



# *It Began With a River*

An Illustrated History of Milton and the Broadkill

by  
Joana S. Donovan

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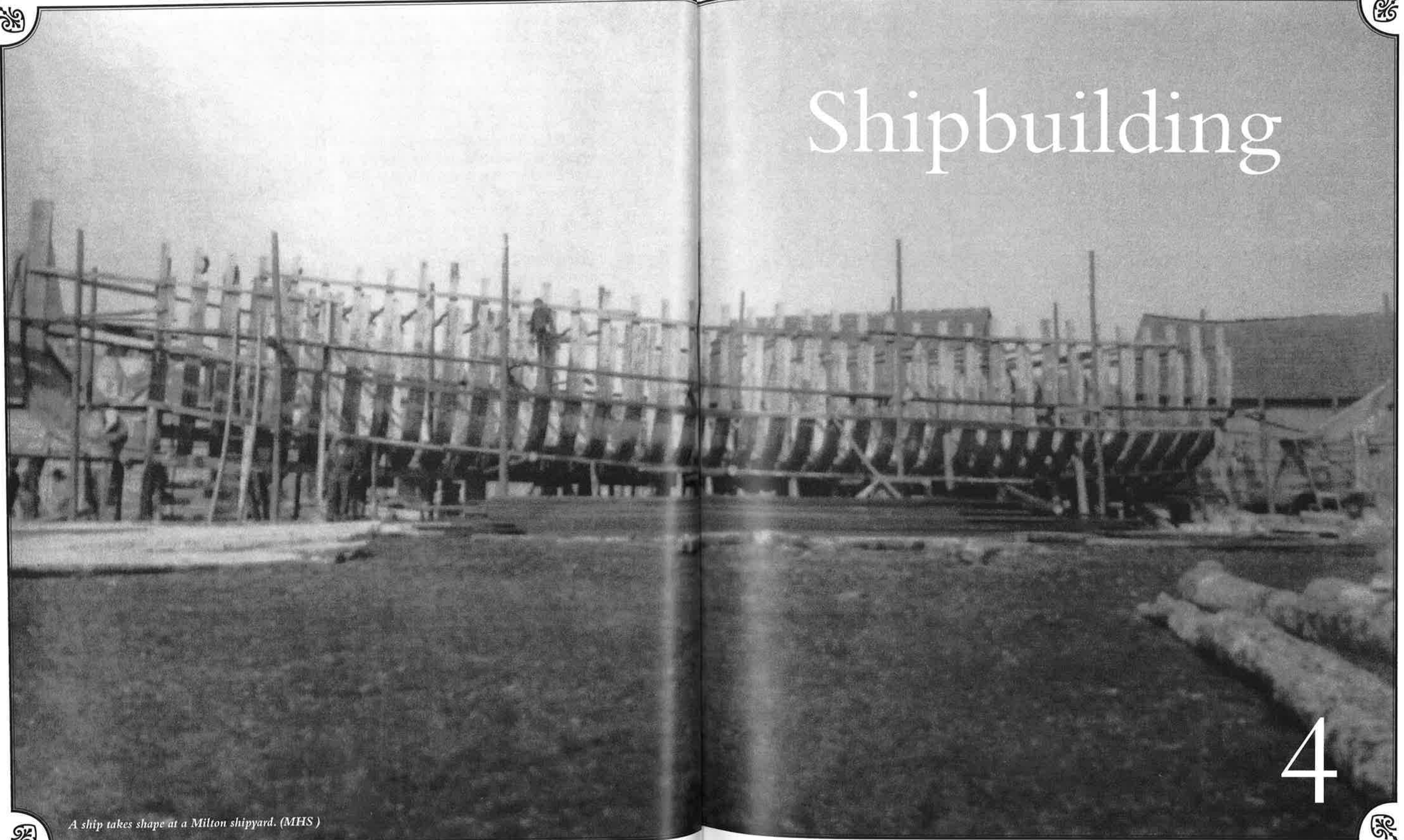
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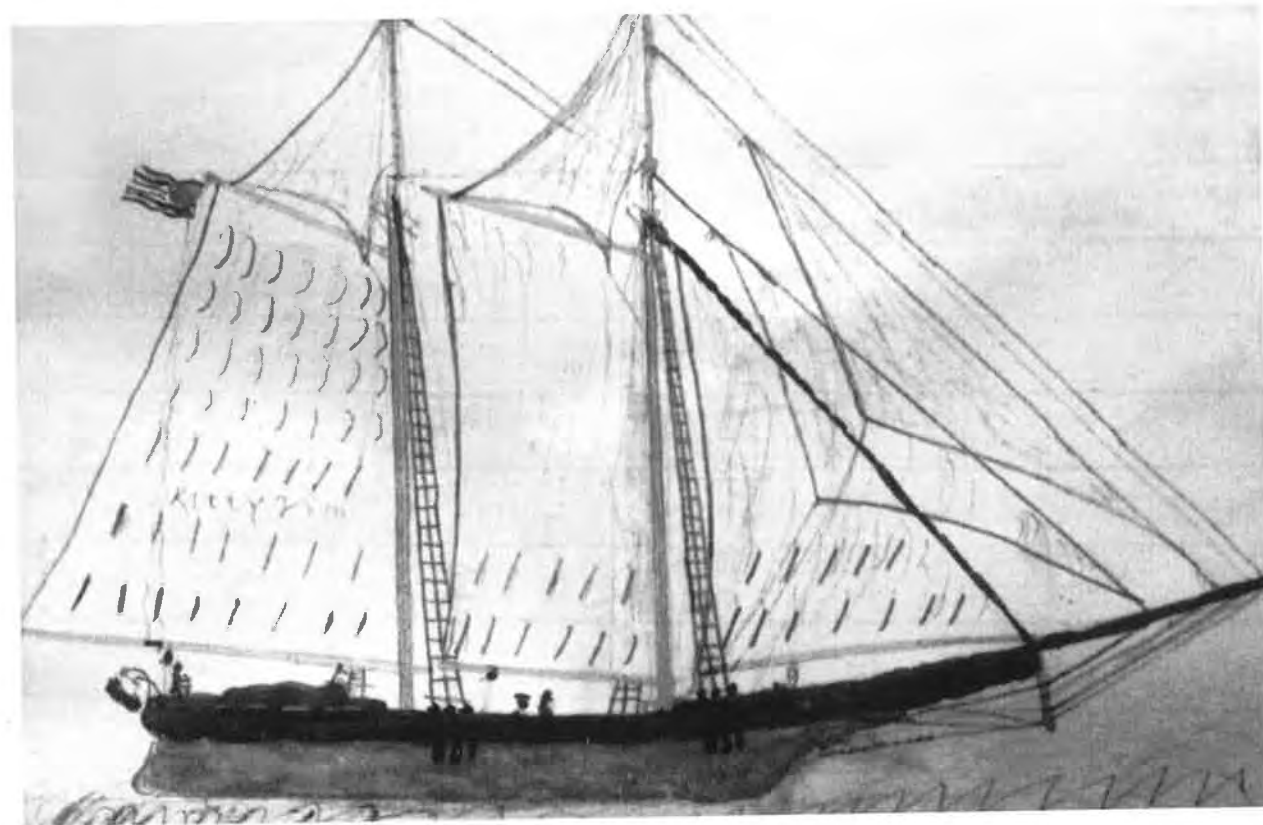
*European settlers sailed up the Broadkill past the marshy shoreline searching for land on which to begin a new life. (2006 photo by Joana Donovan)*

