

The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

THE RABUN COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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GRIST MILLS: SOUTHERN APPALACHIAN ICONS

Grist mills of one sort or another have been around for centuries, even millennia. Although the term grist mill can refer to any mill that

grinds grain, the term was used historically for a local mill where farmers brought their own grain and in return received ground meal or flour, minus a percentage called the “miller’s toll.”

Classical mill designs were usually water-powered, and in most watermills

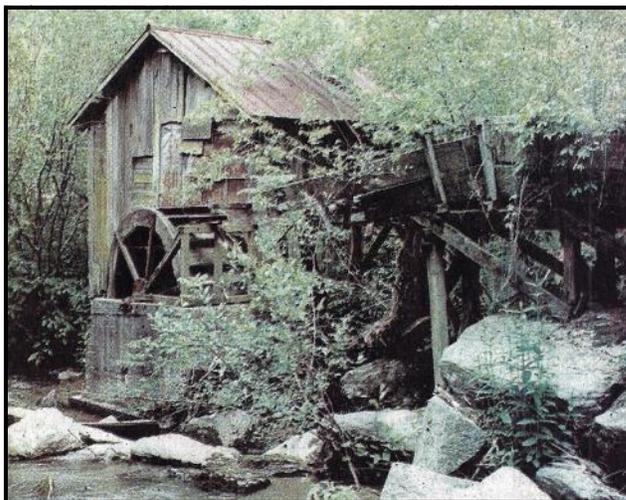
the water wheel was mounted vertically.

Water-powered mills are an icon of the Southern Appalachians, and in days past there were many in Rabun County. Not much wheat was grown here, so the mills ground corn to make corn meal and grits. Of course, some mills also ground corn for whiskey. It was customary for every community to have its own mill, as there needed to be a mill within easy distance of all farmers. The mills were also a gathering place where folks visited while waiting for their corn to be ground into meal. Even when power mills

were available, many preferred water-ground meal because they claimed a power mill burned the cornmeal in the grinding

process and gave it an odd taste.

Community grist mills are gone now, though you can still see the crumbling remains of some of them along creek banks. Some of the mills have been preserved and restored.



Mill on Warwoman Creek

Sylvan Falls Mill

is one of at least three mills that served residents of Wolfork Valley. Built in 1840, the mill’s original wooden wheel was replaced with a steel one in 1946. The mill has since served as a bed-and-breakfast inn.

A second mill that served residents of Wolfork Valley was the Dickerson Mill. It was built in 1926 by Bill Dickerson on Keener Creek. He used the same water wheel to turn a grist mill and a sawmill. There is now a private residence on the property, and the mill is part of the landscaping.

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T H E V I N T A G E R A B U N C H A L L E N G E

Whose bicentennial will be celebrated in 2019?

Answer on page 4.

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The Mill on Warwoman Creek, located off Sandy Ford Road, has a rich history. The oldest name we have for it is Captain Beck's Mill, named for Captain Sam Beck who also operated it as a sawmill. After Beck died, it was owned by Dixie Wilbanks who operated it as Wilbanks Mill and made a living there for 27 years up until 1968. It was washed out by the flooded creek in 1973 and stood idle until it was restored in 1980, and it resumed a Saturday afternoon operation as Darnell Mill for a few years. It, too, is now idle and in a state of disrepair.



Barker's Creek Mill

Barker's Creek Mill is nestled at the end of Betty's Creek Valley near Dillard. It is owned

and operated by the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts and Sciences. The current mill was built in 1944 at the site of an older mill that served the community since the first white settlers came into the area in the late 1820's. Currently whole wheat flour is produced from hard winter wheat that is brought in, and corn for grits and meal is locally grown. Their meal and grits are sold locally and shipped throughout the United States.

The Bell Gristmill is located at the Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center. The complete mill was relocated from Macon County, North Carolina and reassembled on Foxfire's property.

**Catherine and Jessica Dermody:
Two Years, Twice as Nice**



This month marks the two-year anniversary of Catherine and Jessica Dermody volunteering their time at the historical society. With resumés in hand, they walked into our building in January 2009 offering to work. They were recent graduates of Wesleyan College, and they were looking to be of service while searching for full-time employment.

They were put to work immediately inputting data into our Past Perfect software. For two hours each Monday, they catalog the books in our research library. Jessica completes a form listing key information about the book which can be used in a subject search. When that is complete, Catherine enters the information into the computer.

Catherine and Jessica have strong ties to Rabun County, as they are related to former state school superintendent and part-time Rabun resident, M.L. Duggan.

CIVIL WAR SESQUICENTENNIAL EVENTS:

The 150th anniversary of the beginnings of the Civil War will be marked in Georgia and other states with a variety of events. For a listing of these events, please check out the new website, www.CivilWarHeritageTrails.org

NEW EXHIBIT:

A new exhibit called "People Who Made a Difference" is now on display in our museum. It features Larry McClure, developer of the Sky Valley resort that became Rabun's newest town; Helen D. Longstreet, who fought Georgia's first big environmental battle at Tallulah Falls; and three individuals instrumental in developing varying aspects of Rabun's tourism industry, Carrie Dillard, "Pop" Jameson, and John Arrendale.

