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OLD MILLS OF FAR SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

By Emory L. Hamilton

Preface

Not long ago nearly every rural community in Southwest Virginia had a grist mill, and oftentimes one mill house enclosed both a grist and a flour mill. Oftentimes, they served as gathering places for the men of the community, especially on Saturdays. Nearly all were water powered. The overshot wheel type predominated, because even a brook in the hills could be turned through a flume and made to spill on the big overshot wheel. This type also was the most picturesque. However, turbine power wheels were especially used in large creek or river mills where it was necessary to empound water with dams.

In order to preserved as much history as possible of these mills, Emory L. Hamilton collected what information he could about as many of them as he could, and L. F. Addington photographed them.

The Wynn Mill

Located west of Jonesville, Lee Co., VA, just off highway 58, known today as the Wynn Mill, but in earlier days as the Browning-Wynn Mill.

The mill was built sometime after 1863 and was then only two stories high. The third floor was added about 1898, when the rolling Mill Machinery was added for making flour.

Not only did this mill serve residents of Lee County, but some came from

Tennessee and Kentucky to mill. The mill operated until sometime in the 1930's and was then in possession of John C. Wynn.

Dr. James G. Browning, a medical doctor and builder of the mill was born in Russell Co., VA, July 27, 1827. Died at his home at the Methodist Camp Ground, Jonesville, VA, January 17, 1896. He married Martha Ann Farley, who was born April 23, 1829 and died January 11, 1896.

John Calhoun Wynn, who last operated the mill was a son of Acles Porter Wynn and Alafair Ledford, and was born in Harlan Co., KY, December 24, 1861, died at the Camp Ground in Lee Co., VA, August 21, 1940. He married Henrietta Browning at the old Browning home just opposite the mill. Henrietta was born September 1, 1866 and died January 22, 1947.

Most, if not all the machinery is still intact in this old mill, but the building is rapidly deteriorating.

The Ball Mill

Located on the south side of Route 58, just west of Rose Hill, in Lee Co., VA.

Built by Moses S. Ball, about 1878. There was once a water operated saw mill on the north part of the building. The wheel of this mill is the horizontal type "turbine-wheel". The mill remained in the Ball family until 1935, when it was sold to Joe Cowan, who continued to grind meal at this mill for sometime afterward.

The original mill house which was part log and part frame was torn down by Mr. Cowan, and the present building erected on the old foundation. The original machinery, mill wheels and burrs of the original mill are still intact and in operational use today, even though the old mill has been silent for several years.

The Gibson Mill

On Indian Creek, west of Ewing, in Lee Co., VA, and upstream a short distance from the old Wireman Mill stands the fast decaying Gibson Mill. Built by the Gibson family and managed by them for most of the years of its operation.

J. H. Humphrey, J. J. Gibson and J. N. Gibson replaced the original dam which was made of logs with the present dam of limestone rocks, and built the present building around 1910. This mill was a success from the beginning and made money for its operators. Around 1917 it was operating

full blast.

Different individuals have operated the mill among them was A. M. Clark, B. F. Wail, a Mr. Profitt, A. M. Blakemore and perhaps others. Blakemore was the last to operate the mill and perhaps operated it longer than anyone else.

Wireman's Mill

On Indian Creek in Lee Co., VA, west of Ewing, and only a short distance downstream from the Gibson Mill.

Built by a Mr. Wireman sometime prior to the Civil War, and a skirmish between Confederate and Union soldiers took place around this old mill during the Civil War which is locally referred to as "The Battle of Wireman's Mill."

The original mill dam was made of logs and the mill was run by a large wooden "under shot" wheel.

The mill was sold to W. H. Pridemore, commonly known as "Uncle Billy" who in turn sold it to W. P. Nash, who was a grandson of Mr. Wireman, the first owner, and Nash was a bachelor. In 1921, Nash replaced the old log dam with a concrete dam, and erected the present frame building, the original being of log. Both a grist and flour mill, but never a success for reasons unknown, and never made money for its operators. It was remodeled and converted to a rolling mill and Nash's nephew, Carroll Johnston from Knoxville, was the Miller. This attempt was another failure and for several years afterwards the old mill operated only one day a week grinding feed for livestock.

