

RIGGS MILL

THESIS

Presented To-

TAU BETA PI

April 28, 1930

By: William Edward Roberts '31

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

1. Dr. W. L. Taliaferro - U. of M.
2. Mr. Will Freeman -
3. Mr. Encos Ray -
4. Mr. John Joy -
5. Mr. Ellin -
6. The Washington Star - June 7, 1914.
7. The Washington Herald - July 13, 1913.
8. Land Records, Prince Georges County, Maryland,  
at Marlboro.



## S U M M A R Y

Riggs Mill, started in 1769, and finished in 1775, remains today one of the historic spots in the valley of the Northwestern Branch of the Anacostia River. After a life run of one hundred and thirty-five years it ceased to operate in 1910. It was noted for the quality of its flour. The mill is one of the largest ever built in this vicinity. The stone structure of rubble masonry is now in a state of decay. The interior, although it has been mistreated, is in fair condition.

The mill, besides being a center of industry, was the center of social attractions, as the older residents will recall. With proper care this historic mill could be preserved for future generations.

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## R I G G S M I L L

### INTRODUCTION:

Riggs Mill, or Riggs Mills as it appears on some of the maps, is the oldest mill in this vicinity which still stands. It is situated on the Northwestern Branch of the Anacostia River, about five miles from the place where the Branch flows into the river. It is about one hundred and sixty years old. While it is almost in ruins, the structure remains as a historical and picturesque relic of the days when this country was first inhabited.

There are not many who know its ancient history and importance or there would be more visitors to see this old structure; likewise there are not many who yet living near by and knowing it is an ancient structure, with a part in history, know any definite facts connected with its origin and early history, as the persons who did know have since died and not many are left who are heirs to this information.

Riggs Mill played a big part in the history of the valley in which it stands and has several legends connected with it which are an integral part of its history and intimately connected with it.

### OTHER MILLS

It is interesting to note other mills of past generations. The oldest mill but one which no longer exists was the Duck Penns Mill of Bladensburg, which was not so large as Riggs Mill. Other mills near by and almost as old are Burnt Mills, which has been traced as far back as 1778, Calvert Mill, also in Bladensburg, but now destroyed,



Ray's Mill. All of these were on the Northwest Branch. On Rock  
Creek, were Adams, Lyons, Pierce and Blagden Mills of lesser importance.

It was in the year of 1767 that a party of hardy Englishmen with their wives set sail from London aboard a small and quaint wooden vessel, bound for the shores of the vast continent which offered new opportunities. In the summer of 1768 they reached the mouth of the Chesapeake and entering it sailed up to the Potomac and then up the Potomac and its West Branch to a peaceful and enchanting valley where they went ashore to make a settlement. The boat's cargo of brick was unloaded and the boat returned to England.

#### THE FIRST HOUSE IN THE VALLEY IS BUILT.

For a year the men toiled laying the bricks and hewing the timber and finally the brick home was finished. It was in this house, which still stands today, that the families lived while the grist mill and the little house across the road were being built. The leader of the group and the first owner of the mill was a man named Warfield. The stone was quarried and cut in that same valley, as were all the beams and woodwork to go into the mill. The mill was an imposing structure and the largest in the neighborhood. The little colony flourished and enjoyed happiness in the valley until an incident occurred which caused deep sorrow to everyone. This was the death of Ann Barber, and it is necessary to tell the whole legend in order to show why her death affected the group so greatly.

#### THE LEGEND OF ANN BARBER.

Ann Barber was born in London in 1800 and her childhood days were filled with fear and wonder at the stories her mother told her of the great land across the sea and its red men and vast wildernesses. As she grew



older she became more and more beautiful. She could not pass down the street without having someone remark about her grace and charm.

After the din of war had died away, in the year 1822, Ann's parents decided that the time was ripe for them to sail. But this was not good news to Ann for she had fallen in love with a London youth, yet she spoke no word nor shed no visible tears. As the ship sped on its way her parents stood in the bow looking ahead, Ann sat in the stern facing East. When the party arrived at the mill, Ann was the only one to shed tears. Warfield, who was Ann's Uncle, warmly welcomed them.

During the next three years Ann changed, yet so slowly that it was not noticeable. One night, in the fall of 1825, Ann was suddenly stricken with a fever. The Doctor could do nothing when he arrived. Ann spoke of no pain, yet continued to groan. Then in the room lit by the glowing embers of the fire a flame burst forth and then died down again, and with this flame Ann passed into the next world. Ann was buried on the summit of a hill overlooking the valley. Her parents were grief-stricken and, although they hated to leave the body of their daughter behind, sailed back to England on the next boat. Several years later on their departure for England a group of her friends erected a monument to the memory of Ann, which still stands today.

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### HISTORY OF THE MILL.

