American Paper Mills, 1690–1832

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James City County

Williamsburg

1. On Archer’s Hope Creek, south of Williamsburg.

William Parks, printer of the *Virginia Gazette*, built the first paper mill in Virginia with the advice and assistance of Benjamin Franklin, who supplied rags, felts, moulds, and skilled personnel. Through Franklin, Parks obtained the services of Conrad Scheetz, a German immigrant with sufficient knowledge of the craft to design the mill, train the workers, and begin production. The mill must have been making paper by March 1744, when Scheetz left to start his own papermaking business in Pennsylvania. Parks published a poetical plea for rags in the *Virginia Gazette* of 26 July 1744 and had enough on hand to make paper worth £55 12s. 9d., which amount was duly credited to his account in Franklin’s ledgers on 3 September 1744. He died at sea in 1750, and the mill was sold under execution for £96 3s. 9d. in 1752. Goodwin suggested that the mill could have continued in other hands, presumably those of the new proprietor of the *Virginia Gazette*, William Hunter. Miller, on the other hand, thought that it could not have remained in business, for Hunter did not use Virginia paper in the *Gazette* and had to buy paper from Franklin in 1751. If the mill was closed, no doubt the executors of Parks’s estate would have been glad to sell off the machinery and tools, such as the paper moulds, which Conrad Scheetz retrieved and used in Pa. Mill 45 as early as 1751 or 1752. References: Goodwin 1939; Miller 1974, xliii–xliv.


Note: The 1753 London edition of Stith’s history of Virginia is a reissue of the William Parks 1747 edition with cancel title pages and a reprinted preface.

Augusta County

Staunton

2. Near Staunton.

In 1790 Alexander St. Clair, William Chambers, John Boys, Robert Grattan, Robert Gamble, and others received legislative approval to hold a lottery for the
purpose of raising £300 to build a paper mill “for the use of Gideon Morgan and Peter Burkhart.” Morgan and Burkhart were probably more involved with the business side of the concern than with its manufacturing operations since they are not identified as papermakers in other sources. The foreman appears to have been Daniel Womelsdorf Jr., who left the family business at Pa. Mill 61 in 1784 and moved to Virginia, possibly with the expectation of running this mill for the citizens of Augusta County. Some birth and marriage certificates issued in that vicinity are said to contain his W watermark. He was still in business in 1810, when the census noted that his annual output was worth $14,400, an impressive figure but not entirely trustworthy. He closed the mill after the local printing firm failed to pay for the paper he supplied, but he remained in Augusta County and was buried there. References: Peyton 1882, 349; Coxe 1814, tables, p. 104; Komarek 1986, 5.

Fairfax County

Clifton


John and Samuel Sowden ordered for this establishment several pairs of moulds from the Sellers firm between 1795 and 1800. John Sowden was obliged to put the mill up for sale in 1800. “Nothing would induce me to part with this valuable property,” he announced in a newspaper advertisement, “but for the pressing demands against those concerned.” Presumably he meant silent partners who needed to liquidate their investment. The advertisement notes that the mill building measured 50 by 21 feet and was situated next to two vat houses, a drying house, a rag house, a dwelling house (not quite finished), and a settling pond, which supplied pure water for the engines. References: Hunter 1952, 165; [Philadelphia, Pa.] Claypoole’s American Daily Advertiser, 9 Sept. 1800, 4; Sellers Moulds Finished, 25 Dec. 1795: demy; Sellers Moulds Finished, 12 Dec. 1796: royal, sent to Virginia; Sellers Moulds Finished, 29 Aug. 1800: double wrapping.


D [laid] — ms., Dumfries, Va., 1803 (Carey Papers, 18:8191).


The mill probably went down before the Census of 1810, which does not record any papermaking activities in Fairfax County. Reference: Coxe 1814, tables, p. 104.

Dinwiddie County

Petersburg


In November 1807 Bannister & Company (John Munro Bannister, John Daly Burk, and possibly others) had almost completed the construction of a paper mill on the Battersea estate, which belonged to Bannister. The foreman, John Le Messurier (also Le Mesurier), traveled north in March 1808 to recruit the necessary personnel and succeeded in raiding the Brandywine Paper Mill (Del. Mill 1) by a clever subterfuge. He obtained a letter of recommendation from one of the Brandywine proprietors and presented it to the foreman, Lawrence Greatrake, who allowed him to converse with the workers. A vatman, a coucher, and a sizer listened to his tempting job descriptions and defected to Virginia in such disgraceful circumstances that Greatrake wrote to Le Messurier and demanded satisfaction in a duel. Burk died in a duel a month later (although not by the hand of Greatrake), compelling
his partners to advertise his share in the lease in the local newspaper. Production must have started soon after May 1808, when the proprietors ordered a complete assortment of moulds from the Sellers firm. References: Gravell & Miller 2002, p. 237; Bidwell 1992, 116; Sellers Moulds Ordered, 24 Feb. 1808: assortment of moulds; Sellers Moulds Finished, 24 June 1809: double cap laid, watermarked with eleven letters, i.e., B & C° PETERSB°, and a device of tobacco leaves; Sellers Moulds Ordered, 30 Apr. 1810: wove fine post, watermarked B & C°, Petrsb° V°.

