

Carroll Yesteryears  
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A History of Milling Along Sam's Creek  
By Mary Ann Ashcraft

In January 1931 *The Carroll Record* published the recollections of Willis R. Zumbrun (1854-1933) concerning the mills along Sam's Creek, part of the boundary between Carroll and Frederick counties. The editor wrote that Mr. Zumbrun spoke authoritatively on the subject because he had been in the milling business almost his entire life. His article is reproduced below with minor changes for clarity and a few omissions.

"The first mill on Sam's Creek – but not the oldest – is the small chopping mill on George Buckey's farm near Union Bridge. Going up the meandering stream was "White Rose" mill which stood on the farm now owned by Jesse W. Fuss. The first mill there was built soon after the French and Indian war, by John Stoner, who emigrated from Pennsylvania to escape the war. This was a clover seed and oil mill which according to tradition, was burned by the Indians. The old foundation and race banks are still visible.

"The flour and grist mill, about five hundred yards down stream was built by John Stoner in 1799. A brick structure of four stories with saw mill and oil mill in connection, all operated by an over-shot wheel until 1858 or 1860 when a modern turbine wheel replaced it. The large cone-shaped stone used for making flaxseed oil is in the front yard at Fuss' home, and still in a good state of preservation. The grist mill had four sets of buhrs, one for chopping and three for wheat. The mill was operated by George Kirchner from 1855 to 1860. Then Joseph Woods came into possession and operated it until 1867.

"In this mill Abram Lynn was murdered by Joseph Davis, Friday, April 5, 1872. The mill was torn down in 1900. Jesse Fuss' family purchased this property from Josiah and Jonas Englar, of Linwood. As the mill was not favorably located for constructing a dam, a head race about a half mile long was used instead. As it was desirable for this race to hold as much water as possible, and as it naturally accumulated a lot of mud on account of its sluggish flow, the water was drawn off once a year and the mud shoveled out over the banks. ...

"About a mile further up-stream stands McKinstry's Mill, an up-to-date mill operated by turbine wheels. Evan McKinstry, the grandfather of the present Evan B. McKinstry, bought the mill in 1814 from George Pusey – the said George Pusey built the first mill in 1767 (this date was found on an old mill stone of the present mill.) Samuel McKinstry was the next owner about 1844. He built the present mill and the large dam which covered about twenty acres of land, looking like a lake, and supplying pleasures in fishing, boating and skating. A course of nearly a mile being available for the latter sport.

"This immense dam deserves more than passing mention, because of the tons and tons of ice it supplied each year, not only for filling individual ice-houses for the whole community, but for a rather extensive ice-cream factory, for a time located in the village. The ice was both cut and sawed off the dam on the side along the public road [Sam's Creek Road], and was easily loaded

into big wagons. It was also the scene of a great deal of shooting at – rather than shooting – wild ducks that often frequented it, and hundreds of pounds of shot must now rest in what was then the bottom of the dam.

“Thousands of barrels of flour were shipped from this mill to Baltimore and from there to many ports. All new machinery was put in this mill in 1891 – including rollers. Mordecai C. McKinstry came into possession in 1861 and kept the mill in its traditional flourishing condition. Then William H. Zumbrun rented the mill in 1875 and kept up its fine reputation until his death in 1889. In 1891 Willis R. Zumbrun had charge of the mill which he bought in 1915, and shipped many barrels of flour to Baltimore and elsewhere. One large order came from Commodore Thornton Rollins for South America. Mr. Rollins’ name appeared in last week’s Baltimore paper, stating he bought the first ticket to the “Charity Ball” soon to take place on Baltimore.

“The mill is still owned by Willis R. Zumbrun, is up-to-date in every way, and is now operated by his son Thomas Rinehart Zumbrun. The mill is the best in this part of the country and does a thriving business in whole wheat flour, corn meal, hominy and much chopping of every kind. The corn meal is very popular everywhere. To the milling business has been added a peanut factory where salted and roasted peanuts form a large trade.

“Before the W. M. R. R. was built, the flour was all hauled to Baltimore. The farmers would load up on Monday morning – 25 or 30 barrels or more – and would go by Uniontown and Westminster. The trip required four days, and they would bring back as a return load, sugar, coffee, and a barrel of whiskey for harvest time and some over. When the B. & O. was built to Mt. Airy, they would haul there.

“Also up-stream was the Israel Norris saw mill on the farm now owned by Joseph Stitely. Further up was Josiah Greenwood’s mill for hulling clover, the place now being owned by David Haines. The next was Jeremiah Greenwood’s mill – saw mill and chopping – the place now owned by John Hoff. Going on up-stream was Hiram Plaine’s saw and chopping mill, now owned by Mr. Duncan. This was the first cider mill in the country, operated then by David Franklin.

“Then comes the old Landis mill, later owned and operated by S. P. Englar. Rollers were put in about 1890, the power being an over-shot wheel; once a thriving business place but not running now; built about 1817. After that is the Naille mill, formerly a flour mill, but now a saw, chopping hominy and cider mill, and owned by Carville Alexander. Jesse Devilbiss, the next on the stream, operated a thriving flour and saw mill – over-shot wheel, three buhrs – but not running for years; present owner, Wm. Borland. The last on Sam’s Creek was the Jesse Wilson mill; saw mill, chopping and some wheat ground, once noted for its excellent buckwheat, but not working for many years; formerly owned by John Peter Moore.

“Only two of the mills named herein are in operation – McKinstry’s and Alexander’s.”

Although Willis Zumbrun’s 1931 account mentions the only mills then functioning, traces of several other mills still dotted the landscape. Today only McKinstry’s Mill stands. While it remains the focal point of the McKinstry’s Mill community, its physical condition is not the way

Zumbrun would recognize it. If he could see what has become of his mill, he would be shocked—windows broken out, siding falling off, and trees growing out of the foundation. It needs to be saved from demolition by neglect so that future generations can read these recollections and appreciate the long history of milling along Sam's Creek on the western edge of Carroll County.

*Mary Ann Ashcraft is a volunteer at the Historical Society of Carroll County.*



*Image 2: Credit: Submitted photo*

*Caption: Alexander's Mill, also known as Sam's Creek Mill, stood on the Frederick County side of Sam's Creek in the village with the same name.*



*Image 2: Credit: Submitted photo*

*Caption: Englar's Mill, one of many mills once operating along Sam's Creek, appears shortly before it collapsed. A similar fate awaits McKinstry's Mill unless something is done soon.*