

MENNONITE MILLS IN CENTRAL KANSAS

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(46 min.)

MENNONITE MILLS IN CENTRAL KANSAS.

A while back, in another era, BC, Before COVID, LaVern asked me to develop a program on Mennonite flour mills in central Kansas, focusing on the Alta Mill and the Murdock Mill in Kingman County.

The topic of flour mills is something learned for me. Yes, I am a descendant of the Alta Mill families. My grandpa was John E. Stucky. But in 1980, when my dad's cousin Eldo Stucky donated three milling machines to the Goessel Museum, Ben Boese was the Museum Chairman there. He had been my high school woodworking teacher at Moundridge.

He came to me, and demanded that I make a large, mounted poster illustrating the milling process, like a flow chart--that you will see a little later. And it had to be RIGHT NOW, RIGHT NOW, IN 3 WEEKS, BEFORE THE NEXT THRESHING DAYS!!!

I told him, "Mr. Boese, there's only one thing wrong----- I've never been inside a flour mill. They tore the Alta Mill down when I was 6 years old, and I have no idea what this process is like. I don't think I can do this."

He said, "Aw, sure you can. You know this stuff by osmosis from your family, right?"

No-----, I don't. So, I began research from my Dad Ransom, his cousin Eldo, taking trips to the Whitewater and Lindsborg mills, and drawing chicken scratches on paper. After double and triple checking with them, I went ahead and drew the poster. And I've been learning ever since.

WHEAT. There is something about flour mills in central Kansas. There is first the obvious connection of the Great Plains being well suited for wheat growing.

IMMIGRANT SHIP There are stories of many pioneers, including Mennonites, who flooded the plains in the 1800's, coming from other places and other countries.

KOTOSUFKA. The countries of origin included various parts of Russia. Our Swiss Volhynians along with others in Ukraine had already grown wheat in lands before coming to Kansas.

RUSSIAN MILLS

Even in Russia, flour mills were built among Mennonites. The milling industry really exploded in the early 20th century.

IMMIGRANT HOUSE EXTERIOR. As the people migrated and began to get settled, some communities were aided by the Santa Fe Railroad building immigrant houses for them to live in temporarily.

IMMIGRANT HOUSE INTERIOR. As the immigrants got established in America, buying land, building houses, they were living out of Russian steamer trunks that contained all their worldly possessions except the clothes on their backs. So, space was limited for food, utensils, and seeds for the new world. Of course, there was only space for a sack of a gallon or two of wheat to plant. This would not plant a very large field.

ANYWHERE THERE WAS A SMALL CREEK

As the land became settled across the State, quickly there sprang up a flour mill in almost every community. Wheat itself was not much good unless it could be made into flour. And flour and food was critical for survival.

So, anywhere there was even a little creek, someone threw up a dam and built a flour mill, and even a 3-story building--until they suddenly realized that,-- Oh!, there wasn't enough water flow to support the operation of the mill. So, in a year or two it was closed and torn down. This happened again and again across the State of Kansas. At one time or another, there were over 500 mills in the State. Today there are about 6.

Today I'll tell you a little about Mennonite flour mills in central Kansas. I won't go into much detail about any of them, so this is somewhat of an overview. I've used multiple sources, and they don't all agree. Sometimes there is conflicting information. So, if you have a different date or information than what I give, I wouldn't be surprised.

BERNHARD WARKENTIN

The mills at this time were operating with the ancient technology of mill stones, or burr mills, with very hard millstones imported from France.

And, the majority of wheat was soft, white wheat. And, the major crop in Kansas in the 1870's was actually corn, not wheat.

It wasn't really until 1885 when Bernhard Warkentin imported 15,000 bushels of Turkey Red seed wheat to sell to farmers, that the explosion in wheat production actually happened in Kansas.

WARKENTIN MILL HALSTEAD. In 1873 Warkentin built a mill in Halstead on the banks of the Little Arkansas River with his father in law, Eisenmeyer. If the date is right, this is the first Mennonite flour mill in central Kansas. He was an astute businessman, and anticipated the large wave of Mennonites migrating to Kansas, and he would be there ready to serve them.

This mill began as a grist mill, grinding with millstones, 3 runs of buhrs, and later increased to five runs of buhrs and five sets of rollers. Through different ownerships Warkentin sold the Mill, and the Mill eventually became part of other businesses.

HALSTEAD MILL

A view from Halstead's Main Street, looking NE shows the mill in Halstead, the left building of which was destroyed by fire in 1913. Some of the lower buildings survive today.

EXCELSIOR MILL, MARION. In 1874, Jacob Funk bought an existing mill 2 miles south of Marion Centre, the first mill in Marion County, built by Ira Moore in 1871. Eventually the Ehrlich family bought it. It was also known as the Stone Brook mill and Excelsior Water Mill. Originally built as a wooden mill, stone and cement parts were added on later.

