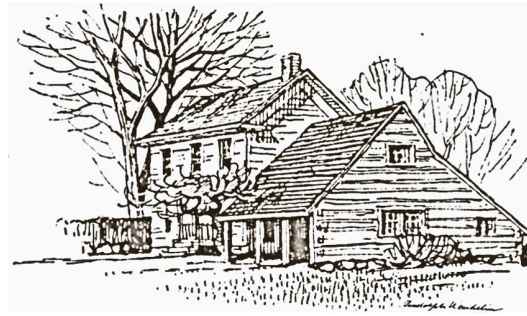




In 1742 farmer John Ball obtained a 166-acre land grant from Lord Fairfax along Four Mile Run. He and his family built a one-room log house with a loft in what became Arlington, Virginia. He added a lean-to and covered the structure with clapboard. Visitors can see the original logs, ceiling beams, and wide plank floors and even the original oak clapboard roof which is among only a handful of such roofs in the nation.

John, his wife Elizabeth, and their five daughters lived in this simple house. They farmed and kept sheep, cows, pigs, and bees.

Marian Rhinehart Sellers was the last private owner. She donated the house to the Arlington Historical Society in 1975 to preserve it and share it with the public. The Ball-Sellers House is on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register.



The house is one of the oldest surviving structures in the Washington region. It is run as a free public museum by the Arlington Historical Society.

Learn more at the Arlington Historical
Society Website

<https://arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org/>
or
<https://arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org/visit/all-sellers-house/>

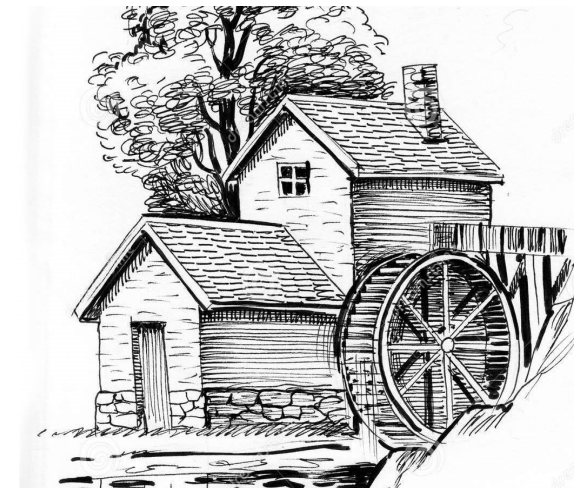


The Arlington Historical Society was founded in 1956 and is a 501.3(c) nonprofit educational organization. The goal of the Arlington Historical Society is to conduct research and to preserve and share the history of Arlington County, Virginia.

John Ball:

A Miller on

Four Mile Run



The Ball-Sellers House
Arlington Historical Society
Arlington, Virginia

Making Flour for Bread

When John Ball got a grant of 166 acres from Lord Fairfax in 1742, he chose a property that included a site for a grist mill on Four Mile Run.

Farmers in this time and place grew corn and wheat rather than tobacco. But before bread could be made from corn or wheat, each had to be ground into flour. Without a mill nearby, families used hand mills which took a long time to make enough flour for a single loaf of bread.

Mortar and Pestle

A mortar and pestle had been used for centuries before gristmills were invented. The mortar was like a deep bowl, often made from a tree stump. The pestle looked like a club and was also made of wood. Wheat or corn was put in the mortar and the pestle was used to smash it until it was flour.



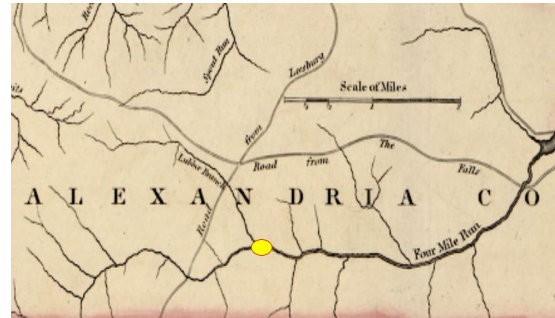
Quern

A quern is made of two round flat stones one on top of the other. The top stone was turned by a handle and corn or wheat was poured into the hole in the center. As the top stone turned, the corn or wheat was crushed between the two stones, was pushed out the side of the stones, and was collected.



Mills Helped Build Community

John Ball built his mill on Four Mile Run where Lubber Run flows into it (see the yellow dot on the map). Everyone in the community would have helped build it.



Mills were good for the mill owner and nearby farmers. The fee for grinding crops was $\frac{1}{8}$ of the wheat or $\frac{1}{6}$ of the corn. As the population grew, the Balls could have eventually supplied their own grain needs without planting it themselves. But a mill was also an investment. Roads had to be built to the mill and were maintained by the mill owner. Flour was inspected and millers had to use accurate measures.

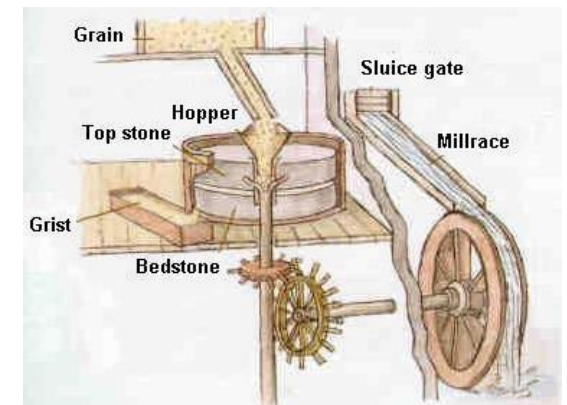
These responsibilities were the reasons behind a colonial Virginia law that exempted mill owners like John Ball from service in the Virginia militia that fought in the French and Indian War (1754-1763).

Women and children were usually the family members tasked to grind corn and wheat if there was no mill. With a mill nearby they could spend time on other things like learning to read and write, making clothes, or even playing.

Milling on Four Mile Run

Mills needed a steady flow of water to turn a wheel that turned a series of wheels and gears that crushed and ground the corn or wheat between two huge flat round stones, similar to a quern.

Every few weeks John would have had to “dress” the millstones or rough them up by deepening the furrows that had been worn down on each stone wheel.



You can visit the house that John and Elizabeth Ball built c. 1750 and learn more with a personal tour guided by a knowledgeable docent.

The house is at 5620 3rd Street, South in the Glencarlyn neighborhood of Arlington. It is open free every Saturday 1-4 pm from April through October.