

Diana Scott

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Mills served as a connection between the farmer and the merchant because I believe they were a middle man. When the farmer first came; he was an early settler, had to do everything himself, grind his own corn, grind his own wheat. This way he could take it to somebody who would do such a thing for him. It would be bagged or barreled and it would be sent to, if not sent, at least it would be ready to be taken to Baltimore city where the merchants stood in line to either ship it out to England or to one of the other colonies at the time.

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The earliest settlers were the English in this portion of the county, in the southern portion. They came from Anne Arundel county, which shared a border with Baltimore county, which this was at that time. They also came up from the western shore, from Annapolis, from the other towns along the way to settle in this area. And among those was the Bennett family. There's quite a group of them. They were down by the Patapsco River, on both sides, because it was all Baltimore county and they were Perry, Samuel, Wesley, Elisha, Henry, William. So there were quite a lot of Bennetts. And also included in that were some other English names like Phillips and Watson and Snowden, and all these people had land patents. Now the one we're interested in for the Oakland Mill, where the mill finally appeared, was Elisha Bennett, and he had Bennetts Park and White Oak Bottom; they were his two land patents. And I always think that perhaps Oakland got its name from one of those land patents, mainly the White Oak Bottom. It must have been a beautiful place because he called it Bennetts Park, and that appeals to me too when I think back to what it was like then.

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It wasn't until 1810 that the tax records finally tell us that there was a mill on the property. He was assessed for \$400. He had a saw mill; he was assessed for \$60, and he had eight slaves, which said perhaps he was, also in addition to the milling business; he was either growing tobacco or wheat to grind in his own mill, and to be able to ship that down to Baltimore where most of the farmers took their goods.

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Okay, well the Bennetts were still holding on to the grist mill and they decided to lease it to a father and son duo named Morton. Now these men were German; they were not citizens so they couldn't own the mill. But I have a feeling that they were probably versed in textiles because they wanted to change the grist mill into a cotton mill, which they did. And they didn't own it until 1834 which is presumably when they became citizens. The idea of changing at that time came from an English boycott that was going on in the early 1800s. We were trying to have our own materials, our own fabrics, so that we wouldn't have to pay top dollar to Britain, who took all our raw materials, made it into a blanket and then it comes back to us and we have to spend an arm and a leg in order to buy this blanket, or to buy the material or fabrics for dresses and gowns. So why

not make our own, and do it at a cheaper price. So I think that's what was going on at that time.

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The next person who owned the mill was William Miller, and he changed the name to the Oakland Manufacturing Company of Baltimore. So I'm assuming that this man came from Baltimore and decided that this mill was in a good spot; it was on the north branch of the Patapsco River. It was on what they called the falls area so there was a lot of power, a lot of energy from the water to use.

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So Mr. Miller coming from Baltimore would also use the mill and the mule teams to send his goods into Baltimore. And this whole area, this whole southeastern corner of Carroll county, of present day Carroll county, dealt mainly with Baltimore. They took their goods down to Liberty Road which at that time was the Diggs Wagon Road, all the way into Baltimore proper, to Camden Yards and that area to set up and sell their goods or produce to a middle man. They would also give it to the shippers to ship out to foreign countries, to France, to Britain, or to the other colonies.

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Yes, I thought it was very interesting. We have Enoch Pratt of library fame coming out to Carroll county. Of course it was Carroll county, 1837; it was the date we became a county, and it was when the Mortons owned the mill is when the county changed. Mr. Pratt leased it and from 1860 until 1867, and he leased it to a man named John Graham Melville. He leased it to a man named John Graham Melville who had experience in the woolen industry. And he also had people from the past, Mr. Morton was still there with him, Mr. Miller was still there with him so he had experienced people around him. And he changed that, or it changed under his managers, to a woolen mill. So here we had grist to cotton and now to wool.

