

TUNNEL MILL JENNINGS COUNTY INDIANA

The *North Vernon Sun* published an article entitled "Mills of Jennings County Disappearing" by Wm. J. Hanna. He listed 18 mills but others, probably smaller mills existed throughout the county. Hanna listed:

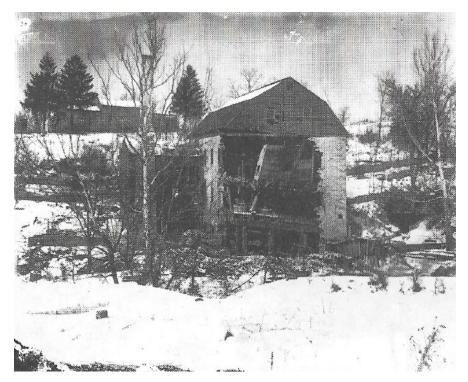
Vernon Flour Mill (built in 1837 by C.V. Valentine); Helt's Mill (built in 1834 by Nathan Stout); Brewersville Mill (built around 1840 by Adam Kellar and today known as Kellar's Mill); Goodnow Mill (built in 1850): Vinegar Mill; Blankenship Mill; Whitcomb Mill (o Six Mile Creek in Spencer Township); Ewan Mill; Fleming Mill (1859 by James and William Fleming); Passmore Mill (built by James Scott and Amos Cobb in 1850); Stanley Mill (Sawmill; built by Lindsay Stanley); Trippton Mills (built by E.P. Hicks, P.C. McGannon, and Walt Allison in 1841); McElroy Mill (Sawmill); Stout and Denny Mill (Sawmill; built by Sam Stout and Robert Denny) and of course, Tunnel Mill.

According to Hanna, Tunnel Mills was built in 1817. But others date it to 1824, being built by Ebenezer Baldwin. Rice notes that it was engineered by John Vawter. The name came from the tunnel excavated through the solid rock from

south to north in the curve of the winding Muscatatuck River. Today it is located within the state's Crosley Fish & Wildlife Area. <u>https://www.in.gov/dnr/fish-and-wildlife/properties/crosley-fwa/</u>



Leathers notes that at one point a paper mill was operated at the mill site, but not being highly profitable was discontinued. Rice mentions that after the Civil War, it became a woolen mill producing blankets, denim, and a variety of other yardage.



Tunnel Mill was the dream of a genius and built by a master hand, but progress took its toll as did the elements. In the flood of 1897, many of the walls of Tunnel Mill were destroyed.

Near 1900 the operators of the mill gave up the struggle and stopped all operations. Today some of the walls are still standing but the uncontrolled flow of the flood waters has altered the tunnel and thus a little less of Tunnel Mill remains. It is treasured by local artists and has been the subject of many famous paintings that are housed in the North American House Museum. They serve as a record of the mill's existence and a reminder of a prosperous period of Vernon history and the counties continuing agricultural heritage.



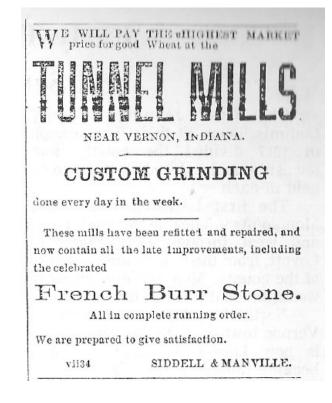
Tunnel Mill photographed by Welker around 1908.

Leathers continues "About 500 feet south of his residence on a narrow bottom between the edge of the valley and the river, the four story grist mill was built. Mr. Baldwin installed in his mill a stone burr grinding system which was the process at that time in general use for the manufacture of flour. The stone burrs installed in the mill were served by inside stairways, but all heavy objects were taken up by means of a hoist operated on the outside of the mill. The grain to be ground was conveyed from the upper floors to the hoppers of the grinding burrs by a gravity system through wooden conduits."

Rice also notes the extensive improvements made to the mill in 1833 by updating the equipment and enlarging the Mill's capacity.

