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INVESTIGATION OF THE OLD MILL AND TAVERN IN
SHENANDOAH NATIONAL PARK 134/133244

By: Thor Borresen

Shenandoah NP

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In accordance with the suggestion made by Mr. Appleton in his technical review of July 23 and of Mr. H. E. Roberts' memorandum of September 4, I visited the Old Mill and Tavern located in the vicinity of Swift Run Gap on the Old Spotswood Trail on September 6, 1940.

Arrangements had been made for me to meet Mr. George L. Daughan, Junior Architect, at Midway Tavern on Route 55. The Tavern faces the Old Spotswood Trail and adjoins the park property. It is also here that the new highway (Route 55) separates from the old original trail. The new highway makes a long sweeping curve, in order to ease the climb over the mountain, whereas the Old Spotswood Trail follows a small creek towards the mountain in a more direct line.

Upon the arrival of Mr. Daughan, accompanied by Mr. C. V. Dart, Project Superintendent, we left immediately for the Old Mill by following the old trail for about 6/10 of a mile from Midway Tavern. The mill is placed about 50 feet north and west of the trail as you face the mountain (see location map attached to this report).

The Mill is an interesting structure. It is constructed of oak logs, hewed inside and out. The gable ends are framed with squared timbers, and are clapboarded. The nailing is done with old black iron cutnails. The clapboards appear to have been put on in the rough, and are cut on a bevel. With the exception of two logs which need

replacing, the cabin is in good condition and is quite large (see photograph No. 1).

The cabin rests upon a dry stone wall. Due to the sloping hill on which it is built, it was necessary to construct a rather high rear wall. This wall will need considerable repair. Several of the stone piers on which the machinery rests within the basement of the building also need repairs. The corner joints of the cabin are of the dove-tail mitre cut, which prevents water from leaking into the interior of the building. The fitting of the mitre cuts is excellently done (see photograph No. 2).

*Water wheel
and cabin*
*for first
restoration*
10.

Instead of using the customary flat stones or saplings for chinking the logs, small pieces of flat wood or boards have been used, the whole plastered over with clay (see photograph No. 2). The end of the building facing the water wheel has been clapboarded over the logs. This was done in order to protect the logs and to prevent the water splashing over the water wheel from washing out the chinking between the logs (see photograph No. 3-4). The water wheel is constructed of oak and is about 18 to 20 feet in diameter. There is much work to be done on the wheel in order to put it in good working order. However, it appears that all parts are there, although much of it will have to be renewed. It will permit us, however, to get accurate measurements of any part that must be replaced if the restoration is not delayed too long. The interior of the mill is in good condition; the machinery appears to be all there and has been well cared for.

The stones are of quite large dimensions. Aside from the water wheel and the wheel shaft, which are of wood, very little work appears to be necessary to put the plant in operation. The driving and companion gears are of cast iron. All the smaller connecting shafts are also of iron. The cast iron gears appear to be old. The cogs are cast direct without milling. Allowance is made in the smaller gears for any imperfections in the castings. No doubt it was a noisy affair. The creaking of the old water wheel and shaft, together with the sound of the clanking machinery would make it sound quite interesting. No doubt somewhere on the gears are the founder's name and number and perhaps the year they were cast, but due to the darkness under the floor, together with the accumulation of rust and dirt, it was impossible to discover them.

The water flume is still there, though in a dilapidated condition (see photograph No. 1-5-4). However, enough remains to give us an accurate dimension of all its parts. The dam is located a few hundred feet south of Spotswood trail. The old wooden culvert, or flume, crossing the trail is still there. The top of the culvert forms the bridge over which all the traffic formerly passed.

The old mill has an ideal location and a very artistic setting directly under the Shenandoah Mountains. The new highway, Route 33, is about a quarter of a mile distant (see photograph No. 9). There are ample parking facilities in the immediate vicinity of the mill.

Other buildings there are the miller's house and barn. Both are of a very recent date. The original miller's house was located some two hundred feet on the opposite side of the old trail, facing the present tenant building. The present tenant house, as seen in the picture, is very poorly built and will need considerable work if it is to be continued as a guard's or caretaker's quarters. The barn is in a very dilapidated condition. Its recent construction gives it no historical significance. However, it forms part of the setting of the mill property, and no doubt the old miller did have a barn, which probably was located on the site of the present barn.

There are two suggestions I would like to make. One is that the area be plotted, and that a topographical map be prepared, which would include the dam and the former site of miller's house. The second is that a maintenance project be set up in order to keep weeds and brush from growing too close to the mill, as this will cause considerable fire hazard.

