



Bergen County, Where America Begins

REDMILL AND ITS HAUNTED HOUSE

By Kevin W. Wright

When Jacob C. Zabriskie leased the 80-acre mill farm upon the Saddle River from Abraham Gouverneur in 1766, it included a new, four-room stone house. The neighborhood, known casually as Zabriskie's Mills, was renamed New Hamburg in 1790, when a post office opened.¹ Located upon the Albany post road, New Hamburg was a busy relay point for stage coaches stopping overnight, the water and pasture thereabout being of the best quality. In winter, large companies of farmers from as far off as Sussex County stayed the night while en route to city markets with sled loads of venison, pork and other farm products. In season, as many as 25 farmers could be seen forming a



procession across the frozen countryside and as many as a hundred rural travelers might put up for the night in hotels near the mill. At one time or another, Garret Oldis, Benjamin Oldis, Harmon Lutkins, Samuel Breevort, Henry Brevoort, George Doremus, John Zabriskie, Henry Zabriskie, Henry Van Emburgh, Cornelius Taylor and David Naugle established reputations for hospitality at taverns along the Paramus Road. Polly Brevoort's hotel, supposedly more popular than any of her numerous competitors, stood on the west side of the bridge. For many years, a solitary fiddler named Yean Moore provided entertainment for the old-time dances at such establishments, whose balconies were illuminated by a row of candles and whose dance-halls echoed with the lively footfall of rustic swains and cityfolk drawn from as far away as Paterson. Barger's Lane (as the old road to Paterson from Arcola was then known) was also a popular track for horse-racing where thousands of dollars were wagered and every foot of the course was lined with men and women from miles around. The Bergen County militia held their periodical "trainings" on the broad and level plain about Red Mills; such training-days, attended by thousands, had the air and festivity of a general holiday.

In 1816, Garret Oldis conveyed the mill lot at New Hamburg to John Ryers of Sloterdam, who installed wool-carding machinery. In January 1820, John and Bernard Ryers sold the carding mill to Albert A. Westervelt. The new owner distinguished the mill with a bright coat of paint and so bestowed the name Red Mill.

In July 1824, Westervelt's son-in-law, Edward B. Force, informed the public that he had "established a manufactory for the purpose of Carding, Spinning, Fulling, Dyeing and Dressing at the Red Mill belonging to Albert A. Westervelt at Paramus, where he intends to carry on the above business in all its various branches." He offered to card farmers' wool "as usual" and to manufacture wool into "all descriptions of yarn, cloths, flannels and Satinet, etc, at reduced prices." In October 1825, he and Garret A. Westervelt

advertised that "their Fulling Machine [was] now in Complete order at the Red Mill, Paramus..." Cloth for fulling could be left at stores in Hackensack, Old Hackensack (Bogota), English Neighborhood and Paterson Landing. Two or three pedlars made regular rounds of the countryside, bringing raw and worked materials from points as distant as Union Hill, Englewood and Nyack. Satinet, yarn and red flannel blankets were manufactured by hands working from dawn until eight in the evening, earning from 50¢ to 75¢ weekly.

Upon his death in 1838, Albert Westervelt was succeeded by Edward B. Force, husband of his daughter Lydia. Force increased production, spinning wool yarn for the Higgins carpet factory in New York. He removed the saw mill portion from over the flume and added it to the north end of the building, then built a two-story addition on the south side where six power looms ran full time. He also built a long building on the east side of the road to house eighteen hand looms. Lastly, he erected a belfry on the mill which he used to summon his employees, who sometimes numbered 50 hands.

Red Mill now used all its power as a woolen mill. Its principal product was heavy printing blankets, fulled in heavy stocks and then used over heavy rollers for printing calicos and other goods. A barn which Edward Force built a short distance south of the mill in 1840 was outfitted with seats in 1842 and appropriated for religious services. In 1843, Force donated a lot for construction of the Arcola Methodist church. His neighbors brought a number of large logs to the mill where they were sawn into timbers. Rev. Manning Force, Edward's brother, laid the cornerstone .

Edward Force died September 6, 1850, at 51 years of age. In November 1853, commissioners of the Orphans Court sold the mill and about 60 acres for \$5,200 to the highest bidder, George Graham, reputedly "a portly Englishman said to have been a high liver." He angered his neighbors along the river by raising the level of the mill dam to increase its power, thereby flooding meadowlands as far as Dunderhook. They retaliated by throwing the upper course of stones on the dam into the river during the night. During the Civil War, Graham produced army blankets for Robert Beatty of Little Falls, who had a government contract. In March 1871, administrators of George Graham's estate sold the property to John Dunlop. He, in partnership with D. S. Beam, Samuel Smith and General Hoxney, all of Paterson, intended using the mill pond as a municipal reservoir for the city of Hackensack, but the water supply proved inadequate for that purpose.

For many years, the setting of the Red Mill, with its two dams, bridge and stream, made it a favorite subject for professional and amateur photographers, sketchers and painters. But its industrial life ebbed away, outdone by the modern factory system. The popularity of the place as a waystation declined with the rise of the railroads and, as the roads thereabout deteriorated, the old drovers and stage hotels closed. In August 1873, The Hackensack Republican announced that the Red Mill at Arcola had been "rented and will soon run as a shoddy manufactory," but the old mill dam sustained a heavy break by a freshet in April 1874. The old dwelling house near the Red Mill was reportedly "the subject of a good many comments":

"The neighbors say that strange noises are to be heard in the building after night fall. On one occasion an apparition in white stood at the window. In the early part of this century 'Olly' Westervely lived there. He was an eccentric man, and it is said, that he ordered a coffin before his death. It was brought into the house, and the old man got into it to see how a wooden overcoat fitted. It was a tight fit, and help had to be brought to relieve Mr. Westervelt out of his predicament. It may be that the spirit of the old man has returned to revisit the old settlement. Change has developed, but little. The old mill still stands, and its former occupant, E. B. Force, and others, have long crossed the dark river. It would not be unreasonable to suppose the spirits of the departed return to earth, that apparitions from the spirit world are walking around the Red Mills, and disturbing the residents by phantoms. The building in itself is enough to scare any one let alone the presence of a ghost. It is an admirable place for goblins 'and sich,' and the only way the public can be relieved of them is to pull down the old dwelling, and break up such a hiding place."

The Red Mill was dismantled in December 1894. In 1898, Edward Denison Easton, a gramophone manufacturer, built a handsome residence at Arcola, near the site of the Red Mill, and wished to constructed a park back of his residence. About fifty men and twenty teams of horses worked on the construction of walks and drives. Trees were planted and a lake formed in the middle of the grounds. In July 1899, John Dunlop conveyed the Red Mill to William Johnson, of Hackensack, who sold it three months later to Edward Easton, who was then "making extensive purchases of property in that neighborhood with a view to beautifying the surroundings of his home." In 1904, Easton constructed the present stone tower on the former site of the Red Mill, which he used to pump water for his gardens.



Easton Water Tower