

The Rock Falls Mill



The beginning of the village of Rock Falls dates back to the arrival of George H. Chamberlin. He built the first mill in 1857 along with B. Weston. Mr. Chamberlin was born in Canaan, New Hampshire, on January 12, 1827. He came west in 1851 to Briggsville, Marquette County, Wisconsin. He was married in 1852 to Antoinette

Weston, and they lived in Briggsville until they moved to Rock Falls, Dunn County. Mr. Chamberlin was a man who held political offices, a worker, and a business man who started a business in Rock Falls which he ran for 46 years. He also held many local offices of trust and represented Dunn County in the assembly in the session of 1881. Appointed postmaster of the village in 1857, during the administration of President Buchanan, he served in that office for a full half a century, retiring in 1907 as the oldest postmaster in the United States.



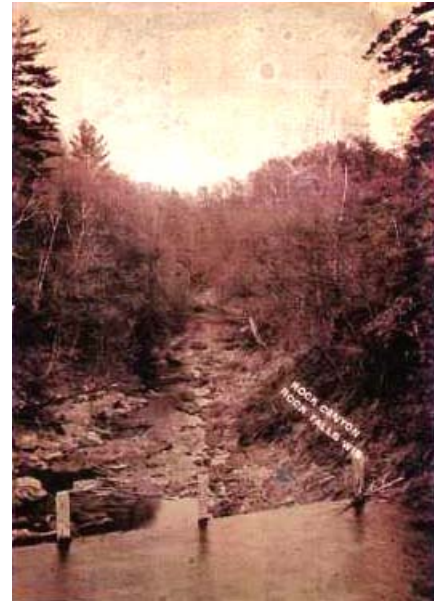
Chamberlin owned the mill until 1868 when he sold it to M. R. Bump. On August 23, 1878 the mill was undermined by a flood. (This is a picture of the mill from water level in about 1890) Mr. Bump rebuilt the mill, sold the interest to a J. P. Schneider and it was operated under the name of Bump and Schneider. Later Schneider sold his share to W. D. Churchill and it became Bump and Churchill.



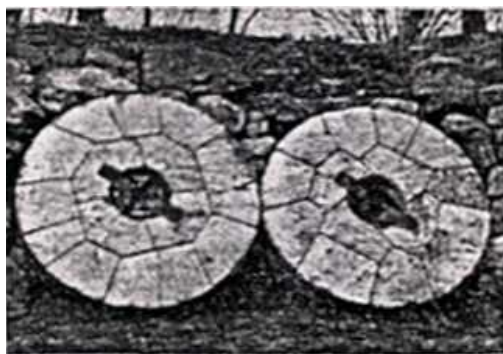
In 1900 a father and son, Samuel and Dan Andrews bought the mill. When Samuel died in 1908, Dan took full ownership. At this time the mill manufactured rye, wheat, buckwheat, wheat graham, and rye graham for flour. (It is thought that the two men at the left are Wes "Bud" Smith and Daniel Andrews.) They also ground oats, corn, and

other grains for livestock feed. Back then the cost for grinding a sack of feed was five cents.

While Dan still owned the mill, he also built the dam, which took about two months. All the work was done by the hands of local workers. Sand, gravel, and water were shoveled into a small cement mixer and then wheel barrowed or carried by buckets to its destination. The cement mixer was conveniently run by electricity which was generated by the mill. Electricity was also supplied for the homeowners of Rock Falls. At night when the mill shut down, electricity was supplied through a big generator run with batteries. Later this was switched to a diesel engine which also ran the mill if the water was low.



The mill was powered by the water fall which is a natural part of Rock Creek. The concrete dam was built around 1920 which replaced a wooden dam. Water entering the concrete abutment on the south-west side of the bridge flows through the draft tube under the bridge and into the lower draft tube. A propeller located in the lower level turned under the force of the water. A shaft, connected to the propeller, rotated, and by a series of pulleys and line shafts provided much of the power necessary to mill grain.



In 1948 Dan sold the mill to his son-in-law and daughter, Wesley and Mildred Smith. Wesley ran the mill for ten years and then sold it to the Durand Cooperatives in 1958.

The mill was totally destroyed by fire in 1969. Durand Cooperatives bought land on the South end of Rock Falls and built the present day feed mill operation.

Even though the old mill burnt down a long time ago, it is still remembered by many people in Rock Falls. After it burnt, the Rock Falls Fire Department bought the land and secured the eroding embankment that was tumbling down into the creek below. The Fire Department uses the falls and old dam for a source of continuous water for fighting fires. (Pictured at the right is the mill in 1968, shortly before it burned to the ground in 1969)



The land is now a beautiful park that is maintained primarily by a local resident named Joe Hoover. He has taken care of the parks on both sides of the highway by planting trees and flowers. These parks provide a great way to remember the history of the old mill.

Pictures and articles provided by Joe Hoover.

Page created by: Micah Daniels and Nathan Deutscher. April '97

(This page was edited in December, 2003 and January, 2004)

The nice photos were added in January of 2004 and were provided from the William J Andrews collection.