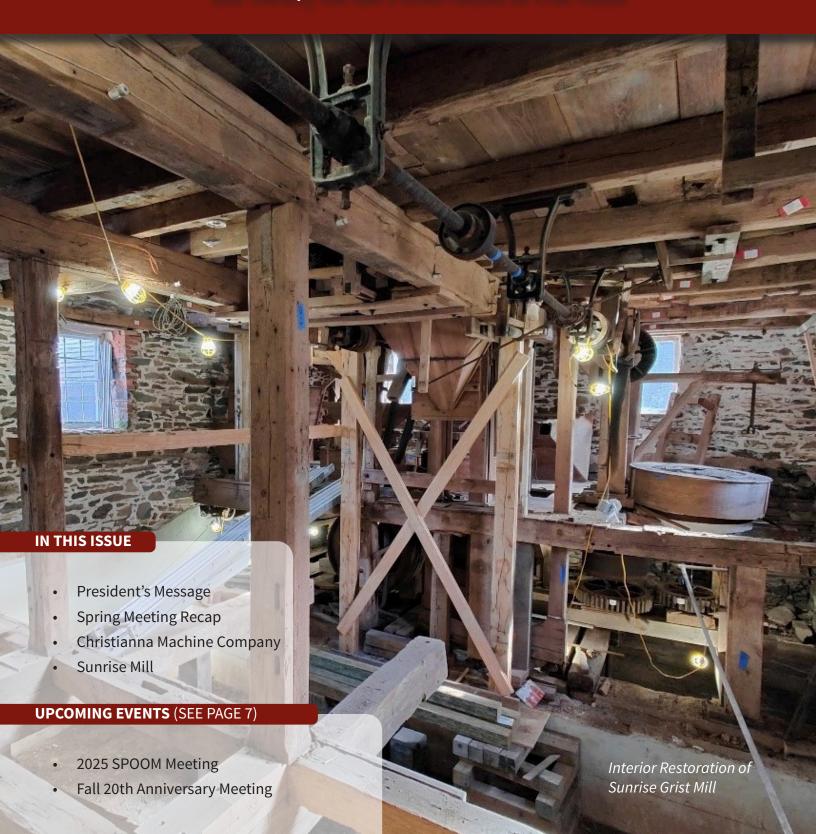


SPOOM

Semiannual Newsletter

> Spring 2025 Edition

Mid-Atlantic Chapter
The Society for the Preservation of Old Mills



SPOOM-MA Chapter

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President's Message May 2025

The Spring 2025 Mid-Atlantic meeting and tours seemed to be enjoyed by everyone who was on board, and I do mean on board (a bus), because it was the first time that we had hired one for a long time. That practice went away after 2019 with the pandemic. The 2 ½ day gathering was particularly rewarding for me because I had planned this trip around Chester County, PA (my adopted home for the past 20 years) for May of 2020. I conceived of it at the time because I had developed a Power Point slide show about the mills of the Delaware River and Brandywine Creek in this area which I had presented to a few local historical societies. Mills are a historic specialty building that many people, not just Spoomers, seem drawn to. Similarly, many people are interested

in visiting covered bridges, and a covered bridge was included in this trip.

So, before the COVID travel interlude, this trip was planned, with hotel and mill sites arranged, bus contacted, and meal destinations selected in early 2020, when on March 16, Pennsylvania shut down due to the pandemic. I recall returning from a meeting on Friday March the 13th, on the PA Turnpike where an electronic sign said, "Governor's Order, all Rest Stops Closed Until Further Notice". By the following Monday, that was true of most or all gathering sites across Pennsylvania and the U.S. I suspect many of us remember where we were when we first heard that a global pandemic was "in the air". The SPOOM-MA Board

tried to revive my trip in the Fall of 2020, but the vaccinations were not commonly available yet so we decided to postpone for what turned out to be a 2 ½ year hiatus. So, for me the successful execution of this tour of Chester County, PA mills and other historic sites, was particularly rewarding and satisfying. I'm glad that it worked out and was enjoyed by all.

