

# Windmills of Nantucket, USA

by Nathanael Hodge, Mills Archive trust

In 1929 Rex Wailes visited the island of Nantucket during his trip to the USA and Canada. This is his write-up of the history of windmills on the island:

Although at present there is but one windmill on Nantucket, there have been a number of others, and records of some of these exist. During my brief visit to this most delightful spot, I was afforded every opportunity by the Nantucket Historical Association, and at the Public Library to study the history of the Nantucket windmills, and to examine the sole survivor.

In 1672 one Peter Folger was appointed by the town of Nantucket to run a watermill; for some unknown reason this was abandoned, and another worked by wind was erected in its place.

Mr Folger also ran this mill, his pay being two quarts for every bushel ground. There are also references to windmills built on the tops of houses, as can be found today in Majorca, but the five mills about which most is known are the four which stood in a line on the Popsquatchet Hills, and the Round Top Mill.

Of the four, the first was built in 1723 by Frederick Macy, who asserted that the design of it came to him in his dreams, it ran as late as 1820 and was then known as Barnabas Bunker's Mill. After the Nantucket fire of 1836 the mill was purchased by the town to test the efficacy of gunpowder for demolishing buildings.

On December 7, 1837, the townsfolk all turned out and the school children were given a holiday to watch

the experiment. A keg of gunpowder was placed in the mill and fired with a train and fuse. On the explosion the mill rose bodily from its foundations and fell in upon itself.

The next in order of building was the present mill built 1746 and this was followed in 1759 by the "Spider Mill", so called from its eight jib sails. Next came the "Red Mill" so called from the colour it was painted; built in 1770 it worked until it was destroyed by lightning in 1867.

The last gristmill to be built stood apart from the rest; it was of the Rhode Island type, shingle covered, with a circular cap. Built in 1802 it ran until it was dismantled in 1873, and was known as the "Round Top Mill".

The 'Old Mill', as the existing mill is called was built by Nathan Wilbur, a Nantucket sailor; it had a grinding capacity of 10 bushels per hour and was worked until 1892.

In 1897 it was bought at auction by Miss Caroline French of Boston for \$850 and presented by her to the Nantucket Historical Association, by whom it is now used as an overflow museum in the summer, an admission of 10c being charged.

The old mill is still working and a visitor attraction today.

