

Potomac Shore Survivor

The Story of Peacher's Mill and the Man Who Built It

by Craig H. Trout

Standing silently alone on its watch, the ruins of an ancient flour-mill steadfastly guard the Loudoun shores of the Potomac. This stoic stone structure, erected in 1824 near the northern footing of Short Hill Mountain, has fascinated hikers and intrigued students of Loudoun County history for decades. While the legends and lore surrounding these silent stone walls have been previously sketched in various newspaper articles and local historical files, the true history of the site has remained elusive. On a corner block of red sandstone, mixed in among the surrounding yellow-brown stones of the walls still standing, are crudely chiseled the initials of a now forgotten boatman, millwright, and entrepreneur; "J.P.", and therein lies the story.¹

Historical Context of Peacher's Mill Site

Peacher's Mill was located at what later became the junction of the "River Road" from Harpers Ferry, completed in 1832, and the earlier

Craig H. Trout is an avid student of early Loudoun County History, and has done extensive original research on early mills and other industries from the time of the formation of Loudoun County until the late 1800's. Craig's 4th great grandfather, Paul TRAUT, was a cordwainer who first settled in the Lovettsville-Taylorstown area in 1769. Craig has two lovely daughters, Heather and Tara.

1. The builder and first operator of the mill was John Peacher, and his Loudoun milling enterprise was known as Peacher's Mill throughout its first fifteen years of operation. After its sale in 1839, the mill was commonly referred to as the River Mill, Wever's Mill, Weverton Merchant Mill and Loudoun Mill, before going out of business at about the close of the Civil War. This was John Peacher's third and final milling operation.



Figure 1 Historic ruins of Peacher's Mill located at the northern end of Short Hill Mountain along the banks of the Potomac. The structure was built as a merchant mill by John and Lydia Peacher in 1824, and was last in production in the 1860's. It is the only flouring operation in Loudoun County to have taken waterpower directly from the waters of the Potomac River. Destructive floods eventually caused its closure. (Photo by author)

colonial road up Falls Branch from nearby Pain's Ferry of 1760. These early trading routes were important to the economic development of local communities on both the Virginia and Maryland sides of the Potomac. The River Road also played a significant role in the many troop movements during the Civil War.

To the east (down river) of the mill site, a short spur from River Road crosses an improved stone ford over Falls Branch and extends approximately half a mile to Stump's Landing, named for Thomas Stump, the original operator of "Frail Pain's [sic] Ferry" of 1760. Thomas Stump, an area farmer and ferryman, was married to Jane Booth, who was the daughter of Robert Booth (died circa 1759). She had inherited the main 200-acre parcel of the 600-acre estate, which had been granted to her father on July 7, 1731.² This very early ferry operation was actually owned by Flayle Payne, Jr. (from Maryland) in partnership with his brother John Payne, whom Flayle eventually bought out by 1763.³

2. Loudoun Will Book, A:24-25; and Northern Neck Grants Book, C:188.

3. Phillips, John T. *The Historian's Guide to Loudoun County, Virginia, Volume I, Colonial Laws of Virginia and County Court Orders, 1757-1766*, (Leesburg, Va.: Goose Creek Productions, 1996), 265.

Flayle Payne, Jr., and John Payne were the sons of Flayle Payne, Sr., who on March 8, 1734, purchased a 100-acre parcel of land named "Pain's [sic] Delight" from John Abington of Prince George's County and his wife Mary.⁴ This "Pain's Delight" estate eventually became the basis for Knoxville, Maryland. Early names for area landmarks, such as "Pain's Branch" (creek through Knoxville), "Pain's Rock" (rocky point overlook from a southern tip of South Mountain), and "Pain's Falls" (early name of Weverton Falls) are all named after Flayle Payne and his descendants. Several of Payne's descendants migrated to Bedford County, Virginia, in 1773, thus ending their 43-year dominance in the Potomac water gap area.⁵

Pain's Ferry served as an important early Potomac River crossing, as evidenced by early road activity on both the Maryland and Virginia sides of the Potomac. On March 11, 1760, the Loudoun County court ordered John Mucklehane, Joseph Jones, and William Smith "to view the most convenient way for a road from John Hough's Mill (Hillsboro) to the mouth of Dutchman's Run."⁶ In response, the viewers submitted a negative report for the proposed road to the mouth of Dutchman's Run, stating that "it will not answer for a Road neither can any Ferry be here kept," but went on to offer an alternate route "running through John Mucklehane's [sic] Plantation lands under the short Hill to the River opposite John Paynes's [present Knoxville] about a mile above the Mouth of the Dutchman may be a good Road and Ferry,"⁷ thus indicating that while the subject road order was quashed, road activity to the site of Stump's Landing was being actively contemplated by early 1760.

Ferry operations continued throughout the end of the French and Indian War and the decade preceding the American Revolution.⁸ The

4. Prince George's County Land Book, T:243-4. This tract of land was originally warranted to land speculator John Abington on May 19, 1730, and was surveyed as "Pain's Delight" on November 2, 1730. (Maryland Land Office certificates of Survey Records, AM#1:30.)

5. For an extensive discussion of Flayle Payne and his descendants, see Russell, George Ely, "Flayle Payne of Frederick County," *Western Maryland Genealogy*, Vol. 4, #2, 51-7, and Vol. 4, #3, 99-102.

6. Loudoun County Court Order Book, A:301.

7. *Ibid.*, A:329.

8. Phillips, *Historian's Guide to Loudoun County*, Vol. I, 265.

"Plat of Weverton" filed in 1849⁹ continues to show a ferry at this site, implying at least intermittent operations through that date. Maps as late as during the Civil War imply that roads led to ferry landings on both sides of the river, but the word "ferry" is omitted. In one Civil War map, the road up Falls Branch on the Loudoun side is tantalizingly named "Boonesboro Road," as if it connected with roads north through Maryland, and is further suggestive of continued ferry operations. An undated manuscript map, circa 1926, in the papers of Dr. George W. Kernodle shows the location as "Hickory Landing," but offers no further information or detail.¹⁰

The first recorded mention of the potential for waterpower at the future Peacher's Mill site occurred at least a dozen years before John and Lydia Peacher began construction. In a deed dated June 1, 1812, from Fernando Fairfax and his wife Eliza to John Discon¹¹ (trustee for Elijah Chamberlain), the sale included a "range of Mill seats with a command of Water below a Considerable Fall on the River Potomack..." In a subsequent deed for the mill site dated January 31, 1818,¹² Jacob Waltman, in addition to transactions involving Fernando Fairfax, acknowledged the receipt of the above "river mill lots" from John Discon, including the "right for a road always to be kept open to & from the mill seats on said mill lots..."¹³ (The Waltmans eventually sold the mill site to the Everharts, who in turn sold it to John & Lydia Peacher).

Another historical site of interest was the Blue Ridge Furnace, built in 1849 by Barker & Company of Baltimore¹⁴ on the Maryland side of the Potomac, directly opposite Stump's Landing. The remaining stub of the road leading from present-day Knoxville toward the old furnace and the ferry site is still existent. This early colonial road down to Pain's Ferry intersected near the furnace with a road to Coxon's Rest (later Berlin, now Brunswick), which ran along the river where the B&O

9. Plan of part of Weverton, William Dawson, Jr., 1849. (Washington County "Maryland Room")

10. Kernodle papers, Savory Collection, Harpers Ferry National Historic Park.

11. Loudoun County Land Book, 2P:315, dated June 1, 1812.

12. Loudoun County Land Book, 2W:268, dated January 31, 1818.

13. Based on cross-references within the subject deed language, this road right-of-way was apparently first documented in a deed dated April 4, 1812, from Fernando Fairfax to John Mann for his Wood Lot #2 (Loudoun Land Book, 2O:415).

14. Frederick Citizen, July 13, 1849

tracks and the C&O canal are now situated. A short railroad spur served the iron furnace complex in the decade before the Civil War.

