

The Grist Mills of the Mountain Communities

Don & Diane Wells



1886 Old Mill – Cherokee, NC

The Grist Mills of the Mountain Communities – Part 1

Don & Diane Wells

In the early days of America, a pioneer community depended on having a nearby gristmill, a sawmill, a general store and other businesses needed to support the life of the surrounding farming community. This six part series is about a critical need in the life of those communities – the gristmill.

The pioneer families, who migrated into the backcountry to occupy the areas from where the Indians had been removed, settled along the rivers, creeks and other waterways on land that could support the raising of crops necessary for sustaining life. Corn was one of the primary food crops grown by those pioneers. It was also used to make “moonshine,” which could be sold or traded for other needed supplies such as sugar and salt or even non-food staples. The grinding of corn for meal or wheat for flour was very important in their lives. Therefore, the presence of a convenient gristmill was also important. Indians ground their corn and wheat using a rounded out rock and a pestle. Hand grinding was slow, hard work. Much time was needed to produce enough flour or corn meal for a day’s need so the pioneers migrated to mechanical means.



Glade Mill Grist Mill, Babcock State Park, WVA

Gristmills are reported as far back as 71 BC! In 1086 in England, 5,624 water-powered mills were reported to exist. That would be one for every 300 inhabitants. The number grew to 17,000

by 1300. So the knowledge of how to design and operate a water-powered gristmill existed throughout Europe. Having brought with them the knowledge of mechanical grinding, these easier, faster and more efficient gristmills were desired by the pioneers who settled the new communities. Also, sources of water for powering the mills was readily available. There is much written about the need for and use of early pioneer gristmills. Missing from this history is information about how the pioneers were able to finance, build and operate the gristmills in their new backwoods communities.

Among the many pioneers that came to America, there were those that had either apprenticed in a gristmill or had been a miller in Europe. They brought their knowledge and skills with them. But, knowledge of how to run a gristmill and the gathering together of the gears and wheels necessary for building that mill are two different things. The grinding wheels, at least one stationary and one moving, were mostly made in England and France. They had to be shipped to America and then transported to the very remote site of the new mill. However, by the late 1700's, people in the colonies had begun manufacturing millstones. In the region of New Jersey and New York, a Shawangunk Conglomerate Grit - a stone consisting of silica-cemented quartz pebbles - was found to be very satisfactory for making millstones. These stones were called Esopus millstones after the Lenape Indian tribe that originally inhabited the area. A pair of large French millstones could weigh as much as 3,600 pounds. The Esopus stones were lighter and, since they did not have to be shipped from France or England much less expensive.

The early mill did not have metal gears. The construction of the wooden gears took special skills and mathematical understanding. Even the overall construction of the mill was not like building a simple log cabin. One manual to help the millers was published in 1795 by Oliver Evans entitled, *"The Young Mill-Wright and Miller's Guide"*. This guide became the miller's Bible and there were fifteen editions of it printed over a 60 year period!

In spite of the difficulty, in every new community that sprung up, a miller was not far behind. If no one had the skills, a miller was usually recruited. It is likely that the entire community worked together to build the gristmill. Once it was completed, sawmills and other new businesses would open. These gristmills were often built with parts ordered from a catalog. There may have been a complete kit available, including the millstones, the gears, the corn hopper, sifters and other parts needed. The cost of a complete grist mill kit is not known but average size millstones alone cost about \$130 for French millstones and \$45 for Esopus millstones as quoted from an 1848 document from the University of Virginia Archives. Suffice it to say, just getting the parts ordered, paid for and delivered into a back road communities would have been an arduous and expensive task. In spite of all the problems of construction, from the mid-1700 until the early 1900's, the small gristmills were a mainstay of rural community life.

One interesting thing about gristmills is that they were not always located on an existing road. The site for the mill had to be at the best location for operating the mill with the available water power. After the mill was sited, roads were built to accommodate the settler's wagons bringing

the corn and wheat for milling. The mill became the community center. During the main harvest season, the miller and his apprentice, if he had one, worked very long hours. A small gristmill could mill approximately 7-10 bushels of wheat in an hour and 7-15 bushels of corn. Waiting your turn to get your produce milled was a part of the social life of the community. Usually, this social time was enjoyed only by the men who brought their goods to be milled and some of the younger children. Women had work to do at home. . The location of many of the mill sites in the mountain communities of Pickens and Dawson Counties is known, but none are left sufficiently intact so that we can know what type wheel drove the millstones. In the next parts of this series, we will begin to explore the community life around the gristmill, the types of mills and what might have been operating in the north GA mountain communities.

