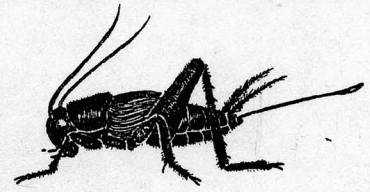


The Story of Twin Mills



Memories of the Old Mill: There is a sentiment and a poetry attached to the old time water mills that appeal to every artistic soul, and especially to all of us old boys, to whom the recollections are very sweet. Although considered a thing of the past, the old water wheel mill is still with us to some extent and has the same charm. The old overshot wheel, however, is now rarely found, and so we lose a little of the artistic feature of the picture, but the river, the dam and the pond are not to be lost as long as water power is used in the gold old way.

Father built his sawmill about 1846 (Mrs. B. says her father Albert Alden built saw mill) on Bark River a mile west of the village, the land being bought from Albert Alden; the road to the mill was new and awful. Opposite Castleman's they put tamarack poles over the mud slough, forming a pontoon bridge to drive over. The mill had the old fashioned jig saw, and log carriage, and I used to ride on the carriage slowly to the end of the cut, and rapidly back for a fresh cut. There was a big "bull wheel" used to pull the logs out of the pond up into the mill. The gristmill was built later.

All the early flouring mills used the French Burr Millstones and the sawmills had the straight saw blades that vertically jugged its way through the log. The millpond was a paradise for frogs who serenaded the community every summer night, with full chorus of soprano, alto, treble and heavy bass, assisted sometimes by katydids, crickets and whippoorwills. The Mill, too, had its music by day. To the rushing sound of the water was added the tick-tack of hopper spindles, the gliding of the elevator cups and the tapping of the bolting frame - all this was music to the youngsters who played around the mill. I am reminded of an old song of the primitive watermill.

The Mills consisted of a sawmill and a gristmill of three sets or "runs" of millstones. The old first mill was an upright sawmill. Then a gristmill was built adjoining. These mills were all burned December 23, 1853. Alpha Child was walking to the village and gave the alarm when our Mills burned - it was a bitter cold night and the pond frozen over and no chance to save the Mill. Father seized a bucked and got on old Black Hawk and rushed down but it was useless. Father was satisfied that the mill was set afire by Reynolds the miller, to shield his stealing. The insurance had expired during a long sickness of Father's, so it was a total loss.

The Mill books showed there should be about 3,000 bushels of toll wheat in the third story - when Father was able to go to the mill after his illness he noticed the amount of toll wheat looked small so he suspicioned at once that the wheat had been stolen. He said nothing but the next day he had all that big lot of wheat run down the spout into weighting bins and began weighting and elevating to another floor. It would take at least two days to complete this. But the second day the mill was a pile of ashes. It was found afterwards that loaded wagons with barrels of flour had been seen driving westward from the Mill at night towards Watertown. No doubt the Miller had been making flour from the toll wheat, running the Mill nights, and his brother-in-law taking the flour to Watertown and selling it. This scamp knew that when the wheat was weighed the shortage would show. So he burned the Mill to hide his guilt. The loss was heavy but Father borrowed the money and rebuilt, but was many years getting out of debt.

The burning of the Mills on December 25, 1853 was a hard blow to Father, as he had been sick and unable to go to Milwaukee to have the insurance renewed and the Mills burned a few days after the insurance expired, so it was a total loss. There were 3,000 bushels of Toll wheat burned - this was equal to \$3,000 alone, but Father borrowed money from Mr. Seelay and Docter's brother and early in the spring the building of the now mills began. The teams would go Milwaukee for machinery and iron and they always brought back some oysters, sometimes in cans and often in little kegs. They were fat and good and we were all very fond of them. There were days of Millwrights and those were the nights of the parties up to about 1858.

Three different families lived in the Millers house down at our mill, and each family had twins (Sol Hartwell's was one family) so there were three pairs of twins born in that house. It was from these events that Father gave the name "Twin Mills" to the newly built mills after the fire.



N. P. Hawks
Letters to his Sister Fannie

