

A Miller's Tale at Jordans Point

By Neely Young



JORDANS POINT was long the Rockbridge center of road, river and rail transportation. It was also the site of many industrial and commercial enterprises, including milling operations. The Jordan family constructed and owned most of the buildings in the area, including a cotton factory, a shop for a tilt hammer used in forging, and a merchant mill.

The Miller's House at Jordans Point, constructed in 1811, was occupied by numerous individuals into the early 20th century. Until recently, we knew nothing about the millers who lived in

the house. Recently, however, we have discovered information about one of them: James E. Newham.

In 1853, the Newham estate brought a lawsuit against members of the Jordan family over disputed bills and payments involved in the mill operation. The suit was filed by Samuel Beard, the estate administrator, who was Newham's son-in-law and worked in the mill with him for several years. Newham had died in December 1852.

The Jordans were the most economically powerful family in Rockbridge County. The court case and some genealogical snooping revealed the following.



JAMES NEWHAM was born in 1793 in Frederick County, Virginia. On December 30, 1814, he married Susan Shipler there, and they had four children, a son and three daughters. From 1820 to 1840 Newham moved up the valley from Frederick County to Rockingham and then into Augusta. By 1841 or 1842, Newham was working in the Lexington Mills.

In 1847, he entered a contract with John and Samuel F. Jordan under which Newham ran the mill, which not only ground flour but also made plaster, very popular in building construction at the time. Newham received one-fourth of the profits from the enterprise, with the Jordan brothers receiving the other three-fourths. The Jordans also agreed to provide fuel and lighting for the Miller's House.

Newham and his wife lived in the house, rent free, from 1847 until 1852. In 1850, Samuel Beard and



The Miller's House at Jordans Point, after 1900. Lexington Rolling Mills is at the right. Note the railroad crossing between the house and the mill.

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Susan Newham were married. In that same year, the census showed Susan Newham and Samuel Beard living in the Miller's House with the elder Newhams. Newham must have been financially successful, as the 1850 census lists him as owner of two enslaved people. Also living in the house was a John Miller, aged 18. Miller was probably serving as an apprentice.

Newham ran the mill on his own with no interference from the Jordans, and is described in court documents as an entirely honest, fair and competent manager. He kept a comprehensive Mill Book, which became a part of the documents in the court case. This document shows that although the mill had numerous customers, the most significant of these by far were the Jordans themselves. They used the milled grains primarily to feed horses in their many entrepreneurial undertakings.

James Newham's wife, Susan, died in September 1852 and James Newham died in December of that year.



The Miller's House, at the left edge, is the only original building remaining at Jordans Point. The mill, built in 1900, was renamed Lexington Roller Mills early in the new century.

Following Newham's death, Samuel Beard continued the milling operation for about six months. Beard's position as miller and occupant of the house probably ended because of the suit he had brought against the Jordans. He was succeeded by Henry Locker, who ran the mill and occupied the house until at least 1855.

The court case dragged on until 1859 with neither side gaining a

particular advantage. All bills were settled, and the heirs of the Newham estate received a small inheritance of less than \$300.



JAMES NEWHAM did not live a spectacular life, but he appears to have been an honest and productive worker, a responsible husband and father, and a solid citizen of Lexington and Rockbridge County.