THE TAVERN

The Tavern is located on the west side of the mountain, at the foot of the hill facing the old Spotswood Trail. In order to permit a more gradual descent of the hill the new highway (Route 35) makes a big sweeping curve, which has left the Tavern in the center of the curve and about $\frac{3}{10}$ of a mile from the improved road. Previous to the construction of the modern highway 35, another attempt had been

made to lessen the grade up the steep hill, formerly followed by the Spotswood Trail. This road offers an easy drive up from the new highway near the foot of the hill and passes close by the Tavern. This road, without a great deal of work, can be made an ideal approach to the Tavern. It also permits ample parking facilities.

The Tavern is of red brick laid in Flemish bond. The bricks, according to Mr. Bert, were made in a field about 500 yards from the building. The dimension of the bricks is $2\frac{5}{7}'' \times 7\frac{1}{8}'' \times 3\frac{3}{4}''$ and they appear to have been pressed in the molder. They are nice and smooth with good sharp edges. The mortar joints are very thin, not over $1/4''$, most of those measured being between $1/8''$ and $3/16''$. No sand was used in the mortar. It consisted of brick-clay and lime, and it is due to this mixture that the narrow mortar joints were made possible. The largest amount of damage to the building is between the windows (see photograph No. 2, 3 and 4). It appears to me that the window sills did not extend sufficiently beyond the walls to permit the water to drip clear. Either that, or else the sills rotted and were not replaced in time to prevent the water from seeping in through the walls. The clay content in the mortar soon permitted the mortar to disintegrate, leaving the bricks loose. The eaves of the gilding have a fascia built entirely of brick and each side has a different style and treatment (see drawing No. 1). There is no real reason for this except, perhaps, that the builder experimented in making various types of bricks and then decided to use them all, or maybe he

could not make up his mind which of the three looked the best. The old shingle roof has been removed, and a metal roof has been substituted. The front and rear porches have been added in later years, and so has the large lean-to in the rear of the building. The interior of the building is in fair condition. Nearly all the old doors, interior trim, and stairs are still intact. Some of the floors are pretty well worn, that in one room on the lower floor has been replaced. Considerable repairs will be necessary in order to put this structure in good condition. According to local traditions, Midcourt Tavern on the east side of the mountain, which now is privately owned, reconstructed, and operated as a tourist home, was formerly one of the original taverns of this area. The next and nearest tavern is the one discussed in this report. Between the two there are seven miles of steep mountain climbing. We readily see what important part these two taverns played in the early days of travel across the mountain. Seven miles of this steep mountainous country was a good day's travel for an ox team and a fair day's travel for a mule team. Thus we see, that hardly a caravan would cross the mountains without stopping over night in either one or both of the two hostleries. The Spotswood Trail is one of the oldest and perhaps one of the most used trails that crossed the Shenandoah Mountains. If the history of the two taverns and the trail could be written, many historical incidents and historical characters might be found worthy of recording.

No detailed drawings or maps have been prepared of the buildings or of the area. I would like to suggest that this be done as soon as possible. Mr. Vaughan, who accompanied me on this trip, was born and raised within a few miles of the building. He was very enthusiastic about the possibility of their restoration, and I believe that he would welcome the assignment, and, no doubt, would produce an excellent job.

Thor Borreson

Thor Borreson,
Assistant Historical Technician.



Old Mill #1

This view shows the front and east end of the mill.
A section of the old flume can be seen, right center.



Old mill # 2;

This shows the mitre-dovetailed corners of the mill.
Note, instead of flat stones or caplings for chinking the
walls, small handsplit wooden blocks is used to hold
the clay.



Old Mill # 2;

This view shows the west end of the mill. Note entire side of the building clapboarded in order to protect the logs and chinking from water splashed by the water wheel. Note also the present condition of the flume.



old mill # 4

This view shows the present condition of the water wheel, and wooden drive shaft. The entire shaft and a large part of the wheel needs to be replaced.



old mill & 3;

This view shows the old mill (left center) in its relation to Route # 33, the Millers house right center. The Old Spotswood Trail is shown passing in front of both structures.