When the County changed the course of the Cottonwood River south of Marion in the early 20th century, the millers sued the County for loss of their main power source, and won. The money was used to build improvements and move to engine power. A railroad line was built past the mill for shipping.

This mill ran up till the 1960's. Today it is still there, on land owned by Darryl and Pat Enos, with a family connection.

SHORT-LIVED MILLS

There were some early attempts at mills that were very short-lived, and almost unknown. I was told by someone---and I forget who---that very early, 1875, just a few months after they migrated from Russia, Joseph Schrag, before he built the Alta Mill, first built a mill on the Little Arkansas

River halfway between Halstead and Sedgwick. In researching that, I found evidence of a map, a newspaper story, and land deeds indicating land owned by Joseph Schrag.

The problem was, he built the mill right on the edge of the river, and I was told the building collapsed and fell into the river. Today there is no trace of a mill there. He then took the machinery to Alta.

JOSEPH SCHRAG MILL SITE, SEDGWICK TWP.

A map illustrating the land deeds shows a variety of land sales, with the red line indicating the land Joseph Schrag first bought on February 16, 1875. This roughly 40 acres is also at the mouth of the Kisiwa Creek.

ZUR HEIMAT AD SCHRAG MILL

An advertisement in the German Mennonite paper "ZUR HEIMAT" from January to May 1876 reads:

ARKANSAS VALLEY MILL

I hereby make known, that my new Water mill, on the Little Arkansas River Located 3 Miles south from Halstead and 8 miles southwest of Newton

Is now in progress and (I) kindly invite the customers. I take the tenth bushel of winter wheat or ten cents per bushel. I hope to satisfy all customers in regard to the quality of the flour. I give all of the bran, coarse and fine. Bring in wheat and give it a try!

Joseph Schrag, Arkansas Valley

But on Dec. 11, 1876, we see the first mention of Joseph Schrag and Jacob Gering, buying 12 acres in Alta Township, under the provision that they build a grist mill and also passing along water rights. In consideration of that, the said Joseph Schrag and Jacob Gering are to build a grist mill on SE quarter of Sec 24.

-----So, the Arkansas Valley mill SE of Halstead lasted a little over a year.

HALSTEAD MILL AD WARKENTIN

But before we go on, note that Bernhard Warkentin was a little concerned. He noticed that he had some competition at the Halstead Mill, so he now took out an ad in March, claiming:

Big Discount In the HALSTEAD MILL. Will from now on be milled at reduced prices.

NEUFELD MILL TURKEY CREEK

Then another short-lived mill that pre-dated the Alta Mill was a one owned by Dietrich Neufeld on the Turkey Creek at Dutch Avenue, planned as early as January 1875. The map in the upper right, from the State Agriculture Report shows a spot on the west side of the creek, but land deeds describe 3 acres in a "D" shaped piece of land on the east side in the curve of the creek. A later neighboring deed took note of the existence of the Mill.

Several newspaper stories describe the repeated collapse of the Turkey Creek dam from high water. In only a year, they gave up.

DEITRICH NEUFELD MILL FOR SALE AD

Already by May 1876, Dietrich Neufeld took out an ad to sell his mill. He bragged up his new Water Mill, saying,

"This mill has for its purpose a very convenient location, by being in close proximity to the German settlements, and can be easily reached by good roads. The cause of the sale is the current lack of working capital. Since this favorable opportunity will probably not be open for long, buyers might hurry up. The extremely generous conditions can be found at Dietrich Neufeld, Halstead, Harvey County, Kansas."

Notice that he conveniently forgot the fact that the dam washed out several times. So, again, a mill lasting a little over a year. In 1893 Dietrich Neufeld finally sold the 3 acres to Henry Regier for \$15.

NOEL BROS & FELIX MILL HARVEY CO WEST PARK.

In old newspapers, I saw a notice of people going fishing at the Alta Mill and old Felix mill. I first had no idea what they were talking about. After a search, I came up with a mill named "Noel Brothers and Felix" 7 miles NW of Halstead. Finding notice of a sheriff's sale, the legal description of the land was in what is today the Harvey County West Park, towards the south end, shown here in a green box.

There is a concrete dam there today, but that was probably built in the 1940s after the park was created. Again, the mill didn't last into the 20th century.

LYDIA MAYFIELD 7 MILLS

Lydia Mayfield, in her booklet "Halstead, the Early Years," made the claim that there was at one time or another, 7 water mills between the

Turkey Creek and Sedgwick. However, she concedes that "*There is no written record of this, it is the word of an old timer.*"

At first, I was astonished. I couldn't believe it. But, after digging, I count 6,--- well, 7 if you count a Sedgwick flouring mill. But, there is no record of Sedgwick mills being water mills on the river, but steam mill and later wind powered on the east side of town. -----Actually, if you count the Neufeld Turkey Creek mill and a Peter Gering mill 2 miles west of Alta which we'll talk about later, that's 7. The location of the mills are in red stars.