The Gristmills of the Mountain Communities – Part 2 Life Centered Around the Gristmill

Don & Diane Wells

Pioneer life was tough and especially in the mountain communities where families scratched out a living on thin, poor mountain soil. They struggled to survive usually in a one-room or at most, a two-room cabin. Winters were hard. Often children didn't survive the harsh mountain winters. A tour through the Pleasant Union Baptist Church cemetery on Steve Tate Road shows this reality. There are four children's graves from the same family on the front row.

Community was a very important part of pioneer's daily life. Monthly church services provided an opportunity to gather but the gristmill was, in many cases, the center of community life. To eat you needed meal from corn or flour from wheat and the gristmill was the place to get it ground. Usually the men would load the wagon if they had one and head for the gristmill sometimes bringing the children along. At the mill, you had to wait your turn and while you waited, you could visit with your neighbors, find out the latest gossip and share experiences. This was also the place to seek help for a task that required more than one family to get the job done. The mill was the corner store of the early urban areas. Today you find the same need to socialize in many fast food restaurants where the old men meet for coffee. To capture some of the essence of what life at the mill was like, Diane shares in the next few paragraphs her experience of going to the mill while living on a farm in South GA in the early 1950's.

Mercer's Mill in Worth County, GA

After my father's death when I was 12, my mother and I moved back to South Georgia from Colorado to be near her family. In fact, we lived with my aunt and uncle for several years. During that time I spent a good bit of time going with Uncle Gordon wherever he went. One of the places we went was to Mercer's Mill. Mercer's Mill was about 5 miles from the farm over dusty, bumpy, not well-maintained roads. The mill was a two-story wooden building with an undershot wheel. It ran only when someone brought corn or wheat to grind. The millpond was fairly large and is still open today for fishing. I don't know if the mill is still there or not. The mill itself set across the road from the pond and a spillway provided the power to run the mill.

There was a small country store at the Mill site. The Wingates ran the store and the mill. The store was almost a carbon copy of the old store at Sautee - Nacoochee near Helen. The store at Mercer's Mill was a bit larger with two aisles rather than one, but the first time I walked into the Sautee - Nacoochee store it was like stepping back into history and going home.

Having finished all of their early morning chores, men from the community would gather at the Mill site. Sometimes children would come with their fathers. I went along with Uncle Gordon because the Wingates had a daughter about my age and we enjoyed being together. The men would sit around on the porch and complain about the weather, commiserate about how the crops were "not as good as last year", laugh about all kinds of things, and tell tall tales. One of their favorite pass times was to "put one over" on any tourist who happened to pull off the main road and stop at the store. When the tourist would get out of their car they would find two or three farmers, wearing bib overalls and well-worn John Deere caps on their heads, sitting on the porch of the store. The men would be discussing whether or not one of them could, with a twenty-two rifle, hit a washer that had been flipped up into the air. These discussions went along the lines of: "Betch ya' I can!" and "Naw you can't!" If the tourist bought into it, they would be allowed to bet too. Of course the men could hit the washer – any of them could. We kids thought it great fun to watch the tourist's unbelief when washer after washer would pop away. And, of course, the tourist was relieved of some of their money.



Hand Operated Corn Shelling Machine

One of the things that we kids would do when it was harvest time was to "crack" corn for chicken feed. While the mill was grinding the good white corn into corn meal and grits, we would be out behind the store feeding the not-so-good yellow field corn into the hopper of the cracking machine, turning the crank, and separating the kernels from the cobs. In retrospect, I think maybe the men used a Tom Sawyer type psychology on us to convince us that "cracking" the corn was fun. Actually, we did have fun. Sometimes we even sang that old song about "Jimmy crack corn and I don't care...."

After an hour or two of socializing, Uncle Gordon would say it was time to go and we would head back to the farm so he could finish his afternoon chores. In our travels all over the county,

whenever we stop for breakfast at any fast food restaurant in any town, there will be old men having their coffee and telling stories. I think the Mercer's Mill served the same purpose. Probably those in the late 1800's and the early 1900's thought so too.