After Nash's death the mill was sold at auction to a Mr. J. D. Hurst, who turned it into a furniture factory, which was also a failure.

The building is now owned by a Mr. Willard Brooks, and has at time been used as a tenant house, room shaving been built on the side of the mill. When I visited the mill in 1967, some disgusted tenant has painted on a wall, "We Democrats can't live here." Recently the old mill has been repaired and a very attractive log restaurant has been built and opened nearby as a tourist attraction.

The Bush Mill

The Bush Mill on Amos Branch in the Copper Ridge section of Scott Co., VA, is sometimes called the Bond Mill. It is now owned by the Scott County

School Board and is used by F. F. A. students as a tobacco barn.

Valentine Bush and his wife Nancy Gose moved from Russell County and bought land, and the first mill was either built by them or was already on the land they bought. The original mill was destroyed by fire, and the present mill was built by Bush about 1896 or 1897. The builders were W. T. Frazier, Stephen and William Bush, sons of Valentine.

The Machinery, part of which is intact was purchased from Tyler and Tate of Knoxville, shipped by rail to Gate City, and hauled by log wagons to the mill site by J. R. Frazier and Jim Bush.

The mill now has a large, metal overshot wheel, but the original was a wooden wheel built by James and Franklin Stewart. The sluice way that carried water to the wheel is no longer standing.

Limestone rock to build the foundations was hauled from Copper Ridge and the mill race dug along side the foot of a hill for some five hundred feet represents a stupendous labor job, the mountain base being an out cropping of limestone.

The mill was once owned by S. H. Bond, hence the "Bond Mill."

Valentine Bush, the first owner also had a water powered sawmill upstream from the mill and on the stream below the mill he operated a Carding Machine. Valentine Bush, born in 1809 is said to have lived to be 105 years old.

In 1866, a 16 year old son of Valentine Bush had taken a horse to water at the fork of Amos Branch and while sitting on the drinking horse a shot was fired from ambush and the young boy tumbled from the horse into the waters of Amos branch. The assassin fled and was never caught. The stone at the grave of this boy in the old Nickelsville Cemetery has an epitaph which reads: "He fell at the hands of an assassin."

Duncan Mill

This landmark mill was blown away in the Rye Cove tornado of 1929. It was built by John Duncan, who came into Scott Co., VA around 1835, built the mill and his home on Cove Creek in the edge of Rye Cove. The mill was a log structure and ground both wheat and corn. John Duncan operated it until his wife's death in 1857 when he turned it over to his son-in-law George W. Johnson who ran it until his death in 1866.

Johnson had the log mill torn down and employed Pinkney Carter and George Peters, both noted millwrights, to build a new mill. Carter designed a three story mill with improved equipment for cleaning wheat. The new mill was completed about 1860, just prior to the out break of the Civil War.

This mill flew the Confederate flag and ground flour for the Confederacy all during the Civil War. Grain was hauled in from wherever available, stored and guarded by Confederate soldiers.

The flour left the mill by wagon and ox-drawn wagons for such places as the Confederate encampment at Pound Gap in Wise County on the Virginia-Kentucky line.

The mill was also a recruiting station for the Confederacy. On Saturdays rallies were held and speeches given to encourage enlistment in the Confederate Army.

In 1917 the third story of the mill was torn off and converted again into a two story building and rolling mill machinery added for grinding wheat, which was still in use when the mill was destroyed by a cyclone on May 2, 1929.

