

The Chatham Historical Journal

Volume 4, Number 1

Chatham County, North Carolina

January 1991

WATER-POWERED GRIST MILLS IN CHATHAM COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA AS OF 1880

Wade Hadley

Grist mills have existed on the streams of Chatham County since the mid-1700s. They have been located mainly at places where natural features of the stream bed and the adjacent land present characteristics favorable for a water-power installation. The 1880 agricultural and manufacturing census records information from forty-three flour and grist mills in Chatham County. All were water-powered. Over the years a series of improved mills were built at some sites, and there may be additional sites at which mills once existed and were abandoned before 1880 and possibly others at which mills were built for the first time after that date.

The census was taken between June 1, 1879, and May 31, 1880. In some places, figures on the census records had been crossed out and others placed above them. In a few cases the figures for grain received and products are identical for pairs of neighboring mills. In view of this, the writer could not but have doubts as to how accurate in general the data reported might be.

Types of Water Wheels in Use

The overshot wheel was in use at 13 mills, the breast at 3 mills, the tub at 2 mills, and the turbine at 25 mills. There were 18 mills powered by a single unit of one of these types and 25 mills powered by multiple units, as follows:

- 3 mills with 2 overshot wheels
- 1 mill with 2 breast wheels
- 1 mill with 1 tub and 1 overshot wheel
- 15 mills with 2 turbines
- 3 mills with 3 turbines
- 1 mill with 4 turbines
- 1 mill with 5 turbines

The horsepower recorded for each mill seems to be for an individual water wheel, not the combined power in mills with multiple power units. The overshot wheels ranged from 10 to 40 horsepower, with an average of 17.64 hp. The breast wheels ranged from 8 to 15 hp., average 11.66 hp. Tub wheels had



HADLEY MILL, on Landrum Creek, Hickory Mountain Township, Chatham County, North Carolina, was built in 1886 after an earlier mill on the same site was destroyed by fire. This mill was entered in the National Register of Historic Places around 1980, along with the adjacent Hadley House.

(Photograph courtesy of Wade Hadley)

11 horsepower, and the turbine wheels ranged from 8 to 30 horsepower, averaging 16.64 hp.

The fall of water under which the water wheels operated ranged from 3 to 24 feet. The average fall for the 43 mill sites was 11.65 feet.

Runs of Stones and Estimated Maximum Capacity

The machine for grinding grain consisted of a lower stationary "bed stone" and an upper rotating "runner stone." This milling unit was termed a run (or pair) of stones. Two mills had but one run of stones, 33 mills had 2 runs, 7 mills had 3 runs, and 1 mill had 4 runs.

The estimated grinding capacity recorded for the mills ranged from 15 to 200 bushels a day; the average was 70 bushels per day. Eight mills were rated at 100 bushels per day, but only two exceeded that figure.

Materials Received and Products

The grain received by the mills was recorded under two headings: "bushels of wheat" and "bushels of other grain." The latter consisted mainly or totally of corn, in all probability. However, the 1870 census records some of the mills in Chatham County as grinding oats.

The forty-three mills received a combined total of 113,350 bushels of wheat and 99,250 bushels of

other grain during the year just past. The wheat was valued at from \$1.00 to \$1.50 per bushel with the average being \$1.17. The other grain (corn) was valued at from \$.50 to \$.90 per bushel, with the average being \$.75.

Combined annual totals of the products from the forty-three mills were:

Wheat flour	22,670 barrels
Corn meal	5,299,000 pounds
Feed	3,699,250 pounds
Hominy (grits)	21,475 pounds
Other products	\$1,770.00 in value

The total value of the above products, as determined by the individual mills, was approximately \$238,665.00. The annual value of the products from individual mills varied from \$357.00 to \$19,360.00, and averaged \$5,550.00.