But it is remarkable to see so many mills within just 20 miles. And, five of these had Mennonite ownership at one time or another.

ALTA MILL

The story of the Alta Mill, 10 miles SW of Moundridge, begins in 1876 with Joseph Schrag and Jacob H. Goering, who built a burr mill on the Little Arkansas River, this time set back away from the river, with water diverted by a dam through a mill race channel with the mill building on top of the mill race. Joseph's teenage son John J. Schrag, nicknamed Crickehannes, built this brush dam, and a later board and beam dam. You have to realize, that there was an Alta Mill 10 years before there was ever a Moundridge, Hesston, Inman, or Buhler.

BURR MILL

A burr mill is a stone grinding mill, with the wheat passing between two horizontal stones. The bottom one, the "bed stone" does not move, but the top one, called the "runner," rotates. As the wheat is fed in the center hole, the ground wheat, or grist, works its way to the outside.

Many mills ground not only wheat, but corn and rye also.

ALTA MILL INDIAN STORY.

It is well known that there were many generations of Native American Indians that lived in the Alta Mill area. And we are today living on what was once Indian land. Artifacts of 500, 1000, 1500, and 3,000 years old have been confirmed by archeologists within a mile of the site. On the Survey map of 1860, see the words in the red box, "Kaw Indian Camp" with little teepees drawn, west across the river from the Mill.

In the days when Schrag and Goering owned the mill, before 1884, Indians were known to congregate west of the Alta Mill across the river where they had a burial ground of their ancestors. A story told in Bill Juhnke's drama, *Our Town Our Country*, relates how some Indians came across the river on their ponies to the business side (east side). Mill owners

Jacob H. Goering and Joseph Schrag knew they were the **quote** "friendly type." Several dismounted. One tied his reins to a small scale for weighing sacks of grain. Something spooked the pony and he took off running, dragging the scale. Parts were broken. Joseph said to Jacob, "**Sie setten das gut mache**" (They should make it good, or, they should replace it). Jacob replied, "**Les sie geh!** das tet may coshta vie a nie vog" (Let them go. That would cost more than a new scale).

---I thought this was once on the SMCHA website, compiled by Delbert Goering, but is not now.

***Now, this all sounded to me like a nice, made-up story to tell to children. However, I have been able to trace it back to the original source, Adolph Goering, who was an eyewitness to this event as a child. So, it appears this is actually a true story.

PETER M. CLAASSEN

Schrag and Goering operated the mill successfully until 1884, when they sold it to Peter M. Claassen from Newton, who had been trained in Warkentin's mill. He made improvements of a second dam in 1885, and building a house at the site.

ALTA MILL PICTURE

In 1898, Claassen built the 3-story roller mill that many remember, and images survive in pictures. This is a wood frame building with tin siding, NOT a stone block mill as some have assumed. This is a 1907 picture with millers loading sacks of flour into horse drawn wagons. The roller mill technology was a progressive advance in technology at the time.

JOHN AND JAKE STUCKY

In 1903 and 04, Claassen suffered back-to-back, state record floods. He said that's enough of that, and sold it to a corporation of 25 area farmers and businessmen. The principal operators were two young brothers, John E. and Jacob B. Stucky, who eventually bought out stock from everyone else. The Alta Milling Corporation was formed, and it grew into a greater community center. A third brother, Chris Stucky, lived there also, was a mechanic, farmed, and tuned pianos. My father grew up in that community along the river with 3 families and 17 cousins, if you can imagine that kind of chaos.

GOESSEL MUSEUM MILLING DIAGRAM.

The real benefit of a roller mill is a series of coarser and progressively finer rollers, with taking the product by elevator upstairs and sifting between each stage, running it through the next set of rollers, and sifting again, is first, the speed---the rollers can greatly increase production----- and also that you can separate out different parts of the wheat product---white flour, bran, wheat germ, or cream of wheat, shorts, etc. The stone milling process just ground everything together.

ROLLER MILLS

One of the most common stories about milling is that the millstones could not grind the hard Turkey Red Wheat, so they had to bring in roller mills. I question part of that story line. In the roller mill process, wheat has a certain amount of water added to soften it for 24 hours. This process is called tempering. So, the first pass through the rollers is not cracking hard wheat, but more like rubbing off the jacket of bran on the outside of the wheat grain, as both my Dad and Eldo have said.

The mill stones may have had to re-grind Turkey Red Wheat, but the real reason roller mills nationwide and worldwide came in was because technology was advancing----not because a few farmers in central Kansas had a little trouble grinding harder wheat.

WOODEN SPOUTING

In a 19th century flour mill, the milled product is run through wooden elevator spouting back upstairs to be sifted through various sifting processes. This is a picture from the restored Lindsborg Mill. I will recommend, that if you want to know what the inside of the Alta Mill was like, go see the Lindsborg Mill. They were built in the same year, 1898, and some of the machinery was manufactured by the same manufacturer.