Thanks,

Daniel T. Campbell

—Dan Campbell





Spring 2025 Meeting Recap

THURSDAY EVENING MEET AND GREET AT THE POUR HOUSE

(116 Pottstown Pike, Exton PA)

Early arrivals gathered in this artsy tavern space for nourishment, networking with fellow mill aficionados, and a math lesson. Ever wonder why restaurants require one check for groups over ten? At least here, orders taken on computer tablets (instead of waitress pads) can't sort out additions of drinks or desserts after the initial order is placed. So, each of us tallied our share, with an additional 1.26 % of the cost to cover PA tax and gratuity. The money in the pot more than covered the total bill, so we escaped without incident.

FRENCH CREEK HERITAGE PARK

(1158 Rapps Dam Rd, Phoenixville PA)

A gunpowder works was commissioned by George Washington to be established on French Creek in Southeastern Pennsylvania in East Pikeland Township. The dam, millrace, and mills were quickly constructed and started producing gunpowder for the Continental Army in June 1776, employing 50 people or more.

Gunpowder is made from saltpeter (potassium nitrate), sulfur, and charcoal. The site consisted of a stamping mill for grinding the dry constituents into a fine powder and mixing the dampened ingredients. The ingredients were dampened for mixing to reduce the chance of explosion. After





stamping and mixing, the graining mill sorted the gunpowder into different sizes.

The powder was then tumbled on a barrel rounding the granular edges, increasing stability of the powder.

The damp powder finally went to one of the four drying houses, or was put on racks outside in the sun to dry. The final stage was packing

the powder into kegs. Other buildings on the site included a saltpeter house, a powder magazine, and the superintendent's house.

September 12, 1777 marked the end of production at the gunpowder works. After the major defeat at the Battle of Brandywine, Washington ordered the powder, guns, and supplies to be moved to other locations "without one instant's delay". Ten days later, on September 22, 1777, a raiding party of Hessian troops destroyed the machinery and burned all the buildings. The Continental Powder Works operated for 15 months.

The area remained an important industrial and agricultural site. In 1792 Casper Snyder Jr. purchased the area including the mill site and started farming the land. Later he built a gristmill, using the same dam and millrace. The stone building on the site was built by Henry and Thomas Snyder, Casper's sons, in 1830, as an oil mill to press flaxseed into linseed oil. Linseed oil production for oil based paints was a very

profitable venture in the early 1800s. They expanded their milling operations to include a gristmill, a sawmill, a spoke mill (wagon wheel spokes), and a clover mill. Clover mills removed the clover seeds from the hull and cleaned the seeds.

The power for these mills was supplied from the same dam millrace on French Creek.

In 1866 a covered bridge was built across French Creek near the oil mill. In 1871 the Pickering Valley Railroad was built through the powder mill site providing the valley with valuable rail transportation.

George W. Rapp was hired as an employee at the Snyder gristmill in 1867. He became the assistant miller, and in 1878 he bought the mill. The Rapp family continued operating the gristmill, modernizing it to roller mills. The mill sold flour under the names of Gold Medal Flour and Rapp's Mill Flour. They also sold 'Lay or Bust' chicken feed.

In 1920 the gristmill was sold to Henry Supoit who continued milling grist until 1935, when the mill burned to the ground ending 150 years of grinding grist.

Today the French Creek Heritage Park is maintained by the East Pikeland Township.

Ivins and JoAnn Smith



CHARLESTOWN VILLAGE HISTORIC DISTRICT

(Southwest of Phoenixville on Charlestown Road)

Charlestown Textile Mill Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Charlestown Mill dates to 1724 when Job Harvey purchased 540 acres from Samuel Carpenter and built and began operating a woolen mill on the Pickering Creek.

The bus let us out along the road at the top of a steep driveway. We hiked the short distance down to the Charlestown Mill, where we were met by millwright Rick Frunzi, who explained the recent restoration process that had been designed by



historical architect Dale Frens. 25 years ago, the old mill was not much more than a pile of stones and old timbers and had been seriously considered for demolition. But, thanks to the generosity of the Bartschi Foundation, the mill was donated to the Charlestown township in 2003. Using grant monies from The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and Chester County Conference & Visitors Bureau, restoration began the next year with masonry work, followed by a new roof, and then 28 windows and a few doors.

