

BOXLEY MILL REVISITED

by Tommi STEVENS

This story first appeared in the Newton County Times & Observer Record on 9 April 1981, and was reprinted in the Newton County Historical Society Newsletter, 2003, Volume 19 #1.

When the National Park Service completes negotiations for the purchase of Clyde and Nellie VILLINES' 308 acre farm at Boxley it will also acquire a building of notable local historical interest - the Boxley Grist Mill.

The first mill was built about 1840 by Abner Casey at its present site below the Boxley Spring. After a period of operation, it was purchased by Samuel WHITELEY and became known as the Whiteley Mill.

The Civil War broke out, and while records reveal no major battles in Newton County, there were a number of bloody skirmishes, including one at Whiteley's mill on April 10, 1864.

In his book, The History of Newton County, Walter LACKEY, relates the following "James Larking VILLINES was two years old when the battle of Whiteley's Mill was fought. As a young boy he later saw much of the battle ground. The Whiteley Mill then stood on the same ground that the present old water mill stands, and where Mr. VILLINES was the miller for many years. He says that the rebel army was camped opposite the present Duty store (Boxley) and that the Union Army attacked the enemy with both mounted and un-mounted troops, being assisted by cannons located on the flinty ridge. John CECIL, the well-known, well-loved sheriff of Newton County was the leading rebel Captain in this battle."

The war ended and by 1870, many new families had established homesteads in the Upper Buffalo River Valley and the need for a larger grist mill became evident.

A man by the name of MILLER was employed to build a large, two-story frame building and Robert VILLINES became the miller. The mill had a large under-shot wheel with plenty of water from the Boxley millpond spring supplying sufficient power for grinding corn and processing flour.

Over the years, Cager BOEN and James Larkin VILLINES, the son of Robert VILLINES, were the millers, providing a much needed service for Boxley, Ponca and the surrounding countryside.

Jasper resident Carl VILLINES recalls:

"Old Jimmie VILLINES was running the mill when I was about 12 years old. I couldn't lift the sack of corn up on the horse, so my father would load the corn and then I'd ride to the mill with it. We lived at Center Point, which was eight to ten miles away, and I had to cross the Big Buffalo five times to get to the mill. The round trip took about all day. Then Lester YOUNG put up a grist mill at Ponca which was a lot closer, so I'd go there instead."

Clyde VILLINES son of James Larking VILLINES and present owner of the Boxley Mill continued to do custom grinding until 1950 when the mill was closed down, ending more than 80 years of service and closing a chapter of Newton County history.

According to the proposal/assessment development concept plan prepared by the National Park Service, the Boxley grist mill is not located in the main development area, but is an important nearby resource that has potential as a visitor attraction. It is listed on the National Register of Historic places as being of regional significance. When acquired, the National Park Service will assume responsibility for maintaining the mill, pond, and millrace. Exhibits and/or guided tours will interpret the story of the mill and the farming community it served.