To the west of Stump's Landing, the bed of the River Road (abandoned after the 1936 flood) continues on around two rocky points, the millrace head gate and remains of Weverton Dam (1849) at .4 miles, around "Devil's Elbow" at .6 miles, to Dixie Bottom at 1.5 miles, and then .5 miles further west to Stillhouse Flats, near where current Highway #340 now crosses from Maryland. The road eventually con-

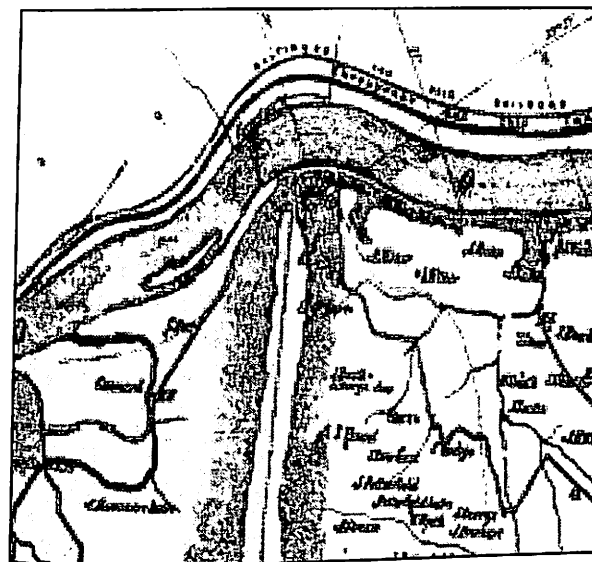


Figure 2 Enlarged portion of the 1853 Yardley Taylor map of the general area of Payne's Ferry and Stump's Landing. Note the dotted line looping from the lower left and up around the northern tip of Short Hill Mountain showing the proposed alignment of the Loudoun Branch of the Manassas Gap Rail Road. Although difficult to read, Weverton M.M. (Merchant Mill), earlier known as Peacher's Mill, is just to the right of the northern tip of Short Hill Mountain.

tinued on to a point opposite Jefferson Rock where Fernando Fairfax had placed the Shenandoah Ferry in operation in 1810.¹⁵ It also connected near Stillhouse Flats with the road leading south through the valley known today as "Between the Hills" (Hillsborough and Harpers Ferry Turnpike) to Neersville and connecting with the Vestal's Gap Road to Hillsboro.¹⁶ The general Dixie Bottom area is the site of Conard's Merchant Mill, the Still House Farm, and the Conard Short Hill Millstone Quarry. On the section of River Road past the first rocky

15. Farmers Repository (Charlestown, WV), November 9, 1810, contains an advertisement that Fernando Fairfax wished to rent his ferry operations at the mouth of the Shenandoah, as well as his store and warehouse on the Loudoun shore. A painting of Harpers Ferry by W.J. Bennett in 1833 clearly shows the Shenandoah Ferry in operation. The painting is on display at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston.

16. Current-day CR 671.

point near the Peacher's Mill site, wagon ruts have been worn into short segments of the rock shelf roadbed in silent testimony of the heavy commerce that once flowed by this route to Harpers Ferry and points beyond. Significant field stone quarry operations along River Road near the mill race head gate and Weverton dam site may have been a principle source of building stone for Peacher's Mill, frequent repairs to the dam, and various structures across the river at Weverton.¹⁷

John Peacher – Boatman, Mill Builder and Entrepreneur

John Peacher, this early boatman, mill builder, and businessman, was a man of energy, vision, and "itchy feet." Born in Maryland in 1782,¹⁸ he moved west to the vicinity of the Keep Tryst Furnace in about 1801. These old iron works, located at the mouth of Elk Run some two miles north of Harpers Ferry, were in blast by 1764,¹⁹ but had since fallen into disrepair. The small cluster of buildings surrounding the old furnace included a sawmill, cooperage, several warehouses, and a number of dwellings, all generally associated with the rapidly expanding Potomac "river trade." Here, boatmen would build rafts or longboats (called "gundalows"), then pole a cargo load of barreled flour and distillery products down the Potomac to Georgetown or Alexandria, where the flour would be traded, and often the very boats themselves dismantled and sold for their wood. George Washington's "Patowmack Company" had built skirting canals around the rapids at Little Falls, Great Falls, Seneca, and Harpers Ferry some twenty years earlier to support this growing river trade. In 1811, a record high of 1,300 boats, as much as 60 to 65 feet long and 8 feet wide, with cargo capacities up to 15 tons, were poled down river from Cumberland to Georgetown or Washington City. Some boatmen of the period routinely charged as much as \$1.25 a barrel to pole longboats of flour from

17. For a much more detailed historical perspective of the area ranging from Stump's Landing west to Dixie Bottom, see Craig Trout's 57-page working papers "Peacher's Mill, Loudoun County, Virginia," pages 5-13, available at the Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, VA.

18. John Peacher, Sr. was born 14 Oct 1782 near Middletown, Frederick, MD to Thomas Pitcher and Nancy unknown.

19. For a detailed history of Keep Tryst Furnace, see Theriault, William D., *A History of Eastern Jefferson County, West Virginia*, (Bakerton: Jefferson County Oral and Visual History Association, 1988).

Harpers Ferry to Georgetown. Here, John Peacher believed that he could make his fortune.²⁰

In February 1816 he enthusiastically announced in Charlestown's Farmers Repository: "To gentlemen millers and farmers. Am in boating this season. Warehouse on the Potomac 1/2 mile above old Furnace. Will deliver flour to Alexandria and Georgetown. John Peacher."²¹ This first recorded glimpse of Peacher does not, however, tell the whole story. He was a man of dreams, and the energy to accomplish those dreams. The following year, with a sharp eye for the potential mechanical power and commerce a good mill seat along the river could generate, John and his young wife Lydia²² purchased the whole of what later came to be known as "Virginus Island."²³ They had bought what eventually became a thriving industrial site for a mere \$1,000.²⁴ Almost immediately, he commenced moving his base of operations and in January 1818 placed the following notice in the Farmers Repository: "Subscriber informs farmers and millers he has removed his boating stand from Old [Keep Tryst] Furnace to island near Harpers Ferry in Shenandoah River where he is ready to receive flour to boat to Georgetown and Alexandria. John Peacher."²⁵ Fittingly, this lowermost island on the Shenandoah, for the time being, became known as "Peacher's Island."

However, John was still more than mindful of the potential of the Keep Tryst Furnace site and began negotiations to purchase the tract, which included not only the previously listed improvements at the riverside settlement, but also a farm, old grist mill and millpond not far up Elk Run. At the urging of George Washington, President Samuel Adams had arranged for the U.S. Government to purchase the tract in 1800, but then, for reasons that included a lack of wood and char-

20. At about this time, a number of warehouses also sprang up along the banks of the Potomac in Loudoun County so that Loudoun flour and distillery products could be shipped by longboat downriver to Alexandria and Georgetown.

21. Farmers Repository (Charlestown, WV), February 1, 1816.

22. John Peacher and Lydia Mollihon were married April 15, 1811.

23. From 1817 until 1834, this was known as Peacher's Island, then Stubblefield's Island, and then by 1827, the name Virginus Island came into use.

24. Jefferson County Deed Book 10:142-143. Grantors were Daniel McPherson and his wife, Susannah Allstadt.

25. Farmers Repository (Charlestown, WV), January 28, 1818.

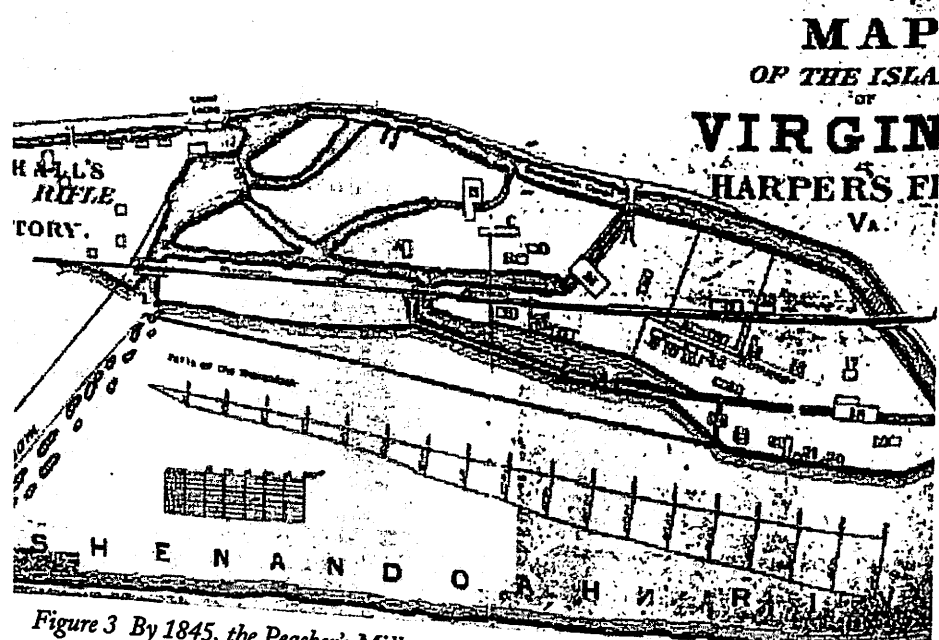


Figure 3 By 1845, the Peacher's Mill structure on Virginus Island had burned (1839) and been replaced by a much larger mill (marked "M"), which was built partially on the same foundations, now extended out over the mill race. This mill was eventually purchased by Abraham Herr and was burned by Confederate troops in October 1861. Herr's Mill, or its burned-out ruins, dominates the center of most early lithographs and photographs of Virginus Island. (Courtesy National Park Service)

