

# The Valley Mills

## Candler, North Carolina

26 September, 2004

The Valley Mills with full-roller process (made flour, corn meal, and animal feeds) were owned and operated by Mr. Russell Jones Gaston. The mill, depicted in this painting, was adapted by Mrs. Gwen Clifford from a photograph which appeared in *The Enka Voice*. *The Enka Voice* (their house organ) was a magazine published by American Enka Corporation.

R. J. Gaston operated the mills which were located on the East side of Hominy Creek and South side of the old Hominy Valley Wagon Road which led South and West. Eventually this wagon road became old North Carolina #10 which stretched across the state from Manteo in the east to Murphy in the west. Today, the road is known as NC 151 – the Pisgah Highway. R. J. Gaston also built and operated a general store on the West side of the wagon road near the newly-constructed railroad which was being built westward to Murphy.

A newly-created post office, called Hominy, opened in the store. People no longer had to go to Sulphur Springs in West Asheville to receive mail. In addition, the train stopped at R. J. Gaston's store so people could travel to other parts of the United States. The magic of telecommunications by telegraph became available in Hominy Valley.

The advent of electricity, more education, better transportation, and the migration of people from the farm to the factory spelled the doom of the old mills in the valley. Brother Ebb Columbus Williams, Sr., who coached 50 candidates in a row, was the last one to operate the mill. A flood washed out the dam on Hominy Creek, the Valley Mills fell into decay, and were torn down by Mr. Dick Gudger. The railroad tracks are still in use, but passenger service and the telegraph are long gone.

The R. J. Gaston's Store was sold and during the week of 18 July 1938 relocated across the highway. After many renovations and face lifts, the old building is still in existence. It is the home of Hominy Lodge 491, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, first chartered in 1897. Among those face lifts were \$13,075 remodeling program (summer of 1951) to include bricking the outside with red bricks, in July 1994 ceramic tile was installed in the 'Chat Room', and in February 1996, after a water line in the water cooler burst, \$29,569.44 was spent on repairs, improvements to the building, and an up-to-code electrical system installed. A corner stone was laid and the building dedicated in 1997.

Newly-chartered, Electa Chapter 228, Order of the Eastern Star became a tenant of Hominy Lodge 491 on 3 May 1944, rent free at that time. The Candler Lions Club and the Enka Lions Club hold their twice-monthly meetings in the Fellowship Hall. The Eastern Star Ladies serve meals to both clubs.

Tragedy: 'Wilb' Netherton's uncle, Lottis age 16 (1891-1909) got his shirt sleeve caught in the gears of the mill and was beaten to death on the floor. Lottis's daddy, C. P. Netherton, raised Sep 1903, was the first of our members to die, 26 Sep 1904 (age 32). Young Mr. Lottis was a Sunday-School teacher at Brown View Methodist Church.

This information is from an article by Drs. Kenneth and Jewel Balcock Israel, the Lodge's history, Mrs. Mary D. Netherton, and Ebb C. Williams, Jr. who while a student at Candler High School (class of 1947) worked in the mills. Kenneth Israel (PhD. History) was also a member of the class of 1947.

Edited by James A. Crabtree, FR