Mr. J. F. Johnson of Fort Blackmore told the writer the following story:

"I have heard my father speak of John Duncan standing in the door of the mill on April 15, 1865 when a Negro slave that once belonged to Washington Salling ode up and said, 'Good morning, Uncle John. How is your health? Uncle John have you heard any good news lately?' He replied; 'Nothing except that it ha been reported General Lee surrendered last Friday morning.' The Negro leaned way back in his saddle, clapped his hands and hollowed, 'Bless God for that!' John Duncan jumped out the door and threw a rock at the Negro man. He was chastized for this act and he replied, 'No Negro can shout in front of me after my people have suffered so.' He had three grandsons shot down in one day at Gettysburg."

Brickey Mill

The original Brickey Mill on Stony Creek, north of Ft. Blackmore, in Scott Co., VA, was built about 1845 by Peter Brickey. Peter Brickey ran the mill until his death. After his death the mill fell to his son James Brickey and at his death to his son John Brickey. John traded the mill to George Wolfe who died and left it to his daughter who was a widow Jennings. Mrs. Jennings sold the mill to Will Owens who at his death left it to his son-in-law Graham

G. Brickey.

The present mill was rebuilt by George Wolfe around 1907-1908. The wheels for this mill were made by James Stewart, who along with his father before him were noted millwrights of the Rye Cove section. Much of the mill machinery is intact and the mill ran until just before World War II. The old water wheel at the back of the building has fallen down and almost rotted away. The mill was operated by an "overshot" wheel with the mill race running from a very large spring further up Stony Creek.

Logan Cox Mill

This mill located in Alley Valley of Scott Co., VA is a composite, being made of parts of older mills and is completely functional today. Owned by Mr. Logan Cox who set up the smaller wheel with intentions of generating electricity for his home.

The present metal water wheel of the "overshot" type was installed in 1936 and came from the old Patterson mill which stood about two miles up Plank Creek from this mill.

The first mill on this site was built by Bent Quillen and Henry Kidd, Quillen's son-in-law sometime around the Civil War. Mr. Cox has converted the original old mill house into a home where he now lives and has the present mill machinery in a small building at the rear of the home.

The old mill house foundation is laid up of large limestone rocks. A cool mountained stream has been diverted under the basement floor. By lifting a flat stone in the floor one has access to a fine, clear flowing spring of mountain water.

Logan Cox, Sr., father of the present owner bought the old mill from Bent Quillen.

The Riggs Mill

This mill no longer standing was undoubtedly rebuilt several times, and has been known by different names, depending on ownership. That this was a very early mill is proven by a Scott Co., VA Court Order dated November 13, 1817 wherein Elijah Carter made a motion for alteration in road from his mill to the mouth of his mill branch.

Harry Carter, 1799-1872 owned the mill before the Civil War. The pictured mill was probably built by James Stewart, or his son, who were noted millwrights and neighbors of the Carters. Harry Carter's wife, Polly McNew, 1810-1903, had twin nephews, Moses and Harry Riggs, who lived on with

their Uncle and Aunt after the Riggs family moved to Kentucky. When Harry Riggs was twelve years old, the fingers of his right hand were torn off by the mill, leaving only the thumb.

Upon Harry Carter's death the plantation and mill were left to the twin nephews. Harry Riggs operated the mill until about 1925. One reason for closing it was lack of sufficient water power. It was torn down about 1930.

Patrick Porter Mill

On March 2, 1774, the Court of old Fincastle Co., VA, entered the following order:

"On motion of Patrick Porter, leave is granted him to build a mill on Falling Creek the waters of Clinch."

This is the first order ever recorded for a mill on Clinch River and it was probably the first mill ever built in Scott Co.

There is little doubt that the Porter Mill of 1774 was of log, and that the picture is of a rebuilt mill on the same site and foundation.

Patrick Porter, 1737-1828, and his wife Susanna Walker came to the Clinch from Guilford Co., NC, in 1772, and built a fort house on Falling Creek, as well as the mill some two years later.

All that remains of the old mill today is some limestone rock foundation, a few runs of brick in the old chimney, and the mill burrs which have been moved to the lawn of the Lee Blackwell home nearby.