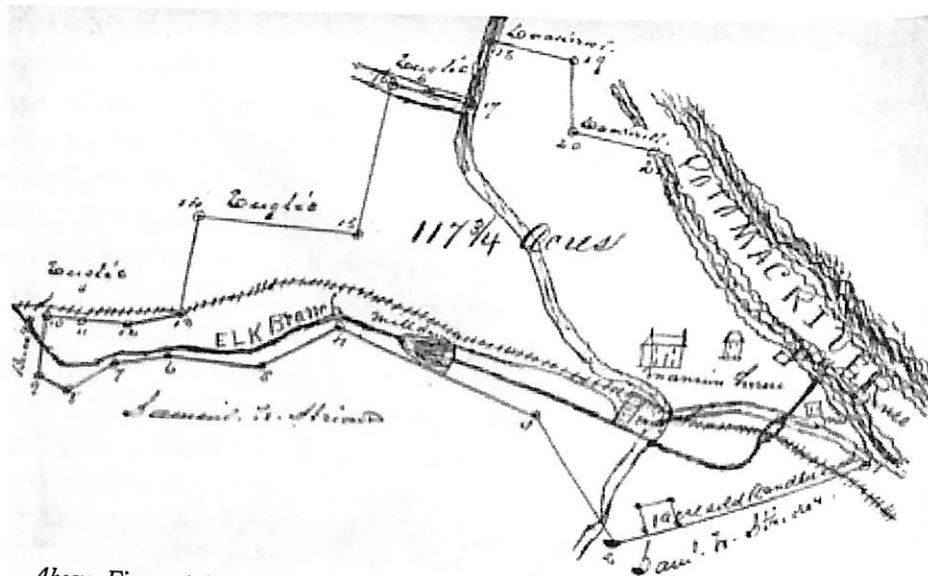
coal, the government had never utilized this prime source of iron ore for the rapidly expanding U.S. Armory operations at nearby Harpers Ferry. While Peacher found that John and Philip Strider currently held a lease to the old furnace settlement and Jesse Moore held the lease on the "Furnace Farm," he concluded that the whole government tract could be purchased outright, with the right connections. Possibly with the assistance and political influence of James Stubblefield, Superintendent of the U.S. Armory, Peacher approached the War Department and offered to take the dormant furnace operations off its hands. Such government land sales were not, however, simple propositions, and it took a special act of the Fifteenth Congress to authorize the Secretary of War to sell Keep Tryst Furnace to dispose of the property. Accordingly, on September 21, 1819, Secretary of War John C.

Calhoun sold the entire 221-acre government tract, which included the old Keep Tryst Furnace and the "Furnace Farm," to John Peacher for \$15,000.²⁶ Not only did John now control the local riverfront, he had purchased a flourmill dating from at least the late 1780's, which now came to be known as "Peacher's Mill."²⁷ John was now thoroughly in the flour business; burrstones, barrel and boat. Records suggest that the old stone gristmill had fallen into disrepair, and so it can be assumed that John and Lydia soon learned much about the refitting of massive wooden mill machinery, creaking wooden water wheels, and tradesmen who periodically came to dress the burrstones. For this part of Virginia, the flour trade was now a principal coin of the realm. Flour from his refurbished mill sold for as much as \$5.25 a barrel at the mill, and \$5.80 delivered in Georgetown (not including freight and inspection fees). And John could provide the freight boats. A single barrel of flour, 196 pounds certified weight, could be sold in Georgetown for roughly a week's skilled wages.

John was now in the flour business. It is not then surprising that he soon began plans to build a more productive milling operation. His new mill would be a substantial 60 feet by 40 feet, built of sturdy stone, and have two water wheels, which in turn would drive two pairs of burrstones; one for cornmeal, and one for flour. But the Old Furnace tract was not suitable for such an ambitious project. The proposed mill would need the head and fall of water available only on his previous development project, the island eventually known as "Virginus." Soon his plans were perfected, and dirt flew, stone footings were placed, the millrace laid out, and the head gates set. Stonemasons completed their work and the heavy wooden mill machinery was installed and operating by about 1822. But in addition to being a millwright, John Peacher was a businessman and entrepreneur. Opportunity again soon knocked, this time in the person of James Stubblefield, Armory Superintendent, who immediately offered to buy nearly the whole island, mill, miller's house, millrace, and improvements included. On August 30, 1823, John and Lydia Peacher sold the north end of Virginus Island to

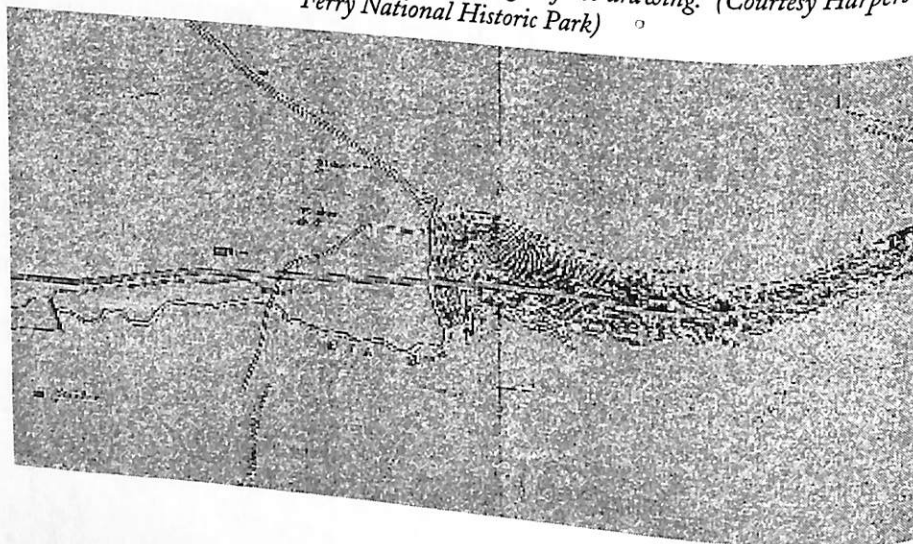
26. Jefferson County Deed Book, 23:178-179. This sale resulted in a long-running dispute between the Striders and James Stubblefield over whether the sale was proper and fair.

27. His first of three successive milling operations, all with the same name.



Above: Figure 4 Reproduction of plat drawing in deed book showing the Furnace Tract Farm on Elk Branch. Note, moving from center to right, the mill pond, gristmill, road crossing, Peacher's "mansion house", and finally the sawmill near the mouth of Elk Branch. (Jefferson County Deed Book, 5:99)

Below: Figure 5 1834 blueprint showing proposed B&O Railroad right of way across the Peacher Furnace Farm Tract. It is believed to be the most accurate portrayal of the relationship between the milldam, race, mill, Peacher barn and houses, and the sawmill near the mouth of Elk Run. Note the Strider Warehouse on the banks of the Potomac just south of the sawmill. C&O Canal locks 35 and 36 are just out of view to the top right, and the wing of Government Dam #3 is immediately to right of the drawing. (Courtesy Harpers Ferry National Historic Park)



James Stubblefield for \$15,000, but reserved a parcel of 36 perches for their continued use, possibly as a boat landing.²⁸ Within four months, Stubblefield sold the flourmill to Fontaine Beckham, who operated it under the name "Island Mill," until the building burned to the ground in 1839.