The Grist Mills of the Mountain Communities - Part 3

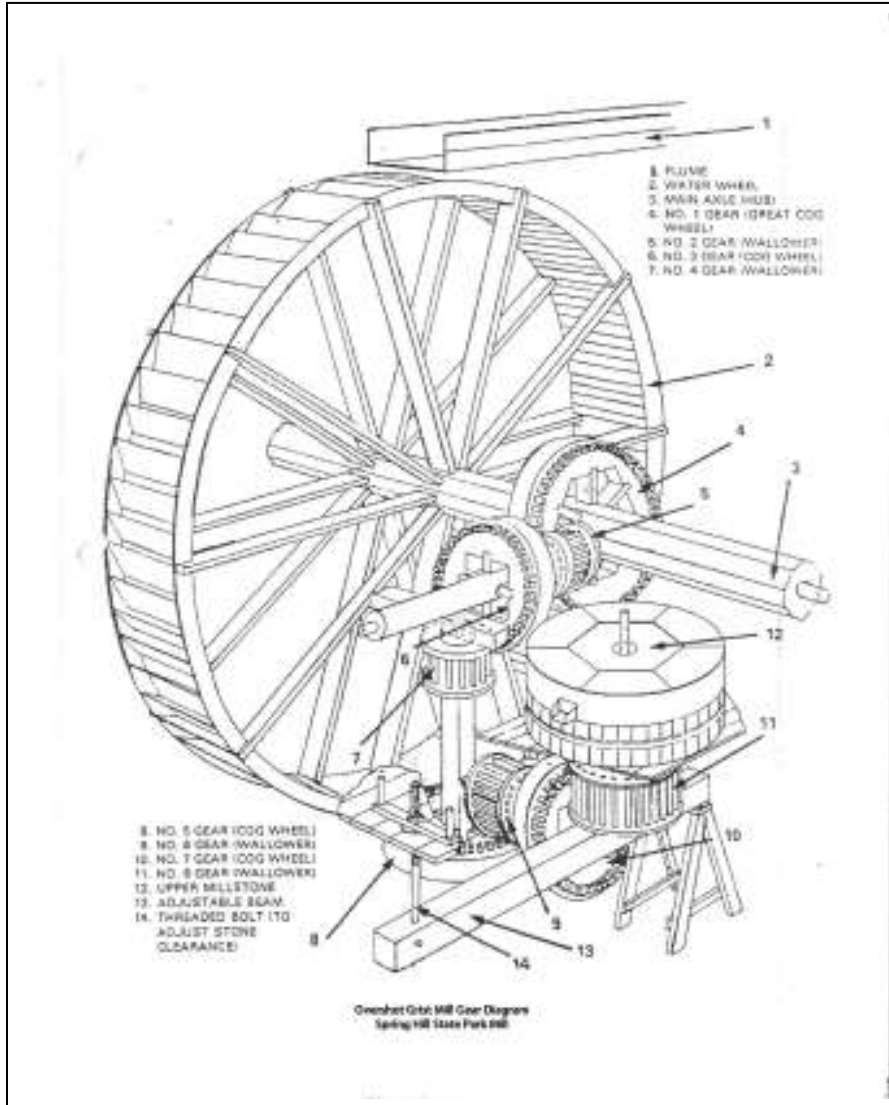
Gristmill Designs

Don & Diane Wells

In building a gristmill, one of the most important design decisions was how to power the mill. The choices were: an Overshot Wheel; an Undershot Wheel; a Breast Wheel, a Pitch-back Wheel or a Turbine Wheel. Each of these waterwheels has different efficiencies and different mill site requirements. There are also cost differences; so, the mill choice was probably a trade-off of what the site conditions would support and how much money the miller had to invest. Unless the miller was willing to build a dam to raise the water level sufficiently to accommodate other mill choices an elevation drop of nine feet or less would limit the choice to an undershot wheel. Overshot mill designs usually needed a vertical drop of 15 feet or more to power the wheel. Higher vertical heads were better. Between 9 and 15 feet, other options came into play.