And, if you go the first weekend in May, for their Millfest, they will run the mill empty, with all the belts and pulleys moving, and sifters shaking, and the whole building vibrating. It is quite an experience.

WATER TURBINE

When the Alta Mill operated on water power, this was provided by a 23-inch, horizontally turning water turbine. In times of low water, it was supplemented by engine power--first by steam engine, and later by gas or distillate.

ALTA MILL DAM

The 1885 dam was a 15 foot-high wooden structure which raised the water level higher, and was a prominent landmark along the river.

DAM FISHING

The dam and the lake it created gave opportunities for fishing, boating, and swimming, and attracted people from miles around. One newspaper story claimed on a nice Sunday, there was fishing continuously from Alta to Sedgwick. There were numerous exaggerated "fish stories" that were told in the newspapers.

DAM BOATING.

But with all the fun with fishing, swimming, boating, and watching fish go upstream on the fish ladder, there were also tragedies. There were 4 drownings that have been documented so far.

In 1891, a 16-year old girl, Stella Covert, thought to be a strong swimmer, drowned in the current.

In 1897, a party of young adults from Newton ended tragically as two out of three in a boat going over the dam resulted in the drowning of Abraham Dick and Jakob Riesen who got caught in the vortex below the dam. Their bodies were not recovered for a couple of days. The younger brother of one of them jumped for safety and clung to a tree and did not go over the dam. The Moundridge Journal, Halstead Independent, and Newton Kansan all record long stories of the gruesome discovery of bodies.

In 1908, a 14 year old YMCA camper, Marshall Plummer drowned after his troop hiked out from Newton.

DAM AND FISH LADDER

But in most years, the dam and lake were a social point of attraction for many, and created many memories. The Alta Mill was certainly more than a business. The park south of the Mill hosted reunions, weddings, revivals, baptisms, sports including baseball games among teams from area towns, and competitions between McPherson and Bethel Colleges. The colleges had two debates there, one on "The Progress of Civilization."

I came to realize the Alta Mill as a "destination place. In earlier times, people didn't take vacations like they do now. So, a man would load up a wagon with wheat, hitch up the horses, put Mom and the kids on top, and go off to the Alta Mill. They would do their business, then maybe camp overnight or a couple of days in the park, go boating, fishing, swimming, eat with the Stucky families. It was like you or me going to Kansas City for

the weekend. It was the highlight of their year. So, of course, the 80 or 90 year old people who were 5 or 6 back then remember this place with great nostalgia.

The neighbor to the north said a few years ago, there was a car parked in the drive, and he saw a 100-year old man stomping around in the weeds on the south side of his yard. The neighbor asked if he could help him. The man was from Oklahoma, and he remembered when he was 5 years old, his father brought a load of wheat here from Oklahoma, and he wanted to see if there was anything left of the place.

FOUR SCHOOL DISTRICTS

In fact, one unique point about Alta was that it was a true American Melting Pot. It drew customers not only from the Moundridge Swiss Volhynians, but the Buhler and Inman Low Germans, the Halstead South Germans, and the Burrton "Englishers." It also drew many visitors from Newton, McPherson, and Hutchinson. And, we know that people came from as far west as Meade, KS and Oklahoma border to bring their wheat to grind into flour.

FLOUR SACKS

Another symbol of the Alta Mill was the iconic flour sack design. With red and blue alternating print, and a picture of the mill, and arched logo, it created a memorable image.

DAM COLLAPSED

Fishing took many forms. After the dam collapsed in 1918, remnants survived for years. Here 3rd from left in the vest is Cornelius "Peanuts" Friesen, the father of Katie and Mary. He operated a store at Alta and later Buhler, but couldn't be kept away from the fishing pole.

FLOOD

Floods were a familiar part of life along the river. Here a flood in about 1918 shows the store and the Mill in the background. The highest record flood of all time has been determined as the 1951 flood which had 24 inches on the floor of the John E. Stucky house.

TRUCK

The Stucky Brothers also had the first car dealership in the Moundridge area. They sold 5 lines of vehicles including REO, the forerunner of the

Oldsmobile. Ransom Stucky was named after its founder, Ransom E. Olds. One vehicle was this truck, for deliveries.

But the Mill community also experienced some difficult times. They helped several people through the Depression when needed. And, thinking of the near-hanging of neighbor John J. Schrag happened in Burrton, for not buying war bonds in WWI, I asked family members what did John and Jake do? Surely they were hit up to buy war bonds. Eldo knew. He said,

"No, they never had to buy war bonds, but one day early in the morning, an Army truck backed up to the Mill and just started loading off flour sacks--confiscating it. John was eating breakfast in his long underwear, and ran out of the house, yelling, "Hey, you're stealing our flour!!"

