



The Past

The Present



The Road to Scott's Mill

A historic walking tour within the
Fair Hill Natural Resources Management Area

Created Winter 2014



The Road to Scott's Mill: The simple gravel road that starts just across from the Gallaher Road Parking Lot and heads east to the Big Elk Creek was once a bustling country lane called simply the Road to Cowantown, moving people and goods to their homes, to work, to church, to places of business. The area was full of small villages – Fairhill (one word on some maps), Andora, Cherry Hill, Cowantown, Fox Chase, Fairview and others.

Today, the road is part of a network of paths and trails crisscrossing the 5,656-acre Fair Hill Natural Resources Management Area. Visitors can walk, run, hike and ride through the park, but can also get a taste of history along the way. Much of the links to that history can be found in the multiple ruins of homes, farms, mills and other structures.

Cowantown was, loosely, the area where Appleton and Jackson Hall School roads intersect. Because of the creek, and the water it delivered to mills of various types, the area was an important industrial center. Farming, the mills and auger making were the chief businesses. Evidence remains throughout the property of the many homes, barns and buildings that were part of a community long before William du Pont Jr. began buying properties in the 1920s. You just have to know where to look.

Let's hit the road.

The Beginning: Start at the Gallaher Road Parking lot – once called Flounders Corner (because the Flounders family lived in a house here) – and walk across the road, past Big Elk Chapel and into Fair Hill. In October, this part of Fair Hill is used for the world-class Fair Hill International equestrian event. In the 1800s, this was a busy community. The church was built in 1877 for a congregation formed by Rev. John France.

Steps on the Road: Continue down the wide gravel road between the tree lines on the banks. The banks weren't always this steep and the trees were once hedgerows dividing various properties. Look closely on the left, about halfway down and you'll see what's left of a stone stairway. It once led to the home of the Peterson and Pennock families. The house is long gone, but a step or two remain.

The Willis House: Up the hill away from the water complex are more high banks with tree lines (again former hedgerows dividing properties). Continue east and you'll soon see a three-story home, or what's left of it, on the right. The house was built in the 1850s and was the home of James Willis and his family of eight. Born in 1820, Willis was a carpenter and built his home in the Greek Revival style. The result was a striking, tall house. James "Jimmy" Willis died in 1884, but his wife Mary continued to run the 20-acre farm. Relatives called the house a "social center" that welcomed many guests and hosted quilting parties, apple-butter parties and more. There were hay fields, corn fields and animals. There was a small smokehouse on the site and a comfortable back porch. When Mary died in 1902, her daughters inherited the home and a member of the family resided there until 1945.



The Willis House was built in the 1850s and was the home of James Willis and his family. Willis was the grandfather of baseball Hall of Famer Vic Willis.



Across the “street” from the Willis House, was another homestead. The foundation and a well are still visible within the trees.

Trees on the Hill: To the north of the Willis House and across the field is a small grove of trees. It used to be a yard with some low stone ruins and a well still visible deep within the trees. The Petersons lived here in a house (right) built sometime after 1877. There is evidence of a farmstead, most likely the original buildings on the property, downhill from the site.



The Orchard House: Farther east on the road, to the left and up the small trail, are the ruins to the former home of Joseph Steele and his family for much of the mid-1800s. Steele was a carpenter, but his house was part of a farm, with an orchard stretching to the north.

The Jonathan Work House: Downhill from the orchard house, near the big sycamore tree on your right, is evidence of the Jonathan Work house. There are two depressions in the ground that were most likely the foundations of buildings on the 15-acre property. Work was part of a network of auger makers in the area. Work and others in some 15 shops in the area made metal screw augers for wood-working and other uses. From 1810 to 1840, auger making was a vital industry in the area – employing upwards of 100 people. Over time, machines were built to make cheaper and better augers and the industry ceased. Another 15-acre property, belonging to the Fulton and Poole families, is now in the briar-filled area down the road from the Work place.



The original stonework is still visible – and in use – at the Scott's Mill Bridge.

