Fairmount Park Commission recap of the History of the Robeson Rolling Mill.

History of the PCC Clubhouse

Theresa Stuhlman of the Fairmount Park Commission was kind enough to pass on to us a little of the history of the building we now call the PCC Clubhouse.

It's worth reading.

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Sent in by Evelyn Koppel

Philadelphia Canoe Club/Colony Castle (c. 1686-1689)

Although an exact date cannot be determined based on the documentation available, the building now called Colony Castle was built sometime in the mid to late 1680s, specifically 1686-1689. The mill was originally referred to as the Robeson Mill and later as the Roxboro Mill.

According to the map department at the Free Library of Philadelphia, no comprehensive map showing structures of the area of the mills (where the Wissahickon meets the Schuylkill) during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century exists. Therefore, in order to research the history of the building it is necessary to examine the deeds related to the sale of the land.

William Penn granted the land to Robert Turner in 1683. Turner sold the land to Joshua Tittery and Richard Townsend in 1686, there is no mention of the mills in this sale. In 1691, Andrew Robeson, Sr. and Charles Saunders purchased the property. However, the mills are mentioned prior to this in a deed of 1689, when Tittery and Townsend sold a third interest in the mills to John Tysack of London.

The present building is the earliest of the three mill complex (called Mill #1) and many sources refer to it as a grist mill, although one source claims that it was the first "cut-nail" factory in America. In 1850 it was called a "log-wood" mill, which meant dye-making. Nowhere in the sources is there a mention of the destruction of Mill #1, therefore it is safe to assume that it is the same building.

According to Workshop of the World (John Bowie, ed., Oliver Evans Press, 1990), the building, known as the Robeson Mill, was originally part of a complex of three mill buildings built circa 1686-1689. The land was known as Sumac Park in the 17th century, having been one of the original land grants from William Penn. The sources used are James Magee's 1934 typescript Wissahickon Valley Industrial Mills, Colonial and Revolutionary Era and Douglas Macfarlan's 1949 typescript The Wissahickon Mills. Macfarlan was a friend of Magee's and based his research on Magee's previous findings with certain later findings added. Both volumes are housed at the Free Library of Philadelphia.

When the Fairmount Park Commission took over the property in 1869, it demolished the other two mill buildings.

Sources

Bowie, John, ed. Workshop of the World. Wallingford, PA: Oliver Evans Press, 1990 Macfarlan, Douglas. "The Mills at the Mouth of the Creek." Germantowne Crier vol. 4, no.2 (June 1952): 15, 29. Macfarlan, Douglas and James Magee, Jr. The Wissahickon Mills. (10 vols.) Reference Material, Social Science & History Dept., Free Library of Philadelphia (includes their extensive notes on the deeds of the property and the mills).

Minor updates: 1.) In 1686, Turner leased land (50.5 acres)—Turner did not sell it until 1691. 2.) The first reference to our mill was as a "Corn Mill."