

## Occoquan History for Children

Welcome to Occoquan and the Mill House Museum. Print off the following pages when you plan your visit to town. The first two pages provide some history of the mills that helped make Occoquan famous as an industrial center. The last two pages are a series of fun scavenger hunt questions. The answers are found as you walk through the streets and inside the Mill House Museum. Have fun and imagine what life was like for the people living here over 200 years ago!

The Mill House Museum located at 413 Mill Street is the only building that survives of the original mill complex. It was built as the miller's office. It may not have been built until the 1790's when the mill was modernized and automated. Around 1755 John Ballendine purchased land on the Occoquan River that in 1804 would become the Town of Occoquan. On his newly purchased land Ballendine built an iron forge and furnace, grist and saw mills, and a large home.



Follow the sidewalk and stand along the fence in front of the historical markers by the Mill House Museum. Just to the left or west side of the museum was a huge merchant's grist mill. At the location of the big sycamore tree a water wheel powered the mill. The historical marker displays a section of the iron conduit that carried water from the race, under the street, to the water wheel. On the other side of the water wheel was a smaller grist mill. Grist is any grain the farmer brought to be ground at the mill. Usually it was wheat or corn.

The larger mill would grind flour for people who would bring schooners or wagons full of grain. These people would usually pay cash to the miller for his services. The smaller mill was a toll mill. A farmer who wanted to only grind enough flour or cornmeal for his family would pay for the grain to be ground with the part of the grain that was for sale. The toll was the price for using the mill's services.

Stand with the river and the sycamore tree behind you. Across the street was the end of the mill race. The mill race brought water from the river to turn the water wheel. The race was a long narrow channel of water. The race could be opened or closed to regulate the water flow. The water from the race went under the road through a big iron pipe. The water would hit the paddles on the water wheel with such force that it made the wheel turn. The wheel was connected to machinery inside the mill that would turn the big millstones that ground the grain. A millstone rests against the front of the Mill House Museum.

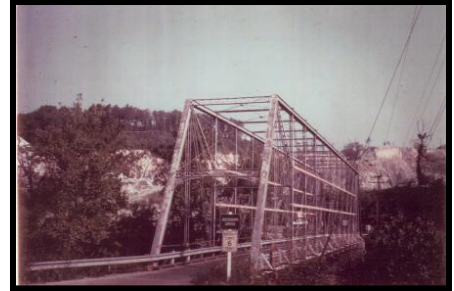
On the hillside in front of you is a large stone house. This house is called Rockledge Mansion. John Ballendine built this house for his family in the 1750's. William Buckland, an indentured servant who came from England, designed Rockledge. George Mason hired Buckland specifically to design Gunston Hall, but allowed him to work for other people at the same time. People in the 1700s and 1800s did not like the look of a stone house and many times covered stone or brick homes with wood. From reading old insurance policies we know that this is what happened to Rockledge. Older photos show Rockledge appearing to be a wood frame house.



Stone to build the mills and Rockledge came from the local quarry across the river. When you walk over to the river you can see how many boulders are in the water. With the help of his cousin Oliver Evans and his brother Thomas, in 1790 Nathaniel Ellicott modernized the mill so it only took one man to operate it. A wagon could pull up to the front of the mill or a boat could pull alongside from the river. All the grain could be unloaded, ground, and put in sacks by one miller. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson visited Occoquan to see how the mill worked so they could use the same design on their own mills. A fire destroyed the mill in 1924.

Walk out on the footbridge. You are standing on the site of a wooden bridge built by Nathaniel Ellicott in 1797. Wagons and horses could cross on this bridge. Mr. Ellicott charged 12¢ for each wagon with horses, and 3¢ each for a man or horse. The mail and passengers traveled by stagecoach from Alexandria over this bridge. They could stop for the night at an Ordinary (Inn) in Occoquan before travelling south to Fredericksburg and points beyond. Before the bridge was built a wooden raft or ferry was the only way to cross the river. A ferryman who lived near the river would be on call.

The wood bridge stood until the 1850's. A storm probably destroyed it. During the Civil War ferries or pontoon bridges were used by troops and supplies to cross. Pontoon bridges were made in sections that floated and could be connected together depending on how long the bridge had to be. In 1863 a temporary pontoon bridge was erected here. Union General Joseph Hooker's army crossed here (and at other sites on the Occoquan River) over the length of several days. These troops were marching to Gettysburg, where one of the biggest battles of the Civil War occurred.