Leathers writes "From the first, the patronage of the mill by the residents of the community for custom grinding was sufficient for a profitable operation of the mill. After the railroad was built through Vernon, the owners, in about 1840, developed a large and profitable shipping trade for the products of the mill. To facilitate their shipping business they built a storage depot in Vernon, on the railroad, in which to store their surplus products pending shipment which was sometimes in carload lots. They also installed steam power at the mill to insure its continuous operation, either by water or steam power.

Ad from North Vernon Sun July 30, 1874.



Tunnel Mills, just south of Vernon, was built in 1817, on the south side of a hill close to the Muscatatuck: A stone dam, which remains today, was built across the river, and the water diverted through a tunnel, cut through solid rock for one hundred yards, to the mill wheel on the opposite side of the ridge. Joe Newcomb and George Baldwin operated the mill and hauled flour to Vernon. Col. John Vawter purchased much of the flour from the mill, and when the Muscatatuck would rise, he sent the flour by flat boat to Madison, where it was reloaded to be sent down the Ohio River to St. Lois and The mill. was first New Orleans. About known as Tunnel Mills. 1880, business became dull and operations ceased. A Mr. Sedell who owned the mill at that time, decided to drill for oil. Instead of oil, Sedell struck natural gas, which was harnessed and used for light and heat by the residents of Vernon, for several years, until the supply was ex-The mill also made paper, haused. in connection with its time. for R grinding operations. Persons from as far south as Madison came to this mill, and when business was good, as many as one- hundred persons waited their turn to have their meal ground. At present, only the tunnel and some of the foundation of the mill remains, George Ale, State Representative, now owns the site.

Hanna, NV Sun March 23, 1939

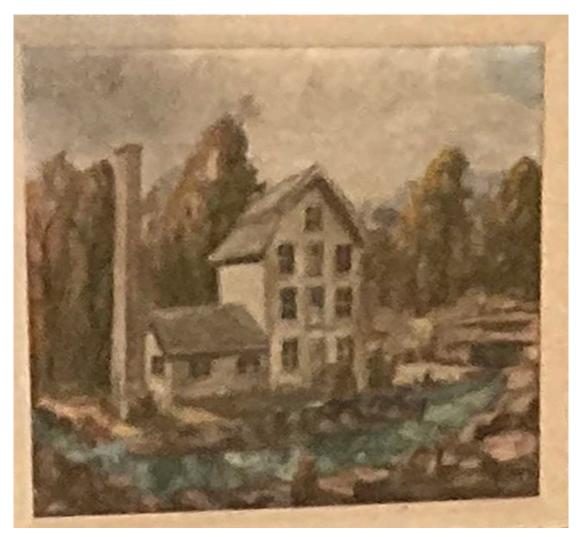
"The tunnel was 12 to 15 feet wide and four or five feet high, the bottom of which was near low water mark; but it came out of the hill on the south side with enough force to furnish water power. A dam was built across the river on the north side of the istamus which impounded ample water for the power needs of the mill. An additional channel was excavated in the bottom of the tunnel four feet wide and four feet deep with perpendicular sides, which gave it the appearance of a vast trough from one end of the tunnel to the other. That constituted the mill race through which the water flowed to flowed to the mill.

The mill was powered by a large turbine wheel through water power only.

Mr. Baldwin laid out a road about a quarter of a mile long on the create of the isthmus, from the public highway to a point where he built a large and commodious log house...



Vinson's Tunnel Mill



Dalton Bolser's Tunnel Mill [On display at Perceptions Vernon Indiana



Postcard compliments of the Jennings County News



This booklet has been prepared by using excerpts from a brochure written in 2021 by Tom Rice, entitled "Tunnel Mill Vernon, Jennings County, Indiana and from "Our Heritage", written in 1976 by Millie Leathers. Additional photos added from the North American House Museum's Archives and photographs of artwork in the museum or at Perceptions in Vernon Indiana.

> Jennings County Historical Society LM/4-2024 Modified for website 9/2024

