



Fairfax County  
Park Authority

10017 Colvin Run Road  
Great Fall, VA 22066  
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## Colvin Run Mill Historic Site



### Introduction

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Thank you for scheduling a field trip to Colvin Run Mill Historic Site. We hope you and your students find your visit to be both educational and enjoyable. This Learning Kit provides you with information to introduce your students to the site and to reinforce concepts learned during your visit. It includes Standards of Learning objectives, educational themes, a brief history of the site and a time line, a list of vocabulary words and worksheets. Please feel free to adapt these materials to your needs and to make copies of this information.



During the visit, your students will go to three learning centers where they will learn how simple machines made work easier and they will use some simple machines. They will also discover the inter-dependence of local rural economics, the impact of geography on the development of communities in northern Virginia and the importance of transportation routes for commerce.



In the c. 1900 **general store**, students discover a thriving commercial center for the town and a hub of social activities as well. Students handle familiar (and some not so familiar) household items and identify simple machines.



In the **mill**, students learn how grain was ground into flour or cornmeal by the water-powered grinding stones and how simple machines helped automate the process.



In the **barn**, students use four simple machines that made work easier in the days before electricity.

## Educational Objectives

### Science Standards

3.2

4.2

6.2

- ◆ **Force, Motion and Energy** objectives from the **Science Standards of Learning** include:

Students will investigate and understand simple machines and their uses and see examples of simple machines at work that made the miller's job easier.

- ◆ The following objectives and themes correspond with the **History and Social Science Standards of Learning** developed for Virginia's elementary students:

### History & Social Science

2.2, 2.7, 4.1, 4.5

2.6, 2.7, 4.2, 5.6

2.5, 4.1, 4.2, 5.6,  
6.7

A community is a group of people with common interests, especially those living in the same area. The students will learn that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century a vital rural community of farmers, craftspeople and merchants grew up around Colvin Run Mill.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Colvin Run Mill was a merchant mill. The students will learn how producers (like the miller) used natural, human and capital resources to produce goods in the past.

Geography and transportation routes determined the location of the mill along Colvin Run. The students will learn how these factors also influenced the location and growth of the 19<sup>th</sup> century community.

Colvin Run Mill operated commercially from about 1811 to the mid-1930s. The students will learn about the social and commercial lives of ordinary Virginians during the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## Educational Themes

### Energy

**Energy** is the capacity to do work. Basic energy sources — water, muscle, heat and wind power — have not changed since the beginning of time. What has changed is **technology**, the ways and means these energy sources are utilized to perform work. Examples of 19<sup>th</sup> century technology interpreted at Colvin Run Mill are simple and compound machines, hand-powered tools, a water-powered gristmill with its sophisticated system of gear-operated machinery, and simple heating and lighting methods.

### Community

A **community** is a group of people with common interests, especially those living in the same area. Primarily a rural, agricultural community, the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Colvin Run community survived intact for over a century despite wars and recessions, technological advances and industrialization. The mill at Colvin Run played a pivotal role within that community.

## A Brief History of Colvin Run Mill

Colvin Run Mill, Fairfax County's award-winning operational water-powered gristmill, is a tribute to the enterprising spirit of America's past. Long before the mill was an active business, the land on which it was built was associated with several famous Virginians. In August 1739, Colonel John Colville received grants from England's King George II of almost 10,000 acres in what would become Fairfax County. He soon sold much of this land to William Fairfax. When Fairfax died in 1753, a 275-acre parcel of this property along Difficult Run was conveyed to his son Bryan Fairfax. In 1760 or '61, George Washington purchased the Difficult Run tract from Bryan Fairfax.

Washington recognized the potential of Colvin Run as a mill site with a good water supply, hardwood forests for building material and located on a major transportation route leading to market at the port of Alexandria. However, the pressing business of waging war and governing the new nation prevented Washington from acting on his plans for his property along Difficult Run.

Although it is unclear when Colvin Run Mill was completed, or indeed who built it, in 1811 William Sheppard purchased 90 acres of Washington's 275-acre par-

cel from Washington's heirs and immediately conveyed it, along with a standing mill, to Philip Carper. In 1813 Carper paid the first known taxes on flour and cornmeal produced here.

For more than a century, a series of merchant millers operated Colvin Run Mill. Unlike custom millers who ground grain for individual orders, merchant millers bought and sold grain and flour to serve local and foreign markets. Grain products from Colvin Run Mill were exported through the port of Alexandria.

A thriving community of farmers, craftspeople and merchants grew up around the mill. Nineteenth century gazettes and business directories refer to numerous blacksmith shops and country stores nearby. The c. 1900 Colvin Run General Store, once located across the road from the mill, has been restored as part of Colvin Run Mill Historic Site.

