

Museum Corner: A Page From History

Harpers Mill & The Big Slide

One of the first people to build flour mills in the Cariboo was Thaddeus Harper, land owner and cattle baron.

After Thaddeus' brother's passing, in 1874, he took over the Clinton Mill. In 1878, Harper decided to move his mill down the wagon road to the Thompson River. Harper rebuilt the mill stone by stone, timber by timber, at the mouth of the Bonaparte River about a mile from the future site of Ashcroft.

What prompted this move down the river was the coming of the Canadian Pacific Railway through the Thompson Valley. However, there were many misfortunes that happened that made the mill not as successful as Harper had hoped.



The first of these misfortunes was the flooding of the Mill. On October 15, 1880, a big slide occurred in Black Canyon, a few miles to the south of Harpers Mill.

The Thompson River was so completely blocked that the river bed below the slide was dry, and above the slide the river was 65 feet high.

The Mill was damaged and water filled the second storey and moved it from its foundations. The site of Ashcroft was covered in 16 inches of water.

After over 40 hours, the dam gave away slowly from the top and within a short time the river had resumed its normal flow.

A sign was placed in the building to show where the high watermark had been

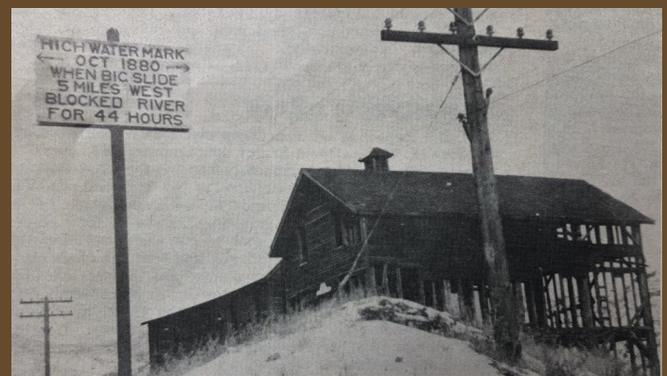


Photo above is from the 1930s. The sign indicates the maximum reservoir formed by the 1880 landslide dam. The building is the old Harper Mill.



BIG SLIDE Feb. 9, 1989
1880
High Water Mark

On the occasion of this high water the river was blocked for about forty-four hours, the water reaching half-way up the mill building, and it was only the weight of heavy machinery and the millstones that prevented the structure from floating away.

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More Misfortunes for Harper

C. P. R. On Wrong Side

Another misfortune was the building of the C.P.R. on the south instead of the north side of the river, as had been anticipated on the basis of surveys. This left the Harper mill on the wrong side of the river, faced with the problem of getting its product across a swift current of water. Harper did not stand and wring his hands, but prepared to ferry his flour across to the C.P.R. Plans were made for a cable, but this fell through, owing to the unfavorable water conditions and the bad approaches on both sides. It is said that he also planned to ship flour to Kamloops by steamboat on the river, but this scheme died in its infancy. For some years

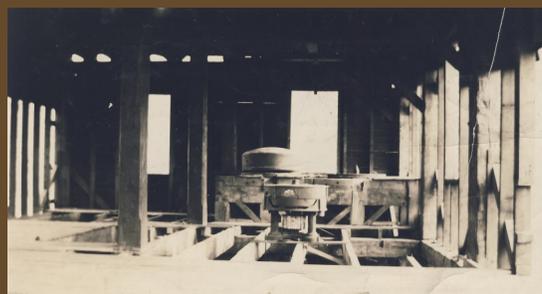
Another misfortune was the building of the C.P.R. on the opposite side of the river after surveys had been made on Harper's side.

(Left: Journal clipping from Feb. 9, 1889)

The Mill was never in full production because of the lack of wheat in the area, and the final straw for Harper and his mill was the coming of "roller flour" from the Prairies. The quality of this flour and the price at which it could be delivered, could not be matched by Harper.

Below: Photos of Harpers Mill, circa. 1926

The Mill supplied local needs and served the new town of Ashcroft until early 1890 when it ground its last grain of wheat.



The Ashcroft Museum is open from Monday to Friday 9:00 am to 4:00 pm.

Come on down and learn some fascinating history about the area.

Located at 151 and 4th Street.

250-453-9232

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The old mill near the Bonaparte River-40's



Today, there is nothing left of the building on its original site. The "High Watermark" sign can be found in the Ashcroft Museum on display.