

Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission

Landmarks Nomination Report: *Hopewell Mill*

Physical Description:

Hopewell Mill is located on the Shenandoah River in eastern Jefferson County, West Virginia. The property sits approximately three miles south of Harpers Ferry, up stream of the Millville Hydro Station and Snyder Hill Dam.

Historic Description:

In 1798, the Virginia General Assembly passed “An Act for opening and extending the Navigation of Shenandoah River.” The plans were part of a larger scheme for river navigation in the western counties of Maryland and Virginia pursued by the Potowmack Navigation Company initially headed by George Washington. In January 1802, the Potowmack Company was authorized to begin the construction of locks on the Shenandoah River. William Little, Jr. initiated plans for milling at Little’s Falls on the Shenandoah River, in response to the canal construction. In 1807 the heirs of William Little, Sr. sold a 2 ½-acre mill seat to Michael Dorsey. Dorsey constructed a mill at that location as early as 1804 under an agreement with William Little, Jr., using water from the canal to power the wheel.

“...one water Grist Mill & Mill seat adjoining Littles Falls...containing two acres & thirty two poles” – “a Mill seat adjoining the canal upon Shanandoah River at Littles Falls...with the exclusive right to all the surplus water of the said Canal...together with two & one half acres of Land adjoining the said Mill seat and on the north east side of the road leading from Vestals Ford to said Mill of said Dorsey erected on the said canal aforesaid.”

This mill lot was located on the north side of the canal and later became known as “Riley’s Woolen Factory.” The mill lot on the south side of the lock was sold by William Little Jr. to Hite & Newcomer that later became known as the Hopewell Mill. Little constructed the nearby house, now known as Hopewell overlooking the mill sites. In 1827, Little conveyed two parcels from his 180-acre tract totaling 20 ½ acres to James Hite and Jacob Newcomer for \$10,000. The two tracts included the 2 ½ -acre mill parcel, with buildings valued at \$6,000 on the 1828 assessment, and an 18-acre parcel described on the 1828 assessment as “including the Millers House” valued at \$300. In 1843, Thomas Hite Willis purchased the mills. Willis, owner of George Washington’s Rock Hall plantation and the Millville Mills, probably never lived at the Little’s Falls mill property, leaving the business to a hired miller. James Watson was listed as a “Woolen Manufacturer” on the 1860 census record, possibly operating out of both the old Riley “factory,” and the Willis Hopewell Mills. By 1862, the value of the Hopewell Mills property had apparently fallen dramatically and Willis sold the 2 ½ -acre mill lot and 18-acre house lot to James Watson for \$5,000 (DB 1 (1865-1867), p. 92). No tax assessment records for Jefferson County were recorded between 1862 and

1871 due to the Civil War and a dispute between Shepherdstown and Charlestown over the location of the Jefferson County seat, finally settled in 1872. In that year (1872), James Watson was assessed for 21 ½ acres called “Hopewell Mills” with buildings valued at \$3,000 – in 1861 the buildings were valued at \$8,000.

Thomas H. Willis was assessed in 1872 for the Millville Mills on 95 acres with buildings valued at \$8,000, half the \$16,000 value in 1861.

The 1883 S. Howell Brown map shows Watson with the Hopewell Mills property and “T. Hite [Willis]” on the Millville property east of “Watson’s Woolen Factory.” In fact, in 1880 Watson was bankrupt and the Hopewell tracts were sold by a court assignee to James A. Gary of Howard County, Maryland for \$3,000. Gary and Watson may have prearranged the sale, allowing Watson to continue his association with the mills. His will, probated in 1888 noted, “. . .any interest that I may have or claim to the property known as the Watson Factory of Hopewell Mills property on the Shenandoah River, I desire to go as I have already endeavored to do, to my friend James A. Gary of Baltimore to pay as far as possible my indebtedness to him. . .”. The 1890 Shenandoah Navigation survey (Lt. Col. Peter C. Hains for the Corps of Engineers) showed James A. Garey [sic] with Hopewell Mills and the house property and Hiram Riley’s Heirs with the 1-acre corner lot and “Riley’s old Factory.”

James Gary sold the mill tracts in 1901, “known as the ‘Watson Mill Property’”. In 1909, then owner Charles Town Light & Power Company sold the lots to David J. Howell. In 1952, D.J. Howell’s daughter-in-law, by then a widow, sold the Hopewell Mills tracts along with four other tracts the Howell family had acquired through the years to Harold G. Moulton.

Historic Resources:

The mill ruins sit at the edge of the Shenandoah River. The remaining walls are built of native limestone and are laid in a random rubble pattern. Some of the wooden window lintels remain. The building was originally about 50 feet by 40 feet. The large mill stood two stories tall when built. This ruin is one of only three remaining mills in Jefferson County.

Nomination Criteria:

The JCHLC nominates this property under Criteria A & C for inclusion on the list of registered county landmarks. Criteria A states that a site may be nominated if, in the opinion of the Landmarks Commission, it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. Criteria C states that a site may be nominated if, in the opinion of the JCHLC, it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or possess high artistic values. Owner, Sally Moulton, has agreed to have the property listed as Jefferson County Historic Landmark.

Nomination Action:

The JCHLC voted unanimously to add Hopewell Mill, under Criteria A and C, to the rolls of registered Jefferson County Historic Landmarks on July 15, 2009.