

## Montague Roller Mill

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*1897 - The Montague Roller Mill when operated by A. L. Dickinson. It was located where the Post Office is now.*

Noah and William Ferry had the Montague Roller Mill built over Buttermilk Creek in 1865 about where the post office is now located.

In 1878, James Webster was listed as being the Miller. According to the 1880 census, he was born in England around 1839 and came to this country with his wife and their eight children. The oldest daughter, Minnie, was a schoolteacher in the area.

Others who were working at the mill at the time included Jacob Diebold, the mill engineer, and Frank Mangold, also a miller, who later had a successful jewelry business in Whitehall.

In 1886 the mill changed into the hands of George R. Hancock & Company. Mr. Hancock was the E. P. Ferry Bookkeeper and very capable of operating the business. He was also married to Kate Ferry, daughter of William Montague Ferry. Others in the company were David D. Erwin of Muskegon and George E. Gardiner of Montague, a very experienced miller.

David D. Erwin was born in Illinois in 1846, lived in Muskegon and was a Lawyer by profession. He died in Muskegon in 1912.

George Edward Gardiner was born in 1854 in Benona, Oceana County. He married Ella May Beede in March 1875. They had no children. George died on 10 April 1896 at the age of 42.

By 1888 the mill was one of the finest in the state and produced an exceptionally fine brand of flour called "Eclipse" that required nine separate grinding processes.

The building was three-stories tall and was powered by a 14ft by 24ft engine with 65 horsepower fed by a boiler 5ft by 16ft.

In the basement was a Barnard & Leas separator, a Eureka smutter, a Eureka brush and decorticator, and a corn sheller.

On the main floor was the E.P. Allis & Co. four-break roller machine, two double set roller machines, and a 30 inch under runner stone for midlings, besides the most improved machinery for the manufacture of granulated meal.

The second floor had storage bins for 9,000 bushels of grain. The third floor contained the purifiers, dust collectors and a bran duster.

All the grain used at the mill was purchased from local farmers with some as far away as Shelby.

By September 1889 the co-partnership of Hancock, Gardiner and Erwin was dissolved with David D. Erwin remaining as the sole owner.

In 1892, George E. Gardiner and Iver S. Calkin formed a partnership and leased the mill from David Erwin with the option to purchase, which they did in June 1894.

Iver S. Calkin was born in New York in 1836. He married Frances Henshal in 1867 in Wisconsin and they had four children. Before coming to Montague in 1892 he was engaged in the milling business in Elk Creek, WI. Calkin died at his Montague home in February 1902.

A. L. Dickinson was born in New York in 1854 and came to Whitehall in 1878. There he set up shop as a blacksmith on Colby Street across from the fire department. He married in 1881 and they had two daughters. Aldemar Dickinson became a Montague resident in 1882, where he had a wagon and blacksmith shop on the Northeast corner of Spring and Water in 1883. Dickinson purchased an interest in the roller mill and successfully took charge of it in 1897, following the death of George E. Gardiner in 1896.

In 1894, the Montague mill introduced a new brand of flour called "White Lily". It was available for \$3.25 a barrel, or 85 cents a sack.

In April 1900, however, the mill closed its doors for an indefinite period. The reason was reported that "incumbrances which accumulated on the mill over time were too great and operations were suspended rather than face insurmountable obstacles." Mr. Dickinson let the property revert to the former owner, D. D. Erwin.

By November 1900, the mill was back open and under the management of Herman H. Olsen and Abraham Youngquist. James Boardwell, veteran engineer, assumed the position he held for several

previous years and Ivers S. Calkins also returned to his old employment. Olsen and Youngquist also operated the Whitehall Roller Mill.

In 1909, the Montague Milling Company was producing a flour called "Nutritia" which was a blend of Michigan and Minnesota's best flours.

Following a severe storm in December 1912, the smokestack on the mill broke. It was the original stack that was put up in 1869. It was soon repaired and put back in operation.

1914 saw another change of hands. This time John O. Reed assumed ownership of the mill. He also owned the Whitehall Mill but operated them separately.

In addition to flour and feed, the Montague Roller Mills also handled grain, hay, straw, salt, dairy feed, cement, plaster board, coal, lime, seed, etc., according to ads in the local paper.

On Saturday morning, March 29, 1930, as Joe O'Connell was passing through town from his parents' home in Maple Grove to his home in Michillinda, he discovered a fire at the Montague Roller Mill. The interior of the three-story wooden structure was a solid mass of flames. So hot was the fire that the windows in the town hall and the White Lake Market Association across the street were broken. Nothing was saved from the mill except a few bags of grain. The loss was in the neighborhood of \$25,000 with insurance of \$20,000. In the end, the building was not replaced.