

# BROADSIDE

FALL 1994

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF GROVER'S MILL: PART I

*Part I of the article on Grover's Mill has been a joint effort with information, advice, and corrections from the following: Elise Bruno, Robert W. Craig, William Denison, Mrs. C. Lawrence Dey, Cynthia Koch, Robert and Jay Schwartz, Elizabeth and Mark Schulman. Part II will be published in Spring 1995.*

Of all the villages in West Windsor, Grover's Mill is probably the best known outside the Township. And why? All because of an event that didn't really happen: a radio broadcast by Orson Welles' Mercury Theatre of "War of the Worlds: an Invasion from Mars."

But even before this non-event, Grover's Mill had a long history. It is one of our earliest villages. The exact founding date has been lost in the mists of time, but it dates from at least the middle of the 18th century, when the mill itself was built.

The other villages of West Windsor grew around churches (Penns Neck and Dutch Neck) or along transportation routes (Edinburg stage coach route;

Princeton Junction railroad; and the Delaware & Raritan Canal in Port Mercer and Princeton Basin). Not surprisingly, Grover's Mill developed around its grist mill/saw mill.

Unlike the other villages of West Windsor, Grover's Mill never included a school, church, general store (other than the mill) nor a post office. People in the village attended school at the Parsonage School on Clarksville Road or at Penns Neck (on Route One, where O'Neill Kennels is located). For religious services, the Penns Neck Baptist Church on Route One and Washington Rd. or the Dutch Neck Presbyterian Church at Mill and Village Roads were the nearest choices. Both these villages contained general stores, as did Princeton Junction on Station Road.



*View of Grover's Mill Village from across the pond c. 1910. At left: Grover's Mill itself at center, mill owner's house. Photo courtesy of Historical Society of Princeton.*



## The Mills of West Windsor

The first mill in West Windsor was actually located partly in what is now known as Plainsboro. This was Scudder's Mills built perhaps as early as the 1730s and bought by Jacob Scudder in 1749. The property remained with the Scudder family until after the Revolution. (Menzie's 1969).

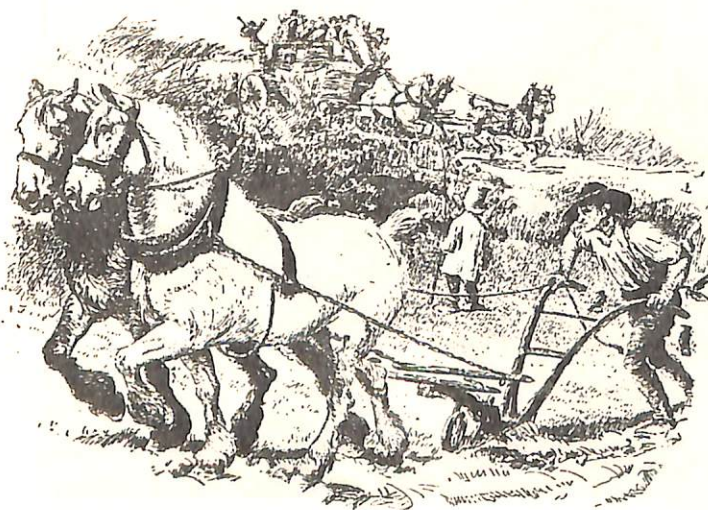
We do not know who built "Grover's Mill" or exactly when, probably as early as 1759. The earliest known operator was Daniel Wolsey. (Robert W. Craig, "Windsor Township and the Early Years of Central New Jersey, 1680-1797." Unpublished manuscript, Hightstown-East Windsor Historical Society, 1987.)

Mahlon Wright bought the mill in the early 1760s. In 1771, he advertised it for sale in the newspaper:

"This is to give public notice that there is to be exposed to sale, by way of public vendue, on the sixteenth day of April next, a Grist mill, with two water-wheels, two pair of stones, and bolts by water; it is situate on a very pleasant stream called Upper Barebrook (sic), in the township of Windsor, and County of Middlesex in New Jersey; also a tract of land, nearly adjoining the same, containing 174 acres, with a dwelling-house, kitchen and barn, and a young orchard of near two hundred trees. Mahlon Wright."

The buyer was Jacob G. Bergen, son of a local farmer. Three years later a notice in The New York Gazette and The Weekly Mercury of August 22, 1774 lists:

"... a grist mill with two pair of stones, 12 acres, a good dwelling house, cellar, merchant's shop, a kitchen, barn, etc. and all shop goods of the subscriber, consisting of a neat assortment of dry goods, etc. will be sold on September 12, 1774 by Jacob G. Bergen."



