

Spring Mill Park

Resurrection of a Village

By ANDREW H. HEPBURN



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The stream of curious came slowly at first, but swelled rapidly as the fame of the village spread. In recent years the number of visitors has reached such proportions that the state has been forced to put in tremendous parking areas to accommodate automobiles. But they are not near the village. You walk into the village up a wooded valley beside a rushing stream. The first glimpse of it is as dramatic as the lifting of a curtain on a stage, for the magic of the village has the reality of good theater. There is nothing at all to spoil it, no note of disharmony, no anachronism. Behind and on either side there is the backdrop of the wooded hills rising high and sheer under a narrow arc of the sky. On the floor of the stage, a floor carpeted with lawn, are the buildings of stone and log, with the great central mill dominating the scene. You can poke about and stick your nose into the dwellings if you like. They appear to have been deserted only yesterday. You may even find someone at work now and then, finishing up a bright homespun rug on a hand loom, for example.

Echoes of Old America

The gray-walled gardens are likely to be bright with flowers. They appear to have been growing there forever. As a matter of fact, many of them were there, fighting the weeds, when Colonel Lieber and his men marched down into the valley to rout the wilderness.

It is curious that no one ever hurries who visits the village. It seems impossible to do so. The spell of it is one of tranquility.

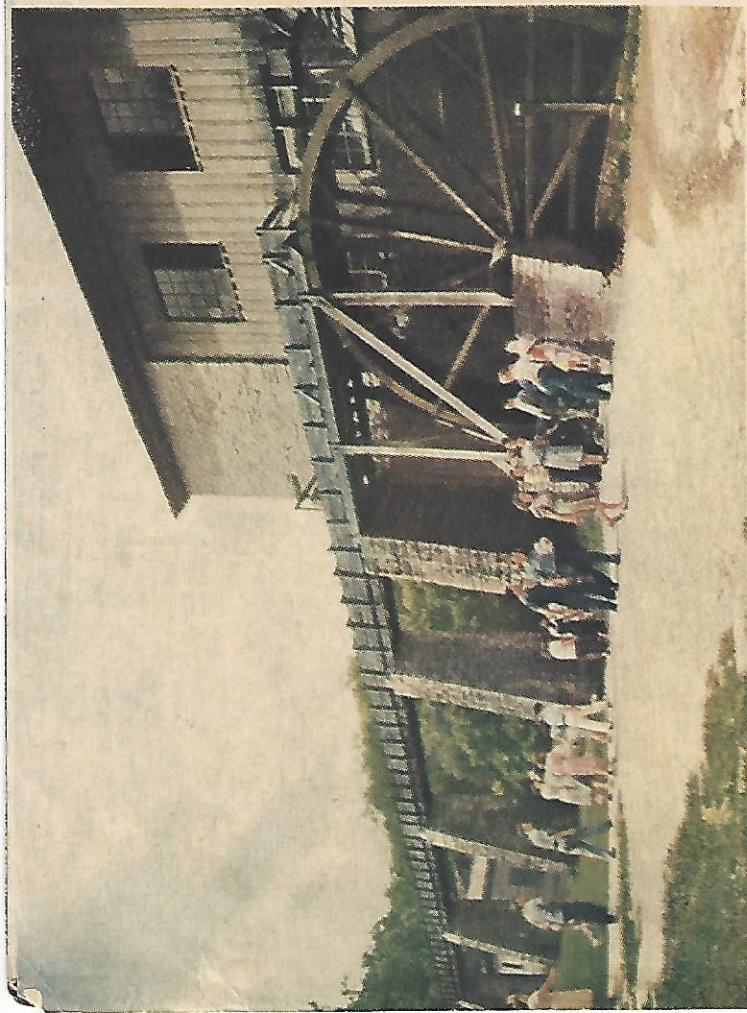
It is said that one visitor returns each year from a distant state in the height of spring bloom because the village acts on his jangled nerves as a bromidic tonic, a restorative of values.

