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Millstone quarry in Woodford, County, Kentucky. See article beginning on page 3.

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ISSUE CONTENTS

President’s Message – Charles D. Hockensmith 1
From the Editor’s Desk – Donald B. Ball 2
**The Grier’s Creek Mill Cluster in Woodford County, Kentucky, with Some Observations
on the Nature of So-Called “Flint” Millstones – Gary A. O’Dell 3**
Notes on Two Early Nineteenth Century Paper Mills in Louisville, Kentucky – Donald B. Ball 23
**Notes on the History and Operation of the DuPont Paper Mill in Louisville, Kentucky
– Donald B. Ball 25**
Central Kentucky Gunpowder Factories – Angelo I. George 31
Wanted to Rent - Cats (1901) 39
An Early Gunpowder Mill in Louisville, Kentucky – Gary A. O’Dell and Donald B. Ball 40
**Notes on the Location and Post-War Fate of the Confederate Powder Mill
at Manchester, Tennessee – Donald B. Ball and Joe D. Brooks, III 47**
A Mill on Daddys Creek, Cumberland County, Tennessee – Carl Mydans 52
Old Mill Postcards: Connecticut, Iowa, Maine, and New York Back Covers

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Cover: Moss-covered nodular chert millstone in a newly discovered late eighteenth-century millstone quarry in Woodford County, Kentucky. Shown left to right are geologist James C. Currens (Kentucky Geological Survey) and geographer Gary A. O’Dell (Morehead State University). See article by O’Dell, this issue, for more information.

THE GRIER'S CREEK MILL CLUSTER IN WOODFORD COUNTY, KENTUCKY, WITH SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE NATURE OF SO-CALLED "FLINT" MILLSTONES

Gary A. O'Dell

While engaged in some long-overdue sorting and filing of several years' worth of research and personal papers, I came across a photocopy of an article that appeared in the *Woodford Sun* on January 19, 1939. The clipping is an interesting retrospective concerning the DuPuy mill, one of the longest continuously operating grist mills in Woodford County, Kentucky, but is of even greater value as a source of information about other historic mills of the region. Rather than attempt a comprehensive examination of milling in Woodford County, however, I have chosen here to focus upon the Grier's Creek area in the southwestern section of the county, close to the Kentucky River, where this mill was located. This turbulent and scenic waterway was home to a number of mills during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Tributaries of the deeply entrenched Kentucky River, such as Grier's Creek, run swiftly through deep and narrow valleys, with a rapid fall of the watercourse, ideal for establishing mills with more efficient overshot wheels, and hence the streams feeding into the Kentucky were dotted with numerous mills along their lengths. Moreover, the river provided convenient waterborne transportation of mill products to distant markets down the Kentucky to the Ohio and Mississippi rivers.

DuPUY MILL

The aforementioned clipping was based mainly on an interview with Robert "Bob" Willis, the last operator of the original DuPuy mill, who retired from milling shortly after the beginning of the twentieth century. His recollections are delightfully evocative of a simpler, rural lifestyle, in which barefoot boys brought single bags of grain to the mill and whiled away an afternoon fishing in the mill stream while waiting for the miller to be done with their offering:

Robert E. Willis, of Versailles, who ran the mill of his father, the late Squire T. Willis, on Grier's Creek, for 14 years – from the time he was 18 until he was 29 years old – probably is the only operator of an old-time water mill now living in Woodford County.

The mill of which "Bob" Willis had charge was one of the oldest in the county when it ceased operation soon after the turn of the century. It was the successor of the original "Dupuy mill" (embraced part of the original walls), established about 1790 by Joel DuPuy, who at the same time built the interesting two-story stone residence that is now the property, with the adjacent land, of Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Wilder, of Lexington. The Wilders occupy the place as a summer home.

Thomas Dean had owned the DuPuy place and run the mill for many years before Squire Willis, of Anderson County, bought the property in 1878. Squire Willis' half-brother, Jack Callahan, became his miller and in later years Callahan taught young Bob Willis the milling trade.

Water impounded from a big spring, diverted through a small canal known as a race, and carried for a distance of a quarter of a mile, was the motive power for the wooden mill wheel. The last water wheel for the mill, 14 feet in diameter, was built by Robert Willis.

Water mills were operated as grist, or custom, mills. The miller took a toll, fixed by law, of one-eighth for grinding corn or wheat for the customer. The steam mills when introduced were allowed a toll of one-sixth. No stock was kept on hand by the millers, as a rule, except what might accumulate from the tolls.

It was provided in an early act of the Kentucky General Assembly that "for failure to properly grind, or to exact more toll than the law prescribes, the miller for every such offense

shall forfeit and pay 15 shillings to the party injured.”

One set of stone buhrs ground the meal from corn and another set ground the wheat flour. The flour was sifted through a silk “bolting cloth.” First, second and third grades of flour were made by the Willis mill.

“Boys used to be sent to the mill on a horse, behind a sack of corn across the horse’s back,” said Mr. Willis. “The rule was first-come-first-served and, as it might be nearly an all-day wait, the boy brought his fishing pole and fished in the creek during the interim.”

“Corn that farmers selected for meal,” Mr. Willis continued, “they put away in the shuck, and did not shuck and shell it until they were ready to have the corn ground. Most of them had grinding done late in the spring. The sacks of flour and meal would be suspended from rafters of a storeroom, and a rock would be placed inside each sack to absorb any moisture.” Mr. Willis recalled, by name, Woodford County farmers who followed that practice.

Like many another who was reared in the country in the water mill days, Mr. Willis maintains that flour and meal made by the old-fashioned process were superior in nutritive qualities and flavor to the product of modern machinery.

Joel M. DuPuy (1760 – 1838) was the son of Bartholomew DuPuy, Jr., who came to Woodford County from Pocahontas County, Virginia, about 1786 with his brother, the Reverend John DuPuy, a Huguenot Baptist minister. Joel married Lucy Craig, of Craig’s Station in Garrard County, Kentucky, and about 1790 built a fine two-story stone house “on a sprawling ledge above Grier Creek,” constructed from large blocks of gray Tyrone limestone quarried from along the Kentucky River. The house, which was known as Reynard Hall by DuPuy, later as “Stoney Lonesome,” and then as Reynard Hall yet again, remains today in excellent preservation and is still occupied as a residence (**Figure 1**). Just below the house, on the creek, DuPuy constructed a mill which “produced hundreds of barrels of flour and meal for the lower southern market” (**Figure 2**). The mill was probably built of stone from the same quarry. A road ran down the creek to Sublett’s Ferry on the Kentucky, where flatboats waited to carry the products of the region to markets down river.¹

Circa 1828, DuPuy sold his house on Grier’s Creek and moved to the east side of Versailles, giving as reason his dislike for having the sun shine in his face on his frequent morning trips into town. The purchaser was Thomas H. Dean (1799-1877), who moved into the old DuPuy house and operated the mill for nearly forty years. The U.S. census for 1850 lists Dean as a “manufacturer,” having in his household one Andrew Ocerty, age forty, of Germany, whose occupation is given as “miller.” Operation of the mill was apparently passed on to John N. Lancaster sometime after 1870, who may have inhabited the DuPuy house with his family for a few years. Lancaster is shown on the 1870 census as a resident of Jessamine County with the occupation of “miller,” and on the 1880 census as a resident of Versailles in Woodford County, also employed as miller.²

¹ William E. Railey, *History of Woodford County, Kentucky* (Frankfort, KY, 1938), 39; Thomas D. Clark, *The Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 210-211; Elizabeth M. Simpson, “Reynard Hall: A House of Primitive Charm, Stands Sheltered by Steep and Wooded Cliffs,” *Lexington Herald-Leader*, August 7, 1938. The DuPuy House was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on June 23, 1983. Lewis Sublett came to Woodford County in 1783 and settled on Grier’s Creek near its mouth, establishing a ferry across the river that continued to operate under his name until shortly after the Civil War, when it was acquired by the Shryock family and thereafter operated as the Shryock Ferry. The road down through the lower Grier’s Creek valley is today known as Shryock Ferry Road.

² Clark, *The Kentucky*, 211-212; Anon., “Some Old Woodford County Homes,” *Woodford Sun*, May 19, 1949; Simpson, “Reynard Hall”; Lucille Shryock Davis, “John Lancaster Once Lived in a House Known as Stoney Lonesome,” *Woodford Sun* (n.d.). The Davis article is a clipping from the family files of the Woodford Historical Society in Versailles but unfortunately the date was not noted. Elizabeth M. Simpson, *The Enchanted Bluegrass* (Lexington: Transylvania Press, 1938).



Figure 1. The DuPuy House, an outstanding structure of Tyrone limestone known as Reynard Hall, was built by Joel DuPuy ca. 1790 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The house, still occupied today, was erected on a rise overlooking Grier's Creek just upstream from DuPuy's grist mill (photograph by Carolyn M. Wooley, 1982).

