



Photo published in the *Covington Virginian* September 13, 1961

Old Red Mill

1961-1962

The name “Old Red Mill” is used both as the name of the corporation that was established in 1961 to own and develop the Bluegrass Mill building property *and* the name of the country store that was created. When the mill was built in 1905, the exterior siding was corrugated steel that was painted red. The community strongly supported this attempt to develop a tourist attraction in Lewisburg. Funding came from the sale of stock and 50 individuals and organizations in the community bought shares of stock at \$100 each. The History/Bluegrass Mill tab on the montwellcommons.org website has a link to the list of stockholders. This article presents detailed account of the country store project and its development.

June 19, 1961 WV Secretary of State, Old Red Mill incorporated

Incorporators - Andrew McLaughlin, John Montgomery, President – Rosalie Detch; Vice President - Charlotte Detch Dietz; Secretary, Treasurer – Paul Detch

July 20, 1961

OLD RED MILL A group of Lewisburg citizens have secured an option on the Old Red Mill located on North Jefferson Street. A stock company has been chartered and a board of directors elected to

operate the business under the name of Old Red Mill, Inc. The property which includes approximately one acre of land and a three-story metal-covered frame building is being purchased from the owners, Woodrow Taylor and John L. Detch at a cost of \$20,000. The company has incorporated at \$30,000, thereby providing \$10,000 for renovation and improvements.

The ground floor of the building will be operated as the Old Mill Store under the management of David Tuckwiller. It will carry appropriate merchandise for a store of its type, much of which will be crafts and products of the county and surrounding area.

Definite plans have not yet been made for use of the second and third floors, but consideration is being given to crafts, especially weaving and to stock their production.

Stock is now available for general purchase. Interested persons may purchase from one to ten shares at \$100 per share. Members of the board of director have applications available to serve prospective buyers. Board of directors are: Mrs. C.W. Lewis Sr, Ralph Barr, Woodrow Taylor, William Ruby, C.A. McHale, Clyde Goodwin, Mrs. Randolph K. Hock, Andrew W. McLaughlin, Sam Yarid, John F. Montgomery, J.K. Palmer, Mrs. Marvin Houck, Roy Hampton, Mrs. J.M. Laird, Alex Turner, Mrs. Sid Neathawk, Fred Staunton, Dale Harvey, and Herbert Rothwell.

Officers of the organization are: Dr. John F. Montgomery, president; Mrs. Randolph K. Hock, vice president; Andrew W. McLaughlin, Secretary; and Ralph Barr, treasurer.

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[Dr. Montgomery was president of the Greenbrier College, Mrs. Hock owned the General Lewis Inn, Andrew McLaughlin was treasurer of the Bluegrass Savings & Loan bank, and Ralph Barr owned the Five and Dime store]

August 1,1961 Deed 214-16

“This deed dated the 1st day of August 1961 by and between Rosalie S. Detch and John L. Detch her husband, Woodrow Taylor and Daisy R. Taylor, his wife, parties of the first part , grantors, and The Old Red Mill, Inc., a corporation organized under the laws of the State of West Virginia, party of the second part, grantee;

“Witnesseth: That for and in consideration of the sum of \$20,000 . . . all of that certain lot or parcel of land, together with all improvements thereon and appurtenances thereto pertaining situate and being in the Town of Lewisburg, Greenbrier county, West Virginia, known as the old Blue Grass Mill property. . . “

September 2, 1961 *Beckley Post Herald* p.8

BOARD MEMBERS REVIEW COUNTRY STORE PROJECT

LEWISBURG Under lantern light of country store days the board of directors of the “Old Red Mill” met Wednesday at 7:30 PM to review the progress of the project and to discuss future plans for the newly conceived idea of transforming the mill into a popular “Old Country store.”

This property in Lewisburg known as the “Old Red Mill”, was a landmark in early days, has been incorporated by a group of community-minded citizens, and plans are speeding ahead for a country store with all the charm and uniqueness of the early pioneer days.

The building has been almost completely renovated for the desired purpose, keeping all details within the atmosphere of pioneer days with their barrels, kegs, bins for grains, huge beams for support, and lighted lanterns.

Those attending the meeting were amazed at the building committee's wisdom in planning the

renovations as was reported by Dr. John F. Montgomery , chairman of the corporation. Much credit was given Mrs. Randolph Hock, who served as chairman of the renovation committee.

It was announced that Dave Tuckwiller would operate the country store, stocking with products of local talent such as weaving items, leather crafts, brooms, handiwork of all types, country hams, and numerous other items. Tuckwiller assured the group he would be ready to open the store for business within a week or two after the renovations were completed.

Plans were discussed for the opening date for the "Old Mill Store." It was felt by all that the building would be ready within a short time.