The leader of the group, probably some Sergeant, stuck a rifle under my grandpa's neck, and said, "Shut up. This is your contribution for the war."

Well, what do you say to that? So, grandpa went back in the house and stewed about it for 3 days, and finally came to the conclusion, that, "Well, soldiers have to eat, too."

HOUSE

The house and the yard were a showplace, and the families hosted many guests and visitors. But, after the John J. Schrag incident, the Stucky Brothers met with selected neighbors in the basements of the houses, at night, with all the lights off. They began to talk seriously if they needed to get out of there, and go to Mexico, or maybe South America. This gives you an idea of the real fear and terror they felt.

My Dad's cousin Amanda Nightingale said, "Oh, they did more than talk about it-----they went to Mexico to scout out land. But the women cried and screamed and threw such a fit, that they didn't want to leave their families and church and community, that the men said, OK, OK, and they stayed.

I could have been born in Mexico.

STUCKY ORCHESTRA

Now on to happier times. As the Alta Mill was much more than a business, one part of life there was music. Early bands were created. Here the Stucky Orchestra operated in the 20's and 30's with John, Jake and Chris Stucky, and some of their children. It was in demand to play at weddings, church, and other occasions.

MILL TORN DOWN.

The end of the Alta Mill was a "perfect storm" of three things. **First**, because of World War II gas rationing, they lost virtually all of their customers overnight. People couldn't afford to drive out from town just to get flour. **Second**, women could simply go to the store and get baked goods off the shelf. **Third**, there was no railroad anywhere near the Mill to ship products to other markets--although there were three attempts to bring in railroads.

So, they closed the corporation in 1949, sold the grounds in 1954 when John and Jake and their wives moved to town, and in 1960 the Mill was torn down. Two teenagers who helped tear the mill down who are still around today are Roy Kaufman and Tom Schrag.

Some artifacts survive, some milling machinery at the Goessel and Moundridge museums.

What made this place unique, aside from being a community and recreation center which was a meeting place of 4 communities, was that it made the transition from a stone burr mill to roller mills; water power to engine power; and survived deep into the 20th century as a family oriented, person-to-person, custom and exchange mill, not an industrial mill on the railroad. In addition, it is one of maybe 5 locations in the State with an existing mill race today.

The grounds today are not open to the public, but since I own the site, I will be happy to give tours there if you contact me. There has been no milling activity for over 70 years; yet people **STILL** stop by all the time looking for the place. That's why I have a sign up, to identify the place.

FRIESEN WINDMILL, HILLSBORO

On to other mills. In 1877, Jacob Friesen, who manufactured fanning mills in Russia, built a wind grist mill on the west end of the village of Gnadenau, that was located 1-1/2 miles southeast of today's Hillsboro. It operated 24 hours a day if there was wind. It ran for about 20 years. Many years later, a replica was constructed on the grounds of the Hillsboro Adobe House Museum.

EHRlich AND FUNK MILLS

In 1877 the Ehrlich family built a mill 2 miles NW of Marion on the Cottonwood River. In 1882, Jacob Funk built a Steam powered Mill in Hillsboro.

MOUNDRIDGE MILL

The Moundridge Mill began in 1886, a year before Moundridge was officially established as a town. For 62 years, the mill was an influential part of the wheat industry of the area. The founder was Christian Krehbiel, followed by J. W. and then Nelson Krehbiel. (*Century One, history of Moundridge*) Another source says others involved early were Jacob and P.J. Galle.

(*Neufeld, Mennonite Flour Mills of H,M, McPh Counties*)

The Mill expanded operations to locations in Kansas and Missouri. Being on the railroad line, the mill cooperated as being the shipping point for much of the relief food sent overseas by private and civic organizations.

WARKENTIN MILL NEWTON

In 1886 Bernhard Warkentin moved his operations to Newton, where he bought the existing Monarch Mills, built in 1879, and renamed it Newton Milling and Elevator Company. This became one of the most prominent mills in Kansas and Warkentin prospered greatly.

It was sold to the International Milling Company in 1948, and closed in 1964. In the early 1970's the vacant mill was in the process of being torn down when Lloyd Smith intervened and bought it, restored it, and renovated it to offices and for a while, restaurant space. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

PETER SCHLOSSER GERING

One of the most colorful characters in the Mennonite milling business is that of Peter "Schlosser" Gering, spelled with an "e". The nickname "Schlosser" translates as "locksmith." Genealogy says that his ship docked in New York in November 1874, which was not with the main Swiss groups in August or September. He did not go to Dakota Territory with the rest of his Waldheim congregation.

PETER SCHLOSSER GERING ALTA TWP.