John and Lydia now turned their eyes downriver to a site in Loudoun County, located on the narrows of the Potomac River between South Mountain in Maryland and Short Hill Mountain on the Virginia side. They recognized that the available head and fall of water along this particular stretch of the Potomac was a potential source of significant waterpower for milling operations, as well as a ready concourse for long-boating their finished flour to the markets of Georgetown and Alexandria. If a suitable "mill seat"²⁹ could be purchased cheaply, the substantial profits from the sale of Virginius Island would be sufficient to erect a substantial stone milling operation and related river landing improvements.

After much negotiation, Jacob, John and Joseph Everhart reluctantly sold on March 20, 1824, a riverside tract consisting of a little more than 10 acres to John and Lydia Peacher for \$1,850.³⁰ While the sellers included "the privilege of erecting a mill or any other kind of machinery"³¹ that John Peacher thought proper, they were careful to stipulate that the proposed mill was "not to interfere with said Everhart's fish dam." Continuing a practice earlier perfected by area Indians, the Everharts maintained fish traps along the exposed rock outcroppings extending across the river. The 10-acre tract included the mouth of Falls Branch, and also a strip of land west along the Potomac to provide for a suitable head gate and millrace. It is possible that the original head gate was some 150 feet downriver from the eventual site of Weverton Dam, which was completed in 1849.

28. Subsequent to this purchase, Peacher's Island now became briefly known as "Stubblefield's Island."

29. The term "mill seat" was used to describe sites with all the prerequisite natural features for building a water-powered milling operation.

30. Loudoun County Land Book, 3W:230.

31. Jacob Everhart and his sons, Jacob, John and Joseph, had been operating a gristmill on Big Dutchman Creek since 1765 (built by Thomas Dodd in 1762). They were more than mindful of the potential of the mill seats being sold to John Peacher.

John Peacher brought great energy to the project and work began immediately. A long millrace was laid out, and a mill site was chosen at the point where the 1760 road to Stump's Landing turned southeast after descending Falls Branch and continued one half mile down river to the colonial era ferry landing. In a repeat of his experiences only two years before at Peacher's (Virginius) Island, stone footings were

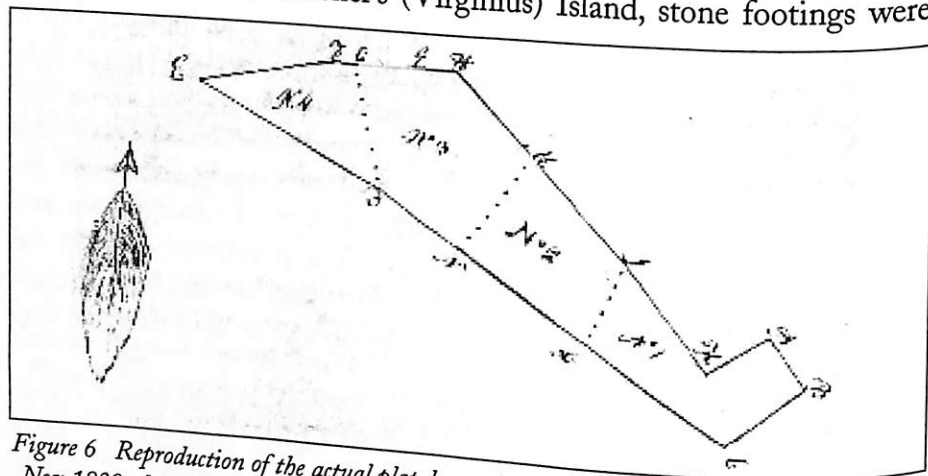


Figure 6 Reproduction of the actual plat drawn in Loudoun Land Book, 3Y:116, dated 9 Nov 1830, showing partitions of the Everhart tract into four lots. The 10-acre "Peacher Mill Lot" is located in the notched-out area running along the top right side of the tract, and was located directly on the south bank of the Potomac.

placed and stonemasons were called to work their trade. At the time that John Peacher was building what much later became informally known as "River Mill," only Caspar Wever's Israel Creek Flour Mill (dating from 1783 and purchased by Wever in 1823) and the Wever's Mills Post Office (established 1823) stood across the Potomac from the Peacher's Mill head gate. The B&O Railroad and C&O Canal did not build upriver through the narrows until 10 years later, about the same time that the River Road was being blasted downriver along the Loudoun shore (1832).

Foreshadowing what was to be repeated many times over the years, the ordinarily indefatigable John Peacher was doubtlessly disheartened when the flood of June 1, 1825, endangered his developing mill operations. While actual damages were not recorded, it can be assumed that the engineering for his head gate and millrace faced its first significant trial by water. From these early beginnings, the perennial pattern was set, where the powerful Potomac was at once friend and foe.

From a purely logistical perspective, John and Lydia Peacher's selection of a mill site at the base of the 1760 road to Stump's Landing was sound business logic. The roadway provided easy access by area farmers to the mill, which, coupled with easy egress to a landing for boating purposes, facilitated the flow of inbound grain and outbound flour.

The two-and-one-half story main mill structure, once completed, was a substantial 60-foot by 35-foot stone affair with walls fully 30 inches thick. A frame building (warehouse or still?) extended some 56 feet to the West. Although it is currently exposed to an average depth of 5 feet, the true depth of the basement "meal floor" cannot be readily determined due to debris and silting-in from years of flooding. The basement would have included the cog pit, as well as the receiving bins for cornmeal and flour grist from the burrstones above. Wooden box-enclosed leather or canvas conveyor belts fitted with cups would have then lifted the grist up to the second story loft, where it would then be cooled and flogged (sifted).

The first floor, where the burrstones and mill furniture would have been located ("stones floor"), was supported by three 12" x 12" heavy wooden timbers inserted into sills in the rock wall foundations, and an offset ledge around the foundation wall provided additional support for the stones floor in general. A mill this size may have had 2-3 pairs of burrstones or more—one for corn and the others for flour. The second story "loft" was supported by a widely spaced series of milled 2" x 6" joists, suggesting that no inordinately heavy machinery was located on this floor. Second floor operations ordinarily included the grain receiving bins, grist cooling apparatus, flour bolting cabinets (sometimes called flogging or sifting boxes), empty barrel and sack storage, cooperage supplies, tools, and similar items. The half-story attic above the loft would have been where all the vertical gear shafts, pulleys, and the grain and grist conveyor systems terminated, as well as providing additional space for lumber, rope, bolting cloth, and similar light storage (and perhaps even a few noisy birds and sleeping bats). The triangular-shaped mill office was located in the southeast corner on the first floor, as evidenced by the large corner fireplace at that location. There is evidence of wide doorways at the center of both the first and second stories of the south wall, as well as ground level doors centered on the east and west walls. The second story doorway on the

south wall was possibly used to hoist grain and supplies to the second floor grain receiving bins, bolting, flogging, and storage area. One can easily imagine the heavy wooden flour barrels being rolled out onto a wharf along the tailrace from the doors on the first floor to waiting longboats for shipment downriver (and in later years by the C&O canal) to waiting markets in Washington City and Alexandria. The north wall, with minimal windows, if any, would have helped support the shaft for the water wheel (or if like his previous mill on Virginus Island, two wheels). Based on examination of the millrace and available head and fall, it is presumed the wheel(s) may have been either of the "middle breast"³² or "undershot" designs. The latter may have been more likely (for reasons discussed below), although middle breast wheels were common at Harpers Ferry during the same time frame. Since the first floor ("stones floor") is only 17 feet above the Potomac, it can be estimated that the basement ("meal floor") was no more than 10 feet above the river level, and thus subject to frequent flooding and attendant water damage. Since a maximum of only 12 feet of fall was available from the millrace³³ and the (basement) meal floor was about 10 feet above the river level, mathematical estimates would suggest that a head of only several feet of water was presented to the wheel(s). With the tailrace dumping directly back into the close-by Potomac, it would seem logical that John Peacher, a boatman himself, may have erected a small wharf on the tail race so that barrels of flour could be rolled down and loaded directly into the long, narrow river boats of the time, rather than being moved the half mile by wagon to Stump's Landing for river shipment.

Overlooking the mill from the hillside approximately 200 feet to the southeast is what appears to be the remains of the miller's house, of which only a neatly constructed 27 foot by 28 foot stone foundation remains, with exposed half-basement, and three curious reinforcement buttresses extending some three feet to the north. Approximately 12

32. An excellent explanation of middle-breast wheels, accompanied by an illustration from the Young Mill-wright and Miller's Guide by Oliver Evans (1834 edition), can be found on page 52 of David T. Gilbert's *A Walker's Guide to Harpers Ferry* (Harpers Ferry Historical Association, 1993).

