

**A HISTORY OF CLOUD'S MILL
IN ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA**

by

Jean A. Beiro

edited by

John G. Motheral



Alexandria Archaeology Publications,
Number 52

Alexandria Archaeology
Office of Historic Alexandria
City of Alexandria, Virginia
Copyright 1986

Preface

Cloud's Mill Race is an important, surviving landmark of historic Alexandria. It is the type of historic site which is often overlooked, rarely preserved. It is neither grandly constructed nor prominent in a landscape characterized today by high rise apartments, townhouses and fast food restaurants. Amazingly, the segments of the mill race have survived and been registered as archaeological sites in Virginia (44AX25 and 44AX27).

Alexandria Archaeology first became aware of the mill race during surveys conducted in the late 1970s along Holmes Run west of Van Dorn Street. We later encountered a segment of the race farther to the east and closer to the location of the original mill. When a resident of a nearby high rise called and alerted us to the proposed development, we examined a strip of land which had a dirty, rat-infested ditch. By looking at historic maps and aerial photos from the early 20th century, we could determine that the ditch was another remnant of the mill race. The developer of the property was fascinated by the discovery and rapidly adjusted the townhouse footprints to preserve the mill race. Additionally, he named the project the Mill Stream and dedicated the streets to commemorate Cloud's Mill. Subsequently, the mill race was cleaned and a plaque erected. Today the mill race is a small bit of history which enriches this neighborhood as well as the verdant Holmes Run greenway.

Jean Beiro's extensive research on the mill led us to a greater understanding of this place and its value to the economy of the larger hinterland.

Pamela J. Cressey, Ph.D.
City Archaeologist
1993

Introduction

In the early 19th century, the War of 1812 and political instability in Europe led the new United States to reconsider its dependence on European markets for exports and imports, which in turn gave impetus to the burgeoning industrial revolution here.

One of the impacts of this on Northern Virginia, in particular Fairfax County, was a shift by planters and farmers from the production of tobacco to that of grains, especially wheat and corn. This in turn led to an increase in milling as a local industry. When plantations were still largely self-sufficient, the milling was often done on the premises, or by “neighborhood mills” which served several surrounding plantations.

Then, in the last half of the 18th century, “merchant milling” grew as an industry, gradually replacing the plantation and neighborhood mills, and drawing on grains produced by farmers over a wider territory. In the Northern Virginia area, this development was slow because the area initially lacked improved roads until a system of turnpikes was constructed, notably for Alexandria’s mills the Little River Turnpike (now Route 236).

Mills were often not profitable here. The millers got little cash for their work, generally being paid in some other commodity. However, the industry did grow, and by the early 19th century the principal exports from the port of Alexandria were milled corn and flour, most of which came as raw materials from the fifteen Northern Virginia counties, and some from Maryland and West Virginia.

During the War of 1812 and the Jefferson Embargo Act which preceded it, such exports from Alexandria declined, but they picked up again significantly after the war. During the period of June, 1816 to June, 1817, Alexandria flour inspectors reported inspections of 209,000 barrels. The peak was reached in 1840.

By then, however, the centers of wheat production and milling moved westward, and by the time of the Civil War, milling in Northern Virginia was in decline, and by the 1880s was almost dead.

One of Alexandria’s mills was what was commonly referred to as Cloud’s Mill, although as this study points out, James Cloud actually owned it for less than a third of its 100-year existence. What follows is the story of that mill.

John G. Motheral, Ed.

Source: Fairfax County Virginia - A History, Nan Netherton et al., Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, 1978. pp. 178-185.

CLOUD'S MILL

Cloud's Mill, one of several in the City of Alexandria before the Civil War, existed for over a century. It was identified most frequently as Cloud's Mill, although James Cloud actually owned it less than thirty years. An 1813 deed refers to a Triadelphia Mill, a name which also appears on an 1879 and a 1915 map. However, Cloud's is the name used on most deeds and maps, especially during the Civil War when the mill also is described as a landmark in letters written by Confederate and Union soldiers. It was located on the north side of Little River Turnpike, somewhere between the present Shops at Foxchase shopping center and North Pickett Street.

