

Hanover County Historical Society BULLETIN



No. 78

"I know of no way of judging of the future but by the past." – Patrick Henry

Summer 2008

Crenshaw's Mill & Blacksmith Shop

In the mid-19th century, citizens of western Hanover County visited Crenshaw's mill and blacksmith shop to have grain milled, lumber cut, and iron tools and utensils forged. The proprietors, W. C. and E. J. Crenshaw, kept meticulous records of their transactions; the surviving account books cover the period from 1846-1874.¹

Crenshaw's mill was one of 37 mills identified on John Wood's map of Hanover drawn in 1820. The mill, located at a ford on the South Anna River below Ground Squirrel Bridge, was accessed by a road which connected present-day Farrington and Scotchtown Roads. The stone foundation and the old road trace are visible today on the north side of the river.

The water-powered mill served two purposes: grinding grain and running a wood saw. The miller provided coarse and superfine wheat flour, as well as wheat bran and cornmeal to the community. Entries give annual totals of wheat milled, often sold one-half barrel at a time:

1850	1,300 bushels
1851	1,700 "
1852	1,500 "
1853	1,408 "
1854	1,215 "
1855	1,150 "
1856	1,030 "
1857	946 "
1858	1,000 "
1859	1,258 "
1860	949 "



Remnants of the mill's stone foundation.

In addition to grinding grain, lumber of various types was milled. Purchases include oak and pine planking, bark-edge sheeting, heart weatherboarding, shingles, scantlings, lathing strips, flooring, and square-edge boards. Most customers were local, but notations show that lumber was also sold in Richmond.

The miller's account book not only reveals commercial transactions in the community, but genealogical information and other items of interest are also recorded. In October 1855, walnut planking was sold to C. L. Anthony to make a coffin for tavern-keeper Charles P. Goodall. Lumber was also purchased to make coffins for Monroe Kimbrough in June 1852, Thomas Bumpass in February 1856, Ned Kimbrough and Mistress Talley in October 1856, Henry Pollard in June 1858, and "Nancy" in October 1870.

Entries for Charles Morris of *Taylor's Creek* indicate that he purchased 3,900 heart shingles for \$17.10. This establishes the construction date of an addition to the manor house as 1856.

In addition to numerous purchases of lumber and milled grain, the blacksmith's shop book indicates that, Thomas R. Walton, another local tavern-keeper, furnished his own iron for horseshoes and commissioned a hoop well bucket in 1863.

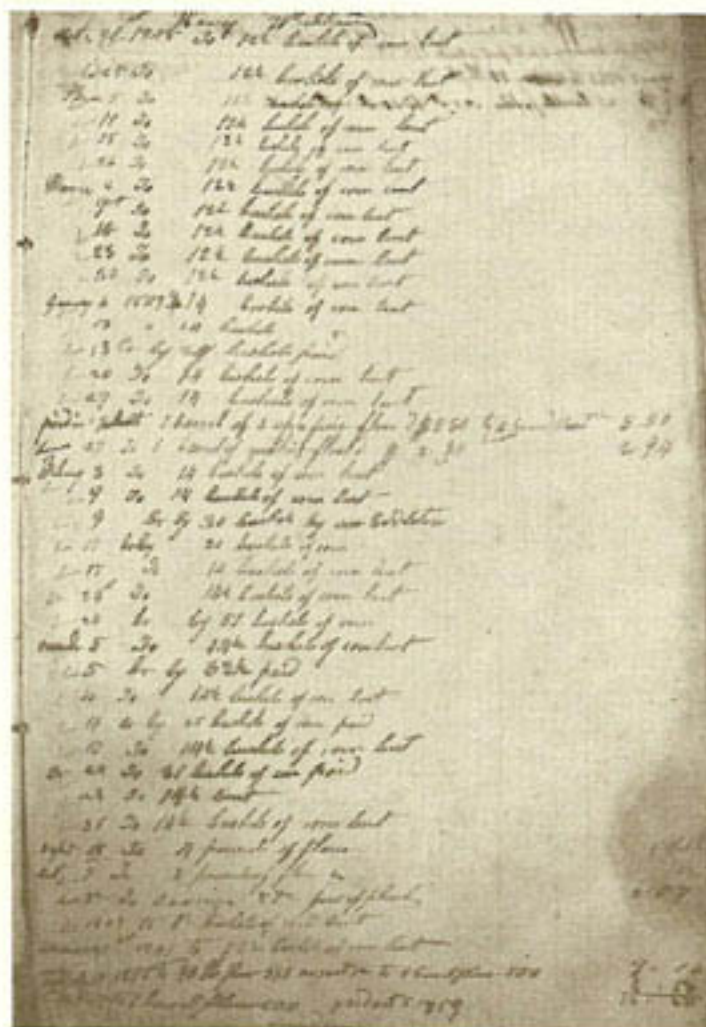
The blacksmith provided vital services to the community. Some items listed in the shop book include barn door hinges, barrel truss hoops, halter chains and bridle bits, staple for a well-sweep, gate hooks, cross-cut saw handle, nose iron for ox cart, ice hooks, iron wagon tires, keys, irons for a boat, crank for an apple mill, and "mending iron to telegraph."

Maintenance of farm implements was also essential. Grubhoes and cultivator teeth were sharpened, plows were pointed, shovels and scythes were mended, wheel-barrows and all kinds of wagon and buggy parts were repaired. Household items, such as ladles and spoons, cutting knives, straps for churns, cooking pots, buckets, garden rakes, andirons, and a spinning wheel spindle, were also mended.

The miller sometimes acted as "banker" by accepting payment on another's account. For example, in 1874, credit was transferred from the account of William Booker to Dr. Adino Nye Brackett's account for medical services rendered. In addition, for several years, notations on Nathan Mines' account show "to paying your taxes."

After the Civil War, services at the mill expanded to include staple grocery items and piece goods. Entries show purchases of bacon, salt, butter, vinegar, soap, brandy, an almanac, and yard goods.

In 1869, several entries recorded hours worked by individuals for which they were paid in cash or received credit on their accounts. For instance, Dick Morris, Vaughn Young, and "Taymer" worked at cutting and



A page from the mill book of W. C. & E. J. Crenshaw.

threshing wheat, plowing, cutting oats, and "working at the machine." One employee lost five days' wages due to drunkenness, and one individual lost a day of work for attending the elections in November 1872.

By the turn of the century, Crenshaw's mill had changed hands and was known as Stanley's. It is unclear though how long the mill and blacksmith shop remained in operation. Remnants of the mill's stone foundation and portions of the mill race are the only evidence of this once-busy commercial destination.

¹The Crenshaw's mill and shop books were loaned to the Editor for research purposes by Carlton Odell of Montpelier.

+ + + + +