33. William Dawson, Jr., survey of 1849 for the Weverton Manufacturing Company. (Washington County "Maryland Room")

feet to the northeast of the house foundation are the remains of two adjacent stone buildings, end to end, approximately 16 feet by 12 feet,

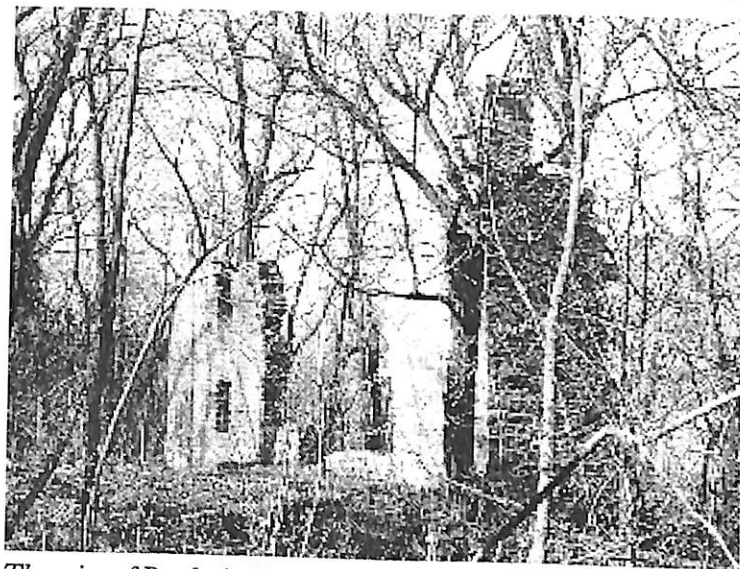


Figure 7 The ruins of Peacher's third mill, which he built in 1824 along the banks of the Potomac near the end of Short Hill Mountain. Built as a commercial "Merchant's Mill," it probably had three runs of burrstones for flour, and one run of country stones for corn meal. If constructed like his second mill on Virginus Island, the mill may have had two water-wheels, much like the wheel arrangement at Aldie Mill. There is evidence of a warehouse foundation to the west of the building, which may have been used for grain and barrel storage, cooperage supplies, and, as was common at the time, perhaps a cider press or distillery. It is possible that John Peacher also maintained a wharf slightly east of the mill for boating his finished product downriver prior to the advent of the C&O Canal and B&O Railroad in 1834. The mill was sold in 1839 to Caspar Wever and was badly damaged in the 1852 flood. Although repaired afterwards, it probably saw its last significant production in the early days of the Civil War. It does not seem to have been burned during the 1864 Burning Raid, and may have been out of production at the time. Much of the severe damage has been at the hands of the numerous major floods that have scoured the surrounding area. (Photo by author)

and 19 feet by 12 feet, respectively. About 20 feet to the rear (north) of the northeast corner of this double structure are the possible remains of a small springhouse. In that the floor of the miller's house was 23 feet higher than the main floor of the mill (and therefore 40 feet above the river), it is presumed that the house and its main outbuildings escaped most effects of perennial flooding.

While the exact usage of the various outbuildings near the mill structure and miller's house has not been established, it is logical that an operation of this size may have included a warehouse and possibly even a sawmill, cooper's shop, blacksmith, and stables. Some mills in the area also had cider-presses and whiskey stills as a source of additional revenue. There is also evidence of a small subsistence garden next to the miller's house.

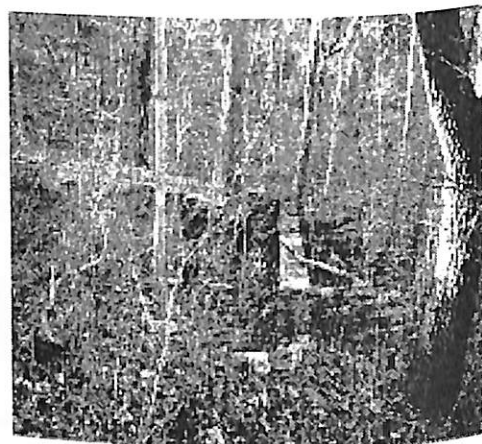


Figure 8 Foundations for ruins of miller's house are located on the hillside to the SE of mill. Adjacent to the house foundations, numerous stone remains of outbuildings can be found, as well as long rock walls extending to the east.

It is not certain whether John Peacher and his family actually lived at their Loudoun mill operation for any extended period of time, or whether they eventually hired others to manage the mill for them. Loudoun County tax record entries for 1825 through 1839 do indicate the mill was his "estate" (domicile).³⁴

If John and Lydia Peacher did maintain their primary residence near the Loudoun mill, their four youngest children may have been born at the site:

Lydia (Liddy)	b. 1826	m. William H.B. HAYES, 1859
Thomas	b. 1827	m. Georgiana ____, c.1856
Ellen Amanda	b. 1831	m. Benjamin C. LOMAN, c.1852
Samuel T.	b. 1832	m. Anna Elizabeth ____, c.1852

(Other sources suggest Thomas and Samuel T. may have been born in Maryland)

With an eye toward quickly expanding operations at his new mill on the Potomac, one of the first orders of business was to provide local

34. However, the tax records list his home as being in Maryland for the 1837 tax year. No other documentation has been found to further support or explain this entry.

Figure 9 Signatures of John Peacher, Sen[ior] and wife Lydia Peacher as they appear on a legal document executed on April 22, 1837. John and Lydia would have been 53 and 45 at the time—two years before they sold the Loudoun mill property near Short Hill Mountain. (Jefferson County, John Peacher Probate File)

farmers with easier access. Accordingly, on May 9, 1825, John Peacher made a motion to have a road approved from Georges Mill down Falls Branch to his new mill.³⁵ The road viewers³⁶ submitted a favorable report on May 21, 1825. In an interesting continuation of intermingled business interests, James Stubblefield (Superintendent of the U.S. Armory), who may well have helped Peacher purchase the Keep Tryst Furnace tract in 1819, and who bought Virginus Island and its mill from him in 1823, now filed a motion on October 10, 1825, to have a road approved from Harpers Ferry around the rocky points of Short Hill Mountain to Peacher's Loudoun mill.³⁷ Later known as "River Road," construction does not appear to have been fully completed until 1832.³⁸

As was often the case with milling operations, related businesses soon located in the area. In 1827, the Genius of Liberty (Leesburg, VA) reported that "four copper stills had been installed by George Shover³⁹ near Peacher's Mill."⁴⁰

35. Loudoun County Road Case #279, finalized September 19, 1825.

36. During this time frame, if the courts received a petition for a road, the court would order a jury of "road viewers" to examine the proposed route and establish compensation to owners affected by the right of way.

37. Loudoun County Road Case #291

38. "River Road" saw continued service for some 111 years until it was abandoned after sustaining severe damage during the great 1936 flood.

39. Loudoun County Land Book, 2P:67. In another possible area connection, Charolette Everhart, sister of Jacob Everhart Jr., had married Simon Schober (Shover) on November 8, 1786.

40. Adam Shover had purchased 27 acres on April 6, 1811 from Fernando Fairfax some 850 feet up Falls Branch from the eventual mill complex. Locating stills near gristmills was a common practice, due to mills being a valuable source of milling by-products, such as corn mash. Ample woodlands at this site would have also provided abundant fuel to fire the stills. In later years, an unrelated limekiln was built not far from the Shover Stills site.

While the reasons are not clear, John Peacher filed a motion on September 30, 1830, to have an additional road approved, this time through John Wenner's land, across a tip of John Mann's land and then down a deep ravine to "Payne's Landing where there is at present a road marked and sometimes used."⁴¹ (This refers to the old Payne's Ferry/Stump's Landing of 1760) It is possible that this alternate route was useful during times of minor flood damage to the road down Falls Branch.

In order to improve access to Peacher's Mill by area farmers, Robert Clarke filed a motion on October 10, 1831, for a more direct route from Axline's Branch via John Leslie's Mill (later known as Kalb's Mill) and the lands of John George (George's Mill), and down Falls Branch to Peacher's Mill lot.⁴² The road viewers report comments that the road down to Peacher's Mill was in daily use.