(NOTE: Both above notices from: Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New Jersey, edited by the late William Nelson, succeeded by A. Van Doren Honeyman. Vol. XXIX, extracts from American Newspapers related to New Jersey. Compiled at request of New Jersey Historical Society 1917.)

Via a deed dated September 30, 1775, Bergen sold the items listed in the 1774 notice to Joseph Skelton, John Imley, Archabald Mercer and John P. Schenck. However the deed listed JOSEPH Bergen, not Jacob. One year later, via a deed dated March 1, 1776, Skelton, Imley, Mercer and Schenck sold 25 acres to George Bergen, Jr. for 600 pounds.



There was no mention of the mill although Jacob's son, George is said to have operated the Mill during and after the Revolutionary War. At the time of the Revolution, various farms in the area were forced to suffer the encampment and feeding of British and Hessian soldiers. The mill was then known as the "Message Mill." (Genealogical and Personal Memories of Mercer County by Francis Bayley Lee, 1907) What exactly a "message mill" was can only be guessed at: perhaps a type of "Underground Railroad" for messages among those working for freedom from British rule.

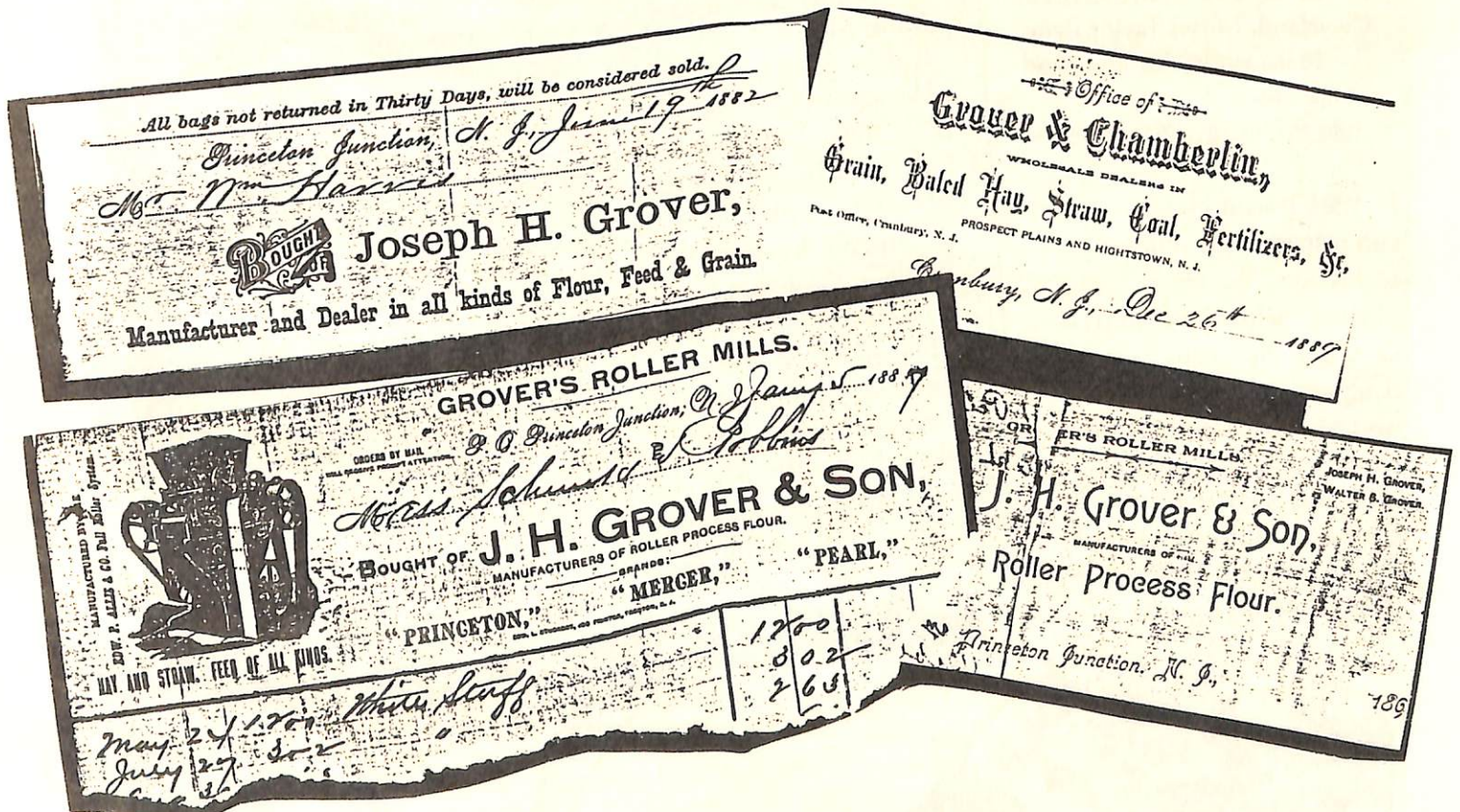
After the Bergens sold the mill (at that time both a grist and saw mill) to Richard Thomas, the area was known as Bear Mill. No documented date for Thomas' purchase has been located. Thomas sold 24 acres to Gottlieb Schwinger (also Schwenger), his cousin, for \$3,000 on March 18, 1837. Gottlieb Schwinger further purchased a total of 45.27 acres: 4.77 acres from Richard Vanhise & Others for \$2,024.29 on March 29, 1837; 16 acres for \$25 from Barzillai Grover and finally on September 13, 1839, Schwinger

