

Sarah Furnace, Grist Mill
1 Mile S of Sproul on Old US 220
Sproul vicinity
Blair County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-180-A

HAER
PA
7-SPROU
1-A-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
U. S. Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

HAER
PA,
7-SPROU,
1-A-

SARAH FURNACE, GRIST MILL

(Yingling Mill)

HAER No. PA-180-A

Location: One mile south of Sproul on old US 220, Sproul Vicinity, Blair County, Pennsylvania

USGS Quad: Roaring Spring, Pennsylvania (I:24000)
UTM: 17 E.715920 N.4459990

Date of Construction: 1840

Builder: Jacob Fries

Present Owner: Bernard Yingling
Pequot, Connecticut

Present Use: Abandoned

Significance: One of only two water powered grist mills which survive in Blair County and which were operated in conjunction with the region's numerous iron plantations. The Grist Mill retains its nineteenth century milling machinery and its overshot water wheel. The wood-frame two-and-a-half story structure maintains much of its historic appearance including the original wood clapboard siding.

Project Information: In February 1987, the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) and the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) began a multi-year historical and architectural documentation project in southwestern Pennsylvania. Carried out in conjunction with America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), HAER undertook a comprehensive inventory of Blair and Cambria counties as the first step in identifying the region's surviving historic engineering works and industrial resources.

The results of this project have been published in Blair County and Cambria County, Pennsylvania: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites (1990), edited by Gray Fitzsimons and produced by HABS/HAER for the National Park Service.

Compiler: Nancy Shedd and Ken Heineman, Historians
Gray Fitzsimons and Kenneth Rose, Editors

History:

Many of the early grist mills in western Pennsylvania were operated in conjunction with the region's numerous iron plantations. Two such grist mills still survive in Blair County: one at Tyrone Forge, also called Ironville, and the other at Sarah Furnace. Both were originally water powered. The wood-frame Tyrone Forge mill is the oldest continually operating industrial site included in the inventory of Blair and Cambria Counties. The Sarah Furnace Grist Mill retains its nineteenth century milling machinery and, significantly, its overshot water wheel. The wood-frame two-and-a-half story structure retains much of its historic appearance including wood clapboard siding.

Sarah Furnace was developed in the southern part of Greenfield Township, then Bedford County, in 1831-32 by the renowned ironmaster, Dr. Peter Shoenberger. On a tract of land south of the iron furnace, a young local builder, Jacob Fries, erected this wood-frame gristmill in 1840. (Fries was purportedly just sixteen years old at the time he erected the mill. Subsequently, he designed and built a number of the region's houses, bridges and churches.) Farmers from southern Blair County and northern Bedford County brought their grain to the mill, which was water-powered. The mill's raceway extended from a small earth and rock dam on a stream about one-eighth mile from the mill. The buhrstones and elevators inside the mill were powered by a wood and iron breastwheel.

In 1876 the mill property along with 45 other buildings in the Sarah Furnace complex was purchased at a sheriff's sale by George W. Smith. The mill, a dwelling house, and 30 acres of land was acquired by Martin Yingling in 1894, and has remained in his family since that time. Sometime in the early twentieth century, a steam engine was installed along the north side of the mill and was used during periods of low water. The Yingling family continued operating the mill until the late 1950s, when it was closed.

The three-story mill building rests on a one-story, course-rubble foundation. The building retains its original, six-over-six-light, window sash, nail-studded doors, and unpainted clapboard siding. A hoisting mechanism projects from the peak of the gable roof on the west side of the mill which faces old US 220.

Sources:

Africa, J. Simpson. History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties. Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883.
Blair County, Pennsylvania. Blair County Deed Records.
Nichols, Beach. Atlas of Blair and Huntingdon Counties. Philadelphia: A. Pomeroy & Co., 1873.