A study of the *Young Mill-Wrights and Miller Guide* by Oliver Evans published in 1795, shows that the design decisions for the choice of the mill wheel and the building of the mill building were not without some technical complexities. Fortunately, Oliver Evans developed a number of formulas and created tables to help the miller make the right choice. The miller could then order from a supplier; or, using Evans guide, build most of the parts himself. In the back, the manual had lists of the parts and the lumber needed to build any particular mill. However, one had to be a master craftsman if he wanted to build the gears, mill wheel, grinding housing and more. Therefore, most times the parts for the mill were ordered and brought in on heavy wagons. Sometimes the wagons had to make their way to the mill site without benefit of roads.

For the miller, the single most difficult decision was determining the amount of power available from the water at the site. He then had to determine how that power would be transferred to the millstone in order to drive it at a preferred speed of 100 revolutions per minute. A series of interconnected gears were needed to change the water flow into the power needed for efficient



grinding. As an example, an Overshot wheel of 16 feet in diameter rotating at 10.4 revolutions per minute will require a master cog wheel with 78 drivers (spokes) connected to a wallower with 23 rounds connected to a counter-cog wheel with 48 drivers connected to a trundle with 17 rounds that will drive the millstone at 99.5 rpm. In some cases, these gears had to be doubled up to get the power to the millstone. If the size of the mill wheel increased, then the master cog wheel also had to increase with more drivers. The other gears remained about the same. The Overshot wheel design was the most efficient at about

75%. A picture of an overshot wheel design is shown below Accompanying photos of some of these gears in the George Washington Mill are also shown. The Undershot wheel design is about half the efficiency of the Overshot design and the others fall in between these two. The Turbine wheel, sometimes called the Tub wheel design, is the simplest and cheapest to build since there are no gears and the turbine is very small compared to the other designs. The shaft of the turbine is directly connected to the millstone. The required size of a turbine to drive a 5 foot diameter millstone at 100 rpm is 3.12 feet in diameter. This Turbine mill design usually required a raceway to be built and the water dropped into a penstock, a tank. The tank had to be tall enough that the drop, sufficient feet of head, would drive the turbine at the required speed. The Mingus

Mill near Cherokee, NC is this style mill. The Nora Mill near Helen, GA is also a Turbine Mill but it uses a dam to raise the water level to drive the turbine through a raceway.



GW Great Cog and Wallower Wheels



GW Mill Gears



GW Millstone Grinding Corn

Some millers built extensive dams to hold water in a mill pond. *Leffel's Construction of Mill Dams* was published in 1874. It provided designs for building the dams. The water from the pond could be released as needed to operate the mill. When not needed, the water could be diverted away from the driving wheel. The dams are usually associated with Breast wheel or Pitch-back Wheel designs but they are also used with Undershot and Turbine designs. For the Overshot wheel designs, the millrace/flume usually required a long run to bring the water to the top of the wheel with a required drop of at least 2 feet to 4 feet above the

top of the wheel. The Mingus Mill in Cherokee, NC brings water in from over 500 feet whereas the Old Mill in Cherokee has a millrace that is over 300 feet long. The Old Mill uses a trellis design to support the millrace. The Mingus Mill uses a pioneer design of stacked logs to support the millrace

The foundation of the mill and the rugged strength of the building were also very important factors to consider when building a mill. One reason most of the old mill buildings are gone today is that the flooding of the waterway on which they were located destroyed them. Deans Mill (later called John's Mill) in western Pickens County was destroyed by storms in 1929 and



rebuilt. It was damaged again by a major storm in 1938 and had to be rebuilt. Oliver Evans in his manual recommended that large stones that could not be moved by the force of water be placed around the foundation. Some mills even had two separate foundations to help keep them standing.

The other factor in the design of the building was its rugged strength. A 1,500 pound millstone being driven at 100 rpm on top of stationary millstone caused lots of friction and vibration in the building. The rotating of the mill wheel and the moving of the gears caused vibrations as well. Heavy timber construction was necessary so

that the mill could withstand these operational problems. An unexpected floating timber in the millrace was another possible disaster. The timber would jam the waterwheel. This sudden stopping could be catastrophic to the gearing and the building. The miller at the Mingus Mill in Cherokee told us that one morning he had a hard time opening the gate valve to the turbine wheel. Opening the gate valve is necessary to start operations. He put all his force on the gate valve. Suddenly, it was wide open! The turbine began operating at much higher than allowable speed. That drove the millstone at a very high rate of revolution. The miller said it felt like the building was going to shake apart before he finally was able to get the gate valve under control.

