

MILL HISTORY OF THE COUNTY

The Tunnel Mill—Built by Robert Watson in the Early Fifties

—Tunnel 400 Feet

Long.

WHEN THE PERRYS OPERATED

Destroyed by Fire in 1889.—Much Grain and Flour Lost—No Insurance.

Effie McKinlay Kantor in the History of Hamilton County: It is impossible to ascertain the exact date when Robert Watson began his tunnel through which the river was to increase the natural current by a deeper fall at the dam, but the time was in the early '50s. Watson laid his tunnel out with a pocket compass; the tunnel was four hundred feet long and was begun from each end and dug toward the center. Watson's accuracy in such primitive engineering may be judged from the fact that the ends of each starting point were but eighteen inches apart in the center of the tunnel. By such methods around the bend of the river from the dam to the mill site the fall of the river was six and one-half feet, and Watson had the privilege of a four and a half foot dam, making an eleven-foot fall of water—head and fall together. This industry in its infancy, was first a sawmill—later a corn grinding mill. Lyman G. Perry bought this mill from Watson in 1867 for \$6,000. He ran it as a saw and corn mill until 1869 or 1870. At this time, or about 1871, Gilbert Perry went into the business with him, grinding wheat with one run of burrs. This was one of the most prosperous of early mills on the river, settlers coming from Story, Boone, Wright, Webster and Greene counties. In pleasant weather or weather not too cold, they usually came prepared to stay four or five days if necessary. Mr. Perry remembers that at times the river bottom below the mill was dotted with wagons; twenty teams sometimes being in waiting for their grists. The way to mill was often a dangerous one. There were many things to be considered before starting to mill where one went thirty and forty miles to have their wheat ground. There must be some one to look after the needs of the family and the stock at home; very often this devolved upon the wife and mother and the frontier woman was a woman who could not quake at sight of a band of Indians who may only have come to beg, but more likely to steal or threaten. Provisions must be made ready for the journey and for those left in the home.

Lyman Perry continued running this mill in partnership with his brother about nine years. The dam at this place was never taken entirely out by the ice gorges, but each spring sections were gone and had to be replaced. The tunnel laid out by Mr. Watson was curved up with planks three feet long and the excavation was in itself three feet by two feet nine inches. It needed constant repair as the fater rotted the boards. They also added improvements from time to time and about 1884 changed from burrs to rolls. At this time and for two years previous, they were busy all season. In 1882 they ran the mill steadily for nine months, Sundays and weekdays, stopping only long enough to repair and oil machinery. Mr. Perry's manner of pay was to take one-eighth toll of wheat. He weighed every grist just as most millers did. He never did any exchange work, as many did, giving flour in exchange for wheat.

On April 14, 1889, the tunnel caved in. This was repaired and work at the mill was resumed.

On November 14th of the same year, he and his son had been grinding buckwheat all day. In fact they had been grinding buckwheat for about three weeks, but this day a hot box annoyed and hindered the work and they shut down the mill at about 7 o'clock in the evening and repaired to the house completely tired out. At 2 a. m. Solomon Dick and his sons awakened by a lurid glare in the sky, hastened to arouse the sleeping miller. They were too late. All that remained of the once flourishing flour mill was a pile of smoking embers. The loss was complete; no insurance was car-

ried and in addition to this, there were stored in the mill, five hundred bushels of winter wheat, one hundred bushels of wheat, five or six tons of buckwheat flour, two or three tons of white flour, two hundred bushels of corn, two hundred bushels of grists belonging to farmers. A kit of carpenters' tools was also in the burned structure. During its years of activity the mill was also a postoffice and a small store was kept in addition.

CHASE MILL.