In 1832, with the final construction of the River Road from Peacher's Mill around the rocky points and on to Shenandoah Ferry⁴³ (opposite Jefferson's Rock), it also became possible for the mill and near-by distilleries to trade with Harpers Ferry and Neersville by this new route. River Road also made it much more convenient for the entire German Settlement (general region surrounding current Lovettsville) to sell their fresh produce and eggs to the thriving industrial center at Harpers Ferry.

By the end of 1834, Peacher's Mill could also begin shipping flour east via the C&O Canal, or by the B&O railroad, the latter having started offering freight business on December 1, 1834.⁴⁴

As was often the practice of the times, it would appear that at least for some period of time, John and Lydia Peacher leased the mill operation to a local miller, thus releasing them to pursue their continuing

41. Loudoun County Road Case #308

42. Loudoun County Road Case #321

43. Acts of the General Assembly of Virginia, February 16, 1832. Local newspapers continued to report on this road construction project for some months. A bridge across the Shenandoah replaced the ferry in 1843.

44. A schedule published at the time indicated the B&O would ship flour loaded near Wever's Israel Creek Mill (directly across from Peacher's head gate) to Baltimore City for 33 1/2 cents a barrel. Interestingly, this tariff is roughly 1/4 the price previously charged by various boatmen, such as Isaac Keyes, who were shipping flour to Baltimore for \$1.25 a barrel in 1817.

milling interests back at Keep Tryst Furnace. In the early 1830's it appears that the mill was leased out to John Litchfield, a local miller who later went on to operate the Oatlands Mill in the 1850's.

On February 25, 1836, after only 10 years of operation, John Peacher placed an advertisement in the Virginia Free Press stating "John Peacher Sr. selling mill on Potomac 4 miles below Harpers Ferry. Also selling mill and farm known as Old Furnace tract." (He did not actually sell the Loudoun mill until 1839.) In that on January 7, Peacher had asked for an extension on the final payment for his 1818 purchase of the old Keep Tryst Furnace lands, it would appear that this might have been a period of financial stress or reorganization. After repeated efforts to find a buyer, John and Lydia Peacher sold their Loudoun mill on February 6, 1839, to Robert Y. Wilson of Baltimore for only \$4,250.⁴⁵ In addition to the relatively low sale price, Loudoun County property tax records also suggest that the mill was in poor repair, or that the machinery was becoming worn. Until 1838, the mill had been consistently assessed at \$1,500, but then dropped to \$800 in 1839, with the total assessed land value dropping from \$1,700 to \$1,000. It is possible that after 15 years of operation, the heavy wooden mill machinery was in need of extensive refitting. A number of mills from the period failed to set aside enough capital for cyclic refitting and simply ceased operating after the 12-15 year operational life of the original heavy wooden mill machinery expired.

Enter Caspar Wever and the Weverton Manufacturing Company

When John and Lydia Peacher first laid out their Loudoun mill operation in 1824, there had been very little activity on either side of the Potomac River in the vicinity of the Short Hill Mountain on the Virginia side and South Mountain on the Maryland side.⁴⁶ All of this dramatically changed when Caspar Wever embarked on a wildly ambitious plan to build an industrial site complete with a large canal for waterpower on the Maryland side of the river. Robert Wilson, who

45. Loudoun County Deed Book 4L:306.

46. Before financial failure and its ultimate destruction by floods, the site included the Loughbridge Stone Sawing Mill, the Henderson File Factory, a cotton mill, numerous industrial lots, a large hotel, a church, and a number of houses. Also see Peter Maynard's *Wever of the B&O Railroad and Weverton* (Brunswick Historical Press, 1996).

had purchased the mill operation from Peacher, was actually a financial backer of Caspar Wever and the Weverton Manufacturing Company⁴⁷, and accordingly, transferred the 10-acre tract of land, including the mill, to Caspar Wever on February 6, 1839.⁴⁸ On July 9, 1839, Caspar and Catherine Wever in turn sold the now refurbished⁴⁹ "Loudoun Mill" to William McCullough, president of Weverton Manufacturing, for \$10,000.⁵⁰ In a separate deed dated May 20, 1839,⁵¹ Wever sold his 556-acre tract of Weverton holdings to the Weverton Manufacturing Company for \$200,000. In this fascinating deed, Wever reserves a plat of land from the sale to be used as his family burial ground, and also expressly exempted the flour mill (previously Peacher's Mill) on the Loudoun side of the river from the sale to Weverton Manufacturing. It is not known whether the wording reflected actual improvements in place, or only more of Wever's visions for the future, but the details included "a quantity of water which would be sufficient, under a five foot head and fall, to move six pairs of five foot Burr Mill Stones...." This reported "five foot head and fall" specification tends to support the previously stated theory that the Loudoun mill used water wheels of the "middle breast," or "undershot" design.

Two months later, on July 9, 1839, Caspar Wever transferred the title for the mill in Loudoun to James McCullough who in turn transferred the property to the Weverton Manufacturing Company for \$5,000 on October 2, 1841.⁵² Although not well documented, John Bagert [Bagent?] may have leased the mill at about this time. On October 26, 1842, the Weverton Manufacturing Company filed a deed of trust back to Caspar Wever in a series of financial maneuvers to manage the increasing debt burden.⁵³

In anticipation of construction of the long planned Weverton Dam, the Weverton Manufacturing Company initiated condemnation

47. Authorized to incorporate by the Maryland General Assembly on April 24, 1835.

48. Loudoun County Land Book, 4L:308.

49. This tends to support the theory regarding the low price received by John Peacher in 1839, that is to say, that the mill had been in poor mechanical repair, or perhaps even flood damaged.

50. Loudoun County Land Book, 4M:308.

51. Washington County Land Book, UU40:377-379.

52. Loudoun County Land Book, 4Q:147.

53. Loudoun County Land Book, 4R:249

hearings in 1847 against the lands of John Everhart, Sarah (Everhart) Wenner, and Samuel E. Washington so as to be able to widen the millrace on the Loudoun side, as well as extend it to the site of the

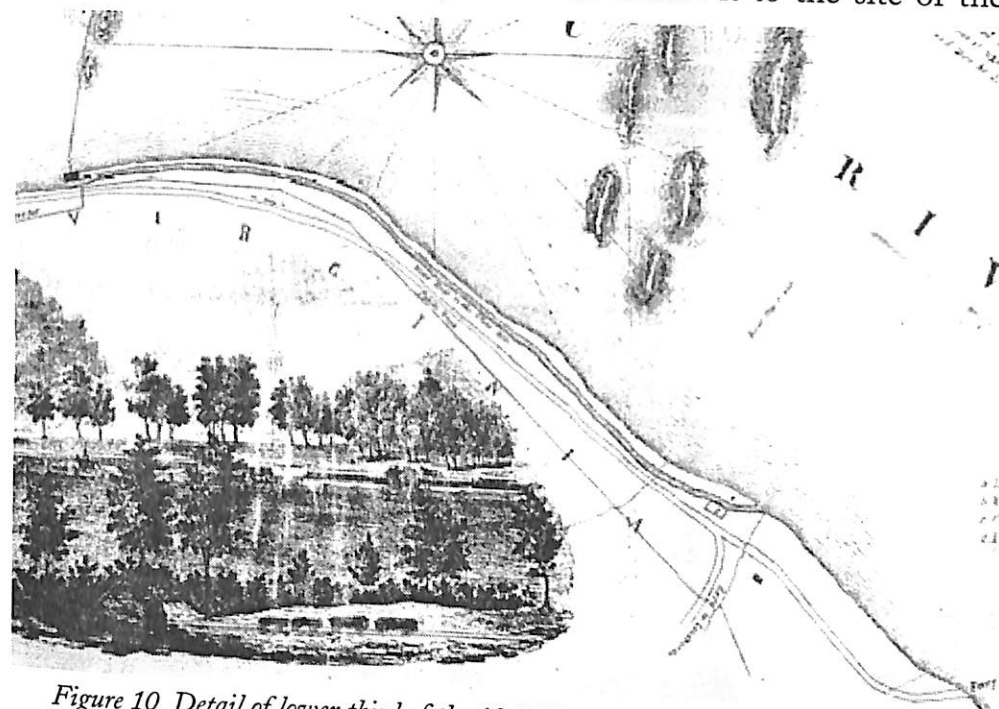


Figure 10 Detail of lower third of the 1849 Plat of Weverton, Maryland, showing Peacher's Mill, the road to ferry, and River Road extending northwest towards Harpers Ferry. The mill structure, which had been built by John & Lydia Peacher in 1824, and sold to Caspar Wever in 1839, shows clearly along the river and is labeled as "d." (Courtesy Washington County "Maryland Room")

proposed dam.⁵⁴ The company justified the hearings based on its desire to "build other machines and engines [at the site of the existing flour mill]...and to supply the same with water by enlarging the present race or canal...."

