

Jefferson County Landmark Nomination Report
Jefferson County Historic Landmarks Commission
May 2015

Beeler's Mill Water Wheel

6517 Kabletown Rd.
Charles Town, WV 25404

Physical Description:

The Beeler's Mill Water Wheel is a Fitz Overshot I-X-L steel water wheel, 22 feet in diameter with a 4-foot face (width of the buckets). The property on which the wheel is located, 6517 Kabletown Rd. is at a point about a mile above the Shenandoah River where Evitts Run crosses WV State Route 25 (Kabletown Rd).

Historic Description

The Beeler's Mill property was formed from two tracts of land granted by royal patent (490 acres granted to Daniel Burnett on October 3, 1734, and 473 acres granted to Samuel Walker on January 1, 1751). Portions of both tracts were conveyed by Walker to Christopher Beeler on August 31, 1752 (DB 13/453). Christopher Beeler was the first to occupy the property and, by 1761, had built the first mill at the site. We do not know the type of mill – only that it was built.

In 1769, the property was transferred to Christopher Beeler's son, Benjamin. Between 1769 and 1827, Benjamin Beeler operated at least two types of water driven mills at the site: carding and grist mills. The Varle map of 1809 shows a mill and in 1813 Beeler was taxed for a grist mill (along with two "whites," twelve slaves, and 17 horses). When Benjamin Beeler wrote his will and died in 1827, he directed that his "carding Machine Mills" on the site were to be repaired and left as a portion of the dower of 80 ³/₄ acres to his widow, Sarah. When his children reached majority and his will was probated in 1834, Sarah had already remarried, so the mill property then became part of the estate of her new husband, Abraham Isler. The schematic recorded in the deed book of the division of Benjamin Beeler's estate clearly shows two mills on this four-acre parcel that went to Sarah (JC DB 36/158).

Architectural evidence indicates that the house that sits on the property today had its origins as early as the years during which the Beelers owned the site. The core of the lapboard-covered home is a log structure that was constructed originally as a mill building. The post support design visible in the structure was only employed in erecting mill buildings – never in residential construction. Regardless of whether its original use was as a mill or as a mill support building, by the early Twentieth Century, it had been converted to residential use and has since been expanded and updated.

From 1834 through the 1860s, the value of the Isler properties fluctuated wildly, but definitely trended downwards. By 1869, Sarah (Beeler) Isler was deceased and the mill site with 4 acres was sold to J. B. McElroy for \$2,800 (JC DB 4/301). By 1878, the property was in severe

disrepair & was sold following a Chancery suit to prominent Charles Town businessmen William F. Weirick and John Weller for \$600 (JC DB F/326).

In 1878, Weirick & Weller built the largest mill ever constructed on the property. The Fitz I-X-L water wheel manufactured in Martinsburg and constructed on site for the new mill. The building was four stories high with three operating burrs and continued to serve the community well into the next century. By 1883, Weirick & Weller (so identified on the Howard map) had also added a sawmill on the property. In 1888, Weirick took full control of the property (JC DB S/117) and continued to operate the mills until the grain mill was destroyed by fire in 1907 and the property again fell into disrepair.

In 1920, T. Wilmer Clipp purchased the property from the Weirick estate (DB 119/218) and built a smaller, two story grain mill on the site – using the same Fitz water wheel previously installed in the Weirick & Weller mill in 1878. The property is still referred to as Clipp’s Mill by many Jefferson County residents. Clipp operated the mill until 1946 when the property (but not the mill) was sold to D. Edgar Stultz (JC DB 165/344). In 1947, Clipp dismantled the mill and used the lumber to help build Children’s Haven, the orphanage run by Mom & Pop Wheeler located on the banks of the Shenandoah River. Clipp left the mill wheel intact, still operable, in its present location.

Of the nine families that have owned the property since the dismantling of the mill (Stultz, 1946 - 1948; McMillan, 1948 1951; Dawson, 1951 - 1964; Howard, 1964 -1971; Brown, 1971 - 1997; Shotts, 1997 - 2000; Birnbach, 2000 - 2007; and Ingersoll, 2007 - Present), some were less than conscientious stewards of the wheel. At the start of the 21st Century, the wheel stood motionless, with a broken axle and overgrows with weeds. Since 2000, significant restoration and repairs have been made, such that the wheel is again operable.

Historic Resource:

The water wheel located on this site is a Fitz Overshot I-X-L steel water wheel, 22 feet in diameter with a 4-foot face (width of the buckets). It was manufactured at the Fitz Foundry (later the Tuscorora Iron Works) in Martinsburg, WV by Samuel Fitz, after 1852 but prior to 1896 when he moved the operation to Hanover, PA. The Fitz waterwheel was an incredible engineering improvement over the wooden wheels previously in use. The efficiency of a Fitz wheel exceeds 95% -- i.e., the wheel captures most of the power of the falling water. By comparison, the old wooden wheels had an efficiency rating of no more than 50%. Even hydro-powered turbines were rated 70%, at best. This disparity in efficiency ratings so rankled turbine manufacturer James Leffel that he purchased the Fitz Water Wheel Company in 1996 and destroyed all the machinery, inventory, patterns and engineering drawings. Given its high efficiency rating, this Fitz water wheel at the Beeler’s Mill site is capable of generating more than 17,000 foot-pounds of torque.

Nomination Criteria:

The JCHLC nominates this object under Criteria C for inclusion on the list of registered county landmarks. Criteria C states that an object may be nominated if, in the opinion of the JCHLC, it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that retains a high degree of integrity. The property owners,

Thomas G. & Barbara D. Ingersoll, agreed to have the water wheel listed as Jefferson County Historic Landmark.

Nomination Action:

The JCHLC voted unanimously to add the Beeler's Mill Water Wheel, under Criteria C, to the rolls of registered Jefferson County Historic Landmarks on May 20, 2015.