purchased 1/2 acre from Abraham Vanhise for \$10. At this time the saw mill portion of the business was closed.

Author's Note: In looking at the Deeds to the Mill through the years, it is interesting to find the following paragraph at the end of each:

"On this date ... personally appeared ... and his wife ... I being satisfied are the grantors mentioned in the foregoing deed ... they acknowledged, signed, sealed and delivered the same as their voluntary act and deed. And the said .... [wife] on a private examination, separate and apart from her said husband, acknowledged that she signed, sealed and delivered the same as her voluntary act and deed freely without any fear, threats or compulsion from her said husband!"

It is comforting to know that the wife was acknowledged. However, I wonder how many wives said they had signed under fear, threats or compulsion?



Various letterheads and invoices dating from 1882 to the 1890s from various Joseph H. Grover companies. (Donated by Elise and Spencer Bruno and J. M. Reynolds).



## Grover's Mill

The mill stayed in Schwinger hands until March 31, 1868, when Sarah Schwinger and John T. Labaw (Executors of Gottlieb Schwinger, deceased) sold their holdings to Joseph H. Grover.

"While Grover was owner the mill was operated by a number of different firms. One of these was Mahaney, Grover and Co., who in 1874 opened a flour and feed store on Witherspoon Street in Princeton. Other operators were Grover and Mahaney in 1878, Rogers and Mahaney in 1879 and Grover and Low in 1882.

"Grover operated the mill himself in 1883. He opened a store on Hullfish Street, Princeton, which supplied feed to many of the prominent people of the town: ex-President Grover Cleveland, Moses Taylor Pyne, the Marquands, Armours and Stocktons."

(Old Princeton's Neighbors)

In 1904 Joseph H. Grover died and conveyed the mill property to his son, Walter S. Grover. Walter, who had married Gottlieb Schwenger's only daughter, was well-known for his lavish entertaining. Newspaper accounts (donated by Elise and Spencer Bruno) describe a Grover Family Reunion held in 1907 (see reproduction on right).



### • GROVER FAMILY REUNION •

A re-union of the Grover family was held at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Walter Grover at Grover's Mills on Saturday, September 7. Dinner was served on the porch at one o'clock and the remainder of the day was spent with music, boating and automobile riding. Among the guests were: Mrs. Elizabeth Stonaker, Princeton; Mrs. V. K. Hutchinson, Weehawken; John Grover, Mrs. Emeline Mershon, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Perrine and Frank Perrine, Cranbury; Mr. and Mrs. Sylvanus Grover, Hattie, LeRoy and Annie Grover, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Grover, Lizzie V. Grover, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Grover, Rue and Alberta Grover, Cranbury Neck; Mrs. Margaretta Grover, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Grover, Mr. and Mrs. Elmer Grover, Lee, Beulah and Russel Grover, Grover's Mills; Mrs. Ella Robinson, Patience and Helen Roberson, Red Bank; Miss Elizabeth Grover, Brooklyn; Mr. and Mrs. Harvey Grover, Hightstown; Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Grover, Ella and Julia Grover, Dayton; Mr. and Mrs. Grover Cox, Mr. and Mrs. William Cox, Katie Cox, Mr. and Mrs. George Grover, Isabella, Sarah and George Grover, Mr. and Mrs. George Snedeker and Nellie Eldridge, Trenton; Mr. and Mrs. William Grover and Walter Grover, Applegarth; Mr. and Mrs. John Reed, Bessie, Sarah, William and John Reed, Rocky Hill; Rev. A. L. Armstrong, Rev. and Mrs. Brown, Dutch Neck; Mr. and Mrs. Harry Hawk and Miss Sarah Baldwin, Trenton; Mr. and Mrs. John Schwinger and Ella Schwinger, New Brunswick; Mr. and Mrs. Amzi Snedeker, William Dock, Mr. and Mrs. Eli Rogers and Bergen Rogers, Princeton Junction.