The Gristmills of the Mountain Communities – Part 4

The Mountain Mills

Don & Diane Wells

Burlison Mill

Isaac and Hannah Burlison arrived on Burnt Mt. in a two wheel ox-drawn cart with all their possessions and three children around 1840 from Buncombe County, NC. They moved into the area that is now Tate Mountain Estates on the northern slope of Burnt Mountain in Pickens County. Clear Creek, flowing in a northerly direction, cuts a deep ravine along the center of the area where they lived. No records can be found as to when Isaac built his gristmill but, until the mill was built, the community had to grind corn by hand as there were no other gristmills nearby.

It is reported that Isaac and Hannah were very frugal with their money. They probably saved enough to build the mill within the first few years after their arrival on Burnt Mountain. In choosing a place to build a mill, Isaac had an ideal water source in Clear Creek. It cascades through several small waterfalls in a steep ravine that would allow a millrace to be built that could support the preferred overshot mill wheel with its 75% efficiency. A gristmill and sawmill are the mainstays of any community and Isaac built both of them as soon as he was able. The population of the Burnt Mountain Community rose steadily probably because it had a gristmill and saw mill. In fact, after the civil war, the community became a sizable community with a large school for the children; and, it became a Placename on Georgia maps.

Isaac may have operated the mill for about forty years, until his death in 1885. Although many of Isaac and Hannah's children had moved away after the Civil War, it is possible that one of those that remained in the community took over operation of the mill until the community was abandoned around 1910. Besides the Burnt Mountain community, the mill was connected to many other communities through pioneer roads, many of which still exist today. One road follows Clear Creek north into a large farming valley that included the small towns of Dyke, Snider, Liclog and Cartecay in Gilmer County. All of these are gone today. Perhaps some of those living in the valley got their corn and wheat ground at Burlison's mill. Interestingly, a road in what was Dyke is called Burelson Road spelled with an "e" instead of an "i."

Champion Mill

Charles Champion is related to Lilly Mae Pendley of whom we wrote about in the "Before Bent Tree" series. He was born in 1879 and raised near Mole Mountain in Pickens County. He married and moved to Dawson County near what is today Fausett Lake. Probably in the early 1900's, he built a gristmill on a small creek which flowed eastward into Amicolola Creek. Amicolola Creek is the source for Fausett's Lake. He built a cabin to live in, a kitchen cabin, a two story mill cabin and the mill. Like most gristmills today, there is little left to determine what kind of mill it was, but it was likely an overshot mill.

This mill supported the area where Johntown was located in Dawson County. Johntown was begun by three Johns; John Anderson, John Seay, and John Fausett. Johntown grew to be a relatively large community with a church and a school. Like Burnt Mountain, it existed from the mid 1850's to about 1915 when it disappeared off of the maps. The Champion Mill served that community and others in and around the mill possibly into the 1940's or 1950's. Charles died in 1958. Three church communities existed at the time of the mill and were probably served by it. They were the Goshen Baptist Church, the Antioch Baptist Church and the Pleasant Union Baptist Church. Most of the early settlers in this area are buried at those three churches.

Charlie Champion and his wife Leaner had two sons, Tom and John. One son died before Charlie and the other died just seven years after his dad's death.

Crane Mill

Bartley Crane came from South Carolina to the Amicalola Falls area around 1851-1852 where he met a lady, Elizabeth Brock, who lived there. Some accounts say that she was a Cherokee Indian who had avoided being removed in the Trail of Tears. She is described as having jet black hair. However, pictures of her do not show the typical Cherokee facial features. They were married in 1853 and began a long history of living in that unique place. With plenty of water cascading down from a 729-foot waterfall, Bartley built a gristmill on the creek that spills over the falls. The gristmill is believed to have been near where the Amicalola Falls State Park visitor center is today. With so much land disturbance when the state park was built on that site, any evidence of the gristmill has been destroyed. However, there is a recorded account from Reuben Sanford in *The Annals of Upper Georgia Centered on Gilmer County* by George Gordon Ward. Reuben Sanford said, "Crane's mill was operated by an overshot wheel set so low that a trench had been cut in the ground underneath so the wheel could turn; the trench was always full of water." Bartley also ran a government sanctioned distillery near the mill.