B & C° | PETERSB° [laid] — ms., Philadelphia, Pa., 1810 (Gravell & Miller 2002, wmk 108; countermark only?, lacking tobacco leaves watermark?).

Tobacco leaves [laid] — ms., Norfolk, Va., 1811 (Gravell & Miller 2002, wmk 947; lacking B & C° | PETERSB° countermark?).


Bannister & Company drop out of the Sellers ledgers in 1810, but Le Messurier continued to order moulds between 1811 and 1815, in one case requesting a BTS° watermark, which may refer to the Battersea Paper Mill. He also ordered moulds watermarked with his own initials, perhaps signaling that he had become the managing partner in the concern. Lists of British aliens compiled in 1812 and 1813 might include two of his employees, Thomas Farr, a papermaker resident in Petersburg, and George Miller, a papermaker in nearby Henrico County. References: Sellers Moulds Ordered, 17 June 1811: double cap, watermarked BTS°; Sellers Moulds Finished, 8 Feb. 1812: double cap, watermarked M; Sellers Moulds Ordered, 11 Aug. 1812: double cap, watermarked J L E M, to be forwarded to Norfolk; Sellers Moulds Ordered, 28 Oct. 1815: super royal laid and double cap laid; Scott 1979, 323, 327.

M [laid] — Society of Friends, London Yearly Meeting, The Epistle (Richmond: s.n., 1812; CSmH).

The mill may have supplied newsprint to publishers in Richmond, who in turn may have owned an interest in the concern or acted as its agent in ordering moulds from the Sellers firm. References: Sellers Moulds Finished, 20 June 1815: super royal laid, ordered by Thomas Ritchie for Thomas Burling; Sellers Moulds Ordered, 8 March 1817: royal vellum for Ritchie, Trueheart & DuVal (Thomas Ritchie, Daniel Trueheart, and Philip DuVal).

Botetourt County

Fincastle

5. Looney’s Mill Creek.

Born in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Henry Stair (also Johann Heinrich Stoehr, Henry Starr?), built a paper mill on land he bought on Looney’s Mill Creek in 1803. This mill must have been in operation before 1811, when William Kyle of Richmond ordered moulds from the Sellers firm. He appears to have been an agent for his brothers Robert Kyle and Hazlett Kyle of Fincastle, Virginia, who also obtained moulds under their own names, once in 1816 and again in 1817, when they asked for the delivery to be made care of William Kyle. Merchants by profession, Robert emigrated from Ireland in 1807 and Hazlett in 1810, according to a list of British aliens compiled in 1812. Also a merchant, William died in Fincastle while visiting Robert there in 1832; his will, probated in New York, mentions extensive business interests in Richmond, Portsmouth, and Botetourt County. It is not clear whether the Kyle brothers were the agents, partners, or successors of Henry Stair. References: Sellers Moulds Ordered, 21 Sept. 1811: medium vellum; Sellers Moulds Finished, 5 Dec. 1816: super royal; Sellers Moulds Ordered, 22 Mar. 1817: super royal, double cap; Scott 1979, 325; Kile 1958, 44–45; http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~jacmac/stoehr-stair.htm (accessed 20 Feb. 2011).
Campbell County

Lynchburg

6. On or near the James River?

The Census of 1810 calls for a paper mill in Campbell County making 1,000 reams a year with a total value of $3,000. In 1816 the *Lynchburg Press* published an account of local industries, including a paper mill, which by that time may have belonged to the Lynchburg merchant David Kyle in association with Henry Starr (=Henry Stair?). References: Coxe 1814, tables, p. 104; Sellers Moulds Ordered, 25 Sept. 1818: newsprint moulds, ordered by Henry Starr for David Kyle; http://www.wscottsmith.com/elliotthouse/1816/ (accessed 20 Feb. 2011).

Frederick County

Winchester


The earliest evidence I have for this establishment is an entry in the Census of 1810, which calls for a paper mill in Frederick County but offers no further comment. James Carter occupied the Red Bud Paper Mill in 1814, when he offered a reward for the recovery of a stolen horse with a saddle bearing the name of John Carter. This Carter may have been one of the proprietors, in which capacity he submitted an order for moulds in 1817 by way of John Hagerty. In 1820 a mill in Frederick County occupied by Smith & Barber was said to employ thirteen hands with an annual output worth $7,000. I doubt that they would have been running a second mill in this remote part of the state, but I cannot ascertain what, if any, relationship they had with the Carter family. James Carter of Winchester, Virginia, ordered a cylinder machine for the Red Bud Paper Mill in 1830. References: Coxe 1814, tables, p. 104; [Washington, D.C.] *Daily National Intelligencer*, 8 Dec. 1814, 4; Sellers Moulds Ordered, Jan. 1817: vellum cap and crown; Census of 1820, reel 18, item 159; Sellers Letter Book, 31 July and 23 Aug. 1830.