

# Mills in the Upcountry: a Historic Context, and a Summary of a Mill Site on the Peters Creek Heritage Preserve, Spartanburg County, South Carolina

Prepared for:  
The Spartanburg Water Authority

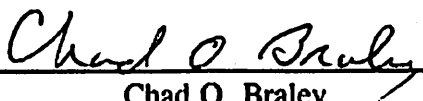
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## The Mill Site on Peters Creek Heritage Preserve

The Peters Creek mill site is located about five miles northeast of Spartanburg (Figure 12), on the north side of the creek. Peters Creek is about five miles long and joins the Pacolet River just above the village of Converse.

As revealed by historic research, at least 40 mills were in operation by 1818 in Spartanburg County. At least three mills existed within a short distance of one another on Peters Creek between the late 1700s into the early twentieth century. The earliest was Wyatt's Mill, located a few hundred yards west of Cannons Campground Road and outside of the Peters Creek Heritage Preserve. The second mill was located a short distance (possibly within 100 yards) upstream from the final mill. Remnants of the second mill should be within the Peters Creek Heritage Preserve, but an archeological reconnaissance failed to find it. There is the possibility that it will be exposed when the current mill pond is drained. The third mill, with its well-preserved dam and rock foundations, a focal point in the Peters Creek Heritage Preserve, is comparatively recent, dating to the 1870s. Following is a summary of the three mills.

### *Wyatt's/Templeman's Mill*

A few hundred yards upstream from the mill site, west of Cannon's Campground Road and the Post Ford Road, was the earliest grist mill on Peters Creek (Figures 13 and 14). This mill site dates to the 1790s or early 1800s and was built by Vincent Wyatt who owned hundreds of acres on Peters Creek. Given the acreage, the first mill may have begun as a plantation mill. The mill and mill pond is depicted on an 1803 plat (Deed Book K:270-272), documenting a 60 acre transaction between Vincent Wyatt and his wife Elizabeth to Zachariah Wyatt (Figure 15). The plat also shows that a headrace led from the dam to the mill, which was on the south side of the creek. The mill is also shown on early nineteenth century maps of Spartanburg County. Later land transactions are somewhat confusing, but the mill was later known as Templeman's Mill (Figure 16).

*On the 18th day of September, 1847, James Templeman bought 416 acres of land from Mr. James Spencer for the sum of \$1500.00. This 416 acres consisted of a post office and a grist mill and house. The post office was located on the north side of Peters Creek and the mill was on the south side about 500 yards of where the present day road [Cannons Camp Ground Road] crosses Peters Creek. The home place stood on the hill north east of the creek and was built of logs. James lived here with his wife, Thursey, his son, Aaron and two daughters, Emeline and Mary Ann until 1856 he sold out to Mr. Floyd. The surrounding community was called Templeman's Mill. My wife and I visited this place in 1977 and found the old mill pond and waterfall. The old stone foundation for the mill was buried in the ground about 6 inches and I brought back a stone for a keepsake. The land is owned by the Spartanburg Police Academy. There was no bridge on the creek so for about 200 years wagons would have to ford the creek. The old wagon ruts were cut in the stone bottom and can be seen today (Templeman 1976).*

