

# The Vintage Rabun Quarterly

## *Grist Mills of Rabun County*

Grist mills of one sort or another have been around for centuries, even millennia. Although the term grist mill can refer to any mill that grinds grain, the term was used historically for a local mill where farmers brought their own grain and in return received ground meal or flour, minus a percentage called the "miller's toll." Classical mill designs were usually water-powered, and in most watermills the water wheel was mounted vertically.

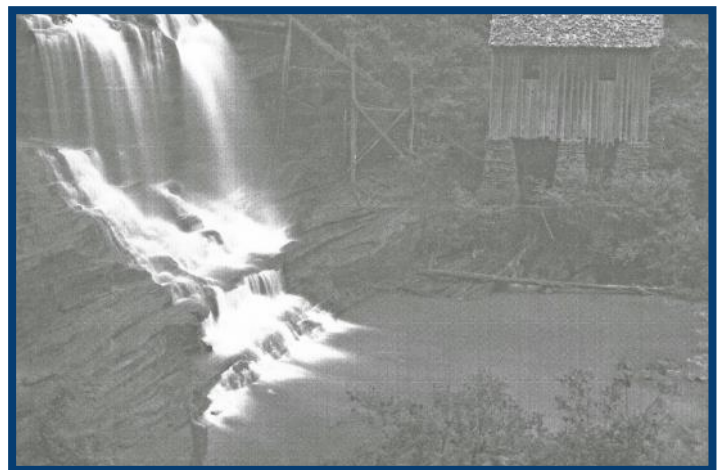
Water-powered mills are an icon of the Southern Appalachians, and in days past there were many in Rabun County. Not much wheat was grown here, so the mills ground corn to make corn meal and grits. Of course, some mills also

ground corn for whiskey. It was customary for every community to have its own mill, as there needed to be a mill within easy distance of all farmers. The mills were also a gathering place where folks visited while waiting for their corn to be ground into meal. Even when power mills were available, many preferred water ground meal because they claimed a power mill burned the corn meal in the grinding process and gave it an odd taste.

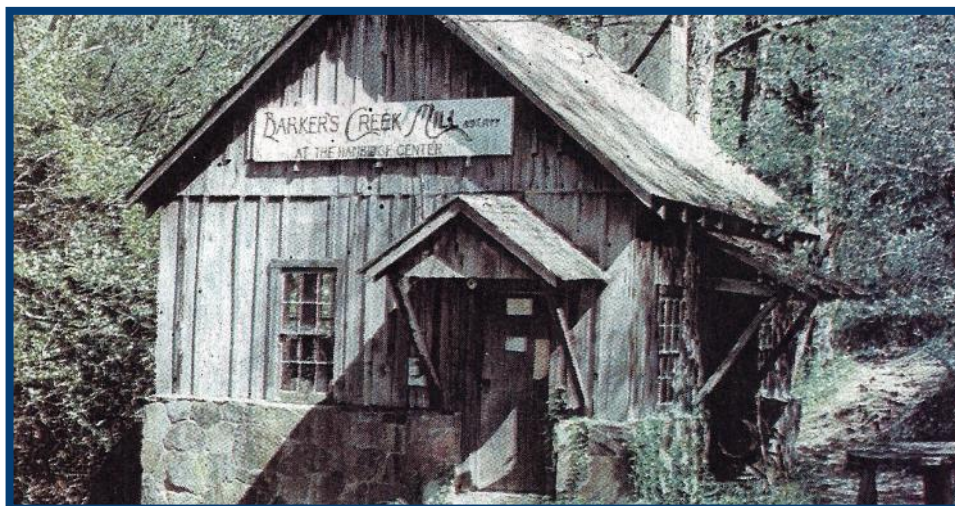
Community grist mills are gone now, though you can still see the crumbling remains of some of them along creek banks. We have included photos of some that are no longer standing. A few of the mills have been preserved and restored. They are pictured here with a bit of information about their current uses.



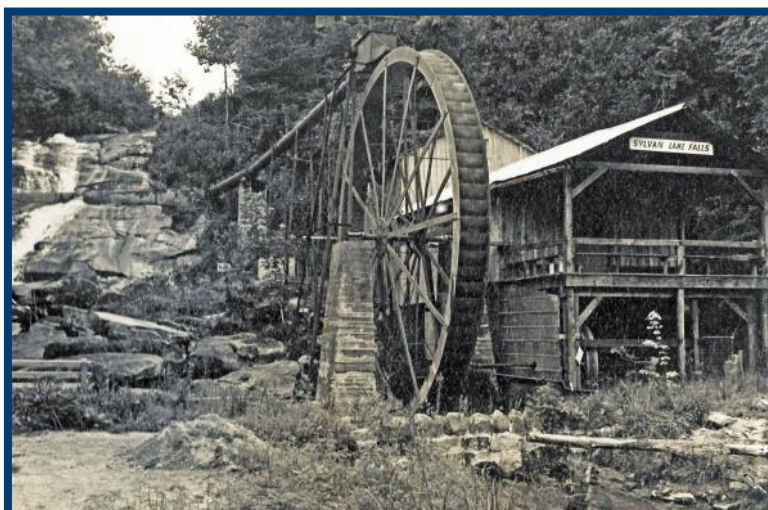
Mill on Scott's Creek, photo c. 1934



Mill on Tiger Creek, off Bridge Creek Road, mill was moved to Habersham County, photo c. 1937