The board of directors include Dr. John f. Montgomery, chairman, Andrew McLaughlin, secretary, Mrs. Randolph Hock, vice chairman, Ralph Barr, treasurer, Woodrow Taylor, Sheldon Haynes, Clyde Goodwin, Samuel P. Yarid, Marvin Houck, James Veneable, Roy Hampton, Alex Turner, Mrs. Sidney Neathawk, Dale Harvey, Fred Staunton, Herbert Rothwell, Dr. George Ferrell, Arthur Dayton, William Rudley, and Mrs. C.W. Lewis.

Others attending the meeting were W.E. Crickenberger, Mrs. Helen Lewis Lindsley, M.T. Moss, Eddie Yarid, G.H. Call, Col. D.T. Moore, Mrs. A.W. McLaughlin, Mrs. John Montgomery, Mrs. Beatrice Harvey, Mrs. Rosalie Detch, Oliver Hagerman, William Lewis, and Mary Montgomery.

October 11, 1961 *Old Red Mill Board of Directors meeting minutes*

The lease for the operation of the Old Red Mill Store having been prepared, it was read, discussed, and signed, John F. Montgomery, President and A.W. McLaughlin, Secretary signing for the Old Red Mill, Inc. and David Tuckwiller, the lessee, signing for himself.

October 1961

OLD STYLE GENERAL STORE WILL OPEN AT LEWISBURG By Burl Osborne Lewisburg, W. Va. (AP) -

In this Greenbrier Valley town of Lewisburg, a group "dead set against all this government giveaway and handout" is setting out to solve the area's economic troubles over a cracker barrel. The plan is simple, and its backers say it will work.

A corporation has been formed, with \$30,000 capital, to operate an old-style country store in Lewisburg. In itself, that is not unusual. The ingenuity lies in the merchandise. You won't be able to buy a television set in the store or the latest fashions. But a tourist will be able to walk through the doors of what once was a grain mill and turn back the clock to revolutionary war days. The products will fit the setting. Shelves will be stocked with hickory syrup, sorghum molasses, hand-made brooms and ceramics, locally produced blacksmith work, wood-based articles, and Greenbrier Valley art.

It will be called the "Old Red Mill, Inc." Its backers include names prominent in the Valley. Dr. John Montgomery, President of Greenbrier College, heads the Board of Directors. The owner of a Lewisburg hotel, Mrs. Randolph Hock, is the Vice President. Andrew McLaughlin, President of the Chamber of Commerce and operator of a savings and loan company, is the Secretary.

The store will actually be operated by Dave Tuckwiller, a former Greenbrier County Sheriff whose family name is frequently seen in the county's history.

McLaughlin, by far the most vocal of the project's supporters says the objects are two-fold: First; to stimulate a slack economy; and also to use the Valley's talent and history as a better drawing card for tourists.

"We are trying to get away from this giveaway and head back to the original idea that native people with native abilities can do a lot for themselves by themselves," McLaughlin says.

With that thought in mind, the promoters have gone into the mountains in search of hand-made products and producers. They found an expert at curing ham. He hopes to do a business of 100 hams a week at the community-owned store. They found a woman – a native West Virginian – who taught weaving for years in the hills of North Carolina. She's coming back to teach weaving in the valley. The products will be sold at the Old Mill.

Without leaving the town limits, they found an artist - Mrs. Doris Caldwell. One end of the store is being reserved for her life-like miniature scenes, complete with figurines. She already has duplicated the atmosphere of a general store as it was shortly after the turn of the century. And they found a blacksmith, a broom-maker, and syrup and sorghum makers and enough hand craftsmen to open the store with a stock of some 250 items – all made in West Virginia.

The Old Mill is part of an overall plan to enhance Lewisburg's tourist potential. A walking tour of the city already is outlined in brochure form, with points of interest given special emphasis. Tours of the Old Mill, when in operation, are being arranged for guests at the Greenbrier, just a few miles away.

McLaughlin led the way into the Old Mill building. Its metal sidewalls still bore the red paint. Gleaming in front were new cedar shingles. The heavy beams were fastened with stout wooden pegs.

In one corner stood a wooden cage-like affair, with an awkward key dangling from a wire. "That's a post office from old Blakers Mill near Alderson," Dr. Montgomery said. It was built sometime about 1796. Its old writing desk was still intact. The slot through which letters could be mailed still was there, though worn by time. "We hope to be able to postmark letters, 'Old Mill Store,'" McLaughlin said.

He pointed to the upper end of the 90 by 40 building. "We're going to try to put a water wheel up there," he said, "and use water from the old spring house across the road." The Lewis Spring, to which he pointed, was in use before the Revolutionary War.

They were toying with the possibility of using the second floor – still complete with grain bins and cleaning machinery – for either a museum or a summer stock theater. On the third floor, weaving classes were being considered, McLaughlin said.

Downstairs, the old hogsheads – still bound with hickory strip – were already in place. One barrel had been hand-hewn from a stump. The old grain and potato bins were still there. Counters were in place. A harness maker's vice was idle in the corner.

Stock was moved in Saturday and the store should be ready for business before October 1. "It'll take a full year to get it into full operations," McLaughlin said. "You just don't go down here and buy the stock we're after – you have to get it one piece at a time."