The interior restoration is unique in that the entire center part of the second and third floors are left wide open so that the visitor can easily see how power was transmitted by line-shafts from the large turbine in the basement, up to the ground level and second floor and then horizontally to the various machines. What an excellent idea! While we were there, all the shafts, pulleys and belts were operating, thanks to a small, hidden electric motor. Signs spaced along the sturdy first floor railing explain the various milestones in the mill's history. Across the driveway, where the miller's house once stood, is a very nice patio surrounded by a short stone wall, perfect for sitting. The whole thing is very impressive and serves an excellent example of what can be done to preserve an old mill. Following our lunch break, we visited our second Charlestown Heritage Village site.



Thomas Mill and Miller's House Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Thomas Mill is located next to a shopping center, along the busy West Lincoln Hwy., in downtown Exton, PA. The mill was built in 1744 under the supervision of Richard Thomas II and is said to be "one of the oldest and most significant historic structures in the township." Exterior conservation was completed in 2003, including metal roofing, but nothing has been done on the inside, which is closed to the public. Our first impressions were of the very unusual biaxially tapered, side-lapped wooden shingles.

Under a shed roof at the back of the mill is an iron-framed, back-shot waterwheel about 14 feet in diameter and 4 feet wide. It was originally fed by a flume from a dirt headrace, but a cast iron pipe was installed under the highway in 1886. When the mill ceased operations, as late as 1957, a Model T engine was powering a cider press.

West Whiteland Township, please see to it that this historic mill restoration is completed!

Adjacent to the mill is a federal style miller's house that appears to be in excellent condition, although we couldn't see the inside. It is unclear exactly which of the Thomas' built the house and when, although from the architectural style it was likely built by Templin Thomas after 1886.

Steve Childershttps://charlestown.pa.us/historical.aspx



CHARLESTOWN PARK LUNCH AND BOARD MEETING

(100 Academic Way, Phoenixville PA)

Charlestown Park borders Valley Forge University on land that was the Valley Forge Army Hospital. A meandering bus ride through the University Campus brought us to our reserved pavilion where box lunches from Feeding Frenzy Catering in Exton awaited us. Our spring board meeting was held immediately following lunch.

SPRING BUSINESS MEETING HIGHLIGHTS

Elections will take place at the Fall Meeting. Currently vice president and secretary positions are vacant. Terms for the treasurer and two board positions expire this year. Openings exist for the event planning committee and newsletter content editor.

The 2025 SPOOM Meeting will be held September 18-20 at Monticello, Kentucky.

Our Fall 20th anniversary Meeting will be hosted by Union Mills MD, where the chapter originated. The dates are October 9 to 11. Details are incomplete, but tentatively call for an Anniversary Banquet on Thursday, tours on Friday, and an Information Fair on Saturday. A Thursday pre-event Miller Training is also being considered.

Full minutes and finance reports for board and membership meetings are posted on the Chapter Activity page of www.spoommidatlantic.org.



NATIONAL IRON & STEEL HERITAGE MUSEUM

(500 First Avenue, Coatesville PA)

We started our tour at The National Iron and Steel Museum with a short video of the history of the Luken Steel Company. Coatesville is home to the longest continuously running iron and steel mill in the United States. The site became an iron works in 1810 when the owners, Issac Pennock and Jesse Kersey, converted a water powered sawmill on the Coates' farm to roll iron plates. This new venture was called the Brandywine Iron Works & Nail Factory. The rolls were 16 inches in diameter and could roll 4 foot rolls.

Rebecca, Issac Pennock's daughter, married Dr. Charles Lukens, a physician from Philadelphia who left his practice for the iron business. Under his leadership, the mill became the first one to successfully roll boilerplate in America. Following his sudden death, Rebecca took over management of the mill despite the challenges of heavy business debt, much needed repairs on the farm, and raising her young children. Over time, Rebecca established herself as a prominent ironmaster, efficient business manager, and America's first female industrialist. In 1850 her son-in-law, Dr. Charles Huston, took over when she retired. A new steam powered mill was built in 1870 to produce wider and longer rolls. In 1890 a new mill was built that could roll 120 inch long rolls. It was powered by steam and was known as Lukens Iron and Steel Company, marking the transition from iron to steel.

Our first stop was the Steelworkers Memorial display where employees were recognized for their military service. Also, Lukens supplied some of the steel for the World Trade Center and some



of the destroyed structures dubbed "World Trade Center Trees" were returned to museum to be incorporated into a display.