Alexandria and Fairfax County deed and plat books trace ownership of the mill lands from 1794 to 1935. On August 12, 1816 Mordecai Miller purchased the mill from David Lupton, John McPherson and Phinias Janney for \$6,500.¹ This 1816 deed of trust includes two parcels of land conveyed by Enoch Fawcis to William Bird by deed dated May 12, 1794, and by William Bird to John Mandeville by deed dated June 23, 1795. The 1816 deed of trust also refers to an 1813 deed and the intent of the purchasers Abijah Janney, David Lupton, Junior and Peter Saunders to erect a mill on the land. This would indicate that the mill was built between 1813 and 1816. Reference is made to the Little River Turnpike Company's Road, a trough hill, a mill dam and a mill race thirty feet wide at the dam. James Cloud may have run the mill many years before he purchased it. A brief history of the mill mentions a deed referring to a survey of the mill trace and naming James Cloud as a "Sworn Chain Carrier." In 1835 Cloud bought Janney's one-third interest in the mill and through a series of deeds acquired the rest of the mill property from the other owners.² James Cloud sold the mill to Edward H. Delahay in 1863. (Delahay appears on Barnard's 1865 map immediately south of Cloud's Mill and north of the Little River Turnpike.) Delahay filed for bankruptcy in 1868 and the new owners were foreclosed on in 1873.³ A

Fairfax County Court Meetings Minutes Book records that on December 21, 1868 Jacob and Charlotte Cornelius gave a deed of trust for “Cloud’s Mill and Land” to Reuben Johnson. (This author of the Minutes seems to have transposed Jacob Cornelius’ names, stating that “Cornelius Jacobs” was the owner foreclosed upon. Also, it is not clear whether Cornelius or Johnson was the owner at the 1873 foreclosure.)

The mill owners’ difficulties can be attributed to the Civil War. A Union officer, George Arrowsmith, describes Cloud’s Mill in a letter as follows:

The place where Ellsworth’s Zouaves carried on the flour business...There we had a barricade of barrels filled with sand and piled up in the road, with a mill on our right and a high hill on our left.⁴

Skirmishes around Cloud’s Mill were frequent during the war. An 1861 Confederate scouting report described one:

A fortification at Clouds Mills of flour barrells with sand and stone logs in them...a force of 3 to 400 at Cloud Mills all together 30 to 40 in a house just below clearlands right on the pike and the run 3 to 4 pickets beyond that...They have been scouting about the woods about Clouds Mills...They lie about in the woods all night about 4 or 500 around these...Clouds Mills 3 miles out of Alexandria.⁵

As the Civil War progressed, the woods disappeared. The land was cleared as trees were felled to build forts and provide fire wood.

James F. Carlin was the next owner of Cloud’s Mill. He bought it at the 1873 foreclosure sale and apparently was able to run it successfully, as it did not change hands again until he died. (The name “Jas. F. Carlin” appears on Hopkins’ 1879 map immediately west of Triadelphia Grist Mill.)

The Alexandria Water Company owned the property for a short time in order to secure an easement to their reservoir at Lake Barcroft.⁶ This may have been around 1913-15 when the Water Company built the Barcroft Dam.⁷

Page four of Fairfax County Plat Book 2 lists a plat showing a “George F. Collins Subdivision of Cloud’s Mill Property, Fairfax Co., Va.” dated November 2, 1935, described as “...land owned by George F. Collins and wife Lucie Collins acquired by them by deed May 16, 1935 recorded Liber V, #11, p. 199 of Fairfax Co. from Wm. A. Lewis and Beulah R. Lewis, his wife.” Deed to this plat is recorded at Liber 2, #11, p. 37.

