

## REMEMBERING THE MURDOCK MILL

### Background.

Peter "Schlosser" Gering and Maria Riess Graber with six children docked in New York on 13 November 1874. For both Peter and Maria this was a second marriage and Maria Riess Graber brought six Graber children with her from her first marriage. The three oldest of the Graber children were married in Russia and the other three were ages 17, 16, and 10 in the year 1874. They came with Peter and Maria Riess Graber on the ship along with three of their own Gering children with the ages of 9, 6, and 1. They docked 2 ½ months after the last of the four ships arrived. Peter and wife were members of the Waldheim Congregation and Peter was the son of a minister in that Congregation. Peter's father retired his ministerial obligations shortly before the emigration. That Waldheim congregation docked in New York on 24<sup>th</sup> August 1874 and went to Dakota Territory. Peter and Maria did not follow the rest of the family and go to Dakota Territory however. They settled near Halstead, Kansas, in Harvey County. In 1886 Peter and his son Jacob built a water mill on the Ninnescah River southwest of Murdock, Kansas, in Kingman County. Murdock is southeast of Pretty Prairie.

Peter Gering, nickname "Schlosser." This family is listed in (SRM) as Petter Gieryng m Feb 15, 1864 Maria Ris 1. Jakob Gieryng, born Dec 20, 1864 2. Kataryna Gieryng, born Nov 27, 1867 3. Magdalena Gieryng, born Nov 17, 1872.

(Information from Brothers Keeper and Ship list information from David A. Haury's book, Index to Mennonite Immigrants on United States Passenger Lists 1872-1904 [HaDa 36] and James W. Krehbiel 2006)

### Memories of Murdock Roller Mill recalled

Interview printed in *Kingman Leader-Courier* on Tuesday, July 26, 2015. Helen Brown talks with Dorothy & Eleanor, Sept. 5, 1980

*(Helen Gering Brown was the daughter of Jake and May Gering; it was Jake and his father Peter Gering that built and operated the "Murdock Roller Mill." Interviewer Eleanor was a cousin to Helen Gering Brown. Helen Gering (1898-1982) and Harold Brown Sr. (1893-1957) spent most of their married life on a farm near the old mill and continued to farm the land owned by the Gerings. In 2005 the land is owned by Harold and Helen's son, Harold Jr. and wife Jeanne, which has kept the land in the family well over one hundred years. Although far from its glory days when Mary Gering cooked for the many men that came from a distance, the old house still stands near where the old mill once stood.)*

**Eleanor:** Helen Brown and Jeanne have come over to spend a few hours with Dorothy and Eleanor, and we had lunch together. Now I am going to ask Helen a few questions and see if she can tell us some of the memories she has from childhood. Can you tell us about – first we would like to know a little bit about the mill your Grandfather and your Father had and operated. Can you tell us something? Your Mother was married in 1892?

**Helen:** The mill was built in about 1889. It was painted red. It had two stories and a cupalo, and it was a great joy to me to visit there with my Father, who was the miller. And his half brother was with him for a short time. And then he took it over entirely with help most of the time.

**Eleanor:** Where did the people come from that brought grain there?

**Helen:** The people brought grain there from Murdock, Norwich, Cheney, Belmont, Hutchinson, near Wichita.

**Eleanor:** Did they grind the grain the day they came to make flour?

**Helen:** They usually came at night. Of course they had horses hitched to the wagon, or whatever they drove and had their grain in, and my father would grind flour, whatever they wanted, during the night. That was night work, for people who came from a distance.

**Eleanor:** Then would they go home the next day, and how did they get their meals?

**Helen:** Well, they always brought grain for their horses or mules, and they would feed them from the wagon at night, and mother would cook for these men, no matter

where they were from, and the meals were always free gratis, and then they would sleep somewhere in the mill.

**Eleanor:** That was interesting. You went down there as a small child; you were around with your daddy you said a lot.

**Helen:** Oh yes. I was just big enough to take him a sandwich about four o'clock, and had very strict discipline to walk straight through the machinery so I wouldn't get caught. And I had to go up a back way, which had about four or five steps. And the mill wheel was right there, beside of the mill. Very little distance between, always the danger that I might slip and go into the millrace, or under the fall, below the mill wheel.

**Eleanor:** Which did they get the stone they used for grinding the wheat?

**Helen:** The stone for grinding the grain of different kinds, wheat, barley, corn, rye, or whatever it was. That stone came from France, for that kind that was needed could not be gotten in this country.

**Eleanor:** Do you still have the mill? Are there any remains there?

**Helen:** No, we no longer have the mill. There is an imprint of the race, and where the water drained down into the river, a short distance from it.

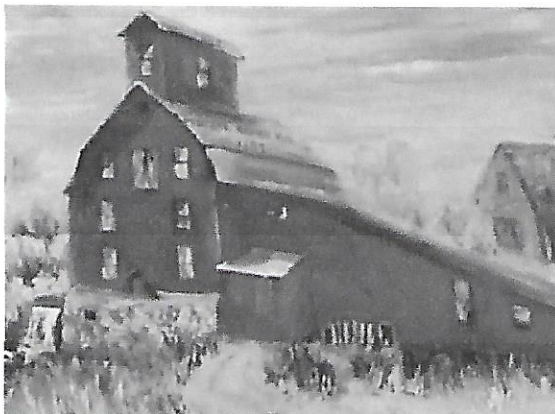
**Eleanor:** Do you still have the grindstone?