There were four mills which produced wheat flour only. All four were located in Cape Fear Township. There were three mills which did not produce flour. The remaining thirty-six produced both wheat flour

and corn meal. Only eleven mills produced corn hominy (grits). Annual production of this item from individual mills varied from 50 to 16,800 pounds and averaged 1,952 pounds.

The most productive mill was the J. M. McIver and Co. mill on Deep River in Gulf Township. Annual output reported was 1,600 barrels of wheat flour, 432,000 pounds of corn meal, 158,000 pounds of feed, and 16,800 pounds of hominy. This mill operated with two 30-horsepower turbines and had three runs of stones.

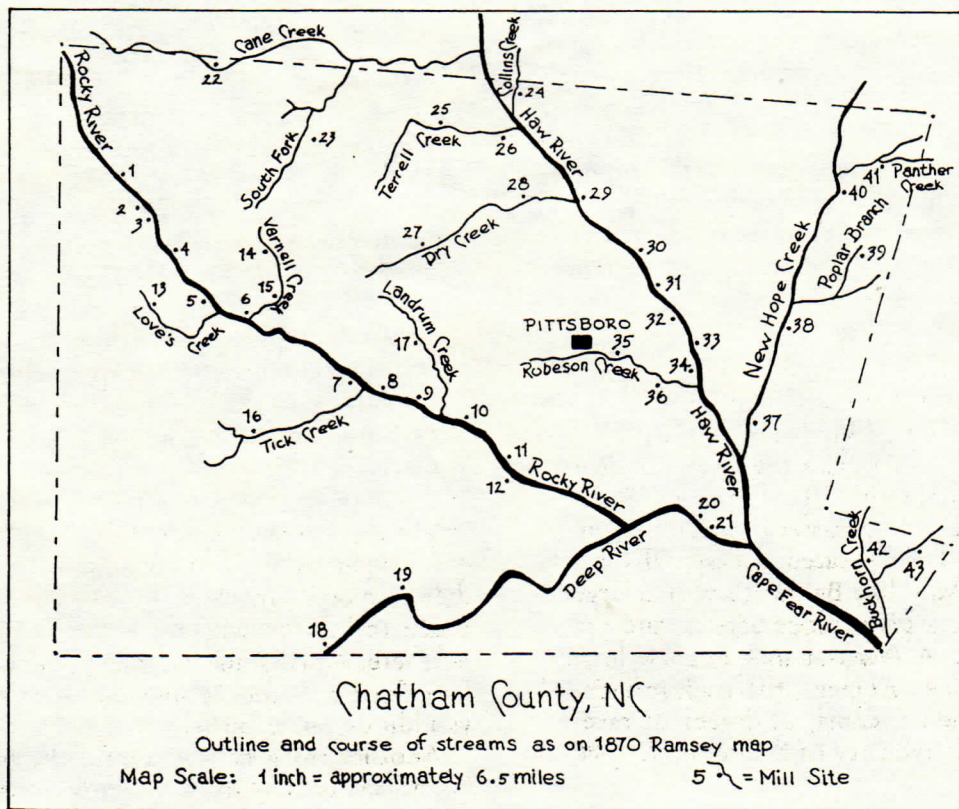
Months in Operation

Eighteen of the mills reported that they were on full-time operation twelve months of the year. Twenty were idle for one to four months during the year, and five were idle from six to eleven months of the year. Eleven of the mills operated on a part-time basis for periods of two to eight months during the year. This was in addition to their months of full operation and/or of idle status.

