

THE GRIST MILL AT THE BELLEFONTAINE PARK AND ARBORETUM



(Photo of Grist Mill Ruins at the Bellefontaine Park and Arboretum)

The mill's story can be understood through three kinds of evidence: the surviving Bellefontaine records, the families associated with the site, and the operation of comparable grist mills of the period.

While we do not have a lot of information about the grist mill located in Bellefontaine's park, the July 1904 Dun and Bradstreet Reference Book lists the J. T. Talley and Co. Grist Mill & Gin as one of Bellefontaine's 1904 businesses. In the Bellefontaine news section of the 1918 *Progress-Warden* newspaper, there was a statement that "Messrs. J. M. Tally and M. E. Moore have put up a grist mill in town." Perhaps this 1918 grist mill was a successor to the one which existed in 1904.

John T. Talley (1842-1913) and Lucy B. Fry Talley (1851-1937) were the parents of James Monroe Talley (1874-1944) who married Louella Matilda Talley (1875-1946). (They were also the parents of Susie Talley Hitt and Huey Cleveland Talley). At one time there was an "old timey" store owned by the Talleys that stood in front of the current location of the new "Historical Hamlet of Bellefontaine" sign on the property. The Talleys once lived on the property which is now Bellefontaine's park. Marion Elmer Moore (1872-1957) married Elsie Talley Moore (1879-1963), and they had at least one child, William E. Moore, who was the father of William Leonard Moore, Clarice Moore Duke, and Bonnie Faye Moore Bryant. All of these named individuals (except for Bonnie Faye Moore Bryant) are buried in the North Union Cemetery in Bellefontaine, Mississippi.

Grist mills have existed for thousands of years, with the oldest recorded example dating to 71 B.C. in Asia Minor. Their basic purpose is to use large millstones to grind grain into flour and cornmeal for baking. By the early 1900s, grist mills were often vital community hubs where crops such as corn and wheat were processed. Farmers brought grain to the mill, exchanged news, and sometimes paid for the service with a portion of the ground grain, known as a “miller’s toll.” Leftover corn cobs and bran were sometimes processed or saved for livestock feed. A standard local grist mill typically ground about two to three bushels of corn or wheat per hour, taking about 20 to 30 minutes to grind a single bushel through traditional millstones. Water-powered mills processed around 50 to 150 bushels per day. The waiting time also made the mill a social center. Farmers often made regular Saturday trips, and while the heavy millstones processed their grain, neighbors exchanged local news, political opinions, community gossip, goods, seeds, and information about livestock.

We do not know exactly what the grist mill in Bellefontaine’s park looked like, but perhaps it may have been similar to the Williams Grist Mill which is now found at the Mississippi Agriculture Museum in Jackson, Mississippi. A Williams grist mill, patented around 1910, is a stone-burr grain mill made by the Williams Mill Manufacturing Company in Ronda, North Carolina. It was built with wooden housings and heavy stone burrs (ranging from 12” to 28” stones) encased in concrete or metal frames. The mill used an internal shaking shoe to feed grain, and a side-sifter with multiple screens split corn/grain into flour, cornmeal, and grits. The mill had a cleaning fan to blow away fine dust, chaff, and corn husks from the grain. It was powered by a flat-belt pulley system that could hook up to a tractor take-off shaft, a hit-and-miss engine, a line shaft, or an electric motor. There was an end-thrust adjustment screw with a bearing to move the runner stone closer to or further from the bed stone, letting you change the grind from coarse chicken feed to fine cornmeal.