One of the more interesting stories about the Crane mill is recorded in Ward's book and paraphrased here. Reuben Sanford's family, living near Bucktown some three miles north of the Crane Mill, ran out of corn meal during the winter of 1872. That winter was a terrible winter! The gristmill near Bucktown was broken; so, Reuben and a friend walked through high drifts of snow to the Crane mill to get their corn ground. When they got there, they found the mill wheel frozen in the ice. It took fifteen to twenty men, stoked with some of Bartley Cranes' whiskey, to chop out the mill wheel so their meal could be ground.

Bartley Crane operated his mill until his death in 1915, Bartley's son John ran the mill and a general store until he sold the land to the state in 1940 for a state park. No information can be found as to what happened to the mill and distillery. It is too bad that the mill and distillery were not saved for they would have added an interesting attraction to the state park. In Alexandria, VA, George Washington's Gristmill and distillery have been rebuilt and now operate as a major attraction for visitors in the Mt. Vernon area of Alexandria.



**Typical Mountain Community Mill
with Raceway**

The Gristmills of the Mountain Communities – Part 5 Mountain Mills and Stone Ground Corn & Wheat

Don & Diane Wells

The Mystery of the Farriba Mill

James Farriba and his brother Sevier probably moved from Habersham County where they were born (1824; 1828) to Lumpkin County sometime in the late 1840's to early 1850's. James married Nancy Anderson of Lumpkin County in 1855; they were married in then Gilmer County, a portion of which became Dawson County in 1857. In the late 1850's, the two brothers purchased property in what is now the Wildcat Creek valley in Dawson County west of Pleasant Union Baptist Church and also along the Amicalola River north of the church.

The Farriba family and their relatives kept mostly to themselves and little of their family history is known other than ancestral connections. They were not included in the Dawson County

Heritage Book but were among the early pioneers in Dawson County. The question that begs to be answered is did the Farriba's build the mill and dam that is on their property and if so, when did they build it? On the land that belonged to the Farriba's is one of the largest pioneer dams that, based on its design, could well have supported a gristmill and a saw mill. The stack stone dam is about 25 feet high and eight feet wide at the base. The dam was built to raise the water level of Wildcat Creek in order to make the water flow at a higher rate of velocity to force an undershot wheel to turn to grind corn or saw timber. Many floods have occurred since the dam was built and the mill configuration can no longer be ascertained. Large sections of the structure have been knocked down and the rest continues to deteriorate today. Downstream of the dam buried in the streambed are metal gears that once were part of the mill machinery.



Metal Gears from Farriba Mill

The assembly of this dam structure is a marvel in engineering and pioneering work. The rocks had to be collected from all over the forest area and brought to the site in wagons where the stack stone dam was built. Some of these stones weigh in the hundreds of pounds and would have been difficult to move by hand and levers. Interestingly, several miles to the east of where the dam is located is another smaller dam built on the Amicalola Creek which has many of the same features of the Farriba Dam. This one is also located on land owned by the Farriba's.

The dam and the mill were likely built by James Farriba and his brother Sevier after 1860. Members of the Farriba family living today have said that the dam existed when they visited the site in the mid-1900, but they did not know if it supported a mill. Based on the gears found near the dam, there was a gristmill and maybe a sawmill as well.

Other Smaller Mills in and Near Jasper

In downtown Jasper near the courthouse and probably situated where the now closed Crust restaurant is located was an electric powered gristmill. In the book, *The Mountains Surrounds Us, Memories of a Georgia Family* by Martha Ann Forest Mobley and Betty Forest Stenger, they wrote about their family visits to Jasper usually every two weeks. The family came into town on a wagon pulled by a mule and after crossing the railroad tracks, they turned to the right where Dad took two weeks of corn supplies to be ground by the miller and then they parked their wagon behind the courthouse.

Another smaller mill was located in what is now Bent Tree probably on the western slopes of Mt. Oglethorpe near a spring feed stream. Lilly Mae Pendley told us her father, Verne Champion, ran the mill for a time which was probably on Thomas Jefferson Fields property. Thomas Jefferson was related to the Champions.

