A History of Upper Mill Creek and Jessup Mill Pond

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by
Debbie Sanders and Keith Hammer

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Town of Jessup, facing south, with dam at center and waterways leading to sawmill at right.
Left to right: store, boarding house, Jessup's home, flour mill.

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Keith Hammer

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In this paper we would like to convey to you a short history of the upper Mill Creek area. This area is situated near Creston, between Broeder's saw mill and the potholes east of the Creston National Fish Hatchery, and once supplied the natural resources necessary for several saw mills, a brewery, and two grist mills located along the creek. These establishments in turn started the town of Jessup located near the present site of the fish hatchery.

The first productive establishment to be started in this area was a small sawmill built by Jesse Yenne. It was located upstream from the present fish hatchery, but it is now submerged in the Jessup Mill Pond. At this time the area had not been cleared and the creek, then known as Lang Creek, was still a free flowing stream.

Power for the saw was supplied by an undershot waterwheel driven by the stream which was narrowed at this point by flumes built of logs and rough lumber. The lumber which Yenne produced here was primarily used for local building by area farmers. This mill did not provide enough lumber for other areas, however, so several years later Yenne, being a jack-of-all-trades, started a larger sawmill in conjunction with a grist mill farther downstream.

This mill was built before 1880, several hundred yards north of Broeder's present sawmill. (Broeder's sawmill was closed permanently due to fire since the original writing of this paper. It was located about one-half mile downstream from the Gatis Flower Gardens on Highway 35). This became known as the Yenne-Eccles Mill when Joseph Eccles entered into partnership with Yenne. The mill did not become very productive, however, until new equipment was installed in both the sawmill and flour mill in 1880. This allowed production of finished lumber and a patent flour, equal to imported brands.

Logs for the mill were obtained from areas very close by and were dragged by horse teams to the mill. Once the logs were cut and finished, the lumber was hauled on a tramway. The tramway was built using slab lumber as ties and 2x4's as rails and ran from the mill to where the creek enters the Flathead River, a distance of about two miles. One horse pulled the car and lumber to the river where it was loaded on barges. Most of the lumber was shipped to Demersville. In fact, most of early Demersville was built using Yenne-Eccles lumber. Production at the mill boomed until about 1902 when a fire destroyed the mill, never to be rebuilt.

During the mill's early operations, a brewery was being operated on the creek bank between Yenne's first mill site and the present road by the hatchery. Schlagels ran the brewery, the foundation of which is now also submerged in the pond. Water was dipped from a large well and

local grains were used for the beer. Thrashers used by the brewery and local farmers had to be transported to Polson and from there shipped by boat. This small brewery supplied fresh beer for the surrounding area as well as Bigfork and Egan.

A large change in the uppermost part of the creek area came about with the arrival of Herbert F. Jessup, who settled on the land which had been homesteaded by Buck Horn in 1881. It was because of Herbert Jessup that the pond named after him came into existence in 1897.

But before the creek could be dammed and a pond formed, Jessup had to purchase the land and the water rights and clear the area around the creek. The land was purchased in 1895 from two parties. The upper section of land, near the head of the creek, was bought from the original homesteader named Patterson. The lower part was bought from Strasburgs. The water rights were purchased originally from Patterson but were later bought by Jessup from a man by the name of Trail in 1896. Thus, Jessup was ready to begin forming the pond.

Jessup chose the site for his damn where the present road bed is and began construction in 1897. The dam was a crib board type structure braced by heavy timbers and was covered with earth. This damn then formed not only a pond but a better source of power for the mill Jessup was to build.

He built the mill directly west of the dam and began operation in 1898. The mill was a three story building with the power turbines located on the ground floor and various other machinery occupying all three floors. These two turbines were four feet in diameter and were pressured by a twenty foot drop of water from the pond,

Jessup's three-story sawmill, facing east.

producing about 50 horsepower each. The turbines, however, only supplied power for the first stages of the operation, with steam used as power for the planing and conveyor sections of the mill.

To supply steam, a huge boiler was used. It was 35 feet long and 8 feet in diameter and it was necessary to use two wagons to haul it overland. The boiler was set in a brick foundation and fire box which was fed sawdust by a small conveyor which branched from a main conveyor running to the teepee type incinerator. This incinerator was built out of large timbers with metal sheeting on the inside, making it necessary to have a watchman on duty at all times in case of fire.

Although this incinerator and much of the other machinery may seem very crude, it was some of the most advanced in its time. It allowed the mill to produce about 30,000 board feet of lumber per day, about as much as Broeder's Mill does today.

