

## The Mills of Mill Creek

In earlier days, the people of Shenandoah County lived pretty self-sufficiently, as did the citizens of rural communities everywhere. One indication of local self-sufficiency is the number of mills that once existed. People didn't buy bread readymade, they baked it themselves. And they often didn't buy the flour to make the bread, they grew the wheat for the bread, in which case they needed a grist mill to grind the wheat. In his book, *The Rinkers of Virginia, their neighbors and kin, and the Shenandoah Valley*, the late D. Warrick Burruss included a chapter about the mills of Mill Creek near Mt. Jackson.

The earliest known mill, built around 1734, belonged to Benjamin Allen, and its presence is believed to be the source of the stream's name, Mill Creek. A sawmill was added to the industry on this site around 1800. The grist mill was burned in 1864, rebuilt after the war, and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, then owner J.I. Triplett converted the water power there into a hydro-electric power plant which generated electricity for the town of Mt. Jackson. The site of this operation is just south of Mill Creek bridge on Rt. 698.

The next mill built was Michael Sigler's pug mill, located a short distance below the Allen mill. A pugmill used water power to make plaster for building construction. This mill was in operation in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and its power came from the Allen mill dam, from water that ran through trunks placed along the creek bank.

About a half mile west of Mt. Jackson on Rt. 263 was John Morgan's fulling mill, built in the early 1800s. A fulling mill was used in the process of making linen from flax or hemp or woolens and felt from wool. It was burned during the Civil War but was rebuilt and was last owned by the Landis family. Many people remember when they used the old building as a cannery.

The Rinkerton Mills, a grist mill and saw mill, were constructed around 1800 and were located about a mile and a half west of town on the north bank of the creek. The dam for the mill was located across Rt. 263 from the Grace Church cemetery and stones from the dam can still be seen in the creek. Later a lumber-drying kiln was added and later still a chopping mill was built. All of these buildings were burned during the war but completely rebuilt by Levi Rinker in 1865. They were in operation until the early 1900s.

Nearby on the north side of Crooked Run, Samuel Walton erected a tan yard around 1795. Though not a mill, this industry also took advantage of the water power available from Mill Creek.

On the north bank of Mill Creek just off of Rt. 263, John Moore operated a saw mill and hemp mill beginning in the early 1800s. The hemp would have been crushed and fibers used to make rope and twine and also as a substitute for flax in the manufacture of linen. Eventually a grist mill was added at this site.

The last of the grist mills was the Mt. Clifton Mill, in operation prior to 1813 and located at the base of the hill between Rt. 263 and the creek and south of Rt. 716. At that time it was known as Jacob Hammon's Mill, though it, like the other operations described here, were owned and operated by different families over the years.

In addition to those mills listed above, six saw mills are documented in the area, and near Rinkerton Mills, in 1811, a water powered mill for a boring and grinding machine was built for Jacob Lindamood. Lindamood had served an apprenticeship under Christian Huffman, Woodstock gunsmith, so the boring machine was probably to be used in the manufacture of guns.

As Warrick Burruss wrote, "Mill Creek provided a lot of much-needed water power in earlier days. Our ancestors could not have accomplished what they did without it."

This moment from the past was presented by the Shenandoah County Historical Society.