When Thomas H. Dean died on February 17, 1877, the mill property was passed to his children by his first wife. Due to conflict among the heirs, the property was subsequently sold at public auction on November 1, 1879 to Squire Turner Willis (1831-1892), a resident of Anderson County across the river from Woodford County. According to the statements by Robert E. Willis quoted above, his father Squire Willis remained in Anderson but turned the residence and operation of the mill over to a half-brother, Jack Callahan. Squire was the eldest son of James (1795-1861) and Susannah Callahan (1796-1858) who married in 1829. Susannah then being at the relatively advanced age (for the era) of 33 years, James was probably her second husband and Jack a child from her first marriage. Callahan also ran a distillery by the creek next to the mill, a natural association given that whiskey is made from corn mash.³

Robert E. Willis, the subject of the sketch in the *Woodford Sun*, was born in 1872 to Squire T. and Rutha Willis, having at the time five older siblings. According to Robert's recollections, he began working in the mill as a boy, and was taught the miller's trade by his uncle Jack. About 1890, when he was eighteen years old, he was given complete charge of the mill operation by his father, perhaps as a result of the death of Jack Callahan, and continued to run the mill until about 1901, when the mill was shut down permanently and he moved to Versailles. The condition of the mill was described in 1920 by William E. Railey, who wrote: "The walls of the mill are standing, but I am under the impression that the

³ Probate Records for Woodford County, Kentucky, Volume W, Pages 21, 119, 122; Woodford County Deed Book 4, 155-156; Simpson, "Reynard Hall"; 1850, 1880 US Census. At the time of his death, Squire T. Willis was the storekeeper or government agent in charge of the bonded whiskey warehouse at the Glenn Springs Distillery in Woodford County (*Maysville Public Ledger*, May 26, 1892).

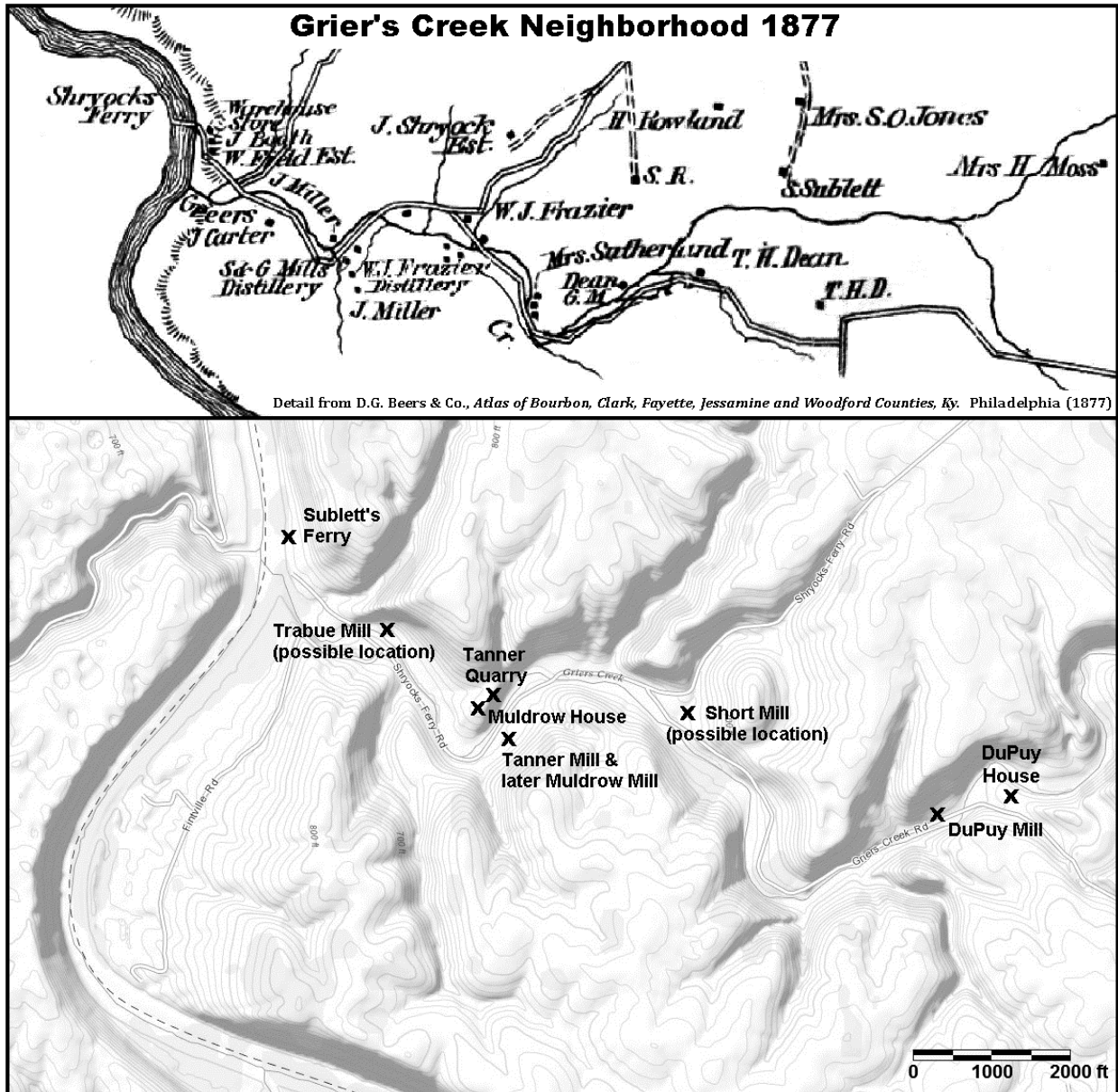


Figure 2. Grier's Creek Neighborhood. Shown are an 1877 map depicting local residents at the time and a modern shaded-relief map indicating known and approximate locations of mill operations and related sites.

Roof has fallen in.” Nearly twenty years later, Elizabeth Simpson featured the property in a lengthy article in the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, and later as a chapter in her book, *Enchanted Bluegrass*. Although she focused primarily upon the historic home, purchased by Gordon Wilder in 1928, renamed Reynard Hall and occupied as a residence, she made note of the mill property: “In the meadow beyond the kitchen is a small original cabin of round, unhewn logs, the earliest of all Kentucky building material. The old lime kiln, where the mortar was mixed for the stone house, is just over the fence, and farther still are the tumbling ruins of an old mill operated a hundred years or more.”⁴

Following the account of Robert E. Willis, the *Woodford Sun* article continues:

⁴ Railey, *History of Woodford County*, 39; Simpson, “Reynard Hall.”

There were other old water mills in the county that were still operating during the 1890s, one of them being Paul's Mill in Clover Bottom, run by Thomas and Samuel Paul. Moore's Mill, on Elkhorn, was another old-timer that was running till the beginning of the present century.

John Little seems to have established the first mill, to grind wheat and corn, at "Falling Spring" (now Versailles) in 1790. In 1804, an act of the legislature authorized John O'Bannon "to take water from the public spring in Versailles for the purpose of operating a water grist mill." O'Bannon also ran a distillery.

Water mills are still operating in some Kentucky counties. The Elizabethtown News last week told of the Nolin mill, in Hardin county [sic], which is still run by water power and has been in continuous operation for 65 years. The News story names an old resident of the community who has gotten his flour at the Nolin mill for 65 years.

Court minutes in "Order Book A," at the county clerk's office, show that the first matters taken up after the organization of Woodford County in May, 1789, had to do with establishing grist mills and laying off roads leading to mills. First application "for leave to build a mill" was that of John McQuady, who proposed to locate his mill "on his own land across Glen's creek near the widow Mitchell's." There immediately followed applications from Anthony Thompson, to build a mill on "Glen's creek below and near the forks," and from William Thomas, to locate a mill on Clear creek, "about two miles from its mouth." Then came a court order, June 2, 1789, appointing a committee to "view the most convenient way for a road from Hugh Shannon's mill to the Falling Spring" (Versailles). Between June, 1789, and the end of 1793 the court approved building of mills by the following applicants, in addition to those named above: Samuel Grant, on Elkhorn; James Lindsay, on South Elkhorn; Cyrus McCracken, on Glen's creek; James McBride, on South Elkhorn; Simeon Buford, on South Elkhorn; John Lewis, at Lewis spring near Shannon's meeting house; John Grant, on North Elkhorn at Mussel shoals; John Craig, on Clear creek "within 5 poles of Dudley Mitchum's upper line"; Daniel Trabue, on Grier's creek; John Little, "at the Falling Spring"; James Sterrett, on North Elkhorn, "opposite the land of Elijah Craig"; Richard Cave, on Clear creek; George Grimes, on North Elkhorn; Daniel Mock, on North Elkhorn; Robert Sanders, on Cane Run; Gen. Charles Scott, on Craig's creek; James Daugherty, on South Elkhorn; Samuel Gregory, on South Elkhorn.⁵

TRABUE MILL

Among those listed above is the mill of Daniel Trabue on Grier's Creek. Daniel was first cousin to Joel DuPuy, his mother Olympia being the sister of Joel's father Bartholomew DuPuy. Daniel Trabue (1760 – 1840) was born along the James River in the Virginia Piedmont, where the Trabues and DuPuy had settled after emigrating from France with other Huguenots. Daniel came to Kentucky in the fall or winter of 1777 where he served as military commissary, examining the accounts at the various forts, and returned to Virginia in 1779. Here he became embroiled in the Revolutionary War, seeing action at Yorktown, and in 1782 married and moved to a plantation on Tomahawk Creek in Chesterfield County, Virginia, that he purchased from his eldest brother James. In February 1783, Daniel erected a grist mill on a six-acre tract in adjoining Powhatan County and soon afterward moved there with his wife Mary. Early in 1785 he emigrated to Kentucky, settling on Grier's Creek in the western section of what was then Fayette County. During the summer of 1788, Daniel was among the signatories to a petition that resulted in the creation of Woodford County out of Fayette by the Virginia legislature in May 1789.⁶

⁵ Many of the mill sites listed, including all on North Elkhorn and Cane Run, are located in present-day Scott County, which was formed from Woodford County in 1792.