In 1855 Sumler and Walter Willson built a sawmill near the site of the old Chase mill. This was, as nearly as can be ascertained, the first sawmill in Webster City. This mill started upon its career auspiciously enough for the settlers were in need of boards and shingles. In 1856 the Willsons disposed of their mill to Chas. B. Stoddard and W. S. Pray. They established a planing mill in addition to the sawmill and made shingles also. A little later the flourishing industry added a furniture factory, and the first work done on a turning lathe was executed here. Cabinetmakers were in demand, and among those, who at one time and another, won local fame as workers in wood were, P. C. Babcock, J. D. Sketchley, B. S. Mason, Lewis Holcomb, Elisha Sackett and Frank R. Mason. There are in the town, pieces of the furniture made here, still in use. They were built to last a lifetime and many of the carefully constructed articles have long outlived their owners. Gilbert Perry has a chair from this factory and there are doubtless others. The only coffins used in the settlement were made here and members of the Pray family still remember how, during a typhoid epidemic, the small force of cabinetmakers worked day and night to fill the orders for coffins.

During these years a corn cracker was added to the other branches of the mill and J. D. Sketchley ran it. Settlers hailed with delight this addition and shelled corn by hand to bring to mill, that they might obtain that delicious oldtime dish—hominy. "Samp," was the pioneer name given to the dish. In 1868 John Hill came to the settlement with his family and bought the mill of Stoddard and Pray April 8, 1868. He sold a third interest to Preston Kimbrell, his brother-in-law, who held his interest until death. John Hill was a fine millwright and at once proceeded to build an entirely modern mill. He used every known appliance in the construction of the mill. Business was very good and the flour put out was of excellent quality. The pioneers were not critical of their bread or their flour however, for they were philosophers enough to accept the goods of the gods and be thankful. The times made men philosophers; when hard times came they plodded uncomplainingly on; when good fortune smiled upon them they as quietly accepted it.

John Hill in 1873 sold a half interest to Judge D. D. Chase and the other half was sold to him in 1877. Mr. Chase employed various men at different times to run the mill as a flour mill. Among these were the La Barr brothers; then in 1882 Charles Closs rented and ran it for about three years; successor to him was P. G. Stearns, who ran it as a feed mill for a year or two, until he bought and operated the Planisfer Flour mills near the Crooked Creek station. With the removal of Mr. Stearns the Chase mill was abandoned. It rapidly lost its windows and began to assume the air of "better days" that a once useful or popular person presents when he ends his period of activity. But the timbers of which it had been built—its bones and sinews—were of too hardy material to so quickly succumb as many of its predecessors had. So it stood for years, the last mill upon the river, the "last leaf upon the tree," in dignified solitude, a sightless old landmark with its solid old walls as firm as they had been fifty years before and became unwillingly the haunt of owls and bats by night, its only companions the complaining wind through its deserted rooms and the murmuring water of the river.

Effie Kantor McKinlay in History of Hamilton County: The third mill on the river was moved here from Polk county by Andrew Groseclose, who came here and built a dam across the river on section 15-87-26, near the David Hook farm in 1852.

The mill was removed later, in 1853, and it was set up by Lewis M. Cray and William Strickler. This mill was also run by an over-shot wheel. The burrs used were the common "nigger-head" burrs two feet across. Corn and buck-

wheat were ground only, for there was scarcely a bushel of wheat raised here at that time. There was no bolting chest in the primitive mill; settlers did their own bolting at home. Later a hand bolting machine was added to mill machinery, necessitating a "hopper-boy," who fed the grain by hand into a hopper which was turned by hand, fanning out the graham and retaining the fine flour. An old miller from Ohio, Father Comley by name, employed at times in local mills, related how he, as "hopper-boy" in an old mill together with a companion, was instructed by the miller, who was to leave the mill in their care for the day, to carry several bushels of wheat which was stored on the second floor. This wheat had been fanned or cleaned and was to be poured into the hopper to be ground. Elevators were then unknown. So, no sooner was the miller out of sight than the ingenious boys hastily constructed a long trough, one end of which they tacked to the floor above and the other end to the hopper. Then boring a hole in the second floor directly over the trough they had but to pour the wheat into the hole and their work was done. But alas! upon his return the thick-headed old miller saw what they had done and mistaking their cleverness for laziness, made them carry the wheat back upstairs and down again by hand, in the good old-fashioned way.