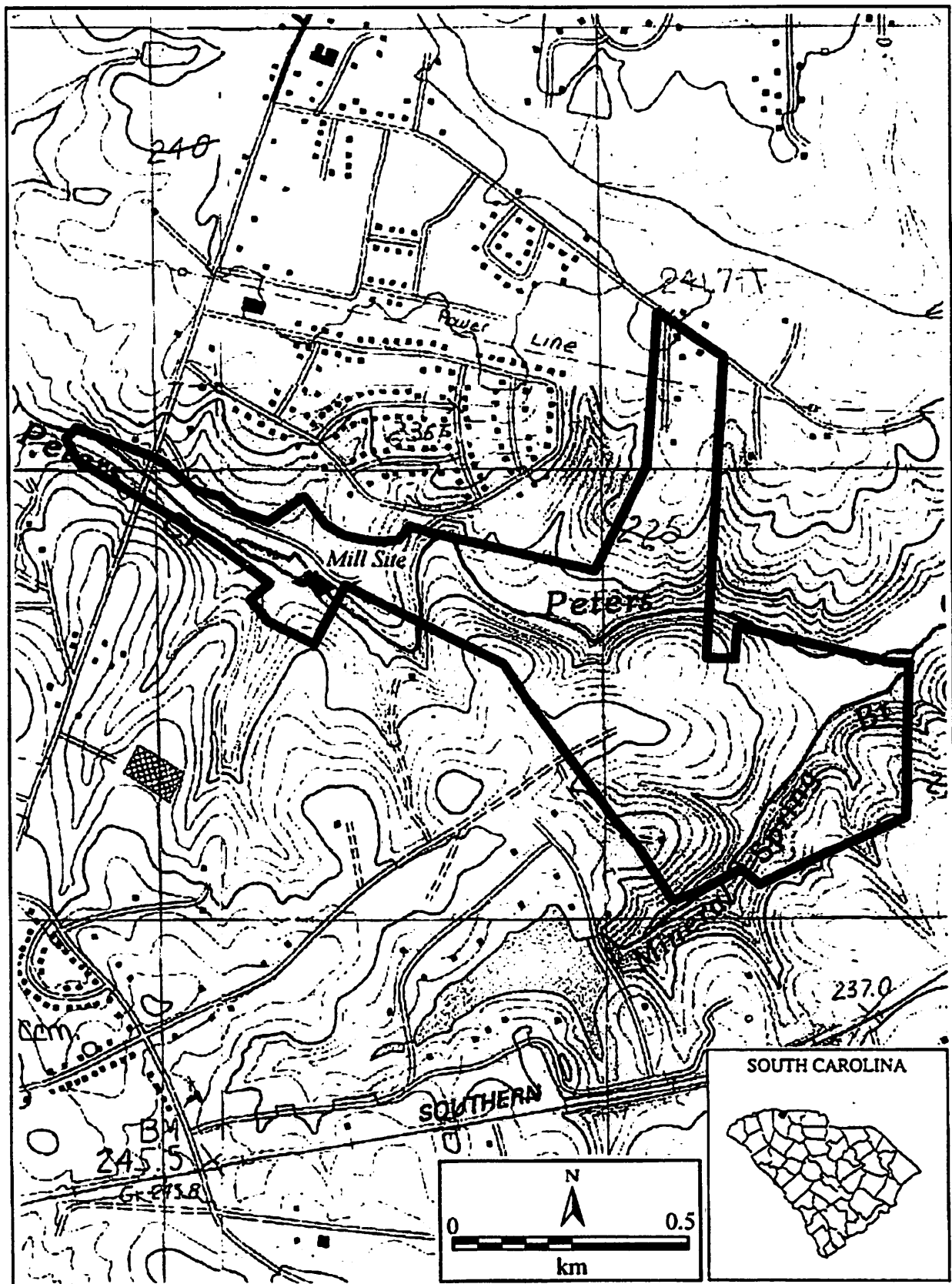
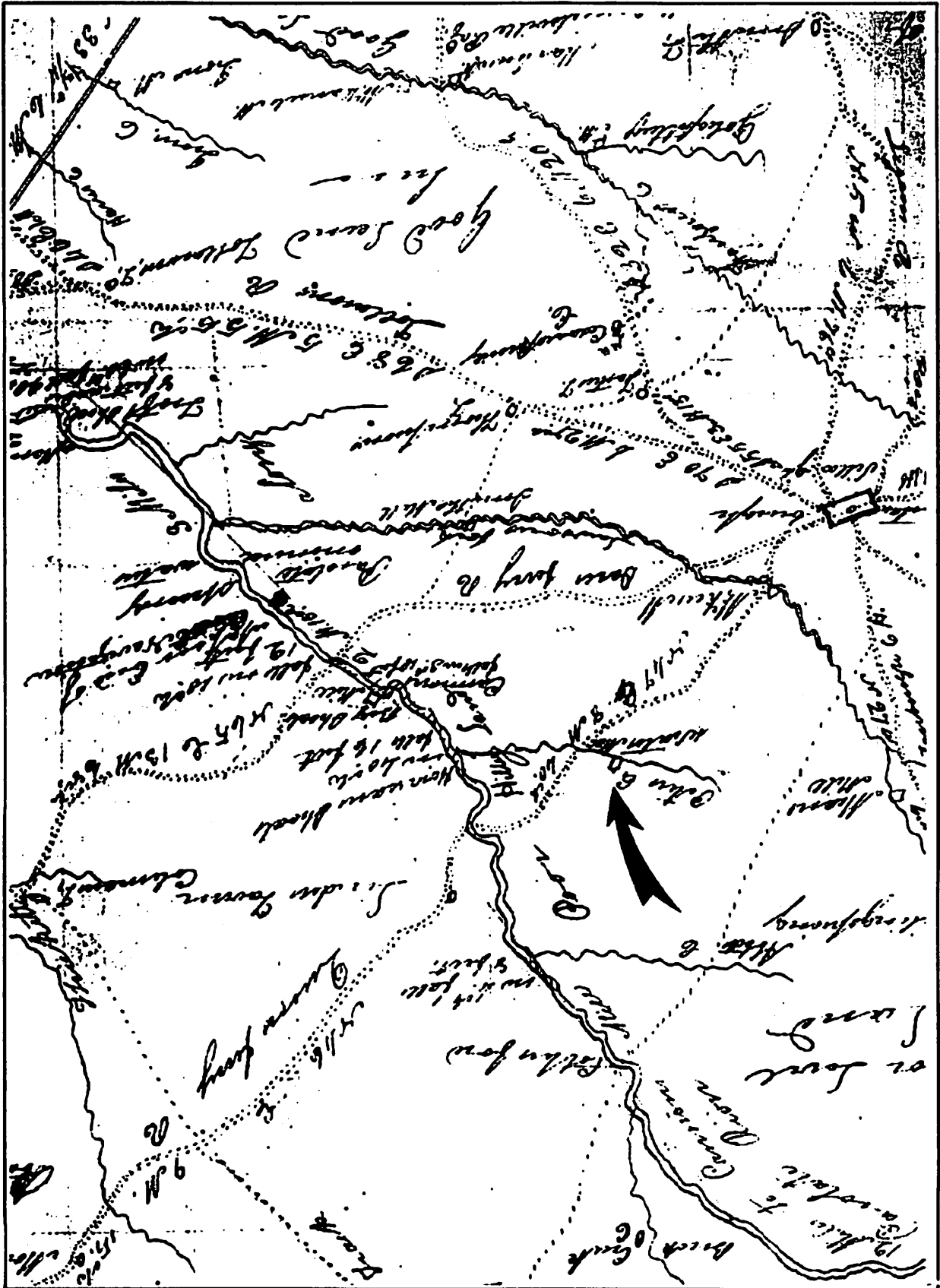


Figure 12. Location of the Mill Site Within Peters Creek Heritage Preserve (source: USGS 1:24,000 Pacolet quadrangle).