The Bridge: Fair Hill visitors should be familiar with the red Foxcatcher Farm Covered Bridge over the Elk Creek near the Fair Hill Nature Center upstream from Route 273. The bridge before you, called Scott's Bridge for the mill on the other side, was also once covered. Completed in 1855, the bridge was built by Ferdinand Wood of Chester County, Pa., for the sum of \$585. The bridge stood for almost 100 years, and was demolished after much deterioration and damage, in 1946. The stone work done by Mr. Wood all those years ago is still visible and helps support the current bridge. The covered bridge was one of several over the Elk Creek north of Elkton including the Foxcatcher, Scott's, Parks Rolling Mill and Baldwin's Mill (at Elk Mills). Of Maryland's six remaining covered bridges, two – the Foxcatcher and Gilpin's Falls on Route 272 at Bayview – are in Cecil County.



The stone dam once stretched across the Big Elk Creek north of the mill.

Scott's Mill: Just across the bridge, on the left, is Scott's Mill (or what's left of it). The grist mill was active in the early 1800s and operated for nearly 100 years. There were actually two mills here, both owned by David Scott. The three-story stone grist mill was on the north side of the road and its walls are clearly visible. A saw mill operated to the south, though only its stone foundation remains in the woods. The mill complex was a massive structure and operated 24 hours a day (in two shifts) at its peak. Scott's Mills made flour, feed, lumber, cider, fertilizer.

Milling in the area dates to 1783 when Henry McCoy bought land adjoining the river and constructed a dam. A slitting mill, which made nails from iron bars or plates, operated as early as 1796 and the mills changed hands numerous times in the coming years and was owned by Philadelphia merchant Benjamin Jones, a partnership of Cecil Countian James Jackson and Wilmington, Del. Resident John Bemis. John Scott bought the mill in 1845 and the Scott family steered the mill complex to its peak. John Scott was born in Ireland and was an auger maker by trade. He married Lucinda Alden and they had two sons John and James. John and James Scott each had a son named David. John's son David was a Cecil County Commissioner and a member of the state House of Delegates. He was also a poet and his tombstone at Head of Christiana Church in Delaware reads "David Scott, the poet."

A Cecil Whig newspaper clipping from 1845 lists Scott's Mills as a grist, saw and bark mill and an auger factory. David Scott's son Howard ran the mill until it was sold in 1875 to James Ray and Constantine McLaughlin of Delaware. An 1877 atlas lists the mill, run by J.B. Taylor, as a source of choice brands of flour, grain, mill food, etc. with "all orders promptly filled." Ray sold his half to McLaughlin, and



Scott's Mill used to be two mills – a saw mill (foreground) where only the stone foundation remains and a grist mill (background).



Well preserved for its age (the structure dates to the early 1800s), Scott's Mill was once a busy workplace.

the mill was later sold to Alfred Howell in 1929. Howell continued the mill's work until 1935. William du Pont Jr. had bought much of the surrounding land in 1931 – leaving Howell the 20-acre mill complex. Du Pont bought the mill area in 1935, ending the mill's operation. The road from Andora to Cowantown was closed, the dam was dynamited (though you can still see its ruins upriver), the millrace bulldozed to allow herds of cattle to graze (though, again, you can see some evidence). The mill house was rented out for years and the mill remained a part of the community, used for a time by the Boy Scouts of Newark and area families as a recreation center. Eventually, the house deteriorated and was knocked down, and the mill faded into the woods.

Though the machinery was sold, the mill wheel is still there. The "Leffel Wheel" made by the Leffel Company of Columbus, Ohio (still in existence) was state of the art at the time. It was an inward flow turbine with adjustable outside wicket gates.

Today, Scott's Mill and the other ruins on the Fair Hill property are evidence of a bygone era. This part of Cecil County featured small communities like this one. The residents worked on farms, in mills, in auger factories, in blacksmith shops. Many of the simple dirt roads of the property were busily traveled. William du Pont Jr.'s purchase of dozens of small farms helped bring that way of life to an end, though much of it was changing anyway. When the state of Maryland acquired the property in 1975, visitors were able to rediscover the history of Fair Hill.



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2014

Special Thanks to:

The rangers and staff of the Fair Hill
Department of Natural Resources Management Area

Researcher Emily Kilby

Steve Graham, the scoutmasters and scouts of Troop 443

*On The Cover: A covered bridge led to Scott's Mill until the 1940s.
A modern bridge replaced the structure, but the view hasn't changed all that much.
Past photo courtesy of Poteet family collection at mdcoveredbridges.com*

*Sources: Research of Fair Hill historian Emily Kilby,
Maryland Inventory of Historic Sites report (1998), mdcoveredbridges.com.
Additional historic photos courtesy of Karen Peterson.*