The mill came to be known as Adelpia Mills and remained so until May 17, 1839, when it was conveyed to Nancy Logan by Thomas Ferrall; its name was then changed to Logan's Mill. The next owner was George W. Riggs who bought it in 1863. Shortly after the Civil War the name was changed to Riggs Mill, which name it bears today. The mill was owned by several generations of the Rigg's family, viz: T. Lowrason Riggs, in 1884, and E. Francis Riggs in 1897. In 1920 the mill was sold to Mr. W. Bladen Jackson, who in turn sold it, in 1925, to its present owner, Mrs. McCormick-Goodheart. The mill ceased to operate in 1910 after a life-run of one hundred and thirty-five years - a very creditable showing for any institution.

#### Ax Handles and Spokes.

For two years after the mill ceased to operate an aged man tramped from Washington to the mill every day and back again in the evening, when the day was drawing to a close. He trudged up the rickety stairs to the top floor where he worked. His work consisted in turning out ax handles and spokes. One day he failed to show up and, when the second day passed with no sign of him, an inquiry led to the discovery that he had reached the end of his journey at the seventy-fourth milestone. Dr. W. L. Taliaferro has a hammer handle which was turned out by this same man. There were two lathes on the top floor, but all that is left is part of one of them lying in the cellar of the old mill.



### Mother Chew's Recollections.

Up the road a short distance from the mill is an ancient frame structure which used to be a smithy. The blacksmith's name was Will Freeman who lived in the brick house built by Warfield. The iron that he worked with had been brought over from England for use in the mill. He recalled the stories of Old Mother Chew, whose real name was Mrs. Tabitha Chew, who died in 1883 at the age of ninety-four. She had lived close by the mill all her life and clearly recalled ships of a fairly large size sailing up the Northwest Branch to the mill - something which today seems inconceivable. She recalled the time when Nancy Logan was the proud owner of the mill. There was painted on the walls of the mill in red letters a brief history of its construction and of the period in which it was built, but which has since been destroyed, as was the corner stone by playful boys. Mrs. Chew also recalled workmen putting a new shingle roof on the brick house, showing the age of the structure, because shingle roofs last a long time. There is another house in this vicinity built of English brick - a rare occurrence. Mother Chew said the ships brought over brick and took back a cargo of flour.

### QUALITY OF FLOUR MANUFACTURED.

The flour was not white but was exceedingly sweet and in constant demand. It was of a variety widely known. In 1905 the flour won first prize at the Hyattsville Fair. Both rye and wheat flour were turned out.

### L'ENFANT'S ORIGINAL BURIAL GROUND

The mill stands on a tract of land formerly known as Elizabeth's Delight. In this tract of land the Rigg's family later had their private burial ground. Pierre Charles L'Enfant, the great French military engineer, who designed and laid out the City of Washington, was buried here before his body was exhumed for reinterment in Arlington National Cemetery.

### STRUCTURE OF THE MILL.

The mill is a stone structure of rubble masonry. The stones are blue stone and iron stone obtained from the valley in which the mill stands. There is one story underground. Above the ground there are two stories of stone, above which there is a superstructure of wood, covered by a hip roof of one full story and an attic. The mill has a front of about fifty feet and is sixty feet in depth with the North side as the front, as indicated by the large doors on that side.

### Water Wheel

The overshot water wheel - on the South Side of the mill which is nearest the stream - was a wooden structure with an iron bearing. The wheel was about ten feet in diameter and eight feet long. The axle of the wheel was a piece of wood over two feet in diameter into which the two by six wooden spokes were jointed by hand. There were some iron bars running parallel to the axle to reinforce the wheel. At the bearing, which rests upon the stone wall, the axle has three iron bands encircling it and an iron bearing about six inches in diameter driven into the end.



One-third of the water wheel is now covered by dirt and debris and the structure is now almost in ruins. (Reference Figure 5) Most of the machinery and gears connected with the wheel are just inside the wall. There is still some heavy machinery in place and also some large gears with wooden teeth. These wooden teeth are held in place by iron bands encircling the gear.

#### Cellar.

That the mill was a spacious and a splendid structure is evidenced by its interior. The cellar which is almost half covered by sand had, at its northwest corner, a spring which came up through a hollowed stone, especially made for that spring. The water from this spring was noted in that valley. A large bin still stands in the north end of the cellar into which the incoming grain was dumped and carried to the top floor by elevator chutes. A fireplace stands in the northeast corner.

#### First Floor

On the first floor are the two burrs. Not every mill had two burrs as this one had. These mill stones are natural stone shaved down into shape. One of the supporting boards bore the legend "Adelphia Mills."