This mill had one distinction and that was a chimney made of handmade brick. It has been written that Patrick Porter, his brother-in-law Captain John Snoddy and others organized a Masonic Lodge and held their meetings on the second floor of the mill. If this tradition is true it may explain why the old mill had a chimney and fireplaces, as no other known mills in the area had chimneys. Also this may have been the first Masonic Lodge organized west of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

After the Porters, William Nash owned and operated this mill for a number of years and it was sometimes called Nash's Mill. When the mill was rebuilt is unknown, but it was torn down after the turn of the century. This old mill heard the "war whoop" of many Indians as it creaked its way through more than a century of services to the pioneer settlers.

The Beverly Mill

The first mill on this site was a small corn grist mill near the bank of Moccasin Creek, near Gate City, Scott Co., VA. The present mill was built by the Click family, who sold it to a Mr. McClellan. After McClellan it was operated by Cephas Meade and also by his son-in-law, Bill Jennings.

William E. Taylor came into possession of it and had the bolting machinery installed. After Taylor the mill was operated by Preacher Bill Vermillion, Harvey Wolfe, and finally sold to Tom G. Templeton, who was once a Mayor of Appalachia, VA. Emory Bellamy operated the mill for Templeton.

The original dam of this mill was of logs, which was torn out by Mr. Templeton, who put in the present concrete dam. L. Farmer was in charge installing the concrete dam. He purchased a sand rock fence from a Mr. Thomas Henry and hired men to beat the rocks into sand for mixing the concrete. Templeton traded the mill to John Ransom (Rant) Beverly for a farm in Tennessee. Rant Beverly was operating the mill in 1917. Beverly who was born in 1854 sold the mill to Ike Fletcher, who in turn sold to Harvey H. Williams around 1919 or 1920. The present owner is L. Kelly Williams.

The machinery in the mill is the roller type and the mill produced corn meal and flour, as well as feed for livestock. A sawmill installed in the adjoining long shed was also operated by water from the mill wheel. The mill last operated in the 1940's and the machinery is intact.

Culbertson-McConnell Mill

This old mill located northeast of Snowflake on Moccasin Creek in Scott Co., VA, was built by James Culbertson, Jr., probably sometime in the 1880's. The mill was operated by turbine wheels. The original mill had a wooden dam, replaced by a concrete dam because the wooden dam was always washing out and flooding the area downstream.

James Culbertson born 1822, went to California in 1850 to participate in the famous California gold rush, and stayed there for some thirty years, traveling back and forth to see his family who never left Scott Co. His wife was Winney Kilgore.

After the death of Culbertson, the mill was taken over by W. Pat McConnell who had married James Culbertson's daughter, Liza. McConnell rebuilt the mill to three stories in height and put in a rolling mill equipped with Nordike Rolling Mill Machinery manufactured in Indianapolis, Indiana. This remodeling took place around 1915 or 1916. The concrete dam was completed around 1919. At the time of remodeling the mill had three turbine

wheels in three separate pits, one for the grist mill, one for the rolling mill, and the third and largest operated a sawmill, said to be the heaviest mill in the county.

After the death of Pat McConnell in 1929, the mill was sold to a man named Shephard who operated it a short time. It last operated in the 1930's.

The Semones Mill

The old Semones Mill stood on Benges Creek on the south side of Clinch River, about two miles downstream from Dungannon, in Scott Co., VA. It was down this Creek that the half-breed Indian Chief Benge led the Livingstone women, crossing Clinch River nearby at McLain's Fish Trap in 1794, the last Indian raid on the Virginia frontier.

This mill was first built as a wool carding machines by James Addington. The land was a grant to William Addington, father of James. Moses Hoge Semones married Eliza Jane Addington, daughter of James, in 1857, and after marriage took over operation of the carding mill. He converted it into a grist mill for grinding corn about 1910. After Moses Hoge Semones became unable to attend the mill it just stood and rotted down.

