

DREISBACH FAMILY ASSOCIATION

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A Family of Millers and Millwrights

We are a family of millers and millwrights! We've just discovered that between 1750 and 1830, the Dreisbach family had at least nine men in the milling trade. We had three millers and seven millwrights, tradesmen who made and repaired the wooden gears and other equipment used in mills.



Sluice and mill of Squire Boone's Mill in Indiana
The size and design of this early grist mill may be quite similar to the mill built by Jost Dreisbach about 1750.

Jost the miller. Jost Dreisbach, eldest son of Simon Dreisbach Sr, was the first of our millers and also is the one we know the most about. In 1747, just four years after arriving in Pennsylvania, the 25 year old Jost warranted land along Indian Creek in Lehigh Township, Northampton County. Here he built his grist mill sometime between 1748 and 1754. It is said that he was the first miller in the township which, at that time, had about 50 men (women and children were not enumerated).

In 1755-56, not long after he built his mill, fierce Indian attacks forced most people in the area to flee south to more populous regions. The inhabitants who remained behind expected "daily to be murdered by the Indians" and they petitioned the government to send troops to help defend them¹.

Jost's fortified mill. A line of forts was established and in 1758 Trisback's (sic) mill became a fort with 30 men stationed there². The mill was probably chosen because it was the most substantial building around - a log structure built on a stone foundation.

A Lt. Ingle was the officer in charge of the troops at Jost's mill. On Tuesday, Feb. 28, 1758 the mill fort was inspected by Lt. Col. James Burd who wrote: "I found...30 good men in a very good Stockade, which he (Lt. Ingle) is just finishing, 15 miles from Fort Allen. Stores - 10 lb. Powder, 10 lb. Lead, 12 Province Arms bad, no blankitts, 4 spades, 3 shovells, 2 Grubing hows & 4 axes..."³. With 12 poor rifles for 30 men, spades, shovels and hoes for the other men, it's a good thing that the fort was not attacked. Moreover with no blankets, and probably no fireplace in the mill, the soldiers must have been cold.

Oral tradition in our family says that Jost was an "Indian fighter". When other members of his family fled south, 34 year old Jost apparently stayed behind, to watch over his mill. No doubt he went on sorties with the militia men to hunt for marauding Indians, thereby gaining his reputation as an Indian fighter.



The stream and location of Squire Boone's Mill also are quite similar to Indian Creek where Jost built his mill.

Site of Jost's mill. Jost's mill was located near what is now the intersection of Cedar Drive and Walnut Drive in Howersville, Northampton Co., PA. Unfortunately it has long since disappeared. The mill dam also is gone, washed out by floods. It's still possible, though, to find the mill pond site. Without a dam, it is mostly empty of water but a small pond remains, surrounded by swampy land.

A Dreisbach log cabin? There is an old log cabin on Cedar Drive, located on what was Jost's land. Currently used for storage, nothing is known of its origins but the fireplace construction suggests it may be from about 1790. It is unlikely to have been Jost's house – although this is possible – but it may have been occupied by Jost's son, Adam the blacksmith, or by Adam's daughter, Catherine and her husband John George Fenstermacher. The log cabin may well be the oldest extant building in Lehigh Township!



Log cabin on what was Jost Dreisbach's property. Exterior is covered by boards. Probably built about 1790.



Log cabin interior with walls made of hand hewn beams.

A glimpse of Jost! Much is known about millers in general and we know some specific things about Jost. If we put this information together, amazingly, we can get a hint of Jost's personality and appearance!



Photo of upper half of the walk-in fireplace in the log cabin.

Physically, Jost must have been *big and strong*. Millers worked hard and routinely carried 80 lb sacks of grain up and down ladders, moved heavy equipment and did other strenuous work. Jost probably *had a short beard*. Most millers wore beards for warmth in winter and to protect their faces from flying stone chips and grain. In addition, Jost, like all millers, *was literate and proficient in math* – skills needed for recording, weighing and calculating.

Millers have a reputation for being cheerful (think of “the jolly miller”) and for knowing how to deal with people. This certainly fits Jost. We have good proof that Jost was both *gregarious and well respected*. He was also an *ardent Patriot*. All of this was verified when, in 1774, Jost was first appointed to the Committee of Observation⁴ and then *elected* by 300 militia men to serve as their colonel⁵.

Jost was also *a man of faith* who donated land for the first Reformed church in Lehigh Twp., known as Jost's Church. Jost seems to have *had a sense of 'family'* as well. Most of the other Dreisbachs who became millers and/or millwrights probably got their start by working in Jost's mill.

