

## A LOOK AT PUTNAM COUNTY GRISTMILLS

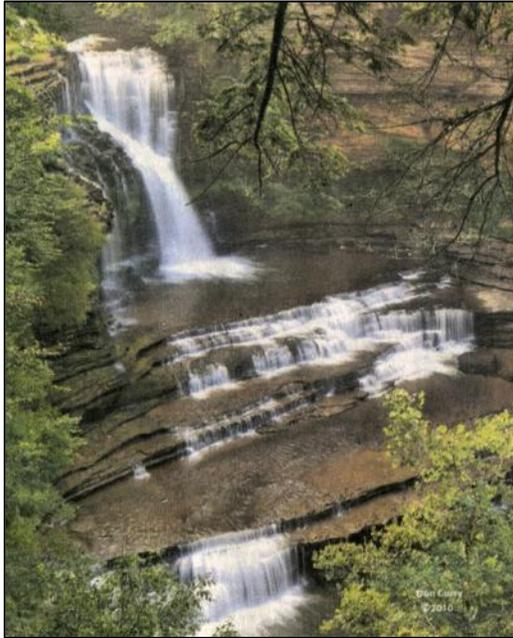
By W. Calvin Dickinson

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'Cumberland Tales'

Gristmills using waterpower are an ancient form of machinery used to grind grain. Romans and other early civilizations used them. The earliest design for a water-powered mill was drawn by the Roman architect



Vitruvius in 19 BC. The Romans established mills in Britain, and the Domesday Book in the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD recorded more than 6,000 in the country. Jamestown, VA, utilized gristmills in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and by the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century mills were constructed in Tennessee. In 1790, the future state had 25 gristmills and 10 water-powered sawmills; by 1800 the numbers had doubled. In 1900, Tennessee boasted 1,618 gristmills and 1,820 sawmills. More than 70 were built on the Caney Fork River above Rock Island in the Upper Cumberland region. Gristmills might grind corn or wheat, but most in Tennessee were equipped for producing corn meal. Wheat flour required a finer stone, many of which had to be imported. Corn was a much more popular crop than wheat in the Upper Cumberland, so mills normally ground corn.

(Pictured: Cummins Falls).

The earliest and most long-lasting method of creating power from water was use of the waterwheel. Most common was the overshot wheel, where water from a sluice (also called race or flume) poured into buckets at the top of the wheel to turn it. Dams upstream from the sluice would pool the water for use. Less common was the undershot wheel, where the wheel was turned by water flowing under the waterwheel and striking its baffles. The undershot wheel was less efficient than the overshot wheel, so not as many were built. Power from the waterwheel was transferred to a driveshaft, which turned the millstones. Turbines later came into use. Water would enter the turbine and activate gears to turn the millstones. Stones in all types of mills were grooved round stones usually laid horizontally, which would grind grain between them. The miller would then collect the meal/flour in hoppers for the customer.

In the Upper Cumberland region, the earliest gristmills were operating in first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The early counties of the region – Overton, White, Jackson and Smith – all had several. In Overton County, the first gristmill was built on the Harris Hatcher farm soon after 1800. Col. Isaac Gore built an early mill on the Roaring River near Windle after settling there in 1792. In White County, the first mill was erected on Lost Creek some time before 1808. William Glenn and Thomas Simpson constructed mills on the Calkiller River in 1815. Cummins Mill in Jackson County was in operation by 1825. In 1800, there were two mills in Smith County, one erected by David Venters on Goose Creek, and another by William Sauders on Dixon Creek.

Putnam County, created out of Overton, White, and Jackson counties in 1848 and 1854, had gristmills before those dates. On the eastern side of the modern county James Robinson and James Scarbrough built a small gristmill on Mill Creek by 1805. Also in the east Cubit Whittaker erected a mill at the Brown's Mill site near Dry Valley in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Hidden Hollow, east of Cookeville, the **Hyder Mill** operated. By 1880 the county boasted eight gristmills and six sawmills. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Buffalo Valley, Bloomington, Double Springs, and Silver Point all had mills.