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John Graham Melville decided for some reason that he was going back to Fredericksburg, and perhaps he was near retirement age, and just wanted to take a little bit of relaxation. He knew that mill had probably had a house in Fredericksburg as well. And his three sons wanted to buy the mill because after all they had grown up in this town, and it was a personal thing to them. They really wanted, not only to own the mill, but to own it because, it was their town. And also during Pratt's lease, not lease but his ownership, this is the first time that you see Oakland on a map was 1877. And as a matter of fact you can still see on today's Maryland maps; Oakland is still printed on it, which I find somewhat amusing since it doesn't exist anymore, but they've kept it on there never the less because it was a very important town in this end of the county.

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So when Mr. Melville went back to Fredericksburg his three sons did buy the mill. They only had it, probably less than a year, when they ran into monetary problems and they had to come up with the money or be ousted. The creditors wouldn't wait so the three

sons; they were James, John Colter, and Charles. James was the oldest brother and he was so close to the town and the people that were there and the workers; he just did not want to leave. And it didn't matter the people, the sheriff of then Carroll county, and bodily took him out of his old boyhood home, and he became so discouraged after that he went to Chicago, but he still made out very well for himself in the textile business in Chicago. John Colter went with his father went back to Fredericksburg and worked at the mill there. And Charles, the youngest one, became a gentleman farmer. As a matter of fact, at the end of Oakland Road today you can still see his big old farm house. In addition to that he dabbled in politics, more than dabbled; he became a commissioner for Carroll county. That was in 1919 and he held that post for 23 years, consecutive years. So he must have been well liked by the community, by Carroll county people.

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After the three boys lost their interest in the mill, it was Nicholas Steele who was the next owner. This poor man only had the mill for six months when the whole thing went up in flames. It was a stone mill so the outside walls remained, but the interior and all the goods, all the equipment was completely ruined. So he had to start from scratch again. And there was a quarry in the area and a lot of locals helped him build this mill; it became a five story mill. And he put into it the latest firefighting technology equipment that he could possibly find; this was never going to happen again to him. He also had a reservoir placed on top of the hill, a nearby hill, so that there would always be water in case such a thing should happen again. He held on to this for many years until 1915, and this is when John Colter Melville came back. He was one of the first generation who left.

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Nicholas Steele held on to the mill for many years, and probably again through some kind of monetary problem, the mill went up for sale, and who should come to buy it but John Colter Melville, the one who had been forced to leave his childhood home; one of the three brothers that we talked about earlier. He came to the town and made some immediate improvements. He put in a new tie house, he put in a weave room, a finishing room, an office, he built a new warehouse, he built four new houses; he even built a brick house. So all this was part of his idea to increase the mill, make the people happy there, so they would like to work there, and it was steady employment, so people wanted to be there. And the more pleasant he could make it for them the better employees he would have. He also hired a handy man who went through the town and painted all the houses. He hired some one in the spring time who would come in and dig up all the home gardens so the people didn't have to do that. So it was a very nice relationship that he established between himself and the people who worked for him.

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John Colter took on as his partners, his three sons and a daughter. The oldest son was John Graham and he went by Graham so he wouldn't get confused with his...the other John. He was vice president of the company and the stories were that he would take off his suit coat, roll up his sleeves, get on the floor, look underneath, see what was wrong with one of the looms or anything that might be broken. He was just one of the people who had a strong work ethic and wanted to be with the employees and get the best out of

them. The second son, George, his job was in sales and he would take sample booklets down to Baltimore to show what kinds of materials, textile the mill could produce. After a while they found out New York was the better place to go and he spent the last 20 years of his life living in New York city as a sales person for the Melville Woolen Company. The last son was Tom Melville. He had gone to college; he knew a lot about textiles. He apparently drew a lot of respect from the employees when he came in. People stubbed out their cigarettes; they sat up straight or else they did some...they continued to work on their project but looked extra busy doing it. They wanted to make a good impression on him. And he was a person who played the concert piano, he was a concert pianist, he had a house on the hill that overlooked the mill; he could look down upon all the houses and the mill itself. So he really did put himself in a kind of a lordly position, I would say.