Moreover, Jost was *good friends with Conrad Kreider*, who owned a local tavern, was a wagon master during the Revolution and like Jost, was a member of Zion Stone Church Reformed Congregation. It's not hard to imagine the two gregarious and no doubt physically impressive men enjoying a pint or two or three together in Conrad's tavern, which was located in Conrad Kreider's house.

The Penna. Archives record an entertaining story about Jost and Conrad Kreider that occurred at Kreider's tavern during the Revolutionary War⁶. You can almost hear the somewhat inebriated conversation recorded below.



A Colonial Tavern Scene – unknown artist.

they would be tried by a Court Martial for their bad conduct.

William Beck Sr. was fined 40 £ conditional on good behavior of the said William towards Colonel Dreisbach and his Officers for the space of one year and ordered to pay Costs. Others involved, Samuel Wilson and Philip Storm, were fined 20£. (No mention is made if Frederick Beck was punished or fined!)

[The above is taken from a transcript of a hearing before the Committee of Observation in January 1777. I have paraphrased the original to make it more readable.]

The story of Jost and the Becks.

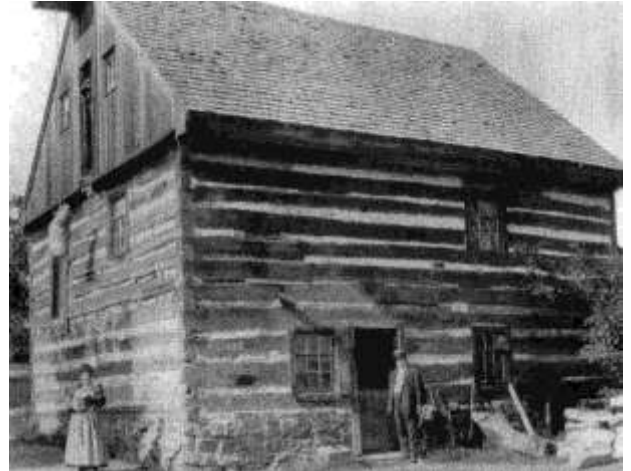
Colonel Jost Dreisbach complained to the Committee of Observation that Frederick Beck had assaulted him at the house of Major Conrad Kreider (which also held a tavern). It was said that Frederick Beck caught Colonel Jost by the throat, lifted up a stick he had in his hand and threatened to strike the Colonel. William Beck Sr. then told Colonel Dreisbach that if the Colonel resisted, he would be a dead man.

The problem arose some time ago when Colonel Dreisbach sent a man to William Beck's house to fetch a drum belonging to the Colonel's Battalion. William's son Leonard, a drummer in one of Colonel Dreisbach's Companies, refused to go with the Battalion, so the Colonel wanted the drum returned. William Beck told the man that he could not have the Drum. Beck continued to say that if the whole Battalion were to come they should not have it, for he had enough Powder and Lead in his house for 24 hours, and he would defend himself. Martin Ashbach, who was also present at William Beck's house, added they would defend themselves for a much longer time than 24 hours!

Major Conrad Kreider confirmed what the Colonel said was true and also confirmed that all the Becks above named were present at his house/tavern and that Frederick Beck had hold of Colonel Dreisbach. Robert Young testified he saw Frederick Beck lay hold of Colonel Dreisbach by the neck and drag him towards the staircase (with the intent of throwing the Colonel down the steps). Capt. Strouse gave a similar testimony.

William Beck was examined by the Committee of Observation and confessed to the charges laid against him by Col. Dreisbach and added that he is sorry for what he has done.

Upon hearing the parties and their evidences, the Committee ordered that William Beck Sr. ask pardon of Colonel Dreisbach and his Officers for offending them in such a manner and promise to behave himself in the future. Beck was also to give Security for the same and pay his costs. The other defendants, being all Associators (members of militia), should return to their respective Battalions where



Gissinger's Mill, Cumberland Co, PA. Courtesy Cumberland County Historical Society. By 1776, Jost's mill probably grew in size and may have resembled this mill. The water wheel is on the back of the building. Note flour sack being lowered to waiting woman at left of picture

Jost apparently worked as a miller as long as he was physically able. Unlike his brothers, he stayed on the land he owned for his whole life, never moving to another spot. The last piece of land he warranted, in 1785, he called "Yost's Retreat" which speaks volumes. He died 17 October 1794 at the age of 73.