The family genealogy says they settled near Halstead in Harvey County. However, there are absolutely no land records for a Peter Gering anywhere around Halstead. But on an 1884 Atlas, two miles west of the Alta Mill, there is land in sections 22 and 23 owned by a "P. Gaering,

spelled with an extra "a." And, in section 23, on the south side of the Little Arkansas River, there is a spot marked "Mill", even though current historians and neighbors have never heard of a mill there.

There are other Peter Gerings in the community, but the timeline fits Peter Schlosser the best. It is understandable that he may have settled in this area, considering that he was a brother to Jacob H. Goering, co-founder of the Alta Mill, and also brother to my great-grandmother, Veronica Goering Stucky, mother of John and Jake Stucky. So, Peter Schlosser Gering is my great-great uncle.

DALE TWP., KINGMAN CO. MURDOCK MILL

It is known that Peter Schlosser Gering did go down to Murdock to establish a mill on the Ninnescah River, the site today is a half mile north of Camp Mennoscah. It is believed that the mill was one reason to draw Mennonites to settle south of Kingman.

If you can see on the map, there is a 2-mile mill race leading to the mill location.

AERIAL OF MURDOCK MILL SITE

The reason for a mill race is that in a place of slight elevation drop, a dam is placed on the river above the mill and water diverted into the mill race channel. At the end of the millrace there is a check dam, with a spout focusing falling water, and the gravitational force of the water causes the water turbine to turn.

In the case of Alta, for example, the millrace was a quarter mile long. At Murdock, a 2-mile millrace indicated very, very flat land. There are still traces of the millrace there, if you know where to look today.

MURDOCK MILL PICTURE

A picture of the 1886 Murdock Mill is provided by great-great granddaughter Grayce Brown Kaufman. This mill began as many did, as a grist mill with millstones. But it later converted or added roller mills. It was said that they kept a bull snake in the mill to take care of rodents, and it did an excellent job. That is, until it got caught in the machinery.

MURDOCK MILL PAINTING

A painting of the Murdock mill that you may have seen was done in the 20th century.

MURDOCK MILL RACE

Recent pictures of the site include cement walls of the end of the millrace, which still exist.

MURDOCK MILL FOUNDATION

Parts of the stone foundation of the mill also exist. The difficult part is, this site is not very accessible, and so is not conducive to tours. But the impact and memory of the mill live on with people in the area.

PETER GERING HOUSE

The Peter Gering house is still standing, barely. The rest of the Peter Gering story gets interesting. He sold his interest in the mill. In his later years around 1900, they went down to Mexico to do mission work and do some ranching. His wife Maria died and is buried there. He and a coal miner from Hutchinson got caught in the crossfire of the Mexican revolution in 1913 and were robbed of possessions and driven from their area in Yucatan.

They had to take a boat over the Gulf of Mexico, escaping with only the shirts on their back, to Galveston, Texas. When back in America, he telegraphed a nephew in Pretty Prairie to send him money to get back to Kansas. Eventually, he went out to California on a visit to his daughter, and died there. What a life. Amazing what you can find on the internet with genealogy.

EBEL AND EBEL BROTHERS.

Moving on, in Hillsboro, there were two attempts at wind grist mills, first in 1888 by Edward Ebel, and in 1892 by brothers Bartel and August Ebel. They were also short lived. But the brothers also began a steam mill.

LEHIGH MILL STONES

If you take a nice little drive down Main Street in Lehigh, you come to a park near the water tower and see a monument with two millstones from a mill began by Frantz Groening. One date is 1894, but the bronze plaque says 1898 until 1914.

One side-light is that Frantz Groening is an ancestor of Matt Groening, creator of the highly irreverent cartoon show, "The Simpsons." Amazing what springs forth from the Mennonites.

BUHLER MILL

The Buhler mill and Elevator Company had its beginning in 1892 when a mill was erected by two Mennonites, Welk and Wiens. The business suspended in 1895 and J.J. Wall continued, and with Herman Rogalsky bought the mill. They increased capacity and in 1906 formed the Wall-Rogalsky (WR) Milling Company in McPherson.

Others joining the business were Jacob C. Regier, J. J. Buhler, and C.N. Hiebert. In 1916, there were more improvements with raising the roof seven feet and 6 more rollers added, a total of 12. Steam engines changed to electric.

In 1946 more concrete tanks were built and Buhler purchased the Enns Milling Company of Inman. At the beginning only a few were employed. By 1953, there were 67 employees.

HERB BULLER IN WAREHOUSE

The picture here shows the warehouse interior, which was where Buhler High School played basketball in its second season in 1917. Imagine a man guarding a player getting screened with a smack into one of these pillars.

WAREHOUSE DOCK TODAY; IDEATEK.

Buhler competed with giants such as General Mills and Pillsbury. Buhler began packaging under the label Dixy Lily, sold largely in the south, for biscuits. Even so, they produced a small amount of different flour for the local Low German communities for Zweiback and bread. The mill has also produced flour for MCC relief programs. The mill was sold to Nabisco and then ADM, closing in December of 2000. Today, the building is occupied by Ideatek, a communications company.