Andrew Groseclose had a large family, one of whom was Mrs. Morgan Hill, now living in Missouri. In 1855 Dr. Charles Fisher, an early-day practitioner, also a millwright and miller, came to this county and bought the mill of Groseclose. Settlers came from such distances in the grinding season that they often had to wait three and four days for their grist. Dr. Fisher had two log houses and always lodged his customers, often providing them food for their own store of provisions ran low. And it was told of him that he always furnished food free. The pay of the miller of this period was every fourth bushel. This mill also ran a saw and made laths and shingles. The mill itself was a small frame one-story building, which finally took fire and burned. It was never rebuilt.

Early settlers also remember the erection on Lick-skilllet—a bottom land below Bell's mill, of a sawmill in 1854. This was owned by Butterworth and Messmore. Hiram Dayton bought it soon after and moved the mill west of Homer, where it was later operated under a different name.

BONE'S MILL.

The site of Bone's mill was for years one of the beauty spots of the county. For a half-mile back on either side of Boone river native timber of walnut, oak and maple made it an ideal home for the settler and a desirable location for a sawmill. Ruthless hands have since cleared this all away and converted the rich soil into farms. About six rods north of the site of Bone's mill, Thomas Williams built his sawmill in 1854. He had come with his family from Dark county, Ohio, to carve for himself and family a home out of the wilderness. This mill was first run as a feed and sash sawmill. Mr. Williams was unfortunately in his choice of a building spot and a location for the dam. The first spring after his mill was built the mill and the entire dam was eaten out by the icy jaws of the spring gorge, and he moved his machinery to the site of Bone's mill. Charles Fisher, who bought the Groseclose mill, was the millwright and took for his pay land belonging to Williams, which is now the W. O. McConnell farm. The mill, which was a grist mill, was to have been completed in three years, but work was delayed and the property was transferred to Lambert Sternberg. Mrs. James Brock, of Webster City, is a daughter of Thomas Williams and well remembers the troublous times following the destruction of the mill by the ice.

Sternberg put in a new dam of logs and large poles bolted together, also adding machinery for grinding wheat. This addition made it a one-run mill with one set of burrs driven by the old-fashioned Rose wheel. The mill was about fourteen feet in height, a story and a half structure besides the basement. Settlers came from distances of thirty and forty miles with their grist. If they had to wait two or three days, as sometimes happened, they slept in the miller's office, in his hay loft or perhaps lodged with the miller's family. These unexpected guests were always welcomed by the women and children of the family, for they brought news of the outside world and after the evening meal sat smoking in the gathering darkness, regaling each other with stories. The usual pay or toll of the mil-

ler at this period was every sixth bushel of wheat. Very little actual cash was exchanged, except where the miller sold flour outright. In the late summer when the water ran very low, the miller could not grind at all. No water ran over the dam for two or three months and grists were stacked ten and fifteen grain bags high and the miller watched for heavy rains.

This mill for a time changed owners rapidly. Lambert Sternberg sold to Jay Sternberg in 1863. Jay Sternberg sold the property to John Ross in 1868. It was at this time, when John Ross was owner, that a tragedy which is still a mystery, occurred. One day in the early summer of 1869, the body of John Ross with a bullet wound in the back, was found in the wheel pit under the mill. Suspicion was at once directed toward a nephew of the murdered man, John Ross, Jr., who had made his home for a time with the uncle. It was known that the nephew had requested and been refused a loan of money. And this fact coupled with the immediate disappearance of John Ross, Jr., was the only clue to the murderer. He was apprehended and brought back to Webster City for trial. The Webster City Freeman of February 18, 1885 says: "A long and complicated trial ensued, in which Charles A. Clark appeared for the state and N. B. Hyatt for the accused, who was but eighteen years of age. The case was tried before Judge D. D. Chase in the December term of district court of 1869, John H. Bradley acting as district attorney." The accused was acquitted by the jury and the matter rested there. No one save the guilty person knows the murderer.

