PROJECT SCROLL RESEARCH NOTE 2026-08

Three sawmills on Potato Creek, 1863: the mills on the ground of Potato Creek State Park, Indiana

Michael Urbanski ORCID 0009-0006-8183-5828 (https://orcid.org/0009-0006-8183-5828), Project Scroll · Issued 27 October 2026 · Version 2 · a permanent identifier (DOI) will be added here

SUMMARY

The published histories of Potato Creek State Park, near North Liberty in St. Joseph County, Indiana, say only that "springhouses and mills dotted the area." The park is exactly six sections of the federal land survey (23–26 of T36N R1E and 19 and 30 of T36N R2E), and the county map of 1863 by M. W. Stokes, laid over those sections, names its mills. It shows three sawmills, each marked "S.M." beside a mill pond dammed across Potato Creek: on the land of Green and Redduck in section 23, names that match the atlas of 1875's "first saw-mill on Potato Creek by John Green, Jr." and the Rudduck family of neighboring Greene Township, on the forty acres of S. Gard in section 25 beside the cemetery ground Samuel Gard deeded in 1854, and on the farm of P. Walsmith in section 30 of Range 2 East. The county atlas of 1875 still draws the mills in sections 23 and 25. The third mill ties a later local story to the park ground: in 1927 the *South Bend News-Times* reported that "the first saw-mill in St. Joseph county was built on Waldsmith's farm on the banks of Potato creek," and Chapman's county history of 1880 places Peter Waldsmith, who settled in 1838, on "section 30." The 1863 map puts P. Walsmith's sawmill and pond in the section 30 inside today's park, with his larger tract just south of it in section 31. Peter Waldsmith, who died in 1873, is buried in Porter Rea Cemetery, also on the park ground.

THE RECORD

1. **M. W. Stokes, *Map of St. Joseph Co., Indiana* (Philadelphia, 1863), Liberty Township, sections 23, 25 and 30 (readings of the map by Project Scroll)**

   > *Section 23: "Green & Redduck 80," with "S.M." and a mill pond on Potato Creek near the line with section 26. Section 25: "S. Gard 40," with "S.M." and "Mill Pond," the cemetery marked just to the north-east. Section 30, T36N R2E: "P. Walsmith 75.17," with "S.M." and "Mill Pond" on Potato Creek; a second "P. Walsmith" tract of 155.63 acres lies in section 31, just south of the park, and a third, of 79.75 acres, in section 36 of Range 1 East.*

   Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/item/2013593163/)

2. **Higgins, Belden & Co., *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of St. Joseph Co., Indiana* (Chicago, 1875), Liberty Township, pp. 54–55**

   > *Section 23: "S.Mill" with a mill pond at the south-east corner on Potato Creek, the owners' names lettered small and partly illegible. Section 25: "S.Mill" and its mill pond on Potato Creek, on the land of "E. Hoke," with "Cem." in the north-east corner and "G. Walsmith" nearby. Section 30 (R2E): a Walsmith tract, but no mill pond drawn.*

   Allen County Public Library; scan at the Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/illustratedhisto00higg/page/n58/mode/1up)

3. **Higgins, Belden & Co., *An Illustrated Historical Atlas of St. Joseph Co., Indiana* (Chicago, 1875), Greene Township, p. 47**

   > *"The first death was that of Isaac Rudduck, Jan. 13, 1833 ... First saw-mill on Potato Creek by John Green, Jr. ... First couple married, John Rudduck and Elizabeth Rupe."*

   Allen County Public Library; scan at the Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/illustratedhisto00higg/page/n50/mode/1up)

4. **Charles C. Chapman & Co., *History of St. Joseph County, Indiana* (Chicago, 1880), Liberty Township, p. 718**

   > *"In 1838 Mr. Waldsmith, father of Geo. Waldsmith, a present resident of Liberty township, settled on section 30."*

   Internet Archive · See the record (https://archive.org/details/historyofstjosep00chap)

5. **"Waldsmith Farm Involved in Sale," *South Bend News-Times*, 3 April 1927, p. 5**

   > *"The first saw-mill in St. Joseph county was built on Waldsmith's farm on the banks of Potato creek ... George Waldsmith, son of the pioneer, operated the sawmill."*

   Library of Congress, Chronicling America · See the record (https://www.loc.gov/resource/sn87055779/1927-04-03/ed-1/?sp=5)

6. **Indiana Historical Bureau, state historical marker "Porter Rea Cemetery" (71.2003.1, 2003)**