The next stop was the building where the steel was rolled into 120 inch long plates to be used in boilers and ships. The equipment has been removed and the plan is to renovate the space for future displays. This location started out as an open hearth furnace but later became an electric furnace.

Our last stop was the motor house where generators provided the electricity to melt the ingredients of steel for fabrication in the steel plant next door. In the photo, the generators, powered by an electric motor, are on the right; switchgear is on the left. There is a display area and storage area for items that will be incorporated when the building that originally housed the 120 inch roller is renovated.

— Bob McLaughlin https://steelmuseum.org/

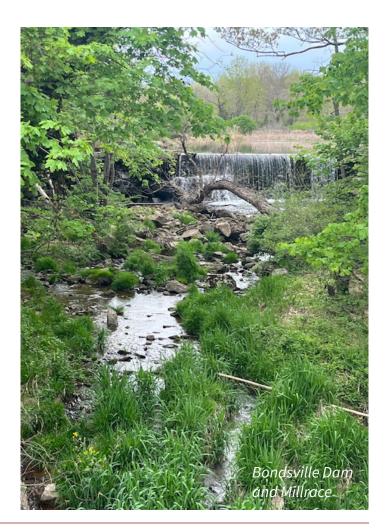
BONDSVILLE MILL AND HISTORIC DISTRICT

(1647 Bondsville Rd, Downingtown PA)

Bondsville Mill, on Beaver Creek, was our last stop on Friday, April 25. As we departed the bus, we noticed these grounds were the remains of an industrial site. A sign near the entrance documents its transition from a water-powered Grist Mill built by Jeremiah Piersoll in 1762 to a commercial woolen mill in the 1800s.



We were met by Jim Buczala who introduced us to volunteers Rocky, Carl and Arne, and then led into the old Spinning Room, now the Nature Center. Jim presented a comprehensive history of the site and displayed fabrics and artifacts from the mill. Of special interest was the Hexamer Insurance Map of 1889 which contained excellent details of the property at that time.



In 1842, Abraham Bond opened the Bond Woolen Factory, producing Kentucky blue jeans, and established the factory village of Bondsville. During the Civil War, uniforms for Union soldiers were produced here. By 1870 steam power (18 hp) was added to water power (16 hp). In 1927, Collins & Aikman Corporation purchased the property and produced automobile upholstery cloth, supplying Fisher Body Works.

During WWII the mill devoted much of its production to materials needed by the armed forces, including fabric for Air Force jacket lining. After the war, the mill produced men's and women's wear fabrics, as well as their Candalon brand of woven nylon used in automobile upholstery.



In the 1960s the mill fell into disrepair and some of the buildings collapsed. East Brandywine Township acquired the property in 2004 and has been cleaning up the property and building hiking trails and picnic areas while stabilizing the buildings.

Restoration of the three story Building C which housed the waterwheel and finishing room on the first floor, the carding room on the second floor, and the weaving room on the third floor is a work in progress. The attic was used as the wool and shoddy storeroom. Today, the ground floor is used as a woodworking shop.

At the southeast end of the complex was the weaving room in 1889, which today looks like a storage building. A large separate one story building containing the wool picker, rag picker &

spreader and the carding in 1889 has been removed and today is the "Culp Clearing Garden", which was dedicated within the last year. David L. Culp is a neighbor and a well-known gardener. He has written several books and was a keynote speaker at a garden conference we attended.

The historic district complex still contains the worker's housing, a school house and general store/post office across the street. These building are now rented. Also across the creek is the memorial for over 100 WWII Collins & Aikman Corporation employees who served and 4 employees who died during the war. The memorial was installed in November 1945.

This mill checked many 'boxes' for us – babbling brook, an intact dam, woolen mill, trails, gardens, wide variety of different textiles, historical signage, butterfly habitat, hives of bees, arboretum, community involvement - definitely worth revisiting on our next trip to the area.