Figure 13. 1818 Map of Spartanburg County Showing "What's" Mill.



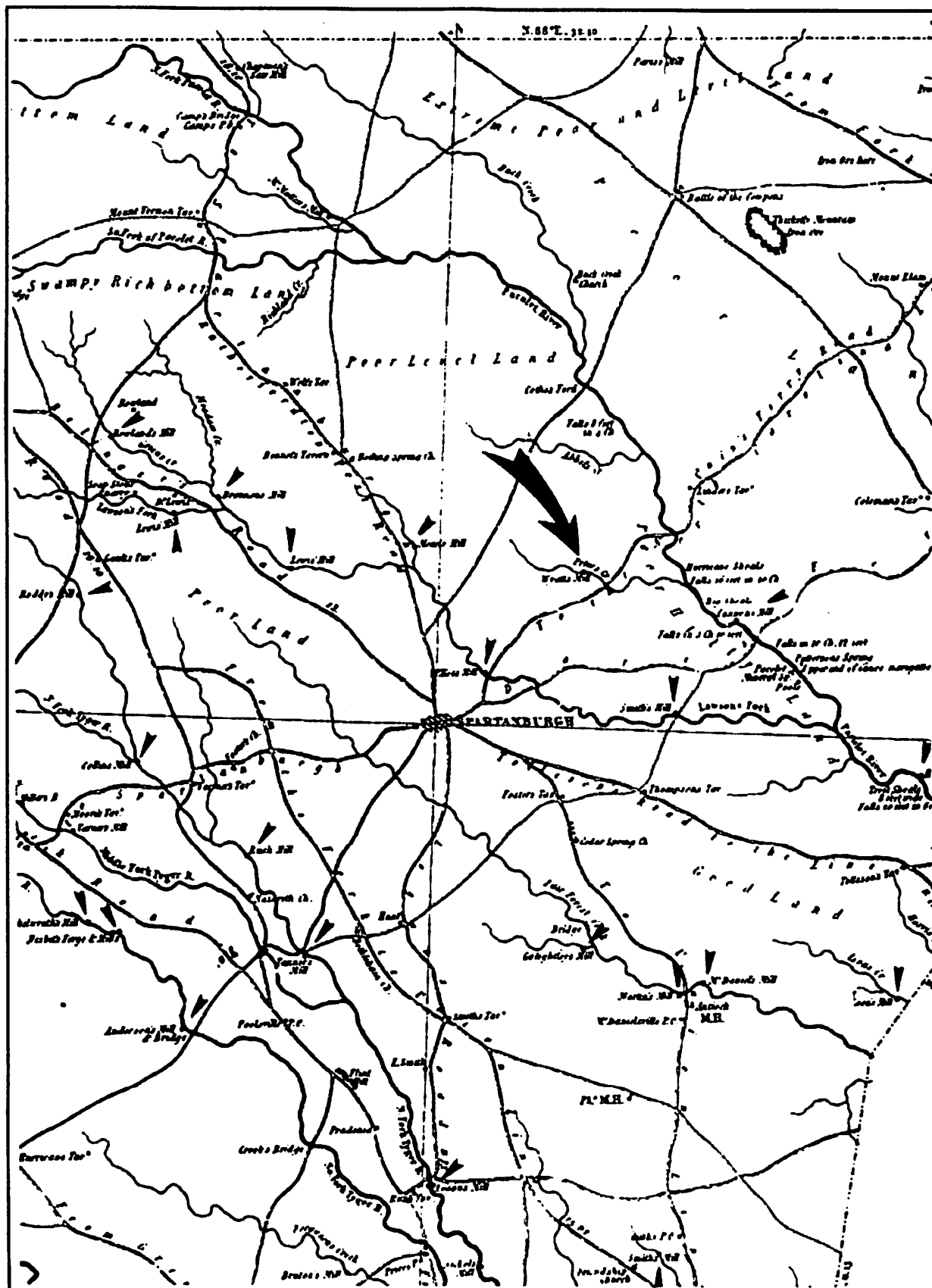


Figure 14. 1825 Mills Atlas Map of Spartanburg County Showing Wyatt's Mill.