Nearby where once the old mill stood, stands the Semones home - a two story combination log and frame building. First built as a two room, two story log building other rooms were added as the family grew.

Mrs. Clarice Semones Lee of St. Paul, VA, says the house was built for her grandfather James Addington who married in 1857, but a log in the older section bears a date of 1849 carved into it.

Caleb Hawkins Mill

This old mill, torn down to make way for Route 58, between Dickensonville and Hansonville operated for many years. The great steel wheel was sold for scrap many years before the mill was torn down.

Built by Caleb Hawkins, the mill was once the hub of community life, consisting of a Roller mill, a Tanning mill which also operated from the mill machinery, and a nearby Blacksmith Shop.

This mill was also once a Voting Precinct of Russell County.

During the life of the mill the following men either owned or operated it: Billy Gilmer, L. A. Matheny, and George Peery.

In 1923, Roy Kessler, who was working at the mill was accidentally caught in the mill machinery and died from his injuries.

The Jessee Mill

The Roller Process Jessee Mill was built between 1889 and 1900, by Andrew Jackson Jessee. It is located on Mill Creek four miles southwest of Cleveland on Route 645 and about six miles from Lebanon, in Russell Co., VA.

The mill was built from lumber grown and sawed on the Jessee farm which consisted of several hundred acres of land. Most of the lumber was yellow poplar and has not deteriorated with age. The machinery in the mill was made in Salem, VA. All the cogs or gears in the machinery are wood. Prior to the building of the present mill there had been a grist mill near the site of the present one for around fifty years.

The building consisted of three floors and the machinery was installed through the three floors. For several years the Jessee Mill was the only roller mill in Russell Co. People came from all over the county and surrounding counties to have meal and flour ground. Huge storage bins were located in the mill for storing grain for the farmers.

Mill Creek during that time was a thriving settlement. There was a general store, a one-room country school and a church.

The mill was owned and operated by Jack Jessee until his death in 1922. His son, Wiley E. Jessee operated it for ten years. The mill closed in 1932.

Mr. Joe Axem served as the first miller at the Jessee Mill. Melvin Kestner operated the mill for twenty-five or thirty years. He lived in the white house just below the Jessee home. Jamie Chafin operated the mill for sometime, also Tilton Jessee. Other men who served as millers sometime during the life of the mill are as follows: Vince Fields, Malcom Buchanan, Red Joe Jessee, Clint Fields, Bruce Campbell and Newton Massie.

Jack Jessee built a large brick home in 1883 and lived there until his death, which house is still standing. The home is located just below the mill. The lumber was sawed on the place, and the carvings on the doors and wood work was hand carved. Located on the second floor hall is a red stained glass window which Mr. Jessee imported from England when the house was built.

In Mr. Jessee's later life, he was unable to go to the mill, but he would lie in bed and see people coming to the mill through a large mirror near his bedroom window. He always wanted everyone to come in and talk with him.

Elk Garden Mill

This mill located just across the road from the Stuart Mansion at Elk Garden, in Russell Co., VA, is the only brick mill known to have been built in extreme southwest Virginia.

Built by Aaron Hendricks sometime between 1823 and 1840, the mill served the Elk Garden community and later the Stuart plantation for many years, grinding corn, wheat, buck wheat and feed for livestock.

Aaron Hendricks was a son of Thomas Hendricks who owned the land from around 1769 to 1823, and Thomas built the Stuart Mansion about 1806. The land fell to Aaron Lilburn Hendricks who sold it in 1868 to William Alexander Stuart, father of Governor Henry Carter Stuart and the Governor held the land from around 1880 to his death, when it passed to State Senator Harry C. Stuart in 1933, and is now owned by the Stuart Land and Cattle Company, the largest cattle ranch east of the Mississippi.

Governor Henry Carter Stuart was a cousin of the Civil War Confederate General J. E. B. Stuart.

Robinson Mill

Located about 300 yards from U. S. 23, on Clintwood Road at Pound, Wise Co., VA, stood the old Robinson Mill which was washed away in the flood of 1957.