Old Tavern # 15

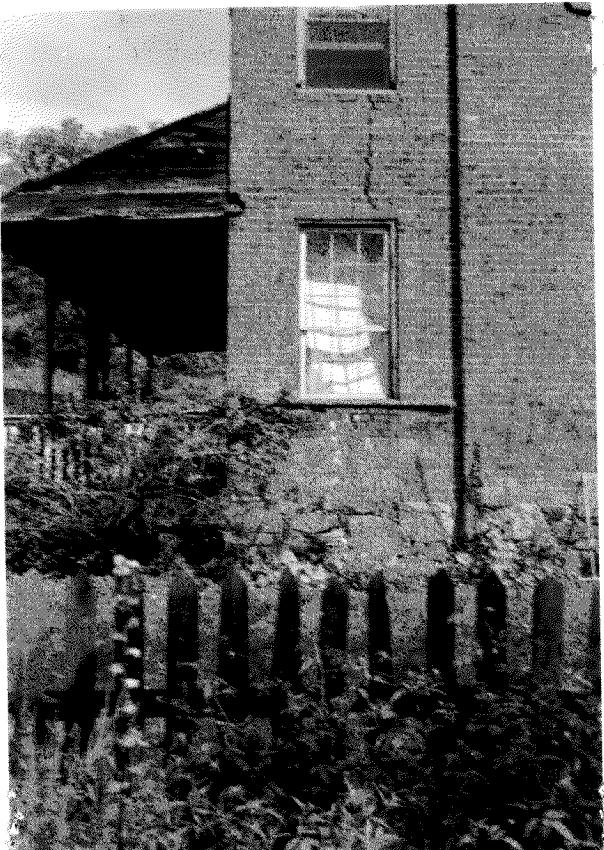
This view shows the front, and the east end of the structure. The front faces the Old Specwood Trail. Both the front porch and the lean-to are later additions.

(The camera was placed in the center of Specwood Trail)



Old Tavern # 2;

This view is a close up of the east wall, and shows the condition of the masonry wall.
Note how the present porch is separating from the structure.



Old Tavern # 5:

This view shows the condition of the masonry of the west wall. The shifting movement of the porch in strong winds is responsible for many loose bricks in the wall. The porch should be stabilized until a decision is made in regards to the entire structure.



old tavern # 4;

This view shows the south side of the building, the disappearance of the mortar between the bricks are quite noticeable. Note the heavy brick fascia under the eaves.

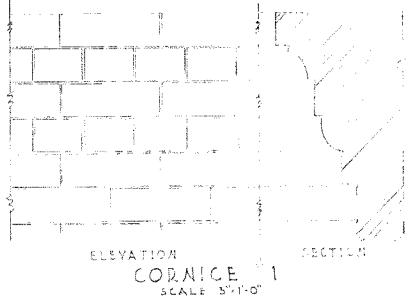
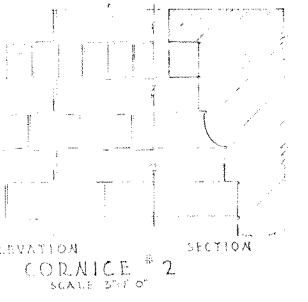
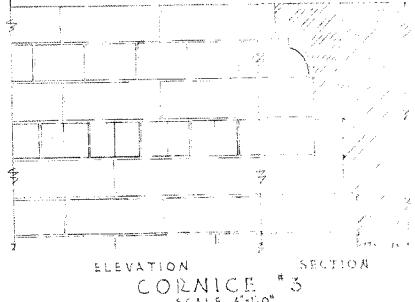
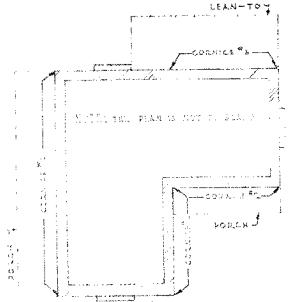


Old Tavern # 81

This view shows the west and south sides of the building. The camera was placed in center of the road constructed previously to route # 81. This road is the one suggested as an approach road to the tavern, and permits ample parking facilities.