Not an owner, but a woman who lived at Cloud’s Mill when she was a young girl, recalls her memories of the area. In 1921 when Dorothy Wood Wolf was ten years old, her family moved from Charlottesville, Va. to the Alexandria area. “We lived in the miller’s house at Cloud’s Mill for about a year,” she said during a recent telephone interview. The mill was no longer being used then, but she recalled the red frame medium-sized mill, the mill race and the two story frame house with the front yard extending to Duke Street. That was the frequently muddy road she walked to the Lincolnia School. “It was two lanes wide and I remember when they paved it, it was covered with straw and water for days,” Mrs. Wolf said.

When she attended the Lee-Jackson High School one of her teachers was a Miss Donaldson of the Donaldson’s store family. The old store, familiar to many early residents, is now called the Apple House and it is located at Braddock Road and Quaker Lane.

Mrs. Wolf now lives on North Donaldson Street, and her sister, Mrs. William Boyd, lives on Strathblane Place. Mrs. Boyd, one of six children in the Wood family, remembers little about the Cloud's Mill miller's house, as she was only two or three years old when they lived there.

From the miller's house, they moved to Allandale Farm where the Foxchase Shopping Center is now located. Their father, Elza Wood, worked for Arthur H. Allan, the farm's owner, for many years.

Appendix

Information on James Cloud, members of his family and Cloud's Mill:

From the Fairfax County Archives:

Record of Roads, 1860, pp. 156-159, February, 1879.

Citizens and property owners residing in vicinity of Cloud's Mill and Lebanon School petitioned for a road from the Little River Turnpike at Lebanon to Backlick Road (or Springfield) on land of Adam Martin.

Extracts from Fairfax County Court Meeting Minutes:

September 20, 1791 - Abner Cloud, a deed from Philip Richard Fendall to Lewis Hipkins.

July 18, 1803 - Abner Cloud's wife, Susanne Pimmett Cloud, received deed from Sampson Trammell.

September 18, 1826 - Mrs. James Cloud (referred to in 1824 deeds as Sarah Ann, and in 1835 deeds as Ann). A deed with her husband, to Robert T. Ramsay for 3 and one eighth acres of Spring Garden Farm near Alexandria.

September 18, 1826 - James Cloud, a deed from Robert J. Taylor and Isaac Robbins for part of Spring Garden Farm, containing 3 and one eighth acres, near Alexandria.

October 19, 1835 - James Cloud, a deed from James Keith and Abijah and Phineas Janney, proved by Robert J. Taylor, Thomson F. Mason and Bernard Hooe.

February 20, 1837 - James Cloud, to appraise estate of Wm. White, deceased.

August 21, 1837 - Ann Cloud, with husband, deed to Joseph H. Miller in trust for William H. Miller for undivided moiety in mill called Triadelphia with land and appurtenances attached.

October 26, 1837 - James Cloud, def. versus Carey & Withers, to pay \$371.38 and interest from October 17, 1835.

May 21, 1838 - James Cloud, a deed from William H. Miller and others for one sixth of the Triadelphia Mill and appurtenances.

October 21, 1839 - James Cloud, to appraise estate of Thomas Moss, deceased.

November 19, 1839 - James Cloud to divide slaves of Thomas Moss, deceased, into eight equal parts in chancery suit by Robert Moss, etc., against Thomas R. Love and Alfred Moss.

February 15, 1841 - James Cloud, security for W.H. Miller, Exr. of Samuel Messersmith, deceased.

May 17, 1841 - James Cloud appointed as Overseer of the Poor.

September 30, 1841 - James Cloud qualified as Overseer of the Poor.

August 16, 1841 - James Cloud nominated for Justice. Received unanimous vote of the court except for Dennis Johnston and Silas Burke. (Records show that Cloud served as a Justice from 1841 through 1844.)

September 28, 1841 - James Cloud commissioned as Magistrate.

November 15, 1841 - James Cloud qualified as Magistrate.

June 5, 1848 - James Cloud, def. versus Edward H. Henry and wife Lucinda forthcoming bonds (two suits) failed to appear. To pay \$847.36 and interest from November 9, 1847 and \$462.86 and interest from same.

November 21, 1853 - Ann Cloud, deed with husband to Samuel Miller in trust for Robert H. Miller for Triadelphia Mills and adjoining lands.