– Karen and Chas Wagner www.bondsvillemillpark.org



MILLERS DEMONSTRATE RESILIENCE AT ANSELMA

(1730 Conestoga Road, Chester Springs PA)

SPOOM-MA members got much more than a grinding demonstration at their recent visit to the historic Mill at Anselma, founded in 1747. On the overcast and somewhat rainy day, millers Dave Rollenhagen, Don Luce, and Paul Hamill were unpleasantly surprised when the mill stones stopped



shortly after starting to grind. Like generations of millers before them, they had no option but to use their understanding of the possible causes of jams, the way product moves through the mill, and how the high humidity might affect the corn meal to identify the problem and solve it. After ruling out some mechanical blockages, the team decided to try clearing the meal from the space between the stones and the hoop. By disassembling the stone furniture and lifting off the hoop, the meal could be whisked off the edges of the stones and then swept off the floor.

After reassembling the furniture, the millers once again opened the gate to let water power the mill wheel and slowly the gears again sprung to life. As they added corn back into the hopper, visitors soon witnessed the resulting meal issuing from the spout and enjoyed the spin of the gears and turning drive shafts. It was a realistic demonstration of what it was like to actually be a miller when, at any time, you might be called on to use problem-solving skills and mechanical aptitude



to deal with unexpected issues in your mill.

Meanwhile, in the miller's house (built in 1873), volunteer Morris Farnum was welcoming visitors, inviting them to see what life was like in the home, and sharing many historical details about the mill, the people who owned and ran it, and how it served the local community over its long history. Interestingly, the Post Office was located in the lean-to addition to the house.

Those curious enough to brave the intermittent showers also enjoyed a walk to see the pond and head and tail races. The right of way that was once the Pickering Valley Railroad can still clearly be seen in a cut right behind the house.

Many thanks to all the volunteers at the Mill at Anselma for providing us with such an interesting visit to their historically accurate grist mill.

— Jean Sansonetti https://anselmamill.org/



SCHUYLKILL RIVER HERITAGE CENTER

(2 N Main Street, Phoenixville PA)

On the concluding Saturday of our Spring 2025 meeting, we visited the town of Phoenixville, PA, site of the Schuylkill River Heritage Center. In the late 19th to the 20th centuries, Phoenixville was a thriving iron and steel producing town and the Phoenix Iron Company foundry was the center of that activity and employment. But by 1987, the foundry closed and most of the buildings were demolished. By the 1990's only the foundry building and the former bridge company building remained.

The 1882 stone and brick foundry was known for production of the "Phoenix Column" a round cast iron column that was pieced together from 4 quarterly round sections or 6 hexagonally round sections, riveted together at their seams. These were used to support several types of structures, especially truss bridges, but are also used to support several other historic buildings. There is a Phoenix Column truss bridge, which still stands on the site, for pedestrian crossing of the French Creek. The courtyard contains "Phoenix Columns" of various sizes, salvaged from multiple buildings around the country.

Battered by weather and time, the foundry was filled with 100 years' worth of trash and debris. The Phoenixville Area Economic Development



Corporation (PAEDCO) undertook the challenge to rescue this iconic survivor. Preservation PA named the Foundry Building as one of Pennsylvania's nine most endangered buildings, and former Governor Ridge named the foundry Building as the place where the industrial legacy of the Schuylkill River would be told.

The Chester County Commissioners gave PAEDCO the grant funding to purchase the 14,000 sq. ft. building so that It could be restored and adaptively reused to become a northern Chester County gateway for visitors and a new venue would be installed in the building that would create jobs to support Phoenixville's urban revitalization.

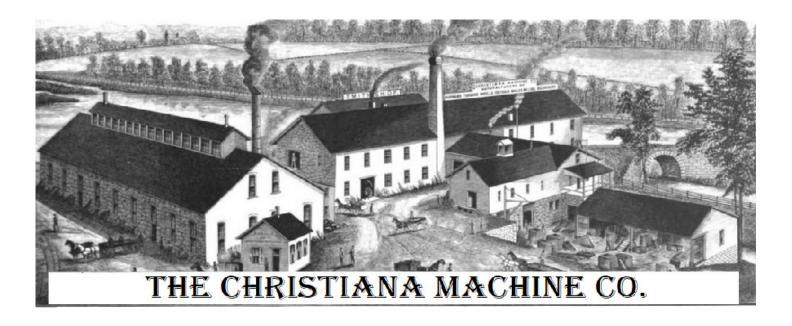
Over 5.2 million dollars was raised by PAEDCO to achieve this goal. The Schuylkill River Heritage Center has become a unique, interpretive place to experience the pieces of the past that give everyone a better understanding of Phoenixville's Iron and Steel legacy and its place in the Schuylkill River's History.