Other Dreisbach millers and millwrights. We know of one more Dreisbach miller, six Dreisbach millwrights and one wheelwright. Most likely there were more but information about them as been lost. In addition to Jost, there was:

George Dreisbach (1733-after 1809), a younger brother of Jost, reportedly owned a grist mill and a saw mill near Cherryville, Pa. in 1773.

John George Dreisbach (1756-1826), the deaf son of Jost's brother, Simon Jr, was a millwright.

John Jost Dreisbach (1757-1813), son of Jost, moved to Montgomery Co. NY. Was a millwright and placed an ad in the 1791 Albany Gazette newspaper

Adam Dreisbach (1762-1849), son of Jost, was a blacksmith but **also was a miller**. His daughter, Magdalena, married a miller, Jacob Hower.

Henry Dreisbach (1762-1841), son of Jost's brother, John, was a millwright.

Jost William Dreisbach (1775-1857), son of the above John George, was a millwright in Colombia Co., PA.

Nathan Dreisbach (1816-1906), son of the above Jost William, was a millwright in Luzerne Co., PA.

Finally, Michael Dreisbach (1779-1868), son of Jost, was a wheelwright, which is similar to a millwright.

George Dreisbach – Saw Mill, Grist Mill?

George Dreisbach, younger brother of Jost, also was a miller. Far less is known about George and his mill, or possibly his mills. There is conflicting evidence in the record: one source⁷ says George had both a grist mill and a saw mill in 1773, while another source⁸ says George Dreisbach had only a saw mill. A local historian and genealogist, Bill Fiedler, said that George had a grist mill and it was in Cherryville, PA, not too far from Jost's mill.

George's saw mill would have been an insubstantial building. If he had a grist mill, it would have been small, made of logs, and operated only during the harvest. It is doubtful that George had sufficient funds to buy, or build a larger mill. We know that he paid only a fraction of the church dues that his more prosperous brothers paid to the Reformed Zion Stone Church in Kreidersville, indicating he had far less money than they did. In the church books George is listed as a "Zimerman" (sic), not a miller, and it is noted that he was paid to help build the church in 1771.



Wood bench and wooden gear, both from Cherryville mill, Photos courtesy of Lehigh Township Historical Society.

The Lehigh Township Historical Society has a wooden bench and a wooden gear from the Cherryville mill. We know that George was a wood worker. If he was connected to the Cherryville mill, as historian Bill

Fiedler maintained, it is remotely possible that George made the bench and/or the wooden gear pictured above.

We have very little information about the Dreisbach millwrights, with one exception. Jost's eldest son, John Jost (1757 – 1813) moved to Montgomery Co., New York sometime around 1780. As the eldest son of Jost, John Jost had certainly worked in his father's mill. When he moved to New York State, he became a millwright and placed this marvellous add in the December 5, 1791 newspaper, the Albany Gazette:

JOST DRIESBACH,
Mill-Wright and Joiner, from Pennsylvania,
TAKES this method of informing his friends and the public in general, that he undertakes, the building of Grist-Mills, so as to answer both for packing and country work, and other Mills, and that he engages to finish them in the neatest and most workmanlike manner.
He has laid out during the winter season, to make Fanning-Mills, Sleights and Blacksmiths' Bellows and all kinds of Furniture, which he will complete at the shortest notice. Those who are inclined to employ him, in any of the above branches, will please to call on him at his house, nearly opposite the office of Theodoras V. Wyck Graham, esquire, North-Gate.
Two Apprentices, wanted to the above business; but none need apply who cannot produce good recommendations.
JOST DRIESBACH.
Albany, December 5th, 1791: 3t 5:5

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How fascinating it is to discover this side of the Dreisbach family and to be able to get to know Jost, George and John Jost Dreisbach in a small way! There probably were other Dreisbachs involved with mills, perhaps we will discover them someday.

Marcia Dreisbach Falconer, *DFA Newsletter Editor*
marcia.falconer@sympatico.ca

¹ Penna. Arch. Series 1, Vol III, p164.

² Penna. Arch. Series 1, Vol III, p341.

³ Penna. Arch. Series 1, Vol III, p355.

⁴ Penna. Arch. Series 5, Vol VIII, pp3-16.

⁵ Penna. Arch. Series 5, Vol. III, p14.

⁶ Penna. Arch. Series 2, Vol. XIV, pp 623-624.

⁷ *The History of Northampton County, PA*, by W.H.Davis, Chapter XLVIII, 1877

⁸ *Manuscript History of Northampton County* by Matthew Henry, 1851