**Waterloo Mill** in Overton County, and Burgess Mill in White County are on the modern county lines with Putnam County. Cummins Mill is barely in Jackson County on the Putnam County line. Waterloo, on Spring Creek, had an interesting and violent history. Using a turbine rather than a waterwheel, John Roberts operated the establishment first as a powder mill in the 1830s. An explosion destroyed the building in 1838. Rebuilt as a gristmill, Roberts and his son continued to operate the mill. During the Civil War the mill was destroyed by high water, but it was rebuilt again. In August of 1878 the site was the scene of a battle between revenue collectors and illegal whiskey distillers. A dozen internal revenue collectors visited a brandy distillery in the Waterloo Falls area. After destroying the illicit distillery the collectors went to the house of James Peek near the falls to stay the night. There they were attacked by a group of men reportedly numbering more than a hundred. Three of the agents were wounded. Retreating to a two-story log house, the agents spent the night caring for their wounded and guarding against attack. The next day, firing commenced and continued all day. Another night of pandemonium passed, but the next morning negotiations started. Finally the attackers left and the battle of Waterloo ended. Waterloo Mill operated up until the 1950s. Before and since that time the site has been a popular fishing, swimming, and picnic location.

**Cummins Mill** on Blackburn Fork used an overshot waterwheel as its power source. Constructed first in 1825 by **John Cummins**, the mill was reconstructed in 1845 closer to Cummins Falls. The new mill had three stories, with the grindstone on the second level. The third floor held the carding machine to produce rolls of wool from which yarn could be produced on a spinning wheel. An attached sawmill was constructed behind the mill, forming the lower part of an "L". A turbine powered the sawmill. Around the mill a small settlement was established. A general store opened on the grounds, and a blacksmith set up shop nearby. A post office and telephone exchange later operated there. These were independent businesses not owned by Cummins. The site was so popular that families from nearby towns built vacations cabins on the grounds for seasonal use. The mill washed away in the floods of 1928 and was not rebuilt. \*See *John Cummins*

**Burgess Mill** is now part of the Burgess Falls State Natural Area in Putnam and White counties. The Federal government first deeded the land to Thomas Burgess in 1793 in payment for his service during the Revolutionary War. In the nineteenth century the Burgess family built a gristmill on Falling Water River. This mill, above Burgess Falls, was powered by water rushing through a wooden box flume to a small turbine; gears attached to the turbine turned the millstones. The mill operated into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, sometimes manned by a teenager. In the 1920s Cookeville bought the site above the falls and constructed a hydroelectric plant to supply electricity to the city. A turbine was used to run the generator.

Many other mills in the Upper Cumberland have interesting histories. Future columns of 'Cumberland Tales' will be devoted to detailed stories of individual mills. Readers of this column are invited to submit stories about local gristmills and other types of mills.

*"Cumberland Tales" is a service of the Cookeville History Museum. The editors, Calvin Dickinson and Michael Birdwell, invite anyone to submit a story of 800 words concerning the history/folklore of the Upper Cumberland region. Send stories to the editor at History Department, Box 5064 TTU, Cookeville, TN 38505. E-mail addresses are [cdickinson@tentech.edu](mailto:cdickinson@tentech.edu) and [birdie@ntech.edu](mailto:birdie@ntech.edu)*

\*Read more Cumberland Tales at: <http://www.ajlambert.com>

**\*John Cummins**

b. 22 August 1783, NC – d. 13 June 1868, Jackson Co., TN, md on the 14<sup>th</sup> of November 1819 to **Elizabeth Woods Cummins**, b. 6 February 1800 – d. 13 January 1864, Jackson Co., TN. Children: **Morrison Woods Cummins**, b. 26 August 1820, NC – d. 1 February 1887, Jackson Co., TN. All buried in Pine Hill Cemetery, Jackson Co., TN. John Cummins also md on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November 1810 to Rachael Cothran Cummins (1787-1817).

**Source:** pp 112-114: The Jackson County Family History Book 200 Years of Memories by The Jackson County Historical Society.

Cumin, the Scottish name from which Cummins was derived, has always been associated with wheat and milling flour. The family crest from Scotland includes 3 shocks of wheat. John Cummins (b. 22 August 1783 – d. 18 June 1868) came to Jackson County from Raleigh, North Carolina by way of Rutherford County Tennessee. He settled on Roaring River and built a grist mill. He married Rachael Cothran (b. 22 March 1787 – d. 5 August 1817) on November 22, 1810.

Following his wife's death in 1817 and the hard luck of losing his mill several times to floods, John Cummins returned to North Carolina. He later returned to Jackson County with his second wife, Elizabeth Woods (b. 6 February 1800 – d. 13 January 1874) whom he married November 14, 1819. This time he settled on Blackburn's Fork. He built a log house there in 1820 and a mill in 1825. In 1845 he built a mill down stream which stood until the flood of 1923. The union of John and Elizabeth Cummins produced 7 children.