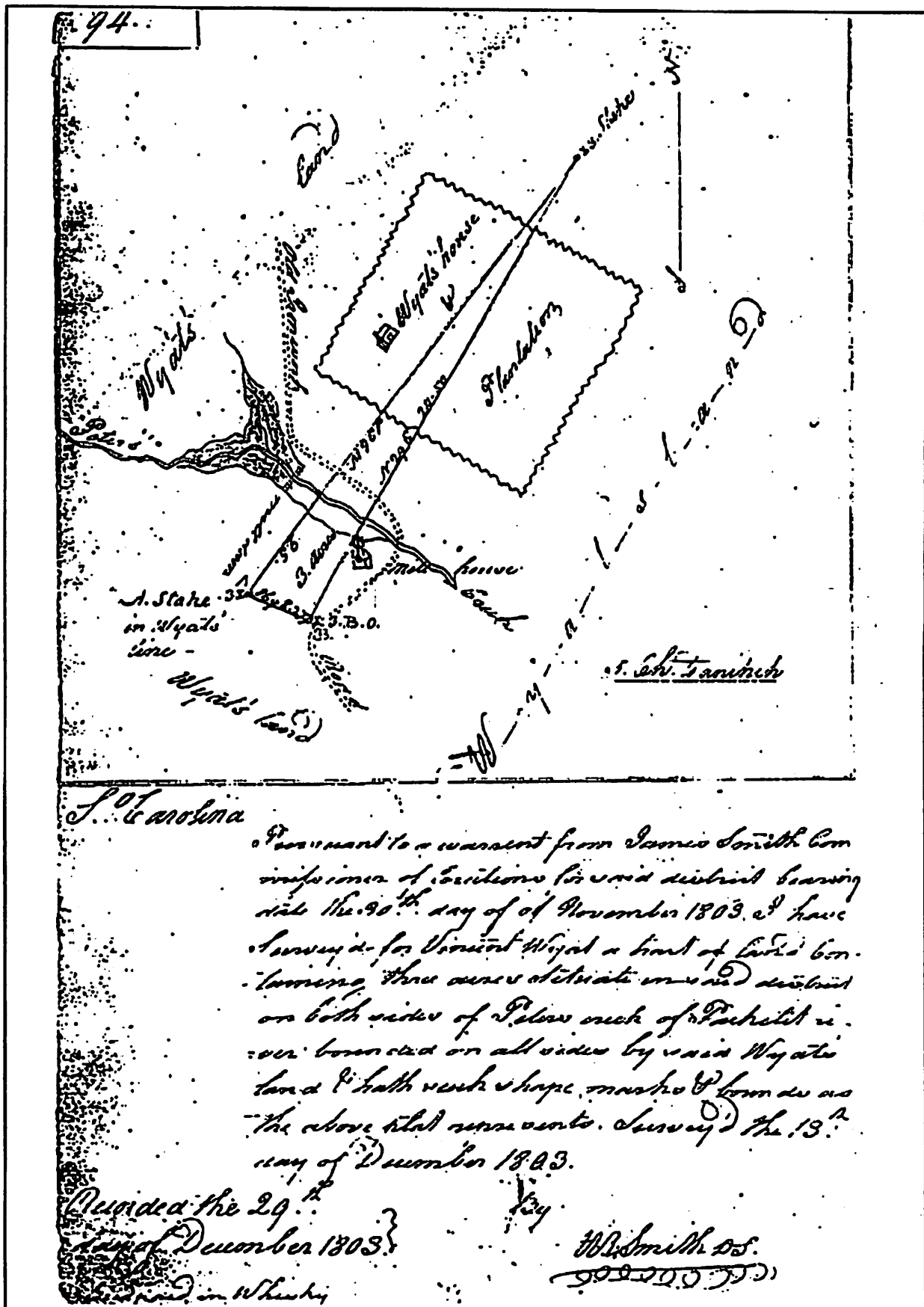


Figure 15. 1803 Plat Showing Wyatt's Mill (Spartanburg County Plat Book A:94)



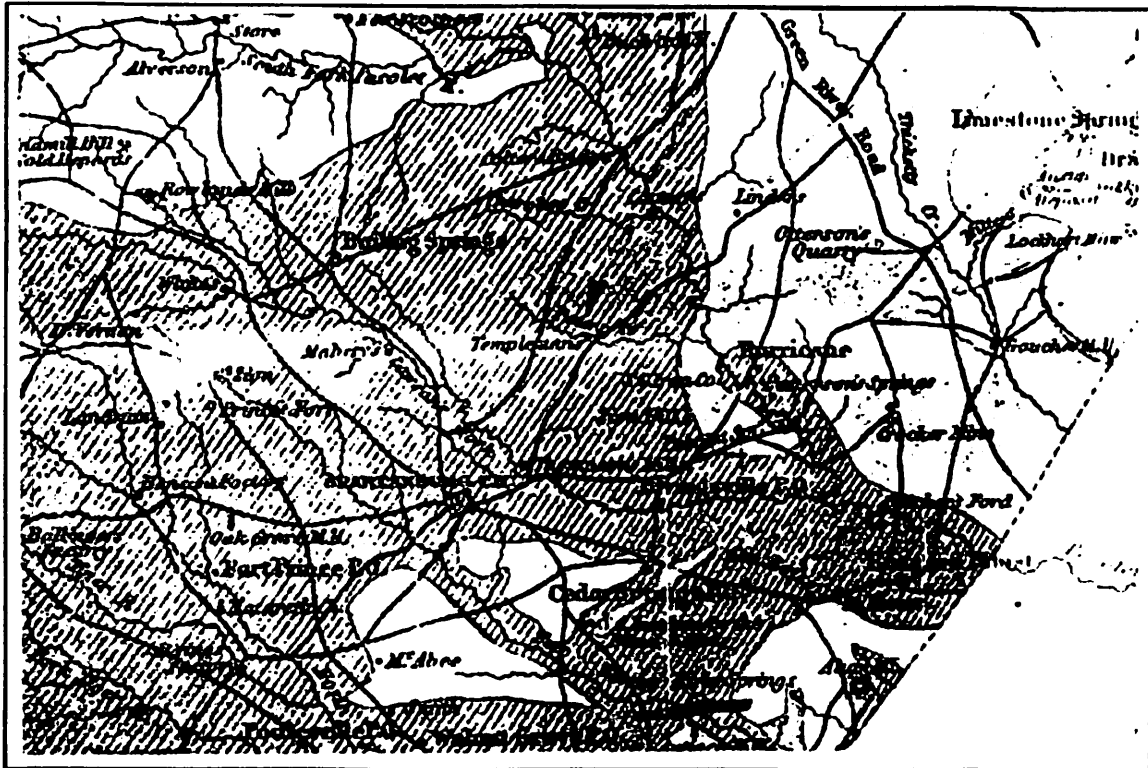


Figure 16. 1858 Geognostic Map of Spartanburg District, Showing Templeman's Mill.