INMAN MILL

The Inman Mill began in 1892 with J. Stancel, C.E. and C. Scott. (*Neufeld, Mennonite Flour Mills in H,M,McPh Counties*) They sold in 1893 ([Newspapers.com](#)) to a Mr. Weisthaner, and had a good business. In 1894 it sold to Cornelius Enns who ran it for many years. In 1946 it was acquired by the Buhler Mill and Elevator Company (ML). In 1979 it was bought by Nabisco and then in 1985 ADM ([Roy Regehr](#)). It was closed for good in March of 2001, and much of the machinery removed. Today the Mill building and elevators are owned by a Regier Grain company.

For the years it was owned by the Buhler Mill, with a big sign atop the elevator, and knowing the intense rivalry of the two small towns, there had to be some unspoken feelings.

The Inman mill was a center of business in the Inman community and provided employment for many years.

KLASSEN MILL GOESSEL

In 1900 Frank Klassen built a mill on Main Street of Goessel, on the site of today's Post Office. It survived the 1906 Goessel tornado, but was twisted on its foundation. The tornado destroyed 3/4 of the town and traveled right down Main Street.

It was later owned by P.C. Matthies and in 1918 he moved it to Hesston because Goessel had no railroad. Later, the building burned.

KLASSEN MILL HILLSBORO

1905 is the date of a mill by Johann A. Klassen in Hillsboro. It was a roller mill run by gas engine, 5 employees, processing wheat, corn, and rye.

WALL-ROGALSKY MILL, MCPHERSON

The business partnership that began in Buhler with Wall and Rogalsky expanded to the bigger town of McPherson in 1906.

It then sold to **Cereal Food Processors** in 2000 which merged with Pendleton Flour Mills and Milner Milling in 2014 to form **Grain Craft**. **Grain Craft** supplies bagged and bulk flour for customers coast to coast for food service, pizza and tortilla industries and grocery stores. (website)

Locally today, **Grain Craft**, mills and packages flour in 2 to 50-pound sacks that include the original W-R flour and private label flour such as Great Value (Walmart's brand), Kroger (Dillon's brand) and Bakers Corner (Aldi's brand).

CLAASSEN MILL NEWTON E. 6TH ST.

Peter M. Claassen sold his interest in the Alta Mill by 1905 and came back to Newton. As the Eagle Mill had moved its operations to a new facility on East Broadway, and its building on East 6th Street was available, so Claassen bought it in 1906 and operated it as Claassen's Mill. This would be on the site of today's Newton Senior Center. Just to the east of the Claassen store front is what is today the Carriage Factory Art Gallery.

There were at least 6 flour mills in Newton at one time or another, 3 of them had Mennonite ownership at one time or another. All were in downtown Newton not far from the railroad tracks.

CLAASSEN AND SON

Peter Claassen and his son operated the mill at this location. The Claassen mill operated in the downtown area. It was torn down in about 1965(?)

PARTRIDGE MILL

A charter was granted in 1919 to McLeod to build a mill at Partridge, southwest of Hutchinson, next to the railroad tracks, and right on highway 61. It was a very strong, poured cement structure.

In 1932, my Dad's cousin Eldo was married. The family story is, The Alta Mill Stucky Brothers felt they needed to set up Eldo in the milling business, so they looked around for a mill for sale, and found the Partridge Mill. Eldo ran it for many years, then turned it over to brother Richard who eventually ran it as a feed mill and eventually made fish food. They discontinued the business in the 1980s, with an auction of contents in the 1990's and Richard died in 1996. Since it was on a railroad right of way, the railroad then took ownership.

GOERZ MILL construction

Our last mill is one that is still operating today. It is located in Newton on Broadway, just east of the Newton Public Library, near the old Axtell Hospital. It began in 1918, built by Rudolph Goerz, son of David Goerz, one of the co-founders of Bethel College.

GOERZ/ARDENT MILL TODAY

Rudolph built the Goerz mill wisely, out of poured cement, and it is as solid as a rock today. The mill structure is in the center of this picture, looking northeast. They still use the same roller mill and sifter machinery from 1918. The elevator can store up to 3.5 million bushels of wheat. This is enough to store all the annual crop in Harvey County. Yes, farmers in the area still bring in wheat to sell there.

The Ross family bought the mill and ran it for many years as the Ross mill, which you may remember that lighted sign at the top of the mill. In 1974 Cargill, a national agricultural conglomerate, bought it. Then in 2002, the Horizon Mill, a Cargill affiliate was formed.

In 2014, Ardent mills was formed between ConAgra, Cargill, and Harvest States. So, it is today named Ardent Mills.

100TH ANNIVERSARY

In the summer of 2018 an open house in Newton was held for the 100th anniversary of the flour Mill. There were food, displays, speeches, and tours for the public. They now employ 70 workers.