(Continued on back page)

LOCATION OF WATER-POWERED GRIST MILLS IN CHATHAM COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA, AS OF 1880

NUMBER ON MAP	NAME OF OWNER	CAPITAL INVESTED	VALUE OF PRODUCTS FOR ONE YEAR
ON ROCKY RIVER			
1	L. T. Teague	\$ 2,000	\$ 3,500
2	Vestal and Pike	1,800	3,540
3	Whitehead and Fox	2,000	4,650
4	Samuel Siler	2,500	3,430
5	Murchison, Dark and Co.	3,000	6,416
6	W. --- Dark	4,000	9,350
7	George W. Brooks	1,500	4,202
8	Roderick Clark	3,000	4,650
9	Robert N. Green	2,500	3,425
10	Clegg Mill	3,000	6,106
11	Peoples Mill	3,000	3,200
12	J. H. Tysor and Co.	2,000	4,636
ON LOVES CREEK			
13	Samuel Siler	1,500	2,887
ON VARNELL CREEK			
14	Isaac Clegg	500	357
15*	Nathaniel R. Moody	1,500	2,000
ON TICK CREEK			
16*	John W. Thomas	1,500	2,200
ON LANDRUM CREEK			
17	William P. Hadley	2,500	6,625
ON DEEP RIVER			
18	J. R. and A. J. Jones	5,000	14,630
19	J. M. McIver and Co.	10,000	19,360
20	J. W. Cole	(?) 500	10,520
21	American Iron and Steel Co.	(?) 300	10,520
ON HAW RIVER			
29	James Pace	6,000	10,522
30	Carney Bynum	3,000	9,600
31	Albert Holt	3,300	12,000
32	Stephen Henley	3,000	3,150
33	Williams and Co.	1,000	2,725
34	Moore and Co.	2,000	2,736



Map compiled by Wade Hadley and drawn by Martha Jourdan.

NUMBER ON MAP	NAME OF OWNER	CAPITAL INVESTED	VALUE OF PRODUCTS FOR ONE YEAR
ON CANE CREEK			
22	H. W. and P. C. Dixon	\$ 2,500	\$ 2,500
ON LITTLE CANE CREEK			
23*	Andrews and Co.	2,500	4,100
ON COLLINS CREEK			
24	Oliver Lamb	3,000	6,275
ON TERRELL CREEK			
25	T. L. Love	1,500	1,735
26	Luther Baldwin	3,000	6,275
ON DRY CREEK			
27*	William J. Dorsett	1,800	1,085
28*	A. B. Chapin	3,000	668
ON ROBESON CREEK			
35	Pendergrass Mill	1,000	900
36	Hatch Mill	1,500	7,040
ON NEW HOPE CREEK			
40*	Sears and Williams	2,500	4,757
38*	Baldwin	3,000	2,730
37	James Thomas	3,000	3,150
ON PANTHER CREEK			
41*	Williams and Sears	4,000	6,825
ON POPLAR BRANCH			
39*	Edward Council	1,500	637
ON BUCKHORN CREEK			
43*	Gaston Rollins	2,000	9,000
42*	Cross and Mims	1,400	9,000

*Position on stream uncertain

NOTES: The above are mills active around 1880 with the ownerships as of that time. Some of the mills may have been known by other names before or after 1880. Dixon Mill on Cane Creek is now in Alamance County.

Custom and Merchant Grinding

Custom millers did not buy or sell grain. They got their income from a portion or toll of the grain earned by milling for others. Merchant millers bought grain, milled it, and sold the product for their own account. Twenty mills reported that their product was custom grinding only. Twenty-three mills reported their product was a mixture of custom and merchant grinding. The portion of the product from their mills done as custom grinding ranged from fifty to ninety percent.

Conclusion

For around 150 years, grist mills were important commercial enterprises within their communities, but while the water-powered grist mill no longer exists as a viable enterprise in Chatham County, many former mill locations are recognizable. The restored Baldwin's Mill on Terrell Creek in eastern Hadley Township remains intact and is operated occasionally for short demonstrations. Mills like Baldwin's with a large overshot wheel present a picturesque aspect, and are still sought by artists. A few old mill houses, long inactive, remain. In some instances, the rock foundations, portions of breached dams, or traces of raceways remain as the only evidence of former mills. ■