The mill operated for more than 120 years, and its most prosperous period was 1883 to 1934 when the Millard family rebuilt the millrace and millpond and modernized the machinery. The greatest change was in the grinding process when a new roller mill — the latest in modern 19<sup>th</sup> century technology — was installed and proved to be more efficient

George Washington to Bryan Fairfax

**"I have been informed that some person has petitioned or is about to petition the Court of Loudoun for an Acre of the Land I bought of you on Difficult to Build a Mill on. . ."**

**1783**



than the old-fashioned millstones. By 1930, it was estimated that over one million bushels of grain had been processed through Colvin Run Mill!

After the Millards sold the mill, it sat idle and neglected for 30 years until 1965 when the Fairfax County Park Authority acquired it and began its restoration. Because the building and machinery had undergone such fundamental change over its commercial life, the restoration was based on the plans of Oliver Evans (1755-1819) whose innovations revolutionized milling in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. The mill's derelict ruins revealed a number of similarities to the floor plans and cross sections printed in Evans' 1795 book *The Young Millwright and Miller's Guide*.

Today's visitor sees the results of many skilled craftspeople who have, quite literally, recreated the past. They repaired the structure, made

the bricks and glass, hand-hewed timber to precise specifications and assembled the machinery. All the gears in the mill, with the exception of a few steel parts included for safety, were handmade from wood. As in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the mill operates solely by water power. Water from Colvin Run is diverted into a pond and millrace and then flows over the 20' wooden overshoot waterwheel to provide the power that turns the gears and operates the machinery.

Traditionally, the homes of famous people and the sites of momentous events have been preserved while the buildings used by ordinary people seldom survive. Colvin Run Mill represents a time when wood and water performed important work and communities prospered in support of such enterprise.

## 19th Century Livelihoods

**Directions:** Draw lines to match the words in each column with the pictures

### Storekeeper

A person who sells goods and provides services to customers.



### Anvil

A heavy iron block on which heated metal is shaped.

### Carpenter

A person who builds or repairs wooden structures.



### General Store

A place where people came to buy supplies, get their mail, meet their neighbors and learn the news.

### Blacksmith

A person who heats iron in a fire and shapes it into many useful items.



### Millstones

Large round stones used for grinding grain.

### Farmer

A person who raises crops or animals for sale.



### Shaving Horse

A bench with a foot-operated clamp to hold wood steady as it is shaped.

### Miller

A person who grinds grain to make flour or cornmeal.



### Plow

A tool with a heavy blade used for cutting up soil to prepare for planting.

## *Oliver Evans' Automated Mill: A Symphony of Simple Machines*

Colvin Run Mill is filled with simple machines that accomplish important tasks to make the miller's job easier.

### Lever

**A stiff bar that moves on a turning point known as a fulcrum.**

Levers are used to operate the sluice gate and beam scale, and to engage the gears and raise and lower the grinding stone.

### Wheel & Axle

**A lever that spins in a circle, a wheel and axle lessens the force needed to lift or move a weight.**

Gears are wheels and axles with teeth that prevent slipping. Gears can be used to change the direction of the turning of an axle.

In the mill, the power from the greater and lesser face gears change direction via the wallower gears. Gears are also used to change force or speed. *Speed* is increased when a small gear is turned by a large one (greater face to wallower) and *force* is increased when a large gear is turned by a small one (wallower to lesser face).

### Pulley

**A single fixed pulley gives no increase of force, but simply changes direction.**

**In the mill, the grain elevator is a four-story pulley that automatically carries grain upstairs.**

In the General Store, the windows are opened by a rope and pulley — pulling down on the rope raises the window.

**A ramp or inclined plane makes it possible to climb gradually or control the speed or direction of descent.**

In the mill, the shoe controls the flow of grain falling into the grinding stones and the shaker assembly regulates the flow of flour or meal across the sifting screen. The stairs and chutes in the mill are other examples of inclined planes.

**A wedge can be either a form of inclined plane that forms a cutting edge or two inclined planes back-to-back whose sloping surfaces make the job a more gradual one.**

Nails are wedges, and the tapered point means you don't have to hammer as hard to drive the nail in. Hand tools like the draw knife are wedges with handles. Furrows chiseled across the surface of grinding stones are also wedges.

**A screw is an inclined plane wrapped around a round form.**

Metal screws open the flume gates and raise the grinding stones.

