



## Evans-Mumbower Mill

By Russ Bellavance, President of the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society.

Photos by Jessica Yale Photography

In the last article (March), we looked at the importance of water-powered mills to Whippany and the surrounding areas. We learned that most of those old mills disappeared, in many cases, without leaving a trace behind. But one mill remains, and on special occasions you can actually see it in operation. The Evans-Mumbower Mill can be found just across Township Line Road, on Swedesford Road in a corner of Upper Gwynedd Township. The Wissahickon Creek flows in a wide arc to the west of North Wales, and it flows due east at the mill before resuming its general southward journey. The existing mill was not the first one at this important juncture of Swedesford and Township Line Roads. Abraham Evans built a mill there around 1745, and it was apparently both a saw mill and a fulling mill. Those are very different purposes, and we can only imagine how long it must have taken to switch between the two uses.

It is unclear exactly when the old mill was demolished and the current mill was built. Some people claim that it was in the late 9th century, while others point to a date stone dated 1835 in the

mill as evidence that it was built much earlier. What is clear is that Henry Mumbower acquired the property for \$7,000 in 1858, in a purchase that included a total of just over 117 acres. The deed is fascinating because it both granted rights in the head race and dam and required Mumbower to build a replacement dam. In the deed, Mumbower was referred to as a miller (deeds almost always listed the occupations of the parties), leaving us to guess that perhaps Mumbower had been operating the mill before purchasing it. Whenever the current mill was built, it was built as a grist mill, which also included ancillary purposes such as crushing corn cobs. It still used the power of the Wissahickon Creek for power, with a portion of the creek being diverted to a mill pond. The mill race ran from the mill pond to the pond and the water wheel, discharging the water back into the creek. The 117 acres have all been developed, and today it is hard to picture what the scene would have looked like in the 19th century. The mill stayed in the Mumbower family for many years, and they operated the grist mill until about 1930. During that time, the Mumbowers converted the mill from water power to engine power, finally catching up with the second

Industrial Revolution. At least a portion of the property came to be owned by our old friend Ralph Strassburger.

After the Mumbowers had ceased operations, the mill stood there neglected and deteriorating for decades. The roof was the first to go, and the wood elements of the structure began to rot. The Towamencin Historical Society made a valiant effort to restore the mill in the mid-1980s, but the project proved to be too expensive. It seemed that another important piece of our history was to be lost, but in 1987, the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association stepped in to take title and begin a restoration process that continues to this day. Restoring and operating a mill had not been part of the WVWA's mission, but they expanded that mission, and today it is an important part of their operations. The restoration process, which was supported by some generous grants, has been as historically accurate as possible, and the results are truly amazing. The WVWA opens the Evans-Mumbower Mill for public view from time to time, usually on the third Sunday from April through November, and sometimes even operates it on those days. It is a great treat for all ages. Please visit their website at [wwa.org](http://wwa.org) for more information, and please consider supporting the dedicated group of volunteers who maintain the Evans-Mumbower Mill.

*This is the 14th in a series of articles about local history brought to you by the Wissahickon Valley Historical Society. If there is a topic you would like to propose for a future article, please contact me at [rcbellavance67@gmail.com](mailto:rcbellavance67@gmail.com). If you enjoy these articles, you may want to consider membership in the Society. Please see our website at [wvalleyhs.org](http://wvalleyhs.org) for more information.*