Due to its proximity to Poole's/Padgett's/Martin's Mill, originally we speculated that the two mill sites were related, and that remnants of Wyatt's/Templeman's Mill could be within the project area. Clearly that is not the case. From the description above, and old maps showing Wyatt's, then Templeman's Mill on the west side of the old road, that mill site is outside the Peters Creek Heritage Preserve.

#### *Hammett's/Patterson's/Brooks' Mill*

On May 24th, 1820, Vincent Wyatt sold William Hammett 370 acres on Peters Creek bounded by the old mill pond and dam (Deed Book U:288-289). Hammett then transferred two tracts totalling 68 acres to David Patterson in December of 1824 (Deed Book U:289-291). At some point, Hammett built the second mill on Peters Creek, downstream from Wyatt's/Templeman's Mill, and a short distance upstream from the third and final mill. By the time Charles Simmons sold his property on Peters Creek to Patterson (January of 1837), the dam evidently had suffered from neglect and disrepair or some disaster, because the deed states that the purchase of the additional land adjoining the mill dam allows "Wm Hammett to Raise his dam as it was before" (Deed Book W:539-540). It is possible that Hammett still operated the mill although David Patterson owned the property on which it was located. Whatever the circumstances, the Patterson family evidently assumed operation of the mill, for deeds now refer to the property as the "Patterson Mill tract" or some variation thereof.

In 1866 John Brooks bought and refurbished the Patterson Mills and advertised in the local newspaper that he would soon be open for business:

### *Mill Notice*

*I would give notice to the public that I have purchased the entire interest of M. PADGETT in the Mills, known as the Patterson Mills, on Peterson's (sic) Creek five miles East of Spartanburg C.H. The Mill is now undergoing a thorough repair, and in a short time I will be prepared to give perfect satisfaction and to feel myself meriting a part of the public patronage. The improvements I am making are such as warrant me in promising good turnouts of flour and meal. I have also a Saw Mill which is in good order.*

*— John Brooks*

*5-17-1866 Carolina Spartan*

### *Brooks Mills*

*These Mills, formerly known as the Patterson Mills, situated on Peterson's (sic) Creek, five miles east of the Spartanburg C.H., and now owned by John Brooks, have been thoroughly repaired and are now in perfect order. Mr. Brooks promises to make as good an article of flour and as many pounds to the bushel as any mill in the State. He has made considerable outlay to make his mills first class, both in renewing the machinery and securing the services of a good miller. He asks a trial.*

*7-7-1866 Carolina Spartan*

As shown on the 1873 plat (Figure 17), this mill was on the north side of Peters Creek. According to the 1870 Industry Schedule (U.S. Census) John Brooks' grist mill had two runs (sets) of mill stones and the wheel developed 10 horse power. We know nothing about the type of water wheel, but Brooks refurbished the mill at a time when turbines were coming into widespread use across the Eastern United States.

### *Poole's/Padgett's/Martin's Mill*

Finally, the archival research indicates that the last mill on Peters Creek was constructed by Washington Poole. In 1870, Poole, a 44 year old farmer who lived in Spartanburg, purchased 42 acres from John Brooks with the proviso that he construct a new mill "some hundred yards below where it now stands." In the transaction between Brooks and Poole it was further specified that Poole would move "houses and machinery" from the old site that contained a grist mill, saw mill and cotton gin to the new location, "the Shoal, near the baptizing place," and also that he would build a 12 ft high mill dam and a bridge and road across Peters Creek (Deed Book II:539-540). The 1873 plat (Figure 17) records that Poole purchased an additional 6.25 acres from J.W. Tillison and James Cannon "whereon there is a shoal for the purpose of building a mill." Scaling this plat to the current USGS topographic map (Figure 18) shows that the 6.25 acres does indeed encompass the mill ruins.



