

Whitehall Roller Mills

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Herman H Olesen/Olsen joined with Christian W. Degen to form the Whitehall Roller Mill in 1884.

The mill was started in 1883 across from Albert Mears' store in the area where the former Harwood House Hotel had been located prior to the 1881 fire. This is the triangular piece of land bounded by Colby on the south, River on the north, ending at Lake Street on the West, and Thompson on the East. Basically, it was behind where Big John's Pizza is now located.

The building was 32 by 50 feet with a brick engine room. There were two mills on the property in Whitehall. The mill started out as a stone flour mill and the roller system was installed in 1886.

Olsen and Degen owned the Whitehall Roller Mills until 1894 when Christian Degen left the partnership and Olsen entered into a partnership with Abraham Youngquist.

Herman Hagberth Olsen was born in Norway in January 1853. He immigrated to Sheboygan, WI with an uncle and lived there for five years before moving to Milwaukee in 1872. He married Berthe Helene

Christensen in December 1879 and for three years they made their home in Milwaukee where they had 4 children before moving to Whitehall in 1882. Olsen would die in January 1918.

Upon his arrival in Whitehall, Olsen joined with Christian Degen and they formed the Whitehall Roller Mill. In 1889 an addition was built on the mill.

Christian William Degen was born in Germany in April 1856 and came to American with his parents when he was a year old. He was a Great Lakes captain for a number of years. He married Elinor Coors of Montague in 1899. They had 2 children and lived in Montague for 11 years before buying the McAllister farm and living there. Degen died in March 1934.

Abraham Youngquist was born in Sweden in October 1847. He came to Whitehall in 1882. He married Emily Larson in Whitehall in April 1885. They would have 3 children. Youngquist died in December 1922.

Together in 1900 Olsen and Youngquist purchased the Montague Roller Mill from D. D. Erwin of Muskegon. Now they owned both the Whitehall Roller Mill and the Montague Roller Mill. They also operated a grocery store on Colby Street for five years and then Olsen ran a dry goods store for a couple of years.

Charles C. Johnson of Fruitland purchased a one-third interest in both the Whitehall and Montague mills in 1901. At some point between 1902 and 1906, he became sole owner of the Whitehall Roller Mills. Before this he was running the Whitehall Roller Mills for Olsen, Youngquist & Company.

Charles C. Johnson was born in Sweden in January 1844. He came to the U.S. in 1867 at the age of 23 and did farm work for about five years. Later he tried saw milling but found that was not agreeable to his health. He married Flora Bell Stockwell in 1878. They had 3 children; all of whom survived him when he died in May 1920.

On August 7, 1906, the Whitehall Roller mill caught fire and burned to the ground. The three-story structure was one of the largest and best equipped. The building and machinery were valued at \$15,000 and there was about \$5,000 worth of grain. Insurance at the time was \$6,000. It was determined that water from a rainstorm leaked thru the roof into some barrels of lime that were stored in the building causing them to catch fire.

Charles C. Johnson's home was just 50 feet away from the fire and was able to be saved by the firemen. As a precaution, household goods and furniture had been removed from the house and the horses and vehicles removed from a nearby Livery barn.

By February 1907 Charles C. Johnson had built a new mill at the same location. Johnson sold the Whitehall Flour Mill to Marshall S. Green and John O. Reed in 1909. That year, John O. Reed opened a branch feed store in the Sadler Block in Montague. Green and Reed abandoned their Montague feed store in 1911.

In the Spring of 1912, a Judge granted a permanent injunction against Charles C. Johnson, restraining him from engaging in the flour, feed, grain and produce business either in Whitehall or Montague in his or his wife's name during a period of five years.

Charles C. Johnson died at the Muskegon County Home in May 1920. In his obituary it indicated that he had been the owner and manager of the Whitehall Milling Company before it was moved to Muskegon

where it operated under the name Johnson Milling Company. No date of the move was indicated; however, the move to Muskegon was probably as a result of the injunction that had been brought against him in 1912.

In March 1913, the partnership of Marshall S. Green and John O. Reed was dissolved by mutual consent. The business firm carried on in the name of John O. Reed.

Marshall S. Green was born in New York in November 1829. He came with his parents to Albion, MI in 1835 attending night school while working on the family farm in the daytime. At the age of 14 he was bound out for three years to learn the miller's trade. His compensation was \$3 and a pair of overalls & jumper the first year, \$7.50 and two pair of overalls and two jumpers the second year, and \$10 with three pair of overalls and jumpers the third year. After working for 2 years at these wages, they let him off his contract and he worked on a farm for 4 years going back to the mill to finish his apprenticeship in 1849. He spent several years out west as a miner before returning to Albion. He came to Whitehall in the early 1870s and engaged in the lumber business with R. W. Norris, eventually selling his interest in the sawmill back to Norris. Marshall Green died in June 1913 after selling his share of the business to John Reed in March of that year.

In August 1914, John O. Reed bought the Montague Milling Company. He bought the milling property of H.H. Olsen with a view of enlarging the business.

John O Reed was a native of the White Lake area being born in Oceana County in 1868. He graduated from Whitehall High School and a few years later was elected county school commissioner. After 8 years as Commissioner, he became interested in the milling business. He was married in 1899; they had a son in 1907; and would divorce in 1914. John Reed died unexpectedly in January 1933.

In May 1916 the Whitehall Flour Mill burned to the ground. It was determined it was the work of an incendiary. John O. Reed decided not to rebuild the Roller Mill in Whitehall, instead he chose to fix up his mill in Montague. He operated the mill in Montague until it burned to the ground in 1930.