⁶ Benjamin H. DuPuy, *The Huguenot Bartholomew DuPuy and His Descendants* (Louisville, 1908); Chester R. Young, ed., *Westward into Kentucky: The Narrative of Daniel Trabue* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 5-7; Will Graves, trans., "Pension Application of Daniel Trabue," Southern

The Trabues settled on two hundred acres on the north side of Grier's Creek, not far from the mouth of the stream (Figure 2). In his memoirs, Daniel wrote, "We thought that was a safe place from the Indians as several people lived over the river and we thought it would soon be better settled." Determined to resume the milling occupation, he petitioned the Woodford County Court in September 1790 to erect a "water grist mill," seeking title to an additional acre of land across the creek for the abutment of the mill dam:

In September 1790 the Woodford County court issued a writ of ad quod damnum by which a jury assessed the damages to be expected by the construction of the enterprise and evaluated the acre taken for this public purpose. Joseph McClain, owner of the land opposite Trabue's, took exception to the decision of the panel to allow a dam fifteen feet high and to appraise the acre at 10s. In June the following year a second jury lowered the height of the dam one foot, raised the value of the acre to 14s, 5d., and set the flooding damage to McClain's adjacent land at 9s. 9d. The court now licensed Trabue to erect his mill and dam. This business establishment and Trabue's Bridge, some sixty feet below the dam, became prominent landmarks in the Grier Creek neighborhood.... Prospering because of the allowable tolls of one-eighth of the corn ground into meal and one-sixteenth of that made into hominy, the proprietor kept this business while he remained in Woodford County.

The June Court of 1791 also ordered that a road be laid out down the creek from Trabue's mill to "Rowland's Boatyard" on the Kentucky River.⁷

During 1795, Daniel and some of his relatives decided to relocate to the Green River country of Kentucky, an area he had become familiar with while stationed at Logan's Fort on the headwaters of the river, and made a joint purchase of a large tract on Skinhouse Branch. In July 1796 Daniel placed an ad in the *Kentucky Gazette* of Lexington advertising "the tract of land whereon I now live on Greers Creek, Woodford county near the Kentucky River, containing 350 acres, with a grist and saw mill &c." By September 24, he had sold his Woodford home and mill operations and shortly thereafter moved to the tract in newly formed Green County. Once again, Daniel Trabue resumed the miller's profession, erecting a very successful mill on Russell Creek in Adair County, along the Columbia – Greensburg road, in 1804.⁸

TANNER MILL

The mill operation owned by John Tanner, Jr. (ca. 1732-1812), while of short duration, is historically significant because he was not only a miller but also a manufacturer of millstones. Tanner was a missionary preacher, a member of the Kehukee Association of United Baptists, an association of strongly Calvinistic Regular Baptist churches that was formed in North Carolina shortly before the Revolutionary War. Tanner traveled extensively throughout North Carolina and Virginia to spread the doctrine and baptize converts. Court records for Edgecombe County, North Carolina, where the Tanner family resided, record a 1767 petition from John Tanner to build a mill on the Tar River. Although it is not clear whether this refers to John Tanner, Jr. or to his father, John Tanner, Sr., it does indicate where the younger Tanner may have learned about the construction and operation of a grist mill. Some time prior to 1785, Tanner came to Kentucky and was one of the founding members of the Tates Creek Baptist church in Madison County, and not long afterward, became the pastor of the Boone's Creek Church at Athens in Fayette County. Tanner moved to Woodford County about the year 1795, and "settled in the neighborhood of Clear Creek Church." Although histories of the Baptist Church in Kentucky provide extensive biographies of John Tanner, Jr., none of them make any reference to his occupation as a miller. Even

Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters (accessible at: <http://revwarapps.org/s14727.pdf>; accessed Jun 12, 2016).

⁷ Young, *Westward into Kentucky*, 7-8, 136; Woodford County Order Book A, 151 (September 7, 1790), 161 (October 5, 1790), 249, 251 (June 7, 1791); Order Book B, 9 (July 5, 1791).

⁸ Young, *Westward into Kentucky*, 9-10; *Kentucky Gazette*, July 16, 1796.

Baptist preachers on the frontier have to earn a living, however, and the circumstantial evidence is fairly convincing. Aside from the fact that I have been unable to locate reference to any other John Tanner in Woodford County for the period, land transactions on Grier's Creek for Tanner refer to his wife as Sarah Tanner, the same as given for Tanner the Baptist preacher. Furthermore, the Clear Creek church, which is still in existence today, is just south of Versailles and six miles, as the crow flies, from the mouth of Grier's Creek, thus placing Tanner in the vicinity.⁹

Three mill-related advertisements by or referring to John Tanner appear in the regional press from summer 1797 to early 1800. The first advertisement was not placed by Tanner, but by Peyton Short, another Grier's Creek mill owner who mentions the Tanner mill solely as a reference point to indicate the location of his own mill. Appearing in the *Kentucky Gazette* on August 12, 1797, Short advertised a mill property:

To be Let

For one or more years

A valuable saw and grist mill, in the county of Woodford, on Grier's creek, about a half a mile above Tanner's mill, and one from the Kentucky river, a very good road leading thereto from said mills, which are situated in an excellent neighborhood, and with a little repair are capable of doing a great deal of business.

Peyton Short, state senator for Fayette County from 1792-1796, was an entrepreneur who had made substantial investments in land and in various business enterprises in Kentucky, including several mills and distilleries. In 1794 Short relocated from Lexington to Woodford County, pursuing the life of a gentleman farmer at an estate he named "Greenfield" located on Clear Creek about three miles south of Versailles. Little else is known about the Grier's Creek mill he intended to lease out, but the advertisement locates the Tanner mill one-half mile from the Kentucky River and thus between the Trabue and DuPuy mills (Figure 2).¹⁰

PRODUCTION OF SO-CALLED "FLINT" MILLSTONES

Also in August of 1797, John Tanner placed a series of advertisements promoting not grain products from his mill but instead offering millstones for sale; apparently Tanner had decided to diversify his interests:

A Mill-Stone Quarry

Is opened near the subscriber's mill on Grayer's [Grier's] creek, Woodford county, the quality of which is flint and equal to the best of Burr stones for manufacturing wheat into flour, and equal to any stone for grinding Indian corn – put them in a flour dress and they will grind wheat and corn alternatively, to the greatest perfection. The following is a certificate given by Asa Combs, millwright, whose character is well established as a competent Judge of Burr mill stones:

I hereby certify, that by examining of, and grinding with, the mill stones now running in Mr. John Tanner's mill, of a flint quality – I think them equal to good Burrs for merchant work, if put in proper order. Given under my hand this 25th day of July 1797.

ASA COMBS

We have run said stones 3 months very constant on one dressing, and they still grind corn to good advantage.

JOHN TANNER¹¹

⁹ John H. Spencer, *A History of Kentucky Baptists from 1769 to 1885*, vol. 1 (Cincinnati, 1886), 97-101; Wynette P. Haun, trans., *Edgecombe County, North Carolina, County Court Minutes*, Vol. 2, *County Court Minutes 1763-1774* (Durham, NC, 1989), 58.

¹⁰ *Kentucky Gazette*, August 12, 1797; Deborah S. Skaggs, "Charles Wilkins Short: Kentucky Botanist and Physician 1794 – 1863," M.A. Thesis, University of Louisville, 1970.

¹¹ *Stewart Kentucky Herald* (Lexington), August 15, 1797.

Possibly Tanner found the manufacture of millstones to be more profitable than the production of corn meal or wheat flour. On July 20, 1799, Tanner appointed power of attorney to one William Vawter to collect debts and conduct business transactions, and subsequently, on October 9, sold twenty acres of his property, including “the place whereon the said John now lives, called his mill seat,” to Vawter for 500 pounds. Although he had thus apparently given up the milling occupation, he continued in the business of millstone manufacture, since in 1800 he placed a lengthy advertisement in a Frankfort paper extolling the virtues of the millstones from his Grier’s Creek quarry:

MILL STONES

A Fair and impartial trial of a pair of millstones cut in my quarry, of flint quality, of four feet in diameter, now running in Colonel Robert Johnson’s mill on North Elkhorn Creek, was made with his Burr stones, as stated in his certificate, 330 lb. of wheat being weighted into each mill, and the wheat weighing 59-1/2 lb. per bushel, and both mills managed to the best advantage, and the flour bolted his superfine cloth immediately, that ground on the flint stones was first bolted, and made 243 lb. of flour, the Burrs 213 lb. leaving 30 pounds in favor of the flint stones, & of equal quality. I have here the colonel’s Certificate for further information:

“I HAVE in my mill on North Elkhorn, a pair of French burr Stones, four feet diameter; also, a pair the same size, which I purchased of Mr. John Tanner, cut in his quarry, in Woodford county. I have made trial of the flint mill stones I purchased of Mr. Tanner, and find them exceedingly good for manufacturing flour; and I further certify that I am of opinion that they are equal to any French Burrs of the same size in the state. Given under my hand, this 15th day of December, 1799.”