After the Civil War an iron truss bridge was built in 1878. This bridge lasted until Hurricane Agnes destroyed it in 1972. Following this event, the footbridge was built and a new bridge was built for cars. The new bridge site is on the east end of Occoquan.

In 1828 Samuel M. Janney and his cousin Samuel H. Janney built a big cotton mill. This mill was located where the large blue water tanks are now. This mill hired so many people more houses had to be built for them. Many of the workers were women of Irish decent. Cotton picked from plants was brought to the mill to be spun into thread that could be made into clothes. This mill was set on fire and destroyed in 1862, during the Civil War.

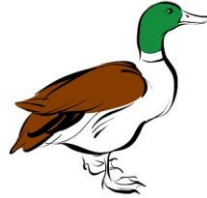


Look up the river (west). At a point on the left bank (south side of the river), about as far as you can see, was the site of the iron furnace. Here raw ore was brought by wagon and smelted to make iron bars. These bars would be sold or forged in town. George Washington purchased iron from John Ballendine for use during the French and Indian War. Daniel Morgan was one of the wagoners who brought ore to the mill. Daniel Morgan would later be a soldier during the French and Indian War and become a famous General in the Revolutionary War. An iron forge was located just to the east side of the Mill House Museum. At the forge iron bars could be made into useful items such as pans, horseshoes, nails, hinges, etc.

These industries, the grist mills, cotton mill, saw mill, and iron works provided jobs and income for the people of Occoquan. They also offered services people needed to survive in a world before big grocery stores, shopping malls, and home supply outlets.

## Scavenger Hunt

1. Which of these animals is on the weather vane atop the gazebo in Mamie Davis Park?  
(Circle the correct answer)



2. Walk through Mamie Davis Park to the town boardwalk. The dock extends from the boardwalk where \_\_\_\_\_ tie up.



3. Read the historical marker at the corner of Mill and Washington Streets. What is the name of the home John Ballendine built and in what year?  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. What state flag flies in front of the VFW Hall at 204 Mill Street \_\_\_\_\_

5. There is a courtyard at the corner of Mill and Union Streets. The courtyard is paved with \_\_\_\_\_. Prisoners at the old Lorton Prison made many of these.

6. What animal head is on the iron gate located between 405 & 407 Mill Street?  
\_\_\_\_\_



7. On the curb in front of 402 Mill Street is a granite \_\_\_\_\_. Ladies used to step on this to get up or down from a cart or carriage.

8. Poplar Alley is a very narrow street. During Colonial times only \_\_\_\_\_ drawn vehicles were used and they were not as wide as many of our cars and trucks.



9. Look at the outside of the building at 308 Mill Street. Can you guess what this building used to be? \_\_\_\_\_ (\$\$\$)

10. In front of Town hall is a large stone with a plaque on it. This plaque names Occoquan as a Virginia Historical Landmark. In what year did this happen? \_\_\_\_\_

11. The footbridge near the Museum takes you across the \_\_\_\_\_ River. The name of the footbridge is \_\_\_\_\_

12. The building at 310 was once a \_\_\_\_\_ where boys and girls studied and learned.



**Look for these answers at the Mill House Museum.**

1. Find the wooden desk. What item was placed in the round hole cut from the desk top?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. There is a "whatzit table" by the window. What was number 3 used for?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. There is an item hanging in the Museum that looks like a giant pair of tongs. They are not used in the kitchen but in the winter to pick up blocks of \_\_\_\_\_
4. Look for the Lorton display board. What item is your favorite? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Only one pill bottle is labeled in the doctor's bag. What is it? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Name two types of mills that operated in Occoquan. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Can you find pictures of these mills in the Museum? \_\_\_\_\_
8. What powered the mills in the 1700 and 1800 hundreds? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Where the footbridge is there was once a large wooden bridge built in 1797 by Nathaniel Ellicott and later an iron bridge built in 1878. Before these bridges were built people crossed the river on a \_\_\_\_\_ boat.
10. The merchant's mill ground \_\_\_\_\_ for the local farmers. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson both visited Occoquan to see how this mill was constructed. It was one of the first automated mills in the United States.
11. This man's picture is on an exhibit hanging in the Museum. What is his name? What did he do that was so important and why was he so brave?

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