In the shadow of the Chariton River Bridge at Yarrow stood a landmark in Northeast Missouri folklore, the Yarrow mill. Some nine or ten miles southwest of Kirksville, the mill served the farmers of the district for 90 years grinding grain, ripping logs into lumber, carding wool, and later furnishing electricity for the town of Yarrow. In actuality there were two mill houses, the original being destroyed by an ice flow in 1874. John Domey was the first owner of the mill and a nearby store from 1851 to 1856 when he sold it to Doctor Johns, who was the proprietor until 1861. By this time the town of Yarrow was beginning to thrive and a post office was set up in a portion of the store, which was owned by George Miller. Doctor Johns operated the mill until he sold it to John Williams, who ran it until 1890. It was during Williams’ term of ownership that the original mill house was broken up and swept downstream by the unyielding Chariton current. Work on the mill began the next year, 1875, but was not finished until the summer of 1876.

Michael Weber, an immigrant from Alsace-Lorraine, France, as a child came to America with his family. He bought the mill and equipment in 1890. Weber is the most remembered owner, partly because he owned it so long and partly because he brought national attention to the mill and surrounding community of Yarrow.

With his knack for understanding scientific innovations he bought and installed an electric generator in Yarrow in 1910. This generator furnished electricity to the stores and households of Yarrow from 6 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. at a rate of 1 cent per light in each house per night. This wasn’t an extravagant fee considering that most households had only one light.

In order to let the people know that the power was going to be shut off for the night the operator would dim the lights to inform the people that they only had ten minutes of power left to finish whatever they were doing.

The brake for the stopping of the mill machinery was a large fence post which was pressed against the flywheel. The mill ground thousands of bushels of corn, wheat, and barley, but very few of the people who had grain ground could pay for it. So the miller took one eighth of the total bushels ground for payment but only mills run by water could do this because other mills run by steam and gas extracted one sixth because of the higher operating costs.

Weber’s mill was unique in the fact that it was the only mill in Northeast Missouri equipped with machinery to extract burrs from barley.

Grinding grain and generating electricity weren't the only...
uses of the mill, because it also carded wool into great fluffy piles that gathered in storage areas in the mill.

A sawmill was operated in the immediate proximity of the mill. It provided boards for the growing community of Yarrow, and railroad ties for the Iowa and St. Louis line. Most importantly, it provided props for the mines up river in Novinger, Stahl and also Connelsville.

The mill proved to be the meeting place as well as part of the economic lifeline of the village. People dancing there on the starry nights of autumn weren’t an uncommon sight. Also, men gathered there to swap ideas and talk about the latest news. They talked about subjects ranging from the Spanish-American War to the Great Depression.

Michael Weber died in May of 1936, leaving the mill to be operated by his children. A mechanical failure caused the mill to be closed permanently in June, 1937, a little more than a year after Michael’s death. The morning of March 3, 1941, marked the final end of Weber’s mill, for at about 3 a.m., an ice flow on the Chariton weakened the supporting southwest column, allowing the mill to drop half of its structure into the icy waters of the river.

So ended 90 years of history. The remaining part of the mill was left to fall into or be washed away by the Chariton. The equipment had been removed before the mill fell in, and now some of the equipment still remains in private collections. All that remains of the mill today is a cleared spot and a few cement pieces of the foundation and the dam. The dam was removed in 1951 when the Army Corps of Engineers straightened the river.

For many people the memory of the mill will be remembered in a fond way. Although the mill is gone forever the towns of Yarrow, Novinger, Stahl, and Connelsville will never forget the good deeds it did for them and other people of the area.

Top photo: Front view of Weber’s Mill which sat on the west side of Iowa and St. Louis railroad tracks. Center photo: This photo shows the mill, dam and the bridge as it looked in 1920. Bottom photo: This photo was taken the day after the mill fell into the river, March 3, 1941.

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