

THE VANCE-PALMER PAPER MILL 1851-1925

For almost three-quarters of a century one of Chester County's smallest and most secluded paper mills was tucked away in the Doe Run Valley one-half mile northeast of Doe Run Village. This mill site now epitomizes desertion and dissolution. The mill building is gone, the onetime comfortable mansion and an earlier stone house are in an advanced state of decay. The dam, once of considerable size, has partly survived but is filled with a century's accumulation of rich silt from the Doe Run Valley fertile hillsides. The area adjacent to the mill site, like that of two other paper mills on Buck Run, is now part of the 10,000-acre Buck & Doe Run Valley Farms owned by the King Ranch of Kingsville, Texas. Here in lush pastures several thousand Texas-born cattle are finished for market each year.

The Mill Under Washington Vance 1851-1865

In March 1851 Hayes Clark, an extensive land owner in the Doe Run area, sold a "Messuage, burn Cotton Factory and tract of 36 Acres" to Washington Vance, of Kennett Township, for \$3,000. Vance's activities at the Willow Brook Paper Mill near Kennett Square have been described under the paper mills on Red Clay Creek. Soon after acquiring his new property he moved his family to it and converted the remains of the cotton factory into a paper mill. His operations here are listed in the 1860 United States Census as@

West Marlborough Township	Chester County
Washington Vance Box Boards	Capital \$4,000.
50 Tons Wollen [Woolen]	Employed 2 males @ \$40/Mo.
Rags and Waste Paper \$1,000.	Sold 40 Tons Box Boards for \$2,400

In the 1860 township tax record was listed "G. Washington Vance, 35 acres @ \$70 \$2,450. Occupation \$200." Due to the death of his wife and the difficulties caused by the Civil War Vance sold his property to a neighbor, Joseph Palmer, in 1865.

The Mill Under Two Generations of the Palmer Family 1865-1925

The "Genealogy of the Palmer-Trimble Family, 1688-1910," notes that Joseph Palmer (1836-1899) was one of ten children. His parents moved to the Doe Run area in 1857. Joseph Palmer married Ruth Baker in 1859. On returning from service in the Civil War in 1865 he was eager to have his own farm and business. From this time until his death, in 1899, he operated the farm and paper mill. The Genealogy notes that he had unusual skill with mechanic's tools, an asset for a mill operator, and was characterized by a sunny disposition.

The advent of the Doe Run and White Clay Creek Railroad, (later known as the Pomeroy and Delaware City) in the early 1870's was a boon to the papermaking establishments in the Doe ~~Run~~ and Buck Run area. Lockwood's Directory for 1873-74 reported :

Joseph Palmer Doe Run Chester County, Pa.
 Mill contains two engines, 250 lbs.; one 36-inch
 Cylinder Machine. Water Power. Makes Binders'
 Boards. Capacity, 1,500 lbs. 24 hours.

The listing of "24 hours" is academic as one of Joseph's grandsons says that the mill was not operated at night. However, it had a misfortune which produced unwelcome light. The Daily Local News of April 17, 1879, reported :

Mr. Joseph Palmer, whose mill, situated on Doe Run
 Creek, West Marlborough township, was burned last
 season, has commenced the rebuilding of it on the
 same site.

That the mill was soon in operation is evident in the 1880 Census which reported the sale of \$4,500 worth of binders' boards during the previous year.

Like several other small mills which sun-dried their boards, this mill did not operate during the winter months. This practice is reflected in the following news item in the Coatesville Weekly Times of March

9, 1889 : The box and binder-board mill of Joe Palmer, Willow
 Glen, Doe Run, which has been closed during the winter
 resumed operations yesterday.

Willis B. Palmer (1865-1939), one of Joseph and Ruth's children, married Annie Landis in 1890. By this date he had been active in the operation of the paper mill for some years. His sister, Laura, married John W. Ziegler in 1892. Mr. Ziegler was a member of the firm of Ziegler Brothers, Publishers and Bookbinders, in Philadelphia. This suggests some of the the likelihood that binder's boards from the Palmer mill were sold to the Ziegler firm.

Joseph Palmer was buried in the Friend's Graveyard at Ercildoun, the final resting place of several local paper makers. After his death his son, Willis, took over the business. Lockwood's Directory for 1902-1903 reported:

Doe Run Chester County Pennsylvania
Palmer, Willia B. WILLOW GLEN MILLS
Shipping Point at Mill. One 450 lb. Beating,
one 35" Machine. Water. Binders' and Jacquard
Boards. 1,600 lbs. 24 hours.

The reported shipping^{point} at the mill is somewhat in error. Doe Run Station, on the Pomeroy & Delaware^{City} Railroad, was two miles from the Palmer mill. Between 1905 and 1925 the production of the mill was listed from 1,000 to 2,000 pounds a day. A surprising aspect of the Willow Glen Mill was its ability to continue in business with such a small operation. By 1900 nearly all of the little mills had been forced out of business by those with large capacity.

In 1925 Willis Palmer sold his 36-acre property and moved to Coatesville. It was acquired by Lamont duPont who was then establishing the Buck and Doe Run Valley Farms.