The only time when a semblance of haste occurs among visitors follows the deep clanging of a great bell hanging beside the mill. It announces that the mill will grind corn. The curious gather around, the water rushes and froths over the wheel, the burrs begin to spin and the yellow meal flies out to be scooped up and sacked in homespun sacks bearing a picture of the mill. Last year 22,680 five-pound sacks of meal were bought at the

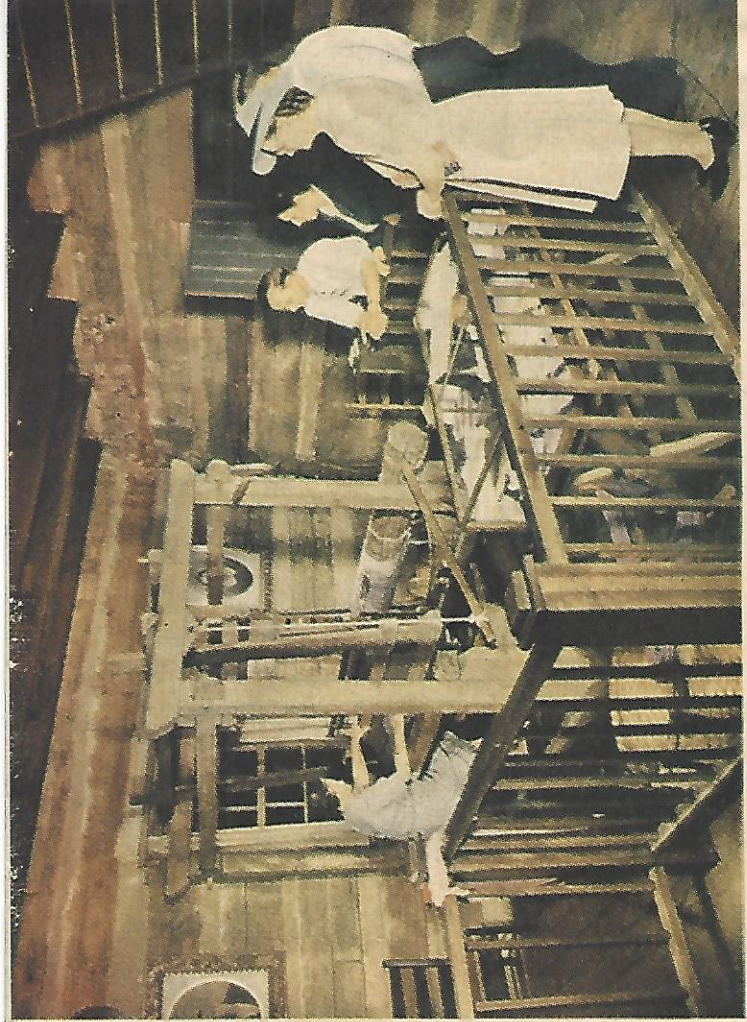
mill by visitors and carried into every state of the Union. There are epicures who refuse to use any corn meal other than that ground at Spring Mill. They return again and again for a new supply.

The perfection of the village extends even to sound. For the sounds of the village are only the sounds that are familiar and natural to it. The girdling forests shut out all others. There are the sounds of the forest itself—the bird sounds, the rustling of trees. Occasionally there is the deep whine of the saw-mill slashing a great log. There is the slow creaking of the mill wheel, rising to a heavy rumble whenever corn is being ground. But with all these special and intermittent sounds there is one which makes a ceaseless music, the *leitmotiv* of the village, the sound of rushing water.

From the dark caverns, with their strange blind fish, high on the hillsides, the clear streams come tumbling out over ancient rocks, surging into the flume, giving life to the mill and rushing on and out. It is the silver thread of life that has never been broken. Because of it, the imaginative believe that the village was really not dead at all, only sleeping.



For today's sight-seers, as for the pioneer farmers of yesteryear, the gristmill with its 24-foot wheel is a central point of interest.



Not designed for show only, Spring Mill is a working replica of the village of 1843, including hand looms that turn out real homespun.

Resurrection of a Village

By **ANDREW H. HEPBURN**

DURING the spring of 1897 George Donaldson appeared on the streets of his native Glasgow after an absence of fifty years. He had returned to die. Behind him in the United States he left a reputation for eccentricity and much property, among the minor items of which was a cave. The cave—not much of a cave as caverns go—burrowed . . . a wooded hillside in Sr . . .

village of the wilderness period to be found anywhere. They say that its great stone gristmill is without a peer.