#### Second Floor

In the Northeast corner of the second floor is a fireplace surrounded by a partition which must have enclosed the office. It was probably on this floor that dances were held. This mill was a favorite spot in which to hold dances. On this floor there is one remaining piece of machinery and two bins. (Reference Figure 7)

### Third Floor

The third floor has a corn crusher in a fairly good condition. Figure 6 shows one piece of machinery; this figure also shows how the roof was built - with a stringer half way up the roof on each side on which the roof rests. The oak planking which was used in an unfinished condition and was not closely joined can be seen also. The rafters are mortised and tenoned at the top and the joints held by dowel pins. The stringers are poplar and the columns oak. The columns are octagonal shaped and about seven inches in diameter. All the stringers rest on the columns by means of mortised and tenoned joints and dowel pins. The workmanship was evidently very painstaking and slow. The main stringers on each floor are about twelve inches by five inches; each floor rests on the one below. The second floor stringers project clear through the wall to the outside. The years have taken their toll of the building by disjuncting some of the columns.

### THE MILL RACE.

The mill race is about nine hundred feet long, six feet wide and three feet deep. It is built up of dirt and reinforced by stone walls at the mill, at the dam, and also at one place where the stream passes beneath the race. The entrance from the dam consists of a stone arch about fifty feet long. The race could be checked at the dam or by an intermediate run-off (Reference figure 9)



### THE MILL DAM.

The dam was a wooden structure reinforced by stone and concrete on either side. It was about twelve feet high and backed up water for over half a mile. In the winter crowds of two or three hundred people used to skate there. In the summer there was extra fine fishing as it had been stocked with fish. When Mrs. Goodheart bought the mill she had the dam torn down, perhaps to destroy the fishing, but more than likely to prevent the boys from swimming there which they were accustomed to do. Figure 8 shows all that is left of the dam and how the stream that was fifty feet wide is now only about eight feet. Cuttings of natural rocks can be seen which were used as footings for the wooden structure.

### CONCLUSION.

This old mill of real historic importance is in a state of decay. The outer walls are crumbling rapidly and before long the structure will be in ruins. A few people are beginning to realize its value and perhaps something will be done to preserve this picturesque spot.

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Figure #1 South View of Mill & Mill House



Figure #2 South View of Mill



Figure #3 North View of Mill





Figure #7 Second Floor



Figure #8 Site of Mill Dam



Figure #4 House and Mill



Figure #5 Water Wheel



Figure #6 Third Floor of Mill





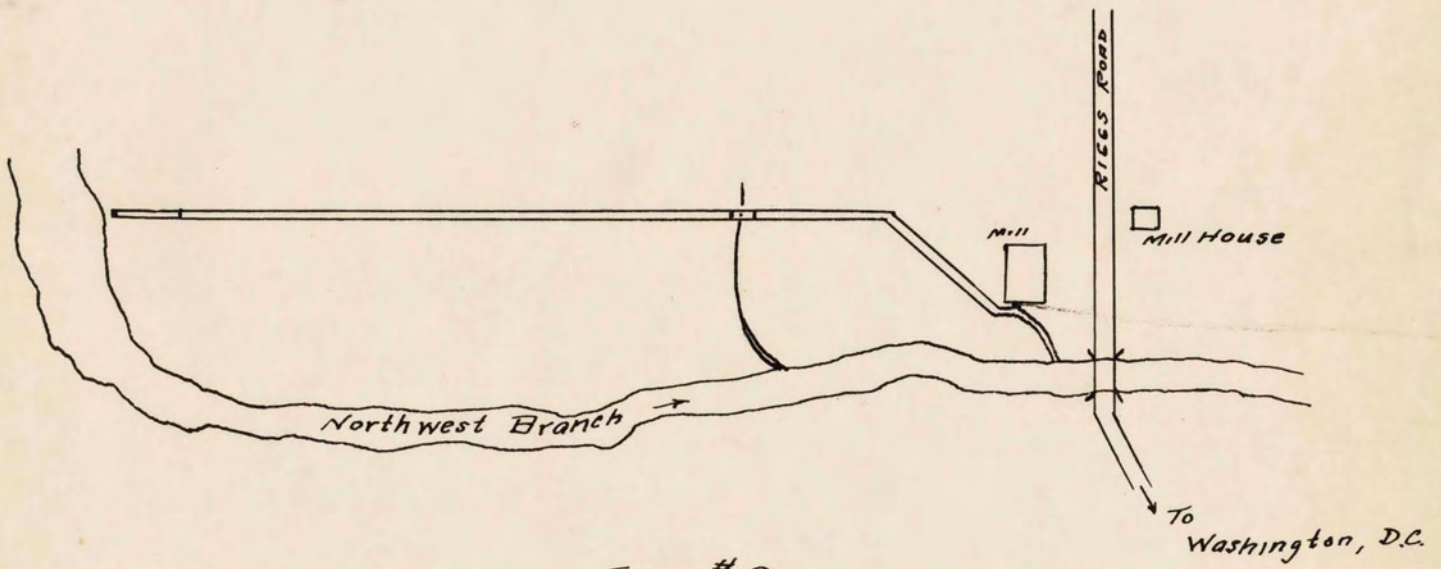


Fig. #9

Location of Mill Race