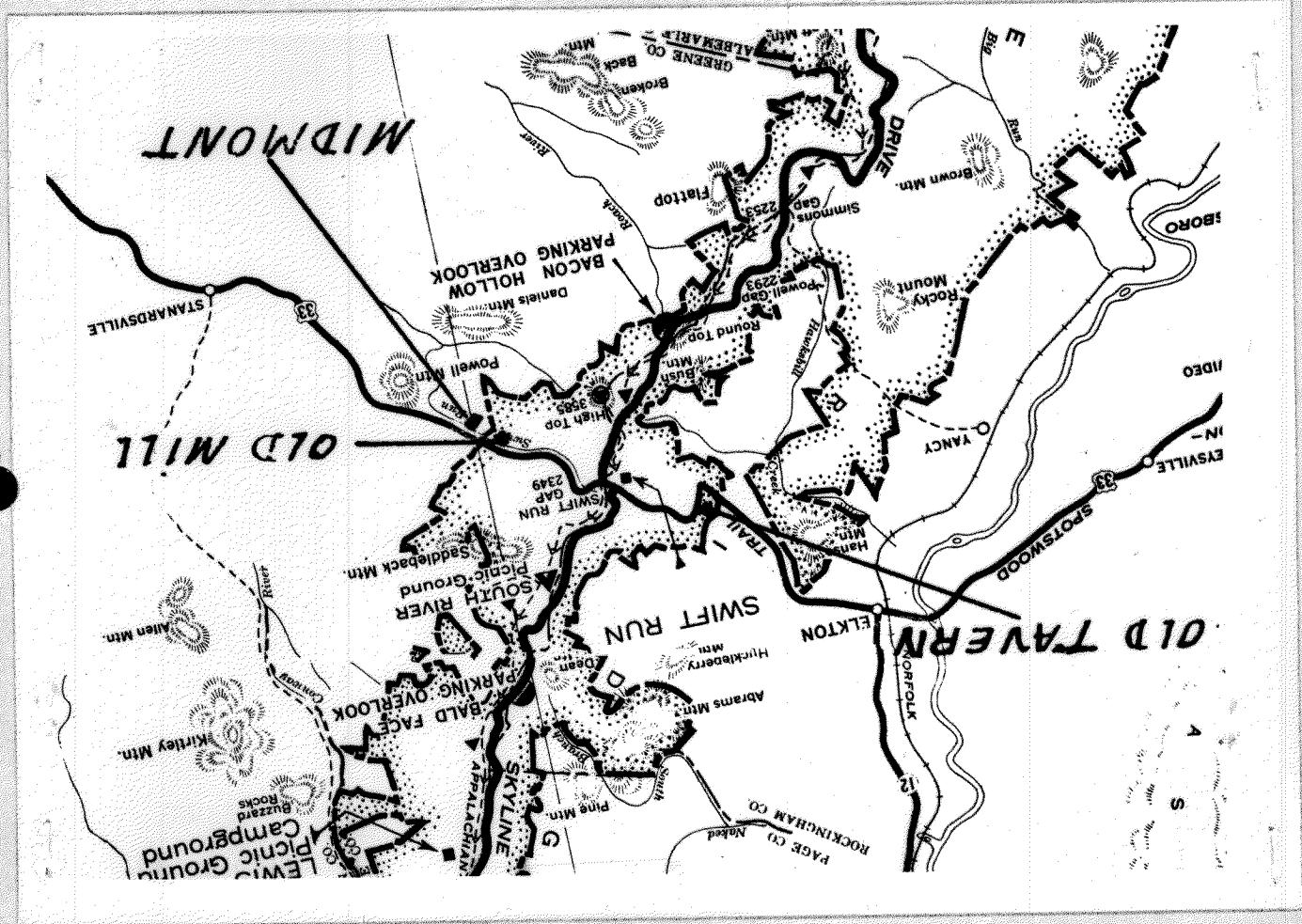


Motley of the Spottedwood Trail as told on a stone tablet. Part of a stone pyramid monument placed at the intersection of the Skyline Drive, and Route # 31.

CLEARED <hr/> REVIEWED <hr/> DESIGNED BY <hr/> BASIC DATA COLLECTED IN THE FIELD BY E. BODDIFIELD TIA, Sept. 21-40	 <p>ELEVATION CORNICE #1 SECTION SCALE 5'-0" x 0'</p>  <p>ELEVATION CORNICE #2 SECTION SCALE 5'-0" x 0'</p>  <p>ELEVATION CORNICE #3 SECTION SCALE 5'-0" x 0'</p> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 20px;">  <p>SECTION PLAN IS NOT TO SCALE CORNICE #1 CORNICE #2 CORNICE #3 POULIN 3 SCALE 100' FACING SOUTH 33</p> </div>	SHEET NO. 1 OF 1 DRAWING NO. 1 NAME OF PARK OR MONUMENT
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Building #1

This drawing illustrates the three different types of brick fascia laid under the eaves, of the old Tavern.



Drawing # 8

Sectional map of the area near Swift Run Gap, where Old Mill and Tavern is located.

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