

THE POND

THE HISTORY

Anigiduwagi, ancestors of the Cherokee Nation, were the early inhabitants of the area as early as 8000 B.C. (or before).

Merrimon Featherstone (1760-1844) was among the early white settlers of Henderson County, North Carolina. He married Amelia Mills (1771-1846), half-sister of William Mills (1746-1833), who was thought to be the first white settler of Henderson County (1787). It is not known where Merrimon was born – possibly France or Corsica – but it was purported that he was related to Napoleon Bonaparte. A skilled wrestler of great renown in Europe, he stood 6 feet 2 inches tall, weighed 210 pounds, and came to America seeking new adversaries. Legend has it that he carried a purse of gold coins in a money belt around his waist and buried it on his land. To this date, it has not been found. When the Revolutionary War started, he was recruited to fight for the Tories in the Battle of Kings Mountain, North Carolina (1780). He was captured but escaped to hide in the mountains. After the war, he pledged his allegiance to the United States.

By the late 1700s, Merrimon owned 1,500 acres in Clear Creek, now part of Henderson County, and along the banks of the Oklawaha – a Cherokee word meaning “slowly moving muddy waters.” Today, it is known as Featherstone Creek.

Merrimon built a two-story, six-bedroom, hand-hewn log cabin on a high knoll above the creek that is now called Featherstone Creek. Some of the furnishings were imported from England. Being well-to-do, Merrimon owned slaves – a rare thing in the early days of mountain settlement. His house was torn down around 1928, and



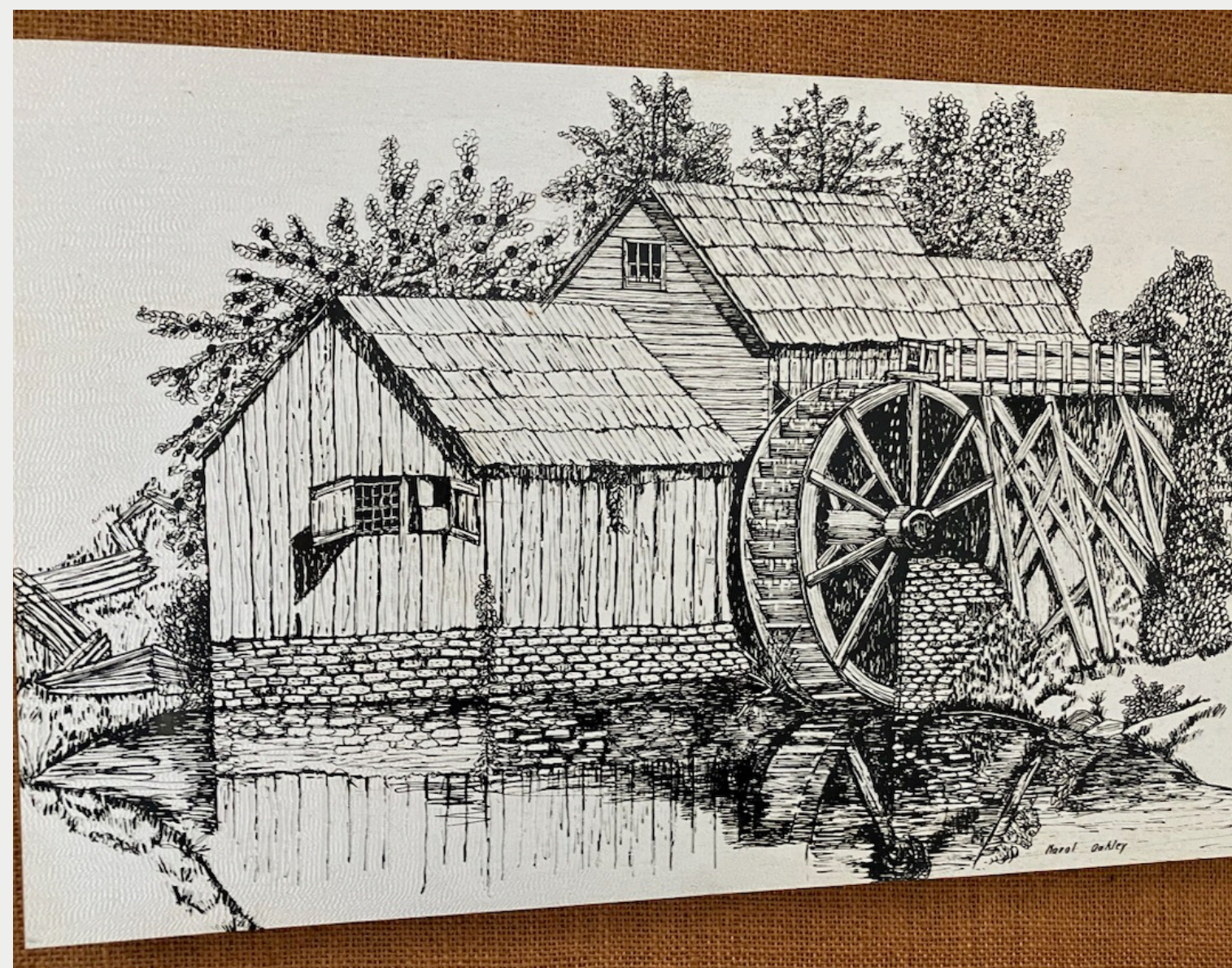
Map Courtesy of Jenny Giles



Mill Pond at Brookside Camp

some of its timbers were used in the construction of later buildings on the property.