Spring Mill village in 1943 exists as it existed in 1843, when its fame had spread throughout the whole new wilderness land. The effect on the observer is startling, but it is accomplished by no artifice. It is the result of location. Nature provided a stage and isolated it by guardian hills clothed in a great forest

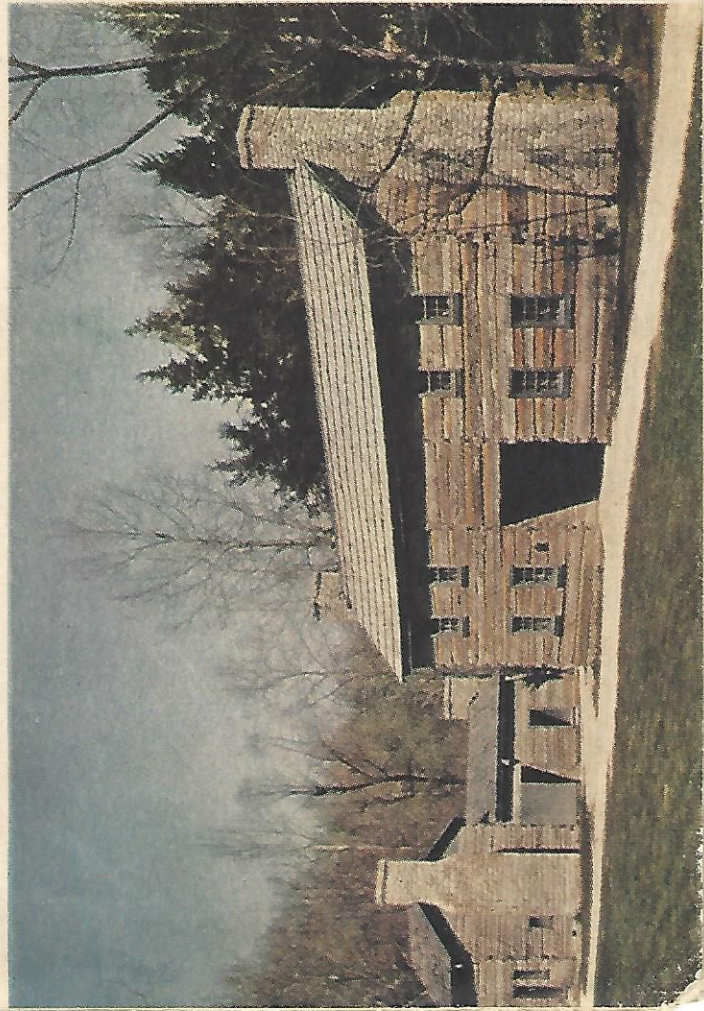
How the discovery of a school of blind fish brought a deserted village back to life.

George Donaldson's favorite amusements. The first of the stream of water which ran through it and frothed out of the mouth to splash down the rocky hill in a miniature cataract. Being something of a naturalist, he noted that within the waters of his cave swam some queer fish—bleached and futile fish with no spirit.

When George Donaldson bought his cave, there was a bustling little village in the valley below. It was called Spring Mill and was a pleasant place of stout stone and log houses dominated by a big stone gristmill. From his land George Donaldson could see the roofs of the village, hear the water rushing through a big flume to turn an overshot water wheel.

George Donaldson saw the village die. As the years slipped by he saw the villagers move away one by one. The great water wheel turned less and less frequently. Presently it stopped altogether. But that didn't bother George Donaldson. He liked solitude and he liked the wilderness. He wasn't concerned to see weeds creep in, see the water wheel decay and fall apart.

Fashioned of local logs and local stone, this is the type of solid house favored by the solid citizens of Indiana's frontier days.



George Donaldson would be surprised today if he could know that the village of Spring Mill has come to life again; that it looks as it looked when he first saw it; that its wide lawns are lush and close-cropped, its flower beds gay with blossoms, smoke curling from the stone chimneys; that the water wheel creaks and groans again as it helps grind quantities of yellow corn. He would be even more surprised could he know that one of the principal reasons the village of Spring Mill lives again lies within the cave which he owned, and which bears his name—that the reason is his colony of odd fish.