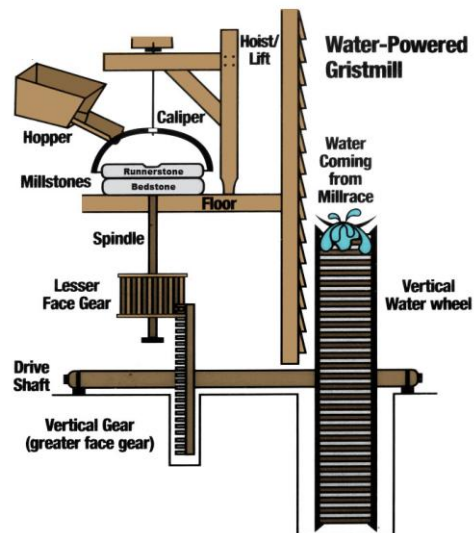
Most traditional grist mills relied on waterwheels or water turbines powered by nearby creeks, rivers or mountain springs. We speculate that the Bellefontaine grist mill could have relied on the artesian springs located on the property.

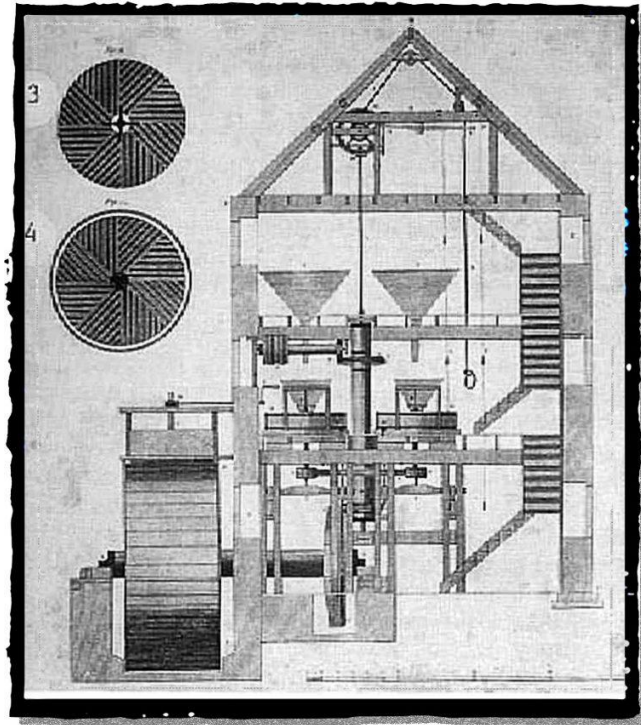
The surface of a millstone is divided by deep grooves called “furrows” into separate flat areas called “lands”. The grooves provide a cutting edge and help channel the ground meal or flour out from the stones. The stones had to be re-cut periodically to keep the cutting surfaces sharp. The stones had to be evenly balanced.

The following illustrations show how millstones and water-powered mill structures worked, offering historical context for the type of equipment that may have been used at Bellefontaine.

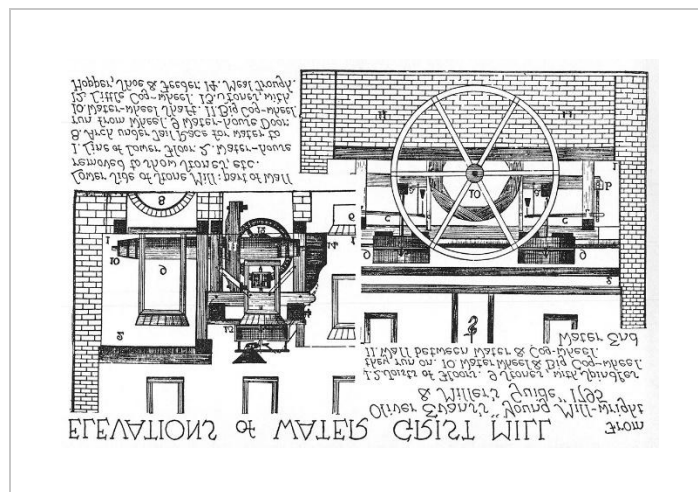


(Millstone)





An 1804 set of plans for a gristmill



Elevations Of Water Grist Mill

Jefferys, Charles W. 1945

The Picture Gallery of Canadian History Vol. II, p.83