

By Mrs. Lee J. Irene Smith Carpenter.

History of the "Old Grist Mill"  
known as the "Yanceyville Mill" - Yanceyville, Louisa County, VA

As we approach the year of the "Bicentennial" Celebration of our Country, the United States of America, we notice a great increase in the interest of the past, and a more appreciative outlook on the life of the past, the homes, the old plantations, the churches, and all of the Industries which meant life and progress to our nation.

Among the many Industries of the past, may I list as one of the most important, the Old Grist Mills, where grains, wheat, corn, barley, and oats were taken to be cleaned and ground into flour, meal, and feed for man and for animals.

This particular Old Grist Mill at Yanceyville and the dam which provided water, power to turn the wheels, the turbines, which moved the old huge stones that did the grinding, had its beginning in the year of 1774.

According to the records, Mr. Thomas Johnson, Jr. requested a permit to build a dam across the South Anna River, thereafter to build a Grist Mill on his property by the dam. During the many years that followed more acreage was added to this site as the property passed through different owners.

I shall not try to list all of the names, only several, whom we might be especially interested in as contributing to the progress and the up-building of our County, as owners and operators of an Industry essential to the welfare of the public - "The Grist Mill".

I wish to mention Mr. Charles D. Yancey and his son, Mr. Robert Yancey. They also operated an ordinary (a store) and other types of business. Their contribution to the County and to the public led to

~~the~~ change of the name of our community from "South Annville" to "Yanceyville".

May I also mention another owner of the mill a few years later, James Duke Nuckolls. He was another owner, who did much to preserve the Industry of Milling, and to help in the advancement and progress of this community.

In the year of 1863, our grandfather, James Edward Smith 1st, purchased the Yanceyville Grist Mill and the surrounding land from James Duke Nuckolls that he, our grandfather, might continue the operation of this wonderful Industry of Milling and the work which he was interested in, as when a young man he had helped his father in an old mill which was located on the South Anna River, also, but where the stream was much smaller in the Green Spring area.

The original Yanceyville Mill building was still in use, but our grandfather found that it needed so much repair work done on it, that he decided to take the old building down and construct a new one, three stories high above the forebays, right on the site by the dam where the original mill building had stood. The story goes that the construction of the new building was so well planned that the business of grinding seldom stopped.

The dam had been kept in good condition and with the new building a saw-mill addition was also included.

Our grandfather, James Edward Smith, 1st, also built a nice home on the hill above the mill and it was there that he and our grandmother raised their family. This home and a small, quaint house built on the opposite hill for an employee to live in, and called "The Miller's House",

are still standing, and the old home is still in excellent condition as it has always remained in the family.

Business increased considerably and a Blacksmith Shop was built on this property near the mill.

Traffic for business in those days was by wagons drawn by horses and by mules, and even ox-carts, drawn by oxen. This means of traffic for business continued for many years.

Our grandfather, with the help of several of his sons, continued to operate the mill until his death in 1885.

His son, Uncle Alphonsa Smith, took care of the milling business until the estate was settled up.

In the year 1901, Mr. Jim Crank and Uncle Alphonsa Smith bought the mill property from the legatees. During their ownership, they had the Roller Mill System installed for grinding white flour.

Our Uncle Alphonsa Smith continued as the miller and operated the business until he became ill and had to give up.

It was then that our father, James Edward Smith II decided to buy the mill property from his brother Alphonsa and Mr. Jim Crank in the year of 1908.

Our father continued to operate the milling business until he became ill in 1945.

How well we can remember that during the harvest seasons the mill ran day and night. Our father employed help and in those early years wagons and teams were seen everywhere nearby waiting to carry the flour, meal and feed back to the homes. The customers waited to load their wagons. In later years, their trucks.

Of course over the years there was always the need of employees to help the owners of the milling industry, and many a fine young man assisted in this work at the Yanceyville Mill.

After our father became ill in 1945, our brother, James Edward Smith III, who was engaged in other work at that time, decided he would keep the mill open on Saturdays for business.

After our father's death in 1953, our brother, James Edward Smith III, bought the shares of the other legatees, one brother and four sisters; and he has continued to operate the mill, but not the Roller System. He uses the old stones for grinding meal, whole wheat flour, and feed and he continues to have the mill open for business every Saturday.

Thus the "Old Grist Mill" at Yanceyville is still in operation after being owned by our family, the Smith family, for over one hundred years.

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