Donaldson's bleached and unhappy fish are a vital link in a chain of strange circumstances, which chiefly concern Spring Mill village. Those who are expert in such matters call it the finest example of a pioneer

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JOHN KABEL AND NOBLE BRETZMAN

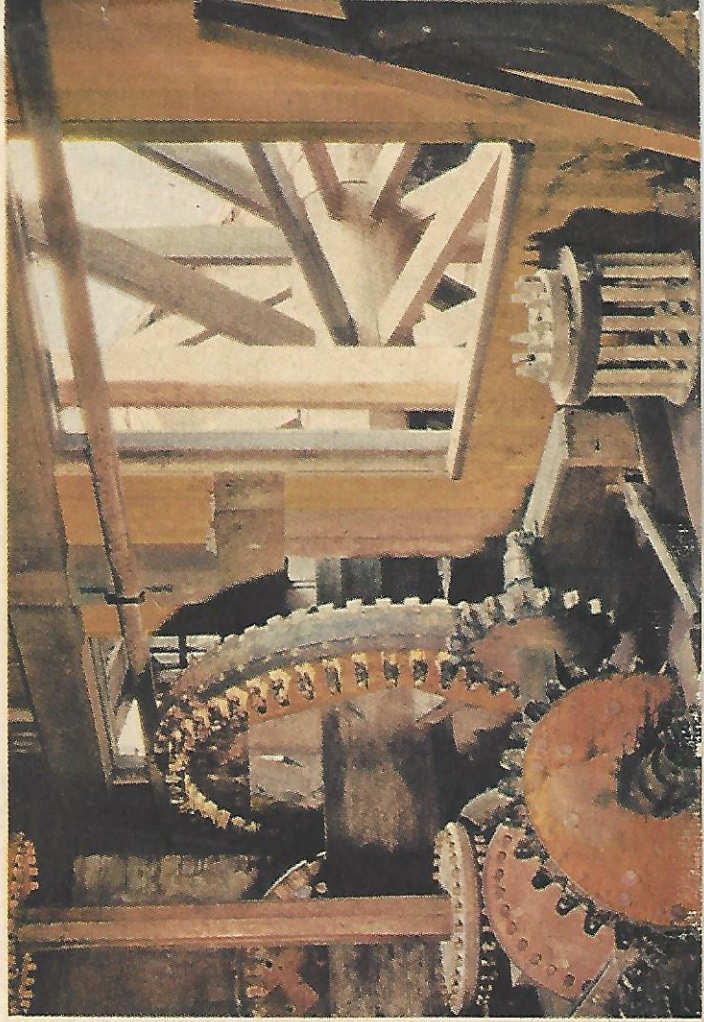
against the intrusion of any sound or sight which might mar its perfection.

Col. Richard Lieber, the practical visionary who discovered the dead village and brought it back to life with cunning patience, puts it this way: "You come down from the top of the hill two hundred feet and you go back one hundred years."