In 1849, the Weverton Dam was completed across the river, providing waterpower for the mills on both sides. Joseph P. Shannan constructed the dam, started in 1847, on contract for \$25,000, with the work being supervised by Charles B. Fisk, an engineer for the C&O Canal.⁵⁵ Fisk's involvement was probably due to concerns about the

54. Loudoun County Order Book, 10:354-356, 374, 386, 394, spanning dates from July 12, 1847 to October 11, 1847.

55. The Frederick Citizen, Frederick, Maryland, July 13, 1849.

possibility of flood damage to the canal resulting from the dam.⁵⁶ It was built of wood covered rock cribbing, anchored with iron bolts to rock outcroppings that still stretch across the river at this point to the Weverton head gates, which are also still standing. Prior to construction of Weverton Dam, Peacher's Mill had been served by a freestanding head gate, which had been some 150 feet downriver from the new dam site.

By 1850, the merchant mill in Loudoun was being leased and operated by Peter Zimmerman,⁵⁷ who also had one employee paid \$30 a month. The 1850 Industrial Census reports that 5,000 bushels of wheat valued at \$4,500 were milled into 1,000 barrels of flour valued at \$4,800 (\$4.80 a barrel). Nearby neighbors included wheelwright James Booth, cooper John Roof, stonemason John Hoof (Hough?), cooper Michael Long, and mechanic Israel Everhart. All of these occupations are consistent with the needs of either a flourmill, or the nearby field stone quarry operations.

On September 27, 1850, William Loughridge⁵⁸ (to whom Weverton owed \$1,000) placed a lien on the mill, as well as other Weverton holdings in Frederick County. Loughridge was the General Agent for Weverton Manufacturing, and also operated a marble cutting mill adjacent to the Weverton head gates by Weverton Dam. Interestingly, pieces of marble with multiple saw cuts still litter the Peacher's Mill site.

On June 1, 1852, a major flood severely damaged Weverton Dam (now only 3 years old) and many of the buildings at the Weverton manufacturing site across the river. The Weverton Manufacturing Company never fully recovered from this disaster. Although not recorded, it can be assumed that Peacher's Mill also suffered serious damage during this flood, and in fact, this may have marked the end of large-scale operations for the old Peacher's Mill complex.

56. Following the disastrous flood of 1877, the C&O Canal purchased the remains of the dam and had it destroyed, so as to reduce future flood damage to their canal.

57. Zimmerman is listed as living at or near the mill in the 1850 census. Loudoun Chancery case M2071 dated 1854 lists Peter Zimmerman as the "tenant" of the mill property.

58. Loughridge is remembered today as the inventor of locomotive air brakes. Once Westinghouse had purchased his patent and had made several minor changes, "Westinghouse Air Brakes" became a world standard. The old Loughridge house still stands west of the old Weverton town site.

Failure of Weverton Manufacturing Company and Later Owners of the Mill Site

Even before the crippling blow dealt by the 1852 flood, Weverton Manufacturing was in serious financial trouble. By May 24, 1852, (only 8 days before the flood), William Loughridge, the former president of the company, had filed a lien of attachment in a suit to recover \$1,000.⁵⁹ This action eventually resulted in the property on the Virginia side being sold at a Sheriff's Sale on June 9, 1852, when Loudoun Sheriff John Bayly also filed a lien of attachment to recover \$27.51 in expenses.⁶⁰ On April 30, 1853, the Loudoun County Court found in favor of Loughridge and Bayly, ordering the sale of the property to recover the just debts.⁶¹ Loudoun County Court records note that the sale of property was finally effected and that Loughridge had been paid \$1,018.95 (damages plus interest) on August 21, 1860. The court also ordered Sheriff David Hixson to deed the mill property to Samuel B. Preston for the cost of processing.⁶² Accordingly, on December 16, 1860, the mill property was deeded to Samuel B. Preston, a 48-year old miller from Knoxville, Maryland,⁶³ although the 1860 Industrial Census suggests that he had actually assumed possession earlier that year. The mill lot remained the property of Samuel Preston until sold by his heirs in 1898.

In spite of the financial turmoil of the parent Weverton Manufacturing Company, indications are that the old Peacher's Mill continued to maintain steady production. In response to a motion filed by John G.R. Kalb on May 12, 1857, for a more direct road to connect Bollington with Kalb's Mill, the road viewers also commented on the road to the Weverton Mill. "It would enable many of the farmers & others to get to the Weverton Mill by a publick road that would be from two to three miles shorter than any other publick road now in use. The Weverton Mill is situated on the South side of the Potomack River, in our County[Loudoun], & it is the only flouring mill within

59. Loudoun County Land Book, 5F:7. Also see Law Order Book 1:487 dated 10/4/52 continuing the action.

60. Loudoun County Land Book, 5F:30.

61. Loudoun County Court Order Book, 2:24, dated April 30, 1853.

62. Loudoun County Court Order Book, 1:208, dated October 22, 1860.

63. Loudoun County Land Book, 5T:209.

six or eight miles of the said route that can do much grinding in dry seasons, and our farmers frequently sell their wheat at the Weverton Mill."⁶⁴

Possibly only an overdue adjustment, but still indicative of continued strong activity (or repairs) at the milling operation, the assessed value of the mill increased from \$800 in 1856 to \$1,500 in 1857, with the overall land value being increased from \$1,000 to \$2,000.⁶⁵ (These figures are in slight disagreement with the valuation of \$2,500 established on October 14, 1854 in the chancery case of *Chapman v. Weverton Manufacturing Company*.)⁶⁶

In 1860, under the ownership of Samuel B. Preston, a 39-year-old miller named Henry Krebs and his wife Catherine were actually operating the mill. Their 15-year-old son, David, is listed as "boatman," suggesting the possibility that he may have been engaged in poling flatboats laden with flour barrels across the Potomac to the C&O Canal or B&O Railroad for shipment east. Two other children, Sarah A. (age 11) and Timothy (age 1) are also listed.⁶⁷

The 1860 Industrial Census lists the operation as a "Merchant & Grist Mill" in which owner Samuel B. Preston had invested \$1,055 in capital. The mill reported having ground 15,000 bushels of wheat valued at \$15,000 into 3,500 barrels of flour valued at \$17,500 (\$5.00 a barrel). The mill also ground 3,000 bushels of corn valued at \$1,500 into 3,800 barrels of corn meal valued at \$2,228 (\$.59 a barrel). The mill had one water wheel at this time, and one employee paid \$20 a month (Henry Krebs?). With the advent of the Civil War, the old River Road past Peacher's Mill became an important thoroughfare for tidal east-west military movements for both the Union and the Confederacy. At the end of February 1862, Colonel John W. Geary, in command of the Twenty-eighth Pennsylvania Infantry, and reinforced by a squadron of the First Michigan Cavalry and two batteries of artillery, crossed the Potomac at Harpers Ferry and moved down River Road to the vicinity of Lovettsville, where he established his headquarters through March 7, 1862. Colonel Geary reported sending "a detachment of infantry

64. Loudoun County Road Case #505.

65. Comparison of 1856 and 1857 Loudoun County property taxes for the mill site.

66. Loudoun County Chancery case M2071.

67. 1860 Census.

and one gun to take a position on Short Hill Mountain to protect our flank," and goes on to describe very active patrolling and a number of skirmishes in the area.⁶⁸ A military map dated September 30, 1863, clearly shows the mill, miller's house complex (5 buildings plus fenced enclosure), and distillery (3 buildings plus fenced enclosure).