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Under the Melvilles the mill became an economic mainstay to the community. I would say that within a ten mile radius, people were affected by this mill. There are stories about men walking from Gamber or walking from Deer Park Road to come to work at this mill. In addition to the houses though, they also had boarding houses, and it's my guess, that they worked six days a week and Sunday was their day off. On Monday they came to work, they stayed the week at the boarding house, and then they left Saturday night and went home again to be with their families for that last day. They worked ten hour days, and they got something like six to twelve dollars a week for the work that they did.

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The town itself had duplex homes. There were two rooms down, to rooms up, and some of the houses had porches. The Melvilles charged their employees a dollar per room and fifty cents for the porch, so it cost \$4.50 to live in one of the Melville homes. You can see that they really were making it a great opportunity, money wise, for their employees. The Melvilles also had a company store and in the store, besides like our convenience stores, they sold things like kerosene, candy, ice cream, more of their fabrics that they produce at the mill. They had ice that they had collected during the winter months... by cracking the ice on the Patapsco River, and bringing that back and putting it under straw, deep in the earth so that they would continue to have the ice to serve their people throughout the summer. They had soft drinks, some canned goods, but mostly the people put up their fresh, the women in the community put up their own canned goods. They also had a type of medical insurance. They would take a certain amount of money out of the employees pay checks, and if you were sick, there was a blackboard in that store; you went to the blackboard, you'd put your name up on it and you said that you were sick with what you thought might be a bad cold or a sore throat or whatever it might be. And would the doctor please come to visit you at house #4 or whatever the address might be. The doctors would come through in their horse and buggies, they would stop at the store, they would look at the blackboard, and then they would go to your house and take care of you.

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The doctors spent the same amount of time with the farmers too. When they came out for the mill employees, the farmers would also put up on the blackboard if anybody was sick in their households. So then the doctors would continue on to the farm houses and treat those people too. Except when he went to the farm houses, it was a little bit more money. He charged between two and five dollars depending on what he had to do.

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Then the store had the only telephone in town, so this was nice if you had an emergency and you needed to call somebody, but on the other hand, if you wanted it to be a private call, it was probably not. I would say by that evening if you called in the morning, by the evening the whole town knew what it was that you had called your neighbor about, or you had called your family member about.

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The Melvilles had a school and a church there; it was a public school. The downstairs of the church was a raised brick portion and that's where the kids went to school. Upstairs was the Union Church where all denominations could meet. Well in 1925 that building burned to the ground, and the people had to find a new place to go to church. And about a mile and a half out of town, there was the Oakland Methodist Church so a lot of people went there, and some went to St. Josephs Catholic Church in Sykesville, and other churches around the community. But they were the two that were mentioned to me as to where most people went. So the Melvilles had to come up with an idea of what they could do about the school. So they offered a warehouse and the first three grades were held in the downstairs portion of the warehouse, and the next four grades were held upstairs. And they had...they would complete seventh grade and then they would go to Sykesville to complete the eighth, ninth, tenth and the eleventh. And the Carroll county school system didn't have a twelfth grade until 1950. So they only went to the eleventh grade at that time.

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They had a bus that was able to take these graduates of the seventh grade to Sykesville, so that was nice for them. They didn't have to walk to school; they had to walk when they were in elementary school.

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It was the same year that the school and the church burned down that Mr. Mellville decided that there should be a community hall. Now whether it was in consequence of or just happened to be in that year, I don't really know, but it was quite an edifice. It was architecturally grand for a mill town. The downstairs though had six to eight bowling lanes so they could go bowling, it had a snack bar. Upstairs was a huge auditorium, a room where they could have dances, where they could watch silent movies, and these movies and were accompanied by (?) Shipley on the piano; I still remember that name, so they apparently they had a piano there.

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When an auction happened at the demise of the mill, there were 500 chairs that they mentioned; and so that told me that the hall was very large to hold 500 individuals. And in addition to the movies they also were able to watch plays and although various churches around there the children would come there to perform a Christmas play, for instance. They also had parades; they entered a float in the Centennial parade that they had. They also had picnics. There was one picnic in particular that I remember. It was in 1922 and they said that 15 to 2,000 people came to this picnic. And the reason I think was there was a fire engine that was going to be on display from Reisterstown. There was going to be a radio demonstration, and all this was new, and of course there old chicken dinner which drew a lot of people. There was a band that the Oakland people had and so you could hear them march. They also had baseball teams, all the towns, small towns around had their marching band; they also had their baseball team with them. They would all compete against one another, and so that was a nice social activity as well. They also had fireworks for their picnic, so this was just a grand thing. Fire engines and fireworks and radios and chicken dinners, and baseball games, and the music, so no wonder they had so many people came.