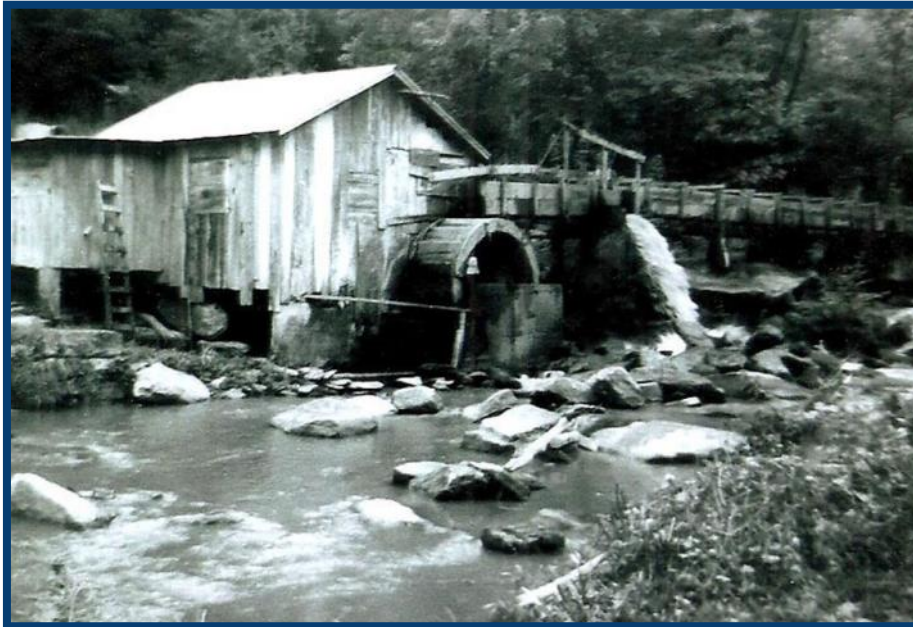
Barker's Creek Mill is nestled at the end of Betty's Creek Valley near Dillard. It is owned and operated by the Hambidge Center for Creative Arts and Sciences, a non-profit institution founded by Mary Hambidge in 1934. The current mill was built in 1944 at the site of an older mill that served the community since the first white settlers came into the area in the late 1820's. Currently whole wheat flour is produced from hard winter wheat that is brought in, and corn for grits and meal is locally grown. Their meal and grits are sold locally and shipped throughout the United States.



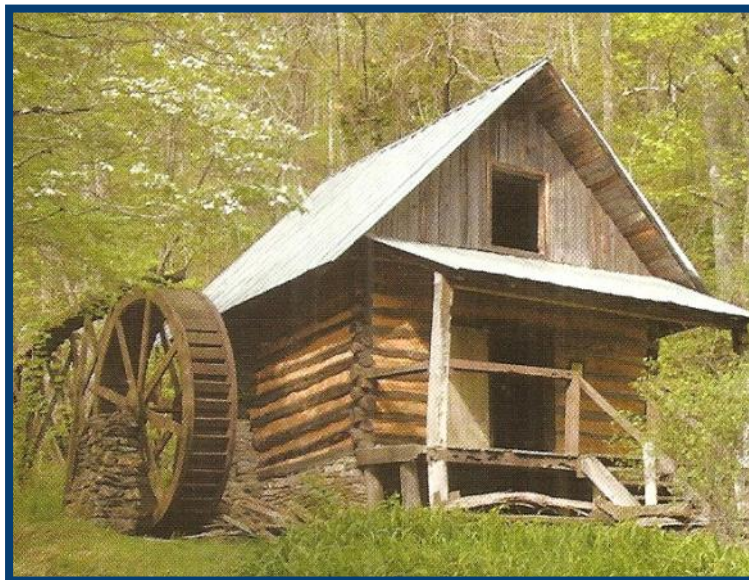
Sylvan Falls Mill, pictured above, is one of at least three mills that served residents of Wolffork Valley. Built in 1840, the mill's original wooden wheel was replaced with a 27 foot steel water wheel in 1946. The mill has since served as a private residence and a bed-and-breakfast inn. The mill still operates today supplying a variety of meals and flours ground from organically grown local grains.

A second mill that served Wolffork Valley was the Dickerson Mill. It was built in 1926 by Bill Dickerson on Keener Creek. He used the same water wheel to run a grist mill and a sawmill. There is now a private residence on the property, and the mill is part of the landscaping.





The Mill on Warwoman Creek, located off Sandy Ford Road, has a rich history. The oldest name we have for it is Captain Beck's Mill, named for Captain Sam Beck who also operated it as a sawmill. After Beck died, it was owned by Dixie Wilbanks who operated it as Wilbanks Mill and made a living there for 27 years up until 1968. It was washed out by the flooded creek in 1973 and stood idle until it was restored in 1980 and resumed a Saturday afternoon operation as Darnell Mill for a few years. It is now idle and in a state of disrepair.



The Bell Gristmill is located at the Foxfire Museum and Heritage Center. The complete mill was relocated from a few miles away in Macon County, North Carolina and reassembled on Foxfire's property.

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- Please visit our museum and research library Wednesday through Saturday from 11:00 until 3:00.
- Group tours by appointment



## *Historical Society Membership Updates*

Welcome to our new members who have joined since  
December 2023.

### Patron

George Krivsky  
Susan Smith-Patrick

### Family

William Edwards  
Don Israel  
Landy Thompson

### Friend

Betty Jo Blalock  
Josephine Budell  
Lance Holland  
Keith Jackson  
Jan Pearce  
Ruth Ritchie  
Bunny Ware  
Mary M. Whitmire