*Grover Family Reunion at millowner's house, 175 Cranbury Rd., September 7, 1907. Walter and Margaret Grover flank the steps; Rev. Amzi Armstrong, First Presbyterian Church of Dutch Neck (with white beard at top of steps). Grover Family members standing at left side of photo, identified by Annabelle Hawke Jantz are: LeRoy, Harvey (married to Emma), Frank, Elmer, Hattie, and Annie. (Photograph donated by Elise and Spencer Bruno.)*

**A second account of the Reunion was written by John G. Grover:**

"The Grover family reunion at Walter S. Grover's at Grovers Mills, Saturday, September 7th, was a very enjoyable affair. There were about 65 present, with a few special friends of the family added. They came from Cranbury, Hightstown, Trenton, Princeton, New Brunswick, Ocean Grove and Hoboken."

"Mr. Grover had excellent arrangements for bringing his guests from Princeton Junction and from Trenton and New Brunswick trolleys. Automobile and stage meeting the trains and trolleys from about 9 to 12 o'clock."

"Among the special invited guests was the Rev. A. L. Armstrong, who became pastor of the Dutch Neck church 50 years ago or more, and what is remarkable nearly all of this family have been members of the congregation some time during Mr. Armstrong's pastorate, consequently the sympathy and love between their old pastor and the Grover family is very strong."

"Mr. Armstrong's successor, Rev. Mr. Brown and Mrs. Brown were also present. In behalf of the Grover family, the writer extends their hearty good wishes to Mr. and Mrs. Brown with the hope that his pastorate may be long and attended with all the success that has crowned the labors of his predecessor."

"We think when Mr. and Mrs. Walter Grover were remodeling their home a few years ago they must have had in mind an occasion of this kind in planning their house and porches, for when we were invited to dine we were all comfortably seated on the porch."

"I would like to tell of the good things provided but our host and hostess are too modest to have me do so. Suffice it to say there was almost everything to tempt the appetite. After awhile we found ourselves facing Mr. Rose from Princeton with his machine for a snap shot."

"Thus ended a delightful day's outing, one of the bright and happy occasions of our life."

