

## Lives, Loves, and Laments of the People of St. James

(I have been writing about William Wickham Mills II, the young man who was the nephew of, William Wickham Mills I, who came to live at Mills Pond at the age of 12, grew up in William Wickham Mills' home, married his only daughter Eliza Ann Mills, and inherited his uncle's entire estate when he died February 2, 1825. At that time, the estate owned some 1698.3 acres of land in Smithtown, and William Wickham Mills II would take that inheritance and build it into an impressive fortune.)

### ***“William Wickham Mills II builds a home that reflects his importance and prominence in Smithtown....” by Bradley Harris, Smithtown Historian***

William Wickham Mills II was 29 when he and Eliza inherited the William Wickham Mills estate in Smithtown. An inventory of this estate taken in 1820 shows that the estate owned some 645 acres of land that included 503 acres in Mills Pond, 57 acres of land at Rassapeague, and 85 acres in Brookhaven. When William Wickham Mills II came into possession of this property, sometime after his uncle's death in 1825, he rapidly began to expand his real estate holdings.

William Wickham Mills II invested “in land throughout his lifetime.” In the Mills Pond area, he purchased tracts of farmland that abutted his “own productive farm,” and in St. James, he purchased “nearby working farms” and found tenants to work them. And in “upstate New York and in New York City,” he purchased parcels of land for “pure speculation.” In this way he increased his holdings, so that “by 1836,” he owned some “2023 acres” of land “Including numerous lots in New York City on 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue “in the vicinity of 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> Streets.” As his real estate holdings expanded, so too did his net worth. (Zachary Studenroth, “Historical Analysis of Mills Pond,” Part 2, p. 16; part of a larger report, “Adaptive Reuse Report” of the Mills Pond House that was prepared for the Smithtown Arts Center in 1977.)

William Wickham Mills II had statements of his net worth drawn up annually and these statements indicate that, over the course of his life, his net worth grew considerably.

1830	\$61,194
1835	\$78,794
1840	\$81,562
1845	\$102,664
1850	\$155,996
1855	\$199,995
1860	\$222,187

His wealth also allowed him to invest in “various business enterprises” that promised even larger returns on his money. “One of these” businesses was “The New York Poudrette

Company, organized in 1839 at 120 Nassau Street, New York City, whose purpose was to 'prohibit entirely the present offensive practice of throwing the filth into the rivers around the city – and at the same time to prepare a large quantity of the best manure in use.' Mills served as one of its seven directors and was one of 'over forty shareholders, mostly farmers on Long Island, or residents of this city who own farms – men of intelligence, character and wealth,'" who purchased the Poudrette fertilizer and used it successfully. The fertilizer was made from night soil and had other secret ingredients, ashes, lime, Plaster of Paris, and ammonia, mixed in with it. The mix was dried into a powder, packed in barrels, and sold for \$2 a barrel. Although it was a product that was used "extensively and beneficially" on Long Island, the Poudrette Company failed and went out of business in 1845. This was one investment that did not work out for William Wickham Mills. (Zachary Studenroth, op. cit., pp. 22-23.)

There were other investments that did not work out. "Mills also invested in the Long Island Rail Road. He purchased 100 shares of stock in April of 1837 through his friend and then vice-president, W.F. Blydenburgh. At that time, the LIRR was completed as far as Hicksville." Unfortunately for Mills, "the company had unexpected reverses and financial difficulties during the following decades," and he lost money on this investment. But his other investments and the "productive farms" he purchased made it possible for him to build the largest and most impressive mansion in Smithtown. (Zachary Studenroth, op. cit., pp. 23-24.)

William began thinking about building a larger home for his family sometime before 1838 when he asked Calvin Pollard to design and build a new house for him at Mills Pond. By 1838, his family had grown to include seven children. Their oldest child was a boy named Washington, b. October 16, 1822. Then came Amanda Moscrop, (b. March 18, 1824); Theodore (b. October 3, 1825); William Wickham (b. November 23, 1828); Oscar J. (b. December 24, 1830); Ann Eliza (b. March 19, 1835); and Horatio Woodhull (b. October 21, 1837). "Two more children would be born to the Mills': Wilfred Irving (b. November 14, 1840) and Josephine (b. April 18, 1842). Of the nine" children, "eight lived to maturity: Ann Eliza died September 30, 1839, aged three years. But in 1837 there was already an apparent need for a more commodious dwelling." (Zachary Studenroth, op. cit., p.17.)