“We Can Grow Anything but Money”

The fertile valleys of Rabun County have always been rich farmland. The Cherokee Indians who lived here for centuries grew corn, beans, and tobacco. In the early 19th century, the first white settlers were farmers by necessity as they had to grow their own food to survive. They grew potatoes, hay, and numerous other grains and vegetables, but corn was the staple crop. Corn provided food for the farmers and their families, but it also fed the mules and oxen that the farmers used to work their land, and the hogs, chickens, and cows which supplied milk, butter, eggs, and meat for the families. Another industry that sprang up from the growing of corn was the making and selling of moonshine whiskey. This provided a cash income for many farm families.

In the early decades of the 20th century, the Rabun Gap School introduced the concept of the “Family Farm School”. Entire families lived on the school campus and learned to make a living as farmers. The children worked one half day and went to school one half day. The families were given a house, barn, space for a garden, and one acre to farm, in addition to enough pasture for two milk cows. The harvested crops were shared equally between the school and the farm family. At the end of the specified length of residence, no more than five years, some families had saved enough to purchase their own farms, and all families would have learned valuable lessons in agriculture and dairying.

In a Foxfire interview, one farmer explained that most of what all farm families grew went toward family needs. Surplus crops, along with

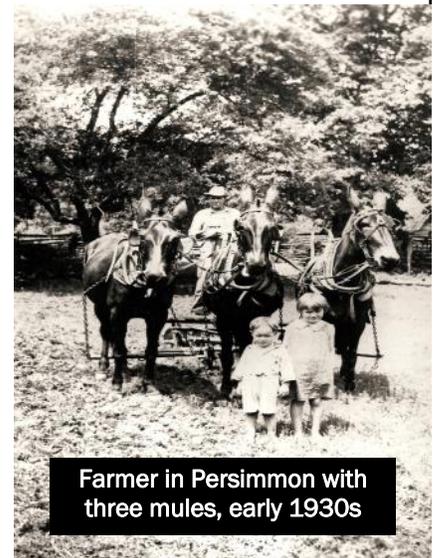
chickens and eggs, were taken to market and sold to provide money, one of the few items that could not be grown or raised. By the early 1900s as farmers began trading and selling more of their surplus, a truck farming industry was born. As a result of the truck farming growth, the State Department of Agriculture built a State Farmers Market in Dillard in 1951. It provided space for county farmers to store and sell their produce. Today there are a few small roadside stands with farmers peddling from pickup trucks and one large commercial market is open on Highway 441.

Truck farming was going strong by the 1960s and 1970s. Rabun growers produced cabbage, potatoes, tomatoes, cucumbers, corn, squash, beans, turnips, apples, blueberries, syrup cane and other truck crops for market. At that time children who were out of school in the summer helped with the harvesting. The growers paid 3 cents a pound for picking beans or 90 cents a bushel. A crew of 30-50 good pickers could pick 150-175 bushels a day, but it was hard, hot work.

Rabun County won the blue ribbon for the best display of apples at the Georgia State Fair in the fall of 1911. Rabun County was noted for its apples. A few apple trees planted on most early farms had been increased and became a great source of income. With the coming of the Tallulah Falls Railroad, large orchards were planted and apple packing houses were built in Tiger and Mountain City. At that time there were about 50 commercial orchards in the county. *The Clayton Tribune* reported in Octo-

ber of 1933 that J.F. Cathey, manager of the Mountain City Packing Company, had 35 employees in his packing house and expected to sell 30,000 bushels of apples. That same year was an off year for Tiger Mountain Orchards, which was shipping out 8,000 bushels, half their normal crop.

A lot of changes have come about since the first settlers farmed in Rabun County. This year the Northeast Georgia Locally Grown Market successfully marketed and sold their produce online. In addition to produce, they sold pasture-raised meat, fresh-baked bread and goat cheese. Customers in Rabun, Habersham, White, Stephens and Hall counties accounted for more than 1,000 individual sales totaling almost \$25,000. This is one of the few places where you can find fresh, local foods all year long. Individual buyers in Rabun County placed their orders online and then picked them up on Wednesdays at Scott’s Nursery in Clayton. Habersham buyers picked up theirs at the former Market Cafe in



Farmer in Persimmon with three mules, early 1930s

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“Preserving the Past for the Future”

Take Note

Meeting Time We meet each month on the third Thursday with the exception of December. The meetings are at 5:30 p.m. at the historical society building, 81 North Church St. in Clayton. Please join us.

Hours of Operation Monday & Friday: 10:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.
Wednesday: 12:30 p.m.-4:30 p.m.
By appointment for your special group tour

Membership If you are not currently a member, we welcome you to join. Membership dues are:
Friend of the Historical Society: \$15, individual annual membership
Supporting Member: \$100, individual life membership
Dual Supporting Members: \$150, life membership for two individuals in the same household
Benefactor: \$250, individual life membership

Your membership is important to us, and your continuing support, both in money and time, is essential to our success. We gratefully welcome these new supporting members:

Thomas Allison	Clifford Bell	Christopher Curran	Jenny Lincoln
Lee Silverman	Cricket Werkheiser	Bill Wilder	

Answer to Vintage Rabun Challenge: Rabun County! Do you have ideas on what form our celebration should take in 2019? Please let us know. It is not too early to start planning!

Email: rabunhsy@windstream.net
Website: www.rabunhistory.org