In fact, we had to schedule our visit around a local high school's event, which used the building for their Senior Prom, a few days before our visit. We were greeted and given a tour by Board member Barbara Cohen, President, who shared her detailed knowledge of the building and the

restoration project, because she had been personally involved. It is truly a Phoenix that has been restored from the ashes and SPOOM-MA is grateful for having it shared with us.

— Dan Campbell https://www.phoenixvillefoundry.org/

NOTE: TWO ADDITIONAL ARTICLES WRITTEN BY ATTENDEES BUT NOT PART OF OUR SPRING EVENT:



Christianna Machine Company

In the early days of hydropower, the industrial marketplace was saturated with ads for water-powered turbines. Publications dedicated to power generation, textiles, farming, and milling were graced with beautifully drawn ads, with each different manufacturer claiming to have the best turbine on the market, and the Christianna Machine Company was no exception.

The Christianna Machine Co. operated under various names and owners during its operations and evolution as a manufacturer. Beginning formally in 1833, a foundry was erected in the small town of Christianna, PA, the vision of local resident William Noble. Noble's foundry made an array of farm and industrial cast components to support local industries. This enterprise was abandoned by 1844 but reopened in 1846 under new ownership. Over the next 17 years, the facility would continue to operate while changing ownership an

additional 5 times before Issac Broomell and his son Isac reopened the foundry in 1864. The now prosperous foundry once again manufactured an array of tooling, castings, gearing, shafts, and farm implements. In 1868, arrangements were made with the well-established turbine manufacturer N.F. Burnham of York, PA to make a portion of his turbines in the Christianna facility. Curiously, this arrangement ended up creating competition with the Christianna facility because the foundry could now sell the turbines and equipment directly to the end consumer and manufacture them. During my research, I have come to realize that much like today, patentees, even in the early hydro days, commonly bought and sold the rights to manufacture and sell their turbines and equipment to other companies. Burnham/ Burnham Brothers had contracted the rights to build and sell their turbines to CMC, and also to

the well-known Fitz Water Wheel Co. of Hanover, PA. This created a wide network and range of installations across the eastern states and occasionally beyond, sharing designs but sold under different names.

The CMC offerings expanded in the hydro division as the market continued to grow and flourish, offering a wide array of turbine configurations for almost any application that could be devised. Retrofitting mills and small manufacturing facilities comprised a majority of the market for CMC. Additionally, CMC offered equipment builds for use with penstocks (wood or steel), as well as 90-degree angled, encased/chambered, and dual-runner configurations in a range of sizes to suit the user's needs.

The Burnham Bros. design was a rather unique and simplified design. When we think about turbine gates, we typically envision a handful of parts in motion, with gates, linkages, stems, shift rings, and gate arms all moving in unison. Burnham's design featured a unique gate/register design with very few individual or moving parts compared to their competition. This configuration featured an inner gate or chute ring that rotated within an outer ring of additional stationary vanes. When rotated within the outer ring, the openings aligned to allow water to pass through to the turbine. The gate ring was actuated by a geared gate ring operator with two arms and was cast as part of a single piece, further simplifying the design. The assembly was then covered with a streamlined cap for protection. While I cannot speak of the efficiency of this design, we can admire its simplicity.





Christianna Machine Co. Turbine

Though industry and sales thrived for a number of years, CMC would eventually succumb to the pressures of evolving industry needs. Larger hydroelectric facilities emerged that added the economies of scale and increased reliability to the power market. With small rural power plants and mills on the decline, the customer base of CMC also began to dwindle. While other industrialists such as S. Morgan Smith and Leffel stayed proactive and scaled up their size capabilities, CMC did not, leading to their eventual withdrawal from the turbine marketplace. CMC would continue for several years as the small turbine market contracted, eventually being purchased by and operated as "Bond Co." in 1915. Bond Co. continues manufacturing activities and performs custom fabrication work to this day, and is still alive and well today in Christianna, PA, and the surrounding areas.