The first mill in this site was built sometime after 1816 by James Mullins and Greenberry Robinson. From the Russell County records we find that James Mullins and Greenberry Robinson bought several thousand acres of land on Pound, Indian Creek and Bold Camp creeks in 1815. Two years later Robinson sold his interest in the land and moved to Pike Co., KY.

It is said that James Mullins built his house near where the Gus Roberson house once stood and that he built a mortar for pounding corn into meal nearby. This pounding mill was first built for his own use, but a short time later he conceived the idea of enlarging it and operating it by horse-power, and people of the Pound area would come for miles around to Mullins' pound for their meal.

Mullins continued to operate the pound until 1837, when he sold to William Roberson, who moved there from Gladeville (now Wise), and replaced the pound with a small watermill which he operated by himself and his son, James, until the year 1857, when James Roberson employed C. Pinkney Carter, of Scott Co., VA, to build the mill which was washed away in 1957. It was probably at the time that Carter rebuilt the mill that rolling machinery

was added for making flour.

William Roberson operated the mill until about 1869, and James Roberson from then until about 1900; and Augustus Roberson from then until about 1934. Augustus was the last to operate the mill and he was a son of James Roberson, the former owner.

The old mill was four stories high. The first floor contained the water wheel and machinery. The second floor the corn mill and the third the flour mill. The wheat was poured into hoppers on the second floor and was carried by conveyors to the top floor, cleaned and then brought back to the second floor where it was ground, and then again to the third floor where it was bolted, ending up again on the first floor through elevators to the waiting customer.

The old mill had a forebay and overshot wheel. Later Gus Roberson installed a turbine wheel. There was also a sawmill connected to the old mill which operated from the water power of the mill.

Bickley Mills

In Castlewood, on lower Mill Creek there are the foundations of two old water mills and three abandoned mill burrs. In these remnants of a by-gone day one could almost say lies buried the history of Castlewood - the history of the first settlements ever made along the Clinch River, for it was around this spot that John Morgan led his settlers in 1769. Little is known of Morgan and his settlers who came into the beautiful Clinch River Valley, other than that each was to take up 400 acres of land for settlement. We do not know the names of any of the original settlers for sure, other than John Morgan and John Smith, not even the number in the settlement party, or from whence they came.

Somewhere in this vicinity also lived the legendary Jacob Cassell, for whom Cassell's Woods was named, shrouded in the mists of the past, about whom all sorts of legendary tales are told. Despite the fact that he was an ordinary person, but who probably preceded even Morgan's settlement the place bears his name after more than two centuries have blown over his dim footprint.

Mill Creek is a clear, beautiful stream emerging from under the red hills of Russell and cascading over an ancient limestone cliff to form a lovely waterfall. Just below this fall, which furnished water for the mill race, lie the two foundations and three grinding wheels, nostalgic reminders of a restless roaming race of men who were not content to remain here, but who helped to settle the great central part of America.

Nearest to the fall is the smaller and older of the two foundations. Some fifteen feet downstream is the other and larger of the two foundations and here lies the three heavy stone grinding wheels. This latter mill, built probably around 1783, creaked and groaned its way through well over a century of time, and lasted well into the memory of older citizens of Castlewood. No doubt the Red Men many times gazed upon these mills with hatred, seeing them as the symbols of the ever encroaching white men upon their land.

From scanty records it appears that John Lynch, who was a merchant and who did not live in the area had the smaller mill built and it was probably operated for him by Frederick Fraley. Colonel Daniel Smith, who was assistant Surveyor for old Fincastle County, which Russell was then a part of, wrote to his superior Colonel William Preston, on March 22, 1774, saying: "Yesterday, (March 21, 1774) I surveyed John Lynch's mill seat."