In the fall of 1869 the mill property was transferred back to Jay Sternberg, who sold the mill in 1870 to James W. Kimbrell. He put in a feed burr and what was known as a Lafell turbine, forty-eight-inch water-wheel, instead of the old Rose wheel. This Lafell wheel was a clumsy, heavy affair, weighing three tons and was hauled by Mr. Page from the Illinois Central station to the mill, six miles south of town, in a rudely constructed cart. The cart was made of an axle of a new wagon, and an oxcart with sawed-log wheels. A yoke of oxen completed the equipage. The trip was made in two days, breaking through a small bridge near the Treat farm and elayed by minor incidents.

In the fall of 1870, Kimbrell sold a half interest to his son, Ben Kimbrell. Upon his death, soon after, the widow's interest was sold to Joseph Bone, who had rebuilt and run Bell's mill. The following year Joseph Bone bought out the J. W. Kimbrell interest and became the sole owner. At this time he began extensive improvements—building over the house, putting a stone foundation under the mill, and soon after installed the new process of making flour. This necessitated one extra burr, a purifier, a sixteen-foot double reel bolting chest and some other new machinery. He also raised the mill twelve feet, adding one and one-half stories, thus making it the largest flouring mill on the river at this time. He discarded the sawmill to make room for other machinery. A. D. McKinlay who had been miller for John Hill at the Hill mill, later for Kimbrell, was also retained as miller.

A little touch of romance is added here. For the second time Joseph Bone retained his miller as son-in-law. James A. Snodgrass, his miller at Bell's mill, married his eldest daughter, and A. D. McKinlay, his miller at this place, married another daughter. In 1880 the mills were named "Excelsior," to distinguish them from the other Bone's mill known as Bell's mill. The firm name at this time was Bone & McKinlay and on until 1889. During the years of Cleveland's first administration a postoffice was installed at the mill and named Tremaine for Ira H. Tremaine, whose farm lay near the mill property. This was later discontinued.

The modern child in kindergarten sings lustily of the miller with his mill wheel turning round, but must sing ignorantly, for he may not learn by experience how musical was the song of the mill. The water mill of forty years ago had none of the metallic, rasping sounds that modern machinery gives forth. When most of the mechanism was of wood the sound was a muffled humming, indescribably sweetened by the splashing of water over the dam, the churning of wheels below in the flume. Inside the mill the sound was louder and a clean, sweet odor greeted the senses. The beginning of bread has a charm also. Not far from the door stood the great wheat hopper from which the miller took his toll and into which the wheat was poured to be cleaned; the great round mill-stones

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with their little grooves which had to be chiseled out on dull days—sharpening, it was called; the long, clean bolting chest that had its reel covered with the expensive bolting or sifting silk once in ten or twelve years; the dustroom with its thick, wheaty odor; the grain bags stacked high on which many a tired child climbed to view these interesting surroundings, but remained to sleep awhile, lulled by the humming of the mill; and the fine, white flour dust settling thickly over all—the miller's hat, his coat (for the early miller wore no white uniform), powdering his hair and eyebrows with its hoary frost and making a miracle of the cobwebs high in the corners; and over all and through all the hum of the mill. No industry was more productive of contentment and a man who was once a miller never finds occupation more to his liking. This mill was sold to P. G. La Barr in 1889, who ran it until 1895, when it became the property of P. B. Osborn, now of Ellsworth. Mr. Osborn installed a boiler and steam engine, but in 1899 an explosion destroyed these and the house in which they were placed, rendering the mill useless. He then transferred what machinery he could use, to his steam mill in Ellsworth and disposed of the land in small tracts. With these events the long period of usefulness of Bone's mill was brought to a close.

Personal Briefs

(From Saturday's Daily.)

—Mrs. Geo. Bonner and little son and Mrs. E. E. Gastren of Jewell were in the city yesterday shopping.

—Mrs. G. Peterson returned to her home in Jewell yesterday afternoon following a short visit with her grandson, little George Peterson, also of Jewell, who is in Mercy hospital recovering from an appendicitis operation.

—Miss Bertha Fear, who has been spending a couple of weeks visiting relatives in Marion, Iowa, returned home today.

—Mr. and Mrs. H. I. Thompson and son Reed went to Fort Dodge today for a several days visit with their son, Fay Thompson and wife.

—Mrs. Mary Cory is spending the day in Duncombe visiting her sister, Mrs. Ralph Beem.

—Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Warren and Mr. and Mrs. Fred Thomas, of Des Moines, spent yesterday here attending the burial of Mrs. Warren's and Mr. Thomas' mother, Mrs. A. E. Thomas. The body was brought here on the 11:20 yesterday forenoon and interment made in Graceland cemetery.

—Miss Cecile Smock, who will spend the summer traveling in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa, as a cornetist with an orchestra of about eighteen people from the Travers-Wick Chautauqua system, left yesterday afternoon for Des Moines. She will join the company in that city and start on the tour in about a week.

—Mrs. C. A. Garlock and little son, Jack, arrived here from their home in Plover yesterday afternoon and spent last night visiting Mr. and Mrs. Harry H. Hoyt at the Mrs. James Hoyt home. They left today for Cedar Falls, where they will attend a week end house party given by the Delta Phi Delta sorority, of which Mrs. Garlock is a member.

—Mrs. John McMahon Jr. arrived here yesterday afternoon from Tara and will spend Sunday visiting at the M. J. Butler home on Bank street.

—Mrs. Ray D. Isham and children, Mrs. Fred Hupp and visiting mother, Mrs. M. Brennan of Sheridan, Illinois, spent last night in Iowa Falls visiting relatives and friends.

—Mrs. H. F. Allen and Mrs. G. H. DeMott, of Blairsburg, were in town yesterday.

—Mrs. E. E. Shipman and daughter, Miss Pearl Shipman, spent last night in Iowa Falls, yesterday being social day at the country club there.

—Mrs. R. E. Jewett, who has been spending a week with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. J. M. Bottorf, south of the city, returned to her home in Blue Earth, Minn., today. She was accompanied by her father who will visit for a short time with his daughter's family.

—Mrs. J. R. Faus, who has been here visiting for two weeks with her daughter, Mrs. G. F. Tucker, went to Humboldt today where she will visit another daughter.

—Miss Ida Thomas, the chiropractor, went to Clear Lake today to spend the week end at her parents home there.

—Mrs. P. W. Luenden and son Perry came up from Colfax today in their car for an extended visit with the former's sister, Mrs. J. E. Clark, on Bank street. From here they go to Fort Dodge to visit another sister.

—Mr. and Mrs. V. C. Crosley and daughter, Mary Eleanor, left today for Clear Lake, where they will spend a week.

—Miss Bertha Teal and visiting friend, Miss Anna Telgren, of Kiron, left today for a two week's visit at Clear Lake.

—Mrs. Elizabeth Thompson returned last night from a two days visit in Anthony and Des Moines.

—Miss Maggie Rowland went to Eagle Grove this morning to spend the week end.

—Mrs. Guw Scott and children, who reside northwest of town, went to Iowa Falls this noon for an over Sunday visit with the Charles Anderson family.

—Mrs. Bascom Huddleston left today for Springfield and Farmer City, Illinois, for a several weeks visit among relatives. She will be joined in Farmer City by her husband and his sister, Mrs. J. S. Melvin, who were called there a few days ago by the death of a relative.

—Miss Bessie Martin of Cherokee spent a part of today visiting at the J. N. Omstead home. She left on the afternoon train for Ellsworth, where she will make a brief visit with the N. C. Omstead family, going from there to Grinnell.

ITALY IN FEAR OF GENERAL REVOLT

Troops are Being Concentrated in Anticipation of Uprising in Four Populous Provinces.

Rome, June 13.—Movements of a revolutionary character were reported yesterday throughout the four provinces of Bologna, Ferrara, Ravenna and Forli, forming what is known as the Pomagna.

Although a cessation of the general strike which began on Monday had been ordered by the labor organizations, the workmen of extreme views in these districts have refused to return to work. The government yesterday ordered a concentration of troops, especially in the towns of Forli and Ravenna.

The only communication from Ravenna reports the death of the chief of police as a result of wounds received in the course of demonstration on Wednesday.

Serious encounters between these strikers and troops are reported from Parma.

The wooden bridge across the Rubicon, now known as the Pisciatello was burned by strikers and railroad communication cut.