*Harriet Ackland Cummins (1812-1839) who taught French in a Nashville female College now known as Belmont College. Unmarried, she died of typhoid fever. While teaching in Nashville, Harriet Ackland Cummins wrote to Morrison Woods Cummins to bring horses, saddles and friends so that they could go to Franklin, Kentucky where Alexander Campbell was preaching and teaching the "Back to the Bible" sermons that were the forerunner of the establishment of the Churches of Christ in this country. The Cummins attended Smyrna Church which became the first Church of Christ in what is now Putnam County. Later they started the Liberty Church of Christ near their home. The Cummins were Presbyterians until this time.*

John and Elizabeth Cummins, and several of his children are buried in Pine Hill Cemetery on the Cummins homeplace.

*A History of Putnam County Tennessee by Walter S. McClain (1925)*

**DOUBLE SPRINGS:** Putnam Co., TN pp: 86-87.

Originally, most of the land around Double Springs (so named because of two large springs in close proximity), was owned by **Maj. Richard Cooke**, although small tracts were early purchased by others. This was a post office about the time of the Civil War, but it did not aspire to be even a small village before the coming of the railroad. **Daniel Hawes**, who clerked in the store at White Plains, and **Joseph Ray** sold goods here at an early date. Later **G. W. Judd & Son** were local merchants. Here also was one of the antebellum "muster grounds," mentioned elsewhere. Among the older citizens we might name **J. M. Barnes, Wood McBroom, J. M. McClellan, T. M. Scarlett** and **W. J. Steakley**.

One of the large industries operated here before the days of prohibition was **J. C. Barnes'** steam distillery.

At one time two large distilleries were running here at full capacity, the second one being operated by William J. Lewis. The last saloon in the county to close its doors was the "Lone Star" in Double Springs.

The Gainesboro and Sparta road crosses the old Walton Road at this place making it a good trade center. A large part of the railroad shipments to and from Jackson County passes through this village. This is also a good market for poles, crossties and timber products generally. Considerable live stock is shipped from this point.

**At present, Double Springs has three general stores, a hotel, livery stable, garage, grist mill and a blacksmith shop.**

A very neat little church was erected a few years ago. The population is about 200.

#### **Thomas Allen**

b. 9 October 1872, Jackson Co., TN md **Mary Jane (Hawkins) Allen**, b. 10 August 1883 – d. 6 March 1957, d/o **William Kinner Hawkins** (1849-1914) & **Mary Elizabeth Smith** (1850-1914), both buried in Dodson Branch Cemetery, Jackson Co., TN. Thomas Allen, s/o **Barbara J. (Gentry) Lynn** (1847-1912), w/o **George Washington Allen & James D. Lynn**. Barbara J. (Gentry) Allen is buried in Overton

Cemetery, Jackson Co., TN. Thomas & Mary Jane (Hawkins) Allen are both buried in Dodson Branch Cemetery, Jackson Co., TN.

(1910 census 7<sup>th</sup> Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN, Enumeration Dist. No. 85: Dwl: 122 – **Thomas Allen** is head of household, 37 yrs. old, TN, (Occupation: Miller Grist Mill), md 10 yrs. to **Mary**, 23 yrs. old, TN, (1 child born, 1 child living). Child: Dales L. Allen, 2 yrs. old, TN).

(1920 census 15<sup>th</sup> Civil Dist., Spring Creek & Cookeville Roads, Enumeration Dist. No. 87: Dwl: 27 – **Thomas Allen** is head of household, 48 yrs. old, TN, (Occupation: Manager Roller Mill), md to **Mary J.**, 40 yrs. old, TN. Children: Dallas L., 11 yrs. old, TN & Pauline, 1 3/12 yrs. old, TN).

**Roller mill.** ... **Roller mills** are **mills** that use cylindrical **rollers**, either in opposing pairs or against flat plates, to crush or grind various materials, such as grain, ore, gravel, plastic, and others. **Roller grain mills** are an alternative to traditional millstone arrangements in gristmills.

(1930 census 15<sup>th</sup> Civil Dist., Putnam Co., TN: Dwl: 66 – **Thomas Allen** is head of household: 56 yrs. old, TN md to **Mary J.**, 46 yrs. old, TN. Child: Pauline Allen, 11 yrs. old, TN). Living next door: Dallas L. Allen, 21 yrs. old, TN, md to Tennie, 21 yrs. old & their dau. Vergenna 1 yr. old, TN.