

HISTORY OF SHELTON'S MILL

BY - Garland F. Dunn - September 28, 1975

The first Shelton's Mill was selected and the starting of construction was by James B. Shelton date unknown, but assumed to be in the first quarter of the Eighteenth Century, according to other dates. He was a native Virginian and farmer in the County and was survived by a son, John B. Shelton, also a farmer in the county, who completed the building of the Mill and the dam which is located on the South Anna River four miles west of the Hanover County line in Louisa County. It was completed in his early years of adulthood and he ran the mill as its miller and owner until it was destroyed by fire in 1859. The first mill was a small capacity - corn and flour mill powered by water, created by the dam built across the stream.

The dam was built of a rock base 12 feet thick with heavy timbers on top of the base and heavy timbers slanted down to the extreme bottom of the river bed. This was done to support the rock base from constant water pressure in the stream. The slanted timbers were then covered with heavy lumber, to reserve the water in a pond of water depth, for depth is power with water. The rock base of the dam was laid on a solid natural rock foundation across the entire stream. Some of the rocks were hauled to the site by wagon loads and others were used from the stream bed. The dam is 20 feet in height from rock foundation to the top and 200 feet in length. The completion date of the first mill and the river dam is theoretically around 1820, based on the date the second mill was built at this same location.

John B. Shelton started the construction of the second mill in 1860 but died in 1862 and his son which was another James B. Shelton completed the mill in 1863 as dated and initialed on its rock foundation. This second mill was a larger building with three floors consisting of a 25 barrell capacity flour mill machinery and a larger corn mill. There was installed a water turbine for the corn mill and a water turbine for the flour mill both located under the one building. The water was let into what is called a pen stock built underneath the mill building, at the elevation of the stream bed from the upper flow of the stream. This water was shut on and off by large wooden gates at the back end of the mill building. The gates were raised and lowered by hand. When the pen stocks were full of water, the twin gates located around the power turbines were opened by a wheel in the building, also operated by hand. The machinery would start up as soon as water pressure hit the turbine impellers. All wheat, corn and other grains were handled by hand to feed them into the mill. They were dumped into harpers and bins for the conveyers and belts to pick them up and carry them to their prospective places of the mill.

James B. Shelton the grandson of the founder ran the second mill completed by him. He was also a farmer in Louisa County and an officer in the civil war between the states. He died in 1896 and his sons ran the mill, while young men, until they settled other places with their own families.

The second mill was in constant operation except for break downs and high water from 1863 to 1960. If you look up the stream from the third top floor of the old mill the sight

is very scenic which only a few have seen. The markings of high water on the mill building are notched on the door as high water marks of the Jamestown and other floods of Virginia. There have been quite a few millers over the years and the last miller died in 1963 only three years after the mill shut down.

The building and machinery have gotten in bad condition but still stands in the same spot where the first mill was located but time and the elements have taken a toll. The people who own it have tried to keep the building and grounds intact but washing around and in water is time consuming and expensive. Who knows the answers in preserving our American Heritage for the enlightenment and strength of our County, State and Country?

"Old mill with notches on its doors of time, often I have passed it by, for it has set upon the stream, to watch the generations fly. My Country, it has given to thee, no longer now does need me. For I shall remain standing high, only to remind the ones passing by."