The Nutritional Value of Stone Ground Corn and Wheat VS Store Bought

We go to the store and pick up a sack of flour, corn meal, etc. and read the label which says Bleached and Enriched (e.g. nutrients added). Bleached with what? The currently most common bleaching agent is benzoyl peroxide. It must be neutralized by adding such substances as: calcium carbonate (chalk!), calcium sulphate, dicalcium phosphate, magnesium carbonate, potassium aluminum sulphate, sodium aluminum sulphate, starch, and tricalcium phosphate. Gad! And we cook with this stuff. The product was processed to remove the hull of the corn and wheat where all the nutrients are located. After the processing, we have to pay to have them added back in (Enriched)

100% Stone Ground Grains leave the corn germ and bran in. Because corn germ is used for unsaturated cooking oils and margarines, a lot of corn product producers remove it and sell it for a higher profit. It has been proven that eating stone-ground whole grains are much healthier for us because, if it is not bleached, we don't have to add artificial nutrients.

Today, we are swamped with ads about fluffier biscuits or pancakes, faster rising flours and tastier bread products. We have become addicted to processed grain products that look better, keep longer, are easier to handle and the list goes on. If we do a comparison of stone ground versus grocery store off the shelf products, we pick the off the shelf cause we see a grittier product in stone ground since the ground up hulls (the nutrients) are still in the product and it looks different. But forget about the look and do a taste test. Mix up a batch of instant grits or even 15 minutes grits bought at the store and then mix up a batch of stone ground grits. You will be amazed at the difference. The stone ground grits are creamier and taste a lot better than the store bought ones. And they are much better for you than the processed ones.. The shelf life of the stone ground products can be extended by cold storage.



Mill Stones Grinding Corn

The Gristmills of the Mountain Communities

Gristmill Tour – Part 6

Don & Diane Wells

Enjoying the beauty of nature, hearing the bubbling creek, learning how the settlers worked with water power, watching the splash of the water from the flume on the waterwheel, being amazed by the intricacies of the mechanical engineering needed to make the mill work and impressed by the heavy mill stones as well as by the complex intermeshing of the gears make visiting an old mill a great way to spend a day. Best of all you can treat yourself to a delightful culinary experience.

At one time Georgia had at least 1,200 water-powered gristmills. Today, there are very few operating mills left. For example, from Clarksville to Helen there are four mills that are still standing. Loudermilk Mill on Hazel Creek, just south of Clarksville, is on private property and is no longer operating. It was built in the 1850's. During a cog greasing accident, the mill claimed the leg of Tom Loudermilk. Sutton Mill on Sutton Creek just north of Clarksville, was built in 1890. It is no longer a working mill but the water wheel is still attached. The picturesque setting is available for special events such as weddings. Watts Mill on the Soque River was first built in 1821 by Joseph Hall. Today it is the site of the Mark of the Potter at 9982 Highway 197

N. And finally, Nora Mill, one of the very few working gristmills still using technology from the 1870's, is nestled along the Chattahoochee River a little way south of Helen Georgia.

Nora Mill was built in 1876 by John Martin, who moved to Georgia in search of gold. Located on the Old Unicoi Road, it predates the town of Helen by about 30 years. The dam that forms the spillway that provides the power to run the turbine engine was probably the first dam across the Chattahoochee River. The dam's fascinating wooden construction can be seen close up from a covered walkway. Featured in the movie "I'll Climb the Highest Mountain," Nora Mill is open every day of the year except Christmas and Easter.



Nora Mills – Helen, GA



Nora Mill Dam on Chattahoochee

Near Rabun Gap there are two mills remaining. Sylvan Falls Mill is a working mill at the base of the waterfall in the Wolf Fork Valley. Built in 1840 from hand-hewn, wormy chestnut timbers that were connected with pegs not nails, the mill had a 27-foot water wheel. It is now the site of the Sylvan Falls Bed and Breakfast. Barker's Mill, on Betty Creek Road, has provided milling services to the community since the mid 1900's. The present mill was built in 1944. The mill is working with the USDA maize genome project to collect, catalogue, and preserve historic non-hybrid varieties of corn and to encourage their use by local farmers and gardeners.

Near Homer, GA is the Ragsdale Mill. Built during the War Between the States, it opened in 1863. The heavy French millstones were brought into Savannah by a blockade-runner to avoid the northern navy. They were then moved overland to the mill site. This mill, on private property, has been restored. If you would like to visit you will need to call ahead to set up an appointment.