They are hoping 10,000 visitors a year will stop by the store, located on US 219, a busy highway to become even busier when Interstate 64 goes in one mile to the north.'

The project will mean an outlet for the handiwork of perhaps 100 persons in the beginning, Tuckwiller said, although fewer than half a dozen will be employed directly to work at the Old Mill.

McLaughlin drew heavily from 20 years spent in a New England industrial climate. He preached diversification and small industrial development, a practice which he said "gave New England a rebuilt economy second to none." And he said, "If they had half the native resources to work with that we have here, they'd be even better. "What we've lacked is leadership", he said. "Let's not ask for help and be begging. Let's do it ourselves."

Part of the "doing it themselves" involves a small garment factory to produce not the latest in women's clothing, but perhaps the earliest in feminine attire.

A New York designer – but Lewisburg native – Emily Whitmore, is designing period clothing to be

manufactured and marketed at the Old Mill.

Of the money raised in sale of stock, \$20,000 went to purchase the land and building and the rest will go towards restoration. "And we haven't gone outside to ask for help," McLaughlin said proudly.

November 6, 1961

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE REPORT TO SHAREHOLDERS (excerpt): (There were 41 shareholders, \$100 per share)

"As of November 6, 1961, the sum of \$18,300 of stock has been sold. A total of \$5925.04 has been spent on renovation of the building, insurance, fixtures, etc. The major improvements include the application of Homasote to the side walls and ceiling of the first floor, the provision of heat, wiring and lighting of this floor, the provision of toilets, a new and enlarged front porch area, a new roof, repair of floors, repair of windows, painting outside of building, closing off stairs to basement and second floor and cistern at the rear of the building. Considerable work has also been done on the grounds but no bill to date has been received for this work."

November 9, 1961

Fire broke out in the Old Red Mill about 5 AM Wednesday. The blaze seemed to originate in the south end of the long metal covered building located on US Route 219 in Lewisburg.

The Lewisburg Volunteer Fire Department, who were later joined by neighbor fire fighters, were greatly hampered in reaching the inferno due to the metal roof and sides. The stubborn blaze took some three hours of hard fighting to stamp it out. It is estimated that the loss will run over \$50,000. The corporation carried \$20,000 insurance on the building.

The Old Red Mill had just been put into operation by Manager David E. Tuckwiller. The stock was being assembled with prospects of a most successful future. The building created an ideal atmosphere to attract the tourist trade and afford local and West Virginia craftsmen a market for their wares.

The Old Red Mill was organized this year by a group of local citizens. The corporation was capitalized at \$30,000 with John E. Montgomery as president and Andrew W. McLaughlin as secretary and operated by a board of directors.

Also lost in the fire were all of the Christmas street lights for the town. The lights and equipment were stored in the building and were in the process of being readied for the approaching season.
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November 10, 1961 (ORM Board meeting minutes)

The spirit of the group was good under the circumstances, and it was agreed that decisions as to rebuilding or liquidating the corporation would not be made hastily.

Post-fire 1961

INSURANCE ESTIMATE from Earl Sampson, General Contractor: [This is a partial list that gives an indication of the size of the mill building]: 70 - 12x12x16' beams @\$28.50, 54 - 12x12x10'6" beams @\$14.80, 602 - 3x10x14' floor joists @\$3.65, 68 - 3x6x18' rafters @\$2.95, 900 - 2x6x12' studs @\$1.20, 14,000 sq ft T&G oak flooring @\$0.20, 60 - double hung windows @\$14, 15 - kegs of nails @\$15, \$7,600 labor with the total cost of materials coming to \$24,772.50

January 31, 1962 (ORM Board meeting minutes)

A rather lengthy discussion ensued with considerable division of opinion as to what course the Old Red Mill, Inc. should take.

August 8, 1962 (ORM Board meeting minutes)

Finally, it was decided that the corporation should offer its real estate to the Town of Lewisburg for the sum of \$10,000 [The Town was interested in using it for parking purposes.] and that a 90 day option should be given to the town on said property. At the same time it was agreed that the corporation should remain intact and should probably continue even though the Town of Lewisburg should exercise the above-mentioned option of purchase.

December 6, 1962 (ORM meeting minutes)

Dr. Montgomery reported that the Town of Lewisburg had decided not to purchase the real estate of Old Red Mill, Inc.

[This was the most consequential event in the history of Montwell Commons. If the Town had purchased the property, it would never have become the asset to the community that it is today.]

Mrs. Hock presented a drawing showing the Old Red Mill property developed as a stockaded village. Then, Mr. Fred Staunton presented a similar idea together with photographs of log buildings that will probably be available.

After the fire, the Old Red Mill directors decided not to rebuild the mill but instead develop the Fort Savannah Village and Museum. For the next 51 years, the property is called the Fort Savannah - , first Village until 1964, then Inn.

Unless otherwise noted, the source for all information presented here is taken from documents in the North House Museum Archive RR series 1 – Container 7 Businesses: N+O Vertical file 8