

THE MILLS ON REEMS CREEK

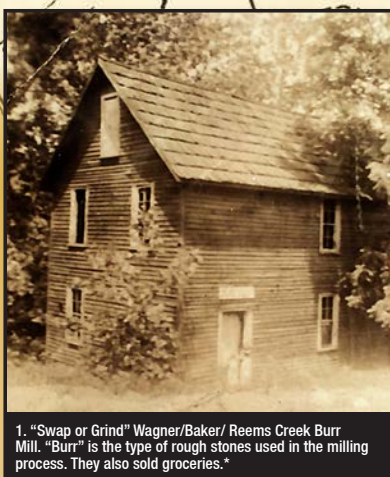


- 1. Wagner/Baker Gristmill
- 2. Biffle/Coleman Gristmill
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- 11. Vance/Hemphill Gristmill

MAP: Road Map of Buncombe County North Carolina copyright 1903 by H. Taylor Rogers, B.M. Lee, Civil Engineer.**

1. Wagner/Baker Gristmill (1800s?-1947)

Typically, mills were named for their owners or the millers. William "Billy" Wagner built the mill, and it was taken over by Thomas W. Baker, Billy's second wife's third husband, after Billy's death. Since locals lived in a subsistence economy, millers would swap or take a portion of the milled grains. William Cullen Bryant described an old mill he saw on Reems Creek in 1870 as "a sort of a fort, something of a store, and a little of a mill."



1. "Swap or Grind" Wagner/Baker/ Reems Creek Burr Mill. "Burr" is the type of rough stones used in the milling process. They also sold groceries.*

2. Biffle/Brittan/Barnard/Coleman/Lisenbee/Robinson and Robinson/Lotspeich/Blackstock Gristmill (1790-1947)



2. This picture was labeled "Old mill on Lake Juanita (Lake Louise) February 1912." It was known as the Blackstock gristmill at this time.*

This is the oldest of the Reems Creek mills and the longest in continuous operation, about 157 years. Adam Biffle and his wife, Catherine, early settlers to the valley, are buried near the mill's Lake Louise location. The second owner, William Brittan, added a sawmill. He sold both mills

and 50 acres to Joseph Barnard, who also operated a drover's inn in Madison County. In 1850 William Coleman, a hatmaker, took over the mills, rebuilding the gristmill. Coleman's granddaughter was married to O. Henry (William Sydney Porter). Louise Wright said that the writer would look at the daily log of customers to create names for his short story characters. Cousins George and Samuel Robinson took over the mill, advertising "The mill is in better condition at present than for several years. Meal, flour, Rye and Buckwheat ground by J.E. Penland." Around 1900 George's wife and six of their children died of tuberculosis, and he left to go out west to Idaho. In 1901 Jacob Lotspeich became the owner and in 1911 he sold the mill to Thomas Weaver Blackstock. In 1947 the building was purchased by the WNC Drug Club to use for their meetings.

3. Weaver/Baird Gristmill (Mid 1850s-1870)

Rev. Michael Montraville Weaver and his brother-in-law, William R. Baird, built a gristmill on a road that could be easily reached by wagon. Other nearby mills were accessible only by foot or horseback. Davolt Hunsucker was the miller. At age 40, Davolt, married Paulina Sherland, age 20, the daughter of another millwright, and they had 12 children. The gristmill ended operation when the Reems Creek Woolen Mill Company took over the building and used the waterpower for their looms. Shortly after, they constructed a new building nearby for their operation.



3. Page from a mill daybook recording customer's name, where they lived, what they brought in, and what they were charged.*

4. Reems Creek Woolen Mill (1870-1914)

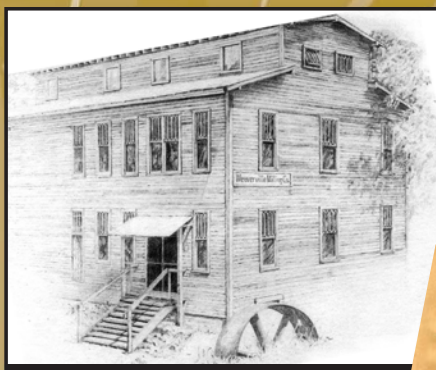
The Reems Creek Woolen Mill stockholders, from a woolen mill in Elizabethton, TN, decided there were enough sheep in this area to supply their mill with wool. A Scotsman, John Cairns, was sent to set up the mill and train workers. His son, John Simpson Cairns, was an eminent ornithologist, who died tragically at the age of 33.