On November 30, 1864, two regiments of the Reserve Brigade, commanded by Lt. Colonel Caspar Crowninshield, of Brevet Major General Wesley Meritt's First Cavalry Division (Union) moved down "Between the Hills" to the Dixie Bottom area, rode along River Road and past Peacher's Mill, then joined the Second Brigade at Lovettsville that night. This movement was part of the disastrous "Burning Raid" throughout Loudoun County during that month. Lt. Colonel Crowninshield reports that the Reserve Brigade destroyed 230 barns, 8 mills, one distillery, 10,000 tons of hay, and 25,000 bushels of grain on its march through Between the Hills, around River Road, and back south to Lovettsville.⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that while the column would have literally passed by the front door steps of Peacher's Mill, it is doubtful that it or any remaining outbuildings were damaged. Although the 1865 Loudoun personal property taxes routinely listed



Figure 11 Civil War era map showing George Shover Distillery at the head of Falls Branch, Peacher's Mill at the mouth of the branch, and the miller's house and assorted outbuildings associated with the mill. Note the millrace extending downriver past the mill. (O.R. Atlas, Plate XIII)

68. U.S. War Department, War of the Rebellion: Official Records..., Series 1, Volume V, pp

"damage by burning" at many nearby farms, no such entry was made for the mill, and the assessed value remained constant.⁷⁰ Speculation would suggest that since a loyal Unionist from Knoxville, Maryland, Samuel B. Preston, now owned the mill, it was spared the fiery end visited on so many neighboring barns, mills and haystacks. It is believed that the nearby Shover's Distillery *may not have* been so fortunate. [Editor's Note: For unknown reasons, the Federals did not burn a sizable swath of the Loudoun Valley along the Potomac River. Unionists did not receive preferential treatment during the Burning Raid.]

It can be assumed that both the Loudoun Rangers (Union), and John W. Mobberly's band of detached scouts from Elijah White's 35th Battalion of Virginia Cavalry ("the Comanches") frequently traveled this key route long the river. Col. John Singleton Mosby's Rangers are also believed to have used River Road on occasion.

Following the Civil War, the now inactive mill repeatedly suffered flood damage. The major flood of September 30 - October 1, 1870, caused extensive damage to the area, and the assessed value of the Peacher's Mill building dropped from \$1,500 to \$1,000. On November 25, 1877, yet another major flood scoured the mill property. In a fit of desperation following this latest disaster, the C&O Canal Company bought the remains of the Weverton Dam and promptly destroyed it in hopes of lessening future flood damages to their often-battered canal. At about the same time, the assessed value of the Peacher's Mill building plunged from \$1,000 to only \$400, implying that by this time it was little more than a water-ravaged shell. In 1885, the assessed value of the Peacher's Mill building again dropped, this time from \$400 to \$200. The May 30 - June 1, 1889 Johnstown Flood⁷¹ is believed to have destroyed the north wall of the Peacher's Mill building. This time,

511-517. (Cited hereafter as "O.R.")

69. O.R., Series 1, Vol. XLIII, Part 1, pp. 671-674.

70. Although there is no evidence of charring on any of the remains, final evidence of whether the mill was damaged is inconclusive. The lack of change in assessed value suggests it was not burned.

71. The massive storm system and torrential rains that resulted in the Johnstown Flood also wreaked total havoc on the early grist mills of Loudoun County, completely scouring away all traces of several mills, to include nearby Everhart's (Dodd's) Mill on Dutchman's Creek. Mindful of the tragedy in Pennsylvania, Loudoun residents of the time also called the massive storm "The Johnstown Flood."

the waters reached an incredible 2.8 feet above the B&O rails on the Harpers Ferry Bridge, and eight feet above the rails at Sandy Hook, which were fully 17 feet above the C&O Canal.

Samuel B. Preston, the last owner of the mill while in operation, died on November 13, 1895, and was buried in Mount Olive Cemetery in Frederick, Maryland. On February 8, 1898, his heirs sold the mill lot to Thomas C. and Hattie Bell Tritapoe for \$150.00.⁷² This low sale price suggests that none of the related buildings were in extensive use. On September 2, 1901, Thomas and Hattie Tritapoe sold the lot to Catherine Tritapoe for \$150.00.⁷³ While only speculation, it is possible that members of the Tritapoe family occupied the miller's house throughout the late 1880's and early 1900's.

On April 7, 1913, Katherine A. and Charles Tritapoe sold the mill lot to G.W. Kernodle for a recorded sum of \$10.00.⁷⁴ (By this time, it was common to conceal the actual details of a transaction by entering low amounts in the deed of record.)

In 1922 the Town of Brunswick developed both Cool Springs and Painter's Springs in Loudoun County as sources of water, laying a pipeline down Falls Branch and under the Potomac via Knoxville. On April 18, 1919, Dr. G.W. Kernodle, for the consideration of \$5.00, had deeded a right of way for the pipeline through the mill lot. The line passed within only 12 feet of the east wall of the mill ruins, and the ground sloping from this point to the river shore remains hollowed out to this day. A water pipe access cover plate is exposed on the bank of the river.

While not well documented, local tradition holds that the old mill lot, and possibly the miller's house, may have been the site of moonshine operations during prohibition and shortly thereafter. The remains of numerous canning jars invite alternate interpretations.

The March 24, 1924, flood scoured the low-lying areas around the mill site and resulted in the permanent closing of the C&O Canal. This massive torrent crested seven inches higher in Georgetown than the disastrous Johnstown Flood.

72. Loudoun County Land Book, 8P:112.

73. Loudoun County Land Book, 8P:113.

74. Loudoun County Deed Book 8S:391.

Throughout the period of 1925-1929, Dr. G.W. Kernodle attempted to promote a hydroelectric dam on the Potomac at a site just above the old Weverton Dam and anchored into Devil's Elbow (the rocky northern end of the Short Hill), as well as a generating plant to be built at "Hickory Landing" (old Stump's Landing) just below the Peacher's Mill ruins. In spite of vigorous efforts, his energetic plans fell through, a fact that he lamented in editorials submitted to area newspapers. Interestingly, a principal supporter was Thomas Savory, who then owned Virginus Island, the site of Peacher's second milling operation. On May 3, 1933, Dr. George W. Kernodle died, and the mill property passed to his heirs.

The March 18-19, 1936, flood was the highest of record (36.5 feet at Harpers Ferry) and resulted in the final abandonment of River Road. One account reports that the river waters carried away the miller's house complex, which had been fairly well preserved to this point.⁷⁵ While the mill complex would have been totally submerged in the 1936 flood, it is unlikely that flood waters reached the miller's house, in that the house floor was 40 feet above the normal level of the river. Yet another major flood again battered the site on October 17, 1942.

On November 20, 1967, the heirs of G.W. Kernodle sold the old mill property to Harry C. Colwell and others. On January 5, 1981, the National Park Service purchased the entire tract (through the Nature Conservancy) from Harry C. Colwell et al, to include land extending up river to Dixie Bottom and Stillhouse Flats.⁷⁶ The major impetus for the Park Service purchase was to preserve the "view-scape" downriver from Harpers Ferry.

In later years, destructive floods continued to plague the site, to include June 24, 1972 (Hurricane Agnes), and the November 7, 1985, flood (also known as "The Killer Flood" by West Virginians), caused by torrential rains associated with Hurricane Juan. In 1997, two major floods once again surged through the river bottomlands around the mill site.

75. Yette Weatherly, Lovettsville: The German Settlement (Lovettsville, Va.: Lovettsville Bicentennial Committee, 1976), pg. 105.

76. Loudoun County Land Book, 778:658.

Peacher's Mill was unique in that it was the only mill in Loudoun County that had directly used the waterpower of the Potomac River. This constant source of waterpower had allowed fairly normal milling operations even when other mills struggled through dry periods. But



Figure 12 What appear to be John Peacher's initials "J.P." carved into a cornerstone on the SE corner of his third and final mill, which he built in 1824 on the banks of the Potomac near the north end of Short Hill Mountain. (Photo by author)

the same Potomac, which had been both the lifeblood of the mill and the ready concourse for its products, was also the engine of its ultimate destruction. Little more now remains than the stoic south wall and the silt-filled cog pit, which now hosts river water several months each year.

Although his Loudoun mill now stands silently in ruins, John Peacher had once been in the flour business, at least for a while.

Read more about it: Craig Trout has prepared a very detailed 57-page set of research working papers regarding the mill operations of John and Lydia Peacher, and has donated copies of his work to the Balch Library in Leesburg, Virginia; the Western Maryland Room in Hagerstown, Maryland; and the Harpers Ferry Historical Park Research Library in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia.

For genealogical data regarding the John Peacher family, see Craig Trout's "John Peacher Research Site" at RootsWeb WorldConnect: <http://worldconnect.genealogy.rootsweb.com/> and enter "John Peacher," born 1782.