STRUCTURE OVER THE STREET

You may have seen the structure that goes over Broadway street. This is not just a walkway. The flour product is milled on the north side of the street, then sent by vacuum over the street to the building on the south side where it is packaged by high speed packing machines.

PACKAGING

The statistics on their handout are:

- *They produce 850,000 pounds daily, equal to one and a half million loaves of bread daily.
- *They produce enough flour every 25 minutes to provide every citizen of Harvey County a loaf of bread.

FLOUR SACK LABELS

They produce different products in over 100 packaging labels to be sent all over the country.

WHITE PACKAGES

And—The mill operates 24 hours per day, and when running at capacity they can pack 57,600 2 pound bags, or 2 million per month. They also produce 5 pound, 10 pound, and 25 pound bags.

What is amazing is, that the milling technology and machinery has not changed much at all since the late 1800's. What has changed is the very high speed packing, and safety improvements.

Yes, the Ardent label does show up in local grocery stores. And, if you check the time code stamped on every package, look for the letters "NT", to indicate it was milled in Newton. Ardent is one of the largest milling companies in the country, including many mills nationwide.

OTHER MILLS NOT MENNONITE

Other early central Kansas mills, not Mennonite, to remember.

- *1871 Marion
- *1871 Sedgwick
- *1873 Peabody
- *1874 Florence

*1875 Newton City Mills

*1875 Hutchinson steam mill; 1876 water powered; and had several mills.

*1877 Burrton

*1880 Canton

*1880 McPherson

*1880 Kingman

OTHER MILLS

*1883 Galva

*1887 Haven

*1889 Walton

*1899 Whitewater.

*1906 Burns

*1907 Aulne

*1909 Durham

-----Pretty Prairie, I was told, once had a feed mill, but never a flour mill.

Amazing how far the milling industry has come. From a total of over 500 mills statewide, there are only 6 surviving today.

FIELDS OF WHEAT

Today with all the advances in agriculture, you can still drive through central Kansas at harvest time, seeing the vast seas of golden grain waving in the wind.

PITCHING BUNDLES

It still evokes memories of early days, when labor-intensive hand work was the process of the day.

WHEAT CLOSEUP

It still causes us to recall ancient and even Biblical lessons of sowing and reaping, and the sustaining of life that goes along with those images. The wheat harvesting and milling of wheat has brought to our communities is not merely symbolic. It is life itself.

THE END

NEWTON MILLS (not counting just elevators)

1875 Newton City Mills E. 3rd and Oak operated until 1902 by Elias Wood, Daniel Wood, and D.K. Cassel

1889 sold, new owners enlarged the facility.

1894 Newton Milling and Elevator (Warkentin) purchased mill

1902 destroyed by fire.

1879 Monarch Mills.

In 1886 Bernhard Warkentin et al. purchased and named it Newton Milling and Elevator.

In 1948 sold to International Milling Co.

1964 shut down. Was in the process of being torn down in the early 1970s when Lloyd Smith purchased and renovated it. Now on National Register.

1899 Eagle mill chartered on E 6th St.

1904 Eagle Milling built new facility at Broadway and Pine. Vacated mill on 6th St.

1905 Claassen Mill. Peter M. Claassen sold the Alta Mill and bought the Eagle Mill. Operated it until early to mid 1960's _____

1904 Eagle Mill built at Broadway and Pine.

1913 Broadway and Pine sold to J.H. Johantgen, re-named Empire Milling Co.

1918 Sale of mill, became Consolidated Flour Mills.

1959 closed, destroyed by fire.

1918 Goerz Mill built on E. Broadway

1938 sold to Paul and G. Murray Ross, operated Ross Industries.

1974 sold to Cargill

2002, the Horizon Mill, a Cargill affiliate was formed.

2014, Ardent mills was formed between ConAgra (another ag conglomerate), Cargill, and Harvest States. Still operates today as Ardent Mills.

(later dates I got directly from Ardent Mills)

INTRO

Brian Stucky is a retired teacher living in Goessel. He grew up southwest of Moundridge in the Alta Mill area; He taught Art and Photography at Buhler and Goessel a total of 38 years.

He says he didn't do well in History in Junior High and High School, but what lit a spark is when it became personal. During the 1974 Centennial he was a junior in college, and he was one of the few his age that paid attention. He was seeking reasons why his great-grandparents came to America from Russia.

He is also the only living member of the committee to write the words for the plaques on the Hopefield monument.

He is interested in local and Mennonite history, and has studied pioneer trails in central Kansas.

Today, as he is a descendant of the family who operated the Alta Mill, he will speak to us about "Mennonite Mills in Central Kansas."

Would you welcome Brian Stucky

Mennonite Mills in Central Kansas

Presentation to the
Swiss Mennonite Cultural and
Historical Association

Brian D. Stucky

October 27, 2022