A true Copy.

(Signed) Robt. Johnson

I Have for Sale, the Quarry out of which the above stones were cut, and five acres of ground including the same; and will make the terms cash to the purchaser, by taking the price in millstones and the produce of the country. Seven hands unto of whom may be warrant will make the 100 £ per month, clear of all expenses, at my usual selling prices, and the probability is, that the stones will bear a higher price than usual, if their value could be generally known, and if a speedy trial could be made of those who incline to purchase of me, I will warrant them to be equal to the Burrs. I have on hand, a few pair, from four feet two inches in diameter to four feet eight inches, which I will warrant as above.

John Tanner¹²

Collins’ *History of Kentucky* states that Tanner moved to Missouri in 1798, but this appears to be an error. He may have left Grier’s Creek and Woodford County in that year, leaving his millstone quarry under the supervision of William Vawter, since he was reported to have relocated briefly in Shelby County, Kentucky, and from there to Caldwell County. Tanner’s will, filed in probate court in Cape Girardeau County, Missouri, on July 18, 1812, was dated August 30, 1810, Caldwell County, Kentucky. Although in Caldwell County he did not engage in the milling or millstone business, he remained interested in the industry. In a letter to his son, Edward, dated August 2, 1802, he wrote: "I have seen Mr. Prince's millstones but I think the base stone is not good." He migrated to the territory of Missouri “sometime prior to the earthquakes of 1811,” settling in the vicinity of Little Prairie about thirty miles from New Madrid. In December, 1810, Tanner and his son, Edward, petitioned the U.S. Congress for permission to erect two grist and saw mills on the waters of the St. Francis River. This proved to be the ultimate in bad timing, since during the winter of 1811-1812 this region was the epicenter of the most powerful earthquakes to shake the lower North American continent in recorded history. Understandably

¹² Woodford County Deed Book C2, 341, October 9, 1799, 344, July 20, 1799; Frankfort *Palladium*, February 27, 1800.

frightened by the experience, Tanner moved fifty miles north to Cape Girardeau County where, now eighty years old and infirm, he passed away during the summer of 1812.¹³

The indication of quarrying of “flint” millstones in the John Tanner advertisements is rather problematic. Millstones could be manufactured from any type of hard, durable rock. Since the surface bedrock of Kentucky is entirely sedimentary, with the exception of a few isolated igneous intrusions, millstones here were generally made from dense sandstone, conglomerate, dolomite and, less frequently, limestone. “Flint” is often used as a synonym for the microcrystalline quartz mineral known as chert, but the bedrock lithology of the Inner Bluegrass region does not provide for deposits of solid chert in layers of sufficient thickness for millstones, except perhaps in some isolated circumstances.

Chert occurs in a wide range of colors in two forms, nodular chert and bedded chert, each having a different origin process but both being the result of recrystallization of amorphous silica. Nodular cherts are widespread in carbonate rocks such as limestone and are thus very common in Kentucky. Chert nodules tend to concentrate along particular bedding planes and range in size up to a few inches thick. Nodule shapes are quite variable, with smaller nodules occurring as more or less regular discoidal or egg-shaped bodies and larger nodules being very irregular knobby bodies. Where chert nodules are abundant, they often form two-dimensional or three-dimensional interconnected networks, and very dense concentrations may resemble bedded chert. Nodular chert was once believed to form by direct deposition of amorphous silica on the ocean floor, but the modern consensus is for a replacement origin, through migration of silica through the host rock. Chert also occurs as continuous beds that may range up to several feet in thickness. Most bedded cherts are generally believed to represent deep-water marine deposits of siliceous fossils, accumulations of radiolarian and diatom oozes. In addition to this biogenetic origin, some bedded cherts are believed to be associated with volcanic activity, through silica derived from dissolution of volcanic ash, silica expelled from submarine volcanic vents, or silica deposited by post-burial fluid flow. Cecil (2004) has, however, proposed that most bedded chert is the result of eolian transport and accumulation of quartzose dust.¹⁴

“Flint” millstones produced from chert beds in France were considered highly desirable by American millers and many were imported into the United States; small cavities left by fossils provided roughness of the millstone surface necessary for milling grain effectively. In the Inner Bluegrass region, thin layers of chert, interbedded with carbonate rocks, are common throughout the region, but most such beds are limited to only an inch or so in thickness, insufficient for millstone production. Outside the region, thicker beds exist, possibly suitable for the purpose, as in southeastern Ohio or in the Steels Knob facies of the Muldraugh Formation, found in Taylor, Casey, Adair, Pulaski, and western Lincoln counties, Kentucky, where bedded chert occurs in layers three to four feet thick. Although millstones were produced from the Ohio chert beds, no documentation has yet been found to indicate that chert millstones were manufactured

¹³ Richard H. Collins, *History of Kentucky*, vol. 2 (Frankfort, KY, 1874), 55; Gary M. Tanner, “Reverend Tanner Was One of Kentucky's First Baptist Preachers,” *Kentucky Explorer* (September 2012), 44-48; Olive S. Eldred and Nancy Beck, trans., *Pioneers of Caldwell County, Kentucky*, Vol. 1, *Probate Records of the Original Settlers 1809-1834* (Princeton, KY, 1976), 6; Marguerite Hussey, *The Family of Rev. John Tanner, Baptist Preacher: Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky, Missouri* (n.p., 1972), 19; Robert S. Duncan, *A History of the Baptists in Missouri* (St. Louis, 1882), 75; Wilson Thompson, *Autobiography of the Elder Wilson Thompson* (Cincinnati, 1867), 174-176, 182-185; “Petition to Congress by John and Edward Tanner,” Clarence E. Carter, ed., *Territorial Papers of the United States, Volume 14, The Territory of Louisiana-Missouri 1806-1814* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1949), 427-228.

¹⁴ Maurice E. Tucker, ed., *Sedimentary Petrology: An Introduction to the Origin of Sedimentary Rocks*, 3rd ed. (Maulden, MA: Blackwell, 2009), 212-218; C. Blaine Cecil, *Eolian Dust and the Origin of Sedimentary Chert*, U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 2004-1098 (USGS: Reston, VA, 2014).

in Kentucky except in Franklin and Woodford counties, where the thicker chert deposits are in nodular form.¹⁵

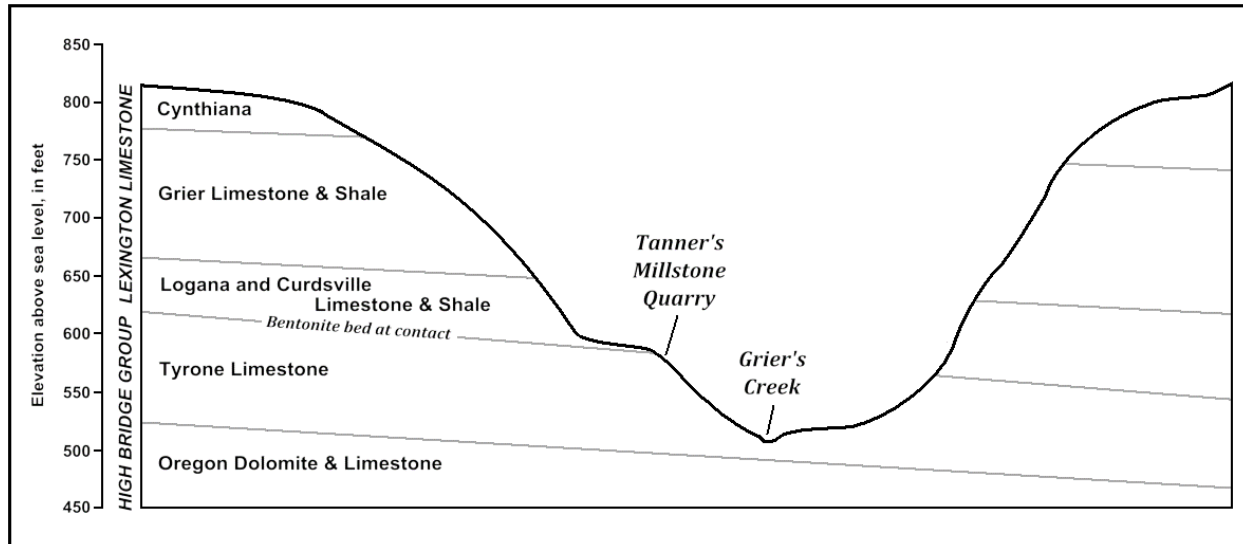


Figure 3. Geologic Profile across Grier’s Creek at the Tanner Millstone Quarry. The nodular chert deposits from which so-called “flint” millstones were produced were most likely the result of the migration of amorphous silica from the bentonite layer found at the Curdsville-Tyrone contact (illustration by the author; vertical exaggeration = 1.4x).

