Abstract

The Emlen Grist Mill was owned by James Emlen, a member of the Quaker Society of Friends, a community miller, and a devoted husband and father. The property located at the corner of Old Forge Road and Yearsley Mill Road in Middletown Township, Delaware County (formerly Chester County until 1789) was used as a grist mill, an all-boys grammar school, and a Quaker meeting house. A portion of this historical property has recently become part of the Pennsylvania State University Brandywine Campus.

James Emlen was a member of a prosperous Philadelphia family who had amassed their fortune through the establishment of breweries. In 1783, James Emlen married Phebe Pierce and in 1784 purchased the grist mill located in Middletown. Emlen was called to represent his meeting house at the Philadelphia Quaker Yearly Meeting in 1798. Although yellow fever was still rampant in the city, he felt it was his duty to represent his meeting house. Since Emlen spent his life providing everything for his six children, he penned his will to ensure that they would be cared for if he would die suddenly.

After returning from the Quaker Yearly Meeting, James Emlen suddenly fell ill with yellow fever and died on October 3, 1798. He left each of his six children an equal portion of his estate. Although Emlen died when his children were very young, the foresight he had when writing his will in 1797 provided them with the foundation and resources needed to live successful and prosperous lives.

After a short period of farming the land, his son James Emlen, Jr. had the desire become a school teacher. His goal was “to sow good seed in the hearts of those entrusted to his care.” With the Emlen Grist Mill now sold to Nathan Yearsley, Emlen, Jr. continued to teach school in a frame tenant house along the road near the mill.