

Crescent Grain and Feed Mill
(Southern Milling Company), 1854
1015 Twiggs Road
Augusta
Richmond County
Georgia

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

CRESCENT GRAIN & FEED MILL (SOUTHERN MILLING COMPANY)

HAER GA-11

Location: 1015 Twiggs Road
Augusta, Georgia
UTM:
Quad:

Date of Construction: Originally 1854, rebuilt pre-1875 and c. 1920.

Present Owner: Southern Milling Company

Present Use: Grain and feed mill.

Significance: One of the few remaining buildings which once housed hydro-mechanical machinery using water from the Augusta Canal. The mill still uses shaft and belt drive.

Historian: Robert L. Spude, 1977

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CRESCENT GRAIN & FEED MILL (SOUTHERN MILLING COMPANY)

A grain mill has stood at the end of the second and third levels of the canal since 1854. Water power furnished by the Augusta Canal turned the machinery through the turn of the century, and much of the overhead shafting and belts once turned by a hydro-mechanical system still exists intact. Though now powered by an electric motor, belts open and close wooden grain bins and run the auger which pushes the grain to the bagger, also powered by the belts and shafts. Of the industries once powered by the Augusta Canal, the Southern Milling Company is one of two firms still using belts and shaft-drive. [1] (See photo.)

Grain and feed mills are necessary industries to an agricultural community. Augusta's development owed much to its role as a trade center, and part of that trade was the selling of fodder and feed to countryside farmers. In 1854, Thomas J. Cheely built a small grain mill and cotton gin factory at the end of the recently completed second and third levels of the canal. To power the mill, he installed a "vandewater" turbine and contracted for 10 hp of canal water power. Up until the Civil War his Crescent Grain & Feed Mill supplied Augusta area farmers. [2]

Augusta business directories for 1859 and 1861 list Cheely's mill as operating at upper Twiggs Road, but in the 1865-1866 directory T. J. Cheely's name is absent. The name of a Mrs. Martha Cheely appears, possibly his widow; these were the Civil War years and Cheely

may have been one of its victims. [3]

The mill at the end of the second level may have remained idle until the mid-1870's. The 1878 Handbook of Augusta includes the following information:

The Crescent Flour mills on the third level of the canal, nearby opposite to the Ice Factory, are owned by J. F. and L. J. Miller, well known merchants. The mills are built principally of wood, but are substantial and well constructed. The establishment grinds five hundred bushels of wheat, per day, producing eighty-five barrels of flour. This is manufactured by a new process. During the twenty-four hours the mills also grind five hundred bushels of corn into meal and pearl grits. The owners find ready sale for all their products and carry on a large business. [4]

Between the Civil War and the mid-1870's the old grain mill was rebuilt, and an 1875 list of the canal water power users includes the Millers' mill. It used 75 hp. [5] Observations made at the mill and compared to the 1884 Sanborn-Perris fire insurance map of the mill lead to the following conclusions: (1) the water wheel pit of pre-1875 still stands; (2) the headrace entered through two brick archways to two small turbines, then exited to the third level through two brick arches lower and on the opposite walls; (3) the turbines were probably vertical turbines; and (4) the main (or jack) shaft was directly above the turbines. From here, belts went up into the flour mill proper. [6]

An 1896 fire totally destroyed the mill, while only doing major damage to the wheel pit. [7] The Miller brothers rebuilt the mill on a smaller scale, only to have it burn down again. Discouraged, they sold out to a corporation called the Southern Milling Company. The company c. 1920 built the present brick structure (see photo) and changed the

power system from hydro-mechanical to electric motor drive. [8] Small DC motors still turn the machinery.

The Smith family, the present owners, became involved in the company, and by 1927 or 1928 J. Dan Smith, Sr., became the Southern Milling Company's majority stockholder. Since World War II, his sons, William H. and J. Dan, have taken over the business. [9]

The mill supplies the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA)--Georgia and South Carolina--with poultry, hog, cattle, horse, and pet feeds. Their "Duplex Feeds," claims an advertisement, "are high in quality and reasonable in price." [10]

The Southern Milling Company is not a big "glamor" industry. Rather, it is an example of one part of the wide variety of industries required to strengthen a community's economic base. Also, it is one of the few buildings still standing that once used Augusta Canal water power and still (1977) uses overhead shaft and belt drive machinery.

OPERATION OF THE SOUTHERN MILLING COMPANY'S GRAIN MILL

Grain is stored in 8 large and 12 smaller metal bins (4,000-bushel capacity each) on the northwest end of the building. From here the grain travels by conveyor to the old wheel pit, where a grain elevator carries the grain five stories up to the top of the building. Chutes in the tower redirect the flow of the grain into 10 wooden bins on the second floor of the main mill building. All the preceding steps are accomplished through the use of recently installed machinery.

The remainder of the operation is more than adequately propelled by

shaft and pulley drive. A small DC electric motor mounted on a wooden platform in the north end of the first floor turns a 6-inch belt that drives a 3-foot diameter wheel. This wheel turns the main power shaft. From it extend other belts and a chain. These belts and chain perform three duties: (1) open and close holes in the bottom of each grain bin (the 10 bins contain different types and qualities of grains); (2) turn the screw auger which pushes the grain from under the bin to a conveyor; and (3) turn the conveyor mechanism. From the conveyor, the grain feeds through a bagger, which fills paper bags and sews them closed.

The bagged feed then travels by conveyor to storage within the building's southeast end. Purchasers pick up their supplies at a dock on the building's south side.

Footnotes

1. The other is the Augusta Iron & Steel Works in the old Lombard Iron Works. See HAER, Augusta Canal Project, Report #10.
2. Augusta Canal Record Book II, p. 89 rpt. for December 23, 1854, p. 113 rpt. for May 29, 1855.
3. Augusta Directory for 1861 and Augusta Directory for 1865-1866.
4. John L. Maxwell, Pleasant A. Stovall, and T. R. Gibson, Handbook of Augusta (Augusta, 1878), p. 34. For a contemporary description of "New Process Milling" see James Emerson, Treatise Relative to the Testing of Water Wheels and Machinery (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1881), pp. 289-302.
5. Byron Holly, The Enlarged Augusta Canal, Augusta, Georgia (New York: Corlies, Macy & Co., 1875), p. 2.
6. Sanborn-Perris fire insurance maps for Augusta, Georgia, 1884, in Map Room, University of Georgia Science Library, Athens.
7. "Minutes of the Canal Committee," p. 15, July 15, 1896, Vault, Municipal Building, Augusta, Georgia.
8. Sanborn-Perris fire insurance maps for Augusta, Georgia, 1923, in Map Room, University of Georgia Science Library, Athens.
9. Interview with J. Dan Smith, Jr., August 25, 1977, Augusta, Georgia.
10. Price list from Southern Milling Company, August 8, 1977.