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It was the legislative act of the Patapsco water basin that was signed by Governor Ritchie that started this whole thing about a reservoir being built. In that act it said that Baltimore city could take for the drinking water of their people everything along the north branch of the Patapsco River. They could take churches, they could take graves, they could take businesses, stores, which of course is a business but, the mill, there was a Bollinger mill up the river a little bit farther that was taken. There were a lot of little hamlets, with three or four houses grouped around. There were everything that you could possibly think of barns, out buildings, all this was taken.

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Okay this happened in 1931. By 1933 the people in the community were starting to get rumors. "Did you hear that our land is going to be taken away from us and is going to be used for a reservoir?" And the other person would say, "Well yeah I heard it from so and so but I don't think its going to happen here to you." No, no, it couldn't; they wouldn't do such a thing. There's too many people involved, there's too many things are involved. So this went on, the rumors, for quite a while. It took all the way until 1942, '31, '42, seven years for an official announcement to be made that this was going to happen. And personally I think that was much too long. People should have been able to start preparing way before 1942. The Melvilles wanted to look like a (?), so they put in another dye house, and they continued to improve their mill and the mill town because they wanted to get top dollar when it came time for the mill to be taken from them. They had it assessed at three million. They asked for two million, and they got a little bit more than a million and a half. So they were the ones who got the money; mill people of course, they were renting those houses, so they had no house. There were going to have no job. They were losing their schools, their churches, their community hall, their social life. It was a whole change of life for these people, and it makes me sad to this day, thinking about everything these people lost

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The farmers also had it very difficult when their old homesteads that had been so often been in their families since the mid-1700s. And it didn't matter, their farms went too. But the difference was they were paid for their farm land and they could invest that money in a new piece of property or a new house, but the mill people didn't have that option. So they had to use whatever life savings they had squired away and buy land or live with a relative until a house could be built; or live in a house or move away completely. Some went to Oella, some went to Rockland; some went to Ashland. These were all mill sites that; they were experienced, they knew what to do, and so they figured they were going to get a job there.

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Now some people, like the women who worked at the mill; they had to go to a completely new job area. There was a Blue Ridge bus line in the fifties, forties, and fifties, and they would take you to downtown Baltimore. And I know one case where two women got a job at the Hutzler's tea room, downtown. Some of the people were very depressed when this happened, and at least one of them, reported to have committed suicide. But you can imagine what I described before, your whole life practically being taken away from you and how you would feel with nothing left actually. You just would have to start over again.

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The land now officially belonged to Baltimore city and so they had, in October of 1953, an auction in which they sold off everything of any value from showcases where the candies were displayed, to coke machines, to clocks, to desks, to the 500 chairs, I mentioned earlier from the community hall, to window frames, to windows, even of course the mill equipment and the looms. So all this was sold, anything that was of any value at all. And then after that everything else was dynamited.

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While this was going on there were timber cutters that came from the south. There was one man his name was Sonny Mealey, and apparently all he had to do; he came from West Virginia, all he had to was call home and tell people there were jobs that were available, and they came in hundreds to help cut the forests here around the Patapsco River basin. They came from as far away as Tennessee, they came from the Carolinas and Virginia and West Virginia, and they lived in the houses that were vacated by the farmers. And they liked the area so well that they decided they would call and talk to their families, have them come here, and they would live here. So there is a section around Deer Park Road and Lyons Mill that was called Little Virginia because so many of the people who had worked on this project liked it so well; they stayed.