   > *The cemetery ground was deeded by Samuel Gard in 1854.*

   Indiana Historical Bureau · See the record (https://www.in.gov/history/state-historical-markers/find-a-marker/porter-rea-cemetery)

7. **Gravestone of Peter Waldsmith (died 1873), Porter Rea Cemetery, photographed by Chris Light, 17 September 2021**

   > *The stone stands in the cemetery inside the park, a short distance from the section 30 mill pond of 1863.*

   Wikimedia Commons (CC BY-SA 4.0) · See the record (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Waldsmith,_Peter_(1873)_7174.jpg)

WHAT IT CHANGES

The park's own brochure and markers mention mills only in general terms, and no history we found names a mill on the park ground. The 1863 map shows three water-powered sawmills with their ponds inside today's park boundary, names the landowners, and places one of them beside the cemetery whose ground Samuel Gard

gave. It also places the mill of the 1927 “first saw-mill” story: Chapman gives only “section 30,” without a range, and the section 30 of Range 1 East, west of North Liberty, has no Waldsmith on the 1875 atlas; the 1863 map puts P. Walsmith’s mill and pond in section 30 of Range 2 East, on the park ground, while his largest tract lay just south of the park in section 31. Visitors to Lake Worster are looking at a creek that powered at least three mills a century before the dam.

LIMITS

The mill locations are readings of two small-scale printed maps, not surveys or deeds; the 1875 lettering in section 23 is partly illegible, and “Green & Redduck” is the 1863 spelling. “P. Walsmith” on the map is identified with Peter Waldsmith of the 1880 history, the 1927 article and the gravestone by name, place and date; no deed has yet been searched to confirm it. The 1927 article describes the Waldsmith farm as “this 160 acre tract,” which fits the section 31 land better than the 75 acres in section 30; the note claims only that the mill and pond stood on the park ground. Neither map dates the mills; they stood by 1863, and two were gone, or no longer drawn, by 1875 or later. The 1927 claim that Waldsmith’s was the county’s first sawmill was printed eighty-nine years after his arrival and is not tested here; other mills in the county are older claimants. The page numbers for the 1875 atlas are its printed plate numbers; the Internet Archive leaf is given in the link. The 1875 atlas does not say where or when John Green Jr. built the first sawmill on Potato Creek; that it was the Green and Redduck mill of 1863 is a reading from the names.

WHAT WE SEARCHED BEFORE CALLING IT NEW

The Indiana DNR’s Potato Creek brochure, trail map and interpretive markers (2026); the Historical Marker Database; Chapman (1880); Howard (1907); Shenneman, *Southern St. Joseph County* (2015); Wikipedia; the Indiana gazetteers of 1833, 1849 and 1858; Chronicling America and the Internet Archive’s full text for Potato Creek with “saw mill,” “mill pond” and Waldsmith; the 1863 and 1875 maps compared with the

OpenStreetMap park boundary and the BLM survey grid. None of the modern accounts names a mill inside the park or places the Waldsmith farm there.

Our standard for calling a finding new is set out in How we research (projectscroll.com/how-we-research/), and how we weigh each kind of record in Scrollsigns (projectscroll.com/scrollsigns/).

"New" means new to print as far as we can tell. If you know of an earlier publication, tell us and we will credit it here and raise the note's version.

WORKS CITED

Earlier work, catalogues and databases named in this note, besides the records quoted above.

1. Michael Urbanski, "Before the lake at Potato Creek," *Project Scroll* (2026), Part 1 of the series on Potato Creek. https://projectscroll.com/news/before-the-lake-at-potato-creek/
2. Timothy Edward Howard, *A History of St. Joseph County, Indiana* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1907), Liberty Township. Internet Archive. https://archive.org/details/historyofstjosep01howa
3. Franklin N. Shenneman II, *Southern St. Joseph County* (Charleston: Arcadia, 2015), ch. 1, "Potato Creek State Park." https://archive.org/details/southernstjoseph0000shen

THE FULL STORY

The finding is set out in context, with the rest of its sources, in Before the lake: the farms of Potato Creek (projectscroll.com/news/before-the-lake-at-potato-creek/). In the discoveries register:

- `pc-mills-1863` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#pc-mills-1863)
- `pc-waldsmith-mill` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#pc-waldsmith-mill)
- `pc-green-1875` (projectscroll.com/discoveries/#pc-green-1875)

HOW TO CITE THIS NOTE

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CHANGES TO THIS NOTE

27 October 2026: Version 2: the 1875 atlas's "first saw-mill on Potato Creek by John Green, Jr." and the Rudduck family added to the record, the abstract and the limits.