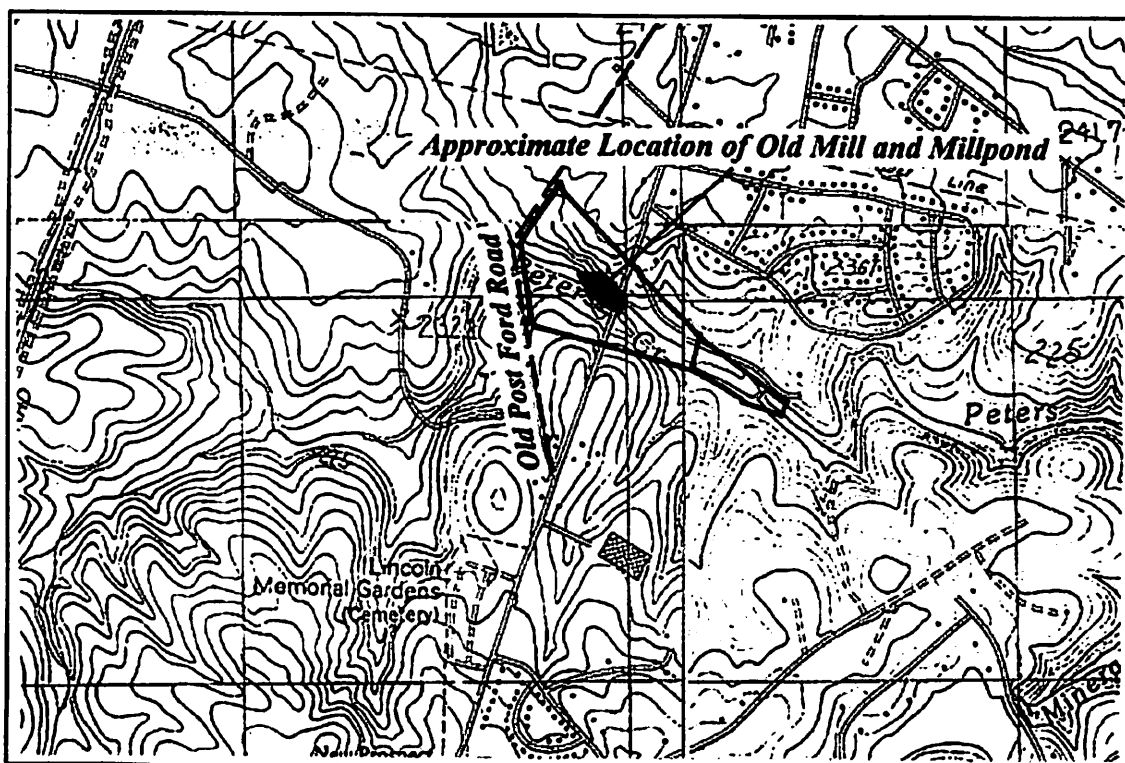


Figure 18. Overlay of the 1873 Plat on the Contemporary USGS Topographic Map.

The 1880 census indicates that Poole operated a flour and grist mill, saw mill and a public cotton gin on Peters Creek. According to the statistics the grist mill had an estimated maximum capacity of 100 bushels per day. The height of the fall was 14 ft, and power to the machinery was supplied by a turbine that was 17 inches in diameter. For grinding grain the mill had two runs of stones (one set for corn, the other for wheat), the turbine turned at 150 revolutions per minute and was rated at 12 horsepower. In 1880, Poole's mill ground 1000 bushels of wheat (200 barrels of flour) and 144,000 pounds (3000 bushels) of corn meal. The cotton gin operated six months out of the year, and Poole ran it with four employees. For ginning cotton the turbine turned at 400 revolutions per minute. The sawmill was operated by two employees who cut 160,000 board feet of lumber in 1880. Lumber was cut with a circular saw, and for this operation the turbine slowed to 100 revolutions per minute. As also revealed by the 1880 manufacturing census, Poole's Mill was one of at least 852 in South Carolina.

Table 8. Statewide Distribution of Mill Types in South Carolina in 1880 (US Census, Manufactures).

Mill Type	Number	Percent
Grist and Flour	551	64.7
Cotton factories	19	2.2
Cotton gins	94	11.0
Saw Mills	160	18.8
Miscellaneous	28	3.3
Totals	852	100.0

Mills and mill ponds often became a focal point for the local community and the mill on Peters Creek was no exception. Early on, a post office was established on the north side of the creek adjacent to Cannon's Campground Road, and community events such as the meeting of the Spartanburg Democratic Club No. 2, were held at the mill pond (*Carolina Spartan* 1876).

Poole operated the mill from the early 1870s until his death in 1886. In 1887, the mill tract was purchased by I.R. Padgett, who owned the property for another 15 years. Padgett died in 1902 and the property was willed to his wife, Lillie. The Padgetts were deeply in debt, so in 1903 the property was sold to J.N. Cudd and J.B. Cleveland (Deed Book 5X:510). Two years later, Cudd and Cleveland sold the property to J.A. Martin (Deed Book 4G:256). Martin owned the property for 15 years, selling it in 1920 to R. Burton Hicks (Deed Book 6D:806) who subdivided the tract into several lots. It is possible that the mill ceased operation by that time, because none of the subsequent land transactions mentions the mill. The abandonment coincides with the invasion of the cotton boll weevil which ravaged the South Carolina economy and caused the abandonment of many farms. At the same time, the small mills were being superseded by large commercial mills that used electricity instead of water to power the machinery. Finally, many small grist mills shut down in the mid twentieth century because of stricter health department regulations.

## Description of the Architectural Remains

A plan map of Poole's/Padgett's/Martin's Mill is presented in Figure 19. Today, the dam is the most conspicuous feature of the site (Figures 20 and 21). About 15 ft high, the dam extends across Peters Creek for a distance of approximately 140 ft, then it makes a bend to the southwest for another 125 ft. This section parallels a spillway on the south side of the creek. The lower half of the main dam is poured concrete, a building material that was rarely used before ca. 1900. The upper portion of the dam consists of stacked and mortared flat stone that outcrops abundantly in the area. The top of the dam is mortared and flat (approximately 2 ft wide). Two rectangular floodgates at the dam's base were controlled by jack screws that protrude from the top of the dam.

Because of the use of poured concrete in the dam, it is possible that it, and some components of the mill, was rebuilt during the early twentieth century. This could have been during the ownership of I.R. Padgett (1887 - 1902), or J.A. Martin (1905 - 1920). The two year gap between Padgett's and Martin's ownership could be significant. In early June of 1903 there were torrential rains in northwestern South Carolina. On the morning of June 6, after another five inch deluge, the Pacolet River rose 40 - 50 ft above normal, destroying mill dams, textile factories and bridges at Clifton, Converse, and Pacolet, only a few miles east of the project area. Sixty-six people drowned, and floodwaters carried away portions of textile mill villages. Smaller streams also spilled out of their banks, causing great destruction to bridges and mills. Official estimates of damage were placed at \$5 million. Based on this information, the concrete portions of the mill dam and portions of the mill could date to sometime after 1905, following the purchase by Dr. Martin.