It is likely that William Wickham Mills I, who was "accustomed to travelling into New York City for special errands," brought along his nephew, William Wickham Mills II, whenever he made the trek into the city. This gave William II knowledge of the city and a familiarity with its patterns of growth that led him, in 1836, to the purchase of land along 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue, "an area that was being laid out in anticipation of a residential boom." This investment in New York City's real estate is the first documented evidence of Mills' involvement in New York City properties and it may have brought him into contact with Calvin Pollard, who was a builder in New York City at the time. (Zachary Studenroth, op. cit., pp. 17-18.)

Calvin Pollard was working with his older brother in New York City learning to be a carver and a carpenter. In 1826/27 he is listed in NYC directories as a builder, and by 1840/41, he had changed his occupational listing to architect. "Largely self-trained, Pollard designed numerous urban dwellings and country villas." In 1837 when William Wickham Mills II approached him about designing a house on Long Island at Mills Pond, Pollard was just beginning his architectural career. The house he created for William Mills was in "the predominant style of the period: the Greek Revival." Pollard's framing plans for the "Principal Story" and the "Second Story" still exist and "they show the house as it was built." (Zachary Studenroth, op. cit., p. 51-54.)

The plans called for a "broad, five-bay façade" with a "center portico" and a "smaller service wing" with a "separate entrance." The large two and a half story house has a "center hall plan" with four large rooms on the downstairs floor. (Zachary Studenroth, op. cit., p. 54.) On the east side of the center hall are two parlors that are connected by sliding pocket doors, and on the west side of the center hall are the drawing room and the dining room, also connected by sliding pocket doors. Access to the second floor is by way of a main stairway which rises in a straight run from the center hall. The second floor has four large bedrooms and one small (10X12) bedroom. The third floor of the main house has eight additional rooms tucked under the eaves. On the downstairs floor, the service wing was designed to have a kitchen, pantry, and several small rooms for storage. The second floor of the service wing has seven small rooms with access from a central hallway that leads to a small stairway which exits on the lower floor of the service wing. These rooms in the service wing were most likely occupied by servants. The house is big with a total of 34 rooms. "The creation of such a house in a rural Long Island community in 1838/40 was a considerable task and served to underscore Mills' prominence. It is the earliest, documented architect-designed structure in the vicinity," and certainly fulfilled Mills' need "for a commodious dwelling that would accommodate a large family with the latest amenities." (Zachary Studenroth, op. cit., p.21.)

One of the more interesting aspects of the story of the Mills Pond House is that "extensive documentation has survived in the form of original drawings, letters, bills, receipts, photographs, and William Wickham Mills II's own record book of building expenses." (Zachary Studenroth, op. cit., p.50.) These are preserved in a family collection and so we know a great deal about how the house was built, what materials were purchased, how much was paid, who did the work, and how long it took them.

"The Smith house specifications called for white pine planks and clapboards, hemlock joists, and other framing material of pine, spruce or hemlock." Some of this building material was bought locally, but "the finest materials came from New York City." In building his house, Mills' spared no expense and always obtained the finest materials. Granite and marble was

imported to use in constructing the foundation and basement flooring for the house. "Brick was used in the chimneys and usually specified for insulation and for strengthening of the outside walls." (p.62) All of these materials "came by sloop from New York. The 'Stony Brook Packet'" skippered by Captain Henry Davis "docked in nearby Stony Brook Harbor. From there, supplies were hauled the short distance uphill to Mills Pond. Albany lumber, Connecticut stone, oil and paint, iron, marble and brick all arrived in this manner." (Zachary Studenroth, op. cit., p. 18-19.)

Throughout 1838 and into the spring of 1839, the foundation stones were put in place, the flooring in the basement was installed and the building was framed out. In the summer, the roof was completed and the house was enclosed. By the winter, the house was beginning to take shape and but the interior work remained to be done. Another year would go by before the William Wickham Mills' family could move into their new home.

More about the Mills Pond House and its construction next time.