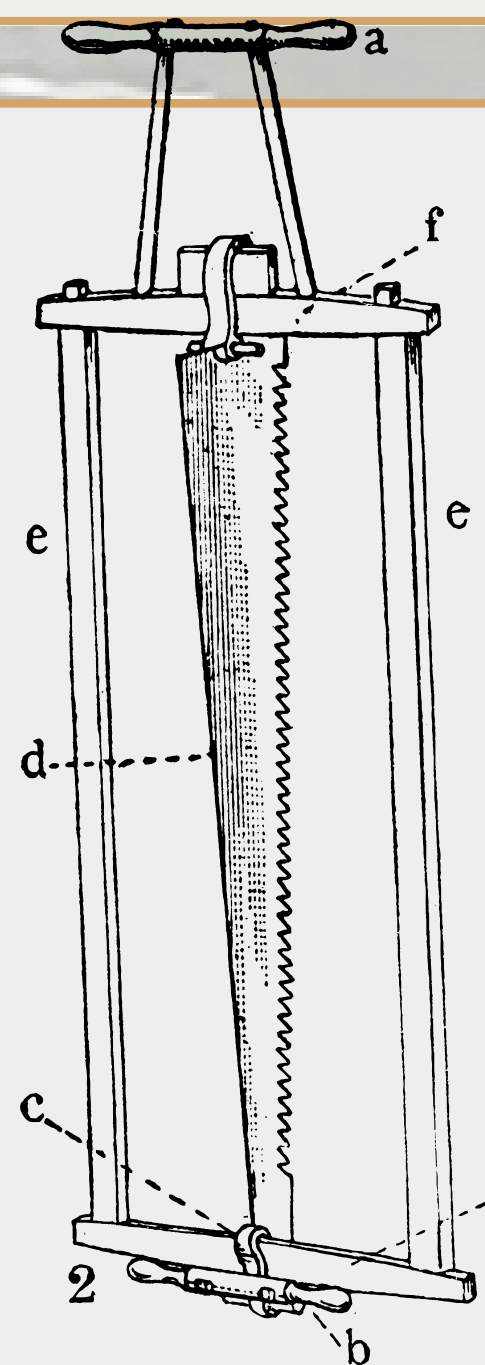
The Featherstone family cemetery is located near the original house. Not far away, in the early 1800s, a second cemetery was established for the enslaved people of the area. Many were Featherstones who took the name of their former owners after emancipation. Slaves lived in small cabins on property now owned by the Dean family – between the main house and the slave cemetery.



A Typical Mill Like Stepp's Mill, Where Ambrose Ground the Family's Corn.

THE MILL

Across the creek and below the old homeplace, Merrimon built a dam of logs and earth (c. 1805) and later established a grist mill and a sash saw or pit sawmill (c. 1815). 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 Buncombe County in 1870 as “a sort of a fort, something of a store, and a little of a mill.”



Sash Saw. Image Courtesy of the Florida Center for Instructional Technology.



"The Big House"

HOUSE, DAM, AND ELECTRICAL PLANT

In 1929, Ambrose and Eula built their first house, but in 1933 it burned down. Undaunted, they used the insurance money to build a modern home with indoor plumbing and electricity. Beside the new dam, Ambrose built a small electrical plant, which provided the Featherstones electricity before commercial power was available along Brookside Camp Road.



Dam and Battery Building



Ambrose Dismantling Power Plant

AMBROSE & EULA FEATHERSTONE

In 1916, the original dam washed away in the great flood. A new concrete dam was built by Ambrose Mills Featherstone in 1933. Ambrose had married Eula Anderson in 1922, and they lived on Featherstone land.



Ambrose Mills Featherstone (1896-1984)



Ambrose and Eula Featherstone (1903-1994)



Featherstone Family (Jack, Ann, Eula, Shirley, Richard, Dave, and Ambrose) and Pony



Eula and children (Richard, Shirley and Dave)



Richard Featherstone

RICHARD FEATHERSTONE

Richard Featherstone was one of Eula and Ambrose's five children. He grew up on the family farm and joined the Air Force in 1954. Major Featherstone moved back to Hendersonville in 1967 after retiring from the Air Force and continued to work for the commercial airlines for 29 years. He acquired adjoining land previously owned by his Aunt Ethel, along with the family barn and farm fields. After restoring those areas and building his home, he bought 17 acres of additional land, built two small subdivisions, and proceeded to rebuild the dam over a three-year period. The subdivisions were carefully planned and built to high standards, enhancing and influencing the future development of the area. He continued to maintain the barn, pond, and dam and currently resides on the land passed down from Merrimon Featherstone. Major Featherstone recently upgraded and rebuilt the dam and added a water wheel to commemorate the original mill that Merrimon Featherstone built so long ago.