### Inclined Plane

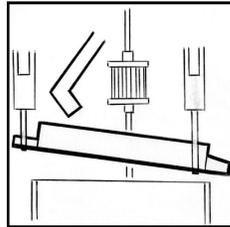
### Wedge

### Screw

## *Simple Machines Make the Miller's Job*

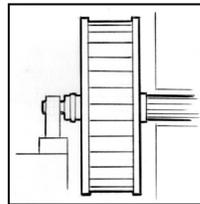
**Directions:** Draw lines to match the words in each column with the pictures.

**Pulley**



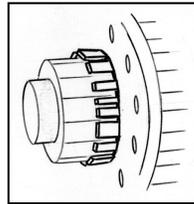
**A stiff bar that moves about a fixed point (the "fulcrum") to make lifting easier.**

**Screw**



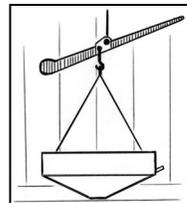
**Two inclined planes back-to-back or an inclined plane with a different function — used to split, cut or hold things together.**

**Lever**



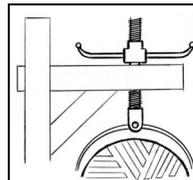
**A circular frame rotating around an axle that lessens the force needed to lift or move a weight.**

**Inclined Plane**



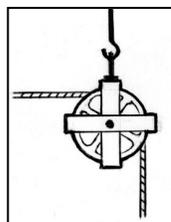
**A wheel with a rope wrapped around it that gives no increase of force, but changes direction — pulling down with this tool raises an object.**

**Wedge**



**An inclined plane wrapped around a round form.**

**Wheel & Axle**



**A flat surface that is sloped to tilted so less force is needed to move an object up or down.**

## *Vocabulary List, continued on pg. 8*

**\*** Denotes an example of, or something that includes, a simple machine.

**\*Auger [screw, wedge & lever].** A hand-powered tool used to drill holes in wood.

**\*Balance scale [lever].** A device used by the miller to weigh grain.

**Blacksmith.** A person who makes tools, household items and other things from iron. The blacksmith heats the iron in a fire and hammers it into shape on an anvil.

**Community.** A group of people with common interests, especially those living in the same area.

**\*Draw knife [wedge & lever].** A two-handled knife used while seated on a shaving horse to shape wood into tool handles, barrel staves and wheel spokes.

**Dusty.** The miller's helper or apprentice, so called because he was often covered in flour dust.

**Flour.** The product made by grinding wheat.

**Flume.** The wooden trough that carries water from the mill race to the waterwheel.

**\*Gear [wheel and axle].** A wheel with teeth or rods made to fit together with other gears so that one gear's turning causes the other gear to turn.

**General store.** A shop, usually found in a small community, that carries a variety of goods including food, tools, medicines and other household necessities.

**Grain.** The small hard seed of wheat, corn, rice or oats. Bread and cereals are made from ground grain.

**\*Grain elevator [pulley].** A continuous cloth belt with attached cups that moves grain or flour between floors in the mill.

**\*Greater face gear [wheel and axle].** The largest toothed gear in the mill. It is attached directly to the waterwheel shaft.

**Gristmill.** A mill that grinds grain into flour (wheat) or meal (corn).

**\*Lesser face gear [wheel and axle].** The smaller toothed gear that fits together with other gears to turn the grinding stones.

**Millstones [cutting surface = wedge].** A pair of large round stones between which grain is ground. The turning of the top stone (the cap or runner stone) does the grinding, while the bottom stone (the bed stone) does not move. Falling water and turning gears make the millstones move.

**Miller.** The person who operates the mill.

## Colvin Run Mill Historic Site

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*The mission of Colvin Run Mill Historic Site is to maintain, develop and interpret the site's historic buildings, collections and resources for the enrichment, education and enjoyment of Fairfax County residents and visitors.*

[www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/crm](http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/crm)

Not all the BIG WHEELS are in Washington

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## *Vocabulary List, continued from pg. 7*

**Mill pond.** The pond where water is collected before it enters the mill race.

**Mill race.** The channel that carries water from the mill pond to the waterwheel and returns it to the stream after the water passes over the waterwheel and powers the mill.

**Pot-bellied stove.** A coal or wood-burning stove with a rounded body used for heating and/or cooking.

**Putlog holes.** Small holes built into a brick wall. Logs put into these holes support a scaffolding for building or repairing the wall.

**\*Stone crane [screw & lever].** A device used to lift the top mill stone. Using the stone crane, the miller can lift a one-ton mill stone alone.

**\*Wallower gear [wheel and axle].** A gear with round rods instead of teeth that fit together with other gears to turn the mill stones.

**\*Waterwheel [wheel and axle].** A large wheel made to be turned by moving water. A waterwheel powers Colvin Run Mill.