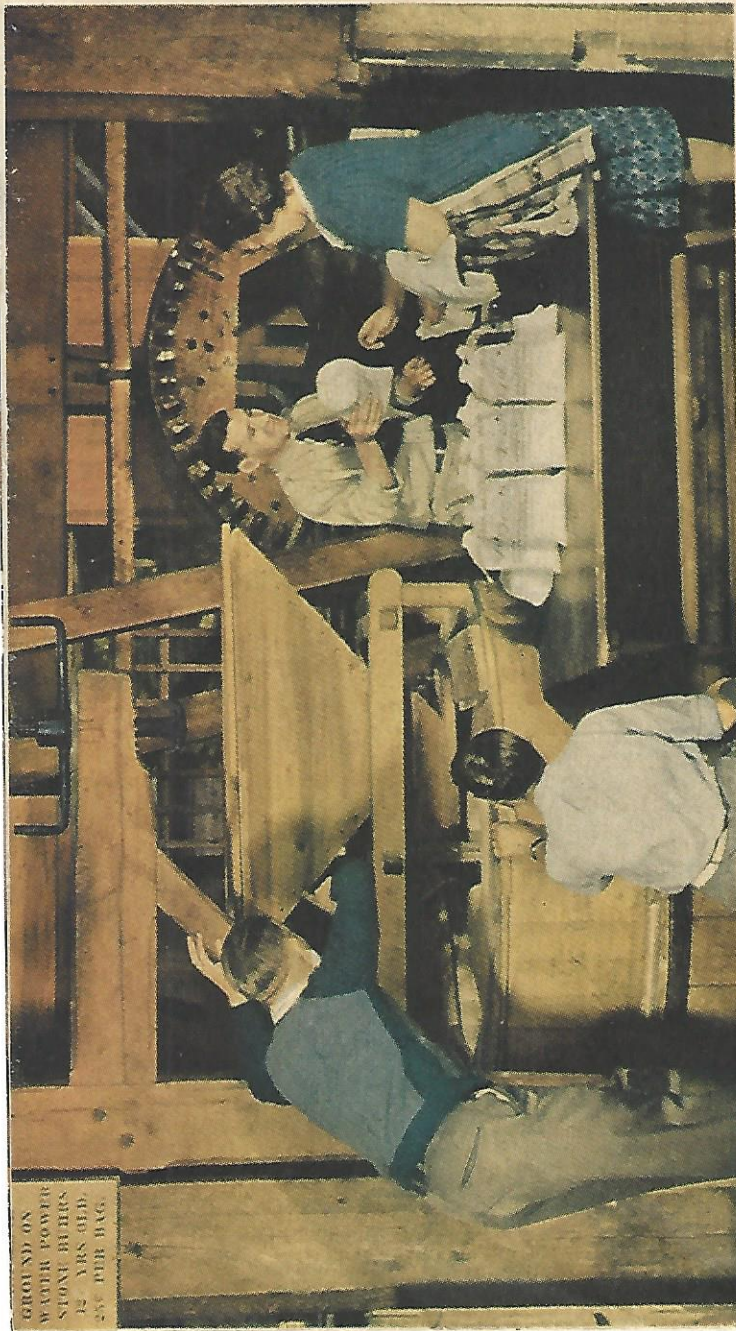
The story starts in 1814 with a young naval officer named Samuel Jackson. A Canadian, he had fought under Perry on Lake Erie and had been wounded. He came to the wilderness of Southern Indiana, seeking land. It is not difficult to understand why he selected the land he chose. Any sailor would recognize the virtue of a quiet cove, protected on all sides by high hills. Ensign Jackson chose just such a spot, a tiny valley hemmed in by very steep and wooded hills.

Ensign Jackson built a cabin and a small gristmill. He opened a limestone quarry in one of the rocky hillsides, perhaps the first in a region which was later to become famous for its stone. In 1816 his title to the

Faithful reproductions of the massive wooden gears which, first set up in 1817, were regarded as the mechanical marvels of the countryside.



GROUND ON
WATER POWER
STONE BURS
12 YRS. OLD
25¢ PER BAG.



There are epicures who will use no corn meal except that ground between the huge stone burs at Spring Mill. Last year visitors bore away 22,680 five-pound sacks.

land was confirmed by a grant signed by the President of the United States. But Jackson was a sailor at heart and the ways of the wilderness were not his ways. The next year he sold his lands, his houses, his little mill to Cuthbert and Thomas Bullitt, of Louisville, two well-connected and prosperous brothers who had come across the mountains from Virginia a few years before. They were very busy as wilderness real-estate promoters, buying lands all through the great forest of Southern Indiana for townsites. They appeared to specialize in gristmills, and saw in Jackson's tiny valley with its foaming spring-fed stream a special opportunity.

In almost no time at all they had a bustling crew of stonemasons, mechanics and carpenters at work.