**Helen:** Yes, yes we still have the stone that ground the different grains.

**Eleanor:** And where is it today?

**Helen:** I have it in my home in the basement.

**Eleanor:** Do you have a picture of this mill?



**Helen:** Oh yes, we have a picture of this mill. In the early days it was called the New Murdock Roller Mill. But after a few years had passed they took the New off and made it Murdock Roller Mill.

**Eleanor:** You have a picture, a larger picture of it, do you?

**Helen:** Yes, we have a large picture of it, in our home and in the Historical Society in Kingman.

**Eleanor:** When we came out to visit you one time I was three years old. Was the mill still here then?

**Helen:** Oh yes, the mill was still here then.

**Eleanor:** And my brothers, Norman and Lawrence came along and I think they went back to the mill with you, didn't they?

**Helen:** Oh yes, they went back to the mill and we went down to the river where the water from the race—the water from the race turned the wheel at the mill to grind the grain, and that water was brought down from a mile and a half to the west to the mill race, and that race was dug with flat slips, horses pulling them.

**Eleanor:** And you say the impression of it is still there.

**Helen:** A slight impression, but a deeper impression where it emptied from the wheel into the river.

**Eleanor:** They used to drive through the river. Was that below the mill?

**Helen:** Yes, that was below the mill. The road there passes very close to the mill.

**Eleanor:** They drove cars through there even, didn't they?

**Helen:** Some, but cars weren't as numerous in that day.

**Eleanor:** I remember my sister Helen came out to Kansas for her honeymoon, Helen and Corwin, and they told that Corwin drove through the river with his car.

**Helen:** Yes, that is right; it was a rock bottom, but over at the south side the sand used to wash in pretty badly, and you took a chance on getting through that side.

**Eleanor:** And I was wondering, you had this cousin Edna that lived with you, didn't you?

**Helen:** Yes.



**Eleanor:** And she came to you as a baby?

**Helen:** Yes.

**Eleanor:** Her Mother or was it her Father was a relative of Uncle Jake's?

**Helen:** Her Father was a half brother.

**Eleanor:** Of your Father?

**Helen:** Yes his name was Graber, and ours was Gering.

**Eleanor:** Yes, I remember when I came here I had pleasant memories of being at your house.



**Helen:** In that day we didn't have things to fight the little animals and snakes and such. And my father kept a huge bull snake in the mill and she kept the different rooms clean of rats and mice. And when people would come to get their grain ground he always warned them to not molest that snake.

**Eleanor:** That's very interesting. I had never heard that story.

**Helen:** And she lived long enough and got old enough that she finally got wound up in the machinery and it killed her.

**Eleanor:** Your father and mother once had a pet pig, I remember.

**Helen:** Yes, we had alfalfa fields; wonderful alfalfa and father also raised hogs. And this little pig's mother died, and when he found it, it was almost dead. It was a pure bred polandchina and it had its weekly bath, and got so mean that our help, the help that helped father would run from the barn to the house so the pig wouldn't get them.

**Eleanor:** Can you think of any more interesting things from your days at home?

**Helen:** There was a big shaft, the big shaft in the mill; there were some in the first story and some in the second. And after father had sold that mill a family moved in from western Kansas by the name of King. They had three children, two boys and a girl. One boy was about seven and he went up in the mill and jumped and got hold of one of those shafts to skin the cat. It almost skinned him till his crippled father got there and got the mill turned off. He never tried to skin the cat on the shaft again.

I might add, that often mother would have an evening meal prepared for one extra person and maybe she would have six extra men to feed that night. It was one of the things of the early age, being generous and dividing and sharing with others.

Often times when there would be a customer who failed to be able to make good bread they would bring that sack of flour back and mother would bake bread from that sack of flour and they couldn't believe it was the same sack.

I might mention that this roller mill at Murdock was the first mill on this side of Wichita that could make flour. There was another mill to the west of Kingman that folded up very shortly after, but they could not make flour.

**Eleanor:** Did the buffalo come through this part of the country?

**Helen:** Yes, there were buffalo a very short time before. Our pasture joining us on the east had a good number of buffalo wallows, which are still quite deep.

I might add, that father had to drain that mill wheel, mill race every so often to get it cleaned out and the wheel cleaned out. Then is when you could pick up fish along that race, and down in below the mill wheel the fish would collect in there, and so would the water moccasins. I would slide down that rod to get fish and quite often would try to climb back up the greasy thing to get away from the water moccasins.

I remember too that when a severe storm would come up in the night, unexpectedly, my daddy had to walk that mill race and then up the river a distance of about two miles to pull the boards to let the water flow go through so it wouldn't wash the dam out. And also pull

the boards at the water gates to let the water go through to the river so it wouldn't wash them out. It really was a serious time for children, and we would lie awake until he got back home, to be sure that he had gotten back safely.

You might be interested in knowing that I really had precious parents. And when anyone would get sick in our community many of them would call mother and ask her to please make some fish soup. A soup that was so mild that you didn't know what it was, and so light on the stomach. And it made no difference what mother was doing, and also father, for he would go to a *private pond* and get a fish to make that soup. And mother would quit any work she was doing to prepare it for the sick.