Berry Mill at Berry College, Rome GA

The Mill at Stone Mountain Park was originally located in Ellijay, Georgia. It was moved into the park in 1965. The Gibbs, who owned other mills as well, owned this mill. It was built in 1869 by Fletcher McDonald Grady and his son Henry. The Grady's moved around the state building mills for other people. They remained on site to teach the owners how to operate them before moving on.

The Mill at Berry College was constructed in 1930. The wooden overshot waterwheel, 42 feet in diameter, is one of its famous features. It has an iron hub, a gift from the Republic Mining and Manufacturing Company that Henry Ford had moved to the college.

During 1977 the wheel was completely rebuilt and in 1985 the mechanism for grinding corn was restored. The Old Mill can be visited at any time but it only operates on special occasions such as Mountain Day.

Built by Benjamin Franklin Prater in 1855, Prater's Mill's is located on what the Cherokee called Fish Kill Shoals on the Cohutta Creek near Dalton. Over time Prater added a gin mill, a sawmill, a wool carder, a syrup mill, a general store and a blacksmith shop. During the Civil War the mill was used as a campsite by both sides. In 1971 the Prater's Mill Foundation took over the mill and began an extensive restoration project. Today there are two art and craft festivals held on the grounds. The mill operates during those festivals. At other times the grounds are open and are popular for picnicking, fishing, and just enjoying the scenery. A quote from the Prater's Mill website says: "Save the planet, it is the only one with cornbread!"

Another possible day trip – well, maybe two-day trip - would be to the Hagood Mill in Pickens, South Carolina. The first mill there was built in the mid 1820's; the present mill in 1845. It is one of the few operating mills in South Carolina and has the only waterwheel still made of wood. The grounds are open every day for picnicking. Tours to see the mill in operation can be taken on every Wednesday through Saturday from 10 – 4. The most interesting time to visit would be on the 3rd Saturday of any month. The Hagood Mill Historic Site & Folklife Center now features the operational gristmill and a traditional barn and family farm exhibit. There are two historic Pickens County (SC) log cabins, one from 1791 and the other from 1925, a great way to compare what "home" was like in two different eras. The monthly folk life festival also offers examples of traditional arts. There are living history demonstrations that include milling, blacksmithing, cotton ginning, moonshining, spinning, weaving, bee-keeping, metal smithing, quilting, woodcarving, flint kapping, chair caning, open hearth cooking and more. Music and other entertainments are also offered. Many of the areas best bluegrass, blues, and other old time music makers play there. Interestingly, having just mentioned Prater's Mill in Georgia, Hagood Mill is near Prater's Creek SC.

In Cherokee North Carolina you can find The Old Mill. It is a non-working mill, but the store does sell freshly ground products and the owner is happy to give you a tour. Mingus Mill just past the Oconaluftee Visitor's Center is usually a working mill. However, at present it is being refurbished. Even not working it is worth a visit.



The 1886 Old Mill, Cherokee, NC

Should you make a trip to our nation's capitol, don't miss the reconstructed Washington's Mill near Mount Vernon. It is not only functional but a work of art. While there, you can also visit George's distilling plant. Both the Mill and the Distillery sit on their original foundations. Located just three miles from the Mount Vernon, the mill and distillery operate every day of the week from April through October. Washington ground his own grain and, as at many other mills throughout the South, charged a toll – about 1/8 of the other farmer grain – for

grinding for them. By 1771 Washington had improved his operation so that he could grind both flour and cornmeal. He ground enough to use at Mount Vernon as well as to sell up and down the East Coast of America and even as far away as Portugal and the West Indies. In 1791, a new automated milling system, invented and patented by Oliver Evans, was installed. Washington's Gristmill is the only mill in the United States with an operating Oliver Evans system. You can see this unique system running on the first weekend of each month. Our local "moonshiners" had nothing on the Father of our Country. He legally ran the biggest "still" around! Construction was completed for the largest distillery in America in 1797. Located next to Washington's Grist Mill, the distillery produced 11,000 gallons of rye whiskey in 1799. As with his grain, Washington sold much of the whiskey produced at the distillery both in the United States and overseas.

In summary visiting these old mills will fill you with admiration for the ingenuity and wisdom of those who were not able to just run down to the store and buy whatever they needed. If you take time to look into the lives that these intrepid men and women lived, you will find them fascinating.