The period of promotion and absentee ownership was over. Hugh Hamer was a miller, having been mill manager on the property for the Montgomerys. The two brothers took up residence at the village in two large stone houses originally built by the Bullitts. They acquired possession of the village in 1832, just eighteen years after Ensign Jackson had discovered his sheltered cove in the forest. A great deal had been done in the eighteen years, but, with the exception of the central mill building and the two large stone houses, it was still very much a crude wilderness hamlet. The Hamers set about to make it the commercial and social center of a wide region. They succeeded, keeping pace with a rapidly growing new land.



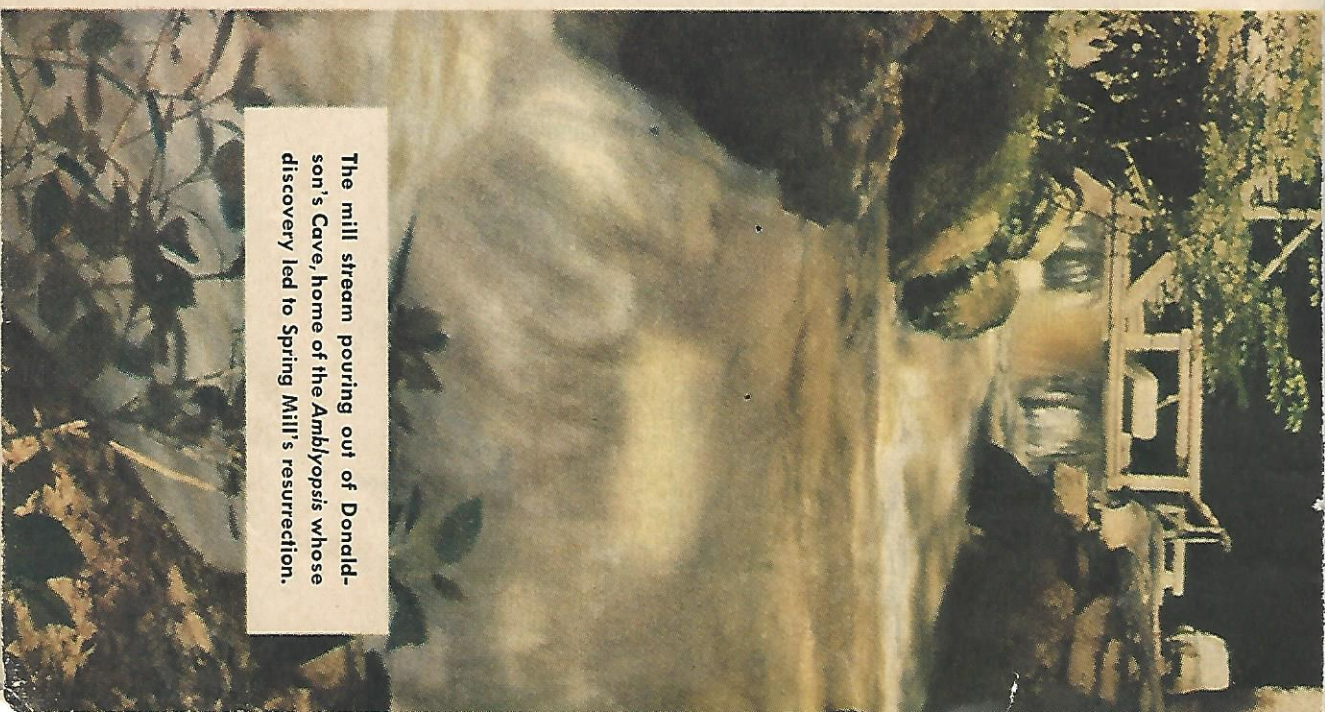
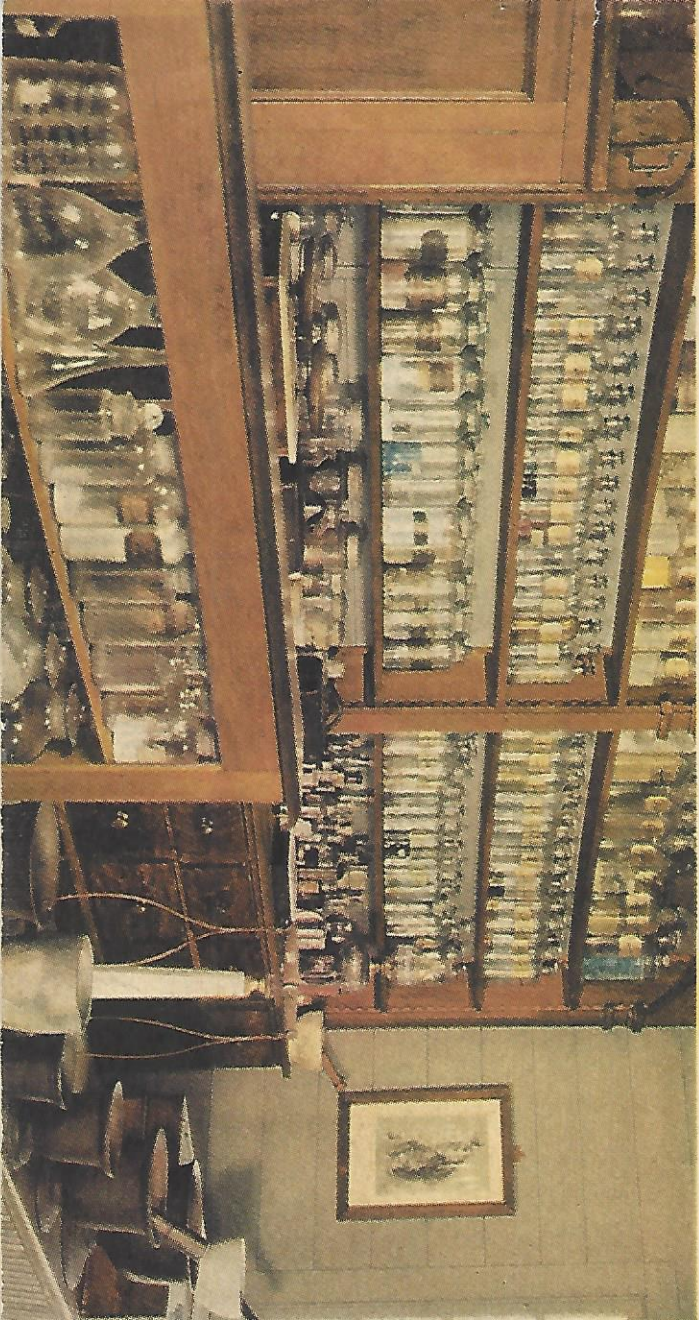
They planned a great gristmill, the largest anywhere in the region, with walls of hewn stone three feet thick, boasting a tremendous overshot water wheel turned by a prodigious stream of water carried to the mill through a wooden flume riding a procession of stone piers.

