

# MAHLON STACY'S GRISTMILL

Where Trenton Began

## history

**Mahlon Stacy**, a Yorkshireman by birth, settled at the Falls of the Delaware in 1679, building a house that he named Ballifield (after his ancestral home in England) on the site later occupied by the **William Trent House**. Stacy immediately set about establishing a gristmill where the Indian trail and main route to Burlington (now South Broad Street) crossed the Assunpink Creek. Other settlers, as they brought land into cultivation, came to the mill to get their grain processed into flour and meal. Some of the flour and meal they consumed themselves; the surplus was transported to market.

**Trenton originated with a gristmill** founded near this spot on the Assunpink Creek over three centuries ago. The mill drove the early economic growth of the town, soon becoming known as Trent's or the Trenton Mills after the family that owned and invested in the enterprise. In spite of numerous floods and some devastating fires, mill waterwheels turned here for almost 200 years, grinding grain into flour and meal, and later helping to make cotton, wool and paper.

Trenton Mills and the South Broad Street Bridge, circa 1804.

McCall Paper Mill. View looking southeast from the South Broad Street Bridge toward where you are now standing in Mill Hill Park, circa 1870.

Funding for signage from the New Jersey Historic Trust and the City of Trenton.  
Sign design by Hunter Research, Inc.  
Image credits: Trentoniana Collection, Trenton Public Library and the New Jersey State Archives.



The millpond with the Trenton Mills and the South Broad Street Bridge in the background, 1848.



McCall Paper Mill and the South Broad Street Bridge, circa 1870.



The William Trent House, also known as Bloomsbury.

Background image:  
A Plan of Sundry  
Lots of Daniel W.  
Coxe, circa 1804.

In 1714, **Mahlon Stacy, the younger**, sold his father's property to **William Trent**, a Philadelphia merchant whose name soon came to define the emerging town. The Trents rebuilt and enlarged the gristmill, adding a sawmill and fulling mill. Within a few years the gristmill was the most productive in all of West Jersey and taxed at a level four times more than its competitors. **The Trenton Mills** flourished under a succession of wealthy and politically well connected owners who took over the Trent estate: William Morris (1729-33), George Thomas (1733-53), Robert Lettis Hooper (1753-65), and Robert Waln (1765-84).

The main action of **the Second Battle of Trenton** on January 2, 1777 swirled all around the Trenton Mills, as the American forces repelled British efforts to cross the nearby bridge over the Assunpink. After the Revolution the mills went into decline and were effectively bankrupt by the early 19th century. In 1814 the Waln family resurrected the building as part of their **Eagle Factory** textile venture, using the premises for picking and carding cotton. Floods in 1822 and 1843, followed by a fire in 1846, doomed this business, causing the site to be sold and redeveloped in 1851 by **Henry McCall** as a paper mill. This building was also felled by a fire in 1872, finally spelling the end of industrial activity at this seminal location in Trenton's landscape.