At this time Smith was making surveys for the original settlers from 1769, and Lynch either had the mill in operation at this time or soon thereafter. We also find in the court records of old Fincastle County in the year 1773 where John Lynch and his brother Christopher Lynch, business partner, brought suit against Castlewood residents for debts which appear to have been made at the mill. No record has been found permitting the erection of this mill and it may have been erected without permit sometime between 1769 and 1774.

John Lynch assigned his "mill seat" property to Frederick Fraley, the latter having apparently settled upon the land when he arrived from Rowan Co., NC in 1769. It is highly probable that Fraley had managed the mill for Lynch before he bought it, and it may be that he and his neighbors built the mill soon after their arrival in 1769, as bread is a necessity and a means of obtaining it would have been their first consideration.

Sometime around 1780, Frederick Fraley seems to have sold the mill to Henry Hamlin, and moved to the Moores Fort property in lower Castlewood which he had bought. Before acquiring the mill seat Hamlin had been living on land on the north side of Clinch River opposite the mill. Hamlin received his patent for the mill land sold him by Fraley from the Washington County Court on November 11, 1782, but had possession for sometime prior to receiving the patent.

Hamlin had the second mill built sometime around 1782 or 1783, for it was surely this mill upon which Charles Bickley, Simon Auxier and Henry Dickenson were working when 17 Indians attacked and scalped Ann Bush,

later Ann Niece. It was around this old mill which was undoubtedly built of logs that the community grew. The mill shown in the picture while on the same foundation has to be of later construction.

Again we go to Daniel Smith, the Surveyor and Captain of Militia for Confirmation. In a letter written to Colonel William Campbell, dated May 19, 1783, he writes:

"On my return from the Cumberland, I came through Cassell's Woods, just after the Indians had been at the Fort at Hamlin's Mill."

Henry Hamlin ran the mill for a few years and on June 19, 1787 sold it to James Bush with the deed showing, "it being part of land patented to him on November 12, 1782, the same land he purchased from Frederick Fraley. As further evidence of Bush's ownership is a Russell County deed of September 17, 1795 which reads: "lying on the waters of Moccasin Creek and Clinch River up to Bush's Mill Creek."

James Bush sold the mill tract on May 27, 1800 to Charles Bickley. It was Charles Bickley who put Bickley's Mills on the map, and who still had possession of it at his death in 1839.

Under Bickley's management Bickley's Mills became a trading center for the western frontier. He converted it into a rolling mill for grinding wheat and buckwheat. He opened up a mercantile business which flourished. One of the old Bickley Mills ledgers is now in possession of Mr. L. E. Gibson of Castlewood, a descendant of Bickley. Many of the items mentioned in the 1830's sound strange today.

Charles Bickley not only expanded the mill, but built a sawmill further upstream, and along with Henry Dickenson, as a partner had installed Carding and Fulling Machines for cloth work. In his will dated April 3, 1825, Henry Dickenson leaves to his son, Henry, Jr., "My interest in the Carding and Fulling machines at Charles' Bickley's."

A Carding Machine was a machine for carding wool by separating fibers and cleaning them of extraneous matter, making it soft and ready for the bobbin. Before invention of the Carding Machine, and for a long time after, wool was "carded" by hand with devices known as wool cards. The wool cards were brush like devices with stiff wire bristles for combing the wool and removing foreign matter much as the carding machine did, but much slower.

A Fulling Machine was for fulling cloth by means of pestles or stampers

which beat and pressed it to a close, compact state, cleaned it, and made a finer, less coarse cloth.

Here at Bickley's Mills on February 3, 1832, was established a post office, with John Bickley, son of Charles, as postmaster, known as Bickley's Mills, Russell Co., VA. This post office continued to serve Castlewood until February 1, 1907. Also here, for several years the "Bickley's Mills Post" newspaper was published, copies of which can still be found as proud possessions of Castlewood residents.

The late Mrs. Mamie Gose, descendant of both Charles Bickley and Henry Dickenson, and who remembered the last old mill, told me, "it stood and rotted and finally the wind blew it down."

