



# Haverford Township Historical Society



## THE MILLER - LEEDOM - DICKINSON MILL AND MANSION

By Irene Coffey

The Historical Society has received inquiries about the house at 570 Mill Road which currently is for sale. The information below should satisfy some of this curiosity.



The valley surrounding Cobbs Creek and stretching from Eagle to Manoa Roads was a manufacturing center in Haverford Township in the 18th and 19th centuries. At least six mills operated along the creek, including grist, saw, fulling, dyeing, textile, and gunpowder mills. Damming Cobbs Creek and creating reservoirs or mill dams produced sufficient water power to drive the mill equipment for the various mills spread out down the valley.

One of the Cobbs Creek mills was the Miller-Leedom-Dickinson mill, in operation from approximately 1810 through the beginning of the 20th century. In 1810 Jonathan Miller bought land in a section of the valley called Echo Hollow. Miller built grist and saw mills there on the west side of Cobbs Creek near where Mill Road ends today. His "mill seat" – a suitable place for a water wheel – had a head and fall of 20 feet from the mill dam to the water wheel, quite adequate for powering the wheel. In 1827 Samuel Leedom took over the operation of Miller's mills and eventually purchased them in 1844. Previously, Leedom had managed the Humphrey family's mill, also known as the Haverford Mill, located closer to Eagle Road.

After Samuel Leedom's death in 1872, his son Augustus B. Leedom became the owner and was succeeded briefly by a Mr. Lambert. George Dickinson, the last owner, purchased the property in February of 1879. During Dickinson's ownership the lane leading to the mill became a Township road and was named the Dickinson Mill Road, shortened today to Mill Road. Depletion of woodland and decline of the industry caused the mills to close. The land was sold to the Philadelphia and Western Railway, which built a power plant at this location and opened its electric railway in 1907. The dam for these mills was washed out about the same time.

The mill owners' house, now known as the Miller-Leedom-Dickinson mansion, still stands on the north side of Mill Road, just west of what today is referred to as SEPTA's Norristown High Speed Line. The oldest, middle section was built in 1725 with additions completed around 1750 and 1800. Now gone, there were a number of outbuildings including a large barn which stood where the driveway is to the Trinity Christian Church of Greater Philadelphia, formerly the Suburban Jewish Community Center B'nai Aaron.

According to the 1994 *Historic Resources Survey for Haverford Township*, the original 1725 two-story building (with the red roof in the photo) is made of coursed rubble fieldstone with two bays (window areas) and a chimney. The date for the low addition on its left is not known. The circa 1750 and 1800 2½-story additions to the right are also built of coursed rubble fieldstone and have gable-end roofs, a total of five bays, and two more chimneys. There is a hipped-roof entry porch spanning these additions, two dormers in the top level, multiple fireplaces, and much original hardware, woodwork, and flooring throughout. The 2½-story bank house sections are built into the hill at the back of the house. On a sunny day, the fieldstones glow with a golden hue.

The Miller-Leedom-Dickinson Mansion, along with Nitre Hall, its partly demolished gunpowder "magazine" or storage building, and the remains of the mill dam on the east side of Cobbs Creek, are the last extant remnants of the Powder Mill Valley's 18th and 19th century manufacturing history.

*[Compiled by Irene D. Coffey from notes and articles by Margaret Johnston, former President of HTHS. This article originally appeared in "The Haverford Herald" newsletter of the Haverford Township Historical Society, in the Spring, 2017 edition.]*

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