The bedrock of the Inner Bluegrass region, which includes Woodford County, consists of relatively pure middle Ordovician carbonate rocks overlain by thinly interbedded upper Ordovician limestones and shales (**Figure 3**). The lowermost of the underlying carbonates, the Camp Nelson Limestone and the Oregon and Tyrone Formations, constitute the thickly bedded members of the High Bridge Group. Collectively ranging in thickness up to 250 feet, these represent the oldest exposed rocks in the state and may be seen only in the deeply entrenched gorge of the Kentucky River and in the lower parts of tributary streams such as Grier’s Creek. The Tyrone is overlain by the thinly bedded Lexington Limestone, ranging in thickness from 195 – 295 feet; the lower third of the Lexington Limestone, like the members of the High Bridge Group, is exposed only in the gorge of the Kentucky River and its tributaries. The Curdsville Limestone is the lowermost unit of the Lexington Limestone and is separated from the upper Tyrone by a layer of bentonite, a type of clay that is derived from the weathering of volcanic ash. The Ordovician was a period of very intense volcanic activity, which resulted in widespread deposition of blankets of volcanic ash. This ash was probably the source of silica for nodular chert deposits in the upper Tyrone.¹⁶

¹⁵ Charles D. Hockensmith, “Ohio Buhr Millstones: The Flint Ridge and Raccoon Creek Quarries,” *Ohio Valley Historical Archaeology* 18(2003):135-142; Garry L. Getz, *Flint: Ohio’s Official Gemstone* (Columbus: Ohio Geological Survey), 1-6, ; Joseph T. Hannibal, Nicholas A. Reser, Julia A. Yeakley, Theresa A. Kalka and Veronica Fusco, "Determining Provenance of Local and Imported Chert Millstones using Fossils (Especially Charophyta, Fusulinina and Brachiopoda): Examples from Ohio, U.S.A." *Palaeis* 28(November 2013),739-754; Arthur C. McFarlan, *Geology of Kentucky* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1943), 72

¹⁶ Earle R. Cressman and Warren L. Peterson, “Ordovician System,” In Robert C. McDowell, ed., *The Geology of Kentucky: A Text to Accompany the Geologic Map of Kentucky*, U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 1151-H (Washington: USGS, 1986, 3-7; Cressman, *Lithostratigraphy and Depositional Environments of the Lexington Limestone (Ordovician) of Central Kentucky*, U.S. Geological Survey Professional Paper 768 (Washington: USGS, 1973), 9-10; Bryan K. Sell, “Intense

Given the lithologic profile of the Bluegrass region, it would thus appear likely that the so-called “flint” millstones advertised by John Tanner were not, in fact, pure, solid chert but instead were nodular chert deposits contained within a limestone matrix. Although the advertisements refer to “flint stones” or “flint millstones,” more revealing are the associated qualified statements describing these stones as being “of flint quality,” which suggest that the composition of the millstones is not genuine flint but an equivalent material. Examination of an actual millstone crafted from Grier Creek rock would provide an ideal resolution of the question as to the nature of these stones. Locating the quarry from which Tanner’s “flint” millstones were produced proved to be an easier task than originally anticipated, by drawing upon local knowledge of the landscape.

On June 17, 2016, I traveled to Grier’s Creek in company with James C. Currens of the Kentucky Geological Survey, a good friend and Woodford County resident whom I recruited for the project. Once we reached our destination Jim directed me to the home of Jimmy Ott, an old friend of his who possessed an intimate knowledge of Grier’s Creek based on forty years of hiking and hunting through the watershed area. Jimmy knew exactly where to find an old, overgrown millstone quarry, and in short order led us to a hillslope ledge overlooking Grier’s Creek not far from the Kentucky River (Figure 2). Here under the trees, where undergrowth was sparse, we found two nearly complete millstones, of 63-inch and 51-inch diameter respectively, abandoned in place due to breakage. Nearby were numerous other moss-covered “blanks,” representing earlier stages of production where rock slabs had been roughly hewn to an appropriate size and shape (Figures 4 and 5). The production area was not an excavation into the bedrock, as one typically pictures a quarry, but an area of rock outcrop where slabs were broken off and shaped in place into millstones. The visible quarry site was about twenty feet wide and perhaps a hundred feet long. The production area may have extended further, but northward the ledge had a sunnier aspect and the thick growth of weeds discouraged investigation in detail, although we did trip over what appeared to be a few more millstone blanks beneath this vegetative cover. Examination of the millstones confirmed that these were indeed manufactured from nodular chert embedded in limestone (Figure 6). Jim Currens, a geologist by profession, identified the site as representing the base of the Curdsville limestone unit and thus the zone where the bentonite beds may have contributed to the deposition of chert. We may also reasonably conclude that the millstones produced in Franklin County, noted by Hockensmith (2009), were of the same nature and origin since this area has a similar geology.¹⁷

Is this John Tanner’s quarry? It is certainly possible that other persons may have been manufacturing millstones from chert deposits in different locations along Grier’s Creek during Tanner’s residency or even long afterward. Tanner’s quarry may also have been used by others after his departure from the area. In the Tanner millstone advertisement dated February 27, 1800, he offered “for Sale, the Quarry out of which the above stones were cut, and five acres of ground including the same.” Land transactions in the Woodford County deed books, however, do not record any land purchases by Tanner and only two sales of property, one in 1796 for 218.5 acres on Grier’s Creek and, in 1799, for twenty acres including his grist mill. Since the quarry was being offered for sale in 1800, neither of these sales would have included the quarry site. I have not been able to exactly place his mill property based on the property descriptions because this would require a very time-consuming process of piecing together the metes-and-bounds surveys for dozens of properties in order to orient Tanner land with known present-day landmarks. It appears fairly certain, however, that the Tanner mill was later operated by the miller Andrew Muldrow, in

Volcanism and Ordovician Icehouse Climate,” in Juan Carlos Gutiérrez-Marco, Isabel Rábano and Diego García-Bellido, eds., *Ordovician of the World* (Madrid: Instituto Geológico y Minero de España, 2011), 527-536; María Ángeles Bustillo, “Silicification of Continental Carbonates,” In Ana M. Alonso-Zarza and Lawrence H. Tanner, eds., *Carbonates in Continental Settings: Geochemistry, Diagenesis, and Applications* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2010), 153-178.

¹⁷ Charles D. Hockensmith, *The Millstone Industry: A Summary of Research on Quarries and Producers in the United States, Europe, and Elsewhere* (Jefferson, N.C. and London: McFarland, 2009), 66-68.



Figure 4. Mr. Jimmy Ott examines one of several cracked and abandoned nodular chert millstones present at the newly discovered millstone quarry, believed to have been operated by Grier's Creek resident and miller John Tanner at the close of the eighteenth century. This millstone is 63 inches in diameter, 5 inches thick, with a center hole 10 inches in diameter (photograph by the author).



Figure 5. A view of the limestone/chert outcrop constituting the Tanner millstone quarry. Millstones were hewn from slabs of the outcrop, either already lying in place or broken away from the exposure. In the foreground is a moss-covered slab or "blank" that was roughly worked into the approximate shape and dimensions for a millstone (photograph by the author).

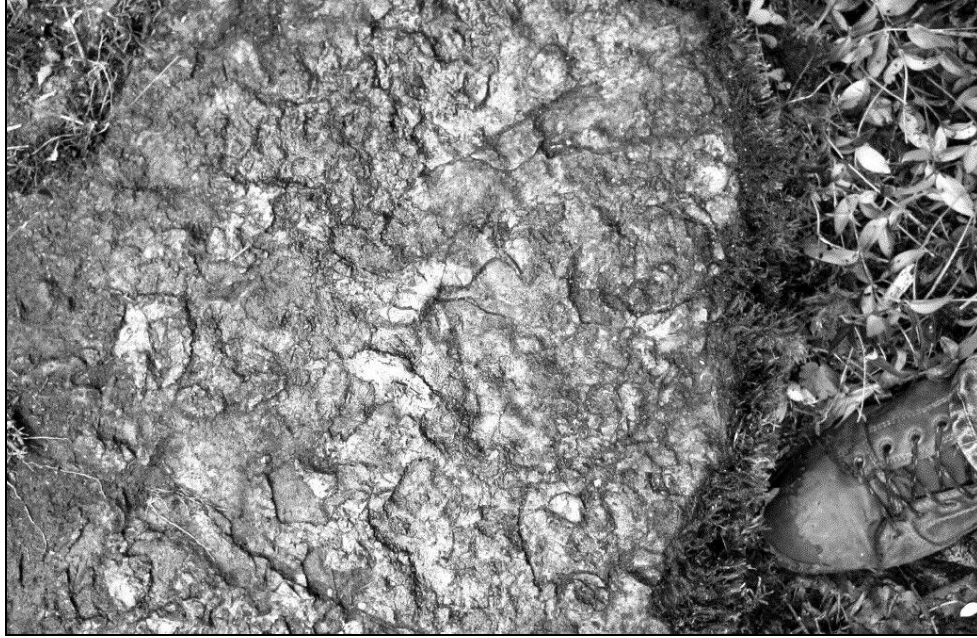


Figure 6. A close-up view of the surface of the millstone in Figure 4, showing the mass of irregular chert nodules embedded within the limestone matrix. Very hard and durable, the chert protrusions provided a rough, long-lasting grinding surface (photograph by the author).

who made land purchases on Grier's Creek during 1813-14 and built a house on the ridge not far from the millstone quarry (see following account).¹⁸

At present, the best approximate location for the historical Tanner quarry (and by association, his mill property) is based on the August 12, 1797, advertisement by Peyton Short, which by reference locates it about one half-mile from the Kentucky River. The quarry site we discovered is approximately 3,100 feet in a straight line from the river, or about 3,700 feet by way of the Shryock Ferry road. By inference, then, the millstone site we visited appears most likely to be the one that was owned by John Tanner. It is also very probable that many of the contemporary mills along the Grier's Creek were using Tanner millstones.