THE REV. THOMAS MANN, PIONEER CIRCUIT-RIDING PREACHER

J. Lamont Norwood

To be sure, the Rev. Mann felt that when Christ told his disciples in Luke 9:62, "Anyone who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is not worthy of the kingdom." Rev. Mann felt that not only did that mean Rev. Mann, but that means Rev. Mann particularly. Given someone like that, what would happen if a romance developed? The answer is, it would be a disaster. Apparently, here in Chatham, Ann Snipes encouraged him at first but later laid down an ultimatum: either you take a station or good-bye. His diary the next week is taken up with [his dilemma]. At one point he says, "My mind is like a troubled sea." Literally, he walked around in a daze for a week before he finally decided to hit the trail again, and when he left, going to the coast to an assignment, I think he knew that that was it. Well, [his decision] led to an observation, one of the most beautiful I know of. He said that when he got to heaven he hoped Ann Snipes would be there waiting for him. Is there anyone here can up that one? Well, Ann Snipes unfortunately had ideas of living in this life, too, so she soon married someone else, and understandably she disappears from the diary.

Rev. Mann was stern, unbending. He'd throw you out of the church at the drop of a hat. He'd throw

[J. Lamont Norwood presented the program at the Chatham County Historical Association meeting on June 10, 1990. The full tape recording of his talk, and an almost-complete transcript of the tape, are available at the Pittsboro Memorial Library. A narrative based on his presentation began in the last issue of the *Chatham Historical Journal*.]

you out for dancing, absenteeism, wife abuse. (It strikes me that with the wife abuse one — he said, "He abused his wife, kicked her and hit her" — we have what is called a redundancy. Any one of the three would be enough, and the husband was guilty of all three.) He mentions at one point, in Virginia, he threw so many out that the others quit. You get a sort of geometrical expansion: if you throw the husband out, the wife hasn't any way to get there, so she's out too. And he threw out so many that he showed up to preach and the house was empty. And (and this is pure speculation) it well may be that the management noted that too, which might have had something to do with his "retirement." But that's a personal opinion; nothing is said about that in the diary.

There are just a few things you have to remember to get an accurate picture of Rev. Mann. One was his preoccupation with his watch. He was punctual and didn't tolerate any laxness in others. If you were supposed to be somewhere at a given time, you'd better be there. Once some people came a little late for a love feast and they found the door closed — and he wouldn't open it, either.

Another thing he was careful about was the care of his horse. It is quite obvious from the entries in his diary that he didn't take that lightly. That he had had his horse shod might be the most important entry for that day in his diary, because that horse was important to him. In fact, I can go one up in caring. There was some young preacher that didn't have the proper recommendations and came down here (the standard way of learning before they had seminaries and such was to go around with some minister) from Virginia to ride around with him — learn the trade, so to speak. Rev. Mann told him, "You're not going anywhere with me with that moth-eaten horse." He told him he could "trade for one I wouldn't be ashamed to be seen with," and recommended a trader in the community, "or you can get on that horse and go back to Virginia." The young man chose the latter. Evidently he decided that he and the Rev. Mann were not going to get along well.

Those were tough times. Hardly anyone was tougher or more dedicated than the pioneer, circuit-riding Methodist preacher, such as Thomas Mann. ■

The *Chatham Historical Journal* is an occasional publication of the Chatham County Historical Association. Its purpose is to disseminate items of historical interest about Chatham County. Material, which should be previously unpublished, may include photographs, private papers, church or organization records, monographs, or letters. Items should be of reasonable length and should include source(s) of research material.

Chatham County Historical Association Officers, 1990
Pres., Gene Brooks, Box 83, Pittsboro 27312 542-2882
VP, Evelyn Powell, Box 326, Pittsboro 542-2537
Historian, Marti Dreyer, Box 866, Pittsboro 542-4124
Treas., John Cooper, Box 1096, Pittsboro 542-3719
Sec., Jane Pyle, Box 913, Pittsboro 542-3603