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## **Book review: Milling around in Montgomery**

Montgomery County Mills: A Field Guide, by Michael Dwyer. Published by the Mid-Potomac Chapter of the Archeological Society of Maryland, 2012. 97 pp., b/w photographs, maps, endnotes, index, \$20 paper. Clear, crisp, autumn days are best for the molinophile in search of mill foundations, dams and raceways. With leaves off the trees and underfoot, visibility is great and the walking easy. For those interested in the mills of Montgomery County, historian Michael Dwyer points you in the right direction with his book, "Montgomery County Mills," identifying and directing molinographers to the sites of scores of mills that once populated the countryside. Explorers fear not: most of the locations are sufficiently vague (there are no GPS coordinates) to insure that the searcher will experience some of the joy of discovery.

Eighty-odd pages of text, photographs and maps summarize many of the known mill sites in 14 drainages that traverse the county from north to south. Some are on public park lands, others on private lands, and Dwyer makes clear which ones are accessible or visible from public rights-of-way and which prospective visitors must seek permission from the landowners.

Late 20th-Century development has erased many of the surface vestiges, leaving the explorer to try to imagine what the setting was like when rhythmic clunking of a wooden water wheel, squeaks of wooden and metal gears, and slapping of thick leather belts could be heard above the splash of water falling from the wheel into the tail race.

Dwyer's descriptions dwell more on chains of title, some tracing ownership back into the 18th Century when many mills were founded to support the booming agricultural economy. Most of the descriptions of individual operations take the reader well into the first half of the 20th Century, when water-driven mills closed in the face of new technologies in crop transportation and processing.

"Montgomery County Mills" directs the reader to individual mills sites, but it doesn't provide guidance on what the visitor might look for or what they might do to collect additional information. Those lacking basic knowledge of mill construction and operations might acquire a copy of David Macaulay's "Mill" (Houghton Mifflin, 1983) before scouring the woods in search of the surprisingly subtle remains of mills. Additional details for those researching these sites can be found in county court records (e.g., equity cases, orphans court records) and the industrial schedules of the federal decennial census for 1850 through 1880 (which often report products, scale of production, horsepower and numbers of hired hands for individual mills). Of course, no method produces more information on individual mills than archeological excavation, but mill sites are very different from aboriginal sites and 19th-Century farmsteads and such work should be left to the direction of experienced industrial archeologists.

Michael Dwyer offers interesting sidelights to several site descriptions. For example, noted Smithsonian archeologist William Henry Holmes owned and lived at Wooton's Mill on Watt's Branch in 1905 and both William Jennings Bryan and Theodore Roosevelt were drawn to Burnt Mills on the Northwest Branch. But the most important insight that Dwyer offers is that all of these mills were different from each other. Millwrights adapted designs to the peculiarities of individual mill seats and millers produced different products for different markets. And that leads us to the readers' challenge: How many distinct direct products (e.g., corn meal) and indirect products (e.g., whiskey) does Dwyer mention? You'll be surprised. Then imagine the variations in mill design, marketing strategy, labor arrangements and a score of other dimensions of variability that made each mill a little different from its neighbors and that draw the attention of archeologists using mill sites as points of departure for community history research.

Michael Dwyer provides a useful tool for casual seekers and committed researchers. "Montgomery County Mills" will promote interest in the identification and conservation of these rapidly disappearing resources and, hopefully, stimulate interest in more intensive research on individual mills.

**James G. Gibb**