

Kidd's Mill

Among the wild, secluded spots of Jefferson Township of the present day, none is more secluded or more wild and beautiful than the site of the old grist and sawmill known for years as Kidd's Mill. The location is near the junction of the two branches of Scott's Run in southwestern Jefferson Township and near the West Virginia line. Near here once could have been seen a declivity known as Hiskus Jump, the story of which comes to us from pioneer times that a man by the name of Hiskus was being closely pressed in a chase by Indians. When the red men were so close to him that he felt that capture was certain, he decided that he would rather leap over the cliff and risk death in that manner than to be captured by the Indians. He made his escape by jumping over the cliff, which he did safely, and then concealed himself in a small cave which he found in a large rock on the other side of the creek.

When one visits the spot today, it is difficult to imagine that here at one time was a center of much activity. All that one sees today is Scott's Run flowing rather swiftly at this point, through a steep-walled valley whose sides on an early spring day are covered with white-flowered trillium and other wild flowers in abundance, and overhanging from the steep banks of the stream are many pine trees. The only sign of human progress in evidence is a very idle railroad trestle spanning the creek and a little farther upstream the ruins of the old mill. While this was once a flourishing crossroads community, today one sees only the scars of the roads which once converged here, there being no road on which one might use a wheeled vehicle within a half mile or more of the old millsite.

A mill was first established at this point by Charles Scott, an Irishman who was an early settler here. The mill was maintained by Charles Scott and his son who sold the tract to Samuel Cresswell who in turn built a larger mill in 1852 and conducted its operation until he sold it in 1855 to Thomas Weaver who appears to have continued as owner and operator until 1865. Then he deeded the property to David A. Benjamin who was trustee for an eastern syndicate which drilled a well to a depth of 800 feet. But this proving unsuccessful, the mill property was sold on March 30, 1868 to Nathaniel Gillespie who, with his son, James, conducted the mill until March 1, 1878 when it was transferred to G. Chalmers Miller. At this time the mill was known as the Pine Grove Grist and Sawmill, the name Pine Grove belonging also to the Presbyterian Church which stood on the hillside just a short distance from the mill.

In 1885, Chalmers Miller deeded the mill property to Eliza Kidd, and thenceforth the mill was known as Kidd's Mill. Eliza Jane Stewart Kidd was a daughter of Robert Stewart of Jefferson Township. She was married prior to 1850 to David Kidd, a native of Ireland. After their marriage this couple moved to Guernsey County, Ohio where Mr. Kidd's death occurred in 1868. The widow and her six children returned to Jefferson Township, and she soon undertook, with the help of her fifteen year old son, Robert, the purchase of a farm of 108 acres near Eldersville. In addition to purchasing the farm at Eldersville, the Kidd family purchased the mill as above stated, and Robert Kidd managed the operation of the mill during the rest of its period of existence.

In its early days this was a watermill, but steam was eventually introduced. Some time after the introduction of the use of steam, a terrible tragedy occurred at the mill August 8, 1882 when the boiler exploded, tearing a gaping hole in the side of the mill as it blew up; then flying out through the air, it struck the steep bank across the creek and then rolled back to the level ground. In this accident, the miller, Tom Bavington, was killed and his helper, James Phillips, was critically injured and died soon afterwards. Elza Scott, then a small boy, was out with his mother picking berries nearby on that fateful day. Suddenly, a horseman appeared riding up the Run Road toward Eldersville. This man, John H. Murchland, saw the Scotts and called out, "The mill's blown up and killed Tom Bavington" and then rode on furiously to Eldersville to secure medical help from the village physician, Dr. J. F. McCarrell. Elza Scott and his mother rushed home, and the boy was dispatched to the homes of neighbors to tell them of the tragedy.

Kidd's Mill continued to operate until shortly after the turn of the century when it was closed down. At this place, Mrs. Agnes Murchland, sister of Robert Kidd, served as postmistress at the Bancroft Post Office and also, for a period of ten or twelve years, conducted a summer resort hotel for working girls from Pittsburgh who came here for vacations of two weeks. The post office was discontinued upon the installation of the rural free delivery of mail.

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