

# Stratford's History Tomlinson's Laurel Mill

*respectfully submitted by Carole Dadino, Stratford Historian*

The Tomlinson name dominates early history in Southern Camden County. Joseph Tomlinson settled in the area in 1686 where he apprenticed in the dyeing trade. In 1690 he invested in 117 acres on Blackwood-Clementon Road. Over 29 years he increased his holdings, and raised 10 children. On October 13, 1821, Joseph's grandson, Benjamin, purchased land surrounding Laurel Lake, and Big Timber Creek for \$4,000. It held a Saw Mill, ("Porter's Old Mill") dated 1739, and a Grist Mill built by John Hillman, in 1745. Benjamin Tomlinson applied to get the North Branch of Timber Creek opened to navigation from his Upper Mill "Tomlinson's Sawmill" in Laurel Springs, to the branches of the creek, below Chews Landing and on to the Delaware River. In addition to using his mule teams, his plans were to transport lumber and grain by way of barges. His request was denied as it would cause flooding of farmland adjoining the creek. Ephraim Tomlinson, (1806-1893) a great-great-grandson of Joseph Tomlinson acquired the land (Records suggest the land was passed down from his father, Benjamin). In 1834, Ephraim built a new gristmill and sawmill on the banks of Timber Creek, just west of the present Laurel Lake dam site at Laurel Road. The sawmill was said to be the largest mill in the area south of the White Horse Pike. In 1844 Ephraim built his home, a Brick Mansion, which remains on Laurel Rd., in Stratford. Around the mills and mansion he began a small community consisting of a slaughter house, about 12 homes for his workers and a Schoolhouse that remains on the hill in Lindenwold. He chose the name Laurel Mills for his little village, after the Laurel that surrounded the lake. Following in his Great Grandfather's footsteps, Ephraim's estate grew to include three farms and three stores.



*Ephraim Tomlinson's Gristmill, built in 1834. It continued grinding wheat, corn and other grains until 1956.*



*Interior of Laurel Mill in 1958, one week before it burned down. Two Millstones sit on the floor while one of the grinding pegs hangs from the beams*

His mule teams transported lumber and grain from his mills and also served the iron and glass factories throughout South Jersey. The gristmill at Laurel Road remained in the Tomlinson name for many years, turning out up to 20,000 pounds of milled corn, wheat and other grains, each week. Ephraim operated his Gristmill until he retired in 1873. He turned the mill over to his son, Albert, who ran it until his death in 1924. The mill was then acquired by John Stafford, and did not cease operations until 1956. It was destroyed by a fire in 1958.



*Firemen hosing down embers from the 1958 Laurel Mill fire. The Tomlinson Mansion, on Laurel Road (right center), can be seen in the background, above the barrel. According to Mrs. Edwin Tomlinson, the fire was an accident, set by a teenager. Some believe it was torched by the Fire Department for practice*