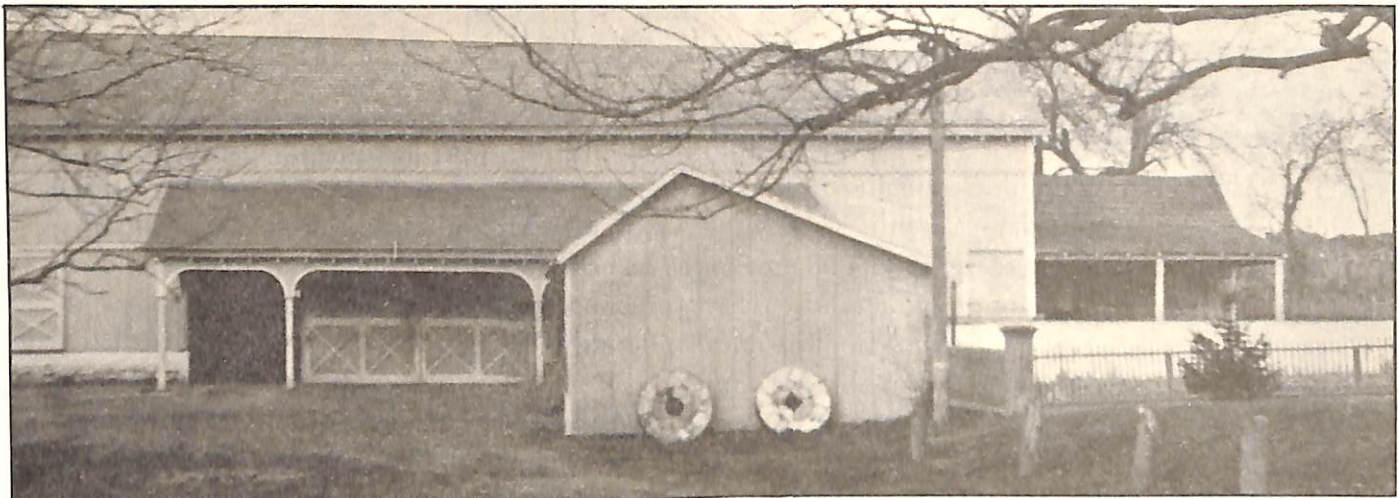


When Walter died in 1929, the property passed to Charles L. Dey. He bought the mill, five houses and some 40 acres of land. Dey then formed the Grovers Mill Company, Inc. with William T. Denison, his brother-in-law. In the 1930s, Dey sold his share of Grovers Mill Company to Denison, who operated the feed mill with his son, William, Jr., from 1939 to 1963.

In 1955, William Denison, Jr. opened a shop across the street in the barn next to the Grover House at 175 Cranbury Road. He repaired and sold lawn mowers. In 1961 he hired Edward Kemp from Plainsboro, who took over the mower shop and ran it with his son, Robert Kemp. The Kemps bought the business in 1973. According to Robert Kemp, in addition to mowers, hardware, paint and garden supplies were also for sale at the barn and the mill itself. At present only the tractor portion of the business still exists as Grovers Mill Company.



*Photo of Grovers Mill Company in 1960s. (Photo courtesy of West Windsor Township.)*



*The barn next to the millowner's house, c. 1900. Future site of the Grover's Mill Company. Note two millstones at right side of barn. (Photo courtesy of Historical Society of Princeton.)*

According to Old Princeton's Neighbors written in the 1930s, Grover's Mill handled mill work for farmers within a 10 mile radius, and ground all the grain used for the thousands of cows at the Walker-Gordon Farms in Plainsboro. The mill was what is known as a full roller mill and was operated by eight employees, using water and electric power alternately.

1974, Jay and Robert Schwartz bought the mill from William Denison and renovated it as living quarters and office for their graphics arts company. In 1975,

they added an art gallery, which was managed by their daughter, Jan Kane. When she was killed in an automobile accident, the Schwartzes closed the gallery, but continued their graphics art company and wholesale plant business.

In 1994 the property has again changed hands. Its new owners, Elizabeth and Robert Schulman will use the building as their residence.

To be continued ... Part II, Spring 1995! 



# Holiday House Tour of Tamarack Hall



96 Bear Brook Road  
Princeton Junction

Sunday, December 11<sup>th</sup>  
from 1 to 5 PM



For the benefit of  
*the Historical Society of West Windsor*

Tickets at the door Adults ~ \$5.00  
Members, Senior Citizens & Students (6-18) ~ \$3.00

# 1994 YEAR END REPORT

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**Auction/Flea Market:** Thanks to generous donations from West Windsor businesses and from members of the historical society, our Auction/Flea Market raised over \$800.

**Zaitz-Schenck House:** Under Malcolm Roszel's supervision, the house now has beaded clapboard across its entire front side. Also soffits and some gutters have been repaired. Special thanks to Warren Schenck for putting the primer coat on both sides of the boards, saving us several hundred dollars. Next steps: painting of front of house, including trim, re-doing roofs of front porches, and replacing clapboard on side facing Southfield Road.

**Exhibits:** Collages of the West Windsor villages and dollhouse versions of the future museum rooms in the Zaitz-Schenck House were used in May for Senior Citizen's Day. The collages will also be used for "Parent's Night" at the high school in September, as well as during the Holiday House Tour.

**Broadside:** With this issue, we have produced 20 issues of our newsletter, Broadside, since 1983! In 1994 we featured the Little League of West Windsor as part of our Service Organizations Series. This issue on Grover's Mill is part of our series on West Windsor Villages. Part II will be produced in Spring 1995. Be sure to renew your membership so you do not miss Part II!

**Holiday House Tour:** Sunday, December 11th from 1 to 5 p.m. has been set for our annual tour of the Castle. We will need bakers and Room Guides. Please call Joan Parry 452-8598 to get the best choice of rooms to be stationed in. Come join the fun! 🍷



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*Broadside is the publication of the Historical Society of West Windsor. Design and layout by Christiana Parry.*

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## *Historical Society of West Windsor*

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