— Matt Pyle

Sunrise Mill

(3431 Neiffer Rd, Schwenksville PA)

For over 250 years, Sunrise Mill has stood on the banks of the Swamp Creek in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. In that time, it has continually evolved to serve the diverse needs of this area: as a flour mill, a sawmill, feed mill, and perhaps most notably, the homestead of a lifesaving medical pioneer. Now, Sunrise is preparing for its next role: to be reopened as a public history site.

Sunrise's story begins in 1767, when Michael Krause and his son-in-law Yost Bitting partnered to construct a gristmill. By 1774, Krause and Bitting had also constructed a sawmill next to the mill. During much of their ownership, Krause and Bitting were drawn into the emerging fight for American independence. In 1775, Bitting and other Philadelphia-area millers and farmers signed a petition to send goods and supplies to Boston, whose port was being blockaded by the British Navy. For his part, Bitting agreed to send 100 pounds of flour. Between 1777 and 1778, the mill likely provided grain to the Continental Army encamped at Valley Forge, per an order by George Washington to receive grain from all households in a seventy-mile radius.

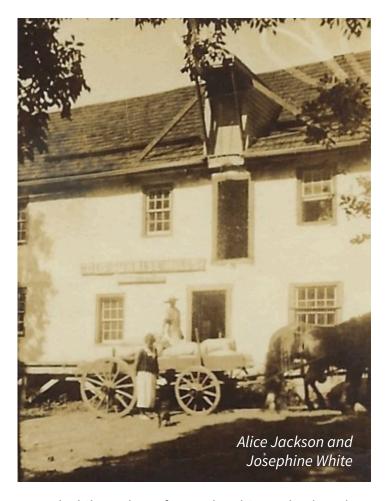
Krause and Bitting sold the mill in 1783, and by 1795 it was purchased by Jacob Shoemaker, who would own the property for nearly 40 years. Shoemaker presided over many changes to the property, including constructing a barn on site (1795) and a farmhouse (1825). Around 1819 he oversaw a significant expansion of the mill, as inferred from a date sign which he installed on the north gable end of the building.

In 1833, Shoemaker sold the mill to Gotfried Saylor, who ran the site with his sons Phillip and Godfrey until 1860. In 1862, the mill was purchased by Aaron Reed, who in the 1870s replaced the mill's internal waterwheels with two 36-inch inward flow turbines. Reed operated the mill until 1909, when the 77-year-old fell off the dam located next to the property, dying of his injuries a few weeks later.



After Reed's passing, the mill passed through several different owners until 1919, when the property was purchased by Sunrise Mill's most notable figure: Dr. Chevalier Quixote Jackson (1865-1958). Born in Pittsburgh, Jackson was a physician who helped to revolutionize the field of endoscopic medicine (examining or operating on a patient by inserting instruments through the mouth and throat to examine the digestive or respiratory system as opposed to more invasive surgery) by developing improved instruments and techniques.

In 1919, Jackson and his family moved to the Sunrise Mill site after he accepted a teaching position at Jefferson Medical College. Jackson hooked a generator to the mill's waterpower to generate electricity for the mill and house. He set up a workshop where he designed and cast prototypes for medical and surgical instruments using a jeweler's lathe and blow forge powered by the mill.



And while Jackson focused on his medical work, Jackson's wife Alice and her sister Josephine White ran Sunrise Mill as a feed mill until the late 1930s.

Several years after Jackson's death in 1958, the property was sold to Montgomery County. By then the mill was badly deteriorated so the sawmill equipment was placed in on-site storage, structural repairs were made to the gristmill foundation, and the Timber Framers Guild collaborated on a volunteer project to rebuild the sawmill platform.

After being delayed by COVID, a bid package for the gristmill's rehabilitation was approved, and work on the building is currently underway. Once completed, Sunrise Mill will be opened as a public history site, allowing visitors to tour its unique grounds and learn the history of the unique owners, workers, and residents who left their mark on this site.

Andrew Lang, museum curator for Sunrise Mill, along with Josh Coleman and Joe McCarthy of Lancaster County Timber Framers, are actively engaged in the restoration of Sunrise Mill. All three attended our Spring 2025 event and anticipate hosting a future event once Sunrise Mill renovations are complete.

— Andrew Lang

https://www.montgomerycountypa.gov/931/Sunrise-Mill



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Membership Manager Mid-Atlantic Chapter of SPOOM 613 Green Valley Road, York, PA 17403