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Then there was a lot of work to be done. It was an enormous scope to, they had 9,300 acres of Carroll county land; they had 3,500 acres of Baltimore county land. They had to dig a tunnel, a 350 foot tunnel, that would go seventeen miles to Montebello, at that time,

now it's Ashburton Filtration Plant, but that was quite an undertaking and at least two men died on that project in making that tunnel. As you go across the north branch bridge you will look off to the right, as you're going into Baltimore county and you see a tall tower standing there; it almost looks like a castle tower, and that was to let water, a certain amount of water go into this tunnel to provide the drinking water for the Baltimore county people to have it filtered. And they could set it for 50 foot down...It was a gravity feed tunnel to take the water to Baltimore city.

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So this 350 foot deep tunnel was a gravity feed tunnel that would take all the water from the reservoir to Baltimore city to be treated for the drinking water.

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Before the flooding could take place they had to rearrange roads, relocate roads like Liberty Road, Deer Park Road, the Louisville Road, the Louisville Road/Sykesville Road; we call that 32 today. The electricity, the wires had to be restrung. They had to build bridges, there were four of them... One went across the Liberty, what used to be the north branch of the Patapsco. One of the bridges went across the north branch of the Patapsco river, that's the longest bridge...The second one went over Snowden...The second one went over the Snowden's Run, which is still on Liberty Road; so these two bridges carried Liberty Road across the, what they call now Liberty Lake.

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When you went up to Rt. 32, there was a stream called Morgan Run and they needed a bridge that would go over Morgan Run. And then there was another one on Ivy Mill Road where they had to build a fourth bridge. So all four of those bridges had to be built, roads realigned, before they could allow water to go in. And of course they dynamited everything in sight along the basin of the river.

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When they started flooding, everything looked like a battle zone. It was in terrible disarray. And soon the flood waters kind of softened that look and it built up and covered the trunks of the trees where they had cut them down. And it built up to the point where it was covering the mill itself, as I said before, it had five stories, and it had gone up at one point. A photograph was taken where there was only one and half stories left to be covered; most of it had been dynamited, like one wall had been left up and that's the part that you could see how deep the water was at this point.

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Once the bridges were completed and the flood waters came in, it brought attention to Carroll county that it never had before. I can remember that I lived in Woodlawn at the time and my father would drive my family up to see the progress being made on Liberty Dam. And I'm sure a lot of other families did the same kind of thing. So all of a sudden I was aware that just over the bridge there was another county called Carroll, but I didn't know anything about it. And then as I got older and got married the Social Security Administration had been built in Woodlawn and it had a lot of people, a lot of employees

there. And I can speak for one, my husband was employed there, we came here because we wanted a house in the country, and this was close, within a half hour to Social Security. And in the beginning, in the early 60s, I would say that most of the people were coming from the Woodlawn area to settle in this immediate southeastern corner here.

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In 1961 the Carroll county commissioners talked to William Donald Schaeffer, who was then the Governor of Maryland, and asked could they also tap into this drinking water, into this reservoir. And Schaeffer agreed that they could; they could take three million gallons out. Everyone agreed to this. And in 19..I believe it was '69 they started digging up Oakland Road and a lot of the area around here in order to put water pipes in. Everybody was on wall water at that time.

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In 1971, they built the water treatment plant at the end of Oakland Road, so that was the beginning of it. That was providing water for new housing developments that could come now to Carroll county where before they would have just to stay with well water; but now we are on city water which is a lot worse tasting.

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And now they are...this is 2008, now they are enlarging those same water pipes so that we can have even more developments in Carroll county, and also to improve the intake of water. Some of the people here in Carroll county have difficulty with water pressure; I shouldn't say in Carroll county, some of the ones here in the southeastern section have difficulty, and this is going to alleviate that by having the larger pipes to bring water through. And it runs through a system of pipes all the way out to Rt. 32, Liberty High School, where there's a big water tank, a big blue water tank, and the water is stored there for community use.

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People thought we had lost the water rights that the commissioners had given \$50,000, or had been given \$50,000 for the water rights; that was not true. It was \$50,000 for the lost income that they would have received in taxes for the land that was taken by Baltimore city to enlarge the Liberty Lake, to enlarge the reservoir. So the water rights had been taken back in 1931 when the first law went into action.