

STORY OF RAMSEY MILLS & THE OLD MILL RESTAURANT

As its name implies, "The Old Mill" restaurant has been around a long time. It was originally a flour mill built by Matthew Gregson, born in Lancashire England, November 5, 1838. He arrived in Minnesota in the late 1850's and, with his brother, Jonathan, built a couple of mills. Then, in 1862 he enlisted in the Confederate army at Vicksburg, MS.

Gregson started construction of the Ramsey Mills and Dam, in 1872, completing it the summer of 1873. The dam was made out of logs cut from trees up stream which were floated down stream, set in place by hand and chinked with dirt and stone. The dam would see two revisions, the second built with 12 x 12 timbers, third, with rebar and cement. Isaac Waltons shared the cost with Walt Meyer in the third and final revision as Waltons wanted to conserve the water supply above the dam, and were instrumental in laying the groundwork and plans for the operation of building.

Gregson built the Mill as a three story wooden structure starting with the wheel pit in the subbasement, 16 feet deep and 60 feet long which housed the variable pitch 67 horse water turbine. The movement of the turbine was driven by the water regulated by control gates. The water was channeled from the pit to the tail race back to the river below the dam. In the basement wooden gears would engage to turn the main shaft. On the first floor grain would get dumped into a receiving hopper then through chutes would be taken to the third floor or attic to the grain cleaner where the bran (outer covering of the grain) would be removed. It would be transferred down to the first floor again by chutes to feed the grindstones. Flour would drop off the edge of the stones and passed into another chute to be carried back to the third floor, or attic, so the flour could be stirred and cooled by the hopper boy then through a chute again would go down to the second floor to the bolting room where flour would be sifted through special silk sheets, from France, to separate various portions of the ground grains into their different parts. The last stop for the flour would be on the first floor, the bagging room.

The grinding stones were made from French Buhr stones (a porous field stone) which arrived here as ballast in empty cargo ships. Together the wheels weighed approximately 2,000 pounds and were set in place with man power alone. Farmers brought the grist to the mill in ox driven and horse drawn wagons. They came from all over southern Minnesota, often with 1,000 pound wagon loads. There was a corral for the oxen, and the wagon drivers slept in the mill, using flours sacks for pillows. (We have been lucky enough to hear first hand experiences from customers!)

In October of 1900, the builder of the Mill died, leaving it to his son, Wallace Gregson. In 1901, the business was bought by Rudolph Helfritz and J. H. Meyer, a brother-in-law partnership, which was taken over by J. H. Meyer in 1906. His son, Walt Meyer started work with his father in the mill when he was only 14. Through changing times, the mill continued to grind, but in 1925, it discontinued making flour. It continued to put out self-rising pancake and buckwheat flour under the brand name "North Star." By 1930 it had become strictly a mill for grinding feed, and in 1933 closed down for good due to the rise of large flour companies. Gold Medal Flour in Minneapolis being one example.



Matthew Gregson
1856

Wallace Gregson
1891



Ramsey Mills 1910



A busy day, December 1918



Original bridge over Cedar River ca 1918



Ramsey Mills 1920



Ramsey Mills 1921



Four of the 11 Meyer siblings sitting by the tail race below the dam.



Second construction of dam with railroad ties.



Workers updating raceway which leads to subbasement.



Sitting at the entrance of the spillway on top of the dam circa 1920.