DISTILLERIES

The most extensive milling operation along Grier's Creek was that founded by Andrew Muldrow (1752-1829), located less than a mile from the Kentucky River (Figure 2). According to Elizabeth Simpson, writing in 1938, Muldrow acquired 3,000 acres along Grier's Creek in 1804. This is nonsensical, since the entire Grier's Creek watershed constitutes only a little over 10,000 acres and Muldrow was only one of many landowners. It seems more likely that Simpson inadvertently added a zero to the extent of his property holdings here, since in 1835 the executors of his will sold the property described as being 300 acres, including "all rights and claims to the mill seat." The date is also inaccurate; Muldrow's first acquisition of land on Grier's Creek was a tract of 137.5 acres purchased from William Vawter in 1813, most likely being part of John Tanner's former land including his grist mill and millstone quarry. Over the next few years, Muldrow made several additional land purchases to piece together his 300-acre estate.¹⁹

¹⁸ Woodford County Deed Book C2, 341, October 9, 1799, 344, July 20, 1799.

¹⁹ Elizabeth M. Simpson, "Muldrow House is House of Autumn, Dreaming, Pensive, Wistful," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, September 25, 1938; Woodford County Deed Book F, 157, April 21, 1813, 379, September 21, 1814, 412, September 27, 1814; Deed Book O, 425, January 14, 1835.

Having married in 1812 to Rachel Worley, the couple lived simply in a double log house while he established several mills, including both a grist and saw mill as well as a distillery. The eminent Kentucky historian Thomas D. Clark eloquently pictured Muldrow's commercial operation:

He harnessed the current of the little creek and forced it through his millrace under the huge wheel of his mill and through the flake barrels of his distillery. His mill ground the rich grain from the acres of the Bluegrass which rolled out behind the big river hill. Farm wagons creaked downhill over the narrow Sublett's Ferry road to deposit their valuable burdens of grain and hemp fiber in Colonel Muldrow's storage houses. A half mile away sturdy flatboats tugged at the end of Kentucky hempen lines looped around the boles of staunch sycamores²⁰.

His various enterprises flourished sufficiently so that in 1817 they were able to move out of the log cabin into a magnificent Georgian house standing on a point of land just above Grier's Creek and his mills, which Rachel named Mount Airy. "Here on the banks of the Kentucky," Clark wrote, "Colonel Muldrow built one of America's architectural gems" (Figure 7).²¹

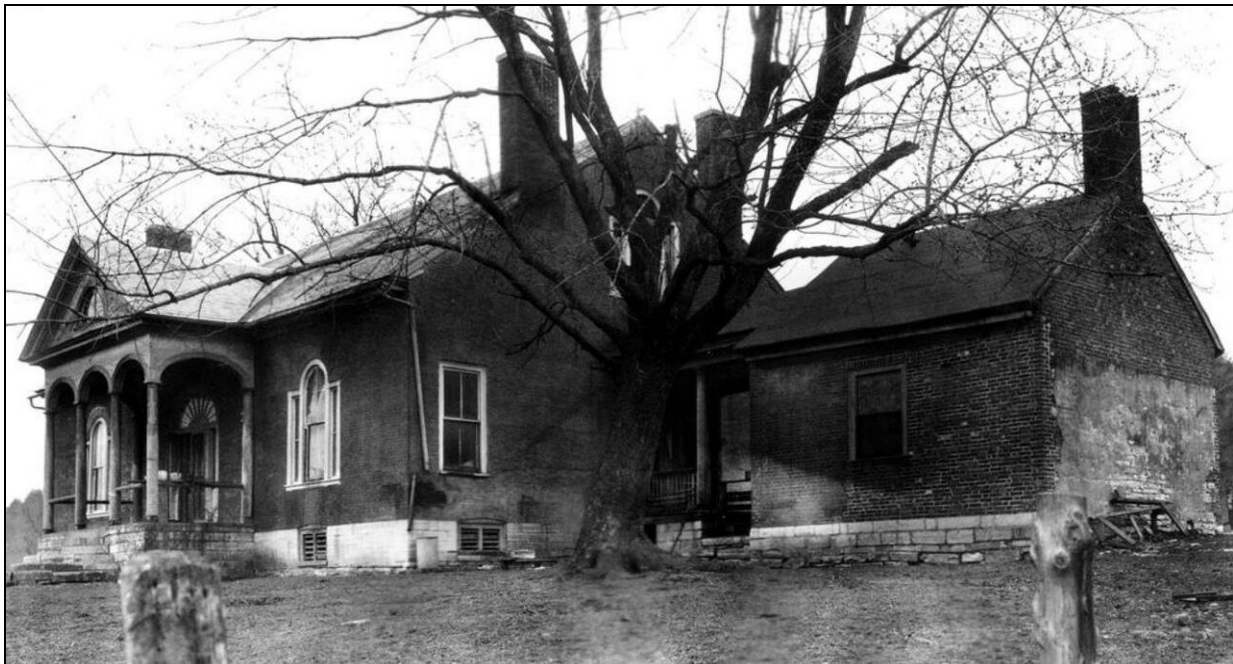


Figure 7. Shown ca. 1930, the home of miller Andrew Muldrow, erected in 1817 on the north side of Grier's Creek just upstream from the mill building. Considered an architectural gem, the house was gutted by fire in 1945 (source: Louis Edward Nollau Nitrate Photographic Print Collection, University of Kentucky Special Collections Research Center; used with permission).

A veteran of the War of 1812, Andrew Muldrow served in the Kentucky House of Representatives in 1822, and in the state senate from 1824 until his death in 1829. In August of that year, Muldrow succumbed to typhoid fever, followed in November by his fifteen-year old son, John Andrew. Rachel Muldrow survived the loss of her husband and only child by three years, passing in 1832 at the age of 50 years. In his will, made out only two days prior to his death, Andrew directed his executors to rent out the recently erected rope walk, and that the distillery "heretofore worked on his premises on Greers Creek shall cease all operation as such." He also ordered that all of his slaves should be provided with an education and freed upon reaching a certain age, twenty-eight years for males and twenty-four for

²⁰ Thomas D. Clark, *The Kentucky* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970), 208.

²¹ Simpson, "Muldrow House"; Clark, *The Kentucky*, 208. The Muldrow house was destroyed by fire on October 8, 1945 (*Lexington Herald*, October 9, 1945).

females, and if they wished then to immigrate to Liberia, the executors were required to furnish them with transportation to Africa.²²

The Muldrow property and mill was sold in 1835 to David Searce, and subsequently acquired by Johnson A. Miller (1808-1882) from German Bohannon, although I have not been able to locate the deed for this later transaction. Miller operated the existing hemp factory and sawmill on Grier's Creek, and either reactivated the old Muldrow distillery or constructed a new facility for whiskey production. Miller was certainly making whiskey in Woodford County during the 1840s. In an 1849 handbill, James L. Moss of Woodford County who, having sold his farm was about to depart for the Oregon Territory, provided a list of his personal property that he intended to auction off on March 1. Among the items listed was a 32-gallon barrel of "Johnson Miller whiskey, seven years old," which would indicate Miller was distilling by at least 1841. His whiskey was made using water from what would be referred to by a subsequent owner as "the celebrated Old Johnson Miller Spring...the largest natural spring of pure limestone water in Kentucky," which, while patently untrue, was hyperbole typical of distillers of the era. He continued to make whiskey for four decades, finally passing from life at the age of 74 in July 1882. The appraisal made of his estate noted 405 barrels of whiskey in bond "made in the season of 1880 & 1881" and 397 barrels distilled 1881-1882. The whiskey was subsequently auctioned off at the county courthouse on September 27; executor Richard B. George offered free samples at his office in Versailles.²³

By the terms of his will, Miller left most of his Grier's Creek property to his wife, Sarah E. Miller, including the tract on which his distillery was located. The distillery was apparently leased to the brothers Jacob (1851-1940) and Ferdinand Laval of Louisville, Kentucky. The Lavals had been raised in a tradition of whiskey making, since their French immigrant father, Jacob M. Laval, Sr., was a Louisville distiller in partnership with Jacob Schrodt as "manufacturers of alcohol, cologne and pure spirits" on Second Street. The Lavals, however, became heavily indebted to William H. Railey, a Woodford County resident, which in due course would result in the downfall of their enterprise. When Sarah died early in 1890, a suit brought in the Woodford Circuit Court resulted in the Miller properties, totaling 325 acres in two tracts, being conveyed to John D. Turner on June 27, 1890. The 1891 Sanborne Insurance maps for Versailles and outlying Woodford County businesses show "J. Turner" listed as the proprietor of the "Old Johnson-Miller" distillery on Grier's Creek (**Figure 8**), so the Lavals may have been separated from the operation prior to this time or Turner was acting as their agent. Jacob Laval was evidently living in Woodford County at this time, however, since his son, Jacob H. Laval, was born here in January, 1891.²⁴

²² Simpson, "Muldrow House"; Last will of Andrew Muldrow, Woodford County Will Book H, 301-302; *Lexington Reporter*, November 25, 1829.