  
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# Shipbuilding



*A ship takes shape at a Milton shipyard. (MHS)*



A drawing by J. L. Black of the *Kitty Anne*, a two-mast schooner built in 1815. (Courtesy of Honorable John R. Hudson)

As the early settlers began their life on the banks of the Broadkill River, they cut the timber to clear the land. The native oak, pine, and cypress were used to build their homes and barns, and the cleared land became gardens and fields. Landings were established along the river; landings with family names such as Heaveloe, Hazzard, Carey, Jones, Reynolds, Vaughn, Short, Wiltbank, and Black. As it had been for the Native Americans, the river was the main form of transportation for the early settlers.

While some boats were built at Broadkill landings, most were constructed at the shipyards in Milton and at Drawbridge. The shallop *Broad Kill* is believed to have been the first vessel built in Milton. It was registered in the Custom House at Philadelphia in April of 1737.

The years 1862 to 1892 were the golden years of shipbuilding on the Broadkill. During that time, more than two hundred ships were built at Milton



The *James M. Carey* was a two-mast schooner built in 1874. It had a length of 68.5 feet and a depth of twelve feet. (MHS)

or at Drawbridge, and shipyards were turning out three and four schooners a year. While the shallows were used locally to transport people and goods from landing to landing, larger oceangoing schooners and sloops were carrying cargoes of local grain, timber, iron ore, piling, and fruit to Philadelphia and New York. Three-masted ships built on the Broadkill sailed up and down the Atlantic Coast, into the Gulf of Mexico, and even to Europe and South America.