The William Gray Mill

I would like to have known William Gray. He must have been a good man, deeply religious, but humane enough to serve the Biblical wine to his workmen at the end of each long day. This Biblical wine was made from the squeezed comb of honey and is known as Methium or Mede, but by the people of the day was called "Methiglum".

In 1813 William Gray married Nancy Green Stallard and soon afterward built his log house in a bend of Clinch River, a short distance downriver from Dungannon in Scott Co., VA, where his wife's two grandfathers had carved out a home on the frontier when it was still plagued by hostile Indians. Here through ingenuity and hard work he built his plantation of several hundred acres into a self-sufficient and productive farm that eventually made him one of the wealthiest men of his day and all without the help of human slavery.

Perhaps the first addition to the plantation was a mill built about 1835 to furnish bread for himself and neighbors. Mr. Otto Dingus, great grandson of Gray, tore the mill down in 1957, and retains a vivid memory of some of the unique and unusual construction methods used in the old log mill house. The wall logs he used to build a house in Dungannon setting the logs in a vertical position, instead of the usual horizontal method. He states that the poplar cap log on the west side of the mill house was 32 feet long and so perfectly hewn, that when he sawed it into lumber there was less than a quarter inch variation in thickness in the entire 32 feet of length. The log had been hewn 10 inches thick and 18 inches wide. The rafters were very unique, being hewn 5 inches square at the eave end, tapering to 2 inches square at the ridge where they crossed and were fastened together with a wooden dowel. The

eave ends were doveled into the cap log.

Mr. Dingus has one of the wooden keys that drove the pinion wheel which he uses as a door-stop. The stone mill burrs are ornaments on Mr. Dingus' front lawn.

The mill flume started about three hundred feet upstream from the mill where there was a small dam of earth and limestone rocks about three feet deep and raced down a steep incline to pour onto the large, overshot wheel to turn the machinery.

Mr. Dingus recalls that his grandfather Dingus and his great grandfather Billy Gray were great friends. Once when his grandfather Dingus was visiting, Billy Gray removed a brick from the chimney inside the house and showed him where he had some money hidden, there being no banks in those times. That night Mr. Dingus did not sleep and come morning he went to Gray and advised him to move the money, fearing that if it was stolen, he knowing its whereabouts, that suspicion might kill their lifelong friendship.

Near where Billy Gray's L-shaped log house once stood is one of the few brick spring houses built on the frontier of Virginia, where the family water supply came from and where the milk was kept cool on hot days. It is shaded by a large catalpa tree that must be well over a century old and has been a home for wild bees for many years. The mill and spring house creek have large catalpa trees spaced from the spring house to where the creek empties into Clinch River planted by loving hands in the long ago.

Sometime in the 1890's a school was built on the Gray property and Otto Dingus attended school there in 1899. His father lived across Clinch River and the children were rowed across the river in a flat boat to and from school. It is not known when the last school was taught here, but some of the teachers were Cowan Stallard, Clara Kidd, Mozell Cox, Laura Rhoten, Maggie Wolfe and Bascom Dingus.

Upon a limestone point, a short distance from the old mill site stands a rapidly deteriorating, but architecturally intriguing Free Will Baptist Church built by Billy Gray. The lumber in the building is first quality, whipsawed yellow poplar. Inside the church is one of the few "Mourner's benches" to be found any where. On the lawn of the church stands the solitary tomb of the builder with this epitaph:

In Memory of
William Gray

Born February 13th 1806
Died January 14th 1888
Age 81 years, 11 months, and 1 day

This was his last request to sleep by
the Free Will Baptist Church he built.

His grave could not be dug deep enough in the hard limestone rock, so it was built partially above ground with limestone and mortar, with two flat limestone slabs about four inches thick, fit together to form the top of the tomb.

Around the hillside from the church is a low opening in the hillside that one can only crawl into but which opens up inside to form a fair size cave, and here during the Civil War the Gray family hid their hams and bacon to prevent them being taken by the contending armies and "bushwhackers".