

A Glimpse Of The Mansfield That Was

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Students of the Mansfield - OSU campus and those persons who will soon be travelling over the newly-improved State Route 39 between Mansfield and Shelby may have some curiosity concerning the small cluster of buildings near the Pennsylvania Railroad overpass.

This is the site of the once thriving community of Spring Mills and the identifying landmark is the large spring that once furnished waterpower to grind the grains grown in this area into cornmeal and flour.

Spring Mills was never incorporated although at one time there were the necessary ingredients that should have made the community grow into a village and even a city.

These facilities of transportation were three railroad lines, the Pennsylvania mainline from Chicago to New York, the Toledo branch of the Pennsylvania, the B & O from Newark and points south running north through Willard to Sandusky, and the electric interurban line from Mansfield through Shelby to link with other electric lines to the north.

Joseph Welch built the mill in 1817 that was powered by the strong stream of water which formed a mill pond adjacent to the mill. It was equipped with French burrs and a 3 feet wide by 24 feet in diameter overshot wheel. The large gallonage per day flow of the springs filled the mill pond with ice cold water

The full pond operated the mill for twenty hours when the headgate was opened to the overshot wheel.

The mill, which operated for over a century, was purchased from Welch by the Hon. Mordecai Bartley who served as Ohio's Governor in 1844. Welch repurchased the mill and later Peter Wentz, who married into the Welch family became the owner. Descendants of Peter Wentz still own land and live at Spring Mills.

The volume of water available at Spring Mills was utilized by the Pennsylvania Railroad, according to the Mansfield news story of October 17, 1913. In fact, around 1905, it was strongly advocated by many citizens and city officials to look into the possibility of pumping part of the Mansfield water supply from the Spring Mills springs. Many persons attested to the fact that the waters had desirable medicinal qualities.

Spring Mills boasted of a post office at one time and there were several grocery stores and other merchantile business in the community. The mill brought in a lot of trade as farmers hauled in their grain and waited on flour or meal to be gourd. The Shelby-Mansfield interurban also had a stop at Spring Mills.

The Mansfield - Shelby road wound through Springmills and over the railroad tracks for many years. A major improvement in the highway during the late 1920's or early 1930's bypassed Spring Mills and took the road over the railroad on an overpass. This section of the highway is



The old mill at Spring Mills with owner Peter Wentz standing in the doorway. The flume to the over shot wheel can be seen at the left.

presently again being improved.

The change in the highway cut - off Spring Mills from the traffic flow and the community regressed further. A story in the News dates July 8, 1923.

noted that the mill was being operated by John Girer who also operated a grocery store in the building.

The old mill building and the mill pond are standing

today. The mill is used as a dwelling. The spring water still gushes out of a small pond and under the road into the old mill pond.

Perhaps with the university just a short distance

away interest may be revived in the community now known as Springmill.

(Photo loaned by Mrs. Blaine (Helen Wentz) Burkholder to the Richland County Historical Society.)