Remnants of the mill complex consist of a series of rock retaining walls, concrete retaining walls, rock piers, and well preserved rock foundations of the mill building. The hill slope immediately below the dam and north of the structural remains has also been graded to form a level, rectangular terrace measuring about 30 x 100 ft; this may have been the location of another mill building, or simply provided access to the mill. The level area is accessed by an old road bed. Other rock and concrete retaining walls are found adjacent to the creek below the dam.

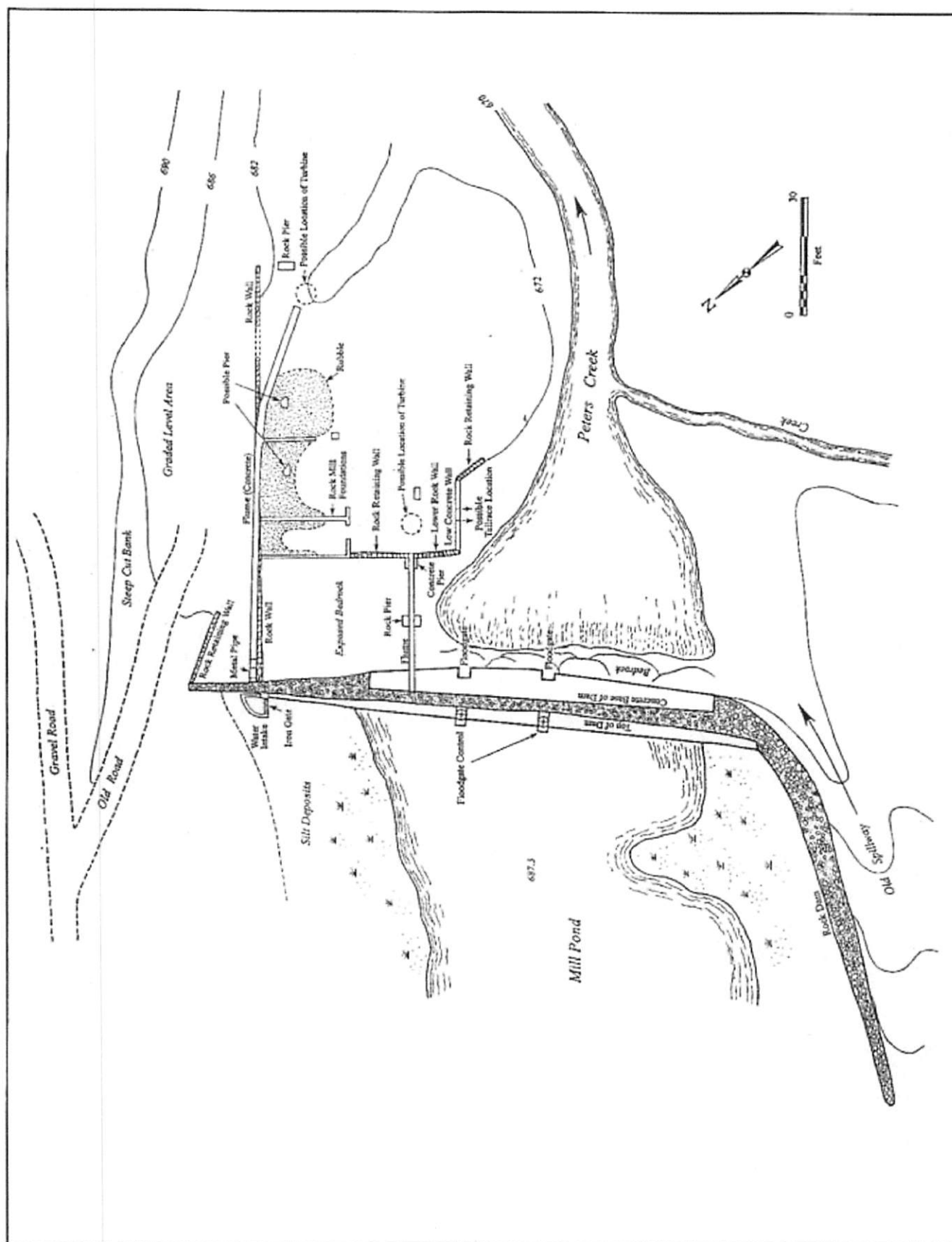


Figure 19. Map of Architectural Features at Peters Creek.





**Figure 20. Photograph of Dam Showing Poured Concrete Base and Floodgates. View to the north.**



**Figure 21. Photograph of West End of Dam. Peters Creek will be rerouted to the left of the dam through the old spillway.**



Without the benefit of excavation it is difficult to determine the dimensions of the mill superstructure based on the foundations. However, it may have been 75 ft long, the distance between the upstream foundation wall and a rock pier next to the end of a concrete flume downstream. The most intact foundations are about seven ft tall and measure 12 x 24 ft, with the long axis parallel to the dam (Figures 22 and 23). They are made of rubble and cut stone. A three ft wide opening is in the southern end of the structure which may have provided clearance for a horizontal drive shaft that led to the turbine. A less substantial foundation wall, about three ft high, is 20 ft to the east. Remnants of three rock piers are associated with the ruins. Much of the area is covered by rock rubble and small amounts of brick are visible on the surface.

