

Hickman's (Diamond) Mills

On the east branch of Naaman's Creek, near the northwest boundary of Lower (and Upper) Chichester townships, was the saw- and grist-mill of Samuel Hickman, which was one of the old mill-seats and landmarks of the county.



Portion of an 1875
Lower Chichester map

The above 1875 Lower Chichester map shows the S. Hickman Mill House, his Saw Mill to the East and his Grist Mill to the West. The road running through the property is now known as Naamans Creek Rd. Map shows trees lining the east and west branches of Naamans Creek which join together just South and West of the Mills.

Note: the curved lines running to the Mills. These were man-made, hand dug millraces used to power the Mills.

Towards the end of the 17th century it was the property of Nathan Pennell, but he having died about 1800, it was leased to Andrew Steel, and in 1802, Nehemiah Broomall became its owner. In 1826 the mill is recorded as grinding between three and five thousand bushels of grain per annum, while the saw-mill was run only occasionally, and was not rated as a first-class mill. On Oct. 19, 1829 Nehemiah Broomall sold the property to Benjamin Hickman for three thousand dollars. After Benjamin Hickman's death the widow, Ann, conducted the business. The mill was then owned by Samuel Hickman, who had erected a new merchants' mill on the old site, and created the brand of "Diamond Mills" which was accepted by the trade as the equal of any flour in the market.

Artist's rendition of a horse drawn wagon pulling S. Hickman's 'Diamond Mills' brand flour.
Circa 1875



Below is the full picture of the estate of Samuel Hickman drawn about 1875 by an artist.

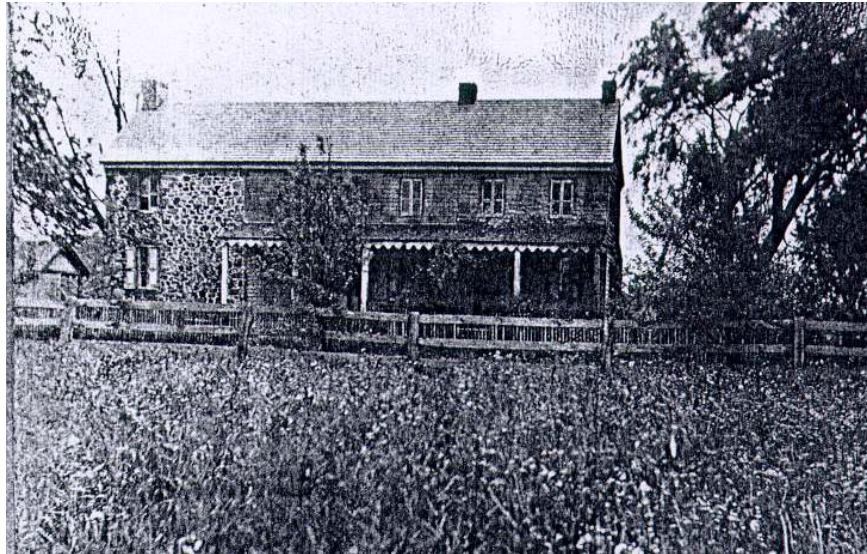


Sometime in the late 1800's (between 1875 and 1892) J & W Hoopes took ownership of the property and Mills. It again changed hands between 1892 and 1909 when Robert Casey took over ownership.