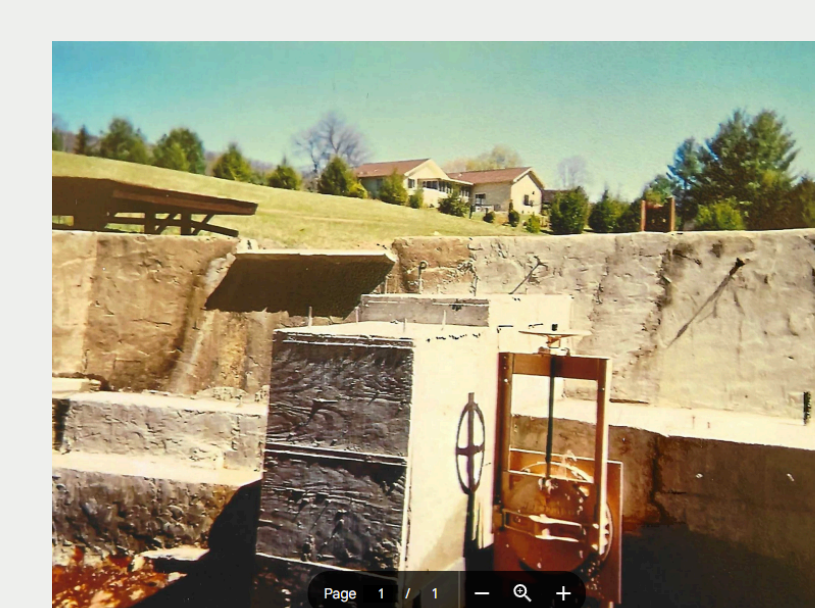
Old Water Wheel Circa 1964



New Water Wheel Supports



Dam Gate



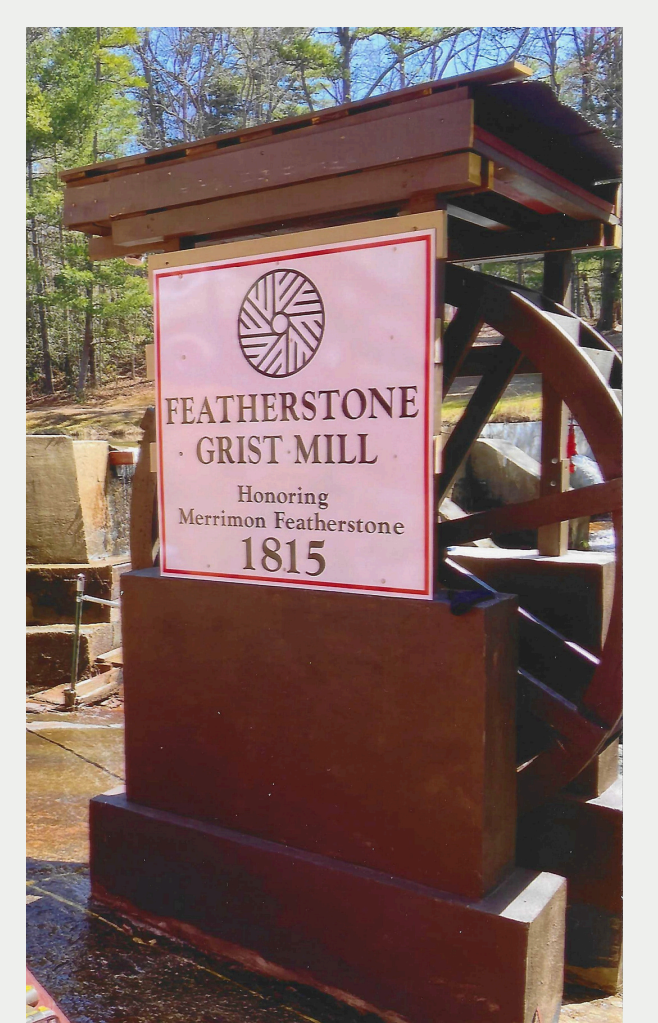
Dam Restoration



Dump Truck & Tractor

NEW CONSTRUCTION

Adding two new floodgates in 2001 enabled the pond to be drained in five minutes. Prior to that, the gates were made of wood with a metal frame. Ambrose would have to go four feet under the water, attach a cable to the gate with a chain, and rip it out (using a horse before later using his jeep; Richard later bought a tractor in 1977). The wooden gate had to be rebuilt each time, and it took several days to drain the pond.



Water Wheel 2022