

Stopping at the feed mill

When I retire at night I do not always know that later a vivid dream will emerge. Last night that did happen probably thanks to the strawberry shortcake I enjoyed just before turning in. I'll try to tell you about my dream. It carried me back over 60 years. I come to the Ben Nellis farm in August 1948 when the Nellis daughter Ethel and I were married. We were both 18 years old. Speaking for myself I must admit I was bewildered to land on a dairy farm and environment I was not familiar with.

I was brought up in the country where we had a pig or two, some chickens and two saddle horses. That was far different from a dairy of cattle. My weight was 125 pounds. I guess because no one knew what else to do with me my job became drawing the cow milk to the creamery at Canojoharie each morning. The vehicle used was a stake bodied, flat wood decked truck. The cans of milk from the two Nellis farms only about half filled the truck deck. That left lots of room for whatever had to be brought back from town. Often that would be cow feed from the feed mill and a few bags of chicken feed. The feed mill was located where I came back toward Stone Arabia but yet in the Village of Palatine Bridge. It had long ago been named Flume and Fuller after the two families who owned and ran it. The building was built on the hill side to the west of Lafayette Street. It was long and painted grey. The back portion was a grist mill where the farmers delivered the corn and oats they grew to be ground and mixed into cattle feed. Even in my dream I could almost smell the sweet odor of molasses they mixed in the feed. When you took the bagged corn and oats to the mill it was unloaded on the upper side of the building where it could be drawn by hand cards back to the grinder. The hillside location was really convenient since you could drive around to the lower side where the bags of mixed grain were slid down a chute to the truck deck without lifting them. My dream visit to the grist mill brought back other memories.

On one of my first stops at Flume and Fuller my father in law went along. The front end of the building was a combined office and store. They had small tools, cow medicine, nails, fence staples and other things needed on the farm. The day we went together one thing stuck in my memory. My father in law reached in his pocket and produced a five dollar bill to pay for something he had bought. Why did that impress me? Because I could not then do that as I had few extra five dollar bills. The two families also owned a cider mill on the property where local people drew their apples in the fall to be pressed into apple cider. I'll end this visit at least in memory as the company itself drew to an end. I believe I am correct in saying that the Fuller family ran the business and did the work while the Flume family had a financial interest. On one of my last visits to the feed mill a member of the Flume family was busy going through the records in preparation for closing up. I ask him how long they had been in business. It was many years. I expressed my feeling that it was too bad to leave after so many years. His reply has always remained in my memory. He said "old businesses are like old ships. They gather a lot of barnacles." I'll let the reader think about what he meant.

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