Saw Mill in operation,
May 1909
Note: the large fresh cut
boards on the ground

Mill House, circa 1909.
Additions completed by
Samuel and Benjamin
Hickman

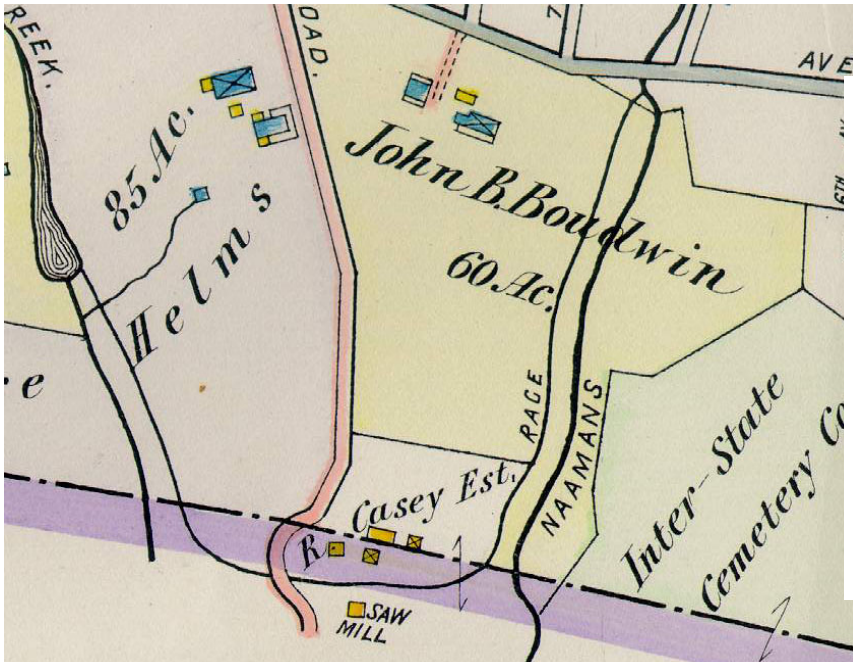


Interesting Story

A strange incident connected with the mill occurred on Saturday night, Aug. 23, 1849. Benjamin Hickman that night was aroused shortly before midnight by the barking of his dog, and going out to the mill saw no one. Before he entered the house the dog barked furiously, and then Hickman noticed a light in the woodshed. He called several times to know who was there, but receiving no answer he discharged his gun, and the report was followed by an exclamation, "You have shot me!" Hickman went to the place, and found a haggard, withered old woman lying on the ground, the shot having taken effect in different parts of her body. She had collected a large amount of combustible materials in a mass, apparently with the intention of setting fire to them. A physician was sent for, and the next day the woman, who would not tell her name, was lodged in jail. She was subsequently sent to the county house.

What is Left?

The Mill house is in fine condition with its current residents accessing it through Orchard Avenue. Unfortunately, the two Mills are long gone. The only evidence of a mill that remains is part of the hand-dug millrace. Just off of Naamans Creek Rd, the lower East part of the man-made waterway can easily be found. It is dried out now but when the creek was dammed near the bridge on Meetinghouse Road, water used to flow down the millrace to power the Saw Mill. There is also evidence of the West millrace that powered the Grist Mill. It runs behind the 'Peppermill Inn' restaurant that is now on the property but it is heavily overgrown.



Millrace still appears on this 1913 map. East branch starts just South of Meetinghouse Rd. West branch appears to have been heavily dammed. Saw Mill is still shown on the map but the Grist Mill is not. Robert Casey is the owner in 1913.

A view of the Millrace dam is shown clearly on the 1913 map. The dam is located near the covered bridge on Meetinghouse Road which was still standing at this time.

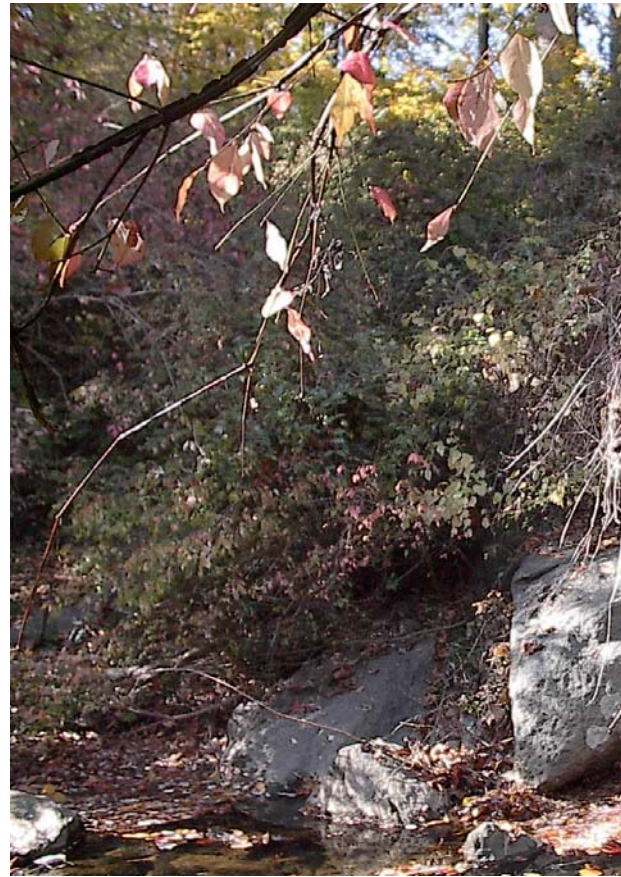


Right: The lower East branch of the Millrace still remains. As you walk along the path, it is apparent this was intentionally dug.

Below Lt: Millrace wall remains. This appears to have been used to help direct and control flow.

Below Rt: The flow gate built into the wall was used to control flow. Horizontal boards were added or removed from the gate to let water flow back down to the creek.





Left: Unique Postcard of the 'Falls on Naamans Creek near Marcus Hook. PA'. This was really the flow control for the Mill Race as controlled by the flood gate in the previous picture.

Right: A photograph of the same location today. Notice the rock on the bottom right is the same in both the photograph and the postcard.

Compiled by: John Schueren, Dec 2005, with information from History of Delaware County - Ashmead, Ch. XXXVIII, (Page 471)