Logs for the mill were obtained from surrounding areas, especially the Creston pothole area, ranging between Creston, Mountain Brook and Echo Lake. This area provided pine and tamarack at close to one million board feet of lumber for every 40 acres of land. Most log-hauling was done by local farmers during the winter, although there were some employees working for the mill full time. Horse teams and sleds were used to haul the logs to the pond where they were dumped and stored on the banks and, in the spring, floated through a canal in the dam directly into the mill, thus requiring very little handling.

Jessup Mill Pond during peak of mill operation.

Even less handling of the logs was required due to the use of a "nigger" which mechanically turned the logs over at the main saw.

Once the logs were processed, the finished lumber was carried out of the mill on tramways. A low tramway was used to start a stack and a higher tramway was used to finish off the stack of lumber, which was later hauled to Kalispell. Here again, local farmers were employed. One-hundred wagons and teams were used to transport the lumber. After reaching Kalispell, it was then hauled to other parts of the valley as well as by railroad to places such as northern Minnesota. Most farmers loaded their wagons in early morning, did their chores, and then hauled the lumber to town since it was a full day's travel, round-trip. The road was rough and the only place to cross the creek was at a bridge just north of the Yenne-Eccles Mill where Highway 35 crosses the creek today. Most of the road along the creek was marshy and was filled with cordwood, slabs and sawdust.

With the coming of the depression, however, lumber prices, which had been twenty dollars per thousand board feet, fell drastically. When combined with the deterioration of the mill buildings, this forced Harry Jessup, who as son had taken over the mill along with several other parties, to close it down. In 1939, the mill was torn down with parts, such as the turbines and brick, being shipped out and reused. The brick from the boiler was hauled to Kalispell and used as an understructure for parts of the present Bethlehem Lutheran Church. During its productive years, however, the mill provided a good source of employment and as a result, a basis for the town of Jessup.

Due to the number of men employed at the mill, about 25 not counting area farm-

Roadside view of flour mill at Jessup, with sawmill at right.

ers hired part-time, an array of shacks, frame houses and buildings sprang up around the pond and mill. The small community soon reached a population of about 15 families, larger than Bigfork was at that time, and developed into a small town with the classical small town establishments.

Among these establishments was a store, flour mill, boarding house, bunk house, and a livery stable. The store was not only a store but the hub of the town. It was a two-story building with the ground floor housing a post office, the mill office and the store itself; while the second floor was a dance hall, doubling as a Presbyterian church on Sundays. Providing flour for the town and surrounding farms was a three-story flour mill located directly south across the creek from the saw mill. Much of the mill's business was done on a custom basis with many farmers bringing their own grain to have it processed. The boarding house and bunk house provided rooms for employees of both the mills while the livery stable housed their horses. Part of the boarding house still stands and is being lived in directly across the road from where the flour mill used to sit.

A great moment in the history of the town was the installment of an electric generator in 1930 which supplied power for the residents of Jessup. It was run by the turbines of the sawmill and put out 110-120 volts of direct current electricity. Because it produced direct current, it was necessary to run the generator only at designated times, during which all lights had to be left on. One resident failed to compre-

Three-story flour mill in Jessup, with lumber storage shed to left.

hend this, however, and as a result of her turning out her lights, cause many problems and blown-out light bulbs for other residents.

But the town of Jessup slowly dissolved. With the closing of the saw mill there was no longer any employment in the area and the residents were forced to leave. Although there is no longer any industry on the upper part of the creek, the pond and original dam, which has been raised with dirt, is used to supply water for the Creston National Fish Hatchery. The federal government purchased the land from Jessup in 1939 and built the hatchery which was then known as the Glacier National Park Fish Hatchery.

Although this ends our history of this area, the land is still changing. The creek is no longer used for a source of power, but is now used for the irrigation of productive farms being operated on much of the land cleared by the logging of both the Jessup and Yenne-Eccles mills. Many of the communities which have disappeared since the end of these industries may soon rise again in a different form, as housing developments edge in on a once primitive and unsettled area.

Bibliography

Harry Jessup: interview and photographs of the Jessup area

Robert Gatis: interview

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Notes on This Publishing

The primary purpose of republishing this high-school history/English project is to render it into a more readable and electronic format by which it and the historic photos provided by Harry Jessup can be more easily distributed and reproduced. Swan View Coalition provided the computer and Web site. "Jessup Mill Pond" was added to the original title. Aside from corrections to spelling, and a parenthetical update about the former location of the now abandoned Broeder Sawmill, the text remains as it was in the original. Acknowledgment is also due Henry Elwood for assigning this history research and writing assignment during his tenure of teaching at Flathead High School.