²³ Woodford County Deed Book O, 425-426, January 16, 1835; Elizabeth M. Simpson, "Traditions and Architecture of Moss House are Divided into Three Eras," *Lexington Herald-Leader*, August 21, 1938; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, September 18, 1882; Woodford County Will Book Y, 157, August 1882. In her article on the Muldrow house, Elizabeth M. Simpson claimed that Johnson A. Miller was the producer of the nationally famous "Chicken Cock" Bourbon whiskey at his Grier's Creek distillery, but this is erroneous. Chicken Cock whiskey was distilled by James A. Miller at Paris in Bourbon County beginning in 1856, not in Woodford County; see *Federal Reporter* 50(May-August, 1892), 277-279; "Last of Bourbon Distilleries," *Bourbon News*, August 11, 1914.

²⁴ Woodford County Will Book Y, 125-128, July 10, 1880; *Louisville Daily Courier*, May 24, 1858; Woodford County Deed Book 9, 466-467, June 27, 1890; Frederick A. Wallis and Hamilton Tapp, *A Sesqui-Centennial History of Kentucky*, Vol. III (Hopkinsville, KY: Historical Record Association, 1945), 1282; I was unable to locate any record of conveyance to the Lavals or related mortgage in the courthouse records, but according to the estate appraisal, the Lavals were nearly \$15,000 in debt to Railey at the time of his death.

The Laval distilling enterprise did not persist for very long, however, for William H. Railey died intestate in February, 1891. The appraisal of his estate made note of forty barrels of “Laval whiskey” made in 1888, and 30 barrels made in 1889. As a consequence of the Laval debt to Railey, the stock of the distillery, totaling 300 barrels in bond at the warehouse, was offered at public sale on June 15 at the courthouse in Versailles, “for the benefit of the estate of W.H. Railey.” John Turner was also entangled in the financial problems of the Lavals, resulting in his property on Grier’s Creek being conveyed on January 29, 1894, to D. W. Young by William S. Barbour, master commissioner and receiver of the Woodford Court of Common Pleas, as a consequence of the action against John D. Turner and others including Jacob Laval. By this time, apparently, Ferdinand Laval was no longer associated with the distillery. Exempted from this transfer was a five-acre tract taken out of the whole, “being part of what is known as the Old Johnson Miller place and upon which is now situated a distillery and outbuildings and machinery appurtenant thereto,” which was sold to John T. Barbee of Louisville. Afterward, Jacob Laval moved to Lexington and continued in the trade of bourbon production, but in the employ of other men; the census of 1900 and 1910 list him as “distillery foreman.” In 1900 he established the Lexington Carpet and Dry Cleaning Company in Lexington, initially managed by his wife Jane, later renamed Laval Cleaners and operated with his son Jacob H. Laval.²⁵

The new owner of the former Miller/Laval distillery, John T. Barbee (1853 - 1900) had previously been associated with the John G. Roach Company of Louisville, for whom he started as a “drummer” or salesman. The Roach Company conducted the wholesale whiskey trade from 1869 until 1879, when Roach began building and operating several distilleries, the last and largest erected in Louisville in 1892. By 1886, Barbee had struck out on his own, operating as a wholesale liquor dealer under the name John T. Barbee & Co. Having accumulated sufficient capital, he purchased the Grier’s Creek distillery in 1894 and engaged John S. Minor of Louisville to demolish most of the old distillery buildings and erect a new, modern facility on the site, at a cost of \$30,000 (**Figure 9**). Minor was a well-known contractor who had constructed many distillery buildings, including the J.T.S. Brown distillery in Anderson county and the Early Times distillery at Bardstown, Kentucky. At his new distillery, Barbee discontinued production of “Old Johnson Miller” brand whiskey, replacing it with “Old Barbee.” John Barbee passed away on July 5, 1900 at the relatively young age of 47 years. A new corporation was immediately formed and the distillery continued to operate under the Barbee name, with Herman F.W. Volkerding as president of the company until his death in 1912. Afterward the company was reorganized with the John C. Weller Company of Louisville.²⁶

With the passage of the Volstead Act in late 1919, Prohibition was the law of the land and was devastating to the distilling industry; many plants, large and small, folded never to reopen. Even before the legislation was approved, however, the handwriting was on the wall, so to speak, and the Weller Company hastened to divest itself of a property expected to soon be nearly worthless. The Barbee distillery went under the auctioneer’s hammer on June 19, 1919, for a paltry \$5,300, a pittance for a facility that was nearly new, having burned down seven years previously and completely rebuilt. The distillery was described as having a “200-bushel capacity, 3 warehouses under one roof, with a capacity of 17,500 barrels, embracing copper and iron tanks, donkey pumps, power engines, 4 fermenting tubs of

²⁵ Woodford County Will Book 1, 522, February 26, 1891; Louisville *Courier-Journal*, June 9, 1891; Woodford County Deed Book 11, 349-350, January 29, 1894; Wallis and Tapp, *History of Kentucky*, 1282, and various advertisements in Lexington newspapers. Jacob Laval died on January 13, 1940, at the age of 89 years. Claims are made that Jacob Laval was founder and operator of the Glenn Springs Distillery on Glenns Creek, Woodford County, in 1881, but I have been unable to confirm this.

²⁶ J. Stoddard Johnston, ed., *Memorial History of Louisville* (Chicago: American Biographical Publishing, 1896), 555-556, 627; Louisville *Courier-Journal*, February 20, 1894; Lexington *Herald*, July 7, 1900; “Big Merger of Whiskey Firms,” Louisville *Courier-Journal*, August 5, 1912; Sam K. Cecil, *The Evolution of the Bourbon Whiskey Industry in Kentucky* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing, 2000), 153.

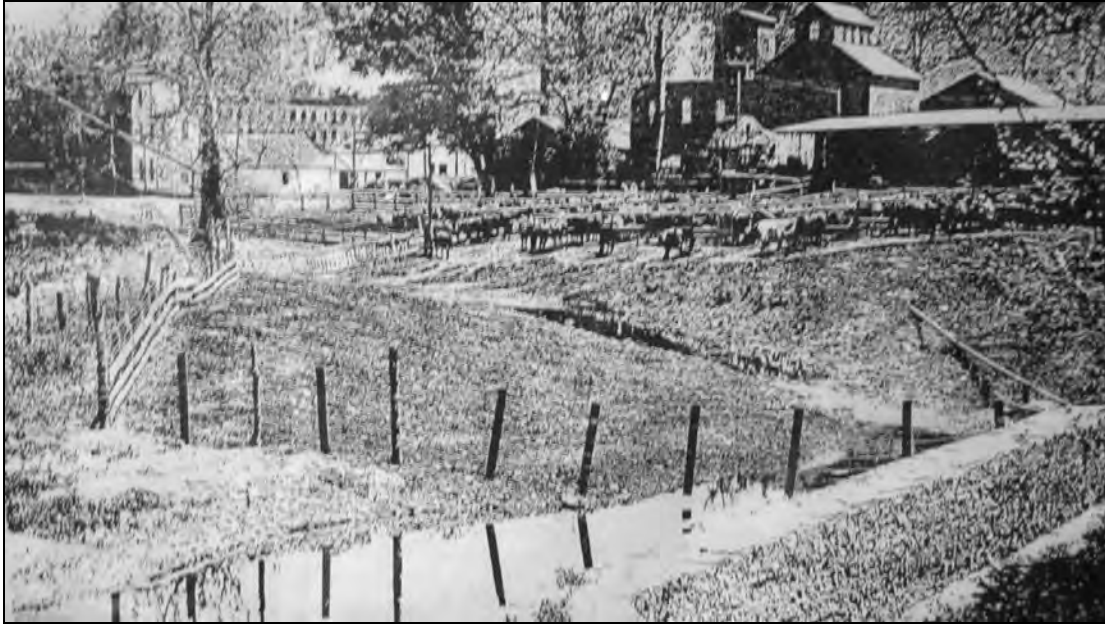


Figure 9. The Barbee distillery as it appeared circa 1900-1918. The distillery plant is on the right, a bonded warehouse for whiskey storage on the left (photo courtesy of Jimmy Ott).