Shipyard owners were: James Ponder, whose shipyard was located on the south bank of the Broadkill from Round Pole Branch to Walnut Street; Samuel Martin, with his shipyard located on the Broadkill between Federal and Chestnut Streets; and the Black Brothers, Jack and Thomas, with their shipyard first located at Drawbridge and then in Milton east of Ponder's yard on the Broadkill.

Among the prominent Milton shipbuilders were: David H. Atkins, George W. Atkins, Joseph L. Black, Thomas Black, Joseph Conwell, Cornelius Coulter, William Coulter, Andrew Davidson, Cornelius C. Davidson, James P. Davidson, John Dutton, Samuel Dutton, David Lank, John Lank, Levin Lank, Nathaniel Lank, Samuel Martin, Noah Wiltbank Megee, John Mustard, Elisha Prettyman, William C. Prettyman, James Robbins, George Russell, Robert Russell, Jacob White, and Isaac White.

The importance of the shipbuilding industry to the Milton area is best summed up by George Henderson in his thesis, "Continuity and Change in a Delaware Shipbuilding Town: Milton, Delaware, 1870–1910":

"By far the most important effect of shipbuilding was felt through the nature of shipbuilding trades and the men who worked in them. Much of the industry was steeped in local circumstances. The adjacent waterway, the harvest of surrounding oak-pine forest growth, the resident skilled labor, the highly visible ship yards, and even vessel names commemorative of local families—all contributed to making shipbuilding an intensely local affair. It was a source of pride, identity and self-reliance, not to mention revenue." (p 49) ←



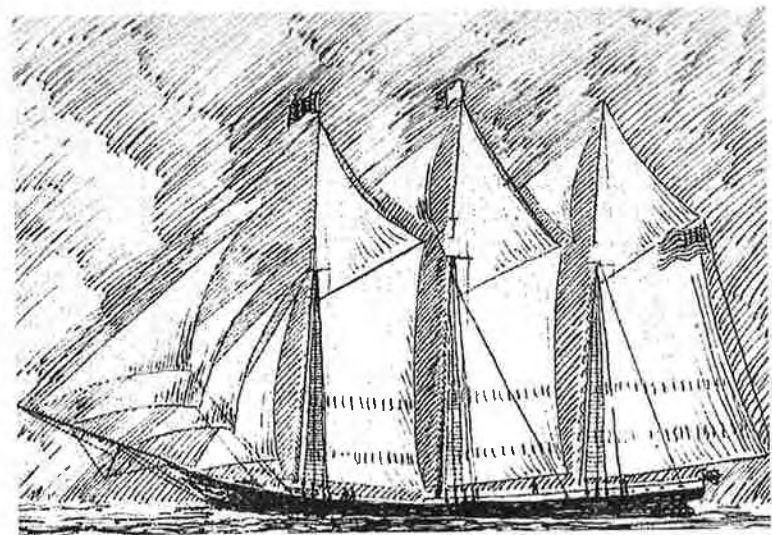
The *Fannie Kimmey* was a three-mast schooner, built in 1879. It had a width of almost thirty-three feet, a length of 129 feet, and a depth of twelve feet. (Courtesy of Herman F. and Emily C. Black)



The *Florence Creadick* was a four-mast schooner built in Milton in 1890. She had a length of 164 feet, a depth of thirteen feet, and a width of thirty-six feet. She was torpedoed in July of 1915 off the coast of France and ended her career under the French flag. (MHS)



*The Thomas Wismore was a three-mast schooner built in 1891 in Milton for Captain James Carey Comwell. It had a width of twenty-four feet, a length of almost seventy-nine feet, and a depth of six feet. (MHS)*



*An illustration of the Henry Waddington, a three-mast schooner, built of Broadkill white oak in 1881 by David H. Atkins. Captain William H. Megee was the ship's master. It had a length of about 140 feet, a depth of twelve feet, a width of thirty-five feet, and sported masts of one hundred feet in length. Ports of call for the Waddington were Texas, Jamaica, Cuba, and other West Indies islands. The Waddington became waterlogged while on a voyage in 1892 and was abandoned at sea. (MHS)*



*The masts of several tall ships are visible in the foreground and background in this early scene of the Milton harbor. (Courtesy of Herman F. and Emily C. Black)*



*The Marie Thomas was the last local vessel built for local trading. Built in 1904 by James P. Davidson for Captain George E. Megee, it was a three-mast schooner and had an internal combustion engine. It was ninety feet long, about twenty-four feet in width, and had a depth of six and one-half feet. The Marie Thomas burned while docked at the Milton wharf in December of 1910. (Courtesy of Herman F. and Emily C. Black)*



*After the demise of the shipbuilding industry, canning factories and other businesses flourished near the old harbor. (Courtesy of Donald Carey)*