Keith Hammer
3165 Foothill Road
Kalispell, MT 59901

keith@swanview.org

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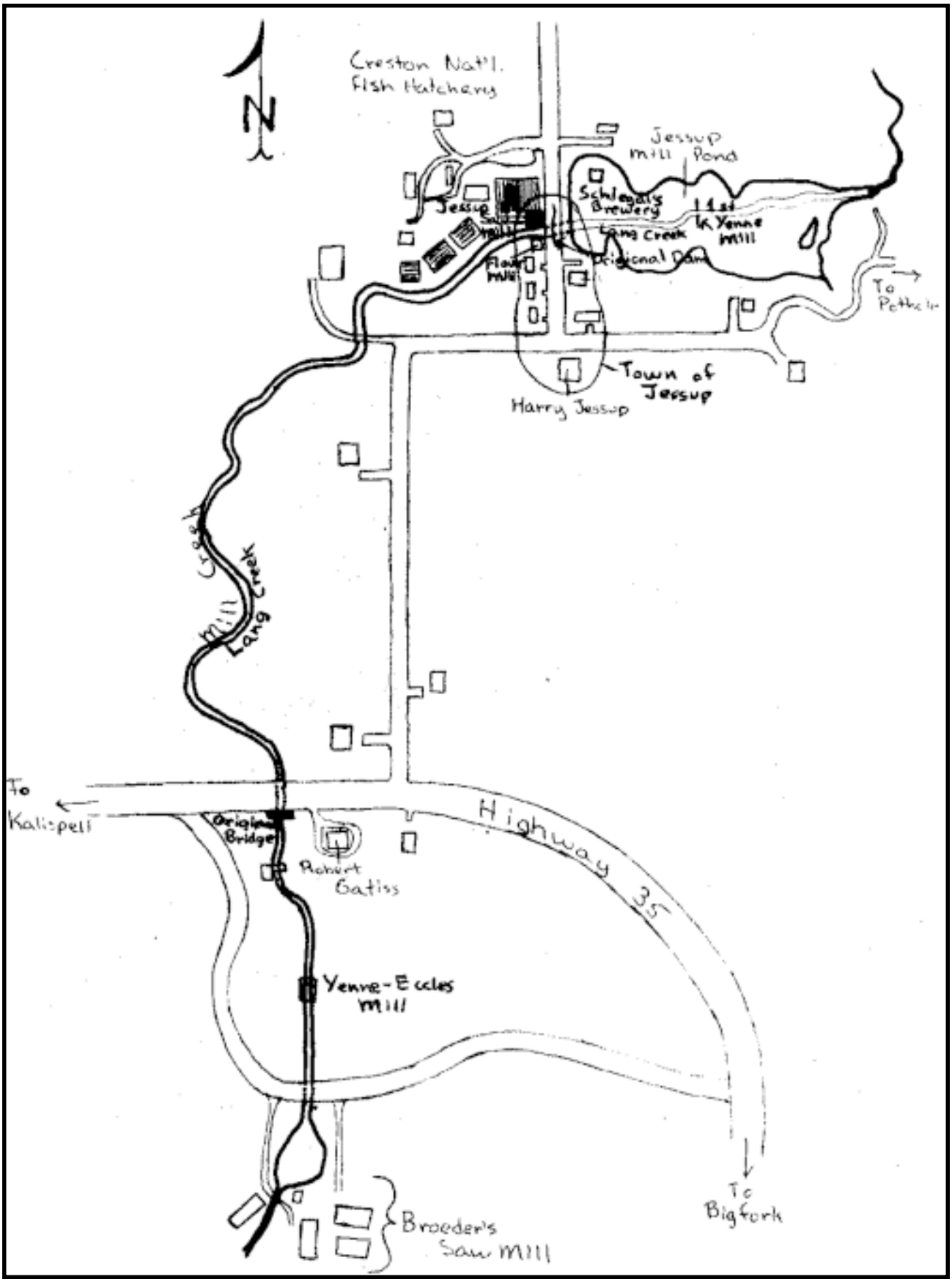
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Creston Nat'l. Fish Hatchery
Jessup Mill Pond
Schlegal's Brewery
Jessup Mill
Lang Creek
1st Yenne Mill
Original Dam
Flour Mill
To Pettibone
Town of Jessup
Harry Jessup
Mill Creek
Lang Creek
To Kalispell
Original Bridge
Robert Gatiss
Highway 35
Yenne-Eccles Mill
Broeder's Saw Mill
To Bigfork