11,960 gallons, [and] 4 grain bins.” The former owners were allowed to continue storage of the bonded whiskey in the warehouses until the beginning of the new year. It was soon removed to Frankfort and bottled, but could only be sold for “medicinal” purposes. The new owner, R. S. Cleveland, planned to “raze the building and sell it as junk.” In short order, the long-running distillery had vanished from the landscape of Grier’s Creek.²⁷

Another prominent Grier’s Creek distillery was that owned by William J. “Jeff” Frazier (1828 - 1908), built on or near to the location of the old Peyton Short grist mill. The Frazier family had a long and complex association with the early distilling industry in Kentucky. Jeff Frazier’s uncle, through his mother Martha Bond, was John W. Bond (1791 – 1842) who founded several important distilleries across the river in Anderson County. In 1810 John Bond built his first distillery on Bailey’s Run at Tyrone, just a mile down the Kentucky River from the mouth of Grier’s Creek. This distillery was sold in 1858 to Jeff Mountjoy and then, shortly after the Civil War, was acquired by James M. Waterfill and “R.H. Frazier” and the “Waterfill & Frazier” label was a very popular whiskey in the United States for many years. About 1890, a son of this Frazier set up a competing distillery using the same brand name, which led to litigation. Another of John Bond’s distilleries was the Bond & Lillard plant established in 1820 on Cedar Creek Run near Lawrenceburg. There is much confusion in the historical record concerning the actual identity of the Fraziers associated with Waterfill and Frazier. Depending upon which source is consulted, the Frazier in partnership with Waterfill was either “G. H. Frazier,” “R. H. Frazier” (most common variant) or “Robert H. Frazier.” The son involved in the trademark infringement litigation is generally named as “G. G. Frazier.” Though careful attention to the census records, I believe that I have resolved the identification problem and also made a close connection of these Fraziers to the Jeff Frazier of Grier’s Creek. The census data shows that Jeff Frazier had a brother named Reuben H. Frazier born in 1832, and Reuben in turn had a son, G. G. Frazier, born 1864. Thus it appears that the Frazier associated with Waterfill in distilling was most likely Jeff Frazier’s brother, and “G. G. Frazier” of the competing

²⁷ “Distillery Burns in Woodford County,” *Lexington Leader*, March 29, 1912; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, June 14, 1919; Cecil, *Whiskey Industry*, 153; “Barbee Distillery is Sold,” *Louisville Courier-Journal*, June 21, 1919.

distillery his nephew.²⁸

Jeff Frazier gained distilling experience beginning in 1857 by working with his father, Thompson Frazier, making whiskey in Anderson County at a plant on Cedar Creek Run that was later sold to William H. McBrayer and afterward operated as “W. H. McBrayer.” It was in Anderson County that the “W. J. Frazier” whiskey brand was established, which was taken across the Kentucky River in 1866 when Jeff moved to Woodford County and purchased an existing distillery on Grier’s Creek built about 1850 by Dick Miller and Wiley Mountjoy. Jeff initially worked this distillery in partnership with John Boswell until the latter retired from the business in 1868. According to an 1887 history of the state, Frazier’s “hand made whiskey” was produced in a distillery that had a capacity of sixty bushels of corn per day and employed six workers (**Figure 10**). His annual sales amounted to about \$15,000, and his whiskey was marketed in Lexington, Cincinnati, and Chicago. In 1907 Frazier, who was then 79 years old, had been making whiskey for half a century and was now ready to retire, sold the distillery to a group of businessmen from Cincinnati, Ohio and Lexington and Covington in Kentucky, who kept the Frazier name for both the distillery and whiskey. The whiskey, according to the report of the sale, was “said to be one of the few brands in the state which continues to be made in the old way, the mash being made in the small two bushel mash tubs, which were common in the olden times.”²⁹

Jeff did not have much time to enjoy his retirement, since he died in January, 1908, but was perhaps fortunate in that he did not witness the destruction of his distillery by fire on April 12 of the same year. In the rural, rather isolated neighborhood in which the distillery stood, there was no way to effectively combat the blaze, so a few watchers stood by helplessly while the main distillery building was consumed. The building, nearly sixty years old, had a first story of stone and a second story of wood frame. The warehouses, filled with aging whiskey, and adjacent sheds were not affected, however, and the facility was soon rebuilt and continued to operate under the management of Jeff’s son, James H. Frazier (1852-1933), until shut down by Prohibition. The whiskey remaining in the warehouse was shipped to Louisville and bottled for medicinal use. Later, the distillery building was torn down leaving a few buildings intact for farm use. Today, the last remaining building of the Frazier distillery stands on a rise overlooking Grier’s Creek, near the junction of Shryock’s Ferry and Grier’s Creek roads.³⁰

CLOSING REMARKS

We do not typically tend to associate an isolated and rugged rural landscape with industrialization, but the Grier’s Creek corridor was home to a significant industrial concentration for nearly 150 years, beginning with the first crude grist mills of the settlement era and ending with the extinction of several large distilleries by the Progressive and Temperance movements of the early twentieth century that brought about Prohibition in 1919. There can be little doubt that the early residents of Grier’s Creek were a hard-working and ambitious group who quarried the native rock to erect buildings and craft millstones, dammed the watercourses to provide power, and distilled some of the best whiskey in the nation using the clear, cold water gushing from hillside springs. The industrial cluster here consisted of at least four grist mill sites, those initially associated with DuPuy, Trabue, Short, and Tanner/Muldrow, and probably

²⁸ Matthew W. Harris, Bond family genealogy, <http://home.earthlink.net/~fbond/bond01/d1.htm>, accessed June 27, 2016; Cecil, *Whiskey Industry*, 53, 54; Frazier v. Dowling, *Kentucky Law Reporter*, Vol. 18 (Frankfort, 1897), 1109-1112; *Wine and Spirit Bulletin* 17(August 1, 1903), 24;

²⁹ Cecil, *Whiskey Industry*, 53-54; “Distillery Burned,” *Woodford Sun*, April 16, 1908; “Buckeye business Men Pass Through,” *Lexington Herald*, May 24, 1907; William H. Perrin, J.H. Battle, and Gilbert C. Kniffin, *Kentucky: A History of the State*, 5th ed. (Louisville, 1887), 787.

³⁰ “Frazier Distillery Destroyed by Fire,” *Lexington Herald*, April 12, 1908; “Distillery Burned,” *Woodford Sun*, April 16, 1908; “Member of Prominent Woodford County Family Ill Several Weeks,” *Lexington Herald*, January 3, 1933; Cecil, *Whiskey Industry*, 152.

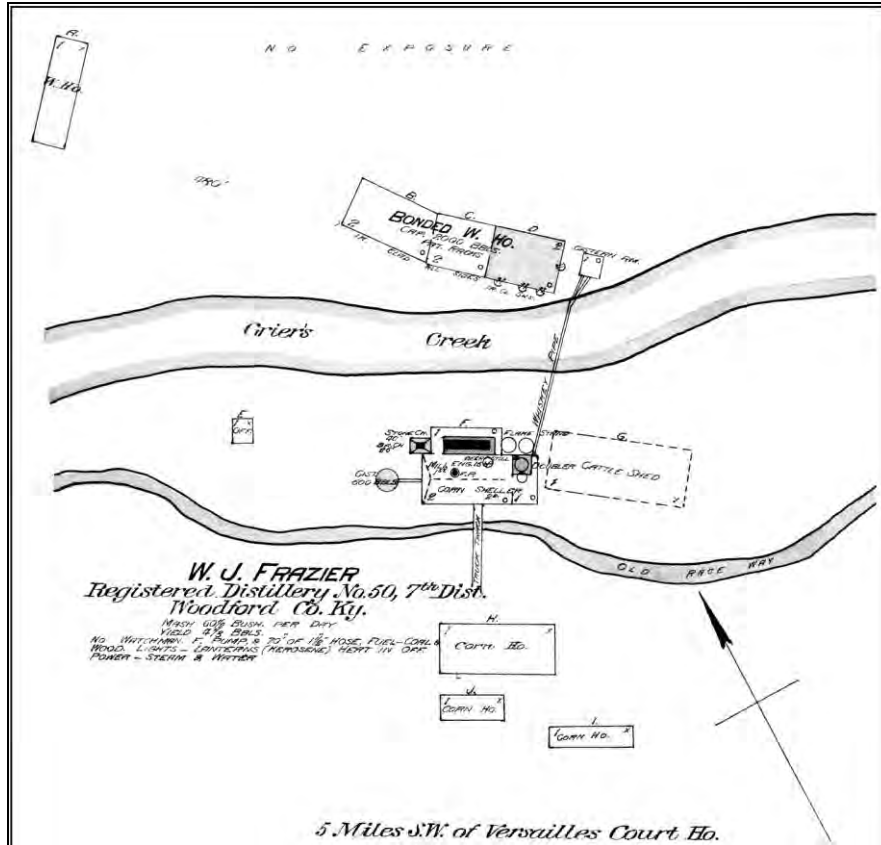


Figure 10. The W.J. Frazier distillery, shown here in 1886, operated from about 1850 until 1918; destroyed by fire in 1908, it was rebuilt and resumed operation until shut down by Prohibition. (Sanborne Insurance Company map).

several more. These were supplemented by saw mills and, beginning in the antebellum period, by several distillery operations. The industry exhibited by the citizens of Grier’s Creek was not, however, an anomaly, for similar industrial clusters were established throughout Woodford County as well as countless locations in Kentucky wherever circumstances combined to provide watercourses favoring mill construction.

My encounter with the interesting little article about the DuPuy mill in the *Woodford Sun*, buried in my files for who knows how many years, provoked the writing of this article, the serendipitous discovery of a hitherto unknown millstone quarry, and not only resolved the question of the nature of “flint” millstones manufactured in the Bluegrass Region but also added some detail to the history of the Kentucky distilling industry. I confess that I have little sympathy for scholars who might complain of difficulty in finding topics to research and write about, for the interaction of the human residents of the Commonwealth through time with the magnificent landscape of our state provides ample opportunities for discovery.

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