

## **Grist Mills in Heidelberg Township**

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Heidelberg Township was fortunate to have several industries in the township in the late 1700's and during the 1800's. They were grist mills, tanneries, a rifle factory, a gun powder mill, carriage factories, cider presses, a machine shop, distilleries and saw mills.

In this issue we will cover the six grist mills that operated in Heidelberg Township.

### **Snyder Mill**

The Snyder mill was erected in 1808 by Jacob Snyder on the Jordan Creek, near the township line of Lowhill. It was erected in that vicinity and Mr. Snyder operated it for many years. It had different succeeding owners until about 1880 when Elias Kressly became the proprietor and after carrying it on for sometime sold it to Frank Hollenback who continued the business and was succeeded by his son, James. It was destroyed by fire about 1900. The saw mill there was not burned, but it was converted into a cider mill and was so used for many years.

### **Holben Mill**

John Hartman erected the Holben Mill on the Jordan Creek in 1769. The mill was just south of Pleasant Corners on Werley Corner Road. Jacob Holben became the owner in 1840, and during the next forty years different parties owned it. Pharon W. Bittner settled there in 1881 and erected a large three-story frame building in the place of the old one. He produced chopped feed on orders and also a machine shop for making general repairs to agricultural machinery. In April 1913 he transferred the business to his two sons, Elmer V. and Albert J. Bittner who carried on the business. Albert Bittner was the last owner and continued operating the mill until about 1987.



### **Leiby Mill**

Bernard Neff built the Leiby Mill in 1767. The mill was situated on the Jordan Creek about a mile and half north of Germansville, a short distance above the village of Jordan Valley.

In 1806 it included 60 acres of land and was sold for \$6000 showing that it was a valuable property with a prosperous trade. Other owners for 80 years of the Leiby mill were Henry Neff, O.W. Oswald, Adam German, Abraham Riedy, son Elias Riedy. Then William Leiby became the purchaser in 1887.

### **German Mill**

Adam German, Sr. originally built The German Mill of stone in 1742 on a land grant from William Penn. The mill is located on the Jordan Creek in Germansville. It came to be owned by Phillip German, Sr. who in 1814 erected a two-story stone dwelling house on the north side. The dam and race to furnish water for the mill were constructed in 1809.

Phillip's son succeeded him and operated the business until his death in 1840. After Phillip's death Nathan German became the owner and he was succeeded by Philip Dieffenbach and after him, Enos German until his death in 1898. Then Howard F. Kern purchased it and operated it until 1903 when he sold it to William Grosscup. After Grosscup the mill was leased to Lewis R. Leiby and William J. Schmeck for five years. Leiby bought the property and rebuilt a three-story structure. Later owners were Elmer and Mary Bittner, Mauser

Corporation (1935), Ralph O. Phillips (1944), Rodney and Diane Schlauch (1986) and it is currently known as Germansville Feed and Farm Supply.

Of the 17 mills that operated in Lynn and Heidelberg Townships, this mill is the only mill in operation to this date 266 years later.

Also, it should be mentioned that previous to 1842 the town of Germansville was called German's Mill.

When one thinks that the mill was in operation 24 years before the United States declared its independence for the British in 1776, it is quite phenomenal, that it is still in operation at the same location. It is undoubtedly one of the oldest, if not the oldest operating mill in the United States.

Research on grist mills on the internet revealed that Jenney's Grist Mill in Plymouth, Massachusetts started operations in 1636, burned down in 1837 and was rebuilt in 1978. A grist mill started operating in 1621 on the James River plantation in Virginia, but no other records exist as to its length of operation. A grist mill started operations in Philadelphia in 1643 but again, no other records exist as to the length of time that it remained in operation.

### **Bittner Mill**

Elias Bittner established a sawmill about 1850 on the Jordan Creek, a mile northwest of the Leiby Mill on property later owned by Peter Fink. He carried on operations for 10 years then sold it to Stephen Bittner who added a chopping mill and carried on the business for about 15 years when he discontinued the business. His father Jacob A. Leiby operated an apple-brandy distillery on the property near the mill for a while.

### **Second German Mill**

Nathan German operated a small mill not far from the Bittner Mill from 1865 until his death in 1893. His son-in-law Edwin A. Weiss carried it on two years to finish the business. An Indian massacre is said to have occurred in this vicinity about 1755.

Related article: Grist Mills in Lynn Township.