With regard to the motive power, we know that the mill had at least one turbine, based on the 1880 manufacturing census. On the ground, direct evidence for this is a concrete-encased metal flume, that originates midway up the dam and extends about 30 ft downstream (Figures 24 and 25). The midsection is supported on a large stone pier and the lower end rests on a poured concrete pier flanked by a stone retaining wall. No doubt the flume originally extended somewhat further, ending at the turbine. Presently, there is no above-ground evidence of the turbine. It may be buried by modern alluvium, or, more likely, was salvaged after the mill was abandoned. The tailrace may have exited the turbine pit to the south, through the base of a low concrete wall that faces Peters Creek. If so, the tailrace is obscured by silt deposits and thick vegetation.

A second flume, 98 ft long, is located on the northern end of the dam. The intake consists of a semi-subterranean concrete block structure (Figure 26) that connects with a large, three ft diameter pipe made of riveted iron plates (Figure 27). In order to prevent debris from entering the penstock, the opening is protected by an iron gate. The intake is now clogged and surrounded by sand and other sediment. The top of the flume is approximately two and a half feet below the top of the dam. A few feet downstream from the dam the riveted iron pipe ends, and the

remainder is concrete.



**Figure 22. Foundation of Mill Building with Bulkhead/Retaining Wall to the Left. View to the southeast.**

After passing through the stone retaining wall/mill foundation, it angles gently toward the creek where it empties into a hole scoured into the creek bank (Figure 28). This flume may have been a secondary spillway to prevent water from cresting the dam. Alternatively, it may have led to a second turbine, one that was not listed in the 1880

census.





**Figure 23. Southwest Side of Mill Building Showing Opening, Possibly for Driveshaft to Turbine.**



**Figure 24. Photograph Showing Concrete Flume (center). View to the southwest.**



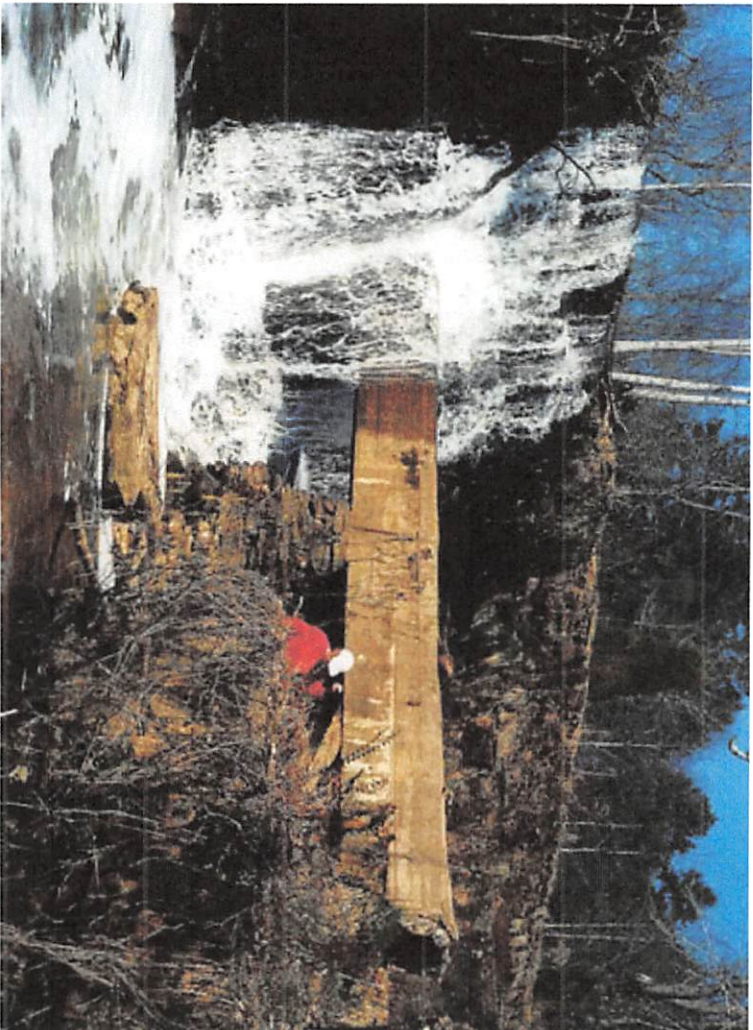


Figure 25. Photograph of Concrete Flume and Rock Pier.



Figure 26. Photograph of Intake to Second Flume. View to the north.





**Figure 27. Photograph of Riveted Iron Pipe Through Dam Showing Transition to Concrete Flume.**



**Figure 28. Downstream End of Second Flume and Possible Turbine Location. View to the north.**

## Summary

Research demonstrates that the mill on Peters Creek was one of about 60 that operated in Spartanburg County during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Archival evidence indicates that this mill did custom work for the local farmers who would bring corn, wheat, cotton, and timber for processing. The mill became a focal point for the local community and a post office was located nearby, named for the miller/landowner (Poole). Because of the nature of the mill, carrying out multiple functions, the architectural features are more substantial than most mills, with a massive dam, and well built masonry foundations, bulkheads and retaining walls. The mill also employed the latest technology, a turbine, to run the machinery.

The final mill on Peters Creek was in service for about 50 years. Three people, Washington Poole, I.R. Padgett, and Dr. J.A. Martin each owned the mill for about 15 years and no doubt modified it and the machinery as conditions dictated. The abandonment and demise of the mill, and many others across the region, is tied to circumstances beyond the control of the operators: the economic downturns after the invasion of the cotton boll weevil in the 1920s, the abandonment of farmland, the out-migration of agricultural workers, the development of mills powered by hydroelectricity, and the Great Depression of the 1930s.