June 19, 1854 - Anna Cloud, deed with husband, to Elisha J. Miller in trust for R.H. Miller for certain real estate.

May 21, 1867 - Road from Little River Turnpike near Cloud's Mill through Mount Hebron to be surveyed.

From the Fairfax County Library, Virginiana Room:

Virginia 1850 Census Index, Sept. 27, 1850 -

The James Cloud household lists the following members:

Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Value of Real Est.	Birth Place
James Cloud	56	M	Miller	\$5,000	VA
Ann Cloud	46	F			VA
Martha C. Coler	21	F			VA
William Bushby	23	M	Miller		VA
Christ. Keisendaffer	19	M	Miller		Ger.

From Lloyd House records, Alexandria Library, Alexandria, VA:

Alexandria Gazette death notices:

Benjamin Franklin Cloud - Sept. 23, 1836, p. 3
Amelia C. Cloud - June 1, 1854, p. 3
Martha Cloud - June 15, 1867, p. 2

From The Lodge of Washington, A History of the Alexandria Washington Lodge No. 22, A.F. and A.M. of Alexandria, Va. 1723-1876, by F.L. Brockett:

James Cloud is mentioned as: Junior Warden - between 1812 and 1836 (p. 31) and Worshipful Master - between 1820 and 1852 (p. 30).

On Dec. 8, 1831, voted “nay” on a resolution to suspend supper in this Lodge (p. 44).

Attended dinner at “Clagett’s Hotel” to honor LaFayette on his visit to Alexandria (p. 64).

Present at the installation of officers’ ceremony on the Festival of St. John the Evangelist on Dec. 27, 1826 and 1830 when installed as Worshipful Master-elect (p. 82).

Pall-bearer at the burial of Samuel Thompson on Oct. 2, 1826 (p. 129).

Married Sarah A. in 1820, daughter of Amos Alexander (who was Inspector of Flour at Alexandria from 1803 to 1824,) and Nancy Ricketts (p. 194).

Information on Other Cloud Properties:

James Cloud owned at least two parcels of land in Alexandria, or what is now within the boundaries of Alexandria, in addition to Cloud’s Mill. One was the 3-1/8 acres at Spring Garden Farm described above in the Fairfax County Minute Meetings. The second property was on Prince Street between South Pitt and South St. Asaph Streets. Records of the Mutual Assurance Society at the Lloyd House include two declarations dated June 5 and 24, 1839 describing properties located to the east and west of that owned by James Cloud. Alexandria Land Records Book F, No. 3, p. 12 lists a deed dated Dec. 6, 1843 describing James Cloud’s Prince Street property as having been sold to John C. Graham for \$1,750, the same property conveyed to James Cloud from David Ricketts and wife on June 30, 1830. (Information on Graham’s purchase is cited in E. Cox, Historic Alexandria, Street by Street, 1976, p. 129.) Graham is shown as the owner of this property on G.M. Hopkins’ 1877 City Atlas of Alexandria.

Footnotes

- 1 Fairfax County Land Records, Deed Book 0-2, pps. 341-345.
- 2 The Historical Society of Fairfax Co., Va., Inc., Vol. 14 - 1976-77, A Preliminary Investigation of Milling in the Area Encompassed by Fairfax County in the Period Between the End of the Eighteenth Century and the End of the Nineteenth, by Haywood Wigglesworth, pps. 48-49.
- 3 Ibid, p. 49.
- 4 John S. Applegate, Reminiscences and Letters of George Arrowsmith of New Jersey (Red Bank, New Jersey, John H. Cook, Publisher, 1893), pps. 62-63.
- 5 The Historical Society of Fairfax Co., Va., Inc., Vol. 19 - 1983, Letters Postmarked Fairfax County 1861-62, Edited by Lewis Leigh, Jr. with notes by Dr. Joseph L. Harsh, pps. 37-38.
- 6 Wigglesworth, p. 49.
- 7 Karen G. Harvey and Ross Stansfield, Alexandria, A Pictorial History (Donning Co., Publishers, Norfolk, Va.), 1977, p. 27.