

Tom Marshall's Weekly News, August 29, 2011

George W. Pusey (1868–1943): George Pusey, a native of the West Chester, Pennsylvania, area, owned and operated the flour mill at Ashland for many years. In the 1890s, he learned his trade as a miller at Clifton Mill between Kennett Square and Yorklyn, quite an important operation with connections to Pillsbury and other large flour manufacturers. He married the former Florence Sharpless, a sister of Ruth Marshall's grandfather, William P. Sharpless. The Puseys had two daughters, Ruth and Alice, both of whom lived at home until their parents' deaths. Ruth Pusey (1904–1948) was my first contact with elementary education, as she taught first grade at the old Wilmington Friends School at 4th & West streets.

The Ashland mill had been built in the early 18th century by the Gregg family, but sometime before 1800, it had become a part of the Sharpless lands that encompassed nearly 1,000 acres between Hockessin and Ashland. Members of the Sharpless family either ran the milling operation or employed a miller to do so, but when George Pusey, already a successful miller, married Florence Sharpless, he took over the Ashland mill about 1898 and ran it until his death in January 1943. They lived in a nice frame house within walking distance and opposite the Ashland Station on the Wilmington & Western Railroad. The Puseys were active members of Hockessin Friends Meeting, and in his later years, George always sat on the facing bench at Meetings for Worship, in those days a respected position for older prominent attenders. He was never late, but neither was he early, and the two other occupants of the facing bench, John C. Mitchell and J. Warren Marshall, would be seated before the Puseys arrived. George came in the side door, neatly folded his overcoat, placed it on a bench near the door with his hat on top, and walked in front of everyone to take his place. During Meeting, his eyes were usually closed, and some thought he was asleep.

Prominent in the business community, George Pusey was a director of the National Bank and Trust Company of Kennett Square for many years. He was an expert bowler, but he didn't want his family to know about this. Secretly, he would go to Wilmington and take part in bowling tournaments, and my father said he thought George once won the state bowling championship. The damaging flood on Red Clay Creek in July 1938 took out the dam for the Ashland mill, located where Sharpless Road joins Route 82. The following Sunday, sightseers flocked to Ashland to look at the damage that included the Ashland covered bridge on Route 82 (not the existing one) that was floated off its foundations and carried downstream, never to be rebuilt. George Pusey conducted an open house for the many curious visitors. The dam was soon rebuilt, and the mill was back in business with its large water wheel turning its grinding burrs, conveyor belts and the other necessary machinery.

I was home for Christmas vacation from M.I.T., and on New Year's Day 1943, we called on George Pusey at the mill. He was in his working clothes—it was not a special holiday for him. Five days later he was dead, apparently from a heart attack. Florence died before the year was over. Within two years, the large frame mill was razed and the mill race bulldozed over, erasing what had been an important industry at Ashland for 200 years.