Six kinds of weaves were available: linsey, jean, blanket, flannel, coverlids, and stocking yarn. The fabric and yarn were used to make suits, coats, blankets, and yarn for socks in a variety of colors. When James Wright purchased the woolen mill, it was a failing business due to the popularity of cotton. In 1914 the mill closed, and Edith Vanderbilt purchased the looms and carding machines for Biltmore Estate Industries, then located in Biltmore Village. The vacated building became Charles Medler's woodworking shop. Medler was a master woodworker who made furniture for the Weaverville Presbyterian Church.



4. Buttons worn on a Linsey-Woolsey dress 1860-1870*

5. Wright's Mill/The Reems Creek Milling Company (1914-1980)



5. Sketch of the Reems Creek Milling Company. It served as a restaurant from 1981-2011 run by Sally Smith.*

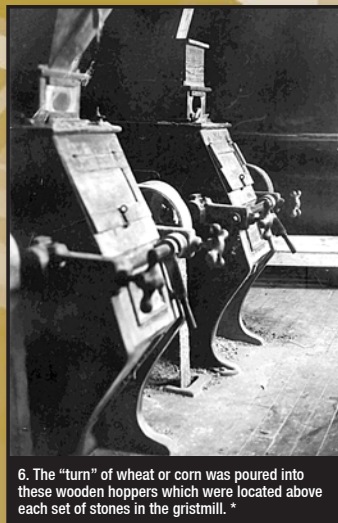
that sold meal and flour to stores by the bag. Wright, a Canadian, refused to become a US citizen until after Queen Victoria Died (1901). One of the last to operate the mill was Marjorie Duff, a tall, slight woman, who could lift a 40- or 50- pound sack with no apparent effort. The building later became The Weaverville Milling Company restaurant.

This mill and the woolen mill were in the area known as Factory Hill, a thriving community in south Weaverville. After closing the woolen mill, Jim Wright built a gristmill



6. Hughey/Williamson Gristmill (Pre 1816-?)

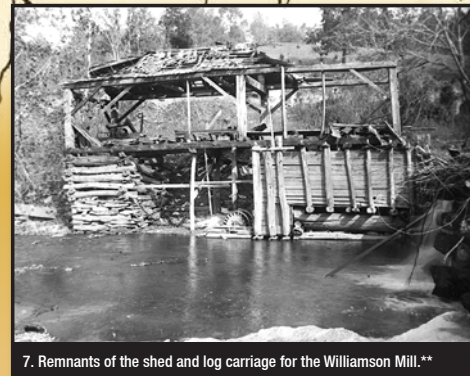
Joseph Hughey was the first sheriff of Buncombe County (founded 1791). Robert Williamson was given the title Colonel and was a founder of the Rims Creek Presbyterian Church, the Buncombe County coroner, and in 1802, became an attorney.



6. The "turn" of wheat or corn was poured into these wooden hoppers which were located above each set of stones in the gristmill.*

7. Williamson Sawmill (1820-1880)

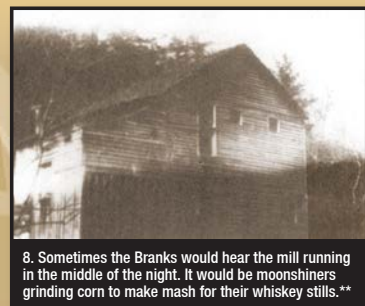
Robert Williamson built the first sawmill in the Reems Creek valley. Residents could now build frame houses instead of log cabins. His wife, Elizabeth, left the mill to Bob Brank for caring for her before she died.



7. Remnants of the shed and log carriage for the Williamson Mill.**

8. Bob Brank Gristmill (1870s-1930)

Robert (Bob) Jasper Brank continued to operate the Williamson sawmill, but built his own gristmill. He was also a magistrate, who could settle small claims and perform marriage ceremonies. The mill was dismantled around 1930 because stone cutters were not available to sharpen the grinding stones.



8. Sometimes the Branks would hear the mill running in the middle of the night. It would be moonshiners grinding corn to make mash for their whiskey stills.**

9. Beech Community Gristmill (1890s-1920s?)

Susan Penland and Bonnie Rhea operated this mill, which was near the rear of Susan's house.



9. Beech Community Gristmill.*

10. Beech Community Sawmill (Early 1900s)

Susan Penland was the cook for the sawmill workers.

11. Vance/Hemphill Gristmill (Mid 1830s-1880s)

Oral history tells us the gristmill was moved to the Ben Hemphill property, but apparently it was not working. In 1852 with debts he could not pay, Ben Hemphill left to take grain to the Williamson mill and did not return for 49 years. Shortly after he left, his wife was able to purchase the mill at auction and keep their homestead and the mill. She was a practical nurse and midwife. Later she convinced her brother, James Brank, to move nearby and operate the mill, but when the Civil War started, he joined the Confederacy.