The Grist Mill

John Simpson built the first mill on the property along Pidcock Creek, downstream of this location. The grist mill you see today was erected in the 1870s by the Neely family.

Millers in Pennsylvania usually owned their own mill, the land it stood upon, and often raised their own grains or wheat. They generally served farmers within a ten-mile radius and kept a percentage of the grain they milled. They also sold flour to those who had no grain for milling. Due to this service, many miller families enjoyed comfortable lives and played an important role in community affairs. Simpson's and Thompson's milling businesses also took advantage of their close proximity to Philadelphia as a major port city and trade hub. A thriving market for flour in Philadelphia exported millions of pounds annually, some coming from this farm.

Grist mills used a pulley and hoist system to lift bags of harvested grain to the top of the building. The grain was then fed into a hopper which fed it into a grain cleaner. Another worker would then feed the cleaned grain through a chute and into a hopper situated above the millstones. A center hole in the top millstone fed grain between the upper, runner stone and the stationary bedstone. Patterned grooves cut in the millstones act as scissors or crushers to process grain into flour as the runner stone rotates.

Hours of Operation

The Thompson-Neely Farmstead is open seven days per week, 10 AM to 4 PM, March through December. Guided tours of the house are available. Tickets may be purchased at the Washington Crossing Historic Park Visitor Center, the Thompson-Neely House, and Bowman’s Hill Tower.

Access for People with Disabilities

If you need an accommodation to participate in park activities due to a disability, please contact the visitor center. This publication text is available in alternative formats.

More Information

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Washington Crossing Historic Park is administered by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources in partnership with the Friends of Washington Crossing Park.
The Thompson-Neely Farmstead includes an 18th century home, farm, and milling complex. Today, you can still explore the house, restored smokehouse, chicken coop, and privy. Join us for a detailed guided tour of the house or take time to visit the flock of sheep in the restored barn.

The farmstead was originally titled to John Simpson around 1740. Simpson erected the house and gristmill soon after and began a thriving business selling flour. Approximately one year after Simpson’s death in 1747, his widow, Hannah, married Robert Thompson. Thompson, once a journeyman miller under Simpson’s tutelage, continued to prosper from the mill. He more than doubled the size of the original home with the addition of a west wing and a second story above the main portion of the house in the late 1750s.

When the Revolutionary War began, Robert, Hannah, their daughter, Elizabeth, and son-in-law, William Neely, lived in the home. William Neely served with the local militia but it is probable the rest of the family resided in the home when the Continental army encamped in the area in 1776. It is likely that the mill supplied troops with grain and flour during this time.

With the defeat of George Washington’s troops in New York and subsequent retreat through New Jersey, Washington’s immediate concern was to defend the river and ferries against British attempts to cross the Delaware and continue their pursuit of the Continental army into Pennsylvania.

The Thompson-Neely property became part of the defended lands under the command of Brigadier General Lord Stirling. Captain William Washington, George Washington’s cousin, and Lieutenant James Monroe, future U.S. President, were based on the property. Major Ennion Williams, who stayed on the property, wrote, “…unless you provide Shoes and Stockings on Purpose for our bare-footed men, …it will be impossible for our Regt to do Duty here much longer…….” Soldiers suffering from wounds, exposure, and illness were brought to the home for medical care and recovery during the December 1776 encampment. Sadly, many soldiers lost their lives, and a portion of the property was turned into a cemetery. Captain James Moore, who served under Alexander Hamilton in the Provincial Company of Artillery of the Colony of New York, is the only soldier identified who perished at the house. A headstone in the cemetery marks his grave.

On Christmas night during a frigid winter storm, George Washington led his exhausted troops from McConkey’s Ferry across the Delaware River to victory at the Battle of Trenton. The victory buoyed the morale of the army and the colonists and changed the course of the American Revolution.

After the war, Robert Thompson and his son-in-law, William Neely, continued to farm and mill on the property. By 1788, an east wing was added to the house. Thompson, Neely, and their descendants remained on the farmstead into the 19th century.