For the time and the place, the undertaking was fabulous, but it was an immediate success. In no time at all Bullitt's Mills was a thriving community, its mill grinding meal for pioneer farmers for miles around. But the Bullitts were promoters. After seven years they had a chance to sell the village for a nice profit to another pair of brothers, William and Joseph Montgomery, of Philadelphia. They, in turn, put up additional buildings of log and stone, which included a tavern and a still house, and sold the property after nine years to still a third pair of brothers, Hugh and Thomas Hamer.

Mellow, yellow corn meal at twenty-five cents a bag.

The village grew. It developed a settled grace, even a certain elegance. Wide lawns spread around the clustering buildings, protected against marauding pigs and cattle by low stone walls. The area between the two main dwellings occupied by the brothers became a somewhat formal garden, which at one time boasted the splendor of strutting peacocks. As the opportunity arose, new activities were added, so that on either side of the central mill building stretched village shops and industries. There were a tavern, a regular stage stop between Louisville and Terre Haute, a still house, a loom house, a pottery. The water from the flume, escaping over the great mill wheel, turned the machinery of a sawmill. There were a cobbler's shop, a hattery, a cabinet shop, an apothecary, a tannery and blacksmith shop, a limekiln and a post office. There were

The care with which the village was restored is exemplified by this reincarnation of a 19th-century apothecary shop. The son of a pioneer Indiana pharmacist helped to equip it.



The mill stream pouring out of Donaldson's Cave, home of the *Amblyopsis* whose discovery led to Spring Mill's resurrection.